



Chile — Va-PoReg Country Report

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02/12/1818 Start Electoral Oligarchy: On this date, Chile declared its independence from Spain. From 1888 suffrage was introduced for men of any race over 21 who could read.¹ LIED classifies the regime period as an exclusive democracy, RoW as electoral autocracy, and PRC as a semidemocracy. It was, however, not a full parliamentary democracy, seeing as the head of the executive was not elected by the legislature. Nevertheless, real power lay with the Congress while the president's role was rather ceremonial. The widely adopted laissez-faire policy led to a gap between political elite and citizens. The electoral system can be classified as clientelist and corrupt and was marked by bribery and intimidation.² Before the 1925 Constitution in Chile, the electoral system was governed by the Constitution of 1833. This earlier constitution was very restrictive in terms of suffrage. Voting rights were limited to men who met certain property or income requirements, effectively excluding a large portion of the population, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This system favored the interests of the landed elite and wealthier citizens, limiting political participation to a small, privileged segment of society.³ The 1925 Constitution of Chile, which replaced the 1833 Constitution, marked a significant step towards modernizing the Chilean state and its political system. However, it maintained certain requirements for voting. The right to vote was granted only to male citizens who were literate, at least 21 years old (or 18 if married) and met certain residency requirements.⁴ According to the data of Vanhanen the percentage of the population who participated in elections lay between 3.8 and 4.4 percentage of the population in this period. It was not until later reforms in the 20th century that these restrictions were gradually lifted, paving the way for broader suffrage in Chile. Under the presidency of Juan Luis Sanfuentes (1915-1920) repressed strikes and opposition movements. The presidential elections of 1915 itself were contested for electoral fraud.⁵ The problem of electoral fraud and political corruption had already been a problem under the presidency of Ramón Barros Luco.⁶ On 12/23/1920, the reformist Arturo Alessandri became president. Political dissonance grew stronger as Congress repeatedly blocked his appeals. The conflict paralyzed Chile politically.⁷ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. 09/03/1924, military officers protested against the political class as well as low salaries. This is known as the „rattling of the sabers“ incident. This led to the establishment of the September Junta.⁸ Until this point, LIED classifies elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as somewhat free and fair while their CEI scores them as not really clean. LIED classifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as somewhat present. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

09/11/1924 End Electoral Oligarchy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, a military coup by right-wing military against president Arturo Alessandri took place. Alessandri went into exile.⁹ The following military regime is also known as the September Junta.¹⁰ Political liberties were absent according to LIED and somewhat present according to V-Dem's PCLI. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. According to

LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period.

01/23/1925 End Military Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, a military movement of young officers, wrestled power from the previous September Junta. They had worried about the conservative restoration of Chilean society. The group organized a new junta, also known as the January Junta, which acted as an interim government. The Junta recalled President Alessandri back to his post. It lasted until Alessandri's resumption of power on 03/20/1925.¹¹ Alessandri's return to power does not mark the beginning of a new regime but rather the continuation of the military autocracy seeing as power was handed to him by the junta and this had been the objective of the coup. Alessandri promulgated a new constitution which was approved by a plebiscite on 03/30/1925.¹² The constitution officially put an end to the parliamentary system and reestablished presidential power (Nohlen 2005).

10/01/1925 End Military Autocracy/Start Democratizing Regime: On this date, Alessandri resigned from the presidency. His vice-president, the civilian Luis Barros Borgoño, took over as acting president of an interim government.¹³

10/22/1925 End Democratizing Regime/Start Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal): On this date, the first direct presidential elections took place. They were the first elections to be held under the new 1925 constitution which extended direct secret suffrage.¹⁴ Under the 1925 constitution, direct secret suffrage had been extended. Nevertheless, women were still not able to vote (Nohlen 2005). Therefore, this period is categorized as an electoral oligarchy. Emiliano Figueroa won the elections with 72% of the vote.¹⁵ He made General Carlos Ibanez del Campo his Minister of the Interior. The latter was exerting more and more control over Figueroa, who decided to resign in order to avoid becoming Ibanez's puppet. According to the constitution Ibanez became vice-president, as Minister of the Interior, and announced the next elections.¹⁶ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During this period, elections are classified as not competitive by LIED. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as somewhat free and fair while their CEI scores them as not clean. Political liberties were absent per LIED and ambiguous per V-Dem's PCLI. In 1926, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints. For 1926, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For the following year, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

05/22/1927 End Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal)/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date, presidential elections were held following the resignation of President Emiliano Figueroa. The result was a victory for Interior Minister Carlos Ibáñez del Campo, who ran as an independent and received 98% of the vote.¹⁷ Ibáñez began to exercise dictatorial powers, using rule by decree (*decretos con fuerza de ley*), suspending parliamentary elections, instead naming politicians to the Senate and Chamber of Deputies himself. Political opponents were arrested and exiled, including his former ally Marmaduke Grove. His popularity, however, was helped by massive loans by American banks, which helped to promote a high rate of growth in the country. He constructed massive public works and increased public spending. He also created the Carabineros de Chile (police force) by unifying the previously disorganized police forces. Another significant achievement of Ibáñez's first administration was the signing of the 1929 Treaty of Lima, in which Chile agreed to return the Tacna Province to Peru, which had been seized during the War of the Pacific. His popularity lasted until after the 1929 collapse of Wall Street. At that point all loans were halted and called. Without the influx of foreign currency, Chile was heavily affected by the Great Depression. Ibáñez's large public spending did nothing to alleviate the situation, and his opponents, primarily the exiled Grove and Alessandri, began to plan a comeback. After a great wave of public unrest, Ibáñez left the country for exile, on 07/26/1931, after delegating his office to the president of the senate, Pedro Opaso, who in turn resigned in favor of the interior minister, Juan Esteban Montero.¹⁸ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections

were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. The scoring of LIED as well as V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI does not change in this period. Political liberties were coded as absent by LIED and as ambiguous according to V-Dem's PCLI. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

07/26/1931 End Electoral Autocracy/Start Democratizing Regime: When the Ibanez administration collapsed on this date and Ibanez himself went into exile, President of the Senate Pedro Opaso became acting vice-president and head of the interim government. The next day, he resigned and passed power to Juan Esteban Montero, former Minister of the interior.¹⁹

10/04/1931 End Democratizing Regime/Start (Male) Electoral Autocracy: On this date, Montero was officially elected president with 64% of the vote.²⁰ The elections are considered as not competitive per LIED. V-Dem's CEI scores them as not clean while V-Dem's EF&FI indicates somewhat free and fair election conditions. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and ambiguous according to V-Dem's PCLI. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

06/04/1932 End (Male) Electoral Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, a military coup took place in Santiago, where a coalition consisting of young socialists led by Eugenio Matte, air force personnel led by Colonel Marmaduke Grove, and army personnel loyal to former president Carlos Ibáñez del Campo under Carlos Dávila seized control of the Air Force base of El Bosque. Their demand was for President Montero to step down from office and as a result he resigned.²¹ On the same night, the revolutionaries who had emerged victorious established a Government Junta, consisting of retired General Arturo Puga, Eugenio Matte, and Carlos Davila, with Colonel Grove serving as their Minister of Defense.²² According to LIED, only executive elections were present, but they were not categorized as multiparty. No legislative elections were present.

09/13/1932 End Military Autocracy/Start Democratizing Regime: On this date, Davila resigned after having lost public support. He handed power to General Bartolomé Blanche.²³ In fear of a military uprising, the latter again transferred power to the president of the supreme court, Abraham Oyanedel Urrutia.²⁴ LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous regarding the state of political liberties.

10/30/1932 End Democratizing Regime/Start Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal): Multiparty elections took place on this date and Abraham Oyanedel Urrutia handed over the president's office to the elected Arturo Alessandri Palma.²⁵ These elections marked the beginning of a period of consistently competitive elections. All existing parties were allowed to run in the elections between 1932 and 1973 (Keech 2004, Remmer 1984). In this regime period neither women nor illiterates (between 28 per cent of adults at the beginning and 19 per cent of the population at the end of the regime period) could take part in the elections. All presidents in this regime period made use of emergency powers. From 01/08/1949 on, universal suffrage for men and women aged 21 and above and able to read and write was granted. However, the first election where this was applied was more than three and a half years later. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as somewhat present from 1933 to 1946. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI indicates that elections were in this period somewhat free and fair and somewhat clean.

14/09/1952 End Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal)/Start Electoral Democracy: On this day the first presidential elections took place, in which women could participate. However, the democracy was deeply defective and had oligarchic tendencies. Illiterates were still excluded from the ballot. According to UNESCO, approximately 19.9 percent of the total population was still illiterate in 1952, thereby excluding nearly a fifth of the population from participating in voting (Educational 1957). Presidents continued to make use of

emergency powers. This limits the quality of the democracy (Keech 2004). Only from 1970 on men and women aged 18 and older could vote whether or not they could read.²⁶ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. From this point onward, LIED categorizes elections as competitive until 1972. V-Dem's EF&FI initially scored them still as somewhat free and fair but upgraded them to free and fair in 1958. The same applies to their CEI which followed by increasing its score of electoral cleanliness from somewhat clean to clean in 1959. According to LIED political liberties were absent until 1959 and present from 1960 onward. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as ambiguous from 1947 to 1957, somewhat present from 1958 to 1963 and as present from 1964 onward for this period. From 1933 to 1957, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. From 1958 to 1963, according to Polity5, the executive's constraints were categorized as Intermediate Category 2, between slight and substantial limitations. Since 1964, according to the Polity5 indicator, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. From 1933 to 1969, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. For 1970, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive.

04/09/1970 Continuation Electoral Democracy: On this date the first presidential elections under real universal suffrage took place.²⁷ As per FH's classification for 1972, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. Political liberties were present in this period (LIED, V-Dem PCLI). However, according to the Polity5 indicator, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power, which indicates defects of democracy regarding executive constraints. During 1971 and 1972, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. For 1973, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive.

09/11/1973 End Electoral Democracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, a military coup ousted the elected government led by Salvador Allende (Drake 1997, Valenzuela 1978, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 54). Allende died during an assault on the presidential palace, and a junta was composed of four high-ranking military officers. These were General Augusto Pinochet (Army), Admiral José Toribio Merino (Navy), General Gustavo Leigh (Air Force), and General César Mendoza (police).²⁸ The Christian Democratic, National, and Radical Democracy parties were placed in a state of „indefinite recess,“ while the Communists, Socialists, and Radicals were banned. In 1977, all parties were dissolved.²⁹ General Leigh, initially opposed to the consolidation of the legislative and executive branches under Pinochet, eventually faced dismissal from the regime in 1978. Air Force General Fernando Matthei replaced Leigh as a junta member.³⁰ Following a referendum that approved a new constitution, Pinochet took over as President on 03/11/1981. The junta remained as a legislative body under the presidency of Admiral Merino (Huneus 1998).³¹ The junta engaged in a campaign against political opponents, leftists, and their family members. The Rettig Commission reported that 2.279 people disappeared and were killed for political reasons or by political violence, and 27.000 were incarcerated, often without trials.³² According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. Per FH, for this regime period, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. As classified for 1988, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. Besides, for this time, LIED and V-Dem's PCLI indicate that political liberties were absent. From 1973 to 1987, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. In 1988, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. In 1989, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are limited. At the

same time, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

12/14/1989 End Military Autocracy/Start Liberal Democracy: In a plebiscite on 10/05/1988, 54.7 percent had rejected a further eight-year term for General Pinochet. Free and fair elections on 12/14/1989 marked a transition to democracy (Angell/Pollack 1990:2, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 54).³³ Augusto Pinochet ceded the presidency on 03/11/1990 after a coalition of Parties for Democracy (the Concertación de los Partidos por la Democracia) won the election (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 20). Patricio Aylwin Azócar took over the presidency (Lansford 2021: 311). Since then, Chile is a stable democracy with regular free and fair elections.³⁴ Since 2021 parts of southern Chile have been subject to a state of emergency due to conflicts between government forces and indigenous activists. A new progressive constitution was drafted by Chile's constitutional convention yet rejected by a majority in a national plebiscite.³⁵ In Chile's presidential regime, the president is both the head of state and of government. A multi-party system allows competitive elections. Institutions that regulate executive power such as the judiciary are independent and stable. FH classifies Chile as free in the whole regime period.³⁶ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 1989 elections are considered competitive by LIED, free and fair by V-Dem's EF&FI and clean by Per FH, for 1989, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. From 1990 onward, the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. V-Dem's CEI. Political liberties were present for this period (LIED, V-Dem PCLI). According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (1978, Angell 1993, Barros 2002, Ensalaco 1995, Faundez 1997, García Méndez 1985, Huneeus 1981, Huneeus 1998, Pearce 1996, Remmer 1984, Remmer 1989, Siavelis 2008, Sigmund 1977, Spooner 1994, Spooner 2011, Thiery 2000, Valenzuela 1978, Valenzuela 1999, Weeks 2003)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37

² https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Chile

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Chile; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilean_Constitution_of_1833

⁴ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Chile_1925

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Luis_Sanfuentes

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ram%C3%B3n_Barros_Luco

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arturo_Alessandri

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruido_de_sables

⁹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Chile#Parliamentary_era_\(1891%E2%80%931925\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Chile#Parliamentary_era_(1891%E2%80%931925))

¹⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_\(1924\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_(1924))

¹¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_\(1925\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_(1925))

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arturo_Alessandri#Second_administration

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luis_Barros_Borja

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1925_Chilean_presidential_election

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1925_Chilean_presidential_election

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlos_Ib%C3%A1%C3%B1ez_del_Campo#

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1927_Chilean_presidential_election

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlos_Ib%C3%A1%C3%B1ez_del_Campo#First_presidency

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro_Opaso

- ²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1931_Chilean_presidential_election#
- ²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Republic_of_Chile; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Esteban_Montero#Presidency
- ²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Republic_of_Chile; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Esteban_Montero#Presidency
- ²³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_\(1932\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_(1932))
- ²⁴ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartolomeo_Blanche_Espejo
- ²⁵ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Oyanedel_Urrutia
- ²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1970_Chilean_presidential_election
- ²⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Chile/The-military-dictatorship-from-1973>;
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_\(1973\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_(1973))
- ²⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Chile/The-military-dictatorship-from-1973>;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973_Chilean_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat
- ³⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_\(1973\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_(1973))
- ³¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_\(1973\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_(1973))
- ³² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_\(1973\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_Junta_of_Chile_(1973))
- ³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1989_Chilean_general_election
- ³⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/chile/freedom-world/2022>
- ³⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/chile/freedom-world/2023>
- ³⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/chile/freedom-world/2024>

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