Towards Technocratic Mass Politics in Chile?
The 1999-2000 Elections and the ‘Lavín Phenomenon’
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Understanding the Lavín Phenomenon

The 1999-2000 presidential elections in Chile have been the most contested electoral event since democratic rule was restored in 1990. Two candidates, the Socialist Ricardo Lagos representing the ruling Concertación coalition of Socialists and Christian Democrats, and Joaquín Lavín of the right-wing coalition Alianza por Chile, fought for every single vote, as both figures possessed an equal chance to win the contest. For the first time as well since 1990, two electoral rounds were needed to decide who would be the next Chilean President. Though Lagos and Lavín were almost equal in the first round (47.95 against 47.51 per cent), in the second and decisive round Lagos managed to obtain a slight advantage of 2.6 per cent against his right-wing rival (51.31 against 48.69 per cent).

For a long time it was expected that the December 1999 contest would bring an easy victory for the Concertación candidate, whoever he would be. This expectation was based on the excellent electoral performance showed by the Concertación coalition during the 1989 and 1993 presidential elections, when Patricio Aylwin and Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle easily won the elections in the first round with 55.2 and 57.9 per cent of the votes cast, respectively. In addition, during the 1990s the right-wing opposition had been extremely divided and had proved unable to become a serious electoral threat for the ruling Concertación coalition. Thus when Ricardo Lagos won the Concertación primaries from the Christian Democrat Andrés Zaldívar on 30 May 1999, his victory in the December 2000 contest seemed almost guaranteed. However, between the primaries and Election Day, the popularity of Joaquín Lavín increased to the point where he stood a real chance to win the presidency. Although he did lose, the huge support he obtained from the Chilean voters has automatically placed him among those with the best chances to win the next presidential elections in 2005. In this manner, the most singular consequence of the 1999-2000 elections has been the fact that for the first time since the restoration of democratic rule in 1990, the Chilean right has been given a real option to govern the country.

In this article I explore the recent electoral strengthening of the Chilean Right and the role played by Joaquín Lavín in transforming it into an acceptable alternative for an important part of the Chilean population. The meteoric rise of the figure of Lavín to the midpoint of the Chilean political scene has been catalogued by the Chilean media and political analysts as ‘el fenómeno Lavín’. His political ascendancy has indeed been truly phenomenal: from being
an almost entirely unknown figure at the beginning of the 1990s, a decade later he has become the indisputable leader of the Chilean Right and a serious presidential candidate in the last elections.

During and after these presidential elections, representatives of the Concertación parties as well as political analysts insisted in picturing Lavín’s political style as ‘populist’ or ‘neo-populistic’. As I will argue in this essay, the ‘Lavín phenomenon’ is rather the expression of a series of profound and complex political and cultural changes that Chilean society has been experiencing during the last ten years. In my opinion, factors such as the increasing depoliticization among Chileans, the transformation of the people into citizens-consumers, the growing role of marketing and the media in modern Chilean politics, and mass assimilation of technocratic views represent crucial aspects for understanding the attractiveness of Lavín’s political style and discourse for a significant part of the national electorate. My contention here is that Lavín does not represent neo-populism – as it has emerged in countries like Peru, Brazil or Venezuela in recent years – but his political style is rather the expression of what I call ‘technocratic mass politics’.

During the former military regime, the main objective of Chilean neo-liberal technocrats was to receive and maintain Pinochet’s support for their market-oriented revolution. Today, a younger generation of Chicago boys is engaged in a much more ambitious political project: to spread their technocratic message of anti-politics and managerial efficiency among the masses in order to conquer the presidency by democratic means.

The Political Ascendancy of Joaquín Lavín

The personal and professional evolution of Joaquín Lavín corresponds with the common pattern of many other Chicago boys-technocrats in Chile. Born in 1953, he began the study of economics at the Universidad Católica de Santiago in 1970. Six years later he was invited by Ernesto Silva and Miguel Kast (two well-known Chicago boys) to work at the National Planning Office (ODEPLAN). This institution was one of the main operation centres from which these neo-liberal technocrats formulated their ‘shock treatment’ for the Chilean economy (cf. Vergara, 1985; Silva, 1991; Montecinos, 1998).

In 1977 he gained a grant to continue his studies at the University of Chicago where he remained for two years and obtained an M.A. in Economics. After his return to Chile in 1979 (he was only 26 years old) he became the dean of the School of Economics of the University of Concepción where he worked until 1981. That year he was put in charge of the economic section (‘Economía y Negocios’) of the influential newspaper El Mercurio of Santiago. From this position he became an active propagator of neo-liberal thought and defender of the market-oriented policies applied by the military government. In 1987 he authored a controversial article in El Mercurio entitled ‘Adiós a Latinoamérica’ in which he announced, in extremely triumphant tone, the ‘take-off’ of Chile that would leave the rest of the Latin American region far behind. In the same year he published Chile, una revolución silenciosa, a book in which he provided a series of statistical figures to show the revolutionary transformation of Chilean society in terms of economic development and overall modern-
The sociologist Ernesto Tironi immediately responded to Lavín’s apologetic vision on Chilean neo-liberalism with *Los silencios de la revolución* (1988). In his book, Tironi contrasted Lavín’s image of Chile by directing his attention to the ‘dark side’ of the neo-liberal revolution, particularly the growing social and economic gap that had originated since 1973 between the rich and the poor in the country.

Following a request of his politico-ideological mentor, Jaime Guzmán, he became more engaged in active politics and in 1987 he became Secretary General of the Independent Democratic Union (UDI). During the 1980s and 1990s this party successfully attracted many right-wing technocrats and *gremialistas* to its membership (cf. Pollack, 1999). Two years later he became the candidate for Member of Parliament for Las Condes (a Santiago district) but he lost against Evelyn Matthei from the rival right-wing National Renewal Party (RN).

In 1992 he became the candidate of the UDI for mayor of Las Condes, the richest district of Santiago (and the country). He won the elections and soon evolved into an extremely efficient mayor who modernized the general infrastructure and provided original solutions to community problems (garbage, traffic jams, drugs, criminality, etc.). In April 1991, a left-wing extremist group assassinated Senator Jaime Guzmán, the unquestionable foreman and ideologue of the Chilean Right. Lavín was among the main candidates to fill the vacuum left by Guzmán.

Lavín’s outstanding administration of Las Condes municipality had provided him with great popularity in Santiago and the rest of the country. He ran for re-election as Mayor in 1996 and obtained an astonishing 78 per cent of the votes. This was the first indication that Lavín was able not only to reach the right-wing electorate but also to obtain the support of a sector that so far had been part of Concertación’s constituency (by obtaining the so-called ‘voto cruzado’).

Prior to becoming the presidential candidacy of the Right, Lavín still needed to solve a series of political obstacles. To begin with, at the beginning of 1999, the National Renewal party (RN) was still planning to go into the December presidential elections with their own candidate, Senator Sebastián Piñera. Lavín had also not yet received the unconditional support of the UDI leadership who, at that stage, was not totally convinced that Lavín was the right candidate for the 1999 presidential contest. In addition, Lavín did not have the decisive support of Senator Augusto Pinochet. The main tactic followed by Pinochet to impede the victory of the Socialist Lagos was to support his rival within the Concertación coalition, the Christian democrat Andrés Zaldívar (President of the Senate). A situation similar to that experienced during the 1964 presidential elections (when Eduardo Frei Sr. won from Salvador Allende with support from the right) was thus being generated. Pinochet and his followers thought that the best thing the Right could do was to support the Christian Democrat candidate (the ‘lesser evil’), thereby hindering the triumph of the Socialist Lagos. However, the huge victory obtained by Lagos against Zaldívar during the Concertación ‘primaries’ in May 1999 (70.1 against 29.9 per cent) completely frustrated his attempt to hinder Lagos’ bid for the December 1999 presidential elections.
Pinochet’s Detention in London

The unexpected detention of Pinochet in London on 16 October 1998 changed the entire political scene in the country, as this suddenly produced the virtual reunification of the Chilean right. From the restoration of democratic rule in 1990 until the General’s detention, the Right had been divided into two antagonistic and apparently irreconcilable fronts. On the one hand, the UDI represented the hard core of pinochetismo and consistently defended in the Chilean Parliament the former military government and its ‘oeuvre’. In addition, the UDI adopted a tough and intransigent opposition to the Concertación governments, rejecting almost all the legal initiatives proposed by the executive. On the other hand, National Renewal (RN) represented the more moderate and democratically oriented sectors of the Right, who since 1990 gradually began to distance themselves from the hardcore pinochetista camp. For instance, RN constituted a very constructive opposition during the Aylwin government, supporting on various occasions the adoption of legislation aimed at strengthening democratic rule in the country.’ Since the restoration of democracy both parties had been fighting bitterly with each other to secure support from the conservative electorate (cf. Pollack, 1999).

Following Pinochet’s arrest, however, the rival sectors spontaneously closed ranks around the General’s defence. For a long time, however, the unification of the right was almost exclusively the result of their common sense of outrage and bitterness following the General’s arrest. In other words, their unification was in reaction to an event and not the product of having a common project for the country’s future. This became clear as the December 1999 presidential election came closer in time. As in the previous presidential elections of 1989 and 1993, tensions between UDI and RN rapidly increased, as they had to decide who was going to be their common presidential candidate for the December 1999 contest. In early January 1999 UDI and RN decided to formalize their electoral unity with the formation of the electoral coalition Alianza por Chile. The idea was to have their own primaries sometime in June to choose between Joaquín Lavín and Sebastián Piñera. However, on 9 January 1999 Piñera withdrew his candidacy as the opinion polls systematically showed that he was not winning a considerable amount of support within the right-wing electorate. Lavín finally became acceptable to the leaders of National Renewal, as they liked the high degree of relative autonomy Lavín had established from UDI. From that moment on, the position of Lavín as the single candidate of the Right became consolidated.

Following the nomination of Lavín as the common presidential candidate of the Right, a new political discourse began to take shape. This was no longer centred on the figure of General Pinochet and the heritage of his regime, but was directed toward the present and future of the country and the need to modernize the Chilean economy and society at large (see Barra, 1999). They realized that the dictatorial past and the abuse of human rights under the Pinochet regime constituted the Achilles’ heel of the Right in its attempt to become a real political alternative against the Concertación.

However when Pinochet was arrested in London, the UDI and RN leaders refrained from criticizing his regime any longer. Lavín, nevertheless, went on with his critical remarks about the Pinochet years and even asked Pinochet
publicly, a few days after his detention, to make a ‘noble gesture’ by asking the Chilean population to pardon his regime for all the injustices committed during his government. This appeal triggered enormous discontent among the Armed Forces and most of the pinochetista sectors within the Chilean Right. The UDI was afraid that a clear disassociation from Pinochet under these dramatic circumstances would alienate a significant group within UDI’s traditional supporters from the Alianza por Chile. Lavín was finally forced by Pablo Longueira (UDI’s president) to pay Pinochet a visit in London in an attempt to restore the confidence of the Right in Lavín. However, Pinochet gave him a very cold reception in London, as he had not forgiven Lavín for the public criticism of his regime. Following Lavín’s return to Santiago, his disassociation with Pinochet became even more evident. At the same time, Pinochet began to support the candidacy of Arturo Frei Bolívar, a right-wing Christian Democrat and member of the Parliament who, as it was expected, could capture a part of the Christian Democrat constituency that was not disposed to vote for Lagos. In the end, however, Frei Bolívar only obtained 0.38 per cent of the votes during the December presidential elections.

Lavín’s tactical ‘distanciamiento’ from Pinochet was a key element in his attempt to capture the support of those middle-of-the-road voters who traditionally had not supported the parties of the Right in previous presidential contests. The military and civil hardcore pinochetistas considered this as an act of treason. However, in the months previous to the December 1999 presidential elections, when it became evident that Lavín had a real chance to beat the Concertación candidate Ricardo Lagos and to win in the elections, all right-wing sectors joined forces to support his campaign.

Declining Popular Support for the Concertación

A series of factors is responsible for the declining popular support for the Concertación coalition. To begin with, after almost ten years in power and having already provided two presidents in a row, many people wanted a change in the governmental team: they desired new faces and new ideas. In addition, the Asian crisis has had severe consequences for the Chilean economy since the end of 1998. Exports and production have declined, accompanied by increasing underemployment, nearing 12 per cent (some 700,000 persons) of the working population. The general impression among the people was that the Frei administration had not adequately handled the economic crisis and had not done enough to reduce the pain among the people who suffered most. So the electorate (openly and implicitly) blamed the Concertación government for their economic difficulties and hence for the sudden ending of the bonanza, after more than sixteen years of steady economic growth.8

The Concertación coalition also suffered from the constant (and often passive) opposition of an important group of people from the left and from many young adults who ‘don’t care for politics’ (represented in the current expression ‘no estoy ni ahi’). These sectors have systematically resisted neo-liberalism and the marketization of Chilean society.9 They blame Concertación for it and show their dissatisfaction by voting void (null and blank votes) during elections or by not enrolling their names in the electoral registers (cf. Riquelme, 1999).
The need to hold primaries just nine months before the elections also reduced the unity and cohesion within the Concertación coalition. The struggle between Lagos and Zaldívar for the coalition’s candidacy produced some unavoidable confrontations between Socialists and Christian Democrats, which did not automatically vanish following Lagos’ victory in May 1999. In addition, the loyalty of Christian Democrats (both from the party cadres and its electoral constituency) to the Lagos campaign was dubious at the very least. After the presidential elections it became clear that many people who had voted for a Christian Democrat presidential candidate (Aylwin and Frei) in the past did not vote for the Socialist Lagos now, but instead transferred their support to Lavín.

On the other hand, Lagos and his advisers did not react in time to see that they rapidly needed to improve and expand their presidential campaign if they wanted to win these elections. For months after the primaries Lagos acted as if he were already the next Chilean President and did not realize, in the meantime, that Lavín had become a serious challenger. Other Concertación figures systematically underestimated Lavín, too, and even made fun of him. They satirically labelled Lavín as being a ‘cosista’, i.e. a person who is only fixed with the solutions of concrete things, but who does not have a statesman’s long-term vision for the country’s further development. Others characterized Lavín as being a clown who in the end would not be taken seriously by the electorate. In contrast, they praised Lagos who, in their opinion, was synonymous with the statesmanship and political experience they considered a ‘must’ to become a Chilean President.

Lagos was indeed extremely popular within his own Party for Democracy (PPD) and the Socialist Party (PS), but what many figures within the renovated Socialist circles failed to see was that the depoliticized masses on the street did not necessarily think the same way. Besides, PPD-PS politicians also underestimated the fact that many Chileans were still afraid and or at least doubtful about (again) choosing a Socialist President (after the Allende experience) because of its possible negative repercussions on the political and economic stability in the country (cf. Silva, 1999a). In addition, many people just did not like Lagos’ personality. He has often been characterized as being ‘cold’, arrogant and an ‘old fashioned político’. Finally, age and generational differences were also important factors that still have not been adequately considered. Young and middle-aged Chileans found Lagos ‘too old’ with his 64 years in comparison with Lavín, who at 46 years of age better represented their generational aspirations.

One of Lagos’ major problems was to position himself vis-à-vis the Concertación’s governmental performance. On the one hand, being the Concertación’s candidate, he could not distance himself too much from the Frei government in which he served as a successful Minister of Public Works. But on the other hand, Lagos did not want to carry full responsibility for the country’s declining economic performance and the existing criticism on the Frei administration. This is the reason why he chose the idea of ‘cambio’ (change). In his view the country needed a substantial change to effectively deal with the existing problems in the fields of health, public security, unemployment, etc. Lavín, however, skilfully appropriated the idea of cambio (adopting the slogan ‘viva el cambio’) and used it against Lagos and the Concertación coalition. He
asked, for instance, how the same people and the same coalition that had been ruling the country for the past 10 years could now produce the changes required by the country. For him ‘change’ meant a new governmental team with new ideas and projects, and not still ‘more of the same’.\textsuperscript{13} Later, the Lagos electoral team changed their motto to ‘Growth with Equity’, to appeal to a society which urgently required more equity and solidarity.\textsuperscript{14} Yet at the same time, it implied that no equity had been achieved after 10 years of Concertación governments. In other words, as Tironi has pointed out, the Lagos team began to play the role of the opposition (stressing mainly the deficiencies and not the achievements of the Concertación), which in the end provoked disenchantment even among traditional supporters of the governmental coalition (Tironi, 1999: 204). Finally, Lagos and his advisers did not understand that many issues they were putting at the centre of his campaign were not the issues most of the people were worried about. This was the case with a series of constitutional changes proposed by the Concertación such as the elimination of the non-elected institutional Senators (the so-called \textit{senadores designados}), the National Security Council, the position of the Chief of the Armed Forces vis-à-vis the President, and the binomial electoral system.

\textbf{The ‘Lavín Style’: Neo-Populistic or Technocratic?}

During the electoral campaign many Concertación representatives labelled Lavín’s style as ‘populistic’ or ‘neo-populistic’.\textsuperscript{15} They insinuated by this that Lavín represented something similar to the political style developed by figures like Alberto Fujimori in Peru or Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. In addition, it has been repeatedly argued that Lavín’s success during the past presidential elections has mainly been the result of his millionaire campaign. I agree with Jorge Schaulsohn as he states that this argument is too simplistic and does not help in understanding Lavín’s outstanding electoral performance.\textsuperscript{16}

This is certainly not the place for assessing the meaning of populism in the political history of Latin America or to analyse the main features of what today is called ‘neo-populism’.\textsuperscript{17} Nevertheless, I want here only to stress the very different economic and political conjuncture presented by those countries in which neo-populism has emerged in comparison with Chilean contemporary reality. In recent cases of neo-populism, populist leaders have attempted to bypass existing political parties in order to introduce neo-liberal reforms from within the presidency. This has happened amidst a situation of general economic and political crisis and where the political party system has traditionally been very weak or even in complete disarray (cf. Knight, 1998; Cammack, 2000). The Chilean situation strongly contrasts with this general pattern (even if we take into consideration the recessive period of 1998-2000). To begin with, traditional populism has never flourished in Chile as a result of the strong institutionalization of the political multi-party system. During the military regime, the Allende government was officially blamed as representing a revolutionary type of populism of the worst sort. As I have argued elsewhere, the entire idea of populism suffered a significant psychological defeat in Chile. After seventeen years of anti-populist rhetoric, many people have, rightly or wrongly, internalized the view that populism was one of the main causes for the
economic and political crisis that preceded the breakdown of democracy in September 1973 (Silva, 1999b). In addition, most of the painful neo-liberal reforms in Chile were done under authoritarian rule, so they did not complicate the transition agenda as has been the case in other South American countries. Even more important is the fact that the neo-liberal policies applied in Chile have been quite successful and thus have received ample support from among the Chilean population, including important sectors of the former opposition to Pinochet (now in power). The economic problems that have emerged since late 1998 have created some discontent among the population, but certainly not to the degree that people are willing to support a total reformulation of the way the political system works.

It is true today that Chilean political parties no longer possess the degree of power and influence they enjoyed in the previous democratic era. However, this does not automatically mean that they are in a state of crisis (cf. Arriagada, 1997). On the contrary, they have been quite capable and successful in smoothly conducting the Chilean democratic transition and in dealing with very sensitive problems such as the strong turbulence created by the detention of Pinochet in London and later with his return to the country. Moreover, the impeccable development of the 1999-2000 presidential elections, where both physical and even verbal violence were totally absent, shows that today this country possesses a high degree of political stability and consensus that has mainly been engineered by these parties.

So if the country has been spared those profound crises that have generated the appearance of neo-populism elsewhere in the region, how can one explain the expansion of anti-politicism among Chileans in recent years? In my opinion, this phenomenon is directly related to two important consequences of the rapid process of modernization experienced by Chilean society in the past two decades. On the one hand, the overall modernization of Chilean society has led to an increasing professionalization of politics and politicians. This has not only strengthened the use of a technocratic discourse among politicians and technocrats, but it has also produced a deepening decline in the role played by political parties in the conduct of electoral campaigns. Today electoral strategies and programme design have mainly become matters for private research institutes and think tanks. The first evidences of the increasing importance of private research institutes and think tanks in Chilean politics appeared during and after the 1989 presidential elections (cf. Silva, 1991: 409-410). During the 1999-2000 presidential elections political parties were almost completely absent in the organization and implementation of the electoral campaigns. The Instituto Libertad y Desarrollo, a neo-liberal think-tank controlled by prominent UDI figures, played a pivotal role in Lavín’s electoral campaign.18

The second consequence of the rapid process of social and economic modernization has been the radical changes taking place in the political culture of the Chilean electorate. This is the so-called sociedad emergente Lavín was already talking about in the late 1980s (Lavín, 1987; Lavín and Larraín, 1989). Though Lavín was severely criticized for his ‘emerging society’-thesis by left-wing intellectuals at that time, prominent sociologists such as José Joaquín Brunner and Ernesto Tironi have now accepted it. The Chile of the 1980s was a kind of continuation of the Chile of the 1960s, as the political process was still dominated by an oligarchic political class. In only ten years everything has
changed. The model of two antagonistic ideological blocks has gradually been disappearing. As Brunner points out, ‘Politics has ceased to be the axis of society. In turn, the citizen has dressed himself as a consumer. The old fashioned politicians despise him, but he is the one who is filling up the malls in the city. (...) Chileans have become individualistic and pragmatic; they are more oriented towards concrete things than to words. (...) The people expect less from the state and rely more on their own efforts. Competition grows as dreams diminish. Performance indicators replace utopias and frustration gives way to expectations. (...) The masses invade the markets, condition the mass media and adopt a high degree of fluidity, disconcerting the leading minorities by this.’\(^{19}\)

In the same vein, Tironi argues that as a result of the modernization process along neo-liberal lines the ‘consumer’s logic’ has been internalized by the Chilean population, exerting a growing influence on its political behaviour. ‘Consumers are leading a revolution that is not only economic, but also political and cultural. While in the 1970s the state was the main protagonist of Chilean society, in the 1980s this role was taken by the entrepreneurial class. In the 1990s, however, it has been the consumer who has become the main societal actor in Chile’ (Tironi, 1999: 227).\(^{20}\)

The point is that Lavín has been both the product as well as a key propagator of this emerging society based on neo-liberal values and consumption which was inaugurated by the former military regime, and its existence has now become evident for almost everyone (cf. Silva, 1995). So while some politicians from the Left and Concertación have neglected the reality of this new type of society or have unsuccessfully attempted to change it, Lavín has been working all these years to represent it.

As I will attempt to show here, his style can be defined as ‘technocratic’ as his attempts to directly obtain the support of the masses has been directed, more or less, against the entire political party system. Showing the high degree of popularity he enjoys among the population was the only weapon he could use against the supremacy of politicians within the structures of the right-wing political parties, and in this way he ‘forced’ this sector to support him as a presidential candidate. Together with his technocratic orientation (expressed in his abhorrence of politics and political parties, and his inclination to ‘technify’ social problems and their solutions) he also represents extremely conservative Catholic values (as a member of Opus Dei). It is this particular side of Lavín’s formation that makes him a very unusual technocrat when he is involved in politics: he possesses a ‘passion’, a ‘mission’ in trying to convince, even his adversaries, about the correctness of his path and his solutions.

Lavín developed his political style as Mayor of Las Condes and he promised to continue that style from the Moneda Palace. He once defined his own style as ‘more action, less politics’. As Mayor he demonstrated the incredible energy he possesses in dealing with the many problems affecting Las Condes. He is a clear example of the workoholic: being constantly busy, doing things, talking with people, visiting institutions, and above all solving problems. The people’s image of Lavín is one of a young, hard-working and intelligent man who is an excellent administrator.

In fact, he has ‘marketized’ local politics by looking at citizens as though they were ‘clients’ who receive ‘products’ from the municipality (in the form of
services, infrastructure, etc.). For this purpose he institutionalized the use of referenda to ask the people about their own priorities in the agenda of the municipalities. The idea was that as consumers and payers of municipal taxes they were ‘free to choose’ the destination of their money. He has also been able – by politically marketing his image as being efficient and ‘a doer’ – to ‘connect’ with the real Chile, a consumer society, in which the citizenry has become accustomed to look at the politicians’ message as being a product.

Lavín’s style is an expression of technocratic politics that reduces social problems to technical problems that in his view only require efficient technical solutions. Moreover, by turning directly to the population, Lavín tried – in the best Chicago boys-tradition – simply to bypass the politicians and the political parties that the Chicago boys find unnecessary and inefficient constructs. By his direct way of doing things and approaching people (talking in a ‘normal’, colloquial and youthful manner and not as a traditional politician), wearing casual clothing and visiting everyone in their own environment, he produces immediate empathy. This makes him a very charismatic person, particularly for the youth.

Not strictly following party lines is a characteristic of Lavín’s political style. Based on a strongly meritocratic conception of leadership, he claims that the government should be comprised of ‘only the best’, independent from their political positions. This implies breaking with the tradition of recruiting people on the basis of party affiliation, and instead stressing their professional excellence and previous performance. During his campaign he repeatedly pointed out that in his government he would include some figures associated with Concertación because of their outstanding qualities.

Another marked feature of Lavín’s style is teamwork. When Mayor and during his presidential campaign he would constantly work with small teams, rapidly dealing with specific questions, meeting preferably in a cafetería somewhere in Providencia or Las Condes. He also has a special talent in marketing his person in the mass media. During the campaign, for instance, he made excellent use of the ‘flanja televisiva’, the (free) five minutes television time candidates got twice a day to expose their views to the electorate. Of course, his exorbitant campaign budget (some estimates go as high as US$ 30 million) allowed him to make expensive spots and to continuously change them. Moreover, his public rallies became veritable shows, as they were accompanied by the performances of well-known singers and pop groups.

Avoiding the past and concentrating on positive things and goals for the near future also characterize Lavín’s style. In fact he copied the very successful concept used by the opposition to Pinochet during the 1988 referendum (‘la alegría ya viene’), in which a non-confrontational appeal was made to construct a better Chile in the future and to put away the conflicts of the past. Each time he was attacked by members of Concertación, he refrained from responding to these attacks, stressing that this was not according to his personal nature. He scored highly by this, as Chileans today do not like direct personal confrontation in politics. They associate that political style with the old democratic period in its terminal phase.

What makes Lavín a special type of technocrat is the fact that he combines his discourse on economic and administrative efficiency with a strong religious message. In other words, he is liberal in economic issues, and conservative in
moral ones. He postulates, namely, a series of conservative values such as marriage and the family (he is the father of seven children). He is openly against divorce and abortion. He also supports censorship on television programmes and films to avoid sex and violence and criticizes anti-AIDS campaigns in which the use of condoms among the youth is recommended. His firm and consequent position on several issues have provided him with the support of many Chileans. They, like him, want modernity as long as it is related to the expanding access to new consuming goods and services, but in respect to moral issues, they also continue to be quite conservative.

In particular, his almost ‘religious mission’ (‘misión de servir’ as he calls it) has brought him very close to the people. As a veritable ‘evangelical’ preacher, he travelled continuously around the country, reaching out to the most remote places and people, bringing them his ‘voice of salvation’: vote for me and Chile will be prosperous again.

Finally, he attempted to put an end to the division between the ‘Sí’ and the ‘No’ that had kept Chilean society divided since the 1988 Referendum. His campaign was primarily directed to obtain the support of the electorate who historically had supported the Concertación governments. By directing his campaign to his own personal achievements he wanted to receive the support of the people not for what he represented in political terms (UDI, the Right), but to convince the electorate that he would be a good president. In attempting to break with the Left-Right dichotomy, he declared himself to be suprapolitical or, rather, apolitical. He knew that his only chance to win the election was to conquer a significant part of the Concertación electorate in order to obtain a ‘voto cruzado’. The results of both rounds of the elections show that he clearly succeeded in receiving support from the rich as well as from the popular sectors.

**The Victory of Lagos and Beyond**

Lavín’s style was different and unexpected even in the way he accepted his electoral defeat. In the evening of 16 January 2000 it became clear that Ricardo Lagos had won the elections. As he prepared to celebrate his victory, Joaquín Lavín paid an unexpected visit to Lagos in his campaign headquarters to personally congratulate him with his triumph. For the first time in Chilean political history, the winner of the presidential elections appeared on the balcony to address the masses accompanied by his main political adversary, who also saluted the people who came to celebrate Lagos’ victory. On that opportunity (and this was Lavín’s second surprise) he publicly offered Lagos his close cooperation and even offered the assistance of his team of experts to help the Concertación experts in the design of new policy instruments.

This gesture inaugurated the style of opposition both Lavín and the UDI are planning to follow during the Lagos government. Lavín and his followers want to show everyone that he is ‘a good loser’ and that he constitutes a constructive and positive factor in Chilean politics. Lavín and the UDI are interested in putting an end to the transition process and to ‘ban’ the past from Chile’s political debates, as they know this factor most probably cost them the past elections. At the presidential elections of 2005, Lavín wants to be freed from
his authoritarian past. So today not only Concertación but the Right as well is interested in finding an lasting solution for the question of the ‘desaparecidos’ and other related issues. Lagos is also interested in surpassing the past and the Pinochet-question in order to concentrate on his own social, political and economic agenda.

The return of Pinochet in Chile on 3 March 2000 produced a new and important change in the relations between National Renewal and the UDI. The close, forced unity produced by his arrest sixteen months earlier in order to obtain Pinochet’s liberation was no longer required. Besides, the excellent electoral results obtained by Lavin during the past contest and hence for the new and promising perspective of the presidential elections of 2005 boosted the drive within UDI to become the hegemonic force within the Chilean right at the cost of National Renewal. To that end, the UDI leadership has actively searched for a closer relation with the Lagos government and its main political representatives. Thus, for example, the UDI leaders invited the new minister of the interior, José Miguel Insulza, to speak to the audience of the UDI Conference held at Termas de Cauquenes on 18 March 2000 about possible consensual solutions for the pending constitutional problems in the country.22

This line of co-operation was further developed during the historical meeting between the UDI President, Pablo Longueira and President Lagos on 22 March 2000. This meeting consolidated the central position gained by UDI as the interlocutor of the Lagos government within the Right. National Renewal heavily criticized the hegemonic aspirations of UDI and demanded that it act as a coalition within the framework of the Alianza por Chile. However, the decision of the Chilean Supreme Court on 8 August 2000 to revoke Pinochet’s parliamentary immunity has provoked a rift between the UDI and the Lagos government.

The Chilean Right directed its attention to the municipal elections of 29 October 2000 in which they wanted to show their full strength to the Concertación government. As expected, Joaquín Lavin became the right wing candidate for mayor of the Municipality of Santiago, the largest and politically most important municipality in the country. He obtained 61 per cent of the votes, while the candidate of the Concertación, Marta Larraechea, only received the support of 29 per cent of the electorate. Like Jacques Chirac in France, an efficient administration of the capital city could be a first step towards winning the 2005 presidential elections. The ambitions of UDI are big and some analysts forecast the creation under UDI leadership of a Partido Popular (following the successful formula adopted by the Spanish right-wing sector lead by José María Aznar), including National Renewal and discontented Christian Democrats. If this occurs, the Chilean Right will become a mass movement for the first time and certainly will manage to increase its appeal to the general electorate.

Concluding Remarks

The past presidential elections have shown that Chilean political culture has experienced some important mutations. A significant segment of the electorate seems to have assimilated the technocratic discourse of ‘good administration’ and ‘cosismo’. In addition, and after decades of bitter confrontations
and dichotomies between the two Chiles, the Right and the Left, the Sí and the No, the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’, the current political map has become more complex. Thus the division between Left and Right is less clear than in the recent past while the traditional party loyalties are rapidly evaporating. In this manner, the ‘voto cruzado’ passes over traditional dichotomies, and the personal characteristics of the candidates seem to be more powerful than the sectors they are expected to represent.

Chilean politics have become extremely moderate and the democratic left and the right are now fighting to conquer the political centre. Lagos and Lavín both defended the neo-liberal orientation of the Chilean economy and the limited role of the state in a market-oriented society, receiving the support of 95 per cent of the population during the first round of the presidential elections. In addition, the extra-parliamentary left has almost totally lost its appeal among the electorate, as the candidate Gladys Marín only obtained 3.5 per cent of the votes.

Finally, the electoral chances for the right will be determined by the political and economic performance of the Lagos government. If in the coming years the economy experiences a solid recuperation and Lagos provides a strong leadership for his government and coalition, the 2005 elections could again become a very contested race between Concertación and the Right. Nevertheless, the question remains whether the Chilean population will still be disposed to elect, for the fourth time in a row, a president representing the same political coalition.

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**Notes**

1. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the SLAS Annual Conference held at Hull in April 2000. I would like to thank Roberto Espíndola, Ronaldo Munck, David Hojman, Francisco Domínguez and Cristóbal Kay for their comments and criticisms during the event.
2. The two rounds were held on 12 December 1999 and 16 January 2000.
3. During the first round four other candidates also participated in the contest, obtaining only a marginal support from the electorate. Arturo Frei Bolívar, an independent right-wing candidate (0.38 per cent); Sara Larraín Ruiz-Tagle, representing the Ecological Party (0.44 per cent); Tomás Hirsch Goldschmidt, representing the Humanist Party (0.51 per cent); and Gladys Marín Millie, the candidate of the Communist Party and the extra-parliamentary left (3.19 per cent).
4. This section on Joaquín Lavín is mainly based on information from Barra (1999) and several Chilean newspapers and magazines including *El Mercurio, La Tercera, Estrategia, Qué Pasa*, and *Ercilla*. On the history of the Chicago boys see Valdés (1995) and Fontaine (1989).
5. The book (which became a best seller) is in fact a collection of triumphant expressions such as
the following one: ‘Today Chile is a leading country. To those who repeatedly have indicated that Chile needs to recuperate its leadership among the Latin American nations, we must tell them that Chile has already recaptured its regional leadership and in an impressive way’ (Lavín, 1987; 154). See also Lavín and Larraín (1989) and Benítez (1993).

6. For an in-depth analysis of the political consequences of Pinochet’s arrest for the Chilean political process see Silva (2000).


8. This became evident from regular opinion polls held in 1998 and 1999 by CEREC at Santiago on ‘governmental approval’ (aprobación de gobierno).


10. One of Lagos’ electoral advisers was the French expert Jacques Déguela. In a recent book he describes the many problems, conflicts and lack of cohesiveness affecting Lagos’ electoral team (see Déguela, 2000).


12. ‘According to many experts, the Concertación candidate has not been able to get rid of his image as being a traditional politician. The names of the men he placed in the management of his campaign could reaffirm that: Genaro Arriagada and Carlos Figueroa, among others’ (La Tercera, 10/10/99).

13. Curiously, this was the same argument used by Gladys Marín, the candidate of the Communist party. For Marín, the possible election of Lagos only meant ‘much of the same’ – the continuation of neo-liberal policies.

14. This has been, for instance, one of the main conclusions of the Third UNDP Report on human development in Chile entitled ‘Más sociedad para gobernar el futuro’, Santiago, March 2000.

15. For instance, Alvaro García, one of the leading figures of Lagos’ electoral team referred to the alleged neo-populism of Lavín in the following terms: ‘If Collor de Mello was the first Latin American neo-populist, Joaquín Lavín is without any doubt the most interesting contemporary case. (…) The old populist did not do much, but he talked too much. The neo-populist doesn’t talk too much and it looks like he is doing much’ in ‘¿Quien es el populista? Lagos o Lavín?’, La Tercera (4/9/99).


17. See for that purpose the collections of papers published in the Bulletin of Latin American Research, (vol. 19, nr. 2, April 2000) in the special issue ‘Old and New Populism in Latin America’.

18. The Instituto Libertad y Desarrollo has close links with the American neo-conservative think tank, the Manhattan Institute of New York. See ‘La fábrica de ideas de Lavín en NY’, La Tercera, 23/1/2000; and ‘El “tanque de ideas” de la derecha’, La Tercera, 16/4/2000. Lagos also established a think tank for his campaign, the Corporación Tiempo 2000, but it played a less prominent role during the past elections than the Instituto Libertad y Desarrollo.


20. See particularly chapter 10, ‘La sociedad emergente’.

21. José Donoso depicted this attitude in Chile in the following terms: ‘there exists an ease, a facilism in Chile. The people expect that things must be nice, light and replaceable. For this it is necessary that things do not possess any force. Everything is reduced to consensus, general pardon, and to nice and light things. All this means not to have to think. There is no other word that people in Chile hate more than the word –denso’ or full of content’. Interview in Qué Pasa nr. 1340 (13-19 December 1996).

22. At this opportunity Insulza stressed the many similar positions that were shared both by Lagos and Lavín in their electoral programmes, and his hope that government and opposition can work together to complete the democratic transition in the country.

References


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