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CIVIL ENGAGEMENT IN ARGENTINA
AFTER THE LAST DICTATORSHIP

By

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Abstract

How has the legacy of the Argentine dictatorship affected civil engagement? This study helps understand 1) dilemmas of an authoritarian regime's transition to democracy; 2) changes in the form of civic engagement, from conventional political participation to social movements; and 3) how civic engagement is influenced by the narratives and symbols that create historical memory. I will compare Argentina with similar political experiences of democratization and new social movements in Latin America since the late 1980s.

Introduction

Argentina is a large country in the southern cone of Latin America. Its territory ranges from the southern tip of the frozen Patagonia to Argentina's subtropical border with Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay. Argentina boasts many cultural achievements like the soccer prowess of famous figures like Messi and Maradona, Tango the national dance, famous Malbec wines from the Mendoza region, rich Argentine Asado, and bitter Argentine Mate. Nonetheless, life in Argentina has not always been as laid back as their thriving cultural heritage would suggest. Rather, Argentina has experienced waves of political turmoil culminating in the last dictatorship (1976-1983). This traumatic event is burned into the historical memory and cultural identity of the people today.

The last dictatorship was a brutal and difficult period in Argentine history. It began in 1976 when a military coup overthrew the democratically elected president Isabel Perón. The senior commander of the Argentine army Jorge Rafael Videla came to the helm of the bureaucratic-authoritarian regime and spearheaded a system of "national

reorganization” with severe repression of all political dissidence. During this time between 10,000 and 30,000 people, labeled as “dissenters”, “terrorists”, or “sympathizers” by the regime were forcibly disappeared; this involved arrest or kidnaping, psychological and/or physical torture, and murder by the state. (Freedom House). Of those forcibly disappeared, known as “desaparecidos”, students, unionizers, and laborers were the primary victims of state terror. The regime lasted until 1983 when civil rule was once again restored to Argentina, thanks to the work of social movements, political pressures, economic failures, and a humiliating military defeat against Britain over the Malvinas-Falkland Islands.

The Argentina we see today is vastly affected by the experience of the military dictatorship. This paper will argue that the legacy of the military dictatorship changed the political culture of Argentina for generations to come. This is because the historical memory lives on. Consequently, Argentina is a fascinating example of the dilemmas in an authoritarian regime’s transition to democracy seen throughout Latin America. In the transition, changes in the form of civic engagement emerge. Thus, Argentina’s past propels them away from conventional political participation toward a more skeptical yet more participatory method of contribution through social movements. The social movements themselves, through their activism and symbolism, are instrumental in forming the public discourse about politics, shaping Argentina’s historical memory.

Literature Review

There is a vast literature on the topics of democratic transitions, Latin American political and economic experiences, and specific Argentine history. This next section will

lay out some of the most influential theories which can help frame the argument on a changing Argentine political culture.

Firstly, in order to understand events today, we must examine a history of political changes in Argentina. Prior to the last dictatorship, Argentina's political allegiances vacillated between authoritarian regimes and democratic regimes. The following timeline is compiled by Vanden and Prevost:

To begin with, Argentine independence from Spain was won in 1816 and immediately followed by a civil war between federal and centralist blocs. The nation was united for the first time under the dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosa (1829-1852). Then, in 1853, a national constitution was drafted based on the United States presidential system, opening Argentina to democracy; but, throughout the next decades (1862-80) oligarchic interest groups controlled the means of power. The oligarchy produced political stability through the export-import growth model (1880-1916), this catapulted Argentina's agricultural elites towards economic success; but disenchanted low-class masses rose in opposition because many did not feel they reaped the rewards of the economic growth. 1916-1930 saw massive democratic movements under the radical middle class administrations of Yrigoyen and Alvear (Vanden and Prevost, 2015).

This era of democratization was abruptly ended with the Great Depression and subsequent economic crisis. Faced with financial disaster, Argentina had a military coup which instated the oligarchies of elite Buenos Aires business owners and their import substitution economic policies (1930-1943). Failure to fix the economy led to mass disenchantment, and Argentina once again sought democracy in 1943. Populist leader Juan Perón was elected president, promising to improve the situation for the working

class; but economic frustrations led to instability again, and during the period of 1955-1966 Argentina experienced a wave of back and forth military dictatorships and limited democratic regimes. In 1966-1973 a bureaucratic-authoritarian regime struggled with socioeconomic problems, urban expansion, and guerrilla warfare (Vanden and Prevost, 2015).

Once again disenchanted masses rose up under Peronist elected governments. Perón died in 1974, leaving the presidency to his wife and vice president, Isabel Perón, who struggled to manage rising political and economic stresses, or contain the violent clashes between guerrilla forces and the government. The 1976 coup overthrew Isabel Perón and plunged Argentina into the last dictatorship. Unable to fix the economic pangs of the country and faced with the potential for mass uprising, the military stepped down and called for elections in 1983. That was the last instance of an authoritarian regime in Argentina (Vanden and Prevost, 2015).

Argentina's transition to democracy after the last dictatorship occurred in 1983. Samuel Huntington famously theorized that the transition is part of a wave of democratization that spanned 1974 to 2001. The period is marked by the winding down of the cold war period, decolonization, and a number of cultural factors leading to democratic transitions. This third wave of democratization includes Argentina, several Latin American states, Middle Eastern states, and Post-Soviet states. According to Huntington's theory, democracy occurs in waves; each wave is international in scope, and often followed by a reverse wave of authoritarian regression (Huntington, 1991).

Another element of Argentina's political system is the depth of democracy it experiences. David Collier and Steven Levitsky are authors on democracies; they seek to

categorize types of democracy for academic research. Thus, they note that an initial change from an authoritarian regime towards a democratic regime referenced by Huntington is not enough to describe all aspects of “democracy”. Democracies come on a spectrum of depth based on attributes like party competition, suffrage limits, human rights, and electoral processes (Collier and Levitsky, 1997). Andreas Schedler, an author on democratic processes, simplifies their framework into four base categories: authoritarianism, electoral democracy, liberal democracy, and advanced democracy. In this instance, electoral democracies are imperfect forms of democracy which have more-or-less representative and fair elections, but often lack the protection of political and civil rights found in liberal democracies; while advanced democracies represents a deep and fair democratic system (Schedler, 1998).

Democratic consolidation has been used to refer to the movement of one form of democracy to a higher form in the spectrum and the institutionalization of the democratic status. Schedler has written extensively on the idea of democratic consolidation, which is problematic as the term’s use depends on different horizons (starting points) and viewpoints (whether the change is considered positive or negative). Democratic consolidation seeks to avoid democratic breakdown (when a liberal or electoral democracy become an authoritarian regime) and erosion (when a liberal democracy becomes an electoral democracy). Consolidation also seeks democratic completion (when an electoral democracy becomes a liberal democracy) and democratic deepening (when an electoral democracy or liberal democracy become advanced democracies). A further concept in democratic consolidation is organization (when a liberal democracy undergoes

a process of institutionalizing of liberal values), which rather than move a government on the spectrum, simply reinforces its position (Schedler, 1998).

In the case of Argentina, the 1976 coup would be an example of democratic breakdown; afterward the 1983 stepping down of the military dictatorship led to electoral democracy, but it wasn't until later in the Kirchner administration (if ever was the case) that Argentina experienced a democratic completion. The process of democratic consolidation seeks to deepen this level of democracy.

A crucial aspect of this research is the idea that a regime can leave a political legacy. There are two predominant arguments in this area: path dependence and regime legacy. Path dependence is varied in scope throughout the literature but it tends to suggest that states follow their political trajectories because changing courses is too costly and therefore unlikely. Authors who are proponents of this political legacy argument include Paul Pierson, Margaret Levi, and Douglass North. But Pérez-Liñán and Mainwaring suggest an alternative in Latin America. They note that the turbulent history of the region would invalidate a strict interpretation of path dependence. For example, in the post-1977 period many states transitioned towards or away from democracy despite long histories of the opposing regime type. Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile fell into authoritarianism after experiencing democracy, and El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Paraguay (which had historically been authoritarian) transitioned towards democracy. Thus, path dependence is limited in Latin America to the context and it is not nearly as deterministic as the theory would suggest. A regime legacy argument is similar in that it seeks to connect historical experience with later political experiences, but it is less-deterministic and more open in scope. It does not emphasize how improbable major shifts

in political realities might be; rather, it focuses on the increased likelihood of states recovering to an earlier democratic path. This regime legacy then helps to explain how and why previous regime types affect the levels of democracy in the present, including how distant experiences of democracy separated by lengthy phases of authoritarianism affect later democracy (Pérez-Liñán and Mainwaring, 2013).

Therefore, rather than path dependency, regime legacy seems pertinent to the Argentine case. The research of Pérez-Liñán and Mainwaring suggests lasting effects of competitive politics found in liberal democracies, particularly in political parties and legal structures. This is because party members are usually socialized into the party platform and strongly invested in their positions which favor democratic methods. So, although the party ideology may change over time, the fact that people engage in parties promotes the continuation or reassertion of democracy. The same effect happens with the legal system. When a state has a strong history of judicial proceedings, it becomes enculturated so that people prefer a transition to democracy or continuation of democracy. Sometime judicial figures remain constant even when regimes change so these figures and the institution can carry the legacy of a democratic regime. Nevertheless, if an authoritarian regime changes the judicial system dramatically, then this has shown to have an adverse effect on the continuation of the legacy of democracy in Latin America (Pérez-Liñán and Mainwaring, 2013).

One aspect of the last dictatorship's regime legacy is state terrorism. Terrorism is defined as, violence or threat of violence which intentionally targets defenseless civilians with the aim of inspiring fear in the targeted population for political reasons. State terror occurs when the state is the perpetrator of such fear tactics. All governments use coercion

to some degree but state terrorism is different. One may take war or law enforcement for example; both can be harmful but neither are considered terrorism. One difference between state terror and normal means of coercion is the unpredictability of terror. Other forms of political violence used by states are often predicated on publicly known laws, declarations of war, or publicized grievances. State terrorism on the other hand is marked for its secrecy. There is denial on the part of the state. For example, when the government of Argentina began “disappearing” people. The government denied all connection to the crime. Most of the people kidnapped by the government were executed and their bodies along with other evidence was hidden. An aspect of secrecy that made it an effective tool for the regime was the enactment of a system of selective secrecy. In general, the public was aware of who was taking people, as many of the desaparecidos were openly taken into custody by state officials, but the actual details of what happened to these people was left to the imagination. It was also unknown what, if anything, the victim did to deserve disappearance. The unpredictability generated fear. The psychological impact on civilians caused self-policing of all thoughts and actions that might result in being disappeared and tortured or killed. People’s uncertainty over the exact reasons for disappearing caused them to police themselves more closely than the government had the capacity to do through any conventional means. Thus, the goal of state terror is to toughen government control through intimidation. Authoritarian systems naturally have a crisis of legitimacy and only fragile control of the populace, so these methods have proved appealing for asserting control. Nonetheless, in many cases, like in Argentina, the very means of terror become the catalyst for the establishment of anti-regime actors (Sisson, 2011).

One of the struggles the Argentine civil government of 1983 faced when transitioning to democracy was the question of how to handle the atrocities committed by genocidaires (those who perpetrated the genocide). This is an example of why democratic completion did not occur immediately. The original situation of the military stepping down from power included an amnesty agreement for certain government officials, and members of the military who committed the genocide. This limitation of accountability was one reason the new regime was characterized as a “restricted democracy.” In 1986 *La Ley de Obediencia Debida* (The Law of Due Obedience) protected from prosecution all members of the military who were working under orders, while *La Ley de Punto Final* (The Law of Full Stop) limited the time frame in which a case against the military would be possible. The initial democracy under Raúl Alfonsín was too unstable to challenge the amnesty laws (Whigham, K. 2016).

With a lack of upfront justice for the human rights violations experienced, Argentine society initially had a profound struggle writing its historical memory. Martha Minow, a specialist in historical memory from Harvard, writes on the topic of resolution of political violence and the peace building process; specifically looking at whether justice under the law or moral peace building is more effective in honoring the memory of victims of political violence and preventing future disaster. She concludes that individual human rights seem fragile when those responsible for committing crimes against humanity are not held accountable to the full extent of the law with prosecutions; but broad human rights are more supported by peace commissions than mere trials. So, settling on peace negotiations or truth commissions might do more good in preventing mass human rights violations in the future and honoring/reconciling the victims and their

families than only trials. But Minow demonstrates how both are important for building a future democracy (Minow, 2008).

When considering these various aspects of violence in Argentina, it is impossible to overlook the neoliberal economic factors that precipitated the deteriorating political context. Moreover, a driving factor of the regime changes faced in Argentina has been economic interests. A strong political focus on the business elites and foreign investment occurred in 1966-1973 and during the last dictatorship in 1976-1983 which led to the adoption of neoliberal policies in Argentina. “The term *neoliberalism* is used to describe a political and economic doctrine as well as a set of economic policies that have become hegemonic in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Originally coined by its proponents, the term today is usually employed by neoliberalism’s critics to refer to a set of policy prescriptions that includes an emphasis on free markets, deregulation, conservative monetary policies, the lowering of tariffs, and the privatization of state assets and services.” (Neoliberalism, 2008).

In Argentina neoliberalism manifested itself with the implementation of structural reforms which included privatization of state owned companies, reduction of state employment, changes to the welfare system, decentralization of administration, economic deregulation, and the liberalization of the market for investment from multinational corporations and foreign trade. Initially Argentina did receive large investments and saw its GDP did increase while inflation decreased. But large systemic problems were exacerbated by the policies. Additionally, reforming the state proved to be ineffective in reducing the detrimental political practices of clientelism, patrimonialism, and corruption which plagued Argentina. Poverty and inequality rose, the working and middle classes

were affected by unemployment, the wealth of the upper class could not offset the impoverishment of many; and, Argentina soon after fell into a recession. Under governmental austerity, growing numbers of unemployed and newly impoverished citizens found themselves unprotected by either the government or unions (Villalón, 2007).

When considering economic status and the possibility of democracy or authoritarian regression, one must note modernization theory and its critics. This theory suggests a link between economic development and democracy (Lipset, 1959). Modernization theory has been criticized because it failed to explain why the relatively wealthy industrialized South American states experienced a democratic breakdown in the 1960s and 1970s. Beyond that, some studies found other variables with correlations to democracy, like consensus (Lijphart, 1977). Lijphart's work would suggest that large class divisions are a stumbling block for democracy, and therefore a large middle class rather than a polarized class system is an asset to democracy. The many variables found in correlation with democracy and the history of the newly industrialized states such as Argentina suggest that mere economic factors are not a guarantee of democracy. In fact, some scholars have gone so far as to link the very factors of modernization theory (large middle and working classes) with the emergence of authoritarianism in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil, as the newly mobilizing groups found their demands blocked by the economic limits of import-substitution industrialization (ISI), and a coalition including the military and economic technocrats stepped in to break the impasse. O'Donnell points to the populist policies and economic agenda supported by the middle and working class which led elite interest groups to seize power. In this case a large popular class coinciding

with other contingent factors may have supported democratic breakdown rather than democratic completion, and therefore modernization theory is limited in its conceptual ability to explain democracy in the region. (O'Donnell, 1973)

Research Design

This essay seeks to examine several questions related to the Argentine post-authoritarian experience, bringing forth the question: “How has the legacy of the last dictatorship affected civil engagement in Argentina?” as the primary focus of research, and comparatively: “How do military dictatorships affect the political culture of Latin American states generally?”

The hypotheses that will be examined are: hypothesis 1: Argentine citizens support democracy strongly because of the legacy of a military dictatorship; hypothesis 2: Argentine citizens mistrust the government system strongly because of the legacy of a military dictatorship; hypothesis 3: Argentine citizens do not participate highly in the traditional politics (voting, party affiliation, proposing candidates, etc.) because of the legacy of a military dictatorship; hypothesis 4: Argentine citizens are very engaged in non-traditional politics (in protests and social movements) because of the legacy of a military dictatorship; and hypothesis 5: The political art and symbols developed because of the dictatorship help to shape the historical memory of Argentina.

To support or reject these hypotheses, samples of literature, primary sources, and public opinion polls will be compared. Several sections of this report utilize data from the Latin American Public Opinion Poll (LAPOP), which publishes a biennial “Barometer of the Americas Report”. These reports are a compilation of data from questionnaires administered in various Latin American states. Argentina was surveyed in 2008, 2010,

2012, and 2014. The date of the survey used will be noted with the data presented. As each survey has a different focus, some were more applicable to the questions presented in this argument. Where quantitative data was not available, this research looks toward qualitative data comparing research from various literary sources to support or reject our claims.

Dilemmas of an Authoritarian Regime's Transition to Democracy

When considering the various dilemmas in an authoritarian regimes transition to democracy, the themes of historical memory come to the forefront. How will the new democracy deal with its past, and how do citizens construct their new identity? Did the last dictatorship permanently affect Argentina's political culture? This section will be looking at two aspects of Argentina's political culture and transition: support for democracy and trust of the government system. (That is, hypothesis 1: Argentine citizens support democracy strongly because of the legacy of a military dictatorship; and hypothesis 2: Argentine citizens mistrust the government system strongly because of the legacy of a military dictatorship.)

Democracy in Argentina

According the public opinion polls, Argentina's citizens support democracy. In fact, all Latin American states show a preference for democracy over authoritarianism, with a regional mean of 77.7 percent. Argentina ranks slightly more supportive than average with 84% (Booth and Richard, 2015). Beyond that, Argentina has the highest level of political tolerance for the rights of people criticizing the regime at 70%, while the regional average lags at 53.7% according to the 2010 Barometer of the Americas (Booth

and Richard, 2015); Favoring the ideals of democracy and supporting civil rights such as freedom of speech indicates a preference for a liberal democracy.

This high level of support for democracy is mirrored in Argentina's lack of support for authoritarianism. It is logical that after a period of state terrorism by a bureaucratic-authoritarian regime, Argentine citizens might react poorly to the suggestion of re-introduction of authoritarian rule. Data from the public opinion poll, Barometer of the Americas 2010, confirms this dissatisfaction with authoritarian rules when Argentine participants reported only a 13.5% support the establishment of a low tolerance authoritarian system. Comparatively this is the lowest percentage in the region (Lodola, 2011). Additionally, according to a study by the Latin American Political Opinion Poll report, "Argentina is one of the places where the citizens believe strongly that the president should not govern without the congress, should not ignore the supreme court of justice, should not limit the power of their opposition party, should not impede the minority opinion and should not assume that minorities represent a threat to the country. In fact, [Argentina] occupies last place in studies of "illiberal attitudes" (Lodola, 2011).

What are the roots of Argentine democracy? Argentina's colonial legacy added elements of authoritarian structures to Argentine culture, but Pearce also suggests that there was a democratic impetus in the associational lives of Latin Americans of the 1700s. So, while colonial legacy was not a good source of democratic values, "The inherited authoritarian logic rooted in everyday experience and expectations did not go unchallenged". In fact, through the independence struggles and the post-colonial experience new methods of social and intellectual exchange emerged which included cultural and scientific periodicals, and academic groups. Social capital and activism

appeared within the church systems, families, and friend groups. Their legacy continued even after the movements died. In the late 18th century, racial divisions and poor literacy limited participation, but “spaces for public discussion had appeared and were used to challenge intellectually the authority of tradition and religion... These contingencies provide clues to the active ingredients, rather than structural impediments, which have shaped Latin American political life.” (Pearce, 2004).

When classifying Argentina’s type of democracy, it is important to recognize the specific cultural and historical factors that make their political experience specific to the national experience and cannot be assumed to copy the pattern of other large developed states. For example, democracy in Argentina is different in form from that of the United States. “Argentine intellectual tradition, again very different from the North American one, is that even if Latin America changes sociologically and economically, its political and civil society situation will continue to look quite different from that of the United States. It is emphatically not the case that, as socio-economic development goes forward, Latin American political institutions and civil society will necessarily or automatically come to resemble those of the United States’ (Wiarda, 2003).

However, one must question; “Is Argentina’s democracy related to their dictatorship experience?” With the data so far presented, it is likely that the first part of hypothesis 1 can be supported: Argentine citizens do in fact support democracy, but the next challenge is to link Argentina’s support to the legacy of the military dictatorship.

Did Argentina support democracy prior to the military dictatorship? According to Modernization theory, Argentina’s history of relative wealth and large educated middle classes had the advantage of fostering greater political participation when compared with

states in the region that lacked a strong educated middle class. During periods such as 1916-1930, 1943-1955, and 1973-1976, Argentina functioned under democracies with high levels of civil engagement, elections, and political parties (Vanden and Prevost, 2015). This shows that Argentina had developed a culture of democracy. And, according to the regime legacy argument of Pérez-Liñán and Mainwaring, these periods of democracy can have an effect on the probability of future democracy.

Looking more closely at Argentina’s previous political transitions, one finds a correlation with economic stresses; but this pattern is broken after the last dictatorship. Argentina in the post-dictatorship era has had a number of economic crises leading to political instability and continued tensions between the military and civil government. Additionally, after the dictatorship, several presidents such as Alvarez and de la Rúa resigned and called for new elections. This is a break from the past because prior to the last dictatorship, political and extreme economic struggles were faced by changing regime type. Democratic regimes would be overthrown or military regimes would be forced to step down and relinquish power to civil governments. In the twenty-first century, Argentina’s military did not try to overthrow civil government with the economic struggles. The 2001 economic crisis for example was not followed by a return to authoritarianism. According to Freedom House, “Democratic institutions remain imperfect in Argentina, but the risk of returned military rule appears low” (Freedom House, n.d)

Date	Regime Type	Reason for change	Method of Change
1816	Independence and civil war	Competing elite interests	Civil war
1829-1852	Dictatorship	Elite interests	Step down

1853	National constitution	Mass democracy	
1862-1880	Oligarchy	Rural elite	
1980-1916	Oligarchy ISI	Urban Elite	
1916-1930	Mass democracy Yrigoyen and Alvear	Masses	
1930-1943		Economic crisis	Military coup
1943	Perón	Populism	Populism
1955-1966	Back and forth dictatorships and democracy	Economic crisis	Several military coups
1966-1973	Military-dictatorship	Fell out of power because of economic problems	Military coups
1973-1976	Peronism democracy	Economic	Populism
1976-1983	The last dictatorship	Economic	Military coup
2001		Economic crisis	No military coup. social movements

At this point, it is safe to accept the first hypothesis that “Argentine citizens support democracy strongly because of the legacy of a military dictatorship,” since Argentina did not become an authoritarian regime after the economic crisis of 2001 as was their pattern, and because of the public opinion poll data which currently shows high support for democratic values and the lowest support for authoritarian values. The sentiment of the population is well summed up in the report *Nunca Más* (a truth commission in 1984 investigating the dictatorship regime’s crimes against humanity). They conclude saying that “Only with democracy will we be certain that Never Again [Nunca Más] will events such as these, which have made Argentina so sadly infamous throughout the world, be repeated in our nation.” (Nunca Más, 1984).

Mistrust of the State

The next section looks at Argentine mistrust of the institutions and systems of state governance. Further public opinion data is useful in understanding the second hypothesis: “Argentine citizen mistrusts the government system strongly because of the legacy of a military dictatorship.”

Today when polled, people in Argentina report low support for government. When broken down into specific aspects of support, Argentina shows a 51.2% support of the institutions of government, 50.3% support for the system generally, 43.9% pride in the system, 40.4 % support for the judicial system, and 39.3 % support of human rights. This shows low levels of support for judicial system and human rights record, unsurprising of a state that experienced a military coup (Lodola, 2011). Additionally, Argentina has some of the lowest confidence levels in political institutions of all the states surveyed in the 2010 Barometer of the Americas. They report the lowest levels of confidence in the president, National Election Agency, Armed Forces and second lowest position of confidence for the Supreme Court and political parties. In all categories, Argentina is well below the mean for Latin America.

Topic	Argentina	Latin America Mean
Confidence in the president	33%	54.5%
National Election Agency	38%	52.8%
Armed Forces	39%	62.3%
Supreme court	37%	48.8%
Political parties	28%	35.7%

Interestingly other states that had oppressive military regimes do not rank nearly as low on these confidence polls as Argentina. According to Booth and Richard, authors of *Latin American Political Culture*, this can be explained because Argentina became an example to other militaries in the region that had committed acts of state terror. Afraid to catch the “Argentine flu,” other militaries sped up negotiations and the removal of military governments to maintain their institutional prestige. After stepping down, other militaries worked on public goodwill projects to lessen their fall while the Argentine military was still shrouded in injustice and cruelty (Booth and Richard, 2015).

Additionally, the increased support for the judicial branch and the government generally in states like Chile as compared to Argentina can be accounted for by the fact that even after the regime crushed the judicial branch, many judges from the previous regime stayed in the court system and carried the regime legacy of democracy so that Chile could quickly rebuild its democratic rule of law, while Argentina’s judicial branch did not experience the same continuity (Pérez-Liñán and Mainwaring, 2013). As mentioned before, Argentina failed to prosecute the offenders of state terror policies and human rights violations immediately following its transition to democracy. This served to delegitimize the courts and the government structures.

To understand the delegitimization of the state in Argentina it is important to go back to the work of Dr. Minow and others who investigate historical memory. Argentine citizens’ lack of trust in their government may have a lot to do with the reconstruction of identity after the dictatorship. In the case of Argentina, the military stepped down under conditions of legal impunity requiring that no trials would fall on members of the military or state involved in the genocide. This led to a public silence on the topic as no justice

was served. Offenders of human rights abuses walked freely in the streets as fear, pain, and political instability kept the society from prosecuting.

To the credit of the new Argentine civilian government, a non-judicial peace commission was formed in 1984 to investigate the disappeared. This peace commission was the first step in building trust in the state. This commission was named CONADEP, the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons. The commission could do nothing to enact justice; rather it collected the stories of survivors, bystanders, and a few offenders. In CONADEP's reaction, they emphatically state that "The recent military dictatorship brought about the greatest and most savage tragedy in the history of Argentina. Although it must be justice which has the final word, we cannot remain silent in the face of all that we have heard, read and recorded. This went far beyond what might be considered criminal offences, and takes us into the shadowy realm of crimes against humanity. Through the technique of disappearance and its consequences, all the ethical principles which the great religions and the noblest philosophies have evolved through centuries of suffering and calamity have been trampled underfoot, barbarously ignored." (Nunca Más, 1984). In trying to understand the impact of historical memory, the next section will look closely at aspects of the report of CONADEP, the first attempt by the government to soften the blow of the transition.

The report reveals the extent of human rights crimes committed. It highlights the systematic and premeditated nature of the human rights violations, recognizing that the crimes of kidnapping and torture were identical across the state. It also reveals that "Human rights were violated at all levels by the Argentine state" (Nunca Más, 1984). This was unfortunate for trust in government and it further emphasizes Argentina's

struggle with state legitimacy. The report does not only accuse government systems blindly, it also identifies the agency of individuals in the crimes. It recognizes that many of offenders committed acts of genocide and other crimes against humanity under orders, but the extent of their crimes revealed an amount of personal sadism (Nunca Más, 1984). Argentina, having seen the darker side of human capability, reports some of the lowest rates of interpersonal trust in Latin America and in 2010 the second highest perception of insecurity (Lodola, 2011).

The report also commentates on the loss of civil rights available to people specifically in the area of Habeas Corpus. The government committed crimes against its own citizenry moving everyday people into the unidentifiable category of *desaparecidos* “Silence was the only reply to all the habeas corpus writs, an ominous silence that engulfed them.” (Nunca Más, 1984); again, delegitimizing the judicial system.

The Commission highlights the state terrorism, commenting on the vulnerability of Argentine society. They notice a fear anyone can have that they would be victimized by the state regardless of their innocence. The terror was a witch hunt against subversives. This fear led to silence, and even with the CONADEP’s investigations it is safe to say the 9,000 survivors interviewed were a small percentage and the true figures of the crimes are much higher. The CONADEP report says that “Many families were reluctant to report a disappearance for fear of reprisals. Some still [in 1984] hesitate fearing a resurgence of these evil forces.” (Nunca Más, 1984). The campaign of silence does not end there, clues and documentation of the crimes have been destroyed to obscure the testimonies and historical memory surrounding the events (Nunca Más, 1984). “Our investigations we have been insulted and threatened by the very people who committed these crimes... Far

from expressing any repentance, they continue to repeat the old *excuses* that they were engaged in a *dirty war*, or that they were saving the country and its Western, Christian values, when in reality they were responsible for dragging these values inside the bloody walls of the dungeons of repression... All we are asking for is truth and justice... Truth and justice, it should be remembered, will allow the innocent members of the armed forces to live with honour” (Nunca Más, 1984). All this further points to the delegitimization of the government system.

CONADEP made several recommendations to the state to ensure that human rights violations would never be repeated, mainly that a court would follow up their commission and investigate their findings, pass laws to provide for the families of the disappeared, declare forced disappearance a crime against humanity, support human rights organizations, obligate human rights education, strengthen the courts ability to handle the human rights issues, and repeal all repressive laws still in force (Nunca Más, 1984).

Although a commission is useful in healing public memory, the recommendations of the commission would not be followed through for some time. In fact, it wasn't until the Kirchner administration in 2005 when the Punto Final laws (which had previously granted amnesty to genocidaires and their conspirators) were overturned (Stahler-Sholk et al, 2014, p. 224).

Ultimately this commission laid the groundwork for national acceptance and reconciliation, but further democratic deepening of the state would not occur right away. According to Sitrin, the true re-legitimation of the state after the period of state silence and social movements between 1976 and 1983 occurred with the election of Nestor

Kirchner in 2003 who introduced leftists back into government, funded social movements, and began a human rights focus. His economic reforms bolstered the middle class and provided subsidies to the working class and unemployed. But there was criticism that the economic recovery introduced by Kirchner did not factor in the continued struggle in the lowest classes of society (Stahler-Sholk et al 2014).

Furthermore, these structures were delegitimized later when the neoliberal economic policies, pushed for during the dictatorship, began to affect the common people poorly. It was in the early 1990s when Argentina was forced to reconcile this legacy and begin the process of structural reform mandated by the IMF and World Bank; high levels of inequality and unemployment ensued. When Argentines looked for support from their governmental institutions and unions they were sent away empty. The state was no longer able to provide for the wants and need of its citizens, leading to further distrust and a crisis of legitimacy. Unions and political parties were also delegitimized because of illegal political practices, falsification of public interests, and misuse of funds (Villalón, 2007).

With this information, we can accept the second hypothesis: “Argentine citizens mistrust the government system strongly because of the legacy of a military dictatorship.” It is seen in the public opinion polls; in the literature when looking at the depth of state terror experienced in Argentina; when comparing the difference between Argentina’s experience in the military dictatorship and other states’ experiences with dictatorships; and in the economic circumstances related to the policies of the last dictatorship.

Changes in the Forms of Civic Engagement

Mistrust of the government system but support of democracy seems like an unnatural combination, but Argentine citizens have learned to balance their political needs and their mistrust of the government through a process of participatory civil engagement. Argentina has some of the highest levels of protests in Latin America and vibrant social movements that have swept into the public sphere. This leads us to our next set of hypotheses: hypothesis 3: “Argentine citizens do not participate highly in the traditional politics (voting, party affiliation, proposing candidates, etc.) because of the legacy of a military dictatorship”; and hypothesis 4: “Argentine citizens are very engaged in non-traditional politics (in protests and social movements) because of the legacy of a military dictatorship.”

Low Levels of Traditional Participation

Several statistical evidences from public opinion polls represent the low levels of conventional political participation in Argentina. Traditional political participation in this case refers to supporting unions, political parties, political candidates, being involved in local government committees or voting. Low levels of support for the traditional paths of political voice can be seen in the 2010 Barometer of the Americas, where Argentina only showed a 19.5% support rate for traditional political parties. The highest support came from Uruguay for comparison with 66.2% support of political parties. In that same study only three other Latin American countries reported support for political parties lower than 19.5% (The Americas Barometer, 2010). Another indicator of traditional political participation is attendance of local municipal meetings. According to the 2012 Barometer of the Americas, only 4.3 % of Argentines attended local municipal meetings. This is the

second lowest rate in Latin America with an average of 9.48% in the region. Only Chile has a lower percentage with 4.1% (The Americas Barometer, 2012).

There are several possible reasons for Argentina's low levels of traditional political participation. Argentine citizens could not participate in the traditional politics during the dictatorship's repression. They experienced state terror, human rights abuses, limited civilian rights, and a systematic state level conspiracy (Nunca Más, 1984). The government, judicial, union, and political parties' struggle with legitimacy continue to plague their membership numbers (Villalón, 2007).

More recent experiences keep people skeptical of government representation. This includes high levels of perceived corruption at the state level. Examples include President Menem's links to narco-money laundering (Hedges, Jill) or President Macri's connection with the Panama Papers (leaked files related to an elite tax haven in association with the law firm Mossack Fonseca) (Bilton, 2016). Corruption and inadequate representation have delegitimized even the biggest unions and political parties (Villalón, 2007).

We can accept the third hypothesis because the delegitimization of the judicial branch and other governmental institutions was fermented in the Argentine dictatorship experience and the transitional struggles. Thus, low public opinion polls on government involvement in the present can be linked to the legacy of the dictatorship.

High Levels of Non-Traditional Participation

What is non-traditional participation? For the purpose of this article, it will be defined as social movements, protesting, and any means of acting politically outside of the standard paths of politics. The next hypothesis on the topic is hypothesis 4:

“Argentine citizens are very non-traditionally politically engaged (in protests and social movements) because of the legacy of the last dictatorship.”

To begin with, the people of Argentina have a lot of interest in politics. Argentina, Uruguay, and the Dominican Republic express the highest levels of political interest in Latin America. Thus, as has been established previously, Argentina is a country where people are strongly supportive of the values of democracy, increasingly skeptical of the legitimacy of political institutions, unlikely to participate in politics through the standard channels of government and political parties, and now they are also highly interested in politics. For these reasons, many citizens of Argentina must voice their political concerns in a different way (Lodola, 2011).

Academics have questioned whether traditional participation and collective action are contradictory forces in a democratic system; but, in Argentina it must be asserted that they are not. In much of Latin America social movements insist on autonomy from traditional political structures, but Pearce maintains that this is not an “anti-political” act; rather, it is a highly political strategy. This fundamental strategy exists from a need to separate the traditional structure of how politics in the region has distributed resources and power. What makes a social movement different is that it does not accept the structure of society forced on people by history and by elites; rather, it is participatory and individuals make choices in its creation. These choices can really change someone’s experience on a personal level. It is individual agency that through contentious politics, highlights inherent problems within Argentine democracy, particularly as distribution of resources is considered. Additionally, social movements redefine the “masses” and therefore challenge some of Argentina’s populist politics. Moreover, the social

movements are training and empowerment platforms for future political leaders (Pearce, 2004).

Protesting is one of the ways in which Argentine citizens act politically as an alternative to engaging in the traditional political structure. Actually, in 2010 Argentina has the highest percentage of citizens who participated in protests of all the states in the Americas (including the United States and Canada). A significant 15.4% of responders participated in a protest within the year, and it is not unusual to see demonstrations in the streets when there is a conflictual issue in need of political resolutions. Protestors tend to act of their own volition, often receiving some sort of answer from corresponding politicians. These protests are regular and can include direct actions such as the invasion of private property and blocking of streets (Lodola, 2011).

Today a number of social movements are active in Argentina and broadly in the region. These movements often organize behind common political desires related to various specific citizen interests. Social movements are often critical of the government and intentionally separate from conventional politics. In some ways the traditional structure can support the efforts of social movements and vice versa, as in the case of Argentina's truth commissions which brought to light the human rights abuses of the previous regime. From that report, the Mothers of the Plaza, a social movement organization, was able to identify 255 cases of missing children and resolve 51 of them (Backer, 2003).

The rise of social movements can be linked to the legacy of the dictatorship as social movements played a key role in overthrowing the military. Groups such as the Mothers of the Plaza and the rise of labor in the late 1970s are credited by Freedom

House for increasing the levels of civil engagement through protests and activism in the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, it was a mass protest in December of 1982 that decisively changed the course of events and forced the military to begin relinquishing power (Freedom House, n.d.).

The dictatorship period was not the only period of contentious politics in Argentina. Alternative political groups were active in the 1960s and 1970s. There were popular movements in the 1940s for greater labor rights and radical movements against the oligarchic elites. Some attribute this continual culture of protesting and alternative politics to more recent political struggles. In her article about the rise of social movements, Villalón quotes a 2002 economic protester who claimed, "If it were not for all the Argentines that lost their lives in their struggles for democracy and social justice, we wouldn't be out here standing up for our rights" (Villalón, 2007). Clearly, the historical memory of Argentina's past, possibly the recent memory of the overthrow of the last dictatorship, affected the decision of this person to participate in a social movement.

Argentina is not the only state in Latin America that experiences social movements. In fact, the period since the late 1980s has seen a rise in social movements throughout the region. The largest perhaps is the MST landless peoples' movement in Brazil. Many of these movements tackle issues of human rights, environmental degradation, neoliberal economic policies, indigenous peoples' rights, women's rights, and right of Afro-Latinos. One common thread in all of them is a reaction against the system set in motion by colonization, a system which manifests itself in the inequalities and economic underdevelopment in the region. (Vanden and Prevost, 2015)

Villalón writes about a period of social mobilization in Argentina from 1993 (ten years after the dictatorship) to the present. She characterizes the change in five phases. The first of which she considers to be between 1993 and 1996; the phase emerged with contention characterized by new methods of politics in response to economic problems and a political opening after the self-censorship of the regime began to fall away. Often protesters utilized town revolts and pickets, unrest in cities was high, though the mobilization was still limited and isolated to impoverished areas. The next phase from 1997 to mid-2001 was characterized for its decentralized roadblocks. This is a scale-shift with the movement growing more members and more organization throughout Argentina. The movement picked up steam with unemployed workers and pickets became increasingly popular. The third stage from July–November 2001 featured further civil unrest with national picketing. Organizations came to the forefront at national and regional level coordinating pickets across Argentina. The movements were no longer decentralized, but they also did not go so far as to embrace a vertical leadership structure. The fourth phase had the highest level of social discontent and ran from December 2001 to 2003. This phase increase diffusion with new methods of social movement, from pot bangers, neighborhood assemblies, and barter clubs to graffiti. The fifth phase lasts until the present, and it is different from the others in that the pickets persist but in a more institutionalized capacity. There are several social movement organizations but their following is more fragmented and in general decline (Villalón, 2007).

Marina Sitrin focuses on the movement in the fourth and fifth phases, highlighting the use of horizontally structured social relationships, grassroots empowerment, autonomy, and contested legitimacy. She states that protesting was effective in 2001

when bank accounts were frozen. This was already after a “deepening” crisis which left many in Argentina without work or food. The state did not provide public assistance programs which led to hundreds of thousands of pots bangers “cacerolando”. They took to the streets and chanted “They all must go! Not even one should remain”. The following two weeks saw four members of the government resign and the economy minister was the first to go. On the evening of the 19th a state of siege was declared which led to state power and violence (the established pattern since the colonial era). But instead of fear the people sought greater collective power. That day rather than take the pink house (presidential residence), a symbol of power, some people of Argentina began a lateral movement focusing on each other and their neighborhoods. They rejected traditional power positions and created alternatives autonomously. Neighborhood assemblies, art and media collectives, and collective kitchens blossomed. (Stahler-Sholk et al. 2014).

Street mobilizations bring together diverse sets of people including many marginalized segments of the population. The protestors are described as “both young and old... survivors of the dictatorship and children of the dictatorship... in the same square. All children of the same history” (Stahler-Sholk et al, 2014, p. 209). The young unemployed, women, children, elderly, former union members, ex-militants, and political activists. According to Villalón, the 2001 economic crisis mobilizations could not use the traditional structure because of the partisanship, unionization, corruption, and lack of representation in unions and parties. These needs were not just material but included issues of identity, recognition, and respect. “Argentina was eager for new political

options. The protesters sought an alternative in horizontalism and social movements were born.” (Villalón, 2007).

Beyond mere protesting, in Argentina various methods of mobilization have thrived. These innovative methods often incorporated street mobilizations with massive strikes. The strategy is that movements block streets and work to disrupt the pattern of daily life in a town so that the protesters’ political opinions would be known. In Argentina, the blocking of streets has been systematic, with protesters targeting the most important streets in and between cities as to garner the greatest level of media coverage (Villalón, 2007).

Of the social movements which thrived during the post-dictatorship and particularly early 2000s, a common feature were the neighborhood assemblies. These neighborhood assemblies used public spaces to create better representation as a counter to power. People in neighborhood assemblies met and discussed new ways of supporting each other. Old political activism was added to by new elements of society with the help of horizontal decision making and new communication technologies (Villalón, 2007). Many described the first encounters as a gathering of peoples from street corner to street corner. Together they built day cares, printing stations, gardens, and kitchens among other things. Hundreds of assemblies emerged in the first year after the crisis with 1-300 participants each. Their numbers began decreasing in 2003, and by 2013 there were only a few dozen in the greater Buenos Aires area. But according to Sitrin this is not evidence of the death of horizontal organization, but rather these strategies are still used in provinces such Corrientes, La Rioja (Stahler-Sholk et al, 2014). The neighborhood assemblies also helped to unify groups of the polarized political system to bring specific

demands to local government. The goal of these organizations was to see concrete differences in the standards of living in their communities (Villalón, 2007).

Alongside popular neighborhood assemblies, another method of mobilization became popularized. The Unemployment Workers Movements (MTD) or Piquetero movement arose in the 1990s when social movements were organizing against local governments and corporations in the context of the growing economic crisis. These movements are generally led by women (a phenomenon common in other Latin American states) and fight intergenerational cycles of unemployment. People take to the streets blocking major streets to demand jobs actions. Often these piquetes become alternative societies with assemblies and food. These movements grew after 2001 into some autonomous communities. Environmental issues are also tackled in this manner; strip mining, water damming, and Monsanto operations have been protested through piquetes. MTD are well supported by the political left, though less prevalent today than they initially were (Stahler-Sholk et al, 2014).

A third growing movement in Argentina is the workplace recuperation movement, where workers occupy factories and offices. They continue production of the products or services utilizing cooperative and community based decision making. The movement grew from 2008 to today, and Argentina spearheaded the international adoption of similar movements in the United States, Canada, Latin American, Europe, and Asia. Though political forces try to shut these businesses down, they are so integrated that local communities often rise up in their defense (Stahler-Sholk et al 2014).

The final movement considered by Sitrin is the H.I.J.O.S movement and organization; Whigham also writes on the topic. The H.I.J.O.S movement started in April

of 1995 in the city of Córdoba as a collection of the children and contemporaries of desaparecidos taken by the dictatorship. In fact, H.I.J.O.S stands for '*Hijos/as por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio*,' (in English: Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence). Their goal is to break the silence around the events that transpired during the last dictatorship. They were especially influential in the period after the dictatorship but before official trials were allowed. The movement started with less than 70 members but grew to 350 in a few months expanding to other cities in the country. As the organization grew, it took on diverse ventures with a three-pronged mission for truth, memory, and justice (Stahler-Sholk et al 2014) (Whigham, K. 2016).

The H.I.J.O.S. is a large organization today which divides its members into various sub-committees, each with an autonomous goal related to the broader mission of the organization. The identity committee looks for information and truth about desaparecidos and their individual legacies. The art and politics committee works to highlight the H.I.J.O.S. goals in the public sphere using various design and communication techniques. Other committees work in other areas of the H.I.J.O.S. organization's mission. Kaiser also notes the importance of the committee of *escrache*, which will be examined closely in a later section of this research (Kaiser, 2017).

Finally, it is argued that through these movements Argentina developed a culture of horizontalism and direct democracy, striving for consensus whenever possible. The people have rejected vertical forms of power, the state, and its representatives; in favor of autonomy and community support. In fact, the very legitimacy of the state is in question when its people choose to turn to local assemblies rather than the government for the

fulfillment of their needs. (Stahler-Sholk et al 2014). It is not hard to see how horizontalism would be preferable to a state whose legitimacy is in question by their complicity in crimes against humanity and later failure to provide essential needs of workers and citizens.

The re-legitimization of the state occurred in 2005 when the Kirchner administration reversed the Punto Final laws (Crimes against humanity amnesty laws from the dictatorship), somewhat re-legitimizing the state. Having broken the silence, some social movements shifted towards more traditional politics while others remained skeptically outside of the political structure, maintaining autonomy for their missions and methods. This divided the movements, and can account for the relative decline since then of social movements; though many are still active (Stahler-Sholk et al 2014).

Public accountability is especially important in the case of Argentina because of the human rights abuses which were not satisfactorily punished. This is a renovation of the political culture at the public level where the non-traditional political styles become the mainstream and discursive politics becomes the new normal. The process undermines the role of traditional power brokers and political representatives which have contributed to the clientelistic politics of the region. (Pearce, 2004). Scholars of Latin America now point to this regional trend emphasizing public participation and civil society through discursive politics, with the hope that this movement would revitalize the region with its transformative language and methods. They see benefit in diverse and specific movements rather than the populist clientelistic practices which had limited democracy in the 60s and the 70s. Still it is acknowledged that this transition may not produce a liberal civil society as modeled by academics; rather, it is producing another Latin American

hybrid type which aspires to be Latin America's democratically motivated response to classical political thought regarding liberal democracy.

A key feature of new Argentine democracy is citizen agency rather than representation. Western democracies have been overwhelmingly favored representative style government institutions, but Latin American social movements seek to reclaim the agency of citizens through participatory democracy (rather than positioning them as the passive receivers of state goods and services). It is an alternative style which can influence state policy makers even outside of traditional electoral mechanisms. The studies done by Brazilian scholar Leonardo Avritzer indicate that social movements have fundamentally changed the public expression of ideas, identity, and democracy in the region. For example, the author notes that many representative and unrepresentative democracies have been criticized because elected officials in both acted autonomously without value for their "constituents"; so from the citizens' perspective traditional politics doesn't exclusively promote democracy. Rather participatory and ground level politics are democracy manifest. (Pearce, 2004).

Thus, Argentina and other Latin American states are unlikely to follow North American model of political culture. Movements do not replace parliaments but they act as public discussion mechanisms alongside representative politics. They stay outside of the traditional structure in order to maintain autonomy and critical perspective; they don't have to be on the periphery but they do reevaluate democracy on their own terms. The goal is a more personalized noticeable change in the lives of individuals by changing the values of society. It contrasts with traditional politics as it seeks these particular goals

rather than the “far flung” “all or nothing” “future oriented” vision of traditional politics. (Pearce, 2004).

As for the hypotheses addressed earlier, it is clear that hypothesis 3: “Argentine citizens do not participate highly in the traditional politics (voting, party affiliation, proposing candidates, etc.) because of the legacy of a military dictatorship can be supported based on the data provided” and hypothesis 4: “Argentine citizens are very non-traditionally politically engaged (in protests and social movements) because of the legacy of a military dictatorship.” can also be supported based on the data provided. Still, it is important to note there are many additional historical factors which contribute to non-traditional political culture in Argentina.

How Civic Engagement is Influenced by the Narratives and Symbols that Create Historical Memory

This section will investigate hypothesis 5, which captures the final theme of this paper by proposing that; “The art and symbols developed because of the dictatorship help to shape the historical memory of Argentina.” I will focus on three aspects of art and symbols, though this is by no means an exhaustive catalog of important Argentine art and symbols.

Escrache

The first symbol of note is the escarache. The escrache is an artistic accusation against authorities, popularized by the H.I.J.O.S organization. The H.I.J.O.S. identify someone involved in the last dictatorship’s genocide and collect testimonies from victims along with other proof of the target’s complicity in crimes against humanity. Then, they intensively organize an event to reveal this person to the public (Whigham, K. 2016).

This can include the marking of genocidaires on public maps, the informing of neighbors through pamphlets and spray paint messages, and the use of demonstrations and theatre in front of the homes of genocidaires in order to expose their acts of complicity and the lack of justice that surrounds them (Stahler-Sholk et al 2014). Another aspect of the *escraches* that made them effective in communities was that the H.I.J.O.S. committed themselves to follow up activities as to not lose momentum. Members of the demonstration would revisit the neighborhoods of genocidaires and show pictures or raise awareness of the past *escrache*. Often, they go house to house and talk to neighbors as a follow up. From this movement, the entire community becomes actively involved in the *escrache* (Kaiser 2017).

Graffiti carries a political tone in Argentina. Many times, the *escraches* of the H.I.J.O.S. organization come in the form of graffiti art. Thus, a spray-painted message becomes associated with the H.I.J.O.S. movement in the absence of justice to transform the narrative of society's historical memory. It pushed society to confront the silence and remember the trauma of the dictatorship (Diego Benegas, 2011).

The *escrache* was born of a lack of justice. The common saying became "If there is no justice, there is an *escrache*". *Escrache* comes from the verb "to reveal". It is an artistic and social expression of the lack of justice against people who committed crimes in the dictatorship. (Whigham, K. 2016). Through their art the H.I.J.O.S. created the political and cultural environment where living alongside human rights abusers could no longer be "normalized". Criminals could no longer interact freely with society or become politicians with complete amnesty. 1998 was the height of the *escrache* movement, making public the names and faces of many violators while many remained unknown.

(Kaiser, 2017) Kaiser says that “The strategy played a key role in challenging impunity and political amnesia.” (Kaiser, 2017).

After formal court justice was enacted and the amnesty laws were nullified the H.I.J.O.S. remained active, identifying repressors and conspirators with their art and theater. Other *escraches* target members of the financial elite who benefited from the dictatorship as well as bishops and church members who are seen as complicit with the military regime. In the post-economic crisis era *escraches* have expanded to include politicians involved in the neoliberal economic policies of Argentina of the 90s. H.I.J.O.S. named neo-liberal economic actors as “economic genocidaires” because of the hunger, unemployment, wealth inequality, privatization of state resources, and devastation of the local argentine market that they promoted (Kaiser, 2017). The re-appropriation of the symbol of the *escrache* to include people guilty of later crimes against the society is an example of how a symbol can grow in influence and change the public discourse.

Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo

Another famous symbol in Argentina is the white head scarf of the Mothers of the Plaza. The Mothers were influential in the overthrow of the authoritarian regime and thus their iconic white handkerchief is seen everywhere in the public sphere. Because political activism was dangerous for participants during the dictatorship, symbolism as subversive political expression came to the forefront. Since 1977 every Thursday at 3:30 the women would circle the Plaza de Mayo wearing white scarves. It is both a resistance and a commemoration in a symbolic historic location. This act continues to the present as an artistic representation of society reclaiming a painful memory. During one military parade the mothers painted their symbol the white scarf on the parade route. Having no

time to remove the graffiti before the parade was set to begin, the troops were forced to march across the image of the struggle in their streets (Kaiser, 2011). This powerful image of military treading over the rights of the people was an expressive political art; which effectively diminished, delegitimized, and accused the military by representing physically their association with the desaparecidos. The Mothers were active in their use of graffiti art to accuse and reclaim. They also utilize imagery of life sized silhouettes to represent the presence of the desaparecidos. The first day of democracy they put up hundreds of silhouettes in Buenos Aires, each with someone's name and date of disappearance. As art, these empty spaces representing missing people oversaw the transition to democracy (Kaiser, 2011).

Physical space has always been important to the mother which is what makes their movement both a political statement and an artist performance. They re-map urban locations of important historical significance and reclaimed them through marches and performances. The Plaza de Mayo was the heart of colonial Buenos Aires, the center of traditional symbols of power. But seen today it has been reclaimed by the mothers with the artful graffiti of the Mothers' white bandanas and white silhouette on the ground to represent their children. In fact, this reclamation became known as "liberated territory". The Mothers created their own space against the regime; by marking politically and historically important locations the mother give the space an alternative meaning. It is a claim of dominance against the repression. And a common saying about the plaza is "*La plaza es de las madres y no de los cobardes*" (the plaza belongs to the mothers and not to the cowards) (Kaiser, 2011).

Like the *escraches* of the H.I.J.O.S., the mother utilized theater with staged demonstrations, and they reached out to the people on mass media outlets. They used what was available around them to make a political message including scripts and improvisation. “Their strategies presented a new aesthetic practice of alternative and radical communications, resulting from their new way of doing politics” (Kaiser, 2011). Their message, methods and remapping of public spaces became the accepted paradigm of human rights activism in Argentina and paved the way for later groups like the H.I.J.O.S. (Kaiser, 2011).

Motherhood itself acts as a symbol. During the regime, the women used the symbol of motherhood to protect themselves from state retaliation. Their white scarf, and motherhood are emblematic of a branch of feminism seen in social movements throughout Latin America. Authors like Kaiser say that these women’s appropriation of the public sphere became the cornerstone of the human rights struggle in Argentina. They turned their very identity as mothers into a political activity testing the traditional political spaces (Kaiser, 2011). It is important to note the difference that the mothers’ insertion in politics has from the historical methods for women gaining their political influence through their roles as women and in connection to powerful men. For example, Isabel Perón became the first woman president in the world, but some could argue that she gained political influence through her husband president Juan Perón. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner became Argentina’s first elected female president, and she also gained influence in conjunction with her husband who was president before her (Vanden and Prevost, 2015). But the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo are different “They have redefined the private and public spheres and sought to create a political space where the two

combine in their organization and political agenda."(Bouvard, 1994). The Mothers of Plaza represent a women's groups asserting political power in outside of Argentina's traditional patriarchal political structure. Thus, the scarf is a symbol of the power of women over the dictatorship and their insertion, no matter how problematic, into the political discourse.

National Rock

Like the H.I.J.O.S and the Mothers of the Plaza, much of the society's post-dictatorship activism was focused on breaking internalized silences. Another force which was crucial in counteracting the censorship of the regime was Argentina National Rock. Argentina National Rock embraces diversity and discursive politics making it the natural opposition to the regime's repressive force. It brings "cultural subversion" back into the mainstream. It also acts as a cathartic re-imagining of a democratic Argentina (Wilson, 2006).

Music became a tool for understanding and recouping. After 1983, rock told the stories of the dictatorship with the emotional and physical pain of Argentina. Listening, analyzing, and re-telling recuperated some of the humanity that the traumatized society struggled to identify within itself. Rock was used in fighting the repression, but when it was no longer repressed, rock had the freedom to develop as a tool for understanding. The regime was a failed attempt at brainwashing, and the public was still deeply scarred by the experience. This is why music allowed them the space to say what had been destroyed from their vocabulary and think in the way that had been previously prohibited (Wilson, 2006).

National rock was a reassertion of youth culture and at its core subversion. One of the targets of the regime had been youth culture. Young people were considered immoral and influenced towards terrorism when falling down the slippery slope of rock and roll, drugs, and free love. Under the regime, young people had been disappeared both literally as desaparecidos and figuratively as their culture and presence in mass media was repressed. Thus, in the post-dictatorship era, the vibrancy of rock was a reassertion of the identity and power of young people (Wilson 2016).

Another way that National Rock helped to break the social silence after trauma was the institution of listening groups. The music created interactions between listeners who disseminated and interpreted its lyrics. “It is significant that young people listened to albums together, rather than each buying separate albums and listening alone, as this act was a further embodiment of the youth solidarity that the regime so despised... these spontaneous gatherings were common.” (Wilson 2016).

These examples give the bases for support of hypothesis 5 which asserts that: “The art and symbols developed because of the dictatorship help to shape the historical memory of Argentina.” With the Mothers’ activism, and the escraches’ quest for justice, and National Rock’s tools of remembrance, Argentina was able to write its memory of the dictatorship and citizens could better understand their own identities.

Conclusion

Argentina is a complex and fascinating country which in the late 1970s and early 1980s suffered under seven years of repressive bureaucratic-authoritarian rule. This led to a distinctive change in the political culture of Argentina. This study looked at dilemmas

of an authoritarian regime's transition to democracy, noticing that post-authoritarian Argentine participants reported low support for authoritarian systems. Additionally, of all Latin American states, Argentina now shows the highest preference for democracy over non-tolerant authoritarianism with a regional mean of 77.7%. This break from Argentina's "path legacy" relates to the severity of the dictatorship and the lasting historical memory the regime carries. We also saw how Argentine citizens report low trust for the institution of government, and after the dictatorship engaged in high levels of non-traditional politics; this is seen in changes in the form of civic engagement, from conventional political participation to social movements and protests. An interesting feature of Argentine social movements is the rejection of vertical power and the focus on a horizontal structure. These forms of civic engagement are influenced by the narratives and symbols that create historical memory. Examples such as the escraches of the H.I.J.O.S organization, the white bandanas of the Mothers of the Plaza, and the subversive lyrics of Argentine National Rock show the power of art in the wake of national trauma.

Additionally, these non-traditional practices bring Latin America closer to direct democracy. Social activists challenge the state of the democracy but often need democracy to be effective. Activists redefine civil society and democracy in Latin America, bringing the style of democracy closer to that of a direct democracy but tolerant enough to be compatible with representative styles of participation as well. Thus, social movements, protests, and collective action are one end of a spectrum of civil engagement, and the other end contains traditional institutions but all are employed to some degree (Pearce, 2004). Collective action influences a new paradigm of democracy in Latin

America. Some outcomes of social movements identified by Giugni are institutionalization, transformation and democratization (Giugni et al. 1998). When it comes to the last part of these outcomes; democratization, social movements are especially effective as they almost always comment on broad citizenship, equal rights, and protection of citizens from abuse of state power including the protection of minorities. But these movements often contribute in different intensities according to the political interest they focus on. For example: student movements often tackle ideological issues, while labor movements tackle resource distribution issues. The social movements are not anti-democratic, they are simply public spaces where opinions, values, and priorities can be expressed. Each is criticizing from outside the traditional structure of government in order to make their system more democratic (Pearce, 2004).

In Argentina, social movements have focused on expansion of rights. This offers an alternative to the definitions of civil engagement which might have a more narrow procedural skew. By focusing on individual right through collective action, especially as expressed through social movements, Argentina changes its political culture so that democracy is not about the delivery of resources but rather achievement of rights. Human rights become the battle cry for constitutional guarantees. Power becomes a more accountable position. Ultimately Argentina has challenged the populist notions of government which it gravitated towards historically. In this way, social movements and activists continually stressed accountability from representatives with a mission to institutionalize a closer relationship between elected representatives and their constituents. (Pearce, 2004).

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