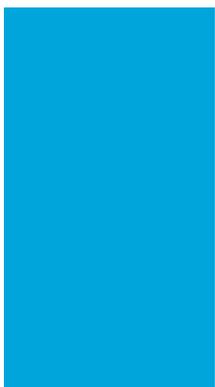


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**The Bachelet Administration:  
The Normalization of Politics?\***

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

When Chilean President Michelle Bachelet was sworn into office on March 11, 2006, it was a defining moment in Latin American politics. Bachelet was Chile's first female president and the first popularly elected Latin American woman president who did not follow a politically prominent husband to office. Equally remarkable was the success and stability of the coalition that she led. The Concertación coalition had ruled Chile continuously for sixteen years when Bachelet took office, making it by far the most stable and longest-ruling coalition among third wave democracies.

The Concertación chose Bachelet as its standard-bearer for the December 2005 elections in an attempt to put a new face on an aging coalition. It did so by choosing a political outsider, by choosing a woman, and by casting Bachelet as an everyday Chilean rather than as a member of Chile's entrenched political elite.<sup>1</sup>

Three particular campaign promises contributed to the idea that Michelle Bachelet represented change despite the fact that she was backed by the same Concertación coalition; she pledged to: appoint a cabinet with an equal number of men and women ministers, appoint "new faces" to these positions, and institute a *gobierno ciudadano* or citizens' government. Together these promises symbolized a renovation of political elites, which proved very popular with the electorate.<sup>2</sup> It was a policy that promised to look beyond the politics as usual of the transition—however successful they may have been.

Yet once Michelle Bachelet took office, these promises proved unsustainable in the face of deeply entrenched elite powers that were shaped during the process of democratic transition and

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1. See Insunza and Ortega (2005) for the most detailed, although uncritical, biography of Michelle Bachelet.

2. In reality, these three promises were less well thought through than they initially seemed. The idea of gender parity was copied from Zapatero's new Spanish government, "new faces" was based on a slip of the tongue, which generated newspaper headlines and proved electorally very popular (Interview with one of President Bachelet's closest advisors), and the "gobierno ciudadano" was a communications concept devised by her chief strategist Pablo Halpern and always lacked substance.

Also, it was the Alvear campaign that, during the primaries, accused Michelle Bachelet of wanting to govern without political parties. This had not originally been Bachelet's intention. At first, she had just insisted that she would not be dictated to by party barons. However, the Alvear accusation stuck. It proved electorally very popular and was therefore adapted by the Bachelet campaign to mean that she would govern with a different style that would not be elite based.

had become deeply rooted in a coalition that was clearly exhausted after sixteen years in office. While the concept of a “gobierno ciudadano” was never clearly defined and therefore became obsolete almost as soon as the president took office, gender parity and the appointment of new faces were, at least initially, relatively easy to achieve as they were embodied by Bachelet’s cabinet nominations. However, they did conflict with the underlying principles of elite politics that rule the Concertación, which in turn complicated the business of government and led to political instability.

Bachelet also soon faced a series of crises including massive student protests, corruption scandals, labor unrest, internal governmental divisions, and allegations of ineptitude and wrongdoing in the major reorganization of Santiago’s transport system known as the Transantiago Plan. The Transantiago debacle led to the most serious and sustained political crisis of the Concertación so far and cost the Bachelet administration its political capital in its first year of government. The initial responses of Bachelet’s ministers and of the president herself to these crises were widely criticized. Her government has therefore not only faced constant cabinet instability but has also found it impossible to define a political agenda.

By December 2007, the administration’s approval ratings had fallen to historical lows, and the Concertación’s days in office seemed to be numbered. In response, President Bachelet undertook her third cabinet change. The new ministerial appointments represented the final abandonment of any attempt to manage executive power differently and illustrated the difficulty Bachelet faced in establishing a different style of politics.

Analysts and observers of Chilean politics agree almost universally that the Bachelet government has been the weakest government of all the Concertación administrations. Criticism of President Bachelet’s leadership and of her personality has certainly been widespread and vehement, especially in the Chilean press. It has focused on her leadership qualities, on the indecisiveness of her government, and on the poor judgment displayed by members of her

cabinet and often by the president herself.<sup>3</sup> Concerns have even been voiced that the poor performance of her government is related to the fact that she is a woman and therefore cannot effectively lead a male-dominated political class.

However, the second half of the Bachelet administration has been evaluated much more positively than the first half. The failure of the changes President Bachelet attempted led to a return to “politics as usual” during 2008. As the Transantiago crisis was gradually resolved and as the government committed fewer mistakes, a greater sense of stability ensued that allowed for a competent and coherent management of the 2009 economic crisis. In turn, this has led to a recovery in the president’s and the government’s approval ratings to the extent that the opposition is consciously avoiding all personal attacks on the president, who is personally very popular with the electorate.<sup>4</sup>

While the Bachelet government undoubtedly suffered from leadership issues and poor judgment during the first half of its term, we argue that an excessive focus on the personal characteristics of the president (whether her lack of leadership or her personal popularity) has obscured some of the, perhaps more important, root causes of the difficulties that the current administration has faced. In particular we make a two-pronged argument.

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3. Criticisms of President Bachelet have been especially vehement from the opposition, which has taken full advantage of the weaknesses of this government and of the president herself. Sebastián Piñera, in particular, turned his campaign attack on Bachelet (“*no da el ancho*” loosely translated as “she is not competent”) into a persistent criticism of Bachelet’s leadership abilities (“*falta de liderazgo*”). His comments have been widely reproduced in the print media, which, almost without exception, tends to be right-wing and biased against the government. They have been echoed by other leaders of the opposition, leading to comments such as “*Aquí lo que ha habido es una falta de liderazgo, porque compara este gobierno con los gobiernos anteriores de la Concertación obviamente que hay una falta de conducción y liderazgo, yo creo que eso nadie lo discute.*” (Pablo Longueira quoted in *La Tercera*, 4/8/2008).

However criticisms of President Bachelet have also been voiced from within her own coalition: Christian Democratic Congressman Gabriel Ascencio, for example commented: “*Si el cambio de Gabinete no va acompañado de un cambio de actitud de la propia Presidenta, entonces no sirve de nada.*” (*El Mercurio* 3/28/2007). Even the international press has been critical of her style of leadership. The *Economist*, for example, wrote that President Bachelet “has been both hesitant and meddling, and has often allowed a small cabal of personal advisers to overrule and undermine ministers.” (*The Economist*, 10 January 2008).

Such comments would have been unthinkable about previous Chilean presidents, especially President Lagos.

4. The election campaigns of 2009 have been marked by this issue. From the beginning of the year, the Alianza began a concerted effort to direct criticism only at the government and not at the president, as this would have been negatively perceived by the electorate. See *La Tercera*, various issues, March 2009. In March 2009, President Bachelet’s approval rating climbed to 62.2 percent according to the monthly Adimark surveys. She took office in March 2006 with a 52.6 percent approval, a rate which climbed to 62.1 percent in April 2006 and then gradually declined to a low of 35.3 percent in September 2007. See [www.adimark.cl](http://www.adimark.cl).

First we argue that the governing coalition continues to rely on a model of elite politics developed during the democratic transition, which, while initially successful, is counterproductive in the current period of democratic consolidation. Politics in most countries is necessarily and by definition dominated by elites. The problem in Chile, however, is that the deal-making at first necessary to maintain the democratic transition, and now essential to maintaining the Concertación coalition, has undermined democratic responsiveness, accountability and legitimacy. This means that the very strengths of Chile's transition have now turned into the weaknesses of the post-transition, which, furthermore, is operating under different parameters as a result of reforms undertaken during the Lagos administration.<sup>5</sup> In particular our discussion focuses on the power of political elites, the power of political parties, and the pattern of political consensus that has prevented deeper and much-needed reforms to the political, economic, and social system.

Second, we argue that Chile has undergone a process of political normalization typical in post-transition societies. This normalization is characterized by the lack of congruence between an elite still operating under the mechanisms of transition politics and a mass public demanding practical changes and solutions to everyday problems, in particular to Chile's glaring inequalities. Through widespread protests of government policies on education, labor issues, and public transport, Chileans have expressed disgust with politics as usual.<sup>6</sup> This incongruence has, to some extent, fractured the elite itself, as some politicians seek their own advantage over that of their party or the Concertación. Thus, divisions within the elite also increasingly explain some of the deeper reasons why the Bachelet government has experienced so many difficulties.

Political exhaustion on the part of both the Concertación and the opposition Alianza undoubtedly compound the difficulties of moving away from transition politics as well as

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5. Both the constitutional reforms and the campaign finance reform enacted under President Lagos have changed the democratic parameters in Chile. The specific impacts of these reforms will be discussed below.

6. As will be discussed below, Chileans were much more active in taking their issues to the streets during the first half of the Bachelet administration than they were during other presidential periods.

the process of political normalization. All parties across the political spectrum in Chile are experiencing problems with the recruitment of a younger generation into politics. There is therefore very little generational change among politicians. Most are in their fifties or older and are products of the fight for (or against) democracy during the dictatorship.

We consider that it is important to examine this post-transition political normalization in detail because it is unlikely that this process will be reversed. A future government of whatever coalition, even under strong leadership, will have to contend with the same problems President Bachelet has had to face. Thus, it would be a mistake to consider the current travails of Chilean politics as a by-product of a particular government without considering the new structural realities of politics, which are likely to persevere.

## 2. THE TRANSITION IS OVER! LONG LIVE THE TRANSITION!

The democratic transition was the crucible for the model of post-authoritarian politics that prevails in Chile today. This model was forged from the partisan political dynamic that emerged following Chile's October 1988 plebiscite on the future of Pinochet's continued rule. The format of the plebiscite allowed Chile's resurgent, and now largely legal, parties to unite behind a simple goal on which all could fundamentally agree: that the Pinochet dictatorship must end. The seventeen parties of the opposition created what became the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (Agreement of Parties for Democracy) and successfully mobilized large segments of the population to support them. The coalition was successful in defeating Pinochet in the plebiscite, mustering 55 percent of the vote, which provided the impetus to maintain the unity of the coalition as the country entered the period of electoral competition. Turnout for the plebiscite was remarkable: 96.6 percent of the eligible electorate turned out to cast a vote (Navia 2000). Following Chile's first free and open presidential elections in seventeen years, Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin led the Concertación to victory and assumed the presidency in 1990.

With Chile's return to democracy, a stable pattern of two-coalition competition quickly emerged between the center-left Concertación and a rightist alliance now known as the Alianza por Chile or simply the Alianza. The Concertación has governed since the return to democracy and is the longest-serving and most stable democratic coalition in the country's history. Three more Concertación presidents followed President Aylwin: Christian Democrat, Eduardo Frei (1994-2000); social democrat, Ricardo Lagos (2000-06); and the current president, Socialist, Michelle Bachelet (2006-10).

With the 2005 approval of comprehensive reforms to the Constitution, which had been designed by Pinochet to protect the power of the armed forces, President Lagos declared the Chilean transition officially concluded. However, despite the fact that many Pinochet-era institutions have been reformed, the legacy of the dictatorship shaped a style of transition politics that has persisted, particularly in the shape of an unusual binominal election system which was originally designed to limit the depth and strength of Chile's democracy.

Chile's successful transition transformed the country into the poster child for democratic transitions in Latin America.<sup>7</sup> Almost without exception, Chile was cast as a success for achieving a pragmatic balance between the exigencies of dealing with the past and the need to look to the future. However, less analyzed is the actual internal coalitional formula that underwrote this success. We argue that elements related to the structure, context, and content of transitional politics all form part of this model. In each of these areas the very successes of the transition are counterproductive as they live on in a post-transitional democracy.

First, with respect to structure, we underscore the centrality of elite politics in managing the transition. The success of the Concertación coalitions was based on a complex elite power sharing arrangement, but it is one that increasingly brings charges of elite domination and politics by quota. While it was certainly a stabilizing phenomenon in the context of a delicate transition with a still-powerful military, it also sidelined Congress and the public. Hence, most Chileans now chafe at the same elitism that made the transition possible.

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7. Although this point cannot be extended to the way it dealt with the human rights abuses of the dictatorship.

Second, in terms of context, Chile's highly institutionalized parties are credited with underwriting the success of the democratic transition and the stability of Chilean democracy. However, while party institutionalization has provided presidents with legislative backing, party elites dominate decision-making and candidate selection with little citizen input. In this sense a developing *partidocracia* (party dominated politics) has contributed to disgust with political parties in a country where they traditionally have been quite functional and successful.

Finally, as regards content, when it comes to public policy, elites have avoided any destabilizing change. They have been loath to address deep public dissatisfaction by engaging in any fundamental reform of the socioeconomic system, leading to superficial patchwork reforms that do not address the deeply ingrained inequalities of Chilean society.<sup>8</sup>

This section deals with each of these elements of the transitional model in turn. Our central argument is that managing a successful democratic transition is distinct from consolidating a strong democracy.

### 2.1. ELITE POLITICS

Elite politics were at the core of Chile's successful democratic transition. This was evident in three areas: the establishment of a supra-party political elite (*partido transversal*), the negotiation of elaborate power sharing arrangements in the executive branch (for example, the distribution of cabinet positions according to party politics, a practice referred to somewhat derisively as the *cuoteo*), and elite domination of the candidate selection process. Each of these informal mechanisms of elite politics has undergone different degrees of transformation since 1990. While some of them remain more intact than others, the power of Chile's political elite remains undiminished. Ordinary Chileans continue to have few tools with which to shape the political agenda or to hold leaders accountable (as will be more fully noted below in the discussion of the electoral system).

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8. The Concertación has very successfully reduced poverty rates from 38 percent to 13 percent between 1990 and 2006. However, this has not led to an improvement in inequality. This point has been widely discussed in the literature. See for example Borzutzky and Weeks (2008), Sehnbruch (2006), or Lopez and Miller (2008).

The arrangement known as the *partido transversal* was central to post-authoritarian success. It refers to the informal group of key politicians in the first democratic governments who defined themselves more as “leaders of the *Concertación*” than as leaders of their own parties. Despite the *partido transversal*’s lack of formal organization, the actors themselves knew who they were, and they structured informal relationships among themselves, between their parties and the coalition, and as discussed later, with social actors whose input has been central to the legislative success of presidents.<sup>9</sup> During the first two *Concertación* administrations, the policy-making process was dominated by executive branch elites belonging to the *partido transversal*.

Although the *partido transversal* was an elite arrangement, its virtue was that it put the interests of the *Concertación* over those of its constituent parties and thus generated political cohesion within a coalition that represented a majority of the electorate. Towards the end of the Frei administration, however, the *partido transversal* ceased to function. As the parties, after ten years in power, failed to regenerate themselves with new members and new political strategies, the *Concertación* began to lack a political project to unite around. However, a combination of strong leadership on the part of President Lagos and the opportunity to unite the *Concertación* behind a political process of ending the transition, partly by implementing constitutional reform and partly by redefining the role of Chile’s military, papered over the cracks in the coalition and permitted a continuing pattern of elitist politics even after the end of the *partido transversal*.<sup>10</sup> Under the Bachelet administration, weak political leadership and the lack of a common political project made these cracks more evident. The *Concertación* as a coalition now lacks supra-party leadership and a mechanism for defending its interests above those of its constituent parties.

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9. Ignacio Walker, who served in the Ministry of the General Presidency (SEGPRES) under President Patricio Aylwin, noted that the *partido*’s members “correspond to informal networks that have...exercised a strong influence under the three administrations of the *Concertación*, both in terms of strategic design and the set of public policies that have been pursued.” (Walker 2003, 5). Since the *partido transversal* was an informal institution, it is difficult to pinpoint the precise time when it ceased to exist. There seems to be some consensus though that during the Lagos administration it was no longer operating as such. It certainly ceased to function before Michelle Bachelet became president.

10. The arrest of former dictator Pinochet in London in October 1998 sparked off a series of events and institutional reforms, which meant that Chile as a country finally faced the historical facts of the dictatorship. The elaborate prosecution of Pinochet in Chile, revelations of the former dictator’s corruption, the Informe Valech, reforms of the military, a female and socialist minister of defence, etc.

With few exceptions, the presidents and party barons of individual parties now act much more according to their own interests.<sup>11</sup> This process is exemplified by the behavior of the Partido Por la Democracia (Party for Democracy, PPD) during the municipal elections of 2008. Rather than running as part of the Concertación, the PPD's president Pepe Auth decided to run on a separate party ticket. The Concertación therefore had to run with two lists, one comprised of Christian Democrats, Radicals, and the Socialist Party and the other comprised of just the PPD. While this strategy may have improved the election results of the PPD, the overall result for the Concertación was devastating. In fact, this was the first election that the Concertación did not win.<sup>12</sup>

The process of elite politics discussed here shows that there have been changes in how elites have operated since 1990. The function of the partido transversal has effectively been replaced by the action of individual party leaders who do not always put the interests of the Concertación before their own party interests. However, while this represents a change in operational tactics, the principle of elite politics still holds.

The second mechanism mentioned above that has historically enshrined elite politics in Chile is the negotiated sharing of executive power, commonly referred to as the *cuoteo*. This informal political institution normally consisted of a careful division of ministerial portfolios and other key government positions among the Concertación's constituent parties and their respective factions according to a very complex power sharing formula based on relative levels of party support, thus ensuring congressional backing when it came to negotiating the approval of legislation. However, it is increasingly perceived as simple cronyism, ultimately undermining the legitimacy of Chilean democracy. During the transition, this arrangement, which amounted to something of a pacted democracy, underwrote the maintenance of coalition unity and prevented

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11. It is well known in Chile that Senator Guido Girardi controls the PPD. A high ranking politician of the PPD recently commented in an interview with the authors: "I challenge you to find one single statement by Girardi that supports the Concertación. ... If it were up to him, he would do away with the Christian Democratic Party."

12. This election resulted in the defeat of the Concertación in terms of mayorships (Concertación 38.46 percent, Alianza 40.56 percent), although the coalition still won an overall majority of municipal councilors (Concertación 45.24 percent, Alianza 35.99 percent). Many factors contributed to this poor election performance, including the weak performance of the Bachelet government and the Transantiago debacle, but the division of the Concertación into two separate lists certainly did its share of damage to the coalition.

the potential divisiveness that might have led to renewed military intervention. However, the mechanism means that key government positions are not necessarily awarded based on political talent, experience, or technical expertise but rather according to the exigencies of party politics.

While many coalition governments rely on similar types of appointment norms, in Chile this additional form of elite politics has been problematic because of its direct ties to political campaigns. In particular, ministerial posts are often awarded to reward individuals, party factions, or whole parties for their efforts and support during the preceding presidential campaign. The complexities of the *cuoteo* mechanism are equally clear during cabinet reshuffles: decisions on incoming and outgoing ministers can either preserve the balance of power within the cabinet, reward (or punish) parties or party factions for their support (or lack of support) of the government, or act as the president's statements of support for a particular political leader.<sup>13</sup> This also means that ministers who underperform are not always removed when they should be and that ministers who are technically competent and/or perform well are sometimes removed from their positions to make way for political appointees.<sup>14</sup> In addition, coalition making in the executive branch is in large part driven by the exigencies of maintaining the alliance in order to compete as a single coalition in legislative elections (a dynamic dictated by the very structure of the election system, as will be stressed more fully later). Taken together, the effects of the *cuoteo* cause it to reek of cronyism and clientelism in a post-transition Chile where expectations of meritocracy are gradually increasing.

It was partly due to the negative perception of the *cuoteo* that President Bachelet attempted a new formula, that of gender parity and new faces. The combination of *cuoteo* rules and these

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13. After Adolfo Zaldívar left the Christian Democrat party in 2007 following an intense process of open political conflict within the party during which the leadership of the party's president, Soledad Alvear, was widely criticized, President Bachelet demonstrated her support for Alvear by nominating Edmundo Pérez Yoma as her new Minister of the Interior. The previous appointment to this position, Belisario Velasco, had also been a concession to Soledad Alvear, even though the minister and the president could never establish a good working relationship.

14. Key party leaders are often referred to as "barons." In the Socialist Party, the majority of both electoral and congressional votes are controlled by a handful of party leaders: Camilo Escalona, Marcelo Schilling, Ricardo Nuñez, and Ricardo Solari. In an interview with a member of the PS following the December 2007 cabinet reshuffle, the reasons given for the removal of Clarisa Hardy from the cabinet were that Solari had not yet been awarded with a ministerial position under the Bachelet administration and that it was therefore time to replace Hardy (who has recognized expertise in social policy) with somebody close to Solari.

two new conditions, however, made the selection of cabinet members very difficult.<sup>15</sup> Bachelet also refused to negotiate cabinet positions with the political parties in the same way that previous presidents had done in an additional attempt to establish her own style of government and to distance herself from typical party pressures. Although she asked the parties for ministerial nominations, she did not negotiate these with party leaders and simply announced her choices.

Although the president still attempted to fill party quotas in ministerial and undersecretary positions, finding new faces whom she trusted that also fit the party bill proved extremely challenging. Fulfilling the campaign promise of gender parity further complicated the selection process.<sup>16</sup> The result was that President Bachelet appointed a cabinet that theoretically respected *cuoteo* rules but did not contain the people that the party presidents would have liked.<sup>17</sup> This later translated into more difficulties and open conflict among the coalition when it came to governing.

Another problem with *cuoteo* politics is that they often oblige presidents to appoint cabinet ministers favored by a particular party leader but whom the president does not really trust. Each president since 1990 has instituted his own mechanism for dealing with this problem. President Aylwin appointed a very strong political team (Enrique Correa and Edgardo Boeninger); President Frei instituted his *círculo de hierro* (iron circle), which included a select group of ministers whom he trusted and with whom policy decisions were made; and President Lagos appointed a team of very competent and trusted personal advisors that served as a kind of super-

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15. The appointment of Alejandro Foxley to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (an area in which he had no particular expertise) and of Andrés Zaldívar to the Ministry of the Interior were the most obvious rewards that President Bachelet handed out to two old hands of the Concertación who had helped her refocus her election campaign during the second round.

16. As Navia points out, gender parity complicated this appointment process at two levels: not only did the overall number of ministers have to be equally distributed between men and women, but also ministers from individual parties had to be distributed equally between men and women. The president could not have appointed only women from the Socialist Party and only men from the Christian Democrats, for instance. Navia, 2007.

17. For example, President Bachelet appointed seven ministers from the Christian Democrat party. This was a relatively low proportion of ministers compared to previous cabinets and left the Christian Democrat party feeling marginalized. Furthermore, she appointed no ministers who were recognized supporters of the Christian Democrat party president, Adolfo Zaldívar. Although Zaldívar supported President Bachelet during her election campaign, he therefore did not reap his share of executive power rewards. President Bachelet's Christian Democrat nominations instead favored Zaldívar's arch-rival, Soledad Alvear. The structure of Bachelet's cabinet nominations therefore did nothing for the unity of the Christian Democrat party and in fact stoked its already pronounced internal conflicts, which culminated with the expulsion of Adolfo Zaldívar from the party in November 2007, depriving the Bachelet administration of its legislative majority in the Senate.

cabinet, known as the “Segundo Piso” or “Second Floor,” named after the location of their offices in the presidential palace. These advisors directed policy and made sure that cabinet ministers were doing their job according to the president’s instructions.

Because mechanisms such as these that circumvent normal executive power reek of elitism and cronyism, President Bachelet vowed that there would be no visible Second Floor during her term in office.<sup>18</sup> However, the lack of a strong team of political advisors combined with the inexperience of her ministers caused President Bachelet’s administration to lurch from one political crisis to another.<sup>19</sup> Only three months after taking office, the president had to make her first cabinet changes. Several more were to follow.<sup>20</sup> In particular, the political team within the cabinet (the Ministers of Interior, Government and the Presidency) has been unstable and weak. With each reshuffle, the cabinet that once was populated with new faces began to look increasingly like traditional Concertación cabinets as party elites pushed to insert their nominees into the cabinet and it proved too politically risky to move away from tried and tested political formulas.<sup>21</sup>

Again, the point that needs to be emphasized here is that although the application of the *cuoteo* rules has perhaps changed since 1990, in principle the mechanism remains very much in place. Specifically, President Bachelet’s attempt to do things differently failed and resulted in a retrenchment to the previous status quo.

The third mechanism of elite politics mentioned above is the selection of political candidates through a complex pattern of closed-door negotiations. Citizens have very little input into who gets on the ballot, and once in office, candidates are extraordinarily difficult to remove.

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18. Despite this official policy, President Bachelet also has a hermetic circle of advisors. It includes Finance Minister Andrés Velasco, her communications strategist Juan Carvajal, and one of her best friends, María Angélica Álvarez (“la Jup”).

19. Navia has referred to these political mistakes as “*los errores no forzados*.” Revista Capital “Las Culpas de Juan Carvajal,” 10 August 2007.

20. For details, see Appendix 1.

21. While most of the new faces have now been replaced with more experienced politicians, there are still more women in the cabinet than under previous administrations, although the cabinet is no longer paritarian.

The almost complete domination of the process by elites further distances the Chilean public from its representatives and likely has contributed to growing disgust with the current political model.

The binomial legislative election system, bequeathed by the Pinochet government, is characterized by two-seat districts doing away with Chile's traditional proportional representation system. Its most significant feature is that the highest-polling coalition in a district can only win both seats if it more than doubles the vote total of the second-place list; otherwise, each list wins one seat. So within the context of Chile's post-authoritarian pattern of two-coalition competition, a coalition must poll 66 percent of the vote to win both seats but can usually win one seat with only 33 percent. Because both major alliances almost invariably poll between 33 percent and 66 percent in each district, the outcome of elections is a foregone conclusion: except in a few cases one member of the Concertación and one member of the Alianza are likely to win in each district. The operational characteristics of the system help to push the candidate selection process further into the hands of the elite. First, the restrictiveness of the two seat system makes it difficult to provide representative equity among the coalition's many parties in the candidate selection process. Therefore, part of the key to the post-transitional model was to negotiate a sharing of candidate seats among the coalition's many parties.<sup>22</sup>

Second, while the candidate selection process has the potential to allow for more citizen input into choosing representatives, the dynamics of the electoral system when considered alongside the exigencies of coalition maintenance have prevented any significant democratization of this process. Because the binomial system provides only two seats to each coalition, and the Concertación is composed of four parties, the number of candidacies that each party in each coalition receives is subject to arduous negotiations before the elections. Parties offer evidence of their performance in previous elections, their standing in polls, and what they can potentially contribute to the coalition as bargaining chips. However, the pairing on individual lists is crucial. Parties seek to place their candidates on the same list with either an extremely weak candidate

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22. Siavelis 2002; Navia 2008b.

(whom they can handily beat), or an extremely strong candidate (who can help carry the list to an unlikely two seat victory). The complexity and political horse-trading involved in placing candidacies on individual lists leaves candidate selection completely in the hands of party elites and works at cross purposes with any efforts to democratize the legislative candidate selection process.<sup>23</sup>

Even where efforts to introduce primaries have been undertaken, party elites have often overridden the decisions of their own parties. Especially in the case of the Partido Demócrata Cristiano de Chile (Christian Democratic Party of Chile, PDC), party elites have actively tried to dissuade certain candidates from running in primaries. Some candidates who managed to garner positions on the ballot found their seats traded away to smaller parties in the interests of coalition maintenance. Even more serious, in a few cases party central committees simply overruled the results of primaries. Navia cites the case of a 2001 Chamber of Deputy race in District Twenty-Four where the PDC National Committee designated Tomás Jocelyn-Holt as the candidate despite his defeat in an open primary (Navia 2008, 106-7).

Since 1990, Chilean presidential candidates and presidents have had a significant say in the selection of party candidates. Aylwin and Frei actively participated in the negotiations regarding legislative candidacies, with Frei openly urging PDC elites to cede seats to smaller coalition partners in 1993 and 1997 (Navia 2008, 106-7). This constitutes one of the informal mechanisms through which presidents have exercised their influence over parties and the legislature. However, it is also clearly a mechanism that perpetuates the power of the elite. The extent to which the public perception of this mechanism has changed was illustrated in 2008 by the reactions to a declaration made by President Lagos, who at the time was considering becoming a presidential candidate in the 2009 elections. He wrote: “*No resulta comprensible que quien conduce la coalición de gobierno no tenga una palabra que decir sobre los candidatos de la coalición que sean elegidos en una elección simultánea.*” That is to say that to President Lagos, it was essential and obvious that he should be able to exercise his influence over the candidate

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23. On legislative candidate selection in Chile see Navia (2008) and Siavelis (2002).

selection process. In a very critical column about the Lagos declaration, Navia wrote: “*Lagos parece creer que puede exigir condiciones a la Concertación... ahora también quiere convertirse en el gran elector que defina los candidatos al parlamente de la Concertación.*”<sup>24</sup> While the opinions of the press do not necessarily represent the opinions of the electorate at large, it is nevertheless indicative that the Lagos declaration should have generated such objections even though he was merely stating what has long constituted standard practice. This reaction could also be interpreted as an increasing level of public intolerance with elitist institutions and mechanisms of policy making.

Chileans were more likely to accept these relatively unresponsive, elite-centered arrangements when the democratic transition was perceived as delicate and the threat of military intervention real. However, with the secure installation of democracy, there has been increasing criticism of the model. More and more Chileans made reference to the *cuoteo político* (a long-standing negative reference in Chilean politics referring to the distribution of partisan spoils), decisions made *a puertas cerradas* (behind closed doors), and an increasing tendency toward partidocracia. Public opinion survey data suggest that citizens’ perceive and object to elite dominance and the lack of turnover. When asked whether members of Congress are concerned about the problems of average people, only 14 percent of the population answered in the affirmative.<sup>25</sup> When asked to name the two principal defects of political parties, the top three responses were “they are not transparent” (36 percent); “they are always the same...there is no turnover” (33 percent); and “they pass out government positions among themselves” (31 percent).<sup>26</sup> While it is impossible to tie demands for electoral reform directly to these responses, it is notable that when asked about reforms to the binomial system, 46 percent said it should be changed completely; 42 percent said it should be maintained; and 12 percent did not know or did not answer.

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24. Navia, La Carta de Lagos, La Tercera, 11/13/2008. The opinion of his column was widely echoed in the press at the time.

25. Centro de Estudios Públicos, “Estudio Nacional de Opinión Pública, No. 56,” November-December, 2007. Available at [http://www.cepchile.cl/bannerscep/encuestascep/encuestas\\_cep.html](http://www.cepchile.cl/bannerscep/encuestascep/encuestas_cep.html).

26. CEP, “Estudio Nacional,” No. 56, 2007.

## 2.2. PARTIDOCRACIA

Although the executive is without doubt the most powerful actor in Chilean politics and therefore also in its transition process, Chile's highly institutionalized parties are also credited with underwriting the success of the transition and the stability of Chilean democracy. However, we must say more about the role of institutionalized parties to understand how they have helped the democratization process on the one hand but have probably also hindered the consolidation of a fully representative democracy on the other.

Strong and well-institutionalized parties are often central actors in high quality democracies (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). Indeed, strong parties were central to the success of the Chilean transition because only strong parties with the capacity to discipline members could negotiate and enforce the agreements that sustained the democratic transition. However, increasingly the domination of the Chilean political system by parties with low levels of popular adhesion is bordering on the development of partidocracia.

To understand this argument it is necessary to put the role of Chilean parties in historical perspective. Before the Pinochet government, parties were recognized as *the* central actors in the political system, with high levels of institutionalization and importance and very high levels of citizen identification and social penetration—to such an extent that they were referred to as the “backbone” of the Chilean political system (Garretón 1987, 64).

With the return of democracy, and despite the Pinochet's government efforts to transform it, the party system forcibly reemerged with the same general physiognomy, and indeed the same leaders, following seventeen years of authoritarianism (Valenzuela and Scully 1997; Siavelis 1997). By all accounts this was a party-led and party-centered democratic transition. At the outset of the democratic transition, seventeen political parties (five of which could be considered major parties: the Partido Socialista de Chile (Socialist Party of Chile, PS), the PPD, the PDC, the Partido Radical (Radical Party, PR), and the Partido Social Demócratico (Social Democratic Party, PSD) joined to form the center-left Concertación coalition to face off against

the Alianza on the right (made up of two major parties, the Unión Democrática Independiente (Independent Democratic Union, UDI) and the Renovación Nacional (National Renewal, RN)).<sup>27</sup> Parties realized that the only way to win post-authoritarian elections (especially in light of the majoritarian legislative electoral system bequeathed by Pinochet) was to join together in a negotiated transition characterized by power sharing between major parties. Political parties constructed a series of elite-negotiated formal and informal institutions aimed at power sharing and securing the democratic transition.<sup>28</sup>

At the elite level, the party system seems remarkably like that of the pre-authoritarian period, and numerous studies attest to the extent of continuity. However, the fundamentally different nature of party–society relations has been less recognized and less analyzed and likely lies at the root of Chileans’ dissatisfaction with the state of democracy in their country. Given the centrality of parties, one is tempted to argue that they still form the “backbone” of Chilean politics. However, while they have been central to structuring elite politics and the democratic transition, the nature of society–party relations is very different than in the pre-authoritarian period.

When surveys began, immediately following the return of democracy in 1990, 62.5 percent of the Chilean public attested to identifying with a political party. By 1992, the number of Chileans self-identifying with political parties increased to 87 percent. From there this percentage has registered gradual declines, to the point that in 2008 only 43 percent of Chileans said they identified with a particular political party, and none of the parties registered a level of adherence above 10 percent.<sup>29</sup>

This low level of party identification is certainly a function of the low esteem in which Chileans hold political parties. When asked their opinion of a series of sixteen institutions in

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27. The Alianza has changed its name a number of times (it has been known as “Democracia y Progreso” as well as “Unión por el Progreso,” but it has been continually comprised of the same party actors (with the exception of the 1993 elections when the Unión del Centro Centro (UCC) ran on the ticket.

28. For a complete analysis of informal institutions and democratization in Chile see Siavelis (2006).

29. These numbers are based on analysis of every political opinion survey undertaken by the Centro de Estudios Públicos between 1990 and 2008 where this question was asked. A total of thirty-seven surveys were consulted which can be found at [http://www.cepchile.cl/dms/lang\\_1/home.html](http://www.cepchile.cl/dms/lang_1/home.html).

2008, Chileans ranked political parties dead last. Only 6 percent expressed “some or much” confidence in political parties, trailing far behind the military (51 percent), the government (30 percent), newspapers (28 percent), and unions (26 percent). The courts and Congress, which ranked fourteenth and fifteenth, had “some or much” confidence of 18 percent and 16 percent of the population respectively (CEP 2008). Certainly, support for political parties is relatively low across Latin America. In terms of comparative referents, among the eighteen countries included in the Latinobarómetro survey, Chile ranks ninth with respect to the citizenry expressing the least confidence in political parties (Latinobarometro 2007, 94). While not at the bottom regionally with respect to the evaluation of parties, this position is remarkable given the strong historical connections between society and parties, and the scholarly work that lauds the quality and institutionalization of Chile’s parties.

Despite low levels of support for parties at the popular level, at the elite level, parties—and in particular party elites—remain the most important political actors in Chile for several significant reasons.

First, while the importance of ideology and party differentiation has decreased at the mass level, at the elite level they have actually intensified since the return of democracy. While certainly the ideological scope even at the elite level has narrowed in light of transformations wrought by the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism, ideological differentiation among parties within this narrower spectrum has increased. Through analysis of a series of questions drawn from the three waves of the Proyecto Elites Parlamentarias Latinoamericanas (Latin American Elite Parliamentarians Project, PELA), a survey conducted by the Universidad de Salamanca, Rodríguez (2008) found that while in terms of actual policy programs elites seemed to be moving closer together, tests of ideological positioning showed that self-professed ideological distinctions between parties have actually become sharper since the return of democracy. Members of parliament also make much sharper distinctions than the citizenry when it comes to the perceived ideological space between parties. Among countries included in the

PELA interviews, Chile is the country where ideology most sharply differentiates legislators' perceptions of the severity of different sets of problems. For example, self-identified leftist legislators are more likely than those on the right to consider economic problems the most important, while those on the right see political problems as much more serious (Alcántara 2008). However, while elites remain firmly entrenched in the party model characteristic of the transition, at the popular level the Chilean public identifies less and less with parties as the main interlocutors of citizen representation. Indeed, 29 percent of Chileans either said they would or could not place themselves along a right-left ideological spectrum (Latinobarometro 2007, 74). Data from the Centro de Estudios Públicos confirms this trend, with 34 percent of the Chilean public claiming not to sympathize with any of the ideological positions and 3 percent saying they did not know (CEP 2008).

Second, parties are recognized as one of the central policy-making actors by members of parliament. When asked whether the structures of deputies' parties "were continuous" or "merely mobilized for elections" over the three waves of questionnaires, deputies pointed to the continuing structural importance of their parties by wide margins: 94.7 percent (1994-98), 88.8 percent (1998-2002) and 85.2 percent (2002-06). With respect to the power and influence of party elites in particular, Chile is the only country of the fifteen included in the PELA study where party leaders are ranked as most important ahead of voters and party militants in terms of whose opinions deputies take into account when making decisions (Marengi and Montero 2008).

Third, party elites remain remarkably powerful actors. They continue to exercise nearly complete control over the legislative candidate selection process, even overriding the results of popular primaries in order to satisfy other deals related to coalition maintenance (Siavelis 2002; Navia 2008). With respect to internal party democracy, legislators perceive it as quite low, albeit growing, when measured in terms of the power and influence of party militants. During the three legislative periods dealt with here, 16 percent of deputies termed levels of party democracy as

“high” or “very high” during the first period (1994-98), 31 percent during the second (1998-2002), and 44.4 percent during the third (2002-06). Overall, among the fifteen countries included in the PELA study, Chile ranked third from the bottom in terms of perceived internal party democracy, behind only Argentina and the Dominican Republic (Rodriguez 2008).<sup>30</sup>

Finally, as has been repeatedly detailed throughout this paper, parties and considerations of party identification are central in determining which posts people receive, where parliamentary candidates run, and how the spoils of Chile’s coalition government are distributed. In writing on pre-Chávez Venezuela, a country previously touted as a “model” and an island of stability in Latin America, Coppedge contended that “The institutions that make Venezuela a stable polity also tarnish the quality of its democracy”(1994, 2). Coppedge noted that Venezuela’s highly institutionalized parties had come to completely dominate the political system in the form of a “partyarchy” or *partidocracia*. In a very similar way, the institutions and political dynamic which made Chile’s transition to democracy a success have also tarnished the quality of democracy, and many of these are tied to a developing *partidocracia*.

This is not to say that party institutionalization is always a bad thing. Just as Coppedge noted the different forms of institutionalization and partisan power, Chile’s parties can play the vital role in democracy that they played in the past. In their study of Uruguay, Buquet and Chasquetti refer to its *partidocracia de consensus* (partyarchy of consensus), noting the extraordinary strength of Uruguayan parties (Buquet and Chasquetti 2004). However, the crucial difference is that while Uruguayan parties demonstrate many of the same prerogatives as their Chilean counterparts, they also enjoy extraordinarily high levels of cohesive support among the mass public. While parties in Chile are strong and influential at the elite level, they increasingly lack the deep roots in society that characterized parties in the past and that are central to effective party representation.

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30. It may seem counterintuitive that the level of perceived internal democracy is increasing given the argument we set out here. This increase may be due to a great willingness of elites to yield some control given the decreasing delicacy of the democratic transition and the concomitant decrease in the importance of managing political outcomes.

In sum, considering Bachelet's difficulty in governing and the citizenry's increasing discontent with Chilean democracy, few have considered the possibility that the much lauded transitional model of party interaction might irritate rather ameliorate these problems. Party and party elites remain extraordinarily powerful and influential actors within the Chilean political system. This reality alone is, of course, not a bad thing. Chile's highly institutionalized parties are credited with underwriting the success of the democratic transition and the stability of Chilean democracy. However, while party institutionalization has provided presidents with workable legislative majorities, strong parties, and powerful party leadership, party elites continue to dominate decision-making and candidate selection with little citizen input. Deals between elites allowed the construction and enforcement of models of accommodation and consensus that were at the root of transitional success but at the same time built elitist decision-making structures and patterns of interaction that are difficult to dislodge and that severely limit representation. Party elites strike deals, reach agreements, and negotiate consensus settlements within the framework of the transitional model, while the Chilean public has more workaday concerns, seeking solutions to long-standing problems put off by the dynamic of elite settlement.

### 2.3. A CONSENSUS MODEL OF POLITICS AND POLICIES

Consensus-building is generally understood as a positive process that can contribute to the success of democratic transitions. However, consensus-building can also be dangerous if elites hijack the democratic process to reach that consensus without sufficient input from the electorate in general and if that consensus results in delaying decisions on issues deemed important by the public. While a policy process based on a model of consensus was central to the success of the transition, it has less of a place in, and is indeed counterproductive to, the consolidation of a fully representative democracy in Chile. The first post-authoritarian president, Patricio Aylwin recognized early in the democratic transition that the economy was the Achilles' heel of the new government. To maintain the transition, presidents avoided going beyond simple tinkering with the Pinochet economic model. Aylwin publicly acknowledged that the private sector was the

primary “motor” of economic growth in the country. Similarly, in 1999 the right and the business community openly suggested that should Ricardo Lagos, whom they labeled as a socialist, be elected president, it would represent a return to the chaotic economic policies of the Salvador Allende government. The Concertación’s decision to adopt a hands-off policy on the economy left its presidents hamstrung when it came to economic policy making. To avoid confrontation, they concentrated on the political transition, only tackling economic problems that did not fundamentally alter Pinochet’s economic legacy.

The overriding exigency of maintaining consensus also spilled over into the policy-making process. Elites structured patterns of political deal making that sidelined key democratic actors and democratic processes. The post-transitional political model involved a series of deals between party elites both within the Concertación and between the Concertación and potential veto players on the right.

It should be noted that, to a large extent, this mechanism of policy making was driven by the Constitution that the Concertación inherited from the dictatorship. Until the constitutional reforms of 2005, the institution of non-elected senators ensured that the right-wing opposition held a Senate majority. In addition, many legislative changes to the so-called constitutional laws required more than a simple majority which was impossible to achieve given the effective veto power the right held in the Senate until 2005. Even since then, the Concertación has only temporarily held a simple majority in both houses of Congress, which has not allowed it to reform any of these constitutional laws.<sup>31</sup> It has therefore been impossible for the coalition to pass legislation that was not pre-negotiated with the opposition. Needless to say, this proved to be a significant political handicap for the Concertación and accounts for its timid reforms since 1990. These constitutional arrangements also led to a pattern of negotiations behind closed doors and the putting forward of pre-negotiated legislative proposals that required very little debate or revision in Congress.

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31. This majority was gradually whittled down as over time the Concertación was able to designate its own senators and as both Presidents Aylwin and Frei became life-long senators. Changing the organic laws requires a three-fifths or four-sevenths majority as instituted by the Chilean constitution. The 2005 constitutional reform did not change this requirement.

However, beyond the constraints of the Constitution, there was also an ethos of extra-institutional consensus building. In terms of the Concertación's relationships with veto players on the right, the bargain included a tacit agreement that the president should negotiate with powerful economic actors and leaders on the right to arrive at consensus solutions for the most controversial legislation. Concertación governments have negotiated directly with the opposition and with powerful players on the right, like business associations and producer groups, to craft agreements before legislation is introduced in Congress. This model, dubbed *democracia de los acuerdos* (democracy by agreement), was used in reforming the tax code, expanding social welfare and anti-corruption legislation, and in the comprehensive constitutional reforms of 2005. These major policy deals involved very little popular or congressional involvement (Silva 1992; Boylen 1996).

Negotiated agreements outside Congress have also often been the norm between the Concertación and its allies, such as trade unions. While aimed at securing the democratic transition by avoiding potentially destabilizing demands, this model has also minimized the role of the citizenry and Congress in government policy making. Two good examples of this kind of policy making are labor reform and educational reform. In both of these examples, the Chilean population and electorate would probably benefit from potential reforms, but the power of the respective union organizations prevents this.

In the case of labor reform, unions have blocked any attempt to reform the relatively high levels of severance pay that employers in Chile are required to provide when they dismiss workers without just cause. Although most analysts agree that severance pay introduces rigidities into the labor market that stymie employment growth, unions view the legislation as an acquired right and block any reform. This means that the government cannot use severance pay as a bargaining chip to negotiate other much-needed labor reforms with the opposition even though such reforms would probably benefit the labor force much more than severance pay does.<sup>32</sup>

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32. This example holds for all Concertación governments, including the Bachelet government. Severance pay probably induces employers to attempt to circumvent legislation by hiring workers on a short-term or informal basis. In practice, a very large proportion

Similarly, the teachers' union (Colegio de Profesores) has done everything possible to prevent Concertación governments from reforming the statutes that regulate the teaching profession (Estatuto Docente) and to protect teachers from being fired. Again, most analysts agree that this legislation should be reformed and that its rigidities are partly responsible for the lack of improvement in Chilean educational standards despite significantly increased educational funding.

This elite-centered consensus model of political and economic development has limited both the content of political debates and policy making itself, resulting in widespread dissatisfaction with politics and political parties among the electorate as the population's demands for greater equity and more equal opportunities are not being addressed by either coalition.

In particular, the consensus model has focused on preserving the economic and social security structures set up by the Pinochet dictatorship. Although the Concertación governments have significantly increased fiscal expenditure on social policies, for example, they have not in any way touched the privatized structures of healthcare and pensions or attempted any form of redistribution that would even out the highly unequal structure of income distribution or educational opportunities. Furthermore, they have kept the state out of economic activities as far as possible, precluding the discussion or implementation of any kind of development strategy. Any such initiatives during the early part of the transition would have been potentially destabilizing, and the Concertación sought to avoid them.

Since 1990, as a result of this consensus model of politics, Chile's two main coalitions have increasingly converged in terms of their political agenda.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, Chilean politics are extremely nonconfrontational, at least as far as substantive policy discussion goes. Furthermore,

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of severance pay is never actually paid out in full, so workers rarely benefit from the legislation, and a potential reform would have little real impact on the functioning of the labor market. It would make much more sense to replace severance pay with more generous unemployment insurance. So far, however, unions have blocked every attempt to reform this legislation. For a more detailed discussion of this point see Sehnbruch, 2006.

33. This process of convergence can mainly be attributed to the fact that the right-wing Alianza has moved towards the political center in order to make itself more electable.

the absence of in-depth discussion allowed the Alianza to hijack the Concertación's political agenda from 1999 onwards, claiming that it is the coalition that will overcome poverty and inequality. The nonconfrontational nature of Chilean election campaigns, in particular the almost complete lack of discussion of the past voting records of both candidates and political coalitions, means that the electorate is unaware of the hypocrisy of such a statement given that the Alianza has consistently blocked legislative proposals that would institute greater equity or shift power from business interests to workers.<sup>34</sup>

A good example of this point is the health reform implemented by the Lagos government: the reform initially proposed a Solidarity Fund and differential value added taxes that would have paid for a broad range of minimum services for all Chileans, regardless of their incomes or insurance status. The opposition, however, vetoed both financing proposals, leaving the government with a much watered-down reform and more limited health service guarantees.<sup>35</sup> Ironically though, during the 2005 election campaign, the health reform was presented as an "achievement" of the Lagos administration, and the opposition's role in blocking its most essential components was not mentioned.

While one might have expected that Bachelet's model of involving citizens in policy making (*gobierno ciudadano*) might have brought an end to policy making by negotiated consensus, under President Bachelet, the process of consensus politics in fact took on an even more formalized shape. Bachelet established extra-congressional commissions to prepare major reforms and to respond to popular demands for reform. Although the members of these commissions were supposed to represent a broad range of social interests, in their majority

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34. 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 stood in 1993, was a former minister of the Pinochet administration, and Joaquín Lavín was a former mayor).

President Lagos raised this point during the 2006 presidential election campaigns, when he asked of the Alianza: "Where's their Christian Humanism when it comes to voting?" For a discussion of this point, see Sehnbruch (2006b).

35. For a discussion of the health reform, see *Iniciativa Chilena de Equidad en Salud* (2005).

they were nevertheless composed of members of the elite.<sup>36</sup> The success of these commissions was varied: while the pension commission put together the basis of a successful reform, the educational commission produced legislation that is widely regarded as not resolving the main problems it set out to address. Similarly, the commission on employment and equity has resulted in some new legislative proposals (most notably reform of the unemployment insurance system), but neither the education nor the employment commission managed to produce agreement on issues that have historically divided Chile.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, the commissions on technology and innovation, and electoral reform have not translated into any major legislative initiatives.

Despite the fact that the main emphasis of the Bachelet government has been on social policy, as with previous Concertación governments, legislation has focused on the allocation of additional funding to social policies rather than on any structural changes to the existing social security systems. For example, expenditure on minimal pensions has been increased, but there is still no social risk-sharing component within the pension system that can redistribute funds from the higher to the lower end of the income scale. The problem with fiscal rather than structural solutions to social issues, of course, is that once fiscal resources become scarce, or if there is a change in government, the increased spending can very easily be cut back, especially if the opposition coalition holds a firm belief in the value of tax cuts in a country that already has a very low level of fiscal revenue from taxation relative to its level of GDP per capita. However, moving forward more aggressively to attack the structural roots of the problem would have upset the tacit post-authoritarian political deal.

In sum, the politics of consensus underwrote a very successful transition but also sowed the seeds of a policy-making process that became informally institutionalized and difficult to dislodge. Attempts to change the process were sabotaged both by the correlation of political

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36. If we consider union leaderships as part of the policy-making elite that operates behind closed doors, the only non-elite members of the commissions were four representatives of the student movement.

37. The main divisive issues in education revolved around the teachers' statute (*Estatuto Docente*), union and collective bargaining legislation, and severance pay. For a discussion of these commissions, see Sehnbruch 2009 (forthcoming) and Kubal 2010.

forces in Congress and through the erosion of support for the Concertación—ironically because of its very unwillingness to confront the social and economic legacies of the authoritarian regime. Political consensus can limit the substance of public debate, and it is precisely due to this lack of debate that the electorate generally does not appreciate the extent to which the Concertación’s policies are limited by the actions of the opposition. In the end, then, widespread dissatisfaction with public policies and unequal opportunities negatively affects the view of both the Concertación and the opposition alliance, especially as the population at large does not understand how and why the Concertación has stuck to consensus politics. This has proven an infertile environment for the consolidation of citizen government connections, as policy is brokered between veto players and imposed from the top down with an eye to maintaining a consensus that will not disturb the post-authoritarian status quo and to allowing the Concertación to function within this limitation. As politics has become normalized with the fading of the threat of military incursion, this policy-making process appears more and more anachronistic.

### 3. THE NORMALIZATION OF POLITICS

While political elites in Chile have thus continued to operate according to the logic and structures of transition politics, the electorate has moved on to establish and expect a pattern of non-transitional politics that in other countries would be considered “normal” but which in Chile has clashed with elite politics, a process that has come to a head under the Bachelet administration.

The normalization of politics in Chile as we see it is essentially a process of disaffection with politics at the popular level that has produced a new, post-transition status quo. This is not to suggest that “dissatisfaction” defines “normal” politics. Rather, we argue that the Chilean public is less willing to excuse limited popular input and the lack of deeper reform as simply an inevitable result of the delicate politics that characterized a sensitive transition. The process, to an extent, has also affected the elite itself, which has faced increased dissent within its own ranks, particularly in the form of the disaffection of deputies and senators from the Concertación.

Disintegrating elite consensus may seem to undermine our point that the elite continues to rely on entrenched patterns inherited from the transition. However, our argument is that certain elements of the transitional pattern of interaction—those analyzed above—remain, while others are increasingly under stress.

Specifically, three trends can be observed that have led to the constitution of this new political reality: First, there has been a gradual decline of popular participation in political processes, in the shape of lower voter registration, lower electoral turnout, and lower levels of political participation and, as discussed above, in the identification with political parties. Second, for the first time since 1990, the population has mobilized against the Concertación on a massive scale, thus putting an end to an era in which mobilizations tended to be in support of the government and against the former authoritarian regime and its vestiges under democracy. Third, there has been a notable loss of discipline among the political elite. This has been evident in both the government and the legislature but has also affected the coherence of coalition partners within the Concertación. This means that there is now a proportion of the elite that no longer operates according to the logic of transition politics.

It is more than likely that all three of these processes have been increased by the fact that the Concertación has now been in office for almost twenty years, an extraordinarily long period by the standards of any democracy but especially in the context of Latin America. However, this factor alone cannot account for these simultaneous developments that appear to have culminated under President Bachelet.

Because similar processes of declining electoral participation, post-transition social mobilization, and increased political infighting have occurred in a range of post-transition democracies, we refer to this process as the “normalization of politics.”<sup>38</sup> Virtually every

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38. See for example Aspinall (2005) on Indonesia, Stauffer (1980) on the Philippines, Donovan (1994) on Ireland, Mervin Gumedde (2005) on South Africa, Levitsky (2000) on Argentina, Henderson (2010 forthcoming) on Slovakia, and Meyer McAleese (2008) on Ireland. Other countries where this process has been observed, for example, include Spain, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, the Baltic states, the Czech Republic, and other Eastern European countries.

country that has been through a period of profound political transformation, especially after an authoritarian regime, eventually stabilizes around a new status quo. However, while Chilean politics at the mass level is perhaps crystallizing around a new status quo, elites cling to what worked in the past, both out of habit and due to an institutional structure that reinforces elitist patterns. Two main factors can be distinguished that have characterized Chile's process of normalization: popular disengagement in "formal" forms of political participation and growing rates of "informal" activism and mobilization.

For at least a decade now, analysts have commented on declining levels of participation in Chile's political parties and elections. In 2007, Angell analyzed popular affiliation with political parties and the behavior of the electorate and concluded that Chilean political parties were developing in line with expectations, given what has been observed in the international context.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, political participation was high by Chile's historical standards during the transition period.

In Chile, young people in particular have disengaged from traditional political activity.<sup>40</sup> This process is probably compounded by the fact that electoral registration in Chile is not automatic. While voting is compulsory for those who register, registration is not. Analysts have lamented the fact that the vast majority of young voters in Chile have not bothered to register in recent years.<sup>41</sup> Marta Lagos, however, argues that this is a normal process in mature democracies as people only start voting at a point in their lives when they have something to protect or to lose.

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39. Angell 2007. This chapter was originally presented at the Latin American Studies conference in 2004.

40. Some of this disengagement is, of course, generational. First of all, the memory and threat of an authoritarian regime, embodied by the figure of former dictator Pinochet, have declined gradually but steadily since 1990. Pinochet's arrest in London in 1998 and subsequent events marked the effective end of this threat. Furthermore, demographic changes mean that a young generation of Chileans, born after 1980, now participates in (or at least observes) politics that has no or very little memory of the dictatorship. Second, increased levels of education, especially of this younger generation, have led to the formulation of much more specific demands for social justice. These demands are also driven by the very visible economic growth that Chile has experienced during the last two decades, which has generated consumption patterns and desires that sit ill with the country's inequality of income and opportunities and which therefore also generate a more urgent desire for social justice and social mobility. One statistic that exemplifies this fact is that seven out of every ten college or university level students are the first in their families to accede to higher education. So even though there are persistent and justified complaints about the quality of education in Chile, nobody can deny the expansion of its coverage, which in turn generates a more demanding set of social and professional expectations.

41. Riquelme Segovia 1999.

Using comparative international data, she shows that voter participation tends to coincide with the stage of their lifecycle when young people establish families, have children, and establish careers.<sup>42</sup> This process of reduced voter turnout rates goes hand in hand with the lower political participation and reduced levels of identification with political parties described above.

However, while formal political participation in Chile has declined, informal participation seems to have increased somewhat, especially under the Bachelet administration. Frustrated demands for social justice, particularly for more equal opportunities and income levels, have brought large numbers of citizens into the streets. These protests, however, are merely the expression of a much more general phenomenon: Chile now has a population that is willing to mobilize and protest against Concertación governments, and the population's willingness to do so is increased by the structural inequalities that characterize Chilean society and by the certainty that their protests will not destabilize democracy or bring back an authoritarian regime.

The most large-scale and successful of these demonstrations was undoubtedly the student protests of May 2006, which mobilized up to one million students nationwide and became known as the March of the Penguins after the school uniforms the protesters wore.<sup>43</sup> The demonstrators initially demanded free bus fare and the waiving of the university admissions test fee. However, more substantive demands soon became part of their agenda as the protests increasingly focused on the quality of education and legislative changes.<sup>44</sup> The mobilization became Chile's largest demonstration of the past two decades. Its articulate leaders generated support and sympathy among the population at large, which considered their demands fair and valid. It was to become the first political crisis Bachelet had to confront, occurring only months after her administration took office.

The student protests were perhaps the best demonstration of the extent to which Chile has changed since 1990. Its leaders were articulate, organized, thoughtful, and no longer prepared

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42. Marta Lagos 2008 and Interview TV Senado, August 2008.

43. *Revolución de los Pingüinos*.

44. Their demands included the abolition of the Organic Constitutional Law on Teaching (LOCE), the end to the municipalization of subsidized education, and a reform to the Full-time School Day policy (JEC).

to tolerate the significant inequality inherent in Chile's education system.<sup>45</sup> However, leaders of other social movements have become equally or even more adept at organizing effective protests. Silva, for example, describes how environmental protesters have become much more proactive under the Bachelet administration, no longer adhering to legal norms and initiating protests against projects from the outset rather than after their environmental impact studies have been published.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, workers under the Bachelet government became much more effective at protesting and striking unequal working conditions and general levels of inequality, also ignoring legislation that theoretically prohibits such actions. In particular, several strikes by subcontracted workers—who organized sector-wide strikes, which are technically illegal—forced sector-wide collective bargaining agreements for the first time since 1973.<sup>47</sup> In fact, 2007 was a year of much-increased union activity. In response to the protests, President Bachelet instituted a special commission on employment and equity to come up with policy proposals that would address the causes of the protests. She had initiated a similar response to the student protests.

The Bachelet government was extremely lucky that users of Santiago's new transport system had no form of structured organization. As the Transantiago debacle hit the population at large and no civil organization in particular, protests were spontaneous and relatively haphazard, although several demonstrations turned violent. Given the number of people affected by the change in the public transport system, the levels of protests could potentially have destabilized the government.

The end-of-year news summaries broadcast by Chilean TV stations in December 2007 showed a year filled with protests, demonstrations, and violent clashes between the police and average citizens. Every month that was summarized in the TV programs had its own pictures of often violent social mobilizations. Even though the Chilean media, including the TV stations,

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45. See Kubal (2010).

46. See Borzutzky (2008).

47. Subcontracted workers launched strikes against the state copper company CODELCO, Aguas Claras, Arauco, and the fruit sector in Coquimbo. For details see Lopez (2008), Sehnbruch (2009) and Ugarte (2008).

is notoriously biased towards the right-wing, the pictures were striking. They created a sense of insecurity, of social disturbances, and of a government that lacked leadership and control. They also showed a population that was reacting as populations in most countries would in the face of acute problems that affect large numbers of people, and they exemplified the wide chasm that has opened up between broad sectors of the electorate and political elites from both government and opposition.

Despite what we have stressed throughout this paper concerning elite policy making and elite agreements for maintaining political consensus, Chile's elites are not as monolithic as this discussion suggests. The process we underscore here is dynamic. In that sense, despite the entrenchment of the elite pattern of politics, there are growing divisions within the elite which further complicated Bachelet's ability to govern.

In the immediate wake of the first democratic elections, the centrality of maintaining party unity was the overriding concern of the Concertación. The first General Secretary of Government, Edgardo Boeninger recognized this risk, noting the importance of party cooperation in a then-confidential internal memo circulated among the highest levels of the Concertación. He wrote, "The fear of a military regression, and the understanding of the risk of such an event occurring, will be directly determined by the level of conflict that exists between political parties" (Boeninger 1989). Unity was transformed into something near an ideology in the governing alliance. As the Concertación has maintained itself in power, however, this unity has gradually deteriorated as individual political parties have put their own interests above those of the coalition, to the point where, as discussed above, in the 2008 municipal elections the Concertación split into two factions. This kind of power mongering and political infighting marks a sharp contrast to early Concertación governments and is very typical of "normal" democracies with coalition governments. It has also adversely affected the performance of the Bachelet administration, depressed approval ratings of her government, and led to the Concertación's poor performance in the municipal elections.

Every one of the three main parties in the Concertación coalition has experienced one or several internal crises under the Bachelet government, and the very public washing of dirty party laundry has damaged the standing of the Concertación, especially as it creates the impression that party elites are busy with their own infighting while the problems of the country remain unresolved.<sup>48</sup> The negative public perception of these problems has been further exacerbated by the allegations of corruption from within the Concertación's own ranks that have accompanied most of these crises.<sup>49</sup>

The result of these crises has been the defection or resignation of high profile party members, who in most cases were founding members of the Concertación during the time of the military dictatorship.<sup>50</sup> In 2008, several of the senators and deputies who left the Concertación joined forces to create a new political coalition, Chile Primero (Chile First), which then regrouped with two other small parties in the 2008 municipal elections to form the Pacto para un Chile Limpio (Pact for a Clean Chile). Its principal leader is Adolfo Zaldívar, who was expelled from the Christian Democrat Party and became the leader of the Senate in December 2008.

Thus, although the Bachelet administration was the first Concertación government to start out with a majority in both houses of Congress, this loss of coalition members has cost the

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48. This view of the Concertación is exacerbated by the fact that the Bachelet government gives the impression of having lost control of the legislative agenda, partly due to the prolonged Transantiago crisis, which cost the government its political capital, and partly because the executive is not putting forward an active policy agenda with a vision for Chile's future. This means that the bad news of political infighting within the Concertación and its constituent parties is not counterbalanced with good news of policy results or legislation that will positively and significantly impact the well-being of the electorate. The exception to this rule is the pension reform, which provided all pensioners with a significantly increased guaranteed minimum pension.

49. Between October 2006 and the end of 2007, Chile suffered from a series of corruption scandals that accused senators and deputies from the PPD (especially Guido Girardi and Laura Soto) of having used illicit funds (some of which, such as Chiledportes, were siphoned off government institutions) to finance election campaigns. Although these scandals were minor by international standards, the allegations were made worse by the statements of several high profile politicians from the Concertación, who asserted that this has been a common practice since 1990, which generated an impression of systemic corruption. Jorge Schaulsohn of the PPD spoke of an "ideology of corruption," while Gonzalo Martner of the PS and Edgardo Boeninger of the DC both confirmed that public resources were often used for election campaigns. Boeninger, one of the most respected and influential politicians of the Concertación, stated in an interview with *El Mercurio*: "Since the beginning of the Concertación it was thought that, since the private sector's money fundamentally favored the right-wing parties, it would not be illegitimate to receive public money from fiscal resources for social programs." *El Mercurio*, 31/12/2006. (*"Desde el comienzo de la Concertación se pensó que, así como el dinero privado favorecía fundamentalmente a la derecha, no sería ilegítimo recibir financiamiento público a través de los recursos estatales para los programas sociales."*)

50. Fernando Flores and Jorge Schaulsohn of the PPD, Adolfo Zaldívar of the DC, and Jorge Arrate of the PS.

government its majority in the Senate. While President Bachelet has not been directly involved in these internal party disputes or in the resignation and defection of their members, she has not been seen as exerting the kind of strong leadership that would hold the Concertación and its coalition parties together.<sup>51</sup>

Although maverick politicians are not a new phenomenon for the Concertación, they have become a much more serious threat to coalition unity under the Bachelet government. It is also clear that this pattern of less-disciplined behavior on the part of party members is unlikely to prove a temporary phenomenon, especially because the campaign finance reform of 2003 made it much easier for politicians to run as independent candidates. Rather than being allocated through political parties, funding for election campaigns is now paid directly to candidates by the national Servicio Electoral.<sup>52</sup>

All of the above developments have been compounded by the fact that Bachelet is the first president since the transition to be limited to a four-year term in office without the potential for reelection. This change has removed any incentives for individual politicians and political parties to cooperate with her government as speculation about who would be her successor began practically on the day she took office. This made the Bachelet administration a lame duck administration very soon after taking office, especially once it became clear that an association with her government would not necessarily prove advantageous for its members.

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51. From the outset, President Bachelet has not displayed much closeness to the political parties of the Concertación, with the exception of the PS, whose president, Camilo Escalona, is widely recognized as being one of her closest advisors. However, during the particular crises of these parties, she has adopted a "hands off" approach that indicates that she is not going to interfere in any process of self-destruction that the parties might be going through, regardless of the effects this might have on her government or on the future election prospects of the Concertación. It is perhaps also doubtful whether there is much she could do given her general position of separation from the parties.

52. We owe this point to Francisco Díaz. Campaign resources are now calculated on the basis of the size of the district in square kilometers and the number of voters. Candidates get \$500 Pesos for each vote they obtain. The Servicio Electoral pays an estimated amount of money three months before the elections based on the results of the previous election. Individual independent candidates receive funding based on the lowest percentage of votes obtained by the losing candidate during the last election, which, if combined with some private contributions, is enough money to run an election campaign without being a member of a political party.

Although the issues discussed in this section could be interpreted as symptoms of fatigue in a coalition that has governed for almost twenty years, they are also very much related to institutional structures, in particular Chile's election system and its associated forms of political conduct. They are furthermore typical symptoms of democracies that have moved on from their transitional periods and established new norms of political behavior. In the case of Chile, however, there is an evident conflict between the political need to maintain the elite power structures that stabilized the Concertación and the transition during its first three governments and the need to move on to the more inclusive form of politics that would be expected from a well-functioning democracy. It is this conflict that has characterized the Bachelet government and that is likely to characterize any future government as well.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The Bachelet government lived through a political crisis during its first two years in office, which demonstrated popular discontent with politics as usual. If this crisis was simply a product of the historical moment or leadership, as most critics and analysts have suggested, there is no cause for concern about the prospects for democracy in the country. However, if the crisis is something deeper, more systemic, and not related to the performance of a particular politician, the threat to Chilean democracy runs deeper.

We have argued here that there are deeper causes. Rather than tracing governing difficulties or general civic disillusionment to a single leader or government, we seek to uncover their source to a variable that has not been recognized or analyzed until now. In particular we argue that the often-lauded democratic transition and the elitist model inherited from it are, ironically, part of the cause. In particular, we have argued that the very model for transitional success planted the seeds of governing failure. While elite politics were at the core of underwriting the success of the democratic transition, their perseverance has been damaging to the long-term consolidation of democracy because everyday Chileans perceive politics to be a game of questionably legitimate negotiation and deal making between elites. While strong parties provided the mechanisms

to structure, broker, and enforce the interparty agreements that underwrote the transition, the party elite domination of significant policy and candidate selection decisions moves the mass public another step away from a meaningful representative connection. The consensus model of politics put off controversial decisions and avoided adverse reactions by veto players, but the negotiations to reach consensus again involved the few and the powerful. Finally, while in the context of a very delicate transition where an authoritarian reversion was entirely possible, this model of politics was widely accepted by the public. However, with the normalization of politics, we argue, the logic and the structures of the democratic transition are not only outdated, they are potentially damaging, effectively preventing Chile's evolution from a successful transition toward a fully representative and successful democracy. We stress that we are not critical of the process of transition, nor do we dispute its successful nature. Rather, our point is that running a successful democratic transition is distinct from running a longer-term consolidated democracy.

This analysis has serious ramifications. It suggests that Chile is not just facing a crisis of a particular leader or government but rather faces a significant crisis of representation. Political parties and political leaders have to change the way of doing politics in Chile. Unfortunately, many of these elitist patterns of politics are underwritten by the incentives produced by the binomial election system. Therefore, a good place to start would be the introduction of some form of moderate, small-magnitude proportional representation that would provide greater competition and accountability and break the lock that parties have on nominations. A proportional representation system with district magnitude of four or five would allow each of the parties to field the candidates they would like, and depending on the list system, allow voters to opt for their favored candidates either on their own party lists or from the various parties of the coalition.

Electoral system reform is not a single-shot cure-all, however. The representative capacity of the political system has been shaped in other ways by the persistence of the models

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inherited from the transition. The traditionally positive role of Chile's relatively effective and representative parties has been perhaps irreparably damaged. However, it is difficult to imagine substantive representation taking place any other way than via political parties. Indeed, it is ironic how effective parties were in the past, only to have their effectiveness diminished by the experience of authoritarian rule and further diminished through adherence to a less-than-representative transitional political model that served to maintain the transition but undermined deeper democratization. Chilean parties must regain some of the support and levels of identification they enjoyed historically by attempting to reconnect with the citizenry. However, improving the representative capacity of parties is a multi-dimensional task, and when—and if—electoral reform takes place, additional efforts to ameliorate the collateral damage produced by the transitional enclaves will also be necessary. New forms of connection between the citizenry and parties, more real power for legislators in the legislative process, enhanced levels of internal party democracy, and a real debate on the future of Chile's economic model are all elements of a much-needed and new form of post-transitional politics that better underwrites democracy in all of its dimensions including representation, legitimacy, and accountability.

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## APPENDIX

**The Bachelet Cabinet**

Interior	Andrés Zaldívar Larraín	DC	Mar. 11, 2006– Jul. 14, 2006
	Belisario Velasco Baraona	DC	July 14, 2006– Jan. 4, 2008
	Edmundo Pérez Yoma	DC	Jan. 8, 2008–
Foreign Affairs	Alejandro Foxley Rioseco	DC	Mar. 11, 2006–
Defense	Vivianne Blanlot Soza	PPD	Mar. 11, 2006– Mar. 27, 2007
	José Goñi Carrasco	PPD	Mar. 27, 2007–
Finance	Andrés Velasco Brañes	Ind.	Mar. 11, 2006–
Secretary General of the Presidency	Paulina Veloso Valenzuela	PS	Mar. 11, 2006– Mar. 27, 2007
	José Antonio Viera-Gallo	PS	Mar. 27, 2007–
Secretary General of Government	Ricardo Lagos Weber	PPD	Mar. 11, 2006– Dec. 6, 2007
	Francisco Vidal Salinas	PPD	Dec. 6, 2007–
Economy	Ingrid Antonijevic Hahn	PPD	Mar. 11, 2006– Jul. 14, 2006
	Alejandro Ferreiro Yazigi	DC	Jul. 14, 2006– Jan. 8, 2008
	Hugo Lavados Montes	DC	Jan. 8, 2008–
Planning (MIDEPLAN)	Clarisa Hardy Raskovan	PS	Mar. 11, 2006– Jan. 8, 2008
	Paula Quintana Meléndez	PS	Jan. 8, 2008–
Education	Martín Zilic Hrepic	DC	Mar. 11, 2006– Jul. 14, 2006
	Yasna Provoste Campillay	DC	Jul. 14, 2006– Apr. 3, 2008
	Mónica Jiménez de la Jara	DC	Apr. 18, 2008–
Justice	Isidro Solís Palma	PRSD	Mar. 11, 2006– Mar. 27, 2007
	Carlos Maldonado Curti	PRSD	Mar. 27, 2007–
Labor	Osvaldo Andrade Lara	PS	Mar. 11, 2006– Dec. 10, 2008
	Claudia Serrano Madrid	PS	Dec. 15, 2008–

Public Works	Eduardo Bitrán Colodro	PPD	Mar. 11, 2006– Jan. 11, 2008
	Sergio Bitar Chacra	PPD	Jan. 11, 2008–
Transport & Telecom	Sergio Espejo Yaksic	DC	Mar. 11, 2006– Mar. 27, 2007
	René Cortázar Sanz	DC	Mar. 27, 2007–
Health	María Soledad Barría Iroumé	PS	Mar. 11, 2006– Oct. 28, 2008
	Álvaro Erazo Latorre	PS	Nov. 6, 2008–
Housing & Urbanism	Patricia Poblete Bennett	DC	Mar. 11, 2006–
National Assets	Romy Schmidt Crnosija	PPD	Mar. 11, 2006–
Agriculture	Álvaro Rojas Marín	DC	Mar. 11, 2006– Jan. 8, 2008
	Marigen Hornkohl Venegas	DC	Jan. 8, 2008–
Mining	Karen Poniachik Pollak	Inde	Mar. 11, 2006– Jan. 8, 2008
	Santiago González Larraín	PRSD	Jan. 8, 2008–
Energy	Karen Poniachik Pollak	Ind.	Mar. 11, 2006– Mar. 29, 2007
	Marcelo Tokman Ramos	PPD	Mar. 29, 2007–
Women (SERNAM)	Laura Albornoz Pollman	DC	Mar. 11, 2006–
Environment	Ana Lya Uriarte Rodríguez	PS	Mar. 27, 2007–
Culture & the Arts	Paulina Urrutia Fernández	Inde	Mar. 11, 2006–

Note: This table does not include interim ministers Felipe Harboe (Interior) DC Jan. 4, 2008–Jan. 8, 2008; René Cortázar Sanz (Education) DC Apr. 3, 2008–Apr. 18, 2008; and Jeanette Vega Morales (Health) PPD Oct. 28, 2008–Nov. 6, 2008, who temporarily took over from Belisario Velasco (who was the first Concertación minister to resign unexpectedly), Yasna Provoste (who was the first Concertación minister to be impeached), and Maria Soledad Berrios (who had to resign over an HIV scandal).

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