

## **New Faces or the Same as Always? Profile of the Candidates for Chile's Constitutional Convention**

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Nearly eighty percent of Chileans voting in the October 25 plebiscite chose a constitutional convention, meaning a deliberative body comprised of everyday Chileans. The plebiscite sent a clear message: most Chileans want to replace General Augusto Pinochet's legacy with a new founding document, and they want new faces and new voices at the table. To ensure this inclusion, the constitutional convention will respect gender parity among both the candidates and the seated delegates, and reserves 17 of the 155 seats for indigenous peoples.

All delegates for the constitutional convention will be chosen via popular election. Yet observers and critics [have wondered](#) if this process will truly yield a body that brings in new faces, or whether the process will advantage the same political leaders and the same political parties as always. Chile arrived at this moment following months of paralyzing protests, disruptions in which many Chileans expressed their dissatisfaction with the traditional political class. The legitimacy of the constitutional convention depends on the assembly being seen as sufficiently diverse and inclusive, such that the traditional political elites cannot dominate the process.

Now that the electoral lists have been assembled and approved by Chile's election authority, known by Spanish acronym Servel, we can answer two critical questions. First, are the constitutional convention candidates actually fresh faces or are they the same politicians as usual? Do candidates' previous forays into electoral politics vary by seat type (reserved or not), gender, age, and party membership?

To answer these questions, we compared the 1,657 individuals who filed with SERVEL to run for the constitutional convention to a database of all individuals that ever sought elected office in Chile. Our database contains about 46,000 names, all of whom were previous candidates for at least one of the following offices: deputy or senator since 1989, municipal counselor since 1992, alcalde since 2004, and regional counselors since 2016.

An initial match revealed that 298 of the 1,657 constitutional convention candidates—18 percent—previously had sought elected office in Chile. While this match cannot tell us how prominent or powerful any individual is within their party or region, the match gives an initial picture of whether the constitutional convention candidates are new to electoral politics. Based on prior candidacy alone, a significant proportion of those seeking to write Chile's next constitution are not experienced politicians: about 80 percent are fresh faces, while about 20 percent are previous candidates.

## **About our data**

Our analysis uses the approved, rejected, and inadmissible candidates reported by SEVEL on January 23, 2021. Of the 1,657 candidates that filed to run, SERVEL approved 1,373: 1,191 candidates will stand for the constitutional convention in the non-reserved seats (“CC”) and 182 candidates will stand for indigenous peoples in the reserved seats (“CC-PI,” by its acronym in Spanish). The CC-PI candidates include both primary candidates and alternate candidates, so 182 candidates corresponds to 91 primary-alternate pairings.

Candidates ruled as rejected or inadmissible did have the opportunity to appeal, so these final numbers may change. However, for all of the analyses conducted below, we compared the candidates filed (the 1,657) to those approved (1,373) and found no notable differences in the results. Said another way, SERVEL’s denials did not vary systematically by previous candidacy, seat type, gender, age, or pact. For this reason, we report percentages for the approved candidates as of January 23.

## **Most candidates for the constitutional convention are new**

Of the 1,373 candidates whom SERVEL approved, 1,115—81 percent—have never stood for elected office before. The proportions do vary slightly by seat type, however. Among CC candidates, 82 percent are new, whereas among CC-PI candidates, that proportion drops to 76 percent for primary and alternative candidates together, and 70 percent for just primary candidates. The candidates for the reserved seats for indigenous peoples present fewer fresh faces relative to the candidates for the non-reserved tier.

The vast majority of both men and women are also first-time candidates, in both the CC and CC-PI tiers. However, within both the CC and the CC-PI groups, women are slightly more likely than men to lack prior candidate experience, and the differences between women and men are statistically significant at the 1 percent level. This outcome suggests the gender parity mechanism succeeded in drawing more women—who have never comprised more than one-quarter of the Chilean Congress—into the constitutional process.

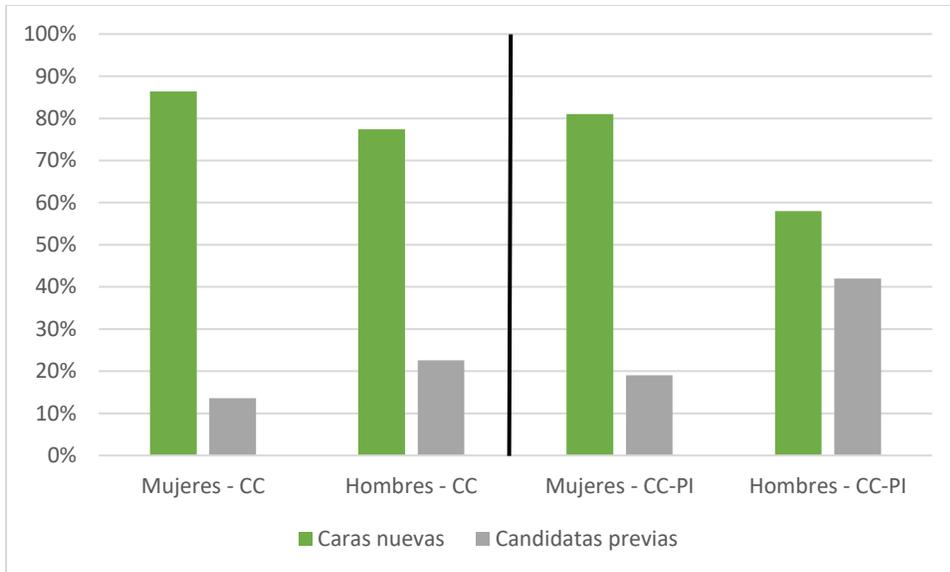


Figure 1. Candidates for the constitutional convention by tier, gender, and previous experience. *Note:* The figures for the CC-PI tier include only the primary candidates.

Figure 1 also reveals an important comparison between the CC and CC-PI candidates: despite the overall trend of newness, male CC-PI candidates have the fewest newcomers. The proportions of women newcomers are similar across the seat types: 86 percent of female CC candidates are new, and 81 percent of female CC-PI candidates are new. The proportions of male newcomers differ by about 20 percentage points, however: 77 percent of male CC candidates are new, compared to just 58 percent of male CC-PI candidates. In other words, 42 percent of men seeking reserved seats previously ran for elected office in Chile, compared to only 23 percent of men seeking the non-reserved seats.

### **Most candidates for the constitutional convention are not young—but they are still new**

Turning to candidates' age, most candidates are 40 years old or over. Few candidates are young: 44 percent of candidates are under 40 (39 or younger), and in the CC-PI tier, only 29 percent of the primary candidates are under 40. While these figures might disappoint those hoping to see the constitutional process attract more youth—especially among those contesting the reserved seats for indigenous peoples—the proportions are still relatively high. For example, the Inter-Parliamentary Union [reports](#) that only 15 percent of the world's parliamentarians are under 40, meaning that Chile's constitutional convention could match or exceed the global average by electing only a fraction of the young candidates.

Not surprisingly, the older candidates have an experience advantage, even though candidates both young and old are largely newcomers. Figure 2 shows this comparison. Of the younger candidates, 91 percent in the CC tier and 81 percent in the CC-PI tier are newcomers, and of the older candidates, 75 percent in the CC tier and 66 percent in the CC-PI tier are newcomers.

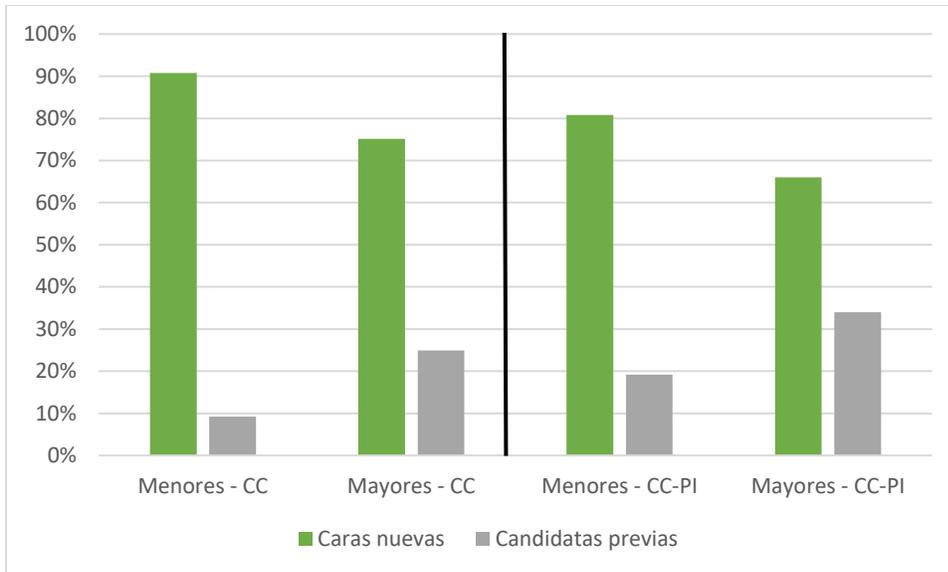


Figura 2. Candidates for the constitutional convention by tier age, and previous experience. *Note:* The figures for the CC-PI tier include only the primary candidates.

Looked at another way, older candidates who previously sought electoral office in Chile comprise 25 percent of CC-PI candidates, but just 15 percent of CC candidates. Yet age in the CC-PI tier advantages women: 55 percent of over-40 candidates for the reserved seats are women, compared to 48 percent of over-40 candidates for the non-reserved seats.

### Independents are also fresh faces

Political parties have some of the lowest approval ratings in Chile, with a reputation for entrenched and unresponsive leadership. As a result, many candidates have opted to run as independents, in order to shed the negative associations of the party label. Yet some independents have no party label but are still running on the candidate lists presented by the three major pacts: Apruebo Dignidad, Lista de Apruebo, and Vamos por Chile. We'll refer to these candidates as "independents in pacts." Other independents are running alone or joined to form their own candidate lists, creating independent lists not associated with Apruebo Dignidad, Lista de Apruebo, or Vamos por Chile. We'll refer to these pure independents as "independents without pacts." This analysis looks only at the CC tier, since candidates in the CC-PI tier are running on indigenous lists, with no party labels.

Together, the three major pacts are presenting 507 of the 1,191 candidates for the CC tier, about 42 percent of the total, with candidacies split evenly across the three pacts: Apruebo Dignidad and Lista del Apruebo are running 165 candidates each, and Vamos por Chile is running 177 candidates. Another 474 candidates are independents without pacts.

The first question is whether any major pact is disproportionately relying on independents relative to party members. The answer is no: independents in pacts comprise 54 percent of candidates presented by Apruebo Dignidad, 44 percent of candidates presented by Lista de

Apruebo, and 48 percent of the candidates presented by Vamos por Chile. The differences between the pacts are not statistically significant, despite this slight variation.

The second question is whether any of the pacts are disproportionately relying on experienced candidates, and again the answer is no. For all three pacts, about three-quarters of all candidates have never run before. Among the pacts' party candidates, about 61 percent are newcomers (with a high of 68 percent in Apruebo Dignidad and a low of 55 percent in Vamos por Chile, though the differences between the parties are not statistically significant). Among the independents in pacts, about 87 percent are newcomers (with a high of 90% in Vamos por Chile and 85% for both Apruebo Dignidad and Lista de Apruebo, but again the differences between the parties are not statistically significant). In other words, the main trend remains: most candidates are new. Independent candidates are especially likely to be new, and pacts appear to be recruiting newcomers and independents in roughly similar proportions.

Finally, we compared the independents in pacts to the independents without pacts, as shown in Figure 3. Eighty-seven percent of independent candidates—whether running in pacts or on their own—are newcomers, meaning they have never sought elected office in Chile before. A slightly higher proportion of newcomers are independents without pacts (92 percent) compared to independents in pacts (87 percent). However, the difference between the two types of independent candidates is just outside the threshold for statistical significance at 5 percent.

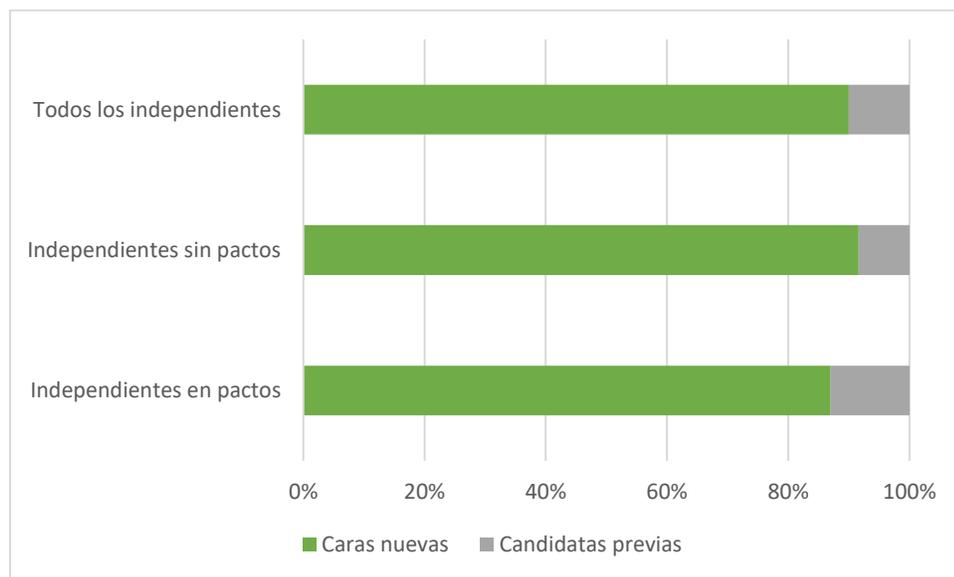


Figura 3. Independent candidates for the constitutional convention, comparing those without pacts and those within pacts. *Note:* Figure is for the CC tier only.

Finally, we did note one systematic difference when comparing independents in pacts to independents without pacts. On average, independents without pacts contain more younger contenders than independents in pacts: about 43 percent of the pure independents are under 40, compared to just 34 percent of the independents running with pacts, and this difference is statistically significant.

## New names on the ballot

The vast majority of Chilean voters have demanded a constitutional assembly with more diverse voices, desiring to see delegates who do not represent the traditional political class. By looking at which candidates for the *convención constituyente* previously ran for elected office before, this analysis shows that, so far, the process is working. Whether looking by seat type, gender, age, pact, or independent candidacy, the same trend appears: most candidates for the *convención constituyente* have never before sought an elected position.

True, candidates may be political insiders in other ways—they may have famous last names, or be longtime party members. Yet they are electoral newcomers nonetheless. When Chileans vote for their convention delegates on April 26, 2021, they can—if they still want to—choose new faces.

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This article uses data from the authors' investigation into the profile of Chile's candidates since the return to democracy. This article also contributes to the authors' ongoing analysis of inclusion and diversity in Chile's constitutional process, which most recently included a piece entitled "[Chile's Constitutional Moment](#)" published in the journal *Current History*.

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