

Democratic Legitimacy under Strain? Declining Political Support and Mass Demonstrations in Chile

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Abstract

The process of democratic transition in Chile has generally been regarded as one of the most successful cases of democratization in Latin America, with the *Concertación* coalition governments aiming for high levels of political stability, economic growth and institutional strength. However, since mid-2011, there have been a large number of demonstrations and protests in the country, challenging the indicators of success and the social and political stability achieved so far. Similarly, declining rates of approval for political institutions, as well as political disaffection have given rise to a number of questions regarding the legitimacy of the current Chilean model. In this article, I will explore several possible explanations for the wave of demonstrations and the decline in support for institutions and elaborate on the challenges and opportunities these problems pose for the legitimacy of the Chilean democratization process. *Keywords:* Chile, legitimacy, demonstrations, democratization.

Resumen: Legitimidad democrática bajo tensión: Disminución del apoyo político y manifestaciones masivas en Chile

La transición democrática en Chile ha sido generalmente destacada como uno de los casos más exitosos de democratización en América Latina, con los gobiernos de la coalición *Concertación* logrando altos niveles de estabilidad política, crecimiento económico y solidez institucional. A partir del año 2011 sin embargo, protestas y movilizaciones han emergido en el país, desafiando los exitosos indicadores así como la estabilidad política y social observada hasta entonces. De la misma manera, una disminución de las tasas de aprobación de las instituciones así como una desafección política han dado lugar a una serie de preguntas sobre la legitimidad del modelo chileno actual. En este artículo, planteo posibles explicaciones para la ola de movilizaciones y la merma en el apoyo a las instituciones políticas, así como analizo los desafíos y oportunidades que estos problemas pueden suponer para la legitimidad del proceso de democratización chilena. *Palabras clave:* Chile, legitimidad, movilizaciones, democratización.

Introduction

Following the end of the Pinochet regime in 1990, the *Concertación* coalition government¹ initiated a successful process of democratic transition and consolidation over a period of twenty years. This process was fraught with both political and economic challenges. The high level of politicization and the multiple demonstrations observed in previous decades were replaced by political stability and the strengthening of institutions, while roughly half the Chilean population living in poverty in 1990 joined a large middle class with broader access to education and greater purchasing power. Together with the restoration of democracy, both the population and international observers seemed to favour and legitimize the Chilean model, judging it positively and giving relatively high rates of approval to the government.

During 2011 however, large-scale demonstrations challenged the successful image of the Chilean transition, with these turning into a test not only for President Piñera's administration, but also for the politics and economic model of one of the most stable democracies in the region. Similarly, there was a decline in the trust afforded to institutions, in approval of the government and in participation in politics, highlighting the tension between different sectors of society and the political arena. In this context, demonstrations and a diminished trust in institutions became relevant phenomena for politicians, scholars and the representatives of civil society. Several explanations for this have been suggested, as well as debates carried out on the legitimacy of the Chilean democratic model. This article assesses the recent demonstrations and the decline in political support and explores possible explanations for both. Furthermore, it highlights the challenges and opportunities these events pose for the Chilean democratization process.

Demonstrations and political support as dimensions of legitimacy

Given the decline in support for politics, especially after the social demonstrations in 2011, the legitimacy of the Chilean democratic model has been called into question. Beetham (2013) defines legitimacy as a social construction resulting from interaction between those who hold power and their subjects. Linz (1987) argues that legitimacy is the belief that, despite its limitations and failures, existing political institutions are better than others that may potentially be established and which, therefore, can demand obedience. According to Suchman (1995), legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within a certain socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions. Thus, in order to affirm that an entity possesses legitimacy, one assumes that the group of observers accepts or supports it as a proper or desirable institution.

On the other hand and according to Friedrichs (1980), a lack of legitimacy is further characterized by pressures, tensions and uncertainties and may represent a turning point often brought about by the convergence of several events

which create new circumstances, threaten the established goals and require institutional actions. In Friedrichs' view, a legitimacy crisis is a multidimensional phenomenon that has perceptual, behavioural and structural dimensions. The perceptual dimension relates to citizens' evaluation of political institutions and is expressed most systematically in the polls as a shift of attitude towards major institutions, a dissipation of confidence and public cynicism; the behavioural dimension is primarily related to activities such as riots, protests or voter apathy, among others, which may be interpreted both as a symptom and a consequence of a legitimacy crisis and, finally, the structural dimension is defined as the source (or cause) of diminished legitimacy. The latter then focuses upon structural characteristics of the relationship between the State and society, shaped by modernization processes, institutional commitments to the people, the satisfying of needs, the failure to provide a feeling of group identity and processes of secularization, among others. According to the author, the perceptual dimension is critical in terms of the manifest existence of a legitimacy crisis, while the behavioural dimension, on reaching a certain level, may bring the crisis to revolution, anarchy or full-fledged repression. Likewise, Friedrichs suggests that a more systematic examination of the structural dimension behind the legitimacy crisis is required.

In terms of the perceptual dimension, or in other words, citizens' evaluation of political institutions, Easton (1975) states that the general or normal meaning of such support refers to the way in which a person relates to a certain object. Such a variable is normally measured in terms of trust in the government, determined by the political officeholders and the performance of institutions and mediated by the individual's ideological orientation and policy preferences (Miller, 1974). In this regard, Citrin (1974) argues that trust in the government is primarily a measure to evaluate the incumbent's performance rather than that of the political system, showing that individuals can express pride in their political system while, at the same time, exhibiting very little trust in the government.

Taking that complexity into account, Easton (1975) proposes observing political support from a broader perspective. The author discriminates between two kinds of support: a specific type related to evaluating the political authorities in terms of performance and a diffuse type directed at basic aspects of the system, representing more enduring bonds which make it possible for members to oppose the incumbents and yet retain respect for the offices themselves. For Muller et al. (1982), diffuse support for political authorities and/or the regime is different to the short-term evaluations of individual incumbents and their policies. It can take the form of trust – a feeling that the system can be counted on to provide equitable outcomes, or of legitimacy – a person's conviction that the system conforms to his/her moral or ethical principles about what is right in the political sphere.

Regarding the behavioural dimension, Deutsch (1961, p. 494) defined social mobilization as the process in which major clusters of old social, economic and psychological commitments are eroded or broken, resulting in a social sys-

tem open to new patterns of socialization and behaviour. Later, Etzioni (1968, p. 243) suggested that mobilization was a process in which a social unit rapidly gains control of resources it did not previously control. These resources could be economic, military, political, psychological or communicational, and the demonstration process produces resources available for collective action. Likewise, Touraine (2002) and Melucci (1989) have proposed the notion of resources and historicity control (material, social or cultural values) as the aim of collective action.² Like Friedrichs, Giménez (1994) states that the genesis of social movements is structural. Movements go through a given system producing opposition among social actors as they compete for the control and allocation of certain resources.

The structural dimension of a legitimacy crisis – in other words, the source of a depleted legitimacy – may be produced by different variables and considered the result of deep changes in the society around it. While Touraine (1988) analysed the structural changes in transitions from industrial to post-industrial systems in Western societies, Inglehart (2008) proposed that such transitions cause materialist values to be replaced by a set of post-materialist values.³ According to the latter, post-materialistic values emerge when people place increasing emphasis on autonomy, self-expression and quality of life. This shift is necessarily linked to changing existential conditions – the change from growing up with the feeling that survival is precarious to the feeling that survival is taken for granted – producing an inter-generational shift from materialist to post-materialist priorities, which brings in new political issues and movements. Per capita income and educational levels are among the best available indicators of the conditions that lead to a shift from materialist to post-materialist goals, but, theoretically, the crucial factor is not per capita income itself but people's sense of existential security.

Likewise and regarding the structural dimension, democratic legitimacy has been also considered a process in which questions about the origins (collective memories) and the exercises (the present) of institutions and political practices are constantly posed (Garcés, 2012a). Thus, the origins of a democratic model can be also defined as a legitimacy factor: 'as legitimacy of exercise and purpose are added to legitimacy of origin, democracy becomes more sustainable, in other words, more durable and capable of expansion' (UNDP, 2011, p. 13). From a different perspective, Lipset (1959) suggests that a democratic system depends strongly on two interrelated factors: the legitimacy of economic development, the system's efficiency for modernization and the effectiveness and legitimacy of the political system. According to the author, economic development involving industrialization, urbanization, high standards of education and a steady increase in the overall wealth of society are basic conditions for sustaining democracy. Likewise, Przeworski (1979) shows that loss of legitimacy is not a sufficient condition for a regime breakdown, thus suggesting that the only predictable variable for such event is economic development.

As will be presented in the following sections, the three dimensions of the legitimacy crisis can be observed in the current Chilean political scenario – perceptual, through declining support for political institutions; behavioural, through demonstrations, protests and voter apathy; and structural, through possible explanations for the demonstrations and declining support for politics: describing the model’s problematic origins, income inequality and more resources and social expectations. I shall now turn to a brief presentation of the redemocratization period in terms of economic and political models to fully explain the context from which demonstrations and diminished political trust have emerged.

The Chilean redemocratization process

As previously mentioned, the Chilean democratization process has often been presented as a successful example of transition within the Latin American region. Political stability, steady economic growth and the strengthening of institutions are recognized as characteristics of the post-dictatorial period under the *Concertación* governments. During the first two democratic governments in particular, Chilean economic growth was double the Latin American average, with the best performance of all the region’s countries (Meller, 2000).⁴ This increase was accompanied by high-scoring macroeconomic and financial indicators, such as savings and investment rates, consolidated fiscal balances, a degree of openness, financial depth and development of the capitals market. Likewise, the country substantially reduced its level of poverty and registered positive results concerning human development indexes, the expansion of educational coverage, health indicators, income per capita and decreasing inflation and unemployment rates, among others. Moreover, Chile was recently defined as the best country in which to be born in Latin America, based on standard of living, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.⁵

These successful outcomes are the result of structural economic transformations implemented during the previous decades. The restructuring programme originally undertaken during the dictatorship and consolidated after 1989 included market liberalization, privatization of government-owned enterprises and a social security system based on privately managed health, education and pension funds, in one of the earliest and most radical applications of neo-liberal ideas in Latin America. Given its overall positive performance, Chile became the first South American member of the OECD in 2010, reflecting international recognition of Chile’s economic and social policies in a programme known as the ‘Chilean Way’.⁶

Along with the upward trends at economic and social levels, Chile was ranked top for the quality of its institutions, rule of law and its governability in Latin America after recuperating democracy (Perry & Leipziger, 1999). Likewise, the country has been classified as a *free country* by the Freedom House Index⁷ and is considered by the Polity IV Index as the only *full democracy* in

Latin America, along with Costa Rica and Uruguay. The overall stability of the Chilean transition was the result of an administration based on agreements and consensus with the opposition coalition, as well as contention and the channeling of social demands through constant negotiations with the representatives of civil society. Thus, the *Concertación* applied a paradigm of governability in order to resolve three major problems: to assure the stability of the civil democratic regime, to confront the centrifugal tendencies of political actors and to contain an overflow of societal demands (Moreno, 2006). The key strategy to facing these challenges was to maintain and consolidate the same ‘rules of the game’ of the dictatorship’s institutional and economic framework. In this context, the governability of Chilean democracy was consolidated and the socio-economic model appeared to obtain high levels of legitimacy.

As Muñoz (2007) describes, by the end of the military regime, the *Concertación* alliance had to decide between radically changing the authoritarian economic model and a return to state interventionism or accepting new institutional regulations, adjusting for social equity and economic efficiency. The second alternative was chosen and, according to the author, its results support the decision made, since at the end of the third *Concertación* administration (Ricardo Lagos), support for the government reached 70 per cent, the highest of a Chilean president. ‘The country had gained great confidence in itself and its institutions and has taken an unprecedented step by choosing a woman, the first, to assume as President of the Republic’ (2007, p. 13).⁸ Ricardo Lagos’ record was only beaten by Michelle Bachelet, with an 80 per cent rate of approval at the end of her administration.

In addition to an increase in domestic and international legitimacy during the Chilean transition, civil society also experienced profound transformations. On one hand, a strategy of top-down governability and, on the other, major neo-liberal economic reforms redefined the relationship between politics and society. In an effort to guarantee democratic governability, the *Concertación* governments left little room for social and political actors in an arena that controlled public inclusion (Oxhorn, 2003; Rovira, 2007). Furthermore, the fast expansion of mass consumption triggered by market-oriented policies yielded in a generalized demobilization, subjective-oriented citizens and caused little or no impact on civil society in the period’s national agenda. According to numerous analyses, the democratic restoration in Chile included fragmentation, a decline of and crisis in social movements (Garcés & Rodríguez, 2004), an end to demonstrations and the deactivation of civil society (Silva, 2001), development without citizen participation (Márquez & Moreno, 2007) and even the absence of civilians (Otano, 2006).

Demonstrations and political disaffection: Challenges for democracy

In 2010, the first right-wing government after the restoration of democracy was elected. A year later, the largest demonstrations in twenty years suddenly oc-

occurred, exchanging a previously subdued scenario for one of large-scale, constant protests, riots and violent demonstrations. Diverse social struggles came to the fore, challenging both the country's successful indicators and its significant achievements on a national level, its good reputation in international rankings and the transition's stability. A number of questions arose as a result of these social movements, as well as criticism and discussions whose focus has moved towards the legitimacy of the political and economic models. Although these protests and demonstrations were not the first within the democratic era,⁹ the cycle that emerged in 2011 was different in both scale and impact, with thousands of people regularly taking part in marches in Santiago and other cities, demanding the elimination of educational establishments operating on a for-profit basis and recognition of environmental rights and regional claims.

At the beginning of 2011, a large protest against the HydroAysén megadam project¹⁰ took place in southern and central Chile. Led by the Patagonia Without Dams advocacy group, activists claimed that the damage this project would cause to the ecosystem and environment far outweighed the project's economic benefits and energy provisions, a position supported by Chileans in the opinion polls. After these events, the largest and most widespread nationwide protests within the demonstration cycle were held by the student movement. From May 2011 onwards, constant demonstrations drew together large groups of the middle-class, especially university and secondary school students fighting for an end to the educational system's for-profit mechanism and for improvements in the quality of free public education. In 2012 during a temporary

Table 1. Evolution of socio-economic indicators

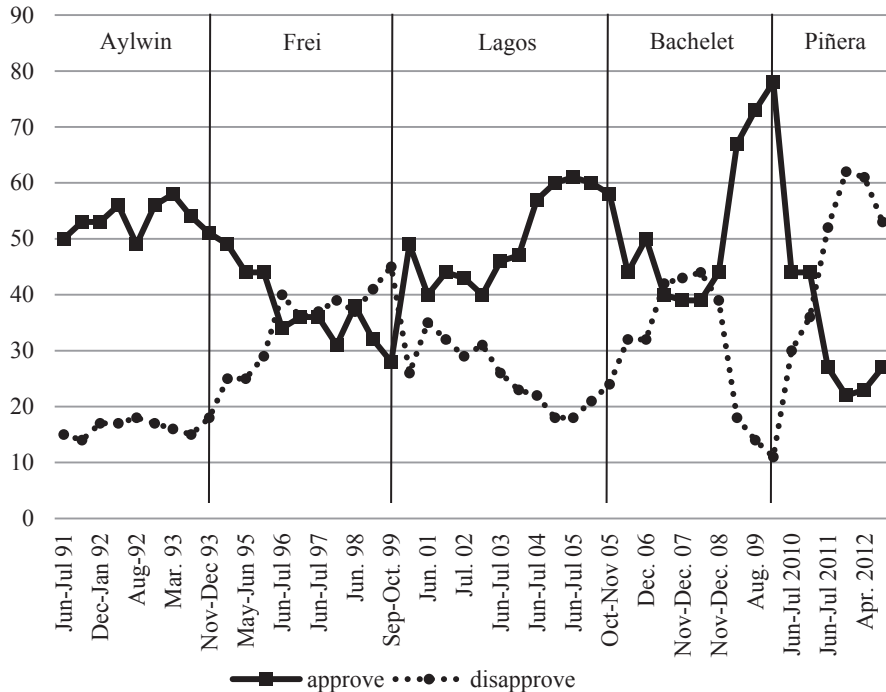
Indicator	1990	1996	2000	2003	2006	2009	2011
GNI per capita, PPP current international (\$)	4,270	7,770	8,910	9,820	12,080	14,200	16,330
GDP growth (annual %)	3.7	7.41	4.49	3.92	5.69	-1.04	5.99
Life expectancy at birth, total (years)	73.6	75.3	76.8	77.9	78.4	78.8	79.0
Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)	15.7	10.8	9.1	8.2	7.9	7.7	7.7
Poverty headcount at national poverty line (% of population)	38.6	23.2	20.2	18.7	13.7	15.1	14.4
Human Development Index*	0.702	...	0.759	0.789 [‡]	0.791	0.808	0.817

Source: World Bank; *2005; [‡]UNDP.

lull in the Chilean student protests, there were new demonstrations in the Patagonian region of Aysén. An entire town went on strike and there were violent clashes with police as people demanded more regional resources and subsidies for their gas, electricity and drinking water. People also demonstrated in the northern town of Calama, demanding a greater share of the region's copper mining profits. The underlying theme of both the Calama and Aysén protests was a call for the country's decentralization.

Politicians, scholars and citizens were surprised by such shows of discontent and struggle, especially given that these demonstrations emerged within an overall, favourable context of steady economic growth during a world economic crisis, low unemployment rates and high levels of investment. Through these demonstrations, Chilean civil society went from a top-down oriented transition to one in which citizens took control of the public agenda, defining which issues were given top priority, the most urgent law projects and media content, as well as organizing public debates within civil groups. In fact, as a response to the massive protests, during 2012, Piñera's government unveiled a tax reform to help fund an education overhaul, his administration created special funding and benefits for Calama and Aysén and the HydroAysén project was placed on hold early in the year. The demonstrations however, especially the student ones, did not cease.

Figure 1. Evolution of approval and disapproval of democratic governments

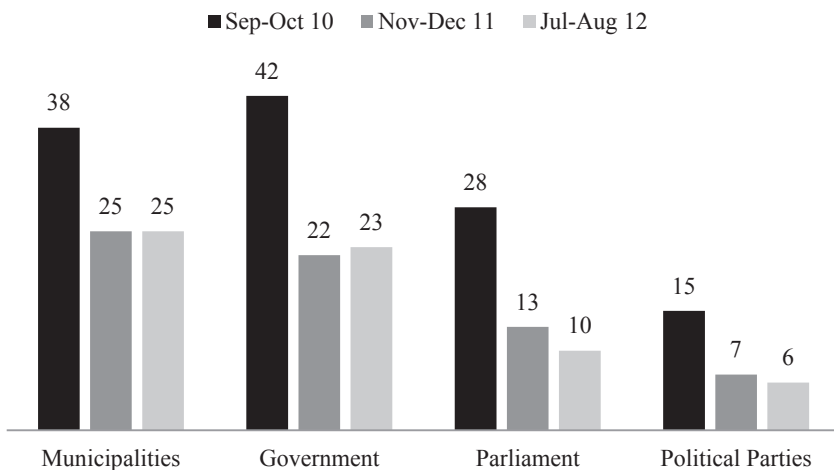


Source: CEP (2012).

The demonstration phase was accompanied by distrust of the government and political institutions, which contested the model's overall legitimacy in terms of political performance and the representation system. Analysing the data from the Centre for Public Studies (CEP) survey of July-August 2012 presented in Figure 1, it can be seen that support for Piñera's administration dropped from 44 per cent¹¹ to 22 per cent, reaching its lowest level when the first wave of demonstrations started (in the first semester of 2011). Approval was also down towards the end of Eduardo Frei's administration. The context then was rather different though, as, in 1998, Chile had been seriously affected by the Asian financial crisis, which caused negative economic performance and increasing unemployment. Despite the unfavourable context and although support for the government had dropped, disapproval remained relatively low compared to Sebastian Piñera's era, in which the demonstration cycle coincided with the worst evaluation of politics in Chile's redemocratization era.

Likewise, Figure 2 shows the level of trust in political institutions. As seen, the negative trend of government approval follows the downward trajectory of the most relevant political institutions. Percentages for those who claim to have confidence in the government, local government (local councils) and parliament have fallen from numbers that were already low, with an even more dramatic decrease for both right and left-wing political parties. Likewise, according to the 2012 CEP Report, approval for the *Concertación* coalition fell from 41 per cent at the end of 2009 to 14 per cent in August 2012. Fifty-eight per cent disapproved of the performance of the *Concertación* in its role as the opposition, while 50 per cent of those who answered were not satisfied with the performance of the *Coalición por el Cambio* (the government coalition). The data allows us to conclude that their legitimacy was eroded: citizen support for all those involved in the political arena went down.

Figure 2. Evolution of trust in political institutions



Source: Adapted from CEP (2012).

Diminished trust in politics is highly related to the phenomenon of political disengagement. Political participation has decreased during the last few years. In 2009, only 6 out of 10 Chileans were willing to participate in local or national elections (ICSO, 2012) and, among these, there was an increasing rate of abstention and null and blank votes, which has corroded current political participation even more. Chilean politicians took this political discontent and the declining rates of participation into consideration when passing an electoral reform allowing for automatic enrolment and voluntary suffrage.¹² According to Sebastián Piñera, this amendment was made in order to ‘refresh our democracy, in view of the loss of confidence and distance between citizens and institutions’ (*La Nación*, 23 January 2012). The effects of the reform, however, have not been encouraging, since, in 2012 during the last local elections, 59.6 per cent of those eligible to vote abstained.

Implications and possible explanations

Taking methodological and interpretative difficulties into consideration and without trying to conclusively resolve the ongoing debate described above, I would like to argue that the evidence leads us to conclude that the Chilean situation reflects at least a *partial* legitimacy crisis. As seen, two out of the three dimensions of a legitimacy crisis mentioned in Friedrichs’ (1980) analytical model are evident in the Chilean case: the perceptual dimension through a decline in institutional trust and how politics are evaluated and the behavioural dimension through riots, demonstrations, protests and the voter apathy documented and commented upon. The third – structural – dimension has multiple possible explanations as well as implications, as social phenomena normally do. Here, I proposed that the structural or institutional legitimacy problems might be related to the model’s origins – that is, a political and economic model designed under the authoritarian regime –, the income inequality issue or to the rise in the level of citizen expectations.¹³

The model’s origins

The discussion of the model’s origins has always been part of public debate in Chile,¹⁴ becoming particularly important after the recent cycle of demonstrations, since the framework for both the political and the economic model was inherited from the authoritarian regime – in other words, the Constitution of 1980 on the one hand and neo-liberal economic policies on the other. The latter creates a basic problem: all significant achievements regarding both national indicators and international rankings are directly related to a model designed under a non-democratic regime.

After the 1973 coup d’état, military rule was established in Chile. This created and applied a new political and economic model in order to erase any legacy of Salvador Allende’s socialist rule, in a process often defined as a new

founding of Chile (Isla Monsalve, 2012). The new constitution created by the military administration and approved in 1980 in a highly-controlled referendum¹⁵ gave the dictatorship a semblance of legitimacy and the legal capability to set up the pillars of an institutional future. The new constitution had three major aims: to define a managed presidency, to avoid a multiparty system and to ease institutional stagnation (Fuentes, 2010b; Pastor, 2004). These aims were achieved by reducing Congress' power and increasing the importance of the figure of the President,¹⁶ counterbalanced by the power of the Armed Forces and so-called authoritarian enclaves (Fernández, 2002; Garretón and Garretón, 2010; Siavelis, 2009).¹⁷ During the first few years of the democracy, a number of amendments were made, the most significant being one in 2005 under Ricardo Lagos,¹⁸ apparently resolving the problem of authoritarian enclaves as well as the most important legacies of the authoritarian regime in the 1980 Constitution.

Similarly, the administration led by General Augusto Pinochet defined not only a new political model but also a new economic framework, with an early adherence to the neo-liberal economic matrix. The regime broke with Chilean 'Keynesian' capitalism – Import-Substitution-Industrialization (ISI) or the *desarrollista* model – which had prevailed since the 1930s. In a context of social repression, structural adjustment economic policies (SAPs) were easily implemented, triggering a speedy process of deregulation, in-depth privatization and economic liberalization (De la Cuadra, 2003). The State would then be able to devote itself to a subsidiary and compensatory role, with public activity being constrained to correcting the market's undesirable effects, providing minimum resources for the poorest to allow their inclusion and participation in the market system.

However, the debate on the constitution's origins and the economic model continues. As former president Eduardo Frei commented during the launch of his presidential campaign for re-election in 2008, 'this constitution has been patched up so many times, it cannot resist any longer. It was designed according to an authoritarian approach and the fear of freedom'.¹⁹ According to Garretón and Garretón (2010, p. 118), it is not possible to analyse Chilean democracy without taking into account the controversy regarding the constitution: 'there is no real consensus on its origin's legitimacy, its contents or whether it represents the will of the Chilean people ... it is the only case in the world of a democratic regime guided by a constitution adopted under a military dictatorship'. Atria (2010, p. 172) goes even further, stating that, due to it being imposed through the alleged fraud of the 1980 plebiscite, no matter how many reforms have been made, 'its origin contaminates everything'.²⁰

Likewise, despite its significant economic outcomes, the cumbersome problem of the economic model's origins have also been questioned. As Carrillo states:

For international financial institutions, Chile is an example in Latin America ... However, those who are pleased to observe the Chilean case, forget the way the restructuring process to neo-liberalism began; forget that the neo-liberal model began with constitutional breakdown and the establishment of a military dictatorship that radically transformed Chilean society's way of thinking and dismantled political opposition through brutal repression ... with a number of people arrested, tortured or disappeared (2010, p. 145).²¹

The legitimacy of an economic and political system rooted in an – illegitimate – authoritarian regime has fed the debate following the demonstrations and political disaffection.²² The education system, binomial elections and the 1980 Constitution, among other important features of the current model, are still considered creations of the dictatorship and, therefore, as a haunting legacy of Augusto Pinochet in the democratic era.

The income distribution problem

The Chilean redemocratization process was generally stable, politically speaking, as well as having a successful development strategy. The country's neo-liberal modernization achieved the most rapid reduction in poverty in the world (Meller, 2000) and has been considered a paradigmatic example for developing countries. Recent demonstrations, however, have provoked criticism of the neo-liberal economic model, especially of its capacity for producing an egalitarian social system.²³

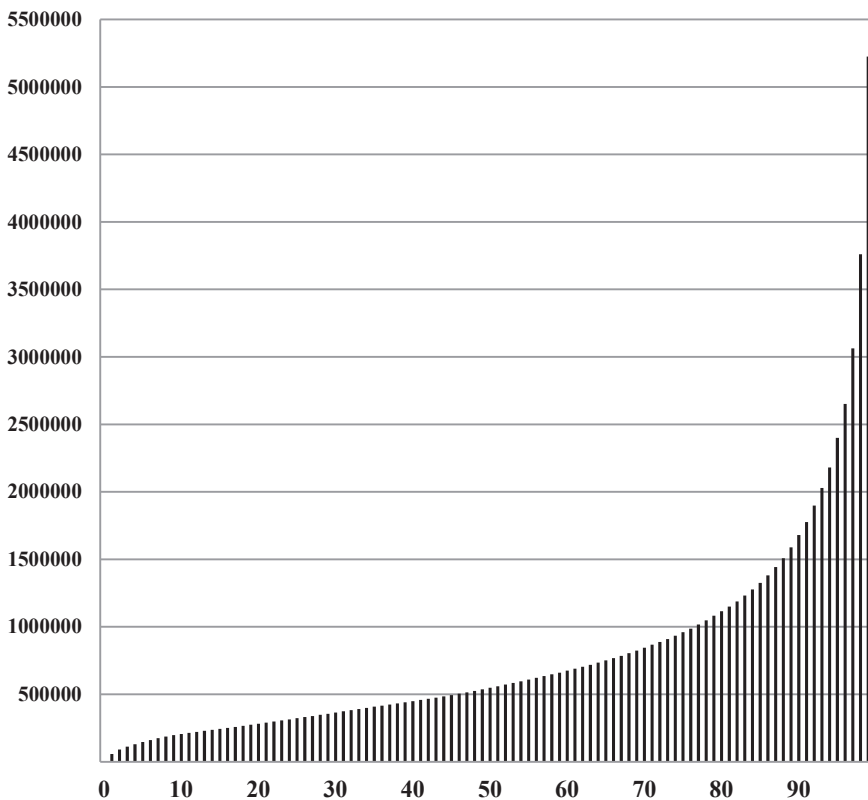
As Meller suggests, during the *Concertación* governments, it was often stated that strong economic growth would trigger a 'trickle-down' mechanism to resolve wealth distribution problems. Reducing poverty in this context would be a step towards a more egalitarian society, since the market's invisible hand would spread wealth among all Chileans. Therefore, all efforts were focused on maintaining the 7 per cent yearly economic growth rate as an expected solution for the problems of inequality. Evidence, however, confirms that income inequity in Chile has remained fairly stable over the last few years and is high compared to international standards. In 2011, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) rated Chile as the worst of its 34 member countries in terms of income distribution, as the Chilean Gini coefficient (0.50) was far higher than the overall average (0.31) of all its country members. This means that, in an OECD country, the average income of the richest 10 per cent of the population is about nine times that of the poorest 10 per cent, while, in Chile, the ratio is 27 to 1 (OECD, 2012, 2011). As seen in Figure 3, 50 per cent of Chilean households live with an average income below around 1000 dollars per month.

Income inequality generates unequal access to public and private services such as education and health. Since it is a largely private system, Chileans ac-

cess such services according to their level of income, loans and the rules of supply and demand. Thus, the higher-income population acquires better quality and more expensive social services in the private market, the middle-income population obtains social services through public sources but usually gets a better quality service in exchange for co-payment and the lower-income population obtains lower-quality social services for free (Larrañaga, 2009), therefore reproducing and consolidating a highly unequal structure for Chilean society.

Despite these differences, during the neo-liberal modernization process, inequities were apparently tolerated by the Chileans. Lately, social discontent has given rise to discussion on the legitimacy of the economic model which, despite its positive indicators, has been unable to solve the problem of inequality. The student demonstrations showed the need for improving both the quality of and access to education, since this represents the most important vehicle for moving towards a more egalitarian society. According to Espinoza (2012),

Figure 3. Total household income by centiles (Chilean pesos)*



*Note: Total household income: sum of independent income and perceived subsidies.

Source: Self-elaborated from the 2011 CASEN Survey.

inequality is a major issue and if political parties are not able to define this as a priority, social movements will do so instead. In other words, legitimacy for the economic model could be achieved by income redistribution policies as a necessary complement to economic growth.

Higher expectations and the development threshold

Social movement theorists have addressed the problem of discontent and latent conflicts – such as the problems of origins and inequality already mentioned – to explain social unrest. Nevertheless, these factors are not enough to cause demonstrations on their own. Whether a conflict remains latent or not or becomes visible also depends on the amount of resources, political opportunities and expectations available at a specific point (McAdam et al., 2001; Tarrow, 1996). In the case of Chile, developing trends and increasing material resources during the last decades have also triggered the inclusion of symbolic values such as social justice and sustainability. In their 2008 study, Tironi & Carreras (2008) show a progressive trend of high expectations and demands for equity, fairness, social rights and protection among Chileans. Based on opinion polls (Genera and the *Latinobarómetro* survey, 2006), the authors propose that access to education and health, the right to life and legal equality are among the most important rights for Chilean society, the second country in Latin America in which democracy is most associated with equality and justice. The latter would represent a change to the Chilean normative horizon, going beyond the need for material integration to demands for more symbolic means of social integration. The emergence of a new set of values might also imply new social struggles and political claims.

Successful indicators in terms of economic growth, as well as Chile's incorporation into the OECD, through which greater availability of wealth and resources are perceived, give rise to different social expectations. Furthermore, the end of the twenty year *Concertación* era and the beginning of a right-wing government which promised different development strategies than those previously offered may also have influenced a rise in expectations among an already more progressive Chilean population.²⁴ Thus, 2011 was a year for demanding more (symbolic and material) resources, as well as rights such as environmental sustainability, an improved educational system and more regional integration.

According to Inglehart (2008), the shift from materialist to post-materialist priorities in the Chilean modernization and democratization process brings about new political claims and social struggles. Likewise, an increase in the income per capita, the level of education and a broader sense of existential security have activated post-materialist goals and social awareness of issues such as the model's origins and the problem of income distribution.

Demonstrations and declining legitimacy: Multiple questions

Like most social phenomena, there is no single variable that explains how social dynamics unfold. Rather than conclusive factors, several perspectives are often found that help shed light on a complex social phenomenon. Although the legitimacy of its origins may have an impact on the model's current levels of legitimacy, the explanation is debatable. Many countries have constitutions that were not necessarily drawn up through democratic, socially-inclusive or participative processes but rather through negotiations involving relatively small groups or the elite. In fact, the former Chilean constitution was created in 1925 after a military coup. Nevertheless and according to Saldaña (2010), despite its illegitimate origins, this document was amended and politically transformed during subsequent decades in order to include the aspirations of more extensive social groups, leading to increasing approval and a significant democratization process during the mid-twentieth century. In this sense, depending on future reforms and their ability to mitigate authoritarian origins, as well as the extent to which Chileans might transform this into an actual public or civic act, the prospects of the 1980 Constitution are still uncertain. Similarly, the neo-liberal model imposed by the military regime has been effective in reducing poverty and increasing the most relevant socio-economic indicators. The positive economic scenario in which the end of the dictatorship took place was key to a stable transition and political consolidation of the *Concertación* governments. The same argument might be used when analysing authoritarian enclaves in the 1980 Constitution, since the inherited model's continuity was relevant in order to avoid authoritarian regression or further risk the peaceful democratic transition.

Likewise, inequality as such is unable to offer a powerful explanation for social discontent. Latin America and the Caribbean are the most unequal regions in the world, with 10 out of 15 countries having the highest levels of inequality (UNDP, 2010), a problem that has persisted since colonial times. Even though wealth distribution represents a major problem in many of the region's countries, it does not necessarily give rise to political disaffection or demonstrations. Inequality is not a threat to democratic stability *per se*, since countries like South Africa, India and Brazil have maintained their democracies amid deep-rooted racial, linguistic, regional or material disparities (Tilly, 1999, quoted in Espinoza 2012, p. 2). On the other hand, during the last few years in Chile, important policies have been drawn up expanding enrolment in education (in primary and secondary schools and higher education),²⁵ increasing social integration and improving healthcare provision (such as *Chile Solidario* and *Plan AUGE*, among others), in which the state has adopted a more important role in wealth redistribution than in the past.

Therefore, while the model's origins and the problem of inequality are important factors, they are not enough to fully explain demonstrations and the decline in legitimacy. The third factor mentioned – higher expectations – also

seems to play an important role. Reaching a development threshold, increasing wealth and accessing higher levels of information and education may have triggered a rise in expectations, along with social awareness of issues such as the model's origins and inequality. The latter becomes relevant in a new socio-political context, questioning and challenging the Chilean democratization process. Thus, along with and probably due to the political and economic developments of the last decades, Chileans have acquired a more critical appreciation and realization of the imperfections and cracks in the model, with a new political cycle thus emerging.

The neo-liberal economic model was implemented at a time when half the Chilean population was poor and the priority was to speed up investment and economic growth, rather than develop equity or the means of distributing income. Therefore, although reducing poverty has been the main challenge during the last twenty years, current social struggles and demonstrations have instead revealed a need for equity and social justice, posing new questions for development strategies. Likewise, it is worth questioning whether the political tools and constitution that emerged from a completely different period in politics – an authoritarian regime first and a transitional phase later – are still appropriate for a democratic model. Whereas political stability was considered fundamental to consolidating democracy, citizens today seem to demand a more flexible electoral system in which competence and the representation of political minorities is no longer a threat but a necessity. This debate highlights the need for equal opportunities, similar resources and transparent rules in both the political and economic arenas. The latter is expanded upon in the following section, where I present some of the prospects or effects of the demonstrations and of a decline in trust in politics within the democratic system.

The democratic legitimacy crisis and future expectations

There is no consensus when assessing the consequences or effects of the demonstrations. There are many positive opinions on their effects since 'social activation' would reflect an auto-recovery of the role of civil society and the democratic system's maturity. This is the argument of those who advocate the presence of civil society to balance out the power between the State and the market (Dagnino, Rivera & Panfichi, 2006). For others, demonstrations are a negative phenomenon, since they could threaten the foundations of governability, as well as political and economic stability and development (see: Boeninger, 1997, and Crozier et al., 1975). According to Deutsch and as seen earlier, demonstrations may be a positive and necessary process for modernization. Although demonstrations should not be used as a synonym for modernization, the Chilean case has features that allow us to assume that the current demonstrations resemble a process of democratic consolidation, an argument partly presented in the previous section. Likewise, in the 1960s and 1970s, American and European social scientists devoted to explaining the reasons behind mobi-

lizations and discomfort in a context of vigorous economic growth in those regions, said that Chile might be experiencing a process of modernization which required instability and demonstrations to open up the system to new patterns of socialization and behaviour. Demonstrations were therefore part of a necessary integration-disintegration-reintegration process and would thus represent a particular moment in a major iterative process, moving from transition to democratic consolidation.

Similarly, there are different viewpoints concerning the evaluation of the effects of an undermined trend of political participation and institutional evaluation. According to the Democracy Index (2011), apathy and abstention are the enemies of democracy, since distance between the political domain and civil society erodes the quality of the democracy. From this perspective, although citizens are free to express their dissatisfaction by not participating, a healthy democracy requires the active, freely-chosen participation of citizens in everyday life. On the other hand, Booth and Seligson (2009) suggest that, despite the wealth of established democracies, surveys show that public trust in the government, politicians and public institutions has markedly declined since 1960 in America and Western European countries, although the potential consequences (revolutions, civil wars or loss of democracy) have not occurred. Rather, dissatisfied citizens in these societies have reinvented their political participation and engaged with the political system on multiple fronts. The same diverging opinions can be found on the consequences of a legitimacy crisis: they can either be seen as an opportunity to test the very basis of the political and economic system and, from a critical viewpoint and as part of a substantive discussion, propose positive changes to and of society or they could threaten political stability and, even more so, Chilean democracy.

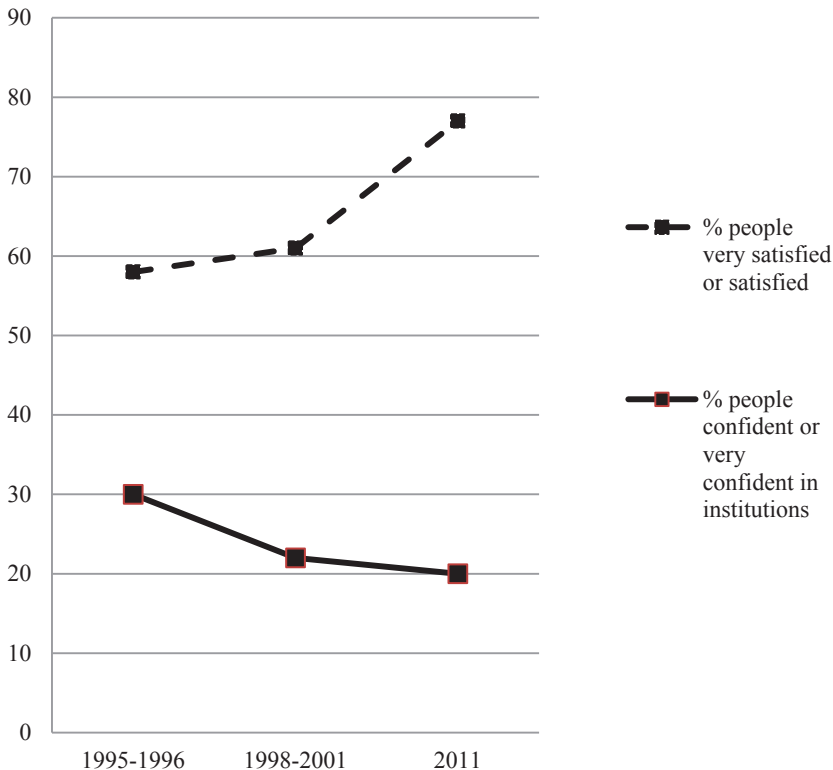
The consequences of a decline in the legitimacy of political stability or even of the erosion of democracy are not conclusive, as a crisis of legitimacy does not necessarily result in instability, breakdowns or a reduction of the regime's chances of survival. On studying the breakdowns of authoritarian regimes, Przeworski (1979) shows that a loss of legitimacy is not enough for a regime to breakdown; furthermore, he indicates that a crisis of legitimacy would only produce a regime's breakdown if a real alternative was available. Therefore, the question is whether a crisis of legitimacy would lead to revolution, anarchy or fully-fledged repression.

The empirical findings of Booth and Seligson (2009) are enlightening in this regard. The scholars' approach involves a multidimensional definition which extends the discussion on legitimacy and provides relevant analytical tools. According to the researchers, there is no cognitive dissonance between holding diffuse legitimacy (feeling part of the political community and valuing core regime principles and norms) and negatively evaluating regime performance and political actors. Furthermore, these scholars propose an analytic model in which the typically used, one-dimensional measure of satisfaction for a model or regime is replaced by a more complex and multidimensional as-

assessment: the broader concept of *triple satisfaction*. This concept includes several indicators, such as support for regime principles and institutions and economic performance, among others. By analysing the ratio of triply dissatisfied to triply satisfied citizens in a specific context, a researcher may be able to anticipate either political stability or a regime collapse.²⁶

Although the more complex analysis of satisfaction versus dissatisfaction conducted by Booth and Seligson will remain pending for the Chilean case, the picture of economic and political achievements described earlier allows us to affirm that there are still many stabilizing forces which prevent a full-scale legitimacy crisis that would compromise the governability or stability of Chile's democracy. The latter is supported by the data presented in Figure 4, which shows the evolution of satisfaction levels on both a personal and institutional level. As seen, personal levels of satisfaction have increased during the last few years, reaching almost 80 per cent in 2011, while trust in institutions has gone down to 20 per cent. The gap between personal and institutional satisfaction brings with it the need to grasp the multidimensional nature of legitimacy when

Figure 4. Evolution of personal levels of satisfaction and trust in institutions



Source: UNDP (2012b).

analysing the legitimacy of the Chilean model, according to a broader, more complex approach. Citizens' discontent, demonstrations and political disaffection are only some of the multiple dimensions of legitimacy and are therefore not sufficient to define a model as 'illegitimate'.

Therefore, the implications of both demonstrations and declining political support for democracy are elusive. Political stability seems to be a phenomenon determined by a number of factors, including economic performance, history and democratic maturity – the so-called reservoirs of legitimacy and the possibility of an alternative model – in other words, the specificities of when and where a legitimacy crisis takes place. Here, Easton's discrimination between diffuse and specific support should be taken into consideration. Political regimes do not collapse when legitimacy is low, partly because legitimacy is a nuanced and variegated concept. A democratic state tolerates and may actually encourage a certain questioning of the official order, but it has to be able to contain such challenges to endure and survive.

Conclusions

Demonstrations seem to be a worldwide phenomenon. The characteristics of each of these demonstrations and the type of challenges they represent for political legitimacy and democracy differ dramatically depending on the country. Chilean demonstrations are different to the Arab Spring or the Spanish *Indignados*, since economic performance, the maturity of their political institutions and the reservoirs of legitimacy vary dramatically between these countries. The same argument applies to the trend for erosion in the evaluation of politics, as its effects on democracy rely on the material and democratic conditions in a particular societal context.

This article mainly elaborates on the structural dimension of a crisis of legitimacy – in other words, the model's origins and inequality, which are also presented as possible explanations for demonstrations and political disaffection. The model's origins, income distribution and high expectations are some of the factors that have been suggested to explain social struggles and a decline in trust of politics that is currently common to the Chilean democracy. Whereas the origins of the political and economic framework, as well as the inequity produced by the economic model are undoubtedly relevant problems for Chilean democracy, these factors *per se* are not enough to explain recent events in Chile. It seems that a rise in expectations, development and wealth are triggering a new awareness among citizens of issues such as the model's origins and the income distribution problem, therefore posing questions and challenges for the Chilean democratization process. Whereas political stability and the reduction of poverty have been the main focus during the last twenty years, current social manifestations instead demand more political participation, inclusion, equity and social justice.

This work suggests that, although the legitimacy of Chilean democracy might be under threat given the emergence of demonstrations and an erosion of support for politics, these phenomena might actually represent the seeds for reconfiguring the relationship between the State, the market and society, allowing for real democratic consolidation rather than the undermining or weakening of the Chilean democratic regime. A process of integration-disintegration-reintegration seems to be taking place. The disintegration produced by demonstrations and diminished support for politics is giving rise to an overall discussion on participation and the representation system, development and economic strategies and the quality, extent and legitimacy of democracy. The discussion has triggered the emergence of new political forces and caused, therefore, a renovation of the political establishment. Similarly, traditional Chilean parties are facing the need to create programmes able to interpret these new challenges and social struggles. This discussion highlights the fact that demonstrations and a decline in the evaluation of politics rather than negative phenomena themselves could be seen as a way of redefining the relationship between social actors, as well as a step towards democratic consolidation.

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Notes

1. The *Concertación* (Coalition of Parties for Democracy) is a bloc of central-left political parties founded in 1988 as the opposition to the military regime of Augusto Pinochet.
2. For more detailed analyses of social movements see Tarrow (2011), Jenkins and Klandermans (1995) and Cohen (1985). For a Latin American perspective, see Foweraker (1995) and Escobar and Alvarez (1992).
3. Materialist values refer to economic and physical security, whereas post-materialist values relate to the need to belong and to esteem and self-expression.
4. The per capita income in Chile in 1975 was three times lower than in Argentina, while, at the end of 2012, Chile had the highest gross national income per capita within Latin America.
5. According to the 2013 Economist Intelligence Unit Index.
6. During the signing-in ceremony in Santiago in 2010, the OECD's Secretary-General, José Angel Gurría, stated that "the 'Chilean Way' and its expertise will enrich the OECD on key policy issues" (OCDE 2010, January 11th).
7. The average indexes (on a scale of 1 to 7) for political freedom (10 indicators) and for civil liberties (15 indicators) are often taken as a measure of democracy. Freedom House criteria for an electoral democracy include: (a) a competitive, multiparty political system, (b) universal adult suffrage, (c) regularly contested elections conducted through secret ballots, with reasonable ballot security and the absence of voter fraud and (d) significant public access to major political parties for the electorate through the media and through generally transparent political campaigning.
8. Translated by the author.
9. In 2006, Michelle Bachelet's government was temporarily threatened by large-scale protests as part of the so-called Penguin Revolution. Although this was the first major event of the student protests and the most important one in terms of demonstrations during 1990-2010, the Penguin Revolution did not have an impact on Chilean politics, nor did it become a transversal demonstration within civil society like the 2011 cycle. The 2006 student demonstrations have, rather, been defined as "the first scream" (Somma, 2012, p. 299) or as a "spasm demonstration" (Mayol and Azócar, 2011, p. 2) when compared to the 2011 demonstrations. For further details on the Penguin Revolution, see Bakamjian (2009), Gómez Leyton (2006), De la Cuadra (2008) and Kahan (2008).
10. HydroAysén is a mega-project that will build five hydroelectric power plants in the southern Aysén region.
11. Approval for Sebastian Piñera was at its highest during the rescue of the 33 miners trapped underground.
12. Until 2012, the Chilean electoral system consisted of voluntary enrolment but compulsory voting for those enrolled.
13. In this article, I will take these particular hypotheses into consideration to explain demonstrations and declining political legitimacy. For legitimacy crises caused by an increasing discontent among Chileans, see Mayol (2012) and Mayol and Azócar (2011). The legitimacy crisis is also included in the analysis of Garcés (2012b), along with the proposal of a new political era after the emergence of recent demonstrations. The role and influence of the Chilean Communist Party in recent demonstrations is analysed in Silva (2012).
14. For further details regarding the problems of legitimacy in the origins of the current Chilean political framework and the neo-liberal bias of the 1980 Constitution, see

- Fuentes (2010a) and Cristi and Ruiz Tagle (2006).
15. The referendum was carried out amidst persecution of opposition organizations; a lack of freedom of speech; a state of siege; the detention, disappearing or exiling of thousands of Chileans; aggressive government media propaganda and censorship of the opposition and multiple irregularities at the polls with voters not registering, among other irregularities (Atria, 2010).
 16. The Executive was given the power to dissolve both chambers at least once during the presidential term, as well as the power to appoint ministers, mayors, governors and, ambassadors, define legislative priorities and law initiatives, establish social security standards and create new services.
 17. Among the authoritarian enclaves were the lack of civil control and the impossibility of removing serving military commanders, which allowed Pinochet to continue as Commander-in-Chief of the Army even after the end of the dictatorship in 1990; the creation of the National Security Council, as well as The Constitutional Tribunal, as semi-autonomous institutions with the authority to make binding decisions on existing laws, presidential decrees, constitutional reforms and policy initiatives; the mechanism of life-long and appointed senators and local authorities; the binomial system in order to avoid the multiparty system, reducing and constraining diverse ideologies from the traditional three political blocs; the Constitutional Organic Laws (*Leyes Orgánicas Constitucionales*) which require a special quorum to be amended, among others (Pastor, 2004).
 18. The abolition of appointed senators, the change in functions and composition of the National Security Council, the impossibility of removing Commanders-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and the police, alterations to the composition of the Constitutional Court and the end of the Armed Forces' role as guarantors of order, among others (Saldaña, 2010).
 19. Eduardo Frei in *La Nación*, September 9th, 2008, quoted by Fuentes (2010b, p. 66). Translated by the author.
 20. Translated by the author.
 21. Translated by the author.
 22. Perhaps the most interesting example of the legitimacy problem and the model's origins can be found in the student demonstrations. Chilean students protested against what they called 'Pinochet's education system' chanting 'y va a caer, y va a caer...' ('It's going to fall, it's going to fall'), the same words used in marches against Augusto Pinochet in the 1980s – this time against the education system that was created in the country during the Pinochet era.
 23. For more details on the income distribution problem and demonstrations, see Espinoza (2012) and Rojas (2012). Likewise, see Vera (2012) for an analysis of the 2011 protests, based on inequality and the problems of the model's origins.
 24. The slogan of Sebastián Piñera's last national election campaign in 2010 was 'Súmate al Cambio' ('Be Part of the Change').
 25. According to Brunner (2008), enrolment in higher education increased from 250,000 students in 1990 to over 650,000 in 2006. Likewise, student loans, grants and scholarships for low-income families have improved accessibility to higher education for different socio-economic groups.
 26. The authors suggested that if the ratio of triply dissatisfied to triply satisfied exceeds 1.0, the conditions for regime collapse, anti-democratic demonstrations or even coups are set. According to their findings, published in 2009, Honduras and Guatemala were the two cases that exceeded this threshold, the same year that there was coup against Honduran President Manuel Zelaya.

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