

Democratization Under the Gun: Military Regimes, Democratic Transitions, and Political Institutions in the Southern Cone

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Abstract

South American authoritarian regimes that held power during the Cold War were different from those in other global regions. Unlike civilian-elite controlled governments in Spain and Portugal, or single-party regimes in Eastern Europe, the southern cone (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay) faced hierarchical military juntas that were directly tied to the armed forces. This structure has had serious implications for Latin American democratic transitions. Argentina's military regime faced a political collapse (1983) that was finalized during a severe economic crisis and failed foreign intervention. Oppositely, Chile and Uruguay held electoral plebiscites (1988, 1980) that were successful in brokering power relations between opposition forces. Brazil faced a drawn out transition (1974-1990), which produced liberalization and a civil society movement that struggled with economic decline. This paper will show that the southern cone's smoother transitions have benefitted from military regimes that have maintained an organizational divide between their institutional and political objectives.

Introduction

In Latin America, democratic transitions have historically been sparked by the extrication or collapse of a hierarchical military government. Throughout a twenty-year period (1964-1985), repressive military juntas controlled South America's "southern cone" (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay). This era included widespread human rights violations committed by authoritarian regimes that were typically justified as stabilization efforts. While initially these regimes enjoyed a significant level of popular support,

tolerance for state-sanctioned violence eroded in all four cases. Disenchantment with military rule allowed for each country to pursue its own transition to democracy.

The southern cone's experience with military authoritarianism remains a particular area of interests for those studying democratization. While Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay all experienced a similar authoritarian regime-type, each country's democratic trajectory has been unique. Argentina, arguably the southern cone's most enigmatic case, underwent a rapid regime breakdown amidst a severe economic crisis. This badly damaged institutional legitimacy, which some analysts argue is still contributing to the country's political instability. Oppositely, Brazil's transition occurred from 1974-1990, allowing the military to tightly control a process of liberalization. However, this process resulted in the formation of skewed institutional norms. Observed to be the most successful cases, Chile and Uruguay both held electoral plebiscites that led to negotiations between each military junta and its opposition (Linz and Stepan 1996).

The military's extrication from government has had implications for the durability of the succeeding democratic system. On one end of the spectrum, Argentina's "ruptura" or regime collapse is what democratization experts consider to be the most complicated path to democratic consolidation (Huntington 1993). Chile and Uruguay are examples of a pacted-negotiations process, which has contributed to the relatively stable democratic norms each country currently benefits from. Theories place Brazil in between breakdown and full consolidation, as it still struggles with structural impediments that threaten the efficacy of its democratic institutions. By evaluating each case through this third wave paradigm, one can see a logical relationship between an authoritarian regime's actions and the level of democratic insulation once a transition has been initiated.

While the southern cone military juntas remained in power for considerably long periods of time (some longer than others), they

ultimately proved to be ill equipped to handle many of the necessary functions of the state. Once the southern cone had reached a point of reasonable security, authoritarian regimes in the region were expected to improve public life. This created a shift from the military's traditional role in Latin America as a "removed" institution to an era of "military-as-government." Economic growth became one of the goals of military juntas in the southern cone. Regimes that were successful in mitigating economic crisis generally survived longer and negotiated more concessions when it came time to hand over power. Military collapse, as evident in the Argentine case, was often coupled with economic incompetence and an inability to implement sound policies (Pion-Berlin 1985).

How has military extrication in the southern cone affected each country's democratic transition? In order to effectively address this question, this paper will examine military exits in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay and the events contextualizing the transfer of power. By identifying each regime's particular strengths and weaknesses, a more coherent understanding may arise in regards to the southern cone's complicated path to consolidation. Each respective country ultimately landed on different trajectories as a result of distinctive political dynamics.

Although many theorize about the "end of the transition paradigm," this type of analysis is still beneficial to those studying democratization. Many theories exist on democratic transitions, which comprise some of the most important ideas within political science. However, a relatively small portion of the literature addressing Latin America's experience with hierarchical authoritarianism actually applies contextualized details significant to individual cases in comparative perspective. This has resulted in oversimplified explanations that do not consider the circumstantial characteristics of military juntas in the southern cone and their effects on democratic development. This paper will apply these characteristics to existing literature in an attempt to better understand the current state of democracy in each country observed.

To synthesize this argument, this paper will be divided into three sections with a brief conclusion. Section one will provide an institutional framework for democratization and analyze the dichotomy between military-as-institution and military-as-government to better understand the theoretical foundations critical to the South American cases. Section two will give an in-depth historical analysis of each country's military junta and its extrication, which will allow for the comparative unpacking of the cases. Section three will discuss what implications this held for democratic transitions, and some of the recent challenges that are preventing consolidation. The conclusion will show that the southern cone's smoother transitions to democracy have benefitted from military regimes that have maintained a divide between their institutional and political objectives.

Institution-Building in Nascent Democracies

Latin America's authoritarian regimes have historically differed from those in other regions of the world. Unlike single-party communist regimes in Eastern Europe, or quasi-fascist civilian dictatorships in Southern Europe, Latin American countries experienced highly bureaucratized military governments. Guillermo O'Donnell (1973), in his classic analysis has characterized these as "bureaucratic authoritarian" regimes. According to this analysis, South American societies that had experienced rapid modernization against a backdrop of delayed development were more likely to undergo an era of authoritarianism due to the need for capitalist accumulation (Remmer and Merx 1982). The absence of democratic norms increases a population's willingness to relinquish political rights in exchange for social stability, a concept that was realized in the southern cone juntas. The compliance of middle class sectors of society had provided the military with the public support to enter the political arena if necessary, thereby fortifying its influence as a legitimate actor. Due to weak political institutions, democracy in the region has historically been subject to untimely suspensions.

Institutional foundations for democratic stability have been frequently identified in the literature as an essential component of the political puzzle. Huntington (1968) makes the argument that institutions act as the primary channels for social organization, making them the genesis in the formation of norms that lead to stability and order:

In a society, of any complexity, the relative power of the groups changes, but if the society is to be a community, the power of each group is exercised through political institutions which temper, moderate, and redirect that power so as to render the dominance of one social force compatible with the community of many. In the total absence of social conflict, institutions are unnecessary; in the total absence of social harmony, they are impossible. Two groups which see each other only as archenemies cannot form the basis of a community until those mutual perceptions change.

However, as the passage explains, the remaining challenge exists in cultivating the norms that will inevitably lead to democracy. For Huntington, this is a long and often violent process that requires the gradual development of political relations. For groups to accept a system that institutionalizes political loss, balanced and predictable interactions must prevail out of social uncertainty.

This normative result is not easily obtained. Sound political interactions are undoubtedly an important requisite of strong democracy. In the South American cases, institutions that cultivate these interactions have been a critical *prerequisite* in the transition from bureaucratic authoritarianism to organized democratic relations. For democracy to evolve to a point that excludes the option of violence, actors' choices must be constrained to a limited range of accepted possible avenues (North 1990). This dynamic forces opposing parties to negotiate settlements that provide a reasonable expectation that either group will have the opportunity to exercise political power

(O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). Once these negotiations have taken place among political elites, the incorporation and expansion of citizenship is able to take place gradually (Dahl 1971). This prevents society from becoming mobilized to the point of threatening the legitimacy of institutions, which could produce a regression back to authoritarianism (Remmer 1985).

This rational transition path has not always manifested itself in the southern cone. Half of the cases in this paper are still struggling to replace extreme protest and breakdown in favor of the ballot box. However, each case's experience has depended on the military's operational structure at the time of its extrication from politics. South American military regimes have traditionally shifted between their roles as a political referee between the state and society, and a formal governing apparatus. "Military-as-institution" signifies the role as a detached oversight body, responsible for upholding constitutional order. Oppositely, "military-as-government" identifies the role of the armed forces in fulfilling the traditional duties of the state in providing for the "public good" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 151).

In occupying both of these roles, the military assumes a set of competing interests that may alter its relations with society. A military-as-institution may rationalize stepping down from power in order to avoid losing concessions during political negotiations or being indicted for human rights violations (as we will see in Chile and Uruguay). Consequently in the southern cone, a military institution that prioritizes its role as a political arbitrator has been able to safely negotiate its way out of power, leading to an institutional space for the organized opposition to compete in elections.

This process is also affected by the internal organizational structure of a military regime and how it delegates power within its ranks. The ability of a hierarchical military regime to institutionalize itself provides a clear framework for governance and leads to a more stable execution of power. Aguero (1998) defines this institutionalization as the formation of strict operational rules:

Institutionalization in a military-authoritarian regime involves the establishment of formal rules that regulate the power structure within the regime and the assignment of government functions to nonrepresentative or semirepresentative bodies, including the armed forces. The adoption of a constitution such as the Pinochet regime did in Chile in 1980 is an example of an attempt at institutionalization of the regime (Aguero 1998).

A regime's ability to separate institutional powers creates a stable governing model. In Brazil and Chile, decisions were channeled through a council of "military chiefs" who were accountable to the head of state rather than their ranking superiors. Brazil went as far to seek legislative approval for the appointment of their presidents who were chosen from a pool of generals.¹ These mechanisms create a system that constrains the use of political power within the military regime. When a set of rules are formalized and followed, it allows for a clear identification of goals and a timeline for achieving them. After these are actualized, a set of expectations is present and a set of interactions between the military and its opposition can occur that paves the way for extrication (Przeworski 1991).

The Chilean case serves as the best example of this process unfolding. Pinochet's regime staged a coup that quickly institutionalized itself as a temporary governing body. After "subversive threats to stability" were eliminated and the country's economy began to grow, a constitution was written clarifying the regime's purpose and extent of power. A schedule for plebiscites was also outlined, which put the regime at risk of being voted out of power. Once violence had ceased negotiations were inevitable given the level of constraint the military placed on itself. This structure also created further separation between political and institutional interests.

¹ Ibid.

To maintain a moderate civil society, Pinochet delegated economic policy options to technocrats with more expertise than military officials (Haggard and Kaufman 1995). By doing this, the military was preserving its status as an apolitical institution responsible for upholding order. The more traditional tasks of governance were framed as civilian issues.

What consequences arise when institutionalized constraint is absent from a military regime? Without an organized structure, military governments risk intra-regime disputes and an overall uncertain political presence (Aguero 1998, 387). Their ability to promote stability and implement sound policies is diminished by political inexperience. This dynamic causes opposition groups to mobilize disproportionately and evade gradual liberalization. In Argentina, this unfolded to delegitimize the military junta. As the country slipped into crisis, violence and demonstration became viable threats to society once again. This caused the military to cave and schedule elections.

The unique characteristic of bureaucratic military governments in South America has had important implications for democratic development. When they have been able to establish institutional norms in lieu of uncertainty and breakdown, countries have been able to follow a more coherent path toward democracy. The absence of these norms has had the opposite effect. Populations find other ways to channel societal breakdown that stem the development of peaceful interactions. The next section will detail the southern cone's experience with military rule to emphasize the institutional variants each country faced and how they contributed to each respective democratic transition.

Military Juntas and Regime Extrication

Argentina (1976-1983)

From 1976-1983, Argentina was ruled by one of the most repressive military regimes in Latin America. This period of the country's history is referred to as the "Dirty War," as a result of the

enormous death toll carried out by the armed forces. The military's intervention was motivated by an escalation of urban violence between rival groups tied to the Peronist Party, a populist labor movement established by President Juan Perón in the 1940s. With support from the Argentine middle class, the armed forces were able to depose the civilian government and contain what they labeled a "subversive threat" (McGuire 1997). General Jorge Videla initiated "El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional," a six-year terror campaign that targeted anyone remotely associated with the political left. By the end of the junta, an estimated 8,960 people had "disappeared," while thousands more had been systematically killed.²

Linz and Stepan (1996) have characterized Argentina's military government as an authoritarian "situation" rather than the type of institutionalized regime observed elsewhere in the southern cone (*see also* Linz 2000). Parties were never established nor were elections held within the military establishment. Videla and his government never voiced any intentions to relinquish power once a specified goal had been reached. Additionally, the divisive nature of the Argentine military branches actually complicated their role as interim government. Disagreements between generals led to abrupt policy changes and unpredictable power relations between elites. Rather than a finely tuned hierarchical machine, the regime was erratic and often volatile. The context of indiscriminate violence further damaged any semblance of coherency the armed forces had.

The regime's downfall and eventual collapse was catalyzed by two important events. The first being an economic downturn caused by severe inflation. The government's national reorganization plan consisted of far-reaching orthodox reforms that were meant to reverse the statist economic model associated with Peronism (Pion-Berlin 1985). To oversee this plan Videla appointed Jose A. Martínez de Hoz as the regime's economics minister, who prescribed a strict austerity plan. These reforms were seldom questioned by the junta

² *Ibid.*, 170.

and initially supported by the middle class, which blamed the Peronist model for causing the crippling inflation. Strict adherence to this model eventually backfired against the regime. By 1978 the Argentine peso was devalued even further to cope with inflationary woes, which in turn led to shocks in wages and exports.³

The poor performance of these policies prompted negative responses from industrialists and large labor groups throughout Argentina. However, the military government was able to remain largely unaffected by social pressures due to its ability to demobilize threats with coercion that block elites from the political process. In March of 1980, this dynamic changed when Argentina's most prominent bank collapsed. The fall of Banco Intercambio Regional triggered the subsequent failures of three other financial institutions and a massive run on assets.⁴ Any faith the middle class had left in the regime was eroded after the country liquidated its reserves. This created a deeper crisis than it had inherited in 1976. Without significant popular support the military could no longer justify its political plan.

The second event that contributed to the military's downfall was the failed attempt to reclaim the Falklands/Malvinas Islands from British occupation in 1982 (Huntington 1993, 22). This effort failed disastrously, due to serious military miscalculations. The generals had assumed that the British would not respond seriously to the invasion and chose to send teenage conscripts instead of seasoned military professionals (Pion-Berlin 1985, 70). The Argentine forces were badly defeated and the regime desperately surrendered after just two months of combat.

Throughout the remainder of 1982, the military faced a slew of general strikes and popular uprisings, which further contributed to its illegitimacy. Because the regime was hierarchically led, albeit disorganized, it managed to keep somewhat of a grasp on the transfer

³ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

of power. The caretaker government overseeing this process was in charge until formal elections took place in October of 1983. During this time, parties that had been banned for the duration of military rule had emerged and began to organize themselves to inherit political power. The fractured condition of the armed forces created a sense of democratic urgency that was not present in the Brazil, Chile, or Uruguay. The regime's internal divisions caused many to fear armed conflict within the military establishment (Linz and Stepan 1996, 192). This perception increased the bargaining power of political parties and trade unions, which were able to strongly dictate the transition process.

The Argentine junta's degeneration rested on its inability to maintain institutional coherency. Due to cleavages within the regime, an organizational structure that would have united the military under a common cause was never established. This caused a series of failed policy options and the appointment of leaders who had different political objectives. When legitimacy was lost as a result of the inflationary crisis, an unsuccessful attempt at militarization confirmed the scheduling of democratic elections and the return to party politics. However, the absence of gradual liberalization and negotiations prevented parties from formal interactions, thus damaging the institutional basis for an Argentine transition.

Brazil (1964-1985)

Brazil's authoritarian experience was the longest of the South American cases. Unlike Argentina, the Brazilian military was comparatively less violent and kept crucial functions of the civilian government in place. Throughout most of the military's tenure, the bureaucratic and political functions of the state remained operational. The legislature remained in session and argued policy, though authority was vested in the upper echelons of the armed forces. Upon entering government, the military did not voice any intention to hand off power or to stay in charge indefinitely. However, the leadership frequently used liberalization rhetoric, which was

actualized by a steady dispersion of power over the span of its occupation (Barros 1985).

The “presence” of a democratic state allowed the military to separate itself as an autonomous institution. The Brazilian armed forces, unlike the militaries in neighboring countries, did not show a desire to permanently merge itself with political life. The institutionalization of their procedure reflected this. A panel of generals was designated to choose the interim president, who would then be subject to strict term limits (Aguero 1998, 386). This decision would then have to be ratified by the congress. The power of the military was constrained by checks placed on it by the political bureaucracy. This marked a clear line between the Brazilian military as an institution, and the military as the governing apparatus.

Brazil’s regime generally maintained a powerful position throughout many of its years in power. During the 1970s, the military benefitted from impressive economic growth. From 1972-1973, the economy experienced growth rates in the double digits, which strengthened the regime’s mandate (Haggard and Kaufman 1995, 72). Due to this expansion, the period was labeled the “Brazilian miracle.” These years marked significant public approval for the regime. A 1989 survey conducted by Geddes and Zaller (1989) found that 59 percent of respondents stated that they could “always trust the military,” which was a higher response rate than any other social institution, including the Catholic Church (329). Likewise, when asked directly if they supported the regime, 41 percent “declared themselves completely in favor.”⁵

However, this approval quickly began to deteriorate over the next decade. By 1980, the miracle had ended and Brazil’s economy began to stagnate. In order to maintain a steady political grasp, the government implemented a process of liberalization beginning in 1974. This process opened a political space for a democratic opposition. The *abertura* bolstered opposition mobilization and

⁵ Ibid.

eventually led to full-fledged electoral support for civilian parties by the early 1980s (Aguero 1998, 389). In 1985, the military agreed to hold indirect presidential elections without military candidates in the running. Although the military's candidate of the established "government party" was projected to win, internal divisions in the congress led to the first election of a nongovernment backed candidate.⁶ However, the president-elect, Tancredo Neves, died before his term was set to begin, leading to the pro-regime vice president, Jose Sarney to fill this void (Linz and Stepan 1996, 168).

The power relations between the military and opposition groups became significantly uneven after the outcome of the 1985 election. With a regime-backed candidate in office, the armed forces were able to secure a major stake in the rewriting of the Brazilian constitution in 1988. The military was able to negotiate an institutional framework that curtailed executive power under the oversight of the legislature, which benefitted the armed forces because they were essentially able to rule the national congress by proxy.⁷ This complicated the democratization process and allowed the military to greatly influence the shape of Brazil's democratic institutions.

The Brazilian military's extrication consisted of a formal negotiations process between the government and opposition parties. Unlike the Argentine process, the military enjoyed a more powerful position than the opposition, which allowed them to dictate the terms of democratization. Brazil's democratic transition, which was completed in 1990, experienced a liberalization process that had positive and negative consequences for the efficacy of its institutions. The bargaining process resulted in military control over the nature of executive power and the interaction between the president and congress. Linz and Stepan (1996) explain that the dynamic of the military's oversight has led to unstable institutional norms that have

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 169.

complicated democratic consolidation: The sudden use of military-backed presidential power contributed to Brazil's constitutional, political, and economic fragility as it attempted to consolidate democracy in the 1990s. In fact, the members of the Constituent Assembly never altered the first seventy-seven "parliamentary" articles. The 1988 constitution thus featured greatly enhanced legislative powers consistent with a parliamentary constitution so that the president, especially in budgetary areas, cannot – except by decree – rule with any efficacy without strong legislative support (169-170).

The military's imprint on Brazilian democratization would eventually lead to informal executive norms developing in the context of economic crisis. Without the legislative support to effectively mitigate further financial decline, President Fernando Collor de Mello would circumvent horizontal checks on power to implement a broad agenda of neoliberal reforms. This will be further explored in the next section where we will examine the characteristics of democracy as a result of the military's legacy.

Opposing Argentina's experience, Brazil was governed by an institutionalized military government that was able to exercise strict control over the country's political institutions. The aesthetic of democracy was kept in order to portray an element of separation between the armed forces and the state. This allowed Brazil to undergo a gradual political opening that fortified the influence of military elites. Negotiations dominated by the regime led to a more controlled extrication that kept civil society forces at bay, allowing institutions to channel participation more effectively. However, the military's role resulted in unstable institutional norms that have limited Brazilian democratization over the last three decades.

Chile (1973-1989)

Like the Brazilian regime, General Augusto Pinochet's government exercised highly organized authority over Chile for nearly two decades. Pinochet's ascendancy to power culminated in a military coup on September 11, 1973. This resulted in the death of

the country's democratically elected president, Salvador Allende of the Chilean Socialist Party. The military's intervention was prompted by the leftist mobilization of working class sectors in Chile that had been escalating during the 1950s and 1960s (Remmer 1980, 280-82). Marxist unions had begun to threaten the trade interests of bourgeois Chileans, leading to the election of Allende who was openly advocating for land redistribution. Once the administration sought to amend the constitution to pursue these reforms, the army acted swiftly to depose the civilian government.

Chile's middle class perceived the leftist orientation as a threat to the country's traditional democratic values. Their strong support backed the military's violent repression of those tied to the Socialist party or affiliated with the trade unions.⁸ Like the Argentine junta, death squads would indiscriminately kidnap, torture, and kill communist sympathizers that were deemed threats to national security. Because this project was cloaked in nationalism, formally labeled as "national reconstruction," the middle class population supported the containment of leftist political movements.

Upon claiming power, Pinochet's junta sought to reverse the Marxist policies initiated by Allende's government. This meant liberalizing Chilean institutions to a point that the country had not formerly experienced. The first step was to reorient the economy to adhere to market principles. To do this, Pinochet delegated economic policies to American-trained economists most of whom, had studied at the University of Chicago under Milton Friedman's orthodox perspective. This group, dubbed the "Chicago Boys," quickly began to privatize state assets and move Chile's economy away from the statist policies of the previous administration. These measures triggered significant economic shocks. Unemployment, rising inequality, and moves to stem consumption all created a potentially destabilizing environment for the regime.⁹ However, the military

⁸ Ibid., 283.

⁹ Ibid., 284.

maintained strict order by closing all channels of participation for civil society groups through coercive repression.

In the 1980s, Chile's economy began to show serious signs of improvement. By 1985, the country experienced its peak in growth, reaching a 6.2 percent GDP rate. This sharply deviated from its economic plight of the previous decade (Haggard and Kaufman 1995, 268). This prosperity insulated the regime from public pressures to restore democracy because the public viewed the regime as more effective at handling the national economy. Pinochet took this opportunity to implement a new constitution in 1980 that was ratified by a plebiscite. This wave of support fortified the military regime, however it also committed it to another plebiscite eight years later that would decide whether or not Chile would transition back to a democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996, 206). In a sense, the regime's initiative to appeal to the public with the expectation it would be the preferred political option sealed the fate of its inevitable extrication.

Pinochet's government was the most stable authoritarian regime in the southern cone. From its occupation in 1973, it outlined concise procedural goals that received support from a moderate public. The appointment of Pinochet as the hierarchical leader of Chile's government and of the armed forces created a clean dictation of power, which kept military matters separate from political ones. The regime's institutional prowess allowed for technocratic efficiency that resulted in turning the economy around and maintaining a strict rule of law that adhered to constitutional mandates (Aguero 1998, 386). A strict separation of powers limited the government's use of decrees and constrained its abilities to what was authorized only in the constitution of 1980.

The priority of the military's institutional goals allowed it to negotiate a democratic framework that reinforced the efficacy of the state's bureaucracy. The "Concertación," a coalition consisting of Chile's previously silenced leftist parties, was allowed to mobilize during a political opening. However, "radical elements" were kept muted, as the coalition knew any extreme shift to the left would be

met with an authoritarian crackdown. The Concertación successfully rallied against the regime to mobilize the public to vote in favor of elections during the 1988 plebiscite. Though, the government's accomplishments particularly on the economic front allowed it to closely guide its extrication. Chile's classification by Haggard and Kaufman as a "non-crisis" democratic transition demonstrates how economic growth was used as a bargaining chip to secure the military's nonpolitical interests once the public voted out the regime (Haggard and Kaufman 1995). Pinochet was able to secure the institutional goals of the military and allow the opposition to remain present during negotiations, which created the basis for the democratic channeling of political grievances. However, at a significant cost as Haggard and Kaufman explain: In Chile, Pinochet remained at the helm of the armed forces following the transition, and he and his appointees sat on the national security council. Military budgets were sustained through a guaranteed share of revenues from copper exports... Before leaving office, Pinochet appointed supreme court justices, mayors, regional governors, and one-fifth of the new senate. These appointments provided the military's conservative allies with the power to block or delay the policies of the incoming democratic government (Haggard and Kaufman 1997, 271).

This process culminated in political interactions that adhered to a predictable set of expectations. By essentially setting up a new democratic framework, the regime was supporting the stable return of political institutions with the guarantee that the military would remain unaltered.

The Chilean case demonstrates a successful process of liberalization that resulted from institutionalized constraints placed on the regime, as well as limitations on opposition mobilization. Coupled with strong economic performance, this process was able to engage both parties in order to formalize democratic norms. This created a basis for consolidation that was not present in either Argentina or Brazil.

Uruguay (1973-1985)

The Uruguayan case shares important similarities with the other southern cone cases analyzed in this paper. From 1973-1985, the country was ruled by a hierarchical military regime that suppressed all political opposition. Comparatively, Uruguay's bureaucratic authoritarian government was "the most deeply repressive," which severely weakened its civil society (Linz and Stepan 1996, 152). However, unlike the other countries, Uruguay had a traditionally stable party structure that deeply institutionalized itself into political life. At the time of military occupation the country had the longest spanning democratic government in Latin America.¹⁰ This tradition of democratic norms deterred the military from abolishing Uruguayan political parties. They knew that if they attempted to reorganize the country's political institutions their incumbency would be threatened.

Like in the previous cases, the military assumed power in Uruguay to contain violence perpetrated by leftist political organizations. Until this period, Uruguay had been a relatively peaceful country, which insulated its strong democracy from shocks that were characteristic of its geographic neighbors. By the late 1960s, the violence had gotten so intense that politicians were courting military generals for an organized government takeover. This allowed the armed forces to avoid a coup that deposed and alienated political elites. Many viewed the occupation as essential to restoring security and ridding the country of communist insurrection.¹¹ Though, this initial support would weaken throughout the 1970s. Like the Argentine and Chilean regimes, this government also shifted Uruguay's economy with market-oriented reforms. Unions were disbanded and massive pay cuts were implemented for industrial jobs.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 156.

This led to serious wage gaps and an uptick in income inequality that affected working class laborers (Haggard and Kaufman 1995, 60).

By 1980, the military held a plebiscite for a newly drafted constitution that would confirm their authoritarian mandate. Surprisingly, the public overwhelmingly voted the measure down (Aguero 1998, 387). The middle class Uruguayans favored a democratic opening in order to improve lagging economic growth (Linz and Stepan 1996, 153). This failed mandate more or less forced the regime to schedule civilian elections for 1985. Because the party system remained intact, although underground, a nonthreatening alternative presented itself as a political option. Mobilization among opposition groups led to negotiations with the regime that produced the Club Naval Pact. While this agreement allowed Uruguay to return to its pre-authoritarian democracy, it also enabled military Generals and Officers to avoid prosecution for human rights violations that occurred throughout the regime's tenure.

The military's extrication process was simplified by its separation from Uruguay's traditional political structure. This dichotomy allowed for the regime to leave with the concessions necessary to allow for a safe initiation of elections. Though unlike the fully institutionalized nature of the armed forces in Chile, the Uruguayan military was unable to secure its constitutional mandate. Liberalization was implemented essentially by default, due to the regime's inability to clarify its political and economic plan (Haggard and Kaufman 1995, 71). When the threat of leftist insurgence was largely neutralized, there no longer remained a significant reason for the suspension of democracy. After the failed plebiscite in 1980, civil society began to voice this sentiment with demonstrations and general strikes. In November of 1983, 400,000 protestors on behalf of political parties and labor unions took to the streets to denounce the military government.¹² After this massive rally, soft-liners within

¹² Ibid., 65.

the regime began to set the tone for a transfer of power back to the political parties.

Uruguay offers a distinctive case when compared with the rest of the southern cone extrications. The failure of its plebiscite led officials to rationalize a transition process that would restore power to its historically strong democratic institutions. Unlike the destabilizing extrication in Argentina, or the drawn out one in Brazil, Uruguay had the foundational structure of a stable party system, consisting of two broad “catch-all” organizations. This system was able to absorb democratization in a healthier way. However, the institutional basis was necessary for the reemergence of stable democratic norms. Uruguayan society already had established itself as a moderate force, so there was no “remobilization” of groups that could destabilize the transition process (as was depicted in the Argentine case). This advantage has separated Uruguay from the rest of the southern cone experiences with authoritarianism.

Democratic Trajectories in the Southern Cone

The southern cone’s experience with democratization has largely varied due to the diverse nature of the outgoing regime. Because the militaries implemented hierarchical rule, a high degree of concentrated power was able to affect the direction and length of the political opening in each respective case. Even in Argentina, where the military essentially botched its authoritarian mandate, the regime was able to initiate a gradual electoral calendar in lieu of a hasty revolution. This dynamic contextualized power relations within the new democratic government and set the groundwork for how institutions would operate without the military in power. On the more stable end of the institutional spectrum lie Chile and Uruguay, both of which transitioned with strong oppositions and a relatively robust rule of law. Oppositely, Argentina and Brazil currently suffer from institutional fluidity that has led to democratic shocks over the last three decades.

The level of bargaining power each government had at the time of its extrication determined what type of norms the opposition would develop once democracy was restored. If a regime had the ability to negotiate aggressively with its opposition, the likelihood of a moderate transition outcome was higher due to the incumbent's ability to threaten relations with the status quo or a repressive slide-back. This forced compromise between parties, which would then translate to stable norms and expectations in the future. This "preparatory phase" allowed for temporary pacts that established an institutional "process," which was preferred over violence or the abandonment of governmental rules (Rustow 1970, 352).

For Chile and Uruguay, this process was actualized. Both countries currently boast comparatively stable democracies that have seen no major crises since their experiences under authoritarianism. This was achieved due to moderating relations between Pinochet and the Concertación in Chile, and the military and the party system in Uruguay. Along with maintaining a significant stake in the government, Pinochet secured 10 percent of the state's copper export profits to be devoted the military budget (Haggard and Kaufman 1995, 112). Additionally, the armed forces in both countries were able to negotiate outcomes that prevented the prosecution of human rights violations. The legal prevention of tribunals neutralized the issue in the Chilean and Uruguayan legislatures. With no threat of retribution, the militaries felt it safe to return to their barracks and disassociate themselves from politics, further legitimizing the democratic option.

The exit of the military from the national stage created the room for political parties to form stronger relationships with one another. Unlike Uruguay, where the party system survived authoritarianism, Chile's opposition encompassed a coalitional body of various parties. These groups were more or less forced to come to agreements or face the risk of Pinochet clinging to power. After negotiations with the regime, parties cooperated with one another to usher in a well-tempered democratic process that fostered a fair

electoral environment, allowing competing parties to maintain influence. Electoral regulations and representation in the congress were largely unbiased, given the broad appeal Chile's centrist parties enjoyed. This institutionalized "political learning," as Linz and Stepan have described it, was a critical normalizing factor in both Chile and Uruguay (Linz and Stepan 1996, 217). Because each country's civil society was constrained in their mobilization efforts, this learning was cultivated through balanced and gradual interactions that then spread throughout the polities.

Argentina and Brazil have faced a more difficult democratization process. While Chile and Uruguay are considered to be "consolidated cases" in their current forms, their neighbors have faced serious bouts of economic and political crisis that have arguably been results of institutional fluidity. O'Donnell (1994) has characterized Argentina and Brazil by the centralized power of their executives, leading to a diminished-type system he has called "delegative democracy" (Guillermo O'Donnell 1994). This typology has resulted from lingering authoritarian norms that did not dissipate fully, leaving executives to centralize their political power at the expense of horizontal institutions like the congress or judiciary. This differentiates Argentina and Brazil from the Uruguayan case in particular. Whereas Uruguay's congress was *restored* after the military extricated, Argentina and Brazil faced a new democratic structure altogether, which meant the formation of a new set of political interactions. The absence of an institutionalized government before each transition caused a chaotic reorganization that led to imbalanced relations between parties and civil society groups (Phillip 1984).

Argentina, as the least institutionalized case, continues to suffer from a lack of stable relations. Unlike Chile and Uruguay, there was no transition plan that allowed actors to act accordingly in order to achieve their desired goals. The military up until its decline, continued to make impulsive and consequently damaging decisions that led society to harshly respond. Once elections were announced, Argentine politics reverted back to the "impossible game" scenario

that divided relations based on class lines. However, now the military was delegitimized. Unable to mend an economy ravaged by hyperinflation, the first civilian president, Raul Alfonsín, was forced to prematurely resign from office amidst violent national riots. The subsequent presidency of Carlos Menem utilized Argentina's institutional weakness to infringe on democratic protections such as term limits, judicial review, and legislative appointments (Levitsky and Murillo 2005). Because Argentina's political parties were not forced to institutionalize cooperative norms, there lacks an operational structure within government, causing executives to have disproportional power over the country's democracy.

Brazil faces similar problems. Like Argentina, before its long authoritarian period, the Brazilian party system was highly polarized and weakly institutionalized. By the start of its transition, Brazil had established several new parties that had not yet operated under a democracy. The country's proportional representation system creates incentives to form new party organizations rather than work through or compromise with ones that garner a multitude of the national vote. The threshold for congressional representation is lower than one percentage point, complicating party relationships (Linz and Stepan 1996).

Although the military was able to maintain control over liberalization, once the armed forces handed off power, the parties could not institutionalize stable norms in the context of economic decay. This led to a strong prescription of neoliberal policies under Brazil's first directly elected president, Fernando Collor de Mello. These reforms consisted of massive privatizations that essentially reduced the capacity of the state. This damaged institutional procedure by fragmenting the distribution of resources to nongovernmental entities. In order to compensate for this, executive power became more centralized and democratic oversteps became frequent, similar to the Argentine case.

Brazil remains somewhat of an outlier in that the fact that its military kept it separated from the government did not necessarily

lead to institutionalization on par with Chile or Uruguay. However, Brazil's drawn out liberalization process gave groups more time to organize in an increasingly uneven way. Poor norms were put into practice after the military removed itself completely from the political process in 1990.¹³ Institutional provisions that regulated parties and the congress that were developed in the wake of military extrication caused Brazilian democracy to enter a trajectory that was not aimed at consolidation.

Conclusion

Due to the southern cone's unique experience with hierarchical military regimes, the region has had a mixed experience with democratic development. While various theories remain on the reasons for stable democratization, this paper asserts that institutional foundations are necessary for the cultivation of strong democratic norms. These foundations allow opposing groups to channel conflicts in ways that prevent violence and allow for fair competition.

In the southern cone, military governments that initiated liberalization caused countries to engage in negotiations that would generally fortify democratic institutions. Chile and Uruguay both benefit from the strongest democracies in the region due to each military's prioritization of its institutional goals over political power. While this occurred in Brazil, different contextual factors led to uneven democratization, which perpetuated institutional fluidity in the initial years after its transition. Argentina faced no negotiations process, which allowed for the over mobilization of societal groups. Its military's collapse created norms that compromised the legitimacy of institutions, which continues to negatively affect its political system.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 164.

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