**Legacies of the Chilean Miracle: A Case Study of the Patagonia sin Represas Social Movement**

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In 2006, amid a national energy crisis in Chile, Chilean energy giants Endesa S.A. and Colbún proposed a joint venture called HidroAysén to build five hydroelectric megadams on the Baker and Pascua rivers in the Aysén region of Chilean Patagonia. The proposal sparked a number of social movements in opposition, led by *Patagonia sin Represas* (Patagonia without Dams), that were concerned with the environmental and social costs of the project. The HidroAysén project was shut down permanently in June of 2014 by a national Committee of Ministers, following eight years of protest. This paper examines the economic and political contexts of the HidroAysén controversy, arguing social movements were unable to address their concerns through formal political channels because political centralization in Chile limits citizens’ opportunity for redress. Both economic privatization and political centralization in Chile are outgrowths of the 1973-1990 Augusto Pinochet dictatorship, whose legacy continues to condition contemporary Chile’s political economy.

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**HidroAysén and *Patagonia sin Represas***

In 2006, amid a national energy crisis, Chilean utility companies Colbún and Endesa S.A. announced a joint venture called HidroAysén, a hydroelectric project proposing to construct five megadams on the Baker and Pascua rivers in Chile’s southernmost region of Patagonia. Public opposition to the project was strong, particularly in Patagonia itself through the *Patagonia sin Represas* (Patagonia without Dams) social movement, opposed to the potential detrimental environmental and social impacts of the dams. Nonetheless, the Chilean national government consistently supported HidroAysén throughout the 2010-2014 Sebastian Piñera administration, despite problems with the project’s environmental impact assessment (EIA) and growing public outcry. In 2012, the conflict reached its apex as Patagonia erupted in protest. The *Movimiento Social por Aysén* (Social Movement for Aysén) incorporated 20 smaller social movements, spearheaded by *Patagonia sin Represas*, and garnered the support of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) in opposition to the dams. On numerous occasions, thousands of Chilean citizens marched in protest in the capital city of Santiago, and solidarity protests occurred in other cities throughout Chile and the globe. The protests in Patagonia escalated to the point where the *Carabineros* gendarmerie was sent to the regional capital of Coyhaique to quell them. In response to the conflict, the HidroAysén project was put on hold indefinitely.In June of 2014, after the election of President Michelle Bachelet, Chile’s Committee of Ministers rejected the HidroAysén project on environmental grounds. However, due to Chile’s political and economic structure, the rejection of HidroAysén does not preclude the possibility of similar “megaprojects” being approved in the future.

This paper argues the HidroAysén conflict is conflict is the product of competing development narratives, the narrative of modernization that drove the “Chilean Miracle” and the narrative of sustainable and human development, wary of the impact of megaprojects like HidroAysén. A deeper investigation of the case illustrates how Chile’s approach to development is anachronistic, and suggests the model has persisted despite pushback due to Chile’s economic model and high degree of political centralization. Chile’s economic model and political centralization both result from the 1973-1990 Augusto Pinochet Ugarte dictatorship, and the vestigial political-economic structure the Pinochet regime left behind. Later, this paper investigates how social movements in opposition to HidroAysén emerged in response to this political centralization, as activists were unable to address their environmental and social concerns through existing political institutions. Finally, this paper will consider the efforts of social movements in opposition to HidroAysén and the factors contributing to their eventual success. The central purpose of the paper is to consider the HidroAysén conflict in its historical, economic, and political contexts in order to investigate how the conflict escalated to such an extent, how the project was eventually rejected, and what lessons can be drawn from an exploratory case study of the event.

**Competing Development Narratives**

Chile, like other countries in Latin America, has been subject to development challenges and has flirted with large-scale development schemes intended to meet those challenges. The HidroAysén hydroelectric project is one such scheme. The controversy that arose in response to HidroAysén is a development problem, which can be understood as a contest between two competing narratives. As this study will illustrate, supporters of the project tend to adhere to the narrative of modernization theory, which argues countries can progress from “traditional” to “modern” societies through economic modernization and democratization. The logic of modernization theory, and the neoliberal policy prescriptions that flow from it, reoriented structuralist economies throughout Latin American during the 1980s. Opponents of the HidroAysén project tend to reference the criticisms of neoliberal development offered by development theory. Development theory, particularly two of its modern strains - sustainable and human development, is skeptical of the linear and deterministic nature of modernization theory and its narrow definition of development as economic growth. Sustainable and human development literatures broaden the concept of development to include concerns about the environment, equity, and individual freedom and are critical of the real-world consequences of megaprojects like HidroAysén. The interplay between the modernization and development narratives illustrates a dynamic political process which calls on us to explore a complex set of political, social and historical factors to explain how development projects unfold.

**Modernization theory and its Neoliberal Policy Prescriptions**

In order to understand the narrative of modernization and its impact on development projects such as HidroAysén we must consider its goals, its basic tenets, and its policy prescriptions. In the wake of World War II, Harry Truman challenged Western industrialized countries to “embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.”[[1]](#footnote-1) In an effort to foster the goal of international development, modernization theory sought to uncover the process by which “traditional” societies could develop into “modern” societies.[[2]](#footnote-2) Classical modernization theory was broad in its scope, attempting to provide an “all encompassing theory of development” that naturally led to political and economic modernity characterized by free market economics and democratic governance.[[3]](#footnote-3) In evaluating the success of development, modernization theory primarily considers economic growth, as measured by gross domestic product (GDP).

For modernization theorists, economic modernization is intimately tied to democratic governance. In 1959, Seymour Martin Lipset established a correlation between economic modernization and democratization in his seminal work, “Some Social Requisites of Democracy”.[[4]](#footnote-4) Since Lipset’s discovery, the correlation between economic development and democratic governance has become one of the best-supported theories in social science.[[5]](#footnote-5) Despite the strength of Lipset’s correlation, classical modernization theorists had difficulty explaining the causal process by which traditional societies modernized. Early theories suggested underdeveloped countries could follow the example of developed countries, emulating their path to modernity. Walt Whitman Rostow’s *Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* famouslyproposed a model of political and economic transition beginning with a “traditional society” that meets preconditions for takeoff through economic growth, as agricultural economies shift towards industrialization and political and social attitudes change accordingly.[[6]](#footnote-6) When a state has “effectively applied the range of modern technology to the bulk of its resources,” it enters the “drive to maturity,” eventually transitioning to an “age of high mass consumption” wherein each society chooses how best to focus its resources and becomes more egalitarian**.** Later theorists proposed similarly linear, deterministic models in which traditional societies progressed naturally through a series of stages towards an economically modern, politically democratic society.[[7]](#footnote-7) These respective theories differed in the details of their proposed causal paths. Nonetheless, they all followed a series of stages akin to the modernization process of Western industrialized countries.

In response to an era of global democratization from the 1970s to the 1990s, modernization theory began to question its early, deterministic models. Samuel Huntington revisited his previous theory of modernization in *The Third Wave* in which he reviews a third global shift towards democratization beginning in Portugal in 1974, continuing through Latin America and the Asian Pacific throughout the 1980s, and spreading through Eastern Europe after the collapse of the USSR.[[8]](#footnote-8) This updated assessment re-evaluates Huntington’s earlier proposed process of democratization, suggesting the “emergence of current democracies as the result of multiple and alternative causal paths.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Many of the countries that democratized during the third wave were prone to “backsliding” or democratic breakdown. This led Huntington to differentiate between the emergence of democracies and their stability, a theme that sparked heated debate in the 1990s. Huntington notes the fragility of democracies that arose during the third wave, and distinguishes *democratization* from democratic *stability*, or “consolidation.” Recently, political scientists have conducted research as to whether high GDP contributes to the emergence of democratic regimes or the whether democratic regimes emerge independent of economic modernization, with high GDP merely contributing to the consolidation of those regimes. This debate is at the core of contemporary modernization theory. Some scholars argue that economic modernization leads *de facto* to democratic societies.[[10]](#footnote-10) Others contend economic modernization simply contributes to a democracy’s stability.[[11]](#footnote-11) Despite the controversy, most contemporary modernization scholars acknowledge the link between economic and political development, and current research seeks to uncover the causal links between the two in detail.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Critics of modernization theory argue the model is too broad, too deterministic, and potentially theoretically unsound. The component elements of modernization (democratization, social development, and economic development) have all emerged as separate fields, hindering the prospects for an all-encompassing theory of societal development. The causal processes linking economic modernization to democratization have yet to be explained. More importantly, the democratization vs. democratic consolidation debate has called into question modernization theory’s validity. If economic modernization only contributes to the stability of democracy, the theory no longer explains the process of transition from traditional to modern society.[[13]](#footnote-13)

In the last third of the 20th century, the prominence of modernization theory in Western development thought led to a number of policy prescriptions, collectively known as neoliberalism. If free markets naturally led to “modern” societies, then market liberalization must be the fundamental concern of development policy. At its core, neoliberalism constitutes “the range of state, capitalist and social practices that allow the extension of the commodity form into all areas of life.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Essentially, neoliberalism argues for the application of classical liberal economics on a global scale.

To this end, Western governments and international financial institutions (IFIs) promoted a set of policies known as the Washington Consensus throughout the 1980s. The Washington Consensus advocated liberalization of markets, removal of trade barriers such as tariffs and quotas, budget cuts to publically provided social services, privatization of state enterprises, deregulation, and an emphasis on export oriented industrialization (EOI) in accordance with states’ comparative advantage.[[15]](#footnote-15) Effectively, the Washington Consensus prioritized market forces over state control, arguing a free market could better distribute resources than could governments. The Washington Consensus was so named because it was often applied through Washington D.C. based IFIs, most notably the World Bank (IBRD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The World Bank is a United Nations (UN) IFI that offers low interest loans to developing countries, typically for large-scale infrastructure projects, or “megaprojects”. Its Articles of Agreement stipulate these loans must promote foreign investment and international trade.[[16]](#footnote-16) The IMF provides loans to assist states in paying off their sovereign debt. These loans are conditional upon strutural adjustment programs that mandate adopting the Washington Consensus policy framework.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Neoliberal economists and practitioners, like adherents to modernization theory, focused on GDP growth as a measure of development’s success. They argued classical economic principles should be applied internationally as a means to combat the slow growth rates accompanying the Keynesian economic policies popular since WWII. [[18]](#footnote-18) During the 1980s, Latin American countries faced a debt crisis that effectively ended ISI policies across the region. When Paul Volker, chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, tightened the US money supply in 1979 to reduce inflation, interest rates spiked worldwide and developing countries were unable to service their debts.[[19]](#footnote-19) Starting with Mexico in 1982, Latin American countries began defaulting on their external debt, most of which was owed to North American and European banks.[[20]](#footnote-20) By 1984, just five Latin American countries (Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, and Chile) owed a collective $48.6 billion USD to nine United States money-center banks including Citibank, Chase Manhattan, Chemical Bank, and Bank of America. This sum equaled 166.5 percent of their shareholder equity. By 1990, the developing world’s debt as a whole totaled $1540 billion USD.[[21]](#footnote-21)As Latin American exports to Europe and the United States declined, and Latin American countries were obliged to pay higher interest rates against a strengthening dollar, the debtor nations faced a ‘scissor effect’. Most sought to restructure their debt through IFIs like the International Monetary Fund, and accepted the accompanying structural adjustment programs. In this manner, many Latin American countries transitioned from ISI economic policies to neoliberal economic policies in the course of a decade.

**Critiques from Human and Sustainable Development**

As Latin American economies stagnated and Asian economies grew at a remarkable pace, neoliberalism appeared to have emerged victorious in the debate between free market economics and dependency theory, and the neoliberal paradigm oriented development policy throughout the 1980s.Yet despite the best efforts of academics and practitioners, the neoliberal development project failed in its goals to alleviate poverty and provide citizens of developing countries with decent, satisfying lives. While development efforts led to rising GDPs in most developing countries and the percentage of people living below the poverty line was reduced overall, “endeavours to promote the reduction of poverty and inequality were modest in scope and extent.”[[22]](#footnote-22) The trickle-down economic theory of neoliberalism, the idea that “a rising tide lifts all boats,” failed to transpire.[[23]](#footnote-23) In fact, “problems such as unemployment, poor housing, human rights offences, poverty, and landlessness were increasing at alarming rates.”[[24]](#footnote-24) The income of the Third World’s poor fell by 10-15% from 1983 to 1987 and the percentage of the world’s income received by the Third World dropped from 5.5 percent in 1978 to 4.5 percent in 1984. By 1989, the income ratio between the world’s richest countries and the world’s poorest had risen to 60:1, up from 20:1 in 1960.[[25]](#footnote-25) While neoliberal development typically contributed to a growth in GDP, the stratification it produced undermined its achievements.

A broader critique of development practices, grounded neither in modernization theory nor in structuralism, emerged in the 1990s as a discreet academic field emphasizing the failures of development efforts and re-evaluating what constitutes success in development. A core critique from the development literature was that neoliberalism’s measure of success, economic growth, was too narrow of a metric to encapsulate “development.” Sustainable development and human development theories in particular broadened the development debate beyond economic growth and its Marxist critiques to consider factors such as the environment, equity, the impact of policy on future generations, as well as the impact of policy on individuals rather than the state as a whole.

Sustainable Development adherents such as former Prime Minister of Norway Gro Harlem Bruntland argued we must develop in a way that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”[[26]](#footnote-26) The concept of inter-generational responsibility is unique to SD and demands a focus on resource consumption and an attention to the limits of growth. For SD, “sustainable growth” as in the neoliberal model is oxymoronic. SD focuses on the complex interplay between economics, equity, and the environment. Balancing these elements is crucial for creating policy. For development to be sustainable, policies must be economically feasible, preserve the environment for future generations, and distribute the benefits of development equitably. Similarly, human development adherents consider the impact of development policies on the ground and emphasize development’s effects on individuals rather than on states. Thinkers like Denis Goulet and Amartya Sen argue development must concern itself with social in addition to economic variables. Goulet posits three facets to human development: life sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom. First, people’s basic material needs must be met, an extension of development-as-GDP that includes the distribution of wealth. Second, development must include feelings of self-worth and independence. This is secondary to equitable trade, rather than exploitative models that privilege developed countries. Lastly, freedom refers to “the ability of people to determine their own destiny,” which is impossible at the bare subsistence level and requires education and the ability to build skills.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Sen’s conception of human development is similar, arguing development must expand people’s “entitlements” and “capabilities.” For Sen, employment opportunities, access to resources, and power relationships must be considered in development. Income does not necessarily address all of these facets, even when distributed equitably.[[28]](#footnote-28) The UN Development Programme (UNDP) has embraced human development and adopted the Human Development Index (HDI), created by Sen and Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq, in addition to the Human Poverty Index (HPI) as a measure of development’s progress. The HDI “is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. The HDI is the geometric mean of normalized indices for each of the three dimensions.”[[29]](#footnote-29) These indices include metrics such as life expectancy, years of schooling, per capita income adjusted for purchasing power parity, and income distribution. Taken together, these theories present different explanations for how development should happen, and offer different criteria for assessing the successes or failures of development projects in terms of their real costs on people’s lives. Human development and sustainable development allow us to consider the impact of large-scale projects in a more inclusive manner than simply considering economic growth.

**Social Movements in Response**

Resistance to megadam projects has typically come from social movements. The academic literature on social movements has evolved a great deal in recent decades. As late as the 1970s, political scientists considered social movements to be “primarily deviant, social-psychological phenomena rooted in ‘mob mentality’ and weak social integration of individuals.”[[30]](#footnote-30) In line with this ‘mob mentality’ view, scholars dismissed social movements in pluralist political systems as illegitimate, as they operated outside of formal channels for redress.[[31]](#footnote-31) During the 1970s, in the wake of the American civil rights movement, social scientists began to re-evaluate the legitimacy of social movements eventually recognizing them as rational responses to valid sociopolitical grievances when formal channels for redress were closed.[[32]](#footnote-32)

More recent research has considered the emerging phenomenon of transnational social movements. Political science and sociology professor Sidney Tarrow defines transnational social movements as “socially mobilized groups with constituents in at least two states, engaged in sustained contentious interactions with power-holders in at least one state other than their own, or against an international institution, or a multinational economic actor.”[[33]](#footnote-33) The transnational social movement literature draws from insights in the national social movement literature to acknowledge social movements as rational responses to sociopolitical concerns whose success is conditioned by their resources and constrained by political context. In terms of tactics transnational social movements fall along a spectrum between ‘routinized,’ operating within formal political channels and ‘transgressive,’ operating outside of or against a political system.[[34]](#footnote-34) Towards the ‘routinized’ end of the spectrum are what scholars Margaret Keck and Katherine Sikkink identify as “transnational advocacy networks” or “TANs.”[[35]](#footnote-35) TANs are global communication networks of activists with shared ideas or values. They are voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontally organized and may include a wide breadth of actors from local social movements, to international NGOs, to parts of governments.[[36]](#footnote-36) Towards the ‘transgressive’ end of the transnational social movement spectrum is what scholars Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow identify as “transnational collective action.”[[37]](#footnote-37) In resisting the HidroAysén project, *Patagonia sin Represas* employed a diversity of tactics incorporating both routinized and transgressive approaches through an international coalition. This diversity of tactics was necessary given the centralized nature of Chilean politics that limits opportunities for redress through the political system.

**Chilean Political Economy and Development**

In order to understand Chile’s current political economy it is critical to review the legacies of political centralization and economic privatization stemming from the Pinochet dictatorship. The national restructuring carried out under the military junta dramatically changed the course of Chilean political economy. These changes continue to echo through contemporary Chilean politics, setting the stage for controversies such as HidroAysén by encouraging the privatization of natural resources and limiting citizen’s capacity for redress of grievances through political institutions. Two key facets of the Pinochet dictatorship are relevant to the HidroAysén project. First, the economic restructuring under Pinochet dramatically reversed the leftist reforms carried out by his predecessors. The residual legacy of economic liberalization under Pinochet conditions Chile’s contemporary political economy, and is relevant to the debate over ownership of natural resources that is an element of the HidroAysén controversy. Second, the political centralization established by the Pinochet regime persists today in Chilean politics, limiting citizens’ capacity for redress through formal political channels.

During the Pinochet regime, Chile underwent a dramatic shift towards privatization, adopting the economic policies espoused by Milton Friedman and the neoliberals and codified in the Washington Consensus. The economic changes undertaken by the junta continue to reverberate in Chile today, conditioning the country’s approach to development. Under Pinochet, the Chilean economy was liberalized with help from the “Chicago Boys,” Chilean economists who had trained under Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago. Julia Paley succinctly describes this liberalization in her ethnography of post-dictatorship social movements saying “The restructuring the Chicago Boys had in mind went far beyond reversing Allende’s program. It required transforming the entire economic model by replacing import substitution with free market economics.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Friedman dubbed the reform project the “Miracle of Chile,” yet the initial results were far from miraculous. During the unpopular monetarist experiment Chile saw little sustained economic growth and social indicators stagnated or declined.[[39]](#footnote-39) In 1982 private national banks, flush with foreign loanable funds, engaged in “excessive risk taking” amid rising consumer demand.[[40]](#footnote-40) The results were disastrous. Chile fell into a deep economic and financial crisis, as GDP fell 16 percent. When the financial sector collapsed, Chilean taxpayers lost 30 to 40 percent of GDP. “Unemployment shot up to 30 percent. Around 50 percent of the population fell below the poverty line. Extreme poverty affected 30 percent of the population.”[[41]](#footnote-41) In 1988, while poverty in Chile hovered around 47 percent, Pinochet cut taxes and reduced government social spending. Wages and pensions were cut, and public health services fell into decline.

In 1990 President Patricio Aylwin took office, following a 1988 plebiscite victory for free elections, and Pinochet stepped down under significant international pressure. Aylwin instituted a program of “growth with equity” combining market reforms with social programs targeting Chile’s poor. Under Aylwin, Chile “controlled its exposure to world markets and maintained its efficient copper company in public hands,” leading to a decade of consistent growth and a 50 percent reduction in poverty.[[42]](#footnote-42) Subsequent administrations continued this pattern, raising the minimum wage, increasing taxes, and doubling social spending. Nonetheless, remnants of Pinochet’s economic policy remain in Chile today. Under the junta, many sectors that were formerly state owned and operated came under the ownership of private companies, including electricity, telecommunications, and water. Of particular interest to the HidroAysén case study is the 1981 Water Code, which introduced Chile to the private water rights scheme now known internationally as “The Chilean Model.”[[43]](#footnote-43) Chilean private water rights were guaranteed in the country’s 1980 Constitution, which reads, “The rights of private citizens over waters, recognized or constituted in conformity with the law, shall grant proprietorship to the owners thereof.”[[44]](#footnote-44) These rights were expanded in the 1981 Water Code, which outlined the framework for Chilean privatization of water resources. The 1981 Water Code mandates the free-market be used to allocate water through water markets. In doing so, the Pinochet regime sought to prioritize water for high-value use, particularly for large-scale irrigation and agriculture in order to meet export demands. Chile’s dogmatic approach to water rights, coupled with weak regulation and an uninformed judiciary, has contributed to the HidroAysén controversy. In 1989, a year before Augusto Pinochet left office, the General bequeathed exclusive rights to develop Patagonia’s rivers to Endesa, a Spain-based multinational energy corporation. Endesa retains those rights to this day and, in a joint venture with Chilean energy giant Colbún, was the driving force behind HidroAysén.[[45]](#footnote-45)

**The Chilean Energy Crisis**

The HidroAysén controversy must be understood in the context of Chile’s current energy crisis. Chilean industry, particularly the economically dominant copper industry, has placed large demands on the Chilean energy sector. The country’s growing population and increasing per capita income further those demands. While Chile is one of the wealthiest countries in South America by many measures it is one of the poorest in terms of fossil fuels, importing approximately 75% of its energy in oil, coal, and natural gas.[[46]](#footnote-46) In years past, Chile imported much of its fossil fuels from neighboring Argentina. Recently however, Argentina has experienced a boom in domestic demand. Gas prices quickly rose until eventually Argentina “unilaterally turned off the taps.”[[47]](#footnote-47) While supply continues to dwindle, Chile’s National Energy Commission (CNE) predicts energy demands will double by 2025.

The dominance of the copper mining sector in Chilean economics exacerbates Chile’s energy crisis. Copper exports constitute the bulk of Chilean GDP. As of February 2015 refined copper constitutes approximately 28% of Chilean exports, and copper ore comprises an additional 20%. Raw copper adds an additional 4.1%. All told, copper alone accounts for about 52% of Chile’s exports and amounts to over 1/3 of the world’s total copper output.[[48]](#footnote-48) The copper industry is a pillar of the Chilean economy, providing 20% of Chilean GDP. Chile boasts both the world’s largest copper mine, Escondida, and the world’s biggest mining company, BHP Billiton. Rising demand in China has kept global copper prices high as rural populations migrate to China’s cities. As of 2015, China consumes 40% of the world’s copper.[[49]](#footnote-49) Although the copper industry provides a massive boon to the Chilean economy, it is also an immense drain on Chile’s energy resources. Copper mining in Chile consumes 39% of the country’s available energy. Fuel alone can account for up to a fifth of a mine’s operational costs. Nearby Bolivia refuses to sell natural gas to Chile because of a long-standing border dispute, and Chilean copper mines can pay up to twice as much for fuel as their competitors in neighboring Peru.[[50]](#footnote-50) While some have suggested hydroelectric power as a means to meet the mining industry’s energy needs, the location of the mines poses a problem for energy transportation. Chile’s mining industry is located in the country’s arid north, while the country’s largest rivers are located in the fertile south over 2000 kilometers away.

Some have argued that Chile’s electricity crisis has been artificially manufactured by the country’s oligopolistic energy market. Endesa and Colbún are two of the four oligopolistic actors, controlling 35% and 15% of Chile’s energy market respectively. The other two companies, AES Gener and Suez Energy Andino, control a further 18% and 12% of the market each. Collectively, these four energy giants control 80% of Chile’s energy generation. President Michelle Bachelet has acknowledged this high degree of concentration in the energy market and has proposed reviewing the current bidding process that discourages new companies from competing in the energy marketplace. It was in this climate of crisis and concentration that Endesa and Colbún proposed HidroAysén in 2006, as a hydroelectric remedy to Chile’s energy woes. HidroAysén was a joint venture proposed by Endesa and Colbún to construct 5 megadams along the Baker and Pascua rivers in the Aysén region of Chilean Patagonia. The project promised great gains in energy and economics. Endesa and Colbún estimated the dams would generate 18430 gigawatt-hours of power annually, about 35% of Chile’s total electricity consumption in 2008. Given skyrocketing demand, by 2020 this power could produce 21% of demand for the Central Interconnected System (SIC), Chile’s central energy grid.[[51]](#footnote-51) Furthermore, HidroAysén alleged construction of the dams and the high altitude transmission lines connecting them to Chile’s mines in the north would provide around 5000 jobs a year during the decade the project would take to complete.[[52]](#footnote-52)

**Sebastian Piñera and HidroAysén**

As the project was being considered over the next 8 years, HidroAysén benefited from a presidential administration friendly toward business in general and the dam project specifically. President Sebastian Piñera won a plurality in the 2009 presidential election and a majority in the subsequent runoff election in January of 2010, taking office two months later as an Independent and serving until 2014. Piñera’s election marked the most conservative swing in Chilean politics since the Pinochet dictatorship, ending two decades of administration by the Christian Democrats, as Piñera became the first right-wing president elected in Chile since 1958. Piñera, a telecommunications and airline billionaire, campaigned on a platform of economic growth and job creation.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Although the new president claimed to have voted “no” against the Pinochet regime in the 1988 plebiscite, Sebastian Piñera consistently supported the regime’s economic policies and had close ties to the economists that orchestrated Chile’s neoliberal shift. Sebastian Piñera’s brother José Piñera served as Pinochet’s Minister of Labor and Pensions from 1978-1980, during which he directed the privatization of Chilean social security, before serving as Minister of Mining between 1981-1982.[[54]](#footnote-54) As the junta left power, Sebastian Piñera lead the 1989 presidential campaign of Hernán Büchi, Pinochet’s finance minister and one of Chile’s “Chicago Boys,” against Patricio Aylwin. Piñera was elected Senator for the right-wing National Renewal party that same year, where he served on the Senate Finance Committee.[[55]](#footnote-55) Sebastian Piñera’s 2010-2014 term as President of Chile was mired in controversy. After an early boost in the polls following the rescue of trapped Chilean miners in October of 2010, Piñera’s popularity began a rapid decline, dropping to a 26% approval rating by 2011 and remaining consistently low.[[56]](#footnote-56) Throughout the Piñera administration, controversy over economic policy fueled public disapproval. Hundreds of thousands of Chileans marched in protest over education policy, environmental issues, and economic inequality.[[57]](#footnote-57) The *Economist* has described the numerous controversies as“popular rebellion against ‘the model’, as some call the free-market policies bequeathed by Pinochet and left largely intact by his successors.”[[58]](#footnote-58)

Despite popular discontent with Chile’s economic model, the Piñera administration consistently supported the HidroAysén project throughout the proposal process. In May of 2011 the Piñera government green lighted HidroAysén after a controversial, 3-year long Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that sparked nationwide controversy.[[59]](#footnote-59) The following June, polls indicated 60% of the Chilean public opposed the dams.[[60]](#footnote-60) Throughout the proposal process, those in opposition to the dams had little recourse through political institutions to voice their social and environmental concerns. Chilean politics are highly centralized, reserving a great deal of power for the President. This centralization is the product of the political framework established in the Pinochet regime’s 1980 constitution, which continues to frame contemporary Chile’s political model.

**Pinochet’s Legacy of Centralized Governance**

By 1980, the military junta had created an avenue by which to transition to democracy. However, the Pinochet regime desired to manage this transition in a manner that maintained personal power for Pinochet, institutional power for the military, and political power for the far right. What’s more, actors in the military junta including General Augusto Pinochet himself desired to guarantee their own impunity from prosecution for human rights violations. To these ends the Pinochet regime constructed a political framework through the 1980 Political Constitution that orders Chilean politics to this day. In 1980, the Pinochet regime unveiled the “Political Constitution of the Republic of Chile.” The 1980 Constitution, passed through a controversial plebiscite, replaced the 1925 Constitution and extended a great deal of political power to the President. The Constitution also established Chile’s unique “binomial legislature” that tends to exclude parties outside of two major coalitions from the political process, tempering the public’s ability to effect change through congress. [[61]](#footnote-61) Additionally, it established a ministerial system of governance whereby the President appoints national ministers who in turn appoint regional representatives of each national department, and a similar system for regional governorships. Initially the 1980 Constitution explicitly prohibited leftist political parties from participating in the political process, and provided for a “state of siege” during which the president could suspend the constitution.[[62]](#footnote-62) Though some of the Constitution’s more overtly authoritarian principles have been repealed in subsequent revisions, a great degree of presidential power, the binomial legislature, and the ministerial and gubernatorial system remain.

Chile’s regions do exercise a degree of regional autonomy in their election of legislators to Chile’s national congress. However, these elections are constrained by Chile’s “binomial legislature,” articulated in the 1980 Constitution. In the binomial system, political coalitions present lists of candidates to the electorate. As political scientists Eduardo Alemán and Sebastián Saiegh explain, “[p]arties or electoral alliances can present two candidates per list in each district, but they can only win the two available seats if they win a plurality that doubles the vote of the list coming second in the district.”[[63]](#footnote-63) That is to say, in order to gain one seat in congress a coalition simply needs a plurality of votes in their district, whereas in order to gain two seats a coalition must win a supermajority. The practical upshot of this policy is that parties form electoral pacts. Two coalitions, the left-moderate *Concertación* and the far right *Alianza por Chile*,dominate Chilean politics and as a product of the binomial legislature there is one representative from each in almost every region. The binomial system tends to skew the legislature to the right, despite the electoral dominance of *Concertación.* As Patricio Navia of New York University puts it, “the distortional effect of the binomial electoral rules have effectively served as an insurance protection mechanism for the right wing Alianza coalition.”[[64]](#footnote-64) Collectively, the binomial legislature and the President’s capacity to set the legislative agenda lend the President a great deal of power. As Navia describes, “the strong attributions granted to the president by the Constitution give the executive an enormous influence over the legislative process.”[[65]](#footnote-65)

***Patagonia Rebelde*: Social Movements in Opposition**

Given the degree of political centralization in Chile, and the Piñera administration’s support for HidroAysén despite overwhelming public disapproval, social movements in opposition to the HidroAysén project had little capacity to address their concerns through formal political channels. Nonetheless, many Patagonians felt the potential social and environmental impacts of the megadam project were too dire to go uncontested. This is due in part to the character of the Patagonia itself, a sparsely populated region with vast wilderness areas and abundant biodiversity, which has been historically treated as a hinterland by the Santiago metropole.

*Patagonia Chilena*, in the *Zona Austral* extends from the Andean cordillera to the Pacific Ocean from east to west, and from Puerto Montt to the Strait of Magellan from north to south, encompassing the southern tip of the continent. The region was the last in Chile to be settled and remains its least populated. It hosts the highest percentage of Chile’s indigenous *Mapuche* population outside of Arucanía. Aysén and Magallanes, the two political zones that comprise the region, have populations of 104843 and 158657 respectively and collectively make up less than two percent of Chile’s total population. Most Patagonians reside in the capital cities of each zone, Coyhaique and Punta Arenas.[[66]](#footnote-66) Economically, Patagonia thrives on sheep herding and tourism. Patagonia is home to a wealth of biodiversity, including numerous endangered species of flora and fauna, among them black dolphins, sea otters, the huemule deer, Magellanic penguins, llama-like camelids called *guanacos* and a host of rare birds. The alpine region hosts massive glaciers, including the *Campos de Hielo Sur* (the Southern Ice Field), the second largest contiguous ice field in the world outside of the poles. Several large rivers, fed by glacial runoff, support Chilean Patagonia’s biodiversity. The Baker River is principle amongst these, and the largest in Chile in terms of volume. The nearby Pascua River is one of the region’s most furious, because of its large drainage basin and rapid flow. HidroAysén proposed to construct five dams on these two rivers to exploit their energy potential.

Had HidroAysén been constructed, the environmental impact would have been devastating. The dams would have flooded 15000 acres of natural reserves. Impacts would have affected 6 national parks, 11 reserves, 26 conservation priority sites, 16 wetlands, and 32 privately owned protected areas. The proposal included 1900 miles of high altitude transmission lines to transport energy northward to Santiago and the mining industry.[[67]](#footnote-67) These transmission lines were to be constructed along fault lines in Chile’s earthquake and volcano prone regions.[[68]](#footnote-68) The 5000 temporary jobs would double the population in the small towns near the construction sites, straining resources and contributing to unemployment after the project’s completion. *Pobledores* and *gauchos* livingin the floodplain would be displaced. The Chilean public responded to these concerns with vehement disapproval. At the height of the conflict, public disapproval towards HidroAysén reached 87% in Aysén and 74% nationwide.[[69]](#footnote-69) Sebastian Piñera took office in March of 2010, in the midst of the HidroAysén controversy. In May of the following year, Piñera appointed a Committee of Ministers to assess the HidroAysén project.[[70]](#footnote-70) Despite public outcry, the committee approved the project with 11 votes in favor and one abstention. The Foreign Investment Committee was notified of the decision 27 days prior to its announcement.[[71]](#footnote-71) The public responded to the committee’s decision with nationwide street protests.[[72]](#footnote-72)

A grassroots social movement called *Patagonia sin Represas* or “Patagonia without Dams” (*PSR*) organized public opposition to the dams. The movement began in the rural Patagonian village of Cochrane, near one of the proposed dam sites along the Baker River. In 2007, shortly after the HidroAysén proposal was announced, *Patagonia sin Represas* formed with the purpose of protecting the environment in Chilean Patagonia and supporting sustainable development in the region.[[73]](#footnote-73) In one of the earliest protests against the dams, *PSR* organized a *cabalgata* (calvacade) of over 100 horseback riders to ride nine days from the rural communities where the dams were proposed into the regional capital of Coyhaique. As they arrived in the city Ernesto Sandoval, one of the *cabalgata’s* leaders from the Baker River area, told the gathering crowd, “We can live without hydro-electric power. We can live without gas. But we cannot live without water. God gave us these rivers, and we the right to defend them.”[[74]](#footnote-74) The protestors on horseback gained the support of regional governor Viviana Betancourt and brought the HidroAysén controversy to the national stage.

*Patagonia sin Represas* cited a number of concerns with the HidroAysén project including flooding, destruction of habitat that supports endangered species, harm to the regional tourism economy, and impacts to national parks and protected areas. As the hydroelectric project progressed through the political approval process, the social movement grew into an international campaign that opposed HidroAysén on a number of fronts. In Chile’s courts, *Patagonia Sin Represas* formed the Lawyers Defense Council of Patagonia to take legal action against HidroAysén and to support concerned citizens whose land was threatened by the project.[[75]](#footnote-75) In the public sphere, *PSR* built an international coalition called the *Consejo de Defensa de la Patagonia* (CDP) incorporating citizen groups, community organizations, and national and international NGOs with the common purpose of opposing the dams.[[76]](#footnote-76) The coalition included international actors such as the National Resources Defense Council, International Rivers, and Conservación Patagonica.[[77]](#footnote-77) To date, the campaign to protect Patagonia from hydroelectric projects is the largest environmental movement in Chile’s history, incorporating over 40 organizations in opposition to HidroAysén. In the Aysén region itself, *Patagonia sin Represas* joined forces with other social movements demanding more regional autonomy in a coalition called *Movimiento Social por Aysén* (Social Movement for Aysén) in a campaign called *Tu Problema es Mi Problema* (Your Problem is My Problem). *Tu Problema* brought together 20 or more social movements including labor organizations, political parties, and environmental organizations, and linked several issue areas all relating to Patagonia’s perceived position as an exploited hinterland.

In February of 2012, the *Movimiento Social* issued a list of demands. These included improvements in regional health infrastructure, the construction of a University in Aysén, a regionalized pension for the elderly and disabled, construction of roads to local villages, a minimum wage that considers the high regional cost of living, strengthening the rights of small business fishermen, reducing fuel costs, and regionalizing control of natural resources.[[78]](#footnote-78) These demands reflected a discontent with centralized governance, and the desire for more local control. By February of 2012, public discontent had reached its apex. Demonstrations escalated on February 7th when fishermen and local political activists seized the *Presidente Ibanéz* Bridge in Puerto Aysén in response to a new national law favorable to industrial-scale fishing. Protestors blockaded the main access point to the town with a boat and tires and lit the barricade on fire.[[79]](#footnote-79) In solidarity, protestors barricaded access points to the towns of Puerto Chacobuco, Chile Chico and the regional capital of Coyhaique. In Coyhaique, Bishop Luis Infantil held mass in support of the movement’s demands.[[80]](#footnote-80) In the following weeks, daily street protests were held with demonstrators numbering in the thousands, and clashes with police became violent. Some demonstrators turned riotous and smashed storefronts in Coyhaique. In response to the protests, President Sebastian Piñera invoked the controversial State Security Law stipulated in the 1980 Constitution.[[81]](#footnote-81) The *Carabineros*, Chile’s national police force, were flown into Aysén to subdue the unrest. Armed with riot shotguns, tear gas and water cannons, they confronted the protestors.[[82]](#footnote-82) Many Aysén residents argued the *Caribineros* used excessive force in quelling dissent, including Puerto Aysén’s Mayor Marisol Martinez. Martinez reported to the Santiago Times:

We wish the government would back the citizens and not use state funds to send Special Forces. We feel violated by the police and many people are taking to the streets today to protest against the force used.[[83]](#footnote-83)

Claudia Torres, a reporter who covered the protests for local radio station *Radio Santa Maria*, described the Carabineros as “violent and cruel,” recounting “stories about people being beaten, shot and arrested, and some women were stripped naked in front of male police officers.”[[84]](#footnote-84) In response to the violence Amnesty International, “called on Chilean authorities to ensure police do not use excessive force with protesters. They received hospital reports of asphyxia and rubber bullet wound injuries, including one person who lost an eye.”[[85]](#footnote-85) The National Department of Human Rights was dispatched to observe the protests. Protests against the dams, and against centralized political authority more generally, were not relegated to Aysén. Throughout the month of March demonstrations spread throughout Chile in solidarity with *Moviemiento Social por Aysén.* On March 17, the town of Arica on Chile’s northern border with Peru held a march to protest “years of neglect by the central government.”[[86]](#footnote-86) Three days later Calama, a poor mining town, held demonstrations demanding profits from the copper industry pay for local infrastructure. Juan Carlos Skewes, head of the anthropology department at the Alberto Hutado University in Santiago, described the reasons for the mounting unrest:

“Basically, this social discontent and public unrest is happening outside the channels of political representation – in other words, political parties and their local representatives – because people are not getting satisfactory solutions from them.”[[87]](#footnote-87)

On March 26, 2012, the Piñera administration signed a tentative agreement with *Movimiento Social por Aysén* to end the violence. Secretary General Cristián Larroulet reported working with *Movimiento Social* to draft, “improvements in health, education, conditions of employment, connectivity, infrastructure, investment, fishing sector, forestry, and quality of life for the Aysén people.” [[88]](#footnote-88) These improvements included subsidies for fuel and a work-force bonus for Aysén’s citizens to offset the high cost of living, but made no guarantees regarding HidroAysén. Larroulet declined to comment on dropping charges for 22 protestors detained under the State Security law. The Piñera administration’s heavy handed response to the Aysén protest hurt the president badly at the polls. Only 11% of Chileans disagreed with *Movimiento Social’s* demands while 85% of Santiago residents supported the protests. In March, Sebastian Piñera’s approval rating dropped to 29%, the second lowest rating of his presidency after a dip to 27% at the height of the student protests in Santiago.[[89]](#footnote-89) One week later, on April 4, the Chilean Supreme Court approved HidroAysén in a 3-2 ruling, denying 7 separate “appeals for protection” submitted by various NGOs, residents of Patagonia, and regional politicians. The three judges issuing the majority opinion argued HidroAysén would not violate any constitutional guarantees. Judge Hernán Crisosto, who dissented, argued, "some parts of the project threaten the legal rights to life and physical integrity, such as equality before the law and the right to live in an environment free of contamination." [[90]](#footnote-90) In a clear financial conflict of interest, one of the judges in the majority, Pedro Pierry, owned over 100,000 shares of Endesa stock at the time of the decision.[[91]](#footnote-91) Within hours of the decision, thousands of Chileans took to the streets in protest. Piñera’s approval rating dropped to an all-time low of 26%, lower than any Chilean president since the fall of the Pinochet regime.[[92]](#footnote-92)

In May, Colbún suspended its involvement in the HidroAysén venture citing a lack of clarity in national energy policy. With Colbun’s participation on hold, the HidroAysén project was postponed indefinitely. Meanwhile, the Piñera administration declined to comment on more than 30 outstanding complaints against the project, effectively passing the approval decision on to the next president.[[93]](#footnote-93) As campaigns ramped up for the 2014 presidential election, support for HidroAysén amounted to political suicide. Candidates across the political spectrum agreed unanimously that HidroAysén was unviable in its current form.[[94]](#footnote-94) One of the most outspoken critics amongst the candidates was former president and 2013 frontrunner Michelle Bachelet. In a televised debate in March of that year, Bachelet said of the project, "I'm not in favor of HidroAysen and I don't think it's viable” adding, “It shouldn’t go forward." Michelle Bachelet was elected president in December of 2013 in a landslide victory, with 62% of the popular vote.[[95]](#footnote-95) On May 15 of the following year she unveiled a new national energy policy proposing to unify Chile’s two national electricity grids, open energy production up to more competition, build a liquid natural gas terminal on Chile’s southern coast, and invest in renewable energy sources. The policy promised 45% of new generating capacity would come from non-conventional renewables until 2025.[[96]](#footnote-96)

On June 10 of 2014, Bachelet commissioned a Committee of Ministers to decide once and for all on the fate of HidroAysén.[[97]](#footnote-97) After three hours of deliberation, the committee unanimously accepted 35 complaints filed against the project, and permanently revoked the environmental permit for HidroAysén. Minister of Energy Máximo Pacheco made a public statement, saying HidroAysén “suffers from serious problems in its execution because it did not treat aspects related to the people who live there with due care and attention” adding, “I have voted with complete peace and clarity of mind with respect to this project.”[[98]](#footnote-98) Juan Pablo Orrego, international coordinator of *Patagonia sin Represas*,described the nationwide affect of the decision as “points[ing] to the end of the era of the thermoelectric and hydroelectric energy mega-projects – an era that in the developed countries ended a long time ago.”[[99]](#footnote-99) After eight years of controversy HidroAysén was abandoned, though the broader political factors that conditioned the conflict remain.

**Conclusions**

I traveled to Coyhaique in May and June of 2014 Throughout May and June of 2014 I conducted field research in Coyhaique, the regional capital of Aysén, interviewing public officials, NGO representatives, activists, and members of the media to gain a deeper understanding of the HidroAysén controversy. My interviews focused on understanding the forces contributing to the conflict and its escalation, including the economic and political factors that condition development in Chile.

In terms of development narratives, HidroAysén’s press secretary Roberto Reyes epitomized the logic of modernization. Reyes focused exclusively on economic factors in evaluating HidroAysén’s potential saying, “the project, if you analyze it from a technical point of view is a good project, it is efficient, you flood 6000 hectares and you can generate 2700 megawatts,” and arguing “the tourism impact will be extremely limited.”[[100]](#footnote-100) Moreover, Reyes viewed changes in Chilean political economy as a linear progression. After discussing controversy over Chilean energy policy Reyes summarized, “in a developing country, there are many things to improve in the country in terms of macro policy, and we are now at that stage.”[[101]](#footnote-101) Noting the nebulous legal context in which HidroAysén was often situated, Reyes said “Hidroaysén will be remembered as the project that generated a change in Chilean society,” and as a step toward “reaching the level of the developed world.”[[102]](#footnote-102)

Patricio Segura, journalist and advocate for *Patagonia sin Represas,* distinguished between “technical” fixes like HidroAysén, and “paradigm shifts” that would address the underlying political and economic causes of the controversy.[[103]](#footnote-103) Many opponents of the project made explicit references to sustainable development and the intersecting concerns of economics, equity, and the environment. Mark Buscaglia, Aysén’s SEREMI of the Economy, spoke to this nexus of concerns saying, “We must understand the ecosystem so it can be healthy, to promote sustainable development and sustainable business. As a state we must develop deeper interventions and regulate more.”[[104]](#footnote-104) Dani Castro, Programs Coordinator for *Consejo* member Conservación Patagonica, echoed Buscaglia’s sentiments saying Chile must generate energy with “fewer environmental and social externalities.” [[105]](#footnote-105) Peter Hartmann, director of the Committee for the Defense of Flora and Fauna (CODEFF) and advocate for *Patagonia sin Represas*,also explicitlyaddressed the need for Aysén to develop sustainably during our interview. Through his campaign *Aysén, Reserva de Vida* (Aysén, Life Reserve), Hartmann has endorsed regional sustainable development planning with citizen participation since 1984.[[106]](#footnote-106) He is currently working on a certification process for the term “Life Reserve” that would incorporate social, economic, and environmental factors.

Several participants focused on the dams’ potential impact on individuals, arguing from a human development perspective. Sergio Vasquez grew up in Aysén and currently works with the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), an American wilderness education program that runs expeditions out of Coyhaique. He served as liaison between the *cabalgata* and NOLS in 2007, when the school allowed over 100 protestors on horseback to camp on their property. Vasquez described the sense of exploitation that many residents felt saying, “We live in Patagonia and we see other people come and take what’s ours. Maybe at some point [the dams] will be a source of work for 20 years or so, but then there will be nothing left.”[[107]](#footnote-107) He continued, considering HidroAysén’s impact on future generations. “Life here is good, tranquil,” said Vasquez, “ and that’s what we want for our children. If rapid progress comes it will break everything.”[[108]](#footnote-108)

Across the board, opponents of HidroAysén felt their social and environmental concerns could not be adequately addressed through Chile’s political system. Throughout my interviews, participants voiced frustration with the lack of redress in Chile’s political system and linked that lack of redress directly to Chile’s centralized political framework. Some participants explicitly linked that political framework to the Pinochet dictatorship. As Peter Hartmann put it, “Chile emerged from a dictatorship sixteen years ago but today has not fully democratized.”[[109]](#footnote-109) Claudia Torres, activist and former reporter for *Radio Santa Maria*, contrasted Chile’s political system with federalism saying “Chile is thought of as a republic, not federal, a unitary state, just one, but we say no, Chile is a country that is composed of 15 regions.” [[110]](#footnote-110) She continued, describing centralism’s affect on Chilean individuals, particularly in rural regions like Aysén:

Centralism sees us not as citizens with rights, but as numbered inhabitants, clients of the institution, and as voters. Because of this, regions like Aysén matter little… changes must happen in the street, in organizations, there must be public pressure.[[111]](#footnote-111)

An anonymous source that participated in the demonstrations agreed that changes must come from civil society in the Chilean political context, but predicted continued pushback from the national government, saying, “We will continue to protest and repression will return, because every time the country reacts the government responds with repression.”[[112]](#footnote-112) Ricardo Arévalo, Director of *Radio Santa Maria*, commented, “This is a structural issue, [Chile] is mainly a presidential and centralized country.”[[113]](#footnote-113) A reporter who joined us during the interview interjected, “requests continue to be taken from the regions but decisions are made at the central level.” [[114]](#footnote-114)Arévalo commented on the *Carabineros’* harsh crackdown and its affect on local perceptions of the national government:

I thought [*Movimiento Social por Aysén*] was not a movement against the government, but then I changed my view. When people saw the reaction of the Government, to crush the movement by way of police repression, it became a movement against the government.

José Urrutia, Assistant Director of the National Forest Corporation (CONAF), spoke to the connection between political centralization and power saying, “This … hub model is extremely functional for the interests of concentrated economic and political power, little power in the regions, much power in the center.”[[115]](#footnote-115) Peter Hartmann explained that concentrated power, both economic and political, is an outgrowth of the Pinochet dictatorship. Economically, “Pinochet opened the Chilean economy to globalization, dogma number one was foreign investment… and entrepreneurs inherited state jobs, including Endesa.” Politically, “[the regime] fixed the political scheme so with the electoral law, the constitution, and all, they could stay in power as long as possible.”[[116]](#footnote-116) Hartmann noted the political framework established under Pinochet is unique to Chile, tends to centralize power, and is extremely difficult to change.

The political centralization in Chile and its limiting factor on redress for regional concerns helps to explain why *Patagonia sin Represas* joined the *Movimiento Social por Aysén*. *Movimiento Social* crossed issue areas to build a coalition of actors broadly concerned with regional autonomy. Protecting Patagonia’s rivers was viewed as one facet of the larger battle for what Patricio Segura called “territorial democracy”.[[117]](#footnote-117) According to Dani Castro, *PSR’s* involvement with *Movimiento Social* was a natural progression. “It was not premeditated,” Castro said of *PSR* joining the coalition, “ but when fishermen acted and began to add people with other demands naturally *Patagonia sin Represas* joined this movement.”[[118]](#footnote-118) Segura described the coalition as “more like Gulliver and the Lilliputians than David and Goliath,” a metaphor he attributed to Patricio Rodrigo, executive secretary of *Consejo*.[[119]](#footnote-119) These social movements employed a diversity of tactics in their efforts to shut down HidroAysén. They were “transgressive” in the language of Gould and Lewis, in that they operated outside of the political system, though they also employed “routinized” tactics such as challenging HidroAysén through the legal system.[[120]](#footnote-120) *Patagonia sin Represas*’ efforts to garner international support separated it from the broader movement towards regional autonomy and highlighted the issue of HidroAysén amongst national and international civil society. As Roberto Reyes acknowledged, “Hidroaysén in practice became a national issue, and the opposition internationalized Hidroaysén. It was known in all parts of the world.”[[121]](#footnote-121) In the language of Keck and Sikkink, *PSR* built a “Transnational Advocacy Network” to raise international awareness of the HidroAysén conflict, which increased domestic pressure on the Piñera administration.[[122]](#footnote-122)

Ultimately however, it was a change in Presidential administration that determined *Patagonia sin Represas’* success. While the social movement was able to assert public pressure on the national government, and build a coalition of international NGOs condemning the project, the final decision rested with the presidential administration. This will continue to be the case for energy projects in Chile unless the country undergoes significant constitutional reform. Under the Bachelet administration, that reform is a possibility. In December of 2014 the Bachelet administration announced that adopting a new constitution would be a priority in 2015. Minister of the Interior Rodrigo Peñailillo told Latin American news agency Telesur, “Next year we will start the democratic, participative and institutional process that will lead us to the creation of a new Constitution.”[[123]](#footnote-123) The announcement came on the heels of a massive protest in Santiago on November 23, 2014, where 10,000 protestors took to the streets demanding a Citizen’s Assembly on constitutional reform.[[124]](#footnote-124) On January 14, 2015, the Chilean Senate approved Bachelet’s electoral reform bill with support from two opposition senators.[[125]](#footnote-125) On the 21st, Chile’s lower house approved the bill. If the Constitutional Court approves the law, it will take effect in the upcoming 2017 elections, ending the binomial legislature.[[126]](#footnote-126) Chile’s new constitution is expected to incorporate the reformed electoral process.

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