

ROOTS OF COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES IN LATIN AMERICA: AN
ANALYSIS ON THE CAUSES OF COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM IN THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all of the Venezuelan youth, those whose childhoods and dreams were stolen, who saw their home crumble to pieces in front of their eyes and did not have the power to save it. This one is for us. ¡Por una Venezuela libre y democrática!

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ABSTRACT

The Latin America region has a long history of dictators, caudillos, military leaders, and other authoritarian forms of government that had an instrumental regard for democracy. Even after several waves of democratization, with consistent efforts to consolidate competitive systems of government and democratic ideals, regimes still found a way to eliminate checks and balances and erode democracy. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the victory of Western democracy, new authoritarian regimes have adapted to the growing international environment by changing tactics from direct coups and abuses of power to slow and incremental expansion of executive power vis-a-vis the other branches of government. By doing so, the regimes inhibit the separation of powers while hiding behind a facade of electoral democracy, thus creating an uneven playing field that compromises the opposition's ability to challenge the power of the incumbent. Despite multiple instances of this type of regime in the Latin American region, most of the research done on the topic focuses on nations in the European and Asian continents. For the research that does exist, scholars have studied specific countries and their democratic deterioration, but do little to put forth why this region is prone to authoritarian regimes. This paper puts forward four causes that, when combined, increase the likelihood of competitive regimes in Latin America: populism, weak political institutions, social structures that facilitate inequality, and a favorable international environment for hybrid regimes. From these, one can extrapolate on the nature of contemporary political climates, and take steps to prevent further democratic backsliding.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term competitive authoritarianism was coined by scholars Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way two decades ago. This concept refers to political systems in which competitive elections exist and are the primary means of obtaining power, but democratic institutions and ideals are violated to the extent of skewing the playing field and ensuring the state's incumbent stays in power.¹ After the end of the Cold War, dictatorships and military rulers all around the world began to collapse and were substituted by formal democratic institutions. However, the demise of these regimes did not always mean that democracy prevailed. Many countries continued to face violations to the democratic ideals, which led to the creation of these hybrid regimes in which democratic institutions exist, but are abused by incumbents, leading to elections that are not competitive, free, or fair.²

What then, led to the establishment of democracy in some countries and the establishment of competitive authoritarian regimes in others? Levitsky and Way argue that international factors, specifically Western leverage and linkage to the West, as crucial in the consolidation of democracy (or lack thereof). Western Leverage refers to a country's vulnerability to international pressure, their ability to avoid punishment from the West as a result of the violations of democratic institutions, and the potential impact a punishment could have on their country. This concept also includes the existence of

¹ Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

² Handlin, Samuel. "Observing Incumbent Abuses: Improving Measures of Electoral and Competitive Authoritarianism with New Data." *Democratization* 24, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 41–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2016.1149814>.

international “black nights” that counteract the power of the West and protect authoritarian regimes from potential punishments from Western democracies such as the United States and the European Union. The second dimension, linkage to the West, refers to the economic, social, political, and organizational ties among a specific country and their Western counterpart, whether that is the United States, the European Union, or both.³ Countries with both high leverage and high linkage to the West are likely to adhere to democratic ideals or even become a stable democracy, whereas countries that lack one, or even more so both of these factors are more likely to backslide into an authoritarian regime. Although this theory has a lot of examples to attest to its validity in nations in the European and Asian continents, it does not always hold true in the case of the Latin America region, which has had high linkage and leverage to the United States, but still continues to see the emergence of competitive authoritarian regimes.

In the case of Latin America, several other factors have been identified as reasons for democratic backsliding. For example, weak democratic institutions that allow for the concentration of power in the executive vis-a-vis the other branches of government can backslide democracy into a competitive authoritarian model.⁴ In a research focused on the Andes region, Levitsky and Loxton state that the catalyst behind competitive authoritarian regimes is populism. Populist leaders, due to their status as political outsiders, their anti-establishment platforms, and lack of experience with political institutions, tend to assault institutions of horizontal accountability and push already

³ Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁴ Pérez-Liñán, Aníbal, Nicolás Schmidt, and Daniela Vairo. “Presidential Hegemony and Democratic Backsliding in Latin America, 1925–2016.” *Democratization* 26, no. 4 (May 19, 2019): 606–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1566321>.

weakened democracies into authoritarian models.⁵ However, none of these factors alone can explain democratic backsliding, and furthermore, the emergence of competitive authoritarian regimes in this region as opposed to other parts of the world.

Despite multiple instances of competitive authoritarian regimes in the Latin America region, most of the research done in the topic focuses on specific countries and their democratic deterioration, or a specific factor that plays a role in the backsliding on democratic ideals. Scholars have studied the types of governments, the levels of authoritarianism displayed, and have classified each regime by their democratic practices, or lack thereof.⁶ However, there are still questions regarding why this region is prone to competitive authoritarian regimes. This paper puts forward the argument that it is not one cause, but several factors that when combined increase the likelihood of competitive regimes in Latin America: populism, weak political institutions, social structures that facilitate inequality, and a favorable international environment for hybrid regimes.

⁵ Levitsky, Steven, and James Loxton. "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes." *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (January 2013): 107–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.738864>.

⁶ Mainwaring, Scott and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán. 2014. *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

LATIN AMERICA IN CONTEXT

The Latin America region has a long history of dictators, caudillos, military leaders, and other authoritarian forms of government that regard democracy as an instrumental tool in their quest for power. This autocratic tradition started with the European colonies in the fifteenth century, and continued long after their fight for independence. The war for independence granted the region freedom from European rule, but instead created a chaotic political system in which strong personalistic leaders called caudillos dominated the region. Caudillos were charismatic regional warlords, who possessed an appearance of moral authority, and personified the ideals of society. Caudillos were autocratic in nature, strongmen whose authority transcended other institutions.⁷ As time went on and Latin America grew and developed, caudillos as a political figure began to disappear, but the new political leaders of Latin America continued to benefit from the tradition of machismo, violence, and authoritarian ruling, taking advantage of the political culture that granted them extended personal power and authority.

Despite their consistent efforts towards the creation of a democratic system, the caudillismo tradition, with its strong personalistic charismatic leaders, persisted. As a result, democracy in Latin America has always been viewed as “fragile, temporary, and superficial in context.”⁸ The collapse of the Soviet Union, and the third wave of democracy that came with it, marked a change in perspective that influenced the political landscape of Latin America. The end of the Cold War led to an increase in democratic

⁷ Sondrol, Paul. “The Presidentialist Tradition in Latin America.” *International Journal of Public Administration* 28, no. 5–6 (May 2005): 517–30. <https://doi.org/10.1081/PAD-200055210>.

⁸ Smith, Peter H. and Sells, Cameron J. *Democracy in Latin America: Political Change in Comparative Perspective* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

ideals, which, along with the subsequent dominance of the West, raised the cost of dictatorship, creating strong incentives for countries to develop formal democratic institutions.⁹ In the region of Latin America, this increase in democratic ideals was met with an increased economic performance, decreased polarization, and the strong commitment of political elites to democracy.¹⁰ All of these factors combined to create the perfect environment for democracy to thrive, and explain the wave of democratization that took place in the last decades of the twentieth century.

In Latin America, however, true democracy was short-lived, and a slow process of democratic backsliding started. Democratic backsliding refers to the debilitation of political institutions that sustain democratic values.¹¹ This process can take many forms, as different actors can start the backsliding by different means of erosion of checks and balances, restricting the power of the institutions meant to maintain democracy. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the victory of Western democratic ideals, drastic authoritarian measures—such as coups, military regimes, and election day voting fraud—were chastised and faced the possibility of international backlash. Therefore, authoritarian political actors switched gears and turned to milder but equally undemocratic measures such as promissory coups, executive aggrandizement and strategic electoral manipulation.¹² Due to new undemocratic practices, scholars began to

⁹ Levitsky, Steven, and James Loxton. 2013. “Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes.” *Democratization* 20, no. 1: 107–36.

¹⁰ Hagopian, Frances, and Scott P. Mainwaring. *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

¹¹ Pérez-Liñán, Aníbal, Schmidt, Nicolás and Vairo, Daniela. “Presidential Hegemony and Democratic Backsliding in Latin America, 1925–2016.” *Democratization* 26, no. 4 (May 19, 2019): 606–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1566321>.

¹² Bermeo, Nancy. “On Democratic Backsliding.” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 (2016): 5–19. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012>.

note that despite being labeled democracies due to the existence of elections and other political institutions, many regimes were better conceived as belonging to the family of authoritarianism. By creating an advantageous playing field, political agents ensure their power while maintaining the image of democracy, blocking the opposition from ever rising to power. This type of regime, then, can be categorized under competitive authoritarianism.

DEFINING COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM

As previously stated, competitive authoritarian regimes can be defined as hybrid regimes in which formal democratic institutions are viewed as means of obtaining and retaining power.¹³ These regimes, which are also known as electoral authoritarian regimes, combine the existence of democratic institutions with constant violations of democratic standards. By doing so, competitive authoritarian regimes hide behind the facade of representative democracy, while the incumbent abuses the power of the state and creates an uneven playing field that ensures their future victory. The system is therefore called competitive authoritarian, because despite the existence of competition, the extent to which the opposition is able to compete is greatly compromised.

Although it is true that competitive authoritarian regimes fall short of full authoritarianism, they are closer to authoritarianism than they will ever be to democracy. While some democracies are characterized by low levels of accountability and abusive executives, they still meet the basic standards for democracy—i.e. officials elected through fair and open elections with a great majority of the population voting, and individual protection of civil rights as well as the rule of law.¹⁴ Competitive authoritarian governments, despite being elected freely and democratically, actively seek to suppress the opposition and the power of other democratic institutions, constantly violating individual rights as well as the rule of law. The incumbent centralizes power in the executive branch of government, restricting the power given to the legislative and

¹³ Levitsky, Steven, and Loxton, James. “Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes.” *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (January 2013): 107–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.738864>.

¹⁴ Mainwaring, Scott and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán. 2014. *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

judiciary branch, therefore eliminating any checks and balances that could impede their autocratic ruling. By undermining the institutions that uphold democracy, these previously competitive regimes then turn authoritarian in nature, incrementing their abuses as they continue to try to hold on to power.

Democratic institutions are kept with the purpose of creating the image of democratic rule, hiding the authoritarian nature of the government. Elections therefore become a facade, a tool used by the incumbents to distract opposition members, pacify the people, and hide behind the idea of popular support. The incumbent utilizes manipulative tactics to continue winning elections, abusing the power granted by the people to their advantage. These abuses can take the form of using government funds for the incumbents campaign, harassment of the opposition, keeping candidates off the voting ballot, manipulation of electoral authorities, restricting voter registration, intimidation of voters, restrict the freedom of press of the media, hampering media access, and other large-scale appropriation of state resources.¹⁵ Despite playing the game of elections, the government in power violates the democratic principles of freedom and fairness, taking advantage of the executive powers to erode checks and balances, with severe and systematic manipulations that fracture the democratic ideals.

Although governments utilizing elections in order to remain in power is not a new idea, competitive authoritarian regimes flourished after the Cold War. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, authoritarian regimes normally took the form of military

¹⁵ Handlin, Samuel. "Observing Incumbent Abuses: Improving Measures of Electoral and Competitive Authoritarianism with New Data." *Democratization* 24, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 41–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2016.1149814>.

coups or hostile takeovers. However, these tactics virtually disappeared after the victory of the West that marked the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union, and the international consequences that came with it, such as the subsequent dominance of the West and the unprecedented promotion of Western democracy, “raised the cost of dictatorship and created strong incentives to adopt formal democratic institutions.”¹⁶ Authoritarian leaders adapted their methods to fulfill these new basic principles of democracy, resisting substantive democratization but maintaining the image of democracy. By limiting challenges without strictly eliminating democratic institutions, and instead utilizing other illegal means such as bribery, restriction of media, and “legal” persecutions, these hybrid governments were able to stay in power without provoking domestic or international backlash. These new forms of hybrid regimes have turned into the most common type of non-democratic governments in the contemporary world.¹⁷ In the region of Latin America, these competitive authoritarian regimes have persisted the test of time and continue emerging, which begs the question as to why this region continues to face the threat of competitive authoritarianism.

¹⁶ Levitsky, Steven, and Loxton, James. “Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes.” *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (January 2013): 107–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.738864>.

¹⁷ Schedler, Andreas. *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

CAUSES OF COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM IN LATIN AMERICA

In order to explain why the region of Latin America continues to see the emergence of competitive authoritarian regimes in the 21st century, it is necessary to analyze both historical and contemporary causes and how they have played a role in the development of competitive authoritarian models. As previously stated, scholars have argued for populism, an international environment favorable to hybrid regimes, times of economic crisis, and other social and institutional weaknesses that have led to democratic erosion in the region. However, it is not one of these causes, but the combination of several factors at a given time, that have left the region vulnerable to competitive authoritarianism.

POPULISM

One factor that can be seen as a catalyst to the democratic erosion of Latin America and the creation of hybrid regimes is populism. Populism refers to a mass politics movement in which a popular political outsider obtains and remains in power by the use of anti-establishments appeals and creating a personal link to the people.¹⁸ Populism and democracy have a turbulent relationship, as populism can be seen as a double-edged blade to the competitive model. Populism can aid in the democratization of a country by mobilizing marginalized sectors of society. These inclusionary measures ensure the representation of minorities in the competitive model; minorities which, for the most part, have previously been neglected by elected government officials. However,

¹⁸ Barr, Robert R. "Populists, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics." *Party Politics* 15, no. 1 (January 2009): 29–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068808097890>.

populism can also trigger a democratic backsliding and push already weakened democracies into competitive authoritarianism.¹⁹

Populist leaders are political outsiders with no real experience with the political institutions of a representative democracy. The livelihood of professional politicians depends on the existence of secure political institutions, and therefore have deep rooted respect for the integrity of such institutions. Political outsiders lack this experience, and as a result, they tend to disregard the importance of strong political institutions and show no commitment to maintaining their independence. Successful populist leaders also come to power at a time of discontent with the existing political system and the political elite that exert influence over it. Because of this public support, populist leaders have an electoral mandate that not only allows them to bury the elite political agents and their institutions, but also provides domestic support for them doing so. Finally, populist leaders, due to their status as political outsiders, lack the support of an established political party. This can lead to political immobilism as the executive and legislative branch of government fail to reach an agreement. In order to eliminate this threat, populist leaders tend to confront the institutions of horizontal accountability and eliminate the checks and balances that maintain the competitive model.²⁰ This event, in turn, tends to trigger a constitutional crisis in which the power of the executive prevails. Populist leaders utilize their favorable public opinion to gain unchecked control over other institutions, burying the opposition and tilting the playing field in their favor,

¹⁹ Levitsky, Steven, and Loxton, James. "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in Latin America." Essay. In *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism*. S.I.: Routledge, 2018.

²⁰ Levitsky, Steven, and Loxton, James. "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in Latin America." Essay. In *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism*. S.I.: Routledge, 2018.

ensuring their re-election and pushing an already fragile democracy towards a competitive authoritarian system.

A textbook example of a populist leader triggering a democratic backsliding that led to a competitive authoritarian model is Rafael Correa in Ecuador. Correa was a political outsider with no government experience when he won the presidency. He came to power at a time of political instability under an anti-establishment platform that promised to dismantle the political elite and save the country from domestic and international threats. He promised to fight against the traditional oligarchy that had corrupted the country, which gained him the support of the majority of the population, obtaining 57% of the votes in the second round of presidential elections. Following the previously established model, one of his first actions in power was a call for a constituent assembly, which granted him extended powers and legitimized him as the leader of the Citizens Revolution. The new constitution not only gave him powers to dissolve Congress and oversee the judiciary, but it also allowed for his re-election for another term, which was previously forbidden.²¹ By utilizing the strong mandate against the established political system, Correa was able to quickly dismantle the system of checks and balances, which directly led to democratic erosion and eventually allowed for democracy to backslide into a competitive model.

Populism alone, however, cannot explain the recent trend of emergence of competitive authoritarianism in the region. Populist leaders seem to continue to emerge in the Latin America region. In the last two decades, several populist leaders have won the

²¹ Selçuk, Orçun. “Strong Presidents and Weak Institutions: Populism in Turkey, Venezuela and Ecuador,” n.d., 20.

presidential elections and obtained power. In twenty-first century Latin America, out of the five leaders that represent strong populist policies in Latin America—Nestor and Christina Kirchner in Argentina, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua—all but one have eroded democracy and turned their country into a hybrid regime, with Venezuela and Nicaragua now falling into full blown authoritarianism.²² However, Latin America has a history with populism since the 1930s and 1940s, and although these leaders had an instrumental view of democratic liberalism, their governments did not lead to a hybrid model in which elections are combined with an authoritarian ruling style.²³ Therefore, populism alone cannot explain the new emergence in competitive authoritarian regimes in the region. Instead, we must look at other factors that have aided populist leaders in their attempts to undermine the separation of powers and establish a hybrid regime.

WEAK POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Political institutions refer to the organizations that create and enforce laws. The presidency, Congress, Parliament, the courts, and political parties are all examples of political institutions. They serve the purposes of ensuring cooperation and allowing for the various political actors to resolve problems effectively.²⁴ When the quality of political institutions decreases, horizontal accountability is harder to enforce and democratic

²² Cachanosky, Nicolas, and Alexandre Padilla. “Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century,” *The Independent Review*, v. 24, n. 2 (2019): 209–226.

²³ Torre, Carlos de la. *Populism in Latin America*. Edited by Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.8>.

²⁴ Moe, Terry M. “Power and Political Institutions.” *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 2 (2005): 215–33.

backsliding is more likely to happen. In Latin America, presidential hegemony, weak party system institutionalization, and ineffective judicial authority have led to weak political institutions, which in turn have left the region vulnerable to democratic erosion and the possibility of competitive authoritarian regimes.

PRESIDENTIAL HEGEMONY

In presidentialist political systems, such as the ones found in most Latin American countries, the executive branch holds the most power. Although this is true all around the world, in Latin America the president is granted an even bigger advantage by constitutional design, creating a presidential hegemony in which the executive branch has control over the decisions of the legislature and the judiciary. The president is given extended powers in comparison to their American counterpart due to the legacy of the Wars of Independence. Most countries in Latin America, after they obtained their independence from Spain, chose presidentialist systems like the American model as their form of government. However, the Wars of Independence and the conflict over territory ownership and borders gave political actors reasons to believe that a strong executive with broad legislative powers was necessary to handle crises and lead the country to stability.²⁵ Presidential systems are more prone to immobilism, with the legislature blocking the president from acting and dealing with crises that arise.²⁶ When Congress is constantly blocking the president from pursuing a course of action, democracy ends up in

²⁵ Pérez-Liñán, Aníbal, Nicolás Schmidt, and Daniela Vairo. "Presidential Hegemony and Democratic Backsliding in Latin America, 1925–2016." *Democratization* 26, no. 4 (May 19, 2019): 606–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1566321>.

²⁶ Mainwaring, Scott. "Presidentialism, Multipartyism, and Democracy." *Comparative Political Studies* 26, no. 2 (1993): 198–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414093026002003>.

a halt where no democratic means can be utilized to solve the problem. In order to avoid this, the executive enjoys extended powers in most constitutions in Latin America.

Although it is true that one liability of a presidential political system is the great likelihood of a clash between the executive and legislative branches, allowing the executive branch to have extended legislative powers blocks the efforts of horizontal accountability and harms democracy. For example, in most Latin American countries, the president is granted constitutional power to initiate legislation, legislate by decree, and execute the law.²⁷ This allows the president to not only control the legislation, but also to modify or alters its intent when it is passed by any of the other branches. The legislative branch is then powerless to inhibit the executive from abusing power and violating constitutional constraints. By granting the executive extended powers, presidents were free to assume authoritarian powers and seize the government if they wished so.

This constitutional power, along with a long history of Caudillismo, a Latin American tradition of absolute power granted to the executive leader, has led to the concentration of power in the executive branch of government. Caudillos saw political power as personal; executive leaders identified the state as part of their possessions, creating an arbitrary ruling style that is still prevalent in the region.²⁸ This made horizontal accountability extremely difficult; the legislative and judicial branches could be neutralized by the executive power, and state and local governments played an administrative role, with no real power in the government. Although caudillos are no

²⁷ Sondrol, Paul. "The Presidentialist Tradition in Latin America." *International Journal of Public Administration* 28, no. 5–6 (May 2005): 517–30. <https://doi.org/10.1081/PAD-200055210>.

²⁸ Sondrol, Paul. "The Presidentialist Tradition in Latin America." *International Journal of Public Administration* 28, no. 5–6 (May 2005): 517–30. <https://doi.org/10.1081/PAD-200055210>.

longer in control of the region, modern Latin American leaders reap the fruit of this caudillo tradition, and the extended power that comes with it. Political leaders utilize autocratic legalism to empower the executive branch at the expense of the other branches of government. The executive branch expands its power by abusing the law in service of their personal gains, weakening checks and balances, and implementing institutional changes that give the president control over the legislature and judicial branches, and hamper the opposition's ability to challenge the power of the incumbent.²⁹

This historical hyper-presidentialism allowed populist leaders in the twenty-first century to erode democracy and turn it into a hybrid model of competitive authoritarianism. This can be exemplified by Venezuela under Hugo Chávez and his party Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). As soon as he won the presidential election, Chavez began to abuse the powers of the executive branch to restrict checks and balances and block the opposition from rising to power. After a year in power president Chavez called for a constituent assembly, which he filled with members of his party, to create a new constitution that expanded the already large powers of the executive branch. His autocratic powers now granted by the new constitution of 1999, in addition to the PSUV dominance of the legislative chambers, allowed him to utilize legal means to impede horizontal accountability and rule with free rein. Once he obtained said power, he started utilizing it to manipulate popular opinion and violate civil liberties, slowly moving the country from a competitive democracy to a competitive authoritarian model. New laws were created to forbid media outlets from “inciting hatred” against the

²⁹ Bermeo, Nancy. “On Democratic Backsliding.” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 (2016): 5–19. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012>.

government, giving the party power to revoke broadcasting concessions if they saw it fit. Laws that forbade any type of disrespect against government officials were also implemented, as well as legal blocks to Venezuelan humanitarian organizations from obtaining help or funds from the international community.³⁰ All of these laws were enacted through the correct constitutional channels and buried among clauses that empowered citizens or other political actors, which made it almost impossible for the opposition to challenge these laws and their legality, and allowed Chavez to rule without constraints, slowly turning the democratic country into a textbook example of competitive authoritarianism.

PARTY SYSTEM INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND COLLAPSE

Party system institutionalization refers to “the stability of interparty competition and the depth of party roots in society.”³¹ A competitive party system is essential to democracy—high levels of party fragmentation interfere with the proper functioning of checks and balances, leaving legislative institutions unable to make the other branches of government accountable for their actions. The nature of party systems also has lasting impact on elections, the quality of representation of the people, policy choices, and the legitimacy of the government in power.³² When party systems are fragmented, governments fall into a gridlock that undermines their capacity to perform effectively.

³⁰ Corrales, Javier. “Autocratic Legalism in Venezuela.” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 2 (2015): 37–51. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0031>.

³¹ Katz, Richard S., and William J. Crotty. *Handbook of Party Politics*. SAGE, 2005.

³² Cameron, Maxwell A. “Democracy and the Separation of Powers: Threats, Dilemmas, and Opportunities in Latin America.” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 27, no. 53 (January 2002): 133–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08263663.2002.10816817>.

Although this is a problem all around the world, it is extremely hurtful to multi-partisan electoral systems that are combined with a presidential system, which is the case in most countries in Latin America. These difficulties come from the problems of coalition building in presidential systems. In a country with a multi-party system, reaching a majority can be challenging. For presidentialist systems, this means that the executive needs to forge coalitions in order to control the legislature. However, once the president's party reaches that majority, they are given freedom to monopolize power and party policies for the rest of their time ruling. This gives the executive the opportunity to disregard checks and balances and interfere with democratic ideals, opening the door for a competitive authoritarian model.³³

Weakly institutionalized multi-party systems are also more vulnerable to allowing personalistic political outsiders, who tend to be radical agents, to come to power. Political outsiders, by definition, are candidates that do not possess any political experience or identify with any political party. They base their appeal on populist endeavors that are anti-establishment, hostile to parties and politicians alike.³⁴ In a presidential political system, this means that these populist political outsiders have the possibility to obtain the highest governmental position, the presidency. Political outsiders utilize their populist appeal to create a personal bond with the people, which favors the development of a personalist style of ruling. At times of public discontent with the existing political system, the threat to democracy increases, since these political outsiders can utilize their

³³ Mainwaring, Scott. "Presidentialism, Multiparty Systems, and Democracy: The Difficult Equation", January 1, 1990.

³⁴ Linz, J. J. (1994). Presidential or parliamentary democracy: Does it make a difference?. The failure of presidential democracy (pp. 3-90).

public support to further undermine systems of checks and balances. Another problem with political outsiders is that due to their anti-establishment views, they tend to be radical actors. Radical actors are not only defined for having policy preferences that fall on one of the extremes of the political spectrum, but by an urgency to achieve those policy goals in the short term. This radicalism not only undermines democracy by creating high levels of polarization, but it also creates an incentive to subvert democracy in order to achieve the radical agenda hastily.³⁵ Therefore, radicalism increases the chances of democratic breakdowns. When radical populist leaders mobilize the people against the already weakened political party institutions, democracy collapses and authoritarianism rises.

The party system institutionalization in Latin America was already weak to the attempts of populist leaders. However, whatever power it did hold began to decay with the discovery of clientelistic practices and corruption of some political figures that began to happen in the twenty-first century.³⁶ This, in addition to a population that was already very displeased with a political system that did not address the growing inequality and economic crisis, led to a party system collapse. The political party system crumbled, which allowed for populist leaders to come to power and dispose of democratic institutions without raising domestic concerns.

This was the case of Bolivia under Evo Morales. Prior to the twenty-first century, Bolivia's party system was dominated by three political parties that shared power for

³⁵ Mainwaring, Scott. "Presidentialism, Multiparty Systems, and Democracy: The Difficult Equation", January 1, 1990.

³⁶ Blake, Charles H., and Stephen D. Morris, eds. *Corruption and Democracy in Latin America*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009. Accessed May 3, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qh6n2>

over twenty years, an agreement called “democracia pactada”. However, these parties and their neoliberal economic model failed to address the increasing levels of poverty and inequality in the country. Furthermore, this system was extremely corrupt, with wide clientelism that benefited the politicians involved. This led to a series of protests and political turmoil from 2000 to 2003 that highly polarized the Bolivian society. Protestors were met with violence and repression, which in turn made them more radicalized. The party system collapsed, and the conflict continued until 2003, when President Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada was forced out of office and fled the country, leaving his vice president, Carlos Mesa to finish his term. New political parties emerged, among them, Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), which, despite not being involved in the protests, was supported by the grassroots organizations that led the movement. During the following election cycle, MAS candidate Evo Morales, a maverick radical populist leader, won the presidency, becoming the first indigenous president of Bolivia.³⁷

WEAK AND DEPENDENT JUDICIARY

The independence of the judiciary is the principal guarantee of a rule of law. Rule of law refers to the “constitutional limits on the kind of power that government may legitimately exercise, and well as on the extent of those governmental powers.”³⁸ In other words, rule of law refers to the set of rules that protect democracy and ensure horizontal accountability from political institutions. The rule of law provides guidance on how to solve problems, protects the rights of citizens, including the rights to property that are so

³⁷ De la Torre, Carlos. “In the Name of the People: Democratization, Popular Organizations, and Populism in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador.” *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies | Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe* 0, no. 95 (October 9, 2013): 27. <https://doi.org/10.18352/erlacs.9229>.

³⁸ Calleros-Alarcón, Juan Carlos. *The Unfinished Transition to Democracy in Latin America*. London: Routledge, 2012.

necessary for capitalistic endeavors, and creates an objective system in which everyone is treated equally. An independent judiciary has the power to provide a system of mutual guarantees set in place to avoid a single political actor from skewing the playing field and obstructing democratic ideals. However, if the judiciary is not independent to act and protect the rule of law, and instead it is bound by the pressure of the executive and other political actors that interfere with its autonomy, the courts are left at the mercy of the executive, who can abuse its powers to dismantle the separation of powers and backslide democracy into a competitive authoritarian model.

This can also be illustrated by Bolivia under Evo Morales. Evo Morales and his party MAS interfered with the autonomy of the judiciary branch in several instances, with great consequences to the separation of powers in Bolivia. During Morales' first period in power, the salaries of judges and other judiciary government officials were reduced by up to 60%, causing complete branches of the judiciary to collapse due to quitting. Among those that quit were six Justices of Bolivia's Supreme Court and 3 Judges from the Constitutional Courts. Morales did not have enough support in Congress to get his candidates approved, which led to a two-year break in which the courts were closed. Afterwards, Morales' executive power was expanded even further by allowing him to elect judges without congressional approval.³⁹ These actions were not only unconstitutional, but a clear blow to the independence of the judicial branch and the separation of powers of Bolivia, and granted president Evo Morales control over the new judiciary.

³⁹ Cameron, Maxwell A., y Juan Pablo Luna. *Democracia En La región Andina Diversidad y desafíos*. Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2012.

Another problem that arises from weak and dependent judicial branches is the ineffectiveness of the courts in protecting civil rights. In a competitive system, an effective judicial branch protects and guarantees civil rights, however, in Latin America, the courts have limited power and are ineffective in dealing with such situations.⁴⁰ Although these countries have turned to democratic systems and have rewritten their constitutions, some of them several times, their judiciary branch lacks the autonomy necessary to fulfil its goals and protect civil rights. This leaves the judiciary at the mercy of executive leaders, who have the power to choose which degrees of freedom to give to the courts.⁴¹ This, in combination with the already mentioned concentration of power in the executive branch, prevents horizontal accountability and separation of powers. By having a judiciary dependent on the presidency, the incumbent is also free to violate the individual rights of the citizens without having to face any legal domestic repercussions. This, in addition to the public support of populist leaders, gave the presidents enough power to dismiss the courts and create a hybrid regime with an authoritarian leader.

In Venezuela, when President Chavez came to power, the judiciary was constitutionally autonomous for the most part. However, Chavez utilized his popularity with the masses to call for public demonstrations and protests that forced the Supreme Court to approve the constituent assembly that would change the 1961 Constitution. Then, he utilized his majority in the assembly to restructure the judicial branch of government, making it weak and dependent on the signaling of the executive. The new

⁴⁰ Pérez-Liñán, Aníbal, Nicolás Schmidt, and Daniela Vairo. "Presidential Hegemony and Democratic Backsliding in Latin America, 1925–2016." *Democratization* 26, no. 4 (May 19, 2019): 606–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1566321>.

⁴¹ Negretto, Gabriel L. and Ungar, Mark. "Independencia del poder judicial y Estado de Derecho en América Latina: los casos de Argentina y Venezuela". *Política y Gobierno*, volume IV, number 1, 997, pp 81-114. <http://hdl.handle.net/11651/1992>

constitution not only allowed for a weakened judicial, but also called for the appointment of new officials to all of the highest judiciary positions, including the Supreme Court and Attorney General's office.⁴² Having packed the courts with people from his party, Chavez now had liberty to violate civil rights, which he did extensively by restricting freedom of speech, freedom of the press, banning the broadcasting of material against the government, and expropriating private property.⁴³ Lacking an independent and strong judiciary branch, regimes have latitude to implement laws that create an uneven playing field and can lead to competitive authoritarianism.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES THAT FACILITATE INEQUALITY

Latin America is the most unequal region of the world. The Latin American region is culturally and ethnically diverse, which created a cultural clash between the traditions of colonial European and indigenous populations. This clash produced hybrid societies in which the legal protection of citizen rights has been contested, which led to systematic abuses, violations of the rule of law, and violence against socially excluded groups such as Native Americans, women, and lower income citizens. These adversities tend to undermine the separation of powers, with the legacy of social exclusion and violence becoming a constant threat to the consolidation of competitive political models in the region.

Latin America is the region of the world where wealth is most unequally distributed. In the 1990s, inequality had increased from previous levels in Mexico, Brazil,

⁴² Taylor, Matthew M. The Limits of Judicial Independence: A Model with Illustration from Venezuela under Chávez. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (May 2014), pp. 229-259.

⁴³ Corrales, Javier. "Autocratic Legalism in Venezuela." *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 2 (2015): 37-51. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0031>.

Guatemala, Peru, Venezuela, and Chile.⁴⁴ A United Nations report in 2011 stated that, despite the increasing economic performance of many of these countries, the top 20% of the population of an average Latin American country makes sixteen times more than the bottom 20% of the population.⁴⁵ Such high levels of inequality do not only pose a threat to economic growth, but they also undermine the positive effects that it should have in consolidating a competitive model. Furthermore, the economic strategies utilized by governments in the region stopped being effective at appeasing the people and failed to address the massive inequality citizens were experiencing. As political figures continued the use of undemocratic practices such as clientelism, corruption, and paternalism, the discontent among citizens grew, and their trust in political institutions and political actors disappeared.⁴⁶ The Latin American government's failure left the people with a deep distrust of political institutions, the very institutions commanded to protect democracy.

The expansion of suffrage that came with industrialization and urbanization also changed the political environment. Mass politics emerged, which, in addition to the existing discontent with political parties and systems, led to the emergence of populist leaders. The electoral consequences of such high levels of inequality and lack of action by the established political actors led to the election of populist political outsiders that did not respect political institutions. The emergence of this threatened democracy by weakening support for the separation of powers. As previously stated, populist leaders

⁴⁴ Cameron, Maxwell A. "Democracy and the Separation of Powers: Threats, Dilemmas, and Opportunities in Latin America." *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 27, no. 53 (January 2002): 133–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08263663.2002.10816817>.

⁴⁵ Mainwaring, Scott and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán. 2014. *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁶ Cavarozzi, Marcelo. "Beyond Transitions to Democracy in Latin America." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24, no. 3 (1992): 665–84.

have a strong mandate by the people, but they tend to have weak parties that do not have the majority in the other political institutions that they need to implement radical change. In these instances, the separation of power in place to protect democracy is seen as a nuisance that only hinders the change that is promised by the populist leader. The executive is then given free rein by the people, and sometimes even encouraged to get rid of horizontal accountability, centralize power in the executive and rule autocratically, opening the door for democratic backsliding, and eventually, an authoritarian model.⁴⁷

This was the case in Bolivia under Evo Morales. Bolivia underwent a period of social unrest with a cycle of protest and political turmoil after the parties in power failed to address the inequality and growing hyperinflation that was devastating the poor. Furthermore, the existing political system was highly corrupt and clientelist, which led to the people distrusting the government and the policies they were trying to implement. Although Evo Morales was not a prevalent leader of the social unrest that had taken place, his platform of “refoundation” had the support of the grassroots organizations that led the movement, and in 2005, he won the presidency, becoming the first indigenous president of Bolivia. Morales had the popular mandate to implement change and create a new constitution, and in doing so, he called for a constituent assembly that created a new constitution which granted him extended powers to rule by decree.⁴⁸ The high levels of inequality and the lack of change produced by the political elite that had previously held

⁴⁷ Cameron, Maxwell A. “Democracy and the Separation of Powers: Threats, Dilemmas, and Opportunities in Latin America.” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 27, no. 53 (January 2002): 133–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08263663.2002.10816817>.

⁴⁸ De la Torre, Carlos. In the Name of the People: Democratization, Popular Organizations, and Populism in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, No. 95 (October 2013), pp. 27–48.

power left the region vulnerable to populist leaders with empty promises of equity and a desire to remain in power, even if it means destroying democracy in order to do so.

FAVORABLE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR HYBRID REGIMES

Now that all of the domestic reasons have been established, it is important to assess how international agents have changes in the last two decades to allow for competitive authoritarian rulers that eliminate checks and balances and backslide democracy. Regime change rarely happens in isolation. Although a lot of theoretical paradigms focus on domestic factors that affect the consolidation (or lack thereof) of democracy, it is important to note that international influences and actors hold sway in the development of regimes, whether democratic or not.

DECREASED LEVERAGE AND LINKAGE TO THE WEST IN THE 21ST CENTURY

International pressure can directly promote democracy and competitive models. However, in order for international pressure to be effective, the country needs to have a high linkage to the West, as well as Western leverage. Linkage to the West refers to the density of ties between Western democratic nations, such as the United States and the members of the European Union, and the country or region at hand. In countries with high social, economic, and political linkage to the West, the cost of Authoritarian governments might be too much to bear. Linkage to the West protects democracy by increasing the probability of an international response to a domestic abuse of power, as well as by creating domestic constituencies for maintaining democratic systems and strengthening the separation of powers and distribution of resources. Western Leverage on the other hand refers to a country's vulnerability to international pressure, and their

ability to avoid a punishment from the West as a result of the violations of democratic institutions.⁴⁹ High linkage and Western leverage promote competitive models and make the cost of authoritarian rule too high. However, in the twenty-first century, these systems have been limited due to the emergence of international black nights that promote authoritarian models and protect such governments from facing the repercussions of the West.

Western leverage and the promotion of democracy was undercut by the emergence of international black nights, such as China and Russia, that decreased the dependence of authoritarian governments on the West, and lowered the cost of authoritarianism and democratic erosion. Although China and Russia were already considered regional black nights, it was not until the twenty-first century that they globalized their aid to authoritarian governments around the world. In the twenty-first century, China has emerged as a global superpower with an exponentially growing economy, an increasingly competitive economic model, and their introduction to the global markets. However, despite economic advancements, their politics continue being highly authoritarian. Therefore, China's foreign policy continues to be defined by their attempts to produce democratic erosion in countries with a competitive model, as well as avoiding democratic change in countries in which they exert an influence. In order to do so, China provides economic support and investment opportunities to authoritarian regimes all around the world.⁵⁰ This includes several authoritarian regimes in the Latin

⁴⁹ Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁵⁰ Diamond, Larry, Marc F. Plattner, and Christopher Walker. *Authoritarianism Goes Global: the Challenge to Democracy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.

American region. Russia also follows a similar model of democratic backsliding.

Russia's influence began to expand at the turn of the century when president Vladimir Putin came to power. Aided by revenues from oil and gas, Putin has rebuilt the military and expanded Russia's influence around the world, also becoming one of the global powers of the twenty-first century. Their foreign policy is clear, to contain the influence of the West and their democratization efforts, to undermine cooperation among Western countries, and to promote a personalistic rule such as the one Putin engages in.⁵¹

As the power of these black nights expanded throughout the region, the power of Western liberalism, specifically the power of the United States in the region, declined. The political and economic environment of the twenty-first century relocated the attention of American politicians to other areas, which in turn led to the decline of foreign policy that promoted democracy. The U.S. involvement in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to the financial recession of 2008, eroded the states' capacity to promote western liberalism and democratic ideals. As time went by, U.S. presidential support for democracy abroad waned. This was particularly true under president Barack Obama, and became even more so exacerbated under president Donald Trump, whose administration's support for democracy abroad virtually disappeared.⁵²

Given the support of black nights such as China and Russia and the lack of support for democracy by the United States, it is no surprise that competitive authoritarian regimes continue to emerge in the Latin American region. Venezuela's

⁵¹ Diamond, Larry, Marc F. Plattner, and Christopher Walker. *Authoritarianism Goes Global: the Challenge to Democracy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.

⁵² Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. "The New Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 1 (2020): 51–65. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0004>.

democratic erosion started very slowly as the freely elected president Hugo Chavez began to dismiss checks and balances and the separation of power. By 2004, when the international community became wary of his authoritarian tendencies and the irregular electoral processes that led to his reelection, the relation between Chavez and Russia aided Chavez in avoiding international backlash. The Russian prime minister issued a statement that verified the legitimacy of the elections and showed his support for the Venezuelan president. This was only the beginning of a relationship that would protect Chavez and his government from international punishment over the years to come.⁵³ After this event, Chavez became Russia's main weapon client, and continued developing ties with the global power by allowing Russian companies to invest in Venezuela. Russia even entered the Latin American financial market through Evrofinance Mosnarbank, a bank that is still used today to laundry money and support the now fully authoritarian government of Venezuela.⁵⁴ Russian ties to Venezuela have allowed for the erosion of democracy and blocked the United States and other international forces from removing the now authoritarian government from power.

The weakening of Western leverage can also be illustrated in the case of Honduran democracy. Honduran democracy faced a blow in 2009 when the military overthrew populist president Manuel Zelaya. Although civilian rule was quickly restored in 2010, it was short-lived, and the country fell to a hybrid model under President Juan Orlando Hernández, who was elected to power in 2014. Although Hernandez was elected

⁵³ Katz, Mark N. "The Putin-Chavez Partnership." *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, no. 4 (July 2006): 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216530401>.

⁵⁴ Crabb, John. "OFAC Designation of Russian Bank a Warning to Maduro's Supporters." *International Financial Law Review* (Mar 25, 2019). <https://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/ofac-designation-russian-bank-warning-maduro-s/docview/2229063801/se-2?accountid=5683>.

freely, since his arrival to power he has consistently undermined democratic institutions and eliminated checks and balances in order to rule autocratically. Even before coming to power, Hernández, as president of the National Congress in 2012, packed the Supreme Court with his supporters, who helped him eliminate horizontal accountability and even allowed him to change the constitution in order to allow for his reelection in 2018. Despite these direct abuses of power, and the added electoral irregularities that characterized Hernández' reelection in 2018, the lack of support for democracy displayed by U.S. president Trump, whose administration remained silent, lent legitimacy to Hernandez' authoritarian government.⁵⁵ Because such direct attacks on democracy were not retaliated by the Western countries, Honduras' government felt safe in their continued efforts to undermine democracy. Furthermore, the business leaders, military officials, and other powerful agents in the country felt little to no pressure to challenge the increasingly authoritarian methods of government. Even in small states with extensive ties to the West, autocratic behavior no longer triggers a costly punitive response from the international community. In other words, the external cost of authoritarianism has diminished.

REGIONAL NETWORKS

Although the support of global black nights plays a critical role in the development of competitive authoritarian governments in the region, it is also important to note the regional networks that also protect authoritarian regimes for international backlash and repercussions from democratic countries and democratic promotion

⁵⁵ Levitsky, Steven, and Way, Lucas A. "The New Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 1 (2020): 51–65. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0004>.

agencies. A favorable regional political environment decreases the likelihood of democratic breakdowns and increases the likelihood of transitions from authoritarian regimes to competitive democracies.⁵⁶ The same can be said of an authoritarian environment, which increases the likelihood of democratic erosion and decreases the likelihood of transitions to competitive democracies.

Chavez's rise to power in Venezuela not only affected the domestic democratic erosion, but it also promoted an authoritarian model in other areas of the Latin America region. Chavez's foreign policy constantly attempted to undermine the power of the United States, and western democratic ideals overall, in the Latin America region. In order to do so, he built alliances with other anti-United States governments such as those found in Russia, Cuba, and Iran. Chavez also utilized Venezuela's oil wealth to provide assistance to other authoritarian regimes in the region, such as Ecuador under Rafael Correa, Bolivia under Evo Morales, and Nicaragua under Daniel Ortega.⁵⁷ In addition, he often made counter proposals to American ideas, such as the creation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas [ALBA] in 2006, an intergovernmental organization that advocated for the integration of economic, social, and political models based on the privatization of industries across Latin America and the Caribbean.⁵⁸

This can be illustrated by Nicaragua's breakdown after the return of Daniel Ortega to the presidency in 2006. Daniel Ortega's government engaged in many anti-

⁵⁶ Mainwaring, Scott, and Anibal Perez-Linan. *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139047845>.

⁵⁷ Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁵⁸ Corrales, Javier. "Using Social Power to Balance Soft Power: Venezuela's Foreign Policy." *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (October 2009): 97–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01636600903232285>.

democratic practices since the beginning of his non-consecutive second term in power. The government dissolved one opposition party by stripping it of its legal status, and replaced it with state Ortega loyalists. The following mayoral elections were marred in irregularities, and also resulted in the victory of one of Ortega's loyal followers. Furthermore, in 2009, Ortega's packed Supreme Court overturned the constitutional ban on reelection, which allowed Daniel Ortega to rerun for president, in elections which were also marred with irregularities. However, even though Ortega's new government engaged in more authoritarian actions in the twenty-first century than during his first term in the 1980s, he faced considerably less external pressure to adhere to the democratic model the second time around. The Venezuelan government and the network provided by the new organizations in place such as ALBA protected Ortega's government from facing the international backlash that his actions should have caused. In addition, Venezuela also aided Nicaragua economically, with an estimated \$4.5 billion dollars in aid, in addition to subsidized oil, all of which were meant to diffuse international pressure. The regional network created by Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez sheltered authoritarian governments in the region, further undermining democracy.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORCES

After the fall of the Soviet Union many intergovernmental organizations readjusted to the new democratic standards, while other organizations were created with the purpose of promoting and maintaining competitive models around the world. For example, the European Union required countries to have full democracy status in order to obtain membership. Several transnational organizations were also created to promote and

maintain democracy and liberty.⁵⁹ In Latin America, the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted new mechanism to protect democracy, such as the creation of Unit for the Promotion of Democracy in 1990, the Santiago Commitment to Democracy that declared the organization commitment to the protection of democracy and human rights, and the adoption of Resolution 1080 in 1991, which stated that the organization would restore legitimate democracies in the case of any sudden interruption to a competitive model.⁶⁰ This new perspective led to a decline in violent coups and other dramatic government breakdowns. However, as mentioned previously, authoritarian regimes adapted to the new trends and changed strategies to allow for a slow but steady erosion of democratic ideals. The new slow and incremental decline in democracy, in addition to the already mentioned decline in the promotion of democratic ideals by the United States left these intergovernmental organizations powerless to the emergence of these hybrid regimes.

The Organization of American States (OAS) played a role in promoting democracy after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. For example, OAS played a role in the removal from power of Peruvian president Fujimori in 2000. However, as the twenty-first century advanced, their attempts to promote democracy have focused on the promotion of free elections, but have been fruitless to address the growing authoritarian trends of freely elected incumbent, unable to stop the growing wave of competitive authoritarianism sweeping through Latin America. In the last two decades, the OAS has sent several missions to oversee elections at times of political turmoil in Latin America.

⁵⁹ Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

⁶⁰ Peter H. Smith and Cameron J. Sells, *Democracy in Latin America: Political Change in Comparative Perspective* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

For example, they sent missions to Bolivia in 2005 to ensure a fair and free electoral process and transition to power. Similar action was taken in that same year to address the institutional instability in Ecuador, and officials oversaw the elections of Supreme Court members. Their efforts went as far as to suspend Honduras from the organization when a coup removed president Zelaya from power. However, their efforts focused on direct and aggressive attempts against democracy, but they failed to act at times of more gradual attempts against the democratic institutions that upheld a competitive model. Although the OAS oversaw the free and fair election of president Evo Morales in Bolivia, they turned a blind eye to Morales's strike to the separation of powers and horizontal accountability. Similarly, Chavez's constant curtail of civil liberties and separation of powers was met with no significant response from the OAS.⁶¹

The slow and gradual democratic erosion rendered intergovernmental organizations powerless to act against democratically elected governments. Although these organizations were created with the intention to protect democracy, their power is limited when it comes to competitive authoritarianism. Without an outwardly direct attempt against democratic institutions, any punishment could be seen as an action against the sovereignty of the state. The slow and incremental decline of democracy gave authoritarian figures such as Chavez in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia more room to rule while maintaining the benefits of the image of a democratic system. When the abuses of one leader go unpunished by the international community due to these technicalities, it indicates to other radical actors that they too can engage in these illegal means to retain

⁶¹ Herz, Mônica. *The Organization of American States (OAS) : Global Governance Away from the Media*. Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011.

power, taking away the fear of political or economic sanctions. The Organization of American States (OAS) has grown ineffective in the twenty-first century, and lacks the power to address the slow democratic erosion that has led to the emergency of hybrid models of governance.

CONCLUSION

Despite constant efforts towards democratization and the adherence to a competitive model, Latin American democracy continues to be weak and vulnerable to democratic erosion and backsliding. The Latin America region has seen the emergence of many competitive authoritarian regimes in the twenty-first century, a trend that does not seem to be diverging any time soon. This is caused not by one factor, but by a combination of factors, namely Populism, weak political institutions, social inequality, and international influences that support authoritarian regimes, all of which, when combined, create a favorable environment for the emergence and survival of hybrid regimes. Popular personalistic leaders take advantage of public support, high levels of inequality, and weakened political institutions to undermine checks and balances and erode a competitive model into a competitive authoritarian regime. This, in addition to an international community that no longer chastises authoritarian practices due to the support of other authoritarian entities such as China and Russia, creates a perfect environment for hybrid regimes to thrive. This model explains why the region of Latin America continues to see the emergence of competitive authoritarian governments, an instance that will not change unless the international and regional political climate changes first.

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