

NOTE: This version of the interview is subsequent to its appearance on March 30, 2024, and contains some [additional indications in blue](#).

- **What kind of people is your book aimed at ?**

To all the people who are not happy with the way democracy works in Chile. It should be a novel and useful reading for those who are in search of an alternative capable of solving, in an effective and irreversible manner, the structural and centenary deficiencies of the system. The book is available free of charge on the website: www.swiss-democracy.ch

Every traveler tends to compare what he observes with his reality at home or in other countries. In the case of people visiting Switzerland, the most common observations are: incredibly rich, calm, safe, free from the omnipresent antagonism of politics, and very serene and happy people. Everywhere, and all the time. And since these aspects are a universal aspiration, people ask themselves: how did they do it ? can it be done in my country too ? what needs to be done ?

With the experience of living in Switzerland for more than 40 years, in this book I have tried to answer these kinds of questions in the context of today's Chile.

- **What deficiencies in particular ?**

It only took a few years after 1990 to be back in the reign of centralist partitocracy, party politicking, "ego-driven pushing&shoving", and instrumentalizing the people as mere by-standers of the system. In other words, it was back to "old-fashion politics". And with it, the "cancer" of politics has been spreading and taking over again the daily lives of millions of people - just as it happened to our grandparents and parents.

"Old-fashion politics" is obsolete, harmful, unfair and ineffective. And it is incompatible with a population that is now much more economically independent as never before, but which continues to be treated as "irresponsible children" and incapable of self-governance by the political class.

- **Why would the introduction of direct democracy be useful for today's Chile ?**

This imbalance experienced by millions of people between high economic freedom and no civic emancipation as a result of this "old-fashioned politics" is detrimental and unsustainable. And it is also a major catalyst for the intense discontent, widespread distrust and animosity that has been building up over the past 30 years towards the political class of all colors and the State in general.

An adjustment towards a certain equivalence between the levels of civic and economic autonomy is inevitable. If it is without direct democracy, the adjustment will be towards the greater poverty and lesser freedom of the past - which is the process Chile has been undergoing for several years now. If it is with the introduction of direct democracy, then it will be possible not only to stop and reverse the "falling backwards", but also to access a virtuous and self-sustainable process towards ever greater levels of freedom and prosperity.

- **Would it not be better to try to continue perfecting the current system ?**

The accumulated evidence shows that one of the central problems of representative democracy is (in Chile and elsewhere) that it is not in a position to avoid or correct by itself its most serious and

harmful imperfections. In fact, the system somehow nurtures and perpetuates its own shortcomings. And not only in Chile.

Electing a new president every 4 years with the hope that things "will get better" has been transformed, once again, into successive cycles of illusion-disillusion with governments of all kinds of inclinations. The message of three lost decades is simple and strong: alternating parties or people simply does not work - and may even make things worse. It is time to look the truth squarely in the face, and recognize that there is not, nor will ever be, a new "messiah" or party so much more dedicated and competent than any of the 8 governments that Chile has had since 1990 to date.

This is indeed a message as simple to observe, as it is difficult to accept ... especially in the absence of knowing about any alternative solution. In this context, my book indicates that direct democracy, and only direct democracy, is in a position to put a rapid and irreversible end to this gigantic exercise of collective self-deception in our country. The book explains the way forward. With map and compass.

- **How does direct democracy work ?**

The big difference between Switzerland and the rest of the world is that citizens not only have the right to elect representatives every 4 years, but they also have the political right to referend any and all decisions enacted by the elected authorities before they come into force.

In Switzerland there are referendum votes every three months. In each session, a YES or NO vote is taken on about 8 well-defined questions, and on all kinds of issues of public interest - education, health, welfare, infrastructure, etc.. At each session, national, regional and municipal issues are voted on. There are 3 ways in which an issue may be subject to referendum: (i) a mandatory referendum, (ii) a facultative referendum, or (iii) a popular initiative. The result of the referendum is the final decision regarding each issue voted on as to whether or not it enters into force.

This prevents laws or decisions of poor quality (in the eyes of the people) from becoming part of the body of laws that govern life in society - and from starting to "do harm" and complicate things before they are eliminated. In addition, and contrary to representative democracies, there is the immense benefit that the political class must always pay attention to the preferences of the majority of the citizenry - instead of pushing ideologies. Otherwise, laws or decisions already enacted and of poor quality can simply be refuted by the people.

- **Does this mean that people are voting everything, and all the time ?**

Of course not.

In Switzerland less than 2% of the thousands of laws and decisions enacted by authorities at national, regional and municipal level are referended. The exceptional effectiveness of direct democracy (compared to representative democracy) does not come from the few things that are referended. Instead, the great secret lies in the incredible quality of the 98% of the thousands of decisions and laws enacted by the authorities, and which enter into force without the need of a referendum for approval - in spite of having the right to it for each and all topics, and at all times.

So much virtue is not the result of the goodwill or greater capacity of Swiss politicians.

Rather, it is the result of the structural imperative imposed on the functioning of the system by the political right of the citizenry to launch a facultative referendum. It is the fear of losing all the work done in (for example) passing a law, which "obliges" the Swiss political class to know and obey the preferences of the citizenry. And this on a permanent basis, on all issues, and at each of the three levels of the State. The result is a political class that is always at the service of the citizenry - instead of the other way around, as in Chile and in so many other representative democracies around the world.

Although it may seem a paradox: it is enough for citizens to have the right to referend ... to automatically have fewer issues that need to be referred to referendum at all. In reality, a few referendums every three months are enough to make the political class behave in a responsible and obedient way and to make the political system work wonderfully. It is as simple as that.

- **And how would the right to referendum help in the case of Chile ?**

The principle at the basis of direct democracy is actually very simple: the last word in all decisions of public interest always belongs to the citizenry and not to the political class. And with this, two completely new things of fundamental importance for Chile occur.

One is that the "cultural burden" of handing over power to the capital's partitocracy is over. And the other is that people will no longer have the excuse of blaming the government of the day (or the system) for all the things that are wrong or do not work. In direct democracy the people have the instruments to change everything that is "not right" all the time. And with that, they can only blame themselves for what is wrong and for the consequences of saying YES or NO to the issues voted in the referendums. This will lead to a great process of learning and civic emancipation of millions of people (including the simplest layers and the most remote corners) as never before in the history of the country.

In this sense, the right to referendum puts an end to these two centuries-old cultural shortcomings. And, almost by magic, it will also put an irreversible end to the long list of deficiencies that have affected the political system in Chile for centuries. Namely: asphyxiating centralism; doctrinaire antagonism; an inefficient State, poorly administered and incapable of providing quality public services (security, education, health, etc.); corruption and abuses in the allocation of public resources; regions and municipalities lacking authority/resources to self-sustain themselves; and the continued condemnation of millions of citizens to the same civic poverty and suppression that they have suffered for generations.

Thanks to the mechanism of direct democracy, Switzerland has come to have: the State that delivers the best public services in the world with the lowest taxes on the planet; millions of people with an incomparable maturity and sense of civic commitment; and a society that lives free of the suffocating, omnipresent and sometimes so decadent politicking of representative democracies.

To conclude this topic, it is very important to emphasize that being freer and richer than other nations is not the "starting point" (or condition) for access to direct democracy. In reality, Switzerland and its people never had, nor have, any "superior" conditions or resources than any other country. Quite to the contrary. Therefore, the privileged level of wellbeing observed in Switzerland is actually the "point of

arrival" (at this moment in time) thanks to the process of practicing and perfecting the virtues of the right to referendum in an uninterrupted manner for decades.

- **Does direct democracy replace representative democracy ?**

Direct democracy does not replace representative democracy. Instead, these two complement each other and are used at the same time. They validate, enhance and perfect each other.

Without the latter, direct democracy is not practicable. Without the former, representative democracy drifts towards a system of partitocracy in which the political class ends up forgetting about the people, and concentrates on how to gain control and abuse the system. This harmful and pernicious aberration that affects Chile and other nations is simply impossible to occur in direct democracy.

From this perspective, and considering also other observations made elsewhere in this interview, there seem to be no valid reasons why direct democracy cannot be as universal as representative democracy.

- **What are the main benefits a nation receives from implementing it ?**

The fact that nothing comes into force without the explicit (2%) or implicit (98%) approval by the majority of the citizenry means crossing the threshold towards the virtuous, self-sustaining and unlimited progression process described and explained in the book.

In Switzerland, every new law or decision that comes into force has a level of legitimacy, acceptance, effectiveness and credibility unmatched by other nations. The security, stability and widespread wealth seen in Switzerland today is the result of thousands of laws and decisions "woven" this way between the political class and the citizenry over decades. Generation after generation.

In this sense, direct democracy is the "master key" that allows a society to access this virtuous circle. The right to referendum is precisely the mechanism through which Switzerland defeated the initial economic and civic misery (late 1800s), and which has allowed the country to access levels of welfare unreached and unreachable for any form of representative democracy.

Therefore, the implementation of the right to referendum in Chile constitutes in reality an invitation to enter and travel a path towards levels of freedom, security, social cohesion and prosperity far beyond that which can be delivered by any person or party that must still govern under the rules of "old-fashion politics".

The nations that adopted representative democracy after the French Revolution have in fact done nothing more than replace one dominant caste with another. Instead of being ruled by an aristocratic elite, they came to be governed by an elite of professional politicians. The hegemony of partitocracy has spread everywhere, has lasted for more than 200 years, and is resistant to the widespread discontent of the people. One wonders whether this new caste is (i) less perverse, cynical, selfish and abusive, and (ii) more capable, fair and better intentioned than the previous one.

Individuals change, parties alternate, but dissatisfaction with the political class remains a universal constant. People have not found a way to control or get rid of this new caste for 200 years - which, for its part, had no difficulty in learning how to (and does not hesitate to) take advantage of the system. Some more, some less. But on all 5 continents. Left and right.

The only exception to the hegemony of partitocracy around the world is Switzerland. This country is the irrefutable proof that:

- the right to referendum is the only instrument really capable of avoiding, or breaking and ending, the supremacy of partitocracy;
- to govern oneself as close as possible to the ideal "by the people, for the people" is not a chimera; and
- this form of democracy delivers fruits that will never be within the reach of countries for as long as they do not manage to free themselves from being governed by a partitocracy.

In this context, putting an end to the worst deficiencies and abuses of representative democracies constitutes in itself, in Chile and in any other country, a most valuable contribution that direct democracy makes to the greater well-being of a nation.

- **Are people in Chile ready to assume such an important role ? Why do you think that direct democracy is compatible with the mentality of the people in Chile ?**

Of course they are ready. And not only now, but have always been.

The decision to vote YES or NO on issues being referended is based above all on common sense. And all people have common sense - regardless of their socio-economic status, level of education, political leanings and other factors that also play a role.

Everyone has to live within a budget. All people know that nothing is really free, and it is clear to them that if they spend on something it means there will be less to spend on other things. Therefore, there is no doubt that also in Chile people will behave very differently and much more responsibly if they themselves have to say YES or NO (as in Switzerland) to pay for either (i) the "free gifts" that come from the State, or (ii) the populist and high-cost promises made by the political class. Demagogy and superfluous expenses disappear as if by magic.

Moreover, the fact that millions of Chileans voted YES to such a delicate issue as a new constitution, and then the same people voted NO to a project that did not convince them, is a powerful proof that people are prepared to receive and exercise with responsibility the right to referendum on a regular basis. Over the last few decades, the largest portion of the Chilean society has already emancipated itself economically. In the process, they are now more than ready (actually demanding) to emancipate themselves civically too.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that more than 90% of the referendum issues in Switzerland are actually about very simple things. The supposed "complexity" of making the best decisions in the public interest is simply a lie of the political class to exclude the people and maintain their privileges. Moreover, it is obvious that 99% of the political class are people who have no "superior" status (moral or intellectual) with respect to the collective common sense of millions of citizens.

Learning to accept that receiving something requires giving up other things is the essence of the maturing process of every individual. The little child learns to accept (with pain and crying) that he cannot have all the toys at the same time. The young adult has to give up other interests when

choosing a higher education or training. And the sooner a person learns that to choose is to give up, the better for everyone.

Therefore, the more a State insists on the deception that it can "give away things/services for free", the more millions of people are condemned to continue living in immaturity and civic subordination. In this context, learning to anticipate and to live with the consequences of saying YES or NO in the quarterly referendums is the best training and "growing up" tool there is. And with the civic emancipation of millions of people, as if by magic: people stop "asking", the State stops "offering and giving away", and the political class does not need to compete on the basis of "lying and vain promises" to get or stay in power.

- **What needs to be done to implement direct democracy ?**

The first step is to start with the municipalities. It is undoubtedly the easiest and most natural way for the people. In fact, there are many municipalities that have been holding regular citizen consultations for years. What is missing now is really very little, namely: (i) that referendums take place on a regular basis 2 or 3 times a year, and (ii) that the results are binding.

Starting to hold referendums does not even have to be mandatory for everyone. It is enough for those municipalities that already feel prepared to start first. All the others will soon follow. The people themselves will demand it. It is in their own interest and for the benefit of all. It is worth mentioning that in Switzerland the 2.170 municipalities are in charge of carrying out the quarterly referendums among their residents. They are also in charge of collecting taxes. Therefore, they play a major role in the exemplary functioning of democracy and of the State in general in this country.

After about 5 years, the right to referendum can be extended to regional level issues. And after another 5 years, it can finally be implemented for national level issues as well. This way of proceeding seems prudent, and certainly gives enough time to all parties involved to "learn" and adapt to the new distribution of roles and responsibilities.

- **Is it not too expensive to hold votes so often ?**

The correct thing to do is to make a comparison of costs and benefits. So just ask yourself: what is the cost to the people in Chile of having: a poorly functioning political system; a discredited political class; an inefficient and costly State; a society plagued by corruption; living in the insecurity of a growing criminal environment; and lower economic growth ?

All in all, the annual cost of holding referendums every three months in Switzerland is about US\$ 40 million - that is, about 0.006% of GDP. In return, the citizenry enjoys an excellent political system, a life in unparalleled security and serenity, a State capable of providing the best public services in the world while collecting the lowest taxes, a political class at the service of the people, and an unmatched level of wealth. There is no way to go wrong.

- **Does everyone benefit equally from the implementation of the right to referendum ?**

A very important question. All people benefit from the increased freedom and prosperity that results from using the "master key" described in the book. However, there are very important relative and absolute differences between the various social classes with respect to the tangible and intangible benefits they receive from direct democracy.

To see this, it is enough to compare the differential in how the richest 20% in Switzerland live with the equivalent in any other country with representative democracy: the difference in favor of the Swiss quintile is non-existent or minimal. Whereas if one compares (for example) the levels of security, access to and quality of public services, quality of housing and infrastructure, employment opportunities and conditions, level of remuneration, etc. in which the lowest 20% of Swiss society lives with the lowest 20% in any other country, the difference in favor of the people in Switzerland is simply enormous.

In other words, and this is an important message for Chile, the lower the social class, the greater the benefits that these people receive for being part of a nation that uses direct democracy. And this exponentially.

- **What will be the main difficulties to successfully implement the right to referendum in Chile?**

The political class, in Chile and in any other country, will never implement direct democracy. On the contrary, they will do everything to prevent its implementation and/or to turn it into a failure.

Therefore, both (i) the implementation of the right to referendum and (ii) the maintenance of its application even in the presence of "learning difficulties" depend entirely on the people. Direct democracy will work in our country only on condition that there are millions of Chileans who demand to receive the political right to referendum at the municipal level already now. It is very encouraging that there are already thousands and thousands of people willing to become responsible protagonists of their own future, instead of continuing to be a mere by-stander, an impotent victim and a disgruntled citizen of a system of (pseudo-)representative democracy that has been taking advantage of them for generations.

The way forward is clear: members of the partitocracy stubbornly defending "old-fashion politics" must be replaced by people willing to promote the right to referendum on a regular basis as a natural and inalienable political right of every citizen.

And it will not be difficult to identify who needs to be replaced. Whether or not to support the introduction of the right to referendum will reveal those who participate with a genuine interest in serving the good of all, and those who do so out of self-interest and to take advantage of the system. Anyone who opposes it only reveals what they truly feel towards the people: disdain and distrust. Nothing is lost, and much is gained, by getting rid of these types of people as soon as possible.