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RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND THE “No” IN PINOCHET’S CHILE

CORREY DIVINEY

In 1988, General Pinochet, nearing the end of his eight-year presidential term, organized a new presidential election as a simple yes or no plebiscite. The surprising success of the “No” campaign in deposing General Pinochet has been explained mostly through traditional social movement theory, focusing on grievances and deprivation of the social movement participants. This study, however, will show that the success of the “No” campaign is instead best explained by the application of resource mobilization theory.

The surprising success of the “No” campaign in effectively deposing General Pinochet in the 1988 Chilean plebiscite presents an interesting anomaly for social movement scholars. The question of how an opposition movement that was absolutely unsuccessful in its efforts over an almost fifteen year period was finally able to end military rule seems at first very puzzling. Many researchers have attempted to explain the movement through the lens of traditional social movement theory. Such research has focused on grievances of the politically disenfranchised Left and Center and has identified those grievances as the underlying impetus for the success of the campaign. While it is clear that grievances and the deprivation of the social movement participants played some role in the “No” campaign, left by themselves these factors do not adequately explain why the Chilean public was able to oust General Pinochet from office after fifteen years of authoritarian rule. For, if grievances and relative deprivation alone were the dominant factors, why hadn’t there been a decisive campaign prior to 1988? More to the point, why had prior social movements, especially those held during periods of economic crisis, failed to overturn the military regime? This article will argue that grievances and deprivation were not the most important factors in Chile’s return to democracy. Instead, it will be argued that the success of the “No” campaign is best explained by the application of resource mobilization theory. Indeed, the savvy leadership provided by a sophisticated elite, in the form of valuable research conducted and analyzed and intensive campaigning based on that research, was the most important factor in explaining the success of the Chilean opposition in their efforts to end military rule. In order to better understand how the social movement elite determined the outcome of the campaign, it is important to first understand the intricacies of the resource
mobilization approach to social movement theory.¹

**RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY**

When the resource mobilization approach was introduced to the scholarly dialogue on social movement theories in the early 1970s, it represented a radical departure from the accepted thinking of the day. While the relative deprivation theory, as developed and defended by such respected social scientists as Ted Robert Gurr, focuses heavily on the psychology of social movement participants, resource mobilization focuses on the resources available to a social movement and the management of such resources by an elite sector. The resource mobilization approach recognizes the importance of deprivation and grievances in mobilizing a collectivity to protest. However, it suggests that there are more important factors at play than simply the degree of frustration of a population. In fact, it goes so far as to suggest that there is always enough deprivation/frustration within a society to generate a social movement. Indeed, resource mobilization theorists assert that even if there is not a great degree of antipathy towards a potential object of protest, it can be generated by a sophisticated elite group.

In rejecting the traditional social movement explanations, resource mobilization theorists point to other factors in their attempts to identify the most significant elements of a successful social movement. This new approach recognizes that successful social movements require the consistent supply of resources. Time and financial support typically constitute the bulk of such resources. The organization and strategic efforts essential to a successful social movement demand the time and energy of a movement's most politically sophisticated participants. Not only does the leadership of a movement typically require some type of financial support simply to provide for its physical sustenance, but the activities of the leadership also require some degree of financial expense. In other words, not only do the "employees" of a social movement need a salary to live on so that they can continue their efforts, but they also need money to purchase the paper their work is printed on, they need the technology to perform statistical analysis, they need money to pay their phone bill, etc.

Consequently, resource mobilization focuses heavily on the flow of resources to the elite of a social movement. This approach seeks to identify the external sources of support and weigh their importance according to their donations. In order to better understand some of the fundamental contributions of resource mobilization theory, it is useful to use a familiar example from recent American history. In attempting an explanation of the success of the American civil rights movement of the 1960s, proponents of traditional social movement theories would point to the degree of oppression suffered by American blacks of that period. The deprivation of that collectivity, relative to its white counterpart, would be used to explain the widespread protests that typified the political climate of the American South of that time. Other theorists would perhaps seek to explain the rise in participation in the social movement as the result of cost/benefit analysis performed by the participants. These researchers would assert that the decade of the 1960s was the first time in American history when protest against the white establishment would actually have been a rational act, given the estimated costs and benefits of such behavior. Resource mobilization theory, on the other hand, explains the success of the Civil Rights Movement as the result of the highly organized and well-funded efforts of an elite few that led activist organizations such as the SNCC, the NAACP, CORE, and the SCLC. Instead of focusing on the frustrated masses, resource mobilization theorists investigate the influence of conscience constituents. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, the relatively few Northern white liberals who provided hefty financial support for the protests are seen as more necessary to the success of the movement than are the tens of thousands of disenfranchised, poor Southern blacks who participated in the marches and sit-ins. The rationale for such a bold assertion is the belief that there had always been a great deal of discontent within Southern black society, but it was not until there emerged a highly professionalized, educated, and securely
funded social movement sector that this society was mobilized to consistent and effective protests. A thorough discussion of the Chilean protest movement that culminated in the “No” campaign necessarily include an in-depth treatment of the role of foreign donations in supporting the movement. Given the limited scope of this article, this important factor will have to be omitted. Instead, this work will focus on the sophisticated leadership of the movement and the resources, other than financial, drawn upon.

As with any social science theory, the resource mobilization approach utilizes a somewhat specialized vocabulary. A thorough understanding of this theory and its application to the “No” campaign in Chile requires a review of the essential terms of resource mobilization theory and the unique meanings these terms have within this research paradigm. To begin with, a social movement is loosely defined as a collectivity unified by a common preference for some type of change within its society. For our purposes in discussing the “No” campaign we will define this movement as the shared preference to terminate the Pinochet presidency. Of course, the Chilean protest movement also encompassed many more preferences; some groups were pushing for a return to Socialist government, some groups were fighting for full accountability for human rights offenses, still other groups were fighting for democratization. But the only preference shared by all participants was that Pinochet should not continue to govern Chile.

A countermovement is a collectivity within the same society unified by a common opposition to the preferences of the social movement. In the case we are discussing, the countermovement would be the preference shared by all those who supported Pinochet’s government.

A social movement organization is a formal organization that identifies its preferences with those of a given social movement and whose objective it is to achieve the goals of that social movement. The social movement organizations most influential in the success of the “No” campaign, and those that this paper will focus upon, were the social science research centers. A few of the most influential of the Chilean research institutes were the Center for the Study of Chilean Reality (CERC), the Center for Social Studies and Education (SUR), the Latin American Faculty of the Social Sciences (FLASCO), the Latin American Institute of Transnational Studies (ILET), the Center for Political Studies (CEP), and the Center for Development Studies (CED) (Puryear 1994, 131–41).

It was not until there emerged a highly professionalized, educated, and securely funded social movement sector that society was mobilized to consistent and effective protests. A social movement organization is made up of a variety of different actors, who can be classified into a few main types. An adherent is an individual or organization that philosophically supports the goals of a social movement organization. A constituent is an individual or organization who provides resources to a social movement organization and can expect to benefit if a social movement organization achieves its purposes. A potential beneficiary is any individual or organization that stands to benefit if a social movement organization accomplishes its designs. A conscience adherent is an individual or organization that philosophically supports a social movement but stands to gain nothing (other than perhaps a sense of satisfaction) from the attainment of a social movement organization’s goals. A conscience constituent is an individual or group that contributes resources to a social movement organization but stands to gain nothing if the social movement organization is in fact successful. Among the most significant conscience constituents with respect to the “No” campaign were North American donor organizations. Some of these organizations, such as the National Endowment for Democracy, actually channeled public funds towards democratic reform in Chile (Muravchik 1991, 209–10). Others, such as the Ford Foundation, drew upon their own resources to support the “No” (Sigmund 1993, 167). The role of conscience constituents, such as the aforementioned donor organizations, cannot be...
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underestimated in explaining the success of the Chilean plebiscite campaign. Again, although these conscience constituents were an invaluable asset to the social movement organizations that led the plebiscite campaign, the details of their involvement are beyond the scope of this article.

Each of these groups—the adherents, the conscience constituents, the social movements organizations, and so forth—played an important role in the Chilean plebiscite. The social movement, as represented by numerous social organizations, relied upon adherents, constituents, conscience adherents and constituents, and potential beneficiaries in its efforts to garner sufficient votes to force Pinochet from office. The existence of sophisticated social movement organizations, unified under a common purpose, and supported by adherents and constituents, is what distinguishes the “No” campaign from earlier unsuccessful opposition movements in Chile. The prominent role played by the aforementioned actors justifies the conclusion that the resource mobilization approach is the most effective framework in which to study the unprecedented success of the demand for the “No.”

HISTORICAL BACKDROP

From the early 1930s until Pinochet’s military coup in 1973, Chile’s democratic tradition was among the strongest in all of Latin America. It was notable for its durability even amidst political and economic turmoil and for its implementation of an effective and truly representative multi-party system. The Left, Center, and Right were all given voice in a form similar to that of many European countries.

In 1970, Salvador Allende, the presidential candidate for the Popular Unity (the coalition then representing the Left), won the presidential election with only 36% of the vote (Drake 1991, 3). The multi-party, winner-take-all electoral rules enabled Allende to take office with a minuscule margin of victory and a support base representing barely more than a third of the population. Allende’s Leftist ideology, combined with his relatively small base and far-reaching agenda for social reform, created a recipe for turmoil.

In the midterm congressional elections of March 1973, an alliance of the Center and Right parties received 54% of the vote to the Popular Unity’s (UP) 44% (Roberts 1998, 88). This led to a standoff between the executive branch and the legislative branch. The opponents of the UP, aided by an economy buckling under the inflation brought on by the redistributive policies of Allende’s socialist experiment, plotted a military overthrow. On September 11, 1973, this opposition, led by General Augusto Pinochet, overthrew the Allende regime. Allende refused offers to be flown into exile and killed himself upon the invasion of the military into the presidential palace (Roberts 1998, 91-4).

The Pinochet regime—made up of a coalition of technocrats, business elites, and most importantly, military leadership—began an unprecedented violation of constitutional law and human rights in Chile. Soon after Pinochet gained power, Congress was shut down and the constitution abrogated (Sigmund 1993, 85, 93). In order for the regime to survive, all outspoken supporters of democracy had to be silenced. Pinochet undertook this task ruthlessly and relentlessly. Social organizations, long the bastions of democracy, were suppressed and disassembled. Those with ties to organized labor were entirely eliminated. The armed forces tortured, killed, and exiled thousands of Chileans. Even those, such as students and university professors, who were traditionally protected by cultural norms, were subject to the brutality of this purging. Roberts documents how within six months the military had arrested an estimated 80,000 persons, 160,000 had “suffered politically motivated job dismissals,” and another estimated 200,000 people went into exile (94).

After the popular sector had been effectively crippled, the regime turned its attentions towards implementing neo-liberal economic reforms. Just as the politics of Chile had undergone a transformation from democracy to authoritarianism, the economy went from state-oriented to market driven. Under the direction of a group of young, American-educated technocrats known as the “Chicago Boys,” the economy experienced dramatic growth (Drake 1991, 55). The period from 1977 to 1981 became known as the “Chilean
miracle" (Drake 1991, 253-4). However, the miracle was not wrought without severe social costs. Unemployment rates soared and the distribution of wealth became more disparate than ever. This created growing resentment among those left out of the successes of the regime, especially the already disgruntled urban working class. The use of brutality to quell the occasional protest continued to be a common practice throughout this period. The Latin American debt crisis of 1982 altered Pinochet's course drastically. After riding on the success of the economic reforms, the regime was severely damaged by the recession; the GNP decreased by over 14% in 1982 alone (Sigmund 1993, 139). Pinochet's policies of economic openness further increased the vulnerability of the domestic economy and intensified the effects of the recession. Thus, ironically, the economic globalization embraced by the regime created its first political crisis. The widespread effects on all classes within Chilean society created deepened disenchantment with the Pinochet regime, even among those who had previously supported it.

The period of 1983-86 was marked by the nationwide protest movement that attacked the regime's human rights violations, its economic policies, and the legitimacy of the regime itself. Led mostly by former labor unionists and students, the movement's most effective form of collective action were the national days of protest that mobilized tens of thousands, sometimes even hundreds of thousands, of Chileans into the public squares to defy the military regime. Other groups, such as the FPMR, were more given to direct, violent attacks on pre-designated targets. These leftist groups were also responsible for the kidnappings and murders of government officials and police officers.

Despite the relatively high-level of participation, this protest movement failed to achieve its ultimate objective—the forced exit of Pinochet from control of the Chilean government. The failure of these groups to achieve their desired ends is fairly easy to explain. The leadership of the movement was largely made up of uneducated workers, inexperienced students, and illogical radicals. The dramatically different political ideologies held by these participants and their failure to come together to form a cohesive force was the biggest factor in the movement's failure. The strategies devised by groups to the Center were far too moderate and pacifist for those on the Left. And the terrorist actions of those on the Left frightened many moderates away from any form of protest whatsoever. The Leftist violence also undermined the moderate efforts of Centrists and gave the military regime the justification it needed to squash the movement as a whole. Both of these groups, due to their lack of social prestige and visibility, were easily oppressed and even eliminated when the regime deemed such action necessary. Their leadership, never a bastion of efficiency, was easily rendered useless by the tactics of the military government. Lack of organization, lack of access to resources, and lack of sophisticated strategy led to the eventual failure of the movement to accomplish its ultimate goal of removing Pinochet from office.

Ironically, however, despite the regime's effectiveness in eventually quieting the protest movement, the movement's exposure of the weaknesses of the government's economic policies did lead to a period of liberalization. Consequently, the press was allowed more openness, and in 1987, a law was passed allowing the reintroduction of political parties onto the national stage (Puryear 1994, 127-8). This contradictory environment of repression and concessions set the stage for the "No" campaign.

**THE "No"**

As part of the earlier passage of the revised constitution put forth by the military government, the presidential term had been extended to eight years, with no laws limiting the number of terms (Drake 1991, 52). The President (Pinochet) had been given the right to deem the election a simple yes or no plebiscite and was not expected to give more than two months notice regarding the specific date on which the plebiscite would occur, but one would have to take place in 1988, that being the end of an eight-year term. Those opposed to the Pinochet government faced significant obstacles in attempting to achieve a "no" vote. First of all, the
lack of options set forth by the regime presented the opposition with no opportunity to set forth their own candidates. Additionally, in a country with so many political parties and of such diverse political ideologies, the method of unseating Pinochet and the choice of a new leader could absolutely not be agreed upon. Unity among the opposition seemed an almost insurmountable task. A second obstacle was the unknown date of the plebiscite. Not being able to put a time frame on their planning made effective strategizing difficult. Another significant impediment to the opposition was the culture of fear created by fifteen years of oppressive military rule. Many potential beneficiaries were hesitant to become politically active for fear of punishment by an intolerant regime if the campaign were unsuccessful. These are but a few of the difficult problems the opposition faced in their efforts to unseat Pinochet. However, social movement organizations, in accordance with resource mobilization theory, were able to overcome these obstacles.

Political parties were banned under Pinochet until 1987. The many social science research centers in Chile took the place of the parties as the centers of political thought and activity in the years prior to the plebiscite. As the centers were privately funded, somewhat less conspicuous than the universities, and without the overtly political intentions held by the parties, the research centers never became the target of government censorship. These centers were essential to the survival of the opposition in that they simply provided employment for the many politically minded intellectuals who would usher in the democratic transition. The suffering economy and the censorship of university life would surely have encouraged these elites to seek employment in American or European universities. As many of these academicians had already received doctorate degrees from prestigious foreign universities, life as expatriates would have been the most sensible option, had it not been for the opportunities provided by the research centers.

Another function the research centers provided was that their work contributed, through innovative polling techniques, a fairly accurate assessment of the political life of the opposition in Chile. In the terminology of resource mobilization theory, the centers were able to deduce accurate estimates of the numbers of adherents, constituents, and potential beneficiaries there were within Chilean society. This was an invaluable tool in setting the groundwork for the plebiscite. Up until this time, the only real public opinion polls based on political sentiment were those carried out by the military government. The results of these were rarely made available to the public and were of questionable accuracy. With the governmental liberalization that followed the economic crisis of the early 1980s, private research centers were allowed more leeway in their efforts to gauge public opinion.

The Center for the Study of Contemporary Reality (CERC), a Santiago based research facility, was among the first and most important of the many centers that effectively became social movement organizations working towards democratic change in Chile. CERC researchers began holding workshops to discuss the prospects for carrying out public opinion studies in Chile in the mid-1980s. These workshops came to include international public opinion experts who had conducted influential survey research during democratic transitions of other nations, such as that of Spain in 1975. Following the lead of social research organization Diagnos, whose general, nonpolitical survey work had showed the public as responsive to polls of this nature, CERC began to conduct surveys. Unlike Diagnos, however, the purely academically motivated surveys were politically slanted. As the results increasingly suggested that Chileans would indeed respond to political surveys, the researchers became bolder in their efforts to understand the political climate of Chile under
Pinochet. In 1987, the CERC researchers conducted the first nationwide survey of political attitudes since the coup (Puryear 1994, 134–8).

Another research center whose work had invaluable implications to the opposition movement was the Latin American Faculty of the Social Sciences (FLACSO). Like CERC, FLACSO's early surveys began as contract work for private entities. In one of these early surveys, prepared in Spain for the Spanish government in order to determine Chilean public opinion concerning that country, FLACSO researchers, apparently more out of curiosity than any real political designs, decided to throw in a few politically slanted questions. The test was to determine whether the Chilean public would respond to inquiries as to their political leanings. The regime had been so intolerant of political expression that many researchers operated under the assumption that Chileans would be reluctant to commit their positions to paper. When this proved not to be the case, FLACSO researchers, again out of academic interest, began to develop more direct surveys. In the years leading up to the 1988 plebiscite, FLACSO's surveys helped to dispel many of the false notions previously held by the opposition elite, and the center emerged as one of the opposition's most powerful social movement organizations (Puryear 1994, 134–8).

The work of CERC, FLACSO, and other research centers like them, constituted a turning point for the opposition movement. Throughout the years of military rule, would-be political leaders had made unfounded and conflicting claims concerning the "will of the people." For the communists, the "will of the people" was, of course, communism, for the socialists, socialism, and so on. The availability of the hard empirical data provided by the surveys forced adherents of various ideologies to confront the indisputable facts. What they found was both surprising and encouraging.

One of the most enlightening findings was that the Chilean public generally held much more moderate views than had previously been supposed. The popular belief prior to the surveys, especially among the Left, was that the Chilean public espoused fairly radical political beliefs and was supportive of a violent overthrow of the military regime. The strategy of social mobilization that had characterized the opposition movement since the early days of the coup reflected this ideology of change by force. This belief was probably supported by the fact that the most visible, if not the only visible, political activists were involved in radical, violent political activities. Guerrilla groups such as the MIR and the FPMR had left a long legacy of political violence on the streets of Chile. Due to the intimidating oppression of the Pinochet regime, these groups were really the only actively engaged protesters for many of the years of military rule. It was therefore only natural for the elites to assume that the actions of the few represented the sentiment of the many. However, the surveys revealed that in fact very few Chileans supported a popular overthrow. While the surveys did prove that the majority favored a political transition, this support was contingent upon it being enacted peacefully. This new revelation forced a paradigmatic shift for many of the elites at the helm of the social movement (Puryear 1994, 137).

Another important discovery of these surveys was that Pinochet's support among the Chilean public had been underestimated by the opposition's elites. Whereas before, the opposition had subscribed to the belief that the vast majority of Chileans (excluding the wealthy capitalists) were strongly opposed to the military government, the opposition leadership was now forced to confront the finding that roughly one-third of the population were either constituents or adherents of the countermovement that the Pinochet government represented. The surveys also indicated that another one-third of the population were neither constituents nor adherents of either side. This helped the opposition leadership realize that a substantial recruiting effort would be required if these potential beneficiaries were to be converted to the movement to end Pinochet's presidency. The sobering nature of these facts forced opposition leadership to come to terms with their unfounded hubris and to realize that a transition to democracy would not come as easily as they had previously believed. On the positive side, by knowing its limitations
and those of its enemy, the opposition was better prepared to confront the obstacles ahead (Puryear 1994, 137).

Perhaps the most encouraging discovery of the surveys was that the vast majority of the Chilean public greatly valued democratic principles. In spite of almost a decade and a half of authoritarian rule, political parties remained a much-desired commodity. Chileans still identified themselves with various democratically oriented ideals and were supportive of a return to thoroughly democratic governance. The conclusion drawn from these results portrayed a Chilean public that opposed political violence, was not entirely committed to any single political stance or to the exit of General Pinochet, but that was almost uniformly supportive of democratic principles (Puryear 1994, 137).

The research centers continued to be of great importance to the opposition elites as they began to reevaluate past approaches and to devise new strategies for democratization. When the CIS consortium was formed midway through 1987 by three academic research centers (CED, ILET, & SUR), it represented a more overtly and deliberately political approach to the research that had been performed by centers like FLASCO and CERC. The CIS consortium had as its mission the transformation of research findings into sophisticated political strategy and modern campaign techniques. With the donated assistance of the Sawyer/Miller group, an American political consulting firm, CIS was able to make insightful recommendations to the opposition political parties that had been recently organized or reorganized. Among the principal members of CIS were intellectuals who were also participating in a group known as the Technical Committee for Free Elections. The primary purpose of the committee was to offer strategic advice to the political parties pushing for free elections. After a comprehensive review of the important survey findings the committee realized the fundamental inapplicability of social mobilization to the Chilean situation. The realization that the public was opposed to tumultuous politics, cynical of new initiatives, weary of conventional forms of protests, and fearful of the uncertainty of the future convinced the committee to abandon the initiatives for free elections. It was concluded that the most successful effort would be an intense and comprehensive campaign to vote “no” in the upcoming plebiscite. This new approach would manage the cynicism and apathy prevalent among Chilean citizens by simplifying the campaign and by generating an optimistic, even fraternal, sense of unity among the various political factions. By just saying no the populace would not be overwhelmed by the complexities that had characterized the opposition programs up to that point. By unifying the cause the opposition would be playing upon a perceived need in Chilean society to finally come together in healing a country fragmented by years of political violence. Additionally, by abandoning the contentious demand for free elections, the opposition would be appeasing a public already frightened by political conflict of any kind (Puryear 1994, 138–42).

After having solidified their position, these academics began an intensive effort to convince the nonacademic political elites of the wisdom of their stance. This would not be an easy task. The position of these opposition political leaders, the bulk of which formed the leadership of the newly formed parties, had been that participation in the plebiscite was out of the question. Most felt that the plebiscite of 1980 had been corrupt and that the regime would again somehow ensure itself a victory. Leaders believed that participation in the plebiscite would undermine the position of the opposition movement—Pinochet was bound to win in any case, and their participation would allow him the leverage of claiming that he had been democratically elected. Instead, they believed that, through effective social mobilization, the opposition movement could demand free elections, with each political party presenting its candidate. Through a series of weekly meetings conducted by academics from CIS and from the Technical Committee, these once dogmatic leaders were subjected to facts that forced them to reevaluate their previously incontestable assumptions. These meetings, consisting of chat groups, dinner parties, and even campaign strategy classes, were focused on dispelling the popular notions regarding public opinion and in convincing the
social movement organization leadership that given an apathetic and frightened Chilean public, a bold campaign for free elections was an unrealistic strategy (Puryear 1994, 145). The Pinochet government would hold the plebiscite, with or without the approval of the opposition. The constituents, adherents, and potential beneficiaries of the opposition movement would be caught unprepared and without voter registration cards and Pinochet would win the plebiscite, remaining in office for at least another eight years. Given those odds, the regime would not even need a rigged election to ensure victory. After several months of this dialogue, the opposition elites were eventually won over to the strategy of participation in the plebiscite and in simply unifying to vote Pinochet out of office. In February of 1988, thirteen political parties formed the “Concertacion para el No,” a coalition reflecting this new approach (Roberts 1998, 128–9).

The Technical Committee was asked by the coalition, which eventually consisted of sixteen parties, to conduct the plebiscite campaign. Drawing from the survey findings, the committee built a campaign characterized by its appeal to previously uncommitted Chileans and by its optimistic, forward-looking approach. Having discovered that the percentage of Pinochet supporters who were registered voters was significantly higher than all other segments of the population, the committee undertook a comprehensive effort to register all social movement constituents, adherents, and potential beneficiaries. The groups identified as being especially disengaged from the electoral system, such as urban youth, were the targets of registration efforts that had been tailored to appeal to such groups. The result of these efforts was a drastic increase in voter registration rates among those opposed to the Pinochet government.

The way in which the social movement elites framed the message of the campaign also had substantial effects on the outcome of the plebiscite. As a majority of the Chilean population was shown to have been cynical of all things political, the campaign was designed as a promise of good feelings upon Pinochet’s exit from government. The campaign slogan became “La Alegria Ya Viene.” The fifteen-minute infomercials aired each night consisted of themes of unity, peace, order, and happiness. Subsequent surveys demonstrated a marked preference for the media campaigns of the opposition over that of the regime (Sigmund 1993, 172–4).

The sophisticated strategy of the social movement elites, as embodied by the research center academics and newly converted political party leaders, led to a victory in the plebiscite held on October 5, 1988. The opposition won with almost 55% of the vote, forcing Pinochet from office and reintroducing democracy to Chile (Sigmund 1993, 175–6). Three months later Patricio Aylwin, leader of the Christian Democratic Party, was chosen as president in a free and fair election (Sigmund 1993, 183–7).

While it is clear that the deprivation and grievances of the Chilean public played a significant role in the success of the plebiscite, as manifested by voter turnouts and simply by a victorious outcome, their efforts in achieving that success was marginal when compared with the role of the social movement organizations and the elites that were leading them. The function of the research institutions was especially crucial. The research centers provided a home base, so to speak, to the sophisticated elites whose informed strategy provided the thrust of the plebiscite campaign. The significance of these research institutions in producing a dialogue among the different factions within the movement and in creating a single approach is especially evident when compared with the earlier failures of the Chilean social movements. The work that was done in conducting informative surveys, developing the basic strategy of the campaign, registering previously uncommitted voters, and winning over potential beneficiaries was the indispensable element in achieving a return to democratic governance in Chile.

Correy Diviney is a graduate student from Crestview, Florida. His plans include continuing work in Washington, D.C., before attending law school.
1 John McCarthy and Mayer Zald’s work in defining the basic premises of the theory is drawn upon heavily in the subsequent section.

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