

# Presidential Strategies in Times of Crisis: Room for Survival?

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## Resumen

Este artículo revisa las crisis y caídas presidenciales que tuvieron lugar en América Latina durante la tercera ola de democratización prestando atención a las estrategias desplegadas por los presidentes para hacerles frente. Argumentamos que la perspectiva de análisis centrada en el presidente ha estado notablemente ausente en la literatura debido a la predominancia de una perspectiva "linziana" en la teoría de las crisis presidenciales, a través de la cual se subraya el papel de actores externos (principalmente, el congreso y las protestas callejeras) como determinantes del resultado de las crisis. Nuestro análisis muestra que el juego político no está terminado cuando estalla la crisis y que los presidentes prueban distintas estrategias para recuperar el control de la situación. El artículo distingue cinco estrategias que los presidentes pueden emplear cuando se enfrentan a una crisis. A través de una comparación de caídas y desafíos presidenciales, y una serie de estudios de caso, argumentamos que el manejo presidencial de las crisis influye sobre el resultado de la siguiente manera: 1) impidiendo su desarrollo en una caída; 2) si la caída es inevitable, definiendo el tipo de caída, es decir a) si se negoció un pacto con la oposición antes de dejar el poder o b) si simplemente se forzó al presidente a salir de su puesto.

## Palabras clave:

Caídas presidenciales - Crisis presidenciales – Presidencialismo - Juan Linz - Estrategias presidenciales.

## Abstract

This article revisits the presidential crises and breakdowns that have taken place in Latin America in the third wave of democratization by paying attention to the strategies presidents displayed to face these crises. This president-centred angle has been notably absent in the literature, we argue, due to the predominance of a "Linzian" perspective in the theory of the analyses of presidential

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crises that underscores the role of external actors (mainly, congress and street protesters) in determining the outcome of the crises. Our analysis shows that the political game is not over when a presidential crisis erupts, and presidents try different strategies to recover control of the situation. The article distinguishes between five different strategies a president can apply when confronted with a challenge. Through a comparison of presidential breakdowns and challenges and a series of case-studies, we argue that presidential management of crises influences the outcomes of the challenges in the following ways: 1) by impeding their development into full breakdowns; 2) if a breakdown seems unavoidable, by defining the type of salida, that is, a) whether a negotiated pact was agreed with the opposition before leaving office, or b) the president was plainly forced out of office.

### Keywords:

Presidential falls - Presidential crises – Presidentialism - Juan Linz \_ Presidential strategies.

### Introduction

It is a common understanding in Latin America that presidents are the most powerful political actors. Although with great variation, presidents count on strong agenda setting powers to control the policy process, have a direct influence over the appointments and dismissals of hundreds of government officials, and play a pivotal role vis-à-vis other political actors at the national and sub national arenas. Still, more than a handful of elected Latin American presidents left power before the end of their term, and a considerable number experienced serious conflicts during their mandates. If most of the institutional literature agrees on the marginal or reactive role of Congress in the policy process, the literature dealing with the mentioned presidential crises remarks, on the contrary, how fundamental parliamentary backing is in shaping the fate of presidents.<sup>1</sup> Presidents leaving power prematurely have been pushed away by the pressure of forces external to their administration, mostly institutional (e.g. an opposing Congress), but also arising from below (e.g. street protests, demonstrations). Following the literature on presidential breakdowns,<sup>2</sup> there is a *de facto* dependence on Congress, as presidents need parliamentary support to remain in power.<sup>3</sup> Other authors refer to congressional supremacy, as dissolution cases during the third democratization wave involve the removal of the president from office rather than the closure of congress.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Hochstetler, K. (2006) "Rethinking Presidentialism: Challenges and Presidential Falls in South America", in *Comparative Politics* 38 (4): 401-418; Hochstetler, K. and Edwards, M. E. (2009) "Failed Presidencies: Identifying and Explaining a South American Anomaly", in *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 1 (2): 31-57; Kim, Y. H. and Bahry, D. (2008) "Interrupted Presidencies in Third Wave Democracies", in *The Journal of Politics* 70 (3): 807-822; Llanos, M. and Marsteintredet, L. (2010) "Conclusions: Presidential Breakdowns Revisited", in Llanos, M. and Marsteintredet, L. (ed.). *Presidential Breakdowns in Latin America. Causes and Outcomes of Executive Instability in Developing Democracies*. New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 213-228; Negretto, G. (2006) "Minority Presidents and Types of Government in Latin America", in *Latin American Politics and Society* 48 (3): 63-92; Pérez-Liñán, A. (2003) "Pugna de poderes y crisis de gobernabilidad", in *Latin American Research Review* 38 (3): 149-64; Pérez-Liñán, A. (2007) *Presidential Impeachment and the New Political Instability in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Valenzuela, A. (2004) "Latin American Presidencies Interrupted", in *Journal of Democracy* 15 (4): 5-19.

<sup>2</sup> Presidential breakdowns are also called presidential removal, presidential failure, presidential fall, and interrupted presidency. See, respectively Pérez-Liñán, A. (2007) *op. cit.*; Hochstetler and Edwards (2009) *op. cit.*; Hochstetler (2006) *op. cit.*; Kim and Bahry (2008) *op. cit.*; Marsteintredet, L. and Berntzen, E. (2008) "Reducing the Perils of Presidentialism in Latin America through Presidential Interruptions", in *Comparative Politics* 41 (1): 83-101; Negretto (2006) *op. cit.*; Valenzuela (2004) *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Mustapic, A. M. (2010) "Presidentialism and Early Exits from Power: The Role of Congress", in Llanos and Marsteintredet (eds.) *op. cit.*, pp. 17-32.

<sup>4</sup> Pérez-Liñán, A. (2005) "Democratization and Constitutional Crises in Presidential Regimes - toward Congressional Supremacy?", in *Comparative Political Studies* 38 (1): 51-74.

Nevertheless, the presidency has a central role in the Latin American regimes, and in many cases extensive powers in dealings with Congress or other actors. Therefore, it could be argued that presidents whose permanence in power is being challenged still can behave strategically in a way that affects the outcome of the challenging episode. Our purpose in the following pages is to revisit the presidential breakdowns and challenges by paying attention to the strategies presidents displayed facing these crises. We underscore the ways in which behavioural aspects of the presidential leadership, or presidential agency, contributed to shaping outcomes.<sup>5</sup> This president-centred angle has been notably absent in the literature, we argue, due to the predominance of a Linzian perspective in the theory of the analyses of presidential crises.<sup>6</sup> We acknowledge external-led challenges as a starting point to show that the resolution of these challenges not entirely depended on these external actors, as the literature suggests. We argue that presidential management of challenges influences the outcomes of the crises in the following ways: 1) by impeding their development into full breakdowns; 2) if a breakdown seems unavoidable, by defining the type of *salida*, that is, a) whether a negotiated pact was agreed with the opposition before leaving office, or b) the president was forced out of office. The analysis intends to contribute theoretical and empirical insight to the debate on presidential crises, as well as to shed light on aspects of presidential agency, an area of study quite under-explored in the Latin American region.

In the next section we review the literature dealing with the causes of presidential breakdowns in Latin America, and clarify the concepts of breakdown and challenge. Then, we discuss how the mentioned literature tends to neglect the impact of presidential factors in the resolution of challenges. We proceed to theorise the impact of presidential strategies upon the outcome of challenges, and show how presidential leadership is linked to these outcomes. Finally, we provide further evidence to our argument through a series of case-studies that trace how presidential strategies affect the outcome of a presidential crisis.

### Presidential Breakdowns: External Causes

When military regimes and regime instability were the rule in Latin America, Juan Linz argued that the characteristics of presidentialism were a crucial explanation for Latin America's endemic instability and authoritarian tendencies.<sup>7</sup> In 1978, however, the third wave of democratisation began to sweep the continent putting an end to long-lived authoritarian regimes. Government crises, nevertheless, persisted, and a new pattern of political instability began to be observed in the region.<sup>8</sup> In their extreme version, crises involved either the premature and forced exit of an elected president that did not entail a democratic breakdown, which we call presidential breakdowns, or the (less frequent) temporary closing of Congress, with more serious implications for the democratic regime. A milder version of these government crises has been represented by attempts from congress, other institutions, or people mobilising in the streets to remove the president from office, which the president survived.<sup>9</sup> The third-wave crises involving a (failed or successful) challenge to the stability of the presidential authority constitute the object of study of this article (see table 1 below).

<sup>5</sup> Neustadt, R. (1960) *Presidential Power*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

<sup>6</sup> An exception is Pérez Liñán, A. (2007), *op. cit.*, chap. 6, although his analysis only deals with six cases of impeachment.

<sup>7</sup> Linz, J. J. (1978) *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown & Reequilibration*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Pérez-Liñán, A. (2003) *op. cit.*; Valenzuela (2004) *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> For presidential challenges, see particularly Hochstetler (2006) *op. cit.* A presidential challenge is also referred to as a presidential crisis, see Pérez-Liñán, A. (2007) *op. cit.* We use the concept *crisis* and base our definition of a presidential crisis on these prior works. We identify a presidential crisis using the Latin American Weekly Report (LAWR) as source. If a presidential crisis is identified in an article in LAWR, additional sources are used to corroborate the empirical evidence (see citations in text). LAWR is only used to identify the crisis, the analysis of the crisis ending in either presidential survival or breakdowns however, is based on thicker analyses as cited in the text.

Table 1. Presidential crises: Breakdowns and survival

Presidential Breakdowns			Presidential Survival		
President/year of breakdown	Country	Modality of breakdown	President/year of challenge	Country	Modality of challenge
Alfonsín 1989	Argentina	Resignation	Lula 2005	Brazil	Impeachment
De la Rúa 2001	Argentina	Resignation	Samper 1996	Colombia	Impeachment
Siles Zuazo 1985	Bolivia	Resignation through anticipated elections	Pastrana 2000	Colombia	Impeachment
Sánchez de Lozada 2003	Bolivia	Resignation	Febres Cordero 1987	Ecuador	Military and congressional
Mesa 2005	Bolivia	Non-confidence vote and resignation, anticipated elections	Borja 1990	Ecuador	Impeachment
Collor de Melo 1992	Brazil	Impeachment	Gutiérrez 2004	Ecuador	Impeachment
Balaguer 1994/96	Dominican Republic	Resignation through anticipated elections	Colom 2009	Guatemala	Street based
Bucaram 1997	Ecuador	Declaration of Mental Incapacity	Chamorro 1995	Nicaragua	Congressional
Mahud 2000	Ecuador	Coup and declaration of abandoned office	Bolaños 2004	Nicaragua	Congressional
Gutiérrez	Ecuador	Declaration of abandoned office	Gonzalez Macchi 2002/03	Paraguay	Impeachment
Serrano 1993	Guatemala	Resignation and declaration of abandoned office	Fujimori 1991	Peru	Congressional
Zelaya 2009	Honduras	Coup followed by congressional destitution	Toledo 2005	Peru	Impeachment
Cubas 1999	Paraguay	Impeachment			
Lugo 2012	Paraguay	Impeachment			
Fujimori 2000	Peru	Resignation and declaration of abandoned office			
Pérez 1993	Venezuela	Impeachment			

*Notes: Crises identified by Latin American Weekly Report (LAWR), modality based on LAWR and cited references in the text.*

Presidential crises ending up in either of the two outcomes, i.e. presidential breakdown or presidential survival, seem to be more a South-, rather than a Central-American phenomenon. We count 13 removed presidents in the south compared to only three in Central America and the Caribbean,<sup>10</sup> as well as three presidential crises in Central America and the Caribbean and nine in South America

<sup>10</sup> There is a debate on whether or not to include President Zelaya as a case of presidential breakdown since the ouster was a coup, see Llanos, M. and Marsteintredet, L. (2010) "Ruptura y continuidad: la caída de "Mel" Zelaya en perspectiva comparada", in *América Latina Hoy* 55: 173-197. We include the case here since the coup differs from "your father's coup", and did not lead to a complete democratic breakdown and installation of an outright

that the presidents survived. The 16 breakdowns are also relatively concentrated in four countries that have experienced ten breakdowns in total (Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay),<sup>11</sup> while six countries have experienced one breakdown. One should therefore be careful when generalising to the whole region the patterns from these events.

In their attempt to explain this new type of presidential instability, scholars resorted to the institutional arguments inspired by Linz. According to Linz the perils of presidentialism lie in its two essential features –the direct election of the executive and legislative branches and the fixed terms, which are responsible for rigidity, a dual democratic legitimacy, and, ultimately, pervasive deadlock problems.<sup>12</sup> In the past, situations of inter-institutional conflict tempted the armed forces to intervene as a mediating power. During the third wave of democratization, struggles between presidents and congresses became less likely to destabilize regimes, but they still led to the removal of governments.<sup>13</sup> High explanatory value has been given to the potential risks posed by certain institutional constellations within presidentialism, particularly minority governments,<sup>14</sup> and which different recent comparative analyses have corroborated as a cause for presidential breakdowns.<sup>15</sup>

But institutions (an opposing Congress) are clearly not the only factor causing presidential breakdowns. The explanatory value of event variables,<sup>16</sup> particularly street protests, and in some cases, political scandals has been highlighted as well.<sup>17</sup> Hochstetler argues that when legislative action did not provoke, or was accompanied by, any popular reaction, presidential challenges failed. Other non-institutional external factors such as economic crises and negative growth also affect the survival of presidents in Latin America.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the role of external factors has been highlighted regarding the type of *salida* of the challenge. For Mustapic the president only manages a more or less orderly succession process when Congress is not in the position to form an alternative coalition to get rid of the

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authoritarian regime 'Pinochet style'. Ruhl, J. M. (2010) "Honduras Unravels", in *Journal of Democracy* 21 (2): 98. The inclusion or exclusion of the case does not alter our argument. There is also a debate on whether or not to include the cases of Presidents Balaguer and Fujimori since both led regimes that could be considered non-democratic at the time of their ousters. Since the seeds for the presidential crises in both cases occurred through fraudulent elections at a time that both regimes were considered semi-democratic, and there was a recognised opposition represented in congress at the time in both cases, we choose to include them. For a thorough conceptual discussion on presidential breakdowns, see Marsteintredet, L. (2013) "Explaining variation of executive instability in presidential regimes: presidential interruptions in Latin America", in *International Political Science Review*. Online 7 January, DOI: 10.1177/0192512112459548.

<sup>11</sup> Some authors consider Duhalde's call for early elections in 2003 in Argentina as a presidential breakdown as well, which would further increase the concentration of cases in these three countries, and add one more case of a pacted breakdown. See Marsteintredet, L. and Berntzen, E. (2008) *op. cit.* However, like most of the cited literature on presidential breakdowns we focus on elected presidents and exclude the case. Including the case would not alter our argument. For the same reason we exclude the short-lived presidency of Adolfo Rodríguez Súa, who was president of Argentina between 22 and 30 December, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Linz (1978) *op. cit.*; Linz, J. J. (1990) "The Perils of Presidentialism", in *Journal of Democracy* 1 (1): 51-69; Linz, J. J. (1994) "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does It Make a Difference?", in Linz, J. J. and Valenzuela, A. (eds.) *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 3-90.

<sup>13</sup> Pérez-Liñán (2003) *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, M. P. (1995) *Electoral Laws and the Survival of Presidential Democracies*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press; Mainwaring, S. (1993) "Presidentialism, Multipartyism, and Democracy - the Difficult Combination", in *Comparative Political Studies* 26: (2): 198-228; Shugart, M. S. and Carey, J. M. (1992) *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press; Shugart, M. S. and Mainwaring, S. (1997) "Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America: Rethinking the Terms of the Debate", in Mainwaring, S. and Shugart, M. S. (eds.) *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 12-55.

<sup>15</sup> Hochstetler (2006) *op. cit.*; Kim and Bahry (2008) *op. cit.*; Valenzuela (2004) *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Laver, M. (2003) "Government Termination", in *Annual Review of Political Science* 6: 23-40; Laver, M. and Shepsle, K. A. (1998) "Events, Equilibria, and Government Survival", in *American Journal of Political Science* 42 (1): 28-54.

<sup>17</sup> Hochstetler (2006) *op. cit.*; Pérez-Liñán (2003) *op. cit.*; Pérez-Liñán (2007) *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Alvarez, M. E. and Marsteintredet, L. (2010) "Presidential and Democratic Breakdowns in Latin America: Similar Causes, Different Outcomes", in Llanos and Marsteintredet (eds.) *op. cit.*, pp. 33-54.

president.<sup>19</sup> Less attention has been paid to other non-institutional factors, such as the role of foreign organisations and the military, in preventing or accelerating a breakdown, some of which we address in the next pages.

In short, causal accounts of presidential breakdowns have focused on factors external to the presidential administration, particularly, a semi- or disloyal opposition in congress and/or the streets.

### Presidential Factors and Presidential Stability

Despite the focus on external factors, the literature suggests three ways in which presidents in their dealings with congress may affect the stability of their tenures. The first concerns their style in constructing relations with Congress. As Pérez Liñán argues, “isolated presidents and, to a lesser extent, presidents who adopt a confrontational stance vis-à-vis Congress are more likely to be impeached, while presidents who build extensive legislative coalitions early in their terms are likely to be shielded”.<sup>20</sup> Second, their management of cabinet politics and the business of government can have an impact on presidential stability. Whilst stable tenures allow ministers to build relationships of cooperation and accountability, gain expertise, and reach inter-temporal agreements, all central to making better policy, frequent internal conflicts and ministerial resignations, associated with governments not holding a stable parliamentary majority, are normally a source of uncertainty that can enhance the risk of breakdown.<sup>21</sup> Finally, presidential policy preferences, and the strength or intransigence of the president’s preferences compared to the preferences of the majority in Congress also affect the sustainability of majorities in Congress.<sup>22</sup>

In more general terms, from a broad literature on Latin American multiparty presidentialism we learn that presidents act in a dynamic political environment that constrains them but that also gives them options.<sup>23</sup> To deal with this context presidents are provided with multiple institutional tools, but they are also faced with the task of building winning coalitions on an ongoing basis.<sup>24</sup> This is a double-sided game in which the composition of Congress sets constraints, but constraints that also presidents can (positively or negatively) affect with their strategical choices. The role of presidential style and tactics, so central in studies of majority building in multiparty presidential regimes, have only been partially acknowledged in some case-studies of presidential breakdowns,<sup>25</sup> or regarding

<sup>19</sup> Mustapic (2010) *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Pérez-Liñán (2007) *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>21</sup> Martínez-Gallardo, C. (2010) "Inside the Cabinet: The Influence of Ministers in the Policymaking Process", in Scartascini, C., Stein, E. and Tommassi, M. (eds.) *How Democracy Works. Political Institutions, Actors, and Arenas in Latin American Policymaking*. Cambridge, MA: Inter-American Development Bank, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University Press, p. 120; Martínez-Gallardo, C. (2005) "Presidents, Posts, and Policy: Ministerial Appointments and Political Strategy in Presidential Regimes", unpubl. PhD Diss., Columbia University; Llanos and Marsteintredet (2010) 'Conclusions'.

<sup>22</sup> See Negretto (2006) *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> David Altman (2000) "The Politics of Coalition Formation and Survival in Multi-Party Presidential Democracies: The Case of Uruguay, 1989-1999", in *Party Politics* 6 (3): 259-83; Amorim Neto, O. (2002) "Presidential Cabinets, Electoral Cycles, and Coalition Discipline in Brazil", in Morgenstern, S. and Nacif, B. (eds.) *Legislative Politics in Latin America*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, pp. 48-79; Amorim Neto, O. (2006) "The Presidential Calculus: Executive Policy Making and Cabinet Formation in the Americas", in *Comparative Political Studies* 39 (4): 415-440; Mejía Acosta, A. (2009) *Informal Coalitions and Policymaking in Latin America*. New York: Routledge; Raile, E. D., Pereira, C. and Power, T. J. (2010) "The Executive Toolbox: Building Legislative Support in a Multiparty Presidential Regime", in *Political Research Quarterly* XX (X): 1-12; Cheibub, J. A., Przeworski, A. and Saiegh, S. M. (2004) "Government Coalitions and Legislative Success under Presidentialism and Parliamentarism", in *British Journal of Political Science* 34: 565-587.

<sup>24</sup> Raile et al. (2010) *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> For an early exception, see Pyne, P. (1977) "Presidential Caesarism in Latin America: Myth or Reality? A Case Study of the Ecuadorian Executive During the Presidency of José María Velasco Ibarra, 1960-1961", in *Comparative Politics* 9 (3): 281-304. The strategies of presidential isolation and imperialness have, however, been highlighted as explanations for the breakdown in case studies of de la Rúa’s presidency in Argentina’s in 2001, see

the few cases of impeachment.<sup>26</sup> For most comparative works, though, presidents (often due to corruption) act as the trigger of crises, but the outcome is wholly placed in the hands of challenging actors and institutions, that is, in actors *external* to the president. According to the argument, when presidents are challenged in the streets, only a majority support in the legislature can save them from breakdown. In our view, this understanding (strongly conditioned by an image of presidential failure and impotence) neglects the fact that presidents normally seek to regain control of the political situation by changing strategy. The political game continues after the crisis erupts, and results are difficult to predict at the outset.

A similar argument can be applied to the type of presidential breakdowns. With some differences in the particulars of the argument, we share Mustapic's distinction of two types of presidential exits of power, pacted and non-pacted (see table 2, below).<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the fact that there exists a sub-group of pacted breakdowns suggests that there is no strict prevalence of external factors in these breakdowns. Pacts can only take place if there is a countervailing strategy on the part of the president, underscoring a more complex problem than one simply reduced to external causality.

In the following sections we systematically trace the strategies of presidents while facing challenges. Based on the literature on presidential breakdowns, we first distinguish between three possible outcomes of a presidential challenge, then we develop and explain our indicators of presidential strategies and link these to the three potential outcomes. Finally through some short case studies we illustrate the ways in which presidents may influence the outcomes of presidential challenges.

### Presidential Crises and Strategies: Presidential Survival, Pacted and Forced Breakdowns

As explained above, the starting point of our analysis is the distinction between crises ending in presidential survival (12 cases) and breakdown (16 cases). We also distinguish between presidents removed through a pact, defined as an agreement between the opposition and the government, and the downright forced ousters of presidents. Then, we obtain three possible outcomes: a forced (non-pacted) presidential breakdown, a pacted breakdown, and presidential survival (see Table 2 below).

We argue that these outcomes are not completely determined by the impact of different external conditions, or by a president's behaviour prior to the crisis. The outcome is also influenced by the actions and strategies displayed by the president while facing a crisis threatening her survival in office. Different from other studies focusing on one or a few cases, we deal with all presidential crises, which allows us to enlarge the observable set of strategies available to presidents. We argue that presidents can choose from five different strategies when encountering a potential office-threatening crisis. Even though there is, as we will show, variation within each strategy, we believe that across-type variation and within-type commonalities are sufficiently significant to warrant the following types of strategies for challenged presidents:

1. Acquiescence/surrender: the president abandons the contested project/policy (AS).

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Llanos (2010) "Presidential Breakdowns in Argentina" in Llanos and Marsteintredet (eds.) *op. cit.*, pp. 55-72; Llanos, M. and Margheritis, A. (2006) "Why Do Presidents Fall? Political Leadership and the Argentine Crisis (1999-2001)", in *Studies in Comparative International Development* 40 (4): 77-103; Ollier, M. M. (2008) "La institucionalización democrática en el callejón: la inestabilidad en Argentina 1999-2003", in *América Latina Hoy* 49: 73-103. For the case of Collor de Melo in Brazil in 1993, Weyland, K. (1993) "The Rise and Fall of President Collor and Its Impact on Brazilian Democracy", in *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 35 (1): 1-37. And the case of Fujimori in Peru in 2000, Weyland, K. (2006) "The Rise and Decline of Fujimori's Neopopulist Leadership", in Carrión, J. (ed.) *The Fujimori Legacy. The Rise of Electoral Authoritarianism in Peru*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 13-38.

<sup>26</sup> Pérez-Liñán (2007) *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Mustapic, A. M. (2005) "Inestabilidad sin colapso. La renuncia de los presidentes: Argentina en el año 2001", in *Desarrollo Económico* 45 (178): 263-280; Mustapic (2010) *op. cit.*

2. New coalition/sponsors: the president seeks new allies (congressional or extra-institutional) as a shield to her office, and in support of preferred project/policy (CS).
3. Negotiation: the president negotiates content of the contentious matter, or the terms of power transfer (NE).
4. Confrontation: intransigent president, and no change of policy; the president meets the challenge by confronting opposing institutions and sectors, and in the extreme case bypassing Congress with unilateral measures (caesarism or imperialness) (CO).
5. Inaction: presidential isolation, timid presidential actions after a challenge, lack of leadership (IN).

Presidential responses to challenges can be grouped into prudent and hazardous strategies. The three first responses belong to the group of “prudent actions” with the president acknowledging her limits. Presidents entering into negotiations with the opposition on the contentious issue that triggered the crisis, or relinquishing the issue altogether if opposed,<sup>28</sup> will have a better chance to survive if for no other reason that the presidents by applying this strategy removes the opposition’s motivation for the initial challenge, and reduces the challengers’ incentives for forcing a presidential ouster. A president who insists on the policy or issue of contention, or if the matter of contention cannot be changed (such as when the issue at stake is proven corruption, or a deep economic crisis), can still survive. The president’s survival in this case hinges upon her capability to forge alliances with other parties in Congress in order to create or maintain a legislative shield during the challenge (especially relevant in cases of impeachment), or forge an alliance with institutions outside Congress (e.g. the military, foreign governments). The latter strategy increases the stakes of the political game by raising the costs for the opposition of removing the president (for instance by increasing the fears of international isolation, as demonstrated in the case of Zelaya, or military involvement, as in the case of Fujimori in 1992).

Presidential responses four and five, should be regarded as “hazardous actions” especially considering the fact that presidents in the current democratic era tend to lose against Congress when inter-institutional crises take place.<sup>29</sup> The confrontational strategy constitutes a continuum that goes from extreme forms of caesarism and retaliation against the opposition, to milder forms of confrontation, intransigence and oral harrassment of the opposition. Presidents who carry on with the contentious matter by confronting the opposition and/or bypassing Congress when challenged risk escalating the conflict-level further.<sup>30</sup> Confronting and harassing a challenging opposition increase the risk of violence and may work to further ignite and unite the opposition, and thereby strengthen the challengers. An extreme form of confrontation may also backfire if the president has not sought prior support among the police and military for such strategies, and increase the risk that these forces land on the opposition's side. A confrontational strategy may also entail the path to attempts of *autogolpe*, that is presidential attempts to temporarily close congress in order to assume exceptional powers, in which case the strategy may be defined as caesarist.

The presidential inaction, and demonstration of lack of leadership, will do little to appease the opposition, but more importantly, if the president by inaction demonstrates a lack of leadership, she risks the loss of support among her own party and key players, and the disintegration of the president’s team. Such a development naturally weakens the government in the face of the challengers, and by definition, strengthens the challengers’ case.

<sup>28</sup> If the matter of contention consists of deep economic problems (as was the case with Alfonsín in Argentina in 1989), one cannot easily appease the opposition by relinquishing a contentious policy. However, even in such cases presidents have the option of negotiating policy with the opposition or seeking broader coalitions. In other words, they still have room for manouevre.

<sup>29</sup> Pérez-Liñán (2005) *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> See Pyne (1977) *op. cit.*

Interestingly, the hazardous presidential strategies seem conducive to the outcome that we have called *forced breakdown*, which is negatively defined as a breakdown in which there exists no pact or agreement between the outgoing president and the opposition.

Table 2: Presidential Strategies and Outcomes of Presidential Crises

<u>Forced breakdowns</u>	<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Pacted breakdowns</u>	<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Presidential survival</u>	<u>Strategy</u>
Serrano 1993	CO	Siles Zuazo 1985	NE	Febres Cordero 1987	AS
Bucaram 1997	CO	Alfonsín 1989	NE	Fujimori 1991***	CS
Mahuad 2000	CO/IN	Balaguer 1994/96	NE	Chamorro 1995	AS
Fujimori 2000**	IN	Fujimori 2000*	NE	Bolaños 2004	CS
de la Rúa 2001	IN	Mesa 2005	NE	Colom 2009	CS
Sánchez de Lozada 2003	CO			Borja 1990	CS
Gutiérrez 2005	CO			Samper 1996	CS
Zelaya 2009	CO			Pastrana 2000	AS/CS
Collor de Melo 1992	IN/CO			Gonzalez Macchi 2002/03	CS
Pérez 1993	IN/CO			Gutiérrez 2004	CS
Cubas 1999	CO			Lula 2005	AS/CS
Lugo 2012	IN/CS			Toledo 2005	AS/CS

*Notes: Abbreviations of strategies: AS: Acquiesce/Surrender; CS: New Coalition or Sponsor; NE: Negotiation with challengers; CO: Confrontation/caesarism; IN: Inaction. Mixed strategies marked by /. \* refers to first negotiated pact of early elections in September 2000, which in the end was not upheld due to Fujimori's resignation from Japan. \*\*Refers to Fujimori's resignation from Japan in November 2000. \*\*\* Fujimori's survival involved a military alliance, which led to the breakdown of democracy through his autogolpe in April 1992. Impeachment cases in italics.*

Table 2 displays the three outcomes of presidential crises: forced breakdowns, pacted breakdowns, and survival. It also links the crises and outcomes with the strategies and actions the presidents took to confront the crises. Some presidents, such as Lula and Pérez, met the crises with mixed strategies, which is also captured in the table. A few presidents, Gutiérrez and Fujimori, confronted several threats to their survival in office, and tried various strategies before eventually falling or surviving in office, and appear twice in the table. These are analysed further in the last section as most-similar cases with distinct outcomes.<sup>31</sup>

Table 2 shows that prudent actions are concentrated among the crises ending in milder outcomes, that is, survival or pacted breakdowns, and that forced breakdowns are linked to hazardous presidential strategies of confrontation and presidential inaction in the face of crisis. The cases of survival following impeachment attempts are special cases that have been explained either by the lack of

<sup>31</sup> Gerring, J. (2007) *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, p. 90.

popular mobilisation against the president, or the president's early strategy to put up and maintain a legislative shield.<sup>32</sup> We believe this is not the full story. Several of the presidents surviving congressional challenges also governed under severe pressure from "below".<sup>33</sup> It is also remarkable that surviving presidents refrained from challenging and confronting the opposition in Congress both before and during the presidential crisis. Furthermore, the outcome of a pacted breakdown as opposed to a forced breakdown cannot be explained by the extent of external street or congressional pressure, or the presence of a majority opposition ready to take over, but rather the choice of a crisis-management strategy by the president, which we call negotiation.

Now we detail how presidential strategies affected the outcome of presidential crises. The cases of pacted *salidas* are the early exits of Siles Zuazo in Bolivia who met the oppositions' demands and agreed to an early election in 1985 to stave off the challenges to his office and save Bolivian democracy from breaking down, the exit of Alfonsín who negotiated with the incoming Menem-team his early exit, Balaguer who negotiated with the opposition (under observation of the Organization of American States, OAS) early elections scheduled for 1996, the first negotiated exit of Fujimori in September 2000 (before the return of Montesinos to Peru, and Fujimori's "escape" to Japan) with early elections scheduled for 2001, and Mesa who negotiated with several opposition demands since his ascension to the presidency in 2003, and eventually left office after submitting his letter of resignation to Congress in June of 2005 paving the way for the negotiations of his succession.<sup>34</sup> The next section will describe the cases of Alfonsín and Fujimori in detail.

Table 2 also lists 12 cases of presidential survival, that is political crises that could have ended in the president's early exit, but did not. We observe that the president's handling of the crisis may have helped her to survive. These presidents mainly opted for one of two "prudent" strategies: they rescinded or acquiesced on the matter of contention, or they were able to form a new coalition in Congress or to find a new extra-congressional sponsor that ensured them a shield against the challenge. Regarding the acquiescing strategy, below we discuss more in detail the challenge to Febres Cordero's presidency. The other cases are President Pastrana, who in 2000 rescinded on his move to hold a referendum on the dissolution of Congress when he was met with threats of his own impeachment, President Lula who offered a public apology hoping to stave off the worst of the impending investigations of corruption into his party and government in 2005, and was able to hold on to his important allies or sponsors among labour unions and social movements, and President Chamorro who in 1995 withdrew her strict opposition to the constitutional reform, which would curtail presidential powers and bar her son-in-law Lacayo for running for presidential office, and entered into negotiations with the opposition.

In the second group of survivors, presidents managed to maintain or extend their coalition to survive a vote in Congress or found an external sponsor that secured their survival. Presidents Samper, González Macchi, and Toledo were moderate presidents that cultivated their links with Congress through negotiations, and more importantly chose not to confront Congress, which helped them maintain their legislative shields and prevail in the impeachment proceedings. President Borja in Ecuador in 1990 managed to win over three congress representatives and prevail in the impeachment vote, in Nicaragua President Bolaños analysed further below, allied with

<sup>32</sup> Hochstetler (2006) *op. cit.*; Pérez-Liñán (2007) *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> This was clearly the case of the presidencies of Febres Cordero, Bolaños, and Toledo. In fact, in cross-national surveys President Toledo often figured as the most unpopular president in Latin America.

<sup>34</sup> Bolivia, see Mayorga, F. (2010) "Enlargement of Democracy and Changes in the Bolivian Party System", in Lawson, K. and Lanzaro, J. (eds.) *Political Parties and Democracy Volume I. The Americas*. Santa Barbara, Ca: Praeger, pp. 76-78; Mayorga, R. A. (1994) "Gobernabilidad y Reforma Política. La Experiencia de Bolivia", in *América Latina Hoy* 8: 36; Buitrago, M. (2010) "Civil Society, Social Protest and Presidential Breakdowns in Bolivia", in Llanos and Marsteintredet (eds.) *op. cit.*, pp. 91-107. Dominican Republic, see Graham, J. W. (2008) "Dominican Republic 94 - Stepping Back from the Precipice" (Presented at Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo, Santo Domingo, DR, Nov. 4); Hartlyn, J. (1998) *The Struggle for Democratic Politics in the Dominican Republic*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. Peru, see Cooper, A. F. and Legler, T. (2001) "The OAS in Peru: A Model for the Future?", in *Journal of Democracy* 12 (4): 123-136.

international actors, state leaders and the OAS to find support against the attacks coming from a united majority opposition. President Colom in Guatemala, although in a less critical situation than Bolaños, also invited and received international support for his presidency during the Rosemberg case in 2009, and Fujimori in 1992 allied with the military to close congress after having been threatened with a vote of incapacity.

Among the forced breakdowns we can first refer to the four cases of successful impeachment (italics in the table). There are elements of mixed leadership styles of isolation and caesarism in these four presidents that disregarded the construction of ties either with opposition parties (in the cases of minority President Collor de Melo), coalition partners (in the case of President Lugo), or their own parties (in the case of majority presidents Pérez and Cubas Grau). In the cases of Collor de Melo and Pérez, the presidents displayed some strategies to appease the opposition after being exposed to convincing evidence of corruption, which did not suffice to counterbalance their lack of coalition-building early in their terms. President Lugo's ultimate attempt to expand his coalition after the Curuguaty massacre only helped to annoy his coalition partners. In addition, the speed with which the impeachment occurred barred the use of any further strategies for the president.<sup>35</sup> The Cubas Grau case, however, constitutes the most extreme case of confrontation, or even caesarism. Despite facing impeachment, his intransigence in supporting the controversial figure of Oviedo (ex-commander of the army, member of presidential faction, at the time in prison for rebellion) was such that the conflict ended with the assassination of vice-president Argaña, leader of opposing faction of the *Colorado* party. This was a confrontational move that united the opposition and the opposition of the *Colorado* party and paved the way for the successful impeachment.<sup>36</sup>

In most of the remaining cases of forced breakdown a predominant presidential attitude of confrontation was present. Strategies of caesarism were obvious in the case of President Serrano attempting an *autogolpe*. Presidents Bucaram, Mahuad, Gutiérrez, Sánchez de Lozada, and Zelaya all met challenges with insisting on the matter of contention, and further confrontation, which in some case involved sending the police or military to quell the protesters.<sup>37</sup>

Below we further analyse the cases of Gutiérrez and Zelaya. Within this category there were as well two presidents who fell by inaction and a strategy of isolation: Fujimori after the return of Montesinos to Peru and the case of de la Rúa in Argentina.

### Case-studies: Linking Strategies to Outcomes of Presidential Crises

This section provides one illustrative case study of each of the five strategies, in addition to two analyses of presidents meeting challenges with different strategies. Through process tracing we establish further links between presidential strategies and the outcomes

<sup>35</sup> See Marsteintredet, L., Llanos, M. and Nolte, D. (2013) "The Politics of Impeachment: The fall of President Lugo in Comparative Perspective", in *Journal of Democracy*, Forthcoming October.

<sup>36</sup> Abente-Brun, D. (1999) "'People Power' in Paraguay", in *Journal of Democracy* 10 (3): 93-100; Nolte, D. (2010) "The President in His General's Labyrinth", in Llanos and Marsteintredet (eds.) *op. cit.*

<sup>37</sup> Guatemala, see Hernández, I. (1992) "Su ambición de poder lo llevó a prostituir la ley", *Crónica*, July, 2 (Guatemala City, Guatemala); INCEP (1993) "La crisis político-constitucional de Guatemala. Del golpe de estado de Jorge Serrano a la presidencia constitucional de Ramiro de León Carpio," in *Panorama Centroamericano*. Ciudad de Guatemala: Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Políticos; Villagrán de León, F. (1993) "Thwarting the Guatemalan Coup", in *Journal of Democracy* 4 (4): 117-124. Ecuador, see Hernández, J., Aráuz, M., Rodríguez V., B. and Bejarano, L. (2000) *21 de enero. La vorágine que acabó con Mahuad*. Quito: C. A. El Comercio; Pachano, S. (1997) "Bucaram ¡Fuera! Bucaram ¿Fuera?", in Báez, R. et al. (eds.) *¿Y ahora qué...? Una contribución al análisis político-histórico del país*. Quito: Eskeletra Editorial, pp. 229-64; Pachano, S. (2005) "Ecuador: Cuando la inestabilidad se vuelve estable", in *Íconos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 23: 37-44; Pallares, A. (2006) "Mass Mobilization and Presidential Removal in Ecuador. *Entre la ira y la esperanza*", in *LASA Forum XXXVII* (1): 22-25. Bolivia, see Buitrago (2010) "Civil Society, Social Protest and Presidential Breakdowns in Bolivia", in Llanos and Marsteintredet (eds.) *op. cit.*, pp. 91-107; Crabtree, J. (2005) *Patterns of Protest. Politics and Social Movements in Bolivia*. London: Latin America Bureau.

of presidential challenges. The two most-similar cases are interesting because they show how the same presidents (Fujimori and Gutiérrez) faced two challenges with different strategies, which resulted in different outcomes. Holding all else but the presidential strategy constant, this within-case analysis of most-similar cases should provide good tests for our theory.<sup>38</sup>

### From Presidential Crises to Pacted “Salidas”: Strategy of Negotiation

As commented above, the commonality between these cases is that presidents sought a negotiated pact with the opposition with the goal of either maintaining power, or reaching an agreement on the terms of the transfer of power or election of new authorities. Their disposition to negotiation had the problem of regime stability in sight. The calling for early elections as an orderly and controlled mechanism of transferring power, provided a *salida* to the critical political situations that ensured a relatively peaceful and pacted transfer of power. But these anticipated transfers of power also proved crucial for future governability, as the example of Alfonsín below illustrates, which suggests that pacted outcomes are in any case preferable to forced breakdowns.

President Raúl Alfonsín left power amid the most complicated social scenario characterized by hyperinflation and lootings, which left fifteen dead, more than eighty people injured, and led to the arrest of thousands. The lootings that took place in May 1989 represented the peak of a deteriorating socioeconomic situation that had been threatening Alfonsín’s government particularly after its defeat in the legislative elections of 1987. In the middle of the difficulties to maneuver the situation the government decided to set the presidential election day for May 14, 1989—seven months before presidential handover due in December 1989. However, the government also lost the anticipated elections of 1989 to Carlos Menem, the Peronist candidate, who became president-elect. When the lootings spread in late May, Argentina already had an elected president but the date for the handover of power was still seven months ahead, a dangerously long time considering the fragility of the moment. An anticipated transfer of power was imminent within this context of emergency and constrained authority, and negotiations began between the incumbent and the president-elect. Even though the Peronists had won the last two elections, President Alfonsín managed to “design” his way out of power.<sup>39</sup> For this, he counted on the backing of his party that still held an important (although simple) majority at the lower chamber. Had Alfonsín clung to power, it is not unlikely that his destiny would have been that of a forced breakdown. Not without difficulty (due to reluctant cooperation from the Peronist opposition), Alfonsín and Menem closed a pact to anticipate the presidential transfer of power from December to July. The Alfonsín solution consisted of a joint resignation with the vice-president, who would have been the first in the line of succession, supported by Congress. The transitional terms also included a period of party cohabitation in Congress during the first months of Menem’s presidency, which would extend until the establishment of the newly elected legislators in December 1989. This institutional agreement resulted in invaluable institutional resources for the coming president to undertake major economic adjustments and state reforms.<sup>40</sup>

The case of Fujimori in Peru in 2000 also merits a discussion because the case demonstrates how the same president can induce different outcomes through the use of different strategies, an observation we believe strengthens our argument that presidential strategies in the face of crisis actually influence the outcome of the challenge. Even though Fujimori’s regime might have been moribund

<sup>38</sup> George, A. L. and Bennett, A. (2005) *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Bcsia Studies in International Security. Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press; Gerring (2007) *op. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> Llanos (2010), “Presidential Breakdowns in Argentina”, *op. cit.*

<sup>40</sup> Llanos, M. (2002) *Privatization and Democracy in Argentina: An Analysis of President-Congress Relations*. New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 76-77.

from his re-election in 2000 or the *Vladivideo* scandal,<sup>41</sup> there also existed a negotiated formula for solving the regime crisis after these events. After the initial exposé of the *Vladivideo* scandal on September 14 2000, Fujimori dismissed Montesinos,<sup>42</sup> proposed early elections on July 28 2001, managed to maintain unity in his government, keep control of the congressional leadership, and entered into negotiations with the opposition (and the OAS) on the terms of his early exit.<sup>43</sup> Montesinos, went into exile in late September, but surprisingly returned to Peru on October 23 2000. Confronted with Montesinos's return to Peru, Fujimori, "the man of action", responded with what we have defined as inaction.<sup>44</sup> His government disintegrated, he lost control of Congress, and at least parts of the military seemed loyal to Montesinos and not Fujimori. To these developments, Fujimori could not come up with a countervailing strategy and ended his presidency by fleeing to Japan on November 20, 2000.

### Surviving Presidential Crises: Presidents Acquiescing or Finding a Sponsor

Presidents may back down on the issue of contention that created the challenge, or they may continue their struggle for their policy preferences, in which case their tenure might be in further peril. The case of the challenge to Febres Cordero's presidency demonstrates how the latter strategy heaps coal of fire on the president's head, while the first strategy is conducive to survival in office. President Febres Cordero of Ecuador along with his defence minister and other high ranking personnel were kidnapped by the Air Force in January of 1987 and presented with demands of the immediate release of Air Force General Vargas Pazzo. Vargas Pazzo had been jailed after orchestrating two uprisings and coup attempts in 1986. Prior to the kidnapping Febres Cordero had confronted Congress, which in September of 1986 had passed a resolution extending an amnesty to General Vargas (and Abdalá Bucaram on a different matter), a resolution Febres Cordero had effectively vetoed.<sup>45</sup> As in the cases of forced breakdowns (see below), this strategy of confrontation escalated the level of conflict, and put his office in peril. Since the president was kidnapped and presented with the demands of the immediate release of General Vargas in January 1987, the threat for his presidency, if not his life, was abundantly clear. Febres Cordero opted to meet the demands of the kidnappers (coincident with the majority in Congress), and released the general.<sup>46</sup> This decision secured the president's survival in office, and potentially also his life. Obviously in this extreme case, Febres Cordero had a very constrained choice given that his life was threatened. Nevertheless, the case demonstrates how choosing a strategy of confrontation with Congress or other opposing forces escalates crises, and, in an extreme manner, how acquiescing is conducive to survival (in all senses of the word).

Even though building a legislative shield early in the term is important for surviving challenges, presidents are not void of other strategies of survival. An external sponsor or ally may also help a president survive the attacks on his office by raising the stakes of the political game and the costs for the opposition of orchestrating a presidential breakdown. If the military gets involved in support of the

<sup>41</sup> Cameron, M. (2006) "Endogenous Regime Breakdown: The Vladivideo and the Fall of Peru's Fujimori", in Carrión, J. (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 268-93.

<sup>42</sup> Montesinos was Fujimori's powerful close collaborator, and head of Peru's intelligence service (SIN), who was caught on the *Vladivideo* tape bribing an opposition congressman.

<sup>43</sup> See Cooper and Legler (2001), *op. cit.*; Hamilton, J. R. (2006) "The Fall of Fujimori. A Diplomat's Perspective", in *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 30 (2): 191-212.

<sup>44</sup> Cameron (2006) *op. cit.*, p. 282.

<sup>45</sup> Conaghan, C. M. (1994) "Loose Parties, 'Floating' Politicians, and Institutional Stress: Presidentialism in Ecuador 1979-1988", in Linz and Valenzuela (eds.) *op. cit.*, p. 271.

<sup>46</sup> Amid street protests both in favour and against the President, Congress now reacted against the way General Vargas had been released and continued, unsuccessfully, demanding the ouster of the president by passing a resolution asking for his resignation Conaghan, C. M. (1987) "Los Vargazos and the Crisis of Ecuadorean Democracy", in *LASA Forum* XVIII (1): 1-4.

president, a challenge may turn on Congress and end in a self-coup, or in violent clashes between the authorities and the opposition. If international actors such as the Organization of the American States get involved, negotiations ensue and a presidential breakdown might lead to the international isolation of the regime. Here we go a bit further in detail into Bolaños's strategy for survival.

As former vice-president under President Arnoldo Alemán (1997-2002), Bolaños was elected president in November 2001 as a candidate for the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (Constitutionalist Liberal Party, PLC), which had won a majority of the seats in Congress. Starting his term with an anti-corruption drive against the previous government, and in particular against the leader of the PLC and ex-president Alemán, Bolaños, quickly lost the support from his own party.<sup>47</sup> This move turned President Bolaños into a least-likely case for presidential survival, and his strategies for surviving his term in office, therefore merit further attention. Unable (in part due to the United States pressure) to forge an alliance with the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberal Front, FSLN), Bolaños had quickly lost his legislative shield, and his anti-corruption drive actually reinforced a previous pact between his old party, the PLC and Ortega's FSLN.<sup>48</sup> In 2004-05 Bolaños became a target for several challenges to his presidency from Congress. The opposition in Congress sought to reform the Constitution to curtail presidential powers and give more power to the Assembly (controlled by the PLC and the FSLN), impeach the president on account of spending illegal funds during his presidential campaign in 2001, and remove other ministers of his administration.

Bolaños had chosen a strategy of confrontation with Congress, but lacked a legislative shield when his strategy backfired. Instead of acquiescing, which was difficult due to external pressure, Bolaños sought external sponsors in order to raise the costs for the opposition to remove him. These costs could be compared to the international condemnation and isolation that Honduras experienced after the ouster of Zelaya in 2009. Bolaños talked publicly about invoking the Inter-American Democratic Charter to resolve the crisis, he appealed court rulings and congress initiatives to the Central American Court, invited the OAS and the local office of the United Nations to mediate in the ongoing crisis.<sup>49</sup> In addition Bolaños used every opportunity to discuss the crisis with international leaders, who he invited frequently as an international shield against being ousted, and ensured that the international support he got was presented in the local media. Bolaños also managed to maintain extreme internal unity throughout the 2004/05 crisis, which helped demonstrate to his international sponsors that his government was able to guarantee the governability of the country.<sup>50</sup>

Bolaños's strategy of seeking an extra-institutional sponsor in times of crisis helped him survive the challenge to his office when he lacked congressional backing, and gave him the strength needed to finally reach an agreement with the opposition that secured his survival in office. Against this argument one could state that Bolaños survived not due to his strategies, but due to the lack of street challenges. But, we argue, this is not the case. First of all, on a host of issues, Bolaños was confronted with street mobilisation that easily could have turned into more serious challenges. In other words, the streets as a factor was not absent during his presidency. Secondly, other cases of breakdown (Serrano, Balaguer, Zelaya, and Lugo) demonstrate that street pressure is not a necessary cause for presidential breakdown.

## From Presidential Crises to Forced Breakdown: Inaction or Presidents Heaping Coal of Fire on their Heads

<sup>47</sup> Pérez-Baltodano, A. (2006) "Nicaragua: Actores Nacionales y Fuerzas Externas en Las Elecciones de 2006", in *Nueva Sociedad* 204: 14-23.

<sup>48</sup> Booth, J. A., Wade, C. and Walker, T. W. (2009) *Understanding Central America: Global Forces, Rebellion, and Change*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, p. 103; Kampwirth, K. (2003) "Arnoldo Alemán Takes on the NGOs: Antifeminism and the New Populism in Nicaragua", in *Latin American Politics and Society* 45 (2): 135.

<sup>49</sup> *Revista Envío* (2005) "¿Cuál Final Para El Conflicto Sin Fin?", (Managua, Nicaragua), available at <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3051>.

<sup>50</sup> Ortega Hegg, M. (2007) "Nicaragua 2006: El Regreso de Fsln al Poder", in *Revista de Ciencia Política*. 205-219.

As we show below, most presidents made mistakes, or chose the wrong strategy to face mounting opposition, but there are also those who faulted by omission or inaction such as in the case of Fujimori after the return of Montesinos to Peru (see above), and the case of de la Rúa in Argentina. De la Rúa, very much an imperial type that became increasingly isolated along his term, resigned amid a social commotion two months after having lost the midterm congressional elections. The last three weeks of his government had been marked by the collapse of economic activity and the Economy Minister's desperate attempts to save the convertibility scheme. The president, whose policy options had always been constrained by this scheme, had heavily leaned on the dominant figure of his minister in all kinds of decisions. With the post of vice president vacant (due to the vice president's resignation a year earlier), all decisions regarding presidential succession were left in the hands of the opposition Peronist majorities in Congress. The vice president episode had been the most critical of several internal conflicts that the ruling coalition had suffered in two years of government. At the time of the midterm electoral defeat in October 2001, even the president's own party had publicly taken a distance from the president. An isolated president, seemingly absent from the critical scenario, would not survive the massive crisis that finished with his government. His inaction and bad choices made him unable to maintain control of his government or achieve support in his own party, and consequently de la Rúa was not seen as a serious negotiation partner for the opposition. His succession was therefore marked by negotiations within different factions of the opposition party, the Peronists. De la Rúa's successor, Adolfo Rodríguez Saá (the governor of San Luis), was elected president through a congressional decision following an informal agreement among Peronist governors. Rodríguez Saá, another failed president who survived only one week, was succeeded by the then Senator Eduardo Duhalde, also a Peronist. Duhalde was similarly elected by Congress but this time with the backing of a wider inter-partisan agreement that included Radical and Frepaso legislators, those belonging to the Alliance that once that accompanied President De la Rúa to power.

Different from de la Rúa's cases, and common to the remaining cases of forced breakdown is that presidents decided to insist on confronting the opposition in the face of threats to their survival in office. The cases commented below are eloquent in showing presidents confrontational approach to the crises.

President Zelaya of Honduras, ousted on June 28 2009, also had plenty of opportunities to acquiesce on his demands or negotiate with Congress on his proposal of a popular referendum regarding a thorough constitutional reform.<sup>51</sup> Zelaya first attempted to present a law to Congress opening the path to a referendum calling for a constitutional reform. When this proposal met with harsh opposition, Zelaya, unable to muster majority support in Congress sought to bypass the legislature by instead decreeing his popular consult in March 2009, a move that later was declared illegal by the courts. Facing opposition both in the courts and in Congress, Zelaya still had the option of rescinding his project, which probably would have secured him survival in office until the end of his term, but in late May and June, Zelaya rewrote the original decree in order to challenge the rulings in the courts, and the majority opposition in Congress, and go ahead with the popular consultation. The popular consultation was scheduled for June 28 2009, and the same day the military forcefully removed and exiled him.

In Ecuador, case experts focus on the unilateral, confrontational, vulgar and populist presidential strategies to explain their breakdowns.<sup>52</sup> President Gutiérrez' breakdown is an interesting case, because he first survived an impeachment attempt against him in October 2004 by changing his coalition in order to maintain his legislative shield, and later was forced out of office on April 20 2005, after

<sup>51</sup> For details on this case, see Llanos and Marsteintredet (2010) "Ruptura y continuidad", *op. cit.*

<sup>52</sup> Ospina Peralta, P. (2005) "El abril que se llevó al coronel que no murió en el intento", in *Ecuador Debate* 65; Pachano (1997) *op. cit.*

choosing a strategy of confrontation against his challengers.<sup>53</sup> Gutiérrez's search for an improved legislative shield and new coalition partner saved him out of the first crisis. In the end the coalition with Bucaram and Partido Roldosista Ecuatoriano (Ecuadorian Roldosist Party, PRE) escalated the conflict to include the courts. The reason was that Gutiérrez had to illegally remove and renew the Supreme Court in order to eradicate all criminal charges against former President Abdalá Bucaram, exiled in Panama, to form the alliance with PRE. It was, nevertheless, Gutiérrez's confrontational strategy when facing mass protests from April 13 to April 20 2005, which signed his fate. Faced with moderate street protests, Gutiérrez unified the opposition against him by declaring that the protesters were "*no más que un puñado de forajidos*";<sup>54</sup> and by organising counter-protests in his favour, which together with armed forces clashed violently with *los forajidos*. These confrontational actions united the relatively unorganised opposition and intensified the street-based challenge, which spurred Congress to take actions and remove the president by declaring that he had abandoned his office, even though Gutiérrez himself, at that time, was on his post in the presidential office.

From these examples, we find that a strategy of confrontation or even *caesarism*, further escalates the level of the crisis, and destabilises the situation and the presidential office even further. Unless caesarism turns into downright authoritarianism or violent persecution, the opposition is unlikely to step down when facing this presidential strategy. This is not to say that the presidents are entirely to blame for their own demise, the challenging opposition in many cases have shown equal or higher levels of intransigence as the president (there are many examples, such as the opposition to Mahuad in Ecuador, Zelaya in Honduras, and de la Rúa in Argentina). Nevertheless, a confrontational strategy from the president seems to increase the chances of a forced breakdown unless she enjoys a legislative shield in Congress or can ally with a sponsor that can offer her protection to remain in office.

## Conclusions

Presidential crises represent extremely complicated situations, many of them provoked by controversial presidential decisions and actions. The context of a crisis is, however, extremely fluid, and it is difficult to predict at the peak of the crisis, based only on a president's external constraints, the direction it will finally take (destitution votes can be negotiated in the last minute, coalitions may be made or broken in the height of a crisis, etc). The "events plus institutions approach" is certainly helpful to understand the origin of a crisis but, in our view, it omits the president's part of the story which concerns the counterbalancing strategies presidents use to face challenges. The external approach cannot alone predict the full range of outcomes of presidential crises, and must be accompanied by analyses that take the president's choices into account. Our perspective in this article shows that presidents have (constrained) choices, and their interpretation and approach at different stages of the crisis have an impact on their survival in power, or the terms of their exit from power.

Does presidential leadership matter? By studying presidential strategies in times of crisis we have showed that presidential leadership clearly does. Challenged presidents have room for manoeuvre and can affect the outcome of the challenge. If survival is not possible, a president can still negotiate the terms of the breakdown and potentially improve governability for the incoming team, as exemplified by the Alfonsín case. Presidents can also survive in the most dire of surroundings by admitting wrongdoing or acquiescing on the matter of contention, or by creating new alliances with Congress or other actors in order to secure a legislative shield or increase the

<sup>53</sup> Bustamente, F. (2004) "Historia de una acusación (por el momento) abortada: Actores y motivaciones", in *Ecuador Debate* 63; Mejía Acosta, A. and Polga-Hecimovich, J. (2010) "Parliamentary Solutions to Presidential Crises in Ecuador", in Llanos and Marsteintredet (eds.) *op. cit.*, pp. 73-90.

<sup>54</sup> Polga Hecimovich, J. (2010) *Políticas, Militares Y Ciudadanos: Un Análisis de las Caídas Presidenciales en Ecuador (1997-2005)*. Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar Ecuador, Ediciones Abya-Yala, Corporación Editora Nacional, p. 68.

opposition's costs of removing her. The most-similar cases further strengthen our argument. The studies of Gutiérrez and Fujimori, and to a certain extent the case of Febres Cordero, have shown how the same presidents facing challenges have applied different strategies and achieved the outcome expected in our theory.

This analysis of the presidential challenges showed a range of strategies that presidents *actually* used to deal with critical situations, and through examples and process tracing we demonstrated their influence on the final outcome of presidential challenges. Expanding on Pérez-Liñán's work by including cases beyond impeachment attempts, we found a larger number of strategies that presidents had at their disposal. This is *per se* an important contribution of the study as there is not much literature on behavioural aspects of presidential leadership in the Latin American region. The range of prudent presidential strategies describes quite well the approach of most of surviving presidents, as well as of those presidents able to negotiate the terms of their exit from power. However, confrontational presidents can pacify a threatening opposition as well by seeking the right allies that might lead the opposition to revise its position. These two options highlight that even presidents facing pressure from the streets or with a weak position in Congress can survive challenges. This article, we hope, should spur more research of the presidency and presidential strategies and leadership, not only in times of crisis, but also in the study of day-to-day politics. There is still a need for more research into the topic of presidential leadership, and a natural next step would be to find explanations for why presidents choose different strategies when facing crisis.

We hope to have contributed to understanding the outcome of presidential crises, and showed that this outcome is not entirely defined by factors external to the presidential office. Sometimes presidents act in ways that improve their chances of survival, whereas at other times presidents act in ways that actually undermine their own position in power. We conclude that presidents have a range of strategies to apply when confronted with threats to their survival, and that prudent choices among these strategies give presidents room for survival.