The political and ideological development of the Chilean right was shaped by the specific nature of the state. The post-1930 Chilean political system, symbolized by the *Estado de Compromiso*, was characterized by political bargaining between the parties, a process of industrialization, a slow but progressive consolidation of political democracy, increased state involvement in the economy, and the establishment of a relatively open system of negotiation between organized workers and the entrepreneurial sector. Since the nineteenth century and until the mid-1960s, the right was represented by the historical parties of Chile’s dominant classes, the conservatives and liberals. Until the late 1930s, both parties dominated the presidential election process. Between 1938 and 1948 however, the right was unable to win any presidential contest. Despite these setbacks, liberals and conservatives still obtained significant representation at the parliamentary level through the mobilization of local client networks and control of political resources, including economic power and vote-rigging.

Following dramatic increases in electoral suffrage from the 1960s onwards, the right’s twin strategy of clientelism and electoral manipulation began to falter, since it lacked the will and the means to appeal to a broader electorate. According to Pilar Vergara, both conservatives and liberals were unable to develop a ‘global’ project because the central ideological traits of the right in this political system were the absence of a developed theoretical position or doctrine and a distinctly pragmatic and defensive attitude towards politics. This weakness was the direct result of the right’s gradual secularization, caused by the progressive marginalization of traditional conservative Catholic thinking and the corresponding strengthening of Social Christianity. This development weakened the ethical component of the political thinking of the elites. The right thus eventually lost its capacity to use conservative Catholicism as the matrix for a global theory. With the loss of these ideological concepts, it developed into both a pragmatic and defensive force, adopting a strategy of *mal menor*. It became increasingly difficult to represent the interests of the country’s elites and to assume the defence of capitalism in universal terms.
The tactic of seeking parliamentary rather than presidential support, and the lack of an adequate programme and strategy, created a paradox. The right's defensive approach of forcing compromises in parliament eliminated the need for urban entrepreneurs and rural landowners to find alternative sources of representation. Instead, the political and economic elites chose to express themselves as a class-based group (representing their own very narrow interests) rather than as a multi-party, alliance-building organization. It was, then, also these very interests represented by the right which engendered its politically limited characteristics, through its incapacity to espouse programmes of modernization which would have led to the loss of rural domination and, thereby, an important base of electoral support.

The spectacular growth of the Christian Democrats in the late 1950s led to the dramatic collapse of the right. The still nascent Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC) succeeded in attracting both large sections of the rapidly growing electorate and a considerable part of the right's clientele. The reasons for this were threefold. First, the 1938 departure of the Conservative's Social-Christian tendency (which subsequently formed part of the PDC). Second, the succession of Pope John XXIII, who in 1961 adopted a structuralist approach to developmental issues. Third, President John F. Kennedy's 'Alliance for Progress', which sought to promote the ideals and institutions of social moderates in Latin America in an attempt to stem the growth of radical left-wing ideologies. Right-wing parties were thus abandoned, to the benefit of more 'moderate' left-wing alternatives such as the PDC. The right, therefore, became increasingly marginalized from its Catholic electorate. The final blow came in the 1964 presidential elections when the Catholic Church, through the pulpit, advised its constituents to abandon the Partido Conservador for the newly established PDC. In the 1965 Congressional elections, the right polled just 12.5 per cent of the vote and won only nine out of 180 seats in the lower house. The time was ripe for a change.

THE PARTIDO NACIONAL: FROM OLD RIGHT TO NEW RIGHT

After its cataclysmic 1964 presidential performance, the Chilean party right abandoned its traditionally pragmatic approach to electoral politics. In 1966, the Partido Conservador and the Partido Liberal, whose ideological differences had virtually disappeared,