

Pinochet's Oppressively Chile Regime

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Research Question: To what extent was Pinochet a positive or negative influence on Chile during his time in power?

Chaos arrives in Santiago as bombs explode and gunshots are fired. The jets soar above the heretofore crystal blue sky, now tainted gray as the gas from their exhaust permeates the atmosphere. The televisions flicker as the news is broadcast across Chile that Allende has fallen. The transformation begins rapidly as the poor are mercilessly killed in their own homes, their villages turned to ash as if nothing was ever there. Troops are stationed in all public areas: schools, markets, and parks. All traces of resistance from before the coup are destroyed. September 11, 1973, the day Pinochet rose to power, unquestionably changed Chile forever. The new policies and principles that were introduced into the political system under Pinochet's rule greatly changed the norm. Pinochet despised foreigners, the poor, and communists, and thus, they "disappeared," along with any trace of their lives. Although Pinochet did improve the Chilean economy and decrease poverty, he was ultimately a negative influence on Chile due to his utilization of foreign governments to gain power, his ruthless slaughter of innocent people, and the lack of essential freedoms during his rule.

The sources that I used in my research pertaining to Chile under Pinochet include a plethora of tertiary sources, secondary sources, and a book. The book, *My Invented Country*, by Isabel Allende, the daughter of the cousin of Salvador Allende, provides me with a view of

Chilean culture during her childhood. Since Isabel Allende grew up in Chile during that time in history, this is the perfect book to give me a sense of the Chilean culture and people. The tertiary sources that I utilized include Encyclopedia Britannica, History.com, and Gale Biography in Context. These sources have provided me with facts regarding Chile during the time of Pinochet. The journal articles that I selected aid me in providing a perspective through the eyes of historians who have studied the topic. "The Pinochet Dilemma," a journal article by Ricardo Lagos, Heraldo Muñoz and Anne-Marie Slaughter, describes the problems with Pinochet's military dictatorship. "The Case against General Augusto Pinochet," also outlines an argument against Pinochet and his military dictatorship. "Chile: Pinochet, the Opposition, and the United States," by Mark Falcoff, describes the influence of the United States during Pinochet's rise to power. Finally, "Chile: Salvador Allende 40 years on," provides great context for Salvador Allende, who was the president preceding Pinochet's coup. The journal article provides me with context as to why the coup may have occurred.

Along with the secondary and tertiary sources that I used, primary sources were key in my exploration of Pinochet and his military dictatorship. An article from The Guardian, titled "Empty Street and Gunfire" describes the military coup three days after it took place. The article was published on September 14, 1973, which is why it is a primary source; it is a document from the time of Pinochet's rise to power. The article offers an American perspective on the issue and allows further insight into the relationship between the United States and Chile. Another primary source that I utilized was titled "Department of State, SECRET Memorandum of Conversation between Henry Kissinger and Augusto Pinochet, 'U.S.-Chilean Relations,'" which was published on June 8, 1976 and is now stored in the National Security Archive. This document is a

transcription of a meeting between Henry Kissinger, the former Secretary of State, and Pinochet. The document also provides me with information regarding the relationship between Chile and the United States, which is useful because the United States played a key role in Pinochet's rise to power due to their mutual hatred of former Chilean President Salvador Allende. Overall, I utilized a wide range of sources in order to better my understanding of Pinochet and Chile both before and during the time of his dictatorship.

Pinochet did ameliorate Chile's struggling economy and decrease Chilean poverty with aid from the United States. Before Pinochet's dictatorship, his predecessor, Salvador Allende, attempted to improve the Chilean economy, which was struggling far before the 1970 election. Allende, being the first Marxist Chilean president, gave hope to many citizens that the economy would improve. However, the Marxist policies implemented by Allende worsened Chile's already declining economy. The subsequent anger felt by the Chilean people festered until there were talks of a military coup (History.com). The person spearheading this cause was General Augusto Pinochet, a capitalist who was infuriated by Allende's Marxist views. On September 11, 1973, The Chilean capital of Santiago was stormed, and Pinochet rose to power. Pinochet has been credited with improving the Chilean economy and decreasing the prevalence of poverty, yet the method by which he did so makes historians today question the validity of accrediting Pinochet with this achievement (Gale).

Pinochet was in power during the time of the Cold War, a time when the United States was vehemently engulfed in an effort to eliminate communism. In this endeavor, the United States did many things to improve Pinochet's presidency so as to show the world that a capitalist government works and prospers. The University of Chicago, an institution known for their

studies in economics, began sending over experts, now known as the Chicago Boys, to improve the Chilean economy and, by extension, the world's view of Pinochet and capitalism (World Book). Milton Friedman, an American economist who led the Chicago Boys, described the effort in an interview when he stated, "Chile was a case in which a military regime, headed by Pinochet, was willing to switch the organization of the economy from a top-down into a bottom-up performance, and in that process, a group of people, who had been trained at the University of Chicago in the Department of Economics, who came to be called the Chicago Boys, played a major role in designing and implementing the economic reforms" (Friedman). Although Friedman's perspective on the Chicago Boys may be skewed because he was a key orchestrator of their actions, he does offer critical insight into the event. In his interview, Friedman emphasized the "major role" that these American citizens played in building the Chilean economy, which also helped to decrease poverty and starvation.

Heraldo Munoz of the Washington Post simplifies Pinochet's actual role in reviving the economy when he writes, "[Pinochet] won praise for transforming the economy, operated by the "Chicago Boys" (Chilean students of Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago), into the most prosperous in Latin America" (The Washington Post). Both Friedman and Munoz have asserted that the Chicago Boys were the key force driving the economy during Pinochet's rule. Pinochet took credit for their achievements, which not only exemplifies his lack of contribution in building a thriving Chilean economy, but it also shows his lack of integrity. Pinochet lied to his citizens and to the world that his ideas resulted in a strong economy, despite his economic policies stemming from the work of the Chicago Boys. Without the help of the United States,

Chile under Pinochet would most likely be plagued with starvation, poverty, and overall economic struggles.

In the effort to gain power, Pinochet looked to foreign governments, most notably the United States, for help. As mentioned previously, the United States, during the time of the Cold War, wanted to promote capitalism, even if that meant supporting a dictator. However, by aiding Pinochet in his rise to power, the United States indirectly participated in mass killings, torture, and other atrocities. Richard Nixon was in office during the time of the Chilean coup on September 11, 1973. He and his secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, supported the coup against Allende, the Marxist president. America's fervor to obtain a global sphere of influence during the Cold War led to the rise of many despotic leaders such as Pinochet. Pinochet was a staunch opponent of communism, and he went so far as to murder thousands of people who were in support of Allende. His partnership with the United States allowed him to export his violent rule outside his own borders (World Book).

A prominent example of this concept is the case of Orlando Letelier. Letelier, Chile's former defense and foreign minister under Allende, was tortured and incarcerated after the 1973 coup. Soon after, he fled to the United States, where he came to work at the Institute of Policy Studies in Washington DC. On September 21, 1976, three years after the coup, Letelier was assassinated by a car bomb. The Guardian describes the event when they write, "Orlando Letelier, Chile's former foreign minister and Socialist Party leader in exile, is killed by a car bomb in the centre of Washington DC. The Pinochet regime is widely implicated" (The Guardian). Letelier's death evinces the clear collusion between Pinochet and the United States. Pinochet was most likely able to kill someone in the United States because the US government

wanted to appease Pinochet. The United States made no reprisals even when an assassination was perpetrated on their own soil.

The website, globalissues.org, comments on the collusion between Pinochet and the United States when they write, “Some have noted USA's surprising relative silence on this matter of human rights -- probably because it has emerged, that in the 70s, Kissinger covered up torture and other abuses in Chile by the Pinochet Regime” (globalissues.org). The atrocities committed by the United States during this rather recent time period not only shows collusion between Pinochet and the US government, but it also shows the extent to which the United States was willing to cooperate with dictators in order to support capitalist regimes during the Cold War. The connection between Pinochet and the United States gave him absolute political and economic power, which allowed for more death and terror to ensue.

Pinochet committed many atrocities during his rule, most notably the ruthless extermination of his opponents through the use of his military junta. Pinochet despised communists, foreigners, and the poor, who were often vocal against his regime. Thus, in a similar fashion to other authoritarian leaders, Pinochet murdered those who opposed him (Gale). In fact, one of Pinochet’s most famous quotes reads, “Sometimes democracy must be bathed in blood” (Pinochet). Chile, during the time, was under control by a military junta, which meant that the military controlled the government. Military juntas usually result from a coup, which is precisely what occurred in Chile. Troops were stationed in almost all public spaces in Chile such as parks, schools, and shops. As a result, Pinochet had limitless power to arrest, interrogate, and murder anyone who spoke out against him. Even those who did not speak out against Pinochet had a target painted on their back just because they were poor, foreigners, or communists.

Anyone who supported Allende was also at risk of losing their life (The National Security Archive). From the time Pinochet rose to power, he immediately began killing people as described when The Guardian writes, “Allende is among the first of 1,213 people who die or disappear between September 11 and the end of 1973” (The Guardian). As noted in this statement, people often “disappeared” during Pinochet’s time in power. Many people had members of their family disappear overnight. Pinochet attempted to make people vanish instead of killing them out in the open in order to maintain support from the global community. Those who went missing are widely known amongst the historical community to have been killed by Pinochet and his military junta (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Retired General Joaquin Lagos, after two decades of silence, asserted in an interview that Pinochet was “fully informed of the mass killing carried out by his troops” (Lagos). A further testament to Pinochet’s moral corruption and malicious behavior is seen in the way in which his military junta murdered people. Later in the interview with General Lagos, he remarks, “[The troops] took their eyes out of their sockets with daggers, breaking their jaws, breaking their legs. . . They shot them in segments, first the legs, then the sexual organs, then the heart with submachine guns...there was not even a final mercy shot” (Lagos). General Lagos offers key insight into the military junta due to his direct connection to Pinochet. Lagos states that Pinochet knew about the mass killings in Chile during his rule. Pinochet knew about the horrible ways in which his own citizens were being murdered, which shows his extreme turpitude and inhumanity.

Under Pinochet’s rule, Chile was transformed into an entirely different nation due to the many freedoms that were stripped away from the Chilean people such as freedom of speech,

freedom of the press, and freedom of expression. Pinochet's military junta not only had the power to murder people, but they also had the power to strip certain freedoms away from citizens. As mentioned previously, the military junta permeated all aspects of people's lives. They were stationed in nearly all public spaces, and thus, people had little freedom. Pinochet used his troops as spies to watch the people of Chile at all hours. Chileans were to be respectful and obedient to Pinochet (Gale). The Guardian expands upon this idea when they write, "Pinochet dissolves Congress, suspends the constitution, bans opposition, arrests trade unionists and imposes controls on the media. Thousands are forced into exile" (The Guardian). The freedoms that were heretofore present in Chile under presidents such as Allende were taken away during Pinochet's rule, and though many did not support him, as evidenced in the multitude of people who came out against him after his regime lost power, these citizens were unable to express their dissatisfaction with the government during the time. Pinochet controlled the press, the government, and the overall lives of the Chilean people (The National Security Archive).

Pinochet was so consumed with a thirst for power that he even decided to change Chile's original foundations. He made a new Chilean constitution as seen in *The Case of Pinochet*, a journal article by Laura Billings, where she writes, "Pinochet presided over the drafting of a new constitution affirming and validating the legal system he had created by decree. Human rights violations were systemic, and fear and terror became institutionalized" (Billings). Pinochet changed the very core of Chile when he came into power. He changed the constitution in order to take away the rights of his citizens and gain power. Billings explains how human rights violations were prevalent, which would usually result in recrimination from other world powers. However, the United States, along with other nations, allowed the human rights violations to

continue due to their desire to satisfy Pinochet. From the moment Pinochet changed the Chilean constitution, he became unstoppable. Everyone in Chile became powerless as they lost their rights and freedoms. Even some of Pinochet's most trusted members of his government felt powerless. General Lagos waited two decades to speak out against Pinochet's crimes. Pinochet changed Chile into a society devoid of freedom, which further exemplifies his negative influence on Chile during his time in power.

Despite the improved economy and decrease of poverty in Chile during Pinochet's rule, his collusion with foreign governments, his murdering of thousands of people, and the lack of freedoms during his time in power ultimately made him a negative influence on Chile. The historical question of whether Pinochet positively or negatively influenced Chile is extremely important if we are to understand what leadership is going forward. By analyzing Pinochet, today's society can learn what attributes a leader must have in order to foster national prosperity and what characteristics may lead to human rights abuses.

The global community has struggled with the idea of putting Pinochet on trial up until his death. After much debate by various nations including the United Kingdom, France, and Spain, Pinochet was extradited to Spain in 1999. However, in January of 2000, Jack Straw, the British Home Secretary, announced that doctors had claimed Pinochet was unfit to stand trial. This was proven to be incorrect, and Pinochet was sent back to Chile, where a Chilean judge reinstated the charges against Pinochet. However, Pinochet died of a heart attack on December 10, 2006 before he was convicted of any crimes (Globalissues.org). The constant back-and-forth between different countries over whether Pinochet should be tried shows the contentious nature of the topic. Pinochet had many supporters and many opponents, which makes his legacy highly

complex. Isabel Allende, the daughter of the cousin of Salvador Allende, describes her view on Chile in her book, *My Invented Country*, when she writes, “I have constructed an idea of my country the way you fit together a jigsaw puzzle, by selecting pieces that fit my design and ignoring the others” (Allende). Allende shares a similar mindset to Chileans today. Whether one supports Pinochet or not, everyone remembers the regime in a different way. However, Pinochet’s evident depravity and thirst for power led to unquestionably horrible acts, which is why, in the end, Pinochet was a negative influence on Chile.

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