

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

Danilo Freire[^df] John Meadowcroft[^jm] David Skarbek[^ds]
Eugenia Guerrero[^eg]

19 March 2019

Abstract

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

Keywords: authoritarian regimes, Chile, georeferenced event data, Pinochet, truth commis-
sion

*We thank Umberto Mignozzetti and Robert Myles McDonnell for their helpful comments. Data and replication information are available at <http://github.com/danilofreire/pinochet-data>.

1 Introduction

On 11 September 1973, 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 Report¹, 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 source, quantitative scholars cannot easily use the rich information it contains. In this paper, we present a manually-coded dataset with all information from the Rettig 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 when we could verify that information.

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, new information can be added to the dataset as archival work continues. The next sections of this paper describe the dataset, show the descriptive statistics of some variables, and then suggest how our data can help answer future research questions.

¹Former 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. 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.

Users can download the data as an Excel spreadsheet (.xlsx) or as a comma-separated values (.csv) file. Both data and codebook are also available to download as an R package at <http://github.com/danilofreire/pinochet-data>. The repository has detailed installation instructions for users new to R. We follow the principles of “tidy data”, where each column represents one variable and each row is one case (Wickham 2014).

3.1 Types of Violence

The Report distinguishes between different types of violence carried out by the Pinochet regime. *Deaths* are cases where the Commission signals a definite and known death of the victim. *Disappearances* are cases where the victims are presumed to be dead at the hands of government agents. Government agents are assumed to have disposed of their bodies in a covert fashion, making their retrieval impossible at the time of the publication of the Report. *Disappearance, information of death* are cases which the Commission has information that signals 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” (1991, 44). *Unresolved* cases are those where insufficient information or evidence is available.

From the report, we identify 1,331 murders, 853 disappearances, 108 cases of disappearances where some information about the victim was available, 93 unresolved cases, and 7 suicides².

²Two cases are ambiguously described in the Truth and Commission Report, so we have decided to treat them as missing data. They are Rüter 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).

However, it is very likely that the people who disappeared were, in fact, killed. But based on the report and our methodology, we can only determine that 65% of all of the cases led to a person being killed. Forty percent of the documented cases were instances of someone being disappeared.

3.2 Geocoding

We georeferenced the events using the Google Maps API. The process is straightforward. The Truth and Commission Report often includes the name or approximate location of hospitals, police districts, houses, or other sites government agents used to torture or kill dissidents. We then

3.3 Variables and Patterns

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 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

- 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 5.
- 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 5.
- Frantz, E. (2018). The Legacy of Military Dictatorship: Explaining Violent Crime in Democracies. *International Political Science Review*, pages 1–15. Cited on page 4.
- Gandhi, J. and Przeworski, A. (2007). Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(11):1279–1301. Cited on page 5.
- 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 4.
- 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 4.
- 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, 3 and 4.
- 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 5.
- 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 4.

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

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 4.