

Online Appendix for

“When Does Backsliding Lead to Breakdown? Uncertainty and Opposition Strategies in Democracies at Risk”

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Perspectives on Politics

In our published article, we analyze the conditions under which executive aggrandizement leads to one of three possible regime outcomes: incumbent takeover, incumbent removal, or democratic survival. We argue that opposition strategy influences regime outcomes, with moderate opposition behavior maximizing the chance of democratic survival. We support this claim with a comparative analysis of aggrandizement in five countries: Bolivia, Ecuador, Thailand, Turkey, and Venezuela. Space constraints prevented us from publishing our entire analysis in the journal, so we created this appendix to provide further detail on two main topics: our case selection strategy, and our case analysis of aggrandizement in Venezuela.

A) Case Selection Strategy

Our analytical efforts are based on structured comparisons of five cases (George and Bennett 2005). Our case selection process helps to control for many factors that would otherwise need to be analyzed directly. Most obviously, we only study cases of aggrandizement, which (at least in our five cases) grows out of a common set of initial conditions – namely, the election of an outsider candidate (or party) in the context of an inchoate or collapsed traditional party system. More generally, our cases are all middle-income countries that benefitted significantly from the economic boom period in early 21st century. The initial strength and the history of democratic institutions across these cases are also similar (Turkey and Venezuela have a more robust history of democratic rule, but evidently that was no barrier to the democratic breakdowns that they suffered in the early 21st century).

At the same time, where there is structural and institutional variation among our cases, it tends not to covary with our outcomes of interest in ways that suggest clean explanations (see George and Bennett 2005, esp. ch. 8). Thailand and Turkey were both parliamentary systems, but had different outcomes. All three Latin American cases are presidential systems, and have many other commonalities based on their historical trajectories, and yet each of the three has a different regime outcome. Venezuela was somewhat wealthier than our other cases, but still suffered a democratic breakdown. Perhaps oil wealth contributed to this outcome, yet the same outcome occurred in Turkey (which lacks natural resource wealth), while Bolivia and Ecuador had different results even while benefiting from a similar Latin American commodity boom. Control through case selection in this research setting is far from perfect, but it provides an initial opportunity to rule out some structural and institutional factors as causes of the regime outcomes we aim to explain, allowing us to focus on opposition behavior. We leverage within-case

variation, counterfactual analysis and process-tracing techniques to further support our inferences about the likely effects of opposition behavior (George and Bennett 2005, Ch. 10).

B) Radical Opposition Behavior and Democratic Breakdown in Venezuela

Our article discusses relatively moderate opposition responses to Chávez early in his first term. But that more conciliatory approach gave way to highly visible, radical attempts not only to oppose Chávez's policies, but to remove him from power, especially after he began his second term in January 2001 (Gamboa 2017, 464-8). Different opposition actors, including conservative media outlets, had been hinting at more radical responses during 2001, and were provoked further by a series of presidential decrees issued in November of that year, according to which (among other things) Chávez would gain more direct control over PDVSA, the state-owned oil giant (Gamboa 2017).

When Chávez acted on these decrees in March 2002, street protests mushroomed in scale and escalated into violent clashes between *Chavista* groups and opposition forces. Opposition leaders played a key role in deliberately escalating the tension in these protests. For example, Pedro Carmona (head of FEDECAMARAS, the country's largest business association) and Carlos Ortega (head of the country's largest federation of labor unions) called a general strike with the explicit demand of Chávez's immediate resignation (Encarnación 2002, 43; Toro 2004). Their message was amplified by opposition media, which openly called for supporters to "take to the streets" in order to "overthrow the government" (Castillo 2003, 151; Lemoine 2003, 156). On April 11, as hundreds of thousands gathered for an opposition march, organizers intentionally deviated from the planned route in order to bring the march to the presidential palace, where

thousands of Chávez supporters had already gathered (Toro 2004; Coronil 2011, 35). The confrontation of the two massive protests sparked violence in which 19 citizens were killed and many more injured. The opposition media blamed Chávez supporters by broadcasting video that appeared to show them shooting at the opposition marchers (Coronil 2011, 35). At this point, individual officers began to publicly denounce the regime, and the next day, the military took custody of Chávez and removed him to an undisclosed location (Coronil 2011; Toro 2004). But public opinion shifted when Carmona stepped in to declare himself a “transitional president” and decreed sweeping political reforms, and the military restored Chávez to power within three days. As Corrales and Penfold (2011, 22-23) offer, “From this point on, Chávez never again sought reconciliation, calculating that provoking the opposition to irrational acts can actually bolster [his] popularity.”

The main effect of the short-lived coup was to strengthen Chávez’s position by enhancing his public support while dividing and discrediting opposition actors. Yet even then, Chávez was unable to seize complete control of the political system. Instead, he continued with more aggressive, but piecemeal, attacks on countervailing institutions, while opposition actors continued to dig themselves deeper into a hole. In December of 2002, thousands of employees at PDVSA went on strike. While we would not generally consider labor strikes to be “radical”, this one clearly fits our definition, given the Venezuelan state’s extreme dependence on oil revenue, and the fact that the striking workers explicitly framed their actions as an effort to bring down the Chávez regime (Gamboa 2017, 466). The strike was broken by March of 2003. Later that year, opposition forces coordinated a petition for a recall referendum, which was held in 2004. Chávez won. In 2005, most opposition parties boycotted national legislative elections. Chávez’s Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) won 69% of the seats, and parties supportive of Chávez won

most of the remainder. “By early 2006,” write Corrales and Penfold (2011, 28), “the opposition had virtually collapsed. Every effort to counter [Chávez] had failed.”

Given the impossibility of observing the counterfactual condition, we cannot claim with certainty that a more moderate opposition would have been able to prevent the breakdown of democracy; faced with aggrandizement, democracy is always at risk. But clearly, “the coup had disastrous consequences for the opposition,” including an increase in public support for Chávez and a reduction in the opposition’s international support (Gamboa 2017, 465). After 2002, Chávez’s actions became more extreme, and the opposition’s efforts to resist were ineffectual. Chávez purged the military and brought it more directly under his control (Rittinger and Cleary 2013). He closed or nationalized newspapers and television stations. He nationalized other industries. In 2004, his government published a list of citizens who had signed the recall petition, effectively blacklisting them from public sector jobs and other benefits. In 2007 he began jailing political opponents, including a judge who ruled against the government in a corruption case (Gardner, 2013). The opposition had one last gasp of resistance, defeating proposed constitutional reforms that would have eliminated term limits, in a December 2007 referendum. Chávez ominously admitted defeat “for now” (*por ahora*), and eventually pushed the changes through in another vote in 2009. The radical strategies that opposition actors had pursued in 2002 and 2003 left them unable to effectively resist any of these subsequent attacks, such that Venezuela’s slide into authoritarianism was complete, possibly by 2006 as Corrales and Penfold (2011) suggest, but certainly by 2009.

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