

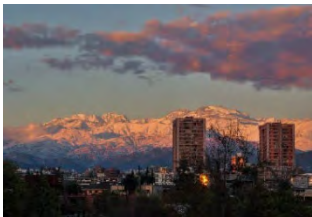
EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE **FIELD GUIDE**

Chile



About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.



The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 is the “Culture General” section, which provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Southern Cone.

Part 2 is the “Culture Specific” section, which describes unique



cultural features of Chilean society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training.

For further information, contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil or visit the AFCLC website at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/>.

Disclaimer: All text is the property of the AFCLC and may not be modified by a change in title, content, or labeling. It may be reproduced in its current format with the express permission of the AFCLC. All photography is provided as a courtesy of the US government, Wikimedia, and other sources. [Please scroll over images to view captions.](#)

PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value—freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.



Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible.

We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner

that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as “cultural domains” – in order to better understand the primary values and

characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.



Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are “people like me” or “people not like me.” Usually, we assume that those in the “like me” category share our perspectives and values.

12 Domains of Culture



AFCLC

This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It

helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.



Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of

what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

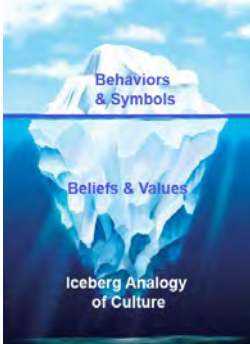
While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters.



Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).



In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel through the Southern Cone, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.



CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

The Southern Cone includes four countries on the South American continent: Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Scientists believe that early humans entered the region around 13,000 years ago. Between 5,000-2,500 years ago, they developed agriculture, and over time, some groups remained nomadic hunter-gatherers, while others settled in communities. By the 15th century, the population comprised a variety of ethnolinguistic groups, with some territories in northern Chile and Argentina controlled by the powerful Inca Empire from its center in present-day Peru.



In the 16th century, Spaniards conquered much of the Americas, seeking wealth, enhanced social status, and the spread of Catholicism. Columbus touched on the Venezuelan coast in 1498, while other explorers landed on Colombia's Caribbean coast in 1499, then conquered Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia by 1541. Meanwhile, Spanish and Portuguese explorers were sailing along the Southern Cone's Atlantic coastline. In 1536, Spaniards founded Buenos Aires (present-day capital of Argentina) and Asunción (present day capital of Paraguay) a year later. Moving overland from Peru, other Spanish conquerors founded Santiago (Chile's modern-day capital) in 1541. By contrast, Uruguay saw little Spanish settlement until the early 17th century, then the founding of Montevideo (its present-day capital) in 1726 as a counter to the Portuguese

presence in neighboring Brazil. The Spaniards introduced horses, cattle, and sheep, establishing **estancias** (large ranches) that relied on forced indigenous labor or enslaved Africans (primarily in Uruguay) and later, **gauchos** (hired ranch hands, often European immigrants). Over the years, the region's indigenous populations reduced due to conflict, disease, famine, and their exploitation in forced labor systems. In Paraguay, the Catholic Church forcibly resettled indigenous people in order to convert them. Some indigenous communities violently resisted the Europeans for centuries.

In the early 19th century, some local leaders began to seek autonomy from the Spanish Crown. Following several years of armed struggle, Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay achieved independence by 1818. Meanwhile, Uruguay, though claimed by Argentina, was annexed by Brazil in 1821, leading to war. After international mediation, the independent state of Uruguay was created as a buffer between Brazil and Argentina in 1828.

Border disputes and economic competition spurred conflicts across South America in subsequent decades. Chile invaded neighboring Bolivia and Peru in 1836, and Paraguay's violent confrontations with Brazil and Argentina in 1858 subsided only after the appearance of US and British navies. The devastating 1864-70 War of the Triple Alliance pitted Paraguay against Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay and resulted in the deaths of two-thirds of Paraguay's male residents and the loss of one-quarter of its territory. In 1883, Chile gained new territories when it won the War of the Pacific against Peru and Bolivia.



Meanwhile, indigenous resistance in Argentina and Chile had continued. To open additional territory for European immigrants, those governments launched campaigns

against the indigenous rebels in the late 19th century, killing or displacing thousands from their traditional lands. In the 1930s, Paraguay prevailed in the Chaco War against Bolivia, gaining disputed territory but causing significant losses to both sides.

Beginning in the mid-20th century, a wave of authoritarian leaders seized power. Prominent dictators included Juan Perón in Argentina (1946-55 and 1973-74), Gen Augusto Pinochet in Chile (1973-90), and Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay (1954-89).



Such regimes typically imposed censorship, banned trade unions, dissolved national legislatures, and outlawed political activities, though they often received the support of the US due to their anti-communist stances. These regimes also frequently detained, tortured, and murdered tens of thousands of their own people. In the 1970s, the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile and military regimes in Argentina and Uruguay perpetuated numerous human rights abuses, with the plight of the “disappeared” victims receiving worldwide attention.

In the 1980s, democracy and civilian rule returned to the Southern Cone. In recent decades, Argentina and Paraguay have experienced political volatility and serious economic challenges. Although a stable democracy, Chile struggles to respond to ongoing social unrest prompted by wealth inequalities. Considered one of the world's strongest democracies today, Uruguay has the region's lowest levels of corruption, poverty, and inequality.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. The Spanish conquest and colonial rule changed society in the Southern Cone considerably. Further, the decimation of the indigenous population, import of enslaved Africans, and arrival of European immigrants in the 19th-20th centuries permanently altered the region's ethnic and racial makeup.

Today, the residents of the Southern Cone are mostly of European or mixed European and indigenous ancestry, with

most Argentines, Uruguayans, and Chileans identifying with their European roots. By contrast, Paraguayans are proud of their mixed Spanish and indigenous Guaraní heritage, viewing it as the fundamental aspect of Paraguayan national identity. Some 2.4% of Argentines and Uruguayans and 2% of Paraguayans identify solely as indigenous, compared to 13% of Chileans. Almost 5% of Uruguayans claim a Black identity, and a small number of Chileans and Argentines also have African ancestry. Generally, indigenous and Black residents across the region tend to be poorer, less educated, and face discrimination. Indigenous communities also struggle to attain rights to their traditional lands.

All the Southern Cone countries today are Presidential Republics. Since the 1983 return of democracy, most Argentine Presidents had been adherents of Peronism – the populist and nationalist policies espoused by former President Perón. Taking office in 2023, President Javier Gerardo Milei is taking a different approach and describes himself as an “anarcho-capitalist” seeking to reduce bureaucracy in the Argentine government.

Between 2006 and 2022, the Chilean Presidency had alternated between socialist Michelle Bachelet and conservative Sebastián Piñera. Although representing opposite ends of the political

spectrum, they both faced large-scale public unrest. Since 2022, Gabriel Boric Font, Chile's youngest President and a progressive, has focused his term on constitutional reforms.

Except for the period 2008-13, the conservative



Colorado Party (ANR) has dominated politics in Paraguay since 1947. Taking office in 2023, Santiago Peña Palacios actually started his political life as a member of the Liberal Party but switched parties in 2017 and was elected representing the Colorado Party.

Since the 1985 return of democracy in Uruguay, parties and coalitions from across the political spectrum have held the Presidency. After 15 years of rule by a center-left coalition, the conservatives returned to power with the 2019 victory of Luis Lacalle Pou. Then, in a close vote in 2024, Uruguay elected Yamandú Ramón Antonio Orsi Martínez of the left-leaning Broad Front party as President.

Relationships in the region are occasionally tense due to territorial disputes, illegal activities in porous border regions, and the influx of illegal migrants, most recently from Venezuela. In 1982, Argentina invaded and briefly held the United Kingdom (UK)-administered Falkland Islands. Today, Argentina continues to claim these and other UK-held territories in the South Atlantic, occasionally leading to tense relations.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

The Spanish conquerors introduced Christianity beginning in the early 16th century. As Roman Catholicism spread, the Catholic Church became entrenched in colonial life. Today, the Catholic Church remains an important part of many communities, a significant provider of social services, and an influential organization with sometimes strong political and social influence.

Roman Catholicism remains the dominant religion in the region, with around 90% of Paraguayans and some two-thirds of Argentines and Chileans identifying as Catholic. By contrast, less than half of Uruguayans claim a Catholic identity, while over one-third report religious beliefs without any formal affiliation. At least 15% of Argentines, Chileans, and Uruguayans



and around 6% of Paraguayans are Protestant Christians. Secularism is growing in the region, with some 17% of Chileans and 19% of Argentines reporting no religious affiliation in recent surveys.

Other faiths with a presence in the region include Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith. Argentina has the region's largest Jewish (some 220,000) and Muslim (up to 1 million) populations.

None of the Southern Cone countries names an official religion, though the Argentine Constitution grants a preferential legal status to the Roman Catholic Church.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of Southern Cone societies. Regional inhabitants tend to maintain strong connections with family members, supporting them emotionally and financially, while providing physical care for elderly or ailing kin if needed. Residence patterns differ somewhat across the region, though multiple generations often



reside together in one household or live in close proximity.

While close family ties mean relatives have some influence over children's choice of spouses, both genders generally choose their own partners. Both Spanish traditions and

Roman Catholic teachings strongly value marriage as an institution and discourage divorce. Nevertheless, divorce rates have risen in recent years, as women have gained social and economic independence.

Most residents live in urban areas, notably over 96% of Uruguayans and around 93% of Argentines and 88% of Chileans. By contrast, less than two-thirds of Paraguayans are urban dwellers. Urbanization has changed life in many areas. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available in urban areas, family structures have become more diverse.

While many upper income residents in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Santiago inhabit luxurious high-rise apartments, many cities lack affordable housing. As a result, some residents occupy crowded sub-standard housing in makeshift communities on urban peripheries.

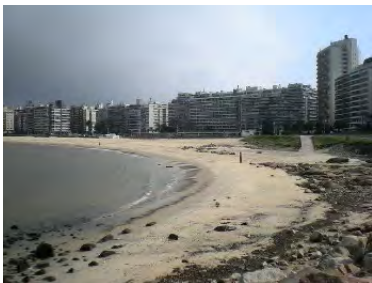
5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The cultures of the Southern Cone traditionally privilege the male's role as provider and leader. **Machismo**, or masculine behavior and pride, is an important element of male identity in many areas, while women traditionally occupy subordinate domestic roles. Women have acquired equal rights under the law, though social, economic, and political inequalities between the genders remain.

Women face continued challenges to their participation in the workforce. In much of the region, women still assume the traditional roles of

wives and mothers, oftentimes having to balance both domestic duties and employment in the workforce. Moreover, women often face gender discrimination in hiring and promotion processes. Female workforce participation rates range from a high of 60% in Paraguay to around 51% in Chile.



Women have a long history of serving in public office in the Southern Cone. When Isabel Martínez de Perón assumed the Argentine Presidency following her husband's 1974 death, she became the world's first female President. Since then, both Argentina and Chile have had female heads of state. Generally, Argentina has the largest female participation in politics, ranking 17th in the world in 2022, when women held over 44% of seats in the national legislature. Paraguay tends to have the lowest rates, with women holding some 15% of such seats in the 2023 legislative elections.



Fertility rates have fallen significantly in recent decades, with Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay averaging fewer than 2 children per woman and Argentina around 2.2. The decrease has been starkest in Paraguay, with the rate declining from 6.5

to 2.3 children per woman between 1960-2023. Since 2012 and 2020, abortion is legal in Uruguay and Argentina, respectively. In Chile and Paraguay, the procedure is illegal except in a few circumstances.

In 2010, Argentina became the first Latin American country to legalize same-sex marriage. Uruguay followed in 2012 and Chile in 2022. Uruguay has since emerged as a Latin American leader in homosexual rights, permitting homosexual individuals to serve openly in the military. Same-sex marriage remains illegal in Paraguay.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

As a result of the Spanish conquest and colonialism, Spanish is an official language in every Southern Cone country and is the

region's most widely spoken language. However, Paraguay's Constitution also names Guaraní, an indigenous language, as an official one alongside Spanish. Over 90% of Paraguayans speak Guaraní, though most also speak Spanish. As of 2021, Chilean law outlines protections for nine indigenous languages yet grants them no official recognition. Chileans are hopeful these languages will receive official recognition in Chile's new Constitution.

Some Argentines and Uruguayans speak a Spanish variety having an accent and vocabulary resembling those of certain Italian dialects. Along the Uruguay-Brazil border, some residents speak a mixture of Portuguese and Spanish.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

While education has improved across the region in recent years, quality and completion vary. Chile and Uruguay performed highest in the most recent international assessments, though they, like all the Southern Cone countries, show large gaps between high- and low-achieving students.

Access to education has increased significantly in recent decades, especially at pre-primary and secondary levels. Generally, children from poor and rural backgrounds are less likely to attend school and more likely to receive a lower-quality education. Argentina and Chile lead the region in secondary enrollment rates. By contrast, Paraguay lags in enrollment at all levels, from pre-primary to secondary. Uruguay has the region's highest repetition rates at the lower secondary level.



Literacy rates reflect the region's varied education landscape, ranging from 95% in Paraguay to 97% in Chile and nearly universal in Argentina and Uruguay. Public investment in education also varies, usually lowest in Paraguay.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. While the pace of life in the Southern Cone is somewhat faster than in many other parts of Latin America, establishing and maintaining relationships often take precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner. The workday runs on a schedule similar to the US, though some businesses and shops may close for mid-day break of around 2 hours, extending their hours into the evening.

The rhythm of daily life typically changes during national holidays, many reflecting Christian traditions and historical events. Communities throughout the region celebrate Carnival, an annual celebration prior to Christian Lent. Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay celebrate their independence from Spain and Uruguay from Brazil.



Concepts of personal space sometimes differ from those in the US. During conversations, regional residents often stand closer than most Americans. Men and women may interact differently than Americans are used to. For example, men shake hands both in greeting and parting, while some women may greet each other with a kiss on the cheek.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most of the Southern Cone's art, architecture, dance, music, and theater reflect the region's Roman Catholic heritage

and European and indigenous influences. Some traditional art and folklore centers on the South American cowboy, the *gaucho* in Argentina and Uruguay and *huaso* in Chile.

Dance and music infuse daily life in the Southern Cone and influence and reflect styles from across the Caribbean and Latin America. Andean styles featuring indigenous instruments like panpipes are common in some northern regions. Other styles more clearly demonstrate European influence, such as the polkas and waltzes common throughout the region and the **tango**, a music and dance style that emerged in Buenos Aires in the late 19th century. One traditional Paraguayan dance requires performers to balance bottles on their heads.



By far, soccer is the most popular sport across the region. Uruguay notably hosted the inaugural World Cup in 1930, and all the Southern Cone countries have had significant international success, producing players of world renown. With its *gaucho* tradition and vast **pampas** (treeless plains), Argentina has also achieved international preeminence in polo. Some games and sports in Chile and Paraguay are of indigenous origin.

Traditional handicrafts such as weaving, ceramics, leatherwork, and woodcarving have been revived in recent years. Paraguay's most famous handicraft is **ñandutí** lace, reflecting 16th-century European and Guaraní techniques. With a rich literary tradition, the region has produced writers of international influence, notably Argentina's Jorge Luis Borges, Chile's Pablo Neruda and Isabel Allende, Paraguay's Augusto Roa Bastos, and Uruguay's Eduardo Galeano, among others.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease

and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Cuisine varies across the region based on local products and tastes, though beef is universally popular. Argentina and Uruguay lead the world in beef consumption, typically more than twice the US per capita average. Along the coasts, residents consume seafood. In Paraguay and Chile, some dishes reflect indigenous traditions, such as the varied use of corn or maize. Argentina and Chile are large wine producers with high domestic consumption. **Maté**, an herbal beverage traditionally drunk from a gourd through a straw, is popular throughout the region.

Health in most of the region has improved in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Argentines, Chileans, and Uruguayans have access to healthcare that is subsidized by their governments, with high quality services and standards of care. Uruguay's



healthcare system is especially advanced, with almost 62 physicians per 10,000 people, almost double the Paraguay rate of 32, and greater than the US rate of 36.

In Paraguay, few residents have health insurance, and clinics and hospitals are often ill-equipped and understaffed, particularly in rural areas. Further, Paraguay has high rates of malnutrition and low immunization rates, resulting in a notable number of preventable deaths. Noncommunicable diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease cause at least 75% of deaths in all the Southern Cone countries, though Argentina and Paraguay also experience outbreaks of communicable diseases.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

Under Spanish colonial control, regional economies focused predominantly on large agricultural estates. After 19th-century independence, Chile experienced a mining boom, and while most economies continue to rely on the export of agricultural products today, they have become more diversified. The Southern Cone's largest economy is Argentina, followed by Chile, Uruguay, and then Paraguay.

The services sector comprises the largest part of GDP in all the countries, ranging from 63% in Uruguay to 48% in Paraguay, as of 2022. Tourism brings in significant income across the region, and Uruguay has emerged in recent decades as an important offshore banking center. Industry has seen significant growth in Paraguay, and mining continues to comprise about 14% of GDP in Chile in 2022.



Nevertheless, agriculture continues to provide most export products. For example, Argentina is one of Latin America's largest producers of grain, Paraguay is a world leader in soybean production, and livestock and associated products make up 40% of Uruguay's export income. Patagonia (a region comprising parts of Argentina and Chile) is home to about half the world's sheep, most sheared for their wool. Wheat and wine are other important agricultural products.

Paraguay tends to have the region's lowest standard of living and Uruguay the highest. Paraguay also has a large informal sector, with many residents laboring as small-scale subsistence farmers. Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay benefit from their membership in Mercosur, the Southern Common Market, a trading bloc that has signed free trade agreements with Chile, Japan, and the European Union, among others. Meanwhile, Chile has joined other international blocs, notably becoming the first South American member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2010.

As of late-2024, economic recovery is underway in the Southern Cone. While the region is still experiencing effects of the pandemic, experts expect economic growth to reach a moderate 2% in 2024.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Roads form the primary infrastructure in the region, though quality tends to deteriorate in rural areas. Argentina has one of Latin America's largest rail systems, though services have reduced in recent decades. While Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay have large container ports for sea-going vessels, landlocked Paraguay relies on river ports for access to the Atlantic Ocean.



Argentina and Chile depend predominantly on fossil fuels, and Argentina also has three nuclear reactors generating about 5% of its energy. While all the Southern Cone countries

rely on hydroelectric plants, Paraguay generates all its power from hydroelectricity and is one of the world's largest exporters of electricity. By contrast, Uruguay has become a world leader in solar and wind energy, generating some 46% of its energy from such sources in 2023.

Of the Southern Cone countries, Uruguay ranks highest in a 2024 worldwide press freedom ranking. In Chile and Paraguay, press freedoms are threatened by the concentration of media ownership in a few hands. Further, to prevent them from reporting on sensitive topics, journalists in Chile occasionally face harassment and those in Paraguay face threats and violence.

Telecommunications infrastructure is generally highly developed. Paraguay has the region's lowest rates of mobile phone users at 128 subscriptions per 100 people as of 2022, compared to more than 132 in the other countries. Internet use ranges from 77% of Paraguayans to 90% of Chileans and Uruguayans.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Southern Cone society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Chile.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Occupying a narrow strip of land along the southern half of western South America, Chile became a colony in Spain's global empire in the 16th century. After Chile's 1818 independence, booming shipping and mining industries brought wealth and regional prominence. Beginning in 1973, Chileans were denied some political freedoms and experienced human rights abuses during Gen Augusto Pinochet's 17-year military dictatorship. Since holding free and fair elections in 1989 experienced, Chile has maintained a stable multiparty democracy amid ongoing protests against economic inequalities.

Early History

Archeological finds indicate that humans inhabited present-day Chile some 15,000 years ago. Around 500 AD, people from present-day



Peru brought new methods of agriculture, textile weaving, and pottery to northern Chile, prompting the formation of larger settlements. By the late 15th century, some northern regions populated mostly by Aymara peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*) had come under the control of the powerful Inca Empire centered in present-day Peru to the north.

The Mapuche: By the time Spanish conquerors began entering the South American continent in the early 16th century, the Mapuche (see *Political and Social Relations*) comprised the region's largest indigenous group, numbering between 500,000-700,000. Organized into largely independent communities, the Mapuche occasionally joined forces against common threats, such as when the Inca sought to expand southwards into Mapuche territory.

The History of Easter Island

Scholars believe that the first people arrived on Easter Island (*Isla de Pascua* in Spanish) from Polynesia between the 1st-6th centuries AD. These islanders developed their own unique writing system and erected **moai** (monumental stone sculptures of human-like figures – see *Religion and Spirituality*). In the decades following their first contact with Europeans in 1722, the population was decimated due to civil war, disease, environmental changes, and attacks from Peruvian slavers. By 1877, Easter Island's native population, known as the Rapa Nui, had reduced to just 111 people.

In 1888, the weakened Rapa Nui allowed Chile to annex the island. For the next several decades, the local population was confined to the island's only town, Hanga Roa. The Chilean government took formal ownership of the rest of the island, leasing much of it to Chileans for sheep-raising. In 1935, the government designated the island as a national park. In 1953, administration passed to the Chilean Navy, which implemented a mandatory unpaid labor program for the Rapa Nui. Only in 1965 did the Rapa Nui receive Chilean citizenship. Today, Easter Island depends heavily on tourism. Meanwhile, the Rapa Nui still struggle to attain rights to their ancestral lands and waters (see *Political and Social Relations*).

The Spanish Conquest

Moving south from Peru, Spanish **conquistadores** (conquerors) entered the territory of present-day Chile in 1536 in search of gold, but having no success, soon retreated. Some 4 years later, the Spanish Crown granted Pedro de Valdivia the right to colonize Chile. In 1541, he founded Santiago (Chile's modern-day capital) and over the next decade expanded Spanish control of the region.

The Spaniards' mistreatment of the Mapuche, notably through an **encomienda** (forced labor) system, provoked significant resistance. In 1553, the Mapuche united under the leadership of a warrior named Lautaro and revolted, even capturing and killing Valdivia. The Mapuche rebels continued to engage the Spaniards for several years, temporarily halting their expansion.



While the Spaniards managed to quell the rebellion and resume their conquest southwards by 1557, this episode marked the start of some 300 years of Mapuche resistance to European colonization. Lautaro ultimately died in battle and remains a folk hero and symbol of resistance today.

Spanish Colonization

Over the next 250 years of Spanish control, a strict class system emerged that supported very little social mobility. At the top were

Spaniards, called **peninsulares**, followed by **criollos** (Spanish people born in the New World), and **mestizos** (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent). In addition to holding all economic and political power, the **peninsulares** also had the highest social prestige.

The colony remained largely of secondary importance to Spain due to its lack of gold, remote location, and constant threat of Mapuche attack. Nevertheless, the colonial period was marked by the growth of silver and copper industries and the rise of a local **criollo** elite. In the 17th-18th centuries, these **criollos** began to promote a Chilean national identity bolstered by the establishment of new institutions of higher learning (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Influenced by revolutions in the US and France, some **criollos** and **mestizos** protested Spain's domination of land, wealth, and commerce beginning in the late 18th century.

The Struggle for Independence

Political changes in early 19th century Europe had resounding effects in the Spanish colonies. In 1808, French Emperor

Napoleon I removed Spanish King Ferdinand VII from the throne and appointed his own brother King of Spain. Refusing to recognize the new King, a group of Chilean *criollos*, among them Bernardo O'Higgins, formed a **cabildo** (local council) on September 18, 1810 (celebrated as Independence Day today) as Chile's first national government.

Eager to stimulate the local economy, the new government lifted colonial restrictions on trade. When the resulting boom in business for Chile hurt revenues in neighboring Peru, Peruvian businessmen protested and began to advocate for Chile's return to Spanish control. In 1812, pro-Spanish forces invaded from Peru, and by 1814, Spain had reasserted its control of Chile.

O'Higgins and his followers fled to Argentina, where they joined forces with Argentine troops led by José de San Martín, a leader in that colony's independence movement. In a remarkable display of high-altitude military prowess, the generals led their troops across the Andes mountains into Chile in 1817. After a series of battles, they finally expelled the remaining pro-Spanish troops at the 1818 Battle of Maipú. As reward for his victory, O'Higgins became independent Chile's new leader, its "Supreme Director."



Early Challenges

Over the next 6 years, O'Higgins laid the administrative foundations of the new country, established a Navy, and mounted a military expedition against Peru. However, his reforms (which targeted the power of the Catholic Church, abolished noble titles, and reduced the privileges of the elite) weakened his support. Amid unrest, O'Higgins was forced to resign in early 1823.

Political divisions increased over the next several years. On the one side were Conservatives who favored a strong, centralized government in alliance with the Catholic Church. On the other were Liberals, who preferred a decentralized, federalist government and the separation of church and state. Their rivalry spawned a civil war in 1829. With the backing of the military, the Conservatives emerged victorious a year later.

Thirty Years of Conservative Control

The Conservatives maintained control for about 30 years. Though he never held the Presidency, Diego Portales held actual power in the early years. Ruling as a virtual dictator, Portales jailed political opponents and restricted the press.

Meanwhile, Chile's northern neighbors, Peru and Bolivia, had formed a confederation, which Chile considered both a political and economic threat. In 1836, Portales declared war on the confederation, and the next year, a Chilean Army regiment opposed to the war assassinated Portales. Nevertheless, the war continued, and the next 2 years of conflict served to unify Chileans and bolster Chile's shipping industry. In 1839, Chile

won a decisive battle and forced the confederation to dissolve, though the confrontation set the stage for future conflicts with Peru and Bolivia.

Following the war's end, the



government focused on economic growth by encouraging foreign trade. In response to demand in Europe, Chile's mining sector boomed, particularly the silver and nitrate industries. Political stability along with newfound wealth supported investment in roads, harbors, and railroads and the opening of new educational institutions (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Economic growth contributed to the creation of a new entrepreneurial elite, and over time, political divisions deepened.

The Liberal Republic and Territorial Expansion

Although known as the "Liberal Republic," the period from 1861-91 began as an era of Conservative-Liberal alliance. That alliance ended in 1872, and over the next 2 decades, Liberal reforms brought societal changes, notably a more tolerant political climate, the reduction of the power of the Catholic Church, and the expansion of voting rights to all literate men. Nevertheless, wealth disparities between the elite and primarily rural poor continued and even grew.

War of the Pacific: Meanwhile, mining continued to be a key source of government revenue. As global demand for silver and nitrate soared in the 1870s, Chilean companies sought access to mines in Peru and Bolivia, contributing to tensions between the three countries. In 1879, disputes over tariffs, Peru's nationalization of its mines, and the discovery of a secret alliance between Peru and Bolivia compelled Chile to declare war.



Naval support enabled an invasion through the Atacama Desert (see *Political and Social Relations*), and Chilean forces advanced as far as Peru's capital, Lima. Following its 1883 victory, Chile annexed significant territories and took control of valuable silver mines in Peru and nitrate fields in Bolivia. Further, Chile acquired Bolivia's entire coastline, effectively landlocking Bolivia, a status that remains a point of contention today (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Meanwhile, Chile and Argentina signed an agreement fixing their border at the Andes mountains and giving Chile control of the Strait of Magellan in 1881. While some Chileans favored expansion into the Argentine pampas, the agreement ensured that Chile would not be drawn into another conflict while the War of the Pacific was still ongoing.

Mapuche Uprising of 1881: Through the colonial era and even after Chile's 1818 independence, the Mapuche retained control of a central region called Araucanía. Beginning in 1861, the Chilean government began opening Mapuche territory to European settlers, provoking episodes of armed resistance.

Satisfied with its progress in the War of the Pacific, the government deployed a large military detachment in early 1881 in an attempt to assert control of Araucanía. Late that year, the Mapuche rebelled, launching coordinated attacks against Chilean settlements in what would be recognized as the last Mapuche rebellion. Technologically superior and with railroad-enabled supply chains, the military quickly suppressed the

uprising. While thousands of Mapuche died during the conflict or from disease or food shortages, Military pillaging caused widespread starvation. Further, the disruption of their traditional economy and loss of their ancestral lands to settlers plunged most remaining Mapuche into poverty (see *Political and Social Relations*).



Early 20th Century Political Instability

The new century brought notable changes. Economic growth helped create a middle class, and labor unions strengthened the power

of the working classes. New political parties formed to advocate for the needs of these varied groups. Nevertheless, the government's inability to deal with ongoing political instability and a worsening economic situation fueled dissatisfaction, particularly among the middle and working classes.

In 1920, Liberal Arturo Alessandri narrowly won the presidential election on the promise of broad reforms, though once he was in office, his initiatives were largely blocked by the legislature. In a bid to force the passage of reforms, the military removed Alessandri from office in 1925 only to reinstate him 6 months later. With the military's backing, Alessandri's administration then passed a new Constitution that established a presidential republic, separated church and state, and enacted labor and welfare reforms.

For the next several years, Army Col Carlos Ibáñez del Campo played an important role in politics. After serving in cabinet-level positions under President Alessandri, Ibáñez rigged the 1927 presidential election, winning 97% of the vote. During his 4 years as a military dictator, Ibáñez founded Chile's Air Force, reorganized the police into a unified national body (the **carabineros** – see *Political and Social Relations*), and settled disputes with Peru from the War of the Pacific. However, he also repressed unions and ousted or intimidated his political opponents. After the worldwide Great Depression that began in 1929 caused global demand for Chile's exports to shrink and its

economy to crumble, a wave of public unrest compelled Ibáñez to flee to Argentina in 1931.

Over the next 18 months, significant political upheaval occurred, even a short-lived socialist republic. However, stability was restored with the return of Alessandri to the Presidency in 1932. In a sharp contrast to his first administration, Alessandri's second term took a pro-business approach to secure Chile's political institutions, passing labor reforms, reorganizing the military, initiating public works projects, and quelling some armed insurrections.



The Radical Presidencies

Despite Alessandri's efforts, the middle and lower classes continued to express discontent, lending their support to several left-leaning parties, notably the Radicals, Communists, and Socialists. Between 1938-52, the Radical Party, an offshoot of the Liberal Party, largely controlled the Presidency. During this period, women received suffrage (see *Sex and Gender*), and the founding of several government-run industrial projects amid rapid population growth and urbanization occurred.

Global demand for copper during World War II and the Korean War benefitted Chile's economy and allowed government investment in education and industry. Influenced at least in part by Cold War attitudes, Radical President Gabriel González Videla outlawed the Communist Party in 1948. Because the Radicals were unable to address social and economic inequities, their support plummeted.

Ibáñez' Return and Political Stagnation

Through the late 1930s-early 1940s, former military dictator Ibáñez had tried to return to power, notably leading two unsuccessful fascist coups. In 1952, he capitalized on widespread frustration with leftist parties to win the presidential election as a right-leaning, populist Independent. As President, he undertook few reforms, and his 6-year tenure was marked by high inflation and foreign debt.

Jorge Alessandri (the son of former President Alessandri) won the 1958 election, also as a right-leaning Independent, and economic challenges also dominated his 6-year tenure. Recovery from a devastating 1960 earthquake and tsunami (see *Political and Social Relations*) proved costly, ultimately requiring a currency devaluation and higher taxes. However, with foreign



assistance, Alessandri launched a public works program to reduce unemployment and implemented education, housing, and land reforms.

A Period of Change

Nevertheless, ongoing economic challenges cost the right-leaning parties significant support. With a platform focused on social reform, Eduardo Frei

Montalva of the centrist Christian Democratic Party won the 1964 presidential election. Unlike many previous leaders, Frei made some substantial changes, notably increasing governmental control of the copper industry, expanding access to education, increasing infrastructure investment, and appropriating uncultivated land for use by landless peasants.

However, Frei's policies dissatisfied Chileans on both ends of the political spectrum. While rightist parties feared that the government would seize the holdings of wealthy landowners, Communist and Socialist parties objected that his policies did not do enough to assist the nation's poor.

Salvador Allende: the Socialist President

For the 1970 presidential election, the Communists, Radicals, and Socialists formed a coalition called ***Unidad Popular*** (Popular Unity) to support the candidacy of Salvador Allende, a founder of the Socialist Party and former Congressman and cabinet minister. In a three-way race with former President Alessandri (representing the rightist parties) and a Christian Democrat, Allende scored a narrow victory. As the first democratically elected Socialist and avowed Marxist in the

western world, Allende's election sent shock waves internationally.

The US under President Nixon looked unfavorably on Allende's election, viewing the event as predictive of the inevitable spread of communism through Latin



America. After unsuccessfully attempting to prevent Allende from taking office, the US remained hostile towards Chile during Allende's tenure, enacting various measures to damage its economy and block its access to foreign credit.

Allende strived to govern democratically, while implementing socialist policies. Notable programs included the seizure of all foreign-owned mining companies and comprehensive agrarian reform that gave land titles to peasants and Mapuche communities. He also implemented a pay raise for workers, froze prices on certain goods, and began large public works programs.

While these reforms bolstered the Allende administration's initial popularity, discontent soon arose. Increased salaries coupled with price freezes led to shortages and rationing (though it later emerged that the US had interfered to worsen these shortages). Further, Allende's agrarian reform caused agriculture output to reduce. This situation, combined with international financial pressure spearheaded by the US, pushed the Chilean population into increasingly polarized camps. Massive strikes in late 1972 and an attempted coup in mid-1973 were evidence of Allende's tenuous hold on power.

The Coup: In the early morning of September 11, 1973, the Chilean Army led by Gen Augusto Pinochet announced it was taking charge of the government. A few hours later, the Air Force began bombing Chile's presidential palace. When troops entered the building, they found Allende dead, likely by suicide.

The Military Dictatorship of Pinochet

The military quickly consolidated its control of the government, dissolving Congress, suspending the Constitution, and banning all political activity. As Chief Executive of the military junta and later self-proclaimed President, Pinochet would rule Chile as a

military dictator for the next 17 years.



The military junta immediately began to repress all opposition, using the secret police to detain and imprison Allende supporters or anyone suspected of leftist sympathies. In all, the Pinochet regime arrested some 130,000 people, torturing some 38,000.

Some 3,200 were murdered or were kidnapped and presumed murdered. Besides terrorizing its own population, the Pinochet regime also participated in the US-backed Operation Condor, a coordinated campaign of political repression and state terror against presumed leftists in several South American countries.

As part of his plan to rid Chile of all leftist ideology, Pinochet supported a reversal of Allende's socialist policies. A new Constitution in 1980 enshrined the military's role in governance and neglected basic protections and freedoms, while guaranteeing conditions for a free market. It also scheduled a referendum for 1988 to determine Pinochet's status as head-of-state after that date.

Pinochet's "shock treatment" of the Chilean economy included the privatization of businesses (notably the portions of the mining industry that had been previously nationalized), reductions in government spending, and the lowering of protectionist tariffs. While these measures helped control inflation, they greatly increased wealth inequalities and reduced social safety nets. Initially successful, these policies eventually caused unemployment to rise, wages to decline, and the standard of living of middle- and lower-class Chileans to worsen.

In an effort to bolster the economy, the government assumed control of a wide range of businesses and financial institutions. By 1983, Chile was facing the world's highest foreign debt per capita and a 33% unemployment rate, prompting large-scale protests and the reversal of Catholic Church support for the regime (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Through the late 1980s, opposition to Pinochet grew, both within Chile and in the international arena, though he showed no signs of willingly relinquishing power.

The “No” vote: In the Constitutionally mandated 1988 referendum, a “Yes” vote indicated approval of Pinochet remaining as President for another 8 years. By contrast, a “No” vote rejected



Pinochet's continued Presidency but named no replacement, allowing Pinochet to remain in office until elections could be held in 1989. A coalition of 16 centrist and leftist parties subsequently known as the **Concertación** or CPD organized the “No” campaign. On October 5, 1988, 54% of voters rejected Pinochet in a surprise outcome.

Retaining his position as commander-in-chief of the armed forces until 1998 and subsequently a Senator for life, Pinochet remained influential. In 1998, he was detained by British authorities, while visiting London after Spain requested his extradition to face charges regarding the torture of Spanish citizens in Chile during his rule. Although Pinochet was ultimately allowed to return to Chile, the case prompted several countries to release previously classified materials that confirmed his regime's crimes. In 2000 and 2004, Chilean authorities ordered his trial on human rights abuses, but Pinochet never appeared in court and died in 2006.

Transition to Democracy

The transition to democracy began shortly after the “No” vote, with Constitutional amendments legalizing political activity approved by referendum in 1989. The presidential election that year was won by Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin with the support of the CPD, and CPD candidates had major wins in both

chambers of Congress. Confronted with the difficult task of uniting a divided country, Aylwin created a truth and reconciliation commission tasked with investigating crimes committed during the dictatorship. Aylwin also introduced tax reforms that allowed increased government spending on social programs and served to reduce poverty levels. In 1994, Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, son of former President Eduardo Frei, assumed the Presidency. Confronting similar challenges as Aylwin, President Frei Ruiz-Tagle focused on growing Chile's economy and reducing poverty.

The 21st Century

The CPD coalition retained the Presidency in 2000 with the election of Ricardo Lagos. However, unlike his Christian Democrat predecessors, Lagos was the first Socialist to ascend to the Presidency since Allende. Lagos benefited from having a military no longer controlled by Pinochet and an opposition willing to continue democratic reforms. Constitutional changes during Lagos' tenure included the reinstatement of civilian control of the military, the abolishment of the position of unelected senator, and the reduction of presidential terms from 6 to 4 years. Lagos also sought to include more women in his cabinet, notably Michelle Bachelet as minister of health, and later, defense.



Representing the Socialist Party and CPD coalition, Bachelet was elected President in 2006 after defeating conservative candidate Sebastian Piñera in a run-off. Besides giving Chile its first female President, Bachelet's election was significant, because she had been a victim of Pinochet's repression, suffering torture by the secret police. Bachelet's tenure began with large-scale miner and student protests (see *Learning and Knowledge*). However, her efforts to expand social welfare programs and navigate the 2008 global financial crisis were successful, and she left office with record popularity.

Because Presidents are ineligible to serve consecutive terms, Bachelet did not compete in the next election. Running for a second time in 2010, conservative candidate Piñera emerged victorious after a run-off with former President Frei Ruiz-Tagle. For the first time since the Pinochet era ended, the Presidency had returned to conservative control. Piñera was challenged by a devastating earthquake and subsequent tsunami shortly before his inauguration and a highly publicized mine collapse that trapped 33 miners for over 2 months. Despite a thriving



economy, growing dissatisfaction with wealth inequalities and the public education system spurred large-scale protests as his term ended (see *Learning and Knowledge*).

The 2013 election (for the term beginning the next year) was historic in that both candidates in the run-

off were female: former President Bachelet representing the Socialist Party and conservative candidate Evelyn Matthei, with Bachelet winning decisively. Bachelet's second term began with popular tax and education reforms. However, her popularity decreased beginning in 2016 when corruption investigations revealed the involvement of some 200 politicians and businessmen in bribery, fraud, tax evasion, and other crimes. Meanwhile, a decline in world copper prices caused economic growth to slow dramatically. In 2016, protestors gathered to demand reform to the Pinochet-era pension system, in which some 44% of pensioners were living below the poverty line.

Former President Piñera decisively won the run-off in late 2017 and began his second term in early 2018. Seeking to promote business-friendly policies, Piñera encountered significant opposition. In October 2019, a price increase in Santiago's metro fares spurred a series of massive protests that continued for months and grew to reflect the public's broader dissatisfaction with wealth inequalities and demand for healthcare and education reforms. The authorities met many protests with violence, prompting international condemnation.

Piñera tried to ease the situation by introducing pension reforms and a minimum wage increase. Unrest continued until the government announced a referendum on replacing the Pinochet-era Constitution, though it was postponed until October 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic (see *Sustenance and Health*). In it, Chileans voted overwhelmingly in favor of a new Constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*). In March 2022, Gabriel Boric became President and promised sweeping social change.

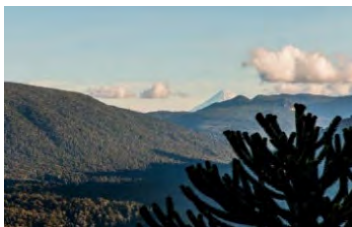
Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Many Chilean myths trace to Mapuche oral traditions, with some referring to historical events, such as the arrival of Spanish *conquistadores*.

La Pincoya*:** Chilean folklore tells of *la Pincoya*, a female water spirit said to live at the bottom of the ocean near Chiloé Island. A long-haired beauty, *la Pincoya* performs dances that magically provide or deny a bountiful catch to Chiloé's fishermen, depending on their respect for the sea. *La Pincoya* also aids seamen who fall overboard, though she banishes sailors who perish at sea to the ***Caleuche, a ghost ship that sails along Chile's coast.

The Death of Pedro de Valdivia: The early, often violent encounters between Mapuche and Spaniards sometimes

resulted in competing myths. In explaining *conquistador* Pedro de Valdivia's 1553 death at the hands of Mapuche rebel Lautaro, Spanish chroniclers claimed that the warriors tore Valdivia's beating heart from his chest and ate it. By contrast, Mapuche lore claims that Lautaro forced Valdivia and a Catholic priest to drink molten gold as punishment for their insatiable appetite for the precious metal.



2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name

Republic of Chile

República de Chile (Spanish)

Political Borders

Peru: 104 mi

Bolivia: 585 mi

Argentina: 4,158 mi

Coastline: 3,998 mi

Capital

Santiago

Demographics

Chile's population of 18.6 million is growing at an annual rate of 0.61%. Some 88% of the population lives in urban areas, with 90% of Chileans residing in the middle third of the country or near the capital city of Santiago. Generally, the population concentrates in the country's middle, with the far North and South sparsely settled.



Flag

Inspired by the US flag, Chile's flag is comprised of two equal-height white and red stripes, with a blue square in the upper left featuring a five-pointed white star. The star stands for progress and honor, and the blue represents the sky. The white stripe symbolizes the snow of the Andes mountains, while the red stripe denotes the blood spilled in the fight for independence.



Geography

Comprising a large part of South America's western seaboard, Chile is long

(stretching 2,654 mi) and thin (averaging just 110 mi wide). Its total land area is 292,183 sq mi, more than that of Texas.

Chile's eastern border with Argentina is defined by the Andes, the world's longest mountain range. Chile's highest point is the Ojos del Salado mountain, which at 22,608 ft, is the Americas' second highest mountain (behind Argentina's Aconcagua) and the world's highest active volcano. In the South, the Strait of Magellan and the Beagle Channel pass through Chilean territory, while the Drake Passage lies directly south of the tip of the Chilean mainland.

Southern Chile and Argentina together comprise the region of Patagonia. The southern half of Patagonia extends into the Antarctic region and consists mainly of glaciers and fjords. Chile claims territories in Antarctica, though some overlap with British and Argentine claims.

Easter Island (see *History and Myth*) lies 2,295 mi off the coast of central Chile and has a total area of just 63 sq mi. With the nearest populated island some 1,850 mi away, Easter Island is the world's most remote inhabited place.

Climate

Chile has three distinct climate zones: a hot, desert north, a



Mediterranean-like center, and a cool, humid South. Northern Chile is the warmest part of the country, with 70°-75° F average temperatures. In the North, the Atacama Desert averages just 0.04 in of rainfall per year, making it the world's driest region. In contrast, central Chile has distinct seasons and year-round average temperatures between 46°-68° F. The Andes prevent weather from moving in from the east, trapping moisture from the Pacific Ocean in southern Chile and creating its rainy and cold climate. The Humboldt Current, a cold ocean current which flows north from Antarctica, serves to cool the entire Chilean coast.

Natural Hazards

Located at the intersection of the Nazca and South American tectonic plates, Chile experiences frequent earthquakes. While

most are small and harmless, some are destructive. In 1960, Chile experienced the largest earthquake ever recorded, the 9.5-magnitude Valdivia Earthquake. Striking off the coastal town of Valdivia, the earthquake and subsequent 80 ft tsunami left 2 million people homeless along with some 1,655 dead and 3,000 injured. More recently, Chile experienced earthquakes measuring magnitude 8 or higher in 2010, 2014, and 2015, with the last forcing some 1 million Chileans from their homes.

Chile is located in the Ring of Fire, a belt of active volcanoes bordering the Pacific Ocean that accounts for 75% of volcanic eruptions and 90% of earthquakes around the world. Of the 580 volcanoes in the Chilean Andes, 90 are considered active. While

eruptions are common, casualties are rare due to effective early warning and evacuation systems.

Environmental Issues

Pollution from Chile's mining, forestry, and fishing industries causes significant environmental



damage. Further, industrial pollution, emissions from cars and wood stoves, and little annual rainfall combine to create a thick layer of smog, especially in the North. In 2007, the northern city of Coyhaique was named the world's most polluted city, and as of 2017, remained the Americas' most polluted city. In 2017, wildfires intensified by climate change destroyed some 1.5 million acres of forest. The same year, melting glaciers and associated rising sea levels caused flooding that permanently displaced some 27,000 Chileans from their homes. Warming sea temperatures and pollution from salmon farming (see *Economics and Resources*) disrupt and degrade marine ecosystems.

Government

Chile is a presidential republic divided into 16 administrative regions, 1 of which comprises the metropolitan area of Santiago. The President appoints an official (*intendente*) to lead each region, which further divide into provinces and communes. Chile's Constitution dates to the Pinochet era (see *History and*

Myth). Though, in a late 2020 referendum, voters approved a plan in which a constitutional convention (with members chosen in April 2021) drafted and presented a new Constitution in mid-2022. However, 61.86% of voters rejected the new Constitution in September 2022. A second 50-member constitutional council was elected in May 2023 to produce another draft Constitution for submission to a national referendum which was defeated in December 2023.

Executive Branch

Executive power is vested in the President, who is both chief-of-state and head-of-government and supported by an appointed 16-member Cabinet. The President is directly elected by an absolute majority vote for a 4-year term, with multiple, but not consecutive, terms allowed. If no candidate receives a majority in the initial round of voting, a run-off is held. President Gabriel Boric assumed office in 2022 having defeated Jose Antonio Kast in the second round of the 2021 presidential election.

Legislative Branch

Located in Valparaíso rather than the capital city of Santiago, the two-chamber

Congreso Nacional (National Congress or NC) consists of a 155-seat **Cámara de**

Diputadas y Diputados (Chamber of Deputies) and a 50-seat **Senado** (Senate). The 155 Deputies are directly elected in multi-seat constituencies representing the 56 provinces for 4-year terms. The 50 Senators are directly elected in multi-seat constituencies to represent the 16 regions and serve 8-year terms. The NC controls most legislative powers, such as lawmaking and approving treaties and declarations of war.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes a Supreme Court (**Corte Suprema**), Constitutional Court, Courts of Appeal, district courts, and a military court system. As the final court of appeal for both civil and criminal cases, the Supreme Court operates on a case-by-case basis, meaning that past rulings are not used as precedent



for future rulings. The Supreme Court's 21 members (20 judges and 1 Court President) are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate for life terms with mandatory retirement at age 70. The Constitutional Court's 10 members are chosen by each branch of the government – 3 by the Supreme Court, 2 by the President, and 4 by the NC (2 from each chamber) to serve 9-year terms.

Political Climate

Following the 1989 end of the Pinochet dictatorship (see *History and Myth*), Chile had a relatively smooth transition to a multi-party democracy, with center-left or leftist parties holding power until 2010. That year, Sebastián Piñera became Chile's first democratically-elected conservative President since 1958. Although Socialist Michelle Bachelet held the Presidency from 2014-18, center-right ideologies resumed predominance with Piñera's 2018 return to office.

Politics today are dominated by two broad coalitions. The center-right **Vamos Chile!** (Let's Go Chile) coalition includes the



Partido Evolución Política (Political Evolution Party), **Unión Demócrata Independiente** (Independent Democratic Union or UDI), and **Renovación Nacional** (National Renewal or RN – the party of former President Piñera). The latter two parties were founded in the 1980s in support of military dictator Pinochet. While the UDI remains a strongly conservative nationalist party, the RN is more centrist and defines itself as a liberal-conservative party. The Political Evolution is a center-right party founded in 2012. As of late 2021, this coalition holds a slight majority in both NC chambers.

Vamos Chile!'s main opposition is the center-left **Convergencia Progresista** (Progressive Convergence or CP), a coalition formed in 2018. CP includes the **Partido Socialista** (Socialist Party), **Partido por la Democracia** (Party for Democracy), and **Partido Radical** (Social Democrat Radical Party). The third most popular coalition, **Apruebo Dignidad** (Approve Dignity), a left-wing coalition, was formed in January of 2021. *Apruebo*

Dignidad is comprised of the **Partido Igualdad** (Equality Party), **Frente Amplio** (Broad Front), and **Chile Digno** (Worthy Chile).

Over recent decades, Chileans have gathered sporadically in large demonstrations to protest the country's economic inequalities and demand education and healthcare reforms. As evidence of Chileans' frustration with the political process, their trust in government dropped from 43% to 33% between 2007-18. Further, voter participation has steadily decreased since democracy's restoration in 1989, reaching just 56% in the 2021 presidential election.

During the latest series of demonstrations beginning in October 2019, critics focused on the Pinochet-era Constitution, arguing



its pro-business emphasis prioritized the market over civil welfare and served to widen Chile's wealth gap. In response, the government scheduled a referendum in which voters approved the

drafting of a new Constitution. Nevertheless, public discontent and unrest persist.

Defense

The Chilean Armed Forces (CAF) are a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air branches, with a joint strength of 68,500 active duty troops and 19,100 reserve personnel. Military operations focus on maintaining domestic stability, territorial integrity, and aid relief during natural disasters. Mainly deployed domestically, the military has limited international reach.

Upon turning 18, all Chilean males must register with the CAF and may be conscripted to serve up to 2 years before the age of 24. In 2019, the CAF called up some 95% of men born in the year 2001, prompting public protests.

Army: This branch consists of 37,650 active duty troops organized into 6 divisions consisting of a Special Forces brigade, 28 maneuver brigades, regiments, squadrons, and platoons

(including armored, mechanized, and light), 11 combat support regiments and battalions, and 4 combat service support regiments and divisions. The Army also includes an Army

Aviation Brigade and a Special Operations Brigade, both deployed near Santiago.



Navy: Deployed in 5 “Naval Zones” along the coast, Chile’s Navy consists of 19,800 active members and includes a Special

Forces command, 4 amphibious Marine brigades and detachments, 4 Naval Aviation squadrons equipped with 21 combat-capable aircrafts, and 55 Coast Guard patrol and coastal combatant ships. Primary naval operations occur in the southern half of Chile’s ocean territory from Cape Horn to Easter Island.

Air Force: Headquartered in Santiago, Chile’s air component consists of 11,050 active members and includes 3 fighter squadrons, a fighter/ground attack squadron, an ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) fleet, an airborne early warning fleet, a tanker squadron, 4 transport squadrons and fleets, 2 training squadrons, a transport helicopter, and an air defense regiment. The Air Force divides into five brigades, with three brigades monitoring Chile’s land and sea borders, one covering special operations transport and Antarctic operations, and another responsible for search-and-rescue operations.



Paramilitary: Chile’s paramilitary consists of 44,700 active members (**carabineros**). They mainly serve as a domestic militarized police force.

Chilean Air Force Rank Insignia



General



Lieutenant



Major
General



Brigadier
General



Colonel



Lieutenant
Colonel



Major



Captain



First
Lieutenant



Second
Lieutenant



Third
Lieutenant



Command
Sergeant
Major



Sergeant
Major



Master
Sergeant



Sergeant
First
Class



Staff
Sergeant



Sergeant



Corporal



Private

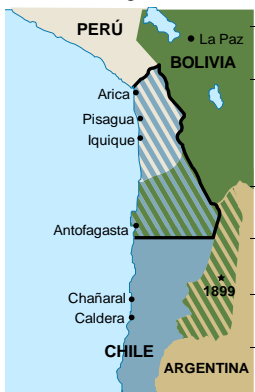
Foreign Relations

Chile historically maintains close economic and political ties with its Latin American and Caribbean neighbors along with the US, Europe, and Australia. In addition, Chile has cultivated close trade ties with China since 1971, notably becoming a partner in China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2018 and signing a free-trade agreement with China in 2019.

Chile is a member of international economic and peace organizations like the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organization, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation, and the International Monetary Fund. Chile is also an active member of regional American alliances such as the Organization of American States, Union of South American States, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. A supporter of regional peace and security efforts, Chile was a top provider of troops to UN missions in Haiti.

Relations with Bolivia and Peru:

Contentious relations with Bolivia and Peru trace to the 19th century, when Chile acquired territories from those countries during the War of the Pacific (see *History and Myth*). Hoping to reclaim lands, both Peru and Bolivia filed cases against Chile with the International Court of Justice. In 2014, Peru won a 7-year case that granted greater sea access, but Bolivia lost its 5-year case to regain coastline territory in 2018.



Relations with the US: The US and Chile first established diplomatic relations in 1823. In the past, relations were sometimes controversial, especially when the US opposed Allende's Presidency and supported the Pinochet dictatorship (see *History and Myth*). Since the restoration of democracy in 1989, the US and Chile have become closer partners committed to democracy, human rights, and free trade.

Since 2004, the US and Chile maintain a free-trade agreement that permits US goods to enter Chile duty free, substantially increasing US trade with Chile. The US provides military equipment and education and training to strengthen the interoperability of Chilean and US forces.

Security Issues

Narcotics Trafficking: Drug production and trafficking increased significantly throughout the 2010s, with the country becoming a hub between South America and Europe. Within Chile, drug trafficking occurs in the northern seaports and along the borders with Peru and Bolivia. In 2019, President Piñera authorized the Chilean Army to assist the *carabineros* in drug search and seizure patrols in these areas. As of 2020, the Chilean government considers drug trafficking to be the



country's most pressing security issue. The same year, some 79% of surveyed Chileans agreed that narcotics smuggling presents a major threat to national security.

Civil Unrest: Between 2005-14, Chile experienced some 200

bombings, primarily of urban businesses. While they rarely resulted in deaths, the attacks often caused significant injuries. The identities and goals of the attackers, referred to as **delincuentes** (delinquents) in Chile, remain largely unknown.

In recent years, Chile has been rocked by sporadic and sometimes violent demonstrations, with protestors demanding a reduction in wealth inequalities along with pension, healthcare, and education reforms. Protests flared again in 2019, when a metro fare increase focused attention on the plight of Chile's working class, many of whom must spend 25% of their income on transportation. The authorities often responded violently to the protests, prompting accusations of police brutality and human rights abuses. The authorities notably targeted protestors' eyes, causing blindness or similar injuries to some 180 protestors.

Ethnic Groups

Historically, Chile has discouraged ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences among its population, promoting instead a unitary national Chilean identity. Correspondingly, the Chilean census recognizes just one ethnic category – Indigenous. According to the 2024 count, 13% of Chileans, or 2.1 million people, identify as indigenous.

The 87% of Chileans who are non-indigenous tend to identify as white or **mestizo**, a term referring to a mixed European and indigenous background. During the colonial era, most European immigrants were Spanish. Following Chile's early 19th-century independence



(see p. 3-4 of *History and Myth*), European settlers included large numbers of Germans and Swiss and some French, Italians, and Spaniards. In the 20th century, Christian and Muslim Palestinian Arabs and Eastern European Jews arrived. While African descent remains unrecognized in the census, a 2013 study found that Afro-Chileans comprised almost 5% of the far northern Arica y Parinacota Region. Chile's Roma (Gypsy) population also lacks official recognition and may number up to 50,000.

Indigenous Groups: The largest indigenous group, the Mapuche, account for some 9% of the total population and around 84% of the indigenous population. They were the predominant indigenous group in the region when the Spanish conquerors arrived in the 16th century (see *History and Myth*) and historically reside in south-central Chile. The next largest group is the Aymara, who are also present in neighboring Peru and Bolivia, and concentrate in northern Chile. Smaller groups include the Alacalufe, Atacameños, Collas, Kawashkar, Quechua, and Yagán. Easter Island (see *History and Myth*) is home to the Rapa Nui people, who, unlike the indigenous groups in mainland Chile, are Polynesian in culture and language (see *Language and Communication*).

Chile's indigenous population has experienced significant urbanization in recent years, and as of 2023, just 12% of them reside in rural areas. The rest tend to concentrate in the metropolitan area of Santiago or urban areas in Los Lagos and Araucanía regions.

As of late-2024, Chile is the only Latin American country that does not recognize its indigenous citizens in its constitution. While a 1993 law recognized the diversity of Chile's nine indigenous groups and outlined the state's duty in respecting, protecting, and promoting indigenous rights, it had few positive effects. Reform efforts since then regularly stalled, and some legal challenges have tried to relax rather than strengthen the few existing protections. However, in a signal of heightened attention to the protection of indigenous interests, the government reserved 17 seats for indigenous representatives in the 2021 constitutional convention, which voters later rejected in September 2022. In June 2024, a new constitutional process was approved by the Chilean congress that may lead to new Constitution that includes indigenous rights.



Social Relations

Like other Spanish territories, colonial Chile had a strict, race-based class system that continued to influence society through the 20th century. Today, Chile's population divides into distinct upper, middle, and lower classes, with many upper-class families tracing their descent to landowning settlers. While 20th-century industrialization allowed some class mobility, some historical upper-class families today strive to maintain their exclusivity through invitation-only clubs, tight-knit relationships, and exclusive, private educational institutions.

Chile's middle class has grown significantly in recent years, increasing from one-third to two-thirds of the population between 2009-19. Nevertheless, wealth remains unequally distributed,

with international observers rating Chile the world's third most unequal country in 2019 (see *Economics and Resources*).

Generally, non-indigenous Chileans tend to fare better than members of minority groups. According to a 2013 study, some 60% of Afro-Chileans lacked a secondary education and just 47% were employed. Poverty rates among indigenous people are typically significantly higher than among non-indigenous Chileans. Further, Araucanía Region, the historical homeland of the Mapuche (see *History and Myth*), experiences Chile's highest poverty, almost double the national average.

Chileans tend to view darker skin as inferior, priding themselves on being "whiter" than many other Latin Americans. Migrants from Venezuela and Haiti have recently experienced racially motivated attacks. Meanwhile, law enforcement officials often target the Mapuche with police brutality and harsh punishments for minor infractions. The *carabineros* occasionally use an anti-terror law to detain Mapuche activists indefinitely.

This disproportionate use of force against Mapuche often coincides with their efforts to assert land rights and prevent the government from allowing development schemes like hydroelectric projects or salmon farms in their traditional territories. In 2017, Mapuche activists carried out some 43 acts



of resistance, such as arson against logging operations in Araucanía. The death of a Mapuche activist in 2018 at the hands of security forces sparked widespread outrage and helped make Chile's historical treatment of its indigenous citizens a focus of the protests sweeping Chile since late 2019.

The Rapa Nui continue to seek recognition of their rights to Easter Island and surrounding waters. They also seek to limit migration to the island in order to mitigate environmental damage brought by population growth. As of mid-2025, none of these demands have been acknowledged, and the Rapa Nui control just 13% of Easter Island, with the rest shared between a private company and the Rapa Nui National Park.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Chile's population is predominately Christian, with some 56% of respondents to a 2023 government survey identifying as Roman Catholic and 9% Protestant, and roughly 30% claimed no religious affiliation. According to the 2002 survey census (the last to include religious affiliation), some 17% of Chileans are non-religious, 4% atheist or agnostic, and less than 5% other. Other religious traditions with small followings include Baha'ism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam.

Chile's Pinochet-era Constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) separates church and state, while establishing no official religion and guaranteeing freedom of worship, so long as practitioners respect public order and social norms. Other laws prohibit religious discrimination and mandate religious education in public schools (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Religious groups that register with the government receive tax benefits and may establish schools, among other privileges.

Early Spiritual Landscape

Before the arrival of European conquerors, Chile's indigenous inhabitants led rich spiritual lives. While the details of many beliefs and practices remain unknown, indigenous groups likely recognized multiple spirits and gods who created the universe, controlled the natural elements, and influenced daily life. On Easter Island, the Rapa Nui people (see *History and Myth*)



constructed large stone figures called **maoi**, which scholars believe may have represented ancestors in certain rituals.

Introduction of Christianity

Christianity arrived around 1540 with the Spanish conquerors (see *History and Myth*). Besides seeking wealth and new territories, the Spanish Crown sought to convert the indigenous population to Roman Catholicism, ordering the construction of a church in all settlements with at least 300 residents and dispatching various missionary orders across the colony. While indigenous people coerced into the Spaniards' **encomienda** (forced labor) system were compelled to convert, the Spaniards did not attempt to systematically destroy indigenous spiritual life, which was their practice in some other New World colonies.

Consequently, a fusion of local and Catholic beliefs and practices occurred in some areas.

Religion during the Colonial Period

During over 250 years of Spanish colonial rule, the Catholic Church was central to most aspects of Chilean life, including education, politics, and economics. Catholic orders, such as the Dominicans, Franciscans, and Jesuits, among others, opened schools, orphanages, and hospitals that provided important social services. In 1758, Chile's first university (see *Learning*



and Knowledge) began providing higher education in Catholic theology.

Religion in the 19th Century

In the decades following Chile's 1818 independence (see *History and Myth*), disagreements over the role of the Catholic Church in society were a fundamental part of the political division between Liberals and Conservatives. In general, the Liberals favored limiting the wealth and political influence of the Catholic Church. By contrast, the Conservatives believed the Catholic Church must be a part of the government in order to ensure social order. As a result, Church influence fluctuated over the decades.

For example, while a Conservative government established Catholicism as the state religion in 1833, Liberal leaders a few decades later sought to reduce the powers of the Church and promote religious tolerance for newly arriving English Anglican and German Lutheran immigrants. The opening of secular schools and removal of the Church as the sole authority in birth, marriage, and death rituals also occurred during the late 19th century's Liberal control (see *History and Myth*).

Religion in the 20th Century

Chile's 1925 Constitution (see *History and Myth*) notably established the separation of church and state and guaranteed freedom of religion.

While Catholic Church leadership continued to support Conservative politics, some local priests allied with the poor and sought social change. Jesuit priest Padre Alberto Hurtado's social justice initiatives among Santiago's



poor in the 1940s resulted in his 2005 elevation to sainthood by Pope Benedict XVI (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, Italy).

The growth of left-leaning political parties like the Radicals, Communists, and Socialists, who advocated major social reform to reduce economic inequalities also occurred during the early to mid-20th century. The popularity of these parties, which at the least, opposed the societal influence of the Catholic Church or at the most rejected religion entirely, reflected the public's changing perspectives. In the early 1960s, the new Catholic Archbishop of Santiago made social reform a Church focus, notably issuing land titles to some of the peasants, who worked Church-owned agricultural estates.

To counter what it considered the radicalization of Chilean society in the mid-1960s, the Church supported the Christian

Democrats and their advocacy of social and political reform within Christian principles (see *History and Myth*). Because he was an avowed Marxist and atheist, Salvador Allende's 1970 ascension to the Presidency provoked disputes in the Church and inspired international opposition, notably from the US (see *History and Myth*). While some priests supported Allende's socialist platform, many in the Church hierarchy opposed him. Despite being an atheist, Allende was supportive of Chile's religious diversity, notably including its small Jewish community in Independence Day celebrations.

Religion during the Dictatorship

Following Gen Augusto Pinochet's 1973 seizure of power (see *History and Myth*), the Church became a refuge for Chileans persecuted by the dictatorship. Together with non-Catholic Christian leaders and members of the Jewish community, the Catholic Archbishop formed a committee that organized protection and support to regime victims. After Pinochet demanded the committee cease its activities, the Church established a new organization, the **Vicaría de la Solidaridad** (Vicariate of Solidarity) to collect data on regime abuses and provide legal advice to victims. As a Church entity, the organization held a special status and was able to continue operations throughout the dictatorship. In response, the regime



frequently harassed religious leaders.

Yet as a practicing Catholic, Pinochet retained the strong support of some conservatives in the Church, and after 1977, a new Archbishop was

notably less antagonistic. In 1978, Pinochet organized the visit of Pope John Paul II to Chile. While the Pope met with Pinochet's opposition, he also prayed with the dictator and his family on the balcony of the presidential palace. Following the eruption of large-scale popular demonstrations against the dictatorship in 1983, the Catholic Church withdrew its support of Pinochet, backing instead his opposition and calling for new elections.

Religion Today

Since the end of the Pinochet dictatorship, the Catholic Church has distanced itself from politics. Further, society has continued to experience both secularization and an increase in Protestant membership, with

the proportion of Chileans claiming a Catholic identity decreasing from 80% in 1987 to 56% today. Even among some Chileans, who claim a Catholic identity, many perceive the faith as simply a part of



their cultural heritage having no regular role in their personal and professional lives. Protestants are more likely to attend weekly religious services than Catholics.

Damage to religious buildings has been a part of wider societal unrest for several years. Pope Francis' 2018 visit to Chile was marked by a wave of arson attacks against Catholic and Protestant churches, likely in support of ongoing Mapuche protests (see *Political and Social Relations*). Since unrest flared again in late 2019 (see *Political and Social Relations*), churches and synagogues have again been the targets of vandalism, looting, and arson.

The Catholic Church Today: Despite declining support, the Catholic Church remains influential. Chile became one of the last countries in the world to legalize divorce in 2004, and abortion remains illegal in most circumstances (see *Sex and Gender*). Further, Catholicism continues to play a large role in celebrations, holidays (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*), and rites-of-passage (see *Family and Kinship*), and it is the focus of most mandatory public-school religious education (see *Learning and Knowledge*.) Recently, the Chilean Catholic Church has been rocked by sexual and child abuse allegations against clergy, prompting the Pope to accept the resignations of 8 of 34 Chilean bishops in 2019.

Other Christian Churches: Beginning in the 1840s, the Chilean government's encouragement of European immigration resulted in the arrival of Protestantism, primarily English Anglicanism and German Lutheranism. Nevertheless, the number of Protestant Chileans remained low, comprising around 1.5% of the population by 1930. In the 20th century, US missionaries brought new Protestant denominations, notably Methodism and Presbyterianism, but also evangelical and Pentecostal sects. By 1970, Protestants comprised some 6.2% of the population.

In recent decades, evangelical and Pentecostal churches have experienced the most membership growth, primarily in the urban areas of Santiago and Valparaíso. According to a 2006 survey,

some two-thirds of Chilean Protestants are members of Pentecostal churches, where some followers engage in associated charismatic beliefs and practices.

These include divine healing, receiving direct revelations

from God, and speaking in tongues during worship services. Other Christian denominations include Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Orthodox churches.

Religion and Indigenous Chileans

Chile's indigenous residents have a different pattern of religious practice than the general population. According to 2018 Chilean government estimates, 38% of indigenous Chileans are evangelical Protestant, 30% Catholic, 26% profess no religion, and 6% followers of other faiths. Some Catholic indigenous Chileans practice a "folk" religion that incorporates indigenous beliefs and practices into Catholic worship. Some indigenous people follow only traditional beliefs and practices.



Among the Mapuche (see *History and Myth* and *Political and Social Relations*), traditional religious beliefs address the balance of positive and negative forces through the god of life, **Ngenchén**, and the god of death, **Wefuku**. Religious specialists called **machis** lead religious rituals, act as intermediaries to the spirit world, and use herbal medicine, prayer, and the **kultrun** (round drum) to heal the sick. Some healthcare clinics employ **machis** today (see *Sustenance and Health*). To honor their ancestors, Mapuche traditionally place carved wooden figures

called **chemamulles** at gravesites.



The Aymara, Atacameño, and Quechua peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*) traditionally recognize multiple spirits and deities, the most sacred being **Pachamama**, the Earth Goddess. To bring good fortune, ensure a good harvest, or cure illness, some Aymara, Atacameños, and Quechua

combine Catholic rituals with offerings to *Pachamama*.

Other Religions

The history of Judaism in Chile likely traces to some of the earliest Spanish conquerors (see *History and Myth*), but only with the early 20th-century arrival of Eastern European Jews was a real community established. In the late 1930s, the community grew further through the arrival of some 11,000 Jews fleeing fascism and anti-Semitism in Europe. Today, Chile's Jewish population of about 25,000 resides primarily in Santiago, with smaller communities in Valparaíso, Concepción, Temuco, and Valdivia. Recently, Chile has seen an increase in anti-Semitism associated with the unrest beginning in late 2019 (see *Social and Political Relations*).

Chile is also home to a Muslim population of about 12,000, many immigrants from the Middle East. Chile's first mosque opened in 1995 in Santiago.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

The family is the center of Chilean life and provides emotional, economic, and social support. Chilean families are typically close-knit and involved in members' life decisions. Marrying and starting a family remain a priority for most young adults.

Residence

Beginning in the 19th century, Chile began to experience increased urbanization, and as of 2023, some 88% of Chileans live in urban areas. While electricity and running water are widely available, central heating systems are typically reserved for upper-class homes and offices. In the near-Antarctic region of Patagonia, most dwellings rely on wood stoves or gas heaters.

Urban: Upper-class urban families tend to own and occupy large private villas, often with tennis courts or pools. By contrast, few middle- or lower-class Chileans own their residences, living instead in rented apartments with varying amenities. While the poorest urban dwellers historically lived in informal settlements (**callampas** or “mushrooms”) on city outskirts, the expansion of

subsidized housing in recent years has reduced their number. Government-subsidized dwellings are typically small with minimal comforts, but residents are permitted to construct additional rooms. To partially address the housing



needs of the large population of Mapuche living in urban poverty (see *Political and Social Relations*), the government has constructed some subsidized homes that incorporate elements of the traditional Mapuche dwelling (**ruka** – an oval or rectangular building without interior divisions and a singular door facing east). Newer dwellings typically have various structural elements to protect them during earthquakes (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Rural: Rural houses are constructed to withstand Chile's extreme weather (see *Political and Social Relations*), with upper-class families typically occupying older, European-style homes with courtyards. Some northern Andean families live in houses made of mud and straw (**adobe**). Houses in the Patagonia region often have metal outer walls and roofs as durable protection against rain and snow.

Family Structure

In Chilean families, the father is traditionally the primary breadwinner and head of the household, while the mother is responsible for domestic tasks and childcare, though many women also work outside the home today (see *Sex and Gender*). Some households include extended relatives, and other relations sometimes live in close proximity. Families are typically close-knit, and children often live at home until they marry. While most newly married couples prefer to move into their own homes, a lack of financial resources compels many to remain with their families. Chileans highly respect their elders, with children often caring for their parents as they get older. Trusted family friends are often brought into the kin network as **compadres** (godparents).



Children

While Chilean families historically had several children, they have far fewer today (see *Sex and Gender*). Parents' involvement in their children's lives varies by social class. Some

upper- and middle-class Chileans employ nannies, while lower-class women typically assume childcare responsibilities themselves. Parents tend to have a relaxed attitude towards childrearing, rarely adhering to strict rules and reasoning with misbehaving children instead of punishing them.

Birth: After a birth, family members and friends typically present flowers and gifts to the new mother. Some caregivers shave newborns' hair in the belief that it will grow back stronger.

Naming: Many Chilean Catholics historically named their children after Catholic saints, and some still do. In the Catholic tradition, each saint is associated with one day of the year, so many Chileans celebrate both their birthday and their saint's day.

Rites of Passage

Many Chileans observe Roman Catholic rites of passage, such as baptizing their children within a few months of birth and celebrating their first communion around age 8. Both ceremonies are usually followed by a dinner celebration with extended family.



Dating & Courtship: Chileans typically begin dating in their mid-teens. Traditionally, most Chileans aimed to marry and start a family in their early to mid-20s. Consequently, they were serious about dating and seldom dated multiple people at once. Today, Chileans increasingly engage in casual dating relationships, often with potential partners met through social media.

Weddings: Chilean weddings typically comprise two events – a civil ceremony performed at a courthouse and a religious one at a church – held anywhere from a few days to several months apart. Family and friends are typically involved in the planning of the events. While the religious ceremony is not legally required, many couples feel that a marriage is not complete without a church event. Attendance at the civil ceremony is usually restricted to a few family members and friends, who gather afterwards for a family dinner and the presentation of wedding gifts. By contrast, the religious ceremony is typically an extravagant affair with up to several hundred guests and followed by a large reception with food and dancing. Chileans typically marry in their early or mid-20s. Although women historically faced intense pressure to marry before turning 30, this attitude has eased slightly.

Divorce

When Chile legalized divorce in 2004, it became the last country in South America and one of the last in the world to take this step. Divorce remains highly stigmatized. By law, a couple must live separately for a year and complete 60 days of couple's therapy before their divorce is finalized. However, these requirements can be waived in the case of intolerable living conditions, such as domestic abuse. Divorce rates remain low today, just .07 per 1,000 inhabitants in 2024, much lower than the US rate of 2.4.

Death

Following a death, Chileans typically hold a vigil (or wake) at home or in a funeral facility. During this period, friends and relatives visit to pay respects, sing hymns, grieve, and reminisce with the family of the deceased. A day or so later, a priest leads a funeral mass in a church, after which mourners accompany the coffin in a procession to the cemetery, where the priest presides over the burial. On the 1-year anniversary of a loved one's death, friends and relatives may attend a special church service. On All Saints' Day (November 1), Chileans return to the cemetery to pay respect and celebrate the lives of lost family members.

Some Mapuche (see *Political and Social Relations*) incorporate elements of their traditional beliefs (see

Religion and Spirituality) into their funeral rituals. For example, according to traditional belief, death is caused by the intervention of evil supernatural spirits, and a newly deceased person is potentially dangerous to the living. Accordingly, a Mapuche wake consists of various rituals meant to purify the body and typically include singing, shouting, and drinking. The deceased is constantly attended for 4 days, then placed in a hollowed-out tree trunk or wooden coffin and buried.



5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Traditionally, Chile has had a male-dominated society, where ***machismo*** (strong masculine pride) is counterbalanced by female subservience (***marianismo***). The Chilean social system is patriarchal, meaning men hold most power and authority. While women's equality has progressed rapidly in recent decades, female workplace opportunities remain among Latin America's lowest.



Gender Roles and Work

Chilean society historically maintains a distinct division between the genders, with women responsible for most household chores and childcare, even if they work outside the home.

Labor Force: In 2024, some 52% of Chilean women worked outside the home, a lower rate than neighboring Bolivia (72%), but lower than Argentina (53%) and higher than the Latin American (LATAM) average (51%). Overall, men tend to dominate skilled and professional positions, and as of 2024, nearly 20% of Chilean businesses counted women in leadership positions compared to the LATAM average of 21%. Further, just 14% of Chile's 100 largest companies had at least one female board member. Overall, women make up 38% of Chile's senior and middle management positions, higher than both neighboring Argentina (38%) and Bolivia (28%). Women comprise the majority of workers in the services sector (such as education, healthcare, sales, and hospitality). Further, some 16% of female workers labor in the informal sector, often as housekeepers or nannies, where they receive low wages and no workforce protections.

Gender and the Law

Women are guaranteed 30 weeks of maternity leave and protected from pregnancy-based employment discrimination. Despite legal protections from workplace harassment, laws fail to adequately define the crime, the authorities often fail to

enforce laws, and employers neglect workplace protections. Although Chile signed a resolution supporting gender equality in 1995, some marriage laws favor the husband, leading to unequal treatment. In 2015, President Michelle Bachelet established the cabinet-level Ministry of Women and Gender Equality, responsible for the promotion and protection of gender equality and elimination of discrimination against women.

Gender and Politics

While Chilean women received the right to vote in 1949, it was only after the 1989 end of the Pinochet era (see *History and Myth*) that women's political participation, both as voters and as candidates, significantly increased. As of 2024, women occupy 35% of national legislative seats, significantly lower than the rate in neighboring Bolivia (46%) and Peru (38%) but higher than that of the US (29%). Michelle Bachelet became Chile's first female President in 2006 and served again from 2014-18 (see *History and Myth*). In 2018, Bachelet became the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.



Gender Based Violence (GBV)

While the National Congress passed Chile's first law criminalizing domestic violence in 1994, a decade later, over 50% of surveyed women still reported spousal abuse. While exact rates are unknown today, GBV likely remains widespread, with many victims failing to report crimes due to the social stigma attached to GBV. Also, reporting is rare because victims do not trust the authorities to protect them and prosecute perpetrators. Shelter and counseling services are typically inadequate, and even if victims do report crimes, few cases make it to court. During the first weekend of lockdown associated with the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, the national domestic abuse hotline reported a 70% increase in calls.

In an effort to combat GBV, new legislation eliminated the statute of limitations on sexual abuse and assault cases in 2019 and

increased the prison sentence for femicide (murder of a woman based on her gender) from 15 years to life in 2020. Nevertheless, observers note that significant improvement in prosecution rates is unlikely until barriers to bringing GBV cases to court are removed.

Sex and Procreation

Chile's fertility rate has decreased from over 5 births per woman in the mid-20th century to 1.2 in 2023, slightly lower than neighboring Argentina (1.5) and the US (1.6). Women today tend



to have their children later in life, with an average pregnancy age of 27-30 in 2022 compared to 20-24 in 1979. However, largely due to a lack of comprehensive sex education, Chile's adolescent fertility rate was 7 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 in 2023, lower than the US rate (13),

significantly lower than rates in neighboring Bolivia (65), Peru (44), and Argentina (26). Abortion is legal only in the case of an unviable birth, pregnancy from rape, or if the mother's life is at risk.

Homosexuality in Chile

Since 2015, same-sex couples could enter into a civil union and receive the same rights as heterosexual married couples, except in adoption. In 2022, government legalized same-sex marriage to include adopting children. While discrimination against homosexual individuals is outlawed, and they are generally accepted in Chilean society, discrimination persists, along with occasional flares of homophobic rhetoric. Since 2019, the law allows an individual over the age of 14 to change his name and gender on official documents without undergoing gender confirmation surgery, a change which activists consider a landmark decision.

At this time, the US State Department does not have a Status of Forces Agreement in place for Chile. Service members will be subject to local laws with regards to this topic.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Spanish is Chile's official language and the primary language of business, government, education, and the media.

Spanish

Spanish conquerors brought their language to the region beginning in the 16th century (see *History and Myth*). Today, almost all Chileans speak Spanish as a first or second language,



which they refer to as **castellano** (Castilian) after a region of Spain instead of **español** (Spanish), the term commonly used in Mexico and most of Central America. Spanish uses the same alphabet as English with three additional consonants – ch, ll (pronounced like “y” as in yam), and ñ (pronounced like the “ny”

in the word canyon). The similar alphabet, consistent spelling patterns, and Latin base make Spanish relatively easy for English speakers to learn.



Chilean Spanish differs from that

spoken in other Latin American countries in its unique grammar forms and vocabulary terms, some of which stem from Mapudungun, the language of the indigenous Mapuche people (see *Political and Social Relations*). Generally, Chileans tend to shorten words and remove consonants in the middle of words, such as pronouncing **salud** (“health”) as “salu” and **nada** (“nothing”) as “naa.” In informal contexts, Chileans may pronounce the “ch” sound as “sh,” such as saying “Shile” instead of “Chile.” Nevertheless, Chilean Spanish is mutually intelligible

with other Spanish dialects from around the world. Common Chilean phrases include **Qué onda?** (“What’s up?”) and **Cachai?** (“Do you understand?”). Chileans sometimes emphasize their statements with the syllable **po** as in **Sí po!** (an emphatic “Yes!”).

Indigenous Languages

While Chile’s 1980 constitution fails to recognize its indigenous inhabitants, a 1993 law outlined the government’s duty in respecting the rights of nine indigenous groups (see *Political and Social Relations*). At the same time, the law committed to the protection of the groups’ linguistic heritage.

The indigenous varieties still spoken today in Chile exhibit significant linguistic diversity and belong to the Aymaran, Quechuan, and Austronesian language families. The most widely spoken indigenous language is Mapudungun (250,000 speakers in 2007), followed by Aymara (19,000) and Quechua (1,000 in 2012). Rapa Nui, the endangered Polynesian language of Easter Islanders that notably has some similarities with



Hawaiian, counted some 1,000 speakers in 2016. Several other indigenous languages are endangered or have become extinct in the last several decades.

Since the 1990s, the Chilean government

has sought to promote and revitalize indigenous languages, such as requiring limited instruction in indigenous languages in schools with an indigenous population over 20% (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Other programs introduce indigenous languages and cultures to non-indigenous students in some elementary schools and daycare centers, but Mapuche demands for bilingual instruction in public schools remain unmet. Meanwhile, the decades-long decrease in speakers of indigenous languages continues. For example, the number of rural Mapuche claiming no knowledge of Mapudungun almost doubled from 16% to 31% between 2006-16.

Other Languages

Chile is also home to speakers of other languages. Beginning in the mid-19th century, the government encouraged European immigration to Chile (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Today, some 45,000 Chileans speak German. Smaller numbers of Chileans speak Catalan (a language spoken in parts of Spain and France), Croatian, Hunsrik (a language related to German and also spoken in Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay), Italian, and Vlach Romani (a language spoken by Roma – see *Political and Social Relations*).

English: An increasingly important language of global commerce, English is a common second language in Chile. Although public school students receive English instruction (see *Learning and Knowledge*), many Chileans do not learn to speak English proficiently. Most fluent English speakers live in urban areas.

Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Chile requires knowledge of Spanish and the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Communication patterns reflect the value Chileans place on close personal relationships and directness. Typically polite and reserved among strangers, they tend to be more talkative once friendship is established. Among friends, good-natured teasing is common and a sign of camaraderie. Humor derived from Chilean slang is also common and known as *picardía* (mischief).



As is common throughout Latin America, ***machismo*** attitudes (see *Sex and Gender*) are widespread, with men sometimes making derogatory and suggestive comments about women to their male friends or directly to women. Foreign nationals should avoid participating in such discussions.

Greetings

In formal settings, Chileans typically shake hands when greeting, although some of them prefer a firm grip over a shake in the workplace. Some Chilean women prefer cheek kisses with both friends and colleagues of both genders. Men may hug and

give back slaps to close associates and friends they have not seen in a long time.



Chileans also use a variety of verbal greetings, most of which refer to the time of day.

Buenos días

("good morning"), ***buenas tardes*** ("good afternoon"), and ***buenas noches*** ("good evening/night") are the most common. Chileans often extend such greetings to all present upon entering a room, shop, elevator, or similar public space.

Forms of Address

Forms of address depend on age, social status, and relationship but are generally highly formal and courteous. In most situations, Chileans use titles of respect such as ***señor*** ("Mr."), ***señora*** ("Mrs."), and ***señorita*** (for young/unmarried women). To demonstrate special deference to elders or those of a higher social class, Chileans use the honorifics ***Don*** (for males) or ***Doña*** (for females).

Spanish has different "you" pronouns and verb conjugations depending on the level of formality required. Chileans tend to use the formal ***usted*** ("you") in all business transactions. In family settings, Chileans also use *usted* when reprimanding children, and married couples often use *usted* with each other to

indicate respect. Foreign nationals should use *usted* with all conversation partners unless directed otherwise.

By contrast, Chileans reserve the informal **tú** or **vos** (“you”) for family, friends, and younger people. Although *vos* is derived from the plural form of the informal “you,” Chileans often use it when referring to a single person, such as asking **Cómo estás?** (“How are you all?”) instead of the singular *tú* form of **Cómo estás?**

Names

A Chilean name typically comprises one or two first names and two last names. A Chilean’s two last names indicate his or her family heritage. For example, in the name of former President Michelle Bachelet Jeria, Bachelet is her father’s family name, while Jeria is her mother’s. Chileans often shorten the full name by omitting the maternal family name. Most Chilean women retain their name when they marry.

Conversational Topics

After initial polite greetings, Chileans typically engage in light conversation about work and family. Other common topics of conversation are other countries and sports. Making positive observations about Chile and its food and wine can help



establish rapport. To avoid offense, foreign nationals should not inquire about the Pinochet dictatorship (see *History and Myth*), a polarizing topic still today. If a Chilean raises the subject, especially Pinochet’s human rights abuses, foreign nationals should listen politely and with compassion.

Language and Training Sources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at <http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/> and click on “Resources” for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Spanish
Hello	Hola
How are you?	¿Cómo está usted?
I am well	Estoy bien
Yes	Sí
No	No
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Gracias
You are welcome	De nada
I'm sorry	Lo siento
I don't understand	No entiendo
What is your name?	¿Cuál es su nombre? / ¿Cómo se llama?
My name is ____	Me llamo ____
Where are you from?	¿De donde es usted?
I am from the US	Yo soy de los Estados Unidos
Goodbye	Adiós
Good morning/night	Buenos días / tardes
What does ____ mean?	¿Qué significa ____?
What is this?	¿Qué es esto?
I would like a ____	Quisiera un/a ____
How do you say ____?	¿Cómo se dice ____?
...in English?	...en inglés?
...in Spanish?	...en español?
What do you want?	¿Qué quiere usted?
What time is it?	¿Qué hora es?
Where is the doctor?	¿Dónde está el médico?
Who?	¿Quién?
When?	¿Cuándo?
Where?	¿Dónde?
Which?	¿Cuál?
Why?	¿Por qué?

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 97%
- Male: 97.1%
- Female: 97% (2022 estimate)

Early Education

Before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors (see *History and Myth*), most regional inhabitants informally transmitted values, skills, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to younger generations.

Formal Education in Colonial Chile

During the Spanish colonial period, the primary focus of education was to impart basic literacy and instruction in Roman Catholicism, with various Roman Catholic orders establishing missions and schools. In 1697, the Spaniards created the College of the Natives to provide basic schooling to the children of Mapuche leaders, part of their larger effort to subjugate and control the Mapuche (see *History and Myth*).



Established in 1738 and formally opened in 1758, the **Real Universidad de San Felipe** (Royal University of Saint Philip) was Chile's first post-secondary institution, offering courses of study in theology, philosophy, law, medicine, and mathematics. In 1842, the institution became the University of Chile.

Education Post-Independence

Following independence (see *History and Myth*), the new government prioritized education, mandating the creation of two primary schools in every town, one each for boys and girls. In 1813, the government opened the **Instituto Nacional** (National Institute), an all-male secondary school in Santiago still operating today. As evidence of the Catholic Church's influence

during this period, education fell under the authority of the Ministry of Justice, Worship, and Public Instruction, which opened several technical schools for men and women, notably the **Escuela de Artes y Oficios** (School of Arts and Crafts). Chile's 1833 constitution affirmed education as a state priority, and laws in 1860 and 1879 established education as a right and guaranteed free public schooling through the secondary level. The 1877 **Decreto Amunátegui** (Decree of Amunátegui) opened post-secondary education to women for the first time.



Education in the 20th Century

Educational opportunities continued to expand in the 20th century. A 1920 law made 6 years of primary schooling mandatory for all children. Following the 1925 constitution's separation

of church and state (see *History and Myth*), the newly established Ministry of Education (MOE) assumed responsibility for education. With 38 public secondary schools for girls by 1931, Chile led Latin America in secondary schooling opportunities for both girls and boys.

Despite this progress, a lack of enforcement mechanisms meant enrollment remained low in subsequent decades. To reverse this trend, the government created the National Council for School Aid and Grants in 1953 to provide scholarships and free meals in both public and private schools. The program was effective, and by the 1960s, primary enrollment was nearly universal. In 1965, new legislation increased mandatory schooling to 8 years.

Into the 1970s, enrollment at the secondary level slowly grew, increasing from 14%-51% between 1960-74. As a Socialist and avowed Marxist, President Salvador Allende (in office 1970-73 – see p. 9-10 of *History and Myth*) proposed integrating the primary and secondary levels into a National Unified School. However, this plan, and his efforts to add instruction in socialist humanism to the curriculum, ended with Gen Augusto Pinochet's 1973 seizure of power.

The Pinochet regime implemented significant education reforms, notably removing authority for education from the MOE and assigning it to the municipalities. Further, the regime introduced a national voucher system for students to use at private schools. With access to these government funds, many new private schools and other educational institutions opened. For example, the number of universities increased from 8-41 between 1980-89. As an alternative to university education, the regime also created fee based **Centros de Formación Técnica** (Technical Training Centers).

Other Pinochet era reforms included the allocation of national government education funds by attendance rates and an end to the national teacher employment system. Because this system had ensured equity in teachers' training and salaries and that geographically remote schools were adequately staffed, this change negatively impacted instructional quality and caused inequalities among schools to grow.

Following the 1989 end of the Pinochet era and transition to democracy (see *History and Myth*), President Patricio Aylwin reintroduced the national teacher system and increased education spending, especially in rural areas. Nevertheless, some Pinochet-era policies remained, with final authority for education remaining with the municipalities.



A 2003 constitutional change lengthened compulsory education to 12 years, 8 years in basic education and 4 in upper secondary. Reforms in 2027 are expected to divide these 12 years into 6 years each at the primary and secondary levels. In 2013, reforms introduced a mandatory kindergarten year.

Modern Education System

Although reformed in 2015, the voucher system established during the Pinochet era continues today, meaning students may choose among free public, private-subsidized, and private non-

subsidized schools. For decades, the inequalities in Chile's education system have been a focus of ongoing social unrest. In 2006, widespread student strikes dubbed the Penguin Revolution resulted in some reforms. These include the MOE's reorganization, free lunch, transportation, the waiving of university entrance exam fees for needy students, and infrastructure improvements. Student protests, marches, and strikes surged again in 2011. While targeting the lack of public funding in higher education, the protests reflected broader discontent with Chile's deep social and economic divisions (see *History and Myth*). The protests again resulted in some reforms, notably the **gratuidad** (gratuity) program, which funds all tuition costs for the poorest 60% of students at Chile's public universities.

Nevertheless, the voucher-based system remains a focus of ongoing public discontent (see *Political and Social Relations*). In 2015, 54% of Chilean students attended private-subsidized schools and 36% public schools. By 2019, the proportion of public-school

students had slightly increased to 37%.

As of 2023, government spending on education was 5.9 % of GDP, just over the US rate that year (5.44%). All schools follow a national curriculum



established by the MOE. Over recent decades, attendance and graduation rates have significantly improved. By the early 2000s, secondary enrollment had reached almost 90%, and by 2018, almost 90% of secondary students graduated. Academic achievement has improved also, especially in reading, though in a 2018 assessment of 79 countries, Chilean students ranked below average in reading, mathematics, and science.

By law, all public schools must offer weekly religious education from pre-primary through the secondary levels. While most instruction is Roman Catholic (see *Religion and Spirituality*), the

MOE has approved curricula for 14 other religious traditions, and schools must supply such instruction if requested by parents. Parents also may request that their children be excused from religious education.

Other legislation mandates instruction in indigenous languages (see *Language and Communication*) in schools where indigenous students make up at least 20% of the student body. As of 2018, almost 1,500 schools offer so-called Bilingual Intercultural Education Programs, though instruction typically comprises only a few hours a week. Further, most indigenous students have no access to such programs because, they live in urban areas (see *Political and Social Relations*) and attend schools that fail to meet the required threshold.

Pre-Primary: Chilean children aged 2-5 may attend free public pre-primary programs, though the majority attend fee-based private programs. While enrollment rates in public programs have decreased in recent years, overall rates have increased.



Some 85% of children of the appropriate age attended pre-primary programs in 2020.

Basic Education: *Educación básica* or basic education begins at age 6 and comprises two stages, 6 years of primary education and

2 of lower secondary. Instruction at this level focuses on Spanish, English, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, art, technology, and religious education. In 2022, almost 99% of students of the appropriate age were enrolled in primary education.

Upper Secondary Education: *Educación media* or upper secondary education comprises 4 years, with the first 2 years providing general instruction and a common set of courses for all students. For the last 2 years, students choose among three tracks. The general track offers instruction in preparation for university studies and was chosen by about 89.2% students in 2020. The two other tracks focus on technical/vocational training

(10.8% of students) and the arts. In 2022, 99% of students of the appropriate age were enrolled in such programs. To enroll in higher education programs, students must pass the **Prueba de Selección Universitaria** (Test of University Selection).

Post-Secondary: Chile's post-secondary institutions are well-known and admired across Latin America. While enrollment rates are typically high, attainment remains low by international comparison, with just 18% of Chileans aged 25-34 attaining any type of post-secondary education as of 2023, compared to 56% in the US. The post-secondary system's high drop-out and low graduation rates historically trace to several causes, notably the predominance of costly private institutions, low government funding of the more affordable public universities, and few sources of financial support for needy students. Recent reforms aim to reverse these trends.

As Chile's oldest and most well-known university, the public University of Chile enrolls some 40,000 students at campuses across the country in undergraduate and graduate programs in science, technology, the arts and humanities, medicine, law, and other disciplines. Other prominent universities include the private Pontifical Catholic University of Chile in Santiago, the public University of Santiago, Chile (formerly the School of Arts and Crafts), and the private Federico Santa María Technical University with its main campus in Valparaíso.



Institutions award several degrees, such as **técnico** (technician) after 2-3 years of study and **técnico universitario** (university-level technologist) after 2-3.5 years. Other programs award the title of **bacherillato** after 2 years of study, while 4-5 years of university study lead to several degrees, such as the **licenciado** (equivalent to a US Bachelor's degree) or **título profesional** (professional degree). After another 1-3 years of study, students may receive their Master's degrees, while doctoral programs typically require 3-4 years additional years.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

In addition to formality and etiquette, Chileans tend to view good interpersonal relationships as vital to conducting successful business transactions. Often having a casual attitude regarding punctuality in personal settings, Chileans usually proceed in a timely manner during business affairs.

Time and Work

The work week typically runs Monday-Friday, with hours varying by establishment type. Many shops open Monday-Saturday from 9am-6pm, while grocery store hours are typically Monday-Saturday 8:30am-6pm. Most banks are open Monday-Friday from 9am-2pm, and some open briefly on Saturday mornings. Post office hours are typically Monday-Friday from 9am-5:30pm, and government offices Monday-Friday from 9am-6pm, though public hours may be shorter. While some businesses close for a short lunch from about 12pm-1pm, others take a longer break in the early afternoon. By law, most businesses must close on Sundays, though a few shops may remain open. In rural areas, operating hours tend to be informal, varying according to owners' preferences.

Working Conditions: The legal work week cannot exceed 45 hours and the workday 8 hours, with Sunday recognized as a mandatory day of rest (with exceptions for essential workers). Employees

receive a 50% bonus for overtime hours. The labor code sets health and safety standards and pension contributions, among other requirements. Many Chileans receive two annual bonuses called **aguinaldos**, one on Chile's Independence Day in September and the other during the December holidays. Some 27% of the population is engaged in informal employment (see *Economics and Resources*), where labor codes and workplace standards remain unenforced, and pay is frequently below the minimum wage.



Time Zone: Most of mainland Chile adheres to Chile Standard Time (CLT), which is 4 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Easter Island adheres to Easter Island Standard Time (EAST), which is 6 hours behind GMT. Both zones observe daylight savings time from September-April. By contrast, southern Chile (the Magallanes and Chilean Antarctica Region) remains 3 hours behind GMT the entire year.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- March/April: Easter weekend (dates vary)
- May 1: Labor Day/Workers' Day
- May 21: Navy Day
- End of June: Saint Peter and Paul Day
- August 15: Assumption of Mary
- September 18: Independence Day
- September 19: Army Day
- October 9: Day of the Races
- End of October: Reformation Day: Day of the Protestant and Evangelical Churches
- November 1: All Saints Day
- December 8: Immaculate Conception
- December 25: Christmas Day

As allowed by law, employers may require staff to work on some of these holidays.

Date Notation: Like the US, Chile uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Unlike Americans, Chileans write the day first, followed by the month and year.

Time and Business

Chilean businesses tend to be hierarchical in structure, with final decisions typically requiring top level approval. Maintaining interpersonal relationships is typically an integral part of business gatherings, which often include family members. While many Chileans have a relaxed attitude to time, the pace of life in

Chile is typically faster than in many other Latin American countries. Most business meetings commence on time, typically beginning with informal conversation before proceeding to business matters at an efficient pace.

Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Chile depends on the nature of the relationship. Friends and family generally observe closer personal space than acquaintances or strangers.

Touch: In business settings, greetings usually include little touching beyond the handshake, though women may clasp hands loosely and exchange cheek kisses. Chileans usually reserve physical affection for family and friends, and young couples sometimes engage in public displays of affection.

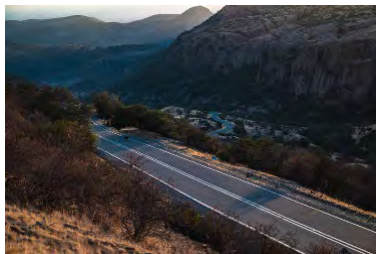
Eye Contact: Chileans typically make brief but direct eye contact during greetings and maintain eye contact in conversations, considering it evidence of interest and confidence.

Photographs

Some churches, museums, landmarks, and military installations prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should acquire a Chilean's consent before taking his photo. Explicit permission is particularly important when photographing children and indigenous people.

Driving

Chile has a well-developed road system compared to other



countries in the Andean region. However, poor conditions on rural mountain roads often force closures, particularly in the winter. In 2021, Chile's rate of traffic-related deaths was 10 per 100,000 people, lower than the US rate (14). As in the US, Chileans drive on the right side of the road.

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Chilean dress, arts, and recreation reflect the country's rich history, Roman Catholic and folk religious traditions, and focus on family. Art and music in particular reflect social and political movements, such as opposition to the Pinochet dictatorship.

Dress and Appearance

Everyday dress is typically conservative, with men preferring jackets and pants and women skirts or pants with blouses. Muted colors are the norm, and the combination of a blue jacket with gray pants (or vice versa) is so common it has been labeled the Chilean "uniform." While Chilean women exhibit more variety in their dress, they also tend to avoid bright colors. In business settings, Chileans typically prefer formal styles, such as dark suits or dresses/pantsuits with high heels.



Traditional: Chileans usually wear traditional dress only for holidays or special events. Men's wear is based on the traditional styles of Chilean cowboys or **huasos**, consisting of an often-colorful wool or silk poncho (**chamanto**) over a black shirt and pants, knee-high leather boots with spurs, and a straw or felt wide-brimmed hat (**chupalla**). Known as the **huasa**, women's traditional wear

consists of a dress with a cinched waist, floral sash, and puffy skirt that falls just below the knees. Styles for older women are more conservative, consisting of an ankle-length black dress accented by a red sash.

Chile's indigenous residents (see *Political and Social Relations*) have their own styles. Traditional Mapuche clothing is handwoven from llama or sheep's wool. A woman's outfit includes a flower-like headpiece (**trarilonco**), silver earrings, and a tunic-like garment covering the shoulders to the knees (**küpam**) that is cinched with a belt and fastened on the right

shoulder with a brooch (**tupu**). Men's wear consists of a black **makuñ**, a garment similar to a poncho, over pants and a shirt and paired with a felt hat and sandals.

By contrast, the traditional clothing of the Rapa Nui on Easter Island (see *History and Myth*) is made of raw material, such as dried grass and banana fibers, and consists of a loincloth (**hami** or **maro**) and cloak made of vegetable fibers (**nua mahute**) if needed for warmth. Women also may add a feather skirt and top. Elaborate headdresses made of plant fibers or feathers are notable features of traditional ceremonies and dances.

Recreation and Leisure

Chileans often spend their leisure time with family and friends, some visiting their parents or grandparents every weekend. Other common recreational activities include sharing meals, playing sports and games, and visiting outdoor dance halls. Kite flying is popular among children.

Festivals and Holidays: Chileans hold a variety of festivals and community celebrations, many reflecting the country's Catholic roots. The government introduced Reformation Day as a new public holiday in 2008 (see *Time and Space*) in recognition of Chile's Protestant population (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Many communities around Santiago celebrate the **Cuasimodo** festival on the first Sunday after Easter, when a procession of horseback riders, cyclists, and pedestrians accompanies the town priest through the streets. Some religious events also incorporate indigenous traditions. For example, some 200,000 people gather in the village of La Tirana in July to honor the patron saint of Chile, the Virgin of Carmen (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Festivities include fireworks, music, and processions of dancers in ornate, colorful costumes. Colorfully clad dancers also perform, with a focus on the Andacollo Festival, held at Christmastime to honor the miracles performed by the Virgin of Andacollo. The Andean Festival with



the Strength of the Sun, held every January in the far northern port city of Arica, attracts musicians and dancers from the entire Andean region.

Other events celebrate Chile's agricultural output. For example, fall harvest festivals held in March and April celebrate Chilean cuisine and its world-famous wines (see *Sustenance and Health*). By contrast, the **Fiestas Patrias**, a week of "national festivities" held around Chilean Independence Day in mid-September (see *Time and Space*), focus on national identity, patriotism, and the military. Events include a military parade, processions, rodeos, open air markets with food and dancing, folklore presentations, and dancing competitions.

On May 21, Chileans mark an important battle of the War of the Pacific (see *History and Myth*) by observing Navy Day. On this day, the Chilean President gives the State of the Union address, noting the country's accomplishments and outlining his future plans.

Sports: **Fútbol** (soccer) is Chile's most popular sport, with youth learning the sport through pick-up games or school and amateur leagues. Many universities have teams, inspiring intense rivalries, and professional leagues field teams at several levels for both men and women. Chile's men's national team, **La Roja**



("The Red") became the South America champion back-to-back in 2015 and 2016 by winning the Copa América, though its best World Cup showing was third place in 1962. The women's national team was the Copa América

runner-up in 2018 and qualified for the World Cup for the first time in 2019, though it was ousted at the group stage of the tournament. Other popular sports include basketball, tennis, skiing, and equestrian e. Chile recognized **palin**, a stick and ball game played by the indigenous Mapuche people (see *Political and Social Relations*), as a national sport in 2004.

Music and Dance

Chile's rich musical and dance traditions reflect European and indigenous influences. Folk music often incorporates European instruments, like the guitar, harp, and accordion and includes various styles of song, such as **tonada** (ballad) and **vals** (waltz). By contrast, Andean music relies heavily on indigenous instruments, such as panpipes (**zampoñas**), with sizes ranging from 2 inches to several feet, the **quena** (cane flute), **palo de lluvia** (rain sticks), **wada** (a dried pumpkin filled with seeds to create a rattling sound), and the **ocarina**, a wind instrument made of clay and shaped like a turtle's shell. Other instruments in Andean music demonstrate European influence, particularly the **charango**, a mandolin-like instrument made of an armadillo shell.

La Nueva Canción

Chilena: During the 1960s, the **nueva canción chilena** ("new Chilean song"), a genre pioneered by singer-songwriter Violeta Parra that combined traditional Andean musical styles with lyrics became prominent, focusing on social justice. Notable examples include the song *El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido* (*The People United Will Never Be Defeated*) and *Cantata de Santa María de Iquique*, a piece that commemorates an early-20th century massacre of striking mine workers. **Nueva canción** artists supported the Presidency of Socialist Salvador Allende and helped popularize leftist ideals in the early 1970s. After Pinochet seized power in 1973, the government detained, jailed, or murdered many **nueva canción** artists, notably famed folk musician Víctor Jara. Other well-known groups include *Los Jaibos* and *Inti-Illimani*.

Other Musical Genres: Other common genres include **cumbia** (a style originally from Colombia featuring complex African rhythms), Puerto Rican **reggaetón**, techno, pop, rock, rap, jazz, and classical.



Folk Dance: An integral part of the annual *Fiestas Patrias* celebrations, the **cueca** is considered Chile's national dance. In it, a couple in traditional attire wave handkerchiefs and perform

fast and lively steps around one another to depict a persistent suitor and his reluctant love interest, a rooster's courting of a hen, or even a *huaso* attempting to lasso a horse.



Other notable folk dances include the **sombreroito**

("little hat"), a group dance in which performers twirl around a hat on the ground, **trastrasera**, traditionally performed on Chiloé Island. The Mapuche perform the **Choique purun**, which mimics the movements of a rhea (large bird native to South America). The Rapa Nui of Easter Island (see *History and Myth*) perform several Polynesian dances, most featuring swaying hip movements and accompanied by drumming and chanting.

Literature

Sometimes referred to as the "Land of Poets," Chile has produced literature of worldwide significance. In the 16th century, Spanish conqueror Alonso de Ercilla's epic poem, *La Araucana*, described the initial phase of the Spanish conquest of Chile (see *History and Myth*). His romantic depiction of the proud valor of both the Spaniards and the Mapuche people and the brave exploits of Mapuche leaders became a fundamental part of Chilean national consciousness in subsequent centuries.

Often considered the father of the Chilean novel, Alberto Blest produced several works in the late 19th century that realistically described everyday life for middle- and upper-class Chileans, while condemning their materialism and moral failings. In subsequent decades, other writers focused on social problems, such as the hard lives of Chilean miners. Beginning in the 1920s, poet and educator Gabriela Mistral gained worldwide acclaim for her highly emotional works focused on love and loss. In 1945, Mistral became the first Latin American author to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature.

A student and admirer of Mistral, Pablo Neruda also began publishing poetry in the 1920s. Over the next 4 decades, he became one of the world's most influential and widely read poets. While known for his odes and love poems, Neruda also explored historical, political, and societal issues and advocated social change, prompted largely by his commitment to communism. In 1971, Neruda was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Chile's self-described "anti-poet" Nicanor Parra also received significant worldwide acclaim in the last half of the 20th century.

Beginning in the late 1960s, Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez' writing style, which mixed myths, dreams, and reality (known as magical realism), influenced a generation of Latin American writers. Among them was Isabel Allende, the niece of President Salvador Allende. Writing from exile following the President's 1973 toppling by Pinochet (see *History and Myth*), Allende gained international prominence in 1982 for her novel *The House of the Spirits*, a saga tracing a family's history from the 19th century to the Pinochet dictatorship. Later works explored the violence of the dictatorship and the lives of women.

Since the 1989 end of the Pinochet dictatorship (see *History and Myth*), literary freedom has returned, inspiring poets and writers to produce works on an array of topics. More recently, poet and novelist Roberto Bolaño received



significant international acclaim, especially for his award-winning 2004 novel *2666*.

Folk Arts and Handicrafts

Chile has a rich history of arts and crafts, with a new generation now seeking to rediscover and preserve techniques. Common handicrafts include ceramics, baskets, woolen textiles, and straw and woolen hats. The Mapuche are known for their delicate silverwork accessories.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Sharing lengthy meals with friends and family is a common social event. Chile's culinary traditions reflect its geographic location along the Pacific Ocean and European and indigenous influences.

Dining Customs

Chileans typically eat three daily meals and sometimes have an afternoon snack. The mid-day meal was traditionally the largest, with workplaces and schools closing for long lunch breaks, though this practice is increasingly rare today. Coffee or tea usually accompanies the afternoon snack (known as **once** or "eleven"), usually taken between 4pm-6pm. Some German-Chilean communities (see *Language and Communication*) have **once alemana** ("German eleven"), a heartier snack featuring cakes or pâtés. The evening meal is typically served at 8:30pm or later.



When invited to a home, guests usually arrive a few minutes late and it's customary to present the host with a small gift, such as flowers or a bottle of Chilean wine. Hosts typically serve their guests first, who after finishing their portions, must decline several offers if they do not want additional servings. Diners tend to take their time eating and may linger for hours over lively conversation. An evening meal is sometimes followed by an after-dinner coffee or liqueur.

Diet

Varying somewhat by region, Chile's cuisine reflects indigenous Mapuche, Spanish, and other European influences. Meals tend to highlight animal protein and make ample use of Chile's long coastline, which provides easy access to seafood. Popular types include king crab, sea bass, salmon, oysters, scallops, and sea urchins, though availability depends on the time of year and

region. As is the case across southern South America, beef is a popular protein, and Chileans often gather to share a **parrillada** (small barbeque) featuring beef, sausages, and potatoes.



Other Chilean staples include starches and grains, which are versatile and low cost. **Choclo**, a white, large-kernelled corn that predates the introduction

of Spanish cuisine, is a common ingredient in traditional foods or as a side dish. Spanish colonizers and subsequent European immigrants brought wheat to Chile, leading to the widespread popularity of breads today. Often dense, bread accompanies meals or is offered with toppings like **pebre** (a mix of tomatoes, onions, cilantro, and peppers).

Popular Dishes and Meals

Breakfast is typically a light meal accompanied by **café con leche** (coffee heavily diluted with milk). Popular breakfast foods include breads such as the **marraqueta** (a small, dense loaf similar in texture to a French baguette) or **pan amasado** (a simple flat bread that is traditionally unleavened) topped with fruit jam or **quesillo** (a soft dairy spread likened to cream cheese). Lunch frequently comprises two courses served in the early afternoon. Often accompanied by salads or **empanadas** (meat or seafood turnovers), popular main dishes include **cazuela de ave** (a hearty chicken soup with rice, peas, carrots, and squash), **chupe de mariscos** (seafood stew), **ceviche** (pieces of raw seafood cured in lime juice), or **pernil de chanco a la chilena** (braised ham with chili sauce). Dinner is typically a smaller version of the midday meal.

A popular meal for special occasions is **curanto** a dish traditionally prepared by Mapuche people on Chiloé Island. In a lengthy process, meat, potatoes, and seafood are wrapped in rhubarb leaves to roast over hot coals in the ground, though a modern method also allows preparation on a stovetop. Other common dishes include **humitas** (corn paste mixed with onions,

basil, and pepper, wrapped in corn husks and steamed),



porotos con mazamorra (white bean and corn soup), and **sopaipillas** (fried pastry made with squash or pumpkin and served with *pebre* or a sweet syrup). Common desserts include **alfajores** (two

shortbread cookies around a filling of browned condensed milk) and **kuchen** (German-style cakes or pies).

Eating Out

Restaurants in Santiago, Valparaíso, and other larger cities range from upscale establishments specializing in international cuisine to inexpensive, casual eateries (**cocinerías**) serving Chilean dishes. Small towns typically have just a few, casual restaurants serving Chilean food. Bakeries and street stalls sell snacks like *empanadas* or a range of sweet and savory bread options. Most restaurants stay open late but close between lunch and dinner services. While service is typically prompt, Chilean waitstaff usually allow patrons to consume their meals without interruption and do not bring the bill until asked. Restaurants do not automatically add a surcharge to the bill, and a 10% tip is expected for good service.

Beverages

Chileans tend to drink tea and coffee in the morning and for their snack. While espresso (**cafecito** or **cortito**) is available, it is less common outside of specialty cafés. As in other South American countries, some Chileans prefer **yerba maté**, a herbal tea drunk from a gourd.

Spaniards introduced grape vines to Chile as early as the 16th century, in order to make wine for use in Roman Catholic church services (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In the mid-19th century, the wine industry began to rapidly develop with the arrival of European winemakers. Chile's temperate climate and rocky soil creates an ideal environment for the product, and Chilean wines consistently garner international acclaim today (see *Economics*

and Resources). Other popular alcoholic beverages include **pisco** liquor, often served as a cocktail that also includes lime juice and egg whites.

Health Overview

Chile has some of the best medical care in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region. As the level of overall health has steadily improved in recent decades, Chile frequently ranks above its neighbors in multiple health indicators. For example, life expectancy at birth has increased from about 74 to 80 years since 1990 and is higher than the LAC (74) and the US (77).

Between 1990-2023, infant mortality (the proportion of infants, who die before age one) decreased from about 16 to 6 deaths per 1,000 live births, lower than the LAC average of 14 and slightly higher than the US rate (5). Likewise, maternal mortality dropped from 31 to 15 deaths per 100,000 live births since 2000, significantly below the LAC average (88) and under the US rate (21).



Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Chilean medicine centers around the beliefs of the Mapuche and other indigenous populations, who tend to view illness as an ailment of the soul. Aiming to address the cause of a sickness, not just its symptoms, Mapuche healers (***machis***) offer a number of treatments that often incorporate prayer, massage, herbal remedies, and the use of a traditional drum (***kultrun***).

In the 1990s, some public clinics began offering some traditional healthcare services, primarily in an effort to serve the growing number of indigenous Chileans moving to urban areas (see *Political and Social Relations*). A 2012 law included traditional medicine in the healthcare system, providing employment opportunities for *machis* in public clinics. Today, these services

are also popular among non-indigenous Chileans seeking an alternative to Western medicine.

Modern Healthcare System

Chileans have the option of accessing healthcare through public or private providers, both of which are funded through paycheck deductions. Public care is managed through the **Fondo Nacional de Salud** (FONASA, the National Health Fund), which any Chilean can access by paying 7% of his salary. The FONASA provides members with comprehensive preventative and curative care, with additional out-of-pocket payments varying according to a sliding scale.

Many middle- and upper-class Chileans prefer to purchase private coverage through the **Instituciones de Salud Provisional** (ISAPREs, Institutions of Provisional Health). Such private options generally offer more accessible and higher quality care, particularly in urban areas. Nevertheless, both the FONASA and the ISAPREs operate under the **Aceso Universal**

con Garantías Explicitas (AUGE, Universal Access with Explicit Guarantees), a 2004 reform that ensures universal provision of quality care for the most common diseases or ailments.



While level of care can

vary across the country, Chile's health system is generally considered one of the region's best-equipped. Further, it ranks higher than the US system by some measures of healthcare efficiency. Chile has some 32 physicians per 10,000 people, less than the US (36) but higher than the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendation of 23.

Health and Healthcare Challenges

As in most developed countries, the leading causes of death are chronic and non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases, which accounted for some 85% of deaths in 2021. Of those, diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular/respiratory diseases are the most common, accounting for some 70% of deaths the same year.

Preventable “external causes” such as accidents, suicides, drug use, and smoking resulted in about 6% of deaths in 2021, equal to the US rate (6%), while communicable diseases, the most common being COVID-19, caused about 21% of deaths.

While Chile is one of two LAC countries that follows WHO guidelines and taxes tobacco at high levels to discourage smoking, the practice remains common, with 29% of adults regularly smoking in 2022, compared to 7% of Peruvians and 12% of Bolivians. Rates are also high among youth, with 23% of children aged 13-15 years old smoke.



An increasingly sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy eating habits have led to a surge in obesity over the last few decades. A 2016 law requires warning labels on food products deemed unhealthy and prohibits their sale in schools in order to combat obesity. The law also forbids food advertisements directed at children. In 2022, 34% of adults were obese, and more than 26% of children were obese or overweight.

While Chile's healthcare system is generally robust and provides high quality care, health and healthcare disparities remain. For example, rates of communicable diseases tend to be higher among indigenous and lower-income Chileans. Further, their reliance on the state-run FONASA creates a high demand for public healthcare services, meaning that patients sometimes encounter long wait times to receive care, particularly in rural areas, where there are fewer healthcare professionals. While the public FONASA system's sliding scale for out-of-pocket payments makes healthcare affordable for the poorest Chileans, it causes significant economic hardships for many middle-income Chileans and forces some to forego care.

As of August 2024, Chile had some 5.4 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, causing some 62,872 deaths, with most cases concentrated in the Santiago metropolitan area.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

Following Chile's conquest and colonization (see *History and Myth*), the Spanish Crown allocated **latifundios** (large estates) – which produced cattle, wheat, and other agricultural products – to some Spaniards. Driven from their traditional lands, many of Chile's indigenous residents were forced to labor on the *latifundios*. Common exports to Spain at this time were tallow and hides.

In the decades following Chile's 1818 independence (see *History and Myth*), the economy continued to focus on agricultural exports, especially wheat. In the mid-19th century, Chile benefitted from growing worldwide demand for copper, creating a mining boom. Global demand for silver and nitrate in the 1870s compelled Chile to



invade Peru and Bolivia, spurring the War of the Pacific (see *History and Myth*) and allowing Chile to acquire valuable silver mines in Peru and nitrate fields in Bolivia. Subsequently, nitrate exports fueled significant growth at the same time that Chile acquired lands in Araucanía, the indigenous Mapuche people's historical territory (see *History and Myth*), helping to expand agricultural production.

Chile experienced economic decline in the 1910s-30s. This contraction was primarily due to two causes: a decrease in demand for nitrate caused by the development of synthetic alternatives during World War I and the worldwide decline in demand for Chile's other exports that accompanied the Great Depression beginning in 1929. This decline reversed during World War II, when expanding global demand for copper fueled significant growth. In subsequent decades, the number of skilled laborers increased through improved education (see *Learning*

and Knowledge). With the government pursuing diversification through industrialization, manufacturing acquired increased importance, as reliance on mining and agriculture faded. Significant urbanization also occurred during this period, with 75% of Chileans living in urban areas by 1970.

Beginning in the 1960s, successive governments implemented various land, education, and industrial reforms to address Chile's social and economic inequalities. These improvements peaked under Socialist President Salvador Allende (in office 1970-73 – see *History and Myth*), when the government seized



foreign-owned mining companies, implemented large-scale land reform and a public works program, raised salaries, and froze prices. However, Allende faced significant opposition, both internal and

external (see *History and Myth*). Due at least in part to US sabotage efforts, these policies led to reduced agricultural output, shortages, rationing, little job creation, and hyperinflation. The unstable economy contributed to Chile's growing political divisions.

Following his 1973 seizure of power (see *History and Myth*), Gen Augusto Pinochet sought to rid Chile of all leftist ideology, particularly Allende's economic reforms, preferring instead a hands-off, free-market economic approach. To this end, Pinochet pursued a "shock treatment" of the economy that included the privatization of all businesses and publicly owned farmland, the repression of labor unions and restriction of workers' rights, and the lowering of protectionist tariffs.

These policy changes supported growth in the export of new commodities such as fruit, vegetables, and wine, with agricultural exports growing from \$33 million-\$1.2 billion between 1970-1991. However, the policies eventually caused

unemployment to rise, wages to decline, and the standard of living for most Chileans to worsen. In response, the Pinochet government implemented new fiscal policies in the 1980s that were somewhat effective. Nevertheless, ongoing political repression combined with economic challenges like high unemployment prompted wide-scale protests and the eventual end of the Pinochet regime (see *History and Myth*).

Since the 1989 transition to democracy (see *History and Myth*), successive governments have retained some Pinochet-era free market policies, while increasing government spending on antipoverty social programs. Fueled in part by increased agricultural exports, the economy boomed, with GDP increasing at annual average rate of 5.8% between 1990-2006, compared to the Latin American average of 1.1%.

Between 2006-10, the economy stagnated, but growth soon returned, with GDP averaging 5.3% growth between 2010-14. Largely due to declining world copper prices, GDP growth fell to 1.6% in 2016, briefly revived in 2018 with 4%, then reduced again to 1.1% in 2019. In 2023 GDP growth was just 0.2%, but it accelerated to 2.2% in 2024,



Today, Chile's open economy, well-developed institutions, and strong rule of law make it an attractive destination for investment. Despite its overall economic strength, Chile continues to exhibit deep social and economic divides. In 2006, the richest 20% of Chileans earned 10 times more than the poorest 20%. Since then, the income gap between rich and poor has narrowed slightly, and the proportion of Chileans living in poverty decreased from 26%-5% between 2000-2024. Government incentives to bring informal enterprises into the formal economy have also been successful: between 2010-23, the proportion of workers laboring in the informal sector decreased from 40%-21%.

Nevertheless, as of 2023, about 65% of Chileans failed to earn enough to cover the monthly cost of their food, transportation, housing, and other basic necessities. Further, Chile's education and healthcare systems tend to burden middle class families with debt. Instead of providing financial stability in old age, the Pinochet-era pension system renders many retirees destitute.

Over the last decades, Chile has experienced waves of protest about these issues, the most recent spurred by a metro increase in October 2019 (see *Political and Social Relations*). In response, President Sebastián Piñera proposed various reforms, notably a change in the pension system that would raise pension payments above the minimum wage. However, the 2020-21 coronavirus pandemic has slowed progress. While the government has issued stimulus checks, loans, and rent subsidies totaling some \$17 billion, the ongoing pandemic threatens to thrust many middle-income Chileans into poverty. Further, the number of Chileans living in extreme poverty will likely increase.

As the world's leading producer of copper and with the metal its principal export, Chile is vulnerable to global price fluctuations. In 2024, GDP growth was 2.2%. In 2023 inflation stood at 3.4% in increased to 4.5% in 2024. Nevertheless, the rebound is dependent on the health of its largest trading partners, the US and China.

Services

Accounting for about 57% of GDP and 72% of employment in 2024, services comprise the economy's largest sector. Key

subsectors include tourism, banking, healthcare, education, creative industries, transport, and construction.

Tourism: Total travel and tourism comprised about 10% of GDP and 11% of employment in

2023, the tourism industry generated some \$22 billion the same year. Visitors primarily from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, and Peru



visit attractions like Santiago, Viña del Mar, the Atacama Salt Lake, Easter Island, and Chilean Patagonia.

Industry

As the second largest sector of the economy, industry accounts for some 30% of GDP, and 22% of employment in 2024.

Mining: This subsector comprised some 16% of GDP in 2024 and focused primarily on copper, silver, and nitrate. Over the last years, copper has accounted for around 43% of exports, but that proportion increased to over 45% in 2023, bringing in some \$43 billion in revenue. Chile is also the world's largest producer of iodine and has the world's largest reserves of lithium.

Manufacturing: This subsector has experienced a steady decline since its peak at about 30% of GDP in 1974. In 2024, it comprises about 9% of GDP and consists primarily of oil refining and chemical production.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector consists of farming, livestock, fishing, and forestry and accounted for some 4% of GDP in 2024, and about 6% of the labor force in 2024.

Farming: As of 2022, about 14% of Chilean land is used for farming. Wheat is grown primarily for domestic use, while fruit, wine, and nuts are exported. Chilean fruit finds a ready market in the Northern Hemisphere, since Chile's summer growing season aligns with the North's winter.

Chile's wine industry experienced significant growth beginning in the late 1980s, when new equipment and techniques enabled increased production capacity. In 2023, over

2% of exports were wine totaling close to \$2 billion, and some 70 wineries sold both premium-bottled and bulk wine to more than 150 countries. In 2024, Chile ranked as the world's seventh largest wine producer and fifth largest exporter.



Forestry: This subsector comprised some 3.5% of GDP in 2023. Large tree plantations produce wood pulp for export, while natural forests yield lumber. The use of historically Mapuche territories for commercial logging has provoked tensions and some acts of Mapuche resistance in recent years (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Fishing: Commercial and artisanal operations harvest sardines, mackerel, hake, and anchovy, among other species. Other products include fish meal and fish oil. Over the last decade, Chile has emerged as the world's second largest producer of salmon behind Norway. Not native to the region, salmon are farmed in ocean bays in central and southern Chile. The salmon industry has attracted significant criticism and opposition due to the farms' pollution and negative impact on biodiversity, water quality, and local residents' health.



Currency

The Chilean **peso** (Ch\$) is issued in four banknotes (Ch\$1,000, 5,000, 10,000, and 20,000) and five coins (1, 5, 10, 100, 500). The

peso divides into 100 **centavos** but no longer in circulation. Between 2015-25, US\$1 ranged between CH\$700-CH\$1,000. As of April 2025, US\$1 is worth CH\$943.

Foreign Trade

Chile's imports, totaling \$7.9 billion in 2024, primarily consisted of petroleum, telecommunications equipment, and cars from China (23%), the US (20%), and Brazil (10%). In the same year, exports totaled \$9.93 billion and consisted of copper, fish products, fruits, and wine sold to China (39%), the US (16%), and Japan (7%).

Foreign Aid

In 2022, Chile received some \$69 million in official development assistance, and in 2022, US bilateral aid to Chile totaled \$1.4 million, mostly for humanitarian aid and migrant response plans. In recent years, Chile has become an aid provider through the Mexico Joint Cooperation Fund and the Pacific Alliance Co-operation Fund (Chile, Colombia, and Mexico).

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Chileans have access to some of Latin America and the Caribbean's (LAC) most developed physical infrastructure and telecommunications systems. While freedoms of speech and the press are constitutionally protected, the authorities occasionally restrict those freedoms.

Transportation

While many middle- and upper-class Chileans travel by privately-owned vehicle, and ride-sharing services are increasingly popular, Chile also has well-established public transportation options. Santiago has an extensive metro system that transports some 2.5 million passengers daily, and Valparaíso has a one-line commuter rail system connecting it with nearby cities. Urban dwellers also rely on **micros** (public buses) and **colectivos** (shared taxis) that collect passengers along a set route. Coach buses are a common method of travel between cities, though domestic air travel is also increasingly popular. Ferries are common in the South, where fjords often separate communities.



Roadways: Of Chile's over 53,427 mi of roads, some 50% are paved. The Pan-American Highway, known as *Ruta 5* in Chile, is a major roadway through most of the length of the country, ending at the southern city of Puerto Montt. Other major roads connect Chile's coast with the interior.

Railways: Chile has about 4,600 mi of railway originally built in the 19th-20th centuries, primarily to serve mining operations (see *Economics and Resources*). Today, most railways transport freight, though the government announced a major investment project in 2019 that would serve 150 million passengers annually by 2027 over several new lines, including commuter rail systems around Santiago.

Ports and Waterways: With its long Pacific coastline, Chile has numerous seaports. The largest and busiest, San Antonio in Valparaíso Region ranked as Latin America's 9th largest in terms of throughput in 2023. Other major seaports include Arica, Iquique, and Valparaíso. The southern port of Punta Arenas services ships headed for Antarctica.



Airways: Of Chile's 379 airports, 90 have paved runways. With some 26.2 million passengers in 2023, Arturo Marino Benítez Airport in Santiago is Chile's and southern South America's

busiest. Other major transport hubs include Carriel Sur International Airport in Concepción and the cities of Antofagasta, Arica, Iquique, Puerto Montt, and Punta Arenas. Most flights for Easter Island depart from Santiago's Mataverí International airport.

Energy

In 2023, Chile generated some 36% of its electricity from fossil fuels, 27% from hydroelectric plants, and another 32% from other renewable sources like wind and solar. Chile has a relatively small oil industry, where almost all extracted petroleum is consumed domestically. Chile must import its natural gas and has occasionally clashed with neighbor Bolivia over the issue. In 2015, Chile approved a plan to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels in favor of renewable sources and become carbon neutral by 2050.

Media

Chile's 1980 constitution protects freedoms of speech and the press, and the government generally respects those rights. Nevertheless, the Chilean national police (the **carabineros** – see *Political and Social Relations*) occasionally fail to protect journalists covering protests and confrontations between Mapuche activists and the authorities (see *Political and Social Relations*). To prevent them from reporting on these and

other sensitive topics, like government corruption, the authorities occasionally target journalists for harassment and physical attacks. Further, just a handful of owners control most media outlets, effectively restricting press freedoms. In a 2023 ranking of the press freedoms in 180 countries, Chile ranked 83rd. Since 2016, when it ranked 31st, Chile's place on the list has fallen every year.

Print Media: Chile's most widely circulated newspapers include *El Mercurio*, *La Tercera*, and *Clinic*, all Spanish-language publications. The *Santiago Times* is an English-language newspaper that covers Chilean, Latin American, and US news. Overall, print readership is falling, with many Chileans preferring to access news online.

Radio and TV: Radio is popular, with a variety of private stations such as *Radio Cooperativa*, *Radio ADN* and *Radio Bío-Bío* broadcasting news, talk shows, rock and pop, and ***nueva canción chilena***



("new Chilean song" – see *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Other popular stations include *FM Quiero*, *Beat FM*, and *Radio Clave*, which feature comedy sketches, Puerto Rican ***reggaetón*** music, and sports commentary. Most Chilean television channels are private, apart from the state-owned ***Televisión Nacional de Chile*** (Chile National Television). Residents also access international radio and television channels through satellite and cable services.

Telecommunications

Chile has some of the LAC region's most modern telecommunications infrastructure. In 2023, Chile had some 10 landlines and 135 mobile subscriptions per 100 people.

Internet: Some 94% of Chileans regularly used the Internet in 2023, compared to 89% of Argentinians and 73% of Bolivians. In 2021, Chile had the LAC region's fourth highest penetration rate, tied with Uruguay. Many Chileans use mobile phones to access the Internet. Generally, government authorities restrict neither Internet access nor block or censor content.



For more information on
the Air Force Culture and Language Center visit:
airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC

For more information on
United States Air Forces Southern visit:
<http://www.12af.acc.af.mil>



CULTURE GUIDE

Access all of the AFCLC's expeditionary culture field
guides in our mobile app!



GET IT ON
Google Play



Available on the iPhone
App Store



DoD Enterprise Mobility
**Personal Use
Mobile Apps**