

Chile

**Period of democratic transition: 1988–1989**

**Pro-democracy civic movement: present**

Between 1973 and 1988, Chile was governed by an authoritarian military regime led by General Augusto Pinochet. Repression against opponents, mostly on the Left, was harsh, and thousands were tortured or killed. A new constitution in 1980 imposed severe restrictions on political parties and placed most power in the hands of the military president.

Protests began to increase in size and regularity beginning in 1983, led by urban civic movements, which also began to link up with trade unions. The Catholic Church, which had sought to preserve its moral authority throughout the postcoup period, joined with these groups to protest human rights violations. In ensuing years, violent repression declined and there was a rise of major public protests as civic organizations, trade unions, and political parties reemerged. A broad coalition—the National Accord for a Full Transition to Democracy—was the principal civil society force that used nonviolent means to press for gradual democratization and liberalization, including an end to restrictions on civil liberties and free and open elections. Unions played an important role and in 1982 were joined by the middle class and students in the wake of an economic crisis. The decision of political parties to work together became the main impetus for a broad ideological coalition created around an effort to defeat the military in the 1988 plebiscite on Pinochet's rule. The opposition alliance portrayed the post-Pinochet future in optimistic terms and worked assiduously to boost turnout. Their efforts were successful; the “no on Pinochet” vote won a clear majority, and the military heads decided to honor the results.

Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin assumed the office of the presidency after winning open elections held in December 1989. Since that time, Chilean democracy has consolidated, and the country has become a successful political and economic model for Latin America.