

CHILE 2024: THE RESILIENCE OF IDEOLOGY AND THE RISE OF ANTI-ELITE ATTITUDES*

Chile 2024: La Resiliencia de la Ideología y el Auge de las Actitudes Anti-Élite

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PABLO ARGOTE 

Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Southern California; pablo.argotetironi@usc.edu

GIANCARLO VISCONTI 

Assistant Professor, Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland, College Park; gvis@umd.edu

ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, mass protests, constitutional debates, and declining trust in institutions have reshaped Chile's political landscape. Many observers argue that the political system is undergoing a rupture, citing the weakening of political parties and rising public distrust. We offer an alternative account: Chile's political system is experiencing both continuity and change. In other words, the political order is evolving rather than collapsing. We use the 2024 electoral events to illustrate this. On the side of continuity, left-right divisions still shape voter preferences. Ideology remains deeply embedded in society, acting as a more powerful stabilizing force than political parties or institutional reforms. On the side of change, the rise of independent politicians reflects growing anti elite sentiment. A large portion of the electorate holds strong anti establishment views. It is this tension—between persistence and transformation—that best characterizes Chile's current political moment.

Keywords: Ideology, Anti-Elite, Elections, Chile

RESUMEN

Durante la última década, las protestas masivas, los debates constitucionales y la disminución de la confianza en las instituciones han transformado el panorama político de Chile. Muchos observadores sostienen que el sistema político atraviesa una ruptura, señalando el debilitamiento de los partidos políticos y el creciente escepticismo ciudadano. Nosotros ofrecemos una interpretación alternativa: el sistema político chileno está experimentando tanto continuidad como cambio. En otras palabras, el orden político está evolucionando, no colapsando. Utilizamos los eventos electorales de 2024 para ilustrar este punto. En cuanto a la continuidad, las divisiones entre izquierda y derecha aún moldean las preferencias de los votantes. La ideología sigue profundamente arraigada en la sociedad, actuando como una fuerza estabilizadora más poderosa que los partidos políticos o las reformas institucionales. En cuanto al cambio, el auge de los políticos independientes refleja un creciente sentimiento anti-élite. Una gran parte del electorado mantiene posturas marcadamente antiestablishment. Es esta tensión —entre persistencia y transformación— es lo que mejor caracteriza el momento político actual de Chile.

Palabras clave: Ideología, Anti-Elite, Elecciones, Chile

* Authors are listed alphabetically. We thank Guada Gonzalez for excellent research assistance.



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I. INTRODUCTION

The year 2024 marked a turning point in Chilean politics, a moment when, to some extent, politics regained a sense of normalcy. An outside observer might see parallels with the Concertación era: the left in power, the right in opposition, and both finding some common ground on key issues. This raises some fundamental questions: How did this relative stability emerge after years of political turmoil? How does today's political landscape compare to two decades ago? What has changed, and what remains the same?

The country has experienced significant political transformations, such as the student movement in 2011, the 2019 social uprising, and the successive failed attempts to change the constitution. These events have reshaped the balance of power, giving rise to new political forces such as Frente Amplio on the left, Republicanos on the right, and a growing presence of independents. Despite these shifts, Chilean politics has regained stability. A leftist administration aligned with orthodox economic principles, consistent with the trajectory of prior center-left governments. After achieving favorable results in the 2024 local elections (*elecciones municipales*), the traditional right, or center-right, has momentarily contained the far-right. This gave them the strength to successfully negotiate a structural pension reform with the government, which will likely become the most enduring legacy of the Boric administration. This stability reveals an underlying sociological phenomenon: ideology remains the key political cleavage. Although the names of the leading players have changed, the fundamental left-right division has endured through the country's major political and social transformations.

In this paper, we interpret 2024's political developments through two analytical lenses. First, despite political and social upheavals, local elections demonstrate high levels of ideological stability. Local councilor elections (*concejales*), a good proxy of ideological allegiance, show remarkable stability in the support for the left and the right. Despite political parties' declining reputation and weakening mobilization capacity, ideology persists as a key determinant of electoral behavior in Chile (Zechmeister, 2015; Visconti, 2021). To explain this stability, we must rely on social psychology: ideology has become a social identity. Through the process of social categorization, individuals align with ideological groups, fostering in-group attachment and out-group distinctions (Argote and Visconti, 2025). The case of Chile demonstrates that ideological identity, rather than party strength, has driven electoral stability over the years. We further claim that the public discussion has neglected this underlying societal force, because it has excessively focused on institutional reforms.

But not everything is stable. Alongside the traditional left-right ideological spectrum, anti-establishment sentiments have emerged as a powerful force (Cox and Garbiras-Díaz, 2024), fueling the rise of independents candidates

(Argote and Visconti, 2023; Titelman and Sajuria, 2023).¹ The growing support for independents, particularly in mayoral elections (*alcaldes*), indicates that a segment of voters is seeking alternatives to traditional parties. Nonetheless, many of these independents maintain political leanings or past affiliations, often adopting the independent label as an electoral strategy rather than a true ideological detachment.

We see the rise of independents as intrinsically linked to anti-establishment attitudes. This emerging elite versus anti-elite divide, however, does not replace the left-right spectrum but rather coexists with it (Uscinski et al., 2021). In this sense, the Chilean electorate operates along two dimensions: left versus right and pro versus anti-establishment (Argote, de la Cerda and Visconti, 2025). Therefore, a plausible expectation is that any viable candidate must position themselves within one of these quadrants.

In the following section, we outline some key milestones from 2024 to provide the reader with an overview of the main political events. We then explore the persistence of ideology in Chile over time. Next, we examine the rise of independents, discussing their origins and implications. After that, we address the “thesis of collapse” (*tesis del desplome*), a prominent narrative in public discourse often advanced by academics, pundits, and commentators as an alternative explanation for Chile’s current political developments. Finally, we conclude with a broader discussion of the evolution of Chilean politics.

II. CHILE IN 2024

Milestones

In 2024, six political milestones stand out as essential for understanding Chile’s current landscape. First, the year 2023 ended with the rejection of the second constitutional project, which was led by the far-right Republicanos party. Such proposal had a markedly conservative imprint (Toro and Noguera, 2024); at times, it looked like the perfect opposite of the failed first attempt, which had a clear progressive frame (Larraín, Negretto and Voigt, 2023; Palanza and Sotomayor, 2024; Heiss and Suárez-Cao, 2024). After this second failure, at the beginning of 2024, the political establishment put the constitutional issue to rest. While a new constitution promised to incorporate more actors into politics and update Chile’s political rules, the second failed attempt underscored relevant deficiencies within the political elite. At the heart of this failure lies a deeply fragmented party system (Jofré and Cabezas, 2025) and a growing disconnect between political actors and the citizens (Morales, 2010; Joignant, Morales and Fuentes, 2016; Morgan and Meléndez, 2016; Siavelis, 2017).

¹ Along the paper, we use the terms “elite” and “establishment” indistinctively.

A second key milestone was the unexpected death of former President Sebastián Piñera in February 2024. Piñera, who served as Chile's president for two non-consecutive terms (2010–2014 and 2018–2022), died in a helicopter accident while flying over Lake Ranco in southern Chile. While his tenure was often controversial and contested, mainly due to his handling of the 2019 social unrest, he was also credited with steering Chile through challenging crises, such as the 2010 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. His most relevant achievement was bringing the right-wing parties back to power in 2010 after four consecutive center-left governments. His death prompted a moment of bipartisan recognition of his legacy, even among those who had previously been at odds with him. Former presidents Frei and Bachelet attended the funeral,² and President Boric acknowledged that, as a legislator, he had sometimes been unfair to the former head of state.

A third key moment was the so-called “caso audios,” a corruption scandal involving high profile lawyers, judges, and politicians. The case began in late 2023, when an audio recording of a conversation involving Luis Herosilla, a well-known and well-connected lawyer, was leaked to the press. In the recording, Herosilla openly boasted about his connections within the tax services, stating that he needed specific fees to bribe officials to secure better deals for his clients. The scandal escalated in 2024, as additional leaked audio recordings implicated more politicians, judges, and prosecutors. At one point, a new name emerged every day, amid a flurry of leaks over a short period. Politically, the case dealt a serious blow to public confidence in institutions, particularly the judiciary.

The fourth milestone was the municipal election on October 26th and 27th. These elections were particularly novel due to the reinstatement of mandatory voting, resulting in an unprecedented voter turnout of 85%. In the previous municipal election, in 2021, voter turnout was 43%. The center-right coalition, Chile Vamos, achieved substantial gains, winning in 122 municipalities, a significant increase from the 87 they held in 2021. This surge underscored a shift in voter sentiment toward a more conservative leadership, and a degree of punishment of the incumbent government. Conversely, the government coalition, Contigo Chile Mejor, experienced notable losses, although it managed to prevent things from falling apart, capturing 111 municipalities, down from 150 in 2021. The far-right Partido Republicano had minor improvements, though their performance was below expectations. Independent candidates performed remarkably, winning 103 mayoral races. This outcome highlighted a growing public disillusionment with traditional party politics, and an antagonism toward political elites.

A fifth milestone was the bipartisan agreement on pension reform. During the second semester, a diverse group of economists met privately to explore poten-

² Former President Lagos could not attend due to health reasons.

tial areas of consensus. After establishing a technical common ground, right-wing senators Coloma, Galilea, and Cruz-Coke, collaborated intensively with key government ministers, such as Jeannette Jara and Mario Marcel, to craft a politically viable agreement. The final outcome did not fully satisfy either side, yet it represents a significant change. Notably, it reinforces the individually funded pension system by increasing mandatory saving, a key objective for the right. The left found the reform palatable because it increases pensions for current retirees by expanding the state-funded component and by introducing an intergenerational loan system. This was a remarkable accomplishment for the political system, as pension reform has been discussed for at least 10 years; the Bachelet and the Piñera administrations failed to reach an agreement, even on issues with bipartisan support.

A last milestone was the arrest of former Deputy Interior Minister Manuel Monsalve on rape charges. During the Boric administration, Monsalve became the face symbolizing the fight against organized crime, as he served as the civilian head of the police. The scandal resulted in his resignation and undermined the government's standing as a committed advocate of feminist principles.

III. THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

President Boric's administration has navigated the last years with hits and misses. On the one hand, he dramatically shifted his priorities, from redistribution to economic growth and crime, without losing his electoral base, which revolves around a 30% of support according to the Centro de Estudios Públicos survey, a non-negligible support in the current worldwide context. On the other hand, he has mismanaged corruption and sexual scandals involving his closest collaborators.

Regarding the economy, the main challenge has been to reinvigorate economic growth. A relatively modest growth rate of around 2% has not strengthened his case, although it exceeded market expectations. Importantly, Boric is not indifferent to macroeconomic stability. Evidence of this is his consistent trust in Finance Minister Mario Marcel, a widely respected economist who began his career during the Concertación years. Similarly, Boric usually takes the time to respond to criticism from the economic establishment, the group of economists active in public debate. Thus, despite some of his earlier statements, President Boric has largely adhered to Chile's economic and fiscal responsibility tradition without seriously attempting to structurally change the economic model.

Chilean party politics also witnessed key transformations within left and right-wing factions. Among the most significant was the creation of left-wing Frente Amplio party. In 2024, several left-leaning parties, including Convergencia Social and Revolución Democrática, merged into a single political entity under the Frente Amplio brand. This move was aimed at strengthening the coalition's unity and electoral effectiveness. On the right, a new political force emerged,

the Partido Nacional Libertario, led by the former Republicano Johannes Kaiser. This party can be defined as far-right with a libertarian flavor: it advocates for minimal government intervention, deregulation, and conservative social policies, similar to Javier Milei in Argentina.

The emergence of yet another party highlights a key problem of Chilean party politics: fragmentation. Today, this phenomenon is intensified by various movements seeking to attract an electorate disenchanted with the political establishment. While voter dissatisfaction contributes to the fragmentation, this is also the consequence of institutional reforms that lowered the barriers for party formation and encouraged political entrepreneurship (Toro and Noguera, 2024). As a result, the current Congress is characterized by weak partisan discipline and high legislative volatility, as evidenced by the presence of either independents, or politicians that constantly jump from one party to the other (Toro, 2023).

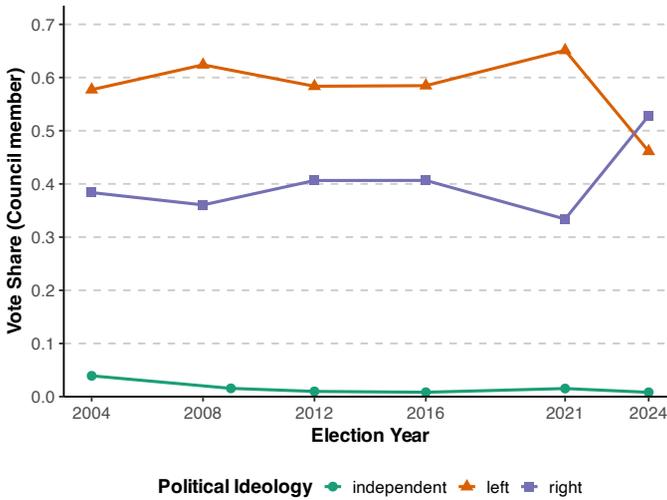
IV. IDEOLOGICAL PERSISTENCE

Despite the country's turmoil since 2019, local elections show remarkable stability. Let's examine the percentage of local councilors, a crucial indicator for understanding the ideological preferences of the population. Compared to mayoral elections, local councilor elections are generally more ideologically based because voters often do not know the candidates personally; therefore, people rely on the party label, voting in alignment with their ideological preferences. Figure 1 shows the trend in the percentage obtained by local councilors from 2004 to 2024. Before 2024, despite normal fluctuations, the sum of left-of-center parties obtained around 60%, whereas right-of-center parties got 40%. In 2024, the right markedly increased their vote share, reaching more than 50% for the first time in recent history.³ On the left, we observe a significant drop of 10 percentage points. In this sense, the left-right divide is the key driver of voting preferences in local council elections, despite some normal variations explained by contextual politics rather than by a consistent deterioration of the ideological branding.⁴

³ It is worth noting that these elections were the first with mandatory voting; it could be that the increase of the right's vote obeys a change in the electorate's composition.

⁴ Independents face greater challenges in local councilor elections. The importance of the total number of votes per list in seat allocation reduces the chances of independents running alone being elected.

Figure1: Council elections 2004-2024



(Source: Chilean Electoral Service)

We add another piece of evidence to support our main claim. Table 1 compares 1995 and 2024 in two key variables: ideological identification and party identification. The stability in ideological affiliation is striking: indeed, as Panel A shows, there is a modest decrease in those identified with the left, and some increase among rightists and centrists.⁵ The real change is in *party identification*, as displayed in Panel B. Here, there is a decrease of 25 percentage points among those identified with any political party. In other words, as partisanship declines, ideology persists.

Table 1: Political Identification: Ideology and Party Affiliation (1995 vs. 2024)

Panel A: Ideological Self-Placement			
Category	1995(%)	2024(%)	Diff. (pp)
Left(1–4)	20.9	17.5	-3.4
Center(5–6)	39.2	41.6	+2.4
Right(7–10)	14.1	15.4	+1.3
None	25.8	25.5	-0.3
Panel B: Party Identification			
Affiliation	1995(%)	2024(%)	Diff. (pp)
Not Identified	39.9	64.9	+25.0
Identified	60.1	35.1	-25.0

Source: Centro de Estudios Públicos Survey, waves 1995 and 2024

⁵ We acknowledge that there is discussion on the meaning of the “Centrist” label. For the purposes of this article, we focus on the fact that ideological placement has remained stable, regardless of the substantive meaning that people give to each label.

How can we explain this observed stability, given that political parties have substantially reduced their capacity to connect with and mobilize voters? Why does ideology persist even as the organizations promoting it in the public sphere continue to weaken over time?

We interpret these results as evidence that ideological orientations have become deeply embedded in Chilean society, even as trust in political parties and institutions has eroded. Previous research has documented declining confidence in institutions and political elites, a trend that has intensified in the wake of high-profile corruption scandals over the past decade (Garretón, 2016; Joignant, Morales and Fuentes, 2016). The persistence of ideological identification suggests that, rather than rejecting ideas, voters appear to reject the politicians and institutions that have come to embody them. In this context, a substantial segment of the electorate continues to identify as either left- or right-leaning, despite a growing reluctance to associate with any specific party.

There is also a social component, as well as in-group and out-group dynamics. Following evidence from Argote and Visconti (2025), there is a notable correlation between an individual's ideology and that of their parents, suggesting that family socialization plays a crucial role in the transmission of these identities. Likewise, a substantial segment of the electorate exhibits strong out-group animosity toward their ideological opponents, which suggests that ideology serves a powerful identitarian marker.

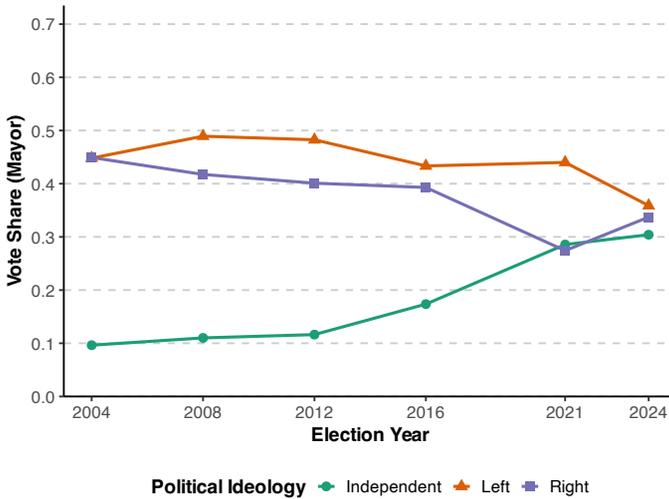
Another way to put this is that ideology became a social identity. Social identity theory suggests that individuals classify into groups to navigate and make sense of the social environment, a process known as social categorization. Over time, this categorization fosters group attachment, which is often accompanied by the distinction between in-group and outgroup (Tajfel et al., 1979). In Chile, ideological groups are identitarian, loyal, and devoted to each other.

V. THE RISE OF INDEPENDENTS

But not everything is stability. As in the rest of the world, Chile is experiencing a surge in anti-establishment attitudes, which explains the significant increase in elected officials without party affiliation. Figure 2 shows the vote share by political coalition in the mayoral elections. Unlike local councilor elections, independent candidates represent a relevant portion of the candidate pool. Thus, it is a good test to see what happens with electoral results when the supply of candidates changes. Support for independents has markedly increased in the past two elections. In 2024, we can divide the mayoral vote share almost arithmetically into three-thirds equally split into left, right, and independent. However, despite this rise, both the left and the right continue to secure a significant portion of the vote, maintaining their influence in the political landscape. Additionally, many independent mayors are not entirely devoid of political ideology; rather, they often have prior affiliations or leanings but choose to run

as independents to appeal to a growing segment of the electorate with anti-elite attitudes.

Figure 2: Mayoral Elections 2004-2024



(Source: Chilean Electoral Service)

We interpret this result by stating that anti-establishment attitudes have become a distinct dimension of political competition, largely orthogonal to traditional ideologies. Our conceptualization is grounded in the ideational approach to populism. This perspective understands populism as a “thin-centered” ideology, a limited set of beliefs centered on three key political concepts: the elite, the people, and the general will (Mudde and Rovira, 2017). Within this framework, anti-establishment views are fundamental to populist thought, portraying political elites as corrupt, self-serving, and acting against the public interest (Mudde and Rovira, 2013).

Even if the number of independents was vast in 2024, we note that anti-elite sentiment is not entirely new; Chile has seen various anti-establishment candidates over the years, including Francisco Javier Errazuriz in 1990 (Arriagada and Navia, 2005), Marco Enríquez-Ominami (MEO) in 2009 (Bunker and Navia, 2013), and Franco Parisi in 2013 (González, Marambio and Torres, 2017). Most of these figures have eventually adopted more conventional ideological positions, suggesting that while anti-establishment sentiment disrupts the political system, it does not entirely replace traditional ideological alignments.

VI. THE “THESIS OF COLLAPSE”

In the previous sections, we have used two arguments to explain Chile’s current political developments: the persistence of ideology and the emergence of anti-establishment attitudes. An alternative explanation for Chile’s political transformation is known as the “Thesis of Collapse” (*la tesis del desplome*), an argument primarily advanced by pundits and commentators in Chilean public debate. Some might argue that academic research should remain separate from these debates, avoiding engagement with arguments made by political commentators. However, an alternative view holds that engaging in these public conversations is not only valuable but essential for democratic discussion. Public discourse shapes political attitudes and can influence policy decisions. By critically engaging with these arguments, academics can bring empirical evidence and nuance to discussions that might otherwise be driven by anecdotal evidence. We adopt the latter approach, aiming to contribute to a more informed and substantive public debate.

The “thesis of collapse” (*la tesis del desplome*) has become prominent in political discussions and public debates in Chile in recent years, especially after the 2019 social outburst that profoundly shocked the political system.⁶ The central point is that Chile’s political development has reached a turning point after a long transition to democracy. The new institutional and political structures, they claim, are deeply eroded and might collapse at any moment. This argument has gained traction among pundits and political commentators and, as a result, has been integrated into broader political discussions. One implication of this argument is that the collapse entails both the end of the traditional party system and the dissolution of the left-right ideological spectrum that has structured Chilean politics for decades. As noted by Covarrubias (2019), “People have abandoned the political dichotomy of left and right and declared the end of ideologies, as these have turned into instruments to serve particular interests.”

The election for the first constitutional convention was cited as evidence supporting the thesis of collapse, as historical parties such as Democracia Cristiana (DC) and Renovación Nacional (RN) performed very poorly, while alternatives options performed better, such as Lista del Pueblo (LDP) and Independientes No Neutrales (INN). While there is clear evidence of the weakening of Chile’s party system (Luna and Altman, 2011), the situation is more nuanced than a simple narrative of collapse. Rather than witnessing a complete disintegration of the existing system, Chile appears to be undergoing a transformation in which old and new political dynamics coexist.

Yes, as we described before, there has been a sharp decline in party identification (Bargsted and Maldonado, 2018; de la Cerda, 2022), a clear indicator of

⁶ This section follows thoughts and ideas written in an op-ed by one of the authors in Ciper Académico in 2021, titled “Reevaluando la tesis del desplome.”

party disintegration (Lupu, 2016). From a regional perspective, Chile exhibits one of the largest declines in partisanship in Latin America (Luna and Rosenblatt, 2012). However, political parties have not disappeared. The decline in traditional partisan loyalty has paved the way for the rise of new and successful political movements like Frente Amplio and Republicanos, which have adopted very clear ideological positions. At the same time, some long-standing parties such as Unión Demócrata Independiente, Renovación Nacional, Partido Socialista, and Partido Comunista, all with strong ideologies, have endured the passage of time, despite some occasional declines. These trends challenge the more extreme narratives of total party collapse, suggesting that, rather than vanishing completely, some parties are adapting to new political realities.

More significant than party realignment is the persistence of ideology. The enduring societal presence of a concept of “the left” and “the right” is a key reason why the country’s political architecture has not collapsed. Many people hold strong ideological loyalties, which prevent them from supporting outsiders who promise sweeping reforms without a clear substantive foundation. Likewise, when these voters head to the polls, they continue to support the party that best aligns with their ideological beliefs, regardless of the party’s specific label. In this sense, to understand political stability in Chile, we must look beyond parties and electoral outcomes and delve deeper into the underlying currents within society.

This persistence of ideological identities might help explain why movements defined as pure centrists, such as Amarillos por Chile, Demócratas, and Ciudadanos, have struggled to gain traction. Although these movements present themselves as alternatives to the traditional left-right divide, their lack of clear ideological positioning makes it difficult to engage voters whose political identities are firmly rooted in established frameworks. Without a distinct ideological anchor, these movements face significant challenges in achieving support from voters who interpret political engagement through a left-right ideological lens.

Additionally, these centrist initiatives have failed to connect with the growing anti-elite sentiment. Recent findings suggest that anti-establishment feelings have become an important dimension of political competition in Chile (Argote and Visconti, 2023; Titelman and Sajuria, 2023), often intersecting with—but not replacing—traditional ideological divides (Argote, de la Cerda and Visconti, 2025). By positioning themselves as pragmatists, rather than as challengers to the political establishment, they remain confined to voters who, most likely, already have an ideology. In a context where ideology and anti-elite sentiments shape voter preferences, pragmatic and elitist parties will struggle to gain electoral relevance.

A process of continuity and change has already occurred in Chile in the early 90s. While the Democracia Cristiana and Partido Socialista survived the 17-year-long dictatorship, new parties emerged in the 1988 referendum, al-

though there were some versions of the old ones. The most obvious example was Renovación Nacional, a rebranding of the Partido Nacional that existed before the coup (Barozet and Aubry, 2005). Another case was the Partido por la Democracia, created for instrumental purposes at the end of the military dictatorship (Plumb, 1998). We argue that Chile is experiencing a similar phenomenon of transformation today, although this juncture is of a very different nature from the transition to democracy in 1990.⁷

VII. DISCUSSION: THE FUTURE OF CHILEAN DEMOCRACY

Looking ahead to the 2025 presidential race, Chile's political landscape reflects ideological continuity and a growing anti-elite sentiment. As of August 2025, the competition appears to be centered around Evelyn Matthei, José Antonio Kast, Franco Parisi, and Johannes Kaiser in the right wing camp; and Jeanette Jara in the left. This electoral scenario reinforces our argument that the left-right divide remains a central organizing principle in Chilean politics, despite the fragmentation of party structures. Matthei, representing the traditional right, has tried to position herself as a serious establishment candidate, although she has made some efforts to have a dialogue with the populist right. For instance, she has praised the economic approach of the Milei administration and invited Kast and Kaiser to join her in a broad primary, but that did not materialize.

At the same time, the emergence of Kaiser, an anti-establishment libertarian, highlights the growing role of outsider candidates who reject the traditional elite while maintaining ideological coherence. This coexistence of ideological stability and anti-elite sentiment illustrates that Chile's political transformation is not a rupture but an evolution, where ideological cleavages remain salient, even as new political forces emerge to challenge the establishment. Rather than witnessing the collapse of the traditional party system, Chile continues to experience a *dynamic restructuring*, in which new actors reshape the political field without erasing the primacy of ideology.⁸

We do not want to be overly optimistic. While our analysis offers a hopeful perspective on Chile's political trajectory, one of transformation rather than collapse, we acknowledge threats to democratic stability, even in the 2025 elections. The most significant of these is the growing prominence of anti-establishment sentiment, which has become a defining feature of Chilean politics. While this trend reflects legitimate grievances against political elites, and has fostered greater electoral competition, it also introduces significant uncertainties.

⁷ The post-transition left-right divide was clearly defined around the legacies of the Pinochet dictatorship (Tironi and Agüero, 1999; Torcal and Mainwaring, 2003; Bonilla et al., 2011).

⁸ Ideological markers are sticky, as an example of that, prior research has found that even Pinochetismo has remained salient for some right-wing voters in Chile (Boas, 2016).

For example, we do not rule out the possibility that either a right or left-wing anti-establishment candidate becomes president. As we have witnessed around the world, such a scenario could present serious risks, as these leaders typically act outside the boundaries of democracy and the rule of law, leading to confrontations with Congress, the judiciary, and other oversight bodies (Mudde and Rovira, 2017). Across the region, we have seen cases where leaders with strong anti-elite rhetoric have weakened institutional checks and balances, consolidated power, or challenged the legitimacy of electoral processes (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2019; Weyland, 2024). Although Chile's robust institutions may push back, this scenario remains a potential risk that should not be overlooked.

We also seek to address whether Chilean politics could become more polarized in the near future. An alternative explanation challenging our central argument is that the persistence of ideology is a by-product of rising affective polarization. In other words, people may not positively affirm their allegiance to an ideological group, but rather despise the opposing camp. In fact, recent evidence suggests that post-authoritarian consensual politics have eroded over the past decade, leading to a moment of both generational (Fábrega, González and Lindh, 2018) and elite-level polarization (Luna, 2024). The 2019 social uprising was perhaps the peak moment of affective polarization,⁹ and its legacy can still be felt today (Segovia, 2022; Cox, Cubillos and Le Foulon, 2025).

We consider it unlikely that ideological persistence can be explained solely by a rise in affective polarization. For starters, ideology has been a key marker of Chilean politics (Zechmeister, 2015; Visconti, 2022), even at times with low levels of polarization. Likewise, Chileans dislike politicians or ideas deemed too extreme; evidence of this is the rejection of two constitutional proposals, one considered extremely leftist and the other extremely rightist. A polarized environment should be fertile for extremist ideologues, but none of that has happened. Future research should investigate whether this new wave of affective polarization will continue to intensify or if it is a temporary phenomenon driven by the heightened political tensions of recent years. Over time, polarization may diminish as political tensions subside; however, we believe ideological voting will remain stable.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

Chile's political landscape is experiencing a combination of continuity and change. Results of the 2024 local elections indicate that the traditional left-right divide in Chile still operates and structures political competition. One of our key questions is whether Chilean politics is undergoing a structural collapse or

⁹ For discussions on the *estallido social*, including its origins and various consequences, see Bellolio (2020), Avendaño and Escudero (2020), Martínez and Olivares (2022), Scherman and Rivera (2021), Escudero and Olivares (2021), Somma et al. (2021), Meléndez, Rovira and Sajuria (2021), Sazo (2023), Cox, González and Le Foulon (2024), and Joignant et al. (2024).

an adaptive transformation. Rather than supporting the thesis of collapse, our answer suggests that the Chilean political system is evolving, as traditional parties weaken and new ones emerge within established ideological frameworks.

The rise of independent candidates, however, cannot be overlooked. Their growing electoral success reflects increasing dissatisfaction with the political elite, reinforcing a broader regional trend of anti-establishment sentiment (Cox and Garbiras-Díaz, 2024). Mandatory voting may enhance the success of independents, as voters who are disengaged from politics but are forced to participate might find independence appealing.¹⁰ Nonetheless, many, if not most, of these independent candidates are not ideologically neutral; rather, they strategically distance themselves from party labels while still holding clear ideological stances.

These dynamics can be explained through the lens of social identity theory. As discussed, political ideology in Chile has evolved into a social identity, where individuals categorize themselves within ideological groups, fostering strong in-group attachment and out-group distinction (Argote and Visconti, 2025). This phenomenon helps explain the resilience of ideological voting despite the decline of party structures. Additionally, the traditional left-right continuum coexists with an establishment versus anti-establishment axis. In fact, we can easily classify voters and politicians by combining these two dimensions (Argote, de la Cerda and Visconti, 2025).

Future research should further explore the implications of these transformations, particularly the long-term impact of the rise of anti-elite sentiments and the potential for realignment within traditional party structures. Additionally, understanding how voters navigate this evolving landscape—balancing anti-establishment ideas with ideological commitments—will be crucial in anticipating Chile's political trajectory in the coming years.

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¹⁰ On the other hand, mandatory voting has helped address some of the biases that voluntary voting was generating in terms of who was more likely to vote (Contreras, Joignant and Morales, 2016; Briebe and Bunker, 2019; Visconti, 2021; Cox and Gonzalez, 2022).

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Pablo Argote es Provost Postdoctoral Fellow en el Departamento de Ciencia Política de la Universidad del Sur de California (USC). Es doctor en ciencia política por la Universidad de Columbia y titulado en sociología por la Universidad Católica de Chile. Sus áreas de interés incluyen los factores que afectan el comportamiento y las actitudes políticas, como la exposición a la inmigración, el acceso a Internet, el acceso a las redes sociales y la indoctrinación estatal.

Giancarlo Visconti es profesor asistente en el Departamento de Gobierno y Política de la Universidad de Maryland, College Park. Es doctor en ciencia política por la Universidad de Columbia y titulado en ciencia política por la Universidad Católica de Chile. Sus áreas de interés son el comportamiento político comparado y la economía política del desarrollo.

