A scar or an open wound? Regime leaders, their fate and polarization
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Regime leaders, their fate and polarization

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Note: This is the second version of this thesis. The major changes can be found in: the Introduction which was changed to have a more concise problem statement and emphasize the academic relevance; the Literature Review which was modified to include more discussion about polarization at the beginning which slightly changed the focus of it; the Theoretical Framework in which the constructivist language was simplified, and it now includes the conceptualization of conflict discourse; the Analysis section in which an intermediate step between methodology and analysis was included to explain how the analysis was carried out; the Conclusion which was changed to address the broader shortcomings of this paper. Minor changes include clearer references to the conflict discourse in the Historical Context and the change of language to make the Analysis section less dry.

Introduction

When we get injured, we need to decide how to treat the wound so it can heal. If we fail to do it properly, what is a painful wound might end up becoming a nasty scar, or it may never properly heal. Something similar happens after society goes through a period characterized by conflict and gross violations of human rights, where regime leaders dehumanized a group to justify violence against them as means of self-defence (Akhavan, 2001). In these cases, the new emerging democracy needs to address these past crimes to allow society to heal and achieve peace (Zalaquett, 1990).

Central to this question is the fate of perpetrators which varies on a continuum of possibilities ranging from criminal prosecution followed by execution or prison for those found guilty, to amnesties and immunity laws (Elster, 1998). These mechanisms are recognized by scholars as transitional justice instruments that share common and overlapping goals: to avoid recreating past horrors and to stabilize democratic rule (Dancy, et al., 2019).

In order to achieve these goals, social reconciliation is of paramount importance, especially following a period where polarization and political violence was instrumentalized by elites (Jackson, 2008). In this regard, Zalaquett (1990) explains that the aim is to foster the "de-polarization" of society by promoting national unity. Social reconciliation aims to avoid pronounced cultural fragmentation after transition since it may make the state vulnerable to instability and further political polarization (Aguilar, 1997). In fact, a post-conflict setting that is not correctly addressed may be a potential pre-conflict situation (Laplante & Phenicie, 2009).

Therefore, what happens to the leaders that promoted polarization through the creation of opposing identities to justify violence might impact the way civilians understand and explain themselves and the world they live in. In turn, if the population is still polarized by the regime discourse, the possibility of conflict reassurance increases and people are less predisposed to collaborate in common causes which undermines the correct development of democracy (Joan & Gerald, 2018). Consequently, to what extent does the fate of regime leaders that have committed gross violations of human rights impact polarization after the transition to democracy?

By answering this question, this thesis seeks to contribute insights to two different but complementary realms. First, it seeks to plug a gap in the existing academic literature, which tends to focus on the relative utility of enacting amnesties or advocating trials and on the short-term outcomes rather than carrying out impact analyses and drawing attention to longer-term impacts (Thoms, Ron, & Paris, 2010). In addition, current research limits its analysis to the impact transitional justice mechanisms have on whether conflict parties reach a peace agreement or not, centring only on the leaders and not the population (Laplante & Phenicie, 2009). In this way, the existing literature overlooks social reconciliation, and the role polarization has in the population.

Second, by researching the understudied long-term implications of transitional justice, this research aims to help policymakers to make more precise decisions in future cases. Although it is true that the decision of what transitional mechanism to use is largely determined by the conflict context (Dancy, et al., 2019), analysing the influence that trials and amnesties have had on polarization in previous cases may lead to better insights to improve future decisions.

This thesis will proceed as follows. First, I will provide an overview of how society might become polarized and create the conditions that lead to state crimes. Here, I will also discuss several different arguments that scholars advance in favour of amnesties and trials in order to infer the possible impact they may have on polarization. I will then use representation theory to propose that trials have the power to delegitimize the conflict discourse instrumentalized by a regime's elites, which may foster de-polarization, whereas amnesties may perpetuate polarization. In the subsequent sections, I will present the discourse analysis of tweets as the method of analysis and provide a short historical context for the two cases selected: Argentina's last Military Junta with its following emblematic trials, and the Spanish Francoist regime with its transitional pact of silence.

Literature Review

According to Zalaquett (1990), the goal of social reconciliation after the transition to democracy is dependent on the process of de-polarization of society. However, before analysing de-polarization and the impact the different mechanisms have on it, how society has become polarized in the first place should be addressed. In this regard, several approaches recognize that polarization and conflict depend on the construction of dichotomous identities, which make political violence possible by pinpointing the external "other" as the enemy (Jackson, 2008). Furthermore, conflict also needs a political elite willing to instrumentalize existing identities and perceptions of threat in order to justify violent retaliation and reverse decades of peaceful coexistence (Jackson, 2008).

Therefore, following Sikkink's (2011) definition of norms as a standard of appropriate behaviour, it could be argued that these "conflict entrepreneurs" try to turn their favoured ideas into new conflict norms for the sake of personal gains (Fearon & Laitin, 2000). However, the establishment of the new norm requires conflict entrepreneurs to institutionalize a dominant regime of truth that is comprehensible for a large amount of people (Jackson, 2008). This means that the crimes committed would not have taken place without the implicit support and co-responsibility of a considerable part of the population (Langenohl, 2008).

Consequently, achieving collective memory is one of the greatest challenges that a post-conflict society must face because it implies reaching a consensus of what happened in a highly polarized context (Laplante & Phenicie, 2009). Furthermore, polarization not only heightens conflict by transforming war into an existential battle waged between right and wrong (Wallensteen, 2018), in the long run, it also represents a danger to democracy (McCoy, Rahman, & Somer, 2018).

Indeed, Joan and Gerald (2018) demonstrate that polarization reduces the willingness of people to contribute to common causes, representing one of the key impediments for social and political progress. In fact, research shows that the way in which crimes of the past are addressed affect both the transition from authoritarianism and the consolidation of democracy (Langenohl, 2008; Olsen, Payne, & Reiter, 2010). For instance, some scholars that advocate amnesties consider them necessary evils to balance polarized claims (Dancy, 2018), while

those who argue in favour of individual criminal accountability claim that trials might influence consensus and national unity (Zalaquett, 1990).

Amnesties

Scholars who advocate the use of amnesties do so because they tend to focus on the establishment of a democratic regime based on the balance between dominant political interests (Dancy, et al., 2019). However, the political context will be shaped by the several different ways in which an authoritarian regime can cease to exist (Langenohl, 2008). In turn, Pion-Berlin (1994) explains that the way a regime ceases to exist will affect the balance of power between the new democratic regime and the previous authoritarian forces, and therefore, affect the transitional justice mechanism implemented.

Moreover, Langenohl (2008) explains that when transition emerges from the rise of the civil population against the authoritarian regime, perpetrators and victims will have different interests. Consequently, if perpetrators or their supporters still hold an influential position in society, the post-authoritarian government is pressured to advocate impunity to secure democratization (Langenohl, 2008). Indeed, scholars who advocate for the use of amnesties to avoid short-term backlashes also maintain that trails create instability in a delicate political period (Chirwa, 1997; Dancy, et al., 2019). In this regard, Goemans, Gleditsch and Chiozza (2009) demonstrate that countries transitioning to democracy on the Third Wave of democratization were more likely to fail when the autocratic ruler was punished.

However, even if adopting amnesties might seem like a pragmatic decision to achieve peace, it does not come without consequences since victims and influential interest groups will condemn the government for continuing the authoritarian legacy, thus questioning its legitimacy (Langenohl, 2008). In fact, Joan and Gerald (2018) argue that the ability of the institutional system to satisfy competing claims directly affects the impact polarization has in restoring peace instead of conflict. Therefore, Dancy (2018) argues that amnesties may act as pacifiers in post conflict settings, but they should be careful not to provide impunity to extreme atrocities since doing so is not associated with lower risk of conflict reassurance.

Trials and Individual Criminal Accountability

The justice norm is based on the idea that the most basic human right violations cannot be a legitimate act of the state but rather crimes committed by individuals that can and should be prosecuted (Sikkink, 2011). Moreover, demanding justice and internalizing the norm not only fulfil the goal of ending impunity (Kersten, 2016), but can also have other effects on peace through deterrence, marginalization, and truth-telling.

Judicial accountability promotes both, specific deterrence, by preventing those who have been indicted from committing further crimes, as well as general deterrence by dissuading others from engaging in criminal behaviour (Meernik, 2005). In this regard, Clark (2009) explains that by establishing certain norms on how war crimes should be dealt with, criminal prosecution deters revenge attacks among different conflict groups. In addition, prosecution and the related political demise of leaders delegitimize their power and send the message that the cost of using ethnic hatred and violence as means of control outweighs its possible benefits (Akhavan, 2001). Kersten (2016) explains that this happens because indicted individuals are portrayed as international criminals with whom political figures refuse to be associated producing marginalization. Therefore, perpetrators will likely be stigmatized by allies, constituencies, and the international community, which will in turn isolate them, leaving them with few resources while undermining their influence (Kersten, 2016). Thus, criminal justice impedes an easy escape as well as their future political rehabilitation (Akhavan, 2001).

A tribunal is also a forum for truth-telling and the creation of historical record, which is essential for any society dealing with human rights atrocities (Meernik, 2005). In fact, Zalaquett (1990) argues that hiding the truth allows perpetrators to institutionalize their own exculpatory version of the conflict and thus avoid the judgment of history. In contrast, legal courts can contribute to making reconciliation with the past more transparent and legitimize it by following a rational procedure (Langenohl, 2008). In this way, an officially established truth becomes part of the nation's historical record as an authoritative version of the events, beyond any partisan considerations (Zalaquett, 1990). Furthermore, the collective character of a nation is dependent on its historical memory since it becomes a common and shared tale that forges group identity and fosters societal reconciliation (Escudero, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Macro-crimes and gross violations of human rights occur in situations where discourse was used to create a context of inverted morality in which previous "deviant" actions are considered necessary and legitimate under the claims of self-defence (Akhavan, 2001). For this purpose, symbols and ideas are discursively deployed by elites as "symbolic technology" (Jackson, 2008). According to Laffey and Welded (1997), symbolic technologies are intersubjective systems of representation through which ideas enable us to establish shared forms of practice that people use to construct meaning about themselves, their world, and their actions.

The proposed understanding of ideas as a symbolic mechanism moves beyond the conception of ideas as objects that can be used by the powerful (Laffey & Weldes, 1997). Instead, ideas are themselves forms of power through their capacities to produce representation (Laffey & Weldes, 1997). This means that leaders who make use of these ideas are not only instrumentalizing them in their discourse to establish new norms, but also representing them. Therefore, leaders exert a symbolic representation by constructing a social group and claiming legitimacy as representatives of such constructed identities and ideas (Stokke & Selboe, 2009). However, as mentioned before, "symbolic mechanisms" are intersubjective systems and thus, leaders both "stand for" those being represented and embody a meaning for them as well (Pitkin, 1967). Consequently, Stokke and Selboe (2009) argue that this symbolic representation is dependent on the extent to which people believe in a leader as a symbol.

Hence, what happens to the regime leaders after transition influences the social perception of the norm they represent and thus, the process of de-polarization. For instance, Akhavan (2001) argues that trials reflect social disapproval, restore the conception of violent actions as illegal and redefine them as no longer an appropriate behaviour. In fact, according to Sikkink (2011), accountability means holding someone to a set of standards and imposing sanctions if those standards are not met. Therefore, holding someone accountable for their actions by considering their act "human rights violations" challenges the meaning that regime leaders promoted for those same actions: "a standard of appropriate behaviour". In turn, this change of meaning also affects people's interpretation of themselves and their world.

Therefore, considering the delegitimization power that trials may have on the symbolic image of a leader, it is reasonable to state:

H1: Trials and prosecutions will foster the de-polarization of society previously divided by the regime leaders' conflict rhetoric.

On the contrary, "amnesties" do not change the meaning for the standard of appropriate behaviour followed under the conflict norm. Therefore, the discourse that leaders represent will not be delegitimized and there will not be an institutionalized norm contestation. Furthermore, since their discourse is not challenged, leaders may be able to institutionalize their own exculpatory version of the conflict (Zalaquett, 1990). Consequently, historical memory can be contested, and collective memory and national unity not achieved, thus leaving an underlying polarized context (Laplante & Phenicie, 2009) in which the conflict discourse may still impact the political relations in the democratic regime, even 50 years after transition.

Therefore, pondering the effects of amnesties on the conflict norm established and represented by leaders, it may be argued that:

H2: Amnesties will perpetuate the polarization of society generated by the regime leaders' conflict rhetoric.

Concepts and Operationalization

Fate of Regime Leaders

The purpose of this research is to analyse the symbolic implications of the decisions taken by the new regime right after transition and the message that these measures send to society. The independent variable of this study addresses the fate of autocratic leaders, that is to say, the higher-ranking officials in the regime, who have committed human rights violations. In order to consider the measures taken by the new regime to address the leader's behaviour, I will focus on those taken in the 6-year period after transition because this is the average term in office of a democratic head of government. This is because an amnesty law passed by the new regime reinforces the meaning of immunity. Therefore, if prosecutions take place a decade after, the possible effects trials can have on de-polarization decrease because now the symbolic implication of impunity established by the amnesty law needs to be contested together with the leaders' norm.

For the purpose of this study, I will prioritize amnesties and judicial prosecutions as possible fates of leaders. This decision is based not only on the fact that these mechanisms are at the core of transitional justice debates and are the most frequently used (Dancy, et al., 2019), but also because they directly answer the question of what happens to individuals which fit the scope of this research.

Furthermore, in this paper, I will not differentiate between international or domestic courts as long as the prosecutions of human rights have been fair and unbiased since in the long run, they both contribute to the individual criminal accountability norm (Sikkink, 2011) and have the capacity to delegitimize the leader. Similarly, I will not differentiate between the various types of amnesties since I will address gross violations of human rights which were committed and orchestrated by the state or the ruling elite against its population. Therefore, independently of the type and the reason that motivated the amnesty, in these cases they all avoid holding leaders accountable and fail to contest the conflict norm that justified those violations.

Conflict Discourse

The public's attention and involvement in a conflict that begins as a fight over the distribution of power within a political elite is likely to depend on how it is being framed (Smith, 1997). By instrumentalizing existing grievances, elites and "conflict entrepreneurs" may try to create opposing groups and thus create a context of inverted morality (Jackson, 2008). According to Smith (1997), discursive choices reflect preferences about how to understand and explain the situation, from the depiction of an enemy to the conceptualization of war itself. Therefore, it should be mentioned that the use of the word "conflict" to describe the leader's discourse does not respond to the idea of discourse embedded in a war, but rather to the perception the elites try to create.

In this regard, although it is true that this type of discourse is generally present in a real war, conflict rhetoric may also be used to explain the situation in a repressive regime and justify violence against civilians. Indeed, in his research, Neubacher (2006) argues that neutralization techniques (such as denial of the victim, appealing to higher loyalties and dehumanization) are key factors if one wants to understand state crimes and gross human rights violations. Consequently, ordinary citizens may decide to support and commit crimes because they accept the given definition of a situation (Neubacher, 2006). Therefore, for the

purpose of this research, conflict discourse is understood as the explanation of the situation which the regime leaders construct and provide to the population, including the perception of war, threat, victimhood and rivalries and, which is used to justify violent crimes.

Polarization

Polarization is understood as a process in which the differences in a society collapse along a single dimension and people start to perceive and describe society in terms of "US" vs "THEM" (McCoy, Rahman, & Somer, 2018). The differentiation starts to crosscut every aspect of social and political life, and at the extreme, each group starts to question the moral legitimacy of the other group (McCoy, Rahman, & Somer, 2018). Similarly, in the context of conflict, identities are based on dichotomous categories as well as discursively defined based on fear, and the de-humanization of the other, all of which leads to questioning the legitimate existence of the other group (Jackson, 2008).

For the purpose of this study, I am interested in the ideological polarization promoted by the leaders during their time in power. Therefore, the single dimension, along which polarization is expected to occur, will be defined in terms of the leaders' conflict rhetoric and their explanation of the situation used to justify violence.

Polarization is expected to be present when society still uses the identities promoted during a regime to make sense of itself, especially if they are consistently used to describe and associated with two new opposing identities, since the existence of few large-sized groups is more conducive to conflict that many fragmented smaller-sized groups (Joan & Gerald, 2018). Furthermore, the attempt to delegitimize members of the perceived opposed group by using the identities employed in the regime's discourse to polarize can take several forms: an insult, a justification to morally question the existence of the other, or a valid reason to question their arguments. Lastly, the more polarization there is, the more the members of the groups will perceive the existence of the other as a threat.

Methodology and Case Selection

For this research paper, I am interested in measuring the extent to which society is still polarized by the regime conflict discourse and whether ordinary individuals still use it daily. Nowadays, that type of interaction can be found on the Internet and social media, where users are able to interact among each other and produce data that provides some insight to everyday life. For the purposes of this research, I will use one of the largest social media platforms, Twitter, to carry out a discourse analysis of the so-called 'tweets', messages of 280 characters, to analyse the way ordinary people interact and how the regime discourse is employed.

I recognize that there are some limitations to this approach. For one, Twitter's population represents a highly non-random sample of the overall population (Mislove, Lehmann, Ahn, Onnela, & Rosenquist, 2011). Moreover, Twitter has also been defined in the US context as an echo-chamber where left-leaning and right-leaning Twitter users are subject to selective exposure of opinion-reinforcing information, which creates polarization (Vergeer, 2015). Nevertheless, Twitter still presents a unique opportunity to analyse the public communication of a large fraction of society (Mislove, et al., 2011). Furthermore, since I will carry out a comparative analysis and both cases will present the same bias, if one case shows more polarization than the other, it will still be relevant.

For the case selection, I have chosen two countries that transitioned from a repressive regime in the Third Wave of democratization for two reasons. First, because it was not until this period, in which numerous post-authoritarian and communist states began to transition to democracy, that the reconstruction and maintenance of peace in the aftermath of conflict gained the attention of policymakers (Laplante & Phenicie, 2009). Second, the decision is justified by the time that has passed since these countries transitioned, which allows for a long-term analysis. In fact, the cases selected are nowadays experiencing their longest and more successful democratic period in their history. However, they chose two opposite transitional mechanisms to confront their dictatorial past, arguably the worst in terms of repression of their respective regions (Pion-Berlin, 1994; Ruiz, 2005).

On the one hand, I will analyse Argentina's Military Junta of 1976 and the new democratic regime's decision to outlaw the self-amnesty law passed by the military regime and prosecute 5 regime leaders in the "The Trial to the Juntas" (Pion-Berlin, 1994). Pion-Berlin (1994)

argues that this trial represented a repudiation of the "Dirty War", which the military defended as an honourable counterinsurgency campaign.

On the other hand, I chose Spain, a country that after 40 years of Francoist regime, transitioned to democracy due to Franco's death in 1975. In 1977, the Amnesty Act passed by the Spanish Parliament, which granted amnesty for political crimes, makes investigating and prosecuting offenders of Franco's regime impossible (Escudero, 2014). Spanish transition is defined as a silence pact: amnesia and amnesties in exchange for democracy (Escudero, 2014). Aguilar and Fernandez (2002) argue that the amnesty law was seen as a symbolic overcoming of the division produced by the Civil War in Spanish society, and which had a delegitimization power over the Francoist regime.

It is true that the conditions for transition were different in both countries and that civil-military balance of power is closely related to the terms of transition. For instance, after Malvinas War and the collapse of the Military Junta, Argentina's democratic forces had an advantage that arguably permitted the establishment of "The Trial of the Juntas" (Pion-Berlin, 1994). On the contrary, even after Franco died, the Francoist elites still held the power and could establish their own transitional terms (Ruiz, 2005). However, although these conditions might have determined and facilitated the transitional mechanisms chosen, the aim of this paper is not to determine whether one is better than the other or which one should have been followed. It is rather my aim to understand the relationship between those decisions and polarization in the long run.

In order to carry out a discourse analysis of tweets in each context, first I will provide a short historical overview to determine 1) which was the discourse the regime leaders used to explain the situation, 2) which identities were created, and 3) which keywords will be used to retrieve tweets via Twitter API.

Historical Context

Argentina

In the early morning of May 24, 1976, María Martinez de Perón was overthrown and arrested by the military forces and a military junta was established with Videla as "president" (Floria & Belsunce, 1992). This marked the beginning of the sixth and last dictatorial regime self-

proclaimed National Reorganization Process *(PRN)* since the objectives were to reconstruct society and eliminate any subversive forces (Unidad 7: la última dictadura militar (1976-1983), 2013). By choosing this name, The Junta was using naturalization techniques and presented the situation as an honourable war in which the enemy were the subversive forces. This is because The Junta was established in a context of rising violence, characterized by confrontation between the military forces and guerrilla organizations such as *Montoneros* (Pilar, 2005).

However, what started out as a counterinsurgency campaign against well-armed insurgents quickly became state terrorism against anyone who was perceived by the Junta as an enemy of the state (Pion-Berlin, 1994). The Junta kept using the same conflict discourse to justify repression, but the enemy became anyone who was believed to be involved in any kind of political activism or anyone who was suspicious of believing in any of the utopic ideals of the revolutionary left (Robben, 2004). The operation gained the name of "Dirty War" due to the gross violations of human rights committed, such as child kidnapping and torture, and which resulted in the murder or disappearance of around 15,000 citizens (Pion-Berlin, 1994). In order to deal with these crimes, the new democratic regime prosecuted 5 regime leaders in the "Trials to the Juntas".

Nowadays, Argentina is living the longest democratic period in its history (Franzé, 2019). The president is Fernandez and the vice-president Fernandez de Kirchner, who was also president of the country from 2007 to 2015. Fernandez de Kirchner and Fernandez are the leaders of a party coalition called *Frente de Todos*, which is generally considered left-wing Peronist and Kirchnerist (Smink, 2019). The main opposition party is "Together for a Change" (JxC), presided by the former-President Macri, Bullrich and Larreta, among others. JxC is formed by centre to right wing parties (Arias, 2021).

Following the historical context discussed above, the conflict rhetoric that the Junta used consisted of explaining the situation as a "war" between "us, the military regime" against the enemy, who was presented as "the leftist, communist subversive forces". In Table 1.1, I present the keywords, in Spanish, which could be identified in the historical context for each side of the discourse, from more specific to more general, and their translation into English.

Table 1.1

Keywords for the Argentinean case.

	The regime side			The "enemy"	
	Concept	Keywords		Concept	Keywords
More specific	The most relevant leaders of the Junta, 1) the first president and 2) the president during the Malvinas War.	1) Videa 2) Galtieri	VS	1) Subversive forces and, 2) guerrilla groups	1) *Subversivo/a* 2) *Montonero/s*
More general	The names used to describe this period. (Civic-military dictatorship, Military dictatorship, military, Military Junta, National Reorganization Process (PRN))	*Dictadura cívico-militar, dictadura militar, militares, Junta militar* and *PRN*		Different ways used to talk about someone that has a left ideology, including communism.	*Izquierdista, zurdo[1], comunismo* and *comunista*

Spain

In July 1936, a military rebellion attempted to overthrow the Second Republic, which represented the start of the Spanish Civil War (Ruiz, Introduction, 2005). During this period, Franco founded the "National Movement", the fascist anti-communist single party that was present throughout the whole Francoist regime. The regime portrayed the situation as a war that represented a crucial moment in the history of Spain, in which the real "true Spaniards" defended their nation against the Republic, which was controlled by "foreign" Bolsheviks and criminals "anti-Spaniards" (del Arco Blanco, 2010). Following Neubacher (2006) explanation of naturalization techniques, it could be argued that the regime appealed to a

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[1] Zurdo is a particular way to talk about someone with leftist ideals. In Spanish, it also means left-handed.

higher loyalty by presenting themselves as the guardians of the nation and blame the victims by accusing them of criminals.

Furthermore, in 1938, a commission was established to prove the illegitimacy of the Republican forces, which were portrayed as "anti-national" and "criminal", which was justified when considering for instance, the Catalan statute of autonomy as a "denial of national history" (Ruiz, Introduction, 2005). Consequently, the military rising was not only depicted as legal but also as a movement that restored the rule of law and saved Spain and human civilization from a communist revolution, and this understanding of the situation later justified the mass scale punishments of Republican supporters in the post-war period (Ruiz, 2005). There were around 50,000 pots-war executions and over 280,000 prisoners by 1940. Furthermore, the differences between being a "Red" or "non-Red" were a reinforced in the regime's everyday social life (González Vicén, 1956, as cited by Aguilar & Fernández, 2002). After Franco died, the new democracy granted amnesties for the political crimes committed during the regime, making prosecution and investigation impossible (Escudero, 2014).

Forty-six years have passed since Franco died and now Spain is experiencing for the first time the successful establishment of democracy (Aguilar & Humlebaek, 2002). The president is Pedro Sanchez, member of the Labour Socialist Spanish Party (PSOE), a social democrat, centre-left party that is governing in coalition with "Together We Can", a left-wing electoral alliance (ESS Round 9: European Social Survey, 2021). The second biggest party in Spain is the Popular Party (PP), a conservative right-wing party (ESS Round 9: European Social Survey, 2021). The third largest political force is Vox, which is considered a far-right party.

Following the historical context provided, the regime conflict discourse in Francoist Spain portrayed "us, the real Spaniards" against the enemy "anti-Spanish, communist republic", and was used to punish anyone who was believed to have supported the Second Republic. In Table 1.2, I present the keywords, in Spanish, identified as representative of each side of the discourse and their translation into English.

Table 1.2

Keywords for the Spanish case.

	The regime side			The "enemy"	
	Concept	Keywords		Concept	Keywords
More specific	The ideology and name the regime receives after its main leader Franco, Francoist, and the adjective to describe a Franco supporter.	*franquismo* and *franquista*	VS	Second Republic: the government Franco considered anti-Spain and anyone who supported it was "anti-Spaniard".	*Segunda República, anti-España* and *antiespañoles*.
More general	Fascism, the ideology of the regime single party.[2]	*Fascismo* and *fascista/facha*[3].		Franco considered himself anti-communist and was fighting to stop the communist revolution. Spain was divided in "red" and "non-red", in reference to the Russian army.	*comunismo, comunista,* and *rojos*.

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[2] Whether Franco was a fascist or not is a heated debate among historians. However, at the beginning of his regime and during the Civil War, he was allied and supported by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Furthermore, the Falange was a fascist party and Franco was its leader.

Analysis

In this section, I will analyse the polarizing impact of conflict discourse in both contexts, and then, whether it is more polarizing in Spain than in Argentina. For this purpose, I discursively analysed a total of 400 tweets, 200 for each country, which contained any of the keywords divided in four keyword groups, as discussed in Table 1.1 and Table 1. 2. In order to randomly retrieve the tweets, I introduced the identified keywords, one at a time, into the Twitter API, which gave back the predetermined number of 50 tweets, for each keyword for a period of 7 days. However, this also included retweets and tweets from users of other countries, which meant that tweets were repeated and consequently analysed only once or eliminated due to the lack of context relevance. Furthermore, sometimes the program retrieved fewer tweets because the keywords were not always used 50 times in the 7-day period selected. Therefore, in the end, each group had a total of 50 tweets that contained one of the group keywords.

Afterwards, I used the identifications the program provides to search for the tweet and analyse the context and user. Then, I introduced each tweet in an analysis table where the previous collected information was used to identify the polarizing indicators derived from the literature and highlighted in the conceptualization: 1) association to a group, 2) delegitimization, and/or 3) expression of sense of threat.

First, I analysed the way the keywords were being used to determine if the user was associating the regime's discourse keywords to a particular group. Later, I aggregated the information retrieved from each tweet to determine whether the keywords were frequently associated to a particular group or to many smaller size groups. I used the recurrent description of the same specific group with the keywords associated to one of the identities promoted by the regime's discourse as an indicator of polarization. More tweets associating the same group to the keywords indicate more polarization. In addition, if the opposite identity is reiterated to describe the ideological opposite current party, this means that the conflict discourse promoted by the regime still influences polarization in current political situations since the "US" vs "THEM" discourse still collapses along the lines the regime used.

Second, I analysed each tweet to determine whether the user was using the word to delegitimize. McCoy, Rahman and Somer (2018) explain that polarization becomes extreme

when each group starts to question the moral legitimacy of the other group. Therefore, using the keywords as an insult or a justification to discredit someone's actions or arguments indicates more polarization.

Last, the tweets were analysed to determine whether the user expressed a sense of threat by evoking fear or urgency to act. Jackson (2008) explains that political elites through discourse instrumentalize the existing grievances to manipulate identities and perceptions of threat to create a sense of victimhood that would justify a violent retaliation. Similarly, Neubacher (2006) mentions the denial of the victim is a neutralization technique used by states that commit gross violations to human rights. If society still uses the conflict discourse and perceives the "other" as an existential threat, it indicates that the polarization promoted by the regime is still present and used to make sense of contemporary matters.

Argentina

The Regime: Videla and Galtieri
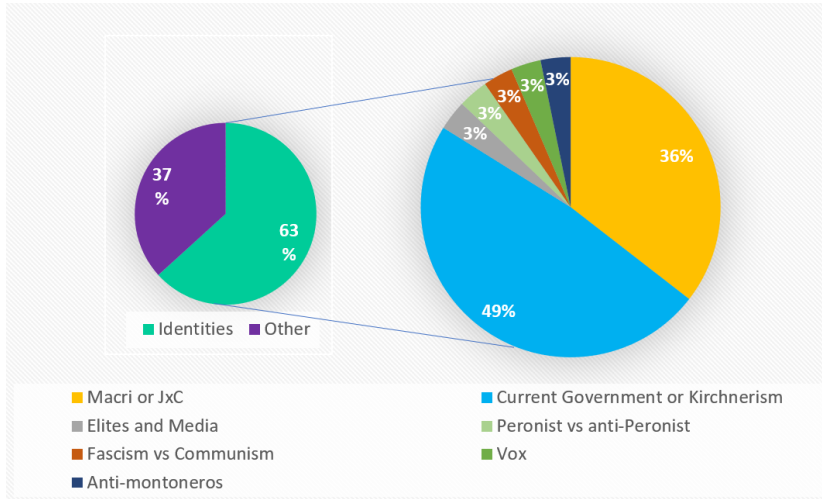
Figure 1.1.1 Entities associated to the key word Videla or Galtieri
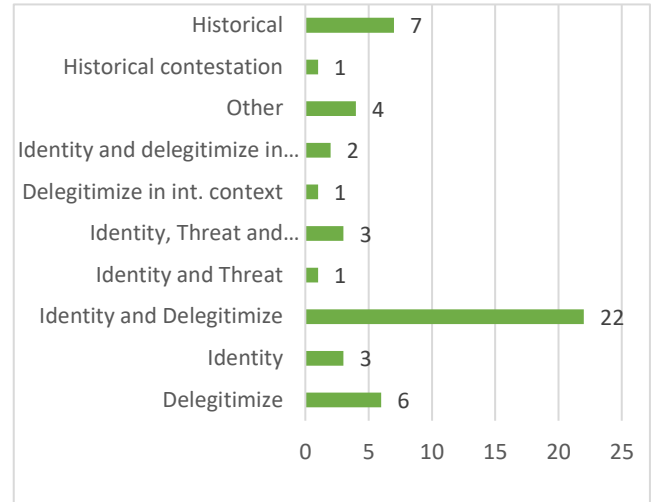
Figure 1.1.2 Tweet's categorization for the key words Videla or Galtieri

At first glance, it seems that the keywords were used in a polarizing manner since 63% of the 50 tweets analysed for the first group of keywords were used to describe a group, as shown in Figure 1.1.1. However, since the words were not recurrently implemented to describe the same group, 49% of the tweets mention Ferandez's government and 36% the opposing coalition, JxC, this cannot be construed as polarization.

Furthermore, Figure 1.1.2 shows that a considerable number of tweets that were used to construct and identity around a group are also used to delegitimize that group. In fact, there are 6 more tweets where the keywords are used to delegitimize without referring to a specific group. For instance, "Jorge Rafael Videla talking about human rights is like you @RobiBaradel, talking about education, work, and personal hygiene."[4](@LuchoBugallo).

In total, there are more tweets using the keyword to delegitimize rather than to associate it with a group. Therefore, it could be concluded that Videla and Galtieri have a very negative image in society, and when used, they are employed to delegitimize equally the main political parties and their supporters, which further contradicts the first impression of polarization.

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[4] Author's translation.

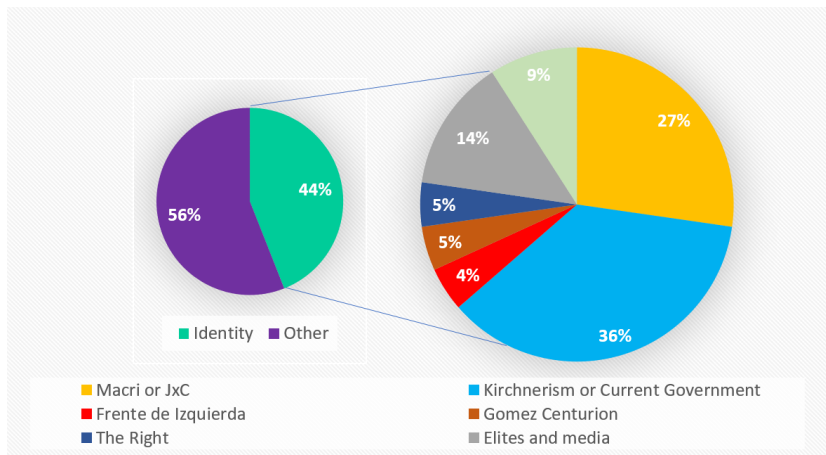The Regime: Military Junta, Military Dictatorship and PRN

Figure 1.2.1. Entities associated to the keywords Junta Militar, dictadura military or PRN
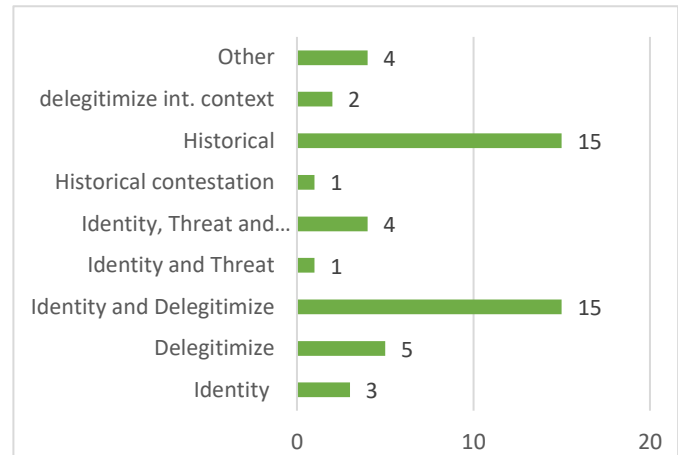

Figure 1.2.2. Tweet's categorization for the keywords Junta Militar, dictadura militar or PRN

Contrary to what happens with the previous keywords, less than half of the 50 tweets use the keyword to refer to a group, as illustrated in Figure 1.2.1. However, the biggest group related to an identity is again the current government, followed by the opposition coalition JxC. Therefore, not only less than half of the tweets presented this polarization indicator, but those that were, are not coherent with the association.

Moreover, in Figure 1.2.2 we can see that there is a considerable number of tweets, 19, that do not present any of the polarization indicators. One of them is worth citing since it is from Kirchner: " Beyond the political and economic public differences that we have, it is comforting that one of the principal opposition leaders share similar sensibilities, experiences and views about the tragedy of the last civic-military dictatorship.[5]" I believe that this tweet represents the findings, because even if the words are used to delegitimize the other party, the

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[5] Author's translation

keywords are not repeatedly associated with the same specific group, demonstrating that Argentina might be a polarized society, but not along the lines of the Junta's discourse.

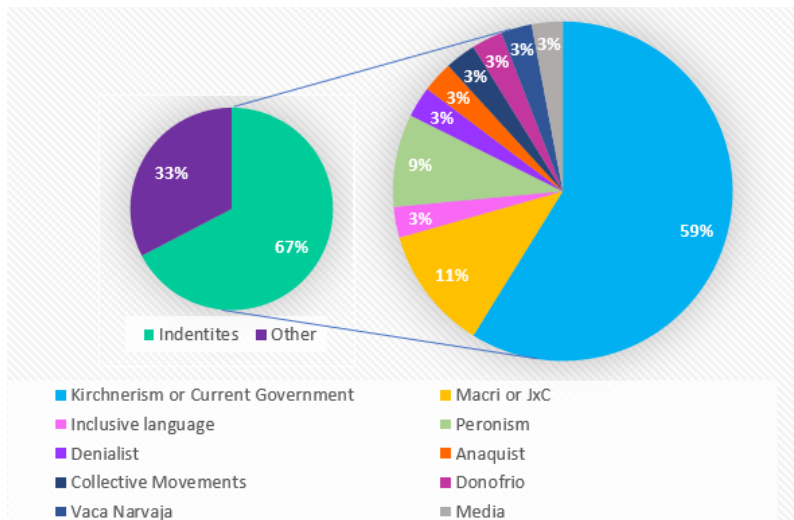The "Enemy": Subversive and Montoneros

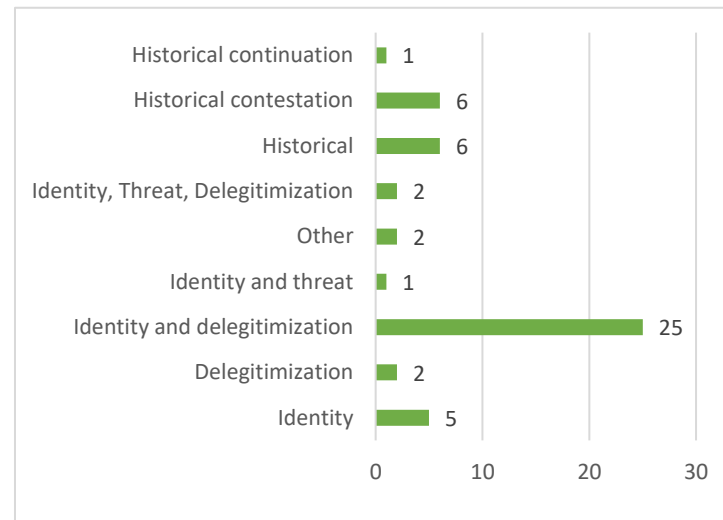Figure 1.3.1. Entities associated to the keywords *subversivo* or *montonero*.

Figure 1.3.2. Tweet's categorization for the keywords *subversivo* or *montonero*.

Moving to the first group of keywords identified for the "enemy" side of the regime, we can see, in Figure 1.3.1, that 68% of the tweets used the keyword in a polarizing way to identify a group. Although the two biggest groups are still the government coalition and the opposition, the difference is now clear and 59% referenced the current government. In addition, Figure 1.3.2 shows that 6 tweets are historical contestations accusing *Montoneros* to be the murderers of a religious figure. This might be explained by the fact that some crimes committed before the dictatorship were never judged nor properly investigated, lacking the same delegitimization process and collective historical memory that is present around The Junta. Therefore, this group is the one that might indicate more polarization in Argentina's case. This could be explained by the number of tweets and the frequency in which the keywords were used in relation to the government, together with the historical contestations that represent the polarized discussions in relation to the past.

The "Enemy": Leftist and Communist

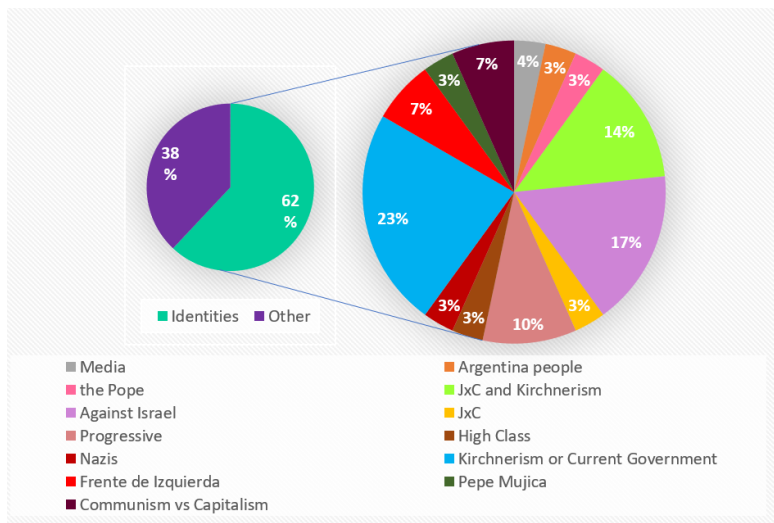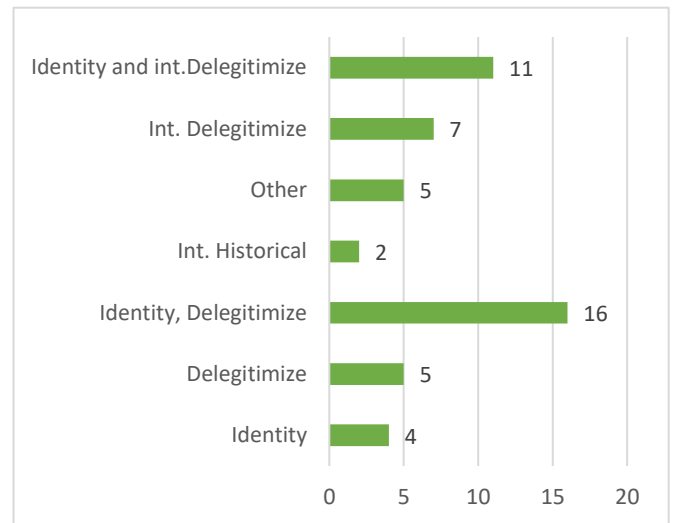Figure 1.4.1. Entities associated to the keywords *izquierdista, zurdo, comunismo* or *comunista*

Figure 1.4.2 Tweet's categorization for the keywords *izquierdista, zurdo, comunismo or comunista*

Although this group of keywords share with the previous group a similar percentage of tweets (62%) that associated one of the keywords to an entity, this one presents less polarization. This is because identification happened with 13 different groups, which represents the most fragmented and diverse keyword group, as shown in Figure 1.4.1. Furthermore, the main party recognized is once again Kirchnerism, followed by a new category that includes both main parties. Overall, this demonstrates that the regime discourse is not coherently used in a polarizing manner. Moreover, Figure 1.4.2 shows that 20 tweets are related to an international context, which moves beyond the role the regime discourse can still have in Argentina's society.

In fact, it is worth mentioning that JxC is trying to implement the PP campaign slogan "*Communism or Freedom*". There are 6 tweets discussing this in the Argentinean context and, although communism was used to attack the current government, even those against it tweeted: "You make me cringe saying "communism" … that doesn't EXIST anymore. Say anti-liberal or pseudo-left populist… but communism is an old concept from 70 years ago"[1] (@karibelmonte). This delegitimization of a Spanish slogan that includes a keyword present in both contexts, confirms that Argentina is less polarized along the lines of the regime discourse.

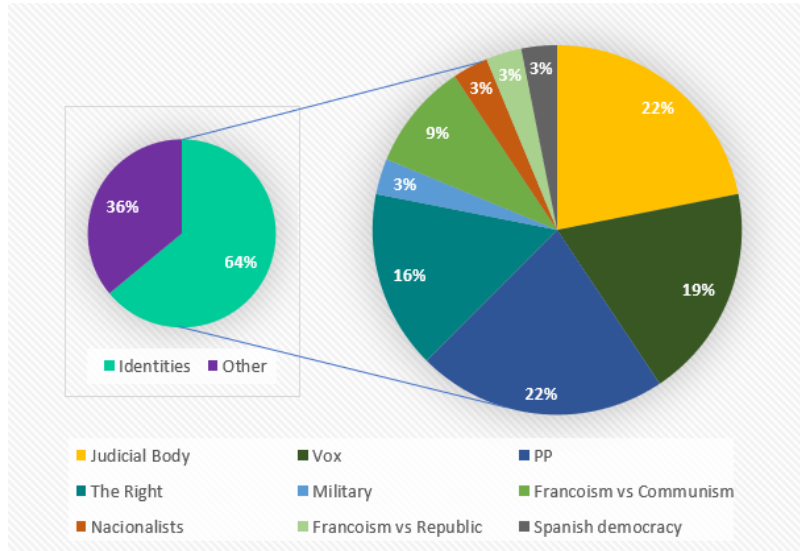*Spain*

The Regime: Francoism and Francoist

Figure 2.1.1. Entities associated to the key words *franquismo* or *franquista.*
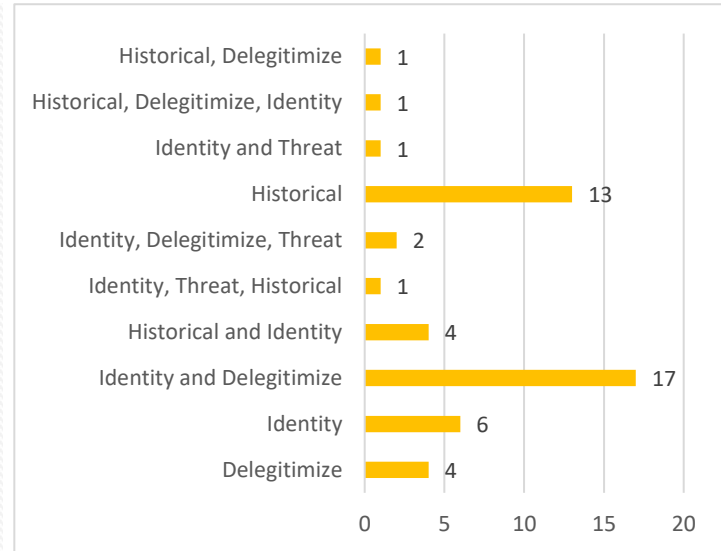

Figure 2.1.2. Tweet's categorization for the keywords *franquismo* and *franquista.*

The Spanish democracy and the judicial body were associated to Francoist regime in 25 % of the tweets that create identities, as pictured in Figure 2.1.1. In this regard, there are 9 tweets expressing a sense of historical continuation in which the regime still plays a role nowadays. For instance, "We still suffer from the consequences of the survival of Francoist impunity, and it is no longer about legal impunity, but also about material privileges"[6] (@foromemoria). This indicates that the regime discourse might still impact today's society. In fact, if we combine PP and Vox with the right, 41% of the tweets that associate the keywords with a group, do so with the right-wing parties, demonstrating a polarizing use of the words. This is supported by the data presented in Figure 2.1.2 which shows that half of the tweets were also used to delegitimize and 4 included a sense of threat.

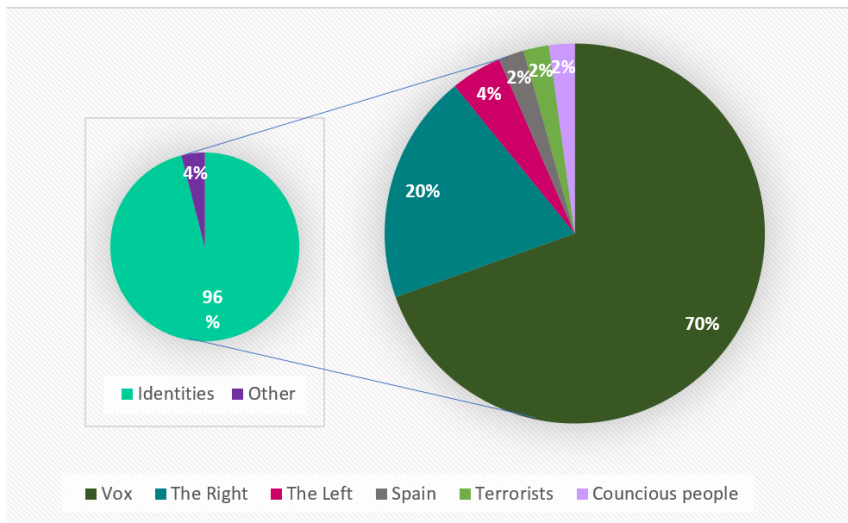[6] Author's translation.

The Regime: Fascism

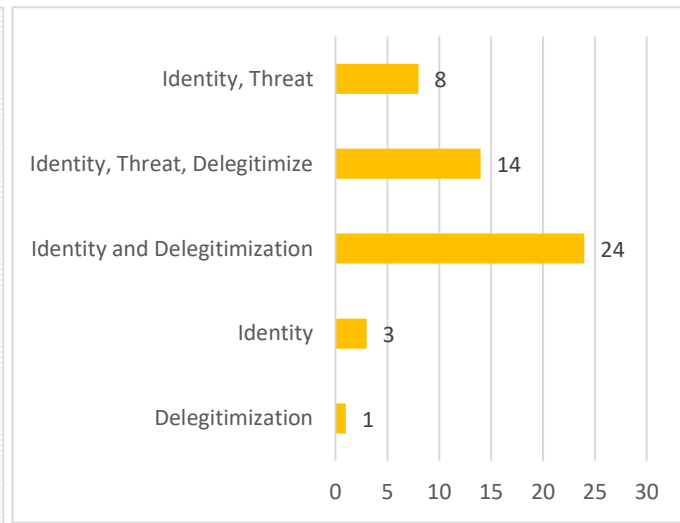*Figure 2.2.1.* Entities associated to the keywords fascismo or fascista/facha

Figure 2.2.2. Tweet's categorization for the keywords fascismo and fascista/facha.

Polarization in the Spanish context becomes clearer when considering Figure 2.2.1, which illustrates that 96% of the tweets were used in a polarized manner to associate an entity to the keywords, which was constantly Vox. Moreover, the only tweet that did not, was still used to delegitimize, as illustrated in Figure 2.2.2. The second largest group is the right, which together means that 90% of the tweets related the word fascism to the right-wing parties. Therefore, this group of keywords is the one that presents the higher level of polarization, with all tweets including at least one polarization indicator, very frequently associating Vox, and almost always the right, with the Francoist side of the regime discourse.

Moreover, it is the group with the larger number of tweets that expresses a sense of threat and 14 of those also were used to delegitimized. For instance, @GemaNieto81 tweeted as a reaction to a Vox campaign: "I do not know any more if I agree with the claim that 'it is better to ignore them', to be honest, or that the intelligent thing is to pretend they do not exist. Right, since we, the aware and decent, are a lot and we have so much power, for sure we will end fascism by ignoring it"[7].

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[7] Author's translation.

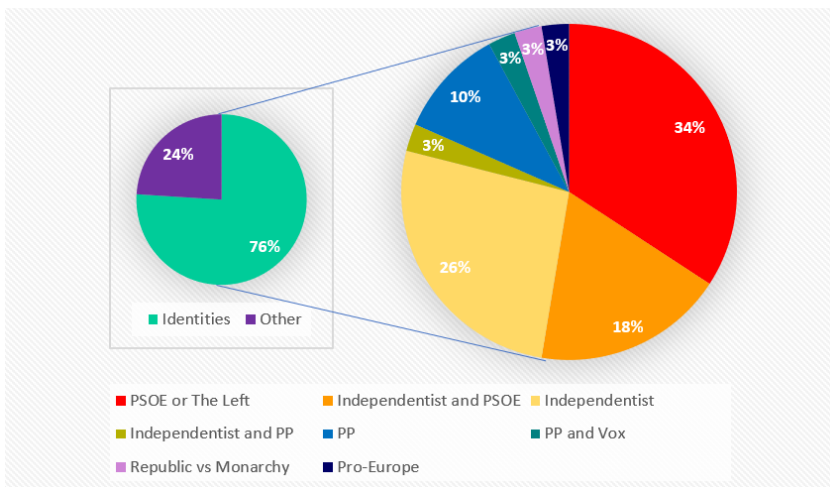The "Enemy": Second Republic and Anti-Spaniards

Figure 2.3.1. Entities associated to the keywords Segunda República, antiespañoles and anti-España
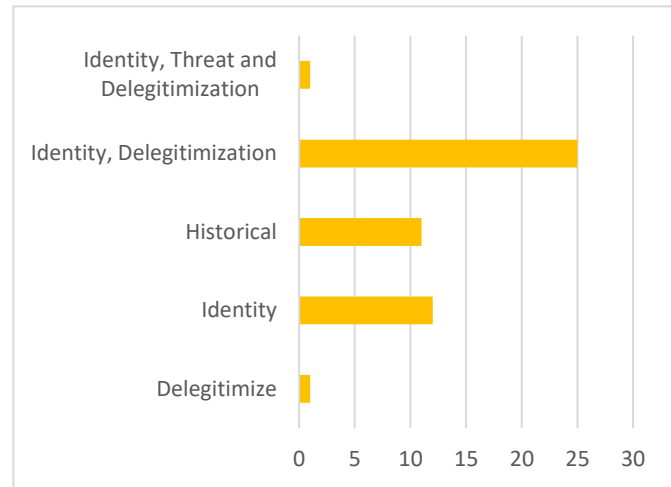

Figure 2.3.2. Tweet's categorization for the keywords Segunda República, antiespañoles and anti-España

Compared to the findings for the "regime" side of the discourse, the groups identified with anti-Spaniards and Second Republic are in the ideological opposite side of the current political spectrum. The three main groups that were frequently associated were PSOE or the left with 34%, PSOE and independentists with 18% and independentists with 26%, as represented in Figure 2.3.1. Furthermore, it could be said that 78% of the tweets that create an identity associated the left and the independentists movements to the concepts of anti-Spain. Thus, this term kept the same meaning that Franco used to talk about autonomous communities and the Second Republic, which demonstrates a continuation of the regime conflict discourse. However, 12 tweets which mainly include the word Second Republic, challenges this claim since they do not include any polarization indicators and were categorized as historical, as presented in Figure 2.3.2.
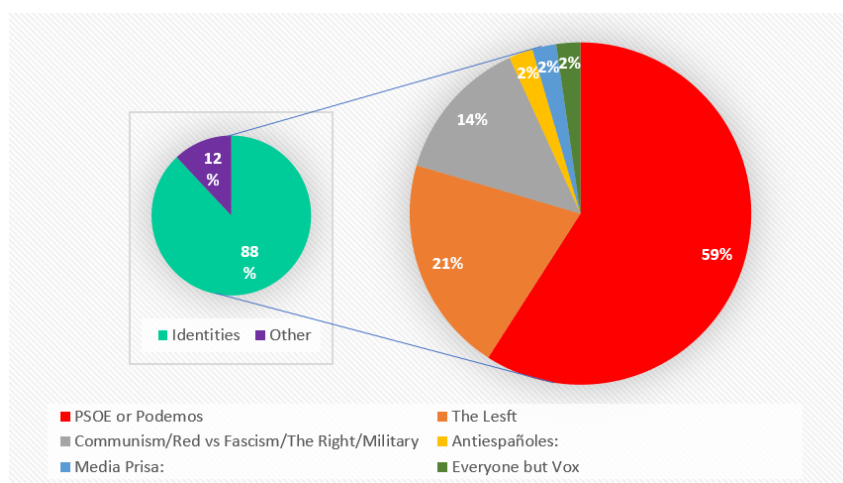
The "Enemy": Communism, Communist and Red

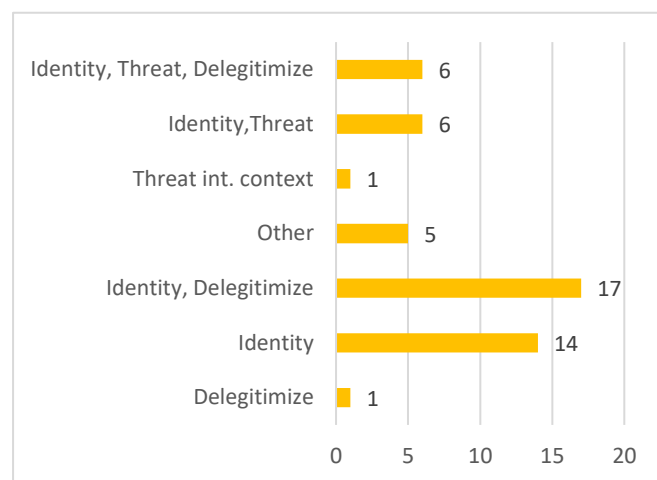*Figure 2.4.1.* Identities associated to the keywords comunismo, comunista or rojo.

Figure 2.4.2. Tweet's categorization for the keywords comunismo, comunista, rojo.

Similarly, 59% of the associations to the keyword communism were PSOE or Podemos, and the second largest group the left. If we combine both categories, 80% of the tweets associated the left-wing parties with communism, as shown in Figure 2.4.1. Once again in the Spanish context, identities are very frequently reinforced by using the regime discourse in a polarizing manner.

Moreover, Figure 2.4.2 supports this claim since most of the tweets contain a polarization indicator and 6 present the three indicators. To illustrate, a left-wing journalist twitted: "Spanish communism participated actively in the reestablishment of Spanish democracy; Vox is a declared heir of that same dictatorship that, during decades, kidnaped our freedom. OPINION. Vox is a threat to democracy, by @ieascolar"[8] (@rosamariaartal). This tweet engages directly with the regime's discourse, which is even used to construct opposing identities and transmit a sense of threat.

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[8] Author's translation.
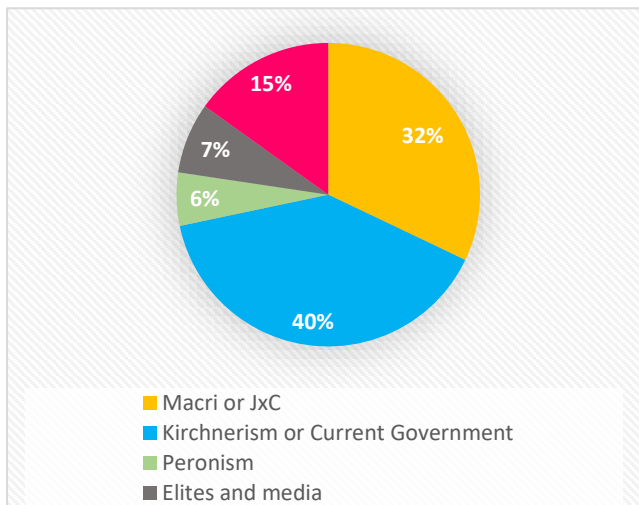
Comparative Analysis

Figure 3.1. Identities associated to the Military Junta side of the regime discourse.
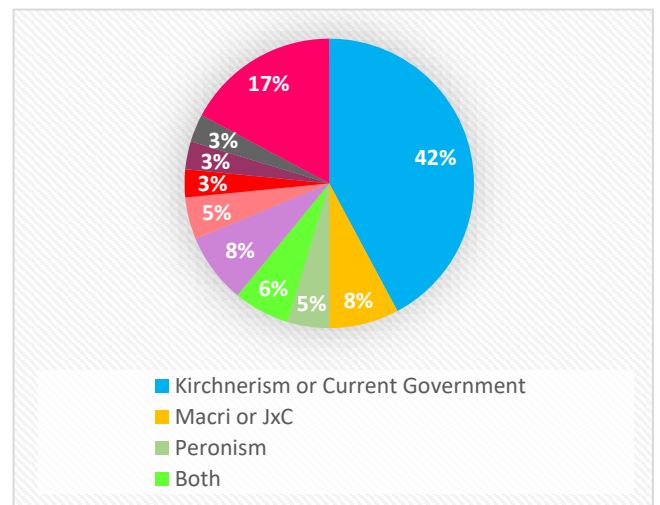

Figure 3.2. Identities associated to the "enemies of the regime" side of the regime discourse.
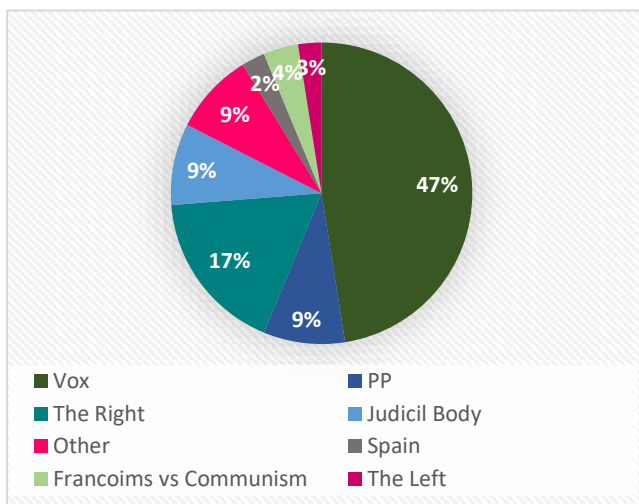

Figure 3.3. Identities associated to the Francoist regime side of the Francoist discourse.
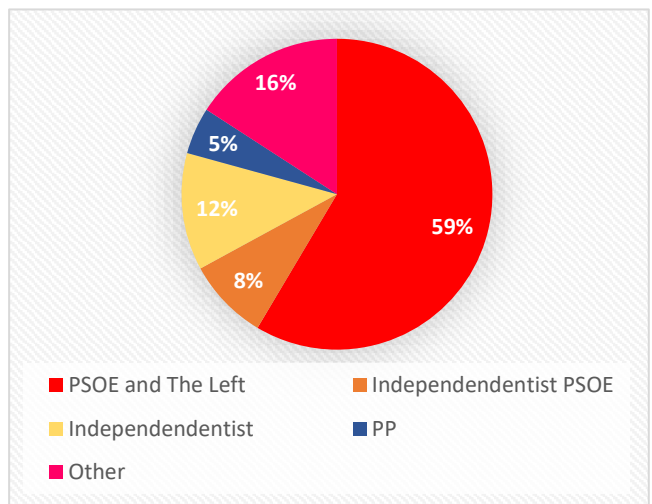
Figure 3.4. Identities associated to the "enemies of the regime" side of the Francoist discourse.

When analysing association to a group with the dictatorial side of the discourse, in the case of Spain, this happened in 80 tweets, whereas in Argentina it occurred less frequently, in 53 tweets, as presented in Figures 3.1 and 3.3. Furthermore, although the main groups identified in each case share a similar percentage, Fernandez and Kirchner with 40% of the Argentinean tweets and Vox 47% of the Spanish, the second biggest group associated in the case of Argentina is the opposition party, whereas in Spain, it is the right followed by PP. Therefore, while Argentina does not present a coherent association of the regime side to an identity, 73% of the tweets that identify a group in the case of Spain do so with the right-wing parties. This

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indicates that in Spain there are more tweets that contain the association of an entity to the keywords and also that they are used more frequently in a polarizing manner.

Similarly, for the "enemy of the regime" side of each conflict, although the difference is smaller, Spain also has more tweets that associate the key words with a group. Furthermore, in Argentina's case, again the biggest group associated with the keywords is Kirchnerism (42%) now followed with a bigger gap by the category "other", which encompass the entities that appeared only once. Thus, Argentina's case is more fragmented in the association of current groups to the enemies of the regime than Spain, in which the largest group associated is PSOE or the left. This further supports the evidence that the Spanish case shows more polarization than the Argentinean: if we compare the group associated to each side of the regime, in Argentina we arrive to the same group, while in Spain we find two opposing political groups.

Furthermore, in Spain, 7 tweets for the "enemies of the regime" and 15 for "the regime" side expressed delegitimization and sense of threat, compared to 5 such tweets in the whole Argentinean context. A similar thing happens with those tweets that only represent a sense of threat. This further supports the claim that Spain uses the identities created in the regime discourse in a more frequent, and polarized fashion than Argentina. The only category where Argentina scores higher is in delegitimization.

However, this might not contradict the findings since trials have the power of stigmatizing the regime's actions as crimes that should be condemned and create a collective responsibility to ensure these crimes never happen again (Escudero, 2014). Therefore, it makes sense to state that society associates the regime with a negative feeling and, being associated with it, delegitimizes a person's arguments and actions. Yet, this is not done clearly and frequently against any of the parties, supporting the idea that Argentina might be a polarized society, but not along the lines of the regime's discourse.

Altogether, Spain presents a higher level of polarization that occurs along the lines of Francoist regime's discourse, with more tweets associating opposing identities to opposing parties and expressing a greater sense of threat. On the contrary, Argentina does not present a high level of polarization along the lines of the discourse fostered by the Military Junta since barely half of the tweets contain an association, and the current government was the largest group with representation in both sides of the regime's discourse.

Conclusion

In Argentina, the fate that awaited the Military Junta leaders because of the gross violations of human rights committed was prosecution. In this study, I argue that through trials, the discourse the regime represented and used to create opposing identities and justify violence is delegitimized, fostering de-polarization. In contrast, Spain decided to follow a silence pact of amnesties and amnesia in exchange of democratization, which protected former regime leaders from facing prosecution and avoided another Civil War. However, I defend that amnesties reinforce the regime's discourse since they do not contest the conflict norm instrumentalized by the leaders.

After discursively analysing how people nowadays use the words present in each regime's rhetoric, I have provided revealing evidence to confirm that trials foster de-polarization since Argentina presents lower levels of polarization along the lines of the regime's discourse than Spain does. In fact, in Argentina users did not frequently associate a keyword to the same group and expressed less sense of threat than in Spain, where amnesties were implemented. The higher level of polarization is further supported by the more reiterated use of the Francoist regime's identity to describe the right-wing parties whereas the Republican side was associated with the left.

However, further research should be carried out to provide more evidence, confirm the hypothesis and help overcome one of the most notorious shortcomings of this research: time. While I believe that measuring long-term effects is necessary and provides valuable insight, it is true that, when investigating the influence of an event that happened half a century ago, controlling every possible extraneous variable that might influence the results becomes a difficult task. Therefore, I suggest that similar analysis should be carried out using other democracies that transitioned in the Third Wave of democratization in order to be able to talk about a possible causation relation between the fate of regime leaders and polarization, which is hinted by the correlation found in this research.

Altogether, this paper moves beyond the short-term consequences discussion that dominates the field and provides a new insight towards the possible long-term effects of transitional decisions. Although the aim of this research was never prescriptive, understanding that decisions on how to deal with leaders that committed gross violations of human rights might still impact society 40 years after transition could be helpful when dealing with similar

situations. The fate regime leaders face as a consequence of their crimes impact political polarization after transition, the same way treatments impact the healing process of a wound. Treat it properly and the result will be a painful memory represented by a scar. Let it be to avoid the immediate pain and you might end up with an open wound.

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Appendix A. Coding Table and Criteria

Table 2

Coding table and criteria followed.

Key word	User	User info	Content	Context	identities	Sense of threat	delegitimization	Historical or other
	The username	Anything that is relevant to understand the content of the tweet. This includes the four first media pictures, the profile picture, the bio description, and information form the first 10 tweets of the timeline.	What the actual tweet says	Anything necessary to understand the content of the tweet, including answers to the tweet, conversations, and if it is citing or answering another specific tweet. Furthermore, this section also includes relevant information of the people or cases mentioned in the tweet.	The identity that was described with the keyword either by comparison, or because the word is an adjective, or is used to clearly refer to someone. If the tweets mention a leader or member of a party, it is coded as the party.	Express fear or a sense of urgency to act. The tweet describes the groups as virus, parasite or something that needs to be stop immediately.	The word is used as an insult or in combination with an insult. The identity associated to the other person makes dialogue impossible or nonsense, or the tweet questions an argument or an action due to the identity of who is saying it or doing it. Mocking an argument to delegitimize the idea is also considered delegitimization Furthermore, association with the identity might be intended as something negative.	A tweet is coded as historical when it refers to a historical moment. Historical contestation means that the user is discussing a historical fact. Tweets could also be categorized as other because they were a joke or none of the above.

Appendix B. Keyword Decisions

<u>Argentina</u>

- <u>Montoneros</u>: While *Montoneros* was not the only guerrilla movements in Argentina, it was the biggest one, with approximately 2000 armed combatants in 1975 compared to the Revolutionary People's Army that had around 400 or 800 combatants. Although the decision was to use *Montoneros* as a keyword, the second keyword of this group, *subversivo*, was incorporated to encompass all of the other "subversive forces". Furthermore, although *Montoneros* was a left-wing Peronist group, it would not have been fair to use the keyword "Peronist" or "Peronism". This is due to the fact that not all Peronists considered themselves *Montoneros*. In fact, during the democratic government of Maria Martinez de Perón, there was a paramilitary right-wing Peronist group, the *Triple A*, that had a similar objective than the Military Junta: to eliminate the "Marxist" groups, including *Montoneros* and the Revolutionary People's Army.
- <u>Videla and Galtieri</u>: the decision to use the name of these leaders rather than others, is because these presidents represented two of the most relevant events that happened during the Junta: the beginning of the dictatorship (Videla) and the Malvina's War (Galtieri). Furthermore, they were the Junta presidents with the longer terms in office.

<u>Spain</u>

- <u>Fascism:</u> Although considering Franco's regime as fascists is surrounded by historical debates, I decided to use this keyword due to how the public understands it. It is true that historians do not agree whether Franco's regime can be considered fascist, because fascism as a concept is highly contested. However, at the beginning, Franco's regime was closely related to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, regimes that supported him during the Spanish Civil War. Furthermore, the *Falange* party, started as a fascist party. Franco then fuse this party and created the "National Movement", which was used to define the complex totalitarian fascist inspired mechanism that pretended to rule over every aspect of the Spanish public life. It then became the single party in Francoist Spain, but it was considered to follow a Francoist ideology rather than fascist. Furthermore, although I decided to use fascism, I did not include *Falange* as a keyword because similarly to the Argentinean case with Peronism, not all the members of the *Falange* supported Franco's regime.