



**Michelle Bachelet**

# Chile's First Woman President



*The first 36 measures taken by her administration will focus on sensitive and high-priority areas for citizens, such as employment, social security, education, health, public safety, the environment and enhancing the country's democracy.*

**"It will be a great honor for the President called upon to hand over the presidential sash on March 11 to a Chilean woman such as Michelle Bachelet".**

**President Ricardo Lagos  
January 16, 2006**



January 15, 2006, will be remembered as a historic day in Chile. For the first time, a woman was elected as President of the Republic. The triumph of pediatrician Michelle Bachelet also symbolizes the "reuniting of Chileans," as Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz affirmed.

In a second electoral round, characterized by an exemplary civic environment, Chileans gave their overwhelming support to the candidate of the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia coalition, in government since 1990. Bachelet received 53.49% of the vote, compared to 46.50% for opposition candidate Sebastián Piñera. Only a few minutes after the first results were announced, a spontaneous celebration began throughout the country, with thousands of people pouring out into the streets.

Chile's election was also an international event. More than 180 foreign correspondents and special envoys watched in amazement as a country viewed as conservative elected a President who is not a member of the political class, who suffered the brutal repression of the dictatorship together with her family.

In her first speech, with the confidence of broad voter support (she won in 12 of the country's 13 regions), the President-elect expressed her happiness: "Who would have thought, 20, 10 or even five years ago, that Chile would elect a woman President!"



“The President-elect is a symbol of the reuniting of Chileans, of peace among us, of a reconciled country; someone who was battered by hate, but preferred to overcome it through understanding, through tolerance, and as she has said, through love”.

Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz  
January 16, 2006

With her three children and her mother by her side, Michelle Bachelet gave an emotional remembrance of her father, who died of a heart attack in 1974 as a result of torture during his detention under the dictatorship. “There is someone who would unquestionably be very proud at this moment, a man I wish I could embrace tonight. That man is my father, Alberto Bachelet; from him I inherited a love for Chile and for all Chileans, without distinctions.”

Amid applause and the release of tricolored balloons into the sky, Bachelet stated: “Thank you for electing me to lead Chile on this journey. I, too, have traveled down a long road to arrive here tonight. As you know, I have not had an easy life. But who has?”

### Challenges beyond gender

Woman or no, what is certain is that the success of Michelle Bachelet’s administration, which will last for only four years, will depend on her ability to confront the challenges she set for herself during the campaign. The slogan “I am with you” clearly reflects her determination: “As the head of government, I want to be on the side of the people who have no power.” The same characteristic was evident in her quest for the presidency: it was a citizens’ campaign which did not attempt to distance itself from political parties, but simply to “give more participation to the people.”

The President-elect will have to maintain and deepen the universally acclaimed economic and social management of President Ricardo Lagos’ administration, while also making progress toward reducing the big gap of inequality that persists in Chilean society.

“The task we have before us is such an appealing one: to construct a country that is more prosperous and more just, with more solidarity – a country of all and for all. This is what I have dreamed of all my life,” asserted Bachelet.

In the early months of her administration, the so-called “100 Days, 36 Commitments Plan” will be implemented. The initiative’s main focus is on combating unemployment, especially among young people, and expanding the network of State support to cover the most vulnerable groups in society. “The next administration will be a short one, only four years, so we will have to start with our engines at full throttle,” noted Bachelet while announcing the 36 measures.

The proposals call for action in sensitive and high-priority areas for citizens, such as employment, social security, education, health, public safety, the environment and the enhancement of the country’s democracy. Among them are the creation of a Ministry of Public Safety and the designation of a Minister of the Environment.

The central emphasis of Michelle Bachelet’s program of government will be placed on social issues. Proposed measures include the following:

**Education:** Promoting an early stimulation policy for all children served by public health clinics; gradually implementing a preschool system to serve children aged 0 to 4 from the poorest 40% of the population, as well as all



children whose mothers work; guaranteeing access for all children to prekindergarten; providing a preferential subsidy for needy children from prekindergarten through fourth grade, which doubles the current basic subsidy; gradually reducing the maximum class size from 45 to 35 children; and guaranteeing the financing of higher education for every talented student.

**Employment:** Facilitating new work modalities (such as part-time employment and telecommuting); promoting the collective negotiation of working hours by workers and employers; providing specific employment training resources for at-risk young people aged 18 to 24; expanding unemployment insurance coverage; and combating anti-union practices.

**Health:** Increasing to 80 the number of medical conditions covered by the AUGE Plan, the central pillar of the most significant health reform implemented during the past 50 years in Chile, aimed at guaranteeing care by law to the entire population by 2010; strengthening the public health system; expanding the resources dedicated to health care needs not covered by the AUGE Plan; strengthening primary care as an entry port into the system; creating Community Family Health Centers; and expanding cost-free health care services in hospitals for people over 60.

**Public safety:** Changing the law to reduce benefits during the trial and prison periods for repeat offenders; placing more urgent emphasis on serious crimes; requiring executive branch authorities working in the area of public safety to provide a public accounting every three months; creating a Ministry of Public Safety; and increasing the staffing of the Investigative Police by 500 agents per year and that of the Carabineros by 1,500 per year.



**Housing:** Implementing a plan to fully eliminate the country's housing deficit within the next eight years.

If Michelle Bachelet's government has a characteristic trademark, it will be her announced reform of the retirement insurance system. The effort will begin during the first year of her term, with the preparation and submission to Congress of a "fundamental" reform proposal.

According to the President-elect, the

idea is "within six months, to gather together all of the relevant participants (in a pension reform committee) to create a proposal with a very concrete vision, and in the second half of the first year of government, to submit a bill addressing the pension system."

The pension reform committee will work to fulfill an explicit mandate: preparing proposals to expand the pension system, in order to effectively protect workers from the risks associated with old age and disability.

Another issue the new President will have to address is the elimination of the binomial system. During the second-round campaign, the administration

"The coverage of the retirement system has not been expanded. A high proportion of workers have significant gaps in their contributions. If things continue as they are, this means that the majority of workers in the system will only be able to obtain a minimum pension, or even less, because they have not made the required level of contributions."

"The current reality of the system is such that the key parameters on which it rests threaten to increase the gaps between rich and poor workers, and between men and women, at the moment of retirement."

From the chapter "Protecting Our People" in Michelle Bachelet's Program of Government.

## FACTS

8,220,897 Chilean citizens participated in the second presidential election round on Sunday, January 15, 2006.

For the first time, polling station committee members will receive an honorarium (6,000 Chilean pesos, or approximately 11 dollars).

According to the final election figures, the majority of both men and women voted for Michelle Bachelet; she was chosen by 53.32% of women voters and 53.69% of men.

The Metropolitan Region contributed more than 220,000 of the 485,000 votes that separated Michelle Bachelet from runner-up Sebastián Piñera.

attempted to reach an agreement with the opposition in this area, but without success – once again – due to rejection by right-wing legislators. The idea is to replace the current system with one that ensures both governability and representativeness, while also implementing an automatic voter registration system.

After March, the situation may change. Parliamentary elections – for half of the country’s Senate seats and the full Chamber of Deputies – were also held on December 11, and the Concertación achieved a majority in both houses for the first time since the country’s return to democracy.



With Ecuador’s President, Alfredo Palacio.

“Thus she mounted a tank, which she drove with a feminine sensibility, as Minister of Defense: What a way to highlight both herself and the Armed Forces of the post-Pinochet era! The daughter of a general tortured by his own comrades-in-arms has become their ‘Commander in Chief.’ We are witnessing here an emblematic moment in the recuperation of Chilean democracy. Those in uniform respect constitutional authority, and she demonstrates that Chilean society can deal with its traumas and pain through the path of forgiveness and reconciliation.”

Antonio Skármeta, author and former Chilean ambassador to Germany.  
Diario *Clarín*. January 16, 2006

### CHILEANS ABROAD, IMMIGRANTS AND INTEGRATION

In her Program of Government, the President-elect included measures to recognize Chileans living abroad and to extend a hand in reciprocation to nations which sheltered those who had to leave the country during the military dictatorship.

- ★ Continue efforts to ensure that Chileans living abroad will enjoy the same rights as their compatriots at home, particularly the right to vote.
- ★ Promote the enactment of a new resident alien law, reflecting the current reality that Chile is a destination country for significant numbers of immigrants.
- ★ Adapt Chilean law to the treaties and international agreements signed by the country in this area.
- ★ Promote the inclusion of migratory topics in integration agreements and multilateral accords, especially within the region.
- ★ Include immigration as a topic in the educational curriculum.

In the international sphere, Michelle Bachelet informed foreign correspondents at a press conference that she would give priority to Chile’s relations with neighboring countries.

“We are in favor of better relations with neighboring countries, and seeing that everyone is doing well, not only in the economic and political spheres, but also in social issues,” declared Bachelet. She emphasized that her foreign policy will stress relations with Latin America, since “we face common challenges, and we will do better if we move forward together.”

Bachelet also asserted that Mercosur and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) “are not incompatible,” but stated that the hemispheric treaty proposed by the United States needs a basic agenda because of the great diversity of the region’s countries.

With respect to the United States, she stated that she will maintain “a great friendship, but at the same time great independence, as has always been the case with our foreign policy, which is based on principles that are always valid, such as the strengthening of multilateralism, democracy and human rights, and a free and open economy.”

### The path to the presidential palace

In June 2002, after a torrential rain lasting several days caused serious damage, Michelle Bachelet, then Minister of Defense, inspected the hardest-hit areas in a Mowag amphibious vehicle. For many, this image represents the beginning of what came to be known as “the Bachelet phenomenon.” After that time, her popularity rose steeply in national surveys.



On September 29, 2004, the charismatic Defense Minister – without a notable previous political career – resigned from her position to dedicate herself fully to her presidential pre-candidacy. Public opinion reacted favorably to the start of a campaign which was built upon the strength of citizens’ voices rather than decisions made among politicians.



Meanwhile, the Foreign Minister at the time, Soledad Alvear, of the Christian Democratic Party, also resigned her post to begin her own run for La Moneda Palace. Confronted with this double candidacy, the Concertación coalition had to figure out how to choose a single standard-bearer to face the representative of the Independent Democratic Union (UDI), Joaquín Lavín (then the only opposition candidate) in the December

2005 presidential election. As a result, coalition officials agreed to hold a national primary election on July 31, 2005.

In reaction to Lavín's declining performance in public surveys, Renovación Nacional (which integrates the Alliance for Chile along with the UDI) changed the electoral scenario by presenting its own candidate, businessman Sebastián Piñera, who owns the airline Lan Chile and the television channel Chilevisión, among other enterprises.

From the start, Piñera distanced himself from the most conservative right, inviting Chileans to form a new movement which would group together "all those who adhere to the values of Christian humanism," in an open allusion to centrist voters from the Christian Democratic party, a member of the Concertación coalition.

On May 24, however, Soledad Alvear withdrew her candidacy, due to a lack of progress in the polls and a feeling that she was not adequately supported by her own party. Thus, Bachelet became the Concertación's sole candidate for the Presidency of the Republic.



The presidential campaign therefore featured four competitors: Michelle Bachelet (Socialist Party) for the Concertación; the two candidates of the Alliance for Chile, Joaquín Lavín (UDI) and Sebastián Piñera (Renovación Nacional); and Tomás Hirsch (Humanist Party), representing the pact Juntos Podemos Más.

The campaign was not free from discord, including the heated and longstanding personal and partisan disputes between the two conservative candidates; accusations that the government was intervening in the election; harsh criticisms of the Concertación candidate's personality and ability; and the constant disparagement of the Humanist candidate, who proved to be something of a surprise, particularly in the first television debate among the four contenders.

On Election Day, December 11, 2005, Michelle Bachelet obtained a plurality, receiving 45.95% of the vote, compared to 25.41% for Piñera, 23.22% for Joaquín Lavín and 5.4% for Hirsch. Bachelet and Piñera continued on to the second electoral round on January 15.

During the month between the first and second votes, the conservative candidate did not spare efforts to disparage not only the government and the Socialist contender, but also President Lagos (who enjoys a public support level of 71%) for backing Bachelet. Piñera accused the President and the government of "shamelessly" and



## DID YOU KNOW?

- ★ Despite all of its technological advances, Chile maintains its old-fashioned voting system, using graphite pencils. Nevertheless, it works: three hours and a half after the polls closed, it was known who had won.
- ★ Each polling station is operated by five committee members, who are chosen by lottery among the precinct's registered voters.
- ★ After the nine hours of operation required by law, the polling station committee conducts a public counting of the votes, which later must be confirmed by the Election Qualification Tribunal (Tribunal Calificador de Elecciones).
- ★ In Chile, men and women vote separately. The reason is a simple and practical one: since women gained the vote later than men, their names were entered into separate registries.
- ★ Voter registration is voluntary, but individuals who have registered have the obligation to vote.
- ★ Suffrage is universal. Starting at age 18, it includes illiterate persons as well as foreigners who have had legal permanent residence in the country for over five years.
- ★ The only document necessary for voting is the national identity card.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- ★ President-elect Michelle Bachelet has a simple summer home on Lake Caburgua, in the country's interior, 750 kilometers south of Santiago. Oddly enough, Sebastián Piñera also has a property there.
- ★ Bachelet's maternal grandfather, Máximo Jeria Chacón, was Chile's first agronomical engineer; two streets in Santiago are named after him.
- ★ Michelle Bachelet was first in her class at ANEPE (National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies), completing the course with a grade of 6.69 out of a maximum of 7. One course requirement was to participate in a conflict simulation exercise, in which she was chosen to play the role of Defense Minister. Only a few years later, President Lagos officially named her to that position.
- ★ Michelle Bachelet's great-great-grandfather, José Bachelet Lapierre, arrived in Chile in 1800. He came from Chassagne, a small town in the Burgundy region of France, and was hired as an enologist by the winery Viña Subercaseaux. This wine industry pioneer had a son, Germán, who was inspired to follow in his father's footsteps and achieved success.
- ★ Since 1983, Viña Denis Bachelet, a winery carrying the name of its founder, has produced wines which are sold in exclusive European wine boutiques. The price for a bottle of Bachelet ranges from 15 to 56 dollars.

“brutally” interfering with the electoral process. However, as Bachelet stated, “with the vote and the pencil in hand, we are all equal. Democracy serves to get to the heart of what people want.” The result: she obtained 485,192 more votes than her opponent.



### Who is Michelle Bachelet?

An *EFE* cable noted that “Michelle Bachelet embodies the personal history experienced by thousands of Chileans from the military coup in 1973 to the present time.”

Michelle Bachelet will take office as President of the Republic of Chile at the age of 54, with a professional and personal history of great social as well as political value. She speaks five languages (Spanish, German, French, English and Portuguese), and as she herself ironically notes, she concentrates “all of the mortal sins in Chile,” being female, socialist, separated and agnostic.

Those close to her describe Bachelet as an affable, hospitable woman with a direct gaze and a friendly smile, who still plays the guitar with her friends, prepares breakfast at home and takes her younger daughter to school each day.

She was born on September 29, 1951, the daughter of Air Force Brigadier General Alberto Bachelet and anthropologist Ángela Jeria. From her parents, she inherited her liberal character, her secular orientation (General Bachelet was a Mason) and her thirst and passion for knowledge.

En 1971, President Salvador Allende chose General Bachelet to head the Price and Supply Committees (Juntas de Abastecimiento y Precios, JAP), which exercised control over prices and helped distribute essential products. In 1974, after the military coup, the regime ordered General Bachelet's detention on charges of “treason against the country.” Tortured by his own colleagues, he died on March 12, 1974, of a heart attack while being held at Santiago's Public Prison.



In 1975, Bachelet and her mother were arrested by agents of the DINA – the regime's secret police – and tortured at the Villa Grimaldi and Cuatro Álamos detention centers. After weeks of imprisonment, they were able to leave for



exile in Australia, later settling in East Germany. There, Michelle Bachelet continued her medical studies at Humboldt University and married architect Jorge Dávalos, the father of her son, Sebastián, and her daughter Francisca, who was born in Santiago in 1982.

After returning to the country in 1979, she resumed her studies at the University of Chile and received her medical degree in 1982.

Her plan to work as a general neighborhood practitioner was rejected by the authorities for “political reasons.” However, she took advantage of a scholarship from the Medical College and specialized in pediatrics and public health at Roberto del Río Hospital.



Around the same time as her separation from Jorge Dávalos, Bachelet began working with the non-governmental organization PIDEE (Foundation for the Protection of Children Affected by States of Emergency), where she was active until 1990.



Early in that year, she was contracted as an epidemiologist by the West Metropolitan Health Service and later by the National AIDS Commission (Conasida). There, she met fellow epidemiologist Antonio Henríquez, who became her partner for more than three years. From this relationship, her younger daughter, Sofía, was born in 1993. From 1994 to 1997, Bachelet served as an advisor to the Ministry of Health.

In 1996, she began a course in Hemispheric Defense at the National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies (ANEPE). Thanks to her excellent performance, she was invited to study at the Inter-

American Defense College in Washington D.C., which she attended with support from a Presidential scholarship.

Returning to Chile in 1998, she spent a year working as an advisor to the Ministry of Defense. On March 11, 2000, President Ricardo Lagos named her Minister of Health, charging her with the task of eliminating the *colas* or waiting lists at health clinics within three months. Bachelet was able to significantly reduce the problem, but she could not do away with it completely. She presented her resignation to the President, who refused it.

In 2002, after a reorganization of the Cabinet, Michelle Bachelet became the first female Minister of Defense in the country’s history, as well as that of Latin America. During her tenure in that position, her popularity in public surveys increased greatly. Viewed as the embodiment of reconciliation at events commemorating the 30-year anniversary of the military coup, she began to position herself as a presidential pre-candidate.



**RESPONSES TO MACHISMO**  
 “Female scientists, engineers, workers – we are all accustomed to working twice as hard. We have always had to give 100%, at home and at work, to be there 24 hours a day, and of course never to have headaches. Every family is a kingdom, in which the father rules but the mother governs. Your wife, your girlfriend, your daughter and your mother can do it – they demonstrate it every day of their lives. Strength knows no gender, and neither does honesty, conviction or ability. I bring a different kind of leadership, with the perspective of someone who looks at things from a different angle. Let us change our mentality; when all is said and done, a woman President is simply a head of government who doesn’t wear a tie.”

Michelle Bachelet, during the campaign.



## OVERHEARD

“Hundreds of thousands of Chileans, dancing with joy and waving multicolored banners, streamed into the center of the capital in the evening.”

*Le Monde*

“Who would have thought, 20, 10, or even five years ago, that Chile would elect a woman President? (...) Thank you for inviting me to lead you on this journey.”

From her victory speech, cited by *L'Express*

“Raising flags and placards with the face of the second-round winner, men, women and children joyfully paraded down the country’s main avenue, Alameda Bernardo O’Higgins, while the uniformed police redirected traffic. The image more closely resembled a family outing, because of the presence of children, than a political demonstration.”

*BBC Mundo*

“Former Pinochet torture victim triumphs in election.”

*The Guardian*

“For many, this strong-willed survivor of the Pinochet dictatorship, which was responsible for the death of her father and for her arrest, torture and exile, personifies Chile’s painful reconciliation with those dark years.”

*The New York Times*

## Reactions from the foreign press

The eyes of the world press were on Chile during the election. Some 180 accredited journalists were present to report on “history in the making” in Chile. All of the international media emphasized the fact that a woman was being chosen as President of Chile.

In addition, the President-elect’s personal characteristics – “agnostic, a head of household, separated and the mother of three children” – were of particular interest to the foreign media as they described Bachelet.

Reporting on Michelle Bachelet’s speech on the night of her victory, *El Mundo* highlighted her statement: “I was a victim of hate, and I have dedicated my life to reversing that hate.”

The periodical also stressed the achievements of President Lagos, who “has set the bar very high, enjoying a 75% popularity level and leaving behind a strong economy with annual growth rates above 6% in recent years.” It further pointed to the fact that when casting his vote, President Lagos was “acclaimed by a multitude who proclaimed him a candidate for 2009.”

With respect to Bachelet’s personality and charisma, the Spanish newspaper suggested that her approachability and conciliatory spirit were among the characteristics responsible for her great popularity: “It is perhaps this quality that has helped her promote a rapprochement and better communication between the civilian and military worlds.”

*El País* noted that “the two-round election system was established by the 1980 Constitution, promulgated by the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990), and designed to prevent the election of someone like socialist Salvador Allende in 1970.”

The Spanish periodical reported that President Ricardo Lagos showed evident pleasure in the results: “I feel a deep pride in presiding over a country that can inform the world of its election results three and a half hours after the closing of the polling stations.”



In a column in *El País*, Ernesto Ekaizer expressed the opinion that Bachelet’s four-year term “will mark the definitive end of Chile’s political transition.” In support of his argument, he pointed to two of the reforms announced by the President-elect during her campaign: “eradicating the heritage of Pinochetism – for example, the binomial electoral system – and putting social measures in place in Chile to correct what is characterized as one of the most unequal distributions of wealth in Latin America.”



In his analysis, Ekaizer noted that Chilean women, who traditionally have tended to vote for right-wing candidates, now gave massive support to Michelle Bachelet. In his view, “the turn to the left which is affecting Latin America was confirmed in a complete social democratic victory.”

In a column in *Clarín*, entitled “An independent woman who dared to live by her own rules,” journalist Mónica González emphasized that “every attempt to raise moral objections to her for being separated and a single mother, being an agnostic in a Catholic country, and having ties to the far left, in addition to the repeated questioning of her presidential stature because she is a woman, failed spectacularly.” ♦

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