Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy

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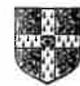

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What Makes Presidential Democracies Fragile?

I have argued in the previous chapters that intrinsic features of presidentialism are not the reason why presidential democracies are more prone to breakdown. Little in the chain of reasoning that leads from separation of powers to the instability of presidential regimes can be supported either theoretically or empirically. Yet the fact remains that democracies tend to have shorter lives when they are presidential. Recall that, for the 1946–2002 period, the expected life of a presidential democracy was 24 years versus 58 for parliamentary ones. Why, then, are presidential democracies more likely to die?

In this chapter I argue that the difference in the survival rates of parliamentary and presidential democracies can be accounted for by the conditions under which these democracies have existed. However, these are not the conditions that have been identified by the extant literature. Thus, I first show that the usual suspects – level of economic development, size of the country, geographic location – are not sufficient to account for the differences in survival rates across democratic systems. Although some of these conditions do matter, they do not fully eliminate these differences. I then argue that some democracies emerge in countries where the probability of a democratic breakdown is high, regardless of the type of democracy that exists, and that presidential democracies have emerged more frequently in such countries. Thus, the fragility of presidential democracies is a function not of presidentialism per se but of the fact that presidential democracies have existed in countries where the environment is inhospitable for any kind of democratic regime. Given that countries are mostly "stuck" with their broad constitutional framework, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of easier-to-implement, subconstitutional reforms aimed at improving, rather than abolishing, existing presidential democracies.

Table 6.1. *Characteristics of Parliamentary and Presidential Democracies*

	Parliamentary[a]	Presidential
Per capita income (1995 PPP$)	6,764	4,467
Economic growth[b]	2.48%	1.59%
In small countries[c]	25.40%	8.49%
In Latin America[d]	0.09%	62.30%

[a] Includes mixed systems.
[b] Annual change in per capita income.
[c] Population less than 1 million in 1980.
[d] Nineteen Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries.

Income, Growth, Size, and Location

Parliamentarism is more frequent in wealthier countries, where democracy is much more likely, indeed certain, to survive (Przeworski et al. 2000). It is more frequent in countries that generate relatively high rates of economic growth (Alvarez 1997). Shugart and Mainwaring (1997), in turn, suggest that the difference in survival between the two types of regimes may involve location – presidential regimes tend to be located in Latin America and Africa, parliamentary regimes in Europe – and country size: parliamentary regimes tend to exist in small countries. These factors constitute the menu of exogenous conditions that have been invoked to explain why presidential democracies have shorter lives than parliamentary ones.

Such explanations are plausible and, as Table 6.1 indicates, have prima facie empirical validity. The average per capita income is 1.5 times higher in parliamentary democracies, and the average rate of economic growth is nearly 1.5 times higher under parliamentarism than under presidentialism. Parliamentary regimes are more frequent in small countries: about one quarter of them (against 8% of presidential democracies) are in countries that had 1980 populations of less than a million. And about 60% of presidential democracies are located in Latin America, whereas less than 1% of parliamentary ones – specifically, two years of mixed democracy in Brazil in 1961 and 1962 – are in this region.

Even so, none of these factors is sufficient to account for the difference in survival rates across democratic regimes. Descriptive patterns are clear, as Table 6.2 shows. Although the probability that democracy would die falls steadily as per capita income increases under both parliamentarism and presidentialism, presidential democracies are more likely to die than parliamentary ones at all

Table 6.2. *Transition Probabilities in Parliamentary and Presidential Democracies by Economic and Geographic Conditions*

	All	Parliamentary	Presidential
Per capita income (1985 PPP$)			
Less than 3,000	0.0453	0.0402	0.0517
Between 3,000 and 6,000	0.0153	0.0083	0.0311
More than 6,000	0.0009	0.0000	0.0059
Economic growth			
Positive	0.0127	0.0076	0.0264
Negative	0.0434	0.0331	0.0610
Country size (population)			
Small	0.0062	0.0053	0.0137
Large	0.0215	0.0137	0.0373
Location			
Latin America	0.0436	0.0000	0.0438
Outside of Latin America	0.0128	0.0116	0.0210

Note: Transition probabilities are defined as TJK_i/J, where TJK is the number of transitions away from democracy and J is the number of democracies.

income levels. Short-term economic performance also matters, but it does not explain why presidential democracies die more frequently than parliamentary ones: the expected life of presidential democracies when the economy is doing well is not much higher than that of parliamentary democracies when the economy is doing poorly. Although democracies in small countries do indeed have longer expected lives, presidential democracies die more frequently than parliamentary ones in small and large countries both.

Probit analyses confirm these findings, as columns 1–3 of Table 6.3 demonstrate. Per capita income matters for the survival of democracy, as Przeworski et al. (2000) have demonstrated. Economic growth also matters, although this effect should be viewed with caution given that growth may be endogenous to the form of government (Przeworski et al. 2000). Finally, population size has no effect on the survival of democracy. Note that, even after controlling for these factors, presidential democracies are still more likely to become a dictatorship than parliamentary ones. The story with Latin America is more complex and will be the subject of subsequent sections. For the moment, let me say that democracies are considerably more unstable in this region than elsewhere

Table 6.3. *Effect of Presidentialism on Democratic Breakdown*

	Model						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Per capita income	−0.2227 (0.031)			−0.2287 (0.000)	−0.2432 (0.000)	0.9994 (0.003)	−0.2435 (0.000)
Growth		−0.0416 (0.000)					
Population			−0.001 (0.388)				
Presidential democracy	0.2840 (0.030)	0.3944 (0.001)	0.5354 (0.000)	0.0591 (0.691)	0.0518 (0.709)	1.3469 (0.234)	0.0487 (0.771)
Military legacy				0.5386 (0.000)	0.4576 (0.001)	1.7052 (0.021)	0.4570 (0.001)
"Latin America"							0.0048 (0.979)
Constant	−1.4459 (0.000)			−1.5896 (0.000)	−1.4943 (0.000)		−1.4936 (0.000)
N	2446	2386	2530	2446	2446	2446	2446
Log likelihood	−199.76	−220.89	−204.18	−193.13			
Wald χ^2					49.74 (0.000)	26.18 (0.000)	50.36 (0.000)

Notes: Dependent variable is transitions to dictatorship; p-values in parentheses. Models 1–4, pooled probit; models 5 and 7, population-averaged probit with Huber–White variance; model 6, Cox survival model with standard errors adjusted for clustering on countries (entries are hazard rates).

(1 in 19 democracies die if they are in Latin America, versus 1 in 70 elsewhere), although presidential democracies still die more frequently than parliamentary democracies if they are located outside of Latin America: 1 in 55 against 1 in 88.[1]

[1] One more possible explanation for the difference between parliamentarism and presidentialism is income distribution. Unfortunately, data on income distribution across countries and time are highly sparse and not entirely comparable. The most comprehensive available data set (Deininger and Squire 1996) covers only 10.3% and 13.6% of the country-years for parliamentary and presidential democracies, respectively. According to these data, incomes are more unequally distributed in presidential democracies (average Gini coefficient is 43.3 against 36 for parliamentary democracies). However, presidential democracies face higher risks of collapsing into a dictatorship regardless of whether the Gini coefficient is below or above the average. Therefore, given the existing data, income inequality is not what generates the difference in survival between presidential and parliamentary democracies.

Military–Presidential Nexus

Consider column 4 in Table 6.3, where a variable indicating "military legacy" is added to a model of democratic survival that also contains variables for per capita income and presidentialism.[2] "Military legacy" is coded 1 if the dictatorship preceding the current democracy was headed by a professional military (see Appendix 6.1 for the coding of types of dictatorships). Once this legacy is taken into account, presidentialism has no effect on the longevity of democracy, and the effect of per capita income remains the same as it was before. If we control for unobserved determinants of the probability of transition to dictatorship (column 5), then the effect of presidentialism remains null and the impact of military legacy is only slightly attenuated. A similar picture emerges if a survival model is used, which accounts for the possibility of time dependency and the fact that democracies were not observed beyond December 31, 2002: as column 6 shows, democracies that follow military dictatorships are 70% more likely to die than those that follow civilian dictatorships; the effect of presidential democracies, in contrast, cannot be safely distinguished from null. Thus, what kills democracies is not presidentialism but rather their military legacy. Since presidential democracies tend to follow military dictatorships more frequently than they follow civilian dictatorships, presidential democracies will die more frequently than parliamentary democracies. Thus there is a military–presidential nexus that accounts for the relatively high level of instability of presidential democracies.

To get the sense of the effect of military legacy on the survival chances of different democratic regimes, consider Table 6.4. This table presents the distribution of democracies, the number of democratic breakdowns, the probability of a democratic breakdown, the expected life of the democratic system (calculated as the inverse of the probability of a democratic breakdown), and its relative frequency – all conditioned on the type of dictatorship that preceded the current democracy. Thus, from panel A in Table 6.4 we learn that there were 133 country-years of parliamentary democracies (during the 1946–2002 period) that were preceded by military dictatorships and that seven of these were cases of democratic breakdown. This means that parliamentary democracies that followed a military dictatorship during this period had a 0.0526 probability of becoming a dictatorship, which is equivalent to an expected life of 19 years. Of

[2] Growth of per capita income was not included owing to possible endogeneity; population size was not included because it does not matter for democratic survival.

all parliamentary democracies that existed between 1946 and 2002, 30.23% of them were preceded by a military dictatorship.

Table 6.4 (panel A) shows, to begin with, that the survival chances of democracies of any type differ considerably depending on their origin: the column labeled "all" indicates that those democracies that follow a dictatorship led by civilians are expected to last for 89 years, whereas those that followed a dictatorship led by the military are expected to last for only 20 years. At the same time, presidential democracies are more likely to follow military dictatorships, whereas parliamentary (and mixed) democracies are more likely to follow civilian dictatorships: two thirds of the observed presidential democracies – as opposed to less than a third of parliamentary (and mixed) democracies – follow dictatorships led by the military. The military–presidential nexus is the product of these two facts: that democracies following military dictatorships are more likely to become a dictatorship and that presidential democracies are more likely to follow military dictatorships. It is the concurrence of these facts that accounts for the higher overall regime instability of presidential democracies. As we can see in the table, once the current democracy's authoritarian legacy is held constant, presidential and parliamentary democracies that followed military dictatorships both face relatively short lifetimes: about 19 years for pure parliamentary and presidential democracies, 24 years if we add parliamentary and mixed democracies.

Thus, while democracies that follow military dictatorships have much shorter lives regardless of their institutional form, presidential ones are much more likely to succeed military than civilian dictatorships. Hence, presidential democracies are more likely to become a dictatorship than parliamentary ones. To see this, assume that democratic regimes emerged with equal likelihood from civilian or military dictatorships. To use the figures in panel A of Table 6.4, let the probability that a democracy of any type will follow a civilian (resp., military) dictatorship be 0.5323 (resp., 0.4677). The expected probability of a transition to dictatorship is given by the sum of two products: the transition probability of democracies that follow a military dictatorship times the proportion of democracies that follow a military dictatorship; and the transition probability of democracies that follow a civilian dictatorship times the proportion of democracies that follow a civilian dictatorship. Thus, assuming that democracies emerge with equal likelihood from military and civilian dictatorships, the expected probability that a presidential democracy would die is given by $(0.0537 \times 0.4677)+(0.0162 \times 0.5323) = 0.0337$. The expected probability that a parliamentary democracy would die is given by $(0.0526 \times 0.4677)+(0.0098 \times 0.5323) = 0.0298$. This translates into expected lives of 33 and 30 years for parliamentary and presidential democracies,

Table 6.4. *Probability of Democratic Breakdown by Authoritarian Legacy*

Dictatorships preceding current democracy	Type of democracy (current)			
	Parliamentary	Parliamentary + Mixed	Presidential	All
Panel A: Democracies between 1946 and 2002				
Military				
Country-years	133	218	484	702
Transitions to dictatorship	7	9	26	35
Probability of breakdown	0.0526	0.0413	0.0537	0.0499
Expected life (years)	19	24	19	20
Share (%)	30.23	28.31	66.21	46.77
Civilian				
Country-years	307	552	247	799
Transitions to dictatorship	3	5	4	9
Probability of breakdown	0.0098	0.0091	0.0162	0.0113
Expected life (years)	102	110	62	89
Share (%)	69.77	71.69	33.79	53.23
Total				
Country-years	440	770	731	1501
Transitions to dictatorship	10	14	30	54
Share (%)	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Panel B: Post-1945 democracies only				
Military				
Country-years	122	207	421	628
Transitions to dictatorship	6	8	19	27
Probability of breakdown	0.0492	0.0386	0.0451	0.0430
Expected life (years)	20	26	22	23
Share (%)	29.26	32.60	66.72	49.61
Civilian				
Country-years	295	428	210	638
Transitions to dictatorship	3	5	2	7
Probability of breakdown	0.0102	0.0117	0.0095	0.0110
Expected life (years)	98	86	105	91
Share (%)	70.74	67.40	33.28	50.39
Panel C: Per capita income less than 1995 PPP$10,000				
Military				
Country-years	118	192	423	615
Transitions to dictatorship	6	9	19	28
Probability of breakdown	0.0508	0.0469	0.0449	0.0455
Expected life (years)	20	21	22	22
Share (%)	38.56	34.97	63.99	50.83
Civilian				
Country-years	188	357	238	595
Transitions to dictatorship	3	5	4	9
Probability of breakdown	0.0160	0.0140	0.0168	0.0151
Expected life (years)	63	71	60	66
Share (%)	61.44	65.03	36.01	49.17
Panel D: Democracies between 1900 and 2002				
Military				
Country-years	213	311	599	910
Transitions to dictatorship	9	12	27	39
Probability of breakdown	0.0423	0.0386	0.0451	0.0429
Expected life (years)	24	26	22	23
Share (%)	39.30	34.29	66.19	50.22
Civilian				
Country-years	329	596	306	902
Transitions to dictatorship	5	8	6	14
Probability of breakdown	0.0152	0.0134	0.0196	0.0155
Expected life (years)	66	75	51	64
Share (%)	60.70	65.71	33.81	49.78
Probability of breakdown regardless of origin	0.0122	0.0115	0.0354	0.0196
Expected life (years)	82	87	28	51

respectively. Thus, had democracies emerged with equal likelihood from civilian and military dictatorships, we would find that the differences in survival would be minimal across forms of government.

Panels B, C, and D of Table 6.4 show that the nexus between dictatorships led by the military and presidentialism is not a consequence of the fact that the sample is composed of democracies observed between 1946 and 2002. Panel B indicates that the survival chances of parliamentary and presidential democracies are about the same even in a sample of democracies that have emerged since 1945 (thus excluding older democracies, which are now considered to be "advanced" or "consolidated"). Panel C shows that authoritarian legacy accounts for the difference in survival rates of democracies even if we consider only those that are relatively poor. This panel excludes democracies that have per capita

income above 10,000 1995 PPP$, the point above which no democratic regime has ever collapsed.[3]

Finally, panel D extends the analysis to include regimes that have existed between 1900 and 1945. There were sixteen democratic breakdowns during this period, fourteen of which took place in European countries.[4] It is conceivable that the patterns observed for the post-1945 period might not hold if we also consider these earlier democratic collapses. In fact, however, the same patterns hold, and again we find that the difference in the survival rates of parliamentary and presidential democracies disappears once we consider that presidential democracies more often follow military than civilian dictatorships.

Note that it could be presidential institutions that generate the nexus between military dictatorships and presidentialism. In this case, and in accordance with the Linzian view, presidentialism would lead to frequent political deadlocks and subsequent military intervention aimed at resolving those deadlocks. In this story, the presidential institutions would generate a domestically strong and active military establishment, which would intervene in the political process and so lead to the breakdown of democracy.

However, the military is the main agent of democratic breakdown, regardless of regime type. Table 6.5 portrays the regime transition matrix for the 1946–2002 period. The diagonal entries give the number of years during which each type of regime survived, while the off-diagonal entries count regime transitions. It turns out that when democracies collapse they most likely do so at the hands of the military, regardless of their constitutional framework: 27 out of 32 cases (85%) of breakdown of presidential democracies, and 21 out of 26 cases (81%) of breakdown of parliamentary and mixed democracies, occurred at the hands of the military. The military, it seems, does not discriminate between democracies it chooses to overthrow. Yet when the military departs from the government it generally leaves presidential regimes behind: 40 out of 60 (67% of) transitions to democracy away from military dictatorships led to a presidential democracy and 15 out of 36 (42% of) transitions to democracy away from civilian dictatorships led to a presidential democracy.

Since democracies are much more brittle when they succeed military dictatorships, and since military dictatorships are followed disproportionately often

[3] The difference with Przeworski et al. (2000), for whom the threshold of safety was $6,000, is due to their use of 1985 PPP dollars.

[4] They were in Austria (1934), Bulgaria (1934), Estonia (1933), Finland (1930), Germany (1933), Greece (1936), Italy (1922), Latvia (1934), Lithuania (1926), Poland (1926), Portugal (1917 and 1926), Spain (1937), and Yugoslavia (1929). The two breakdowns outside of Europe took place in Argentina (1930) and Chile (1925).

Table 6.5. *Regime Transition Matrix (country-years)*

	Current regime							First-order transition
Past regime	Parl.	Mixed	Pres.	Civilian	Military	Royal	TOTAL	probability
Parliamentary	1780	1	0	4	17	1	1803	0.0128
Mixed	1	445	1	1	4	0	452	0.0155
Presidential	0	2	870	5	27	0	904	0.0376
Civilian	11	10	15	2214	62	2	2314	0.0432
Military	11	9	40	46	1450	0	1556	0.0681
Royal	1	0	0	5	5	649	660	0.0167
TOTAL	1804	467	926	2275	1565	652	7689	0.0365

by presidential systems, presidential democracies have shorter lives. Hence, the reason for the instability of presidential democracies lies not in any intrinsic features of presidentialism but rather in the conditions under which they emerge – namely, the fact that presidential regimes tend to exist in countries that are also more likely to suffer from dictatorships led by the military.

Why a Military–Presidential Nexus?

What we know thus far is that military dictatorships tend to be followed by presidential systems and that democracies following military dictatorships have shorter lives, regardless of their institutional frameworks. Two stories, not necessarily rival, can be constructed to account for these patterns. In one the military–presidential nexus is causal; in the other it is purely coincidental, the product of historical accident. I shall argue here that the first story, while plausible, is not empirically accurate, whereas the second is compatible with empirical evidence.

The causal version of accounting for the military–presidential nexus runs as follows. The military has a preference for presidential institutions. Faced with the prospect of transition to democracy, the military prefers the hierarchical structure and concentration of authority in one national office over the explicitly partisan, contentious, and precarious existence of parliamentary governments, subject as they are to the whims of the current majority. Hence, the argument would go, when the military rules the dictatorship, transitions to democracy are more likely if civilians consent to presidential institutions. In turn, if the military has been in power, neither presidential nor parliamentary systems are able to subject it to civilian control and so reduce its role in politics. Under either system the military retains organizational autonomy and thus

its capacity to intervene in politics. And once the military intervenes, neither democratic institutional system can dismantle its capacity to do so again; under this explanation, the military just happens to have an autonomous preference for presidentialism.

However, I do not believe it is historically correct to suppose that different democratic systems resulted from preferences of military dictators over the specific form of democratic government that succeeds them. For one thing, there is no reason for the military to prefer presidentialism on the grounds of preserving their capacity to return to power. Recall that the military is equally likely to overturn presidential and parliamentary democracies: one system is not any easier than the other for it to overthrow; and, per Table 6.4, democracies that succeed dictatorships headed by the military are equally vulnerable to breakdown. This again suggests that the constitutional framework does not matter for the military's ability to suspend democracy.

Moreover, as far as I can tell, there have been few cases where the issue of regime type under democracy was on the agenda during the process of extricating the military from politics and eventual transition to democracy. Suberu and Diamond (2002) report that the military in Nigeria expressed a strong preference for presidential institutions prior to preparations for the 1979 constitution. Likewise, Than (2004) reports that one of the proposals of the military regime in Myanmar is the establishment of a presidential constitution, although this is not yet a case of transition to democracy and the military preference is not conditioned on a regime transition occurring. A case that is sometimes invoked as providing evidence of a military preference for presidentialism is Brazil, where the option of a mixed system (referred to as the "parliamentary" alternative) was seriously considered in 1986–1988, when a new constitution was being written. During this process the military allied itself with the side favoring the preservation of the presidential system (Elkins 2003). However, in 1986 the transition to democracy had already occurred (the first civilian president took office in March 1985), and there is no evidence that the form of government appeared anywhere as an item of negotiation or contention during the long period of liberalization that preceded the military's relinquishing of power in 1985.

Finally, if the nexus between military dictatorships and presidentialism were the product of the preference of incumbent dictators, then we should observe that military dictatorships always leave behind presidential democracies. But this is true only for Latin America, where all transitions to democracy away from a military dictatorship led to presidential democracies. In other areas of the world the military left behind both presidential and parliamentary institutions: of 34 transitions to democracy from a military dictatorship that took place

outside of Latin America, 11 were to pure parliamentarism, 9 to mixed systems, and 14 to presidentialism.[5] Thus, whereas the story based on preferences of the military seems to fit the Latin American record, it does not fit transitions that occurred elsewhere. Even in Latin America, it is telling that the transitions occurring from civilian dictatorships also led to the establishment of presidential institutions.

Thus, it is improbable that democratic systems resulted from preferences of dictators over the form of democracies that succeed them. The nexus between the nature of the previous dictatorship and the institutional form of democracy, I argue, is purely accidental – that is, a product of the historical coincidence of two independent processes. The military–presidential nexus exists because the countries where militarism remained strong at the middle of the twentieth century were also countries that had adopted presidential institutions. Had these countries adopted parliamentary institutions, the level of instability of parliamentary democracies would be much higher than what is actually observed.

Given existing professional bias in favor of seeing important outcomes as the product of causal processes, it is rather unorthodox to invoke a historical coincidence when accounting for presidential instability. Yet I believe that this account is plausible – and closer to the truth than one that views the inherent features of presidentialism as causing the instability of presidential democracies.

There are four steps in the argument that the military–presidential nexus is the product of a historical coincidence.

1. Countries vary in their propensity toward military intervention. Militarism may be a function of social structure or a phenomenon that results from exogenous and conjunctural factors, but it is not likely to be a function of presidentialism itself.
2. Countries *adopt* their initial institutions for reasons that are unrelated to the ones that lead to the occurrence of military dictatorships; in other words, whether a country adopts a presidential or a parliamentary constitution has nothing to do with its propensity toward military intervention. This is particularly true for the relatively large number of Latin American countries that adopted presidential constitutions in the nineteenth century.
3. Countries *retain* the institutions under which they consolidated their existence as a nation-state. Institutions are, in general, sticky, and major

[5] The transitions to pure parliamentarism took place in Ghana, Greece (twice), Lesotho, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sudan, Thailand (twice), and Turkey (twice). The transitions to mixed democracies took place in the Central African Republic, the Congo, Haiti, Madagascar, Mali, Niger (twice), Poland, and Portugal.

institutions such as the form of government are even "stickier" than less encompassing ones.

4. Military intervention took place in many countries, but it persisted (at least until the 1980s) in countries that had adopted presidential institutions. This persistence had little to do with the fact that these countries were presidential and a lot to do with the onset of the Cold War and the military's role in "fighting" it.

The instability of presidential democracies is thus due to the fact that the countries that adopted and retained presidential institutions are those where the military endured after WWII, during the Cold War. Had the military also endured in countries with parliamentary institutions, the same instability that characterizes presidential democracies would also have characterized parliamentary ones. According to this argument, then, the intrinsic features of presidentialism are not the reason why presidential democracies tend to break down more frequently than parliamentary ones. The problem of presidential democracies is not that they are "institutionally flawed." Rather, the problem is that they tend to exist in societies where democracies of any type are likely to be unstable. Therefore, the problem of survival of presidential democracies is actually the problem of survival of democracies in general, regardless of their form of government.

In the remainder of this chapter I shall develop each of these points.

Military Intervention in Politics

Countries, as we know, are not equally likely to suffer from a dictatorship; moreover, among those that experience one, countries are not equally likely to experience a dictatorship led by the military. The reasons are many and probably not systematically known. There is a large but inconclusive early literature on the causes of military intervention in politics. One story points to the degree of social and economic inequality, which generates demands that cannot be accommodated without threatening the existing order. The military intervenes to repress these demands and guarantee the survival of the status quo. This line of argument can be traced to "sociological" explanations for the intervention of the military in politics. It can also be associated with more recent (and, for that matter, more sophisticated and less functionalist) arguments such as that developed by Engerman and Sokoloff (1997), who account for the difficulties of Latin American democracies in terms of the repressive nature of the institutions that were set up to organize colonial production (see Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2001, 2002). It is argued that these institutions generate high levels of

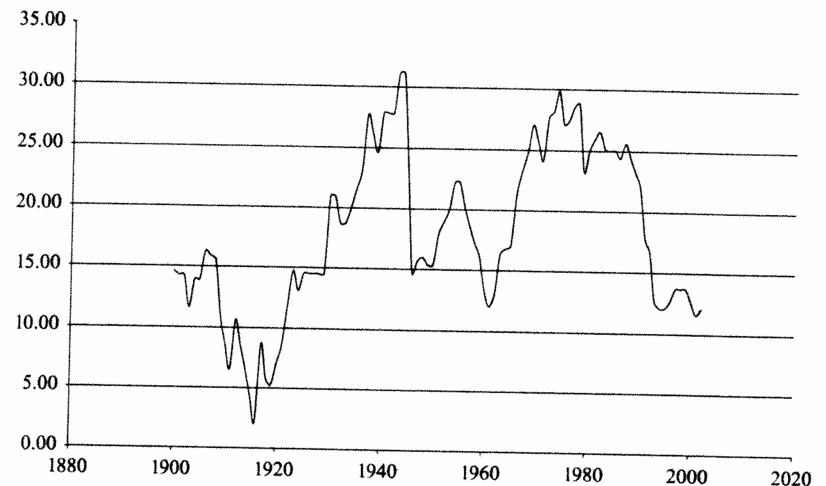

Figure 6.1 Proportion of Dictatorships Led by the Military, 1900–2002.

inequality, which in turn generate the need for repression to organize economic production, thus perpetuating themselves. Other accounts have added a "supply" factor by considering the military's corporate interests and the emergence of ideologies that promote and justify military control over the political system (Stepan 1971, 1988; O'Donnell 1973).

An alternative view is that military intervention in politics happened at a certain historical conjuncture – but that once it happened it triggered other military interventions. Londregan and Poole (1990) were probably the first to establish that coups breed other coups, trapping countries in a cycle of instability and poverty. Along these lines, Przeworski (2004), building on findings reported in Przeworski et al. (2000), shows that all countries that have experienced more than one breakdown of democracy did so at the hands of the military; this suggests that one intervention by the military is likely to lead to subsequent interventions. As for the juncture at which the military became "activated," Figure 6.1 suggests that the interwar period – beginning in 1918 but with an inflection in 1930 – is a good candidate: the proportion of authoritarian regimes led by the military increased from 6% in 1918 to 14% in 1920, to 21% in 1930, and to 31% in 1944. No other period in the twentieth century saw such a dramatic increase in the number of regimes led by the military.

The political activation of the military was not a specifically Latin American phenomenon. In 1917, only 25% of the dictatorships led by the military were located in Latin America. This number increased to 60% in 1921, but by 1926

it was down again to 33%; it increased again in 1930 to about 50%, where it remained until the end of WWII. The military dictatorships that emerged in Latin America in the first two decades of the twentieth century should not be seen as a mere continuation of the pattern of instability that characterized the region since independence. Przeworski and Curvale (2006) have shown that, by the third quarter of the nineteenth century, most Latin American countries had already put an end to the period of turmoil that followed independence. This means they were operating under a system of previously specified rules; in other words, they had stable political institutions.

Adoption of Initial Institutions

From the beginning of the nineteenth century to the breakup of the Soviet Union there have been five "waves" of independence in the world. The first, in Latin America, started in 1804 with Haiti's independence from France and lasted through the early 1820s; the second was due to the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires in the first two decades of the twentieth century; and the third came about with Africa's decolonization, which peaked in 1960 when seventeen new countries were created. The fourth wave occurred in the 1970s with the independence of small Caribbean countries; the last occurred with the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, leading to the emergence of nineteen new countries in Eastern and Central Europe and Central Asia.

There is probably no one set of factors that can account for the kind of constitutional framework that countries in each of these waves adopted. In nineteenth-century Latin America, after a considerable period of constitutional experimentation (Negretto and Aguilar-Rivera 2000; Gargarella 2004, 2005), all countries stabilized under presidential constitutions. European countries emerging out of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires adopted a variety of constitutions, but the majority had strong parliamentary elements. In Africa, some studies have suggested that the identity of the colonizer was central for shaping the constitution with which the new country started its life (Bernhard, Reenock, and Nordstrom 2004).

There might be factors that help explain why, given the availability of the choice, countries choose a presidential or a parliamentary constitution. Thus, it may be that the absence of a viable head of state (due to the occurrence of a revolution or an independence war) is associated with adoption of a presidential constitution, which provides for just such a head at the same time it constitutes the government. Likewise, it may be that the existence of a functioning legislature prior to independence, such as those that existed in India and in many

African and Caribbean countries under British rule, is associated with adoption of a parliamentary system in which the government is accountable to the assembly. But the point is that countries adopt constitutions at the moment they come into being; and they do so for reasons that are, if not idiosyncratic, at least related to the specific historical moments in which they emerge.

Some may object to the idea that institutions are adopted for reasons independent of the propensity toward militarism. For instance, countries where inequality is high will experience conflict and instability, which may lead to both militarism (which helps contain the escalation of conflict) and presidentialism (which allegedly provides for relatively strong leadership). In this sense, the connection between presidentialism and militarism is not a historical accident but instead the consequence of a common cause: high levels of inequality.

In fact, this argument is often given to explain the adoption of presidentialism in the Latin American countries that became independent in the nineteenth century. The idea is that these countries were polarized and far from egalitarian, which led to the emergence of the military. At the same time, as institutions were being "designed," presidentialism appeared as the preferred choice because it provided "strong" government presumably capable of dealing with conflicts generated by the high level of inequality and high degree of instability inherent to those countries. Thus, presidentialism was adopted for the same reasons that militarism emerged – contrary to my claim that they were independent from one another.

Although plausible, this explanation is historically inaccurate and presumes the existence of a choice that was not available at the time Latin American countries were adopting their constitutional frameworks. When presidential constitutions were adopted in these countries in the nineteenth century, the choice was not between presidential and parliamentary forms of government – as it may be today and might have been, for instance, when African countries became independent in the 1960s. Rather, the choice was between monarchy (regimes in which the government is headed by a hereditary leader) and republic (regimes in which the government is headed by people who cannot make any claims of heredity). Parliamentarism – that is, a form of government in which the government is dependent on the confidence of a legislative majority – simply did not exist as an option at the time that the Americas, Latin and otherwise, were crafting their basic institutions. As Cox (1987) has shown in his book on the emergence of cabinet government in England, cabinet responsibility is something that did not emerge until the last decades of the nineteenth century.

At independence, Latin American countries were struggling with the same fundamental problem that leaders of the newly independent United States were

struggling with after 1776: how to constitute authority in a context where the king is no longer ruler. As the early constitutional history of Latin American countries demonstrates, there was considerable experimentation before they all settled on a presidential constitutional form; all of the experiments involved some kind of monarchy, either elective or hereditary. It is telling that the one country (Brazil) in Latin America that did not depose the king kept a constitutional monarchy that might have evolved into a parliamentary democracy. It is also telling that, once the king was deposed (principally because of the monarchy's identification with slavery and the "republican agitation" that erupted in the 1870s; see Viotti da Costa 2000), the form of government adopted was presidential. Presidentialism, one can say, was the solution to a common problem faced by countries that emerged as such in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: how to constitute national authority when the head of the government had been removed.

Institutional Inertia

Basic constitutional frameworks are difficult to change. The reasons are not hard to see: they structure the expectations of the actors operating under them and, in order to change the framework, actors must be willing to leap into the unknown. At the same time, constitutions serve as focal points: all of the transitions to democracy that took place in Argentina since the 1930s resulted in the re-adoption (without much discussion) of the 1853 constitution, which had ushered in probably the longest period of political stability in that country's history.

Indeed, democracies that have changed their form of government are rare. There are only three cases of such change in the world since 1946: Brazil in 1961 and 1963 and France in 1958. Changes are more frequent after an authoritarian interregnum but still are not common. Since the end of the nineteenth century there have been seventy cases of re-democratization in 49 countries; the constitutional framework of the new democracy was different in fifteen cases. Of these, eight involved changes to or from mixed democracies and a mere seven cases involved changes from a purely parliamentary to a presidential constitutional framework. No country that had a presidential constitution under democracy re-emerged under a parliamentary constitution.

In fact, basic constitutional frameworks tend to remain in place even as regimes change. The staying power of these institutions is simply overwhelming given the number of opportunities that have existed for them to be altered. Changes do occur, of course, but they are not very frequent. In the case of Latin America, where the first big wave of independence took place, all countries (with one exception) had presidential institutions by the time politics stabilized after

independence; they kept these institutions in spite of the cycles of democracy and dictatorship that many experienced since then. Latin American dictators were usually called "presidents" and often governed with the "help" of independently elected legislatures. Brazil, which adopted presidentialism only with the first republican constitution in 1891, is the sole exception; but since then, presidentialism has survived six constitutions (1934, 1937, 1946, 1966, 1969, 1988) in spite of explicit and vigorous attempts by some actors to introduce parliamentary institutions.

The continuity in basic constitutional frameworks can also be seen in the continuity of titles adopted by rulers under democracy and dictatorship. It is striking that the countries with leaders who were ever called presidents and/or prime ministers continued to have leaders who were called presidents and/or prime ministers later in their histories. Presidents existed in 67.6% and prime ministers in 65.2% of the country-years between 1946 and 2002. Nearly 37% of these years featured both a prime minister and a president. All but three countries that were first observed with a president in 1946 (or at independence) had a president in 2002. Prime ministers seem to be more ephemeral, but only in appearance. By 2002, fifteen of the forty countries that had a prime minister in 1946 or at independence did not have one in 2002; in eleven of these fifteen, the prime minister office had been abolished and reinstated at least once, and there is nothing to suggest that it may not come back to life again. In only four cases (Malawi in 1966, Nigeria in 1966, Seychelles in 1977, and Sudan in 1989) has the office of prime minister been abolished and the country gone on to live an extended period of time without such a figure. Thus even prime ministers, which under dictatorships seem to disappear more frequently than presidents, have staying power: once in place, they are likely to remain as part of the political landscape of a country.

Thus, "presidential" and "parliamentary" constitutions are resilient; once adopted, they provide the structure of offices and roles that actors will take for granted. When presidential democracies die, they most likely become dictatorships that are led by presidents. When parliamentary democracies die, prime ministers do not always disappear even if their powers do. The basic constitutional framework of countries tends to remain in place, regardless of whether or not government officials come to power through competitive elections.

Historical Coincidence

It is the coincidence of repeated military intervention in countries that had adopted presidential institutions that explains the pattern of unstable presidential democracies. The nexus between militarism and presidentialism is not the

product of design or the outcome of a common cause. Rather, it simply reflects the fact that military dictatorships appeared, remained, and/or recurred – in other words, endured – in countries that had adopted presidential institutions.

Now refer back to Figure 6.1. The marked increase in the number of military dictatorships in the 1920s and 1930s is the result of democratic breakdowns in both Latin America and Europe. In 1938 the military ruled in dictatorships in Argentina, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. By this time, democracy had broken down in Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal (twice), Spain, and Yugoslavia. At the end of World War II, ten of nineteen Latin American countries were democratic. In the same year, most European countries that had not been formally or informally annexed by the Soviet Union in the course of the war were democratic (with the notable exceptions of Spain and Portugal). Not much changed with respect to political regimes in Europe until Portugal in 1975 and Spain in 1977 democratized. In Latin America, by 1970 all countries (with the exception of Colombia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela) were dictatorships, almost all of them led by the military.

Why, then, have postwar Austria, Germany, Italy, and Finland (and later Greece, Portugal, and Spain) become stable democracies, while not a single democracy that existed in 1946 survived in Latin America? Consider this assertion: Latin America continued to suffer from political instability because the dictatorships that were in place during World War II did not lose a war or, to put it in more general terms, were not discredited as a political force, as they were in Europe. There, the United States could not rely on authoritarian forces – discredited and defeated as they were during the war – to thwart the threat of communism. Hence the Cold War battles had to be waged through center-right democratic parties, such as the Christian Democrats in Germany and Italy. But in Latin America the right-wing military became the bulwark against the threat of communism, with the implication that it would step into the political arena whenever necessary. Obviously, the argument here is not that the military coups in Latin America were successful only, or even primarily, as instruments of U.S. intervention. I share what appears now to be the consensus view that military coups succeed only when they enjoy domestic civilian support. But if Latin American militaries had been discredited as the fascist forces in Europe were, these coups would not have been possible.

Thus, although parliamentary and presidential democracies are equally likely to die at the hands of the military, the military remained in a position to "kill" democratic regimes in an area of the world where, for reasons that should be

traced to the constitutional experiments of the nineteenth century, presidential constitutions predominated. Where parliamentary institutions predominated, the military became discredited as a political force and its capacity to intervene in politics neutralized.[6] Dictators in Latin America found presidential institutions when they came to power, and this is what they left behind when they relinquished power. We can see, then, how a military–presidential nexus might have emerged from the coincidence of these historical processes.

The instability of presidential democracies is therefore a consequence of their following military dictatorships, which makes them inherently unstable. They follow military dictatorships, however, because of a set of historical circumstances that allowed the military to remain active and credible as a political force in a part of the world where presidential constitutions happened to be in place. Given the resilience of constitutional frameworks, presidential institutions in place when the military came into power would remain when the military relinquished power. If these institutions had been parliamentary then they would likewise have remained, and the puzzle with which this book started – that presidential democracies die more frequently than parliamentary ones – would not even have existed.

Observe that there is cause for optimism. There are economic and political reasons for us to believe that the spiral of instability has been broken in Latin America. In spite of the economic stagnation of Latin America in the past twenty years, many countries in the region (particularly those in the Southern Cone) now enjoy income levels at which threats to democracy are extremely rare. Even though they are relatively poor in comparison to Western Europe, right-wing Latin American elites have too much at risk economically to engage in yet another authoritarian adventure. But perhaps the more important reason is political. In Latin America, the military was disgraced both by its brutality and its indolence during the last wave of "bureaucratic-authoritarian" regimes. Given the absence of Cold War pressures, it seems that the prospects for a military return to power in the region are practically nonexistent.

Is the Military–Presidential Nexus About "Latin America"?

Much of the pattern we observe in connection with presidential democracies may stem from our historical tendency to observe presidentialism in Latin America,

[6] It is interesting to note in this respect that the two European countries that did not directly involve their military in WWII (and hence survived the conflict unscathed) were Spain and Portugal, where dictatorship survived into the 1970s. The other country that experienced military dictatorship – Greece – also had a military force that was not damaged by WWII.

where we also observe enduring military dictatorships. Although not all presidential democracies are located in Latin America (the United States and some countries in Africa and Asia account for 37% of them), nearly all democracies in the region are presidential (excepting only the sixteen months of mixed institutions adopted in August 1961 in Brazil). However, the eighteen countries of Latin America do account disproportionately for the number of dictatorships that are led by military leaders. Although "only" 22.8% of the military dictatorships observed between 1946 and 1999 were in Latin America, during this period 49.8% of all regimes and 63% of the democracies in the region were preceded by a military dictatorship. Is there anything about Latin America, as distinct from presidentialism or militarism, that might account for the pattern of instability of presidential democracies?

As we know, democracies that follow military dictatorships have shorter lives; and military dictatorships, in turn, have much shorter lives than civilian or monarchical ones. One should therefore expect that, once a country experiences a military dictatorship, a spiral of instability will characterize its subsequent history. Suppose a military regime overthrows a democracy; then, in view of the last two columns of Table 6.5 (which give first-order transition probabilities of the different regimes and their expected lives), we can expect this regime to last for fifteen years. Assume it is followed by presidentialism – which, given that it is preceded by a military dictatorship, is expected to last nineteen years (from Table 6.4) – and that when this presidential democracy is in turn overthrown the result is a military regime that again lasts fifteen years. One would then expect to witness three regime transitions in about fifty years, more or less the period (1946–2002) covered by our data set of observed political regimes.

This cycle, as one will readily recognize, is reminiscent of the history of many Latin American countries. Indeed, not only is regime transition more frequent in Latin America than in other regions, but the average number of transitions in this region is close to what one would expect given the cycle just described. As Table 6.6 shows, although Latin America comprises fewer than 10% of the world's countries, 37% of transitions to and from democracy have occurred there. Between 1946 and 2002, the average number of transitions in Latin America was 2.9 versus 0.5 outside this region. This instability could be the product of some unobserved characteristics of Latin American countries that have nothing to do with militarism and presidentialism. How important, then, is "Latin America" in accounting for the survival of democracies?

Examining column 5 of Table 6.3, we can see the impact of a dummy variable for Latin America (LA) on transitions to dictatorship while controlling for economic development level, presidentialism, and military legacy. As can be seen,

Table 6.6. *Regime Instability: Latin America and Elsewhere*

Number of regime transitions	Number of countries	Latin America	Rest of the world
0	127	0	127
1	37	5	32
2	15	5	10
3	7	2	5
4	4	1	3
5	6	2	4
6	1	1	0
7	0	0	0
8	1	1	0
9	1	1	0
TOTAL	199	18	181

neither presidentialism nor this LA has an impact on the survival of democracies. It is the military legacy of presidential democracies in Latin America, not their form of government or their location, that makes them more brittle.

Figure 6.2 allows us to compare the relative effects of presidentialism and militarism at different levels of economic development. As is apparent from the figure, the real divide in terms of democratic breakdown occurs between those democracies that were preceded by military dictatorships and those that were preceded by civilian dictatorships. At every level of income per capita (at least up to about PPP$6,000) for which democracies are still likely to break down, democracies preceded by military dictatorship are much more likely to become a dictatorship. The effect of presidentialism is simply nonexistent. An almost identical picture would emerge were we to keep the form of government constant and vary the region of the world and the authoritarian legacy of the current democratic regime.

This, however, is not all. Although no dictatorships left behind parliamentary democracies in Latin America, some presidential democracies followed civilian dictatorships. If what causes regime instability is the legacy of military dictatorships and not some "Latin American" factor, then it must be true that, within the region, presidential democracies that followed military dictatorships were more brittle than those that followed civilian dictatorships. And the same pattern must be true for both presidential and parliamentary democracies outside of Latin America.

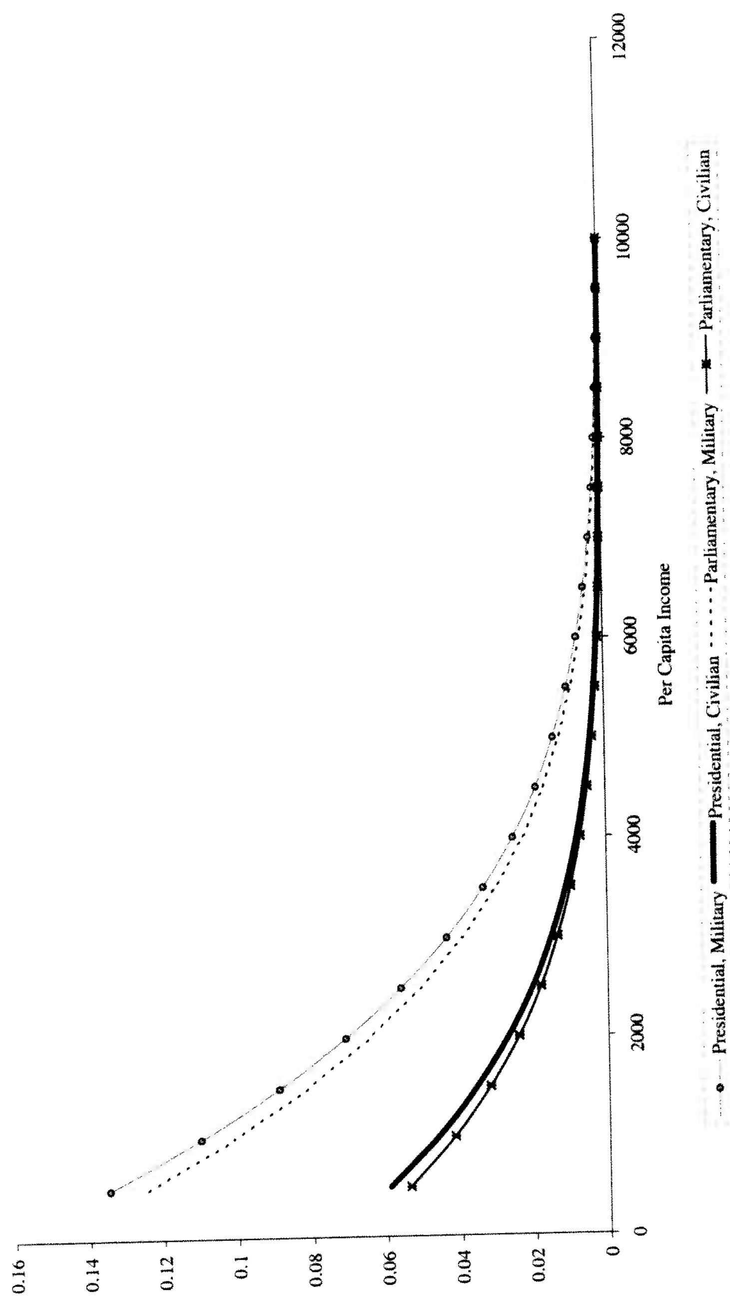

Figure 6.2 Probability of Democratic Collapse of Latin American Democracies by Per Capita Income, Type of Democratic Institutions, and Type of Previous Dictatorship.

We already know that this last statement is true. Because no parliamentary democracy ever existed in Latin America, the numbers reported in Table 6.4 indicate the probability that a non–Latin American parliamentary democracy will break down, conditioned on the type of dictatorship that preceded it. Recall that when the previous dictatorship was civilian, the expected life of the democracy was 89 years; and when the previous dictatorship was military, the expected life was only 20 years. A similar pattern, though not as dramatic, is true of presidential democracies outside of Latin America. Those that follow a civilian dictatorship tend to last for 37 years, whereas those that follow a military dictatorship tend to last for only 14 years. Finally, this is observed even among the presidential democracies within Latin America: those originating in civilian dictatorships are expected to live for 36 years, whereas those originating in military dictatorships are expected to live for 20 years. Clearly, the effect of military legacy seems to be weakened in Latin America, suggesting that there may exist other factors about the region that independently affect regime survival. Yet the effect of military legacy on the probability that a democracy will break down remains – regardless of whether the democracy is presidential or parliamentary and of whether it is in or outside of Latin America.

Thus, it is military intervention that mostly leads to instability in Latin America and, by extension, to instability of presidential democracies. We can therefore assert counterfactually that, had Latin America adopted parliamentary institutions in the aftermath of its independence, we would not be asking questions about the higher rates of regime instability of presidential democracies. The nexus between military dictatorships and presidential democracies is thus purely coincidental: military regimes are not more likely to overthrow presidential democracies than parliamentary ones, and military leaders are not more likely than other leaders to change the institutions they found. It just happened that military intervention occurred more frequently in the countries that adopted presidential institutions at independence, specifically in Latin America.

These systems were not established by "the military"; the very language is anachronistic. The military is a newcomer as an institution. As Rouquié (1994:236) observes, "there is no militarism in the strict sense of the term prior to the birth of standing armies and career officers," which did not happen in Latin America before the end of the nineteenth century, well after independence. It was only in the ten years following 1925, when the first military coups occurred in Ecuador and Chile, that the military stepped into politics as an organization. Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, and Peru suffered military coups in 1930; the following year this was the fate of Ecuador and El Salvador, while Chile remained in the hands of ephemeral military juntas. From

then on, a spiral of instability dominated the history of most Latin American countries. As a matter of fact, the notion that Latin America has been perennially and inherently unstable from the outset needs to be revisited. Many countries in the region experienced relatively long periods of routine (though not democratic) politics, including regular transfers of power, before they became chronically unstable. Thus, instability in Latin America is probably a more recent phenomenon whose causes still need to be identified.

In summary, the higher instability of presidential democracies – a fact noted by many analysts since Linz, and one that I do not dispute – is not due to any inherent defect of systems based on the separation of executive and legislative powers. Neither does this instability have much to do with the exogenous conditions that are often invoked to account for it: level of economic development, size of the country, and geographic location. Although location does matter for regime instability, and Latin America is by far the least stable region of the world, I hope to have made explicit the mechanism that underlies this relationship: the nexus between the military and presidentialism, the product of a combination of historical circumstances that (as I pointed out earlier) are no longer in place.

We may therefore conclude that the problem of presidential democracies is not that they are "institutionally flawed." Rather, the problem is that they tend to exist in societies where democracies of any type are likely to be unstable. Hence, fears arising from the choice of many new democracies for presidential institutions are unfounded. From a strictly institutional point of view, presidentialism can be as stable as parliamentarism. Given that constitutional frameworks are difficult to change, striving to replace them may be wasteful from a political point of view. It would be a misguided use of resources to attempt to change an institutional structure on the grounds of democratic stability when the source of instability has nothing to do with that structure. Hence, that countries with presidential institutions are "stuck" with them does not mean that they will experience regime instability in the future. It also does not mean that there is no room for improvement or that institutional reforms are pointless. There are actions that can be taken to help democracy survive that do not require altering hard-to-change institutional structures.

Appendix 6.1: Coding "Military Legacy"

"Military Legacy" is a variable that distinguishes the type of dictatorship that existed prior to the current democracy. This variable takes the value of 1 when the current democracy followed a military dictatorship or 0 when it followed

something else. "Something else" can be another kind of democracy (a rare event, though); a civilian dictatorship; a royal dictatorship; colonial status; or a regime that is unclassifiable because it has existed since time immemorial (e.g., the regime that preceded the current Swiss democracy or the current monarchy in Bhutan).

"Military Legacy" thus presupposes a classification of dictatorships into different types. Here I use the classification developed by Gandhi (2004), which distinguishes dictatorships according to the characteristics of their inner sanctums – that is, the place where real decisions are made and potential rivals are kept under close scrutiny. Monarchs rely on family and kin networks along with consultative councils in order to rule; military rulers confine key potential rivals from the armed forces within juntas; and civilian dictators usually create a smaller body within a regime party, a political bureau, to co-opt potential rivals. Because decision-making power lies within these small institutions, they generally indicate how power is organized within the regime, the forces to which dictators are responsible, and who may be likely to remove them. In this sense, a parallel can be traced between this way of distinguishing dictatorships and the distinction of democracies in terms of their form of government, which underscores precisely the institutions regulating the way governments are removed from power.

Dictatorships in which the executive comes to and maintains power on the basis of family and kin networks are classified as monarchies. Dictatorships in which the executive relies on the armed forces to assume and retain power are classified as military. All other dictatorships, many of which are characterized by the presence of a regime party, are civilian. Operationally, this classification relies on answers to the following questions:[7]

1. Who rules?
2. Does the head of government bear the title of "king" and have a hereditary successor and/or predecessor?
3. Is the head of government a current or past member of the armed forces?
4. Is the head neither monarchic nor military?

Who Rules? The first step in distinguishing dictatorships is to identify the effective ruler. In democracies this identification is easy: it is the president in presidential democracies and the prime minister in parliamentary and mixed democracies. In dictatorships, identification is frequently unproblematic: usually the

[7] The remainder of this appendix draws heavily on Cheibub and Gandhi (2006).

ruler is the president, the king, the prime minister, the head of the military junta, or the martial law administrator (the title adopted by dictators in Bangladesh in the 1970s). But sometimes the nominal ruler is not the effective head of the government. In most communist states the general secretary of the Communist Party is usually the effective head of government even though the chairman of the Council of State, or president, is the head of state. In other cases, such as in Somoza's Nicaragua, an *éminence grise* lurks behind the scenes as elections duly occur and presidents change according to constitutional rules. Operationally, the nominal ruler is assumed to be the effective ruler unless there is evidence (from the historical record) of such an *éminence grise*. Deng Xiaoping, for instance, never occupied any high-level formal position in the Chinese government; yet everyone recognizes that he ruled after Mao Zedong's death in the mid-1970s until his own death in 1997.

Does the Head of Government Bear the Title of "King" and Have a Hereditary Successor and/or Predecessor? The ruler is a monarch if he (i) bears the title of "king" or "emir" and (ii) takes power or is replaced by rules of hereditary succession. Most monarchs are identified by their title alone. The second rule applies in slightly more complicated cases in which the title of "king" has been taken more recently. In two instances during the postwar period, a member of the armed forces seized power and declared himself king. If he succeeded in passing power to a family member – as did Reza Khan to his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, in Iran – then both members are considered to be monarchs. If he failed, he is not considered to be a monarch; he will be either a military or a civilian dictator. Thus, Jean-Bedel Bokassa, a colonel in the Central African Republic's army, seized power in 1966 and declared himself Emperor; but Bokassa was deposed in 1979, before he was able to have his son succeed him. For reasons that will become clear in what follows, his rule is classified as a case of military dictatorship.

This rule highlights an important point about modern-day monarchs. In considering whether a ruler is a "rightful successor," what matters is only whether the ruler belongs to the current family in power. In other words, whether that family or individual has historically well-founded claims to the throne is immaterial, since contemporary monarchs rule in countries that often were carved by colonial powers without reference to historical claims or social considerations.

Is the Head of Government a Current or Past Member of the Armed Forces? The effective head of government is a military ruler if he is (or was) a member of the institutionalized military prior to taking power. Even if he retired from service, shedding the uniform does not eliminate his military status. Attempts to appear more palatable to voters who are more accustomed to civilian rule do not erase these rulers' connections and access to the armed forces.

Not included as military dictators are those rulers who come to power as heads of guerilla movements. Successful insurgency leaders – such as Castro in Cuba, Ortega in Nicaragua, Musaveni in Uganda, and Kagame in Rwanda – are considered to be civilian rulers. One might object that heads of guerilla movements, often like military rulers, come to power using violence. In addition, once in power, these rulers often give themselves military titles or become heads of the armed forces themselves. Yet there are three good reasons for not considering those involved in guerilla movements to be military dictators. First, not all leaders who originated from guerilla movements were involved in fighting. Many of them were members of the civilian, political arm of the successful movement and have no more experience in warfare than the average civilian on the street. In addition, some guerilla leaders, once they take power, never assume a formal military role. Even though Castro wears fatigues, the leadership of the Cuban armed forces belongs to his brother Raúl. Finally, and most importantly, since they were never a member of the armed forces, these leaders do not answer to that institution. And since the constraints and support offered by the armed forces to one of their members in power are the main reasons for distinguishing military from nonmilitary leaders, guerilla leaders do not fall into this category.

Is the Head neither Monarchic nor Military? As previously mentioned, civilian leaders often create a regime party through which they govern. Yet, unlike kin networks with monarchs and the armed forces with military rulers, the party does not define the civilian ruler. The diversity of modes of government is what characterizes civilian rulers, and for this reason it is best to leave them as a residual category. Thus, if dictators do not qualify as either monarchs or military rulers, they are civilian.

Dictatorships have existed in 139 countries between 1946 and 2002, for a total of 4,607 country-years; 51% of them were led by a civilian leader, 34% by a military leader, and 15% by a monarch. In order to code "Military Legacy," the type of dictatorship that preceded the democracies that existed in 1946 had to be assessed. There were 31 democracies in 1946: fifteen were parliamentary, three were mixed, and the remaining thirteen were presidential. Seven of the parliamentary democracies that existed in 1946 were preceded by authoritarian monarchies (Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom); five were preceded by colonial rule (Australia, Canada, Ireland, Lebanon, and New Zealand), two by military dictatorships (France and Greece), and one by a civilian dictatorship (Italy). One of the three mixed democracies that existed in 1946 was preceded by colonial rule (Iceland), and two were preceded by civilian dictatorships (Austria and Finland). Finally,

seven of the presidential democracies that existed in 1946 were preceded by military dictatorships (Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Peru, and Venezuela), three by civilian dictatorships (Brazil, Colombia, and Uruguay), two by colonial rule (the Philippines and the United States), and one was unclassified (Switzerland).

7

Conclusion

We need to put to rest the notion that presidential institutions are not conducive to democratic consolidation. I hope to have shown in the previous chapters that, sensible as it may appear, this notion finds no empirical support in the data. True, presidential democracies are more unstable than parliamentary ones; but this instability is not caused by the incentives generated by presidentialism itself. Presidential democracies die not because the institutions are such that they compel actors to seek extra-constitutional solutions to their conflicts. The conflicts themselves should take some of the blame, since they are probably hard to reconcile under any institutional framework. And given an "activated" military, it is certainly comprehensible why democracies – of any type – should break down into authoritarian systems.

If this is the case, then we are in a position to shift the emphasis of current thinking about political reforms in presidential democracies. As we have seen, much of the literature about democratic forms of government has focused on the relationship between the government and the legislature and the alleged implications of the ways in which this relationship is organized: conflict under presidentialism and cooperation under parliamentarism. This book should make it apparent that these consequences have been at least exaggerated and that differences in interbranch relationships across the two systems are more of degree than of quality.

Thus, the general tone of the literature on presidentialism has been to emphasize the role of specific institutional arrangements in helping to circumvent the presidential system's propensity for conflict and paralysis. For example, strong presidential powers would be undesirable because they may lead to conflicts with the legislature and eventual governability crises. Concurrent and/or two-round presidential elections, in turn, would be a positive feature of presidential systems given that they tend to reduce the number of political parties

and thereby increase the survival chances of presidential democracies; in contrast, legislative elections organized on the basis of proportional representation would lead to a relatively high number of political parties and thus would be bad for the survival of democracy. Finally, presidential term limits would be necessary to curb the powers of the president, which – if left unchecked – might have a detrimental effect on democracy.

Here I suggest that we look at these same institutions from a different perspective. Given that presidential institutions per se do not kill democracy and given that countries that are now presidential are likely to remain so, it follows that institutions such as presidential powers, electoral systems, and presidential term limits can be seen as ways to enhance goals other than governability, such as representation and accountability. No longer must we allow preoccupation with governability and the survival of democracy to be the overriding concern of reforms; other goals can, and should, be taken into consideration when thinking of ways to improve existing presidential systems. Let me elaborate on this.

Constitutional Limits on Presidential Re-election

Most presidential constitutions set a limit to the number of times that a president can be re-elected. Cheibub (1998) reports that, between 1946 and 1996, only 18% of the presidents in pure presidential regimes were in systems where no restrictions on re-election existed (these included the Philippines prior to 1971 and the Dominican Republic between the mid-1960s and early 1990s); another 18% were in systems, such as the United States, where presidents could be re-elected once. If we exclude from this group the presidents who were already serving their second term and hence could not run again, we find that, during the 1946–1996 period, the proportion of presidents that could be re-elected was only 28.3%. Until the early 1990s, the most common constitutional limit on presidential re-election was the "one term out" rule, according to which a president had to wait for a full term out of office before standing for election again. Since then, countries such as Argentina and Brazil have changed their constitutions and adopted the two-terms limit that has existed in the United States since the 1940s.

Presidential term limits are important because they affect the link between the president and voters. Elections are normally considered to be one of the most important instruments for inducing governments to act in the interest of voters. This is how it is supposed to work: anticipating voters' future judgment of their past performance, politicians are induced to pursue the interests of voters in order to be re-elected (Manin 1997). Whether elections are actually sufficient

to induce this kind of behavior on the part of politicians is a controversial matter (see Cheibub and Przworski 1999). It is clear, however, that if elections are to affect the behavior of politicians at all then voters must be able (a) to punish incumbents who perform badly by throwing them out of office and (b) to reward incumbents who perform well by giving them another term in office. Both are necessary if elections are to induce governments to act in the interest of voters. But constitutional term limits break this link by preventing voters from rewarding good incumbents.

The rationale for instituting term limits for presidents in the first place is reasonable, for such limits are meant to prevent incumbents from taking advantage of their position in order to remain in power. Indeed, the little evidence that is available suggests that presidents do indeed have a large advantage when they are legally permitted to run for re-election. As Cheibub and Przeworski (1999) report, among 22 presidents who faced re-election without impending term limits between 1950 and 1990, only six were actually defeated (although eight others chose, for one reason or another, not to stand for re-election). Given that incumbents won in eight and lost in six elections, their odds of being re-elected were 1.3 to 1; the odds for prime ministers in parliamentary systems were 0.66 to 1.

Thus, although incumbent presidents seem to have a clear advantage when they are legally permitted to run for re-election, most presidential systems prevent incumbents from exploiting this advantage by requiring them to leave office whether or not voters want them to stay. In this way, "excessively" strong presidents are prevented from emerging, and the risks to presidential democracies are allegedly reduced.

However, what constitutes an excessively strong president (i.e., one who abuses the power of incumbency) is unclear, and I submit that the bar is set at a relatively low point given the model that has dominated research on presidential democracies: that presidents are bound to clash with the legislature, inducing unresolvable stalemates. But if such a conflict is not presupposed, the notion of strong presidents becomes less alarming and the bar beyond which their strength becomes excessive is set at a higher point.

Even if we agree that the incumbency advantage of presidents needs to be tamed, constitutional term limits for presidents may be too blunt an instrument because it fundamentally interferes with the relationship between voters and presidents and preempts the possibility that elections may operate as mechanisms of accountability. There may be other institutions that achieve the same goal without exacting such a high price. Some of them include strict regulation of campaign finance and procedures, equal distribution of public political campaign funds in order to reduce barriers to entry into political competition,

free access to media, and the strengthening of agencies that oversee campaigns. These are devices that will limit the ability of presidents to use their office for undue electoral advantage without removing their incentives to perform well with an eye toward being re-elected.

Legislative and Presidential Electoral Systems

Presidentialism may be affected by the way both congress and the president are elected.

Current thinking about presidentialism, as we have seen, is that it must avoid high levels of partisan fragmentation in the assembly. The easiest (it is believed) and simplest way of limiting the number of political parties is to design a restrictive electoral system – one that adopts, for instance, single-member districts, relatively high thresholds for legislative representation, strong legal requirements for the establishment of political parties, or a combination of these features. The result is a party system with a small number of parties and thus, it is believed, a more stable government – in other words, a government supported by a majority (consisting of one or a few parties) that is capable of approving its legislation in the assembly.

But as Chapter 4 demonstrated, the facts that underlie this reasoning are questionable. The relationship between risk of democratic breakdown and legislative fragmentation is not linear for presidential democracies, so reducing the number of parties will not necessarily reduce the risk of democratic breakdown. Similarly, there is no empirical support for the notions that it is harder for presidents to form coalitions when party fragmentation is high, that a presidential democracy is more fragile when no coalitions are formed, or that single-party minority presidential governments are less legislatively effective than coalition governments. It thus seems that presidential democracies adopting "permissive" electoral systems, such as those based on proportional representation, do not really pay a price in terms of the government's ability to govern. They can keep electoral rules that allow for a high degree of representativeness without increasing the probability of democratic breakdown.

As for the way presidents are elected, there are two aspects I would like to emphasize here. The first concerns the rules for the election of presidents; the second concerns the timing of presidential elections relative to legislative elections.

One of the advantages of presidentialism is that it provides for one office with a national constituency. This may become especially important in situations of high political volatility and heterogeneity, since the presidency may operate as

a force toward unity and integration. Yet in order for this to occur, the rules for electing the president must be carefully crafted so that they provide an incentive for integration rather than a reinforcement of existing political, ethnic, geographic, or religious cleavages. There is no one formula that may be generally applied in designing a presidential electoral system in a context of heterogeneity. This is so because, as Horowitz (2000) has shown, the best system depends on the specific distribution of cleavages across the national territory. One mechanism, for instance, requires that contestants seek votes outside of their narrowly defined constituencies in order to be successful. Horowitz (2000) discusses the system used in Nigeria under its 1979 constitution, where the winner of the presidential election must obtain a plurality of the national vote and at least one fourth of the vote in at least two thirds of the states. Another mechanism, also discussed by Horowitz, is the so-called alternative vote used in Sri Lanka's presidential elections, where voters are asked to rank all contestants except one. If no candidate wins an outright majority of the votes then all but the top two candidates are eliminated, and the second and subsequent preferences on the ballots are counted until one candidate garners more than 50% of the vote. Thus, to the extent that no candidate can expect to obtain a majority in the initial balloting, all candidates will have an incentive to reach beyond their own constituencies in order to be ranked relatively high in other groups' preferences. A functionally similar procedure – the two-round presidential election – has been adopted in most Latin American countries. Here elections are held and, if no candidate obtains more than half of the votes, a second round takes place with the participation of the two candidates with the highest number of votes. This differs from the alternative vote in that voters rank only up to their second choice and the ranking occurs at a later stage. These are just some examples of a menu of possibilities that may, in fact, be quite large. What they have in common is using the presidential election to mitigate some potentially problematic cleavages and serve as a force that generates incentives for integration.

Presidential and legislative elections can occur always at the same time (as in Costa Rica) or always at different times (as in Brazil during the 1946–1964 democratic period), or they may alternate (as in the United States, where a legislative term of two years and a presidential term of four years means that elections coincide every four years). There is some evidence that simultaneous elections tend to reduce the number of political parties (Shugart 1995; Golder 2006). Presidents generate large coattail effects, thus aiding the election of legislators of their own parties. This provides a strong incentive for individual legislators to join parties with a real chance of generating a viable presidential candidate, and it may ultimately help produce presidents from parties controlling a relatively

large share of seats in the legislature. Thus, if fragmentation of the party system is a concern, then the stipulation of concurrent presidential and legislative elections may help reduce the number of political parties in competition without the need to implement a restrictive electoral system for legislative elections. The price, however, is that a system of concurrent presidential and legislative elections deprives voters of the opportunity to signal their approval or disapproval of government performance in the middle of the presidential term.

Legislative and Agenda Powers of the Presidency

As we saw in Chapter 4, almost all presidential constitutions give some legislative powers to the presidency. The most important powers include veto, decree, and urgency powers, as well as the government's exclusive power to introduce legislation in some specified areas.

Veto power stems from the provisions that legislative acts must be signed by the president in order for them to become law and that the president may refuse to sign them. When the president can refuse the bill only in its entirety, the president has only *complete* or *total* veto power; when the president may object to portions of the bill, the president has *partial* veto power. But the terminology here is misleading: since presidents with partial veto power are not presented with an all-or-nothing choice, they have more ways to influence legislation and hence are more powerful. When the president vetoes a bill (either partially or completely), it is often sent back to the legislature, which is then given the opportunity to reaffirm its will and override the presidential veto. The legislative majority required for veto override is usually larger than the majority required for the approval of the bill in the first place. Most presidential constitutions (including the U.S. Constitution and the majority of the Latin American presidential constitutions) require a two-thirds majority of the legislature in order to override a presidential veto. If such a majority exists, the president is required to sign the bill and it then becomes law.

Decree power refers to the executive's ability to issue new laws, a power that exists in many constitutions, both presidential and parliamentary. Decree power varies widely (Carey and Shugart 1998). First, it varies with respect to the areas where decrees may be issued. Some constitutions allow only for presidential "executive orders" – that is, purely administrative proclamations pertaining to the implementation of laws already approved by the legislature. Others allow for presidential decrees under special circumstances, which are often sufficiently vague that presidential action is possible in virtually any area (e.g., "relevance," "urgency," "economic or financial matters when so required by the national

interest").[1] Second, presidential decree power varies with respect to its time frame. Presidential decrees typically enter into effect as soon as they are issued. In a few cases, their effect is delayed for a specified time during which the legislature is given the opportunity to reject them. Finally, executive decrees in some cases become permanent laws, whereas in other cases they expire if not approved by the legislature within some time frame.

In many presidential constitutions, presidents are allowed to declare a bill "urgent." When this is done, the assembly is required to vote on the bill within a relatively short time period (e.g., 30 or 45 days), and legislative work is paralyzed until such a vote takes place. The president is thus empowered to directly affect the order of business of the legislative body.

Finally, as also discussed Chapter 4, many constitutions grant the government exclusive power to introduce certain legislation. Presidentialism in the United States is virtually unique among presidential democracies in requiring all legislation to be initiated from within the congress. In most other presidential democracies, the role of the assembly in initiating legislation is limited in some areas, such as setting the size of the armed forces, creating jobs, structuring public administration, and (most importantly) establishing the budget. These bills can normally be amended by the assembly even if constrained by provisions stipulating, for example, that it can only propose amendments that do not increase the deficit or the overall level of spending. Yet even when granted the power to freely amend, the assembly is dealing with an agenda that is set by the president and not by itself.

All these features of presidential agenda powers are rather consequential, and they combine to yield institutionally weaker or stronger presidencies. Although there are many who believe that strong presidents create problems by clashing with congress and eventually generating government or even regime crises, the results presented in previous chapters join others (Figueiredo and Limongi 2000a,b; Siavelis 2000; Amorim Neto, Cox, and McCubbins 2003; Jones and Hwang 2005) in pointing out that strong presidencies are not necessarily bad for the operation of presidential constitutions. For instance, the strong presidential agenda powers established by the post-authoritarian constitutions of Brazil and Chile are largely responsible for the high level of legislative success of their governments. The case of Brazil seems to be most relevant here given the large number of centrifugal elements built into the system, which in combination with presidentialism might suggest a highly volatile and ungovernable

[1] Decree power under "special" circumstances should not be confused with constitutional emergency powers, which allow for the temporary suspension of some constitutional provisions in specified circumstances.

country: a federally structured country with economically diverse regions, weak political parties, and an electoral system for the assembly (open-list proportional representation) with low barriers to entry and features that make state governors influential over party decisions. Nonetheless, legislative behavior in the Brazilian congress has exhibited remarkably high levels of partisanship, with presidents capable of relying on a stable coalition that supports them on most of their legislative agenda (Figueiredo and Limongi 1999). This unexpected pattern is, in fact, a function of the president's legislative powers granted by the 1988 constitution, which include all of the powers discussed previously: partial veto, decree power, the power to request urgency in the consideration of specific legislation, and the sole power to initiate budget legislation.[2]

In their various papers, Figueiredo and Limongi have uncovered the mechanism whereby the powers of the presidency positively affect the capacity of presidential governments to act in the face of many adverse institutional conditions. The concentration of legislative powers in the executive (coupled with a highly centralized decision-making structure in the legislature) renders the individual and independent action of legislators futile. For them, the rational course of legislative behavior is to follow their parties' directives in congress, since this is the only way they will be able to influence public policies and to obtain the resources needed in seeking from the electorate a renewal of their mandates. It is this centralization of the decision-making process, these authors argue, that explains the high degree of legislative success of Brazilian presidents, a success not unlike those obtained in parliamentary democracies.

Thus, institutionally strong presidents are not necessarily detrimental to the functioning of presidential democracies. Attempts to weaken presidents on the ground that they usurp the assembly's rightful power (see Croissant 2003) should be considered in light of the benefits they bring about in terms of government performance.

The superior survival record of parliamentary democracies over presidential democracies has long been explained in terms of the fundamental difference between these two systems: the separation of executive and legislative authorities

[2] The legislative success of the government is also aided by the highly centralized organization of congress, with party leaders wielding enough power to bypass (when necessary) the work of permanent committees and set the agenda for the floor. This organization, of course, is not a constitutional feature and resulted from a decision of the assembly itself. However, it is essential for allowing the president to form stable legislative coalitions with a relatively small number of political parties, despite all the forces that conspire against such stability. See Figueiredo and Limongi (2000a,b), Amorim Neto (2002), and Armijo, Faucher, and Dembinska (2004).

in presidentialism and their fusion in parliamentarism. A number of consequences are supposed to follow from this difference, leading (in one way or another) to conflict between government and assembly in presidentialism or to their cooperation in parliamentarism. A "majoritarian imperative" that supposedly characterizes parliamentary regimes is thought to provide adequate legislative support for the government. This same imperative provides ineluctable incentives for political parties to cooperate with the government and for individual members of parliament to comply with party directives. As a consequence, highly disciplined parties tend to cooperate with each other in forming legislative coalitions that governments will emerge from and then rely upon for their existence. Crises do occur, but they can be resolved by the formation of a new government or the emergence of a new majority.

Since these are consequences of the fusion of powers characteristic of parliamentarism, they should be absent in presidentialism. And in fact, nothing in presidential regimes guarantees that the government will be able to count on an adequate basis of support in congress. As a result, incentives to cooperate are supposed to be few: political parties, it is thought, have no reason to bear the cost of incumbency at election and hence will try to distance themselves from the government; and individual members of congress face no risk of losing their jobs regardless of how they vote. Unless elections return a majority for the president, presidential democracies are destined to experience stalemate and will ultimately break down.

Although I do not deny that parliamentary regimes live longer than presidential regimes, this book has taken issue with the idea that this difference is due to the separation or fusion of executive and legislative authorities. It has shown that many of the results that are viewed as following from this principle should not be expected as a matter of either logic or empirics. More importantly, I showed that the conditions that should be conducive to the death of presidential democracies – were the conventional view of presidentialism correct – actually have no impact on the survival of these regimes. The higher instability of presidential democracies can be entirely attributed to their authoritarian legacy; it has nothing to do with their constitutional structure.

We therefore have no reason to be concerned with the fact that many recent democracies have chosen presidential systems. Such concern stems from the fear that new democracies face the daunting task of restructuring their economies, which can generate profound strains on the system. These difficulties are thought to be compounded to the point of paralysis, or worse, when executives must navigate the complications of a divided control of government and the explosive potential for deadlocks.

The analysis in this book shows that these fears are unfounded. With the possible exceptions of Peru under Fujimori (Kenney 2004) and Ecuador in 2000, none of the democratic regimes that emerged in the past ten or fifteen years have succumbed to the strains of what we could call a crisis of governability. At the same time, most have made significant strides in restructuring their economies. Perhaps the pace of change has not been to the satisfaction of some, thus generating frustration and a sense that not enough is being done. But the fact remains that recent presidential democracies have accomplished quite a bit under a range of political conditions. There is no reason – at least no reason intrinsic to the nature of the form of government – why they should not continue to accomplish as much.