

National Identity And Social Cohesion

CHILE IN PERSPECTIVE

A study by AthenaLab.
Chile 2026





CONTENT

CHILEAN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND HOW IT RELATES TO SOCIAL COHESION..... 5

Introduction.....	5
Definition of National Identity	7
Definition of Social Cohesion	13
Relationship Between National Identity And Social Cohesion.....	21
Versions of National Identity In Chile	25
Military-Racial Version	26
Hispanist-Traditionalist Version.....	30
Psychosocial Version.....	31
Popular Culture Version.....	33
Postmodern Enterprise Version.....	35
Searching for Identity	37
National Identity and Social Cohesion in Chile	41
Tensions and Challenges Regarding National Identity and Social Cohesion.....	45
Bibliographic References.....	48

QUALITATIVE STUDY FINDINGS REPORT 51

CHILEAN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL COHESION 51

Background.....	53
Objective	53
Methodological Framework.....	53

INSTRUMENT FOR GATHERING INFORMATION 55

RESULTS 57

Resilient Identity Core.....	57
Episodic Fragile Cohesion	58
Catalytic Ambivalent Migration	60

Chronic Structural Erosions.....	61
Plurality and Nested Subidentities	62
Criticisms and Strategic Self-Reflection	63
General Conclusions Group 1	65

RESULTS OF DIRECT QUESTIONING ANALYSIS. GROUP 2 66

Positive Cultural Traits.....	66
Reactive Unit Mechanisms	68
Threats to Cohesion	69
Migration Dynamics.....	70
Historical and Contextual Evolution	72

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS (GROUNDED THEORY) 75

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL COHESION IN CHILE. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS BASED ON A NATIONAL SURVEY (AUGUST 2025) 78

Executive Summary	79
Introduction.....	79
Methodological Framework.....	80
Interpersonal Trust.....	81
Institutional Trust	82
Political Polarisation and Division.....	83
National Identity.....	85
Regional Identity	87
Immigration	88
Political Identification.....	90

CONCLUSIONS..... 91

WORKING GROUP 93

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 94

CHILEAN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND HOW IT RELATES TO SOCIAL COHESION

INTRODUCTION

National identity is a complex and multidimensional concept built over time through various historical, cultural, political, and social factors. Its relationship with social cohesion has been extensively studied in different contexts, since, historically, a strong national identity has been shown to foster unity, but when based on restrictive criteria, it can also be a factor of exclusion.

Thus, national identity has served as a mechanism for social cohesion, facilitating the construction of a sense of belonging and solidarity among citizens. However, it has also been used as an instrument of control, reinforcing homogeneous narratives that marginalise certain groups within society. In this regard, various studies have demonstrated that the way a society defines its national identity influences how it manages internal diversity and its capacity to generate inclusion or segregation.

In other words, “National identities provide criteria of demarcation — they tell us who belongs and who doesn’t. Thus, national identities grant to some the status of belonging in the in-group, but they also exclude those who do not fit the criteria imposed. In that sense, a national identity is a double-edged sword, which can both foster unity and fragmentation” (Holtug and Uslaner, 2021, p. 2).

Currently, the disputes surrounding national identities are especially prominent in the debates on immigration and integration, where

“who belongs (and so whose admission should be welcomed), and the conditions on which they can become (full) members (by obtaining citizenship as well as various political and social rights that may or may not be tied to citizenship)” are defined (Holtug and Uslaner, 2021, p. 2).

As a result, it can be interpreted that national identity not only responds to an internal construction, but it is also influenced by international dynamics. These include migration (as mentioned above), in addition to less obvious influences such as globalisation and technological advances, all of which have modified the way in which individuals relate to their countries of origin and to other cultures.

It is worth noting that the importance of national identities goes well beyond their ability to affect people’s access to legal rights; they also foster individuals’ sense of belonging, as they shape perceptions which, in turn, impact their idea of “deservingness of specific groups.” Such perceived deservingness can significantly influence the redistribution carried out by governments in various countries (Holtug and Uslaner, 2021, p. 3).

For its part, “Social cohesion consists in the features that tie community members together in ways that are conducive to cooperation and other forms of pro-social interaction and includes elements such as trust and solidarity.” In this regard, “A major worry in contempo-

rary politics, which has also been expressed by many social scientists, is that immigration and diversity drive down social cohesion” (Holtug and Uslaner, 2021, p. 7).

Framed in this way, it is reasonable to interpret these factors as constantly evolving, challenging traditional conceptions of nation and citizenship. In turn, the appeal to a sense of belonging inherent in their conceptualisation plays—and has played throughout history—a fundamental role in social cohesion. Their impact can be observed in the shift in political orientation that various countries have undergone recently, leading to a resurgence of phenomena such as polarisation, populism, and anti-immigrant sentiment. This can be seen, for example, in Europe, with political leaders like Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz party in Hungary, Alternative for Germany, and the National Front in France, whose discourse increasingly justifies distancing themselves from a liberal political order.

The same can be said of Chile, where the massive immigration of at least the last ten years has led different political actors to modify their positions on the matter, with heated debates regarding regularisation and expulsion processes, border control, the role of the armed forces and even the right to vote.

Motivated by the above, this theoretical framework will explore the concepts of national identity and social cohesion, as well as the relationship between them. This exploration will be conducted from a general, descriptive, and comparative perspective, before proceeding to identify, in the Chilean case, the characteristics, particularities, and circumstances that have historically given rise to the described dynamic, extracting elements that allow for its understanding today.

The research will analyse several different theoretical approaches and international experiences that have addressed this type of conceptualisation and relationships, highlighting both the factors that favour an inclusive national identity and those that can lead to social fragmentation, while also taking into account the political moment in which we find ourselves, both nationally and internationally.



DEFINITION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

As previously mentioned, national identity is a complex and multidimensional concept that encompasses an individual's sense of belonging to a political and cultural community, and it has been addressed from various theoretical perspectives. Historical, linguistic, symbolic, and social factors converge to form this common narrative and sentiment about what it means to be part of a nation.

Considering that the concept of national identity is difficult to define, it is useful to refer to what Miller and Ali (2014, as cited in Kongshøj, 2021, p. 95) defined as its "different dimensions: First, a sense of belonging or attachment to a nation, second, national pride, third, patriotism, and fourth, different normative value conceptions of the nation." In turn, it is important to bear in mind that any national identity to speak of is conditioned on a "shared belief in the legitimacy of the country's political system, whether or not that system is democratic" (Smith 2015 as cited in Fukuyama, 2021, p. 22).

According to the above, national identity "can be embodied in formal laws and institutions that dictate, for example, which language or languages will be considered official ones or what schools will teach children about their country's past. But national identity also extends into the realm of culture and values. It consists of the stories that people tell about themselves: where they came from, what they celebrate, their shared historical memories and their expectations about what it takes to become a genuine member of the community" (Smith 2015 as cited in Fukuyama, 2021, p. 22).

National identities "may be thick or thin, depending on what, or how much, they require people to share in order to be members of the nation. On one end of the spectrum, there are conceptions of national identity that require people to share an entire culture, and on the

other end, conceptions that require people only to share a commitment to some basic legal and political institutions. A basic distinction is between what Michael Ignatieff (1996, 219) dubbed 'ethnic' and 'civic' nationalism, where ethnic nationalism defines the nation in terms of ethnic origins and birth, and civic nationalism defines it in terms of civic values, commitments to institutions and the like." (Holtug and Uslaner, 2021, p. 3).

As can be seen, both Ignatieff's and Miller and Ali's proposals closely link national identity to the concept of nation, which serves to refer to the type of community being discussed. In this sense, this relationship is very well portrayed in Benedict Anderson's perspective (1983, pp. 5-6), who describes the nation as an "imagined community" whose members do not know each other personally but share a sense of belonging based on common symbols, myths, and narratives. This notion can be reinforced through education, the media, and public policies. These policies play a key role in the transmission of a hegemonic national identity, which is a social construct reinforced through these types of institutions.

From a sociological perspective, national identity is viewed as a social construct shaped by historical, economic, and cultural factors. Ernest Gellner (1983) argues that it arises within the context of modernity, which he links to industrialisation, access to mass education, and cultural homogenisation. These characteristics create national identities, as the culture in which people have been raised becomes the core of their identity, with the state responsible for overseeing and reproducing this educational system.

Anthony D. Smith (1991) agrees that national identity is indeed a modern construct. In his words, it is linked to the "Western conception

of nation," where "a new political form, the rational state, (legal and political institutions) and a new type of community (the territorial nation) were first so closely established, leaving their imprint on later non-Western conceptions" (Smith, 1991, p. 8). But, in contrast with Gellner, Smith adds, "Historical territory or homeland and historical memories or collective myths" are also part of its presuppositions (Smith, 1991, p. 12).

Along the same lines, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983), in "The Invention of Tradition", argue that there is a set of practices, called "invented traditions," which are "normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past." In these traditions, "insofar as there is such reference to a historic past," their continuity of it is "largely fictitious," and therefore their "object" would be "invariance", leading them to suggest that these traditions "seem to belong to three overlapping types" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, pp. 1-9):

- a. Those establishing or symbolising social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities.
- b. Those establishing or legitimising institutions, status or relations of authority.
- c. Those whose main purpose was socialisation, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour.

These invented practices tend to be "quite un-specific and vague as to the nature of the values, rights and obligations of the group membership they inculcate: 'patriotism', 'loyalty', 'duty', 'playing the game', 'the school spirit' and the like." Therefore, a "crucial element seems to have been the invention of emotionally and symbolically charged signs of club membership rather than the statutes and objects of the club" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, p. 17).

Elections, in which citizens remain associated with the process as a kind of semi-ritual, are an example of this. So too are symbols and practices such as flags, images, ceremonies, and music, most of which are historically novel and largely invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, p. 18).

Thus, it can be interpreted that such practices considered essential to national identity have effectively been created or reinterpreted at different historical moments to strengthen social cohesion, using "history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, p. 19).

Finally, on the same topic, but differentiating between how national identity is instilled, Michael Billig (1995) introduces the concept of "banal nationalism": "In the established nations, there is a continual 'flagging', or reminding, of nationhood: the reminding of nationhood is embedded in the routines of life", which constantly recall or flag nationality.¹ "However, the reminders, or 'flaggings', are so numerous and they are such a familiar part of the social environment, that they operate mindlessly" (Langer, 1989 in Billig, 1995, p. 38). Consequently, national identity "is found in the embodied habits of social life," which includes "those of thought and language use" (Billig, 1995, p. 8).

Throughout history, nations have defined their identity in diverse ways, which has been reflected in related literature. According to Smith (1991), in line with Ignatieff, the main definitions include ethnic nationalism, which is based on ancestry and shared culture, and civic nationalism, which emphasises citizenship and shared values. In some countries, both models can co-exist, generating tensions in how belonging to the nation is perceived.

1 The author's original concept in English is "flagging," for which the Spanish term that best represented the intended idea was sought.

In the current context of globalisation, national identity faces challenges due to both the increasing interconnectedness of cultures and greater mobility among people. In some countries, this has led to the reformulation of more open and inclusive concepts of national identity, while in others, exclusionary nationalisms have resurged as a response to immigration and demographic changes.

Along these lines, “While initially this literature only made a distinction between civic and ethnic forms of citizenship concepts, various authors have pointed to the fact that it is important also to distinguish a third, ‘cultural’ concept of citizenship” (Reijerse et al. as cited in Hooghe, 2021, p. 50), whose main criterion is “to know whether new immigrant groups will interiorize and adhere to the dominant cultural patterns within a society. The distinction with the civic concept of citizenship is that culture can be much broader and applies to more interaction modes than the civic rules that are often expressed in legal norms” (Hooghe, 2021, p. 50).

The concepts of ethnic citizenship are, by definition, restrictive, while civic identities are in principle accessible to foreigners. Cultural identity, on the other hand, can be experienced as a rather vague category, as the stringency of entry requirements is less clear. In this way, “Culture can also be interpreted in such a way that only those who fully embrace the traditional leading culture of a nation can be seen as full members of society, with the result that immigrants are being requested to discard all of their own cultural heritage” (Pautz, 2005 as cited in Hooghe, 2021, p. 50).

Therefore, “The policy issue that has raised the greatest challenges to national identity is immigration, along with the related question of refugee flows” that it often entails. Thus, “Together, these topics have been the driving force behind the recent upsurge of populist nationalism in both Europe and the United States” (Fukuyama, 2021, p. 26).

Indeed, the electoral growth of populist parties is largely due to a combination of factors, such as economic crises, social media and its effect on political polarisation, and immigration. The latter has acquired such a profound impact on electoral processes that, in the German elections of February 2025, CDU (German Democratic Union) candidate Friedrich Merz promised to implement anti-immigration policies in order to discourage voters from choosing Alternative for Germany (AfD) based on that issue.²

Other regions of the world have also felt the impact of massive migratory flows, such as Latin America: 7.7 million people have emigrated from Venezuela, of which, according to UNHCR 2024 figures, 6.5 have relocated within Latin America and the Caribbean (due to the linguistic affinity), generating anti-immigrant reactions.

This nascent contemporary nationalism observed characteristic of globalisation-derived dynamics, and the criticism it has generated, have been widely discussed in academic literature. Montserrat Guibernau (1999, p. 146), for example, argues that “the renewed strength and appeal of national identity and nationalism are presented as a secular response to the search for identity in a world threatened by increasing homogenisation.”

Along the same lines, Leonel Pereznieto Castro (2017, p. 44) argues that “the process of globalisation has been analysed by some authors as an erosion of the national sovereignty of states, because a greater number have lost the capacity to independently and autonomously

2 The CDU is the party of Angela Merkel, who led Germany from 2005 to 2021. Under her administration, between 2015 and 2017, an open-borders policy was adopted to receive refugees from conflict zones. This led to the acceptance of 1.1 million asylum applications in 2015 alone, mainly from Syrians and Afghans, equivalent to half of the rest of the European Union (Tjaden and Heidland, 2024).

manage certain fundamental aspects of their internal affairs and an array of international policies and, therefore, the exercise of politics is made more complex and dependent."

In this sense, while "globalisation contains modern elements, primarily the product of technology, through which some aim to achieve a world government in the long term, its implementation produces profound effects on the societies participating in this process, hence the natural attempts at revolts by dissatisfied social groups." Therefore, states that participated in the creation of international organisations established after World War II "now suffer the consequences of these policies, which are often reflected in the growth of nationalist groups" (Pereznieta, 2017, pp. 44-45).

This leads us to consider an important aspect of national identities in the contemporary context: as local identities are challenged by globalisation processes, new phenomena emerge, such as a rise in transnational identities. This rise has been addressed from various perspectives. For example, Berta Álvarez-Miranda (2016, p. 85) studies transnational identity among Muslim immigrants in Europe and concludes that these groups develop hybrid identities that combine elements of their cultures of origin and their host culture. According to Álvarez-Miranda, this adaptation process implies the reconfiguration of national identity in more flexible and multicultural terms, challenging traditional notions of national belonging.

In the Latin American context, Rivera Heredia and Obregón Velasco (2014) analyse the impact of migration on the identity of Mexican families with relatives in the United States. Their study reveals that individuals develop "multiple strategies" in their migratory experiences, where some "carefully preserve their original cultural elements, but at the same time establish areas of exchange and connection with the new culture." In this sense, within this group of people, it is possible to find "those who blend both cultures and form a new one, as well as those

who maintain differences, but with channels of communication and environmental exchange", a situation that the authors refer to as a form of "transnational identity" (Rivera and Obregón, 2014, pp. 34-35).

In summary, the studies reviewed here demonstrate that globalisation has generated new forms of national identity, such as transnational identity, driven primarily by the intensification of migration flows. This, in turn, has led to a reconfiguration of nationalism, as social groups seek to reaffirm their identity, which some have considered a resurgence of nationalist ideologies. Thus, in critiques of nationalism, some authors warn of the risks of it being adopted exclusionarily as a response to current changes, while others highlight the opportunity presented by a more flexible national identity, open to diversity.

As previously mentioned, while national identity can strengthen social cohesion and political stability, it can also lead to exclusion if based on rigid criteria. Although this phenomenon will be examined in greater depth in the following sections, it is important to bear in mind that, in today's globalised world, national identities are constantly transforming, adapting to demographic and cultural changes. In this context, when this concept is approached empirically, "the predominant strand of literature has focused on such cleavages at the individual level, either in single countries or across several countries at the same time" (Kongshøj, 2021: p. 97).

According to the above, research generally focuses on how national identity correlates "different indicators of social cohesion or attitudes towards immigration" (Breidahl, Holtug, and Kongshøj, 2018; Wright et al., 2013; Pehrson et al., 2009; Kunovich, 2009; Jones and Smith, 2001; Hjerm, 1998 cited in Kongshøj, 2021, p. 97). Some have also correlated these individual orientations with macro indicators, such as globalisation, economic development, or different aspects of diversity (Ariely, 2012; Green

et al., 2011; Kunovich, 2009; Jones and Smith, 2001 cited in Kongshøj, 2021, p. 97).

Ultimately, to begin to establish what will be understood in this research as national identity, this concept will be defined as a dynamic social construct that combines historical, cultural, and political elements to shape citizens' sense of belonging. This construct can influence social cohesion, depending on how inclusive its definition is and how it evolves in the face of contemporary changes. In a globalised context, the challenge is to maintain a balance between preserving national values and embracing diversity, promoting an identity that fosters unity without falling into exclusion.



DEFINITION OF SOCIAL COHESION

Some characteristics of the concept of social cohesion have already been outlined. It relates to the bonds of trust, solidarity, and cooperation that exist within a society and/or among its citizens. Factors such as equal opportunities, inclusion, and a sense of belonging are fundamental to strengthening it — or weakening it if they are not managed appropriately at the political level.

Therefore, if we take into account that national identities can be both unifying and divisive, depending on how open they are to diversity (as seen in the previous section), then it is possible to interpret that social cohesion depends not only on acceptance of diversity, but also on public policies that promote integration and social justice, understanding the latter as redistribution.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), social cohesion is defined as “the dialectic between established mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion and the responses, perceptions, and dispositions of citizens toward the way in which these operate” (ECLAC, 2007, p. 13). This implies that “the concept of social cohesion is built on the basis of three pillars: gaps, institutions, and belonging; and, more crucially, on the basis of their interaction” (ECLAC, 2010, p. 22).

This definition potentially represents an advantage to being used as a starting point, since it highlights precisely what is initially proposed in this section, that is, the importance of institutions and citizens’ perceptions in the construction of a cohesive society.

Following the above, Jane Jenson defined this concept in five dimensions: sense of belonging; equality of opportunity (inclusion); political and social participation; recognition of differ-

ence; and legitimacy of public and private institutions (Jenson, 1998, pp. 15-17).

These elements, according to Jenson, are the determinants of a society’s stability and, as such, refer to its capacity to manage differences and conflicts without causing ruptures in the social fabric. In this process, institutions play a regulatory or facilitory role in shaping the aspirations of individuals, leading to greater levels of legitimacy and trust, and thus, better prospects for achieving national goals. Conversely, economic inequality, the exclusion of certain groups, and a lack of civic participation are factors that contribute to the erosion of social cohesion.

In this context, “Since the 1990s, economic literature has begun to highlight inequality and, more broadly, social cohesion as determinants of growth processes. In this sense, the most unequal societies are prone to chronic conflict and limit the possibilities for investment in the human capital of large segments of society.” In other words, a “high level of inequality in itself constitutes a barrier to development” (ECLAC, 2010, p. 85).

Therefore, according to the ECLAC (2010, p. 86), “Social cohesion requires principles of cooperation and communication for the generation of functional social spaces of interaction for development processes. High levels of inequality undermine the material bases of social interaction, but the functioning of institutions also constitutes a core aspect for social life.”

Therefore, countries’ public policies play a central role in achieving the overall population’s well-being, which rests on the link between the various social institutions through which people access the different components of quality of life. In particular, the literature recognises households, markets, and the state as core institutional spaces for accessing well-being,



with “the articulation and complementarity of these instances” being a “central determinant of well-being and social cohesion” (ECLAC, 2010, p. 87).

In some countries, social cohesion has been promoted through the implementation of redistributive policies and integration programs. For example, welfare models—as in much of Europe, especially the Nordic countries—aim “precisely to consolidate a set of social benefits and services oriented towards guaranteeing economic, social and cultural rights and, by doing so, establish this foundation of inclusion, redistribution and recognition that is key to moving towards cohesive societies in the long term” (ECLAC, 2021, p. 97).

Conversely, according to the Inter-American Development Bank (2020, p. 14), “Insufficient redistribution and unequal opportunity are the main features of what might be termed a fractured social contract,” which refers to the “implicit agreement among the members of a society to define mutual rights and responsibilities,” since “how much each group obtains from the government and how much it gives is a basic part of the social fabric.” In this sense, Latin America is an example of this type of social fracture.

When these kinds of fractures occur, what is damaged is precisely a key aspect of social cohesion: trust, both in institutions and among citizens. This is why Fukuyama (1995, p. 44) refers to the notion of social capital, understanding it as “a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or in certain parts of it. It can be embodied in the smallest and most basic social group, the family, as well as the largest of all groups, the nation, and in all the other groups in between.”

In this regard, Fukuyama (1995, p. 44) indicates that the acquisition of social capital requires that individuals adapt “to the moral norms of a community” and adopt, in that context, “virtues like loyalty, honesty, and dependability. The group, moreover, has to adopt common norms

as a whole before trust can become generalized among its members.”

Therefore, in societies where trust levels are low, polarisation and distrust toward the political and economic system, as well as crime levels, are commonly higher. This occurs especially in “individualistic societies with little capacity for association. In such a society, both families and voluntary associations are weak; it often happens that the strongest organizations are criminal gangs” (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 46).

Meanwhile, according to Fukuyama (1995, pp. 430-431), when social capital is abundant, “both markets and democratic politics will thrive,” since a “stable party structure can come about only if people with common interests are able to work with one another for common ends—an ability that rests, in the end, on social capital.”

Although the relationship between social cohesion and national identity will be further addressed later, it is necessary for context to return to an idea that was suggested at the beginning: a shared identity can foster solidarity and redistribution, but it can also generate exclusion and social fragmentation if it is based on restrictive ethnic or cultural criteria.

Along these lines, in some European countries, segregation and racism have strained social cohesion, such as France, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, to name a few. In others, inclusive civic nationalism has been promoted as a tool to integrate immigrants and minorities, as is the case in Germany and Portugal. This illustrates Fukuyama’s (1995) earlier point about trust, which, along with the perception of belonging (identity), is a key element in this process, together influencing how citizens interact and relate within a society.

The concept of social cohesion has been analysed from various theoretical perspectives. In his book “The Division of Labour in Society” (1893), Émile Durkheim introduces the terms “mechanical solidarity” and “organic solidarity”

to describe how traditional and modern societies maintain social cohesion. Durkheim argues that, in traditional societies, cohesion is based on similarities and a shared collective consciousness, while in modern societies, the pillars of cohesion are interdependence and the division of labour.

From a more contemporary perspective, John Rawls also analyses social cohesion, but through the lens of liberalism and distributive justice. He argues that the former “provides a set of values that, if shared, tends to promote the social cohesion required for realizing liberal institutions, and in particular egalitarian redistribution”. Specifically, one of the debates among political theorists of this school of thought has focused on understanding “whether principles of justice, or the values in which they consist, tend to provide the level of social cohesion required for implementing just institutions insofar as these values are shared in the citizenry” (Holtug cited in Holtug and Uslaner, 2021, p. 133).

In this respect, “Political theorists disagree about what values will in fact promote social cohesion and in particular the trust and solidarity required for redistributive, egalitarian justice. Whereas, for example, liberal nationalists emphasize the significance of sharing certain aspects of the national culture, non-nationalist liberals tend to argue that we need only share some basic principles of liberty, equality and toleration” (Holtug in Holtug and Uslaner 2021, p. 133).

Currently, there is renewed interest in “social cohesion as a condition for social justice,” stemming from “concerns over whether immigration and the ethnic diversity to which it gives rise poses a threat to such cohesion, and so to redistribution”. In this regard, “Some have argued that increasing ethnic diversity is incompatible with maintaining social cohesion at present levels,” while others argue, “Social cohesion requires that immigrants assimilate

to the national culture” (Holtug in Holtug and Uslaner 2021, p. 133).

However, in response to the above, liberals “tend to argue that liberal values and institutions appropriately accommodate the religious and cultural beliefs and preferences of a diverse citizenry, such as to enable social cohesion at adequate levels. By providing equal religious, cultural and social opportunities for all, liberalism tends to promote social cohesion and allegiance to a polity that, after all, provides for its citizens basic liberties and opportunities on an equal footing” (Holtug in Holtug and Uslaner 2021, pp. 133-134).

In this sense, “There is a question of whether liberal values and institutions suffice to maintain trust and solidarity” (Holtug in Holtug and Uslaner, 2021, p. 138) in contexts such as diverse societies facing large waves of migration. Thus, while “a number of studies suggest that ethnic diversity drives down trust and solidarity in liberal democracies and thus poses a threat to the welfare state,” several meta-studies³ assert, “The evidence for the suggestion that diversity is detrimental to social cohesion is mixed,” which “may suggest that we need to pay more attention to the conditions under which diversity negatively impacts social cohesion” (Holtug cited in Holtug and Uslaner 2021, p. 138).

During the 1980s, communitarians emerged as critics of contemporary liberalism. Among them were several authors who “challenged the ideal of the freely choosing, unencumbered self along the lines I’ve just suggested. They rejected the claim for the priority of the right over the good, and argued that we can’t reason about justice by abstracting from our aims and attachments” (Sandel, 2009, p. 47).

3 Meta-studies are analyses that collect, evaluate, and summarise the results of multiple scientific studies on the same topic to obtain more robust conclusions.

One exponent of this group of communitarians is Charles Taylor (1994, p. 88), who argues that “there are forms of this liberalism of equal rights⁴ that in the minds of their own proponents can give only a very restricted acknowledgment of distinct cultural identities”. This situation poses a problem, according to the author, since “equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society,” in the sense that “its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it”, since “The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized” (Taylor, 1994, p. 68).

According to the above, contemporary feminism, race relations, and discussions about multiculturalism “are undergirded by the premise that the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression”, implying that this can catalyse social tensions that negatively affect social cohesion (Taylor, 1994, p. 68), since, in the author’s words, it creates first- and second-class citizens, a situation that must be avoided at all costs (Taylor, 1994, p. 70). Furthermore, the recognition of an individual’s or group’s unique identity—that is, their distinctness—is overlooked when they are assimilated by a dominant or majority identity (Taylor, 1994, p. 71).

For his part, Michael Sandel (2009) argues, “Many of the most hotly contested issues of justice and rights can’t be debated without taking up controversial moral and religious questions,” as liberalism suggests. According to Sandel, “Asking democratic citizens to leave their moral and religious convictions behind when they enter the public realm may seem a way of ensuring toleration and mutual respect,” but in practice, “deciding important public questions while pretending to a neutrality that

cannot be achieved is a recipe for backlash and resentment” (Sandel, 2009, p. 387).

It follows that public deliberation and debate on the common good are essential to strengthening social cohesion, in contrast to the liberal idea of state neutrality with respect to moral and community values. Thus, for Sandel (2009, p. 388), “A politics emptied of substantive moral engagement makes for an impoverished civic life. It is also an open invitation to narrow, intolerant moralisms.”

Delving deeper into Sander’s vision, “The attempt to detach arguments about justice and rights from arguments about the good life is mistaken for two reasons: First, it is not always possible to decide questions of justice and rights without resolving substantive moral questions; and second, even where it’s possible, it may not be desirable.” (2009, p. 399).

He thus adopts a position regarding these issues, stating, “justice involves cultivating virtue and reasoning about the common good” (Sandel 2009, p. 415), since for him, it is a mistake to try to achieve a just society by guaranteeing freedom of choice, as stipulated by liberalism, but rather, on the contrary, we must “reason together about the meaning of the good life, and to create a public culture hospitable to the disagreements that will inevitably arise” (Sandel, 2009, p. 416).

Some ideas reviewed in this section will be considered in developing a working definition that allows for a clear perspective to be applied to the instruments used in this study. In this sense, social cohesion will be understood as a dynamic process that manifests itself in trust, solidarity, and cooperation within a society, influenced by inclusion, equity, and participation. It is strengthened by inclusive public policies, equitable education systems, and spaces for intercultural dialogue, which foster a sense of belonging and social stability. Conversely, it can be weakened by factors such as economic inequality, social exclusion, and distrust in institutions. Its consolidation depends on the

4 The author refers to “equal rights” in the sense of universal rights that underpin the equal dignity of all citizens.

capacity to manage diversity and promote the common good, ensuring the integration of all sectors of society.





RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

As we have discussed, national identity and social cohesion are closely linked, since the former can serve as a factor of integration or exclusion within a society. An inclusive national identity, based on civic and democratic values, tends to foster trust and cooperation among citizens, thus strengthening social cohesion. In contrast, a national identity built on ethnic or exclusionary foundations can sow division and internal conflicts, reducing solidarity and social stability.

In this sense, the relationship between both elements has been the subject of study of various international organisations and authors. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity emphasises that “policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace” (UNESCO, 2001, p. 2). This approach underscores the importance of a national identity that embraces cultural diversity as a means to achieving a cohesive society.

For its part, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has addressed the relationship between national identity and social cohesion in its publications. In the document “Social Cohesion: Inclusion and Sense of Belonging in Latin America and the Caribbean”, the ECLAC states, “Practices of exclusion and discrimination against different social groups (women, indigenous peoples, the poor, the elderly, people with disabilities, religious or ethnic minorities, gender or sexual minorities) defined by characteristics that are almost always ascriptive, in terms of symbolic and cultural representations of what constitutes ‘difference’, fracture the identity of a society, affect the sense of belonging of those who are marginalised and, consequently, undermine social cohesion.” (ECLAC, 2007, p. 38).

Furthermore, academic studies have explored how the construction of national identity influences social cohesion. For example, the article “Integración e Identidad: Un Proyecto hacia la Cohesión Social” (Integration and Identity: A Project Towards Social Cohesion) analyses how identity construction processes, in dialogue with integration models, can impact social cohesion. For its author, “The construction of identity is a constitutive element in the vital development of the individual and of groups,” and, “In our current globalised and diverse world, this element takes on a central relevance” (Ares Mateos, 2020, p. 68-69).

For Ares Mateos, “Diversity sometimes generates fear and uncertainty; it forces us out of our comfort zone into a new space of dialogue and risk. In this context, we run the risk of closing ranks and relying on our certainties, building walls that isolate us and that lead to mechanisms of exclusion.” But it also allows us to open ourselves to diversity, which “becomes a condition of possibility for the recreation of an identity that is multiple, open, flexible, and complex”, since “each person constructs their identity in relation to others” (Ares Mateos, 2020, pp. 68-69), thus making diversity a fundamental possibility for promoting cohesion.

Drawing on Ares Mateos (2020) and as discussed in previous sections, the way in which national identity is defined and promoted is crucial to the level of cohesion within a society. In this sense, the former can be constructed in either a diverse or restricted way and its impact on the latter will depend largely on how the criteria for belonging are defined.

At this point, it is important to revisit the ideas put forth by Michael Ignatieff (1993), which were preliminarily explored in discussing definitions of national identity. Ignatieff distinguishes between civic nationalism and ethnic national-

ism, two ways of constructing national identity with different effects on social cohesion. Civic nationalism is based on adherence to shared values and principles, promoting the inclusion and integration of diverse groups within a single nation. In contrast, ethnic nationalism defines belonging based on inherited elements, such as origin or culture, which can lead to exclusion and social fragmentation.

It should be noted that, according to Fukuyama (2021, p. 23), "diversity is not an unalloyed good," since there are highly diverse countries where this characteristic has generated violence and conflict. In fact, the concept of national identity acquired a bad reputation during the first half of the 20th century, as it "came to be associated with an exclusive, ethnically based sense of belonging known as ethnonationalism", which "led to the persecution of people who were not part of the group, as well as to acts of international aggression committed on behalf of coethnics living in other countries".

In this regard, Fukuyama (Uslaner 2021, p. 23) defends the liberal perspective on national identity, affirming that the aforementioned problems "stemmed not from the idea of national identity itself but from the assertion of that identity in a form that was narrow, ethnically based, intolerant, aggressive and deeply illiberal". Conversely, national identities can be constructed "around liberal and democratic political values and around the shared experiences that provide the connective tissue allowing diverse communities to thrive", with Canada, France, India, and the United States being "examples of countries that have tried to cultivate national identities along these lines".

In this sense, Canada is often cited as the paradigm among countries with a flexible national identity, characterised by an open yet orderly immigration policy geared toward a specific type of immigrant, particularly young professionals. The counterparts to the Canadian model are Japan and South Korea, whose so-

cieties resist the idea of receiving a significant influx of immigrants, regardless of their low birth rates.

Approaching the topic discussed in this section, namely, the relationship between national identity and social cohesion, Fukuyama also states that the "inclusive sense of national identity remains critical to maintaining a successful modern political order for a number of reasons" (2021, p. 23), which are outlined below:

- 1) Physical security.
- 2) Quality of government.
- 3) Facilitating economic development.
- 4) Promoting a wide radius of trust.
- 5) Maintaining strong social safety nets that mitigate economic inequality.
- 6) Making liberal democracy possible.

It is primarily points 4 and 5 that lead us to the central theme of this section. As we have seen so far, trust "acts as a lubricant facilitating both economic exchange and political participation" and is based on social capital (discussed in greater depth in the section on social cohesion), which, simply put, refers to the "ability to cooperate with other people based on informal norms and shared values" (Fukuyama, 2021, p. 24).

Thus, Fukuyama establishes an initial, specific link between national identity and social cohesion, which comes to fruition through the concept of trust. As he argues (based on Putnam 2000), this is because "Societies thrive on trust, but they need the widest possible radius of trust — enabled by an overarching sense of shared identity — in order to flourish" (Fukuyama, 2021, p. 25).

Along the same lines, "If those within a society feel that they are members of an extended family and have high levels of trust in one another, they are much more likely to support social programmes that aid their weaker fellows." Examples of this are "the strong welfare

states of Scandinavia", which "are underpinned by equally strong senses of national identity", whereas, conversely, "in societies divided into self-regarding social groups, whose respective members feel they have little in common, citizens are more likely to regard one another as competitors in a zero-sum contest for resources" (Calhoun 2007 cited in Fukuyama 2021, p. 25).

These differences in the construction of identities across various societies reinforce the argument that the type of national identity promoted within a community directly influences trust, cooperation, and the social and political stability of a country, which — as we have seen above — are constitutive elements of social cohesion. In other words, these phenomena impact the level of cohesion a society can achieve.

However, it is likely that "the appeal to in-group bias has been the most influential argument for the significance of national identity for social cohesion", a theory which states that "identification with one's in-group disposes to in-group favouritism and out-group prejudice. Since we derive part of our self-image from identification with our in-group, in order for that image to be positive, we need to positively value the group. This, again, affects attitudes towards the in-group, such as trust, helping behaviour, willingness to provide benefits, etc." (Vaughan, Tajfel, and Williams, 1981; Voci, 2006 cited in Holtug and Uslaner, 2021, p. 8).

Thus, the degree of inclusion provided by national identity is considered a key factor in its relationship with cohesion. However, it should be borne in mind that the former "can be mobilized not only to unite but also to exclude and discriminate against whoever does not fall within its (potentially narrow) scope" (Holtug and Uslaner, 2021, p. 11).

In some contexts, national identity has been strengthened to generate unity in times of crisis, but it has also been instrumentalised to justify discriminatory policies, since, "ultimate-

ly, national identity can be invoked in defence of violence, genocide and ethnic cleansing and has of course been invoked in this way historically" (Holtug and Uslaner, 2021, p. 11).

Ernest Gellner (1983) makes a necessary link with nationalism; for Gellner, this phenomenon is "an effect of industrial social organization" (1983, p. 40), which is characterised by general social conditions that "make for standardized, homogeneous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities", thanks to which "a situation arises in which well-defined, educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify" (p. 55).

Under these conditions, "men will to be politically united with all those, and only those, who share their culture. Politics then will to extend their boundaries to the limits of their cultures, and to protect and impose their culture with the boundaries of their power. The fusion of will, culture and polity becomes the norm, and one not easily or frequently defied" (Gellner, 1983, p. 55). Therefore, citizens can only conceptually breathe and operate within this environment, which is coextensive with the territory of the state and its educational and cultural apparatus, and which needs to be protected, sustained, and valued (Gellner, 1983, p. 64).

Given the above, nationalism seeks to impose a cultural homogeneity that facilitates social cohesion, a process that can marginalise groups that do not conform to the dominant culture. In the author's words, "A territorial polity can only become ethnically homogeneous if it eliminates, expels, or assimilates all non-nationals. Their reluctance to accept such fates can hinder the peaceful application of the nationalist principle" (Gellner, 1983, p. 2).

Based on the reviewed authors, it can be defined that social cohesion is influenced by national identity. Said identity can strengthen social unity if built on civic and inclusive principles, or exacerbate fragmentation if based

on exclusionary criteria such as ethnicity or cultural homogeneity. Social cohesion, therefore, depends on how the criteria for belonging are defined and on the policies that promote (or hinder) integration and the recognition of diversity.



VERSIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN CHILE

Following the independence process, the newly formed countries lost their identification with Spain, which inevitably led to attempts to decipher or create a new identity, and Chile was no exception. As in other new republics, the Chilean elite oscillated between a Latin Americanism based on shared language, religion, and origins (the Spanish Crown and its legacy), and a more restricted perspective, encompassing the borders of the Captaincy General of Chile and incorporating the Mapuche people, though not their territories, into the emerging nation.

Indeed, the break with Spain took several years and forced Chileans to think about the elements that would constitute the “imagined community”, in Anderson’s terms (1983). The first constitutive element of identity was the positive view regarding the free and indomitable spirit of the Mapuche or Araucanians, reflected in

the flag and national shield of the *Patria Vieja* (Old Fatherland), in the later tricolor flag with the eight-pointed star and its subsequent modification, and in the name of the country’s first newspaper, *La Araucana* (Soublette, 1984).

Then began a search for identity that would differentiate the country from the rest of Latin America, developing a theoretical body and more elaborate interpretations at the beginning of the 20th century, particularly with the so-called “Centennial Crisis” and its social and political effects.

The versions of national identity presented and developed below are the most identifiable, according to research by Jorge Larraín (2001). At the end of this section, some of the effects and impact of greater globalisation on Chilean identity will be addressed.

MILITARY-RACIAL VERSION

This version of Chilean identity is underpinned by two key elements. The first is the relevance of the 19th-century wars and the role of the army. The second is the conception of a unique and exceptional race, originating from the fusion of two warrior peoples: the Goths, who came from the north of the Iberian Peninsula, and the Mapuche. This version of Chilean identity is considered to have formed particularly during the 19th century.

The first element reaches its highest degree of consistency in Mario Góngora's essay on the notion of the state in Chile (1986), in which he argues that it is the state that has shaped the idea of a so-called Chilean nation based on the external and internal armed conflicts sustained by the country in the 19th century, whose victories and subsequent territorial conquests gave rise to a national consciousness, and political and military figures gave shape to the collective imagination and the idea of a communion of interests.⁵

In this context, the wars may have served to build an idea of nationhood different from the view of Latin American unity that was initially considered the natural drift of the newly inde-

pendent peoples, which decreased as Chile advanced on its path as an independent state.⁶

The top-down construction of an idea of nationhood by the state is not unique to Chile,⁷ but what sets it apart is the fact that armed conflict acts as a catalyst for national identity, particularly the War of the Pacific, since in previous armed conflicts (mainly the War against the Peru-Bolivian Confederation) the elites showed greater participation and the reasons for their occurrence were only cautioned by Diego Portales.⁸

One of the main characteristics of the War of the Pacific was the national mobilisation to achieve victory. Throughout all of Chile, a patriotic fervour inundated the political discourse, the homilies in churches, newspaper editorials, and schools, proliferating the idea that (according to McEvoy, 2011), in that period and by way of the war, Chile was fulfilling a civilising

5 The wars referred to are those commonly known in Chilean historiography as the War of Independence (1810-1826), the War against the Peru-Bolivian Confederation (1836-1839), the Naval War against Spain (1864-1866), the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), and the Pacification of Araucanía. In each of these conflicts, individuals or groups of people who fought in them became renowned for the heroism and significance of their actions. They include General Manuel Bulnes, Sergeant Candelaria, the Chilean Roto, Arturo Prat, General Baquedano, and the Heroes of La Concepción, in chronological order.

6 The first of the Latin Americanists was Bernardo O'Higgins, who proposed that Chile emulate the organisation of the United States as a federation. Manuel de Salas, Ramón Freire, Joaquín Mosquera, and Juan Egaña held similar views. By 1856, Francisco Bilbao advocated for the unity of the Latin American peoples, but this was not the majority position.

7 Carlos Escudé (1992) conducted a solid investigation regarding how the Argentine state constructed its national identity through education and the use of myths.

8 Góngora transcribes almost in its entirety the letter that Portales sent to Blanco Encalada on September 10, 1836, when the latter was appointed commander of the military forces that went to fight Marshal Santa Cruz. Encina (1954) points out that this war became popular only after the victory at Yungay, which generated, in the collective imagination, the image of the Chilean Roto, the humble and selfless everyman who defended his homeland. The Day of the Chilean Roto is commemorated on the date of the victory of the Chilean troops, January 20.

role, pulling Peru and Bolivia out of the barbarism in which they were immersed.

The relevance of this element is fundamental to this version, since the War of the Pacific implied the victory of a superior people and race, representing the most advanced civilisations, such as that of Europe, against a decadent Peru and a barbaric Bolivia (McEvoy, 2011). Two episodes of this war, despite being defeats for the Chilean forces, are fundamental to the development of the conflict and the construction and solidification of the idea of a warrior state. The Naval Battle of Iquique and the Battle of La Concepción, in which Chileans kept fighting despite numerical and material inferiority, were considered proof of superior heroism, and portrayed them as an example of civility, courage, love of country, sense of duty, and an example for future generations (Sater, 2009).

But Chile had not only defeated Peru and Bolivia, it had also annexed territories rich in mineral resources and occupied the Peruvian capital for three years. This situation definitively shaped the idea of a unique nation whose frontier expansion was directly related to its strength and will. Additionally, it fueled the perception of Peru's inevitable decline, given it was once the seat of the Inca empire, a viceroyalty, and later a state with enormous natural wealth.⁹

The cementing of national borders lasted almost a century. Territorial conquests at the expense of neighbouring countries, as well as the occupation of Mapuche territories, were primarily carried out by the Army, an institu-

tion that is crucial to this version, since Chile's survival as an independent state was possible thanks to its successes on the battlefield, but also thanks to the Army's intervention during times of political and social crisis.

In this vein, given the Army's importance to the Republic, it is paramount to clarify and study its origins. Indeed, the systematic study within the Army itself traced its earliest origins back to the formation, by the Royal Decree of 1603, of the Army of the Kingdom of Chile, which became necessary after the Disaster of Curalaba in 1598 (Chilean Army, 2025). From then on, the Spanish and Mapuche military forces began a slow but persistent process of fusion, in terms of a shared fighting spirit, endurance in combat, and a rebellious nature, among other traits. By the time of independence, this fusion had reached a level of maturity sufficient to constitute the armed force that would uphold the country's sovereignty, consolidate it as a nation, and subsequently expand it through territorial conquests at the expense of Peru, Bolivia, and the Mapuche themselves.

In this context of historical continuity, the Army has named some of its most important units after Mapuche warriors, such as the Lautaro Special Operations Brigade. Pedro Subercaseaux's painting "The Young Lautaro" hangs at the Chilean Army's Headquarters, and has always held a prominent place within its cultural and historical heritage. During certain periods of command, this painting has hung behind the desk of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, alongside other portraits of important figures from the Mapuche world. Therefore, it is not surprising that this painting, in which Lautaro holds the iconic flag with the eight-pointed

9 Rodríguez Elizondo (2004) delves deeper into who, for Peruvians, is responsible for their situation: Diego Portales. "In the new context, Portales would be the nefarious icon, not as the one who encouraged the war against the Confederation, but for his thesis on the need for Chilean domination of the Pacific Ocean. After an interval of four decades, he reappeared as the figure symbolically responsible for crushing the Inca Empire, the end of the first viceroyalty, and the humiliation of greatest republic in South America." (p. 24)

star, remains in this place of honor, linking the Army to his figure.¹⁰

This explains its role in the 1980 Constitution as guarantor of institutional integrity and custodian of national values (Political Constitution of the Republic, 1980; Declaration of Principles of the Government of Chile, 1974).

The other element of this version, race, has been addressed by other researchers to analyse situations in their own countries. One of them is Reginald Horsman (1985), who analysed how the racial factor was fundamental to the consolidation of the U.S. idea of "Manifest Destiny", the perception of a chosen people or, in the words of Madeleine Albright, an "indispensable nation".

Of a smaller international impact but similar in theoretical depth, the 19th century saw Chile's elite and part of its society conceptualising the country as the cradle of a special race: the aforementioned amalgamation of Spanish Goths and the Mapuche.

The relevance of this distinction lies in the fact that the Spaniards of the north of the Iberian Peninsula are descendants of the Germans, in particular the Visigoths, to whom a series of characteristics are attributed, including bravery, sobriety, discipline, honesty, a warrior spirit, and patriarchal organisation, which are thought to coincide with those of the Mapuche.

The fusion of races occurred in the context of the intermittent conflict that the Mapuche and the Spaniards maintained for more than three centuries in the southern territories, and the

result is the emergence of human beings who condensed, in themselves, a set of their ancestors' attributes and characteristics, including some particularly unique qualities for war, whose main manifestation was the figure of the Chilean Roto¹¹ (Palacios, 1904).

The main exponent of the racial element here is Dr. Nicolás Palacios, originally from Santa Cruz, in the heart of central Chile, who wrote "Chilean Race" in 1904, considered an essential book by nationalist organisations.

According to research by Jorge Larraín (2001), the military-racial version of Chilean identity is deeply rooted; it is the dominant version in mainstream textbooks. The key events defining Chilean identity are the Arauco War, the War against the Confederation, and the War of the Pacific.

Charles Tilly, in his book "War Makes States and States Make War" (Tilly, 1992), conveys part of this fundamental idea to explain the formation of the state, especially the cohesion that is achieved in critical moments such as a war, which can be applied to the initial formation of Chilean national identity.

Finally, this version connects with the diverse perspectives of Chilean nationalism, most of which were initially critical of the adoption of

10 The discipline that analyses the effects and characteristics of the Armed Forces on society is a branch of sociology called "military sociology", and one of its areas of study is civil-military relations. In Chile, one of the main works on this subject is "Military Sociology" by Omar Gutiérrez Valdebenito. Another is the doctoral thesis by General José Miguel Piuzzi at the University of Salamanca, entitled "The Military in Chilean Society 1891-1970: Civil-Military Relations and Social Integration".

11 In her book "Guerreros Civilizadores. Política, sociedad y cultura en Chile durante la Guerra del Pacífico" ("Civilising Warriors: Politics, Society, and Culture in Chile during the War of the Pacific"), Peruvian historian Carmen McEvoy investigates the Chilean elite's view of the Mapuche and neighbouring peoples, particularly Peruvians and Bolivians, whom they deeply despised. McEvoy argues that the Pacification of Araucanía was the Chilean equivalent of the Conquest of the West carried out by East Coast U.S. Americans in the 19th century.

the free market economic model during the Military Government.¹²

12 Acuña, Rodríguez and Willoughby (1983) have a critical though constructive stance towards the Military Regime, openly expressing their reservations at the time of adopting a model that was not particularly compatible with nationalist thought.

HISPANIST-TRADITIONALIST VERSION

For those who subscribe to this version of Chilean identity, the country was not born in 1810, nor in 1826, when the royalists were expelled from Chiloé. They argue the country was born with the establishment of Spanish institutions on its land by Pedro de Valdivia, founder of the city of Santiago and responsible for making this territory an integral part of the Crown of Castile, though not a colony.

The metropolis not only incorporated these new territories under its dominion in material terms, but also in spiritual terms, by replicating the political structure and social order established in medieval Spain by the Visigothic King Reccared. It was this king who renounced Arianism to convert to Catholicism in the year 589, at which time the figure of Saint Isidore of Seville emerged.

In "Ideario y Ruta de la Emancipación Chilena" ("Ideology and Path of Chilean Emancipation"), Jaime Eyzaguirre (1976, pp. 15-16), who joins Osvaldo Lira as one of the main proponents of this version of identity, explains that it is Saint Isidore who establishes a political order composed of two elements: the king and the people. The former receives his power from God, thus constituting divine right. Meanwhile, the people are not an inorganic mass, but rather "a human multitude associated by legal consent and common agreement." Therefore, divine right and human right converge in the political order. Upon them rests the structure of the state and the moral order that must prevail in society.

From the confluence of these two elements arises the famous aphorism *rex eris si recte facias; si non facias, non eris* ("You will be king if you do rightly; if you do not, you will not be"), meaning that the pillars of Latin American societies were God, the king and the people, where, although the king's power comes from God, his

responsibility must be oriented towards the well-being of the people, since his life are oriented and guided by God (Larraín, 2001).

From this statement emerges a perspective on human dignity that governs the relationship between the monarchy (and its representatives), and the subjects. Indeed, this aphorism implies that the king must act justly and in the best interests of the people, and the people will respect him because his power comes from God. However, if the king acts as a tyrant or if the people consider him illegitimate, they have the right to rebel (Eyzaguirre, 1976).

Within this context, Eyzaguirre situates Hispanic America as a continuous social, political, and spiritual entity, where the independence process did not imply a break with its Spanish identity, but rather a transformation of it. However, the Latin American problem lies in the forgetting of its roots, its detachment from Catholic tradition, and its constant focus on traditions that are not its own, such as the U.S. federalist model. "How can one say anything true, anything original, anything authentic, if he is unfaithful to his own essence?" Eyzaguirre (1976) asked, attributing Latin American decline to the disdain for its traditions and the uncritical adoption of a culture that is not its own.



PSYCHOSOCIAL VERSION

In this regard, Larraín (2001, p. 35) issues a warning: "In particular, it is necessary to avoid transposing the psychological elements of personal identities onto cultural identities. While it is possible and legitimate to speak of a personal identity in terms of the 'character' or 'psychic structure' of an individual, it is not appropriate to speak of a collective identity in terms of an 'ethnic character' or a 'collective psychic structure'."

Indeed, attributing or associating individual psychological traits to a group is a mistake, because it tends to lead to incorrect generalisations that attribute characteristics intrinsic to an individual to a group of people, such as cowardice, bravery, sobriety, selfishness, and laziness. On the contrary, a person can be brave or cowardly in any geographical location, independent of their cultural background, because these are effectively individual characteristics, and this is precisely where the limitation of this perspective lies.

In 1976, when Hernán Godoy wrote "El Carácter Chileno" (The Chilean Character), there was an ongoing debate among the various social sciences that analyse national identity (anthropologists, social psychologists, sociologists, and political scientists) regarding methodologies, areas of study, emphases, and research tools. Therefore, he was aware of and acknowledged the limitations of his line of research. In it, Godoy (1976, p. 21) defines national character, on the one hand, as "the set of attitudes, beliefs, and values consistent with basic institutions and held in common by the members of a society or by a large part of them. On the other hand, studies on national character analyse the configuration of a nation's culture; its manifestation in history, traditions, and customs; its expression in the form of codes, myths, models, creeds, self-image, national conscious-

ness, political styles, and institutions; and the generalised forms and conceptions expressed by literature, art, thought, and politics."

The importance of the above distinction lies in the need to contextualise the conclusions reached by studies on national character, at least in the case of Godoy, who is the main exponent on this topic in terms of the depth of his work and its widespread dissemination. His methodology was to analyse testimonies about Chile and its inhabitants in order to develop a "preliminary study on national character" (Godoy, 1976, p. 24), finding some constants over time, thus allowing him to arrive at some conclusions regarding the Chilean character.

Godoy (1976, pp. 439-443) identifies seven sets of positive traits attributed to the Chilean character, which can be summarised below:

1. The "will to face challenges, serenity in the face of adversity, and the habit of effort and work to survive and progress".
2. "Moderation and sobriety, seriousness and prudence, lack of emphasis and solemnity, inclination towards order and discipline".
3. Their "sharp sense of humour and great sensitivity to ridicule".
4. "The feeling of patriotism, love for the land and conscience".
5. Their hospitality and warm welcome to foreigners in the country. "The affection and hospitality that Chileans offer to foreigners is another trait that virtually all travelers agree on. It is a national characteristic that encompasses all social classes."
6. Their "openness to the world, which translates into a desire to travel, the longing to keep up to date with, and quickly assimilate, the social or cultural progress of more advanced countries".

7. "The critical spirit, which leads them to discover the negative before the positive".

Regarding the most negative aspects of the Chilean, Godoy identifies the authors who criticise the Chilean character, which can be summarised as inconstancy, cruelty, envy, superstition, lack of foresight, an inferiority complex, pessimism, alcoholism, apathy, lack of energy and personality, among other characterisations, such as brutishness and dull bureaucratism.¹³

According to Godoy's research, all these traits are relatively permanent, thus reflecting a consistent Chilean way of being. However, they manifest themselves with variable intensity over time: some are more externalised than others, depending on the changes or upheavals society faces.

For this reason, the identified traits of the Chilean character are not equally visible, but rather depend on the environment, which has periods of change of greater or lesser extent, and are related to social crises that affect the different areas of social and political development.



13 The author Hernán Godoy cites who have negatively described the Chilean character are Victorino Lastarria, Alberto Cabero, Edwards Bello, Benjamín Subercaseaux and Galvarino Guzmán.

POPULAR CULTURE VERSION

Gabriel Salazar is the author who has most developed this version of Chilean identity, stating that its true depositors are the *sectores populares* (middle — and low — class groups) or *el pueblo* (the people). In contrast, the elite has been more interested in identifying itself with cultures considered more advanced or elevated, and has also been, from the state, the creator of the official history and the notion of nationhood.¹⁴

This identification of the elites with Great Britain, France, and the United States caused “families to travel on very long pilgrimages to the source of their identity. They bought residences and apartments and moved there for years, and many remained there. This meant that during the first centenary of Chile, the reality and identity of Chile were unknown to them” (Salazar, 2009).

As the 20th century advanced, wealthy families no longer traveled for long periods to Europe or the United States, although they continued to claim foreign origins. Staying in the country allowed them to familiarise themselves with the Chilean reality, although their contempt for mestizo and middle- and lower-class women remained, because it began to be associated with the Mapuche, who were seen as internal enemies (Salazar, 2009).

For Salazar, this association of the elites with Europe and the United States makes them an imitative social group, lacking content and therefore incapable of creating an original, unique culture. “What happens if we scratch the surface to find what has been and is the au-

thentic national culture? The specifically Chilean culture? Discovered underneath it are not, usually, presidents, generals, ministers and big businessmen (who have traditionally imitated the colonising culture of Western capitalism), but a motley gallery of rotos, laborers, small scale miners, prospectors, folk poets and singers, chinganeras, food sellers, fondistas, tenant farmers, placilleros, fishmongers, farmers, workers, vagrants, etc. who created Chilean culture while trying to humanise themselves, on the margins, against and despite the central system of domination that existed and still exists in Chile” (Salazar, 2006, p. 147).

For Salazar, only an original and creative force can be capable of building the identity of a nation, and that force comes from the mestizo.

This reality is lesser known because historiography requires the adoption of a scientific method that leads to the search for objective and reliable sources, which are mostly recorded in official documents, birth and death certificates, narratives of relevant events, first-person accounts, and a wealth of documents stored and cataloged in the National Archives. For this reason, “The history of Chile that is actually researched and recounted, has been beset—as mentioned above—by ‘objectivity’ and ‘officialdom,’ and therefore has not acted as a factor for the future of the Chilean people. Even today, the people’s history continues to be written by narrating the objective history of the state, of governments, of elections, and of political parties. In other words: where the people are always spectators, satellites, or victims” (Neves, Lermenda, and Ibarra, 2023, p. 9).

To understand the real history, and the true national identity, then, it is necessary to understand the history of the pueblo, of mestizo men and women, of “illegitimate” children, all forgotten by “official” history and therefore mostly

14 According to Salazar, “Chile, as a nation, was built out of Santiago, by Santiago and for Santiago. And Santiago was dominated, since the Spanish defeat of Curalaba, by the mercantile elite that traded with the Peruvian Viceroyalty” (Neves, Lermenda and Ibarra, 2023, p. 7).

unwritten history, “because the people-citizens do not live or make history in the abstract concept of ‘nationhood’, nor in the equally abstract ‘national state’, but where they are among one another, with their children, their neighbours, their teachers, their grocers and shopkeepers. In other words, where they constitute community” (Neves, Lermenda and Ibarra, 2023, p. 9).

POSTMODERN ENTERPRISE VERSION

This version of national identity began to take shape with Chile's return to the international community after the end of the military government and the inauguration of President Patricio Aylwin following the elections that sealed his victory. The new administration initiated Chile's reintegration into the international arena, accompanied by the defence of human rights, democracy, and the opening of the country through various instruments aimed at increasing Chile's trade with the world.

To generate favourable agreements and business deals, it was necessary to project an image of a serious, professional country with a skilled workforce. The opportunity to present itself to the world as a stable place to invest and do business was the Seville Expo '92, at a time when the transition process was just beginning, human rights violations were still fresh in everyone's minds, and the country's projection strategy needed to be defined. Ultimately, the idea that the design and content of the Chilean pavilion should emphasise the image "of a modern, reliable country" prevailed (Gómez, 2022).

Guillermo Tejeda, one of the members of Expo '92 Committee, comments, "We wanted to show a new country. If there was one thing I didn't want, it was ponchos; no ponchos were going to enter the pavilion. I wanted to create a large art installation that would recover the name of Chile, which was in ruins after the dictatorship" (Gómez, 2022).

One of the ideas that materialised for the exhibition was bringing an iceberg from Antarctica. "The image of the iceberg, Léniz told Aylwin, will allow the country to differentiate itself from Latin American exoticism, making it appear as European as possible" (Gómez, 2022).

This initiative proved successful, marking the beginning of a series of trade agreements of

various kinds with different economies. By 1995, Chile was attempting to become a full member of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The positive economic results achieved in the 1990s, Chile's opening to the world, political stability, business success, and the emergence of the idea that this new Chile could offer a homegrown version of the "American Dream" (hard work and success achieved through independence) was personified in the CTC Startel commercial featuring "Faúndez", who became the archetype of the citizen-entrepreneur.

The political stability that arose from a smooth transition process, along with a booming economy, began to generate a success-oriented mentality that led various social actors to identify, once again, with extra-regional states. This led to the coining of the phrase: "Chile, jaguar of Latin America", as a reference to the successful "Asian Tigers" (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea), since no other country in Latin America had achieved such positive results or had as much political and social stability as Chile (Contreras, Moscoso and Paredes, 2009).

A critical perspective on the efforts to make Chile a model of success and modernisation comes from Bernardo Subercaseaux, who argues that generating a national culture based on foreign models has resulted in a persistent lack of "cultural depth" (Pinedo, 1997). For Subercaseaux, the main shortcoming is that economic success has not translated into culture.

Without culture, modernity cannot be achieved.

Another facet of Subercaseaux's critique relates to the amnesia resulting from the transition agreements, as well as the poor practices of the modernisation project. Regarding the former, Expo '92 in Seville is the starting point of this amnesia. Augusto Aninat, member of the

Chilean pavilion organising committee, comments, "You go to fairs to attract attention, not to mourn your dead or to show your negative aspects." Tejeda adds, "There were always angry people. That part really bothers me. They said this was a whitewashing, but no, it was a change of image. I mean, my mother was tortured at Tres Álamos and Cuatro Álamos [political prison camps]; I have a very strong position on that issue. But it seemed to me that this wasn't the right time or place. We didn't want to show a country of victims. The pavilion's purpose was to revitalise Chile's name" (Gómez, 2022).

For Subercaseaux, "Making the country a modern nation seems to be the ultimate utopia of Chileans in recent decades. It is the end that justifies any and all means. In pursuit of this goal, the majority seem willing to accept everything: from human rights violations and the dictatorship in the 1970s, to a polluted Santiago that grows like a shapeless, viscous

stain in the 1980s, to the somewhat bland politics and the forgetting of the past in the 1990s. What does it matter... we're finally going to become a modern country!" (Pinedo, 1997, p. 30).

The research by Contreras, Moscoso and Paredes (2009) allows us to observe how the "model Chile" discourse was promoted not only by the Executive branch, but also by the press, presenting or emphasising economic achievements and the signing of free trade agreements.

Comparing the different versions of national identity, Jorge Larraín says that this one has "more diffuse contours than others, but its projections are profound (...) since it is capable of articulating a supporting philosophy such as postmodernism, reinterpreted in a way that conveniently supports modernisations and the opening to the world market. It also tries to seduce the masses through access to consumption and the promise to end poverty" (Larraín, 2001, p. 172).

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY

When Ricardo Lagos assumed the presidency, Chile had already achieved international reintegration through successful trade liberalisation, adequate levels of political stability, and efforts to overcome the economic crisis. However, Pinochet remained imprisoned in London, and this situation prompted the country to make efforts to finalise the transition, prosecuting human rights violations and creating the Valech Commission, which produced a comprehensive report and paved the way for monetary compensation to be paid to approximately 30,000 victims of political imprisonment and torture.

Along with attempting to complete the transition, Ricardo Lagos's government made efforts to make Chile a developed country through economic growth, infrastructure investment, student loans to expand access to education, universal healthcare coverage for a list of medical conditions (known as Plan AUGE), and a significant amendment to the Constitution. His biggest problem was the corruption scandals that marred his administration.

The strong economic performance, along with political and social stability, pushed the country forward in a context of increasingly pronounced globalisation, generating debates about its effects on national identity, how it is defined, how it is constructed, and its impact on national defence.

As a simplification of the problem, Gabriel Gaspar (2000) argued that essentialist definitions of identity "affect the basic foundation of our sovereignty, which lies in the entire community of citizens of the country [because] if the state is the legally organised nation, then Chileanness can be perfectly defined through the acceptance of its institutions. Regardless of whether they are Aymara, descendants of Nordic immigrants or Easter Islanders, and what-

ever religious creed they profess, those born in Chile, or those who voluntarily accept our institutions and join the uninterrupted process of building our nation, are Chilean, given that this is a daily, dynamic and multidimensional effort" (p. 309).

It is observed, then, that Gaspar moves away from essentialist versions of identity, since true identity is constructed to the extent that states remain as autonomous political units.

Bernardo Subercaseaux (2000) suggests that this view of national identity might be appropriate, given that Chilean culture is so shallow from an ethnic, demographic, and cultural perspective that, if one examines "the trajectory and manner in which the construction of national identity has taken place in the 19th and 20th centuries, it indicates that in Chile it has been, to a large extent, a byproduct of politics and social practice" (p. 156). Given this cultural deficit, one possibility is that identity construction can begin with an effort to deepen democratic identity, incorporate diverse perspectives, and from there equip itself with "the tools to best manage the new scenario of globalisation" (Subercaseaux, 2000, p. 166).

For historian Sofía Correa, the aforementioned versions or models of identity are in crisis and are not able to "move young people, and it seems that it does not succeed as a social unifier (...) The recognition that national identity is not an essence, but a construction, is an indispensable requirement to begin to recreate it [but] the new discourse about ourselves has to be based on reflection on our history and on the careful observation of the most current social manifestations" (Correa, 2000, p. 154).

The challenge, then, is "to articulate a multiplicity of historical narratives that can give us meaning as a community through time (...) So that we can build the homeland that is shared,

a nation that is built politically with the participation of all, in short, a country of citizens, and not a fluttering of consumers who revolve blindly thinking of Chile as an internationalised, globalised commercial product, turned into a website" (Correa, 2009, p. 29).

At this point, it is worth mentioning another relevant aspect regarding how national identity is expressed in our country, because it is not constructed solely out of the major cities, but must include or consider all regional identities. If it is constructed out of Santiago, for Santiago, and by Santiago residents, as Salazar indicates (Neves, Lermenda, and Ibarra, 2023), the cultural richness of the country's different geographical areas is overlooked. Correa (2009, p. 22) complements this idea by pointing out that the construction of the rural myth, "which very successfully posits the countryside of the central valley as a source of identity: consider the dissemination of the cueca, the tonada, the huaso, the willows and poplars, etc., always appealing to a world of natural and social harmony, excluding the arid north and the frigid far south, the people of the sea and the mountains, and, of course, the city dwellers."

Finally, the economic success of the late 20th and early 21st centuries began to weaken after the subprime mortgage crisis that began in 2008. The Bachelet-Piñera political cycle began shortly thereafter, amid strong immigration, first from Haiti and then from Venezuela, the emergence of "identity politics", and the challenge to the economic model and its main symbols (private companies in charge of pension funds and health insurance, and state-guaranteed student loans in order to obtain university degrees), which led to what was called the "Social Outburst".

The formula for overcoming the crisis was the creation of a Constitutional Convention, whose resulting draft was defeated at the polls, leading to a second process and a new draft that met the same fate. Both were characterised by the tension between particularisms and the construction of majorities. For Larraín, one of the problems with identity is when those particularities become essential: "You can't say, 'I define myself by this identity and everything else can go to hell.' That's the problem when your preferred identity is exclusionary" (Marín, 2023).





NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL COHESION IN CHILE

In Chile, national identity has traditionally been influenced by a military-racial perspective, which emphasises the importance of the 19th-century wars and the fusion of Hispanic and Mapuche heritage as fundamental elements. This perspective has been predominant in education and public discourse, reinforcing a narrative of homogeneity. Furthermore, Chilean national identity has been instrumentalised at different points in history to justify specific political projects, contributing to its shifting and sometimes contradictory nature.

However, in recent decades there has been a shift towards a more pluralistic identity, influenced by multiculturalism and globalisation. This process has generated tensions between sectors that defend a homogeneous national identity and those that promote a more diverse and inclusive one.

As a result, the relationship between national identity and social cohesion in Chile has been the subject of debate, especially in the context of migration and demands for recognition of Indigenous Peoples. Certain studies, which will be reviewed below, suggest two important points: that social cohesion in Chile is closely linked to the perception of inclusion within the national project, and that socioeconomic segregation and the exclusion of certain sectors can weaken relationships of trust among citizens, affecting stability and cooperation within the country.

In this regard, a 2020 Ipsos report indicates that 48% of Chileans consider social cohesion in the country weak (Ipsos, 2020). Furthermore, when asked how to improve it, they place the greatest importance on strengthening trust in the police (Carabineros and PDI) (90%), the justice system (82%), and the state (80%). Expanding on this last point, regarding advances that could improve the level of trust in the state,

62% mentioned controlling crime and improving security, 43% strengthening institutions and laws that combat corruption and promote probity in the country, and 38% improving economic growth (Ipsos, 2020).

Along the same lines, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Center for Studies on Conflict and Social Cohesion (COES), conducted a study entitled the Longitudinal Social Study of Chile (ELSOC), which found that social cohesion, trust in institutions and the perception of social justice declined between 2016 and 2020. This study identified that the social protests of October 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the perception of social cohesion in the country (ECLAC & COES, 2022).

The 2021 ELSOC also shows that only 7.9% of Chileans believe that “people can almost always be trusted.” Since 2016, this figure has been steadily declining, reflecting a crisis of interpersonal trust. Furthermore, trust in key institutions such as Congress and political parties remains below 5% (COES, 2021).

In terms of social impact, research conducted by the University of Concepción (Luján Candia, 2021) examined the relationship between social cohesion, inequality, and interpersonal violence in urban communities in the Biobío region. Among the main findings, the study observed a moderating effect of social cohesion on the relationship between socioeconomic inequality and interpersonal violence.

Meanwhile, a report commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development in 2020, titled “Final Report of the Advisory Council for Social Cohesion: Diagnosis for an approach to Social Cohesion in Chile and recommendations to strengthen the contribution of social policy”,

identifies four strengths and ten problem areas regarding social cohesion in Chile.

Regarding the strengths, there are two notable themes that allow for a connection to national identity: 85% feel pride in their Chilean nationality, and most people identify with Chile. Furthermore, there is a high level of acceptance of the immigrant population, with a majority valuing their culture and a minority believing they reduce employment opportunities for the local population. However, this latter view varies significantly by socioeconomic group and region, with negative perceptions increasing substantially in the poorest sectors and in the northern regions (Advisory Council for Social Cohesion, 2020, p. 54).

The study lists the following problem areas related to social cohesion in Chile (Advisory Council for Social Cohesion, 2020, pp. 55-56).

1. Over the past ten years, some social bonds fundamental to social cohesion have weakened: people have fewer friends, less support in times of need, and a third of the population has only one person (or no one) to talk to about important issues
2. Since the restoration of democracy, interpersonal trust has remained low; currently only 19% of the population trusts strangers.
3. There is a problem with respect and dignity in social interaction. Around 40% of people have experienced mistreatment, which is mainly attributed to sexism and classism.
4. Trust in institutions has been low since the mid-1990s and has fallen dramatically over the last ten years. Fundamental institutions of the political order (government, political parties, and Congress) did not exceed 5% trust in 2019.
5. Perceptions towards social injustice have increased in recent years, especially regarding health and education. It is considered unjust that access to good health and education depends upon income.
6. There is an overwhelming consensus that income inequality is very high in Chile (91% of the population). People value individual effort and consider hard work essential for getting ahead in life (80%). However, only 31% feel their effort is well rewarded. This can be attributed to low wages in the labour market, as well as the current payout of pensions.
7. Around 70% of people in Chile perceive that political authorities do not consider their opinion when designing their social programs and benefits.
8. In general, 42% of Chilean men and women express fear of being sexually harassed at work or school, or while walking at night in their neighbourhoods. This figure rises dramatically for women (66% and 55%, in each of the given situations, respectively). Women consider that their physical integrity and dignity are not being respected, a fundamental rule of social coexistence and the common good. Taken together, these high levels of fear reveal the security problem that exists in Chile.
9. Only a third of the population considers being active in social organisations important for democracy. While social mobilisations have increased, only 36% of people participate in any social organisation.
10. Since the return to democracy, voter turnout has declined dramatically, placing Chile among the democracies with the lowest voter participation within the OECD, and the greatest drop in voter participation in Latin America. This decline has been accompanied by low interest in politics and weak identification with political parties, in a context of low civic engagement.

Finally, given the characteristics of the national territory, some studies have attempted to explore the possible existence of a regional identity. In this regard, according to the results collected by the Regional Barometer in a 2009 report by the Undersecretariat of Regional and Administrative Development (SUBDERE), a large portion of citizens believe that a regional identity does indeed exist. When comparing this information by region, significant territorial differences emerge, with some regions constructing a stronger sense of identity than others. For example, the Metropolitan Region appears to have the "least distinctive identity", as 48% of its respondents believe it lacks one. This contrasts sharply with the Los Lagos, Coquimbo, Magallanes, and La Araucanía regions, where over 80% of respondents believe that a distinctive regional identity does exist (SUBDERE, 2009, p. 182).

However, it is important to note that when asked about their primary identity, respondents most strongly chose Chilean (51.4%) and belonging to their neighbourhood (14.4%), while only 8.4% chose their region (SUBDERE, 2009, p. 185).

Another relevant finding from the same study is that those interviewed "do not limit the characteristic regional identity to rigid and homogeneous references, but rather there is a wide range of elements through which people believe that regional culture is expressed, such as religious festivals, forms of interaction, a cheerful predisposition, entrepreneurial capacity, etc. In this wide array of elements, some are more central than others, such as regional history and customs; these two were the most mentioned when respondents were asked about the main contribution of their region to the country" (SUBDERE, 2009, 183).

In this sense, the existence of a regional identity is important for cohesion since, as stated in another SUBDERE report from 2013 entitled "Territorial Identities. Authenticity as a Driver of Local Development", strengthening regional



identities, “among other things, unites people and cultivates a sense of belonging; provides greater ‘security’ in the region and its future; calms antagonisms and fosters cooperation; bolsters institutions based on the common interest; contributes to including citizens in new development projects; creates higher levels of collective and personal motivation; induces the learning of good practices; provides stability in demographic development; generates new fields of productive and economic valorisation from local attributes; contributes to the territory obtaining a better reputation and image to attract investors, entrepreneurs, workers, professionals and technicians; and favours networking, the construction of new institutions and innovative development, since it allows these processes to develop in spaces of trust and openness to change” (SUBDERE, 2013, p. 10).

Nevertheless, the studies presented here demonstrate that social cohesion in Chile faces significant structural challenges. While there are notions of a national identity, the crisis of trust in institutions, the increased perception of inequality, and interpersonal distrust have weakened social bonds, affecting cohesion.

This situation sheds light on the elements that would need to be addressed through public policy if social cohesion were to be strengthened, such as ensuring that government actions towards society are inclusive, and promote equity, access to opportunities, and the rebuilding of trust in institutions and society as a whole, as well as recognising and enhancing the particularities of each region or neighbourhood in places where identification is strong.

TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES REGARDING NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

The content of this work has attempted to reflect, as accurately as possible, the importance of the concept of national identity in modern societies and its impact on the survival of states. As indicated, this identity is constructed through historical factors, in the way children are taught about their country's past, in shared symbols and narratives, in collective myths, in invented traditions, and through repetition.

National pride and patriotism have also played a significant role in shaping national identities, where wars and battles, to mention one example, contribute elements that allow us to nurture the image that societies have of themselves, where institutions, such as the armed forces, often become the custodians and representatives of its expression.

Therefore, throughout history, there have been attempts to foster strong social identities, resulting in identification with fellow citizens, as well as political fluidity and social support for the decisions of rulers (20th-century nationalisms are a good example of this). However, with the advent of globalisation, an identity crisis is beginning to emerge, jeopardising the very legitimacy of political systems and governments.

Indeed, trust in democracy and institutions is plummeting, as citizens feel that politicians are incapable of addressing their problems. In this context, migration highlights the effect of globalisation on national identity and social cohesion. While it is a global phenomenon, decisions regarding its management are made independently in each country (as opposed to interdependently).

This state of affairs has led to increasingly multicultural societies and constantly evolving identities, adapting to demographic and cultural shifts. However, this has also given rise to a new wave of populism that emerged after 2010, a symptom of the social polarisation exacer-

bated by the massification of social media, and by economic crises such as the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020.

This scenario has become a major challenge to social cohesion, as populist leaders portray minorities as threats to the state and the nation, fueling dichotomous "us-versus-them" identity narratives. Thus, in many countries, a tension can be observed between more pluralistic identity discourses, which embrace migration and multiculturalism, and those that defend a more homogeneous or exclusionary national identity.

Globalisation is characterised as a multidimensional phenomenon, originating from the increase in trade in the 1970s and subsequently encompassing culture, politics, language, advertising, and almost every sphere of human activity, achieving varying degrees of economic interdependence and interpenetration in other areas. However, the impact of its cultural influence has not been balanced. States that are able to export their culture and values have a greater chance of penetrating and influencing other countries, as they become role models for their citizens. While the 19th-century model was Europe (as we have seen in the different versions of Chilean identity), from the late 20th century to the present, the model has been the United States.¹⁵

The information generated and circulating on television, radio, the internet, streaming services, and apps, is of enormous variety and mul-

15 "Whatever one may think of its aesthetic values, America's mass culture exercises a magnetic appeal, especially on the world's youth. Its attraction may be derived from the hedonistic quality of the lifestyle it projects, but its global appeal is undeniable" (Brzezinski, 1997).

multiple origins, where language is not a barrier, since simultaneous translators exist or English is easily understood, putting diverse people in contact with other realities, styles, traditions, languages, and other cultural aspects, which could ultimately uproot people from their own culture and traditions, blurring national identities. In other words, what was once considered part of one's own identity begins to lose value when identifying with foreign realities, particularly on the part of the political, social, or economic elite.

Nation-states are another group of actors impacted by globalisation, which has called into question concepts such as national sovereignty and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states, and restricted their decision-making power. Indeed, as international institutions have grown and more economic agreements have been signed between countries, their leeway to make modifications has narrowed, since some aspects of these treaties are conditioned on the adoption of environmental, gender-related, indigenous, or other agendas.¹⁶

This situation has had critical effects on the field of defence and security. Several years ago, Alvin and Heidi Toffler (1994) raised the alarm that the society emerging as a result of globalisation, high incomes, and the comfort of having few hardships, was a society that shunned conflict, was reluctant to wage war, was more willing to contest it, and, most importantly, was unwilling to fight in it. The case of the conflict in Vietnam was particularly worrying for the United States.

In Europe, the perception of a stable security environment and the deepening of economic and cultural integration have not only diluted national sovereignties but have also altered the very concept of the nation-state. Emmanuel Todd (2024) takes this to the extreme, pointing out that one of the main problems in resolving the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is a

lack of understanding for a simple reason: Russians continue to think of sovereignty as the basis of a nation-state, while for many in the West, nation-states should no longer exist.

If nation-states are in decline, is there a possibility that national identities will also decline? If these identities continue to erode or lose their meaning for most people, will there be anything left to defend? If not an identity, will it be a territory, a landscape, natural resources, a constitutional pact?¹⁷

In Chile, as noted before, a process of reflection on identity is currently taking place, where essentialist versions (military-racial, Hispanist-traditionalist, postmodernist, popular culture) are in retreat, and deliberations revolve around what Larraín (2000, p. 94) defined as national identity: "a permanent historical process of construction and reconstruction of the 'imagined community' that is the nation ... The alterations that have occurred in its constituent elements do not necessarily imply that the national identity has been lost, but rather that it has changed."

In this sense, national diversity is no longer represented by the most widespread and documented versions of identity, because there is no single identity, but rather multiple. Together they form the general view of those recognised in the country's geographical zones, where, as has been seen, regions or localities often carry more weight in the identification of individuals than the nation as a whole. Therefore, ways must be found to include and/or strengthen them so that they become part of the collective imagination. Thus, part of the challenge is to

¹⁶ No value judgment is made, the point is simply stated.

¹⁷ The discussion is relevant, given the impact of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine on the rest of the world, but particularly on the discussion about identity and what should be defended (values and principles), the use of mercenary troops, the possibility of reintroducing compulsory military service, increasing defence spending and decreasing social security spending, among others.

maintain national identity amidst its diversity of forms.

In conclusion, since national identity and social cohesion are linked by the influence of the former on the latter, and it is also known that citizens bear notions of national identity through patriotic elements such as the flag or the anthem, in addition to the fact that a large majority feels proud to be Chilean and identifies with their region, it is worth asking what characteristics this bond presents in our country today.

Given the intense wave of immigration that has occurred in recent years from countries such as Haiti and Venezuela, which has visibly strained the political discourse and polarised the national debate, it is important to know where we are in this process as a nation, in the sense of understanding the impact on citizens and their view of the social changes that this phenomenon has produced, to try to understand if ethnic diversity places us in the group of countries whose cohesion is threatened, or if we are achieving its assimilation.



BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- Acuña, G., Willoughby, F. y Rodríguez Grez, P. (1983). *¿Qué es el Nacionalismo hoy?* Artimpres.
- Álvarez-Miranda, B. (2016). Identidad nacional y transnacionalismo en Europa: una perspectiva desde la inmigración musulmana. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso.
- Ares Mateos, A. (2020). Integración e identidad: un proyecto hacia la cohesión social. *Pensamiento*, 76 (288), 53-73. Recuperado de <https://revistas.comillas.edu/index.php/pensamiento/article/view/8031>
- Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo. (2020). La crisis de la desigualdad: América Latina y el Caribe en la encrucijada. BID. Recuperado de <https://publications.iadb.org/publications/spanish/document/La-crisis-de-la-desigualdad-America-Latina-y-el-Caribe-en-la-encrucijada.pdf>
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal Nationalism*. SAGE Publications.
- Brzezinski, Z. (1997). *El Gran Tablero Mundial. La supremacía estadounidense y sus imperativos geoestratégicos*. Paidós.
- CEPAL & COES. (2022). Cohesión social en Chile en tiempos de cambio: indicadores, perfiles y factores asociados.
- CEPAL. (2007). Cohesión social: inclusión y sentido de pertenencia en América Latina. Santiago de Chile: Naciones Unidas. Recuperado de https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/2834/S2006932_es.pdf
- CEPAL (2010). Cohesión social en América Latina. Una revisión de conceptos, marcos de referencia e indicadores. Santiago de Chile: Naciones Unidas. Recuperado de <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/2978-cohesion-social-america-latina-caribe-revision-conceptos-marcos-referencia>
- CEPAL. (2021). Cohesión social y desarrollo inclusivo en América Latina. CEPAL. Recuperado de https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/47403/4/S2100972_es.pdf
- COES. (2021). Radiografía del Cambio Social: *Análisis de Resultados Longitudinales ELSOC 2016-2021*.
- COES. (s.f.). Centro de Estudios de Conflicto y Cohesión Social. Recuperado de <https://uchile.cl/investigacion/centros-y-programas/centros-de-estudio/centro-de-estudios-de-conflicto-y-cohesion-social-coes>
- Consejo de Cohesión Social. (2020). Informe final Consejo Asesor para la Cohesión Social: *Diagnóstico para una aproximación a la cohesión social en Chile y recomendaciones para fortalecer el aporte de la política social*. Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia.
- Contreras, N., Moscoso, C. y Paredes, P. (2009). *El Jaguar Latinoamericano. La Metáfora como Discurso Político*. Tesis para optar al grado de Magister en Comunicación Política, Universidad de Chile.
- Correa, S. (2000). La identidad nacional, una construcción en crisis. En Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo (2000). *¿Hay Patria que Defender? La identidad nacional frente a la globalización*. Ediciones del Segundo Centenario, pp. 150-155.
- Correa, S. (2009). Identidad y globalización. *Revista Atenea* N° 499, pp. 11-32.
- Durkheim, É. (1893). *La división del trabajo social*. Madrid: Akal.
- Encina, F. (1954). *Resumen de la Historia de Chile*. Tomo II, Zig-Zag. Redacción, iconografía y apéndices de Leopoldo Castedo.
- Estado Mayor del Ejército. (2025). Historia del Ejército de Chile. Rescatado de <https://www.ejercito.cl/214-anos-de-historia>
- Eyzaguirre, J. (1976). *Ideario y Ruta de la Emancipación Chilena*. Editorial Universitaria.
- Fukuyama, F. (1995). *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Free Press.
- Fukuyama, F. (2021). Why National Identity Matters. En N. Holtug & E. M. Uslaner (Eds.), *National Identity and Social Cohesion* (pp. 19-30). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gaspar, G. (2000). Globalización, identidad y defensa nacional. En Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo. (2000). *¿Hay Patria que Defender? La identidad nacional frente a la globalización*. Ediciones del Segundo Centenario, pp. 308-322.
- Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Cornell University Press.
- Gobierno de Chile (1980). *Constitución Política de la República de Chile 1980*. Editorial Jurídica de Chile.
- Gobierno de Chile (1974). *Declaración de Principios del Gobierno de Chile*. Rescatado de https://www.archivochile.com/Dictadura_militar/doc_jm_gob_pino8/DMdocjm0005.pdf
- Godoy, H. (1976). *El Carácter Chileno*. Editorial Universitaria.

- Gómez, A. (2022). "Chile en Sevilla 92: a 30 años del debate que encendió la transición". Rescatado de <https://www.latercera.com/la-tercera-domingo/noticia/chile-en-sevilla-92-a-30-anos-del-tempo-que-encendio-el-debate-en-la-transicion/2CTCEZUPQVEURAEL74QVJYNHIQ/#>
- Góngora, M. (1986). *Ensayo Histórico sobre la Noción de Estado en Chile en los Siglos XIX y XX*. Editorial Universitaria.
- Guibernau, M. (1999). *Nations Without States: Political Communities in a Global Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gutiérrez, O. (2002). *Sociología Militar. La profesión militar en la sociedad democrática*. Editorial Universitaria.
- Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T. (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Holtug, N. (2021). Why Rawls Was Right. Liberal Values and Social Cohesion. En N. Holtug & E. M. Uslaner (Eds.), *National Identity and Social Cohesion* (pp. 133-150). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holtug, N. (2022). *The Politics of Social Cohesion*. Oxford University Press.
- Holtug, N. & Uslaner, E. M. (2021). Introduction: National Identity and Social Cohesion. En N. Holtug & E. M. Uslaner (Eds.), *National Identity and Social Cohesion* (pp. 1-15). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hooghe, M. (2021). When Playing by the Rules is not Sufficient. Citizenship Criteria in Ethnic, Cultural and Civic Citizenship Concepts. En N. Holtug & E. M. Uslaner (Eds.), *National Identity and Social Cohesion* (pp. 47-61). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Horsman, R. (1985). *La Raza y el Destino Manifiesto: orígenes del anglosajonismo racial norteamericano*. Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Ipsos. (2020). *La cohesión social va a la baja en Chile y en el mundo*.
- Ignatieff, M. (1993). *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Jenson, J. (1998). *Mapping Social Cohesion: The State of Canadian Research*. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.
- Kongshøj, K. (2021). Inter- and Intragenerational Cleavages in National Identity in Denmark. En N. Holtug & E. M. Uslaner (Eds.), *National Identity and Social Cohesion* (pp. 93-111). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Larraín, J. (2000). Elementos teóricos para el análisis de la identidad nacional y la globalización. En Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo. (2000). *¿Hay Patria que Defender? La identidad nacional frente a la globalización*. Ediciones del Segundo Centenario, pp. 73-96.
- Larraín, J. (2001). *Identidad Chilena*. LOM.
- Luján Candia, J. (2021). *Efecto de la cohesión social sobre la relación entre desigualdad económica-social, la violencia interpersonal y la calidad de vida, en población urbana de las comunas de la ex Región del Biobío*. Universidad de Concepción.
- Marín, P. (2023). "Jorge Larraín, sociólogo: No se puede decir, yo me defino por esta identidad y todo lo demás a la cresta". Entrevista en *La Tercera*. Rescatado de <https://www.latercera.com/la-tercera-domingo/noticia/jorge-larrain-sociologo-no-se-puede-decir-yo-me-defino-por-esta-identidad-y-todo-lo-demas-a-la-cresta/WUEIOESZI5F5JG63LFB6C524GU/#>
- Mc Evoy, C. (2011). *Guerreros Civilizadores. Política, sociedad y cultura en Chile durante la Guerra del Pacífico*. Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, Chile.
- Neves, C., Lermenda, W. e Ibarra, C. (2023). Entrevista a Gabriel Salazar. El quehacer de la Historia en el autoconocimiento y la autoeducación popular". *Revista de Historia* N° 30, pp. 1-26.
- Palacios, N. (1986). *Raza Chilena*. Ediciones Antiyal. (Primera edición, 1904).
- Pereznieto Castro, L. (2017). Nacionalismo vs Globalización. BIOLEX. *Revista Jurídica del Departamento de Derecho* UNISON URC, 9(16), 39-50.
- Pinedo, J. (1997). Chile a fines del siglo XX: entre la modernidad, la modernización y la identidad. *Revista UNIVERSUM* N° 12, pp. 1-40
- Piuzzi, J. (1993). *Los Militares en la Sociedad Chilena 1891-1970. Relaciones Civiles-Militares e Integración Social*. Tesis para optar al grado de Doctor, Universidad de Salamanca.
- Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. (2020). *Radiografía a la cohesión social en Chile*.
- Rivera Heredia, M. E., & Obregón Velasco, N. (2012). Identidades transnacionales y dinámicas familiares en la migración México-Estados Unidos. *Estudios Sociológicos*, 30 (89), pp. 35-50.
- Rodríguez Elizondo, J. (2004). *Chile - Perú. El siglo que vivimos en peligro*, Random House Mondadori.
- Salazar, G. (2006). La Historia como Ciencia Popular: Despertando a los "Weupifes". *Revista Austral de Ciencias sociales* 11, pp. 143-168.
- Salazar, G. (2009). Dudo de que realmente exista la identidad chilena. *La Nación Domingo*.
- Sandel, M. (2009). *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Sater, W. (2009). *La Imagen Heroica en Chile*. Arturo Prat, Santo Secular. Centro de Estudios Bicentenario.
- Smith, A. D. (1991). *National Identity*. University of Nevada

Press.

Soublette, G. (1984). *La Estrella de Chile*. Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso.

Subercaseaux, B. (2000). Espesor cultural, identidad y globalización. En Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo. (2000). *¿Hay Patria que Defender? La identidad nacional frente a la globalización*. Ediciones del Segundo Centenario, pp. 156-166.

Subsecretaría de Desarrollo Regional y Administrativo (SUBDERE), División de Políticas y Estudios, Departamento de Estudios y Evaluación, & Unidad Identidad y Cultura. (2009). *Identidad regional: Reconociendo la diversidad para el desarrollo de los territorios* (Coordinación y edición: División de Políticas y Estudios, Departamento de Estudios y Evaluación, Unidad Identidad y Cultura). Gobierno de Chile. ISBN 978-956-8468-20-0.

Subsecretaría de Desarrollo Regional y Administrativo, División de Políticas y Estudios, Departamento de Estudios y Evaluación. (2013, diciembre). *Identidades territoriales: Lo auténtico como motor de desarrollo local* (Programa de Fortalecimiento de la Identidad Regional). Gobierno de Chile.

Taylor, C. (1994). *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton University Press.

Tjaden, J., & Heidland, T. (2025). Did Merkel's 2015 decision attract more migration to Germany? *European Journal of Political Research*, 64(2), pp. 389-405. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12669>

Todd, E. (2024). *La Derrota de Occidente*. Ediciones AKAL.

Toffler, A. y H. (1994). *Las Guerras del Futuro. La supervivencia en el alba del siglo XXI*. Plaza & Janés Editores.

UNESCO. (2001). *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNHCR. (2024). Venezuela situation. <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/venezuela-situation>

Qualitative study
findings report
**Chilean National
Identity and Social
Cohesion**



BACKGROUND

In this stage of the study, we considered it relevant to conduct a qualitative analysis of the variables investigated within the framework of national identity and social cohesion in Chile. To this end, we defined two study groups to which guided interviews were administered using previously defined questionnaires. The questionnaires for each group differ primarily in question wording, one being more theoretical or conceptual and the other more direct, in order to identify any differences in these areas.

OBJECTIVE

This study analyses the relationship between Chilean national identity and social cohesion through qualitative interviews with 11 experts (E1-E11) per each of the two versions. Different instruments/questionnaires were designed to modify the approach to the topic while maintaining the core concepts under analysis. In order to do so, the methodology was grounded theory, and the software was ATLAS.ti. This allowed for the identification of emerging categories and an explanatory technical model, which were subsequently coded, grouped, and analysed.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The methodological framework of this study is based on grounded theory, an inductive qualitative methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which generates explanatory theories that emerge directly from empirical data through constant comparison, iterative theoretical sampling, and conceptual saturation. This approach is applied to institutional phenomena such as public integrity policies in the Chilean context, integrating ATLAS.ti software to optimise coding, visualisation of relationships, and refinement of categories in a nonlinear and cyclical process.

The methodological design is organised into three interconnected coding stages, supported by ATLAS.ti. In open coding, primary data (semi-structured interviews and observations) are broken down line by line to create initial descriptive codes, using the rapid coding tool and memos to record preliminary reflections and emerging patterns. Data collection continues until initial saturation, guided by queries for similar codes.

In axial coding, open codes are grouped into abstract categories using code clusters and semantic networks, exploring causal, contextual, action-interaction, and consequence dimensions, with refinement through constant comparison and new data. Finally, selective coding identifies a central core that integrates all categories, validating the theory through theoretical saturation, and generating exportable, comprehensive diagrams. The analysis culminates in a report compiling all findings and their links, ensuring traceability through ATLAS.ti exports for rigorous and reproducible analysis.

OPEN CODING

In this first stage, the data is broken down line by line to identify initial codes that capture concepts, ideas, and meanings emerging from interviews, observations, or other materials. The researcher writes memos to reflect on the data and makes constant comparisons between similar incidents. This generates a broad list of codes that guide further data collection until initial saturation is reached.

AXIAL CODING

Here, open-source codes are reorganised into more abstract categories, exploring relationships between them through causal and contextual conditions, action strategies and interactions, and consequences. Subcategories are grouped around central phenomena to construct a provisional framework. Constant comparison refines these categories, adjusting them with new data.

SELECTIVE CODING

In the final phase, a central category is selected that integrates all the others into a coherent and unified theory, validating it through theoretical saturation. The process culminates in comprehensive memos and diagrams that represent the explanatory model. The resulting theory is grounded in data, not in prior hypotheses.

INSTRUMENT FOR GATHERING INFORMATION

The gathering of empirical data constitutes the analytical core of this research, insofar as it allows for the translation of the concepts of national identity and social cohesion — previously defined within social and political theory — into empirical material susceptible to systematic analysis. Given the complex, relational, and symbolic nature of both concepts, a qualitative strategy based on semi-structured interviews was chosen. These interviews were designed to capture both the subjects' conscious interpretive frameworks and their more implicit and experiential dispositions toward the national community.

The design of the instrument is based on the premise that national identity and social cohesion exist not only as ideological or normative constructs, but also as practices of meaning, social emotions, and everyday narratives that structure the perception of belonging, otherness, and legitimacy. Consequently, the study incorporated two distinct but conceptually linked data collection instruments aimed at capturing these two complementary dimensions of the phenomenon.

The first questionnaire was developed using a conceptual-analytical approach. Its questions were formulated in an academic style and were explicitly based on categories from identity theory and the sociology of social cohesion. This instrument aimed to elicit reflective responses from interviewees, prompting them to elaborate on their interpretations of Chile as a political community, the foundations of national belonging, the mechanisms of integration and exclusion, and the degree of cohesion or

fragmentation within society. This questionnaire allowed for the identification of discursive structures, cognitive frameworks, and conceptual patterns that shape how certain actors think about and explain the nation and its social fabric.

The second questionnaire was deliberately designed to be more experiential and intuitive, avoiding technical jargon and abstract formulations. Its direct questions appealed to personal experience, feelings of belonging or alienation, perceptions of others, and everyday judgments about social coexistence in Chile. The objective of this instrument was not to gather conceptually elaborated opinions, but rather to access the most immediate layers of the social construction of identity and cohesion—that is, meanings that operate as practical knowledge and structure social life without needing to be explicitly stated in theoretical terms.

The fieldwork was conducted over two months and followed an analytically deliberate sequence. In the first phase, a conceptual orientation questionnaire was conducted, allowing for the construction of an initial map of categories, tensions, and dominant narratives regarding national identity and social cohesion in Chile. In the second phase, an experiential questionnaire was administered to contrast, refine, or problematise this map based on the interviewees' actual perceptions and experiences.

This strategy of dual instrumentation and sequential application allowed the data collection to go beyond simply describing individual opinions, generating an analytical framework capable of articulating theory and experience,

discourse and practice, ideology and everyday life. The study was thus able to construct a denser and more structured representation of the processes through which national identity and social cohesion are shaped, strained, and eroded in contemporary Chile.



RESULTS

RESILIENT IDENTITY CORE

The category “Resilient Identity Core” shows that, despite the social, political, and demographic transformations of recent decades, a national identity exists in Chile that not only persists but is also renewed and maintained as a minimal shared reference point. This identity does not present itself as a monolith, but rather a relatively stable set of symbolic elements, values, and self-images that the interviewees recognise as “Chilean”, even as they simultaneously question its political uses or its institutional manifestations.

In analytical terms, the core rests on three main components, or pillars. First, a symbolic-affective pillar, where the flag plays a central role, appearing as an emotionally charged emblem, difficult to reject even for those who maintain a critical view of the country. It is described as an “amalgam” and a “cohesive resource”, capable of condensing history, sacrifice, and belonging, and of reappearing in moments of conflict — such as the Social Outburst — more as a demand for inclusion than as a symbol to be destroyed. This pillar is complemented by the national anthem, associated with experiences of intense emotion at sporting events, and by a ritual repertoire that includes war anniversaries (May 21) and Fiestas Patrias (National Holidays), where the historical continuity of the nation is reinforced and epic narratives about foundational wars are revived.

Secondly, the analysis reveals a pillar consisting of a legalistic-territorial worldview. Several codes refer to the “centrality of the law”, “legalism as a horizon”, and “trust in legal engineering”, articulating the idea that being Chilean

implies, at least on a normative level, a strong orientation toward order, respect for rules, and conflict resolution through legal frameworks. This legalism is present both internally (the Civil Code as a “pillar of coexistence”) and externally (the strategic use of international tribunals and treaties), and is linked to the perception of territory as a critical axis. Chile appears as a “miracle of unity across a vast geography”, where the defence of borders and territoriality reinforce the national collective imagination. However, this normative pillar is overlaid by the coexistence of informal practices, summarised in codes such as “obedience alongside the search for loopholes” or “coexistence of law and *pituto* (a Chilean word for nepotism or cronyism)”, which creates tension between the legalistic ideal and a relational culture that relativises norms in everyday life.

Third, the core identity is completed by a differentiated self-image constructed by contrast. Codes such as “identity based on regional superiority (order vs neighbours’ disorder)”, “non-Caribbean character”, or “shyness and distrust as national traits” are recorded, defining Chileans in opposition to other peoples of the region, who are perceived as more disorderly, noisy, or unstable. This self-image is also projected onto recent migratory flows through notions such as “Latin American migration as a refinement of social interaction” or “recent migration as a reinforcement of the us-them boundary”, where national identity is reaffirmed in the face of the arriving “other”, even while acknowledging the economic and cultural contributions of migrants. In this way, the core functions as a “negotiated average”: a set

of traits, symbols, and values that not everyone experiences in the same way, but which are considered sufficiently shared to sustain a minimal common identity.

A key feature of this category is the resilience of that core identity. The codes refer to its “persistence through time”, to “republican continuity”, and to the “democratic reconstruction of emblems” after the dictatorship, indicating that the identity has been able to survive processes of authoritarian instrumentalisation, crises of representation, and structural transformations such as neoliberalism and globalisation. Resilience does not imply immutability; rather, respondents speak of an “existing but diffuse national identity”, a “more heterogeneous identity”, and a “non-monolithic identity”, showing that the core is readjusted in the face of new demands—cultural diversity, greater visibility of Indigenous Peoples—without disappearing as a point of reference.

From the perspective of social cohesion, this core identity serves an ambivalent function. On the one hand, those interviewed highlight its “unifying function” and its role as a “cohesive resource”, insofar as national symbols and certain shared values (effort, sacrifice, moderate meritocracy) allow for a minimum sense of belonging even in contexts of conflict. On the other hand, multiple sources underscore the “disconnect between national identity and social cohesion” and the “structural weakness of cohesion”, indicating that the strength of this core identity does not automatically translate into interpersonal trust, equity, or effective solidarity. This creates a paradox: Chile can demonstrate a high degree of identification with national symbols and a shared history, but at the same time exhibit high levels of distrust, incivility, and socioeconomic fragmentation.

Finally, the category “Resilient Identity Core” reveals that Chilean national identity currently functions less as a top-down homogeneous project and more as a flexible repertoire of meanings, available to be appropriated, rein-

terpreted, and contested by diverse social actors. The flag can be used by both those who defend the status quo and those who demand radical changes; legalism can operate as a containment of violence or as a mask for profound inequalities; the self-image of an orderly country can fuel both pride and criticism. This plasticity explains the resilience of the core, and its capacity to adapt to new contexts without entirely losing its power of reference, but it also limits its scope, as it does not guarantee, on its own, the levels of social cohesion that the country requires in a scenario of persistent inequality, growing identity plurality, and sustained political conflict.

EPISODIC FRAGILE COHESION

The “Episodic Fragile Cohesion” category articulates the predominant diagnosis among those interviewed regarding the current state of Chilean social fabric. This cohesion exists at minimal levels and is characterised by its instability, conditionality, and dependence on exceptional circumstances. This category, which comprises 20% of the coded corpus, reveals a society that sustains conflict containment mechanisms and minimal rules of coexistence, but lacks the structural solidity necessary to face prolonged challenges such as persistent inequality, political polarisation, or mass migration.

The central concept of this category is fragility, understood not as a total absence of cohesion, but as its qualitative and temporal precariousness. Those interviewed agree that Chile possesses “minimal underlying cohesion”, based on “minimum standards of citizenship”, shared “rules of the game”, and a “civil code as a pillar of coexistence”. This cohesion is manifested in the country’s capacity to maintain institutional stability despite recurring crises (the 2019 social uprising, failed constitutional processes, electoral polarisation), and in the absence of widespread violent ruptures. However, this stability is perceived as superficial; condi-

tioned on “basic compliance with norms” and “everyday micro-order”; and vulnerable to the slightest structural disturbance.

The episodic dimension emerges as a defining feature. Cohesion does not operate as a permanent state, but rather is “activated” at specific moments: “episodic cohesion in patriotic rituals, sports, and individual achievements”, “episodic cohesion in the face of disasters”, “cohesion through sporting success”. Explicitly mentioned are Fiestas Patrias (National Holidays), the Telethon, the two Copa América titles (2015 and 2016), and the solidarity shown after earthquakes (2010) or forest fires. These rituals function as “symbolic remediations”, allowing for “channeling collective joy” and “national unity in non-political rituals”, but their transitory nature reveals the absence of a “permanent drive” or “common glue” for daily life. Even at these times, cohesion maintains an instrumental character, whether through the “social cohesion of consumption”, “aspirational cohesion”, or “cohesion by opposition to the other” (anti-immigration as a unifying factor).

A third key component is the vicious cycle of trust and mistrust. The code “high mistrust between people” (saturated across the board) is linked to the “vicious cycle of trust/cohesion”, “chronic limitation of trust”, and “degradation of civic capital”. This mistrust manifests itself in everyday incivility: “daily mistreatment among Chileans”, “normalisation of disrespectful acts”, “deficit of respectful treatment”, and in practices such as mass fare evasion on public transportation or the *pituto* (nepotism/cronyism) as an implicit relational norm. Interviewees perceive that this interpersonal mistrust undermines any attempt at structural cohesion, generating a “disconnect” between symbolic national identity (strong) and the capacity for effective coexistence (weak).

Political polarisation appears as the deepest fracture in this fragile cohesion. Terms such as

“political fragmentation and citizen disengagement”, “elite-society gap in polarisation”, “demonisation of the adversary”, and “excessive adversarialism in political discourse” describe a scenario where the “winner-loser” dynamic prevents even minimal consensus. The 2019 Social Outburst is interpreted as “evidence of low cohesion”, “an expression of accumulated discontent”, and “a rupture in national pride”, while the two failed constitutional processes (2022 and 2023) reinforce the perception of “decisional paralysis” and “institutional delegitimisation”. This polarisation not only divides but is also “contagious” to key institutions (Congress, Judiciary), eroding the vertical trust that could otherwise sustain horizontal trust.

From an analytical perspective, this category reveals that Chilean social cohesion operates under a logic of pragmatic minimums: “cohesion as rules of the game, not a single moral horizon”, “cohesion conditioned by context”, and “cohesion as a task for public policy”. Those interviewed relativise idealised visions of an organic community (“a critique of the organicist vision”), proposing instead a focus on “concrete policies” for redistribution, civic education, and migratory regulation. However, a pessimistic diagnosis persists: “low social cohesion”, “a fractured society”, and the “decomposition of the social fabric”, with migration acting as a catalyst that “makes it more complex” without destroying it, but amplifies pre-existing tensions in peripheral regions.

In short, “Episodic Fragile Cohesion” describes a Chilean society that contains its conflicts through minimal ritual and normative mechanisms, but whose stability depends on the absence of prolonged shocks. The lack of a “common project” beyond immediate management, combined with structural distrust and polarisation, limits its capacity to build lasting social capital.

CATALYTIC AMBIVALENT MIGRATION

The category “Ambivalent Catalytic Migration” captures the complexity of the massive migratory surge in Chile (2015–2025) as a phenomenon that simultaneously challenges and reconfigures national identity and social cohesion. With 76 codes (18% of the corpus), saturated in 10 of 11 interviews, this category articulates migration not as a linear threat, but as a dual catalyst, generating immediate symbolic and relational tensions, but also opportunities for self-reflection and cultural adjustment in the medium term.

Ambivalence constitutes the central interpretive axis. Interviewees acknowledge the functional contributions of migrants — “migrant contribution to service quality”, “migrant cultural and social contributions”, “migrants filling labor niches”, “migration as demographic compensation” — particularly in sectors such as construction, informal commerce, and domestic care. This utilitarian dimension is perceived as positive in aspects ranging from “Chilean liberal values as attractors of migration”, “rapid adaptation to mass immigration”, and “the professional integration of migrants in the south”. However, it coexists with the perception of a symbolic and identity-related threat, such as “the perception of new migrations as less assimilationist”, “the Chilean self-image constructed in contrast to migrants”, and “recent migration as a reinforcement of the ‘us-them’ divide”. The Venezuelan-Haitian wave (post-2015) is distinguished from historical Andean (Peruvian) migrations by its “unprecedented magnitude”, “qualitative change by magnitude” and “identity complexity increase”, altering the perceived relative homogeneity and activating latent “Chilean structural racism”.

The catalytic nature of migration manifests itself on three levels. First, on an identity level, migration forces contradictions to be confronted within the Chilean core: “migration as a trig-

ger for identity-based self-reflection” and “migration as a catalyst for elite-society clashes”, revealing classism (“mistreatment of migrant workers”) and tensions with legalism (“migration-crime association in the media” and “lower- and working-class xenophobia linked to illegality”). Second, on a cohesive level, migration accelerates pre-existing fractures: “direct impact on social cohesion”, “perceived competition for resources”, and “pressure on receiving communities”, especially in northern regions (Arica, Antofagasta), where “focalised cultural clashes” and “regionalisation of the migration conflict” erode the national “same boat” idea. Third, at the political level, “migration as a campaign resource”, “fear strategies in discourse on migration”, “‘Chilean first’ as a response to insecurity” are used electorally, amplifying polarisation without massive xenophobic politicisation (“absence of xenophobic politicisation of migration”).

Analytically, the category highlights qualitative differences: “intracultural” migrations (Peruvian, Bolivian) facilitate assimilation (“greater historical integration of Andean migration via assimilation”), while “intercivilisational” flows (Haitians, Caribbean Venezuelans) generate “initial culture shocks and gradual adjustment”, with the second generation acting as a “bridge” (“assimilated second generation”). Essentialism is rejected, along with “critiques of restrictive discourses” and “recognition of migration as a human right”, but limited capacity is emphasised regarding the “country’s spatial capacity”, the “threshold between migration and invasion”, and the “coincidence of the migration boom with economic stagnation”. In terms of Chilean regions, the north absorbs disproportionate impacts (“the north as a visible example”), while the south shows “low migration conflict”.

From an identity-cohesion perspective, migration acts as a critical mirror, reaffirming the resilient core through contrast (“self-image based on regional superiority”), but straining

fragile cohesion by revealing “a deficit in civic capital” and “structural envy and resentment”. Experts warn about the “call to manage migration”, “preventing xenophobic escalations”, and “explicit identity politics”, acknowledging benefits (“positive valuation of migration”) but also risks (“potential politicisation of fear”).

In summary, the category positions migration as a transformative phenomenon, a catalyst for national maturity if it is inclusively regulated, or for fracture if it is instrumentalised, adding another layer of complexity to the Chilean paradox of strong identity versus precarious cohesion.

CHRONIC STRUCTURAL EROSIONS

The “Chronic Structural Erosions” category encompasses the most severe and structural diagnosis of the analysis, identifying deep and persistent processes that undermine both Chilean national identity and social cohesion. With 68 codes (16% of the corpus) saturated in 9 of 11 interviews, this category articulates the perception that Chile faces systemic pathologies, beginning with extreme inequality, socio-spatial segregation, a breakdown of the collective project, and the degradation of civic capital—issues that are not circumstantial but rather inherited from the current socio-political architecture.

The central concept is the breakdown of the “same boat” idea, a saturated code that encapsulates the loss of a shared sense of destiny: “break with the ‘same boat’ idea”, “fractured society”, “decomposition of the social fabric”. Those interviewed agree that persistent inequality generates “structural envy and resentment”, “socioeconomic insularity”, and a “gap between elites and society”, where lower- and working-classes perceive elites as disconnected (“elite bubbles”, “disconnection between elites and lower- and working-classes”). This

class fracture is directly linked to identity, with the legalistic-orderly core perceived as hypocritical (“coexistence of law and pituto”, “normative formalism vs relational informality”), eroding national pride and fueling chronic mistrust (“high mistrust between people”).

Socio-spatial segregation emerges as a key territorial factor of corrosion: “territorial segregation”, “disconnection between social worlds”, “primacy of Santiago as a source of discontent”, “inequality and socioeconomic segregation”. Chile’s capital (the Metropolitan Region of Santiago) is configured as a “social archipelago” of wealthy (Las Condes) versus peripheral (La Pintana) municipalities, with “spatial ghettoisation” and “privatisation of public space” (malls as a simulated mix). Extreme regions amplify this: the north (migration plus extractivism) and the south (Mapuche), generating “subjective territorial marginality” and “regional rebellion against Santiago”. This segregation not only fragments cohesion (“disconnection between social worlds”) but also weakens territorial identity (“Chilean territorial attachment” strained by the primacy of the Metropolitan Region).

Moral individualism and civic degradation complete the erosive triad: “structural individualism”, “moral individualism”, “post-growth individualism”, “degradation of civic capital”, and “deficit of civic friendship”. Respondents perceive a society of “individual self-resolution of problems”, with a “culture of guardianship” (citizens as “minors”) and “everyday mistreatment among Chileans” as an implicit norm. Intersectional exclusions are exacerbated, “children and women as excluded groups”, “NEET youth exclusion”, linking inequality with generational uprooting.

Analytically, these erosions are chronic because they are rooted in the idea of neoliberalism (“neoliberalism as erosion of cohesion”, “economic model as a generator of fractures”), with a sequence from 2011 to 2022 (“beginning of cycle critical of the model”), culminating in

the 2019 Social Outburst as an “expression of accumulated discontent”. They impact identity by generating a “disconnect between national identity and social cohesion”. The symbolic core persists, but loses legitimacy in the face of “perceived distributive injustice” and the “growth-justice gap”. Cohesion is reduced to “pragmatic minimums” (“cohesion as rules of the game”), vulnerable to shocks (migration, polarisation).

Those interviewed emphasised historical legacies, including oligarchic centralism (19th century), exclusionary transition (1990s), subsidiary neoliberalism. Criticisms included “Santiago’s segregation”, “neoliberalism as a driver of cultural individualism”, and a demand for “prioritising the national project over cohesion” through redistributive policies, decentralisation, and civic education.

In summary, chronic structural erosions place Chile at a fundamental crossroads: without intervention, it collapses due to fragile cohesion and the dilution of its core identity; whereas intervention catalyses national maturity.

PLURALITY AND NESTED SUBIDENTITIES

The category “Plurality and Nested Subidentities” reveals that Chilean national identity does not operate as a homogeneous body, but rather as a hierarchical structure where a minimal shared core coexists and is strained by multiple particular affiliations, such as regional, ethnic, generational, and class-based identities, which function as nested layers within the national project. With 55 codes (13% of the corpus) saturated in 8 of 11 interviews, this category challenges essentialist narratives, positioning plurality as a constitutive feature of Chilean identity, but also as a simultaneous source of richness and conflict.

The concept of “nested subidentities” captures this dynamic: “particular nested identities with-

in the nation”, “non-monolithic national identity”, “internal plural identity”, “differentiated regional and cross-border identities”. The core identity (flag, legalism) acts as a superior container, but it is nourished and strained by subordinate affiliations. Territorially, distinctions are made between “northern vs southern vs central identity”, “Chile as a cultural mosaic”, “plurality of Chiles”, the north (Aymara-border, extractive), the south (autonomous Mapuche, isolated Patagonian), the center (cosmopolitan Santiago). “Primacy of Santiago as a source of discontent” and “regional rebellion against Santiago” reveal centrifugal forces, with “region-based symbolic autonomy” and “center-region dehierarchisation” challenging the “miracle of territorial unity”.

Ethnically, Mapuche emerges as a powerful sub-identity, “identity conflict focalised in Araucanía”, “Mapuche as a parallel nation”, “Mapuche-Chilean flag duality”, “asymmetry in the recognition of Indigenous peoples”, “plurinationality as a weakening of national identity”. It is perceived as a “recurring intra-national conflict” that clashes with the unitary state, demanding “recognition of subnational flags” without national dissolution. Recent migration amplifies plurality, “assimilated second generation”, “emerging plurinational Chilean identity”, complicating linguistic homogeneity (“dominant Spanish”, “subordinate Indigenous languages”).

From a class perspective, “non-communicative class identities”, “elite-society gap”, “elite bubbles”, globalised elites vs popular-territorial, generating “socioeconomic insularity” and “structural envy and resentment”. From a generational perspective, “generational identity gap”: orderly boomers vs multicultural Gen Z (“youth oriented toward global culture”), with “generational divide regarding respect for the national anthem” and fragmented digital identities.

Analytically, these sub-identities enrich the core (“emergence of regional identities”, “more

heterogeneous identity") but fragment cohesion ("plurality and identity competition among indigenous peoples as well" "fragmented national identity"). Essentialist homogeneity is rejected ("critique of identity essentialism", "non-homogeneous identity"), favouring "identity as a negotiated average" and "compatibility national patriotism - multiple loyalties". Tensions include "conflict over the degree of intervention" (plurinationalism vs unitarism) and "emergence of regional identities" (rebellious Concepción, isolated Patagonia).

In relation to identity and cohesion, nested plurality strains the resilient core ("perceived plurinationalism threatens the nation-state") but fosters hybridisation ("hybrid real identity", "nested identities"). Experts call for "recognition of internal diversity" without "terminal identity fragmentation", through decentralisation and plurinational education.

In summary, the category positions Chile as a plural nation by geographical-historical design, where nested subidentities challenge homogeneity, but enrich resilience if managed inclusively.

CRITICISMS AND STRATEGIC SELF-REFLECTION

The category "Criticisms and Strategic Self-Reflection" represents the introspective and proactive dimension of the analysis, where interviewees not only diagnose problems but also engage in profound self-criticism of the national character and propose reconstructive paths for Chilean identity and cohesion. With 48 codes (11% of the corpus) saturated in 8 of 11 interviews, this category articulates a mature perspective that recognises structural pathologies such as racist classism, hypocritical legalism, and disconnected elites as a historical legacy, but emphasises the transformative capability of targeted interventions.

The self-criticism focuses on pathologies of the national character. Key themes include "self-criticism of immaturity", "self-criticism regarding national character", and "national cultural immaturity", diagnosing traits such as "shyness and distrust", "lack of political wisdom", and "criticism of an adolescent attitude toward the past". Legalism is revealed as contradictory: "normative formalism vs relational informality", "coexistence of law and pituto", where apparent obedience coexists with pragmatic loopholes, eroding credibility. Structural classism and racism emerge as key issues: "socioeconomic insularity", "Chilean structural racism", "mistreatment of migrant workers", with "conservative elites and cultural control" ignoring the realities of the masses ("elite bubbles"). Other criticisms include "culture of guardianship" (citizens as dependent), "moral individualism" and "critique of Santiago segregation", linking neoliberalism to persistent fractures ("neoliberalism as a driver of cultural individualism").

This self-criticism is historical and structural, criticising the "incomplete democratic transition", "xenophobic politicisation" hand in hand with "political instrumentalisation of migration", and "performance of democracy and capitalism". Concepts such as exceptionalism are relativised ("criticism of Chilean exceptionalism", "dangers of self-exceptionalism"), recognising Chile as a "classic model of a nation" with an unmanaged "plurality of internal identities".

The strategic dimension proposes an active reconstruction. Civic education is given absolute priority ("civic education by the state", "education as a central tool for identity", "urgent civic education"), emphasising plurinational history, civic friendship, and countering incivility. Inclusive rituals ("patriotic rites reinforcing multi-cultural identity"), unifying leadership ("call for collective maturity", "unifying leaders needed"), and targeted policies ("practical agenda for cohesion", "priority concrete solutions") complement this. There is a demand for "re-

construction from a resilient core with inclusion of sub-identities", with "real decentralisation" and "explicit identity policy" for migration ("call to manage migration").

Analytically, the category integrates diagnosis and proposal, comprised of pathologies such as a "criticism of organicist vision of community" (rejection of essentialisms), which demand "precise definitions", ultimately prioritising "core shared values" over homogeneity. Re-

garding the identity-cohesion link, self-criticism strengthens resilience by confronting hypocrisies ("criticism of identity essentialism"), while strategies rebuild degraded civic capital.

In summary, it represents analytical maturity; Chile faces a "representation crisis" but possesses tools such as education, rituals, or leadership to move from fragility toward strategic cohesion.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS GROUP 1

The qualitative analysis of these 11 interviews reveals that Chilean national identity exists in a robust and resilient manner, centered on a symbolic and worldview-based core that endures despite intense structural tensions. This core is primarily composed of a strong affective identification with the national flag, present in all interviews as a universal emblem that generates intense emotions in everyday contexts, sports, and even social protests, along with a deep legalism and territorial attachment that define the “Chilean DNA” as orderly and formalistic. However, this strong identity does not translate into solid social cohesion, configuring a central paradox: powerful patriotic symbols coexist in a fragile and episodic reality, activated only in specific rituals such as Fiestas Patrias (National Holidays) or sporting victories.

Social cohesion emerges as inherently weak, sustained by a vicious cycle of chronic interpersonal distrust and everyday incivility, aggravated by political polarisation and delegitimised institutions post-2019 Outburst.

Catalytic factors such as ambivalent mass migration erode this social fabric by generating reactive rejection of migrants perceived as less assimilationist, although they also contribute economic dynamism and force self-criticism

regarding structural racism and classism in Chile. Youth, particularly Generation Z, act as a disruptive agent by rejecting traditional historical narratives and exhibiting urban-digital alienation, while chronic erosions such as extreme inequality and spatial segregation shatter the perception of a national “same boat”.

Key concepts in the analysis include the “three-part resilience” of the core identity—symbolic (flag/anthem), worldview-based (legalism/order), and differential (contrast with neighbors/migrants)—versus a “three-part fragility” of cohesion—episodic (rituals), structural (distrust), and relational (incivility). A plurality of nested subidentities emerges (territorial, such as northern/Mapuche; generational; and class-based) that enrich, but also strain, the perceived homogeneity, culminating in strategic self-reflection that diagnoses pathologies such as “hypocritical pituto (nepotism/cronyism)” and proposes reconstruction through inclusive civic education and multicultural rituals.

In summary, Chile is presented with a resilient identity under structural tension, where the symbolic core anchors the nation, but does not compensate for deep fractures that threaten its future cohesion.

RESULTS OF DIRECT QUESTIONING ANALYSIS GROUP 2

POSITIVE CULTURAL TRAITS

The axial category “Positive Cultural Traits” comprises 62 open codes out of the 334 identified in the initial coding, achieving 19.2% coverage and standing out for its role as a robust core identity in the interviews. Qualitatively, this set captures a shared symbolic-cultural repertoire anchored in extended family, festive or gastronomic traditions, resilience/solidarity in the face of crisis, creativity in humour, and universal symbols such as flag, anthem, territory, and language, which function as positive self-affirmation and regional differentiator, albeit contradictory due to its coexistence with the notion of *viveza criolla* (Chilean slyness).

This quantitative density (62/334 codes) validates its inductive emergence through constant comparison, positioning it as a contextual condition for subsequent categories (reactive unit or threats), where latent cultural capital sustains national pride but requires ritual activation for effective cohesion, aligning with the Strauss-Corbin paradigm in ATLAS.ti or grounded theory. The analysis reveals a resilient but underutilised identity profile in everyday life, a basis for causal relationships in selective phases.

The category “Positive Cultural Traits” allows us to observe how interviewees articulate a core Chilean identity that operates simultaneously as a repertoire of self-affirmation, a framework for mutual recognition, and a potential resource for social cohesion, even in a context of high political conflict and structural transformations. This core can be broken down

into three closely linked dimensions: traditions and customs, personality traits attributed to “Chileans”, and a set of everyday symbols that encapsulate territorial, historical, and affective belonging.

First, traditions and customs emerge as privileged bearers of national identity. The discourses repeatedly emphasise the centrality of the extended family—including grandparents, cousins, and siblings—as the primary space for socialisation and support, providing Chilean identity with a strong relational foundation. Not only does the family organise daily life, but it also serves as a value system that structures expectations of care, reciprocity, and loyalty, even above bonds of friendship, which distinguishes Chile from other societies perceived as more individualistic. Added to this family focus is a scaffolding of festive and gastronomic practices that interviewees present as clear markers of identity. The Fiestas Patrias (National Holidays), with their combination of “ephemeral joy”, “mischief”, humour, and the collective consumption of empanadas, marraqueta bread, cazuela (a type of stew), barbecues, and typical drinks, are frequently mentioned as moments when a particular way of being Chilean “emerges”, which is expressed more diffusely the rest of the year. Such practices reinforce the idea of a common culture that is cooked, danced, and celebrated, and that continues to operate as a shared repertoire even in young generations exposed to global flows of cultural goods.

Secondly, this category encompasses a set of personality traits attributed to “Chileans” that

shape a positive self-image, albeit not without ambivalence. Resilience occupies a central place; several interviewees describe Chilean society as accustomed to “overcoming” adversity, whether in the form of natural disasters, political crises, or sporting failures. This resilience is accompanied by a solidarity that is activated with particular force in extreme situations (earthquakes, fires, serious illnesses), reinforcing the perception that, beyond daily conflict, there is an “undercurrent of solidarity” that can show through when the family, the community, or “the country” is perceived as being at risk. Also standing out is creativity, particularly in humour and digital expression, as well as the ability to generate memes, sarcasm, and narratives that reinterpret events from a local perspective, which is seen as a cultural capacity for the symbolic appropriation of the global.

This set of positive attributes becomes more complex, however, with the coexistence of less favourable traits that also form part of the national identity, such as “fear of change” distrust, and certain forms of “slyness” or normalised informality. Several accounts indicate that the same ingenuity that allows one to “get by” in the face of adversity is expressed in practices that strain the supposed legalism. For example, the use of *pituto* (nepotism/cronyism) or the systematic search for loopholes in regulations introduce a fissure between the civic ideal and everyday practice. Thus, the category does not only describe a “catalogue of national virtues”, but also an ambivalent cultural profile in which resilience, solidarity, and creativity coexist with adaptive strategies that can weaken institutional trust and equality before the law.

Third, everyday national symbols such as the flag, anthem, territory, language, and institutions carry significant emotional weight and act as catalysts for these cultural traits. The flag and anthem stand out as emblems of strong, universal identification, especially activated in sporting contexts and patriotic rituals, where

they generate shared emotional experiences that strike a chord beyond ideological affiliations. The presence of the flag in rural homes throughout the year, and not just in September (the National Holiday month), is interpreted as an indicator of territorial and historical roots, reinforcing the idea of a sense of belonging that is experienced firsthand, not just rhetorically. These emblems are complemented by the language—with its distinctive accent and vocabulary—and legal and institutional norms, which are recognised as shared frameworks that distinguish Chile within the regional context and underpin a portion of national pride.

From the perspective of the study’s overall objective, which is to understand the relationship between national identity and social cohesion, the category “Positive Cultural Traits” reveals a relatively robust core of meanings, practices, and symbols that could act as a resource of integration in a highly fragmented context. However, its cohesive effectiveness is not automatic. On the one hand, these traits are more strongly activated in intimate or festive settings than in conflictive public spaces; on the other hand, their ambivalent dimension (especially at the intersection of resilience, “slyness”, and distrust) can both foster cooperation and justify practices that erode trust and equality.

In summary, the axial analysis of this category suggests that Chilean national identity possesses significant “positive cultural capital”—family and festive traditions, resilience, creativity, and emotionally charged symbols—which continues to be widely shared among the experts interviewed. However, this capital currently operates more as a latent reserve than as a structuring element of collective life. Its articulation with the other categories (reactive unity, threats to cohesion, migratory dynamics, and historical evolution) will determine the extent to which these cultural traits can become effective vehicles for social cohesion and not merely sources of pride or identity-based nostalgia.

REACTIVE UNIT MECHANISMS

The axial category “Reactive Unity Mechanisms” encompasses 52 open codes out of the 334 identified in the initial coding, representing 15.6% coverage and establishing itself as the second most prevalent emerging core with high density in situational dynamics. Qualitatively, this set reveals patterns of episodic cohesion activated by catalytic events—sports, rituals, natural disasters, and individual fundraising appeals—that generate circumstantial solidarity and widespread emotion, overcoming political or class divides when there is a “face and name” involved, but fading away in routine.

This quantitative coverage (52/334 codes) confirms its conceptual saturation in constant comparison, positioning it as an action-interaction phenomenon conditioned by the prior positive cultural core, with consequences such as latent, non-institutionalised social capital, key to explaining the fragility of everyday Chilean cohesion and a basis for subsequent structural threats. The codes emphasise bipolarity (convergence-disintegration), illustrating how national identity provides reactive symbolic repertoires in times of crisis.

The category “Reactive Unity Mechanisms” reveals a social dynamic in which cohesion emerges intensely but transiently, activated by exceptional events that act as temporary catalysts for collective identification and solidarity, without translating into more lasting cooperative structures. This pattern, which replicates and expands on findings from the previous criterion on “episodic cohesion through common rituals”, demonstrates a society that possesses latent integrative capacities—be it resilience, generosity, or a sense of belonging—but deploys them predominantly in response to crises or celebrations, leaving the everyday social fabric vulnerable to fragmentation.

The first dimension of this reactivity focuses on unifying events, which act as “switches” for national unity. The Telethon, football (especially

international victories like the two Copa América titles), natural disasters (earthquakes, fires), and campaigns for sick children are repeatedly mentioned as moments when Chilean solidarity “emerges”, transcending political, class, or generational divisions. These rituals generate experiences of shared emotion—“everyone in the red jersey”, “the country comes to a standstill”, “volunteers from all over Chile”—which interviewees describe as evidence of an “undercurrent of solidarity”. Particularly noteworthy is the role of sports (football, rugby, tennis), which not only unites but also projects an image of a “winning” and “represented” Chile, reinforcing national identity through the defence of “the colours”. However, this unity is described as “reactive” or “circumstantial”: it depends on personalised narratives (stories of affected families, specific faces) rather than abstract principles, and tends to fade away once the situation has passed.

A second dimension highlights circumstantial solidarity, which is activated especially when the threat affects what is close at hand: family, community, or immediate territory. Natural disasters and fundraising drives for sick children serve as paradigmatic examples, where the interviewees observe that Chileans “come together when there is a face and a name”, but are less generous when confronted with abstract or structural problems. This interpersonal logic explains why volunteering in emergencies (fires in Valparaíso, earthquakes) achieves broad territorial and socioeconomic convergence, but is not replicated in ordinary life, where closed circles and distrust of the unknown prevail. The contrast with everyday individualism is explicit: “We are one big family when there is risk, but in the abstract, everyone looks out for themselves.”

From the methodological perspective of grounded theory, this axial category connects directly with “Positive Cultural Traits”. Thus, the resilience, solidarity, and sporting pride manifested in these moments are precisely the core

identity elements that are “brought into play” under pressure. However, their episodic nature—“reactionary instances”, “unity only when something happens”—reveals a structural limitation. These mechanisms do not generate lasting social capital or institutions of continuous cooperation, leaving society dependent on shocks to activate its integrative potential. This reactive dynamic is also linked to “Threats to Cohesion”, such as political polarisation and post-neoliberal individualism, which erode the capacity to translate these temporary experiences into broader collective commitments, perpetuating a cycle of convergence and disintegration.

In relation to the study’s objective, this category illustrates how national identity, through its symbols and values, provides a symbolic repertoire for moments of reactive unity, but is not sufficient on its own to sustain social cohesion in contexts of conflictive routine or intense demographic transformations, such as mass migration. Interviewees agree that these mechanisms, while effective in times of crisis, do not resolve underlying fractures (institutional distrust, inequality, group isolation), suggesting that Chilean cohesion depends less on the identity’s symbolic intensity than on the construction of institutional and cultural mechanisms capable of institutionalising these reactive experiences into more inclusive and equitable everyday practices. This tension between symbolic potential and structural fragility is key to understanding why, despite the robustness of the cultural core, Chilean society is perceived as “divided” in everyday life.

THREATS TO COHESION

The axial category “Threats to Cohesion” comprises 62 open codes out of a total of 334, achieving 18.6% coverage and positioning itself as the densest core of inductively identified erosive processes. Qualitatively, it concentrates dynamics such as political polar-

isation (adversarial logics, institutional mediocrity, widespread politicisation), post-neoliberal individualism (group closure, defence of pensions/resources), chronic distrust (institutional and interpersonal), and symbolic fragmentation (identity breakdown and loss of civic reference points), which permeate everyday life and erode the potential of the reactive cultural core.

This quantitative density (62/334 codes) validates its emergence as a primary causal condition of cohesive fragility, mediating between positive traits and episodic mechanisms, with consequences such as “structural division” despite latent capacities, aligned with the report’s grounded theory framework. The codes reveal a social fabric vulnerable to political confrontations and historical inequalities, demanding institutional interventions to reverse the cycle.

The category “Threats to Cohesion” focuses on the structural, institutional, and cultural processes that erode Chilean society’s capacity to sustain collective bonds beyond reactive moments, shaping a social fabric characterised by chronic distrust, polarisation, and symbolic fragmentation. This axial dimension reveals that factors such as political polarisation, exacerbated individualism, and interpersonal distrust undermine the integrative potential of the positive cultural core and the mechanisms of episodic unity.

Political polarisation emerges as the most acute and recurrent threat, described as a shift from a phase of “broad consensus” (democratic transition, 1990–2000) toward a trench warfare dynamic that prioritises confrontation over building a shared national project. Interviewees criticise “us-versus-them” logic, personal attacks, and the media exploitation of conflict, which transform politics into a disintegrating rather than a unifying force. This polarisation is not limited to the partisan sphere; it permeates daily life, dividing families, friendships, and workplaces, and is associated with a perception of the political elites as mediocre, who lose legitimacy to represent “what is

common". In terms of grounded theory, these codes reveal causal conditions such as the crisis of institutional trust (post-2019 Social Outbreak, failed constitutional processes) that fuel adversarial action-interaction strategies, with consequences such as the "demonisation of the adversary" and the fracturing of the public sphere.

A second threat is individualism and social fragmentation, manifested in the closure of emotional circles, the defence of one's own interests (pensions, resources, benefits), and a decreased willingness to prioritise the abstract "collective". This trend is exacerbated by interpersonal mistrust—the normalisation of *pituto* (nepotism/cronyism), everyday mistreatment, and fare evasion on public transportation—and by territorial and class segregation, which generates disconnected "social bubbles". The result is a national identity experienced more in the private sphere (family, traditions) than in the public sphere, and a cohesion that depends on reactive rituals rather than shared institutions.

Symbolic and cultural fragmentation completes the spectrum of threats; several codes allude to a national identity in "fracture" or as being "diffuse", affected by the politicisation of symbols, the emergence of subidentities (indigenous peoples, migrants), and the loss of common reference points such as civic education or a unifying Catholicism. The absence of civic education in the school system is mentioned as a key deficit that hinders the transmission of common values and fosters polarisation. These processes generate a perception of regression of shared identity, where what unites Chileans is "in negative terms" (shared doubt, adversity) and is more powerful than explicit positive consensus.

From the perspective of this study, this category illustrates how threats to cohesion do not stem from an intrinsic weakness in national identity, which maintains a positive cultural foundation, but rather from failed institutional mechanisms and social dynamics that prevent its translation

into inclusive collective practices. Political polarisation acts as the primary causal factor, exacerbated by mistrust and individualism, with consequences such as symbolic fragmentation that weakens the integrative repertoire of the cultural core. To reverse this erosion, those interviewed agree on the need to revitalise civic education, reform politics toward consensus building, and strengthen mechanisms that institutionalise reactive unity, preventing national identity from being reduced to a source of nostalgia or confrontation.

MIGRATION DYNAMICS

The axial category "Migration Dynamics" comprises 51 open codes out of a total of 334, achieving 15.3% coverage and standing out for its role as an ambivalent catalyst in the emergence of the theoretical framework. Qualitatively, it distinguishes positive historical migration (cultural assimilation, such as Peruvian migration) from recent massive flows (Venezuelans/Haitians), with selective everyday reception (in professional or neighbourhood contexts), contrasting with the current discursive rejection (labour competition, xenophobia, and ghettos), amplified by politicisation and a lack of state structures.

This density (51/334 codes) confirms saturation under constant comparison, acting as a challenging contextual condition that tests the boundaries of the core identity and reactivity, with consequences such as forced plural redefinition (cultural hybridisation) or nativism, demanding assimilationist policies to integrate demographic potential. The codes illustrate a public-private asymmetry as a mirror of fragile cohesion.

The category "Migration Dynamics" constitutes a crucial testing ground for the relationship between national identity and social cohesion, demonstrating how recent mass migration (2015–2025) acts as an ambivalent catalyst

that strains the positive cultural core and reactive unity while exposing the structural fragilities of Chilean society. Following the logic of grounded theory, this axial category articulates causal conditions (historical vs. mass flows), core phenomena (selective reception vs. reactive rejection), and consequences (forced identity redefinition), introducing nuance and replicating the “ambivalent catalytic migration” pattern.

The first dimension distinguishes between a historical tradition of relatively positive reception, and the prevailing rejection of recent waves of migration, particularly from Venezuela, Haiti, and Colombia. Interviewees acknowledge that Chile has been a receptive country to European and culturally similar Latin American migrants (Peruvians, Argentinians), associating these flows with economic contributions and successful cultural assimilation—for example, Mexican ranchera music or Peruvian labour in construction and domestic services. This phase is perceived as “natural” and manageable due to its smaller volume and linguistic/cultural similarities. However, the current mass migration is generating a shift toward rejection, attributed to the overloading of public services, labour competition in precarious sectors, and a perception of associated disorder or crime, although the data is nuanced (a minority percentage of migrants are involved). This historical vs recent distinction operates as a key causal condition that explains the perceptual shift.

Secondly, a dissymmetry is evident between everyday treatment and public discourse. In one-on-one or neighbourhood interactions, acceptance predominates (“the neighbour welcomes the migrant”, “appreciation for Venezuelan professionals”), but in the discursive and political sphere, rejection emerges strongly (“monster that takes jobs”, “burden”, racial

prejudices). This contrast is explained by the lack of effective integration, the formation of ghettos and closed circles of fellow citizens, limited invitations to Chilean family spaces, and deficient state policies that fail to achieve cultural assimilation or equitable access to rights. Interviewees highlight hindrances such as language barriers, phenotypic differences, and religious practices, which activate latent xenophobia, especially in working-class neighbourhoods and border regions. At the level of action and interaction, migration is politicised as an “electoral weapon,” amplifying narratives of invasion that strain civic friendship and the “same boat” principle.

The consequences for national identity are profound. Migration forces a redefinition of what it means to be Chilean, challenging a Eurocentric and homogeneous imaginary by introducing new cultural markers, phenotypes, and demands for plurinationality. While some see it as “enrichment” and “demographic vitality” (second generation assimilated, economic dynamism), others perceive it as a threat to the cultural core (symbolic competition, dilution of traditions), exacerbating identity fragmentation. From the perspective of this study, this category illustrates how migration not only challenges cohesion, revealing its reactive limits and fragility in the face of the “other”, but also challenges the core identity by expanding toward more inclusive forms, albeit with the risk of reactive nativism if not accompanied by effective integration policies (intercultural education, clear regulatory frameworks). In this sense, migratory ambivalence functions as a critical mirror of Chilean society; its capacity to absorb diversity will depend on articulating positive cultural capital with institutional reforms that prevent the reproduction of exclusions.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEXTUAL EVOLUTION

The axial category “Historical and Contextual Evolution” comprises 31 open codes out of the 334 in the codebook, achieving 9.3% coverage and establishing itself as the underlying temporal framework that allows us to understand why Chilean national identity presents itself today as a resilient core, yet one strained by unresolved fractures. These codes reconstruct a trajectory that ranges from an insular and homogeneous identity associated with geographic isolation and the republican epic, through the authoritarian appropriation of symbols during the dictatorship and the pragmatic recomposition of the democratic transition, to the symbolic rupture of the 2019 Social Outburst and the subsequent generational globalisation, which dilutes traditional references and pluralises the ways of “being Chilean”.

Qualitatively, this category operates as a causal and contextual condition for the other categories, because it shows how current positive symbolic capital (family, celebrations, and symbols) is heir to a history of national homogenisation, while threats to cohesion are rooted in accumulated fractures, whether historical inequality or a crisis of institutional trust. The combination of 31 codes alluding to milestones, memories, and transformations (transition, Social Outburst, globalisation) reinforces the idea of an identity palimpsest, where superimposed historical layers explain the coexistence of national pride, acute polarisation, and demands for a pluralistic reconfiguration of Chilean identity, thus closing the axial category map with a dense historical anchor.

The category “Historical and Contextual Evolution” provides the temporal and explanatory framework that allows us to understand the current configuration of national identity and social cohesion as a result of discontinuous processes of construction, rupture, and recomposition, marked by political, economic,

and cultural milestones that have reshaped the meanings of “being Chilean” at different historical moments. In line with grounded theory, this axial category operates as a fundamental causal condition, contextualising the other dimensions (cultural traits, reactive unity, threats, migration) and highlighting trajectories of generational and structural change that strain the traditional core identity.

The analysis of the codes reveals a periodisation implicit in the discourses, a predominant “insular and self-centered” identity until the late 20th century, marked by geographic isolation (mountain ranges, desert, continental ice fields) and the republican epic narrative (War of the Pacific, territorial consolidation), which forged a collective imagination of cultural homogeneity and legalism as regional differentiators. This phase, inherited from the Spanish conquest and the Catholic legacy, is reproduced in traditional civic education and in rituals such as Fiestas Patrias (National Holidays), providing fertile ground for the “positive cultural traits” observed in the first category.

The analysis shows us that the so-called “democratic transition” (1990–2010) represents a moment of partial recomposition of society through “broad consensus” between the Concertación (center-left) and the center-right, which allow for a pragmatic cohesion focused on economic development and the recognition of the political adversary as part of a common national project, strengthening the image of Chile as a “successful country” in contrast to the rest of Latin America.

This period consolidated features such as legalism and economic resilience, but also sowed the seeds of post-neoliberal individualism and spatial segregation (ghettoisation in Santiago, regional gaps), which eroded cohesion from within. The 2019 Social Outburst acted as a turning point, generating a radical questioning of national symbols (flag burning), symbolic fracturing, and rejection of the political elite, but also a defensive revaluation of the flag and

anthem as demands for inclusion and national recognition.

At a generational level, there is an evolution towards a more globalised and pluralistic Chilean identity. Generations prior to the 1990s and 2000s evoke a “reserved and legalistic” identity, while later generations perceive themselves as “masters of the world,” with greater global connections, cosmopolitanism, and cultural permeability, although also greater fragmentation due to social networks and digital subcultures. Globalisation and relative economic success have transformed the self-image from insular to differentiated (“I am different in Latin America”), but have also diluted unifying references such as Catholicism or traditional civic education.

Historical milestones have strengthened a resilient symbolic and cultural core (positive traits), but they have also generated fractures that fuel current threats (polarisation, individualism). The transition demonstrates that politics can rebuild cohesion when it prioritises consensus over confrontation, while the current social unrest and migration illustrate how crises catalyse both rupture and identity redefinition. Looking ahead, those interviewed suggest that the evolution toward a hybrid identity could be viable if it is institutionalised through renewed civic education and decentralisation policies, preventing plurality from leading to irreversible fragmentation.

In short, Chilean history is neither linear nor univocal, but a palimpsest of recompositions that explains why the country maintains a sense of nationhood despite the fragility of its daily cohesion.



GENERAL CONCLUSIONS (GROUNDED THEORY)

The main findings from the qualitative analysis of the interviews, structured by axial coding into six interconnected categories, reveal that Chilean national identity is configured as a relatively resilient cultural and symbolic core, but with a limited capacity to sustain structural social cohesion in the contemporary context of political polarisation, growing individualism and intense demographic transformations.

First, a robust set of positive cultural traits emerges that define the “Chilean DNA”, beginning with the centrality of the extended family as the primary space for socialisation and support, festive and gastronomic traditions (Fiestas Patrias, or National Holidays), and a self-image characterised by resilience, solidarity, and creativity in humour that is activated in the face of adversity. These elements are condensed into affective symbols such as the flag and the national anthem, especially powerful in ritualistic sporting or rural territorial contexts, where they generate broad emotional identification that transcends ideological divisions. This identity dimension operates as a shared repertoire of belonging, differentiating it within the Latin American context due to its emphasis on territorial roots, legalism, and everyday “slyness”.

However, the social cohesion linked to this identity is predominantly reactive and episodic. Those interviewed agree that Chileans unite intensely in moments of crisis or celebration (earthquakes, fires, the Telethon, sporting

victories), where circumstantial solidarity and collective emotion unfold, relativising political or socioeconomic differences. This unity depends on personalised narratives (“when there is a face and a name”) and is not institutionalised in everyday practices, leaving a fragile social fabric outside of these scenarios.

The threats to this cohesive identity are multiple and structural. Current political polarisation, characterised by “us-versus-them” dynamics, personal attacks, and institutional mediocrity, has reversed the unifying potential of the democratic transition (1990-2010), transforming politics into a divisive force. In addition, post-neoliberal individualism prioritises the individual over the abstract collective, accompanied by interpersonal mistrust, the closure of affective circles, and territorial segregation, eroding the sense of national unity.

Recent mass migration (Venezuelans, Haitians, Colombians) acts as an ambivalent catalyst. While everyday interactions reveal selective acceptance and recognition of economic contributions, public discourse amplifies perceptions of threat (job competition, overburdened services, association with crime), revealing latent xenophobia and barriers to integration such as ghettos and electoral politicisation. This phenomenon forces a pluralistic redefinition of Chilean identity, questioning its historical homogeneity but at the same time exposing the limits of cultural assimilation without clear state policies.

Finally, historical evolution contextualises these patterns from an insular identity forged by geographical isolation and the republican epic, through fractures from the dictatorship and transitional recomposition, to the rupture of the Social Outburst (2019) and generational globalisation, which dilutes unifying references such as traditional civic education.

Therefore, Chilean national identity possesses latent symbolic capital, based on family resilience, festive rituals, and affective symbols, which sustains reactive cohesion in crises, but is not enough to counteract structural erosions without institutional mediations, such as civic education, migration policies, and responsible political leadership.



National Identity and Social Cohesion in Chile

Quantitative Analysis Based on a National Survey

(August 2025)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This academic report analyses the main findings of the quantitative study “National Identity and Social Cohesion,” conducted in August 2025 through a nationally representative survey of the Chilean adult population. The study aims to examine citizens’ perceptions of interpersonal and institutional trust, political polarisation, national identity, immigration, and political affiliation in order to understand the current state of social cohesion in Chile.

The results reveal a scenario of profound social and political fragmentation, characterised by low levels of interpersonal trust, a sustained crisis of legitimacy of political institutions, a widely shared perception of polarisation and division, and an ambivalent relationship between national identity and immigration. However, this context of crisis coexists with high levels of national pride and a cultural identity that remains anchored in traditional historical, territorial, and symbolic references. The report argues that Chilean society faces a structural tension between identity-based belonging and institutional weakening, with significant consequences for democratic legitimacy (Easton, Norris).

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Chile has undergone profound political, social, and cultural transformations, manifested in cycles of social mobilisation, failed constitutional processes, shifts in the party system, and a growing distrust of institutions. In this context, the analysis of national identity and social cohesion (Durkheim) takes on central importance, as both dimensions constitute fundamental pillars for democratic stability and the legitimacy of the political order.

Social cohesion, understood as the degree of trust, integration, and sense of belonging that unites the members of a political community, is directly affected by polarisation, identity fragmentation, and the erosion of institutional legitimacy. In turn, national identity (Anderson, Smith) operates as a key symbolic resource for sustaining social integration, especially in contexts of crisis. This report seeks to contribute empirical evidence to the academic and political debate on these phenomena, offering a systematic analysis of citizens’ perceptions based on recent quantitative data.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

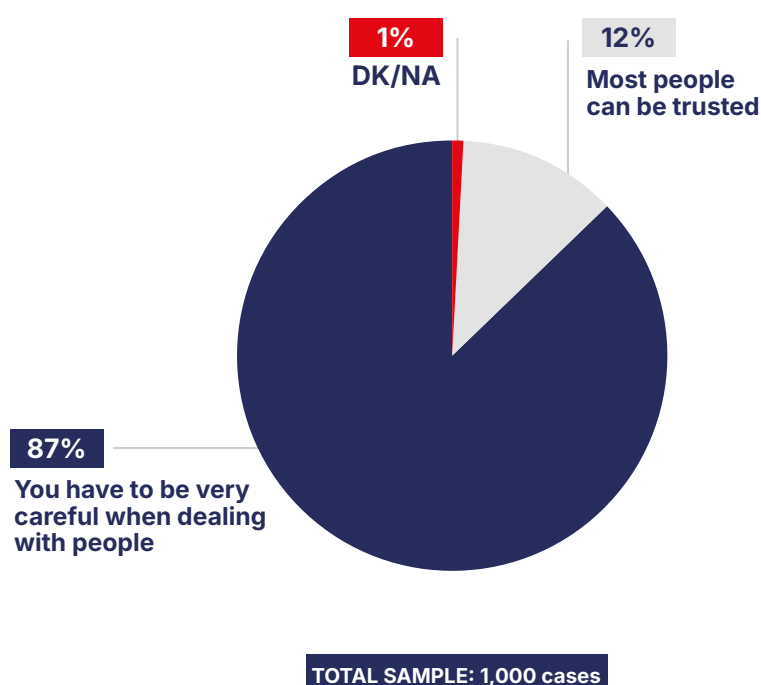
The study is based on a descriptive quantitative design, aimed at capturing the perceptions and attitudes of the adult population regarding central dimensions of social and political life. The sample comprises 1,000 cases, comprising both men and women aged 18 and over, residing in 70 municipalities that together account for approximately 70% of the national population.

Data collection was conducted via computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI), which allowed for standardised questionnaire administration and ensured adequate monitoring of the fieldwork. The margin of error is $\pm 3.1\%$, based on simple random sampling and a 95% confidence level for the total sample. Data were weighted by sex and age, using information from the National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2017) projected to 2025.

The questionnaire was structured and designed in collaboration with AthenaLab, incorporating closed-ended questions and measurement scales that allow for comparison of perceptions across different dimensions. Fieldwork was conducted between 30 July and 16 August 2025, a period marked by a highly sensitive political climate, which provides relevant interpretive context for the results.

INTERPERSONAL TRUST

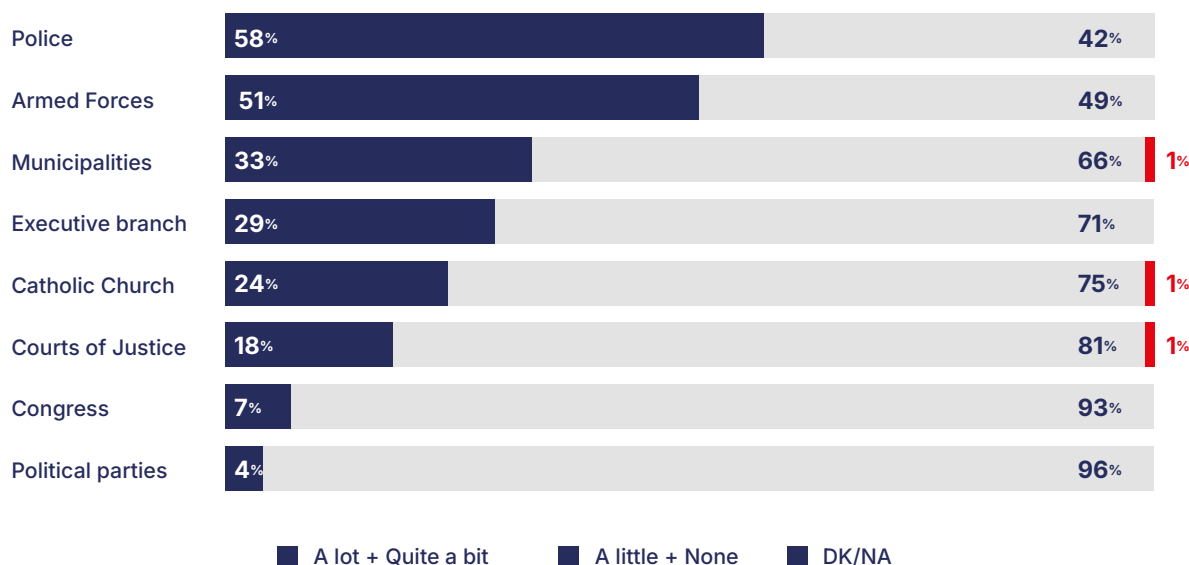
In general, would you say that most people can be trusted, or do you have to be very careful when dealing with them?



The results show a structural deficit in interpersonal trust. When asked about trusting others, 87% of respondents stated that it is necessary to be very careful when dealing with other people, while only 12% believe that most people can be trusted. This pattern is consistent

with previous diagnoses of low social capital (Putnam) in Chile and suggests widespread mistrust and a social environment perceived as risky, fragmented, and unpredictable—a central element of social cohesion according to sociological literature.

INSTITUTIONAL TRUST



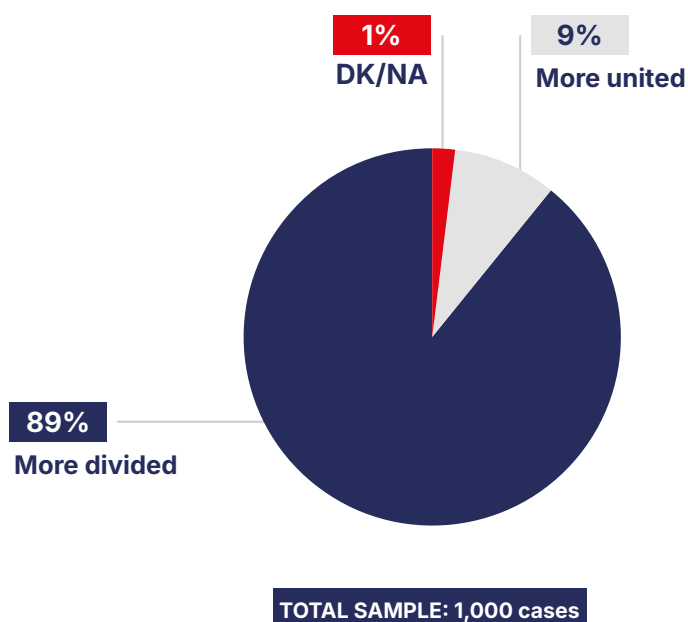
TOTAL SAMPLE: 1,000 cases

At the institutional level, trust exhibits significant asymmetries, showing a highly differentiated pattern among institutions. Those associated with law and order, such as the police and the armed forces, enjoy the highest levels of relative trust. The police (58%) and the Armed Forces (51%) have the highest levels of trust ("a lot" or "quite a bit"), followed at a distance by municipalities (33%) and the executive branch (29%). In contrast, the central political institutions of the democratic system exhibit critical levels of distrust, such as Congress (93% with "little" or "no trust") and political parties (96%).

This result reveals a crisis of political legitimacy, where representative institutions appear severely weakened compared to those associated with order and security. The discrepancy between the trust placed in coercive institutions and the distrust of representative institutions raises significant questions regarding the quality of the democratic system and the dynamics between citizens and political power.

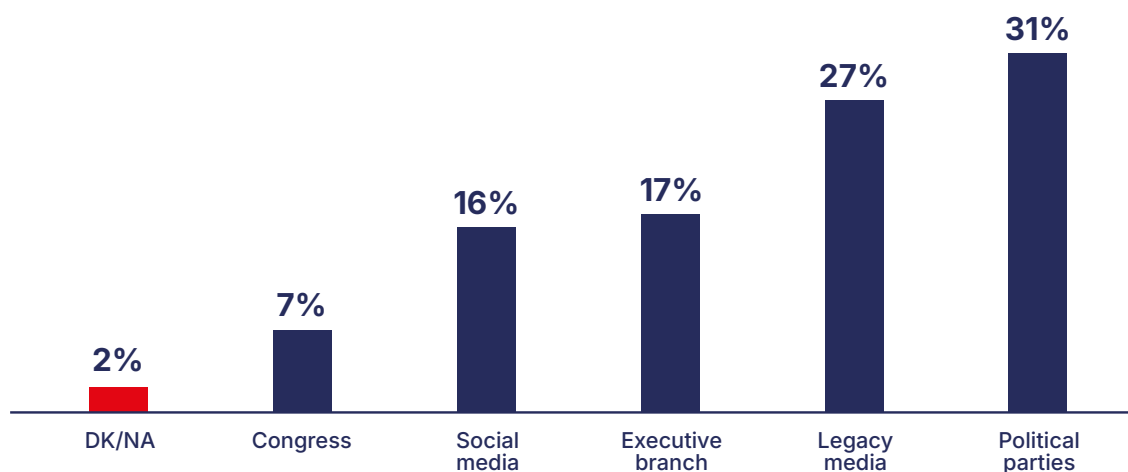
POLITICAL POLARISATION AND DIVISION

Do you think Chilean society is “more united” or “more divided” today than it was 10 years ago?



The perception of polarisation and political division is widely shared. Of those surveyed, 89% believe that Chilean society is more divided today than it was ten years ago, and 88% affirm that there is a high level of political polarisation. These results suggest that polarisation is not perceived as an episodic phenomenon, but rather as a structural condition of contemporary Chilean politics.

And which of the following entities or media contributes most to this polarisation or political division?



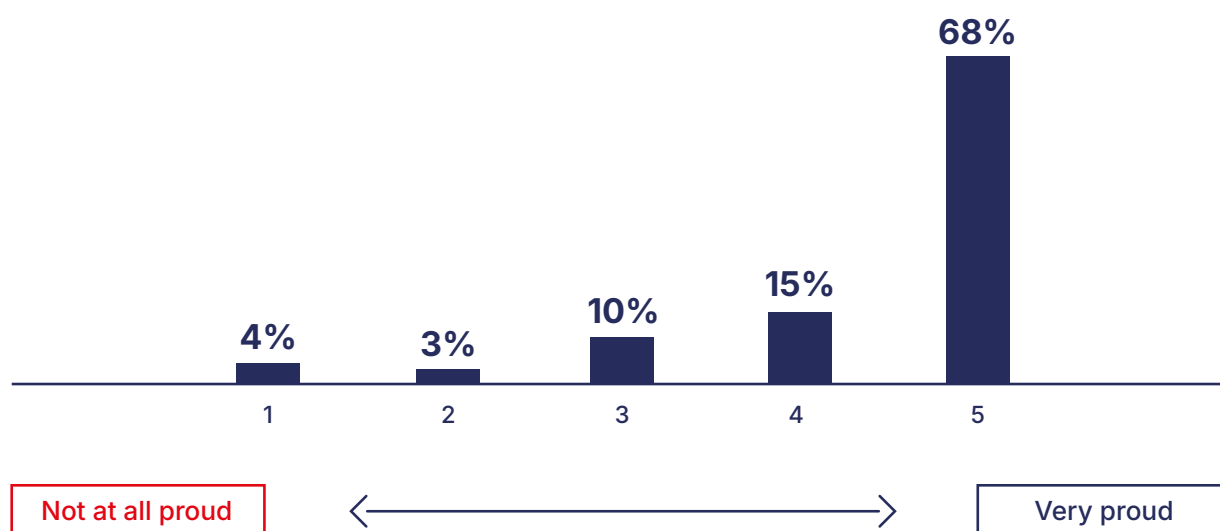
% who respond that there is a high level of polarisation and political division

The causes attributed to this polarisation reinforce this interpretation. A lack of civic education, the absence of strong political leadership, and low trust in institutions are identified as the main factors. Likewise, political parties and the media are identified as the actors that contribute most to polarisation, demonstrating a critical perception of the functioning of the

political-media system and its role in amplifying conflict. This broad consensus suggests that polarisation is not perceived as a phenomenon confined to a particular sector, but rather as a systemic feature of current political functioning, with direct effects on governance and institutional trust.

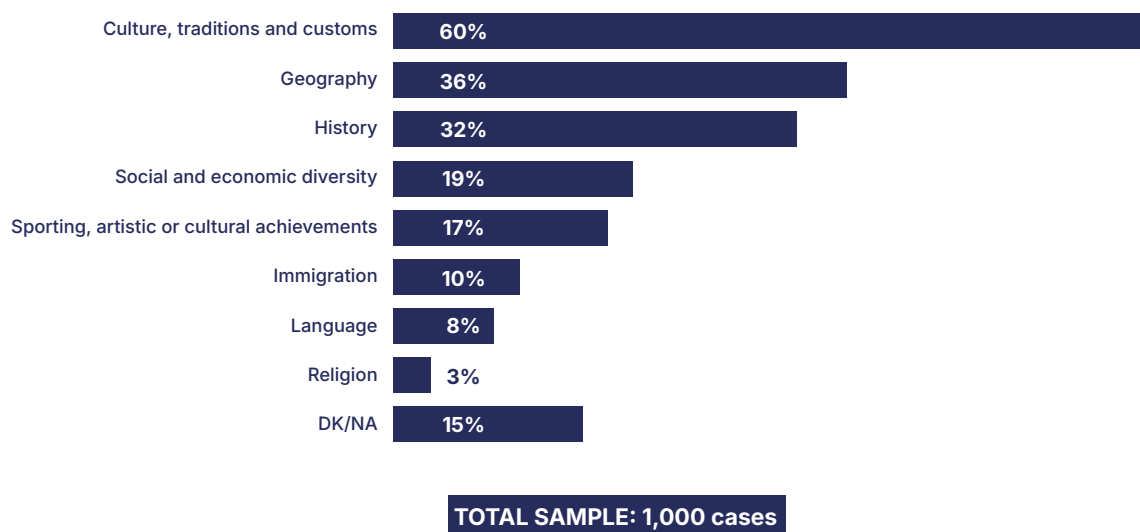
NATIONAL IDENTITY

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all proud and 5 is very proud, how proud are you to be Chilean?



Despite the context of social and political crisis, pride in being Chilean remains high: 68% of those interviewed declared themselves very proud of their nationality. This finding suggests that national identity retains a solid emotional foundation, even when the institutions that organise political life face significant delegitimisation.

And what do you think are the most representative elements of Chilean identity today? (2 mentions)

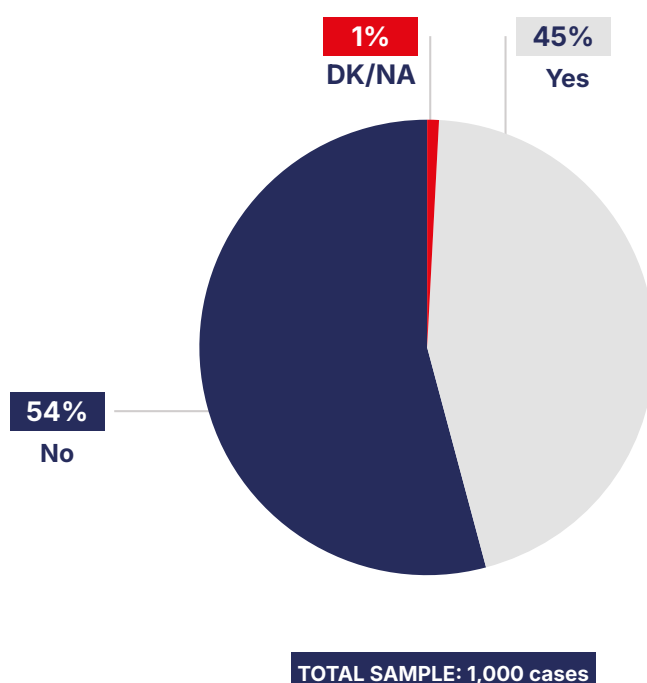


The most representative elements of Chilean identity are concentrated in traditional cultural dimensions such as culture, traditions, and customs (60%), followed by geography (36%) and history (32%). Social and economic diversity (19%) and immigration (10%) occupy a secondary place. This indicates a conception of identity strongly anchored in traditional cultural references, rather than in contemporary social processes.

In contrast, aspects such as social diversity, immigration, and language occupy a secondary place. This configuration indicates a predominantly retrospective national identity, anchored in historical and symbolic references rather than contemporary social processes.

REGIONAL IDENTITY

And do you believe that your identity as an inhabitant of your region [of Chile] is different from the national identity?

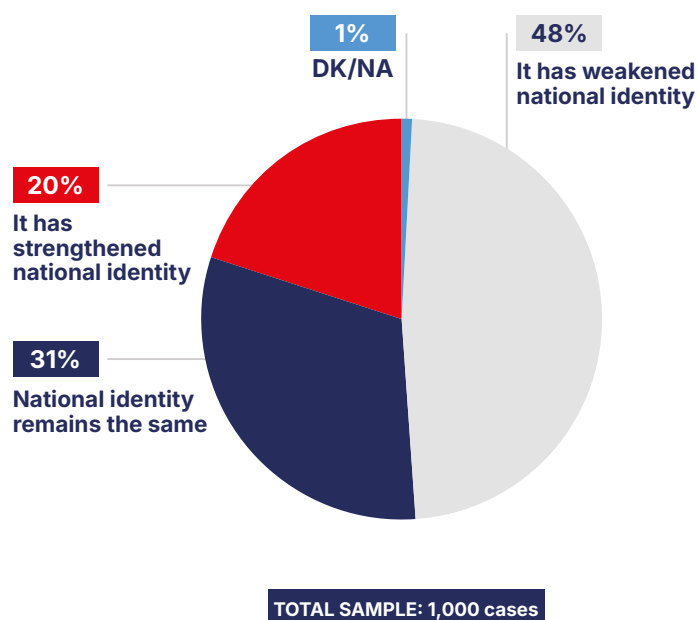


Nearly half (45%) of respondents consider the identity of their region distinct from their national identity, while 54% do not perceive such a difference. This suggests the coexistence of territorial and national identities without necessarily implying a majority split. This plurality of identities can be interpreted both as a resource for cultural diversity and as a challenge

to national integration. Likewise, this result may suggest a latent tension between territorial and national identities, reinforcing the idea of a national identity that is still inclusive, but not without nuance.

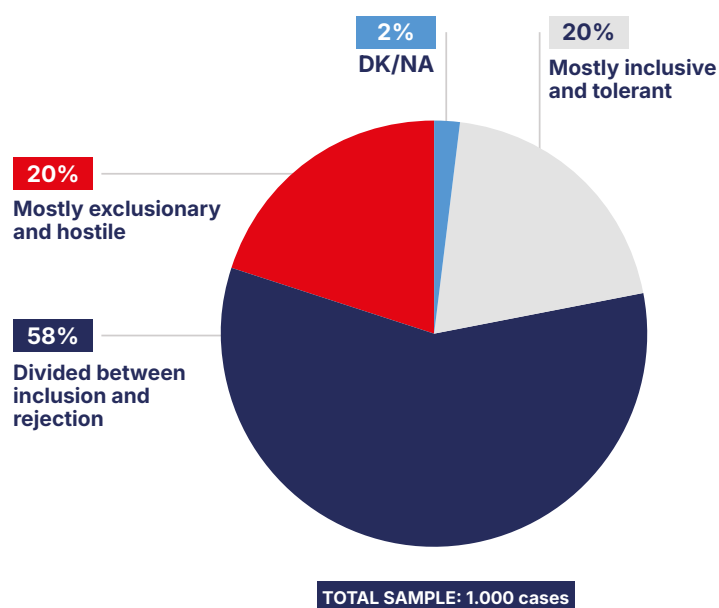
IMMIGRATION

What have been the main effects of the arrival of foreigners on national identity?



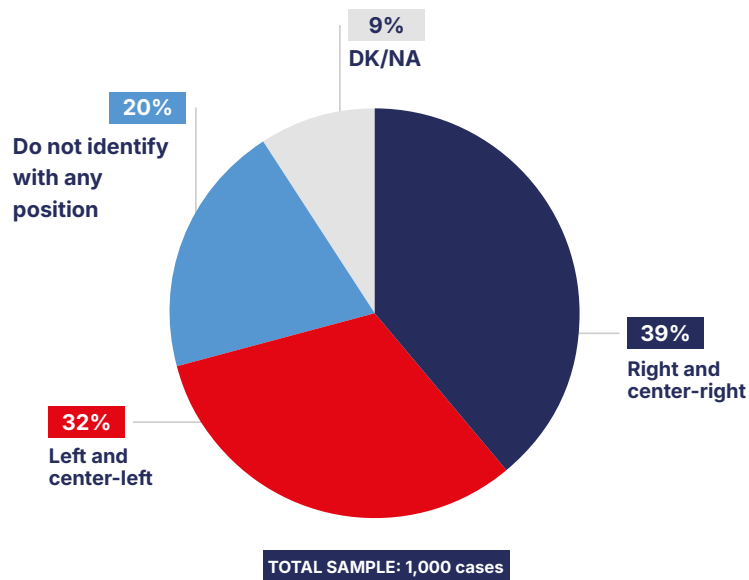
Regarding immigration, the prevailing perception is critical: 48% believe that the arrival of foreigners has weakened national identity. Meanwhile, 31% believe it remains the same, and 20% believe it has been strengthened by it, revealing a society divided on the cultural impact of immigration.

And how would you describe the attitude of Chilean society towards foreigners today?



This ambivalence is reinforced when analysing the perception of social attitudes toward foreigners, which are mostly described as divided between inclusion and rejection. This distribution reveals a predominantly defensive perception toward cultural change, associating immigration with a threat to identity, although a significant minority recognises positive or neutral effects.

POLITICAL IDENTIFICATION



Political identification shows a relatively balanced distribution across ideological sectors, with a slight majority on the right and center-right (39%), compared to the left and center-left (32%), whereas 20% do not identify with any position. This notably high lack of identification can be interpreted as an indicator of disaffection and distancing from the formal political system, consistent with previously observed high levels of institutional distrust.

CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals a scenario characterised by a strong tension between identity and cohesion. While national identity maintains high levels of symbolic and emotional attachment, social cohesion is eroded by interpersonal distrust, a crisis of institutional legitimacy, and political polarisation. This combination creates a picture of relatively stable identity coexisting with profound institutional fragility.

Moreover, it shows high social and political fragmentation, coexisting with an emotionally persistent but culturally traditional national identity. The combination of distrust, polarisation, and national pride creates a complex picture, where the crisis does not imply identity dissolution, but rather a profound tension between symbolic belonging and institutional weakening, with direct implications for social cohesion and democratic governance in Chile.

From an analytical perspective, the results suggest that the central challenges for Chilean democracy lie not only in redefining national identity, but also in rebuilding trust, strengthening civic education, and renewing political and institutional practices. Overcoming the crisis of social cohesion therefore requires that symbolic, political, and structural dimensions be addressed simultaneously, in a sustained effort to rebuild the bonds between citizens, the state, and democratic institutions.

The study's findings reveal an analytically relevant distinction between national identity and state legitimacy. Indeed, high levels of pride in being Chilean coexist with a profound distrust of political institutions, suggesting a disconnect between symbolic identification with the

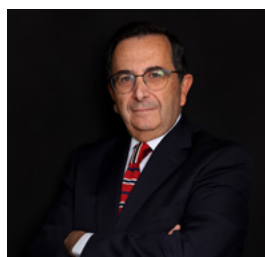
nation and a negative evaluation of the state and its representative mechanisms. This gap can be interpreted as the expression of a predominantly cultural nationalism, grounded in historical, territorial, and symbolic references, but detached from an institutional framework perceived as legitimate and effective. In this sense, national identity functions as a resource for belonging and symbolic continuity, while the state appears weakened in its capacity to channel that belonging into trust, representation, and social cohesion. This disconnect between nation and state constitutes a central feature of the contemporary Chilean landscape and poses significant challenges for democratic governance and the reconstruction of institutional legitimacy.

From an applied perspective, the study's findings suggest that restoring social cohesion in Chile requires a comprehensive approach that integrates public policies, civic education, and institutional reforms. At the public policy level, it is necessary to strengthen initiatives aimed at rebuilding interpersonal and institutional trust, promoting greater transparency, state responsiveness, and equity in access to public goods and services.

In the area of civic education, the data highlight the urgent need to revitalise civic training as a tool to strengthen understanding of democratic processes, the legitimacy of institutions, and the willingness to engage in dialogue in contexts of pluralism and conflict. Finally, at the institutional level, the findings reinforce the need to advance reforms that improve political representation, accountability, and the effective-

ness of the democratic system, in order to reduce the observed gap between a symbolically robust national identity and a state perceived as distant or lacking legitimacy.

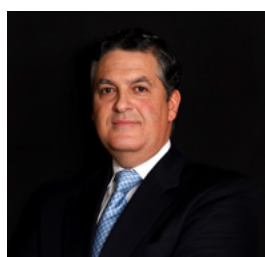
WORKING GROUP



JOHN GRIFFITHS

Executive Director, AthenaLab

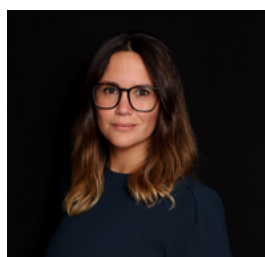
Former Army officer with a degree in Military Sciences. Master's in International Security from Georgetown University and PhD in American Studies from USACH. He has taught at UC, ANEPE and UAI in strategic studies, security and national defense. He has also pursued further studies in these fields at Harvard, King's College and UFSIA. He is a Distinguished Fellow at RUSI.



MARCELO MASALLERAS

Director of Studies, AthenaLab

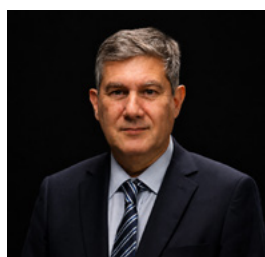
Former Army officer with a degree in Military Sciences. Staff Officer graduate of the Chilean Army and Air Force War Academies and the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Master's in Military Sciences from ACAGUE and in International Security from Georgetown University. He has taught at ACAGUE, the Chilean Air Force, and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.



MARÍA FERNANDA MUÑOZ

Director of Operations and Communications, AthenaLab

Political Scientist from UC, with a Master's in Political Communication and Public Affairs from UAI. She has also studied strategic communication at Georgetown University and holds a diploma in Transparency and Good Governance from UC. She previously served as Project Manager at CEIUC, researcher at LyD, and contributor to the Chilean Council for International Relations.



ALDO CASSINELLI CAPURRO

Director, School of Government, Universidad Autónoma de Chile

Public Administrator and Master's in Political Science from the University of Chile. Director of the School of Government at Universidad Autónoma de Chile and partner at DataCamp. His career spans academic, public, and private institutions, with experience in strategic planning, political analysis, and public management. He previously served as Director of Strategic Planning at Chile's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AthenaLab extends its special thanks to AndesPartners for developing this study and for its contribution to an initiative aimed at deepening our understanding of national identity and social cohesion in Chile.

We also thank SELVA Design Consultancy, Soledad Sairafi, and Ángela García for their work and collaboration throughout the various stages of design, layout, printing, and dissemination of this publication, as well as Enrique León for the English translation. Their contributions were instrumental in bringing this publication to fruition.



athenalab.org

Av. El Bosque Norte 0177, office 1101,
Las Condes, Santiago, Chile