Presidential Crises in Contemporary Latin America[1]

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1. Introduction

Presidential failure and Latin America have long been synonymous.[2] Although the specter of military coups that replaced elected leaders with generals largely receded during the 1980s, presidential crises, like the one that engulfed Brazil's political class and resulted in the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, continue to grab headlines. Following the Venezuelan Supreme Court's ruling to strip the opposition-led legislature of its authority in 2016, Congress voted to put President Nicolás Maduro on trial for plotting a coup against the Constitution. A little more than a year later, Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski resigned rather than be impeached on graft charges related to the widening Odebrecht scandal.

Fixed terms (along with separate selection of the executive and legislature) are at the very core of presidentialism, neatly distinguishing it from parliamentarism (Linz 1990; Shugart and Carey 1992). Although term lengths and reelection rules vary across countries and over time, each and every Latin American constitution calls for the president to serve at least four years (Corrales and Penfold 2014; Elkins, this volume). Thus, according to the framework articulated by Brinks, Levitsky and Murillo (hereafter BLM) in their Introduction to this volume, deviations in the actual duration of presidential terms—whether longer as Elkins describes in Chapter X, or shorter, as this chapter discusses, seemingly offer prima facie evidence that such institutions are weak.

Yet, most Latin American constitutions also provide for formal institutional mechanisms for impeachment, the declaration of mental incapacity, and/or the option of recall elections. Intended

[2] Although the vast majority of Latin American presidents prior to the 1980s fell in military coups, presidential impeachments by the legislature were carried out in Cuba (1936) and Panama (1951; 1955; 1964). Self-coups took place in Uruguay (1933; 1942), Panama (1946), Colombia (1949), Honduras (1954), and Ecuador (1970) (See Pérez-Liñán 2007: 52-55).

to provide citizens with a kind of safety valve, these are measures of last resort against the abuse of executive power. As in the Constitution of the United States, they are designed to "thread the needle" between preserving the separation of powers inherent in presidential systems, and preventing tyranny or chaos in the event that a president cannot or will not serve the public interest (Sunstein 2017).

Precisely because one of the longstanding concerns about presidentialism is its rigidity, the relative normalization of impeachment and other related forms of early removal in the region has often been taken as a rather positive sign that these fraught systems are adopting parliamentary traits (Carey, 2005; Pérez-Liñán, 2005, 2007; Marsteintredet and Berntzen, 2008). Consider recent events in Guatemala. Caught in the middle of a corruption scandal uncovered by the International Commission against Impunity (CICIG), pundits have applauded the stunning early resignation of Guatemalan president Otto Pérez Molina in 2015, touting his downfall as a sign of a "democratic spring" in Central America.[3]

Indeed, when it comes to assessing the relative weakness of institutions surrounding executive fixed terms in Latin America, the optimistic view for invoking such mechanisms of early removal might even be taken a step further. If we suspect that many leaders in the region are prone to just the sorts of bribery and corruption scandals that have taken some of these presidents down (witness the unfolding Odebrecht scandal that has implicated multiple current and former presidents in Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, and Venezuela), then it may be that the failure to oust other such compromised presidents is the real problem. Perhaps undue

[3] BBC Monitoring Latin America, September 7, 2015.

forbearance, to borrow Holland's terminology, not constitutional hardball (cf. Levitsky and Ziblatt, forthcoming), is the real sign of institutional weakness?

2. Ousters and Observability

When it comes to classifying forced presidential exits (or their absence) as indicative of weak institutions, we instantly run up against a common problem of partial observability (Bas and Stone 2017). The basic dilemma is that we observe easily enough the universe of premature presidential ousters, but often have incomplete or conflicting accounts about whether ousted presidents committed an impeachable offense, and/or whether full terms presidents did not. In other words, among the former group, we do not know for sure whether any given case lies in cell A or cell B. Or, among the latter group, whether a case fits in cell C or cell D.

Table 1: Ousters and Inference

	Crime	Not Crime
Ousted	A	B
Not Ousted	C	D

If the rule of law is operating as it should and institutions are strong, most administrations most of the time should be located in cell D, although a few might land in cell A. Impeachment is thus serving the intended safety valve role and performs primarily as a mechanism of deterrence. The threat of early removal, in other words, operates off-the-equilibrium path and presidents obey the rule of law (and fulfill their term) as a result (Helmke 2017). Until recently, most comparative scholars would have classified the U.S. as fitting just this sort of pattern. Of the forty-five presidents that have served in last 240 years, only 3 have been impeached by Congress and none have been removed by the Senate.[4]

Note that even in this fortuitous scenario, it is hard to know for sure whether we should attribute the pattern to the strength of the formal institutions constraining presidents and their opponents. Politicians may be complying with the rule of law due to other normative commitments that have little do with how the formal rules for removal are structured or enforced (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). To this point, the editors' discussion of irrelevant institutions reminds us that simply observing an outcome consistent with the formal rules does not always tell us which, if any, formal institutional mechanism is driving it. The relative frequency of presidential ousters across contemporary Latin America, of course, suggests that unpacking the potential problem of institutional insignificance is hardly the most pressing conceptual concern (cf. Elkins, this volume).

The bigger problem of interpretation rather lies with the partial observability mentioned above both for the cases of early exit, and for those presidents that complete their terms, but suspicions abound over whether they violated the rule of law. Whenever presidents are ousted, for example, citizens and elites may vehemently disagree over what exactly constitutes an impeachable offense and whether the president committed one.

Witness the debacle in Brazil during 2016 over Rousseff's impeachment. Although the procedural rules were followed at each instance (a point I return to below), the basis on which the president was impeached was far murkier. She and her supporters had good reasons to argue

[4] Recently, however, critics of the Trump administration have begun to raise the question of whether the standards for impeachment in the United States are too high and whether the mechanism has been under-used (see Ezra Klein, "The Case for Normalizing Impeachment" *Vox* November 30, 2017).

that the crime for which she was accused – breaking fiscal laws by using funds from a federal bank to mask government deficits in the run up to her reelection in 2014—was not a crime at all, and had long been a standard practice for former presidents. To be sure, Rousseff was deeply unpopular at the time of her ouster, but many saw her removal as a coup against democracy and the rule of law.

Fueling this concern was the subsequent revelation of secret tapes suggesting that Rousseff was removed to halt Operation Car Wash, which has become the largest corruption investigation in history.[5] This interpretation has only been made more plausible by the fact that many of her accusers in congress have been repeatedly linked to the unfolding scandal. Most notably, her main accuser, former speaker of the Lower House, Eduardo Cunha, was subsequently convicted and is currently serving 15 year sentence for taking bribes from the giant state oil company Petrobras.[6] Meanwhile, Rousseff's successor, President Michel Temer has thus far managed to beat out numerous corruption charges and retains his tenuous grip on power. But if Rousseff's supporters are right, the country has suffered the fate befalling leaders in cell B; whereas, with President Temer still in power, Brazil is now entrapped in cell C.

As the Brazilian example also nicely illustrates, whether the formal rules for removal are followed is not dispositive that institutions are working as they should. To be sure, instances where procedural rules are clearly skirted—for example, the 2012 snap impeachment of Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo, which took place in approximately 36 hours and left the

[5] "Brazil minister ousted after secret tape reveals plot to topple President Rousseff" *The Guardian* May 23. 2016. Operation Car Wash began in 2014 and includes the Odebrecht scandal that is currently enveloping much of Latin America's political and business class.
[6] "Brazil ex-speaker Eduardo Cunha jailed for 15 years." *BBC* March 30, 2017.

president no time to mount a defense--obviously raise red flags.[7] But cases such as Rousseff's are harder to interpret from the standpoint of institutional weakness, not because the procedures are flouted or evaded, but because the standards for removal are often unclear. U.S. constitutional scholars routinely debate what exactly constitute a "high crime" or "misdemeanor," or whom, and on what basis, determines the president's "mental incapacity?" As Sunstein (2017) notes in his recent treatise on impeachment in the United States, there may be some very good reasons to leave the conditions for removal vague in constitutions, but doing so means that the door is almost always open to political manipulation.

In sum, because of the limits of information available about what a particular president did or did not do (partial observability), we (citizens and scholars alike) can never fully know the underlying distribution of impeachable offenses.[8] And, because of the vagueness and flexibility of the law itself, we can never be completely sure whether in any given instance the impeachment mechanism (and the like) is being under-used (cell C vs. D) or over-used (cell A vs B). Nevertheless, if political factors systematically map onto presidential exits then we have good reason to suspect that the rule of law is under-performing in both directions. The next section elaborates just such a theory and links it explicitly to the problem of selective compliance outlined by the editors.

3. The Political Logic of Presidential Exits

In their Introduction to this volume, BLM offer a succinct theory of institutional weakness that captures the calculus of non-compliance. Framed as a simple inequality, they argue that

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[7] Initial attempts to impeach Peruvian President Pablo Kuczynski were also extremely rushed: Kuczynski was given just two days to respond to changes of graft ("Bid to Oust Peru's President Falls Short in Congress" *NYT* December 21, 2017)

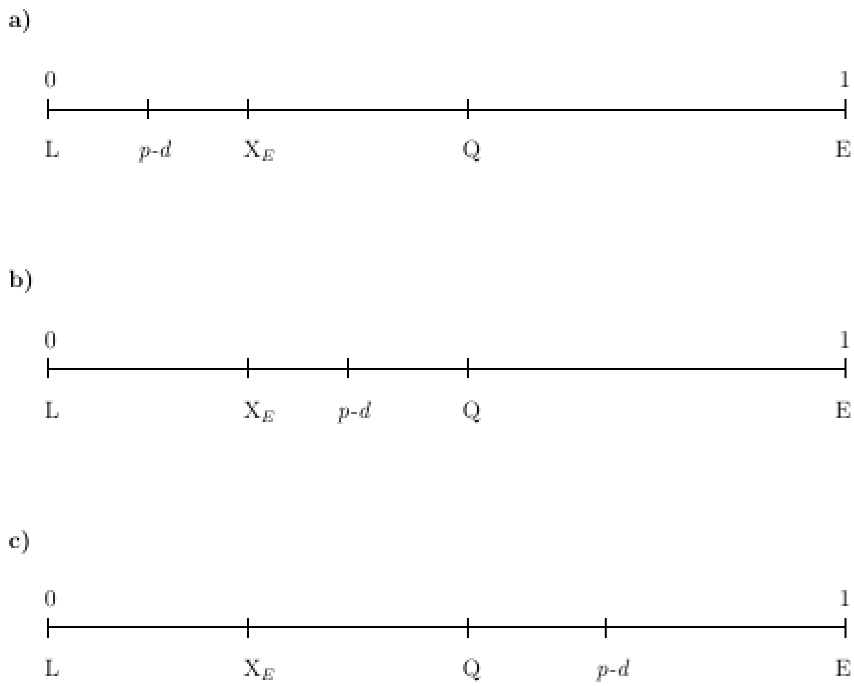
[8] For a game theoretic model of this dynamic, see Nalepa, Vanberg, and Chiopris 2018.

non-compliance will occur whenever both the costs of violating the institution are less than the costs of obeying it (V<S) and the costs of violating the institution are less than the costs of changing it (V<C). Such a calculus maps neatly on to the bargaining theory of presidential crisis that I have developed elsewhere (Helmke 2017).

That theory begins with the familiar premise that Latin American presidents enjoy two types of powers: de jure powers, such as the president's formal institutional powers specified by the Constitution, and de facto powers, such as the president's level of partisan support in Congress or their degree of public support (cf. Mainwaring and Shugart, 1997).[9] To represent this logic more formally, consider the bargaining scenario depicted in Figure 1 similar to Powell (1999). Here, I use the following notation: E represents the executive branch, *L* represents the Congressional branch, *Q* represents the status quo distribution of the president's power to shape policies, X_E represents the president's offer. Note that unlike standard spatial models, where each actor's utility improves as policy moves closer to his or her ideal point, the figure requires a different interpretation. Think of the distance between, say, the executive branch, *E*, and the status quo, *Q*, as the extent to which the president controls policymaking. Moving *Q* to the left expands the president's power; moving it to the right contracts it.[10]

[9] This section draws on Chapter 3 of Helmke 2017.
[10] The model is depicted in terms of the legislature's pie, whereby 1 implies that the legislature has total control over policy and 0 represents complete executive control over policy. For the ease of interpretation, the reversionary point for the legislature in the static model is 0.

Figure 1: Bargaining in the Shadow of a Presidential Crisis



Consistent with Cox and Morgenstern, the size of the gap between the president's partisan support (represented in the model below by the term p) and constitutional powers (represented by the term Q) increases the president's incentives to reign rather than rule. But, crucially, it also increases the opposition's incentives to get rid of the rogue president. In this institutional context, the public also plays a role: Public support of the president raises the costs to the legislature for seeking to oust the president; popular disapprobation lowers the costs to the legislature (as represented by d in the model below).

The legislature's best response is derived by comparing its utilities over the various outcomes. Thus, imagine that the legislature is choosing between accepting the president's use of her extensive legislature's powers versus getting rid of the president. If the legislature accepts the president's proposal, then effectively it receives Q up until its acceptance of the president's proposal and X_E thereafter. Conversely, if the legislature decides to attempt to get rid of the president, its payoffs reflect both the probability that it may win, p (which is a function of the opposition's seat share), minus the costs of carrying out such an attack, d, plus the probability that it may fail, $1 - p$, minus the costs of carrying out such an attack, d. Intuitively, the legislature faces an incentive to attack whenever $p\text{-}d > Q$.

As such, the legislature's incentives for getting rid of the president depend on the relationship between these costs and benefits relative to the current distribution of policymaking power, or Q. To clarify this, consider the first figure above, in which the legislature's payoff to attacking is still relatively small and X_E (and by extension Q) remains to the right of $p\text{-}d$. Here, the legislature has no incentive to challenge the president and the president can move policy to X_E. In the second figure, however, $p\text{-}d$ now falls in between Q and X_E, but as long as the president sticks with the status quo level of his policymaking powers, the legislature still does not have an incentive to attack. In the third scenario, though, $p\text{-}d$ instead falls to the right of both X_E and Q and the legislature now has an incentive to go after the president.[11]

Several points directly related to BLM's hypotheses about institutional non-compliance flow from this. First, the stakes of the presidency (Q), which can be interpreted as the costs of the opposition fulfilling the presidential term (S for the editors), clearly affects the threshold for inter-branch conflict. Specifically, the more policy-making control the executive has (i.e. the further Q is to the left), the lower the legislature's probability of success needs to be in order to

[11] As I explain in Helmke 2017, the inter-branch bargaining problem only emerges in the absence of complete information. In other words, if a president does not know precisely where p-d falls, then she cannot be sure how much she needs to adjust their behavior to avoid a crises.

for it to face an incentive to attack. In the extreme, the strongest presidents imply that *Q* is pushed to a point where the legislature will face incentives to attack, even if the prospects for success are quite low.

Second, by incorporating both the president's legislative (p) and public support (d), the model also speaks directly to V, or the costs associated with legislators violating fixed terms. Clearly, the less legislative support the president enjoys the easier it is to facilitate the president's removal. And in line with many of the familiar proximal cause arguments of presidential crises (Hochstetler 2006; Pérez-Liñán 2007; Kim and Bahry 2008; Hochstetler and Edwards 2009) the core model presented here subsumes the basic idea that the lower the public trust is in the president (captured by d in the above model) – the lower the costs is to the opposition for ousting the president prematurely.

Third, the model also provides a converse political logic for the sort of undue forbearance described in the previous section (i.e. cell C in Table 1). Trivially, when the president in in the legislative majority, the probability of a successful removal is low (witness the debate swirling around the Republican and Trump at the end of 2016). Here, p remains to the left of Q. More counterintuitively, however, the model also suggests that institutionally weak presidents should be secure in office, even if they lack partisan support. At the same time, the model easily incorporates the familiar insight that presidential popularity can also function as the president's shield. Thus, the d term can explain why legislators may still be inhibited from pursuing an impeachment that would be in the public interest whenever the president enjoys wide popular support—think of Fujimori in the lead up to the 1992 self-coup.

Finally, assuming that the thresholds for removal remain lower than the thresholds for changing the constitution (V<C), we can also extend the logic of the model to understand why

the legislature opts for ousting presidents, rather than stripping their formal powers. As such, institutional weakness takes the form of political, not institutional, instability, at least in the sense defined by BLM.[12]

In sum, because the ability to remove presidents early is inherently flexible, it is always in danger of devolving into a partisan tool. This section supplies a logic that explains misuse in *both* directions. In the case of over-use, non-compliance with the basic institution of electing a president for a fixed term is associated with the bargaining failures induced by the gap between the president's de jure and de facto powers as described above. Likewise, in the case of under-use, (selective non-compliance or forbearance against using impeachment) the same model allow us to grasp why a president who is violating the rule of law might nevertheless be allowed to remain.

4. Patterns of Presidential Crises

Let me now turn to empirics. Here, I draw on the *Inter-Branch Crisis Dataset* (ICLAD) that I have constructed in order to measure systematically both cases where presidential crises occur, and where they do not.[13] The unit of analysis is the administration-year for 18 Latin American countries between 1985 and 2008, which yields a total of 474 observations. A complete description of the coding rules is contained in Helmke (2017), but for our purposes here let me underscore the two main criteria that I use to identify a presidential crisis.

[12] See Helmke 2017 for a somewhat different definition of institutional instability. As I have also shown elsewhere (Helmke 2017), it is important to note that such political instability within the executive may spill across the other two major branches of government, as presidents at risk seek to preempt opponents by targeting the courts and legislatures. The self-coups, for instance, that were carried out by Fujimori in Peru and Serrano in Guatemala in the early 1990s were both intimately linked with these Presidents' fears of being removed from power (Helmke 2017). President Maduro's self-inflicted coup against the opposition legislature in the wake of a failed recall referendum in Venezuela last year appears to hew to a similar logic.

[13] http://www.gretchenhelmke.com/data.html

First, because my main research focus has been on separation of powers crises, ICLAD only includes presidential crises where Congress plays a discernible role. This effectively means that a handful of the early presidential exits coded by other scholars are not treated as crises in my analysis. For example, Argentine President Raul Alfonsin left office several months early in the midst of a severe economic crisis, but the Argentine Congress played little role in his exit. Likewise, former Bolivian President, Carlos Mesa had to submit his resignation to Congress twice before they accepted it, and there is little evidence that he did so under any congressional threat to do so. Thus, even though presidents leave office early, these are "non-cases" from the standpoint of inter-branch crises.

Second, because I am interested in the dynamics underlying the onset of separation of powers crises, both congressional attempts that succeed and fail to remove presidents are included. This allows me to incorporate such well-known cases as the failed attempt made by the Colombian Congress to impeach President Samper in 1995-1996 for allegedly accepting drug money during his electoral campaign, as well as the two separate unsuccessful attempts to get rid of Paraguayan president Gonzalez Macchi in 2001 and again in 2002. By including all such attempts at removal, we also pick up several other lesser known incidents, such as the foiled attempts to impeach former Ecuadorian president Durán-Ballén in 1995 following the ouster of his Vice President Alberto Dahik, or threats the same year by the congressional opposition to impeach Nicaraguan president Violeta Chamorro for refusing to promulgate the legislature's constitutional reforms.

These basic coding rules yield a total of 36 presidential crises in Latin America between 1985 and 2008. This translates into 8% of all administration–years, or roughly a third (32%) of all administrations in Latin America experiencing a presidential crisis during these three and a half decades.

Table 2: Presidential Crises in Latin America, 1985-2008

Administration	**Country**	**Crisis Onset**	**Sources**
Siles Zuazo	Bolivia	1985	Latin American Weekly Report; Valenzuela (2004); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Kim and Bahry (2008); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009); Mustapic (2010); Buitrago (2010)
Sarney	Brazil	1987	Latin American Weekly Report; Mainwaring (1997)
Febres Cordero	Ecuador	1987	Latin American Weekly Report; Hochstetler (2006); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009)
Borja	Ecuador	1990	Pérez-Liñán (2007); Mustapic (2010)
Paz Zamora	Bolivia	1991	Pérez-Liñán (2007)
Borja	Ecuador	1992	Latin American Weekly Report; Mustapic (2010)
Fujimori	Peru	1991	Valenzuela (2004); Hochstetler (2006); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008)

Collor	Brazil	1992	Valenzuela (2004); Hochstetler (2006); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Kim and Bahry (2008); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008); Mustapic (2010)
Pérez	Venezuela	1992	Valenzuela (2004); Hochstetler (2006); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009); Mustapic (2010)
Serrano	Guatemala	1993	Valenzuela (2004); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Kim and Bahry (2008); Hochstetler and Edwards (2008); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008); Mustapic (2010)
Balaguer	Dominican Republic	1994	Valenzuela (2004); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Kim and Bahry (2008); Mustapic (2010)
Durán-Ballén	Ecuador	1995	Latin American Weekly Report
Chamorro	Nicaragua	1995	Latin American Weekly Report
Samper	Colombia	1996	Hochstetler (2006); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009)
Wasmosy	Paraguay	1996	Latin American Weekly Report; Hochstetler (2006); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008)
Alemán	Nicaragua	1997	Latin American Weekly Report

Bucaram	Ecuador	1997	Valenzuela (2004); Hochstetler (2006); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Kim and Bahry (2008); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009); Mustapic (2010)
Cubas	Paraguay	1998	Valenzuela (2004); Hochstetler (2006); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Kim and Bahry (2008); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009); Mustapic (2010)
Cardoso	Brazil	1999	Latin American Weekly Report
Mahuad	Ecuador	1999	Valenzuela (2004); Hochstetler (2006); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Kim and Bahry (2008); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009); Mustapic (2010)
Pastrana	Colombia	2000	Latin American Weekly Report
Fujimori	Peru	2000	Valenzuela (2004); Hochstetler (2006); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009)
De La Rúa	Argentina	2001	Valenzuela (2004); Hochstetler (2006); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Kim and Bahry (2008); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008); Hochstetler

			and Edwards (2009); Mustapic (2010)
González Maachi	Paraguay	2001	Pérez-Liñán (2007)
González Maachi	Paraguay	2002	Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2003); Pérez-Liñán (2007)
Chávez	Venezuela	2002	Hochstetler (2006); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009)
Sánchez de Lozada	Bolivia	2003	Valenzuela (2004); Hochstetler (2006); Pérez-Liñán (2007); Kim and Bahry (2008); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009); Mustapic (2010)
Bolaños	Nicaragua	2004	Pérez-Liñán (2007)
Bolaños	Nicaragua	2005	Latin American Weekly Report; Hochstetler and Edwards (2009)
Duarte	Paraguay	2005	Latin American Weekly Report
Gutiérrez	Ecuador	2004	Acosta and Polga Hecimovich (2010); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009); Mustapic (2010)
Gutiérrez	Ecuador	2005	Acosta and Polga Hecimovich (2010); Marsteintredat and Berntzun (2008); Hochstetler and Edwards (2009); Mustapic (2010)

Lula	Brazil	2005	Latin American Weekly Report
Palacio	Ecuador	2005	Latin American Weekly Report
Correa	Ecuador	2007	Latin American Weekly Report
Ortega	Nicaragua	2007	Latin American Weekly Report

Reassuringly, as Table 2 shows, nearly all of the presidential crises identified by other scholars of the region (Valenzuela 2004; Pérez-Liñán 2007; Kim and Bahry 2009; Mustapic 2010; and Llanos and Marsteintredet 2010) are contained in ICLAD.[14] Likewise, with the single exception of Paraguay 1994,[15] I include all of the cases between 1985 and 2005 that are listed by Hochstetler (2006) as either challenges to the president launched by the legislature or jointly by the legislature and the "street." I also include three additional cases that are classified by Hochstetler as only involving the street: Ecuador (1999), Argentina (2001) and Bolivia (2003). As mentioned above, protests arguably played the most important role in these presidential ousters, but in each of these cases the legislature also mattered. In Ecuador, there were calls within Congress to impeach Mahuad in March 1999.[16] In Argentina, the legislature's calls for

[14] Note that the two major exceptions are Haiti and Argentina. First, because I limit my focus to Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries, I do not include Haiti in the dataset (Valenzuela, 2004, cf.). The only other meaningful difference between my cases and the cases covered in the extant literature involves how the interim Argentine presidents' post 2001 are treated. For instance, both Pérez-Liñán (2007) and Mustapic (2010) list Rodriguez Saá, but not the other two short-lived presidents because, as I further elaborate in Helmke (2017), all administrations that last less than 6 months are excluded from my dataset. Finally, Mustapic also includes both Alfonsin and Duhalde (2002-3) as examples ousted presidents, but because Congress was not involved in their resignations, by Rule 1 I do not treat these as inter-branch crises.

[15] Under my selection rules, there was no inter-branch crisis in Paraguay in 1994. To be sure, there were protests by peasants over agricultural reforms, as well as calls for General Oviedo to step down from the armed forces. Also, at certain points the government pact with the opposition in congress broke down, but there were no concrete threats or actions taken by the legislature to remove the president. The only potentially qualifying incident was an investigation into President Wasmosy's election as president of the Colorados, but there is no evidence that the investigation called for his removal, or was followed up in a way that threatened his tenure (see *LAWR* 6/16/1994; 6/30/1994; 12/1/199412/29/1994)).

[16] *LAWR*, 3/16/99.

impeachment were arguably the last straw in getting de la Rúa to step down early (Pérez-Liñán, 2007, p180). Following the violence associated with the protests in Bolivia, Congress played a similar role in getting Sánchez de Lozada to abandon his post.[17] The rest of the cases included in my dataset stem either from threats or failed attempts to remove presidents, which had not been previously uncovered by the literature, or through my inclusion of more recent cases.

Figure 2: A Map of Presidential Crises in Latin America, 1985-2008

[17] *LAWR*, 2/25/03.

Notice the enormous variation across the region in terms of which countries experience presidential crises, and which do not. At one end, there are several countries in which no presidential crises occurred during this period (Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Honduras, and Uruguay). At the other end, there are a total of seven countries that have experienced executive ousters or congressional attempts at ousters multiple times: Presidential crises have occurred twice in Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela, three times in Bolivia, four times in Brazil, five in Nicaragua and Paraguay, and a staggering eight times in Ecuador. In the middle, we have just a handful of countries that have only experienced one such crisis (Argentina[18], Dominican Republic, and Guatemala).

Moreover, statistical evidence presented in related work (Helmke 2017) suggests that this empirical pattern co-varies precisely with the argument outlined in the previous section about the importance of gap between the president's partisan and constitutional powers. Specifically, the likelihood of a presidential crisis increases significantly among minority presidents, but only if presidents have substantial formal constitutional powers. Using the ICLAD data to construct a dummy variable for presidential crises for each administration-year, I estimated a series of logit models with numerous measures for the president's partisan powers, the president's constitutional powers, the interaction between these two types of power, and various measures for public support, such as the number of protests, trust in government, etc. Regardless of the measures used, the story is the same: public support consistently shields the president, while the effect of partisan support is entirely conditional on the degree of a formal presidential power.

Table 3: Illustrative Cases of the Power Gap

[18] See footnote 12.

	Strong *de jure* Powers	**Weak *de jure* Powers**
Unified Government	Chile (1990-2010)	Mexico (Pre-1997)
Divided Government	Ecuador (Pre-2006)	Mexico (1997-present)

To see this conditional effect at work in specific institutional contexts, compare Mexico under unified and divided government to Chile and Ecuador. In contrast to its South American neighbors, the Mexican president is notoriously weak in terms of constitutional power. Throughout the most of the 20th century, of course, the PRI was hegemonic and precisely because Mexican presidents enjoyed enormous partisan powers they were able to utterly dominate policymaking (Weldon, 1997; Magaloni, 2003). And, indeed, during that period in Mexican history executive-legislative relations were nothing if not stable. Yet, even with the collapse of single party rule at the end of the 1990s, and the onset of enormous social violence with the Drug War beginning in the mid-2000s, presidents have been unpopular and lost elections, but they have not been threatened with early exit.

If we switch to contexts in which the president holds far more de jure powers, the effects of divided government become much more noticeable. Specifically, consider Chile and Ecuador. Both countries are in the 90th percentile in terms of formal presidential powers, but the distribution of partisan support for the president varies dramatically from one country to the other. In Chile from 1990 until 2010, presidents came from the center-left coalition, *Concertación*, and essentially controlled the majority of the lower house seats. Since the coup that toppled Salvador Allende in 1973, not a single democratically-elected president has been ousted.

Now, take Ecuador. With the exception of President Correa, over the last few decades no Ecuadorian president has even come close to controlling a majority of seats in the legislature. As a result, presidents in the 1980s and early 1990s were often forced to rely on so-called "ghost coalitions" in order to govern (Mejía Acosta and Polga-Hecimovich, 2010). Unlike Chile, such post-electoral coalitions proved fleeting and unstable, as the defection of the PSC from Durán-Ballén's government and the subsequent ouster of his Vice President, Alberto Dahik, in 1996 illustrated. Meanwhile, the very institutional reforms that further increased presidential powers in the late 1990s severely undermined the president's ability to sustain such coalitions (Mejía Acosta and Polga-Hecimovich, 2010). Given this fateful combination, the massive wave of institutional instability that swept over Ecuador's minority presidents from 1997 until 2006 is entirely in keeping with the political logic advanced in the previous section.

Finally, and entirely consistent with a story rooted in political manipulation and selective non-compliance, it is important to underscore that the vast majority of presidential successors have not belonged to the same political party as the failed predecessor. Here, because only cases of actual removal are relevant, it easy to update the data to 2018. Of the 17 failed leaders in the region during the last three decades, fully two-thirds of their successors were not from the same political party. [19]

[19] Given the split ticket rules that operate in many of these countries, in many of the cases the vice president was not from the same party as the president (Sánchez de Lozada 2003; Collor 1992; Mahuad 2002; Gutiérrez 2005; Pérez Molina 2015; Lugo 2012). [19] In other instances, there simply was no vice president waiting in the wings. Between 1858 and 1999, for instance, the Venezuelan Constitution had no provision for a Vice President. When Carlos Andrés Pérez was suspended in 1993, therefore, the head of Congress temporarily took power until Congress could designate a successor. In Argentina, Carlos "Chacho" Álvarez had already resigned from Argentina's first coalition government over a bribery scandal a little more than a year before De la Rúa was forced from power. In the space of few weeks Congress designated no fewer than four interim presidents; each was from the Peronist opposition. And in Paraguay, where President Cubas was impeached for allegedly having had his own Vice President Luis Argaña assassinated, Congress stepped in to designate someone from the rival Colorado faction.

Table 4: Presidential Crises and Succession, 1985-2018

Country	President/Party	Year of Exit	Replaced by VP	Successor/Party Affiliation
Argentina	De la Rúa/UCR	2001	No	Duhalde/PJ
Bolivia	Siles Zuazo/MNR	1985	No	Paz Estensorro/MNR
Bolivia	Sánchez de Lozada/MNR	2003	Yes	Mesa/Independent
Brazil	Collor/PRN	1992	Yes	Franco/PRN
Brazil	Sarney/PMDP	1990	No	Collor/PRN
Dominican Republic	Balaguer/SCR	1996	No	Fernández/DLP
Ecuador	Bucaram/PRE	1997	No	Alarcón/ARF
Ecuador	Mahuad/DP	2002	Yes	Noboa/DP
Ecuador	Gutiérrez/PSP	2005	Yes	Palacio/Independent
Guatemala	Serrano/MAS	1993	No	De León Carpio/Independent
Guatemala	Pérez Molina/PP	2015	Yes	Maldonado/Independent
Honduras	Manuel Zelaya/Liberal	2009	No	Micheletti/Liberal

Paraguay	Cubas/Colorado	1999	No	González Macchi/Colorado
Paraguay	Lugo/FG	2012	Yes	Franco/ARLP
Peru	Fujimori/Peru2000	2000	No	Paniagua/AP
Peru	Kuczynski/PPK	2018	Yes	Vizcarra/Independent
Venezuela	Pérez/AD	1993	No	Velásquez/Independent

5. Inference, Endogeneity, and Political Instability Traps

Taken together, the evidence from contemporary Latin America points away from a rule of law account of presidential exits and toward a political account of presidential crises driven by gaps in de facto and de jure institutional powers. Of course, as with any sort of observational data, there is simply no way to rule out all threats to inference. Claiming a causal effect of institutions on outcomes is particularly fraught given that institutions like presidential powers are not randomly assigned (Przeworski 2009). Cheibub (2007) makes precisely this sort of argument about the spurious effects of presidentialism writ large on regime instability.[20]

In Helmke (2017), I consider the challenge of inference from the following perspective. Whereas the statistical results presented in the previous section treat each institutional crisis essentially as an independent observation, the fact that crises tend to repeat in the same countries also suggests a more dynamic story in which the crises themselves might alter the conditions that

[20] Interestingly, there is no correlation between past regime instability and the sort of presidential instability I have been describing (see Helmke 2017:94-5).

produce them. This not only has important implications for drawing conclusions about institutional weakness at a particular point in time, but also about the possibility for path dependence or so-called "traps" of institutional weakness.

An obvious extension of my main argument is that presidential crises that occur at time t can potentially alter endogenously the salient conditions that confront actors at time $t + 1$. Importantly, such shifts can either reinforce the tendency toward crises or undermine it. Extending the argument in this way recalls the approach to endogenous institutional change described by Greif and Laitin (2004). In their language, we might think of public opinion, or d in the model, partisan opposition, or p in the model, and the allocation of formal powers, or Q, as "quasi-parameters," which shift in the wake of a given crisis, thus making subsequent crises more or less likely.

Consider the following two quotes by commentators on recent events in Guatemala and Brazil, respectively:

"Mr. Pérez Molina, 64, is the first president in Guatemalan history to resign over a corruption scandal, experts said, a striking rarity in a country long known for the impunity of its political establishment. And though the economy in Guatemala has lagged compared with those of other countries in Latin America, Mr. Pérez Molina's sudden reversal of fortune put it firmly within a wave of efforts elsewhere in the region to make political systems more accountable."[21]

"This is a coup, a traumatic injury to Brazil's presidential system," said Pedro Arruda, a political analyst at the Pontifical Catholic University in São Paulo. "This is just pretext to take

[21] Ahmed and Malkin. "Otto Perez Molina of Guatemala is Jailed Hours After Resigning Presidency." *The New York Times*, September 3, 2015.

down a president who was elected by 54 million people. She doesn't have foreign bank accounts, and she hasn't been accused of corruption, unlike those who are trying to impeach her….It's putting a very large bullet in Brazilian democracy,'' said Lincoln Secco, a professor of history at the University of São Paulo. ''This will set a very dangerous precedent for democracy in Brazil, because from now on, any moment that we have a highly unpopular president, there will be pressure to start an impeachment process."[22]

Clearly, the views expressed above about the longer term effects of presidential crises could not be more different. The former is optimistic. Inter-branch crises are salutary; they not only cleanse the system of corruption, but they set the country on a new path in which horizontal accountability can finally emerge. Political instability, in a word, inoculates. By contrast, the second narrative, captured in the quote on the impeachment debacle in Brazil, forebodes a very different future. In this view, not only is the act of impeachment seen as unjust and undemocratic—overturning the votes of 54 million Brazilians—but the long-term consequences are feared to be even more pernicious. Politicians and citizens indeed learn from institutional crises, but they absorb a very different lesson. Thus, contrary to the instability qua inoculation mechanism, the implication here is that instability becomes a trap.

Again, the core bargaining model contained in section 3 offers a systematic framework for beginning to understand how either path might emerge. Let me start with the optimistic view. To the extent that a previous crisis helps subsequent presidents better understand the legislators' calculus, bargains can now be struck. Implicitly, this is similar to the positive dynamic

[22] Jacobs, Moura and Sreeharsha. "Vote to Impeach Brazil's Leader Passes Strongly." *The New York Times*. April 18, 2016.

suggested in North and Weingast's foundational work on the Glorious Revolution (1989; See also Weingast 1997). By their interpretation, the king was beheaded for trampling rights, and thereafter leaders and citizens alike learned the limits of the government.

Conversely, however, the main payoffs might instead change in ways that makes subsequent crises more likely. If a previous crisis teaches leaders how to reign in their power, it also teaches opposition politicians how to coordinate to effectively remove presidents. Likewise, if crises destroy trust in institutions, not just particular leaders (i.e. a lower d in the next rounds), then this lowers the threshold for presidential crises going forward. Put differently, if crises serve to both endogenously lower the legislature's threshold for removal by raising p and reducing d, then crises become that much more likely down the road.

Last but not least, the model also reminds us of the importance of changing the formal institutions that allocate presidential power in the wake of the crisis. If the theory is right, one of the most disheartening facts about a country like Ecuador is that, in the wake of such crises, incoming presidents have falsely inferred that strengthening the president's constitutional powers will help them overcome any weaknesses associated with being in the minority. Instead, the model tells us that reforms that push Q to the left will only exacerbate inter-branch bargaining failures. Along these very lines, Mejía Acosta and Polga-Hecimovich (2010) highlight the perverse consequences of granting the president more unilateral powers in periods following Durán-Ballén's troubled administration. In particular, they describe how such reforms increased the president's incentives to go it alone and reduced the president's capacity to forge lasting coalitions, thus resulting in the wave of repeated presidential ousters post-1996.

6. Conclusion

Strong presidents beget weak institutions. This familiar paradox runs throughout this essay: The more formal powers are allocated to president, the more incentives opponents face to ignore fixed terms and deploy constitutional mechanisms for early removal. At the most basic level, the fact that impeachment in contemporary Latin America has been at least seriously attempted in about a third of all administrations suggests that the rule of law is not operating optimally. At least some legislatures are likely over-using their powers for partisan gain; others may well be under-using it for the very same purpose. Although problems of partial observability can never be fully resolved, the political logic of selective non-compliance explored in this essay bolsters our ability to understand why, when, and where fixed presidential terms fail.

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