

## **An Investigation of Television's Role in the Transition to Democracy Following the 1988 Chilean Plebiscite**

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On September 11, 1973, Augusto José Ramón Pinochet assimilated power in Chile after a coup that overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende that ended the civil exercise of democracy in Chile. Pinochet's military government lasted 17 years and resulted in a recorded 3,200 murders, 80,000 exiled and more than 30,000 tortured (Evans 2006:228). His government is characterized by three basic elements: the use of brutal coercion during the early stages of power, economic decisions that transformed the country, and the icon of Pinochet as a figure of stability and power (Couso 2009:587). Pinochet legitimized his military regime by constitutional and economic legal means through the reform of the juridical policy, the formation of a new constitution and the restructuring of the economic system previously formed by the Allende government (Couso 2009:589).

1988 marked a revolutionary year in Chilean history: the opportunity to vote in favor or against to the hypothetical eight-year extension of Pinochet's position in power through a plebiscite that was initiated by Pinochet himself (Hojman 1992:171). This plebiscite was the first election in Chilean history in which television served as the primary platform for distribution of political propaganda. Chilean citizens were granted the opportunity to vote SÍ in favor of an eight-year extension to Pinochet's military government, or NO, in favor of elections to be carried out the following year. The NO campaign won with 56% of the popular vote, ending the military ruling in Chile and initiating a gradual transition to democracy in Chile once again.

Through the media-scape, marginalized individuals within society have a platform to assert themselves into a cultural and political context within their nation. The NO campaign was a remarkable example of the power of