

**Democracy, Dictatorship, and Term Limits.** By Alexander Baturo. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014. 350p. \$50.00.  
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— Miguel Carreras, *University of California, Riverside*

Democratic breakdowns can occur in two different ways. First, a democratic government may be toppled by a force external to the government (e.g., a military coup). Second, a democratically elected leader may choose to interrupt the democratic process. While most of the literature has focused on the former type of democratic breakdown, this book analyzes a phenomenon that is often associated with the latter form of democratic interruption: presidents' lack of respect for constitutionally mandated term limits. This is the first book on this subject in a long time, and it is a welcome addition to the literature on presidentialism, democratization, and democratic breakdowns.

As Alexander Baturo points out in the introduction, more than a quarter of the 200 term-bounded presidents who were elected between 1960 and 2010 managed to extend their stay in office. This phenomenon affects democratic development because the principle of alternation of power is key to the idea of democracy: A democratic regime is at risk if one leader become indispensable. Many of the presidents who did not respect their term limits ended up centralizing power and committing serious authoritarian excesses against opposition forces. Two good examples are Alberto Fujimori (president of Peru between 1990 and 2000) and Hugo Chávez (president of Venezuela between 1999 and 2013).

The main goal of this book is to investigate the factors that encourage presidents to play by the rules or to manipulate term limits. Although the main contribution is empirical, the discussion of the normative implication of the lack of term limits in the introduction and in Chapter 2 is very rich and detailed. Baturo's discussion of term limits and how they have been perceived in the history of political thought from Ancient Greece to the contemporary period is enlightening and informative. It is interesting to see how the arguments against and in favor of term limits advanced by the Founding Fathers of the U.S. Constitution (Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson in particular) have a lot in common with the arguments made by contemporary political actors who favor (or reject) tenure extension. Another major contribution of the book is the classification of different strategies that can be used by presidents to extend their tenure. As detailed in Chapter 3, there is a menu of strategies that can be used by presidents to remain in office longer than was prescribed at the time of their election to office (e.g., constitutional change to allow re-election, prolongation by referendum, suspension of elections).

Previous works on term limits have emphasized the different barriers that presidents might face when attempting to modify term limits. These works suggest

that presidents are less likely to violate term limits when they do not dominate their own parties, when they do not control the legislature and/or the judiciary, and when there is mass opposition to a tenure extension. While not neglecting the costs associated with violating term limits, Baturo instead looks at the benefits associated with staying in power. His central argument is that presidents are more likely to extend their tenures in states where rent seeking is prevalent and political office can generate much higher incomes than the private sector. The author also argues that presidents who are concerned over immunity after leaving office are more likely to attempt to retain power beyond the mandated period.

Chapter 6 presents the empirical analyses testing the book's theory. The statistical analyses are conducted carefully, and additional tests are offered to address problems such as endogeneity or omitted variable bias. The author evaluates the factors that lead to tenure extensions using an impressive original data set that includes all presidents in democratic, partly democratic, and nondemocratic regimes in the period between 1960 and 2010. The results indicate that presidents tend to extend their tenures when the public sector has a greater share of the GDP (which is used as a proxy for rent-seeking opportunities in political office) and when they have grounds for concern over immunity (variable constructed by the author based on media reports).

The empirical analyses suffer from a series of problems, however. First, the dependent variable (tenure extension) is measured in a dichotomous way. This is problematic because we lose some of the fine-grained distinctions that were made in Chapter 3. We are left wondering whether democratic presidents who advocate constitutional reforms in order to run for reelection for an additional term (e.g., Carlos Menem in Argentina or Fernando Cardoso in Brazil) are motivated by the same factors that encourage authoritarian leaders to declare themselves "presidents for life." These two types of tenure extension appear as fundamentally different, but they are conflated in the same category in the empirical analysis. In a similar vein, the empirical models in Table 6.1 test the arguments of the book with a large sample of presidents who ruled in democratic, partly democratic, and nondemocratic regimes. Testing the theory with such a disparate sample probably does more harm than good because it might hide interesting differences in the factors leading to the violation of term limits in different types of regimes. Although the results are robust when the sample is reduced to nondemocratic or partly democratic regimes (Table 6.2), there is no certainty that this explanation of tenure extension would hold up in a sample including only presidents elected in fully democratic regimes.

The main weakness of the book—which can be seen both in the theoretical and in the empirical chapters—is the lack of a coherent and overarching theoretical

framework that can integrate the different elements of the explanation of tenure extension. From the empirical analysis, we know that a series of variables are correlated with the lack of respect for term limits (e.g., institutional barriers, financial costs of losing office, and immunity concerns of presidents). But the book lacks a general theoretical framework explaining how these different pieces of the puzzle fit together. Are all these factors necessary for a violation of term limits to occur? Are some of these factors sufficient to explain a tenure extension? Can presidents concerned about immunity and financial stability overcome institutional barriers? Are the factors identified by the author equally relevant for explaining tenure extension in different types of regimes? The author leaves all these questions unanswered.

A useful way to address these causality concerns would have been to conduct one or a few in-depth case studies of tenure extensions, paying special attention to causal mechanisms and to the ways in which different factors fit together in a few real-world cases. In fairness, Chapter 5 does offer a few cases of term limits' violation, but this discussion seems like an afterthought and relies almost exclusively on secondary sources. A good qualitative analysis of a few key cases would have been a good complement to the large-n statistical models in the book.

Still, *Democracy, Dictatorship, and Term Limits* breaks new ground by systematically studying the violation of term limits in a comparative context and by proposing (and testing) an interesting argument about the benefits that presidents obtain by staying in office. Given the importance of the topic, the original arguments, and the empirical findings, this book will be of interest for scholars of comparative institutions and students of democratic erosion.

**Legislator Success in Fragmented Congresses in Argentina: Plurality Cartels, Minority Presidents, and Lawmaking.** By Ernesto Calvo. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 232p. \$95.00.

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Lawmaking under democracy is a hard business; gridlock is common and regular in even the most robustly institutionalized congresses. Producing laws is even more challenging when governing coalitions in legislatures lack a majority, as frequently occurs in multiparty democracies. Indeed, conventional wisdom expects these plurality-driven bodies to be almost continually stymied, thwarted by the opposition parties arrayed against them.

In this theoretically rich book, however, Ernesto Calvo shows that such plurality coalitions can actually achieve a surprising degree of legislative success. He draws on the example of Argentina, teasing out the logic that has allowed what he calls “plurality cartels” to push forward

several significant policy initiatives. He defines these plurality cartels as parties that not only control a plurality of seats but whose “senior partners have the authority to administer the legislative gates” (p. 6). It is this latter, gatekeeping function that gives them such power, and under certain circumstances it can lead to an increase, rather than decrease, in legislative productivity.

Coupling formal modeling with an insider’s knowledge of Argentina’s formal and informal legislative practices, Calvo discerns three key “institutions that precede plenary consideration of bills” through which plurality cartels overcome the challenges they face: “committees, pre-floor party meetings, and the chamber’s directorate” (p. 9). Rather than stifling progress, each of these seeming hurdles allows for important discussion and deal making with both coalition and opposition legislators to advance the measure at hand. Intriguingly, these gatekeeping roles become all the more important when parties lose majority support in congress, as legislators change their strategy in significant ways. First, committee chairs “allow a larger set of bills to be reported from committee”; second, loss of majority support “results in an ideological drift away from the median voter of the majority party, to the benefit of legislation sponsored by the median voter of the Chamber”; and third, “more consensual amendment strategies” are undertaken (p. 13). In other words, the loss of majority support in some instances leads to less polarized outcomes than otherwise, and these may very well more closely reflect the interests of the median voter in society. Democracy thus may become more representative when a majority is lacking.

In explaining this plurality-led legislative success, Calvo makes a major contribution, helping us see beyond what he calls a “theoretical blind spot” in the literature on legislatures (p. 186). Too often, perhaps driven by an emphasis on study of the United States Congress, observers erroneously equate “cases where the president lacks a majority in congress” with “cases where the president faces an organized majority opposition” (p. 186). The reality is much more complex, especially in cross-national perspective. Legislatures in multiparty democracies are frequently not controlled by majority parties, but instead see plurality parties regularly seeking to cobble together successful coalitions. Calvo helps us see how they do that, especially in contexts where it seems most unlikely.

The evidence marshaled in *Legislator Success in Fragmented Congresses in Argentina* is extremely impressive. Calvo has collected data not simply on legislative outcomes, observed in roll-call votes, but on outcomes throughout the “sequential legislative process.” This allows him to detect three points of “legislative success” or failure, as proposed bills first make it out of committee, then achieve approval on the floor in their chamber of origin before gaining final approval in the alternate chamber. Such a rich understanding of the legislative process yields