

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

## Revisiting the Chilean Road to Socialism

Fabrice Lehoucq

University of North Carolina Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina  
Email: [f\\_lehoucq@uncg.edu](mailto:f_lehoucq@uncg.edu)

This essay reviews the following works:

**The Pinochet Generation: The Chilean Military in the Twentieth Century.** By John R. Bawden. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016. Pp. x + 304. US\$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 978-0817319281.

**La Unidad Popular y la revolución en Chile.** By Mario Garcés. Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2020. Pp. 340. CL\$45,000 cloth. ISBN: 978-956-00-1382-8.

**Pinochet desclasificado: Los archivos secretos de Estados Unidos sobre Chile.** By Peter Kornbluh. Santiago: Catalonia, 2023. Pp. 529. CL\$25,900 paperback. ISBN: 978-956-415-039-0.

**Historia de la Unidad Popular: Tiempos de preparación: De los orígenes al 3 de septiembre de 1970**, vol. 1. By Jorge Magasich Airola. Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2020. Pp. 346. CL\$20,000 paperback. ISBN: 978-956-00-1367-5.

**Historia de la Unidad Popular: De la elección a la asunción: Los alidos 60 días del 4 de septiembre al 3 de noviembre de 1970**, vol. 2. By Jorge Magasich Airola. Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2020. Pp. 201. CL\$14,400 paperback. ISBN: 978-956-00-1368-2.

**Historia de la Unidad Popular: La primavera de la Unidad Popular**, vol. 3. By Jorge Magasich Airola. Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2023. Pp. 397. CL\$42,000 paperback. ISBN: 978-956-00-1725-3.

**Historia de la Unidad Popular: De tres a dos bloques**, vol. 4. By Jorge Magasich Airola. Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2023. Pp. 257. CL\$42,000 paperback. ISBN: 978-956-00-1732-1.

**El proceso populista: Momento, fenómeno, régimen: El caso de Chile que no fue: Chile (1932-73).** By Claudio Riveros Ferrada. Raleigh, NC: Editorial A Contracorriente, 2018. Pp. xii + 364. US\$30.00 paperback. ISBN: 978-0990919193.

**A History of Chile 1808-2018**, 3rd ed. By William F. Sater and Simon Collier. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xviii + 560. US\$120.00 cloth and US\$39.99 paperback. ISBN: 978-1009170215.

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Of the more than 340 military coups d'état in Latin America since 1900, the one on September 11, 1973, in Chile is perhaps the most notorious of the twentieth century. It was one of the most violent *golpes* of the twentieth century, with the Chilean air force bombing La Moneda, the presidential palace, and the security forces rounding up thousands of leftists in the subsequent days and weeks. President Allende, as we now know, committed

suicide before troops stormed La Moneda and after declaring, in his last radio broadcast (reprinted in Garcés, 334–335), that he would “pay for loyalty to the people with [his] life.” The military coup ended what Allende called “the Chilean Road to Socialism,” that is, the political project of effecting a transition to socialism—the nationalization of the means of production—while preserving constitutional democracy. Like many military coups, efforts to topple Allende counted upon the support of opposition parties and the complicity of many of his fellow citizens.<sup>1</sup>

The Unidad Popular (UP) government—the left-wing coalition of the Socialist, Communist, Radical, and two smaller parties—was a singular revolutionary experiment. The UP’s time in power was pathbreaking because, “with doubts and reluctance,” to use Magasich Airola’s words (1:11), it had concluded “that democratic conquests have created limited but real legal spaces that would allow it to achieve power and start its socialist transformations.” Like the French or Russian revolutions, the Chilean Road to Socialism is a world-historical event with an origin, a process, and an outcome that left the old regime in tatters—and its counterrevolutionary outcome makes it no less important than the great social revolutions of the modern world.

The UP won a plurality—36.1 percent—of the vote in the 1970 election, barely outpolling Arturo Alessandri, the candidate of the right-wing National Party, by less than a percentage point (Alessandri got 35.27 percent of the vote). It became the constitutional obligation of a joint session of Congress to decide between the two presidential candidates with the most votes, a common enough way of selecting presidents for much of the twentieth century. On October 4, the Christian Democrats endorsed Allende for the six-year presidential term, following convention (but not any constitutional requirement) that Congress ratify the election of the candidate with the most popular votes. This came after weeks of behind-the-scenes efforts to derail Allende’s election by the Chilean right and US officials, as Magasich Airola explores in volume 2 of his *Historia de la Unidad Popular* and Peter Kornbluh documents in the first part of *Pinochet desclasificado*.

In light of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1973 military coup, it is fitting to reflect on what went wrong. While a review essay is not the place to settle that thorny question, it is a vehicle to ruminate over what recent books have to say about one of the central questions of Allende’s overthrow—which is why centrists, especially in the Christian Democratic Party, backed the right’s coup that replaced constitutional democracy with military dictatorship. The immediate decade or so after the coup produced a wave of accounts, exposés, and scholarship about Allende and Chile.<sup>2</sup> Much of this work may be “axe-grinding,” to cite the third edition of Sater and Collier’s (524) much esteemed one-volume history of Chile. But much of it has valuable insights, whose existence I can only acknowledge in an essay that revolves around the question of watershed moments and missed opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to reviewing Sater and Collier’s *A History of Chile, 1808–2018*, I discuss another synthetic effort, Mario Garcés’s *La Unidad Popular y la revolución en Chile*. Garcés’s overview of the UP is a beautifully illustrated and concisely written book that, among other things, distills scholarship on the social history of Chile. It is a book meant for a general as well as

<sup>1</sup> Data on military coups is from my *The Coup Trap in Latin America*, forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> Arturo Valenzuela and J. Samuel Valenzuela, “Visions of Chile,” *Latin American Research Review* 10, no. 3 (1975): 155–175.

<sup>3</sup> Alfredo Joignant and Patricio Navía, “El golpe a la cátedra: Los intelectuales del primer mundo y la vía chilena al socialismo,” in *Ecos mundiales del golpe de estado: Escritos sobre el 11 de septiembre de 1973*, ed. Joignant and Navía (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, 2005), 11–52. I could not include three books in this essay because they came to my attention after I finished this review: Joaquín Fernando, *La revolución inconclusa: La izquierda chilena y el gobierno de la Unidad Popular* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Públicos, 2013), Daniel Mansuy, *Salvador Allende: La izquierda chilena y la Unidad Popular* (Santiago: Taurus, 2023), and Pamela Figueroa and Peter M. Siavelis, eds., *El quiebre de la democracia: 50 años después* (Santiago: Editorial USACH, 2023).

a scholarly audience. I also discuss the initial four volumes (the ones now available) of a comprehensive project on the Unidad Popular by Jorge Magasich Airola, a Chilean historian who, as a young man, was a militant for the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR, which was to the left of the UP). Magasich Airola ended up in exile in Belgium, where he earned a doctorate in history from the Free University of Brussels (1:13–14). If Sater and Collier synthesize two centuries of political developments in 450 pages of often witty prose, Magasich Airola takes an encyclopedic approach to the rise and fall of the UP in what will be half a dozen or more volumes. Later in the review, I briefly refer to Claudio Riveros Ferrada's *El proceso populista: Momento, fenómeno, régimen: el caso de Chile que no fue: Chile (1932-73)*, which, like a large chunk of Sater and Collier's book, examines the long wave of constitutional democracy in Chile between 1932 and 1973.

The last pair of books is about two key players, one more controversial and the other more decisive. Peter Kornbluh has long worked for the nongovernmental National Security Archive in Washington, DC, a repository of previously secret government documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. He has spent years obtaining official documents about the much-polemized role of the United States in Chile. His book *Pinochet desclasificado* analyzes, cites, and reprints a treasure trove of documents from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the State Department, and the White House. His book covers US opposition to Allende and its initial embrace of the military junta. It also charts the US turn against the dictatorship that, by the mid-1970s, was dominated by General Augusto Pinochet, who became commander in chief in late August 1973 and whom Allende believed to be a "constitutionalist" officer (Sater and Collier, 381). John Bawden's book depicts the *mentalidades* of the generation of officers who schooled and pursued military careers with Pinochet, who gradually consolidated his power on the military junta that replaced Allende's government. Pinochet ultimately ran what became a seventeen-year dictatorship before overseeing a transition to what Bawden calls a "protected democracy."

### First approximations

Sater's chapter 12 and Collier's *A History of Chile, 1808–2018* and Garcés's *La Unidad Popular y la revolución en Chile* are good places to start. Each reaches a different conclusion about the causes of the 1973 military coup. Both analyze some of the steps leading from the unification of the left, the 1970 election, the UP's efforts to gain control of much of the economy, and its fall in a bloody coup three years later.

Garcés, Sater and Collier, and, for that matter, Magasich Airola emphasize that the parties of the UP were revolutionary in inspiration and in character. They wanted to overturn oppressive social hierarchies, nationalize much of the economy, and redesign Chilean democracy. Garcés's *La Unidad Popular y la revolución en Chile*, I emphasize, is a work of social history; Garcés suggests that the real story about these years is the formation of a revolutionary consciousness among workers and peasants. His book reminds us that many low-income Chileans—labor union members, shantytown dwellers, and campesinos—not only supported the UP but also demanded that Allende's government intensify the struggle to create a revolutionary society. Much was at stake in Allende's government, which helps explain why the right wasted little time seeking accommodation with the UP.

Garcés's book is full of period photographs, reproductions of newspaper headlines, and other images that take the reader back to Chile in the early 1970s. In part 1, Garcés explains how the Socialist Party (Allende's party, whose key factions were less wedded to upholding the constitutional order than the president) and the Communist Party (dedicated to a moderate transition to socialism) converged with the Radical Party (the formerly dominant centrist party) to field, for the fourth time, Allende's candidacy for the presidency. Part 4 provides an overview of the UP's economic policies that is simultaneously detailed and well organized.

Sater and Collier, as well as Garcés, show how revolutionary the UP government was. By the time of the military coup, it had gone above and beyond the Frei administration's own land reform by redistributing 55 percent of farmland (in excess of eighty hectares; Sater and Collier, 360–362). The UP had, with unanimous legislative support, nationalized the copper mines in July 1971. By 1973, it and the parties and movements of the left had taken over many of the large firms that dominated the Chilean economy.

Sater and Collier, though not unsympathetic with Allende's government, imply that it made a series of fateful decisions that led to its overthrow. Chief among these were expansionary economic policies that substantially raised real wages in the first year of the UP government. But inflation reversed those gains by 1972. When combined with the fall in copper prices (Chile's main export), lack of investment, and the strikes organized by capitalists, professional organizations, and transportation workers, the UP's macroeconomic policies led inflation to spiral from 22 percent to 300 percent between 1971 and 1973 (368–369). “When it became clear that Allende needed to modify these policies to survive politically,” Sater and Collier (355) conclude, “he was unable to do so.”

### Not made in the USA?

The updated Spanish-language edition of *Pinochet desclasificado* chronicles overt and covert US support for Allende's opponents and US policy before and after the 1973 military coup.<sup>4</sup> For many, it is an article of faith that the US played a leading role in the *golpe*; for many critics of US foreign policy, “US sponsored” means “made in the USA.”<sup>5</sup> *Pinochet desclasificado* intersperses Kornbluh's own narratives with selections from previously secret US government documents, from which I extract a pair of important points.

First, the United States did not sponsor, much less organize, the military coup that overthrew the UP, even if US officials knew that Chilean military officers were more than aware that the United States would not oppose efforts to end Allende's government (142). “If we understand in a strict sense the definition of directly participating—collaborating in the planning and provision of equipment, strategic help, and a series of guarantees”—Kornbluh (142, my translation) concludes—“the CIA does not appear to have been involved in the Chilean military's violent actions on September 11, 1973.” Second, Kornbluh (143) suggests that the US “facilitated the transformation of the coalition” of right-wing forces and Christian Democrats into “the principal protagonists” that destroyed Chilean democracy. Kornbluh, like Magasich Airola, notes that the United States, once the legislature voted to make Allende president, shifted to funding the Christian Democrats, the National Party, *El Mercurio* (the country's conservative newspaper of record), a crippling truckers' strike in 1972, and other actions that fueled opposition to the UP.

The second is Kornbluh's more controversial thesis; I suspect that Magasich Airola is sympathetic, but I refrain from characterizing his position because his multivolume epic of the UP is not yet finished. Sater and Collier do not think that US assistance was something

<sup>4</sup> Called *The Pinochet File* in English, the original version of this book was published in 2003 in New York by the New Press. The first Spanish-language edition was published a year later in Barcelona by Crítica. *La Tercera*, a Chilean newspaper, selected the 2023 edition as one of its best books of 2023. See Pablo Rematal, “Los mejores libros del 2023,” *La Tercera*, December 2, 2023, <https://www.latercera.com/culto/2023/12/02/los-mejores-libros-del-2023/>.

<sup>5</sup> A good example is Francine Prose's “Chile's Count Dracula,” *New York Review of Books*, January 18, 2024, 25–26, which is her review of Pablo Larraín's film *El Conde*, where she makes this point in the second paragraph (“three years after the US-sponsored coup that brought Pinochet to power”). The problems with this thesis are well known among specialists but are routinely ignored by generalists. See Christopher Darnton, “After Decentering: The Politics of Agency and Hegemony in Hemispheric Relations,” *Latin American Research Review* 48, no. 3 (2013): 231–239.

like an indispensable catalyst for the confrontation that ended Chilean democracy, even if they concede that the “hostility” of the United States was “real enough, and deep” (369). Instead, they credit Allende’s inability to rein in the more radical factions of the UP and its “economic debacle” for fueling the crisis that led to Allende’s downfall. Garcés, who dedicates little space to the economic collapse of the early 1970s, implies that the right bears principal responsibility for the destruction of Allende’s government.

The United States was complicit in an earlier coup in October 1970 that failed. After the early September popular vote and before the late October legislative runoff, the United States conspired with retired right-wing General Roberto Viaux to prevent Allende from becoming president, as Kornbluh documents (66–81). The US embassy’s military attaché Colonel Paul Wimert supplied weapons to kidnap General René Schneider, the newly appointed military commander in chief and “constitutionalist” officer. The plan was to blame the left for the kidnapping and prompt the army to take power, which would be easier, the conspirators supposed, with Schneider no longer in charge of the armed forces (67). But the putschists inadvertently shot Schneider when he resisted capture on October 22 (he died three days later). Magasich Airola (2:145–159) notes widespread rejection of the assault in Chile (and the failure of the courts to deliver enough justice for the act and Schneider’s assassination; 2:173–189). The bungled plot ended General Schneider’s life but not Allende’s route to the presidency; US participation, in other words, was neither a necessary condition (e.g., the United States got involved in only the first of three military coups against the UP) nor a sufficient one for the president’s overthrow (e.g., the United States was not a member of the final and successful coup coalition).

Kornbluh’s book also charts how US foreign policymakers went from relief at the overthrow of Allende to disenchantment with Pinochet’s government. His book covers Pinochet’s 1998 detention in London, where the general had traveled for medical help. The enterprising Spanish human rights judge Baltazar Garzón had requested Pinochet’s extradition to Spain to face charges of having violated human rights. Pinochet was put on trial once the British government allowed him to return to Chile. Kornbluh also discusses the publication of revelations that Pinochet, who supporters believe was above reproach, had amassed a small fortune in secret bank accounts.

### Viable political strategies

Before tackling Magasich Airola’s opus, let me summarize the central elements of the debate, at least in the English language, about the fall of Allende’s government. The two canonical books are by Paul Sigmund, entitled *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964–1976* (1977), and Arturo Valenzuela, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile* (1978).<sup>6</sup> Both concentrate on the unfolding of events that led to the military coup; Sater and Collier, I note, cite approvingly from these books. The political angle—the possibility that different choices could have led to different outcomes—is no surprise. Both, like me, are political scientists.

These are complementary books. Sigmund’s tome is longer and more detailed. It provides the reader with an analytic chronology of events, especially of the political kind.

<sup>6</sup> Paul E. Sigmund, *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964–1976* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), and Arturo Valenzuela, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) (see the festschrift in honor of its publication; Figueroa and Siavelis, eds., *El quiebre de la democracia*). Valenzuela’s book was published in translation in Santiago in 2005, while Sigmund’s has yet to appear in a Spanish edition. Full disclosure: Valenzuela was the chair of my doctoral dissertation on the development of democratic institutions in Costa Rica, which I defended in late 1992 in the Department of Political Science, Duke University. We rarely discussed the Allende years, but as this essay reveals, I did become quite familiar with the micropolitical approach that he and Juan Linz champion.

Over the years, I have found myself frequently turning to its pages and footnotes for basic information on partisan behavior, institutional details, and constitutional debates. Valenzuela's thin brick of a book, which also covers and documents these events, concentrates on explaining how the zero-sum resolution of conflicts narrowed the space for compromise. While the breakdown of democracy in 1973 was not inevitable, Valenzuela suggests, it gradually became unavoidable once the Unidad Popular and Christian Democrats repeatedly failed to agree on measures to stabilize constitutional democracy. Valenzuela's book also insightfully depicts the nature and dynamics of Chilean democracy on the eve of Allende's election—emphasizing the role of centrist parties in structuring the compromises that led to policies in a frequently gridlocked presidential system. It, too, is based on a careful assessment of Chilean sources. These are important books, and as I reread them for this review, I concluded they are very much still worth reading.

Sigmund (1977, xii) faults Allende more than his opponents for the fall of democracy. He writes:

I am now convinced—with the benefit of hindsight—that even if the CIA had not been giving substantial financial support to the opposition, Allende would not have lasted a full six-year term unless he had drastically altered his policies, so long as the armed forces retained the autonomy and independence which they were guaranteed from the outset of his administration.

Subsequent decisions, in Sigmund's telling, were a chronicle of a death foretold. Note that Sigmund's careful wording does not exclude the right's or the armed forces' culpability in the destruction of constitutional democracy in Chile. But "the autonomy and independence" of the military is, for me, a sterile (if understandable) formulation of this fundamental point.

Most observers, I suspect, would find Sigmund's claim to be a more or less cogent statement of the dilemma facing the Chilean Road to Socialism. No one less than Eric Hobsbawm, the great Marxist historian, agrees. In a forecast published in September 1971, Hobsbawm gave the "Chilean Way" odds of no better than 4–6 in favor, if "a betting man allowed his natural sympathy for Allende to bias his judgment." More realistically, Hobsbawm thought that the odds were 2–1 against UP managing a socialist transition while preserving Chile's constitutional system. He notes that those odds are "not discouraging"; they are better than those faced by the Bolsheviks in 1917, when Russian communists managed to come to power in a rather different and altogether bloody revolution.<sup>7</sup>

Like Magasich Airola, Valenzuela places more of the blame for the breakdown on the Christian Democrats. He suggests they miscalculated by not compromising to preserve democracy, even as he explains that electoral competition drove the Christian Democrats and the UP apart as much as the preservation of democracy should have driven them together. In regularly scheduled elections, each struggled to control the ideological and policy space between the left and the center; important factions on each side therefore interpreted victory for one side as a loss for the other. For Magasich Airola, the PDC's shift

<sup>7</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *¡Viva la Revolución!* (Buenos Aires: Crítica, 2018), 420–421. This collection, with a foreword by Leslie Bethell, is a translation of Hobsbawm's key essays on Latin America. I note that the translator, Alfredo Grieco y Bavio, did not render Hobsbawm's point accurately in Spanish. They were not "seis a favor y cuatro en contra" (420). They were, in the great historian's words, "odds of 6 to 4 against." I have restated these odds in reverse to emphasize how even a sympathetic observer could not hope for too much, which is Hobsbawm's point. The original was published as "A Special Supplement: Chile: Year One," *New York Review of Books*, September 23, 1971, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1971/09/23/a-special-supplement-chile-year-one/>.

from working with the left to supporting the right uncovers the hollowness of their commitment to social reform.

It is useful to ask what Magasich Airola adds to these arguments. For starters, he adds an enormous amount of detail about cultural, social, and, of course, political trends and events in these years. His opus is already four volumes long, and he has taken the reader merely to the end of 1971. This multivolume epic is based on the study of memoirs, newspapers, and mostly Chilean secondary sources (he cites neither Sigmund or Valenzuela's books), each of which is mediated by his recollections of living through these years. Volume 1, all 346 pages of it, covers the origins of Christian Democracy in Chile (essentially as a nonleftist and reformist alternative, one that the United States supported), the 1964 election of Eduardo Frei with 56.1 percent of the vote (Allende got 38.9 percent), and its key policies. Volume 1 also begins to chronicle the right's growing disaffection with constitutional democracy. Magasich Airola reminds us that the right backed Frei's candidacy in 1964 in what turned out to be a successful ploy to prevent its nightmare scenario of a leftist victory at the polls. This volume, like Garcés's book, charts the formation of the UP during the second half of the Frei administration, which ended with Allende winning a plurality of the vote.

Magasich Airola covers the 1970 election in the last forty-five pages of volume 1 and in the almost two hundred pages of volume 2. I applaud him for dedicating an entire volume to the seven weeks between the September 4 popular election and the October 24 congressional runoff. Rarely do historians analyze electoral campaigns in Latin America, much less cover the period between elections and their runoffs.<sup>8</sup> Volume 2 also discusses the impact of the preliminary results on the political class and the public, the reasons for Allende's victory, capital flight, fears, and rival strategies to obtain the support of the Christian Democrats to support Alessandri or Allende in the runoff election. At first, the United States and the right tried to convince the Christian Democrats to support Alessandri, who audaciously promised to resign as president-elect if the Christian Democrats voted for him in the legislative runoff. This would trigger new elections that a candidate acceptable to the PDC and the NP—Frei's name was repeatedly mentioned—could win. Magasich Airola (2:32–34) points out that this contradicted right-wing campaign promises. Sure of Alessandri's victory at the polls in 1970, the right had argued for months that Congress should designate the plurality winner as the new president of the republic, which is what convention (but not the constitution) required.

Volume 3 chronicles what Magasich calls “the Unidad Popular's spring,” which Garcés also covers in great detail. This is the period that includes Allende's “honeymoon,” to use the US term for the president's initial months in office. Magasich Airola writes little about how the UP converted its plans for working as a coalition into operational procedures for obtaining legislative approval of its transition to socialism. This was no small task because UP parties intensely disagreed on tactics and strategy. By far the most important objective of this tome is the UP's plans to nationalize heavy industry and minerals, accelerate agrarian reform, and take over the banks. Volume 3 also has an important chapter on the nationalization of US-owned copper mines, which received unanimous legislative support in July 1971. There are two chapters on the US decision to live with Allende's government and to funnel funds to the Christian Democrats.

Volume 4 discusses the fallout from the PDC's shift from cooperating to opposing the UP, which Magasich Airola analyzes at the end of the third volume. The fourth covers the implementation of the UP's economic reforms and relations with the United States, especially the litigation about the indemnification of US business interests. This volume begins to close with a chronicle of Fidel Castro's monthlong and controversial visit to Chile

<sup>8</sup> See my “Campaigns, Elections, and Regimes in Latin America,” *Latin American Research Review* 57, no. 1 (2022): 201–212.

in late 1971 (as well as French Socialist leader and future president François Mitterrand's visit). Volume 4 ends with, among other opposition protests, the march of "empty pots," the demonstration led by the "ladies who lunch," to quote from the Stephen Sondheim lyrics, against the first signs of food shortages.

Like Valenzuela, Magasich Airola credits the Christian Democrats with playing a decisive role in the 1973 breakdown. Why did the PDC join the opposition? For Magasich Airola, an important reason was, to put it bluntly, the power of US financial assistance. In Magasich Airola's words: "It is impossible, after accepting this money, to practice a politics opposed to that of its donors" (3:306). Perhaps, however, the money did not convert the PDC; perhaps it went to the already converted. Proving blackmail with the sort of documents historians demand, however, is never easy. Magasich Airola at least phrases his audacious point as *his* reading of the PDC's motives.

Three other factors help explain the PDC's shift to the right. One is that it lost many of its reform-oriented members, starting in the late 1960s, when left-wing Christian Democrats formed the Unitary People's Party (MAPU), which joined the UP. By the early 1970s, anticommunism grew in importance as the commitment to the poor and social reform declined in the PDC. Another factor is that PDC activists and members demanded that their leaders oppose the UP. Magasich Airola notes that his interviews with PDC leaders consistently mention this point, perhaps because PDC mid-level cadres were losing jobs in the bureaucracy that were going to UP militants. A final factor was the climate of fear about impending changes and rumors about the rise of armed groups on the left. "Without a doubt," Magasich Airola (3:313) writes, "the convergence between the Christian Democrats and the right" was "precipitated by the assassination of Edmundo Pérez Zújovic [on June 8, 1971] by a group of pseudo revolutionaries." Pérez Zújovic had been interior minister during Frei's Christian Democratic government (1964–1970).

The Chilean Road to Socialism might have persisted, Magasich Airola speculates, if the UP had made different decisions at key junctures. He notes, with a tinge of sadness, that the Senate failed to approve a constitutional amendment in late 1969 that would have allowed the president to dissolve the legislature once during his six-year term in office. The measure might have passed if two left-wing senators would have been present. Visiting her constituency in the north was a Communist Party senator's excuse for missing a crucial vote on the measure. Illness had forced none other than then Senator Allende from being absent the day of the vote. In a reformed system, President Allende could have threatened to dissolve Congress if it opposed his bills. Worse, Magasich Airola tells us, if a Senate committee in February 1969 had amended the constitution to hold a popular instead of a legislative runoff, Allende's popular election in a second round might have given "another orientation to the history of Chile" (2:154). Ironically, Magasich Airola notes, the left did not back these measures while the right backed these and other constitutional reforms proposed by President Frei.

That the UP should have convened plebiscites to obtain approval of its ambitious agenda is another much-debated set of counterfactuals that Magasich Airola raises. At no point did the UP command a majority in Congress; Allende was a minority president, whose bills needed Christian Democratic support for their passage. Thanks to the 1970 constitutional reforms, presidents, however, could organize referendums if Congress refused to back their constitutional amendments (article 109). By not taking advantage of this option, Magasich Airola implies that the UP repeatedly missed opportunities to outflank its legislative opponents by fashioning popular majorities in favor of the transition to socialism. On the first occasion, which occurred three weeks before his assumption of power on November 3, 1970, Allende asked his closest advisers to prepare a package of constitutional reforms to submit to Congress. His team recommended the nationalization of copper mines and of the key firms of the economy, the participation of workers in the administration of firms, and, again, of the president's ability to dissolve



Congress (3:28–32). On the second occasion, in late April 1971, Allende insisted that the UP submit a similar set of reforms to Congress. His own Socialist Party agreed with his proposal, noting that the left had “won” the April 1971 municipal elections, that the opposition was fragmented, and that the armed forces were still politically neutral (3:204–206). On a third occasion, in late June 1971, Allende again argued that, in light of the popularity of the nationalization of copper, the left should attempt to use a referendum to advance its ambitious set of reforms. Among other things, Allende requested that they propose amending the constitution to allow the president to dissolve Congress. Allende even recommended replacing Chile’s bicameral legislature—whose malapportioned senate repeatedly blocked reform—with a unicameral legislature (3:385–388), a long-standing demand of many on the left. Both were core elements of reforming a constitutional framework that had suffered few changes since its 1925 promulgation.

Unanimity or something like it (Magasich does not say) among the UP’s constituent parties turned out to be a double-edged sword. While this rule helped unite the left behind Allende’s fourth presidential candidacy, it also deprived the UP of the nimbleness to advance its agenda. More risk-averse members of his coalition vetoed Allende’s proposal that they take their revolutionary proposals to the electorate. They argued that submitting a plethora of reform bills to the public would unite their opponents and likely fail.

A counterfactual that Magasich Airola does not contemplate but speaks directly to causes and culpability is whether the UP should have pursued something less than the socialist transformation of Chile. Even on the most favorable reading of the evidence, I note that the 1973 municipal elections were a draw—and suggest that the UP’s best performance was hardly a mandate for a revolutionary transformation of the country. The UP gets to a bare majority—50.3 percent of the aggregate vote in the 1971 local elections—by excluding blank and null votes from the calculation (this is the result that Magasich Airola [4:200–201] uses; Sater and Collier [374] report that the UP got 49.9 percent, presumably by including, as required by law, all the ballot cast). While the UP increased its vote share from Allende’s 36.3 percent share in 1970, it got 43.9 percent in the 1973 midterm legislative elections (Sater and Collier, 374). What might have happened if Chile had a parliamentary system, in which the executive survival is contingent on the confidence of a legislative majority? The UP might have moderated its demands to enact social democracy instead of socialism. Allende might have fashioned a coalition between enough of the UP and the Christian Democrats to something less than a revolutionary program.<sup>9</sup>

Counterfactual speculations are among my favorite parts of the *Historia de la Unidad Popular*. It is understandable that Magasich Airola poses but does not investigate the plausibility of these claims. They are far from the remit of standard historical practice. But identifying true from spurious causes requires the contemplation of such counterfactuals and the investigatory skills of the historian. At their core, they assume that a popular majority existed in favor of the UP’s program or at least that Allende’s government might have coaxed one into existence. How accurate is this claim? Volume 4 (117–128) raises doubts about whether a plebiscite would have allowed Allende to dissolve Congress and convene elections where the UP would have manufactured a legislative majority for its revolutionary program. By late November 1971, it submitted two bundles of reforms, one about the nationalized sectors of the economy and workers’ participation in firm management and the other set about strengthening the executive and weakening the legislature and the judiciary. Neither, however, prospered—perhaps because, as Magasich

<sup>9</sup> Arturo Valenzuela, “Party Politics and the Crisis of Presidentialism in Chile: A Proposal for a Parliamentary Form of Government,” in *The Failure of Presidential Democracy: The Case of Latin America*, ed. Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 2:91–150.

Airola implies, the opportunity to fashion a popular majority for what would have been an epic struggle to shape public opinion has passed.

In early November, the Christian Democrats submitted their own constitutional reform bill to require that Congress approve the nationalization of firms (4:124–127). Sater and Collier offer a clearly written paragraph (272) that distills the terms of what would become an epic struggle between the president and his opponents. At least on the surface, the debate revolved around whether the executive could veto constitutional reform bills and the size of the legislative majority necessary to override presidential vetoes. Both became embroiled in what would become major confrontations between the elected branches of government that shattered the *estado de compromiso*—what Chileans called the fundamental agreements sustaining their constitutional democracy. I hope that Magasich Airola, in future volumes of his opus, clarifies the issues at stake by exploring these topics in all of their constitutional and political complexity.

### The armed forces enter the breach

One of the hardest institutions to study is the armed forces. National security doctrines cloak their deliberations in secrecy. In *The Pinochet Generation*, John R. Bawden draws on “army, navy, and air force journals” to disclose “political orientations, core values, beliefs, and assumptions shared by officers” (8). This is a study of the worldviews of “the generation of Chilean officers, born between 1915 and 1925, that entered military academies in the 1930s and 1940s, completed advanced training in the 1950s and 1960s, and went on to hold positions of senior leadership in the 1970s” (2). Bawden describes how a conservative view of Chile’s political order informed the behavior of officers that ended Allende’s government, ran its government between 1973 and 1989, and created a “protected democracy” in 1990.

*The Pinochet Generation* provides the English-language reader with an overview of the military’s role in twentieth-century Chile. Among Bawden’s key findings are that this generation of officers vowed to avoid repeating the breakdown of discipline that they witnessed during the extraordinary period between 1924 and 1931. By my count, rival coalitions of officers and party leaders organized twelve military coups, half of which managed to topple a president.<sup>10</sup> The 1931 naval mutiny, along with the civilian backlash against the armed forces in subsequent years, Bawden (37–45) contends, is what kept this generation in the background. In chapter 5, he succinctly covers familiar ground about how right-wing officers gradually built a coalition in support of the sedition that would claim Allende’s life.

Bawden missed an opportunity, I think, to build on canonical interpretations to explain why the successful *golpe* took place in 1973 and not earlier. Seditious officers moved against Frei’s government in late October 1969 (the “Tacnazo”), which came at the end of a prolonged period of military insubordination, according to Magasich Airola (1:157–188). In late June 1973, several military units moved to encircle the presidential palace to depose Allende (the Tacnazo), which was more serious than the October 1970 putsch led by retired General Viaux and supported by the United States. But none of these efforts proved successful; the June 1973 sedition was a warning that conspiracies were multiplying as political confrontations were intensifying. While “old soldiers took their secrets to the grave” (3), as Bawden reminds us, a comprehensive examination of Chilean newspapers, along with the internal US State Department files, could have helped explain how right-wingers, both in and outside the armed forces, managed to assemble enough officers and

<sup>10</sup> Lehoucq, *The Coup Trap in Latin America*, also explores why the Chilean political system managed to escape from an unusually intense and persistent bout of instability.

the Christian Democrats to liquidate Allende's government. A key part of the story is that, as the political and economic crisis deepened, Allende invited officers into his cabinet, ostensibly because of their reputation for neutrality and competence. It was a decision that retrospection rewards with irony—and that I hope Magasich Airola explores in the depth it deserves.

### Democracy on ice

Reflecting on the past to understand how democracy could have survived in Chile is more than a speculative sport. Yes, of course, the past is over. But counterfactual analysis helps identify the full range of factors—from the distant or structural to the proximate and political—that “caused” the 1973 military coup. I end this essay with some reflections on what a recent collection of books suggests about the end of the Chilean Road to Socialism.

First, different decisions could have led to the preservation of democracy, though perhaps not rescued the UP's attempt to establish socialism in Chile. But like the danger that the proverbial hiker on Patagonian glaciers and lakes faces, it was not clear where all the thin ice of constitutional democracy lay. That the UP was far less united than the Christian Democrats complicated the effort to forge an accord between the left and the center. While more conservative Christian Democrats vied with more progressive factions in their party—and ultimately took charge by late 1972 (when the more conservative Patricio Aylwin [who would become president that succeeded Pinochet's defeat in the 1989 plebiscite] became their leader in May 1973)—the UP could never agree whether it should compromise to preserve democracy, as the Communist Party counseled. Socialists and more radical factions outside of the coalition, like the MIR, in contrast, favored the intensification of conflict. I look forward to reading what Magasich Airola thinks about decisional logjams on the left and their impact on the overthrow of Allende's government.

Second, these sorts of counterfactual speculations imply that constitutional democracy in Chile was resting on less-than-firm ice. By the 1960s, the right had given up on the *estado de compromiso* that protected the constitutional ice of democracy. When a split vote helped Allende win, the right withdrew its consent from the political arrangements once elections could no longer guarantee its hegemony. Moreover, that the Christian Democrats extracted commitments from the UP to amend the constitution (the “democratic guarantees”) to endorse Allende in the legislative runoff discloses that the ice was cracking.

How solid was the ice of constitutional democracy in Chile? Riveros Ferrada, in *El proceso populista: Momento, fenómeno, régimen*, suggests that the multiparty system was solid enough to deter populism. Populism, for Riveros Ferrada, is a counterhegemonic project that unites disparate subjects—workers, peasants, and especially shantytown dwellers—to threaten the power of the oligarchy. Parties—famed in Chile for competing to represent the right, center, and the left—became the principal vehicles linking citizens with the state in the aftermath of the crisis of the oligarchic state (1924–1932), when, in 1924, the military overthrew President Arturo Alessandri (father of Jorge, the candidate Allende narrowly beat in 1970) in the first military coup of Chile's history.

A congress, dating from the nineteenth century, Riveros Ferrada reminds us, remained the grand amphitheater of political negotiations that included a strengthened presidency and a larger role for its state in the economy. The constitutional resolution of the crisis of the oligarchic state—unavoidable social or revolutionary demands for something more than a laissez-faire state—prevented the development of charismatic and organizational bonds that linked populists like Juan Perón of Argentina (1945–1955) and labor unions and other social movements. It was not until the 1960s, according to Riveros Ferrada, that populism erupted. Chapters 6–8, almost half of the book, are dedicated to analyzing the populist features of the three candidates in the 1970 election.

In chapter 8, Sater and Collier ably analyze the politics behind the 1925 constitution—and the notorious instability of the ensuing eight years, when rival coalitions of officers and politicians attempted to overthrow a dozen governments. An urban insurrection forced President (and General) Carlos Ibáñez from power in 1931, who had himself come to power through the force of arms in 1927. It turned out to be an astonishing year; a total of four presidents fell in military coups. In late 1932, none other than Arturo Alessandri won the election with 54.7 percent of the vote, marking the start of the *estado de compromiso*. In chapters 9–11, Sater and Collier analyze the remarkable stability of constitutional democracy in the subsequent forty-one years.

My own reading of chapters 9 to 11 of Sater and Collier's *A History of Chile* suggests that they concur that the ice of democracy was not as thick as we might have hoped. Sater and Collier emphasize less the capacity of the center parties to forge the compromises necessary for presidents and parliaments to enact laws between 1932 and 1973. They write about the enormous difficulty of assembling coalitions to pass laws that did not upset the right but that responded to popular demands for reform. With the growth of the electorate as more and more Chileans met suffrage restrictions—it was not until 1970 that legislators agreed to drop the literacy restriction on the franchise—parties representing lower-income and middle-class voters began to encroach on the privileges of the right. The compromises to protect the ice, I note, always included the center or the right winning control of the presidency. The left was isolated on the ice, which fueled its incessant debates about how to win in a political system where majorities were supposed to be the route to state power. But as the fortunes of the Marxist left rose and the legislative representation of the right shrank by the late 1960s, the right abandoned the guardrails protecting democracy. Instead, it re-created its partnership with the PDC, but this time, it did so to destroy the ice, not to strengthen it.

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**Fabrice Lehoucq** is a professor in the Department of Political Science, University of North Carolina, Greensboro. He is the author of several books, including *Stuffing the Ballot Box: Fraud, Democratization, and Electoral Reform in Costa Rica* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), *The Politics of Modern Central America: Civil War, Democratization, and Underdevelopment* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), and *The Coup Trap in Latin America*, forthcoming. He was book review editor for the *Latin American Research Review* between 2016 and 2024. His website is [http://www.ncg.edu/~f\\_lehouc](http://www.ncg.edu/~f_lehouc).