Pride and protest: The Chilean 18-O as a moral shock

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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: protestas, Chile, moral shocks, emotional response, pride, causal inference, public opinion

[Total palabras 5000]

Introduction

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.” 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. Although the intensity lowered down, the social unrest is ongoing, and all the spectrum of political parties has approved a referendum for changing the political constitution.

However, the social unrest in Chile is one case of a widespread wave of multicausal protests around the world. Hong Kong, Lebanon, Catalonia, and other South American countries have faced similar waves of protests for the last months. Causes and ends are heterogeneous, and we cannot evaluate whether they will generate long-term structural changes. Nevertheless, these social movements might have short-term social and psychological effects that could be evaluated. Thus, we use the case of the “estallido social” in Chile as a moral shock to estimate the impact of recent social movements on emotions of the general population of the country.

Social scientists agree on the unexpected nature of the “estallido social”. 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. Following the literature in emotions and social movements, the “estallido social” was a moral shock that provided information signaling that the country was not as expected, leading to the re-articulation of emotions toward the country and citizens themselves. In particular, we estimate the effect on pride towards the country, its economic development and its citizens. The findings indicate that the “estallido social” affected negatively the national pride 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 “estallido social” in Chile, which is part of a larger 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, which limit the inference of their findings. Besides defining it as an outcome, we use a public opinion survey that was applied to the general population before and after the protests outbroke. 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 “estallido social” 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.

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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