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On July 30, Chileans went to the polls to cast ballots on 54 proposed constitutional reforms. Participation in the referendum was mandatory for the country's 7.5 million eligible voters. Citizens failing to vote may be fined up to the equivalent of $92. An apparent lack of voter interest was attributed to the fact that approval of the reforms seemed certain, since they were accepted in advance by the military regime and an opposition party coalition. The reforms include reduction of the presidential term of office from eight to four years, streamlining the process for future constitutional changes, removing a prohibition on marxist parties with the proviso that they renounce violence, changing the composition of the National Security Council to include four civilians alongside four armed forces officers, expansion of the Senate from 26 members to 38, reduction of presidential powers during states of emergency, and revocation of the president's power to dissolve the national congress. Late Sunday, with 94.6% of the total 6,694,788 ballots counted, officials said only 8.2% of the voters opposed the reforms. With 94.6% of the total 6,694,788 ballots counted, officials said 85.76% approved all amendments, 8.2% opposed the reforms, and the remainder cast blank ballots, destroyed their ballots, or avoided the balloting altogether. In a nationally televised speech, President Augusto Pinochet said the armed forces would respect the results of the referendum. Pinochet initially opposed the constitutional reforms. The general was defeated in another referendum last October in which voters massively rejected the government's proposal to extend his rule until 1997. The referendum results obligated Pinochet to call presidential and congressional elections for Dec. 14. The new government is to take office on March 11, 1990. In his speech, Pinochet called the referendum results a "second ratification" of the current constitution. "This decisive attitude of consensus and national unity represents the most adequate form of definitively consolidating the authentic democratic system, for which the majority of Chileans along with the armed forces have been fighting hard during these historic 16 years," he said. Christian Democrat party leader Patricio Aylwin, the leading opposition candidate for the presidency, said the referendum opened the way for further, more profound reforms to make the nation's constitution "fully democratic." According to Aylwin, "It will be necessary to put forth other reforms to improve the relationship between public authorities and public participation, especially in the Congress." Hernan Buchi, independent rightist candidate for the presidency, said the reforms are positive because they will permit the consolidation of democracy. (Basic data from Notimex, AP, 07/30/89; DPA, AFP, 07/30/89, 07/31/89)

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