Deaths and Disappearances in the Pinochet Regime: A New Dataset[*]

Danilo Freire[†]   John Meadowcroft[‡]   David Skarbek[§]   Eugenia Guerrero[¶]

26 March 2019

Abstract

... However, . This paper presents a georeferenced event dataset on

Keywords: authoritarian regimes, Chile, georeferenced event data, Pinochet, truth commission

[†]Postdoctoral Research Fellow, The Political Theory Project, Brown University, 8 Fones Alley, Providence, RI 02912, danilofreire@gmail.com, http://danilofreire.github.io. Corresponding author.

[‡]Senior Lecturer in Public Policy, Department of Political Economy, King's College London, john.meadowcroft@kcl.ac.uk, http://johnmeadowcroft.net.

[§]Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and the Political Theory Project, Brown University, david_skarbek@brown.edu, http://davidskarbek.com.

[¶]Software Developer, Tempo UK.

1 Introduction

On 11 September 1973, Army General Augusto Pinochet led a coup against Chile's socialist President Salvador Allende. The coup marked the beginning of a seventeen-year military dictatorship that undertook a rapid liberalisation of the Chilean economy while perpetrating systematic violence against the opposition (Meadowcroft and Ruger 2014; Valdés 1995). The extent of the human rights abuses during the Pinochet regime remains unknown. However, in 1991 then-President Patricio Aylwin created a commission to investigate the most serious violations that happened during the military period. The Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation (1991), or the Rettig Report[1], records over 2,000 cases of murders and disappearances. In most cases, there is some detail as to the personal characteristics of the victim, and where and when they died or disappeared, and in many cases there is information as to how that person died. The Report proved a major milestone in the pursuit of justice for the victims of the regime.

Although the Report is a valuable resource for scholars across the humanities, quantitative researchers cannot easily use the rich information it contains. In this paper, we present a manually-coded dataset with all information from the Truth Commission Report plus new variables we constructed to complement the original data. We transcribed every personal detail from the 903 pages of the English translation of the Report, assigned a unique identification number to each of the victims, then matched the location of the human rights abuses to geographic coordinates. We matched all cases which had spatial information available.

Apart from the geographical location of the incidents, our dataset also includes: 1) the sociological characteristics of the victim; 2) their affiliation (where known); 3) the type of violence that took place during that particular event; 4) whether the victim was interrogated, tortured or in some other way mistreated (if known); 5) who were the perpetrators of the violence. If the Report does not have a particular information, we coded it as missing. As each individual receives their own id number, new information can be added to the dataset as archival work on the Pinochet era progresses. In the following sections, we describe the dataset, show summary statistics for selected variables, then provide suggestions about how our data can answer future research questions.

---

[1]Former Chilean ambassador Raúl Rettig chaired the Chilean National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation.

2   Historical Background

3   The Dataset

Our dataset comprises 2,398 observations and 57 variables. As we noted above, each observation corresponds to a victim of the Pinochet regime and every individual has a unique id number. There are several variables describing personal information of the victims, such as age, gender, nationality, occupation, and political affiliation if available. The dataset also includes information about torture or assassination methods and geographical coordinates for a number of the incidents. Figure 01 shows an example entry from our dataset.

Users can download the data as an Excel spreadsheet (`.xlsx`) or as a comma-separated values (`.csv`) file. We have also created an `R` package called `pinochet` which includes the dataset in both formats plus the codebook. The files follow the principles of "tidy data", where each column represents one variable and each row is one case (Wickham 2014). The `pinochet` package is available for download on the Comprehensive R Archive Network (CRAN) and at `http://github.com/danilofreire/pinochet`. To make the data accessible, our GitHub repository has detailed installation instructions for users new to `R`.

3.1   Types of Violence

The Report distinguishes between different types of violence carried out by the Pinochet regime. The first type is *deaths*. These are cases where the Commission signals a definite and known death of the victim. Take the case of Benito Heriberto Torres Torres, one of the first victims of the Pinochet regime (id number 2). Our dataset shows that Mr Torres was male, 57 years-old, and that he worked as a plumber. On the 12 September 1973, just one day after the military coup, Mr Torres was torture on the way to the 26th police station in Santiago. The records indicate he executed and his body was later found in Las Barrancas, Santiago. The dataset also shows that we obtained this information from pages 159-160 of the Truth Commission Report.

The second type of violence recorded in the dataset is *disappearances*. These are cases where government agents are presumed to have killed and disposed of the body of the victims. One such example is that of the Brazilian engineer Tulio Roberto Quintiliano Cardozo (id number 5). Mr Cardozo was a member of the Communist party and troops took him to the Military Academy for

interrogation also on the 12 September 1971. He was never seen again and is presumed dead.

The third category is *disappearance, information of death.* As the name implies, these observations refer to cases the Commission confirms the individual died after being missing. The formal definition for this category is that "the victims are dead; that they died at the hands of the government agents, or persons in their service; and that these or other agents disposed of the victims' mortal remains by throwing them into a river or a sea, by covertly burying them, or by disposing of them in some other secret fashion" (National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation 1991, 44). The assassination of Humberto de las Nieves Fuentes Rodriguez is an example (id number 854). He was taken in custody to the Colina air base, then loaded onto a helicopter with other political prisoners. According to the Report, government agents drugged him, beat him with a metal bar, opened his stomach with a knife before throwing the former Communist alderman from a helicopter. While his body has not been found, there is enough information about the case to classify his death as a severe human rights violation.

The last group is that of *unresolved* cases. These are defined as those where insufficient information or evidence is available. Our dataset counts 93 unresolved cases, many with georeferenced information about possible torture sites[2]. However, it is very likely that the people who disappeared were, in fact, killed. Based on the report and our methodology, we can only determine that 65% of all of the cases led to an assassination. Forty percent of the documented cases are disappearances.

Although the Report provides a comprehensive list of the regime victims, the Chilean Truth Commission itself acknowledges that the data are incomplete. The Commission had only nine months to write the Report and it had no legal power to oblige citizens to cooperate. Therefore, we expect that some cases have not been recorded. But this problem is not unique to the Pinochet regime. Selection bias is a common feature in events data, even more so in datasets about armed conflict or government repression (Ball and Price 2019; Chapman and Ball 2001). As the cases might not be a representative sample of the population of victims, we suggest scholars to carefully consider issues of model specification.

---

[2]Two cases are ambiguously described in the Truth and Commission Report, so we treat them as missing data. The victims are Ruiter Enrique Correa Arce, a news stand owner accused of facilitating message exchanges between party leaders (id number 843), and Alonso Fernando Gahona Chavez, a communist leader of municipal workers of La Cisterna (id number 847).

3.2 Geocoding

We have georeferenced all observations for which the relevant data was available. Based on data from the Truth Commission, we first created a variable indicating where the victim was allegedly tortured or murder. We assigned a number to the six locations that most frequently appear in the report, namely: 1) home; 2) work; 3) university; 4) in custody; 5) in public; and 6) in hospital. We assigned "unknown" if the location could not be identified. Then we added latitude and longitude coordinates to each location where the individuals were seen.

Since the Truth Commission Report includes spatial data in string format – e.g., intersection of *Calle Grecia* with *Avenida Rosa* – we mapped the locations using decimal degrees to increase precision. The mapping process is straightforward. We used three different websites to increase the coverage of our maps and include the largest possible number of observations. The first website we employed is Google Maps (http://maps.google.co.uk), the world's most widely used map software. We queried Google Maps' application programming interface (API) to search for street intersections and other precise addressed we retrieved from the Truth Commission Report. Additionally, we used the API to locate police stations and government buildings still in use.

Next, we used Wikimapia (https://wikimapia.org/), a open-content collaborative platform that allows users to mark locations worldwide. As of March 2019, Wikimapia contains about 30 million places in its database[3]. We benefited from this crowdsourced information to identify shanty-towns, military bases, and small neighbourhoods that could be easily found in general-purpose maps.

Our third source of geographic coordinates is Latitude (http://latitude.to). We used Latitude to source inexact coordinates, such as coordinates for cities and towns. If no precise information was available, our measure of latitude and longitude correspond to those of the control point of each city. We also used the Latitude.to website to convert non-decimal coordinates to decimal ones. For instance, some addresses in Wikimapia are in degrees, minutes, and seconds (DMS) format, and to keep the dataset comparable all coordinates follow the same standard.

3.3 Variables and Patterns

As mentioned previously, our dataset includes 57 variables and covers the seventeen years of the Pinochet Presidency (1973–1990). Figure **??** shows the frequency of government-perpetrated incidents

---

[3]Wikimapia statistics for March 2019 are available at https://wikimapia.org/stats/action_stats/?fstat=2&period=3&year=2019&month=3.

per month from 1973 to 1990. We see that the vast majority of the acts of violence happened in the first two months after the military coup. The high incidence of human rights violations in the beginning of the Pinochet era reflects the activity of the "Caravan of Death", a group of paramilitaries established in October 1973 to torture and kill dissidents (Davis and Ward 1990, 459; Verdugo 2001).

In September 1973 alone, the government committed 633 acts of violence against civilians, of which 406 the Commission signals as "definite and known deaths". The violations continued in October, with 504 incidences and 317 certified deaths. The numbers decline to about 10% of those levels in November and December, and then recede further in 1974.

In absolute numbers, the Chilean dictatorship was not as violent as its Argentinian counterpart[4], but the figures are high when compared to other South American countries. For example, the Brazilian military regime made 434 victims from 1964 to 1985; Paraguay had 424 victims of human rights abuse from 1954 to 1989; and Uruguay reported about 300 incidences from 1973 to 1985 (El País 2014; Folha de São Paulo 2016). The timing of repression also varies. Despite eventual periods of higher intensity, violence in authoritarian Brazil and Paraguay stretched somewhat evenly during the regime (Agência Brasil 2014; El País 2014). This contrasts with the Chilean case, whose repression was concentrated in the early years of the regime.

We can also explore how the government employed violence across space. We see that all types of violence were concentrated around Santiago and neighbouring cities. The results are in line with theoretical expectations. Santiago has been Chile's most densely populated city since the colonial times and in 1975 the city was home to about 30% of the country's population (United Nations 1976).

4   Conclusion: New Avenues for Research

In this paper, we introduce a dataset with rich information about more than 2,000 victims of the Pinochet regime. Our data come from two sources. First, we manually coded all information available in the Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation (1991). Second, we added the geographical locations and the specific dates of the human rights abuses whenever we

---

[4]The Argentinian government disputes the figure of 30,000 deaths and disappearances human rights organisations often suggest (BBC Brazil 2016; El País 2016). Ceferino Reato, a writer and journalist, indicates that there were 7,158 incidences during the regime, including 6,415 cases of disappearances and 743 victims of summary executions (Clarín 2016). However, General Jorge Rafael Videla, who ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1981, seems to agree with those figures. He once remarked that killing "about 7 or 8 thousand people" was "the price of winning the war against the subversives" (Clarín 2012).

could retrieve them. The graphs and maps included in this article provide some preliminary results about the temporal and spatial variation of state violence during Chile's last military government.

We believe our data open new topics of research. For instance, Lupu and Peisakhin (2017), Rozenas et al. (2017) and Zhukov and Talibova (2018) highlight that state repression has enduring effects on political preferences and social attitudes. Researchers can test whether the Pinochet regime has caused similar attitudinal changes in direct or indirect victims. Moreover, sociologists and criminologists can analyse the relationship between human rights abuses and post-regime levels of interpersonal violence. Recent studies show that democracies which arise after military regimes have higher homicide rates (Frantz 2018; Karstedt and LaFree 2006). Our data can show if areas with significant levels of military repression are more violent today.

Researchers can also examine how political coalitions affect the use of lethal violence in authoritarian regimes. Although the topic has received increasing attention (e.g., Fjelde 2010; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Rivera 2017), the internal dynamics of autocratic governments remains understudied. The main reason is a lack of fine-grained information (Ferrara 2014, 16). By linking human right abuses to changes in Pinochet's coalition, scholars can explore whether civilian or bureaucratic support lead to higher incidence of state violence. The individual data presented here can be combined with government records at any level of aggregation.

Qualitative scholars will find the personal details of the victims to be particularly useful. Historians willing to reconstruct the biographies of specific individuals are able to access pre-compiled information in a single digital file. Others might be interested in using our data as a starting point for network analysis or to collect oral testimony from survivors and acquaintances. In that regard, the dataset can accommodate future qualitative information. As we include a unique identification number to each victim, it is easy to update the personal record of any individual with new data from public archives or personal correspondence.

Lastly, scholars can investigate the connections between international legitimacy and domestic politics in repressive regimes. This is a promising area of research as the Chilean government and American intelligence services continue to declassify documents from the Pinochet era. One relevant question is whether pressure from foreign governments and organisations had any influence over the levels of human rights abuses in Chile. We hope our dataset is useful for scholars interested in these and other questions, and that the information it contains elicits hypotheses not only about the

Pinochet period, but about authoritarian governments more generally.

References

Agência Brasil (2014). Comissão Reconhece 434 Mortes e Desaparecimentos Durante Ditadura Militar. http://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/direitos-humanos/noticia/2014-12/comissao-reconhece-mais-de-200-desaparecidos-politicos-durante. Access: 2017-08-08. Cited on page 6.

Ball, P. and Price, M. (2019). Using Statistics to Assess Lethal Violence in Civil and Inter-State War. *Annual Review of Statistics and Its Application*, 6:63–84. Cited on page 4.

BBC Brazil (2016). Como Ossos de Desaparecidos Ajudam a Recontar a História da Ditadura Argentina. http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-37624117. Access: 2017-08-08. Cited on page 6.

Chapman, A. R. and Ball, P. (2001). The Truth of Truth Commissions: Comparative Lessons from Haiti, South Africa, and Guatemala. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 23(1):1–43. Cited on page 4.

Clarín (2012). Videla Admitió que la Dictadura Asesinó a '7 u 8 Mil Personas'. http://www.si.clarin.com.ar/politica/videla-admitio-dictadura-asesino-personas_0_Byk_DEr2DXg.html. Access: 2017-08-08. Cited on page 6.

Clarín (2016). El Número de Desaparecidos: La Verdad no Aumenta la Grieta. http://www.si.clarin.com.ar/politica/desaparecidos-derechos_humanos-estela_de_carlotto-dario_loperfido_0_r1erR6uPXl.html. Access: 2017-08-08. Cited on page 6.

Davis, D. R. and Ward, M. D. (1990). They Dance Alone: Deaths and the Disappeared in Contemporary Chile. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 34(3):449–475. Cited on page 6.

El País (2014). Comissão Identifica 421 Mortos e Desaparecidos Durante a Ditadura. https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2014/11/13/politica/1415898466_812379.html. Access: 2017-08-08. Cited on page 6.

El País (2016). Polêmica na Argentina pelos Dados sobre Desaparecidos na Ditadura. https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2016/01/27/internacional/1453931104_458651.html. Access: 2017-08-08. Cited on page 6.

Ferrara, A. (2014). *Assessing the Long-term Impact of Truth Commissions: The Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Historical Perspective*. London: Routledge. Cited on page 7.

Fjelde, H. (2010). Generals, Dictators, and Kings: Authoritarian Regimes and Civil Conflict, 1973–2004. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 27(3):195–218. Cited on page 7.

Folha de São Paulo (2016). Argentina Ainda Discute Quantas Foram as Vítimas da Última Ditadura Militar. http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2016/02/1735938-argentina-ainda-discute-quantas-foram-as-vitimas-da-ultima-ditadura-militar.shtml. Access: 2017-08-08. Cited on page 6.

Frantz, E. (2018). The Legacy of Military Dictatorship: Explaining Violent Crime in Democracies. *International Political Science Review*, pages 1–15. Cited on page 7.

Gandhi, J. and Przeworski, A. (2007). Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(11):1279–1301. Cited on page 7.

Karstedt, S. and LaFree, G. (2006). Democracy, crime, and justice. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 605(1):6–23. Cited on page 7.

Lupu, N. and Peisakhin, L. (2017). The Legacy of Political Violence across Generations. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(4):836–851. Cited on page 7.

Meadowcroft, J. and Ruger, W. (2014). Hayek, Friedman, and Buchanan: On Public life, Chile, and the Relationship between Liberty and Democracy. *Review of Political Economy*, 26(3):358–367. Cited on page 2.

National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation (1991). Report on the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation. Technical report, Government General Secretariat Ministry. Cited on pages 2, 4 and 6.

Rivera, M. (2017). Authoritarian Institutions and State Repression: The Divergent Effects of Legislatures and Opposition Parties on Personal Integrity Rights. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 61(10):2183–2207. Cited on page 7.

Rozenas, A., Schutte, S., and Zhukov, Y. (2017). The Political Legacy of Violence: The Long-Term Impact of Stalin's Repression in Ukraine. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(4):1147–1161. Cited on page 7.

United Nations (1976). *Demographic Yearbook*. New York: United Nations. Cited on page 6.

Valdés, J. G. (1995). *Pinochet's Economists: The Chicago School of Economics in Chile*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Cited on page 2.

Verdugo, P. (2001). *Chile, Pinochet, and the Caravan of Death*. Boulder: ynne Rienner Publishers. Cited on page 6.

Wickham, H. (2014). Tidy data. *Journal of Statistical Software*, 59(10):1–23. Cited on page 3.

Zhukov, Y. M. and Talibova, R. (2018). Stalin's Terror and the Long-Term Political Effects of Mass Repression. *Journal of Peace Research*, 55(2):267–283. Cited on page 7.