**Pride and Protest: Emotional response in the aftermath of the Chilean social outburst**

## Introduction

Following studies on the revival of emotions in the cultural analysis of (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2000; Jasper, 1998, 2011, 2014), these emotions were then isolated as causal mechanisms of willingness or actual engagement in social movements (e.g. DeCelles, Sonenshein, & King, 2019; Thomas, Zubielevitch, Sibley, & Osborne, 2020; Weber, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2002). However, they are also crucial for the effectiveness of movements as well as for generating potential long-term transformations. The emotional response of the general population to social movements is highly significant in the current context, where climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, and widespread socio-political crises have given rise to uncertainties about the future directions of our value systems and traditional forms of culture. What effect do these moral shocks have on the way we think and feel? In this study, we attempt to examine the short-term effects of one of these shocks on moral emotions (Jasper, 1998, 2011).

Emotions are an aspect of culture. Culture delineates how emotions are constituted, managed, and experienced (Thoits, 1989). Emotions are shared among individuals and are socially influenced (Jasper, 2011, 2014). They are also part of the public culture, and individuals can strategically use them to make sense of their actions (Swidler, 2001). Therefore, how individuals change their emotions toward certain objects is a question of cultural change. Using an interrupted public opinion poll, we analyze the impact of the first weeks of the 2019 “Chilean spring” (Somma, Bargsted, Disi Pavlic, & Medel, 2020) on the country’s sense of pride, economic development, and Chilean citizens themselves. Recent developments in cultural sociology suggest that cultural change is the exception rather than the norm (Kiley & Vaisey, 2020; Vaisey & Lizardo, 2016). Cultural change either occurs due to cohort replacement (Vaisey & Lizardo, 2016), or changes are non-persistent (Kiley & Vaisey, 2020). Thus, we discuss whether the Chilean social movement could lay the foundations for a more stable cultural change.

The Chilean social outburst[[1]](#footnote-1) is one case within a multicausal global wave of protests. Hong Kong, Lebanon, Catalonia, and, more recently, the United States have witnessed massive social movements.[[2]](#footnote-2) Discussing whether these movements are connected goes beyond the aims of this study, but we can affirm they are part of a widespread crisis of political institutions across the globe. The “Chilean spring” provides an opportunity to evaluate the changes in emotions of the general population after the first weeks of protest activities in one of these movements, which we refer to as the short-term consequences of the social movement. The case of the protests in Chile is significant because it was the first country to implement neo-liberal economic policies (Harvey, 2007), and this movement has highlighted the deficiencies of the model. Therefore, not only do the protests in Chile defy the country’s structural conditions, but also the legitimacy of the global economic system. As Fantasia and Hirsch (2004) argue, acute social struggles provide the bases for cultural transformation. The Chilean social outburst initiated what cultural sociologists (Bail, 2012; Swidler, 1986) have called “unsettled times,” where the unprecedented, large-scale crisis challenges shared beliefs about how society should work and about the emotions people feel towards the social environment.

In early October 2019, secondary-school students initiated the practice of fare dodging on the subway in Santiago, the capital of Chile, as a protest against the increase in the fare from about USD 1.12 to USD 1.16, equivalent to 0.28 percent of the minimum wage (Gonzalez & Morán, 2020). Protests involving students have been commonplace in Chile’s political landscape, reaching one of its most critical moments with the so-called “penguin revolution” in 2006 (Donoso, 2013; Guzman-Concha, 2012). However, on October 18, protests escalated to the general population.[[3]](#footnote-3) Barricades were built, the entire subway system was shut down after attacks, and stations were set alight. On October 19, protests continued across the country with shops being looted, buses burned, and clashes between protestors and special police forces. The government declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew. Several international organizations have reported human rights violations during that time (e.g. United Nations, 2019). Although the protests have been sporadic during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the entire spectrum of political parties has approved a referendum for a new political constitution, the case of Hong Kong (Wang, Ramzy, & May, 2020) suggests that the Chilean movement could also be resumed once the health emergency is under control.

As a shared feature of unsettled times and turning points (Abbott, 1997; Bail, 2012), social scientists and policymakers claim that the escalation of the events in Chile on October 18 was unexpected or “they did not see it coming” (e.g. Sanhueza, 2019; Somma et al., 2020). However, its underlying causes are still a matter of debate. The low levels of political identification, distrust in political parties, unfulfilled expectations, cultural change, and market-based inequalities, among others, have been suggested (e.g. Gonzalez & Morán, 2020; Somma et al., 2020). Despite citizens’ demands for deep structural reforms (e.g. changes in the pension system, reform of the police, a new political constitution), Chile has been long considered one of the most developed countries in Latin America. In the last three decades, Chile has undergone unprecedented changes: poverty reduction, increased GDP, and longer life expectancy (The World Bank, 2017). Hence, this article compares moral emotions before and after the unexpected events of the first weeks of the Chilean protest movement. Coincidentally, the social crisis interrupted the fieldwork of a public opinion survey designed to measure beliefs and attitudes toward the country (Fundación Imagen de Chile, 2019). This survey provides, then, a unique opportunity to examine the effects of the first weeks of the “Chilean spring” as a moral shock.

Following the literature on emotions and social movements, the Chilean social outburst could be conceptualized as a moral shock (Jasper, 1998, 2011, 2014) that provided information signaling that the country was not as successful as assumed by the citizens, leading to the re-articulation of emotions toward the country and citizens themselves. Our findings indicate that the protests negatively affected pride in the country, in official symbols, in economic development, and in Chile as a place to live. Nevertheless, the valorization of characteristics of Chileans was positively affected by the social outburst.

The contribution to the literature is threefold. First, this study is one of the first to provide robust evidence of the consequences of the “Chilean spring,” which is part of a larger and dynamic ongoing wave of protests in the world. Second, in recent decades, the literature on emotions has taught us much about why people protest (Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). However, there are few studies considering its cultural impacts on citizens. Third, social and political psychologists have provided evidence of the role of emotions using lab experiments. Despite their internal validity, these studies lack ecological validity (Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013), and researchers are unsure as to whether the students in the lab are willing to take to the streets. Besides defining emotions as an outcome, we use a public opinion survey applied to the general population before and after the outburst of protests. Therefore, our findings are grounded in more realistic settings.

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 data and methods section, we describe our measurements and analytical strategy. Third, the results are reported and discussed in the conclusion.

## Protests and emotional response

The aftermath of the night of October 18 may be understood as an unexpected moral shock in Chilean society. The widespread protests across the country signaled that the Chilean case of apparent success was not what exactly what it seemed. According to Jasper (2011), these moral shocks generate vertiginous feelings, lead to rethinking of moral principles, restructure worldviews, and activate underlying values. In addition, repression events following protests -as in the case of the protest movement in Chile (Somma et al., 2020)- could lead to even greater mobilization and ignite public indignation toward those responsible for the repression (Aytaç, Schiumerini, & Stokes, 2018; Hess & Martin, 2006; Porta & Diani, 2006). The focus of this study is the shockwave of the events of the first weeks of the social movement (for details of events see Table 1S). Classic organizational theories of social movements consider this stage as “social ferment,” where disorganization characterizes the movement, and goals have not yet been clearly defined (Blumer, 1995). Therefore, the effects on emotions are essential for the effectiveness of succeeding stages of the protests and as a tipping point for more sustainable transformations.

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 justify and make sense of actions (Swidler, 1986; Vaisey, 2009). For example, 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 & Pribram, 2002), linking cognitive understandings and action.

Jasper (2006) integrated different emotions into a typology, which helps us to clearly define 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 typically last longer than reflex emotions, do not have a direct object and can be deployed across settings – nostalgia, for example. Third, moral emotions or sentiments are more complex than the previous ones. They are more stable feelings towards others or objects and include pride and shame, but also compassion, outrage, and complex forms of fear and anger. When these moral sentiments include support for changes in the structure of the society, they are part of what has been termed “sentiment pools” (Kim & McCarthy, 2016), which are crucial for the effectiveness and success of social movements (Bugden, 2020). Moral emotions could also be considered part of the “hot cognition” (Gamson, 1992), which triggers political consciousness and participation. Social movements research indicates that the achievement of their goals and social change depends upon the support from the public and the alignment of shared sentiments (Andrews, Beyerlein, & Tucker Farnum, 2016; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Our survey includes measurements of pride in one’s country and its citizens as moral emotions detailed in the variables section.

Pride is an emotion that plays a crucial role in many domains of human activities, reinforcing prosocial behavior, and achievement (Tracy & Robins, 2007). Nevertheless, social psychologists have paid less attention to the collective facets of pride (Williams & Davies, 2017) that could be relevant for sociologists or political scientists. National pride is a group-based emotion that people feel toward the nation-state (Vlachová, 2019). Pride of being Chilean could be considered a collective pride, where individuals self-categorize with a group with an admirable quality or behavior (Liu, Lai, Yu, & Chen, 2014). Individuals do not need to engage in protests activities to feel pride or not toward being Chilean or their characteristics. It is driven by belonging and could be considered as vicarious pride. Therefore, we can frame pride in the country, the system, symbols, and Chileans as emotions.

Social problems that protests signal also require someone to be held accountable (Jasper, 2014). In Chile’s case, the institutions (e.g. government, congress, market, political constitutions, among others) have been held responsible. Thus, the indignation is targeted toward the government, the system, and their symbols. These emotions are shared by participants and supporters of the social movements. As shown by other public opinion surveys, a large majority of the Chilean population supported and participated in the movement across the country.[[4]](#footnote-4) Therefore, these emotions are widely shared by the population and could explain the low levels of approval of the government.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The new information provided by the movement, pointing to the importance of social problems, enables us to propose the hypothesis that pride in the country, official symbols, and economic development will be negatively affected in the aftermath of the social crisis (Hypothesis 1). These represent the status quo and those responsible for the crisis. Moreover, social movements also generate reciprocal emotions among participants and supporters of the movement. Thus, the affections toward citizens might be positively impacted by the social outburst (Hypothesis 2). The restructuring of shared moral sentiments toward the country and reciprocal moral sentiments among citizens might have reinforced the collective identity of the social movement (Jasper, 2011), and explain the escalation of the Chilean crisis in the months after the night of October 18. We cannot elucidate whether the changes will be a stable cultural transformation, or whether moral sentiments will revert to the baseline. However, if the movement has had short-term effects on how citizens feel and think, it could be the basis of a long-term transformation.

## Data and Methods

### *Data*

We use data from the Chilean Pride Study[[6]](#footnote-6) (Fundación Imagen de Chile, 2019), a stratified and probabilistic sample of 1,503 Chileans over the age of 18, collected using a CATI (computer-assisted telephone survey). The fieldwork started on October 15 of 2019, one week before the unexpected events of the night of October 18, and finished on December 7. The total sample can be divided into three measurement periods for substantive theoretical comparison. Of the total sample, 27.8% of respondents were surveyed before the night of October 18, starting on October 15; 30.0% were surveyed 18 days after the crisis between November 5 and November 9; and the remaining 42.2% were interviewed in a follow-up sample 46 days from December 3 to December 7. The fieldwork was resumed on November 5 after the protests began. Thus, it provides unique conditions for evaluating the effect of the first weeks of the protest movement as an events study and to monitor the evolution of moral emotions in a follow-up sample. The survey was originally intended to examine Chileans’ beliefs about their own country and identity, including questions of substantive relevance for our research issue.

### *Measurements*

The dependent variables of the study are four shared moral sentiments toward the country and the system and three reciprocal moral sentiments among Chilean citizens. Regarding moral sentiments toward the country, we have:

*Pride in the country*. Respondents were asked how proud they are of the country on a 7-point scale, where 1 is “not at all proud” and 7 “very proud.”

*Pride in the country's emblem and motto*. The original survey included items measuring how proud the respondents were of specific aspects of the country and its citizens. These items were diverse, including, for instance, the use of the Chilean sky for astronomy, science and technology, and export products. One of these items can be considered as an official symbol of the country: "[pride] in the country's emblem and motto." Since Pinochet’s military dictatorship, the Chilean national emblem (Figure 1) has been signified as a symbol of conservative sectors of the society and the military heritage (Joignant, 2007). In addition, the motto in the emblem may be translated as “by reason or force.” Neighboring countries have long considered this phrase a representation of the Chilean expansionism of the XIX century and the iron fist of the government (Burr, 1965). These official symbols contrast with the use of the Mapuche flag by protestors. The Mapuche are the largest indigenous group in the country, engaged in a long-standing conflict with the Chilean state (Bengoa, 2000). Thus, while the Mapuche flag is part of the movement’s counterculture, the emblem and motto are part of the official culture and symbolize the status quo.

[Figure 1 about here]

*Pride in the economic development of Chile*. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with different statements about Chile, which included economic development. Categories of response ranged from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree.”

*Pride in Chile as a good place to live*. In the same set of Likert scales as the previous item, respondents indicated their degree of agreement with the phrase "Chile is a good place to live."

The variable of moral sentiments among citizens combined a general indicator and two indicators of specific characteristics of citizens.

*Pride in being Chilean*. The reciprocal moral sentiments between citizens were measured by a general question about pride in their citizenship. Respondents were asked how proud they were of being Chilean. The question used the same scale as pride in the country.

*Energy shown by Chileans*. Respondents answered how proud they are of the energy of their own people. Following the remaining indicators, they responded on the same 7-point scale, where 1 represents “not at all proud” and 7 “very proud.”

*Chilean work ethic*. Respondents were asked to choose which of the following statements they would most like people from abroad to think about Chileans: (1) Chileans are happy and welcoming, (2) Chileans are dedicated and hardworking, (3) Chileans take care of their territory and environment, (4) Chileans are serious and responsible, (5) Chileans make high-quality products, and (6) Chile is an economically developed country. The last category is treated as missing because it is unrelated to characteristics of Chilean people, and few people chose it (N=12). Based on a multinomial model reported in Table 2S of the supplementary material, we recoded this variable into a dummy indicator of work ethic where 1 represents “Chileans are dedicated and hard-working” and 0 “otherwise.” Additional information is provided in the results section.

### *Analytical strategy*

Our analytical strategy is threefold. We estimated an OLS regression with the respective emotion as the dependent variable and the treatment dummy (1 “treated” 0 “controlled”) as the independent variable. Robust standard errors were included. This model can be formalized as follows:

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

where stands for a vector of control variables (gender, age, educational level, number of household members, and geographic zone of residence). Second, we used entropy balancing (Hainmueller, 2012), which is a matching technique that estimates scalar weights for the treatment group. It calculates balanced 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 & Schober, 2020). Unlike other matching techniques, entropy balancing makes treatment orthogonal to these predefined covariates, does not rely on a propensity score, and uses the whole sample to estimate effects. Table 5S, in the supplementary material, shows how differences of means, variances, and skewness between treatment and control groups were zero after entropy balancing.

## Results

The results are presented in two sections. First, we describe the time-trend of the moral sentiments across the measured period. Second, we estimate the effects of the first week of the protests on these variables.

### *Time-trends*

Figure 2 shows the daily average of each shared moral emotion. After the social outburst (first vertical line), Chileans reported lower levels of pride. Pride in the country decreases with the level of pride in economic development, which is the moral emotion with the lowest level over the period measured. Nevertheless, although the pride in the country seems to recover in the last measured period, the pride in Chile’s economic development maintains a negative trend. Pride in the official symbols shows a similar pattern. The pride in the emblem and motto decreased after the social crisis began, and the negative trend continued in the last period. Chile as a place to live cannot be directly compared with the other variables because it is measured on a different scale. However, although the trend is less pronounced, it is also negative after the crisis and during the third measurement period.

[Figure 2 about here]

Figure 3 indicates a different pattern for pride in being Chilean and energy shown by Chileans. The overall pride in Chilean citizenship does not show a clear trend and remains at high levels. Nevertheless, the pride in the energy of Chileans increases after the outburst, and it does not return to the levels of the baseline. The peak of the pride in the energy of Chileans is in the first measurement after the fieldwork was resumed. It could suggest that the social crisis is not only a social outburst but also as an “outburst of energy,” in the eyes of the general population.

[Figure 3 about here]

Figure 4 reports the proportion of responses on each category of the variable about features for which Chileans might be known abroad. One of the characteristics that shows a clear trajectory is “dedicated and hardworking.” The descriptive trend indicates that the valorization of this characteristic increases after the social crisis and, although not at baseline levels, decreases again in the third measurement period. Something similar is observed for Chileans as producers of high-quality goods, which could be interpreted as a market-based feature. For further analyses, we dichotomized this categorical variable considering “dedicated and hardworking” as the reference category.

[Figure 4 about here]

### *Effects of the social crisis*

The main methodological challenge of this type of design (e.g. Minkus, Deutschmann, & Delhey, 2019; Slothuus, 2010) is ensuring that respondents interviewed before and after the event are comparable and the difference between treated and controlled could be attributed to the events. Table 1 shows a balancing test for the background characteristics asked about in the survey using a multinomial regression model. The indicator of whether the respondent was surveyed before the crisis (“before”), in the first measurement after the crisis (“after 2”), or in the follow-up sample (“after 1”) is used as the dependent variable. Model 2 indicates no differences between the baseline measurement and the follow-up sample. When comparing the baseline sample with the first sample after the crisis, there are slight differences by age (OR = 0.986, p <.01). The same difference appears when comparing the two last measurement periods (OR = 0.986, p <.001). Regarding the area of residence, respondents living in southern Chile were more likely to be surveyed after the crisis than in the baseline (OR = 1.870, p <.001) and the follow-up sample (OR = 1.768, p <.001). These differences are explained by the organization of the fieldwork. The slightly significant coefficients of less-educated respondents in Model 1 and Model 3 suggest they were less likely to be surveyed in the first measurement after the crisis [(OR = 1.821, p < .001) and (OR = 1.585, p < .05), respectively]. Finally, there are no significant differences in the number of household members. As explained in the analytical strategy, this result suggests the importance of including these variables as additional covariates and weights in the entropy balance as a robustness check. Table 1S, in the supplementary material, provides a detailed account of the events that occurred between the interruption of the fieldwork and its resumption.

[Table 1 about here]

We estimated regressions models with dummy variables for the social crisis and the follow-up sample, using the period before the social outburst as the reference category (Table 3S in the supplementary material). These coefficients are shown in Figure 5 and are the main tests of our theoretical predictions. As stated in Hypothesis 1, Figure 5 suggests that the protest movement negatively affected the country’s moral sentiments. After the first weeks of the movement, pride in the country (B = -0.709, p < .001), pride in Chile’s economic development (B = -0.511, p < .001), and Chile as good place to live (B = -0.279, p <.001) were lower than the baseline. These effects are consistent when using controls and entropy weights, suggesting the robustness of the findings against potential selection in the treatment. Only in the case of pride in official symbols are there slight differences between the binary, controlled, and entropy balancing models. The estimated effect is negative in the three models, but only marginally significant in the latter two [(B = -0.319, p < .05) and (B = -0.308, p < .05), respectively].

The follow-up sample’s effects answer the question of whether the moral emotions returned to the baseline after more than one month after the crisis started on October 18. Although they do not refer to within-individual changes or an unexpected interruption of the poll, they provide insightful information about the trend that emotions followed after the social crisis. For all the indicators, the effect of the follow-up sample dummy is negative and statistically significant. This finding indicates that moral emotions did not return to the baseline. For pride in official symbols, the effect is negative and highly significant, which suggests that, although there is no difference with the period after the crisis, it is negatively affected after a month of protests.

The additional models in Table 4S, included in the supplementary material, enable us to discuss whether the negative effect increased in the follow-up compared with the period after the social crisis. The positive effect of the follow-up dummy on pride in the country suggests that this pride recovered in the most advanced stages of the crisis. However, it did not reach the baseline levels, as shown in the previous analysis. The non-significant effects for the remaining variables indicate that negatively affected moral emotions where neither deepened nor recovered.

[Figure 5 about here]

Figure 6 shows the effects of indicators of reciprocal sentiments. The full models are reported in Table 5S in the supplementary material. The findings from the descriptive trends are confirmed. The social crisis and follow-up samples show no significant effects on Chilean citizens’ pride, which indicates it remains stable. In contrast, the valorization of energy shown by Chileans increases after the social outburst (B = 0.302, p < .001) and is maintained in the follow-up (B = 0.193, p < .001). In contrast, the effect on the valorization of Chileans’ work ethic (dedicated and hardworking), compared to the other categories, increases after the first weeks of the social crisis but returns to the baseline after the follow-up, as suggested by the non-significant coefficient.

[Figure 6 about here]

A recent study (Gonzalez & Morán, 2020) has found an association between participation in the Chilean protests and both educational level and age. More educated people and younger individuals were more likely to report having participated in protest activities. This is consistent with the idea of critical citizens (Norris, 1999). Therefore, we explored whether these groups were also differently affected by the social outburst. Figure 7 illustrates the significant interactions between educational level and measurement periods. The effects of the social outburst on moral sentiments towards the country and symbols are stronger for individuals with an intermediate educational level. This could possibly capture the heterogeneity of the effect according to respondents’ position in the social structure. Chile is a highly unequal society with high levels of social closure (Méndez & Gayo, 2019), and, despite their internal heterogeneity, a large proportion of the intermediate social groups, that is, the middle classes, share support for neoliberal policies and the status quo (Barozet & Espinoza, 2016; Barozet & Fierro, 2011; Méndez, 2008). For example, as shown in Figure 7, individuals that completed secondary education are the group with the highest level of national pride before the protests but this was equaled by the highly educated population in the aftermath of the first weeks of the crisis. The moral shock could have highlighted the vulnerability of this sector and the new middle class documented in the literature (Lopez-Calva & Ortiz-Juarez, 2014; Ravallion, 2009; Torche & F. Lopez-Calva, 2012). Nevertheless, we have no direct measurements of social class for a more robust test of this hypothesis.

Regarding age, the effects show no heterogeneity (models under request). This finding is significant considering that recent evidence (Kiley & Vaisey, 2020) has supported the hypothesis that younger individuals actively update culture more than older individuals. In our subset of moral sentiments, both older and younger respondents are sensitive to the moral shock of the social crisis. The literature has also suggested that metropolitan areas are at the vanguard of social change (e.g. Glaeser, 2012; Evans, 2019). However, we found no significant differences when comparing respondents’ areas of residence.

[Figure 7 about here]

## Conclusions

Chile was the first neoliberal experiment (Harvey, 2007). In recent months, like other countries others in the world, it has undergone a wave of widespread street protests calling for structural changes and challenging the “Chilean miracle” (Friedman, 1991). This study uses an interrupted public opinion poll and a complementary follow-up sample to assess the effect on the general population’s moral emotions of the Chilean social crisis that began in October 2019. Our findings suggest that pride in the country, its symbols, in Chile as a place to live and its economic development were negatively affected by the crisis. The protests signaled that the system was not as healthy as thought, generating a moral shock that affected shared pride in the country. Nevertheless, although not to the baseline levels, pride in Chile recovers in the follow-up. In addition, although the overall pride in Chileans did not change after the first weeks of protests, the specific reciprocal moral emotions between citizens themselves were positively affected. Hence, the social crisis emerges as an opportunity to strengthen collective ties either by sharing sentiments toward who was held responsible for the movement or between Chileans. In the aftermath of October 18, the “unsettled times” (Bail, 2012; Swidler, 1986) have generated adjustment in emotions that could explain the massive scale of the movements and potential cultural changes.

Although previous studies have shown that social movements have a causal effect on how new cultural elements emerge and develop (e.g. Isaac, 2009), recent evidence in cultural sociology has suggested that changes in the belief system come through generational turnover (Kiley & Vaisey, 2020; Vaisey & Lizardo, 2016), instead of an active updating with the environment. In the subset of beliefs and attitudes studied by this literature, high-salience topics and attitudes toward institutions show active updating. Moral emotions toward the system and collective identity measured by our items could be considered among such cultural elements (e.g. Boutyline & Vaisey, 2017). Nevertheless, our findings cannot confirm that the change in moral sentiments will be permanent but does provide strong evidence that the social crisis had a “period effect” on feelings and worldviews. Not only cultural change triggered the outbursts (Somma et al., 2020), but narratives, frameworks, and worldviews of the general population are also affected by social movements. Thus, the protest movement could have provided the basis and tipping point for cultural and social change in the aftermath of a major disruption in contemporary Chilean history. However, the protests continued after the period of social shock. Therefore, the effects identified could also explain the durability of the movement and its massive scale. Further studies could examine the sustainability of these changes, and whether the new political constitution -if approved- could institutionalize moral emotions and invite people to internalize them (Goodin, 1996).

We have evaluated the effect on moral emotions, which are more long-standing affective commitments than reflex sentiments or moods (Jasper, 2006, 2011). Moreover, the overall sentiment towards citizens remained stable after the first week of protests, and only particular features of Chileans -energy and work ethic- were impacted by the social outburst. The general sentiment toward being Chilean is more comprehensive and is at a higher level of abstraction. A mainstream framework in value change (Flanagan, 1982; Flanagan & Lee, 2000; Rokeach, 1973) suggests that core beliefs tend to be acquired at an early age and resist change. Thus, we could argue that, in our case, the effect is on more peripherical aspects of the private culture. The moral shock, or at least during the first weeks of protests, was not sufficient to modify this deeper and more enduring emotion.

The limitations of our study are threefold. First, we have been cautious in not referring to our estimations as causal. Our design could be said to resemble a natural experiment, and we compare balanced groups before and after the beginning of the social crisis. However, the original survey was not designed to follow individuals across time or contain a larger set of measurements for assessing other characteristics that could unbalance pre- and post-treatment samples. For instance, prosocial behavior increases the willingness to participate in surveys and shapes attitudes and beliefs (Groves, Cialdini, & Couper, 1992). Thus, we were unable to examine whether individuals with higher prosocial behaviors were overrepresented in the first stage of the survey because they are an easier-to-reach population due to their willingness to participate. This potential bias is particularly relevant for the follow-up sample, where interruption was not exogenous. Second, we cannot disentangle the specific treatment that generated the change in moral sentiments or whether they explain it all together. Violations of human rights, media coverage, protests events, President’s addresses, among others, could have driven these changes. Therefore, we provide robust evidence of the emotional consequences of the social movement without identifying the specific “trigger” of this change. The repression by the police in the aftermath is particularly important among these factors because it generated fear and anger (Somma et al., 2020). As Bail (2012) suggests, these feelings are emotional energy, enabling civil society to achieve resonance in the public sphere and foster cultural change. Third, the public opinion poll was not designed to measure political engagement, and the questionnaire was not modified after the social crisis. Hence, we cannot clearly identify respondents that participated in the protest activities. Instead, our results refer to an effect on the general population.

The Chilean case illuminates the understanding of other social movements and contemporary events around the world. Regarding climate protests (Bugden, 2020), their effectiveness relies on the effect on sentiments of support for structural changes generated in the public. Likewise, Hong Kong is currently in the second wave of protests once the government has controlled the Covid-19 pandemic. Our study might raise the question of whether this movement has affected moral feelings toward the Chinese government, democratic values, or collective identities. At the same time, the wave of protests in the United States after George Floyd’s death could have impacted on attitudes toward racial discrimination and the police. The Chilean case illustrates that social movements could have significant short-term emotional consequences and could lay the foundations for further cultural changes. Hence, a constituent process of two years, the exposure to moral shocks, and months of protests followed by a health emergency could have generated the conditions for the acquisition of culture in Chile as durable and embodied dispositions. Future studies might examine whether these effects were momentary or might lead to a more profound cultural transformation.

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1. Translation for the term “estallido social” (Somma et al., 2020) used by the media and public opinion in reference to the protests in Chile. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For the sake of simplicity, we use the terms social movement, protests movement, and protests interchangeably. For a discussion, see (Porta & Diani, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a more detailed description of the context and main facts of the social crisis in Chile, as well as explanations based on survey data fielded during the crisis see (Gonzalez & Morán, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Based on a representative and probabilistic sample, surveys (Núcleo Milenio en Desarrollo Social, Chile, De, & Social, 2019) indicate that 85.5% of Chileans over the age of 18 declared their support toward the social movement one month after the social outbreak; 55.3% declared having participated in some form of protest; 70% are willing to participate in cabildos cuidadanos (open citizen councils) to discuss the new political constitution and the political context. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. One of the most prestigious public opinion polls (Centro de Estudios Públicos, 2019) showed that 81% of the Chileans consider that the government responded wrongly or very wrongly to the social outburst, and the president reached the lowest level of approval (6%) ever attained since approval ratings were first measured in the country. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Data and R markdown script code will be publicly available after publication. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)