Presidential Strategies in Times of Crisis:
Room for Survival?

Mariana Llanos
GIGA Institute of Latin American Studies, Hamburg
llanos@giga-hamburg.de

Leiv Marsteintredet
Department of Comparative Politics, University of Bergen
leiv.marsteintredet@isp.uib.no

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Introduction

It is a common understanding in the Latin American region that presidents are the most powerful political actors. They 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 Latin American presidents had to leave power before the end of their term, and a considerable number was challenged by serious conflicts taking place 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.\(^1\) 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\(^2\), there is a *de facto* dependence from Congress, as presidents need parliamentary support to remain in power (Mustapic 2010). 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 (Pérez-Liñán 2005).

However, given the presidency’s central role in the Latin American regimes, and in many cases their extensive powers in dealings with Congress or other actors, it could be argued that presidents, when challenged, still can behave strategically in a way that affects the outcome of the challenging episode. Take for instance the recent crisis in Ecuador. Facing a police rebellion in late September 2010 President Correa claimed to be the victim of a coup, while it was actually unclear whether the crisis was rather a protest that had spiralled out of control. Interestingly, some voices expressed that the president’s intervention and confrontational style in handling the events escalated the conflict into a coup-like scenario.\(^3\) The Ecuadorian crisis eventually settled

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\(^2\) As any dear child, the early withdrawal of presidents from power has been given many names: presidential removal (Pérez-Liñán, 2007), presidential failure (Hochstetler and Edwards 2009), presidential fall (Hochstetler, 2006), and interrupted presidency (Kim and Bahry 2008; Marsteinredet and Berntzen 2008; Negretto 2006; Valenzuela 2004). In the rest of the paper, we shall refer to this phenomenon as *presidential breakdown*.

\(^3\) Interview Simón Pachano: http://www.espectador.com/1v4_contenido.php?m=&id=194099&ipag=1
down with a mixture of imposition of presidential authority and negotiation with the rebels, a positive outcome if we consider that three Ecuadorian presidents were dismissed from power between 1997 and 2007. On those occasions, presidents were certainly at the mercy of an unfavourable constellation of powers, but to what extent did their behaviour affect presidential survival in those and other cases?

Our purpose in the following pages is to revisit the presidential breakdowns and challenges by paying attention to the strategies presidents displayed to face these crises. We underscore the ways in which behavioural aspects of the presidential leadership, or presidential agency, contributed to shaping outcomes. 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. Our purpose here is not to discuss the underlying causes of these crises, where presidents also had a great deal of responsibility. We rather acknowledge external-led challenges as a starting point to show, then, that the resolution of these challenges did not entirely depend on these challenging external actors, as the literature suggests. We assume that the presidential management of the challenges affects 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 government had to leave office in disarray. With our analysis, we intend to contribute both to the empirics and the theory of 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. Given the frequency with which presidents get into trouble, we understand this is a worthy task.

On September 30th, a state of emergency was declared in Ecuador after a police upheaval across the country meant at protesting against a civil-service law that would reduce the bonuses of some workers. President Rafael Correa went to the central barracks in Quito to talk to the rebellious officers, and after been booed and attacked with tear gas, he was rushed to the adjacent police hospital. The crisis took all political and social sectors by surprise. The president, as well as his national and international allies, sustained that he was the target of an organized coup attempt, with sectors of the police, military and political opposition conspiring against him. The international reaction was clearly one of rejection of the police actions and of solidarity with the government.

4 An exception is Perez Liñan’ chapter 6 “Building a Legislative Shield” (Pérez-Liñán 2007), although his analysis only deals with six cases of impeachment.
5 Typically, government policies/measures and corruption are the triggers of crises. For an extensive account of the causes of presidential crises, consult Llanos and Marsteintredet (2010a), as well as the literature cited in footnote 1. Section 3 also presents a summary of president-centred factors.
Due to the small number of cases (a total of 26, 12 presidential challenges and 14 presidential breakdowns), our methodological strategy consists of careful process tracing for which we rely on existing literature and our previous work on the cases. We have tried, not without difficulty, to systematically assess large amounts of historical information, and this paper constitutes a preliminary attempt to compare and classify the cases according to presidential actions. We hope we'll be able to refine our categories after getting the feedback of the panel discussion. The paper is organised as follows. In the following section 2, we review the literature dealing with the causes of presidential breakdowns in Latin America. In Section 3, we discuss how the mentioned literature tends to neglect the impact of presidential factors in the resolution of challenges. In subsequent sections, we further explore the role of presidents in the crises that took place in the region, and show how they can be grouped according to the presidential action used to deal with mounting opposition.

**2. Presidential Breakdowns: External Causes**

Three decades ago, when military regimes and regime instability were the rule in Latin America, Juan Linz (1978) argued that the characteristics of presidentialism were a crucial explanation for Latin America’s endemic instability and authoritarian tendencies. 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 (Pérez-Liñán 2003; Valenzuela 2004). 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 name presidential breakdowns, or the (less frequent) temporary closing of Congress, with more serious implications for the democratic regime. A milder version of government crises has been represented by *presidential challenges* (see particularly Hochstetler, 2006), that is, attempts from congress, other institutions, or people mobilising in the streets to remove the president from office, which did not end up in removal. The third-wave crises involving a (failed or successful) challenge to the stability of the presidential authority constitute the object of study of this paper (see table in page 23).
Presidential breakdowns and challenges seem to be more a South,\(^6\) rather than Central-,
American phenomenon, with twelve removed presidents in the south, and only three in Central
America and the Caribbean.\(^7\) With regards to failed presidential challenges, we find the same
pattern with only three challenges in Central America and the Caribbean, and ten in South
America. The actual 15 breakdowns are also relatively concentrated in three countries that have
experienced eight breakdowns in total (Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador),\(^8\) while seven countries
have experienced one breakdown, and the remaining eight have not experienced any breakdowns
during this last democratic spell. One should therefore also be careful when generalising for 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 (1978, 1990, 1994), 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. 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 (Pérez-Liñán 2003, 157). High
explanatory value has been given to the potential risks posed by certain institutional
constellations within presidentialism, particularly minority governments, which were pinpointed
in the 1990s in the institutional literature (Jones 1995; Mainwaring 1993; Shugart and Carey
1992; Shugart and Mainwaring 1997), and which different recent comparative analyses have
corroborated as a cause for presidential breakdowns (Hochstetler 2006; Kim and Bahry 2008;

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\(^6\) A presidential challenge is a concept that stems from Hochstetler (Hochstetler 2006), also referred to as presidential
crisis (Pérez-Liñán 2007), and refers to any expressed institutional or street based attempt to remove the president. In
other words it is a political situation in which one of the possible outcomes is the early removal of the president. This
paper bases its definition of a challenge on these prior works, and identifies a challenge using the Latin American
Weekly Report as source. If a challenge is identified in an article in LAW, additional sources are used to
corroborate the empirical evidence (Keesing's record of world events, NOTISUR, NOTICEN, international news
media such as NYTimes, or academic articles).

\(^7\) There is a debate on whether or not to include President Zelaya as a case of presidential breakdown since the ouster
was a coup (Llanos and Marsteintredet 2010b, 2010c). We include the case here since the coup at least did not lead
to a complete democratic breakdown and installation of an outright authoritarian regime. The inclusion or exclusion
of the case does not alter our argument.

\(^8\) Some authors consider Duhald'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 (Marsteintredet and Berntzen 2008; Mustapic 2010).
Valenzuela 2004). However, according to Negretto (2006), it is only the minority governments that do not control the median and veto voter in congress that run the risk of not completing the fixed term.

But institutions (an opposing Congress) are clearly not the only factor, and potentially not even the most important factor, causing presidential breakdowns. The explanatory value of event variables (Laver, 2003; Laver & Shepsle, 1998), particularly street protests, and in some cases, political scandals has been highlighted as well (Hochstetler, 2006; Pérez-Liñán, 2003, 2007). Hochstetler (2006) 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 (Alvarez and Marsteintredet 2010). In addition, the role of external factors has been highlighted regarding the type of salida that a crisis adopted. For Mustapic (2010), 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 president.

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.

3. Presidential Explanations and their limits

The literature suggests three ways in which presidents may affect the stability of their tenures, however president-centred explanations are fraught with problems of endogeneity. The first concerns their style in constructing relations with Congress. As Perez Liñán argues in his study of six cases of impeachment, “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” (Pérez-Liñán 2007: 133). Therefore, presidents ought to adopt a cooperative and negotiation style in order to secure their survival in office. 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 (Martínez Gallardo 2010, 120), frequent internal conflicts and ministerial resignations are normally a source of uncertainty that can enhance the risk of breakdown (Llanos and Marsteintredet 2010a). Interestingly, a high turnover of ministers is associated with governments not holding a stable parliamentary majority (Martínez-Gallardo 2005). Finally, presidential policy preferences also affect the sustainability of majorities in Congress. Some authors have paid attention to the strength or intransigence of the president’s preferences compared to the preferences of the majority in Congress (Negretto 2006), and bold and unpopular policies have been cited as explanations for presidential demises in the cases of Bucaram and Mahuad in Ecuador, Carlos Andrés Pérez in Venezuela and Sánchez de Lozada in Bolivia (Crabtree 2005; Hernández et al. 2000; Lalander 2010; Pachano 1997).

The effects of these presidential factors have not been systematically analysed yet, but their impact is certainly acknowledged in the literature, particularly in case studies. It is remarked that presidents themselves may be holding the key to explaining their own demise, especially if they used deadly force to repress protesters (Hochstetler and Edwards 2009), were personally involved in corruption affairs (Pérez-Liñán 2007), or their administration performed bad economically (Valenzuela 2004). Presidential isolation and imperialness have been highlighted as concurrent explanations for the breakdown of Argentina’s presidency in 2001 (Llanos 2010; Llanos and Margheritis 2006; Ollier 2008), Brazil in 1993 (Weyland 1993), and Peru in 2000 (Weyland 2006). The difficulties to casting supportive legislative coalitions under the constitutional rules established between 1995 and 1998 have also been seen as a crucial factor in the Ecuadorian cases (Mejía Acosta 2009: 18-19).

From the above we learn that presidents often tempt their fate. This gives a more colourful note to the plain Linzian argument on the fate of presidents dictated by their minority status in Congress.9 In fact, if we assumed rational actors, a president should be able to identify (correctly) her weak position in Congress, and in case of a conflict with Congress on policy issues, the president, keen to survive in office, would acquiesce to the opposition’s demands and avoid a crisis escalation, or if presidential powers permit use decree powers to overrule congress, but risk

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9 It should be noted, though, that for many authors the features of presidential behaviour described above are endogenous to their institutional constraints. However, we cannot escape the thought that the institutional constraints are also in part endogenous to presidential behaviour. This of course, is an inherent dilemma in institutionalist studies of president-congress relations.
congressional or other, reprisals. Stronger presidents, on the other hand, could count on majority support in congress for policies and would avoid deadlocks altogether, and in the (rare) case of intense conflict the president would be able to count on her majority to survive the crisis. However, this calculated behaviour does not usually take place in the real world, and facts confirm that congressional and street actions are often reactions to presidents’ provocative public actions. An extreme example is represented by the impeachment proceedings pending the murder of Vice-President Argaña in Paraguay allegedly orchestrated by President Cubas. In the recent case of President Zelaya in Honduras, Congress and other institutions reacted to the contentious proposal of a national plebiscite regarding a possible constitutional reform; in Bolivia, Congress and social movements reacted to Sánchez de Lozada’s neo-liberal, water and gas policies; and in Argentina in 1989 and 2001 presidents’ economic policies created harsh critics, and so on.

Despite the above, our impression is that the role of presidents still remains only partially acknowledged because presidential action (often corruption) acts as the trigger of crises and challenges (mostly, mass protests), but the outcome of these crises is wholly placed in the hands of challenging actors and institutional conditions. According to the argument, when presidents are challenged in the streets, only a majority support in the legislature can save them from breakdown (Hochstetler 2006; Pérez-Liñán 2007). Thus, an “events plus institutions approach” (Hochstetler and Edwards 2009) or, in our terminology, an “external approach” is the most common understanding for why not all challenges end up in 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 their attitude (diminishing confrontation or abandoning controversial measures) or pursuing new alliances in congress or with other, extra-congressional actors to counterbalance the deposing forces.

A similar argument can be applied to the presidential breakdowns. Mustapic (2005, 2010) distinguishes between presidential exits (negotiated) and parliamentary exits (non-negotiated) of presidents from power. According to this author, a negotiated exit is only possible when there is no alternative majority ready to take power, whereas a parliamentary exit occurs when this alternative is present. We share Mustapic’s distinction of two types of exits (see Table 1, next section), although, in our view, presidents in fact influenced their exit more than this author.
admits: there were certainly cases of negotiated presidential exits in which an alternative congressional majority was present and ready to take over power (such as in Argentina 1989), as well as cases in which there was no alternative majority and still a non-negotiated presidential breakdown took place (for instance in Peru 2000). Indeed, the fact that there exists a group of pacted breadowns suggests that there is no strict dominance of external factors in these breakdowns. Pacts can only take place if there is a countervailing strategy from the side of the challenged president, underscoring a more complex problem than one simply reduced to external causality.\(^\text{10}\)

In the following sections we trace the role of presidents while facing challenges. Based on the literature on presidential breakdown, 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 show how presidents may influence the outcomes of presidential challenges.

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

If we carefully look at the cases of presidential breakdown, we find tremendous variation in terms of the ways in which presidents left power (see appendix). Think only of the difference between Balaguer’s negotiated exit after the 1994 electoral fraud, in which he managed to postpone his ouster for two years, and Sánchez de Lozada’s exit in Bolivia in 2003, in which the president almost had to be rescued in order to get out of the presidential palace alive. There is also a great contrast between presidents dismissed through constitutional impeachments due to corruption scandals, for instance Collor de Melo in Brazil, and the other cases such as president Serrano who had to relinquish power after a failed *autogolpe*, or Presidents Bucaram and Mahuad who left power after upheavals in the streets due to failed economic policies. There is also a great variation of procedures used to remove presidents in the region, and only a minority of the cases follow the constitutional formula of impeachments (see e.g. Carey 2005; Marsteintredet and Berntzen 2008).

\(^{10}\) The distinction between negotiated transfers of power and non-negotiated transfers of power is of course not new, and was used as an important analytical tool and distinction in much of the transition literature (Linz and Stepan 1996; Munck and Skalnik Leff 1997).
Our starting point of analysis is Hochstetler’s (2006) distinction between challenge (12 cases) and breakdown (15 cases), the two obvious outcomes of presidential crises (president survived; president deposed). We also rely from the beginning on Mustapic’s distinction between presidents removed through a pact or agreement between the opposition and the government, and the downright forced ousters of presidents (Mustapic 2010). Based on these two contributions we obtain three possible outcomes (see table): a non-negotiated presidential breakdown, a pacted breakdown, and presidential survival.

We argue that these outcomes are not completely determined by the impact of different external conditions, but also influenced by presidential actions and strategies in face of a challenge. Differing from Pérez-Liñán (2007) who focuses on impeachment cases and presidential coalition strategies, our cases of breakdown are more ample, and as such there are more available strategies for presidents confronting challenges, furthermore, we focus on strategies available to presidents during crisis, while Pérez-Liñán (2007) focuses on presidential strategies prior to a crisis. Through process tracing we identified a range of presidential responses to challenges. These strategies are not completely inclusive and mutually exclusive, but rather the result of an inductive analysis of the cases. A challenged president can of course also try several strategies before eventually failing or succeeding in surviving in office. Think only of Gutiérrez in Ecuador who exhausted almost all possible coalition alternatives until confronting Congress by involving a play with the Supreme Court before he was forced out of office in April 2005 (Mejía Acosta and Polga-Hecimovich 2010). The most common strategies are the following six:

1. acquiesce/surrender: the president abandons his project/policy
2. new coalition/sponsors: the president does not change policy, but seeks new allies (congressional or extra-institutional).
3. negotiation: the president negotiates policy content or the terms of power transfer
4. cesarism / imperialness: there is no change of policy, the president bypasses opposition in Congress with unilateral measures or goes public.
5. confrontation: no change of policy, escalating confrontation with opposing institutions and sectors
6. Inaction: timid presidential actions after a challenge, lack of leadership

Table 1 here

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The three first responses can be regarded as “prudent actions” with the president breaking actions and acknowledging her limits. They should be conducive to milder outcomes, such as survival or pacted breakdowns. Presidents entering into negotiations with the opposition on the contentious issue that triggered the crisis, or relinquishing the issue altogether if opposed, will have a better chance to survive. The same applies to presidents who do not acquiesce or seek to establish a majority coalition in support of the contested measure, or if the matter of contention cannot be changed (such as when the issue at stake is proven corruption, or a deep economic crisis), but are still capable to forge alliances with other parties in Congress or institutions outside Congress (military, foreign governments) which would help the president raise the cost for the opposition of removing her (for instance by increasing the fears of international isolation or military involvement if the president is removed).

Admittedly, the potential for success of some of these strategies might be partly endogenous to a president's prior behaviour, in particular the president's interest in coalition building early in the term (Pérez-Liñán 2007: 167), the presence or not of prior damaging crises or scandals, and the degree of internal unity of the government in the face of crisis. The latter should come as no surprise, Elster (1989: 164) flatly states: “The ability of a regime to resist external pressure depends on its internal health.” While the president's coalition building strategy is important for the president's legislative shield and the survival of an impeachment vote, the government's ability to present itself as a unitary actor may affect the government's ability to negotiate with the opposition during moments of crisis.

11 We focus here mostly on the non-impeachment cases of challenge and breakdown for two reasons: a) impeachments are a distinct type of challenge and breakdown that are regulated by constitutional rules (Marsteinredet and Berntzen 2008; Pérez-Liñán 2007) and therefore entail a somewhat different logic than the rest of the cases; and b) even though presidents can and do manipulate their probability of survival by their choice of strategies in the face of impeachment, not all strategies mentioned above are relevant for these cases, for instance it is difficult to undo an action of corruption (although asking for pardon, like Lula did in 2005, after the exposé of a scandal is the equivalent to acquiescing in our scheme, and according to research in Norway, is a successful strategy for ministerial survival in office, Midtbø (2007)). We also focus on the non-impeachment cases because the impeachments in Latin America and elsewhere are more thoroughly explored in other works, see e.g. Pérez-Linán (2007) and Baumgartner and Kada (2003).

12 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, seeking broader coalitions, that is they still have room for manoeuvre. Think, for instance, of the recent episode involving President Morales in Bolivia, who eventually decided to withdraw a proposal to end gas and gasoline subsidies enacted during Christmas due to the strong protests this measure caused. His decision aborted the crisis (for now).
The last three responses should be regarded as “hazardous actions” especially considering that presidents in the current democratic era tend to lose against Congress when inter-institutional crises take place (Pérez-Liñán 2005). Those who carry on with the contentious matter by confronting the opposition and/or bypassing Congress and, thus, escalating the conflict into a government crisis, may get into trouble to survive in office. These strategies may also entail the path to attempts of autogolpes, that is presidential attempts to temporary close congress in order to assume exceptional powers.

4.a. From Crisis to Pacted “Salidas”: Strategy of Negotiation

A pacted presidential exit is a presidential breakdown in which the president and her team sat down to negotiate with the opposition and partly define the terms for her early retirement. This outcome is the result of presidents not choosing to challenge the opposition when faced with threats of their own forced resignation, but rather entering into negotiations with the opposition in order to meet its demands and secure an orderly transfer of power. We argue that the key explanatory factor to this outcome compared to a forced breakdown, is not the extent of external pressure ("strength" of the challenge/challengers), or the presence of a majority opposition ready to take over, but rather the choice of crisis-management strategy chosen by the president.

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, the exit of Alfonsín who negotiated with the incoming Menem-team his early exit, Balaguer who negotiated with the opposition (under OAS observation) early elections scheduled for 1996, the first negotiated exit of Fujimori (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 power after submitting his letter of resignation to Congress in June of 2005 paving the way for the negotiations of his succession. The commonality between these cases, and which contrasts these cases to the forced breakdowns, is that presidents sought a negotiated pact on the terms of the transfer of power to the opposition or the election of new authorities. Note that in four of the five cases (the exception being the Fujimori-case) presidents were concerned with finding solutions that would not further destabilise the current regime. Their disposition to negotiation had the
Problem of regime stability in sight. But these anticipated transfers of power also proved crucial for future governability, as the example of Alfonsin below illustrates, which suggests that pacted outcomes are in any case preferable to abrupt and 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. When lootings took place in May 1989, the date for the handover of power was still seven months ahead, a dangerous long time considering the fragility of the socio-economic situation. An anticipated transfer of power was imminent within this context of emergency and constraint authority, as general elections had already taken place and the Peronist candidate, Carlos Menem, had won. Even though the Peronists could present a congressional majority in support for a new president, and Alfonsín could have insisted on sticking to power for the remainder of the term, President Alfonsín sought and managed to “design” his way out of power. He approached elected President Menem and, not without difficulty (due to reluctant cooperation), closed a pact with him 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 succession line, supported by Congress. For this, he got the backing of his party that accompanied the negotiations and agreed to the transitions terms. These terms also included a period of party cohabitation in Congress during the first months of Menem’s presidency, which resulted in invaluable institutional resources for the coming president to undertake major economic adjustments and state reforms.

The remainder of the negotiated cases included the calling for early elections as an orderly and controlled mechanism of transferring power. In the Dominican Republic in 1994, President Balaguer (rather reluctantly) agreed to meet the two opposition parties in negotiations over a constitutional reform and early elections to solve the ongoing electoral crisis. In Bolivia both during Siles Zuazo's rule (1982-1985), and Mesa's administration (2003-2005) negotiations over early elections between the administrations and the opposing parties and groups provided for salidas to the critical political situations that ensured a relatively peaceful and pacted transfer of power, which also secured some sort of governability for the government for the remainder of its period.
In the case of Fujimori and Peru in 2000, there also existed a similar formula for solving the regime crisis in the country. Between Montesinos's, Fujimori's powerful close collaborator, and head of Peru's intelligence service (SIN), ouster and return to Peru (September 16 until October 23, 2000), Fujimori managed to maintain unity in his government, propose early elections in 2001, and enter into negotiations with the opposition on the terms of his early exit. After Montesinos’s return to Peru, Fujimori’s government disintegrated, and he found it best to flee the country as he no longer was in a position to continue negotiating the terms of the transfer of power. This latter case, in our view, also demonstrates the importance of maintaining cabinet unity in order for the presidency to get involved in negotiations, and make and stick to deals with the opposition. If internal disunity is the case for the administration, survival or a negotiated outcome seems less likely. For instance in the case of de la Rúa, there was not much left of the coalition government when the final coup de grace came in December of 2001. Negotiations were not held between the government and the opposition, but rather between various factions of the opposition party (PJ) (Malamud 2006).

4.b. Surviving crisis: Presidents Acquiescing or Finding a Sponsor

Table 1 lists 12 cases of presidential challenges, that is political episodes that could have ended in the president's early exit since there had been expressed demands in congress or outside congress for the early removal of the president. All of these 12 presidents survived in office, however, and we argue that the presidents' handling of the crisis may have affected the outcome. We find that, at crucial points of the crisis, surviving presidents opted for what we called “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. In the first group of acquiescing presidents we find Presidents Febres Cordero of Ecuador, Chamorro of Nicaragua, Pastrana of Colombia, and partly President Lula of Brazil. All of these presidents applied this strategy in order to avoid being removed from office, due to impeachment or other measures. Below we discuss more in detail the challenge to Febres Cordero's presidency, but President Pastrana 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 offered a public apology hoping to stave off the worst of the impending investigations of

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13 For details about the rise and fall of the Fujimori regime, and Montesino's role in this regime, please consult the excellent edited volume by Carrión (2006).
corruption into his party and government in 2005, and President Chamorro withdrew her strict opposition to the constitutional reform, which would curtail presidential powers and bar her son-in-law Lacayo to stand for presidential office, and entered into negotiations with the opposition.

Presidents may relinquish 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, jailed after having orchestrated two uprisings of coup attempts in 1986. Prior to the kidnapping Febres Cordero had confronted Congress, which in September of 1986 had passed a resolution demanding the release of General Vargas, a resolution Febres Cordero had effectively vetoed. As in the cases of forced breakdowns (see below), this strategy of confrontation escalated the level of conflict, and put his tenure in office in peril. In January of 1987 the president was kidnapped and presented with the demands of the immediate release of General Vargas. As the president was kidnapped in January 1987, the threat for his presidency, if not his life, was abundantly clear, and Febres Cordero opted to meet the demands of the kidnappers (coincident with the majority in Congress), and released the general. This decision secured the survival in office of the president.

In the second group of survivors, presidents managed to extend their coalition to survive a vote in Congress or found an external sponsor that secured their survival. President Borja in Ecuador managed to win over three congress representatives to win an impeachment vote, in Nicaragua President Bolaños allied with 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

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14 Congress clearly after the head of President Febres Cordero now reacted against the way General Vargas had been released and continued, unsuccessfully, demanding the ouster of the president as well.
military to close congress after having been threatened with a vote of incapacity. In our view, an external sponsor may help a president survive the attacks on his office by raising the costs for the opposition of orchestrating a presidential breakdown. If the military gets involved in support of the 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 are ensued 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.

Even though building a legislative shield early in the term is important for surviving challenges, presidents are not void of other strategies of survival. As former Vice-President under Arnoldo Alemán's presidency (1997-2002), Bolaños was elected president in November 2001 as a candidate for the Liberal party (PLC), which had won a majority of the seats in Congress. Bolaños however, quickly lost the support from his own party since he started his term with an anti-corruption drive against the previous government, and in particular against the leader of the PLC and ex-president Alemán, who managed to keep control of his party. Unable (in part due to U.S. pressure) to forge an alliance with the 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. In 2004-05 Bolaños became target for several challenges to his presidency from Congress seeking to reform the Constitution to curtail presidencial powers and give more power to the Assembly (controlled by the PLC and the FSLN), impeach the president on account of spending illegal funds in his presidential campaign in 2001, and remove other ministers of his administration. Bolaños chose 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

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15 Fujimori’s strategy cannot be considered a prudent strategy as such, but clearly a strategy that helped him survive in office.
16 During Alemán's presidency the PLC and the FSLN set aside their ideological differences and made a pact that gave these parties the control over important institutions such as the Supreme Court, the Electoral Council, reformed the electoral system, and protected with immunity the leaders of the two parties (ref).
17 Several other issues were at the heart of the matter, such as the destruction (after a deal with the USA) of SAM missiles, and a reform of the justice sector that would deprive the PLC and FSLN of their control of this sector.
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 to mediate in the ongoing crisis, and engaged also the local office of the UN to mediate between the government and the opposition. In addition Bolaños used every opportunity to discuss the crisis with international leaders, who he invited frequently, and ensure 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 (Ortega Hegg 2007), which helped demonstrate for his international sponsors that his government was able to guarantee the governability of the country. We believe that 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.

4.c. From Crisis to Breakdown: Presidents Heaping Coal of Fire on their Heads

Interestingly, most of the cases of presidential breakdown fall under this category that we have named forced breakdown, which is negatively defined as a breakdown in which there exists no pact or agreement between the outgoing president and the opposition. Since these breakdowns did not include negotiations of the presidential exit, the president was simply forced out. This group also includes the three cases of impeachment (in italics in the table), although an impeachment may be seen as a special, constitutional, case of a non-pacted breakdown. An impeachment procedure is often a reaction to the exposure of secret, and illegal, dealings of the president, that is, previously hidden cases of corruption that cannot be easily undone or modified, a reason why the solidity of the president’s alliances in Congress becomes important for her survival whereas some of the other strategies in the list above become less relevant. Nevertheless, the option of admitting personal or collaborators’ wrongdoing (that is, acquiescing) or apologising should also be open even though it is not often observed.18 In other crises, Congress and social groups react to a president’s public actions, often policies that could become object of revision and negotiation during periods of crises, which in theory gives the president an ampler margin of manoeuvre to accommodate to the critical situation. However, common for these cases

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18 Could this be an effect of the so-called “¡Claro!” culture which dominate Latin American politics (Gambetta 1998)?
of breakdown is that presidents decided to insist on the matter of contention even in the face of an expressed challenge.

The leadership styles of the impeached presidents have been duly documented.\textsuperscript{19} There are elements of isolation and cesarism in these three presidents that disregarded the construction of ties either with opposition parties (in the case of minority president Collor de Melo) or their own parties (in the case of majority presidents Pérez and Cubas Grau). Even though both Collor Collor and Pérez attempted to appease the opposition after the exposure of their involvement in corruption, their lack of coalition-building attempts early in their terms made survival difficult in the face of convincing evidence of wrongdoing.

Cubas Grau is actually the major exponent of conflict escalation among the impeached presidents, while both Pérez and Collor used mixed strategies of confrontation with the oppositions in Congress in order to avoid an impeachment vote and coalition-building to survive such a vote should it occur. In the Cubas case, the dividing issue was not economic policy, but the “Oviedo case” (ex-commander of the army, member of presidential faction, at the time in prison for rebellion), which the president approached unilaterally. Cubas decreed his release without consultation with other party factions and opposition. Confronted with strong institutional opposition, Cubas could have rescinded his decree, but decided to defend his decision intransigently against political opponents and institutional decisions (the Supreme Court). His intransigence in supporting the controversial figure of Oviedo was such that it ended up with the assassination of vice-president Argaña, leader of opposing faction, paving the way for a successful impeachment. There are, however, more examples. In the case of Serrano in Guatemala, he met the increasing opposition from Congress and the Ombudsman, later president, León Carpio (on the constant rises of electricity prices), and the president expressed desperation in internal government meetings due to the government’s apparent deadlock.\textsuperscript{20} Despite the media covered presentation of signatures to Congress by parliamentarian Rodrigo Rosales (Acción Cívica) demanding the impeachment of President Serrano, the president seemed to be in no immediate danger of being ousted when he escalated the level of political conflict by (almost

\textsuperscript{19} The impeachment cases have been explored in Pérez-Linán (2007), Lalander (2010), Nolte (2010), and Cheibub Figueredio (2010).

\textsuperscript{20} Marsteintredet interview with Education Minister in Serrano’s administration, María Luisa Beltranena, April 2009.
singlehandedly) announcing the closure of Congress and other institutions on May 25, 1993. The outcome of this tactic was the forced ouster of Serrano and his vice-president (e.g. Villagrán de León 1993). Also President Gutiérrez choice of a confrontational strategy further escalated the crisis in Ecuador in 2004/05. After some failed attempts of impeachment against him, Gutiérrez's search for an improved legislative shield and new coalition partner escalated the conflict to also include the courts. Gutiérrez sought via dubious procedures to take control over the leadership in Congress, and to remove and renew the Supreme Court in order to eradicate all criminal charges against former President Abdalá Bucaram, exiled in Panama. Bucaram was still the leader the PRE, who Gutiérrez sought as a new coalition partner. These actions infuriated even more, and united, the opposition in Congress, which took advantage of serious upheavals in the major cities in the country in April of 2005, and declared that the president had abandoned his post.

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 (Llanos and Marsteintredet 2010b, 2010c). 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 (PCM-005-2009), 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 consult. The popular consult was scheduled for June 28, and the same day the military forcefully removed and exiled him.

These were the extreme cases of confrontation, those presidents wishing to “suppress” opposition at any cost. There were a number of other provocative confrontational strategies in between. Both President Bucaram and Mahuad opted for a somewhat unilateral and confrontational strategy in

21 Zelaya led a minority government with support from a minor party that had secured him a governing majority throughout his term. However, after conflicts in December 2008 regarding the internal elections of his successor as presidential candidate for the Liberal party, Zelaya lost the hold over his own party.
their economic policies, which created staunch opposition in Congress and outside Congress. Neither of these presidents decided to withdraw their (radical) economic programs when met with opposition and challenges to their offices, and this strategy fuelled the protests against them, and made them devoid of a legislative shield. Both were voted out of office by Congress after civilian and military upheavals.

Finally, if all these presidents made mistakes, or chose the wrong strategy to face mounting opposition, there are also those who faulted by omission or inaction. De la Rúa of Argentina, 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.

In common for all the forced breakdowns is that the presidents under attack have attempted to fight back or insist on the policy matter which has been the core of contention between the president and the opposition. From these cases, we find that a strategy of confrontation or even cesarism, further escalates the level of the crisis, and destabilises the situation and the presidential office even further. 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 levels of intransigence as the president. Nevertheless, a confrontational strategy from the president seems conducive to a forced breakdown unless she enjoys a legislative shield in Congress or can ally with other sponsor that can protect her office.
Conclusions

This paper has analysed presidential crises with a focus on presidential strategies and actions because the presidents’ side of the story has hitherto remained under-analysed in the literature. We have shown through several examples that presidential challenges represent extremely complicated situations, many of them provoked by controversial presidential decisions and actions. This has made presidents vulnerable to challenges from different institutional and social sectors, and has simultaneously transformed Congress into a key institution at the time of defining outcomes and appointing successors. The contexts of crisis are, however, extremely fluid, and it seems to us difficult to predict at the peak of the crisis the direction that this crisis 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 challenges but, in our view, it omits a substantial part of the story (one difficult to grasp without detailed process-tracing), concerning the counterbalancing strategies that presidents used to face challenges. This perspective shows that presidents have choices, and their interpretation and approach at different stages of the crisis may have an impact on their permanence in power.

Our inductive analysis of the presidential challenges showed a range of strategies that presidents actually used to deal with critical situations. This is per se an important contribution of the study as there is no much literature on behavioural aspects of presidential leadership in the Latin American region. We took Pérez-Liñán's work as a starting point and, by expanding the number of cases beyond impeachment attempts, we found a larger number of strategies that presidents had at their disposal. Some of these are defined by the institutional setting presidents work in (such as the “imperial” use of decrees to bypass Congress). Other strategies are context-dependent (such as the availability of potential partners outside Congress) or agent-dependent, that is, related to personal options (or even attributes) of the president (such as, intransigence in negotiations, or apathy). Pérez-Liñán suggests that a cautious or prudent approach is wiser for survival than a confrontational attitude, and our study seems to confirm this claim. Although many presidents do change their strategies according to the course of events, 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, stubborn
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 with a weak position in Congress can survive challenges.

We hope to have contributed to understanding the outcome of challenges, and showed that this outcome is not entirely defined by factors external to the presidential office. We believe that presidential strategies in times of crisis influence whether or not the challenge to the presidency succeeds, and also whether or not the terms of the presidential breakdown is negotiated in ways that may secure an orderly transfer of power and governability. We conclude that presidents have a range of strategies to apply when confronted with challenges. Sometimes presidents act in ways that improve their chances of survival, whereas other times presidents act in ways that actually undermine their own position in power.
Table 1: Breakdowns, Pacted breakdowns, and survived challenges.

*Impeachments and impeachment attempts in italics; Fujimori 2000 was a breakdown in two stages, and appears twice in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakdowns*</th>
<th>Pacted breakdowns</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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Incomplete Appendix:

Presidential Breakdowns – Country, Date and Modality of Presidential Exit

Argentina, Raúl Alfonsin (1989), resignation
Argentina, Fernando de la Rúa (2001), resignation
Bolivia, Hernán Siles Zuazo (1985), resignation and anticipated elections
Bolivia, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (2003), resignation
Bolivia, Carlos Mesa (2005), non-confidence vote and resignation and anticipated elections
Brazil, Fernando Collor de Melo (1992), impeachment
República Dominicana, Joaquín Balaguer (1994/96), resignation and anticipated elections
Ecuador, Abdalá Bucaram (1997), declaration of mental incapacity
Ecuador, Jamil Mahuad (2000), coup and declaration of abandoned office
Ecuador, Lucio Gutiérrez (2005), declaration of abandoned office
Guatemala, Jorge Serrano Elías (1993), resignation and declaration of abandoned office
Paraguay, Raúl Cubas (1999), impeachment
Peru, Alberto Fujimori (2000), resignation and declaration of abandoned office
Venezuela, Carlos Andrés Pérez (1993), impeachment

Presidential Challenges and Breakdowns –

Provisional List of Leadership Features and Strategies (to be completed)

Breakdowns
Serrano 1993, cesarism
Bucaram 1997, minority; confrontation; neoliberal; corruption
Mahuad 2000, confrontation
Fujimori 2000,
de la Rúa 2001, minority; faulty leadership / imperial; continuation of neoliberal policies (convertibility)
Sánchez de Lozada 2003 minority; …; neoliberal
Gutiérrez 2005,
Zelaya 2009 minority; confrontation; agenda change (constitutional reform)
Collor de Melo 1992 minority; imperial; agenda change (neoliberal); corruption
Pérez 1993 majority; imperial/aq; agenda change (neoliberal); corruption
Cubas 1999 majority; confrontation; tough agenda (Oviedo issue)

**Pacted Breakdowns**

Siles Zuazo 1984/85,
Alfonsín 1989, minority; negotiation; mild agenda
Balaguer 1994, minority, negotiation in crisis.
(Fujimori 2000),
Mesa 2005

**Challenges**

Febres Cordero 1987 (EC), confrontation, acquiescing during crisis
Borja 1990 (EC), coalition strategy,
Fujimori 1991 (PE) confrontation and external military sponsor, radical agenda,
Chamorro 1995 (NI) negotiation and acquiesce
Samper 1996 (CO) majority; negotiator; mild agenda (Cali money scandal in campaign)
Pastrana 2000 (CO) (aq)
Gonzalez Macchi 2002/03 (Pa) coalition (argañista); negotiator and sponsor (church); neoliberal
Bolaños 2004 (NI) (sponsor int),
Lula 2005 (BR) (acquiesce and apology, coalition)
Toledo 2005 (PE)
Colom 2009 (GU) (sponsor int),
Correa 2010 (EC) majority; confrontation first, then negotiation; police upheaval

**List of references (incomplete):**


