Fragmentation of Presidential Elections and Governability Crises in Latin America

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Abstract: Part for the literature views high numbers of presidential candidates as a threat to political stability in presidential democracies. A contradictory model proposes that an overconcentration of the presidential party system is problematic. Both models are hard to reconcile. We approach this puzzle by arguing that the relationship of the level of fragmentation to governability crises is curvilinear: both the very low and very high effective numbers of presidential candidates increase the risk of governability crisis. We test these theoretical claims through ordered logit model drawing on a sample of 108 presidencies in Latin America between 1978 and 2013 using an ordinal index of the intensity of crisis as the dependent variable. We explore the operation of the theorized causal mechanisms through case studies and formulate implications for the design of presidential electoral rules drawing on the debate contrasting runoff and plurality rules.

I. Introduction

While full reversals of democratic order have been rare in Latin American countries since their transitions to democracy, other less pernicious forms of political instability have become common. Challenges to sitting presidents through the threat of impeachment or coups are sometimes viewed as the primary manifestations of governability crisis (Valenzuela 2004), though others consider it as a flexibilization of the presidential regimes and thus a way of how to oust an unpopular president without a democratic breakdown (Marsteinredet and Berntzen 2008; see also Hochstetler and Samuels 2011). Our conceptualization of governability crisis is broader in that it also incorporates other forms of conflictual relationships between the president and the congress.

Our aim is to advance the institutionalist research agenda which views the patterns of political competition as central to explaining governability crisis. In particular, we focus on the issue of presidential election fragmentation and presidential electoral rules where conflicting interpretations regarding their impact on governability have been advanced in the literature. Are
more fragmented presidential contests associated with the use of runoff rules, or rather less fragmented elections typically governed by plurality rules more conducive to governability crises in Latin America?

This question draws on institutionalist theories which has come to blame the wave of “interrupted presidencies” on a combination of the flawed logic of Latin American presidentialism (scarce incentives to construct coalitions) and public grievances generating social protests which the popularly elected presidents are unable to address (Valenzuela 2008: 12). This line of argument builds on the critical observations on the nature of presidentialism: double legitimacy (as both legislative and executive branches are elected in the direct elections and separately, rigid mandate (as now simple procedure to either remove the president or dissolve the Congress is available) (Linz 1990) for the survival of democracy (Linz 1987; Linz and Valenzuela 1994), especially in its explosive combination with multipartyism which creates conditions for political deadlock (Mainwaring 1993) and, consequently, for an extra-constitutional solution, often in the form of military intervention and coups (Stepan and Skach 1993).

This view has not gone unchallenged. A global comparison of presidential regimes reveals that legislative fragmentation does increase the probability of a non-democratic transition only up to around four effective parties, but the probability subsequently declines in more fragmented party systems (Cheibub 2007; Chasquetti 2001). While party system fragmentation might not be associated with the probability of a full-blown breakdown of democratic order, comparative evidence from Latin America, however, indicates that it indeed generates presidential breakdowns (Alvarez and Marsteintredet 2010). This has been evidenced in the case of Ecuador by Mejía and Polga-Hecimovich (2010) or Bolivia (Buitrago 2010), where sitting presidents were repeatedly expelled due to the erosion of legislative coalitions or their lack of, combined with the pressure of the social movements derived in the interruptions of the presidential mandates. For the cases of impeachment, Pérez-Liñán (2007) shows that the absence of a “legislative shield” makes presidents more vulnerable and thus can explain their removal.

As the patterns of party competition have been viewed as the cornerstone of institutionalist explanations, the academic debate has revolved around the question which institutional configurations best safeguard democratic governance. Especially the choice of presidential electoral systems (runoff or plurality) has become a hotly contested issue because this institutional arrangement has been found to powerfully shape the patterns of electoral competition. A variant of the institutionalist argument therefore suggests that presidential electoral systems are in part responsible for governability crises, although there is little agreement over the most suitable system. The use of runoff electoral rules, and especially the fact that the second round had taken place, is associated with higher legislative fragmentation and ideological polarization which in turn strongly correlate with the occurrence of presidential breakdowns making the absolute majority rule “extremely damaging to democracy” (Chasquetti 2001: 49). Both the necessity and convenience of the presidential runoff was questioned based on the possibility of outcome reversal between the first and the second round (Pérez Liñán 2006). Such situations, especially when they occur in weakly institutionalized party systems, are associated with the magnitude of governability crises given the false impression of greater popular mandate and legitimacy.
However, no less convincing arguments are presented by the opponents of the plurality rule who suggest that runoff elections promote democratic consolidation and their introduction in Latin American countries has been a positive institutional innovation (Colomer 2007, Lehoucq 2008: 253, McClintock 2013). Opening up the political competition to political actors that challenge traditional (and often undemocratic) parties as well as greater ideological moderation and wider popular acceptance of the winning candidate are among the principal mechanisms linking runoff rules to better democratic governance.

Concomitantly, although there is substantial evidence that plurality serves to reduce the fragmentation of both legislative and presidential contests while runoff rules promote it, there are conflicting theoretical interpretations as to the convenience of this fragmentation. While some view the proliferation of presidential candidates as detrimental to democratic politics (Jones 2004, Golder 2006), others argue that instead overconcentration of the presidential party system derived from the plurality rule produces unfavourable political outcomes and a decrease in democracy scores (McClintock 2013).

Curiously, no evidence has so far been provided linking the level of fragmentation of presidential elections to governability outcomes. We therefore fill this lacuna by providing the first direct test of this relationship. We advance the research agenda by arguing that the relationship between party system fragmentation and governability crisis is not linear and by focusing on highly concentrated presidential elections (low levels of fragmentation), we show that the relation is actually curvilinear.

First, we provide an overview of the debate on the origins and political effects of presidential election fragmentation developing two theoretical models with contradictory predictions. Second, we test the implications of the model using data from competitive Latin American presidential elections since 1980. Next we discuss the plausibility of the causal mechanisms suggested by the theory using case study evidence. Our empirical results suggest that both very low and very high fragmentation in the presidential elections is pernicious for the governability, though for different reasons.

II. Electoral systems and Presidential Election Fragmentation

II. 1 The causes and effects of presidential election fragmentation

Comparative research has identified important direct effects of presidential election fragmentation on party politics which in turn affect governability outcomes in presidential democracies. There is increasing evidence that the degree of presidential election fragmentation exercises a coattails effect on the level of legislative fragmentation. In presidential democracies, the dominance of presidential over legislative elections links legislative candidates to their party's presidential candidate (Samuels 2002: 468). As the partisan political resources such as national media attention or campaign finance concentrate on the presidential race and voters receive their cues about legislative elections from the presidential race, legislative candidates are likely to coordinate their campaigns with one of the leading presidential candidates (Hicken, Stoll 2011: 848, Golder 2006). Consequently, comparing a large number of democracies Golder (2006) reports a reductive effect of temporally proximate presidential
elections on the effective number of legislative parties when the presidential contest is concentrated, and an opposite effect in situations of presidential races with a large number of candidates. The format of the presidential race was also found to affect legislative party systems through a “cross-district” mechanism as the competitiveness of local party systems varies greatly and less nationalized party systems are indicative of weak coordination between candidates (Hicken, Stoll 2011). The coattails effect of presidential election on legislative contests does not stop at the level of party system fragmentation and nationalization. Presidential elections under presidentialism also reduce the spatial distance between the major legislative parties and their more centrist positions are also more likely when both types of elections are held concurrently (Williams-Wyche 2014).

Explanations of the degree of presidential election fragmentation have focused on both socio-demographic and institutional factors. Institutional explanations have stressed two variables. The timing of presidential relative to legislative elections matters as concurrent or temporally close elections reduce the number of presidential candidates. Reelection rules also shape presidential races as the contests with incumbent presidents running feature significantly fewer effective presidential candidates (Jones 1999, Jones 2004). However, perhaps the most powerful source of fragmentation is the electoral rule used as runoff systems substantially increase the number of first-round presidential candidates relative to the plurality rule. On one hand, this happens because the second round creates incentives for weaker candidates to participate in the election with a hope of reaching the second round and potentially reversing the outcome (Linz 1994: 22; Valenzuela 1996: 20). Also, even smaller parties without much prospects of winning are likely to run their own candidates under runoff rules because their sole presence in the contest increases their bargaining power between the two rounds exchanging their support for another candidate for policy or office concessions (Shugart, Carey 1992: 210). On the other hand, runoff reduces the incentives for strategic voting because voters anticipate the second round and cast a sincere vote for their most preferred candidate in the first round (Mainwaring, Shugart 1997). There is considerable empirical support for these propositions as presidential elections with runoff rules feature substantially higher effective numbers of presidential candidates than plurality elections (Shugart, Carey 1992, Mainwaring, Shugart 1997, Jones 1999, Carey 2003: 14, Payne et al. 2003). Yet, there is disagreement over the causal importance of runoff rules. Part of the literature stipulates that for runoff rule to exercise such effect it must be used in ethnically fractionalized societies. Thus, Amorim Neto and Cox (1997) find that only elections with runoff rules which are at the same time held in fractionalized societies increase the effective number of presidential candidates, while Golder (2006) shows that social heterogeneity increases the number of presidential candidates when presidents are elected by runoff but not when they are elected by plurality rule. To the contrary, Jones (2004) reports that purely institutional models outperform those that use such interactive specifications.

II.2. The Case Against Presidential Election Fragmentation

The view that the fragmentation of presidential competition is conducive to political crises potentially threatening the survival of democracy is supported by two main arguments. Since presidential elections exercise a coattails effect on the level of legislative fragmentation, a
The high number of presidential candidates and runoff elections that produce it have been viewed as a threat to the survival of presidential democracies (Golder 2006: 47). This view draws on the arguments that emphasize the conflict-prone coexistence of presidentialism and multipartyism. Extreme party system fragmentation not only sets the stage for potential executive-legislative deadlocks but may also exacerbate governance problems because it works against party system consolidation and institutionalization (Mainwaring 1999: 338). High levels of legislative fragmentation also affect which types of presidential candidates are elected. Large effective number of legislative parties across Latin America are conducive to the success of political outsiders and ex-presidents, both of which signal governance problems and party system crises, although the causal arrow probably points both ways (Corrales 2008: 19). The proliferation of such presidential candidates both precipitates and is conditioned by party system deinstitutionalization, polarization of the electorate and the reemergence of caudillistic leaderships.

Whatever the precise nature of the link between fragmented presidential contests and political instability, this view can be summarized as follows: “In sum, the more fragmented presidential competition is, the more problems are likely in presidential democracies.” (Jones 2004: 75). Finally, a large number of presidential candidates presents governability problems on its own because it reduces the identifiability of the governing options (i.e. winning candidates) (Jones 2004: 75). This is especially pronounced under runoff election rules where the first-round proliferation of many candidates prevents the voters from making an efficient choice (Shugart, Carey 1999: 215).

The debate about the pitfalls of presidential fragmentation has naturally revolved around the type of electoral rules used to elect presidents. Whether plurality or runoff system is used is perhaps the most important variable shaping the levels of fragmentation. Switching to plurality rules for presidential elections has been recommended on the grounds that it reduces fragmentation in both legislative and presidential elections because the presidential contest induces voters to vote for legislative candidates of the same party (Mainwaring 1999: 338). Presidential runoff elections were also found to increase the levels ideological polarization in presidential regimes compared to plurality rules (Williams-Wyche 2014: 173).

Furthermore, substantial case study evidence emphasizes the deleterious effects of runoff rules. In Peru, the runoff contributed to the inability of the opposition to unite against Alberto Fujimori in 2000 because it gave diverse opposition parties the hope to place second in the first round and reverse the result in the second (Levitsky, Cameron 2003:18). The Peruvian 1990 election which saw Fujimori elected after outcome inversion between the first and second rounds is often cited as an example of the runoff facilitating the election of political outsiders responsible for future governability crises (Levitsky, Cameron 2003: 7)

II.3. The Case Against Presidential Election Concentration

A contradictory model suggests that extremely concentrated presidential and legislative contests in Latin America are the problem rather than the solution. Some Latin American countries have retained “duopolies” of traditional and undemocratic parties basing their electoral strength on widespread clientelistic networks and caudillistic appeals (McClintock 2013). These
duopolies are exclusionary because they stifle the development of political competition. Presidential plurality rule becomes one of the primary shields of such concentrated party systems because it prevents new candidates and parties from entering the political arena. Among the countries that use plurality (Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Panama and Venezuela) only Panama has improved its democratic performance while all the others have witnessed significant declines in their levels of democracy over the last decade (McClintock 2013).

The proponents of the runoff rule, supported by the growing tendency in the region to adopt this electoral system, offer various arguments that, in their view, outweigh its problems and plurality advocates’ critiques. The main arguments can be summarized in the following way (Martínez 2004; Crespo 2009; McClintock 2013). First, the second round creates a greater popular support and legitimacy for the candidate that obtains 50% plus one vote. Second, runoff favours the forging of coalitions and creates more incentives for coalition governments and thus strengthens the prospects for governability. Third, it articulates a bipolar competition, often in the form of two electoral block, and implies an ideological moderation. Opening the political competition to new parties and candidates through the use of runoff rules is especially important because it moderates the ideological appeal of leftist parties.

The advocates of the runoff electoral system further do not dispute some of the problems of the runoff rule put forward by its critics. For example, the fact that it produces more fragmented presidential contests, but argue that it does not generate further legislative fragmentation (Martínez 2006: 13). If legislative fragmentation exists it is not a necessary evil by itself because it can be efficiently managed in a multiparty, yet bipolar, political competition which is helped by the use of runoff rules (Martínez 2006: 16).

In a recent paper, McClintock (2013) argues about the advantages that the runoff rule has for the democracy in the Latin American presidential systems. The argument is twofold. On the one hand, the runoff rule is more inclusive in the sense that it permits the people to “vote by heart” in the first round and it permits the inclusion of the previously excluded parties or candidates in a closed party system controlled by conservative elites and clientelistic networks. She exemplifies this situation with the recent evolution in the cases of Brasil, El Salvador or Chile where runoff rule allowed the leftist candidates to obtain the presidency. On the other hand, the runoff rule promotes the ideological moderation of the newcomers to the system as it obliges the candidates/parties to attract the centrist voters in order to get elected. Put this way, these parties are forced to resign on the radical or antisystem components of their party platforms.

Runoff rules also decrease the threat of executive-legislative deadlock in Latin America because they help elect presidents who are both more likely to wield the support of the median voter and the median legislator in congress (Colomer 2007). Plurality rule risks the election of a Condorcet-loser (a candidate who would be defeated in any pairwise contest with another candidate) while such scenario is ruled out under majority runoff because the second round winner cannot be the least preferred candidate.

This mechanism was found to be operative in Latin American countries. The ideological moderation of the PT in Brazil is in part attributable to the use of runoff elections which induced the party to gradually shift to a centrist program seeking to abandon a purely working-class constituency and rely on less ideological appeals to voters (Hunter 2010: 187). Viewed from this perspective, the condition of a runoff electoral system, weak parties and high levels of
legislative fragmentation is an important part of the explanation why the PT had been pushed to moderate its message, seek alliances across the political spectrum and pursue a vote-seeking strategy in order to capture the presidency (Hunter 2010: 25). The substitution of plurality by runoff rule in Uruguay since 1996 had similar effects by concentrating the ideological and political offers within the party system (Lanzaro 2010: 215). The runoff rule reinforced the catch-all character of Frente Amplio, the leftist challenger party coalition to the traditional two-party system which gradually transformed into a non-polarized two-bloc party competition (Lanzaro 2010: 211).

II.4. Theoretical implications

Our principal aim is to judge between the two aforementioned competing theoretical models. Does concentration of the presidential contest generate governability problems, or are these more common under situations of presidential election fragmentation? Both models can be directly tested in a linear framework. An alternative is to view both theoretical arguments as pointing towards extreme values of presidential election fragmentation producing undesirable outcomes. Oftentimes, the arguments linking fragmentation and governability are posed as ideal-typical situations where the extremity (very high or low fragmentation) captures the essence of governability crisis while intermediate values can be deduced to reduce such risk. Our model specification, explained below, allows for such a possibility. We therefore test two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: As the effective number of presidential candidates increases (decreases), the probability of governance crisis rises (declines).

Hypothesis 2: As the effective number of presidential candidates increases from minimum, the probability of governance crisis declines up to a certain point, and increases after this point towards maximum.

III. Data analysis

The theoretical implications are tested on a sample of 108 Latin American presidencies that have originated in competitive and direct elections from 1978, and that have ended by the end of 2013. We excluded the three presidencies of presidents who died in office as well as presidencies of those who were not elected to their office in direct elections but finished the mandates of directly elected presidents who stepped down. To operationalize governability crises, we draw on a simple ordinal index developed by Pérez-Liñán (2006) creating a four-point scale between normal politics on one side and military interventions to oust the president or disband the congress at the other extreme. The lowest score (1) is assigned to presidencies operating under “normal politics” where normal institutional channels were respected. A score of (2) is assigned to presidencies during which the legitimacy of either branch was challenged by the other and called for its dissolution (or impeachment of the president). The score of (3) captures presidencies were such constitutional threat was executed, and the highest score (4) is reserved for such presidencies where the military intervened in the confrontation between the
Our main independent variable - presidential election fragmentation - is operationalized by the conventional measure of the Effective number of presidential candidates (ENPC). This index divides 1 by the sum of squared fractions of votes received by each candidate in the presidential election. The index is squared to produce the variable testing the plausibility of a curvilinear relationship. We control for three further institutional factors that have been found to exercise effects on governability crises. Runoff electoral system is a dummy variable measuring whether (1) the president was elected using a direct two-round electoral system (either majority with a closed second round or qualified plurality), or not (0). A dummy variable Outcome inversion captures the situation in which the first round winner did not win the second round. We also expect the Margin of victory of the first round winner over the second candidate, measured as the difference in percentage points, to exercise a negative effect on the dependent variable.

Table 1. Determinants of governability crises (ordered logistic regression)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective number of presidential candidates (ENPC)</td>
<td>-2.332 * (1.383)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENPC*ENPC</td>
<td>.342 ** (.163)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (current USD)</td>
<td>-.0002 (.0001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP annual growth</td>
<td>-.184 (.126)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gini index</td>
<td>.082 (.052)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runoff electoral system</td>
<td>-.720 (.582)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margin of victory</td>
<td>-.029 * (.017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome inversion</td>
<td>1.085 (.830)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant 1</td>
<td>.045 (4.034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant 2</td>
<td>.841 (4.119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant 3</td>
<td>2.116 (4.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pesudo-R²</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors (clustered by country) in parentheses. * Significant at 0.10 level, ** at 0.05, *** at 0.01.

Of course, institutional determinants do not provide an exhaustive explanation of constitutional deadlocks. Non-institutional approaches focus on bad economic results (high inflation, low economic growth, high unemployment), an implication in a corruption scandal by
the president, or social mobilization represented by mass anti-governmental protests and strikes (Álvarez and Marsteinredet 2010). In this way, Hochstetler (2008) underscores the importance of a “street pressure/politics”, i.e., the mobilization of civil society actors in the fate of the sitting presidents. These protests are found in the mutual interaction with a legislative action that proceeds with the impeachment of a given president.

For these reasons, the model controls for three economic variables that reflect potential disenchantment with economic performance during the presidency. We include both the GDP per capita (in current US dollars) as well as a year-on-year change in GDP. In order to avoid potential endogeneity problems, both are averaged over all full years of the presidency when the dependent variable takes on the lowest value (1), or in the year preceding the crisis event when the dependent variable takes on any of the three values. The final control measures the extent of economic inequality by Gini index.

Table 1 shows the results of an ordered logistic regression with the index of governability crisis as the dependent variable. The results are encouraging for the hypothesis regarding a curvilinear relationship between fragmentation and the incidence of governability crises. Adding the squared term both increases the explanatory power of the model and points in the expected direction as both low and high levels of fragmentation are associated with an increased probability of crisis. The coefficients on all three economic variables point in the hypothesized direction but do not reach conventional levels of significance. The same applies to the coefficients on the Outcome inversion and Runoff electoral system variables. Lower margins of victory of the winning candidates significantly increase the likelihood of a crisis occurring during a presidency.

Figure 2. Probabilities of the four values of the governability crisis variable across the range of the effective number of presidential candidates

![Graph](image)

**Note:** Graph based on model 1. All other variables were held at their means, excepting the Runoff electoral system and Outcome inversion binary variables for which the modal value was set. CLARIFY software was used to produce the simulations (Tomz, Wittenberg, King 2003).
In order to visualize the curvilinear relationship between the level of fragmentation of presidential contest and the probability of governability crisis, figure 1 displays the predicted probability of each level of the dependent variable across the whole range of the effective number of presidential candidates (between a minimum of 1.6 and maximum of 6.9). The probabilities were produced using simulations by the CLARIFY software. The full line represents the probability of a presidency resulting in “normal politics” (values of 1). The probability rises from the minimum of 0.72 at the low end of the ENPC range to 0.89 when there are three effective presidential candidates. The probability of such a non-conflictual relationship between the president and legislature suffers decline with further increase in fragmentation. The extreme level of fragmentation is associated with almost an 85% chance (probability of 0.15) of any sort of governability crisis.

IV. Discussion

This paper advances the argument that the relationship between the presidential crisis and the number of presidential candidates is curvilinear. Thus, it makes two contributions to the theory which claims that negative relation takes places between the party system fragmentation and only at the upper end of the relation, i.e., where the number of parties in the systems is relatively high. On the one hand, we focus explicitly on the relation between the number of presidential candidates, its role and its relations with its own party, and the presidential survival. On the other hand, we posit that the relation is curvilinear and, therefore, the crisis-prone situations occur also where the number of presidential candidates is low. “Normal” politics is most frequent where the moderate number of candidates is around 3,5.

The mechanism that translates party fragmentation to governability crises has been put forward by the classical literature on the presidentialism in Latin America and reaffirmed by the recent studies on presidential crisis/interrupted presidencies. High fragmentation prevents the president from having its own “legislative shield” and exposes him to a (possible) process of impeachment. This normally occurs in the context of a congressional deadlock and the impossibility to advance the policies by the president. This, often combined with social mobilization and revelation of corruption scandals, creates the explosive environment for a constitutional crisis.

In the Andean countries (Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela), the interrupted presidencies resulted as a consequence of a refoundationalist vision of the president who had already announced constitutional changes before the presidential elections during the campaign. Those presidents rose to power amidst the crisis of the political party system and the traditional parties, obtaining ample popular mandate that permitted and “legitimized“ them to carry out these profound, structural changes. Thus, in all three case the newly elected presidents called for the elections Constituent Assembly. This in turn meant that the mandates of the democratically elected legislators was shortened and they were not allowed to accomplish their legislative period.

Second, in cases of instability such as Paraguay or Honduras, sparked by an over-concentration of the presidential party system, the party systems have been traditionally dominated by old, (over)institutionalized political parties and that did not allowed new parties to
emerge. In both cases, the traditional parties were located on the right of the ideological spectrum, possessing important clientelistic apparatus. Such systems have not been permeable to the leftist candidates (McClintock 2013) or to the right-to-left policy switches. Presidents who were removed before the end of their mandates, such as Fernando Lugo in Paraguay or Manuel Zelaya in Honduras, were seen as a factor destabilizing the status quo and a threat for the conservative elites. Both in Honduras and in Paraguay, as well as in Venezuela, the plurality electoral system works against the opening of the political competence as it incentivizes the concentration of party systems.

Third, intraparty conflict in traditionally strong, bipartisan, systems restricted by the use of plurality is likely to generate factional struggle over the access to power. For example, the dynamics of presidential removals occurring in Honduras or in Paraguay could in large part be attributed to the distribution of power within the main parties. In Honduras, Zelaya abandoned the traditional Liberal Party (Partido Liberal) and embarked on leftist policies much against the initial policy stance of his own party. Absent backing by important faction with his party, Zelaya remained exposed to a possible removal. Similarly, in Paraguay the intra-party factional conflict escalated to a level where the governing Colorado Party (Partido Colorado) called for an impeachment of its own sitting president Cubas in 1999.

Such cases differ substantially from those like Uruguay where the leftist Broad Front (Frente Amplio), was able to enter the traditional party system. The gradual insertion of a leftist challenger into the party system helped avoid presidential instability and executive-legislative conflict in the form of possible impeachment or dissolution of the Congress. The difference in part stems from the incentives for party institutionalization under more permissive runoff electoral rules. Frente Amplio, created in 1971 has had a long tradition of subnational politics, particularly in its stronghold, the capital of Montevideo. Also, the party went through a long process of institutionalization from a “coalition of parties” (coalición de partidos) to a “coalition party” (partido de coalición) (Lanzaro 2001 y 2004; Yaffé 2013). The Workers’ Party (Partido do Trabalhadores, PT) in Brazil followed similar pattern of incorporation into the party system. Both parties were

VI. Conclusion

The theoretical and practical implications of the argument are the following. First, the relationship between fragmentation of presidential elections and governability crises is not linear. This sheds new light on the line of arguments that emphasize the coattails effects of presidential elections. To the extent that concentrating the presidential contest has been advocated to avoid further legislative fragmentation and governability crises, this advice cannot be generalized over the board. There are risks associated with an extreme overconcentration of the party system. Rather, our findings parallel those that stipulate a curvilinear relationship between the levels of legislative fragmentation and probability of non-democratic transition.

Second, there are practical prescriptions as to the least crisis-prone presidential electoral system. While plurality rule significantly concentrates the presidential election, absolute majority tends in the opposite direction. The middle road adopted recently by five Latin American countries in the form of a runoff rules with a reduced threshold in the first round might
also be the most likely one to produce intermediate levels of fragmentation. This rule might avoid the overconcentration of the contest between two competing blocs by facilitating access of challenger parties to the presidency, while at same time safeguarding against proliferation of weak candidates.

In late 2013 the Nicaraguan Sandinista president Daniel Ortega announced a constitutional reform which allows presidential reelection without any term limits and reintroduces plurality rule for presidential election. Based on our findings these reforms do not bode well for Nicaraguan democratic governance. As both the fact of an incumbent president running for immediate reelection (Jones 2004) and the existence of a plurality rule significantly concentrate both the legislative and presidential party competition, these reforms are likely to further undermine political pluralism and set a path towards a one-party dominance.

VI. References
