KELLOGG INSTITUTE
THE HELEN KELLOGG INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

**REAPPRAISING THE ROLE OF THE CENTER:
THE CASE OF THE CHILEAN PARTY SYSTEM**

Timothy R. Scully

Working Paper #143 - September 1990

Timothy R. Scully, c.s.c., is a Senior Fellow of the Kellogg Institute and Assistant Professor of Government and International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He has written extensively on political parties, including a forthcoming book *Rethinking the Center: Cleavages, Critical Junctures, and Party Evolution in Chile* (Stanford University Press), and he is coeditor of a forthcoming volume with Scott Mainwaring, *Building Democratic Institutions: Parties and Party Systems in Latin America*.

ABSTRACT

With the return of competitive party politics in Chile, and the reemergence of its characteristic tripartite party system, the problematic of the role played by the center in a multiparty system takes on added importance. First, the paper provides a critical review of previous interpretations of the role of center parties. Next, it briefly explores efforts to constitute and reconstitute the center over a period of twelve decades of party competition.   After examining the emergence and behavior of the Liberals in the 19th century, the Radicals in the first-half of the 20th century, and later the Christian Democrats, the analysis returns to theoretical considerations and proposes an alternative understanding of the center, based on the Chilean experience. The paper concludes with a broad overview of the post-Pinochet party system and, again focusing on the role of the center, points out major elements of continuity and change within the party system.

RESUMEN

Con la vuelta de la competencia política en Chile, y la reaparición de sus características tripartitas, el problema del papel del centro político dentro del sistema multipartidista cobra renovada importancia. Este ensayo examina, primero, previas interpretaciones sobre el tema. Enseguida, se exploran los multiples esfuerzos para constituir, y reconstituir, el centro político durante un período de doce décadas de competencia política. Después de haber examinado la emergencia y comportamiento de los Liberales en el siglo 19, de los Radicales en la primera mitad del siglo 20, y de los Demócratas Cristianos más recientemente, el análisis vuelve a algunas consideraciones teóricas y propone una perspectiva alternativa sobre el centro político, basada en la experiencia de Chile. El ensayo concluye con una visión más generalizada del sistema de partídos post-Pinochet y, de nuevo enfocado en el centro político, señala los elementos principales de continuidad y cambio dentro del sistema de partidos.

INTRODUCTION

On December 14, 1989, elections were held in Chile for the first time in over 16 years. Three candidates campaigned for the presidency. Hernán Buchi, finance minister for the Pinochet regime, billed his candidacy as representing the "independent *center*" of the political spectrum. Patricio Aylwin, representing the multiparty coalition opposed to Pinochet and the military regime, ran as the candidate of the "democratic *center*." The third candidate, Francisco Javier Errázuriz, popularly known as "Fra-Fra," charged that the other two candidates were disguising their true political loyalties. Fra-Fra asserted that Buchi was a staunch ally of the right, and that Aylwin was a front for the left; only he represented the "*true center* of the *center*" ("El verdadero centro centro").

Whatever else might be said about the recent presidential campaign in Chile, it seems indisputable that the dynamics of political competition that characterized the election were dramatically different from those prior to the coup. Gone—at least temporarily—were the well documented center-fleeing or "centrifugal" patterns that characterized party competition during the 1960s and '70s, the presidential politics of "outbidding," and the resulting polarization of the Chilean party system. Instead, the presidential contest of December, 1989, was characterized above all by a rush to the center of the political spectrum. All three candidates aimed their appeals at the center of the political spectrum, never daring to stray too far right or left, presumably because the Chilean political landscape, and the distribution of votes within that landscape, has changed.

In this paper I seek to sharpen our understanding of the role of the center historically within Chile's multiparty system.[1] First, I explore the theoretical literature on the role of the center within multiparty systems. Second, I discuss briefly the analytic lens through which I view the evolution of the party system, and specifically the center. Third, I analyze the role of the center within three discrete periods covering twelve decades of party competition in Chile. Fourth, I provide a sketch of the post-Pinochet political landscape and examine briefly the behavior of the political center within the newly reconstituted party system. Finally, I attempt to draw more general conclusions from the Chilean case.

---

[1] The center parties I shall treat in this paper are "center" in that they lie in between fundamental political alternatives. This involves an intermediate position with reference to a left-right (class-based) ideological spectrum, or to some other fundamental political alternative. See the Colliers, forthcoming, Glossary. I would emphasize that by "center" I am not referring to a geometric point equidistant from the poles, but rather an intermediate or in between "space." Cf. also footnote No. 1, Moulián, 1986b.

II. CENTER PARTIES: A DEBATE ABOUT POLITICAL CAPACITY

In comparison to the attention paid by students of Latin American politics to the study of parties[2] on the left and (though less so) the right, few systematic efforts have been made to study center parties.[3] Though a few broader analyses of political parties have devoted a great deal of attention to center parties, they have generally emphasized the negative effects center parties have on the dynamics of party competition.[4] These analyses raise important questions about the role of the center within political party systems. Is the political center something that exists independently and therefore possesses a certain capacity for political initiative, or is the center essentially a mobile part of the electorate which fluctuates from one pole to the other? Does the existence of a center party enhance patterns of stable party competition, or does it contribute to immoderate party politics? Under what conditions does it tend to contribute to system stability, and when does the center act to disrupt moderating drives within the party system? In this section, I assess earlier arguments regarding the role of the center, arguing that the emergence and behavior of center parties require rethinking.[5]

The nature and role of the political center has been the topic of some debate among a small number of scholars. An extreme position within the debate is that of Maurice Duverger. In his pioneering work on political parties, Duverger argued that "whenever public opinion is squarely faced with great fundamental problems it tends to crystallize around two opposed poles."[6] Thus, Duverger reasoned, where a single cleavage predominates, there will develop only two parties.[7] Even in situations where a two-party system does not prevail, there is "almost

---

[2] A "party" is defined as a political group that presents candidates in elections to public office. This corresponds to Sartori's "abridged" definition. See Sartori, 1976, p. 64. An important addition to this definition is that a political group that *would* present candidates to public office, but is unable to do so, either because it is proscribed or because elections are not being held, is also understood to qualify as a political party. See Colliers, forthcoming, Glossary.

[3] An important recent exception to this is Lucia Hippólito's careful analysis of the behavior of the PSD in Brazilian politics from 1946-1964. Hippólito, 1985.

[4] Most notably, Duverger, 1954 and Sartori, 1976. See also Starzinger, 1965. Daalder's (1984) contribution represents an important effort to redress this imbalance. Particularly noteworthy is Daalder's insistence of the need for an explicit study of the normative assessments of center parties. Unspecified (or negative) value judgments associated with treatments of the center are frequent. Cf. Daalder, 1984, p. 108.

[5] In recent political science research, the role of the political center (though not center *parties*) has emerged as an important topic. Adam Przworski's (1980, 1981) work on class compromise, Linz and Stepan's (1978) emphasis on the crucial role of moderate and "semi-loyal" oppositions, and O'Donnell and Schmitter's (1986) focus on the role of the moderate opposition in transitions to democracy, all point to a need to reinterpret the center.

[6] Duverger, 1954, p. 216.

[7] Duverger, 1954, p. 233.

always a duality of tendencies." This is so because, as Duverger put it, "every policy implies a choice between two kinds of solutions: the so-called compromise solutions lean one way or the other. This is equivalent to saying that *the centre does not exist in politics*, there may well be a Centre party but there is no centre tendency, no centre doctrine" (emphasis added).[8] Thus, Duverger reasons, "there are no true centres."[9] And since the natural tendency is always dualistic, towards bipartism, the political center is fatally flawed, divided against itself and separated into two halves: left-center and right-center. Over a period of time, the center cannot hold, but will be "torn asunder, buffeted and annihilated" by the pull of the extremes.[10]

In Duverger's view, the center is nothing more than an artificial collection of fragments from two opposed positions. Multiparty systems, therefore, emerge only as a result of what he terms "superimposed dualisms."[11] That is, when no single issue predominates, multiple positions can emerge as a result of the interaction of different issues upon one another. When different lines of cleavage interact with one another, an intermediate position can emerge. However, following Duverger's conception, it is not clear why the resulting party should end up near the center of the party system, or even at some point between the extreme poles. Furthermore, according to Duverger, this will be only a temporary phenomenon. The center party can only be a pale reflection of the real forces at work at the extremes and will inevitably be split by the power of attraction exercised by the two poles of the predominant axis of cleavage.

By neglecting the enduring character of multidimensional and competing cleavages which make up the political landscape, earlier accounts of the center have failed to capture the heterogeneous nature of interparty conflict.[12] If a party system is in fact better characterized by multilayered dimensions of cleavage, then any interpretation of patterns of competition (and cooperation) among parties must simultaneously take into account the relative salience of *different* (i.e., earlier or later) dimensions of conflict. As Daalder explains with regard to interparty competition, "[e]ach party attempts to exploit to the maximum that dimension in which it finds itself most comfortable, while attempting simultaneously to drive a wedge into the ranks of its adversaries whose main advantage may lie in another dimension."[13]

Particular cleavages usually have different degrees of salience for different groups of political actors. It is also fair to presume that if one line of cleavage is predominant within a given party system, then parties formed on another, different cleavage dimension end up holding a

---

[8] Duverger, 1954, p. 215.
[9] Duverger, 1954, p. 215.
[10] Duverger, 1954, p. 215.
[11] Duverger, 1954, p. 215.
[12] This is true of Duverger, 1954; Downs, 1957; Sartori, 1976; and others' accounts, all of which tend to reduce interparty competition to a single, class-based line of cleavage.
[13] Daalder, 1984, p. 100.

more or less heterogeneous, and hence equivocal, position with respect to the major conflict dividing the electorate. Such ambivalence would not characterize a party whose identity had been formed on the basis of the principal line of cleavage. Consequently, the relative salience of the predominant line of cleavage *vis-à-vis* the center party will decisively shape relations between the center and the parties to either side of it.

Duverger's work has been influential in subsequent assessments of the role of the center in multiparty systems. Among these, Giovanni Sartori's writings represent an important attempt to escape from Duverger's dualistic logic. In a significant departure from Duverger's scheme, Sartori insists upon distinguishing between two types of multiparty, or "pluralist," systems: moderate and polarized. *Moderate pluralism* is characterized by: (1) a relatively small "ideological distance"[14] separating relevant parties; (2) a "bipolar coalitional configuration,"[15] i.e., alternative party coalitions grouped around only two major poles; and (3) a pattern of centripetal competition, i.e., competition among parties for votes at the center. In contrast, *polarized pluralism* is characterized by the opposite traits, namely: (1) significant ideological distance between the relevant parties; (2) a multipolar configuration; and (3) centrifugal, or "center-fleeing,"[16] patterns of competition, in which parties reach outwards toward the extremes in search of new votes. According to Sartori, a principal characteristic of polarized pluralism is that the "*center of the system is occupied*. This implies that we are no longer confronted with bipolar interactions… The system is multipolar in that its competitive mechanics hinge on a center that must face *both* left and right" (emphasis in original).[17]

By distinguishing between these two types of multiparty systems, Sartori makes an important contribution toward constructing a theory that accounts for stable multiparty systems in societies characterized by deep social and political cleavages.[18] His distinction also holds crucial implications for the role of the center. According to Sartori, moderate pluralism owes its stability to the predominance of centripetal drives in the party system. Centripetal competition is possible, among other things, because of the absence of a center party. Since the center of the party

---

[14] For Sartori, "ideological distance" plays an important role in creating the space for a center party to emerge. Sartori's understanding of "space elasticity" leads him to conclude that "a short space does not allow, or does not facilitate, the perception of a center: It has, so to speak, no room for it. A short space is defined simply by its ends—left and right. A third point of reference—the center—becomes meaningful and perceivable only as the space extends, and particularly when the ends of the space are perceived as being two poles apart" (Sartori, 1976, p. 347). See also Sani and Sartori, 1983; Daalder, 1984.

[15] Sartori, 1976, p. 179.

[16] Sartori, 1976, p. 134-135.

[17] Sartori, 1976, p. 134.

[18] For a more complete discussion of moderate versus polarized pluralism, see Sartori, 1976, especially sections 6.1 and 10.4, and section 6.3 for a discussion of moderate pluralism; for an earlier version of the argument, see Sartori, 1966.

system is not "occupied" by one or more parties, a tell-tale sign of polarized pluralism, parties can compete with one another for votes at the center.[19] By contrast, the occupancy of the center by one or more center parties places moderate voters "out of competition,"[20] and hence encourages centrifugal, rather than centripetal, competition in the party system. In Sartori's words, "the very existence of a center party (or parties) discourages centrality," i.e., discourages the moderating drives of the political system. "Centripetal drives are precisely the moderating drives. That is why this type of party system is center-fleeing, or centrifugal, and thereby conducive to immoderate or extremist politics."[21]

Yet it is difficult to accept Sartori's argument. As long as there exist votes in the center, why should non-center parties refrain from going after center votes, thereby pursuing moderating electoral tactics? In contrast to Sartori, Hans Daalder suggests that, rather than speaking of centripetal competition in systems of moderate pluralism and of centrifugal competition in systems of polarized pluralism, it is more reasonable to argue that in any system of three or more parties (in which at least one party finds itself in an intermediate position between other parties), there will always be both centripetal and centrifugal drives.[22] Daalder notes that Sartori's logic is flawed in his use of the Italian case. Whereas Sartori's model suggests that neither the Communists nor the Socialists compete directly with the Christian Democrats for votes in contemporary Italy,[23] Daalder marshals evidence to the contrary. As Daalder shows, in two very different cases, Italy and Holland, the large party at the center competes directly with both right and left parties for votes (and hence contributes to centripetal drives within the party system).[24]

In fact, a close examination of the Chilean case may lead to the opposite of Sartori's conclusion: in multiparty systems, a bipolar coalitional configuration can tend to increase, rather than diminish, political polarization. An exploration of over 12 decades of party competition in Chile indicates that the existence of a center to act as a broker between the extremes may be necessary to hold the party system together. The center can act as a mediator between the extremes, serving to absorb potential shocks to the system emanating from the two poles. When a multipolar coalitional configuration gives way to bipolar politics, the center tends to divide within itself—thereby weakening the center's hold. Consequently, the party system can tend to pull apart. As Lijphart has shown in the case of plural societies marked with deep social and cultural

---

[19] Sartori, 1976, p. 134.
[20] Sartori, 1976, p. 135.
[21] Sartori, 1976, pp. 134-135.
[22] Cf. Daalder, 1984, pp. 102-103. Luebbert makes a similar point (Luebbert, 1984, p. 13).
[23] Sartori provides a visual representation of competition among five parties, indicating that large extreme parties overlap only with secondary intermediate parties, not the large party at the center. See Sartori, 1976, p. 349.
[24] For an elaboration of this discussion, see Farneti, 1983.

cleavages, bipolar multiparty systems tend to undermine the arena of political compromise. The absence of a center in these cases can lead to situations in which each side attempts to annihilate the other politically.[25] The experience of Chile suggests that it is precisely the persistence of a center that helped make party competition viable in that country from the mid-19th century on.

Despite their many differences, Duverger and Sartori hold at least one element in common which is of critical importance for the present analysis. Both tend to underestimate the *capacity* of the center to generate a political identity and program of its own. For Sartori, this is true even though at several points he explicitly attempts to distance himself from Duverger's dualistic formulation. In one such passage, Sartori puts forth a direct challenge to Duverger's analysis of the center: "I will argue, contrariwise [to Duverger], that when we do not have a center party, we are likely to have a center tendency."[26] In contrast to Duverger, Sartori argues that when no center party exists, a center tendency is likely to predominate within the party system. Yet, like Duverger's center, this center tendency, such as it is, lacks capacity for autonomous political action. Sartori's center is

> …more a negative convergence, a sum of exclusions, than a positive agency of instigation. And this is why it is likely to be *passive*, rather inert, and—all in all—*an immobile kind of aggregate*. Of course the center will move if the balance between its right and left should shift. Nevertheless, it will not be the real change agent within the system, for it is not a center of instigations (emphasis added).[27]

An examination of the Chilean experience, and of the "chronic fickleness of in between parties" in that country, led Sartori to revise his earlier (1966) statement. In this later version, he states, "[e]ven though the center parties tend to be immobilistic, they remain an equilibrating force that perform a 'mediating role'—and mediation, or brokerage, is not the same as immobilism."[28] Yet, even in this amended version, the center—while perhaps not always immobile—is permanently characterized by low political capacity, buffeted by two more dynamic extremes. According to Sartori's logic, a center party that attempts to seize the political initiative, to outdo parties on its right or left, will necessarily contribute to a deadly pattern of centrifugal competition as its opponents are forced to move further out towards the extremes.

Sartori's work has been influential in the recent literature on Chilean parties. Arturo Valenzuela's penetrating studies of Chilean parties partly reflects the same dualistic logic that characterizes Sartori's account of the center. Valenzuela applies Sartori's framework directly in his own analysis of the breakdown of Chilean democracy in 1973. For Valenzuela, the Chilean party

---

[25] For a discussion of the political dynamics of democracy in plural societies, see Lijphart, 1977. See especially chapter 3 for a discussion of the center.
[26] Sartori, 1976, p. 131.
[27] Sartori, 1966, p. 164.
[28] Sartori, 1976, p. 135.

system of the 1960s and '70s was a polarized party system, and "a polarized party system has no centripetal drive. The center does not represent a significant political tendency in its own right, but tends to be composed of fragments emanating from both the left and the right poles."[29] Thus, Valenzuela concludes, "centrist movements [in Chile] only minimally represented a viable centrist tendency and were in fact primarily reflections of the erosion of the two extreme poles."[30] However, this account of the experience of Chilean center parties at least implicitly adopts Sartori's dualistic model somewhat mechanically across historical contexts. This type of analysis has not only resulted in underestimating the potential political capacity of the center but also in condemning it to the role of *enfant terrible* of the party system.[31]

This point is simple, but profoundly important for our understanding of the dynamics of competitive politics within multiparty systems: there is no immutable essence or nature of the center, nor even an inherent tendency that necessarily pertains to the center in a multiparty system. What exists is the competitive positioning of a party, which itself is characterized by change over time, within a constantly changing (expanding and contracting) intermediate political space.[32] Therefore, the role played by a center party, as is the case with any party, cannot be determined *a priori* by its relative position within the party system. Rather, its role will depend upon its specific political identity and program, as well as the nature of its competitive interaction with other parties in the context of a given set of voter preferences.[33] The behavior of a center party cannot be deduced from an abstract model, but must be determined empirically.[34]

None of these accounts, then, adequately captures the multiplicity of the roles played historically by the center in Chile. In contrast to Duverger, I argue that a center tendency not only can exist but, in the case of Chile, has more often existed than not. The center has endured and, far from being unimportant, has been a principal protagonist from the beginnings of the party system throughout its long history. This has continued to be the case even as parties reappeared upon the political landscape in the early 1980s. In contrast to Sartori, I contend that the center need not constitute an obstacle for democratic political competition in polarized multiparty

---

[29] A. Valenzuela, 1985, p. 13.

[30] A. Valenzuela, 1985, p. 13.

[31] Moulián uses this expression (1986b, p. 5). He is referring here to the Christian Democratic party, but his observation serves to describe the treatment of the center more generally.

[32] This point is made forcefully by Moulián specifically with reference to the Christian Democratic party in Chile. Again, its application is more general. Cf. Moulián, 1986b, p. 5.

[33] Downs views the problem of the distribution of voter preferences as the principal problem for explaining the behavior of political parties. For his view, see Downs, 1957, especially chapter 8.

[34] This can surely be demonstrated to be true for other cases as well. In her exceptional work on the Brazilian PSD, Lucia Hippólito shows the important role of mediation played by that party within the Brazilian party system from 1946 until the center fell prey to centrifugal pulls within the party system in the late 1950s. See Hippólito, 1985.

systems like Chile's. Rather, the center can play a constructive role in stabilizing polarized multiparty systems by mediating between extreme opponents. As we shall see over the course of this analysis, the key question is not the presence or absence of a center party, but rather, if there exists a center party, what *kind* of center party it is.

There are at least two different ways of conceptualizing the center: as a *locus* at the mid-point between two extremes, or as a *political space* in between fundamental political alternatives. Duverger favors the former interpretation. Since all political groups need to say either "yes," or "no," to any given proposal, the "center" consists of a mere geometrical point that separates the proponents and opponents of a particular issue. A center party might occupy that ideological mid-point, but not for long. Eventually, it will be pulled apart at the seams by internal contradictions. Recall that, for Duverger, there is no such thing as a real "tendency" at the political center.[35]

I prefer to think of the center more in terms of a *political space* than a mid-point between two extremes. In this view, the center is a political *tendency* in between fundamental political alternatives. The way some cleavages become politicized creates opportunities that at times allow for more variegated positions than Duverger's dualistic analysis admits. The very heart of democratic politics is the art of compromise. Politicians often seek to open a space between extreme positions, making the intermediate ground habitable. This is not to argue that a center position will *always* be a viable political option within a party system. Even if electoral laws provide incentives to party leaders to occupy the center, the intermediate position is always a tricky one. On the one hand, when a political community finds itself rent between two fundamental choices, and "ideological space" separating the two extremes "extends," then a space at the center of the political spectrum becomes "perceivable."[36] However, it is precisely in this polarized context that a compromise position is most difficult. Depending on the degree of polarization, calls for moderation can go unheard and in this context the center can easily become vulnerable to pulls from the extremes. On the other hand, when political conflict leaves a "short space," i.e., results in a narrow gap separating the antagonists located at the poles, the appearance of a political center is unlikely: a "short space" has "no room" for a center tendency to appear.[37] After all, the more moderate the right and the left are themselves, the less point there is in being preoccupied with moderation. As Starzinger states paradoxically, "the center is least realistic where it is most relevant, and most realistic where it is least relevant."[38]

An exploration into the evolving character of the center over the course of twelve decades of party competition in Chile offers an opportunity to examine more closely the

[35] Duverger, 1954, p. 215.
[36] Sartori, 1976, p. 347.
[37] Sartori, 1976, p. 347.
[38] See Starzinger, 1965, pp. 16-17.

emergence and behavior of three center parties at three different moments in time. A look at three cases at three discrete moments may yield some lessons about the roles played by center parties in multiparty systems.

III. THE CASE OF CHILE

From their earliest days in the mid-19th century, political parties in Chile found themselves divided into three distinct ideological tendencies, with parties located at opposite ends of the political spectrum and at least one party between the two poles. Over the course of twelve decades of nearly uninterrupted political competition, each of these three political tendencies won between a fourth and a third of the vote; no single party held a majority of the electorate.[39] This tripartite distribution of the Chilean party system, and the spectrum of parties that filled the political landscape, made Chile's party system unlike any other in Latin America.[40]

I have argued elsewhere that the evolution of the Chilean party system in the 19th and 20th centuries can be understood in part as a legacy of how three basic social cleavages—the religious, urban class, and rural class cleavages—became politicized at three historically discrete points in time.[41] Political battles waged between opposing sides of a potentially "generative cleavage"[42] crystallized in the form of new sets of institutional arrangements: specifically, the emergence of new political parties and the appearance of new relationships among older political parties. In the tradition of Lipset and Rokkan, I call the periods in which these basic social cleavages were translated into concrete party alternatives "critical junctures."[43] Within each of these critical junctures, the analysis focuses on the key problem of how social conflicts were translated by politicians from the sphere of civil society into the sphere of political society, i.e., into the sphere of parties and the state. Understanding this process of *conflict displacement*, from one sphere to another, requires a careful study both of how cleavages sometimes become

---

[39] From 1830 until 1973, the only deviation from this pattern of competitive party politics were the crises of 1891, 1924, and 1932, when unconstitutional governments held office for periods of up to five months. The Ibáñez "dictatorship" from 1927 to 1932 should also be considered an exception. See A. Valenzuela, 1985, p. 1.

[40] Students of Latin American politics have often noted the distinctiveness of the Chilean political party system. Among others, see Kalman Silvert, 1965, p. 99; Federico Gil, 1966, p. 244; A. Valenzuela, 1985, pp. 2-3; A. Valenzuela and S. Valenzuela, 1981, pp. 15-22.

[41] See Scully, 1989.

[42] This expression was formulated originally by S. Valenzuela in A. Valenzuela and S. Valenzuela, 1981, p. 15. Cf. also A. Valenzuela, 1985, p. 3. Not all social cleavages are "generative," i.e. not all are reproduced in the political arena. Before it crystallizes in the form of new political institutions, such as a political party, it is necessary for a cleavage to become translated or "politicized." Cf. Hause and Rayside, in Maisel and Cooper, 1978, p. 36.

[43] Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, p. 37 ff.; Rokkan, 1970, p. 112 ff.

reflected in parties and the party system, as well as how at other times they are produced and reinforced by politicians.[44]

The way political and social elites in Chile responded to the clerical-anticlerical cleavage in the 19th century, and to the class cleavage in the 20th, left institutional legacies that set patterns for political party alliances and oppositions for years to follow. Crucial for my analysis of the Chilean case is the argument that the second of these cleavages, class conflict, precipitated the reorganization of the Chilean political arena at two historically distinct junctures. Class conflict came to dominate the terms of party conflict in Chile during the first decades of the 20th century. At first, political elites succeeded in limiting party competition along class lines to the "urban sector."[45] Only beginning in the 1950s, with the erosion of long-standing patterns of clientelistic controls in the countryside and the spread of new forms of social and political organizations into the rural sector, did parties with a working-class agenda penetrate the rural electorate. Therefore, since class conflict within the urban and rural sectors represents two different stages of the political unfolding of the same broad social cleavage, I treat these stages separately.

From the very beginning of organized party politics in Chile, two-sided conflicts yielded a tripartite party system. A critical juncture framework, and the analysis of the sequence of overlapping cleavages it permits, highlights the persistent effort to build a political center. Curiously, in each of the three historical periods that I have identified as critical junctures in redefining the shape taken by political conflict within the party system, the political center of the party system became reconstituted: first, by the Liberal party in the mid-19th century; later, by the Radicals in the first decades of the 20th century; and finally, by the Christian Democrats in the middle of the same century.[46] By exploring the emergence and behavior of each of these three center parties in three distinct periods within a single country case, it is possible to gain analytic leverage on the controversial issue of the emergence and behavior of center parties.

IV. REAPPRAISING THE ROLE OF THE CENTER

---

[44] Parties both represent social interests and channel them. Thus, in addition to reflecting cleavages within society, parties and politicians also "aggregate, select, and eventually deviate and distort" these conflicts. Sartori, 1976, pp. 27-29. See also Sartori, 1969, pp. 87-89.

[45] By "urban sector," I mean to include both the urban and mining enclave areas. Another term used for this is the "modern sector," because it includes not only the economy of the urban sector, but also areas marked by activities, such as mineral extraction, that are characterized by the application of technology that yields relatively high levels of productivity. O'Donnell (1973, chapter 1) provides a helpful discussion of potential indicators that serve as a point of demarcation between what he calls the "modern" and "traditional" sectors and what I refer to as the urban and rural sectors, respectively. See also Colliers, forthcoming, Glossary.

[46] In the case of both the Liberals and the Radicals, they became center parties when new parties emerged to their "left." In the case of Christian Democracy, as we shall see, the party emerged from the middle position and eventually undermined the previously existing center.

A purely negative appraisal of the role of the political center is inconsistent with long standing patterns of party competition emerging from the Chilean case. In this section I will focus on the evolving character of the center within the Chilean party system and examine the various roles Chilean center parties have played since the 19th century.[47] After exploring three specific cases, the Liberals, the Radicals, and the Christian Democrats, I will conclude by attempting to draw more general lessons from these experiences.
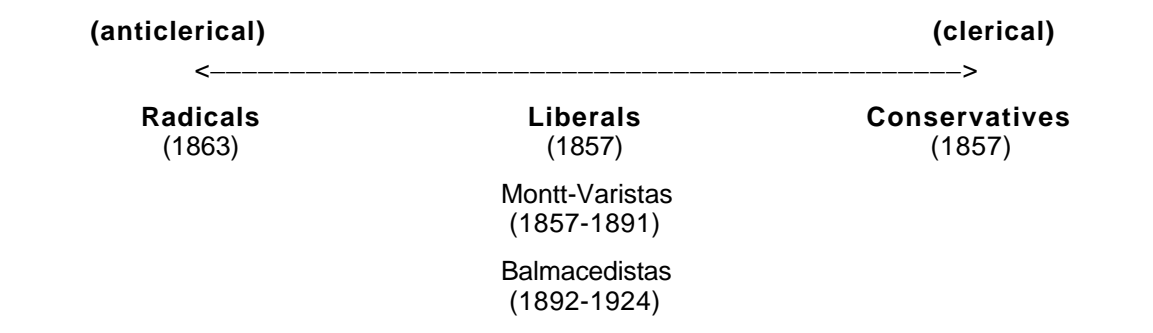
The 19th-Century Liberals

The appearance of the Liberals at the center of the initial party spectrum in the mid-19th century was largely a result of the way an earlier incumbency struggle (i.e., a struggle for high office between Manuel Camilo Vial and the Pelucones of Antonio Varas), was cross-cut by the clerical-anticlerical conflict. The way these two lines of cleavage intersected, and subsequently the way they were exploited politically between 1857 and 1861, produced a party system characterized by three fundamental tendencies. The clerical-anticlerical conflict precipitated parties that coalesced poles apart on the issue (the clerical Conservatives and the anticlerical Radicals), and left a space in between extensive enough to be filled by Vial's "out-party," the Liberals (see Figure 1).

---

[47] Admittedly, it becomes problematic to study the role of center parties during the 19th century because the nature of political competition can hardly be considered to be "democratic." Suffrage was highly restricted during the first decades of political competition, and electoral control by the executive was a major feature of Chilean electoral politics until after the civil war of 1891, when executive electoral control was replaced by local party influence. Despite the highly restricted electoral universe, the basic dynamics of political party competition, and the set of opportunities and constraints available to the political center, were comparable to later patterns.

_____

FIGURE 1

Religious Cleavage and Party Evolution[48]
_____

(anticlerical)   **(clerical)**

<——>

Radicals   **Liberals**   **Conservatives**
(1863)   (1857)   (1857)

                                Montt-Varistas
                                (1857-1891)

                                Balmacedistas
                                (1892-1924)
_____

Why did a political center appear at all in Chile? Duverger reasoned that, where a single cleavage predominates, only two parties would develop.[49] From this perspective, the Liberals might not have emerged at the center of a political system where the clerical-anticlerical conflict predominated. Why did this political cleavage generate three, instead of two, major political parties?[50] Perhaps even more puzzling, why is it that not two, but three, *political tendencies* came to permanently characterize the Chilean political arena?

One possible explanation is that the electoral system generated a tripartite distribution of the electorate. However, in the 1850s and '60s, the electoral system was a majority system, and clearly favored the emergence of bipartism, *not* a multiparty system. The classic explanation for multiple parties is proportional representation.[51] However, a form of proportional representation was only adopted with the cumulative vote in Chile in 1874, and then only for the election of deputies. Genuine proportional representation was not instituted in Chile until decades after the emergence of a tripartite party system.

I have argued elsewhere that the way the clerical-anticlerical cleavage between 1857 and 1861 was imposed upon a previous ins vs. outs incumbency struggle led to the development of a

_____

[48] During this period (1861-1920), the Liberals shared the center with two personalist "party" groups. First, the Montt-Varistas and later, after the civil war of 1891, the Balmacedistas, or Liberal Democrats. These latter were followers of the fallen president Balmaceda who committed suicide after losing the war. Both these political groupings were located closer to the "ins," or authoritarian, side of the political axis.

[49] See Duverger, 1954, p. 233.

[50] In fact, as we have seen, more than three political parties were formed during the 19th century, but only three would survive throughout the entire period (and into the following one). The personalistic origins of the Montt-Varistas and the Balmacedistas might provide some clues as to why certain political parties endure and others do not.

[51] Duverger, 1954, p. 248.

center party in Chile.[52] The clerical-anticlerical cleavage cross-cut the incumbency struggle in such a way as to create "space"[53] for three, not two, political camps. As a consequence of this battle between Church and state elites, the distance separating the clerical-anticlerical poles widened, yielding a political space between the two parties conforming the extremes of the spectrum, the Conservatives and the Radicals. Liberal party leaders, because they had formed the nucleus of their political party in 1849, prior to the political eruption of the clerical-anticlerical cleavage, were able to remain basically aloof from the outbreak of political warfare in 1857. In that the political profile of the Liberals was not founded upon religious disputes but rather upon opposition to Montt and his *pelucón* government, the Liberals alone of the nascent parties were free to fill the space that had opened up between the two extremes. That they did so was primarily a consequence of specific political calculations of the Liberal party leadership.   In avoiding identifying themselves with either side of the dispute at the height of this critical juncture, Liberal party leaders sought to advance their own goals by playing one side off against the other. The existence of ideological space between the two extremes, combined with skillful maneuvering by Liberal party politicians, enabled the Liberal party to occupy the center of the party system.

The Liberals were opportunists. On the one hand, Liberal leaders were devoutly "anti-authoritarian" (at least until they assumed presidential power themselves) and used this banner to appeal to the Conservatives. On the other hand, they belonged on the anticlerical side of the religious dispute. While they suppressed this second aspect of their political identity during the fifteen years of the *fusión*, they also called upon their anticlerical credentials to enter into periodic alliances with the Radicals. In both cases, it was the center party Liberals who decisively shaped the terms of coalition and alliances in Chile, tilting first to one side of the political spectrum, and then to the other.

In this way a single predominant social cleavage, far from precluding the emergence of a center, yielded space for a compromise position located at the center of the political spectrum. The Liberals were able to fill this space because the other parties had taken ideological commitments that made the center position unavailable. Once the Liberals had filled this center space, their presence within the party system was useful for restraining further polarization between the two extremes. The mediating presence of the Liberals at the center enabled the two extremes to coexist within the same political arena.[54]   Furthermore, the relatively smooth

52 See Scully, 1989, especially Chapter 2.

53 The concept of political space is borrowed from J.S. Valenzuela's use of the image of organizational space. The concept provides a useful image for understanding how the "quirks of history often produce boundaries to the space which the organizations can occupy."   J.S. Valenzuela, 1979, p. 17.

54 There is significant support for the argument that the role of the Liberals during the 19th century can generally be understood in terms of a mediating force. Cf. Heise, 1982, pp. 283-297,

resolution of the programmatic issues presented by the religious dispute in Chile was possible largely because of the moderating influence of the Liberals. Since the center party Liberals constituted the governing party during the period in which these issues were basically resolved (in the 1880s), all-out war between the Conservatives and the Radicals was avoided.[55]

The electoral predominance of the center during this period meant that the two extremes occasionally shared the predicament of being governmental "outs" together. Thus, incentives existed to encourage periodic cooperation between them, thereby discouraging extremist politics. For example, in the case of the reform legislation of 1874, despite the depth of their differences, the Conservatives and Radicals were able to set ideology aside temporarily in order to combat the institutional mechanisms of Liberal electoral control. If party competition during this initial period had consisted of only two, rather than three, discrete political tendencies in an equally polarized political context, one of them might have been able to capture executive power and use it to implement its program to the complete exclusion of its adversary. In other words, without the continued existence of the center, political competition would have been more, not less, polarized.[56]

Therefore, from the initial period of party formation in the late 1850s until the breakdown of the parliamentary regime in the 1920s, many salient characteristics of the behavior of political parties can be explained in terms of the moderating role played by parties of the center (Liberals, together with the Nationals and Liberal Democrats). During this period, center parties displayed a marked tendency to avoid direct confrontation, to arrive at a compromise or some middle-ground solution.[57] Given the essentially nonideological, pragmatic political profile adopted by the

---

also pp. 308-310, 320, 331-333; Rivas Vicuña, 1964, p. 140; Villalobos, et al., 1974, p. 709, 717; Eyzaguirre, J., 1967, pp. 173-174.

[55] The Church lost parliamentary battle after battle during this period. In rapid succession, the Santa María government passed laws secularizing cemeteries (1883), legislating civil marriages (1884), and providing for civil registries (1884). Each of these measures represented a humiliating defeat for the Church, as well as a loss of prestige and power. However, partly owing to the cushioning effect of the Liberals, more extreme anticlericalist measures were avoided and the transition to secular public institutions was a relatively smooth one. See Krebbs et al., 1981, *passim.*

[56] This argument is supported by J.S. Valenzuela, 1985, p. 140. The logic here is similar to that employed by Arend Lijphart, 1977, pp. 61-65, where the author argues that consociational arrangements become more possible in the presence of multiparty systems. I quote, "multipartism with relatively few parties is optimal for a plural society. This proposition challenges the traditional wisdom that two party systems are superior to multiparty systems. For instance, when a division into two major political segments is politically expressed as a two party system, as in Austria, this dual pattern is less conducive to consociational democracy than a multiparty system" (Lijphart, 1977, p. 62).

[57] This essentially nonideological posture of 19th-century center parties has led some to call them "negative entities," consistent with Sartori's view. Cf. Gil, 1962, p. 32; Edwards, 1984, p. 87, p. 117. I will return to this issue in the final chapter.
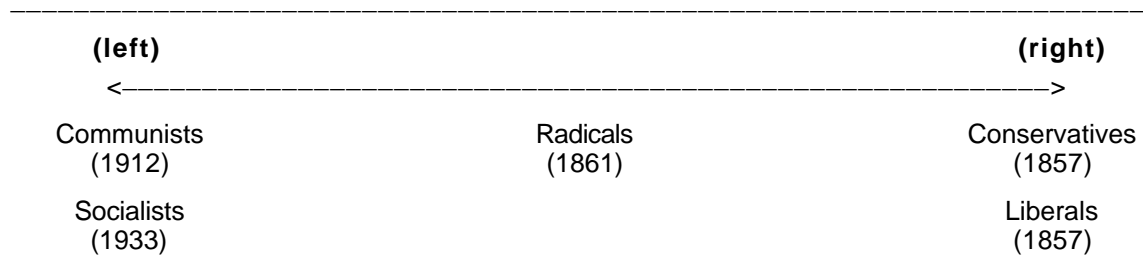
Liberals during this period, a pattern of interaction between parties emerged that favored political accommodation.[58]

The Radicals In the First Half of the 20th Century

A similar argument could be made with respect to the appearance of the Radicals at the center of the party spectrum as a consequence of the eruption of the urban class cleavage in the first decades of the 20th century. Like their Liberal party predecessors at the center, the anticlerical Radicals were the residue of an earlier conflict, eclipsed on the left by the emergence of working-class parties (refer to Figure 2). Within this newly reconstituted party system of the early 1930s, the underlying continuity of the tripartite structure of the emergent party system was clearly discernible.[59] Like the party system that had resulted from the 19th-century clerical-anticlerical battles, there emerged parties at both extremes of the political spectrum, as well as a key party to occupy the center. Figure 2 situates the parties as they were located along the new predominant axis of cleavage, the class cleavage.

_____

FIGURE 2

Urban Class Cleavage and Party System Evolution in the Post-1933 Period
_____

(left)		(right)
<——————————————————————————————————————>		
Communists	Radicals	Conservatives
(1912)	(1861)	(1857)
Socialists		Liberals
(1933)		(1857)

_____

The far right position remained in possession of the Conservatives, with the difference that it was joined on issues related to class by the Liberal party. The Conservatives' clerical

_____

[58] Heise, 1982, pp. 283-284. During this period, public figures—particularly from center parties—gave the impression of acting with indecision and inconsistency, without possessing doctrinally coherent goals. Such behavior was necessary to acquire a reputation as a "prudent politician" (Heise, 1982, p. 285). Jorge Huneeus Gana, in his well known *Cartas Abiertas* (found in *La Ley* between 1894-1895), has left noteworthy portraits of public figures of center parties who represented this style.

[59] The underlying continuity within the party system was captured colorfully by an article in the *Mercurio* in 1932: "The Socialists of today are the Radicals of yesterday and the Liberals of the day before. The vanguard has changed in name, but its nature is the same. As much can be said of those stigmatized today as oligarchs: they are the same ones who yesterday were conservatives, and the day before yesterday were ultramontanes. Between them both is the center, which today is Radical and yesterday was Liberal. The names change, humanity does not." Quoted from Drake, 1978, p. 77.

character was now reinforced by their conservative stance on the class cleavage. Newly invigorated working-class parties occupied the left of the party spectrum, staking out the opposite, anticlerical and working-class electoral position. As in the 19th century, the parties at each end of the spectrum constituted antagonistic political forces.

Both of these center parties, the Liberals and the Radicals, were formed on the basis of a conflict that preceded their occupation of the center. Since they were formed on the basis of an earlier (clerical-anticlerical) cleavage dimension, the Radicals were likely to consist of rather heterogeneous elements, if viewed from the perspective of the predominant dimension of conflict. In the turbulent context of a critical juncture, party leaders may see it in their own best interests to choose a somewhat indeterminate, and hence "compromise" or "centrist" position.[60] By the early 1930s, the Radicals were firmly in place at the center of the party spectrum in Chile.

Having occupied the center position of the left-right party spectrum, the Radicals soon found themselves pulled in opposite directions, towards both the right and the left. Though they were the predominant electoral force within the reconstituted party system, the Radicals lacked the strength to govern alone. In order to govern, the party had to seek partners, and in doing so its leadership found itself split between two alternative coalitions. They could either move right, joining with the Liberals and Conservatives, or move left, forming an alliance with the predominantly working-class parties.

The formation of the center-left Popular Front coalition in 1936, and the narrow electoral victory in 1938 of its presidential candidate, Pedro Aguirre Cerda, had the effect of consolidating class-based party politics in Chile.[61] Through the Popular Front, Marxist parties, organized labor, and other previously excluded elements were successfully incorporated into the arena of party politics. A peaceful transition to class-based politics was facilitated by the fact that working-class parties themselves (especially the Communists after 1935), as a strategic response to the advance of fascist regimes in Europe, openly pursued alliances with the bourgeois Radicals at the center.

However, a less obvious factor was also important. The formation of the Popular Front was made possible in part because of the brokerage role played by the Radicals. Though the 1930s opened a period of often intense leftist mobilization of the working classes,[62] Chile's

---

[60] This argument is consistent with Daalder, 1984, p. 100.

[61] This argument is made in Moulián et al., 1985, pp. 11-16; and in Drake, 1978, p. 214.

[62] Within two months after the 1938 presidential election, the Chilean Labor Federation (CTCh) grew by the tens of thousands, more than doubling its membership. This rapid growth of union membership was symptomatic of the successful institutionalization of urban working-class groups under the Popular Front. Cf. Drake, 1978, p. 211. Morris documents the rapid growth of organized labor within legal unions. According to him, from 9,000 in 1938, the number of unionized workers grew to 210,000 in 1941. See Morris, 1966, p. 262. Though probably inflated, the figures serve to illustrate the point.

political and social stability was enhanced by the Radicals who played the role of fulcrum within the party system. By opening electoral and bureaucratic avenues of participation to the organized working class and their representatives, the Radical party-dominated Popular Front governments had the effect of delaying polarization within the Chilean party system, cushioning the impact of working-class party demands.[63] As Cavarozzi has argued, "the Radical party acted as a wedge (*cuña*) within the oligarchic regime, within which it was a fully functioning member."[64] The moderating role played by the Radicals during the 1930s and '40s softened the impact of the political incorporation of the working classes and permitted a relatively smooth transition, comparatively speaking, to a competitive electoral regime that included the participation of working-class parties of the left.

Popular Front strategy was predicated upon the political dominance of the center in Chile and upon its ability to reach understandings with other major parties to the right and the left. In a larger historical perspective, the Radical party came to play a role similar to that played earlier by the Liberals as the principal broker within the party system. Like its predecessor, the Radical party came to play the pivotal role of a flexible and mediating center. The Radicals were able to mediate class conflict, given the moderate position the party took with regard to this, the predominant political cleavage. Like the 19th-century Liberals, the Radicals were *incidental* to the predominant axis of conflict. The moderating presence of the Radicals at the center of the party system contributed to the basically centripetal direction of political competition and facilitated the transition to competitive party politics with the participation of the working classes within the Popular Front.

However, the mediating role played by the Radicals, and the oscillating coalitional behavior it implied, was not without its costs to the party. Over time, as the center developed complex, and in some ways contradictory, sets of *electoral* and *governing* alliances with elements of both the right and the left, the credibility of the party became exhausted.[65] Like the late 19th century where Liberals were able to establish electoral importance but *not* overall hegemony within the party system, the distribution of the Chilean electorate during this period produced a key center party but not enough of a center tendency to enable the Radicals to govern alone.

---

[63] The Radical party profited enormously from its dominant position within the Popular Front coalition. The Radicals benefited most especially from the expansion of the state bureaucracy, in which their membership had become entrenched. While the Socialists focused on electoral mobilization, the Communists concentrated more on organizational linkages with the working classes. See Drake, 1978, pp. 213-214.

[64] Cavarozzi, 1978, p. 256.

[65] The reemergence of Ibáñez in 1952 can be explained, in large part, by the ideological exhaustion of the center as a result of its left-right pendular movement. This, combined with the left's unwillingness to have its agenda tabled by the center, gave added impetus to Ibáñez' antiparty movement of the 1950s.

The Christian Democrats in the Second Half of the 20th Century

The emergence of the Christian Democrats at the center of the party spectrum within the context of the third critical juncture, the spread of working-class politics to the countryside in the 1950s and early '60s, represented a rather different development when compared to the Liberals and Radicals. The Christian Democrats emerged largely as a consequence of the development of an alternative response to the class conflict which included the social and political mobilization of popular sectors in both urban and rural areas. Perhaps more than anything else, the Christian Democratic invasion of the countryside, upsetting traditional social and property relations and robbing the right of its electoral domain, constituted a virtual declaration of war against the political *status quo.*

Crucially, the Christian Democrats and their close allies within the Catholic hierarchy rejected absolutely both Marxist and capitalist paths to development. They proposed a third way, exclusive of both the right and the left. An important difference, then, between the founding experiences of the Liberals and Radicals when compared with that of the Christian Democrats was that the latter erupted at the center of a left-right political spectrum and placed themselves decidedly at *the center of class conflict* whereas the former were displaced by other parties on either side. The Christian Democrats were not *incidental* to the then predominant line of cleavage, that of class. Rather, the Christian Democrats, unlike the Liberals and Radicals before them, rejected the policies of both the right and the left, and offered a third fundamental alternative, a "third pole" within the party system.[66]

This difference in the case of the Christian Democrats led to behavior at the center very different from that of its predecessors, behavior characterized by a diminished capacity of the center to compromise. In exploring the controversial role played within the party system by the Christian Democrats (PDC) between 1957 and 1973, it is necessary to distinguish three distinct phases. Initially at least, the Christian Democrats did not replace the historic center party Radicals, but rather joined them at the center, becoming a second intermediate party.[67] During the first phase of the Christian Democrats' growth, from 1957 to 1963, Chile's party system was characterized by *four* major tendencies instead of the customary three, as shown below in Figure 3.

The existence of two electorally viable centers from 1957 to 1963 (the year in which the Radicals formed the Frente Democrático with the right) served in one way to *enhance* available

---

[66] Garretón has argued emphatically that the Christian Democrats constituted a "third pole" within the party system. Garretón, 1989, p. 7.
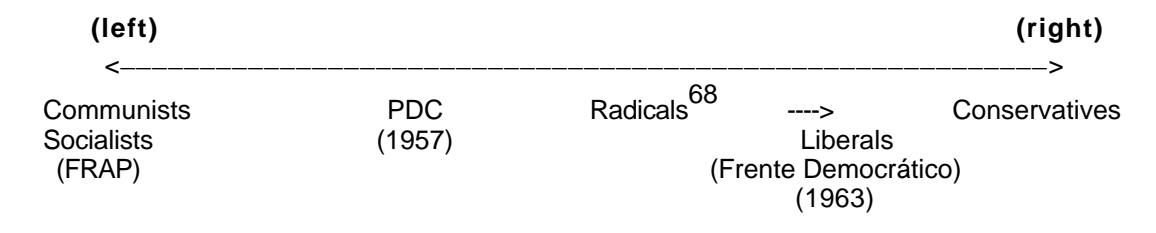
[67] Moulián's interpretation of the role of the center during this period has been most helpful for the analysis that follows. See especially, Moulián, 1986b, *passim.*

coalitional opportunities within the party system. The presence of the Christian Democrats during this phase, at least theoretically, multiplied the number of potential coalition partners. In fact, in the 1958 presidential election, the Christian Democratic party—itself a recently formed amalgam of various different party strains—made an effort to form an electoral alliance with the Liberals. The emergence of the Christian Democrats, at least initially, did not *automatically* produce polarization or reduce the level of cooperation among parties. Rather, it introduced yet another potential coalition partner. Arguably, between 1957 and 1964 at least, the Christian Democrats did not play the centrifugal role that has been attributed to them.

_____

FIGURE 3

Party System Evolution: Phase 1 (1957-1964)

_____

(left)   **(right)**

   <———>

Communists   PDC   Radicals[68]   ---->   Conservatives
Socialists   (1957)   Liberals
  (FRAP)   (Frente Democrático)
                                                         (1963)

_____

However, the role played by the Christian Democratic party in the second phase of its development from 1964 to 1970 is less ambiguous. We have already seen that after 1959 the Christian Democrats became less and less interested in interparty coalition politics. Once the Christian Democrats captured the presidency in 1964, the party reinforced centrifugal forces already at work within the party system. Several reasons justify this argument. First, Christian Democratic policies during this second phase, especially in the rural sector, so traumatized the right that any understanding with this reformist center party became unthinkable. The right pole of the party system became reconstituted politically in 1966 as the Liberals and Conservatives merged with other nationalist elements to form the National party. Second, Christian Democratic reforms were so far reaching that the left—itself already undergoing a process of radicalization—was pushed even further leftward in its effort to distinguish itself politically from the center. Third, the historic center, the Radical party, suffered rapid electoral decline at the end of the 1960s and, in 1969, moved to the left to join the Popular Unity coalition. Thus, a different configuration of party behavior, shaped largely by the challenge of Christian Democratic electoral mobilization, characterized this second phase, as shown below in Figure 4.

---

[68] The proximity of the Radicals to the right during the period of their defensive electoral alliance from 1961 to 1963 created a void at the center-left of the party system, opening a space for the Christian Democrats to fill.

The extent to which the Christian Democrats contributed to centrifugal competition between 1970 and 1973, the years corresponding to the government of Salvador Allende, is a question that requires close scrutiny. It would appear that, at the outset of the Popular Unity government, the center attempted (unsuccessfully) to play a mediating role. With the right firmly entrenched in the opposition, compromise between the parties of the Popular Unity and the Christian Democrats was the only possibility that remained if the breakdown of political competition was to be avoided. However, the capacity of the Christian Democrats to act as broker within the party system was greatly impeded by hypermobilization of the

_____

FIGURE 4

Party System Evolution: Phase 2 (1964-1970)
_____

(left)   **(right)**

  <———>

    Popular Unity   <-------- Christian Democrats ------->   National Party
      (1969)   (1966)
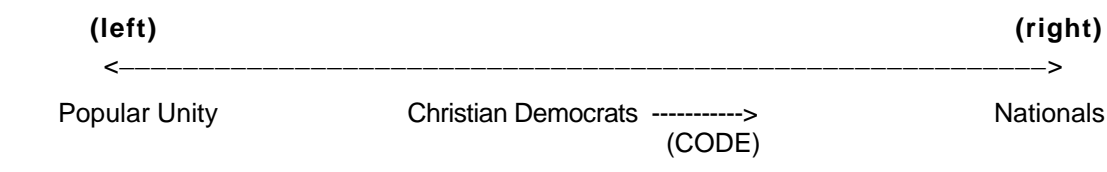_____
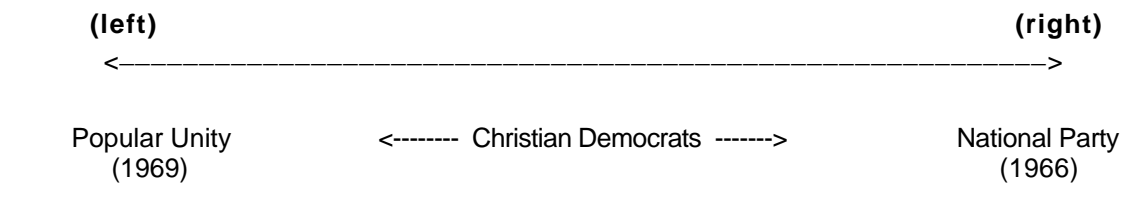
electorate and deepening political polarization. To these factors must be added the substitution of the Radicals by the Christian Democrats at the center. This was a different type of center party in a very different political context (see Figure 5). Even if they had wanted to, the Christian Democrats would have encountered great organizational difficulties trying to play the role of mediator within the party system. The Christian Democrats understood themselves not principally as a compromising *positional* center party but as a *programmatic* center party with high stakes in virtually every policy outcome. We shall return to this discussion briefly in the final section of this paper.

_____

FIGURE 5

Party System Evolution: Phase 3 (1970-1973)
_____

(left)   **(right)**

  <———>

    Popular Unity   Christian Democrats ----------->   Nationals
                                                    (CODE)
_____

        The intransigence of the Socialist party within the Popular Unity coalition and its absolute refusal to consider alliances outside the Popular Unity coalition further reinforced the party system's centrifugation and led, eventually, to the loss of viable political options for the center. Faced with these difficulties, the center gradually lost the political initiative to the right. Though the Christian Democrats throughout the period remained a formidable electoral force and recovered their place as Chile's largest single party in the parliamentary elections of March 1973, the right emerged as the leader of the opposition to Allende. In July 1972, negotiations between the Popular Unity coalition government, headed by Salvador Allende, and the Christian Democrats, represented by Patricio Aylwin, ended in failure. In October 1972, a national strike

was organized by merchant and professional associations to bring the economy to a standstill. The strike, which paralyzed the country for almost thirty days and brought the Allende government to the brink of disaster, was supported by a number of key economic actors, such as the trucker's union. In anticipation of the municipal elections of 1973, parties in opposition to the Allende government consolidated their electoral efforts by forming an alliance called the Democratic Confederation (Confederación Democrática, or CODE), bringing the process of polarization to its logical conclusion. By August, a motion before Congress declaring the Allende government unconstitutional passed with a clear majority. Chile's traditional three tendencies had evaporated, leaving a deadly standoff between two mutually exclusive alternatives. On September 11, 1973 competitive party politics ended in Chile with a brutal coup, and a governing junta was named with Army General Augusto Pinochet at its head.

The emergence, growth, and consolidation of the Christian Democratic party at the center of the Chilean party system has been inadequately analyzed by previous scholarship. The ambitious electoral strategy of this hegemonic center party can hardly be described as "weak, more of a reflection of exclusions from the two extremes than from a positive center pole."[69] Rather, the center constituted a strong political protagonist with considerable initiative capacity. Furthermore, once the Christian Democrats had occupied the center of the party spectrum, despite strong centrifugal pulls operating within the electorate the center held on to a sizable share of the electorate. Even if the electoral explosion of the Christian Democrats in the parliamentary elections of 1965 are ignored (since the right had essentially collapsed electorally during these elections), the pattern of continuous, incremental growth at the center begun in the late 1950s experienced only a slight decline (0.7 percent) in 1973. Given the comparatively recent emergence of the party, it appears that the Christian Democrats held together surprisingly well during the very years characterized by extreme polarization. There appeared little overall electoral "hemorrhaging" from the center party.

While it is true that the Chilean party system was characterized by extreme polarization prior to the breakdown in 1973, Sartori's claim that the "center amounted, in substance, to a *transit* from left to right and vice versa"[70] is doubtful. Ultimately, political fragmentation in Chile was not the result of the lack of a *solidifying* center pole but, somewhat, of its opposite: it was largely a consequence of the *success* of the electoral mobilization strategy of the Christian Democratic party and the way in which the consequences of this strategy eventually defined the structure of political choice available to the right and to the left.

---

[69] Cited from A. Valenzuela, 1985, p. 18. Sartori describes the Chilean center in precisely the same terms. See Sartori, 1976, pp. 159-163.

[70] Sartori, 1976, p. 160.

The role played by the Christian Democratic party was not one of a weak and defensive *occupied center*,[71] but rather an aggressive and highly dynamic *occupying center*, winning and losing new constituencies to both the right and the left. The Christian Democrats sought to attract the support of both newly registered voters and, more importantly for the shape of political competition, previously committed ones. In so doing, the Christian Democrats undermined previously functional political coalitions, and attempted to forge a new urban-rural coalition under its own hegemony. Ultimately, the failure of this attempt made regime stability more difficult and contributed to the eventual breakdown of competitive politics in September, 1973. The Christian Democratic party was successful enough to prevent the left and the right from arriving at a formula for a stable governing coalition, but not successful enough to govern by itself.

Two Types of Center Parties

In sum, democratic politics is in important measure about compromise, i.e., finding middle positions in relation to major conflicts. Politicians often seek to create a center option. The manner in which multiple lines of cleavage cross-cut one another can create more opportunities for compromise, more possibilities to forge a habitable space—or tendency—at the center of the party spectrum. Whether or not a *party* actually emerges and endures at the center depends on the variable distribution of electoral opportunities, the electoral procedures that shape these opportunities, and the availability of political entrepreneurs to take advantage of them. The particular type of party that appears at the center, and the impact of the center party on the dynamics of interparty conflict within the party system, will be shaped decisively by the relative salience of the predominant axis of cleavage.

The experience of Chile suggests that differences in the relative salience of the predominant cleavage yields at least two different types of center parties: *positional* and *programmatic*. A *positional* center party takes the middle position along the major axis of cleavage without a substantive commitment to any single particular outcome or set of policies. By contrast, a *programmatic* center party has a specific in between program on which it may well *not* be willing to compromise. A *positional* center tends to view its *raison d'être* as winning control of the government and then keeping it. In order to do this, the party will quite readily attempt to make electoral and governing coalitions with parties on its right, or on its left, or even with both simultaneously. Ideally, a positional center party is able to move with relative freedom to mediate between the poles because the party was formed on the basis of an earlier, now secondary, cleavage. Like the Liberals and Radicals in the Chilean case, the positional center enjoys considerable freedom to act as a broker between the two poles largely because its fundamental

---

71 An "occupied center" is described by Sartori as one in which the center ground of a party system is claimed by a party that takes it "out of competition." See Sartori, 1976, p. 350.

political identity tends to be *incidental* to the predominant political battle being waged. As a result, the party experiences less friction in moving along the major axis of the party spectrum, making and unmaking necessary compromises and adjustments. Contrary to what earlier accounts may have argued, the presence of such a center party can play a crucially important role in making party competition possible. This is especially true within a party system such as the Chilean, where no single group possesses a majority position.

The extraordinary longevity and stability experienced by the Chilean party system can in part be explained by the crucial role of broker played by the positional center. In the cases of both the Liberals in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the Radicals until the late 1950s, these parties were often more interested in putting together the support needed to build stable governing coalitions than in advancing a specific party program. They were ready to reach a compromise position, sometimes even on key political issues of the day. Thus, what was scorned by Duverger as an *ambiguous* center making "real" choice impossible might be regarded here as an important source of stable patterns of political compromise within the party system. Rather than viewing the center as a factor contributing almost inevitably to immoderate and extremist politics within the party system, as both Duverger and Sartori do, the experience of Chile suggests that, at least under some circumstances, the presence of a center is essential for maintaining stability. In some deeply segmented contexts, like the Chilean, where political opinion is often divided sharply—frequently posed as a fight between good and evil, making conversion from one political faith to another almost impossible—a two party system can be more destructive of political stability than one in which center parties can mediate between extreme opponents.[72]

In contrast, a *programmatic* center party is one whose core party identity (or party "profile") is derived fundamentally from the predominant axis of cleavage within the party system. When a party is formed on the basis of a centrist position on the predominant axis of cleavage and places itself at the electoral center, it will encounter much resistance—both from within the party as well as from without—to playing the role of mediator between the extremes. A programmatic center party enjoys much less freedom to move from pole to pole to make the political bargains and deals that can serve as a lubricant to party competition.

The Christian Democrats emerged at the center of the class-based party spectrum in the late 1950s and were increasingly unwilling and unable to play a role as broker between the right

---

[72] This point is made by a number of political analysts. Among others, Lechner, 1985, p. 27; Huneeus, 1984, p. 23; and Huntington, 1968, p. 416. As Chilean political analyst Norberto Lechner has stated for the Chilean case, "In contrast to Sartori, bipartism appears to be not only inviable, but also undesirable" (Lechner, 1985, p. 27). In fact, the two Latin American cases of bipartism, Colombia and Uruguay, support my argument. When the parties in these cases have acted as single units, the result has been conflict. With fractionalization, one fraction might ally with the opposing party in a coalition-style government, thereby playing the role of "center."

and the left.[73] Sartori and Valenzuela are correct in arguing that the center-party Christian Democrats played different roles from those of their predecessors at the center, the Radicals. But it is not only that the Christian Democrats were "more ideological" than the Radicals; they were ideological in a different way, one that can be traced, ultimately, to the manner in which the Christian Democrats defined themselves in terms of the predominant axis of cleavage: the class conflict in both the urban, but especially by the 1950s, the rural sector. The Christian Democrats occupied a third pole in the middle of the Chilean party spectrum, a pole that constituted, in effect, a programmatic commitment to a *specific political alternative*—explicitly rejecting those of both the right and the left—and thereby contributed to patterns of center-fleeing, or centrifugal, party competition. The disappearance of a political space at the center of the party system where compromise might have taken place contributed to the breakdown of democratic politics in 1973.

V. RECONSTITUTING THE CENTER AFTER PINOCHET

For over 16 years, the military regime headed by General Augusto Pinochet attempted to refashion politics in Chile. However, beginning with the outbreak of nationally organized protests in 1983, and especially since the triumph of the opposition to Pinochet in the plebiscite of October 5, 1988, political parties have gradually resumed their place as the *columna vertebral*[74] (literally, the "backbone") of the Chilean political process. The basic contours of the political landscape that reemerged as a result of the transition from authoritarian rule at the end of the 1980s were not unlike those of the early 1970s.[75] As in the party system prior to the breakdown in 1973, it is possible to observe the reappearance of basically three underlying political tendencies in Chile: right, left, and center. However, despite multiple similarities, there are important differences both within and between these newly reconstituted political actors. In what

[73] My argument, which can be found in greater detail in Scully, 1989, Chapter 4, is considerably more complex than I am able to present here. It is important to point out, however, that a crucial reason for the increased rigidity within the party system can be traced to the increasing unavailability of party coalitions from the left and right poles, as well as the center, dating from the mid-1950s.

[74] This expression is used in Garretón, 1983, *passim*; also 1989b, pp. xvi-xix. According to Garretón, this "backbone" was formed by "the interlocking of base-level social organizations with the political party structure, both in tension with the state as the focal point for political action. This backbone was the mode of organizing political subjects and social actors of national scope" (Garretón, 1989a, p. xvi).

[75] The only really new political actor within the newly reconstituted party system was the Humanist party, basically composed of youths, and advocating a new political agenda based on such issues as ecology, feminism, and pacifism. As Garretón correctly points out, this political group showed itself to be more a political "movement" than a party, and was unable to win more than pockets of electoral support. See Garretón, 1990a, p. 12.

follows, I will attempt to sketch the political trajectory of the major actors within each of these three tendencies, underlining some of the more important continuities and changes each of them has undergone with the rebirth of party politics. I will then conclude by taking a closer look at the role of the center within this most recently reconstituted party system.

The Right

The right in Chile has experienced a considerable political rebirth. Having voluntarily disbanded themselves after the coup, important sectors of the right allied themselves with the military regime to assist in the formulation of economic, social, and political policy. The affinity between the political right and the military regime became especially pronounced after 1975 with the adoption of a radical version of market-oriented economic policies. Perhaps even more than the military regime itself, the right in Chile over the past decade and a half has tied its political star to a liberal, free-market style political economy. The right has come to identify itself as the champion of private initiative and the market, and within the more global context of the collapse of communism and the resurgence of liberalism in many parts of the world, the right has reemerged as a stronger political actor with a great deal more self-confidence.

With the return of competitive politics in Chile, the right found itself divided into basically two opposed political camps.[76] On the one hand, the Renovación Nacional (RN) has attempted to distance itself from the more objectionable features of the Pinochet regime and occupy the electoral space that has traditionally been reserved for the democratic right (a space which, from 1966 to 1973, was filled by the National party). On the other hand, the Unión Democrática Independiente (UDI), a creation of Jaime Guzmán's and direct political descendent of the military regime, views itself as trustee of the tutelary aspects of the version of democracy set forth in the 1980 Constitution.[77] In the December 1989 elections, these two political parties joined to form a single list of candidates under the banner "Democracy and Progress." Though both parties demonstrated a surprising capacity to capture votes, RN emerged as the hegemonic party within the right, winning 18.2 percent of the popular vote in the congressional elections (gaining 29 deputies for the party) and 12.4 percent in the senate races (winning 6 senators plus several

---

[76] Efforts to unite these two factions into a single party in 1987 were unable to endure owing to ideological and personality differences between the two groups.

[77] The return to democracy in March 1990 was conditioned by the preservation of what Garretón has called "authoritarian enclaves." He cites as examples of these the statutory reduction of the role of the state in the economy, "organic" constitutional laws such as those that institutionalize the autonomy of the Central Bank, the National Television, the Armed Forces, as well as the measures that locked partisans of Pinochet in nonelected public office such as university rectors, the members of the judiciary, and especially the leading figures within the armed forces. See Garretón, 1990b, p. 6.

independents who joined the party after the elections).[78] The level of support for UDI was about one-half that of RN, winning 9.2 percent of the vote for its congressional candidates (11 deputies) and 5.4 percent of the vote in the contests for the senate (2 senators).

Some caution must be exercised in interpreting these results. Not only did rightist candidates generally take advantage of the clientelist networks of the state to support their campaign efforts, but also the electoral system adopted for the December contests was designed to consistently favor the winning candidate of the list finishing second (namely, the candidate from Democracy and Progress). The electoral law established that, for the elections of both deputies and senators, each voting district would elect two candidates. In order for a single list to win both seats, the combined total obtained by the two candidates of the list needed to double the combined total of their nearest competitors. This system theoretically permitted a list obtaining minority support to win 50 percent of the seats.[79]

However, even taking into consideration the distorting effects of the electoral regime adopted by the Pinochet government, the level of electoral support for parties of the right in the December 1989 elections was considerably higher than it had been in 1973. The combined list of both RN and UDI, together with other successful independent candidates on the right, obtained 33.6 percent of the popular vote in the congressional contests, and 35.4 percent in the Senate. If the votes received by smaller rightist parties (whose individual vote totals fell below the legal minimum and therefore are obliged by law to dissolve themselves) are added to the total obtained by "Democracy and Progress," the total popular vote obtained by the right in the congressional elections swells to approximately 40 percent.[80] Whether this surge of support for the right will be an enduring feature of the Chilean political landscape remains to be seen. However, even if the

---

[78] All the data for the December elections were taken from results given by the Ministry of Interior, and which appeared in *El Mercurio*, December 16 and 17, 1989, and *La Epoca*, December 16, 18, and 25, 1989. Only the Presidential Election results had subsequently been confirmed by the Tribunal Calificador de Elecciones, but it is doubtful that they will vary notably from the results cited here.

[79] Owing to the effects of the electoral regime, parties in opposition to Pinochet obtained 72 deputies (60 percent of the House) with 56 percent of the vote, while Democracy and Progress won 48 deputies (40 percent) with 33.4 percent of the vote. In the Senate, opposition parties won 22 seats (48 percent) with 56.3 percent of the vote, whereas Democracy and Progress gained 16 seats (34 percent) with 35.4 percent of the vote. It should be noted that the 1980 Constitution provides for 8 senators to be designated. If the designated senators were to vote as a bloc with the right, they would hold an absolute majority in the Senate. Since the 1980 Constitution provides that important legislative matters require a three-fifths, two-thirds, or a four-sevenths plurality in both Houses (depending on the nature of the law), such a distribution of seats makes legislation difficult for the Aylwin government. See Garretón, 1990b, pp. 12-13.

[80] These parties, and their respective vote totals, were the Partido Nacional (2.2 percent), the Partido del Sur (0.7 percent), the Independents (1.3 percent), the Avanzada Nacional (0.9 percent), the Democracia Radical (0.4 percent), the Partido Liberal (0.7 percent), and the Partido Socialista Chileno (0.2 percent). They were distributed within various lists.

right suffers some electoral slippage in future elections, it is noteworthy that the electoral performance of congressional candidates of the right in 1989 was almost double that of 1973 (40 percent versus 21.3 percent).

The Left

Shifts within the composition of parties on the left side of the political spectrum have been at least as great as those on the right. Having suffered the brunt of the repressive policies of the military regime, including torture, imprisonment, exile and, in some cases, physical extermination, parties and party leaders of the left have emerged from the experience of authoritarianism in large part transformed. Though the major parties that composed the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende, the Socialists and the Communists (together with some sectors of the Radical party and fragments from the Christian Democrats), have reappeared, these parties have undergone important internal changes.

As with the right, the left found itself divided into two basic tendencies in the newly reconstituted party system. The Socialists, who until shortly after the December 1989 elections were divided into two major factions (the Nuñez Socialists and the Almeyda Socialists, named after their respective General Secretaries), have gradually drifted apart from their historic alliance partners, the Communists. After the victory of the Concertation presidential candidate, the Socialists joined with the center (mainly the Christian Democrats) to form a coalition government under the leadership of Patricio Aylwin. Though composed of different ideological currents and tendencies, both major factions within the Socialist party—to a greater or lesser degree—have submitted themselves to a thorough-going critique of their participation in the Popular Unity government. As a consequence, an important faction within the recently reunited Socialist party, particularly those members originating from the Nuñez faction, have self-consciously distanced themselves from Leninism, reappraised the value of "formal" political democracy, and have openly encouraged strengthening and extending the alliance with the center. This "renewed" version of Chilean socialism represents a markedly different political actor when compared to its more "purist" predecessor within the pre-coup party system.

Division within the socialist camp made it impossible for a single socialist party to coordinate its efforts in the December elections. Instead, the more centrist-leaning Nuñez Socialists, together with several smaller political groups, formed the Partido por la Democracia (PPD) as a catch-all electoral instrument to field its congressional candidates. In the December elections, PPD deputy candidates received 11.0 percent of the popular vote (winning 17 seats), and the support of 12 percent of the electorate for its senatorial candidates (electing 4 of its members to the Senate). The harder-line Almeyda Socialists, together with the Communists, Christian Left, and others, created an electoral alliance called the Partido Amplio de Izquierda

Socialista (PAIS). This second alliance of leftist parties, despite efforts to coordinate electoral strategies between the two leftist alliances (the PPD and the PAIS), attracted only 4.3 percent of the electorate in the contests for the lower House, and only slightly more, 4.7 percent, in the Senate races. As a result, PAIS failed to gain any seats in either House. Though it is difficult to draw conclusions from the results of the December congressional elections owing to the divisions within the left, the biased character of the electoral regime, and the ambiguity of the PAIS toward the elections themselves, parties of the left emerged from the elections having lost a sizable share of the popular vote when compared with 1973.[81]

The second key actor within the Popular Unity coalition, the Communists, have undergone what has been perhaps the most profound political transformation experienced by any of the actors within the party system. Partly as a result of the extreme repression that was visited upon the party during the early years of the Pinochet dictatorship, and partly as a consequence of the increasing consolidation of the military regime represented by the 1980 Constitution, in 1980 the Communists adopted a new political strategy consisting of "the use of all forms of struggle," including "popular rebellion…and acute forms of violence."[82] However, by the mid- and late 1980s, as competitive politics returned to Chile, and all other major political actors (including their traditional allies, the Socialists) eventually opted for a strategy that required accepting the 1980 Constitution as the framework for the transition, the Communists found themselves increasingly isolated. By the end of the 1980s, the reappearance of the political arena within the basic framework of the 1980 Constitution had produced a schizophrenia within the Communist party. On the one hand, the party hesitantly (and belatedly) participated in the electoral overthrow of the regime, calling party cadres to support opposition candidates at the polls. Yet, on the other, party leaders, gathered in a Party Congress shortly after the 1989 elections, sharply reasserted the party's support for "popular rebellion" and armed struggle.[83] This confusion, combined with the critical situation facing international Leninism, has precipitated the worst identity crisis in the history of the Chilean Communist party. At the start of the 1990s the future of the Communist party in Chile appeared in doubt. Whether the party will persist in its

---

[81] The combined total support for leftist (PPD, PAIS, PRSD, and Independent) candidates in the 1989 congressional elections hovered around 25 percent, a sharp decline when compared to the levels enjoyed by the Popular Unity coalition which received 43.9 percent in the congressional elections of 1973. The 1989 figure is supported by Aníbal Palma in an article that appeared in *La Epoca*, December 18, 1989. For the 1973 figures, see A. Valenzuela, 1978, p. 85.

[82] Quoted from Garretón, 1990a, p. 10.

[83] For a discussion of this process, see Ahumada et al., 1989, Vol. III. These authors attribute the transformation of the Communist party in 1980 to four fundamental factors: (1) repression from the military regime; (2) the impact of the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua; (3) the political shunning of the Christian Democratic party; and (4) the severe internal critique in the 1977 Party Plenum of the failure of the Popular Unity government to defend itself.

insurrectionary strategy, and suffer the consequences of further state repression, or whether it will attempt to rejoin its historic alliance partner, the Socialists, within the context of electoral politics, or whether some third alternative lies ahead for the party, remains an open question.

The Center

        Of all the party actors that returned to the political arena in the 1980s, the major party of the center, the Christian Democrats, reemerged as perhaps the most organizationally coherent. While all political parties were banned during the years of military rule, not all parties were treated equally. Whereas parties of the right voluntarily went into recess after the coup, parties of the left generally suffered harsh repression. The centrist Christian Democrats, while legally banned, were able to exploit their privileged relationship with key sectors of the Church and, at least initially, enjoyed the indulgence of some sectors within the regime. In some respects, then, the center party enjoyed a certain comparative advantage in organizational terms relative to other parties during the years of the dictatorship.

        The Christian Democratic party returned to the electoral arena in December 1989 with an impressive show of party support. In addition to seeing a party member, Patricio Aylwin, elected to the presidency, Christian Democrats won the largest party representations in both Houses of Congress. The party received 26.1 percent of the electorate in the deputy elections electing 38 of its members.[84] In the Senate races, Christian Democrats won 13 spots with 32.0 percent of the vote. Thus, the levels of electoral support enjoyed by Christian Democratic candidates in the 1989 elections are strikingly similar to those in 1973, when Christian Democrats won 29.1 percent of the vote in the congressional elections.

        The Christian Democrats still show some signs of the internal divisions that rent the party into opposing right-left factions in the late 1960s and '70s. This was attested to by the bitter intraparty fight among party leaders for the spot as the party's presidential candidate in the 1989 election. The emergence of Aylwin as the party's choice represented a victory for the party's old guard. However, since the intraparty struggle in the nominating convention, and particularly since the party's strong showing in the December 1989 congressional elections, Aylwin has become a major force for unity within the Christian Democratic party. It appears that earlier predictions of the imminent demise of the party were premature.[85] Again, a note of caution is in order. It is

---

[84] This figure does not include the successful candidacy of a Christian Democrat who ran as an independent in the eighth Region.

[85] The most prominent of these is Fleet, 1985. Fleet argues that this split between the right and the left would force the Christian Democrats "at some point relatively soon" to choose between one or another of these tendencies, resulting in a permanent division between the two groups. Fleet's argument shares the same dualistic (and largely fallacious) logic of which Duverger is guilty. See Fleet, 1985, p. 5.

impossible to know whether or not the December 1989 results will be reflected in longer-term trends within the electorate.

Even if the Christian Democrats are able to consolidate their electoral hold over the center, several questions remain to be answered. Will the political reconstitution of the center provide the party system with the kind of political ballast it needs to reinforce centripetal tendencies within the party system? Will the Christian Democrats be able and/or willing to take up the role of mediator between the extremes which has proven so useful in the past for regime stability in Chile? In the conclusion of this paper, I should like to address this final set of issues.

VI. CONCLUSION: FUTURE PATTERNS OF PARTY CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

When discussing the center within the context of Chilean politics, it is important to distinguish between the major center *party*, in this case the Christian Democrats, and the underlying political *tendency* that makes the center electorally habitable. Party competition in Chile has often revolved around more than three parties, but has almost always been divided into three fundamental political tendencies. The post-Pinochet party system is characterized not only by a strong political party at the center, but also, and perhaps more importantly in terms of political stability, by a center tendency which appears to have become the principal tendency within the party system.

Survey data prior to the December elections suggested that the distribution of the electorate in Chile changed significantly from the period prior to the coup. Table 1 shows the ideological distribution of the Chilean electorate over a period of almost three decades. As the data indicate, while still manifestly tripartite, by 1986 the ideological self-placement of the electorate had shifted notably towards the center.

_____

TABLE 1

Ideological Distribution of the Chilean Electorate: Right, Center, and Left
_____

Question: Do you feel closer to the Right, Center, or Left?

_____

	1958 %	1961 %	1964 %	1970 %	1973 %	1986 %
Right	31.4	23.8	17.4	26.6	21.9	16.6
Center	17.8	28.2	29.0	24.2	26.8	41.2
Left	24.5	26.5	32.0	26.0	42.9	14.2
No Response	26.3	21.5	21.6	23.2	8.4	28.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

_____

Source: Carlos Huneeus, 1987, p. 163. His data before 1973 are taken from Hamuy. 1986
            data are the results of a public opinion poll conducted by CERC in Santiago, which
            included 889 interviews in the greater Santiago metropolitan area.

_____

This shift toward the center was partly ratified in the results of the general elections of December, 1989. Candidates from across the political spectrum scrambled to identify themselves with the "center," and consciously disassociated their positions from either the extreme right or left. Though again difficult to assess precisely because of the complex set of interparty coalitions and alliances, centrists party candidates, i.e., the Christian Democratic candidates, combined with the candidates from their small (and organizationally dependent) center party allies (some sectors from the Radicals and the Social Democrats), obtained around 30.0 percent of the vote in the deputy elections (securing 44 places in the lower House), and 34.9 percent in the contests for the Senate (winning 16 seats).

Thus, despite Duverger's claim that "there is no centre tendency, no centre doctrine,"[86] there are strong indications that, within the reconstituted party system, the center has regained its historic predominance. Sartori's injunction that "the very existence of a center party (or parties) discourages 'centrality,' i.e., the centripetal drives of the political system"[87] notwithstanding, the centripetal drive underlying the Chilean party system has been enhanced in decisive ways by the presence and behavior of a major party at the center.

_____

[86] Duverger, 1954, p. 215.
[87] Sartori, 1976, p. 135.

Judging from the behavior of the Christian Democrats within the party system in the 1980s, it appears that they have learned important lessons from the failure of their efforts to constitute a single-party-dominated governing formula in Chile. From the late 1950s onward, the preferred Christian Democratic electoral and governing strategy was to go it alone rather than seek alliances with other parties. Professing an ideology that rejected both liberal capitalism as well as Marxism, the Christian Democrats attempted a hegemonic party strategy to gain a majority position within the Chilean electorate. By the late 1960s and early '70s, the limitations of this strategy had become apparent. It is likely that, after surveying the ruin wrought by maximalist politics in the 1960s and '70s, the leadership of the Christian Democratic party has learned that only by pursuing an active strategy of coalitions and alliances can a stable governing formula be reached in Chile.[88]

This conclusion seems justified on the basis of observing the substantially different behavior of the Christian Democratic party during the 1980s. Once the regime-sponsored plebiscite in 1980 had erased all doubts as to its future intentions, the Christian Democrats increasingly took upon themselves the role of public leadership within the opposition. By 1983, with the eruption of national protests against the regime, the Christian Democrats succeeded in bringing together political groups from the right, center, and the Socialist left to form a coherent alliance, designated the "Democratic Alliance."[89] The formation of the Democratic Alliance was the first in a number of attempts to unify the multiple and fragmented parties of the opposition and to adopt a common strategy against the Pinochet regime.

Again, it was the Christian Democrats who played the key role in building the successful coalition of 17 parties that made up the "Concertation for the NO" for the 1988 plebiscite.[90] Parties in opposition to Pinochet representing a broad spectrum of political opinion (including the entire opposition except the Communists and some smaller groups) banded together for the

---

[88] Before his death the late leader of the party, Eduardo Frei, signaled the need for such a change in coalition strategy in his book *El mandato de la historia y las exigencias del porvenir*, 1975. My own interviews during 1988 and 1989 with approximately 30 Christian Democratic party leaders also support this view.

[89] Other interparty alliances were formed as well between the months of August and December, 1983. The Popular Democratic Movement was formed by other socialist groups, as well as the Communist party and the Leftist Revolutionary Movement (MIR). The Socialist Bloc constituted an effort to unite the Socialists with the Christian Left and MAPU. For a detailed account of these efforts, see Garretón, 1989a, pp. 417 ff.

[90] On February 2, 1988, 13 opposition parties formed the Concertation for the NO. By the end of 1988, four additional smaller parties had joined the alliance. The principal parties that participated, and arrived at an agreement to form a coalition for the December 1989 elections with a single presidential candidate and a common platform for government, were the Christian Democrats, the Radical party, the Social Democratic party, the Nuñez Socialists, the Almeyda Socialists, the Humanist party, the Party for Democracy (PPD), the Radical Democratic Socialists, MAPU, the Christian Left, and various smaller groups from the center and left. The core of the alliance was made up of the Christian Democrats and the Nuñez and Almeyda Socialists. For a detailed account of this complex process of negotiation, see Garretón, 1989a, pp. 395-466.

purposes of coordinating efforts to defeat Pinochet's bid to remain in power. The 17 parties of the Concertation demonstrated great skill during the campaign to oust Pinochet, registering over 90 percent of the population to participate in the plebiscite, and frustrating his hopes to remain in the presidency by a margin of 54.7 percent to 43.0 percent.[91]

Fresh from their victory in the 1988 plebiscite, the parties of the Concertation formed a new, more ambitious, political alliance designated the "Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia." After several months of intense negotiations, all 17 parties of the alliance reached agreement on a number of strategic issues, including a decision to back a single candidate for the presidency, and a commitment to elaborate a common program for a multiparty coalition government. Again, the leadership of the parties of the Concertation demonstrated remarkable political agility in agreeing upon an entire slate of candidates. At the head of the list, party leaders agreed to support a single candidate for president, selecting Patricio Aylwin, a Christian Democrat, to head the ticket. In each electoral district, the Concertation fielded two candidates, roughly splitting their common list of candidates in two, between the major tendencies within the alliance, the center and the left.

The efforts of the Concertation were successful both in electing Aylwin to the presidency, winning the support of 55.2 percent of the popular vote, and in securing a clear majority of the popular vote in the contests for both Houses of Congress. In the presidential race, the heir apparent of the authoritarian regime, Hernán Buchi, obtained 29.4 percent, and the populist right-wing candidacy of Francisco Javier Errázuriz (popularly known as "Fra-Fra") won 15.4 percent of the vote. On March 11, 1990, Patricio Aylwin and his broadly based coalition government was inaugurated into office, putting an official end to authoritarian rule in Chile.

The growth in the capacity of the Christian Democrats to form coalitions and alliances suggests a question for this analysis. Can a center party that was once an uncompromising *programmatic* center party can become a more flexible *positional* one? In other words, have the dimensions of the trauma provoked by the breakdown of democracy and the 16 years of authoritarian government that followed resulted in a fundamentally new political project and rationale for the Christian Democrats? Key sectors of the leadership of the Christian Democrats have undergone a process of moderation, or "secularization," *vis-à-vis* the ideological contents of the party program.[92] Though it is possible that a less flexible and pragmatic faction might gain hegemony within the party sometime in the future, as party competition returned to Chile in the

---

[91] Both the high percent of the population registered for the vote (92 percent) and the very low rate of abstention (2.4 percent) were records for Chile. These figures are available from the Servicio Electoral de Chile.

[92] "Secularization" is a term used by Huneeus to describe this process of de-ideologization in the Chilean political context. See Huneeus, 1989, p. 15. See also Garretón, 1989a, pp. 417-418.

late 1980s and early '90s, the Christian Democrats were playing the role of coalition-maker within the party system. This shift, combined with similar changes in coalition strategies among potential alliance partners on the right *and* the left, suggests the possibility that patterns of party competition in Chile in the 1990s will correspond to moderate, rather than polarized, pluralism.[93]

A renewed predisposition to form coalitions and alliances within the party system constitutes a crucial difference when comparing it to the antecedent party system. Its significance is placed in high-relief when reviewing the course of decades of party competition in Chile, a period during which no single party has held a decisive electoral advantage. The formation of a broad center-left electoral and governing alliance among the parties of the Concertation, and especially the rapprochement it represents between the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, also suggests the possibility that a new longer-term governing coalition has been forged. With both these parties sharing power in the transition government of Patricio Aylwin, the costs and benefits of government are spread more evenly thereby diminishing the incentives for a politics of out-bidding. A further indication of the party system's new-found flexibility can be found in the capacity of major party actors of the right, center, and left to agree on certain minimal conditions to be met in the transition to democratic rule.[94]

Despite Pinochet's efforts to restructure the party system, it seems clear that the familiar tripartite distribution of the electorate has reappeared within the party system. However, even though the same fundamental social cleavages that structured political conflict within the party system over twelve decades still shape patterns within the party system, the Pinochet period left party politics in Chile transformed in substantial ways. The experience of authoritarian rule traumatized key social and political groups, and suggests that these groups have reappraised both the value, and the very real fragility, of the give-and-take required by political democracy.[95] The failure of warring political groups to attain their goals through the increasingly zero-sum logic of majoritarian politics, followed by the repression of party politics during the years of military rule,

---

[93]   For Sartori, a crucial variable determining moderate versus polarized pluralism is the "ideological distance" separating the extremes. In the Chilean case, a process of "secularization" has also characterized parties at the extremes. See Garretón, 1989a, pp. 438 ff. See also Huneeus, 1989, pp. 15-16.

[94]   The parties of the right, center, and left were able to agree on certain measures to reduce the "authoritarian enclaves" that had been written into the 1980 Constitution. These included the approval of provisions to make constitutional amendments easier, the reduction of the first presidential term to four years, greater protection of human rights, the elimination of ideological proscriptions, and the reduction of the role of designated senators and the National Security Council. The changes were approved in a national plebiscite in July, 1989. See Garretón, 1990b, p. 6.

[95]   Garretón argues that political elites in Chile have undergone a process of political learning, with an especially steep learning curve between 1983 and 1989. See Garretón, 1989a, pp. 395-466, *passim.*

may lead political elites to seek cooperation over conflict in key areas of policy. Within this new calculus of political conflict and cooperation, the incremental gains of coalitional politics may appear preferable to the higher stakes—and higher risks—of majoritarian political principles.[96]   If so, it is quite possible that the consensual disposition that characterized the party system in the December 1989 elections, encouraged by the presence of a strong center party as well as a predominant center tendency, will contribute decisively to the consolidation of democracy in Chile.

---

[96] Efforts to continue the Concertación as a governing coalition share some elements of a consociational type of power sharing formula. Lijphart has defined consociationalism as a variety of democracy wherein "the centrifugal tendencies inherent in a plural society are counteracted by the cooperative attitudes and behavior of the leaders of different segments of the population (Lijphart, 1977, p. 1).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahumada, Eugenio et al. (1989). *Chile: La memoria prohibida*. Santiago: Pehuén.

Borón, Atilio (1971). "La evolución electoral y sus efectos en la representación de los intereses populares: El caso de Chile." FLACSO Working Paper.

_____ (1971). "Mobilización política y crisis política en Chile, 1920-1970." *Aportes*, No. 20 (April), pp. 41-69.

Cavarozzi, Marcelo (1978). "El orden oligárquico en Chile, 1880-1940," *Desarrollo Económico*, No. 7 (July-September).

Cavarozzi, Marcelo and Manuel Antonio Garretón, eds. (1989). *Muerte y resurrección: Los partidos políticos en el autoritarismo y las transiciones en el Cono Sur*. Santiago: FLACSO.

Collier, Ruth Berins and David Collier (forthcoming). *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement and Regime Dynamics in Latin America.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Daalder, Hans (1984). "In Search of the Center of European Party Systems," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, Nos. 1-2, pp. 92-109.

Downs, Anthony (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.

Drake, Paul (1978). *Socialism and Populism in Chile.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Duverger, Maurice (1954). *Political Parties*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Edwards, Alberto (1984). *La Fronda aristocrática*. Santiago: Editorial Universitaria.

Eyzaguirre, Jaime (1967). *Historia de las instituciones políticas y sociales de Chile*. Santiago: Editorial Universitaria.

Farneti, P. (1983). *Il sistema dei partiti in Italia 1946-1979.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

Fleet, Michael (1985). *The Rise and Fall of Chilean Christian Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Frei, Eduardo (1975). *El mandato de la historia y las exigencias del porvenir*. Santiago: Alta Mar.

Garretón, Manuel Antonio (1983). *El proceso político chileno*. Santiago: FLACSO.

_____ (1989a). "La oposición política y el sistema partidario en el régimen militar chileno: un proceso de aprendizaje para la transición" in Cavarozzi and Garretón (1989).

_____ (1989b). *The Chilean Political Process*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

_____ (1990a). "Los partidos políticos chilenos en la perspectiva de la transición y consolidación democráticas." Kellogg Institute Working Paper #138 (May).

_____ (1990b). "Las condiciones socio-políticas de la inauguración democrática en Chile." Kellogg Institute Working Paper #142 (June).

Gil, Federico (1962). *Los partidos políticos chilenos: Génesis y evolución*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones De Palma.

_____ (1966). *The Political System of Chile.* Boston: Houghton, Miflin and Co.

Heise González, Julio (1982). *El período parlamentario.* Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Chile.

Hippólito, Lucia (1985). *P.S.D.: De raposas e reformistas.* Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.

Huneeus, Carlos (1984). "Los partidos políticos y la transición a la democracia en Chile hoy," *Estudios Públicos*, No. 15, (Winter), pp. 57-88.

_____ (1987). *Los chilenos y la política*, Santiago: CERC.

_____ (1989). "Los partidos políticos y la democracia en Chile." A paper presented at the seminar on "Transformation and Transition in Chile, 1982-1989," University of California, San Diego (March 13-14).

Huntington, Samuel, P. (1968). *Political Order in Changing Societies.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kaufman, Robert (1972). *The Politics of Land Reform in Chile, 1950-1970.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Krebbs, Ricardo et al. (1981). *Catolicismo y laicismo*. Santiago: Ediciones Nueva Universidad.

Lechner, Norbert (1985). "El sistema de partidos en Chile—una continuidad problemática." FLACSO Working Paper.

Lijphart, Arend (1977). *Democracy in Plural Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Linz, Juan (1978). "Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration" in Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lipset, Seymour M. and Stein Rokkan (1967). "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction" in Lipset and Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross National Perspectives*. New York: The Free Press, 1967.

Loveman, Brian (1976). *Struggle in the Countryside.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Luebbert, Gregory (1984). "A Theory of Government Formation," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (July), pp. 229-264.

Mainwaring, Scott (1988). "Political Parties and Democratization in the Southern Cone: A Review Essay," *Comparative Politics,* Vol. 21, No. 1 (October), pp. 91-120.

Maisel, Louis and Joseph Cooper, eds. (1978). *Political Parties: Development and Decay.* Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Morris, James (1966). *Elites, Intellectuals, and Consensus.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Moulián, Tomás (1986a). "El gobierno de Ibáñez." FLACSO Working Paper No. 2 (January).

_____ (1986b). "La Democracia Cristiana en su fase ascendente: 1957-1964." FLACSO Working Paper.

Moulián, Tomás and Germán Bravo (1985). "La Derecha en Chile: Evolución histórica y projecciones a futuro." Santiago: CED.

O'Donnell, Guillermo (1973). *Modernization and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism.* Berkeley: Institute for International Studies.

O'Donnell, Guillermo, Philippe Schmitter, and Lawrence Whitehead (1986). *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Przeworski, Adam (1975). "Institutionalization of Voting Patterns, or Is Mobilization the Source of Decay?" *The American Political Science Review,* Vol. 69, pp. 49-67.

_____ (1980). "Some Problems in the Study of the Transition to Democracy." Working Paper No. 61, Latin American Program, The Wilson Center, Washington, D.C.

_____ (1981). "Class Compromise and the State: Western Europe and Latin America" published in Spanish in Norberto Lechner, ed., *El estado y la política en América Latina.* Mexico City: Siglo XXI.

Rivas Vicuña, Manuel (1964). *Historia política y parliamentaria de Chile*, Vols. I, II, and III. Santiago: Ediciones de la Biblioteca Nacional.

Rokkan, Stein (1970). *Citizens, Elections and Parties.* New York: David McKay, Inc.

Sani, Giacomo and Giovanni Sartori (1983). "Polarization, Fragmentation and Competition in Western Democracies" in Daalder and Mair, eds., *Western European Party Systems.* Beverly Hills: Sage.

Sartori, Giovanni (1966). "European Political Parties: The Case of Polarized Pluralism" in Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner, eds., *Political Parties and Political Development.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

_____ (1969). "From the Sociology of Politics to Political Sociology" in Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., *Politics and the Social Sciences.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____ (1976). *Parties and Party Systems*: A Framework for Analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schattschneider, E. E. (1960). *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Schmitter, Philippe C. (1976). "Historical Block Formation and Regime Consolidation in Post-Authoritarian Portugal." Unpublished paper, Dept. of Political Science, University of Chicago.

Scully, Timothy R. (1989). "Cleavages, Critical Junctures, and Party Evolution in Chile: Constituting and Reconstituting the Center." Ph.D. Dissertation for the Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley.

_____ (forthcoming). *Rethinking the Center: Cleavages, Critical Junctures, and Party Evolution in Chile*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Silvert, Kalman (1965). *Chile: Yesterday and Today*. New York.

Starzinger, Vincent, E. (1965). *Middlingness: Juste Milieu Political Theory in France and England, 1815-1848*. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia.

Stepan, Alfred (1978). *The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Valenzuela, Arturo (1978). "The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile" in Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

_____ (1985). "The Chilean Party System: Origins, Characteristics, and Future Prospects." Woodrow Wilson Center Working Paper.

_____ (1989). "Chile: Origins, Consolidation, and Breakdown of a Democratic Regime" in Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America,* Vol. 4. Denver, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

Valenzuela, Arturo and J. Samuel Valenzuela (1981). "Party Oppositions under the Chilean Authoritarian Regime." Woodrow Wilson Working Paper.

_____ (1986). *Military Rule in Chile.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Valenzuela, J. Samuel (1976). "The Chilean Labor Movement: The Institutionalization of Conflict" in Arturo Valenzuela and J. Samuel Valenzuela, eds., *Chile: Politics and Society.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1976.

_____ (1979). "Labor Movement Formation and Politics: The Chilean and French Cases in Comparative Perspective, 1850-1950." Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Sociology, Columbia University.

_____ (1985). *Democratization vía reforma: la expansión del sufragio en Chile.* Buenos Aires: Ediciones del IDES.

Villalobos, Sergio et al. (1974). *Historia de Chile,* Vols. I-IV. Santiago: Editorial Universitaria.