Presidential Impeachment and the New Political Instability in Latin America

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This book documents the emergence of a new pattern of political instability in Latin America. Traditional military coups have receded in the region, but elected presidents are still ousted from power as a result of recurrent crises. Aníbal Pérez-Liñán shows that presidential impeachment has become the main instrument employed by civilian elites to depose unpopular rulers. Based on detailed comparative research in five countries and extensive historical information, the book explains why crises without breakdown have become the dominant form of instability in recent years and why some presidents are removed from office while others survive in power. The analysis emphasizes the erosion of presidential approval resulting from corruption and unpopular policies, the formation of hostile coalitions in Congress, and the role of investigative journalism. This book challenges classic assumptions in studies of presidentialism and provides important insights for the fields of political communication, democratization, political behavior, and institutional analysis.

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Presidential Crises and the Decline of Military Intervention

What are the consequences of presidential crises for democratic stability? To what extent has the "third wave" of democratization reduced the risk of democratic breakdown and increased the likelihood of impeachments as a result of executive-legislative conflicts? This chapter places those questions in historical perspective by comparing fifty-eight presidential crises that took place in Latin America between 1950 and 2004.

In the first section of the chapter, I document the expansion of democracy and the related decline in military interventions that took place in Latin America after the late 1970s. Section two introduces the concept of presidential crisis – a situation in which one of the elected branches of government attempts to dissolve the other. In the following sections, I show that similar episodes of executive-legislative conflict have resulted in very different historical outcomes. I discuss presidential crises not only in terms of their consequences for the political regime (disruption, breakdown, or survival) but also in terms of their impact on checks and balances (whether one of the two branches asserts itself over the other). I map nine possible pathways from presidential crises and discuss historical instances of these ideal types.

The comparative analysis suggests that the incentives confronted by military officers in most Latin American countries changed significantly during the 1980s. As a result of those changes, the army withdrew from politics and civilian politicians found themselves unable to transform disputes over policy into broader disputes over the nature of the regime. Before the third wave of democratization, a vast majority of presidential crises had led to some form of military intervention; among the new democratic regimes, a vast majority did not. Only in this new context could presidential

impeachment become the main mechanism regulating disputes between the executive and congress.

Democratization and the Decline of Military Intervention

The second half of the twentieth century was marked by a permanent struggle to build stable democratic institutions in Latin America. In the early 1950s, powerful presidents – whether populist leaders or neopatrimonial rulers – dominated the politics of the region (Chehabi and Linz 1998; Lewis 2005). Although the executive branch was prevalent, those regimes typically allowed for an elected Congress, and executive-legislative confrontation was possible when opposition legislators dared to defy the president. Legislators alone were too weak to confront the executive, but they often recruited disgruntled military officers willing to lead an armed revolt. In the late 1950s, a brief "twilight of the tyrants" (Szulc 1959) was followed by a short wave of democratization: the number of democratic (or at least semidemocratic) regimes grew from five in 1955 to twelve by 1958. However, the fears ignited by the Cuban revolution (1959) and the conservative reaction that followed made this trend short-lived. In the 1960s and early 1970s, military officers displaced elected governments and took over in country after country. By 1977, only three nations (Colombia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela) could claim to be democratic.

Surprisingly, the trend was reversed in the late 1970s, when a new epidemic of democracy started in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador and spread to the rest of the region over the course of a decade. Following Huntington (1991), Hagopian and Mainwaring (2005) have described this surge as the "third wave" of democratization (the first one being the trend that affected a few Latin American countries in the early twentieth century, and the second one being the more extensive wave of the late 1950s). In the new democratic context of the 1980s and 1990s, presidents were regularly elected, legislatures were reopened, and the realities of executive-legislative conflict became part of day-to-day politics.

To illustrate the magnitude of this change, Figure 3.1 traces the number of democracies and semidemocracies in Latin America between 1950 and 2004. I have followed the classification of political regimes outlined by Mainwaring, Brinks, and Pérez-Liñán (2001; 2007), coding countries as democratic when four conditions were present: (1) the president

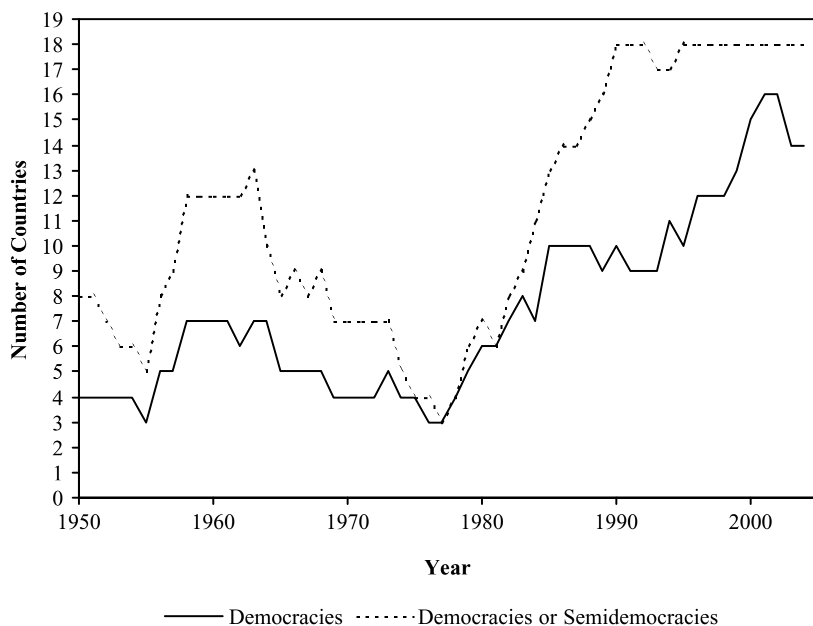

Figure 3.1 Competitive regimes in Latin America, 1950–2004. *Source:* Mainwaring, Brinks, and Pérez-Liñán (2007).

and members of the legislature were elected in free and fair elections; (2) voting rights were granted to a vast majority of the adult population; (3) civil liberties were respected; and (4) the military did not interfere in civilian affairs. If any of the four conditions was clearly absent during a particular year, the country was coded as nondemocratic (or authoritarian). If any condition was "partially" violated (for instance, if there were accusations of electoral fraud in certain regions of the country, but they were not thought to alter the overall result of elections), the country was coded as semidemocratic. For simplicity, I will refer to the set of democratic and semidemocratic countries as "competitive regimes" (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2005).

Figure 3.1 shows the unprecedented level of democratization achieved by the region in the 1990s. By 1995, eighteen countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela) could be considered competitive regimes,

Table 3.1. *Incidence of military coups in Latin America, 1950–2004*

	All Regimes			Competitive Regimes		
Decade	Country-Years (N)	Military Rebellions (Percentage)	Successful Coups (Percentage)	Country-Years (N)	Military Rebellions (Percentage)	Successful Coups (Percentage)
1950–59	190	14.2	7.9	81	13.6	7.4
1960–69	190	16.8	9.5	100	19.0	11.0
1970–79	190	12.1	9.5	54	13.0	11.1
1980–89	190	8.9	4.2	113	7.1	1.8
1990–99	190	3.7	1.1	178	3.9	1.1
2000–04	95	3.2	1.1	90	3.3	1.1
TOTAL	1,045	10.4	5.9	616	8.9	4.5

Sources: Fossum (1967); *Latin American Weekly Report* (1980–2004); Needler (1966); and *The New York Times Index*.

and only one (Cuba) was fully authoritarian.[1] Although the ultimate reasons for this historical transformation lie beyond the scope of this study, changes in the international context, as well as the learning process triggered among civilian and military elites by the dictatorships of the 1970s, help explain this evolution.

The transformation of Latin America during the 1980s resulted not just from the demise of several authoritarian regimes within a few years. It was also the product of a declining capacity (or willingness) of military officers to intervene in politics over the long run (Fitch 1998; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2005). Once established, the new democratic systems were less vulnerable to military conspiracies than their predecessors.

Table 3.1 documents this trend by comparing the incidence of military coups in Latin America over five and a half decades (1950–2004). The unit of analysis in the table is countries during particular years (e.g., Argentina in 1950). The right-hand panel shows the incidence of coups among competitive regimes, while the left-hand panel includes all cases (even authoritarian regimes, with or without legislatures). Each panel displays the total number of cases, followed by the percentage of cases that experienced a

[1] In contrast to Mainwaring and colleagues (2001), I count countries as democratic or semidemocratic if they met the required conditions for part of the year but failed to do so by December 31. The reason for this decision is operational: if a presidential crisis unleashed a military coup, it is important to determine the nature of the regime at the time when the interbranch confrontation took place, not just the resulting form of government by the end of the year.

military rebellion (defined as any military action directed against the president or Congress) and by the percentage of successful coups (instances in which the military was able to force the exit of the president or the closure of the legislature).[2]

The return of military officers to the barracks in the 1980s is reflected in the decline in the number of insurrections. In the 1960s, 11 percent of all competitive regimes experienced a successful military coup, and 19 percent of them confronted some form of military rebellion. In the 1990s, the rates were 1 percent and 4 percent, respectively. For the historian concerned with the *long durée*, the last decade and a half may look like a brief flash of civilian stability in a long history of political turmoil. But for politicians operating in the 1990s, the new context represented a significant break with the past. How did this change affect the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches throughout the region? And more importantly, how did it alter the outcome of extreme interbranch confrontations?

Presidential Crises

In most presidential countries, executives and assemblies regularly confront each other on policy issues, bargain with each other, defy each other, and eventually agree on a common policy (or not). This is normal politics, and certainly not the focus of this book. I will focus on a particular type of situation labeled "presidential crisis" (Pérez Liñán 2003b). Presidential crises are episodes characterized by extreme levels of conflict and by the decision of one elected branch to dissolve the other in order to reshape its composition. This stance, which would be normal in a parliamentary system, unleashes the threat of constitutional breakdown in a presidential regime.

The operational definition of "presidential crisis" employed in this book includes any episode in which the chief executive threatens to dissolve Congress or supports a constitutional reform having that purpose, attempts a military coup against Congress, or "suspends" the term of the legislature (even if no decree proclaims its "dissolution") until the next election. It also

[2] Military interventions (particularly failed military coups) are not always easy to pinpoint. The events coded in Table 3.1 were identified using *The New York Times Index*, *Latin American Weekly Report*, and other historical sources (Fossum 1967; Needler 1966). I am indebted to Annabella España-Nájera and Scott Mainwaring for collecting and sharing important data on coups. Datasets and computer codes to generate the components of the table are available at ⟨http://www.pitt.edu/∼asp27/Presidential/Impeachment.html⟩.

includes any situation in which congressional leaders announce a decision to impeach the president, to declare him or her incapacitated, or to force his or her resignation; in which at least one of the houses of Congress debates any of these alternatives; or in which Congress legitimizes a military or civilian uprising against the executive by accepting his "resignation" or by appointing a successor.[3]

Under this definition, some fifty-eight presidential crises took place in Latin America between 1950 and 2004. The identification of such crises can be a matter of debate, because information is often fragmentary and there is no single uncontested "historical record" (Lustick 1996). For the sake of consistency, I initially used *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (1950–86) and *Keesing's Record of World Events* (1987–2004) to identify presidential crises in the nineteen countries under study. This information was supplemented by more than fifty articles and monographs. Short narratives were entered in a qualitative database, with the entries documenting the proximate causes of each crisis, the institutional context, the outcome, and the historical sources employed.[4] Table 3.2 lists those presidential crises, indicating the country, the year, and the nature of the political regime at the time of the event.

The table shows that strictly *democratic* rule is not a necessary condition for the occurrence of a presidential crisis. Crises may take place in any presidential regime in which the executive and the legislature are autonomous enough to display significant "separation of purpose" (Cox and McCubbins 2001). As the historical examples to be presented here will show, this situation has been common not only in contemporary presidential democracies but also in nineteenth-century competitive oligarchies (presidential regimes with civil liberties but limited participation) and in modern *democraduras* (regimes with separation of powers but restrictions on civil liberties).

Some of the episodes presented in Table 3.2 have already been covered in Chapter 2, and many others will be discussed in the pages that follow. It is important to note that the element of executive-legislative conflict was more visible in some crises than in others. The table includes a few episodes that arguably represent marginal instances of interbranch confrontation, like

[3] Note that this definition encompasses both situations in which constitutional mechanisms are activated and others in which nonconstitutional actions are unleashed. It is the willingness of one elected branch to reshape the composition of the other, not the outcome of the process, that defines a presidential crisis. This definition allows us to compare recent confrontations ending with impeachments to past crises leading to military coups.

[4] The qualitative database is available at ⟨http://www.pitt.edu/∼asp27/Presidential/Impeachment.html⟩.

Table 3.2. *Presidential crises in Latin America, by type of regime, 1950–2004*

Competitive Regimes		
Democratic	Semidemocratic	Authoritarian Regimes
Argentina (1989)	Argentina (1962)	Brazil (1966)
Argentina (2001, twice)	Argentina (1976)	Brazil (1968)
Bolivia (1983)	Bolivia (1979)	Brazil (1977)
Bolivia (1985)	Brazil (1955, twice)	Guatemala (1957)
Bolivia (1990)	Colombia (1991)	Honduras (1954)
Bolivia (2003)	Colombia (1996)	Panama (1951)
Brazil (1954)	Ecuador (1963)	Panama (1955)
Brazil (1964)	Ecuador (1970)	Panama (1988)
Brazil (1992)	El Salvador (1987)	Paraguay (1954)
Chile (1954)	Guatemala (1993)	Paraguay (1959)
Chile (1973)	Guatemala (1994)	
Colombia (1977)	Honduras (1985)	
Dominican Republic (1994)	Nicaragua (1992)	
Ecuador (1961)	Panama (1968)	
Ecuador (1984)	Paraguay (1999)	
Ecuador (1987)	Paraguay (2001)	
Ecuador (1990)	Paraguay (2002)	
Ecuador (1997)	Peru (1991)	
Ecuador (2000)	Peru (1992)	
Ecuador (2004)	Peru (2000)	
Nicaragua (2004)		
Uruguay (1969)		
Uruguay (1971)		
Uruguay (1973)		
Venezuela (1993)		
Venezuela (1999)		
N 27	21	10

Source: Database on presidential crises, based on *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (1950–86), *Keesing's Record of World Events* (1987–2000) (London: Longman), and country-specific sources.

the ousting of Presidents Fernando de la Rúa and Adolfo Rodríguez Saá in Argentina in 2001, or of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in Bolivia in 2003 (see Mustapic 2005). I included those episodes in the analysis for the sake of consistency, but the element of executive-legislative conflict was peripheral to the turmoil that forced the exit of these presidents at the time.[5] I will return more systematically to this problem in Chapter 7.

[5] The degree of executive-legislative confrontation was also marginal in Colombia in 1977, in Bolivia in 1985, in Argentina in 1989, and in the Dominican Republic in 1994.

The Political Consequences of Presidential Crises

Presidential crises may lead to very different political outcomes depending on their effect on executive-legislative relations and their impact on the stability of the regime. Interbranch relations and regime stability constitute two related but analytically distinct levels of analysis. At the first level, one of the two branches may succeed in its attempt to dissolve the other. Thus, crises may lead to the removal of the president (via resignation, impeachment, or coup) or to the dissolution of Congress. It is also possible that no branch will succeed in this attempt (and thus that the elected president and legislators will coexist until the end of their terms) or that both branches will be dissolved by a military intervention, imposing a mutual defeat.

At a second level, a confrontation between the executive and the assembly often carries the potential to destabilize the presidential regime. A political crisis spills over onto the regime when political actors consider interbranch conflict as an indication of the weakness of the existing institutions, disregard the "rules of the game," and resort to praetorian politics. Under those circumstances, the military typically intervenes in the confrontation as the ultimate arbiter.

Once the crisis has spilled over onto the regime, two outcomes may follow: reequilibration or breakdown. Following Juan Linz, I employ the term "reequilibration" to denote "a political process that, after a crisis that has seriously threatened the continuity and stability of the basic political mechanisms, results in their continued existence" (Linz 1978, 87).[6] The term "breakdown" refers to the collapse of presidential regimes that, as discussed earlier, may or may not be fully democratic. Breakdowns in turn may have short-term or long-term consequences. In some cases (e.g., Argentina in 1962, Brazil in 1955, Ecuador in 2000), presidents or legislators supported a brief military disruption of the constitutional order and the reinstallation of the previous political formula shortly afterward. In others (e.g., Argentina in 1976, Brazil in 1964), the military intervened to replace the existing constitution with a lasting authoritarian arrangement.

[6] I use the term to refer to episodes of *early* reequilibration. "Early reequilibration" refers to the process by which breakdown is prevented without a major institutional disruption. By contrast, *late* reequilibration refers to situations in which an interruption of the existing regime occurs – as in the transition from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic in France – but where changes in the political order ultimately take place within the democratic framework. Linz (1978, 90) was aware of this distinction but never developed the idea.

These conditions create the nine alternative outcomes summarized in Figure 3.2 The figure provides a framework to classify the fifty-eight presidential crises introduced in the previous table. The episodes discussed in Chapter 2 basically fall into two categories: the removal of the president from office (Type VII) and political stabilization following a crisis (Type IX). The former category includes the removal of Presidents Guizado of Panama (1955), Collor of Brazil (1992), Pérez of Venezuela (1993), Bucaram of Ecuador (1997), and Cubas Grau of Paraguay (1999). It also captures cases in which Congress legalized the exit of an unpopular president, as happened in the resignations of Raúl Alfonsín (1989) and Fernando de la Rúa and Adolfo Rodríguez Saá (2001) in Argentina; Hernán Siles Zuazo (1985) and Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (2003) in Bolivia; and Alberto Fujimori in Peru (2000).[7] Notably, ten of the eleven cases of constitutional removal took place after 1978.

The category of stabilization with mutual survival (Type IX) includes the cases of President Ernesto Samper of Colombia and Luis González Macchi of Paraguay discussed in Chapter 2, plus nineteen other episodes that took place between 1950 and 2004. Against concerns with the "perils" of presidentialism, 36 percent of all crises (twenty-one of fifty-eight) did not lead to the ousting of any elected officials or to any form of regime breakdown. In the following sections, I discuss the nine ideal types presented in the figure and provide some historical illustrations of those outcomes. Based on this discussion, in the final section I will show how the consequences of presidential crises for democracy have changed over the last decade and a half.

Regime Disruptions and "Short-Term" Breakdowns

Presidential crises may disrupt the operation of the political regime if the constitution is suspended in order to resolve the stalemate. For example, a military rebellion supported by Congress may force the president to resign, allowing "normal politics" to resume afterward. Occasionally, this kind of military intervention may impose a suspension of the constitution for a longer interval. What I call a "short-term" breakdown is an authoritarian

[7] Fujimori resigned anticipating an impeachment, but executive-legislative conflict was less relevant in the other four cases. Siles Zuazo and Alfonsín negotiated with Congress an early exit from office, typical of what Mustapic (2005) has described as a "presidential" management of the crisis. In the Dominican Republic, Joaquín Balaguer (1994) also negotiated anticipated elections, but because of the time frame (two years), I have coded this case as an instance of stabilization.

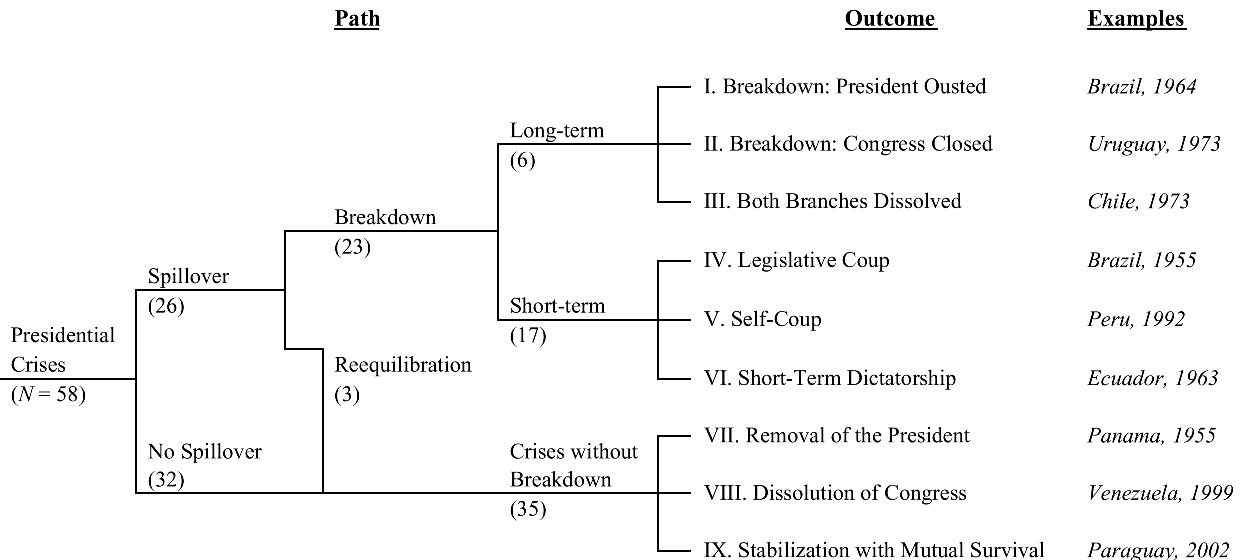

Figure 3.2 A typology of outcomes of presidential crises.

interlude lasting up to three years. Although the three-year criterion is somewhat arbitrary – the duration of the authoritarian experience following a presidential crisis is a continuous rather than a discrete variable – this rule is intended to reflect the exceptional nature of the interim government (for a similar criterion, see Geddes 2003, 69–70). Short-term interventions (whether disruptions or temporary takeovers) are usually meant to "solve" a political crisis and to restore the nation's order (Stepan 1971, 63). For this reason, the military may not seek (and civilian politicians may not allow) the imposition of military rule except for a short transitional period.[8]

Short-term interventions may take three different forms, depending on the nature of civilian-military coalitions. The first one is what I call a "legislative coup," a joint action of the military and Congress to oust the president.[9] The second one corresponds to what is normally described as a "self-coup," an alliance between the executive and the army to dissolve Congress. The third pattern is one of short-term military takeover in which both the president and the legislators are ousted and a new civilian group is eventually allowed to take office.

Legislative Coups Despite their name, legislative coups against the president are not always conducted by the legislators themselves. In most historical circumstances, the members of Congress have simply offered congressional support for a military conspiracy. This leads to an important distinction between proactive legislators, those who initiate and control the confrontation with the president, and reactive legislators, those who jump on the bandwagon of a confrontation driven by the military or by other social actors. As I will show later, this distinction is relevant for praetorian as well as for institutional outcomes, for past as well as for contemporary presidential crises.

The Brazilian coups of 1955 illustrate this point. After the suicide of Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas in August of 1954,[10] Juscelino

[8] The "exceptionality" of the military intervention can only be determined in historical perspective. In some instances (e.g., Argentina in 1930) military leaders intended to remain in power but were prevented from doing so, while in others (Chile in 1973) the apparent "short-term" intervention turned unexpectedly into a lasting military regime.

[9] This pattern roughly corresponds to what Alfred Stepan has called *moderating intervention*. "The military has played a crucial role in politics in Brazil, with . . . actual coups against the executive representing the *combined* efforts of both civilian and military groups" (Stepan 1971, 79).

[10] The suicide of President Vargas was itself the outcome of a previous crisis that had almost led to a legislative coup (see Saunders 1964).

Kubitschek won the ensuing presidential election with the support of the "Getulista" parties that had formed Vargas's coalition (the PSD and PTB) plus the ever-feared communists. Irate at this result, the sectors that had confronted Vargas in previous months encouraged a coup to prevent Kubitschek from taking office. As the situation put stress on his heart condition, Vice President João Café Filho requested medical leave in November of 1955 and was replaced by the speaker of the house, Carlos Coimbra da Luz. When Luz as acting president dismissed Café's minister of war, Gen. Henrique Teixeira Lott, the Getulistas feared that an anti-Kubitschek coup was in progress. On November 11, 1955, Gen. Lott launched a preemptive strike. Army tanks surrounded the presidential palace, and Luz sought refuge in a navy gunboat (Dulles 1970, 3–61; Stepan 1971, 118–119). The Getulistas in Congress declared Luz unable to govern and installed Nereu Ramos, the speaker of the Senate, as acting president by a vote of 185–72 in the Chamber of Deputies and 43–9 in the Senate (Dulles 1970, 48; *Diario do Congresso Nacional*, *Seção I*, November 11, 1955, 8372–8382).

In a desperate attempt to prevent Ramos from taking office, Café Filho claimed that he was fully recovered from his stroke. But fearing that he would obstruct Kubitschek's inauguration, army units surrounded the presidential palace, Café's home, the War Ministry, and the Chamber of Deputies. On November 22, Congress declared (by a vote of 179–94 in the lower house and 35–16 in the Senate) that Café was physically incapable of returning to office and confirmed Nereu Ramos as president. At the request of the army, Congress also declared a state of siege.

In contrast to the impeachment of Fernando Collor thirty-seven years later, in 1955 Brazilian legislators violated most procedural rules related to the declaration of presidential incapacity (not to speak of the impeachment process) in order to legitimize two coups in less than two weeks. The Getulista leaders acted in alliance with (and under heavy pressure from) the army. These two components, dubious congressional procedures and active military participation – even military *initiative* – are key components of any legislative coup. Similar elements were present in the ousting of Ecuadorian President José M. Velasco Ibarra in 1961 (Fitch 1977, 47–54) and in the "impeachment" of Panamanian President Eric Delvalle in 1988 (Velásquez 1993, 162).[11]

[11] The Panamanian "impeachment" was a praetorian outcome in the context of an already undemocratic presidential regime. I shall return to this connection between the nature of the regime and the pattern of crisis resolution later in this chapter.

Self-Coups The second form of short-term intervention is the presidential self-coup (in Spanish, *autogolpe*). According to Cameron, "the term *autogolpe* refers to a temporary suspension of constitutional guarantees and closure of Congress by the executive, which rules by decree and uses referenda and new legislative elections to ratify a regime with broader executive powers" (Cameron 1994, 146). Self-coups result from an alliance between the president and the military in order to dissolve Congress.

Although the Peruvian self-coup of 1992 is the example that immediately comes to mind (Cameron 1997; Conaghan 2005; Kenney 1996; 2004; McClintock 1993), *autogolpes* are not new in Latin American politics. Ecuadorian President José María Velasco Ibarra executed a self-coup in 1970, early in his fifth term in office (Fitch 1977, 174–176).[12] In December of 1954, when the Honduran Congress reached an impasse while attempting to elect the new president, outgoing President Julio Lozano dissolved the assembly and appointed himself the new chief executive. Facing a threat of impeachment, Colombian President Mariano Ospina closed Congress and declared a state of siege in November of 1949 (Hartlyn 1988, 40–41; 1994, 304). In Uruguay, President Gabriel Terra dissolved the legislature and the Council of Administration in March of 1933, and his successor, Alfredo Baldomir, in turn shut down the assembly by the end of his term in 1942.[13] In both cases, constitutional reform ensued (Taylor 1952; 1962, 23–32).

According to this definition, self-coups have taken place in democratic as well as in authoritarian regimes. President Alfredo Stroessner dissolved the Paraguayan Congress in May of 1959 after the Chamber of Deputies – fully controlled by his Colorado Party – condemned police repression of student demonstrations.[14] In Brazil, President Castello Branco dissolved Congress in late October of 1966 (until congressional elections took place a month later) when congressional leaders opposed the executive's removal

[12] In the end, Velasco's disruption of the regime led to a long-term breakdown, because the military later took over in order to prevent Assad Bucaram from winning the presidential election.

[13] The National Council of Administration was a nine-member independent branch of the executive in charge of domestic policy implementation. Authors concur in pointing out that it operated in practice as a "third chamber." On this topic, see Fizgibbon (1952).

[14] Although the 1940 constitution allowed the Paraguayan president to dissolve Congress, the repression and exile of party dissidents suggests that this was more than a mere constitutional procedure.

of six deputies by decree.[15] In fact, the first executive-legislative crisis of independent Latin America led to a self-coup when Agustín de Iturbide, hero of Mexican independence (and newly appointed emperor of Mexico), confronted Congress on the right to free speech (Bushnell and Macaulay 1994, 63–64).

The short life of the Mexican empire suggests that self-coups are a risky enterprise that easily turns on its head. In 1954, Chilean President Carlos Ibáñez flirted with the idea of a self-coup, but desisted when he realized that the risk was too high and that even part of his own cabinet openly opposed the plan (Bray 1961, 63–67). In May of 1951, facing a political and financial crisis, Panamanian President Arnulfo Arias abolished the 1946 constitution, dissolved Congress, dismissed the Supreme Court, and ousted several judges and officials. This self-coup quickly changed course when mass demonstrations called for the national police to back the constitutional order and political leaders agreed to impeach the president. Arias resisted the decision of the Assembly, and the police ousted the president after an armed confrontation that left three people dead and more than a hundred wounded (Pizzurno Gelós and Aráuz 1996, 369–373). In this case, as in the Guatemalan crisis of 1993 (discussed in Chapter 7), what began as an *autogolpe* concluded as a legislative coup.

For the sake of conceptual clarity, self-coups should be distinguished from two other related phenomena. As a form of short-term breakdown, *autogolpes* are different from presidential coups inaugurating an enduring authoritarian regime (the 1973 coup in Uruguay, to be discussed later, is a good example). On the other hand, presidents may lock up Congress in order to twist the arms of legislators, with no further intention of *dissolving* the assembly. In early 1908, for instance, Argentine President Figueroa Alcorta occupied Congress with police officers, prevented extraordinary sessions from being held, and reissued the 1907 budget by decree (Botana 1979, 228–229). In 1992, Nicaraguan President Violeta Chamorro similarly used military forces to prevail in her confrontation with Congress, but she did not close the legislature (McConnell 1993, 23; 1997, 49–50). Although unconstitutional, this type of move falls short of being a full-fledged *autogolpe*. Instead of resolving the presidential crisis through

[15] The ARENA party (pro-military) had been formed in late 1965 and already controlled 68 percent of the Brazilian Lower Chamber.

forced dissolution, this form of intervention typically represents a chapter in a longer conflict. Presidents' bold moves may result in reequilibration (as in Alcorta's Argentina or Chamorro's Nicaragua), or they may lead to a disastrous escalation of conflict, as in the Chilean civil war of 1891.

Short-term Dictatorship The third pattern of short-term breakdown involves mutual defeat. In the context of a presidential crisis, the military may intervene to remove *both* the president and the legislators from office, impose an interim government, and reestablish a presidential regime after some months in office. This form of intervention is not necessarily neutral, because short-term breakdowns usually benefit the rise of certain political factions after civilian rule is restored. However, an intervention of this sort indicates that the armed forces consider the civilian elites incapable of solving the existing institutional crisis.

The Ecuadorian coup of 1963 illustrates this pattern. President Carlos Arosemena Monroy faced intense pressure, from left and right, on the issue of severing diplomatic relations with Fidel Castro's Cuba. Arosemena attempted to preserve a neutral stance, but when Conservatives and Social Christians left the ruling coalition in protest, the president was forced to end relations with Cuba and rebuild his cabinet with members of the Frente Democrático Nacional (Liberals and Socialists). In this context, Arosemena's drinking habits came to the fore as a highly controversial matter, and the Conservative leaders in Congress began to question the president's character. An early attempt to censure the president on charges of incapacity failed, and a second, formal motion of impeachment did not pass because Conservatives and Liberals could not agree on the succession. After an incident in December of 1962 – Arosemena was intoxicated when the Chilean president arrived on an official visit to Ecuador – the Conservatives called an urgent congressional session to discuss impeachment, but they were unable to collect the required number of signatures. Problems of collective action made the assembly unable to solve the crisis. At this point, noted Samuel Fitch, "the legalist mentality of the armed forces began to wane" (Fitch 1977, 59). Some military groups began to plot a coup in early 1963, in the midst of increasing public criticism of the government. After another diplomatic incident in which the president was drunk, the military took over on July 11, 1963, and imposed a military junta that ruled until April of 1966.

Long-Term Breakdown

In contemporary Latin America, the confrontations between the executive and Congress sometimes occurred in a context of broader social and political turmoil that ultimately led to the demise of the presidential regime (Bermeo 2003). The best example of this pattern is the establishment of what Guillermo O'Donnell has called Bureaucratic-Authoritarian (BA) regimes after the Brazilian coup of 1964, the Chilean and Uruguayan coups of 1973, and the Argentine coup in 1976 (Collier 1979; O'Donnell 1988).[16] Long-term breakdowns have produced three main outcomes: the ousting of the president and the establishment of a subservient assembly, the elimination of Congress and the installation of a puppet president, and the imposition of a military junta with a long time horizon.

President Ousted In Brazil, President João Goulart (1961–64) attempted to mobilize mass support as he faced a mounting economic crisis and rising popular demands. In March of 1964, Goulart announced a program of land reform, nationalization of oil refineries, legalization of the Communist Party, and constitutional change. He threatened to bypass Congress by using a plebiscite to enforce changes in the status quo, and rumors of a self-coup unfolded (Bermeo 2003, 95; Menendez and Kerz 1993, 23–36; Stepan 1971, 191–192). In early April, the armed forces deposed Goulart and took over. The military requested extraordinary powers to control communist activities, but Congress refused. In response, the armed forces issued the first "Institutional Act" establishing, among other things, the indirect election of the president and the authority of the army to oust elected officials. Within a few days, the political rights of more than 150 leaders and the terms of 44 members of Congress – most of them from Goulart's PTB – had been terminated (Stepan 1971, 123; *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* 14, 1964). The reshuffled Congress ratified Gen. Castello Branco as the new president of Brazil, inaugurating twenty-one years of military rule.

Congress Closed In Uruguay, the confrontation between parties (and their "fractions") interacted with the confrontation between politicians and military leaders. Since mid-1972, the Uruguayan armed forces had demanded

[16] The Argentine coup of 1966 also inaugurated a BA regime, but it was not preceded by a presidential crisis.

greater autonomy from civilian authorities, and in early 1973 they openly opposed the appointment of a new minister of defense. President Juan M. Bordaberry accepted greater military participation in government affairs through a National Security Council (Lerin and Torres 1987, 9–20; Weinstein 1988, 44–45). Congressional leaders from almost every quarter refused to back the government on this issue, expecting that President Bordaberry would be forced to resign (González and Gillespie 1994, 163). Bordaberry, however, turned to the military for help, and supported the officers when they demanded that Congress lift the immunity of a senator presumably linked to the Tupamaro guerrillas (Bermeo 2003, 128–130). The legislators not only refused to comply, but also warned the president that he could be impeached if the senator was arrested (Kaufman 1979, 114). Between April and June, the executive coalition in Congress collapsed. On June 27, the president dissolved the National Assembly and appointed a Council of State composed of civilians and military officers. The armed forces took control of state companies and the central bank, allowing Bordaberry to remain in office until 1976, when he was replaced by President Aparicio Méndez. Military rule lasted until 1984.

Military Takeover In Chile, President Salvador Allende's socialist experiment (1970–73) increasingly faced social unrest and alienated political support from the center-right (Valenzuela 1994, 130–137). In early 1972, the Christian Democratic Party (DC) began to distance itself from the ruling Unidad Popular. Later that year, DC leaders openly began to ask for Allende's resignation (Kaufman 1988, 148–149), supported a critical truck owners' strike, and formed an electoral coalition with the rightist National Party for the midterm election of March 1973. The goal of the coalition was to gain control of two-thirds of the seats in Congress. According to Helios Prieto, the Christian Democrats sought to gain enough legislative leverage to blackmail the president, while the National Party intended to initiate an impeachment process (Prieto 1973, 17). The coalition, however, failed to capture a two-thirds majority in the midterm election. By August of 1973, the National Party was pressing for the use of article 43 of the constitution, which allowed Congress to declare the president unfit to rule (Sigmund 1977, 232). The Christian Democrats opposed this move but managed to pass (by an 81–47 vote) a resolution against the government. On September 11, 1973, the armed forces deposed the government and dissolved the two houses of Congress. The Christian Democrats expected the military to restore elections within "two or three years" (Kaufman 1988,

151), but the coup opened the way for seventeen years of military rule under the aegis of Gen. Augusto Pinochet (Bermeo 2003, Chapter 5).

The examples just presented suggest that long-term breakdowns solve presidential crises in a Hobbesian way, by expropriating power from the two conflicting branches in favor of a third player – the army or an individual dictator. Even when the president is kept in office, as in 1973 in Uruguay, or when Congress is not shut down, as in 1964 in Brazil, those institutions are progressively deprived of power because they have to perform new, diminished functions under the logic of bureaucratic authoritarianism.

Although bureaucratic authoritarianism represented the main pattern of long-term breakdowns during the period under study, presidential crises have opened the way for other forms of nondemocratic rule, such as state corporatism or neo-patrimonial rule. In 1937, President Getúlio Vargas of Brazil dissolved Congress to impose his *Estado Nôvo*, a corporatist regime. In 1954, the Paraguayan assembly accepted the resignation of President Federico Cháves when a military coup forced him out of office, opening the way for the ensuing election of Gen. Alfredo Stroessner as president (Seiferheld 1987). By 1954, the Paraguayan regime was hardly democratic (opposition to the Colorado Party had been banned since 1947), but it lacked the strong elements of personalism that Stroessner imposed on the new regime.

Presidential Crises without Breakdown

The cases discussed in Chapter 2 suggest that since the last decade of the twentieth century presidential crises have typically been resolved without compromising the stability of the existing regime. The concept of "crisis without breakdown" is drawn from Eugenio Kvaternik's study of military coups in Argentina (Kvaternik 1987).[17] In a crisis without breakdown, deadlock may place the system under stress, but (to recall Giuseppe Di Palma's expression) the regime will often "survive without governing" (Di Palma 1977). A presidential crisis without breakdown may end in the removal of

[17] In his study of the 1962 military coup in Argentina, Kvaternik identified four possible outcomes of a democractic crisis: breakdown, reequilibration, failed reequilibration, and no breakdown. The first two categories reflected Linz's thinking on the issue, while the other two were Kvaternik's own contributions. Failed reequilibration was at the core of Kvaternik's study; he related this type of failure to the moderating military interventions described by Stepan (1971) in the Brazilian context and to the 1962 coup in Argentina. The fourth category, crisis without breakdown, was not systematically explored.

the president from office, the legal dissolution of Congress, or some form of institutional stabilization.

Removing the President The first pattern of resolution without breakdown is the constitutional removal of the president from office. This category refers to any procedure allowing Congress to oust the president on legal grounds, including a conventional impeachment (as framed in the American Constitution); an alternative model in which Congress authorizes a trial performed by the Supreme Court; a declaration of mental, physical, or moral incapacity of the chief executive; and even some rare quasi-parliamentary procedures.[18] I have described several episodes of removal in Chapter 2, and will discuss the specific differences among those legal instruments in Chapter 6. Marginal to this category are situations in which the president is forced to resign by popular pressure and the legislature negotiates the terms of the transition or appoints a new chief executive. In such situations Congress plays a reactive role, similar to that played in many of the legislative coups described earlier.

The removal of the chief executive within the limits of constitutional law preserves the integrity of the regime, but it may or may not lead to a positive outcome in normative terms. For instance, after the assassination of Panamanian President José A. Remón in January of 1955, Vice President José Ramón Guizado was exposed to the maneuvers of adversarial leaders who unjustly accused him of conspiring to kill the president. Guizado was suspended by the Assembly in a 45–8 vote and imprisoned after an infamous impeachment process (Zúñiga Guardia 1957).

Dissolution of Congress The second possible outcome of a crisis without breakdown is the legal dissolution of Congress. Presidential regimes typically lack such a procedure, and it is highly restrictive where it exists (Shugart and Carey 1992, 126–129).[19] To bypass such restrictions,

[18] For instance, the Uruguayan constitution of 1934 established that an assembly elected right after the president had dissolved Congress could disband the government through a vote of censure (article 143). Taylor (1962, 27) noted that this procedure implied some form of "impeachment rather than [parliamentary] censure." My definition of impeachment does not include quasi-parliamentary devices that allow the removal of ministers but not the president (for such procedures, see Stokes 1945 and Shugart and Carey 1992, Chapter 6).

[19] Exceptional were the Paraguayan constitutions of 1940 and 1967, which allowed the president to dissolve Congress at will in order to preserve "the balance between the branches" (article 182, 1967). This clause was removed in the 1992 charter. The Chilean constitution of 1980 also established an unrestricted form of dissolution (article 31, section 5), but this clause was abolished during the transition to democracy.

presidents have made use of self-coups in the past and have promoted constitutional reforms in recent years. The Colombian Constitutional Assembly dissolved Congress in 1991, and a constitutional referendum allowed for the dissolution of the Guatemalan Assembly and the Supreme Court in 1994. President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela employed a loyal constitutional assembly to disband an adversarial Congress in 1999 (Crisp 2000, 230–234). In all cases, a new election followed, and Congress was reshuffled in a way that resembled parliamentarism.

Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela have explicit dissolution clauses in their constitutions, but presidents have been unable to make them work to their advantage. The Peruvian constitution of 1979 allowed the president to dissolve the Chamber of Deputies if the latter censured three or more cabinets (articles 227–229). Although the 1993 constitution reduced the requirement to the censure of two cabinets, a congressional dissolution has never been enforced. Similarly, the Venezuelan constitution of 1999 (articles 236 and 240) empowered the executive to dissolve the unicameral assembly if the latter censured the vice president three times before the last year of the legislative term (Crisp 2000, 233). In Uruguay, the 1934 charter (article 141) established the president's power to dissolve Congress if a minister was censured by a simple majority of the legislative votes and two-thirds of the members failed to support the censure in a second vote. With minor modifications – the threshold for the second vote was reduced to three-fifths – this rule was preserved in the 1942 and 1966 constitutions. In 1969, Uruguayan President Jorge Pacheco threatened to dissolve Congress when his minister of industry and commerce was censured by the legislature (Shugart and Carey 1992, 115). The conflict was decided when a faction of Pacheco's party defected to the opposition in the second vote. Support for the censure reached three-fifths of the votes, and the president was unable to invoke the dissolution clause (González and Gillespie 1994, 158–162).

Stabilization Crises without breakdown are often resolved through some form of political stabilization that results in the continuity of elected officeholders in the two branches of government.[20] This outcome is attained, for instance, when the president survives an impeachment process

[20] The idea of stabilization with survival should be distinguished from the Linzean concept of *reequilibration*, discussed earlier. Stabilization refers only to the preservation of current government officials, while reequilibration refers to the preservation of the regime as a whole.

(e.g., Presidents Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton in the United States, or Luis González Macchi in Paraguay). In some cases, stabilization involves an additional component of regime reequilibration. For instance, to prevent Arnulfo Arias from winning the presidential election, in 1948 the Panamanian legislature passed a resolution "recovering" its status as Constitutional Assembly (a role exercised in 1945), dismissed President Enrique Jiménez, appointed the comptroller general as president for four years, and nullified the recent election. But the Supreme Court rejected the constitutionality of the resolution, and the national police backed President Jiménez. The president ignored the decision, the legislative coup folded, and the president and the legislators completed their terms (Pippin 1964, 20–28; Pizzurno Gelós and Aráuz 1996, 341–344).[21]

Presidential Crises and the New Politics of Impeachment

Table 3.3 compares the fifty-eight crises introduced in Table 3.2 according to the alternative outcomes presented in Figure 3.2 Because these categories represent ideal types, classification is not always straightforward. Some of these episodes were initially headed in one direction but ended in an unexpected outcome. In 1968, for instance, Panamanian legislators accused President Marco Aurelio Robles of using his powers to manipulate the electoral process and voted to remove him from office. In response, the National Guard surrounded the Assembly and preempted his removal. The Assembly was not dissolved, however, and Robles and the legislators finished their terms. This episode started as an attempt to remove the president, evolved into a potential self-coup, and ended as an instance of stabilization (the military nonetheless took over soon after the presidential crisis was over).

The table suggests that presidential crises are far from being the destabilizing force that the critics of presidentialism have assumed them to be. Sixty percent of the crises that took place during the period 1950–2004 had no disruptive effect at the level of the regime; more than half of them never posed a threat of spillover (see Figure 3.2); and over one-third were resolved without resorting to the dissolution of Congress or the ousting of the president. The likelihood of military intervention in those crises, however, has varied over time.

[21] Arias did not take office until 1951, however. The election results were rigged, and the *Liberal Doctrinario* candidate, Domingo Díaz, was proclaimed the victor.

Table 3.3. *Outcomes of presidential crises, 1950–2004*

Consequences for the Regime	Consequences for the Elected Branches		
	President Ousted	Congress Closed	Balanced Outcome
Breakdown	I. *President ousted* Brazil (1964) Paraguay (1954)[a]	II. *Congress closed* Ecuador (1970) Uruguay (1973)	III. *Takeover* Argentina (1976) Chile (1973)
Disruption	IV. *Legislative coup* Bolivia (1979) Brazil (1954) Brazil (1955, twice) Ecuador (1961) Ecuador (2000) Guatemala (1957)[a] Guatemala (1993) Panama (1951)[a] Panama (1988)[a]	V. *Self-coup* Argentina (1962) Brazil (1966)[a] Brazil (1968)[a] Honduras (1954)[a] Paraguay (1959)[a] Peru (1992)	VI. *Dictatorship* Ecuador (1963)
No Breakdown	VII. *Removal* Argentina (1989) Argentina (2001, twice) Bolivia (1985) Bolivia (2003) Brazil (1992) Ecuador (1997) Panama (1955)[a] Paraguay (1999) Peru (2000) Venezuela (1993)	VIII. *Dissolution* Colombia (1991) Guatemala (1994) Venezuela (1999)	IX. *Stabilization* Bolivia (1983) Bolivia (1990) Brazil (1977)[a] Chile (1954) Colombia (1977) Colombia (1996) Dominican Republic (1994) Ecuador (1984) Ecuador (1987) Ecuador (1990) Ecuador (2004) El Salvador (1987) Honduras (1985) Nicaragua (1992) Nicaragua (2004) Panama (1968) Paraguay (2001) Paraguay (2002) Peru (1991) Uruguay (1969) Uruguay (1971)

[a]Not a competitive regime at the time of the crisis.

Source: Table 3.2, Figure 3.2, and database on presidential crises ⟨www.pitt.edu/∼asp27/Presidential/Impeachment.html⟩.

Table 3.4. *Impact of presidential crises before and after the wave of democratization*

	Number of Crises	Crises Leading to Breakdown or Disruption (%)	Outcome for Branches (%)		
			President Ousted	Congress Closed	Tie
Crises before the third wave	26	73.1	38.5	26.9	34.6
Competitive regimes, 1978–2004	32	12.5	40.6	12.5	46.9
TOTAL	58	39.7	39.6	19.0	41.4

Note: Crises are coded as part of the third wave of democratization if they took place under democratic or semidemocratic regimes after 1977. The last column ("Tie") includes cases of stabilization and of mutual dissolution.

The transformation of the regional context ignited by the third wave of democratization, described in the first section of this chapter, imposed new conditions for the resolution of presidential crises. To the extent that military officers became less willing to intervene in support of the executive or the legislature, civilian elites were forced to find constitutional ways to resolve their disputes. This change of politicians' strategies had three important consequences.

In the short run, the demilitarization of presidential crises meant that executive-legislative conflict became less threatening for the stability of presidential regimes. Table 3.4 illustrates this effect. Before the third wave of democratization, nineteen out of twenty-six presidential crises (73 percent) led to regime disruptions or breakdowns, while among the competitive regimes established after 1977, only four out of thirty-two presidential crises (13 percent) involved some form of regime disruption. This difference is statistically significant at the .01 level (Fisher's exact test).

In the medium term, the search for constitutional solutions tended to alter the relative leverage of the two elected branches in the confrontations. Because presidential constitutions typically empower Congress to remove the president from office (via impeachment or declaration of incapacity) but do not allow presidents to dissolve Congress, legislators found themselves in a safer position to confront the chief executive (Pérez-Liñán 2005). This does not mean that presidents found it impossible to dissolve Congress after 1977. As explained in previous sections, in at least one case (Peru in 1992) the president was able to use military force against Congress successfully, and in three other instances (Colombia in 1991, Guatemala in 1994, and Venezuela in 1999) a constitutional reform did the job. But the rate of

congressional dissolution declined markedly, from 27 percent during the era of military intervention to 13 percent in the post-1977 period.

Because of the small number of cases (seven of twenty-six vs. four of thirty-two), this decline in the rate of congressional dissolutions is only marginally significant in statistical terms (Fisher's exact test is 0.104, mid-$p < .09$; see Agresti 1996, 43–44). However, Table 3.4 suggests that despite the decline in military interventions, and in contrast to members of Congress, presidents were not even marginally safer in the post-1977 era. The probability of being ousted from office was roughly the same for presidents elected in the two periods.

The continuing fall of elected presidents, and the stable incidence of presidential crises (there was no decline in the level of executive-legislative confrontation in the post-1977 period) have often reinforced the perception that presidential regimes are naturally prone to instability, and that most of these crises could have been resolved in a less traumatic way under a parliamentary system (Valenzuela 2004). This may be true, but it is also true that the demise of elected presidents did not bring about the collapse of democratic regimes during the current democratic era. In case after case, Congress was able to provide a (more or less) constitutional framework to guarantee a (more or less) orderly government transition.

The new pattern of political instability, in which some form of impeachment, rather than military intervention, has become the modal mechanism to remove presidents from office, has had a third important consequence over the long run. With the decline of military intervention, legislators have become subject to new pressures from other social and political actors. In the following chapters, I will document how the press and social movements have become key players in the politics of impeachment. The press can investigate accusations of corruption or abuse of power, ultimately providing the reason to initiate an impeachment procedure, while social movements may activate popular mobilization, destabilize the government, and ultimately force legislative action against the executive.