



Here come the independents

by Andrew Thompson

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What happened?

Nearly 65% of the 3,399 candidates who have registered to stand in Chile's 11 April elections to a 155-seat constituent assembly are independents, not affiliated to any political party.

The details

Chile is about to embark on a vitally important experiment. Across Latin America voters are fed up with political parties, often seen as part of obsolete, unrepresentative, and corrupt political systems. Starting in October 2019 there were violent street protests across Chile, which led the right-wing government of president Sebastián Piñera to agree to replace the country's constitution. In a [referendum last October](#) Chileans voted overwhelmingly to bypass existing members of Congress and elect a new constituent assembly, which would seek to reflect a wider spectrum of opinion. Non-party members were encouraged to participate. Half the seats were reserved for women. Seventeen seats have been set aside for members of indigenous communities.



Sener, the electoral authority, has now closed registration for the constituent assembly elections. There is a lot that is positive about the people in the running. New voices are seeking to be heard. Chile's existing constitution was written by a military dictatorship over 40 years ago and is in need of a systematic update. The independents who have come forward represent a wide variety of backgrounds. They include people who took part in the 2019/20 protests (such as the 'Peoples' List'); critics of the private pension system (No+AFP); feminists (Coordinadora Feminista 8M) and a range of independent professionals (such as

those in the ‘Non-neutral independents list’). In short, more diverse voices are likely to be heard.

Yet there are also risks. One is that the negative aspects of the old party system may endure. With more funding and better organisation, the parties may still end up running the show (it doesn’t help that local government elections are being held on the same day). A range of right and far-right wing parties who support the President have managed to form a single list, while left-wing parties remained split between moderate and more radical blocks. This division could mean that the “politicals” in the assembly lean to the right, while the independents lean to the left. For many an ideal outcome would be if the engagement between these different tribes renovates and refreshes the political parties. Patricia Politzer, one of the independents, says the aim is certainly not to destroy the political parties since “without them the only alternative would be fascism”. Many are also fearful of Donald Trump-style populism (the party of Jose Antonio Kast, described as ‘Chile’s Trump’ has joined the pro-Piñera coalition).

What does it mean?

The Constituent Assembly will have nine months to agree a new constitution, which must be backed by two-thirds of the elected delegates. At the moment how that deal may be done remains wide open, adding to short term economic uncertainty.

About the Author

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As well as being a Canning House Associate Fellow, Andrew is a former foreign correspondent (Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro) and a broadcaster for the BBC’s Latin American Service. Working through La Rambla Research Ltd., he writes about economics, political risk, and business in Latin America.



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