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Getting back to the state: policing the Covid-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT
This paper analyzes the impact of the pandemic (from 2020 to 2021) on levels of trust and legitimacy of the Chilean police (*Carabineros*) by the population in the metropolitan area of Santiago, Chile. Based on a pseudo-panel method and a cohort fixed-effects regression model that controlled for unobserved time invariant heterogeneity, we found a significant increase in police legitimacy during the pandemic (on average, 63%, among the adult residents of the region, based on the police legitimacy index comprising six perceptual variables). Evidence suggests that the perceived performance of the Carabineros during the pandemic served to recover the trust of citizens, at least temporarily, even when this intervention entailed the enforcement of anti-popular measures.

Introduction

The first Covid-19 case was registered in Wuhan, China, at the end of December 2019. Shortly afterwards (on March 11, 2020), the speed of transmission of the illness and the high mortality rate spurred the WHO[1] to declare a pandemic. Most countries responded by implementing a variety of emergency measures – with police intervention – to stop, or to at least slow the propagation of the virus, for example, by limiting movement, introducing mandatory stay-at-home measures, closures of airports and businesses, etc. The pandemic posed an enormous institutional challenge for both public health and security forces. The police, traditionally the State's first responders in emergency situations, confronted unexpected and unprecedented challenges when helping the population, enforcing new public security measures, and maintaining order and surveillance, with the broadening of their functions and tasks occurring within a context of risk (of infection), and restricted resources. Beyond the initial difficulties and confusion regarding the scope of the new measures – for example, the detention of people for violating the stay-at-home measures (Farrow 2020, Jennings and Perez 2020, White and Fradella 2020) -, the success of security functions depended on the degree of trust in and legitimacy of the police.

Across Latin America, thousands of people were detained for disobeying stay-at-home orders or for contravening curfews (Alvarado *et al.* 2020). This resulted in a double challenge for the region's police forces who systematically suffer from a lack of public trust and legitimacy (Arias and Goldstein 2010) or from a negative perception of their work (Cao and Zhao 2005, Corbacho *et al.* 2015, Cruz 2015, Sozzo 2016, Bergman 2018). Paradoxically, the lack of trust affects police capacity, while to a certain degree, their capacity determines public trust in the police institution (Bottoms and Tankebe 2012; Terrill *et al.* 2016).

The legitimacy of the police and trust is fundamental to ensure obedience to the law, and even more so in crisis situations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Lack of trust and legitimacy often implies greater resistance to abide by and cooperate with the police (Bolger and Walters 2019), a lower tendency to report (Brunson and Wade 2019, Crehan and Goodman-Delahunty 2019) and the tendency to recidivate (Paternoster 1997, Sunshine and Tyler 2003). On the other hand, within the regional context of distrust and lack of legitimacy, the police are responsible for enforcing and monitoring compliance with unpopular measures (such as isolation, curfews, closure of businesses or street markets) that impact low-income sectors more significantly. These sectors traditionally have the least trust in the police (Kane 2005, Gau and Brunson 2010, Mazerolle and Wickes 2015), and, at the same time, are the most monitored and controlled social groups, subject to the most contact with the police (Auyero and de Lara 2012, Willis 2014).

In sum, the police in Latin America had to guarantee public safety, prevent disruptions, and enforce compliance with the new public health regulations within a context of lack of trust and legitimacy, paradoxically depending on the willingness of the public, and particularly the most disadvantaged (and most affected) social groups, to comply with social distancing, the prohibition of travel, and business closures. The importance of studying perceived police behaviour during the pandemic lies in understanding the effect of the police response to the crisis on legitimacy and community trust, beyond the pandemic. This paper therefore analyzes the perceived performance of the Chilean police during the pandemic (2020–2021) and the effect on population levels of trust and police legitimacy. Chile has two national police bodies. This study focuses on the Carabineros de Chile, national, uniformed police, responsible for crime control and prevention.

This is a particularly relevant case given the institutional crisis that confronted this police institution during the social outbreak at the end of 2019 that concluded with various international reports confirming human rights violations (Amnesty International -AI[2], Human Rights Watch -HRW[3] and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights -OHCHR[4]). This, together with corruption scandals, had resulted in a substantial decrease in citizen trust (Dammert *et al.* 2021). Within this context, our findings indicate an increase in police (Carabineros) legitimacy during the pandemic, particularly in sectors generally inclined to support police work and presence. The actions of the Carabineros during the pandemic initiated the recovery of citizen trust, even when their intervention involved enforcing unpopular measures. (Nevertheless, it should be noted that the situation itself, rather than the actions of the police, may have influenced public attitudes towards the police).

These data are important as they may be useful for designing public policy recommendations and point to a possible path for the police in the region following the pandemic, particularly as 'Many Latin American countries view the Carabineros as a model of success, sometimes inviting them to train their police forces' (Bonner and Dammert 2021, p. 2). In addition, the data can contribute to consolidating a response to highly complex situations (natural disasters, epidemics, and other similar events), to strengthen the relationship with the community, and increase trust and institutional legitimacy.

Trust, police legitimacy and emergency threats (Pandemic)

Trust in the police is based on a series of behavioural expectations that the population consider to be positive (Nagin and Telep 2017). Obviously, this is not only an issue of perception, as this trust determines behaviour. For example, low levels of trust in the police are generally associated with low crime reporting levels (Tyler 2006, Tyler and Fagan 2008), which in turn, have a certain impact on police effectiveness, as the institution is not directly aware of crime frequencies, spatial concentration, or criminal modus operandi. Paradoxically, trust also depends on police effectiveness. This is particularly important in contexts of social crises or emergencies, such as natural disasters, social upheaval or in cases of terrorism because increase the sense of vulnerability of the people (Gordon and Arian 2001).

In such situations, the police generally become the most visible face of the State and their deployment is not only necessary in terms of security, but also in terms of aid, rescue, public order, and institutional presence (Perry and Jonathan-Zamir 2020). On occasions, the police become the coordination body for different areas of the State involved in crisis response (firefighters, health, civil defense, etc.). Any of these situations may modify the role of the police, and consequently, their 'usual' relationship with the community (Deflem and Sutphin 2009). Precisely in this regard, Jonathan-Zamir and Weisburd (2013) studied the effects of security threats on antecedents of police legitimacy, and showed that during extraordinary periods, police legitimacy may differ from ordinary times (that is, 'assessments of police performance did increase in importance for the public under threat' - p.3).

The importance of studying policing during the pandemic lies in the fact that citizens' perceptions of the police may have been negatively affected by the public health crisis and the role played by police institutions. Police reaction time to crime may have decreased with the incorporation of 'new' functions within a context of reduced personnel (agents with comorbidities were released from service or assigned to administrative tasks), as the enforcement of new restrictions and controls is generally undertaken at the expense of patrols and conventional surveillance (Weisburd and Bayley 2015). Negative perceptions of the police (in this case, for neglecting their usual functions) may also be affected in other ways. In the particular case of the Covid-19 pandemic, some authors have shown that physical social distancing measures, new protocols for contact with the public, and specific protection equipment have created the perception that the police are less accessible and friendly and more distanced from the population (Lum *et al.* 2020, Sandrin and Simpson 2021). At the same time, as first responders, the police have had to confront criticism caused by certain civil rights restrictions –on movement, travel within the country or the monitoring of people- (Reicher and Stott 2020). In fact, to a certain degree, the police have had to assume the rejection of regulations, occasionally resulting in confrontations with citizens (Neyroud 2020) or to social disturbances (Murphy 2020, McCarthy 2021).

However, not in all cases did pandemic policing provoke negative attitudes in the population. On occasions, public opinion may have improved as the police appeared to be enforcing a collective interest that generated a certain social cohesion: public health. The police may have been seen as an institution concerned about the needs of the community – all needs, not only those related to security (LaFree and Adamczyk 2017). In fact, this point is key to the success of police interventions in moments of crisis (Deflem and Sutphin 2009). The police become the institutional representation of 'we are all in this together' that positively impacts police legitimacy and boosts obedience of Covid-19 regulations (Jackson 2020). Public support of the police may also improve as a result of a general feeling of cohesion in the face of an emergency threat of some kind (Clements 2020). This support may vary with time once the emergency disappears, is mitigated, or decreases, or can turn against the police once the cost of policing the crisis becomes more evident (Lai and Reiter 2005). There are cases, such as in New Zealand, where the police implemented aggressive measures from the start of the pandemic and by the end of lockdown, satisfaction and trust in police institutions had increased (Sibley 2020). This may be previous context-dependent (and thus not necessarily generalisable): for example, France implemented an extremely strict, repressive approach, while the Netherlands a more pragmatic and communicative style that depended largely on individual responsibility. 'In France, the dominant frame is of policing as a matter of 'force' and 'war'; the Dutch policing style is framed in terms of responsibilization, communication and persuasion' (Terpstra 2021, p. 168). Paradoxically, although the experience in France was similar to that of New Zealand and Chile, no increase in levels of trust in the French police were registered. This may be due to the fact that the French police generally have a hierarchical relationship with the population, together with regular and considerable tension, and are distrusted by citizens (police in France perform modestly in terms of satisfaction, trust, and legitimacy compared to other European Union countries: Roché 2020). Similarly, Canada increased powers as the virus spread, and implemented, -again, according to a previous traditional context-, over-policing in poor and

working-class communities, that was also often racialized (McClelland and Luscombe 2021). In any case, the idea proposed by Jones (2020), that a restrictive police response to the pandemic is predictive of a major division between them and the community and limits the possibility of constructing police legitimacy after the pandemic, strongly depends on the previous context of the relationship between the police and the community.

Latin America

Little research has been done in the region on public perceptions of the police, likely due to the lack of systematically generated reliable empirical information (Sozzo 2016), although Mexico is an exception (National Institute of Statistics and Geography - INEGI 2021). Even so, both available figures (Latinobarómetro, 2020)[5] and research involving police institutions (Cao and Zhao 2005, Corbacho *et al.* 2015, Lessing and Willis 2019, Liebertz 2020, Fondevila *et al.* 2021, Malone and Dammert 2021) point to low levels of trust and police legitimacy in the region. Historically, this has been problematic for the functioning of Latin American police forces, particularly in the context of the harsher public security policies of recent years (Malone and Dammert 2021) where the police have played a key role in the increased punitivism (an increase in criminal justice apparatus, punishable behaviours, sentences, etc.) (Massa and Fondevila 2019, Bergman and Fondevila 2020).

In contrast, other analyses have focused on specific experiences of the relegitimation of the police in the region, or on the positive effect of certain innovations or limited attempts at reform on citizens' perception: for example, pacifying police units in Río (Larkins 2013), police procedural justice in São Paulo (Oliveira *et al.* 2020) or in Colombia (Ordóñez 2020), female police stations in 100 municipalities in Brazil (Córdova and Kras 2020), hybrid security orders -operationalized through the presence of non-state armed groups participating in local governance- in Central America (Cruz 2021), the use of body cameras by the police in Uruguay (Ariel 2020), and the municipal forces in south of Mexico (Fondevila and Meneses 2017).

Research in the region on the causes and consequences of the lack of legitimacy, low levels of trust in and satisfaction with the police has focused on victimisation (Carreras 2013), the perception of insecurity (Carreras 2013) and corruption (Sabet 2012, Cruz 2015, Vilalta and Fondevila 2020). Socio-demographic characteristics also impact trust in the police: Sabet notes that age is a dominant factor in comparison with education and income in Mexico (2012). However, other regional studies argue that education levels and income are more important than age in determining trust and satisfaction with the police (Cao and Zhao 2005). Other structural variables, such as democratic stability and the rule of law, also appear to be strong predictors of trust in the police (Malone 2010).

Chile

Regarding trust, the Chilean police are an exception as both the Carabineros, as well as the Investigations Police have traditionally enjoyed high levels of citizen trust (Dammert 2017, González 2019). With the return to democracy in 1990, and considering that levels of insecurity were the main citizen concern at the time, police institutions occupied a central position, promoted by the perception of a high degree of efficiency, professionalism, and low corruption rates (Dammert & Malone, 2020). This perception of the police emerged out of a systematic policy of rapprochement with the community, as well as a solid communication strategy that strengthened the institution's image of probity and efficiency (Bonner 2013).

Democratisation in Latin America did not include the consolidation of trust in and efficient police institutions (Arias and Goldstein 2010). In fact, data from national and regional sources have consistently shown that besides the Carabineros de Chile and the National Police of Colombia, police forces face a crisis of legitimacy based on violent practices, corruption, and limited effectiveness in crime control and prevention (González 2019, Malone and Dammert 2021). For example, data from LAPOP on trust in national police in 2018 showed Chile with the highest levels at 52,38, while

Colombia had 49,64; Argentina 44,96; Peru 43,41; Honduras 42,09; and Guatemala 41.43 (Americas-Barometer, 2022[6]).

The importance of trust in the police in Chile has been analyzed from multiple perspectives, among the most relevant of which are those that emphasise the importance of its public relations and communication strategy (Bonner 2013); its community policing practices (Malone and Dammert 2021) and the sense of fair treatment (Dammert *et al.* 2021).

However, in mid-2016, various cases of corruption were revealed, resulting in the purge of more than fifty senior officers for fraud against the State (Weibel 2018). This impacted citizen trust in police work (Graph 1), and the Carabineros were no longer considered the Chilean institution that enjoyed the highest levels of citizen trust (Dammert & Malone 2020) –they did, nevertheless, maintain a high citizen trust rate, more than that of the public prosecutor, the executive power and congress (González 2019). Added to this, in the following year '*Operación Huracán*' (Operation Hurricane') (2017)[7] led to the detention of eight Mapuche leaders, apparently involved in an illicit terrorist organisation. This operation revealed serious deficiencies and illegal practices of incriminating suspects (Viollier Bonvin and Ortega Romo 2019, Olea and López 2020).

Within this context of an increasing lack of trust, the police institution was confronted with the social upheaval that began in October 2019. The street protest demanded the broadening of State coverage in matters of health and public education, as well as the social pension system (Faúndes 2019, Morales Quiroga 2020). The violent police response created mass citizen rejection and multiple confrontations that ended in serious human rights violations – including cases of torture and sexual abuse (Muñoz *et al.* 2021). This caused a crisis of institutional legitimacy that opened a conversation on the need for a police reform that would limit the Carabineros' autonomy and incorporate accountability mechanisms (Araujo 2020, Dammert 2020). The year ended in confrontations with the police in various parts of the country and historically low levels of institutional trust.

During the initial stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, the police played a key role in monitoring the extremely strict health measures that included the creation of a 'virtual police office' charged with issuing passes and constantly patrolling public spaces. They also played an important role in creating a permanent sense of protection through their presence in public spaces, by broadcasting information and general data, by collaborating with multiple media outlets that portrayed them as 'heroes' battling against Covid-19, as well as through multiple social protection initiatives and even by bringing food to families in need throughout the country.[8] Community policing practices were enhanced in most urban areas, providing those in need with a close by 'helping hand'. Nevertheless, the main role of the Carabineros during the pandemic was one of control: of crime, illness, contagion, and failure to comply with lockdown measures, while their tools of communication were based on arrests and control of the streets. The other tools mentioned supported this main role, rather than a more preventative one. Thus their protector role is understood essentially as their capacity to control the problem and act as a mechanisms of dissuasion, rather than prevention. Furthermore, considering the shadow of corruption and violent practices cast by the 2019 social upheaval, the police (and the government) developed multiple initiatives designed to tackle these issues. In December 2021, a bill was sent to congress that aimed to enhance police training, especially for those in the lower institutional ranks.[9] Also, in February 2022, the 'Modernization of Carabineros Law' was passed, which included limitations on the use of force, as well as external audits.[10]

In March 2020, the pandemic began in Chile (Clunes Clunes 2020). Authorities immediately adopted harsh measures to mitigate infection, based mainly on a national declaration of 'State of Catastrophe', with daily curfews of between 10 and 12 h (Ochoa-Rosales 2020). The restrictions were based on a) the prohibition of movement (except in the case of public and private health officials, firefighters, and Armed Forces of Order and Security) and only with individual permissions (passes) in exceptional situations; and b) increased penalties and sanctions –sanctions for non-compliance with the health measures were increased from a maximum of 540 days to 5 years imprisonment (Ministerio de Salud, 2020[11]).

Within this context (discredit and pandemic), the Carabineros quickly became a fundamental actor in ensuring compliance with the measures. The institution deployed 39,124 additional police officers and in just three months (until June 2020), had undertaken 17,400,071 citizen inspections (pedestrians on the street were stopped to check for permits to leave their homes) and 6,518,000 vehicle inspections ('stop and frisk' road blocks in the main streets). This represented an enormous effort given that the country has a population of 17,574,003 -only just higher than the number of inspections- (National Institute of Statistics – INE 2017). By the following year (March 2021), the Carabineros reported having detained 450,137 people for public health crimes[12] (for not using face masks, but mainly for failing to adhere to the stay-at-home policies: 285,154). Furthermore, 3.908.338 passes and 175.901.278 exit permissions were issued by the virtual office. This information was all registered in the Carabineros Public Account.[13]

The role of the police centred around the enforcement of measures and the protection of citizens. Paradoxically, although this function acquired a highly repressive nature, it served to reverse the growing tendency of discredit of the Carabineros.

Data and methods

To test the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the legitimacy of the Carabineros, we used the two waves of the Police Legitimacy Survey (January-March 2020 and November-December 2020) conducted in the metropolitan area of Santiago, Chile. These time intervals correspond to the periods before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. As can be seen, the first survey, reflecting public attitudes and perceptions prior to the pandemic, was collected between January and March 2020. However, this is hardly a before period; COVID-19 was first identified in China on December 31st, 2019, and declared a pandemic by the WHO on March 11th (https://www.who.int/news/item/27-04-2020-who-timeline—covid-19). Accordingly, many of the studies on policing during COVID-19 have looked at March 2020 as the first period of the pandemic, making the findings of the current study incomparable. Nevertheless, we use Chile's specific pandemic timeline and consider that this period was indeed a 'before' period for the Carabineros. The first government epidemiological report on Covid is dated March 29, 2020, with an estimated total of 2,499 known cases in the country. In fact, the first recorded deaths from the disease only appear in the report of April 16, 2020 (Informe Epidemiológico 2020). In terms of containment, on March 19, with 238 diagnosed cases, a State of Constitutional Exception of Catastrophe was implemented for 90 days, together with the closing of borders. It could be argued that prior to the second half of March, the changes in Chilean daily life were minor (Castiglioni 2020). In addition, according to the fieldwork report, 80% of the information of the second cohort was collected before March 15.

Given the attrition rate, wave two of the survey was purposely designed to follow a pseudo-panel or synthetic panel approach. Synthetic panels were developed to generate variable estimates when actual panel data is not available (Guillerm 2017, Levi and Goldberg 2021). Synthetic panels also help to avoid measurement error produced by either non-response or attrition (Hirano 2001, Dasgupta 2015, Levi and Goldberg 2021). Synthetic cohorts were created based on gender, age group, commune (i.e. municipality), and household socio-economic index. The latter is a composite index of the level of household income, and education level and occupation of the household head.

In the first wave, 932 individuals were interviewed. With the synthetic cohorts approach, the second wave consisted of 708 individuals, of whom 104 had participated in the first wave. The pseudo-panel survey approach was followed to provide the matching missing cases from the first wave. The sampling error of the first wave is 3.2% (95% CI), with 3.7% (95% CI) for the second wave. These samples are representative of the adult population of the metropolitan area. The survey questionnaire consisted of 349 variables divided into eight thematic sections: respondent identification variables; state of the country, safety, and police effectiveness; police presence; justice; equity and legality; public image and trust in

the Carabineros; social outbreak; and demographic, socioeconomic and political ideological characteristics of respondents.

Dependent variable

Police legitimacy constituted the dependent variable in this study. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used to create a component index measuring Police legitimacy.[14] This component index was based on the following six perception/opinion items: the Carabineros never act according to the law; individuaĺs predisposition to obey the police; the Carabineros apply the law to everyone equally; the Carabineros respect human rights; the Carabineros represent Chilean society; and the Carabineros effectiveness in providing safety. With an Eigenvalue above 3.8, the first component accounts for 64.1% of the covariation between items (see Table 1 in the Appendix). The resulting scores were used to represent individual measures of Police Legitimacy. Figure 1 below illustrates the distribution of the Police Legitimacy component scores in waves 1 and 2 of the survey, that is, the time periods from January-March of 2020 and from November-December 2020 respectively. Table 2 in the appendix shows the changes in each item before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Most perception items (5 out of 6) show a significant improvement with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 1 below shows that the mean of the Police Legitimacy component scores increased significantly from the pre-pandemic to the pandemic periods, from a mean value of -0.281 before the pandemic to 0.254 ($p<0.05$) after the pandemic began. The Police Legitimacy component measure is the result of a PCA and therefore individual scores are standardised score values with a mean of zero and standard deviation of one.

Figure 2 presents the boxplot of the Police Legitimacy scores for both survey waves. It shows, in greater detail, that the median value of individual scores of the Police Legitimacy component also increased once the pandemic began. The histogram of the individual changes in the Police Legitimacy component between the Pre-pandemic and Pandemic periods (i.e. surveys 1 and 2 respectively) resemble a normal distribution (see Figure 2) although partially skewed to the left. Overall, these statistics and plots indicate that Police Legitimacy increased significantly after the start of the pandemic, compared to the period prior to the pandemic Figure 3.

Independent variable

The independent variable (IV) is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on police legitimacy. The IV is a binary (0,1) dummy variable indicating the pre-pandemic and pandemic periods, where Wave 1 comprises the first period (January-March of 2020) and Wave 2 the latter period (November-December 2020).

Table 1. Cohort fixed-effects linear regression.

	Estimate	Robust Std. Err.	Z Value	Sig.	[95% CI]	
Pandemic period	0.635	0.104	6.110	0.000	0.431	0.838
Victimisation	−0.322	0.163	−1.980	0.048	−0.642	−0.002
Fear of crime	0.501	0.145	3.450	0.001	0.216	0.786
Social protests (2)	0.219	0.185	1.180	0.237	−0.144	0.582
Social protests (3)	0.083	0.204	0.410	0.683	−0.318	0.484
Contacted Carabineros	0.264	0.151	1.750	0.080	−0.032	0.559
Within R2	0.079					
Between R2	0.115					
Overall R2	0.089					
Rho	0.479					
Hausman Test	88.34					
AIC	3,827.2					
Obs.	1,263					

*Categories for Social Protests are (1) = Benefited, (2) = Affected, (3) = Neither Benefited nor Affected.
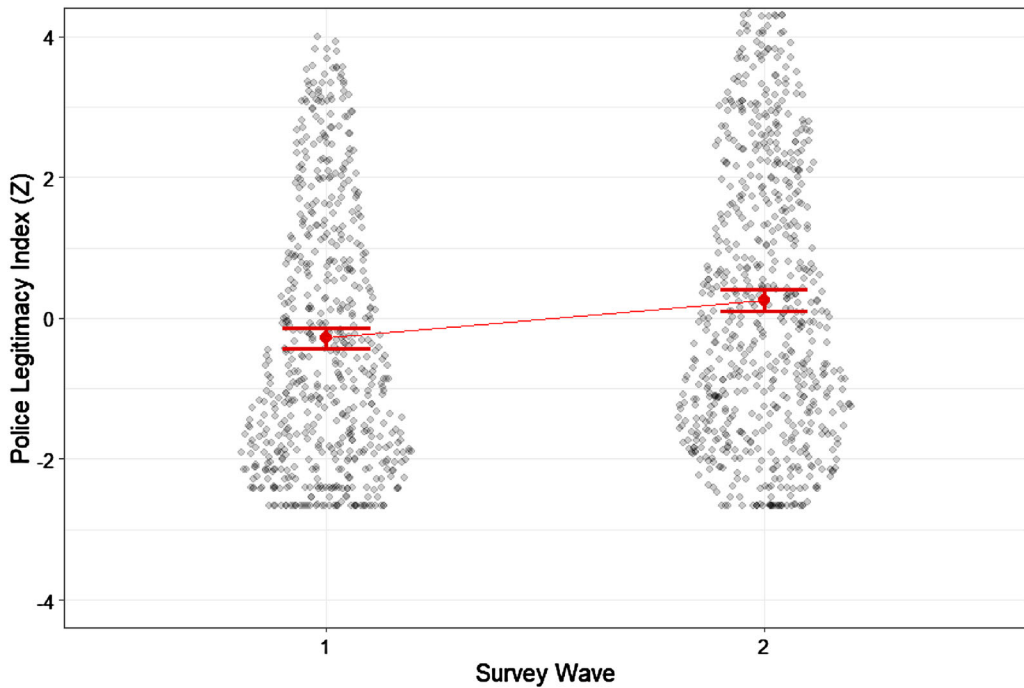
Figure 1. Plots of the Police Legitimacy Component for Waves 1 and 2*.

*Brackets represent the Standard Error.

Control variables

Four variables were included as control variables. The first two variables were used to represent quality of life with respect to crime and public security: previous experience of criminal victimisation (1 = Yes; 0 = No), as well as the fear of crime when walking alone in a neighbourhood[15] (1 = Yes; 0 = No). Opinions on the social protests of late 2019 and early 2020, the third control, were included to account for the 'law and order' ideological predispositions of respondents. The fourth control variable was having had direct contact with the Carabineros at least once (1 = Yes; 0 = No). Figure 4 below shows the relationship of each control variable with Police Legitimacy for each time period (or survey wave). The Police Legitimacy component can be seen to have increased significantly between periods (survey waves 1 and 2) for most categories of the control variables. Major increases in Police Legitimacy can be observed among respondents that had not been victims of crime, had no fear of crime, and among those who believed that social protests affected the state of law and order in the country. Police Legitimacy also increased in similar magnitudes for respondents irrespective of whether they had had at least one incident of previous contact with the Carabineros.

Table 2. Estimation sample descriptive statistics.

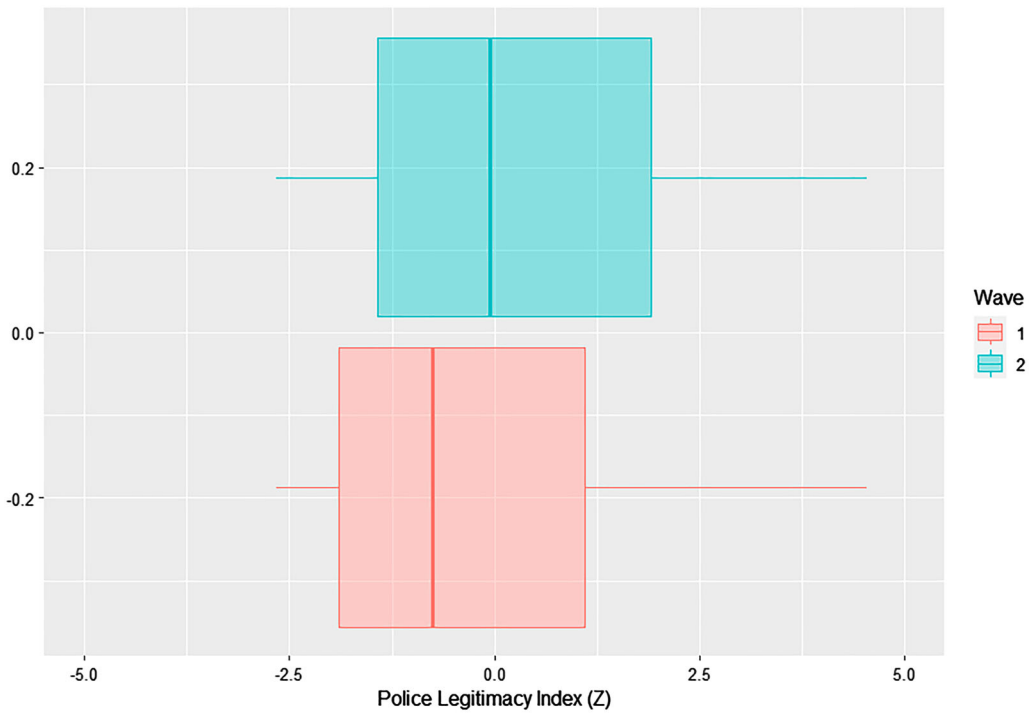|	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max
Police Legitimacy	0.023	1.961	−2.663	4.549
Pandemic period	0.528	0.499	0.000	1.000
Victimisation	0.006	0.452	−0.280	0.720
Fear of crime	0.002	0.484	−0.624	0.376
Social protests (2)	0.436	0.496	0.000	1.000
Social protests (3)	0.143	0.350	0.000	1.000
Contacted Carabineros	0.003	0.488	−0.608	0.392
Weights	1.011	0.111	0.869	1.207

Figure 2. Boxplots of the Police Legitimacy Component for Waves 1 and 2.
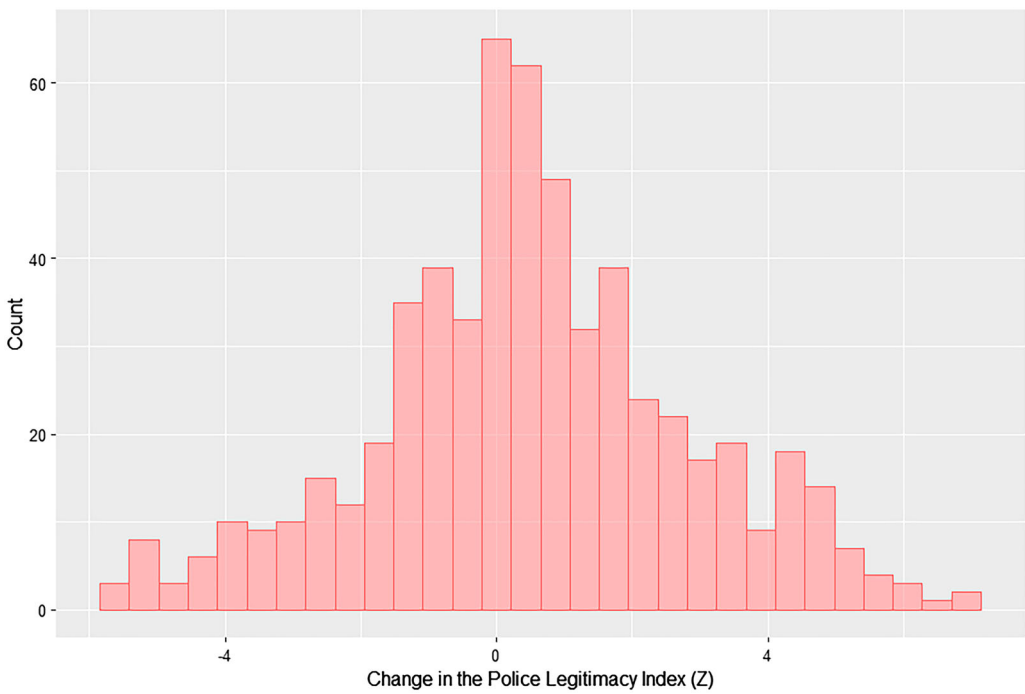

Figure 3. Plots of the Police Legitimacy Component and Changes between Waves 1 and 2.
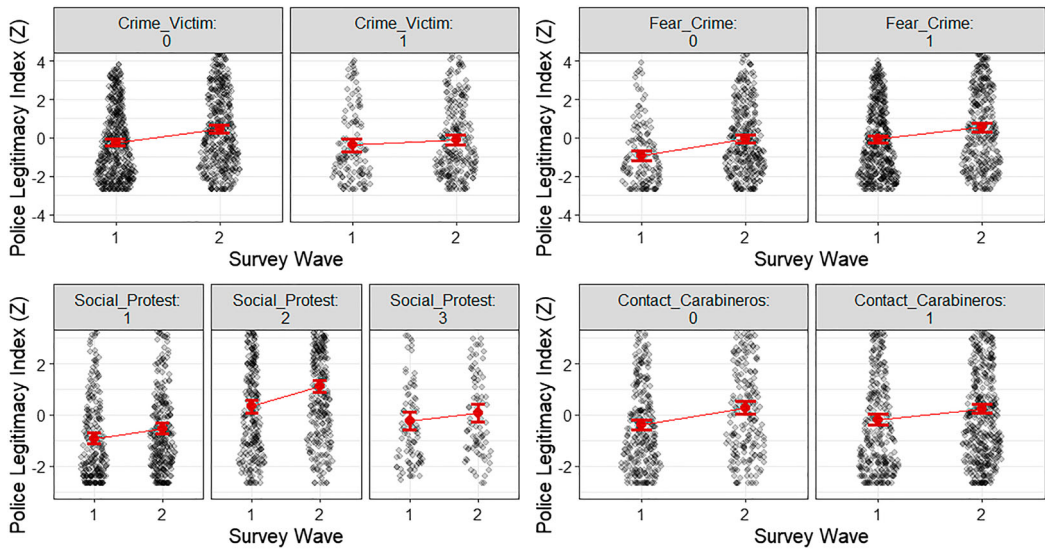
Figure 4. Relationship between Police Legitimacy and Control Variables by Survey Wave *.

*Note: 1 = Yes, 0 = No. Categories for Social Protests are (1) = Benefited, (2) = Affected, (3) = Neither Benefited nor Affected. Brackets represent the Standard Error around the Mean.

Analytical strategy

As we aimed to test whether a change in Police Legitimacy (DV) occurred between the pre-pandemic and the pandemic periods, and the sample was collected separately using a pseudo-panel method, we estimated a fixed-effects cohort panel regression in which the individual-fixed effect was replaced by a mean cohort effect. That is, the DV was centred on the mean of the observed values for each cohort. The predictors were also centred on their mean for each survey wave cohort. Under this approach, fixed effects estimators, based on cohort averages, are consistent and will converge towards the true values of the parameters of interest when the number of cohorts/survey waves is small, the sample size is sufficiently large, and the explanatory variables are not correlated with the error term (Guillerm 2017). We thereby controlled for unobserved time invariant heterogeneity in the model. We conducted a Hausman test to test the null hypothesis of fixed effects errors uncorrelated with the regressors.

Given that substituting individual variable values with intra–cohort averages introduces measurement errors, and thus violates the absence of correlation between the error term and the covariates assumption, we used a quasi-maximum likelihood estimate of the parameters (Moffitt 1993, Collado 1997, Guillerm 2017). As our observed DV is continuous, we fitted the data with the use of a linear model. In addition, we used a two-ways fixed effects regression model to simultaneously adjust for individual-specific and time-specific unobserved confounders. However, although two-ways fixed-effects specifications cannot remove all potential causes of bias, our analytical strategy provides robust evidence regarding whether the Covid-19 pandemic had an independent effect on police legitimacy, while controlling for observed covariates and the different sources of unobserved confounders. Results with $p < 0.05$ values were considered statistically significant. Weighted samples were used in all analyses. Given the sample design, results cannot be extrapolated to residents outside of the Santiago Metropolitan Area.

Results

As observed in the previous section, survey results show an important change in the population's attitude towards the Carabineros during the pandemic period as compared to the period prior to

the pandemic. The public health crisis and the role of the police appear to have calmed critics of the institution and its social devaluation. It is possible that the crisis served to alter public opinion of the State (perhaps temporarily), and, in particular, its visible face: the Carabineros as first responders whose purpose was to safeguard the nation during the external threat of the virus.

The effect of the pandemic itself was also examined, while controlling for the correlates of these changes. The results of the cohort fixed effects regression model are shown below. Linear model coefficients represent average marginal effects. With the control variables kept constant, the Carabineros significantly recovered their legitimacy in the Santiago de Chile metropolitan area during the pandemic. On average, their legitimacy increased by around 63%, among the adult residents of the region. Their scores in the Police Legitimacy component also increased by an average of 50% among residents who are afraid of crime, but not among actual victims of crime. In the case of the latter group, the Carabineros experienced an average reduction of 32% in the Legitimacy component. Neither opinions regarding the social protests nor the experience of having had contact with the Carabineros at least once, seem to have had an independent effect on the Carabineros Legitimacy.

The result of the Hausman test is statistically significant (Chi2 = 88.3, p <0.001) leading us to reject the null hypothesis of the errors correlated with our regressors. In other words, our fixed effects specification is adequate. The within R2 value indicates that the model's within individual variation explains a good proportion of the variation in Police Legitimacy, suggesting that individuals indeed changed their minds over time with respect to the Carabineros legitimacy. The Rho estimate suggests that 47.9% of the total variation in Police Legitimacy is due to population heterogeneity or unobserved confounders across individuals.

Discussion

The question remains as to how this evidence can be understood. One possible explanation is that the mentioned crisis of legitimacy and trust, linked to corruption and the violation of human rights by the Carabineros, was less important than the general issue of protection. In other words, lost trust can be easily regained when the more general processes of insecurity are once again fundamentally valued, which is precisely the situation with the pandemic: an external threat endangered the continuity of community existence and the life of its members. Within this context, Covid-19 offered a unique opportunity to the Carabineros to reposition themselves as the ultimate safeguard of the community and the Chilean State (although these results are not applicable to those living outside of the Santiago metropolitan area). These police represent the enforcement of collective interests, creating social cohesion around public health at risk (Jonathan-Zamir and Weisburd 2013, LaFree and Adamczyk 2017). As argued by Jackson (2020), the Carabineros became the institutional representation of 'we are all in this together', and this positively impacted police legitimacy. While the role of first responder often tends to be problematic, reducing the positive perception of the institution as it becomes the visible face of the State in conflictive situations, in this case, it appears to have had the opposite effect. The Carabineros became the basic coordinating body of the different State areas related to the pandemic, and in addition, assumed aid, rescue, State presence, and public order functions, among others (Perry and Jonathan-Zamir 2020). These functions possibly reversed the fall in popularity experienced by these police (Deflem and Sutphin 2009), at least during the pandemic. To date, no third wave of the survey has been conducted. This would provide information on whether the wave of support is a short- or long-term occurrence. At the same time, it should be noted that the lack of true counterfactuals, given that the study is not a randomised controlled trial, is an important limitation of this work, and prevents broad generalisations.

Their visibility during the extreme emergency served to rebuild the lost levels of trust and legitimacy (Deflem and Sutphin 2009). The rise in positive perception, including among those who are not usually inclined towards police work, may also be related to the redefinition of the threat itself. The Covid-19 pandemic unified the population around the need to make certain sacrifices, comply with regulations, and recognise first responders as being in the front line against the virus and risking

their own lives. This 'new' general cohesion may have led to public support for the police (Clements 2020).

The data appear to indicate that in such crisis situations, the population no longer see police work only in terms of crime control and prevention (the narrowest view of police work), but broaden the role to include social workers responsible for multiple problems that impact the daily life of citizens. Consequently, trust and institutional legitimacy increase (the broader and more comprehensive view becomes perception). This suggests that the enforcement of new restrictions on and controls over the population did not result in an increase in negative perceptions of the Carabineros (Lum *et al.* 2020, Sandrin and Simpson 2021), resulting, for example, from being perceived as less accessible and friendly to, and more distant from the population, nor due to certain restrictions, such as the prohibition on movement and travel and the increase in monitoring and control of people (Reicher and Stott 2020).

Another possible explanation (that does not contradict the above) is that during the pandemic, there was a growing sense of increased crime, and a certain lack of control over the violence. In fact, the ENUSC (2020) showed that perceptions of rising crime in the country reached 84,3% in 2020, an increase of 2,5% in comparison with 2019, with a 46,7% perception of increased neighbourhood crime in 2020, up 6,3% from 2019. This in a context of a 19,2% aggregate victimisation rate of households, that is, 4,5% less than 2019, and a 3,5% decrease in the aggregate revictimization rate of households (21,5%) in comparison with the previous year. This sensation of insecurity correlated with the increasingly evident justification of protection mechanisms, in this case, the police, and was confirmed by data from the National Survey of Public Opinion (CEP, 2021). Its records from August 2021 showed that citizens believed that the government's principal concern (once overcoming the pandemic) should be crime (42%).

Interestingly, the increase in crime did not result in a loss of confidence or legitimacy in the Carabineros for having neglected crime control and prevention (Weisburd and Bayley 2015). In fact, the same survey showed that trust in the Carabineros had increased from 17% to 26% between December 2019 and August 2021. While the literature suggests that initial support during the pandemic could decrease once the emergency disappears or diminishes (Lai and Reiter 2005), the contrary appears to be evident regarding the Carabineros in Chile.

Finally, the post social upheaval political process may also have played a role as once political agreements were reached in November 2019, the population no longer viewed protest and violence as the necessary response mechanisms to social problems. The agreement consisted of a process of constitutional change formed on a parity basis, with seats reserved for original populations. Following this agreement, public perception of the protests began to change with an increasingly critical sense of the violent events and protests. To a certain degree, this Agreement may also have boosted support for the Carabineros.

Conclusion

The Chilean case is similar to that of New Zealand where the police implemented aggressive measures from the beginning of the pandemic, and at the end of lockdown, satisfaction and trust in police institutions had increased (Sibley 2020). These results also show the need to consolidate certain police bodies to concentrate, for example, on matters of protection in a pandemic situation, health emergencies or natural disasters, while the rest continue to focus on crime prevention and control where results may possibly continue to be limited (in terms of trust and positive perception of the population).

Is there a public policy lesson to be learnt? Are the Carabineros a model to follow in the rest of the region? Possibly not, given that in the rest of Latin America, the police performed practically the same duties – enforcing restrictions on travel, controlling the population, undertaking detentions for failing to respect the new health measures, etc. (Alvarado *et al.* 2020) -, and no other survey of trust and legitimacy in the region has shown an increase or significant improvement in these indicators. Throughout

the region, from Mexico, where there was barely police enforcement, to Argentina, where the police detained hundreds of people for breaking the quarantine measures, the police fulfilled the same role as the Carabineros in Chile, with no substantive improvement in trust and legitimacy. This may be because the police in other countries began with much lower levels of trust and legitimacy than the Carabineros (Cao and Zhao 2005, Corbacho *et al.* 2015, Cruz 2015, Sozzo 2016, Bergman 2018). That is, such an increase may only occur with police forces who already have relatively good performance evaluations and comparatively high levels of trust and legitimacy, given that the most significant increases in these indicators were among sectors of the population usually supportive of police work and presence. In any case, the previous fall in trust and legitimacy was circumstantial and the pandemic was an appropriate trigger for institutional recovery.

In terms of policy, this implies that the increase in trust and legitimacy may not, in fact, indicate a recovery. Levels of trust before the crisis of legitimacy are key to understanding the recovery of the Carabineros during the pandemic (and perhaps future surveys will show a decline in support for the police, likely returning to pre-pandemic levels). Thus, this situation, in the form of public policy, cannot be applied to the rest of the region, and particularly not to countries where the police have extremely low levels of legitimacy (Kane 2005, Gau and Brunson 2010, Mazerolle and Wickes 2015).

A future line of research directly related to this topic would involve the implementation of a third survey in Chile, once the Covid-19 pandemic is completely over. This would enable a reliable determination of whether the wave of support is sustained over the long-term or only linked to the immediate effect of the pandemic as a crisis and threat to Chilean society. On the other hand, more variables of analysis could also be added to overcome the limitations of a not randomised controlled trial. This would perhaps allow for a more solid generalisation of the Chilean experience.

Notes

1. https://time.com/5791661/who-coronavirus-pandemic-declaration/
2. https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/press-release/2021/07/chile-exige-investigacion-general-director-carabineros-violaciones-ddhh/
3. https://www.hrw.org/es/world-report/2020/country-chapters/336397#
4. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CL/Report_Chile_2019_EN.pdf
5. https://www.latinobarometro.org/latContents.jsp
6. https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/lapop.central/viz/LAPOPV3_2/Combination?publish=yes
7. https://www.biobiochile.cl/noticias/nacional/chile/2022/02/16/pinera-promulga-ley-de-modernizacion-de-policias-incluye-auditorias-y-preferir-medios-no-violentos.shtml
8. https://www.camara.cl/verDoc.aspx?prmTIPO=DOCUMENTOCOMUNICACIONCUENTA&prmID=70045
9. https://www.minsal.cl/gobierno-anuncia-nuevas-medidas-restrictivas-y-cuarentenas-para-el-control-de-la-pandemia/
10. https://www.notimerica.com/politica/noticia-coronavirus-carabineros-chile-interviene-mas-fiestas-ilegales-tres-meses-2021-todo-2020-20210323210907.html
11. https://www.carabineros.cl/secciones/carabCifras/assets/carabineros_en_cifras2020.pdf
12. https://www.notimerica.com/politica/noticia-coronavirus-carabineros-chile-interviene-mas-fiestas-ilegales-tres-meses-2021-todo-2020-20210323210907.html
13. https://www.carabineros.cl/secciones/carabCifras/assets/carabineros_en_cifras2020.pdf
14. We would like to thank one of the reviewers for suggesting this method for creating a better measure of the DV.
15. It should be remembered that this variable has been highly questioned as people may not walk alone in a neighborhood due to other factors, and not necessarily only because of crime (Mason *et al.* 2013, Waygood and Susilo 2015). We include it as a possible proxy for crime or perception of crime.

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