Raising the Red Flag: Democratic Elitism and the Protests in Chile

Matthew Rhodes-Purdy and Fernando Rosenblatt

The recent surge of global populism has led many intellectuals to call for new forms of democratic elitism. Yet research into the sources of support for political organizations and regimes predicts that suppressing opportunities for public participation will likely exacerbate antisystem political tendencies. We cite the recent protests in Chile, a nation that has employed democratic elitism more effectively than perhaps any other, as illustrative of the eventual consequences of suppressing voice. Our research indicates that empowering citizens through vibrant parties and continuous democracy is the best way to avoid populist impulses and waves of contentious politics.

The democratic world is in crisis: social unrest, collapses in legitimacy, and in some cases total systemic breakdowns have been increasingly common in recent years. Although the causal processes behind these crises are varied and conditioned by the histories of the countries that suffer them, most of them are driven in part by a sense of resentment against political elites. Even in countries like Chile, one of the best-governed countries in Latin America and the primary subject of this paper, waves of disaffection and social unrest seem to threaten the stability of political systems. There seems to be a widespread perception that political leaders care little for the concerns of ordinary people, and a concomitant set of demands for greater responsiveness and participation.

It is therefore surprising that in these days of populist uprisings, a number of highly respected scholars of democracy have recently argued that elites (usually unelected), can steer the course of politics away from danger zones such as ethnonationalism, demagoguism, populism, etc. (e.g., Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Mounk 2018; Rosenbluth and Shapiro 2018). Although many of the authors we cite here are not entirely comfortable with elitism, the label fits in the sense that these individuals want to shift the balance of power away from ordinary citizens and toward elites. Watching the rising tide of politicized xenophobia and populism is enough to make even the most stolid small-d democrat wonder if the elitists might be on to something.

That said, before advocating for a new era of democratic elitism, it is reasonable to ask if we are downplaying or ignoring some of the risks inherent in trying to throw ever more formidable barriers between the people and the state. There is a long and robust tradition in democratic theory (e.g., Held 2007; Rousseau 2002) that holds continuous and active participation in democratic politics to be necessary for human development; more recent research suggests it is crucial for building support for democratic regimes (Rhodes-Purdy 2017a, b) and other political organizations, such as political parties (Pérez Bentancur, Piñeiro Rodríguez, and Rosenblatt 2020). Elitism closes off political access to citizens and silences voice: the entire purpose of elitism is to reduce the power wielded by the public, in favor of maintaining elite autonomy. And the literature described earlier makes clear predictions about the results of suppressing voice for the sake of elite stability and technocracy: mass antipathy towards political systems of the sort that fuels populist revolts or violent (or at least aggressive) protest movements.

Our paper has three interrelated goals. First, it provides a cautionary tale about the risks and costs of democratic elitism by analyzing the recent (and not so recent) protests waves in Chile. We have chosen to focus on Chile in part because it may well be the strongest empirical argument in

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doi:10.1017/S1537592721000050

favor of democratic elitism. The country has bucked regional trends and excelled in economic growth, employment, poverty reduction, budgetary discipline, and control of corruption. In other words, we use Chile as a real-world "steel man" argument for elitism and technocracy: drawing on prior research, we show that even the country that has used elitism most successfully could not escape its pernicious effect on legitimacy and system support.

Of more interest to the general reader is our second goal, which is to observe a real-world state in which elitism has been pushed to the absolute maximum for a democratic regime. Chile should serve as a cautionary tale for those who believe democratic elitism to be the solution to the global legitimacy crisis, because, as we will show, such a strategy continuously generates the antisystem sentiments that it is intended to contain.

Finally, we argue that Chile (and Uruguay, which we briefly discuss to illustrate the possibility of a different kind of politics) suggests that continuous democracy, with political parties as the primary mechanism, is the most promising way to overcome the legitimacy challenges democracies will likely face in the coming years. If democracy is to survive in the twenty-first century in the context of a more empowered citizenry and with an abundance of information, political systems must incorporate permanently open points of entry for citizens to express their voice. We do not advocate any major departure from representative democracy (i.e., we do not suggest that direct or participatory alternatives should replace representation, which is nearly impossible in large-scale societies). Rather, we argue that representative democracy must deepen, and allow for a more continuous, citizen-focused model of representation. Political parties are the natural candidate to provide those channels for citizens to express their voice effectively on a permanent basis. Other institutions should also include such spaces to increase the legitimacy of the decision-making process, but parties are the most effective mechanism to give voice to citizens in national politics. Any attempt to face the global crisis of liberal and representative democracy should aim to promote permanent and open channels for expressing voice in democratic settings.

Our primary goal is to warn both policymakers and activists away from elitist strategies to manage political discontent, yet a warning without an alternative path would be of little use to anyone. We therefore advocate for continuous democracy and argue that political parties are the most important organization through which this robust form of democracy can occur in contemporary societies. Yet any effort to democratize parties must recognize that parties are not entirely free to respond to demands for reform: they are constrained by institutions and the rules of the democratic game that prevail in a given context. This raises another question: where should reformers and activists direct their efforts? Is elitism a characteristic of parties, party systems, or institutional environments?

Party leaders have some degree of agency and some level of freedom to pursue different strategies within the institutional environment. Nevertheless, this agency is not entirely free. Parties face considerable pressures (to win elections, to expand their influence, etc.), many of which originate in institutional incentives and constraints. Party leaders who prefer elitist forms of politics may be forced to allow more robust participation if the electoral survival of the party or their own position within the party depends upon it; conversely, even leaders who are open to a more participatory mode of politics may adopt elitist tactics if they see participation as risky or unlikely to benefit themselves or their parties.

In other words, parties may exist in institutional environments that are either permissive of or hostile toward continuous democracy, and activists must adapt their tactics to suit the institutional environment. In permissive environments, working within parties will likely be sufficient to progress toward continuous democracy. In hostile environments, however, activists and reformers must attack elitism on multiple fronts. First, they must advocate for reform to the institutional environment to tear down barriers to parties serving their participatory function, and to push for institutional variants that encourage broad participation and vibrant party organization. Yet institutional reform alone will not be sufficient: as we state earlier, parties are not robots that respond mechanically to incentives and constraints.

As we show later in this paper, the Chilean political system has democratized a great deal since its inception in 1990, yet party elites, accustomed as they are to democratic elitism and interparty bargaining, have done little to take advantage of these new opportunities. Even with more significant reforms on the horizon, we should not expect parties to instantly adapt to the new reality; they are more likely to cling to political methods and strategies that they have grown to accept and even embrace. Activists must be prepared to push parties directly in more participatory directions, and we expect that some parties will adapt more quickly than others; if this bears out, elitism will remain a factor in Chile (and similar systems), but it will become an element of individual parties, rather than the institutional environment and the party system.

We do not limit our argument to parties of any specific ideology. Right wing parties can and do form grassroots bases of support in some circumstances; indeed, the most deeply rooted party in Chile is the far-right Independent Democrat Union (UDI). Populist radical right parties have also developed roots in society in Europe (Ignazi 1992, Norris 2005, Mudde 2007). That said, this is not typical for traditional right parties; such parties face considerable challenges in balancing the interests of core (i.e., elite) constituents and popular activists, and outreach

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721000050 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to popular-sector voters can risk diluting a party's brand (Lupu 2016, 2013). As a result, most of the discussion in this paper relates to left parties, as they do not face such barriers to acting as participatory channels, without denying the possibility of right parties (especially populist parties) serving a similar purpose.

Democratic Elitism: The Chilean Case

Chile's political trajectory in the latter third of the twentieth century was chaotic, especially when compared to the relative stability the country had maintained in previous eras. During the first half of the twentieth century Chile saw the rise of the industrial working class, rapid polarization in the 1960s, and the first democratically elected Marxist, Salvador Allende, in 1970. We have no wish to relitigate the Allende era; suffice it to say that political and economic crises (partly caused by a campaign of sabotage by the United States and the Chilean far right) eventually led to Allende's ouster in a military coup that included images of the air force bombing the presidential palace and Allende's suicide on September 11, 1973. The result was a military dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet that lasted until 1988, when Pinochet's bid to extend his presidency was defeated in a plebiscite. A two-year transition process followed, and democracy was restored in 1990.

Although Chile democratized after seventeen years of brutal military rule, it was a democracy of a peculiar sort. Having enacted a revolutionary transition from economic statism to an extreme version of free-market neoliberalism, the exiting Pinochet regime had no intention of allowing "populists" to erase its economic legacy, not to mention its members' freedom and often ill-gotten wealth.

To this end the military bequeathed to the nascent democracy a constitution that is both formally democratic and intensely elitist. The document bears little resemblance to genuine modern democracies, but instead reflects the anxieties of liberals (e.g., Locke 2003; Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 2008; Schumpeter 2008) who accept the need for elections as checks on governmental abuses but nevertheless deeply distrust the uneducated and easily-swayed masses of people. These scholars raise some valid concerns about mass democracy. Voters often lack the time and information necessary to commit on a permanent basis to politics. Popular preferences are often inchoate, making it difficult for any democratic institutions, no matter how strong, to translate the amorphous "general will" into specific policies (Przeworski 2010; Riker 1988). Also, voters do undeniably fiercely support leaders and movements that are manifestly opposed to genuine democracy. Democratic elitists therefore argue that scholars and activists should focus on creating sociopolitical environments that foster democratic preferences among elites (Higley and Burton 2006; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013); these institutions are often inimical to broad public participation, which many elites will view as threatening. We acknowledge that some of these concerns are valid, and that elite buy-in (especially in the young and unstable democracy) should be considered carefully.

Yet these arguments fail to recognize that solutions to problems during transition and consolidation may cause problems of democratic deepening if systems do not adapt as democracy's survival becomes assured. The risk in many democracies is not a violent democratic breakdown but steady erosion due to poor democratic quality (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Chile certainly matches this description: early concerns over the viability of democracy led to the maintenance of a constitution that allows *chilenos* to select their leaders, and then invites them to stand aside and allow those leaders to do what they believe is best.

This system was not crafted over protests by the anti-Pinochet opposition. Fear of "populism" runs deep through the Chilean political psyche (Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017), which is hardly surprising given the economic and social turmoil of the Allende years. And in the early democratic period (roughly corresponding to the period between transition and Pinochet's arrest in London in 1998, based on a Spanish warrant accusing the former dictator of human rights violations), fear of provoking the military exacerbated this hard-learned wariness of how public agitation could destabilize a fragile political system.

As a result, opponents of the military regime (i.e., the *Concertación*, a coalition of center and leftist parties) did little to counter attempts to exclude the public: center and leftist parties decided to cut ties with their grassroots activists out of fear of polarizing the fragile democratic transition (Roberts 1998). They were focused on ensuring the stability of the presidential terms, not giving a long-silenced public a voice in politics. But fear of the past and any omens it might have had for future troubles borne of public inclusion was not the only factor that contributed to the development of democratic elitism in Chile.

The Institutional Setting of the 1980 Constitution

If one were looking for a template document for an elitist democracy, it is difficult to think of a better choice than Chile's 1980 constitution. No other constitution manages to marginalize its citizens so thoroughly while still meeting the minimum requirements to be considered a competitive, liberal democracy. It does so through interlocking rules that discourage political elites from attempting to mobilize large majorities to score policy victories.

For one, until recently, Chile's electoral system[1] made it extremely difficult for any political faction to gain a substantial majority in the lower house of parliament. The binomial system, a strange variant of proportional representation with a district magnitude of two, allowed a minority party or coalition to receive one of two seats per district by getting a mere 33% of the vote. Scholars have

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721000050 Published online by Cambridge University Press

long squabbled over the extent to which this system has disproportionately advantaged the political right (Zucco 2006; c.f. Polga-Hecimovich and Siavelis 2015), although the clear intent was to allow the right enough seats to remain a powerful veto player even if it only had weak popular support.

In another country, this might not be such a serious failure of democracy. Plenty of electoral systems distort popular preferences when assigning legislative seats, including the plurality system of the United States and Westminster systems. However, institutions do not exist in a vacuum, but in an institutional setting where they interact with other rules and procedures. In the Chilean case, the distortions introduced by the electoral system have much more severe consequences for the exercise of popular voice due to other elements of the political system. These include supermajority requirements to pass legislation on important policy issues (e.g., labor policy, taxation, education) that would be handled by simple pluralities in other democracies. Moreover, until 2006, appointed senators[2] made it virtually impossible for the center-left to gain a majority in the upper chamber.

Thus, the only way to undertake major policy reforms was to cut deals with the opposition. This is an extreme example of the liberal principle that consent of the minority should be necessary for all but the most minor policy changes, in order to ensure that the majority does not violate the rights of minority-bloc citizens, and to contain government within its proper bounds. It should be noted that this arrangement is also inherently conservative; breaking with the status quo was intentionally made a herculean task.

Weak Voice

This institutional setting incentivizes elites to embrace their roles as gatekeepers, especially for those on the left. The need to forge compromises with members of the right bloc renders popular pressure extremely risky; mass mobilization of leftist social organizations and social constituencies would likely be perceived as provocative by the rightist moderates that the left needs to win over.

These incentives allowed the authoritarian right-wing elite to remain a powerful political force (Siavelis 2010). Elites of the center and left, many of whom had personally faced repression during the military regime, adopted a preference for stability and ensuring the survival of the fragile new democracy. Given that democratic instability and uncertainty tends to encourage elites to focus on short-term gains over long-term transformative politics (Lupu and Riedl 2012), it is hardly surprising that the leaders of the center-left coalition moderated. In practical terms, this meant breaking ties with grassroot social movements that had been activated in preparation for the 1988 plebiscite (Roberts 1998). Instead, the center-left coalition converted into electoral-professional parties, appealing to voters through mass media on the basis of competent economic and political management of the country. In other words, the parties of the left depoliticized: no longer would they see themselves as the vehicles through which subaltern sectors struggled for power (Rosenblatt 2018).

Furthermore, the entire structure of the constitution mitigated against any attempts by the left to retain its politics: systemic changes that would fundamentally shift the balance of social power would be all but impossible under the constitution and its associated organic laws. In addition to the issue of the electoral system, the constitution fortified the market neoliberalism imposed by the Pinochet regime. Reform to complex systems like health and education are always difficult, but the Chilean constitutional system (including the document itself, its associated organic laws, and interpretations of the document) generally favors the property rights of elites over the social rights of the broader public. As Huber, Ragin, and Stephens (1993) predict, this hostile constitutional structure (along with the strong counter-majoritarian checks) reduces the possibility of major reform, without which the neoliberal and elitist status quo that existed at the time of the constitution's ratification in 1980 is almost impossible to challenge. These constitutional provisions would not be so daunting if they were interpreted by a neutral court. The Constitutional Court in Chile (The Court), however, has consistently favored the status quo. The Court has considerable power to influence legislation, well beyond that held by typical constitutional courts. As public law scholar Bassa (2015) argues, the Court and its justices behave less like judges and more like legislators, intimately engaging in the entire legislative process.

The Court is not simply an impartial arbiter of the law, but instead often has an ambiguous role that is part judicial and part political (Bassa 2015, 256). And in this role the Court (as well as conservative legal scholars who share ideological sympathies with its members) have played an important role in blocking transformative politics. The Court has consistently interpreted ambiguous elements of the constitution (especially those relating to social rights like education and health care) in ways that explicitly favor the entrenched interests of economic elites over those of the popular sectors. The Court relies heavily on writings of the Comisión de Estudios para la Nueva Constitución (Study Commission for a New Constitution), which operated during the initial years of the Pinochet regime, and thus the hard right views of that regime are continually encoded into modern constitutional interpretation (Bassa 2018). The Court's continuous role in the legislative process allows it to preempt reforms that it might be reluctant to strike down once promulgated by the legislative branch. In short, both the structure of the institutional design and the interests and ideologies of the actors empowered by those institutions form a mutually

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721000050 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reinforcing mechanism by which the constitutional structure's elitist elements are amplified.

Again, institutional effects are interactive. Atria (2013) points to the Court, the organic laws, and the difficulty of amending the constitution as three of the four "Constitutional traps" (the fourth being the binomial system) that allow the elite minority to protect its interests against popular demands. These systems, working together, produced an environment in which the purpose of constitutional law is not to protect vulnerable minorities from the tyranny of the majority, but to protect the interests of a wealthy and powerful minority against demands to redistribute power and wealth (Bassa 2018). Even if the center-left coalition could somehow surmount the barriers put in place by the binomial system and supermajorities, the right could always threaten to overturn a transformative process by taking the controversy to a conservative and excessively politicized court (Atria 2013; Bassa 2018, Busch Venthur 2012). Recently the court has opposed several reforms undertaken by the elected branches, related to labor reform, abortion, and strengthening the consumer protection agency (2018).

In addition to the Court, several other provisions of the Constitution were designed to repress popular demand-making. The most objectionable was the National Security Council, a body whose majority was to be appointed by the military, that had the right to overrule virtually any decision in the name of national security (Rhodes-Purdy 2017b, ch. 6); the council's role was revoked in the reforms of 2005 but its role profoundly influenced the transition process. Until 2005, a third of the Senate was appointed, rather than elected. The constitution also limited any collective bargaining to the firm level, drastically reducing the power of unions. Even though most of these barriers were removed by subsequent reforms, they served to enforce entrenched interests through the transition process, and thus established norms and ways of doing politics to which all party elites acclimated.

To summarize, the 1980 constitutional system was designed to place filters and barriers between the people and the state far beyond what is normal for liberal democracies. Any attempt by political parties to mobilize voters in pursuit of transformative politics would inevitably crash against wall after wall of undemocratic veto players. In this context, even a party with strong preferences for popular empowerment would have little choice but to demobilize and opt for more conciliatory forms of politics. Nor were these barriers ideologically neutral: they were intended to preserve the balance of power that had been structured under military rule, where economic elites were protected against incursions by democracy and redistributive demands.

With the decline of popular participation and grassroots activists came the rise of *los técnicos.* Chilean presidents of all political stripes came to rely on expert commissions, staffed by highly educated professionals (many holding advanced degrees from Ivy League institutions in the United States). In turn, their policy decisions were implemented by a well-trained and professional civil service. Although privileging technical competence over politics contributed to Chile's macroeconomic stability and an enviable record of economic growth and poverty reduction, it also occasionally produced some colossal unforced errors. The reform of the public transit system in the nation's capital (the infamous Transantiago crisis of 2007), almost completely ignored the societal impact of a major reform to the way people use public transportation in Chile's capital. While the reform was well prepared by experts, its implementation was a mess, as might be expected when virtually no one involved in policy making would even consider getting on a bus.[3]

Consequently, the top-level elites in the center-left coalition have consistently resisted any attempts to connect more profoundly with grassroots activists or new social movements, such as the student movement. As has been extensively documented, the Chilean party system became ossified and uprooted (Luna and Rosenblatt 2012; Luna and Altman 2011; Rosenblatt 2018). A few years after the transition to democracy, Chilean parties showed increasing signs of organizational fragility. Different institutional and organizational variables explain this outcome, especially the electoral rules and the absence of state funding to develop the party organization. The Chilean party system was not able to channel demands emanating from poor sectors of the Chilean society or new demands that emerged form a rapidly changing (and modernizing) society.

Democratic Elitism and Contentious Politics

The technocratic turn further alienated citizens from democracy. Privatization of key social services and an institutionally-enforced *laissez-faire* economic model took most issues of interest for poor and working-class citizens off the table (Kurtz 2004b, a; Roberts 1998). As a result, politics in Chile's new democracy quickly turned boring, technocratic, and detached from society in general. The Concertation developed an elite of decision-makers, including politicians, technocrats, and technopols, or politicians with technical expertise and experience (Joignant 2011). This decision-making style consolidated as the new normal way of doing politics. In other words, democratic elitism and technocracy in Chile have multifaceted origins, involving reactions (both emotional and attitudinal) to a turbulent history, incentives and constraints imposed by the institutional setting, and socialization to new ways of doing politics.

To summarize, Chile has become what Rousseau envisioned when he claimed citizens in liberal democracies were free only during the split-second when casting ballots

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721000050 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for parliament; at all other times, citizens had no political power, and were subject to the whims of those they elected (Rousseau 2002). The *técnicos* became the new philosopher-kings, guiding society unrestrained by the whims of the masses. Chile is a democracy, but one in which popular participation is extremely constrained outside of periodic elections. And this lack of continuous democracy is a major part of the reason why Chile is currently on fire, about to tear down its constitutional system and start over from scratch. The Chilean political system has managed to get by for years based on extraordinary policy performance: it achieved high levels of economic growth and poverty reduction (especially in the 1990s) and it has been a beacon of macroeconomic stability in a region plagued with inflationary spirals among many other macroeconomic imbalances.

As this piece has been mostly critical of Chile, it is only fair that we fully acknowledge the incredible competence and efficacy of the *Concertación* and its leaders in their management of Chile's economy (the country barely took a scratch from the 2008 financial crisis). While Chile's successes are undeniable and there is an abundant literature describing and explaining it, the country's defenders err by assuming that policy performance alone can be sufficient for maintaining the social order that comes with strong legitimacy.

Continuous Democracy in Action: Uruguay and the Frente Amplio (FA)

If Chile shows the pitfalls of democratic elitism, Uruguay shows the benefits of continuous democracy and the conditions that need to be in place for such a model to thrive. We do not intend to conduct a full-scale comparative analysis here; our focus is Chile and what it can tell us about elitist democracy in general. We do, however, briefly discuss Uruguay to demonstrate that Chile's problems are not intrinsic to developing states, nor to Latin America, nor to the Southern Cone countries, but are in fact the result of specific institutional effects on the Chilean party system specifically and the political system generally. Uruguay shows that political party organizational structures, rising due to a combination of actors' choices, historical trajectories, and institutional structures, can and do provide opportunities for continuous democracy in a context that is at least somewhat similar to Chile. In short, we do not use Uruguay to control variables, but to demonstrate the practical utility of our argument: things are different in Uruguay, and thus could be different in Chile as well, should the institutional context change and if parties decided to adapt.

Unlike Chile, Uruguay's institutional environment encourages broad-based engagement between parties and base-level activists and voters. While a comprehensive description of Uruguayan institutions is beyond the scope of this paper, we can briefly illustrate the key features of the Uruguayan system that are relevant. First, Uruguay has checks and balances, but it has more balances than checks, in the sense that there are no veto players with sufficient power to enforce the status quo over popular majorities. For example, the Supreme Court's role is less expansive than in Chile: courts may engage in judicial review but cannot nullify laws due to constitutional incompatibility, only prevent their enforcement on a case-by-case basis.

Second, the electoral system encourages internal party democracy. The combination of closed lists with the double simultaneous vote (DSV) allows democratic competition both within and between parties. Voters are allowed to choose from multiple lists (which cannot be modified, avoiding the personalism associated with open-list PR (Ames 1995)) within their party. This allows parties to settle factional disputes and disagreements democratically, while maintaining party unity (Buquet, Chasquetti, and Moraes 1999; Piñeiro Rodríguez 2007). Third, Uruguay has direct democracy mechanisms that can be activated from below. This allows the public a check on political elites: if elite bargains stray too far from public opinion, the people can attempt to counter the move. Even if such attempts fail, the failure itself confers greater democratic legitimacy on the policy (Altman 2010).

Of course, there are complexities here we do not and cannot address in such a brief discussion, but the picture is clear: electoral incentives and checks and balances align to allow parties to engage with their base-level activists and voters, as winning broad and consistent support from the electorate is the only way to achieve policy goals.

Consequently, Uruguayan parties tend to be much more deeply rooted than their Chilean counterparts, although this varies considerably between parties. The Uruguayan Frente Amplio (Broad Front, FA) is well ahead of the other major parties in its commitment to permanently foster the engagement and participation of its activists. The FA has an organizational structure and rules that facilitate the incorporation of new activists and, at the same time, activists are present throughout the party structure, including a decisive role in the decision-making bodies of the party (Pérez Bentancur, Piñeiro Rodríguez, and Rosenblatt 2020). This explains the party's ability to remain as the only institutionalized mass organic leftist party in Latin America (Levitsky and Roberts 2011). The FA is unique in the intensity of its mechanisms for continuous democracy among parties in Uruguay, but even the older, more traditional Uruguayan parties (National and Colorado, founded in 1836) are far more open and inclusive than their Chilean counterparts, taking advantage of a system that fosters institutionalized internal competition. Elites within the traditional parties are not as committed to continuous democracy as the FA, but they face the reality that the only way for elites to advance and for parties to enact their preferred policies is through

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721000050 Published online by Cambridge University Press

maximizing their electoral success in a system which is by design open.

The results are enviable: Uruguay routinely ranks highest in citizen satisfaction with democracy and support for the political system and has been virtually immune to the populist impulses that periodically sweep Latin America. And while mass demonstrations are by no means unusual in Uruguay, they are almost invariably peaceful and goal-oriented, whereas protests in Chile almost inevitably turn violent and destructive, in part because of brutal police repression but also because extreme disruption is the only tool protesters have to force elites to listen to them.

In other words, dynamics in Chile (as well as Uruguay, which we use from here as a contrast case) may have flummoxed those who believe citizens only want a chicken in every pot and the trains to run on time,[4] but they are consistent with a large body of scholarship from social psychology[5] that addresses how people evaluate the organizations to which they belong, especially those that exert control or power over them. The underlying logic is simple, yet powerful: *how* decisions are made is just as, if not more, important that the actual content of those decisions.

The Political Psychology of Democratic Elitism

Recent research in the area of political system support (Rhodes-Purdy 2017a, b) finds that support based on policy performance is inherently fragile. Far more durable is support based on genuine democratic inclusion and participation; citizens who feel like their political system gives them a significant voice in politics will stand by that system even in troubled times. In other words, genuine, vibrant democracies have room to make mistakes, and to weather the storms of policy crises and occasional governmental lapses in competence. Elitist democracies, on the other hand, had best get it right every single time; because the smallest mistake could bring outbursts of discontent. A reservoir of legitimacy is crucial for periods of crisis. This reservoir is only available for organizations and institutions that incorporate their stakeholders in the decision-making process. The logic is simple: individuals will support political institutions and organizations if they have substantial influence on the decision-making process. Also, if one feels part of the decisions and the destiny of an organization or institution, it will be less likely that she will jump ship whenever things go awry.

While it might seem that people should only care if an organization produces good outcomes, individuals embedded in organizations where they are subject to the authority of others cannot trust that favorable outcomes today will guarantee continued performance indefinitely. People must constantly worry that they might be exploited, that leaders of the organization will make decisions for their own benefit, disregarding the interests of those beneath them. As a result, if decision-making procedures are just (more on how just is defined momentarily), a person will maintain faith in an organization even if it occasionally makes decisions which may be painful for that person. Conversely, if decision-making processes are unjust, organizations can only win support as long as the organization consistently makes good decisions.

Yet this support will be fragile, dependent on consistently good performance. Support based on procedural justice is considerably more durable than that based on favorable outcomes. This occurs because procedural justice shapes individual perceptions of the organizations to which they belong in multifaceted ways. Justice builds support, but it also prevents people from withdrawing support when outcomes are poor, and it can also make bad outcomes seem less terrible (Rhodes-Purdy 2020). In other words, procedural justice provides more than an alternative mechanism for building support. When justice is high, an organization can ride out the effects of unsuccessful choices, at least for a time. On the other hand, organizations with low procedural justice will instantly lose support if they fail to produce excellent outcomes. Thus, the margin of error for organizations that rely on competence is extremely narrow.

Most of this work has focused on employees within firms, disputants in court procedures, and interactions with the police. Yet recently, this logic has been applied to democratic states (Magalhães 2016, Dahlberg, Linde, and Holmberg 2015). Democracies are hierarchical organizations, and therefore subject to the same logic as firms and courts. As such, all the elements of justice (e.g., transparency, impartiality, absence of corruption) that pertain to more typical subjects of this literature also pertain to democracy. Yet democracies are also unique among hierarchical organizations in that they grant some degree of power to their lowliest members. This power can vary wildly in its balance between popular control and elite autonomy. The model of democracy as envisioned by the U.S. founding fathers, for example, tipped the scales heavily in favor of elites, with a minimal role for the public. On the other hand, many contemporary democracies have shifted power back to the public, through institutions such as more representative electoral systems, a reduction of checks and balances (e.g., parliamentarism), and even elements of direct democracy (e.g., initiatives, referenda, and recall petitions).

In short, while all democracies give some power to ordinary citizens, some give more than others. While all parties (and other political institutions) give some power to their adherents, only a few give real decision-making power to their activists. And this differential in the elite/popular balance of power has a profound effect on how citizens view the democratic regimes that govern them (Rhodes-Purdy 2017b, ch. 2; 2017a). The extent to which citizens have meaningful influence in the political process,

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which we have called "participatory opportunities" or "strong voice," is a crucial part of the procedural justice of democracies (Rhodes-Purdy 2020; Pérez Bentancur, Piñeiro Rodríguez, and Rosenblatt 2020; Rhodes-Purdy 2017b).[6] States which grant citizens significant power are thus better able to overcome policy crises with their legitimacy intact, while those which do not delegate such power are likely to manifest symptoms of antisystem sentiments, such as mass protests or the rise of populists, as a result of even modest policy failures.

When considered in light of procedural justice theories of regime support, the Chilean protests are considerably easier to understand. The modest increase in transit fares did not "cause" the protest; it was merely the most recent trigger for a citizenry that feels excluded and ignored to rapidly withdraw support from a regime which cares little for what ordinary people want or think. Furthermore, it helps explain why the protests rapidly devolved into such extreme destruction. Every element of the Chilean political system, from institutions to elite attitudes to the police response, is arrayed against the effective use of voice by the public. In such an environment, what else but a primal outburst of rage and frustration severe enough to totally shut down public life could force elites to listen? It is somewhat perverse to scold the protesters for their excesses, when the political system gives them *no other way to influence politics*, except to wait for the next election. Do we really expect citizens to simply keep their frustrations to themselves for years?

What Is the Alternative? Vibrant Parties and Continuous Democracy

Although the focus of this essay is to raise an alarm about democratic elitism as it gains prominence as a potential guard against populism and other popular excesses, it is incumbent on us to briefly discuss possible alternative tactics for confronting the democratic world at the current moment.

To begin, we are skeptical of the trendiest solution to these problems, namely participatory and direct democracy. We do not deny that initiatives, referenda, participatory budgeting, and other such direct and participatory mechanisms can and do have a positive influence on democratic quality in some circumstances. Yet these mechanisms also have significant risks that should not be ignored (Altman 2010). For one, these mechanisms (especially referenda) often seem to produce the kind of apocalyptically short-sighted policies that give classical liberals nightmares (Brexit and California's Proposition 187 spring immediately to mind).

More insidious to those of us who argue for the importance of strong voice in democracy is the tendency of these programs to draw energy and attention away from national politics toward local issues. In extreme cases, leaders with authoritarian leanings (such as Hugo Chávez) can use participatory mechanisms to legitimate their dominance at the national level by deepening democracy at the local level (Rhodes-Purdy 2015; 2017b, ch. 5). In short, while participatory and direct democracy can play a productive role, they are too manipulable by elites and require too much information and sophistication of voters to be a viable short- or medium-term solution to the legitimacy crisis the world confronts now.

The most widely used mechanisms of direct/participatory democracy tend to suffer the same temporal problems as electoral democracy: they confine the use of voice (even strong voice) to specific moments in time, which may or may not correspond to upsurges in demands. This can distort the results of such mechanisms: if the Brexit referendum were held a few days later, without heavy rain in London, the results may have been different. That the most consequential political choice in a generation hinged on the whims of Zeus should cause even the most die-hard supporter of direct democracy to pause for a moment of quiet reflection.

Modern democracies do not need more one-off or temporally bounded half-measures; they need continuous, open channels of communication between the state, political leaders, and society. These channels must work both ways; political leaders must effectively communicate information to their base-level militants, and base activists must have constant and unrestricted (i.e., no one can be prevented from participating) mechanisms for pressing claims and demand-making. Disputes and competition over demand prioritization must be handled democratically, so that the loyalty of factions who do not get their way is maintained.

Based on our studies of Chile, Uruguay, and other democracies, we believe the most important solution to the global legitimacy crisis rests in political parties. Parties are the single most powerful mechanism by which collective action is enabled, interests are aggregated, and strong voice can be maximized. In short, parties can turn subjects into citizens, actors capable of having a meaningful impact on the political process in complex, modern democracies. More to the point, parties can do what elections, referenda, and participatory budgeting cannot: provide enduring, continuous channels for voice.

The FA in Uruguay, with its extensive inclusion of perspectives and intense deliberation and internal democracy, is perhaps the best real-world example of this. The FA's organizational model, where the party is seen not as a monolith but as a coalition of left-leaning factions and a movement of grassroots activists, has proven extraordinarily effective at balancing interests and maintaining unity among the often-fractious factions that make up the modern left in most countries. The literature on civic associations and some new books in the study of party politics also point to the same direction: relational, participatory, and effective inclusion of many members builds

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721000050 Published online by Cambridge University Press

stronger and more legitimate organizations (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Han 2014, 2016). Pérez Bentancur, Piñeiro Rodríguez, and Rosenblatt (2020) show how organizational rules that promote the active role of grassroots activists helps explain the vibrant reproduction of the Uruguayan FA. The Obama campaign is also an example of deep engagement of voluntary activists as a major source of strength of his successful campaign in 2007 and 2008 (McKenna and Han 2014), as were successful campaigns for the Senate in Georgia.

In an institutionalized party system, one characterized by enduring parties that incorporate and balance interest groups and provide for ongoing participation and strong voice, continuous democracy engenders individuals' attachment and support; this support helps maintain loyalty even when outcomes are unfavorable, as they will inevitably be from time to time (Luna et al. 2020; Piñeiro Rodríguez and Rosenblatt 2020). Political decisions become a shared destiny, not a gift (or a curse) brought by leaders, who are drawn from a political class that is different from the general citizenry.

By contrast, the anger and societal unrest that we observe in allegedly stable and functioning democracies derives from the stark separation of leaders from the governed. Nowhere is this more apparent in Chile. The side effect of Chile's dual transitions (from authoritarian regime to democracy and from the Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) model of development to open market economies) was a closed party system, tied weakly with society, where the political class became fundamentally divorced from the run of ordinary life (Luna and Altman 2011; Rosenblatt 2018). Successful economic and social modernization collided with the lack of popular incorporation to produce the present crisis of legitimacy. High levels of development, and free and fluid circulation of information, cannot coexist with ossified party systems, which provide no channels for increasing demands for self-expression and more effective democracy.

There is also a distinct rational calculation that predicts political violence or other forms of maladaptive participation. Aggressive mobilization such as the Chilean protests occur when it is seen as the only way to move things forward in a closed democratic system. As declared by a regular citizen protesting, interviewed by a TV network "if we do not *dejamos la cagada*" nothing will change. In a vibrant party system, political parties do not maintain support simply through blind loyalty, but by rolling with the punches, i.e., by internalizing and reflecting the anger of their supporters and converting it into effective action, rather than mass explosions of impotent fury.

During the process of revising this article, Chileans voted (by a staggering majority) to replace the 1980 constitution with a new document to be crafted by a constituent assembly. This raises the question: what kind of reforms should be enacted during this critical juncture in Chilean political history? We do not provide a laundry list of specific institutional choices here; institutions are incredibly complex, given their tendency to interact with other institutions in the same setting, producing effects that are often neither intended nor predicted. What we will do is discuss specific principles that will need to be followed if Chilean democracy is to undergo a deepening after the new constitution is enacted.

The highest priority should be reforming the electoral system (which already occurred in 2015) and the excessive supermajority requirements of the constitution that relate to policy issues that would typically be the domain of normal legislation. This combination prevented any possible mobilization strategy across the party system, and no transformation of the party system would be possible without it. While the electoral system has since been changed, the supermajority requirements continue to exert pressure against reform. The new constitution must therefore avoid enshrining specific policy conflicts, especially those in which the status quo strongly favors the wealthy and the powerful.

Relatedly, the constitution must be rebalanced to guarantee the social rights of citizens with at least as much zeal as it guarantees the property rights of the powerful. As Wampler (2015) argues in the Brazilian case, a strong social-rights regime would provide powerful incentives to citizens to involve themselves in politics by giving them something concrete to fight for: the activation of their rights as citizens. Such a regime would restore the politics to the political system. It would also deprive economic elites of the easy resource to undemocratic veto players (such as the Constitutional court).

On a related note, the role of courts needs to be carefully circumscribed. Courts have an important role to play in protecting the interests of marginalized groups, especially those that face strong discrimination by dominant majorities. Nevertheless, we should be wary of relying on courts. As discussed earlier, policies made through undemocratic means (such as court decisions) are likely to antagonize opponents more than if the same decisions were made democratically. The right-wing backlash against social liberalization in the United States serves to illustrate this. And as both Chile and (especially recently) the United States show, a court that actively protects powerless minorities can easily be swayed to use its power against subaltern groups to defend the privileges of the elite. While there are various mechanisms for reigning in the courts (term limits, requiring supermajorities to strike down congressional acts as unconstitutional, nonpartisan appointment bodies, etc.), democracies must be extremely careful to ensure that courts remain a check, rather than an unwelcome intruder into the democratic process.

That said, institutional reform, even constitutional replacement, is no panacea. Reform opens the gate, but elites and organizations must decide to go through. Even

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721000050 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with a major opportunity for change like a new constitution drafted by a constituent assembly, there is no guarantee that set patterns of elite disconnection from society will not endure and reproduce itself in the new constitution. For genuine change to occur, parties, elites, and activists must all move in the same direction: toward a more continuous and socially rooted understanding of democracy. Institutions friendly to this goal are a necessary but woefully insufficient condition: elites must understand that elitist democracy is unsustainable and prone to eventual disruption by populism or contentious politics.

Conclusions

Our primary argument is directed at political parties: stop acting as elite cartels, resist the urge to close ranks to keep outsiders out, and start embracing your role as participatory conduits. Parties are uniquely situated to act as channels for citizens to utilize effective voice in a continuous manner. When parties instead conspire to silence their adherents, eventually the distance between elites and grassroots and society in general will widen. That distance can lead to a full-blown legitimacy crisis. Citizens will grow so frustrated and so detached from the political system that they will eventually reject its authority to compel their obedience. This challenge can occur in the streets under the cover of face masks and clouds of tear gas, or perhaps more likely in countries other than Chile, in mass rallies before charismatic populists.

Political psychological research has shown that people who feel beset by threats will only turn to charismatic leaders if they also believe themselves powerless to confront those threats. In such circumstances, people are likely to latch on to a leader they feel is super-humanly capable of vanquishing their enemies; when this occurs, followers identify so strongly with the demagogue as to be incapable of critical evaluation of the leader (Madsen and Snow 1991). In other words, when parties use gatekeepers to prevent their base-level activists from influencing party decisions, they set in motion a vicious cycle, where frustration leads to increasing need for elitism, until eventually things boil over to the point where no gate will be sufficiently well kept to hold back popular anger.

Rather than attempting to marginalize popular discontent, parties should build internal mechanisms and institutions for channeling it in productive directions. It is especially critical for parties to maintain mechanisms that can respond to sudden surges in demand-making or shifts in public opinion (such as the base committees in the FA). Internal party democracy and deliberation are crucial here, but so are less intensive mechanisms, especially in parties in large countries like the United States. Primary systems, for example, are prone to the chaotic swings that occur when voters lack information about candidates; an inchoate primary environment can, as occurred with Donald Trump's nomination in 2016, allow a charismatic outsider with committed followers to overcome resistance from more traditional sectors of the party. Parties can overcome this, not by minimizing voice, but by maximizing it: systems such as ranked voting or enduring intraparty factions (such as exist in Uruguay) could be used to reduce the problems associated with low-information internal party democracy.

The specifics of how parties enable voice among their supporters will vary from country to country. But the warning we sound here applies to all: parties need to embrace their function as channels of popular voice, not avoid it. If problems crop up (e.g., factionalism, an overabundance of ambitious leaders seeking nominations, ideological extremism), party leaders need to find ways to solve them that do not involve simply slamming the door in the faces of those who are rocking the boat.

While parties are the most important institution in democratic regimes to channel democratic representation, other institutions can also include institutionalized "points of entry" for citizens´ demands and voice. Nor do we expect that these reforms will be easy to achieve; weak state capacity and extreme inequality (especially in Latin America) may well be insurmountable hurdles to this kind of democratic deepening. Yet the fact remains: the combination of democratic procedures and open access points of entry are critical for democracy in the twenty-first century. Chile provides an excellent example of the likely (if not inevitable) conclusion of elitism: eventually, one way or another, the excluded, the angry, and the alienated will breech the gate, and with substantial collateral damage in the process.

Continuous democracy does not imply constant chaotic shifts in the balance of power, nor does it require a sustained attack on the status quo. Instead, we build on Przeworksi's idea of democracy as a regime in which parties may lose elections (Przeworski 1991, 10); in continuous democracy, the status quo may be challenged at any time by new actors and interests. Yet continuous democracy envisions a system in which such new actors must compete for influence by appealing to an informed and engaged electorate through open and inclusive democratic institutions and parties, not by elite bargaining. In other words, the status quo may be preserved only by persuading citizens that it should be preserved, not by hiding behind veto points. Pursuing the latter strategy does not bring stability, but rigidity, which is increasingly incompatible with diverse and dynamic societies.

Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank Kurt Weyland, Rafael Piñiero Rodriguez, Verónica Pérez Bentancur, and Jaime Bassa for their insightful comments. Fernando Rosenblatt received funding from ANID FONDECYT (Grant #1190072) and the ANID – Millennium Science Initiative Program (Code ICN17_002).

Notes

1 The electoral system is established by constitutional organic law. The constitution also provides a larger supermajority (three-fifths rather than four-sevenths) to amend the organic law associated with the electoral system.
2 Until 2006, one-third of the Chilean Senate was not elected. These appointed or institutional senators included former presidents, ministers of the Supreme Court, and former commanders of the armed forces. The composition generally favored conservative (and in some cases military) influence over public opinion.
3 Dahl predicted these sorts of mistakes in his stellar critique of democratic elitism; Dahl 1989, ch. 5.
4 Until recently, this has been the dominant view in the study of regime support.
5 For an excellent review of this literature, see Folger and Cropanzano 2001.
6 "Voice" comes from Hirschman's (1970) famous work in economics. The modifier "strong", inspired by Barber (1984) is applied to indicate that voice must have institutionally guaranteed effects to provide legitimacy as discussed here.

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