

September 11, 1973

Breakdown of Democracy in Chile

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On September 4, 1970, Chile captured the world's attention when it elected Socialist senator Salvador Allende Gossens as president. With his leftist Popular Unity coalition, Allende promised a peaceful transition to Democratic Socialism could be won at the ballot box instead of on the battlefield. At the height of the Cold War, Chile appeared to offer an alternative path to both U.S. capitalist liberal democracy and Soviet-style Communism. At a time when enthusiasm for the 1959 Cuban Revolution had declined as Fidel Castro moved into the Soviet orbit, Allende offered a top-down economic development model that would redistribute wealth by occupying the state rather than destroying it. Chile's competitive multiparty, political system shared much in common with Western European countries like Italy, Portugal, and France. Allende's election would test the viability of having a Marxist government democratically elected as opposed to taking power via armed revolution.

There was plenty of reason for optimism in 1970 for the prospects of Allende's government and the so-called Chilean path to Socialism. Chile had enjoyed uninterrupted democratic rule since 1932. Unlike most other Latin American countries, the Chilean military did not intervene in politics, elections happened on schedule, freedom of the press was guaranteed, and openly Marxist parties not only legally participated in politics but also formed part of coalitional governments. Despite his election at the height of the Cold War, Allende believed his model of ideological pluralism could flourish in the context of superpower rapprochement.

His victory represented the culmination of a decades-long strategy by the Chilean left to take state power through peaceful means. Starting in the late nineteenth century, a strong labor movement emerged in the northern nitrate mines and the southern textile and coal-mining communities. This leftist, often Marxist-oriented labor movement allied itself to the emergent political parties that represented the working class: the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. Across the twentieth century, the goal of the two largest parties on the

left was to channel social struggle through electoral participation. As a result, Chilean democracy became synonymous with competitive elections, coalition governments, and representation of nonelite sectors (*sectores populares*) within the political process.

On election night, voters gave Allende a slim 39,000-vote margin (36.2%) over the right's candidate, Jorge Alessandri (34.9%). The centrist Christian Democrats, the party of sitting president Eduardo Frei, finished last (27.8%). When there was such a three-way split in Chilean politics, presidents were typically elected with a plurality, not a majority, of the vote. Under Chilean law, when no candidate won an outright majority, Congress determined the outcome of the election between the two top candidates in the popular vote. Previous congresses had always respected the popular vote. Yet in 1970, despite precedent, there were some indications that Congress might not choose Allende.

Thus, before he could even assume office, Allende faced an organized and well-funded opposition. Although presidential elections occurred on September 4, it would be nearly two months before Congress met to certify the popular vote and name the next president. From the outset, the U.S. government and the Chilean political right, representing elite landowners, mass-media moguls, and industrialists allied with foreign capital, operated as antidemocratic forces in Chile. Openly fascist and anti-Communist Chilean groups joined their ranks, including *Patria y Libertad* (Fatherland and Liberty), which was partially funded by the CIA. *Patria y Libertad* carried out violent acts of sabotage during the years ahead and engaged in street skirmishes with Allende supporters.

These sectors used the two-month delay between September and November 1970 to devise a number of political and military schemes to prevent Allende from assuming the presidency. Lobbying for Washington to intervene began almost immediately from both Chilean and U.S. business sectors, most notably with Augustin Edwards, owner of Chile's largest newspaper, *El Mercurio*, who conveyed a warning to U.S. president Richard Nixon and his secretary of state Henry Kissinger that Chile was about to go Communist, while International Telephone and Telegraph, a U.S. corporation with large holdings in Chile, offered the CIA one million dollars to stop Allende. On September 15, 1970, Nixon met with top advisors and issued a directive to the CIA to initiate covert operations to prevent Allende from taking office and to promote a coup in Chile.¹

U.S. covert operations consisted of two tracks: a constitutional path that lobbied legislators to declare the second-place candidate Jorge Alessandri of the National Party the winner. Alessandri would then call new elections

¹ Richard Helms, "Meeting with the President on Chile at 1525," CIA, September 15, 1970. For more on U.S. covert operations in Chile, see Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: The New Press, 2003).

which would pave the way for outgoing president Frei to be reelected.² Despite the influx of covert funding and U.S. pressure, Christian Democrats refused to break with tradition, but not before, “Frei and some of his ministers seriously considered the possibility of a coup in September–October 1970,” reflecting “a mindset dominated by a deep fear and an intransigent rejection of the Marxist Left.”³

The second track of U.S. covert policy was a military solution. The CIA channeled arms and funds to right-wing military officials and civilian conspirators, including *Patria y Libertad* members, who devised a plot to kidnap the head of the armed forces, General René Schneider, a strict constitutionalist who opposed military intervention. The kidnapping would be blamed on leftist extremists, which would provoke sufficient panic to justify a military coup or to convince Christian Democrats to vote for Alessandri over Allende. Instead of kidnapping, the CIA-supported conspirators assassinated General Schneider. This egregious act of political terrorism shocked the nation. When the identities of those responsible came to light, instead of the desired military coup, the Chilean armed forces, Congress, and the country rallied behind Allende’s congressional confirmation on October 24, 1970.

Allende’s inauguration on November 4, 1970, marked the beginning of a period of three years in which the Popular Unity government attempted to put in place its policies and in which the opposition inside and outside of Chile became increasingly convinced the only way to prevent Allende from succeeding was by creating sufficient conditions of chaos to provoke a military coup. As long as Allende moved toward Socialism *within* a constitutional framework, those opposed to him would have to destroy the legitimacy of Chile’s political institutions, the very same institutions that Allende now occupied. During Allende’s government, one of the principal challenges presented by the Liberal democratic system—by the organization of the Chilean state—was that the main players did not trust each other, and different agendas controlled different branches of government. Eventually, this produced a crisis of legitimacy for the entire political system that ultimately spelled the end of Allende’s presidency and Chilean democracy.

On September 11, 1973, the military seized power, following the aerial bombardment of the presidential palace, La Moneda. While those on the right who opposed Allende from the outset had both financial resources and political influence on their side, they did not have a sufficient base of support to overthrow his government, despite encouragement and aid from the United States.

² Chile’s Constitution stipulated that sitting presidents could not be reelected for a second term. But new elections would allow Frei to return to office.

³ Sebastian Hurtado, *The Gathering Storm: Eduardo Frei’s Revolution in Liberty and Chile’s Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 201–202.

Rather the Christian Democrats, who held the presidency from 1964 to 1970 and represented the political center, eventually concluded that the best prospects for getting back into power were not a political solution—waiting until the 1976 presidential elections—but a military one: throwing their support behind the antidemocratic right to destabilize the Allende government and calling for military intervention. The Chilean middle class, politically aligned with the Christian Democrats, provided a nonelite base of public support for a military intervention. The coup led by General Augusto Pinochet and the brutal seventeen-year dictatorship that followed sought not only to overthrow a Marxist president and a democratic transition to a Socialist economy but also to turn back the decades-long struggle of working people for full inclusion as citizens in Chile's democracy.

Explanations for Democratic Breakdown

Explanations for the overthrow of democracy in Chile emerged in the immediate aftermath of the 1973 military coup, with seminal studies, such as Arturo Valenzuela's *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile* (1978), appearing by the end of the decade. This first wave of scholarship, much of it produced by political scientists, sociologists, foreign journalists, and Chilean politicians, emphasized to varying degrees four different factors: class conflict, U.S. imperialism, errors by the left in power, and polarization of political elites and the electoral system, particularly the centrist Christian Democrats.⁴ In the nearly fifty years since the coup, historical research has provided a more complete and nuanced understanding of the motivations that guided different actors during the tumultuous thousand days of Allende's presidency. In many respects similar to Weimar Germany, Chile in 1970 had both "a strong authoritarian tradition and a strong democratic tradition."⁵

Within Latin America, Chile is often cast as a democratic exception. In the early national period of the nineteenth century, Chile stood out among the new Latin American republics for its political stability. Chile did not experience ongoing interelite conflict between liberals and conservatives nor disruptive cycles of military strongmen and military coups. Living under authoritarian rule in the 1980s, Chilean social scientists based at NGOs and think tanks began to question this "myth of Chilean exceptionalism." Chilean historian María Angélica Illanes

⁴ For an excellent summary of the English-language literature, see Alfredo Joignant and Patricia Navia, "El golpe a la cátedra: Los intelectuales del primer mundo y la vía chilena al socialismo," in *Ecos mundiales del golpe de Estado: Escritos sobre el 11 de septiembre de 1973*, ed. Alfredo Joignant and Patricia Navia (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, 2013), 11–52. For a survey of the Chilean scholarship, see Mario Garcés and Sebastian Leiva, *Perspectivas de análisis de la Unidad Popular: Opciones y omisiones* (Santiago: Universidad Arcis, 2004).

⁵ See Eric Weitz's chapter in this volume.

dates the myth's origins to the 1920s, when, during a period of political and economic crisis, a group of conservative historians consciously sought to resurrect Bernardo O'Higgins and Diego Portales as founding fathers. By casting Portales as a heroic figure who saved Chile from the "anarchy" of the 1820s Liberal governments and consolidated a strong central state in the 1830s dominated by Chile's small oligarchy, these historians celebrated the institutional stability of the "Portalian state" as responsible for Chile's unique path.⁶ Throughout the twentieth century, the narrative of Chilean exceptionalism gained currency across the political spectrum, as competing groups refashioned it to support divergent political projects. The staying power of these beliefs—that the military respected the constitutional order and lacked vocation for political office, led many politicians on the left, including Allende, to erroneously believe the military would not intervene in Chile's political crisis, and those in the center, such as Frei, to assume that if it did, it would not stay in power.⁷

When the military junta seized power in September 1973, they justified their actions as necessary to save Chilean democracy from the threat of Marxism and international Communist conspiracy, citing "resolutions by Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Contraloría General denouncing the constitutional and legal violations by the Allende government."⁸ Moreover, as political scientist Brian Loveman points out, the military consolidated its rule by drawing on "key authoritarian features of Chile's constitutional tradition, political institutions and political practices."⁹ As Diego Portales famously observed in 1832, "[T]he social order is maintained in Chile by *the weight of the night* . . . [and] the masses' general passivity is the guarantee of public tranquility."¹⁰ Should the "weight of the night" be lifted, "Portales and his successors never hesitated to use 'the stick' to secure that tranquility."¹¹ Thus, in a reappraisal of the Chilean state's seemingly remarkable stability, scholars have increasingly acknowledged the exclusionary elements at its core: elite rule, traditional social hierarchies, and repression of popular movements.¹²

⁶ María Angélica Illanes Oliva, *La batalla de la memoria: Ensayos históricos de nuestro siglo, Chile 1900–2000* (Santiago de Chile: Planeta, 2002), 165–166.

⁷ James Petras, "Chile after Allende," in *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Chile*, ed. Paul M. Sweezy and Harry Magdoff (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 163.

⁸ Brian Loveman, "The Political Architecture of Dictatorship: Chile before September 11, 1973," *Radical History Review* 124 (January 2016): 12.

⁹ Loveman, "The Political Architecture of Dictatorship," 15.

¹⁰ Diego Portales, "The Authoritarian Republic," in *The Chile Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Quay Hutchinson, Elizabeth Quay Hutchison, Thomas Miller Klubock, Nara B. Milanich, and Peter Winn (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 141.

¹¹ Brian Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4–5.

¹² Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt Letelier, *El Peso de la Noche: Nuestra Frágil Fortaleza Histórica* (Santiago de Chile: Ariel, 2000).

By documenting how political norms were traditionally upheld at the expense of addressing social inequality, scholars have highlighted the repeated use of states of exception, amnesties, and political violence directed at the lower classes.¹³ Chile's democracy endured as long as social relations in the countryside, particularly on the large, landed estates (*haciendas*), remained unchanged. If this tenuous political compromise "was threatened, political toleration ended."¹⁴ For Chile's traditional landed elites, represented politically in the twentieth century by the National Party, the beginning of the end came not with Allende's election in 1970 but with his predecessor Christian Democrat Frei's passage of the 1967 Agrarian Reform Law.¹⁵ By examining how political violence was a constitutive element of state formation across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholars suggest that the sudden shock of the September 11, 1973, military coup was less of an aberration in Chile's democratic tradition than previously thought. By contrast, the exception appears to be the short decade from 1964 to 1973, corresponding to the "Revolution in Liberty" led by Christian Democrat Frei (1964–1970) and the "Democratic Path to Socialism" under Allende (1970–1973), a period marked by remarkable advances in democratization and nonelite political participation.

Chilean Popular Front: Democratic Expansion and Contraction in the 1930s and 1940s

In contrast to the authoritarian traditions within the Chilean political system, the advent of mass politics in the 1920s enabled the development of a strong democratic culture, particularly among the lower classes. In the 1930s and 1940s, Popular Front governments were a prototype for the kind of multi-party, multiclass coalition that brought Unidad Popular (Popular Unity) candidate Allende to office in 1970. This experiment made manifest, historian Jody Pavilack contends, "deep divisions over the definition and practical content of democracy."¹⁶ At the same time, the pattern of democratic expansion followed by

¹³ Elizabeth Lira and Brian Loveman, *Las Ardientes Cenizas Del Olvido: Via Chilena de Reconciliación Política, 1932–1994* (Santiago: LOM, 2000). See also Gabriel Salazar, *La Violencia Política y Popular en las "Grandes Alamedas". La Violencia en Chile 1947–1987 (una perspectiva histórico popular)* (Santiago: LOM, 2006). Florencia Mallon, *Courage Tastes of Blood: The Mapuche Community of Nicolás Ailío and the Chilean State, 1906–2001* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 21; Lessie Jo Frazier, *Salt in the Sand: Memory, Violence, and the Nation-State in Chile, 1890 to the Present* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Loveman, *Chile*, 3rd ed., 202.

¹⁵ Fernando Mires, *La rebelión permanente: Las revoluciones sociales en América Latina* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1988), 337.

¹⁶ Jody Pavilack, *Mining for the Nation: The Politics of Chile's Coal Communities from the Popular Front to the Cold War* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 31.

contraction and repression in important respects foreshadowed the tragic end to Allende's Popular Unity government.

Chile, like many other industrializing countries in South America, went through a period of populist governments, particularly in the 1930s and 1940s, when Popular Front governments, which included Socialists and Communists, came to power. The Popular Front governments were led by middle-class parties, especially the Radical Party, but as members of the governing coalition, the Socialists and Communists held important ministry positions. Under each of these governments, urban workers gained rights and saw a rapid expansion of their political participation.¹⁷ In her study of southern Chile, Pavilack documented how Chilean coal miners aligned with the Communist Party mobilized "to make representational politics effectively serve the interests of popular sectors, not just those of the oligarchic and bourgeois elites or foreign investors."¹⁸ She adds, "[D]emocracy, as it was embraced by Marxist parties and their working-class followers in mid-twentieth century Chile, was an intrinsically contentious project. Organization and mobilization from below came to be seen by workers not as a way to overthrow Chilean democracy or halt its capitalist advance, but rather as a way to participate fully. Workers were prepared to fight within existing systems rather than against them, but this did not mean an end to class conflict."¹⁹

Between 1946 and 1947, Chilean copper and coal miners, allied with the Communist Party, launched a series of strikes that threatened to bring Chile's export-oriented economy to a standstill. Pressured by the U.S. government and the U.S. owned-mining companies, President Gabriel González Videla ended the strikes in October 1947 by declaring a state of siege and sending the military to occupy the southern coal zone. Over the next four months, between six thousand and seven thousand Communist workers and their families were forcibly deported to internment camps. Afterward, President González Videla passed the Law for the Permanent Defense of Democracy (1948), which banned his former allies the Chilean Communist Party and disenfranchised some forty thousand voters. As a young army captain in 1947–1948, Augusto Pinochet Ugarte spent time in northern Chile at the Pisagua internment camp before assuming command of the military occupation in the southern coal-mining zone. He would later attribute the origin of his anti-Communism to these experiences.²⁰

¹⁷ Mario Garcés Durán, *La Unidad Popular y la revolución en Chile* (Santiago: LOM, 2020).

¹⁸ Pavilack, *Mining for the Nation*, 6.

¹⁹ Pavilack, *Mining for the Nation*, 34.

²⁰ John R. Bawden, *The Pinochet Generation: The Chilean Military in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016), 56. See also Augusto Pinochet, *The Crucial Day: September 11, 1973* (Santiago: Editorial Renacimiento, 1982).

Despite urban workers' efforts to deepen and expand democracy, the Popular Front revealed the limits of Chile's political system to tolerate not only political pluralism but also nonelite empowerment. While urban workers gained important rights, including the right to unionize, engage in collective bargaining, and strike, rural workers continued to be deprived of these same rights, and other important social sectors, including women, indigenous people, peasants, and illiterates, remained disenfranchised.²¹ The 1948 Cold War proscription of the Chilean Communist Party, which would not be legalized again until 1958, and the subsequent internment of many working-class Communist militants mirrors a pattern in Latin America in which populist governments in the 1930s and 1940s ended with persecution of workers, unions, and leftist political leaders. As historian Marcelo Casals contends, anti-Communism as an ideology was not merely reactive; it was dynamic and adaptable in providing a powerful social script.²² By midcentury anti-Communism was already deeply embedded in Chilean political culture and informed how opposition inside and outside of Chile viewed Allende's presidential campaigns in 1958 and 1964. From this perspective, his subsequent electoral victory in 1970 symbolized "the materialization of all anticommunist fears."²³

Cold War Politics in Chile and U.S. Intervention in the 1950s and 1960s

If the 1948 Law for the Permanent Defense of Democracy marked Chile's alignment with the United States in Cold War era politics, U.S. government interest in Chile would grow in the decades ahead. The U.S. government found a new ally in the Chilean Christian Democratic Party (PDC), founded in 1957, and celebrated leader Eduardo Frei as the "last best hope" for countering Communism in Latin America.²⁴ In less than a decade, the Christian Democrats became Chile's largest political party and captured the presidency in 1964.

²¹ For more on the exclusion of rural Chile from the benefits of the Popular Front governments, see María Angélica Illanes, *Movimiento en la tierra: Luchas campesinas, Resistencia patronal y política social agraria, Chile, 1927–1947* (Santiago: LOM, 2019).

²² Marcelo Casals, "The Chilean Counter-revolution: Roots, Dynamics and Legacies of Mass Mobilisation against the Unidad Popular," *Radical Americas* 6, no. 1 (June 2021): 1–17. See also Marcelo Casals, *La creación de la amenaza roja: Del surgimiento del anticomunismo en Chile a la "campaña del terror" de 1964* (Santiago: LOM, 2016).

²³ Marcelo Casals, "Anticommunism in 20th-Century Chile: From the 'Social Question' to the Military Dictatorship," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*, online, March 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.666>.

²⁴ Leonard Gross, *The Last, Best Hope: Eduardo Frei and Chilean Democracy* (New York: Random House, 1967).

By the middle of the twentieth century, the preferences of the Chilean electorate broke down into three thirds: right, center, and left. Each of these political blocs occupied the presidency: first, Conservative Jorge Alessandri in 1958, then the center represented by Frei and the Christian Democrats in 1964, and finally the Socialist Allende leading the leftist Popular Unity coalition in 1970. In 1958, the right's candidate, Alessandri, won with 31.2% of the popular vote, narrowly beating a leftist coalition headed by Allende, who earned 28.5% ahead of Frei, who earned 22%. Had there not been a fourth spoiler candidate, a renegade leftist priest, who received 3.3% of the vote, Allende might plausibly have been elected one year before the 1959 Cuban Revolution.

The Cuban Revolution unquestionably altered the political landscape in Latin America and in U.S.-Latin American relations. Unlike in Central America and the Caribbean, the U.S. influence in South America was fairly limited prior to World War II. In 1947, the U.S. government created the Central Intelligence Agency and also signed the Río Treaty (1947) with most Latin American countries, including Chile. In line with the Truman Doctrine, this Cold War mutual security agreement treaty gave the U.S. government influence that it never had before in South America, particularly in the training of military forces. Under the broad doctrine of national security, Latin America in the mid-twentieth century experienced multiple forms of U.S. intervention, resulting in the removal of governments that were perceived as threats to U.S. political and economic interests: Guatemala in 1954, Guyana in 1961, Brazil in 1964, and the Dominican Republic in 1965.

After the April 1961 Bay of Pigs military invasion failed to oust Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro, President John F. Kennedy sought to open a new chapter in U.S.-Latin American relations with the Alliance for Progress. Driven by the desire to avoid another Cuba, U.S. policymakers laid out an ambitious ten-year, \$20 billion economic and military aid program. U.S. policymakers acknowledged the need for social reforms in a region where the high levels of poverty and disenfranchisement made Socialist revolution appealing. Kennedy's vision sought to stave off the threat of revolution by improving standards of living across the hemisphere.

Founded in 1957, the PDC sought to provide a "third way" by pursuing a social reform agenda that was capitalist and anti-Marxist.²⁵ Its social base was primarily the urban-professional middle class and managerial class.²⁶ In 1964, Eduardo Frei Montalva campaigned for the presidency promising a "Revolution in Liberty," a middle-class revolution that was in large part bankrolled by the

²⁵ In addition to Sebastian Hurtado's *Gathering Storm*, see Mario Amorós, *Entre la araña y la flecha: La trama civil contra la Unidad Popular* (Madrid: Ediciones B, 2020).

²⁶ Alan Angell, *Politics and the Labour Movement in Chile* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 182.

U.S. government's Alliance for Progress. The right opted not to run its own candidate and threw its support behind Frei, who received a stunning 56% of the popular vote in 1964, handily defeating Allende. While the previous political center had been occupied by the pragmatic Radical Party, the Christian Democrats represented "the rise of an ideological Center," which, as Arturo Valenzuela, notes "aggravated" political polarization.²⁷

Over half of Frei's 1964 presidential campaign was funded directly by the CIA, which spent an additional \$3 million on an anti-Communist propaganda campaign against Allende. Known as the "campaign of terror," its purpose was to convince voters that the election of a Marxist president would undermine respect for the family and traditional gender roles. Thus, by 1964, Chilean political actors on the right, the CIA, and conservative Brazilian women had already established a transnational anti-Communist network that tapped into anxiety over changing gender roles as a key narrative for its anti-Allende messaging.²⁸

Lifting "the Weight of the Night": Mobilization of Chilean Society in the 1960s

Polarization of society figured prominently in early scholarship on democratic breakdown in Chile. Explanations ranged from highlighting the "hypermobilization" of society to the detriment of governability, concluding that "the real problem is whether the masses can be controlled,"²⁹ and the assessment that national political parties' ideological positions overtook civil society, preventing autonomous social organizations from flourishing.³⁰ These perspectives diminish the significant agency exercised by nonelite actors and incorrectly suggest that social organizations functioned as mere mouthpieces for political parties. The reality on the ground was far more complex.³¹

²⁷ Arturo Valenzuela, *Chile: The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), xiii.

²⁸ Marcelo Casals, "'Chilean! Is This How You Want to See Your Daughter?' The Cuban Revolution and Representations of Gender and Family during Chile's 1964 Anticommunist Campaign of Terror," *Radical History Review* 136 (January 2020): 122; Margaret Power, "Who but a Woman? The Transnational Diffusion of Anti-Communism among Conservative Women in Brazil, Chile and the United States during the Cold War," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 47, no. 1 (2015): 93–119. For more on Brazil's role in undermining democracy in Chile, see Roberto Simon, *El Brasil de Pinochet. La dictadura brasileña, el golpe en Chile y la guerra fría en América del Sur*. Trad. Pablo Diener. (Santiago: LOM, 2022).

²⁹ Henry A. Landsberger and Tim McDaniel, "Hypermobilization in Chile, 1970–1973," *World Politics* 28, no. 4 (July 1976): 540.

³⁰ Manuel Antonio Garretón, *The Chilean Political Process*, trans. Sharon Kellum (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

³¹ Marian Schlotterbeck, *Beyond the Vanguard: Everyday Revolutionaries in Allende's Chile* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

Motivated by the desire to win in highly competitive elections, political parties across the spectrum, but particularly on the center and left, as historians Gabriel Salazar and Julio Pinto have argued, encouraged social mobilization and popular empowerment, “only to subsequently repress” these lower-class movements or “to actively contain this impulse from below.”³² Politicization of social organizations was a key feature of Chilean politics in the 1960s and 1970s. It was accelerated by three of the Christian Democrats’ key reforms: (1) the expansion of the electorate, (2) agrarian reform with land redistribution in the countryside, and (3) the creation of Promoción Popular (Popular Promotion) programs that incentivized organizing by the urban and rural poor.³³ While moderate in many respects, these reforms rattled traditional social hierarchies and the political status quo, which rested on the exclusion of peasants and other marginal sectors from political life.

As more and more Chileans had a stake in the system, they began to demand something of it. When given the opportunity to organize, people did. Peasants formed unions and cooperatives, went on strike, and occupied land. Landless urban poor (*pobladores*) organized neighborhood councils and homeless committees and carried out land occupations. Labor militancy and strikes multiplied.³⁴ As one observer noted, “[W]hat is certain is that with its reforms, the PDC unleashed social forces that from the beginning escaped their control, creating a climate of social agitation that the parties of the Left had not been able to create.”³⁵

The Christian Democrat’s relationship to the landless urban poor exemplifies this dynamic of mobilization and subsequent repression when popular sector actions and demands exceed institutional control. Despite encouraging community-organized neighborhood councils as a key step to resolve Chile’s housing crisis, the Frei administration began to crack down on illegal land occupations (*tomas*), most notoriously in the March 1969 “Massacre of Puerto Montt,” in which Chilean national police violently dispersed an illegal land occupation, killing ten people.³⁶ As Sebastián Hurtado concludes, President Frei

³² Gabriel Salazar and Julio Pinto, *Historia contemporánea de Chile V: Niñez y juventud* (Santiago: LOM, 2002), 214.

³³ Eduardo Frei carried out an ambitious agrarian reform program (1967) endorsed by the U.S. Alliance for Progress. The extension of the right to unionize and strike to rural workers aimed to counter the appeal of more revolutionary options and to expand the Christian Democrats’ electoral base. Similarly, under Frei’s government, electoral changes lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen and extended the right to vote to illiterate Chileans, who accounted for approximately 10% of the population. The 1970 presidential election was the first with the newly expanded electorate (Loveman, *Chile*, 3rd ed.).

³⁴ Peter Winn, “Loosing the Chains: Labor and the Chilean Revolutionary Process, 1970–1973,” *Latin American Perspectives* 3, no. 1 (1976): 73.

³⁵ Mires, *La rebelión permanente*, 338.

³⁶ Angela Vergara, “Revisiting Pampa Irigoin: Social Movements, Repression, and Political Culture in 1960s Chile,” *Radical History Review* 124 (January 2016): 43–54. For more on Chile’s housing rights movement in the twentieth century, see Mario Garcés, *Tomando su sitio: El movimiento de pobladores*

“chose to enforce the rule of law with great determination, following the historic pattern of the Chilean state’s violent repression of modes of mobilization perceived as unacceptable challenges to the social order.”³⁷ Just three years earlier, the Chilean military left eight people dead in the northern mining town of El Salvador after President Frei called them in to break a copper miners’ strike in 1966. By end of Frei’s term, the Christian Democrats faced not only a crisis of political representation but also one of power when, on October 21, 1969, the military went on strike over poor wages in the so-called Tacnazo.³⁸

By the late 1960s, many Chileans who had first mobilized under the auspices of Frei’s Revolution in Liberty had become disenchanted with the centrist, middle-class Christian Democrat’s unfulfilled promises. The contradiction of encouraging the mobilization of workers, peasants, and urban poor, only to revert to the historical practice of the state using violence against the activism that these mobilizations gave rise to, produced serious rifts within the party. While President Frei led the largest and most conservative wing, a sizable faction led by former Christian Democratic student leaders and key figures from the agrarian reform program, like Jacques Chonchol, argued for accelerating and deepening social reforms begun under Frei. This more progressive, leftist faction broke from the party in May 1969 to form the Popular Unitary Action Movement (MAPU), which soon joined Allende’s Popular Unity coalition.

In 1970, the Christian Democrats ran candidate Radomiro Tomic, from the center-left wing of their party, with a platform that in many ways resembled the one supported by the Popular Unity coalition. Tomic called for nationalization of the U.S.-owned copper mines, which expanded the Frei government’s “Chileanization of copper” with the purchase of the majority share of Chile’s largest copper mines. Whereas in 1964, the Christian Democrats formed an electoral alliance with the right, as historian Sebastian Hurtado notes, “so powerful and appealing was the message of the Left for a considerable part of the Chilean polity that even within the PDC a good number of members, [including Tomic,] promoted an alliance with the coalition of Communists and Socialists.”³⁹ Tomic contended that an alliance of “the truly progressive forces” would ultimately have the best chance of carrying out much needed structural reforms and held that Frei’s “ideological refusal to reach an understanding with the Marxist parties was an intellectual and strategic mistake.”⁴⁰ After Tomic finished a distant third in the

de Santiago, 1957–1970 (Santiago: LOM, 2002) and Edward Murphy, *For a Proper Home: Housing Rights in the Margins of Urban Chile, 19560–2010* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

³⁷ Hurtado, *Gathering Storm*, 202.

³⁸ Mires, *La rebelión permanente*, 341–342.

³⁹ Hurtado, *Gathering Storm*, 199.

⁴⁰ Hurtado, *Gathering Storm*, 121, 200.

1970 presidential elections, Frei and the more conservative Christian Democrats took back control of the party.

Just as the labor movement predated the emergence of Chile's Communist and Socialist parties in the early twentieth century, popular movements composed of workers, students, peasants, and *pobladores* drove the democratization of Chilean society across the 1960s, carrying the five-party Popular Unity coalition to power in 1970 and forming the milieu out of which Chile's New Left parties emerged. In this sense, Allende's election reprised a familiar dynamic in which lower-class organization and mobilization preceded and subsequently facilitated electoral victories for leftist parties. Allende campaigned on promises to radically redistribute power "from the established dominant groups to the workers, peasants and progressive middle-class sectors in the city and the countryside."⁴¹ In his inaugural speech on November 4, 1970, Allende declared, "[T]he *pueblo*, at long last having reached the Government, takes leadership over the nation's destiny."⁴²

Allende's election in 1970 reflected the heightened expectations raised by Frei's Revolution in Liberty and the extent to which the Chilean electorate had both expanded and moved to the left in the 1960s. The 56% of the popular vote Frei received in 1964 (from right and center) had become 64% of Chileans who voted for platforms by Allende and Tomic that promised substantive social and economic change.⁴³ Thus, while Allende won with a plurality and occupied a minority position within the government, many supporters optimistically interpreted the leftward shift in the electorate as a popular mandate.

Allende's commitment not to use violence against his working-class supporters signaled an important break from the historical pattern of elites' use of the state to exercise violence in support of their interests. As the Popular Unity's 1969 campaign platform contended, "the development of monopoly capitalism prevents the spread of democracy and encourages the use of violence against the people."⁴⁴ The election of a *compañero* president thus expanded the possibilities for social mobilization on an even greater scale than under Frei. The perception of expanding horizons inspired some Chileans to carry out actions that went beyond the promises of the Popular Unity platform. Historian Peter Winn characterized this grassroots activism as "the revolution from below" to

⁴¹ Unidad Popular, *Programa básico de gobierno de la Unidad Popular* (Santiago: Comando de la Unidad Popular, 1969), 12.

⁴² Salvador Allende Gossens, "Primer discurso político del Presidente Dr. Salvador Allende: Pronunciado el día 5 de noviembre de 1970, en el Estadio Nacional" (Santiago: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, n.d.), 5.

⁴³ Lois Hech Oppenheim, *Politics in Chile: Democracy, Authoritarianism and the Search for Development*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 40.

⁴⁴ Unidad Popular, *Programa de gobierno de la Unidad Popular* (Santiago: Comando de la Unidad Popular, 1969) 5.

differentiate it from Allende and the Popular Unity government's top-down revolution from above. While Allende remained steadfast in his commitment to democratic procedure, not all of his supporters did. Motivated by a desire for social justice and immediate redistribution, the direct-action tactics associated with the revolution from below, particularly carrying out illegal land takeovers (*tomas*) in the city and countryside, challenged the rule of law and questioned the slow pace of institutional reform carried out within existing democratic processes.

Founded in 1965, the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) was another important actor in the Allende years. As a Marxist-Leninist party, participants drew inspiration from the model of the Cuban Revolution, but they also drew on Chile's much longer tradition of anarchism and labor activism. At the time, the MIR's endorsement of armed struggle and its admiration for the Cuban Revolution were not unique in Chile or Latin America. Much like the left wing of Allende's own Socialist Party, the MIR had been skeptical of Allende and the moderate left's strategy to take power through electoral means. Yet unlike in Argentina and Uruguay, Chile's Marxist-Leninist left did not become an urban guerrilla organization. Instead, following Allende's election, the MIR engaged in grassroots organizing among the rural and urban poor. Their more militant wing worked with young Socialists to form Allende's personal bodyguard. Despite several overtures from President Allende, the MIR never joined his Popular Unity coalition. Relations between the moderate Communists and the radical MIR remained strained. While the MIR's inflated revolutionary rhetoric antagonized the Christian Democrats, the Communists blamed the MIR for undermining the government's goal for a controlled top-down transition to Socialism.⁴⁵ Yet the extent to which the MIR controlled the revolution from below is debatable. A defining feature of the era was the Chilean lower classes' significant autonomy and sense of historical agency, encapsulated in the phrase "When we made history."⁴⁶

Early Signs of Democratic Erosion

In addition to the right's plot to deny Allende the presidency with the assassination of General Schneider in October 1970, other earlier indicators of democratic erosion existed. The Christian Democrats in Congress agreed to vote for Allende only after he signed a Statute of Constitutional Guarantees, in which

⁴⁵ Valenzuela, *Chile*, 108–109.

⁴⁶ Julio Pinto Vallejos, *Cuando hicimos la historia: La experiencia de la Unidad Popular* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2005), 5.

he pledged to protect and obey the Constitution. No other president in Chilean history had to sign such a document, essentially stating the well-understood principle that constitutionally elected presidents will respect and uphold the Constitution. Political scientist Arturo Valenzuela observed that the Christian Democrats' extraction of this concession from Allende in exchange for their confirmation votes in November 1970 indicates that from the outset, his government confronted "a breakdown in mutual understanding" that signaled "the fragility of Chilean institutions."⁴⁷

At the same time, under the terms of Chile's existing Constitution and political system, Allende had little reason not to anticipate exercising his constitutional powers. His predecessors had similarly faced opposition-controlled congresses. Perhaps underestimating the powerful forces lining up against him, Allende expected that working within the existing political norms of negotiation, compromise, and coalitions would enable him to resolve political conflict. He knew that Chile's democratic institutions were not built to enact rapid, sweeping changes. Along with the moderate Communist Party and the moderate wing of the Socialist Party, Allende remained committed to a phased implementation of Popular Unity's program, working with Christian Democrats to pass specific legislation. For these sectors, the goal was to consolidate an electoral majority in the 1976 elections, which meant not alienating the middle class. The left wing of the Popular Unity coalition, principally represented by the Socialist Party, Christian left, and MAPU, advocated for moving faster and relying principally on working-class support. In this regard, the left wing of Popular Unity and the more radical MIR aligned ideologically.

The lack of internal cohesion within Allende's Popular Unity coalition resulted from the fact that it was a coalition, not a single party. The process for decision-making often resembled a parliamentary system within the governing coalition. His political program's stated goals contained several contradictions that became increasingly difficult to reconcile or balance, including how to stabilize the political system and economy while promising revolutionary change, how to support grassroots activism, and how to channel activism through existing institutions. Politically, disagreements within the Popular Unity coalition hampered Allende's ability to govern effectively and efficiently and slowed the government's response time at critical junctures.

The next section traces the unfolding chronology of Allende's presidency with attention to the internal and external factors that contributed to democratic erosion across important groups, including the Christian Democrats, the middle class, and the military.

⁴⁷ Valenzuela, *Chile*, 49.

Salvador Allende and the Popular Unity Project

With more than twenty years as a senator, Allende was deeply invested in the political institutions and norms that he had helped build. He believed in the possibilities of both popular democracy and the capacity of the state to improve the lives of Chile's poor majority (*el pueblo*).⁴⁸ Like many other Latin American leaders and Marxist intellectuals, Allende looked to dependency theory to diagnose the region's historic challenge of underdevelopment. First advanced by Latin American economists working for the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, dependency theory contended that the development of the First World had been achieved through colonialism and the capitalist exploitation of the developing world. Third World poverty was thus seen as the product of this unequal relationship. Allende and the other Popular Unity leaders believed that a majority of Chileans would never support a revolution characterized by collective violence or state terror. Instead, the Popular Unity government hoped that by implementing structural reforms—land redistribution and nationalization of key industries—economic strength would translate into political support as it sought to persuade the majority of Chileans to vote for Socialism by the end of Allende's term in 1976.

With the goal of creating a state-run economy, Allende expanded many reforms begun during Frei's Revolution in Liberty (1964–1970). Allende had campaigned on a platform to end foreign and monopoly control of the economy, grow the public sector, and deepen democracy through the creation of worker control in state-run factories. Within a year of taking office, Allende's government had nationalized the American-owned copper mines with unanimous approval in Congress. In just eighteen months, his government implemented one of the most extensive land redistributions in world history without widespread violence. By the one-year anniversary in November 1971, Chile's GNP had increased, as had social spending and workers' share of the national income. These gains translated to an increase in support for Popular Unity at the polls. In the April 1971 municipal elections, the first elections since Allende took office and widely seen as a referendum on the democratic road to Socialism, Popular Unity candidates received just under 50% of the popular vote—a remarkable increase from Allende's plurality victory in September 1970. The Popular Unity government interpreted these elections as signaling widespread approval for its policies as well as raising the possibility that the electoral majority necessary to legislate a democratic transition to Socialism could be obtained ahead of the 1976

⁴⁸ Steven S. Volk, "Salvador Allende," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History, November 2015, doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.106.

elections.⁴⁹ Typically, the left could count on 30% of the votes and the right could get 25%–30%. Within Chile's tripartite political blocs, the center functioned as a swing vote. In this scenario, Popular Unity would need to maintain their existing base of support and expand it to include more middle-class sectors from the political center.

Along with land reform, Allende's signature economic proposal was the creation of a socialized area of the economy, the *Área de Propiedad Social* (APS). The Popular Unity platform identified changes in property relations as an essential step toward breaking both Chile's historically dependent role within the world capitalist system and the power of domestic economic elites. In the case of agrarian reform, Allende's government applied the 1967 Agrarian Reform Law passed by the Christian Democrats, which contained specifications for the size of rural estates and the circumstances under which they could be expropriated. The Popular Unity government had no such legal precedent for how to create a socialized sector, nor was there agreement within the leftist coalition over the size of enterprises that should be included or the mechanisms by which they should transition to state ownership. It took the government nearly a year to introduce legislation, which further contributed to uncertainty among business sectors fearing possible expropriation.

Political Opposition: Christian Democrats in Congress

In addition to the hostility of the U.S. government and the Chilean political right, Allende faced a number of institutional constraints once in office. While he had won the powerful executive branch within a presidential system, this was the only branch of government he controlled. The Popular Unity parties accounted for just over one-third of the seats in Congress, making them a minority. Since congressional elections in Chile would not be held until March 1973, Popular Unity had no chance to alter this balance of power in the majority Christian Democrat Congress during Allende's first years in office. The judiciary, including the Supreme Court and Constitutional Court, was also controlled by the right. Political scientist Lois Oppenheim observed the "built-in contradiction" of Allende's position was his commitment to "carry out revolutionary change . . . within the legal confines of a political system in which [his government] had very limited political power."⁵⁰ The rhetoric of Allende's government,

⁴⁹ Peter Winn, "The Furies of the Andes," in *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*, ed. Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 241.

⁵⁰ Oppenheim, *Politics in Chile*, 65; Mires, *La rebelión permanente*, 374–375.

with its focus on the working-class as its primary constituency, also differentiated it from previous administrations.

Without a majority in Congress, the Popular Unity government needed to reach agreements with opposition parties, essentially the Christian Democrats, to pass legislation critical to advance its program. Allende repeatedly tried to negotiate deals around specific legislation with the Christian Democrats in December 1971, March 1972, and June–July 1972. These negotiations were hampered by ideological disagreements within the Popular Unity government over the necessity and possibility of reaching an agreement with the Christian Democrats. The moderate wing of Popular Unity, led by the Communists, saw an agreement with the Christian Democrats as critical to success. Despite Allende's dogged persistence trying to reach political compromises to pass key legislation, he became increasingly isolated politically.

There was little strategic incentive for the Christian Democrats to compromise with the Popular Unity government. The Popular Unity parties represented the primary competition at the polls and in social bases, including among sectors like the urban poor and peasants, who had first been organized by the Christian Democrats. After Allende's election, all political parties maintained their electoral mobilization, which contributed to increased polarization. Second, as U.S. allies in the Cold War, the Christian Democrats were anti-Marxist, pro-capitalist, and anti-Communist. A sizable segment of the more conservative wing of the Christian Democrats was deeply resistant to forming any kind of legislative alliance with the Communist Party. Third, the Christian Democrats were a large, heterogeneous party that was internally divided. Following the departure of the MAPU in 1969, another splinter group from the Christian Democrats formed the Christian Left in 1971 and joined the governing Popular Unity coalition. President Allende had desperately tried to convince the Christian Left to remain within the Christian Democrats. Despite additional congressional seats for the government's coalition, ironically, the Christian Left's departure decreased Allende's chances of reaching a compromise with the Christian Democrats since the progressive Congress members, who had been most inclined to work with Allende, had abandoned the Christian Democratic Party to its more conservative leaders.

From the start, the creation of the socialized area of the economy (APS) proved contentious and put Allende on a collision course with the political right and center. Between 1971 and 1972, Congress blocked government-backed legislation, so Allende circumvented Congress with executive decree-laws. Congress passed a Christian Democrat-sponsored constitutional amendment to undo the APS, which Allende vetoed, then Congress voted to overrule his veto. This political stalemate produced a constitutional crisis that was not easily or quickly resolved. Allende resisted congressional attempts to overrule his veto, which

would have effectively created a parliamentary system in place of the existing presidential one. The failure of the mid-July 1972 Popular Unity–PDC talks in some respects signaled the defeat of the Popular Unity moderates’ strategy. In the face of political roadblocks, Allende’s social base mobilized to show their support for the president and their rejection of politicians’ attempts to halt the expansion of the socialized public sector.

Allende and the more moderate wing of the Popular Unity government remained committed to moving toward Socialism within a constitutional order. They stretched the institutional bounds in creative ways. For example, without a majority in Congress, Allende’s government utilized several decree-laws from the 1930s to intervene and requisition industries for the socialized state sector. By the end of his first year in office, Allende had nationalized ninety-one of the largest monopoly firms, including banks, insurance companies, and foreign companies, and had expropriated key industries like textiles, steel, and coal. The government had searched for any legal means possible and had used the constitutional powers of a strong executive branch in order to implement structural changes and redistribute wealth. These actions infuriated the opposition.

One classic explanation for the breakdown of democracy in Chile centers on the political system and its democratic institutions. Politically, Allende had difficulty governing because he controlled only the presidency but not the other three branches of government. The opposition, which controlled 59% of Congress, wanted to block Allende’s agenda. They were short of the 66% needed to impeach Allende, but impeachment of ministers required only a simple majority. So by 1973, Congress had impeached Allende’s entire cabinet. This level of turnover made it impossible for Allende to govern effectively. The case of Chile in the early 1970s illustrates the risk that occurs in a democracy when political opposition to the sitting president is so intense that an opposition-controlled Congress is willing to undermine the basic functioning of government just to block the president’s agenda. In questioning Allende and his government’s legitimacy, the political right and center ultimately weakened the entire democratic system.

With a stalemate between Allende in the executive and an opposition-controlled Congress, political conflict became increasingly displaced to society. The failure of Allende’s moderate strategy to reach an agreement with the Christian Democrats signaled the erosion of the political center. As Arturo Valenzuela notes, the Christian Democrats “should have realized more fully the necessity of coming to an agreement when the [Popular Unity] government coalition was willing, in the crucial negotiations of June and July 1972.”⁵¹ Traditionally, the political center played a moderating role in Chile’s political system. Instead, in the year ahead, Chile’s institutions and society would polarize.

⁵¹ Valenzuela, *Chile*, 107.

The center would swing to the right, leaving the Allende and the moderate left increasingly isolated.

Conflict Moves to the Streets: The Opposition's Mass Strategy to Defeat Allende, December 1971

In the second year of Allende's government, the opposition strategy moved from Congress into the streets. This was a play not just for the political center but also for the middle class. In doing so, it mobilized a sizable segment of Chile's population against the constitutionally elected government. Between November and December 1971, Cuba's revolutionary leader Castro visited Chile. There is no doubt that his extended presence and the publicity surrounding his stay served to galvanize the opposition around a common cause. On December 1, 1971, near the end of Castro's trip, the forces opposed to the Popular Unity government took their protest to the streets in the first "March of the Pots and Pans," in which elite right-wing women guarded by the fascist Patria y Libertad's shock troops marched down Santiago's streets, symbolically banging pots and pans to suggest the hardships imposed by Allende's government.

The March of the Pots and Pans unveiled the opposition's new "mass strategy" that would seek to challenge Allende's economic policies directly in the streets—adopting the organizing tactics traditionally used by the Chilean left. These marches were geared toward frightening the middle class since the right wanted the middle third of voters to suffer under Allende. Broadly, the opposition sought to create conditions of sufficient political and economic chaos that the middle class would join the anti-Allende movement and the Chilean military would be persuaded to remove Allende from power. The post-Watergate 1973 Church Report by the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee observed that "throughout the Allende years, the CIA worked to forge a united opposition"; to that end, between 1971 and 1973, the U.S. government channeled direct payments to the Christian Democrats and the National Party.⁵²

The opposition's mass strategy, which debuted with the March of Pots and Pans, intensified in the years ahead. It accused Allende not only of breaking the Constitution but also of undermining traditional gender roles and, by extension, the foundations of society and civilization. Elite right-wing groups like Feminine Power successfully mobilized a cross-class alliance of "apolitical" women by organizing around their shared identity as mothers and housewives and galvanizing a sense of uncertainty in the face of social and economic

⁵² U.S. Senate, Select Committee on Intelligence Activities, Staff Report. *Covert Action in Chile, 1963–1974* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975).

dislocations. The Popular Unity government underestimated the uneasiness of the Chilean middle class when confronted with dramatic social change, which partly explains why ideas about the family, gender roles, and school choice became rallying cries for the opposition. Historians, including Heidi Tinsman, Margaret Power, and Gwynn Thomas, have demonstrated how the Chilean left's inability to see women as political actors and to address women's needs as women was a strategic and ideological shortcoming.⁵³

The Allende government had staked much on the success of its economic transformations, which left it vulnerable to criticism and attacks from their domestic political opposition and from the Nixon-Kissinger machinations. Even with the creation of a socialized area of the economy, the Popular Unity government still controlled only part of the economy and did not control distribution chains. By 1972, the second year of Allende's government, serious shortages of foodstuffs and other basic goods emerged. The shortages were caused, in part, by the initial success of Allende's redistributive policies, which meant more people had more money. The assumption of Keynesian stimulus spending was that production would increase to meet the new demand. This did not happen in Chile, in part because production could not be expanded to keep pace with rising demand, but also because some producers who were opposed to Allende opted to forgo profits by producing less. Similarly inclined shopkeepers hoarded goods in warehouses, which could then be sold for greater profit on the black market.

The decisive factor in the Chilean economic crisis and consequent unrest was a calculated U.S. policy, known as the "invisible blockade." Long before Castro's visit, Nixon in September 1970 issued a directive to "make the economy scream."⁵⁴ The 1975 Church Report found that soon after Allende's election, "the United States cut off economic aid, denied credits, and made efforts—partially successful—to enlist the cooperation of international financial institutions and private firms in tightening the economic 'squeeze' on Chile."⁵⁵ Ultimately, Nixon's directive in September 1970 had long-term destabilizing effects. While the Allende government's unwieldy coalition and inexperience contributed to its economic woes, it is difficult to imagine any government adept enough to withstand the Nixon administration's clandestine international offensive.

Unlike the political right, economic elites, and the U.S. government, Chile's middle class was neutral toward Allende at the start of his presidency. In the

⁵³ Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950–1973* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle against Allende, 1964–1973* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Gwynn Thomas, *Contesting Legitimacy in Chile: Familial Ideals, Citizenship and Political Struggle, 1970–1990* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

⁵⁴ Helms, "Meeting with the President on Chile at 1525."

⁵⁵ U.S. Senate, *Covert Action in Chile*.

struggle for the middle third, the economy took center stage. The objective was to polarize Chilean society, particularly by making life difficult for the middle class, which would eventually push them toward the conservative opposition. For much of the twentieth-century, the fate of the Chilean state had been intertwined with the Chilean middle class, which held a privileged place as both a beneficiary of state policies and a participant in creating them. The Popular Unity government discursively put the working class at the heart of its political project. In doing so, it neglected the “long-standing norms that had governed” the special relationship between the Chilean state and the middle class.⁵⁶ Social mobilization, often associated with the revolution from below, sought to accelerate the pace of Allende’s reforms and often challenged private property rights. For example, in southern Chile, the MIR and its peasant wing, the Revolutionary Peasants Movement (Movimiento de Campesinos Revolucionarios, MCR), collaborated with indigenous Mapuche peasants to reclaim ancestral lands and accelerate the pace of Popular Unity’s agrarian reform. Their actions prompted a violent response from landowners and extensive media coverage, which tended to inflate the scope of the threat of “violent *tomas*” and the MIR/MCR as “guerilla groups.” The Christian Democrats, through the opposition-controlled media, promoted “distorted depictions of the local situation [which] served as ammunition in the national political conflict.”⁵⁷ Historian Marcelo Casals concludes that both “real and imagined threats to middle-class social status, such as the expansion of state property, inflation, massive shortages of basic goods, and street violence,” eroded middle-class neutrality toward Allende.⁵⁸

In response to the opposition’s mobilization, Allende called a high-level meeting of Popular Unity at Lo Curro in June 1972. On the one hand, the moderate Communists advocated for consolidating the social gains already achieved and continuing negotiations with the Christian Democrats. On the other side, the more leftist Socialists called for accelerating the pace of reforms and backing the workers. The moderate side advocating class reconciliation, which reflected Allende’s own position, carried the day. Allende informed his supporters the following month, “[T]o continue governing in the service of the workers, it is my obligation to defend tirelessly the democratic institutional regime.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Marcelo Casals, “The Insurrection of the Middle Class: Social Mobilization and Counterrevolution during the Popular Unity Government, Chile, 1970–1973,” *Journal of Social History* 54:3 (Spring 2021): 944–969.

⁵⁷ Claudio Robles-Ortiz, “Revolution From Below in Panguipulli: Agrarian Reform and Political Conflict under the Popular Unity in Chile,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 18 (2018): 622. See also Casals, “The Chilean Counter-revolution,” 3.

⁵⁸ Casals, “Insurrection of the Middle Class,” 3.

⁵⁹ “Enérgico rechazo de Allende a la ‘Asamblea del Pueblo,’” *El Mercurio*, August 1, 1972, 8.

The Bosses Lockout: October 1972

In October 1972, the counterrevolutionary opposition launched a nationwide action aimed at creating the conditions for a coup. Politicians declared the Popular Unity government to be operating outside the law, going so far as to declare, “[T]he moment to act has arrived.”⁶⁰ Christian Democrats, the National Party, and the openly fascist paramilitary group *Patria y Libertad* marched together in the streets of downtown Santiago. A strike by truck owners in the remote southern province of Aysén in October 1972 soon spread across the country, threatening to bring the Chilean economy to a standstill. This was not a coincidence; it was “the culmination of more than a year of planning, and organization by Chile’s economic elites” to bring middle-class sectors over to their side.⁶¹ In the late 1960s, as the Frei administration’s reforms threatened their class interests, Chilean economic elites began to open their business associations, like the chamber of commerce and the National Agriculture Society, to smaller merchants, shopkeepers, farmers, and manufacturers. While this business movement remained controlled by elites, its visible face during the October Strike was the middle-class leaders “who could more effectively portray the action as a broad-based, popular rejection of Marxism.”⁶² According to the U.S. government’s Church Report, “anti-government strikers were actively supported by several of the private sector groups which received CIA funds,” which financially subsidized the lengthy strike that effectively prevented the movement of goods to markets and to consumers.⁶³

What the organizers of the Bosses Lockout had perhaps underestimated was the degree of popular support that Allende still held, despite the economic turmoil of the previous year. One sign at a pro-Allende rally read, “With this government, you have to wait in line, but this government is mine.”⁶⁴ Allende’s supporters, particularly workers, mobilized to defend the government, occupying factories and opening shops to keep the economy running. The Bosses Lockout, moreover, had strong class connotations. Unlike the illegal land occupations (*tomas*) in the city and countryside, the workers’ mobilization did not challenge the legal order: the lockout was illegal; to work was legal.⁶⁵ October 1972 also marked an important advance in grassroots democratic participation and popular-sector organizing through the creation of supply and price boards,

⁶⁰ Senator Alberto Baltra (PIR), quoted in Mires, *La rebelión permanente*, 358.

⁶¹ Peter Winn, *Weavers of Revolution: The Yarur Workers and Chile’s Road to Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 235.

⁶² Thomas C. Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 3rd ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2018), 157.

⁶³ U.S. Senate, *Covert Action in Chile*.

⁶⁴ Illanes, *La batalla de la memoria*, 158.

⁶⁵ Mires, *La rebelión permanente*, 359.

industrial belts (*cordones industriales*), and myriad other territorial organizations. These were not “soviets” or alternative institutions to the Chilean state—despite being decried as such by the opposition and celebrated as “embryos of power” by the far-left MIR and Socialist Party. Instead, they were grassroots social organizations that sought to deepen and expand democratic participation in the context of defending the democratically elected government. It was this mobilization from below that ultimately saved the Allende government in late 1972.

The left-wing Popular Unity pointed to this mass mobilization as evidence that revolutionary advance was possible and Allende should throw his support behind the workers. Yet by October 1972, Allende’s government was largely in a defensive position. Time and again, Allende reiterated that “he would not endorse an armed road to revolution nor suspend the Constitution. He would find a solution by continuing to navigate and stretch the inherited institutional framework.”⁶⁶ At the insistence of the opposition to guarantee congressional elections would be held in March 1973, Allende ultimately ended the Bosses Lockout by incorporating military officers into his cabinet.

Failure of a Political Resolution via the March 1973 Congressional Elections

After the October 1972 Bosses Lockout, the new battleground in the campaign to unseat Allende became the March 1973 congressional elections. The National Party and the Christian Democrats joined forces to form the Democratic Confederation. This center-right alliance vowed to attain the two-thirds majority in the Senate necessary to impeach Allende. The Nationalist Party (right) openly called not just for a new balance of power in Congress but also for a new government, accusing Allende of imposing Marxist totalitarianism. For its part, the Popular Unity government sought to rally its bases and secure a majority mandate for continued reforms. Consistent with Chile’s pluralist democratic traditions, it made sense to all sides of the political spectrum that the March 1973 congressional elections would be a referendum on the revolutionary process.

If Chileans looked to the polls for a resolution to the political crisis, the election results only reinforced the existing stalemate. Both sides could claim victory in the March elections. In absolute numbers the center-right coalition received 54.6% but failed to secure the two-thirds majority in Congress needed to impeach Allende. The left picked up seats in Congress, garnering 43.5% of the vote. Despite economic turmoil and growing unrest in the streets, support

⁶⁶ Steve J. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet’s Chile, 1973–1988* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 19.

for Allende's government went from 36% when he was elected in September 1970 to nearly 44% in March 1973. Although lower than the 50% in the March 1971 municipal elections, the results still indicated a remarkable level of support from Chile's poor majority for the changes carried out in the previous two years. The left-wing Popular Unity and MIR called for a revolutionary option to push forward support for worker mobilization. Allende steadfastly eschewed the idea that violence was necessary for revolution, refused to consider arming the workers, and relied, perhaps too heavily, on his skills at political negotiation to carry him through crisis points.

To the very end, Allende and the moderates continued to seek a negotiated political solution, only to face a Christian Democratic Party no longer interested in compromise. By 1973, the Frei-led conservative wing of the Christian Democrats not only dominated the party but also "sabotaged all attempts to reach an agreement with the government," including those sponsored by the Catholic Church.⁶⁷ Former president Frei concluded that "Marxism was the gravest threat to the institutions of liberal democracy and, to confront that challenge, unconstitutional and undemocratic measures could be temporarily warranted."⁶⁸ Without the numbers to impeach the president, the center and right in Congress could not remove Allende constitutionally. The National Party and the Christian Democrats arrived at the same conclusion: a military solution to the country's political impasse. The pivot of the Christian Democrats, who held the presidency from 1964 to 1970, to throwing their support behind the most authoritarian elements within the right indicates the extent to which politics can become so polarized that they become antidemocratic.

In the months ahead, the opposition movement gained greater traction and visibility. There were several aspects of the Popular Unity program that left it vulnerable to being exploited by the opposition. As manifested by the March of the Pots and Plans, the opposition successfully tapped into widely held beliefs about the obligation of the state to protect and provide for Chileans families as a rallying cry to delegitimize the government.⁶⁹ In March 1973, Catholic schoolchildren marched in the streets to protest the Allende government's educational reform plan. Despite being aligned with UNESCO's recommendations for modernization, the opposition painted it as an effort to circumvent parental authority and warned of children being shipped off to Cuba and the Soviet Union for political indoctrination. Second, the APS socialized sector of the economy benefited only some workers, not all, which opened the door for challenges from the revolution from below and their far-left political allies in the form of factory seizures

⁶⁷ Casals, "Insurrection of the Middle Class," 15.

⁶⁸ Hurtado, *Gathering Storm*, 201.

⁶⁹ Gwynn Thomas, "The Legacies of Patrimonial Patriarchalism: Contesting Political Legitimacy in Allende's Chile," *Annals of the American Academy* 636 (July 2011): 69–87.

and demands for inclusion in the APS. Meanwhile, the Christian Democrats successfully exploited preexisting labor petitions for salary adjustments to back a segment of copper miners as they launched a months-long strike.⁷⁰ The image of Catholic university and high school students marching alongside the copper miners underscored the sense that Allende had lost even the workers' support.

The Creeping Coup: June–September 1973

In late June 1973, the Allende government staved off a coup attempt, known as the Tanquetazo. As tanks rolled down Santiago's streets, leftist activists mobilized across Chile to defend workplaces and neighborhoods as they had during the Bosses Lockout in October 1972. Within hours, General Carlos Prats and forces loyal to the Constitution successfully put down the anti-Allende rebellion in Santiago. Congress refused to grant Allende's request for extraordinary powers to respond to the seditious uprising. Not only did the conspiratorial elements within the military escape punishment, but Allende once again brought the military back into his government, appointing General Prats as minister of defense. Despite vociferous demands from the left wing of his coalition, Allende never gave serious consideration to arming workers.⁷¹

Allende's decision to incorporate the military into his cabinet was likely the only way to end the October 1972 Bosses Lockout, but it had the effect of further politicizing the armed forces, which remained in the government until the March 1973 elections and again, following the failed military uprising in June 1973. Allende can be criticized for tolerating seditious right-wing elements within the military, for misjudging the extent of U.S. national security indoctrination, and for underestimating the anti-Communism among his officers corps. He trusted that the military would remain loyal to the Constitution, or at the very least, that his repeated efforts to demonstrate his respect for the Constitution would dissuade or sufficiently isolate any pro-coup tendencies, which had periodically surfaced with the 1969 failed military uprising under Frei, the 1970 Schneider assassination, and the failed coup attempt in June 1973.⁷² Internally, this final failed coup attempt served as an opportunity for the military to purge its ranks of those loyal to Allende. By June 1973, an important part of the high

⁷⁰ Thomas Miller Klubock, *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile's El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904–1951* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 282–295; Angela Vergara, *Copper Workers, International Business and Domestic Politics in Cold War Chile* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

⁷¹ Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,) 232–234.

⁷² Tanya Harmer, "Towards a Global History of the Unidad Popular," *Radical Americas* 6, no. 1 (June 2021): 6–7.

command of the armed forces of Chile had lost respect for the democratically elected government.

The political right did not share Allende's belief that the military should respect constitutional order. An openly seditious right engaged in "a propaganda campaign of terror, a legislative campaign of total obstructionism, and a secret conspiracy of treason against the democratic institutions that it publicly professed to defend."⁷³ Unable to instigate a coup in 1970, the Chilean political right and the U.S. government actively courted the Chilean armed forces. Coup plotting began to take shape in earnest in November 1972, shortly after the resolution of the Bosses Lockout. Based on firsthand accounts, mid-rank military officers met with middle-class activists, Christian Democrat-affiliated labor leaders, and business leaders, intentionally excluding segments of the top brass considered to be loyal to the Constitution.⁷⁴ After March 1973, the conspiracy widened to include the right wing of the Christian Democrats.

Writing in 1978, political scientist Arturo Valenzuela concluded that the Christian Democrats failed to appreciate how the "political game shifted" after the March elections and June 1973 Tanquetazo: "[I]n combating the dubious prospect of 'Marxist totalitarianism,' to the bitter end, they failed to realize how much of a stake they had in the democratic political order they thought they were defending. By not moving forcefully to structure a political solution, they seriously undermined the position of the president and his advisers who were clearly ready to reach a mutual accommodation."⁷⁵ This failure of moderate political elites on the left and center to reach an agreement in mid-1973 weakened not only the authority of Allende's government but also the legitimacy of the political class altogether. The front lines would increasingly be in the streets and in the barracks.

In 1970, the Chilean armed forces were essentially divided between those who opposed Allende's election on ideological grounds and those who remained sympathetic, or at least neutral, to Popular Unity's vision for national development.⁷⁶ At that time, Chilean military training incorporated elements from homegrown anti-Communism alongside counterinsurgency tactics promoted by the United States in the National Security Doctrine.⁷⁷ Yet they were by no

⁷³ Oppenheim, *Politics in Chile*, 91.

⁷⁴ Johnathan Kandell, "Chilean Officers Tell How They Began to Plan the Take-over Last November," *New York Times*, September 27, 1973, 3.

⁷⁵ Valenzuela, *Chile*, 107.

⁷⁶ Verónica Valdivia Ortiz de Zárate, "'¡Estamos en Guerra, Señores!' El régimen militar de Pinochet y el 'Pueblo,' 1973-1980," *Historia* 43, no. 1 (January-June 2010): 170. See also Verónica Valdivia Ortiz de Zárate, *El golpe después del golpe: Leigh vs. Pinochet, Chile, 1960-1980* (Santiago: LOM, 2003).

⁷⁷ For more on National Security Doctrine in Cold War South America, see Francisco Leal Buitrago, "La doctrina de seguridad nacional: materialización de la guerra fría en América del Sur," *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 15 (2003): 74-87.

means the dominant ideologies. By 1973, however, the military had started to interpret events within Chile through the National Security Doctrine framework, which opened the door to define segments of the civilian population as an internal enemy. After the failed June 1973 Tanquetazo, the military's internal analyses became dotted with references to the enemy within and internal warfare. Unlike Argentina and Uruguay in the 1970s, Chile had no armed revolutionary groups to challenge the military or the state's monopoly on violence. Instead, it was the armed forces that launched preemptive assaults on Allende's working-class supporters in July 1973.

Acting on the advice of General Prats and as a gesture of compromise, President Allende ratified the October 1972 opposition-sponsored Arms Control Law, which gave the Chilean armed forces the discretionary authority to search and seize weapons from the general population. Historian Peter Winn has argued that the application of the law served the dual purpose of intimidating Allende supporters and acclimating conscript soldiers—often drawn from poor sectors—to the abuse of fellow citizens.⁷⁸ Following the failed coup attempt in June 1973, the armed forces began to apply the law, carrying out raids in factories and working-class neighborhoods across Chile. Despite the fascist paramilitary *Patria y Libertad's* ongoing acts of sabotage, the military almost exclusively targeted pro-Allende working-class supporters, particularly the *cordones industriales* (industrial belts) that had organized to resist the Bosses Lockout. This “creeping coup” gutted the left and in many respects explained the weakened position of Allende's social base prior to the coup.

During this same period, the military carried out an internal house cleaning, detaining and torturing soldiers and marines suspected being loyal to Allende or the Constitution.⁷⁹ In August 1973, several sailors and civilian naval base workers were arrested on charges of sedition, and the national leadership of the Socialist Party, the MAPU, and the MIR were accused of attempting to infiltrate the Chilean armed forces. Secret meetings between the groups had taken place, but the initiative came not from above, but from below. Low-ranking sailors and civilian workers had overheard their superiors discussing coup plans, and they took action to warn the Popular Unity government. The opposition-controlled press amplified the charges as a left-wing conspiracy to infiltrate the armed forces.

On August 22, 1973, the Chilean Congress passed a partisan but nonbinding resolution declaring that Allende's government had violated the Constitution through its use of decree orders to carry out appropriations. Many scholars point

⁷⁸ Winn, “The Furies of the Andes,” 260–226.

⁷⁹ Jorge Magasich, *Los que dijeron No: Historia del movimiento de los marinos antigolpistas de 1973* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2008); Danny Monsálvez, “Agosto 1973: Proa al golpe en la armada: Los marinos antigolpe,” *Revista Tiempo y Espacio* 14 (2004): 203–233.

to this event as sealing Allende's fate, as it "provided a fig leaf of legitimacy for a military coup."⁸⁰ The following day, General Prats resigned as commander-in-chief of the Chilean Army. He had served as minister of the interior, a role equivalent to vice president in Chile, following the October 1972 Bosses Lockout. After his appointment as minister of defense in June 1973, right-wing women staged regular demonstrations to sprinkle chicken feed on the lawns of military officers, especially targeting General Prats. The failed June 29 coup attempt and the gendered protests convinced Prats that he had lost his officers' support and he resigned along with two other pro-Allende generals. The path had widened for the coup conspiracy to move forward. To replace Prats, President Allende respected the chain of command and appointed the next general in line: Augusto Pinochet Ugarte.

By September 1, 1973, the coup plan was already in place, with the Chilean navy taking the lead. It is unlikely the military would have been deterred by last-minute political negotiations between the Christian Democrats and Allende's government, nor by Allende's plans to hold a plebiscite. On September 10, fifty officers suspected of loyalty to Allende, including three generals and one admiral, were arrested. Those elements within the armed forces who might have defended democracy were preemptively neutralized.

September 11, 1973, Military Coup and the Legacies of Authoritarian Rule

One of the earliest, if now largely discredited, explanations for the breakdown of democracy in Chile framed it as an act of U.S. imperialism directed by President Nixon and his top advisor, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Unlike coups in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954), the Chilean coup was not CIA orchestrated or executed. Nor did it directly involve the U.S. military, as had occurred as recently as 1965 with the marine invasion to depose the democratically elected government of Juan Bosch in the Dominican Republic. Washington's actions did contribute to the destabilization of Allende's government, particularly as Nixon's September 1970 directive to "make the economy scream" materialized in mid-1972 along with U.S. material aid to key opposition groups like the striking truck drivers and copper miners. As has so often been the case in Latin America, the U.S. government was no friend to democracy. Pro-coup Christian Democrats, including Eduardo Frei, erroneously believed that after the coup, the United States would exert sufficient pressure for new elections and a return to civilian

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Quay Hutchinson, Thomas Miller Klubock, Nara B. Milanich, and Peter Winn, eds., *The Chile Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 351.

government. Instead, the Nixon administration immediately granted diplomatic recognition to the military junta, and despite mounting evidence of the systematic violation of human rights, U.S. military and economic aid readily flowed to the Pinochet regime over the next seventeen years.

Rather than understand the Latin American Cold War as derivative of super-power conflict, recent historical studies have suggested it was largely fought over different types of democracy.⁸¹ As elsewhere during Latin America's "democratic spring" in the 1930s and 1940s, Chile under the Popular Front governments witnessed tremendous gains by urban labor and the expansion of mass politics. For both the Communist and non-Communist left, democracy entailed striving for economic equality and guaranteeing the rights of social citizenship. Initially the United States backed these reforms and promoted the consolidation of Latin American welfare states, particularly with the Alliance for Progress aid program. Yet by the late 1960s, Washington increasingly jettisoned any notion of social citizenship in favor of a more limited definition of democracy centered on political and individual rights. Strong authoritarian tendencies in Latin American political thought, emboldened by Cold War anti-Communism with varying degrees of support from Washington, coalesced with violent fury to crush the left in Latin America and reverse decades of democratic gains.

The tragic end to Allende's government and Chile's democratic tradition was by no means inevitable. It was the result of contingent political decision-making by several actors: the Chilean armed forces with the active endorsement of the political right and center and the United States. It counted on the support of business sectors inside and outside of Chile and a sizable portion of the Chilean middle class mobilized through associations of professionals, small shop owners, truck drivers, students, and women.

The rhetoric and actions of the political right consistently undermined institutional stability. Historically, whenever the status quo had been challenged, Chile's upper classes had repeatedly turned to violent repression to retain power. Still smarting from the 1967 Agrarian Reform Law passed during Christian Democrat Frei's administration, they were vehemently opposed to Allende's election and the Popular Unity platform.⁸² Unlike the political left and center, the right did not share the belief that the military should respect constitutional order, underscoring the absence of "moral limits when it comes to defeating those it identifies as its mortal enemy."⁸³

⁸¹ Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), introduction; Greg Grandin, "Living in Revolutionary Time: Coming to Terms with the Violence of Latin America's Long Cold War," in Grandin and Joseph, *Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*, 1–42.

⁸² Casals, "The Chilean Counter-revolution," 7.

⁸³ Casals, "The Chilean Counter-revolution," 3.

While this antidemocratic camp was a small minority in 1970, by mid-1972 it had become a powerful mass movement “that would end up paving the way for the military coup.”⁸⁴ The Chilean middle class, politically aligned with the Christian Democrats, represented the linchpin as a nonelite base of public support for a military intervention. They had been economically squeezed by inflation and shortages; politically, their leaders in the Christian Democratic Party had already moved to the right; and anti-Communist and seditious messages were widely disseminated in the media. Anti-Communism, already deeply embedded in Chilean political culture, offered a coherent script to mobilize and expand the opposition’s ranks.

Despite the Chilean armed forces’ application of the National Security Doctrine as a framework, Chile was not experiencing a military crisis in 1973. Rather, military intervention responded to the country’s political, social, and economic crisis. Among the factors that stoked the military’s anti-Communist mindset and facilitated their move into politics, historian Veronica Valdivia points to the “capacity of the opposition to intensify the confrontational climate” gripping the country and conflict over private property.⁸⁵ On September 11, 1973, the military’s declaration of internal warfare against an enemy within did not correspond to reality: Chile had no leftist guerrilla movement. Rather, this National Security Doctrine framework served as justification for systematic violence against the Chilean lower classes and their political allies on the left. State terror aimed at eradicating the political, social, and cultural spaces built by the lower classes in the preceding century, particularly as social mobilization multiplied, and democratic participation flourished in the decade from 1964 to 1973.⁸⁶

The commitment of citizens, particularly those without significant economic or political power, to work within existing channels contrasted with the willingness of political elites to abandon democracy. Those who came to defend the Allende government and Chilean democracy were nonelites—the ordinary men and women who mobilized to keep the economy running during the Bosses Lockout in October 1972 and the low-level soldiers who tried to warn party leaders on the left of their superior officers’ conspiratorial plans, only to be detained and tortured. The same sectors experienced a creeping coup in the months running up to September 11, 1973, and disproportionately figure among those targeted for human rights abuses under military rule. In the seventeen years of military rule, state agents assassinated more than 3,000 citizens. More

⁸⁴ Casals, “The Chilean Counter-revolution,” 1.

⁸⁵ Valdivia, “¡Estamos en Guerra, Señores,” 170.

⁸⁶ Francisco Domínguez, “Violence, the Left, and the Creation of *Un Nuevo Chile*,” in *Political Violence and the Construction of National Identity in Latin America*, ed. Will Fowler and Peter Lambert (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 150.

than 38,000 Chileans survived imprisonment and torture in clandestine detention centers, and an additional 100,000 were subjected to torture during raids on working-class neighborhoods and mass round-ups following public protests.⁸⁷

Chile in 1973 offers a cautionary example of how class tensions reached a level where politicians and a significant amount of the electorate came to reject the basic principles and shared understandings that underpin democracy. By 1973, these sectors came to see “the price of inclusion of the masses—for example, wages, inflation, and property transfer, not to mention the ultimate possibility of radical social displacement”—as greater than the risks of direct conflict and military rule.⁸⁸ Unlike the ideologically divided left, antidemocratic actors successfully developed a more unified and better organized counterrevolutionary movement. Yet even those politicians and civilians, especially in the center, who actively courted military intervention and initially celebrated September 11, 1973, as Chile’s liberation, paid a much higher cost in the long run for losing democracy.

⁸⁷ Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds*, 392–395.

⁸⁸ Paul W. Drake, *Socialism and Populism in Chile, 1932–1952* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1978), 340.