

It's the Christian Democrats' Fault: Declining Political Identification in Chile, 1957–2012

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The widely observed decline in party identification around the world does not necessarily respond to the same causes everywhere. The decline might be associated with institutional weakness, a crisis of democratic representation, the rise of personal politics, generational replacement or post-materialist values, and it might not be uniformly distributed across all parties. In fact, while identification with some parties might sharply fall, other parties might experience a smaller decline or no decline at all. Using the case of Chile, we show that identification with the largest party has declined—and fluctuated in general—far more than identification with the other parties. To better understand decline in identification with parties, attention should be paid to variance in party identification within countries, as a good deal of the decline might be explained by falling identification with the largest party.

When democracy was restored in 1990, 71.5 per cent of Chileans identified with a political party. In late 2013, the figure was 26 per cent. That decrease—larger than in industrialized democracies—has received explanations that range from a democratic crisis of representation to the normalization of politics after an authoritarian experience. However, two-thirds of

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the fall in party identification can be explained by the decline in identification with the largest party, the centre-left Christian Democratic Party (PDC). Identification with the PDC has gone from 37.2 per cent in 1990 to 6.2 per cent in 2014. Identification with other parties has fallen by far less (34.3 to 19.4%)—in line with a decline observed in advanced industrial democracies (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000: 26). Using polling data from before the democratic breakdown of 1973 and from after 1990, we show that political party identification with parties other than the PDC has fluctuated far less over time and fallen less markedly in recent years.

In what follows, we discuss the concept of party identification and the causes for its widely reported decline. We then review existing evidence on declining party identification in Chile. Next, we present our data to show that the variance in party ID between 1957 and 2014 is primarily explained by fluctuations in identification with the PDC. As the party system in Chile has been historically aligned on a left-centre-right continuum, we also analyze the evolution of ideological identification on *three-thirds*, as the three-way division is regularly called. Though there is an evident decline in identification with the centre, identification with the left and right has remained more stable. We finish by analyzing the evolution of the determinants of party identification and identification with the PDC in selected pre-electoral polls for the 1960 to 2014 period. We show that the support basis for the PDC has aged and narrowed in terms of ideology.

Party Identification

Since first introduced, the concept of party identification seeks to “characterize the individual’s affective orientation to an important group-object” (Campbell et al., 1960: 121). The Michigan School considered party identification a central determinant of voting preferences: “No single datum can tell us more about the attitude and behavior of the individual as presidential elector than his location on a dimension of psychological identification extending between the two great parties” (Campbell et al., 1960: 142–43).

Though initially used to predict voting patterns, party identification subsequently became a dependent variable. The focus was placed on the determinants of party identification more than on its consequences (Fiorina, 1981). Where Campbell and colleagues “spoke of a stable, affective, and identity-based party identification of almost exogenous status, Fiorina saw a potentially volatile, rational, policy-based party identification with a clear endogenous position in the funnel of causality” (Holmberg, 2007: 559).

Although it remains a controversial concept (Holmberg, 2007), party identification has been used as a proxy for institutionalization (Dalton and Weldon, 2007), party volatility (Drummond, 2006; Roberts and

Abstract. For different reasons, identification with political parties has been on the decline everywhere. Using polling data, we show that political identification in Chile increased in times of polarization before 1973 and in the transition to democracy in 1990 and fell under democratic consolidation. The decline comes primarily from falling identification with the largest party, the centrist Christian Democratic Party (PDC). Assessing the determinants of party identification, we report that while in the 1960s the PDC had a wide appeal as it attracted voters identified with the left, centre and right, in recent years the PDC attracts support from centrists and older people.

Résumé. Pour différentes raisons, l'identification partisane est en diminution partout. À partir de données de sondages, nous démontrons que l'identification partisane au Chili a augmenté durant la période de polarisation politique antérieure à 1973, ainsi que durant la période de transition démocratique des années 1990, avant de diminuer durant la période de consolidation démocratique. Le principal facteur qui explique ce déclin est la chute de l'identification avec le plus important parti politique, le Parti de la Démocratie chrétienne (PDC) situé au centre de l'échiquier politique. L'analyse des déterminants de l'identification partisane révèle que durant les années 1960, le PDC attirait des électeurs de gauche, de centre et de droite alors que depuis les dernières années, il attire essentiellement des électeurs de centre et plus âgés.

Wibbels, 1999) and fragmentation (Coppedge, 1997). Support for parties is also one of the indicators to assess party alignment and dealignment (Dalton et al., 1984).

The emergence of post-materialist values (Inglehart, 2007), the rise of the personal vote (Cain et al., 1987) and single-issue voters (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006) have diminished the importance of long-term determinants of voting preferences. The decline of social class as a determinant of political identification has also reduced the importance of party identification as an explanatory variable (Knutsen, 2007). Finally, the focus on the economic vote has conditioned the effect of party identification on voting behaviour (Duch and Stevenson, 2008, Erikson et al., 2002; MacKuen et al., 1989).

Be it a dependent or independent variable, party identification has been on the decline since first identified in the 1960s (Dalton, 2004; Holmberg, 2007). That decline was well established in industrialized democracies in the latter half of the twentieth century (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000) and in emerging democracies (Holmberg, 2007), including Latin America (Hagopian, 1998), where it has been used as evidence of a crisis of democratic representation (Mainwaring et al., 2007). The cause behind declining party identification in Latin America has been associated with partisan dealignment which “has proceeded faster in more countries than has realignment” (Hagopian, 1998: 126). Most of these studies look at the aggregate decline for specific or groups of countries rather than at how identification with individual parties within countries has evolved. By using the case of Chile, we underline how the decline in identification at the national level hides a wider variance in the evolution of identification with individual parties.

Party Identification in Chile

Using electoral results, Carreras and colleagues find ample regional evidence for a dealignment, but note that Chile and Honduras stand out as having “stable partisan alignment[s]” (2013: 13). The Chilean party system has been compared to European party systems in its cleavage-based structure (Coppedge, 1998). Valenzuela argues that “forming a new party or running as an independent... has been a somewhat risky strategy given the identification of a considerable portion of the electorate with the major party labels (1995: 4).”

Yet, using polling data, Bargsted and Somma find a “generalized process of dealignment” in Chile (Bargsted and Somma, 2013: 11). In fact, Chile stands among the countries with the lowest levels of party identification (Latinobarometro, 2013). The Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) 2010 report indicated that “except in Haiti, no other country in the region presents such a drastic decline in such a short period of time” (Luna and Rosenblatt, 2012: 170). In the 2012 LAPOP report, Chilean parties are noted “among those with the least sympathy” (Luna et al., 2012: 81) among all the countries included in the report. Reporting a decline in party identification across all age and income groups, Segovia notes that more Chileans identify with parties and on the ideological scale on election years (2009).

Noting that identification with parties decreased from 70 per cent when democracy was restored to 40 per cent in 2009, Morales (2012) argues that “low volatility and low identification is exceptional for the theory of [party] institutionalization” and proceeds to define Chile, following Zucco (2010), as a “hydroponic party system” (Morales, 2012: 85), suggesting that parties are strong but have shallow roots in society.

Discontent and malaise with the new democratic system was reported in the 1990s (Moulián, 1997; PNUD, 1998; Riquelme, 1999). In 1998, Huneeus reported a “decline in party identification... which results in an increase in the volatile vote” (1998: 4), associating it with the way in which the transition to democracy occurred. While some have noted that “low- and medium-educated citizens and youth (with the exception of highly educated youth) are the groups that present lower levels of partisan attachment” (Luna and Altman, 2011: 19), others have claimed that declining levels of party identification evidence a weak and insufficiently representative democracy (Atria et al., 2013; Mayol, 2012; Portales, 2000; Winn 2004).

The decline in party identification has been linked with a decline in identification on the left-centre-right scale (Huneeus, 2005: 72–73). In fact, “the declining meaning of ideological currents is matched by an increasing refusal to identify with any of the ideological currents [left, centre-left, centre, centre-right, right, and independent]” (Luna and Altman, 2011: 14–15).

These two conflicting views on party identification decline result from the fact that overall party identification has fallen primarily because of a steep decline on party identification with the PDC. In the early 1990s, when identification with the PDC increased, overall party identification also increased, but identification with other parties did not vary significantly. To be sure, identification with other parties has also fluctuated, but far less than identification with the PDC. Detecting this trend in the mid-1990s, López and Martínez reported that PDC sympathizers do not easily switch allegiance to other parties (López and Martínez, 1999: 172–75).

The discrepancy on whether Chile has seen alignment or dealignment results from the fact that these studies treat party identification as a variable that affects all parties equally. In showing that declining party identification need not uniformly affect all parties, we contribute to the discussion on what explains falling identification with parties and on the determinants of party dealignment in emerging democracies.

Methodology

As the Chilean party system is usually analyzed on identification with individual parties and on a left-centre-right scale, we also use the traditional dual focus on parties and “thirds.” We look longitudinally at the evolution of party and ideological identification and use a cross-sectional analysis to explore the determinants of that identification in three different moments.

We rely on polls conducted between 1957 and 1973 in Santiago by sociologist Eduardo Hamuy (Navia and Osorio, 2015). In 20 of those polls—conducted between October 1957 and February 1973—the questionnaires inquired about identification with the left, centre, right or none. In 20 polls, conducted between 1961 and 1973, Hamuy inquired about identification with political parties. Often, Hamuy also asked about identification with political parties and with the left, centre or right (not on the usual 1–10 scale). For the post-1989 period, we use polls conducted by Centro de Estudios Públicos (CEP) between 1990 and 2014. These polls used probabilistic national samples. Normally, CEP conducts two polls per year. Altogether, there are 58 post-1989 national polls where respondents were asked to self-identify with the left, centre or right and with political parties. The pre-1973 polls were conducted only in Santiago. The post-1989 polls were national samples. Though they are not fully comparable, the pre-1973 Hamuy polls are the only survey data available to study political party and ideological identification.

For the cross-sectional analysis, we conduct multinomial logit regressions using the Hamuy and CEP polls for years immediately preceding an election year. Unlike Torcal and Mainwaring (2003) who use polling data from 1973 and 1995 to assess changes in the social bases of party

competition, we avoid using years of unusually high levels of polarization. As we discuss below, 1973 was the year with the highest level of party identification, while 1995 saw a steep decline in party identification. Since party identification increases in election years, we select years that are comparable in terms of the electoral cycle. Thus we analyze the determinants of party identification and identification with the PDC in the pre- (presidential) election years of 1969, 1992, 2004 and 2012. We exclude the 1989 and 1999 presidential elections because they were held under authoritarian rule (1989) or non-concurrently with legislative elections (1999).

The Evolution of Political Identification in Chile

In the twentieth century, the Chilean party system constituted along a left-centre-right alignment (Collier and Sater, 1996; Valenzuela, 1978; Valenzuela and Valenzuela, 1976). Parties were described as having deep roots in society, with a well-defined class-based structure (Drake, 1978; Scully, 1992). The incorporation of the urban working class explains the rise of left-wing Communist (PC) and Socialist (PS) parties (Angell, 1972; Drake, 1978). The incorporation of the rural poor in the 1950s redefined the political landscape, favouring the PDC and weakening the PR (Fleet, 1985; Grayson, 1968; Scully, 1992; Valenzuela, 1995). The PDC-led agrarian reform increased political polarization in the countryside and weakened the landowning electoral base of right-wing parties (Loveman, 1976; Scully, 1992; Valenzuela, 1978).

As the new leading centrist party, the PDC failed to facilitate the formation of multi-party government coalitions and thus a polarized multi-party system emerged in the late 1960s (Valenzuela, 1978, 1990). Based on studies of party elites, polarization of the party system at the elite level is said to have contributed to the democratic breakdown (Valenzuela, 1978), but others have blamed the extreme parties for polarizing the system (Moulian, 1993; Scully 1992). Using data from three polls, the claim of increasing polarization has been challenged (Prothro and Chaparro, 1974). Declining identification with the PDC coincided with the breakdown of democracy in the early 1970s and with democratic consolidation since the early 1990s.

The two traditional right-wing parties, Liberal and Conservative, badly lost the 1965 legislative election and merged into the National Party (PN) in 1967 (Correa Sutil, 2005; Valenzuela, 1995). Thus, the pre-1973 party system comprised the Liberal and Conservative parties (and later the PN) on the right, the PDC and PR on the centre and the PS, and PC on the left (Moulian, 1993).

With the restoration of democracy in 1990, several pre-1973 parties made a comeback (Angell 2003; Siavelis, 2002). Drawing on continuities

in party organization and electoral preferences before 1973 and after 1990, the persistence of the three-thirds alignment has been noted (Garretón, 1989; Valenzuela, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Valenzuela and Scully, 1997; Valenzuela et al., 2007). Others have identified the emergence of a new authoritarian/democratic divide in the political party system (Bonilla et al., 2011; Montes et al., 2000; Tironi and Agüero, 1999; Torcal and Mainwaring, 2003). The electoral system has also been identified as a barrier that prevents the three-thirds divide from materializing (Navia, 2005; Siavelis, 2004). The across-the-board two-seat proportional representation district arrangement, known as the binominal system, induced the formation of two coalitions that challenged the old three-thirds alignment (Magar et al., 1998).

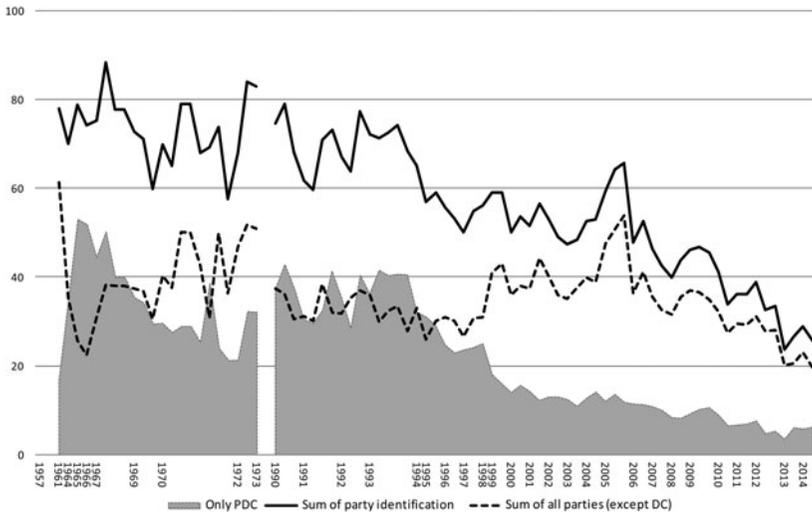
The PDC became the most important party in the mid-1960s and has remained so until today—in terms of party identification, though it is not the party with the highest vote share. Yet, the electoral bases of PDC changed during the dictatorship (Torcal and Mainwaring, 2003; Valenzuela and Scully, 1997). In post-Pinochet democracy, Bonilla and colleagues (2011) and Dow (1998) find PDC sympathizers self-identify as left-of-centre and report that identification with the PDC and left-wing parties is strongly associated with opposition to the Pinochet regime. Identification with the centre on a left-right scale and religion, in urban areas, is an important predictor of support for the PDC (Morales and Poveda, 2007). Huneus (2003) showed declining identification with the PDC among the youth from 1990 to 2001.

Overall party identification has evolved substantially over time. Figure 1 shows the evolution in party id from 1957 until 2014 (excluding the Pinochet period), with and without the PDC. When we exclude identification with the PDC, evolution in identification with all other parties fluctuates less.

To analyze the evolution in identification with parties other than the PDC, we separate the analysis in two figures. Figure 2 includes the three left-wing parties, the PS, PC and Party for Democracy (PPD), and two centrist parties, the PDC and PR. Four parties—PDC, PR, PS, PC—have been active uninterruptedly since the mid-1950s. With the exception of the 1970–1973 period, identification with the PS, PC and PR has remained below 10 per cent. The PS enjoyed a peak over 20 per cent under Allende. After 1990, though lower than its pre-1973 peak, identification with the PC and PS was at similar levels as in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Identification with the PR shows a decline in the late 1950s and stability since the early 1970s. Identification with the PPD has fluctuated between 5 and 10 per cent.

Identification with the PDC fluctuated significantly, between 10 and 50 per cent. It reached its peak when Eduardo Frei became president in 1964. After 1990, support for the PDC remained high under the presidencies of PDC Patricio Aylwin (1990–1994) and Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle

FIGURE 1.
Identification with political parties, with and without PDC 1957–2014



Source: Authors, with data from *Eduardo Hamuy polls, 1957–1973* and *CEP polls, 1990–2014*

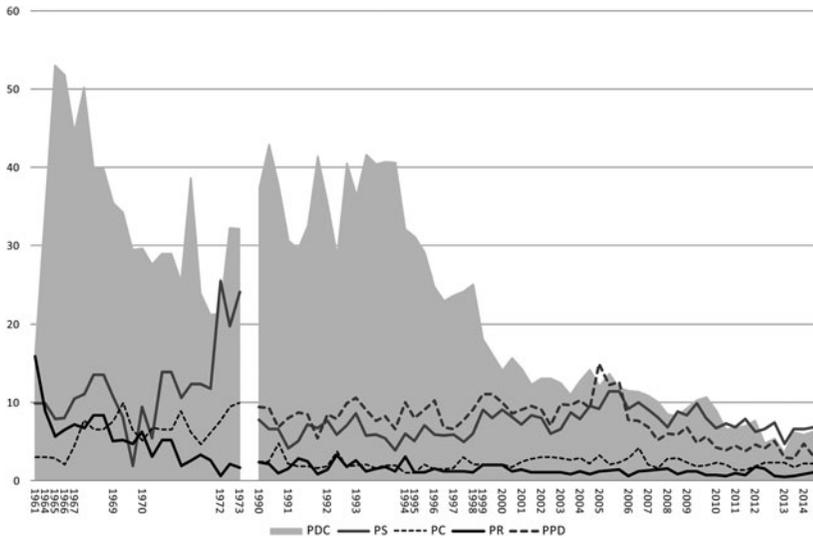
(1994–2000). Decline in identification with the PDC began in the mid-1990s and continued after 2000, when the PDC was a minority partner in the Concertación, under presidents Ricardo Lagos (PPD, 2000–2006) and Michelle Bachelet (PS, 2006–2010).

Figure 3 shows identification with right-wing parties from 1961 to 2014. For before 1966, we combined the identification with the Conservative and Liberal parties. For after 1990, we report identification with Unión Demócrata Independiente (UDI), Renovación Nacional (RN) and the combined identification with the two right-wing parties.

Identification with the right shows an upward trend since the 1960s. Identification with the PN grew to 18 per cent in the first year of Allende before declining by 1973. After 1989, identification with right-wing parties has reached peaks of more than 20 per cent after the 1999 and 2005 presidential elections. The peak with UDI happened after 1999 and with RN in 2005, years when each party had popular presidential candidates. With the exception of the period around 1999, more people identify with RN than with UDI. The combined identification with the two right parties shows fluctuation—not just decline—over time.

The highly polarized party system identified as one of the causes of the breakdown of democracy is not reflected in the patterns of political party identification shown in Figures 2 and 3. There was an increase in

FIGURE 2.
Identification with Centre and Left Political Parties, 1961–2014



Source: Authors, with data from *Eduardo Hamuy polls, 1957–1973* and *CEP polls, 1990–2014*

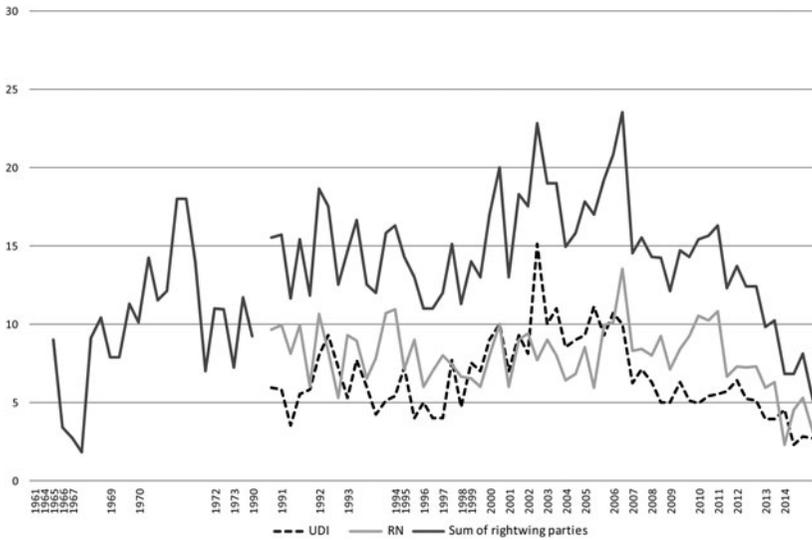
identification with the PS and PC before 1973, but at the height of political polarization, fewer people identified with left-wing and right-wing parties than with the PDC. Considering that it was a period of high political polarization, there was high fluctuation in the level of identification with the PDC, and to a lesser extent with right-wing parties before 1973, while support for left-wing parties was more stable (with the exception of the Allende period).

The claim that political parties have always enjoyed high levels of identification is not supported by public opinion data. The overall trend points to higher volatility in identification with the PDC and more stable identification with the other parties. Though some parties have experienced upticks in times of polarization, as in the early 1970s and during the transition to democracy in the early 1990, all other parties show far less variance in their identification during the period than the PDC.

Identification on the Left-Centre-Right Scale

The evolution in identification on the left-centre-right scale can shed light on why identification with the PDC evolved differently than identification with other parties. In Chile, polls normally ask individuals about their

FIGURE 3.
Political Identification with rightwing parties, 1961–2014



Source: Authors, with data from *Eduardo Hamuy polls, 1957–1973* and *CEP polls, 1990–2014*

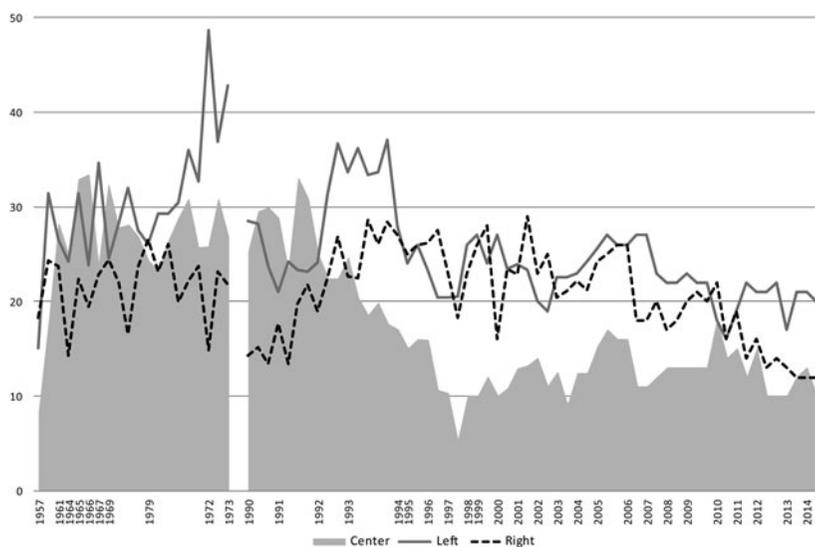
political identification with the left, centre or right rather than on a 1–10 scale as is normally done in other countries. Both the Hamuy and CEP polls ask specifically if Chileans identify with the left, centre or right. In that regard, pre-1973 and post-1990 polls are comparable in assessing political identification.

In the early 1960s, close to 30 per cent identified with the left and centre, and around 25 per cent did so with the right, as shown in Figure 4. Identification with the left reached almost 50 per cent in 1972. Identification with the centre remained at around 30 per cent, while identification with the right was steady near 20 per cent. As Chilean politics became more polarized, identification with the right did not grow, but identification with the left increased drastically.

By 1972, the three-thirds had evolved into a two-way polarizing divide between a leftist half and a centre-right half in Congress. Political polarization is associated with the weakening of the centre (Sartori 1976). Yet, before 1973, there was a growth in identification with the left, a smaller increase in identification with the right, a large decline in identification with the PDC, but identification with the centre remained stable.

In the early 1990s, identification with the centre was at similar levels as before 1973. After falling below 10 per cent in 1997, it has since fluctuated between 10 and 15 per cent. Identification with the left and right has

FIGURE 4.
Political Identification with the Left-Centre-Right in Chile, 1957–2014



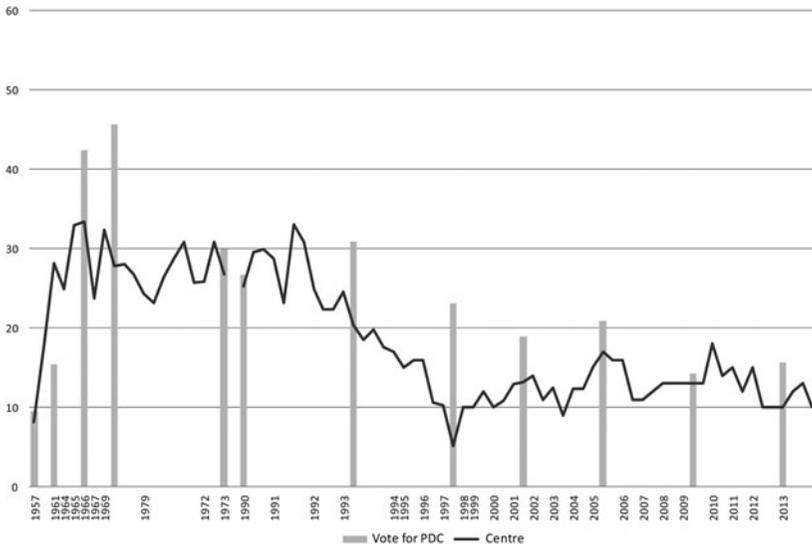
Source: Authors, with data from *Eduardo Hamuy polls, 1957–1973* and *CEP polls, 1990–2014*

fluctuated more, with the highest support for the left a few years after the transition. A downward trend since then has brought support for the left to around 20 per cent. Identification with the right was lowest in the early 90s, with less than 15 per cent. Figure 4 shows a steady decline in identification with the three thirds since 1990. After being the most stable before 1973, the centre was the first third to see a decline after the transition.

Figure 5 plots the identification with the centre and vote share for the PDC between 1957 and 2014. Before 1973, support for the centre was lower than the PDC vote share. While in 1973 less than 30 per cent sympathized with the centre, the vote share for centrist parties was close to 40 per cent. Higher vote share than poll support for centrist parties before 1973 might result from the rapid growth of the PDC in rural areas. Unfortunately, the Hamuy polls in our study were only conducted in Santiago. Since 1989, the PDC vote share has always been higher than the level of identification with the centre. Thus, the PDC electoral base extends beyond those who identify only as centrists.

Studies on electoral behaviour and political preferences in Chile have normally assumed that voters who identify with political parties also identify with the corresponding third on the left-centre-right scale (Morales and Poveda, 2007: 149; Briceño and Navia, 2008). However, as Table 1 shows,

FIGURE 5.
Political Identification with Centre and votes for the PDC, 1957–2014



Source: Authors, with data from *Eduardo Hamuy polls, 1957–1973*, *CEP polls, 1990–2014* and Cruz-Coke (1984)

TABLE 1.
Identification with PDC by identification with thirds (per cent)

	1969	1992	2012
Right	18.7	19.9	17.7
Centre	18.7	28.3	29.9
Left	50.4	47.3	54.5
None	12.3	4.5	3.9
Total	100	100	100
per cent identified with PDC	34.2	40.4	5.2

Source: Hamuy Poll (1969) and CEP Polls (1992 and 2012)

those who identify with the PDC in three polls conducted a year before the 1970, 1993 and 2013 presidential elections shows a far less than perfect overlap between identification with political parties and on the left–centre–right scale. Though overall identification with the PDC varied from 43.2 per cent in 1969 to 40.4 per cent in 1992 and 5.3 per cent in 2012, those who identified with the party were consistent in the way they aligned themselves on the ideological scale. Close to 20 per cent of PDC sympathizers identified with the right, whereas around 50 per cent indicated

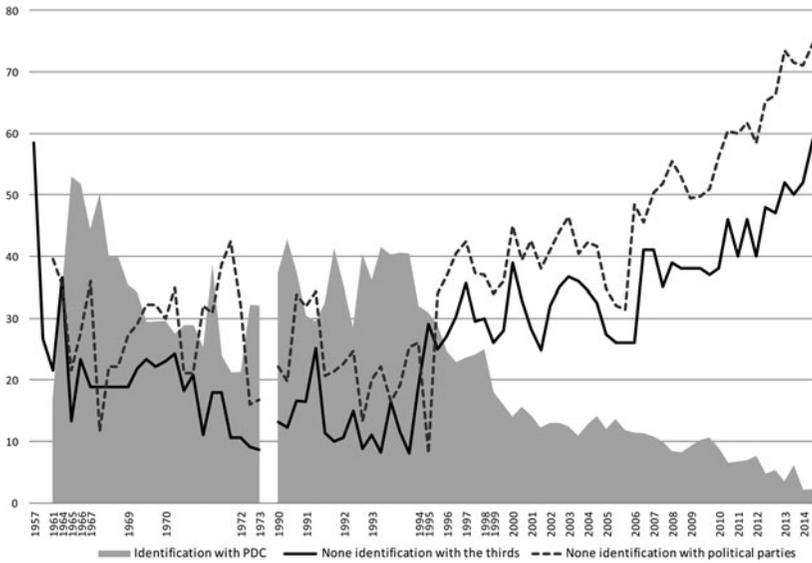
an identification with the left. Those identified with the centre increased from less than 20 per cent in 1969 to close to 30 per cent in 1992 and 2012. Thus, political party ID and ideological self-positioning should not be treated the same way, at least for those identified with the PDC. While identification with the PDC declined over time, the breakdown of PDC sympathizers continued to reflect a wide ideological identification on the left-centre-right scale.

Since 1990, the dominant role played by the centre-left Concertación coalition and the centre-right Alianza has made it more difficult to use the three-thirds to describe the Chilean electorate. As Torcal and Mainwaring (2003) and Bonilla and colleagues (2011) have argued, parties form coalitions that, in turn, align along an authoritarian-democratic divide. However, identification with coalitions has also fallen in line with declining party identification. In 1994, when CEP polls first asked for identification with coalitions, 47 per cent identified with the Concertación and 19 per cent with the Alianza. By 2012, those numbers had fallen to 22 per cent and 14 per cent respectively, showing a steeper decline in the coalition that includes the PDC.

The decline in identification with the PDC and the centre is correlated with an increase among those who do not identify with parties or on the scale. Figure 6 shows those who identify with “none,” both on the left-centre-right scale and with political parties. There is a U-shape trend. There were low levels of party and ideological identification in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but those choosing “none” decreased starting in the late 1960s. After 1990, it began to increase rapidly. The “none” is higher on the party than on the left-centre-right scale. When identification with the thirds declines, so does identification with parties. We do not know which dimension of identification drives the other. It might be that they are both indicators of a broader notion of political identification.

In the October 1957 poll, 58.5 per cent identified with no political sector. The fact that President Carlos Ibáñez (1952–1958) was an independent might explain the low identification with the thirds, but even if we exclude those who identified with “other,” 29.6 per cent chose not to identify on the left-centre-right scale. Presidential elections are associated with an increase in polarization. Consistently, in the first poll conducted after Frei's 1964 victory, those not identified on the ideological scale fell to 10 per cent, but by 1965, the number increased again to 25 per cent. After the 1970 election, levels of identification remained high. The low identification with “none” in February of 1973 (8.6%), the last poll conducted before the democratic breakdown, reflected high polarization. After democracy was restored, identification with “none” began to experience a steady increase. Though there was polarization at times of turmoil in the late 1960s and transition to democracy in the early 1990s, in politically normal times, about a fourth of Chileans have consistently failed to identify politically.

FIGURE 6.
Political Identification with PDC and “None”, 1957–2014



Source: Authors, with data from *Eduardo Hamuy polls, 1957–1973* and *CEP polls, 1990–2014*

Determinants of Identification with the PDC

Since the evolution in support for other parties has varied far less, we focus in this last section on changes in identification with the PDC. To assess the evolution in support for the PDC, we look at the determinants for identification with the PDC before and after 1973. Since the polls were different in their design and scope, we separate the two periods. We estimated three multinomial regression models. The dependent variable is identification with political parties. We grouped identification in four categories, identification with the PDC, identification with leftist parties (those parties to the left of the PDC), identification with right-wing parties and none. We use identification with the PDC as our reference category.

Following classic studies on party identification, we include as control variables long, medium and short-term determinants of party identification. We use level of education, socio-economic status, political identification on the thirds (left-centre-right scale), approval for the president, and socio-tropic perceptions. Sociotropic perceptions on the economy, following Erikson and colleagues (2002), are coded from ‘-1’ (worse) to ‘1’ (better). As control variables, we include gender and age. Table 2 reports the findings for the Hamuy poll in 1969 and Table 3 reports the findings for the CEP polls in 2002 and 2012.

TABLE 2.
Multinomial logit regression on PDC identification, 1969

	Left-wing parties	Right-wing parties	None
Female	0.107 (0.333)	-0.184 (0.462)	0.135 (0.319)
Age	0.00327 (0.0683)	0.257 ^a (0.0963)	-0.0426 (0.0661)
Education			
Primary*			
Secondary	0.196 (0.366)	0.495 (0.517)	0.312 (0.350)
Tertiary	0.0697 (0.785)	1.049 (0.948)	1.152 ^c (0.657)
Socio-economic status			
Low*			
Medium	-0.0167 (0.370)	1.047 ^c (0.604)	0.268 (0.363)
High	0.628 (0.554)	2.632 ^a (0.758)	0.801 (0.511)
Identification with thirds			
Centre*			
None	-0.958 ^c (0.496)	-0.556 (0.966)	1.015 ^b (0.434)
Left	-1.387 ^a (0.397)	0.00361 (0.651)	-1.233 ^a (0.406)
Right	-1.619 ^a (0.542)	1.955 ^a (0.700)	-1.101 ^b (0.530)
Presidential approval	-1.818 ^a (0.366)	-1.739 ^a (0.494)	-0.685 ^b (0.345)
Sociotropic evaluation	-1.263 ^a (0.300)	-1.449 ^a (0.408)	-1.185 ^a (0.283)
Constant	0.967 ^c (0.514)	-3.639 ^a (0.985)	-0.119 (0.535)
Observations	379	379	379

The reference category for the dependent variable is identification with the PDC

*Reference category

Standard errors in parentheses

^ap < 0.01

^bp < 0.05

^cp < 0.1

Source: Hamuy Poll (April, 1969)

Table 2 confirms that the ideological bases of the PDC were not restricted to those who identified with the centre. Those not identified on the ideological third (right, centre or left) were more likely to identify with no party, but they were also more likely to identify with the PDC than with left-wing parties. This is consistent with findings that report PDC sympathizers to

TABLE 3.
Multinomial logit regression on PDC identification, 1992 and 2012

	1992			2012		
	Left-wing parties	Right-wing parties	None	Left-wing parties	Right-wing parties	None
Female	-0.238 ^c (0.136)	-0.199 (0.153)	-0.309 (0.194)	0.340 (0.278)	-0.471 (0.347)	0.0289 (0.260)
Age	-0.00551 (0.00470)	-0.00207 (0.00519)	0.00300 (0.00670)	-0.0340 ^a (0.00866)	-0.0275 ^a (0.0105)	-0.0294 ^a (0.00810)
Education						
Primary*						
Secondary	0.0435 (0.164)	0.252 (0.180)	0.49 ^a (0.231)	-0.0486 (0.332)	0.263 (0.416)	-0.158 (0.307)
Tertiary	0.436 ^b (0.210)	0.556 ^b (0.237)	0.904 ^a (0.308)	0.732 (0.584)	0.886 (0.677)	0.886 (0.557)
Socio-economic status						
Low*						
Medium	-0.0667 (0.149)	-0.0172 (0.170)	0.334 (0.216)	0.170 (0.286)	0.312 (0.368)	0.240 (0.268)
High	-0.0845 (0.344)	0.654 ^c (0.340)	0.209 (0.504)	-0.520 (1.492)	-1.037 (1.370)	-0.171 (1.168)
Identification with thirds						
Centre*						
None	0.475 (0.342)	-0.559 ^c (0.336)	3.495 ^a (0.254)	0.992 ^c (0.584)	0.450 (0.812)	4.077 ^a (0.507)
Left	1.529 ^a (0.182)	-2.476 ^a (0.309)	-1.012 ^a (0.309)	0.984 ^a (0.333)	-2.228 ^a (0.811)	-0.161 (0.307)
Right	0.343 (0.235)	0.834 ^a (0.164)	-0.0791 (0.282)	-0.183 (0.489)	2.432 ^a (0.471)	0.392 (0.399)

Presidential approval	-0.552 ^a (0.150)	-1.219 ^a (0.158)	-1.161 ^a (0.200)	-0.0427 (0.356)	0.711 ^c (0.406)	0.0795 (0.322)
Sociotropic evaluation	-0.130 (0.109)	-0.165 (0.123)	-0.121 (0.158)	0.0827 (0.218)	0.499 ^c (0.267)	0.287 (0.205)
Constant	-0.827 ^a (0.304)	0.103 (0.308)	-1.645 ^a (0.418)	1.588 ^b (0.644)	0.300 (0.778)	2.379 ^a (0.596)
Observations	1,779	1,779	1,779	1,340	1,340	1,340

The reference category for the dependent variable is identification with the PDC

*Reference category

Standard errors in parentheses

^ap < 0.01

^bp < 0.05

^cp < 0.

Source: CEP Polls (November, 1992 and November, 2012)

self-locate left of centre in the ideological scale after 1990 (Bonilla et al., 2011; Dow, 1998). Those identified with the left were more likely to identify with the PDC than with left-wing parties. That reflected both the heterogeneity of left-wing parties and the reformist rhetoric of the PDC (after all, the PDC came to power in 1964 promising a Revolution in Liberty). Thus, those who self-defined as leftist were inclined to identify with the PDC just as those who identified with the PDC were more likely to define themselves as leftists.

Those who self-defined as centrists were strongly identified with right-wing parties. They were less likely to identify with the PDC than with right-wing parties but they were also more likely to identify with the PDC than with no party. Thus, those self-defined as rightists who did not adhere to a right-wing party were also potential PDC sympathizers in 1969. That reflects the broad base appeal of the PDC that attracted support from among those self-defined as leftist and rightist.

Not surprisingly, Table 2 also shows that in 1969, those who identified with parties other than the PDC or with no party at all were less likely to approve of President Frei and less likely to have a positive economic outlook. In terms of socio-economic strata, the electoral base of the PDC only differed from those of right-wing parties. The base of PDC sympathizers was not statistically different than the base of sympathizers of left-wing parties or those not identified with any party.

Table 3 shows two multinomial logit regressions for 1992 and 2012. Since political identification normally increases in elections, we chose the year before a presidential election. The models reflect the change in the support base for the PDC over the period. As identification with the PDC decreased, the basis of support for that party also changed.

In 1992, there were no age differences in the bases of support for the PDC with regards to left-wing and right-wing parties (and with those not identified). In 2012, PDC sympathizers were systematically older than the rest. The evolution in identification with the PDC between 1969 and 2012 shows the aging in identification with the PDC overtime. In the 1960s, the PDC had stronger support among younger Chileans while by 2012, its strongest support base was among older Chileans.

In terms of gender, more women identified with the PDC than left-wing parties in 1992, but that was no longer the case in 2012. The base of support for the PDC was strongest among those with lower levels of education. Those with higher educational levels were more likely to identify with left-wing and right-wing parties than with the PDC. Those with higher educational levels were also more likely to identify with no party than with the PDC. The PDC was also less likely than right-wing parties to attract support from people in higher socio-economic status.

In 1992, those not identified with the left, centre or right were strongly more likely not to identify with any political party, but they were also more

likely to identify with the PDC than with right-wing parties. Those who self-defined as leftist were obviously more likely to identify with left-wing parties but also more likely to identify with the PDC than with right-wing parties or with no party. In 2012, those not identified with the left, centre or right were more likely to identify with no parties, but also more likely to identify with left-wing parties than with the PDC or right-wing parties. In 2012, those identified with the left continued to identify more with the PDC than with right-wing parties. Those self-defined as rightist continued to identify primarily with right-wing parties and not with the PDC in 2012.

In 1992, when PDC President Patricio Aylwin had high approval, presidential approval had a positive effect on identification with the PDC with respect to other categories. In 2012, when the president was from the right-wing Alianza, presidential approval explained identification with right-wing parties when compared to the PDC. Unlike 1969, sociotropic perceptions were not significant in 1992 or 2012.

After 1990, identification with the PDC was lower among rightists than among those identified with the centre. Something similar happened with those identified with the left. They were no longer more likely to identify with the PDC. Those identified with none were also far less likely to identify with the PDC than those identified with the centre. Unlike 1969, when the PDC drew support from all sectors, after 1990, the support basis for the PDC was restricted to those identified with the centre. As the percentage of those identified with the centre declined, support for the PDC also declined.

Since the 1990s, PDC sympathizers have been more likely to identify with the left than with the centre. However, in 2012, the support base for the PDC no longer showed a higher likelihood among leftists than centrists to identify with the PDC. Over time, the PDC lost its support base both in the right and left and was only able to maintain its support basis among those self-defined as centrists.

Before 1973, the PDC attracted support from those identified with the right and left, but after 1990 the PDC obtained its support primarily from those identified with the centre. As the percentage of centrists declined, identification with the PDC also fell rapidly. Since those not identified on the ideological scale have markedly increased since 1990 and the PDC—or any other party—has failed to attract support from that group, the electoral base for the PDC has continued to shrink. As compared to before 1973, when the PDC also attracted support from the left and right, after 1990, the inability of the PDC to attract support from those identified with the left, right or none explains the rapid decline in identification with the PDC. Since the pre-1973 polls were only conducted in Santiago, we also estimated the models for the post 1990 polls using only Santiago

residents. The results did not differ from those using the entire national sample.

Conclusion

As in most other countries, identification with political parties in Chile has declined in recent years. However, the evolution of identification with parties for the entire 1957–2014 period is more nuanced. In periods of polarization, identification with parties increased while in periods of political normalcy, it declined. Most of the decline can be explained by falling identification with the PDC, the largest party. Identification with other parties has fallen far less.

Identification on the left-centre-right scale should not be automatically equated with identification with political parties that ascribe to each ideological third. In fact, the PDC received support from people identified with the left, centre and right. Though the party self-defined as centrist (ideologically different from the socialist left) in the 1960s and as centre-left after the restoration of democracy, PDC sympathizers before 1973 saw themselves primarily as leftists more than centrists or rightists. After 1990, PDC sympathizers have primarily defined themselves as centrists.

Though party identification there has fallen as elsewhere in the world, the case of Chile shows that most of the decline is explained by falling identification with one large party, the PDC. If the PDC is excluded, political identification in Chile has declined far less, with periods of up and down associated with elections and political polarization.

To be sure, political parties have remained, as Garretón noted, the backbone of the political process in Chile (1989: xvi). Before 1973 and after 1990, they have been central to the political evolution in the country. The data we present do not challenge abundant references to the high level of party institutionalization in Chile but simply introduce nuances as we show that a large segment of society never identified with political parties in polls. The fact that political parties have historically dominated electoral politics—with Chileans showing scant interest in supporting independent candidates—underlines the importance of our findings. With the exception of the PDC, identification with parties was stable and low but people continued to vote for candidates from traditional parties. Moreover, since identification on polls with the left-centre-right scale was historically higher than identification with political parties, we conclude that ideology was an important determinant of political identification in Chile.

The case of Chile can enlighten our understanding of declining party identification elsewhere. A drastic fall in the identification with a large party can lead to wrong generalizations about declining identification

with all parties. Even if identification with other parties remains constant, when identification with the largest party falls drastically, observers might wrongly conclude that the country is experiencing an overall party identification dealignment. By analyzing the evolution in party identification by parties—and not just at the national level—richer conclusions can be made about what explains the overall decline in party identification.

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