

Limited transition: the Chilean case

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Transition theory

Transition theory,¹ derived from schools of political development, is held in high esteem in academic circles. Yet, despite its success, it is going through a stage of deep terminological and conceptual confusion, which has affected usage of terms like “liberalization,” “political reform,” “democratization,” “democratic reform,” “democratic development,” “re-democratization,” “political or democratic modernization” and, obviously, “political development.”²

Schools of political development proliferated in the years following World War II, with decolonization and the advent of the Marxist-Leninist so-called “peoples’ democracies.” These schools put forward a dynamic, optimistic view of democracy, seeing it as the unfolding (the dynamic aspect) and inexorable perfecting (the optimistic aspect) of democratic institutions.

This view was fed by the idea—or should it be called the belief, à la Ortega?—that the whole world would inevitably be developed (the concept of preordained progress), thus establishing the material basis for political development. A good many political scientists agree that political development and democratic development are exactly the same thing.

In the sixties and seventies, this view was challenged by the thinking of the Non-Aligned Movement and Third Worldism, based on the idea that the development of non-industrialized countries required a new world economic order. These schools simultaneously upheld the thesis that if the needed economic, social and cultural conditions did not exist, political democracy, and consequently, electoral democracy, was neither sustainable nor viable.

In contrast, in recent years the so-called democratic wave,—which began in Mediterranean Europe with Portugal, Spain and Greece, continued in Latin America with the elimination of military regimes and culminated in the fall of Real Socialism in both Central and Eastern Europe—, would seem to back up those who argue that political democracy can exist even within the framework of economic and social underdevelopment.³ Others take this argument even further by saying that the advent of democracy in itself carries development with it.

The case of Spanish democracy, with all the basic elements of a paradigm, extended and deeply rooted the concept of democratic transition. A transition is a change in regime, a change from an authoritarian regime to a fully democratic one; and thus it is more than just a change in regime.

The axis of this transition is the agreement between the authoritarian regime and the democratic forces on a basic agenda: the design of new political institutions and a new electoral system; an agreement on the status of political parties; a general legal framework and human rights; and the solution of regional questions. Although the question of human rights goes to the heart of the economic and social system, it is not commonly part of the transitional agenda, since it goes beyond the boundaries of politics per se.

The agenda also includes different specifics like phases, deadlines and the definition of actors and procedures.

I have called the technological/methodological dimension of the transition “democratic engineering” to denote that it transcends convictions or emotions to include the operational and democratic planning spheres.⁴

Viewing the transition in this way provides an approach to deliberate democracy, which is the result of foresight and deliberate intent, a democracy which can effectively replace authoritarianism because throughout the

¹ Ruiz Massieu, José Francisco, *El proceso democrático de México*. FCE, Mexico City, 1993, pp. 123-257.

² Pye, Lucian W., *Aspects of Political Development*. Little, Brown and Co., United States, 1966; and Almond, Gabriel and Powell, Bingham, *Comparative Politics. A Development Approach*. Little, Brown and Co., United States, 1966.

* General Director of the Institute of the National Fund for Workers Housing (Infonavit).

³ Huntington, Samuel P., *The Third Wave*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

⁴ Ruiz Massieu, José Francisco, “La ingeniería democrática,” in *Ideas Políticas*. Year I, No. 2, Cambio XXI, Fundación Mexicana, Mexico City, 1992, pp. 28-49.

Table 1
Forty years of ideological alternation, 1952-1993 *

YEAR	POLITICAL AFFILIATION	PRESIDENT
1952	Quasi-left populism	Carlos Ibáñez
1958	Right (conservatives)	Jorge Alessandri
1964	Center (Christian Democrats)	Eduardo Frei, Sr.
1970	Left (Socialist Party and Popular Unity)	Salvador Allende
1973	Right authoritarian (military regime)	Augusto Pinochet
1989	Center-left (democratic coalition)	Patricio Aylwin
1993	Center-left (democratic coalition)	Eduardo Frei, Jr.

* Presidential election years, plus 1973, the year of Pinochet's coup d'état.

change itself, rules are followed and the most appropriate methods used.

In order for the transition to be effective and lasting, there must be a shared, deep-going idea of democracy, enriched by the familiarity with real democracy and comparative political systems needed to avoid conceptual mistakes and mystifications. In this sense, democracy is a deliberate, collective, unfinished process which at any moment can be reversed; the transition is a process both inclusive (everyone has a role to play) and dialectical (it means cooperation, not Manicheism).

The transition is a process of inertia (we will come back to this point later): the authoritarian regime initially intends to circumscribe, limit or graduate democratic change. But when the process reaches a certain stage and goes beyond certain limits, it takes on its own dynamic and depends less and less on the authoritarian regime and more and more on the democratic forces promoting the change.

Two paradigmatic transitions: Chile and Spain⁵

The Chilean transition brings together the outstanding elements of a paradigmatic transition because it includes many of those to be found in the Spanish case and still others which give it a profile of its own.

The essence of the transition is the pact established between the authoritarian regime and the political forces fighting for democracy. This pact is based on each side's view of its own possibilities and those of its opponent: the

⁵ The most outstanding contributions of a plentiful bibliography on this subject may be found in the volumes coordinated by Rodolfo Cerdas and Daniel Zóbatto, *Elecciones y democracia en América Latina (1988-1991), una tarea inconclusa* (IIDH-CAPEL, San José, 1992); and in Ascanio Cavallo Castro, Manuel Salazar and Oscar Sepúlveda's *La historia oculta del régimen militar. Chile, 1973-1988* (Diana, Mexico, 1990), for the Chilean case. For the case of Spain, the most outstanding is *La transición democrática española* (Editorial Sistema, Spain, 1989) by the same three authors.

dictatorship comes to the conclusion that it cannot maintain total power indefinitely, while the opposition realizes that a violent change of regime is not in order, that it is a question of politics and not war. Both sides agree that the only way out is a pact and, therefore, that each must make concessions to the other.

In Chile, the Pinochet group had control over state power and the democratic forces had the strength given them by consensus, the

population's aspirations, the stimulus of international public opinion and a collective democratic memory.

The accord did not lead to a new constitution nor a formal act of negotiation—as in the case of Spain with the Charter of 1978 and the so-called Moncloa Pact—but was initially based on the legal framework of the authoritarian government itself as established in the 1980 Constitution, decreed from above by the military government.

Another difference between the two situations is that the transition in Spain was precipitated by the death of Franco, while in Chile, the authoritarian regime was dismantled while still led by the dictator.

Chile and Spain are also different in terms of the depth of the transition. Chile is a case of re-democratization in which, in the 1980s, the political generation which had participated in the pre-Pinochet democratic era was still active. In Spain, by contrast, re-democratization took place forty years after Franco's victory; by the mid-70s, practically no participants of the pre-Franco era survived.

In Spain, the king acted as the fulcrum between the outgoing and the incoming regimes, playing an extremely efficient role as an arbitrator in the non-partisan task assigned to him by the democratic monarchy. In contrast, in Chile the "presidential regime" and the participation of the dictator himself did not allow for the emergence of a political arbiter.

The role played by King Juan Carlos compelled the armed forces to rapidly abandon their aim of being arbiters themselves (after Tejero's attempted coup) and to withdraw into the institutional role assigned them by modern constitutionalism. They even accepted that a civilian fill the cabinet post overseeing the military.

Chile has moved along the opposite road: the armed forces have assumed *de facto*—and in good measure, even *de jure*—the role of supreme arbiter in the political arena.

There is yet another distinction between the two cases. In Spain, the first transitional government, backed by

popular vote and democratic legislation, was really the transmutation of the previous government, set up by non-democratic mechanisms: the new monarch together with the Council of the Realm, itself Franco's creation, designated Adolfo Suárez, secretary of the National Movement —“the single party”— as president. He then made pacts with forces both inside and outside the democratizing camp, thus turning his regime into a sort of para-democratic government, although his origins were not democratic. This para-democratic government gave way to the first transitional government, which won the 1979 elections and was headed by Suárez himself. The axis of this transition, then, was Adolfo Suárez.

In Chile, the first transitional government, headed by Patricio Aylwin, resulted from elections which had been part of a pact, but were the fruit of Pinochet's defeat in the 1988 plebiscite and the failure of Buchi, the official candidate, who lost the 1989 elections to the converging democratic forces.

At the same time, there are many similarities between the two processes. An outstanding one is that both in the Spain of the '70s and the Chile of the '80s, the international situation was a lever for democracy. The Europeanization of Spain through its incorporation into the European Community, and its subsequent affiliation to NATO and other regional

organizations, called for dismantling the authoritarian regime and replacing it with complete democracy.

In the case of Chile, internationally, the United States, Spain itself, the Holy See and non-governmental human rights organizations exerted pressure on the regime to hold the 1988 plebiscite and the 1989 elections to permit the people to express their will openly. As a result, the Pinochet regime realized that the international community was resolved to isolate it.

In Spain as in Chile, details aside, the Catholic Church hierarchy contributed to democratic change by beginning to distance itself from the regimes and finally demanding the restoration of democracy —despite its initial closeness both to Franco and Pinochet due to its opposition to the Republican and Allende-aligned left.

Worker and peasant organizations, demobilized during the authoritarian period, did not play a completely active

role in designing the transition, but did show their ability to exert pressure. In both cases, capital kept a prudent distance during the process.

Engineering the Chilean transition ⁶

Chilean democrats rested their democratization project on two solid bases: an understanding among the different opposition forces and the pact with the authoritarian regime.

The convergence of these opposition forces, particularly the historic parties ⁷ and personalities of all persuasions, centered on recognition of the need to restore electoral democracy; the postponement of all economic or social reform which would carry with it the risk of dividing the members of the entente; and the acceptance of the regime's rules of the game after the

convergence had exerted political pressure.

It is important to emphasize that the democrats —by submitting themselves to the legal framework of the authoritarian regime, including recognition of government-dominated electoral bodies— were running a calculated risk, that of being defeated in a process in which complete guarantees of their rights were by no means ensured.

This stance, like the acceptance (albeit tacit) of Pinochet's “padlocks” on the process, reveals that Chilean democrats were

Table 2
Presidential elections
(1958, 1964 and 1970)

YEAR	CANDIDATES	VOTE
1958	Jorge Alessandri	31%
	Salvador Allende	28%
	Eduardo Frei, Sr.	20%
1964	Eduardo Frei, Sr.	56%
	Salvador Allende	39%
1970	Salvador Allende	36%
	Jorge Alessandri	35%
	Radomiro Tomic	28%

conscious that if they became more demanding, the Pinochet regime would become more rigid and could even postpone the elections.

In any case, they were also aware that transitional pacts, as in all agreements in which both sides make mutual concessions, do not set up optimum rules for democratic change and that once set in motion, they unleash a process driven by inertia: it is a process of democratic change that, though initially spurred by an outside driving force (the pact), at a certain point comes to be driven by the process itself.

⁶ Arrate, Jorge; Allamand, Andrés; Silva, Patricio; and Medina, Manuel, “Continuismo y ruptura: el caso chileno,” in *Transición política y consolidación democrática en el Cono Sur Latinoamericano*. Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Madrid, 1991, pp. 89-161.

⁷ Osorio, Jaime, *Raíces de la democracia en Chile*. Biblioteca Era, Mexico City, 1990.

In short, they realized that the very holding of free and honest elections, despite the “padlocks,” would inevitably lead to advanced phases of democracy.

The internal pact among the most important opposition forces regarding a democratic project also required large doses of both wisdom and pragmatism, particularly given that the historical affronts, ideological enmities and economic and social demands that had divided the democrats during Allende’s short administration had to be put aside.

While the program of the martyred president—including nationalizations and a state-led economy—gave rise to clashes between Congress and the Executive and between the Executive and the armed forces and several power groups,⁸ the dictatorship had taken the road of an accelerated, deep-going neo-liberal policy.

Bringing these points up in discussions would have caused the desertion of some of the groups which supported democratization.

The Agreement for Democracy, a coalition formed by almost twenty political organizations, key among them the Christian Democracy and a good number of Radicals and Socialists, was aimed at developing the democratic project. The very nomination of Patricio Aylwin—a Christian Democrat, whose organization had confronted Allende’s Popular Unity government and kept its distance at the time of the 1973 coup—as its candidate, shows just how profoundly the democrats agreed that their internal pact required a clear sense of the political moment.

The limits

When General Pinochet became convinced that he would not be able to continue heading the state with the voters’ support and that a democratic government would probably be the outcome of elections, he enacted a range of legislation to limit the new government and retain a large degree of power that would serve as a dissuasive, inhibiting factor for those who would replace him.

These limits involve the constitution, the Congress, the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Tribunal, the

⁸ Various authors, *El golpe de Estado en Chile*. FCE-UNAM, Mexico City, 1975.

Table 3
Plebiscite for the 1980 constitution

VOTE	%
No	30%
Yes	67%
Annulled	3%

armed forces, the central bank, the National Security Council, the regulatory body for radio and television transmissions, and electoral norms.

Chilean Socialist Party leader Jorge Arrate, at a Friedrich Ebert Foundation-sponsored colloquium,

passionately summed up many democrats’ opinion of the “locks” Pinochet had written into the constitution:

To be able to open that safe, you have to know two combinations; one isn’t enough. The locks have two mechanisms: first, the constitution itself establishes that an extraordinarily high proportion of votes is required for the constitution to be amended. Certain chapters require a two-thirds majority, while others require six-tenths. A series of pieces of legislation called organic constitutional laws—about 150 of them, which to a certain extent really form part of the constitution itself (for example, the Education Act and the Armed Forces Act)—can only be amended with a little over 57 percent of the vote. This is one of the singularities of the Chilean transition, because it is a four-sevenths’ majority, a percentage I believe appears in no other constitution in the world.⁹

In addition to this, a virtual *de facto* amnesty was declared, eliminating the possibility of any systematic attempt to bring to trial anyone who had broken the law or violated human rights as part of the repressive dynamic of the authoritarian regime.

Any review of the limits on the transition must begin with an examination of the 1980 constitution and the process whereby it was written and enacted.¹⁰

Pinochet’s constitution is virtually a model of what is known as a “professorial constitution,” the result of an academic exercise, far removed from the participation of the public and the dialectic of real power relationships. It is a made-to-order constitution, since its fundamental aim was to defer to the interests of the authoritarian regime.

The enactment of the constitution was prepared in several stages: in the 1978 plebiscite, the people accepted that a new constitution be written; that

⁹ Arrate, Jorge, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁰ Nogueira Alcalá, Humberto, “El sistema constitucional chileno,” in *Los sistemas constitucionales iberoamericanos*. Dykinson, Madrid, 1992, pp. 175-324.

Table 4
Plebiscite for the election of Augusto Pinochet, 1989

VOTE	%
No	54%
Yes	43%
Annulled	3%

Table 5
The presidential elections of
the transition

1989	
CANDIDATE	VOTE (%)
Aylwin	54%
Buchi*	29%
Errázuriz	15%
Annulled	2%

* Pro-Pinochet.

1993	
CANDIDATE	VOTE (%)
Frei, Jr.	58%
Alessandri	24%
Piñeira*	06%
Others	10%
Annulled	2%

* Pro-Pinochet.

same year, the Commission to Study a New Constitution (with the participation of Jorge Alessandri, who was a Pinochet appointee like all the rest of the members) presented a rough draft to the government; the government, in a second stage, developed another draft, written by the Council of State, dominated, obviously, by unconditional supporters of the regime. Both drafts were then studied by the junta, which combined them into the definitive version put to the vote in the 1980 plebiscite.¹¹

While the voters approved the government draft (66% voted "yes," 30% "no" and the remainder of the ballots were either blank or annulled), it is important to remember that the plebiscite was carried out in the framework of a state of emergency, that political party participation was blocked to the maximum and that basic political freedoms were limited.

The 1980 constitution was the framework for the search for democracy over the subsequent decade, acting as a bridge between democracy and the final phase of the Pinochet dictatorship. It established that:

- Pinochet would remain in power eight more years.
- The junta would remain in place in the same terms for those eight years, retaining practically all its legislative faculties.
- The heads of the armed forces and the Carabineers (special police) would name the sole presidential candidate to run in the 1988 elections, and the new president would have an eight-year term.

¹¹ Fernández, Mario, "Sistemas electorales: sus problemas y opciones para la democracia chilena," in *Sistemas electorales y representación política en Latinoamérica*. Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Madrid, pp. 77-93.

The constitution had 29 transitional articles setting out in great detail the rules of the game from the time it was passed until it went fully into effect in 1990.

As was to be expected, the commanders of the armed forces selected Augusto Pinochet as the sole presidential candidate, but the public's repudiation of him¹² led to a democratic election, with contending candidates: the 1989 presidential, senatorial and congressional elections.¹³

This weakening of the authoritarian regime facilitated its coming to an agreement with the joint opposition forces—before those elections—on 54 amendments to the 1980 constitution, as well as the relaxation of restrictions in electoral legislation aimed at moderating representational distortions and permitting the creation of electoral fronts to group the enormous number of existing political organizations. Manuel Alcántara¹⁴ summarizes the package of constitutional amendments:

The key points among the 54 proposed constitutional amendments were the following: the replacement of Article 8, which made unconstitutional all political parties that subscribed to a totalitarian doctrine or were based on the class struggle, with a wording to better ensure real and responsible political pluralism; the increase of the number of senators elected by direct vote, through the creation of regional districts in each of which two senators would be elected, with the exception of six regions which would be divided into two senatorial districts; also, while the possibility of perfecting some National Security Council dispositions was left open, the norms on the Armed Forces remained intact; the rule requiring the approval of two successive legislatures to amend certain constitutional chapters was replaced by only a two-thirds vote of the deputies and senators in office; finally, and most importantly, only for the presidential term beginning March 11, 1990, the chief of state elected will only be able to serve four years and will not be able to run for reelection for the following term.

The congress is elected in such a way as to give privileges to the Pinochet forces, through a system of multiple districts with binomial majority election of slates. The functioning of this system, unprecedented in electoral democracy, has been described by Humberto Nogueira Alcalá:

If the [winning] slate receives double the number of votes of the slate which is first runner-up, the first slate

¹² "Yes" votes, 44%; "No" votes, 54%.

¹³ Fernández Baeza, Mario, "Análisis del proceso electoral chileno de 1989," in Cerdas, Rodolfo and Zobatto, Daniel (coordinators), *Elecciones y democracia en América Latina, 1988-1991. Una tarea inconclusa*. IIDH-CAPEL, San José, 1992, pp. 524-531.

¹⁴ *Sistemas políticos de América Latina*, Volume I. Tecnos, Madrid, 1989, p. 73.

will be assigned all the seats up for election [in that district]; if the slate with the highest number of votes does not receive double the number of votes of the first runner-up, the two slates with the highest number of votes will each win one seat, which will be assigned to the candidate within each slate who received the highest number of individual votes.¹⁵

As this jurist points out, this *sui generis* system is neither majority-takes-all nor proportional.

The election results were as follows: Agreement for Democracy (the coalition of democrats headed by Aylwin) won 70 seats in the Chamber of Deputies with 49.33% of the vote; Democracy and Progress (the Pinochetists, headed by Buchi) won 48 seats with 32.4% of the vote. The overall number of right-wing deputies, then, was sufficient to block any initiatives in the lower house.¹⁶

The 1980 constitution had reinforced the Senate as one of Pinochet's "padlocks"; the bicameral congressional structure allowed it to block any undesirable bill. There were three ways of becoming a member of the upper house: by election (38 seats); by virtue of being a former president of the republic; and by appointment.¹⁷ Senators have eight-year terms, and half the seats come up for election every four years, with the exception of the ex-presidents, who retain their seats for life.

In the senatorial race, the democrats received 50.5% of the vote, winning 22 seats, while the right received 43% of the vote and 24 seats (including both elected and Pinochet-appointed seats).

The junta put yet another "padlock" on the judiciary, despite its being the only branch of government which survived from Allende's time, given that it had acquiesced to Pinochet. The dictator forced the early retirement of several members of the Supreme Court and appointed judges who shared his thinking. He did the same with the Constitutional Tribunal, thereby limiting two basic institutions of a genuinely democratic state.

It should be noted that the Constitutional Tribunal is charged with deciding the constitutionality of organizations, movements or political parties and the responsibilities of high public officials, including the president of the republic.

Also, four out of five members of the Electoral Tribunal, without whose unquestionably honest and

¹⁵ Nogueira Alcalá, Humberto, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

¹⁶ Valenzuela, Arturo, and Siavelis, Peter, "Ley electoral y estabilidad democrática: un ejercicio de simulación para el caso de Chile a partir de las elecciones de 1988," in Cerdas, R. and Zobatto, D. (compilers), *op. cit.*, pp. 533-576.

¹⁷ Nine senators are appointed every eight years in the following way: the president names a former cabinet member and a former university president; the Supreme Court designates two of its former members and a former controller general; and the National Security Council names a former head of the Carabineers and of each branch of the armed forces.

Milestones of the transition

1978

- Writing of new constitution approved in plebiscite.
- The Commission for the Study of a New Constitution presents its draft to the government.

1980

- New constitution approved in plebiscite. The transitional regime established therein takes office, headed by Augusto Pinochet.

1988

- The citizenry defeats Augusto Pinochet at the polls.

1989

- The Agreement for Democracy signs a pact with the authoritarian government to reform the constitution.
- Patricio Aylwin, Agreement for Democracy's presidential candidate, triumphs at the polls, and his colleagues running for senators and deputies win a plurality.

1990

- The new Congress begins its term and President Aylwin is inaugurated.

1992

- Municipal reform effected.
- Partial congressional elections.

1993

- Presidential and congressional elections.

unbiased functioning a democratic transition cannot be carried out, are named by the Supreme Court.

The process of economic restructuring, to modernize the country along the lines of the neo-liberal model begun by Pinochet's government, produced positive macroeconomic results, but had high social costs.¹⁸

Within this sphere as well, two more limits were placed on the transition: a) the Central Bank was set up, with complete autonomy vis à vis the government, with a five-member board of directors, two of whom were appointed by Pinochet; and b) at the end of Pinochet's government, a rapid series of privatizations put businessmen closely linked to the dictator in very powerful positions.

¹⁸ García, Roberto (compiler), *Economía y política durante el gobierno militar en Chile, 1973-1987*. FCE, Mexico City, 1989.

The Central Bank is important because, according to the constitution, "It may only carry out operations with financial institutions, be they public or private. Under no circumstances may it give them its guarantee, nor may it acquire documents issued by the state, its institutions or companies. No public expenditure or loan may be financed with either direct or indirect credit from the Central Bank."¹⁹ Thus, several instruments of economic policy were taken out of the hands of the incoming democratic government.

By means of what might be called the granting of autonomous status to strategic state institutions, the government lost control of the National Television Council, the seven directors of which were Pinochet appointees.

As Manuel Alcántara Sáez correctly points out, the make-up of the National Security Council under the 1980 constitution is far from democratic.²⁰ Its members are the commanders of the three branches of the armed forces and the general director of the Carabineers—these four alone make up a majority—plus the presidents of the republic, the Senate and the Supreme Court. The president of the republic alone cannot recall the Council, but must have two more members' votes to do so; and the legal quorum is four members.²¹

It is the Council's duty to judge "any event, act or item which in its opinion may represent a grave threat to the country's institutions or could compromise national security."²²

In the same vein, it is important to note that the dictatorship hastened to dissolve the National Center for Information (previously the National Directorate of Information [DINA], the military and political intelligence agency, with its somber history of repression), transferring several of its members to the army, thereby putting them out of reach of the judiciary and under the direct orders of the Pinochetists.

The process of inertia

Francisco Franco arrogantly wrote in his political testament that he had "left everything neatly tied up"; Pinochet shared that wish and introduced all sorts of "padlocks."

However, the election of President Aylwin was a catalyst for a democratic process which slowly but surely began to take on a rhythm of its own: while Pinochet and the armed forces have retained the role of arbiters they took upon themselves, they have not had the opportunity to interfere in political life; city governments once again became elected bodies; mid-term elections were democratically held; and criminal investigations were cautiously opened up regarding some of the most heinous crimes committed under the authoritarian regime.

¹⁹ Article 98 of the 1980 constitution.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 71.

²¹ Articles 95 and 96 of the constitution.

²² Article 96, Fraction B of the constitution.

Only four years after the first free elections since 1973, the outcome is impressive: the Congress and the Constitutional Tribunal have been restored to functioning; political parties function normally; the state of emergency was replaced by the rule of law; the armed forces are increasingly controlled by civilian authorities; the repressive police apparatus has been dismantled and the Carabineers subjected to civilian rule; the administration of justice has been reformed; civic freedoms are exercised; society is going through a process of reconciliation; and rules of civic responsibility are developing in political life.

Clearly, the limits imposed by Pinochet have not canceled out the enormous democratizing effort Chileans have made. Quite the contrary: it has become evident that a transition is above all else a collective venture of intelligence, pragmatism and prudence.

The elections of consolidation

On December 11, 1993, the first elections in more than twenty years carried out under the aegis of a completely democratic government were held. The results point to the fact that the limited transition has entered a phase of clear consolidation. It is to the democrats' credit that, headed by Aylwin, they were perceptive enough to understand that the restoration process would take on a dynamic of its own, ridding itself of Pinochet's "padlocks."

It is worth reemphasizing that they understood that a genuine transition is a process of inertia whereby—though the authoritarian regime may initially intend to limit, dictate and graduate democratic change—when the process reaches a certain point, it changes, beginning to depend less and less on the authoritarians and more and more on the democratic forces involved.

The results of the autumn elections (which pushed the Pinochetists into their own final winter) allow for no confusion: Frei, who nominated Aylwin four years ago and in 1993 was the candidate of a center-left coalition, won an absolute majority of votes (58%), thereby making a second round of elections unnecessary. The same coalition also won a congressional majority, thus contributing to governability and the efficient operation of political institutions.²³ The elections were peaceful, credible and legitimate, giving rise to no controversies whatsoever. At the same time, historic political currents consolidated themselves, pushing the Pinochetists electorally to the sidelines for good (their vote dropped from 30% in 1989 to 6% in 1993).

It is noteworthy that for the first time since 1915 a presidential candidate from the same political grouping as the outgoing administration won the elections **X**

²³ Of 120 congressional seats, the PPI coalition won 70, and of 18 senatorial seats up for election, it won 9.