

Chile Referendum

Why in news?

Chile voted in favour of replacing its Constitution with a new document.

What is the story behind?

- In 2019, Chile was shaken by mass protests.
- So, the conservative President, Sebastián Piñera, agreed to hold a referendum on rewriting the country's Constitution.
- This Constitution was introduced during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.
- It was approved in a fraudulent plebiscite in 1980.
- It was the main hurdle in introducing social and economic reforms.
- Now, 78% of Chileans voted in favour of replacing the charter with a new document.

Was any attempt made previously to replace it?

- Since its transition to democracy in 1990, Chile has amended the Constitution to take away many of its anti-democratic features.
- But the document, which has enshrined the conservative free-market philosophies of the Milton Friedman School, stayed on.
- It allowed the private sector to thrive and helped the economy expand.
- But it also led to the concentration of wealth in a minuscule minority, triggering social tensions.

Why did 2019 protests happen?

- Protests erupted last year over a small rise in metro fares.
- But it soon snowballed into a public agitation demanding reforms,
 1. An abolition of the private pension fund system, implemented by Gen. Pinochet,
 2. An increase in investments in education and health care, and
 3. Strengthening of the rights of the indigenous communities.
- The protesters also demanded an overhaul of the Constitution as it was impossible to introduce far-reaching reforms with the current charter.
- With the recent plebiscite results, they have won the first stage.

What will happen?

- Replacing the Constitution is going to be a two-year process.
- In 2021, Chileans will elect a 155-member Assembly to draft the new document, which will then be put to a plebiscite in 2022.
- Half the delegates will be women.
- The new Constitution is also expected to be a heated political issue, with the general elections next year.
- But despite the political and procedural challenges, it offers a fresh opportunity for Chile to say goodbye to a dark era.

What will a new charter mean?

- Now, through a democratic process, Chileans can bury the document and introduce a modern democratic charter.
- It offers them an opportunity to right the systemic wrongs of the past.
- It will also chart out a more inclusive economic and social system that works well for all Chileans.

Source: The Hindu

