

Chile: From the electoral conjuncture to the recovery of popular initiative

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The crisis of the system of domination in Chile inaugurated by the popular revolt of October 2019 continues with an ever more uncertain outcome. The result of the different electoral events (for delegates to the constitutional convention, governors, mayors, and councillors) of the weekend of 16-17 May 2021 is evidence of it. Some antecedents are undoubtedly obvious.

At the level of the delegates to the constitutional convention, the right, grouped in the Vamos por Chile list, obtained only 37 of the 155 available places. But the fate of other traditional parties, such as the Christian Democrats (2) or the Radical Party (1), was not very different. Only the Socialist Party, which made up the Lista del Apruebo (List of Approval) with the aforementioned, escaped this trend, electing 15 representatives. For its part, the self-proclaimed progressive left (Lista Apruebo Dignidad), elected 28 delegates to the convention, with standout results for Revolución Democrática (9), the Communist Party (7) and Convergencia Social (6).

Discounting the 17 seats corresponding to indigenous peoples, the remaining 48 seats correspond to a wide and heterogeneous range of independent candidates, among which the 22 elected by the Lista del Pueblo stand out. A highly fragmented scenario that does not allow anyone to make predictions regarding the text that should be subject to a plebiscite (on an undetermined date), 60 days after the delivery of the proposal by the Constitutional Convention.

The right, undoubtedly the hardest hit group here, did not attain the one third of delegates needed to block the reforms that the popular movement has been demanding for years: recognition of civil, social and political rights, redistribution of wealth, nationalization of natural resources, environmental protection, pluri-nationality and so on.

However, the representation of the interests of the ruling classes has also ceased to be monopolized by this group for a long time, so that the defence of the institutional framework of the current system of domination will also be carried out by some delegates on the list of Apruebo and Apruebo Dignidad. Moreover, many of the current “independent” delegates have political trajectories that allow us to presume that they will vote to contain the most radical reforms.

Thus, to suppose that the summation of delegates from the lists of Apruebo, Apruebo Dignidad, Independents and Indigenous Peoples (118), will inexorably lead to the profound transformation of the current institutional system constitutes naivety. The ruling classes have undoubtedly suffered a severe blow, but they have shown historically and in the recent past (Agreement for Social Peace and the New Constitution of 15 November 2019), their great capacity to react and their community of interests in defence of their privileges. The enemy is weakened but is in no way defeated.

In fact, if we look at the results of the remaining electoral processes, the scenario becomes quite nuanced. In the regional governorship elections, the Pacto Chile Vamos again had an unfavourable

result (19.4% of the votes), but it placed 9 candidates in 16 regions into the second round of this election. The prognosis for them is not good, but it reveals that they continue to have a significant electoral flow.

But the candidates of those who have administered the system since the early 1990s is not as bad as in the case of the Constitutional Convention. The Unidad Constituyente list, which brought together the Christian Democrats, Socialists and Party for Democracy, obtained 25.9% of the votes, electing two governors (Aysén and Magallanes) in the first round and getting 11 more into the second round, with high expectations of being elected. The Frente Amplio, in turn, managed to directly elect the governor of Valparaíso and aspires to win in the second round in Tarapacá and Santiago.

The independents, in this case, appear much more diminished. They did not win any governor's office in the first round and placed only three candidates in the second round. In one case (Atacama), the candidate is a former socialist activist, in another (Maule), it is a lawyer specialized in citizen security issues and, finally in Bio Bío there is a former Christian Democrat activist.

But while in the constitutional convention and the gubernatorial elections, the political representation of the traditional elite has deteriorated, at the local level, which forms the basis of the political power of the territories, the scenario looks much more favourable, according to the preliminary figures available the former Concertación parties, grouped into two different lists (Unidad por el Aprorro, led by the PS and Unidos por la Dignidad, led by the DC), should elect 128 mayors out of 345. In fact, the Christian Democrats continue to have the most elected mayors (46). Further back is Chile Vamos, which elected mayors in 88 municipalities.

While the remaining lists, Chile Digno, Verde y Soberano (which included the Communists), Frente Amplio and Dignidad Ahora (the movement led by parliamentarian Pamela Jiles), managed to elect 24 mayors. The independent candidates, in turn, elected 105 mayors, but in this case a significant number of the candidates have had long political careers in the traditional parties, both the former Concertación and Chile Vamos.

It should also be noted that this time electoral participation fell significantly compared to the October 2020 plebiscite, with only 43.35% of registered voters participating. Moreover, in some popular municipalities of the Metropolitan region, this participation was below the national average: La Pintana (36.3%), San Bernardo (37.0%), Independencia (37.9%), Estación Central (38.2%), El Bosque (38.7%), Recoleta (municipality led by the CP presidential candidate, 40.0%), Lo Espejo (40.9%), Conchalí (41.1%).

The pandemic situation affecting the country, the multiplicity of electoral events called at the same time, the lack of clarity regarding the proposals underlying each event and a systematic trend towards institutional disaffiliation that has dragged on since the presidential elections of 2000 explain to a large extent this lack of interest in the process.

It is important to emphasize that no radical group or analyst (among which I include myself), can attribute this disaffiliation to the political agitation carried out by the fringe of social and political activists that chose to exclude themselves from this process. No way. The same doubts and suspicions that an important part of the population has with the traditional political elite also exist with respect to the revolutionary groups.

This forces us to reflect not only on the electoral situation, but in broader terms on the political situation and the current correlation of forces. It is evident that the adversary, the ruling classes and their political representatives, are very much weakened. But it is no less evident that this weakness extends to the field of revolutionary social and political actors.

The popular sectors have not arrived at the Constitutional Convention with a common program. Those who have acceded to this body, taking on the representation of the popular sectors, only share a diagnosis: "This is what we do not want". But they do not share a constitutional platform that is capable of becoming an option for the workers and the people. This being the case, and beyond the goodwill or consequence of the popular conventions, a constitutional text (consensus) may end up being sanctioned, which will not reflect the set of expectations of the popular camp.

In the signing of this agreement, the capacity for adaptation and negotiation developed by the conventional delegates from Chile Vamos, the former Concertación and the Frente Amplio, will have an important influence, a provision that many of its leaders have already rushed to point out.

Being wary of these manoeuvres and accompanying the constitutional process with a systematic and permanent mobilization appears as a fundamental requirement. But it is also essential that popular sectors get together and discuss the constitutional proposals that will be brought to the Convention. Only the articulation of a Program of radical changes with a state of permanent mobilization will allow us to turn this body into an effective field of accumulation of forces.

It must also be assumed that the current convention scenario is an experience which an important segment of the popular sectors has chosen, and we cannot remain indifferent in this regard. This does not mean validating each and every one of the electoral processes to which we are summoned, much less legitimizing those who seek to become representatives of the most deprived, as they have done on previous occasions.

It is about turning these electoral events into part of a process of accumulation of forces that allows us to effectively transform ourselves into an alternative of power. At that point, it is necessary to articulate participation in the Constitutional Convention (which is already a political fact), with permanent and radical mobilization. But it is essential to give clear objectives to this mobilization and it is also necessary to scale up in the development of the different forms of struggle.

This means accompanying the constitutional debate with the mobilization of the people, not only to impose a constitutional text that endorses the expectations of the popular sectors, but also aiming to deepen the defeat of the ruling classes and, on that basis, configure a horizon of power in which the workers and the people become masters of their own destiny.

This requires that both in our territories (local space), as well as at the sectoral level (union, student, environmental, feminist organizations, and so on), we can agitate the popular project. A decalogue that brings together the demands that have been developed in recent years, as well as the economic, social, political and cultural guidelines from which we will build a new society.

For this, it is necessary to strengthen popular organization, as a space for debate and discussion, and as an instance of agitation and mobilization. The strength of the people cannot be mortgaged in the Constitutional Convention. It is necessary to convert our spaces of organization and struggle into deliberative spaces and, from them, transform the conventional space into a Constituent, Democratic, Free and Sovereign assembly.

The results of the current electoral situation are a political opportunity, while the Constitutional Convention is not an end in itself. But from the current situation of relative weakness of the dominant classes, we must advance towards the formation of those instances of power, of popular power, that allow us to deploy with all its strength and energy the popular tornado that must transform not only the political institutions, but refound Chilean society from the ground up.

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P.S.

- International Viewpoint. Tuesday 1 June 2021,:
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7165>
- Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Resumen** [“De la coyuntura electoral a la recuperación de la iniciativa popular”-><https://resumen.cl/articulos/de-la-coyuntura-electoral-a-la-recuperacion-de-la-iniciativa-popular>