

## The Defeat of the Concertación Coalition and the Alternation of Power in Chile (ARI)

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**Theme:** The second round of the Chilean elections on 17 January 2010 handed victory to the opposition, putting an end to a run of four governments led by the centre-left *Concertación por la Democracia* coalition, in power since the end of the military regime of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-90). This is hugely significant because it signals the return of the right wing to the La Moneda presidential palace after no less than 52 years.

**Summary:** In the second round of the elections held on 17 January 2010, Senator Eduardo Frei of the Christian Democrats (*Democracia Cristiana*, PDC), former President (1994-2000) and *Concertación* coalition candidate, was defeated by Sebastián Piñera of the National Renewal Party (*Renovación Nacional*, RN), leader of the centre-right Coalition for Change (*Coalición por el Cambio*), also encompassing the Independent Democratic Union (*Unión Demócrata Independiente*, UDI). Piñera received 51.6% of the vote, vs Frei's 48.39%. In the first round on 13 December 2009, coinciding with the parliamentary elections, Piñera obtained 44% of the vote and Frei a low 29.6%, followed by the independent candidate Marco Enríquez-Ominami, with 20.1% and Jorge Arrate, backed by the Communist Party (PC), with 6.2%. The latter two had to leave the Socialist Party (PS) to compete for the Presidency. In the parliamentary elections, the *Concertación* coalition obtained a poor showing of 40.3%, a slump vs the results of the previous poll in 2005 (51.7%). The Coalition for Change (*Coalición por el Cambio*) obtained 43.4%, an increase of almost 5 points vs the 38.7% it had won four years previously. The new government, which will take office on 11 March 2010, will not have a majority in either of the two chambers of Congress, a situation similar to the previous four democratic governments, who were forced to reach an understanding with the opposition to approve the draft laws required for pushing through their programme.

**Analysis:** *Concertación por la Democracia*, the centre-left coalition comprising the Christian Democrats (PDC), the Socialist Party (PS), the Party for Democracy (PPD) and the Radical Social Democratic Party (PRSD), which had been in government since the end of the military regime in 1990 with four consecutive presidents, lost the presidential elections in the final run-off against Sebastián Piñera, candidate for the Coalition for Change, comprising the RN and the UDI, and the small *Chile Primero* party. Although the margin was small, Piñera won in 11 of the country's 16 regions, including the Santiago Metropolitan region, the most highly-populated one, and the Bío-Bío and Magallanes regions, which have a long-standing tradition of voting for the left. For the first time since 1958, the right wing had reached the La Moneda presidential palace. At that time it was Jorge Alessandri, supported by liberals and conservatives, who received barely 31.6% of the vote, a victory that was later ratified by Congress, giving him access to La Moneda. Without the disputes of the past between the UDI and RN and with a skilfully-run

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campaign, the opposition built a very effective electoral alternative, which ultimately gave it this triumph.

Piñera, a wealthy businessman (with investments in a number of sectors, including control over a TV channel, Chilevisión, and majority shareholdings in LAN Airlines and Colo-Colo, the most popular and successful soccer club in the country), was a Senator (1990-98) and President of the RN (2001-04). He was the presidential candidate in 2005, having beaten the UDI candidate Joaquín Lavín in the first round. Lavín had been the sole leader of the opposition in 1999. Piñera was beaten by Michelle Bachelet in the polls held in January 2006. Unlike the previous right-wing presidential candidates, Piñera did not support the Pinochet regime, and had voted 'no' in the plebiscites held by the General (1978, 1980 and 1988). This background helped the right-wing candidacy, which also comprised leaders who had supported and participated in the military regime, most notably those of the UDI.

Piñera obtained a comfortable win in the first round on 13 December, while Frei was extremely weakened. To win in the run-off, Piñera needed just 6 points and Frei more than 20. Frei expected to obtain the votes received by Jorge Arrate, who supported him, and also a majority of the votes obtained by Marco Enríquez-Ominami. This was a difficult objective because Enríquez-Ominami ran an extraordinarily tough campaign against Frei and the *Concertación*. Jorge Arrate won 6.2% of the votes. He was Chairman of the PS and a former minister in the governments of Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994) and Frei Ruiz-Tagle, and played a central role in renewing the PS during the military regime. Enríquez-Ominami won 20.1% and is a deputy.

This result came after an election campaign that was short on content, with no debates on the options for solving the country's major problems, aside from the well-known political and economic 'achievements', such as a precarious labour market, low wages, 'scandalous inequalities', deficiencies in public education (including higher education), eroded quality of life among the working classes, and so on.

The *Concertación* coalition also obtained a poor showing in the parliamentary elections. In the lower house (120 deputies, chosen from 60 districts), which was entirely renewed, the governing parties received 40.3% of the vote, almost 12 points less than in the 2005 poll and their representation slumped from 65 deputies to 54. *Concertación* made a pact with the PC to end the exclusion to which it was condemned by the binomial electoral system, giving it a quota of parliamentary representatives in nine districts; it managed to obtain three deputies elected: Guillermo Teillier, Party Chairman, Lautaro Carmona, Secretary General, and Hugo Gutiérrez, a well-known human-rights lawyer. This electoral agreement did not give the *Concertación* any electoral advantage, since it actually lost one-fifth of the votes achieved by the two coalitions in the nine districts in which there were PC candidates: of the 495,489 votes obtained by the two coalitions in 2005, the figure fell to 399,334 in 2009, ie, 96,155 fewer. Neither did they manage to obtain the 2-to-1 ratio over the right-wing contenders necessary to obtain both deputies in a constituency, as expected based on simply adding up the votes from the two groups. This proved that the results of the pact were more complex than simply adding up the sum of previous voters. This agreement was used by Piñera and the Coalition for Change against Frei's candidacy, tapping a long-standing anti-communist tradition in Chile.

The opposition, in contrast, saw its percentage of the vote increase by four points to 43.4%, very much in line with the figure obtained by its presidential candidate, winning 58

deputies, although failing to secure a majority in the Chamber of Deputies. However, there are two independent deputies who may support the new government. Helped by the divisions in the *Concertación* parties, the right avoided being outpolled 2-to-1 in six constituencies, as had happened in the previous elections, when the *Concertación* won both deputies in each of these constituencies, giving it the majority in the lower house. It also managed to keep the only deputy in the districts of Vitacura, Las Condes and Lo Barnechea which it had won since 1993, despite the candidacy of a grandson of General Augusto Pinochet.

**Table 1. Parliamentary election results (Cámara de Diputados), 2005 and 2009**

Political Party	2005				2009					
	Votes	%	Seats	%	Votes	%	Seats	%		
UDI	1,508,72	8	22.85	34	28.33	1,608,40	3	24.59	40	33.33
RN	1,047,65	8	15.87	20	16.67	1,210,28	0	18.51	18	15.00
Chile Primero	—	—	—	—	—	22,631	0	0.35	—	0.00
PRSD	233,564	2	3.54	7	5.83	247,486	5	3.78	5	4.17
PRI	—	—	—	—	—	262,269	3	4.01	3	2.50
PDC	1,413,97	2	21.42	21	17.50	975,803	19	14.92	19	15.83
PPD	1,064,66	6	16.13	22	18.33	849,644	19	12.99	19	15.83
PS	705,005	6	10.68	15	12.50	647,533	11	9.90	11	9.17
Communist Party	339,547	3	5.14	—	0.00	181,037	3	2.77	3	2.50
Extra-Parliamentary Left	149,071	2	2.26	—	0.00	389,821	—	5.96	—	0.00
Independents	139,600	1	2.11	1	0.83	144,663	2	2.21	2	1.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,601,81</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>6,539,57</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Interior Ministry, [www.elecciones.gov.cl](http://www.elecciones.gov.cl).

The UDI confirmed its position as the main party, obtaining 24.59% of the votes in the parliamentary elections. It obtained 40 deputies and 33% of the seats, and was the list most benefited by the binominal system in the lower house, as the PDC was in the Senate. The RN managed to increase its electoral weighting, helped by Piñera's leadership. With 18% (an increase of almost four points) it won 18 deputies, a small number that should be understood to be caused by other reasons, such as having assigned a quota of nine seats to the *Chile Primero* candidates, which prevented it from seeing more of its own deputies elected.

The PDC won 14.2% of the votes, a seven-point decline. It obtained 19 deputies, clawing back the five lost from resignations from the party in 2008. The PPD obtained a 12.6% share of the vote, with 18 deputies, including the party's Chairman. The PS, with 9.9%, won 11 deputies, and the PRSD obtained a 3.8% share and five deputies. Two new groups have entered the lower house, each with three deputies: the Regionalist Independent Party (*Partido Regionalista Independiente*, PRI) and the Communist Party (*Partido Comunista*, PC). The former managed to re-elect two deputies who had resigned from the PDC in 2008, Pedro Araya and Alejandra Sepúlveda, elected in 2005 with a substantial share of votes. It also managed to get the former Mayor of Illapel, Luis Lemus (formerly PS), elected, preventing the *Concertación* coalition from obtaining the crucial two-to-one ratio. This is a notable performance since it managed to break into the binominal system, something which no other political group had managed previously (except in the 1990s the former presidential candidate Francisco Javier Errázuriz, in 1989, and the Centre-Centre Union –*Unión de Centro Centro*, UCC–).

In the Senate, which is renewed one half at a time (18 of 38 senators), the *Concertación* coalition saw a Senator elected in each of the nine constituencies: four from the PDC, three from the PPD and two from the PS. The Coalition for Change also elected nine senators, three from the UDI and six from the RN, offsetting its poorer showing in the lower house. The RN and PDC will have most representatives, with nine senators each; the UDI will have eight senators, the PS five, the PPD four and the PRSD one, and there will be one independent Senator, supporting the Coalition, Carlos Bianchi, and another from the left, who will be in the opposition, Alejandro Navarro.

It is worth pointing out that there was a varying level of competition among the parties at the Senate elections. Competition was more limited among the RN and UDI candidates in various constituencies, and was boundless among *Concertación* candidates. In four constituencies, the RN and UDI did not compete, but they did compete in the other five, with competition very fierce in the constituencies of Quinta Costa and Quinta Cordillera, Valparaiso region. In one of these, Joaquín Lavín (UDI) was defeated by the young deputy Francisco Chauán (RN). Lavín was a presidential candidate in 1999 (he came 31,000 votes short of beating Ricardo Lagos) and in 2005. His defeat made evident the limitations of the electoral clout of the UDI's party structure, which also failed in its attempt to defeat the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Rodrigo Álvarez, in one district of Santiago.

Competition between the *Concertación* candidates changed significantly with respect to previous Senate elections, since the pact between PS/PPD/PRSD was over. They used to field a joint candidate supported by all three parties to compete with the PDC candidate, who was running alone. This change benefited the PDC, which managed to obtain four seats in the Senate. Accordingly, in March it became the strongest party in the Senate, since it already had another five senators from the 2005 election. The PS, in contrast, retreated, losing two senators up for re-election (Jaime Gazmuri and Jaime Naranjo).

#### *Explanations for Presidential Election Outcome*

The outcome of the presidential election can be explained by various factors, including the cost of 20 consecutive years leading the executive. Alternation of governments usually comes more from the defeat of parties in power which end up –and the generalisation is valid in this case– unable to ignore the successful policies of the opposition. The cost of running the government had a particular slant during the mandate of Michelle Bachelet, which helped strengthen the figure of the President in the election year. This objective was successful in the short term, because she attained considerable popularity in opinion polls (up to 80%). There was a conviction that this would help the government-sponsored candidate and the candidates for Congress. However, it actually had adverse consequences for the presidential candidate, who was somewhat overshadowed in a context of considerable presidential activity. A majority of governing coalition candidates to both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, including those of the PDC, focused on the President's propaganda campaign and sidelined candidate Frei. Bachelet was placed at the centre of the campaign, to the extreme that a poll conducted by the pro-government consultants *Imaginación* assessed the attributes of the candidates and the President, and she beat them all. Bachelet focused on the office of head of state, she remained aloof from the campaign, without intervening in controversial issues and kept a depoliticised leadership style, which appealed more to her own qualities than to political resources, winning her the sympathy of voters, including from the opposition (60% of Piñera supporters approved her work in office). Advisors at La Moneda failed to see that this

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popularity was personal and non-transferable and lacked political components that could also benefit Frei.

Secondly, the governing parties were significantly weakened, with divisions since 2006 due to damaging in-fighting, and senators resigning, two of whom actually defected to the opposition. The divisions began in the PPD, when Senator Fernando Flores left the group accompanied by a deputy and some leaders and militants in protest because he considered he had been hampered in his bid to become chairman of the party. The *Concertación* lost its majority in the Senate, which it had obtained for the first time in 2005. The party leadership expelled Jorge Schaulsohn, one of its founders, who had been its Chairman and President of the Chamber of Deputies. Together, they set up a new party, *Chile Primero*, which supported Piñera.

In 2007, Senator Adolfo Zaldívar, former Chairman of the PDC, was expelled from the party and with him another five deputies resigned, depriving the *Concertación* of the majority it had held in the lower house since 1990. This enabled the opposition to approve the impeachment of Education Minister, Yasna Provoste (PDC), for irregularities detected by the Comptroller General at her Ministry; she was later removed from office by the Senate.

In the PS, the situation was more serious, since it was the party of President Bachelet. Two senators resigned, Alejandro Navarro and Carlos Ominami, father of the Deputy Enríquez-Ominami, as did the former Minister and former party Chairman, Jorge Arrate. The divisions in the governing party continued during the municipal elections in 2008, when the PPD, to stem the outflow of leaders defecting to *Chile Primero*, formed, along with the Radical Social Democrat Party (*Partido Radical Social-Demócrata*, PRSD), a list of candidates for councillors separate from the list made by *Concertación*, comprising the PS and PDC. For the first time the coalition was divided in the run-up to an election, and this encouraged the presentation of breakaway candidates for mayor (not members of *Concertación*), who ran in independent lists, and in some cases were indeed elected. Although *Concertación* was united in the mayoral elections (held separately, although at the same time as the elections for councillors), it obtained a poor result, losing the mayoralties of all the regional capitals, except for two.

Against a backdrop of conflict and division, a common candidate for *Concertación* was nominated, through primaries that were somewhat lacking in rigour. The former President Ricardo Lagos declined to run and so did José Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), pre-candidates of the left wing for *Concertación*. Frei launched his campaign in 2008 in the PDC, winning the candidacy and declaring his willingness to participate in the primaries of *Concertación*. Having been proclaimed candidate for the PDC, PS and PPD, Frei competed with the Chairman of the PRSD, Senator José Antonio Gómez, in open primaries for *Concertación* held in two regions. Frei won.

Thirdly, Senator Frei, as presidential candidate, made mistakes, most notably refusing to appoint a campaign chief, which would have enabled him to unify his command and render it more efficient. As it turned out, both of these characteristics were sorely lacking, and there was disorder among the leaders of his campaign and the leaders of the *Concertación* parties that filtered through to public opinion. Furthermore, Frei did not nurture the formulation of a future programmatic proposal, instead emphasising the continuity of the policies implemented by the Bachelet government, thereby confirming

that his candidacy looked to the past, underpinning what was already the main criticism from the opposition since he was himself a former President. And he did not ably tackle the candidacy of Enríquez-Ominami, which appealed to the young voters and supporters of *Concertación* who were disenchanted with political parties.

The defeat of *Concertación* cannot be explained without examining the presidential candidacy of Enríquez-Ominami, who skilfully tapped the power vacuum stemming from the sorry state of the governing parties. He is a young deputy aged 36, with a brief political biography which began four years ago when he won a seat in one of the districts of the constituency of his father, Carlos Ominami (PS). Without having made much of an impact either on the PS or Congress, his electoral strength stemmed from his decision in tackling the *Concertación* and Frei, with the economic backing of a well-known businessman, Max Marambio (who had belonged to the Revolutionary Left Movement – MIR– in his youth and who had amassed his fortune in Fidel Castro's Cuba), the press, the television (where his wife is a well-known personality), and sectors of the right wing, who saw his candidacy as a way of weakening Frei and benefiting Piñera.

## Conclusion

### *Outlook*

The new President, Sebastián Piñera, who will take office on 11 March 2010, will face a difficult task, although he is an extraordinarily intelligent man with political experience. In the first place, he will have a minority in Congress. This is a political situation similar to that of his four predecessors, which led Presidents Aylwin, Frei, Lagos and Bachelet to reach an understanding with the opposition, forcing them to relinquish part of their programmes. Piñera has admitted this reality, sustaining that he would foster a 'democracy of agreements', a term coined by the RN when it supported draft laws during the administration of President Aylwin. The PDC and PS have said they will conduct a constructive opposition, projecting the continuity of the policy of agreements between the government and the opposition, and making Chile's a democracy of consensus, as Arend Lijphart called it.

Secondly, the task facing Piñera is made difficult by the recent fragmentation of the party system as a result of the divisions in the three governing groups and the organisational weakening thereof, with less cohesion in their congressional representation. There is no shortage of evidence of weakness in the governing parties: membership has slumped; there is no renewal at leadership level; their presence in the student movements at the main universities is scant; neither are they present in the trade union movement; and, finally, but no less significantly, they have neglected ideas, and failed to offer proposals to solve the country's main problems.

Thirdly, it is difficult, because during the campaign great promises were made, promises that it is going to be hard, indeed impossible, to keep, such as creating one million jobs in four years. He has declared that he will govern more efficiently than his predecessors, and this is already borne out by his hectic schedule of working meetings and public events. However, the challenges facing Chile require institutional changes that need careful preparation and time. Piñera will have to get used to the fact that the tempo of politics is different from the world of business to which he previously belonged. Securing agreements in Congress will be more difficult due to the fragmentation of the party system, with no less than eight groups represented, akin to what Giovanni Sartori called polarised pluralism, although in Chile the ideological distance between them is actually

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very small. However, for a time the *Concertación* parties will lack the cohesion necessary to act effectively, since they must first define their new role in the opposition after 20 years in power.

Piñera has announced that his will be a government for all Chileans, indicating that while his is a successful business background, he nevertheless plans to push an agenda that takes into account the interests of the entire country. In the last two governments there has been excessive influence from major corporations in the public agenda, stemming from the interest of the last two Presidents (Lagos and Bachelet) in putting an end to the distrust between the corporate world and the political left. There is no justification for this and there is now an entirely new scenario, and a new right-wing administration under Piñera could well implement a policy with fewer concessions to large businesses and more to labour, enabling him to broaden his electoral support among voters from the centre.

The *Concertación* parties also face difficulties, which may hamper the new government's action. There will be an initial phase of recrimination with regard to the causes of the defeat and it will be difficult to quickly define a common position to promote effective opposition. They are all faced with a series of major problems: the centrifugal force of the PS, the organisational and programme-related weakness of the PDC, the structural fragility and high degree of personalisation of the PPD and the scant electoral presence of the PRSD. The renewal of its leaders will mean people who have been in government, the Congress or the party leadership will have to step aside, and this will be a complex process. Because it was a coalition formed to re-establish democracy and support the government, in the opposition it will have to find new sources to afford it legitimacy of action. The definition of a common policy to give it continuity is helped by two major institutional incentives: the binomial electoral system, which pressures for cooperation between parties in parliamentary elections, and the voting system which requires competing presidential candidates to reach agreements. The *Concertación* parties have a long-standing history and a significant grass-roots base which will enable them to continue to wield considerable power and influence on the political system. And if they really want to be an alternative, they will have to find a policy that combines the interests of all (its diversity, the rainbow), with a common strategy, that fulfils other objectives, conducting an intelligent opposition vis-à-vis the new government.

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