POLITICS SYMPOSIUM

# When Ideology Trumps Deliberation: Evidence from Chile's 2022 Constitutional Proposal*

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**ABSTRACT** Existing research on Chile's 2022 constitution-making process primarily explained the negative referendum outcome through individual-level factors. The role of political parties in responding to the product of deliberation has been widely overlooked. This article addresses that gap by examining party reactions to the draft constitution, a proposal aligned with the left-wing constitutional project of New Latin American Constitutionalism. Although the proposal embodied this project, party responses proved far more ambivalent, especially in the center-left, where party endorsement often was conditional. This ambivalence weakened the approval campaign and proved decisive in the referendum's rejection. The analysis underscores that partisan ideology matters in deliberative constitution-making.

In September 2022, an overwhelming majority of Chilean citizens rejected a proposal for a new constitution that had been produced by a freely elected Constitutional Convention (2021–2022). Many studies have focused on individual-level characteristics to explain the rejection of the proposal in the 2022 referendum, such as the deliberative procedure (Ginsburg and Álvarez 2024), the different electoral rules of the two referenda (Heiss and Suárez-Cao 2024), and the role of independents (Larrain, Negretto, and Voigt 2023). However, little attention has been given to what the political parties did in the final stage. Indeed, evidence suggests that the Chilean voters' perceptions of the core content strongly shaped their decisions (Berg and Navia 2025).

Aligned with previous research that demonstrates the relevance of political parties in the rhetoric and practices of deliberation (Gherghina 2024; Gherghina and Mitru 2025), this article addresses this gap and contends that most political parties in Chile shaped the public opinion by openly opposing the draft constitution on ideological grounds, particularly objecting to its content. Indeed, the draft arguably included many provisions that conflicted with the ideological preferences of moderate and conservative actors. Parties mobilized against that content in the referendum campaign (Belmar, Morales, and Villarroel 2023), acting in line with policy disagreements that so far have been overlooked by explanations for the rejection of the constitutional proposal. Previous conclusions outlined that the key factor was the ambivalent center-left strategy (Astudillo 2022); therefore, this analysis focuses on the far more complex developments within these parties because those on the far-left and the right-wing were straightforward in their positions.

This study uses a qualitative content analysis of two bodies of text: (1) the final draft constitution produced by the 2021–2022 Constitutional Convention; and (2) a corpus of public communications by the major Chilean political parties from across the ideological spectrum during the referendum campaign (June–September 2022). The parties and coalitions examined include the far-left Apruebo Dignidad[1] coalition; the center-left coalition Socialismo Democrático[2] with key parties such as Democracia Cristiana (DC); the center-right Chile Vamos[3] coalition; and the right-wing Partido Republicano (PRCH). The selection criteria were guided by consideration of the public prominence and representativeness of each party's official or influential stance, focusing on the party leadership.[4] The corpus consists of official party statements

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and transcripts of speeches from press interviews and releases. This systematic collection allowed a detailed tracing of how party elites invoked the substantive content of the draft to frame their arguments for or against it.

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The analysis proceeds as follows. First, it explores the 2022 draft, reframing some of its key provisions as elements of a far-left constitutional project with clear regional precedents in the constitutions of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. Second, it maps the reactions of Chile's major political coalitions, linking their campaign arguments as an ideological response to this project. Third, the conclusion draws broader lessons about the crucial role of ideological consensus and party elites in the success or failure of deliberative constitution-making. The primary contribution of this article is to shift the focus on the rejection of the Chilean constitution-making process to substance and content, demonstrating that ideology channeled through established political parties was a decisive factor. In this sense, the Chilean experience is an exemplary case for broader arguments about the importance of ideology in deliberation (Gherghina and Jacquet 2023; Ramis-Moyano 2025).

## THE LEFT-WING REGIONAL APPROACH TAKEN BY THE CONVENTION'S DRAFT

The rejected draft produced by the Constitutional Convention was the latest and most ambitious expression of the "New Latin American Constitutionalism" (NLAC), a distinctly leftist political project that emerged in the 1990s and further developed in the early 2000s in countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia. This constitutional model is characterized by its profound reaction against the "Neoliberal Washington Consensus"; its emphasis on direct popular sovereignty and majoritarianism over liberal checks and balances; and the establishment of a state-centric model guaranteeing an expansive list of social, economic, and collective rights (Landau 2013; Salazar 2013; Viciano and Martínez 2011). The Chilean draft of 2022 followed this model (Delucchi 2024; Landau and Dixon 2024).

The most evident NLAC approach in the draft was Article 1, which defined Chile as a "plurinational, intercultural, regional, and ecological" state. Article 5 elaborated on this by recognizing "the coexistence of diverse peoples and nations within the framework of state unity," explicitly acknowledging them as nations preexisting the state and possessing distinct collective rights. This formulation was imported directly from the first articles in the constitutions of both Bolivia and Ecuador, which similarly reframed their states as plurinational. This statement was far more than symbolism; it represented a left-wing challenge to the liberal ideal of equal individual citizens, and its consequences permeated the entire proposal. Article 309 established legal pluralism, stipulating that Indigenous justice systems would coexist "on an equal footing with the National Justice System." This provision, meant to create parallel justice systems in which Indigenous authorities would be empowered to exercise legislative and judicial powers, directly challenging? the unity of the judiciary and the principle of equality before a single body of law. Furthermore, Article 79 guaranteed Indigenous peoples the right to "substantive political and territorial self-government," including executive, administrative, and financial powers. Collectively, these articles exactly mirrored the plurinational design of the Bolivian (Articles 2, 3, 178, and 289) and Ecuadorian (Articles 2, 57–60, 171, and 189) constitutions.

A second core tenet of the draft's leftist approach was its expansive social rights catalogue and anti-neoliberal foundations. It represented a systematic effort to dismantle the economic model and replace it with a state-driven economy (Zañartu and Zañartu 2022). The draft sought to establish the primary (and at times exclusive) role of the state in key sectors such as education (Article 35), health (Article 44), and pensions (Article 45). Provisions were designed to severely limit or eliminate the role of the private sector in providing these services. This design explicitly mirrors the constitutions of Venezuela (Articles 83–85), Ecuador (Articles 28, 32, and 369), and Bolivia (Articles 77, 18, and 45). The draft was celebrated as an "eco-constitution" (Barandiaran 2025), a term that reflects opposition to the so-called extractivist economic model in Chile (Delucchi 2024). Article 171 granted constitutional rights to nature, a feature directly taken from Ecuador (Articles 71–74), and the restrictions on natural resources exploitation mirrored Bolivia (Articles 311 and 403).

Finally, the draft sought to radically reimagine Chile's political structure (Richner 2022). First, it aimed to replace the Senate with a weaker "Chamber of Regions" with limited powers. The intention was to bypass the slow bicameral legislative process, but critics viewed this as destabilizing the country's system of checks and balances (Castellà Andreu 2024). The draft also dismantled the judiciary to enshrine different judicial systems. This was meant to decolonize justice (Richner 2022), but it also raised serious concerns about effectiveness and the possible consequences when people from outside of the Indigenous communities were involved (Martínez and Fuentes-Contreras 2024).

These core tenets show that the most controversial elements—plurinationality, legal pluralism, the design of social rights, nature rights, and the dismantling of existing institutions—were not isolated provisions but in fact were deeply interconnected components of a coherent ideological political approach consistent with NLAC.

## PARTIES' REACTIONS TO THE DRAFT

Upon the dissolution of the Constitutional Convention, parties and their leaders across the spectrum took positions for the referendum. The provisions outlined in the previous



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section became central battlegrounds. This section examines the different groups of parties. Their arguments often converged, usually when the draft's leftist vision clashed with more moderate and highly valued democratic principles. The far-left coalition (Apruebo Dignidad, led by the Communist and Frente Amplio parties) enthusiastically endorsed the draft. The center-left coalition (Socialismo Democrático, led by PPD and PS) and DC officially took the same position as Apruebo Dignidad but informally undermined the campaign. On the right-wing, the center-right coalition (Chile Vamos, led by UDI and RN) aligned with the PRCH's total rejection of the content of the draft. The difference was that the center-right proposed a second constitution-making process to attract broader center-left votes and to justify their contradictory stance in 2019–2022 regarding constitution-making in Chile.

### The Far-Left's Embrace

For Apruebo Dignidad, the draft represented the culmination of their political project. Their campaign in favor was characterized by full endorsement of the draft's most polemic elements, which they presented as the fulfillment of the October 2019 crisis and the definitive overcoming of the neoliberal model, which was clear in the coalition's government program (Apruebo Dignidad 2021). The central arguments of the campaign were the will to replace "the dictatorial constitution" and the strong provision of social rights as the "only way" (Apruebo Dignidad and Socialismo Democrático 2022). The president of FRVS pointed out that the first reason to support it was "more rights to live with dignity," praising the new rights to proper nutrition, sports, and domestic work, among others (Torrealba 2022). Subsequently, the coalition government started a campaign that was supposed to provide constitutional education for the referendum. In reality, however, it appeared to be an illegal bias campaign (*El Mercurio* 2022), which prompted formal investigation for electoral interventionism (*DW News* 2022). Among these parties, plurinationality was portrayed as a moral imperative to repair historical wounds (Carvalho 2022) or a democratic imperative (Yáñez 2021). Prominent FA representatives including Amaya Alvez and Constanza Schönhaut praised the ecocentric approach of the draft (*Ex-Ante* 2022).

### Right-Wing Counter-Offensive

Chile Vamos and PRCH mounted a strong campaign against the proposal. Their strategy was to frame the draft as an illegitimate extremist project against the nation's unity and core democratic values, in alignment with the undesirable models of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. The general councils of the Chile Vamos parties agreed that the Constitutional Convention's proposal (1) did not unite the country; (2) undermined the foundations of freedom and democracy; and that (3) the Conventions' delegates worked poorly and were biased (González 2022).

However, the strategic campaigns among the center-right and right-wing parties were very different. Whereas Chile Vamos campaigned for rejection promising a new constitutional process (*Diario UChile* 2022b)—essentially contradicting their long-standing political positions against constitutional replacement—PRCH was consistent throughout the entire process, always rejecting the need for a new constitution but being open to concrete reforms that could improve constitutional order (Faúndez 2022).

Nevertheless, Chile Vamos and PRCH found a common position regarding the content of the draft. The most persistent and effective argument was directed at the state-driven economic model: plurinationality and its implications. The right spectrum successfully framed this concept as an assault on the idea of the Chilean Nation, economic progress, and the concept of equality before the law.

### Center-Left Dilemma of "Approve to Reform"

Officially, the far-left and Socialismo Democrático were in agreement (Moya 2022), but the actual situation was delicate for the center-left. Socialismo Democrático, as members of the governing coalition, were bound politically to support the "Apruebo." Yet, their own traditions of rooted reformism were deeply at odds with the refoundational and NLAC spirit of the draft. This led them to adopt the risky and ultimately self-defeating slogan of "Approve to Reform," led by PPD (Román 2022). This stance, the result of a difficult political calculation, revealed the profound ideological fissures within the broader left and invigorated the "Reject" campaign.

The dilemma was determined by being the key partner of Apruebo Dignidad's 2022–2026 government. A center-left decision to join the "Rechazo" campaign would have triggered a terminal crisis within the ruling coalition, mere months after initiating its term. Therefore, supporting Apruebo was a political necessity to maintain a semblance of governmental coherence and to avoid ceding the entire political terrain to the right-wing opposition. Their support, however, would come at a high price because the thesis proposed by the center-left was conditioned on promises of future reforms that proved difficult to achieve considering the rigidity of the proposed amendment rules.

Sergio Bitar, a former leader of PPD, captured the sentiment by campaigning for approval but acknowledging that "the text proposed by the Convention contains risky aspects…that must be corrected" (Bitar 2022). The dangers he identified related to plurinationality and the lack of checks and balances, especially regarding the judiciary. In a similar way, PPD/PS ex-president Ricardo Lagos published a document stating that the proposal lacked consensus and proposed that the debate be continued to achieve a constitution representing the majority (Torres 2022). Similarly, Senator Lagos (PPD) referred to issues that he found uncomfortable in the draft constitution and reaffirmed his will to "approve to improve" (Senado de la República de Chile 2022). Senator José Miguel Insulza (PS) made the vague observation that "there are all kinds of issues, such as the judiciary, that could be improved and will be improved" (Román 2022). Ex-President Michelle Bachelet (PS) affirmed her support, stating, "It's not perfect, but it is near to what I dreamed" (*Diario UChile* 2022a).

A few days before the referendum, the PPD president stated that "there are many areas where legitimate doubts and fears arise, which have unclear boundaries" (Vargas 2022), and all center-left parties were publicly open to making new deals to somehow amend the draft in pursuit of a better one. This raised concerns among Apruebo Dignidad, even though it was President Gabriel Boric who had called on his coalition to make the necessary agreements so that the text could be


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approved in the referendum (Vargas 2022). These statements were awkward given that the drafting process had already been completed, the Constitutional Convention had been dissolved, and the September referendum was fast approaching. There was no space for anyone to modify the text because of legal impediments.

Unsurprisingly, the center-left heavily broke apart. In a public letter, ex-President Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (DC) announced his rejection vote due to the lack of checks and balances, the danger of creating a politically controlled judicial system, and because plurinationality represents an actual danger to the unity of the state and to the equality of rights (Palma 2022). In parallel, some political leaders from DC, PPD, and the Radicals created "Amarillos por Chile" and openly campaigned for rejection. This movement created two center-left political parties: a party of the same name and the Democratic Party. Both are rooted in and stem from opposition to the idea of re-founding the state in this campaign. These influential political leaders detached from traditional centrist parties to join the Rechazo campaign, arguing for the need for a draft that unites. The key players were Senators Ximena Rincón and Ignacio Walker, both historical DC.

## CONCLUSION

Evidence indicates that ideology strongly structured the 2022 vote choice: right and centrist voters leaned for reject and left voters for approve (Fuenzalida Gauna, Navia, and Osorio 2025; Morales 2024). This supports my claim that center-left cues nudged moderates toward Rechazo, amplifying the draft's defeat. This dynamic underscores that deliberation does not occur in a political vacuum: the fate of a democratically drafted constitution hinges on its acceptance by key political actors and the public's ideological center of gravity. This study demonstrates that many Chilean political parties opposed the new constitutional proposal based on its content. The campaign became a substantive debate over constitutional principles: the unity of the nation versus plurinationality; representative checks and balances versus unicameral majoritarianism; and classical social-democratic and liberal rights versus expansive and diffusive rights emphasizing the role of the state.

Several lessons emerge. First, the Chilean case underscores that establishing an ideological consensus is crucial for constitutional endurance. The 2022 draft was crafted by a left-wing majority with no input from moderates or conservatives. Consequently, it lacked buy-in from the political center and right. The Chilean Constitutional Convention, portrayed as inclusive, failed to incorporate more moderate viewpoints among society. The result was a text sufficiently skewed that large segments of the political spectrum felt ideologically alienated by it. These findings add nuance to previous conclusions about deliberation in fragile contexts (Curato and Calamba 2024).

Second, the case demonstrates the enduring influence of party elites in shaping referendum outcomes. Despite initial hopes placed on independent candidates, the public ultimately looked to cues from parties and familiar leaders. The campaign is a reminder that even nonpartisan processes might be interpreted and evaluated through partisan and ideological lenses. In Chile, once the draft was completed, the parties took over the debate. This shows that opening up the constitution-making process to new voices does not eliminate the influence of established political cleavages when it comes to ratification.


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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

## NOTES

1. Partido Comunista (PC), parties that merged to form the current Frente Amplio (FA), Federación Regionalista Verde Social (FRVS), and Acción Humanista (AH).
2. Partido Socialista (PS), Partido por la Democracia (PPD), Partido Radical (PR), and Partido Liberal (PL).
3. Unión Demócrata Independiente (UDI), Renovación Nacional (RN), and Evópoli.
4. There was strong identification between the coalition and the party position, especially considering that the left-wing coalitions managed to reach the executive branch together in 2022. This was an issue that influenced the action of the center-left parties in the face of the referendum, which is why the coalition and its ideological position are worth mentioning.

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