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Chile

# Kast: Chile's "democratic route" back to Pinochetism

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**On Sunday 14 December, the far-right politician José Antonio Kast won by a wide margin (58.2%) in the presidential run-off against the incumbent government candidate and member of the Partido Comunista de Chile (Communist Party of Chile), Jeannette Jara (41.8%).**

The result falls within what the main polling organisations had anticipated—particularly CADEM, whose survey of 29 November projected the final outcome with notable precision—but it also confirms a broader political trend that has been visible since the government coalition primary in June. As was noted at the time: 'The challenge for Jeannette Jara's candidacy is immense on several levels. The first and most significant is transforming the 825,835 votes from the primary into the 7 million that will be needed to win in the presidential run-off, which for the first time since 2012 will be held with compulsory voting, a modality that, according to all trends, has favoured the right.'

Following the first round of the presidential election, [as we noted](#): 'the election results of Sunday 16 November clearly demonstrate the magnitude of the right-wing victory. In the presidential election, the right-wing bloc garnered 50.3% of the vote, distributed among José Antonio Kast (23.9%, Partido Republicano), Johannes Kaiser [\[1\]](#) (13.9%, Partido Nacional Libertario), and Evelyn Matthei (12.5%, Chile Vamos).'

With turnout of 85% of the electoral roll, Jeannette Jara increased her vote between the first and second rounds by approximately 1.7 million votes. However, this growth proved clearly insufficient against Kast's advance, who added more than 4 million new voters and won in every single region of the country, without exception.

Analysis of the vote distribution by gender and age allows for a more precise understanding of this dynamic. Kast achieved his best results amongst male voters across all age groups, but he also recorded particularly strong performance amongst women aged between 35 and 54. Jara, by contrast, won the female vote amongst those under 35 and those over 54, representing a more fragmented and socially localised base of support.

## Who is José Antonio Kast?

José Antonio Kast is not an outsider. He was a member for more than two decades of the Unión Demócrata Independiente (Independent Democratic Union, UDI) [\[2\]](#), the historic party of Pinochetism, served as a deputy for sixteen consecutive years (2002–2018), and has stood as a presidential candidate on three occasions.

In 2016, Kast resigned from the UDI, arguing that the party had abandoned its founding project—ultraconservative in moral terms, Catholic in cultural terms, and neoliberal in economic terms—in favour of a strategy of mass appeal and discursive moderation. Shortly afterwards, in 2017, he launched his own presidential platform, Acción Republicana, which in 2019 formally constituted itself as a political party under the name Partido Republicano (Republican Party), his current political vehicle. [\[3\]](#)

Consistent with this trajectory, in 2020 Kast was one of the signatories of the so-called Madrid Charter [\[4\]](#), an initiative promoted by the international far right with the explicit objective of halting 'the advance of communism' in Latin America.

Kast is the youngest of ten children born to the German émigré couple Kast-Rist. His father, Michael Kast, was a

soldier in the armed forces of Nazi Germany (Wehrmacht) and was affiliated with the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (Nazi Party).

Both his parents and several of his siblings developed business activities in the agricultural sector of Chile's central zone. There are, moreover, documented journalistic and judicial investigations linking members of the Kast family to criminal activities of the Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI) [5] during the Pinochet dictatorship, including their participation in civilian patrols alongside the regime's repressive forces and in operations associated with serious human rights violations, including enforced disappearances.

José Antonio's eldest brother, Miguel Kast—an economist trained at the University of Chicago [6]—held key positions during the dictatorship: he served as Minister of Labour and subsequently as President of the Central Bank. In his role as minister of the Oficina de Planificación Nacional (ODEPLAN, National Planning Office) between 1978 and 1980, Miguel Kast Rist was one of the principal promoters of the statistical category of 'extreme poverty', which guided the targeting of social spending towards the most impoverished sectors. This definition institutionalised a policy of minimal social expenditure, oriented towards mere survival, fully consistent with the structural adjustment programme and dismantling of the social state promoted by the dictatorship.

Of ultra-Catholic family background and political formation, Kast identifies himself as a faithful disciple of the principal civilian ideologue of the Chilean dictatorship and founder of the UDI, the late senator Jaime Guzmán [7]. In keeping with this doctrinal framework, Guzmán held an extreme position on abortion: 'The mother must have the child even if it turns out abnormal, she did not want it, it is the product of a rape, or even if having it would result in her death.'

As a deputy, Kast systematically opposed the expansion of civil and sexual rights. He voted against marriage between same-sex couples and against anti-discrimination legislation, actively campaigned against comprehensive sexuality education, rejected the free dispensation of the morning-after pill, and defended the repeal of existing legislation permitting abortion in three circumstances [8].

This orientation was also reflected in his policy proposals. During his second presidential candidacy, Kast proposed the elimination of the Ministerio de la Mujer y la Equidad de Género (Ministry for Women and Gender Equality), its replacement with a Ministry of the Family, and the restriction of certain social benefits—particularly relevant for impoverished women—exclusively to married women.

In 2017, during his first presidential bid, his wife, Pía Adriasola, recounted in an interview that, upon expressing her desire to postpone a pregnancy before having their third child—the couple have nine—she consulted a doctor who prescribed oral contraceptives. Upon informing Kast of this decision, according to her own testimony, he reacted with the phrase 'Are you mad? That's not allowed' and subsequently took her to see a priest, who told her that the use of such pills was forbidden.

In August of that same year, José Antonio Kast was proclaimed candidate by associations of retired military personnel and by organisations of relatives of those convicted of crimes against humanity. At an event held at the Teatro Caupolicán, he declared: 'My name is José Antonio Kast, and I do proudly defend the work of the military government, I do believe that many military personnel and members of the Armed Forces are being persecuted, and I do commit, if I become President, to protecting the Armed Forces', pledging to pardon 'all those who are unjustly or inhumanely imprisoned.'

Amongst those convicted is Miguel Krassnoff Martchenko, a brigadier in the Army at the time of the 1973 coup d'état [9], subsequently an agent of the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA) [10]—the dictatorship's secret police—and sentenced to more than 1,060 years in prison in twenty-seven cases of kidnapping, torture, and enforced

disappearance. Kast, who has visited Krassnoff in prison, was repeatedly asked during this latest presidential campaign whether he maintained his intention to pardon him. He consistently refused to answer.

All of the above allows us to characterise José Antonio Kast as an explicit and consistent defender of the work of the Pinochet dictatorship, not only in terms of a symbolic vindication of the anti-communist feat of the past, but as a conscious attempt to recover the Pinochetist programmatic framework to confront the multiple crises currently traversing Chilean society. His proposal combines a heavy hand to restore 'the rule of law', deregulation and commodification of social services to 'improve conditions for investment and job creation', and a conception of society founded on the centrality of the family, the preferential right to private property, individual entrepreneurship, and patriarchal control over women and children.

## What to expect from the next government?

In 2023—following the defeat of the constituent process that emerged from the social uprising [\[11\]](#)—a second attempt at constitutional reform took place. This new process was, in practically every sense, the antithesis of the previous one. The body called the Consejo Constitucional (Constitutional Council) was composed of fifty councillors, of whom twenty-two belonged to the Partido Republicano, a force which also presided over the body.

The constitutional proposal that emerged from this body, crafted in the image of the Republican ideology, consisted of a sort of return to the original text of the Pinochetist Constitution of 1980, stripped of the reforms introduced during the democratic period. The project was rejected in the plebiscite of December 2023 with 55.7% of the vote. With that result, the constitutional cycle opened in 2019 came to a close. However, the process allowed for testing the degree of dogmatism of the Republican project and brought to prominence several political figures who, with high probability, will play a significant role in the coming four years of government. [\[12\]](#)

On the evening of Sunday, in his first speech as president-elect, Kast opted for a moderate tone. He declared his respect for democracy, for political opponents, and for pluralism, expressed an apparent commitment to consensus-building, and acknowledged the contribution of the presidents who preceded him. At times, he seemed to be appropriating the so-called 'politics of agreements' that characterised post-dictatorial governance: a framework sustained by a centre-left that had accepted the social market economy and by a right that had progressively attempted to distance itself from the explicit legacy of Pinochetism in order to manage the democratic transition.

However, this conciliatory rhetoric contrasts markedly with the first programmatic definitions from his team. The plan announced for the first three months of government aligns with the Kast known during the campaign and is structured around four central axes: tax counter-reform, deregulation, an offensive against labour, and fiscal adjustment.

In tax matters, Kast proposes reversing the reform implemented during the second government of Michelle Bachelet, through tax reductions for medium and large enterprises and the elimination of tax on the individual profits of business owners. This represents an orientation that reinforces the regressivity of the tax system and consolidates a transfer of income towards higher-income sectors.

In regulatory matters, Kast's programme aims to dismantle existing limits on the power of capital, with particular emphasis on the deregulation of environmental protection frameworks and the relaxation of restrictions on the property development business. This is an agenda long promoted by big business, which in recent years has popularised the neologism 'permisología' [\[13\]](#) to delegitimise environmental impact assessment processes applied to projects with potential negative effects on assets protected by current legislation.

On the axis of the attack on labour, the central objective consists of reducing the inspection and sanctioning capacities against anti-union and anti-worker practices, through the weakening of the Dirección del Trabajo (Labour Directorate). To this is added the explicit intention to limit the application of the 40-hour law, approved during the current government, reversing even the limited advance that this legislation represented for placing the question of vital time at the centre of the labour movement's struggle.

Finally, regarding the reduction of public spending, the proposal has been deliberately attention-grabbing: a cut of 6 billion dollars (approximately EUR 5.7 billion). The magnitude of this figure rapidly generated suspicions and demands for clarification. In response, one of the campaign spokespersons was explicit in justifying the refusal to detail the adjustments: 'Obviously, we're not going to say which ones because they'd paralyse us the next day. If you say "I'm ending programme X", we're going to have the streets on fire.'

Beyond this cynical frankness, the first announced measures are reduced to vague formulations: promises to limit so-called 'political expenditures', increase the efficiency of public spending, strengthen the powers of the Contraloría General de la República (Comptroller General) to audit municipal spending, and dismiss civil servants categorised as 'political operatives'. Taken together, this represents an adjustment agenda whose concrete content remains deliberately opaque, but whose foreseeable effects fall upon public employment, social policies, and the regulatory capacities of the state.

## Kast The first day: protocolar and international

On Monday 15 December, on his first day as president-elect, Kast visited the Palacio de La Moneda and held meetings with the teams of the parties that supported his candidacy. Nothing out of the ordinary in institutional terms.

The most significant political signals of the day came, however, from the international sphere. Kast received explicit congratulations from central figures of the so-called 'fascist international': Javier Milei [\[14\]](#), Donald Trump, and Benjamin Netanyahu openly celebrated his electoral victory and presented him as an ally in the offensive against Latin American socialism. The Wall Street Journal expressed itself in the same register, interpreting Kast's triumph as part of a 'bad democratic season for socialism in Latin America', suggesting that the wave of 'leftist violence' and economic stagnation was entering retreat.

Everything indicates that Kast will become one of the pieces in the realignment of the Latin American right in power, with at least two consequences that function as warning signs. First, an unqualified adherence to the new orientation of United States foreign policy, the so-called 'Trump corollary to the Monroe Doctrine', whose immediate objective is regime change in Venezuela and the appropriation of its energy resources. Second, the beginning of a process of re-normalisation of relations with Israel, even at the cost of endangering Chile's historic commitment to the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. This commitment has recently been expressed in Chile's participation in the case brought by South Africa against Israel before the International Court of Justice for genocide, as well as in the suspension of certain instances of diplomatic and military cooperation with the occupying state.

In the dissonant concert of the global far right, each country contributes its own tradition and specific form of legitimisation. In Chile, everything indicates that this form is Pinochetism. There the far right finds its glorified past, its most successful governing experiences from the perspective of the ruling classes, and the strategic memory—economic, military, and cultural—that allows it to take root in the new global scenario. [\[15\]](#)

# What does Kast's triumph mean in Chile's historical trajectory?

The government of José Antonio Kast will be the first democratic government of Pinochetism. With his victory, the aspiration long held by the founders of the Unión Demócrata Independiente, the party created by Jaime Guzmán together with Miguel Kast and other central cadres of the authoritarian Catholicism of the dictatorship, is realised for the first time. Kast embodies the return of this project, now updated by the experience of the international reactionary wave and by the new sensibilities of a younger, ideologically cohesive, and politically uninhibited far right.

It is worth paying attention to the role that historic UDI cadres play in the formation of the cabinet and ministerial teams. Just as a still inexperienced Frente Amplio [\[16\]](#) once turned to Concertación cadres to sustain the functioning of the state apparatus, it is likely that a relatively young Partido Republicano will need to rely on its old comrades: former ministers of the dictatorship and of Piñerismo [\[17\]](#), bearers of key experience for governing under conditions of social conflict and conservative restoration.

But Kast's triumph does not express only the electoral victory of Pinochetism. In this election, anti-communism also prevailed as the articulating axis of political common sense. There is no doubt that the centre of the campaign revolved around fear of violence, unemployment, and the rising cost of living—phenomena systematically attributed to crime, drug trafficking, corruption, and migration. The decisive question is why these anxieties managed to be politically organised around Kast and against Jeannette Jara.

We argue that the backbone unifying these fears was a simple and persistent idea: that, regardless of any disturbing aspect of Kast, 'communism is worse' and that a communist government would inevitably lead to more misery. The ideological glue binding these induced fears was the threat—non-existent in real terms—of a government headed by a communist, mechanically associated with Venezuela, Cuba, the Unidad Popular [\[18\]](#), or the Soviet Union. In this way, criticisms that were in many cases reasonable—of governmental management and of the everyday difficulties facing broad social sectors—were subsumed under a profoundly irrational argument: anti-communism as a living inheritance of the dictatorship, forged in the context of the Cold War and still effective in the Chilean popular imagination.

In the weeks following the defeat, retrospective analyses and the distribution of blame will abound. Once this initial phase has settled, the Chilean left will find itself obliged to start over. The tactical adjustments attempted in recent years will no longer suffice. The scenario is highly complex and could become even more contradictory if an increase in investment in the copper industry is confirmed, driven by greater global demand, opening a potential supercycle favourable to the incoming government. At the same time, the absence of elections for at least three years gives Kast significant room to impose his agenda as the central axis of national politics.

In this context, the immediate challenges for the working class in Chile will concentrate on two closely linked fronts: resistance to the regressive reforms of the new government and the capacity to articulate a social opposition that does not remain subordinated to the same progressive leadership that presided over what now appear as four lost years in the struggle against the advance of the far right. The cycle that is opening demands something more than partial defences: it demands a strategic recomposition of the Chilean left commensurate with the new historical moment.

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Translated by Adam Novak for [ESSF](#) from [Jacobin America Latina](#).

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