

# **Do transitional justice museums persuade visitors? Evidence from a field experiment**

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## **Abstract**

Do transitional justice museums persuade visitors? We implement a novel field experiment at the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago, Chile to understand the effects of governments' attempts to shape citizens' attitudes through symbolic transitional justice policies such as museums and memorials. Our findings suggest that though perceptions of the museum vary along ideological lines, Chilean university students display greater support for democratic institutions, are more likely to reject institutions associated with the repressive period and are more supportive of restorative transitional justice policies after visiting regardless of their ideological priors. We test for the persistence of these results and find that some of the effects endure for six months following the museum visit. We find support for the notion that emotional appeals deployed in the museum can shift citizen attitudes, which might have implications for processes of reconciliation.

Keywords: field experiment, museums, transitional justice, emotions, violence, repression, human rights

# 1. Introduction

Governments and their policies often seek to shape citizens' political behavior and attitudes. After periods of political violence, the consequences of such policies are particularly weighty, as they influence societal processes of democratic consolidation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding (Barahona De Brito et al. 2001; Horne 2014). Thus, whether and how policies influence citizens' opinions and actions, warrants investigation. Though emotional and symbolic appeals have often been considered of secondary importance, we suggest that these approaches - which often reach large audiences - can have meaningful effects on political attitudes and preferences.

We study how citizen attitudes are altered in a particular, controlled setting: transitional justice museums. Despite the substantial resources dedicated to transitional justice implementation, we know little about its individual-level effects (Fletcher & Weinstein 2002; Mendeloff 2004; David 2017). Our lack of knowledge is particularly jarring given the reverberating consequences of conflict that persist long after violence has ceased. For instance, current polarization in the United States may be attributed, in part, to trauma emerging from the pre-emancipation era (Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997). Thus, whether and how transitional justice policies shape political divisions are important questions. In this article, we ask how visiting a transitional justice museum alters individuals' support for and trust in state institutions and their views toward polarizing topics including how to address the past. These questions are critical for understanding how transitional justice policies such as museums impact citizens' view of their nation's past.

Transitioning societies face the difficult task of rebuilding the state-citizen relationship while threats of a return to conflict or a coup instigated by those formerly in power loom large (Snyder & Vinjamuri 2003). In these settings, politicians can appeal to individual's emotions, and in doing so, alter attitudes and shift public opinion to advance political goals. Museums are a context to examine these appeals and their consequences. Memorials and transitional justice museums have become increasingly common, contentious, and visited.<sup>1</sup>

Conventional wisdom suggests that memorials and museums recount troubled pasts, pay tribute to victims, and encourage values such as respect and tolerance - not only toward those negatively impacted by the past conflict - but in contemporary relationships as well (Barsalou & Baxter 2007). Some have highlighted, however, how these physical spaces can remind visitors of a conflicted past, perhaps activating divisive ideologies (Jelin 2007; Greeley et al. 2020). We build on insights from both of these paradigms. While we posit that an individual's ideology conditions the way she perceives transitional justice policies, we argue that the victim-centered approach and emotional content in museums can be particularly effective in generating empathy and attitudinal changes on divisive political issues. We expect these shifts to persist after the initial visit.

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<sup>1</sup> Museums commemorating political violence in Japan, Germany, and the US for example, each attract more than a million annual visitors. See <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/02/27/national/hiroshima-peace-museum-breaks-annual-attendance-record-obama-visit/#.Wz9vuVMvxTY>; <https://2017.911memorial.org/>; and [http://70.auschwitz.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=82&Itemid=173&lang=en](http://70.auschwitz.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=82&Itemid=173&lang=en), accessed July 13, 2018.

In this project, the first of its kind, we measure whether transitional justice museums impact visitors' political attitudes and how long the effects endure. Insofar as transitional justice museums constitute one example of a government strategy to change citizens' attitudes, this study assesses their success through a field experiment evaluating the impact of visiting a museum that memorializes victims of General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, the *Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos* (Museum of Memory and Human Rights, hereafter MMDH).<sup>2</sup> We randomly assigned participating Chilean university students to visit the museum for one hour and leverage our random assignment procedure to causally infer how a museum visit shapes political attitudes. In particular, we focus on political attitudes concerning institutions associated with the period memorialized and those concerning transitional justice policies. By analyzing these topics, we are able to draw conclusions about the effects of visiting a memorial museum. Through several follow-up surveys, we probe the durability of these effects.

In Chile, the military dictatorship pitted those on the right against those on the left. We find that though those currently identifying on the left and right view the museum differently, the museum elicits emotional reactions and persuades visitors on both sides of the ideological spectrum. After visiting the MMDH, participants are more supportive of democracy, opposed to military governments, and satisfied with the government. With respect to transitional justice policies, we find that museum visitors are more likely to support victim compensation and pardoning perpetrators. We find suggestive evidence that these results are driven by the emotional component of a museum visit. Some attitudinal changes display high degrees of durability (two to six months).

This article speaks to the literatures on transitional justice and on political attitudes and behaviors and their adaptability. In societies with a convoluted history of war, repression, or intergroup strife, addressing the past is thorny but far-reaching, especially the emotional component. What societies do to confront their traumatic past is manifold, and much of it involves inducing affective responses by addressing the conflict in an inherently political manner. Memorials and memorial museums are one manifestation of this tactic and their prevalence and popularity extend to countries rich and poor and across continents. The article is organized as follows: in the next section, we present the theoretical framework. Next, we discuss our research design and empirical strategy. We then present the empirical results and conclude.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Reconciliation**

How do memory policies affect individuals exposed to them? Existing accounts remain divided. Some scholars and practitioners advocate for transitional justice policies, arguing they can be therapeutic, allowing victims and societies to come to terms with past abuses (Kritz 1995; Long & Brecke 2003). Others suggest that transitional justice policies “close the book” on a traumatic past, break a damaging cycle of revenge, and can form the basis of a shared history (Hayner 2001). The implicit or explicit logic, then, is that acknowledging the past promotes desirable

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<sup>2</sup> Opatow argues: “The MMDH was proposed, approved, and inaugurated during Michelle Bachelet's presidency (2006-2010) and therefore speaks for the State.” (2015: 237).

outcomes including tolerance, trust, and reconciliation among those on opposite sides of the political cleavage and can shore up support for contemporary political institutions.

Critics, however, maintain that these policies can ingrain societal divisions and strengthen animosity between victims and perpetrators (Amstutz 2005; Snyder & Vinjamuri 2003). By antagonizing former opponents and conjuring painful memories, skeptics fear that transitional justice policies might induce a polarizing effect and damage prospects for reconciliation (Mendeloff 2004; Rieff 2011). People with different views of the past might respond differently to these policies. This may be especially acute when politicians use memorial sites to make political affirmations and propagate a certain version of a contested history (Hamber 2006; Jelín 2007). In cases where the past is debated and there exists a lack of consensus with respect to political violence, theoretical accounts suggest that policies that address the turbulent past may harden existing divisions between those with conflicting views of the period in question. We will argue that a third option is possible: museum visitors can be persuaded to adopt a certain position on divisive issues regardless of their prior political stance and evaluation of the museum itself. This outcome is particularly likely when museums reconstruct atrocities and encourage compassion, evoking an emotional response.

Empirical evidence about transitional justice policies' ability to change individual attitudes and societal dynamics is inconclusive. Some studies of transitional justice's effects have found that they strengthen human rights, peacebuilding, and prospects for democratization at the state-level (Olsen et al. 2010; Loyle & Appel 2017). At the individual-level, research has also suggested that participation in transitional justice can increase trust and forgiveness of perpetrators (Cilliers, et al. 2016), perceptions of justice and pro-democratic attitudes (David & Choi 2009), and civic trust (de Grieff 2006). At the same time, a number of scholars have failed to find evidence of hypothesized positive effects (Gibson 2006; Backer 2010%; Meernik 2005). There is also evidence of detrimental effects following participation in transitional justice; studies have shown that in some contexts participants are dissatisfied with the policies and that their discontent can grow over time (Gibson 2006; Backer 2010). Negative psychological repercussions have also been documented among those participating in transitional justice (Cilliers et al. 2016; Pham et al. 2004).

Overall, despite a marked desire to understand the effects of transitional justice policies, it is unclear whether they alter attitudes, harden existing beliefs, and whether the effects differ according to pre-existing perceptions. In particular, we have much to learn about how memorial policies impact individuals' political attitudes, such as their views toward certain political issues, institutional trust, and support for other transitional justice policies. Political attitudes of individuals in transitioning societies, as in democracies in general, are consequential. When aggregated, they shape the extent to which these societies are able to achieve reconciliation, prevent conflict reversions, and build long-lasting peace.

## **2.2 The Effects of Transitional Justice Museums**

Transitional justice refers to policies or actions taken to address histories of political violence. Symbolic transitional justice, a subset of transitional justice policies (Aguilar et al.

2011), are the primary focus of this article.<sup>3</sup> Often, symbolic transitional justice policies acknowledge victims in a collective way by establishing spaces of memory, memorials, or museums depicting victims' experiences. Symbolic transitional justice policies also frequently strive to educate the public and instill particular values, such as respect for human rights, to deter future conflicts and promote reconciliation. In pursuing these objectives, symbolic transitional justice policies often evoke emotional responses among participants.

While there is a large literature on other types of transitional justice policies, including trials, truth commissions, lustration, and reparations, our understanding of symbolic transitional justice policies, and museums in particular, lags behind. Nonetheless, symbolic measures are both heavily debated and funded. Like other transitional justice policies, museums are often constructed as part of a reconciliation effort and conventional wisdom and case study evidence suggests that museums and memorials can change opinions, raise awareness of certain issues, and increase empathy with victims (Hamber et al. 2010). That said, examples of their polarizing potential are not difficult to encounter: Beit Beirut, an \$18-million dollar museum constructed to commemorate the Lebanese civil war, has generated contentious debate and lacks the political backing to consistently stay open to the public (Loveluck 2018). Peru's *Lugar de Memoria* (Place of Memory) has also been controversial, with political opponents suggesting it “apologizes for terrorism,” a claim that has sparked a fierce debate concerning the portrayal of Peru's past political violence (Pereda 2018).<sup>4</sup>

In this article, we build on insights from these varying perspectives to hypothesize how a visit to a transitional justice museum might influence visitors. In doing so, we seek to add nuance that more accurately coheres with complexities in transitioning societies. A first approach considers that individuals' perceptions and opinions of transitional justice mechanisms vary with their political views of the past confrontation. This would suggest that views correlate with ideology when the violence occurred along ideological lines, as in Chile. In other post-violence settings, perceptions and opinions may vary along ideological, ethnic, class or other cleavages, depending on the conflict's master cleavage. From this notion, we derive a straightforward hypothesis:

- Perceptions and opinions of transitional justice museums will vary according to pre-visit views of the conflict's master cleavage.

However, we argue that these heterogeneous perceptions do not prevent museums from persuading visitors. We therefore agree with the notion that symbolic justice can influence citizens' emotions and subsequent attitudes and behaviors (Jelín 2007; De Brito et al. 2001; Hite 2011, Hite et al. 2013). At the same time, it can draw attention to painful pasts, stir up negative

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<sup>3</sup> Transitional justice policies can be divided into three overlapping categories: (a) justice measures aimed at punishing former perpetrators for human rights violations or depriving them of illegitimate privileges; (b) policies aimed at providing material and/or symbolic reparation for victims; (c) truth revelation procedures.

<sup>4</sup> Transitional justice museums are understood to be those that recount instances of past domestic political violence, either between the state and its citizens or among different societal groups. We are interested in museums established and/or funded by the state, and thus considered one aspect of a government's effort to redefine societal dynamics, including trust, forgiveness, and prospects for reconciliation. We thus focus on museums that aim to promote human rights and reconciliation, and not on museums that are promoting a belligerent narrative (e.g. museums of the Revolution in Cuba), museums that emphasize aggression from an outside power (e.g. museums about Japanese repression in Korea or China) or that memorialize only one side in a civil war (e.g. *Valle de los Caídos* in Spain)

emotions, and highlight prior societal divisions (Clark 2013; Rieff 2011; Robben 2012). Where our argument differs from existing accounts is by suggesting that these phenomena need not be at odds with the persuasive effects of these policies. In a nutshell, we anticipate that appraisals of the museum will be driven by ideology but suggest that the museum is nonetheless capable of shifting opinions on salient political issues.

We argue that museums are capable of political persuasion for a number of reasons. First, they recreate historical pasts and "serve as vehicles for the intergenerational transmission of historical memory" (Hamber 2006: 567), drawing attention to not only events themselves, but influencing views toward institutions responsible for repression and contemporary debates on how the events should be addressed. Aware of this, politicians or public figures can use memory sites strategically, to increase support for political institutions or propagate a certain version of a contested history (Hamber 2006, Jelín 2007). At the same time, museums often have an explicit social pedagogy function and often become integrated in school curricula.<sup>5</sup> In this way, museums act as a framing mechanism with the potential to reorient thinking on a subject (Nelson et al. 1997). Second, they can commemorate victims, serving as a form of symbolic reparation for the atrocities suffered (Hamber 2006, Jelín 2007). In doing so, museums often adopt a victim-centered approach.<sup>6</sup> By featuring individual victim stories, transitional justice museums activate emotional responses and may shift perceptions of social norms, processes that have been theorized and shown to alter attitudes and behaviors (Paluck 2009; Broockman & Kalla 2016). These affective cues can be particularly effective channels of persuasion, as they shape information processing, impacting the type of information that individuals focus on and how they weigh this information (Way and Masters 1996). The museum's exhibits, by portraying the personal experiences during violence, might induce fear and anxiety among visitors, causing them to focus on reducing potential threats or adopting policy positions that ensure that the events transpire "never again" (Brader & Marcus 2013). Broadly, negative emotions like anxiety, fear, and disgust induce an aversive reaction, prompting individuals to avoid the circumstances that gave rise to these negative emotions in the first place (Gray & McNaughton 2000). Moreover, they encourage individuals to seek out additional information and can make them more willing to compromise (MacKuen et al. 2010). In this context, we expect that these negative emotions can be elicited among visitors of all political predispositions and can thus persuade individuals to alter their opinions on salient political topics.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.3 Concepts and Hypotheses

We identify the effects of a museum visit on two main dependent variables: attitudes towards political institutions and towards transitional justice. We argue that because political

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Rwanda similarly seeks to not only dignify and support survivors, but to "inform and educate visitors about the causes, implementation and consequences of the genocide..." and "to teach visitors about what we can do to prevent future genocides." See <https://www.kgm.rw/about/>, accessed April 14, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum in Israel, for example, "[emphasizes] the experiences of the individual victims". See <https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/holocaust-history-museum.html>, accessed January 15, 2018. The House of Terror in Budapest, Hungary was erected as "a fitting memorial to the victims" of the Nazi invasion and Communist era. See <http://www.terrorhaza.hu/en/museum>, accessed January 15, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Though additional mechanisms may be at play and we cannot directly test whether emotions drive attitudinal changes, below we test whether individuals' emotional state is altered as a result of a museum visit.

violence affects broad swaths of society, these concepts need not be measured among direct victims and perpetrators but can be observed among those who were not directly affected and may have not lived through it.

Regarding attitudes toward political institutions, museums frame and discuss political institutions in certain ways, often implicitly or explicitly condemning the political institutions associated with the time period being memorialized, while venerating those that came about during transition periods. Applied to the Chilean context, the MMDH recounts human rights violations coordinated by authoritarian institutions while glorifying the transition to democracy. With regard to attitudes toward transitional justice, historical periods reconstructed in museums are also addressed through other active transitional justice policies. Thus, engaging with memory by way of a museum visit might shape opinions about appropriate ways that governments should address past political violence. In line with recent research documenting the sizable changes in attitudes based on active processing and induced empathy, we expect that visiting a transitional justice museum that emphasizes victimization will increase support for transitional justice policies (Broockman & Kalla 2016; Shechter 2007).

In addition, prior research has found higher levels of support for symbolic and restorative policies that aim to improve social relations in post-conflict settings versus punitive measures such as trials and truth commissions that often assign blame and emphasize cleavages salient during the period in question (Aguilar et al. 2011; Rettberg & Ugarriza 2016). After a museum visit, we expect greater support for policies that seek to rebuild social fabric and intergroup relationships, especially because museums of this type attempt to offer hope, emphasizing the country's ability to unite and move forward. Simultaneously, given transitional justice museums' focus on victim experience, we expect that support for victim-oriented transitional justice policies, such as victim compensation, will increase most relative to policies like trials and truth commissions.

In short, we expect that attitudinal changes will be manifested in views toward political institutions and transitional justice. We posit the following hypotheses:<sup>8</sup>

- **Political institutions hypothesis:** Visiting a transitional justice museum will cause visitors to reject the political institutions associated to the perpetrators of repression and to support political institutions perceived as opposing them.
- **Transitional justice hypothesis:** Visiting a transitional justice museum will increase support for transitional justice policies. This support is likely to be greater for non-retributive policies and for policies focused on victim compensation.

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<sup>8</sup> Hypotheses are registered in an Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) pre-analysis plan with ID number 20170321AB. We also registered additional hypotheses, the results of which may be reported in subsequent publications.



## 3 Empirical Strategy

### 3.1 The Chilean Case

#### 3.1.1 The Military Dictatorship

In 1970, socialist Salvador Allende was elected president of Chile. With support from the US, the Chilean military overthrew Allende's administration and installed their own regime, which ruled until 1990. During this time, General Pinochet and a military junta oversaw systematic repression. As in much of Latin America during the Cold War, political dissidents were detained, disappeared, tortured, and murdered (Policzer 2009). In 1988, Pinochet held a popular referendum granting citizens the opportunity to terminate his rule. In the 1988 referendum, 55.99% of Chilean voters voted "NO", initiating a democratic transition. In late 1989, Patricio Aylwin was elected president, though Pinochet remained Commander-in-Chief of the Army.

#### 3.1.2 Chile Today

In Chile, the dictatorship and Pinochet's legacy are still debated among the general public, though the transition happened over 25 years ago. Many Chileans denounce the dictatorship altogether, while others believe that Pinochet helped their nation evade a communist takeover and installed an era of economic growth. Recent public opinion polls illustrate this divide. In 2013, 55% of Chileans responded that the military dictatorship was bad or very bad, while 9% regarded the dictatorship as good or very good and 21% were split on the matter (O'Brien 2013). More recently, in 2015, a poll found that one in five Chileans maintained a positive view of Pinochet (Alvarez 2015) and 75% suggested that Chilean society had not fully reconciled since the transition to democracy. Often, these debates are resurfaced in the form of claims that those convicted of human rights violations are afforded unfair privileges in prison or that the 1978 amnesty law should be annulled (Vargas 2016).

The cleavage around these issues gave rise to political parties (i.e. Unión Demócrata Independiente, Partido de Liberación Nacional, Partido Militar Metropolitano, Por mi Patria, and more recently, Partido Republicano) some of which attract significant support today (the founder of Partido Republicano, on the far-right, obtained above 7% of presidential votes in 2017). The dictatorship continues to serve as a dividing point in contemporary Chilean politics (Loxton 2016). Ideology constitutes a useful measure through which to understand this societal division, with people on the right more supportive of the Pinochet regime than people on the left.<sup>9</sup> This split in Chilean public opinion allows us to measure the role of the museum in a society where public opinion remains divided and to use an individual's ideology to investigate heterogeneity among those with varying prior perceptions of the dictatorship. With respect to heterogeneous

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<sup>9</sup> Valenzuela and Scully (1997) show that 78% of those voting "Yes" on the 1988 plebiscite (in favor of Pinochet staying in power) voted in 1990 for the right-wing candidate and 90% of those voting "No" voted for the left-leaning candidate. More recently, the 2016 Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey finds that 69% of left-leaning Chileans believe a coup is unwarranted even when crime is high, and 78% believe a coup is unwarranted when corruption is high, compared to 48 and 56% of right-leaning respondents, respectively. (Note that these left and right figures exclude the two intermediate categories 5 and 6 in LAPOP's scale, which ranges from 1 to 10). LAPOP's 2014 wave reveals a similar trend. Though we do not assert that all students on the right support Pinochet, we argue that ideology is a useful tool to intuit views of this time period and to conduct heterogeneous analyses.

effects, because right-leaning individuals are more likely to encounter new information and arguments, they might be particularly susceptible to attitudinal shifts during a heightened state of negative emotional arousal.

### 3.1.3 Museum Establishment

Since Pinochet left power, Chile has invoked a number of transitional justice mechanisms, including reparations, two truth commissions, trials for military officials, and several commemorative sites. The history of the specific site we study, the MMDH, dates to 2003 when President Ricardo Lagos and human rights NGOs agreed to finance a *Casa de la Memoria* (House of Memory). Newly inaugurated President Michelle Bachelet resurrected the idea and announced the construction of a state-funded transitional justice museum, which she inaugurated in 2010. The museum's goals are to examine the Chilean past and to promote reflection on memory, solidarity, and the importance of human rights. In other words, the museum has reparative and public pedagogy objectives.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note that the museum was built in Chile twenty years after the end of the dictatorship. This implies that museum visitors, including those in our study, may not have lived through the dictatorship. We argue that legacies of political violence persist years and even decades following their conclusion, an assertion supported by recent research (Balcells 2012; Lupu & Peisakhin 2017; Rozenas et al 2017).

## 3.2 Treatment description

To assess the effect of visiting a transitional justice museum, we utilize a field experiment. We randomly assigned participating university students to a treatment or control group. Treatment consisted of a museum visit, while those in the control group completed surveys to allow us to credibly estimate a treatment effect. We recruited a random sample of students from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (UC) in Santiago, Chile. We worked with the Institutional Research Office at UC to administer two surveys to a random sample of first, second, and third year undergraduate students (N=9,000).

In late 2016, 1,857 subjects responded to our simple survey, supplying basic covariates. In this baseline survey, we also listed museums in Santiago; respondents indicated which they had visited. We excluded participants who responded that they had already visited the MMDH. This left us with a total subject pool of 914.

In March 2017, we emailed a survey to these 914 individuals, asking if they wished to participate in the research project and obtaining their availability during the research period (March 21-28, 2017). A total of 502 responded affirmatively.<sup>11</sup> Based on their responses, we distributed a survey to measure basic covariates as well as pre-treatment views on our key dependent variables, with the exception of those addressing Pinochet, human rights, or transitional justice. We opted to measure these variables only after treatment so as to limit experimenter demand. Our experimental design is graphically depicted in A1.

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<sup>10</sup> See <https://ww3.museodelamemoria.cl/>, accessed July 13, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Table A22 shows the differences between the baseline sample and the experimental sample.

We invited the 502 students interested in participating to meet at a central location at UC's San Joaquín campus and randomly assigned them to treatment or control (251 in each). After students checked in with a member of the research team, we informed them whether they would visit the museum (i.e., be in the treatment group) or complete a survey in the computer lab (i.e., be in the control group). While those in the treatment group boarded a bus to the museum, those in the control group completed an endline survey mirroring the instrument administered to the treatment group after visiting the museum. Though it is possible that convening as a group in an emotional environment might have some effect independent of the museum visit, we minimized this possibility by randomly assigning seating on the bus and in the lab and asking subjects in both groups not to talk to each other during their participation. These strategies mitigate social desirability bias and contamination. Each group was accompanied by one of the authors and a research assistant to ensure procedures were followed.

On the trip to the museum, we distributed a museum map with highlighted stations to ensure that participants' visits were as similar as possible.<sup>12</sup> Upon arrival, our team gave subjects an audio guide and asked them to meet at the entrance in one hour. Immediately after the museum visit, subjects completed a survey about their experience, which included questions designed to measure our dependent variables. We emailed this survey to participants at the end of their visit, and they completed it on their personal telephones or individual tablets we provided.<sup>13</sup> This approach can minimize spillover by limiting the opportunities to discuss the experience before completing the survey. Additionally, the self-administered survey completed on a participant's own device may help elicit honest responses to sensitive questions (Tourangeau 2007). To reduce contamination, we asked subjects not to share their experience with others for at least 10 days following their visit.

Both treatment and control consisted of 251 assigned individuals. 143 individuals assigned to treatment (57%) and 126 individuals assigned to control (50.6%) showed up at their assigned time. Both subjects who turned up and those who did not were unaware of their treatment assignment. Five subjects who were assigned to the treatment group told us after checking in that they did not have time to visit the museum and were unable to participate; we thus estimate the complier average treatment effect (CATE) adjusting for non-compliance (Gerber & Green 2012).

Table A2 presents covariate balance.<sup>14</sup> We measure ideology on a 1-10 scale, with lower numbers indicating that an individual places herself on the left and higher numbers on the right. For imbalances (likely arising due to our small sample size), we include control variables in regression estimates. Attrition occurred *prior* to subjects' receiving their treatment assignment. Put differently, individuals who dropped out of the study were unaware of their assignment to the treatment or control group. Still, we analyze average differential attrition rates among treatment and control groups as well as by covariates in the Supplementary Material (Tables A14 and A15).

When individuals' attitudes change, a key question concerns the persistence of that change. While some research has shown that effects are fleeting (Gerber et al. 2010) other accounts suggest that changes persist months down the line (Broockman & Kalla 2016, Cilliers

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<sup>12</sup> See Figure A2 in the Supplementary Material.

<sup>13</sup> Note that individuals did not complete this survey before the visit concluded.

<sup>14</sup> Replication data and code, as well as survey instruments, will be made publicly available.

et al. 2016). We lack a clear understanding, however, of the mechanisms that generate durable versus ephemeral change. This makes it difficult to predict whether changes from a museum visit will be durable. We aim to help refine this puzzle by estimating the longevity of shifts resulting from a museum visit. We administered follow-up surveys one week, 8 weeks and 24 weeks (roughly 6 months) after treatment. As always, any analyses we conduct rely on research subjects' willingness to participate in our research. Over time, as we administered follow-up surveys, we suffered from attrition as individuals failed to complete the surveys, limiting our sample size ( $n = 131$  in the final round). With this caveat, we present results analyzing whether or not our original findings remained strong after the initial intervention.

### **3.2.1 Visiting the Museum**

MMDH visitors enter by descending a walkway framed by concrete walls displaying the United Nations's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The museum's first floor contains the exhibit "Human Rights: A Universal Challenge," which describes cross-national experiences with crimes against humanity and policies invoked to address them. In addition, a map of Chile locates 160 sites commemorating human rights abuses during the dictatorship.

After climbing a staircase to the second floor, visitors find an open space with videos, text, and interactive exhibits recounting the events of September 11, 1973, the day of the military coup. Through press reports, fragments of Patricio Guzman's documentary `\textit{La Batalla de Chile}`, and radio excerpts, the second floor details the repressive nature of the Pinochet regime. There is also an audio reproduction of Allende's famous radio farewell speech. Visitors are directed towards a dark room that shows how human rights abuses were committed in detention centers and contains accounts of repression and torture described by victims through video.

The second floor also recounts arrests during the Chilean dictatorship, restrictions imposed on freedoms of assembly and speech, and how the press manipulated information. It showcases the search for political asylum at embassies and through migration. As a whole, the second floor evokes strong emotions and creates a link between visitors and victims.

The third floor shifts the focus and describes growing resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship and its eventual defeat. It details efforts by religious groups to assist victims and their families, documents local artists' opposition movements, and projects student-organized protests. A section recreates the 1988 plebiscite vote, carried out by Pinochet in an effort to validate his regime. By focusing on the actions of the resistance and the defeat of Pinochet, the third floor conveys a message of democratic triumph and hope for Chile's future.

## **3.3 Estimation**

To estimate the CATE of a museum visit, our main specification estimates our post-treatment dependent variable while controlling for its pre-treatment level. This procedure is commonly used in experimental research to lower variance and increase power (Gerber & Green 2012; Cilliers et al. 2016). Compliers are all participants except for those five who said they did not have time to complete the museum visit.

Table A4 shows how we operationalize our two dependent variables: political institutions and transitional justice. Each variable is captured by survey responses obtained throughout the course of the experiment.

We fit the following regression:

$$Y_{iw} = \alpha + \beta T_i + \lambda Y_{i0} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_i + Y_{\{i0, T_d - d\}} + \varepsilon_i$$

where  $Y$  refers to the outcome of interest post-treatment for individual  $i$  in survey wave  $w$ , for waves 0 (baseline), 1 (one week later), 2 (eight weeks later), 3 (6 months later).  $T_i$  indicates treatment assignment, and  $\beta$  estimates the treatment effect.  $\mathbf{X}_i$  refers to a vector of individual-level control variables. Baseline measures of the variable are denoted by  $Y_{i0}$ . We include  $Y_{i0, T_d - d}$  where  $T_d$  refers to the date of treatment and  $d$  denotes the date baseline was measured (this term ranges from 0-9) to allow the baseline to exert different effects over time. Finally,  $\varepsilon_i$  is an individual-level error term.

For variables that we did not measure pre-treatment to attenuate experimenter demand, we estimate an alternative cross-sectional specification:

$$Y_{iw} = \alpha + \beta T_i + \gamma \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

We report heteroscedasticity consistent standard errors to allow for heteroscedastic residuals. We also recode missing values (which are minimal)<sup>15</sup> to their means.

### 3.4 Experimenter Demand and Social Desirability

Survey and experimental research are often critiqued for their susceptibilities to experimenter demand and social desirability bias (Edwards 1957; Orne 1962; Zizzo 2010). While we cannot fully rule out the possibility that our study is affected by these phenomena, we took many precautions to prevent participants from responding to the museum in a way that would be palatable to their peers, society, or the research team. For instance, we limited individuals' interactions during the experiment so that participants could not infer the preferences of others. Additionally, we allowed participants to complete surveys in privacy on personal handheld devices. We also reminded them that their responses would be kept anonymous. Further, public opinion in Chile remains divided on many of the issues we asked about, and there does not exist a clear, socially desirable response. Note that even today several Chilean legislators are openly in favor of the Pinochet dictatorship and play down past human rights abuses.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the museum does not explicitly address transitional justice, making it difficult for subjects to intuit the socially desirable response.

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<sup>15</sup> For most variables, missing values comprise between 0 and 2% of our total observations. The results are consistent when we drop missing cases; see tables A16 and A17 of the Supplementary Material.

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.latercera.com/politica/noticia/gobierno-destaca-diversidad-tras-dichos-diputada-rn-pinochet/449933/>; <https://www.biobiochile.cl/noticias/nacional/chile/2019/09/04/tiene-toda-la-razon-camila-flores-defiende-dichos-de-bolsonaro-sobre-la-dictadura-de-pinochet.shtml>

## 4 Empirical Results

### 4.1 Descriptive Results

We begin by presenting descriptive results of participants' perceptions of the museum. We expect perceptions of the museum to vary according to an individual's pre-treatment ideology. Our qualitative results suggest that an individual's ideological preference conditions his/her experience in the museum. After exiting the MMDH, we asked individuals about their perception of the museum. Two excerpts from these responses are illustrative.

"Little objectivity, 100% politically charged with a tendency to ignore facts that are relevant for this historical period." - Subject self-scoring 8/10 on the ideological scale

"Remembering is critical if we are to move forward. But Chile requires more than just remembering. The existence of this museum is fundamental and absolutely necessary for students of all primary and secondary schools and all universities. Everyone should come and remember, but it should be the first step in a longer process of reconciliation." - Subject self-scoring 3/10 on the ideological scale

By and large, our data align with these perspectives (see Table A3). Perceptions vary significantly along ideological lines. Those on the right are more likely to believe that the museum has a left bias and that it inhibits societal advancement (by focusing too much on the past). Meanwhile, those on the left respond that the museum exceeded their expectations, impacted them emotionally, and is an important place for other Chileans to visit. The difference among left and right individuals reporting that they learned new information in the museum, however, is not statistically significant. Our analyses below will examine heterogeneity among individuals depending on their ideological position. Though perceptions clearly vary along ideological lines, our main results suggest that these heterogeneous perceptions do not preclude attitudinal change along our dependent variables.

### 4.2 Results

We turn now to our results. We find that individuals, after visiting MMDH, are more likely to support institutions that opposed or are not associated with the dictatorship such as the church and democracy. At the same time, they express less support for institutions associated with the period of repression - most notably the police and military governments. We also find that support for victim-oriented and conciliatory transitional justice policies increases. These effects occur irrespective of political orientation.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

We find sizable support for our political institutions hypothesis, which suggested that after visiting a museum, individuals would be more likely to reject the political institutions associated with the military dictatorship and more likely to embrace those associated with democracy regardless of ideological tendencies. These results are robust to multiple comparisons adjustments (see Table A15). Figure 1 documents our findings, showing that among our entire sample overall satisfaction with the current government increases after visiting the MMDH ( $\beta =$

0.15,  $p=0.04$ ) as measured with a 4-point Likert scale where respondents could indicate 0 (no satisfaction/trust) to 3 (full satisfaction/trust).<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, support for a military government drops 11% after visiting, particularly among those on the right, whereas those on the left were unsupportive from the start.<sup>18</sup> Trust and satisfaction in the police and military also decline, though the results do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Importantly, satisfaction with democracy (measured on a 4-point Likert scale) increases following a museum visit by ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ), particularly among those on the left ( $\beta = 0.16$ ,  $p = 0.10$ ).

After visiting the MMDH, individuals increase their trust in the church ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). The museum devotes a sizable exhibit space to religious groups' involvement in resistance and victim assistance. In particular, it documents the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad*, a division of the Catholic church created by Pope Paul VI to lend support to the victims of the dictatorship. This suggests that the way in which the MMDH frames issues does indeed generate significant attitudinal adjustments.

To investigate the museum's effect, we analyze conditional average treatment effects based on individuals' pre-treatment ideologies. Figure 1 plots those on the left and right separately according to their pre-treatment placement on the 1-10 ideological measure (with higher numbers indicating ideologies more toward the right).<sup>19</sup> As a reminder, we expected those on the left and right to be affected by the museum visit, but that those on the right might be particularly influenced as the emotional museum materials are more likely to be novel to them and to challenge their pre-visit beliefs. Though our small sample size means that many of these calculations lack the statistical power to detect significant treatment effects, we note that the direction of our effects remains consistent irrespective of pre-treatment ideology, suggesting that the museum influences attitudes across the partisan divide but that some changes on the right are noteworthy when it comes to political institutions.

With respect to acceptance of a military government, those treated on the right decrease their acceptance of a military government by 17%. The gap between those on the left (who had low levels of acceptance to begin with) and those on the right is reduced from 0.43 to 0.34 after visiting the museum. Concerning views toward democracy, the increase in satisfaction with democracy among those on the left and right also means that the partisan divide is reduced from 0.26 to 0.12 after treatment. Those treated on the right also report less satisfaction and trust in the police while individuals on the left already had negative views of the police and military governments prior to treatment.

Turning to the evidence concerning transitional justice, our hypothesis that visiting the museum would increase support for transitional justice policies receives mixed support, as shown in Figure 2. After visiting the MMDH, subjects are less likely to report that they believe

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<sup>17</sup> The exact question wording is as follows: “1) Would you say you are very satisfied, satisfied, somewhat satisfied or not at all satisfied with the functioning of the government? 2) Please tell me how much trust you have in the government. Would you say you have a lot, some, a little, or no trust?” These questions were repeated for each institution included in our results.

<sup>18</sup> Measured after visiting the museum, only 6 individuals on the left agreed with the statement that they would “support a military government in favor of a democratic one if things got very bad.”

<sup>19</sup> In addition, we run a regression with treatment and ideology interacted as an independent variable (see Tables A7 and A10).

dwelling on the past prevents progress in Chile ( $\beta = -0.32, p = 0.03$ ), which maintains significance after correcting for multiple comparisons (see Table A16). They also express greater support for victim compensation ( $\beta = 0.19, p = 0.00$ ) and for a public apology from the military ( $\beta = 0.18, p = 0.09$ ), though the latter is significant at the 10% level. These findings suggest increased empathy with victims, while the lack of significant results concerning judicial action or individualized accountability suggest that policies that advance an "eye for an eye" approach to transitional justice receive less support. These findings accord with other research that holds that individuals in post-repression or post-conflict settings express desires for restorative - rather than retributive - means to address the past (Aguilar et al. 2011). In addition, visitors are more likely to say that those who committed crimes during the dictatorship should be pardoned ( $\beta = 0.22, p = 0.02$ ), and this finding is robust to adjusting for multiple comparisons (see Table A16).

Those on the right increase their support for victim compensation while disagreeing with the notion that compensation should come from those who specifically committed crimes. At the same time, those on the left significantly increase their support for pardoning perpetrators, a result which is especially useful to dissipate concerns of social desirability bias in our study: given that the museum is quite graphic in its depiction of the abuses committed by the Pinochet regime, we might expect this to increase demand for punishment. It is unclear that some types of transitional justice policies - such as compensation for victims, which we found to be significantly higher after a museum visit - would be more socially desirable than others - such as punishment for human rights abuses. We believe this finding helps substantiate the claim that students were not mindlessly repeating what they encountered in the museum, or what they believed would align with the experimenters' own beliefs.

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

### 4.3 Mechanisms

Our results suggest that transitional justice museums generate sizable attitudinal shifts with regard to political institutions and views toward modern-day policies. We have argued that museums' narrative of past events can both impart knowledge and elicit emotional reactions among their visitors. In this section, we shed some light on these mechanisms. Regarding learning, we asked participants who visited the MMDH to indicate if the information in the museum was new to them, with only 13.14% ( $n=18$ ) indicating that it was. Thus, while it is certainly likely that students learned some new facts while visiting the museum, most of them had also previously been exposed to the topic.

Regarding the emotional pathway, on both pre-treatment and post-treatment surveys in the treatment and control group, we asked participants to respond to the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson & Clark 1988). This construct, used often in psychology, asks respondents to consider a slew of positive and negative emotions and indicate how much they feel that way in the present moment. We consider both an aggregate of positive and negative emotions as well as their component pieces.

First, we consider the positive emotions constituting the scale. As shown in Figure 3, those in the treatment group are more likely to feel inspired, perhaps due to the positive message conveyed by the museum or the desire to enact change after leaving. Additionally, participants are more likely to feel interested and less likely to feel active and enthusiastic.



Next, we consider negative emotions, also in Figure 3. Museum visitors are more likely to feel scared, fearful, embarrassed, hostile, afraid, guilty, disgusted, and tense than those in the control group. As discussed earlier, fear has been linked to risk aversion (Lerner & Keltner 2001), which may partially explain our results that visitors display greater support for restorative versus retributive transitional justice policies. Individuals may be fearful of a return to repression, and retributive policies may be seen as a way to provoke those who could install an oppressive government (Snyder & Vinjamuri 2003). Taken together, our results provide suggestive evidence that the emotional experience of a museum may act as a key mechanism underpinning the effects of a museum visit.

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

#### 4.4 Durability of Effects

By and large, the patterns discussed in the previous section are sustained, but their significance levels diminish after one week, as shown in Figure 4. Several results are worth noting: first, we consider individuals' support for pardoning perpetrators; we still find that those in the treatment group are more likely to support pardoning, though the results are no longer statistically significant at conventional levels ( $\beta = 0.20, p=0.16$ ). Similarly, participants were still more likely in the treatment group to report satisfaction with the government, to support victim compensation, to trust the church, and to disagree that dwelling in the past makes it difficult for Chile to advance.

Our limited sample size in the follow-up period precludes us from estimating results with the same precision as the results so far discussed. Still, we present the results to offer evidence that the direction of the initial results is upheld. Given that this study is the first to measure the effects of a transitional justice museum through a field experiment, we believe that such results are suggestive of their durable impact but emphasize the need for further research.<sup>20</sup>

[FIGURE 4 HERE]

## 5 Discussion

Because we present results from a single case study, readers may question the extent to which our findings generalize. Many countries construct memorials and museums to commemorate the victims of political violence, so our empirical strategy could be applied widely. Our analysis of the Chilean case provides initial insight to our questions, as Chile experienced political violence followed by a democratic transition. Nonetheless, we believe that our findings in this case are illustrative of dynamics that take place in other contexts. Within Chile, our findings are based on a sample of university students. From a policy standpoint, findings drawn from this population are particularly informative; most of the museum's visitors are young, and it is a common destination for high school field trips. Thus, our findings are likely to extend to many of the museum's quotidian visitors, many of whom do not "self-select" into visiting the MMDH but are

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<sup>20</sup> We analyze differential attrition rates by pre-treatment covariates and survey responses immediately after the intervention. We do not find evidence of systematic relationships between these variables and continued participation; see Tables A11-A14 in the Supplementary Material.

assigned to do so, just as participants were in our study.<sup>21</sup> For governments constructing museums as part of their transitional justice and reconciliation policies, this group is also particularly consequential. For example, in Germany, the government promotes student visits to Nazi concentration and extermination camps. Knowing the impacts of these visits is thus valuable in evaluating policy initiatives in other contexts as affecting the beliefs and attitudes of the post-dictatorship generation can yield long-lasting societal repercussions.

Our results are derived in a post-dictatorship context. Museums are common in both post-dictatorship and civil war contexts. In the Chilean context, blame attribution for human rights violations is relatively straightforward, facilitating visitors' rejection of certain institutions and support of others. In civil war contexts, where multiple actors perpetrate abuses and atrocities are not only committed by government institutions, it is less clear how perceptions of actors involved in the violence would be altered after a museum visit. Exploring how our results travel to post-civil war settings remains a task for future research.

Finally, our study was conducted 28 years after Chile's return to democracy. Passage of time is likely to influence the effects of a museum visit, as the memory of violence is less vivid. Still, we find significant effects among a generation that did not experience the conflict. We believe that this does not compromise the generalizability of our argument because museums are rarely built immediately after a conflict ends since actors often vehemently oppose transitional justice policies in the immediate aftermath of conflict. In addition, reaching a consensus around what should be included in a memorial museum takes time.

## 6 Conclusion

This project analyzes how symbolic appeals shift attitudes after political violence. Specifically, we measure the impact of visiting a transitional justice museum. We find that after visiting the MMDH, individuals increase support for institutions associated with democracy and conciliatory transitional justice policies. At the same time, they decrease support for institutions associated with repression during the Pinochet dictatorship. Taken together, we provide initial evidence that the treatment, a museum visit, constitutes an emotive experience that can persuade visitors. These findings point to how symbolic policies can impact emotions and attitudes in a meaningful way, even in the realm of polarizing, partisan topics.

As a whole, our results point to the effectiveness of transitional justice museums after political violence. The construction of these museums is one policy among many, and future research should investigate the trade-offs and effectiveness of different policies available to transitioning governments, including trials and truth commissions, reparations, and other symbolic measures. Such questions constitute the frontier of future transitional justice research.

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<sup>21</sup> We also note that though in real-world settings many citizens do "self-select" into visiting a museum, the MMDH is connected to a relatively busy metro stop that shares its name with one of the city's most popular parks, Quinta Normal, and is surrounded by other museums and cultural and artistic venues (Centro Cultural Matucana 100, the National Museum of Natural History, The Railway Museum of Santiago, and the children's art museum Artequin), so it is quite possible that individuals may visit the museum without being fully aware of its subject matter. This is likely to be the case in other post-violence contexts as well.

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## **Biographical Statements**

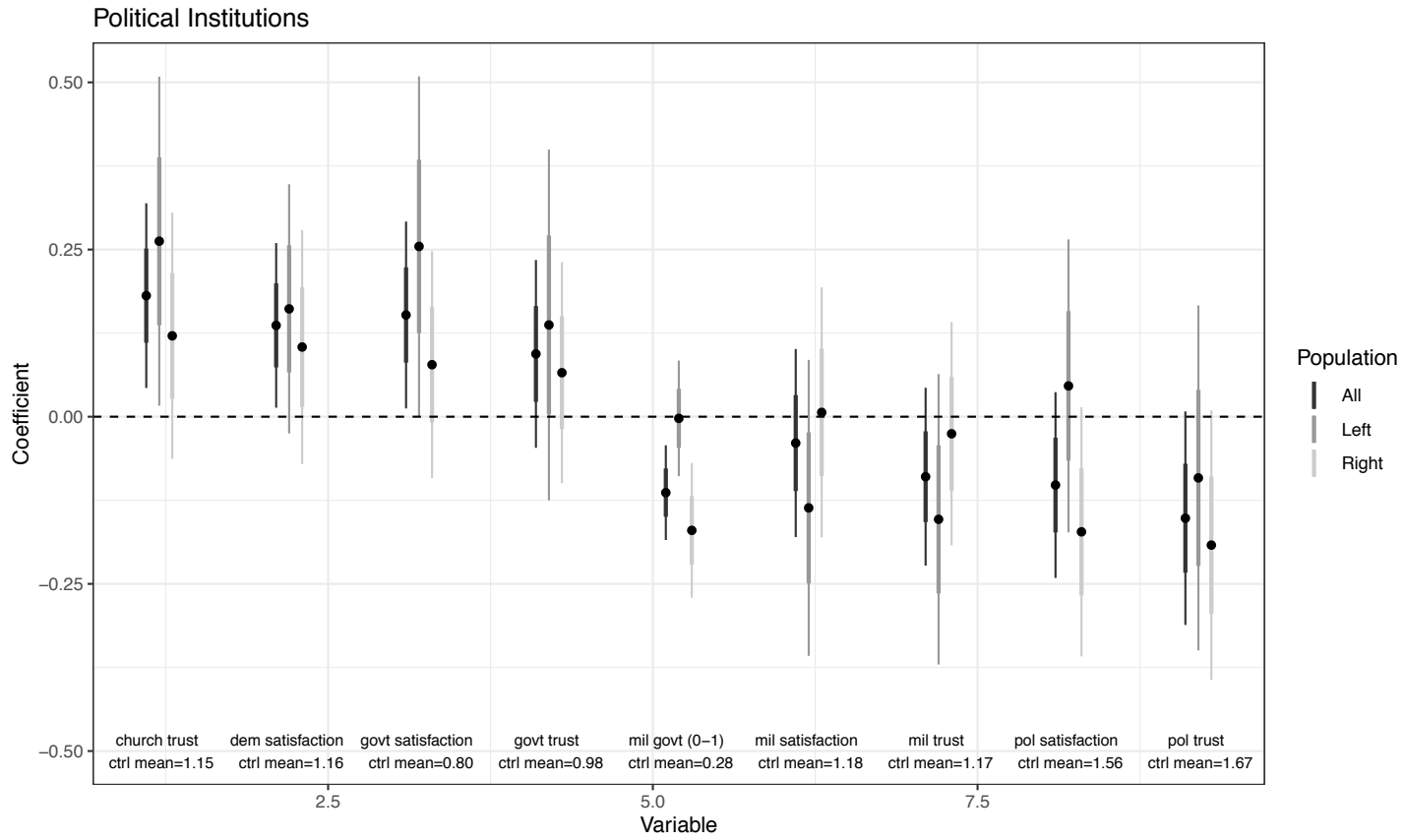
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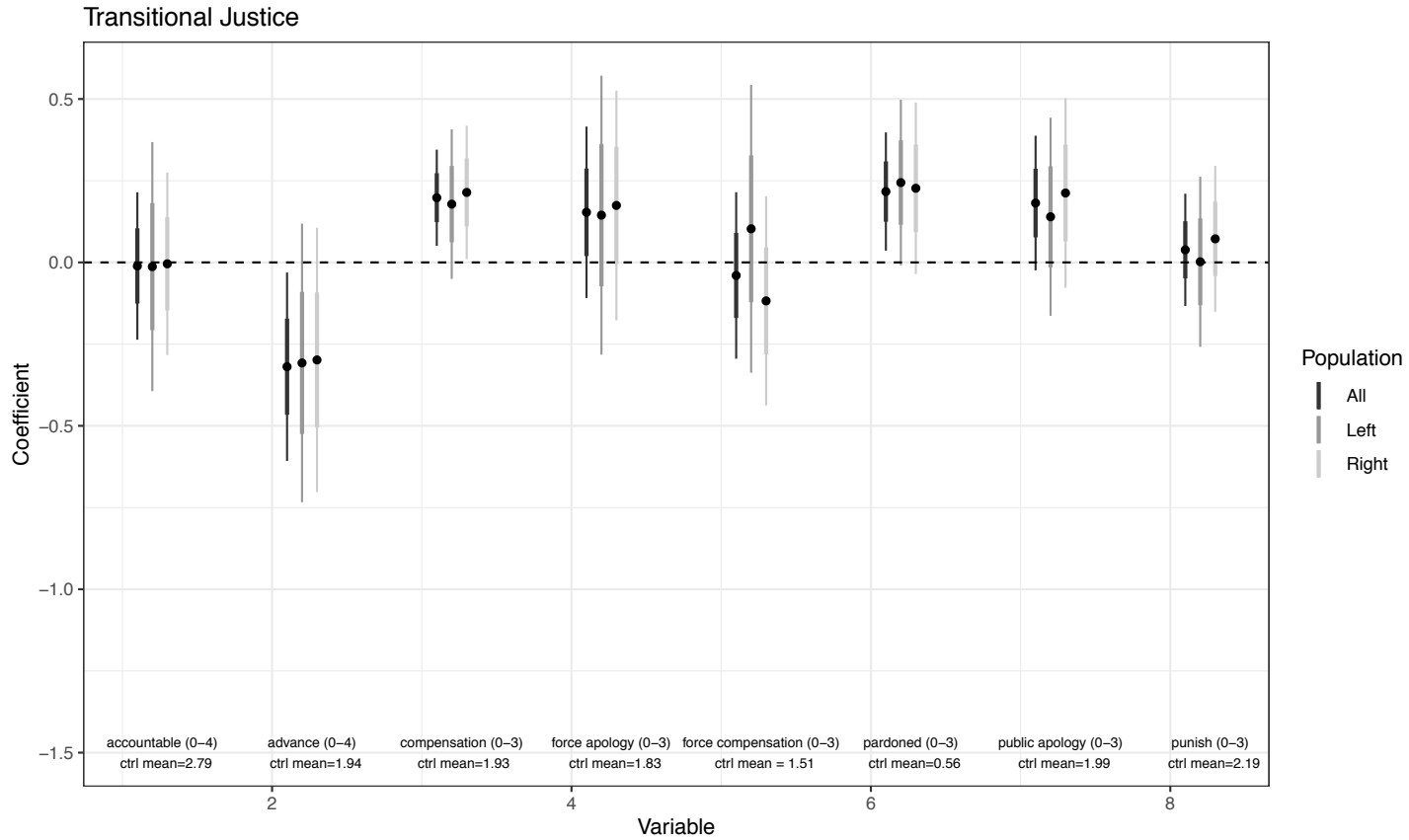


# Tables and Figures



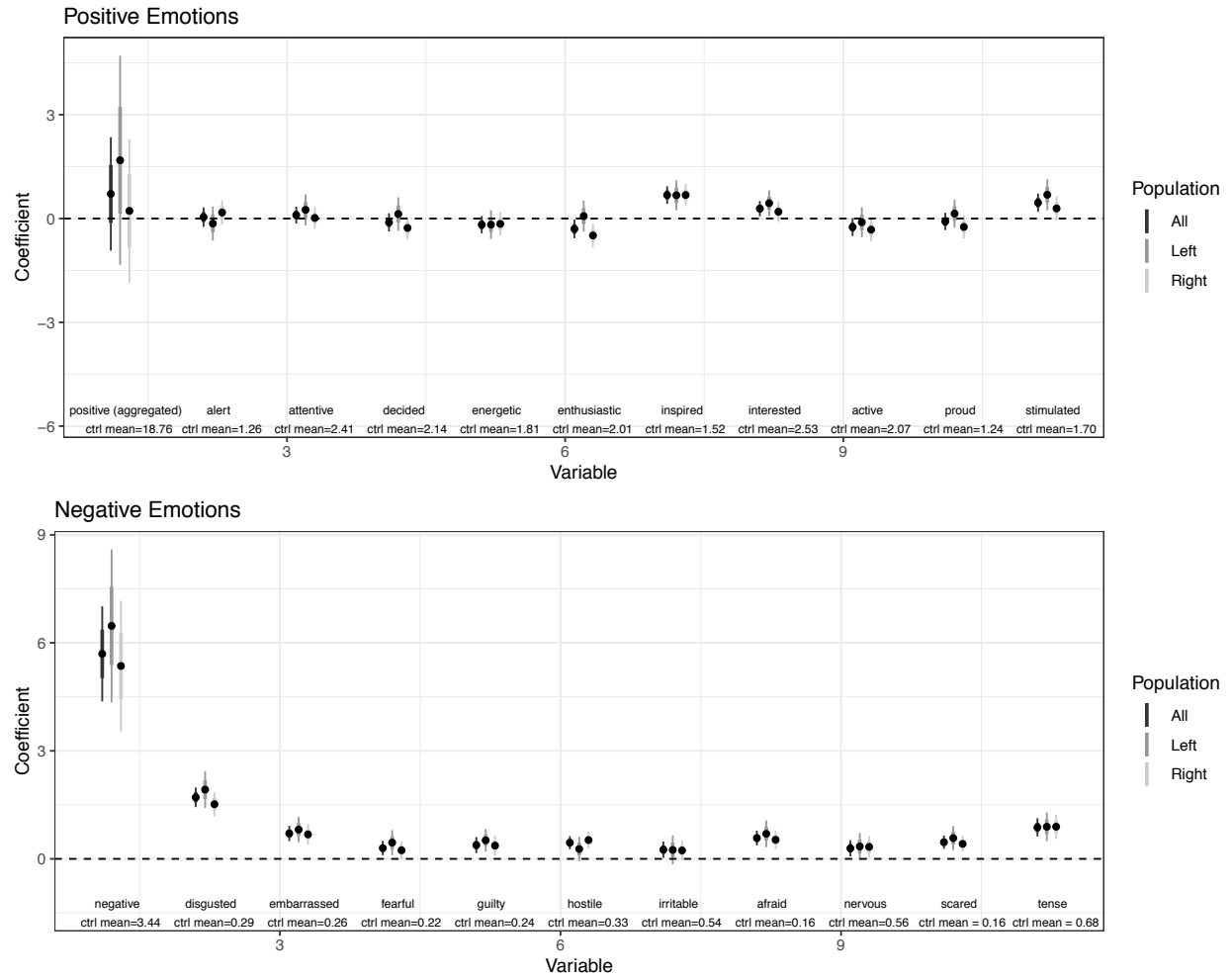
*Notes:* Regression coefficients on treatment variable, with the dependent variables across the x-axis. Thick lines represent one standard error. Thin lines represent 95% confidence intervals. All questions measured on 0-3 Likert scale unless otherwise noted (in parentheses).

**Figure 1.** Political institutions treatment effects.



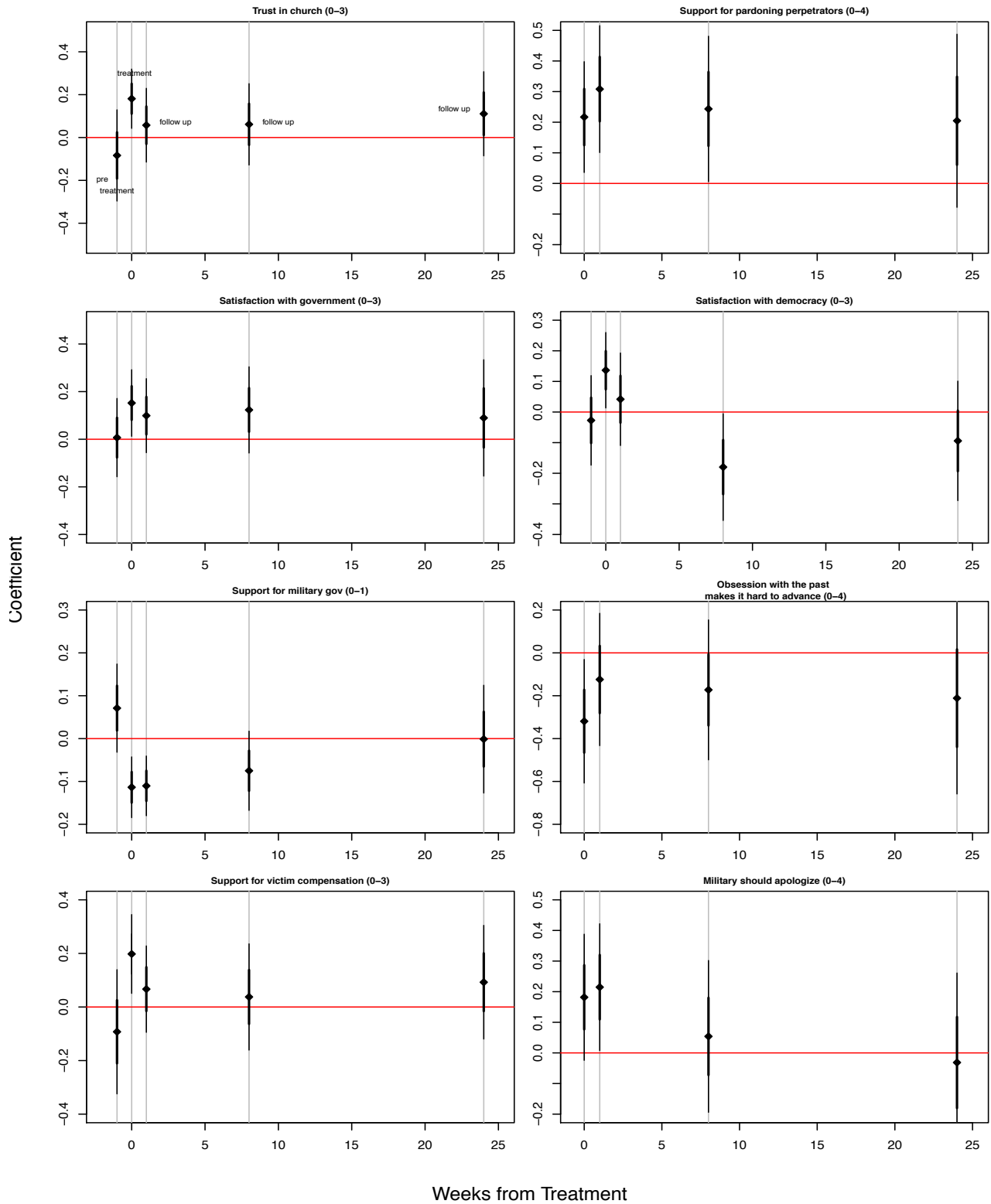
Notes: Regression coefficients on treatment variable, with the dependent variables across the x-axis. Thick lines represent one standard error. Thin lines represent 95% confidence intervals. All questions measured on a Likert scale (points denoted in parentheses).

**Figure 2.** Transitional justice treatment effects.



Notes: Regression coefficients on treatment variable with dependent variables across the x-axis. Thick lines represent one standard error. Thin lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

**Figure 3.** Positive and negative emotions treatment effects.



Notes: Regression coefficients on treatment variable, with the dependent variable measured longitudinally, as indicated by the x-axis. Thick lines represent one standard error. Thin lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Question scales denoted in plot title.

**Figure 4.** Durability of treatment effects.