

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Chile

Score:	2009	2010	Change	
Polity:	10	10	0	
Democ:	10	10	0	
Autoc:	0	0	0	
Durable:		21		
Tentative:		No		

SCODE	CHL	CCODE	155	Date of Report	1 July 2011
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Polity IV Component Variables

XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP
3	3	4	7	5	5

Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)

End Date	5 October 1988	Begin Date	16 December 1989
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Polity Fragmentation: No

Constitution	1981
Executive(s)	President Sebastian Pinera (CPC), directly elected, 13 December 2009 and 17 January 2010, 51.6%
Legislature	<p>Bicameral:</p> <p>Chamber of Deputies (120 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 11 December 2005)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coalition for Change (Formerly APC) (CPC): 58 Coalition of Parties for Democracy (CPD): 57 Clean Chile Vote Happy Coalition: 3 Non-partisans: 2 <p>Senate of the Republic (48 seats; 38 directly elected, 10 appointed; most recent elections, 11 December 2005)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPD: 19 CPC: 16 Clean Chile Vote Happy: 1 Non-partisans: 2 Appointed members: 10
Judiciary	Supreme Court

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

A coup led by Gen. Augusto Pinochet on 11 September 1973 resulted in the forced removal of Chile's elected socialist President, Salvador Allende, the banning of all socialist parties, and the establishment of a conservative military dictatorship. While all remaining political parties were officially banned by the Pinochet regime in March 1977, after a 10-year period of strict military dictatorship political parties were once again allowed to form on 15 January 1987 in preparation for Chile's gradual return to electoral politics planned for 1989. While Pinochet had hoped to retain the military's position of political power in this new "democratic" system of civilian governance, nonetheless, opposition to the military regime immediately set to work to defeat a 1988 plebiscite designed to endorse Pinochet's continued service as "president." Having thus "ousted" Pinochet, authority was returned to an elected president in March 1990. Despite the return to civilian rule, the Chilean military and Pinochet-loyalists in the legislature continued to wield sufficient power to block government attempts to initiate reforms.

In 1994, Eduardo Frei, member of the Christian Democratic Party and son of a popular former president, was elected with a clear mandate to subdue the military's hold on Chilean politics. The presidential elections of December 1999/January 2000 produced a transfer of power from President Frei to Ricardo Lagos Escobar of the Party for Democracy. Escobar became the first socialist president in Chile since the overthrow of Allende in 1973. International and domestic observers found both the 1999 election and January 2000 runoff to be free and fair. The increasing consolidation of democratic politics was also evident in the December 2005/January 2006 presidential election. In the run-off election of January 2006, Michele Bachelet became Chile's first women president, taking 54% of the popular vote.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

Up until 2005, Chile's constitution, first written under the former military government, provided for a strong executive and the establishment of institutional limits on popular rule. The armed forces remained a constraining factor for the president's authority (even though they were constitutionally subordinate to the President through an appointed civilian Minister of Defense) because they held several permanent seats in the National Security Council (NSC) whose concurrence was required for important presidential appointments. In December 2000, President Lagos had to concede to the military pressure to involve the NSC in decisions regarding the fate of the former dictator Pinochet. However, in a special session of Chile's congress in August 2005, the legislature voted to scrap elements of the constitution which had institutionalized the military's involvement in politics. In addition to giving the president the power to sack commanders of the armed forces, these constitutional reforms also abolished the nine senatorial seats reserved for unelected members of the army as well as the "senator for life" position afforded to former-President Pinochet. As such, the size of the Senate was to be reduced from 48 to 38 seats. These constitutional amendments were signed into law in mid-September 2005. Moreover, during this same month, the Supreme Court further reduced the political influence of the military when it stripped former President Pinochet of immunity for crimes he committed during his rule.

The legislature exerts substantial powers in controlling the actions of the government. The Chamber of Deputies can bring accusations of malfeasance against public officials including the president and the Senate is empowered to act as a jury for such cases. The Senate also decides on conflicts of jurisdiction between political or administrative authorities and higher courts of justice and lends or denies its consent to presidential actions. The current parliamentary majority is comprised of the four member parties of the Concertation of Parties for the Democracy, which includes the party of President. The Concertation Coalition has been in power since the retreat of General Pinochet from power in 1990 and currently holds majorities in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The Coalition pursues a policy of agenda that shows a commitment to both free markets and social programs. The judiciary is constitutionally independent, although it still includes a fair amount of military era appointees. However, continued turnover in the court system has significantly reduced external influences on the administration of justice.

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Political Participation: Competitive Political Competition (10)

Chile's modern political history has been marked by struggles for ascendancy between left-wing and right-wing groups. Political parties were abolished and human and civil rights restricted under the military government in 1973-1987. Multi-party elections were resumed in 1989 and a constitutional provision outlawing Marxism was repealed in an effort to ensure political pluralism. Presently, Chilean political parties are a mix of ideologically based movements and personalistic or identity-based groups. These "micro" parties have coalesced into two opposing blocs: the Concertation of Parties for Democracy (CPD) and the Alliance for Chile. The Concertation of Parties for the Democracy is a loose alliance of parties of both centrist and leftist orientations whose common agenda has been their opposition to the Pinochet dictatorship and military rule. It has metamorphosed several times in the 1980s and 90s, re-emerging under different names (first as Multipartidaria, then as Democratic Alliance and eventually as the Concertation). Conservative parties, in response to this left-wing coalition, formed the Alliance for Chile. While the conservative coalition made substantial electoral gains in the December 2001 legislative elections, the 2005 elections reestablished the political dominance of the CPD in Chilean politics and reaffirmed the society's commitment to both purge the military from politics and bring former-President Pinochet to justice for the crimes against humanity that he committed during Chile's long "dirty war."

By 2006 the legacy of violent class politics and military rule that had defined Chilean politics throughout much of the second half of the 20th century had been institutionally erased. The death of General Pinochet in December 2006 (after being placed under house arrest in October 2006) along with the election of center-left Concertacion candidate Michelle Bachelet to the office of president in January 2006 (the fourth consecutive Concertacion candidate to win this post), demonstrated a full return to competitive and regulated political competition in Chile. In recent years the right-wing has increasingly distanced itself from the Pinochet legacy while the left-wing has moved steadily to the center on economic and social issues.

Despite the institutionalization of party competition in Chile in recent years, political participation remains highly volatile. Violent street protests against the high rate of unemployment and the increasing costs of public transportation and education paralyzed the capital city of Santiago and several other cities in the spring and summer of 2007. These demonstrations, led by the powerful Central Workers Union, were organized to protest the failure of President Bachelet's socialist government to bridge the wide economic gap between rich and poor in the country. Bachelet's presidency has brought about a significant split in the country's socialist movement over her continued promotion of neo-liberal economic policies. If this split continues to worsen, it may undermine the consolidation of institutionalized political participation in this country.