

Enfranchising Migrants in Chile: A Century of Politics, Elites, and Regime Changes

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This is the final accepted version of the publication in JEMS. Please cite this article as:

Victoria Finn (2023): Enfranchising Migrants in Chile: A century of politics, elites, and regime changes. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2182714>

Abstract

Enfranchising migrants into the demos is a growing global trend, not exclusive to democracy. Analyzing a country that has expanded migrant suffrage in both democracy and dictatorship, I address how and why Chile became one of the most inclusive countries worldwide for migrant voting rights. Chile was a pioneer for enacting select *immigrant* suffrage rights in relative democracy in 1925, expanded the rights in 1980 during dictatorship, then was a latecomer for granting *emigrant* voting rights in liberal democracy in 2014. Stepping away from analyzing enfranchisement in consolidated democracies in the ‘Global North’, I unpack almost a century of elite-led top-down politics in Chile through historical analysis and taking 1980 enfranchisement as an extreme case. The evidence comes from constitutional laws, transcribed debates from constitutional commission sessions, scholarly literature, national censuses, and electoral data. The findings reveal the durability of migrant voting rights and a normative path dependence of who belongs as voters. Inclusivity requires not only continued implementation in elections but also rights survival through shifting ideology and political regime types.

Keywords migrant enfranchisement process, top-down suffrage, political elites, migrant voting rights, legislative historical analysis, Chile

Introduction

Granting voting rights to migrants—i.e., enfranchising foreign residents and nonresident nationals—appears as a phenomenon full of contemporary democratic ideals, but instead can emerge within a lengthy dynamic process of defining who belongs to the political community. The voter inclusion-exclusion debate has included race, gender, property, morals, intellect, physical wellness, as well as residence and nationality. Enfranchising immigrants means adopting nationality is no longer required for voting, whereas enfranchising emigrants eliminates residency as a requirement (see Caramani & Grotz, 2015; Collyer, 2014). Extending migrant suffrage has occurred under various political regimes (Brand, 2010; Escobar, 2015; Umpierrez de Reguero, Yener-Roderburg, & Cartagena, 2021; Wellman, 2021), meaning rights can be introduced, implemented, and survive during nondemocratic periods.

The role of different political regimes—beyond consolidated Western democracies—merits study since domestic contexts and politics offer alternative explanations for migrant enfranchisement, beyond contemporary democratic or norms diffusion (Umpierrez de Reguero, Finn, & Peltoniemi, this issue). Such lessons appear in Latin America since countries in the region have experienced the full spectrum of political regimes between democracy and nondemocracy, as well as offer widespread migrant suffrage rights (Escobar, 2015, 2017). Aligned with both the aim of this Special Issue and my prior work (Finn, 2020a, 2021), I apply an immigrant-emigrant lens to this study by examining Chile, one of the most inclusive demos worldwide for immigrant suffrage (Bauböck, 2005; Schmid, Piccoli, & Arrighi, 2019). Such a lens is relevant in a within-case comparative study because inclusiveness affects the notion of democracy and how contemporary citizenship practices unfold within the same country over time.

In South America, regarding *immigrant* voting rights, Chile, Ecuador, and Uruguay are among the most inclusive worldwide, along with Malawi and New Zealand (Altman, Huertas, & Sánchez, this issue; Arrighi & Bauböck, 2017; Barker & McMillan, 2014). While Uruguay has rigid eligibility requirements, including a 15-year residence (Margheritis, 2022; Stuhldreher, 2012), Chile and Ecuador extend voting rights after only a five-year residence to adult foreign residents, regardless of nationality, in local and national elections; they also offer suffrage to nationals abroad in national-level elections (Arrighi & Bauböck, 2017; Finn, 2020b). The countries have different tracks of migrant enfranchisement and rights survival, but I select Chile since the process unfolded over a whopping 92 years and endured more extreme political regimes changes.

How and why did Chile become one of the most inclusive countries worldwide for migrant voting rights? Chile enacted select immigrant voting rights in 1925 (making it a global pioneer), expanded the rights during a military dictatorship in the 1980 Constitution, and then enacted emigrant voting rights

in 2014, applying them for the first time in 2017 (making it a latecomer). The comparative historical analysis finds new evidence regarding the reasons and underlying processes of why states politically incorporate migrants. Post-implementation, the process continues; in 2022 when reviewing its 40-year-old constitution, Chile discussed migrant suffrage but left it untouched; regardless, the draft was rejected in a national referendum. Rights survival will surface again when the country starts another constitutional review process.

The following section fits the present analysis into the migrant enfranchisement literature, worldwide then in South America. Section II elaborates on the case, method, and data. Section III outlines Chile's 92-year migrant enfranchisement process. Section IV discusses the major takeaways, followed by the conclusion.

I. Migrant Enfranchisement: Trends, Reasons, and Timing

Extending suffrage rights to migrants is a growing worldwide trend: over 130 countries allow some form of overseas voting (Umpierrez de Reguero, 2022; Wellman, 2021; Wellman, Allen, & Nyblade, 2022) and around 50 countries allow foreign resident voting (Escobar, 2015; GLOBALCIT, 2019). Enfranchisement requires a country to pass, regulate, and apply voting rights—meaning enshrining migrant suffrage rights in law, creating regulatory steps (e.g., electoral laws) to access voting rights, and implementing rights, marked by the first time the new group of migrant voters can cast a ballot in an election (Palop-García & Pedroza, 2019). The inclusion of immigrants and emigrants can occur in similar ways, and it changes the (democratic) inclusiveness of a demos; thereafter, it influences the voter turnout of both groups, in turn affecting electoral outcomes. Nonetheless, analyses and databases tend to separate immigrant and emigrant rights (Umpierrez de Reguero et al., this issue), a disconnect that I attempt to link in the present article.

There are two overarching alternatives for extending suffrage: a bottom-up or top-down approach. The first stems from migrant communities demanding voting rights, such as movements in Spain (in 2006) and Buenos Aires (2011) for local-level voting, or through other ways of exercising agency (Wegschaidt, this issue); however, in Latin America, most immigrants did not make such demands (Escobar, 2015). The second approach is when states incorporate migrants into the electorate, e.g., via electoral reform or constitutional change, despite migrants' role in petitioning this right. Top-down enfranchisement can happen at the supranational level, e.g., the 1992 Maastricht Treaty requires European Union (EU) requires member states to grant local-level suffrage to EU nationals living in the territory, although timing and implementation have varied.

States can tweak laws and application, for instance, deciding to enact but not implement migrant voting rights (Palop-García & Pedroza, 2019; Umpierrez de Reguero, this issue), implement but restrict rights (Chang & Pedroza, 2020; Finn & Besserer Rayas, 2022; Hutcheson & Arrighi, 2015; Wellman & Whitaker, 2021), implement rights but then reverse them (Hayduk, 2006; Wellman, 2021), or continue to implement or expand rights, as in Chile (Finn, 2020a). Migrant voting rights greatly vary since countries often restrict rights to select migrant groups or election types, e.g., local, regional, national, or a combination (Arrighi & Lafleur, 2019; Bauböck, 2005; Escobar, 2017; Pedroza, 2019; Piccoli, 2021).

There are many motives to enfranchise migrants: normative reasons revolve around selecting those subject to a government and its laws, affected by a state's decisions, or who are stakeholders (e.g., Bauböck, 2005; Earnest, 2006; Owen, 2012; Umpierrez de Reguero et al., this issue). Beckman (2007) highlights 'universal' suffrage still excludes minors, felons, the intellectually disabled, and migrants. Other country-level reasons for incorporating immigrants involve sharing an imperial past, prior political authority, or cultural or linguistic affinity (Bauböck, 2005; Pedroza, 2019). Immigration size can also be a reason to extend or withhold suffrage rights (Caramani & Grotz, 2015; Lafleur, 2015). States may aim to politically 'integrate' immigrants for electoral support (Mollenkopf, 2013) or (re)establish ties with emigrants, e.g., symbolically or for remittances (Burgess, 2018; Collyer, 2014; Wellman & Whitaker, 2021).

Contrary to contemporary ideas that democratic ideals underlie suffrage rights, other regimes have enfranchised migrants (Brand, 2006; Caramani & Grotz, 2015; Collyer, 2014; Escobar, 2015). Authoritarian states, and non-state actors within them, connect with the diaspora for various motives (see, e.g., Adamson, 2020; Tsourapas, 2020); even democracies may be indifferent or create negative policies toward emigrants (Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2019). While withholding rights may not be undemocratic, granting migrant voting rights is more democratic (Pedroza, 2015), but does not occur only in democracies. Democratization can relate to migrant enfranchisement—including in Latin America and the Caribbean (Pedroza & Palop-García, 2017)—especially within a 'window of opportunity' following a democratic transition and because of global norms diffusion (Erlingsson & Tuman, 2017; Lafleur, 2015; Rhodes & Harutyunyan, 2010; Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015). The global-norm hypothesis proposes that international standards permeate outwards, affecting other states' enfranchisement decisions—but fails to explain the pioneers, such as Chile.

Timing proves critical in the enfranchisement process (see Kayran & Erdilmen, 2020). Except Suriname, the other 11 South American countries grant different types and levels of migrant suffrage,

which occurred in different periods (GLOBALCIT, 2019). The region comprises migrant suffrage rights pioneers dating to *immigrant* voting in local-level elections in Buenos Aires in 1917, locally in Chile in 1925, and in multilevel elections in Uruguay in 1934 (Escobar, 2015, 2017; Altman et al., this issue).

Escobar (2015) identifies two main waves of immigrant enfranchisement: first from the early 1900s to the 1980s when “strongmen” in (non)democratic settings and second in the 1990s onwards, when mostly left-leaning governments granted migrant voting rights; the exceptions are Peru in 1997 under strongman Fujimori and Chile in 1925 since it occurred in democracy. The later trend extends globally since the 1980s for democracies, with left-wing parties tending to accelerate the timing of enacting immigrant suffrage while right-wing parties tend to stall it (Kayran & Erdilmen, 2020). However, earlier in Latin American ‘strongman’ periods, regimes were more often *right*-wing and granted rights to obtain symbolic support, legitimacy, or increase turnout (even in fraudulent elections), meaning most factors were domestic (Escobar, 2015). Such strongmen are not unusual in the region, even in democracy. Chile is no exception, given its hyperpresidentialist constitution favoring a stronger executive power over the legislative branch, including for migration laws and policy (Acosta, 2018; Siavelis, 2002). As Escobar (2015) argues, nationalist reasons spurred the first wave, while international factors affected the second wave, reflecting globalization, international agreements on human rights, the notion of ‘universal citizenship,’ and hope for reciprocity, as well as positioning migrant enfranchisement as a step toward regional market integration.

II. Case, Method, and Data

Chile became one of the most inclusive countries worldwide for migrant voting rights (Altman et al., this issue) through a process between 1925 and 1988 for immigrants then 2014 to 2017 for emigrants (see Table 1). I conduct a comparative historical analysis on these timeframes, using 1980 Chile as an extreme case of migrant enfranchisement (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). The case selection maximizes the variance on the dimension of interest: comparing enfranchisement under (non)democratic regimes, given Chile’s unusual circumstances of having initially granted rights in relative democracy (as a global pioneer), expanded them in dictatorship, then again in liberal democracy (as a global latecomer).

For the pioneer phase in the 1920s and 1930s, I analyze constitutional laws and reforms, transcribed debates from constitutional commission sessions, newspaper articles, and scholarly literature. My aim is to find evidence on the politics behind immigrant enfranchisement and the role

of political elites in the process. At that time, Chile's 1833 Constitution was active, thus a review commission was tasked with suggesting changes to form the eventual 1925 Constitution. Relevant for this analysis is the new Article 104 in the 1925 Constitution since it enacted local-level suffrage for select immigrants in Chile (see Table 1). The commission's transcribed debates are digitally available on Chile's Library of the National Congress website (Ministerio del Interior, 1925) in the document, 'The Official Acts of the Commission and Subcommissions' Sessions in Charge of Analyzing the Project of the New Political Constitution of the Republic.' After a keyword search in newspapers about enfranchising foreign residents from 1924 and 1925 in Chile's National Digital Library brought no results, I turned to contemporary newspaper articles relating to the 1920s political and economic situations. To further clarify my analysis, I also interviewed Dr. Prof. René Millar Carvacho on August 26, 2020—a well-known historian and author of the 1981 book, *La elección presidencial de 1920* (The 1920 Presidential Election). Our conversation, recorded and transcribed in Spanish, covered the political scene in Chile in the late 1800s through the 1930s and focused on the political career of Arturo Alessandri Palma, twice president of Chile.

For the case study of extending immigrant rights in 1980 from local to national elections, I analyze transcribed dialog from the Ortúzar Commission in 1974—officially called, 'The Commission of Studies for the New Political Constitution of the Republic of Chile'. The members discussed the nationality and citizenship articles in Chile's 1925 Constitution, to make suggestions for the 1980 Constitution. The discussions are recorded and available online within the *Historia de la Ley* (2005) of Article 14 of the Republic of Chile's Political Constitution of 1980, prepared by the National Congressional Library, the Supreme Court, and the General Accounting Office. To analyze the country context, enfranchisement process, and laws, I also use academic references and Articles 12 and 14 from the 1980 Constitution. I further support my arguments with data from Chile's national censuses since 1875, the National Institute for Statistics (INE), and the Electoral Service (Servel).

III. Chile's 92-Year Road to Enfranchising Immigrants and Emigrants

Chile used top-down approaches over a span of 92 years, from 1925 to 2017, to enfranchise both immigrants and emigrants (see Table 1). Five-year residence is the only constitutional requirement specific to foreign residents to vote in Chile, in addition to meeting standard voting requirements (i.e., a clean criminal record and at least 18 years old, which was previously restricted to literate men 21 years and older).

Table 1 Milestones in Chile Enfranchising Immigrants and Emigrants

Year	Action	Enfranchisement Step Description
1925	Review	Subcommission reviews 1833 Constitution
1925	Enact	Article 104 of the 1925 Constitution enacts immigrant suffrage with 5-year residence (restrictive, municipal elections)
1931	Regulate	Electoral law regulates foreign resident voting
1934	Regulate	Electoral law was reformed
1935	Apply	First time foreign residents vote in municipal elections
1974	Review	Commission reviews 1925 Constitution; drafts Article 12 and Article 14
1980	Enact	Article 14 of the 1980 Constitution enacts immigrant suffrage with 5-year residence (universal, multilevel elections)
1988	Apply	First time foreign residents vote in national elections, in a plebiscite
2014	Enact	Law 20.748 enacts external voting
2016	Regulate	Law 20.960 regulates external voting
2017	Apply	First time Chilean nationals vote from abroad in national elections, in presidential primaries (July), the first round of the presidential election (November), and the second round (December)

Source: Author's elaboration.

Enfranchising Immigrants in Local Elections, 1925–1935

As a worldwide pioneer in immigrant voting rights, Chile enacted local-level immigrant voting rights in Article 104 of the 1925 Constitution, which were regularized in 1931, reformed in 1934, and applied in 1935 when select foreign residents voted for the first time (see Table 1). The 1935 municipal elections also marked the first time women voted in Chile (E. M. Valenzuela, 1995). Literate foreign-born men at least 21 years old could vote in municipal elections, after a five-year residence in Chile. Both the 1925 and 1934 changes occurred under Arturo Alessandri Palma's administrations (1920–1925 then 1932–1938), making him a key political figure in immigrant enfranchisement history.

These rights emerged during a critical juncture in the party system, beginning with Alessandri's presidential victory in 1920. Alessandri was a charismatic populist candidate unlike any preceding him, marked for his anti-oligarchical rhetoric connecting with the 'masses', including the working class and others who had previously been passive toward politics (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Scully, 1992). The victory occurred in a competitive election, which a century later, remains the closest presidential election in Chile's history (Retamal & Retamal, 2020). It was nonetheless marked by low participation and fraudulent irregularities, e.g., vote buying, bribery, and both main candidates altered ballots and election records (Lennon Zaninovic, 2020; Millar Carvacho, 1981, 2020). At the time, vote buying was not illegal, nor considered bribery but rather as *gratificaciones* ('gratuities,' a 'reward,' or 'bonus') for fulfilling political favors, like voting (Millar Carvacho, 1981, p. 169).

Alessandri used "all the available tools" to gain support from the 'masses' to meet his political goals, e.g., he closed the National Congress in 1924, consolidating his power instead of calling a constituent assembly, and manipulated the press during his second administration (Millar Carvacho, 2020; San Francisco, 2020). Despite such irregularities, this period spurred modern democracy (Lennon Zaninovic, 2020). As Millar Carvacho (1981, p. 213, own translation) describes it, "the 1920 election clearly reflects a moment of transition in the country's historical evolution. Values, ideas, economic and social structures are in a full transformation process". Alessandri remains a key well-studied political actor in Chile's twentieth century history. Positioning Alessandri as a "strong supporter of universal suffrage", Escobar (2015, pp. 930, 933) describes him as "an authoritarian leader who resorted to immigrant enfranchisement in search of new support".

I claim that Alessandri was *not* an advocate for universal suffrage but indeed sought votes, electoral support, legitimacy, or symbolic popularity as a leader. For Alessandri, "suffrage was not a priority" (Millar Carvacho, 2020). Instead, he prioritized automatic registration in the electorate to reduce manipulation and protect his own political aims (Millar Carvacho, 2020), paralleling his

reputation for using populist political discourse rhetoric (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). He nonetheless served as a key political elite for enfranchisement since he organized the constitutional review Commission and Subcommission that created immigrant voting rights; he appointed 15 men who comprised the elite group, who met 30 times to discuss amendments and drafted 110 Articles (BCN, 2020b; Bernaschina, 1956).¹ The Subcommission comprised “politicians and other political operatives” but since the group lacked popular legitimacy, “Alessandri resorted to an extra-constitutional means of ‘legitimizing’ his Subcommission’s constitutional proposal” through a plebiscite (Tsebelis, 2018). Despite universal suffrage being one of three main topics in his project to reform the 1833 Constitution (BCN, 2020a), Alessandri and the Subcommission dedicated scarce time to discussing suffrage rights (Ministerio del Interior, 1925). Enfranchisement was largely absent in political discourses, from the press, and in academic legal and historical accounts.

In the 1920s, there was a “general dissatisfaction with the existing order” throughout society (Silva, 1994) yet few people had voting rights since Chile still excluded women, illiterate men, and those under 21 years old. While these contributed to Alessandri gaining popular support and why the population was unconcerned with immigrant enfranchisement, they fail to explain why enfranchisement occurred. Moreover, both the number of immigrants and their percentage within total population seem insignificant: in 1925, immigrants comprised 2.5%–3% of total population (see Figure 1). The strict voting requirements meant the 1925 electorate was small: in the 1920 presidential election, 383,331 men were registered and 166,115 voted—representing just 9% of the *male* population (Millar Carvacho, 1981).

Despite their low numbers, new immigrant voters joined a small special electorate. Select male foreigners were already legally defined as Chileans, according to citizenship law as early as the 1822 Constitution (Courtis, 2017). I suggest that perhaps Alessandri sought to gain indirect electoral support or increase his chances of future election or appointment to other public positions. As a Senator and Deputy prior to running for president, he was already a “political insider” (BCN, 2020a; Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 523). It is reasonable to expect that he wanted to maintain political power in public office; indeed, after being president twice, he remained a Senator until his

¹ Alessandri organized the original Consultative Commission through Decree 1.422; it comprised 122 people, then resulted in two subcommissions (*forma* and *reforma*). The first met three times to oversee tasks and logistics, e.g., obtaining voters’ approval for the process; the second was the Subcommission of Constitutional Reforms.

death in 1950 (BCN, 2020a). Hence, local-level immigrant voting rights meant that Alessandri could gain votes and electoral support in municipal elections during his post-presidential political career.

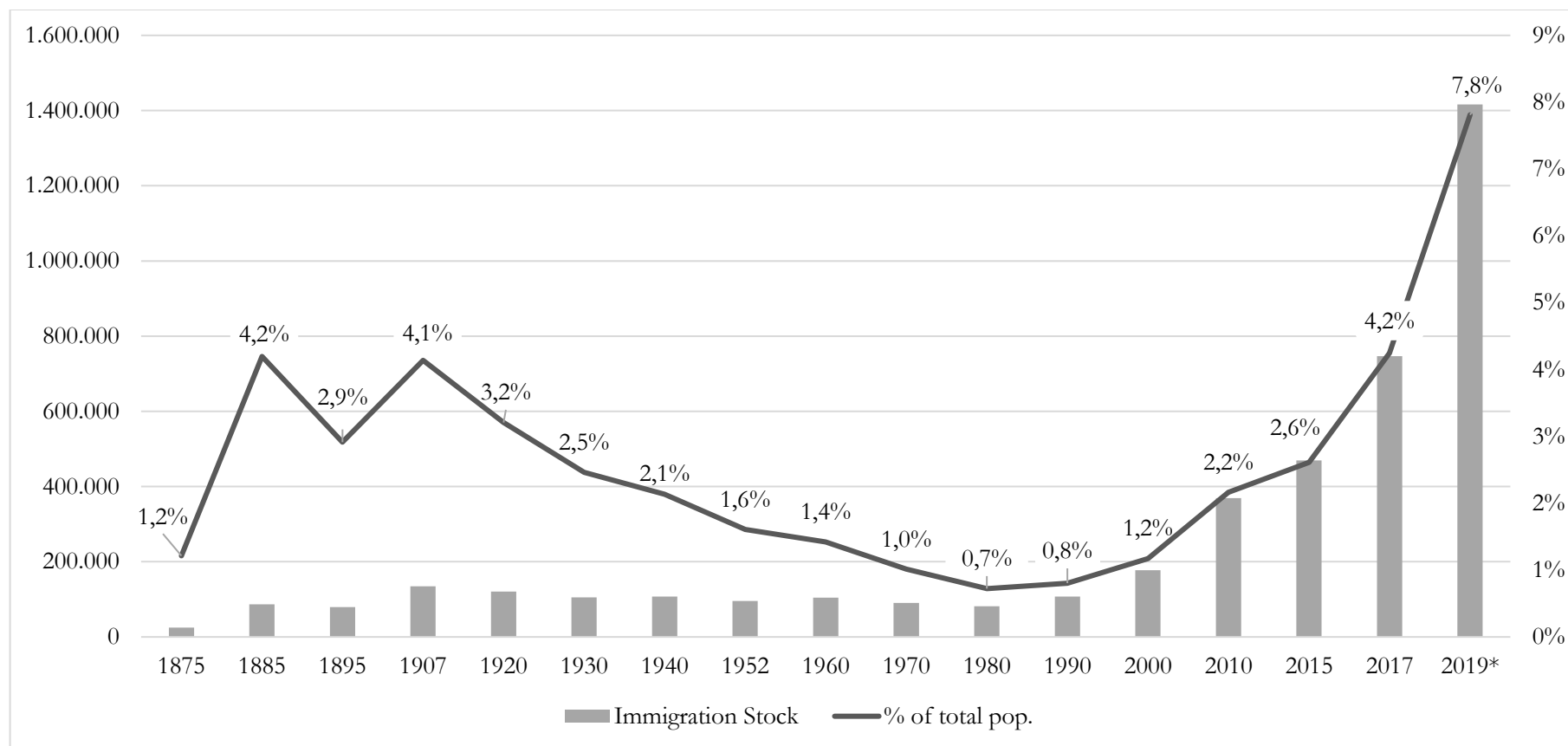
Enfranchising Immigrants in National Elections, 1980–1988

The extreme case of migrant enfranchisement occurred in dictatorship in Chile between 1980 and 1988. The coup d'état of Allende's administration resulted in a declared state of emergency and General Augusto Pinochet's 17-year military dictatorship (1973–1990). Political parties had polarized to two extremes, dissolving the ideological center, which eliminated the possibility of forming coalitions necessary for reaching agreement (Bermeo, 2003; A. Valenzuela, 2003). For context, Chile first gained independence in 1810 and the first constitution was in 1833. Political parties had started to form in between, starting with the Conservative, Radical, and Liberal party period from 1828–1891 (J. S. Valenzuela, 1995), meaning Chile had already experienced almost a century and a half of democracy. A tripolar division of left, center, and right had dominated the Chilean partisan system since the late 1820s and this deep-rooted system reemerged post-Pinochet (Scully, 1996; J. S. Valenzuela, 1995).

Pinochet maintained polarization to exploit the dire situation. Huneus (2000) explains that implementing economic and constitutional changes was part of a multidimensional plan to legitimize the regime, extend his rule, delay transition (i.e., continue the state of emergency), and centralize political power. Martínez and Díaz (1996) point out that changing the foundations of the political and socioeconomic systems may have been a standalone objective (also see Barros, 2002). Being unable to single-handedly control all political players, Pinochet founded a secret police to control the opposition and spy on government employees (Huneus, 2000, pp. 104, 160).²

² The DINA (*Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*, or the National Intelligence Directorate) was Pinochet's secret police, which changed to the CNI (*Central Nacional de Informaciones*, or the National Information Center) in 1977. These organizations, and Pinochet himself, were later tried in court for violating human rights, e.g., for conducting torture (Huneus, 2000, pp. 113, 163).

Figure 1 Chile's Immigrant Stock in Number and Percentage of Total Population, Select Years 1875–2019



Source: Own elaboration based on INE-DEM (2019), INE (2019), and Population and Housing Censuses from Chile, select years between 1875 and 2017 (e.g., INE, 1875).

Notes: *2019 data are estimates from Chile's National Institute for Statistics (INE); after the 2017 census, Chile began crossing census data with administrative records from the Department of Foreigners and Migration (DEM) for a more precise measure of the immigrant stock; the methodological change is reflected in the steeper increase from 2017 to the 2019 estimate.

Part of the political overhaul involved wiping the slate clean: Pinochet eliminated other political parties and began revising the constitution. The objective of reviewing the 1925 Constitution and implementing ('Chicago boys' technocrat-style) free-market economic change was to re-establish normalcy in politics and the economy, after it had been in dire straits prior to the coup (Huneus, 2000). Bermeo (2003) argues that society comprised 'ordinary people' who believed the coup saved Chile from communism, that the country was in a war against Marxism, and underestimated or ignored the abundant violence and human rights abuses. Although Pinochet aimed to settle the chaos, he used the situation of the war against Marxism and a state of emergency to maintain fear, while making significant institutional changes during this critical juncture in Chile.

Directly following the coup, the Ortúzar Commission began in 1974 to review the 1925 Constitution, whose input greatly shaped Chile's 1980 Constitution. The Commission comprised eight appointed men who discussed and suggested the final wording for Article 12 (defining suffrage and citizenship) and Article 14 (foreign resident voting), both approved in 1978 during the writing of the 1980 Constitution. Expanding the franchise does not appear to have been to control foreign residents or for national security—as other authoritarian regimes have done for emigrant voting rights (Brand, 2006)—given that the immigrant stock was only around 1% of total population in 1970 and dropped to its lowest at 0.7% in 1982 during the dictatorship's restrictive migration period (Lara Escalona, 2014, p. 81; see Figure 1).

The Migration Law of 1975 regulated immigrant flows at this time, which had been implemented earlier in Pinochet's regime, unsurprisingly from a national security perspective (Thayer, 2019). The law was under debate for almost a decade and active through 2020 but in April 2021 a new migration law was promulgated (Doña-Reveco & Gouveia, 2021; Finn & Doña-Reveco, 2021; Gobierno de Chile, 2021). Regardless, immigrant suffrage rights have not constitutionally changed since 1925, except their implementation and extension. Expanding immigrant voting rights from local to national elections in the 1980 Constitution was not a drastic change but rather could be considered "institutional innovation" since the change expanded the status quo (Thelen, 2003). Since 1925, foreign voters could choose to participate or abstain in municipal elections; I find that the Commission expanded this understanding to mean foreign resident voters should be able to choose whether they want to participate, or not, in all elections, both municipal and national.

A critical political actor in the perspective of immigrants having the right, not duty, to vote was Jaime Guzmán. He led the Gremial movement, a political group in higher education, based at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. Guzmán maintained a "close relationship" with Pinochet (e.g.,

writing numerous speeches for him and stating that the government could restore social peace), which politically backed the movement (Huneus, 2000, p. 146). Guzmán was a vocal member of the Ortúzar Commission, often taking opposing stances to other members: he alone supported an optional voting system for *all* voters, whereas the other members posited it optional only for immigrant voters.

Reviewing the Commission's debate (Historia de la Ley, Art.14, 2005, pp. 35–38, 43–44), especially Ortúzar expressed that optional voting would have grave consequences for social order and it would be a mistake to interpret “the contemporary conception of what a free, open, and democratic society is” while being lax about the “weak sustaining bases” of such a society if the government allowed voters to choose to be interested, or not, in the electoral process. Ortúzar argues that the government must force people to vote, because if they had a choice, many would abstain—preferring instead a day of rest rather than making the “minimal sacrifice” of expressing their opinion via voting. He states that moderate voters abstain whereas activists and those with strong interests would always vote, which would worsen the political divide. As citizens lose interest in public matters, it would increase the chance for those “desiring the destruction of the institutional system” to succeed in doing so. Believing “all members” must participate is *not* synonymous with universal suffrage goals, but it did reflect a large group: after debating if citizens should be 18 or 21 years old, the decision (in Session 57 on December 5, 1987) favored 18. Those meeting the age requirement and free of convicted sentences and crimes gained voting rights.

Contrary to the mandatory voting discussion, the Commission see foreign resident voting as a right, so aim to constitutionally ensure that immigrant meeting requirements have the possibility to vote, if and when legislators decide to grant this right via electoral law (Historia de la Ley, Art.14, 2005, p. 30)—highlighting the important difference between the enfranchisement steps of enactment and regulation. Foreign residents, however, would not be able to run for elected office (i.e., no candidacy rights). Despite the Commission's stance that optional voting would make sense in a “purely aristocratic or elite society, but in no way in a democracy in which all its members are called to participate,” they nonetheless decide that foreign residents should be able to opt in or out of joining the demos and voting.

The Commission's stance endured, converted into Article 14 of the 1980 Constitution (DL N3464), “Foreigners residing in Chile... may exercise suffrage rights in the cases and manner determined by law.” Although the Commission wanted to avoid the possibility that legislators or political parties could use immigrant enfranchisement as partisan leverage, their focus was on ensuring immigrant voting, if enacted, could never be constitutionally considered mandatory. The debate

focused on future interpretation of the constitution and who will meet requirements. They stated that voting is not an inherent right, although expressed the stance that individual migrants would have the option (after 10 years, later reduced to 5) to choose, as the immigrants themselves see fit, to participate or not in the political community.

The rights versus duties discussions have two repercussions for the voting system and personal freedoms. First, since the Commission, Chile changed to an optional voting system with automatic electoral registration in 2010, after experiencing declined turnout, which did not destroy the institutional system. Turnout rates are lower (Carlin, 2006), mirroring Ortúzar's stance that fewer people vote when it is voluntary. But based on the Commission's sessions, the debate was less about optional or mandatory voting and instead on how to control nationals to ensure they fulfil the obligation, considered a "moral duty"—i.e., they extensively debated how to establish effective punishment for those who do not vote (Historia de la Ley, Art.14, 2005, pp. 35, 39–40, 42).

Second, the Commission's result (counterintuitively) increased foreign residents' personal freedoms while restricting those of nationals. As Commission member Enrique Evans de la Cuadra expresses, if Chile offers immigrants the chance to naturalize after a residence period, he sees no reason why the Constitution would not also grant suffrage rights to foreigners under certain conditions (Historia de la Ley, Art.14, 2005, p. 10). As Pedroza (2015) outlines, a country can include migrants in the political community through either a traditional route of naturalization (see, e.g., Brubaker, 1992) or enfranchisement. The Commission seems to echo this view, as members positioned optional voting after a residence period as *just as logical* as offering optional naturalization after a residence period. Table 2 shows the two routes of joining the political community: naturalization would mean gaining the Chilean nationality and thereafter voting would be mandatory; alternatively, non-naturalized immigrants could join the political community and vote when they want to.

Table 2 Two Paths for Immigrants to Vote, Chile

Migration	Path	Voting Rights
Immigration	→ Naturalization	Mandatory voting for nationals (until 2009/2012)
		Facultative voting for nationals (enacted in 2009, applied in 2012)
	→ Enfranchisement	Facultative voting for foreign residents (since 1980, applied in 1988)

Source: (Finn, 2021)

The two routes apply only to first-generation immigrants since Chile has *ius soli* laws: children are born into the nationality, making it a non-voluntary (but renounceable) membership. The electoral system must determine the type of registration (automatic, mandatory, voluntary) and the type of vote (mandatory or facultative), which was repeatedly debated and changed in Chile (see López & Figueroa, 2009). As of 2022, Chileans and immigrants both have automatic registration and optional voting, enacted in 2009 (Law 20.337), regulated in 2012 (Law 20.568), and applied in 2012 (in local elections). Both categories must be free of felony convictions and at least 18 years old, whereas foreigners must also have resided five years in Chile. After five years, the Chilean electoral service automatically adds foreign residents to the electorate (for multilevel elections), then individuals choose to vote or abstain in elections. Foreign residents also choose whether to naturalize after a five-year residence. Having granted voting rights to foreign residents made enfranchisement “an option vis-à-vis naturalization, either an *alternative* or a *pathway*” (Pedroza, 2013, p. 27, emphasis in original). Here the two both led to multilevel voting rights, implemented at the national level in 1988. The second route gave immigrants extensive freedom to participate or abstain in Chilean elections, while Chileans faced obligatory voting.

In sum, the 1974 Commission discussed *which* foreigners would have the right to vote under which rules, rather than *if* foreigners would vote. After a residence period, naturalization and enfranchisement were framed as equally logical routes to joining the demos, leaving the choice to the immigrants to decide. Immigrant suffrage was explicitly to be a right, never an obligation, in stark contrast to the members’ rigid views for constitutionally ensuring Chileans comply with their ‘duty’ to

vote. Their views reflected that, *nationals and foreigners had fundamentally different relationships with the state* since the state set different expectations for these groups with voting rights.

Enfranchising Emigrants in National Elections, 2014–2017

As opposed to pioneering immigrant voting rights, Chile was a latecomer in granting emigrant suffrage, completed between 2014 and 2017. External voting was enacted in 2014 (Law 20.748), which outlined voting from abroad in presidential primaries, presidential elections, and national-level plebiscites. External voting was then regulated in 2016 (Law 20.960), requiring Chileans to change their address to abroad and to prove a past residence of at least one year in Chile, presumably any time within the individual's life. Finally, enfranchisement for emigrants was applied in 2017 (see Table 1). Chile's road to enfranchising both immigrant and emigrants thus ran a whopping 92 years, from 1925 to 2017 (Finn, 2021).

Chile's emigrant enfranchisement process had a dozen failed attempts before approval (Finn & Ramaciotti, 2022; Toro & Walker, 2007). According to the government's record of constitutional reform detailing the chronology of external voting, the first mention of Chileans being allowed to vote from abroad dates to 1971 during Allende's administration (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2015). This occurred *before* Pinochet's regime that exiled many Chileans and pushed others to emigrate. This reinforces López and Figueroa's (2009, p. 59) inclination that emigrant enfranchisement delay had little to do with worry about the vote choice based on experiences with the authoritarian regime. External voting had already arisen in Chilean politics, and elites from both right and left parties continued proposing it until successful.

The topic of external voting resurfaced post-Pinochet: in 1991, a proposal tried to modify it (Law 18.700) to include Chileans abroad in presidential elections. Two years later, the proposal, along with details on electoral registration, was presented, but nothing came of it. The discussion lay dormant until 2005, when another proposed modification to Law 18.700 was rejected. Despite setbacks of a lack of political agreement, it marked a turning point, as external voting became a regular issue, appearing every one to three years. In 2009, Bachelet proposed automatic registration and facultative voting for Chileans abroad, but again, nothing came of it. In 2010, Piñera proposed a similar motion to modify Law 18.700 but his proposal required voters to have an additional "link" (*vínculo*) to Chile in order to vote from abroad—the Senate considered this restrictive and rejected the proposal (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2015).

A group of Senators followed up in 2013 by re-opening discussion on external voting for presidential elections and plebiscites and suggested that external voter registration be required before every Chilean election. It was approved with 29 votes from the Senate (with 6 votes against and 1 abstention), thus moved to the Chamber of Deputies (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2015). In 2014, Bachelet prioritized the discussion and added the right to also vote in presidential primary elections and eliminated the voter registration requirement before every election. The National Congress approved the constitutional reform project in April 2014, with Bachelet's last amendments, which proved successful through the following legal steps through the Chamber of Deputies, finishing in 2016 (as Law 20.960). Bachelet commented,

We believe that with this law, we are honoring democracy, by allowing each of our compatriots to effectively have the possibility of marking his or her preference in our national elections. And that is what we are doing—we are cutting a tie that was limiting [the breadth of] our democracy and also [we are] strengthening the bond between the sons and daughters of this land, by enacting the law that will regulate the right to vote of Chilean men and women abroad. (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2016, own translation)

The requirement in Law 20.960 of living at least one year in Chile excludes some from the larger group of Chileans abroad (i.e., anyone holding the nationality) to include voters only from the smaller group of emigrants—meaning the Chilean nationality is *not* a sufficient condition to vote for the second or later generations who have never lived in Chile. A Chilean abroad must register their address with Chile, complete a form to register to vote, show Chilean identification, and prove that they have lived in Chile at least a year (*el certificado de vecindamiento de Extranjería*) (Serval, 2020). Voter registration becomes automatic when Chile's Electoral Service has access to the residence certificate (Law 18.566).

The presidential primaries and election of 2017 marked the first application of Chileans voting from abroad. As Bachelet's quote reinforces—emigrant enfranchisement was very much framed around democracy, fitting Escobar's (2015) second wave of enfranchisement emerging from left-leaning governments and motivated by international norms and rights-based reasons. Moving back in time to Chile's dictatorship paints a distinct picture of when and how immigrant voting rights were extended from local- to national-level elections.

IV. Discussion: Takeaways from a Century of Politics, Elites, and Regime Changes

The extreme case of immigrant enfranchisement in Chile quakes the notion and rhetoric that migrant suffrage is naturally democratic or influenced by international forces. It evidences Brubaker's (1992) insights and supports some of Earnest's (2008) findings on the longevity of historical notions of who is part of the political community; while these studies were based on consolidated democracies, Chile shows similar patterns through political transitions. Through extreme shifts in political regimes and power, foreign resident suffrage not only survived but was extended, revealing four key takeaways.

First, the historic analysis of immigrant national-level enfranchisement reflects lengthy political and legal processes. It was not a stand-alone discussion or priority, which could more likely occur in countries where immigration, emigration, or migrant voting is already politicized (see, e.g., Kovář, 2022) or in scenarios with strong pressure groups (Umpierrez de Reguero, 2022; Wegschaider, this issue). As Durán Migliardi and Thayer (2017) highlight, Chile's nineteenth-century migration-related laws focused on encouraging certain inflows, whereas progressively incorporating select immigrants into legislation have roots stemming from the early twentieth century. Enfranchisement in the 1980 Constitution was a minor change within a complete constitutional revamp. These drawn-out constitutional changes entailed part of a dictator's plan to centralize power and delay a return to democracy. Even in democracies, such as Germany, parliamentary discussions on immigrant enfranchisement have also spanned decades (Pedroza, 2019). I find political elites, including but not exclusively the Executive, across regime types played major roles in enfranchising migrants.

Second, the immigrant population size hardly played a role in the process of expanding migrant suffrage in this country. Immigration size helps to explain why the government *could* enact it without opposition since an authoritarian regime deterred public backlash, meaning the Commission and government had no need to justify their reasons or decisions to voters. However, it does not explain why they expanded immigrant suffrage. The context and preceding constitutional dialog indicate that the number of immigrants had little to do with enfranchising them—meaning bottom-up approaches from individuals who receive such rights is not necessary when politics and elites play larger roles with top-down approaches of migrant enfranchisement.

Third, immigrant enfranchisement did not aim at inclusion or democratic ideals (e.g., universal suffrage), nor stem from human rights arguments. Occurring during a state of emergency during dictatorship, the Ortúzar Commission members (ironically) discussed 'democratic ideals.' They felt strongly about nationals' roles as stakeholders in the country's future and their obligation to exercise suffrage, seen through rigorously supporting mandatory voting systems (Historia de la Ley, Art.14,

2005). Yet free and fair elections were not held until 1988, in a plebiscite that ended the military dictatorship. This leads me to highlight that although Chile was an early pioneer in local-level immigrant voting rights in 1925, when Chile enfranchised immigrants for national-level elections in the 1980 Constitution, it was a far cry from any democratic trend or desire for human rights or inclusion. This unpacks the trend recognized by Escobar (2015) that Latin American countries enfranchised migrants for democratic reasons only in the 1990s onwards. Moreover, migrant suffrage rights can survive drastic changes in political power and regime types.

Fourth, the state allowed immigrants to participate electorally as they wished, albeit without candidacy rights. Simultaneously, it strictly forbade Chilean voters to be indifferent about politics, seeking to punish those failing their ‘moral duty’ to vote. Without human rights in mind, the dialog behind the legislation gave foreign residents more personal liberty (and less coercive requirements) than they provided for nationals. However, freedom to choose was for a small select group of existent immigrants; moreover, extended liberties strangely occurred during a restrictive migration legislation period that discouraged newcomers, expelled both foreigners and Chileans alike, and framed foreigners as threats to society, the regime, and state security (DL 2460 of 1979; Lara Escalona, 2014). The analysis sheds light on post-implementation steps of how migrant voting rights transform and endure over time—reflecting changing stances of why states grant and withhold migrant political rights.

Using the so-called immigrant-emigrant lens (Umpierrez de Reguero et al., this issue), this analysis has exploited within-country differences and similarities. On one hand, I find that the legal and policy processes for immigrant versus emigrant enfranchisement seem to be unrelated in terms of debate, intentions, and normative stances. Much of this is because government procedures and general viewpoints changed over such a lengthy period; for instance, there was a growing legal openness to dual citizenship and perspectives of emigrants as nationals and compatriots living abroad, rather than political exiles or traitors. Emigrant voting rights was moreover implemented because of democratic stances of inclusion and alongside the global spread of external voting rights trend. On the other hand, I found one similarity: fixed views of *territorial connection*. Whereas territorial inclusion typically relates to immigrants’ claims to political rights (Bauböck, 2005, 2007), here it not only explains early immigrant enfranchisement but also late emigrant enfranchisement since those abroad can prove their territorial connection by having lived there at least one year sometime in their life. With such ‘proof’ of connection, being physically outside the territory was irrelevant to be included and being in the territory was viewed as having connections to it and rights within it.

Conclusion

Spanning almost a century, Chile became one of the most inclusive countries worldwide for migrant voting rights through top-down elite-led approaches. From constitutional review discussions, a legal structure for migrant voting rights was built brick by brick into constitutions and regulated with electoral laws. The configurational enfranchisement sequence of implementation, expansion, and survival of migrant voting rights is not inherently a democratic phenomenon. The historical comparative analysis adds further reasons beyond the post-transition window of opportunity or diffused liberal norms (see Erlingsson & Tuman, 2017; Lafleur, 2015; Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015), which became relevant for migrant suffrage rights in Latin America only after the 1990s (Escobar, 2015). In Chile, migrant enfranchisement occurred regardless of drastic changes in political regimes: during relative democracy in 1925–1935, dictatorship 1980–1988, and liberal democracy 2014–2017.

This analysis provides evidence that strengthens Brubaker's (1992) insight that historical conceptions of the political community have long-lasting effects, even through nondemocracy. Historical understanding of who comprises the demos in 1925 in Chile set path dependence for including immigrants in the political community; the normative stances of the time aligned well with the citizenship law that considered select foreigners as citizens, as early as the 1822 Constitution (Courtis, 2017). This path dependence is unique because thereafter in the 1970s constitutional review sessions, existing laws served directly as reference points, to justify the expansion of immigrant voting rights.

Such rights survival and expansion differ from other countries. The survival over time contrasts with Wellman's (2021) findings in Sub-Saharan Africa, where incumbents implement or withhold emigrant voting rights according to their own perceived electoral support. The presence of select voting rights does not imply that a country would then expand such rights. For instance, most EU Member States have not extended voting rights to other immigrants beyond EU nationals, nor granted additional rights, such as for national-level elections. This highlights the need to contextualize domestic political environments and historical trends within countries and regions to compare migrant enfranchisement and voting practices across time and place. Chile's process strongly affected the discussions in the 1970s, resulting in expanding foreign-resident voting to the national level in 1980, which remains intact as of early 2023. Such continuity suggests certain migrants' rights can endure in specific contexts, despite fluctuating ideology and political regime types.

Taking an immigrant-emigrant lens in this analysis, I found that Chile as a pioneer of immigrant enfranchisement is seemingly unrelated to being an eventual latecomer for emigrant voting rights.

While political elites devised legal changes based on their norms and implemented them top-down, debates and electoral laws remained separate for immigrants and emigrants. This offers little help to develop an overarching migrant enfranchisement theory. However, it is still important for scholarly analyses to link immigrants and emigrants, as this Special Issue aims to do, since the level and extensiveness of migrant voting rights conveys a country's inclusiveness of suffrage and how migrant-state relations develop over time.

Long-standing rights survival can be interrupted by a critical juncture, such as was tested during the social unrest in Chile that culminated in its first constitutional convention in contemporary liberal democracy, opening a window for rights reversal. Contrary to the 1925 and 1974 commissions—which both comprised a small group of men appointed by the president, tasked with reviewing the constitution—the 2021 convention instead comprised 155 representative members elected to draft a new constitution.³ Both emigrant and immigrant voters participated in electing the constitutional commission members and voted along the constitutional process. The socio-political climate involves upticks in immigration since 2015, some xenophobic outbursts and overall social discontent erupting between 2019 and 2021. While retrenchment of the more recent emigrant voting rights seemed unlikely, the proposed constitution left immigrant voting right intact, although this draft was rejected in the September 2022 referendum. The debate could reopen in the next round of constitutional review; if and when it arises, institutionalized immigrant organizations in Chile would be at the forefront of ensuring continued immigrant political rights that date back almost a century.

³ For details on the constitutional process, see: www.gob.cl/procesoconstituyente/.

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Sebastián Umpierrez de Reguero for reading this work in many forms and drafts, and Jorge Vásquez for research assistance on graphing the early 1900s data. For comments on early ideas of this paper, I thank Fernando Rosenblatt, Carolina Segovia, and Claudio Fuentes, as well as Cristóbal Rovira for additional data sources on Alessandri's populism. Many thanks for useful feedback from Fiona Adamson at APSA 2020 and gracious invitations for presenting parts of this work from Mari-Liis Jakobson at a 2021 MIRNet workshop, Andrew Shields at a 2020 LIMS seminar in Leiden, and at a 2019 seminar at UNU-Merit. I am also deeply grateful to have discussed twentieth-century Chilean politics with Dr. Prof. René Millar Carvacho, which greatly supported my arguments.