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Chile

Rise of the Far Right in Chile

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP611 - December 2025 -

Publication date: Wednesday 31 December 2025

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WITH THE SECOND round of the Chilean election, José Antonio Kast won a decisive victory over the progressive candidate Jeanette Jara (58% to 42%). When Kast is sworn in as president on March 11, he will be the first far right-wing president since 1990.

Kast's surprising victory speech hit a moderate tone calling for national unity, avoiding attacks on political opponents and even praising Jara for "her courage...in facing a very difficult challenge...and fighting till the end." He also stated that people had voted for change, hinting at a major departure from the current government's policies.

He has received congratulations on his win from a number of far-right figures including Argentina's president Javier Milei. Milei posted a map of Latin America on X with Chile joining Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru governed by the right.

How did Chile move from the euphoria of Gabriel Boric's triumph in 2021, with a 10-point lead over Kast, to a far right-wing victory?

First, we can point to the failure of the Boric presidency to secure a new constitution, which could replace the one from the Pinochet dictatorship (1980), with some amendments during the Coalition of Parties for Democracy (CPPD) after 1990.

The social revolt that led to Boric's win had already approved a plebiscite for constitutional change. Securing a new constitution that would overcome the barriers to the inequality of income distribution, health, education and pensions was its main task.

But when the final draft was submitted to a referendum vote on September 4, 2022, it was soundly rejected by 62% to 38%.

The always-present right wing had campaigned hard against the new constitution, and its victory allowed a majority right-wing delegates to develop its proposal, which was also soundly defeated in a December 2023 referendum.

By that point, Chileans had moved on from constitutional concerns to the bread-and-butter, post-pandemic issues of employment, inflation, mass immigration and public safety. Of course, the issues of inequality, health care, education and pensions bubbled in the background, always present.

The changed political climate had diminished the optimism and much of the trust in Boric's government, whose popularity steadily declined despite attempts by the government to address key issues — even with Boric's relative success in terms of the economy, which is growing steadily as inflation is well under control, and Labor Minister Jara's achievements in increasing the minimum wage, reducing the working hours and implementing pension reform.

“Falling to Pieces” False Narrative

The right's narrative of Chile "falling to pieces" was pushed daily by the majority rightwing media. It grew in strength

with continued attacks on economic competence and the failure to curb “illegal immigration” and crime, principally violent crime.

Secondly, for the 2025 elections voting was made mandatory. Most analysts agree that these additional “forced voters,” normally not interested or engaged in politics, mostly expressed discontent with the government and voted for the opponents of Jara, the Minister of Labor in the Boric government and a member of the Communist Party.

These voters are neither right nor left, they are looking for politicians to offer solutions that deliver more money in their pockets and safety in the streets and in their homes.

In the November 16 first round of elections, of the eight candidates, Jeanette Jara won 26.58% while the top three right-wing parties won the majority. José Antonio Kast, a 59-year-old lawyer and leader of the extreme right-wing populist Republican Party won 23.92%.

Including Kast, the top three right-wing candidates won over 50% of the vote while the People’s Party candidate won almost 20%. Although Jara worked to win the People’s Party voters, most voted for Kast in the decisive second round.

This was Kast’s third time running for president; last time Boric beat him by a 10% margin. Kast’s father arrived in Chile in 1951 from Germany, where he had been an army officer and Nazi Party member. His brother was a key minister in the Pinochet regime.

Kast has claimed that Pinochet, if still alive, would have voted for him. However, he did not run on his very extreme right-wing social views, such as complete opposition to abortion, but as someone prepared to efficiently govern. In fact, the election of Kast is not necessarily a sign of some major shift to the right in Chilean politics.

The country will go from a progressive president in Boric to a far-right extremist in Kast, but Chile is most definitely not “falling to pieces” and its strong institutions will continue to function fairly normally.

The right’s failure to dominate Congress, which has a tie in the Senate and a simple right-wing majority in the lower chamber, means that legislation will have to be negotiated. With the strong People’s Party representation (14 deputies) and its plan to be in active opposition means that the more extreme measures in Kast’s program are unlikely to succeed.

Some observers feel that a Kast administration is bound to fail for a number of reasons. Campaign promises, such as putting an end to crime and deporting over 330,000 irregular immigrants, seem undeliverable. Others believe that if he acts in the pragmatic manner he signaled on the night of his triumph, focuses on crime, immigration and the economy, and builds on the stability and growth delivered by the Boric government, he has a good chance.

Kast has issued a demand that those immigrants without status self-deport between his election and his installation next March. For the Venezuelans, Peruvians, Colombians and Haitians, even Bolivians and Argentinians who have overstayed their visas or came across the northern borders.

Chile is a magnet because of its relatively stable economy. These recent immigrants have family and friends in the country. Kast says he will build a wall, but that will not prove easy along the long and porous Peruvian and Bolivian borders.

With organized crime spreading throughout Latin America, Chile's violent crime rate has gone up, although it seems already in decline. However, Chileans feel less safe and Kast's "Implacable Plan" outlines an iron-fist policy. According to the New York Times December 13, 2025 feature on "The Crime Wave Reshaping Latin American Politics" by Emma Bubola, Kast met last month with Salvadoran president Nayib Bukele's security minister. Kast and his team have almost no experience of government, and unless prominent members of the more traditional right parties agree to join the cabinet, technical and political mistakes are almost inevitable.

Kast himself makes a virtue of his inability and unwillingness to compromise. Given that politics in government is all about reaching agreement, it's impossible to see how the president Kast will differ from the long-term candidate. Can the leopard lose his spots?

However, it looks increasingly clear from Kast and his closest advisers' pronouncements and ongoing meetings with traditional right-wing personalities and former government ministers and their advisers, that his first cabinet to be announced in January, will draw from the whole of the right-wing spectrum.

Unlike the United States, where Trump enjoys a legislative and executive "trifecta" and the almost total loyalty of the GOP, Kast will have no such luxury. Political actors who neither owe him allegiance nor have an interest in seeing him succeed hold considerable sway in Congress, and he's in for a rough ride.

Some analysts have even predicted a resurgence of mass protests just months from the presidential inauguration in March 2026. I'm not convinced about this since Jara and the whole of the forces behind her campaign have called for responsible opposition within Chile's institutional framework and wholly within the law.

As the next electoral cycle for local councils and governors is scheduled for October 2028, his administration will have 30 months before his performance in the role will be subjected to public scrutiny.

In the meantime, a vast number of Chileans will wait and see what develops, with only a quarter of all voters who are staunch Kast supporters fully committed to his success. Only then, I think, could we speak of a decisive and definite rise of the far right.

Source: January-February 2026, [ATC 240](#).

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