

## *Abortion and the Differences between “Leftist” Governments*

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Latin America is a region of contrasts in many senses: social, cultural, economic and even political. Despite this fact, it is observed - when analyzing different local legislation throughout the region - that there is a common trend for protecting the human right to life from the moment of conception.

In addition to the clear trend of the domestic order, the Latin American countries have assumed commitments in the international sphere through the signature and ratification of international treaties that protect life from its first moment, for example in is the cases of the Pact of San José de Costa Rica or the American Convention on Human Rights<sup>2</sup>.

Nevertheless, this legislative and political trend, might change - in the short term - in some countries, due to the strong pressures that fight to legalize abortion, which is often associated - in the popular ideology - with the existence of governments that have “leftist” agendas or a socialist profile.

Thus, "conservative" governments are usually identified as those who have protectionist legislation toward the right to life, and "progressive" and "leftist" governments as those who implement reformist tendencies favorable to abortion. However, recent evidence shows that this identification is not necessarily realistic.

Indeed, whereas in some countries - for example Chile - the rise to power of a government of “the left side” again<sup>3</sup> might threaten the current force of legislation that protects the right to the life, in others - such as Ecuador - the right to life is "untouchable" despite the fact that its government is considered by many people as one of the most "leftist" of the region.

As a country, Chile is characterized by the forward-looking policies which it has adopted and which have been respected by the various administrations which have held power in the country. Furthermore, the people of Chile respect and trust institutions, such as the government and the justice system. Thanks to these qualities and its sustained growth the country has gained the nickname "Latin America's jaguar." This is a country that has managed to go from years of military dictatorship to democratic governments through more or less ordered transitions. Meanwhile, in "valóricos" issues (this is how people refer in Chile to ethical-moral topics) it is catalogued as a country the society of which is mostly "conservative" and strongly

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<sup>2</sup> Signed in San Jose, Costa Rica on November 22, 1969, in the Inter-American Specialized Conference on Human Rights. Available in <http://www.cidh.org/Basicos/Spanish/Basicos2.htm>

<sup>3</sup> After Pinochet's dictatorship a coalition of leftist, center-left and center political parties called "La Concertación", ruled Chile from 11 March 1990 until 11 March 2010.

In the last presidential election, Michelle Bachelet won 62.16% in the ballotage, becoming for the second time in her life President of Chile.

protective of the right to life. In this trend it is possible to include a great part of its political class. It is interesting to highlight as an example of this the statements of former President Sebastián Piñera, who in the year 2010 took office at the head of this country with a key premise that reflected his vision of the right to life: "*We reaffirm the commitment to the values that orientate our society: the value of life, especially of an innocent and defenseless person like the unborn child*"<sup>4</sup>. Two years later, in an open letter published by El Mercurio - a very important newspaper - on March 16, Piñera reaffirmed his statements, proving to be totally against abortion: "*I am a supporter of protecting life and human dignity from conception up to natural death. And for the same reasons, I am also against euthanasia and the death penalty*"; concluding that "*in doubt it is always better to choose for life. Because if we still did not have certainty of the respect of the juridical treatment that has to be given to a human life in gestation, the correct and wise thing to do is to assume a humble position and to choose the solution that is more favorable to the protection and development of this life*"<sup>5</sup>.

Nevertheless, in the twilight of his administration, things in Chile are likely to change.

The President Michelle Bachelet, who took office last March 11, already during the presidential campaign proposed big changes concerning the right to life. As a candidate she showed herself to be in favor of the legalization of abortion. In August, 2013 on a work day of the Women's Metropolitan Network for Bachelet - a group that formed during the electoral campaign to promote of the policies that the political party Nueva Mayoría was seeking to implement - the former Executive Director of UN WOMEN<sup>6</sup> stated that they were trying to stimulate the legalization of abortion in three specific cases: risk to the life of the mother, unviability of the fetus, and rape<sup>7</sup>. All this was reflected when presenting the government program last October 27 before hundreds of people at the Huemul theatre<sup>8</sup>.

Thereby, it seemed that Chile has begun to slowly leave the "conservative" position and initiate a process of repealing the protection of life and human dignity in certain cases.

Ecuador, on the other hand, is governed nowadays by President Rafael Correa<sup>9</sup>, whose government might be catalogued as a "lefty" one. Nevertheless, and paradoxical to what could be supposed, this government promotes the protection of the right to life and the criminalization of abortion as a clear state policy.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.umayor.cl/gestionpublica/descargables/docs/programa\\_gobierno\\_2010.pdf](http://www.umayor.cl/gestionpublica/descargables/docs/programa_gobierno_2010.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.emol.com/documentos/archivos/2012/03/18/2012031810505.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> She was in that position since September 14, 2010 until March 15, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> <http://cnnchile.com/noticia/2013/08/24/michelle-bachelet-queremos-impulsar-la-despenalizacion-del-aborto->

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.latercera.com/noticia/politica/2013/10/674-549066-9-bachelet-incluye-aborto-y-matrimonio-igualitario-y-apoya-afiliacion-sindical.shtml>

<sup>9</sup> Correa is President since January 15, 2007 when he won the election in 2006. Then he was reelected 2 times: in 2009 and 2013.

This was reflected at the end of 2013, when, in Ecuador, a tense moment occurred due to the “resignation threat” that President Correa issued<sup>10</sup>. The motive? The possibility of legalizing abortion in Ecuador, through a bill presented by two legislators allied to his Party. Correa made a statement to a TV program: he would never approve the legalization of abortion<sup>11</sup>. He thought the behavior of these congressmen to be an act of treason. He reminded them that the Constitution speaks of protecting life from conception, and does not allow abortion. Finally the project was withdrawn before the resounding reaction of the President.

Given these apparently conflicting realities, it is interesting to observe that there are shades inside ideologies, and that assuming all “leftist” governments support a pro-abortion proposals is patently false. At the same time, it shows that the defense of life from conception is still in the collective subconscious of our nations, and that overcomes any political barriers.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.infobae.com/2013/10/11/1515310-rafael-correa-amenaza-renunciar-si-el-congreso-despenaliza-el-aborto>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOC7juMXUR8>