

Contemporary Public Understanding on Refugees in Brazil and Chile: Trends and Reasons for Approval or Rejection

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Abstract

Globally, refugees' management has become a matter of international concern due to its significant expansion and has led to a new Global Pact on cooperative, sustainable policies. The present study analyses the concepts of coproduction between resources, knowledge, and power, tacit civic epistemologies, the shaping of public understanding, and the labelling of hierarchies between displaced subjects. The article aims to describe the international and national legislation on refugees in Brazil and Chile and the trends towards the approval of asylum seekers' requests. It also analyses statistical differences in the perceptions of the Brazilian and Chilean publics on the role of refugees and the stances publics take towards granting them human rights, using data from a global survey on refugees carried out by the UN Refugee Agency. The study is descriptive and hypothetical, of a qualitative nature, and its data sources are: specialized literature, international conventions, legal documents and controversies, as well as selected online news. The study concludes that Brazilian refugee law was globally considered among the most advanced ones, and refugee approval has always been much smaller in Chile than in Brazil. Public opinion in both countries is based on civic epistemologies that are ill-informed and discriminatory, often due to media coverage. They tend to believe that refugees' bring positive socioeconomic impacts but often regard their inclusion into public services as negative. In both cases, refugees' rights are dealt with as

general principles, therefore, only some of the publics consider they should be put fully into practise.

Keywords: Refugees, International conventions, Legislation, Brazil, Chile, Public opinion, Civic epistemologies, Public understanding

1. Introduction

Forced displacement has increased in unprecedented ways. “More than 120 million people have been forcibly displaced globally by May 2024 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, or events seriously disturbing public order. Of those, 43.3 million are refugees, with low- and middle-income countries hosting 75% of the world's refugees and least developed countries hosting 21% of the total” (UNHCR, 2024, p. 1). In 2021, according to the UN Refugee Agency (2021) 4.6 million refugees were from Venezuela.

After the Second World War, the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees was signed in 1951, which restricted its application geographically – implicitly referring to be applied to events occurring only in Europe before the date stipulated- and that had happened before January 1, 1951. The definition of a refugee, as found in article 1, p. 3 of the Convention, is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”. Its cornerstone here is the principle of non-refoulement (article 33), i.e., refugees cannot be returned to their country of origin.

Subsequently, the Protocol on the Status of Refugees issued on January 31 of 1967, widened the Convention’s temporal and geographical limitations to be applied universally and protect all persons fleeing conflict and persecution. Further on, the concept was reviewed, in the Declaration of Cartagena on November 22 of 1984, based upon a perspective from Latin America, to include broader contexts of vulnerability, such as: those people who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized social violence, foreign aggression, internal or armed conflicts, massive violations of human rights or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order (Declaration of Cartagena, 1984, Third Conclusion, p. 3). This initiative to include severe contextual disturbances was taken, partly due to the political circumstances of repression faced by different countries in Central America, as well as Mexico, Panama, Cartagena de Indias and Colombia and given the large displacement of people that was taking place who did not meet the requirements to apply for refugee status as initially defined.

Meanwhile, to share responsibilities for refugees internationally, on December 17 of 2018, the United Nations General Assembly promoted the non-binding Global Pact on Refugees. This Pact intends to reach a sustainable solution for the situation of refugees, promoting international cooperation as absolutely indispensable. The Pact’s four main aims are: to diminish pressure on the countries of settlement, to increase refugees’ self-sufficiency, to widen access to solutions from third-party countries, and to support the conditions in the countries of origin for a secure and dignified eventual voluntary repatriation.

The present study sets out to investigate trends on and the vision of refugees in Brazil and Chile relying on public opinion. It analyses the following interrelated questions:

1) How many refugees are found in each country? What is their socio-demographic profile?

- 2) Which are the general public's level of information and their main visions on refugees?
- 3) How does the general public qualify their social integration and access to rights?

2. Considerations on Theory and Method

It is difficult to strictly characterize as voluntary or forced the quality of the international displacement of people, the circumstances, and the motivations that lead to it. In some sense, most migration flows obey to some form of forced displacement, whether it be economic, political, religious, cultural, or other. However, some type of clear differentiation needs to be established to design a legal characterization of the forms of protection and rights of the people displaced without undermining the international refugee regimes agreed to. In this sense, the concept of forced migration becomes abstract and vague and could be attributed to anybody in need to leave his/her country of origin.

Instead, refugees have a specific legal status and concomitant rights. The crucial situation they experience is that they are individuals faced with life-threatening situations, violence, and persecution, at the individual or contextual levels, and the prohibition that once approved as refugees, these subjects cannot be sent back to their country of origin.

However, for any institution dealing with requests for approval or rejection of refuge, the situation becomes a complex one. The process for application to refugee status usually involves at least three administrative stages: (a) the filling out of a form on the applicants' history and an explanation on the reasons for fleeing the country of origin; (b) an interview with the applicant, conducted by representatives of the responsible institution, to investigate past events and the causes claimed to request refugee status; (c) internal collective deliberations on motives and severity of the plea e.g. to establish a distinction between strong and weak cases; and (e) final decision-making and the communication of the decision taken. Some of these stages may be repeated several times.

A study on the role of civic society- more specifically of Caritas RJ- within the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), developed by Castro (2020) in Brazil, shows the extreme difficulties found in trying to adequately evaluate the information provided by refugee applicants, most especially during the interviews. The study concludes on the immense possibility of producing epistemic injustices in the credibility analysis (Fricker, 2007), even when civic society technicians are present (Facundo, 2017).

Castro (2020) emphasizes the subjective and emotional character of the process in its multiple dimensions: from the stage of filling out the application form that requires the help of Caritas' employees, due to difficulties with its bureaucratic formulation and, the impact produced by the applicant during the interview which is built upon an asymmetric power relationship. Interviews are often led more as an "investigation" of the asylum seeker's life than as a dialogue. The ambivalences, perceptions, differences, and conflicting interests between the members of the decision-making body are also to be negotiated for the approval or rejection of the requests. Often, consultations with other organizations are required to obtain more detailed information on the background of the applicant and/or on the ongoing context of his/her country of origin.

From a very different perspective, Lara (2019), a Chilean academic, analyses the differences in the type of psychosocial interventions to be developed with female refugees sent to a university treatment centre by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHRC). The author brings up the adjustments needed during the psychotherapeutic treatment and in the relationship of the dyad, which is also asymmetric in power, though not evaluative, as in the case described for Brazil. Here, the refugees' distrust is more openly expressed, and it usually involves the fear that the institution could be in contact with those perpetrators whom they had fled from in their country of origin. Contact with the other is felt by refugees to be very risky; credibility is also at stake. The contradiction faced in this setting is that trust in the psychotherapeutic relationship is necessary for any type of mental health improvement.

However, in the cases narrated for both countries, initially, the asylum seeker feels unprotected and at the disposal of the institutions' handling of his/her future. Public opinion on refugees often involves at least one similar characteristic. It is shaped by a social 'imaginary risk' that defines the unknown subject of refuge and often generates great fear and distrust among the general public.

According to Habermas (1989 [1962]), public opinion involves an open space for rational discussion on public wellbeing, situated between the sphere of political power and the private realm. Public opinion is shaped by several factors. On the one hand, mass media acts as a bridge between ongoing events and the public, and it influences public understanding. For example, news coverage generates its own version of refugee law, refugees' behavior, dominant character traits of asylum seekers from different nationalities, genders, races, and ages, as well as their presumed resilience strategies and tendencies towards social integration or isolation. Media develops a process of sense making, intimately related to cultural meanings and histories and very often not based upon evidence (e.g., Acero, 2020a; Acero, 2024a).

On the other hand, a substantive part of public opinion has lately been based upon information accessed from websites. Rueda and Alamán (2020) explain that technologies 2.0 have redefined the public as virtual communities in cyberspace that collectively debate a wide range of experiences in a more participative way than that presented by traditional media. The quality of this information impacts people's awareness, and often, participants tend to be susceptible to manipulation. Instead, direct personal experiences with refugees among the public tend to contribute to validating refugees' rights as persons and potential citizens.

Public officials' design of migration and refugee policies, their actions, and public declarations also form part of opinion shaping. States manage migration flows, framing these people with 'labels', i.e., bureaucratic migration classifications (Zetter, 2007; Martino & Moreira, 2020). These labels can be based upon different regulation systems, reflect a number of possibilities of access to rights, and be mobilized according to the internal and external political orientations of each State. A certain hierarchy is established between these labels, and some are prioritized, e.g., temporary residence and complementary protection versus refuge.

Therefore, public opinion is co-produced between power and knowledge embedded in people's experiences, social narratives, and institutions. Civic forms of knowledge or 'civic epistemologies' have been defined by Jasanoff (2024) as patterns of culturally specific meanings that the 'publics' use to verify data and act within the social sphere. However, the effects of media information on individual and collective opinions largely depend on how news coverage is organized and presented in written texts and visual icons.

Tendencies towards discrimination, xenophobia, or racism towards migrants and refugees have permeated the societies under study. For example, it has been explored how intellectual elites have contributed to naturalizing class and gender racism in ongoing migration processes (Pavez, 2016), based upon a generic and trivial idea of discrimination (Tijoux, 2016). In Chile, authors have analysed migrants /refugees' discrimination in access to the public health system and in the behavior of health personnel (Liberona, 2012; Tijoux & Ambiado, 2023). Discrimination also takes place in other public services, such as education (Tijoux, 2013; Riedemann & Stefoni, 2015) and housing (Daisy & Bijit, 2014).

In Brazil, there was an early social inclusion of international refugee standards during the 90s and early 2000s. But later on, the situation changed. Some of the asylum seekers' requests began to be dealt with based on other migration mechanisms. Standard norm internalization on refugee status has also been hindered by the limited operational capacity of the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), the existence of few local integration policies, and the difficulties in making refugees' rights effective. As some asylum seekers are redefined as migrants, this exposes them to practices like deportation, which are a violation of their rights (Izidro Gonçalves et al., 2020).

In summary, the theoretical approach followed in this article critically articulates coproduction theory, civic epistemologies, influences on the shaping of public opinion and the labelling of displaced people into hierarchies.

In terms of method, this is a descriptive and hypothetical study of a qualitative nature based upon specialized literature on migration and refuge and the revision of legal documents on the main contents of the laws passed on refuge, social controversies, as well as the international conventions approved. Online press information has also been often analysed, and selected statistical material on refugee trends is briefly reported for both countries. The section on public opinion is based on an interpretation of the statistics found within a comparative global survey on public understanding of refuge carried out by UNHRC (2024).

3. Refuge in Numbers

Brazil was a pioneer in the Region in incorporating the definitions of the International Conventions of 1951, 1967, and 1984 on the protection and rights of refugees. It enacted its own Refugee Law n°9474 in 1997, where the views of the Declaration of Cartagena on refuge were summarized as: "a situation of severe and generalized violation of human rights (article 1, III)".

It has been globally considered a very advanced law (Jatoba & Martuscelli, 2018). It is also innovative because it created a collegiate body, CONARE, associated with the Ministry of

Justice and Public Security (MJSP), that included the full participation of civic society to analyse and judge refugee requests. For example, Cáritas-RJ in Rio de Janeiro is the permanent representative of civic society at CONARE.

Instead, in Chile, a Refugee Law was not passed until 2010, Law n°20.430. Previously, legal developments on this topic had been insufficient to respond to the demands for refuge, as well as to keep in pace with the international standards the country had committed to. The Chilean law follows the wider principles of the Cartagena Declaration. A big difference with Brazil is that the Department of Foreigners and Migration (DEM), in charge of processing these applications, subsequently sent to the Recognition Commission where the applicant has to attend a series of interviews, has no formal representative from civic society or international organizations. This Department deals with migration in general and its members have little training on the condition of refuge; it receives assessment and eventually basic humanitarian assistance from UNHRC and the Foundation of Social Support of the Christian Churches (FASIC). Moreover, Chile is yet to adhere to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (UNHRC, 2017).

In Chile in 2023, there was a small number of 2 338 refugees and 12 694 asylum seekers, and another 435 728 people in need of international protection under the UNHCR mandate (UNHCR, 2023) (Note 1). According to the National Service for Migration (SERMIG, 2024), in 2023, 201 refugee requests were recognized and in 2024, only 105. The highest amount of refugee requests approved corresponded to 2017 (n° 162) and 2018 (n° 166). New applications in 2024 involved 525 individuals, with 66 being recognized or given complementary protection, and 187 rejected. There are quite a lot of decisions pending in Chile: a number of 12 340 cases. The majority of new applications have been from Venezuelan individuals, 276 cases, among which, only 120 were approved.

According to the Brazilian Observatory for Migration (OBMIGRA), in 2022, Brazil received 50 355 refugee applications from 139 countries, with the main nationality being that of Venezuelans (67%). Before then, between 1997 and 2018, there had been only 11 231 persons recognized as refugees.

The growth in the number of asylum seekers in Brazil was significant between 2016 and 2022, increasing from approximately 8 700 registered requests to over 82 000 in 2019 and close to 50 000 in 2016. In 2022, CONARE reviewed 41 297 applications, out of which just 5 795 were approved. Among the approvals, men predominated (56%) over women and children, adolescents, and people up to the age of 24 represented 46.8% of the total. Refugee status was given mainly (in 82.4% of cases) for the cause of “Serious and Widespread Violation of Human Rights (GGVDH),” and it was followed by that of “Political Opinion, (10.9%) (Oliveira et al., 2024). Since 2025, according to DATAMIGRA, there have been 6 640 requests for refuge (11 from Haitians and 2 475 from Venezuelans) and 300 approvals – 6 of them of Venezuelans. Between 2021 and 2023, Haitians’ requests for refugee status represented around a third of those by Venezuelans (Conare/OBMigra/MJSP, 2023).

4. Public Opinion on Refugees and Their Rights

The perceptions within the general local population on the role refugees occupy in Brazil and Chile are worth an analysis because the public's behaviour towards them largely depends on people's civic epistemologies. In June 2024, UNHCR published a substantive report on the perceptions of civic society towards refugees and their rights based upon a global survey carried out jointly with the Institute Ipsos (specialized in marketing research). Within it, 33 197 individuals across 52 countries were interviewed (UNHCR, 2024).

In Brazil, 82% of the interviewees agreed that people should be able to take refuge in other countries to escape from war or persecution; in Chile, however, only 68% of survey participants had the same opinion. Nevertheless, 45% of Brazilians have certain distrust about refugees' motives, e.g., suspicion on whether refugees are not merely trying to take economic advantage of the country or its welfare services. However, this type of scepticism is much higher in Chile (76%).

A majority of Brazilians are also concerned that refugees might not be able to adapt and socially integrate (62%); whereas, in Chile a minority (37%) feels that way – opinions that would be interesting to be explored qualitatively as perhaps, they reflect different levels of welcoming and /or discrimination.

More than half of the Brazilian interviewees (56%) consider that refugees will make a positive contribution to the country, versus only 38% of Chileans. However, a fourth of Brazilian interviewees (24%) declared that borders to refugees should be entirely closed and that more refugees could not be accepted at this time. Perhaps, this minority opinion is the result of the socioeconomic and political conflicts ongoing on the Northern borders between nationals and foreigners. Instead, 64% of Chileans express this last opinion on border restrictions and closures. Moreover, as seen before, refugee status is approved in a much smaller proportion than in Brazil. A securitization perspective seems to predominate, maybe due to Chile's smaller population, which makes refugees more visible, and/or due to recent conflicts with Venezuelan and Colombian migrants in the Northern Region.

Very few Brazilians have taken any concrete action to support the refuge cause during the last 12 months: 10% had donated funds or goods, 14% had posted messages of support in social media and less still (6%) had signed petitions in their favour, (5%) had volunteered to help them to find a job or contacted government officials for advocacy on refuge. Only 2% had offered refugees some form of shelter. In total, 80% of Brazilians had taken no initiative whatsoever to benefit refugees. These attitudes seem in contradiction with their positive opinion on their potential contribution to Brazil, expressing little real commitment. The case of Chile is similar, as 78% of nationals had not connected with the refugee cause to provide any type of support. But the ways in which they did connect vary somewhat from those of Brazilians. For example, in Chile, donations are lower (6%), so are posts in social media (7%), volunteers (2%), and collaboration in refugees' job searching is similar (6%). Government officials have hardly been contacted on the refugees' behalf (3%), but 3% of Chileans did offer them housing. However, 8% of Chileans declare that they have taken other actions to support refugees, versus only 5% of Brazilians. There is no information as to which

protection actions they refer to.

Brazilian and Chilean perceptions of who could be considered a refugee often reveal limited knowledge. The most frequent definitions are: “A person fleeing their home country due to conflict, violence, or persecution” (among 66% of Brazilians and 57% of Chileans); “a person escaping their home country due to a natural disaster” (43% of Brazilian opinions and 33% of Chileans) or “a person who seeks and is granted asylum by the government” (33% of the Brazilian interviewees and 42% of Chileans). There seems to be greater awareness in Brazil about the condition of refuge induced by climate change, while in Chile, greater emphasis is placed upon the Government’s decision-making. There is a certain confusion between the definition of a migrant and that of a refugee, as 18% of Brazilians consider a refugee “as a person seeking a better economic opportunity outside his/her country”, and so do 23 % of Chileans. Two of the definitions provided by the survey on refugees: “a person entering the country without authorisation or informally” and, “a person who legally enters the country but overstays their visa or permit”, add up to 18 % of Chilean answers and in Brazil, to almost a third of answers (29%). For a significant number of interviewees, the category of refugee is considered as equal to that of an undocumented foreigner, thus maybe increasing prejudice or even criminalization towards refugees. This clearly shows the urgency to develop national training campaigns to keep the public informed of the differences between the labelling of migrants.

Almost half of Chileans (43%) consider refugees to have enough routes of entry into the country, and that no more should be provided (22%) – outstandingly, a total of 65% of responses, making Chile occupy the seventh position globally among countries that resist refugee entrance. Often media’s fake or sensationalist sources influence the population’s perceptions negatively, as they portray the country as being flooded by migrants/refugees who take advantage of economic conditions, or else, are criminals. Instead, more than a third of Brazilians believe refugees should be provided more routes of entry into the country (37%), but 29% of the interviewees think they have enough routes, and 7% believe they should be given no routes of entry at all. The last two types of opinions may reflect public opposition to the massive influx of Venezuelans through the Northern borders, often demanding refugee status. This led the Federal Government, through the military, to establish in 2018 a plan for the ‘voluntary reallocation’ of these migrants to other Brazilian States with more resources, called Operation Welcoming (*Operação Acolhida*).

In the opinion of 71% of the people interviewed in Chile, the country has accepted more refugees than it should, 1% consider it the right amount, and only 9% think that there would be capacity to receive more of them. Globally, Chile occupies the fifth position among countries that restrict the entrance of refugees, unfortunately, showing strong social consensus and misinformation. In comparison, the Brazilian society is more divided in its opinions on this issue. A third of the interviewees stated that Brazil has accepted more refugees than it should have (36%), 27% think those refugees accepted are about the right number, and 16% believe that Brazil took in fewer refugees than its capacity would allow for. These answers are aligned with the Brazilian interviewees’ perceptions of the liberation of refugee entry routes into the country.

More than a third of Brazilians understand that the national socioeconomic impact of refugees will be overall positive, though answers vary substantially according to which economic sector is considered. Faced with the same question, Chileans are much more distrustful, with only 19% of them foreseeing a positive overall socioeconomic impact and almost half a negative one. Chile represents the sixth most distrustful country in the world to regard refugees' social integration as an opportunity for economic development and/or multiculturalism (Canelón Silva & Almansa Martínez, 2018).

Relating the labour market, 35% of Brazilians think refugees' impact will be positive, 24% argue they will not make much of a difference, but 23% believe they will have a negative impact. These last answers might reveal the dispute for jobs among the lower classes, as annual unemployment rates reached 6% in 2024 (Agência gov, 2025). In terms of refugees' effects upon Brazilian culture and way of life, answers are divided. The majority think it will be positive (33%), while 25% consider it will not make a difference, and 23% evaluate future impacts as negative. A possible explanation could integrate different levels: (a) the underestimation of foreign cultures, (b) the high cultural diversity existing in Brazil between regions, and (c) the fact that refugees represent a very small proportion of Brazil's large population to be able to make a substantive impact. When their potential impact on public services (health, education and housing) is measured, perceptions are almost equally divided, 31% of Brazilians regard their impact as positive, 26% as indifferent and 26% as negative. In this sensitive issue in Brazil, the proportion of those who fear refugees' use of public services would imply a detriment for nationals rises a bit, though not substantively.

Chilean negativity on refugees' economic impact refers mainly to their potential role in the labour market; half of them see their impact as negative. Public perceptions might be latently based upon the extensive labour market segmentation and the dominant role of the informal economy in the country (Mora, 2009). Chileans' evaluation is slightly better in relation to the country's culture and way of life, but still 43% consider their influence on that topic as negative, showing perhaps a mixture between nationalism, discrimination, and a defence of the homogeneity of the country's own culture. Opinions are slightly worse relating refugees' role in the national economy. However, the lowest rate (14%) is attributed to any positive influence of refugees regarding public services, such as, housing, hospitals and education. There is a current strong controversy on this issue in Chile, as the infrastructure and human resources of public services institutions are scarce, even for nationals, and sometimes totally inadequate to receive new large flows of people, whether migrants or refugees (Cabieses et al., 2017).

Brazilian interviewees' opinion on refugees' effects on the national economy are classified as positive in 35% of cases; 25% consider it as indifferent, and 22% as negative; perhaps due to their small number relative to the total population. Instead, in Chile, their impact is mainly considered negative, in 46% of cases, and positive only in 18%; the rest regard it as indifferent. This shows an important bias and/or misinformation in Chile, as it has been proved that migrants, as a whole, have created new economic activities and innovative sectors such as, in gastronomy, electronic entrepreneurship and art, enriching Chile with their previous experiences (Polloni, 2024).

Refugees' influence upon national security is an extremely sensitive topic, most especially in Chile, where more than half of the survey participants (61%) consider it negative. In public thought, and even among some authorities, the increase in crime is often attributed to foreigners, without the necessary evidence. Also, the fact that some international gangs involved in drug and human trafficking have recently been operating in the North of Chile, has contributed to spreading the fantasy that all foreigners may be dangerous (Erazo Patiño et al., 2024). On the contrary, a third of the Brazilian interviewees believe refugees do not make much of a difference in terms of national security, and the two opposite polar opinions, i.e., the perception of refugees generating either a positive or a negative impact, are similar in proportion (25% versus 23%). Discussions in Brazil tend to view the causes of violence, theft and insecurity as being provoked either by poor residents of peripheral communities or by armed conflicts between different criminal and drug trafficking gangs, as well as between them and the police (e.g. Sousa Silva, 2017; Krenzinger et al., 2018).

Regarding refugees' rights, a more abstract concept, understandings vary significantly. Sixty per cent of Brazilians consider that refugees should have full access to the labour market, 26% that they should only have limited access, and 5% that they should not have any access at all. However, the question does not specify whether it refers to formal or informal jobs. The level of informality in total employment in Brazil was 42% in 2019, and for five categories of workers it reached 45%: street vendors, waste pickers, market traders, home-based workers, and domestic workers (Bouvier, et al., 2022). The positive answers on job access seem to be based on the population's empathy about the need for refugees' survival. For Chile, some of the same considerations apply. However, only 39% of interviewees consider that refugees should have full access to work, while a little less than half (45%) think this access should be limited. Reasons that can be influencing this understanding are that unemployment levels have been rising lately, representing 8.7% between January and March 2025 (Note 2). As well as the rise in the informal labour rate, 27% between July and September 2024, which has increased by 3.6% since 2023 (Note 3).

In spite of this, a vast majority of Brazilians believe that refugees should have the right to full access to the national education system (67%), still 18% would grant them limited access, and only 6% would not grant them any at all. The situation is similar regarding the public health system: full access 65%, limited access 20%, and no access 6%. These are two types of national public services highly valued by the local population, as well as questioned in terms of their quality, efficacy, and capacity to meet national demand (e.g., Carvalho et al., 2019; Campos, 2020).

In the case of Chile, less than half of Chileans (48%) would give refugees full access to education, while it is striking that 38% would only consider limited access, and 9% no access at all. Regarding the health system, opinions are still more divided: only 41% favour full access, 39% limited rights, and 10% would grant no right at all. Apparently, answers are highly influenced by the lack of adequate infrastructures and resources that have made the national population have to 'compete' for educational and health treatment vacancies and this situation is often attributed to the 'excess' presence of migrants- a term which Chileans use indistinctively to refer to migrants or refugees (Blukacz et al., 2020)

Policies allowing family reunification are massively supported, with 62% of Brazilians in favour of the exercise of this right, 21% limiting it, and 6% not granting it; in a country where the rights of families are highly valued. Instead, in Chile, with similarly important family values, answers to this question are almost equally divided between those that would grant it (38%) and those that would limit it (40%), and there is still a significant proportion of 10% who would not allow this right. It seems that the right to protect family life is mainly recognized for that of Chilean nationals.

Only half of Brazilians (52%) accept the right of refugees to apply for permanent residence or citizenship, being the third country in the world to have so many positive responses to this question; 30% would limit this right, and 6% would deny it. The right of and the pride of being a Brazilian citizen seems to stem, for quite a few interviewees, largely from the land and culture into which they are born (Onusic & Mendes-da-Silva, 2015). For Chileans, the right to citizenship seems to be even more cherished and exclusive, as only 26% of the survey participants accept access to nationality as a right for refugees, 51% would limit it, and an amazing 15% would deny it.

International aid provided to developing countries, where refugees are usually based, are considered as less than that needed by 44% of Brazilians, while 19% comment that it is just the right amount, and 17% say it is more than that needed. Perhaps, the last two percentages reflect either a fear of losing the country's autonomy, negative previous experiences with international aid providers or some ignorance on this topic. The distribution of opinions is somewhat similar in Chile, where 38% consider it insufficient, 21% as the right amount, and 19% more than needed. The causes for this type of thinking could be similar to those found in the Brazilian case.

The majority of Brazilians (56%) obtain their information about refugees from traditional media, such as TV, newspapers, and also online websites, 48% from social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, etc.), and other online resources are also mentioned in 13% of cases. This behaviour coincides with the distribution found between the use of different media sources, as periodically reported by the National Survey on the Public Perception of Science and Technology (CGEE, 2023). Few of the interviewees (9%) obtain information from teachers and academics, showing how little this topic is dealt with within the educational system. Fewer people obtain it from personal experience with refugees (7%), reflecting their limited contact with these persons. Chilean narratives have some similarities, with traditional media ranking first (58%) followed by social media (43%), and then by other online resources (27%). However, the communication from friends and family ranks higher in Chile (19%) than in Brazil (10%), as well as the personal experience with refugees (17%), showing perhaps that family members are more frequently consulted and that, in a smaller society, it is easier to establish personal relations with refugees. The weight of the information transmitted by teachers and academics is of the same order in both countries, and the role of political leaders and parties in providing information is very low.

Brazilian trust in the quality of the information transmitted relies, for half of the interviewees (51%), upon traditional media. Instead, trust in social media news is much lower (35%),

perhaps due to the fake news transmitted during the last presidential election and the Covid-19 pandemic, which have lately been widely denounced (e.g., Da Silva & Americo, 2024; De Barcelos et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Brazilians believe that other internet sources- usually alternative press- are also trustworthy, in 21% of cases. When the three main trusted sources in Brazil are grouped, they outnumber Chilean understandings. Trust in the information delivered by teachers and academics, who tend to be highly valued, is in the order of 17% of the Brazilian answers, an equal proportion to that found in the case of Chile.

But the source of personal experience with refugees (7%), which deserves very low trust among Brazilians, can be an indicator that reflects perhaps the little social integration of refugees with nationals. Among Chileans, who tend to have more face-to-face contact with refugees, answers interestingly show an opposite trend to the one in Brazil: the knowledge obtained from direct communication with refugees is significantly trusted in 22% of cases.

In Chile, though 40% of the interviewees trust the traditional means of communication, quite an importance is given to other social media (27%) and alternative sources on the internet (19%). A small difference is found between both countries in the trust assigned to information coming from families and friends, representing 14% in Brazil and 17% in Chile. Information presented by political leaders of parties and by community or religious leaders in Chile is received with little trust (7%). There is in this country a general distrust of institutionalized information. Meanwhile, in Brazil, community and religious leaders are a little more trusted (10%), showing perhaps the effects of the role of Evangelic Churches that congregate a significant number of followers. The lowest rates of trust are directed to the information transmitted by employers and businesses in Brazil (4%), while in Chile, a little more trust is given to them (8%). There is a significant number of people interviewed in both countries- in the order of 8% of answers- that assign very little trust to all of the sources mentioned in the interview. Trust gaps on the means mentioned are considerable.

In summary, opinions are quite divided on refugee intake, but there is some openness to giving refugees access to some rights, though it should be evaluated if this is formally expressed or if it does represent a real commitment. This attitude towards rights declines when social services, mainly education and health, are discussed. The need to access more international aid is also ambivalent, maybe as a product, as said before, between the public's concept of support versus autonomy, as well as due to previous negative experiences or lack of sufficient familiarity with the subject.

5. Conclusions

Very often, people have been obliged to flee from their communities and countries as a result of political persecution, social violence, and armed conflicts. They become the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society who are excluded from the structures of political power.

The management of refugees globally has become a matter of increasing international concern due to its significant expansion, and has led to new agreements on sustainable policies to be taken in cooperation between different countries. The number of asylum

seekers for some countries constitutes a relatively new phenomenon for which State agencies were largely unprepared and became strained. The response of the State to deal with this new influx, including adapting specific policies and actions for refugees' successful social integration, has been considerably delayed in providing them with dignified means of survival regarding: necessary food sovereignty, infrastructure, employment, health, education, and other public services. Countries in developing regions have proved increasingly reluctant to accommodate large numbers of refugees, often introducing procedures that partly or fully deny admission to their territory, as a result of the co-production between resources, knowledge, and power, as was described mainly in the case of Chile. The massive unexpected migration of Venezuelans, due to the increasingly deteriorating socioeconomic conditions in their country and the existing socio-political violence, has significantly influenced the forms of reception of refugees in Latin American countries.

Civic epistemologies in different countries also vary culturally, allowing for important distinctions in the way refugees are seen, treated, and assimilated, as has been described in the cases of Chile and Brazil, with the last country being more open to differences. The historical, cultural and legal evolution, population size and socioeconomic characteristics of both countries' contexts condition the way refugees are received and rights labelled, as well as the publics' perceptions about them.

While at the legal level Brazil can be considered an advanced country, its local policies on refuge are scarce and dispersed; often applied at the last minute i.e., to 'solve' problems already installed. A lack of adequate foresight prevails. Instead, Chilean laws were designed much later, applied with strong participation of the security forces in border regions, following predominantly a securitization approach. Often, refuge rights are formally recognized but not necessarily put into practice, and discrimination is an everyday experience—at the workplace, on the city streets, and in transport.

In both countries, common people are ill-informed on the specificities of the case of refuge, a task that in the Brazilian case tends to be left largely in the hands of civic organizations and migrant collectives. Unfortunately, the media turns the subject mostly into fake news in Chile, inducing the criminalization of refugees – their new label.

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Notes

Note 1. See, UNHCR- Refugee Data Finder.
<https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download?v2url=bd1059>

Note 2. See, ENE, 2025.
<https://www.ine.gob.cl/sala-de-prensa/prensa/general/noticia/2025/04/29/la-tasa-de-desocupaci%C3%B3n-nacional-fue-8-7-en-el-trimestre-enero---marzo-de-2025>

Note 3. See, INE, 2024.
[https://www.ine.gob.cl/sala-de-prensa/prensa/general/noticia/2024/11/05/tasa-de-ocupaci%C3%B3n-informal-a-nivel-nacional-lleg%C3%B3-a-27-0-en-el-trimestre-julio-septiembre-de-2024#:~:text=La%20tasa%20de%20ocupaci%C3%B3n%20informal,Nacional%20de%20Estad%C3%ADsticas%20\(INE\)](https://www.ine.gob.cl/sala-de-prensa/prensa/general/noticia/2024/11/05/tasa-de-ocupaci%C3%B3n-informal-a-nivel-nacional-lleg%C3%B3-a-27-0-en-el-trimestre-julio-septiembre-de-2024#:~:text=La%20tasa%20de%20ocupaci%C3%B3n%20informal,Nacional%20de%20Estad%C3%ADsticas%20(INE))

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