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Chile

# Communist Party triumph and opportunity in an adverse electoral scenario in Chile

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**Jeannette Jara swept the country, displacing the former Concertación and Frente Amplio [1]** (Broad Front or FA) parties. If she were to win the November 16, 2025 presidential elections, it would be a milestone that would run counter to the current political climate in Latin America.

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On Sunday, June 29, the primaries for the presidential election to be held in November of this year were held in Chile. It was a primary for the governing coalition, with only the ruling parties participating, given that the right-wing parties failed to reach an agreement to run jointly or to register as a pact. This is a crucial development: it is the first time that a single political bloc has participated in the presidential primaries since the primary election system was established in 2012.

Jeannette Jara Román, the Communist Party candidate and former Minister of Labour in the Boric administration, won with 60% of the vote—about 825,000—winning in every region of the country. Jara's overwhelming percentage contrasts with the meager 28% (385,379 votes) obtained by Carolina Tohá—former Minister of the Interior and Public Security of the current government—and candidate of the Socialismo Democrático (Democratic Socialism or SD) alliance made up of the Party for Democracy and the Socialist Party. [2] The defeat of Tohá, who, according to polls, started the race as the favourite, confirms the already established path of electoral decline for the so-called political centre, embodied by the parties of the former Concertación.

For his part, Gonzalo Winter, a congressman and member of the Broad Front—President Boric's party—received just 9% of the vote. The ruling party entered the primaries without a candidate of its own, having relied until the last minute on the possible nomination of Michelle Bachelet (PS), an option that the former president ultimately ruled out. After a succession of declines by other figures in the Broad Front, the group ultimately encouraged Representative Winter—who had also initially declined to be a candidate—to take on the task. With more than 60,000 members, the presidential party's candidacy garnered just 123,829 votes in this primary, a clear defeat for that sector of the ruling party. Finally, Jaime Mulet, a deputy from the Green Social Regionalist Federation and former Christian Democrat member, obtained a predictable fourth and last place with 2.7% of the votes (37,659).

With this unprecedented result, the Chilean Communist Party—virtually absent from the political system until just over ten years ago—takes the lead in the center-left coalition, displacing both the parties that traditionally held that leadership and those who have led it recently.

This is the third Communist Party presidential candidate to appear on the ballot. The first was Pablo Neruda in 1969. The second was Gladys Marín in 1999, forty years later. Although Chile has had numerous governments where the Communist Party has been part of the ruling coalition (including the Unidad Popular, Popular Unity or UP), it has not, until now, had its own presidency.

Data kills the story: (not so) low overall turnout and expanding support for the Communist Party

A first analysis of the election results immediately leads us to the low turnout in the primaries.

Unlike in 2021, when voting was voluntary in both the primary and the first round, this year the primary remains voluntary, while the first round will be mandatory. This means that the primary votes will be diluted across a much

broader electorate, significantly reducing their relative weight.

This Sunday, the voting percentage reached 9.1% (1,420,435) of the total voter register (15,499,071), which represents a considerable decrease from the percentage of participation in the previous primaries, where 21.4% of the electoral register voted in the sum of the votes for the left and right pacts.

If the comparison is narrowed down and only the turnout in the last primaries of the left- and center-left blocs (2021) is considered, the decline is less steep: 11.9% of the registered voters (1,752,922 people) voted then. Despite this, most local media outlets and analysts insist on highlighting the low turnout as the most significant political statistic of these elections.

In the 2021 presidential primaries of the Apruebo Dignidad coalition, Gabriel Boric (FA) competed against the then mayor of Recoleta, Daniel Jadue (PC), winning with more than 60% of the votes. In the right-wing primaries, the winner was Sebastián Sichel, the former Christian Democrat and Piñera candidate, who later finished only fifth in the first round of the presidential election. In that same election, far-right candidate José Antonio Kast emerged as the frontrunner.

This background explains the reluctance of the Republican Party (Kast) and the National Libertarian Party (Kaiser) to participate in primaries with candidate Evelyn Matthei, a representative of a traditional right whose electoral collapse has only worsened.

Despite a campaign marked by persistent references to the Cold War, Jeannette Jara's sweeping victory over Carolina Tohá in every region of the country demonstrates the at least partial failure of this narrative of fear.

In the Metropolitan Region, where 40% of the electoral roll is concentrated, the preference for Jara was especially clear in the working-class communities. The results stand out in Lo Espejo (74%), Conchalí (72%), La Pintana (71%), Puente Alto (69%), San Ramón (69%) and Pudahuel (68%) where she had the explicit support of left-wing and independent mayors. Among them, Matías Toledo, a left-wing independent and current mayor of Puente Alto, is highlighted. Following his resounding victory in the recent municipal elections, he has established himself as a leader in the sector. Toledo expressed his support for Jara, stating: "Our heart and our political positions are with her."

In contrast, and contrary to the predictions at the start of the campaign that announced a comfortable majority for her, Tohá's candidacy only managed to win in the five wealthiest communes of Santiago (Vitacura, Las Condes, Providencia, La Reina, and Lo Barnechea).

"From Conchalí to the Presidential Palace of La Moneda" What did Jeannette Jara Román do to win?

Friendly, smiling, and clear-eyed, Jeannette Jara's campaign was sustained primarily by the support and enthusiasm that her image and career aroused, with a marked emphasis on her personal story as a working-class woman born in the historic town of El Cortijo de Conchalí, which contrasted significantly with the profiles of the other candidates.

But it wasn't just about her origins. Her extensive political career—which began in the 1990s as a student leader in the Student Federation of the University of Santiago—also includes work as a union leader, Undersecretary of Social Security during Michelle Bachelet's second term, and Minister of Labour in Gabriel Boric's administration.

The sustained deployment of activists and volunteers throughout the country took a qualitative leap forward thanks to the momentum generated by its social media campaign, especially aimed at competing for youth votes against

Gonzalo Winter. With references to Japanese kawaii or “cute” culture, [\[3\]](#) TikTok trends, a television segment marked by simple messages, and the absence of major figures, her campaign projected the image of a candidate distinct from the traditional tenets of the Chilean left.

The viralisation of its content was not merely symbolic; it demonstrated its real reach in recent weeks, with long lines of students at public events convened with barely a day's notice at universities such as the Catholic University and Alberto Hurtado University. An unprecedented enthusiasm that incorporated an emotional component, consistent with the demeanor and tone of a candidate who at all times avoided falling into disqualifications, controversy, or hostile responses, even in the face of constant questioning from other candidates about her suitability to confront the far right due to her membership in the Communist Party.

In her role as Minister of Labour, Jara epitomised effective government management. In a context of a parliamentary minority, she successfully implemented two of the government's main programmatic commitments: reducing the work week to 40 hours and reforming the pension system. During the campaign, her constant refrain was to highlight precisely this management capacity, particularly her ability to engage with the business community and the opposition, key players in the negotiation of both reforms.

However, these achievements came at a cost that has been widely criticised by unions and by social sectors. In the case of the working day, the agreement involved the incorporation of mechanisms of flexibility promoted by the business community. In the case of the pension reform, the promise to improve retirement payouts stems not only from maintaining the current private pension system, but also from increasing the capitalisation of insurance companies by almost 50%, which the government's programme and that of the Communist Party itself promised to eliminate.

This helps to explain, in part, the tensions Jara's candidacy has faced within her own party. Far from the favouritism of the PC's historical leadership—openly inclined to support the leadership of a judicially challenged Daniel Jadue [\[4\]](#)—this distance has ended up strengthening rather than weakening the reach of her campaign, expanding her margins of support beyond the party's organisational structure.

Jara has capitalised on this position. When faced with controversial issues, such as the persistent questions from the mainstream press about the human rights situation in Cuba and Venezuela, she has not hesitated to emphasise that, regardless of the positions of the Communist Party, she—as the eventual head of state—will be the one to set the course for Chile's foreign policy. In her victory speech, she declared: “I do not want Chile to be subordinated to foreign governments or external models. That is why I will maintain an international policy based on independence and multilateralism, defending human rights wherever they are violated in the world.”

Regarding her programme, the main proposed measures include initiatives aimed at strengthening the welfare state, redistribution, and social rights. In economic terms, she proposes boosting domestic demand by raising the minimum wage, creating jobs, and strengthening collective bargaining.

In terms of public safety, she proposes strengthening existing police forces (Carabineros and Investigative Police), pursuing drug trafficking money routes, and lifting bank secrecy to facilitate this task. In health, she advocates strengthening the public system, emphasising the reduction of waiting times and clarifying that the goal is not to replace the private sector, but rather to strengthen state services. In pensions, she proposes ending the AFP (Association of Pension Funds) and consolidating a public, solidarity-based Social Security system.

In terms of gender, her programme includes guaranteed access to sexual and reproductive health care—including abortion on request—the implementation of Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE), and parity at all levels of

representation. In terms of redistribution, she posits the creation of a tax on the super-rich, remuneration for reproductive and care work, and state regulation of basic services to guarantee fair rates, differentiated subsidies for the most vulnerable sectors, and the evaluation of the creation or strengthening of public companies in strategic areas.

### Fragmented majority of the right

Jara will be the one to face the right in the first round of the presidential elections in November. According to polls, the majority of voters in Chile are currently behind the three main right-wing candidates: a true triumvirate of "German patriots" made up of Evelyn Matthei, José Antonio Kast, and Johannes Kaiser.

Evelyn Matthei, a member of the Unión Demócrata Independiente (Independent Democratic Union or UDI)—a party descended from the Chicago Boys' doctrine—and a candidate for former President Piñera's Chile Vamos coalition, has served as a deputy, senator, minister, mayor, and presidential candidate. The daughter of Air Force General Fernando Matthei, a member of the military junta that ruled Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship, she embodies the so-called "traditional right." In the current electoral climate, she began by leading in the polls, but her candidacy has suffered a progressive and sustained decline.

For his part, José Antonio Kast, standard-bearer of the far-right Partido Republicano (Republican Party or PR), has steadily increased his support and is currently leading the polls as the favourite to advance to the second round. The so-called "Nazi of Paine"—a reference to the rural area where his family of German origin settled, and a civilian accomplice to the dictatorship's crimes against peasants—was the most voted candidate in the first round in 2021, winning by a majority in 11 of the country's 16 regions. However, the mobilisation of the popular vote in the second round managed to reverse the result in favour of current President Gabriel Boric.

A third candidate, also from the far right, is MP Johannes Kaiser, from a family of German settlers. After breaking with Kast's party, he founded his own political party, the Partido Nacional Libertario (National Libertarian Party or PNL). In a style openly aligned with figures like Trump and Milei—he has questioned women's right to vote and suggested awarding honours to men who rape "ugly" women—Kaiser seeks to embody the phenomenon of breaking into the establishment with a radical and provocative discourse. Kaiser's polling performance has been unstable: after a significant surge some time ago, his support appears to be trending downward. His main political effect, however, has been to dislodge Kast from the extreme position he held during the last presidential election, giving him an appearance of moderation.

The ongoing dispute over right-wing hegemony prevented this sector from reaching an agreement to participate in the official primaries. Everything indicates that the first round of presidential elections will act as a de facto primary to decide their leadership. While possible variables cannot be ruled out in advance, if everything goes according to today's picture, that leader should be José Antonio Kast.

### From primary to government: Jara's long march

The challenge for Jeannette Jara's candidacy is enormous on several levels. The first and most significant is transforming the 825,835 primary votes into the 7 million needed to win the presidential runoff, which for the first time since 2012 will be held with compulsory voting, a system that, by all accounts, has favoured the right. According to the latest CADEM poll, in a potential runoff election between Jara and Kast, the Republican candidate would obtain 50% of the vote, while the Communist candidate would achieve 30%. Twenty percent of those surveyed stated they had no clear preference.

To achieve this, the second major challenge will be to rally the broad social and popular movement that made Boric's victory possible. The scenario, however, seems more difficult today than it was then. In the 2021 presidential election, voting was voluntary, the first constitutional process was still ongoing, and a significant portion of the electorate that voted in the second round did so with the expectation of ensuring its success. The defeat of this process had a demoralising effect on the organised social movement, compounded by a rapid conservative shift by the government, which strengthened its alliance with the traditional parties of "neoliberal progressivism" and deepened the programmatic disengagement of the Broad Front. As a result, this sector ended up pushing for profound compromises on key and sensitive issues, such as pensions, healthcare, education, and the environment. All of this contributed to further disenchantment among the same sectors that defined the last runoff election and that, today, must be called upon once again to mobilise their votes around Jara's candidacy.

Likewise, it remains to be seen how cohesive the current governing parties will be around the communist leadership. During the primary campaign, defeated candidate Tohá (of the PPD and the PS) placed her central emphasis on the so-called "useful vote," claiming that voting for Jara would be tantamount to handing the victory to Kast.

In this regard, candidate Kaiser has clearly foreshadowed the anti-communist content of his campaign. In his first post-primary speech, he attributed the more than "100 million murders" of Stalinism to the Chilean Communist Party and affirmed that the victory of the Communist Party poses a danger to institutions, that democracy is at stake in this election, and that the Communist Party is entering the state through elections, never to leave again. He said all this while accompanied by former agents of the dictatorship, including one convicted by the Chilean justice system for the crime of torture.

In a more subdued tone, Kast stated that it was bad news for the country that someone from the radical left was leading the ruling coalition, that the current government was a failure, and he emphasised that the strategy deployed by his candidacy was being seen as the correct one.

For her part, Matthei stated that Chileans don't want ideological fights and, distancing herself from Kaiser's narrative, focused on her own programmatic measures.

For their part, the mainstream media supports the narrative that it would be not only undesirable—because of the danger to democracy—but also impossible for a member of a Communist Party to become president of a country through elections.

Without a doubt, achieving this would in itself create an unprecedented scenario. Achieving this in the current international and local context, marked by the social and electoral advance of the far right, would be a feat that would transcend Chile's borders. In a country that pioneered the so-called "peaceful path to socialism," the possibility of a new historic milestone cannot be ruled out in advance. The only force that can make it possible, once again and as always, is the people.

What will their terms and conditions be? What is the openness of the ruling parties? May deliberation from below take over the coming days.

1 July 2025

*Translated and annotated by David Fagan for **International Viewpoint** from [Jacobin America Latina](#).*

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[1] The Concertación or Coalition formed in 1988 was an alliance of centrist parties. In 2013 it was replaced by the Nueva Mayoría or New Majority coalition until 2018. The Frente Amplio formed in 2017 and led by current Chilean President, Gabriel Boric was composed of centre and left wing parties and movements which in July 2024 merged into the Frente Amplio party.

[2] The DS coalition was formed in 2021 by the Partido Socialista (Socialist Party or PS), Partido por la Democracia (Party for Democracy or PPD) Partido Radical (Radical Party or PR), Partido Liberal de Chile (Liberal Party or PL) and Nuevo Trato or New Deal.

[3] Think “Hello Kitty” and Pikachu, a character from Pokémon, for example.

[4] Daniel Jadue, Mayor of Recoleta from 2012 until 2024 is, like Jara, a member of the Communist Party.