

Analysis of Political Debate Programs to Identify the Elements of Political Transition Process in Chile

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ABSTRACT

The research seeks to identify the determinants of mass speeches through an analysis of the political programs of television debates at the beginning of the Chilean transition, thus, it is desired to identify the variables that initially operated in these mass speeches and that best explain the themes or topics installed in these audiovisual formats of recognized influence, in moments of political openness and social uncertainty. For these purposes tobit models have been used. The results indicate that the variables associated with polarization are avoided by the panelists to give way to discussions on the economy, consensus and political reforms, among others, favoring the actors of political parties, union representatives and businessmen.

Keywords: Political transition, Political television programs, Television debates, Political communication, Econometric modeling

INTRODUCTION

More than 30 years after the recovery of democracy in Chile, the aspects that ensured a peaceful political transition and with outstanding macroeconomic indicators (Boeninger, 1997), are valid and necessary to study, identify and contextualize before the current unstable scenarios, marked by the polarization and uncertainty of economic, business and political agents in Latin America.

The dimension that we have applied for this study is that of media content, due to the importance that political communication acquires in social processes, through an econometric analysis (Coughenour et al., 2016; De la Fuente-Mella et al., 2020; Elórtegui et al., 2020; Umaña et al., 2020). The media are fundamental actors in the creation of the agenda and in the identification of topics of interest in public opinion. They also contribute to the construction of public trust when they carry out their functions of monitoring power or when they establish spaces for dialogue to strengthen democracy (Elórtegui and Mellado, 2017).

In this plane, we delve into the political content of Chilean television in 1989, specifically, in the political programs of debates or political gatherings

of the channels that presented this format in their programming. In that year, the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet began to experience its last months of existence, due to its defeat in the 1988 plebiscite and the holding of the first presidential elections since 1973 (Tironi, 2013). Therefore, there was already a progressive opening of political discussion in media such as television, radio and newspapers. Television was rapidly consolidating as a space of political influence due to the success of the electoral slot in the NO campaign, which contributed decisively to the victory of the opposition to Pinochet (Salazar, 2018).

The year 1989 is interesting because it marks the preamble to the period of political transition. This year is little studied by the Chilean human, scientific and social disciplines, but it is important because the institutional and communicational discourses of the transition begin to be established at a massive level, with the consequent lessons that can be obtained by analyzing the events in perspective.

In fact, during 2019, a social explosion took place in Chile that strongly criticized the foundations of said transition, so it is also pertinent to identify the discursive axes of three decades ago to analyze whether there are elements that would give life to a semi-sovereign democracy or limited in its citizen participation (Huneus, 2014).

Given the above, the study formulated the following research question:

Q1: What are the variables that best explain the topics discussed in television political debate programs at the beginning of the Chilean transition?

We will understand political debate programs as those that are characterized by having a similar type of journalistic management, the presence of different political forces on the set and, generally, stable panelists who exchange their visions or political interpretations of events. They can have interviews in segments or blocks of the program, contingency themes and discursive interactions, since their guidelines are more flexible. In fact, they explore choral modalities of opinionated genre (León Gross & Gómez Calderón, 2011; Ortega, 2005).

These formats of political gatherings are identified by dialectical combat (Humanes, 2005) or by being in hybrid orbits between information and even spectacle (Cebrián Herreros, 1998). In Chile, a historical example is “At this time it is improvised” (1969-1973); in Spain, “El Gato al Agua” or “Al Rojo Vivo”; in the US they have been consolidated since the 1960s, for example, with the programs between Gore Vidal and William Buckley (ABC).

METHODOLOGY

The sample consists of 30 television programs broadcast during 1989 on Chilean open television, through channels owned by Chilean universities. File recovery work was carried out, as part of this material was still on tape. The only public channel was still controlled by the dictatorship (TVN) and was not included in the sample due to its low credibility with the audiences of the time and because it did not have programs that included diverse political views.

The programs total more than 50 hours, which were analyzed at the level of measures by 48 variables of sectoral, institutional, state and citizen characteristics that include topics grouped in Politics (for example, dictatorship, elections, transition, consensus, democracy, corruption, participation, reforms, polarization, etc.); Justice (for example, Human Rights, due process, responsibility of the Armed Forces, courts, violence, etc.); Economy (employment, growth, inequality, poverty, etc.); Social (education, housing, health, pensions, transportation, labor rights, demonstrations, environment, etc.); Others (religion, culture, international relations, etc.).

For the identification of the mentioned variables, we worked from the discursive interactions present in the debate programs, that is, in the instances of linguistic exchange between two or more panelists displayed on the television set and who delve into a predominant topic from their perspectives. opinions. These interactions are the axes of political programs (Mazzoleni, 2010; León Gross & Gómez Calderón, 2011; Ortega, 2005) and many times they consolidate a space of pre-eminence of politicians over journalism and citizenship (Castelló and Montagut, 2011). The discursive interactions within a program can have various topics identified with the variables and various participants who expand on the variables in a differentiated way.

RESULTS

As the main objective of the study is to analyze and determine the variables that explain the way Chilean television had to process one of the most complex moments in its recent history. To do this, as noted, the hundreds of discursive interactions of the political actors who starred in these debates were analyzed, in order to identify the frames in dispute and the potential forms of conflict resolution, through the application of models such as Censored Normal (TOBIT). The tobit model, also called a censored regression model, is designed to estimate linear relationships between variables when there is either left- or right-censoring in the dependent variable (Chahuán et al., 2022; Vallina et al., 2020). Censoring from above takes place when cases with a value at or above some threshold, all take on the value of that threshold, so that the true value might be equal to the threshold, but it might also be higher. In the case of censoring from below, values those that fall at or below some threshold are censored.

The results indicate that one of the significant variables present in the political programs at the beginning of the transition is the economy. This topic centralizes the interactions of the politicians involved in the debates because it is assumed that growth, the need to grant confidence in national and international economic agents, as well as job creation, will give stability to the transition. For these programs, the economic variable is the one that can fight against inequality and the one that is connected to the political variable of polarization, as another of the great discursive concerns.

CONCLUSION

It is considered that inequality generates polarization, but also the inability of the State to apply justice, repair human rights and consolidate social rights

such as health. Therefore, at the level of solutions, the presence of political agreements and consensus emerge as significant variables that lead to the achievement of another variable of importance in the analysis, such as political reforms and the materialization of elections.

Finally, other significant variables that appear are the presence of politicians opposed to Pinochet, businessmen and workers' union representatives, probably as the most outstanding panelists of the programs. There are no mentions for other non-partisan citizen groups, nor for aspects given by citizen participation in the transition or re-democratization processes outside these identified spheres.

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