



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

Country Report: Chile August 2021

The Republic of Chile is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual country. Most of the [population](#) identifies as white or mestizo, but there is a minority of Afro-Chileans and many Indigenous groups, including the Mapuche, Aymara, Rapanui, and Quechua. Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion, but there are also Protestant, Jewish and Indigenous religious communities. Despite this rich social and cultural diversity, Chilean society is still coming to terms with a history of genocide. Minorities continue to face discrimination today.

Chile gained independence from Spain in 1818 and established an authoritarian republic. From [1930 onwards](#), as the socio-economic gap widened, Chile's left-wing party grew, triggering an increase in political polarization. In 1973, a right-wing military junta overthrew the democratically elected socialist President Salvador Allende. Following the coup d'état, General Augusto Pinochet ruled as a brutal military dictator until 1990. In 2013, [Amnesty International](#) estimated at least 3,216 people were "disappeared" or murdered during Pinochet's rule, while another 38,354 suffered political imprisonment and torture.

Spain's Progressive Association of Prosecutors filed complaints of genocide against Pinochet's government in [1996](#). The Audiencia Nacional argued that the targeting of members of the national group who were "considered contaminated by beliefs, such as communism and atheism" [constitutes genocide](#). In 1998, Spain's central criminal court indicted Pinochet on charges of genocide, terrorism, torture, forced disappearance, and murder. Pinochet [died](#) of heart complications in 2006 before being tried. National courts continue efforts to prosecute the perpetrators of crimes against humanity during the Pinochet regime with mixed results.

Although Indigenous Mapuche led rebellions against Spanish colonizers in the 1650s, Indigenous populations were decimated by centuries of targeted persecution. Spanish colonizers forced Indigenous people into a harsh and discriminatory labor system (encomienda). Beginning in 1883, the Indigenous Selk'nam people were the [victims of a genocide](#) that saw their number reduced from around 4,000 to 300-500. The Selk'nam lived on the Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego, split between modern-day Argentina and Chile. Government concession laws encouraged European migration to the area and promised a [pound sterling](#) for each Selk'nam killed.

In [2007](#), the government proposed a bill to recognize the extermination of Indigenous people and to construct monuments to recognise their history. Mapuche representatives have [petitioned the ICC](#), citing continuing crimes against humanity by the Chilean and Argentinian governments. [Chile's constitution](#) does not recognize Indigenous people. Elisa Loncon, a Mapuche academic and activist, is leading [ongoing efforts](#) to rewrite the constitution through a constituent assembly.

The Chilean state has failed to fully prosecute [past abuses](#) by the Pinochet regime. [Currently](#), the state is also failing to uphold the rights of people with disabilities. Chile's Indigenous peoples suffer discrimination over [land rights](#) and are vulnerable to targeted [attacks](#) from drug traffickers, mining companies, and [state police](#). Police have subjected civilians to torture and other [human rights abuses](#). In 2019-20, police responded with [extraordinary force](#) to repress [social unrest](#).

Genocide Watch considers Chile to be at **Stage 3: Discrimination and Stage 10: Denial**.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- State police should be held accountable for crimes committed against citizens.
- The government should increase funding for NGOs representing Indigenous communities, like [IWGIA](#).
- The government should put an end to industrial encroachments into Indigenous lands and recognize Indigenous identity and land rights in the national constitution.
- The government should guarantee the rights to truth, justice, and reparations for victims of genocide and human rights abuses.