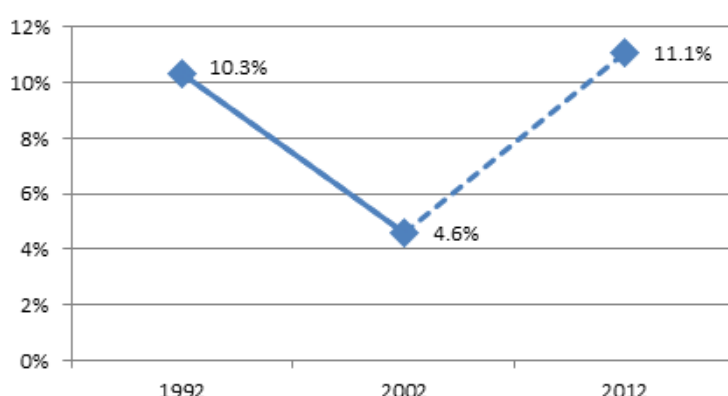


COUNTING CHILE'S INDIGENOUS POPULATION

Inter-American Development Bank
Gender and Diversity Division (SCL/GDI)¹
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Determining the portion of the population that self-identifies as indigenous in Chile has proved particularly contentious in recent years. While the census in Chile dates back to 1831 (the first truly national census took place in 1835), the Chilean National Census only began asking questions on indigenous identity in 1992. In 1992, 10.3 percent of the national population self-identified as Mapuche, Aymara, or Rapa Nui, representing slightly less than one million individuals.² However, when the census was next conducted in 2002, the share of individuals self-identifying as indigenous declined to 4.6 percent, or less than 700,000 individuals. This decline in the share of the population self-identifying as indigenous has led some critics to refer to the “statistical genocide” of Chile’s indigenous peoples.³

Figure 1. Chilean Indigenous Population According to National Censuses



Source: Official statistics from the 1992 and 2002 National Census (INE) and the initially reported statistics from the 2014 National Census (INE).

Although the 2002 Census offered options for additional indigenous peoples, the phrasing of the question reduced the number of individuals who self-identified as indigenous. In 1993, the Chilean government passed *Ley Indígena* (No 19.253) declaring that Chile had eight officially recognized indigenous peoples.⁴ While one would have expected to see an increase in the size of the indigenous population as a result of the inclusion of more indigenous peoples, this was not the case and the indigenous share of the population fell from 10.3 to 4.6 percent. The rationale for the drastic decline in the share of indigenous peoples self-identifying can be partially explained by changes in the wording of the census question. In 1992, the question read, “*Si usted es chileno, ¿se considera usted*

¹ This note was prepared by Adam Ratzlaff, consultant, under the supervision of Judith Morrison, Senior Advisor.

² In the 1992 census, these were the only three indigenous groups that were included in the census’s question on indigenous self-identification.

³ Namuncura, Domingo. April 2, 2013; Censo 2012 y Pueblos Indígenas: primeros indicios. <http://derechosindigenaschile21.blogspot.com/2013/04/se-inicia-difusion-de-los-resultados.html>

Seelau, Ryan. April, 8 2013; Chile’s “Official” Indigenous Population More than Doubles with new Census Results. <http://indigenousnews.org/2013/04/08/chiles-official-indigenous-population-more-than-doubles-with-new-census-results/>

⁴ Alacalufe (Kawaskar), Atacameño, Aymara, Colla, Mapuche, Quechua, Rapa Nui, and Yámana (Yagán).

*perteneciente a alguna de las siguientes culturas?”*⁵ However, in 2002 the question was changed to “*¿Pertenece usted a alguno de los siguientes pueblos originarios o indígenas?”*⁶ Many of Chile’s indigenous peoples have clear definitions of what it means to officially belong to the *pueblo indígena*. So even if you are of indigenous descent and self-identify as indigenous, you may not fulfill the requirements to be considered officially a member of the indigenous group.

In 2012, the Chilean National Statistics Institute (INE) tried to correct issues surrounding the wording of the question on indigenous self-identification, however, the 2012 Census ran into other issues. For the nation’s most recent census, the question related to indigenous self-identification was changed once again to a broader definition of indigenous. The 2012 Census question was split into two components; “*¿Se considera perteneciente a algún pueblo indígena (originario)?*” and, if the answer was yes, the question, “*¿A cual pertenece?*”⁷ The latter question provided nine specific indigenous peoples as well as the option “other” where the individual could list an indigenous group other than the nine

THE RATIONALE FOR THE DRASTIC DECLINE IN THE SHARE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES SELF-IDENTIFYING CAN BE PARTIALLY EXPLAINED BY CHANGES IN THE WORDING OF THE CENSUS QUESTION

provided.⁸ The 2012 Census initially announced that indigenous peoples represented 11.1 percent of the national population. However, shortly after the release of the new census data, problems over the methodology employed by INE became evident. Nearly 10 percent of the national population was excluded from the census, with surveyors inconsistently labeling houses. Following an inspection by an independent panel, the Chilean Government annulled the results of the 2012 Census on March 27, 2014.⁹

The national census is not the only source of data on the indigenous population of Chile. Starting in 1985, the Social Development Ministry conducts the Encuesta de Caracterización Socioeconómica Nacional (CASEN) every two to three years.¹⁰ Since 1996,¹¹ the survey has included questions on indigenous heritage. The phrasing has been much more consistent in the wording of the question on indigenous self-identification than has been the case in the Census. Starting in 2006, the question has been phrased as “*En Chile, la Ley reconoce la existencia de 9 pueblos indígenas. ¿pertenece Ud. o es descendiente de algunos de ellos?*”¹² However, the question was worded slightly differently in the 1996 to 2003 surveys, where it was phrased as “*En Chile, la ley reconoce la existencia de 8 pueblos originarios o indígenas, ¿pertenece usted a alguno de ellos?*”¹³ While this is a broader question than that asked in the National Census, it does allow for an estimate of the indigenous population. Interestingly, although the phrasing of the question has remained the same, the share of the population that self-identifies as indigenous in the CASEN has increased over time (See Figure

⁵ If you are Chilean, do you consider yourself a member of one of the following cultures?

⁶ Do you belong to one of the following indigenous or original peoples?

⁷ Do you consider yourself as an indigenous or original people? If so, which?

⁸ Mapuche, Aymara, Rapa Nui, Likan Antai, Quechua, Colla, Diaguita, Kawesqar, and Yagán o Yámana

⁹ Census 2012 Website, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (INE), <http://www.censo.cl/>.

¹⁰ The CASEN has been conducted in 1985, 1987, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2011, and 2013 (Data not yet available).

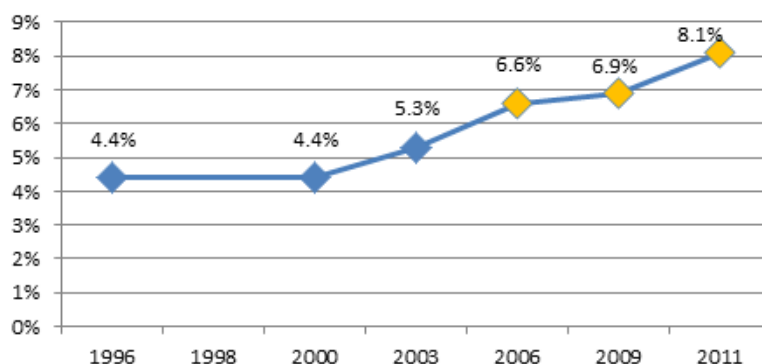
¹¹ The 1998 CASEN did not include a question on indigenous descent.

¹² In Chile, there are nine legally recognized indigenous peoples. Do you belong to or are a descendant of one of these peoples?

¹³ In Chile there are eight legally recognized indigenous or original peoples; do you belong to one of these groups?

2). The changing of the question's wording between the 2003 and 2006 CASEN rounds may explain some of this increase. Although the CASEN survey is conducted more regularly than the national census and there has been more consistency in the phrasing of the question, the CASEN should not be used for determining the indigenous population of Chile. While the objective of the census is to include all of the national population, the CASEN only presents a sample of the overall population.

Figure 2. Individuals Self-Identifying as Indigenous in the CASEN



Source: Tabulations from CASEN

Although the number is artificially low, the 2002 Census marks the most recent and complete official count of the indigenous population in Chile. With the results of the 2012 Census officially annulled by the Chilean government, the official reports of the nation's population rely on the use of the 2002 Census. Additionally, the nature of other surveys does not provide us with a complete count of the population. While there are known problems with the methodology utilized by the National Statistical Institute in determining the share of the Chilean population that self-identifies as indigenous, these numbers remain the most up to date for official reports on the indigenous population in Chile. While there has been some discussion over the implementation of a new census in 2015, this census has not yet been conducted.

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NATION'S POPULATION RELY ON THE USE OF
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