**Pride and protest: cultural response in the aftermath of the Chilean social outbreak**

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Una reciente ola de protestas ha emergido alrededor del mundo. Hong Kong, Líbano, Chile, Cataluña, entre otras. Sin embargo, los cientistas sociales avanzan más lento en presentar evidencia empírica sobre las consecuencias de estos movimientos sociales en curso. En este estudio, analizamos de forma cuasi-experimental la respuesta emocional de la opinión pública (N=1502) al estallido social chileno que comienza el 18 de octubre del 2019. Estas protestas se entienden como un shock moral que resulta de la información que provee acerca del país y los ciudadanos. Los resultados indican que el estallido social tuvo un efecto negativo sobre el orgullo hacia el país y nivel de desarrollo económico. En contraste, la respuesta afectiva hacia los chilenos incrementa después del estallido social. Así, discutimos el efecto de la protesta social como un shock moral que señala las deudas como país, pero que ofrece oportunidades de la revalorización y resignificación de los ciudadanos.

**Palabras claves**: social movement, emotions, Chile, moral shocks, causal inference, public opinion.

[Total palabras 5000]

# **Introduction**

Recent developments in cultural sociology suggest that cultural change is rather the exception than the norm (Kiley and Vaisey 2020; Vaisey and Lizardo 2016). Either culture change occurs due to cohort replacement (Vaisey and Lizardo 2016), or changes are non-persistent (Kiley and Vaisey 2020). This perspective does not provide hopeful expectations in the current context where climate change, COVID-19 pandemic, and widespread political crises arise uncertainties about future directions of our systems of values and traditional form of culture. All these events could be understood as moral shocks (Jasper 1998, 2011) that could have consequences in the way that we feel and think, breaking with the stability of cultural dispositions. In this study, we attempt to examine the short-term effects of one of these cultural shocks on emotions and beliefs. We shift the traditional emphasis on culture and emotions as motivations of social movements of resource mobilization theory to the cultural consequences of these moral shocks.

After the revival of emotions in the cultural analysis of protests (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000; Jasper 1998, 2011, 2014), many specific emotions have been isolated as causal mechanisms of willingness or actual engagement in social movements, protest movements or protests (e.g. DeCelles, Sonenshein, and King 2019; Thomas et al. 2020; Weber, Mummendey, and Waldzus 2002). However, the literature on the causal effect of protests on emotions has not followed the same pace. Using a natural experiment, we analyze the impact of the “Chilean spring” of 2019 (Somma et al. 2020) on the pride toward the country, beliefs about economic development, and beliefs about Chilean citizens. We conceptualize these cultural elements as moral sentiments in the framework of emotions of protest (Jasper 2011). The Chilean social outbreak is a case in a multicausal global wave of protests. Hong Kong, Lebanon, Cataluña, and, more recently, the United States have encountered massive social movements in the last months, and some are still ongoing at the moment of writing. The Chilean spring offers an opportunity to evaluate the short-term consequences of one of these social movements. As Fantasia and Hirsch (2004) argue, acute social struggles provide spatial and social-organizational bases for cultural transformation.

Since early October of 2019, secondary-school students started protesting for fare-dodging on the metro of Santiago, capital of Chile. Protests involving students have been commonplace in the political landscape of the country since the so-called “penguin revolution.” (Donoso 2013; Guzman-Concha 2012) However, on Friday 18, everything changed, and protests escalated to the general population. Barricades were built, the entire metro system was shut down after attacks, and entire stations were set alight. On October 19, protests continued across the country with shops looted, buses burned, and clashes between protestors and the special police forces. The government declared an emergency state and curfew. Several international organizations have reported human rights violations during that time (XXX). Although the protests have stopped during the covid-19 pandemic and all the spectrum of political parties has approved a referendum for changing the political constitution, the case of Hong Kong provides signals that the Chilean movement could also be resumed after the health emergency is under control.

Social scientists agree on the unexpected nature of the Chilean social outbreak (e.g. Gonzalez and Morán 2020; Somma et al. 2020). Although protestors claim for lower inequality, changes in the pension system, a new political constitution, among others, Chile has been long considered one of the most developed countries of Latin America, and recently classified as a high-income country by the International Monetary Fund. In the last three decades, Chile has undergone unprecedented changes: reduction of poverty, increased GDP, and longer life expectancy. Therefore, what happened on the night of October 18 and the following days across the country could be considered as an exogenous treatment to evaluate its causal effect on emotions. Hence, this article uses a natural experiment comparing beliefs and emotions before and after of the main events of protest. The social outbreak started during the fieldwork of a public opinion poll aimed to measure Chileans beliefs and attitudes toward the country (Imagen País 2019). Thus, the social outbreak could be considered as an exogenous moral shock generating an unintended quasi-experiment.

Following the literature in emotions and social movements, the Chilean social outbreak was a moral shock (Jasper 1998, 2011, 2014) that provided information signaling that the country was not as expected, leading to the re-articulation of emotions and beliefs about the country and citizens themselves. The findings indicate that the protests[[1]](#footnote-1) affected negatively the national pride and beliefs about development but increased the positive valuation of characteristics of Chileans.

Our contribution to the literature is threefold. First, this study is one of the first in providing robust evidence of the consequences of the social outbreak in Chile, which is part of a larger and dynamic wave of protests in the world. Second, the literature in emotions as sources of protests is growing. However, there are few studies considering the effect on emotions. Third, social psychologists and political psychologists have provided evidence of the role of emotions using lab experiments. However, although their internal validity, these studies lack of ecological validity (van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013), and researchers do not really know if the students in the lab are willing to take the streets. Besides defining it as an outcome, we use a public opinion survey that was applied to the general population before and after the protests outbreak. Therefore, our findings are grounded in a more realistic ground.

The article is structured as follows. First, the theoretical framework of emotions and social movements is discussed, which provides tools to understand the social outbreak as a moral shock. Second, in the methodological section, the data, measurements, and analytical strategy are presented in detail. Third, the results are reported and discussed in conclusion.

# **Protests and emotional response**

The aftermath of the 18-0 could be understood as an unexpected moral shock of the Chilean society. The widespread protests along the country signaled that the Chilean case’s apparent success was not what they had expected. These moral shocks generate vertiginous feelings, a rethinking of moral principles, restructuration of worldviews, or activation of underlying values (Jasper 2011). In addition, repression events following protests -as the case of the protest movement in Chile- could lead to even greater mobilization and ignite public indignation toward the responsible of the repression (Aytaç, Schiumerini, and Stokes 2018; Hess and Martin 2006). Thus, the moral shock is stronger.

Emotions are an aspect of culture (Jasper 2014). Culture delineates how emotions are constituted, managed, and experienced (Thoits 1989). In toolkit theory, culture is strategically used to make-sense and justify actions (Swidler 1986; Vaisey 2009). For instance, people use different understandings of love to interpret their circumstances, feelings, and beliefs (Swidler 2001). Emotions also participate in the reproduction of culture, subjectivity, and power relations (Harding and Pribram 2002), linking cognitive understandings and action.

The sociology of emotions has always encountered the flaw of the elusiveness of the concept (Jasper 2011; Thoits 1989). Jasper (2006) has integrated different emotions in the literature into a typology, which helps us to define clearly the scope of this study. First, reflex emotions are quick and automatic reactions to certain events. They include anger, joy, distrust, fear, among others. Second, moods which are typically lasting longer than reflex emotions. They do not take direct objects and can be deployed across settings. For instance, nostalgia. Third, moral sentiments are more complex than the previous ones. They are more stable feelings toward others or objects and include pride and shame, but also compassion, outrage, and complex forms of fear and anger. They are the “hot cognition” (Gamson 1992) that triggers political consciousness and participation. The design of the survey of our natural experiments included measurements of moral sentiments, which are detailed in the variables section.

Social problems that social movements signal also require someone to be held accountable (Jasper 2014). In the case of Chile, the government and the economic system has been blamed as responsible. Thus, the indignation is targeted toward the government, the system, and their symbols. These moral sentiments are shared for the participants and supporters of the social movements. As shown by other public opinion polls, a large majority of the Chilean population supported and participated in the movement across the country[[2]](#footnote-2). Therefore, these emotions are widely shared by the population and could explain the low levels of approval of the government in the period before COVID-19 pandemic[[3]](#footnote-3). Henceforth, the first expectation is that these negative moral sentiments will be strengthened in the aftermath of the social outbreak (hypothesis 1). On the other hand, social movements also generate reciprocal emotions among participants and supporters of the movement. Thus, the positive affections toward citizens might be positively affected by the social outbreak (hypothesis 2). The restructuring of negative moral sentiments toward the government and positive moral sentiments toward citizens could have reinforced the collective identity associated with the social movement (Jasper 2011), and explain the scalation that the Chilean outbreak took in the months after the night of October 18. We cannot elucidate whether they will be a stable cultural transformation, or these moral sentiments will revert to the baseline. However, the short-term effect could be on the basis of a long-term transformation.

# **A natural experiment**

We use data from the Chilean Pride Study (Imagen País 2019), a stratified and probabilistic telephone sample of 1,503 Chileans over the age of 18. The fieldwork started October 11th of 2019, one week before the social outbreak the night of October 18th. Out of the total sample, 27.8 of the cases were collected before that night, and the remining 72.5% in the upcoming month. The fieldwork was resume on XX after the protest movement began and finished in XXX. Thus, it provides unique conditions for a natural experiment. The study was intended to examine beliefs of Chileans about their own country and identity.

This data was analyzed as a natural experiment where the treatment is the Chilean social outbreak of October 18th. The main methodological challenge of this type of designs (e.g. Minkus, Deutschmann, and Delhey 2019; Slothuus 2010) is to make sure that respondents interviewed before and after the exogenous shock are comparable and the difference between treated and controlled could be attributed to the treatment. Figure X compared both groups on attributes measured on the survey. It indicates that the experiment is balanced due to similarity of treated and controlled in these key variables.

## *Measurements*

## *Analytical strategy*

Our analytical strategy is threefold. We estimate an OLS regression with the respective emotion as dependent variable ant the treatment dummy (= social outbreak) as independent variable. Robust standard errors are included. This model can be formalized as follow:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | (1) |

where represents the average treatment of the Chilean social outbreak (T) on the emotion ; stands for the intercept and error term. In addition, two complementary analyses were conducted as a robustness check. First, control variables were included in the model:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | (2) |

where stands for a vector of control variables mentioned above. Second, we used entropy balancing (Hainmueller 2012), which is a matching technique that estimate scalar weights for the treatment group. It calculates balance covariates directly through the exact match of pre-specified means and variances of the covariates’ distribution of the treatment and control group (Hainmueller 2012; Stahl and Schober 2020). Unlike other matching techniques, entropy balancing makes treatment orthogonal to these predefined covariates. We also replicate the analyses using nearest-neighbor matching with replacement, which could be found in Table XX of the supplementary material. All the results are confirmed.

# **Results**

Los resultados reportados en la Figura 1 sugieren que el estallido social tuvo un efecto negativo sobre distintas variables de orgullo nacional. Es decir que el orgullo hacia el país, sobre su desarrollo económico y símbolos patrios (escudo y lema) disminuyeron luego de las protestas iniciadas el 18 de octubre. Asimismo, en el nivel de acuerdo con que Chile es un buen lugar para vivir se ve afectado negativamente. Esto es consistente con la idea de que el estallido social fue un shock moral que entregó señales sobre desafíos pendientes para el país. Los resultados son robustos utilizando tres especificaciones de los modeles para cada variable: 1) verde para la relación binaria, 2) azul para la inclusión de covariables y 3) la ponderación del efecto usando balance entrópico.

Figura 1. Efectos del “Estallido Social” en indicadores de orgullo nacional.

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated

Note: Los coeficientes son obtenidos de regresiones ordenadas logísticas.

En contraste, el “estallido social” tuvo un efecto opuesto en la valoración de las características de los ciudadanos. Mientras las emociones hacia el país se ven negativamente afectadas, el movimiento social aumentó el orgullo hacia la energía de los chilenos y la probabilidad de querer que los chilenos sean reconocidos por su esfuerzo. Por lo tanto, el movimiento social es un shock moral que permite la resignificación de los ciudadanos, a diferencia de la valoración del país como un todo y su nivel de desarrollo.

Figura 2. Efectos del “Estallido Social” en indicadores de orgullo ciudadano.

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated

Note: Los coeficientes para el modelo de orgullo sobre la energía se obtiene de regresiones logísticas ordenadas, mientras que el esfuerzo proviene de regresiones logísticas binarias.

**Conclusion**

We do not whether it is a short-term change or persistent.

People do not experience emotional reactions randomly, but rather as a product of their cognitive evaluations of a given event or phenomenon (e.g., Ellsworth, 1991; Lazarus, 1993; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Roseman, 1991).

By contrast, the levels of national pride and presidential trust should decrease, as protests signal poor political performance, which has negative effects on trust and regime support (Finkel et al., 1989; Mishler & Rose, 2001) .

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**The effects of anti-abortion demonstrators and pro-choice escorts on women's psychological responses to abortion**

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1. For the sake of simplicity, we use the terms social movement, protest movement and protest interchangeably. For a discussion see Jasper (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Based on a representative and probabilistic sample, surveys (Núcleo Milenio en Desarrollo Social et al. 2019) indicate that 85.5 percent of Chileans over the age of 18 declared their support toward the social movement one month after the social outbreak; 55.3 percent declared to have participated in some form of protest; 70 percent are willing to participate in *cabildos cuidadanos* (open citizen councils) to discuss the new political constitution and the political context. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. One of the most prestigious public opinion polls (Centro de Estudios Públicos 2019) showed that 81 percent of the Chileans consider that the governed responded wrongly or very wrongly to the social outbreak, and the president reached the lowest level of approval (6 percent) since it is historically measured in the country. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)