**Chile’s Riots: Frustration at the Gate of the Promised Land**

**BY**[**PATRICIO NAVIA**](https://www.americasquarterly.org/node/535)**| OCTOBER 21, 2019**

It's about more than the economy.

**1.2K508**

SANTIAGO - As the most developed economy and most stable democracy in Latin America, Chile was the last country observers would have expected to see riots and looting. For that reason, the riots that destroyed Santiago’s subway, wreaked havoc and paralyzed Chile starting Friday were so surprising — even for Chileans.

As analysts rush to explain the cause of the outburst of discontent, the explanations for Chile’s weekend of rage will have important consequences for our understanding of what is happening in Latin America now that the commodity boom is over and the Latin American electorate is in a strong anti-incumbent mood. While some will see a popular rejection of the market-friendly economic model in place in Chile for the past 30 years, others — including the right-wing government of President Sebastián Piñera — will point to an international conspiracy to test the strength of Chile’s democratic institutions.

In fact, many of those protesting *do* oppose the neoliberal economic policies championed by both left-wing and right-wing governments in Chile over the past 30 years, and there might be activists committed to derailing the most stable moderate right-wing government in the region. But the real reasons behind the rage lie in the frustration of a population that was promised access to the promised land of middle-class status, but that has been denied such access at the gate due to an unlevel playing field characterized by an abusive elite, an unresponsive government and an unkept promise of meritocracy and equal opportunity.

The bad news is that people are upset, disappointed and angry. The good news is that Chile is in a good position to adopt inclusive reforms that promote social justice, defend markets (rather than business or special interests) and level the playing field. The riots have been a much-needed wakeup call for the ruling and political elites to open the gates to the promised land. If the elites fail to live up to the occasion, Chile will fail to become the first Latin American country to graduate to a high-income level. If the Chilean elites relinquish many of their privileges and accept that meritocracy means that while some move up others move down, Chile will have shown the way for other Latin American countries to make the transition from middle-income to high-income status.

Glossary

1. Riot : Alboroto, motín.
2. Looting: Saqueo
3. Wreak: Causar, provocar.
4. Havoc: estragon
5. Outburst: Explosión
6. Incumbent: Titular
7. Rejection: Rechazo
8. Point: Señalar
9. Strength: Resistencia
10. Champion (v): Disputado
11. Left-wing: La Izquierda
12. Right-wing: La Derecha
13. Activist: Activistas
14. Derail: Descarrilarse
15. Moderate: Moderada
16. Rage: Ira
17. Lie (v): Yacer
18. Due to: Debido a
19. Unlevel: Desigual
20. Unresponsive: Insensible
21. Unkept: no mantenida
22. Upset: Acongojado
23. Dissapointed: Decepcionado
24. Angry: Enojado
25. Reform (n): Reforma
26. Ruling: Dominante
27. Fail: Fracasar
28. Relinquish: Renunciar
29. Middle (High) – Income: Ingreso medio