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Chile

The elections and the conservative way out of the crisis in Chile

- IV Online magazine - 2021 - IV563 - December 2021 -

Publication date: Friday 10 December 2021

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Two years after the popular revolt of October 2019, Chilean society was called, once again, to a mega electoral event (a presidential election, part-Senate elections as well as elections for the entire Chamber of Deputies and regional councillors positions). However, the "democracy party", as the mass media insistently called it at the service of capital, had few in attendance. Of the 14,959,945 Chileans able to vote, only 47.34% did. Less than the 49.36% who voted in the presidential elections of 2013 and slightly higher than the 46.72% who voted in 2017.

If we follow this same train of thought, this is also fewer than those who voted on the plebiscite for the approval of the Constitutional Convention of October 2020 (50.95%), but much more than those who participated in the election for delegates to the constitutional convention in May 2021 (41.51%). Without a doubt, the most worry data continues to be that more than half of the population entitled to vote is not doing so, thus revealing the profound fragility of the Chilean democratic system.

And as has been the case in recent years, the highest percentage of electoral abstention occurs in the working-class electorates of the country. Working-class electorates such as La Pintana (40.31%), Independencia (41.06%), Estación Central (42.53%), San Ramón (42.68%), Lo Espejo (42.90%), Cerro Navia (43.14%) or Recoleta (44.18%), show lower voting rates than the national average. Additionally, we can see that in these electorates, for example in La Pintana, the presidential candidates representing the conservative bourgeoisie (Kast, Parisi and Sichel), collectively obtain 38.27% of the votes. In other words, more than 1/3 of the voters in working class electorates vote for representatives of the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, electorates in which the dominant classes of our country reside, such as Vitacura (69.01%), Barnechea (65.33%) or Las Condes (63.27%), continue to show high levels of electoral participation and, in these, the candidates representing the most conservative political positions prevail by a huge margin. In the electorate of Vitacura, for example, the conservative candidates obtained 85.88% of the votes. Consequently, it is not surprising that the ultra-conservative candidate, José Antonio Kast, obtained the first majority in yesterday's elections (27.91%) and that the third place in them is being disputed inch by inch by the two other standard-bearers on the right: Franco Parisi (12.80%) and Sebastián Sichel (12.79%).

The parliamentary elections for senators and deputies also represented a consolidation of conservative positions. Of the 50 parliamentary positions that make up the Senate, the right wing (Chile Podemos Más [Chile We Can Do More] and Frente Social Cristiano [Christian Social Front]) have 25 representatives, to which must be added the parliamentarians of the Christian Democracy (5) who on many occasions vote together with their right-wing coreligionists. It should be noted that often senators from both the Partido de la Democracia [Party for Democracy] and the Partido Socialista [Socialist Party] also vote for conservative motions. The only positive factor in the composition of the new Senate is the participation of two communist senators, the first since the 1973 coup, along with Fabiola Campillai, a social movement leader who was a victim of police violence.

The situation in the Chamber of Deputies, elected in its entirety, is more complex. The Frente Social Cristiano and Chile Podemos Más, obtained 68 representatives, to which must be added (without a large doubt), the six parliamentarians who flagged the presidential candidacy of business engineer Franco Parisi, who came third in the Presidential elections first round. In this way, the conservative sectors have very good parliamentary representation which will allow them to wheel and deal with the most reformist sectors of the old Concertación and Frente Amplio. Clearly, the institutional or parliamentary path is not the best option for winning the transformations that were called for by the popular sectors in October 2019.

How do we explain the popular disenchantment and, by extension both the low popular participation and the significant support that conservative candidates have obtained in the different electoral bodies? Undoubtedly, the

different alternatives proposed by those representing the popular sectors (Boric, Provoste, Enríquez-Ominami along with the symbolic candidacy of Professor Eduardo Artes), were unable to read, much less represent, the demands of the popular sectors. The economic crisis, triggered in 2020 by the effects of the pandemic, has deepened the precarious existence of the popular sectors, yet in the face of this only measly palliatives (pension retirement funds) have been promoted. But, on the other hand, structural problems, associated with job instability, the pension system, serious problems of the health system, inequities in education or the unequal distribution of wealth, have not aroused genuine interest from the political elite. If nothing distinguishes these sectors from the representatives of the bourgeoisie, what is the point of opting for them?

On the other hand, it is no less real than the security problems that affect many popular neighborhoods, generating significant levels of support for those candidates who demanded discretionary use of the repressive forces. As if it was no longer part of our daily life. But this shows that, beyond the media agitation about criminal violence, this is a real problem that affects large sectors of the population and for which the reformist left has not been able to develop concrete proposals that are distinguished from the calls for repressive violence proposed by broad sectors of the conservative world. Something similar can be observed with respect to the immigration issue, where the conservative discourse that proposes applying discretionary expulsion policies, achieves significant support, especially in regions with the greatest influx of immigrants. Thus, in the regions of Arica Parinacota, Tarapacá and Antofagasta, in the extreme north of Chile, the average of the vote obtained by the three candidates on the right was 64.44%. In the face of xenophobic discourse and in the face of policies of discrimination and expulsion, the reformist left and its allies in the political centre still did not have an alternative response.

In the macro-southern zone (Bio Bío and La Araucanía), where the Mapuche conflict has developed with particular intensity in recent years, the elections were held in a state of emergency, with the police and the army occupying the territory militarily, intimidating the aboriginal communities and giving all their support to the ranch elite, heir to the usurpations of the late nineteenth century. In the La Araucanía region as a whole, electoral participation was below the national average (45.08%), reaching particularly low percentages in those electorates with a majority Mapuche population: Melipeuco (29.13%), Curarrehue (34, 53%) or Carahue (39.06%). Those who did vote did so mainly for the representatives of the conservative right. In this very region, candidates Kast, Sichel and Parisi obtained 64.46% of the votes.

Whatever the result of the second presidential round, on December 19, 2021, the defeat of the popular field is plain. If José Antonio Kast prevails, the immobility of the neoliberal economic model and the extension of the repressive policy will be guaranteed, all with a significant degree of parliamentary support. An extension of the state of emergency is probable whenever the business elite demands it. If Gabriel Boric succeeds, he will be forced to negotiate governmental agreements, not only with his political opponents from the old Concertación (who have significant parliamentary representation), but also with his opponents on the right-wing benches. This guarantees the extension of the neoliberal model and even of the repressive policy.

But we can't fool ourselves. If reformism was defeated in the recent elections, so was the revolutionary camp. And it has been defeated more forcefully. Without the ability to develop political proposals to confront the electoral situation, revolutionaries missed (once again) an important opportunity to agitate for their own policies, which would show clear differences with both the bourgeoisie and reformism. Since October 2019 we have not been able to advance in the definition of our own programmatic proposals, of structuring a social and political movement with the capacity to convene and mobilize the popular sectors, much less to give meaning and proportionality to direct action and mass self-defense. We continue to be engulfed in sterile discussions, in activism lacking political objectives and in a mobilizing ritual that is becoming more and more worn out every day.

We are approaching the temporary resolution of the crisis unleashed by the popular sectors in October 2019. And we are in the worst- case scenario: one of a profound defeat for reformism, but also with a strategic defeat for the revolutionary sectors.

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Translated by David Fagan from [Punto de Vista Internacional](#).

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