

Advertise on NYTimes.com

## With Kiss-Ins and Dances, Young Chileans Push for Reform



Fernando Nahuel/European Pressphoto Agency

A protest in Santiago, Chile, last month. Students have held rallies of up to 100,000 people and taken control of dozens of schools around the country. [More Photos »](#)

By ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO  
Published: August 4, 2011

SANTIAGO, Chile — A blanket stretched over their legs, Johanna Choapa and Maura Roque, both 17, sat in front of the stage in a chilly school auditorium last week as more than 300 parents and teachers debated whether to continue supporting their [hunger strike](#) aimed at pressuring the Chilean government to reform the country's education system.

“We want the government to feel the pressure from you and from us, so we need a lot of support,” said Ms. Roque, who said she had been on an all-liquid diet for 11 days.

About three dozen high school and university students have turned to starving themselves to raise the stakes on the government of President [Sebastián Piñera](#). In the more than two months since education protests began in this country, students have organized rallies drawing up to 100,000 people, taken control of dozens of schools around the country, and forced hundreds more to stop holding classes. Their protests, and the issues driving them, have helped to sink the popularity of the president to its lowest level since he took office last year.

### Multimedia



Slide Show

[Student Protests in Chile](#)

[Enlarge This Image](#)

RECOMMEND

TWITTER

COMMENTS (20)

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS

SHARE



Log in to see what your friends are sharing on nytimes.com.  
[Privacy Policy](#) | [What's This?](#)

**Log In With Facebook**

### What's Popular Now

[The Wrong Worries](#)



[Public Views Congress as Top Culprit in Debt Debate, Poll Finds](#)



Ads by Google

what's this?

#### [Marketing MBA Programs](#)

for Busy Marketing Managers: Online Master's Degree (MBA) in Marketing!

[EducationDegreeSource.com/Free\\_Info](#)

#### [Thomson Reuters](#)

Get free intelligence on Deals Ownership and Private Equity.  
[dmi.thomsonreuters.com](#)

#### [University in Australia](#)

Find Out How You Can Study at an Australian University  
[StudiesInAustralia.com/University](#)

#### [Full time Executive MBA](#)

Improve your global management skills with a top MBA in France

[www.mba.audencia.com](#)

#### [¿Buscas Un Plan De Salud?](#)

Descubre Los Beneficios Del Plan De Salud De Cruz Blanca. ¡Aquí!

[CruzBlanca.cl](#)

Advertise on NYTimes.com

### TimesLimited E-Mail



MOST E-MAILED

MOST VIEWED

1. [Pogue's Posts: Five \(And Then Some\) Tech Tips for Travel](#)



2. [OP-ED COLUMNIST The Wrong Worries](#)



3. [PERSONAL HEALTH Ancient Moves for Orthopedic Problems](#)



4. [Even Marked Up, Luxury Goods Fly Off Shelves](#)



Ariel Marinkovic/European Pressphoto Agency

Police detained a student during a protest in Santiago on Thursday. Hundreds of students who tried to demonstrate were dispersed by the police. [More Photos »](#)

#### Readers' Comments

Share your thoughts.

[Post a Comment »](#)

[Read All Comments \(20\) »](#)

and decrying police repression.

“The whole country is watching this movement,” said Eduardo Beltrán, 17, a student at Instituto Nacional, where the students have seized control of the school. “The generation of our parents,” he said, “is watching us with hope, with faith that we have the strength to change this education system and make history.”

Even as Chile appears to the outside world to be a model of economic consistency and prudent fiscal management, there is deep discontent here with the neoliberal model and its economic consequences for those who are not part of the economic elite.

The sentiments have been building for years, but have begun spilling out only recently. In 2010, when Mr. Piñera became the nation’s first right-wing president since the dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, [young voters stayed on the sidelines](#), with few of them registering to vote. But last Friday, Mr. Piñera noted that Chileans were witnessing a “new society” where people “feel more empowered and want to feel they are heard.”

He said Chileans were rebelling against “excessive inequality” in a country that has the highest per capita income in Latin America but also has one of the most unequal distributions of wealth in the region. “They are asking for a more just society, a more egalitarian society,” he said, “because the inequalities we are living in Chile are excessive and, I feel, immoral.”

Still, he has also shown impatience with the protesters, saying this week that “there is a limit to everything.”

The education protests have become ever more creative. There are at least two or three people [jogging at all times](#) around La Moneda, the presidential palace, trying to complete 1,800 laps to symbolize the \$1.8 billion a year that protesters are demanding for Chile’s public education system. They carry flags that say “Free Education Now.”

Others have held a [mass kiss-in](#), [dressed like superheroes](#), [danced as zombies](#) to Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” and even staged fake group suicides where [they fall in a heap of bodies](#).

Students and teachers say they are determined not to repeat the mistakes of 2006, when a protest movement dubbed Los Pinguinos (“the Penguins”), named after the dark blue-and-white ties of some students’ school uniforms, created a crisis for former President Michelle Bachelet but ultimately failed to win deep reforms.

The protests then were over unequal funding and the quality of elementary and middle school education, a complaint that remains. But this year the focus has widened to include demands for a more affordable and accessible university system. General

If the Arab Spring has lost its bloom halfway across the world, people here are living what some have come to call a Chilean Winter. Segments of society that had been seen as politically apathetic only a few years ago, particularly the youth, have taken an unusually confrontational stance toward the government and business elite, demanding wholesale changes in education, transportation [and energy policy, sometimes violently](#).

On Thursday, in one of the longest and most violent days of protests yet, high school and college students clashed with the police, who used water cannons and tear gas to disperse hundreds of demonstrators. Tear gas blanketed pockets of Santiago, and nearly 900 people were arrested, with more than a dozen police officers and protesters injured. Demonstrators set up dozens of flaming barricades in the city, while people banged pots and pans outside their homes, in support of the student movement

5. [Disapproval Rate for Congress at Record 82% After Debt Talks](#)



6. [STATE OF THE ART  
Tiny Camera Performs Like a Pro](#)



7. [PRACTICAL TRAVELER  
How to Beat the High Costs of Dialing Abroad](#)



8. [STOCKS AND BONDS  
Stocks Plunge on Fears of Global Turmoil](#)



9. [36 HOURS  
36 Hours in San Sebastián, Spain](#)



10. [NEWS ANALYSIS  
Time to Say It: Double Dip Recession May Be Happening](#)

[Go to Complete List »](#)

[Show My Recommendations](#)



## New roles for transgender performers

ALSO IN MOVIES »

[Build the apocalypse inside your garage](#)

[Rachel Weisz exposing injustice on screen](#)

**nytimes.com**

MOVIES

ADVERTISEMENTS



[Harry Potter: the exhibition - NYTimes.com/Arts](#)

**Save up to 68% on home delivery of the IHT**  
and get free unlimited access to NYTimes.com

International Herald Tribune [Subscribe today](#)



Ads by Google

what's this?

### [Study in Germany](#)

Start your studies made in Germany

in English language!

[www.p2uc.org](#)

Pinochet decreed a system in 1981 that encouraged the development of private, [for-profit universities](#), which has led to high levels of student debt.

Before the Pinochet decree, there were eight state-financed universities and fewer than 150,000 university students in Chile. The state began reducing government funding for public universities, and dozens of private universities sprouted. Today there are 1.1 million students in Chilean universities, in a country of about 17 million people. More of those students are in private colleges than in public ones.

“There is a very chaotic and broken-down system,” said María Olivia Monckeberg, author of two books on Chile’s university system. “The students and their families are tremendously indebted,” she added, and educational “quality is totally debatable.”

That has led to some tough choices for many university students. “I’d like to study psychology, but I’m not sure I can because of the price,” said Ms. Roque, one of the hunger strikers. “I don’t have the means to pay for it.”

Mr. Piñera had promised to address university reform, but by late April student leaders had lost patience and began organizing protests. High school student groups and the country’s teachers’ association soon joined forces, demanding, among other things, that municipal grade schools, many of which are badly run down, be brought under the umbrella of the national Ministry of Education to ensure equitable funding and accountability.

The protests leaders are also pushing for constitutional change to guarantee free, quality education from preschool through high school and a state-financed university system that ensures quality and equal access.

Where students have taken control of public schools, they have organized security details and held out cans on streets asking for change to pay for food and supplies.

The three dozen or so students who remained on hunger strikes this week have huddled under wool hats and blankets in the unheated schools. At Ms. Choapa and Ms. Roque’s school, four hunger strikers, ages 17 and 18, camped on mattresses in a second-floor room. At another school, student leaders require people to wear hospital masks and disinfect their hands with gel before talking to three hunger-striking girls.

“For many years our parents’ generation was afraid to demonstrate, to complain, thinking it was better to conform to what was going on,” said Camila Vallejo Dowling, the leader of a university student group. “Students are setting an example without the fear our parents had.”

*Pascale Bonnefoy contributed reporting.*

A version of this article appeared in print on August 5, 2011, on page A4 of the New York edition with the headline: With Kiss-Ins and Dances, Young Chileans Push for Reform.

[Connect with The New York Times on Facebook.](#)

[COMMENTS \(20\)](#)

[SIGN IN TO E-MAIL](#)

[PRINT](#)

[REPRINTS](#)

#### More Headlines From Around the Web

[Sponsored Links](#)

CNBC

[Outrageous Workplace Perks](#)

BANKRATE.COM

[Bank has right to jack up CD fee](#)

ENTREPRENEUR.COM

[How to Fend Off a Cyber Attack](#)

BEAUTYLISH

#### Get Free E-mail Alerts on These Topics

[Demonstrations, Protests, and Riots](#)

[Politics and Government](#)

[Economic Conditions and Trends](#)

[Pinera, Sebastian](#)

Mary J Blige Releases New "My Life Blossom" Fragrance

Ads by Google

what's this?

**Official AMBA MBA Degree**

Improve your career w/ AMBA MBA.

Apply now for UK MBA Degree.

[www.RGU.ac.uk/MBA](http://www.RGU.ac.uk/MBA)

**INSIDE NYTIMES.COM**



HEALTH »



Centenarians Have Plenty of Bad Habits Too

TRAVEL »



36 Hours in San Sebastián, Spain

MOVIES »



Filmmakers Head to the Country

OPINION »

**Op-Ed:  
Vulnerable  
And Broke**  
Our immigration policy has created a class of people cut off from traditional legal and economic structures.

ARTS »



Populating the Landscape With Idealism

OPINION »



Disunion: 'The Lion of the Day'

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y. / Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Autos](#) | [Site Map](#)

© 2011 The New York Times Company | [Privacy](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Terms of Sale](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Advertise](#)