

Montalva on Tactical Voting: If a “Spiral of Silence” Takes Hold, Matthei Could Narrow the Gap with Kast

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“Three people from different sectors told me it’s a fact: the right has pulled the curtain on Matthei, they’re all backing Kast—and business leaders think that would be very good,” the noted journalist revealed in a conversation on La Mañanera.



The presidential campaign is unfolding in a fast-moving, uncertain landscape, where the dynamics of tactical voting and the so-called “spiral of silence” could shape the final outcome. That’s how noted journalist Juan Diego Montalva, editor of the Poder newsletter (The Clinic), framed the race in a conversation on La Mañana, as he analyzed the challenges facing the candidates for La Moneda.

First, El Ciudadano director Javier Pineda Olcay asked Montalva whether, with five weeks to go before the vote, polls are truly capturing public sentiment, highlighting “the sheer number of surveys out there.”

“I’m already mixing them up—I’m immersed in this all day, and I confuse which ones are weekly and which are biweekly. In the end, some people still expect surprises. They say: ‘Look what happened in Ecuador; the non-favorite won’

(Daniel Noboa). In that context, I don't know if Chile's case leaves much room for speculation, because the truth is all the polls repeat roughly the same pattern: first Jeannette Jara (Unidad por Chile), hovering at or above 30 points; then José Antonio Kast (Partido Republicano) with 17—some give him 18 or 19—and then a candidate, Evelyn Matthei (Chile Vamos), who is 5 or 6 points behind him. So if the numbers are that consistent, you'd assume there shouldn't be a surprise," he argued.

However, he noted that the elections scheduled for Sunday, November 16 will bring 5 million voters to the polls due to compulsory voting—"a real question mark."

"According to many polls, there'd be nothing to doubt—everyone says the same thing—but those 5 million inject some uncertainty and the possibility of a surprise," he said.

The “spiral of silence” and Matthei’s camp pinning hopes on the “tactical vote”

The journalist was also asked about two theories. The first, floated by some analysts, is that a “spiral of silence” could be at play: voters who stay quiet about their choice but, believing Matthei has the strongest attributes or provokes the least rejection, ultimately decide to back her.

The second, advanced by sociologist Alberto Mayol, director of the think tank La Cosa Nostra, posits that people who don't vote or rarely vote tend to behave very similarly to those who do, influenced by what they hear at work and in social spaces.

On that point, the journalist explained that Mayol's thesis speaks to “the level of influence the broader public has over that seemingly more ethereal, less defined group.”

“These are apolitical people who decide in the last two weeks and are generally from lower-income sectors; therefore, the response tends to be rejecting the traditional canons of politics (...) As Mayol suggests, the most interesting question is how the broader mass manages, in some way, to attract or co-opt this segment,” he emphasized.

Regarding the spiral-of-silence notion, he recalled a recent conversation with a member of Jeannette Jara’s team about how “ex-center-left voters from the former Concertación, Nueva Mayoría, and Democratic Socialism might turn out—and would not disclose their vote—because they’ll back Matthei to vote against Kast.”

“I’ve written about this in the newsletters. Matthei’s team is banking on it. They pitch Matthei as the tactical vote—for both the right and the left. For the right, because she prevents Jeannette Jara from winning; she’s the less polarizing option. In that sense, the right would fare much better in a runoff with Matthei, because center-left voters who already supported Matthei in the first round would add on. And in that scenario, for example, the first round would be a way to knock Kast out of the race.”

Nevertheless, he stressed these are “pure suppositions.”

In fact, he said people in Jara’s campaign “dismiss the possibility of center-left voters breaking for Matthei.”

He noted that one lawmaker told him bluntly: “That happens in Chile. No one talks about it—you’re just posh elites.”

He highlighted a model by Unholster—“a group that cross-references data and uses a lot of artificial intelligence”—that compared “what happened in the municipal elections with what could happen now.”

“What struck me is they conclude the right will dominate the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. All of this puts a big question mark over the process,” he said, adding that in his view these presidential elections are among “the most consequential we’ve had, even since the return to democracy.”

“I think, obviously, this cycle is unique. Of course, there’s Aylwin’s victory—and that famous Fortín Mapocho headline about him ‘running unopposed and losing.’ I’d say Lagos vs. Lavín is similar, but even then the scenario was clearer: everyone says today how striking it was that Lavín nearly caught Lagos, but ultimately Lagos prevailed in the runoff,” he recalled.

He argued that Chile’s 1999–2000 presidential contest was “tense,” but the upcoming election has far more at stake, including “the potential arrival of a much more polarizing, conflictive right.”

“There are five million new voters who must decide whom to support; for the first time since the return to democracy, Chile has an election with compulsory voting—with real enforcement. We also have a significant number of foreign residents eligible to vote, which gives this election a distinctive profile—quite striking and important in the context of our electoral history,” he added.

The business sector and a ‘curtain fall’ for Matthei

One part of Montalva’s analysis focused on the relationship between the business community and the candidates.

Montalva disclosed first-hand information suggesting Chile’s major economic groups are distancing themselves from Evelyn Matthei’s campaign, and that the right has essentially “brought down the curtain” on the Chile Vamos candidate.

“Three people from different sectors have told me it’s a fact: the right has pulled the curtain on Matthei, they’re all backing Kast—and that would be very good for business leaders,” he said.

He noted that during events like Chile Day in the United Kingdom and Spain, people who took part told him business leaders seemed “excited about Kast winning,” stressing that “what matters is winning”—and that if Kast prevails, “we’ll still have a right-wing government.”

Matthei’s message shift: from “combative episodes” to a call for “social peace”

Facing this adverse scenario on the right, Montalva described a sharp turn in the former Providencia mayor’s communications strategy.

In his view, Matthei has stopped signaling to the farthest-right sectors and is trying to position herself as a guarantor of stability.

“Evelyn Matthei joined a discussion with The Clinic, and this is interesting. There was a moment—remember when she told the spokesperson (Aisén Etcheverry) to be quiet?—with some combative episodes, including when she addressed human rights, which felt like she was signaling to the far-right, Kast’s right. She’s cut that off. Yesterday she spoke about the dictatorship, the need for a solid team, and the value of knowledge and experience in state posts—and that aligns with what her husband, Jorge Desormeaux, said about social peace. She leaned heavily into the theme of social peace in yesterday’s conversation at The Clinic,” the journalist explained.

“Her tone is genuinely warm and welcoming now, which stands out in Matthei’s case—she can have outbursts that are unsettling or aggressive. She’s taking a much more people-centered stance, calling for a united Chile—a country for everyone. In that sense, she’s putting distance between herself and Kast. I don’t know what impact that will have, but I think that’s the key to governability,” he added.

In the political analyst’s opinion, this shift in Chile Vamos’s messaging is aimed at the business sector. However, he underscored that “the feeling among people—

within her campaign, in the ruling coalition, and in government circles—is that the business community would be perfectly happy with Kast. Let’s leave it at that.”

The vote-absorption problem

Despite this repositioning, Montalva also identified a core challenge for Matthei: her difficulty consolidating voters that Kast is losing to other candidates.

“There’s an interesting point about how Johannes Kaiser (Partido Nacional Libertario) has grown, and how (Franco) Parisi (Partido de la Gente) has grown,” he noted, adding that the prevailing sense is that she “isn’t managing to absorb Kast’s drop-offs. It’s not that her softer, coalition-building message has convinced Kast’s sector. And that’s a problem for her.”

With a month to go until election day, the editor of Poder sees a complicated path ahead—but one potentially disruptive factor: the presidential debates.

“Kast is being very cautious. Kast doesn’t perform well—he lacks the tools to succeed on a presidential debate stage—and there are three presidential debates just this month.”

This factor, Montalva said, “could move the needle,” especially considering the Republican’s weaknesses, contrasted with past experiences of other candidates.

On Wednesday’s edition of La Mañanera, our director also spoke with Nicolás Salgado, a leader of the O’Higgins regional chapter of the Colegio de Profesores and a candidate for deputy in District 15.

You can watch the full program below:

Fuente: El Ciudadano