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Transitioning to Democracy: The Role of the Right in Chile and Argentina

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OLIVIA HUTCHINSON, JAN 21 2016

How Has the Right in Chile Helped the Transition to Democracy and Ensured a Relatively Peaceful Transition? Has the Peaceful Transition Led to a Positive Image of the Right Today? Compare this with Argentina.

Many countries in Latin America have experienced a recent history of military dictatorships before returning to a democratic state by the 1980s. Although many countries in the region share this transitional experience, there have been stark differences in the process. More recently, Latin America has witnessed the surge of the Left, or 'marearosada' in Spanish. There are currently only two right leaning political parties governing in South America, in Colombia and Paraguay. While there is a vast amount of literature on the transitional period and on the 'marearosada', the literature often ignores the political right. This essay will thus look to provide some analysis of the right that has so far been missing. It will highlight that, while the left advocated the return to democracy, the right has also played an important part in the transition and consolidation and this should not be forgotten.

The principal ideological definition of a right-wing party is based on "the belief that the main inequalities between the people are natural and outside the purview of the state" (Luna & Kaltwasser, 2014: 4). This essay expands on this definition to include both policy and social preferences such as economic policy and core electoral bases. The main differentiation between left and right is based on class, with the upper strata of society identifying with the right (Middlebrook, 2000). This is what frames the political spectrum; most right-wing parties are founded on these principles which appeal to their core electorate.

In Chile, the left-right party identification is clear-cut. The *Concertación* is the left-wing coalition that has held power almost constantly since the return to democracy in 1990. The *Alianza*, the right-wing coalition, was elected democratically in 2010 for the first time since 1958. In contrast, the political spectrum in Argentina is less succinct. There fails to exist a clear right-wing party in Argentina; instead an ideological divide has developed between two movements: Peronism (the *Partido Justicialista*, PJ) and Radicalism (the *Unión Cívica Radical*, UCR). The UCR was created in the 1890s as a social movement to promote male suffrage and democratic elections but, after its initial triumphs, did not succeed in establishing itself as a political party with a core electoral base. The Peronist movement gained core support from labour unions and from the use of clientelistic favours. Both hegemonic movements sought mass support to win in elections but, once in power, preferred to control the political agenda personally (Anderson, 2009).

This essay will make a comparative analysis of the role of the right in Chile and Argentina in their consolidation of democracy. There exists today a strong right party in Chile whereas the same cannot be said for Argentina. Can this be explained because of their distinct transitions? Due to the limits of this essay, it will assess only three themes in the transition to democracy: firstly the political climate in both countries; secondly the military and human rights abuses; and thirdly the economy. It will study these themes to provide an overview of the right in the transition and whether this has positively or negatively impacted upon the image of the right today.

The Political Climate in Chile

It is almost impossible to analyse the political climate in Chile without referring to the 1980 Constitution, which is still in place today. It was this constitution that initiated the end of the Pinochet dictatorship. As stipulated in the Constitution, Chile would hold a plebiscite in 1988 in order to maintain Pinochet in power for another eight years. However, Pinochet did not envisage that he would lose this plebiscite when he ratified the Constitution. O'Donnell asserts that the self-confidence of a "bureaucratic-authoritarian" regime or leader can result in (unintentionally) a transition to democracy (O'Donnell, 1999). Pinochet believed that his regime was firmly entrenched and sought legitimacy via the plebiscite. It is worth highlighting that when Pinochet lost the plebiscite in 1988 by 44% to 56%, the right and the military did not protest. They respected the results and conditions they had laid down in the Constitution. The Constitution, architected by the right, was designed to protect democracy and institutionalise authoritarian enclaves in order to restrain the opposition in the event that Pinochet lost the plebiscite (Luna & Kaltwasser, 2014). It can be assumed that the right believed that their constitution would protect their interests in the return to democracy and for this reason accepted that Chile would once again become a democratic state.

In concordance with the Constitution and Pinochet's defeat in the plebiscite, presidential elections followed in 1989. However, the dictatorship had successfully depoliticised society and necessitated the exclusion of political parties both on the right and the left (Silva, 2004). The UDI (*Union Democrata Independiente*), member of the *Alianza*, was not repressed during the dictatorship. It emerged as a grassroots party in 1983 with the aim of preserving authoritarian rule and becoming the main political party in the event of democratisation (Luna, 2010). This party is the most affiliated to Pinochet and still exists today. Jaime Guzmán, the leader of the UDI, had in fact devised the 1980 Constitution. Many will argue that the anti-democratic elements in the Constitution, designed by the right, hindered and slowed the transition to democracy. It becomes apparent, however, that these measures established a gradual and negotiated or 'pacted' transition to democracy which this essay argues promoted peace and stability in Chile.

Chile uses a binominal electoral system, as laid down in the Constitution. Angell stresses that, despite the disadvantages of this system, it does encourage coalition forming and thus moderation (2007). The two right-wing parties in Chile, the UDI and the RN (*Renovación Nacional*), united to form the *Alianza* during the 1989 elections in an effort to defeat the left-wing *Concertación*. These two parties have different ideologies; the UDI is strongly in favour of Pinochet and his regime whereas the RN seeks to distance itself from Pinochet. In order to win votes, the *Alianza* had to present themselves as a moderate party that appealed to the electorates of both the RN and UDI. This resulted in the moderation of the right and the prevention of political polarisation (Luna & Kaltwasser, 2014). The *Alianza*, specifically the RN within it, took on the role of the "softliners", as O'Donnell (1999) puts it. He further explains that the outcome of a transition is dependent on negotiations between the "softliners" and the moderate opposition, who will aim to convince the extremes that their fundamental interests will be preserved. As time has progressed, the *Alianza* has modernised, positioned itself as a centre-right coalition and distanced itself from Pinochet. It cannot be denied that this contributed to the *Alianza*'s electoral victory in 2009/10.

In contrast, many argue that the electoral system is biased towards the right and over-represents rural areas or districts, traditional strongholds for the right in Chile (Angell, 2007). The complicated binominal electoral system elects two Congressmen per district and almost guarantees the election of one candidate from the winning coalition and the second from the runner-up coalition (Rahat & Sznajder, 1998). This was designed by the right with the intention of avoiding marginalisation, something they had experienced before the military coup of 1973. The right had traditionally been the runner-up, thus this system would secure them seats in Congress. The left has subsequently been unable to hold a majority, which has prevented them from pursuing policies that were not in accordance with the ideology of the right.

In addition to the biased binominal system, the 1980 Constitution severely affected the autonomy of the *Concertación*. The designated senators and mayors, 'special quorum' majorities needed to pass bills, the military's role in the National Security Council and the Amnesty Law to name a few all restricted the *Concertación*'s ability to govern. Nevertheless, the *Concertación* realised that, in order to ensure a peaceful transition and promote democracy, they would have to avoid the question of the legitimacy of the Constitution (Fuentes, 2012). During the Aylwin presidency (1990-94), of the 41 bills debated, only 3 were passed. Similarly, of the 242 bills submitted to congress during 1990-2010, only 24 were approved (Arcaya, 2003; Fuentes, 2012: 259). This was due to the designated senators and 'special quorum' majorities. While these measures have hindered the autonomy of the

Concertación, they have also prevented the *Concertación* from passing drastic and conflictual reforms.

It is without doubt that the 'protected' democracy that was designed by Pinochet and his advisers created many obstacles for the left to confront during the transition. However, it is worth mentioning that these restrictions also played an important role in ensuring a peaceful transition. The electoral system guaranteed the participation of the right in the democratic process (Angell, 2007). This is an important issue to overcome in any democratisation process and will prevent any conflict or regression to authoritarianism. As Przeworksi highlights, "defeats can be accepted if the institutional framework promises potential future success" (Tedesco, 2004: 32). If the right believes that there is no chance of success, they will resort to other means to gain power and influence. In the same vein, the harsh treatment of Germany in the Versailles Treaty, many argue, provoked Germany to march towards WWII in pursuit of revenge and power (Boemeke, Feldman &Gläser, 1998). Would the right in Chile have acted similarly if they were excluded from the political game?

The Argentinian Political Climate

The right in Argentina has a more complex history. Throughout the twentieth century, the Argentinian right could be defined as an extreme right, resorting to authoritarian impositions to secure power and prevent the rise of the left and communism (Domínguez, Lievesley, & Ludlam, 2011). Argentina does not have a history of stable democracy or a strong party system; for example, political parties only had freedom to participate for a total of eleven years between 1955 and 1983 (Szusterman, 2007). It is also impossible to analyse Argentinian politics without referring to Peronism. This movement, led by Juan Perón, superseded class and gave rise to the notion that political parties were unnecessary (McGuire, 1995). As a result, there exist today movements that are not defined by the usual left-right axis, but centred on pro or anti-Peronism.

At the end of the 'dirty war' (1974-83), there was a strong desire for a return to democracy in Argentina. Many authors argue that the election of the UCR candidate, Raúl Alfonsín, was seen as the end of authoritarianism and the beginning of a new political era (Szusterman, 2007). Since 1983, a bipartisan system emerged with the PJ and UCR accounting for 86% of the vote (Szusterman, 2007). This made the situation for any other political party extremely difficult. The right in Argentina, which had historically been a minor actor that tended to resort to undemocratic means to obtain power, was unable to compete successfully in this two party system. The main impediment for their success was dealing with populist movements such as Peronism (Luna & Kaltwasser, 2014).

Another obstacle for the right, even today, is the overall public disenchantment with political parties. Argentina has witnessed political crises, economic chaos and military confrontations since their return to democracy. This has led to the "discredit of Argentina's political class" (Tedesco, 2004: 11). Szusterman shows that, in a survey conducted in 1995, eight out of ten people "mistrust" political parties in Argentina (2007: 2). As a result, there is little space for the right to garner leverage.

The Economy in Chile and Argentina

This next section will analyse the economy in both Chile and Argentina. The right in Chile sought above all to protect the economic policies implemented during the dictatorship. The UDI and RN concurred over the economic policies that the 'Chicago Boys' had implemented in the early 1980s. These policies led to strong economic growth, such as sustained GDP growth, small fiscal deficits, low inflation and a decline in unemployment (Drake &J aksic, 1991). Chile was performing better than many of its neighbours. These policies were institutionalised in the Constitution and helped avoid the hyperinflation that was experienced in Argentina (Teichman, 2001). Economic downturns and subsequent austerity measures can affect political stability and support in any country (Westphalen, 1984). Pinochet and the right gained and maintained support thanks to the strong economy, especially among the business elite and upper classes. Originally, Pinochet believed that his economic success would facilitate his victory at the polls and guarantee the future of his regime (Domínguez et al, 2011) and the eradication of Marxism (Drake et al, 1991). Owing to the Constitution and the success of the economy, Chile's neo-liberal economic policies remained largely the same after Pinochet's defeat and under the *Concertación*.

A change in leadership can induce fragility and oscillations in any economy. As a result, the left had the task of ensuring a stable economy during the transition. The *Concertación* has focussed on social and political developments rather than economic for various reasons. First, given the ongoing success of the economy, the *Concertación* did not want to risk losing votes by interfering and potentially destabilising the economy (Tedesco, 2004). Even though the *Concertación* had won the 1989 elections, it was by a very tight margin and therefore support for Aylwin and democracy could easily by swayed. Second, Aylwin had to balance maintaining the left's support without antagonising the right. The economy is a difficult realm to succeed in this. Nevertheless, Aylwin succeeded; the economy grew at 5.6% annually under the *Concertación* from 1990-2005, compared with 2.9% under Pinochet (Angell, 2007). These economic achievements resulted in the right not perceiving the left as a threat to neo-liberalism and thus the right did not revert to violent means.

Argentina, on the other hand, did not experience such economic stability during its transition. This can be related to their previous experiences. The right in Argentina was traditionally quite weak electorally and thus would resort to the use of force to obtain power and influence. The twentieth century was plagued with military interventions under the pretence that the military, supported by the right, would protect the country from economic mismanagement (Deutsch & Dolkart, 1993). When the military took power in 1976, the Argentine economy was already on the brink of collapse. The right (with military support) had the intention of destroying Peronism and restoring economic growth Luna & Kaltwasser, 2014).

The military government of 1976-1983 implemented market-oriented economic reforms based on agriculture exportation. The military realised that de-industrialisation would reduce the power of the urban working class – the main electorate of the Peronist movement which the military sought to dissipate (McGuire, 1995). Therefore, the military government under Videla "lowered tariffs, favoured large enterprises, privatised state companies and deregulated banks" (Deutsch & Dolkart, 1993: 172). By the end of 1981 however, inflation in Argentina was at 120% and the economic climate was not dissimilar from when the military overthrew Isabel Perón with the aim of restoring economic growth (Veigel, 2009: 86). The opening up of the economy did not produce the desired results and the military even attempted to reverse its own policies (Smith, 1989). As a result, the military lost credibility.

The final straw for the Argentine population was the defeat to Great Britain in the Falkland Islands war in 1982. This led to economic chaos and the further disrepute of the military government. By 1983, the extent to which the military government was behind on its foreign debt payments led some to describe the situation as a "financial Hiroshima" (Waisman & Peralta-Ramos, 1986: 28). The military left office in 1983 with an unprecedented record of human rights abuses, military defeat in the Falklands and a dire economy, resulting in its complete loss of legitimacy.

Since the return to democracy in 1983, Argentina has been beset by economic recessions and high inflation. This has been the case under both Radicalism and Peronism. Carlos Menem, the Peronist president, shocked the country when he came to power in 1989 by implementing right-wing economic policies such as trade liberalisation, deregulation and fiscal reform (Borner&Kobler, 2002). It can be argued that Menem implemented these reforms because he realised there was no alternative model that would lead to economic growth. However, this argument is not substantiated as alternative economic models always exist (Borner & Kobler, 2002). In contrast, it would seem logical that Menem presented himself as a Peronist because he recognised he would not succeed as a candidate of a right-wing party. Menem's government deteriorated the image of the right further as their electorate began to "see the PJ as a viable option" (Luna & Kaltwasser, 2014: 323). Furthermore, the economic crisis of 2001 was blamed on the neo-liberal economic policies implemented by right-wing economic ministers (Luna & Kaltwasser, 2014: 323). As a result, the image of the right in Argentina has not improved.

The Role of the Military

The role of the military is an important factor to analyse in the transition to democracy. In both Argentina and Chile, the right was in support of military coups as a method of gaining power; the right had previously struggled at the ballot box. It is this association of the right with the military dictatorships that has had the most detrimental effect on the image of the right.

As discussed previously, Argentina was plagued with military coups in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the dictatorship of 1976-1983 was deemed the most horrific owing to the human rights abuses. These abuses, combined with the economic chaos and the failed war, initiated the transition to democracy. This collapse of the regime paved the way for a transition to democracy with little input from the military (Panizza, 1995). This is in contrast to the transition in Chile where the military played a key role. Instead of involving the military, the Alfonsín government sought to bring the military to justice in a way that threatened them and their interests (Panizza, 1995). Stepan (1988) and Pion-Berlin concur that the Alfonsín government rushed to implement punitive policies towards the military resulting in retaliation and conflict (Pion-Berlin, 1991). In order to avoid conflict, subordination of the armed forces must be achieved through cooperation between the government and the military. This is the fine line that the left had to contend with in order to avoid future coups.

The military in Argentina felt threatened for two main reasons and this resulted in their continued attempts at maintaining power and self-rule. First, as Deutsch & Dolkart argue, the military's human rights abuses and incompetence led to the public distaste of the right and the military (1993: 187). They argue that, as more abuses were discovered, the more "discredited the military and its allies on the Right" became. The military had lost credibility in the public eye. Second, the measures the Alfonsín government implemented during the transition were perceived as extraordinarily harsh, almost like a witch hunt (Pion-Berlin, 1991). These included organisational, judicial, legislative and budgetary reforms, such as the reduction of the military budget by 40% (Pion-Berlin, 1991: 11). For these reasons, the military institution as a whole felt under attack, threatened and humiliated. In the face of a military uprising, Alfonsín pardoned many officers for their abuses losing credibility himself that he could not confront the military (Pion-Berlin, 1991: 23). It was clear that the military had not 'returned to the barracks' in Argentina. They continued to resort to undemocratic means which did not improve the image of the military or the right in Argentina.

In contrast to Argentina, Chile saw Pinochet attempt to legitimise his reign via a plebiscite, which subsequently led to his downfall. As a result of this peaceful and non-violent transition, the military in Chile did not lose credibility and, as O'Donnell states, the outgoing regime will maintain some control over the democratisation process (1999). By accepting the terms of the Constitution and signing the National Accord in 1985, the left included the military and agreed to abide by their terms (Fuentes, 2012). The Constitution guaranteed special power to the military and independence from civil interference, such as promotions, the military budget and immunity from prosecution for committing human rights abuses (Angell, 2007: 44). The latter became the biggest challenge facing many Latin American countries: how to address these human rights abuses. The *Alianza* itself was divided: the UDI placed responsibility on the left for provoking military intervention in 1973 whereas the RN believed that the abuses could not be justified under any circumstance (Correa, 1993). In reflection of this, the RN performed better than the UDI at the congressional elections of 1989 (Angell, 2007).

From 1989 until today, the success of the right has gradually increased for various reasons. In the first instance, the RN realised that a commitment to Pinochetismo "would condemn the right to political marginalisation", and thus they favoured confronting the regime's human rights abuses (Luna & Kaltwasser, 2014: 250). Pinochet was arrested while in London in 1998 and had been accused of corruption charges. These circumstances led to a change in attitude of the military and the right towards Pinochet's regime. Joaquín Lavín, UDI candidate in 1999, distanced himself from the human rights abuses and Sebastian Pinera, RN candidate in 2005 and 2009, even emphasized that he voted 'No' in the plebiscite (Angell, 2007). Second, the military cooperated in the Truth Commissions, which were set up by the Aylwin government in order to establish the truth and bring to justice those culprits where necessary. The Commissions were seen as an "informal conflict resolution with the military" (Fuentes, 2012: 248). As a result of this distancing and the military's cooperation in the Truth Commissions, the right performed better in elections; in the 2005 final round, Bachelet (of the *Concertación*) gained 53.5% and Piñera (the *Alianza* candidate) 46.5% of the vote (Angell, 2007). In 2009, Piñera became President of Chile, the first right-wing president democratically elected since Jorge Alessandri in 1958 (Domínguez et al, 2011).

Conclusion

This essay has analysed three themes that have affected the transition to democracy in Argentina and Chile: the political climate, the economy and the role of the military. The political climate in Chile has been more favourable than

in Argentina for the successful establishment of a right-wing party. However, it is also important to recognise the measures that the Chilean right have taken in this process to consolidate democracy, such as architecting the complex Constitution and binominal system, initiating successful economic policies, negotiating with the left and ensuring economic and political stability during the transition. These, along with the efforts of the left, have ensured a strong right-wing force in Chile. As Correa states, the fact that the right and left both have chances of electoral success "contributes significantly to the consolidation of democracy in Chile" (Correa, 1993: 171).

The transition in Chile was a slow and 'pacted' process in contrast to Argentina, who saw an abrupt end to the dictatorship and fierce policies against the military enacted by Alfonsín. It has been argued that a slower, pacted transition is better in the long run to avoid conflict, especially with the military (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986). The military tensions that endured during the transition severely damaged the public image of the right in Argentina. The failure of the military and their limited achievements resulted in the military being "incapable of controlling the transition itself" (Veigel, 2009: 123).

The way in which both countries democratised has had a profound impact on the image of the right in their perspective societies. The image of the right today in Chile has improved due to their successful distancing from Pinochet, compliance with the Truth Commissions and maintenance of a successful economy. On the contrary, the right in Argentina remains largely mistrusted and is a weak political force. It is impossible to deny the link between the success of the right in Chile today and the role it played during the transition. Whilst the climate in Argentina has not been as favourable for the right to emerge as a dominant party, the failures of the military and the conflictual transition have negatively affected the image of the right in Argentina.

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Written by: Olivia Hutchinson
Written at: University College London
Written for: Kevin Middlebrook
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