

Municipal Elections 2012: Results and Lessons

The past municipal elections featured a high abstention level and the ruling coalition's defeat in emblematic communes, which is far from being a "debacle" from its political projection's perspective, especially because the Concert of Parties for Democracy, the *Concertación*, did not increase its vote.

This should be seen as an opportunity for the political system, and particularly for the center-right, to renew its political offer in leadership and ideas and try to mobilize its electoral base after the voluntary vote introduction.

Providencia, Santiago and Concepción, rather than by a significant reduction in its vote (3% in mayors and councilmen). This is far from being a "debacle" in terms of its political meaning and projection, as some analysis have wanted to show, most of all because the *Concertación* does not increase its vote; the increases are simply explained by the addition of the Communist Party's vote.

Electoral Results

In general terms, the ruling coalition lost 23 mayors (-3%) and the *Concertación* won 21 (+4.1%, including the PC vote). With regard to the councilmen, the difference is 33% for the Alliance (-3%) and 49.5% for the *Concertación* (+4.3%). The *Concertación's* apparent increase is explained

Municipal elections were held last Sunday, October 28th, the first ones with the new system of automatic registration and voluntary vote. This transformation represented an absolute challenge for political stakeholders; a break was expected in the traditional way of making politics, since the electoral uncertainty levels would substantially increase. Both aspects implied an important competition injection, which is a positive matter for our democracy.ⁱ

However, there was a high abstention, and only 41% of potential voters cast their vote, far from the 58% in 2008 (1,400,000 electors less). From the electoral perspective, many political analysts from the opposition are optimistic in terms of the number of communes obtained, and although there is a defeat in the ruling coalition, it has been underlined by the loss of emblematic communes such as Ñuñoa,

by the arithmetic addition of this group plus the historical vote obtained by its ally in the past election, the Communist Party. Considering the governed population, the communes of the Alliance concentrate 38.2% of the total population and those in the hands of the *Concertación*, 49.1% of Chileans at national level.

At mayor's level, we can highlight the entry of the Progressive Party (PRO) and the great number of independents out of parties. With regard to the councilmen, the PRO achieves 4.5% and the *Concertación's* vote (the addition of Democratic Concert, Progressist Party and Communist Party) maintains compared with the vote obtained in 2008 in these three lists (the vote obtained by communists in the list *Juntos Podemos Más* is considered).

When analyzing the ten largest communes, the center-right wins in Puente Alto, Viña del Mar, La Florida, Valparaíso, Las Condes, Temuco, San Bernardo and Antofagasta, although the latter is debatable since Karen Rojo was elected as independent (she is former Secretary of the Ministry of Health in the current administration and former member of Renovación Nacional (RN)). In the case of Maipú and Santiago, the victory was for the *Concertación*.

It is interesting to highlight that in the communes having greater presence of indigenous issues, such as Ercilla, Padre las Casas, Alto Biobío and Lonquimay, the Alliance gets the victory; in the same way as in the communes most affected by the post-earthquake reconstruction, such as the local governments of Constitución, Cobquecura, Coronel, Talca, Rancagua and Hualañé (Iloca). Furthermore, it conquers the mayor in Aysén, a commune marked by conflicts at the beginning of this year.

On the contrary, the *Concertación* obtains relevant communes from the symbolic point of view, such as Ñuñoa, Recoleta, La Reina, Concepción and Providencia. In turn, the Progressist Party gets the victory in Arica, a regional capital.

When analyzing the regional capitals, the *Concertación* obtains six communes, La Serena, Santiago, Concepción, Puerto Mont, Coyhaique and Punta Arenas, considerably better than in 2008 when it obtained two. Meanwhile, the Alliance gets seven if we consider Antofagasta (independent, former RN who competed out of parties), Copiapó (the victory of the Regionalist Party of Independents –PRI- and omission from the Coalition), Valparaíso, Rancagua, Talca, Temuco and Valdivia.

Table 1

RESULTS FOR MAYOR AT NATIONAL LEVEL

LIST/PART Y	MAYORS 2012			MAYORS 2008		
	VOTES	%	ELECTED	VOTES	%	ELECTED
<i>Igualdad para Chile</i>	33,336	0.69%	0			
<i>Regionalists & Independents</i>	126,510	2.40%	5	254,610	4.00%	8
<i>El Cambio por Ti (PRO)</i>	155,964	2.96%	7			
<i>Chile está en Otra (CH1)</i>	9,776	0.18%	0			
<i>Por un Chile Justo</i>	720,865	13.70%	62	618,685	9.72%	46
Democratic Concert	1,546,773	29.40%	106	1,826,824	28.71%	101
<i>MAS Humano</i>	82,666	1.57%	3			
<i>Coalition</i>	1,971,651	37.47%	121	2,586,754	40.66%	144
<i>Por el Desarrollo del Norte</i>	33,864	0.64%	1	25,571	0.40%	1
<i>Independents (out of parties)</i>	576,664	10.96%	40	647,025	10.17%	38
<i>Juntos Podemos Más (PC)</i>				402,661	6.33%	7

Source: www.elecciones.gob.cl

Table 2

RESULTS FOR COUNCILMEN AT NATIONAL LEVEL

LIST/PARTY	COUNCILMEN 2012			COUNCILMEN 2008		
	VOTES	%	ELECTED	VOTES	%	ELECTED
<i>Igualdad para Chile</i>	33,361	0.81%	1			
<i>Regionalists & Independents</i>	312,651	7.63%	138	459,993	7.56%	117
<i>El Cambio por Ti (PRO)</i>	184,830	4.51%	48			
<i>Chile está en Otra (CH1)</i>	5,990	0.14%	2			
<i>Por un Chile Justo</i>	905,092	22.10%	501	1,052,333	17.29%	393
<i>Democratic Concert</i>	1,120,472	27.36%	664	1,694,494	27.84%	677
<i>MAS Humano</i>	125,215	3.05%	31			
<i>Coalition</i>	1,349,211	32.94%	827	2,194,528	36.05%	861
<i>Por el Desarrollo del Norte</i>	18,476	0.45%	5	35,232	0.58%	7
<i>Independents (out of parties)</i>	39,434	0.96%	6	94,986	1.56%	12
<i>Juntos Podemos Más (PC)</i>				555,329	9.12%	79

Source: www.elecciones.gob.cl

High Abstention

One of the most outstanding data is the existing voting level. In this election, the citizens who cast their ballot accounted for 41%, 17.02% less than in 2008. In numerical terms, 5.5 million Chileans voted; 1.4 millions less than in 2008, when 6.9 million Chileans went to the ballot boxes. Observing the breakdown, in the Metropolitan Region, 37.2% of potential voters cast their vote; in the regions the figure increases to 43.4%

Table 3

VOTING LEVEL AT NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

	National	Metropolitan	Regions
Voters	5,495,929	1,931,871	3,564,058
Potential	13,404,000	5,188,038	8,215,962
Percentage	41,00%	37,20%	43,40%

Source: www.elecciones.gob.cl

When comparing these data at international level, it is important to consider that the literature and empirical evidence show that in local elections there is usually a minor electoral participation than in parliamentary or presidential ones.ⁱⁱ Specific cases are Great Britain, obtaining 38.1% in local elections, or Colombia with 45.3%. In turn, given our country's increasing presidentialism, citizens will probably grant greater relevance to the presidential elections than local ones when considering the country's future.

Table 4

PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL AND PARLIAMENTARY OR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Countries	Participation in local elections	Participation in parliamentary or presidential elections
France	51.2%	71.2%
Netherlands	53.0%	71.1%
Italy	64.2%	79.1%
United Kingdom	38.1%	61.1%
Colombia	45.3%	44.9%
Average	53.0%	66.1%

Source: IDEA International

Furthermore, within the OECD, 26 out of 33 countries, besides Chile, apply this voting system, which consolidates it as one of the most used among established democracies.

In this context, abstention must be considered as a sign of alert (especially for the ruling Alliance who lost 700,000 votes in relation to 2008); but also as an opportunity to freshen up faces, leaderships and, of course, to invigorate the electorate through a discussion of ideas.

Primary Elections: Institutionalizing Renewal and Competition

In this perspective, the need for renewal and substantial increase of competition relies on an evident ally: the primary elections; an institution recently approved by the national Congress and which is going to be available for the nomination of presidential and parliamentary candidates for the 2013 elections. Moreover, it does not only concern a mechanism for nominating candidates, but one searching to mobilize the affiliates, supporters and independent electorate of the political parties and coalitions, thus increasing the participation and density of our representative democracy. Of course, it is also a unique opportunity to discuss ideas and programs within parties and coalitions, in front of their electors. In this sense, it strengthens a culture of domestic democracy, diversity and real power delivery to the bases, generating incentives for the parties to open to the community.

As we have discussed in previous publicationsⁱⁱⁱ and sustained in Libertad & Desarrollo since 1993, primaries are a pre-electoral instrument with the potential of tending to greater transparency, competition and participation, which are essential variables to our democracy.^{iv} Therefore, we hope that this will be the definition mechanism for the next presidential elections, so as to be able to discuss issues that are relevant for the electorate itself, to motivate and convoke citizens who did not cast their vote in the municipal elections in a considerable volume.

The above can also foster a greater candidate heterogeneity; increase their quality by passing through several filters –beyond those of the sole executive committees of political parties’, which have a relevant role anyhow-; rely on the communication media’s attention, which is essential for the programmatic debate, since it can have an impact on voters’ mobilization; among others.^v

One of the lessons of the past municipal elections is that primary elections do matter. The *Concertación* chose to subject most of its candidates to a primary process, which naturally had certain defects, but nevertheless granted its candidates a democratic legitimacy different from that of the rest of the offer. In this perspective, part of the *Concertación’s* success could be explained by what in a line of Political Science literature has been called the “bonus of primary elections”.^{vi}

Conclusions

The past municipal elections featured a high abstention level (which had a relevant impact on the center-right) and the ruling coalition defeat’s in emblematic communes; a defeat which is anyhow far from being a “debacle”, as different opposing political analysts have tried to interestedly

show, especially because the Concert of Parties for Democracy, the *Concertación*, did not increase its vote.

The former must be considered as a greater opportunity, both for the political system and the center-right in particular, to renew its political offer in leadership and ideas, and try to mobilize its electoral base, a strategy derived from the vote's voluntary nature. Therefore, primary elections appear as an essential mechanism. In fact, besides playing a key role for the presidential election, the use of parliamentary primaries should be the general rule for the parties.

In brief...

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS 2012:

- In this election, 41% of the voters' record cast their vote, that is, 17% less than in 2008. In numerical terms, 5.5 million Chileans voted; 1.4 millions less than in 2008. In the Metropolitan Region, 37.2% of potential voters cast their vote and in the regions, 43.4%
- In general terms, the ruling coalition lost 23 mayors (-3%) and the *Concertación* won 21 (+4.1%, including the PC vote). With regard to the councilmen, the difference is 33% for the Alliance (-3%) and 49.5% for the *Concertación* (+4.3%). The *Concertación's* apparent increase is explained by the arithmetic addition of this group plus the historical vote obtained by its ally in the past election, the Communist Party.
- The needs for renewing leaderships and at the same time to increase the political competition have an evident ally: primary elections.

ⁱ Przeworski, Adam. *Democracy and Market*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998,

ⁱⁱ Hajnal, Z & Lewis, P. "Municipal Institutions and Voter Turnout in Local Elections". In *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 38 Nr 5, 2003.

ⁱⁱⁱ “*Elecciones primarias: más competencia y representatividad*”. Libertad & Desarrollo, Public Issues 1,047, January 2012.

^{iv} “Primary Elections in the Final Round: Ideas Pro Competition and Legitimacy”. Libertad & Desarrollo, Public Issues 1,066, June 2012.

^v Dowdle, A.J., Adkins, R.E. & Steger, W.P. “The Viability Primary: Modeling Candidate Support before the Primaries”. Political Research Quarterly, Vol. 62 Nr 1, 2009.

^{vi} Carey, John. “*El bono de las primarias en América Latina*”, in Arturo Fontaine, Cristián Larrroulet, Jorge Navarrete & Ignacio Walker (Editors). *Reforma de los partidos políticos en Chile*. CEP, L&D, Proyectamérica and CIEPLAN, 2008.