

Presidential Breakdowns in  
Latin America

Causes and Outcomes of Executive  
Instability in Developing Democracies

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## Conclusions: Presidential Breakdowns Revisited\*

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The chapters of this volume demonstrate that Latin American presidential breakdowns have been the outcome of very complex and multifaceted processes. They are situated at the end point of a chain of events, which makes it extremely difficult to weigh which factors are decisive in the exit from power of presidents. Economic crises, coalition breakdowns, intra-government crises, scandals, policy deadlocks, and social protest have often jointly preceded the early departure of a president. Thus, borrowing from Ragin (1987, 27), presidential breakdowns seem to be caused by the combined effect of a set or a conjunction of causal factors that intersect at a particular moment in time, creating a “perfect storm” that hits a president. Table C.1 below presents an outline of the contributions to this book.

In this concluding chapter, we revisit the comparative literature on the causes of presidential breakdowns and discuss how one of the factors highlighted in several chapters—intra-government conflict—may contribute to presidential breakdown. We then examine the implications of presidential breakdown for presidentialism, democracy, and policymaking, which are also briefly reviewed in table C.1.

### The Causes of Presidential Breakdowns

The comparative literature has tended to emphasize the last link in the chain of events leading to a presidential breakdown, that is, a combination of street challenges and legislative action. This focus prompted a debate on which of these two factors mattered the most (see Pérez-Liñán 2008, for example), leading to the conclusion that it was street protest that is the dominant cause (see introduction). In several of the contributions to this book, the influence of the protest variable is recognized, but the claim that it is relatively more important than Congress was challenged.

Table C.1 Presidential breakdowns: A country-based summary of causes and outcomes

<i>Country and Year of breakdown</i>	<i>Causal Factors (Dominant and Others)</i>	<i>Aftermath</i>
<b>Argentina</b> (1989, 2001) (+ 2 caretakers: 2001, 2003)	Institutional: Minority government; midterm electoral defeat. Presidential: Imperial behavior and isolation for de la Rúa; moderate policy preferences for Alfonsín. Others: Economic adversity; looting	Executive instability Flexibilization of rules (presidential fixed-term; call of early elections)
<b>Bolivia</b>	Events: Generalized, high-intensity street protests Others: Minority governments; intra-coalition conflicts	Flexibilization of fixed-term rules
<b>Brazil</b>	Institutional: Minority coalition government. Presidential: Extreme policy preferences; imperial behavior first, then confrontation and negotiation Others: Inflation; scandal; declining presidential popularity; social protests	No apparent flexibilization of the presidential fixed-term Flexibilization in cabinet politics through changing government coalitions within a presidential term Unilateral strategy together with greater integration between president and congress
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	Presidential: Incompatibility of authoritarian leadership with democracy Events: Unlawful term extension by electoral fraud Others: international pressure; strong political parties manage to demonstrate fraud	Stabilization of core democratic principles. Constitutional reforms, few long-term consequences
<b>Ecuador</b>	Institutional: Limited coalition incentives; adversarial congressional majorities Presidential: Imperial behavior; high cabinet turnover Others: The role of the military; indigenous and popular mobilization; economic crises	Executive instability Flexibilization of fixed-term rules Poor economic performance Emergence of political outsiders

Continued

Table C.1 Continued

<i>Country and Year of breakdown</i>	<i>Causal Factors (Dominant and Others)</i>	<i>Aftermath</i>
<b>Guatemala (1993)</b>	Causes of self-coup: Minority government; social discontent; neoliberal austerity measures; confrontational style of president Causes of democratic restoration: Actions by the traditional interest groups (the CACIF and the army) Others: Broad civil society alliance; international pressure	Stabilization of core democratic principles, but: No changes in de facto power relations Delays in peace process No strengthening of representative institutions No gains in democratic accountability and rule of law
<b>Paraguay (1999)</b>	Institutional: Faction-ridden majority government; president-congress-court conflict; succession rules. Presidential: Strategic mistakes; confrontational leadership. Others: Deteriorating economic situation; scandal; violent street protest; international pressure	Flexibilization of presidential rules Electoral weakening of the Colorado Party Shift in the balance of civil-military relations Judicial process against Oviedo remains open
<b>Peru</b>	Institutional: Loss of majority in congress; governing party disintegration. Events: Unlawful term extension; scandals involving president or his close collaborators Others: Popular mobilization against the president	Stabilization of core democratic principles Constitutional reforms including the ban of immediate reelection, and later reforms involving decentralization and local democracy Emergence of another political outsider to the presidency
<b>Venezuela (1993)</b>	Institutional: Erosion of legitimacy and credibility of partyarchy model; centralized and rigid party structures. Presidential: Hostile president-party relations; presidential isolation Others: Scandals; challenges to established parties by new political actors and social protests; neoliberal policies and economic decline;	No apparent flexibilization of the presidential fixed-term Collapse of the party system and rise of new political actors Judicial process against Perez remains open



According to the authors of this book, legislative action, not popular uprisings, is the main force behind the collapse of elected administrations, whereas street challenges are often only the last factor in a chain of events leading to presidential breakdown. As Nolte argues, Paraguayan demonstrators did not force the political parties to act but rather supported them in their power struggle. In Ecuador, indigenous movements led mass protests and organized opposition against all three deposed presidents, but it is difficult to confirm a direct causal link between this activism and political instability (chapter 4, this volume). In Brazil, public protests were staged after Congress's investigations began to produce evidence against Collor, and broadened as the evidence against him mounted (chapter 6, this volume).

More research is needed about the role of protests and street challenges and their connection to congressional action during successful and unsuccessful challenges to presidents. The type of protest and whether protests express broader and diffuse discontent seem to count. Additionally, it is an open question how the extent to which street demonstrations are spontaneous or orchestrated from above, and the degree of involvement of opposition forces (a point often highlighted about the Argentine breakdowns, but also sometimes about the Venezuelan and Paraguayan cases, as our chapters show), makes a difference. It may also be the case that the "institutions versus streets" debate is misleading, as it ignores the many other (preceding) factors that influence a president's fate. Three factors motivating Congress and/or the public to seek a president's deposal stand out in the contributions to this book: the maturity of a democracy, economic performance, and intra-government politics.

It has already been highlighted that the level of maturity of democracy is an underlying factor that may be a necessary condition for a scandal to evolve into impeachment (Pérez-Liñán 2007, chs. 4–5). Furthermore, this factor seems to affect which type of scandal is likely to end a presidency. In hybrid regimes, it appears to be undemocratic behavior, such as a president's attempt to extend their mandate unlawfully, that signals the end of the presidency. Thus, several of our authors pay attention to the link between presidential breakdown and the consolidation or final transition toward democracy. Indeed, this issue is an integral part of the analyses of the Paraguayan, Guatemalan, Dominican, and Peruvian cases.

However, the intervention in these crises of other actors, such as international forces, to protect democracy has been practically absent in comparative studies of presidential breakdowns. Marsteintredet (this volume) shows how the United States and the Organization of the American States (OAS) pressed Balaguer to leave power after the fraudulent elections of 1994 in the Dominican Republic. International players also advised Serrano of the dire consequences of his attempted *autogolpe* in 1993 (chapter 9, this volume; INCEP 1993; Villagrán de León 1993), and the OAS was present, but not vital, in Peru at the time of Fujimori's resignation, helping to secure a democratic outcome to the ongoing crisis there. In these cases, international

pressure may have helped remove a president on account of the undemocratic behavior that is typical of hybrid regimes. By contrast, international influence in other instances helped to thwart the challenge to a president, as in the case of President Bolaños in Nicaragua in 2004, when former presidents Ortega and Alemán established an "unholy alliance" to (unsuccessfully) orchestrate his ouster. Moreover, various countries in the region have often helped deposed presidents by offering them asylum, and thus helping to relax tense circumstances and potentially lowering the cost for a president to leave power when there is popular pressure for him or her to resign. All this suggests that international pressure may not only affect the outcome of such crises but may also have an impact on the way in which they are resolved (by preventing the repression of street demonstrators, for instance). In short, more research on the impact of international factors is necessary.

Concerning structural variables, economic instability, economic development, and economic and socioeconomic performance contribute to presidential breakdown because they trigger protests and weaken presidential popularity. The cases of Hernán Siles Zuazo, Raúl Alfonsín, Carlos Andrés Pérez, and Jamil Mahuad come to mind: they all fell during periods of economic turmoil, and in part due to their own inability to deal with ongoing economic crises. Although the contributors to this book acknowledge contexts of economic malaise that characterize most of the presidential breakdowns analyzed, for the most part they do not refer to the economy as a problem per se, but rather to the way in which economic matters are handled by governments. This adds to the evidence provided by comparative work that is also referenced in our chapters about presidential limitations when dealing with Congress (whether presidential majorities can be built through coalitions or not), government responses to street protest (whether protests are subject to repression or not), and personal behavior (whether presidents or their governments are involved in corruption).

In light of the above, we conclude that presidents appear to be at least partially responsible for their own demise. This is obvious in impeachment cases, but we believe that the claim also applies more generally. Considering that instability nowadays manifests itself at the level of government rather than regime, presidential leadership and actions within a given set of political and institutional constraints seem rather under-explored in the literature on presidential breakdowns (chapter 3, this volume). If presidents themselves are part of the problem (Llanos and Margheritis 2006, 81) or, conversely, are partly responsible for surviving in office, presidential strategies, or the style of presidential leadership, must be considered an independent variable that shapes performance in office (Pérez-Liñán 2007, 146).<sup>1</sup>

There are several examples of how presidential strategy can influence the fate of Latin American presidents in the chapters in this book. Below we present some of these different president-centered independent variables.

A striking variable is the relationship between the president and the vice president, which can have unpredictable consequences for presidential



stability, as vice presidents are often the first in the line of succession. Linz (1990, 65) argued that it was particularly risky for regime stability if the winning presidential and vice presidential candidates came from different parties, or if the vice president was nominated mainly to balance the ticket, without due consideration for governability and stability. If we take the twelve relevant presidential breakdowns considered here<sup>2</sup> (there were five vice presidents belonging to the same party as the president, four with no party affiliation, and three belonging to the other party (or one of the parties) of the government coalition), we find that none of the different political constellations have been exempt from difficulties (although not all deposed presidents have had problems with their vice presidents).

The most extreme case in terms of its consequences is that of the Cubas and Argaña presidential duo in Paraguay. Both were *Colorados* but each belonged to a different, antagonistic, faction. Argaña's assassination triggered the fall of President Cubas, who, it was believed, was involved in the crime (chapter 8, this volume). Although less dramatic, there are other cases that are significant. In Argentina, the resignation of Vice President Álvarez after a conflict with President de la Rúa not only seriously damaged the government's credibility but also left the office vacant, opening the opportunity for the intervention of (the Peronist dominated) Congress to determine the line of succession, as happened a year later (chapter 3, this volume). In Bolivia, Vice President Paz Zamora had his eyes on the presidency when, with support from Bánzer, he demanded that his party withdraw from the governing coalition, while at the same time he remained in office. Eventually, both president and vice president left together, after calling for early elections. In Ecuador, independent vice president Palacio distanced himself early from President Gutiérrez, and clearly stated that he was ready to take over in case any of the early impeachment attempts in 2004 were successful. Even in the case of President Balaguer in the Dominican Republic, Vice President Morales Troncoso (from the same party) made secret overtures to the U.S. State Department and offered to become president if the United States decided to oust Balaguer (Skol 2009).

In short, even though we have found no clear evidence that a specific type of ticket is particularly vulnerable, various cases of presidential breakdown suggest that confrontation within the presidential ticket may shorten a president's term. On the one hand, since they are next in the line to take over the presidency, vice presidents have little incentive to support the president in case of a government crisis. If the vice president remains too close to the president, he or she runs the risk of falling together with the president, as shown by the fate of the vice presidents of presidents Serrano and Bucaram, Gustavo Espina and Rosalía Arteaga, respectively. On the other hand, by distancing themselves from the president, vice presidents stand a higher chance of taking over the presidency if the president falls, and this behavior can contribute to destabilize the government as well. Third wave presidents and presidential candidates would be wise to bear all this in mind when picking their companion on the presidential ticket.

Intra-government problems other than the above-mentioned ones can also have consequences for presidential stability. As presidents have the power to freely appoint and dismiss ministers, presidential cabinets are a reserve of the chief executive. The profile of cabinet members can vary according to the presidential calculus, that is, according to the strategy that presidents adopt to implement their policies (Amorim Neto 2006). We know that presidents who opt to govern alone, refraining from building a "shield" in Congress (Pérez-Liñán 2007), or by adopting "imperial" (Cox and Morgerstern 2002, 460) or "delegative" (O'Donnell 1994) strategies that bypass Congress, may be tempting fate. On the other hand, the use of unilateral resources in conjunction with a high degree of integration between the legislative and executive branches, mainly achieved through the formation of cabinet coalitions, has proven a successful strategy, as the Brazilian case illustrates (chapter 6, this volume). If coalition building is a source of stability and success, coalition breakdowns and splits in the ruling party and administration may have the opposite effect. They weaken a president's position in Congress, as well as his popularity and his credibility in various sectors—including, but not exclusive to, the financial sector—by exposing the internal disputes and difficulties that the president has handling them.<sup>3</sup> Mejía Acosta and Polga-Hecimovich (this volume) highlight how coalition rupture caused several presidents to fall in Ecuador; and Serrano's *autogolpe* was triggered, among other factors, by the split in the president's congressional coalition with the National Centre Union (*Unión del Centro Nacional*, UCN) and the Guatemalan Christian Democratic Party (*Partido de Democracia Cristiana Guatemalteca*, DCG). However, this is not always the case. In Brazil, it is routine for governments to preside over successive coalitions without breaking down. Again, what seems to count is that the president keeps an eye on how and what coalitions are formed, and the background incentives provided by national institutions (chapter 4, this volume).

The next section provides a statistical exercise (albeit provisional and imperfect) to test whether internal conflicts in the administration may be a contributing factor to presidential breakdowns.

## President-Centered Explanations

On social change and revolutions, Jon Elster (1989, 164) wrote: "The ability of a regime to resist external pressure depends on its internal health." But most explanations of presidential breakdown have centered on a government's relationship with its environment, be it Congress, social movements, or the "streets." Several chapters in this book have highlighted more president-centered explanations, which focus on style of leadership and internal conflicts in the administration or within the ruling coalition. The following three models in table C.2 (below) attempt to capture the importance of president-centered factors, while controlling for the factors commonly



Table C.2 Models of presidential breakdown

	Model 1: Presidential breakdown (N = 389)	Model 2: Presidential breakdown (N = 324)	Model 3: Presidential challenges (N = 389)
Growth (lagged 1 year)	-.084 (.039) **	-.079 (.039) **	-.111 *** (.029)
Inflation (natural logarithm)	.013 (.100)	.011 (.108)	-.044 (.109)
President's share of seats in lower or single chamber	-.032 (.013) **	-	-.013 (.011)
Level of democracy (lagged 1 year)	-.109 (.074)	-.119 (.082)	-.013 (.011)
Scandals (dummy)	.937 (.775)	.902 (.719)	1.175 (.535) **
Internal splits	.782 (.343) **	.783 (.367) **	.746 (.316) **
Deadlocks	-	6.205 (1.979) ***	-
Street Protests	-	3.149 (2.211)	-
Constant	-1.362 (.886)	-3.269 (.833) ***	-1.559 (.683) **

Notes: Level of significance: \* $<.1$ ; \*\* $<.05$ ; \*\*\* $<.01$ . Growth and Inflation based on data from the World Bank (WDI 2008). President's share of seats based on (Nohlen 2005) and updated with official sources for the most recent elections, measured as a percentage. Level of democracy is based on Polity's combined authoritarian and democracy index (Jaggers and Gurr 1995). Scandals, internal splits, deadlocks, and street protests are all from the LAWR, coded by Marsteintredet and compiled in a dataset on political conflicts in Latin America for his doctoral thesis on presidential breakdowns in Latin America. Internal splits is a count variable counting for the number of ministerial resignations in a single year. Deadlocks and street protests are level variables, in which the number of deadlocks or street protests (including strikes) directed at the national government is divided by the number of political news reports on a country in a given year as reported in the LAWR. These two latter variables exclude challenges (attempts to remove the president). The coding is inspired by Jones (1995).

highlighted in the literature on presidential breakdowns, namely, economic, institutional, regime, and contention variables. To do this, we have used the *Latin American Weekly Report (LAWR)* newsletter, and created a count variable for each time there is an internal conflict in an administration resulting in the resignation of at least one government minister.<sup>4</sup> Our assumption is that the more internal splits or conflicts in the administration there are, the more the administration is weakened. The variable varies between 0 and 4, and the extreme value 4 corresponds to Bolivia in 1983, a year without a breakdown. It is important to state here that these are only resignations of ministers that are reported by LAWR as clearly being caused by an internal government conflict. Therefore, we exclude from the count regular reshuffles in the cabinet, ministers who have been forced to resign due to censure by Congress, a common procedure in some periods and places, such as Ecuador (Mejía Acosta 2006), and resignations due to reasons that are presumably not related to internal conflicts (as when ministers, and vice presidents in particular, resign to run for another public office position).

The unit for the models are country-years, and we use Rare Events logistic regression since there are very few positive instances compared to negative instances of the dependent variables (King and Zeng 2001b; 2001a).<sup>5</sup> Due to the few cases of breakdown and challenges, the results of our statistical analyses should be interpreted with great caution. Standard errors (in brackets) are robust using countries as clusters (we do not assume that the observations are independent within countries). We only include full semi-democratic and democratic years as coded in the MBP Index for Democracy (Mainwaring, Brinks, and Perez-Liñán 2001) in the period 1980–2005. In all our models, we have excluded the variable of challenges to presidents, or presidential crisis, and opted to run a separate model on challenges (Model 3 below).<sup>6</sup> The reason is that, as Model 3 demonstrates a challenge to the president, be it successful or not, either from the streets, Congress, or both, is driven by many of the same factors that provoke the fall of presidents, so it is more appropriate to regard them as a dependent variable.

Model 1 uses the presidential breakdowns identified in table C.1 as dependent variable, and shows that when controlling for growth (lagged one year), inflation (natural logarithm), a president's share of seats in Congress upon election, the level of democracy (lagged one year), and scandals, then internal splits in an administration is significant at 5 percent.<sup>7</sup> As expected, economic growth (lagged) is negative and significant at 5 percent, the president's share of seats is also negative and significant at 5 percent,<sup>8</sup> whereas the level of democracy is negative but, as expected, not significant. Furthermore, the scandals variable, although positive, does not reach 10 percent in terms of its level of significance. The latter finding is not surprising since only a few presidents fell as a result of scandals implicating them personally.<sup>9</sup>

In Model 2 we replaced the president's share of seats with a direct measure of deadlocks, and also included a direct measure of level of contention in the polity. A deadlock is defined as an open conflict between Congress



and the executive, excluding all challenges or attempts to remove a president (see Jones 1995; Negretto 2006). Street protests include any protests, demonstrations, or strikes that present the government with demands, but exclude those calling for the removal of the president. Deadlocks and street protests directed at the government are both measured as level variables to control for the varying coverage in *LAWR* of different countries in the region: in other words, we divide the number of deadlocks or street protests in a year by the number of political news presented in *LAWR* about a country in a year.<sup>10</sup> In Model 2, all the variables found in Model 1 do not change significantly. Interestingly, Model 2 is partly related to the debate about whether it is institutions or the “street” that matters the most. We note that our deadlock variable is highly significant and positive, whereas the general level of contention in the streets is positive but its level of significance is only 15.4 percent. Institutional factors such as a president’s position in Congress and the level of interinstitutional conflicts seem to play an important role in the breakdown of presidents, and potentially more so than the level of contention in the streets. Together with the information in Model 1 on the president’s share of seats in Congress, our findings again call attention to the factors that Linz associated with the perils of presidentialism but which are now associated with presidential rather than regime breakdown. The relative lack of significance for the street contention variable is perhaps not that surprising, as this has been noted previously (Hochstetler and Edwards 2009). Although street challenges or antigovernment demonstrations clearly increase the risk of presidential breakdown (chapter 2, this volume; Hochstetler 2006), it is more difficult to find a clear association between the general level of contention, evident in the level of antigovernment demonstrations, strikes, *piquetes*, and other forms of protest, and a presidential breakdown.

Finally, in Model 3 we use challenges to presidents from either Congress or the streets as a dichotomous dependent variable, and again find that internal splits are significant (5 percent), and that scandals are also significant at 5 percent. From this, we can conclude that, unsurprisingly, internal splits, scandals, and (negative) growth affect the likelihood of a challenge to presidents. The variable president’s share of seats in Congress when elected, on the other hand, does not seem to explain challenges to a president, but is important to explain challenges that successfully end in breakdowns. In short, internal splits in presidential administrations seem to have both a direct and an indirect effect on presidential survival. They contribute directly when a split in the administration leads to a president’s resignation, either because former party supporters abandon the administration and leave the president with few other options other than to resign; or because the opposition, now strengthened by former members of the governing coalition, can get enough votes in Congress to force the president to leave power early. An internal split has an indirect impact on presidential survival since the opposition may become bolder in its attempts to remove a president when the latter is clearly

weakened by the removal or resignation of ministers, or when scandals come out into the open as a result of internal quarrels in the administration.

These models thus support many of the findings in the comparative literature on presidential breakdowns, but they also call attention to an omitted variable: presidential leadership and the internal conflicts within presidential administrations. It appears that the political management of crises is relevant. Our internal splits variable is only a crude measure of presidential leadership and the internal erosion of an administration, and we consider that it is worth paying more attention to the internal politics of governments in presidential regimes. However, our analysis also suggests that despite the protection that presidents gain from having fixed electoral terms, they should nonetheless—like their parliamentary counterparts—fear for the survival of their governments if there are internal conflicts and particularly when such conflicts break up governing coalitions.

## Presidential Breakdowns and their Aftermath

Turning now to the aftermath of presidential breakdown, there are only a few systematic studies about the effects of this phenomenon. Hochstetler and Samuels (2008) find that there are few measurable consequences, although rapid regime re-equilibration is a general outcome. The chapters presented in this volume suggest that presidential breakdowns have implications on three areas: presidentialism, democracy, and policymaking; and that the implications are not uniform across all cases.

### *Implications for Presidentialism*

Marsteintredet and Berntzen (2008) take issue with Valenzuela’s (2004) analysis and argue that presidential breakdowns in Latin America have changed how presidentialism works during times of political crisis, mitigating some of the flaws of presidentialism identified by Juan Linz.<sup>11</sup> For them, presidential breakdowns demonstrate that presidential regimes can operate in a flexible manner during crises in part by inventing new para-constitutional practices, and, further, that in some instances these practices seem inspired by the flexible solutions that parliamentary regimes find to cope with crisis (namely, early elections, the vote of no-confidence, and congressional elections of the presidential successor). Mejia Acosta’s and Polga-Hecimovich’s chapter support these claims for the case of Ecuador. Similarly, Mustapic (chapter 1, this volume; 2005) suggests that we should reconsider the role of the fixed-term presidential mandate, since it is the impossibility of dissolving Congress (and the dual legitimacy principle) rather than the former that truly distinguishes presidentialism from other systems. Presidential resignations show that Congress is a key to government stability: the capacity to give or withdraw support from presidents puts Congress in a position analogous to that of parliamentary legislatures with their capacity to censure executives.



However, Cheibub Figueiredo (chapter 6, this volume) warns against the inclination to generalize about Latin American presidentialism. In her view, the Collor impeachment did not signal a crisis of presidential democracy because, as Marsteintredet and Berntzen (2008, 91) have also maintained, impeachment is a constitutional mechanism—albeit exceptional—that is available for presidential regimes to resolve conflicts between the executive and the legislature, and is one that seems to be working. It is also important to add that there are only three countries in Latin America that have undergone repeated presidential breakdowns. Thus, it is difficult to make region-wide generalizations.

In light of the above, we consider it important to retain the picture of regional diversity that is highlighted in the introduction and in the chapter by Cheibub Figueiredo. If impeachments and early resignations were exceptional in some countries, in others they may be here to stay, particularly where presidencies have broken down several times. In such contexts, breakdowns are part of the political memory of the citizens and presidential candidates alike, and an option that remains open regardless of constitutional fixed-term rules.

A further element that is typical of presidential systems that this wave of presidential breakdowns has brought to the fore is the role of the vice president and, more generally, of succession rules. Latin American constitutional rules vary considerably regarding the workings of the vice presidency: there are constitutions that do not provide for a vice presidency (Chile and Mexico), and some that provide for more than one (Costa Rica and Peru). The role that vice presidents play when there is no president in office also varies, as there are different succession rules to provide for the termination of a presidential term, including: the appointment of a successor by Congress; calling elections; the adoption of a mixed system; and following a preestablished line of succession (see chapter 1, this volume). In crisis situations, these different dispositions may well shape the actions of legal successors and/or legislators, thus giving rise to varying political strategies, including challenges to the president either by vice presidents or Congress, as various chapters here show. On the other hand, the increased likelihood of presidential breakdown may lead to changes in the way presidential tickets are built or even promote a change in constitutional succession rules in acknowledgment of previous presidential successions. Our study suggests that we should pay more attention to what happens with succession rules in the future.

### *Implications for Accountability and Democracy*

How is accountability between voters, Congress, and the president affected by presidential breakdowns? Pérez-Liñán (2005) observed that, over time, Congress prevails more often than presidents when there are interinstitutional conflicts, which alters our perception of power relations between the two institutions. Marsteintredet (2008) concludes that presidential breakdowns

should increase the level of horizontal and vertical accountability, and that they subject presidents to a dual accountability from the streets and Congress.

But concerns have also been voiced that this is a failed rather than a virtuous kind of accountability (Schmitter 2004), and that presidential breakdown suggests the prevalence of an “intermittent model” of checks and balances that responds to popular pressure and differs greatly from the institutionalized forms of accountability that characterize well established democracies (Pérez-Liñán 2007, 207). Against this view, the evidence from Brazil (chapter 6, this volume) suggests that Congress functioned as an effective oversight institution, not only during the impeachment of Collor but on many occasions thereafter. Further, as is stressed in other chapters here, the relatively more powerful role of Congress as compared with popular pressure makes it hard to conclude that it is only the Brazilian case that fails to comply with the “intermittent checks and balances” model. In fact, impeachments—as well as votes of confidence in parliamentary systems—are instruments of accountability of last resort: their use is intended to be sporadic and they are therefore complemented by a wide range of other oversight mechanisms that are more appropriate in normal times. This is not to say that horizontal checks on the executive are not “politicized” (Pérez-Liñán 2007, 207): electoral, partisan, and even personal motivations clearly lead legislators to pursue actions against a (discredited) executive.

This seemingly optimistic view of accountability is complemented by the immediate and positive democratic effect that presidential breakdowns had in countries with regimes that combine elements of democracy and authoritarianism: Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, and Guatemala were all hybrid regimes when presidential breakdowns occurred there. Several studies published in the early aftermath of presidential breakdowns highlighted the positive effects that the phenomenon had on the consolidation of democracy, including the emergence of a stronger citizenry (Abente-Brun 1999; Hartlyn 1998; Schamis 2002; Villagrán de León 1993). However, the relevant chapters in this volume suggest that we should be more cautious about drawing such conclusions. National and international pressures led to the ouster of presidents on account of their undemocratic behavior and for disrespecting minimal democratic procedures, but with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that there are many continuities in the way that politics is done, and there has been little progress with strengthening of the rule of law or improving the quality of democracy. In Paraguay, for instance, a high percentage of the population (between 30 and 44 percent) is still open to authoritarian solutions (chapter 8, this volume).

It is difficult to arrive at a general conclusion about such a diversity of cases, and we can say that the most important implication for the democratic regimes of Latin America remains separating government instability from regime instability, which, Linz argued, were intrinsically linked under presidential regimes (Linz 1978, 74). That, by itself, is no small feat when



the absence of stable democracy was one of the more durable features of the region for decades.

### Policy Implications

As regards the policy implications of presidential breakdown, Valenzuela (2004) suggests (and the chapters here support) that presidents usually fall as a result of their inability to deal successfully with economic crisis or because they implement unpopular neoliberal reforms. Thus, presidential breakdown is linked to policy switches, be they abrupt implementations of economic reform by decree (Stokes 2001) or more gradual reforms. The first two presidential breakdowns examined here were those of Siles Zuazo in Bolivia and Alfonsín in Argentina. Both occurred after heterodox economic policies promoted by the presidents failed to put an end to economic crisis. Their successors, Paz Estenssoro and Carlos Menem, respectively, implemented broad neoliberal reforms by decree. In his memoirs, Alfonsín (2004, 145) pointed out how his fall facilitated Menem's radical policy shift. We agree that a government crisis such as a presidential breakdown may facilitate such dramatic policy shifts. Consider the contrast between the introduction of neoliberal reforms in Argentina and Venezuela in 1989: because of the crisis, the Radicals agreed to help Menem pass his reforms in Congress until the new Congress had been installed in December of that year, whereas Pérez's *gran viraje* that same year was met with widespread protests—*el caracazo*.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, there is the breakdown of presidents de la Rúa in Argentina, Carlos Andrés Pérez in Venezuela, Sánchez de Lozada in Bolivia, and Mahuad in Ecuador, which signalled a gradual demise of the neoliberal model. Their successors tried but failed to reverse some neoliberal reforms to satisfy both popular demands and international actors.<sup>13</sup> After this short interregnum, Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador elected presidents who established a clearer break with the previous economic model.<sup>14</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have emphasized president- or government-centered explanations of presidential breakdown, and we have examined the implications of presidential breakdown for presidentialism, accountability and democracy, and policymaking.

As regards explanations of presidential breakdown, it seems clear that government instability is no longer intrinsically linked to democratic regime instability, as Linz argued in 1978. Our focus, then, has been on relations between the president and Congress or popular mobilization, but more specifically on president, or government-centered explanations of presidential breakdown. The chapters in this book and our statistical models strengthen the hypothesis that splits in the governing coalition seem to play an independent and important role in presidential breakdowns both directly and indirectly.

As regards the implications for presidentialism, democracy, and policy-making, we conclude, regarding the first, that the role of the vice president needs further attention; regarding the second, that presidential breakdown seems to curtail authoritarian presidents in hybrid regimes, and is preceded in more consolidated democracies by congressional control over presidents who misbehave; and regarding the third, that breakdowns are associated with broad and often dramatic policy shifts. Yet, due to the variety among the cases of presidential breakdowns, and even more so in the region in general, one should be cautious about making general, or overly optimistic, statements about the implications of presidential breakdowns.

Perhaps the most important—and encouraging—observation is that, as recent experiences of presidential breakdown show, governments can break down without threatening the survival of democracy. Insofar as this is true, Latin America's democracies seem to have found a “democratic” way to solve political crises: they have resorted to the early removal from power of elected presidents rather than to military intervention.

### Notes

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1. See also Weyland (1993; 2006) for analyses of how neo-populist leadership may explain the falls of presidents Collor de Melo and Fujimori in Brazil and Peru, respectively.
2. We exclude Carlos Mesa because he was a vice president, and Carlos Andrés Pérez, because when he was impeached Venezuela's constitution did not provide for a vice president (Article 187 states that congress must appoint a caretaker for the remainder of the presidential term in the absence of the president).
3. It is also likely that internal conflicts, or conflicts with Congress, increase the likelihood of scandals implicating members of the administration coming to public light.
4. In other words, our count of internal splits is not affected by whether one, two, or more ministers left at the same time or not. In any case, the event counts as one internal split in the government.
5. The command in Stata for rare event logistic regression is *relogit*. This type of regression analysis has become quite common in the study of presidential breakdowns (see Negretto 2006, for instance). All calculations are made in Stata/IC 10.1.
6. To include this variable one should either use selection models (Hochstetler and Edwards 2009) or conceptualize challenges and breakdowns as two different values within the overarching concept of presidential crisis. In the latter case, ordered probit models might be considered (chapter 2, this volume).
7. We also ran separate models using *internal splits* as a dummy variable (whether present or not in an administration during a year) and found that this did not significantly alter the results.

8. We ran separate models using the effective number of parties instead of the president's share of seats in Congress. This variable remained significant at between .05 and .1, depending on the model.
9. See also Morgenstern, Negri, and Pérez-Liñán (2008).
10. Thus, both variables vary between 0 and 1. We also exclude any country-year with fewer than six political news reports, which explains the drop from 389 to 324 observations in this model.
11. See also Carey (2005).
12. As Corrales (1997) convincingly argues, however, it was not the prior *economic* crisis that explained the different levels of success in the implementation of neoliberal reforms in these two countries.
13. The successors were Eduardo Duhalde in Argentina, Rafael Caldera in Venezuela, Carlos Mesa in Bolivia, and Lucio Gutiérrez in Ecuador.
14. We refer to Nestor Kirchner in Argentina, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Rafael Correa in Ecuador.

## Epilogue

Mariana Llanos and Leiv Marsteintredet

### The Breakdown of Zelaya's Presidency: Honduras in Comparative Perspective

On June 28, 2009, when this book had just gone into production, the world was astonished by the breaking news that Honduran President Manuel Zelaya had been deposed and sent into exile. At about 5 am that morning, the military burst into the Honduran presidential palace, seized President Zelaya in his pajamas, bundled him onto a plane and flew him to Costa Rica. According to official communications from the Honduran Supreme Court,<sup>1</sup> the military were acting on orders of the court for contentious administrative proceedings (*Juzgado de Letras de lo Contencioso Administrativo*, JLCA). Later on the same day the military's actions received the legislature's consent. The legislature approved what may be a forged letter of resignation (Zelaya publicly denied having signed any such letter), and the line of succession provided for in the constitution was then activated. Because Zelaya's original vice president, Elvin Santos, had already resigned to run for the presidency in the elections scheduled for November 28, 2009, the president of Congress, Roberto Micheletti, was sworn in as president to serve out the remainder of Zelaya's term until January 2010.

The day Zelaya was deposed, there was meant to be a poll about whether to hold a fourth "election" (the *cuarta urna*, or fourth urn) concurrently with the upcoming general election. The question the Honduran citizenry would have to pronounce itself about with the *cuarta urna* would be whether to elect a Constituent Assembly or not. Those supporting the initiative claimed that the aim was to reform the constitution to deepen participatory democracy, but Zelaya's opponents argued that the constitutional reform was meant to facilitate the president's reelection. At the time of writing (August 2009), no solution has been found for this presidential crisis. Micheletti is still president, and Zelaya, who has received the backing of all the countries in the hemisphere, is still insisting that he should return to office. Our intention here is to present a short account of the events so far and compare them with the other cases analyzed in this book.