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**TAGS:** PGOV, ECON, CI

**SUBJECT: Chile's Presidential Election: Dec. 13 Vote Pits Sputtering  
Frei against Rising Enriquez-Ominami for Spot in Runoff**

**REF:** SANTIAGO 897 SANTIAGO 919

**CLASSIFIED BY:** Laurie Weitzenkorn, A/DCM, State, US Embassy  
Santiago  
**REASON:** 1.4(B), (D)

1. (SBU) **Summary:** Opposition candidate Sebastian Pinera is almost certain to emerge from the December 13 presidential election in first place but falling short of the absolute majority required to be elected outright. The real question to be answered is whom he will face in a second round--Concertacion candidate Eduardo Frei, or upstart Marco Enriquez-Ominami? Both camps are cautiously optimistic, with the Enriquez-Ominami team arguing that their rising support will have overtaken Frei's slow decline by December 13--a result that could signal a major re-structuring for the long-ruling Concertacion. End Summary.

### **December 13: The First Round of a Historic Election**

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2. (SBU) On December 13, Chilean voters will go to the polls in the first phase of a historic election that could be a major step towards bringing the center-right to power for the first time in decades. Chile's center-left Concertacion coalition has ruled the country continuously during the nearly twenty years since the Pinochet dictatorship, but this year the opposition Alianza has its best chance ever to regain the presidency. A win for Sebastian Pinera, the Alianza candidate, would not only mean that Chile would be governed by political conservatives for the first time since 1989, but would also be the first time in sixty years that a conservative candidate has been elected president. (In 1958, conservative candidate Jorge Alessandri won a plurality of votes with 32% and was later confirmed as president by Congress. The last time a conservative candidate won a majority of votes was in 1932, when Jorge Alessandri's father, Arturo Alessandri, won 55% of the vote.)

3. (SBU) Pinera is practically guaranteed a spot in the second round election and has a good chance of ultimately winning the presidency. Chile's most respected national poll, conducted by the Centro de Estudios Publicos (CEP), has consistently shown him leading both first and second rounds of the presidential race during various surveys over the past several months. Fifty-three percent of Chileans expect Pinera to become the next president, compared to 26% for Frei and 8% for Enriquez-Ominami (Ref A).

## **The Big Question: Who Will Pinera Face in the Second Round?**

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4. (SBU) Given Pinera's commanding lead in polls, the real question to be answered in the first round of voting is whom Sebastian Pinera will face in the second round. With poll numbers consistently placing Pinera in first place but with less than 50% of the vote, there is little doubt that a runoff election will be required and that Pinera will be one of the two contenders. (Note: The Chilean constitution requires a second round election if no candidate receives an absolute majority of the vote. If required, the second round will be held on January 17. End Note.) Concertacion candidate and former president Eduardo Frei finished second in the CEP poll released in November (Ref A). Other polls have given upstart candidate Marco Enriquez-Ominami the edge over Frei to make the second round, but most of those polls focus on urban voters, undercounting small cities and rural areas that are seen as favoring Frei.

## **Charges in Death of Eduardo Frei Montalva Come Just Six Days Before Election**

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5. (SBU) Charges against six people allegedly involved in the murder of President Eduardo Frei Montalva, the father of presidential candidate Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, were filed on December 7, just six days before the election. (Septel will provide additional background on this case.) News coverage riveted around the charges and the reaction of the Concertacion candidate, who ended his campaign three days early. (Chilean law sets December 10 as the last day of campaigning.) Other candidates publicly expressed support for the Frei family. Some observers have questioned the timing of the charges as politically convenient for Frei's candidacy, though the judge has denied any political considerations. (Comment: News of the criminal charges may give Eduardo Frei a small boost in the December 13 vote, as it both emphasizes the

image of his beloved and well-respected father as well as bringing up the specter of the Pinochet administration, which is still tied to the Alianza coalition in the minds of some voters. End Comment.)

## **Frei Campaign Sputters Along**

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6. (C) The Frei camp has run a terrible campaign and its mistakes have continued into the final weeks before the first round vote. Enriquez-Ominami advisor **Ciro Colombara** quipped to **Poloff** that Frei's run ""has almost been a lesson in how not to run a presidential campaign."" Concertacion Senator and former presidential candidate **Soledad Alvear** told **Poloff** that the Frei campaign has been ""strange"" and has suffered from not having an effective overall leader. Alvear admitted that she has purposefully kept her distance from Frei's campaign. Similarly, Christian Democrat president **Juan Carlos Latorre** told the Ambassador that several Concertacion congressional candidates are reluctant to pose with Frei in their campaign ads.

7. (SBU) Perpetual staff turnover at the Frei command continues to make headlines and give the impression of a poorly managed effort. In the most recent shift, Socialist politician and former Labor Minister **Ricardo Solari** recently assumed many of the communications responsibilities of the poor-performing communications director, **Pablo Halpern**. In addition, several high-profile Concertacion loyalists seem to be publicly preparing for (and thereby contributing to) a Frei loss. The Chilean Ambassador to Spain (and former Socialist party president) **Gonzalo Martner** told the press that Enriquez-Ominami could also continue President **Bachelet's** extremely popular policies, contradicting Frei's message that he is the true inheritor of Bachelet's legacy. **Carolina Rosetti**, another Socialist and Chile's Ambassador to Switzerland, has agreed to record political ads in favor of Enriquez-Ominami. And in November, former Foreign Minister **Gabriel Valdes** said that while he planned to vote for Frei, **Pinera** would not be a bad president.

8. (C) Frei advisor and former Interior Minister Belisario Velasco evinced confidence that Frei would prevail in the December 13 first round, but was less confident about how he would do in a runoff against Pinera. During a December 2 conversation, Velasco predicted that Pinera would receive 40% of the vote in the first round, compared with 31% for Frei, 20% for Enriquez-Ominami, and just 7% for independent leftist candidate Jorge Arrate.

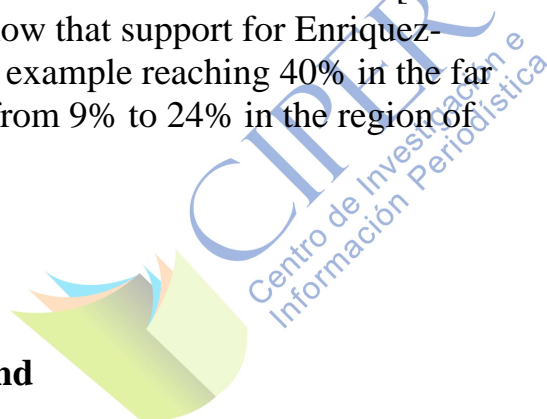
### **Enriquez-Ominami Team Says They're on the Rise**



9. (C) The Enriquez-Ominami team asserts that their candidate is doing better than the CEP poll indicates, and that the 36-year-old parliamentarian has a real chance of besting Frei on December 13 and making it to the second round. Although widely viewed as Chile's most credible poll, the numbers from the CEP poll released on November 12 are now quite out of date, Enriquez-Ominami advisor Javier Sajuria assured Poloff, with most of the interviews having been done Oct. 11-21. Given that Enriquez-Ominami's poll numbers have been rising steadily while Frei's have been slowly falling, the real question is whether Enriquez-Ominami's support can overtake Frei's by December 13. Moreover, the period when the CEP poll was taken was a peak period for Frei, with President Bachelet Bachelet's very popular mother, Angela Jeria and several Concertacion ministers campaigning for him. If Frei's support dropped despite that positive news coverage, the Concertacion candidate is in trouble, Sajuria asserted.

10. (C) Enriquez-Ominami chief advisor Max Marambio backs up Sajuria's analysis, and told Poloff December 4 that there has been a real "effervescence" among Enriquez-Ominami supporters in recent weeks. Enthusiasm for the upstart candidate seems to have finally spread outside his young, urban base of support to older, more rural, and poorer voters. (Comment: This may be largely attributed to Enriquez-Ominami's famous and

beloved wife, television personality Karen Doggenweiler, who has been campaigning actively in rural areas over the past several weeks. Observers from inside and outside the Enriquez-Ominami campaign say that affection for Doggenweiler is a major factor in Enriquez-Ominami's success thus far [Ref B]. End Comment. ) The campaign's polls show that support for Enriquez-Ominami has jumped in some rural areas, for example reaching 40% in the far southern town of Punta Arenas and jumping from 9% to 24% in the region of Araucania.



## **Pinera Team: Focused on the Second Round**

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11. (C) With their presence on a second-round ballot all but assured, the Pinera campaign team is focusing its resources on winning the January 17 vote and preparing to govern. The campaign takes as a given that they will face Frei in a runoff, qualifying an Enriquez-Ominami victory over Frei as "impossible." Political observers say that Pinera has already bought up radio time for the four weeks between the first and second rounds of voting, and has a warehouse full of printed materials ready to be deployed on December 14. Campaign staff tell us that they have already recorded radio spots for the second phase of the campaign. In a conversation with poloffs on December 4, defeat in either the first or second round seemed almost unthinkable to Pinera advisor and parliamentarian Dario Paya, who talked little of Pinera's campaign strategy and instead discussed the challenges a Pinera administration would face and uncertainty regarding congressional races.

## **What to Watch for on December 13**

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12. (C) Assuming that the most likely scenario prevails and Frei and Pinera emerge as the victors of the first round, their relative performance will be key to predicting how the final phase of the campaign season and the runoff election unfold. As long as Frei is within 10 points of Pinera, he is all but guaranteed to win in the second round, Frei advisor Belisario Velasco said, as Frei is likely to get all of Arrate's votes and many of Enriquez-Ominami's. However, should Pinera's lead approach 13-14 points, Frei will have a very difficult time defeating him the second round. (See Ref A for a discussion of why Enriquez-Ominami may be a more formidable second round opponent than Frei.) For their part, Pinera advisors Jose Miguel Izquierdo and Rodrigo Yanez say that their goal is for Pinera to win 44 percent or more of the first round vote, which they believe would assure his victory in the second round.

### **Comment**

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13. (C) Pinera has run an effective, error-free campaign with a relatively united conservative coalition, and his team is very confident on his chances for both the first and second round. Frei's campaign thus far has been ineffective, and his team is counting getting to the second round with a manageable gap and starting an essentially new campaign, while hoping that the center-left will gather behind Frei. Few pundits expected Enriquez-Ominami to run such a competitive campaign, and were he to make the second round the question is whether his appeal would continue to build, or whether his weaknesses would be exposed in a two-person campaign.

**SIMONS**