

**Barricades, Molotov Cocktails, Fires, and Explosive Attacks.  
Contributions to a Typology of Political Violence in Contemporary Chilean  
Anarchism (2004–2019)**

**Barricadas, cócteles molotov, incendios y atentados explosivos. Aportes a una  
tipología de la violencia política en el anarquismo chileno contemporáneo  
(2004–2019)**

**Barricadas, Coquetéis Molotov, Incêndios e Atentados Explosivos.  
Contribuições para uma Tipologia da Violência Política no Anarquismo Chileno  
Contemporâneo (2004–2019)**

**Felipe Guerra Guajardo**

PhD in History (University of Santiago, Chile). Postdoctoral researcher at USACH. Lecturer at the Academy of Christian Humanism University.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9759-7100>

[f.guerra.guajardo@gmail.com](mailto:f.guerra.guajardo@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

The resurgence of anarchism in Chile at the beginning of the twenty-first century led to a reconfiguration of its political practices and of the actors who carried them out, situating the movement within a new cycle of social conflict. Within this context, political violence constituted one of the principal repertoires through which contemporary anarchism expressed its antagonism toward the state and its institutions. Drawing on a historiographical analysis based on the triangulation of judicial records, print media, and materials produced by the movement itself, this article identifies, describes, and characterizes different typologies of anarchist political violence developed between 2004 and 2019. The temporal delimitation responds to analytical criteria related to the specificity of this historical cycle and does not imply the closure of the phenomenon itself. The typological approach proposed here makes it possible to understand these practices not as a homogeneous or linear process, but rather as a field of experiences shaped by continuities, tactical transformations, and internal disputes. In doing so, the article contributes both to the recent history of Chilean anarchism and to the historiographical study of political violence in the contemporary period.

**Keywords:** Direct Action, Anarchism, political violence, social protest, political conflict, revolution, critical history.

**Resumen**

El resurgimiento del anarquismo en Chile a comienzos del siglo XXI dio lugar a la reconfiguración de sus prácticas políticas y de los sujetos que las protagonizaron, inscribiéndose en un nuevo ciclo de conflictividad social. En este contexto, la violencia política constituyó uno de los repertorios mediante los cuales el anarquismo contemporáneo expresó su antagonismo con el Estado y sus instituciones. A partir de un análisis historiográfico sustentado en la triangulación de fuentes judiciales, prensa escrita y materiales producidos por el propio movimiento, este artículo identifica, describe y caracteriza distintas tipologías de violencia política anarquista desarrolladas entre 2004 y 2019. El

recorte temporal responde a criterios analíticos vinculados a la especificidad de este ciclo histórico y no implica la clausura del fenómeno. El enfoque tipológico propuesto permite comprender estas prácticas no como un proceso homogéneo ni lineal, sino como un campo de experiencias atravesado por continuidades, transformaciones tácticas y disputas internas. De este modo, el trabajo contribuye a la historia reciente del anarquismo chileno y al estudio historiográfico de la violencia política en el tiempo presente.

**Palabras clave:** Acción Directa, Anarquismo, violencia política, protesta social, conflicto político, revolución, historia crítica.

## Resumo

O ressurgimento do anarquismo no Chile no início do século XXI deu lugar à reconfiguração de suas práticas políticas e dos sujeitos que as protagonizaram, inserindo-se em um novo ciclo de conflitividade social. Nesse contexto, a violência política constituiu um dos repertórios por meio dos quais o anarquismo contemporâneo expressou seu antagonismo em relação ao Estado e às suas instituições. A partir de uma análise historiográfica fundamentada na triangulação de fontes judiciais, imprensa escrita e materiais produzidos pelo próprio movimento, este artigo identifica, descreve e caracteriza diferentes tipologias de violência política anarquista desenvolvidas entre 2004 e 2019. O recorte temporal responde a critérios analíticos vinculados à especificidade desse ciclo histórico e não implica o encerramento do fenômeno. A abordagem tipológica proposta permite compreender essas práticas não como um processo homogêneo ou linear, mas como um campo de experiências atravesado por continuidades, transformações tácticas e disputas internas. Dessa forma, o trabalho contribui para a história recente do anarquismo chileno e para o estudo historiográfico da violência política no tempo presente.

**Palavras-chave:** Acção directa, Anarquismo, violência política, protesto social, conflito político, revolução, história crítica.

## Introduction

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, Chile experienced a series of bomb attacks claimed by anarchist groups, alongside ongoing confrontations with police forces during riots, demonstrations, and premeditated actions. This context raised concerns among political actors, public opinion, and security agencies regarding the individuals and groups involved, the political traditions underpinning these actions, and whether they represented a novel phenomenon or a historical continuity. Although the anarchist tradition in Chile has been marked by periods of both visibility and retreat, its contemporary resurgence not only reentered the public sphere but also intersected with longer-standing traditions of political violence associated with radical left-wing and anti-institutional sectors.

The association between anarchism and violence has a long international historical trajectory. While the media and political opponents have often reinforced this image, it cannot be understood solely as a caricature or media construction, since it is firmly grounded in historical experience. A significant milestone in this tradition was the formulation of the so-called “propaganda by the deed,” endorsed at the Congress of the Anti-Authoritarian International held in London in 1881 (Avilés, 2012), where violent action was defended as a privileged means of political agitation and revolutionary pedagogy. The well-known assertion that “the simplest act directed against existing institutions speaks more effectively to the masses than thousands of pamphlets and torrents of words” (Avilés, 2009) clearly reflects a conception of violence as a form of political language and social mobilization. Nevertheless, this formulation represented only one among many historical expressions of the relationship between anarchism and violence.

The use of violence as a political resource has not been exclusive to anarchism; rather, it has been employed by a wide range of ideological currents, both revolutionary and conservative, in pursuit of transforming, preserving, or restoring the social order. In the anarchist case, the distinctive nature of political violence lies not so much in its intensity or lethality as in the radicalism of its ideological foundations, particularly its rejection of the state, its institutions, and all forms of authority.

At the same time, contemporary anarchism has also developed a broad repertoire of nonviolent political practices, including the creation of social centers, publications, squatted spaces, grassroots collectives, and participation in student movements. These experiences have coexisted with violent action, shaping a diverse field of political intervention that cannot be reduced to a single mode of expression.

Within this framework, the present study examines political violence within the contemporary anarchist movement in Chile between 2004 and 2019. The central research question explores the forms that such violence assumed during this period. The study’s main objective is to characterize these practices by proposing a typology capable of distinguishing their principal modes of expression, while the specific objectives seek to identify their forms of manifestation and examine the political and social contexts in which they emerged.

Analyzing anarchist political violence in light of its historical trajectory and the diversification of its repertoires makes it possible to examine its insertion into different cycles of social mobilization and the responses developed by the state. It also facilitates an understanding of the interaction between radical political action and mechanisms of control, surveillance, and repression, as well as the political and symbolic meanings that emerge within specific historical contexts.

On this basis, the article proposes an operational definition of anarchist political violence and develops a typology aimed at understanding the heterogeneity of its forms of expression during the period under study.

## **Methodological Strategy**

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach focused primarily on understanding the forms and expressions assumed by anarchist political violence. Through a hermeneutic and comparative analysis, recurring patterns within repertoires of action were identified, from which analytical categories were developed.

The corpus analyzed consists primarily of judicial records, print media, and materials produced by the anarchist movement itself. The triangulation of these sources makes it possible to reconstruct specific episodes and contrast different perspectives, providing access both to their public dimension and to the interpretations advanced by the actors directly involved.

The temporal scope of the study extends from 2004 to 2019. The year 2004 is established as the starting point due to the visible reemergence of forms of political violence associated with anarchism in the public sphere, particularly in the context of the anti-APEC protests (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum: Jiménez, 2022) and in the claiming of bomb attacks by groups explicitly identifying with this political current. The year 2019, meanwhile, represents a turning point marked by the social uprising that reconfigured the scale, actors, and repertoires of political violence in Chile.

Although the analysis of these sources was not intended to produce a comprehensive inventory or quantitative assessment, it nevertheless made it possible to identify recurring patterns and methods in the deployment of violence. Based on these regularities, an analytical typology was constructed to distinguish and categorize the exercise of anarchist violence not as a merely heterogeneous repertoire, but as a set of identifiable forms of political action. In this sense, the proposed categories were developed from empirically observable regularities detected in the sources.

## **Anarchist Political Violence: Approaches Toward an Evolving Concept**

The conceptualization of violence has generated a broad field of reflection within the social sciences, addressing its definitions, uses, and typologies from disciplines such as anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology. Historiography entered this discussion at a later stage, once violence began to be understood as a phenomenon that could itself be historicized, capable of revealing both processes of change and long-term continuities. Different approaches have interpreted violence as an expression of social anomie, either through pathologizing perspectives or through frameworks centered on structural and cultural factors, leading many scholars to favor interdisciplinary approaches to its analysis.

A significant portion of these efforts has focused on defining the concept of violence itself. However, its indiscriminate expansion -to the point of encompassing almost any human action- has tended to strip the term of analytical precision and undermine its usefulness as a category (Aróstegui, 1994b). In response, some studies have sought to historicize the semantic debate surrounding violence (Blair, 2009), highlighting the difficulty of constructing a universal definition. From this perspective, scholars

have examined its ethical foundations (Suñé, 2009), its symbolic dimensions, its relationship to gender (Krook & Restrepo, 2016), and its systemic character within contemporary societies (Han, 2016).

Among the classic contributions to the subject is that of Walter Benjamin, who distinguished between legitimate and legal violence, as well as between violence that founds law and violence aimed at preserving it (Benjamin, 2001). This reflection was later revisited by Eduardo Grüner, who emphasized violence's foundational role in the creation of new legal and political orders (1997). Max Weber, meanwhile, focused his analysis on the legitimization of structural violence, particularly through the consolidation of the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force (2021).

For the purposes of this study, this diversity of perspectives must be narrowed, especially regarding the concept of political violence. Different studies have approached the issue through analyses of specific episodes of social conflict (Goicovic, 2013) or through long-term historical perspectives (Salazar, 2006), with historiographical emphasis placed on state massacres (Goicovic, 2004), resistance to state discipline (Goicovic, 2020), and illegal practices developed by popular sectors in response to structures of domination (Lozoya, 2014).

Florentino Moreno Martín, professor in the Department of Social, Work, and Differential Psychology at the Complutense University of Madrid, proposes understanding political violence as the action of organized groups aimed at transforming the structure of power, its distribution, or the manner in which it is exercised (Moreno, 2009). From this perspective, political violence encompasses both the use of force by the state and the actions of those who rebel against state authority or against equivalent actors. Nevertheless, approaches centered on the defense of state order frequently equate political violence with terrorism (Rosler, 2015), emphasizing its illegitimate and criminal character. Pilar Calveiro, political scientist and Argentine exile who was detained and tortured at the Navy Mechanics School (ESMA) during Argentina's military dictatorship in the 1970s, warns that the vagueness of the concept of terrorism allows highly diverse practices -even entirely peaceful actions- to be subsumed under that label (2012).

From another perspective, historian Eduardo González Calleja argues that violence should be understood as a symbolic action endowed with meaning and capable of communication (2002). Similarly, Julio Aróstegui conceives violence as a mechanism for resolving conflicts through the rupture of established norms, understanding it fundamentally as a social relationship. In this sense, political violence may be defined as any action outside institutional rules, carried out by individual or collective actors with the aim of influencing or controlling the functioning of the political system (1994a).

Isabelle Sommier, professor of Sociology at the University of Paris, further develops this characterization by emphasizing the pragmatic intentionality of those who exercise violence, defining it as behavior aimed at causing physical harm in order to confront power from the standpoint of a radical ideology of social change (2009).

For the purposes of this research, political violence is understood as a relationship between opposing actors who resolve their disputes through noninstitutional means, expressed through collective attacks motivated by an idea of radical social transformation and directed against a political regime or against competing groups.

Among the various ways of conceptualizing the political dimension of violence, the identification of actors with a particular ideological matrix facilitates its intelligibility. This study focuses on political violence situated within the ideological framework of anarchism, which requires a concise characterization of that tradition.

Although antecedents of anarchic thought can be traced much further back, anarchism as a political doctrine is fundamentally a modern phenomenon that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. Its etymology, derived from the Greek an-arkhé (“without government”), evolved from denoting the absence of authority into a revolutionary proposal for social emancipation. Anarchism developed most strongly within the European labor movement and converged with Marxism within the First International, where the two currents competed over political strategy, particularly regarding the role of the state.

Despite its diversity, certain minimal principles can be identified. Sébastien Faure notes the difficulty of formulating a closed definition and instead identifies, as constitutive of anarchist doctrine, a set of general principles shared by individuals who regard themselves as enemies of authority and who struggle, individually or collectively, against all political, economic, intellectual, and moral forms of discipline and obligation derived from it (Faure, 2006). In a similar vein, legal scholar Hugo Araneda Dörr describes the coexistence of a negative dimension -expressed through the rejection of the state- and a positive one oriented toward cooperation without coercion (1993). Faure also identifies three central forms of authority: political, economic, and moral (2006), while the 1920 program of the Italian Anarchist Union called for the abolition of private property and all forms of government (Montseny, 2014).

Piotr Kropotkin synthesized this conception by defining anarchism as a form of social organization without government, based on free agreements (Grupo de Estudios J. D. Gómez Rojas, 2017). Despite its internal diversity, anarchism maintains as its central core the opposition between the state and human emancipation, an idea expressed most radically by Bakunin in his assertion that the state constitutes the negation of humanity itself (Bakunin, 1979).

These elements make it possible to characterize anarchism as an ideological matrix structured around the rejection of the state, capital, religion, and all forms of authority, while emphasizing horizontality and mutual aid.

It is essential to clarify that adherence to anarchism does not necessarily imply recourse to political violence. Historically, broad sectors of the anarchist movement have privileged other repertoires of action and, in many cases, have explicitly rejected violence on the grounds that it is counterproductive.

Consequently, violence should not be understood as an essential feature of anarchism, but rather as a practice associated with specific tendencies or historical conjunctures.

Within this framework, anarchist political violence may be understood as a form of confrontation carried out through noninstitutional means, expressed in actions directed against the political regime or against other actors regarded as oppressive, and grounded in a project of radical social transformation that combines antagonism toward structures of domination with the affirmation of social relations based on free association.

### **History of Chilean Anarchism: From the Labor Movement to the Hooded Youth**

During the nineteenth century, Latin America became an increasingly important destination for European migrants seeking new means of subsistence, within the broader context of a global capitalist economy that demanded the large-scale movement of labor. These migrants, predominantly workers, introduced anarchist ideas that found fertile ground in countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil before spreading across the continent, including to Chile. In Valparaíso, the newspaper *El Oprimido* (The Oppressed), the first anarchist publication in the country, was already in circulation by 1893 (Muñoz, 2015), marking the beginning of an ideological influence that transformed the ways in which workers confronted exploitation and organized collective action. Anarchism promoted horizontal organization, direct action, and nondelegation, identifying the state, capital, and religion as obstacles to human emancipation.

Within a context of oligarchic expansion and growing industrialization, Chilean workers began organizing through mutual aid societies and, later, resistance societies influenced by anarchism, which coexisted alongside socialist currents. By the end of the nineteenth century, anarchist organizations had become established in Santiago, Valparaíso, and other cities, maintaining a visible public presence through publications, mobilizations, and direct actions. Anarchism was not confined to labor struggles alone; it also promoted a broader transformation of both the individual and society, incorporating practices such as naturism, self-education, and sexual liberation.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, while various political parties emerged from the labor movement, anarchists chose to maintain autonomous organizations and avoid participation in state institutions. Within this framework, they played an active role in strikes and workers' mobilizations that faced severe repression. The Industrial Workers of the World and the Chilean Workers' Federation represented some of the most significant expressions of labor organizing promoted by anarchist sectors. Alongside these large organizations, smaller-scale violent actions also emerged, such as those carried out by Antonio Ramón Ramón in 1914 (Goicovic, 2020), who attempted to assassinate the general responsible for the Santa María School massacre in Iquique (Devés, 2018), and by Efraín Plaza Olmedo in 1912 (Varios Autores, 2012), whose armed attack targeted members of the bourgeoisie in downtown Santiago.

Anarchist expressions could also be identified within the Student Federation of the University of Chile, where activists faced intense repression under nationalist discourses that portrayed anarchists as antipatriotic (Craib, 2018).

By the 1930s and 1940s, however, the anarchist movement had entered a marked period of decline. The enactment of the Labor Code in 1931 weakened anarchist influence within the labor movement by integrating trade unions into the legal system, a process reinforced by the repression carried out under the Ibáñez del Campo regime against dissident movements. In this context, the growing hegemony of Marxist currents increasingly displaced anarchist militants. In 1953, anarchist sectors participated in the founding of the Central Workers' Union in an attempt to regain influence, but their insurrectionary proposals became subordinated to reformist strategies. Tensions with official unionism deepened, and many libertarian organizations eventually became marginalized or disappeared altogether (Godoy, 2020).

In the following decades, anarchism's loss of influence became increasingly evident, accompanied by the fragmentation of its remaining organizations. At the Latin American level, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 captured the attention of revolutionary movements and reinforced the predominance of Marxist conceptions of revolution.

In 1970, Salvador Allende won the presidential election and inaugurated the Popular Unity government, which proposed the Chilean road to socialism as a peaceful and democratic transition. Within this context, anarchism occupied only a marginal position. The most significant expression was the Libertarian Trade Union Movement, which brought together noninstitutional revolutionary sectors, though with a predominantly Marxist orientation, alongside a weakened Chilean Libertarian Federation, whose activities were largely limited to leaflets and isolated statements (Godoy, 2025).

The Popular Unity project unfolded under growing internal and external pressure. Within the broader context of the Cold War, the United States viewed the Chilean experience as a strategic threat, promoting economic sabotage and political destabilization. After three years in office, the process culminated in the military coup of September 1973, inaugurating a civic-military dictatorship characterized by systematic repression against left-wing parties and movements.

Anarchism, already weakened after a prolonged period of Marxist hegemony, virtually disappeared from the domestic political scene during the dictatorship. Although some anarchist expressions persisted in exile, they had little influence on debates surrounding resistance to the regime (Muñoz, 2013). Historiography has emphasized this historical absence, highlighting the limited presence of anarchist expressions during this period (del Solar & Pérez, 2008).

During the 1990s, within the framework of the transition to democracy, center-left governments promoted policies aimed at dismantling the armed resistance organizations that had continued confronting the authoritarian legacy. This process of social pacification, together with the defeat of the radical left and the exhaustion of actually existing socialist regimes, created a new political context in which anarchist ideas began to reemerge. Unlike the historical forms of anarchism linked to the labor movement, this new cycle was primarily articulated around youth sectors, countercultural spaces, and new forms of political engagement.

Through critiques of the democratic transition, antimilitarism, and the influence of punk culture and broader countercultural currents, anarchism experienced a renewed vitality, organizing around fanzines, social centers, and squatted houses (okupas) (Salazar, 2014). On multiple fronts, the

movement began to rearticulate itself through support networks for political prisoners from the transition period, participation in the student movement, and its incorporation into the ongoing tradition of street violence associated with Chilean revolutionary politics (Kalinov Most, 2018). Within this context, anarchists became active participants in demonstrations, riots, and confrontations with the police, gradually achieving greater public visibility.

### **Expressions of Violence in Contemporary Anarchism**

With the resurgence of the anarchist movement in Chile at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and despite the continuity of earlier forms of political violence -primarily associated with street violence- anarchism gradually acquired a central role within certain dynamics of urban conflict. These spaces brought together various extra-parliamentary left-wing groups and anti-capitalist currents, within which anarchism consolidated a significant role in direct action and confrontation with the state.

The subversive tradition inherited from the politico-military organizations that fought against the dictatorship and, later, against the democratic transition contributed to legitimizing the use of violence among radicalized sectors, even after these organizations disappeared by the mid-1990s. This process created a favorable context for the insertion of anarchism into radical protest, energizing political violence both temporally -by breaking with its previous concentration around symbolic commemorative dates- and operationally, through the revival of bombing practices (Anónimo, 2015; Colecciones Memoria Negra, 2018a, 2018b) and the expansion of targets, consistent with the anarchist movement's radical rejection of all forms of authority.

Alongside the continuities inherited from historical anarchism -directed against the state, capital, and religion- the contemporary period also incorporated new discourses and political sensibilities, including antispeciesism, radical environmentalism, and feminism. These additions reinforced the movement's internal heterogeneity. Different tendencies emerged, often in tension with one another, around questions of organization, the definition of the revolutionary subject, forms of intervention in social conflict, and the role assigned to political violence. Among these were synthesis anarchism, especificismo, and insurreccionalismo. The latter tendency became particularly associated with the political violence of the period under study, as it promoted informal organizational structures based on affinity groups, emphasized the urgency of immediate attack, and defended the propagandistic value of violence.

Beginning in 2005, a series of arson and bombing attacks against state and financial institutions, claimed by anarchist groups, came to occupy a central place on the state security agenda. The year 2006 marked a turning point in the consolidation of the anarchist movement, evidenced both by the scale of its participation in street confrontations and by highly symbolic actions, including the throwing of Molotov cocktails at the presidential palace, La Moneda, and the first arrests of anarchist militants.

From that point onward, anarchist political violence expanded across a wide range of spaces, modalities, and dynamics of action, which will be examined through an operational typology. These categories are not intended to establish levels of frequency or hierarchies among the different modalities, but rather to identify the principal ways in which contemporary Chilean anarchism expressed political violence within the public sphere. Delimiting these repertoires constitutes an initial analytical step that may serve as a basis for future research.

### **Low-Structure Street Violence**

This category encompasses episodes of violence occurring in the context of large-scale demonstrations, working-class neighborhoods, and disturbances that unfold during extended periods of social protest, strikes, or general stoppages. In these settings, the actors involved do not necessarily know one another, tend to organize themselves in small groups, and generally do not determine in advance the specific times or locations at which violence will occur, even though they may arrive equipped with clothing or materials intended for confrontation.

These may include, for example, masks or hoods, Molotov cocktails, paint-filled bottles, slingshots, hammers, or other improvised devices, as well as objects readily available in the surrounding environment, such as stones or urban street furniture.

A central feature of this modality -and the element from which its low level of structuring derives- is the absence of effective control over the development of events. Participants do not determine the beginning, outcome, or spatial trajectory of the action. Although their participation may be accompanied by pamphlets, banners, or slogans expressing an anarchist ideological affiliation and identifying targets of violence -such as police forces or specific state, financial, or religious institutions- this does not translate into strategic control over the course of the confrontation.

Due to its disruptive character and lack of coordination with the original organizers of demonstrations, this form of participation often generates criticism and public distancing on the part of protest organizers, as well as accusations of infiltration or claims that such actions facilitate state repression. In some cases, these tensions lead to confrontations among demonstrators themselves.

This type of violence frequently appears in contexts of mass mobilization, such as the so-called “Penguin Revolution” of 2006, the university student protests of 2011, and various commemorative dates within the national political calendar. In media coverage, these episodes are commonly associated with groups identified as anarchists and often culminate in the arrest of anarchist militants, primarily prosecuted under weapons control legislation for the use of Molotov cocktails. These arrests are subsequently referenced in movement communiqués and activities, reinforcing the public visibility of this modality.

From an analytical perspective, low-structure street violence makes it possible to understand anarchist political violence as a contingent practice, dependent upon the immediate context of mobilization and the unpredictable dynamics of urban conflict. Unlike more planned modalities, this form of action does

not seek to produce an autonomous political event, but rather to insert itself reactively into preexisting collective dynamics, privileging disruption, confrontation, and escalation, even at the cost of relinquishing strategic control over the development of events.

### **High-Structure Street Violence**

This category encompasses forms of violence carried out by organized and coordinated actors who determine in advance the locations and timing of their actions, without the presence of a mass demonstration or public mobilization. Participants arrive prepared for the exercise of violence, taking into account both the execution of the action and the subsequent withdrawal from the site.

The mode of intervention is defined beforehand, revealing a high degree of structuring in the planning process, the discreet arrival to the target area, and the unfolding of the violent episode itself. This form of violence is expressed primarily through barricades -often preceded by the prior accumulation of materials such as tires- and through confrontations with police forces involving the use of Molotov cocktails and, in certain circumstances, the occasional use of firearms.

High-structure Street violence regularly incorporates devices of political propaganda, such as banners, pamphlets, or graffiti, through which participants explicitly communicate the motives behind both the action and the confrontation with police. In some cases, these actions are later claimed through communiqués circulated on anarchist-oriented websites (Hommodolars, 2011; Liberación Total, 2013; Noticias de la Guerra Social, 2022). Once the action concludes, participants generally withdraw in a coordinated manner. During the period under study, these practices occurred primarily in educational institutions -universities and secondary schools- although they also appeared on central avenues and within certain working-class neighborhoods.

This modality of violence has been expressed particularly in connection with specific mobilizations, such as hunger strikes by political prisoners, protests against legislative initiatives, and, recurrently, commemorations of deceased anarchists. The months of May and December, associated with the deaths of Mauricio Morales and Sebastián Oversluij<sup>1</sup>, concentrate numerous episodes of high-structure street violence, as do certain dates within the national political calendar. These actions demonstrate that confrontation is not limited to large public demonstrations in central urban spaces, but is instead deployed from territories and temporalities defined by the movement itself, generating scenarios of tension according to autonomous political logics.

In press coverage and judicial records, these manifestations are generally described according to their level of impact and confrontation, while anarchist-affiliated media widely disseminate them through photographs, chronicles, and reivindicatory communiqués. Unlike low-structure violence, the number of arrests is generally smaller, which may be interpreted as an indirect indicator of the precautions and prior preparations undertaken by participants.

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<sup>1</sup> Mauricio Morales died on May 22, 2009, while attempting to plant an explosive device at the Gendarmerie School. Sebastian Oversluij died on December 11, 2013, while attempting to rob a bank branch.

Analytically, high-structure street violence expresses a specific logic of political intervention characterized by prior planning, control over time and space, and the deliberate production of a confrontational event. The objective is to establish conflict autonomously, conceiving violence as a strategic and communicative tool aimed at challenging the state while demonstrating organizational capacity, internal cohesion, and offensive willingness.

### **Arson Attack**

This category encompasses a specific modality of anarchist political violence primarily oriented toward causing material damage to a previously selected building or structure through methods agreed upon and prepared in advance by the actors involved. In general terms, these actions reproduce the characteristic features of high-structure street violence, most notably the use of Molotov cocktails as the principal weapon.

Actors typically carry out these attacks by taking advantage of numerical superiority or the element of surprise, with the objective of causing destruction through fire. To achieve this, they employ both the throwing of Molotov cocktails and the direct application of flammable substances onto the targeted property.

These arson attacks are often subsequently claimed through pamphlets left at the scene or through communiqués distributed across different platforms, in which the motivations behind the attack are made explicit. This category includes attacks directed against banks, fast-food restaurants, buses, and police stations, selected because of their symbolic significance and their association with economic or state institutions.

Empirically, arson attacks tend to occur within specific contexts of commemoration or political agitation, similar to those associated with high-structure street violence, such as commemorative dates or actions linked to particular political struggles. Nevertheless, these attacks involve a higher offensive threshold, even when similar tools are employed. This distinction is also reflected in their legal classification, which generally shifts from charges such as public disorder or violations of weapons control legislation toward more serious offenses, particularly arson.

Due to their material impact, these actions tend to attract considerable attention from mainstream media while also being widely circulated by media outlets associated with the anarchist movement. In the judicial sphere, such episodes frequently lead to formal investigations, the appointment of prosecutors, and public statements by government authorities, all of which contribute to their high degree of social visibility.

Analytically, the arson attack may be understood as a modality of political violence directed toward material destruction yet endowed with strong symbolic density. Situated within a brief temporality and a spatially limited intervention, this form of action allows its protagonists to maintain relative control over the operation, reduce the risk of arrest, and maximize public visibility. Unlike other forms of political violence, it does not seek to sustain prolonged confrontation, but rather to execute a punctual

disruption within urban space. In this sense, fire operates simultaneously as a means of destruction and as a communicative resource, condensing the rejection of authority, the affirmation of direct action, and the political contestation of urban space.

### **Explosive or Incendiary Bombing**

This category encompasses episodes of violence characterized by the manufacture and deployment of explosive or incendiary devices placed against targets selected in advance because of their symbolic association with the state, capital, or religious institutions. These actions require prior planning and are generally carried out by small groups who enter the target area, place and activate the device, and subsequently withdraw covertly. Unlike other forms of violence, these actions prioritize camouflage or disguise in order to access the target and reduce the likelihood of detection during execution.

The sophistication of these devices varies according to their method of manufacture, ranging from incendiary mechanisms with delayed activation systems -using mechanical, electrical, or chemical triggers- to homemade explosive devices or industrial explosives associated with black powder or more powerful materials such as TNT.

These attacks are generally claimed afterward through pamphlets, communiqués, or other discursive devices, as well as through references to symbolic dates or political circumstances linked to the selected target. They are also distinguished by the high level of technical and logistical preparation involved and by the limited number of participants directly engaged in the operation.

Although this typology may occasionally coincide with commemorative dates, it tends to develop its own autonomous rhythm and agenda. It represents one of the forms of political violence that has generated the greatest media impact, both because of the potential damage involved and because of its persistence over time.

Legally, these episodes have prompted the application of exceptional legislation, including the Anti-Terrorism Law and specific provisions of the Weapons Control Act. During the period under study, they also led to the creation of a specialized prosecutorial unit dedicated to the investigation of explosive devices. As a result of long-term investigations, anarchist militants were imprisoned in highly visible judicial processes characterized by extensive media coverage and the imposition of custodial sentences.

Within the anarchist movement itself, these actions have been disseminated through sympathetic websites, but they have also generated internal debates and controversies, particularly regarding the scale of the repressive response directed against the movement as a whole.

From an analytical perspective, the explosive or incendiary bombing constitutes one of the most complex and controversial expressions of anarchist political violence, insofar as it combines technical planning, operational secrecy, and symbolic density in the selection of targets. Unlike other modalities,

this form of action deliberately separates the moment of attack from the direct presence of its perpetrators, shifting the conflict toward the production of an autonomous political event.

The centrality of the device itself, rather than direct confrontation, points to a conception of violence as propaganda by the deed, in which media impact, disruption of everyday order, and indirect confrontation with the state acquire strategic value. Within this framework, the objective of the attack is neither mass participation nor territorial control, but rather the establishment of a persistent signal of rupture and symbolic threat.

### ***Expropriation***

This category encompasses armed robberies directed primarily against bank branches, whose objective is the acquisition of financial resources through the use of force. These practices require planning and logistical coordination in their execution and have generated persistent debate within the anarchist movement insofar as they may overlap with dynamics commonly associated with ordinary criminality.

In the language of the actors themselves, these actions have traditionally been referred to as expropriation, a term retained here in italics to reflect its emic and contested character. The concept has historical antecedents within anarchism dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; however, in the contemporary context it also incorporates discursive and operational inheritances from other subversive and revolutionary groups in Chile.

Unlike other forms of political violence, these actions are rarely publicly claimed through communiqués or other propagandistic devices. As a result, their identification as practices of political violence generally occurs through the arrest, prosecution, or death of one of the participants, at which point their ideological affiliation becomes explicit.

Historically, anarchism has contained currents that justify bank robberies both as a means of financing collective political projects and as a way of resolving individual subsistence needs. This coexistence has contributed to persistent internal tensions regarding the legitimacy and political meaning of these practices.

During the period under study, this type of political violence appeared in isolated form and did not require a broader context of social mobilization, instead responding primarily to the decisions of its protagonists. Empirically, these actions may be indistinguishable from robberies committed by ordinary criminal groups, except for the identities of the actors involved and the political meaning they attribute to the act. Their relatively low frequency nevertheless reveals an expansion of the repertoires of anarchist political violence during the period analyzed.

The violent acquisition of economic resources shifts the emphasis away from symbolic confrontation toward a predominantly instrumental dimension of conflict. Within this framework, the tension between individual subsistence and political projection introduces a persistent conflict between the political and

the criminal, exposing the limitations of this modality in generating consensus, communication, or symbolic accumulation, even within the movement itself.

### **Selective Political Violence Against Individuals**

This category encompasses acts of violence directed against specific individuals through various means, including firearms and explosive devices. Targets are selected primarily because of their political significance, symbolic role, or direct association with particular institutions, whether by virtue of the context in which they operate or the positions they occupy.

Unlike other modalities of political violence, these actions do not display a clear pattern of systematic public claim. Their political character rests instead on the identity of the target and the nature of the attack itself, allowing for the inference of an intention to inflict personal harm motivated by political reasons.

This form of violence personalizes conflict by shifting the focus away from symbolic or infrastructural targets toward concrete individuals. Consequently, it requires a considerable degree of planning and tends to provoke strong repressive responses, as well as substantial public attention due to its political and media repercussions.

From a historical perspective, these practices have longstanding antecedents within anarchism, particularly in the assassinations associated with the strategy of propaganda by the deed. In the contemporary Chilean context, this modality also draws upon the legacy of subversive actions carried out during the dictatorship and democratic transition by Marxist-oriented politico-military organizations. Its use has generated intense controversy within anarchism itself, particularly regarding the limits between the symbolic value of the attack and the infliction of personal harm upon individuals.

During the period under study, selective attacks were carried out through a range of mechanisms, including parcel bombs and the use of firearms. Although this form of violence is frequently invoked within the narrative of contemporary anarchism, its empirical manifestations were episodic, albeit with high symbolic and media impact, and did not result in the deaths of the selected targets. Legally, these acts have been systematically prosecuted as attempted aggravated homicide, exposing their perpetrators to severe prison sentences.

Selective violence against individuals constructs the meaning of the action primarily through the identity of the target rather than through the material damage inflicted. While it intensifies political confrontation and radicalizes the rejection of authority, it simultaneously reduces the possibilities for social legitimation and amplifies repressive costs. In this sense, this modality encapsulates with particular clarity the internal tensions within contemporary anarchism surrounding the use of violence, as well as the severity of its media and judicial treatment.

### **Conclusions**

The resurgence of Chilean anarchism at the beginning of the twenty-first century introduced both continuities and transformations in its theoretical foundations and in the subjects composing the movement itself. Within this new cycle, different currents of contemporary anarchism developed a diverse repertoire of practices of political violence, the characterization of which constituted the central focus of this study.

By delimiting a period spanning from 2004 to 2019 -marked by the progressive emergence of anarchism within scenes of street violence and by the social uprising of October 2019- it becomes possible to identify a plurality of forms through which the movement expressed political confrontation. Within this framework, anarchist political violence does not appear as a homogeneous or linear phenomenon, but rather as a field of practices shaped by internal tensions, tactical experimentation, and accumulated forms of learning.

Seeking to move beyond juridical or security-oriented classifications, this study proposed an analytical typology aimed at identifying different modalities in the exercise of anarchist political violence. Although these categories are not mutually exclusive and frequently overlap, together they constitute differentiated forms of political intervention organized according to specific logics of temporality, visibility, planning, and control over the event itself.

From low-structure street violence to bomb attacks and selective political violence against individuals, a continuum emerges in which varying degrees of autonomy, direct confrontation, and symbolic density can be observed. All of these categories share a common core: the appeal to direct action as the organizing principle of political practice and the explicit rejection of institutional mediation.

As violence shifts toward more planned and selective forms, tensions intensify between symbolic impact, public visibility, social legitimacy, and repressive response. While the more highly structured modalities appeared episodically, less structured forms of street violence demonstrated greater temporal persistence, embedded within broader cycles of social mobilization. This dynamic was accompanied by ongoing internal debates within the movement regarding the legitimacy of particular violent practices and the costs associated with the intensification of state repression.

The typological approach therefore makes it possible to understand anarchist political violence not as a linear or cumulative process, but as a contested field of practices in which each modality reveals both the possibilities and the limitations of violence as a tool of political intervention.

This analysis also confronts significant methodological difficulties stemming from the fragmentary and biased nature of the available sources, shaped by judicial criminalization, media sensationalism, and the protective logics of the actors involved themselves. Within this context, the proposed typology does not seek to exhaustively capture the phenomenon empirically, but rather to analytically delimit a repertoire of practices while acknowledging the limits inherent to their historical observation.

During the period under study, anarchist political violence acquired a predominant presence within certain repertoires, particularly street violence and the use of explosive devices, even as it coexisted

with more marginal expressions associated with other revolutionary sectors and broader dynamics of social conflict. The decision to conclude the study in October 2019 responds to the rupture represented by the social uprising, which radically altered both the scale and composition of political violence in Chile, diluting the specificity that had characterized anarchist violence during the preceding period.

Finally, this research constitutes an initial step toward future lines of inquiry aimed at empirically deepening the analysis of specific typologies, conducting comparative studies, and examining the internal tensions within anarchism regarding the use of violence as a political tool.

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