

*The strong do what they can
and the weak suffer what they must.*
Thucydides

Introduction

The Chilean presidential election in 2025 meant much more than a clear electoral victory for José Antonio Kast, leader of the Republican Party and a central figure in Chile's conservative right wing, as it revealed a structural change in the axis of national politics. For the first time since the return to democracy in 1988, the division between supporters and opponents of Augusto Pinochet's military regime (1973–1990), which for more than three decades served as a fundamental divide in Chilean politics, has ceased to decisively shape electoral behaviour, and the territorial map of the vote has shown strong continuity with the 2022 constitutional plebiscite, when the proposed new constitution was rejected, rather than with the historical coordinates of the democratic transition¹. This highlights the emergence of a new axis of political conflict, restoration versus refoundation, which is not defined by the memory of the authoritarian regime, but by conflicting interpretations of the cycle that began in 2019, marked by social unrest, the crisis of institutional legitimacy and the constitutional process².

The 2025 presidential campaign clearly reflected this dichotomy. While Kast structured his discourse around the restoration of order, security and state capacity – the 'how' of restoring normality – centre-left candidate Jeannette Jara emphasised the content of pending social transformations – the 'what' to change. It is therefore particularly significant that none of the main candidates organised their narrative around the dictatorship-democracy axis, whose absence contrasts with its historical centrality for decades.

This change is evident not only in the behaviour of the electorate, but also in the positions taken by long-standing political leaders. Figures emblematic of the democratic transition, such as former President Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle—historically identified with opposition to the military regime and with the Chilean centre-left—have expressed support for or

¹ SERVEL (Chilean Electoral Service). Available at: <https://www.servel.cl/resultados-preliminares-eleccion-presidencial-y-parlamentarias-2025/>

Note: All hyperlinks are active as of 9 January 2026.

² ALTAMAN, D. "Restoration vs. refoundation: how the 2019–2023 cycle reconfigured the Chilean political conflict," *La Tercera*. 12/16/25. Available at: <https://www.latercera.com/opinion/noticia/el-nuevo-clivaje-de-la-politica-chilena/>

affinity with positions that are now associated with an agenda focused on order, security and institutional stability. In the past, when the division between supporters and opponents of the dictatorship structured political life, such positions would have been practically unthinkable. Their emergence on the current scene shows the extent to which the political references that guide the elites and public debate in Chile have changed.

This debate, far from being limited to the domestic sphere, has direct implications for the way the country projects itself in its regional environment and in the international system. The priorities that emerge from this reading—whether a greater emphasis on order, institutional stability and predictability, or a commitment to more profound structural transformations—will shape Chile's profile as a regional actor, its willingness to assume leadership roles and its degree of alignment or autonomy vis-à-vis other Latin American countries and the main extra-regional actors.

In an Ibero-American context characterised by political fragmentation, the weakening of integration mechanisms and growing competition between external powers³, the way in which Chile manages this new internal cycle will influence its ability to present itself as a reliable and predictable partner or, conversely, as a country absorbed by its domestic tensions.

Decisions on security, economic policy and foreign policy will be closely linked to this internal debate, with effects on Chile's position in the Southern Cone, in the Pacific Alliance and in its relationship with key actors such as the United States, China and the European Union⁴.

Understanding this connection between internal political dynamics and external projection is therefore essential for analysing the place Chile will occupy on the regional and international stage in the coming years.

Chile after the elections and its real margins for transformation

The results of the 2025 Chilean presidential elections could be interpreted in a broader context than strictly electoral. Chile enters this new political cycle after more than a

³ RUIZ-CAMACHO, Paula. "Integration or fragmentation? Latin America and the liberal order," *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, no. 139. April 2025, pp. 31–50. Available at: https://www.cidob.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/31-50_PAULA%20RUIZ%20CAMACHO.pdf

⁴ OECD Economic Surveys: Chile 2025. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-economic-surveys-chile-2025_efad96ce-en.html

decade of accumulating structural tensions—social, institutional, and economic—which manifested themselves with particular intensity following the social unrest of 2019 and the subsequent failed constitutional processes. This backdrop conditions both the significance of the right's victory and the new government's real margins for action.



Figure 1. José Antonio Kast celebrating his victory in the 2025 Chilean presidential elections.

Source: AFP / EITAN ABRAMOVICH.

In this context, José Antonio Kast's victory in the second round of the presidential election, with just over 58% of the valid votes, represents a significant political shift, but not necessarily a systemic break. The election result expresses, above all, a significant reaction by broad sectors of the electorate to the cycle that began in 2019, marked by the perception of deteriorating public order, insecurity, migratory pressure and prolonged institutional uncertainty⁵.

The reinstatement of compulsory voting, which significantly increased voter turnout, reinforces the formal legitimacy of the result, but also introduces greater heterogeneity into the voter profile, making linear ideological interpretations difficult⁶.

From the point of view of the balance of power, the new Chilean political landscape is characterised by a clear asymmetry between the executive and the legislature. Although conservative and right-wing forces have increased their parliamentary representation, the

⁵ CARO, Isabel. "Four keys to explaining Kast's resounding victory in Chile (and what they say about the challenges he faces)," *BBC Mundo*. 15/12/25. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/c4ge41lwqk4o>

⁶ LEAL, Christian. "Figures reveal how José Antonio Kast won the election thanks to compulsory voting," *BIOBIO Chile*. 28/12/25. Available at: <https://www.biobiochile.cl/noticias/nacional/chile/2025/12/28/cifras-revelan-como-jose-antonio-kast-gano-eleccion-gracias-al-voto-obligatorio.shtml>

resulting Congress remains fragmented and does not give the new government a sufficient majority to push through structural reforms without inter-party negotiation.

This fact is central to a geopolitical analysis, as it acts as an institutional containment mechanism that limits the possibility of significant changes in both domestic and foreign policy.

Beyond the change in the orientation of the executive branch, institutional continuities remain one of the defining features of the Chilean case. The architecture of the state—including the autonomy of the Central Bank, the fiscal framework, and the stability of the legal system—has shown remarkable resilience even in times of high social conflict. These continuities function as structural anchors that reduce the country's strategic volatility and reinforce its predictability as a regional and international actor.

On the economic front, the new government inherits a development model based on trade liberalisation, integration into global markets and heavy dependence on strategic sectors such as mining. Although political discourse may anticipate adjustments to certain public policies, macroeconomic constraints—moderate growth, dependence on external demand, fiscal discipline—limit the possibility of a profound reorientation of the Chilean economic model in the short and medium term⁷.

From a geopolitical perspective, this continuity consolidates Chile as a stable player in global value chains and a predictable partner for external actors.

In the social sphere, the new political cycle begins with a scenario marked less by active mobilisation than by accumulated social fatigue and a perceptible shift in citizens' priorities. The demands that emerged forcefully during the 2019 uprising have not disappeared. That massive uprising, which included peaceful demonstrations involving more than a million people in Santiago alone and spread throughout the country, highlighted deep fractures that had accumulated in Chilean society, not only due to the increase in tariffs or violence in the streets, but also as an expression of structural discontent regarding access to education, health care and pensions⁸.

After years of protest, two constitutional processes and consecutive political changes, some of the original social concerns seem to have been partially displaced in the public debate by immediate concerns associated with security, migration and law enforcement,

⁷ OECD Economic Surveys: Chile 2025. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-economic-surveys-chile-2025_efad96ce-en/full-report/macroeconomic-developments-and-policy-challenges_7984f8c6.html

⁸ "Social unrest in Chile: security, economic and political crisis, analysis of how structural unrest continues after 2019," *Political Dialogue*. 8/4/25. Available at: <https://dialogopolitico.org/agenda/analisis/malestar-social-chile>

which have gained prominence in public perception and in the priorities of political parties during and after the 2025 elections⁹. This shift in discourse reflects that, although structural causes remain relevant—as even the head of the United Nations regional human rights office acknowledges when he points out that deep inequalities persist—the everyday concerns of a significant part of the population have temporarily shifted towards demands related to security and public stability. This shift does not imply a resolution of underlying social conflicts, but rather a temporary reordering of the urgent issues perceived by large sectors of the population¹⁰.

The 2025 election result does not necessarily reflect explicit support for a coherent long-term ideological project. The victory of the right could be, in large part, the result of a combination of social anxiety, perceived insecurity, and the absence of a clearly articulated centrist alternative, rather than a clear ideological shift. Many voters, disconnected from traditional parties, seem to have prioritised stability, order, and concrete responses to everyday concerns—especially related to security—over a commitment to a classic right-wing political project. In this vein, experts at the David Rockefeller Centre for Latin American Studies (Harvard University) have described the recent Chilean electoral context as that of a "politically orphaned" society, in which large sectors of the electorate opt for alternatives that promise order and immediate answers in the absence of moderate leaders capable of articulating stable consensus¹¹.

From this perspective, the new government faces a society that is less mobilised than in previous years, but not necessarily more cohesive. Social tensions have not disappeared, but have changed in form and priorities in the public debate, now manifesting themselves more intensely in perceptions of insecurity, concerns about migration and a demand for effective responses from institutions to restore everyday order¹².

⁹ "The new political-cultural map in Chile shifts to the right and challenges progressivism, on security and migration priorities in the post-uprising context," *El País*. 28/10/25. Available at:

<https://elpais.com/chile/2025-10-28/el-nuevo-mapa-politico-cultural-en-chile-gira-a-la-derecha-y-desafia-al-progresismo.html>

¹⁰ CASTRO, M. "Chile marks five years since the social unrest with ongoing demands, but with other priorities," *El País*. 18/10/24. Available at: <https://elpais.com/chile/2024-10-18/chile-cumple-cinco-anos-del-estallido-social-con-demandas-vigentes-pero-con-otras-prioridades.htm>

¹¹ DAVID ROCKEFELLER CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES (DRCLAS), Harvard University. *Experts "Describe a Politically 'Homeless' Chile as Public Anxiety Shapes the Election."* 20/11/25. Available at: <https://www.drclas.harvard.edu/news/2025/11/experts-describe-politically-homeless-chile-public-anxiety-shapes-2025-election>

¹² ICISO-UDP survey (November 2025), Social Climate Series. Available at: <https://icso.udp.cl/encuesta-icso-udp-noviembre-2025-serie-clima-social-el-clima-antes-del-cierre>

This coexistence between unresolved social demands in their structural dimension and a political agenda focused on order is one of the main determinants of governance in the short and medium term. The emphasis on security and territorial control, which has dominated much of the public debate and campaign proposals, acts as a mechanism for containing social conflict; at the same time, it limits the Executive's scope for action to address wide-ranging reforms in areas such as social protection, inclusion or redistributive inequality¹³.

This prioritisation reflects not only the public perception that insecurity is an urgent problem, but also a cautious political response to social fragmentation and the volatility of demands.

Social climate surveys conducted shortly before the second round of the 2025 presidential election show that a significant portion of the population identifies crime and irregular immigration as the main problems facing the country, above other traditional demands such as education or inequality, which shows a shift in the issues that currently shape the political agenda¹⁴.

In addition to these restrictions, there is another decisive factor in understanding the effective limits of political change: the configuration of Chilean legislative power and its implications for governability. The Congress resulting from the 2025 elections has been clearly fragmented, with multiple political forces represented and none of them—either separately or in consolidated coalitions—achieving solid majorities in the legislative chambers. No bloc gained absolute control of the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate, which imposes a scenario of constant negotiation for the approval of key laws¹⁵.

This parliamentary fragmentation is a result of both the proportional electoral system and the dispersion of votes among various emerging forces and weakened traditional parties. These factors include the rise of groups such as the People's Party¹⁶, with an openly anti-party discourse focused on criticising traditional elites and promising direct representation of citizens, which achieved significant representation in the lower house.

¹³ OECD. *Closing social protection gaps in Chile*. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/expanding-social-protection-and-addressing-informality-in-latin-america_86c1fd38-en/full-report/closing-social-protection-gaps-in-chile_f05752ea.html

¹⁴ "What will Chilean citizens be most concerned about in 2025? Here's what three key surveys say," *Tenemos que hablar de Chile*. 12/8/25. Available at: <https://www.tenemosquehablardechile.cl/noticias/seguridad-inmigracion-corrupcion-principales-preocupaciones-ciudadania-chile-2025>

¹⁵ "The far right surges in Chile's legislature, but the opposition fails to win a majority," *EFE*. 17/11/25. Available at: <https://efe.com/mundo/2025-11-17/legislativas-chile-avance-ultraderecha/>

¹⁶ The People's Party (PDG) is a Chilean political group founded in 2019 by Franco Parisi, characterised by its strong citizen component, use of digital democracy and post-ideological populist discourse.

The presence of multiple coalitions and smaller groups forces the executive to interact with a wide range of actors, complicating the formation of automatic majorities and the stability of broad legislative agendas¹⁷.

In this context, the absence of its own majorities means that the incoming government does not have a homogeneous parliamentary bloc that automatically supports its legislative proposals. Although forces identified with the right and conservative sectors have gained a relative advantage, they often fail to muster the quorum needed to pass important initiatives without external support, and the figures show that reforms requiring qualified majorities will require negotiation with actors outside the main coalition¹⁸.

This parliamentary logic promotes a climate of need for specific and pragmatic agreements, where each bill must constitute a basis for individual negotiation with different parties depending on the issue, its political cost and its social impact.

This dynamic means that legislative policy tends towards the functional search for consensus on specific measures, rather than the imposition of a broad or ideologically cohesive programmatic agenda. For structural projects—such as changes to the pension system, profound tax reforms, or broad transformations in public policy—the lack of clear majorities means that the executive branch must invest political time in building broad support, which encourages gradual and defensive policy strategies aimed at tangible results in the short term but less ambitious in terms of systemic transformation.

Viewed in the global context, this variation means that Chile faces a cycle in which governability will depend both on the ability to negotiate minimal agreements with multiple intermediate forces and on the Executive's ability to modulate social and parliamentary expectations. The result is an operational logic geared more toward stability and incremental adjustments than toward profound reforms, in line with a citizen agenda focused on order and concrete responses rather than extensive ideological programmes. In short, this context suggests that Chile will maintain a profile of stability and predictability, with a predominantly pragmatic orientation, more inclined towards gradual adjustments than fundamental redefinitions of its regional and international positioning.

¹⁷ "2025 parliamentary elections: Congress in dispute with familiar faces and new strategies: Party changes, comebacks and legislative challenges," *Chile News*. 17/11/25. Available at:

<https://www.chilenews.cl/miradas/9294/2025-11-30/elecciones-parlamentarias-2025-congreso-chile-jara-kas>

¹⁸ DECIDECHILE by Unholster. "Parliamentary candidacies: Continuity and reconfiguration." Available at:

<https://www.decidechile.cl/analisis/presidenciales-y-parlamentarias-2025/candidaturas-parlamentarias-continuidad-y-reconfiguracion>

International direction and global strategy

Chile's international course after the 2025 elections must be framed within a changing world order, characterised by intensifying strategic competition between global powers, changes in international security priorities and the persistence of issues such as migration, regional governance and strategic resources¹⁹. These factors increasingly condition the foreign policy options of medium-sized countries such as Chile.

In terms of specific proposals, President-elect José Antonio Kast has outlined some policies that may directly or indirectly influence the country's international standing. During the campaign, Kast—who focused much of his discourse on security, order, and migration—expressed his support for the possibility of US-led international action to end Nicolás Maduro's regime in Venezuela, describing that government as a dictatorship and positioning himself in line with a regional strategy that favours confrontation with regimes considered authoritarian. Although Kast has indicated that Chile would not intervene directly, he has stated that "if someone else acts, it must be clear that a problem is being solved for all of Latin America," which places Chile in a position of political cooperation with external initiatives to put pressure on the Venezuelan regime²⁰.

At the same time, Kast has proposed measures related to the management of irregular migration, such as the creation of a "humanitarian corridor" to facilitate the return of irregular migrants to their countries of origin, especially Venezuelans, indicating a close relationship between domestic policy and external priorities in the design of public policies²¹. These proposals reflect an emphasis on issues that, although formulated from a domestic perspective, have external implications in the articulation of regional migration control agreements and cooperation with neighbouring and extra-regional countries.

In terms of the configuration of priority bilateral relations, Kast's first international visit after his election was to Argentina, where he anticipated a close relationship with President Javier Milei focused on regional security, the fight against organised crime and the promotion of joint investments, which anticipates the possibility of greater strategic

¹⁹ INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND. *World Economic Outlook 2024–2025*. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO>

²⁰ NDTV WORLD. "Chile President-Elect Calls For End To Venezuela's 'Dictatorship'". 17/12/25. Available at: <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/chile-president-elect-jose-antonio-kast-calls-for-end-to-venezuelas-dictatorship-under-nicolas-maduro-9828686>

²¹ SANHUEZA, A. M. "Kast negotiates with presidents of the region for a humanitarian corridor to return irregular migrants," *El País*. 17/12/25. Available at: <https://elpais.com/chile/2025-12-16/kast-gestiona-con-presidentes-de-la-region-un-corredor-humanitario-para-devolver-a-los-migrantes-irregulares.html>

coordination with ideologically aligned governments in the region²². This bilateral approach could open up opportunities for functional collaboration in areas such as border security and economic development, although it may also involve adjustments within the traditional frameworks of regional integration.

These statements and proposals anticipate a foreign policy approach that, while not breaking with historical trends—such as the commitment to international cooperation and diversification of relations—introduces nuances specific to the domestic priorities that characterised the election campaign.

This context conditions the starting point from which Chile's international behaviour will be evaluated in the coming years: a country that seeks to manage its bilateral and multilateral relations according to priorities perceived as strategic for its internal stability, albeit within previous structural frameworks and with no signs of abrupt reorientations in its principles of global integration.

In South America, the new executive's room for manoeuvre will be articulated in a regional context marked by greater ideological affinity with some governments, as we have been pointing out, particularly with Argentina under the presidency of Javier Milei. Kast has signalled his interest in deepening political and strategic coordination with like-minded governments, which could translate into greater cooperation on security, border control and the fight against organised crime. This could lead to Chile's possible incorporation into the 'Regional Bloc' promoted by the Argentine president 'to replicate the transnational coordination strategy historically used by the left in the region, represented by the São Paulo Forum'²³. However, this approach also reduces the space for equidistant diplomacy by anchoring part of Chile's foreign policy in specific political alignments within the region.

At the same time, the discourse of firmness and order promoted by the new executive coexists with an implicit recognition of the real limits of Chilean power. Kast's position on Venezuela reflects a strategy of external political support that preserves formal sovereignty but highlights the dependence on initiatives promoted by extra-regional

²² "Chile's president-elect meets Argentina's Milei, anticipates stronger bilateral cooperation," *EFE*. 16/12/25. Available at: <https://efe.com/en/latest-news/2025-12-16/kast-meets-milei-anticipates-a-bilateral-relationship>

²³ "Milei promotes a regional bloc of ten countries to counteract the left," *Instantáneas*. 2/1/26. Available at: <https://www.instantaneas.tic.bo/2026/01/02/internacional/milei-bloque-regional-conservador-paises/#:~:text=S%C3%A3o%20Paulo%20Forum%3A%20a%20platform%20that%20brings%20together%20left-wing%20political%20parties%20and%20movements%20from%20Latin%20America%20and%20the%20Caribbean%20to%20coordinate%20strategies%20and%20discuss%20common%20issues.%20It%20was%20created%20in%201990%20by%20the%20Brazilian%20Workers'%20Party%20as%20a%20space%20for%20dialogue%20and%20joint%20action%20in%20response%20to%20political%20and%20economic%20changes%20in%20the%20region.>

powers to address large-scale regional crises²⁴. Although he has focused his message on celebrating Maduro's arrest, he has not explicitly praised the US military intervention²⁵. This logic is likely to be projected into other areas of South American politics, where Chile will seek to exert influence without incurring high direct costs.

Within this landscape, the relationship with China is one of the main vectors for assessing the new Chilean government's real room for manoeuvre in foreign policy. No substantive changes are expected in the bilateral economic relationship, given China's central role as Chile's largest trading partner and the high degree of interdependence that exists²⁶. However, the executive's focus on order, control and governance opens the door to specific adjustments in the political management of the relationship, especially in areas considered strategically sensitive. In particular, a more cautious approach to foreign investment can be anticipated in sectors such as critical natural resources, strategic infrastructure and technologies with dual-use potential, where the discourse of sovereignty and national security takes on greater weight in the new political cycle. This approach does not imply a direct questioning of the relationship with Beijing, but rather a greater willingness to evaluate political and strategic costs beyond immediate economic benefits.

Likewise, the new government's stance towards authoritarian regimes and its ideological closeness to regional actors aligned with the United States may generate indirect discursive tensions with China, particularly in an international scenario marked by strategic competition between major powers. However, Chile's diplomatic tradition of avoiding rigid alignments and the need to preserve access to Asian markets suggest that these tensions will be expressed more in rhetoric than in disruptive foreign policy decisions.

Consequently, policy towards China will tend to develop under a logic of conditional continuity: maintaining economic and trade ties as a central pillar of international integration, combined with a more strategic reading of the risks associated with Chinese

²⁴ "José Antonio Kast affirms that Chile will support the US if it intervenes militarily in Venezuela," *La República*. 16/12/25. Available at: <https://larepublica.pe/mundo/2025/12/16/jose-antonio-kast-afirmo-que-chile-apoyara-a-ee-uu-si-llega-a-intervenir-militarmente-en-venezuela-1592224>

²⁵ LABORDE, A. "Boric and Kast clash over Trump's military attack on Venezuela," *El País*. 5/1/26. Available at: <https://elpais.com/chile/2026-01-05/boric-y-kast-chocan-por-el-ataque-militar-de-trump-a-venezuela.html>

²⁶ SUBREI. *Outlook for Chile's Foreign Trade and its Main Trading Partners* (January-June 2024). Available at: <https://www.subrei.gob.cl/>

projection in key areas²⁷. This balance reflects the new government's desire to strengthen internal stability without abruptly altering the structural foundations of Chilean foreign policy, opting for pragmatic and selective management of its relationship with Beijing²⁸.

This approach cannot be analysed in isolation, but rather as part of a broader reflection on Chile's strategic position in its immediate geographical environment and in the areas where it projects its international presence. Indeed, the management of the relationship with Beijing highlights a structural tension that runs through the new government's foreign policy: the aspiration to strengthen the country's own decision-making capacity, in the face of the real limits imposed by both its insertion in the Pacific and its membership of the South American space. Before addressing the relationship with the United States—a central player in the hemispheric and global architecture—it is necessary to examine how the executive branch conceives Chile's role in these two areas, and to what extent its emphasis on security, order and sovereignty translates into greater decision-making capacity or, on the contrary, into autonomy conditioned by economic dependencies, regional alignments and power asymmetries.

The future Kast government, which will take office in March 2026, proposes a foreign policy in which strategic autonomy is understood as a means to support its domestic priorities—security, immigration control, and economic stability—rather than as an end in itself²⁹. This view will directly influence how Chile relates to the Pacific and South America, as its scope for decision-making will be limited by structural factors and the need to collaborate with other actors.

In the Pacific region, the new executive will seek to maintain an active position that reinforces Chile's profile as a platform connecting South America and Asia-Pacific, albeit with a more selective approach. Initiatives such as the Humboldt submarine cable, which is scheduled to come into operation this year, are not only economically but also strategically important, as they position Chile as a regional digital hub³⁰. However, the

²⁷ CHILEAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. Bilateral Relations. *Chile Abroad (China)*. Available at: <https://www.chile.gob.cl/>

²⁸ "Chile strengthens its foreign trade: record exports in the first four months of 2025," *Interborders*. 10/6/25. Available at: <https://interborders.com/actualidad-mundial/chile-fortalece-su-comercio-exterior-record-de-exportaciones-en-el-primer-cuatrimestre-2025>

²⁹ MISRAJI & BEJAR ABOGADOS. "Government proposals by José Antonio Karst (2026–2030)." 18/12/25. Available at: <https://www.mba.legal/post/propuestas-de-gobierno-de-jos%C3%A9-antonio-kast-2026-2030>

³⁰ JEREZ, S. "What will the Humboldt cable be like? The 17 mm fibre optic cable that will connect Chile with Asia and Oceania", *Bio Bio Chile*. 11/6/25. Available at: <https://www.biobiochile.cl/noticias/ciencia-y-tecnologia/pc-e->

government's emphasis on sovereignty and security anticipates a stricter review of such projects, especially with regard to the participation of foreign actors and the control of critical infrastructure, which introduces practical limits to Chile's autonomy in the Pacific. Overall, Chile's strategic autonomy under the new government appears to be conditional: greater assertiveness in discourse and political selectivity, but within limits defined by regional interdependence, geopolitical competition in the Pacific and the need for cooperation with more influential actors. The central challenge for the executive branch will be to turn this limited autonomy into a functional and strategic tool that reinforces internal stability without eroding Chile's ability to operate effectively in its immediate environment and in strategic areas of the Pacific.

The United States: a key ally in a context of order and security

In light of the above, this scenario presents Chile with a central dilemma for its foreign policy in the coming years: how to reconcile a domestic agenda focused on order and stability with a regional and trans-Pacific environment increasingly marked by competition between major powers and security dynamics that exceed its capacity to control. It is precisely at this point that the relationship with the United States takes on a coordinating role, not only as a bilateral link, but also as an inevitable reference point for understanding the limits and possibilities of Chile's international strategy in the new political cycle.

Washington's early diplomatic response to Kast's victory is a clear indicator of this centrality. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio congratulated the president-elect and expressed his willingness to work closely with his administration to strengthen regional security and revitalise the bilateral trade relationship in the face of shared priorities such as controlling illegal immigration and public security³¹. Consistently, other representatives of the US government—such as the Secretary of the Treasury—celebrated Kast's victory, pointing to the possibility of strengthening cooperation on issues of order, growth, and stability³².

[internet/2025/06/11/como-sera-el-cable-de-humboldt-la-fibra-optica-de-solo-17-mm-que-conectara-chile-con-asia-y-oceania.shtm](https://www.ieee.es/instituto/2025/06/11/como-sera-el-cable-de-humboldt-la-fibra-optica-de-solo-17-mm-que-conectara-chile-con-asia-y-oceania.shtm)

³¹ "Rubio congratulated Kast on his victory in the presidential elections: 'The United States looks forward to working with his administration'," *CNN Chile*. 14/12/25. Available at: https://www.cnnchile.com/pais/rubio-felicito-a-kast-por-triunfo-en-las-presidenciales-estados-unidos-espera-colaborar-con-su-administracion_20251214/

³² CARRIZO, E. "US Treasury Secretary celebrates Kast's victory: 'Chile has categorically rejected the failures of communism'," *La Tercera*. 15/12/25. Available at: <https://www.msn.com/es-cl/pol%C3%ADtica/gobierno/secretario-del-tesoro-de-ee-uu-celebra-victoria-de-kast-chile-ha-rechazado-rotundamente-los-fracasos-del-comunismo/ar-AA1Sp338>

This joint discourse of congratulations and opening channels of dialogue suggests that Chile's new administration will enter a phase of significant political cooperation with the United States, especially in the areas of security, migration and trade. The pre-election meeting between Kast and the US ambassador in Santiago also anticipates this pattern, with the promise to "promote practical cooperation" between the two governments on security, growth and innovation, with respect for democratic institutions³³.

The interaction between Chile and the United States will not be limited to diplomatic gestures or declarations of goodwill. Since last year, the Donald Trump administration has adopted a markedly more assertive foreign policy in Latin America, the most critical point of which has been, for the moment, the military operation in Venezuela that ended with the capture of Nicolás Maduro in Caracas and his subsequent transfer to New York



to face federal charges of narco-terrorism and conspiracy linked to drug trafficking. The position of President-elect José Antonio Kast has been explicit from the outset, as we have already pointed out; however, he has specified that Chile would not participate with military means due to its limited capabilities and because the resolution of the Venezuelan conflict "does not directly concern" the country³⁴.

This type of position—political support for Washington's actions without direct participation—is a clear example of the conditional autonomy that Chile will seek to exercise: alignment with certain US foreign policy objectives, such as pressure on regimes considered authoritarian, without committing its own resources to high-risk operations. The recent US military operation in Venezuela has generated intense debate in multilateral forums and prompted immediate reactions from neighbouring governments and regional organisations. Several Latin American countries denounced the action as "military aggression" and called for urgent meetings of bodies such as the OAS (Organisation of American States) and the UN to assess its legality and regional

³³ "US Ambassador meets with Kast and assures: We will continue to promote cooperation with Chile," *La Tercera*. 4/12/25. Available at: <https://www.latercera.com/politica/noticia/embajador-de-eeuu-se-reune-con-kast-y-asegura-seguiremos-impulsando-una-cooperacion-con-chile/>

³⁴ "Kast confirms support for US intervention in Venezuela: 'It will have our support'," *El Periodista*. 17/12/25. Available at: <https://www.elperiodista.cl/2025/12/kast-ratifica-respaldo-de-intervencion-de-usa-a-venezuela-va-a-contar-con-nuestro-apoyo/>

implications³⁵. These responses reinforce the idea that Washington not only acts as a de facto partner in hemispheric security matters, but also as an actor whose decisions reshape the region's regulatory and political frameworks³⁶.

Beyond specific cases such as Venezuela, the Trump administration's global break with multilateral approaches and its emphasis on national interests coincides with Kast's programmatic emphasis on security, order and sovereignty.

In the area of regional security, cooperation with the United States could intensify in areas such as intelligence, border control, combating drug trafficking and organised crime, especially in the Southern Cone and in the flows connecting South America with global illicit routes. These areas fit directly with Kast's domestic agenda of order and control and allow for the strengthening of state capacities without altering the fundamentals of Chilean foreign policy. However, this strengthening of security cooperation also deepens dependence on frameworks and capabilities driven by Washington, which introduces clear limits to the aspiration for full strategic autonomy.

In economic and trade terms, no drastic changes are expected in the relationship with the United States, but rather a political revaluation of the link. Although China will remain Chile's main trading partner, the United States continues to play a key role as an investor, technological partner and relevant actor in strategic sectors. The new government could favour greater regulatory and political convergence with Washington in areas such as critical infrastructure, sensitive technologies and supply chains, in line with an increasingly prevalent view of economic security in US policy. This approach, however, will force Chile to carefully manage its balance with China to prevent political rapprochement with the United States from leading to unwanted economic tensions, especially considering China's growing economic and strategic presence in Latin America³⁷.

This creates a framework of simultaneous opportunities and tensions: on the one hand, the possibility of articulating shared agendas on security and the economy; on the other, the risk that an overly close relationship with Washington will reduce Chile's ability to manage strategic ties with other major global players.

³⁵ "Global reactions to US bombing of Venezuela," *El País*. 3/1/26. Available at: <https://elpais.com/internacional/2026-01-03/las-reacciones-al-bombardeo-de-venezuela-en-el-mundo.html>

³⁶ "The US attack on Venezuela on 3 January 2026: official reactions from Latin American states," *Pressenza*. 4/1/26. Available at: <https://www.pressenza.com/es/2026/01/el-ataque-de-estados-unidos-a-venezuela-del-3-de-enero-del-2026-a-proposito-de-las-reacciones-oficiales-de-estados-de-america-latina/>

³⁷ "China consolidates its economic presence in Latin America amid friction with the United States," *Forbes*. 29/12/25. Available at: <https://forbes.cl/negocios/2025-12-29/china-consolida-su-presencia-economica-en-latinoamerica-entre-fricciones-con-estados-unidos>

Indeed, cooperation with the United States on security and migration can strengthen Chilean state capacities in areas of interest, but it also forces Santiago to carefully navigate the balance between pragmatic alignment and preserving its strategic autonomy. The key for the Kast government will be to maximise the benefits of the relationship with Washington without making it an absolute condition for its international projection, especially in a hemisphere where power asymmetries remain profound and the decisions of a single power can redraw entire regional scenarios.

Conclusion

The outlook for Chile after the 2025 elections shows a country that has reorganised its internal political coordinates and, at the same time, will have to redefine its position in an increasingly competitive international environment. The overcoming of old divisions, inherited from the transition, has given way to a more contemporary dispute between projects that seek to restore institutional stability and others that aspire to resume profound transformations. This new dynamic is not transitory: it anticipates a prolonged cycle in which governance will depend on the state's ability to manage tensions rather than resolve them definitively.

Parliamentary fragmentation and the heterogeneity of the electorate will force the executive branch to move forward through specific agreements and gradual strategies. This scenario suggests that Chile will move towards a model of incremental governance, where stability will be sustained by the ability to articulate minimal consensus and the prudence not to overload a political system that still bears the scars of the fractures that have been open since 2019. In this context, it will be crucial for the government to manage citizens' expectations realistically, clearly explaining the structural limits of the system and prioritising policies with a tangible impact on security, public services and social protection, in order to avoid cycles of frustration that could reactivate latent tensions.

In foreign policy, Chile will have to navigate an international environment marked by growing rivalry between the United States and China. Political alignment with Washington on security and governance issues, visible for example in its stance on Venezuela, will coexist with the need to preserve an essential economic and human link with Beijing. This duality requires a delicate balancing act: maintaining cooperation with the United States in areas such as critical infrastructure, sensitive technologies and supply chains, without compromising economic autonomy or damaging relations with China. To this end, it will

be necessary to strengthen diplomatic channels with both powers, diversify

strategic suppliers and strengthen national capabilities in cybersecurity, energy and critical infrastructure protection, so that Chile can better absorb external pressures without becoming caught up in rivalries.

At the regional level, ideological alignment with governments such as Argentina's opens up opportunities for coordination on border security and the fight against organised crime, but it can also generate tensions with other South American countries and weakened multilateral mechanisms. In this scenario, Chile must avoid allowing the security agenda to lead to unnecessary friction and, at the same time, take advantage of opportunities for functional cooperation that allow for concrete results. The region offers few opportunities for large integration projects, but it does offer opportunities for specific initiatives in migration, territorial control, and economic governance, where Chile can play a useful role if it acts pragmatically and avoids overstating its capabilities.

Looking ahead, institutional stability will remain one of the country's main strategic assets, but it will not be enough on its own to sustain internal cohesion and international relevance. Chile will need a niche foreign policy, focused on areas where it has comparative advantages—clean energy, strategic mining, regulatory standards, ocean governance—and a domestic policy capable of reducing social tensions without generating expectations of immediate transformation. The key will be to combine internal order, economic prudence and diplomatic flexibility so that the country can adapt to a rapidly changing global environment without sacrificing its autonomy.

In short, Chile is entering a period where governance will depend on managing tensions rather than resolving them, and where foreign policy will be a limited but crucial area of manoeuvre for preserving stability and autonomy. The central challenge will be to simultaneously maintain internal cohesion, economic competitiveness and international relevance in a world that offers less and less space for neutral positions. The success of this effort will depend on the country's ability to anticipate risks, strengthen its strategic capabilities, and act pragmatically in an environment where uncertainty will be the norm rather than the exception.

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