

**Variation of executive instability in presidential regimes: Three types of presidential interruption in Latin America**

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**Abstract:**

This paper argues that presidential interruptions in Latin America mainly fall into one of three types based the motivation behind presidential challenges: Presidential scandals, presidential violations of democratic principles, and popular discontentment with a president's policies. The types of interruptions affect which actors are most likely to dominate the challenge to the president, and the outcomes and aftermaths of presidential interruptions. By differentiating between different types of interruptions, and opening for different patterns of causes and effects of presidential interruptions in Latin America, the paper provides a new and nuanced contribution to two ongoing debates in the field: Whether presidential interruptions institutionally or street-driven; and whether presidential interruptions are positive or negative for presidential democracy.

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Are all presidential interruptions equal in terms of causes and outcomes? Do presidential interruptions differ in any systematic manner? These are central questions to be raised in this paper. The literature on presidential interruptions in Latin America has basically treated the phenomenon as being the same across all cases of premature exits of presidents in the region. Treating all cases of presidential interruptions as the same value on the dependent variable makes sense in many circumstances. For one, it facilitates statistical and causal analysis, using e.g. presidents' completed terms in office as a control group. Secondly, it facilitates comparisons of this new form of executive instability with previous forms of instability in the region, such as democratic breakdowns. The same arguments are valid for treating all interruptions as equal when interruptions are treated as an independent variable.

While the analyses using this approach have taught us a great deal about the phenomenon in question, I am not convinced they have provided us with the best possible answers in the two most prominent debates regarding presidential interruptions in Latin America. In the first debate presidential interruptions operate as a dependent variable: Whether institutions or actors in the "streets" are more important for causing the early exits of elected presidents. In the second debate, presidential interruptions operate as an independent variable. This debate discusses whether presidential interruptions entail positive or negative implications for presidential democracy, and related to this, whether or not presidential interruptions solve the ongoing crisis of the political system at the time. Analyses treating all cases of interruptions as being the same provide answers of the on average effect of causal

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factors on presidential interruptions, and the on average effect of presidential interruptions on a set of dependent variables. However, to properly address these questions, a differentiation between presidential interruptions seems to be called for.

All cases of interruptions are caused by popular and/or elite opposition to actions taken by a president and the administration. Yet, analysing the cases of presidential interruptions, one is struck by the great internal variation among the cases both in terms of what caused the presidential challenge in each case,<sup>2</sup> and in terms of the different aftermaths or outcomes of the presidential interruptions. These differences between the cases of interruption are under-explored in the literature. And, by treating all cases of interruptions as the same, the causes and effects of these differences are averaged out.

This paper aims to map the cases of interruptions, explore and systematise the differences between the cases in order to address the two debates mentioned above. Taking as point of departure the actors' motivation or reasons for an oppositional reaction that challenges the president, I argue that presidential interruptions in Latin America fall into basically one of three types. One type of interruption is the personal presidential scandals: presidents removed due to reactions against a president's unlawful behaviour. Another type of presidential interruptions is linked to reactions against a presidential behaviour that constitutes a breach of the constitutional order, and core democratic principles. A third type of presidential interruptions is related to the public reactions to policy-issues, and a president's policy decisions, rather than illegal or anti-democratic behaviour. These three types of presidential interruptions

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<sup>2</sup> The concept presidential challenge is from Hochstetler (2006) and is defined by an attempt for instance from congress, to remove the president.

also entail three different paths during and after the interruption. First of all, the importance of different actors varies across the types of interruption. Second, whereas others have found few discernable implications of presidential interruptions, I argue that the consequences clearly depend on the type of interruption.

The paper proceeds as follows, first I discuss typologies in relation to the topic of presidential interruptions in Latin America, then I present why and how I code the cases according to the opposition's motivation for challenging the president. Second, I analyse the cases with a focus on central actors during the interruption, and the implications of the interruptions. Third, I summarise my analysis and ask whether this inductive grouping of the cases of interruptions can be seen as a potential typology of presidential interruptions.

### **Types, Typologies, and Presidential interruptions in Latin America**

Typologies are a common feature in comparative politics, and there are numerous examples of their use. Types and typologies of presidential interruptions are important because they facilitate the understanding of this new phenomenon in presidential regimes, and situate it in its semantic field. Typologies may also improve our understanding and conceptualisation of the differences across cases within the overarching concept of executive instability. Typologies also help avoid conceptual stretching and too broad generalisations.

The main goal of typologies is often to explain variation within a category, concept, or phenomenon, and to create meaningful, and often qualitative, variation to be explained as a dependent variable, or to be used as an independent variable for

explaining other phenomena. There are many examples in the vast literature on transitions to democracy that typologies are used as both dependent and independent variables (e.g. Linz and Stepan 1996: 57-60), and also regime types have been used as both independent and dependent variables in numerous ways and works (see, Collier and Levitsky 1997), typologies are also well-known from the literature on welfare states, normally as variation to be explained (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990), interest representation and corporatism (e.g. Schmitter 1974), (political) crises (O'Donnell 1988), and revolutions (Skocpol 1979). In the literature on presidential interruptions, all interruptions are mainly considered to be of the same type, and few have distinguished between different types of interruptions.<sup>3</sup>

A presidential interruption is defined by a premature, extraordinary and forced exit of an elected president that does not lead to a democratic breakdown. The interruptions all have in common that they are triggered or caused by a popular and/or institutional opposition to a president's actions or inactions. Among the studies of presidential interruptions, there are some minor differences in the definition of the phenomenon and, consequently the cases studied, but the differences are not big.<sup>4</sup> According to my

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<sup>3</sup> For an exception see Marsteintredet and Berntzen (2008). Even in Pérez-Liñán's (2007: 61) book on presidential scandals, which in my view constitutes one type of interruption, almost all interruptions fall under the same category of outcomes, when compared to other types of presidential crises.

<sup>4</sup> Basically the differences relate to whether to include only elected presidents (which would exclude the early exit of President Duhalde in Argentina in 2003), whether to include vice-presidents as part of the group of elected presidents (which decides the inclusion or exclusion of the early exit of President Mesa in Bolivia in 2005), whether calls for early elections are considered part of the phenomenon (inclusion or exclusion of President Siles Zuazo, among others), and whether the focus of the definition is on the completion of the constitutionally prescribed electoral term (inclusion or exclusion of President Balaguer in the Dominican Republic in 1994). Methodological reasons for different case selections include the time-period studied, and where to put the lower threshold for considering a regime democratic (often the dilemma of including the fall of Fujimori in 2000 or not). My definition includes the case of Mesa since he was elected Vice-president, but excludes Duhalde and other interim presidents. I include the Balaguer case, but exclude the Sarney case since I insist that the interruption should be extraordinary, the change in the electoral cycle in Brazil, was permanent. I exclude the cases of accidents (Roldós), suicides (Guzmán) or illness (Bánzer) since I add that the exit should be forced.

definition, fifteen cases qualify as presidential interruptions since the start of the Third Wave in Latin America (see table 1).<sup>5</sup>

<table 1 about here>

An important part of concept-formation and typologies is to relate the phenomenon at hand to other, similar phenomena (Collier, La Porte, and Seawright nd). Presidential interruptions has been seen in relation to democratic breakdowns (Pérez-Liñán 2007: 61; 2008), and causal analyses of the phenomenon have been inspired by the similarities to democratic breakdowns (e.g. Alvarez and Marsteintredet Forthcoming 2010). Another strategy has been to move up the ladder of abstraction and explain which cases of inter-institutional conflict that the president seems to win, and which the military, congress or the supreme court seem to win (Helmke 2007; Pérez-Liñán 2005). Presidential interruptions have also been seen in relation to parliamentary changes of government (Carey 2005; Marsteintredet and Berntzen 2008; Mustapic 2005). This latter literature has made some procedural distinctions between types of interruptions, however, the procedures chosen at the point of a president's early exit might be fortuitous at the time, and procedures do not seem to be the crucial distinguishing factor between the cases of interruption.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these distinctions, the literature generally treats presidential interruptions as sharing the same value on the dependent variable, and few have offered systematic

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<sup>5</sup> I only treat fourteen of the fifteen cases here, since the Honduran case occurred too late to be included as a case and the outcome is still not clear.

<sup>6</sup> The procedures of interruption are important, however, when used to analyse the validity of Linz's and Valenzuela's argument on presidentialism as the above-cited authors do. The international reactions to the removal of Manuel Zelaya in Honduras also indicate the importance of procedures. A military removal and forced exile of a president in pyjamas, seems to draw the line between what the international community defines as an interruption and a coup.

analyses into the variation among the cases of interruption.<sup>7</sup> The reason for this is that the cases studied all satisfy the definition given above, and that treating them all equally facilitates causal analyses. A further distinction among subtypes of presidential interruption would, given the relatively few instances of the phenomenon, make comparative statistical analyses at the macro level, very difficult.

Presidential interruptions are causally linked to scandals (Pérez-Liñán 2007), street challenges (rather than institutional challenges) (Hochstetler 2006), a president's strength in congress (Kim and Bahry 2008), minority governments (Valenzuela 2004), but particularly those that do not control the median voter in congress (Negretto 2006), and economic performance (Edwards 2007). The greater debate in terms of causes, however, has been whether or not it is the "streets" or the institutions that are to blame for a president's early exit (Hochstetler 2006; Morgenstern, Negri, and Pérez-Liñán 2008; Pérez-Liñán 2008). The arguments have centred around Linz's (1990; 1994) contributions on the perils of presidentialism, and has revived this debate with a new dependent variable (presidential interruptions instead of democratic breakdown). Hochstetler (2006) convincingly argues that street challenges are a stronger predictor for presidential interruptions than are institutional challenges, and holds that this bears consequences for the understanding of presidential regimes. Others, such as Valenzuela (2004) holds that presidential interruptions confirm the (institutional) perils of presidentialism as a regime type, and institutional factors also find support in several comparative analyses (Morgenstern, Negri, and Pérez-Liñán 2008) and case-studies. One of the better descriptions of the opposition to presidents about to get interrupted, however, is that presidents are hit by a "perfect storm" of

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<sup>7</sup> A caveat here is made for the work of Pérez-Liñán who mainly studies a subgroup of presidential interruptions, the presidential scandals, and includes analyses that point to different pathways to presidential interruption.



factors (Mejía Acosta and Polga-Hecimovich Forthcoming 2010),<sup>8</sup> a term that indicates multiple, and complex causality.

In terms of consequences and outcomes of presidential interruptions, less is known, but a debate about the desirability and implications of presidential interruptions has, nevertheless, ensued. Analysing presidential interruption through the lenses of the perils of presidentialism, Valenzuela (2004) clearly sees presidential interruptions as a problem for presidential democracies. Others have argued the opposite, namely that presidential interruptions seem to counter the perils of presidentialism since the regimes in question have managed to find *salidas* to serious political conflicts (Marsteintredet and Berntzen 2008). Distinguishing between the above-mentioned pessimistic and optimistic views of presidential interruptions, Hochstetler and Samuels (2008) argue that consequences are few, and reequilibration seems to be the trend.<sup>9</sup> Finally, others focus on a strengthened congress vis-à-vis the presidency (Pérez-Liñán 2005), and that presidential interruptions may increase levels of both horizontal and vertical accountability (Marsteintredet 2008). Though less studied, the analyses of the implications and desirability of presidential interruptions, also treat all interruptions as being equal, and assume that the effect of interruptions is the same across all cases (causal homogeneity).

The above-cited comparative analyses do not distinguish between the cases of presidential interruptions, i.e. all units are considered identical. Furthermore, the

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<sup>8</sup> The cited authors, however, argue that presidential interruptions in Ecuador are linked to institutional factors such as incentives for coalition building and maintenance rather than challenges from the streets.

<sup>9</sup> This is maybe not surprising since reequilibration of democratic regimes is part of the definition of the concept of presidential interruptions, while similar phenomena such as coups that end democracy are excluded from the concept.

comparative analyses all assume causal homogeneity, i.e. that the explanatory variables have the same effect on the dependent variable across all cases or across units of time.<sup>10</sup>

If, however, one can identify different causal patterns among subgroups, or subtypes of the phenomenon to be explained, the effect of assuming causal homogeneity is that these systematic differences are averaged together, and results may be misleading, and biased. This, I hold, is a problem that is particularly relevant for the two debates mentioned above. Furthermore given the few cases of interruptions in Latin America, caution is warranted when using statistical techniques, since any misspecification and errors may seriously affect the analysis.

### **Variation between presidential interruptions in Latin America**

Even a cursory review makes it clear that there exists great variation between the cases of presidential interruptions even though all cases satisfy the definition of the phenomenon. In the cases of presidents Alfonsín in Argentina, Bucaram in Ecuador, and Sánchez de Lozada in Bolivia, street protests and challenges are factors difficult to ignore. However, in the case of Balaguer there were no protests in the streets or congress demanding his ouster (Marsteintredet Forthcoming 2010), and in the case of Fujimori the greatest street protest against the president occurred in late July (*La marcha de los cuatro suyos*), while Fujimori only fled to Japan in November 2000, shortly after having lost the majority in congress. In Guatemala in 1993 business elites and international pressure seem to have been just as important as pressure in the streets and congress in the ouster of presidents Serrano and Espina. Likewise, in terms of the outcomes of presidential interruptions, the variation is equally clear. The

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion and definitions of causal homogeneity in the social sciences, see the Brady and Collier vs. KKV debate (Brady and Collier 2004; King, Verba, and Keohane 1994).

impeachment of President Cubas was interpreted as an important step in the democratisation of Paraguay (Abente-Brun 1999), and Schamis (2002) argues that the military absence during the crisis in Argentina in 2001-02 was an important step in that country's consolidation of democracy. Few would argue that the early exits of presidents such as Fujimori and Balaguer harmed democratic regime development in Peru and Dominican Republic, respectively. On the other hand, recent military actions in Honduras against President Zelaya, and the coup that removed president Jamil Mahuad in Ecuador, clearly suggest that the implications of presidential interruptions vary from case to case. More indirectly presidential interruptions have also been linked to concepts such as crisis of democratic representation (Mainwaring, Bejarano, and Pizarro Leongómez 2006), and democratic erosion (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2005). Another interesting variation across cases is that some interruptions are followed by more challenges, crises and interruptions (Ecuador, Bolivia), whereas after other interruptions, street or congressional opposition die out, and the interruption seems to be an isolated event (e.g. Dominican Republic, Brazil). That there is variation across cases is therefore beyond doubt. The questions I raise, however, is whether these variations are systematic.

It is the opposition that drives the processes of presidential interruptions. The mobilisation of a challenge to a president is motivated by a reaction to some sort of presidential behaviour, which the opposition argues qualifies the demands for the president's ouster. As such, I understand presidential interruptions as corrective measures that, first and foremost, aim to end some type of unwanted behaviour.<sup>11</sup> In the following I therefore group the cases of interruption based on what type of

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<sup>11</sup> Another way to put this would be to use the lingo of path dependent scholars. In that sense, a presidential interruption is the result of a reactive sequence set in motion by an antecedent event, for instance a scandal. See Mahoney (2000).

presidential behaviour motivated the opposition to demand the president's ouster. Based on empirical evidence of what created the oppositional reaction to the president and its demands for the presidents early exit, presidential interruptions in Latin America fall into three types: presidential scandals, a president's violation of the democratic order, and a president's policy decisions.

### **Three types of interruptions and their cases**

In the discussion of the cases my focus is on two questions. Which actors were the driving forces behind the presidential interruptions in each case (and why)? And, what were the outcomes or implications of the presidential interruptions (and why)? First, however, the cases are organised according to types in table 2, and I argue briefly for the categorisation of the cases.

<table 2 here>

The placement of most of the cases above should be uncontroversial. Some, however, are rather fuzzy members, and will merit some discussion. The two presidential scandals are relatively straightforward. In the case of Collor de Melo in Brazil, popular reactions and the impeachment were beyond doubt motivated by the corruption scheme involving the president and his campaign manager (Cheibub Figueredo Forthcoming 2010; Weyland 1993). The case of Cubas in Paraguay is somewhat less clear, congress had attempted to remove Cubas at an earlier stage, as such the impeachment trial following the murder of Vice-President Argaña was not the first attempt at his removal. However, the prior attempt to remove the president was also motivated by an abuse, or scandal: the release of former coup maker General

Oviedo. Furthermore, the protests against Oviedo and the reaction in congress were clearly confined to a reaction against the murder of Argaña, i.e. the scandal. In sum, these cases are clearly cases of interruptions the opposition to the president is caused by a presidential scandal. The most surprising within this type of interruptions is probably that Venezuela is not in the category, I return to this below.

There are three cases of presidents interrupted due opposition generated by a president's violation of core democratic principles. They have in common that the presidents attempted to illegally and undemocratically extend their terms as presidents, and that these actions created opposition both within and outside the regimes in question. Fujimori got the Supreme Court to agree on a dubious interpretation of the law, which permitted him to run for a third term in 2000. The election was then organised in a manner that did not satisfy democratic standards (OAS 2000). Protests ensued in July against the stealing of the election. And, when the corruption scandal later burst, Fujimori fled to Japan. Occurring prior to the exposé of the scandal involving the *Vladivideos* the violation of the democratic order started the chain of factors leading to his demise. Thus the opposition and the challenges to Fujimori were motivated by demands to restore democracy.<sup>12</sup> The case of Serrano is clear. The *autogolpe* organised on May 25, 1993, was a clear authoritarian move that started the protests against his actions, and the demands for his ouster. In the case of Balaguer the fraudulent elections in May 1994, which gave him four more years in power, led to the partisan protests and international pressure and mediation that shortened his term with two years.

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<sup>12</sup> The *Vladivideos* was also a scandal of a different nature than in Brazil, as it exposed the corrupt nature of the regime created by Fujimori and his close collaborators and not only exposed the president as being corrupt. For a discussion of regime causes vs. the *Vladivideos* in the case of Fujimori's fall in 2000, see Cameron (2006) and McClintock (2006).

The cases of policy interruptions all have in common that the protests leading to the interruptions of these presidents were motivated by policy demands in addition to demands for the removal of the president. The most surprising case in this category is probably the case of Carlos Andrés Pérez. He fell as a result of an impeachment after taking personal advantage of the exchange system RECADI (Régimen de Cambio de Dinero) just before his new policies abolished it. Before this scandal burst in November of 1992, congress had attempted to remove Pérez several times, he had survived two coup attempts, and protests in the streets had demanded reversals of his neo-liberal reforms in addition to Pérez's ouster. Thus the protests and challenges initially included political demands that turned into demands for the removal of the president. The scandal and impeachment were not the first in a chain of attacks on the president, rather the culmination. In the two Argentine cases political demands and protests against failed economic policies led to the early exits of Presidents Alfonsín in 1989 and de la Rúa in 2001. In the case of President Siles Zuazo in Bolivia, the pressure outside congress from the unions was clearly politically motivated, since COB (Central Obrero Boliviano) pressured the president for equal representation on the board of state industries, and also demanded half of the posts in the administration. Parties to the right of Siles's administration fought every concession Siles gave to the unions. For Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada the demands for his ouster first began with the gas war that ensued after the president's decision to export gas through Chilean ports. Protests continued against his economic package, coca eradication programme, and new and increased taxes. For Carlos Mesa, the same political problems continued, and although he attempted to appease the opposition, it was not enough to satisfy the opposition's political demands. The Ecuadorean cases

follow a similar pattern, and even though Bucaram was the “crazy” president, and was immersed in scandalous behaviour (Pérez-Liñán 2007), it was a political protest against his new economic policies that toppled him on February 5, 1997. Mahuad also fell as a result of contested economic policies, and particularly the reaction to his new economic measures taken in January 2000. Gutiérrez, on the other hand, seemed to be doomed from the day that he betrayed his partner, Pachakutik, and his promises of new policies, and instead decided to follow a more neo-liberal path. Though towards the end of his presidency the democratic regime was at stake, the demands for his ouster had commenced earlier and were in part a reaction to his economic policies.

#### *The presidential scandals*

Both in Brazil and in Paraguay the actors driving the impeachment procedures were elites in congress, but actions in congress were supported by popular pressure in the streets. The street protests against Collor de Melo and Cubas were rather concentrated in time, and began after congress had started moving along the impeachment procedures against the presidents. In Paraguay, the street challenges appeared as an instant reaction to the murder of Argaña, but congress had at that time already worked on several impeachment attempts against Cubas, and in Brazil the inquiring commission into the Collorgate case was already working when the first challenges in the streets appeared against Collor.

In terms of consequences, the street protests were short and concentrated before the impeachments, and died out instantly after the impeachments. The goal of the protests had been reached, the oppositions’ battle had been won, and there were no longer any reasons to continue the protests in either country. Whereas street protests were

concentrated around the impeachment proceedings in congress, a more long-lasting consequence for the presidential democracies in question may be increased levels of horizontal controls over the presidency. This has been clearly stated by observers of the Brazilian case (Cheibub Figueredo Forthcoming 2010; Hochstetler and Samuels 2008), despite dim early evaluations of the fall of Collor de Melo (Weyland 1993). In Paraguay, all presidents since Cubas have been challenged by congress on account of what can be defined as scandalous presidential behaviour. In Brazil congress has investigated cases of corruption involving both successors to Collor or their close collaborators. Thus, congress seems to have strengthened its role vis-à-vis the president as a result of the successful impeachments in these two countries. Interruptions motivated by presidential scandals, however, do not entail implications for presidentialism as a regime type, or for the regime's level of democracy.

#### *Presidents violating democratic principles*

If a president violates the democratic rules of the game, either the president leaves power (the case of Serrano), or democracy ends (the case of Fujimori).<sup>13</sup> As with scandals, the main actors operating to remove the president are elites, supported by popular pressure. What is interesting to note, however, is the much greater involvement by international actors than in other types of presidential interruptions. The type of interruption explains their participation in these crises. With democracy as the most dominant game in the Latin American town, the end of the cold war, resolution 1080 of the OAS, international actors make their voices heard when democracies are in peril (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2005). The already very precarious rest of democracy was in peril in Guatemala, Dominican Republic, and

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<sup>13</sup> These words follow the words Mainwaring, Brinks and Pérez-Liñán (2001) use to distinguish between democratic and authoritarian regimes.



Peru prior to the interruptions in these countries. In Guatemala, international reactions were swift and clear against Serrano's *autogolpe*,<sup>14</sup> helping and convincing national actors to stand strong against Serrano, and convincing previously anti-democratic actors such as CACIF and the army to oppose Serrano's move (Booth 2000; Villagrán de León 1993).<sup>15</sup> In the Dominican Republic the US and the OAS were the most important factors explaining Balaguer's early exit through a constitutional deal with the opposition (Graham 2008; Marsteintredet Forthcoming 2010; Hartlyn 1998). Without this pressure, Balaguer would surely have stayed on as president until 1998. In Peru, the OAS were present in the country to negotiate between Fujimori and the opposition after the opposition-boycotted elections, and the U.S. had increased its pressure for democratic reforms prior to the elections in 2000 (Palmer 2006: 237), but international actors played a minor role compared to the cases of Serrano and Balaguer. However, the international presence and pressure was probably more important in Peru than in the cases of other types of interruption.

In addition to the greater involvement of international actors, this type of interruptions can also explain why these presidents were not impeached despite impeachment-qualifying behaviour. The reason is that this type of presidential interruption is more likely to occur within regimes in which the degree of democracy is already in question.<sup>16</sup> The interruptions in Guatemala, Dominican Republic and Peru constitute the lowest scores on the Polity index for any country-year with a presidential

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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed list of international reactions to Serrano's coup, see INCEP (1993).

<sup>15</sup> Serrano not only misread the internal situation in the country (he believed he had strong support for his moves), but also the different situation of Guatemala and Peru. Guatemala, a much smaller country than Peru, and much closer to the USA, was in a relatively speaking, much weaker position to end democracy than were Peru a year earlier. The increased linkage and leverage the USA had with Guatemala compared to Peru (Levitsky and Way 2006), probably also played an important role. However, judging so far from the case of Zelaya's ouster in Honduras, linkage and leverage seem to be more effective when elites are split on the matter of contention.

<sup>16</sup> Which leads some to exclude these cases from their analysis, see Hochstetler and Edwards (2009).

interruption. Guatemala registered a 3 on the combined Polity-scale, the Dominican Republic 5, and Peru 1.<sup>17</sup> In these regimes lingering between delegative democracy (O'Donnell 1994) and electoral authoritarianism (Schedler 2002), presidential powers tend to be comparatively higher, and institutional autonomy relatively lower, than in more institutionalised democracies. Therefore the institutions that should hold a president accountable for his or her actions, were not strong, or independent enough to do so. In the Dominican Republic, Congress was not, and has never been, strong enough to hold a president accountable for his actions even in minor issues (Marsteintredet 2009: chs. 4, 6), and the Supreme Court was politicised and under presidential control until 1996. In Peru, Congress and the Supreme Court lost power in the 1993 constitution implemented by Fujimori, and both institutions were packed with his supporters (Mauceri 2006: 45-46).<sup>18</sup> In Guatemala, on the other hand, congress was indeed a strong actor, but highly discredited due to widespread rumours of corruption. In fact it was congress's opposition to the president, and legislators' demands for payment to support the president, that were the immediate causes of the *autogolpe* (Beltranena de Padilla 2009). The Supreme Court, however, was politicised (Alvarez Aragón 1999). The president of the Supreme Court at the time, Juan José Rodil Peralta, won his position after a deal with president Serrano, and was more known for his corrupt behaviour than anything else (Hernández 1992). Thus the controlling institutions, as is expected in weakly institutionalised democracies, were either too weak and/or discredited to take action against the president. Thus, the elites confronting the presidents were not acting within these institutions.

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<sup>17</sup> The polity data can be found here: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>, see also Jagers and Gurr (1995).

<sup>18</sup> Fujimori lost his majority in congress right before fleeing to Japan, and his resignation may have prevented an impeachment attempt.

The outcomes of these interruptions relate more to the level of democracy rather than presidentialism as a regime form. The regimes in question were borderline electoral authoritarian, and the outcomes improved the level of democracy in the regimes.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, linked to the interruptions, constitutional reforms to remove “democratic” problems in the constitutions were implemented. Though constitutional reforms and entirely new constitutions have been written at numerous junctions in other countries as well, the reforms after the interruptions within this type are directly linked to the interruptions, and their causes.

<table 3 here>

The reforms are closely connected to what has been perceived as the democratic problem causing the interruption. In both the Dominican Republic and Peru the re-election of authoritarian-minded presidents was clearly perceived as a problematic factor, and subsequently banned. In Peru, several of the centralising reforms Fujimori implemented in 1993 were reversed two years after Fujimori left power. In Guatemala, the constitutional reforms strengthened the control over the presidency to prevent the potential for a constitutional excuse of future *autogolpes*. Furthermore, the reforms became an elegant solution for the calling of early elections and renewing the corrupt Congress and Supreme Court (Arellano Rojas 2009). Constitutional reforms are regular and even frequent in some Latin American countries, but in the three countries in question, there have been very few reforms during the last democratic spell. The one in Guatemala is the only since democratisation, in the Dominican

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<sup>19</sup> Guatemala went from 3 to 8 from 1993-1995 on Polity’s combined democracy scale, Dominican Republic from 5 to 8 from 1994-1996, and Peru from 1 to 9 from 1999-2001. As such, the interruptions in these three countries might be considered similar to the coloured revolutions in former Soviet Republics, see e.g. Beissinger (2007) and Kuzio (2005).

Republic it was the first since 1966, and in Peru the reforms in 2000 and 2002 were the first since Fujimori's constitutional renewal in 1993. There should be no doubt then, considering the substance of the reforms and the timing (and low frequency) of reforms in these countries that these worked to amend previous democratic problems and secure a transition towards more democracy.<sup>20</sup>

### *Policy interruptions*

The previous two types of interruptions are caused by behaviour that qualify for an impeachment, and thus are events that qualify for executive removals in any type of regimes. The policy interruption, on the other hand, which is empirically the most important group with nine cases, is clearly different. No constitutional ground exists for the early removal of presidents on account of policy differences in presidential systems. This group of cases affect thus both presidentialism, by relaxing the fixed terms, and democracy by removing presidents on dubious constitutional or even unconstitutional grounds and procedures.

As a contrast to the other two types of interruptions, the popular pressure is relatively more important for policy interruptions. The reason is connected to the lack of constitutional grounds to remove a president. Whereas in the two previous types of interruption, the cause for the interruption immediately trigger either institutional or international reaction, failed, or unpopular economic (or other) policies do not. This also explains why for instance in Ecuador, congressional elites and former presidents Borja and Hurtado urged people to the streets to help them oust presidents Bucaram (LAWR, 05-97; Pachano 1997: 249). Lacking a constitutional rationale for

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<sup>20</sup> Constitutional reforms in connection with full transitions to democracy is also quite regular, and is important for the consolidation of new democracies (Linz and Stepan 1996: 81-83).

presidential removal, popular pressure creates a generalised sentiment of an ungovernable situation that helps put pressure and strains on the administration, and convinces the other institutions such as congress or a supreme court to act against the president. In Argentina Alfonsín himself said that his decision to resign early was clearly connected to the lootings and social upheaval in the last week of May 1989 (Alfonsín 2004: 140-154), and in the case of de la Rúa the pictures of looting and protesters crying “*¡Qué se vayan todos!*” went across the world.<sup>21</sup> Likewise in Ecuador, Bucaram’s ouster was preceded by a general strike calling for the reversal of several economic measures the day before Congress declared Bucaram mentally incapacitated (Luna 1997: 207-208). The same pattern of generalised popular protests with political demands in addition to demands of presidential removals can be found in the two other cases of interruptions in Ecuador, the three cases in Bolivia, and in the case of Pérez’s impeachment in Venezuela.

The popular pressure in these cases, however, is not confined to the removal of presidents, but rather popular protests start with political demands, and only after some time, develop into demands for presidential removals. The removal of the president in these cases only satisfies *one* of the demands of the opposition. The political demands are not immediately satisfied, or easy to satisfy at all. Therefore, in the aftermath of presidential interruptions of this type, the level of conflicts continues, and may even lead to more challenges and presidential interruptions. These interruptions are part of processes of social change. The successors to the interrupted presidents immediately meet demands of policy changes, and of fixing whatever is defined to be wrong at the moment.

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<sup>21</sup> See Ayuero (2007) for an analysis of particularly the 2001 lootings.

In Argentina, a count of political street protests registered in LAWR (Latin American Weekly Report) shows a higher number of these protests in 1990 than the preceding years,<sup>22</sup> also inter-institutional conflicts continued at the same level throughout 1990 (see also Corrales 1997). Not until 1991 when hyperinflation, one of the principal causes of the fall of Alfonsín, was brought under control did the levels of conflicts in the streets and in congress go down (see also Weyland 2002: 126-127).<sup>23</sup> In Bolivia after Siles Zuazo's early exit in 1985, one can find some of the same pattern, street conflicts and strikes continued at a high level even after inflation was brought under control in 1986-1987. In Venezuela, according to my registration in LAWR, the protests and pressure on both successors of President Pérez (first Ramón Velasquez as caretaker, and then Rafael Caldera), and the level of street protests against the deteriorating economic conditions increased every year until the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998.

In the latter interruptions in Ecuador (1997, 2000, 2005), Bolivia (2003, 2005) and Argentina (2001), not only did the level of conflict maintain its high level after the interruptions of presidents, but more interruptions and challenges followed.<sup>24</sup> In Ecuador Bucaram was toppled after the initiation of his economic policies built on Menem's model of reforms and with Domingo Cavallo as his advisor. The conflicts

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<sup>22</sup> These and other references to the level of protests are based on a dataset from LAWR on political conflicts in Latin America since 1980 for my PhD-dissertation titled *Presidential Interruptions in Latin America. Concepts, Causes, and Outcomes*. (University of Bergen, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Inflation reached levels of over 3,000% in 1989, 2,000% in 1990, and only 133% in 1991, and from there it continued to go further down (WDI 2008).

<sup>24</sup> I must qualify here the case of Argentina. My definition excludes the early exit of President Duhalde as a presidential interruption since he was a caretaker president. However, also Duhalde left the presidency early by way of an early election he was forced to organise due to popular pressure against his presidency. Whether or not the case qualifies as an interruption is not important for the arguments here, it does however demonstrate that the level of conflict did not go down after the ouster of President de la Rúa in December of 2001. Several authors treat the Duhalde case as an interruption, see e.g. Llanos (Forthcoming 2010) and Hochstetler and Samuels (2008).

regarding economic policies led by newly mobilised indigenous groups continued into the Mahuad presidency and signalled the downfall of him as well (Zamosc 2007). In 2000 Lucio Gutiérrez allied himself with the indigenous movement to topple Mahuad, and in the 2002 elections went to the polls in alliance with the indigenous party Pachakutik. Nevertheless, Gutiérrez's continuation of his toppled predecessors' policies assured him strong opposition in congress and the streets, which ultimately led to his ouster. In Bolivia the gas export issue generated enough opposition against his predecessor to oust him from the presidency, and despite Mesa trying to ameliorate the relations with the strong opposition led by Felipe Quispe and Evo Morales, congressional and street pressure against him was no lower than against Sánchez de Lozada. In 2005 Mesa, unable to satisfy the opposition's political demands, fell as well. In Argentina, the economic crisis led to de la Rúa's early exit, but the *piquetero* movement continued its pressure from the streets against Duhalde, who as Mesa, tried to satisfy the political demands he was confronted with. Pressure from congress and the streets, however, did not end, but rather ended the presidency of Duhalde early, in April 2003.

To conclude, even though presidential interruptions indeed are "corrective" measures of prior undesired behaviour of presidents, they fail to solve the ongoing political crisis when the demands of the opposition are broader than only the removal of the president. This explains why in some cases of interruptions protests in congress and the streets continue, while in other cases these die out immediately after presidential interruptions. Protests and pressure against presidents will continue until the additional policy-related demands are confronted or dealt with by the incoming administrations. Failure to meet these demands will in all likelihood increase the risk

for an interruption. Whereas in the two other types of presidential interruptions, the principal demand of the opposition is already met with the removal of the president, in the policy interruption, a presidential interruption is only part of the solution.

### *Policy change and policy-interruptions*

It seems like that another aspect that sets this group of interrupted presidents apart from the others, is that vast policy changes seem to follow in their aftermath.<sup>25</sup> And, as Elster (1989: 163) reminds us: “*There are two mistakes governments can and do make in a disequilibrium situation: to concede too little or too much.*”<sup>26</sup> Analysing the levels of success of the interrupted presidents’ successors within this type of interruption, the more successful presidents are the not the ones that makes the mistake of conceding too little to the opposition, but rather the ones that do too much (or just enough).

There are two models for policy changes to be observed in the aftermath of presidential interruptions this type (see table 4). One immediate and vast, and one where only minor changes are implemented first, followed by repeated interruptions, and then vast changes.<sup>27</sup>

<table 4 here>

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<sup>25</sup> I am not saying that the interruption necessarily helps the implementation of all details of vast policy changes, such as neoliberal reforms (see Corrales 1997 for a wider discussion on this), rather that it may help the initial presentation and launching of such changes. This argument seems to be in line with Weyland’s (2002) more general argument on market reform. However, Weyland as well as Corrales, focus more on economic crises. My argument relates more to political crises, and one particular type of presidential interruptions.

<sup>26</sup> And, then Elster (1989: 163) adds: “*Often, they do the former out of fear of doing the latter.*”

<sup>27</sup> Due to the timing of these interruptions, the two models also indicate policy changes in two separate directions: from heterodox, or import substitution industrialisation policies towards neoliberalism in the first case, and from neoliberal towards post-neoliberal policies in the latter cases.



The immediate and vast changes describe well the changes after the two first presidential interruptions in Latin America, in Argentina in 1989 and in Bolivia in 1985. In Bolivia, Paz Estenssoro initiated the period of pacted democracy in 1985 with decree 21060, which changed the economic course of that country, and signified a sudden break from his interrupted predecessor's policies. It is not inconceivable that the political and economic crisis and the total failure of the previous model helped muster support within the established political parties for this radical change. In Argentina, Menem in July of 1989 launched his neoliberal reforms helped by advisors from Bunge and Born, and market-reform friendly Alvaro Alsogaray from the centrist UCeDé (Unión del Centro Democrático) (Weyland 2002: 112-115, 120-121). Again the previous failure of Alfonsín in dealing with the economy facilitated an initial tacit support from the political parties and CGT at the time (Levitsky and Way 1998). In the period between Menem's takeover in July till the inauguration of the new congress in December, the Radical party helped the passing of reforms by providing quorum in Congress and not voting against Menem's measures.<sup>28</sup>

The relative success of Menem and Paz Estenssoro contrast in this sense the destiny of President Pérez and his introduction of neoliberal reforms in 1989 in Venezuela. CAP's *gran viraje* was met with the *Caracazo*, a great demonstration that ended in terrible violence (López Maya 2003). As such it seems that a prior crisis facilitates at least the initial presentation of neoliberal reforms.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Alfonsín (2004: 145) himself argues that his prior failure to complete his term and deal with the economy indeed helped Menem implement what Alfonsín defines as reactionary policies.

<sup>29</sup> Another destiny is that of Fujimori who met congressional resistance to his reforms and ended up closing congress. After that he implemented neo-liberal reforms, and also effectively interrupted democracy for a couple of years.

Despite continued pressure from congress and the streets Menem and Paz Estenssoro survived in office, and Menem even managed to reform the constitution and win a second term in office. On this account the destiny of these two presidents contrast that of the ones that lacked or only came with half-hearted responses to the demands that had accompanied the challenges to their predecessors. In the case of Venezuela, President Caldera initially reversed many of the economic policies of CAP (Weyland 2002: 210). But about midway during his presidential term, Caldera dismissed his more heterodox approach to the economy, sought the support of the IMF and re-introduced several of the reforms CAP had introduced in 1989 (Weyland 2002: 218-219, 225-227).<sup>30</sup> Caldera failed to stem the social changes going on in Venezuela, and Chávez won the election in 1998. Chávez on the other hand, soon implemented not only vast changes in the economic policies over the years, but also reformed the political regime through a constituent assembly and the writing of a new constitution. The level of conflict in society did not recede, however, in 2002 Chávez survived a coup, and attempts continued in the streets and via the constitution to remove Chávez through a referendum.

In Ecuador, Bucaram's successors continued with what the opposition defined as internationally supported neoliberal reforms. The lack of changes in policy meant the end of not only Mahuad, but also Gutiérrez after him. Correa elected in 2006, later changed the course of the economic policies demanded from the outset of the rise of the indigenous movements in the country, organised elections for a Constituent Assembly in September 2007, a referendum on the constitution a year later, and a new

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<sup>30</sup> Some of the same pendulum effect can be observed in Brazil, but to a much lesser extent than in Venezuela (Weyland 2002: 212-213).

presidential election in April 2009. During this process Correa also followed Chávez in closing congress upon the election of the constituent assembly.

Mesa conceded somewhat to the pressure on the gas issue by holding a referendum in July 2004 on increased taxes for international companies extracting natural gas in the country, but fell prey to what Elster called “doing too little”, and, ultimately, lost a vote of confidence in Congress and resigned the presidency in June of 2005. Evo Morales elected in December of 2005 promised and delivered vast political changes through among other things the nationalisation of the gas industry on May 1, 2006. In his efforts to constitute a new Bolivian State and regime, a constituent assembly was elected in 2006, and after a tumultuous and protracted process, a referendum over the new constitution was held in January 2009. One observer has called this the Bolivia’s third revolution (Dunkerley 2007).

In Argentina, Duhalde the peronist successor of the Radical de la Rúa also aimed to reverse some of the failed policies of his predecessors. He implemented some emergency social policies, and clearly went away from the track of economic policies recommended by the World Bank. Yet, the changes were not sufficient to stave off continued pressure from below and in congress, and Duhalde was forced to hold early elections. The election of Kirchner in 2003, however, did mark the beginning of a clear move towards the left and new economic policies with more state intervention (Levitsky 2008: 109-110).

It is early to judge, especially the presidencies of Morales and Correa, but a pattern of the above analysis of policy interruption is clear. All policy interruptions are followed

by rather vast policy changes, and this outcome is not found in the other types of presidential interruptions. Furthermore, despite continued political protests, the presidents who do “too much” after a presidential interruption survive. Due to the previous discredit of the president, his or her policies, and the political or economic crisis in general, bold policy moves seem to be facilitated. Presidents who linger on with failed policies (e.g. in Ecuador), or only make half-hearted attempts to please both the pressure from below, and international lenders at the same time (Mesa, Bolivia), on the other hand, experience that their survival is as much at risk as their fallen predecessors.

In sum policy-interrupted presidents have implications for *presidentialism* by relaxing the fixed terms in a manner not constitutionally permitted in presidential regimes, *democracy* by being constitutionally and democratically questionable incidents, and on the face of it, *policy* since these interruptions are followed by vast policy changes.

### **Conclusions. Three types of presidential interruptions, and a typology?**

Above, I argued that the cases of presidential interruptions in Latin America fall into three types. In table 5, below, I summarise the commonalities within and differences between the types of interruptions.

<table 5 here>

The top row includes the criterion I initially used to distinguish between the types of interruption, and on which I believe the central actors and outcomes depend. It should be clear from the discussion above that the importance of the streets vs. institutional

actors, and the implications of interruptions depend on the type of interruption. These differences across the cases of interruptions have been largely ignored since all cases of interruptions mainly have been treated as being equal in terms of their causes and consequences. Congress, supported by popular protests and outrage, plays a crucial role in presidential scandals. When presidents violate core democratic principles, international actors also enter the arena negotiating with national elites, while popular protests in the streets, though clearly important, seem to play a relatively minor role. It is on the other hand, impossible to explain the cases of policy-interrupted presidents without referring to the popular outrage, protests, looting, etc. in the streets. In these cases, Congress and other institutional actors, rather play catch-up with whatever is going on outside their offices. The reasons for these differences seem to be related to the main cause or motivation for opposition towards the president.

In terms of the outcomes of presidential interruptions, I also argue that there are systematic differences across the types of interruptions. The scandals dealt with through impeachment proceedings show that congress can hold presidents accountable despite previously held beliefs that impeachments are too cumbersome to be used (Linz 1994). Apart from this implication, this type of interruptions seems to have few other implications for presidentialism, democracy or policy. Interruptions of presidents having violating democratic principles entail important, positive implications for the democracies in question. But, despite constitutional reforms in the aftermath of the presidential ouster, there are few implications for presidentialism as a regime type, or the directions of important policies. In contrast to the two above-mentioned presidential interruptions, to remove a president when the uproar against the chief executive is motivated by displeasure with the administration's policies,

does not automatically resolve the situation. Therefore protests tend to continue even after the interruptions, and unless policy switches occur, more interruptions may follow. Policy interruptions thus affect presidentialism as a regime form, democracy (but not in a uniform or predictable manner), and policy.

Do the types of interruption constitute a typology of presidential interruptions? A type should share a combination of features that distinguishes it from other types of the same overarching phenomena, and the types of a typology should ideally be mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive (George and Bennett 2005: 237-238). A good typology indicates a meaningful difference among types that may be explained as an outcome, or that may be used to explain other outcomes. The suggested types of presidential interruption may fall short of being jointly exhaustive, and maybe also mutually exclusive, these are two ideal goals that, nevertheless, are difficult to fully satisfy within the social sciences. I nevertheless think that the differences between the types of interruptions are meaningful. Though sharing many similarities, the different types seem to be the result of somewhat different causal paths that involve to a certain degree different actors. Furthermore, in terms of outcomes, the suggested types help distinguish and explain why in some cases the political and social turmoil continue after the interruption whereas in other cases the nightmare ends with the interruption, and suggest each type have different implications for democracy, presidentialism and policy.

Whether or not this relatively inductive exercise of creating types of presidential interruptions will survive as a typology, the exercise has highlighted that the outcomes of presidential interruptions are not uniform across all cases, and that

different actors' importance in these processes also vary across cases. Furthermore, these differences seem to be systematic and have been overlooked in other analyses. Therefore this exercise focusing on different causes of interruptions and different outcomes of the same phenomenon, is a nuanced contribution to debates regarding this new form of executive instability in Latin America.

## Tables:

**Table 1: Interrupted presidents in Latin America since 1980**

<b>President</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Year</b>
Hernán Siles Zuazo	Bolivia	1985
Raúl Alfonsín	Argentina	1989
Fernando Collor de Melo	Brazil	1992
Carlos Andrés Pérez	Venezuela	1993
Jorge Serrano	Guatemala	1993
Joaquín Balaguer	Dominican Republic	1994/96
Abdalá Bucaram	Ecuador	1997
Raúl Cubas	Paraguay	1999
Jamil Mahuad	Ecuador	2000
Alberto Fujimori	Peru	2000
Fernando de la Rúa	Argentina	2001
Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada	Bolivia	2003
Lucio Gutierrez	Ecuador	2005
Carlos Mesa	Bolivia	2005
Manuel Zelaya	Honduras	2009

**Table 2: Cases and types of presidential interruption in Latin America**

<b>Presidential scandals</b>	<b>Democratic violations</b>
Collor de Melo, Brazil, 1992 Raúl Cubas, Paraguay, 1999	Jorge Serrano, Guatemala, 1993 Joaquín Balaguer, Dominican Republic, 1994/96 Alberto Fujimori, Peru, 2000
<b>Policy interruptions</b>	
Siles Zuazo, Bolivia, 1984/85 Raúl Alfonsín, Argentina, 1989 Carlos Andrés Pérez, Venezuela, 1993 Abdala Bucaram, Ecuador, 1997 Jamil Mahuad, Ecuador, 2000	Fernando de la Rúa, Argentina, 2001 Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, Bolivia, 2003 Lucio Gutiérrez, Ecuador, 2005 Carlos Mesa, Bolivia, 2005



**Table 3: Presidential interruptions and constitutional reforms**

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>Dominican Republic</b>	<b>Peru</b>
<b>Reforms</b>	In 1995: Increased control of president, relations congress-president, new elections of congress and Supreme Court (arts. 157-158, 160-164, 165e,j, 173, and 184)	In 1994: Ban of immediate re-election, professionalisation of Supreme Court, separation of elections (arts. 49, 64, 121-122)	Ban on re-election (art 112). In 2002: Decentralisation (arts. 188-190)

Sources: Political Database of the Americas (PDBA 2009): <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/constudies.html>; Nolte (2008)

**Table 4: Two models of policy interruptions and policy change.**

	<b>Interrupted president and successor</b>	<b>Direction</b>
<b>Immediate and vast</b>	Alfonsín → <b>Menem</b> Siles Zuazo → <b>Paz Estenssoro</b>	From ISI to neoliberalism
<b>Minor changes, repeated interruptions</b>	CAP → <i>Caldera</i> → <b>Chávez</b> Bucaram → Mahuad → Gutiérrez → <b>Correa</b> Sánchez de Lozada → <i>Mesa</i> → <b>Morales</b> De la Rúa → <i>Duhalde</i> → <b>Kirchner</b>	From Neoliberalism to post-liberalism, and new perspectives on democratic regimes in new constitutions

Notes: **Bold** indicates vast changes, *italic* indicates minor changes. The concept post-liberalism is from Arditi (2008), and is used for lack of a better word.

**Table 5: A summary of the three types of interruptions**

<b>Type of interruption</b>	<b>Presidential Scandal</b>	<b>Democratic violations</b>	<b>Policy interruptions</b>
<b>Cause for opposition to challenge president</b>	Personal scandal implicating president	Regime scandal in which president violates core democratic principles	Discontentment with policy direction of presidential administration.
<b>Dominating actors in interruption:</b>	Elite-driven in institutions, supported by popular pressure	Elite-driven outside institutions, supported by popular pressure. International actors present.	Driven by popular pressure supported by varying levels of elite pressure in or outside institutions
<b>Outcomes:</b>			
<b>Regime/ Institutions</b>	Few changes. Increased level of accountability?	Improvements on minimal procedures for democracy; constitutional reforms to correct “democratic flaws”	Fixed terms flexible. Use of procedures questionable in light of democratic principles and constitution.
<b>Conflict level</b>	Low after interruption	Low after interruption	Continuing conflicts, often more interruptions
<b>Policy</b>	Few	Few	Changes in economic policy

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