

PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL IN CHILE, 1990-2018: VARIANCE IN U-SHAPED CURVES¹

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Abstract

Studies on presidential approval in consolidated and emerging democracies identify similar determinants of popular support and show a common U-shaped cyclical pattern, with higher levels of support during the honeymoon period and in the last year of the presidential term and lower support in the in-between years. Since democracy was restored in 1990, Chile has had six presidential terms. With some nuances, presidential approval has evolved following the same cyclical pattern of higher approval at the beginning and end of the administrations. Using 66 presidential approval polls from Centro de Estudios Públicos between 1990 and 2018 (N=82,984), we assess the effect of party identification and economic vote variables on presidential approval. We show that party identification matters in the approval of all presidents. We also show that economic vote variables affect presidential approval for all presidents, though the effect was stronger for Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006) on average.

Resumen

Los estudios sobre aprobación presidencial en las democracias consolidadas y emergentes identifican determinantes similares de apoyo popular y muestran un patrón cíclico en forma de U, con niveles más altos de apoyo al comienzo del gobierno y en el último año del período presidencial y niveles más bajos en años interme-

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dios. Desde el retorno de la democracia, Chile ha tenido seis administraciones presidenciales completas. Con pequeñas diferencias, la aprobación presidencial ha evolucionado siguiendo el mismo patrón cíclico de mayor aprobación al comienzo y al final de los gobiernos. Usando 66 encuestas de aprobación presidencial del Centro de Estudios Públicos entre 1990 y 2018 (N=82984), evaluamos el efecto de la identificación partidista y variables de voto económico sobre la aprobación presidencial. Mostramos que la identificación partidista importa en la aprobación de todos los presidentes. También mostramos que las variables de voto económico también afectan la aprobación presidencial de todos los presidentes, aunque su efecto fue mayor, en promedio, en la aprobación de Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006).

Since democracy was restored in Chile in 1990, the five presidents that have presided over six presidential terms have experienced fluctuating presidential approval. Under different economic conditions and political contexts, leftist, centrist and rightwing presidents have seen their approval fluctuate from a low of 20 to a high of 80. With some nuances, all presidents experienced a U-shape evolution in their presidential approval, with higher approval in their honeymoon and end-of-the-term periods and lower approval during the in-between years. We analyze the determinants of presidential approval in Chile and hypothesize that ideology and economic vote variables explain presidential approval. We then present the case of Chile and the 6 presidential terms that have elapsed between 1990 and 2018. After discussing the methodology and presenting the data, we move on to the inferential analysis on what explains presidential approval in Chile.

Determinants of presidential approval

There is an overwhelming consensus that presidential approval is partially explained by long-term determinants, like political ideology and other socio-cultural variables – like race, class, religion or geographical residence in some

countries or other cleavages that explain the formation of the political party system (Erikson, MacKuen, & Stimson, 2002). Voters who are identified with the same political party/coalition or ideology as the president are more likely to approve of the president's performance in office –and that will also make them more likely to re-elect the incumbent government (Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Nannestad & Paldam, 1994). Short-term determinants, mostly associated with the economic performance of the country, are also relevant in explaining presidential approval (Erikson, MacKuen, & Stimson, 2002; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1989). Voters who do not identify with political parties or ideology are more likely to assess the performance of the president based on the observable economic variables, such as unemployment, inflation and economic growth (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson, 2000, MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1992).

Other short-term variables also affect presidential approval. In some countries, wars or political conflicts affect approval (Weyland, 1998; Arce, 2003). Political scandals or perception of corruption have also been found to have a negative effect on presidential approval (Manzetti & Rosas, 2015). The salience of different issues varies from country to country, but given similar economic conditions, presidents will have different approval levels based on the way people perceive they are handling political disputes or responding to unexpected events like natural disasters, scandals or social crises (Edwards III, Mitchell, & Welch, 1995). Presidential approval is also affected by the ability of governments to deliver on campaign promises. When a candidate strongly campaigns on specific promises, people will assess his or her performance in office based on their assessment of the president's fulfillment of those promises (Stokes, 2001).

Presidential approval is influenced by the evolution of democratic regimes. When democracy has been recently restored, presidents will benefit from a democratic honeymoon effect. As democracy becomes the norm, voters will

not cut the new president the same slack they cut the president in the first democratic period (Singer, 2015). Thus, it would be expected that newly established democracies or post-authoritarian democracies will deviate somewhat from the norm. As democracy consolidates as the only game in town, presidential approval should behave similarly as in other consolidated democracies.

In every term, presidents will also go through a political cycle. Newly inaugurated presidents will enjoy a honeymoon –which will last differently for different presidents. When they are nearing the end of their terms, presidents will also see their approval rise –either because people value the legacy of their entire terms or because people are happy to see unpopular presidents go. In the in-between years, presidents will often struggle with their approval as they seek to advance their legislative and reform agendas. The honeymoon effect might be affected by national idiosyncrasy and past legacies. For example, in a country that had a bad past experience with a leftwing president, the election of a new leftwing president might generate some concern among voters. Thus, the honeymoon effect might be less pronounced. If that new leftwing president leads a successful government, voters might end up rewarding him or her more strongly at the end of the term. The same might happen with the first woman president or with a very young president. Because some voters might be concerned about the new president's capacity –or might be biased because of her gender or age– the honeymoon effect might be less noticeable while the U-shape evolution in presidential approval at the end of the term might be more pronounced.

Presidential approval might partially depend on the legislative support they enjoy in congress –often measured as the seat share for the president's party or coalition (Canes-Wrone & de Marchi, 2002). When presidential terms do not coincide with legislative terms, or when there are midterm elections for legislators during a presidential term, presidential approval will both affect and be impacted by legis-

lative elections. When the president's approval is high, the president's party or coalition will likely benefit from a sympathy vote for the president and will be in a better position to increase its seat share in congress. Inversely, an unpopular president will mean that his or her party might take an electoral beating and lose seats in the legislature. A more amenable legislature will be more receptive to the president's agenda and, as people perceive that the country is moving in the direction the president wants it to move forward to, presidential approval might increase. A president who faces a less friendly congress after a midterm election might see his or her popularity decrease as people perceive gridlock in government –though presidents who play their cards in a way that successfully puts the blame for gridlock in the opposition might see an increase in their approval after a midterm election.

In short, presidential approval is affected by long-term determinants, where party identification or ideology and socio-demographic characteristics are the most commonly mentioned, by short-term determinants, like economic-perceptions and country-specific issues, by the electoral cycle and by specific conditions that apply to each democracy. Based on that discussion, we postulate two hypotheses in comparing the determinants of presidential approval for Lagos and for the other Chilean presidents. Our first hypothesis states that political party identification has strong explanatory power for presidential approval. Our second hypothesis states that economic vote indicators account for variations in presidential approval within each administration.

The evolution of democracy in Chile, 1990-2018

After a negotiated transition to democracy triggered by the 1988 plebiscite, Chile held democratic presidential and legislative elections in 1989 and the new government replaced the Pinochet military dictatorship (1973-1990) in March of 1990. The conditions that determined the tran-

sition to democracy, including the electoral rules inherited by the dictatorship, led to the restoration of the pre-1973 multi-party system aligned along two dominant coalitions. The center-left Concertación coalition that opposed the Pinochet dictatorship was comprised by the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), the Socialist Party (PS), Party for Democracy (PPD), Radical Party (PR) and smaller groups. The center-right Alianza coalition –which changed names for every election– was comprised by National Renewal (RN) and the far-right Independent Democratic Union (UDI).

The Concertación overwhelmingly won the 1989 presidential and legislative elections. PDC Patricio Aylwin became the president for a special 4-year transition period. Due to the presence of unelected senators (9, who joined 38 elected senators) appointed by the outgoing dictatorship, the Alianza ended up with a majority in the Senate, while the Concertación kept the presidency and a majority in the Chamber of Deputies. Former dictator Pinochet stayed on as Commander in Chief of the Army and several constitutional authoritarian enclaves limited the ability of the new Concertación government to advance its legislative and reform agenda.

At the end of the Aylwin administration (1990–1994), Concertación PDC candidate Eduardo Frei easily won the 1993 presidential election. The Concertación retained control of the Chamber of Deputies but the Alianza retained control of the Senate due to the influence of designated senators. Since Frei had a 6-year term and legislative elections are on a 4-year cycle, the 1997 and 2001 legislative elections did not coincide with a presidential election.

In 1999, Chileans voted in a non-concurrent presidential election. Concertación candidate Ricardo Lagos narrowly defeated Alianza Joaquín Lavín in a runoff contest –the first since democracy was restored. Since Lagos was a member of the leftwing PPD –farther left than the PDC, the party of Aylwin and Frei– and Lavín was a militant of the UDI, the 1999 presidential election was also the most polarized

since democracy was restored. Lagos won and became the first leftwing president of Chile since Allende (1970–1973).

At the end of the 6-year Lagos term, a comprehensive constitutional reform package was passed. The package included the elimination of designated senators (thus, creating an all-elected 38-member Senate) and the reduction of the presidential term to 4 years, establishing concurrent presidential and legislative elections from 2005 on. Lagos presided over the broad constitutional reform agreement and successfully eliminated all pending authoritarian enclaves from the constitution.

In the 2005 election, the Concertación won again and also clinched a seat-majority in both chambers. PS Michelle Bachelet became the first woman president in the country. The Concertación's legislative majority was lost in early 2008, when a handful of centrist legislators abandoned the PDC and other Concertación parties and joined the rightwing Alianza coalition, handing it the presidency and majority control of the Senate and producing a tie in the 120-member Chamber of Deputies.

At the end of Bachelet's term (2006–2010), the rightwing Alianza coalition won its first presidential election. RN Sebastián Piñera became Chile's president (2010–2014), though the Concertación retained a majority in the Senate. The Alianza legislative delegation had a plurality in the Chamber of Deputies. In the 2013 election, Bachelet returned to power leading a new coalition, Nueva Mayoría (comprised by all Concertación parties plus the Communist Party). Nueva Mayoría signaled a leftwing shift in the Concertación and Bachelet campaigned on a more markedly leftwing platform in 2013 than she did in the 2005 election. Nueva Mayoría overwhelmingly won the election, carrying a majority of seats in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies.

Thus, the first three Concertación presidents had majority support in the Chamber of Deputies but not in the Senate. Bachelet (2006–2010) had majority support in both cham-

bers, but lost it halfway in her administration. Piñera was a minority president and Bachelet, in her second term, had majorities in both chambers.

As Figure 1 shows, presidential approval in Chile presents a downward trend overtime, with significant variations within presidential periods. Aylwin apparently enjoyed a democratic honeymoon effect early in his term. His approval declined in the middle of his term and then experienced a small upsurge at the end of the term. Aylwin's approval conforms to a U-shaped trend, but it was distorted by a huge honeymoon effect early in his administration. As Aylwin's popularity remained above 50% throughout his 4-year term, the end-of-term upsurge was less pronounced.

Frei experienced a short honeymoon. His approval declined quickly after he took office. It continued to decline for most of the term and then experienced a small upsurge at the end of the term. Thus, the evolution in his approval resembled more an inverted J-shape than a U-shape. Still, for both Aylwin's 4-year term and Frei's 6-year term, their low point in their presidential approval was observed in years other than their first and last.

Lagos approval also went through a short honeymoon and then declined rapidly. Yet, during the second half of his 6-year term, Lagos's approval experienced a constant increase. In the last poll under his administration, Lagos saw his approval marginally decline. Thus, the evolution in Lagos's presidential approval is more J-shaped than U-shaped. Given that Lagos was the first leftwing president since Salvador Allende (1970-1973), his honeymoon approval effect might have been hindered by concerns about whether Lagos would –unlike Allende– be able to complete his 6-year term. Moreover, as Lagos assumed office shortly after former dictator Augusto Pinochet was released on humanitarian grounds after a 16-month arrest in London for charges of crimes against humanity brought against him by a judge in Spain, the country was politically polarized as Pinochet's arrest and release triggered a profound debate about the suc-

cesses and failures of Chile's transition to democracy. At the end of his term, Lagos's approval was higher than his predecessor's and higher than his approval when he began his term, thus the small downturn seen in the last presidential approval poll before he left office does not contradict the expected U-shaped trend over the entire presidential period.

Bachelet's approval in her first term (2006–2010) experienced a dramatic U-shape evolution. Her approval declined after the honeymoon, but toward the second half of her administration, it reached an all-time high for post-dictatorship Chilean presidents. Though less dramatically, Sebastián Piñera's approval also experienced a U-shaped evolution, with a short honeymoon period, a decline in the in-between years and an increase at the end of his term. Bachelet's second term (2014–2018) also went through a U-shaped evolution, with higher approval at the beginning of her term and big drop in the in-between years and a small increase at the end of her 4-year term.

Thus, with nuances, presidential approval in the six presidential terms between 1990 and 2018 has conformed to a U-shaped trend. The marginal deviations from that trend can be easily explained by the particularities of each government and by the political dynamics that surrounded each presidential term.

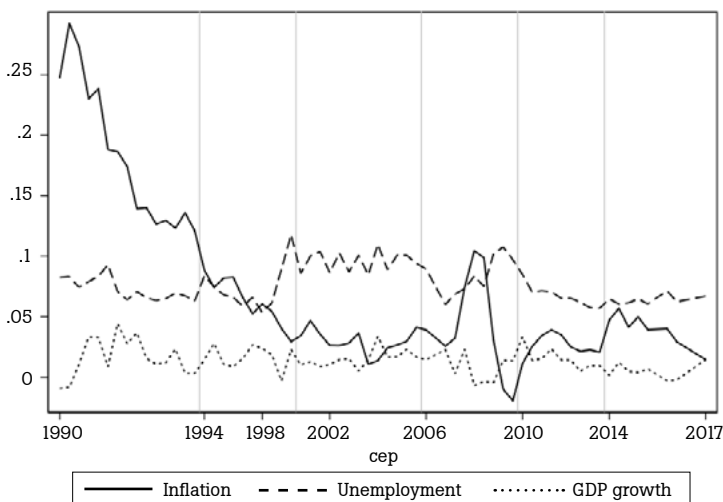
Figure 1. Presidential approval in Chile, by presidential term, 1990–2018



Source: The Executive Approval Project 1.0 (Carlin et al., 2016).

Economic conditions also varied in Chile during the period. As Figure 2 shows, inflation was in the high 20s when Aylwin took office. Inflation gradually declined over time to stabilize in the low single digits under Lagos. Briefly under the Bachelet administration, inflation increased to about 10% before the 2008 world economic crisis. Unemployment varied far less, between a low of 5 and a high of 11% during the period. Monthly GDP growth shows a stable pattern of sustained growth. The country experienced two recessions during the period, one in 1998-1999 (Asian crisis) and another short-lived recession in 2008-2009 (the financial crisis).

Figure 2. Main economic indicators in Chile, 1990-2018



Source: Authors with data from Central Bank of Chile.

There was sustained growth in the 1990s, with impressive results in terms of poverty reduction and social inclusion. The economy struggled in the 1998-2001 period, as the country recovered slowly from the Asian crisis. The start of the commodity boom in 2002 helped propel rapid econom-

ic growth until 2014 –with a brief interruption in 2008–2009. Progress in reducing poverty slowed down as poverty reached single digits in the 2000s. Since then, poverty has remained low, but the social policy focus has been on reducing inequality and promoting social and economic inclusion.

Data and methodology

To assess the determinants of presidential approval in Chile, we use the widely cited Centro de Estudios Públicos (CEP) polls. Conducted regularly since the late 1980s, the CEP polls are the only poll series that dates back to the entire democratic period. With a national sample and person-to-person interviews, the CEP polls are highly reliable. Their data and methodology are of public access (www.cepchile.cl). CEP polls are conducted at least once a year. As Table 1 shows, there have been some changes in the periodicity of the polls, with more polls conducted under the Aylwin term than in subsequent terms. The fewest number of polls was conducted under the Frei 6-year term. Still, there is at least one poll conducted per year for each of the 28 years of the 6 presidential terms between 1990 and 2018.

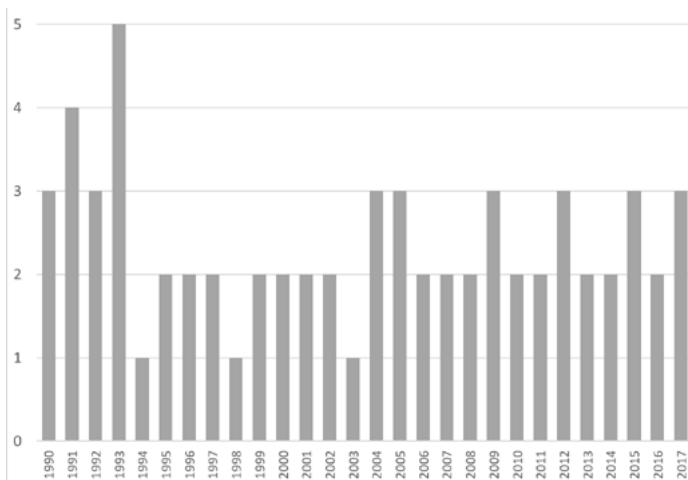
Table 1. Number of CEP polls by presidential term

Presidential term	Time period	# polls	Average number of polls per year
1-Aylwin	1990-1994	15	3.75
2-Frei	1994-2000	10	1.67
3-Lagos	2000-2006	13	2.17
4-Bachelet	2006-2010	9	2.25
5-Piñera	2010-2014	9	2.25
6-Bachelet	2014-2018	10	2.5
Grand Total	1990-2018	66	2.36

Source: Authors with data from CEP polls, 1990-2018.

Figure 3 shows the number of CEP polls conducted per year. There are more polls in presidential election years (1993, 1999, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2017). We chose to use all the polls conducted even if that means that, in some cases, some presidents and years end up being over represented in the entire sample, our regression estimation controls these differences within terms.

Figure 3. Number of CEP presidential approval polls by year, Chile, 1990-2017



Source: Authors with data from CEP polls, 1990-2018.

Our dependent variable is presidential approval. Though the CEP poll offers people four options (approve, disapprove, neither and no answer), we recoded the answers into a dichotomy (approves and other), since we are more interested in analyzing the positive effects of presidential support rather than its variation among the three different categories. Our independent variables are gender, age, education (which we standardized, since the coding for the CEP polls has varied over time) and socio-economic status (SES). We also include a question on the perception of the direction of the country. Curiously, CEP polls offer people three respons-

es –progressing, regressing or stagnant. Since stagnant is a bit more charged than “the same” –as it is the standard answer– it is no surprise that few people chose the negative “regressing”. Having this present, we use the three categories available as a continuous variable.

The poll also includes questions on sociotropic and egotropic assessments. We keep the three answer categories “worse”, “same” and “better” and analyze them as a continuous trichotomous variable. Since the poll includes a question on party identification, and we analyze 5 center-left presidential terms and one center-right term, we coded all the parties as belonging to the president’s coalition for every presidential term and all the parties that were in the opposition. Doing this we can compare the political parties across different presidential terms and political coalitions, independently of their political ideology. We included those two variables –with no identification with either government or opposition parties as the reference category. Finally, we include the indicators of inflation and unemployment for the month each poll was conducted. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for all the variables.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of dependent and independent variables for presidential approval in Chile, 1990-2018

Variables	N	mean	sd	min	max
Presidential Support	82,984	0.444	0.497	0	1
Female	82,984	0.581	0.493	0	1
Age (6 categories)	82,984	3.428	1.649	1	6
Education Standardized	82,984	0.0148	0.993	-2.278	2.294
SES	82,984	1.667	0.696	1	3
Direction of Country	82,984	2.295	0.679	1	3
Sociotropic evaluation	82,984	1.804	0.684	1	3
Egotropic evaluation	82,984	2.263	0.676	1	3
Party Id Government	82,984	0.332	0.471	0	1
Party Id Opposition	82,984	0.157	0.364	0	1
Inflation	82,984	0.0719	0.0677	-0.019	0.292
Unemployment	82,984	0.0764	0.0153	0.053	0.118
GDP Growth	82,984	0.0135	0.0113	-0.009	0.045

Source: Authors with data from CEP polls, Chilean Central Bank and National Institute of Statistics, 1990-2018.

Previous studies and stylized facts

Previous studies on presidential approval in Latin America have highlighted the importance of the economic vote in interaction with political preferences (Cabezas, 2015), prior expectations (Carlin, Singer, & Zechmeister, 2015). Voters punish incumbents when the economy does not perform well, but economic considerations are not the only determinant of incumbent performance (Murillo & Visconti, 2017). Studies on presidential approval in Chile have highlighted the role of economic performance mediated by ideology (Navia & Soto Castro, 2015). Social class is reported to be a strong determinant of presidential approval (Morales & Saldaña, 2009). Personality traits explain deviation from approval of the president and the government (Morales & Navia, 2008). Several descriptive texts have highlighted deviations from the expected effect of ideology and economic considerations on presidential approval (Navia, 2006).

The 6 presidential terms included in this study comprise periods of democratic transition (Aylwin 1990–1994), continuity in power by the same coalition (Frei 1994–2000, Lagos 2000–2006, Bachelet 2006–2010) and alternation in power (Piñera 2010–2014, Bachelet 2014–2018). Some of the governments studied had majority control of the legislature (Bachelet 2006–2010, Bachelet 2010–2014) or, even when they had majority electoral support, did not have majority support in congress (Aylwin, Frei, Lagos).

The economic conditions under which each government assumed power were also different. While Aylwin took power when the economy was expanding (albeit with high—but also declining— inflation), Lagos took office when the economy was under an economic recession. Piñera also assumed office when the economy was just coming out of a recession, but two weeks before his inauguration, a devastating earthquake hit the central region of the country and forced the government to adjust its economic program and

legislative priorities. In both of her terms, Bachelet came into office when the economy was expanding, but in her first term, she faced the economic crisis of 2008.

The different economic conditions under which each president governed offers a wide variance of exogenous factors that might have affected the way in which presidential approval evolved in their terms. Yet, while presidential approval for Frei, Bachelet's second term and Pinera evolved in a manner consistent with a U-shaped evolution, presidential approval under Aylwin reflected an inverted-J shaped evolution while for Lagos and Bachelet's first term it showed a J-shaped evolution.

To be sure, Bachelet's approval in her first term also experienced a J-shaped evolution. But the explanation for that rapid increase in presidential approval at the end of her term is associated with the way in which her administration responded to the 2008 crisis. Since Chile had benefited from the commodity export boom starting in 2003, Bachelet promoted the creation of a sovereign wealth fund (SWF) when she came to power. The SWF accumulated huge amounts of money by 2008. When the economic crisis hit, the government tapped those funds to stimulate the economy and minimize the negative impact of the international crisis. Bachelet's high approval resulted from her decision to pay the political costs of saving money under the favorable conditions in a rainy-day fund and then having the opportunity to spend it when the economic crisis triggered a short but deep recession in late 2008 and early 2009.

In the case of Lagos, the economy recovered slowly after the 1999 crisis. It is true that the economy was expanding when Lagos completed his term –and the commodity boom was getting stronger– but Lagos did not experience the kind of drastic change in economic conditions that helped Bachelet propel her approval to a record-breaking high. Thus, the J-shaped evolution in Lagos's presidential approval needs explaining. We turn to that in the next section.

Inferential analysis

To assess the effect of the determinants of presidential approval and to test our hypotheses, we estimated a Maximum Likelihood Estimation model with a probit link on presidential approval, since the variable is dichotomous. We run a model for Ricardo Lagos and a different model for all the other presidents. Because Lagos was the first leftwing president in Chile after the transition and because the way his approval evolved deviates the most from a U-shaped trend, we compare Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006) to the other five presidents. Both models in Table 3 take into consideration the different presidential terms and time across each term using a mixed-effect estimation approach.

Table 3 shows the results of our inferential analysis. Gender and SES did not have an effect over presidential support during Lagos administration; meanwhile they were significant over the rest of the terms. We must introduce a word of caution here. Since we combine presidential approval for presidents of different political ideology, party affiliation and distinct personal traits, it should come as no surprise that the effect of stronger approval among lower SES groups reported elsewhere in support for Bachelet (Morales & Saldaña, 2009) is cancelled out when she is grouped with presidents who enjoyed higher approval among upper or middle class groups –like Piñera or Frei. Both age and education level had a similar effect over the whole period analyzed.

Not surprisingly, those who believe the country is making progress –or is headed in the right direction– are more likely to approve of the performance of the president. This is true for Lagos and for the other 5 presidents combined. In a similar fashion, as the perception of the personal or national economic situation improves also does presidential support. Not surprisingly, the economic vote variables are significant in explaining presidential approval.

Yet, there is one important difference when analyzing the effect of the economic evaluations. The perception of

the national economic situation had a similar effect of coefficient over the 6 terms, on average. But a different story happens when we pay attention to the effect of the socio-tropic evaluation. As the perception that the personal economic situation improves, the support for the president also does, but its effect or impact was twice as big on Ricardo Lagos administration with respect to the average effect of the other 5 presidents.

This points to a greater effect of the economic vote for Lagos approval than for the other presidents. This difference might be explained by the fact that the election of Lagos as the first leftwing president since Allende might have triggered concerns over the way the economy would evolve under a leftwing Concertación government –as opposed to the two PDC centrist previous Concertación administrations. When Lagos implemented market-friendly reforms and promoted free trade agreements –including one that he signed with the U.S. in 2004– those with egotropic concerns might have rewarded Lagos with higher approval.

Those who identify with a party that belongs to the president's coalition are also more likely to approve of the president's performance, while those who identify with an opposition party are more likely to disapprove. There is one substantive difference when comparing Lagos administration to the rest of them. The effect or impact of feeling represented by a politician in the opposition was stronger under Lagos realm with respect to the other presidents. This means that Ricardo Lagos suffered a harder treatment from the individuals who did not identify with the parties in office, an effect 25% higher or worse than the other presidents on average.

While inflation has no effect on the approval of the other 5 presidents, Lagos' approval increased with higher inflation. This finding goes against the expectations, but it might be explained by the fact that, as Lagos' approval increased towards the end of his 6-year term, inflation also began to increase as a result of the commodity boom. The effect of

unemployment is also the opposite to what was expected. Higher unemployment has a positive effect on presidential approval for Lagos and for the other 5 presidents.

The effect of GDP variation is the opposite for Lagos than for the other 5 presidents. While a higher GDP variation –growth– has a positive impact on Lagos’s approval, GDP growth has a negative effect on the approval for the other 5 presidents.

The data backs our first hypothesis. Party affiliation –measured as identification with any of the government coalition parties– explains presidential approval in Chile. Identification with a government party explains presidential approval for all Chilean presidents in the 1990–2016. This confirms previous findings that ideology and party affiliation are strong determinants of presidential approval –and vote choice– in post authoritarian Chile. Even though those who identify with political parties are on the decline, identification with a political party remains a strong determinant of presidential approval among those who continue to identify with a party. We also find evidence in support of our second hypotheses. Economic vote indicators explain presidential approval for all presidents. Thus, while party identification is a strong predictor of presidential approval in democratic Chile, economic vote variables also explain variation in presidential approval.

Table 3. Presidential support in Chile, Probit coefficients

	(1) Ricardo Lagos	(2) Other Presidents
Female	-0.028 (0.025)	0.024** (0.011)
Age	0.025*** (0.009)	0.028*** (0.004)
Education	-0.059*** (0.016)	-0.072*** (0.007)
SES	0.022 (0.022)	-0.045*** (0.009)
Direction of the country	0.480***	0.578***

	(0.021)	(0.009)
Sociotropic evaluations	0.332***	0.336***
	(0.021)	(0.009)
Egotropic evaluations	0.299***	0.135***
	(0.020)	(0.008)
Government Party Identification	0.758***	0.636***
	(0.028)	(0.012)
Opposition Party Identification	-0.266***	-0.190***
	(0.035)	(0.016)
Inflation	10.776***	-0.977***
	(2.034)	(0.225)
Unemployment	0.645	9.543***
	(1.789)	(0.441)
GDP Growth	14.879***	-4.166***
	(2.487)	(0.530)
CEP poll number	0.010	-0.030***
	(0.007)	(0.002)
Constant	-3.657***	-1.708***
	(0.373)	(0.287)
Observations	12,638	70,346
# presidential terms	1	5
Rho	---	0.232

Standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Since identification with government coalition parties has a strong effect on approving of the president's performance, we estimated its effect for each presidential term. We estimated the betas for the six presidents included in our analysis in the appendix. Not surprisingly, those who identify with parties that are part of the government coalition are more likely to approve of the president performance, while those people who identify with an opposition party are less likely to approve of the president. As democracy has consolidated –and as party identification has declined among Chileans– party identification has turned into a stronger predictor of presidential approval. While those that identified with opposition parties were barely less likely to ap-

prove of Aylwin and no less likely to approve of Frei, since Lagos came to power in 2000, those who identify with opposition parties have been clearly less likely to approve of the president's performance. The gap in approval between those who identify with a government coalition party and those who identify with an opposition party has increased with every administration. In the first Bachelet term (2006–2010), those who were in the opposition had the most negative effect on her support. In the Piñera administration (2010–2014), those who identify with a government coalition party were more likely to approve of the president's performance than ruling party sympathizers for any of the Concertación/Nueva Mayoría administrations.

Given that party identification is on the decline in Chile, falling from a high of 70% during the Aylwin administration to a low of less than 30% in recent years, the effect of party identification might simply be reflecting the higher level of polarization among those who identify with parties. As a majority of people no longer identify with parties—either ruling or opposition parties—those who identify are more likely to hold stronger ideological views and, thus, their assessments of presidential performance might also reflect higher levels of polarization—with those identifying with ruling parties more likely to support the president and those identifying with opposition parties less likely to do so. Yet, the differences between administrations leads us to speculate that people identified with rightwing parties were far more ideological in their assessment of President Piñera's performance in office than those who identified with leftwing parties were of Bachelet and Lagos's performance. This might be because Piñera was the first rightwing president in Chile since the transition to democracy. Yet, given that Lagos was the first leftwing president since the transition to democracy, we should have expected a similar level of enthusiasm in approving of Lagos' performance among those who identified with center-left Concertación parties during his administration.

Similarly, the higher rejection for the first Bachelet administration among those who identified with opposition parties leads us to speculate that her administration was more ideologically polarizing than Lagos. Because Lagos inherited an economic crisis, he had to quickly implement centrist and pragmatic market-friendly policies to jumpstart the economy—a move that was a welcoming surprise for those who had concerns over the type of economic policies that the first leftwing President since Allende would implement. Six years later, Bachelet did not have the same constraints and her reforms, while still market-friendly, were perceived as more ambitious in terms of promoting social spending among the poor and seeking to reduce inequality.

A similar effect happens when analyzing whether positive and negative socio-tropic perceptions on the economy have a significant effect on presidential approval. To compare the effect of those variables over time, we estimated the betas for sociotropic perceptions on the economy on presidential approval for every presidential term, included in the appendix. The effect of the sociotropic perceptions on the economy have decreased over time. This should not be surprising. When democracy was restored in 1990, there were widespread concerns over the kind of economic policies the new center-left Concertación government would implement. The military dictatorship and rightwing parties strongly campaigned on fear mongering about the economic policies that their centrist and leftwing opponents would implement if elected. As the Concertación administrations demonstrated that they were responsible at handling the economy, the effect of sociotropic views declined. In more recent years, the gap in presidential approval among those with positive and negative sociotropic views has declined even further. This is consistent with the increase in ideology as a determinant factor of presidential approval in recent years. Yet, since a growing majority of Chileans do not identify with political parties, the decreasing importance of socio-tropic views—the economic vote variables—in ex-

plaining presidential approval begs the question of what drives presidential approval among those –a growing majority of Chileans– who do not identify with political parties.

Conclusion

Contributions on the determinants of presidential approval highlight the importance of party identification and economic vote indicators. In analyzing presidential approval in Chile between 1990 and 2018, we find variance in the evolution of presidential approval for different governments. While we do find a U-shaped trend in the approval of 3 of the six presidents, there is one president –Aylwin (1990–1994)– who experienced an inverted J-shaped approval (something that can be attributed to a strong honeymoon effect for the first president under the new democratic period) and two presidents –Lagos (2000–2006) and Bachelet (2006–2010)– who experienced a J-shaped approval, with record-breaking high approval during the second half of their administrations.

With probit estimations using 66 presidential approval polls conducted between 1990 and 2018, we showed that party identification explains presidential approval for all presidents. We also show that socio-tropic economic vote variables explain presidential approval for all presidents as well, but that ego-tropic assessments better explain presidential approval for Lagos. As party identification becomes a stronger determinant of presidential approval and the explanatory power of socio-tropic concerns lose strength, our study invites further research on what explains presidential approval among the growing number of Chileans who do not identify with political parties. If party identification –and perhaps even ideology– are strong determinants of approval, further research ought to look into what explains approval among those who do not identify with political parties or who do not express ideological preferences.

Appendix 1. Probit estimations on presidential approval in Chile by presidents, 1990-2018

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Aylwin	Frei	Lagos	Bachelet1	Piñera	Bachelet 2
Female	-0.114***	-0.023	-0.028	0.195***	0.051*	0.125***
(1= female)	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.029)
Age	0.031***	0.000	0.025***	-0.001	0.038***	0.049***
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.010)
Education	-0.013	-0.102***	-0.059***	-0.106***	-0.046***	-0.157***
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.018)
SES	0.028*	-0.028	0.022	-0.137***	0.055**	-0.159***
	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.024)
Sociotropic	0.376***	0.370***	0.332***	0.285***	0.305***	0.295***
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.022)
Egotropic	0.150***	0.149***	0.299***	0.097***	0.143***	0.084***
	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.024)
Progress of country	0.628***	0.542***	0.480***	0.581***	0.523***	0.497***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Gov party id	0.687***	0.563***	0.758***	0.655***	0.965***	0.697***
	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.041)	(0.037)
Opposition	-0.136***	-0.012	-0.266***	-0.410***	-0.163***	-0.397***
Party id	(0.030)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.033)	(0.064)
Inflation	0.989*	1.203	10.776***	-4.096***	-30.038***	-17.373***
	(0.539)	(2.616)	(2.034)	(0.440)	(2.021)	(2.689)
Unemployment	-5.714***	3.489***	0.645	7.256***	-51.813***	-2.134
	(1.734)	(0.917)	(1.789)	(1.162)	(9.290)	(5.193)
GDP growth	-4.005***	-6.474***	14.879***	-1.728	11.729***	11.703***
	(0.718)	(1.590)	(2.487)	(1.501)	(4.474)	(2.669)
Cep poll #	-0.053***	-0.014	0.010	0.074***	-0.161***	-0.117***
	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.020)	(0.011)
Constant	-1.499***	-2.415***	-3.657***	-6.549***	11.693***	7.159***
	(0.306)	(0.718)	(0.373)	(0.335)	(1.923)	(0.856)
Observations	19,164	15,128	12,638	12,697	12,643	10,714

Standard errors in parentheses.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

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