



[Referendum in Chile to Rewrite the Pinochet-Era Constitution Passes After Months of Protests](#)

Earlier this week, a referendum in Chile to replace the country's military dictatorship-era constitution with a new one passed by a significant margin, as an overwhelming 78% of participants voted in favor of the motion. Back in November of last year, Chilean President Sebastian Pinera agreed to hold the referendum after widespread nationwide protests, including in the capital city of Santiago. The vote was a central demand of the continuous demonstrations and had originally been scheduled to take place in April, but was postponed until this month because of the coronavirus pandemic. The historic referendum also allowed Chileans to decide the type of entity that would be tasked with drafting the new constitution, with the majority supporting the election of a body of 155 citizens as opposed to a mixed one consisting of both lawmakers and citizens. This constituent assembly is slated to be elected in April 2021, and its members will then work to put together a new constitution to be submitted to Chilean voters in 2022.

Chilean President Sebastian Pinera had initially agreed in November 2019 to hold the constitutional referendum after months of peaceful protests, but the coronavirus pandemic forced a delay until this month. Over a million Chileans had protested peacefully in Santiago and other cities across the country over rising inequality. The dictatorship-era constitution contributed to the rampant inequality by putting the private sector in control of health, education, housing, and pensions. The unrest started innocuously, with people upset about an increase on the metro fare. However, the protests soon grew to demand change throughout Chile's institutions. The overwhelming level of support for the referendum indicates the popularity of the proposed changes among Chileans.

After the constituent assembly to draft the new constitution is elected in April 2021, the focus will turn to what should be included in the new charter. Chileans have indicated that greater protections for the lower class should be a priority, as well as a declaration of universal basic rights such as education, healthcare, and housing. Since Chile's transition to democracy in 1990, critics of the previous constitution have argued that it was too focused on creating a market-friendly business environment at the expense of living conditions of ordinary Chileans. Chile is home to vast deposits of natural resources and a diverse economy, but the country is buried in foreign debt and public systems are in shambles. The new constitution has the potential to completely change Chile's economic and political landscape in favor of ordinary citizens.

Chileans view this week's referendum as finally closing the chapter of dictatorship in Chile. The previous constitution was written without public input, in an era of military rule and no freedom of expression. The high voter turnout and overwhelming majority of Chileans who voted to rewrite the constitution was a historic event for the country. The movement began with the peaceful protests over a year ago, and has culminated in the demands of the demonstrators being willingly met by the government. In this sense, the referendum and corresponding constitutional rewrite is an overwhelming victory for democracy in Chile.