

Press coverage and public opinion on women candidates: The case of Chile's Michelle Bachelet

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Abstract

Because more women are running – and succeeding – in presidential races all over the world, it is important to analyze the way they are portrayed by the news media. Using Chile as a case study and agenda setting as a theoretical framework, the authors examined differences in press coverage of this country's first woman president, Michelle Bachelet, and her male contenders in the 2005/6 elections and compared them to public opinion. As expected, the press covered the candidates' personal attributes and issue positions following traditional gender stereotypes. However, some gender-based differences in news coverage actually boosted the image of Michelle Bachelet. The authors suggest that the media may have influenced public opinion toward the candidates, and discuss the implications of these findings for future research.