

Did Salvador Allende commit suicide or was he killed?



History Internal Assessment 2026
Word Count: 1997

Section A:

The investigation will explore the question: Did Salvador Allende commit suicide or was he killed?

The first source is an excerpt from a 1973 Ms. Magazine article titled, "The Day my Father was Killed," by Beatriz Allende and Sandra Levinson. The purpose of the article is to tell the story of September 11 1973 to the readers. It is relevant to the investigation because it states that the President of Chile, Allende, fought valiantly, but was eventually cornered by the coup and shot to death. Because the article was co-authored by Beatriz Allende, this source has value because she is the daughter of Salvador Allende. Being the daughter of Allende, she would be familiar with the type of person her father is, and would have connections to the people that were present in the situation. The purpose of the document is valuable because the reason it was made was to explain how Allende died, which matches up directly with the research question. The content of the document, which states that Allende was cornered in the palace and shot by the opposition, is valuable because it provides evidence for the argument that Allende didn't kill himself. While Beatriz Allende, the author, is Allende's Daughter, which carries a lot of value, ultimately, it is also an immense limitation because children don't want their parents to be put in a bad light, such as killing themselves. In addition, parts of this source, like the battle information, are secondary sources as Beatriz and Sandra were not actually there to take an account for themselves. Because a part of the purpose is to rally the people of Chile against the "fascists" that took their country, the content and origin is limited because it is in their favor to embellish facts like how Allende died. The content is furthermore a limitation for historians because the amount of bullets in Allende's body are not consistent with any of the other accounts (even the ones on their side).

The second source is a memo from the Assistant for National Security Affairs of the United States, Kissinger, to the president of the United States, Nixon, for the purpose of informing him on the events that took place on Sept. 11 1973. It is relevant to the investigation because it states that a source reported to him that Allende committed suicide in his presidential palace. The date of this source is valuable because it is on the same day that the event happened, which leaves very little time for the information to get lost or embellished. The content of this document, which states that Allende killed himself, is very valuable because it directly answers the investigation question. The greatest limitation of the source is its origin. While the origin gives us a complete story, that narrative is from a secondary source that is cited to be “unconfirmed.” The limitation of the purpose is that the document was created by a US official that would not have wanted to put into writing, top secret or not, that the US backed coup had killed Allende because that would have been a disaster for foreign policy.

Section B:

On September 11th 1973, a military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet and backed by the United States of America, arrived at the Moneda Palace to take over the government from the democratically elected leader Salvador Allende. In the 1970s there was a landmark election in Chile where a politician, who was considered to be Marxist by the US, won the presidential election of Chile. While this era wasn't exactly the “red scare” times, the US was not going to stand still while their domain was being penetrated by a Marxist leader. After the coup, there was a controversy of the way that Allende died that was weaponised by both sides. The nationalists of Chile and the Marxists of South America used the narrative of the coup killing Allende as a battle cry to rally the people against the "fascists" that took over their country. The opposition to

the government used it as a sign of weakness of the leadership of Chile. Despite the convincing conspiracy supported by eyewitness and family testimony that the suicide of Salvador Allende was staged, ultimately, the dominant narrative of an Allende suicide is the most likely story due to a greater consistency and trusted sources on their side.

Some evidence suggests that Allende's death was caused by the soldiers of the coup due to their motivation to suppress the opposition and portray Allende's party as weak. After the insurrection had started and the leader, Pinochet, had become aware of the death of Allende, a reporter named Robinson Rojas speculated that "Pinochet and his General Staff must have known that the news of Allende's killing would make the workers' opposition much fiercer" (Robinson Rojas). There were many reasons that the US had labeled Allende as a Marxist. One strong point was that in the 1960s, Salvador Allende "serve[d] as president of the Latin American Organization of Solidarity" which was an organization in favor of Fidel Castro that was trying to infuse more Marxism into the continent of South America (Kyle Orton). As we know, the victors get to write the history. In this situation, it was in the coup's best interests to make it seem like Allende killed himself, even if he didn't, in order to suppress the fierceness of the workers and show the world that Marxist leaders such as Allende are cowards and will take the easy way out instead of giving everything they have to fight for their country. In Allende's last speech, just hours before he would die, he ensured the people of Chile that he would stand by them till his last breath, saying, "I will not resign. Placed in a historic moment of change I will pay with my life for the loyalty of the people" (Annie Murphy). In a testimony by a soldier fighting with Allende, collected by Sandra Levinson and Beatriz Allende to write the article "The Day my Father Was Killed," the soldier records that "the President directed the fight from the Red Room," and that "that's where he was hit by the first bullet." "[Then] he was hit a second

time ... [and then] riddled with bullets” (Sandra Levinson and Beatriz Allende). In his own words Allende says that he would do the opposite of what the resistance says he did. Mixed with the testimony of the soldier, these two sources paint a picture of Allende as a leader that is proud of his country that would fight to the bitter end and give his life for what he stands for, not a leader that would cower in a room and commit suicide as the oppositions forces closed in.

Nonetheless, there is stronger evidence to suggest that Allende’s death was a suicide. As more informed sources trickled in after the initial reactions to Allende’s death, the narrative of even Allende’s side shifted their story to align with the indisputable evidence that points to a suicide. In 2003 (30 years later), an Associated Press, El Universal article, titled, “Allende’s Daughter Admits to her Father’s Suicide,” Beatriz Allende, who had stood by her fathers dignity as a proud leader who would give anything for his country for 17 years, recounted to the reporter the last straw that overpowered the strong, personal, internal conflict she had with her father to make her come to the consensus that her father had killed himself, saying, “It was only after his body was exhumed that [I] acknowledged that he had committed suicide” (AP). In the same article listed above, the account of Patricio Gijon, the physician of Allende, tells a story of witnessing Allende killing himself, recounting, “the president [sat] down in an armchair and shot himself in the mouth with an assault rifle held between his legs” (AP). By multiple people on the side of Allende switching over, it shows that the initial reaction of many people was to deny such an unthinkable thing and disregard evidence in an attempt to make the situation into something they could comprehend. In a memo from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs, Kissinger, to the President of the United States, Nixon, Kissinger reports on the mental state of Allende on the day of September 11th 1973, saying, “A defiant and reportedly drunk Allende finally accepted defeat after Chilean Air Force planes bombed the Palace” (Government

Archive). In a follow up autopsy that was done in response to the May 31st article by Annie Murphy that speculated on the legitimacy of the account of Allende's death, ballistics expert David Prayer explains that "an assault rifle that was held between [Allende's] legs and under his chin and was set to fire automatically" (Portland Press Herald). Both of these sources are highly informed and paint a picture of Allende's last moments being driven by the fear of what could happen if he was captured by the people that wanted him out of power. They are also both consistent with the other sources on this side and contribute greatly to the narrative of Allende killing himself.

If you take into account the entire timeline of the situation, it is clear that the claim of Allende dying in battle is held together by more emotional and convenient evidence that seems to fit exactly with the propaganda Marxists would want to produce, while the common narrative of Allende killing himself has a wide variety of science and witness based evidence that all line up together. Despite the convincing conspiracy supported by the eyewitness and family testimony that the suicide of Salvador Allende was staged, ultimately, the dominant narrative of an Allende suicide is the most likely story due to a greater consistency and trusted sources on their side. But do we ever know the truth if the narrative is on the winners side?

Section C:

One challenge I faced in this investigation was perspectives vulnerable to misinformation. For example, the memo from Kissinger to Nixon, that supported the side of Allende killing himself, was made by a party that would be impacted negatively if it was found that the coup they were backing killed the president of Chile. My sources on the other side of the argument were challenging for this reason too; for example, in the article, "The Day my Father

Was Killed,” the document was primarily made to enrage the followers of Chile and Allende to keep them opposing the force that took him down. Because I ran into many political motives that corrupted the integrity of the perspectives of my sources, like the two autopsies, I realized that historians have to verify their evidence’s content with the content of other evidence to reveal their validity.

Because of the challenges I faced, I relied on corroborating evidence from both sides of the argument to create a verified account that I could make a claim off of. For instance, in the article written by Allende’s daughter, Beatriz, it states that he was shot many times all over his body. This story is not only contradicted by the autopsy on the opposing side, but also by their own account, deeming this perspective invalid. In addition, I used the article from Robinson Rojas that describes the intentions of the Chilean military to outrage the Chilean people, to verify the account of Allende’s Daughter decades later when she said that the death of Allende had been turned into a “legend” for people to rally around. It was difficult to reach the conclusion that Allende had killed himself because most of my evidence’s content had been made invalid by corroboration and most of their value was in their purpose. However, I was able to corroborate the account of Allende’s personal doctor with an autopsy done by a third party to reach my conclusion. This investigation has taught me to seek out evidence that can be used to corroborate my other sources.

Works Cited

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	A: 0 B: 0 C: 0	A: 1-2 B: 1-3 C: 1-2	A: 3-4 B: 4-6 C: 3-4	A: 5-6 B: 7-9	B: 10-12	B: 13-15
A. Identification and evaluation of sources A: 5-6 B: 7-9	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.	• The question for investigation has been stated. • The student has identified and selected appropriate sources, but there is little or no explanation of the relevance of the sources to the investigation. • The response describes, but does not analyse or evaluate, two of the sources.	• An appropriate question for investigation has been stated. • The student has identified and selected appropriate sources, and there is some explanation of the relevance of the sources to the investigation. • There is some analysis and evaluation of two sources, but reference to their value and limitations is limited.	• An appropriate question for investigation has been clearly stated. • The student has identified and selected appropriate and relevant sources, and there is a clear explanation of the relevance of the sources to the investigation. • There is a detailed analysis and evaluation of two sources with explicit discussion of the value and limitations of two of the		

				sources for the investigation, with reference to the origins, purpose and content of the two sources.		
B. Investigation B: 10-12	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.	• The investigation lacks clarity and coherence, and is poorly organized. Where there is a recognizable structure there is minimal focus on the task. • The response contains little or no critical analysis. It may consist mostly of generalizations and poorly substantiated assertions. • Reference is made to evidence from sources, but there is no analysis of that evidence.	• There is an attempt to organize the investigation but this is only partially successful, and the investigation lacks clarity and coherence. • The investigation contains some limited critical analysis but the response is primarily narrative/descriptive in nature, rather than analytical. • Evidence from sources is included, but is not integrated into the analysis/argument.	• The investigation is generally clear and well organized, but there is some repetition or lack of clarity in places. • The response moves beyond description to include some analysis or critical commentary, but this is not sustained. • There is an attempt to integrate evidence from sources with the analysis/argument. • There may be awareness of different perspectives, but these perspectives are not	• The investigation is generally clear and well organized, although there may be some repetition or lack of clarity in places. • The investigation contains critical analysis, although this analysis may lack development or clarity. Evidence from a range of sources is used to support the argument. • There is awareness and some evaluation of different perspectives. • The investigation argues to a	• The investigation is clear, coherent and effectively organized. • The investigation contains well-developed critical analysis that is focused clearly on the stated question. • Evidence from a range of sources is used effectively to support the argument. • There is evaluation of different perspectives. • The investigation argues to a reasoned conclusion consistent with the evidence & arguments provided.

				evaluated.	reasoned conclusion.	
C. Reflection A: 1-2 B: 1-3 C: 1-2	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.	• The reflection contains some discussion of what the investigation highlighted to the student about the methods used by the historian. • The reflection demonstrates little awareness of the challenges facing the historian and/or the limitations of the methods used by the historian. • The connection between the reflection and the rest of the investigation is implied, but is not explicit.	• The reflection is clearly focused on what the investigation highlighted to the student about the methods used by the historian • The reflection demonstrates clear awareness of challenges facing the historian and/or limitations of the methods used by the historian. • There is a clear and explicit connection between the reflection and the rest of the investigation.			

Comments:

A: 5 A question and two sources are provided. The relevance of both sources is clearly stated. There is analysis for both sources, and the analysis is tied to the investigation question.

B: 12 The investigation is generally clear and well organized. There is evidence and analysis to support the claims. There is awareness of and some evaluation of a different perspective.

C: 2 Methods used by the historian are clearly discussed. Challenges faced by the historian are mentioned but still need to be more developed.

Total: 19