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The Chilean elite's point of view on indigenous peoples

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ABSTRACT

In Chile, recognition of the country's indigenous peoples is generally approached from the victims' point of view, drawing attention to the social, economic, and legal situation of historically excluded communities. Although this is a legitimate approach, this paper proposes another perspective: looking at how the influential members of the elite perceive indigenous peoples and the construction of a plurinational democracy. Recognition of indigenous peoples' rights depends to a large extent on their relations with other groups and, in particular, on the strategies deployed by the most powerful minorities. In order to ascertain the opinion of those directly concerned with the "Mapuche issue", we focused on businesspeople with investments in mining, forestry, salmon farming, and the electricity industry, as well as the country's business associations. Similarly, we paid special attention to political authorities, private-sector and religious leaders, judges, judicial authorities, and government officials from the Araucanía Region. Apart from identifying differences among members of the elite based on their political affiliations, this paper reveals a generalized awareness of discrimination but a widespread reluctance to find concrete solutions.

RESÚMEN

El reconocimiento de los pueblos originarios en Chile suele encarase desde el punto de vista de las víctimas, poniéndose de relieve las condiciones sociales, económicas y jurídicas de las comunidades históricamente excluidas. Aunque ésta es una postura legítima, proponemos situarnos en otra perspectiva: aquella que atiende a cómo las fuerzas hegemónicas del poder perciben a los pueblos originarios y a la construcción de una democracia plurinacional. El reconocimiento de los derechos de los pueblos originarios reposa en gran medida en su relación con otros grupos, y en particular en las estrategias desplegadas por las minorías más poderosas. El artículo analizará la forma en que las élites perciben a las minorías indígenas en Chile, particularmente en el caso mapuche. Para hacerlo se tomará una definición amplia de elites, incluyendo en ellas tanto a la elite política (parlamentarios) como a los dirigentes empresariales y autoridades de distintos sectores de la Región de la Araucanía. Además de identificar diferencias entre las elites dependiendo de su posición política, se reveló una conciencia generalizada de discriminación, pero un rechazo transversal a la búsqueda de soluciones concretas.

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Introduction

In Chile, the issue of indigenous peoples, and the Mapuche people in particular, has many different nuances. The social sciences have taken different approaches to the problem, studying the lack of political, legal, and cultural recognition, the conflict between factions of indigenous peoples and landowners occupying reclaimed territories, the poverty in the areas in which indigenous peoples live, and indigenous peoples as victims of exclusion, subordinated and discriminated against by the majority or the minorities that hold power. Despite their differences, all of these approaches place the Mapuche people at the center of their analysis, without delving into their relationships with other social groups.

In this paper, we have chosen to examine and interpret the phenomenon of discrimination against indigenous peoples in Chile, the Mapuche people in particular, 1 from a different perspective. While some research focuses on the perceptions of those who are the object of discrimination, we will analyze the way native populations are perceived by other social groups, in particular members of the elite. Based on the premise that the political situation of indigenous peoples in Chile has strong ties to the (conservative) political values of the Chilean elite, we believe that understanding the elite's thought is fundamental to understanding why it has been so difficult to achieve real intercultural dialogue in Chile that can lead to acceptance – or greater acceptance – of indigenous demands.

The relations between European-American elites and Mapuche descendants are a key part of Chilean history. After the establishment of the republic at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Mapuche, who had historically lived in the Araucanía Region, began to undergo a process of assimilation and loss of autonomy. This was justified on the grounds of national security, the danger of not clearly recognizing and defining the country's boundaries, and the need to incorporate lands and natural resources into the emerging national economy (Báez 2009). However, there was also a universalist, nationalistic, and homogenizing ideology based on liberal paradigms underlying these arguments.

Although the dominant liberal narrative presupposes a society formed by free and equal individuals, the persistence of inequalities and the centrality of the elite are the "iron laws" of human societies, and they have been particularly hard to overcome in contemporary Chile.² In the 200 years since independence, researchers have shown that Mapuche descendants remain in the lower social positions (CEPAL 2012), while wealth, prestige, and power remain concentrated in the hands of a few urban, European-American families (Contreras 2002; Stabili, 2003; Thumala 2007). Although in some political systems it is true that minorities control resources that are scarce and decisive for the rest of the community, it is important to note that in Chile, the Mapuche are excluded from these privileged positions, which seem to be largely held by an exceptionally closed-off inner circle. Public visibility, specialized knowledge, control of the means of production, and responsibility for crucial decisions are reserved for a small set of individuals.

Considering the persistence of these differences and the importance of the elites' perceptions in public decision making, our aim is to describe how members of the elite build, mediate, and prioritize certain interests and values facing the native population. Do the Mapuche people constitute an important issue for Chilean elites? Is there any difference between the members of the Left and Right political parties? Is the issue more important for the regional elite than the national elite? Are these two groups equally aware of the disadvantages and exclusions suffered by indigenous people? What factors are associated with a greater awareness? Even if opinions and perceptions are not enough to fully understand practices and decision making, they offer a starting point to understand how identities are constructed, how oppositions are justified, and eventually how benefits are confined to a closed group or distributed to weaker members of society in accordance with more or less explicit criteria.

In the study of the elite, different definitions have been proposed. While, for some branches of the Marxist tradition, the ruling elite and the dominant classes are closely interwoven (for example, in Wright Mills 2005), theorists of pluralism tend to emphasize the diversity and tensions found among the groups that occupy the upper echelons of power and wealth (Dahl 1958). More contemporary authors have concentrated their attention on the political system in which the political class and the technocracy are seen as leading groups in public decision making (Joignant 2009).

Moreover, within this diversity of definitions and perspectives, some researchers have defined the elite according to their relevance to the issue under study. On the one hand, issues tend to define participants. For example, economic policy studies tend to consider not only politicians and technocrats but also businesspeople and workers' representatives; the analysis of religious matters takes into account religious leaders and secular spokespersons; and so on. On the other hand, situations tend to define positions: while ordinary and persistent matters are usually dealt with by those who occupy established positions, surprising events enable outsiders to play a determinant role. We will be looking at groups that have differing levels of influence but have some power of decision over the issue at hand. This is why we use the definition of elite as coined by Burton and Higley (1987) and Khan (2012), who see this group as individuals who are national leaders in different areas (political, governmental, religious, intellectual, or economic) and, given their position in society, are able to influence national decisions.

Given that Chile is a centralist republic, its Congress is the primary arena for observing political diversity. The National Congress is the most representative space of Chilean politics and plays the leading role in the discussion and approval of legislation in the country. In order to ascertain the opinions of the elite, a survey of members of congress was conducted in 2012. Taking into account the composition of the Chilean Congress, we included 158 legislators (representatives and senators from all regions). This population enabled us to compare the opinions expressed by Leftist and Rightist members of congress.³ By doing so, we create a map of ideological positions on the Mapuche issue in Chilean politics. To what extent is indigenous sensitivity equally distributed throughout this ideological spectrum? Are Leftist representatives more aligned with the Mapuches' demands than Right-wing ones? Are women more sensitive than men? Taking into account that the Mapuche issue is also a geographical one, can we observe any difference among legislators based on their region of origin?

However, this quantitative congressional data is insufficient to describe the perceptions of the elite. One way we addressed this was to collect extended opinions from members of Congress as well as from other relevant members of the elite, since indepth arguments help in the interpretation of shorter answers. We also expanded our population to include regional elites and businesspeople. The fact that the native population is not equally distributed in all the Chilean regions encouraged us to pay special attention to the southern regions, especially the Araucanía region. There, where the Mapuche presence is more marked, local structures of racism persist and cases of exclusion and aggression towards indigenous people are more frequent (Richards 2010). The views of the regional elite seem interesting, as they have close ties with indigenous peoples: they interact with these peoples on a daily basis and participate in the design, adoption, and implementation of decisions that affect them at the regional level. The closer we get to the regional scale, the clearer it is that the Mapuche issue is not only political; the private sector must also be taken into account. At the national level, the importance of businesspeople in public debate in Chile is remarkable. At the regional scale, the progress of economic activities in the Araucanía places the interests of the local economic elite at odds with the indigenous peoples' claim to ancestral lands. The development of mining companies, hydroelectric plants, and forestry operations has recently deteriorated the Mapuches' situation in the region (Di Giminiani 2012). For this we turned to the elite of the Araucanía Region.⁴

As explained above, for this paper we used a mixed methodology (Verd and López 2008) to explore the opinions of the national and regional elite who have direct ties with the country's indigenous peoples. We surveyed all 120 members of the Lower House of Congress and all 38 senators between July 2011 and January 2012. In addition, we carried out 19 semi-structured interviews with the economic elite (10 from the Los Lagos and Araucanía Regions in the south of the country and nine from the Santiago Metropolitan Region), represented by influential businesspeople with interests in sectors that have been particularly sensitive concerning the Mapuche issue, such as forestry, hydroelectricity, salmon farming, etc. We also interviewed people in the Araucanía Region with authority stemming from government posts and roles in influential institutions. Twelve semi-structured interviews were carried out, ranging from a bishop and an evangelical minister to government officials and mayors. To what extent are the perceptions of the elite in line with or out of line with those held by Chileans in general? Do the Chilean elites reflect the perceptions of their constituents? Are they more or less sensitive than their constituents to the Mapuche issue? Our research on elites' perceptions is complemented by a regular Annual National Survey carried out by the Diego Portales University (UDP). This survey, with a probabilistic sample, comprises personal interviews with 1,302 people and is representative of 74% of the country's total population and 85% of its urban population. The availability of both databases - the elites and the population survey - for the same period enables us to produce comparisons of both groups' perceptions and thus to evaluate the coherence or incoherence of elites' opinion to those of their constituencies.

Following in the footsteps of a recently developed line of study,⁵ this paper seeks to use the opinions of the elites concerning the country's indigenous peoples to examine the acceptance/rejection of multiethnicity, tolerance of different forms of social expression, and perceptions of how to solve the indigenous conflict in Chile. We start from the assumption that there is a widespread perception of discrimination in Chilean society, which is shared by the elite. However, we observe that there is still some reluctance on the part of a highly conservative Chilean elite to propose concrete solutions to this problem.

The article is divided into four main parts. First, we show how the literature on multiculturalism, liberalism, justice, recognition, and nationalism frames the theoretical discussion on the issue of discrimination towards minorities. Applied to our case, the discrimination is towards native peoples. Then, using empirical evidence, we aim to show how Chilean society thinks - the elite in particular - when questioned about justice, equality, racism, and discrimination. Thirdly, we specifically address the issue of discrimination against the Mapuche people using a series of data that show congruencies and differences at different levels and between different groups in the Chilean elite. Lastly, we present the conclusions of the study, which confirm a widespread perception of discrimination in Chile but a continuing reluctance of the elite to find and implement concrete solutions to this problem.

The multiculturalism debate and the age-old question of discrimination in Chile

This international debate is particularly relevant for contemporary Chile. In this country, the governmental approach to indigenous peoples has historically been one of the domination of Western culture over indigenous culture. The construction of a national identity goes back to the time of independence, when a conservative model triumphed and was embodied in the 1833 constitution. The nationalist discourse of political and social stability and material progress of the unitary nation replaced the democracy and citizenship that had characterized the Republic (Pinto and Valdivia 2009). The hegemony of national unity has worked against those excluded from the system, and indigenous peoples have been relegated to the status of subordinate minorities. Most indigenous peoples were incorporated into the national state during its main stage of formation at the end of the nineteenth century. This forced and violent incorporation was based on homogenizing precepts and, in the case of the Mapuche, implemented through the military occupation of their territory. Thus, based on the logic of aculturalization and forced assimilation, indigenous peoples entered the Chilean state without recognition of their indigenous condition and without their culture, language, and history holding any value for the newly created nation. The indigenous peoples who inhabited the territory of Chile were incorporated into the nation and invited to participate on equal terms with the rest of the inhabitants, forcing the assimilation of these ethnically differentiated populations in order to build a nation based on hegemonic (generally European) cultural elements (Marimán 2012). To do this, according to Gallardo, Martínez, and Martínez (2002), it was necessary to create a discourse that would deny the indigenous person as a different other and treat him or her as a subordinate and inferior being. The idea of occupation and anti-indigenous feeling that arose parallel is summarized by Pinto (2003) in four key ideas: (1) the need to extend national sovereignty to the indigenous territory; (2) the theory of the inferior race; (3) the idea of a country harassed and insulted by barbarians; and (4) the theory of the superior race. These ideas marked the relationship between the government and the Mapuche and spurred the actions carried out against them.

From the first half of the twentieth century through to the 1960s, relations between the government and the Mapuche people were anchored in the land issue. First their territory was forcibly reduced, and later their communities were divided, with the intention of ending indigenous property altogether. In the 1960s and until the military coup, Mapuche demands on the State acquired greater visibility but were mainly addressed from the point of view of rural poverty, without recognizing their specific ethnic characteristics (Bello 2002). During the military regime, forced and in some cases violent division of communities became more frequent, to the point of denying the existence of an indigenous population.

In the 1990s, with the restoration of democracy, the outlook for indigenous demands became more promising. Under President Patricio Aylwin, roundtables were established, the first Indigenous Law (Law No. 19,253) was enacted, the National Corporation for Indigenous Development (CONADI) was created, and reports were prepared in a quest for the "historic truth", generating a new institutional framework for relations between the government and the indigenous population. Nonetheless, the structure of the nation state (homogenization, sovereignty, and rationality) persisted in agreements and disagreements in the new debate in Latin America on indigenous issues, such as the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (Abarca 2012).

Since 2000, we have witnessed a series of political moves designed to resolve these problems, but they have been erratic, lacked long-term perspective, and, in some cases, been of a compartmentalized nature that has not fulfilled indigenous expectations. The "New Deal", an initiative that sought to generate a generalized view of the indigenous population, and the ratification of Convention 169 after 18 years of debate in Congress are examples of the new policy towards indigenous peoples; a policy that reflects the liberal and universalist interests of the country's majority, criminalizes indigenous demands, and reveals a government that is inflexible and not open to change (Bello 2002). The 18-year delay in approving Convention 169 demonstrates how reticent and conservative the Chilean elite is with respect to the protection of rights and recognition of indigenous peoples.

Universal equality, a consequence of the postulates of nineteenth-century enlightenment, leads in some cases to implicit or explicit forms of discrimination against cultures or groups different from the dominant ones. This discrimination arises from complex networks of social judgments and meaning, historically and collectively constructed, which we often fail to identify (Escalante 2009). These negative representations are transformed into acts of discrimination when they turn into specific behaviors towards a group or its members, reproducing an asymmetry in value and in distribution of power between social groups. The most valued and esteemed groups assume a differentiated power (Reinoso and Thezá 2005) and impose their own worldviews. The homogenizing policies or standardization typical of modern societies, or simply the unequal treatment to which excluded groups and minorities are subjected, are some examples of the imposition of the dominant culture. Faced with these initiatives, the idea of justice appears to focus not only on the redistribution of certain material benefits but also on the prevention of humiliation or disparagement (Honneth 2010). Recent struggles for the recognition of differences have gradually encouraged different formerly subjugated groups to start claiming

their rights. Philosophical-theoretical discussion about individual versus collective rights and all the sub-categories that have been created in the debate of ideas help us to understand the general framework of the argument between liberalism and multiculturalism and, most recently, as a consequence of the argument between the two former concepts, interculturalism. We find theorists who defend multiculturalism, others who adapt it to certain realities, others who do not believe it is the solution to the problems of discrimination and exclusion of certain minority groups in a society, and, finally, others who postulate different types of multiculturalism. Those who partially defend multicultural strategies argue that they promote equality in difference, allow people to express their ethnic identity and reduce external pressures for their assimilation (Kymlicka 1996). In this way, they aspire to generate a more practicable intercultural dialog.

Those who wish to resolve the tension between universalism and particularism propose a deliberative democracy in which controversy and dialog nourish the political sphere and exchange between cultures becomes ever more natural (Benhabib 2006). This stance is comparable to that of those who advocate an intercultural citizenry, in the sense of forging forms of political organization and coexistence between different cultures based on the recognition of differences and the social and economic inclusion and political participation of historically excluded or marginalized groups (Tubino 2004). Fidel Tubino argues that reparation or affirmative action policies should only be a temporary step in the structural transformation of a society into an intercultural system and not long-term policies. He understands this in its normative dimension or, in other words, as "ethical-political and educational proposals for the improvement or transformation of asymmetric relations between cultures, in order to generate public spaces for intercultural dialogue and deliberation that enable progress towards the concerted solution of common problems" (Tubino 2004). Similarly, Fraser and Honneth (2006) suggest that these asymmetric relations or mistaken recognition of identities and the resulting discrimination against them are fundamentally a matter of social status. Discrimination, therefore, has its origin in "an institutionalized relation of subordination and a violation of justice or, in other words, [is] represented by institutionalized patterns of cultural value in a way that prevents participation as an equal in social life, an injustice that is transmitted through social institutions" (Fraser and Honneth 2006). In this sense, these institutions are the expression of the dominant culture (Kymlicka 1996).

This tension between the dominant and the dominated that in Chile began with the Spanish Conquest still persists today and is expressed in crucial elements such as memory, symbolic violence, and epistemic privileges in the systemic racism and colonialism that sneak into both the work of the State and everyday interactions (Richards 2013). This asymmetric relationship is the root of certain stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory attitudes towards indigenous peoples that are commonly found in everyday conversation. The discrimination is not only symbolic but is also seen in the low socioeconomic position of these groups. As numerous studies have shown, the region's indigenous peoples are in an undeniably marginal position, with unequal access to and less control over the "life opportunities" of education, healthcare, housing, etc. (Del Popolo and Oyarce 2005). This is the reality documented by scientific studies,

but what is the perception of Chile's elite on these issues? Do they perceive discrimination occurring against these groups? And, if so, how do they explain it?

An unjust, racist, and classist society: a common, but nuanced, awareness of inequality

It is striking that half the Chilean population considers their society to be unjust, according to the results of the 2011 UDP National Survey, and only 14.7% believe it is just.

Chile is known for its high levels of inequality in income distribution, access to education and healthcare, etc. It is not difficult, based on these results, to predict a high perception of discrimination among the country's citizens. Indeed, the survey results indicate that 87.5% believe that Chileans are discriminatory.

As explained at the beginning of this paper, we are interested specifically in the views of the elites on this issue. The opinions of the country as a whole are given by poll results and the views expressed by social organizations, social manifestations, or opinion columns in the press. Our specific research focuses on how (or not) the peoples' demands manifest in the views of those who make decisions on behalf of the country as a whole. We believe it is essential to understand the perception of those who ultimately have decision-making power in the laws that are voted on and in the public policies and programs that are designed and implemented.

In general terms, the data obtained (both quantitative and qualitative) indicates that the Chilean elite perceives Chilean society to have high levels of discrimination. However, in the case of specific discrimination against the Mapuche, certain revealing nuances emerge. Almost 80% (77.9%) of members of Congress think that Chilean society is discriminatory (very discriminatory + discriminatory); a figure almost 10 percentage points below that of Chileans in general (87.5%). If we analyze this result based on the coalition to which the members of Congress belong,⁷ the differences are clear. Members on the Right have a lower perception of discrimination than those on the Left (62.5% and 90.3%, respectively).

If we look within each coalition, we find a small difference in the responses of the two Center-Right parties, with 72% of members of the National Renewal party (RN) indicating that Chilean society is discriminatory compared to 61.4% of members of the Independent Democratic Union (UDI). In the case of the Concertación, the Christian Democrat Party (PDC) thinks there is lower discrimination than the other parties while the Radical Social Democrat Party (PRSD) emerges as the most critical in this regard. Beyond these nuances, the four Concertación parties as a whole are considerably more critical in their answers than their counterparts on the Center-Right.

Members of Congress were then asked to evaluate a series of characteristics of Chilean society (Table 1) on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is democratic, just, pacific, tolerant, not racist, and not classist and 10 is authoritarian, unjust, violent, discriminatory, racist, and classist. The general results by type of congressional member (senators and Lower House representatives) are shown.

If we examine the characteristics given the worst scores by the congressional elite – classist/not classist, discriminatory/tolerant, unjust/just, and racist/not racist - we find that, in all cases, the views of members of the Left are more negative than those of the

Table 1. Perceptions of Chilean society among Lower House representatives and senators.

Position/ Party	Democratic/ Authoritarian	Peaceful/ Violent	Just/ Unjust	Tolerant/ Discriminatory	Not racist/ Racist	Not classist/ Classist
Lower House rep	oresentatives					
UDI	3.26	3.68	4.55	5.26	4.76	5.68
RN	4.41	4.47	5.41	6.24	5.71	6.53
PRI	6.00	4.00	5.00	6.50	5.50	7.50
PDC	3.74	3.21	5.79	5.89	5.68	6.53
PPD	4.72	4.83	6.11	6.39	6.00	6.89
PS	5.00	4.00	6.55	6.55	6.09	8.18
PC	6.67	5.00	6.67	8.00	7.00	8.00
PRSD	4.00	5.00	5.80	6.60	5.80	7.40
Independents	5.50	5.33	7.33	5.67	6.17	7.50
Total	4.15	4.10	5.55	5.96	5.54	6.61
Senators						
UDI	1.38	2.50	3.13	4.25	4.63	5.38
RN	2.00	3.50	4.25	4.75	4.88	6.25
PDC	2.89	3.78	5.33	6.00	6.00	7.44
PPD	3.75	3.50	7.00	6.75	7.00	9.25
PS	3.60	2.00	7.40	8.40	7.60	9.20
PRSD	5.00	5.00	10.00	9.00	7.00	10.00
Independents	2.00	3.00	5.50	6.00	5.50	8.00
Total	2.68	3.16	5.16	5.89	5.84	7.29

Source: Observatorio Político Electoral using data from the 2011 ICSO-UDP National Survey and the 2011/2012 ICSO-UDP survey of members of Congress. The question put to members of Congress was: "According to what you have seen and on a scale from 1 to 10, is Chilean society... Democratic/Authoritarian; Peaceful/Violent; Just/Unjust; Tolerant/Discriminatory; Not racist/Racist; Not classist/Classist?"

Right. It is logical that these four characteristics received a poor evaluation since classism and racism are forms of intolerance and social injustice denounced especially by Left-wing and Center-Left movements and parties.

Looking in greater detail at perceptions of justice/injustice among senators and Lower House representatives, we see clear differences according to the political party they represent, with a larger proportion of those on the Right responding that society is just compared those on the Left and Center-Left. It is, however, not only party lines that are decisive. When we look at general opinions about how discriminatory Chileans are, we also find differences by gender. Female members of Congress are much more critical than their male colleagues, with all of them answering "discriminatory" (68.2%) or "very discriminatory" (22.7%), while men opt in at least 23.5% of cases for "not very discriminatory" or "not discriminatory at all". Using an intersectional framework to conceptualize and analyze multiple forms of discrimination, we can observe that women experience a faster rate of increase in their endorsement of affirmative action policies. Perceptions of gender, age, and race-based discrimination are significantly and positively correlated with one another (Harnois 2014; Bohmert and DeMaris 2015).

There are few extreme answers, but they are consistent with the trends described so far. It is only in the UDI (the most Right-wing party) and in a very small percentage (2.1%) that we find the perception that Chilean society is not at all discriminatory. The view that Chilean society is very discriminatory is more prevalent on the Center-Left than on the Right, with 36.4% of PPD representatives taking this view, followed closely by members of the PSRD and the PS with 33.3% and 31.3%, respectively. It is striking that, in the UDI, responses that Chilean society is "not very discriminatory" or "not discriminatory at all" total 36.2%, whereas in the PRSD, the most critical party with

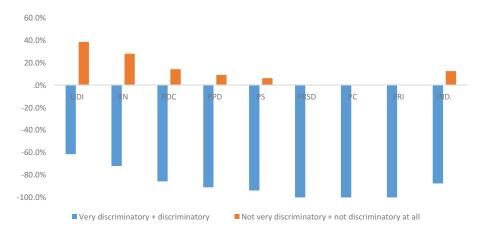


Figure 1. Perceptions of discrimination in Chilean society among members of congress by political party. Source: ICSO-UDP survey of members of Congress (December 2011–January 2012).

respect to the discriminatory nature of Chileans, all its representatives answered either "very discriminatory" or "discriminatory". Thus the most extreme perceptions are found on the one hand in the UDI, which has a more positive vision of Chilean society and continues to express the view that there is not discrimination in Chile, and on the other hand among members of the PRSD, PC, and PRI, in which, as clearly seen in Figure 1, views about discrimination are much more negative and problematic.

Mapuche and discrimination: extended coherence for congressional discrepancies

We have so far looked at discrimination in general terms but now turn specifically to discrimination against the Mapuche people and the reasons the elite give to explain this discrimination. A first interesting point is that members of Congress identify "being Mapuche" as a third factor in discrimination after "municipal district in which a person lives" and "being homosexual". In "municipal district in which a person lives", there are not large differences between members of the Right and the Left, but, in "being homosexual" and "being Mapuche", perceptions vary considerably by political party. Members of the Right attach much less importance to "being Mapuche" as a factor in discrimination (45.9%) compared to 88.8% of members on the Left.

A majority of the Chilean elite believes that the Mapuche suffer discrimination. However, the views expressed are contradictory, with nuances between the coalitions as well as by the gender of members of Congress and their region of origin. Our conjecture is that those representing the Araucanía Region have had closer experiences with the issue and, therefore, a more informed opinion. In order to investigate this, we analyzed the similarities and differences between the views expressed by interviewees.

A review of the data shows that a majority of members of Congress believe that the Mapuche people suffer from a high level of discrimination. As the UDP National Survey shows, the options "very discriminated" and "discriminated" account for 76.6%, a not insignificant difference from the data for discrimination in general. In other words, the political elite considers Chileans to be discriminatory, but does not give the same

emphasis to the Mapuche as the object of discrimination as they do to discrimination in general terms. This could be due to the "egalitarian liberalism" (Villavicencio 2010) that exists in both the Chilean constitution and among the country's elite. The idea that Chileans share an identical set of rights could manifest as blindness to cultural diversity, subjugating dimensions such as ethnicity to broader structural problems and suggest that recognition issues are not a relevant dimension in their perception.

In order to gain a better understanding of these results, we analyzed the same question with different variables and found significant differences. The gender of members of Congress appears to be decisive in their views on the issue. The perceptions of women are significantly more negative than those of men, with a larger proportion believing that there is discrimination against Mapuche (95.5% versus 73.3% of men). In addition, we found differences between Lower House representatives (26.7% consider Mapuche to be very discriminated against) and senators (only 7.9% take this view).

Another variable that we used to explain these results is the region the members of Congress represent. Those who were elected in the Araucanía Region, ¹⁰ and therefore have been more in touch with Mapuche issues, are more likely to believe that Mapuches are discriminated against in Chile (85.5%) than representatives from the rest of the country (75.7%).

Finally, when we analyze the data by political party, we find that, in the case of the Right-wing parties, the proportion of senators and Lower House representatives who consider that the Mapuche are not at all or not very discriminated against is largest in the UDI. In the Center-Left coalition, on the other hand, 59.1% of members of the PPD and 50% of those of the PRSD responded that the Mapuche are very discriminated against in Chile compared to only 4% and 2.1% of members of the RN and the UDI, respectively. In other words, within the coalitions, members of the UDI take a more positive view than those of the RN regarding the treatment the Mapuche receive in Chile, while in the case of the Center-Left, the PRSD is the most pessimistic. The Leftwing parties that do not form part of the Center-Left coalition, like the PRI and the PC, have even more extreme views.¹¹

We have already described the general perceptions of the population and congressional elites in contemporary Chile. However, to what extent are the arguments of the congressional representatives similar to those put forward by the economic elite and the Araucanía Region's elite? What are the arguments of those who do not believe there is discrimination against the Mapuche? In order to answer these questions, we compare the views of members of Congress with those of other members of the elite. As the second set of data is not statistically representative, the aim here is to offer a first comparison of the contents of their discourse. This comparison allows us to draw an initial conclusion: arguments inside and outside of Congress are similar.

Among those who are aligned, in general, with Right-wing positions, the predominant belief is that in Chile there is not discrimination against the Mapuche and that all Chileans are treated equally. As the following testimonies show, this belief finds its roots in the traditional liberal position:

I think that Chile isn't a discriminatory country because, for example, the Mapuche today, those who are receiving education, are in different levels in different places in society. So I think Chile isn't a discriminatory country [...] there are elements, yes [...] And, in relation

to the Mapuche world, I don't think so, you know? I think it's not so much like that here in Temuco, they are well integrated with the people in the city [...] it's what I see from a distance but, as I say, I'm not that closely involved yet. (Regional elite 12, male, Araucanía)

This quotation hints at the tendency of the elite to integrate the Mapuche into Chilean society and not to recognize their difference. According to this group of interviewees, Chile has progressed in integrating its indigenous peoples. This is exemplified in the following fragment from one of our interviews:

if you want to tell me that, as a country, we discriminate, I don't think that's true; on the contrary, I think that what the country has wanted, especially in recent years, is to find precisely how to reintegrate or reinsert them. (Economic elite 16, male, Santiago)

As the data above shows, this is not a widespread stance. On the contrary, what we see across the different groups of the elite studied is a perception of effective discrimination against the Mapuche people. Among representatives of the economic elite, we find first the view that the Mapuche are generally discriminated against by Chileans:

There is a very negative stereotype. I'm talking in general, what's in the papers when there's a protest. That's one thing. But in everyday conversation, the community in general, there's a very bad, very negative stereotype, that the Mapuche are drunks, that all they do is ask for things. I think it's a pretty negative image. Now, second, there's very little feeling for, very little pride in our indigenous peoples. What one hears is that we didn't get lucky and get the Mayans, the Aztecs or the Incas; instead, we got the Mapuche. (Economic elite 12, male, southern Chile)

In general, when they think about how Chilean society as a whole reacts to the Mapuche people, both the regional and economic elites are critical:

First, there's social discrimination against the Mapuche. I think that the Chilean population sees the Mapuche as stubborn, with bad habits, violent. They're not a society that's welcome. And they are looked down on by the majority of Chileans. That's the perception I have, without any basis of any type. In general, people look at them very negatively. And, in general, they discriminate against them in the sense that, if they need to hire someone, and one is Mapuche and the other one isn't, they'll hire the other one. (Economic elite 15, male, Santiago)

When asked who they believe discriminates most against the Mapuche in Chile, several interviewees pointed to farmers or large landowners in the area of the ongoing unresolved conflict for the recovery of ancestral lands. Interviewees also argued that their exclusion reflects the difficulty of incorporating them into the production system:

with the Mapuche in particular, it's often much more difficult to interact, adapt them to a system, a routine, a habit or to get them to focus on the production one requires. It's as if they don't respond well to the instructions or orders that one gives and this tends to mean that afterwards one has to manage them a bit on the side-lines. You prefer not to get involved with them because you know that the outcome may not be so satisfactory. (Economic elite 7, male, southern Chile)

After talking about discrimination from the standpoint of an observer, interviewees tend to mix this more overall perspective of Chilean society with their own personal opinions and we find quite recurrent and negative views about the Mapuche. These views appear in reference to the labor market and hiring as well as the Mapuche culture

or simply their social or personal characteristics, with traditional prejudices about them surfacing:

The Mapuche don't have much that redeems them. Not personal aspects, not intelligence, not special aptitudes. It's a matter of looking at what we have gotten from them. The music; it's a disaster. It doesn't make any sort of contribution. It's very boring, sticks with one theme, monotonous, without any sparkle of any kind. That can be extrapolated to other characteristics of their cultural level, their degree of insertion into society [...] My personal opinion of the Mapuche is a bad one. I find they are arrogant, violent, not very pleasant with the rest of the population. They believe too much in the independence issue, they evoke their ancestors. (Economic elite 15, male, Santiago)

This coincides perfectly with the results seen above concerning perceptions of discrimination. To summarize, and recognizing nuances among their discourses, the reasons that Chile's elite gives for discrimination against the Mapuche people tend to be connected to a cultural comprehension problem, such as non-Mapuches not understanding them or Mapuches having a different worldview and being strange. The traditional stigma attached to the Mapuche - that they are drunks, beggars, lazy, and violent - emerged in several of our conversations with representatives of the different elites.

A sense of discrimination: positive, negative, and collateral effects

The different populations studied confirm that a large part of public opinion in Chile and the country's elite recognize that their society tends to discriminate against some of its members and, particularly, those who belong to or descend from indigenous peoples. In the case of members of Congress, we found that differences by Right-Left, menwomen, and senators-Lower House representatives were consistent throughout the different dimensions analyzed, with the first of each pair associated with a less sensitive view of the Mapuche issue and the second with a more sensitive view. In addition, the testimonies gathered from the economic, expert, and regional elites helped to identify a certain correlation between the positions and arguments of members of Congress and those who participate in decisions made outside of Congress and at other levels of contemporary Chilean society. But beyond this generalized recognition of discrimination, how is it manifested and what challenges does it pose?

Reluctance to recognize the Mapuche problem is seen clearly among both Center-Right members of Congress and representatives of the regional and economic elites. Representatives of large companies insist that, in hiring employees, they make no distinction based on ethnic descent:

The truth is, no, I don't think we discriminate because I don't see a negative bias with regard to hiring Mapuche or non-Mapuche individuals. I think that, in general, hiring decisions tend to be based on other characteristics, not ethnic descent. (Economic elite 9, male, Santiago)

This testimony reflects the previously mentioned opinions of certain representatives of the elite that the Mapuche do not suffer discrimination or unequal treatment. These opinions are at odds with those of other observers of the daily reality of the Mapuche who interact with economic and political leaders in the Araucanía Region. In this

group, and particularly among representatives of the regional elite, we find a sense of the persistence of a clear conflict between farmers and the Mapuche:

There are some sectors of local communities that are simply very discriminatory. I would say that these are groups that come from the landowning families because they have a cultural background that, in general, underestimates the Mapuche as people [...] considering them as among the most underprivileged sectors of society and on the lowest rung in terms of giving them opportunities and valuing them as people. (Regional elite 10, male, Araucanía)

Those who do not believe that there is discrimination against the Mapuche tend to belong mostly to the most conservative wing of the Right and some even think - and not to an insignificant extent – that, if there is some type of discrimination, it is actually of a positive nature. In other words, some interviewees feel that Mapuche are given benefits simply because they are Mapuche, often to the detriment of non-Mapuche people. Those who express this view reject this policy of positive discrimination because they believe that the Chilean state should treat everyone equally. They suggest that, today, it is even an advantage to have a surname or name that is recognizably Mapuche because it means that these people or their children can demand certain benefits not available to others who are not Mapuche:

Today, everyone registers himself or herself as Mapuche. Before the Mapuche discriminated against themselves. Now that's not the case, the guy goes to CONADI, 12 says this is my name and family and this is my surname or my second surname or my third surname because they get a lot of benefits. (Economic elite 1, male, southern Chile)

In other words, some interviewees in the Araucanía Region as well as some representatives of the economic elite - from southern Chile and Santiago - view the different treatment of minorities with mistrust because in the last decades affirmative action has been under sustained assault: in courts, legislatures, and the media, opponents have condemned it as an unprincipled program of racial, ethnic, and gender preferences that threatens fundamental liberal values of fairness, equality, and democratic opportunity (Herring and Henderson 2012). In the justifications they put forward, they do not mention the issue of the social marginalization historically suffered by the Mapuche people or the radical differences in cultural identity. Instead, they argue that both Mapuche and non-Mapuche workers are equally poor, and thus should all receive equal help without any special benefits for anyone.

On the other side, authors who defend the position of providing special rights justify these as compensation and suggest different ways of repairing the harm caused in the past, such as affirmative action policies in order to achieve social justice, participatory parity, quotas in political representation, constitutional recognition, etc. When referring to positive or reverse discrimination (Dovidio and Gaertner 1998 in Saiz, Rapimán and Mladinic 2008), they mean the compensatory policies that the government implements in order to repair harm caused in the past. It is assumed that these policies are temporary, remaining in place only until the groups reach a level of equality. In practice, however, these reparation measures are often kept in place over time and eventually generate a certain sense of injustice among non-beneficiaries. In the case of Chile, there has been a marked rejection of such policies for the Mapuche on the grounds that they receive unjustified privileges (Saiz, Rapimán and Mladinic 2008). When addressing the issue of positive discrimination, the elite interviewed prefer to



sidestep the differences and attempt to integrate the ethnic minority under a liberal legal framework. This view is apparent in many of our interviewees, particularly those from the Araucanía Region:

I think that rights must be equal for all Chileans and I think [the Mapuche] also form part of the Chilean nationality, and we think they should, in this sense, integrate into the way we all operate. What happens when there are special rights for a certain people at the expense of others? We've seen that in the Araucanía Region, a Mapuche suddenly has a subsidy for 'x' reason but the non-Mapuche who's equally poor, who lives next door, doesn't qualify. Why not? Because of not being Mapuche. I think then the reason for the differentiation, instead of helping the integration of society, creates an element of distortion. (Economic elite 9, male, Santiago)

If we analyze the perception of the different elite groups (political, regional, and economic), we find - based on the opinions and arguments they provide - a certain tension in their views concerning positive discrimination for the Mapuche people. Its emphatic rejection by the Right does not, in this case, go hand-in-hand with a consistent defense of these policies by a majority of Left-wing party members. When the two groups are asked what they think about providing special rights or compensatory policies, the reaction is quite generalized. The immediate response is to talk about equality above all else and the damage that can be caused by positive discrimination. Many conclude that, although it sounds very good to talk about it, the ultimate goal should really be for Mapuche and non-Mapuche individuals to have access to the same benefits and same rights.

Given the difference in the perceptions of political parties that we have described above, the criticism by the different representatives of the Chilean elite of special benefits is equivalent to the argument of Will Kymlicka refuted at a theoretical level by different authors. It is argued that, in this case, differentiated rights for minority groups can be detrimental to "society as a whole" as they could draw attention to the differences between the groups:

Why create the idea of recognizing the difference of an indigenous people, why give them special characteristics that are from another culture. The Italians could then demand the same thing, I don't know [...] I think [...] I'm inclined to believe what I said before. That when you live in a country, you have to respect that country's rules. And making exceptions because they're from another culture, another country, is a mistake. (Economic elite 15, male, Santiago)

Indeed, even the groups most sensitive to this problem are very cautious and, at times, critical in their evaluation of the positive discrimination measures implemented for the Mapuche. Many seem to conclude that, rather than helping to integrate the Mapuche and give them equal rights with other Chileans, they have resulted in a greater withdrawal by and rejection of these groups.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to explore the perceptions of the Chilean elite, who, based on the thesis of Burton and Higley (1987), we define as individuals who are national leaders in different fields (political, governmental, economic, religious, and intellectual) and, given their position, can influence national politics. We started by looking at the elites' perception of discrimination in general in Chilean society and then moved on to their opinion on the Mapuche issue. We also described what the elites think about effective discrimination and possible discrimination against persons of Mapuche appearance. Finally, we analyzed the opinions of these groups on the possibility of providing special benefits for Chile's indigenous peoples and the consequences this decision could have.

Several conclusions can be drawn based on our results. On the one hand, quantitative data reveals that half the population of Chile and their congressional elites recognize that there is a high level of discrimination in Chile and that this affects the Mapuche in particular on an everyday basis. Nevertheless, there is a certain gap between the elite's perception and the perception of Chilean society in general: the political elite tends to have a more positive point of view than the country's citizens on all issues related to discrimination. If we look closely at the results obtained by this study, we also find significant differences within the political elite, with Right-wing members of Congress (UDI and RN) expressing less critical views on discrimination than those from the Center-Left parties (PDC, PRSD, PPD and PS). Being female and coming from certain regions also tends to be associated with a higher sensitivity to discrimination, especially to the disadvantages that Mapuche people experience.

Moreover, the in-depth discourse analyses yielded two convergent conclusions. The first finding was a strong convergence in the opinions of Right-wing politicians and businesspeople on the one hand, and the opinions of Left-wing politicians on the other. The differences found among members of Congress seem to accurately reflect an ideological difference in Chile based on socioeconomic status. In Chile, programmatic divisions between Left and Right are of great importance in structuring national policy, among the congressional elite and voters alike. The party system covers the full political spectrum, reflecting and straining their different positions on the functions of the State and its relationship with the market through opposing (though nuanced) views of socioeconomic policy (Nolte 2004).

The testimonies of the elite show a common perplexity with regard to Mapucherelated public policy. For those involved in the discussion and design of public policies to promote Mapuche rights, this research reveals a significant paradox. In all the opinions studied, an overwhelming recognition of discrimination goes hand-in-hand with a generalized disillusionment with strategies of positive discrimination. The interviewees have a fairly negative perception of this type of policy, and this cuts across all the elite groups interviewed. The arguments given against this type of positive discrimination measure are that they do not contribute to the construction of an integrated Chilean society and a single nation, and that in the end they exacerbate differences because those who do not receive the benefits consider them unjust. We immediately find universalist views like "we're all equally Chilean" and "we must all abide by the legal framework existing in Chile". This paradox cannot be ignored by those who, as party members or experts, wish to increase the respect for and advocate for indigenous peoples. In a society in which the public and a significant part of the elite perceive there to be a high level of discrimination, public debate is called for to address the most appropriate ways to recognize differences and step towards dialog between the different cultures sharing the same territory.

The results of this research warrant further evaluation in light of the questions it does not answer and those which, although raised, need to be addressed in greater depth. It is clear that research into the opinions of elites using semi-structured interviews and surveys provides access to the views they consider suitable for public expression. Their testimonies should be interpreted with caution, without assuming consistency of behavior or the preservation of their views over time. The elites' sensitivity to discrimination is a sign of the recognition the country's indigenous peoples have achieved in public life and general public opinion in Chile. Just as opinion surveys are sensitive to changes in the public mood, the elite's discourses are related to the particular context in which they occur: they express the state of public debate and political correctness more than the deep beliefs of the politicians and businesspeople themselves. Therefore the opinions collected cannot be assumed to be consistent or definitive. In order to further analyze these views, it would be necessary to advance along two convergent paths: on the one hand, complementing this research with other expressions of sensitivity to discrimination (proposed legislation, election results, openness to complaints) and, on the other, monitoring views over time to see whether, when faced with changes in public life, a significant number of interviewees more openly put forth positions that their audiences would today consider "politically" incorrect.

Notes

- 1. The decision to focus on the Mapuche community is based on the demographic importance of this ethnic group in the Chilean indigenous population. According to the 2009 National Socioeconomic Characterization Survey (CASEN) in Chile, 1,188,340 people, or 7% of the population, identified themselves as belonging to one of Chile's indigenous peoples, and, of these, 87.9% (924,560 people) described themselves as Mapuche.
- 2. This key affirmation was popularized by the so-called Machiavellist theorists (Burnham 1945). The iron law notion of oligarchies refers specifically to Michels and his study of the evolution of Socialist parties (Michels 2008).
- 3. Chile's ideological map comprises the following political parties: Communist Party (PC), Socialist Party (PS), Party for Democracy (PPD), Radical Social Democrat Party (PRSD), Christian Democrat Party (PDC) (with the latter four corresponding to the Center-Left coalition known as the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia) and the National Renewal (RN) and Independent Democratic Union (UDI) parties (which form the Center-Right Alianza). In addition, there are the Independent Regionalist Party (PRI), the Broad Social Movement (MAS), and the Independents (IND).
- 4. Fifty percent live in the Bío-Bío, Araucanía, Los Lagos, and Los Ríos Regions, principally in Cautín and Malleco. Historically, this part of southern Chile has been the home of the Mapuche culture and is the focus of this people's territorial demands.
- 5. See Clarke and Sison (2003), Hossain (2005), and Reis and Moore (2005).
- 6. For further details about the philosophical-political debate, see Kymlicka (1996, 2003), Benhabib (1996, 2006), Taylor (2003), and Wieviorka (2003).
- 7. As this corresponds to a census of the members of the Chilean Congress, not a sample, the analysis is not inferential. All comparisons between political parties consider those that form the Alianza (Center-Right) and the Concertación (Center-Left) as well as the PRI, the PC, and the Independents. For reasons of statistical secrecy, the MAS is not included in the analysis because it has only one representative.
- 8. In Chile, the elites have a clear pattern of territorial concentration in the form of widespread residential segregation. This is particularly acute in the city of Santiago,



- where patterns of location of the extreme social groups (rich and poor) are extremely homogeneous (Rodríguez and Arriagada 2004).
- 9. From a total of 158 congressional members, 120 representatives, and 38 senators, 13.9% (22) are women and 86.1% (136) are men. The senate is composed of 33 (86.8%) male senators and five (13.2%) female senators, while the Lower House is composed of 103 (85.8%) male representatives and 17 (14.2%) female representatives.
- 10. The senators and representatives interviewed were categorized into those representing the Araucanía Region (8.9%: four senators and 10 representatives) and those representing the other regions of the country.
- 11. We excluded members of Congress who are independent or do not belong to a party from this analysis because they lack a shared view on the issue.
- 12. The Ministry of Social Development's National Corporation for Indigenous Development.

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