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Memory Policies on the Authoritarian Past and Outcomes for Democracy in Argentina and Brazil

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Abstract
In this article, we seek to understand how two countries that experienced, at similar times, authoritarian regimes and fluctuations in their economic performance ended up developing consistently different levels of support for democracy. Our argument is that the different processes of transition to democracy in the two countries produced different institutional arrangements, conditioning reparations and memory policies on authoritarian regimes, as well as dissimilar possibilities for political interference by the armed forces, influencing the contrasting levels of support for democracy. In order to do that, we analysed opinion polls and reconstructed the transition processes as well as the implementation and development of reparation and memory policies about authoritarian regimes. This paper seeks to contribute to the field of research in two ways. First, in terms of discussing the factors that can interfere with adherence to democracy. And secondly, by comparatively addressing the processes of transition to democracy and the long-term repercussions of these processes, such as the recent military influence in Brazilian politics.

Keywords: Democracy; memory policies; Argentina; Brazil.

As políticas de memória sobre o passado autoritário e os impactos para a democracia na Argentina e no Brasil

Resumo
Neste artigo, buscamos compreender como dois países que passaram por regimes autoritários em momentos semelhantes e que vivenciaram oscilações nos seus desempenhos econômicos desenvolveram níveis de apoio consistentemente distintos à democracia. Nosso argumento é que os diferentes processos de transição para a democracia no Brasil e na Argentina produziram distintos arranjos institucionais em torno das políticas de reparação e memória sobre os regimes autoritários, além de distintas possibilidades de interferência política das Forças Armadas. Para isso, analisamos pesquisas de opinião e reconstruímos os processos de transição e de construção de políticas de reparação e memória. Desta forma, o artigo contribui com duas literaturas: a primeira trata dos fatores que podem interferir na adesão à democracia; a segunda aborda os processos de transição para a democracia e suas repercussões de longo prazo, como a recente influência dos militares na política brasileira.

Palavras-chave: Democracia; políticas de memória; Argentina; Brasil.

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1. Introduction[1]

On 30 March 2021, Brazil's then Minister of Defence, Army General Walter Braga Netto, published a statement in which he praised the military coup that took place in the country in 1964. In the note, the General stated:

> The Cold War enveloped Latin America, bringing to Brazil a scenario of insecurities with serious political, social, and economic instability. There was a real threat to peace and democracy. Brazilians recognized the emergency and went to the streets, with broad support from the press, political leaders, churches, the private sector, different sectors of organized society, and the armed forces, interrupting the escalation of conflict, resulting in the so-called movement of 31 March 1964 (Ministério da Defesa, 2021).

This was not the first time that high-ranking members of Bolsonaro's government spoke out in defence of the coup that ousted President João Goulart. During his presidency, Jair Bolsonaro himself had defended the coup on more than one occasion, going so far as to say that 31 March should be celebrated as 'Freedom Day' in Brazil (Mergulhão and Castro, 2021).

In Argentina, on every anniversary of the military coup (March 24th), except during the COVID-19 pandemic, Plaza de Mayo (in front of the presidential palace) becomes a scene of mass demonstrations. In 2002, March 24th became, by the 25,633 Law, the 'National Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice'.

This comparison illustrates well what we will be discussing in the present article. If the armed forces represent, in the collective memory, an authoritarian past, the defence of this regime by mainstream or popular politicians (and whether or not there are political and electoral costs of doing that) says a lot about the relationship between this society and democracy in the post-redemocratisation period.

In this article, we seek to understand how two countries that experienced, at similar times, not only rule by authoritarian regimes, but also fluctuations in their economic performance, ended up developing consistently different levels of support for democracy from their transition processes from authoritarian to democratic regimes in the 1980s. Our argument is that the different processes of transition to democracy in the two countries produced different institutional arrangements, conditioning policies of reparations and memory about authoritarian regimes as well as dissimilar possibilities of political interference by the armed forces in democratic periods, influencing the contrasting levels of support for democracy. Thus, this article contributes to two fields of literature: the first deals with the factors that can interfere with adherence to democracy; the second addresses the processes of transition to democracy and their long-term repercussions.

As part of our research project, we analysed, for the first time in a comparative perspective, surveys carried out in the 1960s and 1980s by different research projects and institutes in both countries. We also analysed the longitudinal series of opinion polls produced by the Latinobarometer as far back as the 1990s, and data related to the performance of the economy. In addition to these databases, we have historically reconstructed the processes of implementation and development of reparation and memory policies on authoritarian regimes, as well as the political roles played by the military in both countries.

It is not an objective of this paper to debate the role of the level of legitimacy of democracy in the possibility of survival, or not, of democratic regimes. In a more minimalist way, we start by recognizing that higher levels of adherence to democracy represent an additional constraint on the adoption of authoritarian discourses and practices by political leaders in democratic contexts.

This article is ordered as follows: in the next section, we show that the two countries had similar levels of support for democracy in the 1960s, and that, from the 1980s onwards, they

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displayed significant changes and constant contrast. We also show that age and education levels, as well as economic performance, are unable to explain the differences found in adherence to democracy in the two countries. Next, we dedicate a section to reconstruct the democratic transitions in the two countries, with the different capacity of the armed forces to intervene politically in them, as well as the public policies of reparations and memory about the authoritarian regimes in the following decades. In the last section, we present our final considerations and highlight our contributions to the literature.

2. Adherence to Democracy in Brazil and Argentina

It is not very easy to find opinion polls carried out before the 1980s in a methodologically appropriate way, with questions about the levels of support for democracy in Brazil and Argentina. The questions vary widely, and the results are difficult to compare. Nevertheless, it is essential for our argument to demonstrate that there is no evidence that Argentina had a clearly higher level of support to democracy than Brazil in the '60s. To do this, we analysed data from studies carried out in the mid-1960s in both countries, which we found through bibliographical review and archival work in the historical collection of the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública e Estatística,* IBOPE).[2]

In 1965, the magazine Atlántida published the results of a poll carried out by the Gallup Institute in the city of Buenos Aires. The survey asked whether *coups d`état* were justifiable in the country. Sixty-two per cent (62%) of those interviewed believed they were "sometimes" justifiable, while 6% believed they were "always" justifiable. Only 28% indicated that *coups d`état* were "never" justifiable (Jorge, 2009).

In Brazil, as in Argentina, we found some evidence that adherence to democracy and its procedures and rules was not very high. In surveys carried out by IBOPE in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, two months after the military coup in March 1964, 56% and 57% of those interviewed, respectively, said they were in favour of 'revocation of electoral mandates' and 'suspension of political rights.' In São Paulo, 54% of respondents said that the deposition of then president João Goulart had been 'beneficial' for the country, while 20% said it had been 'harmful.' In Rio, in June of the same year, 62% said they would 'accept' that Marshal Castelo Branco, the first president after the coup, would remain in power after 1965 'even without elections' if he led a good administration, while 28% said that they 'would not accept' his leadership.[3]

As can be seen from the available evidence, a large part of the population in the main cities of both countries had, at the very least, an ambivalent relationship with democracy and its rules and procedures. In other words, the data shows that in both cases the levels of support for democracy were relatively close, which helps to exclude the possibility that Argentinians have always had a consistently higher level of support for democratic regimes than Brazilians.

From the second half of the 1980s onwards, opinion polls were carried out with greater comparability. In 1988, a project developed by researchers from several Latin American countries found 40% support for democracy in the city of São Paulo, and 76% in the city of Buenos Aires (Moisés, 1995).[4]

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[2] IBOPE's historical collection is available for public consultation online at the Edgard Leuenroth Archive, (AEL) of the Universidade Estadual de Campinas, UNICAMP, in Brazil.

[3] Data taken from the IBOPE collection (PE 061) are available at www.ael.unicamp.br. Accessed on July 5, 2021.

[4] The question used in this study was the following: 'Which of the following sentences do you agree with most? 1) "Democracy is preferable to any other form of government"; 2) "Depending on the situation, a non-democratic government is preferable"; 3) "For people like me, it doesn't matter if it's one regime or the other" ("*Tendências*" section of the journal *Opinião Pública*, n. 1, v. 1, p. 13).

Unfortunately, we could not find survey data that allowed comparisons between the two countries between 1988 and 1994– Latinobarometer series of pools starts in 1995. However, the data exclusively relating to the Brazilian case, collected from various sources, show that support for democracy grew in the country only between 1989 and 1990, reaching 56% and then declining again in subsequent years, sinking to 42% in 1992 (Linz and Stepan, 1996; Montero et al., 1998; Moisés, 1995; Meneguello, 2013). This growth was most likely due to the first process of direct elections for the presidency of Brazil in 1989, after the end of the authoritarian regime.

In 1995, the Latinobarometer began its series with percentages very similar to those observed in 1988: 76% of respondents in Argentina said that 'democracy is preferable to any other form of government', while only 41% responded the same way in Brazil. Among the eight countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela) included in this first wave of the survey, Brazil had the lowest level of adherence to democracy while Argentina had the second highest. The average was 58%. The data available for the period immediately following transitions from authoritarian regimes demonstrates that Argentinians start the new regime with a substantially higher level of support for democracy than Brazilians.

The Latinobarometer Data and Possible Explanations for Variation in Support for Democracy

The Latinobarometer data obtained in both countries between 1995 and 2020 shows that support for democracy in Argentina was consistently higher than in Brazil.[5] During the period, the average was 67% in Argentina and 43% in Brazil. Considering the eight countries included in all waves, the average was 58%. The swings were also smaller in Argentina than in Brazil. In 2001 and 2020, the level of support was the lowest among Argentinians, scoring 58% and 55%, respectively. The highest was exactly at the beginning of the series, in 1995, with 76%. Brazil also had its lowest point in 2001, with 30%, and the highest level of support for democracy occurred in 2009, with 55%. In summary, the lowest level of adherence to the democratic regime in Argentina was the same as the highest level in Brazil (see Figure 1).[6]

When we compare the data on support for democracy with the general economic performance of both countries over the period, we see that the differences found in the long term are not explained by this variable, although it does help to explain part of the oscillations in each country (see Figure 2).

In the case of Argentina, it is possible to observe a reduction in support for democracy at the beginning of the century and in recent years, partly reflecting the deterioration of economic conditions among the population. However, the variations are much smoother than the variations in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the same period. For the Brazilian case, we can observe a steady growth in support for democracy between 2003 and 2010, a period in which Brazil's economy grew by an average of 4% per year, with a subsequent decline from 2015, when the country entered a long economic recession. According to Meneguello, economic growth alone cannot explain the growth of support for democracy in Brazil between 2002 and 2010 (Meneguello, 2010). The author indicates that an agenda of reducing social inequalities through redistributive policies also had an impact on levels of support for democracy in the period.

[5] The Latinobarometer did not conduct surveys in 1999, 2012, 2014, or 2019.

[6] The question used by the Latinobarometer is the following: 'With which of the following phrases do you agree most: (1) "democracy is preferable to any other form of government"; (2) "in some circumstances an authoritarian government may be preferable to a democratic government"; (3) "for people like me, it doesn't matter if it's a democratic or an undemocratic regime" (4) "I don't know;" (5) No response.' The percentages portrayed include those who did not respond or were unable to respond. Data available at: http://www.latinobarometro.org. Accessed on October 11, 2021.

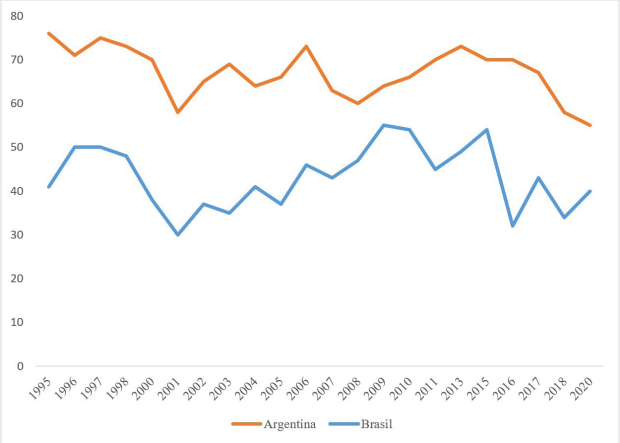

Figure 1 – Support for Democracy in Argentina and Brazil (1995-2020) (%) **|**
Source: Latinobarómetro, 2023.

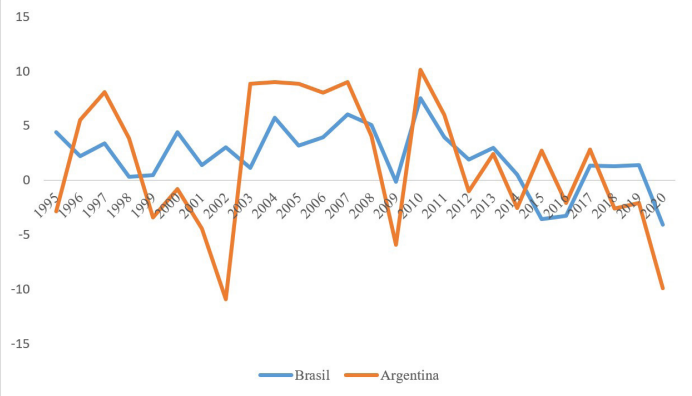

Figure 2 – Change in GDP between 1995 and 2020 (%) |
Source: World Bank, 2023.

Analysing the Latinobarometer data and GDP variation suggests that the difference in the level of support for democracy in the two countries in the long term is not related to economic performance, as Jorge has already pointed out (Jorge, 2009). Furthermore, our analysis showed that support to the democratic regime in Argentina proved to be quite resilient over the period, despite strong variations in the economy.

Part of the literature on levels of adherence to democracy in "Third Wave" countries (Huntington, 1991) evaluates the effect of experiences with authoritarian regimes and transition processes on political perceptions in different age groups (Montero et al., 1998). In Spain, for example, younger people initially showed greater support to democracy. However, over the years, there has been greater homogeneity between the different groups, indicating a process of attitudinal change and political learning (Montero et al., 1998).

Unfortunately, we do not have longitudinal data that go back to the end of the authoritarian regimes or the beginning of the transition processes in Brazil and Argentina. In other words, it is not possible to observe possible fluctuations in the two countries like these seen in Spain. However, for our purpose here, it is enough to see whether there are differences between the age groups that help explain the levels of support shown.

The Latinobarometer data shows that, in general, the age groups showed similar levels of support for democracy in both countries, and also reacted in similar way to the variations mentioned in each case. In Brazil, it is possible to observe that in all age groups there is continuous increase in support for democracy between 2003 and 2010 and a drop between 2015 and 2020. In Argentina, we observe the same thing: a drop in the early 2000s and

in recent years in all age groups. One fact deserves attention here: in recent years, there seems to have been a shift away from support for democracy among younger people (see Figures 3 and 4). We will discuss this further below.

In none of the years observed was the lowest level of adherence to democracy among the age groups in Argentina lower than the highest point registered among the groups in Brazil. In other words, specific differences in the age structures of the two countries or different processes of political resocialization during democratic regimes based on previous individual experiences with authoritarian regimes are not factors that help answer our central question.

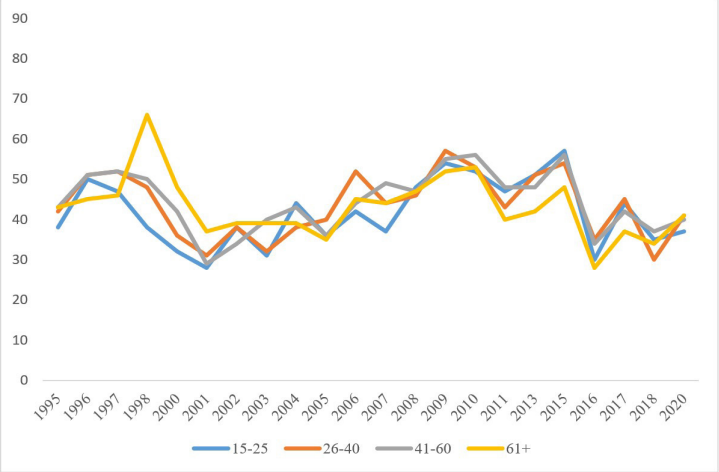

Figure 3 – Support for Democracy in Brazil by Age Group (1995-2020) |
Source: Latinobarómetro, 2023.

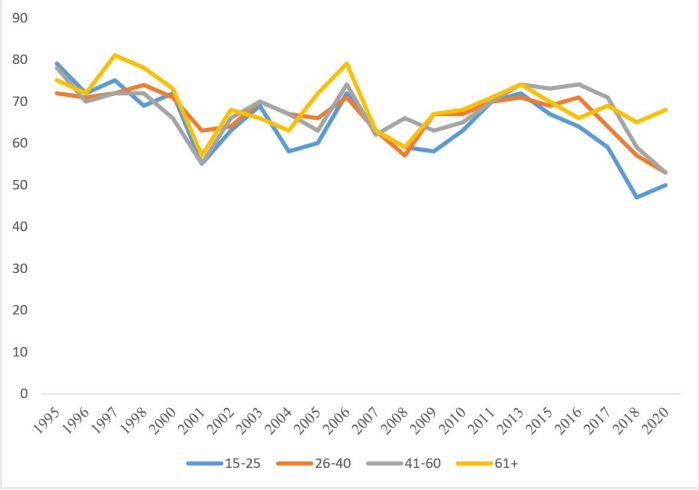

Figure 4 – Support for Democracy in Argentina by Age Group (1995-2020) |
Source: Latinobarómetro, 2023.

Various studies have emphasised the impact of the "education level" variable on support for democracy in different parts of the world. In general, individuals with a higher level of education tend to be more supportive of democratic regimes. For the Brazilian case, studies such as those by Schlegel (2021) and Borba and Ribeiro (2021), based on analysis of several surveys, have shown, since the beginning of re-democratisation, the level of education has proven to be a good predictor of preference for democracy. The same is found in Argentina. Jorge (2009) highlights the role of education as an explanatory variable

for the acquisition of democratic values. When performing multivariate analysis to explain adherence to democracy based on data from the Americas Barometer, Lodola et al. (2013) found a positive impact of the education variable.

There are many explanations for the positive impact of education level on adherence to democracy, but it is not our objective to discuss them here. It is important to observe whether different educational levels in the two cases are responsible for the variation described. For this, we have analysed the education data available in the Latinobarometer series. There is a considerable difference between the two countries in the sampling carried out. In Argentina, on average over the entire longitudinal series, 35% of the sample had only basic education, while in Brazil the percentage was 57%. In Argentina, on the other hand, an average of 24% of those interviewed had higher education. In Brazil, it was 13%.

When we analyse the averages of support for democracy in the two countries by level of education, we find two phenomena: (a) as indicated in the literature, adherence increases according to the level of education in both cases; (b) in all ranges, support for the democratic regime in Argentina is substantially higher than in Brazil (Table 1). In other words, the data show that the differences in educational levels in the two cases are not able to explain the greater support for democracy in Argentina.

TABLE 1 – Averages of support for democracy in Argentina and Brazil by educational level (1995–2020) (%)

Schooling range	Argentina	Brazil
Elementary incomplete	57%	37%
Elementary complete	57%	41%
Secondary incomplete	62%	42%
Secondary complete	71%	50%
Higher education incomplete	79%	58%
Higher education complete	82%	69%

Source: Latinobarómetro, 2023.

To close this section, it is important to highlight the findings of research carried out in large Argentine urban centres between 1982 and 1988 by different research institutes and government agencies. The first survey in the series, carried out in May 1982, during the conflict in the Malvinas, indicated that 70% of those interviewed agreed with the statement 'the best political system is one based on periodic elections'. A year later, the percentage would be 79%, and, in 1984, it would reach 83%, maintaining the same level until the end of the series (Catterberg, 1989).

3. Democratic Transitions and Subsequent Reparations, Memory, and Justice Policies

We believe that the contrasting levels of support for democracy in Argentina and Brazil and their evolution are closely related to the characteristics of the democratic transition processes that both countries went through in the 1980s and how they shaped the subsequent public policies of justice, reparations, and memory about the repression occurred during the dictatorship. The advances and institutional limitations at the time of judging the crimes of the dictatorship and constructing collective notions about the social trauma produced by state terrorism are key to understand the scenario posed by the survey data studied.

The Authoritarian Experience

The political processes inaugurated by the *coups d`état* (1976 in Argentina and 1964 in Brazil) shared some significant characteristics, such as the (re)foundational rhetoric outlined by their perpetrators, and some type of participation or collusion on the part of civil sectors. However, these authoritarian governments differ in their tenures, systematicity, and scope of political repression, as well as in the ways in which they intervened in the party system and interaction with institutions. For instance, the longer duration of the civic-military dictatorship in Brazil (1964–1985) meant that different generations of society were socialised into this authoritarian context. In Argentina, on the other hand, several others had preceded the 1976 coup since 1930, tracing a path of instability and democratic intermittency.

In relation to repression, without attempting to comparatively measure the cruelty of state terrorism during the Brazilian and Argentine dictatorships, it is still possible to identify some qualitative nuances in terms of their repressive engineering and subsequent social trauma. This is true, above all, in relation to the greater systematicity and national scope of state terrorism in Argentina. The Argentine regime also showed a considerable bureaucratic sophistication of repression: clandestine systems of hundreds of detentions, torture, and disappearance centres; relatively stable *modus operandi* for these actions (Calveiro, 1998; Catoggio, 2010); and the methodical nature of the illegal appropriation of hundreds of babies born in captivity by families linked to agents of repression. Through these actions, the dictatorship left indelible traumatic marks on the Argentinian society.

In Brazil, state repression since 1964 also included the institutionalisation of torture and murder (more harshly after the Institutional Act No. 5, or AI5, in 1968), although the use of the existing prison has predominated (Teles, 2014). The autonomy that some actors had at the local level in Brazil (Araujo, 2006) also contrasts with the greater centralization of Argentina´s repressive engineering. Unlike the Argentinian repressive model, which privileged reliance on a "power of disappearance" (Calveiro, 1998), in Brazil a "power of torture" prevailed (Teles, 2014).

Despite these contrasts, both dictatorships implemented intense state terrorism, the trauma of which could have generated in both societies a rejection of the authoritarian experience and, consequently, similar evaluations of democracy. However, for our argument, a fundamental difference lies in the ways in which these authoritarian governments handed over power in the transition, and their margin of negotiation of certain prerogatives for the armed forces, especially the guarantee of impunity for the crimes committed. It is in the way collective memory of the crimes committed during the dictatorship was processed at the beginnings of democratic governments that we find a key element in understanding the contrasts in subsequent social support for democracy in Argentina and Brazil.

In this sense, in Argentina, the Trial of the Juntas (1985) and the official publication (1984) of the report by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP) implied the emergence of testimonies of survivors in the public sphere. These testimonies contributed immensely to clarifying the facts and the logic that characterised the repression. Meanwhile, in Brazil, these testimonial voices would only be officially authorised—in accordance with a state initiative—decades later and with significant legal limitations. This element is essential, in our view, to make sense of the data analysed in the previous section of this paper.

Transitions: Diverging Paths

The Political Science debate on democratic transitions in the Southern Cone converges on characterising the Argentinian case as a transition due to the collapse of the regime

–catalysed by the Malvinas War–and of the Brazilian case as a negotiated or agreed transition (O'Donnell et al., 1988).

With this, the outgoing authoritarian government in Brazil had a greater margin to obtain prerogatives such as the autonomy of the armed forces; the preservation of the constitutional right to intervene in the internal order (Carvalho, 2016); and, above all, a guarantee against investigations into human rights violations. In Argentina, on the other hand, the Military Junta had to hand over power in weak conditions, and this guarantee was frustrated (Stepan, 1988).

We start from this characterisation of transitions to understand how the trajectories of these first post-dictatorship governments and those that followed have shaped a scenario in which Argentina has, at least so far, implemented a sort of historical democratic cushion that is larger than Brazil, with consistently higher levels of social support for this type of regime.

Although Argentina's defeat in the Malvinas War (1982) was a catalyst for the country's transition and increasingly reactivated society against the regime, disputes and conflicts within the Military Junta had already intensified between 1978 and 1981, leading to a crisis and 'decomposition of military power' (Canelo, 2006). In a similar sense, Novaro and Palermo (2003) and Quiroga (1990) emphasize the notion of an internal collapse or implosion of the regime even before the Malvinas War, in addition to the ongoing social mobilisation. Even the projection of a force that a part of the regime conceived as a possible 'offspring', the *Movimiento de Opinión Nacional* (National Opinion Movement, MON), ended up being frustrated. Likewise, Raúl Alfonsín, elected president in 1983, was the least conciliatory option towards the Military Junta within his party, the Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union, UCR).

In Brazil, presidential successions after the 1964 coup were processed through indirect elections in Congress. In the last stage, an important sector of the ruling civil party began to distance itself from the regime. With this, they managed to recycle themselves in the democratic transition and imbue it with marks of continuity, blocking transformations that could endanger their own position in the new context. However, in parallel to the negotiations and pacts between political elites, there was the massive process of popular mobilization demanding direct elections. Although the "Direct Elections Now" (Portuguese *Diretas já*) campaign in 1984 did not achieve its objective, it undoubtedly changed the political axis and accelerated the end of the dictatorship.

The new president, José Sarney, had been a staunch defender of the authoritarian government and had chaired the ruling party (ARENA) until shortly before the indirect presidential election of 1985. One year earlier, within the framework of the military leadership's fear of an eventual contagion or 'Argentinisation of the Brazilian transition', Sarney issued a statement in the *Correio Braziliense* newspaper:

> The Brazilian process is not at all like what happened in Argentina. […] In Argentina, the armed forces got involved in what they called a dirty war […] in Brazil, none of that happened. The revolution was in the name of democratic values […]. If there were excesses, these were carried out by individuals and groups acting on their own, who are easily identifiable and never, at any time, compromised the value, dignity, and pride, the institution, and destiny of the armed forces (quoted in Bauer, 2016, pp. 18-19).

This attempt at self-differentiation with respect to the crimes of the Argentine dictatorship and its transitional justice process were well illustrative of the limitations that would characterise memory politics in Brazil in the decades that followed.

In August 1979, the Brazilian dictatorship enacted the Amnesty Law, a 'reciprocal' law that reached not only political prisoners, but also their executors, ensuring that those responsible for the illegal repression, torture and murders committed by the state would not be criminally prosecuted. Following a rhetoric reconciliation and 'turning the page', this restriction meant silencing the voices of the survivors of the repression. Based on this, the architects of the transition interpreted the instance on the need for truth and justice

as a form of revenge and a lack of understanding of the conciliatory virtues of Brazilians (Iokoi, 2009).

Two reflections emerge in relation to these contrasts. In reference to post-fascist Italy after 1945, Traverso (2009) defines amnesty as a political ban on memory, which seals immediate reconciliation but creates conditions for the resurgence of a memory expressed as long-suffering and unfulfilled justice. In a revision of the intellectual field of transitional justice, Hollanda (2015) identifies a common premise: the idea that ignorance about the past prolongs divided social realities, while elucidating the facts has a regenerative effect and frees the future from the bonds of the past. In relation to both elements, memory and justice, the years of transition in Argentina and Brazil took different paths.

The legal framework of the Amnesty Law in the post- 1985 governments in Brazil established a restricted democratic socialisation, which prevented the possibility of collective learning, through justice and memory policies, about the trauma generated by the authoritarian experience. Throughout the 1990s, a paradigm of state passivity dominated the production of the truth about the crimes of the dictatorship (Hollanda, 2015), with measures in which the burden of proof had to be collected and provided by civil organizations and family members. The state only assumed responsibility for producing information on human rights violations after the creation of the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* (National Truth Commission) in 2011, an element to which we will return later.

In Argentina, the Military Junta also tried, in its final years, to block the eventual prosecution of state terrorism but was unsuccessful. From 1982 onward, the protests became massive (Acuña and Smulovitz, 1995), and social protest became 'more vigorous and daring,' even in the context of a paradoxically haughty, and less conciliatory government (Novaro and Palermo, 2003). For a brief period, the war with Great Britain over the Malvinas Islands had social support and the dictatorship managed to redirect the public debate, but as external armed conflict was the main role of the armed forces, the military defeat put the very survival of the regime at stake (Yannuzzi, 1996).

In this context, in April 1983, the Bignone government released two documents (the "Final Document on the War against Subversion and Terrorism" and the "Institutional Act"), justifying the actions of the Military Junta in what was described as a kind of victorious internal war. It denied the existence of clandestine detention centres and warned that the armed forces would resist any trial that was not 'that of history' (Canelo, 2006). Then, in September, it decreed the *Ley de Autoamnistía* (Self-Amnesty Law) an initiative similar to the one sought by the Brazilian dictatorship—only at a time of marked weakness of the regime.

Abundantly analysed by the academic literature (González Bombal, 1993; Aboy Carlés, 2001), the military and transitional justice policy carried out by the Alfonsín government was characterized by advances and setbacks. The trial of the members of the Military Junta in 1985 was a historic milestone in a context of deep tensions with the armed forces, which objected to the possibility of being tried for their actions by a civil court. The gravity of this judgment for Argentine society was considerable, not only in terms of the impact on public opinion of images of commanders sitting before a court as defendants, but also because it gave public voice to numerous testimonies from survivors. The government initiative to convene a National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), made up of notable figures and dedicated to collecting and investigating the claims, and delivering a final report to the state, was also fundamental in the construction of a collective memory about the crimes of the dictatorship.

In post-dictatorial Brazil, a similar report with documentary and testimonial records of human rights violations by the authoritarian government, *Brasil Nunca Mais* (Brazil Never Again), was published in 1985, but it was the product of a private initiative of the Archdiocese of São Paulo. The State, for its part, continued to refrain from taking an active

role in the public clarification of the crimes of the dictatorship and, within the framework of the amnesty law, did not bring those responsible to justice.

Alfonsín's military policy included measures to subordinate military power to civil rule in economic and budgetary terms (Stepan, 1988; López, 2001). The tension between the government and the armed forces sometimes reached disturbing levels, as in the three 'Carapintadas' uprisings—named because of the use of military facial camouflage by those involved. The centrepiece of their demands was to stop the prosecution of military personnel who had taken part in the repression.

Two initiatives by the Alfonsín government appeared as an attempt to end the transitional justice process. First, the 'Punto Final' (Full Stop Law) established a short period to summon those involved in crimes against humanity to testify, after which the possibility of criminal charges ended. However, court summons multiplied rapidly, with the consequent outrage within the armed forces. Second, the 'Obediencia Debida' (Due Obedience) law (1987), seen as a concession to the leaders of the April 1987 military uprising, applied another type of limit to transitional justice: the notion that members below the rank of Colonel should not be punished, as they had merely obeyed orders from their superiors.

Years later, Carlos Menem`s government decreed a presidential pardon for the main convicts, sealing a 'reconciliation' arrangement in the transition process,[7] despite significant social opposition.

In addition to the measures taken by the first democratic government and their limits, an element to be highlighted for our argument is that the armed forces' efforts to guarantee their impunity and their sectoral demands of Alfonsín ended up displacing them, in the eyes of Argentine society, from their historical role as an arbitration power to a merely corporative role (Canelo, 2006). Nothing similar happened in Brazil, where the veto power of the military over transitional justice was effective and the president of the transition, José Sarney, stated, as we have seen, that the armed forces as an institution should not be questioned for their actions (Hunter, 1997; Passos, 2021).

We therefore see two dissimilar routes: on the one hand, in the Argentinian case, transitional justice sought prosecution and public transparency around the crimes of the dictatorship; on the other hand, in Brazil, these transition initiatives were impeded, and the actions of the armed forces were even justified by leading political party figures.

Memory Policies during Argentina's Kirchnerism and Brazil's PT administrations

Several years after the democratic transition, during the governments of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2003–2015) in Argentina, and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016) in Brazil, it is possible to notice turning points in the policies relating to memory –and, in Argentina, also to the prosecution– of the crimes of the dictatorship.

In Argentina, the government's promotion of the annulment (in 2003), in Congress, of the Due Obedience and Full Stop Laws and the subsequent declaration of their unconstitutionality by the Supreme Court (2005) allowed the trials of those responsible for human rights violations during the dictatorship to multiply. Along with these processes, a series of discursive appeals and official policies laid the foundations for a memory policy that consolidated the reading of what happened as state terrorism.

[7] Between 1989 and 1990, different presidential decrees sanctioned the pardoning of 1,200 people: from convicted commanders and soldiers to members and leaders of armed organisations, and even participants in the 'Carapintadas' rebellions.

In Brazil, Lula's government announced that it would open the confidential archives of the dictatorship. However, it maintained the secrecy for those documents that threatened Brazilian 'sovereignty, territorial integrity, or foreign relations'. Also, intra-governmental discussions around the 2009 National Human Rights Programme showed a clear division between areas of the government that defended the investigation of the dictatorship´s crimes and the non-application of the 1979 Amnesty Law, and others that defended the validity of this law and the closure or resolution of the past (Santos, 2010).

A turning point in the trajectory of the memory policies since 1985 in Brazil occurred in 2011, under the presidency of Dilma Rousseff. With the law that created the National Truth Commission, the Brazilian state for the first time assumed the responsibility for investigating human rights violations committed by the authoritarian regime (Hollanda, 2015). This movement led to the creation of truth commissions at various levels, within state governments and also in public institutions such as universities.

The experience of the Truth Commission, however, suffered from certain limitations. Conceived from a notion of truth as a democratic pedagogy, it did not imply any instance of justice (given the validity of the Amnesty Law, confirmed by the Supreme Federal Court in 2010), but only sessions in which the torturers were obliged to appear but could refuse to provide any information. Also, the Commission's day-to-day work sometimes came into conflict with other prerogatives that the armed forces guaranteed during the transition.

Rousseff, a victim herself of torture during the military dictatorship, received the final report from the Commission, and referred to the need of future generations to know the truth. However, she also highlighted the need to respect the "political pacts that led us to democratization", an implicit allusion to the validity of the Amnesty Law (Passarinho, 2014), and presented the report as a form of reconciliation of the country.

For its part, the military reaction to the formation of the Truth Commission included a petition with more than 500 signatures against the initiative and an attempt to stop its disclosure in court. During the Commission's operation, different indirect signs of insubordination also emerged, such as the announcement in 2012, by the Military Club that it would hold a party to commemorate the 'revolution' of 1964, despite the government ban. Then General of the armed forces, Eduardo Villas Bôas summed up the feeling of the armed forces towards the Truth Commission:

> Made up only by representatives of the Left, in our view, it lost its legitimacy by restricting investigations to the period of military government and to the universe of government agents. The law that created it originally covered the period since 1946 and not only state agents. It had, therefore, a clear revenge bias, fostering in us, although not intensely, a kind of 'revanchism in reverse' (quoted in Castro 2021, p. 158).

Over the years, in Brazil, the armed forces have maintained an important veto power over reparations and memory policies that they did not have in Argentina.

Authoritarian Appeals and Withdrawals in Recent Years (2015-2018)

In April 2016, during the controversial parliamentary impeachment process of Dilma Rousseff, the then Deputy Jair Bolsonaro, justified his vote in favour of impeachment by shouting: "*They lost in '64, they've lost now […]. For [the Brazilian] family and for the innocence of children in classrooms […] against communism, for our freedom*". His speech ended with a dedication: "*In memory of Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, the scourge of Dilma Rousseff*".[8] Ustra, who died the previous year, had commanded the DOI-CODI (Operations and Information Detachment - Internal Defence Operations Centre), a

[8] Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LC_v4J3waU , accessed on August 6, 2021.

branch of the Army that carried out a significant part of the torture and murder of political prisoners during the dictatorship.

The vindication of the crimes of the dictatorship had been a recurring feature in Bolsonaro's public argumentation prior to this speech. But the fact that this type of public and broadcast apology for state terrorism did not have a significant political cost for him in his subsequent political rise becomes intelligible in a context in which justice for crimes against humanity perpetrated by the armed forces has not been possible. Moreover, it becomes viable in the framework of a growing political crisis, where some groups in street demonstrations (especially since 2015) have openly questioned the democratic system and invoked the need for military intervention.

We can understand Bolsonaro as a corollary and at the same time as a feedback force of a social phenomenon of progressive dissatisfaction with democracy and inclination towards authoritarian and reactionary appeals. We argue that this phenomenon was made possible by the way Brazil processed the memory of the crimes of the dictatorship. Unlike the Argentinian case, the brutality of the Brazilian authoritarian regime was not officially exposed and judged. This allowed the construction of idealized speeches about the period 1964–1985, in which the armed forces would have responded to a call by society in the face of the communist threat and guaranteed peace and social order.

In Argentina, the Cambiemos Alliance government (2015–2019) outlined an official discursive withdrawal from what had been some key points of memory and justice policies in previous years. In 2014, Mauricio Macri had declared in an interview that 'los *curros* de los derechos humanos' ('this human-rights shady business/deception') would end, and in 2016 he described state terrorism as a "dirty war" (La Capital, 2016). In any case, the Macri government has shown little interest in the collective memory of the dictatorship's crimes.

Nevertheless, there were two episodes in the same period that we could understand as indicators of a solid and active popular consciousness regarding the trauma of the authoritarian experience in Argentina. First, the immediate and massive repudiation (among journalists, assemblies of press workers and across a large part of the spectrum of political parties and media agencies) caused by the publication of the editorial "*No Más Venganza*" [No More Revenge] in the newspaper La Nación (2015). The paper questioned the human rights policy so far, the criminal proceedings of the trials and demanded house arrest for convicted repressors of advanced age. Second, in May 2017, thousands of people mobilized at the Plaza de Mayo in repudiation of the possibility, enabled by the Supreme Court of Justice ruling, that repressors convicted of crimes against humanity could benefit from the already existing '2x1 Law'[9] and hence be freed. Congress finally passed a law excluding this group from such law, and some government officials quickly declared their commitment to memory and justice.

4. Final Considerations

Based on the data presented in the previous section, the sustained differences over time, in support for democracy in Argentina and Brazil, need to be analysed taking into account an element that has been neglected when analysing levels of adherence to democracy and the costs of political forces adopting authoritarian discourses and practices. This aspect deals with the policies of reparations and memory that the governments following the countries' respective transitions to democracy implemented in relation to previous

[9] The 1994 "2x1 Law" originally contemplated the cases of those convicted of common offenses (not crimes against humanity) who had been in pre-trial detention prior to their conviction. After two years, each day in prison counted as two days of serving the sentence.

authoritarian legacies, and the role that the armed forces played in those processes. It is in this element that we can place a turning point in two cases that were similar in the 1960s but differed significantly during the 1980s.

The public policies of the first democratic governments regarding the crimes of the dictatorship, conditioned themselves by two very different transitions, outlined dissimilar scenarios in terms of the memory of the authoritarian experience in Argentina and Brazil.

In 'Transitions from Authoritarian Rule,' O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) state the following:

> It is difficult to imagine how a society can return to some degree of functioning which would provide social and ideological support for political democracy without somehow coming to terms with the most painful elements of its own past. By refusing to confront and to purge itself of its worst fears and resentments, such a society would be burying not just its past but the very ethical values it needs to make its future liveable (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986, p. 30).

The analysis, although loaded with the interpretation of complex political processes in the heat of events, illustrates some of the contributions to literature that we seek to present in this paper.

The first concerns factors that can influence the levels of adherence to democracy in countries with recent authoritarian experiences. In addition to aspects such as education level and improvement in social conditions, we emphasise the existence of another element: the construction of memory and justice for crimes carried out under authoritarianism.

The second deals with the long-term aspects of the different types of transitions experienced. In Brazil, there were significant restrictions on civilian control over the armed forces compared to the Argentinian case. As we have described, the different institutional configurations resulting from the transitional processes in the two countries conditioned different political trajectories that helped both to shape the perception of authoritarian regimes and to guarantee different capacities for political intervention by the armed forces (Collier and Collier, 1991; Pierson, 2004). In this sense, our work helps to explain the recent military influence on Brazilian politics, as a result of a long-term political process.

Having said that, support for democracy in both countries seems to be eroding. In the case of Brazil, we could read Bolsonaro´s rise within the framework of that trajectory described in the previous sections of our work. Undoubtedly, his explicit right-wing radicalism proved innovative in relation to the characteristics of the traditional political leadership in Brazil in recent decades. But, at the same time, other signs were already revealing themselves before his rise. From the discursive suggestion of fraud to delegitimise the results of the 2014 presidential elections, to slogans (e.g., 'Military intervention now' or 'SOS armed forces') heard in the street demonstrations of 2015 and 2016 against Dilma Rousseff's government, these different elements were outlined as correlates of the political crisis in Brazil. This was in stark contrast with the type of claims emerging from the 2001 crisis in Argentina (such as *'Que se vayan todos'* or 'All of them must go'). Although both countries have shown a drop in the levels of support for democracy (see Figure 1), social consideration of the armed forces as a legitimate arbiter only seemed to appear as a latent possibility in Brazil, and not in Argentina, where the levels of popular trust in the armed forces have remained considerably lower.

In any case, 22 years after the 2001 crisis, the Argentine scenario seems to have undergone a change, which forces us to postulate at least a few nuances with respect to what has been, up to now, a greater democratic dampening in that country. With the passage of time, we can observe a certain dilution or weakening of democratic socialisation against the legacy of the recent authoritarian experience among new generations, even despite the continuity of curricular content in school related to that collective memory. In 2021, among the under-30 age group, levels of trust in the armed forces were higher than in the rest of the population. As Iazzetta affirms, 'these young people, born between 1992 and 2003, do not preserve the memory or the anti-authoritarian reflections of the generations who lived through the authoritarian experience of the 1970s or of those that

were socialised in the initial years of democratisation, when this past was still close' (Equipo de Poliarquía Consultores, 2021).

Second, the growing dissatisfaction with democracy in Argentina between 2018 and 2020 makes sense given the limitations of successive democratic governments to substantially and lastingly improve social and economic indicators. Poverty, indigence, inequality, unstable labour, and macroeconomic instability are constant reminders of that failure. Paradoxically, this malaise can be appropriated by radical right-wing sectors, such as the so-called 'libertarians', defenders of measures of even greater liberal orthodoxy, more brutal police repression (the so-called *mano dura*) and even cultural reactionism (disbelief of climate change, attacks on public funding of science, anti-feminism, rejection of sex education and women's reproductive rights). There are those who openly question memory and justice policies, and even relativise the crimes of the last authoritarian regime. We are referring to the right-wing politicians Javier Milei, whose diatribes against communism and in favour of liberal ultra-orthodoxy bears similarities with some of Bolsonaro's appeals;[10] and Victoria Villarruel, leader of an organization that has been questioning the core of memory policies for many years.[11] Although Milei has not explicitly challenged the democratic regime, his recent electoral support coincides with a growing popular dissatisfaction with traditional political actors.[12] In view of the recent electoral outcomes in Argentina, we should not consider its increased democratic dampening as a fixed and immovable element over time.

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[10] In an interview, in August 2023, Milei referred to socialists as "rubbish, human excrement". Available at https://www.eldiarioar.com/politica/elecciones-2023/milei-dijo-socialistas-son-basura-excremento-humano-presidente-colombia-comparo-hitler_1_10475758.html, accessed on September 4, 2023.

[11] She was also the founder, in 2007, of the Civil Association "Center of Legal Studies on Terrorism and its Victims" (CELTyV), from which she argued that deaths caused by the Guerrilla should also be defined as "Crimes against Humanity", that is, as equivalent to State-led repression, torture and disappearance (Goldentul, 2021).

[12] Milei and Bolsonaro's rise and support should also be read considering the global context of electoral growth of a so-called "new" or alternative right, represented by Donald Trump in the U.S., José Antonio Katz in Chile, the Vox party in Spain, Giorgia Meloni in Italy, and others.

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