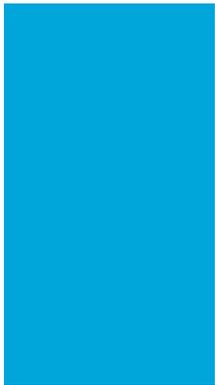


Center for Latin American Studies  
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The Chilean Presidential  
Elections of 2005–2006:  
More Continuity than Change

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October 2006

Paper No. 16

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# The Chilean Presidential Elections of 2005–2006: More Continuity than Change<sup>i</sup>

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October 2006  
Paper No. 16

<sup>4</sup> I would like to acknowledge my debt to the late Jaime Crispi, the former head of the Departamento de Estudios of the Dirección de Presupuesto under President Ricardo Lagos, and advisor to the Minister of Finance, who died on September 5, 2006, as a result of a tragic accident. Jaime was not only a great friend. Our discussions over the years also influenced and contributed to my work in every way, and indeed led to my initial research on Chile. As President Michelle Bachelet said at his memorial service: “He was a brilliant man, a great human being, and a man dedicated to a more just country.” This paper is dedicated to him.

I would further like to thank Jorge Arrate, Kent Eaton, Cristóbal Huneeus, and David Lehmann for their very helpful comments. The usual disclaimers apply.

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On the night of January 15<sup>th</sup>, Chile celebrated the election of its first female president, Michelle Bachelet. In fact, we could go as far as saying that Bachelet is the first woman to have been elected as president in the Americas based purely on her own merits and personal achievements. She is neither from a politically preeminent family with a well-known name, nor is she the widow of a former politician.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Chile, which has a reputation for being one of the more conservative countries in the Latin American region, elected not only a woman, but a fifty-four-year-old divorced, single mother of three children from two different fathers, one of whom she never married. In addition, Michelle Bachelet is an agnostic and a socialist with a militant past. Seen from the perspective of the United States, such a combination of characteristics is nothing short of extraordinary.

The administration of President Ricardo Lagos from 2000–06 was marked by some fundamental reforms and changes, of which these elections are perhaps the most visible manifestation, although a process of steady and continuous modernization has been underway in Chile since the early 1990s.<sup>2</sup> For a long time now the country has been the region's model for matters relating to economic and social development. Its transition to democracy in 1990 after the seventeen-year dictatorship of General Pinochet has furthermore been regarded by many analysts as an example of gradual and stable political development. With these elections, Chile may also move into the Latin American vanguard in terms of its sociocultural development, as candidates were asked about the possibility of instituting homosexual marriage and legalizing abortion during the campaigns, even though the country only instituted a divorce law in 2004.

Yet Michelle Bachelet is the embodiment of continuity as well as change: She is a member of Chile's Socialist Party, which has been part of the country's governing center-left coalition since Chile transitioned back to democracy in 1990; she was a high-profile minister of the Lagos government for four and a half years; and it is more than likely that her government will pursue policies that will continue the path laid out by the preceding administrations.

Bachelet defeated her opponent from the right-wing coalition, Sebastián Piñera, with a sound 53.5 percent of the votes in a run-off election, following a campaign that demonstrated all the strengths (and some of the weaknesses) of Chile's governing coalition as well as her own personal appeal and capacity.

Bachelet's personal popularity in the public opinion polls had ironically led to a weak campaign for the first round of the elections that took place on December 11, 2005. A certain degree of complacency, together with some misjudgments on the part of her campaign advisors, opened up a space for her right-wing opponents to pick up popular and independent votes. It was this first round that made these elections interesting, as it revealed Chile's current state of political affairs and increased the uncertainty of the election outcome.

The Chilean elections were further remarkable because they returned Chile's governing center-left coalition, the Concertación, to office for a fourth term, which will lead to a total period of uninterrupted government of twenty years. Conversely, the opposition parties on the right will have spent twenty years out of power. In Chile's case, this is an indication of the successful administration of the governing coalition and not a sign of corruption, electoral manipulation, or abuse of power. In the context of Latin America, such a long period of genuine electoral success is unprecedented.

This article first provides some background information on the candidacy of Michelle Bachelet and then presents a relatively detailed overview of the elections themselves. It goes on to discuss the continuities and changes that these elections represent, their significance in Chile's context of democratization, the position in which they have left Chile's opposition parties, and the likely impact of the election of a woman in a country that is frequently described as socially conservative. The article closes with a discussion of the policies that we can expect from Bachelet's government.

## 1. WHO IS MICHELLE BACHELET?

This question is warranted first because Michelle Bachelet's personal history has a strong symbolic and political significance for most Chileans and second because her professional career has not been as public as that of most political candidates when they run for office. Only six years ago, she was a virtually unknown figure in Chilean politics.<sup>3</sup>

Michelle Bachelet is the daughter of Angela Jeria, an archaeologist, and Alberto Bachelet, an air force general who served under President Allende and was imprisoned and tortured following the military coup of 1973. He died in prison in 1974 as a result of injuries sustained from torture. Bachelet herself became a militant socialist when she entered the university in 1970 to study medicine. She soon became associated with leading figures in the Chilean Youth Socialist Party.

Following her father's arrest and death, Bachelet chose not to go into exile in order to continue the now clandestine struggle against the dictatorship. Together with her mother, she, too, was arrested and tortured in 1975 at one of Chile's most infamous torture centers during the dictatorship, the Villa Grimaldi.

Due to her family's personal ties with the military, Bachelet and her mother were eventually released from imprisonment in 1975 and left the country for Australia. They later moved to East Germany where Bachelet continued to study medicine, married, and had her first child.

After her return to Chile, Bachelet specialized as a pediatrician and worked in an NGO which helped look after children who had in some way been affected by the human rights violations of the military dictatorship. With the return of democracy in 1990, she moved into public health administration as the immense challenges facing the new democratic government in this area became clear.

In 1996, she decided to formalize her intuitive knowledge of the military sector by undertaking courses in military affairs, first in Chile and then in Washington D.C. Apart from her interest in the subject for personal reasons, she very correctly perceived that the Pinochet

dictatorship had left Chilean society very divided and that these divisions hindered the country's further progress.<sup>4</sup> Upon her return from Washington, she moved to the ministry of defense to help modernize the military's health services and to coordinate their provision with that of the public health system.

When President Lagos assumed office in 2000, he appointed Bachelet Minister of Health and charged her with one of the most important reforms that his government was to undertake: the Plan AUGE, a comprehensive reform of the country's health insurance systems that was to guarantee a range of treatments to all Chileans, regardless of whether they were insured or not. He also asked Bachelet to eliminate the endless queues at doctors' offices in the public health service. Both tasks were difficult, high-profile, and politically explosive. Bachelet had to find a common ground for health reform, not only among the different opinions within the governing coalition, but also with the opposition on whose support any new legislation depended. Her efforts laid the foundation for a series of reforms, which were eventually implemented in 2004.

In the course of a cabinet reshuffle in early 2002, Lagos appointed Bachelet Minister of Defense, the first time a woman had held this position in Chile and in the Americas. Helped by her intimate knowledge of the military community in which she grew up as a child, she established excellent relationships with the military leaders who learned to trust and respect her. During her period as minister of defense, the thirty-year anniversary of the military coup was commemorated, important information was released on the human rights abuses during the dictatorship, General Pinochet and leading figures of the regime were prosecuted, and significant institutional reforms were agreed to that re-established the president as the head of the Chilean military. Bachelet's role as a mediator and facilitator in all of these processes was pivotal.

When, in addition to her role as a symbolic figure of reconciliation, Bachelet was photographed overseeing the military's rescue operations from an armored vehicle during intense flooding in Santiago in 2002, her recognition and approval ratings in the public opinion polls

skyrocketed.<sup>5</sup> Together with her personable style of politics and her genuine warmth of character, which touched both the public and those she worked with, it was this rapid rise in the opinion polls that catapulted Bachelet into the position of a presidential candidate even though neither her political experience nor her seniority in the coalition warranted such a move at the time.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. THE FIRST ROUND OF THE ELECTIONS: SURPRISE COMPETITION

Chile's political landscape is divided into two broad coalitions, the center-left governing coalition "Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia" (known as Concertación) and the right-wing Alianza. The Concertación comprises one party of the center, the Christian Democrats (Partido Demócrata Cristiano, PDC), and several left-wing parties including the Socialist party (PS).<sup>7</sup> The opposition, on the other hand, consists of the hard-line conservative Unión Demócrata Independiente (UDI) and the less conservative Renovación Nacional (RN). The 2005 presidential elections were further contested by a left-wing coalition, the Pacto Juntos Podemos Más,<sup>8</sup> comprising the Partido Humanista (PH) and the Partido Comunista (PC). The coalition ran on a platform that was largely critical of the performance of the Concertación governments so far and of the Chilean development model in general. Although its candidate, Tomás Hirsch, ran a very lively campaign (and considerably spiced up the television debates), he never had a real chance of garnering significant support.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 1 presents the different coalitions, candidates, and parties that participated in this election, together with a list of candidates who participated in primaries, which will also be discussed briefly below.

This first round of the presidential elections also coincided with congressional elections which replaced the entire House of Deputies and half of the Senate. This made for a more complex behavior on the part of parties and coalitions than would otherwise have been the case, the effects of which will be discussed where appropriate in the course of this paper. The detailed results of all of the elections (presidential, congressional) are presented in the Appendix.

**Figure 1**  
**Parties and Candidates in the First Round**

The Left	The Center-Left	The Right	
Pacto Juntos Podemos Más	Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (Concertación)	Alianza	
Tomás Hirsch	Michelle Bachelet	Sebastián Piñera	Joaquín Lavín
Partido Comunista	Partido Demócrata Cristiano Partido por la Democracia	Renovación Nacional	Unión Demócrata
Partido Humanista	Partido Radical Social Demócrata Partido Socialista		Independiente
No Primaries	Christian Democrat Primaries (held January 2005): Adolfo Zaldívar and Soledad Alvear Concertación Primaries (cancelled in May 2005): Soledad Alvear and Michelle Bachelet	No Primaries	

The campaigns leading up to these elections were rather contrasting: While the Concertación's campaign began with a process of primary elections which led to a long delay in the start of effective campaigning, Alianza began its campaign much too early and never seriously contemplated the possibility of holding primaries. Since primaries are still a developing phenomenon in Chilean politics, there is as yet no established timetable or method for holding them.

It can reasonably be argued that the Alianza's election campaign began almost immediately after Ricardo Lagos was elected to the presidency in 1999. From that moment forward, every move that his narrowly defeated opponent, Joaquín Lavín, made was calculated to prepare his candidacy for the 2005 elections.<sup>10</sup> While several analysts at the time declared that it would be impossible for Lavín to sustain campaign activity for a full six years, this is exactly what he set out to do.<sup>11</sup>

Part of his project was to show that as the elected mayor of the middle-income district of Central Santiago, he would be able to do as good a job as he did as mayor of the significantly wealthier district of Las Condes. However, despite several projects that attracted a lot of attention and hilarity, his performance as mayor of Central Santiago was widely perceived as mediocre.<sup>12</sup> Lavín also maintained continuous media coverage, partly through his indefatigable travels up

and down Chile, partly through his municipal projects, and partly through several calculated trips abroad, all of which achieved little, except some good photo opportunities.<sup>13</sup>

It was partly this role of undisputed leadership of the right that Lavín adopted during the Lagos administration that prevented the right-wing alliance from holding primaries for the 2005 elections. Despite his efforts, however, Lavín never really regained the momentum of his previous campaign in the 2005 elections. In 1999, when Chile was struggling with a severe economic downturn, he could successfully promote an agenda for political change (*El Cambio*).<sup>14</sup> But he could no longer make the same argument in 2005 at a time when the Chilean president was enjoying historically high approval ratings, even among his opponents. And as Lavín did not replace his slogan for change with an attractive and distinctive political program, his approval ratings, which peaked at 76 percent in June 2001 (see Figure 2 in the Appendix), declined steadily thereafter.

The Concertación, on the other hand, did hold primaries. The first was held within the Christian Democrat party and a second round was planned within the coalition. For many years, Soledad Alvear, who was Minister of Foreign Affairs under President Lagos and Minister of Justice during the previous government, had been the trump card of the Christian Democrat Party for the 2005 elections.<sup>15</sup> It was only when Michelle Bachelet's name was included in the opinion polls that another politician emerged as a potential presidential candidate for the Concertación. It was thus an expected state of affairs that the candidate of the Concertación would be determined through primaries between Bachelet and Alvear, which were scheduled for July 2005.

The first surprise of this election campaign came when the president of the Christian Democrat Party, Adolfo Zaldívar, unexpectedly challenged Soledad Alvear to intraparty primaries. This not only delayed the Concertación primaries, but also prevented Alvear from focusing exclusively on the intracoalition primaries. Zaldívar's candidacy also displayed the rift that exists between different factions of the Christian Democrats as well as being a manifestation of his own (unrealistic) political expectations.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, Michelle Bachelet ran unchallenged as the candidate of the Concertación's left-wing parties but was unable to campaign officially, neither for the Concertación primaries, nor for the presidency, as she was waiting for the Christian Democrats to define their candidate.

Although Alvear won the Christian Democrat primary hands down, her position was severely weakened by Zaldívar's challenge. Alvear's campaign thus never really took off, especially as Zaldívar, in his role as party chairman, was largely responsible for rallying support for her. Alvear, therefore, did not succeed in rebounding in the opinion polls: Although her personal popularity remained undiminished, the electorate clearly preferred Bachelet as a presidential candidate. Between January and May of 2005, the foregone conclusion was that Bachelet would win these elections in the first round with an absolute majority.

At the same time, Joaquín Lavín's poor and declining approval ratings in the opinion polls led to conflicts inside his coalition. As it became increasingly clear that he would not win the presidency, the candidates from his coalition began to concentrate on the congressional elections and on obtaining the largest possible majorities for their individual parties.<sup>17</sup>

The absence of primaries within the Alianza at an early stage of the election campaign and Lavín's disappointing performance opened up an opportunity for a rival candidate from the Renovación Nacional (RN), the less conservative right-wing party, to enter the fray in May of 2005.<sup>18</sup> Sebastián Piñera, a telegenic and charismatic self-made billionaire, represented a new style in Chilean politics, as voters sensed that he would run the country like a company chief executive.<sup>19</sup> While this style appealed to many who perceived the governing coalition as having become too stagnant and complacent in power—aided by Bachelet's own campaign which seemed to confirm this view—it also scared many others who were concerned that he would turn the country into a public limited company ("Chile S.A."), and use his political power to further his own business interests as well as those of fellow members of the business elite.<sup>20</sup>

Piñera presented himself as the candidate of the center, banking on the fact that voters would see him as a genuine alternative to the Concertación because he was not linked to the

Pinochet dictatorship or to the extreme right. This also represented a direct challenge to the potential candidacy of Soledad Alvear, who thus bowed out of the Concertación primaries in May 2005, leaving Bachelet as the only candidate of the governing coalition, which from that moment onwards could rally behind its candidate as a single unit.

There has been much speculation about whether Piñera did attract votes away from the Christian Democrat party from those people who regarded Michelle Bachelet as too unconventional a candidate.<sup>21</sup> More importantly, however, he took away at least half of Lavín's vote, splitting the right-wing alliance (see Figure 1 in the Appendix). This led to an intense rivalry between these two candidates, who spent most of their time trying to distinguish themselves from each other rather than from Bachelet.

Bachelet's own campaign undoubtedly suffered from a protracted start due to the primaries held by the Christian Democrats. Several other factors, however, also contributed to the slow start of her campaign, most notably, Bachelet's own hesitation over naming her political and technical campaign managers and teams and clearly defining her political program.

Bachelet's overwhelming lead in the opinion polls and the slow start of her campaign lulled her advisors into a false sense of security. Apart from her own campaign activities, there were few grassroots activities for most of the period running up to the election, especially if compared to the Lagos campaign, which, although also slow to take off, had faced tougher competition in 1999. Only the Centro de Estudios Públicos (CEP) survey results, which showed a decline in voting intention for Bachelet in November 2005, one month before the election, generated a greater sense of urgency and increased political activity among the Concertación's campaigners.

One of the difficulties that Bachelet had to resolve was the dilemma of how to present herself as a distinct political candidate who would not just be an extension of President Lagos, yet at the same time use the historically high approval ratings of the president to her advantage. Ironically, Bachelet's approval ratings declined after the entry of Piñera into the race, while those of the president continued to climb, and Bachelet's advisors feared that the president's

overwhelming statesmanship and charisma would overshadow her candidacy. Thus the incumbent president and the candidate spent most of 2005 carefully staging their mutual support while also emphasizing their dissimilarities.

A word should also be said about the television debates that took place during the first round of these elections. In total, three debates took place, all with a rather rigid format in which the candidates had to answer the same questions in a given time frame. These debates were essentially used by Piñera and Lavín to pitch themselves against each other, although they also served as a testing ground for Bachelet, whose capacity to articulate her ideas clearly needed some work but improved with time. Piñera emerged as the strongest candidate of the three in all of these debates while Lavín visibly became more nervous the more he slipped in the polls.<sup>22</sup>

One question that all the presidential candidates had to face was who commanded their coalitions. Since the two right-wing parties were each running their own candidates, this immediately raised the question of governability: Would the coalition unite behind whichever candidate made it into the second round and would personal rivalries interfere with the business of government? In the case of Lavín, it was even questionable whether he had the full support of his own party which was concentrating more on its own advantage in the congressional elections than on the campaign of its presidential candidate. In Bachelet's case, her leadership was also questioned, first, because her personal style contrasted so vividly with President Lagos' statesmanship and Piñera's image as a business executive; second, because Piñera deliberately attempted to cast doubts on her competence as a leader; and third, because of her own vacillations when it came to clearly defining her policies and team of advisors.

The main suspense of the first round of these elections therefore centered on which of the two right-wing candidates would make it to the second round, especially as opinion polls predicted a close result. In the end, Piñera beat Lavín with 25.4 percent versus 23.2 percent, while Bachelet won the first round with 45.9 percent of the vote, falling significantly short of the absolute majority that she had initially been expected to win. (Hirsch obtained 5.4 percent.)<sup>23</sup>

Thus, although Bachelet won this round by a large margin, her performance was nevertheless judged as weak. She did not obtain the absolute majority necessary to prevent a run-off election,<sup>24</sup> and she obtained fewer votes than her coalition in the congressional elections. (The Concertación obtained 52.6 percent of the seats in the Senate and 54.2 percent in the House of Deputies.) Also, the total proportion of votes that went to the right added up to 48.6 percent, which exceeded her own result, and even with the votes of the coalition led by Hirsch, she would only just make it past the 50 percent mark in the second round. Meanwhile, Hirsch was calling on his supporters to vote null and void in the second round, while his Communist Party coalition partners needed convincing to vote for Bachelet as the “lesser of two evils.”

This meant that, in the second round, Bachelet faced the challenge of winning over voters who had voted for the right in the first round. These votes could only come from the more right-wing but populist candidate Lavín, who had a personal following in Chile’s low income districts (*poblaciones*), where people would not be prepared to vote for a different right-wing candidate, especially not a businessman.

It is not the purpose of this article to analyze the results of the congressional elections in detail.<sup>25</sup> However, a few points should be highlighted here, as they are also relevant for the context of the presidential elections. First of all, we should note that the Concertación increased its majority of both deputies and senators, which improved the potential effectiveness of Bachelet’s government. Second, we should note the political shift within the Concertación: For the first time since 1990, the Christian Democrats were no longer the largest block within the Concertación. In this sense, these elections represented a swing to the left and perhaps also indicated an erosion of support for the party of the center.<sup>26</sup> And third, despite Piñera’s electoral triumph over Lavín, his party did not benefit from his success as much as could have been expected. Although the RN gained some seats, the UDI remained the leading party of the right. We will return to the relevance of these results in subsequent sections of this article.

### 3. THE SECOND ROUND OF THE ELECTIONS: “WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS”

The first and second rounds of the presidential elections were separated by one month. During the first two weeks, both candidates committed some gaffes and the tone of the campaign became a little aggressive.<sup>27</sup> However, Piñera still initially appeared confident and strong, although he clearly found it difficult to convince voters that his coalition was still intact after the display of rivalry between himself and Lavín during the first round. Although Lavín kept his promise and officially campaigned alongside his former rival in an attempt to display the unity of their coalition, many of the UDI’s leading figures appeared to have gone on holiday, leaving Piñera without the support of the largest and most organized party in his coalition and highlighting the fundamental lack of cohesion within the Alianza. In the second two weeks of the second round, his campaign ran out of steam (and apparently also money), and the fissures in his coalition became increasingly evident as many of its leading figures almost disappeared from the media coverage.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, Bachelet reorganized her team: The campaign managers who had (mis)managed the first round of the elections faded out of the limelight to make way for two seasoned Concertación politicians: Sergio Bitar and Andrés Zaldívar, who stepped in to coordinate and refocus her campaign.<sup>29</sup> Other Concertación heavyweights also made a concerted effort to back Bachelet in public displays of support, including the former presidents Frei and Aylwin, and Luisa Durán, the wife of President Lagos. Only Soledad Alvear remained somewhat on the sidelines, although officially she, too, was part of Bachelet’s team.

President Lagos himself threw his full weight behind Bachelet’s campaign. The number of joint appearances with his candidate increased and the tone of his public interventions changed. During the first round he had repeatedly said that Bachelet was doing very well by herself (“*Ella se defiende de lo más bien solita!*”). But now, as Piñera was attempting to increase his vote from the center and from disaffected Christian Democrats by describing his motivations and values

as “Christian humanist,” in an oxymoronic contrast to Bachelet’s agnosticism, President Lagos aggressively asked where this Christian humanism was when it came to voting for legislation. (“*Dónde está su humanismo cristiano a la hora de votar?*”). With this question, President Lagos raised an important issue, which will be discussed further in the following section.

As Bachelet’s campaign for the second round thus finally gathered force with the help of her coalition’s key political figures, Piñera’s lost its momentum. The turning point was undoubtedly the television debate between the two candidates, during which it became clear how much Bachelet had grown into her role.<sup>30</sup> She appeared much more confident and articulate, answered all the questions in the allotted time, and also projected warmth and as much sincerity as is possible given the very rigid format of such debates. Piñera, on the other hand, appeared aggressive, cold, and rather nervous (displaying many twitches, shoulder jerks, and a fixed smile), and did not once complete his answers in the available time.

In the end, Bachelet won the second round of these elections with 53.5 percent of the vote, leaving Piñera with 46.5 percent.<sup>31</sup> While this certainly represents a good result for Bachelet, especially because it beats the Concertación’s vote in the House and the Senate, it is not a spectacular one. Since President Frei won his elections in 1994 with 58 percent (primarily due to a very divided opposition), Chilean presidents inevitably face comparison with this result.

This election result also shows that Piñera was unable to win over the UDI’s popular vote, which Lavín had built up in the poblaciones, despite the latter’s efforts to be seen campaigning with his former rival. While these people would have voted for Lavín personally, they were not prepared to transfer their vote to another candidate, especially not a businessman like Piñera.

#### 4. REMARKABLE CHANGES AND REMARKABLE CONTINUITIES

Several articles on the Chilean political system since 1990 have centered on the subject of continuities and change.<sup>32</sup> While this repetition of a theme may indicate a lack of originality on the part of analysts (myself included), it also indicates a genuine pattern. In these elections the

changes have certainly been exciting. However, overall these remarkable changes are outweighed by the rather less exciting, but probably more significant, continuities that Bachelet's candidacy represents.

The most important change is the fact that Chile elected a woman, and at that, a woman with an unusual set of personal characteristics for a president. Since an entire section will be devoted to the discussion of this point below, I will merely emphasize its powerful symbolic value here. Few people could be considered to bridge the gap between Chile's recent authoritarian past and its present so effectively. This could have important implications for the pace with which the reforms that President Lagos initiated with regard to Chile's military will continue under the Bachelet administration and for how the issue of human rights violations under the military are dealt with.

The second important change brought about by these elections is that the Concertación achieved a majority in both houses of Congress. This is as much a result of these elections as of the constitutional reform implemented by the Lagos administration which abolished the non-elected senators that formed part of the Pinochet legacy. This legacy had skewed political power in the Senate to the right during most of the years that the Concertación has spent in government, thus allowing the opposition to block any legislation it did not agree with.

A third significant change, also attributable to legislation implemented by the Lagos government, was that money mattered less in these elections than in previous ones, especially if we compare the 2005 elections with those of 1999.<sup>33</sup> According to the official statistics, none of the candidates overspent the limits set by the new legislation, although the legislation does not require a transparent declaration of the origin of the funds. Piñera claimed that he financed almost the entire campaign out of his own pocket, while Bachelet stated that she had taken out a loan to finance the campaign based on the estimated state funding that she would be entitled to given voter intentions. Certainly to the naked eye it seemed as though much less was spent on the

campaigns in 2005 than in 1999, and what was spent appeared more equally spread between the competing coalitions. In 1999, Lavín's campaign organizers had the entire country painted blue and yellow, while his smiling face was attached to every lamppost—in contrast to the campaign of Ricardo Lagos, which was noticeably more modest. In 2005, the painting of walls was actually prohibited and the prohibition somewhat complied with.

An important and most welcome change that characterized these elections was the now definite disappearance of the former dictator General Pinochet from the Chilean political scene. During the 1999 elections he was still officially a senator for life as well as the recently retired head of the armed forces. The disputes over his arrest in London and the subsequent debates over whether he should and could be brought to justice in Chile meant that even though he no longer played an active part in politics, he was still very much in the news and constituted potentially explosive material for any politician, as Chilean society is still very divided over how best to deal with the country's outstanding human rights issues.<sup>34</sup> Ricardo Lagos and Joaquín Lavín thus studiously avoided the subject as much as possible in 1999.

By 2005, Pinochet, however, no longer mattered at all. His health had declined to a point where he was no longer able to appear in public. The most recent and comprehensive report on his dictatorship's human rights violations had further discredited him by adding more detailed information to what was previously known, as had the investigations of these same violations by Judge Juan Guzmán. And finally, the disclosure of information on his corrupt financial dealings and the associated investigations by Judge Sergio Muñoz, had stripped him of most of his support even among the political right, which, although prepared to turn a blind eye to his human rights violations, was not prepared to forgive corruption.<sup>35</sup>

Pinochet's disappearance from Chile's political scene—even though he is still very much present in its news and also in the historical consciousness of voters—meant that politics could move on to new subject areas. Arguably the biggest changes occurred already under

President Lagos who was able to push through several significant reforms, which would have been unthinkable if Pinochet had still been a politically relevant factor (such as the removal of designated and life-long senators, or the reestablishment of the presidential right to dismiss military commanders).

However, the subject of Pinochet and the military dictatorship embodies both change and continuity in the context of these elections. While his now complete loss of political support constitutes a change, there can also be no doubt that the 1988 plebiscite in which Chileans voted for or against the dictatorship still largely determines voting patterns today, thus constituting a significant factor of continuity in Chilean politics. Such continuity is likely to persist while the key figures of all political parties are still associated with either the struggle for or against the dictatorship.

This first important continuity further persists because of another legacy of the dictatorship: young adults who come of age have to register in order to vote. Although they are not obliged to register, once they have done so, they are obliged to vote.<sup>36</sup> An extraordinarily high proportion of young Chileans choose not to register, either because they are politically apathetic or because they do not wish to be bothered with the requisite administrative procedures, and therefore do not participate in the electoral process. This influences the outcomes of elections as the electorate has changed little since the plebiscite: It has just grown older.

However, the most obvious and important continuity that results from these elections is that the Concertación stays in government for a fourth and consecutive term. In the context of Latin American democracy, this is nothing less than remarkable.<sup>37</sup> While this performance is partly attributable to the persistence of voting patterns described above, it must also be attributed to the remarkable progress Chile has made over the last sixteen years: The country's consistently high economic growth rates combined with a strong focus on social policies have produced the most significant reduction of poverty rates seen in Latin America over the last decades and have led to widespread acceptance of Chile's development strategy.<sup>38</sup>

Although there is some voter fatigue with the Concertación, this is offset by the fact that different presidents from different parties within the coalition take office.<sup>39</sup> And voting for a woman this time around definitely gave voters the feeling that they were voting for change, even though the political coalition remained the same.

A number of analysts have argued over whether the Chilean political spectrum can best be defined by its historical division into thirds (right-wing, center, and left-wing), or whether the plebiscite and Chile's binominal voting system have generated a so-called sociohistorical shift (in the Lipset and Rokkan sense),<sup>40</sup> which simply divides the electorate into halves (a center-right and a center-left coalition).<sup>41</sup> These two views do not necessarily contradict each other, especially since this election has deepened a trend that began during the 1999 Lagos and Lavín campaigns: The political ground in Chile has clearly shifted towards the center as Socialists and the right wing have endeavored to make themselves more electable. This means that while the thirds may continue to exist (broadly speaking), the center has simply split roughly down the middle, creating two large voting blocks.

This shift towards the center ground is making it increasingly difficult for parties and candidates to differentiate themselves from each other, especially as the political debates between the candidates rarely moved away from broad generalizations and included almost no real debate of fundamental issues. This process has been underway since before 1990 as the Concertación set itself up to convince the electorate that it would govern responsibly and not endanger economic stability. So while the Concertación has generally presented itself as a responsible conservative coalition with an emphasis on social policy, exemplified by the campaign slogan of President Lagos "Equitable Growth" (Crecer con Igualdad), in 2005, it was now the right that turned equality into their leitmotif. So, rhetorically, at least, both coalitions have now met in the center, although a closer look at the political programs of the candidates indicates to what extent their practical policies would differ.

Broadly speaking, the campaign program of the three main candidates covered similar topics, such as employment, healthcare, education, pension reform, public security crime, and the environment, although they were discussed with different levels of detail and emphasis.<sup>42</sup> There are, however, clear differences in language: The programs of Piñera and Lavín were more oriented towards business and contained very specific measures that would address their concerns. Bachelet's program, on the other hand, is clearly based on the policies of the previous Concertación governments as she promised a continuation of successful policies and improvements of others, such as more targeted social programs (e.g. to help young people insert themselves into the labor market), and uses language that spells continuity (e.g. "*continuiremos avanzando, profundizaremos, expandiremos, reforzaremos*").<sup>43</sup> But overall, the political programs of all the candidates actually contained very few innovative ideas and no fundamental changes. They basically reiterated issues that the coalitions have been fighting over since 1990.

To an outside observer, Chilean politics can appear strangely nonconfrontational, and the confrontations that do occur are generally not about substantive issues. Chilean voters do not reward negative campaigning, so although there was some bickering among the candidates, there was no serious mud slinging. Strong language, personal disqualifications, and attacks were largely avoided, which is also why the few slips in this regard received so much attention.<sup>44</sup>

In particular, Chilean election campaigns do not discuss the past voting records of the candidates' political parties in detail.<sup>45</sup> To a North American observer, this may seem surprising after having observed endless U.S. campaigns in which candidates are constantly judged on how they voted on particular legislative proposals. Although individual politicians in Chile may make comments that refer to past voting records (such as Lagos' question "Where's their Christian Humanism when it comes to voting?"), the absence of an in-depth discussion allowed the opposition to hijack the political agenda of the Concertación in both these and the previous elections by claiming that they were the coalition which would finally overcome poverty and inequality, even though they have made every attempt in the past to block legislative projects that were designed to establish more equal opportunities.

Two good examples of this point are the health and the labor reforms implemented by the Lagos government: The health reform initially proposed a Solidarity Fund and differential value added taxes that would have given the government the means to establish what would have amounted to practically universal health care for all Chileans, regardless of their income or insurance status. The opposition, however, vetoed both proposals, leaving the government with a much watered down reform and more limited health service guarantees. Similarly, the original labor reform proposed by the Lagos government included measures that would have strengthened the rights of workers by improving the bargaining power of unions. Again, the opposition blocked these proposals.<sup>46</sup>

Ironically, although the government did not manage to implement the legislation it wanted, both the labor and the health care reforms were presented as key achievements of the Lagos administration during the election campaign, while the opposition's role in blocking some of their most important aspects, which would have led to greater equity for Chilean voters, was not mentioned. Instead of challenging the opposition directly, the government employed the same indirect tactic that it had used in 1999: It proposed legislation that was designed to call the opposition's bluff. In this case, it proposed a reform of subcontracting legislation and of the binominal electoral system, fully expecting the opposition to block these reforms, in order to expose its double standards on the issues of greater equity and increased democracy.

Such a strategy shows that the government is by no means a neutral actor in Chilean election campaigns. In these elections, as in previous ones, many of its senior officials were involved in designing Bachelet's political program, while the Concertación's election campaign was mostly organized by its civil servants, often during office hours, which led the right to accuse Bachelet of abusing state resources. It is during an election campaign that it becomes very evident that the Chilean civil service is not a body of independent officials but highly politicized and linked to the governing parties. This is epitomized by the high-profile events organized in the center of Santiago which bring an army of civil servants out into the streets. Similarly,

government and municipal civil servants also organize door-to-door campaigning and local events. It takes the opposition significantly more effort and money to mobilize a similar amount of people.

The involvement of the government itself at all levels of the campaign illustrates the extent to which the Concertación has an inherent advantage in all elections, which partly makes up for the lower levels of campaign funding it raises. Like all incumbent governments, the Concertación can manipulate the public agenda and mobilize public resources much more easily than the opposition. Although it is impossible to judge to what extent such maneuvers end up influencing the electoral outcome, it has to be emphasized that together with the government's other natural advantages, such as the higher public profile of its ministers, they amount to a powerful barrier to entry that makes it more difficult for the opposition to obtain power. This leads us to the important question of whether the Alianza is ever going to be able to turn itself into a government.

## 5. THE DILEMMA OF THE ALIANZA

These elections have shown very clearly that the Alianza, Chile's right-wing coalition, is in urgent need of redefinition, reorientation, and rejuvenation. This task is a pressing one as a united and credible opposition is as necessary to a functioning democracy as is a coherent government. It is also a difficult task, because the right is divided not only by value issues (e.g. divorce and abortion among others), but also by their different histories, particularly with regard to their positions vis-à-vis the Pinochet dictatorship. While the UDI was born out of the *gremialista* movement, which provided the intellectual foundations of the Pinochet regime, and is thus closely linked to the dictatorship (both in terms of the individual histories of its members as well as its basic *raison d'être*), the RN is founded on more liberal principles, and its leaders were not as closely linked to the Pinochet administration.

The Alianza is clearly dominated by the UDI, which is the party with more members, more resources, and a disciplined organizational structure. The RN has always been the junior

coalition partner, and the UDI has treated it as such. However, the politicians from the RN are generally more popular than those of the UDI, who have little broad appeal among the electorate. As was discussed above, even though Piñera beat Lavín in these recent elections, this victory was not strong enough to establish him as the undisputed leader of his coalition. So although it is likely that he will remain a key figure within the coalition, it is not Piñera who will be able to cajole and bully the Alianza into making the necessary changes. The question of leadership is an important one for the Alianza, especially as voters rightly perceive that the coalition is basically managed by a small hermetic circle of leading figures from the UDI who are generally unpopular with the electorate and which neither Lavín nor Piñera could control.

Joaquín Lavín has, for the moment at least, run out of political steam. His steadfast refusal to engage in any debate of substance (whether on historical issues or on matters of policy making), his mediocre performance since the 1999 election campaign, and above all his defeat in the first round of this election have undermined his standing both within his own party and his coalition. He may retire to private life, which could open the way for a new leader.

The subject of leadership is one of the most problematic issues that the right has to face. An analysis of the public opinion polls from the CEP reveals two fundamental problems: First of all, most of the positively evaluated public figures are from the Concertación. Out of the top ten political figures with positive or very positive approval ratings, eight were from the governing coalition. And if we look at the top twenty, only six are from the Alianza (four from the RN and two from the UDI). The government is thus providing a fertile ground for its politicians (most especially its ministers) to achieve public recognition as well as popularity. Given the prominence of the executive power in Chile, it is very difficult for members of the legislature to achieve prominence. The only other figures from the right who have a chance of gaining popularity are the mayors of large cities or important districts (e.g., Lavín, who was the mayor of Central Santiago, and Jacqueline van Rysselberghe, who is currently the mayor of Chile's second largest city, Concepción).

Second, the leading figures of the Alianza, if they are positively evaluated at all, generate almost as much, if not more, rejection as they do approval. This represents a particularly serious problem for the UDI, three of whose leading figures (Joaquín Lavín, Pablo Longueira, and Jovino Novoa) generated rejection rates of over 40 percent in November 2005. These figures show that the Chilean electorate is not very forgiving of public figures who associated themselves closely with General Pinochet in the past. During the 2005 elections, Lavín's high disapproval ratings clearly presented a limitation for his candidacy. However, at present it seems highly unlikely that the leadership of the UDI will collectively resign in order to make way for younger leaders who are not associated with the dictatorship.

Apart from the issue of leadership, the right also has to face the problem that its political program still does not appeal much to the Chilean electorate. Despite Lavín's heroic efforts to modernize the agenda of his party and coalition; despite his attempts to drag a reluctant party leadership towards the center ground of the political spectrum; and despite his successful efforts to build up popular support in the poblaciones (creating the UDI Popular), the electorate remains skeptical of the sincerity of these efforts.

As for the Alianza's economic policy, the right can no longer claim ownership of the Chilean development model, as the Concertación has been more successful on all counts at running the economy than the Pinochet dictatorship was before it. Also, since the Concertación has continued essentially the same economic policies as the dictatorship, albeit with a greater emphasis on social policies, it is hardly surprising that most Chilean voters find it hard to tell the political parties apart as far as their economic agenda goes.

Furthermore, the right cannot credibly claim that it would resolve the problems of inequality and poverty better than the Concertación (as it did during this recent campaign), simply because it has spent the last sixteen years blocking any legislation that could have a significant impact on the fundamentally inequitable structures in education, health, employment, and pensions that characterize the everyday lives of most Chileans. And although this point is almost always swept

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under the carpet during the election campaigns, this does not mean that voters are not aware of the issue.

As far as other issues are concerned, although the electorate is clearly worried about increasing crime rates and generally believes that the right would do a better job in terms of enforcing law and order, this does not appear to be an issue that is important enough to sway an election. And as for issues related to family and moral values, the right is also increasingly out of touch with an electorate in which more than half of all babies are born out of wedlock (see next section).

So the right urgently needs a more progressive agenda, one that resonates with an electorate, whose views and values have changed very rapidly in recent decades. Such an agenda should include progressive issues such as environmental concerns. And it should also be prepared to show the electorate that the right is genuinely prepared to support social legislation that would advance equality. The upcoming reform of the pension system would provide such an opportunity, but so far, the Alianza is showing all the signs of not having learned its lesson.

For the purpose of redefining the Alianza, the more moderate RN would clearly have to take on a more leading role in the coalition. However, this not only means overcoming the deep historical rift that separates the two parties but also garnering more electoral support in order to shift the balance of power within the coalition. This in turn would require a more efficient and widespread level of party organization that the RN still lacks.

So in the near term, the future electoral prospects of the Alianza remain bleak. At present, no political leader from the coalition has the clout to undertake the necessary reforms and enforce the requisite party and coalition discipline that would be required to win an election. Without leadership and the unifying force produced by having to govern, the Alianza's political strategy at the moment is anything but proactive, and consists mainly of hoping that a combination of extremely unpropitious circumstances (e.g. an economic crisis combined with corruption, a poor track record of government, and the lack of a popular candidate) will eventually weaken the Concertación sufficiently for the electorate to desire a change of government.

## 6. ELECTING A WOMAN IN A “SOCIALLY CONSERVATIVE” COUNTRY

Since her election as president, Michelle Bachelet’s personal background and history have attracted a lot of media attention, especially in the United States, where it currently appears impossible that a person with her combination of characteristics could ever be elected president. The analysis in newspapers across the United States has highlighted the fact that she is female, agnostic, a single mother, and a socialist.<sup>47</sup> In particular, Bachelet’s election has been interpreted as part of a more widespread “swing to the left” across Latin America, which is viewed with emotions ranging from paranoid fear to undisguised glee, depending on the political preferences of the analyst. Such analysis deals in stereotypes and is obviously designed to grab headlines, especially through its tendency to throw all left-wing Latin American governments into the same pot.

However, Bachelet’s election has also incited much debate among academics who are discussing the question of how conservative Chile really is.<sup>48</sup> I would argue that the attitudes of the average Chilean have for a long time now been much less conservative than Chilean politics, and than the political elite in particular. The Catholic Church in Chile exercises a powerful influence over politics (partly through its links with the Christian Democrat party and the right-wing parties, especially the UDI). However, only 18 percent of the Chilean population actually consider themselves to be practicing Catholics. The combined vote of these three parties in the Congress therefore far exceeds the proportion of the population that holds conservative views.

For many years the Catholic Church blocked legislation on divorce—even though an increasing number of Chilean marriages were being annulled—and it has consistently opposed sex education at schools, contraceptives, and public campaigns advocating the use of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS. For many years it even blocked legislation that would allow pregnant girls to continue their high school education. Until 1999, adolescent girls who became pregnant were routinely expelled from state schools to set an example for their fellow students, which literally preprogrammed social and economic devastation as it created a very high number

of uneducated single mothers. Private and subsidized schools, and especially schools run by the Church, still routinely engage in this practice. Most recently, the Church has attempted (unsuccessfully) to block legislation on the morning after pill.

Several indicators show that Chilean society is very rapidly becoming much less conservative. The 2002 census data show that more couples are living together without being married, that marriage and fertility rates are declining as couples are getting married later, and that the proportion of children born out of wedlock is increasing, as are divorces (or annulments as they were called prior to the 2004 legislation).<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, opinions are fast becoming very progressive: Only 21 percent of Chileans believe that couples who live together should be married, only 44 percent agree with the statement that couples who want to have children should marry, 58 percent believe homosexuality is as legitimate a sexual preference as any other, 64 percent think that same-sex partners should be able to formalize their relationships through some form of civic union that gives them the same rights and status as married couples (34 percent are even in favor of giving them full marital status including the right to adopt children), and over 80 percent agree with the government’s decision to make the morning after pill available to Chilean women.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, one could also argue that the conservative position of the Catholic Church, now so at odds with average public opinion in Chile, has caused a backlash. Most importantly, the proportion of Chileans who consider themselves practicing Catholics has declined steadily. It is also clear from the opinion polls quoted above that fewer people identify with the Church’s conservative doctrine on issues relating to family and marriage. And furthermore, policies such as preventing children from receiving sexual education at school (let alone being given access to condoms in public places) has most likely contributed to the high number of teenage pregnancies recorded in Chile, which in turn increases the proportion of births out of wedlock (and presumably also the tolerance of such situations). Thus the Chilean government, which is supposed to be separate from the Church, has allowed itself to be held to ransom by the Church’s

threat of public protest, and for a long time did not keep up with public opinion in its legislative process, especially since it could count on the conservative right to block any progressive legislation on behalf of the Church.<sup>51</sup>

The election of a president with Bachelet's personal characteristics should not come as a surprise to any analyst who considers the facts and the opinions displayed by Chileans in numerous surveys. Throughout her campaign, Bachelet very effectively used the fact that she was a woman, first of all in order to convince Chileans that her election would produce a different style of politics (more inclusive, conscious of voter priorities, and focused on the individual rather than on statesmanship); second to distract them from the fact that they were voting for the same governing coalition for the fourth time in a row; and last but not least in order to make female voters identify with her. Her campaign advertisements frequently showed her as a mother, running a household, and multitasking in an effort to combine the demands of a family with a career. Chilean women, especially in the poblaciones, perceived her as being "one of us."<sup>52</sup> That Bachelet's emphasis paid off is shown by the fact that a majority of women voted for her in contrast to the 1999 election, when a majority of women voted for Lavín. Such a shift in the voting pattern illustrates the degree to which women identify with their new president.

As for the frequently asked question of whether having elected a female president will have an impact on Chilean women, the answer must undoubtedly be yes. In particular, Bachelet has kept her campaign promise of instituting gender parity in her cabinet and other top government positions. Given that government ministers are the most likely candidates for future presidents and turn into the most high profile politicians, this will undoubtedly have far-reaching consequences and will change the political scene in Chile. An important question in this context is whether the political parties will follow her lead and institute the principle of gender parity over time. One interesting development since her election has been that in two major parties, women have run as candidates for the presidencies of their party.<sup>53</sup> The key question, however, is whether in future congressional elections more female candidates will run, as at present the proportion of female senators and deputies is still very small, even by Latin American standards.

And, of course, the more women in Chile enjoy public recognition, the more they are likely to feel inspired to push further in their professional lives. President Bachelet has further proposed policies specifically aimed at helping women who would like to join or rejoin the labor force and who have difficulty juggling the demands of a family with those of a career (e.g. professional training for women, subsidized childcare facilities, and a greater number of part-time employment contracts). At the very least, this is likely to increase participation rates among lower income segments of the labor force, where women are most discriminated against.

One thing is certain, however: Bachelet's election is perhaps the best illustration of Ricardo Lagos' claim that his government expanded the frontier of what is possible in Chile ("*Corrimos la frontera de lo posible.*").<sup>54</sup> There can be no doubt therefore that Bachelet's election will have a positive impact on the collective consciousness of women in Chile. However, the extent of this impact is impossible to predict and probably depends to a large extent on the success of Bachelet's presidency and the performance of her ministers, in particular of her female ministers, which leads us to the question of what we can expect from her administration.

## 7. EXPECTATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In any discussion of what can be expected from President Bachelet's government, we have to begin by pointing out that while the previous two Concertación governments faced six-year terms, Bachelet's government will only have four years, and she will not be reelectable.<sup>55</sup> This means that in order to have a lasting impact on her country's development, President Bachelet will have to act decisively and quickly. During her election campaign, Bachelet promised to make politics in Chile more participatory. However, participatory politics requires time for lengthy discussions that incorporate all social sectors, and time is precisely what Bachelet does not have. In her handling of this contradiction lies the potential degree of success of her government, including the question of whether she will be able to modernize the figure of the presidency, which after Lagos has become even more personalized and rooted in a style of traditional statesmanship.

Chile's most pressing unresolved issue now is the inequality that marks its society like a scourge and which the Concertación governments have previously been unable to improve. This article will therefore conclude by examining some of the policies that the next government is likely to propose in order to address this problem, and whether, given the political context, it is likely that any progress will be made on this issue.

Like all countries in which the provision of social policies such as health, education, and pensions is split between public and private providers, this provision is unequal in its quality. However, in a country with limited public resources, such as Chile, this inequality is even more pronounced. Since 1990, the Concertación governments have spent more on public services, but they have not changed the *fundamental structures* of social security provision in any way. Partly, this can be explained by the legacy of the military dictatorship. For example, the Chilean pension system was instituted in 1982 as a *ley orgánica*, which means that more than an absolute majority is required in both chambers of Congress to change this law. And since the Concertación has generally not held a majority in Congress since 1990, it lacked the requisite number of votes to push through any substantial changes. However, it must also be recognized that the Concertación has pursued a policy of consensus on all matters since 1990 and has avoided harsh confrontations as much as possible.

The main question that the government of President Bachelet therefore faces is to what extent it is prepared to tackle the dogged inequalities that characterize Chile's development process. Her government's biggest and most important battle is likely to be the reform of the pension system, which currently leaves at least 50 percent of the Chilean workforce without even a minimum pension. However, a broad consensus will have to be achieved for this reform as the political power of the pension funds is entrenched, and votes from the right will be needed to pass any new legislation. It is likely that her government will attempt to introduce a series of changes to the system aimed at increasing its coverage and contributions as well as the competition between individual fund management companies. However, since any genuine

competition would significantly reduce the profitability of these companies, it is unlikely that the government will succeed in implementing any fundamental changes, which are violently opposed by the right. Any successful reform of the pension system will have to convince workers that it is worth contributing to the system. At the moment, most think that contributing is not worthwhile. This opinion is unlikely to be altered by a reform consisting of half measures which is the likely outcome of negotiations between the government and the opposition.

The same goes for other social reforms in the areas of health, education, labor, and social welfare. Fundamental and structural changes would have to be negotiated with the opposition, but the advisors closely associated with Bachelet's campaign appear unwilling to take on more battles than the pension reform.<sup>56</sup>

During her campaign, and since, Bachelet has repeatedly promised that her government would be more inclusive and participatory.<sup>57</sup> The key reform that would be necessary to enhance the democratic process in Chile is a reform of the binominal electoral system, which has consistently distorted political power by according political parties a different number of seats in the Senate and the House of Deputies from the proportion of votes that they received.

Although the Concertación's electoral success under the binominal system may act as an incentive to maintain the status quo (after all, the Concertación has won every election since 1990), its difficulty in passing the legislation it has proposed over the years should act as a powerful counterincentive in favor of reform. As discussed above, the Concertación has had to make important compromises with the right in order to get key legislation passed in the Senate, which has led to a dilution of their efforts to emphasize social policy and improve equality. A reform of the binominal system, which could strengthen the Concertación's majority, would therefore help its aim to combine successful economic growth with greater social equity.

Together with her election manifesto, the initial measures that Bachelet's government has taken are a good indicator of what we can expect from her administration: more money for social

programs and improvements to the existing social security framework (e.g. differential vouchers for school children), but no fundamental changes (e.g. measures that would threaten the voucher system).

To a large extent, the performance of Bachelet's government will also depend on the quality of her leadership. During the election campaigns, we saw both Bachelet's strengths and weaknesses. She made some mistakes, sometimes put her foot in it, and dithered every now and again. But she also showed us capacity for leadership, great personal appeal, and genuine warmth and sincerity. The cabinet that she nominated following the elections shows that she is her own master and will not be pushed around by political parties, even if she owes them a debt for her election victory.

Bachelet also showed that she is true to her word. Her cabinet is the first in the Americas to be appointed according to a principle of gender parity, and it consists of an array of mainly new faces, just as she had promised during her campaign.<sup>58</sup> Bachelet has shown, too, that she is not averse to running risks. Many of her appointments lack high-level political experience and profile, precisely because they are new faces. This could lead to problems and a loss of valuable time in a four-year administration. The cabinet reshuffle that occurred in July 2006, only four months after the initial appointments were made, has served to illustrate these risks.<sup>59</sup>

However, at this stage, it is difficult to make predictions and tell whether in the long run Bachelet's bets will pay off. If her government performs well, she will go down in history as Chile's first female president, who did more than anyone else before her to promote gender equality in Chile. However, if her administration is mediocre or worse, she may pave the way for a shift to the right, and may even damage the principle of gender equality.

As for Bachelet's government itself, her campaign and her political program illustrated the extent to which her government represents continuity. I would expect no major or fundamental policy shifts from this new government, but would perhaps hope for an accelerated pace of

reform, especially considering the fact that for the first time since 1990, Bachelet commands a parliamentary majority, which will accord her greater degrees of political freedom compared to her predecessors.

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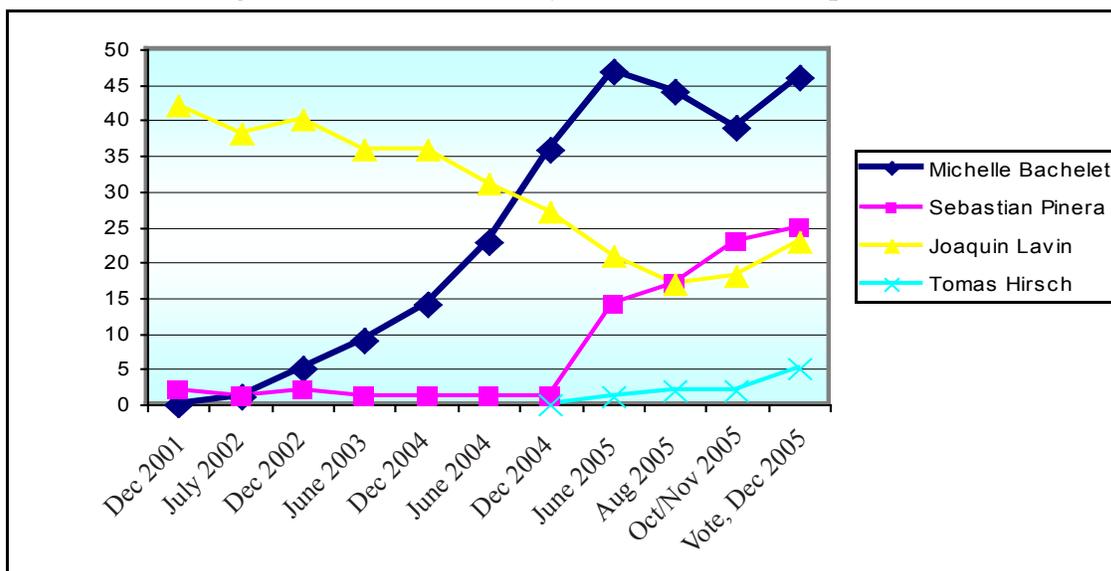
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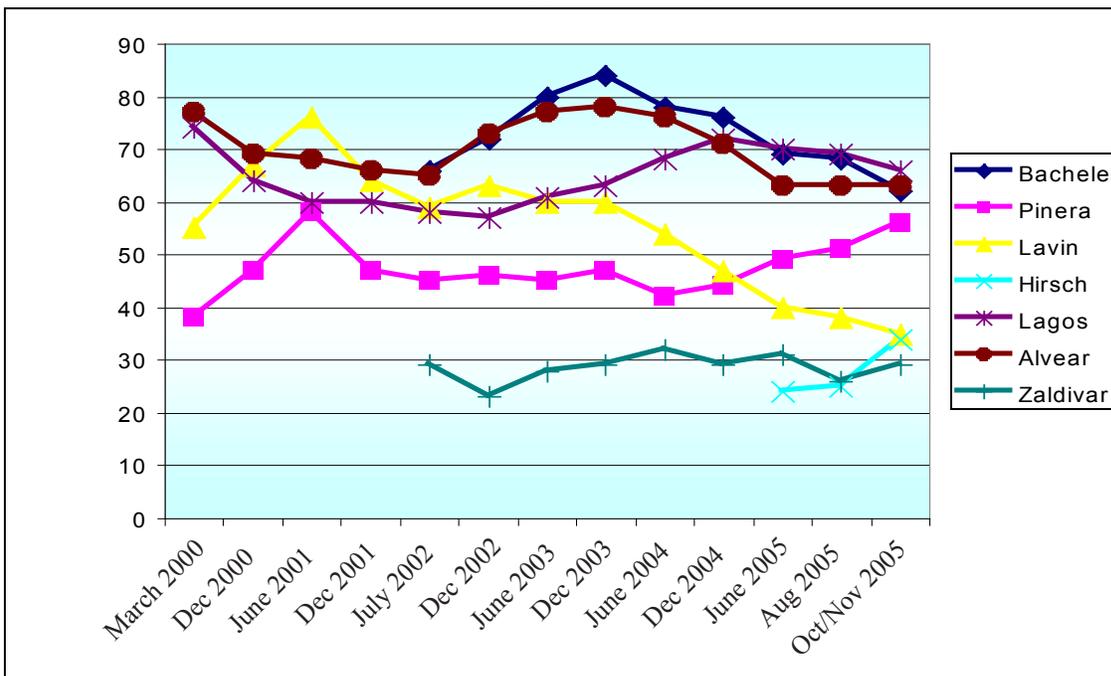
APPENDIX

**Figure 1**  
**Voting Intentions: Who would you like to be the next president of Chile?**



Source: Centro de Estudios Públicos, Estudio Nacional de Opinión Pública, various years

**Figure 2**  
**Approval Ratings**



Source: Centro de Estudios Públicos, Estudio Nacional de Opinión Pública, various years

## ELECTION RESULTS

**Table 1**  
**First Round Presidential Election Results, December 11, 2005**

Candidate	Number of Votes	Percentage of Votes
Michelle Bachelet	3,167,939	45.95
Sebastián Piñera	1,751,866	25.41
Joaquín Lavín	1,601,169	23.22
Tomás Hirsch	372,609	5.40
Total	6,893,583	100.00

**Table 2**  
**Senatorial and Congressional Election Results, December 11, 2005**

Party/Alliance	Senators	Percentage of Votes	Deputies	Percentage of Votes
DC	6 (-6)	15.7	21 (-3)	17.5
PPD	3 (=)	7.9	22 (+1)	18.3
PS	8 (+3)	21.0	15 (+4)	12.5
PRSD	3 (+3)	7.9	7 (+1)	5.8
Concertación	20	52.6	65 (+2)	54.2
UDI	9 (-2)	23.6	34 (-1)	28.3
RN	8 (+1)	21.0	20 (-2)	16.7
Alianza Por Chile	17	44.7	54 (-3)	45
Independent	1	2.6	1	0.8
Total	38		120	

**Table 3**  
**Second Round Presidential Election Results, January 15, 2006**

Candidate	Number of Votes	Percentage of Votes
Michelle Bachelet	3,712,902	53.5
Sebastián Piñera	3,227,658	46.5
Total	6,940,560	100.00

**Table 4**  
**Composition of Michelle Bachelet's Cabinet**

Interior	Andrés Zaldívar (PDC), replaced by Belisario Velasco (PDC, July 14, 2006)
Finance	Andrés Velasco (Independent)
Foreign Affairs	Alejandro Foxley (PDC)
Defense	Vivianne Blanlot (PPD)
Presidency	Paulina Veloso (PS)
Government	Ricardo Lagos Weber (PPD)
Economy	Ingrid Antonijevic (PPD), replaced by Alejandro Ferreiro (PDC, July 14, 2006)
Justice	Isidro Solís (PRSD)
Public Works	Eduardo Bitrán (PPD)
Transport and Telecommunications	Sergio Espejo (PDC)
Employment and Social Security	Oswaldo Andrade (PS)
Education	Martín Zilic (PDC), replaced by Yasna Provoste (PDC, July 14, 2006)
Health	María Soledad Barría (PS)
Agriculture	Alvaro Rojas Marín (PDC)
Women	Laura Albornoz (PDC)
Culture	Paulina Urrutia (Independent)
Planning and Cooperation	Clarisa Hardy (PS)
Housing and Urban Affairs	Patricia Poblete (PDC)
National Assets	Romy Schmidt (PPD)
Mining	Karen Poniachik (Independent)

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bachelet is the eighth female president who has come to power in the Americas and the fourth to have been elected to office.

Nicaragua saw the first election of a female president in 1990, when Violeta Barrios Torres defeated the Sandinista Daniel Ortega. She was better known as Violeta Chamorro, as she used the surname of her deceased husband who was a high-profile victim of the Somoza dictatorship.

In 1997 Janet Rosenberg Jagan became the president of Guayana after an electoral process of dubious legitimacy. She was the widow of the country's previous president, Cheddi Jagan.

And in 1999, Mireya Elisa Moscoso, was elected president of Panama. She was the widow of former president Arnulfo Arias.

<sup>2</sup> The most frequently cited political achievements of the Lagos government include the institution of a divorce law, abolishing censorship and the death penalty, campaign finance reform, the negotiation of several free trade agreements (including those with the United States and the European Union), and several important reforms of the 1980 constitution, which included the subordination of key military positions to the presidency. In implementing these reforms, President Lagos took advantage of the fact that during his first years in office, the former dictator General Pinochet was wholly discredited by financial scandals as well as a more extensive knowledge of the human rights abuses committed under his regime, which practically eliminated his political influence (see Borzutzky and Oppenheimer (2006) on this point).

<sup>3</sup> Two biographies of Michelle Bachelet have been published in Chile (see Sierra and Subercaseaux (2005) and Insunza and Ortega (2005)). Sierra and Subercaseaux provide a very superficial account of her life, focusing mainly on her personal history rather than on her political career. The Insunza and Ortega biography is more comprehensive and much better researched and allows the reader to form a better impression of Bachelet's character and personality. However, both books avoid subjects that are controversial or delicate, such as Bachelet's relationship with the father of her third child, and they do not discuss her performance as a minister from a critical perspective.

<sup>4</sup> Insunza and Ortega (2005: 170-171) quote her as saying "*Es la única forma que tengo de entender lo que le hicieron a mi papa...para mí, esto es casi terapéutico.*" (It's the only way I can understand what they did to my dad....for me, this is almost like therapy).

<sup>5</sup> In the Appendix, Figures 1 and 2 show the results of the opinion polls undertaken by the Centro de Estudios Públicos. Before the floods, Bachelet had not even been considered an important enough political figure to include in the opinion poll survey. When they eventually did include her name in the survey, she shot into the rankings with an approval rating of 66 percent, surprising all analysts and many of her colleagues.

<sup>6</sup> Insunza and Ortega (2005) describe how reluctant Bachelet was to declare herself as the candidate of the left. According to their account, she was pressured by her party leadership, which was reacting to her popularity in the opinion polls. It took Bachelet almost a year to decide that she would indeed run as a presidential candidate.

<sup>7</sup> This is somewhat of an over-simplification of the complexities of Chilean politics. On some issues the Christian Democrats are more progressive than some of the other parties comprising the left wing of the Concertación.

<sup>8</sup> Loosely translated as "Together we can achieve more."

<sup>9</sup> The best source of information on Tomás Hirsch and his supporting coalition is his Web site: [www.tomashirsch.cl](http://www.tomashirsch.cl).

<sup>10</sup> In 1999, Lavín had received 47.51 percent of the votes in the first round and 48.69 percent in the second, versus the 47.95 percent and 51.31 percent respectively, that Lagos obtained.

<sup>11</sup> See González Camús (2005) for a detailed and sometimes tongue-in-cheek account of Lavín's political career. North Americans may well be reminded of George Bush when observing Joaquín Lavín: both hold very strong conservative values, are closely linked to the religious and economic right, have a populist touch, and seem to inspire admiration and adoration among their supporters and condescending disdain among their opponents, while very few remain indifferent. Both are also apt to look at the bright side of life, although Lavín's characteristic facial expression is more

like a smile than a smirk (González Camus' book on Lavín is aptly entitled "*Sonriendo por la Vida*," perhaps best translated as "Smiling your way through life"). To be fair, Lavín is more capable of coherent argument and syntax than is Bush.

<sup>12</sup> Lavín is known for conceiving grand projects, which attract a lot of attention, provide him with some popular support, but over which most of the population shake their heads in disbelief at their extravagant cost in a country with pervasive poverty. One of his better-known projects was to bring truckloads of sand to Santiago and install a beach on the banks of the river Mapocho, so that children from low-income families could experience what it was like to be on a beach. Another was to ferry snow into Santiago to set up skiing pistes on the Cerro San Cristobal in the center of town, again so that underprivileged children could experience the pleasures of snow. Perhaps his most ridiculed project was to pay for low income families to spend "fantasy nights" (*noches de ensueño*) at one of Central Santiago's best-known luxury hotels (The Carrera), which were to include dinner, a show, and accommodation, so that they could experience a mini-break from their routine. (See *El Mercurio*, July 31, 2005, which wonderfully captures the political style of Lavín, and also González Camus, 2005. For the perspective of a respected right-wing analyst who comes to the same conclusions, see *La Tercera*, August 28, 2005.)

<sup>13</sup> As mayor of Santiago, Lavín visited the New York fire services (attempting to meet with Rudolph Giuliani) and the Miami crime stoppers, inspected community health projects in Cuba (where he met with Fidel Castro to demonstrate his open-mindedness), attended Opus Dei celebrations in Rome where he met with the Pope (he is an Opus Dei supernumerary), and traveled to Haiti accompanied by the vedette Marlén Olivari to visit the Chilean troops stationed there.

<sup>14</sup> See Joignant and Navia (2001) or Angell and Pollack (2000).

<sup>15</sup> During the administration of President Eduardo Frei (1994–99), Alvear instituted a comprehensive reform of the judiciary, which is widely regarded as having been successful. As foreign secretary under President Lagos, she negotiated several free trade agreements, including the very high profile agreements with the European Union and the United States, which for Chileans represent important landmarks in their development process. Alvear was also brought in to turn around the election campaign of President Lagos in 1999 and attract the votes of women. The idea of voting for a female candidate in the 2005 elections had been a real possibility in the minds of Chilean voters since at least 2000, as Soledad Alvear was consistently rated as one of Chile's three most popular politicians (together with Lagos and Lavín; see Figure 2 in the Appendix).

<sup>16</sup> Alvear and Zaldívar represent different factions within the Christian Democrat party: While Zaldívar is critical of the Chilean development model that would improve Chile's income distribution, Alvear represents the view that the model only requires further fine tuning in order to improve the opportunities of the lower income groups. Value issues also separate the two factions: Zaldívar represents Catholic and conservative values more staunchly, while Alvear represents a less conservative tendency. Despite these real differences, there can be no doubt, however, that Zaldívar's challenge to primaries was based on personal ambition and rivalry.

<sup>17</sup> Chile's binominal electoral system requires each coalition to put up two candidates (which are generally drawn from the different parties in the coalition). For a coalition to win both seats in an electoral district, it must win twice as many votes as its next competitor, (i.e., generally around 65 percent). The number of seats in which this occurs basically determines the extent of a coalition's majority in both houses of Congress. For details on this electoral system, and its significance and consequences in the context of Chilean politics since 1990, see Siavelis (2005), Siavelis and Valenzuela (2001), Garrido and Navia (2005), Navia and Sandoval (1998), and Navia (2002).

<sup>18</sup> Only in 1999 had the Right united behind a single candidate. In 1989, it was split between Francisco Javier Errázuriz and Hernán Büchi and in 1993 between Arturo Alessandri and José Piñera (the brother of Sebastián Piñera).

<sup>19</sup> In fact, in many television interviews and also in his campaign advertisements, Piñera repeatedly argued that there were great similarities between running a business and a country and between the role of a CEO and that of the president.

<sup>20</sup> Details on Piñera's personal and political history can be found in Millas (2005). During the campaign, Piñera promised that if he were elected president, he would sell all his business investments in order to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

<sup>21</sup> On the basis of opinion poll results, Navia has argued that this happened because Bachelet's campaign team, which had integrated the leadership of the Christian Democrat Party, and thus Adolfo Zaldívar's skepticism about Chile's development model, did not come out in a clear cut defense of the model. *La Tercera*, December 3, 2005, and *Capital*, December 2, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Actually, Tomás Hirsch, who was not constrained by any delicate political balancing act, was the strongest performer in these debates, but since he had no chance of being elected, his performance was ultimately irrelevant.

<sup>23</sup> These results were very close to what was predicted by opinion polls. On this occasion it was the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Contemporánea (CERC) that made the most accurate predictions.

<sup>24</sup> In the 1989 and 1993 elections, Aylwin and Frei respectively, defeated a divided opposition with sound majorities. Although the opposition in 2005 was also split, Bachelet did not repeat this performance as some people originally expected given her wide lead in the opinion polls.

<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of the congressional elections, see Angell and Reig (2006).

<sup>26</sup> While the political maneuvers of Adolfo Zaldívar and the resulting display of personal rivalries undoubtedly damaged the image of the Christian Democrats in these elections, it can also be argued that there is less need for a party of the center, as since 1999, both the right and the left have moved towards the center of the political spectrum. Also, given the changes that Chilean society is undergoing with regard to its mores and values (which will be discussed in section 6 of this article), it also appears that the PDC, like the UDI, is increasingly out of touch with the majority of the electorate.

<sup>27</sup> Bachelet accused Piñera of buying Christian Democrat votes, which caused an uproar as she had no proof for such a claim. Piñera in turn, put his foot in it when he described Bachelet as *tuerta* (literally one-eyed, and figuratively used as a pejorative expression for someone who isn't seeing very clearly), which also caused a stir as this was considered personally insulting.

<sup>28</sup> Among analysts, there was a lot of (well-founded) speculation, that Piñera had given up on his own cause in the light of the lack of support from his coalition, and thus, like the good businessman that he is, decided to stop investing money in a loss-making endeavor. This explanation makes some sense, given that Piñera financed most of his campaign out of his own pocket.

<sup>29</sup> Andrés Zaldívar is the brother of Adolfo Zaldívar. Although both brothers are leading Christian Democrats, it is widely known that they do not see eye to eye. Andrés Zaldívar is a former senator, president of the Christian Democrat Party, president of the Senate, and, and Ricardo Lagos' challenger during the Concertación primaries of 1999. Most recently, he was named Minister of the Interior in President Bachelet's new cabinet, but his appointment lasted only four months.

Sergio Bitar is a veteran politician from the PPD, and the successful minister of education from the Lagos government, a post from which he had to resign in order to take on Bachelet's campaign.

<sup>30</sup> This debate can be downloaded from [www.tvn.cl](http://www.tvn.cl).

<sup>31</sup> In a remarkably accurate prediction, MORI had estimated that Bachelet would win with 53 percent versus 47 percent for Piñera. See MORI 2006.

<sup>32</sup> See for example Garretón (2000), Scully and Valenzuela (1997), and Navia (2000).

<sup>33</sup> Joaquín Lavín is reputed to have spent US\$51 million on his 1999 campaign. Details on Chile's new (though still imperfect) campaign finance legislation can be found in Villar (2006). Details on campaign expenditures can be found on the Web site of the official electoral service: [www.servel.cl](http://www.servel.cl).

<sup>34</sup> See Huneeus (2003).

<sup>35</sup> That Pinochet had enriched himself and his family mainly through arms deals during his periods in office as president and as head of the armed forces had long been known in Chile. When a scandal erupted in 1993 with regard to the involvement of Pinochet's son in an illegal arms deal (commonly referred to by historians as the "Pinocheques" crisis), this led to threats of intervention from the military (the *boinazo*). In response, the Aylwin government quickly hushed

up the scandal. However, more recent scandals surfaced in the United States as a result of investigations run by a Senate committee into the Washington-based Riggs Bank in 2004. This meant that the allegations could not be hushed up or denied, and that the right accepted them as fact rather than as anti-Pinochet propaganda. The financial scandals eroded the last of Pinochet's political support in Chile, as he is widely considered to have been the only president in Chilean history to have personally enriched himself through his office.

<sup>36</sup> Not turning up to vote if you are registered to do so potentially incurs a fine in Chile. Voters can excuse themselves from voting (e.g., due to ill health or physical distance from the voting location), but this requires following a series of administrative procedures.

<sup>37</sup> Hagopian and Mainwaring (2005) excluded Chile (along with Costa Rica and Uruguay) from their recent study, the Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America, because they deemed the country too stable to be theoretically relevant for the democratization processes that other Latin American countries are undergoing.

<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere, I have been highly critical of the Chilean development model, especially of the inequality that it perpetuates; see Sehnbruch (2006). I would like to emphasize here that my argument recognizes Chile's spectacular performance if we compare it with other countries in the region. This does not, however, mean that its development model is sustainable in the long term, nor that the country is prepared for the inevitable increased competition it faces from Asia, nor that its current development strategy will ever overcome the inequality that characterizes Chilean society.

<sup>39</sup> The Concertación therefore does not face the same voter fatigue as parties and coalitions in other countries where the political leader remains the same (e.g., Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives in Britain, Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats in Germany, François Mitterand's Socialists in France, Felipe González' Socialists in Spain, and currently Tony Blair's Labor Party in Britain).

<sup>40</sup> Lipset and Rokkan (1967).

<sup>41</sup> See Aguero and Tironi (1999), Valenzuela (1999), and Mainwaring, Montes, and Ortega (2000) for examples of this well-known debate.

<sup>42</sup> Lavín's program mentioned the environment, for example, in a brief paragraph, while Piñera devoted one of seven chapters to it.

<sup>43</sup> Translated as, "We will continue advancing, we will deepen, we will expand, we will reinforce."

<sup>44</sup> During the final television debate between Piñera and Bachelet, for example, Piñera disqualified the educational policies of the Lagos government. Sergio Bitar, who was the former education minister and was now running Bachelet's campaign, took Piñera's comments personally. As soon as the debate concluded, Bitar went up to Piñera and gave him a piece of his mind that displayed all his fury about Piñera's remarks. As the cameras were still running, the incident was broadcast live. The following morning, this incident grabbed the headlines and overshadowed the analysis of the presidential debate.

<sup>45</sup> In Chile, of course, the candidates themselves often do not have a voting record: In the Concertación's case, all presidential candidates since 1990 were former ministers of government. As for the opposition, some candidates have been senators (e.g. Sebastián Piñera), while others were also ministers or other officials (e.g., his brother José Piñera, who ran for president in 1993, was a former minister of the Pinochet administration, and Lavín was a former mayor).

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of the health reform, see *Iniciativa Chilena de Equidad en Salud* (2005), and on labor reform, see Sehnbruch (2006).

<sup>47</sup> *New York Times* (March 8 and 9, 2006), *Washington Post* (March 10, 2006), *San Francisco Chronicle* (March, 12, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> At the Latin American Studies Association conference held in Puerto Rico in March 2006 (only days after the official inauguration of Michelle Bachelet), several papers addressed the issue of how conservative Chile really is, and incited enthusiastic debates about both this question and Latin America's swing to the left. See Funk (2006) and Oppenheim (2006).

<sup>49</sup> See Ramos, et al. (2004).

<sup>50</sup> See Lehmann (2003) for opinions on family and marriage; see Fundación Chile 21 (2004a and 2004b) for opinions on homosexuality and the morning after pill.

<sup>51</sup> For a long time before legislation was finally passed in 2004, the vast majority of Chileans were in favor of divorce legislation and mostly blamed the Catholic Church for it not being implemented sooner. See Fundación Chile 21 (2001).

<sup>52</sup> See Garretón in El Mostrador, “Campaña con Rostro de Mujer,” January 11, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Soledad Alvear successfully ran for the presidency of the PDC, and Isabel Allende ran for the presidency of the PS (and lost to Camillo Escarlona).

<sup>54</sup> Interview in The Clinic, November 24, 2005.

<sup>55</sup> This change was negotiated as part of the constitutional reform package that was instituted under the administration of President Lagos of which the principal component was the abolition of the nine unelected senatorial positions.

<sup>56</sup> The new head of the Budget Office in the Ministry of Finance, Alberto Arenas, told me that he would have no time for reforms other than pension reform, nor was he very interested in taking on additional issues. Interview, January 12, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> On the night of her election victory, Bachelet put it like this: “*El 11 de marzo también marcará el comienzo de un nuevo estilo en la política nacional. Un estilo de gobierno dialogante, participativo. Fui la candidata de los ciudadanos. Ahora seré la Presidenta de los ciudadanos. Chile requiere una nueva política para una nueva ciudadanía, amigas y amigos.*”

(“The 11th of March (the date of the inauguration of her new government) will mark the beginning of a new style in national politics. The style of a participatory and dialoguing government. I was the candidate of the people. Now I will be the president of the people. Chile needs a new policy for a new people, my friends.”)

<sup>58</sup> During the election campaign, when the press was speculating about future cabinet appointments, Bachelet asserted on several occasions: “*Nadie se repite el plato.*” (Nobody gets to eat the same dish twice.) This assertion generated the widespread expectation that the new government would consist of mainly new faces, an expectation that Bachelet broadly fulfilled.

<sup>59</sup> Since education minister Zilic’s embarrassing mishandling of the student protests, which erupted almost immediately after the new government’s inauguration, Bachelet has replaced three ministers in her cabinet. This has given her critics the opportunity to assert that she should have picked the best and most experienced ministers for each position rather than emphasizing gender parity and new faces. The complete list of ministerial appointments can be found in the Appendix, Table 4.

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