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From the Wave of Protests in October 2019 to Constitutional Change: The political significance of social mobilisations in Chile

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ABSTRACT
The paper examines the causes of Chile's October 2019 wave of protest and the path taken in the relationship between institutional policies and social mobilisations, and that led to the 2020 referendum for a New Constitution. It is based on a hypothesis on the transformation of society and the configuration of democracy in its cultural and political dimensions. The key question posed is: To what extent can the two main problems be solved?, to wit: (1) finding a new social-economic order to replace the model imposed during the dictatorship ("Neo-Liberalism with Chilean features") —a model that was tweaked by the *Concertación* and the *Nueva Mayoría* Centre-Left coalition governments (Garretón, 2012; Mayol, 2013; Atria; 2013); (2) coming up with new kinds of links between politics and social movements, offering scope for going beyond the classic model and for marking a radical break with the past, as in Chile's case.

Keywords: social revolt; Neo-Liberalism; institutional policy; social movement; constitutional process.

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SUMMARY

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This paper examines the factors behind the October 2019 wave of protests in Chile, focusing on changes in institutional politics bearing on social movements. This eventually led to the approval of a draft New Constitution in a 2020 referendum, and that was to have superseded the 1980 Constitution currently in force in Chile. However, the citizen-drafted Constitution was rejected in a September 2022 referendum. This rejection gave rise to a new constituent process, and the New Constitution's final text will be put to the vote in another referendum in December 2023. Our goal is to explore the possibilities emerging after the social upheaval, addressing two main issues arising from citizens' demands: (1) the creation of a new socio-economic order that goes beyond the model used during the dictatorship: 'Chilean-style Neo-Liberalism'; (2) development of new interactions between institutional politics and social movements to replace the traditional model, which has been in crisis since the early 2010s (Garretón, 2016a).

Post-dictatorship Capitalist democracies are marked by political crises and tend to spawn: weak institutions; public policies for strengthening democracy; narrowing power imbalances (Madariaga, 2020). This paper is based on sociological observations, literature reviews, and interviews with key figures. It reveals that the Chilean Neo-Liberal social structure, though partially offset by Centre-Left coalitions such as *Concertación* [Concert] and *Neuva Mayoria* [New Majority], failed to fully deal with the inherent inequalities of Neo-Liberalism (Garretón, 2012; Mayol, 2013; Atria, 2013; Morales-Olivares, 2023). During this period, the ruling coalition — *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia* (CPD) [Concert of Parties for Democracy], maintained control through the gradual inclusion of social-democratic elements, mainly in discourse and ideology, with some partial reforms (Garretón, 2012; Ffrench Davis, 2003). The governing Chilean political bloc faced growing implementation challenges. These arose from: (1) the need to bring in broader business sectors to foster stability; (2) poor integration of grassroots

political forces or social movements. This meant failure to bridge the gap between institutional politics and society — a grave handicap for a fledgling democracy. A shared factor was the exclusion of marginalised groups seeking political influence and the failure to grapple with social inequality. Thus, Neo-Liberalism persisted as *Concertación's* economic policies were seen as falling short by the actors of that time, especially in the light of the initial goals set during Chile's return to democracy in the late 1980s.

In the context of Chile's historical development, the country has undergone its fastest period of Capitalist growth since 1960 (Ffrench-Davis, 2003; Garretón, 2012). This reversed the trend set in motion by Salvador Allende's Socialist government in 1970. The 1973 *coup d'état* ushered in General Pinochet's military dictatorship. Chile then made structural reforms that strongly reflected the Neo-Liberal model. Pinochet's reforms widened economic inequality, and fostered privatisation and deregulation. Some scholars contend that these changes boosted rentier growth rather than modernisation (PNUD, 1998; Palma, 2010; Madariaga, 2020). The *coup d'état* and the dictatorship altered all areas of society, with the foundational discourse defining it as a system that overcame "over-dependence on The State". In 1980, a New Constitution was drawn up by The Ortuzar Commission, which comprised right-wing experts and intellectuals. The new legal framework this created gave the Executive major powers, especially those for ensuring Augusto Pinochet kept his grip on power (Vergara, 2020; Cordero, 2020; Morales-Olivares, 2021). This Constitution was passed in a sham referendum and "those voting in it were politically unrepresentative of society as a whole" (Bassa and Viera, 2008). Nevertheless, it remains in force (albeit with some amendments, especially during President Ricardo Lagos's term of office), showing the continuity of this model. The victory of the democratic Centre-Left forces in the 1989 referendum, in which *Concertación* supported the 'No' option (that is, opposing Pinochet's continued rule), sparked fears of a return to an authoritarian right-wing regime (Weyland, 1999: 69). In this context, the shift to democracy was more of a one-sided imposition rather than a mutually agreed-upon pact. It required negotiations and consensus on gradual reforms. According to Gruninger (2003: 6):

> The transitional framework stopped the new government making real democratic changes. The 1980 Constitution, with its decentralisation of government functions and privatisation of public economic roles, were big hurdles to democratisation. Another challenge was the need to maintain a political balance and choose a consensus-based approach rather than confrontation with the Right. Furthermore, there was a favourable global environment for Neo-Liberal economic reforms and for 'prudent' democracies, that combined with Chile's strong macroeconomic performance in the early 1990s, made it hard to justify an alternative economic strategy.

One should also note that the various *Concertación* governments between 1990 and 2010 (Aylwin, Frei, Lagos, and Bachelet) were coalitions of Centrist political parties. This can be seen from the number of Ministers from the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), which had historically aligned with the Right. Yet in the Chilean context, its closeness to the democratic and reformist Centre let it forge major agreements with a section of Chile's Left. The *Concertación* coalition was dissolved and the *Nueva Mayoria* coalition formed to fight the 2013 elections. *Nueva Mayoria* was a broad Centre-Left umbrella group that included the Communist Party in its coalition. This proved a winning combination and led to the election of President Michelle Bachelet. *Nueva Mayoria*'s narrative was built on the 2011 Chilean student mobilisation. The upshot was a radical movement that reflected an international trend. The movement's demands included: free, quality education; tax reform; a New Constitution. These goals became the basis of Michelle Bachelet's second-term programme (2014-2018), alongside the issue of labour reform proposed by the recently incorporated Communist Party (Garretón, 2016b).

Social discontent began to grow in 2011-2012. This disenchantment stemmed from *Concertación*'s

largely unchanged policies over twenty years and the 2010 election of the first Right-Wing president after the dictatorship, Sebastián Piñera. His second term, which began in March 2018, brought this discontent to the boil when he criticised the path taken over "The Thirty Years" [the period spanning 1990-2020, which began with the restoration of democracy]. Piñera made various populist promises with a view to reversing the former Michelle Bachelet government's efforts to reform 'The Chilean Model'. This shift sparked one of Chile's largest social protests even as trust in public administration plunged and the government's approval rating fell to below 30% (Boccardo and Guajardo, 2013). Government policy shifted towards repressing the demonstrations and seeking a way out of the crisis by accepting demands for a New Constitution, and proposing a National Social Compact, which we shall discuss in due course.

ENCLAVES, ANCHORS, AND CHILEAN-STYLE NEO-LIBERALISM: PRELUDE TO PROTEST

In the literature on the restoration of Chilean democracy after the military dictatorship[1], it is generally agreed that the *Concertación* and *Nueva Mayoria* governments tweaked certain aspects of General Pinochet's Neo-Liberal model but left much of the authoritarian institutional apparatus in place. Many argue that doing so greatly hindered progress, change, and democratic discourse. Some have even stated that Chile's democracy was crippled by these lingering constraints (Garretón, 1994; 2012; Atria, 2013; Huneeus, 2014; Sources, 2021). The key feature of these *authoritarian enclaves* (whether institutions and/or powerful individuals) was that they did not 'play the democratic game'. Examples of such 'hold-outs' include certain parties, The Armed Forces, and those not brought to book for their human rights violations during the dictatorship. Such actors worked to block structural change and to delegitimise and belittle the young democracy, hindering its consolidation (Garretón, 1990; 1997).

There were several critical issues. One of them was the unchallenged dominance of the free-market economy model inherited from the dictatorship. This economic model has done much to deepen socio-economic inequality in the country, as several scholars have pointed out (Silva, 2012; Garretón, 2003; Siavelis, 2009). Furthermore, the political landscape is strewn with hurdles. Institutional politics, including the electoral system and the political party structure, have proven hard to reform. These factors have discouraged the general public from taking part in politics. This has left the elite with a great deal of control over political disputes and processes — a point noted by several researchers (Garretón, 1990; 2003; Luna, 2008; Siavelis, 2009; Atria, 2013).These issues have led to growing distrust, and questions about the legitimacy of political actors and institutions. Various studies have covered this subject (Garretón, 2016a; Joignant, Morales-Olivares, and Fuentes, 2017; Alvarado-Espina, Morales-Olivares, and Rivera, 2020).

The 'authoritarian enclaves' in Chile's democracy (that is, remnants of the dictatorship) make it hard to bring about social change outside the Neo-Liberal system or beyond the established political institutions. This is also our research hypothesis. Sociologist Tomas Moulián, in his book *Chile, anatomía de un Mito* [Chile, Anatomy of a Myth] examined the situation and concluded that Chilean democracy

1 We use the term transition in this context given its widespread acceptance. That said, it fails to fully capture the nature of the Chilean case whereby each government defined the term 'transition' to mean its own policies. This let both sides use the term to justify their own strategies. From this standpoint, Chile's transition has no end in sight. Strictly speaking, it seems better to refer to the transition from one kind of political regime to another (in this case, from dictatorship to democracy). Taking this definition, one can say that Chile's transition began with the referendum on the 5th of October 1988 and ended with the inauguration of the first democratic government on the 11th of March 1990. In Chile's case, what came after that was an "incomplete democracy" (Garretón, 2003) or "a semi-sovereign" State (Huneeus, 2014) characterised by weak democratic consolidation and deficits. In our view, *political democratisation* would be a more accurate description of what happened in the country.

mainly strove to retain authoritarian features with a view to keeping the nation on an even keel. To achieve this, they ran things in a way that limited the power of trade unions and kept the military in control of political activities. This was based on the idea of an 'iron cage' whose bars were forged from the main political laws enacted between 1977 and 1989, and the political party system that began to take shape in 1983. In the Chilean legal framework, there are rules restricting the powers of future leaders. These limitations are still present in legislation such as The Higher Education Act, regulations covering Pension Fund Administrators, Private Healthcare laws, the Mining Code, and others. These laws were enacted in the late 1980s (Gárate-Chateau, 2012: 320-325). In simpler terms, this means that to understand why the Neo-Liberal model is politically successful, we need to consider how it restricts and undermines the principles of representative democracy.

The idea of "authoritarian enclaves" limiting democratic progress, as described by Garretón (2016b), is key to understanding the background of the wave of social unrest in October 2019 and its aftermath in society, politics, and culture. These authoritarian enclaves were spawned by the dictatorship's economic policies and certain institutional strictures that let them linger on after the restoration of democracy. Without these factors, it is hard to imagine Chileans' loss of trust in the nation's political and institutional system, as discussed by Mayol (2013), Garretón (2016b), and Morales-Olivares (2016). Therefore, one needs to see Chile's post-dictatorship democratisation against the background of the nation's history. Put another way: "There is nothing in Chileans' daily life — no matter how small —that does not have something to do with [the dictatorship]." (Garretón, 2021b: 16).

The institutional hang-overs from the dictatorship still shape the scope for political democratisation in Chile. This is why changing the 1980 Constitution (a 'roadblock' to root-and-branch reform) is such a critical step. The process of redefinition is driven by the need for a New Constitution that brings about a re-ordering of national life — a point stressed by various scholars (Huneeus, 2014; Garretón, 2021a; Mayol and Vidal, 2021). The 1980 Constitution fostered a mindset and legal practice that systematically excluded any political debate on the nature of the social fabric and the kind of society people wanted. Instead, it turned politics into a cryptic language understood only by technocrats. The Constitution reshaped the conceptual framework of society, institutionalising it in certain ways, even though The Ortuzar Commission did not formally articulate this vision. This thread reveals a normative effort to discredit democratic ideas in general and those stemming from Socialism in particular. In short, the 1980 Constitution "enshrined a concept of humanity and society that undermines individual freedom, national values, and the rule of law" (Cordero, 2020).

CHILE'S 18TH OCTOBER WAVE OF PROTEST

Chile's wave of unrest can be explained by unique local circumstances, namely the dictatorship's legacy, and the aforementioned shortcomings of democratisation. Some of the events in October 2019 might have been expected, especially in the light of two issues discussed earlier, to wit: (1) the long-ingrained economic model; (2) the link between politics and society. Regarding the gap between politics and society, one must see this in the context of a long-standing rift between the general population and their political masters. This issue was grasped early on in efforts to democratise the nation after the dictatorship ended. Electoral support for each successive government has steadily fallen since the restoration of democracy (Joignant et al., 2017). The political success of the Centre-Left and *Concertación* has not been without its critics, who have slated these parties' unwillingness to challenge the legitimacy of the former political and economic system (Motta, 2008; Garretón, 2016a). Thus, citizens have raised doubts about the idea of a 'new political subject' that could bring about changes in society, the eco-

nomic structure, and the political framework. This scepticism has led to the emergence of major social movements, unlike anything seen in the country's recent past (Garretón, 2016a). It has also given rise to a new set of political parties known for their strong commitment to collaborative, participatory social movements (Alvarado-Espina et al., 2020). Here, Neo-Liberalism weakens the government's control and ability to tackle the widening gap between it and the rest of society (Garretón, 2016a; Madariaga, 2020). This state of affairs highlights the crisis of representative democracy and the growing lack of citizen involvement in the political system. "Democracy — which is meant to furnish institutions and elected representatives that give citizens a say in the decisions affecting them — has failed" (Garretón, 2021b: 13).

The crisis of post-dictatorship Neo-Liberalism came to a head on the 18th of October 2019. The match that lit the fuse was a rise in underground railway fares in Santiago. It marked the culmination of a complex political process in which issues stemming from Neo-Liberal Capitalism and the crisis of representative democracy were tightly intertwined. The rise in rail fares was simply 'the last straw'. The message in the media swiftly became "It's not 30 Pesos... It's 30 years". Thus, what lay behind Chile's "political awakening" were the intricate links between Neo-Liberalism, democracy, and the authority of the people (Vergara, 2005; Garretón, 2012; Undurraga, 2014; Madariaga, 2020). In this light, it is clear that the key to grasping Chile's 'political awakening' lies in the nation's extreme economic disparities. These disparities are intertwined with a notion of progress that is linked to big differences in political power and shortcomings in democratic representation (PNUD, 2015; Akram, 2020; Peña, 2020). These issues stemmed from the Neo-Liberal model used to run Chile's economy. The crisis was thus rooted in the complex interplay between the global economy and Chile's institutional structure. It was also fuelled by recent changes in how people took part in highly active, militant social movements (Garretón, 2021b).

In Europe, the waxing of global Neo-Liberal industrial Capitalism led to a waning of both The State and Democracy (Scholte, 1997). In Chile, it took the form of 'Extractive Capitalism'. This form of Capitalism thrives in a setting where The State is already weakened, and democracy is constrained by hang-overs from a dictatorship (Morales-Olivares, 2016; Madariaga, 2019; Palma, 2020). It is marked by the structural inequalities embedded in the model (PNUD, 2017). The paths taken by Neo-Liberalism (Morales-Olivares, 2016; Undurraga, 2014; Alvarado et al., 2020) and how (a) entrepreneurs wielded their power (Bril-Mascarenhas and Madariaga, 2017) and (b) the role played by the intellectual elites (Morales-Olivares, 2016; Gárate- Chateau, 2012; Undurraga, 2014) shaped Chilean Neo-Liberal Capitalism. This system both helped the dominant classes retrench (Garretón, 2003; Harvey, 2007; Vásquez, 2020) and fostered commodification and economic deregulation (Gárate-Chateau, 2012; González and Madariaga, 2018; Madariaga, 2019; Ahumada, 2019) As Foucault (2007) suggested, Neo-Liberalism is more than just an economic governing system. It is a form of societal governance that acts at every level, ensuring that competitive mechanisms can effectively regulate societal functions. In the Chilean model, Neo-Liberalism goes beyond being just a set of public policies, instead constituting a societal ethic centred on the concept of the 'enterprise.' The aim is to expand this 'enterprise' model throughout the whole social structure by shrinking the democratic foundations of society (Foucault, 2007; Madariaga, 2020; Beckert, 2019).

A blend of economic liberalisation, the breakdown of political institutions, and the lingering ways of the dictatorship have changed the way citizens see democracy. At present, 'democracy' is looked at in much more subjective, personal terms than hitherto (Garretón, 2021b). In the interplay between Neo-Liberal Capitalism and the crisis of representative democracy, the breakdown of institutional legitimacy in the Latin American region has created room for a new type of individual. This person is less tied to collective demands, needs, or affiliations and is

more focused on his or her uniqueness. The core of society's organisation is no longer the economy or politics but has shifted towards communications and the social and cultural aspects of consumption. This reveals that Chile underwent a sea change, during the period between the end of the dictatorship and the 18th October wave of protests. The so-called 'Capitalist Revolution' (Gárate-Chateau, 2012), initially a top-down affair, is now deeply ingrained in the cultural and normative aspects and values of various social groups. These groups reject hierarchies and authority to champion particularism, horizontal organisation, and local and digital deliberation (Millaleo and Velasco, 2013; Peña, 2020). "Anomie, once seen as the bane of industrial societies with its lack of norms, is today the essence of globalised post-industrial society." (Garretón, 2021b: 12).

This new form of subjective, personal experience of democracy can be seen as an 'expressive' or 'continuous' democracy (Garretón, 2021b). Its hallmark is that it is untrammelled and thus acts as a disruptive force — something readily seen in public spaces and on social networks. Citizens have grown weary of institutions because they no longer see politicians as true representatives (Joignant et al., 2017; Garretón, 2021c). Instead, they are perceived as part of a distant political elite (Luna, 2016; Gutiérrez, 2020). This shows that political and democratic processes have split into two spheres of society. On the one hand, the legitimacy of institutional democracy has weakened. On the other, 'expressive democracy' — seen in protests and social movements — has gained in strength and impact (Garretón).[2]

THE PARADOXES OF THE SOCIAL COMPACT AND THE NEW CONSTITUTION, AND THEIR FUTURE

Faced with a snowballing crisis marked by rising violence and human rights violations,[3] Sebastián Piñera's government proposed a political framework to reach agreement and end the protests. This led to the creation of The Social Compact and The New Constitution of November 2019 (hereafter referred to as the November 2019 Agreement). The main goal of this agreement was to kick-start a constitutional process with a view to replacing the dictatorship-era Constitution (Araujo, 2019; Mayol, 2019; Garretón, 2021c). This process revealed the yawning gap between the institutional dimension of democracy and society at large. Here, the gulf was between formal politics and the broader society. It was in the social realm (spanning private and public spheres, associations, and local political participation) that ordinary folk articulated their hopes and expectations. Yet this Agreement also exemplifies the formal political sector's effort to bridge this gap by involving the citizenry in defining the constitutional issue. Many of the calls for greater socio-economic power and self-governance come from this social sphere yet it is one that lacks the organisation and authority needed to tackle the social and political crisis on its own. As Habermas (1991) puts it, ""The public sphere (...) cannot be understood as an institution; it is not a network of rules with a differentiation of competences and roles. It certainly allows for internal boundary-marking but is characterised by open, porous, and flexible horizons extending outward." This reveals both the scope and limitations of institutional politics when it comes to meeting such demands.

The November 2019 Agreement in Chile was a big step towards ending the social conflict. After weeks of protests and negotiations, government representatives and the political Opposition (which included Centre-Left parties and some of the *Frente Amplio* [Broad Front] but not the whole coalition or the Com-

2 Nevertheless, this has both positive and negative aspects. The proposed New Constitution was voted down by a big majority in 2022. The electorate included many new voters, raising concerns about a slowdown in democratic advance or, worse still, a slide back into the authoritarian habits of old (Garretón, 2023).

3 In the 18th of October wave of protests, there were 445 eye injuries and around 2,400 injured nationwide, according to official sources from Chile's National Institute of Human Rights.

munist Party) reached an agreement to start drafting of a New Constitution. This process involved setting up a Constitutional Convention.[4]

The November 2019 Agreement and the constitutional process that followed marked a major change in Chile's political and social landscape. Creating a New Constitution was seen as a chance to tackle inequalities and establish a more inclusive and representative political system meeting citizens' demands. Yet some saw it as an institutional strategy to control and limit protests. Paradoxically, it could be seen as an agreement to channel citizens in making their demands, or as a way to stem the wave of social unrest. Max Weber (1992) defines power as an actor's ability to impose his will despite resistance, stressing its coercive nature. In this context, The November 2019 Agreement was an exercise of institutional power. The power of consensus legitimised the authorities to navigate the social unrest through politics, whether by institutionalising or containing society's will, depending on one's point of view. Dominant groups and elites aimed to manage and defuse the crisis. Research by Fourcade and Babb (2002), and Schneider (2009) reveals that in countries with peripheral economies, elites play a key role in driving change and continuity. The Agreement could be seen as a way to contain or co-opt more radical change alternatives (Morales-Olivares, 2016). It can also be seen as a victory for the demonstrations in wielding institutional power (Garretón, 2021a; b; c), and that might succeed or fail.

THE LIMITS OF THE DEMAND FOR DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION

The challenge posed by shifts in the whole political and economic system creates tensions between two incomplete forms of democracy. On the one hand, there is the inherited form from the last century, involving the ruling political class. This is a kind of democracy that is institution-based, and where citizens vote for their representatives and government (and more recently, make decisions through referendums). On the other hand, there is the form emerging from lifestyle changes — communicational, direct, experiential democracy — which challenges the ruling political class. The success of transformative democracy depends on considering both kinds. On the one hand, there are no "institutional politics" since everything varies based on how actors within the political spectrum operate. The term "political class" is only valid when these actors form a united front to society. On the other hand, "experiential democracy," if not accepted by institutions, can slide into sectorial and identity-based struggles lacking ways to resolve them.

Chilean society took its social demands to the political arena through a constituent process begun by a referendum. This process unfolded within the political system without changing it much.[5] Yet its key feature was that it gave citizens (who had been so vociferous in their demands during the wave of protests) the chance to decide the

4 The constituent process took place throughout 2020 and part of 2021, with the election of the constituents in May 2021. This election enshrined gender parity and the representation of indigenous peoples for the first time — a historic milestone for political participation in Chile. Most of the elected members supported the demands of the 2019 protests.. The Constitutional Convention began its work in July 2021, and its draft fully reflected the demands made during the protest. Yet the draft was widely rejected, with 61.7% voting against it in a national referendum held in September 2004. The constituent process was not only the institutional response to the 2019 crisis but also the issue around which politics and society revolved over the last two years, and the core of democratisation in general (Garretón, 2022). This made defeat of the proposed Constitution all the graver.

5 One should note that the process of drafting Chile's Constitution is underway at the time of writing. The constitutional process in Chile in 2023, officially referred to as the 2023 Constitutional Process, involves drafting (yet another) new proposal for the Political Constitution of the Republic of Chile following the victory of the 'No' option in the 2022 Constitutional Referendum. The new process will be carried out through three bodies created specifically for this occasion: (1) The Expert Commission, which will develop a preliminary draft of the constitutional text; (2) The Constitutional Council, which will approve and may modify the text; (3) The Technical Admissibility Committee, which will act as an arbiter when there are requests regarding proposals for norms that could infringe the regulations in force.

New Constitution. Chile's democracy has indeed undergone major changes due to shifts in its social foundation. Yet it has not given rise to a new proposal capable of taking root in institutions — something that is vital if the nation's democracy is to be transformed. Instead, we have seen a mix of direct, co-operative, community-based forms of participation, alongside attempts to revitalise institutional politics. These efforts occur within the existing political system without greatly altering it (Garretón, 2021c).

This key issue ties in with the paradox underlying The November 2019 Agreement between the Government and the Opposition. The crisis in Chile is not just political but is also one affecting the prevailing order. It calls for the dominant Neo-Liberal class and its political elite to embrace broad changes in both the institutional structure and the economic model carried over from the dictatorship to the democratic transition — conditions that seem unlikely to be met. That is because the crisis did not loosen these influential groups' grip on power. This poses a great challenge, especially given the hurdles new groups and social movements face in reaching broad agreement on key principles (Garretón, 2021c). The lack of agreement (particularly on crucial aspects of a 'New Social Contract') and the more Conservative political elite's efforts to restore the old institutional framework could well throw the constituent process off track and blunt the desire for root-and-branch democratisation.

The Piñera government's first goal in its proposals for a New Constitution was to de-fuse social discontent by tackling demonstrator 'criminality' and 'violence'. The idea was to confine the new process within the old institutional bounds. At the outset, the ruling elite's initial response to the wave of protests was inaction and bewilderment. This swiftly changed in the face of the rising vandalism and violence accompanying the demonstrations (Garretón, 2021c). During a national broadcast, President Piñera declared war against a "powerful, relentless enemy that respects nothing and no one, and is willing to use unlimited violence and crime.".[6] From the government's standpoint, the purpose of the agreement was to restore institutional normality and put an end to violence and acts considered criminal by those running the country.[7]

The Constitution remains the main arena through which social unrest is managed. Given the stop-start nature of the constituent process, one should draw a distinction between the Constitution and its text. The Constitutional Text refers to the fundamental Charter outlining the rules and laws it confers legitimacy on. The term 'Constitution' refers to the restructuring and redefinition of the overall structure of a specific form of social organisation. It involves introducing new elements alongside some remnants of the past, all with the purpose of changing the polity's course. This implies a foundational impetus. In this sense, 'a constituent moment' does not merely involve replacing one constitutional text with another, given that this change can happen without reshaping the social order. Instead, it means creating new norms and social links springing from society itself, thus giving it the potential to transform the nation. (Garretón, 2021a; 2023; Morales-Olivares, 2021).

6 President Piñera stated: "I am sure that, with the unity of all Chileans, we shall defeat those resorting to violence and re-establish the peace and freedom we all want," President's Office 20/10/2019. URL https://prensa.presidencia.cl/comunicado.aspx?id=103689. There was also an attempt to pass an Anti-Mask Bill in Congress, and that would have punished protesters who covered their faces in a manner similar to the classic image of the Zapatista Movement. Much of the movement viewed this as an effort to boost the Chilean police's powers of repression.

7 There were various kinds of violence during the Chilean protests. The most widely covered one in the media was looting and attacks on businesses. The second was the so-called 'frontline', which consisted of various groups that accompanied the protests and ensured their progress. Lastly, there was State violence, which was structural in nature and began with violations of human rights from the outset (Garretón, 2021b: 19-20).

CONCLUSIONS

One of the paper's goals was to analyse the scope for political change after the 18th October 2019. Here, a key point is that the old socio-economic model was left intact. This outcome was despite the Chilean protests effectively identifying and framing the issues. Put baldly, 'Chilean-style Neo-Liberalism' remains largely unchanged in the wake of massive demonstrations and riots. While there has been some tweaking of the Neo-Liberal model, the system's core remains intact. In this slightly amended Chilean Neo-Liberal model, President Gabriel Boric's Administration and the Left-wing have tried to make transformative changes but they have faced big challenges, especially in Parliament, where the government is in the minority.

The paper's second goal was to delve into the changing dynamics between institutional politics and social movements. Here, it can be argued that the protests did make a difference, spawning demands that were later included in the Constitutional Text approved in the September 2022 referendum. Nevertheless, the proposed New Constitution itself was turned down in a subsequent vote. The upshot was a weakening of protests. A major challenge to re-forging the link between politics and society is that neither the Left-wing nor the Centre political actors have really understood the demands citizens made two years ago or taken them on board as part of an overall political vision. At the same time, many social movements have failed to realise that there is a political space that extends beyond individual and group interests and demands.

As things stand, there is scope for a Conservative backlash led by a faction of the Right-wing holding a majority in the new constituent process. Being able to thwart this Conservative agenda depends not on the split between institutional politics and social movements but on the ability to build a Left-leaning project in co-operation with the Centre. Such an approach should address significant transformative changes, the everyday issues of different societal sectors while also considering ideological aspects. On the other hand, it is vital to re-connect these actors and the social movements. Both sides need to acknowledge their autonomy while recognising their interdependence. Here, even though President Boric's government is in the minority, it has made some progress on all these points.

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