

*Prompt:* Write about a political movement you've found interesting in your chosen country. What happened? Why did it interest you?

By Maisie Price

Chile has taken on yet another direction in regards to governmental politics in recent months, welcoming in the youthful, socialist Gabriel Boric as its new president in December last year. What makes Boric such a unique president isn't his young age, nor his unconventional background, though they are significant, but the explosive political and social movements which propelled him to the highest position of office that represented the Chilean people's power and an urgent desire for change.

As aforementioned, Boric's entry to politics was quite far from the standard of a usual politician in Chile nowadays. Instead of entering straight into the political sphere, he was one of a handful of student leaders who led nationwide protests from 2011-12 beside hundreds of thousands of school and university students in Chile against educational inequalities and for many ideologically leftist reforms such as free public university tuition for all Chilean students. On several occasions, the president at the time, Sebastián Piñera, and his government attempted to appease protestors by offering several compromises, yet the demonstrations did not fail to cease, they instead only grew and grew. Once some of the goals were successively achieved, several of the student leaders went on to run for office and become members of congress, becoming known as the "student bench", in the bid to create further action from within the political system. Despite the protests' wane in popularity, they only marked the beginning of Boric's personal political journey and of further waves of a great number of varied and impassioned activist movements in Chile.

In the latter half of the 2010s, political and social movements gained steam once more and, this time, built on the frustrations of the past. The women of Chile mobilised and the country witnessed a series of feminist demonstrations in 2018 which occurred in response to the international "Ni Una Menos" and "Me Too" movements against sexual harrassment, an issue which was especially prevalent in schools. Evidently, the activist flame within Chile's academic settings had most certainly not been put

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out. Not only were these protests centred around the culture of sexism and persistent patriarchal systems, but they echoed calls for equality and a more just society which prevailed seven years earlier.

The following year, secondary-school students were once more at the forefront of protests against the price of bus fares being raised, resulting in violent clashes with police and the largest civil unrest in Chile since the end of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship. Quickly, the protests spread throughout the country, with additional causes coming to the forefront such as frustrations with lack of education rights, the increased cost of living and growing wealth inequality. What began as peaceful demonstrations developed into riots and police brutality very quickly, resulting in hundreds of arrests and 19 dead. Following 2019's protests, the National Institute of Human Rights announced that hundreds had been injured or blinded by rubber pellets used as part of police tactics to curb demonstrations and Amnesty International announced that unnecessary and excessive force was used throughout on the part of police. The force which police implemented was nationally and internationally condemned, whilst it seemed as though a growing percentage of the population were becoming disillusioned with the neo-liberalism of Piñera's leadership. Many saw a government who ignored and cast aside the growing concerns of the people about where the country was headed, one which had overstayed its welcome and which could no longer take Chile into a more prosperous and successful future.

Despite the diversity of concerns, all were united under an overarching demand: a new constitution for Chile. Created in 1980, Chile's current constitution is a relic of former president Pinochet's dictatorship and many deem as the source of much of the country's social, economic and political problems today. This was not the first time that calls for a new constitution were being made, ever since Boric had entered office in 2014 he had been campaigning for a constitution that better reflected and supported the people of Chile. Combined with the incessant pressure of the protests and already mounting calls for a reworked constitution, Boric and other progressive senators took the opportunity to make a deal with Piñera to provide the country with a constitutional referendum. Subsequently, in 2020, a constitutional convention was created that was supported by 78% of those who participated in the referendum and which took into account the approval of all Chilean people, a notable contrast to how the dictator General Pinochet's constitution was formed.

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Whilst the process of forming a new constitution was initiated, soon followed the movement to once again unite the Chilean left. In recent years, Chile's plentiful leftwing parties have formed electoral coalitions in unity and to increase likelihood of election but the most recent has been Apruebo Dignidad. Gabriel Boric was once part of the coalition Broad Front but after contributing his support to the constitutional convention, many other parties and members decided to leave or resign in disagreement with him. However it wasn't long before the more powerful coalition, Apruebo Dignidad, came about, encompassing former members of smaller coalitions like Broad Front, Chile Digno, Social Unity Table, Community for Dignity and more. Leadership of this new movement consisted of leaders from the previous student movements in 2011, some of which had previously entered into congressional politics and others who had remained activists. In mid 2021, Boric ran as leading representative of the coalition and won with 60.4% of the vote, much to the surprise of many members, allowing him to enter the presidential election and face his main opponent, the far-right candidate José Antonio Kast. Once again, Boric surprised many, both in and outside of the country, demonstrating that Chile's leftwing was far from being dead and unelectable.

What has occurred in Chile is not so dissimilar to the trends seen recently in its neighbouring countries such as the election of left-wing presidents Luis Arce in Bolivia and Pedro Castillo in Peru. Together, they represent the resurgence of the 'Pink tide' in Latin America which is a term for a general turn in the direction of leftist governments on the continent. For me, the election of Gabriel Boric encapsulates the work and effort of the numerous social and political movements in recent years which preceded his presidency in Chile and which without, he would not be in the position that he is today. The determination and the actions taken by the Chilean people to aspire towards a more just, egalitarian and fair society even when faced with extreme repression and those who sought to maintain business as usual in the face of much needed change is incredibly inspirational. In my opinion, the protests which spanned the majority of the 2010s are a true testament to the strength of the people of Chile and how a tolerance for maintaining the status quo and neutrality will no longer be tolerated.

What lies ahead of Chile is, so far, unknown, yet it is clear that whatever direction the country aims towards next will be in the hands of its people.