Los que no están ni ahí: The Paradox of Political Disaffection in Post-Pinochet Chile

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Comprehensive Exercise
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Winter 2008
Introduction

Chile transitioned back to democracy in 1989 after 17 years of authoritarian rule under General Augusto Pinochet. Today Chile is considered one of the most consolidated and successful democracies in Latin America. Under four successive governments of the center-left Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia the country has experienced continued economic growth, improved social welfare for citizens, and political stability. These successes stand out when Chile is compared to other countries in Latin America, many of which underwent turbulent economic or political changes during the same period (Angell, 2006: 165). While Chilean’s hopes for political changes were high after years of authoritarian rule, survey data since 1990 shows that Chileans are increasingly dissatisfied with the performance of their democracy and that their trust in the country’s political institutions has declined (Ortega, 2003: 83). This situation presents an intriguing paradox. What is causing Chileans dissatisfaction with a political system that has been heralded as a model for the rest of Latin America? Does this situation represent a crisis of political legitimacy in Chile? How do Chileans’ levels of political satisfaction and trust in political institutions compare to other highly rated democracies in Latin America such as Costa Rica and Uruguay?

The phenomenon of growing disenchantment with politics in Chile has attracted scholarly attention because it is manifested in significant changes in citizen’s behavior. While Chilean political parties once had strong ties to civil society and were considered the most institutionalized in Latin America (Scully, 1995: 100), the place of parties in Chilean society today stands in sharp contrast to this characterization. Though political parties still structure political competition, survey data indicates that citizens of all political leanings lack confidence in political parties and that a large majority of citizens no longer identify with a political party
(Luna and Seligson, 2007: xxiii). Political parties are important mechanisms for organizing citizen interests in representative democracies and so a decrease in mass partisanship and the ties between political parties and the citizenry poses challenges for the legitimacy of a democracy that is organized around a partisan base.\textsuperscript{2} In addition, citizens’ disaffection with politics can be seen in the growing number of people that have chosen not to participate in elections. Election results from the post-authoritarian period show levels of abstention as well as blank and null voting that were never seen under the previous democracy and show a marked increase from the first elections under the current democracy (Riquelme, 1999a: 264).\textsuperscript{3} Though levels of electoral participation overall are still high, the increase in the number of people choosing not to emit a valid vote demonstrates the high levels of dissatisfaction with politics. Dealignment with political parties and citizens’ decisions to marginalize themselves from electoral politics are evidence of the Chilean paradox of seemingly successful institutions yet high levels of political desencanto among the people living under those institutions.\textsuperscript{4} If disenchantment with the political system persists, Chile runs the risk of becoming a democracy in name only as average citizens stop participating in political life and leave politics to be determined by elites who are free to govern without having to respond to the demands of the public.

Some scholars look at the paradox in Chile as part of a global phenomenon of citizen disengagement in developed democracies. They point to the low levels of political participation in stable democracies such as the United States and the United Kingdom to show that the situation in Chile is neither especially different nor alarming. While this explanation has merit, I believe that this puzzle can be explained more fully by taking into account the recent political history of Chile. Chile’s current democracy emerged out of an authoritarian context of “national re-foundation” in which political participation was restricted, political parties were illegal, and
the military regime sought both to fundamentally restructure the relationships between the state and society and to convince the people that politicians were unable to manage the problems of the country (Alcántara and Luna, 2004: 139; Allamand, 1999: 171). In addition to attempting to implant attitudes that devalued democracy, the Pinochet regime also left behind constitutionally created enclaves of authoritarian power in the new democratic government and an institutional structure that favored its civilian successors on the right so that they could continue the policies of the authoritarian regime (Garretón, 2007: 143).

In this paper I will argue that the political disaffection seen in Chile is related to these lingering authoritarian legacies and provides evidence that such legacies can weaken citizens’ satisfaction with democratic government even in a seemingly developed country. Though the majority of Chileans embraced their new democratic system with excitement in 1989 and participation in civil society was high, this initial fervor has been dampened to the point where citizens are now better described as disengaged and disillusioned with politics. The constitutional reform to some of the authoritarian enclaves by the Ricardo Lagos government in 2005 (such as the elimination of designated and life-long senators, new power for civilian authorities to fire military commanders, and the reformation of both the National Security Council and the Constitutional Tribunal to make them more democratic), have managed to slow the trend among citizens towards political disengagement, but they have not managed to stop it because other significant legacies remain. The link between the legacies of Chile’s authoritarian regime and political disaffection in the country can be seen in an examination of citizen opinions in Chile over time and by comparing Chile to other highly evaluated democracies in the region that lack the authoritarian legacies seen in Chile.

While the phenomenon of decreased political participation and disaffection with politics
is something that has been analyzed in detail for well established democracies, with few exceptions it has not been investigated in re-established democracies in the Latin American context. Scholarly literature investigating the phenomenon of political disaffection in Chile has been primarily qualitative research that has established some preliminary arguments about the factors responsible for this attitude that can be investigated empirically. The debate has centered around two possible explanations for the disengagement from politics seen in Chile. The first explanation focuses on situating Chile as a case in a larger phenomenon of political disaffection seen in developed democracies around the world. The second explanation analyzes Chile’s political history and the legacies of the authoritarian regime to explain the paradox of dissatisfaction in a situation of apparent democratic success. In this paper I will seek to remedy the lack of empirical support for this second explanation through a study of public opinion data.

**Chilean Dissatisfaction in Global Perspective**

In attempting to explain the situation of political dissatisfaction in Chile, one scholarly approach has been to look at other democracies around the world where statistics show similar changes in citizens’ attitudes about politics and conclude that these cases share a common explanation. Manuel Garretón explains that public opinion surveys in countries around the world illustrate citizens’ discontent with the quality of politics is not unique to Chile (Garretón, 2007: 141). This is an unexpected result in seemingly developed democracies (as opposed to undemocratic or semi-democratic countries), but authors argue that this result can be explained by the very level of democratic stability and economic development that these countries have achieved. Carla Lehmann argues that as countries achieve democratic stability and higher levels of economic development it is logical for people to turn away from politics because “hay menos cosas en juego o lo que es lo mismo la política, dentro del contexto general de prioridades de la
población, pierde relevancia” (Lehmann, 1998: 2). Since in developed democracies less is at stake in politics than in countries still on the road to democracy, people can afford to lessen their involvement in the political sphere and turn their attention to other priorities. Extending this argument some scholars argue that because in developed democracies the essential political questions about the government have been resolved, people come to see politics as little more than a fight for power between elites rather than an arena where issues of high salience to their lives are decided (Lehmann, 1998: 7; Riquelme, 1999a: 275). Garretón adds that in developed democracies there is the perception that problems in the economy, cultural sphere, and social relations can be resolved within those spheres of life leaving politics a more limited role than in the past when politics was the principal way for people to access the goods, services, and protection (Garretón, 2007: 132 and 142). Scholars who contend that the disaffection seen in Chile is part of a larger global phenomenon view its level of development as part of the reason for citizens’ disengagement from politics. Thus rather than considering citizens’ disengagement from politics a problem they see it as a sign that Chile has achieved a high level of democratic consolidation.

**Chile’s Authoritarian Legacies and the Limitations on Democratic Contestation**

In the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one that occurs without an armed conflict, outgoing authoritarian leaders have the opportunity to influence the construction of the new political system. A negotiated transition can lead to both authoritarian enclaves and legacies in the new democracy. Authoritarian enclaves are institutions, usually explicitly protected by the country’s constitution or as part of a transition agreement, that give former authoritarian leaders or their surrogates continued control over certain areas of government. These enclaves can be considered authoritarian because they are not directly accountable to
people or to another branch of government. An authoritarian legacy is defined more broadly as a
decision made by the outgoing authoritarian regime that limits areas of democratic contestation.
Legacies can also “structure relationships between the state and political or civil society” in a
way that unfairly benefits a dictatorship’s civilian successors (Stepan, 1988: 93). These legacies
vary from institutions, such as an electoral system or an autonomous central bank, to informal
understandings and are elements that are not inconsistent with democratic governance even
though they carry the influence of the authoritarian regime. These legacies can exist within the
democratic institutions of a country. In discussing the Chilean case it is important to distinguish
between authoritarian enclaves and legacies because this distinction indicates which elements of
the political system are truly incompatible with democratic governance and which elements
function within a democracy but reduce its scope and limit its representativeness. However, it is
important to note that the scholarly differentiation between enclaves and legacies is not as
relevant when examining citizens’ perceptions of authoritarian influences on their democracy.

In contrast to those that situate Chileans’ political disaffection in a global context, another
group of scholars claim that both authoritarian enclaves and legacies have led to Chileans’
dissatisfaction with politics though the importance of authoritarian legacies has grown over time
as some of the explicit enclaves have been reformed.10 Under this explanation, scholars attribute
the increasing disaffection with politics during the post-authoritarian period to the fact that
Chileans’ high expectations at the beginning of the democratic regime have not been able to be
met because of the restrictions on the government’s ability to enact real changes that are the
result of authoritarian enclaves and legacies.11 These influences have limited the scope of
democracy by depoliticizing major areas of democratic conflict. Garretón explains that under the
new democratic government people have been able to chose their representatives, but
governments cannot carry out the platforms they were elected on because the system’s authoritarian legacies leave them without the resources to do so (Garretón, 2007: 101).12 Scholars argue that such a system leads to disenchantment and disengagement as citizens confront the limited scope of democracy.

Many of the authoritarian enclaves and legacies created by the military regime in Chile have been reformed as the dictatorship’s inheritors on the political right came to recognize their inconsistencies with democratic governance. The constitutional reforms of 2005 radically rewrote the dictatorship’s constitution in the interests of creating a more democratic system. Importantly for this study, the reforms eliminated authoritarian enclaves such as the designated and life-long senators, phased out much of the military’s autonomy from civilian control, and reworked the National Security Council and the Constitutional Tribunal to bring them under democratic management. These changes along with reforms to other authoritarian legacies reduced the continuing influences of the Pinochet regime on the Chilean political system, but certain legacies remain unreformed.

Because these systemic reforms have not eliminated all authoritarian influences, I have chosen to focus on the influence of authoritarian legacies that remain in Chile rather than authoritarian enclaves that have been removed. The literature identifies four main authoritarian legacies that have not been reformed. First, scholars point to the consensual, pacted nature of the transition to democracy. Second, they look at the influences of authoritarian created limitations on electoral competition. Third, they examine how the military regime depoliticized economics by moving these issues into the hands of technocratic experts rather than elected officials. Lastly, scholars point to the institutional weakness of the Congress that was created by the military regime’s 1980 Constitution. These four factors encompass both institutional legacies as
well as the less obvious restrictions on the sphere of influence and contestation the public is
allowed in the political process.

Scholars believe that one of the key influences on people’s current political attitudes and
actions can be traced to the nature of the transition from authoritarian rule. The pacted nature of
Chile’s transition is not atypical, but its importance to this argument rests in how it served to
limit areas of democratic contestation. In Chile the transition took place under the legal
framework established by the military regime’s constitution with the details worked during
intense negotiations between members of the authoritarian government and elites in the
democratic opposition. Kenneth Roberts explains that the transition favored “political pacts,
negotiated compromises, and institutional engineering” at the elite level rather than citizen
participation (Roberts, 1995: 510). While this type of transition is hardly unique, the situation in
Chile was distinct because it took place on the timetable of the military government’s
constitution rather than as a result of an economic crisis or military defeat as occurred in many
other countries (Garretón, 2007: 43). Since the dictatorship was not economically or militarily
discredited, the democratic opposition was left with less room to negotiate real reforms in the
institutional framework created by the 1980 Constitution. Carlos Huneeus makes the case that it
has now become clear that the negotiated transition created a model of post-transition democracy
based on the politics of elite consensus and limited citizen participation (Huneeus, 1999: 37).
This means that the public agenda is restricted to issues that can be settled through elite
agreements (Huneeus, 1999: 45). This style of policymaking has led the public to perceive that
they have little ability to get their concerns onto the public agenda. Huneeus contends that this
inability to influence politics has led citizens to feel increasingly frustrated with the political
process.
The continuation of governance through elite accords is another major reason for the growing disconnect between citizens and politics. Arturo Valenzuela and Lucía Dammert argue that the mode of the transition has limited the policy agenda and that the system of elite governance that the transition created has outlived its usefulness. They argue that tactics such as elite negotiation that “aided institutional consolidation just after Pinochet may now be growing increasingly counterproductive” for democratic success (Valenzuela and Dammert, 2006: 71). Citizen confidence in the political class when politics are composed of “a tiny band of the same faces” is low because the system the openness and transparency that could make citizens feel part of the political process (Valenzuela and Dammert, 2006: 72). In current Chilean politics “political elites have circumscribed the participatory functions of party structures, adopting a technocratic approach to political activity” in order to maintain the stability of their agreements and this has had clear consequences for citizens’ evaluations of politics (Olavarría, 2003: 14). While negotiating a process of transition with the Pinochet regime was widely accepted in Chile as the only means to return to democracy without bloodshed, scholars argue that this style of politics has influenced the post-authoritarian model of democracy and thereby played into citizens’ disaffection with politics and lack of confidence in the country’s political institutions.

In explaining the phenomenon of desencanto, scholars also look at the influence of authoritarian legacies in the realm of electoral competition. This is an arena in which the authoritarian regime’s institutional structure has remained unchanged, despite numerous reform attempts, because of the supermajorities needed in the legislature to modify it. Scholars argue that the binominal electoral system created by the dictatorship for congressional elections has resulted in citizens’ disenchantment with politics because it is a system with little competition and it excludes certain groups from representation in an attempt to depoliticize the electoral
sphere. In their desire to create an electoral system that would give advantages to the dictatorships right-wing supporters, the regime designed a system with reduced electoral competition. Valenzuela and Dammert explain that “the military-engineered electoral law set up districts with two seats apiece while also holding that the list with the most votes can gain both seats only if its vote share doubles that of the nearest competing list” (Valenzuela and Dammert, 2006: 72). This means that in most districts the two major lists (representing the right and the center-left) are each guaranteed a seat even if their levels of support differ significantly. Under this system, the significance of the popular vote is reduced since citizens can do little more than ratify the candidates proposed by the coalitions, which are virtually guaranteed to win as soon as they are selected (Arriagada, 1997: 67-68). This has left voters to face the reality of a reduced set of electoral options in which voting loses its relevance.

In addition to reducing electoral choice for citizens, scholars also argue that the binominal system is responsible for a distortion in the representativeness of Congress. Paul Posner makes the case that the institutional constraints of the binominal system have forced “a bipolar pattern of competition on parties that have historically divided themselves according to three ideological blocs…seriously distorting the extent to which societal interests are fairly represented in the political arena” (Posner, 2004: 71). The argument is that the unjust electoral system allows both the overrepresentation of the right and the exclusion of smaller parties, especially on the left, from representation (Munk and Bosworth, 1998: 485-486). Scholars make the case that the exclusion of smaller parties (which receive the support of about a tenth of all voters in most elections) from congressional representation strikes citizens accustomed to proportional representation under the previous democracy as unfair and has increased their disaffection with the countrys political institutions (Valenzuela and Dammert, 2006: 73). They
contend that the exclusionary nature of the binominal system has led a significant number of voters to feel that their voices are irrelevant to the political process and provided incentives for them to withdraw from political participation (Huneeus, 1999: 44). Scholars argue that the binominal electoral system created under the authoritarian regime can be linked to citizens’ dissatisfaction with politics because of its lack of competition and its unfair representation of societal interests which depoliticize electoral contestation.

Another legacy of the authoritarian regime that scholars contend can explain the phenomenon of political desencanto in Chile is the depolitization of economics. A major part of the military regime’s reformation project was creating a new economic model in Chile based on neo-liberal policies such as trade liberalization and the reduction of the role of the state in economic planning and regulation. The military regime, facing the inevitability of a transition, was concerned that the new democratic government would roll back neo-liberal policies, so they created measures that would remove economic decision making from the political sphere. Delia Boylan argues that one major action the regime took to protect its economic legacy as it was leaving office was to institutionalize the independence of the Central Bank. She explains that this “not only remove[d] a key aspect of economic decision making from democratic control but it also constrain[d] governments to pursue a set of neoliberal outcomes associated with macroeconomic stability” (Boylan, 1998: 444). By making the Central Bank autonomous, the regime was able to insulate their economic program from change by democratically elected politicians and essentially turn the economic sector into “an irreversible ‘authoritarian enclave’ of its own” under the guise of creating modern fiscal institutions (Boylan, 1998: 457).

In addition to this explicit removal of an arena of economic decision-making from democratic control, other means by which the regime left a legacy of depoliticized economics
were more subtle. Scholars argue that as part of the elite negotiations during the transition, the democratic elite implicitly agreed to support the regime’s economic model and their technocratic view of economics by eliminating economic questions from the legitimate political arena (Huneeus, 1999: 42; Olavarría, 2003: 14-15). The definition of the political changed and came to exclude the economic, which became a sphere only for trained experts, not the people’s representatives. The democratic elite were willing to agree to these economic constraints because they thought they were essential to gaining the confidence of the business sector, which remained loyal to the dictatorship, as well as because of their growing support for the continuation of neo-liberal model itself (Barrett, 2000: 15). Removing the economic model from politics left politicians unable to participate in “un espacio natural de acción y de opinión sobre temas que son de enorme interés ciudadano” (Huneeus, 1999: 42). Scholars argue that this depolitization of economics led to a decrease in political interest over time as people realized that politicians were not involved in the sphere of economic decision-making and therefore could not respond to social demands. This is especially significant for citizens affected by the growing economic inequalities in Chile since the return to democracy.

The last legacy of the authoritarian regime that scholars contend is part of the explanation of political disaffection in Chile is the institutional weakness of Congress. This is another legacy that comes from the dictatorship’s 1980 Constitution. Assuming that General Pinochet would be president, the constitution gives the president extensive powers and creates a Congress whose primary purpose is to stamp their approval on policies proposed by the executive. Given the powers granted to the president to set the legislative agenda, Congress, which most directly represents citizens, is left unable to propose bills with any meaningful social impact and thus the democratic representativeness allowed in the system is reduced (Olavarría, 2003: 23). Margot
Olavarría argues that the system of exaggerated presidentialism “undermines the legislature’s representational capabilities and diminishes the credibility of individual legislators and their promises for change” (Olavarría, 2003: 23). She makes the case that this institutional legacy of the authoritarian regime leaves people feeling that politicians are unable to realize changes for their constituents. Manuel Barrera highlights the fact that the 1980 Constitution removed politicians’ ability to serve their constituents with clientalistic favors that had been the primary way the popular sectors interacted with politicians and the state under the previous democratic regime (Barrera, 1998: 9). The elimination of clientalistic projects from the legislative arena has affected the continuing incorporation of the popular sectors into the political process. Scholars argue that given clientalism’s long history in Chilean politics “es comprensible que los votantes, al gozar de menos beneficios, tengan una mala opinión de los políticos, de los partidos, y del Congreso” (Angell, 2006: 192). Scholarly literature links the institutional weakness of the Congress to the phenomenon of political disaffection in Chile because this weakness has left Congress unable to adequately represent their constituents’ interests.

In seeking to explain the paradox of Chilean citizens’ desencanto with politics under a democratic system that has been highly successful, scholars are divided over whether to look within Chile or to the rest of the world to solve this puzzle. These contrasting approaches to the puzzle provide hypotheses to pursue empirically. To test the explanatory power of these scholars’ approaches their qualitative hypotheses can be investigated by looking at whether they are manifested in citizens’ thoughts and attitudes.

Hypothesis

This paper will investigate the phenomenon of political disaffection in the case of post-authoritarian Chile and seek to explain the variations in disaffection seen over time. To explain
the paradox of growing political dissatisfaction observed among Chileans I will argue that the paradox can only be fully explained by taking into account how the legacies of Chile’s authoritarian regime and the process of transition back to democracy have shaped democratic politics in Chile during the post-authoritarian period. Chile’s level of economic and democratic development is not enough to explain the high levels of disillusionment with politics. The significance of Chile’s authoritarian legacy to the desencanto phenomenon can be established through a comparison to other democracies with similar levels of democratic stability and economic development that lack these authoritarian legacies, such as Costa Rica and Uruguay, where I predict that dissatisfaction will be lower than in Chile. These authoritarian legacies influence on the nature of Chilean democracy have only become apparent to citizens gradually as the changes they expected to see with a democratic government never developed. This has led to growing levels of dissatisfaction as citizens have come to realize that the democracy consolidated in Chile limits the arenas of democratic contestation. While the reform of explicit authoritarian enclaves in 2005 should lead to a decrease in dissatisfaction under my hypothesis, other important authoritarian factors identified by scholars remain in place. I contend that the influence of the consensual nature of the transition to democracy, the system of electoral competition, the depolitization of economics, and the institutional weakness of Congress continue to contribute to surprisingly high levels of political dissatisfaction.

Methodology

In order to study the causes of political disengagement in Chile I undertook a two step process of investigation. First, I investigated the variation in political dissatisfaction in Chile over the seventeen years since the return to democracy using public opinion survey data and looked for corresponding changes in authoritarian legacies to explain the changes in the
dependent variable. Second, I compared dissatisfaction in Chile to that in Uruguay and Costa Rica using public opinion survey data to establish that it is Chile’s authoritarian legacies that are responsible for the high levels of disengagement and disaffection seen among citizens there.

It was important to select cases with similar levels of development to demonstrate that any variation seen in political disenchantment is not due to variation in the countries’ levels of political and economic development. Costa Rica and Uruguay were selected as cases for comparison because of the many similarities between their democracies and Chile’s. These three countries have the longest histories of democratic governance in Latin America, though democracy was disrupted for a time in both Uruguay and Chile. Today they share the distinction of being ranked as the strongest and most consolidated democracies in the region (Valenzuela and Dammert, 2006: 74; Olavarría, 2003: 18). Politically, both Uruguay and Costa Rica have strong party traditions and elect their legislatures through proportional representation. These countries also have relatively similar levels of economic development, as seen in measures such as GDP per capita and real GDP growth.

While the three countries share many similarities, I expect Uruguay and Costa Rica to have lower levels of political dissatisfaction than those seen in Chile because the functioning of their democracies is not disrupted by the presence of lingering authoritarian legacies. As in Chile, the current Uruguayan government emerged from a period of military rule, but in Uruguay authoritarian institutions were replaced with those of the previous democratic constitution as part of the transition process so the authoritarian regime’s influence was never institutionalized. Scholars agree that in contrast to the program of national reformation carried out by the Chilean dictatorship, in Uruguay the military government was more of a “‘paréntesis autoritario’ tras el cual se han retomado las características tradicionales de la matriz socio-política tradicional”
The Costa Rican case provides a good contrast because unlike Chile and Uruguay it has not recently made a transition back to democratic governance and so authoritarian legacies are expected to have no influence on Costa Ricans evaluations of their democracy.

Comparing political discontentment in Chile with these two other Latin American democracies will control for variation in level of development and thus help me to evaluate the uniqueness of the desencanto seen in Chile. If the four authoritarian legacies are found to have strong explanatory power for the phenomenon of political disaffection in Chile but are not related to dissatisfaction in Uruguay and Costa Rica this will provide evidence that the desencanto seen in Chile is more than just part of a global phenomenon found in all developed democracies.

The Study: Variables and Data

In order to conduct my investigation I had to operationalize the variables in question and find a way to measure them empirically. I chose to test the two competing explanations for the political disenchantment seen in Chile by looking at public opinion survey data. The data was obtained from four different sources: the World Values Surveys taken in Chile, the Latinobarómetro Surveys taken in on all three of my cases, the LA POP Survey taken in Chile during 2006, and various surveys from Chile’s Centro de Estudios Públicos which takes national surveys two to three times a year. Using multiple data sources will help ensure greater reliability of results. The only problem with these data sources is that the scarcity of data in the early years of the transition period will make it more difficult to examine the full range of changes in the variables over time.

To begin my study I established the characteristics of the dependent variable of political
desencanto in each case. The dependent variable of political disaffection was measured by questions asking about citizens’ levels of satisfaction with democracy, their preference for democratic governance over an authoritarian regime, their level of interest in politics, and whether they consider democracy fully established in their country. These measures demonstrate the strength of political disaffection present in each case.

To put Chile in context I first looked at the general levels of dissatisfaction with democracy and disinterest in politics throughout Latin America. It is interesting to note all three of the countries under examination have lower than average levels of dissatisfaction with democracy though the Chileans dissatisfaction during the period under examination is closer to the regional average than either Uruguayans or Costa Ricans (see Figure 1). In terms of disinterest in politics, Chile and Costa Rica are above the regional average while Uruguay presents levels below average (see Figure 2). Figure 2 shows the first evidence that among the three more developed countries there are clear distinctions between Chile and Costa Rica, which have high levels of desencanto, and Uruguay, which presents low levels of desencanto. This distinction will be examined in greater detail later in this study. The regional comparison on these two measures demonstrates that political dissatisfaction and disinterest exist in Latin America regardless of a country’s level of political and economic development. It is also important to note that while much is made of political disaffection in developed democracies, the developed cases by no means show the highest levels of disaffection in the region.
Next I looked at changes in the dependent variable of disaffection with politics over time. In examining the levels of dissatisfaction with democracy in Chile I saw that dissatisfaction has been decreasing since 2001 bringing it closer to the levels seen in Uruguay and Costa Rica (see
Figure 3). Unfortunately the first survey data available on this question was from 1995 so I was unable to see how satisfied people were with democracy in the beginning of the post-authoritarian period where I would have expected to see low levels of dissatisfaction expressing citizens’ euphoria with the return to democracy. Qualitative accounts of the early years of Chile’s re-democratization support the assumption that the popular sectors were at first optimistic about the new political situation before becoming disillusioned. Figure 3 also gives evidence that levels of dissatisfaction with democracy in Uruguay and Costa Rica have been consistently lower than those in Chile during the same period until the very last year with data in which dissatisfaction in Costa Rica topped that in Chile. Tests of the difference in mean dissatisfaction between Chile and Uruguay and Chile and Costa Rica indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in dissatisfaction at the 0.05 level in both comparisons.

Figure 3: Dissatisfaction with Democracy 1995-2006

Question: How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in this country? Source: Latinobarómetro Survey 1995-2005 (note: Costa Rica not surveyed in 1995)

Regarding the levels of interest in politics, Figure 4 illustrates an increase in political
disinterest in Chile from 1990 to 1996 after which disinterest remained relatively stable. This data is consistent with the idea that disaffection with politics should increase from the beginning of the transition period as citizens realized that the democracy consolidated in Chile was unable to respond to their demands because of the continuing authoritarian legacies in the model of governance. However, it is surprising to see that the decrease in dissatisfaction with democracy see in more recent years is not paralleled by a decrease in political disinterest. In comparison to the other two cases, levels of political disinterest in Uruguay are consistently about 20 percent lower than those in Chile while by the end of the period political disinterest in Costa Rica come to surpass the levels seen in Chile (see Figure 4). A comparison of mean political disinterest between Chile and Uruguay indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the two countries, while the mean difference in political disinterest in Chile and Costa Rica is not statistically significant.26

Figure 4: Disinterest in Politics 1990-2006

Question: How interested are you in politics? Sources: World Values Survey 1990 (Chile only), Latinobarómetro Survey 1995-2005, and LAPOP Survey 2006 (Chile only)

The third indicator for the dependent variable was perceptions about the establishment of
democracy in the country. This question was asked on Latinobarómetro surveys between 1996 and 2000, the period in which I would expect to see consistently high levels of disaffection in Chile. Examining this variable I saw that few people in Chile considered their democracy fully established and their opinions remained fairly constant over the time this question was asked (see Figure 5). Costa Ricans and Uruguayans were much more likely to consider their democracies fully established.

**Figure 5: Perceptions of the Establishment of Democracy 1996-2000**

![Figure 5: Perceptions of the Establishment of Democracy 1996-2000](image)

Question: Do you think democracy is fully established in this country? Source: Latinobarómetro Survey 1996-1998 and 2000

Finally I looked at citizens’ preferences for a democratic regime over an authoritarian regime as a reflection of their level of satisfaction with democracy. During the period from 1995 to 2005, 50 to 60 percent of citizens in Chile affirmed that democracy is always preferable to an authoritarian system, much lower than the levels of agreement with this statement in Uruguay and Costa Rica (see Figure 6). Looking at the data I noted that people in Chile are not necessarily more likely than their counterparts in Uruguay and Costa Rica to say that authoritarianism is permissible under certain circumstances; instead between 20 and 30 percent of those surveyed in Chile say that it makes no difference to them whether the country has a
democratic or authoritarian regime. This is an interesting finding because it seems to indicate a perception among a fairly large group of citizens that there are not major differences between these two forms of governance. I believe that this can be explained by the still significant influence of authoritarian legacies in Chile.

**Figure 6: Preference for Democratic Government Lowest in Chile**

![Graph showing preference for democratic government over time in Chile, Uruguay, and Costa Rica. The graph indicates that the percentage of people agreeing that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government is lowest in Chile.]

Question: Which of the following statements do you agree with most? a) Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government, b) Under some circumstances an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one, or c) For people like me it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a non-democratic regime. Source: Latinobarómetro Survey 199-2005

After examining the characteristics of the dependent variable in the three cases over time, I next operationalized the independent variable as the four factors identified by scholars as major authoritarian legacies influencing citizens’ desencanto with politics in Chile. First, the legacies of the consensual nature of the process of transition will be evaluated by studying (1) whether people believe that politicians are concerned with their concerns, (2) their opinion on whether the country is governed for the good of all or for special interests, and (3) their levels of confidence in political parties. These variables will give an indication of whether people believe the scope of the political agenda has been limited under the post-authoritarian democracy and whether the model of government by elite negotiation has been a significant influence on Chilean’s
disaffection with politics. To analyze the possible effects of the consensual nature of the transition I studied perceptions of whether there is a model of elite governance. First I looked at a question from the World Values Survey conducted in Chile in 1990 that asked people whether they agreed that their government needed to be made more open to the public. Here I observed that even at the time of the transition when I expected to see optimism about the governmental model, an overwhelming percentage of people surveyed (83.6%) felt that their government needed to be more open. Unfortunately this question could not be tracked over time because it was not repeated in later surveys. Over time I was able to see that in all three countries citizens believed that political leaders have little concern for their concerns and that the country is governed for the benefit of powerful interests rather than for the good of all (see Tables 1 and 2). In Chile it is important to note that these perceptions did not change significantly in 2005 when dissatisfaction with democracy was found to be lower.

Table 1: Political Leaders Concern About Issues that Interest Citizens

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<th></th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot or fairly</td>
<td>23.10%</td>
<td>12.60%</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little or not at all</td>
<td>72.60%</td>
<td>85.60%</td>
<td>89.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot or fairly</td>
<td>34.70%</td>
<td>12.90%</td>
<td>41.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little or not at all</td>
<td>56.00%</td>
<td>85.00%</td>
<td>55.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot or fairly</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>7.20%</td>
<td>9.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little or not at all</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>84.00%</td>
<td>89.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Do you think political leaders are concerned about the issues that interest you? Source: Latinobarómetro Survey

Table 2: Perceptions of Who the Country is Governed For

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For powerful interests</td>
<td>68.40%</td>
<td>65.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the good of all</td>
<td>27.10%</td>
<td>29.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For powerful interests</td>
<td>80.40%</td>
<td>39.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the good of all</td>
<td>13.20%</td>
<td>49.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For powerful interests</td>
<td>67.70%</td>
<td>77.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the good of all</td>
<td>26.30%</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: In general, would you say that the country is governed for the good of powerful interests or is it governed for the good of everyone? Source: Latinobarómetro Survey
Next I looked at citizens’ levels of confidence in political parties, the institution most closely associated with the model of democracy by agreement seen in Chile. Confidence in political parties was fairly high at the time democracy was reinitiated but as expected this decreased over time. Since 2002 there has been a small increase in confidence in parties. Confidence in parties in Chile is lower than that it is in Uruguay, but levels from 1995 to 2005 are fairly similar to those seen in Costa Rica (see Figure 7). It should also be noted that in Chile today only 25.6% claim to sympathize with a political party and of this number 8% sympathize with parties that have never received electoral representation (Luna and Seligson, 2007: 150). While I was not able to find data to track the adhesion to political parties in the pre-coup period, the conventional wisdom about the party system in Chile suggests that the percentage of people expressing support for a certain political party is much lower today than it was in the past.28 This could indicate an indictment of political parties for their continuation of the system of government by elite negotiation that was established during the transition.

**Figure 7: Confidence in Political Parties Remains Low in Chile**

Question: How much confidence do you have in political parties? Source: World Values Survey 1990 (Chile only), Latinobarómetro Survey 1995-2005
The next set of indicators to be measured was the influence of the uncompetitive and exclusionary electoral system on people’s dissatisfaction. The system of electoral competition’s role in political disengagement was assessed by investigating whether people believe their vote makes a difference as well as by examining the reasons people give for not registering and/or not voting. I also looked at electoral participation to measure disaffection with electoral structures. During the period from 1995 to 2005, I saw that the majority of people believe that their vote makes a difference, but the percentage of people who felt that their vote was irrelevant was much higher in Chile and Costa Rica than in Uruguay (see Figure 8). I also noticed that over time more people in Chile began to believe that their vote matters, an inexplicable result since there have been no changes to the electoral system during this time.

**Figure 8: Feelings about the Efficacy of Voting Highest in Uruguay**

![Figure 8](image)

Question: Some people say that the way you vote can change things in the future. Others say that no matter how you vote, things will not improve in the future. Which statement is closest to your way of thinking? Source: Latinobarómetro Survey 1995-1998 and 2003-2005

Since I expect the electoral system to be a major influence on disillusionment with politics in Chile but not in the other two cases, I looked at several measures specific to Chile. In
order to get at possible dissatisfaction with electoral competition under the binomial system, I used two surveys done by the Centro de Estudios Públicos that asked people why they chose not to register to vote. Unfortunately, these surveys did not ask those people who did register but spoiled their ballots or voted blank on Election Day why they did not emit a valid vote, a measure which could reveal protest against the system (Riquelme, 1999b: 32). The two most common responses in both surveys were that the person did not register to vote because he or she did not have any interest in politics and that he or she did not want to be obligated to vote (as everyone who registers is under Chilean electoral law) (see Figures 9 and 10). These surveys demonstrate that protesting against the system, feelings that voting will not change things, feelings that elections are not competitive, and feelings that politicians are not addressing people’s concerns are not found to be significant factors in citizens’ decision not to register to vote. This seems to indicate that the citizenry does not perceive the electoral system to be as important an authoritarian legacy as scholars do. Yet even though citizens are not abstaining from the electoral process in protest, the majority of the population considers the binomial system an unjust legacy of the authoritarian government. This indicates the possibility that the binominal system’s role in depoliticizing electoral contestation plays into and is expressed as citizens’ apathy and disinterest in politics.
In an attempt to capture levels of dissatisfaction with the legislative system, I examined data about electoral participation in Chile. Table 3 indicates that while electoral participation remains relatively high, it has clearly declined since the beginning of the post-authoritarian period. Electoral data also indicates that the percentage of the population legally able to vote...
that has registered to vote has been declining, with the decline especially apparent among 18 to 30 year olds (see column 4 in Table 3). Both registration and participation in elections have been declining during the period under examination, though spikes in participation are evident for highly salient elections such as the presidential election in 1999 (Navia, 2004: 94). While data on levels of registration and absenteeism is difficult to find for all elections during this period in Costa Rica and Uruguay general trends indicate stable levels of absenteeism and growing levels of registered voters.31

Table 3: Electoral Participation in Chile, 1988-2001 (in thousands of votes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population of Voting Age</th>
<th>Registered Voters</th>
<th>Registered Voters (18-30 years old)</th>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>Valid Votes</th>
<th>Null and Blank Votes</th>
<th>Abstention and Unregistered Voters</th>
<th>Voters/Registered Population (%)</th>
<th>Valid Votes/Population of Voting Age (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>8,062</td>
<td>7,436</td>
<td>2,676</td>
<td>7,251</td>
<td>7,187</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>96.6%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>8,243</td>
<td>7,558</td>
<td>2,526</td>
<td>7,159</td>
<td>6,980</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>1,163</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>8,775</td>
<td>7,841</td>
<td>2,348</td>
<td>7,044</td>
<td>6,411</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>1,722</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>8,951</td>
<td>8,085</td>
<td>2,310</td>
<td>7,377</td>
<td>6,969</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>1,540</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>9,464</td>
<td>8,073</td>
<td>1,798</td>
<td>7,079</td>
<td>6,301</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>2,306</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>65.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>9,627</td>
<td>8,078</td>
<td>1,605</td>
<td>7,046</td>
<td>5,796</td>
<td>1,251</td>
<td>2,513</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>9,945</td>
<td>8,084</td>
<td>1,298</td>
<td>7,272</td>
<td>7,055</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>2,674</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
<td>70.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 (2nd round)</td>
<td>9,945</td>
<td>8,084</td>
<td>1,298</td>
<td>7,316</td>
<td>7,169</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>2,628</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>10,100</td>
<td>8,089</td>
<td>1,178</td>
<td>7,019</td>
<td>6,452</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>3,082</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>10,500</td>
<td>8,075</td>
<td>1,051</td>
<td>6,992</td>
<td>6,107</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>3,509</td>
<td>86.6%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The next factor to be investigated was the difficult to quantify legacy of a depoliticized economy. To measure the influence of this legacy, I looked at what institutions people perceive as having the most power in the country and whether they believe the state is able to solve the country’s problems. This was a complicated legacy to measure but I think that these two measures give an indication of whether people believe that the government can respond to their economic demands. I choose not to look at citizens’ evaluations of the country’s economic
situation because I think this measure to too greatly influenced by what is going on in the economy at the time to give a good reflection of what I am trying to measure. To begin, I examined the contrast between the percentage of people who thought that big businesses had the most power and those who thought government and political institutions had the most power in society. Over the period from 1995 to 2005, Chileans consistently asserted that large companies have the most power in the country while very few people saw the government, political parties, and Congress as very powerful at all (see Table 4). This finding contrasts with that in Uruguay and Costa Rica where those believing that business has the most power are also the majority, but people perceived government and political powers as having more power. The perception in Chile that the state and political institutions have little power indicates that people consider them unable to answer their demands, thus leading them to have a negative evaluation of politics.

Table 4: Perceptions of Who Has the Most Power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large companies</td>
<td>49.80%</td>
<td>56.50%</td>
<td>48.80%</td>
<td>49.30%</td>
<td>54.60%</td>
<td>62.40%</td>
<td>59.70%</td>
<td>69.20%</td>
<td>67.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political parties</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
<td>3.60%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>2.90%</td>
<td>3.50%</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>8.70%</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td>6.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the government</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
<td>9.20%</td>
<td>11.40%</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
<td>9.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large companies</td>
<td>39.60%</td>
<td>23.60%</td>
<td>37.60%</td>
<td>21.70%</td>
<td>29.40%</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
<td>34.30%</td>
<td>48.50%</td>
<td>48.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political parties</td>
<td>6.10%</td>
<td>7.80%</td>
<td>7.60%</td>
<td>9.20%</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
<td>17.10%</td>
<td>12.30%</td>
<td>9.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the government</td>
<td>6.80%</td>
<td>27.30%</td>
<td>14.60%</td>
<td>27.30%</td>
<td>23.10%</td>
<td>35.90%</td>
<td>14.50%</td>
<td>8.80%</td>
<td>9.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large companies</td>
<td>38.50%</td>
<td>30.70%</td>
<td>28.10%</td>
<td>45.60%</td>
<td>21.00%</td>
<td>20.90%</td>
<td>24.20%</td>
<td>20.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political parties</td>
<td>16.00%</td>
<td>16.90%</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>7.60%</td>
<td>17.90%</td>
<td>15.70%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the government</td>
<td>16.40%</td>
<td>16.20%</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
<td>13.40%</td>
<td>26.60%</td>
<td>25.60%</td>
<td>22.70%</td>
<td>23.40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
<td>9.20%</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
<td>10.90%</td>
<td>16.80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Who do you think has the most power in this country? Source: Latinobarómetro Survey 1995-2005
For this authoritarian legacy I also examined whether people believe that the state is able to solve the problems facing their society. Especially for Chile, surveys regularly show that economic concerns top the list of things they want the state to address. Figure 11 demonstrates that a significant number of people in Chile and Costa Rica do not believe the state can solve very many of society’s problems while the people in Uruguay are more optimistic about their state’s capabilities. This measure indicates that people in Chile tend to feel that the government is not able to resolve their political concerns. As expected with the reforms to some authoritarian legacies in Chile in 2005 the percentage of people who believe that the state can only solve a few or none of society’s problems has decreased to 37%.

**Figure 11: Perceptions of the State’s Power to Solve Problems Low in Chile and Costa Rica**

Question: It is said that the State can solve our society’s problems because it has the resources to do so. Would you say that the State can solve ______ of the problems? Source: Latinobarómetro Survey 1998, 2000, 2003, and 2005

The last authoritarian legacy’s influence that I wanted to examine was the institutional weakness of Congress. This was evaluated by examining people’s perceptions of Congress’ power and their confidence in Congress. Going back to the perceptions of who has the most
power in society, I saw that in Chile during the period from 1995 to 2005, an average of only about 1 percent of those surveyed felt that Congress had the most power (see Table 3 above). These levels were comparable to those in Uruguay, but lower than those in Costa Rica where in some years nearly 20 percent of people regarded Congress as the most powerful institution in society. Next I looked at levels of confidence in Congress. In Chile there was a high level of confidence in Congress at the beginning of the post-authoritarian period which decreased until around 2003 when confidence began to rebound slightly (see Figure 12). The percentage of people expressing confidence in Congress in Chile falls roughly between the higher levels of confidence in Uruguay and the lower levels in Costa Rica over most of the period. While I had hoped to be able to compare levels of confidence in Congress with levels of confidence in the executive I was unable to find a large enough sample of data on confidence in the executive to make a full comparison.

**Figure 12: Confidence in Congress Begins to Rebound in Chile**

Question: How much confidence do you have in the Congress? Source: World Values Survey 1990 (Chile only) and Latinobarómetro 1995-2005
Data Analysis

This study brought up interesting results that contradict some of my predictions about *desencanto* in my cases (see Table 5). While discontent with politics was found to be high in Chile, on many measures discontent in Costa Rica was at least as high as that seen in Chile. To explain this inconsistency with my hypothesis a more in depth examination of what is happening in Costa Rica and Uruguay is needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chile</th>
<th>Uruguay</th>
<th>Costa Rica</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High political dissatisfaction</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian Legacies</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey data does overall seem to support the connection between authoritarian legacies and political disaffection in the case of Chile. Evidence suggests that dissatisfaction is higher now that it was at the beginning of the democratic period (though concrete numbers are not available for the early 1990s). However, the data presented above in Figure 3 demonstrates that dissatisfaction in Chile has recently been decreasing, even before the constitutional reforms of 2005 that eliminated several authoritarian enclaves that were likely causing disaffection with the democratic system in Chile. This finding appears difficult to explain in light of my hypothesis that dissatisfaction is related to the system’s authoritarian legacies. At the time when dissatisfaction began to decrease the major authoritarian legacies remained constant. However, discussion of the constitutional reform of certain authoritarian enclaves first began in late 2000 during the term of President Ricardo Lagos. After five years of intense congressional negotiations between the parties they were finally able to pass these reforms in 2005. The issue received substantial media attention throughout this time making citizens aware of the increasing scope of democracy. The period during which these reforms were discussed and then finally
approved corresponds to the period in which dissatisfaction with democracy began to decrease in Chile, a situation which supports my argument about the causes of dissatisfaction.

Though dissatisfaction in Chile has clearly decreased, in the most recent survey nearly 50 percent of the sample still expressed dissatisfaction with democracy in Chile. I argue that this continued high level of dissatisfaction can be explained by the authoritarian legacies I discussed that have not even managed to make it on the agenda of discussion for reform. Continued high levels of disenchantment and disengagement from politics can be seen in the measures of citizens’ levels of interest in politics, their indifference about whether they are governed by a democratic or authoritarian government, and the low levels of electoral participation. None of these measures demonstrates the same decline in disaffection as that seen in Figure 3.

In operationalizing my hypothesis into variables, I used measures of disenchantment related to the authoritarian legacies in Chile in order to see if these legacies were part of the phenomenon of dissatisfaction in Chile or in the two cases used for comparison. Taking perceptions about whether the country is governed for the good of all, whether politicians care about the issues that people are concerned about, and people’s levels of confidence in political parties as indications of the legacy of the consensual transitions, data supports a connection between this legacy and political disaffection in Chile. However, it also strongly supports such a connection in Costa Rica where there are no authoritarian legacies, which indicates that dissatisfaction with a model of elite governance is not necessarily limited to countries such as Chile, where this model came about as a result of the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule.

To examine possible connections between disenchantment with politics and the authoritarian legacies in the electoral system I studied whether people felt their vote would make
a difference and why people chose not to register to vote. The presence of this authoritarian legacy does not seem to have quite as strong an influence on disaffection since a majority of people feel that voting makes a difference and they do not point to unhappiness with the system as a reason for not voting. It is important to note that once again in Costa Rica there were higher than expected levels of disaffection related to the electoral system.

The legacy of a depoliticized economy was difficult to represent through survey evidence, but I believe that looking at whether citizens believe that the state can solve society’s problems can provide an indication of whether the Chilean state’s inability to address citizens’ economic concerns is a source of political disengagement. The percentage of Chileans who believe that the state can solve few or none of society’s problem supports a connection between this legacy and political disaffection; though the decrease seen in 2005 is probably related to the constitutional reforms to authoritarian legacies passed that year which did not deal with economic questions. This indicator also revealed higher than predicted levels of discontent in Costa Rica.

Lastly, the connection between the legacy of a weak Congress and political desencanto seems to be strongly supported by the data. Very few Chileans consider their Congress to be a powerful institution and levels of trust in Congress follow the expected pattern of a decline directly after the transition as the realities of the new democratic system set in and then the beginnings of an increase in recent years at debate about reforming various authoritarian legacies was opened. These results indicate support for my argument that disaffection with politics in Chile can be explained by the authoritarian legacies still present in its democracy, yet they beg the question of why disaffection is high in Costa Rica where authoritarian legacies are absent.

Comparing the political situations in Uruguay and Costa Rica during the period under
examination provides a possible explanation for this inconsistency. In 1982, Costa Rica became the first country in Central America undergo a process of economic structural adjustment overseen by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in an attempt to restore the county’s credit after the president decided to default on the national debt. This structural adjustment program rendered meaningless the political discussion of economic programs because these decisions were taken out of politicians hands by the IMF and the World Bank. The macro-economic measures mandated for Costa Rica “straight-jacketed the government’s ability to address deep social problems or to invest for future growth” (Lehoucq, 2005: 146). These external economic restrictions left Costa Ricans unable to democratically influence the economic situation in their country since whichever party they voted for the economic model could not be changed (Lehoucq, 2005: 145).

It is possible that in Costa Rica the structural adjustment program imposed a situation similar to that created by the authoritarian legacies in Chile since the economy was removed from the political sphere and electoral competition was rendered irrelevant given that all parties were obligated to continue the structural adjustment policies. Thus as citizens have been unable to vote for politicians that support their economic demands their frustration has built and found expression as dissatisfaction with the political system itself. This seems like a reasonable explanation, but unfortunately there is no survey data going back as far as the early 1980s that could demonstrate a spike in dissatisfaction in Costa Rica following the implementation of the structural adjustment program. I recommend further study of democracy in Costa Rica to demonstrate whether economic discontentment can be linked to political desencanto. While Costa Ricans’ discontent cannot be related to lingering authoritarian legacies in their democratic model, it is important to investigate whether some of the characteristics of the Chilean
democratic model that I identified as authoritarian legacies are also characteristics of the Costa Rican model and how they came to be part of that democracy.

In Uruguayan politics, dissatisfaction with politics has remained low because the system contains neither the lingering authoritarian legacies of the Chilean case nor the restrictions on democratic expression seen in Costa Rica. When Uruguays were dissatisfied with the social and economic model being pursued by the two traditional parties, their democracy allowed them the option of electing a party that opposed these policies. Frustrated Uruguays exercised this option in 2004 with the election of Tabaré Vázquez Rosas’ Frente Amplio (Queirolo, 2006: 35). In contrast with the situation in Chile and Costa Rica, the Frente Amplio government did not face extra-democratic restrictions on their ability to enact their platform. This means that Uruguayans can hold this government responsible for the policies they enact and if they disagree with what is enacted, they have the option to replace the government through a competitive electoral process. The ability to freely exercise democracy without the restrictions imposed by authoritarian enclaves, legacies, or international economic institutions explains why levels of political dissatisfaction in Uruguay are observably lower than in the two other cases studied here.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that general dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy and level of interest in politics are significantly different in Chile and Costa Rica compared to Uruguay. This provides support for my argument that the dissatisfaction and disengagement from politics seen in Chile is not just part of a global phenomenon seen in all developed democracies since citizens in Uruguay seem fairly satisfied with politics in their country. Even with recent decrease observed in dissatisfaction levels still remain above those observed in Costa Rica and Uruguay (with the exception of 2005 where Costa Ricans are slightly more dissatisfied
than Chileans, see Figure 3). I hypothesized that the paradox of desencanto with Chile’s apparently successful democracy could be explained by the presence of lingering authoritarian influences and institutions. Data attempting to quantify whether disaffection is related to the four most important remaining authoritarian legacies (the fifth, institutional/life-long senators, having been eliminated with the constitutional reforms in 2005) demonstrates overall support for my argument in relation to the case of Chile, but could not explain the situation of disaffection with politics that was seen in Costa Rica. The data analysis I conducted also could not establish how well authoritarian legacies explained variations in political dissatisfaction but does seem to establish correlations between political desencanto and authoritarian legacies based on qualitative evidence of a lag effect as people realized that the new democracy could not respond to their political demands as they had expected it to be able to. In addition, I argue that recent decrease in political dissatisfaction can be attributed to removal of certain authoritarian legacies in 2005, but because these legacies had already been eliminated I did not investigate the role they played in dissatisfaction with democracy. I am unable to conclude that my hypothesis is strongly supported since similar political disaffection was seen in Costa Rica that seems to be connected with the legacy of that country’s structural adjustment program rather than an authoritarian government. While Uruguay demonstrated results consistent with the fact that its democracy does not have the authoritarian legacies that are present in Chile, Costa Rica, which has not had an authoritarian ruler since the 1940s, had levels of discontent related to what I had identified as authoritarian legacies that in some cases where higher than those seen in Chile. This result leads me to the conclusion that it is possible that the characteristics of restricted democracy present in Chile as part of the authoritarian legacy are also present in other consolidated democracies in other forms and are thus not connected exclusively to Chile’s unique authoritarian and transition
experiences.

This study should serve as a starting place for further research on the phenomenon of political dissatisfaction in Chile. While I attempted to find an explanation for the paradox of general disenchantment there is enough survey data to investigate the more specific manifestations of this phenomenon in areas such as citizens’ growing dealignment from political parties and decreasing electoral participation. This study could also easily be expanded in a more quantitative manner. A regression model of the factors that I argue here are related to political dissatisfaction could be constructed to find the statistical significance of the relationship between these authoritarian legacies and desencanto for each year in the post-authoritarian period. This would require further data for the early years of this period, but could easily be done with the data used in this study for the later years of the post-authoritarian period. Adding a more complex quantitative component could be helpful to establish stronger evidence for the connection between authoritarian legacies and disaffection with politics in Chile.
Endnotes

1 Translation: “those who are disinterested.” *No está ni ahí* is a typical Chilean slang expression that indicates an attitude of disinterest or indifference.

2 The decline in mass partisanship is a phenomenon that has been examined in many industrial democracies as a worrying trend for the future of democracy. See for example Craig, 1988; Dalton, 1984; and Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck, 1984.

3 Riquelme states that he found abstention and blank and null voting under the previous democracy to be insignificant with that seen in the post-transition elections but he does not cite statistical evidence to back up this claim. Unfortunately, the Chilean Electoral Service does not have statistical evidence for this claim either because they do not include these measures in its summary of historical voting trends. It is possible to see that blank and null voting has increased during the post-authoritarian period and that electoral participation has fallen. See Table 3 above for an illustration of these trends.

4 *Desencanto* can be translated as disillusionment or disenchantment.

5 At the end of President Lagos’ term in 2005, reforms eliminated some of the major remaining authoritarian institutions, but political parties could not agree on reforms to other key authoritarian legacies such as the electoral system. See “Democratic at Last: Cleaning up the Constitution,” *The Economist* 376 (September 17, 2005): 38.

6 Exceptions include Pérez-Liñán, 2001 and Seligson, Conroy, Córdova, Pérez and Stein, 1995 which focus on electoral participation in Latin America.

7 See also Angell, 2006: 185 for a similar argument.

8 Translation: “there are fewer things in play or what is politics itself, with the general context of the population’s priorities, loses relevance.”

9 Garretón argues that the changing role of politics in society has been very significant in society. Describing Chile in its period of democratic development he finds that “Política y Estado no sólo ofrecían bienes materiales y una institucionalidad protectora, por supuesto todo ello obtenido a costa de luchas, sino que tales luchas llenaban de sentido la vida de la gente [politics and the State not only offered material goods and a protective institutionalism, of course all obtained at the cost of fighting, but these fights filled the lives of the people with meaning]” (Garretón, 2007: 142). Today in its more developed state of democracy, “ya no es necesario que toda opción en la vida significativa deba referirse a una opción política ni menos a la militancia en ella [now it is not necessary that every significant option in life should refer to a political tendency nor militancy in one]” (Garretón, 2007: 132).

10 For a good discussion of the enclaves and legacies created by the outgoing Pinochet regime see Heiss and Navia, 2007.

11 One example of the increasing disaffection is the change in citizen participation in political movements. While citizen participation was important in pressuring a regime change in Chile, scholars have observed that “desde el momento en que reemergió una democracia incompleta pero respetuosa de las libertades civiles y políticas, se produjo una disminución de la energía participativa que fue decisiva en el desgaste y posterior derrota de la dictadura [Since the moment that an incomplete democracy, but respectful of civil and political liberties, reemerged there has come about a reduction in the participative energy that was decisive in wearing down and overthrowing the dictatorship] (Martner, 2007: 27).”

12 For example, the legacy of central bank independence means that legislators have no say in the making of macro-economic policy even though this greatly affects their constituents.

13 See Godoy, 1999 for more information on the political negotiations involved in the transition.

14 Today the electoral system is not actually written into the 1980 Constitution (it was removed from the Constitution by the 2005 reforms), but it is an organic constitutional law that requires a three-fifths vote in both houses of Congress for any reform to be approved.

15 Valenzuela and Dammert add that “in any two-list contest, the top list must get at least 66 percent in order to take both seats, while the runner-up list can win a seat (thereby matching the top list) with only a bit more than a third of the vote” (Valenzuela and Dammert, 2006: 72). An example of the distortion in popular preferences caused by the binominal system can be seen in the example below.
**Election in Circunscripción 7, Región Metropolitana (Santiago), 1989**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party/Sex</th>
<th>Total Vote</th>
<th>% of the vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concertación</strong></td>
<td>807.948</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrés Zaldívar</td>
<td>408.227</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricardo Lagos</td>
<td>399.721</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democracia y Progreso</strong></td>
<td>424.252</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime Guzmán</td>
<td>224.396</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel Otero</td>
<td>199.856</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other lists</strong></td>
<td>73.269</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Winners of seats: Andrés Zaldívar and Jaime Guzmán

Source: Siavelis, 2000: 35.

10 Translation: “a natural space of action and opinion about themes that are of great interest to citizens.” Economic growth and development are issues given an inordinate amount of importance by Chileans. A survey from 1997 indicates that 86.7% of citizens surveyed considered the country’s economic situation important or very important in contrast with only 50.2% who gave the same importance to the country’s political situation (Ortega, 2003: 56).

11 While Chile has been performing well on a wide variety of macroeconomic indicators, such as income per capita, this economic success has come with a growing gap between the rich and the poor (Martner, 2007: 64; Olavarria, 2003: 15).

12 For a more detailed exploration of this legacy see Chapters 1 and 5 in Siavelis, 2000.

13 Translation: “it is understandable that the voters, enjoying fewer benefits, have a bad opinion of politicians, political parties, and Congress.”

14 See Alcántara y Luna, 2004 for an extensive discussion of the similarities that make Chile and Uruguay excellent cases for comparison.

21 See the CIA World Factbook available online at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.

22 Translation: “‘authoritarian parenthesis’ after which [democracy] has retaken the traditional characteristics of the traditional socio-political matrix.”

23 For some years, multiple data sources asked respondents in a certain country the same question. In these cases I checked for differences between data sources and if the percentages were similar used the exact number from Latinobarómetro to construct figures. Latinobarómetro was chosen because it encompassed the most years of data and therefore I could more easily control for possible differences in methodology. It should be noted that no significant inconsistencies where found in the few cases with overlapping data.

25 Independent samples t-test was used and a p-value of 0.000 was obtained in both comparisons. This indicates that such a difference in means is statistically significant at the 0.05 level for both cases.

26 Independent samples t-test was used and a p-value of 0.000 was obtained for the comparison between the mean in Chile and Uruguay with a significance level of 0.05. For the comparison between Chile and Costa Rica, the p-value was 0.378 indicating that this difference is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

27 The perception in these countries that politicians are governed for the benefit of powerful interests could possibly be related to perceptions of corruption. While the three countries rank as the least corrupt in Latin America according to Transparency International, citizens’ perceptions seem to belie that ranking and could be a large source of discontent with politics. See for example Lehoucq, 2005 on Costa Rica.

28 Huneeus, 1999 gives a good presentation of the conventional wisdom that adherence to political parties in Chile is diminishing. Oxhorn, 1994: 741 describes the pre-coup party adherence.

29 This is an unusual system in which citizens are essentially given incentives not to register since if they do register they must vote in every election or else pay a fine. In reality, it is unclear whether this system has actually discouraged people from registering since the Congress has commuted the fine imposed for not voting in every election since the return to democracy.

30 In a Centro de Estudio Públicos survey taken in 2006, 50.2% of the sample felt that the electoral system should be radically changed.
31 See statistics available from El Corte Electoral in Uruguay

32 This was evident in both Latinobarómetro and CEP surveys.

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