

*Chile's 'Presidenta': A Change in Chile's Democracy?*  
**An assessment of women's political participation in Chile (1990-2006)<sup>1</sup>**

ACUARELA GUTIERREZ FERMANDOIS  
Master of Science in Latin American Studies  
University of Oxford

**Abstract**

In 2006 Michelle Bachelet became Chile's first elected female president making many analysts wonder if this was the beginning of a new political structure that would take into account the interests of the female population. However, before venturing into such kind of speculations it is important to scratch below the surface and address the issue within a longer perspective to assess the true extent of women's political participation in Chile. This paper will attempt to underline the existence of structural problems surrounding the issue of under-participation of women in politics and the under-representation of women within the state in post-Pinochet Chile. It argues that despite Chile's return to democracy there have been very few changes leading towards a more egalitarian society in gender terms. In this sense, Michelle Bachelet's election as President on one hand possibly reflects long term cultural changes in Chilean society, demonstrating it is now prepared to vote for women. On the other hand, it also represented a clever political move by the *Concertación* which allowed it to reap the electoral gains of having a female presidential candidate as a new face within continuity. Thus, it seems that the aspirations of the citizenry were an essential factor in beginning to push for the reshaping of political structures allowing for a fairer political presence of women in party politics, electoral politics and the implementation of gender related policies within the State.

**Introduction:**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January of 2006 Chile elected its first female president. In her first victory speech Michelle Bachelet stated: "Who would have thought, friends...twenty, ten or five years ago, that Chile would elect a woman as president?"<sup>2</sup> Her comment reflected

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally submitted as my master's degree dissertation at the Latin American Centre at the University of Oxford in May 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Dixon, Diane : "Michelle, Top woman in a macho world." in *The Observer*, April 2, 2006.  
<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/>.

the general conception of Chile as a very conservative country and perhaps the least likely one to have a woman president in Latin America.

Amongst her first announcements was the gender parity element in her cabinet with half of the ministers being women. However, the importance of Bachelet's election, together with the cited measure does not reflect the real underlying structure of women's participation in politics in Chile.

The figures show that only 5 per cent of the senate seats have been occupied by women in the last sixteen years (only 2 of 38). In the lower chamber during the 2005 elections, women only gained 16 of 120 seats, corresponding to 16 per cent of those elected.<sup>3</sup> Since women constitute 52.4 per cent of the national electorate, women's political representation is extremely disproportionate to the amount of votes they cast.<sup>4</sup> This pattern is also observed at the municipal level where 42 women were elected to the post of mayor (only 12 per cent).<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, these figures are below the average percentage present in Latin America, which has seen a slow but positive increment of women's political participation since 1990 mostly due to quota laws in several countries.<sup>6</sup>

This essay will attempt to underline the existence of structural problems surrounding the issue of under-participation of women in politics and the under-representation of women within the state in post-Pinochet Chile. It will be argued that despite Chile's return to democracy there have been very few changes leading towards a

---

<sup>3</sup> "Datos relevantes y curiosos. La radiografía de las elecciones parlamentarias 2005" en <http://www.terra.cl/>.

<sup>4</sup> Servicio Electoral (SERVEL) 2005, "Electorado Nacional" in <http://www.servel.cl>, Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM) 2005, "Mujeres al Parlamento" <http://www.mujereschile.cl>.

<sup>5</sup> However, there is a notable increase in the percentage of elected female councilors (27 per cent in 2004). See Table 6 below.

<sup>6</sup> For list of the countries see Table 8 below.

more egalitarian society in gender terms. Women's participation in electoral politics and in the executive power is very low but Chilean women's presence in the labour market is also one of the lowest in Latin America (37 per cent).<sup>7</sup> In this sense, Michelle Bachelet's election as President on one hand possibly reflects long term cultural changes in Chilean society, demonstrating it is now prepared to vote for women. On the other hand, it also represented a clever political move by the *Concertación* which allowed it to reap the electoral gains of having a female presidential candidate as a new face within continuity.<sup>8</sup> Thus, it seemed that the aspirations of the citizenry were an essential factor in beginning to push for the reshaping of political structures allowing for a fairer political presence of women in party politics, electoral politics and the implementation of gender related policies with in the State.

This essay will first reflect on the problem of political representation and the question of whether to have women in Chilean politics matters in general. Second, it will focus on the barriers to women participation in electoral politics focusing on two main issues: the role of political parties and the electoral system. Finally, we will focus on the issue of a gender quota law in Chile, firstly showing the debate over gender quotas in Congress and in the political arena in general and secondly discussing the factors that have made such legislation impossible: the lack of political will from the parties and from the state with regards to improving women's under representation in politics.

---

<sup>7</sup> Hardy, Clarisa 2005, "Evolución de la participación femenina 1990-2005" in *Foro 21*, <http://www.chile21.cl/>.

<sup>8</sup> As Patricio Navia stated in an interview: "-Sí, porque lo de Bachelet ha sido un mensaje de continuidad con algo de cambio. Es lo mismo, pero con faldas." in *Antimedios* <http://www.antimedios.cl/archivors/>.

**Table 1**  
**Female Representation in the Lower Chamber (Number and Percentages)**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total (Women and Men)</b>	<b>% Women</b>
1990-1993	7	120	6
1994-1997	9	120	8
1998-2001	14	120	12
2002-2004	15	120	13
2005-2008	19	120	16

Source: Servicio Electoral.

Source: <http://www.sernam.gov.cl/basemujer/> (Retrieved March 5 2006)

**Table 2**  
**Female Representation in the Upper Chamber (Numbers and Percentages)\***

<b>Period</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total (Women and Men)</b>	<b>% Women</b>
1990-1993	3	38	8
1994-1997	3	38	8
1998-2001	2	38	5
2002-2005	2	38	5
2006-2010	2	38	5

\* Includes nine designated senators until 2005.

Source: Servicio Electoral.

Source: <http://www.sernam.gov.cl/basemujer/> (Retrieved March 5 2006.)

## 1. The problem of political representation of women

*“Only 27 women preside over one of the Houses of the 187 existing Parliaments (...) Women therefore occupy only 10.3% of the total number of 262 posts of Presiding Officers of Parliament or of one of its Houses”<sup>9</sup>. In 2003, the number of female ministers worldwide was only 7%<sup>10</sup>.*

### ***General overview***

Considering that one-half of the world population are women, the above figures clearly show the existing inequality of political representation that exists between women and men. This data not only shows that the gender gap is relevant due to the low number of female representatives, but also because it implies that their interests are not represented or possibly interpreted in different ways by men. Moreover, in some cases women representatives or women in power positions do not necessarily represent women’s interests.

In this section, the objective is to explore why the gender balance matters in light of the presented above ideas. Firstly, due to its conceptual relevance, the meaning of women’s interests will be briefly explained. Secondly, the problem of representation in Chile’s political arena will be briefly discussed.

---

<sup>9</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union 2006. *Women speakers of national parliaments. History and the present* in <http://www.ipu.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> *Fact Sheet on women in government 2003*, in <http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/>.

## **‘Women’s interest’**

Authors who study the issue of 'women's interest' begin their analysis by stating that women have a distinct position in society and a shared set of problems that characterise a special interest.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this agreement, it is difficult to find the same agreement in defining what these interests are. Virginia Sapiro has pointed out that women’s objective situations are relevant to their political interests. Thus, the division of labour, stratification in public life, biological differences, laws, public policies (related for instance with property and contract matters, economic opportunity or protection from violence) and socio-economic position influence their interests.

However, this does not mean that women are always conscious of these differences and that they define themselves as having special interests requiring representation.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, “although women share many common problems, they are also divided, for example, by class, race, age, and marital status”.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Why does the gender gap matter? And what happens in the Chilean case?***

Women occupy a small percentage of the possible places in the parliament or in the state. What kind of logic then operates when 50 per cent of the electorate are women but only around 15 per cent of the representatives are not men?<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> See Sapiro 1998; Diamond and Hartsock 1998; Phillips 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Sapiro 1998, pp.166-167.

<sup>13</sup> Sapiro 1998, p.168.

<sup>14</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union. Women in national parliament. (2006) in <http://www.ipu.org/>. One exception are the Nordic Countries where women in the Upper and Lower House is 39.7 per cent.

This gender gap means that women still have a very limited access to formal politics and that their interests are not necessarily being represented in the best way. This occurs because they are represented mainly by men who may not know, understand or prioritize them or their problems. Nevertheless, there is no agreement among scholars about what are specifically ‘women’s interests’, and this is a commonly cited flaw for this argument. Anne Phillips, coming in its defence, argues that “it does not seriously undermine the claim to gender parity (...) if women’s interests were transparently obvious to any intelligent observer, there might be no particular case - beyond the perennial one of trust-for insisting on representatives who also happen to be women.”<sup>15</sup> Although this argument is valid to a certain point, it is important to consider that, if women’s interests were more specific, it would be easier for men and women representatives to take them into account. It is common to see in political parties that a mandate of difference is attached to women politicians which “is recognised by party leaderships, both men and women, as a relevant political mandate (but) they do not clarify exactly which values or priorities will form the basis for a transformation of public policies.”<sup>16</sup>

Following this argument, it is assumed that women representatives ensure female representation in politics. Considering representation principles, and perhaps through an excessively theoretical lens, Phillips explains that due to the considerable autonomy of representatives, what really matters is who those representatives are.<sup>17</sup> During the political process, it becomes apparent that women are willing to defend and introduce women’s interests in the political agenda more than men. Therefore, “an increase in the

---

<sup>15</sup> Phillips 1998b, p. 234.

<sup>16</sup> Skjeie 1991, p. 234.

<sup>17</sup> Phillips 1998b, p. 236.

number of women elected seems likely to change both the practices and the priorities of politics, increasing the attention given to matters of childcare, for example”.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, as Sapiro argues, there are some questions about the validity of the assumption that women in the political sphere will necessarily be more responsive to women’s interests than men would be.<sup>19</sup> For instance, are women in the role of public officeholders different from men? Research has demonstrated that very few women seek political office with the intention of representing women’s interests per se, and female candidates tend not to initiate discussion of women’s issues, trying to show that they are concerned with the people’s needs rather than a specific group.<sup>20</sup> In this respect, Skjeie indicates, citing the Norwegian case, “while most women politicians want to make a difference, they do not want to act too differently. They use power strategies that create limited issue-specific alliances. But they avoid confrontations with male colleagues. Many seek to influence party viewpoints, but most do not challenge party priorities.”<sup>21</sup>

However, some of the reasons underlying these tendencies need to be considered. Firstly, women have integrated into parties that were born in relation to political cleavages that did not necessarily involve women’s interests. In this sense, women’s movements have made an effort to include these interests into the political agenda, and some relevant changes and contributions can be observed. However, it is still not possible to find women’s cleavages that have modified a specific party system. In the Chilean case, even during the political transitions to democracy, where a new party system was created, some of the traditional cleavages were maintained. Thus, the new party system,

---

<sup>18</sup> Phillips 1998b, p.235.

<sup>19</sup> Sapiro 1998, p. 180.

<sup>20</sup> Sapiro 1998, p. 180.

<sup>21</sup> Skjeie 1991, p. 235.

after 17 year of authoritarianism, conserved the main historical features of the old system. Only the support or rejection of the authoritarian regimen was included as a new cleavage.<sup>22</sup> Despite the important role played by women during the process to recover democracy, this only translated into the inclusion of some women's issues in the political program of the new democratic government and -to a smaller degree- of the political parties in general.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, as noted above, class and race must be taken into account in defining women's interests.<sup>24</sup> If race or class affects women's experiences and their 'objective situation', then they are not minor elements. "Our identities as women invariably intersect with racial identities, class identities, regional or national identities - and these do more than complicate the picture, they introduce very real conflicts and divides".<sup>25</sup> In terms of representation, it means that women representatives are not automatically going to represent all of the complexity of women's interests in a specific society.

Closely related to the last point, ideology is another factor that must be considered. Political positions on the traditional 'left to right' spectrum imply opinions and decisions about all kinds of subjects. In Chile, for instance, the left wing has been keen on changing the status-quo on issues such as reproductive rights, divorce law, abortion and income inequalities. This is in contrast to the conservative position adopted by right wing politicians and PDC with strong influence of the Catholic Church. As Skjeie suggests, women representatives usually follow party decisions considering the

---

<sup>22</sup> See Scully 1992.

<sup>23</sup> See Waylen 1996a and also Waylen 1996b.

<sup>24</sup> Although it must be noted that race, unlike in other Latin American countries such as Peru and Bolivia, has never played a major role in Chilean politics Nevertheless, some research has been done on the issue of women political representation within the Mapuche ethnic minority. See Richards 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Phillips 1998a, p. 13.

political program, and it is only for specific issues that they make alliances with the women of another party.<sup>26</sup> The consequences of this situation are very clear. In a specific debate such as the divorce law in Chile, women on the right wing voted against the legislation for many consecutive years. Despite the favourable votes of other women and men, the project had to wait in Congress for nearly 10 years to be finally approved in 2004. Consequently, following the idea that women in politics represent women's interests, one must ask what happens with the representation of all those women who were in favour of this much needed law?

The presence of women in the state machinery does not necessarily mean that women's interests occupy a relevant place in governmental decisions. In most cases, "women ministers remain concentrated in social areas (14 per cent) compared to legal (9.4 per cent), economic (4.1 per cent), political affairs (3.4 per cent) and the executive (3.9 per cent)."<sup>27</sup> Thus, it is possible to agree with Sapiro's idea that "the presence of female officeholders is only one element among the factors determining the degree to which government responds to the interests of women."<sup>28</sup> It is also important to consider that the role of women is shaped by recruitment procedures and organizational constraints of a political system dominated by patriarchal norms. In addition, and keeping in mind that it is a political space, in some cases women in governmental posts are used as symbols to hide gender inequalities and become only one element among others within

---

<sup>26</sup> See Skjeie 1991. A survey carried out in 1998 among 54 women across the political spectrum in Chile found that "women from parties of the right were as likely as their counterparts in parties on the left to support policies for practical care issues, but there was far less consensus regarding strategic gender issues." In Gray 2000, p. 312.

<sup>27</sup> Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations 1996, in <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/>.

<sup>28</sup> Sapiro 1998, p. 183.

the political discourse. In this sense, further analysis is required to evaluate the real meaning of women in state machinery.

Finally, much responsibility is allocated to the women representatives who have to consider the intricacy of women's interests. At the same time, women politicians have to deal and work within a system of parties and states, which mostly operate in function of men's interests. Thus, it is evident that deeper and more structural measures must be taken to guarantee the representation of women's interests such as reforms in the gender division of labour, electoral system, and the structure of the state. The challenge is now to design laws and public and social policies that can secure equality in the labour market, opportunities to participate in politics and a fair and representative electoral system. This list is extensive and it constitutes a big challenge.

## **2. Women and politics in Chile: electoral system, parties and the State**

### ***Women and electoral politics in Chile***

In this section we will focus on the barriers to women participation in electoral politics focusing on three main issues: the role of the electoral system and the political parties and how these are both affected by the political culture. In this respect, Joni Lovenduski's point that the institutional features of political life, most notably electoral system and candidate recruitment, exert a powerful influence over women's attempts to improve their numerical representation reminding us that the Chilean case is no exception.<sup>29</sup>

In general terms, in post-Pinochet Chile women's participation has only increased from 5,8 per cent in 1989 to 16 per cent in the 2005 Congressional elections. However, this situation varies within the political spectrum, with the left-wing parties (PS and PPD) having the highest percentage of female congressional representation (18 and 19 per cent respectively) due to a self imposed gender quota. On the other hand, the most resistant parties to promote women leadership have been the two self confessional parties, PDC and UDI.

### ***The Electoral System and Women Participation***

Pippa Norris has pointed out that comparative studies encompassing first world countries suggest that the electoral system affects women's representation through the following three factors: "the ballot structure (whether party list or single candidate); district magnitude (the number of seats per district); and the degree of proportionality

---

<sup>29</sup> See Lovenduski and Norris (ed), 1993.

(the allocation of votes to seats) (...).”<sup>30</sup> As will be shown below the first and second factors mentioned by Norris are the most relevant to the Chilean case.

The Chilean electoral system has been generally accused of being anti-democratic and over representing the political right. At the same time, its supporters argue that it has provided democratic Chile with political stability. The electoral system in Chile emerged with the 1980 Constitution replacing the traditional proportional representation system with a binominal one. The electoral laws set up by the Pinochet regime, both the Constitution of 1980 for the senate and the electoral laws of 1989 for the lower Chamber of Deputies, consist of two-member voting districts. Each seat is obtained with 33.3 per cent of the vote, which means that an almost unreachable 66.66 per cent of votes are needed to get the two seats per district known in Chile as *doblaje*.<sup>31</sup> As Alan Angell has pointed out, since 1989 the Concertación has only secured on average the *doblaje* in the lower house in eleven constituencies out of a total of sixty.<sup>32</sup> The system was designed to overcome Chile’s historical ‘three-thirds’ tendency, fostering coalition building which in return favours the political right (the alliance of UDI and RN).<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, few scholars have mentioned the negative effects of this electoral system on the issue of women’s representation.<sup>34</sup> In this respect, Susan Franceschet argues that there are three main negative consequences that the binominal system has had on women’s political participation. First of all, the system places such a pressure on the political parties that candidate selection prioritises men over women. Secondly, the same

---

<sup>30</sup> Lovenduski and Norris (ed) 1993, p 313.

<sup>31</sup> Before 1973, Chile was divided into 29 electoral constituencies for the lower house elections, and each constituency had between 2 and 18 representatives based on a proportional representative (PR) system. See Gray 2003, p. 64.

<sup>32</sup> Angell 2005, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> See Scully 1995; Valenzuela, S 1995; Siavelis 2002 and also Angell 2005.

<sup>34</sup> See Franceschet 2005; Macaulay 2006.

problem applies to the next stage of candidate selection when parties begin negotiating within their alliances. Finally, incumbency in Congress is very high making few seats available and as a result women are frequently postponed in final alliance decisions if need being so.<sup>35</sup>

In general, parties feel the pressure to put forth candidates who guarantee high numbers of votes in order to produce significant majorities. To achieve this, coalitions often favor men over women candidates because of a general belief within the parties that men are more appealing to voters.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, this also increases competition among the parties that compose the two main electoral coalitions. Thus, “even if women succeed in winning her party’s nomination – whether through a primary or a centralized process- the party may ultimately bargain away that candidacy as the various coalition partners negotiate each party’s number of candidacy and the districts in which they will run.”<sup>37</sup> This system is so highly competitive that produces a zero sum political game in which to promote women as a candidate is to displace a man.

Another dynamic that works against women’s numerical presence is the importance of incumbency in Congress. In Chile, Peter Siavelis shows that, for example, in the 1993 and 1997 elections 74 per cent of deputies were re-nominated for either the same seat, another constituency or a seat in the Senate with a 81,5 per cent of re election.<sup>38</sup> This leads to a vicious circle for women because it makes it even more difficult to break into the electoral system and gain sufficient political capital to become a

---

<sup>35</sup> Franceschet 2005, pp. 88-89.

<sup>36</sup> In the Congressional elections of the year 2001, 89 per cent of the candidates were men while in the last election of 2005, the percentage has been reduced in 4 points with a still very high figure of 85 per cent of men candidates. See Rios and Villar 2006, p.2.

<sup>37</sup> Franceschet 2005, p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> See Siavelis, 2002.

possible candidate.<sup>39</sup> However, even when new faces appear on the political stage it is once again men that have a stronger showing than women as was the case in the last elections.

**Table 3**  
**Ranking of Candidatures**  
**for First-Time Male and Female Deputies (2005)**

Ranking	Party	Women	Men	Total Elected Members*	Newly	Percentage of Women
1	PS	5	9	14		35,7
2	PPD	3	10	13		23,0
3	RN	10	37	47		21,7
4	DC	4	36	40		10,0
5	UDI	2	27	49		6,8
6	PRSD	0	4	4		0,0
1	Concertación	12	59	71		16,9
2	Alianza	12	64	76		14,6
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>147</b>		<b>16,3</b>

\*Some candidates have taken part in other elections in different constituencies.

Source: Claudio Fuentes, Marcela Ríos, Andrés Villar; “¿Tiempo de Mujeres en Chile? Programa de Gobernabilidad” in *Observatorio* no.8, October, 2005. [Flacso Chile], p.6.

Together with the limitations that the binominal system causes to women’s participation, the problem of political culture also emerges. For example, having the right ‘*apellido*’ in Chile still carries much weight in the political world. This of course, is a general tendency in politics that affects both men and women not only in Chile but also around the world in general.<sup>40</sup> In the case of women, when examining the names of women politicians, it is not surprising that an important percentage of them are wives or daughters of high-profile male politicians.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, on the issue of men being more electable candidates in Chile “there is no evidence that female candidates are less likely to be elected than their male

<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, in the last few years female presence in the executive power has grown allowing them to gain political capital.

<sup>40</sup> Siavelis 2002, p. 15; Gray 2003, p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> Examples of this are Isabel Allende (PS), daughter of Salvador Allende, Carolina Toha (PPD), daughter of Jose Toha, ex minister of Allende or Evelyn Mathei (UDI), daughter of Fernando Mathei, member of the Military Junta and Mariana Aylwin (PDC), daughter of Patricio Aylwin.

counterparts.”<sup>42</sup> In fact, it could be argued that the results of the last presidential elections could produce an inclination towards favoring women within the parties as they now are seen to attract more voters.

### ***Party System and Women’s Participation***

There is enough evidence to show that the exclusion of women and their interests in politics reflects very deep and strong cultural norms about gender. Chile is no exception and scholars such as Maria Elena Valenzuela have mentioned the centrality of what has been called ‘*machismo institucional*’ to understand this exclusion of women from political posts.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, as Lisa Baldez points out, it lies in the hands of the institutions “(...)[el] premiar y castigar un comportamiento específico de género de distintas maneras.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the experience in first world countries shows that the institutional model can change or at least repress cultural patterns and social practices that produce inequalities and unfairness.<sup>45</sup>

In the case of Chile since the return to democracy the political parties have been a very important barrier to women political participation. These barriers are related to the nature of the institutions, the rules of the electoral game but also to the cultural barriers within the parties. Be that as it may, it is also possible to observe some improvement; but the responses within the whole spectrum of the party system are as diverse as the parties themselves. Moreover, there is a general consensus that there is much that needs to be changed in order to provide women with a more equal role in electoral politics.

---

<sup>42</sup> Franceschet 2005, p. 85.

<sup>43</sup> See Valenzuela, M. 1998.

<sup>44</sup> Baldez, 1999, p. 413.

<sup>45</sup> See Lovenduski and Norris (ed), 1993.

During the military dictatorship, women's organizations were central in the struggle against the regime. Women framed their mobilization in terms of their status outside the political arena. "The timing and framing of women's protest allowed diverse organizations across the entire spectrum of the opposition to converge: human rights, the poor, and feminists, as well as movement activists and female party leaders."<sup>46</sup> Despite their central work in a period when the political opposition had mostly been divided and weak, as soon as the country recovered democracy, formal politics took over with the party system monopolizing and controlling all access to spheres of decision making and power. In this sense, political parties quickly become the main barrier for women participation in elected formal politics. In Baldez's words:

"Irónicamente, mientras la represión de la "política de siempre" durante el régimen militar permitió que nuevos grupos ganaran influencia, el regreso a la "política de siempre" bajo la democracia ha empujado a estos grupos fuera de la arena política."<sup>47</sup>

One of the characteristics of the Chilean party system is its historical strength. In contrast to other Latin American countries the party system in Chile reemerged after a sixteen and half year dictatorship recovering its central role in Chilean democracy. At the same time, women have a long history of working in nonpartisan politics at the local level and not necessarily having strong linkages with political parties. Thus, because parties monopolize politics and, as we already mentioned, the binominal system makes it virtually impossible for any candidate who is not part of the two main coalitions to succeed, the inclusion of women in formal politics has been difficult and slow.

---

<sup>46</sup> Baldez, 2002, p.147

<sup>47</sup> Baldez 1999, p. 406. See also Frohmann and Valdes 1993; Waylen 1993; Matear 1996; and Schild 1998.

Consequently, women who wish to be in the decision-making sphere must participate in and advance within the political parties.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, one of the many ways parties can exclude women intentionally is by not supporting them in internal elections to reach top level positions. When analyzing the executive committees of all the parties within the two main coalitions, it is possible to observe a general growing trend of women participation in the last decade and a half, although the levels still remain very low. In the case of the PDC these numbers are even lower than what their own minimum gender quota laws determine. During the 1990's, in aggregate terms the average percentage of women participation in parties executive committees was 11 per cent. These figures improved since the year 2000 with an average of 17,4 per cent for the period 2000-2005 and 20 per cent for 2005.<sup>49</sup>

**Table 4 Composition of Political Party Executive Committees  
(Numbers)**

Political Party (1)	2001		2002		2003	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Renovación Nacional	0	3	0	3	0	3
Demócrata Cristiano	0	3	0	3	0	3
Partido Por la Democracia	0	3	0	3	0	3
Unión Demócrata Independiente	0	3	0	3	0	3
Partido Socialista de Chile	1	2	1	2	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>

Source: Servicio Electoral

(1) Only refers to the following posts: President, Secretary and Treasurer. Does not include Technical Commissions within parties.

Source: <http://www.sernam.gov.cl/basemujer/> Retrieved May 5, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Franceschet 2005, p. 89.

<sup>49</sup> Clarisa Hardy 2005, in <http://www.chile21.cl>.

At the same time, when it comes to electoral contests and candidate selection, an extremely important barrier that women confront is the lack of access to the support networks that male politicians already enjoy, especially for financing electoral campaigns.<sup>50</sup> Claudio Fuentes had calculated that in a constituency of 100 thousand people, a candidate to the lower Chamber should have US\$90-100 thousand dollars to be able to have a chance of being elected.<sup>51</sup> Despite the fact that since the 2005 elections Chile has public funding to finance electoral campaigns, the lack of access to funding still hits women harder than men. Franceschet interviewed women politicians from the entire political spectrum and all of them categorically agreed on the issue.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, the idea of '*machismo institucional*' reflects the notion that democracy and its institutions "al ser diseñadas por hombres finalmente sus estructuras políticas favorecen a su propio genero y así excluyen a las mujeres."<sup>53</sup> Elisabeth Friedman, for example in research done on the Venezuelan case, suggests that because of this man-made design of the political mechanisms it ends up producing institutions where women do not fit.<sup>54</sup> For example, many women politicians argue that party activism is not women-friendly, as it reflects male preferences, schedules and the need for wifely or maternal support. Moreover, raising children is another problem as women are less likely than men to be able to participate in political assemblies and party congresses.

Furthermore, barriers related to cultural and discursive practices that associate women with the private sphere rather than the public arena also make it very difficult to include women in party politics. At the same time and because of cultural prejudice

---

<sup>50</sup> Franceschet 2005, p. 89.

<sup>51</sup> Fuentes 2006, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Franceschet 2005, pp. 89-90.

<sup>53</sup> Baldez 1999, p. 412.

<sup>54</sup> Friedman 1998, p. 89.

associated with gender differences there is a traditional view among society of women as “débiles y emotivas, y por lo tanto menos capaces de desempeñarse en un cargo de representación.”<sup>55</sup> On top of that, women’s public activism continues to be seen by the more conservative sectors of society as a transgression of their more traditional roles. Many women in politics see themselves constantly questioned regarding their family commitments and priorities. These barriers all have the effect of reducing the number of women willing to enter the political arena and public life.

### ***Are political parties in Chile doing something about women participation?***

Lovenduski points out that in general, parties have implemented three types of policies to increase women’s representation in elected office: rhetorical strategies, positive action programmes and positive discrimination.<sup>56</sup>

The first one refers to *rhetorical strategies* which “(...) aim at changing the party ethos by affirming the need for more women in leadership speeches, official statements and party platforms.”<sup>57</sup> She concludes that this is the least successful way of improving the number of women in politics but that it is also the easiest one to commit to. In the Chilean case, after a first look at the two coalition party websites one can see that ‘women’s issues’ are part of their general discourse, but not necessarily in terms of women’s inclusion as active political actors. The PS and PPD are the only parties of the *Concertación* alliance that actually use this rhetoric within their party documents and

---

<sup>55</sup> See Htun, Mala N. 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Lovenduski and Norris (ed) 1993, pp. 8-11

<sup>57</sup> Lovenduski and Norris (ed) 1993, p. 320.

public discourse, even to the point of being critical towards what they call “el machismo, patriarcado en política.”<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, the PDC, RN and UDI have a very strong family-oriented discourse on women with affirmations such as: “Renovación Nacional (...) valora las funciones y virtudes de la mujer como portadora de la vida, núcleo de la familia y transmisora de los valores morales y las tradiciones.”<sup>59</sup> Women are usually portrayed as having a ‘natural role’ in society which should not change when faced with the demands of a modernizing society. In this respect, the UDI has stated amongst its principles that “Unión Demócrata Independiente se empeñará para que se permita a la mujer compatibilizar las actividades que ella realiza en la sociedad con las *funciones que le son propias*, especialmente aquellas relacionadas con la maternidad, la crianza de sus hijos y el cuidado de la familia.”<sup>60</sup> Unsurprisingly in the case of RN and UDI, there seems to be no need for gender equality. For example, in the last presidential campaign the UDI candidate Joaquin Lavín echoed this view when he stated that:

“lo que necesita la mujer en Chile es más que nada trabajo. Si tiene trabajo va a salir adelante y lo segundo, que luchemos firme contra la delincuencia y la droga para salvar a sus hijos y a su familia”.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Barrueto 2003, “Discurso del Presidente del Partido Por La Democracia” in <http://www.ppd.cl/documentos/>. In general for the case of the PPD see “Declaración de Principios del Partido por la Democracia” (1993) in <http://www.bcn.cl/>. For the case of the PS see: “Documento de Trabajo Colectivo” (2005), in <http://www.ps Chile.cl/pschilea>.

<sup>59</sup> RN, see “Principios” in <http://www.rn.cl/>.

<sup>60</sup> “Nuestros Principios, Doctrina y Principios, Punta de Tralca” (1991) in <http://www.udi.cl/>. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>61</sup> Lavín speech during forum organized by *Comunidad Mujer*; October 25, 2005 in <http://www.joaquinlavin.cl/>.

Historically and in general terms, “the most resistant to promoting women leadership have been the two semi-confessional parties, PDC and UDI, whose internal organizational structures mirror those of the Catholic Church.”<sup>62</sup> They also share the support of a very large rank-and-file base of female members that by 1994 was 41.7 per cent for the PDC and 61.7 per cent for the UDI, the highest such percentage among all parties.<sup>63</sup> This last example is not surprising when one analyzes the strategies UDI utilizes to incorporate women from shanty towns (*pobladoras*) amongst its ranks. These include strong clientelistic ties which date from the Pinochet dictatorship period together with a simplistic discourse which appeals to the *pobladoras* emphasising security (*seguridad ciudadana*) and employment. Moreover these ideas are usually presented in a way that appear apolitical and thus engage with the *pobladora*’s distrust of traditional politicians. Thus, we are reminded that numbers showing female membership within a party do not necessarily indicate a pro-active attitude towards female participation in all spheres of the political arena. Rather, it is the case that conservative parties such as the UDI seek to promote women’s participation at a ‘base’ level which is deemed more appropriate within what is conceived of as women’s ‘natural’ political space.

**Table 5**  
**Elected female mayors within coalitions**  
**(Numbers and percentages)**

Years	Concertacion		Alianza		Total in Chile	
	Percentage	number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	number
1992	4,1%	17	16,5%	11	7 %	32
1996	5,6%	15	15,9%	21	9 %	32
2000	6,0%	11	19,4%	31	12 %	42
2004	8,4%	17	20 %	25	12 %	42

Source: Efectividad de mujeres en Municipales <http://www.electoral.cl/mujeres/> and : <http://www.sernam.gov.cl/basemujer/>  
Retrieved May 10 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Macaulay 2006, pp. 174-175.

<sup>63</sup> The female party affiliation for other parties by 1994 was as follows: PC 42.6%, PS 41.2%, PPD 44.5%, PRSD 49.4% and RN 51%, (Servicio Electoral 1994). Quoted in Macaulay 2006, p.172. Information for more recent years could not be found.

**Table 6**  
**Popular Election Posts at the Local Level City Councilors**  
 (Numbers and Percentages)

Years	Women	Men	Total	% Women
1992(1)	216	1.434	1.650	13
1996	258	1.531	1.789	14
2000	308	1.475	1.783	17
2004	450	1.230	1.680	27

1) Corresponding to June 28, 1992. The post of Mayor was shared over two equal periods in 98 council districts (*comunas*).

Source: Efectividad de mujeres en Municipales <http://www.electoral.cl/mujeres/> and : <http://www.sernam.gov.cl/basemujer/>  
 Retrieved May 10 2006.

**Table 7**  
**Number and Percentage of Female Candidates within Political Parties**  
**Municipal Elections (2000)**

Party	No. Total Candidates	No. of Female Candidates	Percentage of Female Candidates
UDI	364	87	23,9
RN	515	96	18,6
PDC	619	103	18,6
PPD	382	72	18,8
PRSD	278	41	14,7
IND – Right	720	133	18,5
IND – Concertacion	201	42	20,9

Source: Magda Hinojosa, “Municipales 2004. Se buscan candidatas mujeres”  
 in [http://www.electoral.cl/actualidad/sebuscan\\_candmujeres.html](http://www.electoral.cl/actualidad/sebuscan_candmujeres.html). Retrieved 15 April 2006.

Nevertheless, ideological factors obviously can play a much larger role in the type of women they attract, the role they play within the party and the discourse these parties have on women issues. In the case of the UDI, a hierarchical, centralized, hermetic and internally disciplined structure is in place where its leaders are strongly united by religion and a very homogenized cultural and educational background to form what Fiona Macaulay has called “a self-appointed ‘moral aristocracy’.”<sup>64</sup> Despite the fact that women comprise a majority of its members and of its votes as we just mentioned, UDI

<sup>64</sup> Macaulay 2006, p. 175.

has very few female party leaders or national representatives. This is reflected in that UDI did not elect any women to Congress until 2001. (See Tables 1 and 2)

In contrast, the PDC is a much more heterogeneous party with clan and generation-based factional divisions inside which make its approach and discourse much more complex and less rigid. Although the party has a very strong social Catholicism in their party history (which makes the PDC less hierarchical than UDI), women still account for only 13 per cent of its leaders.<sup>65</sup> However, Soledad Alvear's recent election as head of the PDC (April 30, 2006) with a 68,49 per cent of the votes could lead to a new approach to promote female participation within the party and to popularly elected positions. Until now, women in the PDC only make up 17 per cent of the political commission and their presence in Congress is only 5 per cent. The implications of Alvear's victory for gender equality remain to be seen and we must bear in mind that she only chose one woman as part of the new central committee.<sup>66</sup>

Another way to increase female participation within political parties has been that of establishing mechanisms of positive discrimination. In this respect, Lovenduski has shown that the use of mandatory gender quotas (20, 40, or 50 percent), applied to internal party bodies, shortlists of applicants, or lists of candidates, is the most successful but also the most contentious and controversial.<sup>67</sup> However, Norris points out that the distinction between advisory targets and mandatory quotas is usually handled in an ambivalent way

---

<sup>65</sup> Macaulay 2006, p. 175.

<sup>66</sup> Numbers cited from Angell (2005). See also, "Soledad Alvear es la nueva presidenta de la Democracia Cristiana" in *El Mercurio* April 30, 2006 in <http://www.emol.com/noticias/> and "Soledad Alvear obtiene holgada victoria en la interna DC" in *La Nacion*, April 30, 2006 "in <http://www.lanacion.cl/>

<sup>67</sup> Lovenduski and Norris (ed) 1993, p. 11.

by political parties. Thus, quotas are not always implemented as a rule but rather more as a desirable outcome in the near future.<sup>68</sup>

In Chile the PPD and PS have moved towards such affirmative action policies. It was the women members of these two parties, mostly militant feminists, who demanded that this action be taken. In the case of the PPD, the party has a 20 per cent quota for women on party lists since 1988-1989 and as a part of its founding charter. In 1998 the quota was increased to 40 per cent and was also extended to popular elections. This regulation was changed recently to state that neither women nor men can have more than 60 per cent of all candidatures. The PS introduced a 20 per cent quota for internal post (1989) that was raised to 30 per cent by 1996. It then changed to a 40-60 per cent quota for both sexes beginning with elections in 1999.<sup>69</sup> As a result, the parties reserved first a 20 and then a 40 per cent of internal leadership positions for women as well as a similar quota in candidate lists for legislative elections. However, studies have pointed out that the 40 percent target has not yet been reached in either case and this strategy has not proven effective as was expected by its promoters.<sup>70</sup>

In the case of the PDC, by 1996, and after years of internal debate led by party members such as Mariana Aylwin, the party finally introduced a 20 per cent quota, but only for internal positions and this quota remains weakly enforced.<sup>71</sup> Overall, despite the weak implementation of the quota system, the PS is the party with the highest percentage of female candidates. Thus, it appears that changes within the institutions such as a quota system can effectively modify the political culture, albeit in a gradual way. All in all,

---

<sup>68</sup> Lovenduski and Norris (ed) 1993, p. 320.

<sup>69</sup> International IDEA and Stockholm University 2006, in <http://www.quotaproject.org>.

<sup>70</sup> Macaulay 2006, p. 173; Franceschet 2005, p. 99; Waylen 2000, p. 774.

<sup>71</sup> Franceschet 2001, p. 221.

quota systems are not necessarily an effective panacea as has been observed by those female politicians who have benefited from it. As Georgina Waylen has pointed out:

“In Chile *feministas* and *políticas* within the centre-left parties, the PPD and the PS, won quotas for internal party positions, but soon discovered that if they were not large enough to form a ‘critical mass’, the quotas intended as floors too easily became unofficial ceilings unless constant supervision was exercised.”<sup>72</sup>

In contrast, and due to its conservative rhetoric the political right in Chile (RN and UDI) has refused to follow the same path and is ideologically opposed to affirmative action policies of any type. This attitude is reflected in the way these parties approach the issue of female representation within the party. Macaulay presents the example of the RN’s spokeswoman on ‘women and the family’ affairs, but contrasts this with the party’s small rank-and-file organizational structure to address other women issues in society. The UDI, in this respect, only has a Family Issues department, also showing the same attitude towards the limits of women’s participation within the party.<sup>73</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that the different types of barriers to women’s participation in electoral politics are both institutional and cultural. Politics has been a male dominated public sphere and “political parties [have] moved on women’s issues when they were pressed to do so.”<sup>74</sup> In the Chilean case and with the return to democracy, as Macaulay has argued, the *Concertación* parties have indeed tried to break

---

<sup>72</sup> Waylen 2000, p. 790; Gray 2003, p. 55. See also Muñoz and Levine 1996 and Craske 1999.

<sup>73</sup> Macaulay 2006, p. 173.

<sup>74</sup> Lovenduski and Norris (ed) 1993, p. 5.

with the ‘invisible’ historical role of women in politics by rhetorical and positive action strategies.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, it has been argued that even when gender quotas have been accepted by parties, male party leaders use them to their advantage by making electable women compete against each other in order to become candidates.<sup>76</sup> However, the levels of women’s participation in politics is still very low and some scholars such as Franceschet have a less optimistic view on the issue and argue that since the return of democracy political parties “have proven unwilling to adopt the type of strategies, particularly legislated gender quotas, that would improve women’s numerical representation.”<sup>77</sup>

Despite the importance that internal quotas in parties represent for the gradual process of opening up political participation for women, it is only through more formalized mechanisms such as an overall legislated quota system whereby real change could be achieved.

### ***What happens with gender quota legislation at the national level?***

In Chile there have been two attempts to legislate mandatory gender quotas but both have failed due to opposition to the law and doubts about its benefits have been stronger than the lobby in favor of it. The first attempt came in 1997 when a bill was introduced to congress by ten deputies from the *Concertación*, among which were prominent women deputies such as Fanny Pollarolo (PS) and Mariana Aylwin (PDC). The idea was to promote the right of women to participate in national public life through a law which establishes that neither sex should form more than 60 per cent of internal

---

<sup>75</sup> Macaulay 2006, p. 172.

<sup>76</sup> Gray 2003, p. 69.

<sup>77</sup> Franceschet 2005, p. 13.

party positions or candidates for municipal or national elections.<sup>78</sup> This initiative failed to gain any support from the executive or parliamentarians – indeed, women’s movement organizations did not prove interested either.

Seven years later, on March 13, 2003 another bill was introduced again by ten parliamentarians with a similar proposal. This time, two of the bill’s sponsors were from the Alianza por Chile (one from RN and one from UDI) but this proved not sufficient. Once again, similar weaknesses emerged as the bill lacked support from a broad multiparty group of parliamentarians and, although the government body *Servicio Nacional de la Mujer* (SERNAM) did support the bill it was not declared ‘urgent’ by the executive and therefore it was not included in the extraordinary legislative session.<sup>79</sup>

The reasons for this absence of political will to legislate are diverse and related to the lack of cohesion among those who support the motion; the lack of priority the State has placed on gender quota legislation; and the constant downplaying or dismissal of the issue by the political right, among others.

### ***Debates and arguments over legislated gender quotas***

There has been considerable debate in the last years over the principle of gender quotas as well as over the specific policy measures such quotas would entail. Moreover, there is very little consensus even among female partisans of the *Concertación*, who have struggled for more women’s political participation through the backing of a bill for gender quota.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Waylen 2000, p.785.

<sup>79</sup> Franceschet 2005, p. 101.

<sup>80</sup> Franceschet 2005, p. 99.

On one side of the issue, the arguments opposing electoral gender quotas are various and mostly come from the right wing and conservative groups but also from some factions within the PDC. Their main argument is that a numerical quota is inappropriate to improve the quality of representation. This criticism comes from two main arguments: firstly, that merit-based competition between women and men is the only fair and adequate means for improving women's representation; and secondly that not enough women are willing and/or qualified to fill decision making roles.<sup>81</sup> Some opponents go even further stressing that any type of positive discrimination is “(...) contrario a nuestra constitución, discriminatorio e inviable”.<sup>82</sup>

On the other side, proponents of a gender quota, who are mostly linked to the centre-left parties and feminist organizations, argue that electoral quotas are an important strategy for increasing the number of women in political institutions. This argument stresses the idea that quotas would address the problem of under representation of women and its negative impact on both public policy and the legitimacy of the democratic system.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, this argument points out that the development of institutional structures to increase the level of women's legislative representation is a relatively easier way than changing political culture or economic inequalities.<sup>84</sup> Finally, their argument is

---

<sup>81</sup> Gray 2003, p. 55.

<sup>82</sup> Bown Sepúlveda: “Ley de cuotas para todos” in *Columna de Opinión* n 21, April 2006, Centro de Estudios Públicos, Universidad del Desarrollo, in <http://cpp.udd.cl>.

<sup>83</sup> Gray 2003, p. 55.

<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Fuentes points out that “ (...) las condiciones sociales por si solas no resuelven las brechas de desigualdad existentes en una sociedad. La legislación interviene para corregir aquella diferencia y generar condiciones de igualdad(...)” in Fuentes: “¿Por que una ley de Cuotas?” in *La Tercera*, February 9, 2006 in <http://www.latercera.cl>.

supported with the successful examples in first world countries but also in developing ones which have showed improvements on the issue.<sup>85</sup>

Another argument in support of national quota laws is that they are “far more effective than political party quota rules because they apply to all parties rather than a select few and the bureaucracies or judiciaries enforce quota laws, whereas the party leadership enforces internal party quota rules.”<sup>86</sup>

When looking at other Latin American countries’ experience with gender quota law one can observe three necessary prior conditions for it to be implemented.<sup>87</sup> First of all, a consensus among *all* political parties on the importance of a gender quota law is needed not only for its approval in Congress but also in order for the issue to be regarded as a legitimate concern for the whole of society. Secondly, it is necessary for the state to place the issue of gender quotas high on its agenda and, more importantly, convey to society the reasons why it is important to legislate on this matter. Lastly, feminist and women organizations must play an active role in placing the issue on the forefront of public debates.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> For example, the Scandinavian countries which are among the first to use gender quotas in electoral politics (1970s-1980s) with consistent results achieving the highest rates of female representation in politics worldwide. See Bystydzienski 1995; Lovenduski and Norris (ed) 1993.

<sup>86</sup> Gray 2003, p. 55.

<sup>87</sup> See Peschard 2002 for a discussion on the quota system in Latin America.

<sup>88</sup> These arguments are loosely based on the argument presented by Franceschet 2005.

Table 8 Results of Quotas in Latin America

Country	Year of Reform	Legislative Body	% Women (before law)	% Women (after law)	Change (in % points)	Minimum quota by law	Type of list
Argentina	1991	Chamber	6	30	+24	30%	Closed
	2001	Senate	3	36	+33		
Bolivia	1997	Chamber	11	12	+1	30%	Closed
		Senate	4	4	0		
Brazil	1997	Chamber	7	6	-1	30%	Open
Costa Rica	1997	Unicameral	14	35	+21	40%	Closed
Dominican Republic	1997	Chamber	12	16	+4	25%	Closed
Ecuador	1997 2000	Unicameral	4	15	+11	20% 30%	Open
Mexico	1996	Chamber	17	15	16	30%	Closed
		Senate	16	-1	+1		
Panama	1997	Unicameral	8	10	+2	30%	Open
Paraguay	1996	Chamber	3	11	+8	20%	Closed
		Senate	10	18	+7		
Peru	1997	Unicameral	11	18	+7	25%	Open
		Average	9	17	+8		

Source: Adapted from Mala Htun and Mark Jones, "Engendering the Right to Participate in Decision-making: Electoral Quotas and Women's Leadership in Latin America", in *Gender and the Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America*, eds. Nikki Craske and Maxine Molyneux (London: Palgrave, 2002) and author's calculations based on recent election results. The effectiveness of quotas depends largely on the nature of a country's electoral and from Htun, Mala and Mark Jones. 2000. "Leyes de cuotas" Cuotas y mujeres en América Latina; Inter-American Commission of Women, Organization of American States. in <http://www.oas.org/CIM/spanish/leyesdequotas.htm>.

### *Legislated gender quotas and the Chilean case*

In this respect, Chile's failure to have such a system after two bill proposals lies very much in the lack of the conditions cited above. The lack of cohesion among those who support the motion is the most important of these. The quota law still does not have enough support within the women of the *Concertación* itself with politicians putting forward different arguments on how to achieve gender equality. Soledad Alvear (PDC),

for example, believes that meritocracy is better than quotas.<sup>89</sup> However, left wing politicians such as Fanny Pollarolo (PS), have expressed their concern as to how effective quota laws can be as they may act more as a ceiling than as a floor for women's participation. Carolina Toha (PPD) has voiced yet another concern, that of the very lack of women in politics which may cause problems for an effective implementation of a quota law system. In each case these concerns are based on their own experience with internal quotas in parties.<sup>90</sup>

Support from the political right is even less forthcoming as is the case of the UDI which is staunchly against legislated gender quotas for the reasons mentioned above. Thus, politicians such as Maria Angelica Cristi (UDI) for example, have stated that gender quotas are 'simplemente innecesarias en Chile'.<sup>91</sup>

This apparent indifference on behalf of politicians towards legislated gender quotas is understood by the fact that there is a strong perception among them (both men and women) that public support for quota legislation is low.<sup>92</sup> More recent studies do not reflect this as studies reveal that women are not only very much interested in politics (49 per cent) but also feel that it is men that exclude them from this arena (38, 2 per cent).<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, on the issue of legislated gender quotas the same study showed that 70 per

---

<sup>89</sup> "Observatorio Ciudadano. La importancia de una ley de cuotas" in *La Nacion*, <http://www.lanacion.cl/>, April 15, 2006.

<sup>90</sup> A number of women pointed out in interviews by Franceschet that without more women seeking involvement in electoral politics, candidate gender quotas would be counterproductive. See Franceschet 2005, p. 100.

<sup>91</sup> Riffo, José Luis, March 13, 2006, "Ley de cuotas: Proyecto emblemático de Bachelet ya tiene oposición en el Congreso", in <http://www.terra.cl/noticias/>

<sup>92</sup> SERNAM 2002, pp. 41-42.

<sup>93</sup> Sohad Houssein, "Candidata presidencial en Chile: Paridad de género en gabinete", (November 3, 2005) <http://www.mujereshoy.com/>. The survey in question was carried out among female registered voters by Corporación Humanas together with Universidad de Chile during May-June 2005.

cent of the women surveyed believed that such a law should come into existence for all public posts.<sup>94</sup>

If the lack of will amongst political parties has hindered efforts to promote the cause of gender quotas, one must then address the role that the executive has had in this respect. The *Concertación* governments have had to face the political constraints left behind by Pinochet and his 1980 Constitution. This invariably affected the nature of government and established the so-called '*politica de consensos*', which limited conflicts with the opposition and also had an effect on the ruling coalition itself. In this respect, this style of ruling has restricted and limited the possibilities of gender-related policies that the government attempted to implement during Aylwin (1990-1994) and Frei (1994-2000), as it had to reach a consensus with the right on political and social matters.<sup>95</sup>

On the other hand, Pinochet's Constitution, in actual fact, made Chile maintain its strong presidentialist tradition, in which the state "es una pieza articuladora central del quehacer politico."<sup>96</sup> Thus in matters such as poverty alleviation, fiscal budgets and tributary systems the state has managed to push its agenda within the spirit of consensus described above. As this same mechanism applies to issues related to gender, it is not surprising, then, to find similar results. Baldez has pointed out that a stark difference emerges between those projects that were introduced via Congress and those introduced by the Executive power. In the case of the Congress fifteen projects were introduced but

---

<sup>94</sup> "Observatorio Ciudadano. La importancia de una ley de cuotas" in *La Nacion*, <http://www.lanacion.cl/>, April 15, 2006.

<sup>95</sup> Baldez 1999, p. 407.

<sup>96</sup> Fuentes 1999, p. 215.

only three were finally approved. However, the Executive power managed to get the approval for seven out of its nine legislative proposals regarding gender issues.<sup>97</sup>

A central part of the *Concertacion*'s gender agenda was the creation of a government ministry which would solely focus on women's issues. Thus the SERNAM<sup>98</sup> was created within the first two months of the Aylwin government despite the opposition from RN and UDI who condemned it as being a vehicle of feminist propaganda and an intrusion into the private sphere.<sup>99</sup> Despite the heightened fears of the political right, the SERNAM in actual fact is far from conveying 'feminist propaganda'. It rather has adopted a moderate attitude towards the role of women whereby its initiatives "tend to reinforce rather than challenge women's participation in the informal political arena and the gendered division of labour between formal and informal politics."<sup>100</sup> This has been attributed to the strong presence of the more conservative factions of the PDC in the leadership of SERNAM, which has stressed family values and has usually shied away from proposing structural reforms that would allow for women's participation in formal politics.<sup>101</sup>

In light of the above scenario, the Chilean case seems to offer little prospects of hope for the existence of a legislated gender quota system. On the one hand, the evident lack of a broad cross-party support for a quota system among women, in contrast to the Argentinean and Mexican cases, makes it extremely difficult in actual fact to legislate on this matter. It becomes clear that this is an issue that will necessarily have to be pushed

---

<sup>97</sup> Baldez 1999, p. 424. These projects were all approved under the governments of Aylwin and Frei.

<sup>98</sup> SERNAM was created due to the demands that the Concertacion de Mujeres por la Democracia (CMD) placed upon the future Aylwin government. The CMD was the umbrella organization for women's organizations and feminists which opposed the Pinochet regime. Once democracy returned the CMD was disbanded as most of its members stuck to their party allegiances or went back to informal politics.

<sup>99</sup> Baldez 1999, p. 417.

<sup>100</sup> Franceschet 2005, p. 96.

<sup>101</sup> See Macaulay 1998; Baldez 1999 and Franceschet 2005.

by women both inside and outside the parties to be taken seriously.<sup>102</sup> As Mark Jones has noted, “¿Por qué iban los políticos a perder su monopolio histórico sobre el poder sin una lucha violenta y prolongada?”<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, legislated gender quotas have not been presented as a matter of urgency or priority amongst the political parties of the *Concertación*. A good example of this is how the quota bill has not been a part of the discourse of democratization. Thus the issues of electoral and labour law reform carry a strong sense of democratic urgency which has overshadowed the democratic potential that a quota bill possesses.<sup>104</sup> In this respect the issue seems to be one of political will, as it is up to the *Concertación* to place the quota bill as a central political objective rather than “una situación deseable, pero condicionada a las circunstancias.”<sup>105</sup>

Finally, despite the stability that the so-called *política de consensos* has brought to Chile, it is misleading to believe that all issues can be resolved in this way. This is especially the case with moral and social issues which still create huge divisions amongst the political class.<sup>106</sup>

Even though the *Concertación* has continued to display unity in its sixteen years of successful electoral politics, its alliance in terms of a long-term political project is fraught with tension when faced with sensitive topics which touch upon moral issues such as euthanasia, abortion and women-related issues. As Fuentes has concluded: “La contingencia los reúne en torno a bloques pero internamente se producen serias

---

<sup>102</sup> Franceschet 2005, p. 101.

<sup>103</sup> Jones, 2000, p. 46.

<sup>104</sup> See SERNAM 2002, p. 42.

<sup>105</sup> Ossandón 2005, “Una Concertación con Candidata... un PS sin candidatas.” in <http://www.centroavance.cl> June 20, 2005.

<sup>106</sup> Franceschet 2005, pp. 106-107.

divergencias programáticas y conflictos de prioridades que los actores no están dispuestos a transar.”<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Fuentes 1999, p. 217.

## **Conclusions: Chile's *Presidenta*: A change in Chile's Democracy?**

The works that have been analyzed in this essay cast a shadow of doubt on the prospects of women's participation in Chilean politics. Nevertheless, none of the authors could have imagined that Chileans were going to elect a woman as their new president. This leads to a simple yet crucial question: how was it possible that Michelle Bachelet became president despite the existing barriers for women in electoral politics?

It is possible to trace the 'irruption' of women on the major political scene within the context of Ricardo Lagos's troubled presidential campaign. In a new reshuffling of his campaign team he chose Soledad Alvear as his *generalisima* reinforcing his promise to tackle women's issues. This was a strategy that sought to win over the female vote which traditionally has favoured conservative candidates. This tendency did not change in the 1999 election but it paved the way for allowing women onto a major political stage which was unprecedented in Chilean political history: a 31 per cent of female members in his first cabinet, but more importantly, two of them in key posts that had been traditionally male-dominated: Foreign Affairs (Soledad Alvear), Health and later on Defense (Michelle Bachelet).

However, Michelle Bachelet's appearance in a grand political arena was also indicative of major changes occurring in Chilean society since the return to democracy. Here was someone who had been imprisoned, tortured and later exiled during the Pinochet dictatorship. Moreover, she was the daughter of a constitutionalist general of the Air Force who died in prison, and as Defense Minister she sought to heal the wounds of the past that still haunted Chilean society. This background, together with her undeniable

charisma, caught the eye of the public. Whilst in charge of Defense, Bachelet skyrocketed in the polls, a trend which was dubbed in the press as the ‘fenómeno Bachelet’.

Despite the tacit pact existing between Lagos and Alvear regarding her presidential candidature the above mentioned polls began to challenge this plan. The strategy behind the candidature of Alvear was based on the supposition that “sólo una mujer con una familia tradicional proveniente de la democracia cristiana podría contrarrestar la reticencia del electorado por optar por una candidatura femenina y que, después de un gobierno presidido por un socialista (...).”<sup>108</sup> However, in the end the *Concertación* leadership and Alvear herself had to accept that the polls were overwhelmingly in favor of Bachelet as Chile’s next president.

Bachelet’s candidature had to do with the need for renovation within a successful *Concertación* which inevitably was in danger of wearing itself out after sixteen years in government. The fact that Bachelet was seen as a newcomer in politics by the general public played an important role in her success and popularity in the polls and later on in the ballots.<sup>109</sup>

Thus the question remains on whether being a female candidate was at all relevant for the decision cast by voters. This has important implications on how Chilean society has been viewed in general by analysts and by its political elite. First of all, Bachelet’s election revealed that the historical trend of the female conservative vote came to an end

---

<sup>108</sup> Valenzuela, A. (August 2005): “El fenómeno Bachelet” in <http://www.reconstruccion2005.com.ar/>

<sup>109</sup> As Halpern has pointed out, Bachelet did not have a central leading role within traditional politics and within her own party. Nor has she cultivated relationships with Chile’s economic interest groups which allows her to project a more autonomous image than other politicians. See Halpern (September 2, 2005) : “Otro país” in *La Segunda*, in <http://www.expansiva.cl/>.

as the *Concertación* managed to secure a female majority surpassing men's votes by two percentage points.<sup>110</sup> These results may even question the alleged 'conservative' vote that Joaquín Lavín cultivated among women in the 1999 and to a certain extent in the 2005 elections. Rather than Lavín's conservative (Opus Dei) background, it was his seemingly 'apolitical' and pragmatic approach that struck more empathy with the aspirations of many people within the lower stratum of Chilean society. This is not to say that Bachelet was simply replicating the same path. The point is that most Chileans were not seriously concerned about moral issues (as Bachelet's left wing, agnostic and divorced single mother status would suggest) but were rather focused on the prospects of their economic situation.

All of the above thus suggests that Chilean society is more open and modern than what the political elite is prepared to admit. Consequently, as has been argued throughout this essay, Chile's political institutions at this stage are hardly adequate to cope with these changes and the democratic aspirations of society.

Michelle Bachelet's arrival to *La Moneda* was charged with powerful symbolisms as women celebrated on the street wearing a presidential band. But the power of these symbols is not limited only to its impact on women. Younger generations undoubtedly will eventually perceive the presence of women in higher positions of power as something natural.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Centro Regional De Derechos Humanos Y Justicia De Género, Corporación Humanas (2005), p. 4.

<sup>111</sup> An anecdote in this respect states the following: "Un niño de diez años, nacido y criado durante el Gobierno de Margaret Thatcher, al ver en la televisión a su sucesor, John Major, preguntó sorprendido: papá ¿los hombres también podemos ser Primeros Ministros? Esta anécdota ilustra hasta qué punto el imaginario social de las próximas generaciones está marcado por los modelos públicos de su época." Quoted in Centro de Estudios para la Mujer, March 30, 2000, "Los hombres también pueden ser presidentes de La República" in *Argumentos para el cambio* in <http://www.cem.cl/argumentos/>.

Women in power, of course, do not necessarily imply an increase in the role of women in politics.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, strong signals in this respect can be seen in Bachelet's government agenda starting with the parity in her cabinet. Gender equality, however, has been presented within a wider discourse of inclusion and modernity which brings together the demands of other groups in society such as ethnic or sexual minorities as was reflected in her annual presidential speech delivered in Congress this year.

A gender quota law at the national level is viewed by Bachelet's government as a necessary institutional step towards a more egalitarian and democratic society. However, such a project will not only require political will on behalf of the Executive and Congress, but it will necessarily have to be preceded by the change of Chile's binominal electoral system. As has been discussed above, a gender quota law would lose much of its potential within the present electoral system.

It is too soon to be able to tell whether such a radical change in Chile's political culture will take place during Michelle Bachelet's presidency. However, nobody can question the unprecedented importance that gender issues now occupy on the political agenda in the name of a modern and participative democracy heralding "un tiempo de mujeres y hombres, como nunca antes en nuestro país."<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Angell 2005, p.8. Angell cites the case of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom.

<sup>113</sup> Bachelet 2006, *Discurso del 21 de Mayo* in <http://www.gobierno.cl/21mayo2006/>.

## **Abbreviations**

CMD	Concertación de Mujeres por la Democracia
PDC	Partido Demócrata Cristiano
PPD	Partido Por la Democracia
PS	Partido Socialista
PRSD	Partido Radical Social Demócrata
RN	Renovación Nacional
SERNAM	Servicio Nacional de la Mujer
UDI	Unión Demócrata Independiente

## Bibliography:

Alvarez, Sonia E., Evelina Dagnino and Arturo Escobar (eds) (1998) *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press

Angell, Alan (2005), *The Challenges Facing the Next Government* (Paper for Conference, Escuela de Ciencia Política Universidad Diego Portales).

Antimedio (2005), Interview with Patricio Navia in <http://www.antimedios.cl/archivos>.

Baldez, Lisa (2002): *Why Women protest. Women's movements in Chile*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barrueto, Victor, (2003): "Discurso del Presidente del Partido Por La Democracia, al inaugurar el II Consejo Programático de Ideas y Valores Progresistas para Chile" in <http://www.ppd.cl/documentos/>

Bown Sepúlveda: (2006) "Ley de cuotas para todos" in *Columna de Opinión*, No.21, April, Centro de Estudios Públicos, Universidad del Desarrollo, in <http://cpp.udd.cl>.

Bystydzienski (1995) *Women in Electoral Politics: Lessons from Norway*. Praeger.

Centro de Estudios para la Mujer (2000) "Los hombres también pueden ser presidentes de La República" in *Argumentos para el cambio*, March, <http://www.cem.cl/argumentos>.

Centro Regional De Derechos Humanos Y Justicia De Género, Corporación Humana (2005) *Mujeres y elecciones 2005: Análisis de las elecciones parlamentarias y presidenciales 2005* in [www.humanas.cl](http://www.humanas.cl)

Craske, Nikki (1999) *Women and Politics in Latin America*, Polity Press.

Diamond, I. and N. Hartsock (1998): "Beyond interests in politics: a comment on Virginia Sapiro's 'when are interests interesting?' The problem of political representation of women". in A. Phillips (ed.) *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 193-202.

Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations (1996): *Fact Sheet on women in government*, in <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/fact.htm>

Dixon, Diane (April 2, 2006): "Michelle, Top woman in a macho world." in *The Observer* in <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/>

El Mercurio (April 30, 2006) "Soledad Alvear es la nueva presidenta de la Democracia Cristiana" in *El Mercurio* in <http://www.emol.com/noticias>.

Franceschet, Susan (2001) "Women in politics in post-transitional democracies: the Chilean case" in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol.3 No.2, pp. 207-36.

——— (2005) *Women and Politics in Chile*, Lynne Rienner.

Friedman, Elisabeth Jay (1998) "Paradoxes of gendered political opportunity in the Venezuela transition to democracy," in *Latin American Research Review* Vol.33 No.3, pp. 87-136.

Frohmann, Alicia and Teresa Valdés (1993) *'Democracy in the Country and in the Home': The Women's Movement in Chile*, Santiago: FLACSO Social Studies Series Working Paper No. 55

Fuentes, Claudio A. (1999) "Partidos y Coaliciones en el Chile de los '90. Entre Pactos y Proyectos." in Drake, Paul and Jaksic, Ivan (1999) *El Modelo Chileno. Democracia y Desarrollo en los Noventa*, Santiago: Lom Ediciones, pp.191-219.

——— (2005) [with Marcela Ríos and Andrés Villar] "¿Tiempo de Mujeres en Chile? Programa de Gobernabilidad" in *Observatorio* no.8, [Flacso Chile]

——— (2006): "Democracia en Chile: Instituciones, Representación, y Exclusión", Paper presented at Latin American Studies Association Conference (LASA).

Goetz, Anne Marie (May 1995): "The politics of integrating gender to state development processes. Trends, Opportunities and Constraints in Bangladesh, Chile, Jamaica, Mali, Morocco and Uganda", Paper no.2, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development: United Nations Development Program.

Gray, Tricia (2003): "Electoral Gender Quotas: Lessons from Argentina and Chile" in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 52-78.

Halpern, Pablo (September 2, 2005): "Otro país" in *La Segunda*, in <http://www.expansiva.cl/>

Hardy, Clarisa, 2005, "Evolución de la participación femenina 1990-2005" in *Foro 21*, <http://www.chile21.cl/foro21/44/5.act>.

Hinojosa, Magda (2004): "Municipales 2004. Se buscan candidatas mujeres" in [http://www.electoral.cl/actualidad/sebuscan\\_candmujeres.html](http://www.electoral.cl/actualidad/sebuscan_candmujeres.html).

Houssein, Sohad (November 3, 2005): "Candidata presidencial en Chile: Paridad de género en gabinete" in <http://www.mujereshoy.com>.

Htun, Mala N. (1998): *Informe Participación, Representación y Liderazgo Político de la Mujer en América Latina* in [http://www.thedialogue.org/publications/women/mhpolspn.html].

——— (2002) “Women in Political Power in Latin America.” in *International IDEA, Women in Parliament*, Stockholm in [http://www.idea.int].

Inter-Parliamentary Union (2006a): *Women in National parliament* in <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.

——— (2006b): *Women speakers of national parliaments. History and the present.* in <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/speakers.htm>.

International IDEA and Stockholm University (2006): “Global Database of Quotas for Women - Chile” in <http://www.quotaproject.org/displayCountry.cfm?CountryCode=CL> (retrieved May 5, 2006)

Jaquette, Jane y Wolchik, Sharon (ed) (1998), *Women and Democracy*, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

*La Nacion*, (April 15, 2006) “Observatorio Ciudadano. La importancia de una ley de cuotas” in *La Nacion*, [http://www.lanacion.cl],

——— (May 30, 2006) “Soledad Alvear obtiene holgada victoria en la interna DC” in <http://www.lanacion.cl>.

Lavin, Joaquin (2005) Speech during forum organized by Comunidad Mujer , October 25, 2005 in <http://www.joaquinlavin.cl/noticia.asp>.

Lovenduski and Norris (ed) (1993): *Gender and Party Politics*, London: Sage Publications.

Macaulay, Fiona (2006) [Forthcoming work on Women in Chilean Politics].

Matear, Ann (1996) “ ‘Desde la protesta a la propuesta’: Gender politics in transition Chile,” in *Democratization* Vol.3, No. 3, pp. 246-63

Muñoz, A and Levine, S. (1996) “Importancia de una Ley de Cuotas en Chile” in *Democracia, Mujeres y Ciudadanía*, working paper series. Santiago, Chile: Fundación de Ideas.

Online Women in Politics Organization (2003) *Fact Sheet on women in government.* in <http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/statistics.htm>

——— (2003), *Statistics* in <http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/statistics.htm>.

Partido por la Democracia (1993), *Declaración de Principios* in <http://www.bcn.cl/pags/instituciones/partidos/ppd.htm> and in <http://www.ppd.cl/documentos/Declaracion%20de%20Principios.pdf>

——— (2005) *Ideas Progresistas para Chile* In <http://www.ppd.cl/ideas.html#2>

Partido Socialista, Vicepresidencia de la Mujer Partido Socialista de Chile (2005): “Documento de Trabajo Colectivo, Las Prioridades de las Mujeres Socialistas”, in [<http://www.pschile.cl/pschilea>]

Phillips, A. (ed.) (1998): *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Peschard, Jaqueline (2002) “The Quota System in Latin America: General Overview” in *International IDEA, Women in Parliament*, Stockholm in [<http://www.idea.int>].

Phillips, A. (1998b) “Democracy and representation. Or why should it matter who our representatives are?” in A. Phillips (ed.) *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.224–240.

Rai, S. (1996): “Women and the state in the Third World: some issues for debate” in Rai, S. and G. Lievesley (1996) *Women and the State: International Perspectives*. London: Taylor Francis, pp.5-22.

Rai, S. and G. Lievesley (1996) *Women and the State: International Perspectives*. London: Taylor Francis.

Renovación Nacional (2004), “Principios” in <http://www.rn.cl/>

Richards, Patricia (2006), “The Politics of Difference and Women’s Rights: Lessons from Pobladoras and Mapuche Women in Chile” in *Social Politics Journal* , pp.1–29 <http://sp.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/>

Riffo, José Luis (September 17, 2005) “Datos relevantes y curiosos. La radiografía de las elecciones parlamentarias 2005” in <http://www.terra.cl/> (retrieved on March 4, 2006)

——— (March 13, 2006): “Ley de cuotas: Proyecto emblemático de Bachelet ya tiene oposición en el Congreso” in <http://www.terra.cl/noticias>.

Sapiro, V. (1998) “When are interests interesting? The problem of political representation of women” in A. Phillips (ed.) *Feminism and Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 161-191

Servicio Electoral (SERVEL) (2005) “Electorado Nacional” in <http://www.servel.cl>

Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM) (2006) “Mujeres al Parlamento” in <http://mujereschile.cl>

Schild, Veronica (1998) “New subjects of rights? women’s movements and the construction of citizenship in the ‘new democracies’ ” in Alvarez, Sonia E., Evelina Dagnino and Arturo Escobar (eds) (1998) *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Scully, T. (1992) *Rethinking the center: party politics in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chile*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Siavelis, Peter (2005) “The Hidden Logic of Candidate Selection for Chilean Parliamentary Elections.” in *Estudios Públicos*, No.98, Autumn, pp. 2-32.

Skeije, H. (1991) “The rhetoric of difference: on women’s inclusion into political elites” in *Politics and Society*. 19 (2), pp.235–263.

Taylor, Lucy (1998): *Citizenship, Participation and Democracy: Changing Dynamics in Chile and Argentina*, London: Macmillan Press.

Unión Demócrata Independiente (1991) “Nuestros Principios, Doctrina y Principios, Punta de Tralca” (1991) in <http://www.udi.cl/udi/p7.htm>.

Valenzuela, Maria Elena (1998): “Women and the democratization process in Chile” in Jaquette, Jane y Wolchik, Sharon (ed) *Women and Democracy*, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Valenzuela, A. (August 2005): “El fenómeno Bachelet” in <http://www.reconstruccion2005.com.ar/0508/bachelet.htm>

Valenzuela, Samuel (1995) “Orígenes y Transformaciones del Sistema de Partidos de Chile.” in *Estudios Públicos*, No.58, Autumn, pp.67-80.

Vianello, M. and G. Moore (2000) *Gendering Elites: economic and political leadership in 27 industrialised countries*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Waylen, G. (1996a) “Democratization, feminism and the state in Chile: the establishment of SERNAM”, in Rai, S. and G. Lievesley *Women and the State: International Perspectives*. London: Taylor Francis, pp. 103-117.

——— (1996b) *Gender in Third World Politics*, Open University Press.