



Global Learning Hub for Transitional Justice and Reconciliation

Endangered cultural memory

The impact of far-right discourses and practices on human rights related to the dictatorship in Chile

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Introduction

In 1973, Augusto Pinochet led a coup d'état that violently overthrew the democratically elected government of Chile, which had been led by President Salvador Allende—a socialist, who killed himself at the governmental *Palacio de La Moneda*—and installed an authoritarian regime that eliminated congress, banned political parties, and systematically persecuted and exterminated many of its detractors. Pinochet's cruel 17-year military dictatorship oversaw the execution or disappearance of more than 3,000 people and the torture and illegal imprisonment of a further 40,000 (Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación 1991; Comisión Nacional Sobre Prisión Política y Tortura 2004). Early in the dictatorship, elements of civil society began to coordinate efforts to uncover the truth regarding the whereabouts of their missing relatives and, with the support of the churches, the first organisations were formed to help the families of the victims in their search for their loved ones. Efforts continued with great difficulty under the shadow of the dictatorship, laying the foundations for what, once the transition to democracy had begun in 1990, would evolve into the framework of measures known today as transitional justice (Teitel 2000; Lira and Loveman 2005). However, the electoral and cultural expansion of the far right in Chile in the past five years has challenged the fragile balance that has so far sustained the country's transitional justice process.

The transitional justice paradigm has been highly influential in Chile. As a report published by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) observes, “Chile was a unique and invaluable venue for this international discussion, as it provided concrete examples of many of the dilemmas, challenges, and issues discussed” (Brett et al. 2007). Among

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the transitional justice initiatives implemented since 1990 aimed at working through the human rights violations perpetrated during the Pinochet dictatorship, three different truth commissions have been launched to establish an official truth. The first, known as the Rettig Commission was dedicated to investigating human rights violations resulting in death and disappearance (Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación 1991). Two subsequent entities, known as Valech Commissions I and II, were dedicated to investigating instances of torture and unlawful imprisonment (Comisión Nacional Sobre Prisión Política y Tortura 2004, 2011). All three commissions recommended the granting of reparations in both tangible and symbolic forms, such as offering pensions and scholarships to victims and their relatives. The commissions have also played a crucial role by proposing and supporting the construction of memorials to the victims in cities around the country (Klep 2012) and the rehabilitation and protection of former centres used for human rights violations as sites of memory (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos 2024; Hite and Badilla 2019). Subsequently, 2010 saw the inauguration of Chile's first Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago, which houses the main findings of the truth commissions (Lazzara 2011). In the same year, the National Human Rights Institute opened its doors.

The implementation of a transitional justice framework in Chile has laid the foundations for the construction and legitimisation of an institutional human rights structure, a culture of respect for human rights (Arthur 2009; Kelly 2018), and a cultural memory of human rights violations. These actions have been achieved through a long and painful process driven mainly by civil society organisations (Collins et al. 2013) which, especially during the early years of the transition, faced strong opposition from right-wing parties and the military. Chilean society has continued to work through its troubled past and, over the years, the country has seen a significant increase in commemorative activities, particularly for the 30th and 40th anniversaries of the coup d'état (Waldman 2014). However, as the present article argues, we now find ourselves in a very different context, with transitional justice initiatives and even the broader human rights framework coming under scrutiny by far-right actors.

The emergence of far-right positions around the world has been particularly alarming on social media, which has helped to rapidly expand their impact and circulation and facilitate the creation of related online communities (Barberá et al. 2015; Ghasiya et al. 2023). In Chile, these positions have also been expressed through the vandalisation of more than 160 memorials dedicated to the victims of the Pinochet dictatorship (Aguilera and Badilla 2022; Unidad de Cultura, Memoria y Derechos Humanos 2024). Both aspects are covered in the present article. There is therefore an urgent need to analyse far-right revisionist discourses on the dictatorship and those that question the validity of the multilateral organisations that sustain human rights governance (notably the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights), as well as the concerning phenomenon of vandalism to human rights memorials and sites of memory.

This article will focus on exploring these far-right narratives and actions by analysing how they are disseminated on social media and how they impact cultural memory in Chile. The section following this introduction contextualises the recent rise of the Chilean far right. The subsequent analysis employs a mixed approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse, on the one hand, far-right discourses expressed on X (formerly Twitter) and, on the other, discourses and practices expressed in relation to the desecration of human rights memorials. The latter involves analysis of press publications and interviews with professionals from a variety of state institutions

and civil society organisations in charge of managing Chile's memory policy. Finally, we reflect on the effects of these phenomena on transitional justice measures in Chile.

The recent rise of the far right in Chile in a global context

Chile has recently experienced an electoral and cultural expansion of the far right that, as we present here, challenges the fragile balance that has so far sustained the transitional justice measures that have positioned the country among the first to address the issue (Teitel 2000). The rise of radical and far-right groups in Chile reflects a broader global trend that can be seen in Europe, the United States, and across Latin America (Mudde 2017; Payne et al. 2023; Luna and Rovira Kaltwasser 2021). These groups are gaining electoral ground and achieving significant political milestones. Evidence for this trend can be found in the 2024 European Parliament elections, where the far-right European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID) parliamentary groups grew considerably in influence. Common characteristics of these groups include nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, advocating for ethnically homogeneous states, strict social order, and the empowerment of common people against elites (Mudde 2017).

In Latin America, these movements—often described as “la derecha anti-derechos” (“the right against rights”)—focus on reversing the gains of marginalised groups in areas like gender, sexuality, and ethnicity and, in cases like Argentina and Chile, on overturning advances in transitional justice and memory policies for victims of recent dictatorships (Payne et al. 2023; Escoffier and Vivaldi 2023). Their rise is linked to the politicisation of religious groups, particularly neo-Pentecostals, and the emergence of “outsider” politicians who address current security and economic crises with authoritarian and neoliberal rhetoric. Examples include Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, and Javier Milei in Argentina, who have all leveraged concerns over security and the economy to gain support, often opposing progress in relation to human rights, memory, and transitional justice. Their popularity is in part a response to the shift toward a pro-rights agenda by traditionally conservative parties, which has created a space for the emergence of reactionary positions and social movements (or counter movements) that challenge the prior consensus regarding social and human rights (Rovira Kaltwasser 2020; Payne et al. 2023). However, few studies have so far focused on these groups' assaults against human rights institutions and transitional justice measures relating to the most recent wave of Latin American dictatorships (cf. Salvi 2023; Kane et al. 2023). This aspect is the focus of the present article.

In Chile, notable groups exist both within and beyond the political system. Within the political system, the recently created *Partido Republicano* (Republican Party) and the *Partido Social Cristiano* (Social Christian Party) stand out, each linked to a series of grassroots groups. Outside the electoral system, the *Movimiento Social Patriota* (Social Patriot Movement, MSP) and *Team Patriota* (Patriotic Team) have gained visibility. The biggest political group has been the *Movimiento de Acción Republicana* (Republican Action Movement), whose political party is the *Partido Republicano*, founded by former *Unión Demócrata Independiente* (Independent Democratic Union, UDI) senator José Antonio Kast in 2019. Its rise began in the context of a process of political fragmentation and tension between moderate and radical currents within the right (Rovira Kaltwasser 2020).

Kast and the *Movimiento de Acción Republicana* began an upward trajectory during the 2017 presidential election, in which he competed against the traditional right-wing candidate Sebastián Piñera (elected) with a radical right-wing populist discourse, garnering 8% of the vote (Rovira Kaltwasser 2020, 50). His rhetoric fiercely attacked the left and adopted more radical right-wing positions, advocating for conservative values like the traditional family as the basis of society, championing the importance of religious institutions within the state edifice and society in general, emphasising the protection provided by law and order against crime, and featuring radical anti-immigration proposals and a strong endorsement of the military, including figures involved in the coup d'état (Rovira Kaltwasser 2020; Zanoti and Roberts 2021). Importantly to transitional justice and cultural memory, on the 2022 anniversary of the coup d'état, Kast, again running as a presidential candidate, celebrated the event with a post on X that would have been unimaginable in years prior: "On September 11th, 1973, Chile chose freedom, and the country we have today is thanks to the men and women who rose up to prevent a Marxist revolution in our land."¹

The party's ideological base corresponds to the typology of radical right-wing populism, opposing advances in identity, sexual, and reproductive rights with markedly authoritarian discourses that promote a social order centered on the family and glorifying national symbols and cultural homogeneity (Días et al. 2023; Campos 2021). This rise was strengthened by the emergence of a reactionary counter movement to the social unrest of 2019, which opposed the changes—primarily social justice and an end to abuses by powerful groups²—called for by protesters (Barozet et al. 2022; Aguilera and Espinoza 2022). This counter movement mobilised a discourse that criminalised the protests, which at times involved considerable violence, in defence of a conservative social order. Proponents favoured an authoritarian response to the protests and criticised political elites, who they considered incapable of tackling the social unrest (Barozet et al. 2022; Campos 2021). As we will explain in detail below, the counter movement also involved numerous attacks against memorials to victims of the dictatorship around the country. Positioned outside the traditional right, the *Movimiento Republicano* promotes a radical discourse that resonates with positions left unrepresented by the moderation of traditional right-wing parties, such as opposition to moral freedom (e.g., free abortion, marriage between people of the same sex or gender, or gender transition policies) and redistributive policies in the economic and social spheres (Rovira Kaltwasser 2019, 2020; Campos 2021).

The *Partido Republicano* has achieved significant electoral success in recent years. Kast reached the second round of the 2021 presidential election, winning the first round with 27.91% of the votes but ultimately losing with 44.13% against Gabriel Boric. Surprisingly, his party also dominated in the election of the "Constitutional Council", securing 45.1% of the vote and thus passing the 33% "veto player" threshold with a majority that enabled them to block initiatives that clashed with their ideas. Notably, one of the party's political strategies has been to generate controversies via social media, and this has enabled them to achieve significant media influence by positioning themselves against gender equality and defending the Pinochet dictatorship (Cruz and Varetto 2019). Alongside

¹ Available at: <https://x.com/joseantoniokast/status/1569022538671325184> [accessed 17 February 2025].

² Abuses by big companies and the economic elite have been a significant cause of malaise in Chile, leading to massive protest in some cases (Joignant and Somma 2024). Chile has a neoliberal market system, in which private companies obtain massive gains by providing social goods such as pensions, health and education. Moreover, since 2007 large private companies have been condemned for colluding to fix consumer prices and for avoiding market competition (Fuentes 2019).

traditional electoral approaches, the *Partido Republicano* has deployed strategies across multiple media platforms. In what they call the “Republican holding,” its members have created the *Academia Republicana*, which serves as a political training space open to the public; Republican cafés; and the think tank *Ideas Republicanas*. They also maintain links with think tanks associated with the UDI, such as the *Fundación Jaime Guzmán*, the *Instituto Res Pública*, the *Fundación Cuide Chile*, and *Comunidad y Justicia*, which advise parliamentarians on conservative issues such as religious freedom, anti-abortion policies, and robust defence of the traditional family (Campos 2021; Escoffier and Vivaldi 2023). To better understand the impact of these groups on Chile’s cultural memory, the next section presents an analysis of far-right discourses on remembrance on X (formerly Twitter).

Human rights discourses within far-right communities on X (formerly Twitter)

Chile is no exception to the critical role that social media plays in the growth and dissemination of far-right positions. While this has not been systematically researched in Chile, evidence is available from Brazil, Argentina, Europe, and the USA that highlights the importance of social media in popularising far-right and radical-right ideologies and attracting new audiences, particularly younger generations (Dias et al. 2021; Gold and Peña 2021; Saferstein 2023; Santos et al. 2020). This section presents an analysis of online discourses on X (formerly Twitter) concerning remembrance in Chile, focusing on a critical event: the 50th anniversary of the 1973 coup d’état.³ This exploration is inspired by studies that have shown that the far right have leveraged social media to disseminate content to diverse global audiences, forming a cultural identity that helps the spread of these communities both online and offline (Barberá et al. 2015; Gurchani 2024; Hawkins 2023).

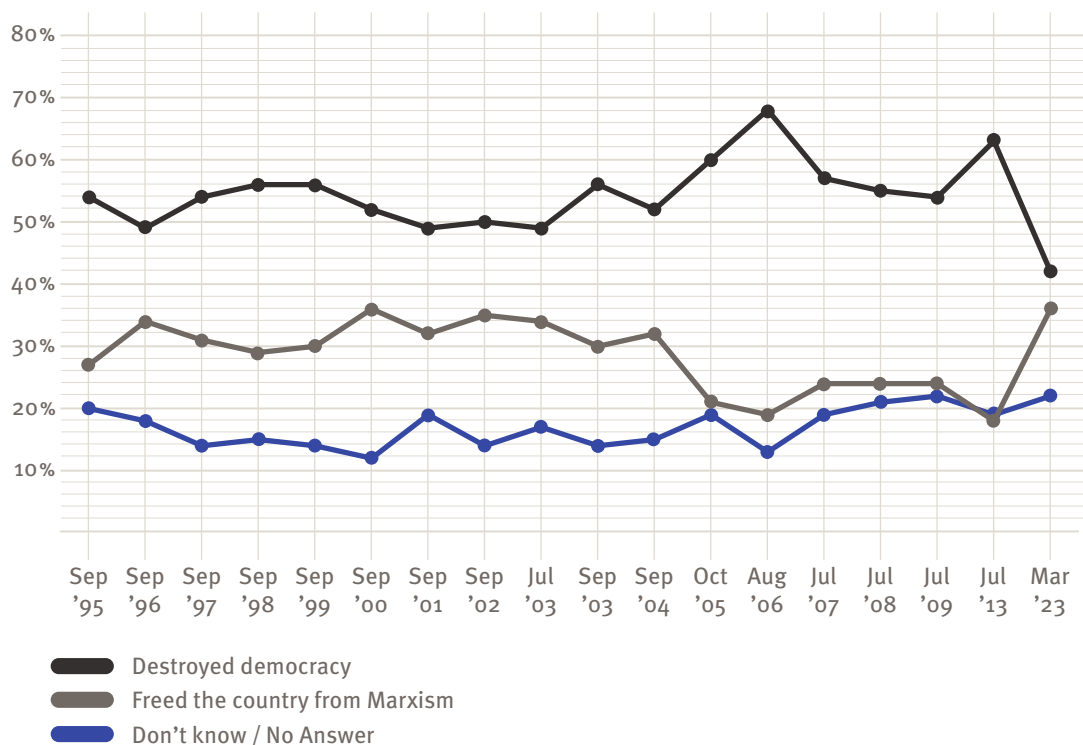
The 50th anniversary of the coup d’état in 2023 marked a surprising reversal in public opinion regarding the historical meaning of the coup and the later transitional justice initiatives. To illustrate this change in public opinion, we refer to a long-running poll conducted since 1995 by Market Research Opinion International (CERC MORI 2023). One of the questions asked of respondents is what 11 September means to them⁴. The survey offers two answers, which are the main cultural frames through which Chileans have answered in the past: for those on the right it meant the salvation of Chile from Marxism; for those on the left, it meant the destruction of democracy. For a long time, the majority of people chose the latter response, and this trend increased between the 30th and the 40th anniversaries, peaking in 2006 and 2013. However, at the last anniversary, only 42% of respondents—the lowest level ever—chose this meaning, while 36% felt that the coup d’état had saved Chile from Marxism (Chart 1). As there are no data from this survey for the years between 2014 and 2022, it is unfortunately not possible to analyse how this shift took place over the years.

3 It is important to note that there is considerable discussion regarding the value of considering X, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and other open platforms as spaces for debate (Carlsson 2016; Bouvier and Rosenbaum 2020). On the one hand, they are likely used predominantly by certain groups with internet access and better technological skills. It has also been argued that algorithms, or even companies and groups dedicated to this purpose, have the capacity to manipulate the information circulating on these platforms, leading to increased segregation, radicalisation of positions, and the spread of false content (Carlsson 2016; Brown 2020; Bouvier and Rosenbaum 2020). Methodologically, this creates a somewhat opaque system, posing challenges for research based on conversations held in these spaces. With this in mind, however, there are numerous studies that demonstrate a strong relationship between the use of social media and both progressive social movements and counter movements.

4 The 1973 coup d’état in Chile occurred on 11 September.

Chart 1

The meaning of 11 September 1973, 1995 – 2023



SOURCE: CERC MORI (2023); TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY THE AUTHORS

An analysis of discussion threads on X relating to the 50th anniversary of the coup d'état, produced by 23 accounts⁵ during September 2023, reveals three main lines of argument. One particular discourse expressed strong criticism of the fact that the government was organising an official ceremony for the anniversary, suggesting that the commemoration would divert attention away from tackling criminal violence and that it constitutes a misuse of public funds for an issue that divides the Chilean population.

For instance, the most popular post (with 13,241 likes) was: “Share if you’re fed up with all the drama about the 50th anniversary...”⁶ Other popular posts, including one by Kast himself, were: “While the government is still worried about what happened 50 years ago, a 13-year-old girl is shot and killed in Recoleta. The government’s priorities are clearly out of touch with the public’s urgent needs.”⁷; “Boric has caused the biggest polarisation in Chile in 50 years.”⁸ We interpret this as evidence of the rise of a discourse that delegitimises commemorations connected to human rights crimes.

5 We conducted purposive sampling of 23 far-right accounts, selecting public figures belonging to this sector and who use X, and including those accounts that interact with them most under the same ideological perspective.

6 Available at: https://x.com/Jou_Kaiser/status/1700855467717648690 [accessed 17 February 2025].

7 Available at: <https://x.com/joseantoniokast/status/1699379811766952346> [accessed 17 February 2025].

8 Available at: https://x.com/desde_1965/status/1703712306390044865 [accessed 17 February 2025].

A second discursive argument we observed was the challenge to the democratic or human rights credentials of the government prior to the coup, and those of the left in general. The posts included criticisms of left-wing parties and leaders for supporting left-wing dictatorships (notably the former German Democratic Republic and contemporary Nicaragua), for having supported violence as a legitimate means of social transformation, or for not condemning the *Unidad Popular* government of Salvador Allende. The discourse disputed the legitimacy of this sector of society to lead the commemoration and to impose their view of the event. The following posts are indicative of these opinions:

“We also need to remember the killings by the Communist Party, so people understand that there’s no moral authority to talk about human rights if you belong to the party responsible for the most deaths and dictatorships in history.”⁹

“The day the left truly commits to respecting the law and the constitution, and completely renounces violence, its justification, terrorism, and totalitarianism, will be the day that any future coup will become impossible and indefensible.”¹⁰

These posts indicate how the commemoration of victims of gross human rights violations committed during the dictatorship is called into question through the delegitimisation of the social sector close to victims (the left and supporters of the *Unidad Popular*). This argument is based on the common position in Chile to criticise the Chilean left by linking it to the repressive politics of communist countries in Eastern Europe and Cuba, rather than acknowledging the commitment to democracy demonstrated by Chilean left-wing parties since their creation.

This is related to the third significant discourse critiquing the official meaning of the commemoration, which was expressed either through denouncement of the organisers for not including a statement about the alleged responsibility of the *Unidad Popular* government for inciting the coup, or through direct celebration of the coup itself, which was a highly visible opinion on the day of the anniversary. This latter opinion is framed by the salvationist memory promoted by the dictatorship, which argues that the *Unidad Popular* was not a democratic regime but a totalitarian Marxist government, and that the coup saved the country from it. This discourse is closely related to opinions that Salvador Allende and his government were directly responsible for the coup, articulated in popular posts such as: *“Today, I was with the people who stood up against the Marxist oppression 50 years ago!”¹¹*, or *“According to the Pulso Ciudadano survey, Salvador Allende and the Unidad Popular are seen as the main culprits behind the coup.”¹²*

These posts promote a historical interpretation that seeks to obstruct the moral condemnation of gross human rights violations, which is the focus of the commemoration and the basis for transitional justice measures. This argument is based on the collective memory of the violence of the coup and the

9 Available at: https://x.com/tere_marinovic/status/1699226804781728109 [accessed 17 February 2025].

10 Available at: https://x.com/Jou_Kaiser/status/1699463721075011639 [accessed 17 February 2025].

11 Available at: <https://x.com/carreragonzalo/status/1700606255562215605> [accessed 17 February 2025].

12 Available at: <https://x.com/Josefcologos/status/1699400585655566630> [accessed 17 February 2025].

years that followed as having been justified, because they were necessary to fend off Marxism (Stern 2006). In this sense, the discourse represents an inversion of the victim-perpetrator relationship, portraying the left as the main perpetrator and the rest of society, particularly those who fought against Marxism, as the primary victims.

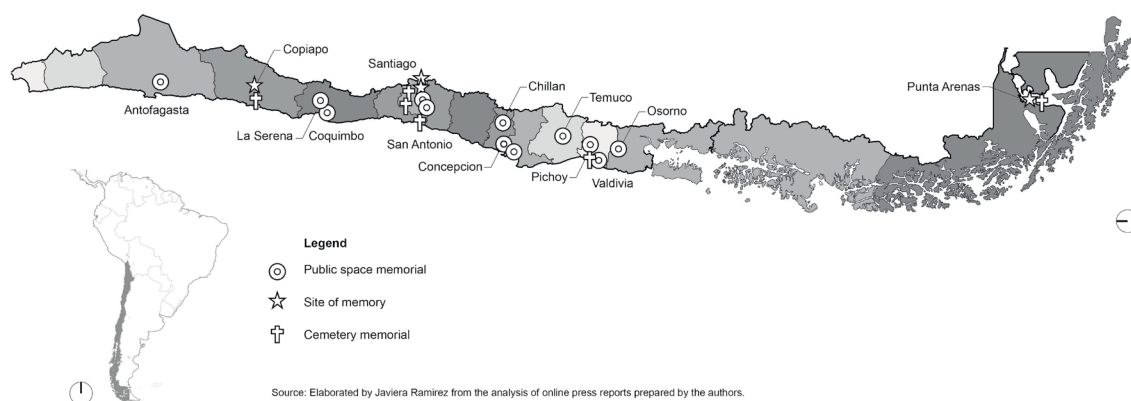
Vandalisation of human rights memorials

The far-right discourse on Chilean remembrance evident in X posts has gone hand in hand with acts of vandalism against memorials dedicated to the victims of human rights violations perpetrated during the military dictatorship, as well as against memory sites. Memory sites are areas where human rights violations previously occurred and that, in some cases, have been recovered by human rights organisations to be used as small grassroots museums, meeting places, and spaces for the promotion of human rights (Hite and Badilla 2019). Memorials and memory sites have been important for Chilean society, often receiving protection by the state or being officially categorised as a human rights heritage (Seguel 2019; Cabezas et al. 2017).

Vandalism against memorials and memory sites has been carried out by small far-right groups and constitutes a very clear means of jeopardising the cultural memory of human rights violations anchored in the public space, which has been one of the main advances achieved by organised civil society and the state in this area (Aguilera and Badilla 2022). In a research project conducted in 2020–2021, we investigated the rise of this repertoire of action, identifying at least 22 acts of vandalism in cities around Chile (Figure 1).

At that time, the phenomenon could be interpreted primarily as a reaction by some conservatives against the huge wave of protests that shook Chilean society in 2019–2020. The so-called “social uprising” began on 18 October 2019, and saw the vandalisation of more than 64% of the country’s public monuments, especially those dedicated to military heroes of the colonisation, conquest, and formation of the nation state (Badilla and Aguilera 2021). This wave of vandalism embodied a call for social justice and an end to the structural violence experienced not only by the indigenous population, but also by different groups in conditions of social exclusion (Matus et al. 2023). Interference with these “toxic monuments” can be understood as a larger struggle for racial equality and social justice (Rigney 2022). As such, the vandalisation of numerous human rights memorials can be interpreted as a vengeful reaction to these developments and a demand for the status quo to be maintained.

Figure 1
Human rights memorials attacked since 18 October 2019



SOURCE: AGUILERA AND BADILLA (2022)

The series of actions taken against memorials and memory sites in the context of the 2019–2020 protests can be associated with some of the key discourses of the far right. One element of the vandalism is the justification of repression and the criminalisation of protest, which are characteristics of authoritarianism. In the actions taken against memorials and sites we observe the idea that the victims were not innocent and that there was therefore justification for the perpetration of crimes or the use of force in the context of social demonstrations. Similar to the X posts, these actions illustrate an inversion of the victim-perpetrator relationship, portraying the victims of human rights crimes represented in the vandalised memorials as criminals. For example, in one of the acts of vandalism carried out in the city of Concepción, graffiti bearing the message in black paint “more were missing” (“*Faltaron +*”) constituted a clear assertion that in their view, the number of victims of the dictatorship was insufficient (Figure 2), implying that more people should have been murdered or gone missing.

Figure 2
Vandalisation of a human rights memorial in the city of Concepción

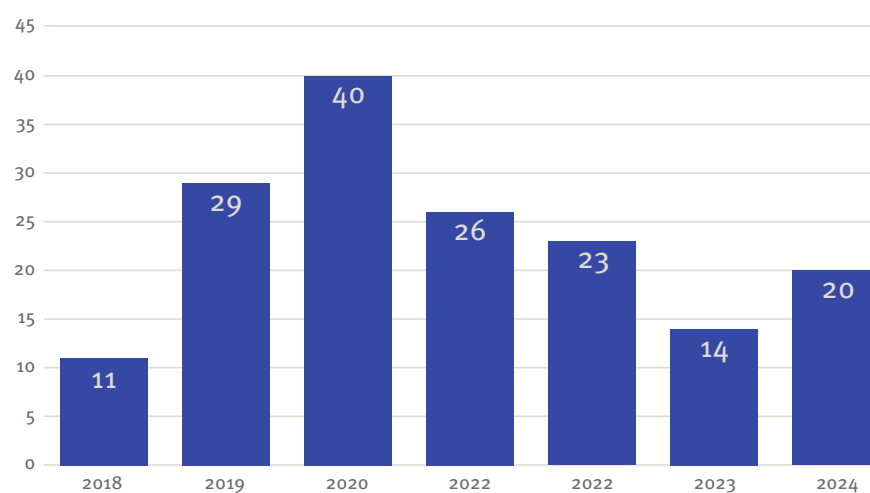


SOURCE: @EGUZMANRIOSECO, PUBLISHED IN EL MOSTRADOR
(AVAILABLE AT: WWW.ELMOSTRADOR.CL)

However, the phenomenon did not cease in 2021, and continues at an alarming rate today. As indicated by a recent report prepared by the Culture, Memory and Human Rights Unit of the Chilean Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage, between 2018 and 2024 more than 163 acts of vandalism to memorials and memory sites have been recorded (Chart 2). The report states that in July 2024 alone, the number of attacks recorded was higher than the total for the previous year (Unidad de Cultura, Memoria y Derechos Humanos 2024). The report also shows that vandalism has occurred all over Chile, but that the majority of acts have been perpetrated in the central and most densely populated regions, namely the Metropolitan region and the Valparaíso region.

Chart 2

Human rights memorials vandalised between 2018 and 2024¹³



SOURCE: UNIDAD DE CULTURA, MEMORIA Y DERECHOS HUMANOS (2024)

These acts of vandalism have raised concerns among those Chilean policymakers responsible for memory issues, who observe that the discursive expansion of the far right and its questioning of the institutionality of human rights constitutes a clear threat to Chile’s human rights heritage and to the implementation of policies for its protection (Culture, Memory and Human Rights Unit, 2024). As one civil servant at the Ministry of Justice’s Department of Memory points out in an interview, “it is very belligerent nowadays to talk about human rights or protection of memorials because people link it directly with a political position and not with the exercise of human rights, and even less so with the exercise of cultural rights, which is another extension” (personal communication of a memory policy specialist in July 2024).

¹³ This graph illustrates the number of attacks on memorials and memory sites in Chile between 2018 and 2024. Each bar represents a year, with the numbers above indicating the total memorials and sites affected. For example, the year 2020 shows the highest number of incidents, with 40 affected sites.

Echoing this interviewee's account, some of the acts of vandalism to memory sites express an emerging discourse that discredits these places of memory as spaces for political indoctrination, the enrichment of those who work there, or corruption and the payment of political favours, based on the fact that some of these sites receive state funding for their professional staff. An example of interventions of this type was reported by the *Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi*, the first memory site implemented in Chile, which has suffered several attacks involving graffiti and the installation of posters. On two occasions, members of the far-right group *Movimiento Social Patriota* put up posters and banners bearing messages such as "No more profit from human rights," and "Place of indoctrination."

Figure 3

Banner outside *Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi* bearing the message "No more profit from human rights"



SOURCE: PHOTO BY DANIEL REBOLLEDO

Another far-right strategy observed in relation to the vandalism of memorials and memory sites is the appropriation of spaces and commemorative practices to celebrate people or groups associated with the dictatorship. For example, some of the acts of vandalism have involved graffiti celebrating the dictator, such as "Viva Pinochet," "Thank you armed forces," or depicting the symbols of far-right groups such as *Patria y Libertad*. This appropriation is accompanied by the broadcast of denigratory or hateful speech toward the victims of the dictatorship, aiming to dichotomise the population as friends and foes and give shape to the figure of a dispensable "other." This aspect is frequently observed in vandalism involving terms such as "terrorists" or "murderers" in reference to victims of the dictatorship.

Such actions foster the revictimisation of the memory communities that have created and/or cared for these places and who, on top of having to try to overcome the loss of their loved ones, must now endure this new aggression while dealing with limited support for their efforts to clean up and regenerate these spaces. Efforts are often arduous and yield meagre results, undermining the mission of reparation that underlies transitional justice initiatives. As stated during an interview with a state

employee involved in memory policy: “The state abandons you twice. The same state that provoked the crimes against humanity, once it erects the monuments—if it erects them at all—abandons them. And once it abandons them, it is again the organisations that have to take action to safeguard, protect, and care for them, and again it is the state that falls into inaction and fails to protect them” (personal communication of a memory policy specialist in July 2024).

Conclusion

This article examined an under-researched aspect of the rise of the far right in Chile: the questioning and erosion of advances in human rights and transitional justice initiatives regarding the violations committed by the military dictatorship of 1973 to 1990. Based on our analysis of discourses in far-right online communities during the 50th anniversary of the coup d’état, along with the growing occurrence of attacks against memory sites and memorials to the victims, we can assert that the human rights and transitional justice framework—which condemns state crimes against citizens and calls for public policy to achieve justice and reparations for victims—is being challenged by means of three main strategies.

First, we find growing efforts to relativise the very status of the victims themselves, as seen in acts of vandalism that denounce them as terrorists or criticise memory sites as spaces of political indoctrination by the left. A similar position is observed on X, where posters argue that responsibility for the coup d’état lies with the *Unidad Popular* government, that is, with those who became the victims of the military dictatorship. We see this movement, both in discourse and in acts of vandalism, as a disturbing rhetorical inversion that persistently portrays the victims of brutal military violence as perpetrators, criminals, or terrorists, while positioning those responsible for their deaths and disappearances as the primary victims.

Second, a mood of celebration of the coup d’état and the promotion of a discourse of salvation expressed in vandalism and disseminated on social media is gaining momentum under a political-historical reinterpretation of the facts. According to this discourse and these practices, the victims and the human rights violations become a simple consequence of the higher purpose of liberating the country from a totalitarian Marxist regime. In this, we observe a characteristic of the far right: the valorisation, and in some cases exaltation, of the “iron fist,” including, as our analysis shows, the framing of the coup d’état as a necessary measure.

Thirdly, the emergence of these discourses and practices associated with the far right reflects the uninhibited production of a memory that valorises the figure of Pinochet, along with military and patriotic symbols. Like any cultural memory, this can consolidate ties within these groups, strengthening their identities and social and political projections. This phenomenon has its own rationality and should be the focus of future analysis to safeguard the minimum common ground established in Chile and Latin America for the protection of democracy.

Finally, the results of this analysis reveal the production of discourses and practices by the far right that challenge the consolidation of the “Never Again” memory that has been painstakingly built by human rights organisations over the years. This challenge circulates both online and offline, further complicating the preservation of cultural memory related to dictatorial violence. These troubling

findings remind us that the work of memory is always fragile in the face of social and political changes, and therefore requires strong state protection to safeguard cultural memory. Memorials and memory sites, due to their presence in public spaces, are particularly vulnerable to desecration. Human rights organisations have long fought for the formulation and approval of a law that guarantees the protection of these sites, but recent parliamentary shifts toward the far right are not encouraging, and such a law has yet to be discussed in the Chilean congress. This is just one indication that, as a society, we must continue to work and remain vigilant in safeguarding the guarantee that past mistakes will not be repeated. Crucially, it also serves as a reminder that memory work must be continuous and enduring.

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ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

The Global Learning Hub for Transitional Justice and Reconciliation is a network of organisations from Germany and across the world, initiated by the Berghof Foundation and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in early 2022. We want to facilitate an inspiring space for dialogue and learning that is driven by solidarity, inclusivity and innovation. By building bridges, generating knowledge and amplifying voices, the Hub seeks to advance the policy and practice of dealing with the past to strengthen peace and justice.

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