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## Agenda and Public Policy: Evidence From Chile

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### ABSTRACT

Based on Kingdon's model and the punctuated equilibrium theory, this article analyzes the process of four Chilean public policies from 1990 to 2013. Evidence was collected from 205 interviews, official documents, 3,905 press clippings, and academic literature. Grounded theory was employed to analyze interviews. The analysis shows a tacit alliance between power and expert knowledge, that presidential motivation seems to be a key factor for an idea to be included in government agenda, that Chile's policy-making process is rather elitist, and that its characteristics coincide with the "inside access model of agenda building."

### KEYWORDS

Chile; agenda; public policy; public management; modernization

### Introduction

How are public policies made in Chile? Or, more specifically, why does government decide to intervene on one problem but not in others in Chile? Who are the most influential actors of policy-making in Chile? And how do they interact throughout Chile's policy process? Policy-making has been a topic of increasing interest in academic works in Latin America during the last two decades. In this context, for instance, in an effort to advance the understanding of Latin American policy politics, Stein et al. (2006) focus their analysis on political institutions and the way these shape the behavior and incentives of actors participating in the policy-making process. Other critical questions remain, however, such as what are factors, in addition to political institutions, that may be influencing the development of the policy process; how does an issue get on the government agenda; and who are the key actors in the policy formulation process and how do they manage to get a proposal approved and later implemented?

The teaching and policy analyses in Latin America have been mainly done following the theoretical framework originating in the United States due to the lack of empirical analysis identifying the real characteristics of the policy process in the region's countries. Thus, for instance, although works of Kingdon (2011, 1995), Jones and Baumgartner (2005), and True, Jones and

Baumgartner (1999) have been very influential, the question that immediately arises is whether conclusions of those conceptual frameworks may be generalizable to other countries. Addressing this question, for example, and based on the cases of oil, telecommunications and railroad privatizations in Great Britain and France, Zahariadis (1999) concludes that the Kingdon multiple stream model works making three extensions and one refinement/amendment to the model. Notwithstanding the interesting findings of Zahariadis, the question remains as to whether the theoretical model may be also useful to understand how the policy-making process works in a Latin American country.

Thus, the question of how the policy-making process works in a Latin American country is an academic endeavor that needs to be done to clarify whether policy politics from that type of country can be understood from theoretical frameworks arising from the USA reality. The article focuses on Chile, which according to Stein et al. (2006, p. 170) would be "the country having the best characteristics of public policies" among the 18 Latin American countries included in that study.<sup>1</sup>

Chile reinstalled its democracy in 1990 after a 17-year dictatorship. Chile has been characterized as a politically stable country (Aleman & Saiegh, 2007), with a very high level of political centralism in Latin America (Eaton, 2004), an institutionalized party sys-

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<sup>1</sup>The Latin American countries included in that study are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Panamá, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. According to the study by Stein et al. (2006), Chile has the overall highest value in the policy index and in the majority of its components as well.

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tem with clear ideological differences (in the continuum left–right), low levels of polarization and pragmatic but programmatic parties (Stein et al. 2006; Alcántara & Luna 2004), and two stable coalitions.<sup>2</sup> Chile has a presidential system with a very powerful President compared to the constitutional power of other Latin American Presidents (Boeninger, 2007; Payne et al., 2006; Aninat et al., 2008; Mainwaring & Shugart 2002; Siavelis, 2001). Furthermore, in Chile the legislative authority of the president would be potentially dominant (Mainwaring and Shugart 2002), and the president has a strong influence on the organization of the legislative work by setting urgencies to the discussion of law proposals. The Chilean president also has the veto capacity, which basically allows him/her to reintroduce the discussion on a proposal decided by Congress but on which the president disagrees.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of this, the Chilean Congress is one of the strongest in Latin America regarding its role in the policy process (Stein et al., 2006). Berríos and Gamboa (2006) argue that Chilean Congress has been increasing its influence thanks to greater specialization and professionalization, which is related to the creation of a system of competent advisory. Aninat (2006) points out that this is a consequence of a high rate of reelection that Chilean congressmen show, which stresses their negotiation capacity.

In contrast, the US political system appears to be having higher levels of equilibrium of power than that of Chile and those of other Latin American countries. For instance, according to Cox and Morgenstern (2001, p. 181):

the US President does not have the right to introduce legislation in either house of Congress, ... does not have the right directly to determine the measures that congress will consider, to accelerate bills pending on congressional calendar, or otherwise to affect the legislative agenda, ... (and) president's budget must be introduced by a member of Congress

which is neither the case in Chile nor in most Latin American countries. Furthermore, Cox and Morgenstern (2001) characterize the US Congress and

the assemblies of US states as being proactive/reactive while the Latin American Congresses are merely reactive.

Several academic works have addressed the policy-making process in Chile but the question about why the government picks a certain issue, how the policy process goes within the executive branch, and how key actors manage to get a proposal on it approved have received little attention. Castiglioni (2012) analyzes continuity and change in the social policy of President Bachelet's first term, focusing on the role of formal and informal institutions, informal actors, and ideological factors. The book edited by Larrañaga and Contreras (2010) deals with major social protection policies of the decade of 2000, the rationale behind their design, a short historical description of their evolution and results of evaluation studies made on them. Hass (2010) analyzes how the feminist movement influences the expansion of the legislation promoting women's rights. Following a political transaction cost model, Aninat et al. (2010) analyze the outcomes generated through the decision-making process of productivity-related policies. Murillo (2009) concentrates the analysis of political competition and partisanship on the policy-making of public utilities, concluding that in the Chilean case there was pragmatism in the coalition that impelled those reforms and an ideological renovation in the left-wing parties, including the acceptance of market mechanisms. Picazo (2007) analyzes the 1990s school curriculum reform, emphasizing the role played by two institutional forums including political actors as well as representatives from the educational sector. Aninat (2006), from a political economy perspective, describe the roles of the executive and legislative powers, the constitutional tribunal in the processing of reforms enacted through laws in the 1990s, and the capacities of bureaucracy for policy implementation.<sup>4</sup> Murillo and Le Foulon (2006) focuses on the role of the 1998–99 electricity crisis, and its effects on citizens in the context of an upcoming competitive election, in promoting changes in the regulatory policy in the Chilean electrical sector.

Technocratic influence on government activity has also been a topic of interest in academic analysis of

<sup>2</sup>Those coalitions are: the center-right Alianza por Chile (Alliance for Chile), which includes the Renovación Nacional (National Renovation Party) and the Unión Democática Independiente (UDI) (Independiente Democratic Union), and the center left Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (Agreement of Parties for Democracy) including the Christian Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, the Radical Social Democrat Party, and the Party for Democracy. In the 2013 presidential and parliamentary campaign, the Communist Party and the center-left Concertación formed a new coalition under the name of "Nueva Mayoría" (New Majority) and elected Michelle Bachelet as President and the majority of seats in Congress for the period 2014–2018.

<sup>3</sup>A majority of two thirds of the votes in Congress is required to reject a presidential veto.

<sup>4</sup>This work suggests that there are four salient characteristics in the Chilean policy process: a long-lived and legitimated party system, a very powerful presidency, the existence of veto players, and an honest and relatively efficient bureaucracy as a key mechanism for policy implementation. This latter characteristic is also stated in Aninat et al. (2008).

Chile though its specific role and actions on policy formulation have not been the main focus of these analyses. A very persuasive book of Silva (2008) explains how technocrats have influenced government decisions since early XX century. An essay by Silva (1997) identifies the main socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors that have facilitated the strengthening of technocratic positions within the new Latin American democracies. Another work of Silva (1991) shows how technocratic groups were established with different ideological orientations, and how they gained political influence within the administrations in which they participated. An article of Joignant (2011), in turn, analyzes the influence reached by 20 agents who served as ministers and undersecretaries, between 1990 and 2012, based on the combination of technical capacities, political competence, and collective leadership, who are characterized as “technopols.” An essay of Moreno (2010) analyzes the influence of think tanks in policy-making, arguing that for a long time they have ignored the critical steps of design, negotiation, approval, and implementation of public policies.

This article instead is an empirical research, mainly based on primary sources, that focuses on the role played by key actors in the policy-making process. Thus, the article follows the procedural institutionalism perspective, which seeks to understand the type of processes which originate policies and, given that, pays attention to interactions among key players and the context in which they behave (Barzelay and Gallego, 2006).

The analysis is based on evidence from the government modernization policy, the health-care reform, the Santiago urban transportation plan (popularly known as Transantiago), and the policy on transparency and access to public information. Particular studies on these policies were undertaken between 2008 and 2013 under an extensive research program.

These were policies in which the five administrations governing the country from 1990 to 2013 intervened, giving the opportunity to see whether there were regularities in the policy formulation process or differences among administrations. All of these policies have had high visibility in the public debate and correspond to different sectors of government activity, which reduces the bias of analyzing just one policy or policies from sectors with similar functioning. On the other hand, two of these policies are on health care and transport, which are the same type of policies that provided the evidence to John Kingdon to build his well-known model of policy formulation. These two policies have a high and direct impact on citizen's well-being, and expose political controversy and

interest confrontation. The other two, the public management modernization and the policy on transparency, although less controversial, have a high and direct impact on how citizens receive the benefits of government interventions. And all four influence the citizen's perception of State effectiveness. Furthermore, two of these policies have been approved through congressional votes and the other two through the use of the president's administrative capacity.

The following sections of the article include an exposition on the theoretical framework, a description of methods and data used in the analysis, a presentation of the evidence on the Chilean policy-making process, and a discussion of its conceptual implications. The final section offers the main conclusions arising from the study.

### On the policy-making process

According to Cobb et al. (1976, p. 127), “the public agenda consists of all issues which are the subjects of widespread attention or at least awareness; require action, in the view of a sizeable proportion of the public; and are the appropriate concern of some government unit, in the perception of community members.”

In turn, Kingdon (2011, 1995, p. 3) defines government agenda as “the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time.” In his famous study, Kingdon focuses on how a certain issue gets into the government agenda, goes to the decision agenda, and, finally, to the policy enactment. Three streams shape the policy process in his analytic model: problem recognition, generation of policy proposals, and political events around the issue. Each stream has its own development but at some point in time they converge. Thus, the likelihood of getting a policy enacted on a particular issue dramatically increases if a problem is recognized, there is a workable policy solution ready, political events around the issue are propitious and there are policy entrepreneurs working on the coupling of streams.

The punctuated equilibrium theory (PET), instead, observes that “political processes are often driven by a logic of stability and incrementalism, but occasionally they also produce large scale departures from the past” (True et al., 1999, p. 97). Policy changes—either marginal or large scale ones—are the consequence of the interaction of the policy subsystem and behavioral decision-making which, when combined, create patterns of stability and punctuated equilibrium.

According to PET, periods of equilibrium are produced when a subsystem captures an issue and major changes are the consequence of a situation in which an issue is forced into the macro political agenda. Jones and Baumgartner (2005, p. 267) argue that the processing of information from the policy environment is a key factor in getting an issue into the government agenda, which would mainly depend on how heavily the signals about the severity of the problem are weighted among the policy-makers. These signals can come from “several sources, including the anxieties of general citizens, the vividness of particular events, and the activities of interest groups and policy advocates.”

Thus, major changes would be the consequence of the involvement of actors and institutions from the political system (either Congress or the Executive Power). The issue leaves the subsystem and rises in the government agenda either because the issue has captured the public attention and new participants have become interested in the debate or because previously uninvolved political actors and institutions are pushing for a massive intervention. When that occurs, the likelihood of an intervention from the government for a substantial reform increases dramatically.

Then, taken together, what these conceptual frameworks are suggesting is (i) that a major policy change is going to occur when the demands for changes on an issue can no longer be treated within a policy subsystem; and (ii) that a government intervention most likely occurs when a problem is recognized, there is a workable policy solution available and political events are propitious for the reform.

Both the multiple stream framework and PET consider the role that those in possession of expert knowledge play in the policy process. Two concepts have been extensively used to denominate them: technocrats and technopols. According to Collier (1979, p. 403) technocrats are “individuals with a high level of specialized academic training which serves as a principal criterion on the basis of which they are selected to occupy key decision-making or advisory roles in large, complex organizations—both public and private.” A technopol instead would be a person with a high technical background, who has deployed political skills to govern more effectively (Dominguez, 1998, 1997). Williamson (1994, p. 12) argues that while technocrats have been mostly civil servants, “technopols are those technocrats who have taken the risk of accepting political appointments, with the responsibility that entails.” To Marier (2008), however, the role of technopol would

not only refer to the position served but to the capacity to link expert knowledge and political abilities along different complex situations of the policy process.

Technocrats and technopols are actors of a similar professional profile but with different roles in government. While technopols work at the political level, technocrats work at the professional level. It is also highly likely that a technopol leads a group of technocrats in the policy design or that “a political leader selects a team of competent technocrats and delegates them enough authority to permit reforms” (Williamson, 1994, p. 13).

A natural question that arises then is how do these technopols and technocrats interact with politicians throughout the policy process? The following sections address this question through the analysis of four policy cases on Chile.

## Methods and data

This is a multiple case study that analyzes the policy-making process of four public policies in Chile, between 1990 and 2013. The analysis is aimed to realize whether or not there have been similar patterns in the formulation of these four policies and, then, to set a conceptual proposition about how the policy-making process works in Chile. Although multiple case studies produce more compelling evidence and the overall study is considered to be more robust (Yin, 1994), the results of this work must be regarded as propositions that further research have to either prove or disprove.

The unit of analysis is the policy issue. The four policy issues mentioned in the introduction, covering the period 1990–2013 and five presidencies,<sup>5</sup> are analyzed in this article: four presidencies from the center-left coalition “Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia,” and one from the center-right “Alianza por Chile”.

Data comes from four sources: interviews, official documents, academic bibliography, and the press. Two hundred and five interviews were conducted, and 3,905 press clippings were analyzed, from 1990 to 2013, from the following newspapers: *El Mercurio*, *La Tercera*, *La Cuarta*, *La Nación* and *El Siglo*. Table 1 presents a distribution of interviewees.

Two ways of identifying interviewees were applied: choosing them from a list of people who performed key positions during the formulation of each of the policies analyzed and asking the interviewees to suggest other key people to interview. Interviewees were selected

<sup>5</sup>The five presidencies are those of Patricio Aylwin (1990–1994), Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (1994–2000), Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006), Michelle Bachelet (2006–2010), and Sebastian Piñera (2010–2014).

**Table 1.** Key Actors Interviewed.

Type of actor interviewed	Policies analyzed				TOTAL
	PM modernization	Health reform	Transantiago	Transparency	
President	1	—	—	—	1
Ministers	7	8	9	1	25
Undersecretaries	4	8	4	—	16
Heads of public agencies	12	15	8	9	44
Advisors and public managers	28	14	11	7	60
Congressmen	2	2	7	1	12
Interest groups	3	12	9	5	29
Experts and scholars	5	7	4	2	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>205</b>

Source: Author's records.

according to criteria of theoretical sampling and theoretical redundancy, which permitted the collection of testimonies and information that led to identifying relevant analytical categories and to avoiding already known information or that without analytical value (Valles, 2007).

The interviews included open questions about the rising and recognition of problems, the building of policy proposals and whether other alternatives were considered, the approval of the policy proposal and the manner in which the decision was made, why the decision-makers chose to use either the presidential administrative capacity or go through the legislative way, identification of key actors, their roles and behavior along the process, the political context in which the process took place, and the decisions made and actions taken to implement the policy. Interviews were done from 2008 to 2013 and analyzed through the “grounded theory method.”<sup>6</sup>

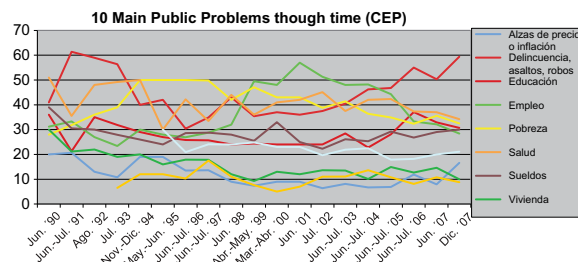
The processing of information from the four sources mentioned permitted the preparation of case studies on each policy analyzed. These case studies covered topics such as the role of politicians, congressmen, political parties, technocrats, the press, and interest groups, the

evolution of the issue addressed by each policy, and the political debate around each of these issues. These case studies were the basis on which this article has been prepared.

### Evidence on the Chilean policy process

Were the issues addressed by policies analyzed in this article in high places on the public agenda? The CEP survey is the main data set available in Chile on public perceptions about the most important problems affecting people. According to it, 3out of the 4 issues analyzed here were never among the 10 most important public problems for citizens. The health-care system, however, ranked as the third/fourth most pressing public problem for citizens by 1999 and 2000, when the reform to it was announced as a presidential campaign promise.

Then, how problems to be addressed by government interventions are selected is a natural question arising from Figure 1. Evidence on this topic as well as on the development of the remaining steps of the Chilean policy formulation is presented in what follows in this section.



**Figure 1.** Main public problems from 1990 to 2007 according to CEP surveys.

Source: Center of Public Studies (CEP) Survey.

<sup>6</sup>For an explanation of the “grounded theory method,” see Valles (2007).

### **The policy on public management modernization**

The public management modernization policy (PMMP) refers to a set of changes made in the public sector management on organizational structures and procedures with the purpose of achieving higher levels of effectiveness in functioning. PMMP became one of the main endeavors undertaken under President Frei Ruiz-Tagle's administration, though "this was never a citizen's claim in the whole history of our Republic" (ex-presidential advisor). Modernization of public management began, in the early 1990s, with microreforms at the level of public agencies,<sup>7</sup> the processes and results of which expanded concerns about the necessity of and opportunity for it. Those public managers diagnosed that "the State was working inefficiently and obsoletely" (ex-Minister and ex-Senator) and had the conviction that "the State must do it better" (ex-Chief of a Public Agency and ex-Minister). Results obtained by those microreforms made the political level of government get involved in the process and President Aylwin—in his last speech before Congress about the state of the country (May 21st, 1993)—expressed that "... it is necessary to dignify public function, speed up procedures, stimulate merit and initiative and set strict parameters of responsibility" (Aylwin, 1993, pp. 20–21).

Given President Aylwin's statement and the professional career profile of Frei Ruiz-Tagle,<sup>8</sup> the inclusion of the issue in his presidential platform was a natural consequence. Frei Ruiz-Tagle played a crucial role in including this issue in his presidential platform because "this stuff of efficiency was very important to him ... he certainly had a global vision on this and translated it to the decision scope" (ex-Minister). According to an ex-presidential advisor, Frei Ruiz-Tagle "was not interested in ideologies, his interest was the good functioning of the government, ... he was also interested in leaving a bequest regarding the necessity of getting a modern government that may effectively serve the citizens."

The relevance this theme got in the Frei Ruiz-Tagle's platform was extensively expressed in the press. The *La Segunda* Newspaper (1993, p. 20) titled an article "The

modernization of the State will be one of the most important themes of the next administration: Eduardo Frei, before being nominated candidate of the Concertación, pointed out the necessity of modernizing the State as a crucial theme." By the same token, a key member of the Frei campaign declared to *El Mercurio* Newspaper (1993, p. C3) "the Frei campaign headquarters is studying the modernization of the State."

Once in office, President Frei Ruiz-Tagle included the theme in his first presidential address before Congress about the state of the nation<sup>9</sup> and a few days later he announced an initial plan for it, creating the Inter-Ministry Committee for the Public Management Modernization (El Mercurio, 1994; La Epoca, 1994). This was an initiative developed by a small group appointed and empowered by Frei Ruiz-Tagle. Mario Marcel, head of the Division of Administrative Rationalization in the Budget Office, led this group which concentrated on implementing a management control system in the central government. According to an ex-high public official "the modernization raised as a programmatic issue based on the accumulated experience because there were diagnostics of the situation already and some microreforms at the agency level had begun." Another high public official adds, "Government modernization corresponded to very advanced visions of a technocratic group, which did not have roots in the political parties or other areas of government."

Besides technical capacities, this group developed political skills that allowed it to deploy its influence toward public agencies and set alliances with politicians within government. An ex-member of this group expresses it as follows: "... the alliance between politicians and technicians was very clear ... we were very technopols, we were a very clear political-technical alliance with differentiated roles." Another expert on modernization adds that there was "a combination between political support and technical skills in the advising teams" (to undertake modernization).

This group of technocrats worked on a proposal and went further without political interference. According

<sup>7</sup>The public agencies where the modernization began were the "Servicio de Impuestos Internos" (SII)—the Internal Revenue Service, the "Instituto de Normalización Previsional" (ISP)—the Social Security Institute, and the "Servicio de Registro Civil and Identificación" (SRCel)—the Civil Register and Identification Service. Heads of these agencies met monthly to talk about their experience. Later, the Head of the "Fondo Nacional de Salud" (FONASA)—the National Fund for Health Care—joined the group. By the time that President Aylwin called for the updating of public administration before Congress, the group had expanded to 10 Heads of public agencies who met regularly to share their views, experiences and lessons learned.

<sup>8</sup>Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle is an Engineer with graduate studies on management in Italy. Later he became a high executive of an important Chilean company and a successful entrepreneur. His experience in managing large organizations is directly linked to his concern for the public management modernization as a necessary step to get an effective State that supports the process of becoming a developed nation.

<sup>9</sup>President Frei Ruiz-Tagle took office on March 11, 1994, and his first presidential address before Congress was on May 21, 1994.

to an ex-Minister, “politicians did not realize (about the moving forward of the public management modernization) ... this was not an issue for Congressmen ... it was an issue for a group within the government.” Another ex-Minister states “nobody knew much about the discussion so we could go further” (on public management modernization). A person who worked within the government expresses “politician interests are very far from this issue.” Given the remoteness of the politicians with this theme, the technocrats that drove this policy used the administrative capacity of the President to approve and implement the initiatives contained in the PMMP. On this, an ex-Minister points out “with our team we preferred to go doing small things so as not to have to reach the parliament and to have to break many political eggs ... that was the manner to make decisions” and an expert adds that they “wanted to avoid delays and political interference in the concretion of this policy.”

In this process, there was not a debate on alternatives about public management modernization. There was just one proposal built and implemented: the one worked out by the groups of technocrats empowered by President Frei Ruiz-Tagle. According to an ex-Minister “there was never a confrontation of ideas, of proposals” (on this topic). Another ex-Minister points out “the only confrontations of visions was about who had to lead the PMMP ... and the President decided that the team of the Budget Office had to have the control of the process.”

In the next administration, the issue went off the government agenda because “President Lagos had other priorities and this was not a main concern for him” (ex-Minister). Thus, from being in the first level of government hierarchy, as the Inter-Ministry Committee for the Public Management Modernization, the status of the policy was lowered to the fourth level, under a Division dependent on the Undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Presidency as a Project of State Reform and Modernization (Proyecto de Reforma y Modernización del Estado—PRYME).

The policy would be reinstalled in the government agenda when a political crisis erupted due to several cases of corruption by late 2002 and early 2003.<sup>10</sup> The crisis was so serious that as long as the judicial investigations moved further several analysts discussed the possibility that President Lagos would not finish his term (Navia, 2004).

The crisis was solved through a political negotiation between President Lagos, represented by his Minister of the Interior and Head of the Cabinet, Jose Miguel Insulza, and the leader of the opposition majoritarian party,<sup>11</sup> then Representative Pablo Longueira.

The opposition was interested in getting an open government procurement system and in limiting the presidential capacity of political appointments because many of those appointees were political campaigners of the Concertacion—the coalition in power by then—according to the opposition claim. On the other hand, the Lagos administration was interested in getting approval in Congress for a proposal of public financing for political campaigns.

The opposition demand of reducing the presidential capacity of political appointees was difficult to accept for the Lagos Administration and for the Concertacion because it was seen as “a right wing initiative” (ex-high public official) that affected public employees who mainly voted for them. The point is clarified in the testimony of an interviewee who expresses that “once I heard the then Ministry say ‘the issue is as follows: the political structure works in such a manner that a political party or a coalition of parties seeking government power compete for a booty (treasure). And the booty (treasure) is an extensive variety of possibilities of employment and utilization of the government apparatus to provide jobs to people which keep them united by political links.’”

In the previous administration, a proposal on this had been left aside because of lack of support within the coalition. According the testimony of an ex-Head of the Division of State Modernization, although

during the Frei Ruiz-Tagle presidency there was a process of upgrading public management ... but there was neither agreement nor political chance to go further with tougher and deeper reforms on public management modernization, such as the High Public Management, which was the cornerstone of this process (Orrego, 2007, p. 55).

The negotiation resulted in the “Political-legislative agreements for the State modernization, transparency and the promotion of economic growth,” popularly known as “the 49 measures.” Among the most transcendent measures were those that created the Civil Service, the High Public Management (a mechanism to select high public managers through a merit-based

<sup>10</sup>Those cases were “oversalaries” (sobresueldos), consisting of Ministers receiving an extra payment in cash in a closed envelope; “bribes,” involving five congressmen receiving illegal payments from an entrepreneur; “MOP—GATE,” “MOP—CIADE,” “MOP—IDECON,” consisting of payment for nondemonstrable works done by the Ministry of Public Works.

<sup>11</sup>This party is the right-wing Union Demócrata Independiente (UDI).



system), the public procurement system, and the financing of political campaigns.

The reinstallation of the public management modernization policy—with the creation of the Civil Service, the High Public Management, the public procurement system, and the financing of political campaigns—required a legislative decision as well. In this case, proposals were generated by the group of technocrats backed by the opposition leader, which the congressmen of the President Lagos coalition had to vote for because of the political weakness of the Lagos administration.

Thus, the modernization of public management illustrates a case in which an issue came onto the government agenda because of the motivation of the main actor of the political system, went off the agenda due to the lack of priority given by the next president, and was reinstalled by a political actor with equivalent political capacities in the context of a serious crisis that might have led to an anticipated end of the Lagos administration. The case also illustrates the role of technocrats, the remoteness of politicians in this issue and the lack of alternatives to the proposal built by the Budget Office team in the formulation and implementation of PMMP.

#### **The health reform and the AUGE plan**

The motivation behind the health reform of the decade of 2000 and its flagship AUGE Plan was to institute a system that guaranteed equitable access, opportunity, quality, and financial protection in the health-care services received by people—no matter whether they were covered by either the private or the public systems—as well as to improve the effectiveness of the public health-care system and the regulation of the private system (Lenz, 2007; Zuñiga, 2007; Drago, 2006). The reemergence of democracy in Chile coincided with a tendency of health reforms in Latin America because of demographics and epidemiological changes, a greater complexity of medicine, and issues related to management and effectiveness of the public health sector.

Health care was the third/fourth most important problem for citizens by late 1990s (Figure 1). People's concerns on health care were related to “an unsatisfied demand in public hospitals and community health centers, which was expressed in long waiting lists for medical services (interview with an analyst of the health-care system) and restriction and high cost of services of the private sector” (interview with an ex-Minister).

During the early 1990s efforts of technocrats and policy advisors were concentrated on the diagnostic,

given that the new government did not have much information on the situation the health system was in after the 17 years of Pinochet's authoritarian regime (interview with an ex-Minister). Aylwin's health-care policy concentrated on improving access to health care, with a particular focus on the poor, restoring the public hospital network, and strengthening prevention and promotion actions as well as the institutional development of the public health-care sector (PAHO, 2002).

President Frei Ruiz-Tagle and the Ministry of Health Carlos Massad fostered technical developments and studies on the health sector. One interviewee explains, “during that period studies on the burden of illnesses were performed”. Another interviewee states “studies in which a guaranteed health-care plan was recommend were done by then”.

Advisors saw this as an opportunity to push for the reform but soon it became clear that there would be no health reform in the Frei Ruiz-Tagle administration. A member of that group of experts explains that

during the previous administration we had done a diagnostic, we had found the problem and knew that we had to respond but the question was: What is the policy answer? There was not a simple and clear message about what would be the administration's offer as health-care policy.

Another member of that group adds “propositions rebounded, first, due to a lack of political capacity and, second, because of lack of technical development with respect of what was to be done and how much it would cost.”

The option was to go further with technical works that later might be useful for a new health-care policy. One of these expert explains, “those of us who were close to the Technical Committee (of the political parties of the coalition) became the policy advisors of the Minister of Health and were charmed with the idea of a health reform but from the very beginning we were told that it would not occur.” Another policy advisor explains that “then the instruction we received was to keep going preparing the reform”.

The time for the health-care reform came with the presidential primary election of the “Concertación.” The Christian Democratic precandidate Andrés Zaldívar promoted a health-care reform, which was not initially considered by his opponent, the Social Democrat Ricardo Lagos. After the primary election, the health-care commissions of both precandidates reached an agreement and the winning precandidate, Ricardo Lagos, took it on as a highly visible issue of his presidential platform. Lagos' close circle of advisors saw

the health-care reform as a policy consistent with his campaign slogan of (economic) “growth with equity” and as highly politically profitable in an election that polls announced to be very competitive, as it really was. Consequently, the then candidate Lagos announced his commitment to the health-care reform in a campaign meeting in the Barros Luco Hospital, in Santiago, in October 1999, although he “had not had a specific proposal of reform” (Drago, 2006, p. 50).

The assumption of Ricardo Lagos to the presidency implied a convergence of two wills: on the one hand, a group that had been working for a decade in studies that might be useful for a potential reform, and, on the other, a president motivated by the idea of a reform establishing “universal access with explicit guarantees in health care”.<sup>12</sup> Once in office, President Lagos appointed his close friend Hernán Sandoval<sup>13</sup> as the Executive Secretary of the Presidential Commission for Health Care Reform.<sup>14</sup>

This created a bi-headed structure of the public health sector. On the one hand, was the Minister Michelle Bachelet in charge of solving the problem of the long waiting list for specialized care and surgery, and the day-to-day management of the Ministry. On the other, was the Executive Secretary of the Presidential Commission—a direct contact to the President—in charge of the content, and who appeared as the ideologist of the reform.

A controversy soon arose between these two heads about the orientation of the reform. Minister Bachelet headed a vision that was characterized as “statist,” which encouraged greater government control of health care, fostered increased public spending on health and sought to minimize the role of ISAPREs.<sup>15</sup> The Executive Secretary Sandoval instead was close to a perspective that a group of technocrats had been working on, which was characterized as “integrated health.” This accepted the role of ISAPREs under strict government regulation, sought to improve the efficiency of the public sector through the creation of self-managed public hospitals and the introduction of management control mechanisms, believed in the concept of “prioritization in health” and promoted the creation of a government agency to regulate both the public and the private health sector. Given the reform implied to

modify prior laws, public organizations, and new spending, a congressional approval was necessary.

After two years of slow progress, President Lagos appointed Michelle Bachelet as the Minister of Defense and Osvaldo Artaza as the Minister of Health with the mission of getting the four bills conforming to the reform approved in the House of Representatives. Artaza fulfilled that task in a year but at the cost of facing a big conflict with the unions of the public health sector and the Chilean Medical Association. Pedro García replaced Osvaldo Artaza as Minister of Health with the assignment of getting the reform approved by Congress.

Artaza and García were well reputed physicians, had academic background and extensive experience in hospital management, were members of the Health Commission of the Christian Democratic Party and in that capacity had worked in the health program of the precandidate Zaldívar in the Concertación primary election, had extensive and intensive links with the presidential coalition, and had good and close relationships with Sandoval as well as with those who had worked on the studies done during the 1990s.

After a long and inflamed debate, laws conforming to the reform were finally enacted between late-2003 and mid-2005. The design and contents of the reform were based on studies done in the previous administrations, which had been generated by the group of technocrats promoting the “integrated health” vision.

Along the policy process President Lagos showed a resolute will of getting health-care reform approved during his term, in spite of not having a specific proposal on it at the very beginning, which was seen as a secondary problem by then (interview with a high public official of the health sector). President Lagos was directly involved in the design of the reform, pushed the proposal forward, changed Ministers when he felt that the reform was not making enough progress or when the situation made it necessary to move it onto a new stage, and backed and empowered the group of technocrats that shaped the content of the reform. According to Navarrete (2012), without Lagos there would not have been health care and because of his commitment the reform could overcome the opposition of his first Minister of Health, the Medical

<sup>12</sup>This is the basic idea of the reform, which was expressed in the Spanish acronym AUGE. Although four laws shaped the reform, AUGE Plan was considered its flagship.

<sup>13</sup>Hernán Sandoval is a physician with background in public health and risk prevention, with extensive links within the president coalition and with ISAPREs, the private companies managing the pre-paid health-care plans.

<sup>14</sup>The presidential commission was headed by the Minister of Health and integrated by the Ministers of Finance, Work and Social Security, General Secretariat of the Presidency, and an Executive Secretariat of seven members.

<sup>15</sup>ISAPREs are pre-paid health insurance plans.

Association, the National Union of Health Workers and a half of the political parties of his coalition.

### **Transparency and access to public information**

The case of the transparency policy shows a long process that took 15 years, from the report of the Public Ethics Commission of President Frei Ruiz-Tagle, in 1994, until the enactment of the law on transparency and access to public information in 2009. Transparency was not among the main citizen's concerns during the decade of 2000s—nor was it in the 1990s—although it is considered one of the main achievements of the first Bachelet Administration. From the mid-1990s to late-2000s three Presidential Commissions worked on the issue, the Internal Auditing Council was created, several laws were amended, a bill on access to public information was sent to the Congress (it was withdrawn later) and an initiative of two Senators to reform laws to give citizens access to public information was being discussed in Congress by the time President Bachelet sent a bill allowing the access to public information and creating the Council for Transparency.

The final stage of this long journey started with the inclusion of the theme in the Bachelet presidential program, which was the result of a coincidence between the aspirations of a group of NGOs and lawyers working on it, and the desire of Bachelet to develop a citizen's government. An interviewee, a member of one of these NGOs, explains that they “met Bachelet during the campaign, explained to her the importance of the issue and got her convinced that transparency and a citizen government were convergent ideas ... and that is how transparency got into her campaign program.”

Although access to public information was included in the presidential platform of the then candidate Michelle Bachelet (2005), the issue really got onto the government agenda in the context of a complex situation for the State of Chile: corruption cases in previous administrations of the coalition that backed Bachelet

had been heatedly discussed during the presidential campaign, other corruption scandals erupted also at the beginning of her administration,<sup>16</sup> the decision of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the case of Marcel Claude and others against the State of Chile<sup>17</sup> was communicated on September 19, 2006, and the proposal of Senators Larrain and Gazmuri was moving forward in the Congress.<sup>18</sup>

In this context, Bachelet appointed a task force, in September 2006, to propose measures in favor of the efficiency, objectivity, public accountability, and professional quality in the public management. Alejandro Ferreiro was the head of that task force. He—a lawyer with high technical capacities, extensive political links and a member of the Christian Democratic Party—had served in several positions in Concertacion administrations, as advisor in the General Secretariat of the Presidency, Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Public Ethics, as Head of several regulatory agencies, and Minister of Economy.

Other members of that task force were high public officials, prominent members of Non-Governmental Organization dealing with the issue of transparency and even a member of a think tank linked to the then opposition. The task force made use of reports done by the Commission on Public Ethics appointed by President Frei Ruiz-Tagle, in which Ferreiro had been its Executive Secretary.

The report was submitted in November, 2006 to President Bachelet, who accepted it and sent a bill to a parliamentary discussion on December 6. Congress approved the bill and the Council for Transparency—the public agency in charge of implementing the law—began functioning on April 20, 2009. Once the law on access to public information was enacted, Ferreiro was appointed as Counselor of the Council for Transparency and in October 2011 became its President for the 18 month term.<sup>19</sup>

The accumulation of experiences, lessons and knowledge appear to have been key for the approval of the law proposal and the implementation of the

<sup>16</sup>The corruption scandal cases were those of Chile Deportes, employment programs in Valparaíso Region and the Governor Office in Valparaíso Region (see Instituto Libertad, 2007).

<sup>17</sup>The case started in 1998. Mr. Claude and others requested to the Central Bank Foreign Investment Committee information on the Rio Condor project, and the seriousness and eligibility of investor Forestal Trillium. The information was not provided by the Central Bank and Chilean Courts also denied access to that information. On October 10, 2003, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights accepted the submission of the appellants.

<sup>18</sup>The proposal of Senators Larrain and Gazmuri proposed amendments to the Organic Law of the General Bases of State Administration, the Law on Administrative Procedures, and the Constitutional Congress Law in order to enforce the right to access to public information and restrict the causes for reserve or secret (see BCN 2008). Senator Larrain belongs to the right wing party “Unión Demócrata Independiente” (UDI), and Senator Gazmuri is a member of the left wing Socialist Party.

<sup>19</sup>According to the law, the Council for Transparency is integrated by four counselors and each one of them is to be its president for a term of 18 months.

transparency policy in the country. The case of the transparency policy shows a combination of both a presidential will to intervene on the issue and a compelling convergence of events faced by President Bachelet, which seem to have been seen as an opportunity to make her commitment through citizen access to public information effective.

### Transantiago

A reform of the public transport system of the city of Santiago was neither among the most important problems for citizens by late 1990s and early 2000s (Table 1) nor among the priorities of the presidential program of the then candidate Lagos. However, it became one of the most important policy interventions of his administration.

Even though the Lagos presidential program included a general mention about the modernization of the urban transport of Santiago (Lagos Escobar, 1999), this was not a central issue in his campaign platform. An ex-Minister interviewed explain that

it was for elimination but not by choice that Transantiago was so central ... (a person from his inner circle) told me that Lagos is giving importance to this issue because other "pyramids" he was thinking to build for the bicentennial had fallen ... Lagos had 10 projects and Transantiago was not among them.

Another ex-Minister adds that as a consequence of the deepness of the Asian crisis "Lagos did not have (resources for) big projects and suddenly Transantiago appeared." Another interviewee states "Lagos saw the celebration of the bicentenary in the same manner as it was in the centenary, with big and emblematic projects such as the building of the Art Museum and the like."

Already in office, the Lagos administration exposed two main arguments to demonstrate the need to reform Santiago's transport system: on the one hand, the strong negative externalities of the transport system (Díaz Silva, 2005) showed in technical studies and, on the other, the fact that public transportation neither corresponded with the level of development of the country nor with the wishes of authorities to make Santiago a world class city. An ex-Minister mentions "in his first presidential address President Lagos, in the context of the big bicentennial projects, included the urban transport issue not only to Santiago but also to Concepción, Antofagasta and Valparaíso."

President Lagos was directly involved in the design of the Plan. A participant of a meeting held at *La Moneda*<sup>20</sup> narrates the episode:

there were several key cabinet members, presidential advisors and experts, and I was very surprised to see that the speaker of the workshop was President Lagos himself. There was a certain consensus about the necessity to improve urban transport and how it had to be done, and the person who explained everything was President Lagos himself.

On September 17, 2000 the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications presented a document titled "Plan de Transporte Urbano de Santiago" (PTUS) (Santiago Urban Transport Plan), which was mainly conceptual (about the basic architecture of the plan) according to Germán Correa, an ex-Minister of Transport and Telecommunications (2007)

The President approved the plan in November based on his administrative capacity. The idea was to avoid delays and political interferences. Congressmen were not particularly interested in this initiative because it was seen as a particular policy just for Santiago, with technical complexities, which was being worked on within the executive branch. On the other hand, the Association of Bus Owners was an active obstructionist with a capacity to finance electoral campaign of influential congressmen (ex-member of the Inter-Ministry Committee for Transantiago). A political authority of the Lagos Administration explains that in the case of Transantiago "there was an explicit decision of not going through the Congress but using presidential orders, because if the plan had been sent to legislative discussion it would have not been approved in the Lagos period and perhaps it would have never seen the light."

On April 7, 2003 the Inter-Ministry Committee for the Santiago Urban Transport System was established. Transantiago would start operations in October 2006 but finally started on Saturday February 10, 2007. The time period between the creation of the Ministers Committee and the call for proposals—the milestone of the Plan—was only 20 months. The term of references for these proposals were the basis on which contracts were written.

The committee was technically supported by a group of technocrats belonging to the Secretary of Transport Planning (SECTRA). The relationship between politicians and technocrats seems to be critical for results reached by the policy. None of the Ministers during the formulation of Transantiago had technical background or extensive experience in the transport sector, and the

<sup>20</sup>La Moneda" is Chile's presidential palace, which is located in down town Santiago.

same applied for the majority of Transantiago Coordinators. An ex-public official states that “technocrats made propositions based on what they believed would be the politicians’ directions and according to that, politicians decided . . . In some moment politicians reacted badly to such detailed reports, such as what would be the incentives for companies operating buses.” But an expert expresses that “the Minister, who took office later, said in sessions that he had no capacity to understand the magnitude of the problem he had to face.” Another expert adds, “there was some self-complacency and autonomy in the decisions about the Plan.”

The approval of PTUS raised the need to do studies to support the proposal, which focused on surveys of origin-destiny in Santiago’s Metro of 1991 and 2001, the size of the fleet of buses, and years of service as well as the urban transport’s contribution to Santiago’s pollution. Analyzing the origin-destiny surveys was a very important information and the basis of the design for Santiago’s Urban Transportation Plan.

In spite of the fact that a well-known consultancy firm worked on the design and some studies had been done, the plan lacked critical information on customer behavior and the cost of the plan, and it had unclear information on the rate of customer transferences between buses, frequency of buses and average time of trips as well as a lack of understanding about the complexities of a transport system of a big city. Briones (2009) claims that the failure of Transantiago was mainly a problem of not enough information on the issue at three levels: first, about the modeling of new trips and on the old trips to which passengers were accustomed; second, insufficient information provided to passengers to be able to adapt to the new system; and third, information asymmetries between the authorities and bus owners, which was a key issue in writing contracts and the perverse incentives these included. An interviewee adds: “old routes were not considered and that was important knowledge.”

## Discussion

What does the exhibited evidence tell about how the policy process works in Chile? The gathered evidence most properly suggests a kind of nonexplicit agreement between political power and expert knowledge in the Chilean policy-making process of the analyzed period, in other words, a tacit alliance between the most powerful actor of the political system, the president, and those who obtain the expert knowledge and apply it, the technocrats and technopols. Furthermore, the evidence identifies not only who the most influential

actors are but also how they constitute this alliance and work through the policy process to select problems, and formulate, approve, and implement government interventions.

The evidence shows that the inclusion of a problem in the government agenda rather depends on the vision that a small group within the government has developed on a particular situation. This group is commonly integrated by very influential policy advisors, high public officials, and the president. The vision developed by this group would depend on a set of factors such as professional background, the theoretical frameworks in which they have been trained in their studies, the perception of the problem they have developed on a particular situation, studies undertaken on the issue and evaluation of programs under current implementation. The fact that an issue had been among the main citizen’s concerns was not a decisive element for that issue to be included in the government agenda.

The analysis of the four cases seems to show a pattern. If the president has a motivation on the issue or if policy advisors succeed in getting the President convinced that the situation is a public problem, then the likelihood to be included in his/her presidential platform, while a candidate, or in the government agenda, when president, increases dramatically. In all four cases presidents had personal inclination to the issue either because of their experiences, beliefs, knowledge on the issue, because of their interest in solving a situation they saw as a problem or because they wanted to leave a bequest for next generations.

On the other hand, the fact that an issue leaves the government agenda appears to be related to the president’s lack of motivation to it, which is the case of the public management modernization in the Lagos administration. In that situation, in a context of a political crisis or a severe weakness of the president, an actor with equivalent political capacity, and inclined to intervene on the issue has to emerge to get the issue included in the government agenda and move it toward the decision agenda, as the case of the public management modernization shows.

Technocrats and technopols contribute expert knowledge to give rationality to problem selection. While the president is the protagonist in the problem selection stage, technopols appear to have the leading role in the formulation and implementation stages, whereas technocrats are key actors in the details of designing interventions. Presidential motivation appears also to be linked to the issue moving up in the government agenda and coming into the decision agenda. In all four cases the president appears to be the crucial actor to overcome any difficulty in the process

of building and approving a policy proposal, because he/she is the one who may give the most important political support to the policy initiative.

This tacit agreement between these two types of key actors seems to work as follows: a motivated president appoints and empowers technopols, who lead groups of technocrats to build a proposal based on expert knowledge. These technopols set ties and work within political networks across government and develop extensive efforts—supported by the president—to get a proposal approved and implemented later.

Three out of four cases analyzed in this study show policies being approved and implemented went through a long process of accumulation of information, experiences and, ultimately, knowledge on the issue that would be intervened. This was a crucial factor in decisions on building the government agenda as shown by cases of public management modernization, the policy on transparency and the health-care reform during both the Lagos and Frei Ruiz-Tagle administrations. Health-care reform was not undertaken during the Frei Ruiz-Tagle administration because of the lack of enough expert knowledge on the issue and, because of that, the president's instruction was to develop studies for the reform that might be implemented in the following administration, which would allow the next president—Ricardo Lagos—to implement it.

Transantiago shows, on the one hand, a case of inclusion of an issue into the government agenda based on the president's strong motivation and will without having enough expert knowledge on the issue to be intervened. On the other hand, it reveals that failure in the understanding and complementation between technocrats and politicians may lead to a policy failure.

The cases studied also show another main characteristic of the Chilean policy formation process: there were not alternatives, but just one proposal, the one produced by the group that had worked on it within the government—empowered by the president—or the one generated by a group backed by an actor with enough political capacity, as showed by the case of the reinstatement of the public management modernization. Different from what Kingdon (2011, 1995) finds for the US case, the analysis of the four Chilean policies does not show a selection process of contending proposals. The analysis rather suggest that there is one idea or perspective, which is the basis for a proposal progressively built by a group of technocrats/technopols empowered by a politically dominant actor, who almost always is the president.

This characteristic seems to be related to another one, expressed in the fact that technopols and

technocrats seek the political support of the president to use his/her administrative capacity to approve proposals and implement them later, and leave the legislative way to situations in which there is no other constitutional choice and/or in contexts in which crises have to be solved through political negotiations that must be expressed in the approval of laws. This characteristic may be also seen as another expression of the tacit agreement—which appears to be very robust—between political power and expert knowledge. Interviews reveal that officials from the executive branch frequently—but not always—see Congress as a source of obstruction, disinterest, or long delays on executive initiatives, which they prefer to avoid for as long as possible for two reasons: to have a fast approval and to keep control of the process—to prevent that corporate interest may make that process deviate from the objectives of the reform defined by technopols and technocrats.

The analysis of the four Chilean cases suggests that the policy process would work somewhat differently from that of the US. Studies performed on cases from the United States conclude that joining the streams—problems, solutions, and politics—is the key factor to understand the formulation of a public policy (Kingdon, 2011, 1995), and that “an issue intrudes (in the government agenda) when a problem is severe and when the signal indicating the severity of that problem is weighted heavily” (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005, p. 266). According to this latter perspective, the key to understand the inclusion of an issue in the government agenda and the rise of a public policy is the processing of information (from public opinion, policy advocates, interest groups and the like) that occurs in the political system, which leads to interpretations that create images about the need to intervene on an issue that had been managed in a policy subsystem. Kingdon's perspective is close to that since his analytical focus is “how problems come to be recognized and how conditions come to be defined as problems,” which implies processing information that comes in the form of “systematic indicators, focusing events and feedback from the operations of current programs” (Kingdon, 2011, 1995, p. 19).

These very interesting and seminal studies seem to depict a quite rational process and resemble what Cobb et al. (1976, p. 128) describe as the “outside initiative model” of agenda setting. These studies focus their analysis in how the decision-makers process information, mainly coming from the public agenda, to set the government agenda and to undertake the policy-making process. Thus, what these analyses describe is a rather pluralist model (see, for instance, Howlett &

Ramesh, 2003) of agenda setting for policy cases from the USA.

In contrast, the evidence collected on the Chilean policy formation processes suggests the presence of an elitist model, where groups reaching government power and those around them have the ability to set some issues in the government agenda beyond whether or not these issues were in the public agenda. This characteristic seems to resemble the “inside access model” of agenda building and policy-making, where “proposals arise within governmental units or in groups close to the government . . . (implying an) attempt to exclude the participation of the public” (Cobb, et al., 1976, p. 136).

Seen in perspective, the analysis suggests that the Chilean policy process mainly develops within the executive branch—because of the institutional design—and that there is reciprocal and robust support between the president and technopols/technocrats—or, in other words, power and expert knowledge—which is maintained even when the knowledge on an issue is weak—as shown in the case of Transantiago. These two factors would make the president and technocrats/technopols very influential on the policy-making process. In this context, the president would be the political actor—given his/her motivation—that most frequently opens the process for a policy change. Technopols/technocrats would be the key actors in the design and implementation stages, depending on the presidential administrative capacities to avoid delays and keep control on the policy process. Similarly, as the health-care reform shows, competition between different advocacy groups for the contents of the policy tend to be solved by the president, who sets the framework ideas in which the policy proposal has to be designed.

### Conclusions

This article has analyzed four Chilean policy cases. The evidence collected from those cases insinuates that the Chilean policy formation process is rather elitist and the characteristics of the Chilean agenda-setting process is coincident with the description made by Cobb, et al. (1976) on the inside access model.

The evidence provided by the four Chilean cases analyzed suggest that the president’s will and motivation seems to be a key variable in Chile to identify a chance for a policy change. Most frequently a motivated president is the key actor that opens the process, identifying a situation on which he/she would like to undertake a policy intervention; the workable solution

depends on the knowledge accumulated on the issue and the framework of ideas set by the president.

This central characteristic of Chile’s policy formation process diverges from the one that reputed scholars have identified in the US case. While in the US case a plurality of proposals contend, in Chile no other proposal is considered in the process except the one worked on within the executive branch.

Thus, the analysis suggests that a policy change would most likely occur when a motivated president nominates and empowers a group of technopols/technocrats, which takes advantage of an extensive accumulation of knowledge on an issue, designs a proposal, and manages to get it approved and implemented. Technopols/technocrats, in turn, wishing to avoid delays and keep control of the process, prefer to use the administrative capacity of the president to get the proposal approved and implemented. But, if it is constitutionally mandatory or politically needed—because of a crisis, for instance—they are going to submit the proposal for a Congressional discussion and decision.

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