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CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN LATIN AMERICAN EDUCATION

CASE STUDIES AND PERSPECTIVES ON ADVOCACY

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3 The Student Movements to Transform the Chilean Market-Oriented Education System¹

Cristián Bellei, Cristian Cabalin, and Víctor Orellana

One of the most important changes in the Chilean political system in recent decades was the establishment of automatic registration and voluntary voting in 2012. Its political objective was to increase youth participation in elections, which had been low since democracy was restored in 1990. The lack of electoral participation among youth was explained during the 1990s as an expression of general apathetic behavior, and young people were considered “the ‘whatever’ generation” (*La generación “No estoy ni ahí”*) due to their supposed apolitical attitudes and limited motivation to be involved in public affairs (Moulián 2002; Muñoz Tamayo 2011). Despite their disinterest in electoral and partisan politics, there is evidence that Chilean youth had profound criticisms of society (Duarte Quapper 2000) and a high level of interest in public and social problems, especially those related to inequity and arbitrary discrimination issues (Schulz et al. 2010).

The dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990) fiercely implemented a process of de-politicization and demobilization of Chilean society and contributed to apathy among youth. Moreover, in 1980, a comprehensive neoliberal reform in Chile restructured the national education system and the delivery of social services. As a result of this reorganization, social services such as health care, pensions, and education began to be delivered by market dynamics and private companies, and the public sphere was seen as increasingly less relevant, further diminishing the will for political participation. After 1990, the political process was increasingly isolated from the rest of the society, and the democratic governments that followed the dictatorship did not emphasize the creation of new spaces for social organization and participation (De la Maza 2010; PNUD 1998; Moulián 2002; Ruiz Encina 2015; Huneeus 2016).

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