

**Madam or Mr. President?**  
**Chile's Michelle Bachelet, press coverage and public perceptions**

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### Abstract

Because more women are running —and succeeding— in presidential races all over the world, it is important to analyze the way they are portrayed by the media. Using Chile as a case study, the authors examined (1) differences in news coverage of Chile's first female president Michelle Bachelet and her male contenders in the 2005 elections, and (2) the impact of these differences on voters' perceptions. Using a content analysis of three Chilean newspapers, a secondary analysis of a public opinion survey and agenda setting as a theoretical framework, the authors found striking differences in press coverage and suggest that the press influenced the public's images of the candidates. For instance, compared to her male rivals, Bachelet received an overwhelmingly negative coverage of her qualification and leadership skills. However, journalists portrayed her as the likely winner of the election in 88 percent of the news stories about the horse race. More importantly, the authors also found that the newspapers appear to have had a role in influencing the issues and personal characteristics that voters linked to Bachelet and her two main opponents, Sebastián Piñera and Joaquín Lavín. The implications of these findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** female candidates, newspapers, elections, agenda setting, political communication, Bachelet, Chile.

**Estimated word count:** 7150.

## Introduction

“When you are woman, they [the media] delve into private life, concentrate on the suit, the hairdo, I mean, issues that nobody evaluates in a man, and women politicians are asked things that, actually, men are not.” This complaint, expressed by the then-presidential candidate and now president of Chile, Michelle Bachelet (Radio Cooperativa 2004), is remarkably similar to criticisms against media coverage voiced over the years by women competing for executive posts in the U.S. and other countries (Braden 1996; Norris 1997; Ross 2002).

Feminist scholars (e.g., Carter et al. 1998; Gallagher 2001; Sreberny and van Zoonen 2000; Vavrus 2002) also allege that the media portray a stereotypical image of female candidates, a trend that can have negative “consequences not only in their campaigns but also at the polls” (Banwart et al. 2003: 658).

Despite these biases, women are succeeding in presidential races all over the world. Besides Bachelet—who in March 2006 was sworn in as the first female president in Chile’s history—, Liberia’s Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became Africa’s first elected female state president in November 2005. Almost at the same time, Angela Merkel was sworn in as Germany’s first woman chancellor. In January 2006, Tarja Jalonon was reelected for a second six-year period as President of Finland. Even in the U.S. some analysts (e.g., Morris and McGann 2005) believe that the 2008 presidential election could be a race between Hillary Rodham Clinton and Condoleezza Rice.

Thus, it seems timely to examine the basis of the criticisms against the press coverage of female candidates as well as the influence of the media on public attitudes towards women running for president. The purpose of the present study then is twofold: (1) to analyze differences in news coverage of female and male presidential candidates using Chile

as a case study; and (2) to explore the impact of these differences on people's views of the candidates' attributes using the theory of agenda setting as a framework. The latter is particularly relevant, because until now only a handful of studies on gender differences in political coverage have linked media content to public perceptions.

Chile's 2005 presidential election was chosen as a case study for three reasons. First, because it allowed an international replication of the research on political coverage showing that female candidates are treated differently from male candidates. Second, because it was a unique election in the history of Latin American politics, namely, Bachelet is the first female president in Chile's history and in Latin America not to be related to a well-known politician.<sup>1</sup> And, third, to increase knowledge in the field of political communication in Chile, for only one study before this one has empirically tested media effects on election campaigns: Dussallant's (2005) analysis of the 1999 presidential election.

### **The 2005 Chilean Presidential Election**

The 2005 presidential election marked a milestone in Chile's political development. It was the first time that this country—one of the most stable democracies in Latin America and the region's best-performing economy over the last two decades—had a female candidate that had serious possibilities of becoming president—and eventually succeeded. Bachelet's victory was also a political breakthrough because she was a Socialist Democrat physician and a divorced mother of three in one of the most socially conservative countries in the Western Hemisphere. In addition, and unlike her predecessors, Bachelet (54 at the time of the election) had become a public figure quite recently, when she was appointed in 2000 by the then-president Ricardo Lagos to the health ministry, and later in 2002 to the defense ministry, becoming the first woman in Latin America to hold this position. Before serving as a minister, she had been working as a pediatrician in the public health sector. In

1975, she fled the country after the military —having seized power in 1973— held her for weeks with her mother in detention centers due to Bachelet's involvement with the Socialist Youth. Eventually, her position in Lagos's cabinet would cause her name to appear at the top of the public opinion polls. She resigned her office in 2004 and decided to run for president, becoming the official candidate of the ruling coalition Concertación in May 2005.

Her rivals in the election were three men. Two of them were U.S.-trained economists from the center-right coalition Alianza. One was Joaquín Lavín (52), a social conservative who barely lost the previous election against Lagos and was the former mayor of the capital city, Santiago. The other was Sebastián Piñera (56), a wealthy businessman and political leader of the Alianza's centrist wing. The third male candidate was the former ambassador Tomás Hirsch (49) who represented the far-left Juntos Podemos Más, a coalition of Communist and other anti-capitalist parties.

The main election was held on December 11, 2005. Bachelet won 46% of the vote; Piñera, 25%; Lavín, 23%; and Hirsch, 5%. Since no candidate garnered an absolute majority, a run-off election was held on January 15, 2006 between Bachelet and Piñera. In this case, she won 53.5% of the vote while Piñera obtained 46.5%. In both elections, the proportion of men and women who voted for Bachelet was similar.<sup>2</sup>

### **Literature Review**

**Gender differences in news coverage of candidates.** As Larson noted, “the study of women and politics in the media is a relatively young subfield” (2001:227). Only in the last 20 years have scholars examined the relationship between a candidate's gender and his or her media coverage. Various studies by Kim Fridkin Kahn (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Kahn and Kenney 1997) examined newspaper coverage of U.S. female candidates running for election during the 1980s and 1990s and found that

the press stereotypes them, questions their viability as candidates, gives more coverage to their male competitors, and focuses more on their personality traits rather than on their issue positions.

Many of Kahn's findings have been confirmed by more recent research (e.g., Aday and Devitt 2001; Bystrom et al. 2004; Piper-Aiken 1999a). Devitt (1999) found in his study of 1998 U.S. gubernatorial candidates that women received less issue-related coverage than men. In a subsequent study, Heldman et al. (2005) analyzed Elizabeth Dole's campaign for the Republican presidential nomination in 1999 and found that she received significantly less coverage than did her male rivals and that the press paid more attention to her personality traits than to the traits of other candidates.

Although some scholars argue that gender-stereotyped media coverage has improved (e.g., Rausch et al. 1999; Smith 1997; Solomon 2004), many insist that there has been no change at all despite the increased number of women running for elected office. For instance, Ross (2002) examined the experiences of women politicians in Great Britain, South Africa, and Australia and found that in all countries the broadcast media portrays them in traditional gender roles. Thus, women were regularly presented within a "domestic" or "family" frame of reference, highlighting the stereotypes of care, compassion and motherliness. In contrast, men were presented as belonging to the public world of politics and, consequently, framed in news coverage in stereotypical masculine manners, described as efficient, competent and rational. Gallagher (2001) even reported that in some countries more gender stereotyping is occurring now than in the past.

Previous research has also found that newspapers report personal information about women more frequently than that of men. Such personal information includes attire, appearance, and marital status. By contrast, men are more likely to be identified by their

occupation, experience, or accomplishments (Davis 1982; Jamieson 1995; Jolliffe 1989; Turk 1987). Also, male candidates are more likely than their female counterparts to be described in gender-neutral terms, in which a subject's gender is irrelevant to how he or she is portrayed (Kahn 1996). In contrast, stories about female candidates usually employ the "first woman" frame, which may reinforce the idea that they are an anomaly rather than serious contenders for the presidency (Heldman et al. 2005).

**The influence of the journalist's gender.** A possible explanation for differences in news coverage is the link between news content and the reporter's sex. For example, Aday and Devitt (2001) found that male reporters were about half as likely as female reporters to include issue-framed content in stories about Elizabeth Dole and were significantly more likely to use personal frames to discuss her than to discuss the male candidates. However, other research has generally shown that a journalist's gender has little effect on his or her reporting. Liebler and Smith (1997) concluded that female and male reporters did not treat female and male sources differently based on gender. Similarly, Piper-Aiken (1999b) found that female and male journalists did not cover subjects differently with regard to gender of sources and in making gender distinctions. For these scholars, similarities in coverage may be best explained by organizational pressures and professional values that encourage uniform reporting (Gans 2004; Shoemaker and Reese 1996). In contrast, feminist scholarship presents another interpretation:

Women in the media have to compete in a man's world, and they often have to play by the big boys' rules if they are going to survive. This inevitably means adopting the male-orientated ethos of the newsroom and taking on a determinedly masculine gaze when writing about women (Ross 2002:109).

**Effects of coverage differences on public perceptions.** So far, only a very limited number of studies have examined empirically the link between differences in campaign coverage of female and male candidates and voters' attitudes. Most research focuses on content and assumes—but does not test—that the audience is influenced by media messages. A notable exception were Kahn's (1992, 1996) experiments on public opinion and perception of gender-differentiated media coverage that allowed her to conclude that "gender differences in news patterns are important and produce distinct images of the candidates" (Kahn 1996:63).

However, the existing literature shows that news coverage of political campaigns—no matter the candidate's gender—can have significant effects on voters (Iyengar and Simon 1993, 2000; Shaw 1999). The most documented effect is the learning process that takes place in the public. It has been found that news coverage "provide people with words and phrases they can use to defend a [political] point of view" (Noelle-Neumann 1993:173)—including the reasons why they would prefer certain candidates. Several scholars have demonstrated that voters exposed to a "hard fought" race, which makes larger volumes of information available, are more engaged and cast better-informed votes (Kahn and Kenney 1997). Most importantly, Popkin (1994, 1997) has shown that voters do make inferences about the candidates' personalities based on what they see and read. There is also strong evidence that the way the media describe a candidacy can shape the tone and focus of a political campaign. For example, Devitt (1999) noted that if a newspaper describes a female candidate's attire or comments on her marital status, the reader may have less of an understanding of where she stands on public policy issues or whether or not she is qualified to hold the office she is seeking. Even horse race news stories may have a cognitive impact because they raise the public's consciousness of the candidates' prospects (Mutz 1997).



Most of these cognitive effects derive from the fact that nowadays “most interaction between presidential candidates and citizens occurs in living rooms, watching television, reading the newspaper or surfing the Internet” (Heith 2001:335). Thus, what the media say or do not say about a presidential candidate is of vital importance for the electorate.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present study, then, will focus on how male and female Chilean presidential candidates are described—or “framed”—by newspapers and explore the impact of differences in news coverage with voters’ perceptions of the candidates using agenda setting as a theoretical framework. This is a useful theory for the present study because it allows researchers to examine “the characteristics that the news media link to political figures and how the public subsequently links these same attributes to the political figures” (Golan and Wanta 2001:247).

**Agenda-setting effects.** In its core idea, the agenda-setting function of the mass media refers to the ability of the news media to focus public attention on a few key “objects” (whether public issues, political candidates, companies, or other). Since the seminal 1968 Chapel Hill study by McCombs and Shaw (1972), more than 350 studies and experiments in the U.S. and other countries have been able to produce evidence that there is a transfer of salience between the “objects” prominent in the media agenda and the “objects” prominent in the public agenda (McCombs 2004). For example, Wanta and Ghanem (2006) found a mean correlation of +.53 between the media agenda and the public agenda in a meta-analysis of ninety empirical articles. Therefore, the salience of presidential candidates in the media—signaled, for instance, by amount of news coverage—can influence the salience of those same candidates in the public’s mind—often measured as “candidate name recognition” in public opinion polls.

Agenda setting may operate also at a wider scope, in the sense that the media can influence the audience not only in regard to the salience of news objects but also on the attributes of those same objects, by providing and emphasizing some of their characteristics and traits (McCombs et al. 2000). Thus, the salience of attributes on the media agenda may influence the salience of those attributes on the public agenda, a phenomenon dubbed the second level of agenda setting.

First and second-level agenda setting affect the public in different ways. According to Carroll and McCombs (2003), at the first level, agenda setting effects are on attention, while at the second level, agenda setting effects are on comprehension. In turn, attribute agenda setting effects on public comprehension can be described in terms of two dimensions: cognitive and affective (Ghanem 1997; Golan and Wanta 2001). In a study where political candidates are the objects of news, as the present one, cognitive attributes involve information about issues positions and information about personal characteristics (Kioussis 2005). At the same time, cognitive attributes can also be arranged along an affective dimension, usually defined as positive, negative or neutral (Ghanem 1997; Golan and Wanta 2001).

A growing body of research has demonstrated empirically that the media can set the public agenda of attributes of political candidates in both its cognitive and affective dimensions. For example, in his study of the news coverage of two presidential candidates in the 1999-2000 Chilean election, Dussillant (2005) found a mean correlation of +.71 and +.97 between the media agenda and the public agenda in the cognitive and affective dimensions, respectively.

## Hypotheses

In order to examine differences in press coverage, compare these differences with the public's image of the candidates, and determine if —and to what extent— the audience reacts to media messages, the following hypotheses are put forth:

H1: Newspapers placed more emphasis on Bachelet's individual traits and background, such as her gender, profession, family or appearance, than on male candidates' individual traits and background.

H2: Newspapers gave a different coverage to Bachelet's chances of winning the election than they gave to male candidates.

H3: Newspapers gave a different coverage to Bachelet's issue positions than they gave to male candidates.

H4: Newspapers gave a different coverage, both in tone and substance, to Bachelet's personal characteristics, such as her leadership and competency, than they gave to male candidates.

H5: The reporter's gender was not significantly related to differences in newspaper coverage of Bachelet and her male competitors.

H6: Newspaper salience of Bachelet and her male competitors was positively correlated with their public salience, the proportion of the public who recognized these candidates.

H7: The public linked issues and personal characteristics to Bachelet and her male competitors in a similar pattern as the newspapers.

Previous research conducted in the U.S. and Europe has found that, compared to male candidates, women receive more coverage on their personal traits. Hypothesis 1 predicts that the same would be true of the 2005 Chilean election. However, researchers have yielded inconsistent and, at times, contradictory findings concerning the difference between the news coverage of male and female candidates' electability, issues and personal characteristics. Since these results do not point to any specific direction, hypotheses 2, 3 and 4 predict that there is a difference in coverage, but do not anticipate the substance of that difference. In line with previous research, hypothesis 5 predicts that the coverage of female

and male reporters is similar. Finally, hypotheses 6 and 7 test if first and second-level agenda setting were at work in the Chilean election.

### Methods

To test the hypotheses, data from a content analysis of three newspapers will be combined with a secondary analysis of a public opinion poll conducted during the election campaign.

**Content analysis.** News content for the study was obtained from three prominent Chilean newspapers. It was important that the content originate in major outlets because the poll was national in nature. The newspapers selected were *El Mercurio*, *La Tercera* and *Las Últimas Noticias*, because they have the largest circulation in Chile as identified by the AVCL, the local bureau of circulation, and are targeted to different audiences. *El Mercurio* is the elite newspaper of record, *La Tercera* is the educated middle-class newspaper and *Las Últimas Noticias* is the country's most widely read newspaper thanks to its tabloid formula of reporting celebrities and man-bites-dog stories.

For the hypotheses that test coverage differences —H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5— this study analyzed a period of six months of campaign coverage. Specifically, the monitoring period started on July 11, 2005 and ended on January 15, 2006. This allowed inclusion of press coverage of the first round and the runoff-ballot campaigns. For the remaining hypotheses —H6 and H7— the time span was shortened to four months of the campaign, between July 11, 2005 and November 13, 2005, because the public opinion poll was conducted on November, 2005.

To ensure validity but at the same time narrow down the data set for the content analysis, the constructed-week method of sampling was used, which eliminates the possibility of overrepresentation of certain editions, such as the larger Sunday paper, and controls the

variation in newspaper readership across the week. This method also allows greater generalization over time than simple random samples or consecutive day samples (Riffe et al. 1993). Beginning July 12, 2005—the date randomly selected as the starting point for the sample—, all the articles that mentioned a presidential candidate published by any of the three newspapers every 8<sup>th</sup> day until completing two seven-day weeks were content analyzed.

The unit of analysis was the individual article, including news stories, feature stories, interviews, editorials, opinion columns, letters to the editor and picture captions. Since “the only somewhat complete version of any electronic database [of news stories] is the in-house, internal database that is kept by each news organization for use by its own reporters and editors” (Hansen 2003:224), the articles from the selected dates were obtained using *El Mercurio*’s internal database. It must be noted that the owner of this newspaper is also the owner of *Las Últimas Noticias*, and that this database includes all the articles published by these two newspapers and most of *La Tercera*’s. The following search term was entered in the database for collecting the articles: Bachelet OR Hirsch OR Lavín OR “Sebastián Piñera”. For the monitoring period of the runoff-ballot campaign, the following search term was entered: Bachelet OR “Sebastián Piñera”.

The constructed-week process resulted in a sample of 48 issues and 349 individual articles to be coded, with a median of nine paragraphs per article.

To test H1, each article was coded for the frequency of mention of the candidates’ sex, appearance, family background, marital status, economic status, profession and household chores. To test H2, any reference to a candidate’s position in the election race was coded as noncompetitive, competitive or likely winner. For H3, at most five issues were coded, according to the level of emphasis on the issue in the story. The categories were: crime and corruption, democracy and human rights, economic growth and business

regulation, education, employment and labor protection, international issues , poverty and inequality and relationship with parties. To test H4, two variables were coded: (a) Type of personal characteristic (categories were: leadership, charisma, compassion, competency, honesty, and aggressiveness), and (b) Nature of the personal characteristic frame (coded as positive, neutral or negative). In both cases, at most five characteristics of each candidate were coded, according to their level of emphasis. To test H5, the gender of the author(s) was coded as male only, female only, male and female and no named author/cannot tell the author's sex. As has been the case in most agenda setting studies (e.g., Kioussis and McCombs 2004; McCombs and Shaw 1972), to test H6 and H7 the salience in the newspapers of each candidate, her or his issue stances and his or her personal characteristics were defined in terms of the number of stories.<sup>3</sup>

Specific instructions on how to code each item were included in the content analysis codebook. The two authors of this study —both native Spanish speakers with a journalism background and familiarity with Chilean politics— coded the whole set of news stories. Holsti's inter-coder reliability (based on a random sample of 10 percent of the stories) was a high 98 percent given the straightforward nature of the codebook used.<sup>4</sup>

**Public opinion data.** The public opinion survey used in this study was conducted between October 15, 2005 and November 4, 2005 by the Centro de Estudios Públicos (2005), a private, nonpartisan, non-profit academic foundation that conducts the most comprehensive election surveys in Chile.

The survey was completed face-to-face among 1,505 Chilean citizens age 18 or older, using a random sample of the whole country population, including urban and rural areas. The response rate was 83 percent and the sampling error was plus or minus 2.7 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

Ideally, the salience of the candidates in the public agenda should have been measured using a direct indicator of prominence. Unfortunately, no such measure existed in the CEP survey. As an alternative, an indirect indicator of salience was used: name recognition (see Kiouisis and McCombs 2004). Since the CEP survey includes items that measure attitudes towards political figures, including the four presidential candidates, these items were used also as indicators of name recognition because respondents could indicate they did not recognize the name of the political figure. Thus, the proportion of survey respondents who “did not recognize” the person about whom they were asked to give an opinion was subtracted from 100% to create the salience measure for each presidential candidate.<sup>5</sup>

To measure the public’s descriptions of presidential contenders’ attributes, many studies ask an open-ended question similar to “Imagine that you have a friend who didn’t know anything about the candidates. What would you tell your friend about... (name of the candidate)” (McCombs et al. 2000:84). But no such question existed in the CEP survey. Thus, the following question was used: “Which of the following candidates (name of the candidate) would do the best job improving the following issues in this country?”. The response choices used in this study were: employment and labor welfare, crime and corruption, equal opportunities and income inequality, economic growth, family and international relations with neighboring countries.

For measuring which personal characteristics the public links to each of the candidates, the following question was used: “Which of the following attributes would you identify with (name of the candidate)?”. Response choices selected for this study were: leadership, qualification to be president, honesty and trustworthiness, sensibleness to the problems of people like you and affectionate.

**Statistical analysis.** The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to process and analyze the data. For the first part of this study, that is, the analysis of differences in news coverage, descriptive statistics, such as frequencies as well as cross-tabulations, were used. For the second part, that is, the effects of news coverage on public perceptions of candidates, correlations and sets of chi-square tests were used.

Specifically, the comparison between coverage of issues-positions and personal characteristics of candidates and the poll results is based on Golan and Wanta's (2001) methodology of chi-square tests. In this case, statistically significant chi-squares would suggest that media coverage differed from public perceptions. Non-significant chi-squares, on the other hand, would demonstrate that media coverage was similar to public perceptions. This latter case, then, would offer support to the notion of media effects on public perceptions.

## **Results**

**Individual traits and background.** Hypothesis 1 predicted that newspapers would cover differently Bachelet's individual traits and background, such as her gender, profession, family and marital status, as compared to her male counterparts. The results supported this hypothesis. According to Table 1, while 13 percent of the stories mentioned her gender, none mentioned the male candidates' sex. Bachelet was repeatedly described, for example, as "the woman that dispelled the stereotypes followed by female presidents in modern times" (*El Mercurio*, December 11, 2005), as the candidate "that is going to change many things just because she is a woman" (*Las Últimas Noticias*, October 24, 2005), and "the woman that is likely to become president" (*La Tercera*, August 21, 2005).

[Table 1 about here]



Although few stories made reference to Bachelet's attire (4 percent), domestic chores (2 percent) and economic status (2 percent), there were statistically significant differences between her coverage and that of the male candidates in regard to these traits. While she received less coverage on her socioeconomic background than Piñera, she garnered more stories that mentioned her appearance and linked her to household chores than any other candidate.

**Horse race coverage.** The second hypothesis posited that newspapers gave a different coverage to Bachelet's chances of winning the election than they gave the three other male candidates. The data, which show remarkable differences, offer substantial support for this hypothesis. Bachelet not only garnered more horse race coverage, but there were extraordinary differences in the substance of this type of news content (see Table 2).

[Table 2 about here]

In 88 percent of the stories that commented on Bachelet's chances to win, she was always described as the likely winner. In stark contrast, four-fifths of the horse race coverage that each Piñera and Lavín received in the campaign depicted them as competitive candidates, but not as likely winners. Although Piñera made it to the runoff, in only two percent of the stories was he portrayed as the likely winner. Finally, in more than nine out of every ten stories that made reference to Hirsch's position in the race he was described as the noncompetitive, sure loser candidate.

In conclusion, journalists made no effort in depicting in similar terms the electability of Bachelet, Piñera, Lavín and Hirsch. Citizens that followed the campaign reading the newspapers were more likely to develop a very positive impression of the electability of Michelle Bachelet.

**Coverage of issue positions.** Hypothesis 3 predicted that newspapers would pay attention to the issue concerns of Bachelet in a different manner than that of the male candidates. The results supported this hypothesis. As Table 3 shows, the issue-priorities of the candidates showed in the three newspapers were different.

[Table 3 about here]

The most frequent issue linked to Bachelet was democracy and human rights (15 percent). In the case of Piñera, it was his relationship with political parties (11 percent), while crime and corruption were the most recurrent topics linked to Lavín (13 percent). Of the few stories that mentioned Hirsch in regard to his issue positions, there was a four-way tie between the economy, political parties, income inequality and poverty, and international issues (2 percent each), the latter due to a controversy over his position on how to manage Chile's foreign policy with Peru.

Moreover, rank-order correlations of the overall agenda of issues of Bachelet and each male candidate show that there was a very weak, if at all, association between them. One comparison was negative (Bachelet vs. Lavín; Spearman's  $\rho = -.13$ ) and one was positive but showed a very weak relationship (Bachelet vs. Hirsch; Spearman's  $\rho = +.13$ ). Only the agendas of Bachelet and Piñera revealed a moderate association (Spearman's  $\rho = +.49$ ). Due to the small number of pairs compared ( $N = 7$ ), none of the three correlations were statistically significant.

**Personal attributes.** Hypothesis 4 posited that Bachelet and her male contenders would receive a different newspaper coverage of their personal attributes, such as leadership and competency. The data offer substantial support for this hypothesis. As Table 4 shows, whether comparing the ratio of positive to negative coverage or type of coverage for each candidate, the tone and substance for Bachelet differed from other candidates.

[Table 4 about here]

For all candidates, only in one attribute —aggressiveness— out of five the neutral frame predominated. In the rest, the coverage was clearly positive or negative.

Analyzing the frames that were established for Bachelet's attributes, the coverage of her competency stands out as highly negative (54 percent versus 29 percent of positive mentions). The attributes that were framed in an overwhelmingly positive manner were her charisma and compassion (84 percent versus 6 percent of negative comments), and her honesty (52 percent against 42 percent). Her leadership skills and her aggressiveness were described only slightly more positively than negatively. In contrast, Piñera's fitness for office was framed in a tremendously positive manner (61 percent compared to 20 percent of negative mentions). Similarly, his leadership skills and charisma were mostly described in positive terms (45 percent versus 21 percent and 56 percent versus 37 percent, respectively). In contrast, his honesty was depicted in a highly negative manner, with 62 percent of all references to this trait being negative. His aggressiveness was covered mostly in neutral terms. In Lavín's case, the overall coverage of his personal characteristics was more balanced. Thus, in three out of five attributes he received mostly positive coverage—for charisma and compassion, leadership and honesty— while on the other two—qualification and aggressiveness—he was described negatively. Although few stories made a reference to Hirsch's personal characteristics, most of them were framed in negative terms.

**Gender of reporter.** Hypothesis 5, which predicted that the journalist's gender did not account for differences in newspaper coverage of Bachelet and her male contenders, was supported by the results. Although male reporters wrote significantly more of the stories included in this study (42 percent compared to 20 percent written by women only), there were no significant differences in the way female and male reporters covered Bachelet. A set

of six cross-tabulations—one for each type of individual trait mentioned, including gender, profession, family and marital status, appearance, household chores and economic status—were generated comparing the coverage of male and female reporters. Only the cross-tabulation of Bachelet's gender achieved statistical difference (see Table 5). While one out of four female journalists mentioned Bachelet's sex, only one out of ten male journalists did so as well.

[Table 5 about here]

The evidence lends itself to conclude that female authors were more aware than their male counterparts of the “first woman” breakthrough implied by Bachelet's quest for the presidency.

**Basic agenda setting effects.** Hypothesis 6 predicted that the newspaper salience of Bachelet, Lavín, Piñera and Hirsch was positively correlated with their public salience, measured as the proportion of the public who recognized these candidates in the CEP survey. The data offered modest support for the hypothesis.

A rank-order correlation was calculated between the number of stories that mentioned each candidate at least once that were published between July 2005 and November 2005—when the poll used in this study was conducted—and the percentage of people who said they recognize the political figures that they were being mentioned. Of the 227 stories coded for this period, Bachelet appeared in 48 percent of them, Lavín in 37 percent, Piñera in 32 percent and Hirsch in 8 percent. However, for the first three candidates, their public name recognition in the CEP survey was a statistical tie of 98 percent, while Hirsch had a lower rate of 67 percent. Thus, the strong association between the media and the public (Spearman's  $\rho = +.77$ ) was somewhat overstated. The only real difference in salience was between Hirsch in the last place and the other three candidates.

This came as no surprise given that Bachelet, Lavín and Piñera were all well-known public figures before the content analysis and the CEP survey were conducted.

**Attribute agenda setting effects.** Hypothesis 7 posited that the public would link issues and personal characteristics to Bachelet and her male contenders in a similar manner as the newspapers. This hypothesis attempts to measure if the aspects emphasized by the newspapers about the candidates were also the aspects emphasized by voters when they were asked by the CEP poll. The data supported this hypothesis.

Ideally, all issues and personal characteristics would have been used in the comparison. However, not all the attributes that were measured in the content analysis were asked in the poll, and even when there was a match, chi-square tests required a frequency of at least five stories per attribute and/or per candidate. Thus, as Table 6 shows, seven types of cognitive attributes —economic growth, crime, inequality, leadership, charisma, competency and honesty— linked to the three main contenders —Bachelet, Piñera and Lavín— were used in the comparison between press coverage and public perceptions. The results show that two of the seven chi-square tests were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) — for the issue of crime and for the personal attribute of honesty. In other words, media coverage of the candidates and these attributes differed. In contrast, the other five attributes show striking similarity between the CEP survey results and newspaper coverage.

[Table 6 about here]

Equally strong support was found in the analysis for the affective dimension of second level agenda setting. Here, none of the chi-square tests were statistically significant. In other words, the tone the newspapers used to describe the candidates' leadership, charisma, competency and honesty were very similar to the people's perceptions of those same attributes as reported in the CEP poll.

## Discussion

Because more women are running for president than before, it is important to examine the way they are portrayed by the media. Many studies have examined how the press covers candidates and found that gender does make a difference. In many cases, the difference seems to work against the image of female candidates. However, few studies have attempted to measure simultaneously media coverage and its effects on public attitudes towards female candidates (Shoemaker and Resse 1990). As Larson noted, “most research focuses on content rather than (...) consequences” (2001:227). This study attempted to bridge this gap by integrating the findings of a content analysis of three newspapers with voters’ perceptions reported in a survey using agenda setting theory. The results supported all seven hypotheses tested.

**News coverage of the candidates.** In general, this study shows that the Chilean press emphasized different background traits of the candidates. Given the conservative culture predominant in Chile and previous studies’ findings, it came as a surprise that Bachelet did not get more press coverage on her family and marital status than Piñera, her main male contender. There is evidence that Piñera emphasized his family background to counterbalance the image of being a “greedy billionaire businessman,” something that his rivals liked to highlight. When a journalist asked him: “Are you tightfisted?”, he responded: “No. But my parents educated me to be austere. My father was a bureaucrat. His salary was that of any public servant. And my mother taught us the values of work, sacrifice and solidarity” (*El Mercurio*, October 16, 2005). As for Lavín and Hirsch, it seems that both were more willing to be linked to their wives in order to counterbalance the attraction of voters to a female figure like Bachelet.

Another explanation could be that journalists avoided discussing Bachelet's marital status because she was a divorcee in a Catholic country where marriage is still regarded as the proper marital status for women. Thus, if journalists commented on this aspect, they could have been accused of a bias against her.

However, the amount of coverage on Bachelet's individual and background traits was marginal. Four of the six traits measured were mentioned in fewer than 10 percent of the stories. This result is consistent with Norris' (1997) study on international female heads of state that found little evidence of gender role stereotyping in terms of appearance and background traits.

Because neutrality and balance are longstanding journalistic values, it was a surprise that in nine out of ten stories Bachelet was depicted as the likely winner of the election. This pattern held true for the six months of campaign coverage analyzed, including the runoff campaign, when Lavín called his former supporters to vote for Piñera. Thus, in stark contrast with previous research, gender differences in the horse race coverage favored the female candidate. In fact, with the significant amount of attention given to Bachelet's position in the race, readers could consider her to be the likely victor in her bid for the presidency without an election.

Why did journalists portray each candidate's chances of winning so differently? Perhaps the most important reason is that from the very beginning of the campaign the polls gave Bachelet the lead in the election. In fact, when the monitoring period for the newspaper coverage started (July 2005), the CEP survey gave Bachelet 48 percent of the vote, compared to Lavín's 22, Piñera's 16 and Hirsch's 1.5. When asked in the same poll about their preferences in the event of a runoff, Bachelet beat Lavín 56 to 29 percentage points and Piñera 55 to 27.5. Such unequal distribution of preferences might have prevented journalists

from artificially portraying a competitive, balanced race between Bachelet and her male contenders.

In terms of issues and personal characteristics, the findings of this study reveal some significant differences in the description of male and female candidates. While an association, albeit weak, was found between the agenda of issues of each candidate, press coverage of personal attributes revealed significant differences. In this case, readers were exposed to more coverage on Bachelet's fitness for office and leadership skills than to that of any of the male candidates, while they were considerably less exposed to information about her honesty and aggressiveness.

One of the most interesting and troubling finding has to do with the tone of the coverage. While Dussillant (2005) found that neutrality was the frame most frequently used by the Chilean press to describe the candidates of the 1999 election, this study found that journalists seldom described the personal characteristics of the competitors in a neutral manner. Thus, while Bachelet's charisma and honesty were framed positively, her competency was framed in an overwhelmingly negative manner. This came as no surprise because her qualification was perceived by her opponents as her most evident weakness, prompting campaign attacks that received wide publicity.

On the other hand, Piñera received a positive coverage of his personal characteristics and only one of the five attributes examined was framed in negative terms. These findings support the notion that the press portrayed Bachelet in the traditional female stereotype of care and compassion while the male candidates were framed in stereotypical masculine manners, described as competent and good leaders. In this sense, this study supports previous research that "the coverage of women (...) undermines [their] authority" (Wilson 2004:38).



As was predicted, the gender of the reporter did not account for any significant difference in the way the female candidate was covered, except in the case of frequency of mentions of Bachelet's sex. The evidence of this study supports the idea that female journalists were more likely than their male counterparts to emphasize the novelty of having a female state president. This finding supports Kahn and Goldenberg's (1991) claim that male reporters appear to be more neutral in their coverage, devoting most of their time to discussing personal traits regardless of the sex of the candidate. However, the fact that there was no other difference supports the notion that journalistic values and organizational routines are more powerful than reporters' demographical variables in "deciding what's news" (Gans 2004).

**Public perceptions of candidate attributes.** This study shows that there was a positive relationship between media attention to presidential candidates and public recognition of those figures. Bachelet received an amount of coverage that was consistent with her standing as the number one candidate in the polls throughout the time period examined, and so did her male contenders.

More interestingly, the three newspapers appear to have had a role in influencing the issues and personal characteristics that Chilean voters linked to Bachelet, Piñera and Lavín. Media coverage and public perceptions were closely related on the areas of economic growth, inequality, leadership, charisma and competency. In these five areas, public perceptions of the candidates closely matched the amount of coverage the candidates received. Thus, the results suggest the agenda of attributes mentioned in newspaper articles influenced the agenda of attributes that voters linked to the candidates. Moreover, this study found that positive media coverage may have led to positive public perceptions of the candidates' personal characteristics. For all four affective attributes measured, the tone of the

newspaper coverage was similar to the tone of voters' feelings towards the candidates. These findings suggest that media descriptions of female candidates can substantially shape the voters' image of female candidates.

Overall, the results of this study support the notion that in the 2005-2006 Chilean presidential election, the press covered male and female candidates differently; that the coverage was related to public perceptions of the candidates; and that many of the findings of previous studies conducted in the U.S. and Europe apply to developing countries such as Chile. In addition, this study advances agenda-setting theory. Although agenda-setting effects have been found in local, state and national elections, they have never been tested when a female is a serious contender for president.

However, the research design presents several limitations. First of all, it deals with one case study. Thus, it is not clear that the results can be extrapolated to other countries and cultures. For that, more subsequent studies are needed. Also, given its cross-sectional approach, this investigation employed only one public opinion poll—that is, there is no measure of the pre-campaign agenda of issues and personal attributes. Thus, future research should clarify the order of causation between the press agenda and the public agenda using a longitudinal design. The influence of the candidates' agenda, as expressed in their political advertisements, should also be addressed. This could help clarify to what degree female candidates, conscious of gender-based differences in media coverage, may actually seek to attract a gender-differentiated content in order to conform to the media's rules and get covered.

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### Notes

1. Other former Latin American female presidents, such as Violeta Chamorro in Nicaragua, Mireya Moscoso in Panama and Isabel Perón in Argentina, followed what Norris (1997) calls the “family mantle route” or, in the case of Lidia Geiler in Bolivia, were appointed to leadership through patronage.
2. In the first round, Bachelet comprised 47% of the female vote and 45% of the male vote. In the second round, 53% of the female voters and 54% of the male voters supported Bachelet.
3. A copy of the codebook may be obtained from the authors.
4.  $C.R. = 2M/N1 + N2$ , where C.R. is the coefficient of reliability, M is the number of coding decisions agreed on, and N1 and N2 are the total number of coding decisions made by each coder (Poindexter and McCombs 2000:203).
5. Specifically, the CEP survey asked: “The phrase that best describes your opinion about (name of the candidate) is: very negative, negative, neither negative nor positive, positive or very positive?” Other response choices were: “Don’t know the person”, “don’t know”, and “no answer”.

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**TABLE 1** *News coverage of individual traits and background information: Distribution by candidate<sup>a</sup>*

Reference	Bachelet (% of stories)	Piñera (% of stories)	Lavín (% of stories)	Hirsch (% of stories)
Gender	13	0**	0**	0**
Profession	13	14	7**	0**
Family/marital status	8	8	5**	2**
Appearance	4	2*	2*	0**
Household chores	2	0**	0*	0**
Economic status	2	9**	1	0**
(Valid cases)	(349)	(349)	(267)	(267)

a. Because multiple candidates could have been mentioned in each article, statistical significance for differences in coverage of individual traits were calculated through individual z tests for percentage differences between Bachelet and each male candidate (see Agresti and Finlay 1999:219-20).

\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*  $p < .001$

**TABLE 2** *Newspaper coverage of the horse race: Distribution by candidate*

<b>Description</b>	<b>Bachelet (% of stories)</b>	<b>Piñera (% of stories)</b>	<b>Lavín (% of stories)</b>	<b>Hirsch (% of stories)</b>
Likely winner candidate	88	2	0	0
Competitive candidate	12	83	82	5
Noncompetitive candidate	0	15	18	95
(Valid cases)	(92)	(65)	(51)	(19)

**TABLE 3** *Newspaper coverage of issues: Distribution by candidate*

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Bachelet (% of stories)</b>	<b>Piñera (% of stories)</b>	<b>Lavín (% of stories)</b>	<b>Hirsch (% of stories)</b>
Democracy / Human rights	15	5	5	1
Relationship with political parties	13	11	6	2
Economic growth / Business regulation	8	3	5	2
Employment / Labor protection	7	6	3	0
Poverty / Inequality	5	4	7	2
Crime / Corruption	5	5	13	1
International issues	5	2	3	2
(Valid cases)	(349)	(349)	(267)	(267)

**TABLE 4** *Newspaper coverage of personal characteristics by type and tone: Distribution by candidate*

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Bachelet (% of</b>	<b>Piñera (% of</b>	<b>Lavín (% of</b>	<b>Hirsch (% of</b>
Positive charisma /compassion	84	56	77	100
Neutral charisma /compassion	10	7	17	0
Negative charisma /compassion	6	37	7	0
(Valid cases)	(67)	(41)	(30)	(4)
Positive honesty	52	21	45	0
Neutral honesty	6	17	15	0
Negative honesty	42	62	40	100
(Valid cases)	(33)	(47)	(20)	(3)
Positive leadership	41	45	44	17
Neutral leadership	23	34	36	33
Negative leadership	36	21	20	50
(Valid cases)	(66)	(38)	(25)	(6)
Positive aggressiveness	36	15	21	42
Neutral aggressiveness	38	47	40	50
Negative aggressiveness	27	38	38	8
(Valid cases)	(45)	(60)	(42)	(12)
Positive competency	29	61	40	11
Neutral competency	16	20	16	0
Negative competency	54	20	44	89
(Valid cases)	(92)	(51)	(25)	(9)

**TABLE 5** *Comparison between author's gender<sup>a</sup> and mention of Michelle Bachelet's gender in news articles: A cross tabulation*

Bachelet's gender	Female authors only (% of stories)	Male authors only (% of stories)
Mentioned	25	10
Not mentioned	75	90
(Valid cases)	(68)	(146)

$\chi^2 = 8.895$ ; d.f. = 1,  $p < .01$ ;  $\phi = .204$ ,  $p < .01$

a. Articles authored by both males and females were excluded from the analysis.



**TABLE 6** *Comparison between newspaper coverage<sup>a</sup> and public perceptions of the candidates' attributes*

<b>Economic growth</b>	<b>Bachelet</b>	<b>Piñera</b>	<b>Lavín</b>
Public	34	37	18
Newspaper coverage	14	8	8
$\chi^2$ for public vs. newspaper coverage: 2.15, $p = 0.34$			
<b>Crime</b>	<b>Bachelet</b>	<b>Piñera</b>	<b>Lavín</b>
Public	33	20	32
Newspaper coverage	8	9	27
$\chi^2$ for public vs. newspaper coverage: 7.80, $p = 0.02$			
<b>Inequality</b>	<b>Bachelet</b>	<b>Piñera</b>	<b>Lavín</b>
Public	42	21	20
Newspaper coverage	13	6	9
$\chi^2$ for public vs. newspaper coverage: 0.78, $p = 0.68$			
<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Bachelet</b>	<b>Piñera</b>	<b>Lavín</b>
Public	38	29	19
Newspaper coverage	43	23	22
Positive coverage	21	7	9
$\chi^2$ for public vs. newspaper coverage: 1.19, $p = 0.55$			
$\chi^2$ for public vs. positive newspaper coverage: 2.83, $p = 0.24$			
<b>Charisma/Compassion</b>	<b>Bachelet</b>	<b>Piñera</b>	<b>Lavín</b>
Public	38	22	21
Newspaper coverage	44	24	26
Positive coverage	37	11	20
$\chi^2$ for public vs. newspaper coverage: 0.08, $p = 0.96$			
$\chi^2$ for public vs. positive newspaper coverage: 2.5, $p = 0.29$			
<b>Competency</b>	<b>Bachelet</b>	<b>Piñera</b>	<b>Lavín</b>
Public	38	27	21
Newspaper coverage	46	21	20
Positive coverage	14	14	6
$\chi^2$ for public vs. newspaper coverage: 1.54, $p = 0.46$			
$\chi^2$ for public vs. positive newspaper coverage: 1.19, $p = 0.55$			
<b>Honesty</b>	<b>Bachelet</b>	<b>Piñera</b>	<b>Lavín</b>
Public	40	21	20
Newspaper coverage	15	25	16
Positive coverage	9	9	7
$\chi^2$ for public vs. newspaper coverage: 7.79, $p = 0.02$			
$\chi^2$ for public vs. positive newspaper coverage: 1.5, $p = 0.47$			

a. Newspaper coverage refers to the number of stories published only before the public opinion poll, that is, between July 11, 2005 and November 13, 2005.