

The Social Diversity of Victims Under the Pinochet Regime

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Abstract:

Pinochet's dictatorship lasted from 1973 to 1990, but its implications extend beyond its duration. During the dictatorship, close to 30,000 people were detained, tortured, or disappeared. These statistics facilitate the generalization and neglect of the serious human rights violations suffered by these victims. By highlighting individual cases from different social groups, we can better understand how widespread the violence of this dictatorship was and commemorate the identities and experiences of these victims.

These victims came from very different occupations, political ideologies, social classes, and countries, demonstrating the diverse motives behind state-sponsored violence. By examining various cases using archives with press information, interviews, declassified documents, and victim databases, a deeper understanding was gained of how and why this violence spread so rapidly.

This paper aims to reduce the anonymity associated with using statistics to convey the experiences of victims by exploring violations against high-ranking officials, foreigners, DINA agents, and victims connected to right-wing parties.

Introduction to Pinochet's Chile

September 11th, 1973, marked the beginning of a new Chile. On that day, armed forces filled cities all over Chile, successfully staging a coup d'état to overthrow the socialist government of Former President Salvador Allende. The coup climate had been fostered by a unique mix of internal dissatisfaction regarding Allende's policies, economic failure, and the intervention of the US government to prevent the spread of communism. Allende's policies included large nationalization efforts, land reforms, and wage and price controls. This welfare-economy-like

approach and poor economic performance intensified internal conflict. According to Espinosa and Véjar (2025), these policies originally saw a macroeconomic boom from 1970 to 1971. The Chilean government aimed to achieve higher employment and experienced gains in productivity and economic growth. This was encouraged by a lax fiscal policy that increased public spending. As unemployment declined, Chileans could finally afford to increase their consumption, and simultaneously, aggregate demand, this growth spread to other components of Chile's GDP, allowing for an economic boom. As the fiscal deficit increased with aggregate demand, monetary policy was implemented by cutting interest rates by 30% between 1970 and 1971, increasing business activity. However, by 1972, price controls, large fiscal deficits, work stoppages, and foreign exchange shortages had contributed to a worsening economy.¹ Additionally, efforts by the US to as President Nixon put it, "make the Chilean economy scream," did a great amount of damage to President Allende's credibility, economic plans, and government. The United States had decided that Allende's government was too risky and threatened to promote communism, which was dangerous given the effects of the Cold War. The United States resorted to covert operations that included propaganda in media outlets such as El Mercurio, which was a popular right-leaning magazine; financing groups opposed to Allende to undermine his authority; and influencing multilateral banks to limit loans to Chile. They also suspended multilateral and bilateral aid to Chile pretty early on, before Allende had a chance to implement his own economic policies.²

This unique blend of events, coupled with coup-hungry officials, led to the 1973 coup that deposed Allende and set Augusto Pinochet up as the most notable Chilean dictator. Following the coup, the Pinochet regime relied on a coordinated system of institutions, practices, and spaces of violence to suppress opposition and maintain power. This included Pinochet's secret police DINA, which stood for the National Intelligence Directorate. Originally it was created to collect information for the formulation of policies, plans, and measures necessary for the security and development of the country. However, DINA was granted, through three secret articles, the authority to act as a secret police force with the power to surveil, imprison, and eliminate enemies of the regime.³ By 1977, DINA had an active force of approximately 10,000 men, who

¹Sebastian Edwards, "*The Debauchery of Currency and Inflation: Chile, 1970-1973*," (NBER Working Paper 31890, 2023), 22.

² Peter Kornbluh, "*The Pinochet Files*," pp. 6-9.

³ National Security Archive, *The Pinochet Regime Declassified DINA*, 2024.

were responsible for the majority of the human rights violations documented by the Catholic Church and by international organizations such as Amnesty International. They frequently arrested, tortured, and killed members of various political parties. However, most of the victims belonged to the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) and the Communist Party. Pinochet himself reportedly stated, “They must torture members of the MIR; without torture they will not talk.”⁴ In order for the dictatorship to be successful and consolidate power, they needed to eliminate the opposition and put a complete stop to their anti-regime activities.

Detainees were kept in a variety of detention sites that were founded with the objectives of torturing, punishing, and extracting information from detainees who were suspected of participating in activities that went against the ideas and activities of the dictatorship. This could range from political activists to artists and family members of suspected individuals. Anyone who had minute relations with anti-dictatorship individuals or activities could be imprisoned. Different detention sites had different purposes and conditions; some were also known for the specific types of abuses they inflicted on detainees. In sites like Venda Sexy and Villa Grimaldi, agents of the state employed various forms of sexual torture aimed at extracting information, instilling terror, humiliating detainees, and breaking prisoners psychologically. Rape and sexual assault were common practices at these facilities and were often carried out by guards against detainees of all ages and genders, although women were targeted more often. These episodes of torture were sometimes followed by moments of apparent kindness in an attempt to extract information. Sexual torture was also carried out at Villa Grimaldi, where women were raped in the facility’s rose garden. Although men were also subjected to sexual torture as a tool of domination and degradation throughout different detention sites, women experienced these abuses in a more systematic and frequent manner.⁵

The brutality inflicted in clandestine detention centers illustrates the regime’s treatment of the most vulnerable members of society. Yet, this violence was not reserved solely for those without power or influence.

Violations against High-Ranking Officials

In order to properly repress the possibility of the left rising up against the newly created dictatorship, an internal cleanse was required. High-ranking officials were placed under scrutiny

⁴ Collier and Sater, *A history of Chile*, 1996, p. 678.

⁵ Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura, pp. 242-251.

and had their loyalty tested. During the coup, many anti-coup and Allende-supporting officials had been detained or eliminated. For example, on the day of the coup, Orlando Letelier, who had served as the ambassador to the United States in the Allende government, was swiftly detained, and spent around a year in different prisons before he was released due to international pressure.⁶ One of the prisons he served time at was Dawson's Island. This island is located in the Strait of Magellan, around 100 kilometers south of Punta Arenas. This navy-controlled prison camp had around 1,500 prisoners during its operation period from September 1973 to October 1974. Detainees were tortured and interrogated by Navy personnel in two different sections of the camp called Compingín and Río Chico. The cells had three different levels of punishment, from deprivation of blankets to deprivation of clothing and bedding. Prisoners were kept in four barracks sectioned off from the rest of the camp by barbed wire. High-ranking officials from Allende's government were held in a segregated sector of the camp. They had to perform exhausting and at times purposeless labor, which included military drills, forced marches, and carrying heavy materials. They also faced mock executions, psychological abuse, and electric torture.⁷ José Toha González, who had been Allende's Minister of Defense, faced this treatment as well. Like Letelier, he was arrested on the day of the coup. He had been detained in La Moneda with other Popular Unity authorities before being sent to Dawson Island. During his time there he lost 27 kilograms, leaving him with a weight of 49 kilos despite being 1.92 meters tall. He was malnourished and transferred to the Military Hospital in Santiago; he was unable to move and was extremely weak. When he died, his family was told that he had committed suicide by hanging himself with his belt in a closet; however, they did not believe it, given his advanced malnutrition he could barely move on his own. Furthermore, he was taller than the closet that they claimed he hanged himself in. The Commission did not have enough information to conclude if he had been murdered or committed suicide. However, it was determined that the state was still at fault because if he had committed suicide as they had stated, it was as an attempt to escape from the dangerous and painful environment he found himself in at the hands of the state.⁸

⁶ Museo de la Memoria y Derechos Humanos, "LETIELIER DEL SOLAR ORLANDO – MMDH – Víctimas," [Museodelamemoria.cl](https://museodelamemoria.cl), 2025.

⁷ Chile., *Informe de La Comisión Nacional Sobre Prisión Política Y Tortura*, 2004, 425.

⁸ Museo de la Memoria y Derechos Humanos, "TOHA GONZALEZ JOSE – MMDH – Víctimas," [Museodelamemoria.cl](https://museodelamemoria.cl), 2025.

This was not the only time that forced suicide had occurred with high-ranking officials; this method of staging deaths as suicides or pressuring officials to kill themselves was used to help the regime avoid responsibility for their deaths, especially since the officials had been people of importance. This gave the state the chance to frame these officials as traitors who died by their own hand, not the state's. It also took away the need for arrests, deep investigations, and judicial proceedings. The dictatorship needed to eliminate these officials, leading to investigations to ensure that those in power shared pro-dictatorship values. One example of this was Gustavo Cantuarias Grandón, a 45-year-old army colonel and former director of the Los Andes Mountain School. Declassified documents from the United States show that investigations were being led by the armed forces and carabineros into anti-coup officials and others who had been close to Allende. On the day of the coup, September 11, 1973, Cantuarias was arrested and held at the Military Academy, where he died on October 5, 1973. Official reports claimed that he committed suicide, stating that the cause of death was a gunshot wound to the head. However, the National Commission later concluded that his death occurred while he was under extreme pressure from state agents, meaning that his suicide occurred less as a free decision and more as a final escape from coercion.⁹

Although Cantuarias was without militancy, he was known for holding progressive views and for maintaining close ties to figures associated with the Popular Unity government. Declassified documents show that he was investigated for failing to carry out key orders during the coup, including failing to place guards on the bridge at the Andina Mine, closing the Argentine border above Portillo, and not sending soldiers to the military academy at the agreed-upon time. He was also accused of warning Popular Unity supporters about imminent arrests.¹⁰ Ironically, despite being trusted by Pinochet to the extent that his family sought refuge with Cantuarias during the coup, his perceived lack of loyalty ultimately placed him at risk. Cantuarias's death illustrates how pressure-induced suicides were used to remove individuals who did not fully conform to the regime's expectations, while allowing the military to avoid openly acknowledging internal dissent.

Foreigners and Violations Committed Abroad

⁹ Museo de la Memoria y Derechos Humanos, "CANTUARIAS GRANDON GUSTAVO ANTONIO RENATO – MMDH – Víctimas," [Museodelamemoria.cl](https://museodelamemoria.cl/), 2025.

¹⁰ DECLASS2024, "Investigations of Persons Suspected of Having Connections with Allende Government," [Declasseeucl.cl](https://www.declasseeucl.cl/?documentId=43679), 2024, <https://www.declasseeucl.cl/?documentId=43679>.

The reach of the dictatorship spread far past Chilean citizens and borders. During this period, there were various groups of foreigners living in Chile; some were immigrants from other Latin American countries who were fleeing dictatorships and seeking out better lives, while others ranged from diplomats and embassy workers to international activists, students, and missionaries. Despite their lack of Chilean citizenship, foreigners who found themselves detained were violated in a similar fashion to Chilean citizens. The dictatorship's school of thought placed a heavy emphasis on conforming to the ideas and values of Pinochet's regime; any deviation from this was wrong and needed to be corrected or exterminated. Violations against these non-conformers were seen as deserved and necessary to create a homogenous society, where pro-dictatorship ideas would flourish without resistance from opposition. Foreigners who were involved in or suspected of being part of anti-governmental activities were targeted and detained. They were kept in various detention sites like the National Stadium, which at one point had 7000 detainees, including around 200 to 300 foreigners of various nationalities.¹¹ Similarly to Chilean detainees, their families were kept in the dark regarding their whereabouts. The case of Que Phung Tran Huynh is one that demonstrates the treatment that foreigners faced when they went against the dictatorship. Born in Vivaldi, Vietnam, to a general of the Vietnamese army, Huynh was a biochemist and doctor of nuclear medicine. During the Vietnam War, Huynh had traveled to France and the United States to campaign against the American invasion of his country. He was described as excited about Allende's historical win and arrived in Chile in 1971 to work in the health sector. He had been invited by President Allende to share his knowledge on biochemistry. He carried out important research and invented a machine that performed instantaneous blood tests.¹² He ended up finding a home and also started using his skills in the agricultural sector in the Ministry of Agriculture in the Agricultural Development Institute, and also at a shrimp plant in Coquimbo. After the coup in 1973, he got married to a Chilean woman named Olga del Carmen Aliaga Lavin. In the months following the coup, Huynh used his special United Nations passport to support socialists being pursued by the military by establishing contacts with embassies and coordinating their asylum. The idea of the socialist leaders had been to save the lives of a group of their

¹¹ Chile, Informe de La Comisión Nacional de Verdad Y Reconciliación. Vol. 1, 1991, 115.

¹² Iana Rivera, "50 Años: Personas Extranjeras Y Migrantes Expulsados, Asesinados Y Desaparecidos En Dictadura", SERMIG, 2023.

intermediate-level and militant leaders who would be trained abroad in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic. They would later return to Chile with their new skills to join the fight against the dictatorship and replace the socialist leader, who would likely be captured. On the day that he was murdered, Huynh was organizing the asylum of Juan Arias and Juan Carlos Merino, Juan Diaz, and Mario Zamorano Cortés with the Finnish Embassy. According to the testimony of Juan Merino's brother, these men were members of the Socialist youth organization and were being pursued by members of the armed forces. On the day of the coup, the men had fought against the army in an attempt to defend Allende, and intelligence had detected their participation and their roles as leaders within the socialist youth organization and had begun to search for them in their homes.¹³ Cortés and Huynh had met in July 1973, became close, and began helping those who needed asylum. In the early morning of November 26th, 1973, the 5 men were en route to the Finnish Embassy when they were surprised and detained by a military patrol. The next day, their bodies were found by a neighbor; they had gunshot wounds and injuries that did not appear to be from guns. They were also found in Plot 38 in El Arrayán with a slogan attributed to the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), which labeled them as traitors. Neighbors had reported hearing a heavy vehicle and multiple gunshots around 4:00 a.m. Their bodies also showed signs of torture based on their bruises and burn marks. The MIR slogan found near them seemed to be an attempt by the armed forces to frame MIR for the murder and killing of the men. However, given that they had been executed during curfew, signs of torture and use of high-caliber weapons, as well as their shared political affiliation and previous interactions with the armed forces, the Commission came to the conclusion that they had been executed by state agents who violated their right to life.¹⁴

This case is just one example of how the repression of Pinochet's regime strongly and rapidly extended far past Chilean citizens to foreigners. Despite his differing nationality, Huynh's activities as a non-conformer meant that he had to be eliminated in the eyes of state agents. This same logic was also applied to individuals who dared to go against the Chilean dictatorship abroad. Covert networks like Operation Condor made it possible to repress and eliminate the opposition at an international level. It was set up by the security services of Argentina, Bolivia,

¹³ Memoria Viva, "Que Phung Tran Huynh," MemoriaViva.com, 2025.

¹⁴ Museo de la Memoria y Derechos Humanos, "TRAN HUYNH QUE PHUONG – MMDH – Víctimas," Museodelamemoria.cl, 2025.

Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay and advised by the CIA. Operation Condor permitted these nations, which all had dictatorships of their own, to collaborate in persecuting exiles, sharing intelligence, and carrying out clandestine transfers.¹⁵ Governments were able to access intelligence that made it easier to weed out and eliminate the opposition. They believed that the international enemy (Marxists and Democratic allies) required an international military organization. This would allow them to take on enemies who were scattered across South America and seeking refuge in the United States and Europe. The collaboration of these governments allowed their agents to access new spaces and intelligence. This also meant that they could take their violations to a newer level. Victims of Operation Condor ranged from pregnant women and their newborn babies to diplomats and activists.

One of the most renowned cases of this is the assassination of Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and American secretary Ronnie Moffitt. According to Uruguayan Colonel José Alberto Fons, at the suggestion of Chile, one of the objectives of Operation Condor was to eliminate people in any part of the world, people like Letelier.¹⁶ On the 21st of September 1976, Letelier and his colleague Ronnie Moffitt were killed by a bomb that had been placed underneath Letelier's car. He had been an ambassador of the Allende government to the U.S. and had actually been arrested on the day of the coup. After he was freed, he moved to the United States, where he began to work at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. During his time there, he continued to act against the Chilean dictatorship by lobbying from the United States. Right before his death, his Chilean citizenship was removed from him by the dictatorship. Despite attempts by Chilean forces to hide their role in his assassination, it was eventually revealed that agents had been given fake passports to travel to the United States in order to eliminate him.¹⁷ Moffitt and her husband, Michael Moffitt, had been accompanying Letelier to work when the bomb went off. Her husband was injured but survived.

This terrorist attack on American soil sparked a lot of outrage, especially since it was the first time the U.S had dealt with a foreign government as a suspect¹⁸ In 1979 there was even a dissent channel memorandum filed by four State Department officials who called for U.S. policy to

¹⁵Museo de La Memoria Y los Derechos Humanos , *Operación Cóndor*, Ediciones Universidad Tecnológica, 2015, p.17.

¹⁶ Museo de La Memoria Y los Derechos Humanos, *Operación Cóndor*, 2015, p. 18.

¹⁷ Museo de La Memoria Y los Derechos Humanos , *Operación Cóndor*, 2015, pp. 190-195

¹⁸ Becky Little, "How a Dictator Got Away with a Brazen Murder in D.C. In 1976 | HISTORY," HISTORY, 2018.

force Pinochet to step down due to his role in the terrorist attack. They called out the precedent that it would set for other countries with exiles in the United States. Additionally, they mentioned how the decision to entrust Chilean courts with this case would allow them to “accommodate the defiance of Pinochet.”¹⁹ Even though Pinochet did not step down at this time, this message demonstrated the backlash that the regime would continue to face due to their constant human rights violations.

Operation Condor revealed the extent to which the Pinochet regime and its allies were willing to expand authoritarian repression, transforming state violence into a coordinated, transnational project.

Violations Against DINA Agents

Despite being the main perpetrators of state violence, some DINA agents still fell victim to the violence of the dictatorship. DINA’s main priority was to dismantle MIR as effectively as possible. In order to do this, they needed agents. In the early days of DINA, agents were recruited from different branches of the armed forces and carabineros. However, DINA failed to strengthen its selection criteria, which meant that it was not able to recruit the most skilled or committed agents. Most of the agents did not even fully understand the extent of their work; one agent even stated that he had been told he was going on vacation when, in reality, he was becoming a DINA agent.²⁰ The lack of preparation on DINA’s part led to a lot of issues when it was discovered that an agent was sympathetic to the prisoners or, worse, shared the same non-conforming ideologies as the prisoners.

This was evident in the case of Carlos Alberto Carrasco Matus, who was only 21 when he was apprehended on 14th March 1975. Carrasco had been working as an agent and guard in a detention center called Cuatro Alamos. This center was fully operated by DINA, with other security personnel rarely having access to it. It was located inside of Tres Alamos, another detainee camp. Cuatro Alamos consisted of about 12 small cells, one large cell and offices. Detainees were often sent there after being kept in another detention center; they could also be

¹⁹National Security Archive, “The Letelier/Moffitt Assassinations: Policy toward Chile,” National Security Archive, Gwu.edu, 1979.

²⁰ Chile, *Informe de La Comisión Nacional de Verdad Y Reconciliación*, vol. 1, 1991, 860.

transferred to other torture centers or taken out by agents to assist them in arrests. Torture did not occur at this site, and compared to others, it was said to have better living conditions.²¹ During his time there, Carrasco passed information from detainees to leftist parties and their families. Detainees stated that he went by the nickname 'Mauro.' he was described as humane and kind, and had even offered emotional support to them. Once DINA discovered these activities and that he had been a member of a leftist political party before the coup, he was arrested by his own colleagues and brutally tortured. According to some witnesses, he was beaten to death with chains by one of DINA's leaders in the backyard of Villa Grimaldi. Today, his name can be found on a commemorative wall in Villa Grimaldi.²² Since there was no confirmation of his death or body, he is listed as disappeared.

Unfortunately, Carrasco was not the first or last young DINA agent to experience these violations. Rodolfo Valentín Gonzalez was 19 years old when he was detained by DINA on 24th July 1974. He was a conscript of the Chilean Air Force (FACH) and an agent who had been assigned to guard duty at the Military Hospital where political prisoners were held. The Military Hospital was where some detainees were taken to receive treatment. The hospital did not register the detainees brought in by DINA and tended to avoid judicial inquiries about them. Prisoners received fairly professional care considering the pressure and supervision the workers received from DINA agents.²³ Unbeknownst to DINA, Gonzalez's brother had been seeking asylum in the Argentine Embassy due to his militancy and political activities with the left. Gonzalez was also helping prisoners at the hospital by carrying information to and from their families. Once this was discovered by DINA, he was taken to Villa Grimaldi, where he was brutally tortured. At some point during this torture, he was thrown out of a window and required medical attention. After his treatment, he was imprisoned again. Nothing has been heard of him since.

These cases demonstrate the complex nature of institutions and organizations that are rooted in violence. DINA acted as Pinochet's secret police and was the main perpetrator of violations during the dictatorship. It is easy to assume that all agents shared the same violent ideas as their leaders due to the crimes they committed; however, upon deeper inspection, there were agents who became victims of DINA themselves. The absence of proper background checks and

²¹ Chile., Informe de La Comisión Nacional de Verdad Y Reconciliación, 1991, 733.

²² Chile, Informe de La Comisión Nacional de Verdad Y Reconciliación, 1991, 861.

²³ Chile, Informe de La Comisión Nacional de Verdad Y Reconciliación, 1991, 740.

screening of new agents catapulted many young men into an unknown and grave environment. Some became instruments of violence, and others tried to find ways to fight back. Carrasco and Gonzalez represents the moral dilemma that comes with a role as intense as that of a DINA agent; like many others, they had to choose between complacency and taking action. Unfortunately, by choosing the latter, they risked and lost their lives. Due to the large number of people who were disappeared during the dictatorship It is possible that there were many more DINA agents that acted like Carrasco and Gonzalez and met similar fates.

Victims Connected to the Right-Wing

Throughout the dictatorship, members of the right and conservative parties supported Pinochet and viewed him as the “savior” of Chile. They tended to possess the view that socialism would ruin their nation and that they would have fallen into communism if Pinochet had not stepped in. However, supporting the dictatorship did not protect them or their loved ones from the repression and violence of Pinochet’s regime. These supporters had played an important role in fostering a coup climate; protests by right-wing women against Allende had given others the opportunity to notice his weaknesses and air their own grievances with his government as well.²⁴ However, their loyalty to the regime did not guarantee the safety of them and their loved ones. Additionally, It was easy for many to assume that they were safe given the intense crackdown on supporters of the left. These ideas left many right-wing supporters with the belief that they and their loved ones would not be hurt by the dictatorship. One right-wing mother had to face reality when her left-wing son was tortured and killed by agents of the state. On the day of the coup, Josefina Santa Cruz had been ecstatic as the military overthrew Allende; she had even ordered her butler to hang the Chilean flag on the balcony of her expensive apartment. She had thought briefly about her son Roberto Guzmán Santa Cruz, a lawyer who was a militant of the Revolutionary Left Movement. However, she did not believe that any harm would come his way due to their affiliation with other rich right-wing families and their access to the Chilean upper class²⁵. Unfortunately, just 3 days after the coup, he was arrested in La Serena for encouraging miners from the Desvio Norte camp to steal powder magazines and offer armed resistance to the

²⁴ Jack Devine and Vernon Loeb, *Good Hunting*, Sarah Crichton Books, 2014, 58.

²⁵ Aquiles Cordova, “*Golpe de Estado// ‘Si, Yo Maté a Mi Hijo’* Por Aquiles Córdova,” *Revistadefrente.cl*, 2024.

Governing Junta.²⁶ He was tortured for 32 days before being executed on October 16th with 14 other people. His mother expressed how she felt as though she had killed her son because she and many others had called for the coup that opened the door to the atrocities committed by the regime.²⁷ Despite coming from a wealthy family with strong connections to the right, her son still fell victim to the forces of the dictatorship.

Even though MIR and other leftist groups were heavily targeted during the dictatorship, anyone could be at risk. For example, the case of Renato León Zenteno demonstrated how repression under the dictatorship spread well beyond political opposition and reached into groups traditionally aligned with the regime. León Zenteno was a respected Conservador de Bienes Raíces, a prestigious and well-paid legal position in Chile responsible for certifying the legality of property titles and safeguarding the integrity of real estate records. When he died, he was 69 years old and belonged to a conservative family that supported and viewed the military regime favorably. On November 30, 1976, he was found dead in his apartment in the Providencia district of Santiago. His death was initially reported as a heart attack and later framed as a robbery and then a crime motivated by his sexuality. Although an autopsy was ordered, its results were never disclosed, and his family was denied access to official documentation, preventing them from pursuing legal action. More than three decades later, it was revealed that León Zenteno had been killed with sarin gas, a chemical weapon whose use is prohibited under international law.

Testimony later showed that DINA ordered his assassination after he refused to register a series of fraudulent property transactions linked to regime figures.²⁸ This case reveals that even conservative professionals with no political militancy were vulnerable if they obstructed the regime's interests. León Zenteno's death underscores how the dictatorship relied on extreme violence, secrecy, and impunity to enforce compliance, making clear that no social position, political alignment, or loyalty guaranteed protection.

Furthermore, strategic steps were taken in order to prevent justice from being served; it took around 30 years before the true events were revealed. Unfortunately, these forms of obstructions to justice were common at the time. This is evident in the case of Gloria Stockle, a 21-year-old student who was raped, beaten, and killed by soldiers in 1985, and due to intimidation, forgery,

²⁶ Museo de la Memoria y Derechos Humanos, "GUZMAN SANTA CRUZ ROBERTO – MMDH – Víctimas," museodelamemoria.cl, 2025.

²⁷ Córdova, Aquiles. "Golpe de Estado// 'Si, Yo Maté a Mi Hijo' Por Aquiles Córdova." 2024.

²⁸ GritoGrafías, "Téngase Presente: El Olvidado Mártir Del Poder Judicial Y Su Sentencia de Muerte" Gritografiasenred.org, 2023.

and other obstructions to justice, it wasn't until 2011 that her killers received sentences. These obstructions became evident in the treatment of both witnesses and legal actors. Irene Ponce, whose testimony placed Gloria inside the casino on the night of her death and identified officers involved in her assault, was subjected to severe intimidation after speaking out. She reported being followed, receiving threatening phone calls, surviving an attempted abduction, and having a gun pressed to her head with the explicit warning to remain silent if she wanted to live. Fearing for her life, Ponce fled Copiapó and later returned under conditions of extreme insecurity, contributing to contradictions in her testimony that further weakened the case.²⁹ Her experience demonstrates how fear was actively used to silence witnesses and distort the judicial process.

At the same time, Gloria's family and their lawyer, Erick Villegas González, who took on the case at the request of Bishop Fernando Ariztía, faced systematic institutional resistance. Villegas was initially denied access to key case files, publicly insulted, threatened, and even almost intentionally run over by the mayor, Carlos Porcile Valenzuela. Requests for military records and officer photographs were delayed, ignored, or deliberately obstructed by the Army and the Ministry of Defense, while judges repeatedly attempted to close the case despite unresolved evidence.³⁰ Years later, former army sergeant Héctor Florentino Navarrete Jara testified that he had been ordered "eliminated" on the instruction of then-Commander-in-Chief Juan Emilio Cheyre after attempting to reveal information implicating officers in Gloria's murder. He explained how the Commander gathered everyone and dished out orders to cover up the crime; some guards were even given new names and told to impersonate others.³¹ Together, these accounts reveal a system in which state institutions not only perpetrated violence but also prevented justice from occurring through witness intimidation, procedural delays, and the suppression of truth, extending the repression of the dictatorship deep into civilian life and the justice system itself. In 2011 her killers Mario Cristián de Luján Martínez Villarroel, Sebastián Gustavo Wladimir Flores Cañas, and Teodoro Ivo Lingua Latorre, were sentenced to 5 years in prison, granted probation, and were ordered to pay one hundred million pesos to the victim's siblings for the moral damage they inflicted on them.³² There were mixed opinions on this

²⁹ Francisco Martorell, *El Caso de Gloria Stockle: Otra Historia de Impunidad*, LOM Ediciones, 1998, pp. 50-55.

³⁰ Francisco Martorell, *El Caso de Gloria Stockle: Otra Historia de Impunidad*, 1998, pp. 57-62.

³¹ "Cheyre ordenó eliminarme: Ex sargento acusa a comandante en jefe del Ejército," *El Periodista*, 2002.

³² Poder Judicial, "Corte Suprema Dicta Sentencia Definitiva En Caso de Homicidio de Gloria Stockle," *Pjud.cl*, 2012.

sentencing; however, it was a step forward for victims who were violated by the state and its agents. If the leaders had reported the crime and provided the criminals, the commission would have considered it to be a common crime. However, due to the steps taken to hide the truth, the moral responsibility of the state was compromised; hence, there was a violation of human rights according to the Commission.³³

To conclude, this project used archival research to show that repression during the Chilean dictatorship affected far more than one group of people. By examining documents and case studies, it becomes clear that victims included political activists, civilians, women, high-ranking officials, and even individuals targeted beyond Chile's borders. These violations were not isolated incidents but part of a deliberate and organized system of state violence designed to silence opposition and maintain control.

Looking at these cases through archives helps move beyond statistics and exposes the human cost of the dictatorship. Preserving and engaging with these records is essential not only for understanding the past but also for preventing denial and historical distortion. Commemorative memory plays a key role in this process by honoring victims, acknowledging the full scope of repression, and reinforcing the importance of human rights and accountability in post-dictatorship Chile.

³³ Chile. Informe de La Comisión Nacional de Verdad Y Reconciliación, 1991, p. 20.

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“*Cheyre ordenó eliminarme: Ex sargento acusa a comandante en jefe del Ejército.*” El Periodista. October 17, 2002.

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