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■ AQ FEATURE

Chile's Pragmatic Middle-Class Voter

by

[Gregory Elacqua](#) and [Cristóbal Aninat](#)



A woman casts her ballot during the Chilean elections on December 13, 2009, in Santiago, Chile. Photo: Marcelo Hernandez/LatinContent/Getty

As Chile's middle class broadens its expectations, its political loyalties have shifted, too.

Chile's middle class has always played a key role in the country's politics. In the first four presidential elections after the 1989 democratic transition, middle-class voters were a decisive factor in the victories of center-left Concertación candidates Patricio Aylwin, Eduardo Frei, Ricardo Lagos, and Michelle Bachelet. By 2009, however, Chile's middle class turned away from the Concertación and voted for Sebastián Piñera, a center-right businessman and former senator who became the country's first non-Concertación president since the return to democracy.

The historic shift was not driven by any change in the Left's platform and rhetoric, or by the personalities of the candidates. It was the Chilean middle class that had changed.

Chile's middle class represents a majority segment of the voting population. It is defined as adults over 18 belonging to the middle 50 percent of households ranked by socioeconomic status. And over the past two decades, its interests and characteristics have changed.

Today, middle-class Chileans are more educated, more likely to send their children to private schools and to have greater access to credit to purchase goods and services. They also, significantly, demonstrate less party loyalty—making them a critical swing vote.

Thus, although surveys show the current government under Piñera is losing support among the general electorate, the underlying shift in middle-class voting behavior, combined with low turnout levels in the 2012 municipal elections, has complicated predictions for the 2013 presidential election...

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