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Road to Boric – From the Pinochet Dictatorship through the Concertación era

Jelige: *binomiális rendszer*

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Introduction

The history of Chilean election systems is complicated in its nature, since in Chile democracy won over dictatorship, but the voting system designed during Pinochet's military regime, introduced with the 1990 elections remained. The reason for this is not the fact that it functioned so well and contributed to democracy, but that it was designed to be able to "protect" itself through Rightist politicians and introducing appointed important political positions instead of elected ones. Thus, the total transition to a democracy that is able to evolve was sabotaged by the constitution of the exact people that wanted to improve their democracy. This assured that the Right was overrepresented in important institutions and thus was able to block reforms that aimed to change the system. This led to a constant battle between coalitions, – coalition formation is an important effect of this system and a very crucial part of Chilean politics – that to some extent is still ongoing today even though the quality of democracy in Chile grew.

This essay aims to provide an understanding on the Chilean election system with its history and functioning, to analyze the governments of the country since its transition to a presidential republic from a dictatorship, and to evaluate the most recent elections while also providing an explanation based on history and trends as to how was it possible to move from center-governments to a radical left one. Although it contains mostly political analysis, culture and values will also be mentioned for greater understanding on the topic.

The main sources used are internationally indexed journals mainly when the focus is on elections and the implementation of reforms, their impact on society, and scientific papers when it comes to historical facts and content of formal documents. In a methodological sense, qualitative methods and source analysis are favored, which the paper is based on.

The binominal voting system, its history and functioning in Chile

Proportional representation system

An electoral system with proportional representation was introduced in the new Constitution of 1925. One of the reasons for this reform was the fact that the previous system lacked formal mechanisms for the possibility for parties to compete in joint lists.¹ This is

¹ Gamboa, R., & Morales, M. (2015). Deciding on the Electoral System: Chile's Adoption of Proportional Representation in 1925. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 57(2), 41–66.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44684465>

important, because coalitions will play an important role even more than 60 years later when the binominal system is already applied. This new system in the 1920s introduced incentives for candidates from same parties to work together instead of looking at each other like rivals, since the electorate had the opportunity to vote for parties, and not just the candidates themselves, which helped reducing inter-party conflicts and thus benefited the party itself. Also, when a candidate had surplus votes, it was handed over to another candidate on the list. Before this, the buying of votes was a major problem, since candidates had close contacts with voters and could make them promises, or give them money in order to gather more votes. In the PR system, however, this problem is solved, since this contact is reduced, and so is the incentive to purchase votes. The PR system was perfectly designed to overcome two major problems at the time, bossism and the already mentioned disintegration of parties.

The system was established in the constitution itself.² For the election of Senators, 9 provincial groupings were set up, where each elected 5 senators, so the Senate had 45 members overall. As for the Chamber of Deputies, 24 districts were set up with varying magnitudes between 2 and 18 seats to be filled, and the total number of deputies to be elected was determined at 132.³ Looking at the candidates and lists, in each district the number of nominated candidates were the amounts of seats to be filled, either by individual or joint lists at a district level. This was beneficial for parties, because national coalitions did not have to be formed, and they were able to form pacts with parties in each district that was most favorable for them. There was no ballot that contained all the candidates, so each party and electoral pact had to prepare their own. Voters were able to vote for specific candidates by putting a mark next to their name, or simply vote for the list just by placing their ballot in the ballot box. To determine how many seats were awarded to the list, the votes for candidates and list votes were added up, and divided by the number of seats to be filled in each district. They were ranked in a decreasing order until they reached the number of people to be elected. The last quotient in the ranking was the electoral quotient, by which the number of votes for each list was divided in order to determine the number of seats given to them. The first candidates to be elected from each list were whose personal votes contained the electoral quotient. The list votes were added to the first candidate on the list. If there were still seats to be filled, the surplus votes were added to the personal votes of candidates by order of preference. If there were seats that still remained

² Stanton, K. A. (1998). Transforming a political regime: The Chilean constitution of 1925

³ Gamboa, R., & Morales, M. (2015) 41–66.

unfilled, but there were no more candidates with enough votes to make the electoral quotient, the so-called multiplication mechanism was used.⁴

The binominal voting system

The binominal voting system in Chile came into existence on 26th May 1989, when the Junta passed Law 18,799.⁵ This was the year that the military government failed, and gave space to a democratic transition in Chile after 17 years of military rule in the country. This new system was however designed in an authoritarian way and therefore up to a “blocked” this transition. Pinochet had power concentrated in his hands and thus was able to manage this blockade, since he oversaw who was nominated as a member of authoritarian institutions if not directly, than indirectly.⁶ First, I would like to elaborate on what this system actually was, how it functioned. Later on, I will also reach back to the Constitution that guaranteed the framework needed for the functioning of this Right-oriented system, the 1980 Constitution.

The “bi” refers to the fact that in each electoral district not one, but two Senators were chosen. This resembled the system of the US, where each state elects their two senators in alternating elections, but there is a slight difference, because in Chile each region elected all of its senators one single election. With every legislative election, two seats were filled, parties and coalitions were allowed to run two candidates on an open list. The candidate getting the most votes was able to claim one of the two seats. Obviously, the goal of each competing party was to get both seats in as many districts as possible, this however was quite a challenge, since the second seat was given to the coalition finishing second in the voting. The winning party could capture both seats only if they received more than double the votes of the coalition placing second. If only two coalitions were competing, 33.4% of the votes needed to be received to win a seat, but to get both, this percentage was 66.7%.⁷ When drawing up electoral districts, drafters gerrymandered the borders of them with the idea that the Right should receive the 33.4% support in mind, since the main aspect when designing the system was to assure seats to the Right in Congress. Due the plebiscite held in 1988 on whether Augusto Pinochet should stay in power or not, the drafters of the electoral system had a clear picture on the level of support of

⁴ Parrish, C. J., Von Lazar, A. J., & Tapia-Videla, J. I. (1970). Electoral procedures and political parties in Chile. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 6(12), 255-267.

⁵ Pastor, Daniel. (2004). Origins of the Chilean Binominal Election System. *Revista de ciencia política* (Santiago), 24(1), 38-57. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2004000100002>

⁶ Pastor, Daniel. (2004). 38-57

⁷ Chile: A System Frozen by Elite Interests —. (n.d.). https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/annex/esy/esy_cl

the military government.⁸ They assumed, those who voted for Pinochet to stay would vote for the Right in the next parliamentary election. Pinochet's support was higher in conservative areas, which meant, that the designers gave these districts a lower vote-per seat ratio, so it would be easier to gather seats, and the chance to double the seats was higher for the Right.

An important characteristic of the binominal system is that it creates a high incentive for coalition formation, because of the high thresholds and thus low possibility of gaining two seats in an electoral district.⁹ This is not a completely unintentional effect, since it was designed to eventually turn into a two-party political system where coalitions of the Right and the Left are competing for seats.¹⁰ The fact that composing parties of the center-left Concertación and the center-right Alianza remained in a continuous power struggle with each other and did not gave notable place to smaller parties, reflects the stability of this coalitional system.¹¹ Coalitions also appeared in the pre-authoritarian system for the period of elections, but eventually disintegrated because if they had not, according to the no reelection rule in the next election the victory of the other coalition would have been guaranteed. In the proportional representation system, the threshold for winning legislative seats is generally lower, so winning electoral seats was possible without forming a coalition.¹² Parties also had the ability to support a common presidential candidate while presenting separate parliamentary lists. Pacts of omission were also popular, meaning that parties agreed not to present competing lists in certain areas, and thus maximize support of each party in one area. These were mutually beneficial and still, the formation of a coalition was not needed. In the binominal system on the other hand, acquiring full representation for all significant political sectors was impossible without cross-party coalitions, and even with belonging to a coalition, it was still a challenge. This led to conflicts among party members inside one coalition as to who will fill the seats earned, and thus endangered the stability of the coalition.¹³

⁸ Garretón Merino, M.A.A. (1995). Redemocratization in Chile. *Journal of Democracy* 6(1), 146-158. [doi:10.1353/jod.1995.0009](https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1995.0009).

⁹ Bargsted, M. A., & Maldonado, L. (2018). Party Identification in an Encapsulated Party System: The Case of Postauthoritarian Chile. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 10(1), 29–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X1801000102>

¹⁰ Siavelis, P. M. (2005). Electoral System, Coalitional Disintegration, and the Future of Chile's Concertación. *Latin American Research Review*, 40(1), 56–82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1555365>

¹¹ Siavelis, Peter M. (2006). Electoral Reform Doesn't Matter-or Does It?: A Moderate Proportional Representation System for Chile. *Revista de ciencia política* (Santiago), 26(1), 216-225. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2006000100015>

¹² Wills-Otero, L. (2009). Electoral Systems in Latin America: Explaining the Adoption of Proportional Representation Systems during the Twentieth Century. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 51(3), 33–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20622740>

¹³ Chile: A System Frozen by Elite Interests

Now that the voting process and the functioning of coalitions are clear, I would like to return to the origins of the system. The main goal after the 1988 plebiscite was to prevent the Concertación from winning, and secure the future representation of the Right, so that they can prevent proposed constitutional reforms of the Concertación and protect the 1980 Constitution of the military government with enclaved authoritarian parts, that enabled the formation and functioning of the binominal system. There were three objectives kept in mind when forming the system: the ensuring of the high representation of the Right in Congress, the creation of a two-party political system where the center (Christian Democratic Party) should align itself with the left or right, and depriving the Communist Party of representation.

To understand how the Right was so untouchable, once again, we need to reach back to the 1980 Constitution, the foundation of “protected democracy” in Chile. The notion of protected democracy is related to the political system of Hayek, its supreme rationality is found in liberal capitalism.¹⁴ It is a limited democracy, because a decision-making system is preserved in the Constitution, that is designed to ensure the rational goals created under the Pinochet dictatorship.¹⁵ In it we can read, that 1/3 of the Senate was nominated and not elected, which provided for military influence in a civil government. From 1980 to 1988 Pinochet would be the first Chilean president with an 8-year term.¹⁶ The public approval of this constitution in form of a national referendum gave apparent legitimacy for the dictatorship and a legal framework for the nation.¹⁷ The Armed Forces got a particularly important role in this new system, as the “guarantors of the institutional order”, they had a constitutional role in politics which also increased the influence of military in politics.

The new constitution contained authoritarian enclaves, like the fact that the President was unable to remove commanders in chiefs in branches of Armed Forces. To do so, he would have needed the approval of the National Security Council. In the original text of the Constitution, the majority of the members of this Council were military officers, which meant that they could veto any decision they did not like. This meant no civilian control over military commanders, which is contradictory to the notion of democracy. Another authoritarian enclave embedded in the Constitution is the institution of the Constitutional Tribunal. Its function is to make binding decisions on the constitutionality of existing laws and legislation at any point in

¹⁴ Ansaldi, O., Pardo-Vergara, M. (2020) What Constitution? On Chile’s Constitutional Awakening. *Law Critique* **31**, 7–39 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10978-020-09260-0>

¹⁵ Filip, B. (2018). Hayek on Limited Democracy, Dictatorships, and the ‘Free’ Market: An Interview in Argentina, 1977.

¹⁶ Pastor, Daniel. (2004). 38-57

¹⁷ Brian Loveman. (1994) “Protected Democracies” and Military Guardianship: Political Transitions in Latin America, 1978-1993. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 36 (2), 105-189.

the process of legislation. There is no appeal to its decisions. What made this authoritarian was that Pinochet was able to oversee the appointment of all its seven members, since all of them were appointed by bodies with a majority of nominated members. Famous positions created with the 1980 Constitution were the positions of designated and lifelong senators. The institutions designating these senators were mainly those, where the Right was assured the majority of the votes, like the aforementioned National Security Council. The role of these Senators was to assure the majority of Right-wing parties in the Senate, and grant them the power and votes needed to veto any decision not favoring the Right.

Reforms to the binominal system

It does not come as a surprise that between 1990 and 2010 successive parties of the Concertación aimed to change the system on many occasions with no effect. The Constitution created under Pinochet was amended 19 times, so the actual content of it does not resemble to a constitution of a dictatorship.¹⁸ Some reforms were connected to the election system that is in focus in this chapter. A considerable change happened in 2012, when an election law reform was passed and created a system of automatic registration and voluntary voting. Before this, Chile had a compulsory voting law with voluntary registration, which meant, that all Chilean citizens over 18 were eligible to register to vote, and those that did, were obliged to do so, otherwise on a registered voter that declined to vote sanctions could be imposed. Since the country's transition to democracy in the 1980s, voter registration was continuously declining, so it was decided that a change would be beneficial in a sense that through automatic registration new, younger voters would be incorporated into the aging electorate, so two major issues of the government could be solved at once. There was a contradiction however in the notion of voluntary voting, because it has a tendency to decrease voter participation, and as already mentioned before, the goal was to increase it especially among the youth. This new system can strengthen the relationship between democracy and accountability. Is the politicians' great interest to become more responsive to the concerns of the electorate in order to encourage voter participation. In case of a mandatory system, parties tend to focus less on the interests of the people, since they have no incentive in encouraging them in doing something that is already obligatory.

¹⁸ Szente-Varga, M.; Bács, Z. Gy. (szerk.) [Dél-Amerika a 21. században – társadalmi, gazdasági és politikai konfliktusok](#) Budapest, Magyarország : Ludovika Egyetemi Kiadó (2019) 194, 59-75

After the change in the election law, the most notable reform passed in 2014, when the Congress approved a constitutional reform that contributed to the strengthening of the democratic system in a sense, that its aims consisted of reducing the inequality of the vote, making the system more competitive and improving the representativeness of the system.¹⁹ The last two objectives meant that not only the biggest parties of the two main coalitions, but also smaller parties could have the chance to present candidates and win seats. The reform bill also contained redistricting, which were carefully managed so that it would not influence the parliamentarians' chances of reelection, in order for them not to veto this reform. There was not a huge change in sense of territorial limits, since only the already existing districts were preserved or fused together. The main change was in the magnitudes of the districts, on which I will elaborate later on. The focus was also on avoiding, or at least minimizing competition between deputies of the same party by not fusing them together. A change in the number of parliamentarians to be elected is also mentionable, in the Chamber of Deputies instead of the earlier 120, this number grew to 155, and in the Senate, there were now 50 members to be elected instead of 38, which would logically increase the representation of smaller parties, and not just the two main ones around which coalitions were formed.²⁰

The biggest step towards democracy and fairness in this reform was that the system of the original 60 districts were abandoned and instead 28 new ones were drawn up for the election of the members of the Chamber of Deputies. Instead of the binominal system where every district elects 2 deputies, district magnitudes were established and varied from 3 to 8. This is reviewed every 10 years and the magnitude may be reassigned according to the districts' proportion of the population. This calls for a system in which the votes are equally distributed according to the number of the people and not based on the number of the districts. Similar to this, in the election of the Senate members, the number of districts was reduced from 19 to 15, and the magnitude differed between 2 and 5 senators to be elected. According to the M+1 rule, each list has the opportunity to include as many candidates as seats are up for election plus 1. This is a huge improvement compared to the binominal system and an absolute sign of the promotion and evolution of democracy. The new system guaranteed that even smaller parties within a pact were also able to present at least one candidate in most districts, through this, internal tensions were reduced and the negotiations inside coalitions were simplified, because

¹⁹ Staff, R. (2014, August 14). Electoral reform in Chile passes lower house in key step forward. U.S. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-chile-reform-electoral-idUSKBN0GE1HI20140814>

²⁰ Gamboa, R., & Morales, M. (2016). Chile's 2015 Electoral Reform: Changing the Rules of the Game. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 58(4), 126–144. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44683863>

more parties were able to achieve their goals. Furthermore, it is important that the participation of women in politics was encouraged, because the gender of the candidates was controlled so that neither males, nor females can exceed 60% of the candidates.²¹ What was even a bigger encouraging factor, was the fact that political parties received a bonus for each woman elected. With this, the participation of women in politics was not only accepted, but also supported, which also contributed to the strengthening of democracy. The last change was in the process of the creation of parties. Before this reform, they needed 0.5% of signatures of the voters in the last election in a single region. This percentage was lowered to 0.25, which also supports smaller parties rather than the binominal system focusing on the two main ones.²²

The Concertación era, presidencies before Boric

Name of president	Term of office	Election	Party	Coalition
Patricio Aylwin	11 March 1990- 11 March 1994	1989	Christian Democratic	Concertación (center-left)
Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle	11 March 1994- 11 March 2000	1993	Christian Democratic	Concertación (center-left)
Ricardo Lagos	11 March 2000- 11 March 2006	2000	Party for Democracy	Concertación (center-left)
Michelle Bachelet	11 March 2006- 11 March 2010	2005	Socialist	Concertación (center-left)
Sebastian Piñera	11 March 2010- 11 March 2014	2009	National Renewal	Coalición por el Cambio (center-right)
Michelle Bachelet	11 March 2014- 11 March 2018	2013	Socialist	New Majority (center-left)
Sebastian Piñera	11 March 2018– 11 March 2022	2017	independent	Chile Vamos (center-right)
Gabriel Boric	11 March 2022- Incumbent	2021	Social Convergence	Apruebo Dignidad (radical left)

²¹ Niemann Peralta, P. V. (2021). A comprehensive approach to the study of electoral reform: An analysis of Chile's road to electoral reform (1989-2015) (Doctoral dissertation, Leiden University).

²² Hale I. (2021) Electoral Reform & Strategic Voting in Chilean Legislative Elections, Representation, DOI: [10.1080/00344893.2021.1964585](https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2021.1964585)

Before focusing on Boric, I would like to provide an overview on the Chilean political situation from 1990 to 2021. After the end of Pinochet's military rule, a changing tendency of center-left and center-right governments could be observed. Candidates of the center-left Concertación, ruled the country from 1990 to 2010 under the presidencies of Patricio Aylwin, Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet. However, in 2010, there was an electoral shift towards the right, when conservative Sebastian Piñera won as a center-rightist. but 4 years later at the next election, the center-left coalition grasped power again with the win of Michelle Bachelet. Piñera was up for a second term after being elected in 2017, and now, with the win of Gabriel Boric, for the first time since 1970, the power is in the hands of the Radical Left.²⁴ In this chapter I will be discussing the Concertación era and why the coalition was able to keep the presidency for 4 elections straight, but I will also examine why it failed, and I will also assess why the electorate was dissatisfied with center governments and enabled in the latest elections the leftist Gabriel Boric, offering a radical alternative to win.

The Concertación era

After the fall of the military government, the biggest challenge was to move Chile through a transition to a democratic regime. The focus was mainly on restoring the balance between economic and social development, because with the presidency, the coalition also inherited social policy problems out of which the most important were dissatisfaction connected to education and healthcare. Pinochet started the process of privatization of Chilean higher education with an implementation of a reform in 1981, which allowed the creation of privately controlled and funded universities, and transferred state-funded institutions' costs from tax revenue to the resources of individuals, meaning that an incentive for higher education institution to find funds from private sources, like tuitions of students was created. This privatization occurred because of the "Chicago Boys" - a group of economists trained at the University of Chicago - who had a big part in the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies.²⁵ They promoted a system called student-base formula, which aimed to increase the revenue generated by tuition, to popularize student loans instead of scholarships and to reduce

²³ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2019, January 8). list of presidents of Chile. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/list-of-presidents-of-Chile-2063350>

²⁴ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2019, January 8).

²⁵ Heiss, C. (2017). Legitimacy crisis and the constitutional problem in Chile: A legacy of authoritarianism. *Constellations*, 24(3), 470-479.

student allowances. Another factor influencing the privatization of the education system were policy recommendations of the World Bank and IMF's stabilization and structural adjustment programs, that reduced public expenditures. The natural response of higher education institutions in order to generate more revenue was to increase tuition fees and level of sale of services. This process of privatization continued during the governments of Aylwin, Frei and Lagos. Despite their campaigns and reform promises, 4 presidencies of the Concertación failed to address problems related to the education system in Chile at all-levels of schooling. This led to the emergence of student protests under Bachelet, the most significant social mobilization in Chile since 1990. Even though the main demands were the guarantee of free high-quality education from preschool through high school and a state-financed university system, protestors also touched topics of health care and retirement pensions that were both privatized under the dictatorship.²⁶

The problem the Concertación faced over and over again was that despite the fact that they won the presidential elections and acquired majority in the Chamber of Deputies more times, like under the presidency of Aylwin, they were still unable to reform the system as they wished because they could not get the approval of the Senate, since the binominal system assured the overrepresentation of the right. In 1993, on the second election in the presidential republic after the Pinochet dictatorship, Frei won as the candidate of the Concertación simply because Chileans desired to continue with the only alternative to the Right. Under his presidency, there were two major problems that hurt the support of the Concertación, the high unemployment rate because of the economic crisis, and the fact that General Pinochet was arrested in London.²⁷ It is no wonder, that in the 1999 elections the victory of the center-left coalition was not so clear anymore. Lagos, the candidate of the Concertación did not achieve a majority in the first round of voting, he had to face the first ever runoff against Joaquín Lavín, the right-wing candidate. Lagos managed to win, and by the end of his presidency, he still had a 71% approval rating, which was enormously beneficial to the next candidate of the Concertación. In the 2005 elections, Michelle Bachelet, the first woman candidate and former Minister of Health from 2000 until 2002 and Minister of Defense from 2002 until 2004 was nominated as a sole candidate of the Concertación against the two nominees of the right-wing

²⁶ Espinoza, O. (2008). Creating (In) Equalities in Access to Higher Education in the Context of Structural Adjustment and Post-Adjustment Policies: The Case of Chile. *Higher Education*, 55(3), 269–284. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29735182>

²⁷ Passarelli, G. (2011). Presidential and Congressional Elections in Chile, December 2009 and January 2010. *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe / European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 91, 71–80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41305294>

Alianza, Sebastian Piñera and Joaquin Lavín. For the fourth time, the left-wing coalition defeated Alianza and Michelle Bachelet became the last president of the Concertación era.

It is undeniable, that this coalition was extremely successful in the beginning of the transition to democracy. To understand how was it possible for them to stay in power for 15 years under unsure political and economic circumstances in a changing country, first, we must examine their success in the economy of the country. Under Concertación governments, exports grew, international debt fell, and by 2005, the inflation was only 3%.²⁸ Trade deals were made with the USA, EU, Mexico, South Korea, which put Chile in a better political position in the international sense. Under Lagos's presidency, the country went through a huge economic development, unemployment rates fell, minimum salary went up by 29%, exports more than doubled and minimum pensions also rose. Overall poverty fell from 45.1% of the population to 18.8%, which is considered a major achievement. According to this data, it is no wonder, that people voted for the Concertación over and over again, since they saw improvements. In addition to this, the Lagos government was able to pass democratizing reforms, such as the abolition of the designated senators, and the restoration of the President's power to remove heads of branches of the armed forces.²⁹

Michelle Bachelet was appointed as Minister of Health, and later on as Minister of Defense under the Lagos government. It was "easy" to run for presidency after the successful years of President Lagos, because the Concertación's level of support was higher than ever, and there were no signs that the preference of the electorate changed from the previous 3 elections. The ideal campaign would have been one in which the successes of the government were assured to keep up with that of Lagos, while also offering something new. Contrary to this, Bachelet ran a low-profile campaign, and did not feel the need to involve parties, or campaign all-over the country in order to gather more supporters. This led to her popularity to decline in the polls before the first round of the elections. Another factor affecting the slight shift towards candidates of the Right, was their focus on poverty and exclusion instead of the free-market economic doctrine which they supported before. Up to this point, these issues were mainly discussed by the Concertación. Despite the fact, that Bachelet was highly supported in the beginning of her campaign, she failed to receive the 50% threshold in the first round of elections, and had to compete head-to-head with Piñera at a second round for a run-off in

²⁸ Triami Media. (n.d.). *Inflation Chile 2005 – CPI inflation Chile 2005*. <https://www.inflation.eu/en/inflation-rates/chile/historic-inflation/cpi-inflation-chile-2005.aspx>

²⁹ Angell, A., & Reig, C. (2006). Change or Continuity? The Chilean Elections of 2005/2006. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 25(4), 481–502. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27733879>

accordance with the election rules of Chile. Contrary to her tactic in the first round, where she was leaning on the sympathy of the people and the popularity of the coalition, she was more focused on running a solid campaign. She had to prove, that she was in fact a leader figure with strength and ability to be tough, because at the time politicians and civilians both questioned whether women have the ability to be leaders. President Lagos also got more involved in the campaign, probably to an unacceptable length.³⁰ He sent two reform bills to the Congress to change the electoral system and to protect the employment of temporary workers, both of which reflected the will of the people. The bills were of course rejected by the right, because they had no interest in change during an election period. This effected the campaign of Bachelet positively, because people started to wonder whether the right was really ready for an electoral reform, and the rejection of bill proposing the protection of the workers seemed unsympathetic to the middle and lower-classes. Bachelet could also be confident in the win, because the votes of Hirsch, another candidate of the Concertación would likely go to her in the second round. The quality of Piñera's campaign diminished, he focused more on press publicity and less on direct interactions with the electorate. In 2005 not only presidential, but also congressional elections were held, and this was the first year that the Concertación had majority in both houses, and the first time that there were no designated senators in the senate.

After being elected, Bachelet acknowledged the increasing demands for rights considering minorities, human rights and more liberal laws such as the right to abortion or the enactment of a modern divorce law. The electorate leaned towards a more liberal Chile, but the conservatism with deep roots in the Chilean politics was still showing. Reforms that required more than simple majority for their approval were still blocked in Congress by the political right, but for Bachelet in order to improve democratic participation the approval of political reforms was of crucial importance, especially the renewal of the electoral system.³¹

Sebastian Piñera's first presidency

In 2009, for the first time since the democratization started in 1990, a right-wing candidate, Sebastian Piñera won the Chilean elections. In the elections, 4 coalitions presented candidates, the Concertación with Juntos Podemos por más Democracia, The Coalición por el Cambio, the Nueva Mayoría para Chile, and the Chile Limpio Vote Feliz. Piñera was a nominee of Coalition for Change based on his great electoral showings in 2005, and his position as leader

³⁰ Angell, A., & Reig, C. (2006). Change or Continuity? The Chilean Elections of 2005/2006. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 25(4), 481–502. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27733879>

³¹ Angell, A., & Reig, C. (2006). Change or Continuity? The Chilean Elections of 2005/2006

of the National Renewal party.³² Even before campaigning, the Concertación made a mistake by showing a weakness and letting people see, that the unity within the coalition is weakening, because precedentially, all member parties supported the same candidate of the coalition, but this time, after deciding to nominate Frei, Marco Enríquez-Ominami broke out of the Concertación and ran for election as an independent candidate. His campaign included internal political opposition to the center-left parties and the Concertación itself, which also hurt the popularity of the coalition, and as an unintentional side effect, increased the support of Piñera. The Concertación's diminishing support could also be observed on Frei's campaign, who in core focused on promising to continue the policies of the Bachelet government, and satisfying the welfare needs of the middle-class, but at the same time shifted towards more liberal promises, like the legalization of the use of the day-after pill in order to attract new voters, since they realized securing the votes their previous supporters might not be enough to win. Piñera on the other hand started campaigning right after his defeat saying that the Concertación's grasp on power must be ended. He backed his theory with the fact that in the 2009 elections Bachelet supported Frei, as a clear sign of the center-left coalition's aim to stay in power. His slogans were change-oriented and the focus of his proposals was on economics, privatization and the creation of new jobs. The main difference between Frei and Piñera was that Frei focused on promising the same as Bachelet 4 years earlier, like combating unemployment or improving pension and social security benefits, health care and education. This method was criticized for being too oligarchic and only making promises to keep the power through the votes of previous supporters of the Concertación. Contrary to this, Piñera seemed like someone interesting and new, he focused on emphasizing modernization and stressed reduction of state intervention in the economy and the guarantee to expend access to natural resources by private companies. In the first round, Piñera got 44.05% of the votes, and Frei 29.6. Since Piñera did not reach the 50% threshold needed, a second round was organized, in which he managed to win with gathering 51.6% of the votes. In the Congress, neither coalition held majority, which made it difficult for Piñera to pass legislation.³³

This shift towards center-right governments at the time was not only happening in Chile at the time, but also all-over the Latin American region, for example in Argentina and Peru.³⁴ The new president carried out social policy reforms in his first two years in power, because at

³² Passarelli, G. (2011). 71–80.

³³ Passarelli, G. (2011). 71–80.

³⁴ Niedzwiecki, S., & Pribble, J. (2017). Social Policies and Center-Right Governments in Argentina and Chile. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 59(3), 72–97. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44684349>

that time he enjoyed enough popular and political support. In 2011, he expanded maternity leave benefit from three to six months, and allowed fathers to share the last 3 months of maternity leave with the mother. The emphasis was however only partly on the length of the maternity leave, it also included coverage, because women working in the informal sector were not eligible to take maternity leave. The reason Piñera was able to get his coalition on board with this reform was that the benefit was funded through general revenue and did not impose cost on employers. Before this, mothers requested sick leaves when their child was ill after the end of their maternity leave, which was financed by health insurance, and to lessen that cost, this reform was also a solution. In field of education, which was a major issue in the Chilean society, Piñera was not so active, he initiated no reforms, only a 15% increase from GDP spendings. In 2009 under Bachelet a childhood health and education program Chile Crece Contigo (Chile grows with you) was launched, guaranteeing access of children to daycare and preschool to the bottom 60%.³⁵ In 2013 a constitutional reform was approved that increased mandatory years of schooling from 12 to 13, with an additional guaranteeing one year of preschool and fully funded education to those using public sector facilities. Since Chile Crece Contigo already guaranteed this, it meant no additional spendings for government. This is a perfect example of policy maintenance, when no change is actually made, but it might appear like the system is being reformed. Regarding social assistance, Piñera's goal was to eliminate extreme poverty by the end of his presidency, and he aimed to reach this by the reforming of an already existing conditional cash transfer program called Chile Solidario.³⁶ In 2012, he replaced it with Ingreso Ético (Ethical Income), which contained dignity income transfers, conditional income transfers and income transfers based on achievements. Based on the fact that the third transfer is not guaranteed, it is hard to assess whether this really led to increase, so this can again be considered as a way of policy maintenance, because CCT value still remained small and limited in coverage in both people eligible for it and in terms of time scope (2 years).³⁷ In his campaign, Piñera set out the goal to eliminate wait lists at public healthcare institutions by 2012. He actually reached this goal in 2011, but not by investing in public healthcare, but by increasing public transfers to private clinics, because he wanted to address the problem and make quick progress and appear sympathetic to the electorate. This decision

³⁵ Atalah, E., Cordero, M., Quezada, S., Carrasco, X., Romo, M., & Guerra, M. E. (2013). Monitoreo de la implementación del programa Chile Crece Contigo en el embarazo: 2008-2011. *Revista chilena de obstetricia y ginecología*, 78(4), 310-316.

³⁶ Hoces de la Guardia, F., Hojman, A., & Larrañaga, O. (2011). Evaluating the Chile Solidario program: results using the Chile Solidario panel and the administrative databases. *Estudios de Economía*, 38(1), 129.

³⁷ Oliveira, M. C., & Gonnet, C. O. (2022). Change and continuity between Chile Solidario and Ingreso Ético Familiar. *Revista de Administração Pública*, 56, 80-99.

led to an unintentional privatization as a result of a campaign promise, because public transfers to private hospitals between 2010 and 2012 grew by 21.7%. This did not strengthen the public health system in any sense. Since his presidency did not live up to people's expectations, which created an opportunity for the center-left to get the power back.

The second Bachelet government

In the elections of 2013, Michelle Bachelet won for her second term as a candidate of the New Majority coalition, politically similar to the Concertación, but it included the Communist Party too, which moved the center of gravity towards the left rather than center-left.³⁸ In her program she made promises for five reforms in fields of taxation, constitution, labor market education and pension.³⁹ Her opponent, Evelyn Matthei representing the right-wing Alliance also made similar promises, but instead of a new charter, she preferred constitutional evolution.⁴⁰ Bachelet won the second round of elections with 62% and the New Majority won a majority in both houses of legislature, but not the needed supermajority to pass all promised reforms. In her second presidency, Bachelet relied on bilateral agreements with individual ministers when it came to passing of reforms rather than politicians of the NM in legislature in order to have a better chance.⁴¹ The presidency of Bachelet can be considered unsuccessful, because by the end of the 4-year term, her approval rate sank to 21% from the initial 65% in 2014. The reason for this was the constant struggle against the dissolution of her alliance, which led to people getting political positions that could satisfy neither the public nor the political sphere, that created not so promising circumstances for the passing of promised bold reforms. A tax reform law was passed, but in a modified way than promised, and was highly criticized for its complex application. After passing, its disapproval rates were twice as high as the level of consent. In field of education, universal free education was not offered to all students, which would have been the initial and crucial part of the reform. This led to the continuing of protests, and the disapproval rate for the reform was 72% in 2016 after its passing. She also failed with the constitutional reform, by not generating substantial changes and failing to specify the legal form for carrying the steps out. Her labor reform was tailored to suit the banks' needs rather than that of the people, therefore its public approval understandably also

³⁸ Waylen, G. (2016). Comparing Michelle Bachelet's Two Presidencies: Continuity or Change?. In *Gender, Institutions, and Change in Bachelet's Chile 197-223*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

³⁹ Benedikter, R., & Zlosilo, M. (2017). Chile's 2017 presidential election: evaluating the second Bachelet government. *LSE Latin America and Caribbean Blog*.

⁴⁰ Bhojwani, D. (2014). Chile's Elections: A Bend in the River? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(1), 25–26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24478451>

⁴¹ Waylen, G. (2016). 197-223

appeared low. Her pension reform failed to even become a bill. She lost the support she had and people were not pleased with her presidency in 2017, at the time of the next election.⁴² Even if Bachelet wanted to, she could not have run for presidency in the next election, because Chile has a no reelection rule, meaning that after a 4-year term served, the candidate has to wait an additional four years before running for office again.⁴³ That is why although Bachelet and Pinochet alternated each other for four elections straight, they only competed directly against each other in the elections of 2005.

Second presidency of Sebastian Piñera

The two main “players” in the 2017 presidential election were Piñera, nominated by the center-right Chile Vamos coalition and Alejandro Guillier on side of the center-left Force of Majority Coalition. In the first round 8 candidates ran, so I would rather focus on the second round of the election between the 2 candidates. Piñera won with more than 54% of the votes and started his second presidency.⁴⁴ He was not the most popular president even directly after election and was the first president in Chile to ever be doubted whether he can complete his presidential term due to his lack of support. People were dissatisfied and demonstrations, protests became regular with demands connected to 7 main topics. The private pension system, its structural composition resulted in low pension that heightened the dissatisfaction of people. The healthcare system was crucial for protestors, because the privatization process resulted in a system in which most services were not free of charge. Connected to public transform, a project called “Transantiago” was launched, which focused on the problem that the public transportation system in Santiago was not modern enough especially considering that the population of the city is constantly growing. The already mentioned dissatisfaction with the education system reached its high at the first presidency of Piñera, and even though situation got better during the second presidential term of Bachelet, people were still not pleased. A newer demand was a New Constitution, that I will elaborate on in the next chapter. The abolishment of corruption and lowering the salary of politicians was the 6th major topic discussed among citizens. Based on these, and the fact that the president failed to appropriately address the protests -an 8-day quarantine and police force was his answer - the president’s

⁴²Chile’s 2017 presidential election: evaluating the second Bachelet government | LSE Latin America and Caribbean. (2017, December 12). LSE Latin America and Caribbean Blog. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2017/11/18/chiles-2017-presidential-election-evaluating-the-second-bachelet-government/>

⁴³ Szente-Varga, M; Bács, Z. Gy. (szerk.) 59-75

⁴⁴ BBC News. (2017, December 18). Chile election: Conservative Piñera elected president. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-42388019>

resignation was also commonly demanded.⁴⁵ An impeachment process was initiated against him, proposing that he failed to protect human rights during the protests, but was vetoed by the Senate.⁴⁶ The removal of the president would likely not have resolved the crises in Chile, since the problem was not mainly between citizens and the actual government, but it was the long disconnection between parties and citizen as a whole. As a temporary solution to crises, in April 2020, he scheduled a referendum to allow Chileans to decide whether they would like to change the old constitution. With regard to the coronavirus outbreak – which impacted Chilean economy in a bad way, and lowered Piñera’s already not so high popularity – it had to be rescheduled to October. The voting results reflected what was already known, almost 80% voted for change.⁴⁷ The fact, that it is said that Piñera’s greatest legacy is his response to the COVID-19 vaccination program says a lot. He failed to assess economic, healthcare and education related problems, and his approval rate by the end of his presidency fell to only 9%.⁴⁸ Before the next election, left-wing candidates were hopeful, because after the failed presidency of Piñera, many thought the electorate would go back to a leftist government considering the altering history of the two sides in Chilean presidential elections.

Gabriel Boric

Introducing Boric and his campaign

The latest election on 19 December 2021 was won by Gabriel Boric, who has sworn on as president on 11 March 2022 and is now the first radical leftist president since 1970. He is the first winner since the return of democracy not to form a part of either of the two main coalitions, the Concertación and the Alianza, and also the youngest president Chile ever had being elected at the age of 35.⁴⁹ In his victory speech he said “*Compatriots, I will be the President of all Chilean men and women. Of those who voted for this project today, of those*

⁴⁵ Pólyi Cs., Thomázy G. (2019) A chilei tüntetések háttérében álló tényezők, Nemzet és Biztonság: Biztonságpolitikai szemle 12(3) 79-103.
<https://m2.mtmt.hu/api/publication?format=html&labelLang=hun&sort=publishedYear,desc&cond=authors;eq;10013406>

⁴⁶ Martínez, C. (2020, December 23). Presidential Instability and the “Survival” of Sebastian Piñera. *Latinoamérica 21*. <https://latinoamerica21.com/en/presidential-instability-and-the-survival-of-sebastian-pinera/>

⁴⁷ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2022, February 1). Sebastian Pinera | Biography, Facts, & Presidency. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sebastian-Pinera>

⁴⁸ Magnet, O. (2021, June 3). Chile’s unpopular president delivers solitary farewell. *Politics News | Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/2/chile-unpopular-outgoing-president-delivers-solitary-farewell>

⁴⁹ BBC News. (2021, December 20). Gabriel Boric: From student protest leader to Chile’s president. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-59694056>

who chose another alternative and also of those who did not vote."⁵⁰ This presents him as a great democratic president, his real inclusiveness and humility is however yet to be proved. Just like during his campaign, with this statement even after winning he emphasized the importance of citizens' role in and commitment to democracy.

Considering current political and social context, digital media was part of the campaign to a greater extent than ever before. For political discussion Twitter the most commonly used platform on both the candidates' and the citizens' sides. This calls for candidates' mutual online arguments and critique of each other, and also the opinions of the electorate. The age of the leftist candidate made him look relatable to younger generation, which helped in making him an icon of necessary change and transformation in Chile. Memes also started to appear, and Boric's social media team knew exactly in what style and aesthetic they needed to post in order to live up to the electorate's expectations.⁵¹ The drafting of a new constitution initiated under the Piñera government is an actual topic of discussion among Chilean citizens, campaigns were based on it to a great extent. Boric's program proposed a more inclusive public health system, the cancellation of student debt, raising taxes of the super wealthy and the revision of the private pension system inherited from the military regime.⁵²

The election

In the first round of the election no candidate received the 50% needed, Boric acquired 25.8% of the votes and came out as second to right-winger José Antonio Kast, who received 27.9%.⁵³ After the first round, Boric managed to gain enough support of the electorate to win with 55.9% of the votes.⁵⁴ Voter participation reached a historic high since the abolition of the mandatory voting system with a 55.6% turnout that gave democratic foundation for the presidency of the newly elected young man. It is notable that the campaign of Boric before the second round attracted new voters, especially young people from the middle classes. The higher the electoral participation – especially of groups feeling excluded from the system – the more solid democracy is. His female supporters helped him in winning this election to a huge extent.

⁵⁰ Chile, R. (2021, December 20). Gabriel Boric, Speech as President-elect.

Pressenza. <https://www.pressenza.com/2021/12/gabriel-boric-speech-as-president-elect/>

⁵¹ Gómez, C. E. (2022, April 18). Presidenciales chilenas: los ejes digitales en disputa que dieron el triunfo a Gabriel Boric | Más Poder Local. <https://www.maspoderlocal.com/index.php/mpl/article/view/99>

⁵² Suarez, K., Romo, R., Regan, H., & Humayun, H. (2021b, December 20). Leftist Gabriel Boric, 35, wins Chile's presidential election. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/12/19/americas/chile-election-gabriel-boric-intl-nk/index.html>

⁵³ Poll Tracker: Chile's 2021 Presidential Runoff. (2021, December 6). AS/COA. <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/poll-tracker-chiles-2021-presidential-runoff>

⁵⁴ Suarez, K., Romo, R., Regan, H., & Humayun, H. (2021, December 20)

The fact he gained their trust might seem strange considering he is a young male, non-believer and leftist, but Chilean women's fears of setback in their rights and freedom associated with Kast were higher than their fear of such a man in power. His youth was not actually considered a negative factor when it came to his nomination, he won because of it, not in spite of it. People saw something new, something hopeful and someone willing to change the old ways. His change of attitude and willingness to listen and be more inclusive before the second round, and his belief that the second round is not a runoff, but a whole new election is what lead him to victory. His whole agenda embodies what people in marches of 2011 demanded, beliefs of feminists, pensioners, defenders of the environment. He represents the middle class to an extent that even though his victory was a shock, his defeat would have been a bigger one after seeing the inclusiveness of his campaign.⁵⁵

Boric's cabinet and potential challenges

Boric represents a new generation of politicians that mostly rose as result of student protests launched for the reforming of the educational system. They played an important role in expanding the political spectrum from the two main alliances and made the party system more ideologically heterogeneous. Boric himself was a leading figure of the student movement and while studying law at the Universidad de Chile, he chaired the Student Federation and was a spokesperson for the Confederation of Chilean Students. In 2006, a round of demonstrations known as the Penguin Revolution were organized. The name came from the outfits of the demonstrating high-school students dressed in black and white uniforms. The now president-elect Boric also participated in this demanding greater state support for education and putting an end to subsidies for private schools.⁵⁶ The 2021 election was not his first political appearance as he was a parliamentarian for the Magellan Regions and the Chilean Antarctic from 2014 to 2022. Apruebo Dignidad, the alliance presenting Boric was formed in early 2021, at the start of the constitutional process. Its main aims were to deepen Chilean democracy by the expansion of rights, reduction of socio-economic inequalities and the promotion of social cohesion. The changes they want to make might seem radical, but his motto "hope has defeated fear" reflects, that he presents change as something to look forward to instead of being afraid of. The issue of identity and human rights was – and still is – a continuous problem in Chile, especially because

⁵⁵ Poder, N. (2021, December 23). ¿Por qué ganó Boric? <https://www.nuevopoder.cl/por-que-gano-boric/>

⁵⁶ Anderson, J. L. (2022, June 6). Can Chile's Young President Reimagine the Latin American Left? The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/06/13/can-chiles-young-president-reimagine-the-latin-american-left>

of the Mapuche minority.⁵⁷ Boric, in his acceptance speech as president-elect greeted people both in Spanish and Mapudungun, the language of the Mapuche, which proves his more liberal and inclusive approach to this topic. He also has ambitious programs for helping the overcoming of social and geographical asymmetries in fields of education, healthcare and the pension system, but accomplishing it in real life will not be that easy since his coalition does not have the required majority, so he will have to compromise with opposition parties. Moreover, there is a further obstacle to reach the goals is the internal ideological division in his own coalition. This poses a new challenge to Boric: achieving governability within his own cabinet. The average age among members of his government is 49 and out of 24 members, 14 are women. The composition of politicians in power is not only diverse comprising of socially and ideologically different people. At least six ministries will be headed by independents and some members are LGBTQI+ activists, like Alexandra Benardo, sports minister.⁵⁸

At the same time of the first round of the presidential elections, parliamentary elections were also held. In the Chamber of Deputies 23.8% of the newly elected members are part of the president's electoral alliance Apruebo Dignidad. If we look at possible cooperators, they can turn to Nuevo Pacto Social, the center-left alliance. With their support, in the lower chamber an absolute majority could be acquired, but the government cannot take the support of the center-left coalition for granted, since the ideological gap between the center and the radical left widened throughout the years. The composition of the Senate is different, Boric's alliance fills only 5 seats, and even if we add the mandates of the Nuevo Pacto Social, they cannot reach absolute majority against rightwing conservatives who control 50% of the seats.

However, he has to face much greater challenges than any other president since 1990, because he must oversee the drafting of a new constitution, challenges related to a stagnant economy caused by the covid pandemic, and the deep health crisis that has been ongoing for decades. The immigration of Colombian, Venezuelan and Haitian people to Chile might also cause some distress to the young president considering that the organization of demonstrations and hate speeches against them are on the rise.⁵⁹ Due to the COVID19 pandemic, and the closing down of borders have affected migration to a great extent. It also endangered human safety, as destinations of migration were often approached through illegal routes. Between 2018

⁵⁷ Campbell, E. (2022, March 17). Chile's largest Indigenous group is fighting to take back what was lost. ABC News. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-17/mapuche-chile-fighting-for-independence-/100907988>

⁵⁸ Zilla, C., 2022. "Gabriel Boric assumes office in Chile: A "hinge presidency" launched amidst constitutional process," SWP Comments 18/2022, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), German Institute for International and Security Affairs

⁵⁹ Hernández, S. G. (2022, November 11). The Reasons Why Gabriel Boric Won In Chile. LatinAmerican Post. <https://latinamericanpost.com/39451-the-reasons-why-gabriel-boric-won-in-chile>

and 2019 there was a 12,3% increase in the number of immigrants, but after the security measures of the pandemic, between 2019 and 2020 this fell to only 0.8%.⁶⁰ 30.7% of immigrants were Venezuelans, followed by Peruvians, Haitians and Colombians.⁶¹ This is not a new problem either, immigration and cultural diversity caused issues in Chile also in the past, but the scale might be different now.

The constitutional process

The constitutional process poses a big challenge to the government of Boric. His intentions considering this renewal have been clear for a while, understated by him being a signatory of the Agreement for Social Peace and a New Constitution conclude in November 2019.⁶² The Constitutional Convention (CC) directly elected in May 2021 and established in July has no unlimited powers, but is bound by provisions of state authorities, regulations of the current constitution and by the rule that all decisions must pass with a two-thirds majority. Its time scope is 9 months (which ended in September) with an opportunity of extension one time, with 3 additional months, that was not initiated. Once it is negotiated, an “exit plebiscite” – a referendum for people’s approval of the constitution - must be held to decide whether to replace the currently valid constitution. Despite these constraints, the CC has almost unlimited freedom in defining the content of the new constitution as long as it maintains the country’s character as a republic and a democracy, respects legally binding court decisions and international treaties ratified by Chile that are still in force. Even in the composition of the Convention, diversity is an important characteristic. Neither political bloc is overrepresented, so decisions will be based on cross-party compromise. This ensures that the constitution will not be drawn up in an extremist way only to be rejected in the referendum.

Whether or not a new constitution will be applied, the Boric government marks the end of an era, and the beginning of a yet unfamiliar one. Based on new politicians’ age and the fact that they did not directly experience the Pinochet dictatorship, their overview of Chilean politics varies from that of the cabinets of earlier governments, so the governing style will not be affected to such an extent by the Pinochet era. Another hard task imposed on the young president is that he should not let the constitutional process and everyday politics influence each

⁶⁰ Thomázy G. (2022). [Migráció és Covid-19: Chile \(esettanulmány\)](#) hadtudomány: a magyar hadtudományi társaság folyóirata 32(1) 115-132.

⁶¹ Thomázy G. (2022). 32(1) 115-132.

⁶² Nacional, B. D. C. (n.d.). Acuerdo Por la Paz Social y la Nueva Constitución. bcn.cl. https://www.bcn.cl/procesoconstituyente/detalle_cronograma?id=f_cronograma-1

other. Therefore, the debate is not only between old and new politics, but also between long and short-term policies and their unnecessary to overlap.⁶³

The plebiscite regarding the approval of a new constitution was held on 4 September 2022.⁶⁴ First, I would like to briefly discuss the content of the constitution, and then elaborate on turnout. The text of it focused mostly on social issues and gender parity, on rights of the minority, environment and climate change and most importantly, what people have been fighting for years, free education, health care and housing. The current constitution favors the private sector over the state in these fields. Putting focus on Indigenous people of the country is of crucial importance, even though in Chile a smaller segment of the population identifies themselves as a minority than in most Latin American countries.⁶⁵ According to the National Statistics Institute, 13% of the Chilean population identifies themselves as indigenous based on a census held in 2017.⁶⁶

In the new constitution, there are established autonomous territories with a recognized parallel justice system for them. This raised controversy, because some citizens feel that the aim to make Chile one nation as a whole would not be supported by giving autonomy to its minorities.⁶⁷

The new constitution was rejected by 61.86% of the population, with a voter turnout of 85.82%, both surprisingly high rates.⁶⁸ The nature of the voting also shaped the outcome in a way that tilted toward rejection, because it was made compulsory, and thus new voters who were less interested in the process mostly just maintained the status quo and voted for rejection.⁶⁹ In case of a system where voting is not mandatory, these voters tend to stay home and not vote instead, so for this particular referendum the odds of the draft being approved was lowered by the necessity of citizens to go and vote.

Based on polls and statistics before the referendum, the rejection was likely to come, but the opinion of the public on the internet and streets showed a different picture. This is

⁶³ Zilla, C, 2022.

⁶⁴ Why we failed to approve the new Chilean constitution | LSE Latin America and Caribbean. (2022, September 15). LSE Latin America and Caribbean Blog. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2022/09/15/why-we-failed-to-approve-the-new-chilean-constitution/>

⁶⁵ Gonzalez, J. B. (2020, September 12). Breakdown of Latin American Ethnic Groups. Latino Stories. <https://latinostories.com/latin-american-ethnic-groups/>

⁶⁶ Staff, R. (2020b, December 16). Chile reserves seats for indigenous as it prepares to rewrite Constitution. U.S. <https://www.reuters.com/article/chile-constitution-indigenous-idUSKBN28Q05J>

⁶⁷ Politi, D. (2022, September 5). Chile sees high turnout in vote on proposed new constitution with sweeping changes. PBS NewsHour. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/chile-sees-high-turnout-in-vote-on-proposed-new-constitution-with-sweeping-changes>

⁶⁸ Why we failed to approve the new Chilean constitution (2022b, September 15.)

⁶⁹ Cella, L., & Rau, E. (2022, September 16). Chile's new voting rules may have derailed the new Constitution. Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/09/16/chile-constitution-mandatory-voting/>

curious, because the people's thirst for change was obvious based on protests and the referendum held in 2020 when 78% approved changing the constitution. This reflects that they do in fact want change, but not in a radical way.⁷⁰

One crucial reason behind this rejection was controversy connected to the fact that in the new Constitution Chile is defined as a plurinational state.⁷¹ Plurinationality means the broadening of constitutional rights of indigenous people living in the state through indigenous political organizations that have authority over a group of nationality.⁷² Additional factors are the convention's failure to include the right-wing in the negotiation and definition of rights, a division of the center-left whether to approve it, and reduce of legitimacy due to the fact that one of the members of the convention faked cancer in order to get elected. Also, the convention failed to clearly communicate its content to the electorate, before the referendum, the fake news and disinformation shared on social media confused voters. They allowed themselves to focus on the negatives of the constitution rather than the positives, and the opposition grew day by day leading up to the plebiscite.

By rejecting the proposed constitution, people not only rejected change, they also rejected the social and political values and social rights proposed by the convention, one of the most democratic bodies of Chile's history that represented citizens to a great extent. The reason for this is the sharp inequality within the society that creates division. Difference between the quality of life of the upper-income class and low-income families still did not change. What people protested for represents their wish for mobility, but their values and mindset are not yet changed. The constitution proposed was pitched for a Chile of their dreams, but not suitable for the Chile they currently have.⁷³ In order to have political change, the country has to undergo changes culturally. A new set of values could only be negotiated after Chile's transformation in a cultural sense. The values the constitution was based on are solidarity ecocentrism, probity, good governance, territorial autonomy that are not yet agreed on among the society, and thus taking this into account, its approval was never an option.

Even though, the new constitution was rejected, but what remains in Chile is the constant need for change. In a speech after the rejection, Boric emphasized that his government

⁷⁰ Cella, L., & Rau, E. (2022, September 16).

⁷¹ Americas Quarterly. (2022, September 5). Chile Could Become "Plurinational." What Does That Mean? <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/chile-could-become-plurinational-what-does-that-mean/>

⁷² Gilman, K. E. (n.d.). Knowing Nature: Plurinationality and Productivity in Ecuador's Socialist State. Western CEDAR. <https://cedar.wvu.edu/wwuet/481/>

⁷³ Why we failed to approve the new Chilean constitution (2022b, September 15).

will focus on forming a proposal that unites people as a country, but the outcome of this for now remains to be seen.⁷⁴

Conclusion

With the fall of the military government in 1989 the binominal voting system came into existence, and gave space to democratic transition, but also assured the complicated nature of this process and the struggle between coalitions of the Right and Left that characterized Chilean politics for 31 years. Despite the assured overrepresentation of the Right in Congress and Senate – an authoritarian enclave created by the binominal system - the Right-wing coalition was not able to govern from 1990 until 2010 in the now presidential republic, the center-left coalition, the Concertación was in power due to people's fear of a rightist government. There is no argument whether the Concertación era was more democratic than the military government, because the answer is obvious, however because of the system inherited by the Pinochet regime, social and political problems appeared, and as people started to forget about the horrors of the military, they started standing up and protesting in order to give voice to their concerns and discomfort considering social policy and inequalities in fields of education, healthcare, rights and income. All four governments of the Concertación era, and the additional 3 presidencies of Sebastian Piñera and Michelle Bachelet failed to properly address and solve these problems, which lead to people turning away from center-governments and seeking hope in a 35 years-old leftist candidate at the 2021 elections, Gabriel Boric, the definition of change and reform. Parallel – and even connected to – the ongoing democratic transition and evolving in Chile, a Constitutional Convention was set up in order to draft a new constitution and destroy the one created by the military government. Despite the obvious need and will of citizens to reform the constitution that they did not benefit from, in the plebiscite that took place on 4 September 2022, the majority rejected the constitution, proving that Chileans might still not be ready for political changes and must focus on cultural and social evolvement and renewal of values first. The overseeing of this process and the drafting of yet another constitution that represent Chileans more and is acceptable by them will be the task of the young president and his government assuming office in March 2022. Whether Chileans will be able to move on from

⁷⁴ Romo, R., Ehlinger, M., Sorto, M., & McCarthy, S. (2022, September 5). Chilean voters overwhelmingly reject proposed leftist constitution. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/09/04/americas/chile-constitution-vote-intl/index.html>

the past and widen their old values to some extent is yet to be found out during the next four years.

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