

Primary Elections: Raising the Standards of Our Democracy

Primary elections, in a voluntary voting scenario, surpassed the expectations in terms of participation and organization. It is a standard that came to stay in Chile, which is positive to our country, particularly for a political system based on representative democracy. It is worth highlighting that there are many opportunities for introducing improvements to our legislation on primaries, especially by increasing the role of affiliates to political parties.

The primary elections of June 30th were the first ones to rely on legal status, simultaneity and the support of the Electoral Service (SERVEL), coinciding at the same time with a voluntary voting system that entered into force less than a year ago in the context of the municipal election, where one of its main features was the low level of electoral participation.

From the perspective of participation, there is consensus in the fact that expectations were widely surpassed, considering that the *Nueva Mayoría* (New Majority) has 491,161 affiliates and the *Alianza por Chile* (Alliance for Chile) has 173,501 affiliates registered in their parties. Primaries were a way of empowering citizens to elect their presidential candidate and, in 10 districts, a candidate for deputy.

In the following lines, results of these elections are given with a detailed analysis by region; then, a comparison with the available international experience is made, and conclusions are drawn with regard to the primaries' institutional framework and the political climate.

Results of the Primary Elections

In view of the high abstention in the last municipal election and the uncertainty created by the low presence of opinion surveys, a participation close to 10% of the electoral register was anticipated, but expectations were widely surpassed when 3,008,087 Chileans went to the ballot-boxes, that is, 22.5% of the electoral register for the primaries.

The results gave Pablo Longueira (UDI) the victory for the right-wing Alliance (*Renovación Nacional* (RN) and *Unión Demócrata Independiente* (UDI)), after obtaining 51.37% of the votes; and Michelle Bachelet (*Partido por la Democracia* (PPD), Socialist (PS), Communist (PC), MAS and *Izquierda Ciudadana* (IC)) got 73.07% of the preferences for the New Majority, in a pact which also included the independent candidate Andrés Velasco, the candidate of the Social Democrat Radical Party (PRSD), José Antonio Gómez, and the Christian Democrat candidate Claudio Orrego (see table 1).

Table 1

RESULTS OF PRIMARY ELECTIONS BY COALLITION

New Majority			Alliance		
	Votes	% Votes		Votes	% Votes
Bachelet	1,563,208	73.07%	Longueira	414,427	51.4%
Gómez	108,329	5.06%	Allamand	392,229	48.6%
Orrego	189,550	8.86%	TOTAL	806,656	100%
Velasco	278,358	13.01%			
TOTAL	2,139,472	100%			

Source: SERVEL (2013), tentative result according to article 175 bis, Law 18,700, Colegio Escrutador (vote tabulation board).

In relation to the convoking capacity, the New Majority reached a very similar portion of its effective electorate of the recent 2012 municipal election, which accounted for 2,385,178 voters. In the Alliance, for the same election the effective electorate was 2,079,854 voters, but in the 2013 primary election only 806,656 participated; in other words, there are approximately 1,250,000 votes less for this sector than in the last municipal election.

As we can see in Table 2, the candidate of the block PC-PS-PPD-IC-MAS obtains a large number of registered votes in the regions. The Metropolitan Region is the only one with less than 2/3 of the votes. There are emblematic cases which are interesting to analyze, such as the fact that Andrés Velasco, who in spite of having no supporting party or bases, achieves 13% of the New Majority votes. His results in the regions of O'Higgins, Maule and Biobío are striking, since Velasco dominated in historical bastions of Christian Democrats. The result of José Antonio Gómez is also surprising, following the logic that he gets the last place in the district where he is currently a Senator (Antofagasta), in addition to having a considerably lower percentage (5.06%) when comparing the number of affiliates of the PRSD, which represent 17% of all the affiliates who adhere to the New Majority. This is also applicable to the candidate Claudio Orrego, who got 8.86% of the votes, while the DC holds 23.1% of

the pact's affiliates and it is the party with most affiliates in the country. The results bring up a number of issues concerning Bachelet's alternatives. The percentages indicate that, although she has a great number of votes, the support incited by certain ideas of Gómez, which are more extreme and disruptive - such as the constituent assembly and the end of the private pension fund system (AFP) -, received less support than Velasco's more moderate proposals.

Table 2

RESULTS FOR THE NEW MAJORITY BY REGION

	New Majority							
	M. Bachelet		J.A. Gómez		C. Orrego		A. Velasco	
	Votes	% Votes	Votes	% Votes	Votes	% Votes	Votes	% Votes
Arica & Parinacota	15,854	78.22 %	1,014	5%	1,485	7.32%	1,914	9.44%
Tarapacá	14,610	72.42%	1,697	8.41%	1,520	7.53%	2,345	11.62 %
Antofagasta	33,331	73.63%	1,994	4.40%	3,510	7.75%	6,428	14.20 %
Atacama	25,151	80.87%	1,640	5.27%	1,665	5.35%	2,643	8.49%
Coquimbo	72,175	82.44%	3,556	4.06%	4,886	5.58%	6,930	7.91%
Valparaiso	171,741	73.23%	13,229	5.64%	19,349	8.25%	30,172	12.86 %
Metropolitana	587,154	65.11%	52,815	5.85%	101,546	11.26 %	160,237	17.76 %
O'Higgins	90,669	79.24%	4,643	4.05%	7,642	6.67%	11,457	10.01 %
Maule	116,611	83.20%	4,983	3.55%	8,202	5.85%	10,345	7.38%
Biobío	223,282	79.81%	11,458	4.09%	19,989	7.14%	25,030	8.94%
Araucanía	80,790	80.34%	4,238	4.21%	7,636	7.59%	7,891	7.84%
Los Ríos	36,661	81.78%	2,011	4.48%	2,723	6.07%	3,432	7.65%
Los Lagos	69,664	80.48%	3,307	3.82%	6,935	8.01%	6,645	7.67%
Aysén	9,524	80.90%	644	5.47%	878	7.45%	726	6.16%
Magallanes	16,575	78.42%	1,014	4.79%	1,643	7.77%	1,902	8.99%

Source: SERVEL (07/03/2013), tentative result according to article 175 bis, Law 18,700, Colegio Escrutador (vote tabulation board).

In turn, in the Alliance the vote distribution was much closer than in the opposing primary, where Pablo Longueira was the winner for nearly 22,000 votes, mainly represented by the advantage obtained in the center-south (regions of Valparaiso, Metropolitan, O'Higgins and Maule).

The primaries of the Alliance – the first ones in their history, which widely exceeded the expectations and participation level of the *Concertación's* 1993 primaries – introduce future challenges in view of the existing gap with the New Majority's total number of votes. Despite of having less than one third of their affiliates and representatives, this election allows setting a precedent with regard to the designation method for the presidential candidate, by revealing proposals and ideas.

Table 3

RESULTS FOR THE ALLIANCE IN PRIMARY ELECTIONS, BY REGION

	Alliance			
	P. Longueira		A. Allamand	
	Votes	% Votes	Votes	% Votes
Arica & Parinacota	4,122	52.17%	3,778	47.82%
Tarapacá	4,406	51.06%	4,223	48.93%
Antofagasta	6,377	47.33%	7,095	52.66%
Atacama	3,861	49.12%	3,998	50.87%
Coquimbo	10,744	48.98%	11,190	51.01%
Valparaiso	49,806	52.52%	45,013	47.47%
Metropolitan	200,609	53.65%	173,297	46.34%
O'Higgins	20,791	53.43%	18,118	46.56%
Maule	23,232	53.28%	20,370	46.71%
Biobío	41,512	45.94%	48,843	54.05%
Araucanía	21,143	46.02%	24,793	53.97%
Los Ríos	8,002	45.72%	9,497	54.27%
Los Lagos	14,546	48.02%	15,745	51.97%
Aysén	2,460	46.57%	2,822	53.42%
Magallanes	2,808	44.42%	3,513	55.57%

Source: SERVEL (07/03/2013), tentative result according to article 175 bis, Law 18,700, Colegio Escrutador (vote tabulation board).

It should be noted that in these primary elections, candidates for deputies were elected in ten districts of the country belonging to the party *Renovación Nacional*, including candidates from Evópoli (*Evolución Política*). In these primary elections, a total of 293,815 votes were issued.ⁱ

International Comparison

The United States is the country with the longest tradition in primary elections. They have been implemented since the first half of the 20th century, combining local assemblies (caucuses) and primary elections, depending on the state. The big difference with the North American primaries, in relation to the Chilean ones, is that in the United States they are not simultaneous; they integrate in an electoral calendar covering approximately six months. This is the first issue to be taken into consideration.

The participation figures show that in the 2012 primary process of the Republican Party, 18,908,313 voters participated in the states where they were held.ⁱⁱ This figure, if compared with the North American electoral register –which includes 220 million voters-ⁱⁱⁱ shows that the participation in the last primary election was close to 8.6% of the general registration record. It should not be forgotten that these primaries referred to only one of the two big political cultures in the country and the Republican Party was in the opposition.

In France, the last primary election was held in 2011 in order to elect the candidate that would compete against Nicolas Sarkozy in the presidential election. They were not only at national level and simultaneous, but they also applied the traditional French system of *ballotage* or “second round” between the two most voted candidates. They were open elections among six candidates, where the requirement to participate was the adherence to a declaration of principles and the contribution of 1 euro to defray the process. In this manner, in the second round between Francois Hollande and Martine Aubry, 2,860,157 voters participated, which represents 6.6% of the French registration record of 43 million voters.^{iv} This result is considered high if we take into account the requirement of monetary contribution and the fact that it only represents one of the political cultures of the French political system.

In Uruguay, internal elections of five parties were held in 2009 that had a binding nature, since if they did not undergo this process they could not participate in the general and department elections. However, for people registered in the electoral register (*Registro Cívico Nacional*) they had a voluntary nature. Uruguay is an extraordinary case with regard to civic involvement and electoral participation. Figures show that 95% of the population with age to vote participates in the election processes, although with mandatory voting. The last internal election demonstrated that when

the voluntary feature was incorporated, with the same electoral register of 2.5 million voters, the result was that 1,157,842 Uruguayans^v voted, that is, 45.2% of the register.

Argentina is an unusual case in relation to the institutionalization of primary elections, because they are mandatory both for parties and citizens. Thus, the same national general register is used, in an open election, both for party affiliates and independents, and it is simultaneous. Since it is practically a de facto general election, participation levels were very high. For the 2011 primary election, where Cristina Fernández got an impressive majority, 22,705,378 people voted^{vi} from a general registration record of 28.9 million people^{vii}; that is, 78.5% of the electoral register.

Conclusions

Primary elections, in a voluntary voting scenario, surpassed the expectations in terms of participation and organization by far. It is a standard that came to stay, which is positive to our country, particularly for a political system based on representative democracy. As a matter of fact, high participation levels also allow ignoring the thesis of some more radicalized groups or candidates with anti-politics discourses who pretend to define the terms of the current political debate in the way of an institutional crisis. All in all, and as we have previously stated, there are many opportunities to introduce improvements to our legislation on primaries, especially by increasing the role of affiliates to political parties.

In brief...

- Participation close to 10% of the electoral register was anticipated, but expectations were surpassed when 3,008,087 Chileans went to the ballot-boxes, that is, 22.5% of the electoral register.
- The results gave Pablo Longueira (UDI) the victory for the right-wing Alliance, after getting 51.37% of the coalition votes; and Michelle Bachelet, candidate of the New Majority, got 73.07% of the preferences.
- In these primary elections, not only presidential candidates were elected, but candidates for deputies were selected among *Renovación Nacional* in ten districts of the country with more than 293,815 votes in total.
- There are many opportunities to introduce improvements to our legislation on primaries, particularly by increasing the role of affiliates to political parties.

ⁱ The elected ones were Ximena Valcarce for Arica, Camarones, General Lagos and Putre (District 1) with 45.2% of the votes, Nestor Jofré for Iquique, Pica, Pozo Almonte, Huara, Colchane, Camiña and Alto Hospicio (District 2) with 62.40% of the votes, Pablo Argandoña for La Serena, Vicuña, Paihuano, La Higuera and Andacollo (District 7) with 48,58%, the current deputy Gaspar Rivas for Los Andes, San Felipe, Calle Larga, Catemu, Llaillay, Panquehue, Putaendo, Rinconada, San Esteban and Santa María (District 11) with 50,81% of the votes, Eduardo Cuevas with 56,89% of the votes in Independencia and Recoleta (District 19), Lucía Muñoz with 41,16% in Codegua, Machalí, Rengo, Coínco, Coltauco, Doñihue, Graneros, Malloa, Mostazal, Olivar, Quinta de Tilcoco and Requínoa (District 33), Diego Paulsen in Lautaro, Curacautín, Galvarino, Lonquimay, Melipeuco, Perquenco, Victoria and Vilcún (District 49) with 32,67% of the votes, Marcelo Ruiz in Puerto Varas, Fresa, Frutillar, Llanquihue, Los Muermos, Puerto Octay, Puyehue, Purranque, Río Negro (District 56) with 53,38%, Antonio Horvath in Aysén, Coihaique, Cisnes, Chile Chico, Cochrane, Guaitecas, Lago Verde, Río Ibañez, O'Higgins, Tortel (District 59) with 51,88% and Gloria Vilicic in Punta Arenas, Antártica, Cabo de Hornos, Laguna Blanca, Natales, Porvenir, Primavera, Río Verde, San Gregorio, Timaukel and Torres del Paine (District 60) with 41,85% of the votes of the district.

ⁱⁱ <http://uselectionatlas.org>

ⁱⁱⁱ www.idea.int

^{iv} Idem

^v http://www.ceibal.edu.uy/contenidos/areas_conocimiento/cs_sociales/090622elecciones/

^{vi} <http://www.elecciones.gov.ar>

^{vii} www.idea.nt