

Social Revolt in Chile: A political counter-hegemony challenging the Neo-Liberal narrative?

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ABSTRACT

On the 18th of October 2019, Chile began undergoing the biggest political and social upheaval since the one that ended the Pinochet dictatorship. This upheaval slowly gave way to a process of impeachment of the traditional institutions of The State. This paper looks at the political dimension of the ensuing social revolt and its scope in the Constituent itinerary agreed on the 15th of November 2019. It seeks to answer the question of whether the mass movement was the expression of a political counter-hegemony challenging the Neo-Liberal order. To this end, it draws on the main theoretical currents questioning the fit between democracy and Neo-Liberalism, especially Chantal Mouffe's 'antagonistic' notion of 'the populist moment'. In practical terms, it analyses, on the basis of past political and electoral behaviour, two cleavages that tie in with the emergence of the populist moment, that of elite/people and parties/independents. From the analysis of the electoral data covering the last thirty years and that bearing on the results of the 2021 election of the members of the Constituent Convention, it is concluded that political weariness is mirrored in the two cleavages defining the populist moment. Moreover, there was a strengthening of the various political forces that saw themselves as anti-Neo-Liberal.

Keywords: Neo-Liberalism, democracy, social movements, counter hegemony, cultural change

SUMMARY

Introduction

Thesis on and tensions in democracy

Neo-Liberalism and democracy: an analysis of its symbolic dimensions

The political dimension of the social revolt challenging Neo-Liberal hegemony and Democratic Liberalism

‘The populist moment’: a chain of equivalences and ‘The People’s’ identity

Resignification of democracy

Values and ideas challenging Neo-Liberal hegemony

Analysis of electoral results: establishment of an anti-Neo-Liberal hegemony?

Conclusions

Bibliographic references

Short Biographies

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INTRODUCTION

On the 18th of October 2019, Chilean society began undergoing its biggest political and social upheaval since the end of Pinochet's dictatorship¹ in the late 1980s. Mass fare-dodging by High School students on the Underground Railway system was sparked by a price rise. This was to lead to a wave of protests

throughout the land.”² The government, led by President Sebastián Piñera, responded with escalating force against the demonstrators, and declared

1 The biggest demonstrations and strikes in Chile’s history took place between 1983 and 1986 in protest at the Pinochet dictatorship. They were held by mining trade unions, *Central Única de Trabajadores* [Central Workers Union] (CUT), Civil Servants, and university and Secondary School [High School] students.

2 Chile’s Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications issued a Decree on the 1st of October 2019, raising Public Transport single fares throughout the Santiago Metropolitan Region by 30 Pesos (roughly 3.9 Euro Cents at the time [€1=794.7 Chilean Pesos]). This price rise sparked massive protests by Secondary School students, who began to dodge paying fares on the Underground Railway. Unrest grew over the next two weeks until it reached a tipping point on the 18th of October, with the city paralysed by the protests and several Underground stations and trains being set on fire.

a State of Emergency³. This repression fuelled the next stage of civil disobedience, which reached its climax on the 25th of October when over two million people turned out for demonstrations throughout the nation. Their slogan was: “It’s not about 30 pesos, it’s about 30 years.”⁴

Emerging literature charts citizens’ loss of trust in the symbolic capital of the Neo-Liberal market dogma, and that was the root of the mass protests (Mayol, 2019; Garretón; 2021). Furthermore, many scholarly articles highlight the ongoing struggle to reconcile liberal economic theory with the notion that Democracy and Capitalism emerged together (Dahl, 1997; Wagner, 2012). Yet in Chile, Democracy has long had a fraught relationship with Capitalism, as evidenced by various studies (Garretón, 2012; Madariaga, 2020). Etymologically, democracy is understood as a system based on the inclusion of the people in the decision-making process. Capitalism, on the other hand, can be defined as a system that grants power to a social elite holding capital (Harvey, 2007; Streeck, 2011; Piketty, 2015).

Now, the Neo-Liberal version of Capitalism resists any form of political intervention (*demos* and *polis*) in the economy by imputing almost magical properties to market self-regulation. This means today’s Neo-Liberal Democracy merely underpins

and reproduces the traditional social hierarchy (Parsons, 2013). It is a system that dissolves all political antagonism into mercantile transactions between citizenship and the political sphere. Our paper argues that Chile’s wave of protests challenges the current system. If this is so, does it also pose a threat to Neo-Liberalism?

To address this question and its implications, we use a conceptual framework based on two theoretical and analytical dimensions:

(1) The relationship between Democracy and Neo-Liberalism. The concept and principles underpinning Neo-Liberalism instil values, goals, and mechanisms that render it anti-political and anti-democratic.

(2) Antagonistic Theory (Mouffe, 1999). Assuming that Chile’s wave of protests marks an upwelling of ‘Populism’, we try to discover whether the cleavage was between the elite and those at the base of the social pyramid — something that held true in Southern Europe following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

To answer the question, we looked at academic studies on the topic and at secondary data from post-protest surveys.⁵ We also identified four key content areas, which included the most important information and our team’s interpretations. These categories were compared with the empirical data on the election of constituents on the 15th and 16th of May 2021. Using this data, we shall try to say whether there is a challenge to Neo-Liberalism’s political narrative and, if so, if it was reflected in the Chilean electorate’s political preferences in the 2021 election.

3 Chilean governments have various options open to them. One of these is declaring a State of Emergency, which is only one step down from State of Siege, which confers draconian Executive Powers. Even so, a State of Emergency allows the government to take extraordinary measures to maintain public order and security when faced with serious disturbances, public unrest, or grave internal issues. It might involve imposing curfews, deploying security forces, and restricting movement or assembly in specific areas or throughout the country.

4 This slogan summed up the build-up of social demands and discontent over three decades. The slogan draws a parallel between the 30 Peso rise in the base Underground fare and 30 years of democratic governments that had only perpetuated the Neo-Liberal order established under the dictatorship. It was a period in which political parties were accused of governing to suit the rich and powerful, not for citizens as a whole.

5 Criteria Research, Pulso Ciudadano y Espacio Público [Public Opinion and the Public Sphere]

THESIS AND TENSIONS ON DEMOCRACY

As mentioned earlier, the separation of politics from the economy has led to a switch in roles between what is seen as political and what is not (Beck, 1998). This raises questions about whether Capitalism and Democracy truly go hand in hand. This is in line with Neo-Liberal thinking, which tends to avoid political involvement, keeping economic decisions separate from discussions on democracy and the power wielded by ‘The People’ (Mouffe, 2012; Madariaga, 2020).

The crisis of Democracy in Chile might not stem from citizens' lack of interest in politics or the rise in corruption cases. Instead, it could be rooted in the uneven distribution of essential resources that is driven by dependence on the market (Leiva, 2020). Despite the public's clear preferences, both Centre-Left and Centre-Right governments have yet to grapple with this issue. This could be because, in the Neo-Liberal era, the political system becomes a model that favours the elite (Garrido-Vergara, 2020).

In recent times, the absence of clear differences in beliefs and plans among political groups has made political competition more akin to horse-trading among powerful groups. This is what people commonly call ‘the political class.’ This led to a crisis in the democratic political system, which was only worsened by keeping economic policies out of public debate. This crisis has led to different ideas, some hinting at change, others at a step backward in the political system. The main strands of thought here are:

(1) The transitional thesis of Post-Liberal Democracy (Therborn, 1996; Schmitter, 2015). Schmitter (2015) suggests that modern democracies are moving towards more public involvement in political and financial decisions. This includes defining citizenship, funding political parties and community groups, and setting quotas for women.

(2) Another idea is the post-Democracy theory of regression (Jörke, 2008; Offe, 2014). It explains the breakdown modern democracies are facing in their link to the general public (Offe, 2014). Even though the structures of Liberal Democracy stay the same, popular participation in politics is on the wane (Jörke, 2008). This implies that voting holds less sway over rulers' choices. Decisions shift from democratic channels (Dahrendorf, 2002) to murkier areas influenced by experts, technocrats, and lobbyists (Alvarado Espina, 2017; 2018). People's say in politics slides as major Capitalists and their interest groups wield unbridled influence over public decisions (Nun, 2003).

Neo-Liberal economic reforms have boosted social inequality in modern societies (Harvey, 2007; Piketty, 2015). This inequality shapes how much people can and want to take part in decision-making. As a result, elections — which usually legitimise political power in a democracy — are having less and less real impact on the final results of the democratic process (Nun, 2003).

In this crisis of Democracy in the Neo-Liberal Age, certain political and structural conditions seem to undermine the democratic process, questioning political equality, hindering political pluralism in institutions, and discouraging electoral accountability. These conditions include political elitism and social inequality (see Alvarado Espina, 2017).

NEO-LIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY: ANALYSIS OF THEIR SYMBOLIC DIMENSIONS

There are various definitions of Neo-Liberalism in the literature (Hayek, 1993; Harvey, 2007; Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009). This theory of political and economic practices asserts that the best way of boosting human welfare is by letting individuals freely develop their abilities and entrepreneurial freedoms within a system marked by private property rights, robust free markets, and trade freedom (Harvey, 2007).

Neo-Liberalism is proposed as a potential antidote to the historical threats that Capitalism poses to the social order. One of the issues is that Capitalism makes The State contradictory and destabilises it. As Foucault (2012) noted, Neo-Liberalism is not the same as a hands-off [*laissez-faire*] approach; rather, it calls for The State to take a watchful, active role and to intervene whenever it deems fit. Although The State may seem to stay at arm's length, it is very much involved. The key idea in the approach is to let the market control most productive activities. This shift involves handing over tasks that The State used to perform to the private sector in the belief that the latter can do them more effectively (Hayek, 1993).

Neo-Liberalism limits and organises citizens' actions around entrepreneurial and business ventures. These concepts dominate international bodies (notably the IMF and WTO), which push for financial 'deregulation' and 'Free Trade', and are mirrored in financial and governmental institutions in various countries (Stiglitz, 2011). Under Neo-Liberalism, the market is given immense power to shape and reform social life. Thus, it is little wonder that Neo-Liberals commonly attack those they see as threatening 'economic stability'.

Democratic institutions lose legitimacy (and credibility) as spheres in which decisions are made. This happens given the overwhelming influence of corporate Capitalism and international bodies. Democratic processes seem to cater more to multinationals' whims than reflecting the wishes of the majority expressed in elections. At this point, a consensus among government leaders endorses the dominance of Neo-Conservative ideas such as open markets, privatisation, individual effort, flexible labour, and financial deregulation (Keane, 1992: 24-25). This agreement underpins a set of reforms.

This lets powerful economic interests control various aspects of the economy, spanning governments of varying political beliefs, to slash State spending

on welfare, turning rights to healthcare, housing, education, pensions, and so on into mere commodities. As a result, welfare provision shrinks to the point of bare subsistence. Harvey (2007) argues that Neo-Liberal concepts in post-industrial societies are inextricably bound up with restoring or rebuilding the power of the economic elite.

Within this framework, the political system and the Nation State are reshaped by the rise of 'Corporate Capitalism' (Dahl, 2012). A form of Neo-Liberal Capitalism emerges, letting it prioritise issues, safeguard its interests, foist its beliefs, and influence the political agenda by gaining the backing of the political elites (Offe, 2014). An example of this is the rhetoric that extols competitiveness, economic growth, the market, and fiscal measures as the only ways to achieve economic and social prosperity. This stance is supported by both Centre-Left and Centre-Right governments in ways that hardly differ. These goals hide the means used to attain them. Thus, 'The Powers that Be' strive to conceal the ills that come in their wake. Such evils include: a surge in unstable jobs (demanded as the price to be paid for 'competitiveness'); growing social inequality; sacrificing the environment for the sake of economic growth (Bauman, 2014).

It seems to boot little that this economic growth stems from State policies that only worsen inequalities. Here, governments shy away from tackling the social divide for fear of how 'the market' and powerful commercial interests might react. Needless to say, such a fainthearted approach undermines democracy itself (Bauman, 2014).

Market deregulation changes, together with the loss of social rights, have made business interests more powerful. This has led to a form of globalisation that helps unbounded Capitalism prevail over democracy. Stiglitz (2011) argues that such interests are often hidden under the guise of serving the general good. Mouffe (2012: 131) states that "Here, as in many other cases, the mantra of globalisation is invoked to justify the *status*

quo and reinforce the power of big transnational corporations. When it is presented as driven exclusively by the information revolution, globalisation becomes detached from its political dimension and appears as a fate to which we all have to submit.” (2012: 131).

As property tax revenues shrink, high incomes greatly outstrip the lowest wages, boosting inequality — something that is stark in Chile (Piketty, 2015). This situation leads to efforts in politics to disarm conflicts stemming from class differences to ensure that “power relations and their constitutive role in society are eliminated” (Mouffe, 2012: 123). The upshot is that the space for civil society’s involvement in society’s political matters fades away, making it easier for institutions to control politics. Specialised knowledge becomes crucial for decision-making. Meanwhile, Political parties neglect their duty to represent the people, with their leaders forming a dominant group focused on personal gains (Mair, 2015).

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF THE SOCIAL REVOLT THAT CHALLENGES NEO-LIBERAL HEGEMONY AND DEMOCRATIC LIBERALISM

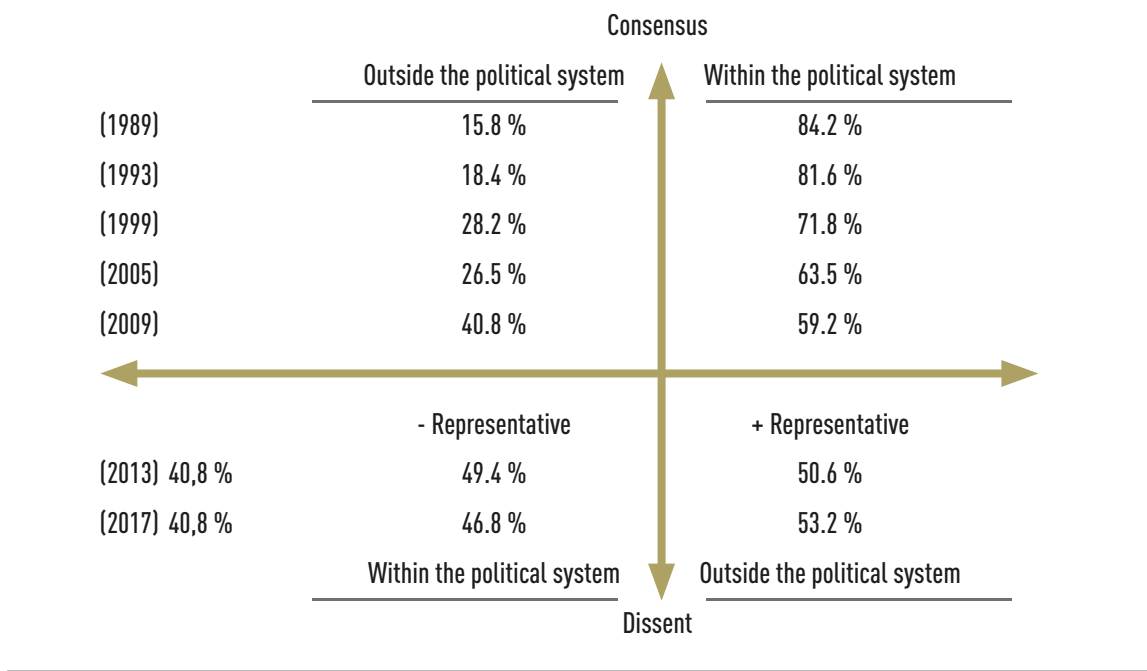
It has been hard for ordinary Chileans to fathom the nation’s political system from the transition to the present. Its lack of transparency worsens inequality by creating hurdles that are hard for the huddled masses to overcome (especially those at the bottom of the heap). Moreover, there are

no direct democratic institutions that would let citizens voice their views on major national issues. This elitist style of Chilean politics has greatly lessened the impact of popular participation, leading to a huge, ever-wider gap between the general public and the political elites (Alvarado Espina, 2018; Garretón, 2021). Thus, Liberal Democracy shows clear signs of being on the slide.

Voter turn-out steadily shrank between 1997 and the 2020 plebiscite for a New Constitution. Alvarado Espina’s study (2017) suggests that this decline may stem from the political structure rather than from the voting system itself (e.g. today’s voluntary versus yesteryear’s mandatory voting). This perspective contrasts with the commonly accepted belief that the falling turn-out is solely due to the introduction of voluntary voting in Chile in 2012.

Figure 1 shows that up until 2009, there was broad consensus among political elites. Even though voter turn-out fell in each successive election, most citizens still took part in elections where the two main party groups, the Right and the Centre-Left, battled for power. Here, 2009 was a watershed for it was then that the dominant political alliances that formed during Chile’s transition in the early 1990s started losing their political control over the nation. This trend aligns with the voting patterns of new voters in the 2009 and 2013 presidential elections. These voters gave greater support to two maverick politicians, Marco Enríquez-Ominami and Franco Parisi (see Huneus, Lagos, and Díaz, 2015).

Figure 1 Political Hegemony and Legitimacy (1989-2017)



Source: Authors, based on electoral data from The Electoral Service (www.servel.cl).

From 2009 onward, there was a subtle change in how people related to the established political system. ‘The Penguin Revolution’⁶ of 2006 and other social movements during Michelle Bachelet’s government (2006-2010)⁷ showed a growing gulf between those wielding power and citizens. This ‘disconnect’

helps explain why the period spawned mass social movements.

‘The Populist Moment’: Chain of Equivalences and The People’s identity

The diverse set of demands shared by a vast majority after the 18th of October 2019, introduced a concept of collective identity that seemed to have been lost: The People. The slogans seen on most protest banners pointed to structural inequality stemming from two key issues. The first was unmet material needs, the second was disparities in symbolic power. On the first score, there were demands for decent pensions (No + AFP), high-quality free education, quality healthcare with universal coverage, fair wages and decent work, an end to tolls (No more TAG), among other demands. On the second score, there were calls for gender equality, equal treatment,

6 Movement of Secondary School students, whose main demand was quality Public Education as one of Chile’s political goals. ‘The Penguin Revolution’ got its name from Chile’s traditional black-and-white school uniforms, which might make a gaggle of schoolchildren from a distance look like a colony of penguins.

7 Various student organisations called for protests against profit in education, demanding free, quality education. Major industrial projects were taken to court and/or suspended, such as the case of building hydroelectric dams in Patagonia. Four years later, workers and retirees mobilised against the AFP pension system, and on other issues.

greater inclusion and political equality, an end to privileges, and equality before the law. All of these demands coalesced into a call for decent living conditions and a New Constitution.

The growing rift between society and politics challenges the notion suggested by the transcultural theory of Welzel, Inglehart, and Kligemann (2003), which posits that once societies cut poverty to certain levels, they put more stress on post-material values than on material ones. This belief may be linked to the side-lining (or sweeping under the carpet) of working-class demands in the Neo-Liberal political system. Such neglect stems from the lack of confrontational politics between the main parties — a feature of the Liberal consensus found in both Centre-Right and Centre-Left parties (Mouffe, 2018).

The October mass protests led to greater demands for social, political, and symbolic equality. These demands gradually linked up various struggles into what Mouffe (2018) calls a "chain of equivalences." This linkage brought diverse demands under a political umbrella for collective action, forging a set of different yet unified movements. This unity was evident in the conflict between an identifiable "they" (elite, caste, oligarchy) and an inclusive "us" (people, citizenry, commoners). This cleavage between the citizenry and the ruling class is often framed in terms of 'The People versus the elites' (Mouffe, 2018). Collective action thus forged a political entity, 'The People', which sought to overturn an unjust social order (Mouffe, 16th June 2016).

According to Mouffe, this populism expressed several kinds of resistance to the political and economic transformations during the years of Neo-Liberal hegemony" (2018: 27). This concept covers the growing opposition to the cultural, political, and economic narrative that treats social relations as commodities. This challenge might have begun in Chile as early as 2006. Then, there was big public opposition to

market-driven education, with widespread demands for high-quality public education for all.

These popular movements clearly express a desire for democracy and a restitution of the voice taken away from citizens by the elites. This aim remains the same, regardless of the problems some movements may show.

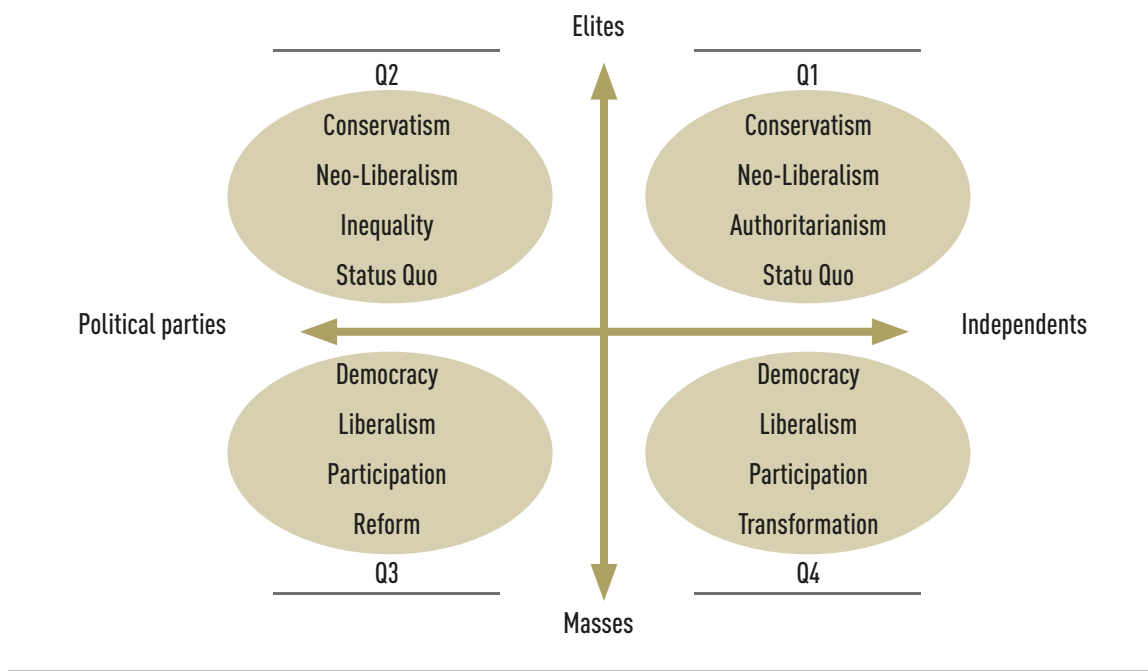
Resignification of Democracy

The massive demonstrations, civil disobedience, and the yawning gap between the citizenry and political institutions triggered the emergence of grassroots social movements. This gave rise to citizen assemblies, meetings, and hubs for labour and social unity nationwide. These spaces fostered debate and offered non-traditional political structures to bring together seemingly unrelated demands. Thus, an unorthodox yet democratic institutional framework sprang up that was both participatory and deliberative. This framework symbolically represented a unified political entity — 'The People'.

This rupture led to cleavages that put an end to the political consensus that had marked the transition but which the Broad Front had already begun to attack in 2017 (see Alvarado Espina, Morales Olivares, and Rivera Vargas, 2019). On the one hand, there was the wider conflict between the elite and the people, where professional politicians, the mass media, and large corporations were cast as 'they', and ordinary citizens protesting on the streets as 'us'. Yet another rift emerged from this, namely that between political parties and independent entities.

Considering these divides, we came up with a framework based on two explanatory axes representing the nature of these clashes. Figure 2 is split into quadrants Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4 where: Q1: identifies the values of the Neo-Liberal Right and Q4 identifies the values of the Egalitarian Left. In other words, the framework offers a description that ranges from anti-democratic positions to radically democratic ones.

Figure 2 Descriptive framework of the elite/people and parties/independents cleavages



Source: Author

Each quadrant should be seen in relation to the attributes on each axis. The axes are more like analytical categories that pin down the main traits within each cleavage. In some cases, there are overlaps between traits in quadrants on different axes. The important thing here is the relative placing of each item, not its meaning.

Values and ideas that challenge Neo-Liberal hegemony

Foucault (2012) posits the presence of invisible control mechanisms in modern Capitalist society. These power mechanisms can also be linked to the ideas and values imposed by Neo-Liberal logic.

Neo-Liberal ideology treats any notion contradicting or challenging its principles as a threat, with any alternative idea being dismissed as 'irresponsible.'

This is how the ruling class (which benefits from market deregulation and tax cuts), discourages any collective action at odds with the belief system. The narrative trickles down from economic elites to the masses. Yet, this imposition is not only top-down; it also operates through tiers reinforcing the main narrative, involving political elites, the mass media, and opinion leaders who interpret it for the public (refer to Deutsch, 1966). There are several narratives underpinning this model and which serve to legitimise Neo-Liberalism. By way of example, two are: "Economic growth is needed to cut unemployment" and "Crime is society's biggest problem." In both cases, public opinion is whipped up to make citizens accept such statements as self-evident truths, thus reinforcing the elites' narratives.

Neo-Liberalism, as a political practice (that is, as an ideology backing a given economic and social system) subtly undermines democracy. It does so by fostering the belief that better economic performance stems from 'Free Market' competition. Yet, like any other ideology, Neo-Liberalism needs to anchor itself in culture. In doing so, it introduces other values that mirror its economic principles. The upshot is norms and values that serve as cultural frameworks, dictating what is seen as beneficial in social interactions and what is not. The following gives an idea of some of these values: consumerism; idealising private enterprise; commodification of life; individual initiative; competitiveness; political alienation (de-politicisation); making inequality seem part of the natural order; worshipping property and money (see Harvey, 2007; Alvarado Espina, 2018). These values have been institutionalised not through authoritarian might but by control over various spheres of socialisation, such as the family, school, university, and the media, and through various versions of the same ideology.

This latest version of Capitalism splits workers, undermines social movements, and trivialises politics. Wherever unions are picked upon as hurdles to progress and whose collective ethos counts for nothing, politics becomes little more than a Music Hall act with Neo-Liberalism running the show. Chile is a prime example of this malaise, with unions and social movements down-trodden by the politicians who took power after the dictatorship's demise. Nevertheless, civil society finally took up cudgels against the political elites who had sold out to Capital.

There was palpable frustration on the 18th of October with both the economy and the values, rules, and behaviour used by 'The Powers that Be' to shape the world in their image. Studies carried out from October 2019 to January 2020 revealed that protesters were demonstrating about a host of things. These included: better public healthcare and education; the resignation of President Piñera; a rise in the minimum wage; a New Constitution; the calling

of a Constituent Assembly; decent pensions; water rights.⁸ These same demands were mentioned in other public opinion studies, such as the MORI⁹ Survey.

The social unrest marked a watershed in what was considered feasible in a Neo-Liberal version of representative democracy. Traditional groups holding political, economic, and social power were side-lined, while an unstructured mass movement emerged, rallying around different demands opposing the Neo-Liberal story. We examine this clash between the Neo-Liberal narrative and its challengers in the light of the voting patterns in the Constituent elections.

Analysis of Electoral Results: Establishment of an anti-Neo-Liberal Hegemony?

After the 18th of October 2019, a Constituent process began, leading to institutional changes. On the 15th of November, members of parliament and party leaders finally agreed on a political solution¹⁰ for drafting a New Constitution. This plan included a referendum on the 25th of October, the election of the Constituents on the 15th and 16th of May 2021, and a final referendum to approve or reject the New Constitution. Of these steps, the election of Constituents is the key one for assessing the challenge to Neo-Liberal hegemony.

8 First results bulletin of the Citizen Survey from the 25th October 2019. See https://www.achap.cl/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Primeros-Resultados_Encuesta_Ciudadana25.10-1.pdf

9 It should be mentioned that this opinion study incorporates a more structural demand, such as equality under the law. See <https://cut.cl/cutchile/2020/01/24/barometro-del-trabajo-mori-fiel-enero-2020-percepciones-y-expectativas-de-la-coyuntura-social-politica-economica-del-pais>.

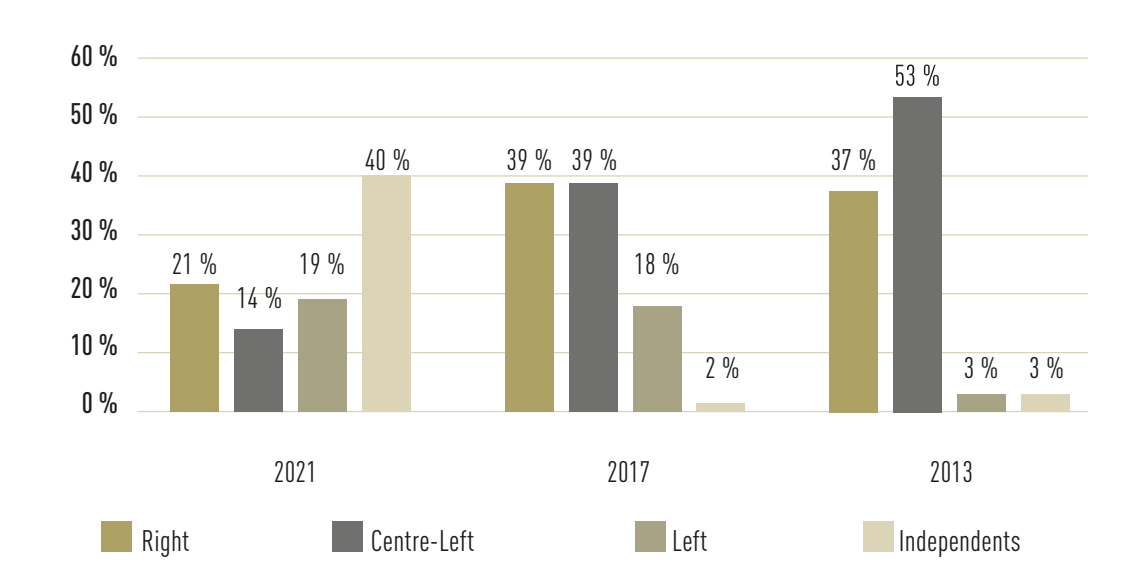
10 This is the Agreement for Peace and the New Constitution, which became Law on the 24th of December 2019. This Act (No. 21,200) for constitutional reform set out the following road map: 26th April 2020, a referendum for a New Constitution and the kind of body drafting it; 26th October 2020, the election of Constituent Assembly members, and a referendum to approve or reject the new constitutional text 90 days after the Convention finishes drafting the new Constitution.

Figure 1 highlights the results achieved by various parties in the election of Constituents. These results are compared with those in the 2013 and 2017 elections. The data reveals a shift in political support towards emerging political entities. In this regard, support for Centre-Left and Centre-Right parties governing the country at various times since 1990 fell markedly. These parties enshrined the Neo-Liberal social, economic, and cultural hegemony. Specifically, the huge number of seats previously held by the Centre-Right and Centre-Left blocks

shrank greatly. These blocks accounted for 90% of votes cast in 2013 but only 35% in 2021.¹¹ While this suggests a rift between the masses and the political elites, it does not by itself confirm that a counter-hegemonic trend has taken hold.

¹¹ In the 2013 elections, the Centre-Left coalition forged an alliance that included the Communist Party and candidates from social movements, such as those led by Gabriel Boric and Giorgio Jackson. The latter two founded the *Frente Amplio* [Broad Front] in 2017.

Figure 1 Political Preferences in the 2013, 2017, and 2021 Elections



Source: Authors based on data published on www.servel.cl

Second, as shown in Table 1, the gap between the citizenry and political elites is revealed by a big rise in voting for independent lists. These lists received

40% of the votes, beating the votes cast for parliamentary parties by a wide margin.

Table 1 Electoral Preferences in 2021, 2017, and 2013

2021 Constituent			2017 Parliamentary Deputies			2013 Parliamentary Deputies		
List whole Nation	No. votes	% votes	List whole Nation	No. votes	% votes	List whole Nation	No. votes	% votes
Vamos por Chile (Right)	1,174,502	20.56%	Chile Vamos + Amplitud (Right)	2,368,062	39.49%	Alianza por Chile + PRI (Right)	2,326,087	37.39%
Lista del Apruebo (Centre-Left)	825,397	14.45%	Fuerza de la Mayoría + Convergencia Democrática + PRO + Ciudadanos (Centre-Left)	2,365,186	39.44%	Nueva Mayoría + PRO + PL (Centre-Left)	3,305,719	53.15%
Apruebo Dignidad (Left)	1,070,361	18.74%	Frente Amplio + FRVS (Left)	1,103,568	18.40%	Partido Ecologista Verde + Partido Igualdad (Left)	172,903	2.78%
Listas de independientes (not parties)	2,285,092	40.01%	Independents outside the pact	104,427	1.74%	Independents outside the pact	206,634	3.32%

Source: Authors based on data published at <https://pv.servelecciones.cl> and <https://historico.servel.cl>

To say whether citizens' political preferences have undergone a real shift, one needs to compare the results of the Constituent election to the demands made during the 2019 wave of protests.

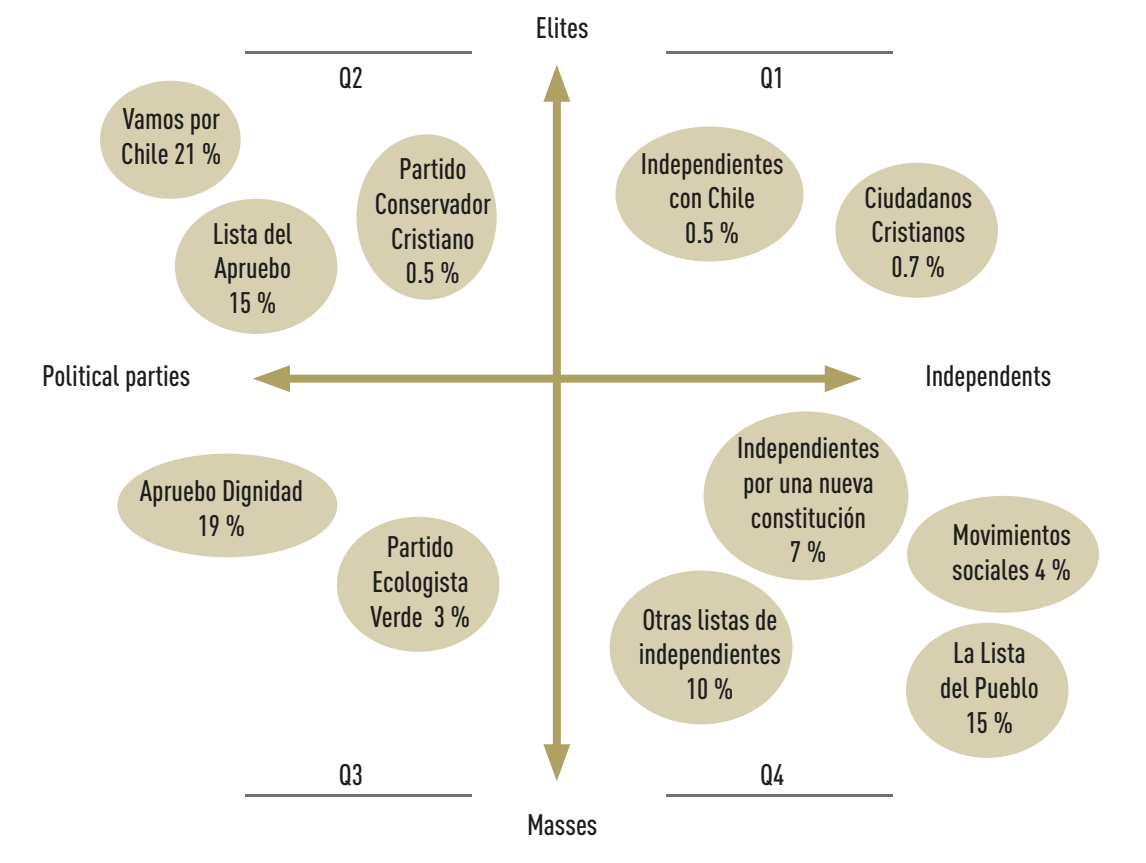
Based on the election results and our methodology, we shall now examine: (1) whether representation in the Constituent Convention ties in with ideas challenging Neo-Liberal ideology; (2) the extent to which this result is reflected along the two axes representing the upsurge in populism, namely: (A) elites/people, and (B) political parties/independents. In both cases, we consider the percentage and the absolute number of votes for each political force, as shown in Table 1.

Using the model in Figure 2, we distribute the percentages of votes for each electoral pact into the

quadrants in Figure 1. The first quadrant shows the lists of independent Right-Wing, Neo-Conservative, and anti-Democratic candidates. The second quadrant shows the pacts of Right-Wing and Centre-Left parties with Neo-Liberal tendencies. The third quadrant shows parties of the Democratic Left and anti-Neo-Liberal in outlook. The fourth quadrant show the lists of independent candidates that are anti-Neo-Liberal and radically democratic.

By looking at the votes cast for these four political groups, we can better understand the link between the social revolt and voting behaviour. To do so, it is vital to determine whether the elites/people and political parties/independents cleavages played a decisive role in how most citizens voted (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Representation of Main Preferences along the Elites/People and Political Parties/Independents Axes



Source: Authors¹²

12 Independent candidates not featuring on party lists have been left out of the quadrants. This is so given that one cannot say with any certainty what their political programmes were. Accordingly, the quadrants sum to less than 100%.

Key	
<i>Vamos por Chile</i>	<i>Support Chile!</i> [party name]
<i>Lista del Apruebo</i>	<i>Vote Yes</i> [coalition]
<i>Partido Conservador Cristiano</i>	<i>Christian Conservative Party</i> (Evangelical-leaning)
<i>Independientes con Chile</i>	<i>Independents for Chile</i> [coalition]
<i>Ciudadanos Cristianos</i>	<i>Christian Citizens Party</i> (Evangelical coalition)
<i>Apruebo Dignidad</i>	<i>Vote Dignity</i> [coalition]
<i>Partido Ecologista Verde</i>	<i>Ecologist-Greens Party</i>
<i>Otras listas de independientes</i>	Other lists of independent candidates
<i>Independientes por una nueva constitución</i>	Pro-New Constitution list of independent candidates
<i>Movimientos sociales</i>	Social movements
<i>La lista del Pueblo</i>	Community list

There are four key findings from the election results, which may indicate both an electoral and ideological shift.

First and foremost, Left-Wing options garnered 58% of voter preferences (Q3 and Q4). These groups declared themselves as anti-Neo-Liberal in their constitutional proposals and claimed to represent demonstrators' demands in the 18th October mass protests. However, the 'Independents for a New Constitution' list, given its diverse ideological make-up is a less clear-cut case.

Second, traditional parties from the coalitions that sprang up following the transition lost their electoral hegemony. Their share of the vote dropped to 21% on the Right and to 15% on the Centre-Left (Q2). The combination of both political coalitions (36%) won far fewer votes than over the previous three decades, when together they averaged about 90% of the votes cast.

Third, lists of extreme Right-Wing independents did poorly and failed to win any seats in the Constituent Convention (Q1). Citizens clearly had little interest in such options.

Fourth, when examining the voting preferences along the elites/people axis, it is clear that the first electoral choice in the "People" category was independent lists (36%), surpassing those of the parties (22%). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the addition of these two types of lists outnumbers the votes in the 'elites' category, which together accounted for 38% of votes cast. Regarding the political parties/independents axis, the trend shows a clear preference for party lists (58%) compared to independent lists (40%). However, these percentages also show that parties lost their monopoly on political representation in the Constituent Assembly.

All in all, the electorate's behaviour in the Constituent Elections shows a shift away from the voting patterns typifying the previous three decades. This shift seems to be discursively linked to the anti-Neo-

Liberal and anti-establishment narrative marking the 2019 social revolt.

CONCLUSIONS

The study's conceptual framework and analysis lets us say whether the opposition shown in the 2019 social revolt challenges the Neo-Liberal political story. Here, our main goal was to see to what extent the rift between elites and citizenry affected voting for the various groups fighting the elections. Here, one should recall that this point in time is what Mouffe (2018) terms 'The Populist Moment'. This is coupled with the electoral cleavage between parties and independents.

We began by examining Democracy's key principles — Equality, Political Pluralism, The People's Will/Sovereignty (Mouffe, 2012; Alvarado Espina, 2018). We focused on grasping how Neo-Liberalism might weaken the foundations of this political system — specifically by channelling social interactions through the market and property, making individuals' rights less effective. The upshot is impacts that go far beyond the consumption preferences of the neo-classical *homo economicus* [Economic Man] — an individual acting in accordance with market assumptions. Yet these impacts are blithely ignored by politicians. Such 'elite' behaviour strains the vital links that Democracy forges between The People's Will and political decision-making to breaking point.

Drawing on Antagonistic Theory — which highlights how hidden conflicts and market dominance shape politics — we began looking at political trends in Chile over the past three decades. Over this thirty-year span, there was a marked decline in support for the dominant power structure established through transition agreements. This was accompanied by a steady fall in election turn-out and a rise in mass demonstrations. This trend greatly strengthened following the 2009 parliamentary and presidential elections.

We also delved into the rise of the populist moment stemming from major social and economic crises in the Neo-Liberal era (Mouffe, 2018). Here, we looked at the cleavage between The People and the elite that appears when social movements press their political demands. In other words, these movements link demands (whether explicitly or not), seeking greater Democracy in their resistance to Neo-Liberalism. The wave of protests established this 'chain of equivalences', resulting in a recognised collective political subject: The People. This led to re-signification of the role of the political in social organisations, marking the end of a political cycle and the emergence of a new one in which the antagonistic rift lies between The People and the elites.

On the question posed in this paper, one can answer it by looking at the outcomes flowing from voting choices made in the Constituent elections. Yet while there is broad evidence of the rift between the citizenry and the political establishment, this does not in itself show the birth of a counter-hegemony or a decisive political opposition.

We base this statement on four main factors: (1) 58% of voters supported Left-Wing options opposing Neo-Liberalism; (2) traditional parties that had played a key role in the transition lost their dominance; (3) lists of independent Far-Right candidates did poorly, winning few seats; (4) Lists of independent candidates got more votes from 'The People' than from 'the elites'. Furthermore, 'People'-linked lists got more votes than ones linked to 'the elites'. Yet when it came to parties versus independents, voters leaned towards the former. That said, the percentages show that parties did not sweep the board in the constitutional debate, contrary to the assumptions typically made in a Representative Democracy.

To sum up, there was a direct link between the demands driving millions of Chileans to protest in October 2019 and the establishment of the Constituent Convention. Moreover, the voting preferences align with the People/Elite rift. This suggests a broad trend that might take Chile beyond a Neo-Liberal society. That said, it is still too early to say where this trend might lead.

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