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Making Democracy Count: Opinion Polls and Market Surveys in the Chilean Political Transition

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August 29, 1992. San Ramón, Santiago de Chile. Organizers of the “First District-Wide Health Seminar” have invited community groups,¹ nongovernmental organizations, municipal officials, and elected officers to express their views and develop proposals for how to improve health in this very poor urban district.

After presentations by a group working against alcoholism and a youth organization fighting AIDS, Valeria, a representative of the grassroots health group Llaretta, rises to give her talk. She presents data derived from a study the health group had conducted two years earlier. Not unlike the paid workers employed by politicians or businesses who routinely arrived at *población* (shantytown) houses to ask questions during the late 1980s and into the 1990s, members of the health group had chosen a sample of 314 households in two sections of the *población* and asked residents about employment, overcrowding, income, housing, plumbing, environmental hygiene (parasites), and overdue utility payments. Going door-to-door in small groups, members of the health group used a questionnaire they had prepared to ask their neighbors questions such as how many unemployed teenagers lived in the home, how many people there were per room, what kind of fuel was used for cooking, and whether the household had rats. These data had been assembled into percentages, and at the seminar, the health group used an overhead projector to display the information in the form of pie charts, bar charts, and graphs.

The decision to use quantitative data in its presentation had been made the week prior to the seminar, when the health group debated how to present its material. At one of Llaretta’s planning meetings, one member, Sonia, suggested that the group perform a skit to illustrate the health problems they faced. Popular theater was a method they used at many of their activities to dramatize such phenomena as long lines at the health clinics or the nonresponsiveness of government officials to their demands. But this time, Sonia’s suggestion was quickly dismissed. The group came to an agreement that the only way to be taken

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seriously at a forum such as the district health seminar was to use “professional” means of presentation.

When members of Llaretta collected their survey data in January 1990, they used skills they had learned from a nongovernmental organization (NGO) called Educación Popular en Salud (EPES).² EPES and other NGOs worked during the dictatorship and during the transition to democracy to build the capacity of grassroots groups to analyze, describe, and transform their own reality. During the 1980s community diagnostics carried out by local health groups trained by EPES had served as a basis to denounce the military dictatorship. In 1990, when Llaretta members surveyed their neighborhood to determine health conditions, they did so in the context of a political transition to democracy that had raised expectations that the new government would improve living conditions in poor neighborhoods and begin to pay back the “social debt” left by the dictatorship.³ The survey results, which showed a high level of overcrowding, poor housing conditions, and sewage problems, were used to bolster calls by the health group and other local organizations for action by the municipality and other government authorities.

By 1992, when the health seminar took place, an elected municipal government had just replaced municipal officials appointed by the military regime. Llaretta and EPES were together experimenting with building a new kind of relationship with professionals in the municipal government and in the local health clinic. Their desire to have grassroots leaders taken seriously in setting the agenda for health priorities in the community contributed to their decision to rely on quantification to explain community needs and to use professional techniques to present their work.

That social movements make “strategic use of quantification” has been noted by Jacqueline Urla (1993:833) in her study of the Basque nationalist language movement. In the pursuit of self-determination, Urla writes, Basque nationalists “seized upon [statistics] as a tool for diagnosing or exposing an endangered Basque identity” (1993:832) and “articulat[ing] the idea that Basque speakers are a linguistic population” (1993:834). In the case of Llaretta, the community organization not only incorporated statistics into its strategy, but at the same time publicly critiqued that style of knowledge presentation as itself being a form of power.

As Llaretta used the results of its diagnostic survey during Chile’s political transition, health group members expressed mixed feelings about having to rely on statistical data to describe situations they experienced daily. For example, at a public assembly (*cabildo*) in 1991, Valeria had read a statement criticizing the way in which the media and some public officials had portrayed *pobladores* (shantytown residents) as responsible for their own poor living conditions. She began by asserting that pobladores “knew full well what it meant to be poor because they experienced unemployment, hunger, and lack of decent housing.” Asserting that the health group’s survey results “spoke for themselves,” she presented statistical data about poverty, nutrition, utility debt, and parasites. But then she stopped abruptly and asked, “But why continue, if

the cold data don't demonstrate all the frustration and impotence and the humiliation that the economic and human disaster that we inherit from the dictatorship has meant" (Grupo de Salud Poblacional Llaretá 1991:1). In her statement, Valeria both used statistical information and cited its limits, thereby expressing the health group's complex relationship with quantitative data: a reliance on its information and locutionary force, combined with frustration with the limited ability of quantitative data to convey the lived experience of poverty and military rule, and the group's analysis of the broader meanings, effects, and causes of health conditions in the población.

The tension involved in relying on quantitative data would repeat in 1992 during the "First District-Wide Health Seminar" when the health group again presented the results of its survey—this time with graphs, an overhead projector, and other symbols of professionalization—yet, at the same time, critiqued the technical way in which professionals organized knowledge.⁴ By using statistical language, the health group aimed to be taken seriously by professionals who often dismissed the ideas, capabilities, and demands of the urban poor. At the same time, members of Llaretá were aware that statistics themselves were often connected to technical approaches, medical models, and a reliance on expertise that positioned the poor as objects rather than authors of knowledge.⁵

Part of the explanation for the simultaneous appropriation and critique of statistics and professionalized knowledge is the central role that quantification played in post-dictatorship Chilean politics. In 1990s Chile, one very important form of quantification was public opinion polling. Whereas the census, which has been the primary focus of anthropological studies of quantification,⁶ seeks to describe demographic characteristics by counting and categorizing bodies, public opinion polls have a somewhat different goal: they aim to chart desires and graph interiorized states. In this, they operate less by serializing, sorting, and identifying discreet individuals than by establishing averages and norms that, in effect, constitute an aggregate.⁷ Moreover, the aggregate that polls constitute is not a population that can be regulated and monitored by the state, but rather "public opinion" which, by claiming to express preferences of respondents, can act as a powerful legitimating mechanism for political democracy and public policies.

Evidence of quantification's power effects in a wide range of societies and historical moments suggests that instruments of statistical calculation may be revealing lenses for understanding how power operates within contemporary democracies. In Chile, the widespread use of public opinion polling leading up to and during the transition to democracy followed the proliferation of consumer market surveys accompanying neo-liberal economics under military rule. In recent years, and in many countries, opinion polls have become closely intertwined with elections, operating on a continual basis and nearly supplanting voting as an indication of citizen choice.⁸ Providing the respondent with options from which to choose, opinion polls stake their claims to legitimacy on revealing the statistical distribution of preferences, often assigning opinions to different social groups. Although polling sometimes identifies two or more

interest groups with widely diverging opinions on a particular theme, a common phenomenon is that the views held by a majority are equated with public opinion as a whole, while the views held by a minority of respondents become marginalized. Opinion polls are also framed as a way in which political elites discover the wishes and thus represent the interests of citizens. Given claims by some politicians and social scientists that opinion polls are democratic practices fostering people's participation in the political system,⁹ and given their close ties to electoral campaigns throughout the world, opinion polls provide a crucial lens into forms of power operating in contemporary democracies.

In this article I explore the forms of power that quantification enacts in post-dictatorship Chile. My results are based on research conducted in 1990–92 in a población in the southern zone of Santiago, just after Chile's transition from military to elected-civilian rule. At that time, polls and surveys were being administered to judge residents' electoral choices, political attitudes, and consumer preferences.¹⁰ The widespread use of polling—including in poor urban neighborhoods—reflected a merging of marketing, politics, and social science unique, in Chile, to the period surrounding and following the transition to democracy.¹¹ In this article, I examine power exercised primarily through polls and secondarily through market surveys, and the mechanisms through which social movements—including community organizations such as the health group *Llaret*—have both resisted and appropriated statistical knowledge. The article shows how polling and the construction of public opinion through quantification play a key governance role in a democracy in which citizens have little influence over major public decisions, and correspondingly, how social movements contest the subject effects of quantification by making themselves the authors, not just objects, of statistical knowledge.

Historical Considerations

Surveys were first introduced to Chile in the late 1950s, when Eduardo Hamuy imported “such U.S. methodological advances as scales and polls” in the service of developing a scientific sociology (Puryear 1994:14; see also Godoy 1977:37–38). At the time, surveys were mainly used to describe social conditions, although Hamuy later used the methodology to garner voters' political attitudes in order to predict electoral outcomes.

During the military period, surveys served additional purposes. Businesses employed them for market research, municipalities used them to measure receipt of public services, and the military drew on them to assess its public reputation. Chilean social scientists, many of whom were forced out of universities after the coup and subsequently joined opposition think tanks, conducted extensive surveys and performed interviews about living conditions in Santiago's urban neighborhoods and shantytowns (e.g., Raczynski and Serrano 1985; Rodríguez and Tironi 1987; for an overview, see Frohmann 1993). Much of this research served to document the negative impact of the military regime's economic and social policies on poor communities. The coexistence of consumer, government, and academic data collection meant that even before

the transition to democracy, surveys and social science research in Santiago's poorest neighborhoods were not uncommon.¹² In the mid 1980s, opposition research institutes began to carry out public opinion polling to assess how more than a decade of military rule had altered Chilean society and political culture. Conducted by Chilean social scientists, this research was funded by organizations in Europe and the United States, with the stated goal of restoring democratic government and rebuilding civil society in Chile (Brunner and Sunkel 1993:100–102; CED and FLACSO 1987:1; Puryear 1994:137).

Opinion polls and focus groups were not directly incorporated into political campaigns until the late 1980s, when politicians were devising their approach to a negotiated transition. Chile's constitution called for a plebiscite in 1988, in which Chileans were to vote either YES to approve Pinochet's remaining in office for another eight years, or NO to oppose it. If the NO vote won, free elections for president would be held in 1989. Opposition leaders, many of whom had earlier rejected the idea of participating in the plebiscite under the premise that doing so would legitimate Pinochet's constitution, now decided to use the plebiscite as an opportunity to vote Pinochet out of office and thereby end military rule.

The decision by opposition political leaders in the Christian Democratic and Socialist parties to negotiate a transition process with the military regime, leading to the plebiscite, represented a break with a strategy of widespread social protests and marches that had been carried out against the regime beginning in 1983. By 1986 these opposition leaders—many of whom would later move into government positions after the end of military rule—had chosen political marketing strategy over social mobilization to fight the dictatorship. Facing the challenge of persuading a majority of Chileans to vote NO in the plebiscite, they focused their energy on the third of the population said to be undecided, and made scientific tools for measuring and influencing public opinion central to their strategy (Tironi 1990:33).

In an effort to tap into modern political marketing techniques, opposition leaders drew on internationally tested political campaign methods that they learned from foreign consultants. Political scientist Juan Gabriel Valdés in particular, worked with one U.S. political consulting firm to bring political marketing strategies to Chile (Puryear 1994:139). Later, as part of an effort to promote a transition to democracy in Chile, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) coordinated the efforts of volunteer consultants from U.S. organizations, who “offered technical advice in polling, computerization, media and organization to a gifted group of Chilean campaign organizers and strategists” (NDI Reports 1988:6; see also Burns 1996; Cutter 1996).¹³ Drawing on diverse skills, Chilean social scientists, opposition politicians, and technical experts experienced in media and market analysis, collaborated to conduct research and produce publicity materials for the NO campaign.

By tying social science to politics, the NO campaign inaugurated a new use for survey research in Chile. Whereas previously Chilean scholars had collected data in order to describe political situations and predict winners of elections

(investigational research), in the 1988 campaign, politicians and intellectuals used surveys less to anticipate the results of the plebiscite than to achieve particular electoral outcomes (Puryear 1994:138). One sociologist who worked on the NO campaign explained that surveys served less to predict the outcome of the plebiscite than to “segment” the “electoral market” into different categories ranging from definite votes for YES to definite votes for NO (Vergara 1989:15–16).¹⁴ The campaign could then dedicate its energy to developing a campaign oriented toward winning the support of the “swing-vote,” consisting of the undecideds and those with only a weak inclination toward the NO (1989:17).¹⁵ Survey research thus took on not just a descriptive, but also a strategic role.

But despite the fact that survey research was used to affect results and decide political strategy, politicians garnered credibility for polling by presenting it as a scientific tool that could accurately describe reality. They portrayed public opinion polls as information-gathering mechanisms that allowed political elites to be influenced by the interests and desires of citizens. Eugenio Tironi, a sociologist who became director of the Office of Communication and Culture in the Aylwin government, expressed this view. Stating that “modernization of politics is inevitably linked to ‘marketing,’ ” he observed:

The fear that this raises in some circles, comes from a reductionist vision, that identifies it with the manipulation of public opinion by an elite. Nonetheless, why not take it in the inverse sense, that is, as *a vehicle by way of which the society brings its aspirations to bear on the elites?* From this point of view, the “manipulated” would be the elites, not the citizens. [Tironi 1989:4, emphasis added]

Polling, in this perspective, gives politicians direct access to citizens’ preferences, thereby enabling the politicians to represent those interests as they made policy decisions. Conceived as scientific and transparent reflections of public will, opinion polls were portrayed as mechanisms for enacting representative democracy.

Creating Acceptable Answers

To situate the view that opinion polls reflect citizens’ preferences, it is useful to look with an ethnographic lens at an instance of polling in action. The following story recounts an opinion poll that I witnessed in 1991, in the Santiago población of La Bandera (Gemines Ltda. 1991).¹⁶ One afternoon, a survey taker came to the front gate of a family that I knew well and with whom I had had many hours of conversation. I accompanied Jorge, the man of the house, as he went out to the front gate after hearing the pollster announce his presence. Jorge agreed to respond to the questionnaire, whereupon the survey-taker jotted down Jorge’s first name, street address, age, and other identifying information, and then began asking questions.

One of the items on his list required Jorge to name the television channel he watched most frequently. None of Jorge’s attempted answers fit the investigator’s

required format. “I just flip through the channels until I get to a show I like. I never pay attention to which channel it is,” Jorge told the poll taker first. The interviewer, who himself was constrained by the structure of the survey, rejected this answer. Disregarding the printed instructions which directed him not to state out loud the multiple choice options on his sheet, the poll taker read aloud the possibilities from his paper. “Which television channel do you watch most?” he asked. “Channel 4, 7, 9, 11, or 13?” With his first answer unaccepted, Jorge tried again. “Which channel we choose depends on who is watching television—my daughters, my wife, or me alone.” The survey-taker rejected this answer as well and read the list of options again. Finally, Jorge chose a channel, seemingly at random. The questioner wrote it down immediately and went on to the next question. In many ways himself a subject produced by the process of conducting the survey, the interviewer was clearly uninterested in obtaining information about Jorge’s preferences for watching television. He needed only to fill in the form.

The need to acquire information that fits the interview schedule is a characteristic of knowledge in what Mark Poster (1990) has called the “mode of information.” The encoding of information that is used in databases and polls aims to eliminate “noise” and all forms of ambiguity by reducing information to pre-established categories (Poster 1990:94–96). Limited response questionnaires such as that to which Jorge responded exclude what is meaningful to him (his experience of watching television), and his actual practices (his actions in choosing television channels) by not admitting this information into the survey. Because Jorge apparently chose it at random, the answer recorded on the questionnaire was, arguably, meaningless. The mismatch between Jorge’s qualitative response and the quantitative answer recorded would be invisible in the final product. What would become visible, and what would ultimately give the poll meaning and stature, was its ability to compile the responses of a vast number of people and generate an average or percentage breakdown of response. Despite the poor reflection of opinions it purported to record, the poll would have the status of being scientific because it produced quantifiable and comparable information.

As poll designers themselves know, expressed desires and stated opinions vary depending on how options are posed. Correspondingly, the way a question is worded can establish a conceptual framework to which answers must conform. Another of the questions asked of Jorge made this point especially clear. The pollster asked Jorge: “Do you believe that, in Chile, National Reconciliation has been achieved, or that it has not yet been achieved?” In this query, the question bounded the range of possible answers. There was no space for the respondent to reply “I believe that violators of human rights should be brought to justice” or, alternatively, “I believe that the military should eliminate all subversives.” Regardless of the response chosen, by answering the question Jorge was affirming that reconciliation was a desirable goal, and thereby lending credibility to the poll’s conceptual framework. The aggregate results, identifying what percentage of Chileans believed reconciliation had or had not

been achieved, would—regardless of the numerical outcome—promote the discourse of reconciliation, a discourse central to the kind of pacted democracy being created in Chile in the early 1990s.¹⁷ In framing the question in terms of reconciliation, the poll constructed the reality it purported to describe, solicited the participation of citizens in reproducing that discourse, and gained legitimation for the ideas of reconciliation through citizens' response.

The critique of limited-choice responses embedded in the foregoing analysis is arguably true of any form of quantification. As is evident from anthropological analyses of colonial and contemporary censuses, the collection of numerical data (as well as other forms of data collection including visual representation) by its nature imposes categories. Statistical knowledge thereby transforms what is in fact interpretation into what comes to be seen as hard facts about society (Poovey 1998:xii).¹⁸ What gives quantification its legitimacy is the supposition that statistics are scientific and neutral accounts that have no interpretive dimension.

In imposing categories, yet claiming neutrality, what does quantification in the form of opinion polls say specifically about the operation of power in Chile's transition to democracy? Inseparable from the questions asked of Jorge was the political framework in which they took place. In Chile, the military dictatorship, rather than being a distinct and bounded period preceding elected-civilian rule, shaped many of the terms in which democracy would operate. The fact that reconciliation between the military and its former opposition was being promoted as a mainstay of democracy set limits around responses to some of the queries on the questionnaire. Explicitly political questions such as "which of the following political parties do you like the best?" illustrate this point because they immediately raised concerns about personal safety for the respondent and others known to him. In a country where people had been imprisoned and killed for their political beliefs over a seventeen-year period of military rule that had only recently ended, in a nation in which perpetrators of human rights violations were not being punished for their actions, and in a neighborhood that had been highly politicized and organized by left-wing political parties, the question about party preference was loaded. Rather than identify his actual party preference, Jorge responded to the question by choosing a prominent center-left political party that he and his family held in low esteem.

Jorge's guarded answer about party politics revealed that in the 1990s in Chile, two forms of knowledge creation—and two forms of surveillance—intersected and overlapped. Technologies of knowledge such as opinion polls coexisted with police surveillance in a state whose secret service had not been dismantled but rather transferred from the government to the military. Plain clothed police gathered information secretly, while pollsters gathered it openly, with the consent of local residents. Unlike covert intelligence gathering, polls do not make people mere objects of study. Rather, they engage respondents in a form of "participatory surveillance" (Poster 1990:93) in which people voluntarily provide information to researchers. Yet how the data gathered

on questionnaires would be used remained ambiguous, especially since the poll taker recorded the respondent's name and address. Jorge's decision to lie about his political preferences revealed something about his perception of ongoing repression, and called into question the accuracy of polls as a measure of political preference, at a time when the specter of military rule had not yet been relegated to the distant past.

When polls do not allow respondents to provide answers that fit their preferences, why do people cooperate with them? It is significant that Jorge decided to participate in the survey in the first place, and that he then continued answering the questions even as it became progressively clear to him that doing so meant giving false information, risking exposure of personal details, and listening to questions that were alienating. Why might he agree to respond?

One possible answer as to why people agree to give information on surveys, particularly at the outset before they are presented with a limited set of choices, is that responding potentially offers the person being questioned a certain satisfaction. There may be an attraction to thinking that for once one's own opinions count, that someone may be listening. In Chile, after 17 years of military dictatorship, that idea was linked with democracy for many people I interviewed.¹⁹ In workshops I held on the meaning of democracy in 1992, community leaders in La Bandera defined democracy as being listened to, as having their opinions taken into account, as having their ideas taken seriously. It could be, then, that polling had an appeal because it operated as one of the few instances in which the urban poor were asked what they thought of public issues, and in which their answers might be heard. In concert with Eugenio Tironi's assertion that opinion polls gather information on citizens' preferences and thereby allow citizens to influence public officials, to the degree that respondents felt they might be listened to, polling could actually gain credence among potential respondents as a manifestation of democracy.

The incident described above shows, however, that the experience of being questioned does not necessarily meet those expectations. Given the fact that Jorge's answers were distant from his desires, it is unlikely that by the time he finished responding to the questionnaire, he thought the poll would result in public policy designed to meet his needs. This was not a situation, to use Tironi's words, in which "the society brings its aspirations to bear on the elites." It was a situation in which public opinion, rather than being an accurate translation of reality, was constructed through the process of polling itself.

Subject Effects

By circumscribing the alternatives through which respondents can reply, polls do more than narrow the field of possible answers. They also create certain kinds of subjects. Foucault has argued that power operates not only in a negative capacity in that it restricts, oppresses, or coerces, but also in a positive capacity in that it produces certain kinds of subjects, be they delinquents in the prison, slow learners at school, or mental patients in a clinic. Opinion polls also produce particular types of subjects: they construct respondents as choice-makers.

This sense of being able to choose is a fundamental property of both electoral democracy and the market. It fits the political-economic formation of a capitalist democracy, in which individuals are positioned simultaneously as citizens and consumers (see also Schild 2000; Yúdice 1995).

The confluence of citizenship and consumption reflects the interweaving of business and politics in Chile that elsewhere I have called “marketing democracy” (Paley 2001). By “marketing democracy” I mean first the permeation of Chile’s officially democratic political system by the market (both in its orientation to global competition, and in the spread of consumerism throughout society), and second, the use of marketing techniques in creating political messages about the meaning and benefits of democracy. Opinion polls are one mechanism that bridged the needs of political democracy and neoliberal economics in Chile, and blended the techniques of politics and business, as well as social science. Respondents may be unable to (and uninterested in) distinguishing whether it is universities, private corporations, or political organizations—or intellectuals and businesses that cater to politics—that sponsor the polls to which they respond.

One of the most fundamental impacts of the military regime and its economic policies on Chile was the permeation of consumer culture throughout the society. The opening of the Chilean economy to the world market brought an influx of imported goods, including clothing and electronics, and created booms and busts that led to periodic surges in consumer spending. Market research carried out in the 1980s by companies such as TIME and ADIMARK, both reflected and extended the expansion of consumerism. Commissioned by producers of brand name products, these surveys were conducted in neighborhoods across the socioeconomic spectrum, including the poorest sections of Santiago. Marketing and market research helped construct Chileans as consumers.

The experience of Ricardo, a young man who grew up in a *población* in the northwestern hills of Santiago, and in the late 1980s earned money conducting consumer surveys, illustrates this phenomenon. Ricardo would ask people a series of questions about what products they used on a regular basis. Their answers were used not only to generate aggregate data on consumption but also to provide information that companies could use to follow up with direct marketing of products. Because Ricardo was newly hired and inexperienced (and probably also due to his own class background) he was often sent to the lowest socioeconomic communities, where survey workers were paid less for each completed survey.

One day in 1987, Ricardo was sent to administer a questionnaire in La Bandera. Frightened of crime (for which La Bandera had a reputation), he asked a woman he was interviewing if he could step inside her house to fill in the questionnaire. Inside, Ricardo was able to compare the woman’s responses with her living conditions. One set of questions asked her to identify which hot beverages she consumed on a regular basis. The woman said she drank coffee. Ricardo knew from experience that nearly everyone in the *poblaciones* drank

only tea, and sometimes they could not afford even that. Looking around her kitchen, Ricardo could see that the shelves were mostly bare. An old coffee tin was visible on a shelf, but it looked as if it had been bought years before; with the coffee long gone, the jar was being used as a container for other things. Ricardo suspected that when this lady and others he interviewed said they used particular products, they were not always telling the truth—that they were at times claiming to be consuming items that they could not actually afford. After he wrote down their responses, Ricardo would sometimes ask off the record if they really did use the products. In a number of cases, the respondents admitted they did not, but told him to leave their original answers on the form. Ricardo interpreted these decisions to lie in response to the survey questions as an effort not to feel humiliated about their social status.²⁰ Most importantly for this article, in asking about their consumption habits, the questions in the survey constructed respondents as agents of options and consumers of products, even if only in the imaginary space of an interview which postulated their ability to buy things they could not afford.

In Chile, the construction of individual citizens as consumers making individual choices was facilitated by an intentional project by the military regime to restructure the Chilean economy and the state-citizen relationship. After the coup in 1973, the military regime sought to “de-politicize” Chilean society by eliminating avenues for collective resolution of social needs and replacing them with individual consumer choice in the market. Three places where this can be seen are education, health care, and social security, all of which were privatized under the program of “seven modernizations” beginning in 1979. In the case of social security, the regime replaced a redistributive state system with a system of individual savings accounts managed by private investment firms which competed for market share among consumers (Oppenheim 1999:147–152).

Ultimately the focus on marketized individuals under the military government created the conditions of possibility for opinion polls to construct the individual as agent of consumer choice as the citizen’s role in democracy. The decision by the elite political opposition in the mid- to late 1980s to participate in a transition to an elected government under terms set by the military regime eventually created a political system that merged free market choice with political democracy and made it possible for the economic model installed during the military dictatorship to be sustained. In a volume on democracy and economic adjustment sponsored by the World Bank (Haggard and Webb 1994), Genaro Arriagada, a key player in the plebiscite NO campaign, and an advisor to subsequent elected presidents, wrote an essay with World Bank employee Carol Graham which explained that:

Leaders of the democratic opposition were aware that, regardless of popular sentiment, they had to contend with a balance of social forces, including important private sector groups and middle-class strata as well as the military, with a stake in preserving the economic model implemented by the Pinochet regime. Reversing

any of the model's major tenets would endanger the entire transition. [Arriagada and Graham 1994:243]

The fact that the transition was predicated on maintaining Pinochet's economic model meant that, by design, key decisions about Chilean society and economy—such as the privatization of formerly public services—were not open to influence by citizens.

As this statement shows, while both politics and business construct the individual as having choice, the free market model may actually restrict political options. In much of the contemporary world, key decisions about economic distribution, government expenditure, and public investment are made not by citizens in elections, but by nonelected technocrats in international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (Ferguson 1993). Decisions formerly or potentially made in a public sphere of deliberation and debate, or decided in elections or referendums, are passed into a technical realm where they appear to be scientific and nonpolitical. This arrangement actually gives experts increased leverage and flexibility over procedures (Cruikshank 1999:113) while giving citizens reduced control over decision-making. Indeed, delegating public decisions to a small circle of experts may further erode citizens' understanding of, and ability to influence, complex social issues. The illusion that the individual is the site of free choices can undercut examination of structural constraints on choice.

In this context, opinion polls constituted a key mediating device in a democracy where citizens obtained the formal right to vote without gaining the ability to influence important economic decisions. Although major decisions were outside the control of the population, opinion polls created the impression that people's opinions were being taken into account. The architects of the transition to democracy were clear that a crucial goal was to create societal consensus and limit social mobilization that could jeopardize the economic status quo. The transition in effect simulated citizen participation by providing individuals with limited alternatives from which to choose, thereby aiming to diminish the social conflict that could arise from the emergence of ideological positions located outside the prevailing framework.

In this context, choice-making suggests a very particular and limited kind of political action for citizens to engage in. Selecting from pre-given alternatives is a quite different kind of political practice, for example, than participation in grassroots organizations. Such organizations might mobilize into social movements, challenge the public framing of issues, or contest the state.²¹ Of course opinion polls are not sufficient to eliminate mobilization: where there are compelling incentives to organize, opinion polls are but a small factor influencing social movements' political strategies. However, choice making is significant because it enacts a very distinct kind of power that activates respondents as agents in their own subjection and may itself result in demobilization. Market research positions respondents as part of a feedback mechanism: by asking questions of potential consumers of their messages, politicians know

how to publicize themselves and their issues, and business people know how to sell their products.

Opinion polls did provide Chilean politicians with information about popular support or dissatisfaction about policies. For example, writing with Carol Graham, Genaro Arriagada states that,

although the consensus achieved was quite strong among political leaders and elites, particularly in the arena of economic management, it was far less so among the rank and file of the parties. Opinion polls recorded surprisingly low public acceptance of or support for the economic reforms, particularly among low-income groups. [Arriagada and Graham 1994:243]

Although Arriagada and Graham acknowledge that many people lost out as a result of the economic reforms, rather than conclude that the economic model should be altered to accommodate citizens' interests and their preferences as stated in polls, they fault the military for failing to shape public opinion. "This [lack of support for economic restructuring] is explained, in part, by the authoritarian nature of the regime implementing the reforms; *it had no desire to educate or 'sell' them to the public*" (1994:243, emphasis added). In this statement, written for an audience of international elites, survey data are envisioned not as a way for citizens to influence policy or shape the terms of debate, but rather as a feedback mechanism that would allow politicians to shape public consensus in favor of decisions that have already been made.

In the NO campaign for the 1988 plebiscite, to give another example, opposition political leaders used focus groups to identify the aspirations of youth, and, based on that knowledge, to create messages most likely to inspire them to vote for the NO (Weinstein 1989:19–25). Here, respondents participated in creating the very simulations that they later watched on television. Nonetheless, when they voted in the plebiscite, they presumably experienced their vote as a product of their own volition. In a similar fashion, opinion polls elicit respondents' views in order, later, to inform the population about what it thinks, desires, and feels. In doing so it stakes out the territory of what can be legitimately desired.

Inherent in choice making, and the feedback mechanism attached to it, is a form of governmentality. Drawing on Foucault's concept, Rose and Miller (1992) have written about the "ways in which rule is exercised in advanced liberal democracies." They hold that

power is not so much a matter of imposing constraints on citizens as of "making up" citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom. Personal autonomy is not the antithesis of political power, but a key term in its exercise, the more so because most individuals are not merely the subjects of power but play a part in its operations. [1992:174]²²

Elsewhere, Rose (1999) argues that people are governed through their freedom. That is, in choosing from alternatives, subjects not only are acted on by an external source of power (e.g., the state) but are themselves conduits of a

kind of power that operates through citizens' own seemingly autonomous practices. In eliciting responses and constituting the citizen as choice-maker, opinion polls create the individual as a mechanism of his or her own governance.

Public Opinion and the Public Sphere

In addition to constructing citizen-subjects of capitalist democracy, opinion polls also construct the entity "public opinion" and by extension, the "public" itself. A product of the invisible aggregation of opinion by experts, "public opinion" is difficult to contest, first because its processes of construction are invisible and seemingly scientific, and second because the desires it expresses appear to emanate directly from the citizenry. But, I suggest in this section, both public opinion and the public it refers to are less pre-existing entities being listened to than cultural constructions being produced through the procedures of polling itself.

The question of how polling constructs public opinion requires us to shift our attention from how pollsters collect individuals' responses (and the subject effects on those individuals themselves) to how experts calculate the aggregate public opinion. Contemporary social theory provides a number of lenses through which to interpret this process. Among the most imaginative are post-structuralist theories, which contend that public opinion does not pre-exist the survey, but is constructed through the concept and procedures of polling itself. Jean Baudrillard argues that the doubts frequently raised about opinion polls ("do they . . . manipulate opinion?" or, we might say, do they distort democracy?) are moot, because the questions confuse two different systems of knowledge (1988:209). "An operational system which is statistical, information-based, and simulational is projected onto a traditional values system of representation, will, and opinion" (1988:209). That is to say, although residents may answer questions on a survey, the aggregate "public opinion" is not something that emanates from them. As a statistical construct calculated from results of a survey, it embodies no living human being's desires. Rather, the results are a phenomenon people watch, as spectators, on the television news.

An antecedent and context for the kind of quantification that happens in opinion polls is the statistical calculation of macroeconomic indicators that became the hallmark of neoliberal economics. In Chile, the military regime introduced two linked phenomena shortly after it took power in 1973. One was a free market economy based on the principles of the Chicago school of economics. The other was the premise that economic policy, when orchestrated by expert technocrats, was apolitical. This claim dovetailed with the dictator's stated goal of purging all politics from Chile.

To associate technocracy with the beginning of the military's economic project, is not to imply that the use of expertise was new to Chile in 1973. To the contrary, statistical calculation done by persons with high status credentials has an important history in Chile (Silva 1991).²³ What changed with the onset of the military government compared to the immediate pre-dictatorship period was the way in which knowledge more generally was legitimated and how that

legitimation was related to politics and economy.²⁴ From that point on in Chile, knowledge became acceptable to the degree that it could be considered scientific and politically neutral.

Changes in the legitimation of knowledge during the military period were so powerful in Chile that they structured not only the work of free market reformers, but also work done by those in opposition to the dictatorship and its economic program. Despite an environment of censorship and repression against academic work, social scientists of the opposition published an impressive quantity of literature during the military years. Academic dissidents at research institutes and think tanks were able to continue working because they challenged regime policies in the same technical language used by the economists working for the military regime (Silva 1991:403).²⁵ Many of these same social scientists later took up important roles in the elected government, thereby reinforcing the emphasis on quantification and expertise in the new political democracy.

Mediated by experts and given status by their claim to scientific accuracy, economic calculations provide a template and standard for the way in which opinion polls are evaluated.²⁶ Yet while opinion polls are legitimated as scientific in much the same way economic indicators are, there are a number of significant differences. The most immediate difference is that macroeconomic quantification is virtually people-free. Whereas the census counts people and opinion polls query them, macroeconomic indicators bypass bodies; they neither reference, nor through discourse constitute, a population. At issue is not so much products (for example, the materials being imported and exported), as money itself (for instance, the value of the peso relative to the dollar, the country's inflation rate). Depopulated in both authorship (where the economy is managed by anonymous technocrats who are but conduits for scientific truth) and subject matter (the economy presented as if uninhabited by the nation's citizens), macroeconomic indicators are presumed to be nonpolitical.

In contrast to economic calculation, public opinion polls are people-full and self-consciously political. Whereas economic calculations bypass the population, and while the census counts and constitutes it, opinion polls function through the direct input of respondents. There is a coincidence here integral to the functioning of capitalist democracy. Although economic decision-making takes place outside of voters' control, polling works to assure citizens that their opinions are being listened to. In post-dictatorship Chile, opinion polls could facilitate the continuation of free market economics because they protected the economic model from social movement resistance by enacting a discourse of participatory democracy.

The people-full quality of opinion polls, however, does not negate the fact that polls excise social interaction from the construction of the "public." Aggregated from the sum of individual responses, the "public" is a statistical construct mediated by experts. Bourdieu (1979) has observed that the gathering of individual responses assumes that people have already formulated political opinions, as if opinion were not always created in conversation. In the survey

form, only the pre-interactive, pre-political opinion delivered by isolated individuals is taken to be authentic, scientific, and pure. With the “public” divorced from social interaction in this way, debate recedes as a legitimate resource for public opinion (Herbst 1993:66). Opinions generated through discussion would appear, in the logic of the survey, to be contaminated by ideology, and neighborhood organizations could be seen as distorting the true opinions of their members.

In his widely disseminated work on the structural transformation of the public sphere, Habermas has proposed that public opinion is only legitimate if it (a) is formed rationally, and (b) arises from the “pro and con of a public conversation” (1989:221). Habermas viewed the scientific development of empirical techniques of marketing and opinion research after World War II as providing the basis for an industry of political marketing which contributed to the disappearance of a genuine public sphere in the realm of politics. From this perspective, political marketing transformed citizens into political consumers (1989:216). “Thus a public of citizens that had disintegrated *as* a public was reduced by publicist means to such a position that it could be claimed for the legitimation of political compromises without participating in effective decisions or being in the least capable of such participation” (1989:221, emphasis in the original).

Habermas’s idealized version of face-to-face communication, and the historical reference of a bourgeois public sphere has been critiqued by a number of authors (Eley 1992; Fraser 1992; Ryan 1992) who point to the class and gender exclusivity of such locales as coffee houses and salons. Even in the absence of a singular, unified public sphere, however, the idea of direct political communication among citizens is valuable for understanding qualitative aspects of democracy. In this context, Fraser’s concept of multiple subaltern counterpublics (1992:123) is useful for contrasting polling and political marketing to other historical forms of political organization in Chile.

Chile before 1973 was a highly politicized and politically organized society, where political parties and controversies shaped almost every area of social life, from workplace and school to neighborhood organization. Following the coup, the military used repression to shut down political parties, close democratic institutions, and censor the press. The first organizations to emerge during the dictatorship were human rights groups functioning under the protection of the Catholic Church. Later, in response to economic collapse, survival organizations formed to meet basic needs. Health groups, “common pot” cooking collectives, unions of the unemployed, and other groups became spaces for people to meet and act collectively. Given the lack of a democratic political system in Chile, these organizations were sites of face-to-face discussions about politics. By the mid 1980s, large numbers of survival organizations had joined in nationwide protests against the military regime. Later, during the transition to democracy, many of these organizations ceased to function or came under pressure to change their role by becoming extensions of municipal service delivery or for-profit micro-enterprises. In this context, the space at a

neighborhood level for direct communication about politics was reduced, at the same time that Chile was adopting an electoral system.

The understanding of democracy for groups like Llareta stands in sharp contrast to that of the architects of the transition to democracy. Although leaders in Llareta did use formal surveys, such as the one they conducted in 1990, the primary way in which they gleaned information about the experiences and perspectives of their neighbors was through conversations held on street corners, in kitchens, while shopping at the outdoor market, and while attending community meetings. For example, residents of La Bandera frequently came to the homes of Llareta's health promoters to share their problems of domestic violence, inadequate service at the health clinic, hunger, and other immediate concerns. Having listened to these problems, leaders of the health group saw their role as engaging their own members in analysis of the situations, and developing educational campaigns to shape the understandings of non-organized residents around the issues. Through these campaigns, they also sought to hold the government accountable. For example, in 1991, when cholera first appeared in Santiago, health promoters were aware that residents of La Bandera were avoiding buying vegetables out of fear of contracting the disease, and that business people in the marketplace were losing their incomes due to a decline in sales. As part of an organized campaign, health group members stood in the outdoor market talking to shoppers and handing out leaflets. The flyers asserted that the outbreak of cholera was caused by the neoliberal economic model and the failure of the government to invest in public health infrastructure, rather than faulty individual hygiene on the part of citizens. They also encouraged residents to continue buying vegetables so as to maintain their own nutritional status and to support the small business people who sold food for a living. Health group members emphasized that residents could eat produce once it had been washed and cooked, but called on government officials to irrigate vegetables in clean water so that these precautions would not be necessary.

The ways in which members of Llareta and other organizations listened to their neighbors, facilitated political discussion inside their organizations, and made efforts at political persuasion of a broader set of people, contrasted with the dominant political culture during the transition to democracy. Politicians involved in the transition and the newly elected government claimed to represent the public because they had access to its wishes through opinion polls. Academics who conducted these polls claimed that community leaders who lived in poblaciones were out of touch with the real desires of the people, atypical of their social group (that is, not fitting the statistically constructed norm for the population) and too ideological to represent the population's interests. They considered leaders' mechanisms for assessing the desires of their neighbors (such as conversations and informal interaction) to be biased, because they did not have the statistical weight of random samples. In this framework, analyses of political situations by leaders of groups like Llareta were seen as less authentically public and less authentically democratic than the results of polling because the scientific tabulation of individual opinions was

framed as a more reliable means for communicating the needs of “the public” than interpersonal interaction and shared experience in the *población*. The ironic outcome is that through statistical calculation, elites rather than local leaders become authorized to represent residents of poor neighborhoods, even though they are themselves hardly typical of the poor population. The end result is that the legitimacy attributed to public opinion polls played a critical role in installing and consolidating a political system in Chile dominated less by debate, interaction, and organization than by expert-mediated information gathering forms.²⁷ As such, it constituted a particular form of democracy in which political elites managed information and decision making, and in which community organizations were struggling with how to develop ways of holding government accountable to locally established demands.

Polling, Norms, and Ahistory

Once opinions have been gathered, the results of opinion polls can be used to establish norms. Here what began as a descriptive measure (an account of the population’s preferences) becomes a standard to which people should conform. When I first told a Chilean sociologist working for the government that I would be doing my fieldwork in La Bandera, for example, he expressed disappointment. That *población* did not interest him and his colleagues, he said, because as a place that had been highly politicized, it was an exception. The norm, he told me, was for shantytown dwellers to be politically disinterested. The people I knew were atypical since the vast majority of people in the country were content with the current government—all the polls agreed.

As this example demonstrates, polls are used not only to describe existing situations but also to influence them by pushing them toward a norm. Using the language of “averages” and “majorities,” one can dismiss a case as an anomaly and attempt to make research or action conform to what polling determines the standard to be—in this case the study of depoliticized people in a depoliticized *población*. In establishing a desired circumstance (here, depoliticization), as the norm, polling can be used to define other opinions as deviant, and sanction those that disagree (Foucault 1977, cited in Poster 1990:90; see also Horn 1995). The sociologist did this both by marginalizing the *población* as an object of study and by warning that my research would be of little interest to the Chilean academic community.

By 1991 when this incident took place, the Chilean political system was characterized by a concerted effort to establish consensus and minimize extremes. The electoral system negotiated between the opposition and the military regime involved a complex binomial election process that had the goal and the effect of creating a political system dominated by two major centrist coalitions, thereby marginalizing smaller parties.²⁸ Perhaps most importantly, major elements of the Chilean political elite, especially the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, had reassessed the history leading up to the military coup and come to the conclusion that the dictatorship was an outcome of the extreme political and social polarization that had characterized Chilean society before 1973.

In short, by the early 1990s, the ideas of consensus and reconciliation dominated political discourse. It is therefore not surprising that statistical norms generated through polling would be such a powerful reference point in post-dictatorship Chile.

In his article “This Norm Which Is Not One,” David Horn (1995) argues that norms do not in fact exist. Analyzing the materials of Cesare Lombroso, an Italian anthropologist during the late 1800s who studied the bodies of those deemed criminals to establish physical indicators of pathology, Horn concludes that Lombroso’s search to find the normal woman ended up suggesting that all women were potentially criminal. At the same time, the finding of pathology implies that there is a norm from which the pathology deviates. This assumption of a norm shapes what we think about groups, individuals, and opinions. The norm is a statistical construct: a fiction, a composite, a hypothetical condition that no individual can actually be. Yet the concept is extremely powerful because it sets the standard from which all other opinions are seen as atypical.

In the process of establishing a norm from which all difference is deviance, polls dehistoricize. They describe as a given reality what is in fact the emergent product of ongoing practices. In establishing the current demobilization as a “given,” the initial violence and later the pacted transition through which people learned to reject politics, were obscured. What were the products of political decisions appeared to constitute a current reality not up for political grabs. Rather than examine the social and political processes generating demobilization, polls reified the population’s current lack of interest in politics, thereby creating a snapshot of a moment rather than a moving picture that could capture process over time.²⁹ That is to say, polls focus on the present: they ask what Chileans now want, believe, or feel. They obscure the historical question “how did people come to frame their desires in these ways?” In omitting that question, polls make invisible the history of the social phenomena about which they ask. Because there was no indication of how things got to be this way, there is also no message about how they could be transformed. Where depoliticization is a mode of governmentality, as it was in post-dictatorship Chile, polling legitimates that condition by establishing it as a given and the norm.

Resistance to the Mode of Information

The idea that the power enacted through polling might produce certain kinds of subjects raises the question of what kinds of resistance might emerge to challenge opinion polls. Although polling results are aggregate phenomena, occasionally individuals tried to counteract distortions and manipulate survey results single handedly. One example of this comes not from opinion polls but from the 1992 census, but I suspect the logic equally applies. Rosa, a community leader in a Santiago población, was unique among the pobladores I knew in that she had authored a book and worked for an NGO. Similar to Ricardo’s observation that the people he surveyed exaggerated their access to consumer

goods, Rosa told me she believed that her neighbors reported possessing products they did not in fact own in order to elevate their image in their own and the census-takers' eyes. Because of this, she said, the census overestimated poor people's wealth. Herself drawing on the logic of statistical aggregation, she tried to correct for that anticipated outcome by carefully selecting her own responses. As she and I sat in her living room discussing this idea, water was boiling on her stove, vegetables were in the refrigerator, her stereo was playing, and a television was visible in the living room. In the interview, she recalled the day a representative arrived to do the census:

they asked if you had a refrigerator, if you had a stove, if you had a radio, if you had electrical appliances. We said that we didn't have anything. Because the majority of the people even when they don't have things say they have it. And this means that all the data rise.

In giving her response to the census taker, Rosa sought to compensate for the distortions produced by the misrepresentations of her neighbors, particularly their tendency to overstate their possessions.³⁰ Rosa's action was individual, but her goal was to affect a composite statistic. Rather than refuse to answer, she gave responses that played with the polling procedure and affected the statistical outcomes themselves.

As it turned out, Rosa's answers did reflect her view of her material conditions. "Why should I say I have these things when in reality they're no good?" she asked me, rhetorically. "The refrigerator is more than twenty years old; I bought it when [my daughter] was a baby. The television was a gift . . . I didn't purchase it. The washing machine that I had when they did the census was a [piece of junk] that I had had for I don't know how many years [and] that washed only when I begged it by saying 'please.' The stove was also old when I bought it." To her the fact that the machines were physically present in her house did not mean that they functioned or that she had what she needed to live. Despite the apparent inaccuracy with regard to her material possessions, her answers fit the questionnaire's format, obliging the census taker to record the responses as she gave them. In a form of resistance tailored to the kind of power enacted through polling, she attempted to manipulate the results of the survey by cooperating with its procedure. At the same time, by the very fact that she responded, she helped legitimate the census.

My research indicates that people sometimes resist, evade, or intentionally undermine the categories offered by survey research. The kind of resistance that seeks to manipulate the poll's outcome based either on personal aspiration or political critique distorts the information collected by the poll even as it conforms to its formal procedures.

In his writings on polling, Baudrillard (1983) suggests that people resist in ways strategically suited to the form of power being wielded. He maintains that this is different for a repressive versus a "participatory" form of power. When people are treated as objects, he holds, they respond—they resist—as subjects. They construct identities, defend their rights, and voice demands

(Baudrillard 1983:107). This characterization well describes what happened during the protest era of the 1980s, when social movements fought back against Chile's repressive military regime.

But contemporary forms of power exemplified through opinion polls operate not by repression but rather by "participation," he suggests. In so doing, they "maximiz[e] the word and meaning." Here ideas are purportedly welcome. In mechanisms such as surveys, elections, and opinion polls, people are asked to "... express [them]selves at any price, to vote, produce, decide, speak, participate, play the game ..." (1983:108). Baudrillard argues that under such circumstances, speaking one's opinion, even in protest, would only reinforce the kind of power that these mechanisms enact. Rather than rebellion, he suggests, the resistance strategically suited to this kind of power consists of "... a refusal of meaning and a refusal of the word" or, alternatively "... the hyperconformist simulation of the very mechanisms of the system, which is a form of refusal and of nonreception" (1983:108).

In this context, rather than speak out and protest, people may refuse to respond. They may decline to vote or choose not to answer an opinion survey. These actions have generally been interpreted as political disengagement and characterized as the citizens' apathy said to plague contemporary democracies. But one might argue that they are a response strategically tailored to the form of power enacted through opinion polls, in which people's thoughts are constantly solicited, without necessarily bringing about desired results.

Alternatively, respondents may acquiesce to power's very mechanisms by playing the game. Like Jorge, and like the señora who exaggerated her access to coffee, they give answers to opinion polls, watch televised campaign ads, and turn out to vote. But their responses so conform to the system—so fit into its limited answer procedures—that the results ultimately do not reflect a pre-existing reality. By giving inaccurate information (often the only kind of information the survey allows), or entering the survey's imaginary space, they empty out the significance of the information-gathering form.

The projection of desire and manipulation of status through the survey suggest that a polling mechanism designed to operate at an aggregate statistical level can be used at an individual level as a stage on which to forge personal meaning. The practices of projecting fantasies by saying you consume things you do not or of imagining participation by choosing to respond to an opinion poll are just two of what could be an unlimited number of meaning systems playing out in each incident of questionnaire response.³¹ These personalized subject effects contrast with the homogenized interpretations of results that calculate an overall norm and take each response to be equivalent to any other. What appear to be equivalent responses within the logic of quantification, can, for the respondents, be an infinitely incomparable set of practices.

Despite its seeming relevance, however, the post-structural analysis described above is insufficient to address the ways in which people respond (or refuse to) in polls, surveys, and even elections, because it erases both collective action and agency. People do not always conform to polling by participating in

an individual and empty gesture; they may actively and collectively aim to affect the results. An example can be found in Chile's 1997 congressional elections where the percentage of voters who annulled their ballots, left them blank, were themselves absent from the polls (in a system where voting is mandatory for those who are registered), or never registered to vote totaled 40 percent of the eligible population (I.D.M./L.F. 1997), causing a potential crisis of political legitimacy in Chile. These actions were not attributable to only minute and individual decisions. At least some portion of the "lost vote" in the 1997 election was the outcome of organized campaigns in which flyers were distributed urging voters to annul their ballots in the upcoming elections (e.g., FSI 1997). Although this organized effort to nullify the election represents outright resistance to the mode of information, other forms of resistance are based on a strategic appropriation of these same techniques.

At the beginning of this article, I described a presentation by the grassroots health group Llaretá at a district health seminar in 1992 where the group not only critiqued quantification but also appropriated statistical techniques. The health group found that surveys and graphs were directly helpful in that they provided information with which the health promoters could evaluate their priorities and analyze conditions in their neighborhood. Moreover, quantification enabled them—a group whose members were poor, without advanced degrees, and with a single exception, female—to credential themselves before public officials.

This article has shown how quantification, particularly through public opinion polling, came to play a central role in the construction of Chilean democracy. Given the importance of statistical forms of knowledge in the post-dictatorship period as a means for elite politicians and social scientists to claim access to citizen preferences, it is understandable that the health group would itself decide to use quantification in an effort to have influence in an elite democracy. Importantly, however, the health group's use of statistics differed from professionals' use of data because by using technocratic tools and language they undermined its usual subject effects. Ordinarily, in opinion polls and data bases, the poor were represented in statistical form as a collectivity. By going door to door in their own neighborhood with a questionnaire they had helped to design, the health group put the poor at the center of the statistics—not only as its objects of study, but as its researchers, its interpreters, its authors, and its audience. By using statistical data in this way, they subverted a main power effect of professionalization—the assertion that only professionals can manage information. Their actions were not in and of themselves sufficient to counterbalance an elite transition in which major economic decisions had been taken out of the control of the citizenry. But their insistence on agency as authors of data does demonstrate that, at a time when polling and market research came to play a central role in facilitating an elite political transition, quantification, albeit in different forms, was invoked as a tool for enacting an alternative vision of democracy.

Notes

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1. The word for popular sector organizations in Chilean Spanish is *organizaciones sociales*. Throughout the article I have used the terms “neighborhood organizations” or “community organizations” because of their greater clarity in English. The word for leader in Chile is *dirigente*, which I have translated as “community leader” for similar reasons.

2. A health education program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile, EPES was founded in 1982 with the mission of improving health conditions in poor neighborhoods in Chile by training teams of health promoters made up of residents in shantytowns in Santiago and Concepción. For more information on EPES and the health groups it has trained, see Calvin 1995.

3. The term *social debt* was used by opponents of the military regime to describe the poverty and reduced social services that resulted from the regime's economic and social policies.

4. Social movements' use of arguments based on statistics to denounce social injustice was not unique to this historical period. For example, the organizations that pressured the state to develop La Bandera in the late 1960s to meet the needs of families living in overcrowded conditions repeatedly based their arguments on the number of people without homes compared to the number of houses the Frei administration planned to build (see for example, *Municipalidad de la Granja* 1967). During the military years, grassroots organizations calculated the amount of money it would take to feed a family and, contrasting it implicitly with the current minimum wage, used this to denounce the military regime and its economic policies, as well as convince residents to organize for price stabilization and higher salaries (see for example, *Campaña Contra las Alzas* n.d.).

5. Llaretta's and EPES's substantive differences with health professionals included a critique of what they considered health professionals' narrow, technical definitions of health focused on germs and disease. They favored broader definitions referencing the social, political, and economic context of health problems including housing, environment, nutrition, work, and education.

6. Anthropological research on quantification has largely concentrated on the census under colonialism. These studies show that at its most pragmatic, colonial governments' gathering of statistical information in their colonies facilitated administrative tasks such as taxation and the regulation of land use (Appadurai 1996:116), thus serving to control and govern the population. Of greater interest to anthropologists has been the classificatory effect of these practices: through the counting of bodies, administrators of the census projected colonial fantasies of race and caste (Comaroff 1998), creating categories that would take on new life and social meaning as persons classified in these ways

were funneled through institutions such as schools and courts (Anderson 1991), and as local residents vied for status within new social hierarchies (Cohn 1987). Moving beyond questions of how the census creates classifications, Appadurai (1996) focuses on the effects of enumeration itself. Foucault (1991) suggests that the colonial census belongs to a set of techniques of power that take the population as their object (1991:100); statistics provide a means of not only documenting the population, but also constituting it through the collection, storage, and processing of data. (For an historical analysis of the role of statistics in the production of the Italian nation-state, see Patriarca 1996; for an additional discussion of categorization in colonial India, see Tolen 1991.) Studies of the census and the use of other demographic data in contemporary liberal democracies have similarly identified a classificatory practice around ethnicity and race (Yanow 1998), and demonstrated how quantification of racial identity can obscure the significance of social class (Segal 1998).

7. The establishing of norms is a characteristic of the census and other statistical forms as well. See, for example, Urla 1993:820; Hacking 1991:182–183.

8. Thank you to Michael Silverstein for this point.

9. In Chile, the “report on the first survey carried out [by Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO-Chile)] in collaboration with the Centro de Estudios del Desarrollo (CED)” identified two principle objectives for the surveys. They included first a description of contemporary political culture among the Chilean public, and second, a way of “following . . . the process of crystallization of preferences in the diverse massive publics. . . .” This would bring both a “larger transparency to the political process” and “provide [political] actors with information that they could use to achieve a greater rationality and a better quality in their decisions and strategies.” (Sunkel 1993: 217–218, translation mine; see also Brunner and Sunkel 1993:102; and Tironi 1989:4, quoted later in this article).

10. In the late 1980s and early 1990s in Chile, telephones were not present on a widespread basis in the homes of poor Chileans. Polls and surveys, as well as get-out-the-vote drives for electoral campaigns, were therefore conducted door-to-door. In this sense they had a much greater day-to-day presence in the poblaciones than the telephone surveys common in the United States.

11. A comparison of the presence of opinion polling and consumer surveys in poor neighborhoods in North and South America would be a valuable contribution to understanding the role of quantification in contemporary political contexts. According to Miguel Basañez of MORI International, an important pollster in Mexico and the United States, “. . . each and every poll that claims being representative of the national population, has to have the proportion of poor people and poor neighborhoods that correspond to the country it is drawn from.” (Personal communication, 2000).

12. The census in Chile has historically been conducted every ten years. On the day of the census, Chileans are required to stay in their homes, and the entire population is counted by census-takers going door-to-door. All households are asked the same set of questions, which include economic activity, housing conditions, and family status. The military regime postponed the 1980 census until 1982, and the new elected government conducted the subsequent census in 1992.

13. NDI received much of its funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which defines itself as “a private nonprofit organization created in 1983 to strengthen democratic institutions around the world through nongovernmental efforts (NED n.d.).” The endowment channels money primarily to “four core institutes: the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the International Republican

Institute, the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, and the Center for International Private Enterprise, which represent the two major American political parties, the labor movement, and the business community respectively (NED n.d.).” Each of these institutes in turn issues grants to organizations in a variety of countries with the stated goal of promoting democracy. Critics have questioned whether NED is actually a private nongovernmental organization given that its funding comes from the U.S. Congress, and have variously accused it of conducting independent foreign policy that is unaccountable to the American electorate (and sometimes at odds with official U.S. foreign policy) and of meddling in other countries’ political processes. NDI initially worked toward a Chilean political transition in 1985 when it sponsored a conference on “Democracy in South America.” This meeting provided an impetus for Chile’s National Accord that temporarily brought together opposition groups. Later, in 1987, the U.S. Congress dedicated one million dollars to be used by the National Endowment for Democracy to further democracy in Chile.

14. According to Guillermo Sunkel (1993:221), a researcher at FLACSO, there were three primary institutes doing large scale public opinion polls in the late 1980s. They varied in their orientation from mainly academic to mainly in service of the NO campaign. Together they conducted a total of 27 polls between 1985 and 1988.

15. Perhaps reflecting an association between the United States and the modern, Chilean politicians, social scientists, and publicists use a plethora of political marketing-related vocabulary in English. These terms include: *swing vote*, *target group*, *focus group*, and *marketing*.

16. My purpose here is not to discredit quantitative investigation generally nor opinion polls specifically, though elements for a critique are present in this material. Rather, I have the broader project of understanding how forms of power, enacted through the quantification of opinion polls, manifest themselves in political democracies.

17. Reconciliation was a major theme of the first elected government following the end of the dictatorship. For example, in his presentation of the 1991 *Report of the National Commission of Truth and Reconciliation*, which detailed human rights violations during military rule, then President Patricio Aylwin called on Chileans to move beyond the conflict that had characterized the years leading up to and during the dictatorship. Because some Chileans have questioned whether reconciliation could really be achieved without first bringing the perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice, the idea of reconciliation has remained a topic of ongoing dispute.

18. Taylor (1987:50–51) argues that political scientists limit their truth claims to facts that can be verified and are presumed to constitute brute data, by using opinion surveys in particular ways. According to him political scientists do not claim to identify what people actually believe (which would be open to debate and interpretation) but rather how they responded to a particular proposition on a questionnaire, and how that response correlates with other behavior. It is worth noting, however, that while political scientists may make such careful distinctions, others who *use* the polling results—such as politicians—may claim that the data do reflect social reality. For further discussion on the uses of opinion polls, see Herbst 1993.

19. It is important to note that the Chilean military government—unlike, for example, the military government in Brazil—did not attempt to negotiate with popular sectors.

20. Phone interview, Philadelphia, March 30, 2000. Ricardo is a pseudonym.

21. Thank you to Susan Brin Hyatt for this point. Personal communication, July 1, 1999.

22. See also Cruikshank 1999. She writes that “the citizen is an effect and an *instrument of political power* rather than simply a participant in politics” (1999:5, emphasis added).

23. For histories of the use of statistics in various national contexts, see Hacking 1990 and Patriarca 1996.

24. For a discussion of legitimation of knowledge, see Lyotard 1984:8.

25. These economists were called the Chicago Boys because they had been educated in the economics department at the University of Chicago in the 1950s.

26. For an account of the role and stature of economists in Chile, see Montecinos and Markoff 1993.

27. Face-to-face communication may have been common among elite politicians who emphasized consensus within government.

28. In contrast to a parliamentary system, this binomial system, like the winner-take-all voting system common in the United States, marginalizes minorities, as Lani Guinier (1994) shows in her work.

29. Thank you to Juan Carrera for this metaphor.

30. Rosa’s attempt to manipulate census data differs from collective resistance two decades before. In 1970, leadership of the squatters’ settlement *26 de enero* at the founding of La Bandera, refused to let census takers into the settlement because they wanted to keep government representatives out of the encampment. They eventually did allow them in, and the resulting census data is available.

31. Thank you to Fernando Armstrong for this point.

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