Navigating The Decline of Party Loyalty in Chile, 1990-2023

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to synthesize the current studies on the decline of political party loyalty in Chile from 1990-2023. There are a plethora of explanations for declining political loyalty, including: the decreasing appeal of parties on the left, increased education levels, stability, increased cost of media, youth who say older leaders do not represent their interest well, antiparty discourse, increased apathy as seen in the increased casting of blank ballots, neo-liberal constraints in policy making, class based explanations, religious change, gender explanations, mal-distributed funding to disproportionately wealthy neighborhoods lower partisanship, non programmatic convergence of rival parties, to name a few. The purpose of this study is to consolidate the datasets to synthesize the approaches and better know which explanations for declining political loyalty are most powerful.

The Literature on Declining Political Party Loyalty

From 1990 to the present, party loyalty has undergone a dramatic decline in democratic Chile. Alan Angel (2003, 88) documents this clear trend between 1997 and 2002. He estimates that the decline during this period has been from 88 percent to 66 percent in just five years. Patricio Silva (2004, 63) estimates what he describes as increasing dis-affiliation of 84.3 percent between 1990 and 2004. Carlos Melendez et al. (2019, 520) document a rise in preferring no party from 38 percent in 1996 to 60 percent in 2015. Scott Mainwaring et al. (2000, 795) documents increased anti party discourse from candidates Errazuriz and Pinﬞera. Margot Olavarria (2003, 10) documents that 3.7 million voters cast blank ballots in the 1997 parliamentary elections. Ryan Carlin (2006, 362) also documents the rise or blank-ballot voting from 1990 to 2006. Paul Lewis (2004, 719) documents that men are less likely to vote than women and more likely than women to cast blank ballots. Burgsted and Maldonado (2018, 29) analyze Centro de Estudios Publicos surveys from 1994 to 2014 and observe the same phenomenon the others document. Nicolas De La Cerda (2018,3) estimates using Centro De Estudios Publico a 69 percent drop in party identification from 1990-2016. David Dixon (2000, 77) documents using anecdotal evidence and data from Centro de Estudios Publicos, FLACSO, and CERC using data from 1920-1991 to observe increasing levels of political disengagement that cut across religious loyalties. FLACSO’s Governability Program (2007, 8) documents the rise of “no ideology” responses in Centro De Estudios Politicos public opinion surveys from 15 percent in 1990 to 40 percent in 2000.

Why the Decline in Party Loyalty?

There are several explanations for decreased party loyalty and increasing blank ballots. Alan Angel (2003, 95), citing Sanchez (2003, 230-232) (1) the decreasing appeal of the Left following the implosion of the USSR; (2) increasing education levels of the electorate; and, (3) the increased costs of advertising via social media. Patricio Silva (2004, 66) argues that there is a generational rift between leaders and masses where young people do not believe their elder leadership class represents them well. Carlos Melendez et al. (2019, 520) believes these trends follow a worldwide rise in populism which undervalues specific parties. Margot Olavarria (2003, 14) argues that municipal spending which favors wealthier communities disenchant people in poor communities. Juan Pablo Luna and David Altman (2018, 1) argue that elites have frozen their policy preferences and distanced themselves from their constituents. Ryan Carlin (2006, 632), argues for the following explanations; (1) a lack of constituent support; (2) depoliticization; (3) and generational shifts. Juan Castillo (2015, 490) argues that unjust distributions of wealth decrease political participation. Matias Burgsted and Luis Maldonado (2018, 29) identified a generational shift between people born later than 1950. Another reality, he continues, is that party leaders do not consult the rank and file when pursuing policy options and candidate recruitment. Xabier Gainza (2021) argues that public works investments at the municipal level are too corrupt and disenchant voters. Nicolas De La Cerda (2022, 3) argues that non-programmatic convergence of the right, which abandoned its loyalty to the authoritarian regime, accounts for decreased participation and the rising number of blank ballots. Leonardo Castillo C. (2009, 5) argues that the binomial (government and opposition) party system merely presents two candidates independently of their party rank and file, leaving voters with no meaningful expression.

Datasets and Variables

A series of fine studies have emerged with supplementary datasets and variables. We review these studies now. De La Cerda (2021, 4) uses data from Centro De Estudios Publicos and focuses on what he calls non-programmatic aspects of electoral competition between 1990 and 2016. He finds further evidence to support his claims from the Diego Portales survey (2005-2015). In addition to these, he consults V-Party and PELA data. He argues ( De La Cerda 2021, 16) PELA and V-Party data show that during the 1990s through the 2000s elites reached an implicit agreement over the rejection of authoritarianism. From the Diego Portales survey he create the following variables: (1) The question is coded one if there is a preference for any political party and a zero otherwise; (2) Variables were coded with four different values, one for Concertation, two for Alliance (rightist opposition), three other for parties neither in the Concertation or Alliance, four value for none when citizens had no preference; (3) The questions ask which of the following statements do you agree with most with the following possible responses: democracy is preferable to any other kind of government, in certain situations an authoritarian government can be preferable to a Democratic one, to people like me it doesn’t matter if we have a Democratic or non-Democratic government.

Xabier Gainza *et al.* (2021, 4) analyzes investment transfers from the Ministry of Public Works to Chilean municipalities between 1989 and 2018. The (Gainza et al. 2021, 5) create the following variables: (1) a dummy which takes the value one when the Mayor belongs to a Political Party of governing coalition, (2) a dummy coated one if the Mayor belongs to one of the coalition parties and one presidential election in that municipality, (3) a dummy that equals one if the government coalition parties one presidential election in the municipality. Other variables included percentage of newborns weighing less than 3,000 grams, percentage of mothers who had more than three children regional GDP growth rate in the previous year, Regional GDP, and regional GDP per capita. Bargsted et al. (2018, 29) conducts an age period cohort analysis to Centro de Estudios Publicos survey data from 1994 to 2014. In addition to CEP data Bargsted et al. use data from Kitschelt (2013) and Singer (2016). The questionnaire reads as follows, of the following political parties mentioned in this card, with which on do you identify or sympathize more. When respondents refused a follow up question asked to which party do you feel a little closer. When respondents answered the first or second question, they received a one value. People who refused both questions received a zero value. There was also a four value nominal variable with 1 for right wing party preference 2 for centrist party preferences 3 for center left identification 4 no party identification whatsoever. In addition to these variables the survey focuses on respondents age survey year and birth cohort.

Angell (2003, 90) uses Latinobarometro, Eurobarometer and Sanchez (2000) and Siavelis (1999) data as well as 2001 figures from ministry of the interior and La Tercera data from 1999 to 2000 and data from Riquelme (1999). Patricio Silva (2004, 64) explores the phenomenon of political deactivation which he believes occurred as a result of military repression followed by civilian passivity in the neoliberal return to civilian rule. He consults the National Institute for Youth survey from 2000 which asks young people whether they believe that politicians care for them. He also uses an opinion poll conducted by UNDP (United Nations for Development) in 2001 which asks respondents whether they prefer democratic to authoritarian rule. Melendez and Kaltwasser (2019, ) use Centro de Estudios Publicos surveys from 1996-2015 and created factor analysis, variables for respondents to address the following opinions: (1) the politicians in congress need to follow the will of the people; (2) the people, not the politicians, should make our most important policy decisions; (3) the political differences between the people and the elite are larger than the differences among the people; (4) I’d rather be represented by an ordinary citizen than an experienced politician; (5) politician stalk to much and take to little action; (6) what people call compromise in politics is really just selling out on one's principles. They also offered three different policy approaches, pro Nueva Mayoría (Concertacion), pro Alianza, or apartisan.

Olavarria (2003, 12-14) uses data from MIDEPLAN, Servicio Electoral, Minister of the Interior and Oppenheim (1993). Her variables include GINI coefficients, election returns between 1988 and 1996 including abstentions, void, and blank ballots. Luna and Altmen (2011, 3) Use the Pedersen index to measure electoral volatility. They also used (Luna and Altmen 2011, 8) they also used World Values Survey data to measure programmatic structuring including substantive, symbolic, totals and waves. In addition to these data sources they consulted Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) to measure sympathies for political parties, age and education cohorts. They also used Centro de Estudios Publicos data from 1991 to 2008 to analyze identification with both coalitions (Luna and Altmen 2011, 15). Neimann Peralta (2021) uses data from Jacobs and Leynaar (2011), Navia and Saldana (2018), and [www.servel.cl\www.bcn.cl](about:blank) . Variables include proportionality, election levels, inclusiveness, ballot structure, electoral procedures, Senate composition (Concertation/Nueva Mayoria and Alianza). Lewis (2004,724) uses data from Gil and Parish 1965 to analyze gender base outcomes from 1952 to 1970. They include data from the minister of interior to analyze gender based outcomes in the elections from 1989-2000. From the minister of interior they obtained gender based outcome data from congressional elections between 1989 and 2001, voter turnout by gender during the same period, gender-based congressional preferences in the metropolitan region, socioeconomic status, proletarian communes, and peasant communes (Lewis 2004, 731).

Barnes and Rangel (2018, 828) use their original data from 2014 to plot electoral participation between 1992 and 2012, distribution of change in turn out between 2008 and 2012. They offer four independent variables: (1) voluntary voting coded zero for elections that took place under the compulsory system; (2) district size, voting eligible population per district in 100,000 increments; (3) electoral competition (winner votes minus the second highest vote getter); (4) candidate fragmentation on a scale of one to nine. Navia (2004, 7) uses data from [www.elecciones.gov.cl](http://www.elecciones.gov.cl) to give us party share in the 1989-2001 lower house election results. Navia also offers similar data for senate elections 1989-2001

This array of fascinating, thorough studies is impressive in its own right, but in need of a consolidated dataset to compare alternative theories in a weighted fashion. It is our intention to provide that dataset and analyze it.

Why Focus on Chile?

V-Party offers an array of contextual information to place Chile in comparative perspective using comparisons of means. The relevant variables include: anti-pluralism index, populism index, anti-elitism, political opponents, candidate nomination, internal cohesion, personalization of party, anti-establishment rhetoric, and position on direct versus representative democracy. We will present the definitions of these variables below.

Anti-pluralism index. The anti-pluralism index asked the question to what extent does the party show a lacking commitment to democratic norms prior to elections. It is an interval level variable with a range from 0 to 1.

Table 1: Comparison of Means for the Anti-Pluralism Index

Global Mean Latin America Mean Chilean Mean

.3994 (N=6305) .4300(N=1,041) .1331(N=56)

As we can see in table 1 the chilean mean is lower than the global and latin american means in anti-pluralist ideology.

Populism index. This question asks to what extent do representatives of the party use populist rhetoric? This is an interval level variable with a range from 0 to 1.

Table 2: Comparison of Means for the Populism Index

Global Mean Latin America Mean Chilean Mean

.3793 (N=6308) .4051 (N=1041) .3103 (N=56)

As we can see in table 2 above Chile has a lower mean of populist rhetoric than world wide cases as well as Latin America cases.

Anti-Elitism index. This question asks how important is anti-elite rhetoric for this party? This variable has the values of 0 for little importance up to 4 for very important.

Table 3: Comparison of Means for the Anti-Elitism Index

Global Mean Latin America Mean Chilean Mean

1.5648 (N=6305) 1.6955 (N=1,041) 1.0536 (N=56)

As we can see in Table 3, Chile has a lower mean in Anti-Elite party rhetoric than global and Latin American means.

Political Opponents: This question asks prior to this election, have leaders of this party used severe personal attacks or tactics of demonization against their opponents. It ranges from a value of 0, which means always, and a value of 4, which means never.

Table 4: Comparison of Means for the Political Opponents Index

Global Mean Latin America Mean Chilean Mean

2.5138 (N=6302) 2.2911 (N= 1,041) 3.1071 (N=56)

Table 4 above indicates that Chile much less often than its global and Latin American neighbors tend to demonize their opponents.

Candidate Nomination: This question asks which of the following options best describes the process by which the party decides on candidates for the national legislative elections. The values range from 0 where party leaders decide unilaterally and 4 when all registered voters decide.

Table 5: Comparison of Means for the Candidate Nomination Index

Global Mean Latin America Mean Chilean Mean

1.4451 (N=6,261) 1.3074 (N=1041) 1.2679 (N=56)

Table 5 indicates that Chile has a lower mean than globally and Latin American cases in the tendency for register voters to help party officials decide which candidates to put forward.

Internal Cohesion. This question asks to what extent do the elites in this party display disagreements over party strategies. The values range from 0 where party elites display almost complete disagreements and 4 where party elites display almost no visible disagreement.

Table 6: Comparison of Means for the Internal Cohesion Index

Global Mean Latin America Mean Chilean Mean

2.9172 (N=6269) 2.9328 (N=1041) 2.6429 (N=56)

In table 6 above we see that Chile has a lower mean than its global and latin American neighbors, meaning leaders are more likely to display disagreements over party strategy.

Personalization of Party. This question asks to what extent is this party a vehicle for the personal will and priorities of one individual leader? The range goes from 0 to when the party is not focused on an individual leader and a 4 when it is.

Table 7: Comparison of Means for the Personalization of Party

Global Mean Latin America Mean Chilean Mean

1.8342 (N=6,307) 1.9308 (N=1,041) .3750 (N=56)

Table 7, above, indicates that Chile has a much lower mean and thus less personalist qualities than its neighbors globally and in Latin America.

Chile is a fascinating hybrid party system showing Democratic and Authoritarian tendencies simultaneously. There is low anti pluralist, demonization of opponents and populist sentiment, high anti-elitist sentiment. There is little voter participation in the appointment of candidates, low cohesion among elites and low instances of personalism. In addition to the interesting contextualizing account above it is important to note that Chile, which began experimenting with democratic forms in 1874, fits well into Huntington’s (1991, 12) first wave democratization which spanned the 1820 to 1926. We should also note that Chile is probably the most likely Latin American nation to achieve industrialized status in the coming years.

Our Variables

Some of our variables come from Centro de Estudios Publicos’ Base de Datos Consolidada Encuestas de Opinión Publica (Enero 2024. These include:

Citizenship 13: Thinking about the last national elections in Chile, how equitable were they relative to candidates’ and interest groups’ opportunities? (1=very just, 2=somewhat just, 3=neither just nor unjust, 4=somewhat unjust, 5=very unjust).

Confidence 6: Next I’m going to read the names of various institutions. Thinking just of the alternatives listed here could you please dell me how much confidence you have for each? (1=much confidence, 2=some confidence, 3=little confidence, 4=no confidence).

Confidence 8: In general would you say that you can trust people or that you have to be cautious in dealing with people? (1=I can almost always trust people, 2=normally I can trust people, 3=normally I have to be cautious when dealing with people; 4=I almost always have to be cautious of people.

Confidence 9: Most politicians are in politics just to look out for themselves (1=they almost always try to take advantage, 2=most of the time they try to take advantage, 3=they try to be fair most of the time, 4=they almost always try to be fair).

Municipal Election 14: Thinking about the next municipal election do you intend to vote for (1=the Concertation, 2=the Alliance for Chile, 3=I will vote but I do not know for whom, 4=I intend not to vote or to cast a blank ballot.

Electoral Participation 46: If you intend not to vote is it because (1=politics does not interest me, 2=this election is not important, 3=I do not know any of the candidates, 4=I wish to protest against the system, 5=my vote will not make a difference, 6=because it is bothersome to vote, 7=because I was sick, lost my ID or was traveling elsewhere on the day of the vote, 8=I was not at home, 9=I was busy with other things, 10=I disliked the candidates, 11=because they changed the poll location without notifying me.

Age (exact age in years).

Education: 0=no education, 1=did not complete primary school; 2=completed primary school, 3=did not complete middle school, 4=completed middle school, 5=did not complete high school, 6=completed high school, 7=did not complete bachelor’s degree, 8=completed bachelor’s degree, 9=did not complete graduate school, 10=completed graduate school.

Marital Status (1=married, 2=civil union, 3=separated, 4=divorcied, 5=widow/er, 6=single, never married.

Labor Sector: Choose one of the following alternatives regarding your sector of work (1=I am employed by the government or public administration, 2=I am employed by a state corporation, 3=I am employed in a private enterprise, 4=I am self-employed. 5 = I am unemployed.

Location of Domicile: Which of these alternatives best describes where you live? (1=in a large city, 2=in the suburbs or just outside a large city, 3=in a small city, 4=in a village, 5=in the country.

Income Level: (1=less than 35,000 pesos monthly, 2=36,00-56000 pesos monthly, 3=57000-78000 pesos monthly, 4=79000 - 101000 pesos monthly, 5=102000 -134000 pesos monthly, 6=135000 - 179000 pesos monthly, 7=180000 - 224000 pesos monthly,8=225000 - 291000 pesos monthly, 9=292000 - 358000 pesos monthly, 10=349 - 448000 pesos monthly, 11=449000 - 1000000 pesos monthly, 12=1000000 - 2000000 pesos monthly, 13=2000000 - 3000000 pesos monthly, 14=more than 3000000 pesos monthly.

Religious Identification 1: (1=Catholic, 2=Evangelical, 3=Jehovah’s Witness, 4=Jewish, 5=Latter Day Saints, 6=Islam, 7=Orthodox, 8=Other, 9=None, 10=Atheist, 11=Agnostic.

Religion 2: How frequently do you attend church? (1=a few times a week, 2=once a week, 3=2 or 3 times a month, 4=once a month, 5=a few times a year, 6=once a year, 7=not very often, 8=never.

Analysis

This is a much more ambitious project than we realized when we began this project, and

we have progressed through fits and starts. In October we assembled individual Centro de Estudios Publicos public opinion between 1987 and 2023. There were over 110,000 cases and the surveys from 1987 to 1993 were purposive samples attempting to parse out regional differences in political attitudes. After fumbling with an impossible project, we discovered in January 2024 that a consolidated dataset exists from 1994 to 2023. There seem to be an enormous amount of missing values that we have not resolved yet, but we hope to have some data runs ready by the WPSA meeting in March.

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