

# Chilean students protest for free public education, 2011-13

- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) student participants](#) [2]
- [an example of paradox of repression](#) [3]
- [included participation by more than one social class](#) [4]

## Timing

Time period notes:

The campaign slowed from January 2012 to March 2012, and from May 2012 to March 2013.

March

2011

to:

November

2013

## Location and Goals

Country:

Chile

Location City/State/Province:

Santiago, Chile, Valparaiso, Chile, Rancagua, Chile

Location Description:

Urban areas, Santiago is the capital, Valparaiso is a major port city, and Rancagua is south of Santiago

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

End the privatization of schools, make public education free for all Chilean citizens, lower interest rates on student loans for university students, provide equal access to high quality schools, funnel public funds into the university system to offset the cost to students

## Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 004. Signed public statements>Confech issued a declaration of its goals that was addressed to the general public
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention>Confech wrote a letter to Joaquin Lavin, Minister of Education
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications>Confech used Twitter and Facebook to electronically display communications
- 028. Symbolic sounds>"Cacerolazo" protest (banging of pots and pans)

- 037. Singing ›Students dance and sing in the streets to Michael Jackson's "Thriller." They wear gravestone hats that identify how much debt they have from student loans.
- 038. Marches ›At the end of some of the marches, students staged a "kiss-in" and a pillow fight.
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 116. Generalised strike
- 138. Sitdown ›Students stage a mass suicide event in which they 'die' because of the education system.
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast) ›About 3 dozen students engage in hunger strikes
- 173. Nonviolent occupation ›Occupied the headquarters of the Democratic Independent Union and the Socialist Party of Chile

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 051. Walk-outs ›Student walk-outs
- 062. Student strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 062. Student strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 062. Student strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation ›Students occupy schools.

Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 062. Student strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation ›Students occupied classrooms and academic buildings

Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 062. Student strike

Segment Length:

5 months

## **Classifications**

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Copper Miners
- Labor union members
- Students (middle and high school
- professors
- teachers
- university-level)

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

Leaders:

Confederation of Chilean Students/Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile (Confech)

Confederation of Students from the University of Chile/Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad de Chile

Coordinating Assembly of Secondary School Students

Confederation of Students from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile/Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad Pontificia Católica de Chile

Partners:

Education 2020/Educación 2020

Chilean Central Workers' Union/Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Chile (CUT)

Middle School Coordinating Assembly

Student Movement for Private Higher Education

External allies:

Parents, teachers, center-left politicians

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Chilean Central Worker's Union (CUT)
- Confederation of Chilean Students (Confech)
- Coordinating Assembly of Secondary School Students

- Education 2020

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Parents
- Teachers
- center-left politicians
- copper miners
- professors

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

The Confederation of Students from the University of Chile and the Confederation of Students from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile are part of the Confederation of Chilean Students. It is uncertain exactly when parents, teachers, professors, center-left politicians, and copper miners joined, but the number of non-student supporters increased significantly at the end of the first segment and at the beginning of the second segment.

Segment Length:

5 months

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:

President Sebastián Piñera and his government

Campaigner violence:

Important movement leaders, such as Camila Vallejo and Gabriel Boric, encouraged nonviolence among protestors. A small group of protestors, however, did engage in violent means. They threw stones at police officers and bombed riot vehicles.

Repressive Violence:

Chilean police officers, known as carabineros, used water cannons and tear gas to disperse protestors. They arrested and beat protestors as well. Education officials expelled about 100 student protestors and threatened to revoke some student protestors' scholarship funds that allowed them to attend high school or university.

## **Success Outcome**

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

8 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

Students demands for free public education were not met, but by November 2013 when Michelle Bachelet was elected as President, former President Piñera had agreed to increase its education budget in 2012 to \$1.2 billion,

a 10% increase; the government offered 24% more scholarships to high-achieving, low-income students; and student loans were issued at discounted rates. In her campaign, Michelle Bachelet promised to increase education spending and reform the tax system. Once in office, she raised corporate taxes from 20% to 25%, thus increasing tax revenue by about \$5 billion. She planned to use this money to fund free college education for the poorest 60% of the Chilean population by 2016, and for all Chilean citizens by 2020. These gains partly answered the students' calls for a more affordable and equitable education system, but they did not end the privatization of Chile's education system entirely. Throughout the course of the campaign, the number of supporters grew from roughly 15,000 to 400,000 people.

On 11 September 1973, Chilean dictator Augusto Pinoche came to power and during the 1970s, he privatized Chile's education system. The central government gave money to some private schools, while the public schools remained grossly underfunded. This commercialization of education began a legacy of educational attainment disparity along socioeconomic class lines—the poor received poor quality education, received jobs that paid meager wages, and remained poor, while the wealthy received high quality education, went on to university, and obtained well-paying jobs that increased their wealth. Even after Pinoche fell from power in 1990, the Chilean education system remained unequal. Students led a campaign of protests in 2006 known as the “Penguin Revolution” (coined as a result of the students' black and white uniforms). Although the students protested, held strikes, and occupied school buildings, they did not fully achieve their goals of free bus transportation for students to and from school, student representation on the Education Commission, and free university testing waivers. As a result of the government's refusal to meet the students' demands during the Penguin Revolution and the government's increasing privatization of schools, the Confederation of Chilean Students, or Confech, led a new campaign of student protests in April 2011. This organization, made up of individual student confederations from schools all across Chile, demanded free public education, government subsidized university tuition, lower student loan interest rates, and equal access to quality schools.

On 21 May 2011, students marched to the Chilean Congress, where President Piñera was scheduled to deliver the State of the Nation speech. There, they met riot police, who used water cannons to disperse the protesters. The repression by police initiated a multitude of protests during a time that some call the “Chilean Winter.” In June 2011, students staged a protest in which they danced to the popular Michael Jackson song, “Thriller.” All the while, they wore hats in the shape of gravestones that listed the amount of student loan debt they owed. On 30 June 2011, students from public and private universities took over the headquarters of the Democratic Independent Union and the Socialist Party of Chile.

The government proposed the Great National Education Agreement (GANE) on 4 July 2011. Though it allocated \$4 billion in funding to provide more scholarships and decrease student loan rates, students rejected the plan because it did not address their demand to end the privatization of the university system. In a creative protest of the plan, students staged a “kiss-in.” Couples gathered outside La Moneda Presidential Palace and kissed for a total of 1800 minutes, symbolizing the 1800 million pesos they wanted the government to invest in public education. The kiss-in was followed by a pillow fight on 13 July 2011 in which students once again protested for a better education. Throughout the rest of July, many students engaged in sit-ins and strikes at schools, and about 3 dozen students began hunger strikes.

By August, the government reaction strengthened. During peaceful anti-government rallies in which students marched throughout Valparaiso and Santiago, police known as carabineros shot water cannons and dispersed tear gas into the crowds to push protesters back. Although some students threw rocks at police officers, student leaders such as Camila Vallejo advocated for nonviolence. Near the end of the summer, Confech's calls for public support moved other Chilean citizens - including parents, teachers, professors, and labor union workers - who joined the student protesters. Drawing on a protest method used during Pinochet's rule, citizens staged

caceroladas in which they banged on pots and pans from their balconies in order to create noise and protest the unequal education system. Throughout August, the government offered two policy concessions called the GANE plan and the 21-point plan that offered increased education funds (up to \$4 billion) in order to appease the protesters, but the protesters refused to accept the plans on the grounds that they were ambiguous, stipulated that the government would legalize for-profit colleges, and otherwise failed to meet their demands for an end to the commoditization of the Chilean education system. .

During September, October, November, and December of 2011, students continued to organize marches on a weekly basis. Workers, teachers, even more students, and other union members continued to join their ranks. On 15 October, the student leaders and their allies participated in a protest that was part of a larger day of global anti-capitalist protests. All of these protests were inspired by the Occupy Wall Street campaign in the United States, which aimed to draw attention to the stark inequality gap that existed in a capitalist American society. The anti-capitalist theme relates to the students who were angry that only the select few wealthy students have access to a quality education, while a majority of students do not. Following this protest, student sit-ins at schools continued. By the end of 2011, students decided to retreat temporarily as they made plans to stage even bigger protests that would incorporate their new support base of non-student Chilean citizens.

On March 15, 2012, the students and their allies were ready. Thousands of people marched in Santiago to once again call for free public education and, this time, to also protest the expulsion of 200 students who protested in 2011.

In April 2012, Education Minister Harald Beyer proposed a decrease in student loan interest rate from 6% to 2%, but the President of the University of Chile Student Federation, Gabriel Boric, did not find this acceptable. Angered students occupied even more schools than they had in 2011, and though police evicted some protesters, students continued to occupy at least seven of the schools. Meanwhile, the Mayor of the City of Santiago threatened to revoke scholarships of protesting students.

By August 2012, the campaign slowed again, but it picked up in March 2013 in anticipation of the presidential election in November 2013. In March 2013, thousands of students marched in the streets of Santiago and police used tear gas, water cannons, and dogs against them. Still, the Student Federation of the University of Chile led another protest in June 2013. Over 100,000 students protested alongside teachers, copper miners, and laborers. Police continued to arrest protesters and use teargas and water cannons against them.

The protesters continued to push for free public education, and thousands occupied schools where the primary elections were held. The campaign led presidential candidate Michelle Bachelet to run on a platform that advocated for drastic overhaul of the public education system. In November 2013, Ms. Bachelet became President, and soon after her victory, she instituted a 25% corporate tax that would raise about \$5 billion in tax revenue to devote towards free public education. She further promised that, by 2016, 60% of the “most [economically] vulnerable” Chileans would receive free public university education, and by 2020, all Chileans would have this opportunity.

Though she did not end the privatization of the national education system, her election was a partial success for the Chilean student protesters and their allies as their protests put free public education on the national agenda. Their demands resulted in policy that aimed to provide free public education by 2020. As of March 2015, Bachelet had increased corporate taxes such that \$8 billion would be raised annually for education expenditures. She also instituted a law to gradually move private primary and secondary schools from for-profit to nonprofit enterprises. Some student leaders like Gabriel Boric insisted the reform was not enough and only continued the commoditization of education, while former student leader, Camila Vallejo, endorsed the gradual change as a pragmatic approach. Thus the movement for a free public education system that meets the demands of all

students has continued with different campaigns that respond to governmental policy.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

This campaign was influenced by the 2006 "Penguin Revolution" in which Chilean students demanded free bus transportation and fee-free college entrance exams. (1) See Chilean high school students strike, win education reform, "Penguin Revolution," 2006. The student campaign of 2011-2013 then influenced the later Chilean student-led campaigns in 2014-2015 that pushed for student participation on national education policy advisory boards. (2)

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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Meghan Kelly, 20-09-2015

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