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## A “Left Turn” in Latin America?

### PROBLEMS OF SUCCESS IN CHILE

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On 15 January 2006, Michelle Bachelet of the Socialist Party won a runoff for Chile's presidency with 53.5 percent of the vote, becoming the first female head of state in the Americas to be elected without any connection to the political career of a male relative. Her election was the fourth win in a row for the Concertación—the center-left coalition built around the Socialists and Christian Democrats—that has held office since General Augusto Pinochet's 17-year military dictatorship came to a peaceful end in 1990. Chilean voters have rewarded the Concertación because it set their 16.5-million-strong South American nation on an admirable course of socioeconomic progress and democratic stability that has eluded many neighboring countries afflicted by weak governing institutions, faltering economies, and high levels of poverty and social exclusion.

While assuring that continuity would be maintained, Bachelet also signaled that she was the best candidate to preside over Chile's first “posttransitional” government. Her immediate predecessor and fellow Socialist Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006) followed the pattern set by the Concertación's two Christian Democratic presidents, Patricio Aylwin (1990–94) and Eduardo Frei (1994–2000). All three presidents governed with the support of experienced party leaders who had begun their careers before the 1973 coup, had been deeply involved in the arduous journey that had led to Pinochet's defeat in a 1988 plebiscite, and had then proved instrumental in rebuilding democratic institutions.

Bachelet promised that her government would bring into public office a new generation of Chileans.

The Concertación had moved cautiously from the start, intent on precluding any crisis that could risk triggering an authoritarian reversal. At the same time, the coalition laid the groundwork for what would become Latin America's most successful economy. A combination of robust growth and effective public investments in infrastructure and social programs cut the poverty rate from 40 percent in 1990 to less than 18 percent in 2006. Democracy and the rule of law fared so well, meanwhile, that Freedom House now ranks Chile as one of Latin America's freest societies, with ratings comparable to those of Costa Rica and Uruguay. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index also gives Chile good marks, slightly below those of the United States but above France and Italy.

After some initial difficulties, Lagos left office with a 70 percent approval rating, the best since polling began. His administration erased such legacies of military rule as constitutional provisions establishing appointed senators, barring the president from dismissing military commanders, and granting the armed forces oversight over elected leaders.<sup>1</sup> Significant renewal in the army and growing willingness in the judicial system to uncover and account for Pinochet-era human rights violations furthered the work of completing the transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

Nevertheless, after sixteen years of coalition rule Chile's democracy faces significant challenges. In 2000, Lagos himself came close to losing the presidency to a populist candidate of the right who capitalized on growing citizen alienation from the dominant parties and their leaders, who rotated from one top post to another. In 2006, Bachelet successfully portrayed herself as the candidate of renewal and change, promising to forge a more inclusive and open "government of citizens"—as implicitly contrasted with one run by and for politicians. She promised 36 specific measures to address issues such as inequality, education, health care, and crime.

The daughter of an Air Force general who opposed the coup and died while in military custody, Bachelet was a relative newcomer to politics. She had played no prominent role in either the struggle against the dictatorship or the early years of civilian rule. A pediatrician trained in Eastern Europe, she received her first official post from Lagos, who made her health minister in 2000. Weekends spent giving free medical treatment to children in poor neighborhoods led citizens to see her as a caring and approachable public servant. Whether Lagos meant to or not, he further burnished her credentials by making her defense minister. She became a figure who could project not only compassion but authority, drawing on her family background as she worked with reformist officers to cement the Chilean armed forces' return to their proper role as apolitical defenders rather than masters of a democratic society.

Bachelet's election to a single four-year term (cut down from six years by a 2005 constitutional amendment) put to rest the myth, picked up by the international press, that she faced an especially uphill struggle in what was characterized as a land of intense social conservatism. In fact, her victory is a reminder that Chile has long been a highly secular society with some of the Western world's strongest Marxist parties as well as a democracy whose rise has been tied to the success of anticlerical parties strong enough to have enacted the separation of church and state early in the twentieth century. Indeed, Bachelet as a single mother was not out of step in a country where more than 50 percent of all births occur out of wedlock.<sup>2</sup> The new president quickly named a cabinet heavy with newcomers, half of them women. (She extended the concept of gender parity to regional and local appointments as well.) Another early project was her well-publicized effort to implement each of her 36 campaign promises within a hundred days of taking office.

Just months into President Bachelet's term, some of the high expectations surrounding her have already met with disappointment. Her administration failed to anticipate that so many students would strike to demand better secondary schooling and lower fees. Then—worse still—she and her team seemed inept at managing the crisis. Her approval rating has dropped, and she has replaced cabinet ministers in order to stanch the criticism.<sup>3</sup> While the general inexperience that was on display during her mishandling of the student strikes may be the proximate cause of her problems, her administration's uncertain start also reflects a deeper problem with her approach to governing Chile. Although Chileans are tired of politics as usual, the answer is not the replacement of a government of parties with a government of citizens. Rather the challenge facing her and Chile's political elites is to make parties more inclusive while safeguarding their essential role as instruments of democratic governance.

### Secrets of a Success Story

Many commentators on Latin America persistently but misguidedly assume that Chile has become a regional standout because the military regime forced a series of enlightened reforms that laid the basis for today's economic dynamism and political stability. While there is no question that the military junta, and in particular Pinochet's embrace of free-market economic policies, helped to steer the country on a path to economic recovery and modernization through export-led growth, a full account of how this happened must include circumstances unique to Chile that contributed to the new government's success in implementing its reform agenda.

Decades of constitutional rule and competitive politics before 1973 had left Chile's armed forces, unlike those of neighboring countries, a

highly professional and apolitical establishment un beholden to private economic interests. Such interests welcomed the coup for ending Salvador Allende's socialism, but hardly expected the new authorities to favor market-opening reforms that would level the protectionist walls which had benefited Chilean businesses in the past. Reforms enacted under democratic rule in the 1960s—particularly the overhaul of the highly unequal land-tenure system that had given traditional elites so much of their power—had made private interests less able to oppose trade liberalization. This contrasts sharply with the cases of Argentina and Brazil, where military juntas failed to implement market-based reforms. It is highly instructive that Chile's military did not return lands to their traditional owners, but instead allowed property in the hands of peasant cooperatives to be sold so that new owners could embark on the revolution in agriculture that would form a major part of the Chilean economy's success story.

The lesson should be clear: Anyone tempted to wish for a Pinochet-like figure willing to slice through the Gordian knot of modernization with an authoritarian blade should think hard about how much Pinochet's reforms actually relied on a strong legacy of democratic governance. Not only military autonomy and viable, transparent state institutions conforming to the rule of law, but also reformist or even radical redistributionist measures are part of the Chilean success story. Indeed, the Chilean case could be considered an exemplar of the need to implement "third-generation reforms," including steps to strengthen state institutions and the rule of law, in order to ensure that macroeconomic reforms and structural-adjustment policies bear fruit.

While Chile's preexisting institutions made possible the relatively rapid implementation of economic reforms after 1973, the country's successful return to democracy after 1988 stemmed directly from the military government's failure to carry out its cardinal objective of eliminating the old parties and leaders. These not merely survived, but united behind a common strategy first to defeat Pinochet in the October 1988 plebiscite that he hoped would legitimize and prolong his rule, and then to beat the military-aligned rightist candidate Hernán Büchi in the December 1989 election that brought Patricio Aylwin to the presidency.

Few observers would have predicted such an outcome. Fragmentation had been the theme of Chilean politics theretofore. It was the inability of the Socialist Allende, elected in 1970 with just 36 percent of the vote, to retain centrist (Christian Democrat) support in Congress as radical elements pushed the country further to the left, that had led to stalemate, rising tensions, and finally the military coup of 11 September 1973.<sup>4</sup> Chile's military rulers blamed the country's democratic breakdown not only on the left but also on the weakness of democracy, which they said made easy prey for demagogues, populists, and international Marxism. Pinochet and his junta set out to change not only the

statist economic policies of the past but the Chilean polity itself. In addition to repressing established parties and leaders, the junta redesigned the constitution in 1980 to limit popular sovereignty, to make the armed forces overseers of all elected representatives including the president, and to ensure that Pinochet himself would remain army commander whatever the outcome of any plebiscite.<sup>5</sup>

The continuing presence of Pinochet and the powerful military establishment had two effects. First, it reassured the right and the business community that the post-Pinochet government could not easily return to pre-1973 economic policies. Second and more importantly, it gave the Concertación partners a strong incentive to stick together while moving (however cautiously) toward the full restoration of democratic practices. Caution, plus the realization that free-market policies were benefiting Chile through job creation and high growth, led the coalition to keep these policies. While the dictatorship's market-based reforms had been unpopular with the parties that beat Pinochet and Büchi at the polls, the Concertación leaders' decision to support such policies helped both to legitimize them and to give Chile's new government the political running room to extend such policies further. At the same time that it was opening Chile up to markets, however, the Concertación was quick to enact new social policies that lifted more Chileans out of poverty.

### **Overcoming Authoritarianism's Legacies**

It is important to stress that Chile's transition was not "pacted." The democratic parties never agreed to specific terms with the authoritarian regime,<sup>6</sup> and indeed signaled from the start that their goal was to end such undemocratic features of the 1980 constitution as appointed senators, limits on the president's power to promote and cashier military commanders, the military-dominated security council, an electoral law that overrepresented the right, and an amnesty law that barred investigating (let alone prosecuting) human rights abuses. The catch for the Concertación was that several of these features (especially the appointed senators and the overrepresentation of rightists) made it hard to gain the legislative majorities needed to change the other rules. Not until fifteen years after Pinochet stepped down would the Concertación be able to abolish the authoritarian legacies of military rule and the judicial system be fully able to hold human rights violators to account.<sup>7</sup>

Of all the issues with which Chile's transitional governments had to wrestle, the question of civil-military relations was among the thorniest. Pinochet used the army as a bastion while resisting accountability for human rights abuses. With backing from rightist parties, the military fiercely sought to bar any reduction of its constitutional prerogatives and opposed the naming of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1990. The courts, however, gradually began to assert their own juris-

diction behind the idea that the absence of a body (as in the case of someone who had been “disappeared” under the junta) required keeping an inquiry open regardless of any amnesty law. The courts also came to accept the argument that, while the amnesty law could bar prosecutions, any grant of amnesty presupposed the determination that a crime had been committed, thereby opening the door to legal review of abuses.

Pinochet’s arrest (on a Spanish warrant) in London in 1997 did not mark the beginning of the prosecution of military personnel for human rights abuses—that had already begun in the mid-1990s. It did, however, mark the beginning of his fall from grace even among his erstwhile supporters, a process that gathered speed in 2004 when Chilean authorities charged him with concealing millions of dollars in foreign bank accounts. In harsh contrast to his carefully cultivated image as a selfless and austere military officer whom destiny had called to save Chile from communism, Pinochet came to seem in many eyes like merely another corrupt “tropical dictator.” His difficulties accelerated change within the army, which publicly acknowledged past abuses and dropped the doctrine of the armed services as “guardians of the nation” in favor of one that defines them as public servants in defense of the nation.

The Concertación’s most important achievements were first to build the most successful coalition government in Chilean history, and then to preserve it beyond the first few years after military rule ended. Chile’s elected presidents had long struggled to govern despite an intensely contentious party system that typically denied the chief executive both a popular-vote majority and majority support in Congress. The Concertación broke that pattern. Although Pinochet’s constitution gave the president extensive formal prerogatives, there was never any doubt after 1990 that constant negotiations among the president, cabinet officials, legislators, and party leaders would be the norm in both the making of policy and the filling of congressional and local nominations, cabinet and subcabinet posts, governorships, and ambassadorships. Commissions formed by executive, legislative, and political-party leaders helped to institutionalize the bargaining system.

As a result, Chile presents a happy contrast to other countries in the region where legislative opposition forces, in effect preferring politics to governance, have decided that undermining minority presidents is better than working with them at the risk of boosting the electoral prospects of such presidents and their parties.<sup>8</sup> By reaching out to opposition leaders, Chilean governments since 1990 have made it clear that their country’s “democracy of accords” includes more than just the parties of the Concertación. Coalitional discipline helped the Concertación to enlist rightist support for a hike in the value-added tax that paid for expanding social programs in the early 1990s, as well as to pass anticorruption legislation during Lagos’s term. In foreign and trade policy, the Concertación frequently reassured the business community that mar-



ket-opening policies would be continued and even enhanced. Skillful economic-policy management and proven respect for the Central Bank's independence gradually won the private sector's trust and convinced it that the Concertación's standing abroad was good for business.

### **Too Much of a Good Thing?**

Chile's democracy is consolidated, but faces challenges that we should not downplay. Ironically, some of those challenges stem from the very model of governance that has helped Chile to succeed. Tactics that aided institutional consolidation just after Pinochet may now be growing increasingly counterproductive. A major trouble sign has been falling voter turnout, especially among the young. High rates of abstention coincided with dipping support for the Concertación parties and increased inroads by the Unión Demócrata Independiente (UDI). This party, the formation on the right most closely identified with military rule and the more conservative elements of the Catholic Church, managed in a December 2001 opinion poll to draw the support of 15 percent of the population, while only 12 percent backed the Christian Democrats, whose decline has been particularly dramatic. At the beginning of the transition they commanded the loyalty of close to 40 percent of the electorate, more than twice the support enjoyed by their leftist partners in the Concertación. By early 2006, UDI's star had faded while the Christian Democrats were stagnating and saw the combined support of the Socialists and the Party for Democracy exceed their own. Tellingly, no single party commands the loyalty of more than 15 percent of the electorate in Chile today, and more than a third of all voters profess no party attachment.<sup>9</sup>

The UDI's initial success resulted from the imagination and hard work of its youthful leaders. They focused on some of Chile's poorest communities, garnering support by serving ably in local offices while using populist rhetoric. This same appeal helped to project Joaquín Lavín, the UDI mayor of Santiago, into the national spotlight. Lavín would give Lagos a serious run for the presidency in the 2000 election, mounting the biggest challenge that the coalition had faced since democracy's return and forcing the contest into a second round. Concern over Chile having its first Socialist president since Allende hurt Lagos, but so did the UDI's ability to present a new face while capitalizing on the growing lack of interest in traditional politics.

Lagos's leadership skills, a rebounding economy, and the serendipitous emergence of two women as candidates as his likeliest successors helped the Concertación to reverse its declining fortunes. The parties of the right did the Concertación a huge favor by not renewing their leadership and by letting themselves become entangled in bitter internecine disputes and political scandals of their own making. Yet the overall lesson from Lavín's near-upset of Lagos remained: The traditional par-

ties as a group had lost touch with their roots and their followers, and were failing to reach younger voters, all of which helps to explain the increased disenchantment of the citizenry with politics and democracy.<sup>10</sup>

The Concertación's recipe for effective governance—disciplined parties with leaders capable of forging agreements while rotating through cabinet posts and congressional seats—had opened a widening breach between leaders and followers. Public office had come to appear as the preserve of a tiny band of the same faces. Scandals related to under-the-table bonuses for high-ranking but low-paid officials, lucrative consulting deals for their friends and relatives, or dubious financing of party coffers added to Chileans' impression that cronyism was out of control.

More problematic still was the lack of vigorous competition for elected office. This shortage stemmed in large part from the military regime's reworking of the electoral system. In order to give parties of the right more congressional seats than they would have received in a more directly proportional system, the military-engineered electoral law set up districts with two seats apiece while also holding that the list with the most votes can gain both seats only if its vote share doubles that of its nearest competing list.<sup>11</sup> This means that in any two-list contest, the top list must get at least 66 percent in order to take both seats, while the runner-up list can win a seat (thereby matching the top list) with only a bit more than a third of the vote. Although this arrangement did help the right, it failed to produce the larger change that the military's constitutional architects wanted—namely, the replacement of multipartism by a system in which two large parties vie to woo the median voter.

Chile's traditional parties proved too remarkably resilient to let this happen. Faced with such an unfriendly law, they adapted by negotiating common lists, thereby retaining and even strengthening the individual identities of each major party in what was and is essentially a five-party system.<sup>12</sup> Even though the electoral law failed to produce a two-party system, could it have played an essential role in encouraging stable coalition government? This question is much debated in Chile. Some argue that the law gave the Concertación a crucial incentive to maintain cohesion. Others hold that even had the older system of open-list proportional representation been kept, coalitional discipline would have endured. The second view seems more plausible, for the first overstates the law's importance relative to such other factors as the fear of an authoritarian reversal and the advantages that a disciplined coalition gave the Concertación in keeping power and moving its agenda forward.

### **The Downside of Doing Well**

Whether the Pinochet-era electoral law or some other array of factors has done the most to reinforce the practice of "democracy by agreements," the downside of that practice should now be clear. Narrow party

elites acting behind closed doors decide how many congressional candidacies each coalition partner will get, how they will be allocated territorially, and who will fill them. When the Christian Democrats held the presidency from 1990 to 2000, the parties of the left argued for parity in congressional representation even though the Christian Democrats were the largest single party in terms of vote share. When in 2000 the presidency went to the Socialists and the Christian Democrats began losing popular support, the latter in turn began insisting on an equal number of “safe seats” to compensate for their “loss” of the presidency and their decline in electoral and popular support. A number of notorious squabbles over safe seats ensued among parties in the Concertación.

At times, party negotiators would force a popular incumbent off a ticket in order to make room for a candidate from another party, or bar from certain jurisdictions candidates who by winning might upset the careful internal balance of power that the coalition was seeking to maintain. With no genuinely open primaries, party followers in districts throughout the country had no choice but to accept leaders imposed by Santiago, most of whom lived in the capital and had few or no links with the people whom they were nominally representing.

Far from encouraging unity and discipline, it appears that over time the electoral system has fed interparty bickering, made worse by a tendency toward heightened ideological polarization.<sup>13</sup> The Christian Democrats’ flagging electoral fortunes may be compounding this, as they are driving some party leaders to argue that Christian Democracy must distinguish itself more clearly from its partners to the left as well as its opponents to the right. Christian Democracy emerged in Chile in the 1960s as a third choice in a society riven by sharp differences between a Marxist left and a right identified with the economic elite. With the Cold War over and most Chileans now embracing constitutional democracy and markets, and with the threat of an authoritarian comeback receding, the Christian Democrats have found it harder to stand out as a genuine middle option.

The electoral law has had the further effect of continuing the “extraparliamentary” left’s exclusion from Congress—thereby driving another wedge between the mainstream parties and society’s disaffected—even though nearly a tenth of all voters support this orientation. Coalition unity comes at the expense of openness and transparency in Chile’s system of representation. The most successful governing coalition that the country has ever known increasingly strikes the public as distant at best, and self-serving and exclusionary at worst. While citizens’ confidence in political parties has dropped across Latin America in recent years, Chile’s decline from 1997 to 2002 was an especially dramatic 66 percentage points—more than double the regional average.<sup>14</sup> And although Chile has been ranked with Uruguay and Costa

Rica as the strongest democracy in Latin America, Chileans appear to be notably less satisfied with the quality of their democracy than their counterparts in those two countries.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the bargaining that goes on, the presidency retains the formidable, even overwhelming powers which it received from Pinochet's 1980 constitution. So long as the Concertación leaves this legacy of military rule untouched, Congress's relative institutional weakness will threaten to intensify the democratic-accountability deficit that already afflicts a legislature filled with candidates chosen through backroom deals. Before 1973, Congress was a major arena for public debate and compromise despite a volatile and polarized national political climate. Today, the legislature plays second fiddle to the executive in structuring agreements and moving legislation forward. Although it would be unfortunate if Congress tried to assert its authority in the absence of a stable majority coalition based on party discipline, the legislature's secondary role in policy formation could very well come to haunt Chile if a president's foes come to see Congress as a tool for undermining executive-branch proposals rather than putting forth serious alternatives to them.

The tale of strong elite agreements that bolster governance but then lead to decay amid their own tendency to alienate and shut out is not new to Latin America. The Pact of Punto Fijo, a power-sharing agreement that Venezuela's two main parties reached in 1958 to head off an authoritarian reversal, eventually came to seem a cozy deal in which elites split spoils (mostly from petroleum) while fending off potential competitors. A sharp decline in oil revenues left the parties too strapped to keep the patronage flowing, and one of Latin America's strongest party systems collapsed while populist and would-be coupmaker Hugo Chávez waited in the wings. In Colombia, the Liberal and Conservative party elites built an elaborate National Accord (1958–74) to end armed partisan conflict—agreeing to share power by alternating control over the presidency and dividing all other posts, including congressional seats, on an equal basis. Although the Accord ended a civil war, it stanching genuine political competition and excluded significant sectors of society from access to power, fueling extrasystemic movements and armed insurgencies that have brought Colombia a new iteration of bloody internal strife.

### **A Government of Citizens?**

Chile is hardly likely to experience political crises as profound as those that have gripped Venezuela and Colombia. Its democratic institutions are stronger, and the very election of Bachelet revealed the system's capacity to generate change while maintaining continuity. Bachelet won by promising a new and more participatory style of poli-

tics while offering to address challenges that include Latin America's highest inequality levels outside Brazil—a problem that remains despite recent successes in reducing the poverty rate and the incidence of absolute poverty.<sup>16</sup> She moved swiftly to constitute a more representative cabinet, insisting on complete gender parity and new and younger faces. To implement her campaign program, she convened a series of commissions of experts and citizens to propose reforms in areas such as education, pensions, and the electoral system itself.

Bachelet's early steps, while appealing to the public, met with skepticism if not resistance within the parties of the Concertación itself. Her team was criticized for not consulting more widely on critical appointments. Her choices left many prominent leaders who had backed her candidacy and even managed her campaign out in the cold. Nor was it clear how she proposed to organize the consultation and decision-making process of her presidential office, or how new initiatives, such as the work of the independent commissions, would be funneled through executive and eventually legislative channels. Although Bachelet had held two major cabinet posts, she had been outside the central decision-making process under Lagos, and seemed hesitant and disorganized in getting her own team off the ground. It is understandable that she needed to place the imprint of her own authority on her government and not risk being controlled or managed by officials and party leaders who viewed the Concertación as their own purview. Particularly difficult for her was the enormous popularity of former president Lagos, who had projected reassuring strength and decisiveness while adroitly navigating the complex shoals of a coalition government.

It was Bachelet's misfortune to have her honeymoon in office end abruptly before she had a chance fully to calibrate her administration. The detonator was a surprising protest movement led by secondary-school students complaining about low educational standards, high fees, and barriers to postsecondary education. Student demonstrations mushroomed as schools throughout the country, including private institutions, joined in solidarity. The movement's leaders cut across party lines and included Socialists and Christian Democrats as well as students aligned with parties from the extraparlimentary left. As the media focused on their cause the students added new demands, calling for the revamping of a public school system administered by municipal governments whose resources varied greatly from one jurisdiction to another.

As Chile's educational system came to a standstill, the government was slow to react—first implying that the student cause had merit, but then moving unsuccessfully to control it with hard-line tactics. After about a month, the protests were finally brought under control with help from party leaders and official assurances that the government would respond to grievances. A commission of 73 members, including student leaders, was appointed to study proposed reforms.

The new administration had hardly recovered from the student protests when it faced a new challenge from widespread flooding in southern Chile. Once again the authorities were caught flatfooted. Bachelet herself was embarrassed when, on a trip to survey the damage, she heard many complaints that government aid had failed to materialize. Attempting to respond to a chorus of criticism, Bachelet fired three cabinet ministers including those in charge of education and the interior.

Finally and unusually, Bachelet came under fire on a foreign-policy matter. When rumors went around that Chile was considering a vote in favor of Chávez-ruled Venezuela's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council, new Christian Democratic Party head Soledad Alvear reacted with a strong statement calling for Chile to vote against Venezuela. Her statement revealed disagreements within the Concertación on foreign policy, something that was rare in previous Concertación governments.

Bachelet's problems go deeper than the shakedown-cruise difficulties that any new administration, particularly one run by relatively inexperienced officials, must learn to weather. In practice, the president's campaign promise to create a "citizens' democracy" has meant appointing many technocrats without much party background or backing. In this, she has deviated sharply from the practice of her predecessors, all of whom consulted carefully with party leaders when filling key vacancies. Even more significantly, a governing style that seeks to project greater openness and less reliance on cutting deals with party leaders has deprived the government of the stalwart support that it needs in order to respond quickly to multiple challenges.

### **A Need to Shift Gears**

There is little doubt that Bachelet and her team are right in thinking that the voters expect their new president to implement change. But it is one thing to put fresh faces in high posts, and quite another to structure a government whose officials lack strong and constant backing from the parties that make up the ruling coalition. In seeking to satisfy the demand for more participatory democracy, Bachelet risks making the same mistake that President Vicente Fox made in Mexico. He assembled a group of able technocrats whom he believed would satisfy the conditions for a "plural" government of "transition," but who proved weak because they simply did not come close to representing any of the real political forces in the country.

Bachelet needs to shift gears quickly and seek the support of key leaders in the parties and Congress. While she appears weak, the reality is that strong leaders with long governmental experience now head the parties in her coalition. Rooting her administration more firmly in these well-established parties will dispel the aura of weakness, but she must be careful at the same time to remember and take seriously the depth

and extent of Chileans' hunger for a new approach to politics. Insofar as the parties have lost touch with their bases as elite agreements have substituted for more open and participatory discussions and citizen involvement, Chile's leaders need to reinvigorate parties rather than try to shunt them aside with appeals to an ill-defined ideal of "government by citizens."

An essential item on the agenda must be the strengthening of mechanisms for internal party democracy and greater openness in selecting party leaders as well as nominees for public office. Internal party reform needs to dovetail with the adoption of a new electoral law that will permit greater citizen input in the electoral process through open primaries or a more directly proportional system of representation built around larger district magnitude, open lists and preferential voting. One of President Bachelet's commissions, chaired by former senator and minister of the presidency Edgardo Boeninger, has suggested election-law reforms whose enactment would be a strong step in the right direction. The new law includes gender quotas to bring women into political life, including party organizations.<sup>17</sup> All the parties in the Concertación have an interest in seeing Bachelet succeed. In order for this to happen, however, they must move beyond the logrolling culture of the "politics of agreements" and join in an effort to promote reforms that will make the system of representation in Chile more open and broadly competitive.

Just as Bachelet must recognize that the parties are central to governance, the parties must realize that the quality of democracy is at stake and that reforms which promote participation should be at the top of the policy agenda. Congress, still severely limited by Pinochet's constitution, is the branch closest to the people. No participatory reform can be complete until legislative powers and prerogatives have been restored. The appropriate place for policy debates on critical policy matters is not an array of ad hoc citizen commissions that report to a dominant executive, but the halls of the legislative body with its public hearings and robust debate. A strong legislature provides an arena for forging compromises and agreements that are more transparent and inclusive. Party leadership will continue to be important, but redressing the executive-legislative imbalance that military rule left behind will help create a more responsive and accountable representative body. At the same time, the government needs to rethink how efforts at decentralization and devolution of authority to provincial and local levels have been working. The student protests were a sign that the municipalization of education which began under the military government has serious drawbacks.

Chile's success has owed much to the ability of disciplined parties with roots in society to agree for the sake of governance. The country still faces many challenges—reducing inequality, renewing the educa-



tional system, and strengthening economic competitiveness, to name a few. Chile's leaders can best address them by working with the population to overhaul democratic institutions to make them more open, participatory, and responsive. A new electoral law shorn of the former military regime's distortions will be an excellent place to start.

## NOTES

1. Robert Funk, *El gobierno de Ricardo Lagos: La nueva vía chilena hacia el socialismo* (Santiago: Universidad Diego Portales, 2006). See also Felipe Agüero, "Democratización y militares: Breve balance de diecisiete años desde la transición," in Manuel Alcántara Saéz and Leticia Ruiz Rodríguez, eds., *Chile: Política y modernización democrática* (Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2006), 313–35. This collection is the best on Chilean politics since the reestablishment of democracy.

2. J. Samuel Valenzuela, Eugenio Tironi, and Timothy R. Scully, C.S.C., *El Eslabón perdido: Familia, modernización y bienestar en Chile* (Santiago: Editores Taurus, 2006), 19. Chile's reputation as a conservative country stemmed from a misreading of the reasons why it lagged behind other countries in legalizing divorce. First, the Concertación lacked needed Senate votes due to the overrepresentation of the right that the military left behind. Second, the Chilean Church's prominent role as a defender of human rights during the dictatorship made coalition leaders reluctant to confront the Church over "moral issues." Finally, although the Church had distanced itself from the social liberalism of the Christian Democrats, the latter remained wary of pressing issues with the Church in ways that might cost them votes.

3. Valuable survey material is available from the Centro de Estudios Públicos at [www.cepchile.cl](http://www.cepchile.cl).

4. Arturo Valenzuela, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

5. For an overview of the military government, see Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies: Chile under Pinochet* (New York: Norton, 1991).

6. J. Samuel Valenzuela makes this point forcefully in "Los derechos humanos y la redemocratización en Chile," in Alcántara and Ruiz, *Chile: Política y modernización democrática*, 269–312. For an argument that the Concertación did at least implicitly pact with the military, see Felipe Portales, *Chile: Una Democracia Tutelada* (Santiago: Editorial Sudamericana, 2000). Portales was writing during the Frei government before some of the key "authoritarian enclaves" were removed.

7. J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Los derechos humanos y la redemocratización en Chile." See also Robert Funk, *El gobierno de Ricardo Lagos*.

8. Arturo Valenzuela, "Latin American Presidencies Interrupted," *Journal of Democracy* 15 (October 2004): 5–19. Since the democratic transitions of the early 1980s, fifteen Latin American presidents have had to leave office early. In each case, the lack of a congressional majority and the consequent elusiveness of a stable governing coalition loomed large. The comparison between Chile and Mexico is particularly illustrative. Mexico's PAN, a center-right party similar to the Chilean Christian Democrats, was never able to ally with the leftist PRD even though both were battling the entrenched single-party PRI regime. Mexico has thus had divided government with the usual policy paralysis, a syndrome unlikely to im-



prove in the wake of the disputed 2006 election in which no presidential candidate garnered more than 36 percent.

9. For survey data, consult the periodic surveys conducted by the Centro de Estudios Públicos, by far the best and most reliable. Unlike other Chilean pollsters CEP makes its data available to researchers free of charge. See [www.cepchile.cl](http://www.cepchile.cl).

10. Alan Angell, "Hechos o percepciones ciudadanas? Una paradoja en la evaluación de la democracia chilena," in Alcántara and Ruiz, *Chile: Política y modernización democrática*. See also Alan Angell, "Party Change in Chile in Comparative Perspective," at [www.lac.ox.ac.uk/parties-ips.pdf](http://www.lac.ox.ac.uk/parties-ips.pdf).

11. For an early discussion of the electoral law and its potential ramifications, see Peter Siavelis and Arturo Valenzuela, "Electoral Engineering and Democratic Stability: The Legacy of Authoritarian Rule in Chile," in Arend Lijphart and Carlos H. Waisman, eds., *Institutional Design in New Democracies: Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996), 77–99.

12. The Concertación is formed by the Christian Democrats, the Socialists, and the Party for Democracy (PPD) as well as several minor parties. On the right of the political spectrum are the Unión Demócrata Independiente (UDI) and Renovación Nacional (RN). The Communist Party and its allies continue to poll at about 3 percent.

13. Leticia Ruiz, "El sistema de partidos chilenos: Hacia una desestructuración ideológica?" in Alcántara and Ruiz, *Chile: Política y modernización democrática*, 86.

14. Alan Angell, "Hechos o percepciones ciudadanas? Una paradoja en la evaluación de la democracia chilena," in Alcántara and Ruiz, *Chile: Política y modernización democrática*, 185.

15. J. Mark Payne, et al., *Democracies in Development: Politics and Reform in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank, 2002), 34.

16. Dagmar Raczinski, "Radiografía de la familia pobre," in J. Samuel Valenzuela et al., *El eslabón perdido*, 294. As Alan Angell notes, leaving aside the richest tenth of the population Chile is one of the most egalitarian countries in the Americas. Inequality is less than what one finds in the United States. See Alan Angell, "Hechos o percepciones ciudadanas?" 171.

17. For an analysis of Boeninger's proposals see Andrés Tagle Dominguéz, "Cambio del sistema electoral: Análisis del proyecto de reforma constitucional y propuestas de la Comisión Boeninger," Documento de Trabajo No. 365, Centro de Estudios Públicos, Santiago, August 2006, <http://cepchile.cl>. Tagle misses the point in criticizing the proposed reforms when he argues that they would not improve proportionality. The issue is not proportionality as much as the capacity of the system to provide for more citizen choice. Peter Siavelis' arguments in favor of a return to PR are far more compelling. See his "Electoral Reform Doesn't Matter—Or Does It? A Modest Proportional Representation System for Chile," *Revista Chilena de Ciencias Políticas*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2006): 216–225.



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