

## Coalition Politics and the Limits of State Feminism in Chile

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**ABSTRACT.** Studies of government agencies for women identify a series of factors necessary for a high level of commitment to feminist policy. These include strong grassroots pressure, a highly statist political culture, an organizational structure that facilitates cooperation with other government agencies, international norms, and political will on behalf of government leaders (Friedman 2000; Stetson and Mazur 1995). In Chile on the eve of democratic transition in 1989, all of these factors were in place. Since then, however, Chile's government agency for women, the National Women's Service (*Servicio Nacional de la Mujer*, SERNAM), has not proven to be a strong advocate of feminist policies. This study turns to the literature on coalition theory to explain why this is the case. The level of commitment to feminist policy within a women's agency varies depending on whether a government is controlled by a single party or a multiparty coalition. In a single-party government, the agenda of a particular ministry will closely match the platform of the governing party. In a coalition government—whether in a presidential or parliamentary system—the party controlling a particular ministry is in a position to exercise disproportionate control over policy within that jurisdiction, such that the policy may vary from the platform agreed upon by the coalition. In Chile from 1990 to 1999, SERNAM's policies reflected the

agenda of the Christian Democrats who served as ministers of the agency. Under their leadership, SERNAM pursued policies that demobilized the women's movement, limited the movement's impact on policy, and helped to build an alternative base of support among women. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

Government agencies for women have been created in numerous countries throughout the world. These agencies, known as women's policy machinery, have become important arenas for the adoption of policy stipulated by the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which 167 countries have ratified as of March 2000. Feminist activists have looked to government agencies for women as a means of forwarding women's rights and securing "a space in the state." Yet the extent to which such agencies implement feminist goals varies widely. What explains the level of commitment to feminist policy within government agencies whose mandate is to advance the status of women?<sup>1</sup>

In their path-breaking book on state feminism, Dorothy McBride Stetson and Amy Mazur (1995) identify mobilization, political culture, and organizational structure as the critical variables. On the basis of fourteen case studies of women's policy machinery in the developed world, they conclude that the "highest level of state feminism" will be present under three conditions: a balance between lobbying from moderate feminist groups and grassroots pressure from radical feminists outside the state; societies that favors strong state intervention; and agency structure that promotes or requires interministerial cooperation. Other studies have identified international factors and "political will" on behalf of government leaders as important (Friedman 2000).

Given these factors, the level of state feminism in Chile in the 1990s should have been very high. In 1989, on the eve of democratic transition in Chile, the variables identified as necessary for a strong state feminist agency were in place. Chilean women's organizations had created a vibrant, creative, and powerful movement amidst a repressive military dictatorship.<sup>2</sup> Moderate feminist organizations had formed a crosspartisan alliance to pressure the political parties of the incoming democratic government in order to adopt progressive policies for women, while radical factions of the women's movement remained highly critical of

the *políticas* who placed policy concerns above consciousness-raising. Chile's highly state-centric political culture had been reinforced by the military regime and a new constitution that gave significant powers to the executive branch. Male politicians across the spectrum recognized the importance of creating a state agency for women in order to comply with the international standards stipulated by CEDAW. In fact, General Augusto Pinochet himself ratified CEDAW in December 1989, just one week before the presidential election. Finally, incoming president Patricio Aylwin made an agency for women one of his legislative priorities.

Given these conditions, existing theories about state feminism would predict that Chile's agency for women would exhibit a high level of commitment to women's rights. Yet just the opposite proved to be true: the Chilean government's commitment to feminist policy has been notably weak (Cáceres et al. 1993; *Centro de Estudios de la Mujer* 1993; Frohmann and Valdés 1995; Matear 1996; Molina and Provoste 1997; Provoste 1995; Schild 1998; Valenzuela 1998; Waylen 1993, 1997). Since the transition to democracy in Chile in 1990, the government not only failed to promote gender equality, but adopted policies that weakened the ability of the women's movement to establish an institutional foothold in the government, as well as prevented movement organizations from building upon their existing base of popular support. Thus the Chilean case requires us to generate alternative explanations for the adoption of state feminist policy.

In this article, I turn to coalition theory to develop an alternative approach. I argue that the level of commitment to feminist policy within women's agencies differs according to whether the government is controlled by a single party or a multiparty coalition. In a single-party government, the party that controls the executive branch controls all the ministries. We can expect that the policies pursued by particular ministries will closely match the platform of that party. In this sense, if one knows the policy preferences of that party, it is straightforward to predict the policies it will implement. In coalition governments, the connection between platforms and policy is more complex. Parties in a governing coalition may agree upon a set of policies prior to election, but the actual policy implemented within a particular policy area may diverge from the agenda stipulated by the coalition as a whole, according to the distribution of ministerial portfolios among parties. Thus the level of state feminism achieved by a particular government depends upon the priorities of the party controlling the state feminist agency, a factor subject to party competition in a coalition government. This account suggests that femi-

nists may face greater obstacles to enacting their desired policy goals in coalition governments than in single-party governments. Alternatively, coalition governments could be particularly feminist friendly, depending on the degree to which the party controlling the women's ministry supports feminism. The bottom line is that the agenda control held by ministers makes the type of policy produced under coalition governments highly sensitive to the particular distribution of ministers across parties. Explanations of feminist policy outputs should, in turn, be sensitive to this characteristic of coalition government.

The policies adopted by the National Women's Service (*Servicio Nacional de la Mujer*, SERNAM) in Chile from 1990-1999 provide evidence that supports this argument. In Chile, the fate of SERNAM is best understood within the context of coalition politics, both in terms of conflicts between the governing coalition (the center-left *Concertación*) and the opposition (the center-right *Unión por Chile*), as well as within the *Concertación* itself.<sup>3</sup> The leading party within the *Concertación*—the Christian Democratic Party (PDC)—sought to protect its interests and to prevent its main coalition partners, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Party for Democracy (PPD), from claiming the women's movement as an electoral constituency. As the dominant party in the governing coalition, the Christian Democrats used the extensive powers of office afforded to the executive branch to demobilize the women's movement, limit the movement's impact on policy, and build an alternative base of support among female voters. Having a member of the Christian Democratic Party serve as Minister of SERNAM (the women's policy agency) was critical to achieving these goals.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I place this study in the context of approaches that focus on the gendered nature of political institutions. I then develop an alternative explanation of state feminism based on coalition theory. The following sections provide an overview of the Chilean women's movements and examine evidence drawn from the Chilean case, in terms of agency creation, agency leadership, budget conflicts, and legislative outcomes. I conclude by suggesting avenues for future comparative research on women's policy machinery.

### ***EXPLAINING STATE FEMINISM: GENDERED INSTITUTIONS***

Low levels of state feminism can be attributed in part to the persistence of *machismo* in politicians' attitudes and to the gendered nature of politi-

cal institutions, as well as to the nature of women's movements (Alvarez 1990; Friedman 1998; Villaroel 1994). From this perspective, male politicians are systematically biased against the participation of women and the incorporation of women's concerns onto the political agenda. *Machismo* seems to go a long way in accounting for the low priority of women's issues and small budgets of women's policy machinery; few government agencies for women enjoy more than 1% of the government budget overall (Stetson and Mazur 1995). Male politicians exclude women intentionally—by neglecting to support their advance in political leadership—and unintentionally—by sustaining practices and modes of behavior that are commonly associated with men. As Elisabeth J. Friedman (1998, 89) puts it:

Because the major "construction workers" building or rebuilding democracies are men, the political structures they put in place tend to favor their own gender—and thus exclude women. The founders of such institutions do not necessarily seek to privilege men's participation. But in designing political mechanisms with male politicians in mind, they end up creating institutions into which women do not "fit."

The gendered nature of institutions provides one account for why government ministries for women tend to be weak relative to other ministries, in terms of their budget and their ability to implement policy. The experiences of movement activists and female politicians strongly attest to the prevalence of retrograde attitudes toward women and confirms that political activities tend to favor men's participation over women's. Stereotypical feminine styles of leadership and decision-making are ridiculed or ignored, and the rigorous schedules of politicians, including frequent late-night meetings, for example, deter many women from pursuing political careers (Hola and Pischedda 1993).

Ample evidence suggests that the exclusion of women and women's interests from politics reflects deeply held cultural norms about gender. But this approach cannot explain variation across cases. It rests on an assumption that men's and women's interests are necessarily and dichotomously opposed. It implies that cultural patterns of *machismo* are inevitable and permanently resistant to change, suggesting that all men everywhere always have the same interests in keeping women out of power and that gender inequality is inevitable, regardless of the strategies women pursue to combat it. Yet different institutional structures can reward and/or sanction gender-specific behavior in different ways.

Ideally, alternative institutional arrangements can prompt even the most *macho* politicians to develop an interest in promoting progressive policies for women. Institutional design can alter or at least suppress certain cultural patterns and practices, even the most primordial ones (Laitin 1986). In Chile, the nature of bargaining, within coalition politics, structures the incentives of different parties in different ways.

### ***AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION: COALITION THEORY***

Discussions of coalition politics in Latin America have focused on relations between democratic governments and their authoritarian predecessors. Some have argued that the persistence of "reserved domains" or authoritarian enclaves in Latin American democracies will prevent newly elected democratic governments from enacting their policy agendas. Outgoing military dictators in Latin America sought to protect their interests by putting in place institutional arrangements that aimed to tie the hands of incoming democrats and severely restrict the scope of policy they could pursue (Agüero 1997; Casper 1995; Karl 1990; Remmer 1990; Zagorski 1992). This would appear to be nowhere more evident than in Chile, where General Augusto Pinochet engaged in strenuous efforts to consolidate his power from the early years of his regime.

Some argue that these arrangements make the implementation of redistributive policies unlikely (Galleguillos and Nef 1992; Matear 1996; Petras and Leiva 1994; Waylen 1993, 1994). However, other studies suggest that new governments have been able to exercise power in some arenas despite the persistence of authoritarian enclaves. Weyland (1997), for example, has shown that the Chilean government not only implemented progressive tax and social policies, but that these policies reduced poverty in real terms. Baldez and Carey (1999) argue that the Chilean Constitution gives considerable budget-making authority to the executive, permitting the executive to forward its fiscal agenda despite conservative opposition. Thus, in Chile, to a greater extent than other Latin American countries, the executive branch is uniquely poised to have a powerful influence over agenda-setting and policy-making.

Several implications for the success of gender policies follow from this account of the Chilean institutional context. First, the executive should be able to promote its policy agenda for women against the objections of its conservative opponents. From this perspective, feminists' decision to push for the creation of an executive agency to oversee women's issues should have proven to be a particularly savvy one,

given the extent to which the executive branch dominates the policy-making process. Second, women's organizations should have a greater chance of achieving policy change when they pursue their objectives through the executive branch than when they work within the legislative branch or organize outside the political system altogether, as independent interest groups. However, these hypotheses are not borne out from the record of implementation of the goals of the women's movement since 1990. If the executive branch has so much power, why didn't it use this power to forward the women's movement agenda?

The answer to this question lies in the complex negotiations among political parties and their competition for votes within a coalition government. The Chilean executive enjoys considerable power, but that power has been shared among a coalition of political parties since the transition. The executive is not a unitary actor. The framers of the 1980 Constitution chose Chile's electoral system in the hopes that it would promote the formation of a two-party system, and thus limit the chronic instability and partisan politicking associated with the political system prior to the 1973 coup (Baldez and Carey 1999; Siavelis 1996). While this has not happened—Chile is still a multiparty system—the parties have tended to organize themselves into coalitions that function like parties in important respects. Roll call voting data suggests that discipline at the level of coalition is maintained on the floor of Congress, but coalition unity is stronger across some policy dimensions than in others. Discipline within the ruling coalition, as well as within each of the constituent parties, is relatively weak on social issues, compared to economic or foreign policy issues (Carey 1999; Londregan 2000). The Christian Democrats have tended to favor a more conservative line on social issues, consistent with Roman Catholic Church doctrine, while the Socialist Party and the Party for Democracy have supported more progressive views on issues that center on sexuality, the family, and the role of women. The views of these two leftist parties are much closer to the core concerns forwarded by the women's movement than to the Christian Democrats. The differences among the main parties in terms of their views on abortion and divorce are presented in Table 1.

The party that controls the presidency controls the considerable legislative and fiscal powers afforded to the executive by the Chilean Constitution. Prior to 1999, the presidential candidate for the *Concertación* had been selected behind closed doors, beyond public purview. It is reasonable to expect that levels of electoral support enjoyed by the various parties were critical to determining which party got to run its presiden-

TABLE 1. Chilean Legislators' Opinions About Abortion and Divorce, 1994  
(% of total)

		Socialist Party	Party for Democracy	Christian Democrats	National Renovation	Indep. Dem. Union
Legalized Abortion	Support	8	9	0	0	8
	Regulated	92	73	19	25	0
	Oppose	0	18	81	75	92
Legalized Divorce	Support	17	55	17	4	8
	Regulated	60	45	60	58	0
	Oppose	23	0	23	38	92

Source: Fuentes 1999, 201.

tial candidate.<sup>4</sup> Thus, each party within the coalition has an interest in courting those constituencies it expects will bring them votes.

The conventional wisdom about coalition systems is that the set of policies a given government will pursue is determined largely before the election, on the basis of compromises and agreements among coalition partners. If this is the case, we should expect that the policies adopted by SERNAM would match the platform stipulated by the incoming government in 1989. But Laver and Shepsle (1996) argue that the policies adopted by a governing coalition will vary by portfolio. In a coalition government, policy reflects not an amalgam or blend of party preferences, but a set of fixed points that varies according to which party controls which ministry. Coalitions may articulate a platform for the purposes of campaigning, but the informational and procedural advantages inherent to ministerial positions means that actual policy implementation depends on the will of particular politicians. In other words, "the entire process of policy formation on any given issue is very heavily influenced by whoever has political clout over the relevant government department—the cabinet minister of the department concerned" as identified both by party label and personal reputation (Laver and Shepsle 1996, 13). The policies pursued by a particular minister can reflect the preferences of that minister's party rather than the preferences of the coalition overall as identified by its platform. Laver and Shepsle further argue that if portfolios change hands among the parties within a given coalition, the result must be considered as a new government that will generate distinct policy outputs. Although these findings have been de-



rived from observations about parliamentary systems, it is reasonable to assume that the same logic applies in presidential systems governed by coalitions of parties (rather than single parties), as recent work by Octavio Amorim-Neto (1998) suggests.

When a single party controls the executive branch, slippage between the government platform and the policies actually implemented by a particular agency is less likely to occur than in a coalition government. Policy agendas can be explained in terms of the government/party's commitment (or lack thereof) to a particular constituency or set of issues. In single-party systems, "the fate of the [women's] agency [is] largely dictated by the will of the president," as Friedman (2000, 73) has convincingly argued in the case of Venezuela. The *Instituto de la Mujer* in Spain provides additional evidence for this claim. The Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE) has controlled the executive since 1982. Close links between the Instituto and the PSOE have facilitated a strong commitment to feminist policy in Spain, most notably indicated by the government's limited legalization of abortion (Threlfall 1996; Valiente 1995).

### **THE CHILEAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

Chilean women mobilized to support the creation of a women's ministry, but their strategies did not prove effective in negotiating concessions within the governing coalition. Feminist activists consistently emphasized cross-partisan unity, even in the face of deep and persistent conflicts among female activists. To a certain extent, the experience of living under authoritarianism and the fear of a return to military rule elicits cooperation among groups that ordinarily would be opposed to one another. At many points since the transition to democracy in Chile, the fear of a return to dictatorship has been palpable. Memories of the past in Chile remain intense and raw ten years after the return to civilian rule. From this perspective, those who suffered under dictatorial regimes have been willing to moderate their demands in order to enhance the stability of the new system and to limit the chances that dictators would return to power (Hipsher 1996). These sentiments have prompted convergence on policy outcomes (Drake 1996; Weyland 1997).<sup>5</sup> In the case of the women's movement, activists did temper their demands somewhat in the hopes of avoiding conflict with conservatives. The Coalition of Women for Democracy, for example, consciously left the issues of abortion and divorce off its agenda so as not to jeopardize its

chances of passing more moderate reforms (Matear 1996). To a certain extent, however, these compromises made in the spirit of cooperation and desire for stability worked against the interests of the left.

At several points during the repressive military regime of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1989), diverse groups of female activists converged in a united front to oppose the dictatorship and to promote women's rights. Chilean feminists developed "a new way of doing politics" that diverged from male models of partisan politicking. A rally organized by women's groups on March 8, 1989, the year that democratic elections would be held in Chile for the first time since the coup, exemplified women's alternative style of political engagement. The demonstration commemorated International Women's Day and kicked off the upcoming political campaign. Organizers billed the event as an artistic-cultural rally, with dancing, singing and theatrical performances, centered on the theme "democracy works because women are there" (*la democracia va porque la mujer está*). Graciela Borquez, a leader of *Mujeres por la Vida*, one of the organizations that led the struggle against the military regime, described what was different about this demonstration:

[There won't be any speeches] because we have found that speeches are so boring; we can say the same thing in visual form, with another language, which today will be *muy de mujer*, with our affective side, our feelings. Let me sum it up by saying it will be an event with an open heart, with our heads in the stars and our feet on the ground. (Imperatore 1989)

Indeed, this demonstration was not a typical political rally. Participants took their seats in one of four quadrants in the Santa Laura stadium in downtown Santiago, representing different aspects of women's roles. The west represented culture: "the witches with their brooms, singers, pianists, violinists, and dancers" ("Diferente será". . . 1989). The other sections represented women as workers, students, and mothers. The event ended with the enactment of the birth of the "new woman," performed by two enormous puppets. As *La Época*, then the leading opposition newspaper, reported, "These figures, in the midst of a dialogue about the importance of birth, the loss of fear and the hope of giving birth, told the story of the role of women in Chilean history, beginning with Mapuche women, the colonial era, Independence, the Republic and 1973" (Imperatore 1989). The Santa Laura rally celebrated women's efforts to oust the dictatorship and epitomized what Chilean feminists envisioned when they talked about "a new way of doing politics." The

event also demonstrated the strength of the women's movement; an estimated 20,000 women attended, making it the largest event that the movement had organized during the Pinochet regime.

This display of unity masked deep divisions between *feministas* committed to building the movement and *políticas* focused on policy goals, as well as conflicts among women from different political parties. Yet the strength of the women's movement derived from its ability to convene women across party lines and to mobilize outside the realm of party politics. While some women's organizations developed alternative political practices, others sought to promote gender-related policy issues through more conventional channels. To this end, leading activists in the women's movement organized the Coalition of Women for Democracy (*Concertación de Mujeres por la Democracia*, CMD) to pressure the opposition to incorporate women's issues onto the political agenda. The day before the Santa Laura rally, for example, the CMD sponsored a breakfast with politicians from the Coalition of Parties for Democracy to lobby for the adoption of gender-based policies for women. The CMD successfully lobbied to get the following five issues placed on Patricio Aylwin's platform: the creation of a cabinet-level ministry for women, positive discrimination measures to increase women's political representation, programs for poor women, and legislation on equal employment opportunities and equal pay. This platform represented the culmination of years of discussions, compromises, and strategizing among activists in the women's movement. It represented a set of demands that satisfied people across the political spectrum, reflecting the notion that women's clout derived from their ability to unite across partisan and other divisions.

From the perspective of the political parties, however, the movement represents and always has represented a primarily leftist constituency, particularly at the grassroots level. The three distinct kinds of organizations that made up the women's movement during the dictatorship—human rights organizations, economic subsistence organizations, and feminist groups—all lean to the left in terms of their political sympathies. This is perhaps most clear with the human rights organizations, which had relatively strong ties to leftist parties in comparison to other women's organizations. As María Elena Valenzuela (1995, 167) notes, "The close links of [human rights] groups to the proscribed [i.e., Marxist] political parties, out of whose ranks most of the victims of the repression came, led these organizations to give higher priority to partisan activities." Economic subsistence groups, such as soup kitchens, shopping collectives, and craft workshops tended to be organized in shanty-

towns whose affiliation with the left was well known (Oxhorn 1995; Schneider 1995). The majority of feminist organizations also sympathized with the left, although they sought to establish a measure of autonomy from the political parties (Chuchryk 1984; Kirkwood 1986; Molina 1989; Muñoz 1987). Many of the core organizations of the women's movement had been active in leftist political parties prior to the coup (Valenzuela 1995; Chuchryk 1984, 1994).

This is not to say that women with more centrist political orientations did not participate in the women's movement, or that all members of the Christian Democratic Party viewed the women's movement as an electoral threat. Graciela Borquez, the woman from *Mujeres por la Vida* quoted above, served as a member of the executive committee of the Christian Democratic Party. Several female leaders in the PDC actively participated in the Coalition of Women for Democracy, including Senator Carmen Frei (daughter of the former President Frei and sister of the current President Frei) and former congresswomen Wilna Saavedra and Mariana Aylwin, the daughter of President Patricio Aylwin. Many male PDC leaders have supported feminist concerns, including Congressman Ignacio Walker, one of the leading proponents of divorce legislation.

Yet few of the grassroots-level organizations within the women's movement sympathized with the Christian Democrats. As one feminist activist commented:

The PDC wasn't linked to the struggle during the dictatorship, and lacked a strong connection with people at the base; moreover, people at the base didn't have faith in [the PDC] . . . Women's organizations had spent more than a decade working with poor women (*pobladoras*) all over the country. But when SERNAM Minister Soledad Alvear [a Christian Democrat] traveled around Chile to publicize the government's programs for women, people would come up to me and say hello, greet me enthusiastically, but they had nothing to say to her. (Isabel N. 1994)

Despite its appeal to crosspartisan unity, the bridge built by the women's movement reached relatively few women on the center-right of the political spectrum.

To my knowledge, no one in the women's movement supported the rightist parties. Conservatives tend to view the women's movement, and feminism in particular, as a cultural cover for the traditional Marxist-Leninist left and an unacceptable threat to the social order. In an article discussing the National Women's Service, for example, Lucía Santa Cruz,

a leading conservative pundit, describes feminists as a special interest group that seeks to use the state to further its own concerns “at the expense of the general interest of the country, especially the poor” (Santa Cruz 1994).

This acknowledgment of the predominantly leftist orientation of the women’s movement will come as a surprise to no one, given the context in which the movement emerged and the issues around which women mobilized. Nonetheless, this point is critical to understanding the fate of the movement’s demands in the period following the transition to democracy in Chile. The predominant party within the *Concertación*, the centrist Christian Democrats, had little to gain by meeting the demands of the women’s movement and much to lose by sustaining the movement as an autonomous political actor. The *Concertación*’s policy toward women in the 1990s can be explained as the result of efforts by the Christian Democratic Party to regain control of women’s political agenda, to mobilize a new constituency of women loyal to the party, and to limit the ability of the leftist parties, particularly the PS and the PPD, to be perceived as representing women’s interests.

### ***AGENCY CREATION***

The creation of a government office for women was one of the central demands that activists in the women’s movement made in the context of the transition to democracy (“Demanda de las mujeres” 1988). Women’s decision to focus their efforts on the creation of a national ministry for women stemmed from the experiences of other countries that had recently restored democracy—especially Argentina, Brazil and Spain—and reflected the issues spelled out in CEDAW, the United Nations’ treaty on women’s rights (Valenzuela 1998). President Aylwin moved quickly to honor his campaign commitment to create a government agency for women. Two months after taking office, in May 1990, Aylwin signed the National Women’s Service into being, with the stipulation that it be approved by Congress. The decision to submit the creation of SERNAM to legislative approval honored the CMD’s desire to make it a permanent agency that would not be eliminated with a change of government (Valenzuela 1998).

Politicians from the two main parties on the right, National Renovation (RN) and the Independent Democratic Union (UDI), condemned the proposed agency as a vehicle for feminist propaganda, an unnecessary aggrandizement of government power, and an unjust intrusion into

the private sphere. They objected strenuously to the principles articulated in SERNAM's enabling legislation: that men and women are equal, that women should participate fully in Chile's development, that traditional differences between men and women are the source of discrimination against women, and, furthermore, that the government should play an active role in combating these stereotypes.

In the face of conservative opposition to the proposal, provisional SERNAM appointees sought to mobilize support for the initiative among women's organizations. The agency convened a series of meetings with local women's groups throughout Santiago to increase awareness of the agency's mandate and to bolster public support for its enabling legislation. These meetings involved hundreds of poor and working-class women. Discussion at these meetings centered on two questions: "How can we, as women's organizations, help the creation of SERNAM?," and "What ways can we identify to establish real and effective communication between women's organizations and SERNAM?" Participants signed petitions affirming their support for the law's approval, but expressed intense dissatisfaction that the meetings focused more on the government's priorities than on those of women's organizations.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the government's own efforts to mobilize support for the agency, most women's movement organizations refrained from organizing their own campaigns on SERNAM's behalf. They feared that their demands would exacerbate conservative opposition and threaten the agency's approval by the legislature. "It is an extremely, extremely delicate situation. If we exert pressure, it will frighten the right," stated one woman who headed a women's center in Valparaíso (Zuleta 1990). Activists moderated their lobbying efforts for fear of exacerbating tensions between the government and the pro-military opposition and did not negotiate for concessions within the governing coalition.

The bill creating SERNAM passed, retaining the originally specified levels of personnel and funding (Waylen 1997). The minister of the women's agency would serve as a member of the president's cabinet, but the agency itself would be subsumed under the Ministry for Planning and Cooperation. Conservative parties compromised on the issue of creating an advisory council to oversee the agency and the right to audit programs funded by international sources.

One of the agency's central programs is a national network of information centers (*Centros de Información y Difusión de la Mujer*, CIDEM) that serves as a point of contact between the agency and the public. In instituting these centers, the agency took over a well-established network of centers that had been established by women's groups prior to

the transition. The original network, known as RIDEM (*Red de Información y Difusión de la Mujer*), aimed to provide women with information about their legal rights. As one RIDEM's organizers said, "Women knew nothing of their rights, about marriage, about divorce. Some women would get married twice and end up in jail, without understanding why" (Isabel N. 1994).<sup>7</sup> In refashioning the centers, however, "the Christian Democrats came in and reconstructed entire existing programs, took them over" without acknowledging or incorporating the women who had put the programs together amid intense repression, despite their offers to help (Isabel N. 1994). Because the centers were designed to make contact with women as individuals, and not as representatives of organizations, they further distanced SERNAM from the women's movement (Schild 1998).

At the same time that the women's rights centers were being debated in Congress, however, the government created a series of parallel organizations that mobilized poor and working-class women in their capacity as mothers, under the direction of the president's wife and within the rubric of the party system. These initiatives included the *Programa de Promoción y Desarrollo de la Mujer* (PRODEMU), a national network of mother's centers; *Fundación Integra*, a network of day care centers for poor and working-class women; and *Fundación Nacional de la Familia*, an organization designed "to reinforce the role of the family in poor and working class neighborhoods" (Valenzuela 1999a). The government established PRODEMU in part to provide an alternative to the network of mothers' centers that had been controlled by General Pinochet's wife, Lucia Hiriart, under the military government (Waylen 1997, 99). While these measures would appear to meet women's demands to a certain extent, these programs have been criticized as reflecting the ideology of more conservative sectors within the Christian Democratic Party. The new mothers' centers permit the PDC to consolidate support among *pobladoras*, one of the parties' primary electoral constituencies prior to the coup. The mothers' centers also allow the Christian Democratic Party to develop support among organized women, rather than individual women. Regardless of the government's intentions in creating these parallel organizations, they compete with SERNAM for resources and access to women's organizations (Guzmán, Lerda, and Salazar 1994).

The first two administrations of the *Concertación* government have poured resources into the mothers' centers, while the women's rights centers have operated on a minimal budget. During the first administration, funding for the mothers' centers came from 22 government agencies, 11 foreign embassies, 9 NGOs and 10 private companies (including

Coca-Cola). While it is difficult to determine the actual budgets for either of these programs, the numbers of women served by each one indicate a wide disparity in resources. Approximately 300,000 women have been seen by the women's rights centers between 1991 and 1999. During the same period, PRODEMU reached more than 200,000 women *each year* (see Table 2).

In creating the National Women's Agency, government officials sought to appease conservative opponents on the right and to limit the agency's ability to maintain contact with organized women's groups at the grass-roots level. In the midst of heated debates about SERNAM, the executive quietly created a parallel agency for women, PRODEMU, to which it has devoted far more resources than it has to SERNAM. This apparent duplication represents an effort to demobilize the women's movement and activate new women's groups closely linked to the executive and the Christian Democratic Party through the First Lady.

### AGENCY LEADERSHIP

Within the governing coalition, the Christian Democratic Party has been the least sympathetic to feminist concerns (see Table 1). Thus the appointment of Christian Democrats as ministers of SERNAM has played a significant role in determining the nature of the agency's policy in the 1990s. Coalition conflicts between the Christian Democrats and the left-ist Socialist Party and Party for Democracy have figured prominently

TABLE 2. Comparison of Women's Rights Centers and Mothers' Centers

	Women's Rights Centers	Mothers' Centers
Government Agency	SERNAM	First Lady under PRODEMU
Mandate	Inform women of legal rights	Workshops on handicrafts, sewing
# Clients	300,000 women 1991-1999	200,000+ women each year 1991-1999
Form of contact with clients	Counselors meet with individual women	Monitors create new women's organizations
Budget Sources	50% funded by Swedish govt; 50% funded by Chilean govt	Funded by 22 government agencies, 11 foreign embassies, 9 NGOs and 10 private companies (incl. Coca-Cola)

Source: SERNAM (1999) and Fundación para la Promoción y Desarrollo de la Mujer (1994).



into the appointment of SERNAM's leadership. In the women's agency and all other government ministries, the *Concertación* has sought to maintain a balance of power by dividing cabinet posts among the parties in the coalition. In both administrations, the minister and vice-ministers for each ministry have come from different parties. This allows the parties within the coalition to keep watch over one another, and ostensibly prevents government agencies from being "captured" by a particular constituency (Laver and Shepsle 1996). In formal terms, the women's agency is no exception to this policy. In 1991, President Aylwin named Soledad Alvear from the Christian Democratic Party as SERNAM's Director and Soledad Larraín from the Socialist Party as Subdirector. When Soledad Larraín resigned in 1992, she was replaced by María Teresa Chadwick, another Socialist. In 1994, President Frei named Christian Democrat Josefina Bilbao as Minister and Socialist Paulina Veloso as Subdirector; Veloso was replaced by Socialist Natacha Molina in 1997.

The story behind these appointments suggests that the *Concertación* explicitly sought to limit the extent to which SERNAM would advocate the agenda of the women's movement. Neither of the agency's directors, Alvear nor Bilbao, had any ties to the women's movement. Alvear, a lawyer, came to women's issues through her work on legal reform; Bilbao served as head of the Carlos Casanueva Institute, an organization dedicated to the preservation of the family, prior to her appointment. Larraín, however, had been a long-time feminist activist with strong ties to *pobladora* organizations. Many viewed her presence in SERNAM as critically important to the advance of feminist concerns in the government. In 1992, however, she resigned her post over political conflicts with Alvear.

Conservatives applauded Larraín's resignation. Although opposition leaders were deeply suspicious of *all* the Socialists who served in Aylwin's cabinet, they viewed Soledad Larraín as a particularly grave threat because of her feminist views and her strong connections to popular organizations. During the legislative debates on the creation of SERNAM, for example, Fernanda Otero, a deputy from the National Renovation Party, asserted, "Leonor Oyarzún [the wife of President Aylwin] understands the views of [our party], but I doubt that Soledad Larraín does" (Escobar 1990). Another RN deputy, María Angelica Cristi, criticized the "liberal, feminist, Gramscian" view that Larraín represented (Galaz 1992). The appointment of María Teresa Chadwick to replace Larraín did not arouse the same degree of opposition, perhaps because she did not represent a grassroots feminist constituency. Similar conflicts that surfaced between the PDC and the PS/PPD in other ministries suggest

that the PDC has used cabinet appointments to maintain its dominant position within the coalition.<sup>8</sup> While there are too few cases—and too many anomalies among them—to determine a clear pattern, it does appear that the PDC has ousted socialist officials within SERNAM for espousing the goals of the women's movement.

The tenor of SERNAM's policies should change under the guidance of a minister from a different party. In March 2000, Socialist Party President Ricardo Lagos appointed a new head of SERNAM, Adriana Delpiano from the leftist Party for Democracy.<sup>9</sup> The next few years will determine the extent to which this change will result in more explicitly feminist policy. President Lagos has already far surpassed his predecessors in appointing women to high-level positions in the executive branch. Delpiano is one of five women members of Lagos' cabinet, in addition to eight female subsecretaries ("Few New Faces . . ." 2000).

### **BUDGET CONFLICTS**

The most important indicator of a government's commitment to a particular policy area is budget allocations. Worldwide, women's policy agencies command extremely small budgets, less than 1% of total government expenditures in most cases (Stetson and Mazur 1995). SERNAM's budget is small even by these standards, less than 0.1% of the total budget for the Chilean government since 1990. SERNAM has relied heavily on funding from international sources, receiving as many as three to four times its government allocations from foreign governments and non-governmental organizations (Valenzuela 1998). While remaining minuscule relative to other government programs, SERNAM's budget grew at a faster rate than the government budget overall between 1992 and 1996 (Baldez and Carey 1999). Part of this impressive rate of increase may be accounted for by the government replacing the agency's international funding (part of the initial agreement for the agency) and part by "ongoing pressure" (Valenzuela 1998). However, these increases are especially significant given the opposition that the agency has faced, both from conservatives on the right and within the *Concertación* itself.

The 1996 budget rounds provide a particularly interesting demonstration of the nature of the government's fiscal commitment to SERNAM. The budget negotiations took place a few months after the Fourth World Conference on the Status of Women, held in Beijing, China, in September 1995. The release of the Chilean government's platform for that conference unleashed a storm of controversy and public debate (Franco

1998; Guzmán and Mauro 1997). The document, which SERNAM had prepared in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Women (*Centro de Estudios de la Mujer*, CEM), a feminist think-tank, outlined a comprehensive series of reforms to government policy toward women. Conservatives found the language of the document, particularly the use of the term “gender,” particularly worrisome. Conservative newspapers published articles about the upcoming conference with titles such as “Goodbye to the Masculine and Feminine, Hello Gender” (“Fin a lo femenino . . .” 1994), “Gender Theory Means Savage Slavery for Women” (“Doctora Maritza Busquets” . . . 1995) and “Equality or Feminist Totalitarianism?” (Molina 1995).

The opposition-controlled Senate adopted a resolution censuring Chile’s platform for the Beijing Conference. Ten senators from the *Concertación*—nine Christian Democrats and one from the Party for Democracy—joined their colleagues on the right to support this resolution. In response, President Frei changed the language of the Beijing Platform to “lower the tone” of the document (Valenzuela 1999b). The introduction to the final document was rewritten to affirm the family as the central unit of society, explicitly oppose abortion, and eliminate the word “gender” (“Declaración Pública” . . . 1995). Nonetheless, women from the opposition parties continued to criticize SERNAM—even at the Beijing Conference itself. In Beijing, RN deputy Cristi distributed a pamphlet opposing the government’s position, which many considered to be inappropriate given the official nature of the conference. Thus the government’s efforts to mute the feminist tone of the Plan did little to appease conservatives.

Ultimately, this war of words against SERNAM took concrete form. The controversy spurred by the Beijing Conference carried over to the 1996 budget negotiations, which began a few weeks after the U.N. conference ended. In the Joint Budget Committee (*Comisión Mixta*), opposition deputies proposed a series of cuts to SERNAM, totaling 12% of four key items in SERNAM’s proposed budget (República de Chile 1995). The budget committee rejected the cuts and voted down the opposition amendment. Subsequently, however, final passage of the committee’s budget bill was stalled by opposition in the Senate. This prompted a round of eleventh-hour negotiations between members of the committee and the Finance Ministry to hammer out a compromise that could pass in both chambers of Congress before the deadline for passing the budget. At this point, the opposition legislators re-introduced the initial cuts to SERNAM, which enjoyed strong support in the Senate. In

the end, the government agreed to cut 3% from SERNAM's proposed budget.

It is important to note that most of the opposition's proposed reductions were not approved, but some of them were re-integrated into the budget law at the precise levels initially requested by the opposition. These budget cuts prompted outrage from SERNAM officials: even though the final reductions were substantially less than the amounts stipulated in the initial amendments proposed by the opposition legislators, SERNAM was one of the few agencies that sustained cuts of any kind. What really stung was that these cuts were made in the context of overall increases in social spending (Baldez and Carey 1999). Nonetheless, despite the cuts, the agency's 1996 budget still represented an increase over the previous year. These conflicts over the budget demonstrate the government's willingness to sustain high levels of funding to the agency—but only to fund programs supported by the agency's minister, Christian Democrat Josefina Bilbao. The government punished SERNAM for endorsing policies too far to the left by changing the text of the agency's policy statement, but it maintained a relatively high level of spending for the agency overall. In light of these overall increases to the agency's budget, it is difficult to interpret the 1996 budget conflicts as anything more than a light slap on the wrist.

### LEGISLATIVE OUTCOMES

Since the transition, the Chilean Congress has passed an impressive number of laws: a total of 693 between 1990 and 1997 (Siavelis 2000). Most successful legislation has been initiated by the executive: 83% of the new laws began as executive *mensajes*, compared to 17% as legislative *mociones* (Siavelis 1998). The fate of legislative proposals dealing specifically with women's issues echo these findings. Of the 24 bills pertaining to women that were introduced between 1990 and 1995, eleven of them—almost half—have become law. Of those 24 bills, nine of them were introduced as executive *mensajes*; seven of these ultimately became law. The remaining fifteen pieces of legislation were introduced by legislators; of these, three have become law (Haas 2000). One of these three, the *Ley de Violencia Intrafamiliar* (Law 19.335), was co-sponsored by SERNAM, so it cannot be considered as an ordinary legislative proposal. This evidence suggests that the executive's ability to pass laws pertaining to women is far superior to legislators'.

The parties within the governing coalition differ in terms of their commitment to women's policy concerns, as we can see by comparing the legislative voting record of members of Congress from the PS/PPD with those of the PDC. Legislators on the left have tended to vote more favorably on bills for women than their cohorts in the PDC. This claim is tentatively supported by Haas (2000), who shows that leftist legislators broke coalition ranks to promote women's bills in 5 out of 24 cases, and voted to support progressive legislation when the PDC voted against it.

However, given the small universe of bills for women that have been considered in Congress, a more in-depth analysis of particular bills is warranted to determine whether they are consistent with the goals espoused by the women's movement and the Coalition of Women for Democracy. Closer inspection reveals that the feminist tenor of SERNAM's policies toward women has been tempered and replaced with a discourse that focuses on women's roles as mothers, within the context of the family (Valenzuela 1998). Legislation on domestic violence is one example. Congress passed legislation sanctioning domestic violence, but they redefined the issue as one of "violence between men and women" rather than violence against women, thus removing the issue of gender inequality and power from the legal definition of spousal violence (Matear 1996). The change of the bill's name from the Domestic Violence Law to the Interfamily Violence Law reflects this change in content.

Implementation of the Interfamily Violence Law has been severely hampered by lack of funding for resources for victims of domestic violence. Women have the legal right to take their husbands to court in domestic abuse cases, and they might be fortunate enough to work with police that have been trained in domestic violence cases. State funding has been limited to counseling and awareness programs; however, the legislation has made no provision for public funding for shelters for domestic violence victims. The programs that do exist have been only moderately successful. One study conducted by researchers at the Instituto de la Mujer found that most women were not familiar with the *centros de atención* that had been set up to counsel victims of domestic abuse; in fact, women who were victims of abuse were even less likely to know about the center than other women in their *comuna* (Provoste 1995).

### CONCLUSION

Since Chile's transition to democracy in 1990, some important changes in women's legal status have been made and public awareness of women's issues has increased. Overall, however, the government's record on implementation of policies that promote women's equality is not impressive. Abortion remains absent from the political agenda and Congress has failed to pass legislation legalizing divorce. Only two of the demands presented by the Coalition of Women for Democracy have been met. These successes—the creation of SERNAM and the passage of domestic violence legislation—have been weakly implemented and represent a watered-down commitment to the concerns expressed by the women's movement. The government's agenda has diverged significantly from the goals stipulated by its campaign platform. This disappointing record has prompted many feminist activists to question whether it is advisable to continue to pursue gender policy through state channels (Barrig 1997; Valenzuela 1999a).

Why has SERNAM been such a weak advocate of state feminism? Why didn't the favorable conditions in place in 1989 translate into political clout for feminists in the new democratic administration? In the period leading up to the democratic transition, the Coalition of Women for Democracy studied state feminist institutions in other countries, and developed strategies they expected would enhance the influence of the Chilean women's movement on state policy relative to movements elsewhere. The CMD established an alliance of activists and party leaders from all the parties of the ruling coalition, developed a precise and tractable list of demands, and, with SERNAM, succeeded winning permanent, institutional access to the powerful executive branch. The CMD sought to prevent the women's movement from facing the classic problem of being "fished" for votes at election time (to use the Chilean parlance) and later abandoned. The picture of Chilean politics presented here suggests that electoral concerns do not disappear once the campaigns are over.

It is difficult for any social movement to make the switch to more conventional approaches to political change. The women's movement was more than an interest group that wanted access to government resources. Activists in the movement had sought to introduce a "new way of doing politics" into the public arena, one premised on erasing the boundaries between the private and the public and uprooting authoritarian practices from all aspects of life. Women's lives had been profoundly changed by participating in the movement, risking their safety

to protest against the dictatorship. Their perspective put them at odds with the electoral imperatives of the incoming democratic regime.

This article suggests that coalition governments present unique constraints for the implementation of feminist policy through government agencies for women. In a coalition system, there may be considerable slippage between the platform espoused by a particular coalition of parties at election time and the agenda that a particular government agency pursues once the elections are over. Coalition platforms represent an amalgam of the policies preferred by the various parties within a particular coalition; they reflect compromises reached among those parties as a condition of coalescing. But the agenda of a particular ministry depends on the party affiliation of the person chosen to head that agency. This suggests that activists looking to establish “a space in the state” need to focus their energies on cabinet appointments. The connection between electoral platforms and feminist policy will be more straightforward in single-party governments than in coalition governments—particularly where one or more of the parties is ideologically disposed to promote feminist concerns in the first place. The evidence provided in this article is suggestive, but not conclusive. Validation of the theoretical perspective presented here merits testing across an array of cases in Latin America and elsewhere.

## NOTES

I presented earlier versions of this article at the Analytic Narratives Conference at the Center for Political Economy at Washington University, May 21-23, 1999, and at the Department of Political Science at Duke University. I would like to thank María Elena Valenzuela, John Ferejohn, Sunita Parikh, John Carey and three anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions. Any errors are my sole responsibility.

1. One of the difficulties associated with explaining feminist policy outcomes stems from the status of feminism as a contested concept. What counts as feminist varies widely, even within a single organization. To delimit this analysis, I follow the approach developed by Stetson and Mazur (1995). In general, I consider a policy to be feminist if it “[improves] the status of women as a group and [undermines] patterns of gender hierarchy.” Within the Chilean context, I compare the government’s record of policy adoption against the list of demands publicized by women’s rights organizations in 1988, the year before the transition to democracy, as I discuss below. I also refer to the *women’s* movement rather than the *feminist* movement, using the terminology most commonly accepted in Chile.

2. The military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet lasted from 1973 to 1989.

3. As of July 2000, the parties of the *Concertación* are the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), the Socialist Party (PS), the Party for Democracy (PPD) and the Radical Social

Democratic Party (PRSD). The two main parties in the opposition are the Independence Democratic Union (UDI) and the National Renovation (RN). The rightist coalition is currently called *Unión Por Chile*; it has also gone by *Democracia y Progreso* and *Unión por el Progreso*.

4. This claim is supported by the fact that the presidential candidate for the 1999 election was determined by a primary held among party members. Socialist candidate Ricardo Lagos won the primary with 77% of the vote.

5. Recent memories of an authoritarian past do not necessarily make organized groups willing to moderate their demands. Nancy Bermeo (1997) demonstrates that popular mobilization actually increases around the time of transition, rather than decreases—although groups may be mobilizing to ensure that political leaders meet their already moderate demands.

6. At the meeting I attended, which was held in the unheated auditorium of a high school in a working-class neighborhood in Santiago, approximately 200 women in attendance broke into small groups to discuss these issues and then presented their responses to the meeting at large. Many of the women with whom I spoke that day criticized SERNAM on two grounds. First, they suspected that the agency would become a hierarchical organization that would not respect the autonomy of social organizations. At one point the audience broke into a chant of “*no cúpulas!*,” which roughly translates as “no rule by tiny cliques at the top.” Second, they wanted SERNAM to address the issue of political prisoners and human rights abuses. Although human rights was a top priority issue for many of the women, it would never appear on SERNAM’s agenda.

7. Divorce is illegal in Chile. The lower house of the Chilean Congress (the *Cámara de Diputados*) passed divorce legislation in 1997, but the conservative-led Senate has not yet moved to consider the bill.

8. Many viewed the appointment of Ricardo Lagos as Minister of Public Works in this light. Lagos, the leading member of the Socialist Party, lost his 1989 Senate race although he received more votes than his conservative opponent, Jaime Guzman.

9. Delpiano’s record during the previous administration illustrates a solid commitment to the agenda of her party. As Minister of National Property (1994-1999), Delpiano promoted the return of goods confiscated during the military regime back to leftist parties and political leaders (“Government Vows . . .” 1994); supported the conversion of private property into national sanctuaries (“Committee Reviews . . .” 1995); banned private beaches (“Court Orders . . .” 1998); and oversaw the donation of a new office to the Association of Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained, a group closely affiliated with the leftist parties (“Government Donates . . .” 1998).

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