

## Between humanitarianism and security: the reorganization of border control in Chile (2010-2022)

## Entre humanitarismo y seguridad: la reorganización del control fronterizo en Chile (2010-2022)

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### Abstract

Since 2010, the Chilean State has designed various strategies to contain irregular flows and attempt to seal the borders of northern Chile with border control regulations and actions on profiles of people considered at “risk”; as well as with the reinforcement of border control under the assumption of protecting the most vulnerable migrants. This article analyzes the reorganization of border control in Chile and its effects on the production of migratory irregularity based on the analysis of official national reports on border rejections and data on expulsions of foreigners and entries through unauthorized crossings until 2022. It is concluded that, beyond the State narrative on the fight against organized crime and its humanitarian version of mobility, selective strategies were implemented to contain flows that reorganized the border control with a securitarian emphasis, which increased migratory irregularity and criminalized transnational mobilities.

Keywords: borders, security, reorganization of control, migration.

### Resumen

Desde 2010, el Estado chileno diseñó diversas estrategias con el fin de contener los flujos irregulares e intentar sellar las fronteras del norte de Chile con normas y acciones de control fronterizo sobre perfiles de personas consideradas de “riesgo”, así como con el reforzamiento del control fronterizo bajo el supuesto de proteger a los migrantes más vulnerables. Este artículo analiza la reorganización del control fronterizo en Chile y sus efectos en la producción de irregularidad migratoria a partir del análisis de reportes nacionales oficiales sobre los rechazos en frontera y datos de expulsiones de

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extranjeros e ingresos por pasos no habilitados hasta 2022. Se concluye que, más allá de la narrativa estatal sobre el combate al crimen organizado y su versión humanitaria de la movilidad, se habilitaron estrategias selectivas de contención de flujos que reorganizaron el control fronterizo con acento securitario lo que aumentó la irregularidad migratoria y criminalizó las movilidades transnacionales. Palabras clave: fronteras, seguridad, reorganización del control, migración.

## Introduction

The early 21st century was marked by the attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States, an event that became a milestone in recent history and had a significant impact on the globalizing optimism of the time. Before this event, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the expansion of neoliberalism in the West, and the opening of markets to the global economy had driven the belief in a world without borders (Paasi et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, the attacks, alongside increased migration pressure from sub-Saharan Africa to the old continent, began to challenge the idea of the end of borders (Paasi et al., 2018). As a result, and as the current century progressed, suspicions toward those who crossed international borderlines allowed the spread of a securitization agenda in various parts of the world (Brunet-Jailly, 2010; Paasi, 2018; Pereira & Domenech, 2021; Quinteros et al., 2021).

The above has reinforced the idea that borders have not disappeared; rather, they move, mutate, and multiply in a sophisticated process of bordering and overflowing (Gil, 2011; Sassen, 2007). Actually, from the understanding of the border as an imminently mobile and heterogeneous architecture (Balibar, 2003, 2005b; Paasi, 2018), it is recognized that these configurations were framed in processes of *rebordering* of states (Walters, 2006, p. 188). Thus, borders were reconfigured through new legislation, an intense military presence in these areas, and greater resources to control migration flows (Topak, 2014).

Due to forced migration movements and those motivated by economic reasons, this resulted in greater interest in strengthening borders as separation barriers and protectors of national security and in the externalization of borders to stop migration flows at source (Brandariz, 2023).

Furthermore, to prevent or stop border crossings, the construction of fences, walls and ditches increased globally (Minca & Rijke, 2017), and control practices at national borders, airports and embassies diversified and multiplied (Bigo, 2006). In particular, an agenda was generated to promote closures, the reintroduction of some border controls in Europe, the expansion of Euroskepticism across Europe, and the installation of an anti-migration and criminalizing narrative with the arrival of Donald Trump to the United States presidency in 2017 (Wille et al., 2021).

Latin America and the Caribbean were not immune to the impacts of global events in a context of increased intraregional migration since the 2000s, with a decrease in migration flows to extra-regional countries (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, 2020). For example, there was a decrease in 2010 in Mexican migration to the United States, in South American migration to Spain, and a redirection of migration flows to the continent.

The reasons for these changes in migration patterns were the restrictions the United States and Europe imposed on migration, the economic growth of some countries in the region, and the impact of the Venezuelan exodus on the various host countries (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 2023), among others. The situation was further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the expansion of these migration flows. It is estimated that more than five million people—including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers—were affected by mobility restrictions in 2020 (Phélan C. & Osorio A., 2020, p. 120).<sup>1</sup>

The Chilean case is of particular research interest because it has been observed that during the 2020s, the management of border and migration control policies has undergone significant changes. On the one hand, the emergence of a discursive duality is observed: while the view of irregular migration as a threat persists, an approach focused on the “protection” of migrants in situations of vulnerability is simultaneously promoted. On the other hand, there is evidence of an evolution in the public agenda aimed at limiting the mobility of certain migration groups and strengthening security on Chile’s northern border, historically characterized by its permeability (Tapia Ladino & Quinteros Rojas, 2023). Due to this management, the Chilean State has adopted various strategies to control and restrict the entry and stay in the country of foreigners classified as “dangerous” for national security (Stang et al., 2020).

This paper aims to understand the administrative and border migration measures implemented from 2010 to 2022 and their effects on the generation of irregular migration in Chile, that is, on the conditions of entry and stay of foreigners. To achieve the proposed objective, a qualitative methodological strategy has been developed, and secondary sources of information on border returns, entries through unauthorized crossings, and administrative removals for irregular entry from 2010 to 2022 have been used.

These sources were obtained through requests made under the Transparency Law No. 20.285 to official agencies involved in migration and border control, such as the Chilean Investigative Police, National Migration Service, Department of Aliens and Migration, Undersecretary of Defense, and Carabineros de Chile, among others. In addition, an exhaustive documentary review of plans, laws and administrative decrees related to migration and border control applied from 2010 to 2022 has been carried out, as well as local and national press articles.

The article is organized as follows: the first part presents general background information on migration and security policy in Chile applied between 2010 and 2022. Next, the scientific literature on border and security is reviewed along with a brief account of the notion of “humanitarianism” deployed in migration agendas. The third part describes the securitization of migration and border control, together with the analysis of the data obtained regarding the reorganization of migration and border control in Chile. In this way, the effects of the migration flow containment policy in Chile are presented based on three closely linked milestones: on the one hand,

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<sup>1</sup> According to census data from the 2010 round, around 30 million Latin Americans and Caribbeans resided in countries other than their place of birth, representing an increase of approximately 4 million compared to 2000 (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, 2020). Moreover, the United Nations Population Division estimated that in 2019 there were 11.7 million immigrants and 40.5 million migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, representing 1.8% and 6.2%, respectively, of the entire regional population (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, 2020, p. 3).

rejections at the border and regularized entries and, on the other, administrative removals. Finally, the main reflections of the study are presented.

## Background: the border control circuit in Chile

Global and Latin American changes in migration have led to the adoption of regional consensus on human mobility and a significant reconfiguration of migration policies (Domenech, 2020). In these consensus, international organizations have played an influential role in defining these policies by promoting notions such as *migration management*, orderly migration, shared responsibility and global and integrated perspectives in the European Union and Mercosur (Gil Araujo & Santi, 2019).

In this new dynamic, border policies have also changed, as migration has become part of security agendas under the notion of “new threats” (Domenech, 2011; Navarrete Yáñez, 2019). This resulted in the need to securitize borders (Pereira & Domenech, 2021) with the adoption of exceptional measures to identify and prevent risks associated with the entry of people, which implies the adoption of regulatory frameworks and practices of exceptionality (Walters, 2010). In this way, States generate risk profiles and apply extraordinary treatments to control transnational migration (Bigo, 2006).

Consequently, prior to the pandemic, migration management in Latin America shifted from looking at the phenomenon “with a human face” (Domenech, 2013) to “extraordinary treatment” (Domenech et al., 2022), which, as will be seen below, forms two sides of the same coin (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 14).

Afterward, the pandemic added the health dimension to the control of migration, for which the closing of borders operated as a particular form of control of international migration characterized by the deployment of ideas and practices aimed at producing “immunized mobility” (Basualdo, 2023, p. 19).

Nonetheless, although these measures reduced the formal migration flow through border checkpoints, it never stopped. In fact, there was an increase in entries through unauthorized crossings in the western corridor, which runs along the borders of Colombia, Ecuador and Peru to reach the various countries in the region, including Chile (Liberona Concha et al., 2024).

Regarding migration policy, the Chilean State introduced a migration and aliens’ law in 1975 (Decree Law 1904), a regulatory framework that controlled the entry and stay of foreigners until February 2022. That law remained in force during the growth and acceleration of the migration flows.

In general terms, between the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the proportion of foreigners in Chile increased from 0.8% in 1992 to 6.7% in 2020 (Colmenares & Abarca, 2022, p. 167) and to 8.7% in 2022 (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2022, p. 8). The Peruvian population constituted the largest group until 2017, when it was relegated to second place by the Venezuelan population. In 2023, this group represented 32.8% of the total foreigners, with an estimated population of 1 625 074 (Servicio Nacional de Migraciones, 2023).

One of the most striking features of this acceleration was the shift from a predominance of mainly border foreigners, especially Peruvians and Bolivians, to cross-border and Caribbean groups from Venezuela, Haiti and Colombia.

Based on the above, Chilean migration policy was marked by a tendency toward the management of mobility with a national security doctrine approach (Barrera Rodríguez, 2019; Quinteros, 2016; Stang, 2016). In this regard, the literature has indicated that in this period measures were implemented that restricted entry to certain nationalities and granted the authorities wide margins of discretion through policies focused on safeguarding national security and where access to the rights of migrants depended on their regularity status (Concha Villanueva, 2018; Echagüe Alfaro, 2018; Quinteros Rojas et al., 2019).

This is reflected, for example, in the fact that right-wing President Sebastián Piñera, one month into his second term in office in 2018, attempted to update Chilean migration policy by announcing a series of migration and border control measures aimed at “putting the house in order” (Dufraix Tapia et al., 2020). In general terms, a migration and immigration bill was proposed (Prensa Presidencia, 2018) that was finally enacted in 2022 with several objections from migrant and pro-migrant organizations, which even led to a complaint before the Chilean Constitutional Court.

Regarding border control policy, a significant milestone was achieved in 2010 when the first government plan was implemented to contain “dangerous mobility” derived from organized crime. This plan, called *Frontera Norte* (2010-2014), was developed to address new threats, especially illegal transnational actors and flows, including drug trafficking, transnational organized crime and migrant smuggling (García Pinzón, 2015a, 2015b).

Later, in 2018, Plan Frontera Segura was implemented, according to a narrative of reinforced security and in the context of the imposition of consular visas for nationals coming from Haiti and Venezuela (Tapia Ladino & Quinteros Rojas, 2023; Valencia Huerta & Ramos Rodríguez, 2021). Both agendas, migration and border control, experienced a convergence prior to the pandemic by promoting the idea of securing the border and restricting the entry of “unwanted” groups. Nonetheless, despite the implementation of these policies in terms of migration flow containment, the fact is that—as will be seen in detail below—entries through unauthorized crossings have risen sharply since 2018.

Additionally, with the closing of borders due to the pandemic in March 2020, the flow control strategy underwent a new change. It was the assembly of, on the one hand, the humanitarian approach to mobility (Basualdo, 2021; Domenech, 2018; Pereira & Clavijo, 2022; Stang, 2012) and, on the other hand, the reinforcement of control and safeguarding devices (Basualdo, 2021; Stang Alva et al., 2020; Trabalón, 2019).

In this way, the role of the migrant was simultaneously twofold: that of a victim of danger and vulnerability and that of a source of dangers linked to non-state threats located in border contexts (Ramos-Rodríguez et al., 2021). Notwithstanding, the international literature has pointed out that the humanitarian rationale, far from incorporating a perspective focused on the protection of the rights of migrant communities, legitimizes the security aspect in the control of mobility (Basualdo, 2021). Therefore, both elements—the securitarian and the humanitarian—should not be considered incoherent or exclusive but as closely interrelated migration management processes (Franko Aas & Gundhus, 2015).

In fact, through an analytical approach to the humanitarian version of migration management in the Chilean context, in this reorganization stage, border and migration control strategies were designed to “protect” the foreign population through the persecution of “illegal” migration. These included the incorporation of detection and

administrative deportation mechanisms that were considered more efficient and the implementation of measures aimed at “combating” human trafficking and smuggling of migrants (Dufraix Tapia & Ramos Rodríguez, 2022).

Likewise, administrative decrees were applied indicating “humanitarian” objectives (Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública, 2019) for the containment of migration flows, particularly for migrants from Haiti and Venezuela (Cociña Cholaky, 2020; Dufraix Tapia & Ramos Rodríguez, 2022; Valencia Huerta & Ramos Rodríguez, 2021), who registered the highest percentages of residents in Chile (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2022). The administrative acts of this measure were justified to “protect” citizens coming from Haiti and Venezuela from the risks associated with their irregular situation in the country (Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública, 2018).

Based on the above, a favorable scenario was generated so that, with the arrival of the pandemic in 2020 in a border area located in the extreme north of Chile, characterized by high porosity (Tapia & Ovando, 2013), a change in the control strategy was implemented, incorporating aspects related to health control with a “humanitarian” approach.

In this area, the self-reporting mechanism as an offending foreigner or Voluntary Declaration for Clandestine Entry<sup>2</sup> stands out, which moved the nature of migration control from the border to the nearest cities in the north of Chile. Nevertheless, the self-reporting enabled the administrative removal process (Stefoni & Contreras, 2022) by allowing the registration of those persons entering the national territory in an irregular manner (De Marchi Moyano & Alvites Baiadera, 2022). This mechanism was applied to those who wanted access to vaccinations, quarantines and even to travel within the national territory (Stefoni & Contreras, 2022). Nonetheless, although being reported as an offending foreigner leads to an administrative removal measure, according to De Marchi Moyano and Alvites Baiadera (2022), migrants believed it was a formal process of migration status regularization.

## Borders, migration and security: approaches to the “humanitarian” version of mobility

Border studies have developed greatly from the end of the 20th century to the 2020s to form a field of study, paradoxically, with imprecise boundaries (Tapia Ladino, 2022). Migration studies, for their part, have also increased significantly, especially due to concerns about the proliferation and acceleration of migration flows and the increasingly forced nature of human mobility (International Organization for Migration, 2022).

Specifically, the literature on critical border studies is a useful analytical framework for understanding the questioning of the idea of globalized security in the treatment of international mobility (Amoore, 2006; Amoore & Hall, 2010; Bigo, 2006). This is

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<sup>2</sup> This declaration allowed—after police registration—the health authorities to transport people in buses to sanitary residences to comply with preventive quarantines. This mechanism of identification and migration control was used not only at the border but also in public spaces in various cities throughout the country (Stefoni & Contreras, 2022). However, this form of voluntary reporting proved to be more efficient in registering clandestine entry, which led to the issuance of administrative removal orders for irregular entry, a sanction provided for in the old and the new migration law (Cociña Cholaky & Quinteros, 2021).



because, in managing migration, borders play a key role in security as they are conceptualized as spaces for all kinds of illegal and potentially dangerous activities (Balibar, 2003, 2005b). Thus, in a globalized world, the operation of borders meant they did not fade away but were constantly reformulated to fulfill new purposes of filtering “unwanted” migration flows (Sassen, 2007) and facilitating and accelerating the transit of goods.

This crossover between border studies, migration and notions of security shows how the three phenomena—which ran in parallel until the beginning of this century—have converged in multilevel politics: migration, borders and security.

Thus, critical approaches in these fields discuss the predominance of territorialized ideas on borders based on a classical conception of sovereignty and migration. Simultaneously, in this multilevel crossroads, humanitarianism is included in the management of migration as a way of managing irregular migration flows and the expansion of the notion of security in the framework of the “new threats” (Ferrero-Turrión & López-Sala, 2012).

From different perspectives, the international literature has problematized humanitarianism’s role in border and migration control (Franko Aas & Gundhus, 2015; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). On the one hand, the control paradigm has observed a certain “political opportunism” of the humanitarian argument. Thus, for example, it has been stated that the “rescue” through the neutralization of those who facilitate entry through unauthorized crossings serves to divert attention from migrants—and their rights—to the means of cross-border crime (Zartaloudis, 2011).

On the other hand, however, there have been reflections on the convenience of navigating the complexities of a scenario in which punitive measures and humanitarianism coexist (Dufraix Tapia et al., 2023). In this regard, Aliverti (2020) has stated that the importance of the “humanitarian turn” in migration control should not be underestimated since the practices and discourses of the “humanitarian” lead simultaneously to control practices that complement each other for more efficient containment of migration flows (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010). Specifically, the assumption of the humanitarian version of mobility “legitimizes a particular mode of migration and border control, even considered a by-product of securitization” (Basualdo, 2021, p. 166 et seq.).

Thus, borders have become a key instrument in security management, classifying populations on the move according to risk profiles (Walters, 2006). Instead of acting as walls and fences trying to stop migration flows, borders become smart, mobile and selective and “operate at a critical juncture between security expectations and intense commercial exchanges” (Deleixhe et al., 2019, p. 640).

Since then, borders have strengthened their functions and become key political instruments for controlling irregular and clandestine transnational activities (Sassen, 2007). This all occurs in a context of strong global exchange where the intersection between migration, borders and security has resulted in the *rebordering* of States (Walters, 2006, p. 188) that seek to stop and contain the migration flows (López & Godenau, 2017).

These phenomena are materialized through an intense military presence in these areas and greater resources to control migration flows, as well as through new legislation and externalization of borders in the framework of regional agreements, as is the case of the European Union (Ferrero-Turrión & López Sala, 2012). Therefore, based on the understanding of the border as a mobile architecture (Balibar, 2005a, 2005b;

Paasi, 2018), the contribution of critical geography seems useful with the category “heterogeneous border” that alludes to the variety of forms that the border acquires not only at the line but long before reaching it and even once crossed.

If the border was ever “material”—in the most literal meaning—it has ceased to be so (Giráldez, 2016). Its mechanisms are subtle and unquestionable, so its spatiality breaks with its traditional imaginary (Balibar, 2003) and is constituted in a mobile architecture since they do not only act on the political-administrative boundary “but in a complex of power relations that operate in and between territories” (Alvites Baia-dera, 2019, p. 128), a way of operating in an inclusion/exclusion key (Mezzadra, 2012) that allows borders to be “one of the most important control and risk management devices of the 21st century” (Brandariz & Mendiola, 2019, p. 9). This sophistication has allowed for convergences of control and “humanitarian” practices intertwined in migration management.

The above poses a challenge in theoretical and empirical terms because it is necessary to extend the analysis of this convergence to a broader framework of punitive and non-punitive control practices (Wacquant, 1999) and question them as such. Moreover, the pandemic reinforced the separating character of borders based on health management but, at the same time, it tested the scope of security that somehow oscillated between care, restriction and control in different parts of the world (Lara-Valencia & García-Pérez, 2021; Lois, 2020; Tapia Ladino & Quinteros Rojas, 2023).

## From a controlled border to a militarized border

Until the turn of the century, defense functions in Latin America were performed by the armed forces and law enforcement by the police, which, in the case of Chile, is carried out by the Carabineros and the Investigative Police. Nonetheless, the armed forces have been progressively incorporated into internal security tasks in recent decades. The reasons for this can be traced back to the end of the Latin American dictatorships when the new governments emphasized democratic civilian control of the military (Abbott et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the changes in global agendas at the beginning of the century allowed civilian authorities to expand the traditional functions of the armed forces in a context of low external conflict. One of these changes was military action and participation in natural disasters.

Then, in the context of the “overflow of public security” (Álvarez & Gómez, 2022, p. 116), the agenda shifted to concern for “non-traditional threats” such as organized crime and drug and human trafficking. This shift can be seen in the changes in domestic security regulations, as pointed out by Álvarez and Gómez:

In 2014, the safeguarding of internal order was addressed in the constitutions of ten Latin American countries, 94 percent of them included activities related to public security involving the armed forces, and 76 percent had regular programs to combat drug trafficking and organized crime (Pion-Berlin, 2017). By 2016, the constitutional mandate to safeguard internal order increased to eleven countries, and it was found that, in all of them, the armed forces had the role of cooperating in internal order. However, in the case of Argentina, Chile and the Dominican Republic, at least until that year, it was only possible



by declaring a constitutional state of emergency (RESDAL, 2016). Despite these findings, in the case of Chile, political and legal initiatives have enabled the armed forces' growing involvement in domestic missions and functions. (Álvarez & Gómez, 2022, p. 121)

Thus, in the case of Chile, the armed forces became progressively involved in border security tasks because, according to these definitions, these are spaces where the "new threats" materialize. It is common to find in the literature the notion of "hot borders" to understand the border areas as the spaces where these threats are present or are more liable to occur (Fuentes, 2008).

As a result, given the increase in the entry of drugs through the north of the country (Corder Tapia & Ruiz Tagle, 2013), in 2010 Chile signed up to the 2003 Declaration on Security in the Americas, which recognizes drug trafficking as a security problem (Troncoso, 2017).

Furthermore, it should be noted that the Chilean-Bolivian border has a peculiarity that should be highlighted: Chile and Bolivia have not had diplomatic relations since 1978 as a result of litigation arising from a nineteenth-century conflict and the maritime claim of the Andean country (Ovando Santana & González Miranda, 2012).

As a result, for example, until the pandemic there was no coordination between police, customs and the armed forces along the border, as opposed to the Chilean-Peruvian border. Additionally, the area is inhabited by an ancestral community, the Aymara, who live and travel through this space and whose existence precedes the installation of the international border (Tapia & Ovando, 2021). The community has national affiliation depending on the case and, many times, they circulate along the border regardless of what is indicated by the respective authorities and where, in addition, there are a hundred unauthorized crossings (Gutiérrez García & Bernal López, 2020).

In fact, until the pandemic part of the Bolivian community crossed the border during border fairs, evading control and taking advantage of the border traffic to go shopping in the Iquique Free Trade Zone or work for short periods in coastal cities (Leiva Gómez & Ross Orellana, 2016) and, in recent years, to harvest or farm in central Chile (Hinojosa Gordonava & Colque Quillca, 2023).

There is also a historical trade in the smuggling of different types of goods (Jiménez Cala, 2021), as well as the entry of drugs and narcotics (Corder Tapia & Ruiz Tagle, 2013). In this context, and once the global health alert was declared, the government of former President Sebastián Piñera developed new border control measures to contain these migration flows.

Likewise, the idea of promoting an "open border" policy for "orderly and regular" migration and a "closed border" policy for "illegal migration", human trafficking and migrant smuggling became more intense in the discourse (Dufraix Tapia et al., 2020). This was reflected in at least two moments.

The first was the decision to implement the *Plan Frontera Segura* in 2018 (Subsecretaría del Interior, 2018), which took up what was proposed in the first government of President Piñera between 2010 and 2014 under the *Plan Frontera Norte*, but with some new features. These included, for example, expanding the radius of action to other administrative units of the country.

Although with discursive nuances, both plans sought to ensure greater control of land, maritime and air borders based on the implementation of technology, logistics

and resources, plus the participation of various state agencies that coordinated to share information (Ramos Rodríguez & Tapia Ladino, 2019).

Another novelty of the Plan Frontera Segura was the territorial coordination centralized in the Oficina Fuerza para la Tarea contra el Crimen Organizado (Subsecretaría del Interior, 2018) located in the city of Iquique during 2018. The purpose of this public policy derived from the “danger” of transnational mobility was to improve control, observation and reaction capacity to ensure efficiency in the transportation of resources and adequate reaction capacity.

The second moment was observed in the context of border “overflow” with the rapid increase in the arrival of Venezuelan people in Colchane in late 2020 and early 2021 (Tapia Ladino & Quinteros Rojas, 2023). The town is small and was not prepared for the large number of people, so the national authorities deployed a series of measures with a new strategy (Tapia Ladino et al., 2021). This was *Plan Colchane*, which consisted in military reinforcement of border control to contain “illegal” migration, combat illegal trafficking of migrants, expedite administrative removals for irregular entry and “implement humanitarian measures that will go directly to the aid of migrants” (Subsecretaría del Interior, personal communication, April 15, 2019).

It should be noted that this plan was incorporated into a broader migration flow control strategy inaugurated in 2019 through Decree N°265 (Subsecretaría para las Fuerzas Armadas, 2019), which granted powers to the Armed Forces to act on the border.

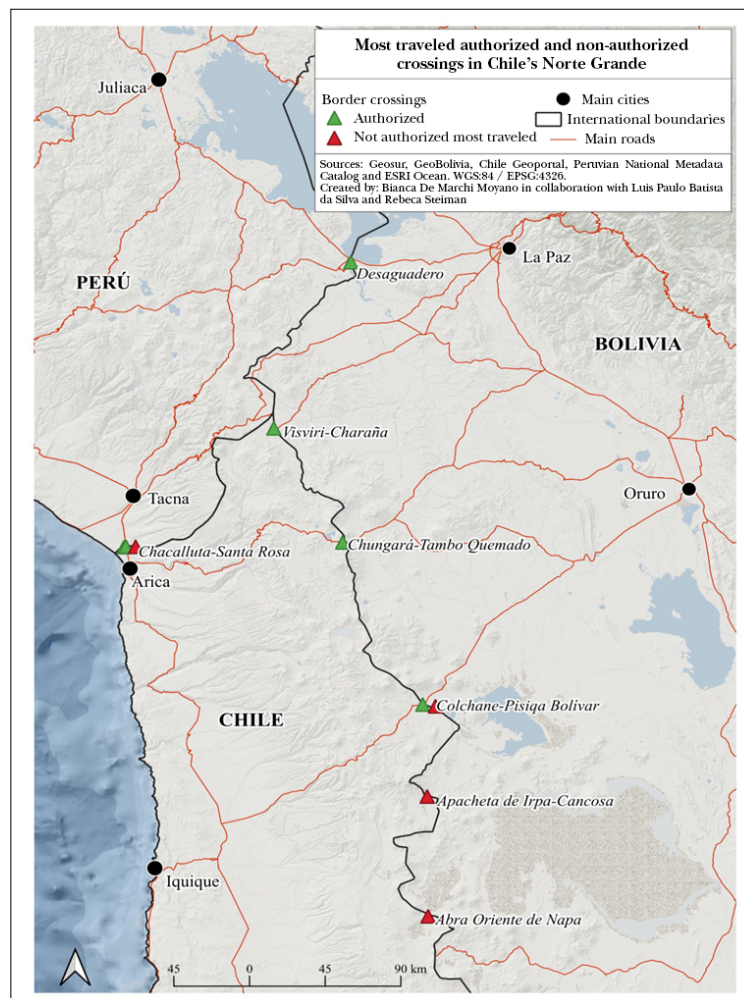
In these circumstances, it was possible to observe a greater effort by the executive branch to contain entries through unauthorized crossings. Nonetheless, the results of these measures, which aimed to detect criminal organizations and expedite removals in the scope of administrative sanctions for irregular entry, showed that the displacement in the functions of border control toward interior spaces was sustained through discourses, practices and regulatory frameworks that functioned to track, classify and capture migrant subjectivities read in the key of risk and danger (Brandariz & Mendiola, 2019).

De Marchi and Alvites state that, far from remaining outside the trends of the Global North, in the South American space, different physical obstacles have been promoted or constructed “beyond the facilities or checkpoints” to identify offenders (De Marchi Moyano & Alvites Baiadera, 2022, p. 358). In other words, the forms of border control converged, not without contradictions, “in those historically situated processes that configure borders, leading to a shift from the analysis of the border to the analysis of its constitution processes” (Trabalón, 2019, p. 3).

### ***The effects of the reorganization of control: border rejections, entry through unauthorized crossings and administrative removals***

Pre-pandemic records on land entries noted that the main access of foreigners to Chile was through the Chacalluta-Santa Rosa border crossing (Tapia Ladino et al., 2017), a border facility located on the Chilean-Peruvian border that separates the cities of Arica and Tacna (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Map of northern Chile



Source: created by Bianca De Marchi (2024)

As a result of the imposition of consular visas for migrants from Haiti (2018) and Venezuela (2019), a route through the West of the continent was formed that connected Venezuela with the countries of the Pacific coast and was later consolidated because of the closing of borders due to COVID-19 (2020). This route was formed by a branch from Peru to Bolivia, given that those migrants who tried to enter through the Chacalluta border crossing were rejected at the formal entry and moved to Desaguadero (Peru-Bolivia) to continue the route to the border crossing located between the commune of Colchane (Chile) and Pisqa Bolívar (Bolivia) (Liberona Concha et al., 2022, 2024).

This border crossing that unites Chile and Bolivia is in the Andean altiplano at more than 3 500 meters above sea level. It is a place of neighboring transit where the people who inhabit and transit through this area share a common sense when establishing their own territorialities (Ramos Rodríguez & Ovando Santana, 2016). It is also a place of transit between Chilean and Bolivian migrants where exchanging goods and merchandise is a constituent part of its reality (Tapia & Ovando, 2013).

Nevertheless, since 2012, there has been a history of crossings of people of Dominican origin through this place after the imposition of visas on this group in 2012 (Galaz et al., 2017). However, it was not until 2019 that this place began to experience an increase in the number of people crossing through this area, especially groups with consular visas imposed on them. Then, because of the COVID-19 health alert, Chile closed its land borders in March 2020, as did Peru and Bolivia, so border rejections during 2020-2022 decreased drastically.

As shown in Table 1, migrants initially attempted to enter the country through formal channels. However, they were rejected at checkpoints.

**Table 1. Total re-embarkations (rebounds) by year and nationality**

Nationality	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*	Total
Ecuador	422	692	876	1 724	1 124	138	295	668	432	1 064	250	168	316	8 169
Venezuela	3	19	39	67	62	62	210	2 241	6 460	22 939	221	165	64	32 552
Colombia	1 403	2 565	4 505	6 762	5 169	1 115	1 893	3 358	1 917	5 322	1 198	458	1 054	36 719
Bolivia	44	98	273	682	1 035	545	473	535	422	1 393	705	168	358	6 731
Peru	2 695	3 651	3 696	5 265	3 923	1 647	1 411	1 890	944	4 430	2 007	609	813	32 981
Haiti	117	281	657	365	640	1 933	815	467	52	40	31	84	66	5 548
Dominican Republic	72	441	973	97	71		85	113	69	63	15	21	14	2 034
Cuba	9	14	13	13	14	15	6	145	23	24	11	9	3	299
Other	118	173	745	914	877	798	641	495	348	596	574	483	469	7 231
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4 883</b>	<b>7 934</b>	<b>11 777</b>	<b>15 889</b>	<b>12 915</b>	<b>6 253</b>	<b>5 829</b>	<b>9 912</b>	<b>10 667</b>	<b>35 868</b>	<b>5 012</b>	<b>2 702</b>	<b>3 152</b>	<b>132 793</b>

\* Data up to October 2022.

Source: created by the authors based on data requested for transparency (Subsecretaría del Interior, personal communication, April 15, 2019)

The Chilean Investigative Police use the term *re-embarked* to report rejections (Rojas Pedemonte & Silva Dittborn, 2016) or *rebounds* at the border (Liberona Concha et al., 2017). The reasons for rejection may be not having the appropriate documents or not justifying financial resources or the purpose of entry. Thus, as can be seen, during 2019, border rejections tripled from 10 667 to more than 34 000. This situation mainly affected citizens from Venezuela, who in 2019 alone experienced 22 709 rejections.

In fact, as a result of the consular visa for Venezuelan citizens, and with the impossibility of entering Chilean territory through regular channels, in August 2019, an accumulation of people was generated in the Chilean consulate located in Tacna (Liberona Concha et al., 2022). This milestone made it possible to estimate a displacement in the formal route of entry to the country, mainly through southern Peru, and the development of strategies for mobility and entry through informal channels from Bolivia to Chile.

Table 2 shows that the entry of foreigners through unauthorized crossings has risen sharply since the imposition of consular visas.

**Table 2. Number of clandestine entries by year and nationality**

Nationality	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Ecuador	6	23	32	62	44	16	20	25	45	40	75	—	—
Venezuela	—	—	2	1	1	1	11	9	101	3 333	12 935	43 449	40 089
Colombia	84	222	311	844	922	347	234	253	270	439	742	2 311	3 882
Bolivia	163	486	568	269	216	204	318	300	322	755	844	6 975	55 325
Peru	133	107	90	109	105	111	145	70	120	117	322	794	795
Haiti	2	12	4	1	11	15	31	12	19	644	1 089	1 913	1 349
Dominican Republic	4	12	32	296	665	1 017	1 811	1 453	1 785	1 190	286	446	1 221
Cuba	16	30	28	11	9	24	38	715	3 574	1 448	449	201	214
Other nationalities	14	30	41	71	124	44	57	68	74	82	106	497	1 002
Totals	422	922	1 108	1 664	2 097	1 779	2 665	2 905	6 310	8 048	16 848	56 586	53 875

This information reflects the number of persons reported by the administrative authority (violation of Article 69 of the Immigration Law, Decree Law No. 1094 of 1975) through various channels (inspections at border checkpoints and within the national territory or self-reporting as a foreigner violating the law). It should be noted that this is an approximate record and that, given the characteristics of irregular entry, there is a hidden figure; therefore, these are approximate data.

Source: Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, 2022, 2023; Subsecretaría del Interior, personal communication, April 15, 2019

According to data obtained by the Chilean Investigative Police, as of 2018, entries through unauthorized crossings showed a “break” in the trend observed since 2010. In fact, in the records of that decade, the 2019-2020 period showed the highest number of entries through unauthorized crossings in the context of closure of border crossings due to the pandemic. In this regard, it was observed that, in the case of Venezuelan citizens, the number of entries increased from 101 in 2018 to 3 333 in 2019 and 12 935 in 2020.

In the following years, according to the Jesuit Migrant Service (Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, 2022, p. 29), these entries continued to rise from 2021 to 2022. In 2021 were registered 56 586 entries through unauthorized crossings, 43 449 of which corresponded to Venezuelan migrants. In 2022, 53 875 irregular entries were recorded, 40 089 of which corresponded to Venezuelan migrants. Thus, with the arrival of the pandemic and the sharp increase in entries through unauthorized crossings, the records used to identify this form of entry were through the so-called “self-reporting”, which, as indicated, is the migration control system for foreigners who violate the law (Stefoni & Contreras, 2022).

Thus, the migration policy generated from 2018 onwards, which became more acute during COVID-19, caused a sophistication of the control through a detection circuit that made the occasion propitious to capture irregularity at the borders and within the national territory. This circuit was activated through two channels: prior to the pandemic, rejections at border control, and during the pandemic by reporting (voluntary or involuntary) to law enforcement and security forces of foreigners entering through unauthorized border crossings. This border-migration-health control route ended in



a stay for quarantine protection, which sometimes resulted in the materialization of administrative removal orders (Cociña-Cholaky, 2022).

However, as can be seen in Table 3, although the number of administrative removal orders for irregular entry has increased, the fact is that their enforcement has systematically decreased.

**Table 3. Number of removals implemented and percentage of effectiveness (2012-2021)**

Year	Administrative removals		
	Orders	Implemented	Effectiveness
2012	2 269	1 021	45.0%
2013	2 067	1 053	50.9%
2014	2 464	1 056	42.9%
2015	2 180	929	42.6%
2016	2 536	599	23.6%
2017	2 951	978	33.1%
2018	3 307	302	9.1%
2019	6 702	576	8.6%
2020	4 006	202	5.0%
2021	6 889	246	3.5%
2022	1 700	31	1.8%

Source: Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, 2022, 2023; Subsecretaría del Interior, personal communication, April 15, 2019

These data show how ineffective administrative removal was, especially in 2018 when important restrictions on entering Chile were added (Dufraix Tapia et al., 2020). In fact, if the effectiveness of administrative removal orders implemented in 2012 was 45%, it decreased systematically during the following years. By 2019, it reached 8.6%; in 2020, 5.0%; and in 2021, the effectiveness was 3.5%.

This inability to implement administrative removals generated a significant deportability gap that, as Brandariz and collaborators point out, “sets the limits of operation of the deportation system as a whole, since no country can implement all the removal orders it issues, as a result of which the system must operate under the prioritization of removable subjects” (Brandariz et al., 2018, p. 753).

In addition, the literature review found that 78% of the total number of removals implemented during 2011-2019 were in the northern zone of Chile (Dufraix Tapia et al., 2020, p. 187). According to nationalities, until 2018, it can be seen that the most affected by the removals decreed and implemented were those of Bolivian nationality. This situation is explained, in part, by the policy of targeting Bolivian citizens in the border space of northern Chile because it enables the reduction of costs associated with the transfer. Given the proximity to Bolivia, removals are carried out by land, which explains the figures (Cociña Cholaky, 2020).



Notwithstanding, a relevant aspect that was noticed in the data analysis is the nationalities that were especially affected by the removal orders. The case of migrants from Venezuela is particular since, in 2019, they registered historically high figures in terms of administrative removal orders for irregular entry, which even surpassed those of Bolivian nationality in that year.

Indeed, according to the Servicio Nacional de Migraciones (2023), in 2018, the total number of removal orders against Venezuelan citizens did not reach 30 at the national level. Nevertheless, in 2019, 1 964 orders were issued; in 2020, they increased to 1 839 to end 2021 with a total of 4 472 removal orders.

In fact, 2021 was the year in which the Chilean government issued the most administrative removal orders. A paradigmatic example of this prioritization was the implementation of administrative removals against citizens of Venezuelan origin in February 2021. This act was even broadcast by the Chilean government's digital networks (Jiménez Guajardo, 2021), which were subsequently declared illegal by the Supreme Court.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to consider that even though unimplemented administrative removal orders have been decreasing, they have generated a significant deportability gap and, consequently, a condition of permanent removability because they are subject to removal, but their materialization is indefinite. This is due, among other things, to the high costs of removals, especially by air, which exceed the States' capacity and intention to enforce them.

Legislative shortcomings added to this, given that the processing is cumbersome due to the difficulty in locating expellable persons (Gálvez, 2023), therefore "migrants who are subject to these measures not only tend to produce subjects who are essentially expellable, but also to facilitate the activation of certain dynamics of selectivity" (Brandariz et al., 2018). In other words, beyond the administrative removals facilitated by the Colchane Plan during 2021, the truth is that it was a very difficult measure to implement. As such, it would seem that the only reason that allowed it to survive is its association with its symbolic weight, that is, with the message it conveys and the effects it produces in the collective imagination of the national community.

In short, the migration-border-health control circuit materialized the idea of a "mobile border" to the extent that the control was extended beyond the boundary, a phenomenon that had been noted prior to the pandemic and that provides an understanding of how the border is formed by a multiplicity of internal spaces (Brandariz & Mendiola, 2019).

In the same way, the existence of increasingly extensive and invasive surveillance in militarized ideologies of control and sustained in humanitarianism can be observed. In other words, they are humanitarian and selective ideologies of mobility that are superimposed as complementary perspectives to the fields of security, where the defense of human rights always goes hand in hand with surveillance and control (Agier, 2010; Fassin, 2005).

Consequently, it can be observed that beyond what has been declared by the Chilean State in terms of the "protection" of foreigners, there has been a tendency to strengthen the nexus between border, migration and security. Also, the border has

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<sup>3</sup> The case was heard by the Supreme Court and resolved in favor of the expelled persons, albeit two days after the flight landed in Venezuela. The main argument of the Supreme Court focused on the fact that the expelled persons did not have the right to defend themselves (Supreme Court, Rol N° 33.950-2021).

been displaced within the national territory as an instrument of security control (Alvites Baiadera, 2019), which has generated a scenario conducive to the production of irregularity and has laid the groundwork for the criminalization of irregular mobility, especially during the pandemic (Liberona Concha et al., 2022).

## Concluding remarks

In recent years, and amid the growth and acceleration of migration, Chile has promoted a border migration policy that, although it invoked the protection of migrants, prioritized national security issues. This was seen mainly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, but its explanatory elements were forged beforehand as, for example, with the restrictions through the imposition of consular visas (Dominicans, 2012; Venezuelans, 2018; and Haitians, 2019), the strengthening of borders to address the “new threats” and the effects produced by border policies for the entry and stay of foreigners, especially migrants from Venezuela.

The reorganization of border control from 2010 to 2022 was structured based on a series of changes in regulations (migratory, administrative and procedural), the development of border plans to address the new threats (Frontera Norte 2011-2014, Frontera Segura 2018 and Plan Colchane, 2021), and greater coordination of the state agencies involved, including the Carabineros, the Investigative Police and the Armed Forces.

The above was accompanied by the inclusion of technological surveillance mechanisms and the expansion of military collaboration in transportation, logistics and technology in border control. Additionally, with the closing of the borders due to COVID-19, the Chilean State implemented a migration control route associated with health control. This mechanism facilitated the registration, control and application of administrative removal measures due to irregular entry. This circuit provided health care for “humanitarian purposes” for irregular migrants, conditional before the police authorities on the “self-reporting” of those who entered through unauthorized crossings.

As a result, the control management was reorganized, giving rise to a “migration crisis” resulting from inefficient and ineffective strategies to deal with the new scenario. Although the authorities’ statements included the discourse of humanitarianism, the set of actions only sought to contain and dissuade migration flows.

In this context, it is observed that the reorganization of border control reinforced the securitization of mobility at the border with *ad hoc* plans. Despite this, it was found that entries through unauthorized crossings increased, especially during the period 2018-2022, as a result of rejections at the border. Similarly, the highest number of administrative removal orders for irregular entry was recorded even though, in practice, the implementation of these removals has been systematically declining.

Therefore, the heterogeneous notion of the border made it possible to understand the capacity of borders to control mobility based on mechanisms that were functional to their scope of application. In other words, the functions of border control were not only activated in the course of rejection at the borders but also managed to extend to the interior spaces of the national territory.

From this point of view, governmental narratives and practices founded on the idea of “controlling to protect” delineated a structure of mobility management where the humanitarian reason was defined from the spheres of control. Related to that, the “humanitarian reasons” that have been incorporated into the public agenda since 2018 and were reinforced in the context of the pandemic legitimized the intervention and expansion of control for the containment of migration flows.

Lastly, it is postulated that, as occurred with the 9/11 attacks, with the pandemic, borders recovered the territorial and defined sense that was already known. Before the health alert, processes of *rebordering* or strengthening of borders were known, but the accumulated factors detailed here brought back the deepest and most deeply rooted sense of borders: territoriality and the exercise of sovereign control. This has become significant in light of current and ongoing events, which indicate that the exceptionality applied is here to stay.

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