

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Chilean-Style Populism: Carlos Ibáñez's Electoral Support Base

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Abstract

Based on his record as president, Carlos Ibáñez is usually considered a populist caudillo in Chilean historiography. However, there are few studies of whether his electoral base permits this classification or of the type of populism he represented. In his four presidential bids between 1927 and 1952, Ibáñez ran with the support of both left- and right-wing parties. Using municipal-level data, we assess his electoral support in the 1942 and 1952 presidential campaigns and support for Ibañista parties in the 1953 legislative elections. In 1942, Ibáñez's electoral base was similar to that of right-wing candidates while, in 1952, his support increased in areas where the Left was historically strong. While he received consistent support in agricultural areas, it fluctuated in mining and industrial areas.

Keywords: electoral support; Chile before 1973; Carlos Ibáñez del Campo; populism

Carlos Ibáñez del Campo (1877–1960) was one of the most important political figures of twentieth-century Chile. He served twice as the country's president (1927–31 and 1952–8) and ran for president on four occasions (1927, 1938, 1942 and 1952). He never belonged to a party and his behaviour was at odds with the traditional left–right alignment of Chilean politics at that time. There is a broad consensus that Chilean politics in the twentieth century was structured around a social cleavage that resulted in the programmatic arrangement of parties on a left–right scale, mirroring what has been reported for institutionalised democracies in Europe at the time. Ibáñez, however, constitutes an exception and an anomaly that calls into question the alleged programmatic and non-populist basis of Chilean politics. Given the common association that several studies make between Ibáñez, Getúlio Vargas and Juan Domingo Perón, the Chilean former president is often labelled as a populist. However, up till now we have had no evidence as to whether his discourse was constant or whether it changed over time, and we have lacked information about the electoral bases of support that made him

electorally relevant to Chilean politics for several decades. If he was indeed comparable to Perón, we would expect him to be associated with a strongly anti-oligarchic discourse anchored on the defence of the urban working class. Yet there has hitherto been no conclusive evidence that supports that claim.

In this article, we assess his electoral base in the two contested presidential contests in which he competed, as well as support for Ibañista parties in the 1953 parliamentary elections. Based on a discussion of the description of populism widely attributed to him in the literature, we look at how much similarity there was between the electoral bases of his presidential candidacies in 1942 and 1952 and support for his movement in the 1953 parliamentary elections. After presenting our methodology and the data, we analyse the electoral bases of Ibañismo and, finally, explore which of the different definitions of populism best describes the candidate Ibáñez.

This paper seeks to shed light on the bases of electoral support for Ibañismo, reviewing changes in Ibáñez's discourse and in his electoral bases of support in the presidential campaigns in which he ran. Studies on popular support for Perón associate his electoral backing to the urban working-class population. In the case of Ibañismo, though there are discursive similarities with Peronism, Ibáñez's bases of support were strong in agricultural areas and fluctuated over time in industrial and working-class sectors. In addition, Ibáñez did not end the programmatic tradition of the party system in Chile nor the country's left–right alignment. In fact, he was forced adjust to those factors. This paper seeks to enlighten our understanding of a critical moment in Chilean history and to better understand the most important personalist and allegedly populist political presence in a country where politics has been traditionally linked to programmatic parties.

What is Populism?

Political science struggles to define populism, due to the phenomenon's changing and imprecise nature. Here, we discuss four approaches: ideational, discursive, strategic and sociocultural, and assess whether any of them is applicable to Ibáñez.

Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser's ideational approach describes populism as a 'thin-centered ideology' that divides society into two antagonistic camps – the people and the elite.¹ The people are always 'pure' because they are 'authentic', while the elite is 'corrupt' and 'inauthentic'. In other words, the division in populism is of a moral nature, unlike in Marxism, where it is understood in terms of economic class.² Political activity must, therefore, be the representation of the general will of the people. The concept of 'thin-centered ideology' is key since it can be assimilated by other 'thick-centered ideologies', such as fascism, agrarianism, liberalism or socialism.³

The discursive logic and the construction of the people, that are fundamental to Ernesto Laclau's approach to populism, describe the emergence of populism as a

¹Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 6.

²Cas Mudde, 'Populism: An Ideational Approach', in Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.* (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 27–47.

³Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*.

moment when different demands not addressed by the political system come together in a 'chain of equivalencies',⁴ a common subjectivity, based on opposition to the elites and the emergence of a caudillo, who becomes the leader of the new people.⁵ For Laclau, the discursive construction of the people and the markedly personalist nature of the phenomenon are fundamental; for Claudio Riveros, 'The populist logic is ... an articulation of demands ... whose essential characteristic is their opposition to the established order.'⁶

Kurt Weyland sees populism as a political strategy through which a personalist leader seeks or exercises power with the non-institutionalised and non-mediated support of mostly disorganised followers.⁷ Here, discourse matters less and action more.⁸ Populism is associated with a direct relation between caudillos and their followers;⁹ the leader is the incarnation of the new people.¹⁰ Given the absence of strong ideological commitment, populism fits with Herbert Kitschelt's focus on electoral linkages based on the charismatic nature of the leader rather than on programmatic ties.¹¹

A fourth approach to populism is the sociocultural approach advocated by Pierre Ostiguy.¹² Characterised by a 'high-low' political distinction, this cultural approach focuses on accents, language registers, body language, gestures and ways of dressing. Populism connects with the 'low' dimension of society through identities, group differences and resentments.¹³ Politicians in the high dimension are measured and well educated while those in the lower dimension have fewer inhibitions and behave more crudely.¹⁴

These four approaches underline the multiple dimensions through which populism has been studied and point to the difficulties in pinpointing who is and who is not a populist. Notice that since the divide is between the people and the elites, populists can come from the Left or the Right. In fact, they will often seek to minimise the relevance of ideological or programmatic differences as their discourse focuses on the tension between the people and the elites. Not surprisingly, the debate over whether Ibáñez was a populist is impacted by the dimension of

⁴Ernesto Laclau, *La razón populista* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005).

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Claudio Riveros, 'El proceso populista: Un aporte teórico al debate del fenómeno', *Izquierdas*, 38 (2018), p. 66.

⁷Kurt Weyland, 'Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics', *Comparative Politics*, 34: 1 (2001), p. 14.

⁸Kurt Weyland, 'Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach', in Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.* (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, pp. 48–72.

⁹Weyland, 'Clarifying a Contested Concept'.

¹⁰Pierre Rosanvallon, *El siglo del populismo: Historia, teoría, crítica* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2020), pp. 24–77 (originally published as *Le Siècle du populisme: Histoire, théorie, critique* (Paris: Seuil, 2020)); Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), pp. 1–30.

¹¹Herbert Kitschelt, 'Linkages between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities', *Comparative Political Studies*, 33: 6–7 (2000), pp. 845–79.

¹²Pierre Ostiguy, 'Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach', in Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.* (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, pp. 73–98.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Pierre Ostiguy, 'The High and the Low in Politics: A Two-Dimensional Political Space for Comparative Analysis and Electoral Studies', Kellogg Institute Working Paper 360, July 2009.

populism that the texts we discuss above have focused on, especially because in his long political career Ibáñez formed alliances with right- and left-wing parties.

Others have approached the study of populism from a historical viewpoint. Pierre Rosanvallon places the origins of populism in the Bonapartism of Napoleon III, with his criticism of political parties, his quest to replace representative mechanisms with plebiscitary democracy, and his strong identification with the French people.¹⁵ Others, like Federico Finchelstein, relate the historical origins of populism with fascism.¹⁶ In the period after World War II, populism attempted to reframe the fascist legacy in democratic terms as a new third way between liberalism and socialism. This explains the fascist past of leaders like Perón and Vargas who, after the defeat of Nazism, renounced their pro-dictatorial foundation. Definitions of populism understand true democracy as 'direct, polarised and immediate'¹⁷ or as anti-liberal and authoritarian.¹⁸

Flavia Freidenberg classifies Ibáñez as a classic populist along with Perón in Argentina and Vargas in Brazil, among others.¹⁹ This classic Latin American populism is often associated with 'a transition to modernity'.²⁰ Both Torcuato di Tella and Gino Germani characterise it as typical of under-developed and peripheral countries.²¹ Freidenberg frames classical populism as a discourse of social reform in a context of transition marked by urbanisation, industrialisation and the rapid extension of political rights to the lower classes.²² As a result, populism tends to favour a radical nationalist discourse (Finchelstein) and economic protectionism (Rosanvallon).²³ Freidenberg furthermore identifies deep economic inequalities, political crises and weakly institutionalised party systems as factors that explain the emergence of populism.²⁴ In Riveros's view, populisms arise at times of hegemonic crisis when the current political and economic model is called into question.²⁵

Ibáñez's record as president and his style of politics provides grounds for classifying him as a classic populist. However, his electoral performance and the characteristics of the people who voted for him somewhat challenge that classification. As we discuss in the next section, historical studies have focused on his two governments, which began in 1927 and 1952, and have paid less attention to his failed presidential bids of 1938 and 1942. In turn, because these studies have focused on his performance as president and on his campaigning style – his slogan in

¹⁵Rosanvallon, *El siglo del populismo*, pp. 79–92.

¹⁶Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism*.

¹⁷Rosanvallon, *El siglo del populismo*, pp. 24–77.

¹⁸Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism*, pp. 1–30.

¹⁹Flavia Freidenberg, *La tentación populista: Una vía al poder en América Latina* (Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 2007), pp. 79–88.

²⁰Riveros, 'El proceso populista', p. 64.

²¹Torcuato di Tella, 'Populismo y reforma en América Latina', *Desarrollo Económico*, 4: 16 (1965), pp. 391–425; Gino Germani, 'Democracia representativa y clases populares', in Gino Germani, Torcuato di Tella and Octavio Ianni (eds.), *Populismo y contradicciones de clase en Latinoamérica* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1973), pp. 12–37.

²²Freidenberg, *La tentación populista*, pp. 53–4.

²³Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism*, pp. 1–30; Rosanvallon, *El siglo del populismo*, pp. 24–77.

²⁴Freidenberg, *La tentación populista*, pp. 45–7.

²⁵Riveros, 'El proceso populista', pp. 82–3.

the 1952 campaign, '*Ibáñez al poder y la escoba a barrer*' ('Ibáñez to [take] power and the broom to sweep [away corruption]'), is embedded in Chile's collective memory – they have generally ignored his electoral performance in the various presidential campaigns.

Chilean Politics and Society during the 'Ibañista' Era (1925–58)

In the period during which Ibáñez was active in politics – from the 1920s through to the 1950s – a gradual expansion of the franchise brought middle and lower segments of the population into the country's political life. The percentage of voting-age population with the right to vote increased from 9.1 per cent 1920, to 17.4 per cent in 1942 and 29.1 per cent in 1952.²⁶ Moreover, by the end of the 1930s, over 50 per cent of the population lived in cities of more than 20,000 inhabitants.²⁷ This increased the visibility of poverty and led to the emergence of '*poblaciones callampa*' (literally, 'mushroom settlements' because of the speed with which they grew up) on the periphery of the capital, Santiago.²⁸

As urbanisation increased, the industrial sector also grew, thanks to protectionist policies implemented from the 1920s and the work of the economic development agency, the Corporación de Fomento de la Producción (CORFO), established in 1939.²⁹

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, Chile's multi-party system had been structured around a social class cleavage, with left-wing parties representing the working classes and right-wing parties representing liberal-capitalist thought.³⁰ In the Centre, the Partido Radical reached agreements with the Left or the Right, depending on the circumstances.³¹ This structure lasted largely unchanged until the 1973 coup. Its stability and clear ideological definition were comparable to those of European party systems.

The party system's 'three-thirds' composition had a correlate in society. The right-wing parties – the Partido Liberal and the Partido Conservador – represented the interests of the wealthier classes, the agricultural sector and big business. The Conservatives were particularly strong in rural areas. The political centre, represented by the Partido Radical, had its base in the middle class and was particularly strong in the regions, among public employees and in the services sector. By contrast, the electorate of the left-wing parties – the Partido Socialista (PS) and the Partido Comunista (PC) – was in sectors with a large concentration of workers,

²⁶Patricio Navia, 'Participación electoral en Chile, 1988–2001', *Revista de Ciencia Política*, 24: 1 (2004), p. 87, Table 1.

²⁷Simon Collier and William Sater, *A History of Chile, 1808–1994* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 291.

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 291–5.

²⁹Brian Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 196–229; Collier and Sater, *History of Chile*, pp. 235–63.

³⁰J. Samuel Valenzuela, 'Orígenes y transformaciones del sistema de partidos en Chile', *Estudios Públicos*, 58 (1995), pp. 5–80 (also available in English as 'The Origins and Transformations of the Chilean Party System', Kellogg Institute Working Paper 215, Dec. 1995).

³¹Timothy R. Scully, *Rethinking the Center: Party Politics in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Chile* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 62–105.

particularly those employed in mining and industry.³² The left-wing parties competed for the same electorate and, while the PC gained ground among the urban proletariat in Santiago, the PS became strong in the copper mining industry, where standards of living were traditionally higher than in the rest of the country's working class.³³

The left-wing parties also had a strong union presence. The two main strands of the trade union movement were dominated by the PS and the PC.³⁴ They predominated in mining unions, particularly in the copper and coal sectors. The Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile (CTCh) was founded in 1936 in the first attempt to unify the trade union movement within the framework of the Frente Popular; it managed occasionally to stifle conflict between the PS and PC.³⁵ Just as the Left dominated the unions, the Right dominated business organisations, such as the Sociedad Nacional de Agricultura (SNA), the manufacturers' association the Sociedad de Fomento Fabril (SOFOFA), the Cámara Nacional de Comercio (CNC) and the Sociedad Nacional de Minería (SONAMI).³⁶ These organisations sought to influence politics as interest groups and maintained strong ties with the Partido Liberal and the Partido Conservador and, to a lesser extent, with the Partido Radical.³⁷

Despite the party system's apparent stability and institutionalisation and its maintenance of roots in society, Chile saw several cases of populist anti-party leaders in the twentieth century.³⁸ Esteban Montes *et al.* assert that, despite their stability, the parties were not particularly strong amongst the electorate and, although there were three clearly defined tendencies – left, centre and right – they were not balanced in strength and not always reflected in presidential elections.³⁹ Other studies have also questioned the supposed exceptionality of Chilean politics within Latin America.⁴⁰

Kirk Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser identify five populist moments in pre-1973 Chile: the two presidencies of Arturo Alessandri, both governments of Ibáñez, and the government of Salvador Allende.⁴¹ However, while Alessandri was elected twice with the support of a coalition of traditional parties and Allende with that of a

³²Federico Gil, *El sistema político de Chile* (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1969), pp. 263–317.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 309.

³⁴Alan Angell, *Politics and the Labour Movement in Chile* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 83–120.

³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 103–20. The Frente Popular was a left-wing electoral and political coalition in existence between 1936 and 1941.

³⁶Sofía Correa Sutil, *Con las riendas del poder: La derecha chilena en el siglo XX* (Santiago: Editorial Sudamericana, 2005), pp. 32–3.

³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 32–8.

³⁸Hugo Cancino, 'Experiencias nacional-populares en Chile en el siglo XX. Los casos del Alessandrismo (1920–1925) y el Ibañismo (1952–1956)', *Sociedad y Discurso*, 15 (2009), pp. 36–53.

³⁹J. Esteban Montes, Scott Mainwaring and Eugenio Ortega, 'Rethinking the Chilean Party Systems', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 32: 3 (2000), pp. 795–824.

⁴⁰Verónica Valdivia Ortiz de Zárate and Julio Pinto, '¿Populismo en Chile? De Ibáñez a Ibáñez, 1927–1958', *Travesía*, 20: 1 (2018), pp. 79–93; Nicolás Bravo, 'Populismo en Chile: Las vías no tomadas y la incidencia de la cultura política del país', *Revista Chilena de Derecho y Ciencia Política*, 7: 3 (2016), pp. 91–105.

⁴¹Kirk A. Hawkins and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 'The Ideational Approach to Populism', *Latin American Research Review*, 52: 4 (2017), pp. 513–28.

left-wing conglomerate, Ibáñez won the 1952 election amid fragmentation of the party system, without the support of a uniform political bloc and with a campaign that emphasised the person, rather than a programme of government.

Ibáñez's Political Career

A soldier by profession, Ibáñez appeared on the public scene in 1924 in the midst of the crisis of Alessandri's government (1920–5). He was one of the officers who led a military revolt, known as the 'Ruido de Sables' ('the Rattling of the Sabres'), to pressure Congress to pass social bills that had become bogged down in the legislative process. Eventually, this pressure triggered a crisis that put an end to the so-called 'parliamentary republic', with the promulgation in 1925 of a new, markedly presidentialist, Constitution. Ibáñez himself signed the Constitution as Alessandri's minister of war. Ibáñez's rise in politics occurred in the context of a global crisis of liberalism and parliamentarianism in the inter-war period.⁴²

Ibáñez's conspiratorial activity from within the government precipitated the resignation of Alessandri in 1925 and that of President Emiliano Figueroa two years later.⁴³ Figueroa's resignation in 1927 triggered a presidential election in which Ibáñez – the then vice-president – was the only candidate.⁴⁴ In an election with a higher abstention rate than in previous years, Ibáñez, the sole candidate, received stronger support – reflected in a turnout of over 80 per cent of registered voters – in provinces with large rural populations, such as Colchagua, Linares and Llanquihue, whereas in the more urban provinces of Tarapacá and Antofagasta, with a mining tradition, abstention ran at almost 50 per cent, which can be understood as an indication of low support for the sole candidate in the election.⁴⁵

Ibáñez promised that, as president, he would provide efficient government and take action to modernise the country.⁴⁶ After winning the 1927 election as the sole candidate, Ibáñez ruled as a dictator until 1931, when he resigned amidst an economic crisis caused by the world depression. His government implemented a broadly developmentalist programme that expanded the state sector and public works and included economic nationalism and a weakening of property rights.⁴⁷ He also implemented a purge of public administration with the aim of combating corruption and 'politicking'.⁴⁸ To his followers, Ibáñez was a saviour figure, a sort of Mussolini or Primo de Rivera of the Southern Cone,⁴⁹ who would contain the

⁴²Enrique Brahm García, *Carlos Ibáñez del Campo: El camino al poder de un caudillo revolucionario* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Bicentenario, 2019), pp. 19–80.

⁴³Tomás Moulian, 'El gobierno de Ibáñez: 1952–1958', *Material Docente sobre Historia de Chile*, FLACSO, 1986, p. 10.

⁴⁴Ricardo Cruz-Coke, *Historia electoral de Chile, 1925–1973* (Santiago: Editorial Jurídica de Chile, 1984), pp. 94–6.

⁴⁵Jorge Rojas Flores, *La dictadura de Ibáñez y los sindicatos (1927–1931)* (Santiago: Centro de Investigaciones Barros Arana, 1993), pp. 21–2.

⁴⁶Frederick M. Nunn, 'La elección presidencial de 1927. Un final esperado y profético a la vez', in Alejandro San Francisco and Ángel Soto (eds.), *Camino a La Moneda. Las elecciones presidenciales en la historia de Chile, 1920–2000* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Bicentenario, 2005), p. 110.

⁴⁷Moulian, 'El gobierno de Ibáñez', p. 10; Brahm García, *Ibáñez*, pp. 385–416.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 360–71.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 359–60.

advance of Communism and restore presidential authority.⁵⁰ Although the political parties had almost ceased to function, the government appointed an acquiescent 'Congreso Termal' (named after the spa town of Termas de Chillán) with their support.⁵¹

The Ibáñez dictatorship had corporatist and fascist elements.⁵² Many left- and right-wing politicians were exiled or banished to remote parts of the country, and unions were repressed.⁵³ The government's discourse was anti-communist and it exercised strong censorship.⁵⁴ Its strategy towards the lower classes was two-pronged, consisting in social legislation, combined with strongly anti-oligarchic language, and heavy repression of elements of public opposition within the workers' movement. Although strongly backed by workers' organisations not affiliated to the militant Left,⁵⁵ Ibáñez did not represent a threat to the country's privileged classes, which had held a banquet for him in Santiago's Club de la Unión on the eve of his election in 1927.⁵⁶

This first incarnation of Ibañismo bore similarities to Latin America's classic populisms, including social crises overcome or at least mitigated by an expansion of state services, the extension of enfranchisement rights to parts of the working class and an appeal to national unity.⁵⁷ In Latin America, this period was a critical juncture as regards the granting of social rights to previously excluded groups – the lower and middle classes – characterised by an iron grip over the state under which the government sought to demobilise and depoliticise the workers' movement while, at the same time, including the masses of workers in political life in a controlled manner.⁵⁸

The ideology of this Ibañismo is summarised in the thought of Alberto Edwards. In his famous book, *La Fronda Aristocrática*,⁵⁹ he presents a vision of the history of Chile that exalts the strong, impersonal and authoritarian state inherited from the era of Diego Portales, a strongman who served as Chief Minister in the 1830s and who referred to the rule of law as '*el estado en forma*', claiming that a strong state authority could contain the aspiration of the oligarchy (Edwards's 'aristocracy') to rule directly. In Edwards's vision, Chile began to decline when, in the late 1800s, the oligarchy co-opted the state, particularly during the parliamentary republic (1891–1925), when elite political parties engaged in self-interested struggles. As shown below, this authoritarian, anti-oligarchy stance and a critical attitude towards

⁵⁰Nunn, 'La elección presidencial de 1927', p. 111.

⁵¹Ernesto Würth Rojas, *Ibáñez: Caudillo enigmático* (Santiago: Editorial del Pacífico, 1958), pp. 152–5.

⁵²Luis Corvalán Márquez, *Nacionalismo y autoritarismo durante el siglo XX en Chile: Los orígenes, 1903–1931* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez, 2009), pp. 339–61.

⁵³Collier and Sater, *History of Chile*, pp. 214–20.

⁵⁴Corvalán Márquez, *Nacionalismo*, p. 330; Brahm García, *Ibáñez*, pp. 380, 311.

⁵⁵Rojas Flores, *La dictadura de Ibáñez*, pp. 77–140.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

⁵⁷Julio Pinto Vallejos, '¡La cuestión social debe terminar! La dictadura de Carlos Ibáñez en clave populista, 1927–1931', *Historia*, 53: 2 (2020), pp. 591–630.

⁵⁸Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

⁵⁹Originally published in 1928 under the Ibañista government: Alberto Edwards, *La fronda aristocrática en Chile* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1997).

political parties – the legacy of the Portales era – were to become a constant feature of Ibáñez's discourse. Edwards would become Ibáñez's minister of education, justice and foreign relations, and he would become one of the regime's most influential intellectuals.

Ibáñez resigned in July 1931, in the wake of the economic and social crisis caused by the Great Depression. This opened the way to contested elections and effective implementation of the 1925 Constitution (impossible during the instability of 1925–31). Ibáñez went into exile and, for a few years, disappeared from Chilean politics. However, at the end of Arturo Alessandri's second administration (1932–8), he once again ran for president with the support of the Alianza Popular Libertadora, a coalition that included Nazi and Ibañista elements as well as a rebel faction of the PS.⁶⁰ This time, Ibáñez's discourse was clearly anti-oligarchic, highlighting the idea of national unity and his own anti-party position.⁶¹ Despite his efforts to convey an image of independence, his opposition to Alessandri positioned him close to the Left,⁶² and there were even attempts to establish a common candidacy with the Frente Popular, the opposition conglomerate that brought together Radicals, Socialists and Communists.⁶³ Ibáñez's programme promised respect for public liberties, economic protectionism, improvements in social security and state control of natural resources.⁶⁴ After the Seguro Obrero massacre of 5 September 1938 – an attempted *putsch* by young Nazis that was bloodily repressed by the police – Ibáñez was arrested, abandoned the presidential race and backed the candidacy of the Frente Popular, in the person of Pedro Aguirre Cerda, a Radical.⁶⁵

The 1942 Election

The 1942 presidential election was triggered by the death of President Pedro Aguirre Cerda in November 1941. This was the first contested election in which Ibáñez took part. He was initially put forward as a candidate by various nationalist and populist groups, in a tense political climate in the midst of World War II.⁶⁶ In his campaign, Ibáñez revived the usual themes: patriotism, anti-politics, anti-communism, social welfare, in short, a populism “above politics and parties”.⁶⁷ Although he was formally the candidate of the right-wing Partido Liberal and Partido Conservador, there was some resistance to him within those parties, leading to division within them.⁶⁸ The weakness of the right-wing parties, following

⁶⁰Marcus Klein, ‘La elección presidencial de 1938. El despertar fortuito de la era radical’, in San Francisco and Soto (eds.), *Camino a La Moneda*, pp. 139–70; Würth Rojas, *Ibáñez*, p. 204.

⁶¹Joaquín Fernández Abara, *El Ibañismo (1937–1952): Un caso de populismo en la política chilena* (Santiago: Instituto de Historia, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 2007), p. 29–72.

⁶²Bravo, ‘Populismo en Chile’.

⁶³Tomás Moulian and Isabel Torres Dujisin, *Discusiones entre honorables: Las candidaturas presidenciales de la derecha 1938–1946* (Santiago: FLACSO, 1987), p. 141.

⁶⁴Fernández Abara, *El Ibañismo*, p. 68.

⁶⁵Klein, ‘La elección presidencial’, p. 162.

⁶⁶José Díaz Nieva, ‘La elección presidencial de 1942. J. A. Ríos y la continuidad de la era radical’, in San Francisco and Soto (eds.), *Camino a La Moneda*, pp. 171–205.

⁶⁷Brian Loveman and Elizabeth Lira, *Las ardientes cenizas del olvido: Vía chilena de reconciliación política 1932–1994* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2000), p. 111.

⁶⁸Díaz Nieva, ‘La elección presidencial de 1942’.

their poor results in the 1941 parliamentary elections, together with their opposition to the Frente Popular and, particularly, communism – and the need to rapidly field a candidate for the election of February 1942 – facilitated Ibáñez's nomination.⁶⁹ Ibáñez ran against Juan Antonio Ríos, the candidate of a conglomerate of left-wing parties in coalition with the Partido Radical.

In his 1942 campaign, Ibáñez advocated for presidentialism with national authority, administrative rectitude and nationalism, an end to social agitation, and opposition to communism.⁷⁰ This discourse was more supportive of the status quo and placed less emphasis on anti-oligarchy feeling than his failed 1938 campaign. His strong presidentialist emphasis sought to reaffirm the principles of the 1925 Constitution, which he himself had promoted and signed in opposition to the parties' parliamentarian aspirations.⁷¹

In justifying its support for the former dictator, the Right underlined his anti-party stance and his promise that he would seek to establish a national government.⁷² For much of the Right, his candidacy was the 'lesser evil'.⁷³ However, it was resisted by a group of Liberal politicians, including former President Alessandri, Ibáñez's political rival, who gave their support to Ríos.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the other political parties dubbed Ibáñez's candidacy 'fascist'.⁷⁵ In the election, Ibáñez obtained 43.8 per cent of the vote to Ríos's 55.7 per cent (Table 1). Ibáñez won in the provinces of Valparaíso, Talagante, Melipilla, Maipo, Colchagua, Curicó, Talca, Maule, Linares and Llanquihue and lost heavily in the north of the country and in the province of Concepción.⁷⁶ In principle, this reveals a continuity with respect to his electorate in 1927: more support in agricultural and rural provinces and less support in mining and densely urban areas.

The 1952 Election

The death of Ríos in 1946 meant a fresh presidential election, won by Gabriel González Videla, also from the Partido Radical, with the active support of the PC. At the end of his six-year term in 1952, Chile became embroiled in a political crisis, with an increasingly fragmented party system.⁷⁷ In the 1940s, the PC and PS had had serious disputes over their role in Radical governments as well as disagreements over union control. These conflicts led to schism in the CTCh, the country's main union umbrella organisation.⁷⁸ After winning the presidency with the support of the PC, González Videla did a U-turn on his campaign position and introduced the 'Ley de Defensa Permanente de la Democracia' (referred to by the Communists

⁶⁹Fernández Abara, *El Ibañismo*, pp. 75–114.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁷²Moulian and Torres Dujisin, *Discusiones*, pp. 175–6.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁷⁴Fernández Abara, *El Ibañismo*, pp. 75–114.

⁷⁵Collier and Sater, *History of Chile*, p. 244.

⁷⁶Díaz Nieva, 'La elección presidencial de 1942'.

⁷⁷Valenzuela, 'The Origins and Transformations of the Chilean Party System'.

⁷⁸Paul Drake, *Socialismo y populismo: Chile 1936–1973* (Valparaíso: Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, 1992), pp. 241–74.

Table 1. Results of the 1942 Presidential Election

Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Juan Antonio Ríos	Radical	260,034	55.7
Carlos Ibáñez del Campo	Independent	204,635	43.9
Blank and null votes		1,838	0.4
Total		466,509	100

Source: Urzúa Valenzuela, *Historia política de Chile*, p. 531.

as the ‘accursed law’), outlawing the PC and removing its members from the electoral register.⁷⁹

The Radicals’ break with the Left was followed by ambivalent and contradictory behaviour on the part of González Videla, who first brought the Right into his government and then broke with it, appointing a centrist cabinet. As a result, most political parties spent some time in government in the six years between 1946 and 1952.⁸⁰ These manoeuvres failed to resolve the country’s economic and social problems and, ultimately, weakened the party system, alienating voters from the traditional parties.⁸¹ In this context, Ibáñez was elected senator for Santiago in 1949 with the support of the Partido Agrario Laborista, a party with corporatist, nationalist, anti-communist and social-Christian elements that was particularly strong in the rural and agricultural central and central-southern provinces.⁸²

Meanwhile, high inflation, the banning of the PC and problems of administrative corruption brought González Videla’s government and the political system as a whole into discredit.⁸³ The banning of the PC further weakened the party system at the end of the 1940s and, according to Sofía Correa Sutil, was also one of the reasons for the rise of Ibañista populism as the parties sought to attract the orphaned communist vote.⁸⁴

The 1952 presidential election took place in a context of discredited traditional parties, disenchantment with Radical governments and an atomised Left.⁸⁵ With a slogan promising to sweep away corruption – embodied in the traditional parties – Ibáñez ran on a platform composed of the Partido Agrario Laborista and the Partido Socialista Popular (one of the two factions that had previously made up the Partido Socialista), a large number of independents (including the Unión Nacional de Independientes) and professional and business organisations as well as social-Christian, corporatist, nationalist and women’s groups and organisations

⁷⁹Decree no. 5.839 of 30 Sept. 1948. See Gil, *El sistema político*, p. 90.

⁸⁰Jaime Antonio Etchepare, ‘Ibáñez y su revolución de 1952’, *Política*, 26 (1991), p. 63.

⁸¹Cruz-Coke, *Historia electoral de Chile*, p. 104.

⁸²Cristián Garay Vera, ‘El Partido Agrario Laborista 1945–1958: Un intento frustrado de recomposición del sistema partidista de Chile’, *Política*, 29 (1992), pp. 133–65.

⁸³Collier and Sater, *History of Chile*, pp. 246–51.

⁸⁴Correa Sutil, *Con las riendas del poder*, pp. 142, 141.

⁸⁵Cristián Garay Vera, ‘La elección presidencial de 1952. La candidatura de Carlos Ibáñez del Campo y su retorno a La Moneda’, in San Francisco and Soto (eds.), *Camino a La Moneda*, pp. 243–78.

campaigning in favour of an authoritarian presidentialism that would put an end to the disorder of the parties.⁸⁶

The Partido Socialista Popular justified its backing of Ibáñez on the grounds that he was critical of Radicalism and the Right as well as anti-oligarchic, nationalist and anti-imperialist.⁸⁷ Just as Ibáñez's 1942 candidacy had produced divisions within the Right, in 1952 it produced divisions within the Left. Allende became the presidential candidate of the so-called Frente del Pueblo, formed from the PS and the outlawed PC.⁸⁸ In its arguments for not backing Ibáñez, this bloc cited his past as a dictator and his closeness to Peronism.⁸⁹

The Ibáñez personality cult during the 1952 campaign emphasised the need for an apolitical movement as the only way to resolve Chile's problems and to combat corruption.⁹⁰ Ibáñez's main strength lay in voters' disillusion with the traditional parties and the discontent caused by an increase in inflation.⁹¹ Several of the characteristics of populism discussed above – a personalist and anti-elite leader who brings together different unmet demands of the masses, a transition to urbanisation and industrialisation, social deprivation, political crisis and weakening of the political parties – were present in this 1952 presidential election.

There was a shift in Ibáñez's discourse in 1952 compared to his 1942 campaign. One of the main differences was his position on the PC. In 1942, his discourse had been anti-communist whereas, in 1952, his campaign promises included economic planning, agrarian reform, the centralisation of banking, control of copper companies, and an end to inflation.⁹² Moreover, in 1952, he promised to repeal the law banning the PC.⁹³ Ideologically speaking, this platform was closer to the Left and, in particular, to Allende's presidential campaign, which also proposed agrarian reform, state control of mining and a progressive tax system.⁹⁴

The 1952 presidential election was the first in which women could vote, a measure that had been approved in 1949.⁹⁵ Ibañismo was influenced by María de la Cruz Toledo, the first female senator, founder in 1946 of the Partido Femenino de Chile, and personal friend of Argentine president Juan Perón and his wife Eva. De la Cruz often portrayed Perón and Ibáñez as similarly motivated by defence of the people.⁹⁶ Ibáñez's rivals were Arturo Matte, the candidate of the right-wing bloc; Pedro Enrique Alfonso of the Partido Radical; and Allende, the official PS candidate.

⁸⁶Cruz-Coke, *Historia electoral de Chile*, pp. 104–6; Etchepare, 'Ibáñez y su revolución de 1952', p. 63; Fernández Abara, *El Ibañismo*, pp. 127–80.

⁸⁷Joaquín Fernández Abara, 'Nacionalismo y Marxismo en el Partido Socialista Popular (1948–1957)', *Izquierdas*, 34 (2017), p. 31; Octavio Avendaño and María José Henríquez, '"Nacional y Popular": Vínculos y transferencias entre la Revolución boliviana y el Ibañismo, 1952–1956', *Historia*, 53: 2 (2020), pp. 337–74.

⁸⁸Drake, *Socialismo y populismo*, pp. 276–7.

⁸⁹Fernández Abara, 'Nacionalismo y Marxismo', p. 31.

⁹⁰Garay Vera, 'La elección presidencial de 1952'.

⁹¹Gil, *El sistema político*, p. 92; Avendaño and Henríquez, 'Nacional y Popular'.

⁹²Collier and Sater, *History of Chile*, p. 253.

⁹³Gil, *El sistema político*, p. 92; Germán Urzúa Valenzuela, *Historia política de Chile y su evolución electoral desde 1811 a 1992* (Santiago: Editorial Jurídica de Chile, 1992), p. 561.

⁹⁴Collier and Sater, *History of Chile*, p. 252.

⁹⁵Garay Vera, 'La elección presidencial de 1952', p. 246.

⁹⁶Donald W. Bray, 'Peronism in Chile', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 47: 1 (1967), p. 41.

Table 2. Results of the 1952 Presidential Election

Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Carlos Ibáñez del Campo	Independent	446,439	46.6
Arturo Matte	Liberal and Conservador	265,357	27.8
Pedro Enrique Alfonso	Radical	190,360	19.9
Salvador Allende	PS	51,975	5.4
Blank and null votes		2,971	0.3
Total		957,102	100

Source: Urzúa Valenzuela, *Historia política de Chile*, p. 554.

The ‘General of Hope’, as Ibáñez was known, won by a wide margin. The factors that explain his victory include his personal popularity, the fragmentation of the traditional parties, the divisions within Radicalism, the deterioration of the economy and the women’s vote.⁹⁷ Campesinos, the working class and sectors of the middle class also appear to have been decisive in his election.⁹⁸

Geographically, Ibáñez’s support was quite heterogeneous. He won in some mining provinces of the north (Antofagasta, Atacama), large urban centres (Valparaíso, Santiago, Concepción) and some provinces in central-southern Chile (Linares, Malleco), albeit losing to Matte in others such as Colchagua, Curicó and Ñuble.⁹⁹ Table 2 shows the results of the 1952 presidential election.

Ibañismo in Power (1952–8)

Ibáñez’s victory in 1952 was followed by parliamentary elections in March 1953. They marked the electoral peak of Ibañismo amid a crisis of the traditional parties.¹⁰⁰ The Ibañista bloc was led by the Partido Agrario Laborista and the Partido Socialista Popular, although a series of smaller parties – the Partido Radical Doctrinario, the Partido Democrático del Pueblo, the Partido Nacional Cristiano, Acción Renovadora de Chile and the Partido Laborista, and the Ibañista Movimiento Nacional del Pueblo – also supported the president. Government candidates exploited the personalism associated with Ibáñez and their ties to him; Ibáñez, in this campaign, refused to put forward any policies.¹⁰¹ As shown in Table 3, the party system was highly fragmented, with 19 parties obtaining seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Ibañista parties took 44.2 per cent of the vote, electing 71 of the 147 deputies.

Once in government, the different factions of Ibañismo competed for the favour of the president.¹⁰² The Left’s love affair with Ibañista populism was short-lived.

⁹⁷Urzúa Valenzuela, *Historia política de Chile*, pp. 557–8.

⁹⁸María Elisa Fernández Navarro, ‘Integración de la mujer en la política: La mujer chilena en las elecciones presidenciales y el gobierno de Carlos Ibáñez del Campo, 1952–1958’, *Cuadernos de Historia*, 22 (2002), pp. 161–87.

⁹⁹Fernández Abara, *El Ibañismo*, p. 213.

¹⁰⁰Scully, *Rethinking the Center*, pp. 124–35.

¹⁰¹Würth Rojas, *Ibáñez*, pp. 274–5.

¹⁰²Garay Vera, ‘El Partido Agrario Laborista’.

Table 3. Results of the 1953 Parliamentary Elections

Party	Votes (number)	Votes (percentage)	Seats (number)
Ibañista parties			
Partido Agrario Laborista	118,483	15.2	26
Partido Socialista Popular	68,218	8.8	20
Unión Nacional de Independientes	39,877	5.1	5
Partido Democrático del Pueblo	31,961	4.1	5
Movimiento Nacional del Pueblo	28,976	3.7	6
Partido Nacional Cristiano	21,381	2.7	4
Partido Radical Doctrinario	17,882	2.3	3
Acción Renovadora de Chile	9,480	1.2	1
Partido Laborista	8,171	1.0	1
Total Ibañista	344,429	44.2	71
Non-Ibañista parties			
Partido Radical	103,650	13.3	18
Partido Liberal	84,924	10.9	23
Partido Conservador Tradicionalista ^a	78,383	10.1	16
PS	41,679	5.3	9
Partido Conservador Social Cristiano	33,332	4.3	2
Falange Nacional	22,353	2.9	3
Movimiento Nacional del Pueblo	19,238	2.5	1
Partido Democrático de Chile	11,570	1.5	1
Partido Agrario	8,125	1.0	2
Partido de Unidad Popular	2,344	0.3	1
Total non-Ibañista	405,598	52.1	76
Other parties^b	29,147	3.7	0
Total valid votes	779,174	100	147

^aThe Partido Conservador adopted a different name for this election due to party division.

^bParties that did not win seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

Source: Urzúa Valenzuela, *Historia política de Chile*, p. 656.

The Partido Socialista Popular left the government in October 1953, arguing that it was failing to assume its promised anti-oligarchic and anti-imperial stance.¹⁰³ The hopes raised during the election campaign soon gave way to disillusion and apathy, even among those who had been the government's most fervent allies.¹⁰⁴ Further complicating the situation, the creation of the Central Única de Trabajadores (CUT) in 1953 reunited the trade union movement. After the Partido Socialista

¹⁰³Fernández Abara, 'Nacionalismo y Marxismo', p. 32.

¹⁰⁴Würth Rojas, *Ibáñez*, pp. 248, 279.

Popular left the government, the CUT took on a markedly antagonistic role, despite Ibáñez's efforts to use his influence to control it,¹⁰⁵ and, in May 1954 and January 1956, it called three general strikes against the government.¹⁰⁶ Ibáñez's difficult relations with the CUT were in stark contrast with the situation in Argentina, where Peronism, with its trade-union base, controlled that country's trade-union body, the Confederación General del Trabajo.¹⁰⁷

Against a backdrop of political difficulties and financial crisis, the government brought in a group of liberal economists (the Klein-Saks mission) who advised it to change its approach to the economy, resulting in a shift to more conservative positions.¹⁰⁸ The government's changes in policy, as well as its extremely high ministerial turnover – the second Ibáñez administration had a total of 135 ministers¹⁰⁹ – led to the decline of Ibañismo and the re-emergence of the political parties in the municipal elections of 1956 and the parliamentary elections of 1957.¹¹⁰ This decline coincided with the disappearance of the Partido Socialista Popular, due to its reunification with the PS in 1957,¹¹¹ and the dissolution of the Partido Agrario Laborista, whose members went on to support Eduardo Frei in the 1958 presidential election.¹¹²

At the end of his period in government, Ibáñez, with the support of the Partido Demócrata Cristiano, the Partido Radical and some on the Left (including the PS and Allende, Luis Bossay and Frei), promoted the Bloque de Saneamiento Democrático to push through an electoral reform detrimental to the presidential chances of the Right's Jorge Alessandri.¹¹³ At the end of his term, Ibáñez also fulfilled his campaign promise to repeal the 'accursed law', lifting the ban on the PC (see note 79 above). In the 1958 presidential election, in which there was no candidate of the outgoing ruling party, Ibáñez gave Allende – the candidate of the left-wing Frente de Acción Popular (FRAP) – his lukewarm support, albeit informally. Yet, according to Jaime Etchepare, the pro-government media campaigned positively in favour of the FRAP; Allende was therefore circumspect in his references to the Ibáñez government,¹¹⁴ as if seeking to win over the remains of the Ibañista electorate.

Is it possible to define Ibañismo? Some authors have drawn attention to Ibáñez's changing ideology, although it was always characterised by nationalism and presidential authoritarianism,¹¹⁵ with anti-liberal and middle-class components as well as

¹⁰⁵Correa Sutil, *Con las riendas del poder*, pp. 160–1.

¹⁰⁶Jorge Barria, *El movimiento obrero en Chile: Síntesis histórico-social* (Santiago: Ediciones de la Universidad Técnica del Estado, 1971), pp. 108–9; Correa Sutil, *Con las riendas del poder*, pp. 140–75.

¹⁰⁷Freidenberg, *La tentación populista*, pp. 79–88; Bray, 'Peronism in Chile'.

¹⁰⁸Avendaño and Henríquez, 'Nacional y Popular'; Freidenberg, *La tentación populista*, p. 102; Moulian, 'El gobierno de Ibáñez', pp. 35–41; Würth Rojas, *Ibáñez*, pp. 336–7.

¹⁰⁹Würth Rojas, *Ibáñez*, pp. 355–62.

¹¹⁰Correa Sutil, *Con las riendas del poder*, pp. 140–75.

¹¹¹Fernández Abara, 'Nacionalismo y Marxismo', p. 27, fn 2.

¹¹²Garay Vera, 'El Partido Agrario Laborista'.

¹¹³Etchepare, 'Ibáñez y su revolución de 1952', p. 91. Jorge was the son of Ibáñez's long-term rival Arturo.

¹¹⁴Etchepare, 'Ibáñez y su revolución de 1952', p. 92.

¹¹⁵See, for example: Bray, 'Peronism in Chile'; Fernández Abara, *El Ibañismo*; Freidenberg, *La tentación populista*, pp. 79–88; Cancino, 'Experiencias nacional-populares en Chile'; Bravo, 'Populismo en Chile'.

opposition to parliamentarianism and oligarchic control of politics.¹¹⁶ These elements, which are also found in the thought of Ibañismo's intellectual poster boy Edwards,¹¹⁷ could be defined, in Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's terminology, as the 'thin-centered ideology' of Ibañismo.¹¹⁸ For Simon Collier and William Sater, Ibáñez's diffuse ideology turned his lack of doctrine into a virtue and he appealed to feelings, rather than reason.¹¹⁹ Indeed, in a letter to Perón, Ibáñez himself defined the movement that bore his name as 'an inorganic force, almost purely sentimental'.¹²⁰

According to Brian Loveman, the two Ibáñez governments had a common approach: use of the state apparatus to foster the country's industrialisation and development, accompanied by repression of the union movement and opposition elements.¹²¹ In his first government, Ibáñez acted heavy-handedly against the unions and the Left but in his second he sought support from low-income and middle-class sectors.¹²² Some Ibañista groups, with clear personalist and populist tendencies, saw Ibáñez as Chile's Perón, a caudillo characterised by policies advocating the restoration of order and distributive economics.¹²³ However, Ibáñez's rather brusque and taciturn personality was very different from that of Perón, a charismatic caudillo who conquered the masses with his oratory.¹²⁴

Although he was always characterised by a personalist and populist discourse, the parties that supported him, his government programme and the emphasis of his campaign in 1942 differed from those of 1952.

Assessment of Ibáñez's Electoral Base

Methodology

Given that Ibáñez was the only candidate in the 1927 presidential election and withdrew shortly before the 1938 presidential election, we evaluate his electoral base only in the 1942 and 1952 presidential elections. We also assess the determinants of the electoral support for Ibañista parties in the 1953 parliamentary elections. The electoral and census data used here were originally assembled by Arturo Valenzuela for his classic texts on the political system of the time and have been used in subsequent analyses of the election results of the period.¹²⁵ Valenzuela's database comprises the results of presidential and legislative elections between 1938 and 1973 in Chile's then 287 municipal districts and municipality-level information from the 1940 and 1952 censuses.

¹¹⁶Corvalán Márquez, *Nacionalismo*, pp. 319–25; Nunn, 'La elección presidencial de 1927', p. 93.

¹¹⁷Edwards, *La fronda aristocrática*; see note 59.

¹¹⁸Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*.

¹¹⁹Collier and Sater, *History of Chile*, p. 252.

¹²⁰Bray, 'Peronism in Chile', p. 38.

¹²¹Loveman, *Chile*, p. 222.

¹²²Freidenberg, *La tentación populista*, pp. 79–88.

¹²³Cancino, 'Experiencias nacional-populares en Chile'; Würth Rojas, *Ibáñez*, pp. 295–304.

¹²⁴Würth Rojas, *Ibáñez*; Brahm García, *Ibáñez*.

¹²⁵Arturo Valenzuela, *Political Brokers in Chile: Local Government in a Centralized Polity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977); Arturo Valenzuela, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Patricio Navia and Ignacio Soto Castro, 'El efecto de Antonio Zamorano, el Cura de Catapilco, en la derrota de Salvador Allende en la elección presidencial de 1958', *Historia*, 50: 1 (2017), pp. 121–39.

The dependent variables are the percentage vote for Ibáñez at the municipal level in both presidential elections – for the 1952 election, we differentiate between his support among men and women – and the vote for Ibañista parties in the 1953 parliamentary elections. As independent variables, we use the vote obtained by the right-wing coalition's presidential candidate, Gustavo Ross, in 1938, with the aim of evaluating the relationship between these results and the vote for Ibáñez in 1942 and 1952, respectively. In addition, we use Ibáñez's vote in 1942 for the models that explain his vote in 1952. We include an indicator of each municipal district's population, each district's percentage of rural population, and the percentage of the economically active population working in agriculture, mining, industry, construction, commerce and services. All these data come from the 1940 and 1952 censuses. We grouped the economically active population into blue- and white-collar workers.

Our unit of analysis is the municipal district. Districts' populations varied significantly, from a minimum of 1,378 inhabitants to a maximum of 223,598, according to the 1952 census, with an average of 19,798 inhabitants and a median of 12,515. We therefore use the logarithm of the population as a control variable. We estimate ordinary least squares (OLS) models. [Table 4](#) gives the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the models.

Data

We have generated scatterplots to show the correlation between Ibáñez's vote in 1942 and 1952 and the vote for other presidential candidates in 1938, 1942, 1946, 1952 and 1958. [Figure 1](#) shows a positive correlation between Ibáñez's vote in 1942 and that for the right-wing candidates in 1938 (Ross) and 1946 (Fernando Alessandri, the candidate of the Partido Liberal and its allies, and Eduardo Cruz Coke of the Partido Conservador). His vote is also negatively correlated with that for the centre-left candidates in 1938 (Pedro Aguirre Cerda, the candidate of the Partido Radical and its leftist allies) and 1946 (Gabriel González Videla of the Partido Radical). These results appear to corroborate the view that, in 1942, Ibáñez's electorate was right-wing. Paradoxically, the votes he obtained in 1942 and 1952 are negatively correlated with each other, which once again suggests that, in these elections, his electorate was different.

[Figure 2](#) shows scatterplots with the vote for Ibáñez in 1952 and other presidential candidates in 1946 and 1958. Ibáñez's vote in 1952 has a weak, but positive, correlation with that of González Videla in 1946 and a negative correlation with those of Alessandri and Cruz Coke in 1946. In other words, in 1952, in contrast to 1942, Ibáñez's vote is more closely correlated with the centre-left electorate than with right-wing voters.

By comparing Ibáñez's vote in 1952 with the results obtained by Allende, Frei and Jorge Alessandri in 1958 as the presidential candidates of the Frente de Acción Popular (Left), the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Centre) and the Right, respectively, we can assess whether Ibañismo still carried electoral weight in the 1958 election. With Alessandri, the association between the variables is negative while, for Frei and Allende, it is positive, confirming that Ibáñez's electorate in 1952 leaned towards the Centre-Left.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of the Independent and Dependent Variables

Variables	N	min.	max.	mean	SD
Dependent variables					
% Ibáñez 1942	275	0.2	86.7	44.7	17.0
% Ibáñez 1952 male voters	279	0.5	75.3	38.3	15.6
% Ibáñez 1952 female voters	271	2.7	71.7	34.2	14.5
% Ibañista coalition 1953	278	2.9	70.6	39.6	14.6
Independent variables					
% Ross 1938	273	4.1	100	58.7	19.5
log population 1940	266	2.9	5.8	4.1	0.3
% rural 1940	266	0	100	69.9	26.1
log population 1952	259	3.1	5.3	4.1	0.3
% rural 1952	259	0.4	99.9	64.3	27.1
% agriculture 1940	266	0.2	87.3	29.9	14.6
% mining 1940	263	0	88.4	5.3	14.1
% industry 1940	266	0	24.8	4.3	3.8
% construction 1940	266	0	13.1	1.2	1.4
% commerce 1940	266	0.1	8.3	2.7	1.8
% services 1940	266	0.1	22.3	5.2	3.1
% agriculture 1952	258	0.1	73.0	17.3	9.6
% mining 1952	234	0	41.8	2.3	6.3
% industry 1952	259	0.5	17.7	3.7	3.0
% construction 1952	255	0	7.7	1.2	1.1
% commerce 1952	259	0.2	6.1	2.1	1.3
% services 1952	259	0.3	33.6	4.9	3.4
% blue-collar workers 1940	266	1.4	50.9	18.1	6.6
% white-collar workers 1940	266	0.1	7.1	2.5	1.2
Average years of schooling 1960	286	1.2	7.0	3.2	1.0

Source: Compiled by the authors using data from Valenzuela, *Political Brokers in Chile* and *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*.

We can, therefore, make three observations based on the descriptive evidence. First, Ibáñez's vote in 1942 is strongly associated with right-wing voters. Second, his vote in 1952 is associated with voters who had historically supported the Centre-Left. Third, it follows logically that Ibáñez's electoral bases in 1942 and 1952 differed significantly. In other words, Ibáñez's voters in 1942 were not the same – or did not share the same ideological leanings – as those of his successful 1952 presidential candidacy, suggesting that Ibañismo, rather than being an organic or ideological political movement, had a fluctuating electorate.

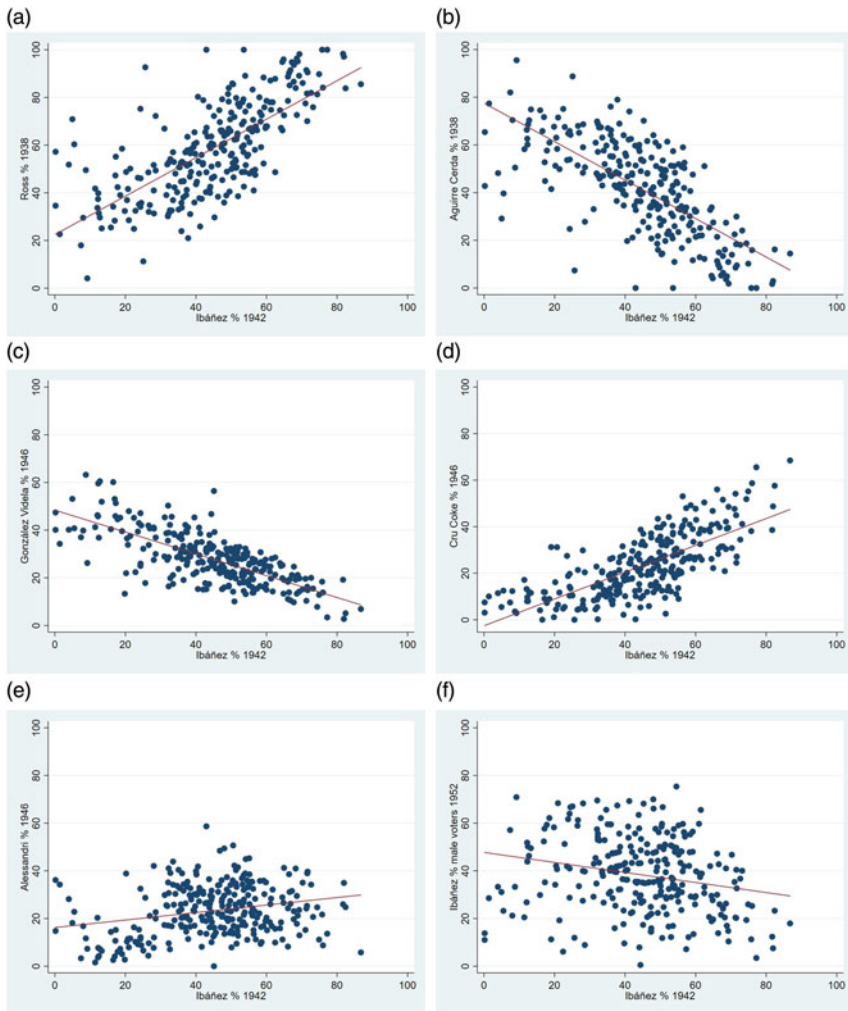


Figure 1. Ibáñez's Vote in 1942 and that of Other Presidential Candidates at the Municipal District level, Chile

Note: Women did not acquire the right to vote at the national level until 1949. In Fig. 1 (f) we therefore compare the 1942 vote (when only men had the suffrage) with the male vote in the 1952 election.

Source: Compiled by the authors using data from Valenzuela, *Political Brokers in Chile* and *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*.

Results

Table 5 shows the results of the ordinary least squares (OLS) models. The dependent variable is Ibáñez's vote in 1942 and 1952. For the 1942 election, the independent variables are the vote for the right-wing candidate, Ross, in 1938, the population and the percentage of rural population taken from the 1940 census, and the percentage of workers in different types of economic activity by municipality (agriculture, mining, industry, construction, commerce and services). We also incorporated the percentage of white- and blue-collar workers reported in the 1940 census. Finally,

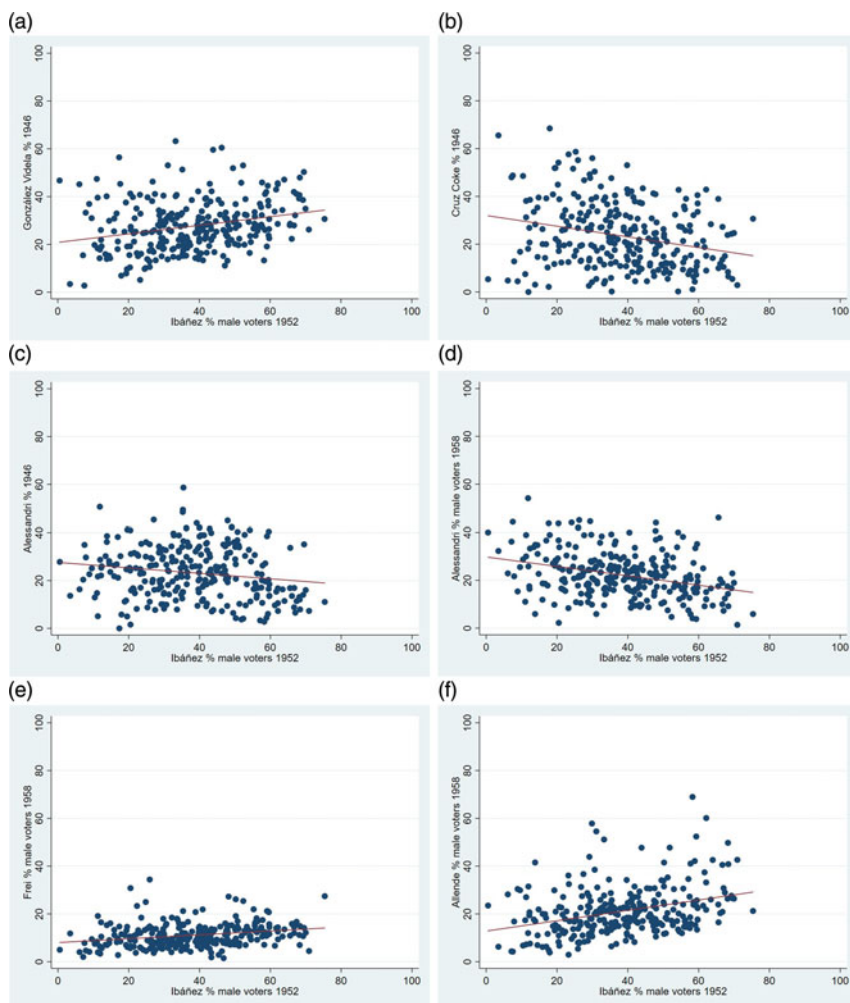


Figure 2. Ibáñez's Vote in 1952 and that of Other Presidential Candidates at the Municipal District Level, Chile

Note: Women did not acquire the right to vote at the national level until 1949. We therefore compare the 1946 vote (when only men had the suffrage) with the male vote in the 1952 and 1958 elections.

Source: Compiled by the authors using data from Valenzuela, *Political Brokers in Chile* and *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*.

we included an indicator of each municipality's average schooling as reported in the 1960 census (comparable data by municipal district are not available in the 1940 and 1952 censuses). For the 1952 election, we distinguished between male and female voters and included the same independent variables, except that, instead of Ross's vote in 1938, we used Ibáñez's own vote in 1942. Population and rurality variables for the last four models ((3)–(6)) were updated to 1952.

The results show that Ibáñez had different electoral bases in 1942 and 1952. In 1942, he attracted agricultural and commercial sectors, traditionally linked to the

Table 5. OLS Models: Vote for Ibáñez in the 1942 and 1952 Presidential Elections

Variables	(1) Ibáñez 1942	(2) Ibáñez 1942	(3) Ibáñez 1952 male voters	(4) Ibáñez 1952 male voters	(5) Ibáñez 1952 female voters	(6) Ibáñez 1952 female voters
Ross 1938	0.601*** (0.0420)	0.694*** (0.0426)				
Ibáñez 1942			-0.0871 (0.0560)	-0.0813* (0.0473)	-0.0679 (0.0526)	-0.0264 (0.0454)
Population	5.548** (2.175)	1.958 (2.439)	7.256** (2.975)	9.513*** (2.822)	3.491 (2.921)	5.543* (2.883)
Rurality	0.0301 (0.0643)	-0.0439 (0.0460)	-0.0706 (0.0589)	-0.0520 (0.0516)	-0.137** (0.0570)	-0.111** (0.0502)
Agriculture	0.273*** (0.0845)		0.280** (0.121)		0.289** (0.114)	
Mining	-0.0751** (0.0299)		0.549*** (0.176)		0.374** (0.174)	
Industry	0.184 (0.252)		1.981*** (0.404)		1.780*** (0.378)	
Construction	0.455 (0.607)		-0.234 (0.977)		1.522 (0.962)	
Commerce	2.713*** (0.755)		0.854 (1.129)		-0.337 (1.077)	

(Continued)

Table 5 (Continued)

Variables	(1) Ibáñez 1942	(2) Ibáñez 1942	(3) Ibáñez 1952 male voters	(4) Ibáñez 1952 male voters	(5) Ibáñez 1952 female voters	(6) Ibáñez 1952 female voters
Services	-0.0496 (0.330)		0.328 (0.321)		0.129 (0.302)	
Blue-collar		-0.335*** (0.120)		0.203 (0.134)		0.120 (0.131)
White-collar		0.573 (0.686)		1.198 (0.746)		0.603 (0.728)
Schooling		1.483 (1.206)		4.111*** (1.343)		3.420*** (1.287)
Constant	-31.46** (12.28)	-1.379 (12.92)	0.727 (14.16)	-14.18 (14.47)	18.16 (13.95)	4.732 (14.60)
N	263	262	228	249	224	244
R-squared	0.608	0.538	0.432	0.380	0.421	0.352

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Right. The argument that his electorate was more conservative in 1942 is confirmed by the fact that he fared better in municipalities where Ross obtained good results in 1938 and that he was supported by sectors with a low concentration of mining activity and a low number of blue-collar workers.

In 1952, by contrast, his electoral base was correlated with a greater share of workers in the mining and industrial sectors, which favoured the Left. In 1942, his vote was low in mining municipalities while, in 1952, it showed an increase explained by the strong presence of left-wing parties in these areas. However, in 1952, there are no statistically significant differences between municipalities with a high concentration of white- or blue-collar workers. Ibáñez also performed well in agricultural areas in 1952, which suggests that he had support not only from the traditional left-wing electorate, but also among more conservative sectors. Indeed, the percentage of workers in agriculture is the only variable that is significant and positive in all but one of the models in [Tables 5](#) and [6](#). Support in agricultural areas can be explained partly by the electorate of the Partido Agrario Laborista, which was strong in campesino sectors, especially in the Araucanía region.¹²⁶

The population variable is positive in all ten models, albeit not always significant. This indicates greater support for Ibañismo in more densely populated municipalities. Ibáñez's voters were slightly more urban in 1952 than in 1942, although this relationship is significant only among the female electorate. In addition, the years of schooling variable is positive and significant, indicating that the 1952 Ibañista platform appealed to more educated voters. This variable is also positive, but not significant, for the 1942 election. This suggests that Ibáñez had some support among the growing urban population – something that would make his appeal similar to that of Perón – but since he was the candidate of left-wing parties in that election, that support might have resulted more from the endorsement of left-wing parties than from Ibáñez's own appeal.

Finally, [Table 6](#) shows the OLS models for the parliamentary elections held in March 1953, a few months after Ibáñez's victory in the 1952 presidential election. We estimated the determinants of the vote for the 'Ibañista coalition' (all government forces) in these elections. The explanatory variables are the same as in the models in [Table 4](#), except that we also used Ibáñez's vote in the 1942 and 1952 presidential elections.

It is not surprising that the vote for the Ibañista coalition is determined by the vote for Ibáñez in 1952, although the effect is more pronounced among female than male voters. As in 1952, the Ibañista vote is higher in industrial and agricultural areas, although not significantly so in all the models. The most important change is that the mining variable is not significant in any of the models, marking a difference with respect to the determinants in [Table 5](#). The results show that the left-wing vote in mining areas did not go to Ibañista parties in 1953. The presence of white-collar workers and more years of schooling both have a negative effect in the case of Model 9, again marking a difference with [Table 5](#). In short, Ibáñez rapidly lost his electoral support base just months after his 1952 presidential victory.

In summary, we find that the main constant in the Ibañista electorate is the support of voters in areas economically related to agriculture. In 1942, in line with the

¹²⁶Garay Vera, 'El Partido Agrario Laborista', p. 140.

Table 6. OLS Models: Vote for Ibañista Parties in the 1953 Parliamentary Elections

Variables	(7) Ibañismo 1953	(8) Ibañismo 1953	(9) Ibañismo 1953	(10) Ibañismo 1953
Ibáñez male voters 1952	0.240** (0.116)		0.285** (0.113)	
Ibáñez female voters 1952	0.523*** (0.121)		0.478*** (0.117)	
Population	5.628** (2.619)	10.21*** (3.223)	6.525** (2.546)	9.634*** (3.330)
Rurality	0.0784 (0.0509)	-0.00513 (0.0632)	0.00697 (0.0439)	-0.0105 (0.0678)
Agriculture	0.0903 (0.100)	0.284** (0.129)		0.333** (0.137)
Mining	-0.229 (0.151)	0.186 (0.180)		0.334 (0.227)
Industry	-0.124 (0.354)	1.353*** (0.434)		1.286*** (0.460)
Construction	-0.807 (0.758)	-0.490 (0.939)		0.133 (1.057)
Commerce	0.555 (0.949)	0.547 (1.216)		0.781 (1.256)
Services	-0.0525 (0.268)	0.120 (0.348)		0.0907 (0.391)
Blue-collar			-0.155 (0.113)	-0.243 (0.184)
White-collar			-1.116* (0.636)	0.543 (0.905)
Schooling			-2.452** (1.145)	-0.375 (1.785)
Constant	-15.79 (12.34)	-12.88 (15.17)	-0.949 (12.60)	-8.059 (16.20)
N	226	230	245	223
R-squared	0.536	0.210	0.512	0.217

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1

right-wing parties' support for Ibáñez, his anti-communist discourse and his stance in favour of the status quo, his electorate was more conservative and tended to be in municipal districts related to agriculture and commerce and with a lower presence of workers. In other words, we can classify the Ibañismo of 1942 as right-wing populism. In 1952, however, he achieved more support among traditionally centre-left voters in industrial and mining areas with a high educational level, in tune with his more distributive discourse. This discourse and its electoral base suggest that the Ibañismo of 1952 was left-wing populism. However, he also maintained the support he had obtained in agricultural areas in 1942, achieving a more heterogeneous coalition. In 1953, Ibañismo again performed well in agricultural and industrial areas, but could not maintain its support in areas economically related to mining.

So, what kind of populist was Ibáñez? The Chilean caudillo differed from the classic populist Perón in that the Argentine leader had support among urban workers, while Ibáñez had a loyal base in agricultural areas and fluctuating support in terms of the other variables and did not have systematic support in industrial and mining areas. This can be explained by the fact that, unlike Argentina, Chile had strong left-wing parties with a proletarian base that maintained their urban working-class bases in a way that the left-wing parties in Perón's Argentina did not.

If we apply more recent definitions of populism to Ibáñez, we find that he had some of the attributes identified by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser¹²⁷ and that his discourse had similarities with the concept of 'thin-centered ideology' associated with strong and authoritarian presidentialism and a personalist, nationalist and strongly anti-party discourse – concepts also found in Weyland's definition of populism.¹²⁸ In turn, the 'thick-centered ideology' component of populism would seem to be associated with the right-wing anti-communism in 1942 and a vaguely leftist redistributive populism in 1952 – with a discourse that places it closer to Laclau's concept of 'chain of equivalences' in 'unsatisfied demands',¹²⁹ particularly in 1952. By contrast, Ostiguy's definition seems less applicable to Ibáñez since his support was also greater in areas with a higher average level of schooling.¹³⁰

Conclusions

Many of the studies of Ibáñez cited above emphasise the programmatic aspect of Chilean politics in the twentieth century, with a party system that resembled those of Western Europe. However, his actual record raises questions about this narrative. Here, we seek to fill a gap in studies of Chile's political history and, in particular, to unravel the mysteries of Ibáñez's electoral bases and associate them with the type of populism represented by Ibañismo.

Ibáñez knew how to take advantage of circumstances – such as the weakness of the Right in the unexpected presidential election of 1942 or the fragmentation of the party system and divisions in the Left in 1952 – to gain the support of different political sectors, always presenting a populist and personalist discourse. In contrast to the historical tradition of twentieth-century Chilean politics – programmatic,

¹²⁷Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*.

¹²⁸Weyland, 'Clarifying a Contested Concept'.

¹²⁹Laclau, *La razón populista*.

¹³⁰Ostiguy, 'Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach'.

institutionalised, with well-defined electoral bases and party representation – Ibañismo represented a personalist, populist and weakly programmatic interval, drawing on a fluctuating, heterogeneous and disorganised electoral base that could be brought together only around a caudillo.

We have shown how Ibáñez used different electoral and social platforms to achieve power. Although his electoral bases fluctuated – as did his alliances with political parties – we were able to identify a ‘thin-centered ideology’ that runs through his political career, characterised by the exaltation of strong presidentialism and of his own personal qualities, accompanied by an anti-elitist and anti-political party discourse.¹³¹ This ‘thin-centered ideology’ permitted its assimilation into a ‘thick-centered ideology’ of the Right in 1942 and of the Left or Centre–Left in 1952.

It is precisely Ibáñez’s adaptable and changing populism that explains the different electoral bases of his presidential campaigns. In 1942, his support was greater in areas traditionally favourable to the Right while, in 1952, it was greater in electorally left-wing areas. Only the support of agricultural municipal districts was a constant throughout his long political career. Ibañismo did not create a new electorate, but rather adapted to the social cleavages prevailing in the mid-twentieth century and in the context of each election. Chilean voters may have been temporarily seduced by a populist, anti-party discourse, but remained relatively faithful to the political division into thirds of the Right, Centre and Left, explaining why Ibañismo disappeared after the death of its leader while, in Argentina, Peronism endured.

Ibáñez marked Chile’s transition from a predominantly rural, pre-industrial country, in which politics were monopolised by the oligarchy, to a Chile with broader suffrage in which urban sectors and the middle and working classes had growing weight. This transition, like those that occurred in other South American countries, such as Argentina and Brazil, was characterised by populist leaders as well as, in the Chilean case, by the breakdown of the party system and the fragmentation of alternatives that represented the interests of the lower classes.

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Populismo a la chilena: Las bases electorales del Ibañismo

Carlos Ibáñez es considerado como un caudillo populista en la historiografía chilena a partir de su desempeño como presidente. Pero escasean estudios sobre si sus bases electorales también permiten subrayar esa condición e identificar el tipo de populismo. En sus cuatro candidaturas presidenciales entre 1927 y 1952, Ibáñez fue abanderado de partidos de izquierda o derecha. Evaluamos sus bases de apoyo en sus candidaturas de 1942 y 1952 y de los partidos ibañistas en las elecciones legislativas de 1953, usando datos a nivel comunal. En 1942, tuvo un comportamiento electoral similar a la de los candidatos de derecha; en 1952 su apoyo fue mayor en sectores tradicionalmente de izquierda. Ibáñez obtuvo un respaldo constante en zonas agrícolas, pero su apoyo fluctuó en zonas mineras e industriales.

Palabras clave: bases electorales; Chile pre-1973; Carlos Ibáñez del Campo; populismo

¹³¹Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*.

Populismo ao estilo chileno: A base de apoio eleitoral de Carlos Ibáñez

Com base no seu histórico como presidente, Carlos Ibáñez é normalmente considerado um caudilho populista na política chilena. No entanto, são escassos os estudos sobre se essa base eleitoral permite este tipo de classificação ou o tipo de populismo que representava. Nas suas quatro candidaturas presidenciais entre 1927 e 1952, Ibáñez concorreu tanto por partidos de esquerda como de direita. Utilizando dados a nível municipal, avaliamos o seu apoio eleitoral nas campanhas presidenciais de 1942 e 1952 e aos partidos Ibañistas nas eleições legislativas de 1953. Em 1942, a sua base eleitoral era semelhante à dos candidatos de direita; já em 1952 o seu apoio aumentou em áreas onde a esquerda era historicamente forte. Embora Ibáñez tenha recebido apoio consistente nas áreas agrícolas, ele flutuou nas áreas mineiras e industriais.

Palavras-chave: apoio eleitoral; Chile antes de 1973; Carlos Ibáñez del Campo; populismo