

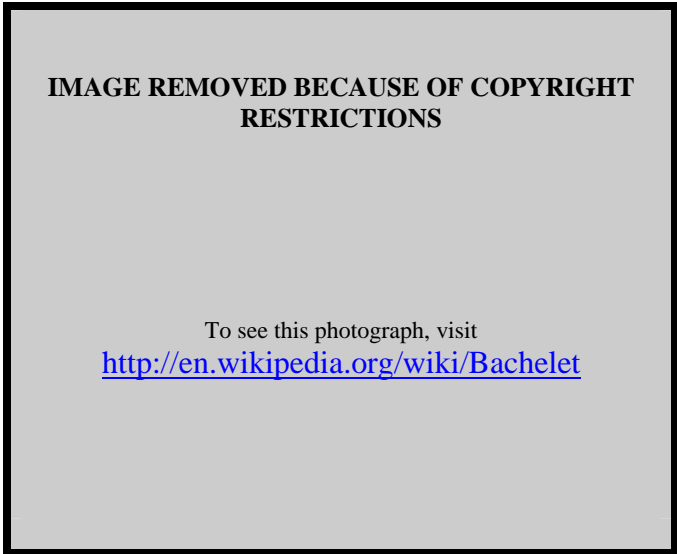
Michael Chaitkin
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PWR 2-2: Cross-Cultural Rhetoric
Research Proposal

Revolutionary Evolution: Bachelet and the Reshaping of Chilean Political Culture

This is the year that defines the Latin America. From Mexico City to Brasilia, voters in 16 nations are electing new representatives and presidents. Rarely do so many countries in a single region confront potentially radical political changes at the same time. As the purported leftward swing of Latin America seems to continue, the outcomes of this year's elections will illuminate important political, social, and cultural trends throughout the hemisphere. For some, the political landscape will change little as reigning regimes simply consolidate their power. For others, like Bolivia, unprecedented results are already in: this week, Evo Morales took office as the country's first indigenous president. An interesting mixture of old and new will characterize this year's elections. Michelle Bachelet (pictured at right) defeated her conservative opponent Sebastian Pinera in a runoff on January 15, becoming Chile's first female president-elect. An atheist, single mother, and trained surgeon, Ms. Bachelet breaks almost every political mold in what has been one of Latin America's most socially conservative, religiously principled, and male-dominated states. Consequently, her victory confirms Chile's status as Latin America's most liberal democracy and promises to firmly establish a progressive political culture distinct form and competitive with Chile's socially conservative old guard.

I plan to investigate the 2006 Chilean presidential election for its significance in the evolution of the nation's political culture.

First, I hope to synthesize media analysis of the results to discuss Bachelet's place in Chile's progression from military dictatorship to liberal democracy. Next, I will combine such news analysis with the findings of other Latin America researchers to consider the Chilean election in the broader context of what is purported to be a



general leftward shift in Latin American politics. Finally, I want to monitor the techniques Bachelet and her party use to bridge the apparent gap between her profile and that of a typical Chilean leader. After all, the three presidents who have ruled since Pinochet fell from power were all white, male, Catholic, Christian Democrats, and socially conservative. I postulate that Ms. Bachelet focuses more on government performance and specific policy plans more than her predecessors, men who appealed directly to the electorate's identity of conservative and Christian values.

I approach my research with several research questions in mind. Are Chilean political norms changing? Is Bachelet's victory evidence of the frequently discussed leftward shift in Latin American politics? By electing a progressive, pro-market woman, will Chile finally get over the hump and become both a liberal democracy and a fully developed nation? Did Bachelet simply exploit her coalition's political dominance or charismatically sway voters despite her nonconformist beliefs?

My background in Latin American politics is moderately strong. I spent a summer living in Ecuador and learning first hand about Andean history and politics. In high school, for my

competitive speech event, I paid very close attention to political and economic developments in the region, often focusing on major trends like the recent shift to the left in many Latin American governments. I have never focused on Chile, though, so I am extremely excited about this case-study opportunity. As I look forward to spending two quarters in Chile next year, this project will be a perfect gateway to my future study of the country and the surrounding region. Consequently, I will need to locate and harness the many valuable resources available to me.

News reports of the election by the New York Times, BBC, and The Economist will be my most important sources. I will analyze how the media portrayed Bachelet during the campaign and how it reacted to her victory. Further, I will inspect the rhetoric utilized by Bachelet and her supporters in this lame-duck period for any themes of reshaping or transcending Chile's political norms. I will also ground my research in recent articles from Maclean's and the Inter-American Dialogue's Latin America Advisor that discuss Latin American political trends to evaluate how Ms. Bachelet fits in. Central to my discussion will be a paper published in Political Studies last year by Francisco Panizza entitled, "Unarmed Utopia Revisited: The Resurgence of Left-of-Centre Politics in Latin America." Furthermore, I will draw on two major projects, one from the American Journal of Political Science and the other from Social Forces on women in Latin American Politics. Lastly, I am conversing via e-mail with Dr. Ivan Jaksic, the well-known Latin American scholar and director of Stanford in Santiago, regarding his take on the election.

The most daunting challenge in this project is developing precise definitions of what I believe are the two distinct political cultures in Chile. Since the events about which I will be writing are so recent, much of the evidence and secondary sources I will collect will be full of

speculation about what the implications of Bachelet's election will be. Consequently, many of the conclusions I draw in my paper will be speculative as well. Nonetheless, by gauging Bachelet's place among recently elected leftist leaders in Latin America, I should be able to offer educated predications about how her term will affect Chile's democratic and economic development.

To complete this project, I propose the following timeline to which I hope to adhere. By February 3 I will collect enough relevant articles about the elections to decide whether I can effectively analyze both and, if not, choose which country to focus on. Also, I will refine my hypothesis into a working thesis by then so that as I write an initial draft, the holes in my research are more obvious. By February 10 I will identify one to three foundation texts that I will use to contextualize my case study in the general dialogue about Latin American political development. In that week I hope to complete a draft of the case study portion of the paper. By February 17 I will define my precise argument and collect any supplemental research I need to finish a full draft. President's Weekend (February 17-19) will provide me the necessary time to complete a draft to be ready for peer evaluation. During the week of February 24 I will revise my argument to polish my paper thoroughly and convert the argument into an oral presentation. By March 3 I will finalize my presentation plans and practice.

Ultimately, I want to credibly judge how Michelle Bachelet's victory fits into recent trends in Chilean and Latin American politics. By contextualizing her election in her country's political evolution and in the resurgence of left-leaning political groups in the region, I will be able to make some predictions about what could be in store for both situations. Furthermore, I hope to identify the techniques employed by Bachelet to reconcile her differences with the archetypal Chilean politician. In essence, I will be analyzing the rhetoric used to communicate

between two distinct (sub)cultures that happen to interact in the same polity. In doing so, I might be able to briefly discuss how candidates in other countries (like the US) might consider campaigning against the political grain, as well as the nature of political subculture in developing countries.

Bio: Michael Chaitkin is a sophomore majoring in International Relations at Stanford University. His interest in Latin American politics stems from his personal experiences living and studying in the region. He is also currently researching democratic development in Latin America for Professor Larry Diamond, Senior Fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution. His other research interests include international security, conflict mediation, and the impact of international law and institutions on state behavior. He hopes to pursue a career in international law and diplomacy.