

## **An Investigation of Television's Role in the Transition to Democracy Following the 1988 Chilean Plebiscite**

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On September 11, 1973, Augusto José Ramón Pinochet assimilated power in Chile after a coup that overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende that ended the civil exercise of democracy in Chile. Pinochet's military government lasted 17 years and resulted in a recorded 3,200 murders, 80,000 exiled and more than 30,000 tortured (Evans 2006:228). His government is characterized by three basic elements: the use of brutal coercion during the early stages of power, economic decisions that transformed the country, and the icon of Pinochet as a figure of stability and power (Couso 2009:587). Pinochet legitimized his military regime by constitutional and economic legal means through the reform of the juridical policy, the formation of a new constitution and the restructuring of the economic system previously formed by the Allende government (Couso 2009:589).

1988 marked a revolutionary year in Chilean history: the opportunity to vote in favor or against to the hypothetical eight-year extension of Pinochet's position in power through a plebiscite that was initiated by Pinochet himself (Hojman 1992:171). This plebiscite was the first election in Chilean history in which television served as the primary platform for distribution of political propaganda. Chilean citizens were granted the opportunity to vote SÍ in favor of an eight-year extension to Pinochet's military government, or NO, in favor of elections to be carried out the following year. The NO campaign won with 56% of the popular vote, ending the military ruling in Chile and initiating a gradual transition to democracy in Chile once again.

Through the media-scape, marginalized individuals within society have a platform to assert themselves into a cultural and political context within their nation. The NO campaign was a remarkable example of the power of images to persuade an oppressed population to voice their opinion through a vote. This summer, I had the opportunity to investigate the role of television in the distribution of political propaganda during the SÍ and NO campaign that initiated the transition to democracy in Chile in 1990. I investigated the use of television in Chile to retain political stability in the country during the dictatorship and the transition to democracy.

Specifically, my focus this summer was to begin to analyze the methodology and intentions of Chilean government-funded television propaganda as well as to investigate the effects of censorship in limiting political involvement and retaining stability in Chile during the 1990s. During my three weeks of independent research in Valparaíso, Chile where I studied abroad, I collected archival information and conducted a series of unstructured interviews with Chilean citizens about their experiences, participation, and opinions regarding the plebiscite and the role of television in the success of the NO campaign.

I spent a lot of time in the Museo de Memoria y Derechos Humanos in Santiago collecting resources related to the topic, speaking with experts in the field, as well as viewing portions of the campaigns themselves in the digital library. I also conducted research in the archives of the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. Interestingly enough, some of the most useful resources were collected from personal libraries of individuals that I had the opportunity to interview: telling of the significance of the victory of the NO campaign in the lives of Chilean citizens. This research will be the basis of an independent study I will conduct in the fall of 2017 under the mentorship of Allen Wells.

**Faculty Mentor: Allen Wells**

**Funded by Latin American Studies Research Award**