Voting for Democracy: Campaign Effects in Chile's Democratic Transition

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ABSTRACT

In a global context in which authoritarian regimes often hold elections, defeating dictators at the polls can play a key role in transitions to democracy. When the opposition is allowed to campaign for votes in such elections, there are strong reasons to believe that its efforts will be more persuasive than those of the authoritarian incumbent. This article examines the effect of televised campaign advertising on vote choice in the 1988 plebiscite that inaugurated Chile's transition to democracy. Using matching to analyze postelectoral survey data, it shows that the advertising of the opposition's no campaign made Chileans more likely to vote against dictator Augusto Pinochet, whereas the advertising of the government's yes campaign had no discernible effect. These findings suggest that the no campaign played an important causal role in the change of political regime.

The predominant form of nondemocratic rule in the modern world is electoral authoritarianism, a regime type in which autocrats submit to the polls while ensuring that the rules of the game are rigged in their favor. Such contests may be fought on an unlevel playing field, but they are also distinct from sham elections in which dictators run unopposed and have their re-election rubber-stamped (Levitsky and Way 2010). Incumbents and opposition candidates both campaign for votes in authoritarian elections, and sometimes the opposition scores a surprising victory, eventually leading to a democratic transition. The effects of these campaigns on voting behavior are therefore a question of great substantive as well as theoretical importance. Can an opposition campaign, despite the uphill battles it faces, persuade citizens to vote for democracy?

Despite their potential importance, campaigns and campaign effects have received little attention in the study of electoral authoritarianism and transitions to democracy. Even the recent literature on "democratization by elections" (Lindberg 2009) typically assumes that authoritarian incumbents lose elections because a long-hostile public has been waiting to throw them out. Yet dictators might be defeated partly because an opposition campaign persuades initially apathetic or ambivalent voters to take a chance on democratization. Whether the process ends with a dictator conceding defeat or attempting to steal the election and being driven from power by mass protests, such transitions might never have gotten underway if not for an effective campaign.

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The question of campaign effects in authoritarian-run elections has also been largely ignored by scholars of voting behavior. Research on campaign effects in established democracies has a long pedigree, but studies of new democracies are fewer in number, and those examining authoritarian regimes are virtually nil. Yet as this article will argue, elections held under authoritarian rule generate a relatively strong expectation of campaign effects in favor of the democratic opposition as long as the opposition is allowed to communicate its message to the public. Where data are available, authoritarian elections present a ripe opportunity for examining the effects of campaign persuasion on voters.

This study examines the effect of televised campaign advertising on voting behavior in the 1988 plebiscite that inaugurated Chile's transition to democracy. In this up or down vote on dictator Augusto Pinochet, the government and opposition were each granted free television advertising time in the month before the election—one of the few elements of a level playing field. Using matching, the analysis compares groups of survey respondents who internalized each side's advertising message to different degrees but were similar in other respects that could influence their vote. It finds that receiving the message of the opposition's no campaign made Chileans more likely to vote against Pinochet, whereas internalizing the claims of the government's yes campaign had no effect on voting behavior. Combined with aggregate shifts in poll standings, these results suggest that the campaign did play a key causal role in Chile's transition to democracy.

DEMOCRATIZATION BY ELECTIONS AND CAMPAIGN EFFECTS

As scholars began to analyze the third wave of democratization between the 1970s and 1990s, they generally agreed that the demise of authoritarian rule takes place through a number of distinct "modes of transition" that sometimes involve elites and sometimes involve masses as the dominant actor (Karl 1990; Karl and Schmitter 1991; Linz and Stepan 1996). A particularly common mode of transition in Latin America, and one that was considered most likely to produce stable democracy, involved the negotiation of elite pacts between moderate factions of the opposition and regime. Cases at the boundary of the elite- and mass-driven ideal types, such as Argentina in 1983 and Peru in 1978, were given an intermediate classification, because elite bargaining took place in the context of significant pressure from below, such as street demonstrations, strikes, and other forms of nonelectoral participation (Karl and Schmitter 1991).

Largely absent from the transitions literature is the notion that elite influences on mass opinion during an electoral campaign might be a key cause of democratization. In the classic framework of O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), elections mark the end of a transition—the "founding election" of a new regime—rather than propelling it forward. Scholars of Latin America were generally skeptical that elections held under less-than-democratic conditions could advance democracy. Instead, elite and popular participation in authoritarian elections was thought to postpone a gen-

uine transition by easing domestic and international pressures on the regime (Karl 1986).

Recently, a new literature on "democratization by elections" has challenged the scholarly consensus by arguing that elections held under authoritarian rule can indeed lead to democracy (Lindberg 2006, 2009). Here, there are two distinct subtypes of election-driven transition (Teorell and Hadenius 2009, 77). In the first, a repeated series of elections under authoritarianism creates institutions, rights, and societal expectations that further democratization (Lindberg 2009). Many African countries fall into this category, as do Brazil, Mexico, and much of Central America. The second subtype involves distinct electoral contests in which dictators are unexpectedly beaten at the polls. They then either give up power willingly or try to steal the election, prompting a mass movement that overthrows them or forces them to concede defeat. These "stunning elections" (Huntington 1991, 174) with surprising outcomes launch a process of democratization that goes well beyond the election itself. Examples include the Philippines in 1986, Chile in 1988, and several recent Eastern European and post-Soviet transitions.¹

Despite its central focus on elections, the democratization by elections literature has paid relatively little attention to the role of campaigns. Studies of the first subtype (e.g, Lindberg 2006) focus on the cumulative effects of electoral procedures, so campaign persuasion (and indeed, the results of any single election) fall largely outside their scope. With the second, "stunning elections" subtype, campaigns could potentially matter, but attention has been focused elsewhere. For example, Schedler's 2009 model of democratization by elections acknowledges that the opposition must successfully campaign for votes but focuses almost entirely on the struggle over electoral rules.

Institutional guarantees are of obvious importance for cases of democratization by elections, and they are a prerequisite for campaigns to matter at all. Without reasonably fair procedures in place, the opposition might boycott the election entirely; with extensive restrictions on its ability to get its message out, its campaign, even if potentially persuasive, will reach few people. Focusing on institutions in the study of democratization by elections is hardly misguided. But institutional guarantees are not the whole story; they merely set the stage for the opposition to take its case to the voters.

The more common assumption about dictators' electoral defeats is that through their own hubris or their underlings' reluctance to pass along bad news, they mistakenly assume that they will win the votes of a secretly hostile public. Diamond (2009, xiv), for instance, argues that authoritarian incumbents such as Marcos, Milošević, and Pinochet "delude themselves into believing the fawning reports from their intelligence agencies that the people are behind them." Other analysts have made similar claims (Birch 2002, 509–10; Constable and Valenzuela 1989, 172–73; Guerrero and Mangahas 2004, 691; Thompson and Kuntz 2004, 166; Thompson and Kuntz 2006, 113). Such arguments imply that the election was over before the campaign even began—that poor governing performance, human rights abuses, or some other flaw of authoritarian rule turned public opinion against

the regime and that the dictator was virtually assured of losing a fair election, regardless of how effectively the opposition persuaded voters.

The study of democratization by elections in post-Soviet states stands as a partial exception to this characterization. Bunce and Wolchik (2010), for instance, argue that campaigns are crucial for convincing an ambivalent public to participate in elections and vote against authoritarian incumbents. Yet the evidence they offer—the presence of vigorous opposition campaigns in five of six successful transitions and their absence in five failures—comes strictly from the aggregate level. Without also examining individual-level data, there is room for uncertainty about how those campaigns affected voting behavior.

Existing research on campaign effects in advanced as well as new democracies suggests that when the opposition to an authoritarian regime is allowed to campaign in an election, its efforts will affect voters' behavior at the polls. A longstanding tradition of research on political behavior in the United States has found that partisan attachments and preexisting stores of relevant political information tend to render voters resistant to persuasion by campaigns or the media (Berelson et al. 1954; Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1962). However, both resistance factors are considerably weaker when one steps outside the context of advanced democracies, and they should be particularly weak in the case of authoritarian elections.

Outside of the United States and Western Europe, most research on media effects has focused on new and transitional democracies, particularly in Latin America (Baker et al. 2006; Boas 2005; Greene 2011; Lawson and McCann 2005). In countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Peru, levels of party identification tend to be much lower than in advanced democracies, and party systems may be volatile or in flux, with numerous candidates from new, unfamiliar party labels contesting each election. In such a context, partisan loyalties are less likely to influence voters' decisions, and a candidate's party affiliation is less likely to serve as a useful heuristic. In making a choice among lesser-known options, the campaign should weigh more heavily.

With respect to sources of political information, the mass media in new democracies are often biased in their coverage of politics because of conservative ownership, the lingering influence of authoritarianism, and an often underdeveloped journalism profession. Ownership of media outlets also tends to be highly concentrated, so citizens have fewer distinct options from which to choose (Boas 2013; Hughes and Lawson 2005). If existing political opinions are based on one-sided sources of information, they will tend to be more fragile than those in advanced democracies and more liable to shift if exposed to counterarguments during a campaign (Lawson and McCann 2005).

If partisanship and stores of political information are likely to be limited in new and transitional democracies, they should be even weaker in cases of elections held under authoritarian rule (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 61). Political parties may have been in recess or may have been competing on a highly constrained basis for many years before the current election. Many parties are likely to be new and unfamiliar; those that existed during prior democratic episodes may have changed substantially in the interim, rendering their labels less useful as heuristics.

With respect to media bias, the shift from one-sided to two-sided information flow during authoritarian elections suggests not only that campaign effects should be present but that they should favor the opposition. Research on U.S. congressional elections has consistently found campaign spending by challengers to be most effective at winning votes because challengers start out less well known than incumbents and profit more from increased exposure (e.g., Ansolabehere and Gerber 1994; Jacobson 1978; Stratmann 2005). The potential benefits of campaign communication should be that much greater for the opposition to authoritarian incumbents. During nonelectoral periods, authoritarian regimes typically dominate the flow of political information to the public, ceding little space to the opposition. Before elections, autocrats usually allow the opposition a greater capacity to communicate its message—via television advertising, door-to-door canvassing, public rallies, or some other medium—to make the contest appear legitimate. Citizens who receive the messages of both sides are thus exposed to a set of government-sponsored arguments they have probably heard repeatedly over the years, along with a novel, countervailing message from the opposition.

CHILE'S 1988 PLEBISCITE

These theoretical expectations of campaign effects on voting behavior apply to the 1988 plebiscite that inaugurated Chile's transition to democracy. Chile's plebiscite was a special election organized by the military government of General Augusto Pinochet, in which voters were asked to choose between an additional eight-year term for the dictator (the yes option) and open presidential elections to be held the next year (the no option). The yes campaign was run by the military government and supported by several right-wing parties; the no campaign was run by the Concertación de Partidos por el No, an umbrella coalition of opposition forces on the center-left. The no option won the October 5 plebiscite by a margin of 55 percent to 43 percent, leading to open elections in December 1989 and the inauguration of a civilian president in 1990.

When classifying Chile's experience with democratization, comparative analyses have placed little emphasis on the Concertación's electoral victory over Pinochet. Instead, scholars typically describe the transition as a elite-dominated affair involving the negotiation of pacts between opposition forces and the military (Cavarozzi 1992; Hartlyn 1998, 103–4; Huntington 1991, 113–14; Kurtz 2004, 13; O'Donnell 1992, 25–26; but see Karl and Schmitter 1991, 277). Such characterizations overlook the fact that there was no transition to democracy in Chile—pacted or otherwise—until after Pinochet's electoral defeat. In the mid-1980s, moderates in the opposition announced several proposals for a negotiated transition—on increasingly favorable terms for the military regime—but were repeatedly rebuffed.

Even the limited institutional guarantees in place for the plebiscite, such as the reestablishment of an electoral registry and free television advertising time for both sides, were not ceded by the regime because of opposition demands but instead resulted from a decision by the independent Constitutional Tribunal that existing laws

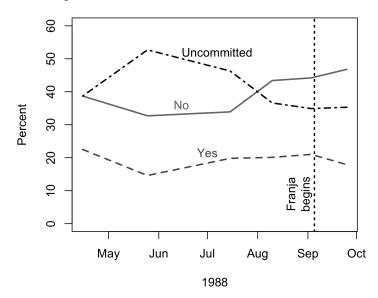


Figure 1. Vote Intention in Chile's 1988 Plebiscite

Note: Data are drawn from internal surveys by CIS, a consortium of think tanks conducting research for Chile's no campaign. "Uncommitted" combines "don't know" responses with those intending to cast a blank ballot or refusing to answer the question.

intended to govern future general elections should also apply to this contest (Godoy Arcaya 1999, 92). Pinochet's plebiscite loss transformed a process intended to legitimate authoritarian rule into one that would install a new democracy, and it shifted the political dynamic enough to allow for formal negotiation between the two sides (Godoy Arcaya 1999). The key role of the plebiscite in Chile's transition establishes it as a case of democratization by elections, even if elite pacts were crucial later on.

In contrast to the comparative literature, case studies of Chile's transition have paid more attention to the causal role of the plebiscite (e.g., Barrett 2000; Garretón 1990–91; Rabkin 1992–93). However, few of these studies characterize a persuasive opposition campaign as an important factor in the opposition's victory (Angell and Pollack 1990 is an exception). More common is to attribute the election outcome to political miscalculation by an unpopular but egotistical dictator (Constable and Valenzuela 1989, 172–73; Constable and Valenzuela 1991, 310–11; Valenzuela 1999, 230), even when discussing the campaign as part of the historical narrative (Constable and Valenzuela 1991, 305–7).

Yet before the election, an opposition victory appeared much less certain. Writing a year before the plebiscite, Chilean academic Cea (1987, 669) predicted that "if the President runs, we may expect him to win by a landslide." Several polls from early 1988, including those by opposition-affiliated think tanks, showed the yes option leading among registered voters (Christian 1988; Rosenberg 1988, 21).

When also considering not-yet-registered voters, the no option consistently came out ahead (figure 1), but with a large number of uncommitted voters who could swing the election either way. Given this scenario, there was no reason to expect an easy victory, and opposition leaders took the campaign very seriously.

Chile's 1988 plebiscite is a case in which we would expect the opposition's campaign efforts to succeed at influencing voters. One reason is that partisanship provided a weak basis for deciding between the two options. Chile is often considered a case of strong partisan identities, especially during the early posttransition years, partly because familiar patterns of partisan competition reemerged in the new democracy (Valenzuela and Scully 1997). Survey data are consistent with this assessment: a comparatively high 78 percent of respondents could name a party preference in June 1990 (CEP 1990). Yet before the transition, partisanship was much weaker. In a June–July 1988 survey in Santiago, only 33 percent claimed to identify with a political party; in a national survey in September-October 1989, the figure was 40 percent (FLACSO 1989, 20; Garretón 1988, 15). In contrast, Brazil—a stereotypical case of weak partisanship in Latin America—had slightly higher levels of party identification at the time (Samuels 2006, 4). Chile's low levels of partisanship in the late 1980s make sense when one considers the political context. At the time of the plebiscite, no partisan electoral competition had taken place since 1973, the Pinochet government had spent 15 years denigrating parties and party politics, and several of the major parties participating in the campaign had not existed in the earlier democracy.

Even if party loyalties did not necessarily incline Chileans toward a yes or no vote, strong support for or opposition to the Pinochet regime might have done so. Yet the large share of uncommitted voters, as highlighted in figure 1, belies this notion. Instead of having made up their minds on the basis of firm opinions about the regime, many Chileans were uncertain of their vote and liable to be moved by the campaign.

A second reason to expect campaign effects in Chile's 1988 plebiscite concerns an abrupt change in one key aspect of the political information environment. Since Pinochet's 1973 coup, news coverage had either ignored regime opponents entirely or cast them as "extremists" and "terrorists." Biased news coverage of the opposition continued during the plebiscite campaign. Major newspapers were all sympathetic to Pinochet; only a few outlets with limited circulation sided with the opposition. Radio was mainly progovernment as well, albeit with the exception of Radio Cooperativa, the most popular station (Tironi and Sunkel 2000). On television, Chileans' most important source of political information, news coverage during the campaign overwhelmingly favored the yes option (Hirmas 1993, 84).

Despite the biased news media, a crucial feature of Chile's plebiscite campaign gave the opposition a chance to convey its political message widely for the first time in 15 years. Regulations specified that television channels would set aside free airtime for campaign advertising (the *franja de propaganda electoral*, or electoral advertising filmstrip) during the month before the election. Each day, a 30-minute block was divided equally between the government and opposition and broadcast simul-

taneously on all television stations nationwide. Despite airing during periods of generally low viewership, the *franja* ended up being extremely popular and widely watched: it obtained a rating of 65 percent, 10 points higher than the popular show *Sábado Gigante* (Hirmas 1989, 117). As a result, millions of Chilean citizens who had heard only the government's point of view for over a decade were exposed to a novel countervailing message. In the words of one Chilean scholar, the change was like "a group of people in a dark room suddenly emerging into the light" (Méndez et al. 1989, 115).

Though the *franja* was a rare level spot in an unlevel playing field, it was hardly the only way that the no campaign potentially mattered for the outcome of the plebiscite (CIS 1989). The opposition was able to get its message out in other ways as well: it regularly held rallies and organized street parades, even if permits for the most desirable locations or routes were routinely denied. The no campaign's massive voter registration drive was also crucial, since Pinochet had destroyed the voter rolls after the 1973 coup. After the polls closed, a parallel vote count organized by the opposition helped ensure that the regime would respect the results. Accounts of the no campaign that emphasize the *franja*—most notably, the 2012 film *No*—have been met with criticism by some of those who ran it, insisting that there was more to the victory than catchy television advertising (Rohter 2013).

An analysis of the *franja* can therefore capture only part of the no campaign's overall effect on voting behavior or on the outcome of the plebiscite. Yet television advertising was the element of the campaign that potentially had the greatest persuasive effect. Television reached many more people than other forms of campaigning. In the survey analyzed for this study, 22 percent of respondents said that they had attended a march or rally, compared to 72 percent who claimed to have followed the campaign on television. Moreover, television advertising should be more likely to reach persuadable voters. Attending a march or rally—especially in opposition to an authoritarian regime—requires a level of prior political commitment that watching television does not. Those who experienced campaign events in person were probably reinforcing a decision they had already made. Those who watched the daily, back-to-back advertising programs of both sides were more liable to be moved toward supporting one or the other.

The no campaign's television advertising was oriented toward undecided voters, along with those who leaned toward one side but were not firmly committed. The registration drive, the first phase of the campaign, focused particularly on disaffected youth and other committed Pinochet opponents who were skeptical of the plebiscite but would certainly vote no if forced to choose. According to internal strategy documents, the campaign estimated that once registered, these hardcore supporters would be unlikely to abstain or cast a blank or null ballot (CIS n.d.). By June, the campaign had shifted to a primary focus on undecided voters (CIS 1988), and by the start of television advertising in early September, it was fully engaged in this effort. In this phase, and especially in the *franja*, the no campaign projected a positive, forward-looking message of national reconciliation, epitomized by its slogan "Chile, happiness is coming."

Vote Message Reception Hypothesis Group Comparison No Yes H₁: No persuades, yes has no effect No - Yes Both - Yes Both - No 0 0 No - Yes H₂: No persuades, yes backfires 0 Both - Yes Both - No H₃: No persuades, yes persuades No - Yes Both - Yes Both - No H₀: No effects No - Yes 0 0 Both - Yes 0 0 Both - No 0

Table 1. Hypotheses

Note: The no message reception group answered more questions correctly about the advertising of the no campaign than that of the yes campaign; the opposite is true of the yes group. The both group answered two questions correctly about each. The message reception group comparison column specifies pairwise comparisons of these groups, and the no and yes vote columns give the expected direction of the corresponding mean differences in the proportion voting for each plebiscite option.

Theory, as well as the no campaign's explicit strategy, suggests that the effect of campaign advertising on voting behavior should be greatest among those who were uncommitted to one side or the other before the start of the *franja*. In the single-wave postelectoral survey analyzed for this study, it is impossible to distinguish such voters from those who had long since made up their minds. However, the substantial share of uncommitted voters in the electorate—over a third of the population during the month of the *franja*—suggests that effects on this subgroup should be detectable in the general population. Those with a prior vote intention might also have been moved by the televised campaign advertising, especially if they were wavering in their support.

Voters probably differ in how they received each side's advertising message. Since the yes and no television programs ran back to back in successive time slots, it is likely that many voters were equally exposed to both campaigns' appeals. Others, however, might have paid more attention to one side or the other, generating a "reception gap" (Zaller 1996) with respect to these competing messages. For example, in the survey, 67 percent considered the no *franja* to be the more entertaining of the two, which might have led them to watch it more often and gain greater exposure to its arguments. Therefore it is worth advancing hypotheses about the voting behavior of those equally exposed to both messages, as well as those who more closely followed either the yes or the no campaign advertising. Table 1 sum-

marizes how the voting behavior of these different groups should compare under a series of distinct hypotheses.

The novelty of the opposition's message for a population already saturated with progovernment propaganda suggests that the no *franja* should be more effective at winning votes for its side. For its part, the yes *franja* might have had little independent effect, especially since its attacks on the opposition and praise for the regime's policies repeated arguments that had been circulating in mainstream media for some time. Under this hypothesis (H₁), voters who primarily received the no campaign's message should be more likely to vote no and less likely to vote yes than those who primarily received the yes message. The same is true of those who received both messages equally. However, the no and the both message groups should vote similarly to one another because they differ only in their receipt of the ineffectual yes message.

A separate possibility, also consistent with a net effect in favor of the no vote, is that the no campaign's televised appeals worked as intended while those of the yes campaign generated a backlash. Several Chilean analysts (e.g., Tironi and Sunkel 2000, 184) have suggested a double effect of this sort. Under this hypothesis (H₂), those who primarily received the yes message ought to vote similarly to those who primarily received the no message, since each group would be pushed toward greater support for the no. Meanwhile, those who received both messages should be more likely to vote no and less likely to vote yes than either of the single message groups, since the individual effects of each side's advertising would compound one another.

A third possibility is that the no campaign's televised advertising was not actually more effective than that of the yes campaign. If each side's appeals were equally persuasive (H_3), voters who primarily received the yes message should be most likely to vote yes, those who mainly received the no message should be most likely to vote no, and those equally exposed to both should occupy a middle category. Finally, we can consider the null hypothesis (H_0) that neither side's advertising had any effect, in which case voting behavior would look similar regardless of the messages received.

Analysis of Campaign Advertising Effects

To test these hypotheses about the causal effect of television advertising on vote choice in Chile's 1988 plebiscite, the ideal research design would involve an experiment. By randomly assigning subjects to different groups that were exposed to the yes *franja*, the no *franja*, or both, a researcher could be confident that any difference in vote intention was due to the experimental treatment rather than confounding factors, such as income, education, or prior political opinions. When experimental data are unavailable, scholars interested in the question of media effects are forced to make causal inferences from observational data, such as pre- and postelectoral surveys. In the real world, people are not randomly assigned to watch campaign advertising. Instead, they make their own decisions about media exposure, based on a number of factors that are also known to influence vote choice.

The traditional approach to this problem of self-selection would be to estimate a multivariate statistical model of vote choice. Such a model would examine the effect of exposure to campaign advertising (the treatment), controlling for other variables that are correlated with both the treatment and the outcome and cannot be considered consequences of the treatment itself (as could, for instance, interest in the campaign). This modeling approach requires two strong assumptions. The first is that the decision to expose oneself to campaign advertising does not depend on any unobserved variable that also affects vote choice (the assumption of selection on observables, or no confounding). The second is that the model has a functional form—the specific combination of squared terms, interaction terms, and so on—that corresponds to the real-world relationship.

In place of a statistical model, my approach for analyzing campaign effects in Chile's 1988 election involves matching, a technique that requires fewer assumptions than regression analysis. Matching seeks to simulate the context of an experiment by comparing observations that received a treatment to a subset of those that did not receive it (the control group). This subset is chosen such that the distribution of pretreatment variables—in this case, demographics and other characteristics that cannot be affected by the campaign—is similar, or balanced, across groups. Like regression, matching requires the selection on observables assumption; namely, that one has successfully matched and achieved balance on all variables that affect both treatment assignment and the outcome. Unlike regression, however, the genetic matching procedure used in this study is nonparametric, and thus does not require any modeling assumption about how these observed variables are related to the treatment and the outcome of interest (Diamond and Sekhon 2013).

Data and Indicators

The data for this analysis are drawn from a postelectoral survey of 1,700 Chileans in 29 cities nationwide, representing 62 percent of the total population. The survey was administered by the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Contemporánea (CERC 1988), with face-to-face interviews conducted two to three weeks after the plebiscite. In addition to standard demographic and political behavior variables, the survey contains a number of specific questions about media consumption during the plebiscite campaign. It is therefore well suited to an analysis of campaign effects.

The dependent variable is a response to the question, Could you tell me how you voted in the plebiscite, for the yes or for the no? The question was asked of all survey respondents, including those who may have abstained or never registered to vote. This measure appears to suffer from social desirability bias, as is common in postelectoral surveys, particularly after dramatic, transitional elections. When missing values are omitted, 25.7 percent of respondents reported a yes vote, 62.2 percent reported a no vote, and 12.1 percent reported a blank or null vote or abstention. The corresponding figures for the population from which the sample was drawn are 35.6 percent, 51.7 percent, and 12.6 percent.²

The difference between the reported and actual distribution of votes may be due to the high rate of nonresponse to this survey question (23 percent). Social desirability bias could take the form of lying, but it might also lead yes voters to remain silent while the no voters tell the truth. The sensitivity of the analysis to assumptions about the distribution of missing values is discussed in detail below.

The key independent variable of interest is respondents' receipt of each side's television advertising message. Analysis of campaign and media effects often relies on self-reports of exposure, but these frequently suffer from both random and systematic measurement error, which lead to biased effect estimates (Zaller 1996). Respondents might answer that they watched the *franja* because the television set was always on in the evening, not because they paid attention. It is also common simply to misremember one's frequency of exposure. Most problematically, social desirability bias might lead respondents intentionally to misreport their viewership. At the time the survey was administered, the crucial role of the *franja* in the electoral outcome was already being discussed, and average nonviewers might not want to admit that they had missed out on this historic event. Moreover, social desirability bias could differ between yes and no voters, with the latter being particularly likely to overstate their exposure.

A common solution to problems with self-reported exposure is to use a measure of political information as an alternative treatment indicator, assuming that such knowledge is gained primarily through media exposure (Zaller 1996). However, since such questions typically tap general political knowledge, such as the name of one's senator, this approach works best for examining media effects on a broad level rather than the effect of one or the other side's television advertising.

This analysis uses a measure of political knowledge that is unusually direct in its ability to gauge receipt of each side's advertising message. The survey has a battery of questions that mention specific scenes from the *franja* and ask whether they correspond to the yes or no campaigns. Those from the yes campaign include "the widow of the policeman assassinated by terrorists" and "the dark tunnel"; those from the no campaign include "the young man beaten by police at the protest" and "the mother of Caszely" (a famous soccer star). Each scene appeared only once, so none of the questions is harder or easier to answer based solely on frequency of exposure.³

In addition to directly viewing the *franja*, it is possible to have gained knowledge about particular scenes through discussions with friends and family. Hirmas (1989, 109) reports that the *franja* became "the topic of everyday conversation" during the campaign. Therefore, these questions are also likely to measure knowledge gained through "hot talk," or communication within social networks (Baker et al. 2006).

To construct an indicator of message receipt based on knowledge of specific scenes in the *franja*, I examine how many questions a respondent correctly answered about the yes and no campaigns. Out of 1,700 respondents, 460 answered all four questions correctly, 301 answered none correctly, and 157 got one yes question right and one no question right. Of particular interest are the respondents who answered more questions correctly about one side's television advertising than the

other: 158 in favor of the yes campaign and 624 in favor of the no campaign. These respondents show evidence of a reception gap (Zaller 1996), which should allow for isolating the individual effects of each side's message.

Matching Procedure

To analyze the effect of campaign advertising on vote choice in the plebiscite, I conduct a matching analysis based on three categories of the treatment variable: full knowledge of the *franja* (four correct answers), greater knowledge of the yes message, and greater knowledge of the no message. The yes message category is taken as the treatment group because it contains the fewest respondents; the other two are control groups to be matched to it. While this setup may be counterintuitive—the no message is hypothesized to have greater effects—matching works best when one can search for matches from a larger group of potential control observations. I also attempted to match the treatment group to respondents who answered zero questions correctly, but balance was poor. Those with no knowledge of the *franja* are simply too different from the treatment group to allow for inferences without additional assumptions. I also exclude the 157 respondents who correctly answered one question about each side's television advertising, both because this group is less theoretically interesting and because it is similar in size to the yes message category, which would complicate matching.

It is important to specify what types of causal inferences can and cannot be made as a result of this matching procedure. My approach to matching allows me to estimate the average treatment effect for the treated (ATT); that is, I am looking at respondents who fell into the yes message category and examining the effect of this reception gap on their vote choice. I can consider the counterfactual of how these respondents might have voted if they had fallen into the both or no message groups. I cannot, however, make direct inferences about respondents in these other categories because they constitute larger and more varied groups than those who primarily received the yes message. Since the no campaign advertising is hypothesized to have greater effects, table 3 (page 16) presents results as the difference in voting behavior between each matched control group and the yes message treatment group—technically, the negative of the ATT—which allows for a more intuitive read. Doing so merely changes the sign and interpretation of the estimate, not the group to which it applies.

To pair respondents from the treatment group with similar respondents from each control group, I match on a variety of individual-level variables. These include demographics (education, income, age, religiosity, male, employed, and urban), along with indicators for each of Chile's regions outside of the Santiago metropolitan area. I also match on variables related to television viewing habits and sources of political information, which could affect treatment assignment as well as vote choice. These include frequency of watching television news (TVnews) and whether television was the primary source of information about current events (TVinfo). In order to capture political predispositions, I include indicators for whether the

Table 2. Balance Statistics Before and After Matching

	Yes vs. No				Yes vs. Both			
	Standardized mean difference		Minimum p-value		Standardized mean difference		Minimum p-value	
Variable	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Education	6.39	2.36	0.34	0.29	49.29	2.75	0.00	0.33
Education ²	12.00	2.62	0.17	0.29	48.68	3.67	0.00	0.33
Income	3.40	3.71	0.46	0.53	-27.97	0.01	0.00	0.91
Income ²	7.88	5.19	0.36	0.32	-26.37	-2.23	0.00	0.74
Age	21.53	1.34	0.01	0.56	45.83	4.74	0.00	0.24
Age ²	22.50	1.84	0.01	0.56	44.61	6.22	0.00	0.12
Religiosity	-4.00	1.34	0.65	0.85	9.31	-1.30	0.31	0.81
Religiosity ²	-1.31	3.57	0.68	0.64	8.41	-2.27	0.35	0.79
Male	-1.84	1.26	0.84	0.88	-11.10	0.00	0.23	1.00
Employed	-3.02	-2.56	0.74	0.74	-5.18	1.28	0.58	0.56
Urban	7.89	-1.28	0.38	0.71	-6.27	-2.56	0.50	0.16
TVnews	6.45	3.30	0.47	0.72	10.85	-1.98	0.03	0.80
TVnews ²	7.67	3.67	0.39	0.69	14.86	-0.17	0.03	0.82
TVinfo	18.40	-6.48	0.04	0.46	40.24	-2.59	0.00	0.81
Region 1	-8.44	0.00	0.36	1.00	1.93	0.00	0.83	1.00
Region 2	1.06	0.00	0.90	1.00	5.80	0.00	0.52	1.00
Region 3	-10.17	0.00	0.31	1.00	-16.64	0.00	0.14	1.00
Region 4	12.15	0.00	0.15	1.00	11.98	0.00	0.16	1.00
Region 5	3.82	0.00	0.67	1.00	8.78	3.46	0.33	0.53
Region 6	-6.03	0.00	0.52	1.00	-19.48	-4.62	0.07	0.32
Region 7	-27.30	0.00	0.01	1.00	-25.54	5.64	0.03	0.32
Region 8	-1.85	-1.68	0.84	0.78	8.99	0.00	0.32	1.00
Region 9	0.68	0.00	0.94	1.00	6.88	0.00	0.43	1.00
Region 10	1.16	2.88	0.90	0.32	0.29	11.51	0.98	0.16
Opposition paper	-21.31	2.30	0.02	0.32	-86.87	0.00	0.00	1.00
Opposition radio	-11.94	1.73	0.19	0.32	-45.26	3.46	0.00	0.73
UCTV	-21.38	-1.27	0.02	0.32	-37.15	0.00	0.00	1.00
TVN	13.55	1.30	0.13	0.76	28.57	-3.91	0.00	0.58
Placebo tests								
Woman-Home	-7.04	11.95	0.42	0.24	-37.38	1.41	0.00	0.71
Woman-Kids	-7.91	-5.60	0.36	0.57	-22.55	9.40	0.01	0.35

Note: Standardized mean difference is 100 times the mean difference of the treated and control observations divided by the standard deviation of the treated observations. Minimium p-values are from bootstrapped Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) tests or mean difference t-tests (two-sample before matching, paired after matching). Chile's Regions 11–12 were not sampled by the survey. Urban is an indicator variable for residing in Santiago, Valparaíso, Viña del Mar, or Concepción.

respondent's preferred newspaper or radio station sided with the opposition (opposition paper, opposition radio) and whether the person usually watched the least biased (UCTV) or most biased (TVN) television station.⁵ These media consumption variables are arguably pretreatment, since they concern general habits and were measured in the survey before asking any question about the campaign.

The similarity of treatment and control groups is greatly improved by the matching procedure, as shown in table 2. Before matching, a number of variables differed significantly between groups, suggesting that voters' receipt of the two sides' advertising messages depended on their income, education, age, region of the country, and media consumption habits, including the political leanings of their preferred news sources. We should expect imbalance of this sort, given that consumption and recall of campaign communication is not randomly assigned in the real world. After matching, the treatment group was very similar to both control groups, approximating what one would obtain with random assignment. For the variables used in matching, the minimum p-value from t-tests of difference in means and Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) tests of difference in distributions was .287 for the no control group and .121 for the both control group. For 75 first-order interaction terms, p-values were no lower than .107 for the no control group and .091 for the both control group (reported in the online appendix).

After matching on a variety of demographic, political, and media consumption variables, selection into the treatment or control groups seems to be largely a function of proximate, apolitical factors that are less likely to have independent effects on voting behavior. Respondents in the both message group were much more likely to report watching the *franja* every day (55 percent, versus 25 percent for the other two groups combined) even though they were matched on their frequency of watching television news. Work and family schedules could easily account for the difference; the *franja* was shown only late at night on weekdays, whereas news programs air throughout the day. For their part, those in the yes message category were more likely than the other two groups to say that the yes *franja* was the most entertaining and had the best anchorperson. Perhaps because of these aesthetic preferences—and not necessarily political ones—they paid closer attention to the yes campaign advertising.

Results

The results of this analysis offer strong evidence that television advertising favored the no campaign in Chile's 1988 plebiscite. The lefthand side of table 3 presents differences between message reception groups in the proportion voting no and yes, which can be directly compared to the hypotheses conveyed in table 1. It also presents differences in the proportion reporting a blank vote or abstention and refusing to answer the survey question. Of the four hypotheses posited above, the results are most consistent with H_1 , that the no *franja* worked as intended while the yes *franja* had no effect. The voting patterns of the both and no message groups, which differ only in their receipt of the yes message, do not differ significantly from one another (except for blank voting or abstention), which would be consistent with an ineffec-

	Vote (Unadjusted)				Vote (Regression-adjusted)			
Message Reception Group Comparison	No	Yes	Blank/ None	NR	No	Yes	Blank/ None	NR
No – Yes	0.09† (0.05)	-0.10* (0.04)	0.09* (0.04)	-0.08 (0.05)	0.09† (0.05)	-0.10* (0.04)	0.09** (0.03)	-0.08† (0.04)
Both – Yes	0.15** (0.05)	-0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.13** (0.04)	0.14** (0.05)	-0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.13** (0.04)
Both - No	0.06 (0.06)	0.07 (0.05)	-0.07† (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)	0.05 (0.05)	0.07† (0.04)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)

Table 3. Campaign Effects on Vote Choice

Note: The no message reception group answered more questions correctly about the advertising of the no campaign than that of the yes campaign; the opposite is true of the yes group. The both group answered two questions correctly about each. The message reception group comparison column specifies pairwise comparisons of these groups. Table entries are mean differences in the proportion voting for each plebiscite option, with estimated standard errors in parentheses. Regression-adjusted mean differences are based on predicted probabilities from a multinomial logistic model. Standard errors for the regression-adjusted estimates are based on a simulation in which one thousand sets of coefficient estimates were drawn at random from a multivariate normal distribution with mean and variance-covariance matrix as estimated in this model.

tual yes message.⁶ Meanwhile, a no vote is significantly more likely for the no and both message groups (at the .1 and .01 levels, respectively) than it is for the yes message group. Those in the no message group are also significantly less likely (at the .05 level) to vote yes. In terms of television advertising, receiving the message of the no campaign, either on its own or in conjunction with an ineffectual yes message, is what affected voting behavior in the plebiscite.

The significant difference in the nonresponse rates between the yes and both message groups suggests that social desirability bias is complicating the analysis. To examine the sensitivity of these results to assumptions about the true vote of nonrespondents, I conducted a simulation (details are in the online appendix). The true number of yes and no votes for any message reception group can be expressed as a function of the reported voting frequencies and the unknown parameter r, the ratio of yes to no nonresponse propensities. Letting r take on 41 values from 1/3 to 3, I randomly reassigned the appropriate number of nonrespondents for each group to the yes and no vote categories and then recalculated the quantities in table 3. I repeated this simulation 500 times, generating mean values of these statistics for each value of r.

Based on this simulation, support for the conclusion advanced above—that the yes campaign's advertising was ineffective while the no campaign's advertising

N = 316 for each comparison.

 $[\]dagger p < .1, * p < .05, ** p < .01.$

shifted vote intentions—is strengthened by any reasonable assumption about the relative nonresponse propensities of yes and no voters. Given the evidence of social desirability bias, the most likely value for r is at the upper end of its range; that is, nonresponse is more likely among yes than no voters. With $r \ge 2.3$, all voting differences between the yes message group and the other two groups are similar or larger in magnitude and are significant at the .05 level or better. Meanwhile, differences between the both and no message groups are smaller and remain insignificant.

Because some imbalance remains between treatment and control groups after matching and any number of unobserved confounders might also be present, it is important to conduct placebo tests. A first test examines the effect of watching soap operas or televised movies and serials on vote choice. Entertainment programs did not suffer from overt political bias at the time of the plebiscite, so they should have had no causal effect on voting behavior. However, watching television in general—either the *franja* or these alternative programs—might be correlated with some unobserved trait that also influences how people vote. Therefore, if viewership of these programs has a significant relationship with vote choice both before and after matching, the after-matching relationship must be due to an unobserved confounder, which could also bias estimates of the *franja* effect. Before matching, more frequent viewers of both soap operas and movies and serials are significantly more likely to vote yes rather than no in the plebiscite. After matching, these relationships disappear, as shown in the appendix.

A second placebo test considers the effect of the television advertising treatment on an alternative outcome. The survey asked respondents about their level of agreement with the following statements: "It is better for the family that the woman should concentrate on the home and the man on his job" (Woman-Home) and "The responsibility for children basically lies with the woman" (Woman-Kids). The topic of gender roles was virtually never mentioned in the *franja*, so exposure to campaign advertising should not have any causal effect on these attitudes. Any relationship after matching would be attributable to an unobserved confounder, such as ideology, that could also bias the estimated effect of the *franja* on vote choice. Before matching, the yes and both message groups differ significantly with respect to these two variables, as reported at the bottom of table 2. After matching, the imbalance disappears.

Despite passing several placebo tests, the matching procedure was unable to obtain a perfect balance between treatment and control groups, so a small degree of bias may remain. In such cases, postmatching regression can reduce bias even further (Ho et al. 2007). Using the matched dataset, I estimated a multinomial logistic model of vote choice. It uses the same four-category dependent variable, with indicators for the two control conditions and all of the matched variables and quadratic terms entered on the righthand side. Based on this model, I generated predicted voting probabilities for every individual in the matched dataset, varying message reception and using observed values on control variables. I then averaged these probabilities over the various message reception groups and calculated differences between groups. These figures, reported in the right half of table 3, can be directly

compared to the differences in voting proportions presented on the lefthand side. The results are nearly identical, suggesting that residual imbalance after matching produces little or no bias.

The extensive series of tests passed by the analysis should lend confidence to its conclusions. Dealing with social desirability bias on the dependent variable by randomly reassigning missing data to the no and yes voting categories strengthens the findings under the most realistic range of assumptions about nonresponse propensities. Placebo tests involving an alternative treatment and alternative outcome argue against omitted variable bias. Furthermore, estimates based on a multinomial logistic regression model of vote choice, which could reduce any remaining bias due to imperfect covariate balance after matching, are nearly identical to the unadjusted results.

DISCUSSION

The results of this analysis offer strong evidence that the no campaign's television advertising affected voters in Chile at an individual level. The question of aggregate-level effects remains. As noted earlier, the existing academic literature has rarely characterized the campaign as an important cause of the Concertación's electoral victory or of the transition to democracy. Did the no campaign really win over a significant share of voters, thereby playing a causal role in the outcome of the election and the demise of authoritarian rule?

The importance of the no campaign for the Concertación's plebiscite victory does not lend itself to precise estimation in the same manner as its effect on individual voters. Lacking panel data, we cannot say how many voters changed their minds over the course of the campaign. Moreover, no data source or method of analysis would permit estimating the number of lost votes if the regime had prohibited television advertising altogether, since the election would have changed in numerous other ways as a result. For example, the significant energy poured into the *franja* would probably have been redirected by the no campaign strategists, perhaps winning votes some other way.

It is also important to acknowledge that electoral outcomes are rarely the result of a single cause. When winner and loser are separated by a handful of votes, virtually anything could have changed the outcome, but with 12 percentage points between the yes and no totals, it is hard to argue that any single factor made the difference between victory and defeat. Clearly, the no option could have won with a somewhat less persuasive *franja*—as it could, for that matter, with a somewhat less successful voter registration drive, fewer rallies in the final stretch, and so on.

Given these caveats, fluctuations in vote intention before the plebiscite do suggest that the no campaign's television advertising was an important component of its electoral victory. In the poll standings shown in figure 1, the only period in which support for the no vote increased at the expense of the yes vote is between September 3 and September 25—a period corresponding almost exactly to the first three weeks of the *franja*. The apparent migration of votes from yes to no does not necessarily contradict the expectation that the no *franja* should be most effective among

uncommitted voters; an equal number of respondents shifting from yes to uncommitted and uncommitted to no could account for this same pattern.⁸

These shifts are within the margin of error for the no campaign's small (N = 800) internal polls, but larger polls from the Centro de Estudios Públicos register a statistically significant 8 percentage point gain for the no and 6-point decline for the yes between May–June and mid-September. Analyzing the latter set of surveys after the election, Chilean scholars argued that the *franja* was the only change in the political scenario capable of producing such a shift in vote intention (Méndez et al. 1989, 93, 115). At the time, such conclusions—based only on the analysis of aggregate data—were a stretch. Fluctuations in the polls could be attributed to any number of other causes, such as increased mass mobilization in the final stretches or a crystallization of voters' opinions irrespective of campaign stimuli. However, in conjunction with the evidence of an individual-level effect on voting behavior demonstrated here, it seems likely that the no campaign's television advertising contributed to the shift.

Moreover, a specific focus on television advertising probably underestimates the number of votes that the no campaign was able to garner. As noted, the *franja* did not take place in isolation. Marches, rallies, canvassing, and appearances in the news media all helped to spread a similar message. Television advertising may have been most likely to reach persuadable voters, but a novel and convincing appeal from the opposition probably won support in other venues as well.

CONCLUSIONS

Scholars have long debated whether democratization results primarily from elite negotiation or mass protest, but that most mundane of elite-mass interactions, politicians' efforts to persuade voters during an electoral campaign, has remained largely outside their scope. Yet opposition politicians often campaign vigorously in authoritarian-held elections, even when conditions fall short of the "free and fair" standard. In many instances of democratization by elections, an opposition victory (whether recognized or not) triggered the chain of events that ultimately led to the installation of a new democratic regime. In Chile, as in other such cases, a dictator would probably have remained in place if not for a strong opposition showing at the polls.

Campaigns are important to the study of democratization because they are particularly likely to influence voting behavior in favor of the opposition to an authoritarian regime. Partisan loyalties in the electorate are often weak or nonexistent under authoritarian rule, meaning that there is more room for the campaign to shift opinions. Authoritarian elections bring two-sided information flow to a public more accustomed to government propaganda, presenting voters with new, countervailing arguments that are more likely to have an influence. In such instances, net campaign effects should favor the opposition over the authoritarian incumbent.

Examining the 1988 plebiscite that inaugurated Chile's transition to democracy, this study shows that the effect of televised campaign advertising did benefit the opposition in this election. Using survey respondents' answers to questions

about television advertising as a measure of their receipt of each side's message, this study has argued that the no campaign's televised appeals made Chileans more likely to vote against Pinochet, whereas the yes campaign's advertising had no discernible effect. This finding seems intuitively plausible: it is easy to envision voters tuning out yet another round of progovernment propaganda while being moved by the first televised message from the opposition in 15 years. Nonacademic accounts of the election, such as the 2012 film *No*, routinely depict the *franja* in this light (albeit at the possible expense of understating other important elements of the campaign). Yet scholars have tended to conclude that Pinochet was bound to lose any free and fair election, rather than giving a creative, hard-fought, and ultimately successful opposition campaign the credit it deserves.

Campaign effects in Chile's 1988 plebiscite have implications for other cases of democratization by elections. Granting equal, largely unrestricted television time to the opposition was a unique feature of the plebiscite, and it probably gave the *franja* a centrality that it would lack elsewhere. Yet the myriad ways that campaigns can convey their appeals imply that persuasive effects should exist more broadly. If receipt of the opposition message could be measured in other "stunning elections," it might well be demonstrated to have effects similar to those in Chile.

Such effects are particularly likely when partisan competition has been suppressed by a long period of dictatorship (as in the Philippines in 1986) and the opposition rallies around a single consensus candidate (in the Philippines, as well as Serbia in 2000). Yet advertising has been shown to favor the opposition even in gradual cases of democratization by elections, such as Mexico (Moreno 2004), where partisan competition allows party loyalty to play a somewhat stronger role in voting behavior. Thus, even where institutional reforms are a key factor in the fall of authoritarian rule, campaigns may also be an important part of the story.

Notes

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- 1. Among this group, Pinochet's Chile is not normally classified as a case of electoral authoritarianism, since the plebiscite was a one-off affair. I argue that findings for Chile do have broader implications, regardless of the frequency of authoritarian elections.
- 2. These figures are based on disaggregated electoral returns in Chateau and Rojas 1989.
- 3. I exclude from consideration a fifth scene, "Doña Yolita, who doesn't have enough money to buy tea," which is less comparable to the others because it was shown multiple times and was parodied by the yes campaign after first appearing in the no *franja*.

- 4. I match directly on all of these variables, along with quadratic terms for interval-level variables, several first-order interaction terms, and linear predictors from a propensity score model estimated for each control group. For the small number of missing values on the interval-level variables (4 percent of observations for income, less than 1.5 percent for all others), I substitute mean values. Missing values on indicator variables receive a score of zero.
- 5. Pro-opposition media included Radio Cooperativa and the newspapers *La Epoca* and *Fortín Mapocho* (Tironi and Sunkel 2000). Hirmas (1993) offers data on television bias.
- 6. Power might be an issue here, given the small sample size. However, significant effects were found with the other comparisons, both of which also have an N of 316.
 - 7. I exclude the region dummies, which are collinear with other variables after matching.
- 8. We might also note that given the final vote tally, more of the uncommitted voters appear to have voted yes on election day. This is probably a result of social desirability bias affecting nonresponse, which is included here in the uncommitted category.

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