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## Chile's presidential election

# Bachelet is back

### But not quite the shoo-in she looks

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AN AGNOSTIC single mother and Chile's first woman president, Michelle Bachelet broke the rules of her country's politics. When she left office in 2010 and went off to New York to head the United Nations organisation for women, she enjoyed an approval rating of 84%. For months, her return has been a matter of much speculation. Her supporters in the centre-left Concertación coalition see Ms Bachelet as their best hope of recovering power. When asked, she replied only that she would "speak in March". Her silence gave her an almost gnostic mystique.

Just before Easter she duly resigned from the UN, and returned home to campaign. Everything suggests she will win the Concertación's June primary with ease. In the subsequent election, in November, she will face a candidate from the governing centre-right Coalition: either Laurence Golborne, who as mining minister was in charge of the rescue of 33 miners trapped underground in 2010, or Andrés Allamand, a former defence minister. Opinion polls suggest Ms Bachelet would wipe the floor with either of them.

But that may change. Having weathered huge student protests, the government of Sebastián Piñera (who is barred from seeking consecutive terms) can point to an impressive economic record. Growth has averaged 5.8% a year, double the rate under Ms Bachelet, who had to grapple with the impact of the world financial crisis (and did so capably). Inflation has fallen, unemployment is low and foreign investment is pouring in.

Ms Bachelet this week told supporters that if elected she would immediately send a bill to Congress to end private profit from education at all levels. That was a sop to the students. In fact, profit is already banned in universities. And the obvious rejoinder is why didn't Ms Bachelet ban it more widely when she was in power?

Another danger for Ms Bachelet is apathy. This year's presidential election will be the first in

which voting is voluntary. Polls suggest many potential voters will stay away, and that supporters of Mr Piñera's Coalition are more likely to turn out than those of the Concertación. The Coalition candidate will no doubt harp on the fact that Chileans are better off now than four years ago, and ask voters to consider who can best guarantee continued economic progress. That is a question that Ms Bachelet will have to answer.

From the print edition: The Americas