

Second Round: Results, Abstention and Challenges

Doubts about the voluntary voting system arose again, following the high abstention in the presidential elections of last December 15th; the system needs adjustments so as to make it easier for the population to vote and thus increase its involvement in democracy.

After the balloting of last December 15th, Michelle Bachelet of the New Majority coalition –composed by the Christian Democratic Party (DC), Socialist Party (PS), Party for Democracy (PPD), Social Democrat Radical party (PRSD), Communist Party (PC), Broad Social Movement (MAS) and the Christian Left (IC)- was elected the new president. With nearly 3.46 million votes and 62.2%, she defeated the center-right candidate Evelyn Matthei, who obtained 2.11 million votes, with 37.8%.

The result was defined by 5.7 million voters from a universe of 13.5 millions, similar to the number obtained in the 2012 municipal election: practically one million voters less than in the first round of November 17th.

We can also highlight the order, efficiency and effectiveness of the process conducted by the Electoral Service: a few minutes after closing the polling stations, the system generated preliminary results; in less than two hours the final result was already known and the non-elected candidate had pronounced her awarding speech. We are dealing with a valuable institutional asset that Chile should appreciate; something radically different from other countries.

Relevant Results

In the first place, it is worth mentioning that Bachelet added nearly 400 thousand votes in relation to the first round (when she got 3.070 millions). On the other hand, Matthei added more than 460 thousand. The first was able to add approximately 210 thousand new votes in the Metropolitan Region; the second, close to 183,000; the first, 48,000 in Valparaiso, the second 56,000, as can be observed in Table 1.

Table 1
ELECTORAL RESULTS BY REGION, COMPARISON
OF 1ST AND 2ND ROUND

Region	Bachelet 1 st	Bachelet 2 nd	Difference	Matthei 1 st	Matthei 2 nd	Difference
Arica & Parinacota	29,374	32,857	3,483	15,292	21,348	6,056
Tarapacá	31,210	36,343	5,133	19,876	27,622	7,746
Antofagasta	69,168	80,912	11,744	33,322	46,865	13,543
Atacama	50,254	55,059	4,805	17,939	24,008	6,069
Coquimbo	141,938	155,338	13,400	52,221	64,951	12,730
Valparaíso	316,925	365,417	48,492	177,833	234,009	56,176
Metropolitana	1,086,263	1,296,860	210,597	718,243	901,935	183,692
O'Higgins	190,556	209,750	19,194	83,953	107,125	23,172
Maule	242,651	257,705	15,054	96,358	122,954	26,596
Biobío	423,978	464,915	40,937	183,709	254,634	70,925
La Araucanía	189,057	196,486	7,429	111,790	138,022	26,232
Los Ríos	84,776	88,959	4,183	38,014	46,771	8,757
Los Lagos	163,294	172,228	8,934	77,009	94,982	17,973
Aysén	19,165	20,924	1,759	8,596	10,638	2,042
Magallanes	31,403	34,000	2,597	11,116	15,148	4,032
TOTAL	3,070,012	3,467,753	397,741	1,645,271	2,111,012	465,741

Source: Prepared by L&D based on SERVEL's provisional results, with tabulation of 99.97% of the polling stations.

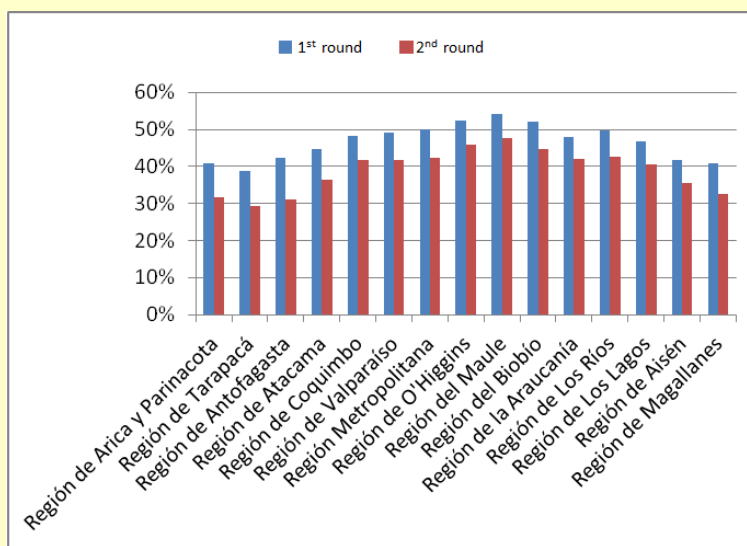
Second, although nobody can criticize the legitimacy of Bachelet's victory, who obtained a clear triumph according to the rules of our democracy, it is nevertheless interesting to analyze the reasons for the abstention.

Political participation and civic disaffection have multiple variables, depending on factors such as civic education and social capital, size of the population, rurality, and competition level – participation tends to increase when the result is narrower and the vote has greater “decision” power-, stability of the population –if there is more at stake in the election in terms of defining changes in the style of life-, campaign expenditure, compulsory/voluntary character of the voting system, type of electoral system, distance from the voting location and easiness of the voting procedures, among others; therefore, it is hard to attribute abstention to a group or single factor, and it should be exhaustively studied in the future.

Now then, if we observe abstention by region, we see that it is more significant in the Region of Antofagasta, where it decreases by 11 percentage points from the record of citizens being able to vote compared with the first round, and it reaches its minimum in the Region of Tarapacá,

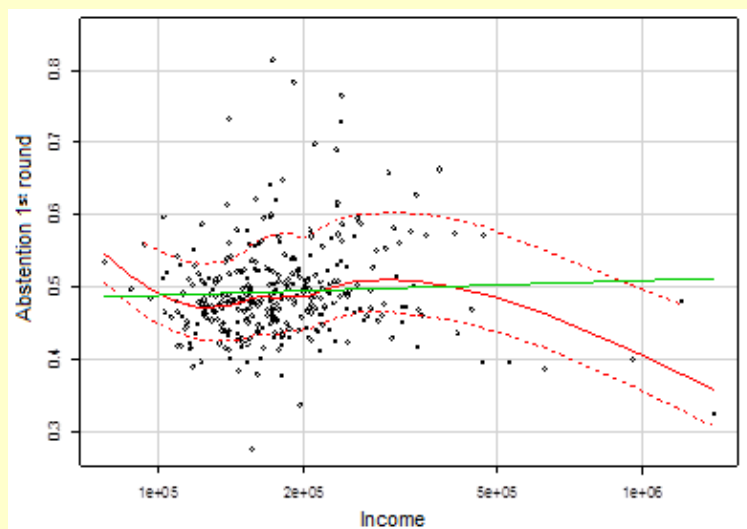
where only 29.4% of the registered voters went to the polling stations last Sunday.

Chart 1
ABSTENTION BY REGION, COMPARISON OF 1ST AND 2ST ROUND



Source: Prepared by L&D based on results of Decide Chile (www.decidechile.cl).

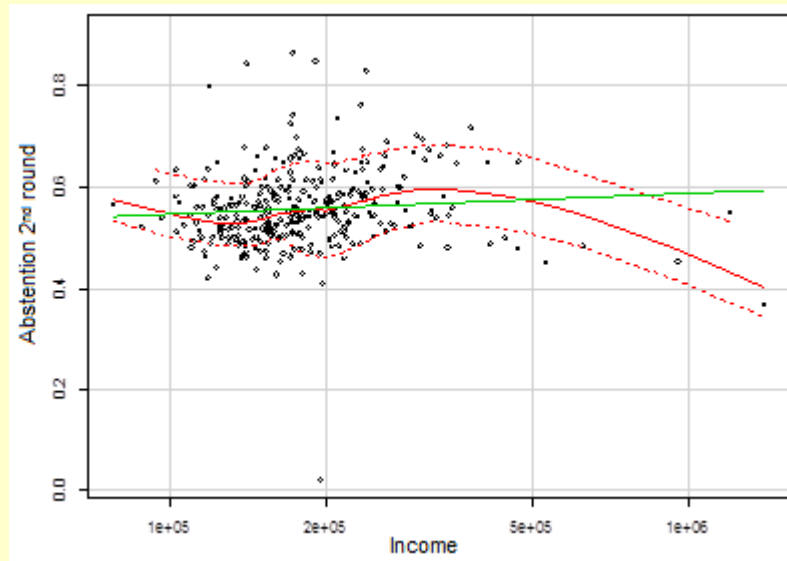
Chart 2
COMMUNAL ABSTENTION IN 1ST ROUND VERSUS COMMUNAL AUTONOMOUS INCOME (LOG)



Source: Prepared by L&D based on data from SERVEL and CASEN Survey 2011.

Chart 3

COMMUNAL ABSTENTION IN 2ST ROUND VERSUS COMMUNAL AUTONOMOUS INCOME (LOG)



Source: Prepared by L&D based on data from SERVEL and CASEN Survey 2011.

In order to make a more complete analysis, a regression model was applied where the dependent variable is the communal abstention percentage in the first round, and a set of independent variables is considered, such as communal average schooling, logarithm of the communal autonomous income, population of 2012 projected on the basis of the 2002 Census, and communal rurality percentage (source CASEN Survey 2011). When controlling by all the mentioned variables, the sole variable arising as statistically significant (to 0.10) is the size of the commune expressed in population terms. In other words, the greater the population, greater the abstention, and the other variables do not significantly affect the abstention level.

In relation to the second round, the same regression model was used, with data from the first round. As in the scenario mentioned earlier, the communal size variable (population) arises as statistically significant, this time, at 0.5. Once again, the rest remains constant; the income variable, at global level, is not statistically significant in the communal abstention.

Based on the statistical analysis of the electoral participation figures, it is not possible to categorically maintain the thesis of the existence of a socioeconomic bias in the electoral participation at national level. Nevertheless, when the analyses are reproduced in the Metropolitan Region, the income variable does show a statistically significant effect on

the communal abstention variable. Needless to say that the present analysis has an exploratory nature, and it is not exempt from logical fallacy risks since it intends to take individual behavior inferences from aggregated data.

Voluntary Voting Challenges

Ever since it was established, and in the light of participation levels since the 2012 municipal elections, certain sectors have transversally questioned the convenience of applying a voluntary voting system. And although turning back to the compulsory system is both a step backwards in terms of individual liberties, and an imprudent measure from the institutional framework perspective, making improvements in the context of reducing people's participation costs seems to be the right way to increase their involvement.

As we have mentioned in previous publicationsⁱ, the powers of the Electoral Service (Servel) are still subject to relevant improvements, both in terms of optimizing the electoral process organization and making legal refinements to the way of creating the voter's registration record ("debugging"). The latter is important, because although on last Sunday's elections the electoral record accounted for 13,572,000 voters, there is certain consensus in the fact that the refined record would amount to 12 or 12.5 million voters, if we deduct Chileans living abroad who, in practice, cannot vote; prisoners who have not lost their right to vote, but do not have polling stations in the prisons; or those thousands of people between 90 and 139 years old, who are still part of the record, although they are estimated to be dead.

Likewise, we have recently proposed the need to update the Servel's institutional design, for example, by creating three divisions: a Survey division focused on making periodical reports that allow collecting data based on evidence, with the purpose of optimizing the interpretation of the electoral processes, better understanding the complex-natured phenomena such as participation through the vote, and introducing innovations in different areas of the electoral system. A second proposed division is Transparency, dedicated to the control and supervision of the electoral revenues and expenditures, financial statements of the political parties and data validation of the records of political party members and the nominations' registration. Finally, we propose a division to promote democracy, since the last electoral participation figures and civic disaffection have evidenced the need to promote certain democratic values and increase civic education levels.ⁱⁱ

Regarding the reforms to make voting procedures easier, there are four specific, necessary measures that we have analyzed in previous documents, which refer to early voting, electronic voting (in person), voting

of Chileans abroad and reducing the distance to the voting locations through georeferencing of the voter registration record, so as to make the road from home to the polling station as short as possible.ⁱⁱⁱ The latter is highly relevant inasmuch as today the logistics is designed to maximize the control of public order associated to the electoral process, rather than facilitating the access of voters to the polling places.

Conclusions

Sunday's election has left a clear result: with 62% of the votes, Michelle Bachelet has become the president who will govern Chile between March 2014 and March 2018. However, it is important to make a correct reading of the abstention phenomenon by Bachelet and the New Majority: it seems sensible to make a proactive search for agreements with the future opposing coalition regarding relevant issues; not only to give stability to long-term reforms, but also to enable a scenario that strengthens governability.

From the voluntary voting perspective, many people wish to go back to the comfortable world of compulsory voting; this would not only mean a step backwards in terms of individual liberties, but also a bad signal in terms of the institutions' design.^{iv} Chile has to keep its prestige in this matter. And as we have demonstrated, there is neither a socioeconomic bias under the voluntary voting system; and finally, although it is preliminary evidence, recent studies in this direction have discarded this argument to justify turning back to the compulsory voting system.

In brief...

- The first presidential election with voluntary voting evidenced that more than half of the citizenship abstained from voting; therefore it is necessary to analyze the current system and make some adjustments.
- Although it has been indicated that one of the factors influencing abstention is the socioeconomic bias generated by voluntary voting, we do not observe an evident relationship between income and abstention level.
- It is necessary to improve the voting system by giving more powers to the Electoral Service and, at the same time, reducing the citizens' participation costs in this process.

ⁱ See, for example “Micro Reforms to the Electoral System: The Post 2012 Municipal Election’s Agenda”, *Libertad & Desarrollo*, Public Issues Nr 1,094.

ⁱⁱ See Ramirez, J. *Modernización Electoral: Funciones y Capacidades Institucionales del Servicio Electoral*. In series Informe Sociedad y Política, Nr 137, 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Public Issues Nr 1,094, ob. Cit.

^{iv} A normative and empirical defense of voluntary voting is present in Lever, A. Is Compulsory Voting Justified? In *Public Reason* (1), p. 57-74, 2009