



## **Chile 2022: from great expectations to rising pessimism**

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# CHILE 2022: FROM GREAT EXPECTATIONS TO RISING PESSIMISM\*

*Chile 2022: de las grandes expectativas al creciente pesimismo*

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## ABSTRACT

In 2022, Chile witnessed two unprecedented events in its recent history: a new political generation came into office, and the end of a consensual and participatory constitutional process. While the early-year hegemony of progressive forces suggested substantive changes in the country, an unexpected conservative backlash in the second half of the year dismantled those expectations. In this article, I analyse three critical processes that help explain the recent variable trajectory of Chilean politics throughout 2022. First, I examine the Constitutional Convention and its discrediting process in the eyes of citizens. Based on opinion polls, I demonstrate how the delegate's scandals, the prioritisation of measures not perceived as critical by the majority of people, and the proposal of highly divisive contents contributed to the final electoral defeat. Second, I delve into the first year of Gabriel Boric's government, focusing on his actions and discourses and how they had to be readjusted amid the changing conditions of the country. Finally, I analyse the evolution of three internal security threats: violent protests, criminal violence and indigenous insurgencies. Using quantitative data, I illustrate how these problems have recently intensified and how they have influenced a growing attitude of pessimism across the country.

**Keywords:** Chile, Gabriel Boric, constitutional convention, Mapuche conflict, criminal violence

## RESUMEN

*En 2022, Chile enfrentó dos eventos inéditos en su historia reciente: la llegada de una nueva generación política a La Moneda y el desenlace de un proceso constitucional consensuado y participativo. Aunque la primacía de fuerzas progresistas a comienzos de año auguraba cambios sustantivos, una sorpresiva ola conservadora en la segunda parte vino a desmantelar esas expectativas. En este artículo, analizo tres procesos críticos que ayudan a explicar la reciente trayectoria variable de la política chilena durante 2022. En primer lugar, estudio*

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*la Convención Constituyente y el proceso de descrédito que enfrentó ante los ciudadanos. Basándome en encuestas de opinión, muestro cómo los escándalos de sus miembros, la priorización de medidas desapegadas de la mayoría, y contenidos altamente divisivos contribuyeron a su derrota electoral. Segundo, examino el primer año de gobierno de Gabriel Boric, poniendo el foco en sus acciones y discursos y cómo ellos debieron reajustarse ante el cambio en las circunstancias del país. Por último, analizo la evolución de tres amenazas a la seguridad interior: las protestas violentas, la violencia criminal y las insurgencias indígenas. Utilizando datos cuantitativos, ilustro cómo estos problemas se han intensificado y cómo esto ha influido en un pesimismo creciente en el país.*

**Keywords:** Chile, Gabriel Boric, Convención constitucional, conflicto Mapuche, violencia criminal

## I. INTRODUCTION

The trajectory of political events in Chile during 2022 was paradoxical. In the first half of the year, progressive forces enjoyed institutional hegemony with few counterbalances. Newly inaugurated President Gabriel Boric vowed to end neoliberalism in Chile, while the Constitutional Convention drafted one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. In Congress, although leftists were a minority in the Senate, they held control over almost half of the Chamber of Deputies, increasing the chances of passing significant legislation. However, in the second half of the year, a conservative backlash emerged, contradicting the expectations for sweeping social changes. The most significant event in this regard occurred on 4 September when 61.9 percent of Chileans voted against the newly proposed constitution. Unexpectedly, these results provided an opportunity for right-wing parties to regain strength after several defeats in elections since 2020 (Martínez and Olivares 2022).

Since President Boric staked his political reputation on the fate of the Constitutional Convention, the defeat in the referendum necessarily resulted in several consequences for his administration. First, it triggered a cabinet reshuffle that redefined the balance of power inside the government coalition, decreasing the role of leftist forces (Apruebo Dignidad) on behalf of more moderate political parties (Socialismo Democrático). This abruptly ended with the original Boric's design of renewing political elites through a young and diverse coalition. Second, it changed the political agenda by returning security and economic issues to the forefront of the electorate's priorities. The idea of sweeping social changes thus lost support and rapidly became unviable. Lastly, the electoral failure drastically impacted Boric approval rate. Presidential power detriment encouraged the opposition to challenge bills and perform as a veto player over the new constitutional process and high-rank appointments in the state. As a result of this turbulent second semester, December polls showed that President Boric enjoyed support from only 25 percent of Chileans, making him the most unpopular president in the first year of mandate since the return of democracy in 1990.

In the following lines, I examine the political development of Chile in 2022. As an eventful year, my analysis focuses on three critical processes, tracking how they unfolded, the ways in which they interacted, and how they help explain the contrasting trajectory of Chilean politics throughout the year.

This article proceeds as follows. I begin by analysing the Constitutional Convention and its discrediting process in the eyes of citizens. Drawing on opinion poll data, I demonstrate how Convention's delegates scandals, the prioritisation of measures not perceived as critical by the majority of people, and the proposal of highly divisive content, contributed to the final electoral defeat. Second, I examine the first year of Gabriel Boric's government, focusing on his actions and discourses and how they had to be readjusted amid the country's changing political and economic conditions. Finally, I analyse the evolution of three internal security threats: violent protests, criminal violence and indigenous insurgencies. Using quantitative data and media reports, I illustrate how these problems have intensified in recent times and to what extent they have contributed to a growing sense of pessimism across the country.

## II. THE FAILURE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

In 2022, the promising idea of leaving behind the 1980 Pinochet constitution through a consensual and participatory process fell apart unexpectedly. Similar to other striking referendum outcomes worldwide, such as Brexit in the UK or the Colombian peace agreement in 2016, Chileans surprised the world by voting overwhelmingly against the proposed new constitution. While some observers have emphasized the role of misinformation campaigns in shaping the result (Piscopo and Siavelis 2023), the causes of this unprecedented failure are more complex. Tracing the trajectory of the Convention's throughout 2022 reveals how its decreasing support correlated with the timing of negotiations surrounding the most divisive articles of the proposed constitution, scandals involving Convention delegates, and the onset of unpopularity for Boric's government. This evidence suggests that the election result was the product of a multifaceted and cumulative process of discrediting, rather than solely the outcome of an organized disinformation campaign. By failing to forge a widely legitimized constitution through a highly democratic process, the Convention became a microcosm of the ongoing crisis of representation in Chile.

### Origin, Aim and Composition

The Constitutional Convention was an ad hoc institution created to redesign Chile's politico-legal framework in response to its largest unrest in recent history. By October 2019, student protests against a subway ticket price increase in the capital resonated with long-standing socioeconomic grievances among Chileans and rapidly spread throughout the country (Palacios-Valladares 2020;

Somma et al. 2020). Increasing disorder and state repression in the streets, which left at least 30 people dead, warned the elite about the seriousness of the situation. To quell the protests, on 15 November 2019, a majority of political parties in Congress agreed to establish a new constitution. While the popular uprising lacked a clear petitory, this was the political elite's response to a crisis that took them by surprise (Dammert and Sazo 2020).

The agreement, known as the "Peace and New Constitution Deal", outlined a three-stage electoral process. The first was a voluntary referendum in which Chileans would decide on whether to have a new Magna Carta and what type of constitutional assembly would draft it. This referendum took place on 25 October 2020, and the result was 78 percent in favor of drafting a new constitution, with 80 percent supporting that all members of the Convention had to be elected (Sáez-Vergara et al. 2022). The second stage was the election of delegates to the Convention who would participate in the discussion and writing process of the new constitution. This event occurred on 15-16 May 2021, and its results were characterized by a large proportion of non-partisan candidates elected, a high level of party system fragmentation, and a poor performance of right-wing parties (Larraín et al. 2023). Following this vote, a mandatory referendum was slated for 4 September 2022 to approve or reject the proposal elaborated by the Convention.

The basic rules of the Convention were as follows. The number of delegates would be the same as the number of deputies in the lower house of the legislature (155), yet the composition would ensure gender parity and places for independent delegates and indigenous peoples. These settings were a concrete response to criticism that minority groups have been excluded from the decision-making process over the last three decades (Martínez and Olivares 2022). Content would be discussed in seven thematic commissions where articles would require a simple majority to pass to the plenary. In this instance the necessary quorum for eventual approval would increase to two-thirds. Although the Convention had some boundaries for its mandate, such as respecting the republican conditions of the Chilean state, judicial decisions and international treaties (Larraín et al. 2023), the possibilities for redefining the political order were significant. The political system, the structure of the state, property rights and other rights more broadly were open to be redefined. In doing so, the Convention offered the possibility for sweeping changes through institutional mechanisms.

The Convention was inaugurated on 4 July 2021 and the core of the discussion on its constitutional content occurred between January and April 2022. Over this short period, daily voting in the plenary by following the two-thirds rule were giving shape to the final draft that would eventually reach 388 articles. Exactly one year after the Convention began its work, the final proposal was submitted to President Boric in a symbolic ceremony in the former National Congress building.

## The Draft Constitution

In the early days of the Convention, many delegates consistently expressed their intention to rebuild Chile through the new constitution. However, the outcome revealed a more nuanced picture. The draft constitution indeed incorporated several innovative measures that garnered broad support among political forces and public opinion. These measures included the guarantee of socio-economic rights in areas such as housing, social security, health, work, and food security. Additionally, there was relatively widespread support for gender parity in state bodies and public companies, as well as the representation of indigenous groups in the legislature. These institutional changes envisioned by the Convention aimed to strengthen the state's capacity to promote greater levels of equality and social recognition for all Chileans, in contrast to the self-sufficient view outlined in the 1980 constitution.

Controversies, however, arose in various other articles. As pointed out by Larraín et al. (2023: 239), the most distinguishable among them were “the constitutionalization of the right to abortion, the creation of a plurinational state with vaguely different judicial and legal systems for indigenous peoples and other Chileans, potentially weaker protection of property rights in case of expropriation, or the right of unions to strike for any reason they see fit.” Further divisive content included the elimination of the 200-year Senate and the exclusion of the state of emergency for public order purposes. The latter seemed incongruous given that this very power was being employed in the southern regions to address rising Mapuche insurgency violence. While the central bank maintained its independence in monetary policies, its goals were ambiguously expanded to “employment protection, care for the environment, and the preservation of natural heritage” (article 358). Not surprisingly, these proposals spurred polarized debates among delegates and were far from building a harmonious draft in the eye of public opinion.

Meanwhile, Boric's government expressed a clear compromise with the Convention's work. This was not surprising, as the president and his closest allies had been advocating for sweeping social changes through a new constitution since the student demonstrations in 2011-2012 (Donoso 2017). Moreover, Boric was one of the most prominent supporters of the “Peace and New Constitution Deal” in November 2019, despite lacking the backing of his own party. Additionally, both governing coalitions —Apruebo Dignidad and Socialismo Democrático— held 34 percent of the seats in the Convention, giving them significant influence on the writing process of the final proposal. Boric's support for the Convention was never a secret, and he openly reiterated his commitment to it during his presidential inauguration on March 11:

We are going to wholeheartedly support the work of the Convention. We need a constitution that unites us, that we feel is our own; a Constitution that, unlike the one imposed by blood, fire, and fraud by the dictatorship, is born in democracy, on the basis of parity, with the participation

of the indigenous peoples; a Constitution that is for the present and the future; a Constitution that is for all of us, and not just for a few (Arellano et al. 2022).

A few days before taking office, Giorgio Jackson, the Minister of Social Development and one of the closest advisors to the President, went even further. He claimed that having a new constitution was 'a sine qua non condition' for implementing Boric's promises. As a result, the government postponed highly controversial decisions on domestic and international politics until after the referendum. These decisions included tax and pension reforms, as well as the fate of significant agreements like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (also known as TPP-11) and the EU-Chile association agreement. The government's expectation was to ensure a favorable institutional field to carry out its agenda. However, the potential risks associated with this decision became a reality for President Boric when the popularity of the Convention began to decline.

## The Election

On 4 September 2022, the ballot paper displayed dichotomic alternatives, asking about the new constitution draft: "I approve" or "I reject." Unlike the 2020 referendum, where the latter option was mostly supported by far-conservative organizations (Heiss 2021; Sáez et al. 2022), this time the composition was broader and more diverse. Besides the center-right and moderate independents, prominent former authorities of the Concertación and other center-left figures (under Amarillos group's umbrella) joined forces against the new draft constitution. Centrists claimed to support a constitutional change, but not *this* proposed change. For the first time since 1989, the electoral cleavage among competing alternatives went beyond the Pinochet figure, allowing a reconfiguration of alliances in the political spectrum.

Despite all polls anticipating a rejection of the proposed constitution, the final tally stunned the world: 61.9 percent of all Chileans voted against the proposed constitution, dwarfing the 38.1 percent of Chileans voting for its approval. Figure 1 illustrates the differences in votes and turnout participation between the national referendums in 2020 and 2022. The electoral victory was as broad as it was consistent across the territory. The "rejection voters" obtained the majority in 338 of 346 municipalities, with the widest disparity of votes in the northern and southern regions (69 and 62 percent voted to reject the proposed constitution, respectively). In Santiago and Valparaíso in central Chile rejection represented 56 percent of the voting population. This interesting pattern proved that rejection voters were not composed of homogenous conservative and high-income class groups, as was the case in the 2020 referendum (Meléndez et al. 2021; Titelman and Leighton 2022). The massive vote disparity and cross-class support provided the proposed constitution's rejection with a high degree of legitimacy and consensus rarely seen in Chilean votes.

Figure 1. Comparison between Chilean national referendums, 2020 and 2022.

Referendum	Turnout	Approval		Rejection		Total votes
	%	%	Votes	%	Votes	
2020	50.9	78.3	5,885,384	21.7	1,633,868	7,560,893
2022*	85.8	38.1	4,860,093	61.9	7,882,958	13,021,063

\* Mandatory election.

Source: Author's own table based on data from Servel (2022).

## Explaining the Electoral Defeat

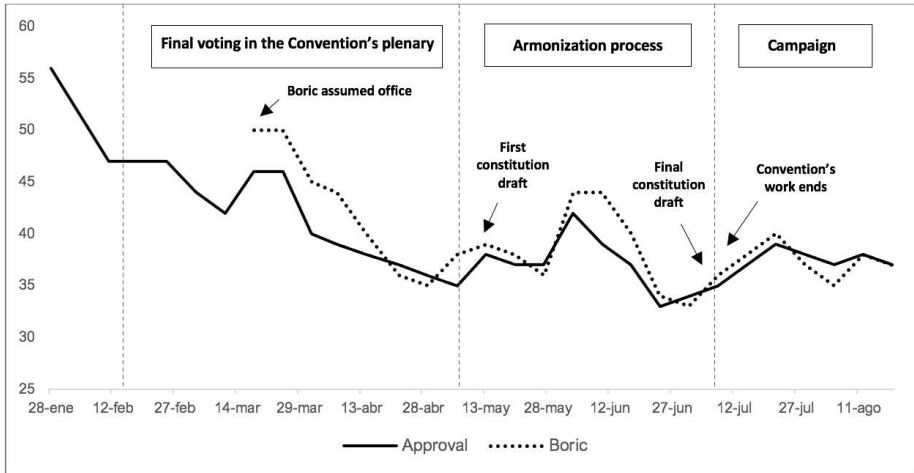
How can one explain that more than three-fourths of Chileans approved a constitutional change but later massively rejected the proposal presented before them? Tracing the Convention's popularity over its twelve months of work shows how the process was effectively discredited. Figure 2 shows the declining trajectory of support for the Constitutional Convention from the final voting in the plenary to two weeks before the referendum. Three factors can explain this severe decline.<sup>1</sup>

First, the Convention was beset by scandals that undermined its legitimacy from the beginning. Many events shaped this distrust among Chilean voters. For instance, some far-left delegates shouted over the national anthem during the initial ceremony in July 2021, and another well-known member was forced to resign in September 2021 when it was discovered that he had lied about having cancer. Further outrageous cases followed in 2022: a delegate voted remotely from the shower with his camera initially on; others appeared costumed as a Pokemon character and as a dinosaur in the plenary; a delegate even played his guitar during a speech, and so on. According to a survey (Criteria 2022), before the Convention started, 64 percent of Chileans declared that being "thoughtful" and "serious" were the most important attitudes expected from delegates. However, these scandals and controversies made most voters doubtful of the Convention's final proposal (Alemán and Navia 2023). After the referendum, Chileans who rejected the draft acknowledged that the poor performance of delegates was their primary voting motivation (CEP 2023).

<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of more than five million eligible voters through mandatory voting may also be an additional contributing factor in the final results of the 2022 referendum. However, future research should assess this impact based on more available comparative data.



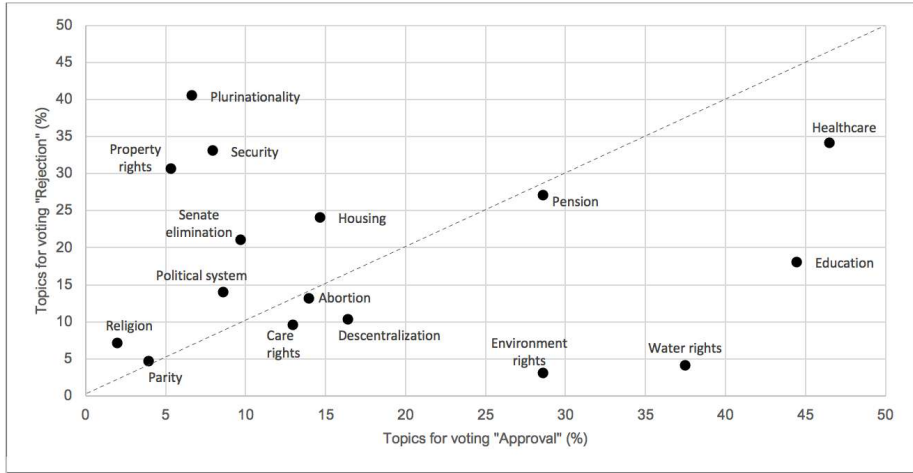
Figure 2. Presidential popularity and voting intention for the 2022 referendum (%).



Source: Author's own graph based on data from Cadem (2022).

Second, identity politics debates inside the Convention progressively detached its content from the Chileans' priorities. As argued by Larraín et al. (2023), this occurred by ill-designed rules that facilitated and overrepresented the election of independent convention members. Under this scheme, an atomized assembly without organized leadership, capable of forming coherent agreements throughout the process, was created (Larraín et.al 2023). Thus, rather than seeking broad consensus on ordinary citizens' top concerns, these independent members tended to focus on singular issues they campaigned for during the Convention delegate elections. This explains why the final document was extremely specific-oriented, including, for example, the state promotion of "education based on empathy and respect for animals", "the culinary and gastronomic heritage" of Chile and recognition of "spirituality as an essential element of the human being", among other niche agendas. However, when it came to addressing issues such as plurinationality, security and property rights, the proposal was ambiguous and equivocal. Figure 3 shows to what extent this impacted people's preferences to vote "Rejection." Ultimately, the Convention became a bubble disconnected from ordinary citizens.

Figure 3. Influential topics according to voting preferences in the 2022 referendum.



Source: Criteria (2022).

A final factor of the Convention's discredit was the underrepresentation and exclusion of right-wing ideas, allowing the constitution draft to be labeled as divisive and polarizing. During the critical juncture of the May 2021 elections for Convention delegates, right-wing parties performed extremely poorly, garnering only 24 percent of the votes. Consequently, they failed to reach the two-thirds majority necessary to block any reform and induce negotiations and compromise. As Larraín et al. (2023) explain, this was an exceptional event considering that in the legislative elections in November 2021, centrist and right-wing parties had retained their traditional levels of support, approximately 40 percent. By excluding the right from basic negotiations in the Convention, the leftist forces forced conservative parties into an early defensive position, ultimately undermining the proposal in the ratification referendum well before the Convention had completed its work. Unlike the 2020 referendum, this exclusion would allow the reunification of moderate centre-right and far-right forces, making the opposition to the "Approval" option electorally more competitive.

### Legacies of the Convention's Fall

The consequences of the Convention's failure were numerous. Politically, it resulted in a drastic rebalance of power among the Boric government and the opposition parties. The electoral defeat, seen as a clear disapproval of the government's orientations up to that point (Alemán and Navia 2023), provided right-wing forces with an opportunity to demand changes in Boric's ambitious agenda, particularly regarding essential pension and healthcare system

reforms. Additionally, opposition parties exerted influence as veto players in negotiations on the new constitutional process and high-rank appointments in the state, such as the president of the Chamber of Deputy and the National Prosecutor. The return of conservatives forces became more apparent in the following months as they refused to support a proposed tax reform meant to finance key elements of the Boric's progressive agenda.

The defeat of the Convention also had an impact on the internal dynamics of the administration. The cabinet reshuffle that took place immediately after the referendum dismantled the initial government design and provided evidence of the emergence of a new order within the government. Most notably, moderate parties under the Socialismo Democrático coalition increased their influence in policy decisions by assuming control of the Comité Político.<sup>2</sup>

Changes in public opinion attitudes were a further consequence. According to several polls, the significance of reforms to the pension and health systems, which were the primary social rights demanded between 2019-2020, rapidly diminished in comparison to concerns about rising crime, double-digit inflation, and immigration. Although Chileans maintained hope for a new constitution, their expectations regarding its transformative role declined. In December 2019, 56 percent of people believed that a new constitution would contribute to solving socioeconomic problems, but this figure dropped to 37 percent after the 2022 referendum (CEP 2023). Moreover, the demand for consensus and a more relevant role for experts in the new constitution-making process contrasted significantly with the revolutionary spirit that strongly characterized the national debate following the 2019 social uprising. By late 2022, this spirit had nearly faded.

### III. THE FIRST YEAR OF GABRIEL BORIC

By December 2021, Gabriel Boric's election produced worldwide attention for several reasons. At 35 years old, he became Chile's youngest president in two centuries and the most voted in the country's history. His resounding victory also marked the consolidation of a young and progressive coalition (Frente Amplio) that broke up three-decade long political hegemony of the center-left (Concertación) and right-wing (Chile Vamos) forces. Moreover, by coming from the 2011 Chilean student movement, Boric's success provided a fresher leader to the revival of the "pink tide" across Latin America (Lee Anderson 2022). Amidst this optimism, expectations grew among his allies and supporters, especially in those who sought a welfare state in Chile following the negative economic consequences of the 2019 social uprising and the Covid-19 pandemic.

<sup>2</sup> This is the inner circle of the head of government for decision-making. It is shaped by five ministries: Interior, Finance, Secretary-General of Government, Secretary-General of the Presidency and Woman and Gender Equality. Before the referendum, Socialismo Democrático had only one representant (Finance). After the election, this number increased to three (Finance, Interior and Secretary-General of the Presidency).

However, these high expectations for sweeping changes lacked strong ideological support among the general population. While Boric ultimately won the presidential election, it came after losing in the first round to the ultra-conservative Jose Antonio Kast, who led with 27.9 percent compared to Boric's 25.8 percent. This meant that around two-thirds of Chileans opted for alternative candidates before Boric's leftist project. To secure the majority in the run-off election, Boric had to adjust his performance to younger and less politicized voters, construct alliances with more moderate left-wing parties, and introduce amendments to his ambitious plan. Only by building a broad front strongly opposed to the far right, ranging from the Christian Democratic Party to the Communist Party, Boric ensured his electoral victory (Argote and Visconti 2021).

On 11 March, in his inaugural speech at La Moneda presidential palace, Boric aimed to unite both progressive and moderate supports. He emphasized the vision of transforming Chile into a "dignified and just" country where "social rights were guaranteed" to all citizens. This plan was based on six cornerstones: social rights, stronger democracy, justice and security, inclusive growth, environmental protection and feminism. To finance programs and legislation in these areas, a tax reform would be implemented. "We come from street mobilizations, we do not forget it", he stated. Nevertheless, Boric highlighted the importance of consensus and gradualism to achieve these ambitious purposes. He thus called for a broad cooperation on his reforms, even from conservative parties he had previously opposed as a student activist and lawmaker. Boric also praised his new allies—the center-left parties—for their contributions to democratization, economic redistribution, and human rights during the post-authoritarian period. By combining progressive goals with conciliatory rhetoric, Boric aimed to find a common ground between the two governing coalitions.

However, Boric's intended design faltered after his inauguration. Moderate speeches failed to materialize into actions as Boric and his closest allies quickly resorted to unconventional forms of leadership in pursuit of sweeping changes. The lack of experience in government positions further reinforced this behavior among several authorities, leading them to overestimate their abilities and disregard the unexpected day-to-day difficulties. After a few months in office, Giorgio Jackson, the Secretary-General of the Presidency Minister and a key advisor to President Boric, summarized this controversial attitude by claiming that his political generation was different and superior in values and principles compared to its predecessors (Vargas and Escudero 2022).

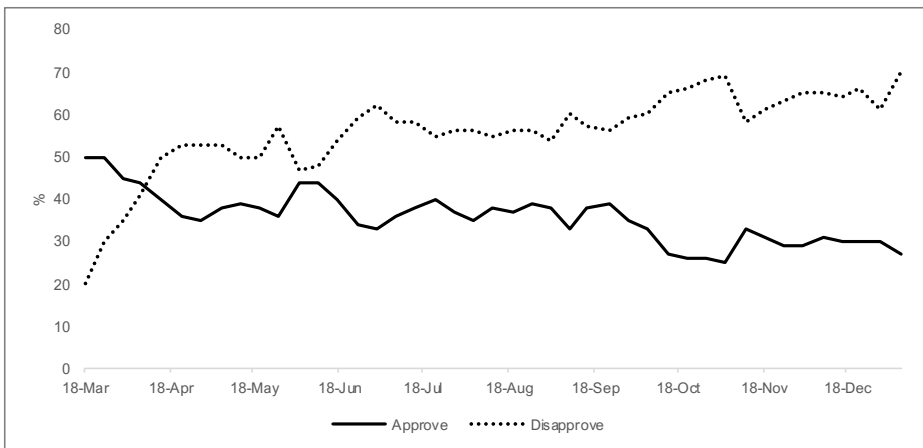
While several high-ranking authorities behaved in this manner, one of the most suggestive cases was Izkia Siches, who became the first woman to preside over Chile's Interior Ministry. During her first week in office, she made a significant decision to visit the restive region of Araucanía, aiming to initiate a dialogue between the new government and Mapuche indigenous groups. Siches ignored the police's warnings and ordered an unarmed convoy to move into the region, despite the area being under a state of emergency due to increasing violence. Her visit to Temucuicui was abruptly disrupted by gunshots near her

motorcade, forcing Siches to seek temporary shelter in a police station. As more details emerged later, this trip revealed a pattern of high improvisation, stubbornness, and inexperience on the part of the new minister.

These traits would foreshadow similar gaffes triggered by other cabinet members in the following months. For example, in April, Minister Sichel also made false statements regarding the expulsion of Venezuelan migrants, and Minister Jackson faced criticisms from socialist senators for prioritizing bills without coordinating with Congress members. In May, Justice Minister Marcela Ríos refused to classify a Mapuche community member, who had been sentenced to 18 years for murder by the Chilean justice system, as a “common prisoner.” Additionally, Irina Karamanos—the partner of Chile’s president—received accusations of personalizing state’s position by renaming with her name the first lady’s office. Thus, the long list of sloppiness among some cabinet members was neither isolated nor low-profile events.

The negative consequences of these controversies impacted the government’s popularity. Figure 4 shows President Boric’s disapproval rating, which rose from 20 to 62 percent within six months in office (Cadem 2022). Except for the charismatic communist minister Camila Vallejo, Boric’s cabinet experienced a similar trend as unpopularity spread among the most visibly progressive minister (Siches, Jackson and Ríos) (Gómez 2022). Interestingly, moderate and more conventional figures related to centre-left forces, such as Finance Minister Mario Marcel, Housing Minister Carlos Montes, and Interior Vice-Minister Manuel Monsalve, maintained steady approval rates of over 50 percent, despite facing challenges in their respective areas of responsibility. Overall, this rapid decline in government popularity indicated a weak ideological alignment among its supporters in general, and more severe opinions against the new figures and their unconventional forms of leadership in particular.

Figure 4. Gabriel Boric’s presidential approval rating, March – December 2022.



Source: Author’s own graph based on data from Cadem (2022).

To reverse his early unpopularity, President Boric resorted to pragmatism and moderation. Pragmatic adjustments involved the reconsideration of symbolic promises in light of the worsening contextual conditions. The Mapuche conflict served as a notable example. While Boric had pledged demilitarization in the Araucanía region and dialogue with rebel groups during his campaign, escalating insurgency violence against civilians pushed him to walk those statements back. In May, he adopted a different approach, choosing to reestablish a military presence in the region and pursue legal action against these groups. In the realm of education, Boric also employed pragmatism by announcing “targeting” policies instead of “universal” approaches regarding student debts known as CAE. Although the president kept his promise to forgive these debts, the implementation would be “gradual and fair”, based on the level of debt rather than unconditional, as initially stated during the presidential campaign.

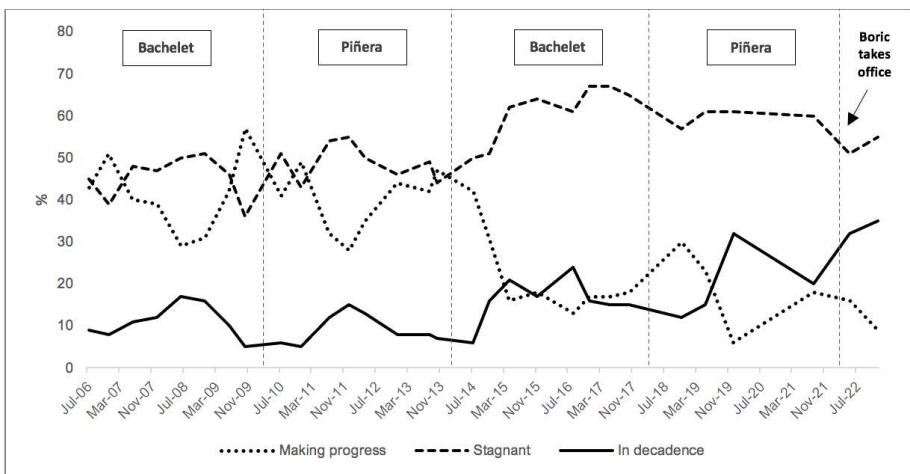
Moderation amendments took shape through the rebalance of power inside the government. This occurred after the constitutional referendum in September, which clearly demonstrated that expectations for far-reaching changes had been defeated at the ballot box. By appointing prominent figures of the former Concertación, such as Carolina Tohá in the Interior Ministry or Ana Lya Uriarte in the Ministry Secretary-General of the Presidency, Boric put an end to the hegemony of the leftist coalition and recalibrated forces in favor of the centre-left coalition. As a result, the ambitious original agenda was scaled back, with a focus on prioritizing reforms that aligned with the pressing concerns of the people, such as rising crime and high inflation. Unlike previous months, these changes now translated into concrete actions, including a significant expansion of the 2023 national budget. When asked about these amendments, Boric claimed it was “good for a government to be able to reassess its decisions”, particularly after having learnt in office that implementing deep transformations were easier said than done [“otra cosa es con guitarra”] (Salgado 2022). Paradoxically, this shift towards pragmatism and moderation did not lead to an improvement in popularity in polls, showing how people’s detachment was more aligned with a broad anti-government feeling.

These adjustments unsurprisingly incited discontent among Boric’s leftist allies, adding tension to the relationships within the government coalitions. For the Communist Party, reverting promises or slowing down reforms entailed a victory of conservative forces and a missed opportunity to achieve unprecedented changes in the country. One of the most vocal critics was Daniel Jadue, the Mayor of Recoleta and Boric’s former adversary in the 2021 primary. In his effort to fulfil leftist disappointments, Jadue frequently challenged Boric’s decisions on issues such as pension withdrawals, the state of emergency in southern regions, the TPP-11 agreement, student debt, and pension and tax reforms. While some prominent leftist figures joined these critiques, such as Valparaíso Mayor Jorge Sharp, the Communist Party and parties from Frente Amplio remained loyal to President Boric.

This loyalty would entail concessions, yet. The Communist Party and Frente Amplio parties continued to pressure President Boric to fulfill certain campaign promises, aiming to satisfy a small group of hardliners within his political base. In late December, these pressures resulted in Boric's decision to pardon 12 people who had been convicted in connection with the 2019 social uprising. President Boric justified his decision by claiming that the beneficiaries "were not criminals." However, media reports revealed that some of them had previously been convicted of violent robbery, rioting, and attacking police, which led to widespread public criticism (Poblete 2023). The decision also opened a political flank with opposition parties and the Supreme Court. The former accused President Boric of neglecting crime and public order, while the latter defended its exclusive constitutional power in making judicial decisions. Opinion polls indicated that the presidential pardon was highly unpopular, with a 62 percent disapproval rating, and ultimately led to the resignation of Marcela Ríos from the Ministry of Justice. In perspective, Boric's pardons became the most significant crisis during 2022.

Overall, the balance of the first year in office shows that the goals and narratives of Boric's government have changed significantly. Although the Boric project remains undoubtedly on the left side of the political spectrum, continuous adjustments in the scope and pace of reforms suggest a much more moderated approach than the original design indicated. If certain ministers in March often emphasized the government's purposes to bolster social rights and support inclusive growth, official speeches shifted to more conventional and pragmatic aims at the end of the year. Controlling crime and inflation, for instance, became a common government narrative and policy goal.

Figure 5. Opinions on the current situation in Chile, 2006 – 2022.



Source: Centro de Estudios Públicos (2023).

This reduction in the government's expectations also responded to the prevailing pessimism in Chile during the latter months of 2022, as figure 5 shows (CEP 2023). In January 2023, when reflecting on his first year in office, Boric highlighted numerous positive achievements under his mandate, including a fiscal surplus of 1.1 percent of GDP, a 12 percent increase in foreign investment (US\$17.1 billion), the free medical care in the public health system, and the largest increase in minimum wage in 29 years (US\$500). Along these lines, Boric claimed that the country was moving forward. "Let's not let pessimism take over our spirit", he stated amid rising unpopularity in polls (Reyes 2023). Interestingly, this statement underscored how the year 2022, which began with high expectations of sweeping social changes, concluded with a more subdued sense of hope.

#### **IV. RISING SECURITY CONCERNS: VIOLENT PROTESTS, CRIMINAL VIOLENCE AND INSURGENCY INDIGENOUS GROUPS**

##### **Violent Protests**

In October 2019, Chile witnessed the largest anti-government mobilizations since the end of the Pinochet dictatorship. Rooted in longstanding grievances about socioeconomic inequalities, elite corruption, and political detachment (Somma et al. 2020; González and Le Foulon 2020), this social uprising — popularly known as *estallido social*— threatened the country's stability and forced political elites to agree on a constitutional referendum as a way out the crisis. While demonstrations temporarily eased with the pandemic outbreak in March 2020, they returned to the streets once public health circumstances improved, performing less massive yet more disruptively (Donoso et al. 2022). This raised increasing concern among citizens who witnessed severe deterioration of public spaces. According to a survey fielded in September 2021, only two months before the presidential election, 55 percent of Chileans prioritized "maintenance of order" over "ensuring civil liberties", reporting a 15 percent growth in comparison with the previous year (Cárdenas 2021). Consequently, the recovery of social peace would become a central priority for the Boric government.

Boric understood that curbing disruptive protests was also important to ensure the success of his ambitious agenda. Therefore, he announced meaningful measures to mitigate discontent among the middle and popular classes. These measures included the establishment of a national healthcare system, government-subsidized pensions and adjustments to student debt. Moreover, he pledged to reform in police institutions in response to serious human rights abuses during the 2019 protests. Immediate actions were also taken to mitigate unrest. The first involved withdrawing the charges under the State Security Act against 139 activists who had been detained during the social uprising (Reyes



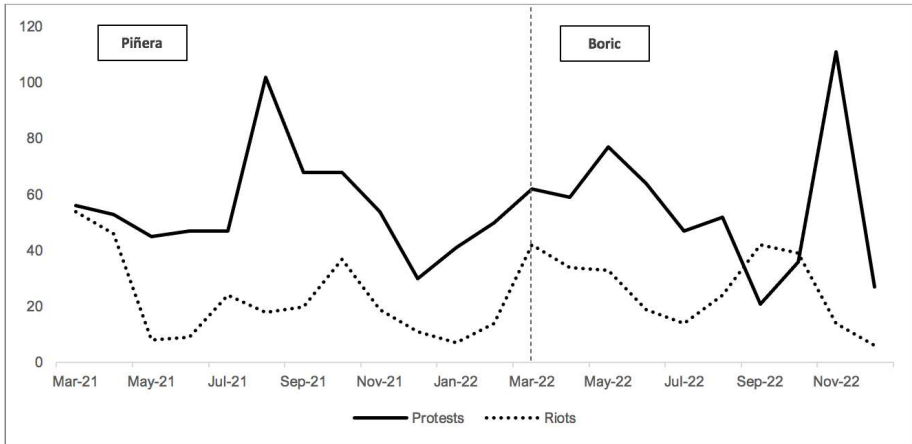
2022). This was complemented by an amnesty program for protesters convicted of attacking police officers and participating in acts of arson and looting. Furthermore, 400 victims of human rights violations resulting from police repression were granted a monthly state pension for life (approximately US\$430). Through these measures, the Boric government aimed to establish a symbolic connection with its base supporters and rebuild the social fabric in order to appease the demonstrators on the streets.

However, Boric's efforts to defuse urban disorder have largely failed. According to ACLED (2023), between March and December 2022, a total of 791 contentious events occurred in the country. On violent demonstrations specifically, which include riots, arson attacks, clashes against police forces and lootings episodes, 256 events were reported over this period, representing a 4 percent increase compared to 2021. Although the variation was relatively small and urban disorder remained comparable to the last year of Piñera's government, this trend challenged certain expectations regarding the demobilizing effect of a left-wing ruling coalition on violent demonstrators (Lee Anderson 2022).

Figure 6 shows that disorder episodes in 2022 reached their highest levels in March and September, coinciding with the inauguration of the new government and the announcement of the constitutional referendum results, respectively. This timing sheds light on two main characteristics of the actors leading the violent disorder events throughout the year. Firstly, by intensifying disruptive mobilizations immediately after Boric assumed office, these actors displayed a high degree of autonomy in their relationship with the left-wing government, despite many of its leaders coming from established organizations like the student movement. Secondly, with the resurgence of violent actions after the electoral failure of the proposed constitution, these groups demonstrated a deep distrust in institutional mechanisms for conducting social changes. In their struggle against exclusion and exploitation, these actors can be broadly categorized as anti-system movements (Jung 2022), primarily composed of anarchist activists and radicalized students from high schools in downtown Santiago (ACLED 2023). Interestingly, Boric also faced strong street opposition from the right in the form of unionized transport workers, which went on a national strike in November. While they caused partial disruptions to traffic in various highway locations, their protests did not involve property destruction or violent clashes with the police.

Overall, the violent demonstrations in 2022 had several consequences. One of the most shocking incidents was the death of a journalist who was shot by informal vendors while covering the Worker's Day marches on 1 May. In terms of material damage, the daily acts of vandalism in Santiago downtown led to the departure of numerous private companies and stores, as public spaces visibly deteriorated since October 2019 (Tapia 2022). Additionally, there was a significant increase in arson attacks targeting public transport in 2022, with at least 48 buses being destroyed. This marked a 50 percent rise compared to the incidents in 2021 (Toro 2022).

Figure 6. Contentious events in Chile, March 2021 – December 2022.



Source: Author's own graph based on data from ACLED (2023).

The endurance of violent protests also impacted peoples' preferences. According to opinion polls (CEP 2023), three dimensions of preferences were the most noticeably affected. The first was the delegitimization of social protests as a valid mechanism to express dissent. By December 2019, amidst remaining enthusiasm for October's social uprising, 59 percent of Chileans supported participating in marches. However, this value dropped to 38 percent after three years of weekly protests and disturbances in public spaces. Second, people rose support for police in using force to control violent demonstrations. While coercive methods were highly unpopular in December 2019, with only 19 percent support, this figure more than doubled by late 2022. Additionally, trust in the Carabineros, the national police force, experienced significant growth during the same period, improving from 17 to 46 percent. The third consequence was a shift in the importance placed on "public order" compared to "civil liberties" values. As it was mentioned above, the prioritization of maintaining order already showed an increase between 2019 and 2021. However, this difference further widened in December 2022, with 68 percent of support for maintaining public order, similar to the rate reported prior to the *estallido social*.

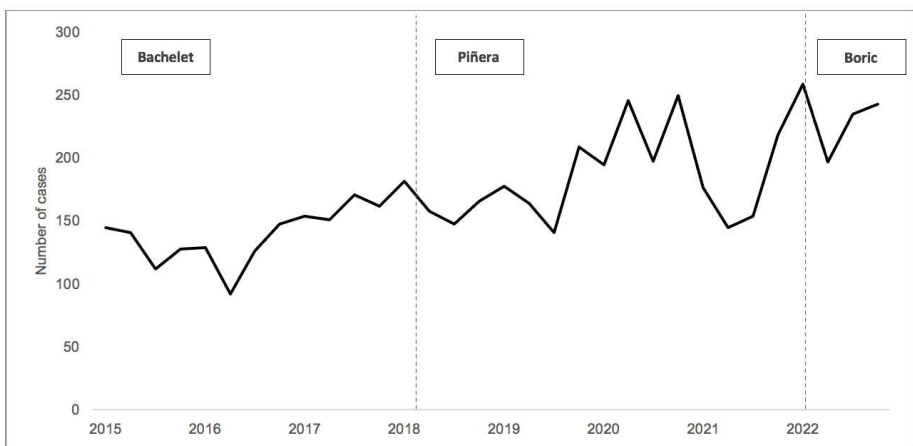
To explain these less favourable attitudes towards violence among Chileans, studies on contentious politics provide some insights. Ketchley and El-Rayyes (2020) suggest that violent protests turn unpopular when they become static and longer-lasting in public spaces, disrupting the public's everyday life and affecting livelihoods. Similarly, Feinberg et al. (2020) point out that disruptive protests can be effective in applying pressure to institutions and raising awareness, yet they often end up undermining social identification, emotional connections, and popular support for mobilized people.

In Chile, many people initially perceived the disruptive demonstrations during the 2019 uprising as necessary and justified in order to bring about the institutional changes demanded during the *estallido social*. However, the fixation on abstract issues of society and governance proved to be short-lived once disruption impacted daily life and peoples' priorities moved to kitchen-table issues. In 2022, despite the advent of a new progressive government that vowed significant socioeconomic reforms, the pattern of violent demonstrations persisted. This background suggests that violent behaviour in demonstrators is detached from general beliefs or issue-oriented demands (Marx 1972). On the contrary, it seems to operate independently of exogenous factors such as government concessions or public opinion support. Therefore, it is likely that the ongoing localized violent disorder will continue through 2023.

## Criminal Violence

Over the last three decades, Chile has been considered one of the safest and least violent countries in Latin America. However, insecurity has surged in recent years, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Insight Crime's latest report (Appleby et al. 2023), the homicide rate in Chile rose from 3.6 to 4.6 in 2022 (per 100,000 people), marking a 28 percent increase compared to 2021. This places Chile behind Ecuador (85 percent) and Uruguay (32 percent) in terms of annual homicide rate growth. Figure 7 illustrates the upward national trend since 2015. Although Chile's homicide rate remains relatively low compared to the region, the Boric administration acknowledged that the country is facing its "worst period of insecurity since the return of democracy" (González 2022).

Figure 7. Total number of annual homicides in Chile, 2015 – 2022.



Source: Centre for Studies and Data Analysis, Undersecretary of Crime Prevention of Chile (2023).

The recent upsurge in violent crime in Chile is puzzling as it challenges the conventional causal explanations given by the scholarly literature. Previous studies on violence in Latin America have argued that structural factors, such as state capacity and the nature of the political regime, often conditioned the expansion of crime organizations (Brinks et al. 2019). Accordingly, countries with effective provision of public goods and strong democratic institutions are expected to be better equipped to prevent patrimonial conduct and impunity practices by illegal groups. However, the increasing homicide rates observed not only in Chile but also in Uruguay and Costa Rica —countries historically known for maintaining high standards in state capacity and democracy— have highlighted the limitations of this perspective. Consequently, further research has complemented the analysis by considering contingent factors, including actors' trajectories, resources, and contextual conditions, and the ways in which these interactions contribute to shifting power dynamics among criminal organizations and the state (Feldmann and Luna 2022).

By combining these structural and contingent explanations on the causes of rising crime violence, three factors can be hypothesized to understand the case of Chile. The first is the expansion of illegal markets. During the mass rioting and looting in late 2019, the police forces were visibly overwhelmed in controlling public order in the urban margins. Months later, state institutions also failed to provide basic economic support in these areas during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic (Donoso et al. 2022). In this context of state retrenchment, criminal organizations consolidated their control over certain neighbourhoods by strengthening clientelist networks, protecting legal businesses, and providing essential goods to those in need (Feldmann and Luna 2022). However, most significantly, these groups expanded into other urban territories, gaining more income opportunities through new illegal activities. For instance, by 2022, the violent robbery of vehicles on public roads, synthetic drugs trafficking, or copper theft became highly lucrative businesses. This profit growth has allowed these groups to diversify their recruitment process and gain easier access to illegally trafficked arms. As a consequence, there has been a rise in violent and deadly crimes, following a trend observed in other Latin American countries (Moncada 2022).

The delegitimization of the police is a second contributing factor. Since 2017, public trust in both national police forces —Carabineros and Policía de Investigaciones (PDI)— has drastically declined due to accusations of corruption and human rights abuses (Dammert and Alda 2022). This would have impacted police-community relations in poor urban neighborhoods, resulting in the deterioration of the exchange of information that is crucial for successful crime prevention and prosecution (Bayley 2005; Luneke et al. 2022). Furthermore, severe police delegitimization would have made certain officers more susceptible to criminal capture by offering them alternative and more lucrative sources of income. While scholarly studies on police-criminal collusion in Chile are limited, similar illegal networks have been extensively documented in cases such as

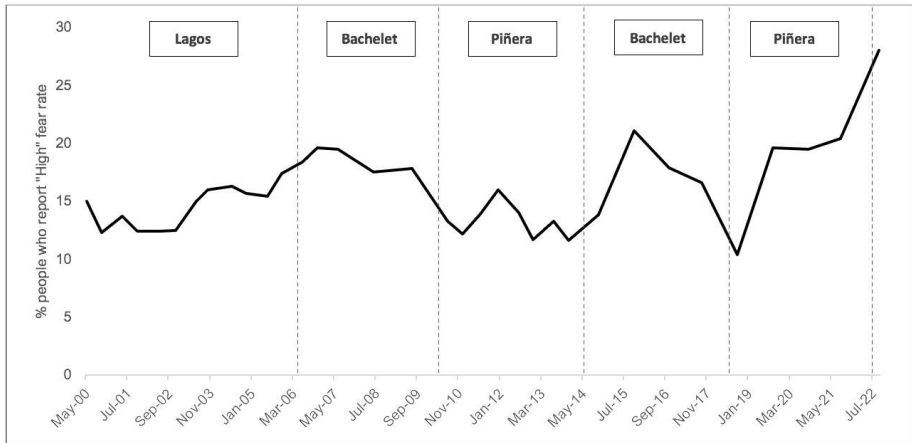
the Conorubano in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Arias and Barnes 2017; Auyero and Sobering 2019). Lastly, human rights abuses by the police during the 2019 protests led Chilean authorities to demand strict restrictions on the use of force protocols. In the words of the General of Carabineros, this ultimately constrained police actions against crime due to the fear of legal sanctions (Vallejos 2023).

The third factor is the arrival of transnational criminal organizations. Amidst the migrant crisis in Latin America during the previous decade, unauthorized immigration flows in Chile increased drastically, from 16,650 cases in 2013-2017 to 127,000 cases between 2018-2022 (Mondaca 2022). The PDI has confirmed that among these new undocumented immigrants are members of foreign-based gangs who have primarily settled in urban areas in Santiago and northern Chile (Guerra 2022). Against this backdrop, Iquique has become a focal point of violent crime due to the arrival of members from Tren de Aragua, Venezuela's largest gang (Ávila 2022). By seeking territorial control, these gangs have engaged in violent confrontations with local organizations, leading to turf wars. Similar to the dynamics observed in Mexico and Colombia (Durán-Martínez 2015), this criminal competition has resulted in more deadly disputes involving violent tactics rarely seen in Chile, such as extortion, extrajudicial killing, and kidnapping.

In the absence of a strategic plan against criminal violence, President Boric was forced to call all parties in Congress for a national agreement on security in May 2022. This marked a significant turning point in the government's approach, shifting from a relatively passive stance to implementing concrete policies against criminality. In the second half of the year, the government launched a national plan focused on confiscating the capital assets of criminal cartels and dismantling their networks and logistics through inter-sectoral coordination among state institutions. Additionally, the government increased the national security budget by 4.4 percent and introduced an unprecedented decree authorizing the intervention of the armed forces to support the police in curbing illegal border crossings in the northern regions. Government officials also modified their approach in speeches, adopting a more assertive "tough on crime" tone, with President Boric being the most suggestive example. In this sense, he ensured that his administration would be like "dogs in going after crime" and issued a warning to migrants to either regularize their status or leave the country (Ortiz 2022).

While only time will tell whether these initiatives translate into lower crime rates, the public's concerns about insecurity continues to rise. As shown in Figure 8, the perception of fear of crime grew in Chile by almost eight points compared to 2021, reaching 28 percent, the highest rate in 22 years (Fundación Paz Ciudadana 2022). Paradoxically, this increase was not correlated with a growth in victimisation rates. According to the same survey, only 32 percent of people reported being victims of robbery in the last six months, a change that was not statistically significant from the previous year and still among the three lowest

Figure 8. Fear of crime index in Chile, 2000 – 2022.



Source: Fundación Paz Ciudadana (2022).

rates in the last two decades. Although rising crime rates in Chile has been an accumulative process over the last decade (Solar 2018; Feldmann and Luna 2022), higher perceptions of insecurity have recently spurred most Chileans to call for more authoritarian and repressive measures to combat crime. While support for democracy as a preferable form of government has fallen from 61 to 49 percent between 2021 and 2022 (CEP 2023), the percentage of people who support the use of firearms against violent crime has reached 95 percent, an increase of 46 points compared to November 2019 (Pedreros 2023). This concerning trend seems to consolidate in the short term, particularly given that 67 percent of Chileans hold negative future outlooks on crime control (Panel Ciudadano UDD 2023).

## Insurgency Indigenous Groups

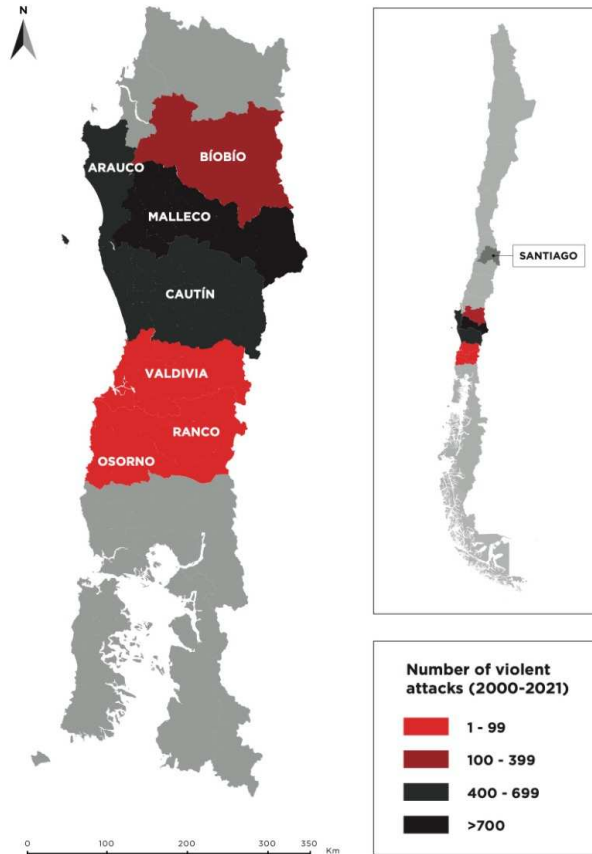
In recent years, violent confrontation in southern Chile have increasingly concerned governments. The so-called “Mapuche conflict”<sup>3</sup>, which involves police officers, landowners, logging private security forces and indigenous rebels, has not only expanded geographically but also became more frequent and lethal. Between 2000 and 2021, a total of 2,622 violent and disruptive events were reported in the South Macrozone<sup>4</sup>, with almost three-quarters of these incidents and 27 fatalities occurred from 2011 to 2021 (Cayul et al. 2022). Figure 9 depicts

<sup>3</sup> For decades, this long-standing conflict has defined the relationship between the Chilean State and indigenous Mapuche people. The latter claims cultural recognition and the rights to their ancestral territorial spaces, which are currently in the hands of large agricultural and forestry companies.

<sup>4</sup> This area encompasses four regions: Biobío, Araucanía, Los Ríos and Los Lagos.

the geographical distribution of these events across seven provinces within the four regions involved. In response to the surge in violence, conservative former President Sebastián Piñera decreed a state of emergency in Biobío and Araucanía regions in October 2021. This measure included imposing movement restrictions and deploying military troops.

Figure 9. Location of violent and disruptive events in the Mapuche conflict context, 2000 – 2021.



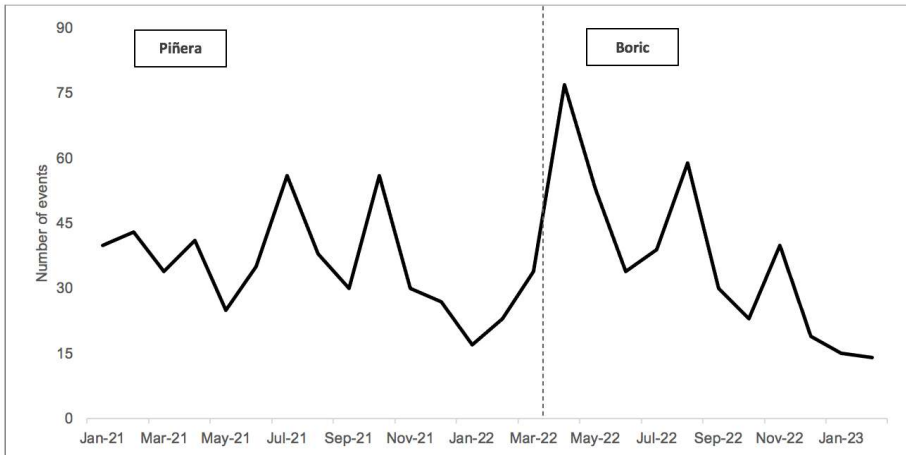
Source: Author's own graphic based on Cayul et al. (2022).

Once in office, Boric's government sought dialogue and negotiation with Mapuche rebel groups. Instead of resorting to heavy-handed approaches that had previously exacerbated violence, Boric claimed "not give up on the path of dialogue", promising to revise the controversial anti-terrorism law and demilitarize the southern regions. In late March, these intentions materialized as the government lifted the state of emergency and withdrew criminal charges following a series of arson attacks. The government maintained its conciliatory

stance despite the ambush against the convoy of Minister of Interior Siches during her inaugural visit to the Araucania region. However, the escalation in rural violence within just one month of taking office prompted President Boric to change his strategy rapidly.

Behind these rising attacks were indigenous insurgency groups, most notably the Coordinadora Arauco-Malleco (CAM), which aimed to radicalize disputes against the new leftist government. This group gained public attention in 1997 for advocating violence against the Chilean state as a means to pursue territorial autonomy (Pairacán and Álvarez 2011; Bidegain 2017). According to Héctor Llaitul, leader of the CAM, Boric’s administration represented a continuation of the dismissive approach of previous Chilean governments regarding territorial autonomy claims, as it defended the presence of forestry companies in disputed ancestral lands. Llaitul thus rejected offers for talks and restated the legitimacy of violent actions. As a result, between March and May 2022, CAM and other groups carried out mass attacks in Biobío and Araucanía regions, including targeting the country’s main north-south highway. This insurgent offensive marked one of the most significant spikes in violence in the Mapuche conflict since the fatal shooting of an unarmed indigenous by the police in November 2018. Figure 10 illustrates the trend of violent incidents from one year before to one year after President Boric’s inauguration.

Figure 10. Violent events in the Chile’s South Macrozone, January 2021 – February 2023.



Source: Author’s own elaboration based on ACLED data (2023).

Under the pressure of opposition parties, transport unions and public opinion, the government response escalated. From April to May, official authorities spoke about the involvement of “organized crime” in rural disruptions and



ordered the redeployment of the army with the limited mission of ensuring free transit on highways in southern regions. While the Boric administration's strategy had noticeably changed, these measures suggested more of an attempt to deter violent attacks from rebels rather than directly confronting the armed groups. This "no-escalation" approach resulted in a reduction in violent events in the short term. However, by concentrating military forces on specific provinces' routes, the indigenous insurgency attacks shifted to neighboring rural areas, further spreading the conflict. In the following months, serious incidents would be reported in Los Ríos region. More worrisome still, Mapuche rebels carried out an unprecedented sabotage attack in Paredones, a municipality located in a neighboring region of Santiago (Reyes 2022).

Interestingly, the radicalization of the Mapuche insurgencies was also driven by the work of the Constitutional Convention. By including legal recognition and the right to land restitution in the constitution draft, the constitution draft addressed failed Mapuche demands that fueled some communities' radicalization in the past (Bidegain 2017). In doing so, the proposal aimed to undermine the historical roots of indigenous discontent against the Chilean state, paving the way for future peace. However, since the constitution draft maintained the unitary sovereignty of the Chilean state, Llaitul openly criticized the Convention as a form of neo-colonialism and called on the Mapuche people to "prepare for armed resistance" in their territory (Toro 2022). One month before the referendum, rebel groups launched numerous high-impact attacks across southern regions on forestry machinery and police headquarters (Rivera 2022). With this spike in violence, the dynamic of the conflict put pressure on Boric once again to readjust his "no-escalation" strategy.

While confronting Mapuche rebels entailed a controversial decision among Boric's leftist allies, public opinion demanded a tougher approach. By mid-2022, 76 percent of Chileans perceived the violent activities of indigenous groups in the southern regions as "terrorism", and 58 percent believed that the state should rely more on direct military tactics rather than political dialogue (Cadem 2022). Against this backdrop, Boric unfolded an offensive strategy in two ways. First, the government charged Llaitul with crimes related to inciting violence and theft of wood under the controversial State Security Act. This lawsuit yielded results in late August when Llaitul and other high-rank CAM members were arrested and the group's illegal financial scheme was dismantled. Additionally, Boric decided to maintain the state of emergency until security conditions improved, making the military presence on Chile's southern highways permanent. In terms of rhetoric, the government made a shift by explicitly distinguishing between indigenous rebels and peaceful Mapuche communities. During a visit to the Araucanía region in November, Boric acknowledged Mapuche's demands of cultural recognition and the right to land restitution, but did not hesitate to label the insurgency violence against private and public infrastructure as "terrorism" and brand the attackers as "cowards" (Vargas 2022). Boric thus pivoted his dialogue strategy with insurgency rebels

and gave relative continuity to the carrot-and-stick strategy, as predecessor governments did since the early 2000s.

Due to this strategy shift, Boric broke the increasing trend of violence in the Mapuche conflict. As a result, the number of violent incidents has decreased to its lowest rate since July 2019, and the violence has become concentrated in specific hotspots in the Biobío and Araucanía regions. This suggests that the government's plan of selectively renewing the state of emergency, targeting insurgency leaders and dismantling the illicit funding of rebel organizations worked effectively in 2022.

The fall of CAM, however, is far from ending this protracted conflict. As previous studies on state violence have shown (Heiberg et al. 2007; Schubiger 2023), coercion often incentivizes more violent tactics and fragmentation among resistance movements. In the Chilean context, this has resulted in the emergence of several splinter insurgency groups, such as the WAM (Weichan Auka Mapu), RMM (Resistencia Mapuche Malleco) and LNM (Liberación Nacional Mapuche). These groups, in addition to radicalizing territorial autonomy demands, have also expanded their repertoires and targets of attacks (Cayul et al. 2022). Given that the defeat of the new constitution left demands for indigenous cultural recognition and restoration of ancestral lands still unaddressed, these groups may find a political support and gain prominence among the indigenous population, as the Chilean state maintains its perceived policy of exclusion.

Although insurgency actions have decreased in late 2022 and early 2023, history would suggest that violent conflict in the southern regions is likely to persist. The duration of such conflict appears to be heavily conditioned by how the Boric government responds to new rebel organizations, the procedural outcomes of lawsuits against CAM leaders, and the incorporation of historical indigenous demands in the new constitutional process.

## V. CONCLUSION

For Chile, 2022 was a year of paradoxes. On the one hand, it began with a clear dominance of left-wing forces and growing expectations for far-reaching social changes. On the other, it ended with a conservative backlash that emphasized the importance of public order and economic stability amid rising pessimism. By tracking the most relevant political events in 2022, I have demonstrated that these variations were the result of an accumulation of factors rather than unexpected circumstances. Once in office, the new government of Boric faced numerous challenges in translating their campaign promises into tangible policies. Simultaneously, the Constitutional Convention drafted a constitution far from the majority's priorities. These developments occurred against the backdrop of worsening economic and security conditions for citizens. In such an uncertain environment, ideas of radical transformation quickly lost credibility.

As a result, people's preferences on social justice demands were postponed on behalf of more kitchen-table issues, such as controlling inflation and curbing crime. The persistent support for a new constitution following the Convention's failure reinforced the notion that the poor performance of delegates and controversial proposals contributed to the victory of the "Rejection" option. As some scholars correctly point out (Larraín et. al 2023; Alemán and Navia 2023), it seems that Chileans did not consider the draft an improvement over the *status quo* and, consequently, opted to wait for a future more representative and less divisive constitution.

In 2022, progressive forces proved their ideological disconnection and the recent conservative backlash may potentially follow a similar trend. As many scholars have demonstrated, Chile faces a severe crisis of representation produced by decades of increasing disconnection between elites and civil society (Luna and Altman 2011; Luna 2016; Siavelis 2016). With low levels of party identification in the country, alternative political identifications have gained centrality. This indicates that Chileans are increasingly shaping their preferences based on rejecting specific parties or movements rather than on ideological affinity (Meléndez 2022; Medel 2023). The fluctuant results of the eleven elections held in Chile from 2020 to 2022 reveal this pattern and suggest that the ideological hegemony will remain fuzzy in the upcoming year.

All in all, recent developments in Chile are a call for concern. The combination of rising pessimism among citizens, the expansion of criminal violence and severe distrust of institutions has proven to have corrosive effects on democratic order in Latin America (Koonings and Kruijt 2007; Munck and Luna 2022). When institutions are consistently perceived as ineffective in tackling basic urgencies, it creates fertile ground for the growth of authoritarian and populist sentiments. The 12 percent decline in democratic support in Chile over the past two years is a concerning confirmation of this trend (CEP 2023). While the country performs healthily according to international democratic indicators (The Economist 2023), the foundations of legitimacy seems to be gradually eroding.

More optimistically, the new constitutional process gives Chileans a further chance to rebuild the connection between elites and civil society and find institutional solutions to address the demands that arose from the 2019 social uprisings. Additionally, the first year in office has taught several important lessons to President Boric and his young coalition. The most significant lesson, as the president himself has acknowledged, is that achieving profound transformations is easier said than done. With three years of mandate remaining, the new government still has time to translate some of the high expectations that brought them to La Moneda presidential palace into tangible realities.

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