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## **Ricardo Lagos to Represent Concertacion in Chile's Presidential Election**

*by LADB Staff*

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In the May 30 primary for Chile's governing Concertacion coalition, Ricardo Lagos of the Partido Socialista won a resounding victory, taking more than 70% of the vote. Lagos is now the front-runner for the Dec. 12 presidential elections. In February 1988, 17 political groups agreed to work together on the "campaign for no," which urged people to vote against Pinochet remaining in power.

In the October, 1988, referendum, which Pinochet expected to win, he instead suffered a humiliating defeat. Pinochet stepped down as president in March 1990. Following the referendum victory, the group became the Concertacion de Partidos por la Democracia. It includes the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC), the Partido Socialista (PS), Partido por la Democracia (PPD), and Partido Radical Social Demócrata (PRSD). The PDC has controlled the Concertacion since its formation.

Former President Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994) and President Eduardo Frei, who will step down next March, are members of the PDC. They easily won the presidential elections in 1989 and 1993, giving the Concertacion 10 uninterrupted years in power. Lagos lost in the two previous Concertacion primaries in 1989 and in 1993. He served as education minister in Aylwin's government and as public works minister under Frei. Lagos defeated PDC candidate and Senate president Andres Zaldivar.

Zaldivar was hurt partly by the general discontent in Chile with the government. Rising unemployment, student and Indian protests, and the economic recession all worked against him. PDC looks at lessons from loss Lagos' election demonstrates the PDC's growing inability to connect with the electorate. It's support has progressively declined since 1989, when it received 35% of the vote, to the last legislative elections when it only received 18%.

The lopsided win by Lagos shows "a very deep rejection of the leadership of the PDC in the last two years and an extraordinary affirmation of Lagos," said analyst Ascanio Cavallo. "We must begin an internal review," said Deputy Andres Palma. He said the PDC needs "a profound reflection in which we examine everything that has happened and review everything that needs to be reviewed."

Deputy Gutenberg Martinez, also of the PDC, said the party "has received a very strong, very hard message that we have to pay attention to." With Lagos victory, the PDC will no longer be able to impose its will on the coalition as it has done, and which has caused resentment among associates who accuse it of high-handedness and arrogance.

### ***Concertacion pledges a united campaign***

Before the primary, some analysts predicted that a Lagos victory would cause sectors of the PDC to abandon the Concertacion. "It is Ricardo Lagos who will have to run for the Concertacion, and we

will work with him loyally," Zaldivar told PDC supporters as results showed a massive Lagos lead. "I will be the third president of the Concertacion, not the second Socialist president," Lagos said in a TV debate with Zaldivar.

In his campaign, Lagos emphasized the continuation of the coalition, but with a slight shift in focus to address social problems such as health, education, and housing. "People want to dream again," said Lagos, who pledged to address problems that have plagued Chile's transition to democracy, such as human rights, constitutional reforms, and wealth disparity.

In a meeting with reporters, Lagos said he will try to determine the fate of thousands who disappeared or were killed during the Pinochet dictatorship. "We cannot continue living in a society in which the Chileans who know what happened ignore it and continue walking on the street," said Lagos. He said those who were military officers during the dictatorship should hand over information about the missing.

Tomas Moulian, political analyst at the Arcis University, says Lagos would not significantly change economic or legislative policies because he understands that foreign investment and sound fiscal policies are necessary for the country's development. Lagos favors unemployment insurance financed by businesses and workers in a nation where it is conspicuously lacking. He wants to open up the state-owned copper monopoly Codelco to foreign investment in specified projects.

### *Observers predict a brutal campaign*

Lagos will face right-wing Union Demócrata Independiente (UDI) candidate Joaquin Lavín, mayor of Las Condes, a posh Santiago suburb. Lavín, a member of the ultra-conservative Opus Dei Catholic organization, has said he will not base his campaign on tying Lagos to Chile's last Socialist president, Salvador Allende (1970-1973), who was ousted in a military coup in 1973 led by Gen. Augusto Pinochet. Although the election is six months away, the campaign has already begun.

Some analysts say, despite Lavín's pledge, the campaign will likely bring an intense psychological war against Lagos, with efforts to stir up fears among voters and divide the Concertacion. The right is expected to capitalize on the polarization of society and tune its campaign rhetoric to attacking Lagos' "leftist" politics, even though the primary showed that appeals to fear and creating insecurity did not succeed. Following Lagos' election, Alberto Cardemil, president-elect of the right-wing Renovación Nacional (RN), called for the defeat of the "socialist option" represented by Lagos.

Cardemil said Lagos is not "the example of prudence and moderation" needed to guarantee governability. Some members of the military, some sectors of the press, and rightist politicians have called Lagos' victory proof that the Concertacion has been "taken over by the left," and they warn of a return to "the chaos" of the Allende years. In a recent interview, when Lagos was asked about comparisons to Allende, he said he did not think it would be a problem.

"But," he said, "when members of the business community asked me about that, I said I hope you will ask my opponent the same questions and say, 'Some people fear that if you become president, you'll have massive violations of human rights.' So if you want to be fair, you'll ask these questions of my opponent." [Sources: Spanish news service EFE, 05/28/99; Clarín (Argentina), 05/30/99;

CNN, 05/31/99; Reuters, 05/28/99, 05/30-06/01/99; Inter Press Service, 06/01/99; The Miami Herald, 06/02/99; Notimex, 05/31/99, 06/03/99, 06/06/99]

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