

*Chile rejects conservative
constitution, leaving Pinochet-era
text in force*

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Santiago de Chile, December 18 (RHC)-- Chile has voted to reject a new conservative constitution, leaving the text drafted during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in force. With nearly all of the ballots tallied on Sunday night, more than 55 percent of Chileans voted against the text, compared with about 44 percent in favor.

The proposed constitution, which was drafted by a committee dominated by the conservative Republican Party, would have reinforced property rights and free-market principles and included limits on immigration and abortion. The result comes more than a year after Chileans roundly rejected a progressive

constitution that would have classified the Latin American country as a plurinational state, established autonomous Indigenous territories and elevated the environment as well as gender equity.

Chilean President Gabriel Boric, who before the vote pledged to focus on long-term development in favor of further attempts to change the constitution, said the results showed that the country had become polarised and divided.

“I invite you to build together a new era for Chile: growth for all, social justice and citizen security,” Boric, who became Chile’s youngest-ever leader in 2021 at 35, said after the vote. “The country needs everyone.”

Republican Party leader Jose Antonio Kast expressed disappointment over the result. “We failed in the effort to convince Chileans that this would be a better constitution than the existing one,” he said.

The push to replace the current constitution, adopted during Pinochet’s military dictatorship, was set in motion after as many as one million protesters took to the streets in 2019 demanding sweeping political and social change.

While Chile is one of the richest and most stable countries in Latin America, it has some of the highest levels of wealth inequality in the developed world.

In a 2020 referendum, 80 percent of Chileans voted to replace the Pinochet-era constitution, which was widely blamed for allowing companies and the elite to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor, working classes. But the public’s enthusiasm for change waned in the years following the protests as issues such as crime, the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation took centre stage.

Opinion polls in the weeks leading up to the latest vote had predicted defeat. “This whole process has been a waste of government money ... it’s a joke,” government employee Johanna Anríquez, who voted against the new constitution, was quoted as saying by the Associated Press news agency. “Let’s just keep the one we have and, please, let’s get on with the work of providing public safety.”

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