Social Networks and Political Parties in Chile

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Resumen

En este estudio se describe el origen y la evolución de dos partidos políticos chilenos (el Partido Radical y el Partido Demócrata Cristiano) por medio del análisis de las redes sociales que los originaron y que los componen. Se propone un modelo teórico que consiste en la combinación de un análisis estructural basado en el estudio de redes sociales y en la descripción del sistema simbólico que las retroalimenta. La estructura y función de las redes sociales depende de la dirección en la que se dan los intercambios -redes horizontales y redes verticales-, de lo que se intercambia, y de la articulación que se da entre las redes. En toda sociedad se dan intercambios simétricos y asimétricos, que van conformando redes horizontales y verticales. Estas redes se van articulando entre sí, conformando el tejido social. El predominio de unas sobre otras y su combinación dan el carácter a la cultura política (ejemplo, autoritaria vs. igualitaria). En el caso de Chile encontramos que se trata de una sociedad horizontalmente estructurada en clases sociales, al interior de las cuales se advierten redes sociales informales que eventualmente y por razones ideológicas se van formalizando en partidos políticos. Estos grupos igualitarios de amigos ejercen informalmente control sobre sus propios miembros creando barreras invisibles que los distinguen de los demás, y aunque si bien es cierto que en ellos surgen líderes "naturales", su liderazgo es condicional lo que permite el surgimiento de tendencias y facciones que a su vez pueden llegar a constituirse en nuevos partidos. Por ende, el sistema depende de negociaciones horizontales permanentes mediadas por un fuerte presidencialismo dentro de un sistema parlamentario fuerte y apoyado por una legitimidad casi fanática.

Palabras clave: redes sociales – estructura política – cultura política.

Abstract

This paper describes the origin and evolution of two Chilean political parties (the Radical Party and the Christian Democrat Party) through the analysis of the social networks that originated and composed them. The aim of this study is to propose a model of national political cultures on the basis of the structure of social networks related to power and of the symbol system, which legitimizes it. The structure of social networks, horizontal and vertical, are based on reciprocal or redistributive forms of exchange, on what is being exchanged and on the articulation between networks. In every society there are symmetrical and asymmetrical exchanges, which produce horizontal and vertical networks. These networks interact among themselves to form the social fabric. The dominance of some over others and how they combine, delineate the character of the political culture (authoritarian vs. egalitarian). Chile is a multiparty country within which there are cohorts of horizontal groups of friends, who informally exercise a central control over their members and create invisible boundaries setting them apart from others, in which leadership is under constrains. The result is both a strong presidential system based on an almost fanatic legitimacy, combined with factionalism and a strong parliamentary system.

Key words: social networks – political structure – political culture.

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The Model

We understand culture to be a behavioral language composed of grammar (la langue) and speech (la parole). Grammar is the set of categories and rules representing continuity in culture, and speech is its linguistic behavior, which is, by its very nature, variable. The technological, economic, and political changes that occur in a society challenge the structure and the result of this confrontation of conservative forces with those of change produce the society's history. The changes are interpreted and assimilated through the continuity of culture. Large and violent changes in cultural grammar occur during cataclysmic periods (conquest, wars, and revolutions). Otherwise, changes occur slowly; events gradually affect culture. People act, absorb, and assimilate change through a preexisting cultural grammar. That is what constitutes the dynamics of continuity and change.

Political culture is accordingly the grammar of relationships of domination/subordination/cooperation; that is, the grammar of social control and of power and how it is expressed.

We propose to define political culture on the basis of:

1. *The structure of the social networks which are related to power* and

2. *That of the symbol system which legitimizes, nourishes, and supports that power.*

1. The structure and function of social networks depend on the direction in which the exchanges take place -i.e., horizontal networks and vertical networks- on what is being exchanged, and on the articulation between networks. In every society there are symmetrical and asymmetrical exchanges, which produce horizontal and vertical networks. These networks interact among themselves to form the social fabric. The dominance of some over others and how they combine delineate the character of the political culture (e.g., authoritarian vs. egalitarian).

2. The symbol system, for its part, reinforces and legitimizes this structure of networks and includes such manifestations as discourse, political rituals, language architecture, the myths of political cosmology, emblems, the use of time and space, and so forth, which are often integral to nationalistic ideology.

Social and Exchange Networks

Social networks are abstract constructions defined by researchers according to the criteria that interest them. That is, these relations are determined by some underlying criteria, making it possible to identify social structures that generally are not formally defined by society and that would not otherwise be identifiable. What is of interest to the social scientist is how the relationships are ordered, how the conduct of individuals depends on their place in this order, and how individuals themselves influence the ordering.

Thus, a diagram can be drawn of the relationships where goods and services are exchanged or of communication between individuals, such as the exchange of administrative bureaucratic favors, of material loans or information. The exchanges can be of three kinds: (a) reciprocal exchanges between individuals with similar resources or lack thereof in a context of sociability or trust; (b) re-distributive (patron/client) exchanges, that is, those between individuals of different status with unequal resources, typically power relationships set within personal relations where loyalty is exchanged for protection; and (c) market exchanges, where the circulation of goods and services is effected through the market and its laws (Polanyi, 1957: 234-69). Reciprocity and redistribution represent informal forms of exchange which vary from culture to culture, both in the definition of the partners in the exchange as in what is susceptible to be exchanged and in the socially accepted ways of doing so. Hence, there is social structure within which these exchanges take place (vertical and horizontal social networks), the material and moral objects of exchange, and a symbol system that reinforces the structure of the network and of the society where this is occurring.

In complex societies an individual must deal with all three kinds of exchange (reciprocity, redistribution and market), and hence must participate simultaneously in three types of social relations, namely those of trust, hierarchy and class (see Lomnitz, 1975, 1987, 1988, and 1991). The economic, political, and socio-cultural domains become intertwined in the individual's life and their pattern shapes macro-social reality (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; for the relationship between vertical networks and power, see Blau, 1964). Each form of exchange has rules that the individual learns to handle and when they are contradictory to reconcile with one another in each situation. Because this process is rich in symbolic language, the ability to handle symbols accordingly becomes a resource.

The resources exchanged determine and originate characteristic social structures. Mexico and Chile can serve as paradigmatic examples. In Mexico we observe vertically structured sectors crossed by horizontal networks. Capital and power are expressed through visible structures that have concentrated around them groups of individuals hierarchically ordered according to the level of resources to which they have access. Patterns of loyalty, life-styles, ideologies, and subcultures are formed through these hierarchies. Horizontal networks of reciprocal exchange are integrated into the vertical structures, thereby easing the pressure on hierarchical relationships and giving them flexibility. The structures of networks formed at personal levels ultimately tend to find expression in the national political system. Horizontal networks, if they are the dominant ones, crystallize in political parties of a horizontal variety with leaderships of a certain kind, while vertical networks in turn generate a different type of society. Mexico is a state with a corporate, vertical, authoritarian, and strong presidential system (a hierarchical society akin to a caste society, where the patriarchal, three-generation family exercises control over its members). Chile is a multiparty country, within which there are cohorts or horizontal groups of friends who informally exercise a certain control over their members and create invisible boundaries setting them apart from others, in which leadership is under constraints; the result is both a strong presidential system based on an almost fanatic legitimacy, combined with factionalism and a strong parliamentary system. The entire system depends on ongoing horizontal negotiations. It is a society that is informally organized in horizontally structured social classes. In our opinion, the basic model for the make-up of each society is that given by the primary institutions that are the basis for sociability and social control. These are what give character to its political culture: in Mexico it is the authoritarian and vertical patriarchal family, whereas in Chile it is the group of friends. In the case of a multicultural nation-state, it would be the socially and culturally dominant group that puts its imprint on national institutions.

Our preliminary studies of the middle class (Lomnitz, 1971) suggest that, in Chilean political culture, horizontal relations prevail over vertical ones within the social classes and that this is reflected in its political organizations. That is, while there does indeed exist a widespread network of reciprocal exchange among members of the same class, narrower networks begin to concentrate until they formally produce political parties with internal exchanges of favors and communications, loyalties and resources, depending on the access that the party has to state power (Valenzuela, A., 1977). At the same time, within the parties, and linked to their growth, there arise cohorts or networks of friends from the same generation, the internal

structure of these groups being egalitarian and highly emotional (such networks generally begin to appear among adolescents in the youth section of political parties). Within these friendship-based egalitarian networks-which by definition occur among equals-there come to the fore "natural" leaders, who are characterized in part by a permanent need and capacity for maintaining their legitimacy within the group. We could say that if in Mexico the leader creates the group, in Chile the group selects and creates its leader. Some of these leaders climb up through the primary network and reach higher ranks within the party, even reaching its highest leadership positions there, all the while having to prove themselves as leaders and being accepted by the grass roots. When this does not happen, splits take place within the party, factions are formed, and groups, may separate to form new parties. The upshot is the factionalism typical of Chilean political culture.

The well-known dominance of horizontal relationships based on trust would imply the possibility that access to power can be facilitated by structures more similar to horizontal networks than to vertical hierarchies. Nevertheless, no complex social system can do away with the latter. Leaders are indispensable, and this means that Chile faces a situation more difficult to resolve than that in Mexico, where the horizontal network is functional, and it complements and sustains the vertical hierarchies. In Chile, however, hierarchy or leadership is something that runs counter to the ideal of horizontal networks and the growth of parties. These contradictions are resolved-at the group level-by mechanisms inherent in Chilean political culture: publicly making fun (la talla) of a leader who tries to inflate this image, or directly putting him down (el chaqueteo), or removing him from his position by underhanded means ("aserruchar el piso": cutting the floor out from under him) and so forth. At the same time, there is an emphasis on the need for leaders to be, and to seem to be, modest, austere, dedicated to the common good, legally correct, and above all, not to abuse their power. If a leader manages to consolidate his personal power to the point of constructing his own vertical hierarchy, the system tends to erode this power, either by causing him to be defeated in the next elections, or through a split and the formation of dissident parties, leading to factionalism. When this has not worked, the system enters into a crisis, and sometimes the solutions that occur are authoritarian and unavoidably based on physical coercion. The nature of Chilean political culture demands that both the horizontal and vertical dimensions be respected and accepted unanimously and legally.

By contrast, in Mexico the predominance of the vertical aspect tends to concentrate power in the highest levels of society or directly in the president, and to consolidate all the political forces in one large party comprising very different sectors that negotiate among themselves within it. This authoritarianism is based on the country's political culture, and the structure of networks and symbol system that sustains it; hence it can function without recourse to physical force. In Chile a monopoly of power in one party or individual would destroy the social peace that is based on a multiparty system of negotiations and alliances.

Thus, if in Mexico the horizontal style complements and sustains vertical hierarchies, in Chile, according to our hypothesis, hierarchy (or leadership) is antithetical to the growth of horizontal groups (networks, parties), which would result in factionalism, a mechanism keeping hierarchic structures from taking hold and impeding the consolidation of a personal leadership, except for the legitimate leadership, subject to criticism, of the president of the republic. The resulting factions are generally composed of a small number of people representing a group of friends belonging to the ruling elite of the party (Including young people, as this factionalism often expresses a generational conflict). Sometimes these factions grow and separate from the main body of the party to the point where they become significant parties with a large number of followers; this is the case with the Radical Party which broke away from the Liberty Party and the Christian Democrats that came out of the Conservative trunk. In most cases, however, these factions end up joining other parties, or they survive for a while without having any significant effect. They might also disappear altogether (see for example Moulian and Torres, 1990; Edwards and Frein, 1949; Vial, 1981).

While factionalism is functional because it impedes leaders from accumulating too much power or hinders one party from achieving political hegemony that would allow it to govern without negotiation, an excess of factionalism leads to, or is an expression of, social and economic crisis. In some historical examples in Chile, authoritarianism has arisen in such situations (Presidents Ibañez and Pinochet). That is, the excess of factionalism pulverizes the system, the equilibrium of which depends on the existence of two or three basic parties, which encompass the main currents of thought into which in Chilean society is divided, and which are dependent on the class that they represent and/or their stance toward religion. It is these parties that, representing one or other of the main currents of thought, stand in continuity-under one name or another. Consequently in Chile there are parties that represent left, center, and right, and are both secular and Catholic

(Valenzuela, Arturo, 1989; Valenzuela, Samuel, 1995; Scully, 1995: I36 and passim). How can we explain the continuity of this pattern over time?

We would say that, just as with ethnic groups or minorities belonging to the same one nation, this continuity results from a combination of social networks comprising individuals occupying similar socioeconomic positions or sharing a common subculture. In the political system, the parties represent sets of social networks of individuals that develop and consolidate common life-styles around a shared political ideology. Like the ethnic communities or minorities that make up a nation, political parties create symbolic boundaries that distinguish them from each other, and that make them feel different from the rest -what Frederick Barth (1969:14) defines as "we-ness"- and that are expressed not only in political ideologies but also in preferred lifestyles, forms of entertainment, the schools and universities to which they send their children, occupations, and so on. In other words, political parties represent characteristic subcultures which guarantee their continuity. It should be pointed out that emphasizing the predominance in Chile of the horizontal over the vertical is not equivalent to claiming that society is not hierarchical, because political parties are generally organized on a class basis, and class differences are clearly established within the country's social fabric. What we are discussing is a model to be applied as an explanation and understanding of the political culture of a society, its origin and the continuity of its cultural "grammar". In Mexico, the primary structure (the three-generation patriarchal family) and the patron/client networks vertically articulated among themselves, result in a corporative and presidential political system. In Chile, the political parties come together out of the horizontal networks of groups of friends, and this result in a society that is class-based and hierarchical, but not authoritarian. In Chile what we see at a macro level is a horizontally organized, although stratified, society (but one that is not impenetrable) deriving from the previously mentioned subcultures. In short, the basis of these subcultures is social class, but social class is defined by a mixture of variables including not only the individual's position in the economy but also the social networks within that class, the issue of religion, ways of life including for example, the way people speak.

In such a system, characterized by its ability to contain strong political subcultures, it is very important to guarantee their coexistence, and that entails accepting a shared regulatory framework: the law. Such respect for the law, expressed in the constitution, is what legitimizes the system and its presidential authority. This aspect of Chilean culture has been present from the beginning and is perhaps one

of its best-known characteristics.   In short, this is what we call a social grammar or culture: the social categories, the rules in effect, and each person's ability to function within them, grammar and speech, the primary structures resulting from them, and the political organizations into which they crystallize and through which access to power is obtained and exercised. These are what give national relations exist in all societies. What makes each society different is the mixture and combination of these ingredients and the relative importance of each kind of structure. These ideas serve as the context for our study and analysis of the Radical Party and Christian Democrat Party in Chile, in which networks of friends, united by a horizontal type of ideological and social affinity, were quite obvious from the outset.It is worth mentioning that both parties share the characteristics of Chilean political culture with reference to the structures of the social networks, horizontality and verticality, conditioned leaderships, family life, and so forth, while displaying clear differences in their symbol systems (values, discourses, ideology, life-styles, and so forth).

It may be noted that the Christian Democrat Party (PDC), which was conceived as a middle-class party, has maintained its cultural connections with the upper class (because it emerged from the Conservative Party) and in the 1960s it succeeded in becoming a multi-class party by drawing in many agricultural workers and poor city dwellers. This presented a problem for analyzing the data obtained in fieldwork, because the life-styles of the DC activists interviewed varied according to their social class. (The problem did not arise in the case of the Radicals.) They are alike, however, in the type of Catholicism that they practice, their (Christian humanist) values, their discourse, and how they see themselves.

The Case Studies

This work began with an overview of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which provided the basis for the theoretical model of the characteristics of Chilean political culture. In it we can see that the Conservative Party, the first party to emerge after Independence, was the product of a dissatisfaction of the "aristocratic fronde" (la fronda aristocrática) with the president's authoritarian behavior. Later, and with the rise of another network of the same aristocracy -the Liberal network- ideological differences about involvement of the church in state affairs began to appear. The upshot was the emergence of the Liberal Party, from which the Radical Party split because of disagreements over the issue of religion. The Radicals were emphatically secular, anticlerical, promoters of secular education, and advocates of the free thought, positivism, and humanism of their French counterparts, and were

supported by Freemasonry. All these principles, plus the socioeconomic changes in the country during the last third of the nineteenth century, made the Radical party the champion of the incipient Chilean middle class. In this historical example one can see how new horizontal networks break off from older ones and become distinct from them and go on to embrace a different ideology, largely because of changes in economic development of the country and the role which the new network goes on to play in that development.

In the twentieth century the middle class expanded enormously because of the need for mid-level people to serve in the army, develop nitrates, serve in government and the educational system, and so forth. The liberal professionals needed for such development were a product of state-run education and that was the foundation for the power of the Radical Party. The popular urban sector, which had already taken root in the twentieth century because of the country's economic development, was also a basis of support for the emerging Radical Party, which served as an intermediary between the dispossessed classes and the national oligarchy. In the first half of the twentieth century, with three Radical presidents in a row, the Radical Party laid the foundations for the country's industrialization, sponsored the expansion of the public education system, and became involved with health care, all of which caused the state apparatus, and with it the Radical Party, to grow.

Meanwhile, Marxist parties appeared on the left and began to represent the urban proletariat. These parties were rooted in ideology as well as in class. As the influence of Marxism rose in Chile and in the world, the Catholic Church put more emphasis on offering an ideological alternative in defense of the poor, with the Church's social doctrine as expressed in the papal encyclicals. This doctrine was adopted in Chile as the basis for the social thinking of catholic student networks, which were eventually absorbed (as ANEC, Asociación Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos) by the Conservative Party and continued to develop there until they became a larger group which called itself La Falange. They later left the Conservative Party over ideological differences that led to a definitive split (conservative church vs. social church). When this network finally formed the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), once again a segment of the Conservative Party (the Social-Christian network operating there) split from the main body and joined the new Christian Democrat Party. This new party therefore had within it two networks with different social origins, although the ideologically dominant group was the Falange network which offered the Catholic middle class an opportunity to

be politically active in accordance with their religious principles. Furthermore, with its ideology of social justice, it sought to attract not only the middle class but also the peasantry and the urban proletariat. It had become a multi-class party composed of a series of social networks in accordance to the sectors of society they belonged to, though united by a strong political and religious ideology which would be the basis for the development of its subculture.

The study of the subcultures of the two political parties involved in this work clearly confirmed the original hypothesis of differentiated party subcultures. Although both parties generally represent the middle class, and have held similar positions on the role of the state in society, their basic ideological differences (secularism vs. Christian humanism) have attracted different social groups from the beginning. For example, the PR originally developed in provincial groups, and its customs, lifestyles, and sociability reflects a certain kind of provincial life. By contrast the Falange, which gave rise to the PDC, began with Catholic intellectual university groups in Santiago, who's less gregarious and more austere and moralistic life-style imprinted a character on the group. Hence, we see that the provincial-style sociability of the Radicals and their egalitarian and non-sectarian ideology, with a heavy emphasis on friendship, is also reflected in their formal and informal organizations: the open assembly as its basic organ of political sociability, with the Radical Club as the main place for coming together. By contrast, the main realm of DC sociability is the family, and in terms of formal party organization they have their district-level grassroots organizations which are closed to all but party activists.

Whereas from the beginning Radicalism emphasized tolerance, conciliation, its "Chilean creole identity" (Identidad criolla) the ability to negotiate and its broadmindedness, the Christian Democrat Party, in its formative period, proposed as a doctrine "its own way" ("El Camino Propio"), basically implying a corresponding tendency to exclude others. They are even reluctant to admit new members, especially at the grassroots. In their discourse, the interviewees expressed this in terms such as "fear of the new members", "fear of infiltration", a need for legitimacy within the party's, mistrust of what are called "interlopers", and so forth.

On analyzing the discourse of each party, one can see a different accent, a specific way of talking, and a vocabulary that expresses the values that each regards as important. Radical discourse places the accent on the parties great achievements in Chilean history: the secularization of some public institutions (Civil Registry, cemeteries); the implementation of the idea of "Teaching State", and the

establishment by the state of an infrastructure to modernize the country (for example, the creation of CORFO (Corporation to Aid Production). In addition, a central part of the Radical discourse, Is the theme of friendship: helping one's friends "of all colors", the conviction the Radicals are good friends, and even putting friendship above political questions. In their discourse, as it appears in the interviews, Christian Democrats do not refer to party achievements on behalf of the country (although they exist), but by contrast, their discourse is essentially axiological, based on an "ought-to-be" that is shared by grassroots activists, mid-level leaders, and national leaders. It is an imperative to be generous, supportive, a good father, good mother, one who struggles for social justice, and austere in one's life-style (in food and clothes). The criticisms Radicals level at their party have to do with the political actions of their leaders, such as having made an alliance with the right, of having supported the Law for the Defense of Democracy, or any other political mistake they may have made. However, they have no critical attitude towards amiguismo (friendship) or compadrazgo (cogod-parenthood), which most of them accept, dismissing the suggestion that this practice might be blameworthy. Indeed, they justify it on the grounds that friends should help one another, and friends do not exclude friends of another political inclination. The critical discourse of Christian Democrats toward their party is closely linked to the imperative of the PDC "ought-to-be" described earlier, and is directed at both the grassroots and the upper levels of the party. Political mistakes by PDC leaders were rarely mentioned in our interviews.

One last noteworthy difference that we will point out between the two subcultures refers to the effect of the mother or the father on their children in their adoption of the corresponding political culture. In the case of the Radicals, it was the father, without exception, who was the central figure and the most influential in the choice of political path adopted by the children, even though many had mothers who were practicing Catholics. By contrast, among the Christian Democrats we interviewed, it was a socially concerned Catholic mother who was the bearer of a doctrine aimed at carrying out such principles. It should be emphasized that the sociability of the Radicals occurs most often outside the home, in male groups, whereas Christian Democratic sociability is centered more at home, in the family where the mother can exercise a greater formative and centralizing influence, and it is she who takes her children to mass.

In summary, through our fieldwork we could clearly distinguish a "Radical" culture and a "Christian Democrat" culture. We think that these cultures or subcultures

have more weight in the development and the permanence of each party and endure longer in time than the principles of political ideology. Even tough the different parties that make up the Pact for Democracy (governing coalition) have accepted the currently prevailing model for running the country, and de-emphasis on class struggle; there nonetheless persist a collective conscience with its symbolic boundaries. What now distinguish each from its coalition partners is its subculture and the fact that they recognize themselves as different and see others as different.

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