

Kast's multipronged security agenda: The bipartisan construction of a police state in Chile

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25 October 2026

The government of President José Antonio Kast has spent the past four months assembling what it calls the Agenda Against Organized Crime and Terrorism (ACOT)—a package of more than 30 bills and a constitutional reform that, taken together, constitutes the most sweeping expansion of the repressive state apparatus since the end of the Pinochet dictatorship. The agenda is the political instrument through which the Chilean ruling class is preparing to confront the next eruption of the class struggle.

The security agenda is the product of a consensus that spans the entire political establishment. The repressive architecture now being wielded by the far right was designed under Sebastián Piñera, enacted into law under Gabriel Boric, and handed to Kast as a fully operational instrument of state coercion. The “left” that now postures as the “opposition”—the Socialist Party (PS), the Party for Democracy (PPD), the Communist Party (PC), and the Broad Front (FA)—are not a bulwark against this authoritarian advance. They are its architects, its enablers, and, when it suits their electoral interests, its critics from the right.

Presented by Kast on August 5 around four pillars—“relentless pursuit,” “apprehend without excuses,” “prosecute with the full force of the law,” and “sentencing without leniency”—the ACOT’s concrete content is a battery of measures aimed at criminalizing youth, immigrants, and social protest, while granting the forces of repression sweeping legal immunity.

The Rules on the Use of Force (RUF). The RUF was expedited following the deaths of several Carabineros officers, including Second Sergeant Jaime Urrea Burgos, shot in Quilleco on October 4, and Second Corporal Christopher Aguilera, killed at a checkpoint in Lo Espejo days earlier. Kast demanded that Congress “pick up the pace,” cynically converting the officers’ deaths into a mandate for expanding the legal immunity of the forces of repression.

Published as Law 21,849 on October 16, the RUF establishes a legal framework for the use of force by the Carabineros, the Investigative Police (PDI), and, under certain circumstances, the Armed Forces. It replaces the principle of proportionality with the weaker standard of “rationality” and authorizes potentially lethal force in scenarios that do not pose a serious or imminent danger to life, including the execution of court orders, the arrest of a person who resists, and the prevention of escape. It also authorizes lethal weapons to protect “critical infrastructure,” a provision that effectively licenses the military to shoot at protesters. Amnesty International warned that it “opens the door to the possibility of serious human rights violations recurring.”

The criminalization of youth. The murder of 12-year-old Alejandro Águila in San Bernardo on June 23 was seized upon by the entire political establishment to advance a pre-existing agenda. The government fast-tracked amendments to the Juvenile Criminal Responsibility Law that would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to be tried as adults for 17 serious crimes and mandate transfer to adult prisons upon turning 18. Yet the

most significant demand to emerge from the tragedy, led by figures from across the governing coalition and the so-called opposition, was to deploy the Armed Forces onto the streets of Santiago.

The “Protected Schools” law authorizing the search of students’ backpacks was published on August 12. The extension of the “flagrancy” period from 12 to 24 hours, allowing police to detain people without a warrant for twice as long, passed unanimously. The anti-barricade law 2.0, which eliminates the requirement to prove violence or intimidation to establish the crime of obstructing traffic, passed the Chamber on September 23.

The anti-immigrant offensive. Immigration was the central theme of Kast’s campaign, with Haitian and Venezuelan refugees vilified as the source of organized crime. Under the “Border Shield Plan,” walls, electric fences, and trenches are being built on the borders with Peru and Bolivia. Kast signed bills extending administrative detention for immigrants with expulsion orders from five days to as long as 180 days and criminalizing the transport of irregular immigrants within Chile. Legislation has advanced requiring healthcare centers, schools, and social security agencies to report undocumented immigrants, effectively stripping them of access to healthcare, education, and housing. National Migration Service director Frank Sauerbaum was blunt: immigrants “will no longer be accepted as undocumented. We won’t let them work, and social benefits will be restricted.”

The constitutional state of exception. The centerpiece of the ACOT was a constitutional reform, introduced on August 17, creating a new “state of exception for public security.” It would have let the president declare a zone under war-like powers—restricting movement, assembly, and association, permitting detention without judicial order, and intercepting communications—without congressional approval for up to 240 days. Denounced as “totalitarian” even by libertarian senators, it ultimately failed, forcing the government to withdraw its own bill and accept a substitute drafted in the Senate.

The Gendarmerie and the prison system. The government is moving to transform the Gendarmerie, the prison service, into a military-style police force, transferring it from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Security on January 1. Security Minister Martín Arrau has announced a 19 percent budget increase for the prison service and 20,000 additional beds.

The continuity: From Piñera to Boric and now Kast

The most politically significant fact about this agenda is that it is not new. The Ministry of Public Security, the vehicle through which Arrau

now operates, was created by Law 21.730, which originated under Piñera's second term in 2021 and was promulgated by Boric on January 27, 2025. It placed the Carabineros and the PDI under a new centralized ministry, created an intelligence-sharing center between public and private entities, and empowered the ministry to file criminal complaints against acts that “disrupted public order” or “generated fear in the population”—a tool aimed squarely at mass social protest.

The Boric administration rammed through 15 pieces of security legislation, including the Nain-Retamal Law, which granted police and military a legal presumption of legitimate self-defense when using lethal force. Under this law former Carabineros officer Claudio Crespo was acquitted in January 2026 for blinding psychologist Gustavo Gatica during the 2019 uprising—an acquittal Kast publicly celebrated. Boric also decreed states of emergency and deployed troops, building the scaffolding Kast is now extending.

The RUF itself is a case study. The bill was introduced in April 2023 by Boric, kept alive in successive legislative fast-tracks under right-wing Senate leaders, including José García Ruminot (RN)—now Kast's Minister of the Presidential Secretariat—and finally incorporated into the ACOT and designated urgent by Kast. As one sympathetic columnist put it, the RUF was “passed from hand to hand for three and a half years, and no one let go.”

In matters of public order and social discipline, there is no break between outgoing and incoming governments. Upon taking office, Arrau met with Luis Cordero, Boric's former security minister, and announced that the National Public Security Policy enacted under Boric “is sufficient... comprehensive and provides room for certain policies, plans, and programs that can be implemented in the future.” Boric's former interior minister Carolina Tohá confirmed the continuity from the other side: the policy “does not belong to the previous government but to the State.”

The essential role of “democratic socialism”

The passage of this agenda has depended at every turn on the collaboration of the parties that present themselves as the “left.” The most revealing episode is the role of Senator Pedro Araya (PPD), who chaired the Senate Constitution Committee and became the indispensable bridge between the government and the opposition.

When the government's original constitutional reform collapsed under its own extremism, Araya, together with Senators Andrés Longton (RN) and Arturo Squella (REP), drafted the substitute bill the government accepted. It retained the constitutional criminalization of organized crime and the authorization of differentiated prison regimes, while replacing the new state of exception with an amendment to the existing state of emergency that could be invoked for a “threat to public safety.” The government withdrew its own bill in exchange.

Araya's role expressed the function of the PPD and PS within the “democratic socialism” bloc: providing “responsible” negotiating cover that legitimizes the framework of the right's agenda. When Araya was removed from the Constitution Committee on October 19 by PS Senator Juan Luis Castro in retaliation for his rapprochement with the government, Araya denounced “authoritarian socialism.” But the dispute was never about the content of the security agenda; it was about who would manage the negotiations and take credit. Araya's own defense, that he sought to “strengthen the state to combat organized crime,” was indistinguishable from the government's position.

The same pattern is visible on immigration, where Deputy Jaime Araya (PPD), the senator's brother, demanded that the government “give

explanations” for the failure of the Border Shield Plan, not because he opposed criminalizing migrants but because deportations were not proceeding fast enough. He also demanded suspension of measures easing entry for foreign seasonal workers—a nationalist appeal that pits Chilean workers against immigrant workers.

The votes tell the story. The RUF passed the Chamber of Deputies with 111 votes in favor and the Senate with 29. The flagrancy extension passed unanimously. These majorities were only possible because substantial sections of the PS and PPD voted with the government. The PS's Senate caucus did vote against the RUF—but only after its deputies had supported it in the Chamber, and after PS President Paulina Vodanovic calculated that a symbolic “no” would cost nothing, since passage was already assured.

The division of labor of the pseudo-left

The PC and FA spent four years in government under Boric implementing the same law-and-order agenda they now feign to oppose. The PC postures as a “principled” critic. Communist Party Secretary General Bárbara Figueroa warned that the reform would make the president “a figure closer to a dictator,” and Daniel Jadue (PC) said it “strengthens the coercion of the state without touching the structural causes of insecurity.” But these are the arguments of a party thoroughly integrated into the capitalist state—a party that, as the dominant force in Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government, subordinated the revolutionary upsurge of the working class to the preservation of the bourgeois state, paving the way for Pinochet's bloody coup of September 11, 1973.

The FA plays the “technical” critic, submitting amendments and appealing to the Constitutional Court—another institution of the bourgeois state. FA deputy Tatiana Urrutia questioned the absence of gun control and port security measures, as if the problem with the ACOT were its incompleteness rather than its character as an instrument of class repression.

The PC and FA provide the rhetoric to contain opposition within safe institutional channels. The PS and PPD provide the “responsible” negotiation that legitimizes the framework. Together, they ensure that the working class has no independent political expression and no defense against the authoritarian advance.

The ACOT is not a response to crime. It is a declaration of class war. The Chilean bourgeoisie, having weathered the 2019 uprising, has constructed a repressive apparatus designed to contain the next eruption of class struggle. The far right administers what the pseudo-left built, and the pseudo-left demands that the far right administer it more competently. Both are committed to the defense of capitalist property relations and the suppression of any movement that threatens them.

The task facing the working class in Chile is to build an independent political movement, based on a revolutionary internationalist program, that breaks completely with the parties of bourgeois rule and their pseudo-left appendages. The security of the working class will come not from the repressive machinery both blocs have jointly constructed, but from the conscious organization of the working class for the overthrow of capitalism.



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