

CHILE IN TRANSITION
By Marta Lagos

As Chile has been in transition back to democratic rule, my colleagues and I at the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Contemporanea have been using polls to monitor the outlook of her people. Here are some of our conclusions.

First, political moderation at the mass level remains striking even in the face of high unemployment, low income, and a weak and repressed trade union movement. People support pacific protest actions, and approve peaceful steps towards democracy—which they regard as the best political system.

Second, the public's economic priorities have shifted greatly from what they were prior to Pinochet's role. Reducing unemployment and extending job security are now the major concerns. Neo-liberal economic policies have been successful in combating inflation, but at the cost of high unemployment.

Third, the authoritarian regime failed to establish for the long-term the views and values underlying its ideology and practice: e.g., sharp criticisms of traditional liberal democracy and its politics, parties, and politicians; insistence that what the country needs most is protection against the internal enemies of subversion, communism, and terrorism; elevation of the army's role as the major actor in the defense of democracy. This failure is explained by the durability of democratic values, opinions and attitudes from pre-authoritarian Chile—built on its experience with democratic rule. The major parties today are the historical parties: Socialist and Communist on the left; Christian Democrat in the center; a splintered right.

Fourth, as in other post-authoritarian systems (e.g., Spain and Argentina) there is a large segment of the populace characterized by apathy, cynicism and low interest in politics, which leaves it frankly ambivalent about democracy. These people are disproportionately from those with low educational levels, more housewives than men, more older people than the middle-aged and youths.

Fifth, the Catholic Church is the institution with the most social support and prestige—well above parties, the justice system, government, trade unions, business organizations, and the armed forces (See Table below). Despite a long and repressive military rule, characterized by the appointment of several dozens of army officers to high political positions, the armed forces retain relatively high institutional prestige, and civilians manifest little real hostility toward them. This again might be also explained by historical continuity, in a country in which the armed forces have enjoyed high prestige and played a crucial role in state-making and democratization since the 19th century.

To sum up, we have not discovered in Chile something new under the sky. We have, instead, seen the working out of a political transition that is heavily influenced by the country's history, values, and traditions.

POLLS ABROAD: Lagos

RESPONDENTS' RATING OF CHILEAN INSTITUTIONS, BY RESPONDENTS' POSITION ON A LEFT-RIGHT SCALE

	LEFT					RIGHT					TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
CATHOLIC CHURCH	6.1	5.4	5.9	6.0	5.9	5.7	5.6	5.4	5.8	5.7	5.8
GOVERNMENT	2.1	2.2	2.4	2.6	3.7	4.4	4.8	5.1	5.0	5.5	3.8
OPPOSITION	5.9	6.0	5.6	5.7	5.1	4.4	3.9	3.5	4.5	3.5	4.8
ARMY	2.7	2.7	3.3	3.4	4.3	4.7	5.3	5.4	5.4	5.7	4.3
NAVY	3.0	2.9	3.6	3.7	4.6	5.0	5.6	5.7	6.0	5.8	4.6
AIR FORCE	3.2	3.2	3.9	4.0	4.8	5.3	5.7	5.7	5.6	5.8	4.8
POLICE FORCE	2.7	2.5	3.2	3.4	4.4	4.7	5.4	5.4	5.6	5.5	4.3
VICARIA FOR SOLIDARITY	6.2	6.3	6.2	6.2	5.8	5.3	5.0	5.1	4.9	4.7	5.6
JUDGES	3.2	3.0	3.8	3.6	4.4	4.7	4.9	5.3	5.5	5.2	4.3
POLITICAL PARTIES	5.1	5.1	5.1	4.9	4.7	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.6	4.3	4.7
PUBLIC ENTERPRISES	3.8	3.6	4.0	4.0	4.4	4.6	4.7	4.7	5.3	5.1	4.4
PRIVATE ENTERPRISES	3.2	3.3	3.8	3.6	4.2	4.4	4.8	4.8	5.1	5.1	4.2

Scale: 1 = very bad
7 = very good

NOTE: The survey was conducted in Chile in August 1989 by the *Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Contemporanea*. The sample includes 2100 respondents, 18 and more years old, in the three most important regions of Chile. The sample also includes the three most important cities of the country. It accounts for 62% of the population.