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## 6 Accused in 1982 Poisoning Death of Chilean Leader

By [ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO](#)

RIO DE JANEIRO — A judge in Santiago ruled Monday that a former Chilean president, [Eduardo Frei Montalva](#), had been poisoned and charged three people connected with the Pinochet dictatorship with murder in the 28-year-old case.

Alejandro Madrid, a judge with the Court of Appeals, said there was evidence that Mr. Frei, who was president of [Chile](#) from 1964 to 1970, was poisoned with low doses of mustard gas and thallium in the months before [his death on Jan. 22, 1982](#).

The poisoning at the Santa María Clinic in Chile's capital compromised Mr. Frei's immune system, the indictment said, and made him too weak to survive surgery for a stomach ailment, which the original autopsy had ruled as the cause of death.

The indictment charged six people in connection with the killing. A doctor connected to Gen. [Augusto Pinochet](#)'s army, a former intelligence agent under the general and Mr. Frei's driver were charged with murder. Two doctors who were alleged to have falsified the autopsy report were charged with covering up the killing, and a third was charged as an accomplice.

Four of the suspects were in custody on Monday night and two had been released on bail.

At the time of his death, Mr. Frei, who at first had supported the dictatorship, had become the leader of the moderate opposition.

He entered Santa María Clinic in November 1981 for a stomach hernia operation. On Dec. 8, he was found in his room bleeding profusely and suffering from septic shock. Diagnosed with an intestinal obstruction, he was whisked into surgery. A few weeks later he died.

His family had long contended that he had been poisoned.

"There is no doubt that Pinochet ordered this murder," Álvaro Varela, a lawyer for the Frei family, said in an interview on Monday. "But there are more people involved with different degrees of responsibility and more leads to follow."

The revelations in the indictment came less than a week before presidential elections in which Senator Eduardo Frei, the son of the late president and a former president himself, is the candidate of the governing Concertación coalition.

The campaign of the opposition candidate Sebastián Piñera questioned the indictment's timing, saying it may have been intended to build sympathy for Mr. Frei, who is trailing in polls by some 10 percentage points.

Judge Madrid responded by saying that "justice has to be done when the time comes for it," and noting that when the investigation began in 2000, Mr. Frei was neither a candidate nor a senator.

Mr. Varela said the possibility that Mr. Frei had been murdered first came to light in 2000 when an anonymous caller told a friend of the Frei family that the former president had been poisoned.

Carmen Frei, a daughter of Mr. Frei and a former senator, said in an address to the Senate in 2001 that her father might have been injected with bacteria produced by Eugenio Berríos, a chemist who worked for the military intelligence service. A 2002 book by Jorge Molina, "Imperfect Crime," also alleged that Mr. Berríos had developed bacteria that were administered to Mr. Frei by intelligence agents. Mr. Berríos was killed in Uruguay in 1995.

A Chilean court agreed to exhume Mr. Frei's body in 2004. A new autopsy showed the presence of toxic substances and other differences from the original autopsy.

Mr. Frei's death "was due to the gradual introduction of non-conventional toxic substances," Judge Madrid told reporters on Monday.

*Pascale Bonnefoy contributed reporting from Santiago, Chile.*

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