Chile: Promoting the Personal Connection—The Internet and Presidential Election Campaigns

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In a 2000 seminar presentation on political marketing in Chile, Genaro Arriagada, campaign manager for the center-left coalition in three of Chile's last five presidential elections,[1] suggested that the Internet would dominate the 2005 electoral campaign (Arriagada et al. 2000). While portraying the rise of online campaigning as part of the same process of evolution that gave rise to television-centric campaigns, Arriagada also suggested that use of this new medium would counteract some of the characteristics of mass-media campaigns that are often considered negative. In particular, he argued, the potential to present information online in greater quantity and depth might challenge the "soundbite culture" that has emerged with the rise of television, and the interactive nature of the Internet could strengthen the types of ties between candidates and grassroots supporters that have weakened with the decline of political parties, unions, and other traditional intermediary organizations.

In this chapter, I argue that while the Internet certainly has not yet risen to the status of dominating electoral campaigns in Chile, it is becoming an increasingly important medium for the second of the two uses highlighted by Arriagada—establishing new forms of linkage between politicians and the public. Several of the candidates in the 2005 presidential elections established blogs to allow for interactive communication with visitors to their websites, and a third made extensive use of the Web and email to recruit, organize, and mobilize a network of campaign volunteers. Using the Internet for these purposes is one of many ways that candidates are seeking to compensate for the declining presence of parties in Chilean political life and electoral campaigns. With respect to the soundbite culture of the mass media, although the Internet does allow for the presentation of greater depth and detail than television, radio, or print media, soundbites have also found their way onto the Internet and are currently featured much more prominently on candidates' websites than government programs in all their complexity. While the rise of the Internet in Chilean politics is able to further an existing trend toward the promotion of direct personal ties between candidates and supporters, it does not appear capable of countering the trend toward soundbite-centric campaigns.

This chapter examines use of the Internet during presidential election campaigns in Chile, with emphasis on the country's most recent election, whose first round was held in December 2005 with a runoff in January 2006.[2] Data include content and feature analysis of the websites and email lists of the three principal presidential candidates, Michelle Bachelet, Joaquín Lavín, and Sebastián Piñera; interviews with webmasters and other members of the campaign communication team of both Bachelet and Lavín; and newspaper coverage of Internet use during prior campaigns. My analysis of the candidates' websites is based on copies that were archived at three different points during the 2005 electoral campaign: early October, and election day for both the first and second round (December 11 and January 15, respectively). Due limited available data, this chapter does not examine the effects of Internet use on voting behavior or public opinion during the 2005 campaign. Campaign effects of any sort are difficult to assess without panel studies or experimental data (Boas 2005), which have not yet become common during electoral campaigns in Chile, nor have even simple single-wave campaign surveys asked about Internet use.

In the following sections of this chapter, I first introduce the Chilean case, discussing the larger environment in which electoral campaigns—both on- and off-line—take place. I then go

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[1] Arriagada was campaign manager for the No campaign in 1988 (a plebiscite that ended the rule of military dictator Augusto Pinochet), the 1993 campaign of Eduardo Frei, and the first round of the 1999 campaign of Ricardo Lagos.
[2] Chile also held congressional elections in December 2005. Because of limited space, and because the presidential campaign saw much more extensive use of the Internet, I do not specifically examine congressional campaigns.

on to examine use of the Internet by political parties and candidates prior to the most recent election. The bulk of the chapter, presented in the third section, consists of an analysis of the ways in which the three major contenders in the 2005 presidential election made use of the Web, email, and related technologies to communicate with the public, mobilize supporters, and seek out financing for their campaigns. In the conclusion, I return to Arriagada's predictions about the importance of the Internet in Chile, assessing what uses have been most significant in the 2005 campaign and which are likely to become even more prominent in the future.

The Online Campaign Environment in Chile

The Internet may be an increasingly global technology, but the way it is used within any country responds largely to national-level variables. First and foremost, it is essential to consider how many and what types of people have access to the Internet. Moreover, regardless of the state of Internet diffusion, its political impacts depend upon the ways in which it is used by political actors, so it is important to examine who these actors are and what constraints they are subject to. In this section I first examine Internet diffusion in Chile. I then discuss the relative strength and influence of the actors involved in online campaigning in Chile—candidates and parties—and also examine the campaign regulations and larger media environment in which they operate. In the course of this discussion, I also offer an overview of the 1999 and 2005 presidential election campaigns.

Diffusion of the Internet: Growing but Unequal Access

A quick glance at the state of Internet development in Chile suggests that the country is a good candidate for the medium to play an important role in politics. The percentage of the Chilean population that uses the Internet has consistently been the highest in Latin America, and a 2003 survey by the World Internet Project found that 34.8% of the population is online, comparable to the percentage using the Internet in the United States in 1999 (Fernández and Goldenberg 2003). If we allow for some growth during the remaining two years, the percentage of Chileans using the Internet during the 2005 campaign was probably comparable to similar figures for the United States in 2000, when the Internet played an important, if hardly dominant, role (Bimber and Davis 2003). The diffusion of the Internet in Chile compares favorably with that of several European countries examined in this volume: according to the same survey cited above, 36.4% of Spain's population and 31.2% of Italy's population were online as of 2003.

While use of the Internet is increasingly widespread in Chile, it remains most common among the middle and upper classes due to the country's rather high level of economic inequality. Following radical market-oriented economic reforms under the Pinochet dictatorship in the 1970s, income distribution remains highly skewed: Chile's GINI coefficient for 2001 was 57.1, versus a figure of 45 for the United States in 2004, and numbers in the 30s or below for most European countries. Moreover, while it is one of the wealthier nations in Latin America, Chile's GDP per capita of US$ 5847 places it squarely in the category of a middle-income country, significantly poorer than Western Europe and North America. Given these statistics, it is unsurprising to find that use of the Internet in Chile is more concentrated among the wealthy than in other countries. There is a 60 percentage point spread between the proportion of Internet users among the richest quartile and the poorest quartile of Chileans; the corresponding figures for the United States and Canada are 39 and 34, respectively (Caron 2005).

Electoral and Party Systems: An Increasingly Personalized Politics

In the Latin American context, Chile is probably the country with the best-organized and most "European" political parties, which tend to have clearly identifiable positions on the ideological spectrum, though these positions have shifted over time. Moreover, Chile's party system exhibits a fairly high degree of stability, with many of its parties having their origins in the democratic regime that pre-dated the 17-year dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (Scully 1995). Major parties include the Socialist Party (PS), Christian Democratic Party (PDC), and Radical Social Democratic Party (PRSD), all with origins prior to the 1973 coup d'etat; National Renewal (RN) and the Party for Democracy (PPD), established in the late 1980s as reorganized versions of pre-1973 parties or political forces; and the Independent Democratic Union (UDI), formed in 1988 by a group of Pinochet's strongest supporters who split off from RN. In contrast to other Latin American countries such as Peru, there are no examples in Chile of loosely organized "parties" cobbled together merely for the purpose of participating in an election, nor are there any of the more highly institutionalized parties that are nonetheless closely associated with a single individual, such as Brazil's Workers' Party. In Chile, parties choose candidates rather than potential candidates creating parties.

Despite the strength of parties in Chile, several institutional factors combine to make individual candidates the central actors in presidential election campaigns—and by extension, the most important political users of the Internet. First, and most obviously, Chile has a presidential rather than a parliamentary system of government, where the president is elected by majority vote and where a runoff is held if no candidate wins a majority in the first round. Presidentialism tends to subordinate parties to individual politicians, both in government and during electoral campaigns. Moreover, the Chilean president is particularly powerful vis-a-vis the country's legislature, and is generally considered the strongest president in Latin America in terms of control of the budget and legislative agenda (Aninat et al. 2006, Baldez and Carey 1999, Siavelis 2002). While the institutional strength of the presidency is more directly relevant to policy-making than to campaign dynamics, it does have the effect of focusing more attention on the presidential race than if the president were a weaker political actor.

The role of parties during presidential campaigns in Chile is also limited by the fact that in almost all presidential elections, the major candidates have been supported by coalitions. The two major coalitions in Chile initially organized around opposite sides of the 1988 plebscite that ended Pinochet's military dictatorship and ushered in democratic elections the following year. The center-left governing coalition, the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (Coalition of Parties for Democracy), is currently comprised of the PS, PDC, PRSD, and PPD; the right-wing opposition coalition, most recently known as the Alianza por Chile (Alliance for Chile), brings together UDI and RN. In part because presidential candidates are typically supported by more than one party, campaigns are run by teams that are organizationally independent of parties, often forming a national network of local and regional campaign headquarters that runs parallel to the structure of the political parties in the coalition. Campaign staff include members of the various parties supporting the candidate, but independents also occupy prominent positions, particularly in the national-level campaign leadership.

Finally, Chilean political parties have weak societal roots and an unpopular, elitist image among the electorate, meaning that candidates increasingly seek to distance themselves from a party image during campaigns and make direct, unmediated appeals to the electorate (Roberts 1998; forthcoming). This trend was first felt most dramatically in the watershed election of 1999, pitting UDI's Joaquín Lavín, a former mayor of the wealthy Santiago suburb of Las

Condes, against Socialist Ricardo Lagos, a former Minister of Education and of Public Works. While Lagos in many ways embodied the image of a traditional party politician, Lavín consistently criticized traditional politicians and characterized himself as a non-political technocrat who got things done. Rather than appealing to either party identification or emphasizing specific policy proposals, Lavín's campaign sought to communicate a direct, personal connection with various social groups—workers, youth, women, etc.—and an intimate understanding of their problems. In the December 1999 election, Lavín placed second to Lagos by only 30,000 votes, by far the strongest showing for the right in recent Chilean history. Because neither candidate obtained a majority, a runoff was held in January 2000, which Lagos won with 51.3% of the vote.

If the 1999 campaign was the first prominent example of a Chilean presidential candidate seeking to ditch the image of a party politician and emphasize a direct connection with the people, the 2005 campaign furthered this trend. On the right, the two parties of the Alianza failed to agree on a single candidate or to let voters choose one in a primary election, so both UDI and RN fielded candidates—Joaquín Lavín for the former, and Sebastián Piñera, a wealthy businessman and former party leader, for the latter. Because each was supported by a single party rather than the coalition, it was harder for Piñera and Lavín to present themselves as supra-partisan candidates—though neither did they seek to emphasize their party affiliations. In 2005, however, the strongest example of a candidate seeking to privilege direct personal connections over party image was Michelle Bachelet, a Socialist and the candidate of the Concertación. A favorite in the polls for years before the election, Bachelet and her campaign team stressed that she had been chosen as a candidate by the people—via public opinion—rather than by the party machinery. Her campaign slogan "Estoy contigo" ("I am with you") epitomized the nature of her campaign appeals, which, like Lavín's strategy in 1999, emphasized closeness to and identification with the people and an intimate understanding of their problems.

In the weeks before the first-round vote, as Bachelet's overwhelming lead began to slip, she backed off of the "empathy campaign" to some extent, seeking to portray herself more as a capable stateswoman who would continue the policies of the popular incumbent government (President Lagos was enjoying over 70% approval ratings at the time). The latter strategy prevailed during the successful second-round campaign against Sebastián Piñera, whom she defeated with 53.5% of the vote. Despite the shift in strategy, however, Bachelet's campaign remained centered on her as a person. With the exception of emphasizing her endorsement by several prominent Christian Democratic politicians—done largely to prevent votes from slipping away to Piñera, who was also trying to appeal to the centrist Christian Democratic tradition—Bachelet's second-round campaign did not emphasize party image any more than her first-round campaign had.

Campaign Regulations: Uncertainty Regarding the Internet

In the context of an electoral campaign, the Internet is first and foremost a medium of communication, and secondly a medium for financial transactions. As with other forms of both campaign communication and financing, electoral laws can have an important bearing on how these processes occur. While electoral campaigns are more highly regulated in Chile than in most other Latin American countries, none of Chile's electoral regulations says anything specific about the Internet. This lack of clarity, combined with the relative newness of the Internet, has created an uncertainty that is reflected in some candidates' approaches toward the medium, particularly with respect to online fundraising.

In contrast to the massive and prolonged advertising blitz that characterizes electoral campaigns in the United States, the restrictions that Chile places on campaign advertising make its electoral environment similar to that of many European countries (Plasser with Plasser 2002). Chile prohibits paid television advertising during campaigns, and candidates receive free blocks of time on broadcast television every day during the month before the election. Candidates are permitted to buy advertising space in other media, such as radio, newspapers, and billboards, though they are similarly restricted to the last month of the campaign. In practice, this restriction can largely be ignored, since campaign advertising is defined as a message asking for a vote, and anything simply introducing the candidate is allowed outside of the official time period. Because the law does not say that all advertising is subject to these restrictions, but rather separately enumerates restrictions for television, radio, newspapers, and outdoor advertising via flyers and the like, it is not clear whether the electoral advertising law applies to the Internet. None of the major candidates in the 2005 election included propaganda on their websites that directly urged a vote prior to the last month of the campaign, though this could be simply because they tend to transfer offline advertising campaigns to the Web with little modification.

Aside from the restrictions on campaign advertising, the other major law with a bearing on Chilean electoral campaigns is the campaign finance and expenditure law passed in 2003 (Fuentes 2004). This law places limits on the total amount of money that can be spent on campaigns, establishes a maximum for both individual and anonymous donations (currently about US$ 67,000 and US$ 670, respectively), and prohibits contributions from foreigners without the right to vote in Chile. However, the law does not distinguish between different forms of donation and has nothing specific to say about the Internet. While the law remains somewhat unclear, online campaign donations are now theoretically possible. In 2004, before the country's municipal elections, several politicians were negotiating to get Transbank, the Chilean credit card clearing company, to allow online campaign donations via the Internet. After initially backing out, Transbank agreed to set up the service, and several candidates took advantage (*La Segunda* July 29, 2004; *El Mercurio* Oct. 17, 2004). In 2005, Transbank handled online donations to Michelle Bachelet's campaign, as discussed below.

Online Campaigns in a Mass Media Environment

Finally, it is important to consider the broader media environment surrounding electoral campaigns in Chile, and what opportunities the Internet provides to candidates and parties that they cannot achieve elsewhere. While Chile's media system has historically been considered the most public service-oriented in Latin America—primarily because television stations were initially run by the government or universities, and private ownership was not allowed until the 1990s—Chilean television has become increasingly commercialized in recent years, and the state and university-based stations now operate essentially as private entities (Fuenzalida 2002; Tironi and Sunkel 2000). In this respect, they have become more similar to radio and print media, which have always been commercially-oriented and privately owned—in the case of newspapers, by a few wealthy and politically-influential families. The major effect on electoral dynamics of this increasingly market-oriented media environment is the promotion of a soundbite culture in which candidates have little opportunity or incentive to explore issues in greater depth. Candidates on the left of the political spectrum, as well as some analysts, also frequently allege a conservative bias in press coverage of politics, though such bias is much less severe than in many other Latin American countries.

In the face of a media environment that is increasingly oriented toward soundbites, and may be somewhat biased in favor of right-wing candidates, the Internet offers candidates two principal opportunities: to circumvent the mass media, and to influence its coverage. By communicating directly with the public via the Internet, candidates can present information in much greater depth and detail than is possible via soundbites, and they can spin the coverage of their own campaign any way they choose. In contrast to television, radio, and print news, however, information on a candidate's website attracts a much smaller audience, typically those who are already interested in the campaign and in politics. In addition to providing an alternative to the mass media, the Internet offers yet another way to influence the coverage of the mass media. A campaign team already oriented toward producing soundbites and photo-ops can distribute these to the press much more effectively using the Internet. Moreover, these sorts of soundbites, rather than more in-depth information, may form the bulk of what candidates put on their websites for direct consumption by the public.

While the Internet does offer Chilean candidates the opportunity for more substantive (and potentially more sympathetic) communication than do the local media, the free advertising space provided to candidates on broadcast television somewhat reduces the Internet's unique advantage in terms of depth, detail, and control of message. Because of their length (usually two-and-a-half to five minutes) and regularity (broadcast at same time every day, usually at noon and during prime time), free television broadcasts give Chilean candidates the opportunity to go into much more detail regarding their campaign proposals, and to cover a larger portion of their overall program, than do the 30-second spots that are typical of countries with paid advertising. Moreover, the length and regularity of Chile's free television broadcasts means that rather than catching the average viewer unawares like commercial advertising, they tend to attract only those viewers who make a conscious decision to watch. In this sense, therefore, television advertising and the Internet both reach an audience that has greater interest in the campaign, though broadcast television is obviously accessible to a much wider segment of the population.

The greatest unique opportunity that the Internet provides to candidates in Chile is probably the potential for interactive communication with supporters and stimulating a sense of community among them, particularly in an era in which parties no longer play an important role in performing these functions. While television provides a direct candidate-to-citizen connection, no other medium approaches the level of reciprocity in communication that the Internet offers.

The Development of Online Campaigning in Chile: Candidates as Protagonists

With the rise of the Web in the mid-1990s falling between electoral periods in Chile, political parties established an Internet presence before individual candidates, but the sophistication of their online offerings was soon outstripped by that of presidential campaign sites. Consistent with their status as well-organized entities that are not dependent upon any one individual, Chile's political parties have websites that represent the party as a collectivity rather than its most prominent politicians. In general, party websites do no active campaigning on behalf of their candidates beyond naming them and possibly providing links to their own personal sites. Because party websites do little more than introduce the party, its history, its ideology, and its major figures, they have not significantly advanced beyond brochure-ware status since they debuted in 1997 and 1998. Only individual candidates, mainly in presidential

elections, have moved substantially beyond the information-dissemination capacity of the web to make use of its capacity for interactive communication, mobilization, or fundraising.

Several Chilean parties established a Web presence in 1997 and 1998, but their efforts were oriented more toward presenting the party as an entity than promoting any of its candidates. UDI was online by the time of the 1997 legislative elections; its site offered a history of the party and featured documents and the text of speeches, along with a roster page that had photos and emails of senatorial and congressional candidates (*La Segunda*, Oct. 16, 1997). By September 1998, the PS, RN, and PPD had also established websites. None of these sites, however, offered much information on presidential pre-candidates for the 1999 election. The Socialist Party site made no mention of Lagos, and the PPD site just said he was preparing for the primaries. UDI's site only mentioned Lavín's name when listing the members of the party's political commission, and it devoted much more emphasis and space (including photos and a biography) to the party's deceased founder, Jaime Guzmán. Only RN's site had any information on the campaign activities of its pre-candidate at the time, Sebastián Piñera (who later withdrew his candidacy in favor of Lavín). A newspaper article concluded that parties were "more concerned about the diffusion of their principals and ideas than about seizing the opportunity to campaign with their eyes toward 1999" (*La Segunda*, Sept. 25, 1998).

In the intervening years, party websites have not advanced much with respect to active campaigning on behalf of their candidates. Among Chile's major political parties, only UDI, RN, PPD, and the Socialist Party had functioning websites when examined in early October 2005. Those belonging to the Christian Democrats and PRSD were unavailable during the week of analysis, though they were later re-established. The four functioning sites all presented party history, basic principles, and news, as well as links to the campaign sites of their presidential candidates. None, however, included links to the websites of any senatorial or congressional candidates, even though some of those candidates were among the parties' most important politicians. All four of the parties published lists of their legislative candidates in the 2005 election, though these lists were not necessarily prominent: the PPD's was in the form of a downloadable file that could be found only by following the "documents" link from the home page. The most information that any of the party sites offered about their candidates consisted of photos and basic information such as age and profession; several parties just listed the candidate's name and district. Ironically, Lavín's presidential campaign site offered more information on UDI's 2005 legislative candidates—addresses of campaign headquarters, and names and phone numbers of campaign managers—than did the party's own site.

In a political system as candidate-centric and hyper-presidential as Chile's, it is not surprising that the major campaign-related use of the Internet has been by presidential candidates. During the 1999 presidential election campaign, all of the candidates had established web sites several months prior to the vote (*La Segunda*, Sept. 10, 1999). Because Internet penetration was quite limited in Chile at the time of the campaign, with only about 4% of the population online in 1999 (World Bank 2006), the information on candidates' websites was not necessarily intended for mass consumption, at least directly. Alejandro Miranda, the webmaster for Lavín's site in 1999, stated that the principal use of the Internet was communicating with the press and ensuring that journalists throughout the country had ready access to the soundbites and photos released by the campaign team (author's interview, Santiago, Oct. 17, 2005). Perhaps for these reasons, the site had a strong multimedia component, allowing downloads of jingles, audio clips from interviews, and several television spots. Other components included the candidate's biography, news from the campaign trail, and announcements of upcoming events. An email list

was used for communication with the press, but not with the general public, partly because people were still reluctant to share personal email addresses at that time. While Lavín's site encouraged visitors to email comments, concerns, and suggestions to the candidate, the webmaster said they received little correspondence.

Internet penetration may have been limited in Chile in 1999, but the Internet was already an important sign of modernity, and having a web site with certain features could communicate important things about a candidate. In addition to the standard features such as news, biography, and a schedule of upcoming events, Lagos's site placed an emphasis on basic forms of interactivity—allowing visitors to submit questions that would be answered on the site, and providing chat rooms for discussions of particular topics relevant to the campaign. In a newspaper article, the campaign's webmaster described the site as "creating an opportunity for public participation" (*El Mercurio,* Nov. 28, 1999). The number of people actually participating online in this fashion in 1999 was undoubtedly minimal, but the number reading about the opportunity to do so in Chile's major newspaper was certainly higher, and probably more important.

Internet Use in the 2005 Presidential Campaign

By the time of Chile's 2005 campaign, use of the Internet by presidential candidates had definitely gone beyond being something of a novelty that campaigns did primarily to show they were modern or to communicate with the press. Candidates' websites had become important ways to connect with the public, though certain uses of the Internet were much more prominent than others. In the following section, I discuss the ways in which the three major candidates in Chile's 2005 presidential election made use of the Internet for publishing basic campaign information, facilitating participation and feedback, corresponding with the public, recruiting and mobilizing campaign volunteers, and soliciting online contributions.

A New Way to Deliver Traditional Information

All of the sites of Chile's major presidential candidates for 2005 had in common certain features which are not particularly innovative or unique to the Internet, but for which the Web is simply a convenient form of delivery. Each site, for instance, featured a news section with an extensive archive of press releases; Bachelet and Lavín both offered audio and video clips from campaign events as well. All of the sites included biographies of the candidate, along with photos highlighting both their personal and professional lives. Each site also had a separate photo archive with photos mainly from the campaign trail. Bachelet and Piñera's sites included endorsements from various individuals, mostly well-known figures but also some from the "guy on the street." All of the sites made available the candidate's detailed governmental program, as well as more digestible forms of policy proposals or policy priorities: Lavín's 50 Promises for Chile, "Michelle's Ideas," and details on a number of Piñera's pet projects. During the second-round campaign, both Bachelet's and Piñera's sites included goals for their first 100 or 120 days in office. While all of this material was potentially availably offline as well, the Web provided a useful way of publishing it all in one place. As Camila Benado, a member of Michelle Bachelet's communication team, put it: "We don't have our own newspaper; what we do have is the Web page" (author's interview, Santiago, Sept. 26, 2005).

As suggested by the placement of Lavín's television spots on the Internet in 1999, the Web is a very convenient medium for delivering forms of advertising that were initially

developed for other venues, and this trend continued in 2005. Lavín put all 15 of his distinct 5-minute spots online, and Bachelet posted a selection of hers, as well as video clips of Christmas and New Year's greetings. All candidates' sites also featured jingles that could be downloaded as audio clips. Bachelet and Lavín both included downloadable images of campaign flyers and official photographs and graphics that appear on banners, signs, and billboards. One gets the sense, however, that some of this material was simply uploaded to the website without a lot of thought. Lavín's site, for instance, featured images of t-shirts, balloons, and hats bearing the campaign logo, without the capacity to buy them online or any information on other ways to obtain them.

Consistent with the trend toward candidates de-emphasizing party affiliations in their political appeals, none of the campaign websites included prominent mentions or symbols of the candidate's party. While each candidate's biography discussed his or her party affiliation and prior party activism, party logos or links to party websites were hard to find. Bachelet was the most extreme in this regard: there was no logo of the Socialist Party or the Concertación anywhere on the website, nor any link to the sites of either the party or the coalition. Piñera, supported only by a single party, had almost as little party emphasis as Bachelet: only a tiny logo on the home page, under the heading "sites of interest," linked to the RN site. Similarly, Lavín included a link to UDI's site only under a list of affiliated websites contained on a separate page. By the end of the first-round campaign, both Bachelet's and Lavín's sites had posted lists of the legislative candidates supported by the same party or alliance, but the emphasis tended to remain on the presidential candidate rather than the party—the link to this list from Bachelet's home page said "A Parliament for Bachelet."

Blogs and Internet Surveys: Genuine Participation and Propaganda in Disguise

While much of the informational material on candidates' websites in 2005 could also be found during the 1999 campaign, interactive features such as blogs definitely marked a new phenomenon. Both Piñera and Bachelet's websites included blogs, while Lavín's linked to a blog that was hosted by a third-party site.[3] Piñera's blog began each week with a post purportedly from the candidate, and entries during the final days of the first round generated upwards of 800 comments. Piñera, or someone writing in his name, even responded to some of the comments himself. Bachelet's blog never purported to be run by the candidate herself or even the campaign team, but rather by a group of supporters. This particular format was not as popular, as only Bachelet's own entries consistently generated more than 100 comments. Both candidates' blogs constituted fairly open spaces for debate; they claimed to be edited only for inappropriate language, and one could certainly find harsh criticism of the candidate among the comments that were allowed to remain.

While Bachelet's and Pinera's blogs can be considered genuine spaces for online participation, other participatory features seemed to be largely campaign propaganda in disguise. Lavín's "Wings for your ideas"—an online survey about policy priorities—was introduced in May 2005 with much fanfare, and the campaign claimed that over 8400 responses were received in the first month (*El Mercurio,* May 29, 2005). The questions on this short survey, however, dealt with what are clearly non-exclusive choices among policy priorities—and, for someone of Lavín's ideological orientation, non-controversial as well. For the question about how to fight

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[3] This third-party site, paisdigital.org, also hosted blogs for the other candidates; few of the entries received many comments. Because they were not actually run by the candidates' campaign teams, these third-party blogs are not considered here.

crime, for instance, visitors were asked whether the most important policy measure should be "that criminals be convicted and serve out their sentences," "that repeat offenders receive harsher penalties," or "that there be more police officers on the streets." Absent from these choices, of course, was a more stereotypically left-wing policy option, such as spending money on crime prevention programs in poor neighborhoods. Lavín's webmasters claimed that the online survey was consulted when putting together the candidate's governmental program, but surely the campaign's own internal surveys asked about a wider range of policy preferences and were taken more seriously than the opinions of a self-selected sample of web users.

Bachelet's "Question of the Week," an Internet survey like Lavín's "Wings for your ideas," was often but not exclusively used for propagandistic purposes. A typical case of propaganda-in-disguise occurred during the middle of August, when the website asked the following: "What is the effect of Michelle Bachelet's triumph in all the surveys, 5 months before the presidential election?" The list of possible responses included "it generates useful space for disseminating her ideas," "it establishes a new type of politician," "it invites people to keep working responsibly," and "it consolidates a more emotional political leadership." As Bachelet's campaign began to stagnate about a month before the December election, however, questions began to touch on issues that could provide useful feedback for the campaign team—not with respect to programmatic issues, but with respect to tactics. In late November, for instance, respondents were asked whether in the final weeks of the campaign it was most important to increase the number of campaign events outside of the capital, promote closeness to the people, appear on a variety of television programs, or give greater visibility to political parties. These were precisely the sort of tactical tradeoffs that were being debated within the campaign team.

Email for Public Communication: More for Feedback than Campaign News

Given the ease and minimal expense with which campaigns can send mass email, one might think that a particularly important component of Internet strategy would be sending messages to people who signed up to receive information from the campaign. All of the principal candidates' sites prominently featured an email sign-up link on the home pages, but interestingly, email did not seem to be a major form of outgoing communication to the general public. I signed up for each of the candidates' public email lists at the beginning of September, but only from Piñera's campaign did I receive messages on an approximately weekly basis. Lavín's list sent out only one message during three and a half months, and Bachelet's list never sent any, even though I tried registering twice. Piñera's and Lavín's mailings simply contained news updates, no different from material that could already be found on the site. Webmasters for Bachelet's and Lavín's campaigns said they were wary of sending out email too often and overloading recipients, but had not considered asking during signup how often subscribers wanted to receive messages (author's interviews with Veronica Molina, Santiago, Oct. 3, 2005, and Carolina Guzmán, Santiago, Oct. 5, 2005).[4]

Although sending email to the general public was not as prevalent in the campaign as one might expect, soliciting emails from the public did seem to be an important use of the Internet for Chilean candidates. All of the sites invited comments and questions from visitors, either via a web form or directly via email. While none of the campaign staff interviewed for this project knew exactly how many messages were received, each claimed that all of the messages were

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[4] All of the websites also featured sign-up forms for a press email list, which received mailings much more frequently, but interested citizens were unlikely to stumble onto this list since the registration form called for specific press-related information.

answered; one staff member from the Bachelet campaign said that the candidate even answers some emails personally (author's interview with Camila Benado, Santiago, Sept. 26, 2006). In a small country such as Chile, where most citizens do not yet think to contact a presidential campaign directly via email, responding to every message appears to be something that is currently manageable.

Volunteers and Mobilization: Organizing and Preaching to the Converted
One of the major potential uses of the Internet in electoral campaigns involves recruiting and mobilizing volunteers; doing so is particularly important in an era in which the role of party militants has declined. All of the sites featured web forms allowing visitors to sign up as campaign volunteers. Neither Bachelet not Piñera's site had much information on what a potential volunteer was committing to, however, and Bachelet's site even omitted the word "volunteer," merely encouraging visitors to "sign up, participate with us." In the final weeks of the campaign for both the first and second rounds, the websites for all three candidates shifted their focus from signing up general campaign volunteers to recruiting poll monitors—an important activity in Chile, where votes are counted by hand at the polls after they close, and ballot uncertainties are challenged on the spot by volunteers from each of the campaigns.

While each of the major candidate's websites allowed potential volunteers to add their name to an online database, Lavín's campaign went well beyond the others in its use of the Internet for recruiting and mobilizing volunteers. Clicking on the link "sign up as a volunteer" from Lavin's official campaign site took visitors to a separate site, voluntariosporlavin.cl (Volunteers for Lavín), also managed by the campaign team. The Lavín volunteers site is probably the only example in Chile's 2005 presidential campaign of targeting online information specifically toward supporters. In some ways, the Lavín volunteers site functioned as a parallel home page, with photos, news, and information on voter registration. News on this site focused on volunteer activities, and was clearly designed to stir up excitement in addition to informing; an article would cover Lavín's campaign trip outside of Santiago, for instance, but would also talk about what volunteers did to support the effort. The Lavín volunteers site seemed to be speaking to a community of shared ideals and a common project much more than any of the candidates' official portals.

In contrast to the Bachelet and Piñera sites, where signing up simply submitted information to a webmaster, signing up as a volunteer on the Lavín site immediately created an online account with access to a volunteer intranet. Based on the extent to which people were active as volunteers during the campaign, they would be granted access to additional areas of the internal site; this approach made it more difficult for "spies" from other campaigns to uncovering sensitive or strategic information.[5] The basic, default level of access to the volunteer intranet featured a list of local volunteer coordinators in various parts of the country, a discussion forum, and an "ask the coordinator" forum that functioned as a sort of frequently asked questions list.

Signing up as a volunteer on the Lavín website also involved subscribing to an email list, which, in contrast to the list for the general public, received heavier traffic (19 messages in the final two months of the campaign) and was used specifically for targeted communication that

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[5] At the invitation of Carmen Mena, the webmaster of the Lavín volunteers site, I registered in order to access the internal portions of the site and receive the emails sent to the volunteers list, but I was not, to by knowledge, granted access to any internal information beyond the default level. The following observations are thus based on the information that any Chilean could access by signing up by entering their national ID number and a few other personal details into a Web form.

was *not* sent to the general public. Some of these messages sought to mobilize people to turn out as volunteers or to attend campaign events. Others sought to reinforce support for Lavín, hoping to prevent votes from slipping away toward Piñera, who had been gaining ground throughout the campaign. Reinforcing emails of this sort were notable for their content, since they portrayed Lavín as something he studiously avoided being seen as in public: a die-hard right-winger. While Lavín consistently sought to distance himself from the Pinochet regime he had once supported—during the campaign, he said that if he had known about Pinochet's human rights abuses he would have voted against him in the 1988 plebiscite—emails to the volunteers list implied Piñera was a traitor to the right for having voted against Pinochet in the same election and that Lavín was the only true right-wing candidate in the race.

When analyzed in early October, before the Lavín campaign reached its initial goal of 100,000 volunteers, the site was clearly oriented toward the task of additional recruiting. It emphasized several different ways that existing volunteers could bring in new ones, including going out on weekends to recruit in person or signing up like-minded people through university networks. In addition, the site specifically emphasized the ability to help in the recruiting effort without having to take part in an organized activity or even hitting the streets as a volunteer. Visitors to the website who clicked on the "Sign up 10 more" link were taken to a page that encouraged them to "be an active volunteer and assist in the triumph of Joaquín Lavín, participating in this campaign without leaving your house," simply by entering into a web form the names of friends, family, and colleagues who were interested in becoming volunteers. Carmen Mena, the webmaster of the Lavín volunteer site, said that this particular online recruiting effort had brought in 5000 new volunteers as of early October (author's interview, Santiago, Oct. 5, 2005).

The emphasis on volunteer recruiting and coordination of the volunteer effort is the most unique aspect of Lavín's Web presence, and Mena characterized the computerization of volunteer records as a key strategic tool for the campaign. "I don't know how effective the website as a whole is" she said, "but I do know that the greatest asset that this campaign team has, apart from the candidate of course, is that database" (author's interview, Santiago, Oct. 5, 2005). The computer-managed network of volunteers, she stressed, allowed them to circumvent potentially complicating party structures in running a campaign on the ground. The Lavín campaign sought to transcend a party appeal, reaching people that would otherwise be reluctant to vote for UDI, and they also wanted have a network of dedicated Lavín volunteers they could rely upon—people who were not faced with deciding whether to devote time to the presidential candidate or a local candidate from the same party.

Online Contributions: Tentative Steps in an Uncertain Realm

One of the major campaign-related uses of the Internet in the United States, online campaign contributions, was not particularly prevalent among Chilean candidates; only Bachelet's site provided this capacity. The first and most innovative way to give money electronically to the Bachelet campaign involved paying a nominal fee (between US$ 1.50 and 2.50) to download campaign-related ringtones and screen images for mobile phones. Supporters could also sign up to have campaign news to be sent to their mobile phones via SMS, also for a small fee per message. In both cases, a portion of this fee went to the phone company implementing the service, but the majority went to the campaign. María José Becerra, in charge of online donations to the Bachelet campaign, emphasized the democratizing effect of this form

of campaign contribution, since access to mobile phones—and thus the potential to give small sums of money—is so widespread in Chile (author's interview, Santiago, Oct. 5, 2005).

Bachelet's website also provided the capacity for potentially much larger donations to be made directly via the Internet using a credit card—a form of campaign contribution that appeared to allow for possible abuse. When first implemented, the online donation feature simply requested a name and email address and then allowed the user to enter credit card information and an amount to donate. The site did not appear to prevent users from donating in excess of either the anonymous limit or the overall personal donation limit, nor did it seem to have any way of preventing foreigners from making illegal donations.[6] By December, the online donation portion of the Bachelet website had been moved to a separate site, www.aportesparabachelet.cl, which included a new section explaining the various restrictions in the campaign financing law. Nonetheless, the actual donation mechanism still did not appear to have incorporated any of these legal restrictions.

Clearly, online campaign financing, at least as it is currently implemented, seems to fall into a gray area in the law. One Lavín staff member said that they had considered allowing online donations, but ultimately decided against it because of the legal uncertainty, and also because not many Chileans are yet accustomed to online financial transactions (author's interview with Nicole Walcovinski, Santiago, Dec. 19, 2005). In the next presidential election in 2009, however, she expected that all the candidates would offer the capacity for online donations and that it would be a much more important way of raising money for the campaign.

Conclusion: Promoting the Personal Connection

While the Internet has become an increasingly important medium of campaign communication in Chile, it still has significant room to grow. Between its political debut in the mid-1990s and the 2005 election, the Internet went from an interesting novelty or symbol of modernity to something that candidates took much more seriously, but it still pales in comparison to the attention that campaign teams pay to press coverage or to advertising on radio and television. Arriagada, the campaign manager who originally suggested that the Internet would dominate the 2005 campaign, has more recently acknowledged that his earlier predictions were somewhat premature, that the Internet in 2005 was only slightly more relevant than in 1999, and that it might take 6-7 more years for it to become a "very important" tool for campaign communication (author's interview, Santiago, Oct. 11, 2005). Miranda, the webmaster for Lavín's site in 1999 and for several UDI congressional candidates in 2005, similarly maintained that not much had changed in terms of overall importance of Internet between 1999 and 2005, but that the Internet would be the "pillar" of the campaign in the next election in 2009 (author's interview, Santiago, Oct. 17, 2005).

Predictions such as these may be somewhat hyperbolic; the Internet is hardly the pillar of electoral campaigns even in the U.S., and it seems unlikely that the medium could achieve that status in Chile in just a few more years. Indeed, there may never be a quantum shift from one election to the next in which the Internet suddenly comes to occupy the central place in the campaign. What seems more likely is that as greater and greater numbers of people begin to use

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[6] The only way to be completely certain about which safeguards were or were not built into the Bachelet online donation mechanism would have been to attempt to make a large donation myself, which I was obviously unwilling to do.

the Internet in Chile, campaigns should consider it an increasingly important medium of communication, devoting more resources and attention to it.

More significant from a comparative standpoint than the pace of the Internet's increasing "importance" (however measured) are the specific ways in which the Internet is used in Chilean electoral campaigns, how these differ from other forms of campaign communication, and how this matrix of uses is likely to evolve over time. With respect to Arriagada's prediction that the Internet would challenge the soundbite culture that has come to dominate mass media-oriented political campaigns in Chile, the Internet certainly has provided *opportunities* for greater depth in the presentation of ideas, and candidates have taken advantage of some of that depth, i.e. by putting their government programs online. But candidates do not really promote or seek to advertise this level of depth to the general public. Miranda notes that candidates discussing a particular issue in press conferences, debates, or advertising still are not in the habit of pointing the public toward the greater detail that can be found on their websites (author's interview, Santiago, Oct. 17, 2005). Moreover, candidates' websites do not necessarily feature this depth and detail on prominent display. Rather, the most prominent component of these websites is the massive quantity of the same type of soundbite-style information that is distributed via the mass media—the various press releases, photographs, and audio and video clips that adorn the home page and are archived on each candidate's site.

With respect to Arriagada's prediction regarding the role of the Internet in strengthening ties between candidates and grassroots supporters, it is still too early to assess the significance of this impact. Nonetheless, efforts to facilitate direct personal connections with supporters—or at least the appearance thereof—are one of the major ways that Chilean candidates currently use the Internet, and one of the areas that has potential for growth. During the 2005 campaign, efforts to build ties with the grassroots were manifest in two major forms—the blogs that Piñera and Bachelet included on their websites, and the volunteer network—including an email list and access to the volunteer intranet—organized by the Lavín campaign. For their part, blogs represented only an initial foray into what could potentially emerge as more substantial interactivity between candidates and supporters in the future, as more and more Chileans get access to the Internet. Creating direct, unmediated connections with voters is an increasingly important part of electoral campaigns in Chile, and the Internet with its interactive capacity is the only electronic medium that approximates the two-way exchange of a candidate visiting a local market to chat with vendors or greeting individual citizens in a town square.

If interactive and participatory spaces such as blogs have the potential to create new types of direct, unmediated ties between voters and candidates, use of the Internet to manage and mobilize a network of volunteers approximates a more traditional form of political intermediation—the party. While mobilizing party militants was an important way to get volunteer labor for political campaigns in the past, mobilizing a large network of campaign-specific volunteers—and organizing and recruiting many of them via the Internet—has become an important way to get volunteer labor in an era in which parties have declined. Although there are important distinctions between the more long-term, political identity-based commitment implied by joining a party and the more short-term and contingent commitment involved in volunteering for a campaign, there are also important similarities. Unlike visiting a website, receiving an email, or commenting on a blog entry, participating as a campaign volunteer is not purely an online phenomenon; a volunteer network is an organizational structure facilitated by the use of the Internet but not wholly dependent upon it. Like joining a political party, signing up for the Lavín volunteer network involved associating with a community of like-minded

individuals and taking part in a common project encouraging participation and broadening of the ranks. Use of the Internet to facilitate the building of new forms of political community—both real-world and virtual—may be an increasingly important component of political campaigns in the future.

While the Internet has not yet become a dominant medium in Chilean politics, it is likely to continue to grow in importance during future elections, probably keeping pace with the growth in access among the population. There do not seem to be any inherent features of the Chilean case limiting its growth, and some characteristics of Chilean politics seem to encourage it. Building direct personal connections with voters, fast becoming the most important form of political appeal in Chile, is something for which the Internet is comparatively well-suited. Other uses of the Internet that seem tentative at present, such as online campaign contributions, may become more prevalent in the future as their legal status is clarified and as e-commerce becomes more common among the population in general. Finally, the future of hybrid online-offline forms of political organization and mobilization, such as a volunteer network managed and partially recruited online, will be important to watch. Where use of the Internet is fully integrated into other components of the campaign—whether this means using email to encourage physical participation at a campaign event, or using a candidate's television appearance to encourage voters to visit her website—it is likely to have its greatest impact.

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