

Chile: Elections and the conservative way out of the crisis

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We are approaching the transitional resolution of the crisis unleashed by the popular sectors in October 2019. And it is possible that it will be resolved in the worst possible way.

Two years after the popular revolt of October 2019, Chilean society has been summoned, once again, to a mega electoral event (presidential election, part of the Senate, the entire Chamber of Deputies and regional councillors). Nevertheless, the “fiesta of democracy”, as the media in the service of capital insistently called it, was poorly attended. Of the 14,959,945 Chileans eligible to vote, only 47.34% did so. Less than the 49.36% of the 2013 presidential election and slightly higher than the 46.72% of the 2017 presidential election. If we follow the same line of analysis, they are also fewer than those who voted for the plebiscite to approve the Constitutional Convention in October 2020 (50.95%), but considerably more than those who participated in the election of Convention members for the same body in May 2021 (41.51%). Undoubtedly, the most worrying fact continues to be that more than half of the population eligible to vote is not doing so, thus revealing the profound fragility of the Chilean democratic system.

And as has been recurrent in recent years, the highest percentages of electoral abstention occur in the country's working-class districts. Thus, working class communes 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 votes than the national average. In addition, we can add that in these communes, as for example in La Pintana, the presidential candidates representing the conservative bourgeoisie (Kast, Parisi and Sichel), together obtained 38.27% of the votes. That is to say, more than 1/3 of the electorate of the working class communes vote for the representatives of the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, the communes in which the ruling classes of our country live, such as Vitacura (69.01%), Barnechea (65.33%) or Las Condes (63.27%), continue to show high levels of electoral participation and in them, the candidates representing the most conservative political positions are massively imposed. In the commune of Vitacura, for example, the same conservative candidates obtained 85.88% of the votes. It is not surprising, therefore, that the ultra-conservative candidate, José Antonio Kast, obtained the first majority in yesterday's elections (27.91%) and that the third place in the elections is being disputed closely by the other two standard-bearers of the right: Franco Parisi (12.80%) and Sebastián Sichel (12.79%).

The parliamentary elections for senators and deputies also saw a consolidation of conservative positions. Of the 50 parliamentary posts that make up the Senate chamber, the right wing (Chile Podemos Más and Frente Social Cristiano) obtained 25 representatives, to which must be added the members of the Christian Democracy (5), who often vote alongside their right-wing colleagues. It should be noted that on many occasions senators from the Party for Democracy and the Socialist Party also vote in favour of conservative motions. The only noteworthy feature of the new composition of the Senate is the incorporation, after the 1973 coup d'état, of two communist senators and the social leader, Fabiola Campillai, who was repressed by the state.

In the case of the Chamber of Deputies, which was elected in its entirety, the situation is even more complex. The Social Christian Front and Chile Podemos Más obtained 68 representatives, to which must be added (without much doubt) the 6 parliamentarians that the presidential candidacy of the business manager Franco Parisi dragged along. In this way, the conservative sectors obtained a very good parliamentary representation that allows them to negotiate agreements and compromises with the more reformist sectors of the former Concertación and the Frente Amplio. In this way, the parliamentary or institutional route does not appear to be the best option to achieve the transformations that the popular sectors raised in October 2019.

What explains the popular disenchantment and, by extension, the low popular participation and the significant support that the conservative candidates have obtained in the different electoral instances? There is no doubt that the different alternatives that claimed to represent the popular sectors (Boric, Provoste, Enríquez-Ominami and the symbolic candidacy of Professor Eduardo Artes), have not managed to read, let alone represent, the demands of the popular sectors. The economic crisis, unleashed in 2020 by the effects of the pandemic, has deepened the precariousness in which the existence of the popular world is developing, and in the face of it they have only promoted miserable palliatives (withdrawals of pension funds). But, on the other hand, the structural problems associated with job instability, the pension system, the serious problems of the health system, the inequalities in education and the unequal distribution of wealth have not attracted the effective interest of 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 effective that the security problems affecting many communes and popular neighbourhoods generated significant levels of support for those candidates who demanded the discretionary use of repressive force. As if repressive force were not already part of our daily landscape. But this shows that, beyond the media agitation of criminal violence, this is a real problem that affects broad sectors of the population and for which the reformist left has not been able to elaborate a concrete proposal that distances itself from the appeal to 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 proposing the application of discretionary expulsion policies has achieved significant support, especially in the 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 vote obtained by the three right-wing candidates was 64.44%. Faced with xenophobic discourse and policies of discrimination and expulsion, once again the reformist left and its allies in the political centre had no alternative response.

In the southern macro-zone (Bio Bío and La Araucanía), where the Mapuche conflict has been developing with particular intensity in recent years, the elections were held in a state of emergency, with the police and the army militarily occupying the territory, intimidating the indigenous communities and lending their full support to the landed elite, heirs to the usurpations of the late 19th century. In the Araucanía region as a whole, voter turnout was below the national average (45.08%), reaching particularly low percentages in those communes with a majority Mapuche population: Melipeuco (29.13%), Curarrehue (34.53%) and Carahue (39.06%). But those who did vote did so mainly for representatives of the conservative right. In this same region, the sum of the votes for the candidates Kast, Sichel and Parisi resulted in 64.46% of the votes.

Whatever the outcome of the second round of the presidential election on 19 December 2021, the defeat of the popular camp is evident. If José Antonio Kast wins, the immovability of the neoliberal economic model and the extension of repressive policies will be guaranteed, with a significant degree of parliamentary support. Probably with the extension of the state of emergency whenever the business elites demand it. If Gabriel Boric succeeds in winning, he will be forced to negotiate governability agreements, not only with his political adversaries from the former Concertación (who

have an important parliamentary representation), but also with his contenders from the right-wing benches. With this, the possibilities of extending the neoliberal model and even the repressive policy are also guaranteed.

But we should not be under any illusions. If reformism was defeated in the recent elections, so was the revolutionary camp. And it has been defeated even more decisively. Without the capacity to articulate a political proposal to confront the electoral situation, the revolutionaries let pass (once again), an important opportunity to agitate a proposal of their own, that would mark differences with respect to both the bourgeoisie and reformism. From October 2019 to date we have not been able to advance in the definition of our own programmatic proposal, to structure a social and political movement with the capacity to convene and mobilise the popular sectors and much less to give meaning and proportionality to direct action and mass self-defence. We continue to get bogged down in sterile disquisitions, in an activism lacking in political objectives and in a mobilising ritual that is becoming more and more exhausted by the day.

We are approaching the transitory resolution of the crisis unleashed by the popular sectors in October 2019. And we do so in the worst scenario. With a profound defeat for reformism, but also with a strategic defeat for the revolutionary sectors.

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P.S.

- Source: Jacobin. 22.11.2021:
<https://jacobinlat.com/2021/11/22/chile-las-elecciones-y-la-salida-conservadora-a-la-crisis/>

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