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# Sex Abuse Scandal Isn't The Only 'Pain' For The Pope In South America

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EMILY GREEN



Pope Francis waves to a crowd as he arrives at the National Shrine of Maipu in Santiago, Chile, to meet with young people, on Wednesday.

*Vincenzo Pinto/AFP/Getty Images*

Two words stand out from Pope Francis' three-day visit in Chile this week: "pain" and "shame."

The pontiff uttered them in a speech on Tuesday before Chilean lawmakers to express contrition for a sweeping sexual abuse scandal that has, more than anything else, undercut the Church's reputation and influence in this once stalwart Catholic country.

Some Chileans were relieved that the pope addressed the topic, and that hours later he met privately with victims of sexual abuse by clergy. But many Chileans — including local priests — said the pope didn't go far enough.

"Forgiveness, forgiveness and shame for the abuse, the pope says at La Moneda [presidential palace]. Then he goes to Mass and celebrates with Bishop Barros who shielded perpetrators of the abuse," tweeted Juan Carlos Cruz, a victim of sexual abuse. "Hypocrisy and empty words."



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#### THE TWO-WAY

Pope Francis Accuses Bishop's Critics Of Slander, Riling Sex Abuse Victims In Chile

Cruz is furious with the pope for his 2015 appointment of Bishop Juan Barros, whom victims accuse of covering up the crimes of a child molester, priest Fernando Karadima. The Vatican found Karadima guilty of sexual abuse of minors in 2011.

Barros says the cover-up allegations against him are lies.

But even some Chilean Catholic clergy have condemned Barros' appointment.

"I think he should resign," the Rev. Fernando Montes said about the bishop.

Another Chilean priest, Mariano Puga, was photographed at the Mass on Tuesday in Santiago, demonstrating with laypeople against Barros.

"The pope just made a mistake. The pope can make mistakes, can't he?" Puga told ADN radio.

The pope hasn't admitted error. On Thursday, his last day in Chile before heading to Peru, he defended Barros and accused critics of smearing the bishop with no evidence.

"The day that they bring me proof against Bishop Barros, then I will say something. There isn't a single piece of proof against him. Everything is slander, is that clear?" Francis told reporters.

Julieta Suarez-Cao, who teaches political science at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, said the pope's responses to the notorious sex abuse scandal this week were "bittersweet."

"People were expecting more, and then they were happy he met with the victims. But then he defended Barros. It was puzzling where he really stands," she said.

### **Abortion law first, marriage equality next?**

The sexual abuse scandal dominated much of the Chile leg of the pope's South America trip — but it isn't the only issue the Catholic Church is facing in the country.

Chileans are increasingly avoiding church pews and embracing social norms opposed by the Vatican, including a greater acceptance of abortion and recognition of the rights of gay, lesbian and transgender people.

This is a trend throughout Latin America, although Chile is perhaps the starkest example of it. The Catholic population in Latin America fell from 90 percent, through most of the 20th century, to 69 percent in 2014, according to the Pew Research Center.

Meanwhile, just 45 percent of Chileans identify as Catholic, according to a poll by Latinobarometro. Other surveys show a higher percentage: The respected Chilean newspaper La Tercera pegged the number at 59 percent.

The pope's visit clearly stirred emotions for some Chileans, with some excited to see the pontiff close up while others staged protests and even attacks on churches. But much of the mood in Santiago was ho-hum.

Even though around 400,000 people attended his Mass in the capital, few people lined the streets to wave afterward or as he drove through the city. That's despite the fact that the Chilean government declared Tuesday a national holiday to honor the pope's visit.

"I didn't see a lot of people. There were a lot less than when Pope John Paul II came [in 1987]," said Leonard Chavez, 58, a devout Catholic who went to the Mass. "Even though it's a holiday today, most of my work colleagues said they were just staying home."

And in Iquique, the pope gave his third public Mass on Thursday to an audience a third of the size that was projected.

Ignacio Walker, a senator who identifies as a "Catholic legislator," said part of the disconnect is that the Church is too "obsessed with sexual morality."

"It's lost its reach among the people," Walker said.

He points to the Church's passionate campaign to kill a recent law that legalized abortion in three circumstances: when the mother's life is in danger, the fetus isn't viable or the pregnancy is the result of rape. Prior to that law reform, Chile had one of the strictest abortion bans in the world.

That zeal was on display during the pope's visit to Pontifical Catholic University in Santiago on Wednesday. The university's president introduced the pope by emphasizing the Church's anti-abortion stance.

The pope, who has previously said the Church is "obsessed" with abortion, homosexuality and birth control, didn't mention the law in his own remarks.

Suarez-Cao, the associate professor at the university, said the Church may have lost sway with average Chileans, but it still exerts powerful influence on elites who govern the country.

"Their parents were Catholic. They went to Catholic schools, Catholic universities," she said. "They have influence on the elites regardless of their relationship with the people in general."

The fact that lawmakers passed the abortion law was a rebuke to the Church — but it came after months of hard negotiations. President Michelle Bachelet, a self-

proclaimed agnostic, has introduced much of the country's socially progressive legislation, including a bill to officially recognize same-sex marriage.

Even so, the Church is a powerful player in Chilean politics, and that influence could play out in coming weeks. Lawmakers have before them not just the same-sex marriage bill but another controversial piece of legislation that would give adults the right to change their gender on government IDs. The Catholic Church opposes both.

Analysts believe supporters of the bills likely have just a few weeks to get them passed, as President-elect Sebastian Pinera campaigned against both of them. Pinera takes office in March, along with a new, more conservative batch of lawmakers. Congress is not in session in February.

"It's now or never," Suarez-Cao said.

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