

ARTICLE

## Authoritarian neoliberalism in the discursive articulation of the Chilean Right post Social Outburst

### El neoliberalismo autoritario en la rearticulación discursiva de la derecha chilena post Estallido Social

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#### Abstract

The following article explores the discursive articulation of the Chilean right, exploring its evolution from a moderate position to one of radicalisation. The article argues that this articulation is based on the defence of the main ideological legacy of the dictatorship: authoritarian neoliberalism, as represented by trade unionism. This evolution is based on a strategy of moral panic that seeks to radicalise neoliberal positions through authoritarian techniques within the democratic framework, taking advantage of a political context conducive to a reaction of far-right ideas.

**Keywords:**  
authoritarian  
neoliberalism;  
far-right;  
backlash politics;  
discourse

The research is based on in-depth interviews with leaders of the Republican Party and the Independent Democratic Union and analysis of documentary sources and public speeches. These narratives provide crucial information for understanding the process of discursive articulation of the Chilean right.

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In the context of the rise of the far right globally, examining the dynamics of its contemporary discourses in Chile offers crucial insights into the complex interplay between capitalism, democracy and the right. Thus, this study seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of neoliberalism's authoritarian and flexible character.

## Resumen

El siguiente artículo indaga en la rearticulación discursiva de la derecha chilena, explorando su evolución desde una posición moderada hacia una de radicalización. El trabajo argumenta que esta rearticulación se fundamenta en la defensa de la principal herencia ideológica de la dictadura: el neoliberalismo autoritario representado en el gremialismo. Esta evolución se basa en una estrategia de pánico moral que busca radicalizar las posturas neoliberales mediante técnicas autoritarias, dentro del marco democrático, aprovechando un contexto político propicio para una reacción de ideas de ultraderecha.

**Palabras Clave:**  
neoliberalismo  
autoritario;  
ultraderecha;  
reacción política;  
discurso

La investigación se apoya en entrevistas en profundidad realizadas a dirigentes del Partido Republicano y la Unión Demócrata Independiente, junto con el análisis de fuentes documentales y discursos públicos. Estas narrativas proporcionan información crucial para comprender el proceso de rearticulación discursiva de la derecha chilena.

En un contexto de auge de la ultraderecha a nivel global, examinar la dinámica de sus discursos contemporáneos en Chile ofrece ideas cruciales sobre la compleja interacción entre capitalismo, democracia y las derechas. Así, este estudio busca contribuir a una comprensión más amplia del carácter autoritario y flexible del neoliberalismo.

## Introduction

“Has rebellion become right-wing?” asks Stefanoni on the rise of the global right wing (Stefanoni, 2021). One of his central theses is that the sense of indignation and disobedience has been transferred from progressivism to right-wing and far-right groups. This has occurred gradually in Latin America and the Caribbean, with explosive and successful speeches, such as those of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Javier Milei in



Argentina. Chile seemed not so close to this phenomenon after the waves of protests in 2019 known as the *Estallido Social*. Until that moment, not only did the rebelliousness seem to be on the side of progressivism and the anti-systemic left, but the Chilean right seemed to have adopted a programmatic and discursive moderation in two of its principal axes: neoliberalism and social conservatism (Madariaga & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020). However, since the rejection of the process that proposed to change the Constitution between 2021-2022 – known as the Constituent Convention – the Chilean right seems to have hegemonised the representation of the sense of rage and unease through the re-articulation of a discourse that combines the defence of free market values and a conservative and authoritarian social order (Alenda et al., 2023; Díaz et al., 2023; Escoffier et al., 2023; Martínez Mateo, 2021; Rovira Kaltwasser & Zanotti, 2022).

What has this discursive articulation of the right been like, from moderation to radicalisation? What role has the national context played after the 2019 protests and the discussion of changing the current constitution? Why has the ideological defence of neoliberal principles been so crucial in conjunction with a rhetoric that promotes social conservatism, order and security? This article addresses these questions by proposing that reordering the Chilean right is a re-articulation of the ideological legacy of the dictatorship: authoritarian neoliberalism expressed in the ideas of guilds.

This re-articulation has been based on a strategy of moral panic (Escoffier et al., 2023; Payne, 2023), which seeks to radicalise neoliberal positions through authoritarian techniques within democratic norms. This is taking advantage of a favourable political context for a *backlash politics* of far-right ideas based on ideological and material considerations. A mixture of the perception of a loss of authority and the risk of endangering the maximum institutional reference point of authoritarian neoliberalism: the 1980 Constitution.

As I will discuss in the section on discursive analysis of right-wing actors, there has been an active attempt to contribute to the construction of a symbolic discourse contrary to the anti-neoliberal demands raised during the *Estallido Social* (2019) and the constituent process (2021-2022). On the one hand, through the defence of neoliberal pillars that are constitutional guarantees and deny the extension of social rights: a) the Chilean state declaring itself to be subsidiary; b) preventing the state from invading the field of the economy and individuals; and c) the defence of property rights. On the other hand, by appealing to conservative and authoritarian values, a strong state can be advocated for, which allows for the above points.

To carry out the discursive analysis, I draw on documentary research and interviews conducted in 2023 with leaders of two right-wing parties: the Republican Party and the Independent Democratic Union (UDI). How can one explore the depth of the link between neoliberalism and values of defence of the family or national identity? From this question, my interest in conducting in-depth interviews was born. For, in a context of radicalisation of right-wing groups and ideas, where direct interaction between social scientists and these actors is scarce, it is not always possible to find the link between neo-liberalism and values of defence of the family or national identity (Damhuis and de Jonge, 2022). I decided to investigate the discourse of these groups first-hand, which can be seen as a contribution in itself, as they are a complex population to access. Therefore, I decided that it was necessary to interact with individuals who shape the reality of my questions and the social phenomenon I am investigating (de Souza Minayo et al., 2012).

As membership in right-wing parties corresponds not only to ideological considerations but also to constructing an identity and belonging to a community (Blee, 2002), my interviews also focused on the motivations and community considerations of their leadership. Thus, these interviews addressed life narratives related to their involvement in politics and self-perceptions of decision-making at critical moments, such as the Social Outburst and the functioning of the Constituent Convention (2021-2022). Therefore, although all interviewees agreed to give their accounts publicly with informed consent, I decided to anonymise their identities to touch on personal issues related to their motivations and identities.

Along these lines, this article aims to empirically explore authoritarian neoliberalism in the discursive articulation of the Chilean right after the aforementioned vital moments. In Kathleen Blee's compilation of works that have carried out ethnographic studies of the extreme right in the world, she argues that despite the different regional contexts and the political and compositional differences they may have, emotionality, culture and suspicion are crucial to understanding these groups (Blee, 2007). Therefore, the richness of this work lies in the complementarity of documentary analysis with the individual motivations that may have contributed to the re-articulation of the Chilean right-wing discourse



## Authoritarian neoliberalism and the breakdown of consensus

The contemporary evolution of the Chilean right is linked to the development of authoritarian neoliberalism. Taking a holistic view that blends the work of Poulantzas (2000), Bruff (2014) and Tansel (2017), the theory of authoritarian neoliberalism leaves aside the conceptual dichotomy between liberal democracy and authoritarianism. In essence, authoritarian neoliberalism would have rigid inclinations that, through joint action between state practices and civil society institutions, support a 'minimal' notion of democracy. In this line, methods of imposition by force, such as installing neoliberalism through coups d'état and dictatorships, are overcome. Instead, the legal norms of a democracy are used to isolate from public power those discussions that would imply a possible change in neoliberal policies (Salyga, 2022). This is especially true when certain formal freedoms are restricted through legal and coercive mechanisms to protect the system (Bruff, 2014, p.115-116; Poulantzas, 2000).

How do authoritarian practices relate to a notion of economic freedom? Several works have studied what at first sight would appear to be a contradiction: the exhaustive use of state policies in supporters of Hayekian doctrines (Bruff & Tansel, 2019; Kiely, 2017; Martínez Mateo, 2020; 2021; Saidel, 2021; Tansel, 2017). These studies propose that neoliberal doctrine attaches fundamental importance to using state policies to protect its hegemony.

Implementing laws provides a means for preserving the rules of economic freedom, which are supposed to be naturally created. However, this instrumentalisation of the state is accompanied by a critique of the state, accusing it of having a privileged role because of the possibility of becoming the greatest threat to the freedom of society: it can intervene destructively and block market forces (Martínez Mateo, 2020, p.607). This is where the paradox is resolved because, for neoliberal actors, the state can and should be authoritarian and repressive when it is necessary to protect the free market. Thus, the conception of neoliberalism as an economic system is overcome. Along these lines, Vivaldi (2019) defines neoliberalism as expanding the market in all aspects, such as the family and bodies. In this way, it would be presented as a rationally sacred truth (Harvey, 2007). Market principles regulate social behaviour and power strategies (Vivaldi, 2019). Along these lines, neoliberalism has become a hegemonic phenomenon in the contemporary world. As Harvey states, it has become embedded in how people interpret, live and understand the world (Harvey, 2005).



This article proposes that the Chilean case is directly related to the characteristics of authoritarian neoliberalism due to the characteristics of its implementation during the dictatorship (1973-1989) and its legitimisation in democracy (1990 - to date). Although during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, there were internal discussions in which different actors proposed different ways of transforming the Chilean socio-economic system, after the 1982-83 foreign exchange crisis, the radicalised version of neoliberalism was imposed on the political elite of the regime (Harvey, 2005; Madariaga, 2020; Rumié Rojo, 2018). The so-called *Chicago Boys* conducted a state intervention focused on post-crisis economic stabilisation. This intervention involved increasing the role of the private sector in social services, strengthening the financial and business sectors, reducing state spending, deregulation and liberalisation of the economy, and creating a more stable economy (Madariaga, 2020; Pitton, 2007; Silva, E, 1996).

For Madariaga (2020), the three pillars underpinning these transformations in Chile are *ideas* represented in constructing a neoliberal cultural hegemony, the economic interests of the local elite, and the institutions that limit changes to the system itself. This last point represents what Garretón (1991) categorised as “protected democracy”: a process characterised by institutionally shielding the model erected through various authoritarian enclaves that accompany the new social consensus. In other words, a central element in the process of neoliberal implementation was establishing an institutional political model to ensure and deepen the transformations of the dictatorship. Garretón (1991) established an unquestionable narrative with the new social order.

The best example is the 1980 Constitution, promulgated during the dictatorship and still in force today. Through this institutional apparatus, the state is conceptualised as a subsidiary and the dominance of the elites is ensured, establishing different regulations that remove any substantial change in the model from public power (Martínez Mateo, 2021; Turner, 2008). At the same time, it expresses and protects two central components of the dictatorship's legacy: authoritarianism and neoliberalism, with the Constitution being the common thread between these two social phenomena (Martínez Mateo, 2021; Turner, 2008).

In this context, the defence of the 1980 Constitution has been a fundamental pillar in the discourse of the Chilean right. Authoritarian neoliberalism became an institutional consensus and a social and political one. The construction of a hegemonic system encompassing all aspects of life was a priority for the main party of the Chilean right and defender of the dictatorial legacy, the Independent Democratic Union (UDI) (Rubio Apolaza, 2015; P. Silva, 2015; Valdivia Ortiz de Zárate, 2016).

Before the 2019 protests, there was little change for over two decades. Thus, this period embodied political stability by excluding demonstrations against free market policies. This meant an ideological agreement between many political actors in alliance with the leading economic power groups and the repressive forces that governed during the dictatorship (Avendaño and Sandoval, 2016; Bargsted and Somma, 2016; Huneus, 2000; Romero and Bustamante, 2016; P. Silva, 2015).

However, this sense of ‘normality’ was accompanied by a parallel social phenomenon of the emergence of grassroots-backed social movements (Joignant et al., 2020; Levitsky, 2011; Roberts, 2013; E. Silva, 2012). Issues such as profit-making in education, environmental struggles, inequality, the Constitution and the privatisation of social rights entered the public debate. Moreover, in this context of gradual mutation, the Chilean right opened up to changes that allowed it to adapt to social transformation through programmatic and discursive moderation but without breaking with the fundamental pillars of authoritarian neoliberalism (Alenda et al., 2023).

### **Programmatic moderation: the prelude to neoliberal-authoritarian radicalisation**

Chilean rights have experienced a series of conflicts in dealing with the new political landscape. Rovira Kaltwasser (2020) argues that the right has recently experienced a tension between moderation and radicalisation. His central thesis is justified by how the social and cultural change brought about by the proliferation of social movements aggravated tensions within this current, making the emergence of new referents and coalitions possible. For the author, this was intensified in a context where the Chilean electorate has become more culturally liberal and less tolerant of socio-economic inequality (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020, p.46).

The tension between programmatic moderation and radicalisation has meant a rapid transformation on the right (Díaz et al., 2023; Madariaga & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020). This is illustrated by how specific points of discord, such as positions on abortion, equal marriage and inequality, began to erode the homogeneity of alliances and discourses (Escoffier & Vivaldi, 2023; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020).

The clearest example is the case of the top leader of the Chilean far right, José Antonio Kast. A historic militant of the UDI, he resigned from that party in 2017, accusing it of abandoning its ideological pillars. In this way, he created a new far-right referent: the





Republican Party. His criticism was based on a discourse opposed to reform that sought to reduce inequality gaps and promote a progressive agenda regarding values (Díaz et al., 2023; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020). In other words, a radicalised defence of the two fundamental pillars of the dictatorship's legacy, neoliberalism and conservatism, forming a new political force that positions itself "to the right of the right" (Díaz et al., 2023; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020).

The Republican Party is a party that political science defines as radical populist right-wing, characterised by three ideological aspects: populism, nativism and authoritarianism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). The populist aspect divides society between a "pure people" and a "corrupt elite". The nativist aspect refers to the idea of protecting native groups (those belonging to the nation) from those who undermine local values. The authoritarian aspect apologises for an ordered society, demanding severe action against those who deviate from this order (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020).

In this context of right-wing polarisation, the country's social-political process known as *Estallido Social* is developing. In October 2019, following the government's announcement to increase transport fares, millions of people spontaneously protested throughout the country during intense days. Without formal leadership, diverse social demands were raised that radically changed the Chilean neoliberal consensus, opening a new political and social cycle (Alzueta-Galar, 2023; Frens-String et al., 2021).

There is no unanimity on whether or not the Social Outbreak was a generalised representation of protests of an anti-neoliberal nature. Some authors attribute it more to an endemic political crisis, a demand from sectors traditionally marginalised in decision-making (Bellolio, 2020; 2022; Peña, 2020). Other authors argue that the essential component of the protest has to do with disaffection towards the neoliberal model (Joignant et al., 2020; Ruiz, 2020; Ruiz & Caviedes, 2022). The organisation of these sectors of society, fuelled by criticisms of inequality and lack of opportunities, is what Rovira Kaltwasser (2020) defines as the "politicisation of inequality". In other words, the construction of organisational resources with an agenda that demands a more active role for the state in guaranteeing minimum socio-economic rights.

Despite the diverse demands and causes that the Social Outbreak may have had, there was a coalescence into one: that of a new constitution (Martínez Mateo, 2021). Less than a month after the mobilisations, political actors from the left and the right agreed on an institutional solution to the social crisis. This meant a process of constituent discussion that contributed to deactivating the conflict. This led to the creation of a Convention





of 155 democratically elected people charged with drafting a new Constitution that would then be submitted to a plebiscite. Thus, a formal discussion began changing authoritarian neoliberalism's most critical institutional lock: the 1980 Constitution

In the following section, I will discuss how the opening of the constitutional debate contributed to the radicalisation of right-wing positions based on the discursive and institutional defence of the two main components of the dictatorial legacy: neoliberalism and authoritarianism.

### **Cracks in the neo-liberal consensus and backlash from the far-right**

The discourse of protecting the hegemony of Chilean neoliberalism is represented as a reaction to the demands condensed in the Estallido Social and the constituent process. The literature refers to backlash politics as a reaction that mixes the perception of a “loss” of order and culture with economic deprivation (Salyga, 2022). Along these lines, actors mobilise to return to a previous social condition through unconventional tactics (Alter & Zürn, 2022). This action attacks efforts to promote equality among historically marginalised groups (Weeks and Allen, 2023); moreover, as ideas of conservatism are often linked to the notion that people are naturally evil, institutions need not only contain transformative impulses but also preserve existing ones out of fear of change (Castro-Rea and Solano, 2023).

On the other hand, Payne et al. (2023) have coined the categorisation Right Against Rights to explain right-wing backlash politics in the region. This would be a collective mobilisation to “control, roll back or reverse specific rights promoted by previously marginalised groups and communities and to restore, promote or advance a status quo ante of traditional political, social, economic and cultural rights” (Escoffier et al., 2023, p.2). Thus, this response does not involve hidden actors seeking to maintain order but specific individuals and institutions mobilised to defend neoliberal hegemony.

The most studied example of far-right backlash politics is Donald Trump, labelled as an unwitting ‘beneficiary’ who took advantage of a political, ideological and institutional moment (Castro-Rea and Solano, 2023). As in the case of Trump, in Chile, the series of defeats of the moral-conservative agenda and the debates on wealth redistribution that opened up with the constitutional debate provided the context of backlash politics for the emergence of new referents, such as Kast and the radical populist right-wing party he



leads. He emphasised the importance of radicalising positions in a new scenario where progressive parties would apply an agenda contrary to conservative and neoliberal values (Díaz et al., 2023; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020).

### **Authoritarian neoliberalism and trade unionism: discursive analysis in right-wing actors**

In what follows, I analyse the components of backlash politics that shape the discursive articulation of the Chilean right after the Social Outbreak. To do so, I present a discursive analysis composed of interviews with leaders and interventions and public material produced by the two parties mentioned above. The interviews, representing my primary qualitative data collection technique, were conducted in Santiago de Chile in late 2023.

To measure the discursive articulation, I examined two central components that right-wing parties maintain from the dictatorial legacy: authoritarianism and neoliberalism, which Martínez Mateo defines as the two political foundations of the 1980 Constitution (Martínez Mateo, 2021). Therefore, I focused my discursive analysis on one of the guiding principles of the Chilean right that combines these elements: Gremialism.

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Gremialismo is a movement formulated in the 1960s by the conservative academic of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC), Jaime Guzmán. It has an ideological structure influenced by Catholic nationalism and anti-communism (Santoni and Elgueta, 2018). It is aimed at the formation of guilds or so-called “intermediate bodies”, referring to various civil society entities represented in the family, businesses, think tanks, NGOs, religious institutions, political parties, etc., and advocates that the state should facilitate their proliferation and strengthening (Barros, 2000; Castro, 2022). Unionism has formed an ideological alliance with the neoliberal currents of the Chicago Boys, formalised in its first reference party, the UDI (Santoni and Elgueta, 2018; Tamayo, 2018). However, those who adhere to this movement are also in the Republican Party, following the flight of militants to that party.

The sense of defending the values of authoritarian neoliberalism is intensified in the ideological conception of trade unionism. For example, one of my interviewees, a former representative of the UDI in the constituent process, when asked about his motivations for participating in national politics, expressed strong ties to this ideological current:



*I had decided to join a political party shortly before the referendum with a group of unionists from the PUC. Until then, the thesis was still: Can the Constitution be saved, can the UDI be saved, or do we have to create a new party? José Antonio (Kast) was already leaving with the Republicans. Moreover, we said it could be solved, but let us try to unite this issue more (Interview with former UDI convention member, 2023).*

The previous paragraph shows us that unionism plays a fundamental role in a context where the Constitution's future will be discussed. The ideological motivations of its political actions are categorised as “gremializar”. That is to say, to represent the ideological bases of trade unionism in the party space and the constituent discussion.

Another example is the response given by a senior Republican Party youth leader. After mentioning the Social Outbreak as a turning point for his involvement in politics, when asked about the identities or values that motivate him to participate in his party, he comments:

*In order for me to dedicate myself to politics in the end, I believe certain feelings in the Movimiento Gremial are identifiable beyond one's position concerning that movement (...)I believe that in the Movimiento Gremial PUC, there is something that does not exist in any other right-wing grouping in Chile, which is very similar to what I see in left-wing movements or parties in our country. Someone who uses the flag declares himself loyal to his movement or party and is disciplined for the same reason. Moreover, that generates and has generated, I believe, that my case exists (Interview with national youth leader of the Republican Party, 2023).*

In the previous paragraph, this leader emphasises the relevance of trade unionism in his political motivations despite no longer being part of the UDI. Not only because this ideological current has inspired him to participate in politics but also because, after his guild formation, he assumes the defence of these values in any future political arena.

What is the relevance of two national leaders, one from the Republican Party and one from the UDI, mentioning the importance of unionism in their motivations? Unionisation is a central element in re-articulating the discourse of authoritarian neoliberalism. This is



because in the figure of Jaime Guzmán lies the central importance of the consolidation and expansion of the conservative neoliberal alliance in Chile (Moncada, 2018). In other words, the guild sentiment allows the radical defence of capitalism to be combined with a conservative perspective, hand in hand with an authoritarian understanding of politics, especially in the context of the constituent discussion.

The right's participation in the constituent process began not only with a minority in representation but also with a sense of defeat. As the former UDI convention member explains:

*We were very defeated. So, we said, let us try to work collaboratively. However, from day one, I would say that, above all, the UDI and Republicans, who were few but who were on our bench, said there was absolutely nothing to be done here (Interview with former UDI convention member, 2023)*

However, the interviewee accepts the need for a strategic reorientation in defence of the historical values of unionism. This would coincide with Republican visions:

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*That is where we make a strategic decision: stand up for what we believe in. Let's make it as bad as possible. We have to choose the bad between the bad and the very bad. Let us prepare ourselves so that this option is approved, and we can try to recover the country long-term. That was the thesis. Moreover, we started with that. We always defended our beliefs (Interview with former UDI convention member, 2023).*

The previous paragraph emphasises promoting an agenda oriented towards defending trade unionist principles but assuming that the constituent process would be lost. By the same logic, from the beginning of the Constituent Assembly discussion, the Republican Party emphasised that defending the 1980 Constitution meant protecting free market values. This is exemplified by Díaz et al. (2023) in their analysis of this party, showing how the guiding principles combine a conservative stance on the cultural axis with economic liberalism:

*(...) the defence of constitutional guarantees to prevent the State from invading the field of economic and social activity of individuals, and our defence and promotion of everyone's right to property because we are convinced that*



*private property, as a result of the exercise of personal freedom, constitutes one of the pillars of a truly free and responsible society (Republican Party Guiding Principles, quoted in Díaz et al., 2023).*

The expression of trade unionism as a re-articulation of authoritarian neoliberalism is exemplified in the above fragment, specifically in the defence of the autonomy of intermediate bodies to develop with economic freedom, in the subsidiarity of the state and in the defence of property rights. At the same time, the strong state presence to enable this freedom makes explicit the importance given to the defence of constitutional guarantees as the guiding thread of neoliberalism in the Republican Party's guiding principles. This notion of freedom goes hand in hand with denying the extension of social rights. The Right Against Rights manifests itself in the response of the Republican Party's youth leader when mentioning the priorities of political actors in the aftermath of the Outbreak:

*In Boric's government, two important projects, the 40-hour law and the minimum wage increase, can be found. We voted against issues just before the plebiscite, which some thought was political suicide. However, people still voted for us (...) I mean, a party that rejects the minimum wage increase, rejects the reduction of working hours two weeks before an election, and simultaneously has the most significant number of votes in Chile (...) Nobody is getting their priorities right and can do anything about it except us (Interview national youth leader Republican Party, 2023).*

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In the previous paragraph, the interviewee emphasises his pride in belonging to a party opposed to social welfare policies and still obtains good electoral results. The position of refusing the reduction of working hours and the rejection of the minimum wage increase shows a radicalised post-Brexit right-wing stance.

The re-articulated unionist discourse highlights the importance of the connection between conservative and traditionalist currents and neoliberal and subsidiarist thinking. Along these lines, Alenda et al. (2023) argue that there is a uniformity in the Chilean right wing that goes through "value conservatism" as support for the family, considered the primary cell of society; the "right balance" that the state should play to correct market errors; and "economic liberalism", characterised by its orthodoxy (Alenda et al., 2023, p.196). Being aware of the different sensibilities within the right wing, both during the dictatorship



and in democracy, the authors conclude that there are no substantial differences in these principles inherited from the dictatorship, but rather a remarkable homogeneity.

The same happens when analysing the Social Outbreak in the interviewees' responses and the documentary analysis. This critical moment becomes a gravitating element in forming the current right-wing identity and the authoritarian defence of the dictatorship's values (Díaz et al., 2023). Along these lines, since the Estallido, the right has focused on the problematisation of public order and violence alteration. For example, it proposed that the institutional solution agreed to overcome the crisis should include limits on social protest (Dávila, 2020).

This same prioritisation was evident in the 2021 presidential election, where Kast obtained a majority in the first round but lost to the progressive candidate Gabriel Boric in the run-off. Rovira Kaltwasser and Zanotti's (2022) analysis of the Republican Party's government program highlights the authoritarian proposals of a party with solid neoliberal values. For example, proposing "greater resources for the police forces and harsher penalties for criminals" along with "many mentions of a greater legitimisation of the role of the police" (Rovira Kaltwasser and Zanotti, 2022, p.7). This would strengthen the authoritarian axis, which calls for an orderly society and punishes those who transgress it with severe actions.

The prioritisation of authoritarian measures in a post-Social Outbreak context would remedy a so-called "Portalesian order". This concept, used independently by two interviewees, refers to the Chilean conservative ideologue Diego Portales (1793-1837), an essential reference point for authoritarian conservatism in Chile. Hence, the "Portalesian order" is linked to moments of social calm, respect for authority, and unification of visions between the political class and society (Correa Sutil, 2005; Cristi and Ruiz Schneider, 2015), which, for example, accompanied the neoliberal consensus prior to the Social Outbreak. Following this line, this prioritisation is evident in the response of the former UDI convention when commenting on his priorities for the country in a post-Social Outbreak scenario:

*Safety first. Everyone will give you the same answer. The situation is difficult in this area because crime and the public's perception of the same thing has increased. I feel that in Chile, there are places where the state is weak. That is to say, I don't believe in a big state with so much bureaucracy, but I do believe in a vital state in the sense of Portalean, in which the state enforces the law (Interview with former UDI convention member, 2023). en el que el Estado haga respetar la ley. (Entrevista ex convencional UDI, 2023)*



In the above excerpt, the interviewee emphasises that addressing the security problem requires a strong state that imposes order but does not expand into other spheres. It is essential to make this distinction, for when he states the need for a strong state in the “Portalean sense”, he follows the trade union logic of allowing a liberalisation of the economic aspects of life, along with a state authority that regulates the other aspects. After decisive junctures, priority is given to a discourse that prioritises the defence of principles linked to authoritarian neoliberalism.

This same line of argument was used independently by another UDI militant and member of the training area of the think tank linked to that party, the Jaime Guzmán Foundation (FJG). When asked about the causes and consequences of the Estallido Social, he answered how Chile’s ideological evolution meant a break with the Portalean consensus:

*This is directly linked to the fact that in Chile, the unity of vision, which perhaps existed at the beginning of the Republic and is very much reflected in the Portalean consensus, so to speak, is something that has been lost. I would say that between the conservative and liberal vision that existed in the 20th century, today we have many more, as many as there were posters in the social outburst. (Interview member FJG, 2023)*

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The Portalean consensus, which the FJG member mentions, would have a simile with the neoliberal consensus and the sense of normality prior to the Social Outbreak. This is exemplified in what he problematises as a proliferation of political currents different from those that shared power prior to the protests. Therefore, the ideological spread of different positions and leaderships is evaluated as a cause of the Social Outbreak and the break with the previous order and authority.

For Díaz et al. (2023), the authoritarian aspect is a central element in the Republican Party’s radical populist right-wing project. This discursive rearticulation is exemplified in Kast’s public speeches. From very early on, he positioned himself against the constituent process. Not only because he defended the legacy of the dictatorship and the 1980 Constitution but also because of his appeal to the use of authoritarian means to restore order. Díaz et al. (2023) identify that one day before the agreement was signed to hold the national referendum that would lead to the Convention, Kast tweeted:

*While politicians in Congress meet to distort democracy, extreme violence is unleashed on the streets, destroying everything. The rule of law and public order are out of control, and the government has not yet reacted (Kast, 2022, quoted in Díaz et al., 2023).*





In other words, from the beginning of the discussion on the new constitution, the discourse expresses a mobilisation against change, positioning order and security as antagonists of the constitutional discussion.

Another example is given on 4 September 2022, in Kast's speech celebrating the rejection of the proposal for a new Constitution by popular vote. In this speech, he emphasises how the constitutional process was linked to the loss of order, authority and neoliberal stability:

*That Convention tried inexplicably to re-found our beloved country, and today, with their vote, millions of Chileans have closed the door to this constituent process that has failed in less than a thousand days. The constituent process has brought insecurity, uncertainty, fights and poverty in less than a thousand days. Today, the common sense of the majority has prevailed over the ideology and violence of a few (Kast, 2022, on CNNChile Channel, 2022, 01m15s).*

Kast criticises the foundational character of the constituent process to draw a similarity between common sense and order and security as an antagonism to the defeated constituent proposal. In the discourse, he uses the resource that The Right Against Rights refers to as “moral panic”, understood as a right-wing backlash political tactic against the conquests of rights by social movements. This resource represents an attempt to create a sense of fear in society, arguing that conservative values are under attack. This is intended to create support among religious, conservative and far-right groups (Escoffier and Vivaldi, 2023, p.157; Payne, 2023). For example, by accusing the constituent process of bringing insecurity and poverty when the work of the Convention was not linked to public policies on security or the economy. The recourse to linking the common sense of voting against the proposal with the struggle against the ideology of violence of a few appeals to authoritarianism to combat the political and social changes discussed in the constituent process. Added to this is the parallel between the days that the process lasted and the thousand days that Salvador Allende's socialist government lasted (1970-1973).

The strategy of moral panic in Kast's victory speech also uses other resources associated with the symbolism constructed around the ideological representation of the constituent process. The re-foundation of Chile and the violation of cultural values are discursive codes that are intended to be associated with those who drafted and supported the failed constitutional project:

*After a profound process of moral, institutional and social disintegration that we have experienced in the last three years, we no longer want our flag to be sullied; we no longer want these offences against our families and our children by people who feel that they abhor what is our tradition, our culture (...) Moreover, that is where we have to go out to defend our homeland and values and rebuild what has been destroyed and lost in recent years (Kast, 2022, on CNNChile Channel, 2022, 2m48s)*

In the previous paragraph, the constituent process is accused of moral, institutional and social disintegration, as opposed to those who seek to defend Chile's values. By emphasising freedom and security, there is an intention to install the notion of authoritarian neoliberalism as common sense.

The criticism of right-wing leaders, both from the UDI and the Republican Party, is thus articulated with a discourse of longing for the previous order, intertwining the ideas of economic freedom and social conservatism. Thus, the defence of the 1980 Constitution is based on the containment of social innovations, appealing to a fear of their catastrophic consequences (Castro-Rea and Solano, 2023). Therefore, in the face of this uncertainty, the discourse is articulated to maintain the institutions inherited from the dictatorship and the social order that existed before the Social Outbreak.

## Concluding remarks

The discursive rearticulation of the Chilean right after the Social Outbreak adds Chile to the phenomenon of right-wing radicalisation in Latin America and globally. The particularity of this case is that the shift from programmatic and discursive moderation to more extreme positions is based on the defence of the values of Chile's authoritarian neoliberalism: unionism.

As the interviewees cited in this article point out, the progress of the progressive agendas and social movements that led to a break with the neoliberal consensus and the so-called 'Portalian order' generated a political context that favoured the proliferation of far-right ideas. Thus, the Republican Party and its top leader, José Antonio Kast, play a leading role in this *political backlash*, while the UDI tends to be attracted to this radicalisation.

The strategy of moral panic that this phenomenon fosters has been to generate a sense of distrust and horror at the possibility of changes to neoliberalism and its institutional pillar, the 1980 Constitution. This was demonstrated in analysing different speeches by leaders of the Republican Party and the UDI. These prioritise the construction of a rhetoric that runs counter to the demands made during the Social Outbreak and the constituent process. Finally, the right's discursive rearticulation has taken advantage of a discussion of national relevance to put forward a radicalised agenda in defence of national "principles", contributing to the discursive defence of authoritarian neoliberalism.

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