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“TODO ESTÁ GUARDADO EN LA MEMORIA”: THE AFTERMATH OF STATE VIOLENCE IN ARGENTINA

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**“Todo está guardado en la memoria”: The Aftermath
of State Violence in Argentina**

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Abstract

Can the memorials honoring the victims of state violence influence present-day elections? This paper examines a natural experiment within the Argentinean electoral system to investigate the causal link between one type of memorial and current electoral outcomes. The results show that the presence of “*Baldosas por la memoria*” (tiles commemorating victims of the 1976-1983 military dictatorship in Argentina) is associated with a significant drop in null votes. Furthermore, my findings suggest that these monuments could be leveraged to impact a particular right-wing political party. The hypothesis behind this result is that these tiles produce a revitalizing effect on the perceived importance of democracy.

Keywords: Elections, Argentina, Dictatorship, Memorials, State Violence

JEL codes: D72, D91, N46

“Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.”

—George Orwell, 1984

1 Introduction

People often use history, sometimes without realizing it, to make sense of current events and engage in debates. The history that comes up in everyday conversations is simply a selection of certain past events that individuals have learned over time and use for various purposes. The utilization of slogans in contemporary politics, particularly those that evoke a triumphant past that must be reinstated (such as “Make America Great Again” in United States or “We want our country back” in Britain), are an example of how the memory of certain events can shape today’s world, even if they are based on the selection of certain aspects of the past.

To pass on representations of the past to future generations, societies use various cultural forms, including myths, stories, tales, and monuments (Saint Laurent (2020)). These types of customs and histories are increasingly studied and evidence shows that they are related to current social dynamics (as in the case of Folklore (Michalopoulos and Xue (2021))). Often, these representations have political purposes, such as emphasizing the importance of obeying ruler’s commands or legitimizing violent actions against civilians. Despite the importance of memory in human history, little has been done to quantify its impact on current political life. This paper aims to shed light on the effect of monuments on current political dynamics, specifically analyzing whether memorials remembering victims of state violence in Argentina impact current electoral outcomes through a memory-revitalizing effect. This type of commemoration, known as “symbolic transition justice” (Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas (2022)) is not exclusive to Argentina. For example, in Europe, there are the *Stolpersteine* (“stumbling stones”) that commemorate victims and survivors of national socialism. This stones are probably the largest case of ground level placement of memorials, with more than 100,000

placed in more than 25 countries (at exactly the last place of residency).

To investigate the link between these commemorations and the election results, I exploit a natural experiment based on the assignment of voters to polling stations during the 2015 election in Argentina. Specifically, I estimate the causal effect of tiles that commemorate the victims of state violence placed in front of schools (where polling stations are located) on the election results. My findings indicate that the presence of these tiles is significantly associated with a reduction of null votes share by 0.06 percent points. Furthermore, if a school has a tile displayed at the front, it is also significantly associated with a reduction of the vote share of the more “right-wing” party during the 2015 election, with an average reduction of 0.37 percent points. This can be attributed to the use of collective memory by the principal left-wing party to associate the right-wing party with dictatorship policies.

One possible explanation for the observed outcome is that individuals who encounter the tiles prior to entering the polling station experience a revitalizing effect on their perception of the significance of democracy. This, in turn, prompts them to re-evaluate the importance of democracy and make more informed choices while casting their vote. The proposed notion that memorials can reinvigorate the significance of democracy was tested in Chile, as demonstrated by an RCT study (Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas (2022)). According to the findings, those who attended to a particular memorial museum in Chile exhibited a heightened self-reported support towards democracy. The Chilean experience implies that this could potentially explain the reasoning behind voting patterns observed in this study.

Among the recent cases of state violence, the Argentine case holds significant relevance for two distinct reasons. Firstly, it existed within the context of authoritarian regimes that committed mass exterminations for various reasons, including political and religious motives, aligning with the many experiences of the 20th century. Particularly, Argentina’s last dictatorship stands out in Latin America due to the violence and magnitude of the experience. Secondly, the commitment to investigate and prosecute the murders and disappearances that occurred after the dictatorship was exceptional, pioneering in nature, and placed memory at

the forefront of Argentinean politics. The quest for memory has been an essential process within the country, making events from the dictatorship widely known among society, and commemorative events easily associated with these occurrences.

Often, after periods of violence, wars, or the fall of political regimes, the question of memory becomes central. However, there is a wide range of approaches to this issue worldwide, from total acceptance of the past (as in Germany after the Holocaust) to complete denial (as in Turkey after the deaths of approximately 1.5 million Ottoman Armenians (Zubrzycki and Woźny (2020))). Although Argentina’s path to dealing with its past has been complex, in recent years the country has moved towards acceptance of the past (reconstructing history, remembering the victims and bringing those responsible to justice). To sum up, the Argentine case is relevant to understand how memorials impact the daily life of Western societies that choose to study and come to terms with their past.

Among the efforts for reconstructing what happened during the dictatorship, one of the most notable initiatives in Argentina are the “Tiles for Memory” monuments, studied here. These monuments are intended to commemorate the disappeared (victims who were killed or imprisoned without due process of law). These are installed by civil organizations at the locations where the victim carried out their daily activities, such as where they lived, worked, studied, or were kidnapped/killed. The tiles contain details such as the name, age, occupation, and the reason for their placement, such as their role in the struggle for justice. Some of these have been placed at the entrance of educational institutions that also serve as polling stations during Argentina’s elections. As a result, a subset of the voting places now has a tile.

The distribution of these monuments, together with the rule of assigning voters within the “Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires”, forms a natural experiment that allows estimating a causal effect of the tiles on the current electoral results. Within the 24 electoral districts of Argentina, there are subdivisions called “circuits”. People are assigned to different polling stations depending on their surname within a specific circuit. Thus, depending on their

surname, people are assigned to schools with or without tiles at the entrance. From the point of view of causal identification, the primary assumption is that neither the characteristics of the people nor the characteristics of the school within the same circuit are correlated with the presence of tiles. This identification assumption would allow us to say that if the election result differs from another, it is solely due to the presence or absence of tiles. This natural experiment was first used by [Ajzenman and Durante \(2023\)](#) to study the impact of school infrastructure on political outcomes for the incumbent. In that paper they find that those assigned to schools with worse structural conditions are less likely to vote for the incumbent running for president, showing that contextual factors (which might seem unimportant elements) can affect voting decisions by making certain issues more visible.

To conduct this study, I compiled a dataset of election results at the polling station level to match treatment (which is the presence of tiles). Additionally, I created a novel dataset that includes information on the location and date of placement of these tiles in the “Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires” from 2015 to 2022, complementing the information provided by the “Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires” (GCBA) until 2014. Finally, geographic and demographic information from GCBA and national institute of statistics and censuses (INDEC, by its acronym in Spanish) are included as control variables.

In addition, I have compiled a new database of information from the “Secretaria de Derechos Humanos” to document the magnitude of this event. As far as I know, this is the first time that such a database has been introduced to the field of economics, which details the victims of state terrorism at the micro level, including the location of the event and the birthplace of the victim.

This paper contributes to the literature related to the impact of commemorating acts of political violence, which finds both economic and political effects ([Belmonte and Rochlitz \(2019\)](#), [Ochsner and Roesel \(2017\)](#), [Fouka and Voth \(2013\)](#), [Anton Rozenas and Vlasenko \(2022\)](#)). Two closely related studies that focus on the micro-level effects of memorials to state violence are [Zabolotskiy \(2022\)](#) and [Turkoglu, Ditzmann, and Firestone \(2023\)](#). [Turkoglu,](#)

[Ditlmann, and Firestone (2023)] investigates the impact of the *Stolpersteine* (“stumbling stones”) on the support for far-right parties in Berlin and finds a significant negative effect. [Zabolotskiy (2022)], on the other hand, studies the use of commemoration as a memory revitalizing mechanism in Russia at a granular level, examining its association with social capital (donations). As far as I know, this is the first paper to study, using a validated natural experiment ([Ajzenman and Durante (2023)]), the causal effect of memorials on the share of null votes, linking it to a revitalization of the importance of democracy.

This paper is also a contribution to the literature on the long-term effects of political violence from the point of view of the possible mechanism. There is a growing consensus in the literature that past political violence has lasting effects on politics and society ([Walden and Zhukov (2020)], [Wang (2021)], [Zhukov and Talibova (2018)], [Arturas Rozenas and Zhukov (2019)], [Lichter, Löffler, and Siegloch (2021)], [Palgi, Shrira, and Ben-Ezra (2015)], [Wayne and Zhukov (2022)], [Esberg (2021)], [Bautista et al. (2023)]), but few studies have focused on the intergenerational transmission mechanism. The literature has mainly focused on the community or family level ([Charnysh and Peisakhin (2022)] and [Lupu and Peisakhin (2017)]), but little has been studied at the micro level. This paper provides evidence that commemorations could be an effective way of transmitting collective memory from one generation to the next. Given that a significant portion of the current electorate did not experience such violence firsthand, this implies that commemorative efforts can have a lasting impact on different generations.

2 Historical context

In 1974, after the death of President Juan Domingo Perón, his vice-president, Isabel Perón, took office for a short and tumultuous term. By 1975, the new government had lost credibility, especially due to economic struggles and escalating political violence from both the left and right sides. Amidst this unrest, the armed forces grew increasingly concerned about the

state of the country, while simultaneously denying any intention of a coup d'état. Instead, they expressed a commitment to combat the common enemy: subversion. As the army became more involved in the government, military ministers were appointed, and they in turn became directly involved in repressive forces. It is important to note that during this process, the fight against subversion was used as a legitimizing factor for state violence. Harsher laws were enacted and supported by certain sectors of society. Repression was gradually becoming an established mechanism in Argentine politics, a mechanism that would later be used by the armed forces when they carried out the coup d'état.

On 24th March 1976, the president was overthrown and put in jail after a long process of institutional attrition. Power was given to the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces, which was made up of the army, navy, and air force. The main objective of the coup was to “eradicate” subversion and carry out reforms that would lead to a “democratic, representative, and federal” outcome. The armed forces viewed these tasks as an “irrevocable historical duty”. Essentially, the fight against subversion was the primary element, from a discursive point of view, to legitimize the coup and achieve cohesion within the armed forces themselves.

Following the coup d'état, the armed forces carried out a widespread repression across the country by dividing it into three armed forces. The country was further divided into zones, sub-zones, and areas, each with their own distinct characteristics and priorities. The organization was decentralized so that each subdivision had its own set of responsibilities. Urban centers were of high priority while other zones and provinces aimed to prevent the spread of subversive action. This suggests that from the military's perspective, not all regions were of equal importance, but this did not prevent repression from taking place throughout the country. Once repression began, it coexisted with a dual character between legality and illegality. On the one hand, public activities such as factory occupations and university interventions were articulated as illegal, as were kidnappings and disappearances. The most common modality of the illegal/secret began with the abduction of a person and

their subsequent transfer to a secret detention center. This could in many cases end with the murder or disappearance of people. The data used to locate people initially came from various state agencies through surveillance, infiltration of organizations, intelligence services, and later from data provided by victims of torture. The forced disappearance of people was the hallmark of this repressive process and had certain characteristics that were unique and novel for the time. The disappearance of a person was not only physical, but also from the records, where there was a deliberate intention to eliminate any trace of the victim, including their children in the case of pregnant women, to hide the perpetrator.

A total of 8629 victims are recorded according to the “Registro Unico de Victimas del Terrorismo de Estado (RUTVE)”, which is the main database of victims of state violence in Argentina. If we observe the time distribution of these events (as can be seen in Figure 5), they are concentrated in the first two years of the dictatorship. After that, there was a huge drop in the number of victims, particularly around 1978. This dynamic could be explained by two main events that occurred during those years: the organization of the FIFA World Cup (Scharpf, Gläsel, and Edwards (2022)) and the growing international interest in human rights violation allegations, including the visit of the Pope.

When examining the distribution of victims on a national level, it becomes clear that the repressive actions were not limited to the major cities. By analyzing the distribution of cases adjusted for population in 1970, Figure 2, it can be seen a consistent pattern across the country. Notably, there were significant peaks in the province of Tucumán. This demonstrates that the repressive actions were a national phenomenon, affecting a significant portion of the population.

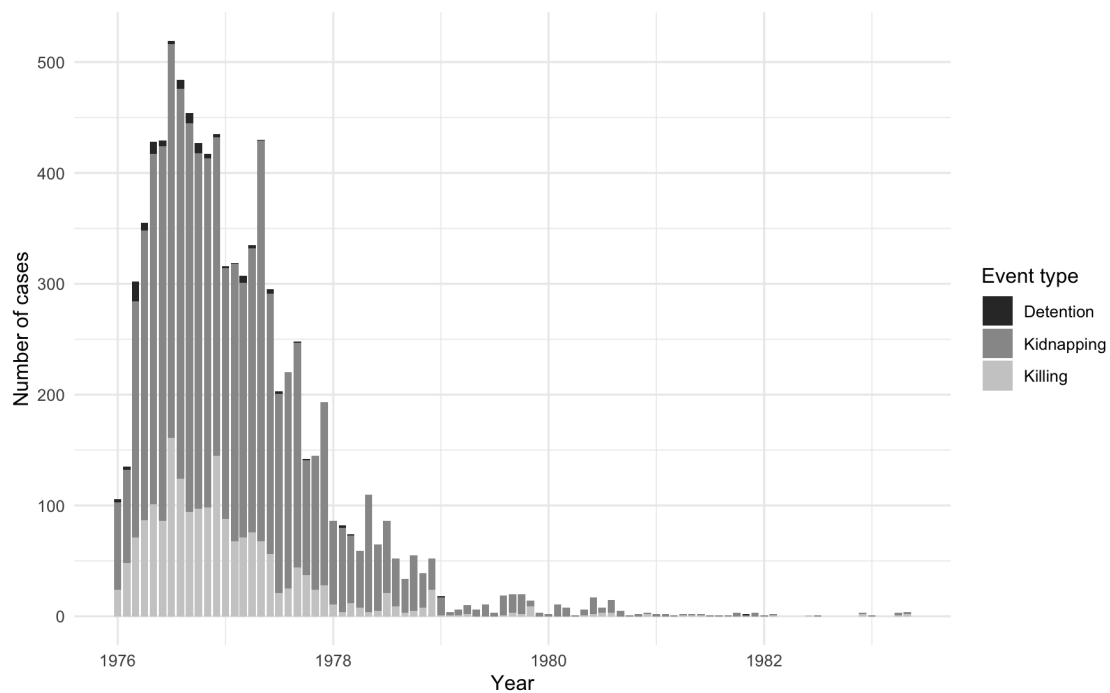


Figure 1: Cases in RUVTE by month of occurrence

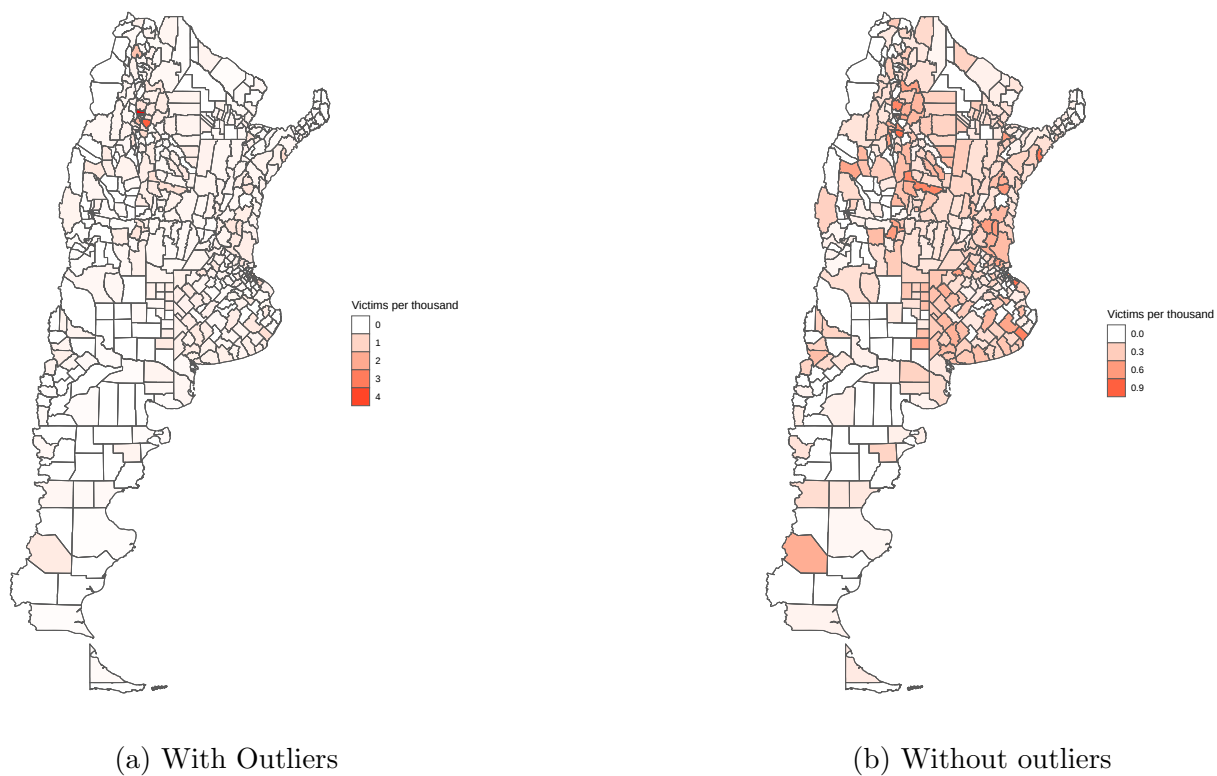


Figure 2: Geographic distribution of victims

The Argentine Capital, “Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires”, had the highest number of cases in the country due to its densely populated district. The latest findings from the investigation have allowed the creation of a heat map showing the distribution of cases. The dots on the map represent the sites where murder or kidnapping of the victim occurred according to RUVTE records. This distribution is strongly linked to the population density of Argentina in the 1970s.

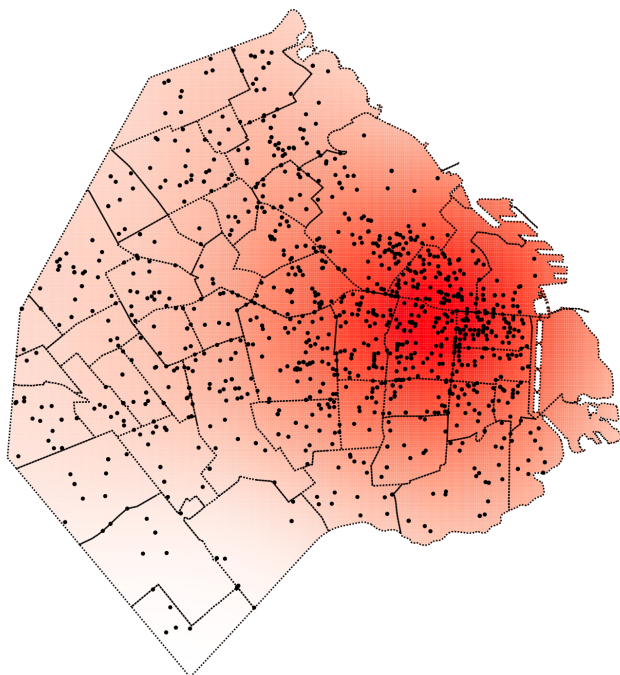


Figure 3: Cases in the “Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires”

In 1977 during the most violent period of this experience, the first civil organizations advocating for human rights were established in Argentina. These organizations were mainly formed by the relatives of victims of state violence. They mainly filed individual complaints and conducted searches to find their missing loved ones. These groups would gather in the city center to organize themselves and systematically record information and complaints. The most well-known case is that of the “Madres de Plaza de Mayo.” Despite facing restrictions on meetings by the dictatorship, they demanded the appearance of their children and exposed

the crimes being committed. With time, these organizations became a fundamental part of Argentine political life due to their significant role in rebuilding the country and bringing those responsible for human rights violations to justice. The figure of the disappeared, as a result of the repressive actions of the dictatorship, generated the need to undertake a process of denunciation and search for information.

After the return of democracy in 1983, a thorough investigation process was initiated to reconstruct the events that took place during the military regime. The information collected during the investigation was used to prosecute those responsible for human rights violations. In 1985, the main perpetrators were convicted, setting a significant historical precedent for this kind of case. Since then, several social organizations and government bodies have worked to reconstruct the history of those years and to make the victims visible. Among these efforts, the reconstruction of histories, the identification of human remains, the recognition of appropriated children, and the creation of monuments and commemorations stand out.

Among the commemorations carried out during the last decades, this paper analyzes the case of the “Baldosas por la memoria” (Tiles for memory). These emerged in 2005 when a group of neighbors in Buenos Aires formed a group called “Barrios por la memoria y la justicia” (Neighborhoods for Memory and Justice), whose objective was to place a memorial tile for each victim of state terrorism. At the beginning, these tiles were not well received by the rest of the human rights organizations, due to the incorporation of names on them. This is framed in the discussion about the number of victims of state terrorism, where certain sectors considered that the inclusion of names on the tiles meant to make invisible the thousands of cases that are allegedly undocumented, and therefore not counted in the official data.

These tiles were placed in those places where the victims were kidnapped, murdered, or where they lived, worked, or studied. Although these tiles are found in multiple cities throughout the country, in this case, I focus only on the *Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires* due to the availability of information (See Figure 4). These tiles contain information about

the person's name, age, time of disappearance, their relationship with that place (whether they were kidnapped, murdered, or alive/worked/studied there), and if they had any kind of party affiliation. For this study, I focus on those tiles that are located at the entrance of schools. Here is an example of these tiles (see Figure 5):

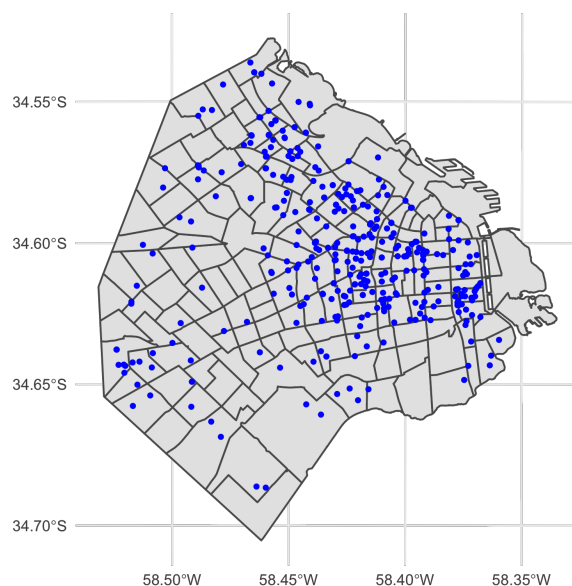


Figure 4: "Tiles for memory" location



Figure 5: Example of the "Tiles for memory"

Looking at the figures on the magnitude and distribution of events, it can be seen that state violence was a nationwide phenomenon, this was in fact an essential factor in bringing

the perpetrators of human rights violations to justice, as the trial was based on their character as a “systematic plan of annihilation”. This meant that attempts to commemorate the victims were not a phenomenon concentrated only in large cities but became a nationwide issue that permeated politics at different levels (national, provincial, and municipal).

Recently, the case of Argentina’s last military dictatorship has received increasing attention in the literature, finding both short and long-term effects of the repressive actions of the armed forces. Examples of estimating effects for the Argentine case are [Esberg \(2023\)](#), which estimates the effects of repression on the artistic generation of persecuted people, and [Edwards and Pierson \(2023\)](#), which estimates the effects of state violence perpetrated by leftwing groups on electoral dynamics in 1973. Among the studies that use data to understand the behaviour of the dictatorship are [Scharpf, Gläbel, and Edwards \(2022\)](#), which analyses the behaviour of repression around the 1978 World Cup, [Scharpf and Gläbel \(2020\)](#) and [Scharpf \(2018\)](#), which examine the recruitment patterns of repressors and how the ideology of those in charge affected repression, and [Klor, Saiegh, and Satyanath \(2021\)](#), which examines the relationship between repression of workers and links to the regime. This paper contributes to that literature, being the first to study the implications of commemorations of the victims in Argentina.

3 Theoretical expectations

Transitional justice is defined as “a set of ad-hoc institutions implemented in countries ending a period of countries ending a period of massive violation of Human Rights, first experimented in South America in the 1980s” ([Bickford \(2004\)](#)). Based on [Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas \(2022\)](#), there are three categories of transitional justice policies. These categories are: punishing the perpetrators, providing reparation, symbolic and/or material, to the victims, and revealing the truth. This particular study concentrates on the second category: the provision of symbolic or material reparation to the victims.

Various forms of commemoration have emerged, ranging from grand monuments and museums to modest tiles. Among these, ground-level tiles may be among the less noticeable. It is therefore reasonable to wonder why such tiles are thought to have an impact on people's daily lives, particularly during the act of voting. In particular, in the case of the "Tiles for Memory", anecdotal evidence from a documentary entitled "Streets of Memory (2012)" shows that the reception of the population towards the tiles goes from total disinterest to interpellation (Bettanin and Schenquer (2015)). Therefore, a priori there would seem to be no reason to think that an effect on people would be entirely expected.

The tiles, beyond the fact of commemorating the victims, are intended to generate an emotional response in the people who see them (Bettanin and Schenquer (2015)). The existence of a victim, with personal history and information, of the dictatorship most likely generates fear in those who see it. This fear is likely to be channeled in a way that seeks to prevent the conditions that led to those events from happening again (Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas (2022)). This is particularly relevant in the case of Argentina, where the desire not to go through the same experience of violence again was channeled through a very popular slogan, "*nunca más*". In this sense, fear is most likely channeled with a desire for no return to the institutions that allowed these events, and the maintenance of the institutions that came afterwards (Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas (2022)).

The discussion of political issues often involves revisiting historical events, and the placement of commemorations can lead to revived arguments between opposing political views. According to Anton Rozenas and Vlasenko (2022), we could hypothesize that the placement of these commemorations may be perceived as a threat by different groups, especially within a specific historical context. This is because the installation of a monument can be seen as an assertion of power ("signaling"), potentially prompting a reaction from the opposing political spectrum. In the highly polarized political environment of Argentina in 2015 and 2019, it is particularly relevant to examine how these memorials could influence the electoral outcomes for certain political parties. In such a context, it is possible that, when right-wing parties

feel threatened, the presence of these commemorations could lead to increased support for those parties.

In synthesis, it could be expected that after seeing the tiles, people will put a renewed weight on the importance of democracy and possibly adjust their behavior to this. This could materialize in different ways, the first one could be to increase their electoral participation, the second one could be to pay more attention when voting (not to make mistakes that nullify votes) and the third one is to punish those parties that are related to the the past dictatorship. Additionally, in the context where the right-wing party feels threatened in its power situation, it would be expected that the presence of these tiles would generate a mobilizing effect and increase the vote for these parties.

Since the decision to vote is primarily made before going to the polling place, the effect on turnout is expected to be null. This is in line with the findings of [Ajzenman and Durante \(2023\)](#). Furthermore, in line with [Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas \(2022\)](#), it is expected that people will have a revitalizing effect of the tiles and that they will pay more attention when voting (reduction of invalid votes). The impact is expected to be more noticeable in the primary elections, given their lower relative significance and the potential for emotional responses to have a greater influence. Additionally, due to the fact that during the 2015 elections a campaign was carried out relating the opposition presidential candidate, Mauricio Macri, with the last military dictatorship, it is expected that this type of memorials would have a negative effect on the vote for this party. On the other hand, in the 2019 election it is expected that these tiles could have a positive effect on the vote for the right-wing ruling party against the possibility of victory of the left-wing party, in a "signaling" effect as shown in [Anton Rozenas and Vlasenko \(2022\)](#). This is in line with the findings of [Ajzenman and Durante \(2023\)](#) which shows that contextual factors can have an impact on the Argentinean electoral dynamics of 2015. Finally, in all cases, the magnitude of the effect is expected to be small due to the size of the intervention.

4 The electoral system

To organize the electoral process, Argentina divides its territory into 24 electoral districts. Within this division are the so-called “circuits”, where people are assigned to schools, voting places, in alphabetical order according to their last name. Within each school, voting tables, minimum observation unit, are located in different classrooms. Below is a map of the different circuits in the “Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires”, 167, and the respective schools, around 800. Elections in Argentina are mandatory between the ages of 18 and 69, with high voter turnout.

Currently, the election process in this country consists of three main stages: PASO (primary, open, simultaneous y obligatory), general, and ballotage. The PASO elections are open to different political parties, allowing them to choose their candidates. The primary elections operate under the same guidelines as the general elections, utilizing a simple majority rule. Candidates who secure the top spot for their respective party and whose party garners more than 1.5% of the total votes are eligible to proceed to the general elections. The general elections represent the final stage and are decided via a simple majority vote. In the event that no candidate obtains more than 45% of the votes or there isn’t a 10% gap between the first and second candidates, who both have vote counts exceeding 40%, a ballotage election is conducted. The candidate with the highest number of votes is declared the winner in this election. Once a voter is allocated to a polling station, this designation remains constant for all three elections held in a year.

5 Data

Election data comes from National Electoral Directorate (DINE, by its acronym in spanish), for the years 2015, 2017 and 2019 and were geolocated at the school level for this study. The focus was on the percentage of blank and null votes in relation to the total. Additional variables, such as electoral participation, the percentage of votes garnered by each party,

and the total number of voters per polling station were also taken into consideration. It's important to note that all schools were considered, as they were all virtually eligible to have a tile at their entrance.

The information regarding memory tiles was originally sourced from the Government of the “Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires” up until 2015. Subsequently, it was manually gathered from various human rights organizations. Prior to 2015, only the geographical location of the tiles was available, Post-2015 the time of placement was also recorded. My newly generated database currently contains information on 400 tiles in the “Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires”. Because after 2015 the available information is only partial (collected manually from the announcements of human rights organizations), the base estimate is made only with that year. Each school is assigned a memory tile at the entrance of the school if it is within a 50 meter buffer around the address of the school. Figure 6 displays the distribution of polling stations based on whether they have memory tiles at their entrances, as well as the electoral circuits (considering until 2019).

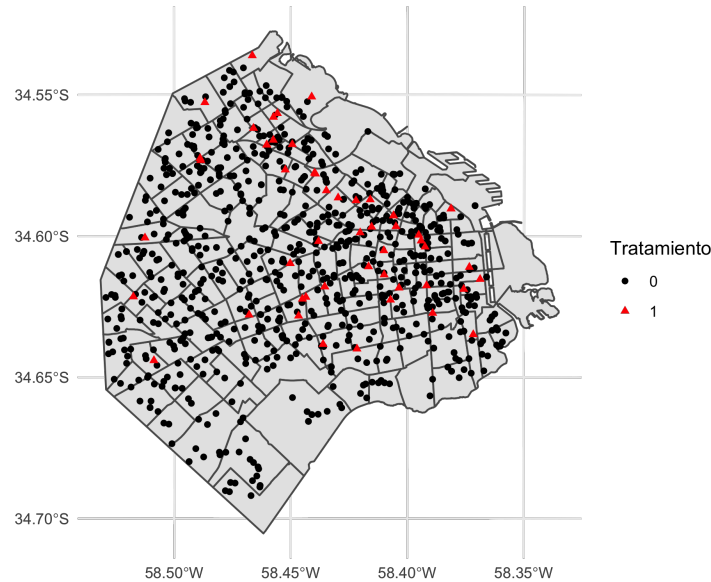


Figure 6: Schools, treatment status and electoral circuits

An important factor to take into account is that in the available data I do not have

information about what each of the installed tiles says (since each tile contains a variable number of victims with different information or inscription). The latter could be generating that within the "treated" group I am including schools with less indicative tiles than others, which could bias the estimate towards 0.

The geographical characteristics utilized in this analysis comes from the GCBA, with a specific focus on the locations of key bus and subway stops. In order to establish a control variable, the distance to the centroid of each circuit is also taken into account. To further corroborate the findings, data from the Census (INDEC) is utilized to gain insight into the unique characteristics of individuals residing in various circuits throughout the city.

6 Empirical Strategy

In order to understand the relationship between the presence of tiles and current electoral results, the natural experiment from the electoral system in Argentina is exploited. To do this, in line with [Ajzenman and Durante \(2023\)](#), the following equation is estimated:

$$Votes_{mecu} = \alpha Tile_{ev} + \lambda School_e + \eta Voters_{mev} + \nu_c + \theta_v + \epsilon_{mecu} \quad (1)$$

Where $Votes_{mecu}$ represents the electoral result in polling station m , school e , circuit c and electoral round v . $Tile_{ev}$ is a dummy variable that takes the value 1 if school e in round v had the presence of tiles due to memory. $School_e$ is a set of school-level controls (such as the distance to the centroid of the electoral circuit, percentage of men in the circuit, number of bus stations, and percentage of households with basic needs unmet). $Voters_{mev}$ is the number of valid voters of the polling station. ν_c represents the strata fixed effect, consider that for the same year, people are always assigned to the same school. θ_v are fixed effects at the electoral round level. I cluster standard errors by school level.

7 Results

Given that the natural experiment proposed here is based on a very precise identification assumption, the first step is to see if the data allows me to validate it. This assumption is based on the alphabetical order of surnames within a circuit is not related to the presence or absence of tiles at the entrance of educational establishments. This is not denying that there are correlations between the alphabetical order of surnames and other variables such as wealth, where it is possible that some surnames in Argentina are related to richer areas, but the assumption is that it is not particularly correlated with the presence or absence of tiles. Since the electoral circuits are small units within the city, it is to be expected that within each circuit, due to the strata fixed effect, these variables are balanced. A different situation would be if we compare larger units, where it would be much more likely that the surname is correlated with many more factors.

To partially validate this assumption, equation [1](#) is estimated using the aforementioned controls as outcomes (see Table [2](#) in the appendix). This allows us to observe that the fact that the school has a tile is not correlated with wealth (percentage of households with unmet basic needs, NBI by its acronym in Spanish), geographic location, connectivity, or population structure. At the polling station level, it can also be seen that it is not related to the number of valid voters. This results provide some validation for the identification assumption proposed here.^{[1](#)}

In Table [1](#), the results of estimating equation (1) expressed in percentage terms can be observed. All regressions have a fixed effect at the electoral circuit and electoral round level, along with the aforementioned controls and clustering at the school level. It can be observed that the only significant result is a reduction in null votes by 0.06 percentage points. This base estimation does not show significant results for voting for the main political parties (except PRO, the right-wing party) and voter turnout. In Table [3](#), it can be observed that

¹A balance regression for pretreatment policy outcomes is not included here as we do not know the exact date of tile placement prior to 2015.

these results are maintained when analyzed in terms of levels. Furthermore, if a polling station has a tile displayed at the front, it is also significantly associated with a reduction of the vote share of the more “right-wing” party during the 2015 election, with an average reduction of 0.37 percent points.

Table 1: Base estimation - Percentage

	Turnout (%)	White (%)	Null (%)	PRO (%)	FDT (%)	FIT (%)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Tile presence	-0.23	0.04	-0.06**	-0.37*	0.18	-0.02
	(0.16)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.20)	(0.17)	(0.04)
R ²	0.55	0.10	0.24	0.89	0.86	0.72
Num. obs.	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00
Mean Var.	77.01	1.69	1.00	53.78	27.06	2.89

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. Regressions include electoral “circuito” fixed effects, election round fixed effects and a set of controls as described in Section 6.

When looking at the results on voter turnout, it can be seen that the tiles seem to have no effect on it. This is to be expected under this scenario, since the decision on whether to vote or not is most likely made before being exposed to the tile that day.

It can be observed in Table 4 that these results are robust when the estimation is performed at the school level (and not at the polling station level), where the variability of the presence of tiles is located. In Table 5, Table 6 and Table 7, it can be observed that these results are maintained when no controls are included, when no round FE are included and if clustered at the electoral circuit level. Additionally, in Table 8 the same regression is estimated for each election separately, where it can be observed that the effect is maintained

regardless of the electoral round² (due to the lower number of observations the result is less stable, but the point estimates are maintained for the case of the null votes, while the PRO vote seems to be concentrated in the PASO).

Some evidence (not entirely robust) can be observed that the presence of tiles may have a negative effect on the vote for PRO. To analyze this, regression (1) is estimated for each election separately (adding 2017 and 2019 election) (see table 10), and it can be observed that the effect seems to be more relevant for the year 2015. Upon examining the impact on null votes, it becomes clear that a noteworthy difference is apparent between 2017 and 2019. The reduced magnitude in the latter may be attributed to the absence of information regarding the total number of tiles placed, which potentially creates a bias towards 0 as we move further away from 2015.

This can be explained due to the different electoral context present in 2015 compared to the rest of the elections (2017 and 2019). During the campaign this year, parties aligned with the incumbent (FDT, left wing party) implemented a political campaign linking the PRO with the last dictatorship. This explanation is in line with Belmonte and Rochlitz (2019) and Turkoglu, Ditzmann, and Firestone (2023), where an appeal to a past experience can have political effects against a particular party. In this case, it may happen that the tiles are bringing a memory of this campaign and tilting the vote against the PRO. It reverts in 2019³ in line with Anton Rozenas and Vlasenko (2022), where a "signaling" effect could be an explanation for these. In both instances, the evidence indicates that this type of commemoration can influence various political parties based on the political context.

In addition, two types of heterogeneity are included in the table 9: The support of right-wing party (PRO) en 2013 and economic situation (Rich). This heterogeneity allows us to observe if those places closer to left-wing parties react differently than those people from

²The fact that the effect is noticeable in the PASO elections, which are relatively unimportant since they mainly determine the composition of the candidate lists, suggests that the emotional aspect of voting, the heightened emphasis on democracy, appears to be especially significant.

³The political landscape in 2019 differed significantly from that of 2015 when the PRO party was in control. Given this shift, it could be argued that the association with the previous dictatorship was no longer a significant concern, causing the aforementioned mechanism to become less relevant.

right-wing parties. In column (2) it can be observed how in those circuits where the PRO got a percentage below the median in the 2013 election have a greater effect of the tiles. This may be due to the fact that more left-wing people react differently to memorials (as well tested in Chile in the case of [Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas \(2022\)](#)). Additionally, in those circuits where poverty indicator is below the median in 2010 have a greater effect of the tiles. On average, the results indicate that the effect is greater in wealthier and more progressive places.

A possible mechanism behind this could be that people, upon seeing the tiles due to memory, have a revitalizing effect on the importance of democracy and therefore pay more attention when exercising their vote. This is only a hypothesis, and there is not enough data here to prove it. In a future line of research, some type of survey experiment could be considered. The evidence presented in the RCT (Randomized controlled trial) performed in Chile by [Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas \(2022\)](#) gives some evidence that this mechanism could be plausible.

Finally, a question to be analyzed is how these tiles are actually placed. A relevant point here is that the tiles are placed by civil organizations that may have political interests. Therefore, I use the information of those tiles placed between 2015 and 2019 to observe whether they were placed where the right-wing party obtained more votes in 2015. In Table [11](#) it can be seen that the data (even with a small number of observations) do not allow to affirm that there is political use of the area where tiles are placed.

In summary, the results presented here show that the memory tiles have an impact on the contemporary political dynamics and that it affects more in those places that were already more left-wing aligned before. These results are in line with what has been found in the literature [Turkoglu, Dittmann, and Firestone \(2023\)](#), highlighting that low-cost, de-centralized interventions can have no small impact through a revitalizing effect on the perceived importance of democracy.

8 Conclusions

In this paper, I study the effects of commemorations of victims of state terrorism on contemporary electoral outcomes. The results obtained indicate that these commemorations have an effect on null votes, with some political impact on right-leaning parties (but not entirely robust) under certain contexts.

This could be indicating that a low-cost intervention can generate greater attention when people cast their vote, although it can also be used for political purposes. The revitalizing effect on the importance of democracy seems to be relevant and could be explaining the persistence of episodes of state violence in the long term.

9 Appendix

Table 2: Balance Test

	Valid voters	Connectivity	% Males	% Poor	Distance
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Tile presence	0.02 (0.08)	-0.65 (1.91)	0.18 (0.36)	-0.29 (0.70)	-3.39 (61.73)
R ²	0.87	0.74	0.50	0.57	0.95
Num. obs.	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00
Mean Var.	346.53	35.48	45.86	5.00	2,080.09

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. Regressions include electoral circuito fixed effects, election round fixed effects.

Table 3: Base estimation - Levels

	Total votes	White	Null	PRO	FDT	FIT
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Tile presence	-0.78 (0.57)	0.12 (0.14)	-0.17** (0.07)	-1.08* (0.58)	0.31 (0.48)	-0.06 (0.12)
R ²	0.56	0.16	0.30	0.88	0.86	0.72
Num. obs.	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00
Mean Var.	266.88	4.49	2.68	142.42	71.64	7.58

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. Regressions include electoral circuito fixed effects, election round fixed effects, and a set of controls as described in Section 6.

Table 4: Base estimation - School level

	Turnout (%)	White (%)	Null (%)	PRO (%)	FDT (%)	FIT (%)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Tile presence	-0.39	0.04	-0.07**	-0.48**	0.33*	0.00
	(0.25)	(0.06)	(0.03)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.07)
R ²	0.81	0.50	0.72	0.98	0.96	0.91
Num. obs.	2442.00	2442.00	2442.00	2442.00	2442.00	2442.00
Mean Var.	77.02	1.70	1.01	53.25	27.35	2.94

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Regressions include electoral circuito fixed effects, election round fixed effects and a set of controls as described in Section 6.

Table 5: Base estimation - Without Controls

	Turnout (%)	White (%)	Null (%)	PRO (%)	FDT (%)	FIT (%)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Tile presence	-0.23	0.04	-0.06**	-0.38*	0.18	-0.02
	(0.16)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.20)	(0.17)	(0.04)
R ²	0.55	0.10	0.24	0.89	0.86	0.72
Num. obs.	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00
Mean Var.	77.01	1.69	1.00	53.78	27.06	2.89

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. Regressions include electoral "circuito" fixed effects and election round fixed effects as described in Section 6.

Table 6: Base estimation - Without round FE

	Turnout (%)	White (%)	Null (%)	PRO (%)	FDT (%)	FIT (%)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Tile presence	-0.16	0.04	-0.06**	-0.25	0.26	-0.05
	(0.18)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.23)	(0.19)	(0.05)
R ²	0.35	0.02	0.05	0.62	0.60	0.07
Num. obs.	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00
Mean Var.	77.01	1.69	1.00	53.78	27.06	2.89

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. Regressions include electoral "circuito" fixed effects and a set of controls as described in Section 6.

Table 7: Base estimation - Cluster at Circuito Level

	Turnout (%)	White (%)	Null (%)	PRO (%)	FDT (%)	FIT (%)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Tile presence	-0.23 (0.20)	0.04 (0.06)	-0.06** (0.03)	-0.37 (0.24)	0.18 (0.18)	-0.02 (0.06)
R ²	0.55	0.10	0.24	0.89	0.86	0.72
Num. obs.	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00
Mean Var.	77.01	1.69	1.00	53.78	27.06	2.89

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the "circuito" level in parentheses. Regressions include electoral "circuito" fixed effects, election round fixed effects and a set of controls as described in Section 6.

Table 8: Base estimation - Percentage - By election round

	Null (%)			PRO (%)		
	PASO	GENERALES	BALLOTAGE	PASO	GENERALES	BALLOTAGE
Tile presence	-0.06* (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.73*** (0.27)	-0.16 (0.22)	-0.22 (0.22)
R ²	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.83	0.89	0.87
Num. obs.	7356.00	7329.00	7357.00	7356.00	7329.00	7357.00
Mean Var.	0.77	0.59	1.64	47.91	50.06	63.36

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. Regressions include electoral "circuito" fixed effects, election round fixed effects and a set of controls as described in Section 6.

Table 9: Base estimation - Heterogeneity

	Null (%)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Tile presence	-0.06** (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)
Tile presence * Below Median PRO (2013)		-0.08 (0.05)	
Total Effect Below Median PRO (2013)		-0.10** (0.04)	
Tile presence * Rich			-0.05 (0.06)
Total Effect Rich			-0.09* (0.05)
R ²	0.24	0.25	0.25
Num. obs.	22042.00	22042.00	22042.00
Mean Var.	1.00	1.00	1.00

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the "circuito" level in parentheses. Regressions include electoral "circuito" fixed effects, election round fixed effects and a set of controls as described in Section 6.

Table 10: Base estimation - Percentage - By year

	Null (%)			PRO (%)		
	2015	2017	2019	2015	2017	2019
Tile presence	-0.06** (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.37* (0.20)	0.18 (0.19)	0.40** (0.16)
R ²	0.24	0.10	0.09	0.89	0.85	0.91
Num. obs.	22042.00	14720.00	14826.00	22042.00	14720.00	14826.00

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. Regressions include electoral "circuito" fixed effects, election round fixed effects and a set of controls as described in Section 6.

Table 11: Predicting the presence of a Tile in 2017 and 2019

	Presence of a Tile
Share (%) PRO Ballotage 2015	0.00 (0.00)
R ²	0.35
Adj. R ²	0.33
Num. obs.	13186
RMSE	0.11
N Clusters	742

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the school level in parentheses. Regressions include, election fixed effects and a set of controls as described in Section 6.

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