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## THE CAUSES OF THE ELECTORAL (IN)STABILITY OF INCUMBENTS IN HYBRID REGIMES IN LATIN AMERICA 1990-2014<sup>1</sup>

Jaroslav Bílek - Barbora Vališková\*

### ABSTRACT

The research on hybrid regimes has advanced in the recent years but there is still a gap with respect to a question of their (in)stability. There are researchers asserting that hybrid regimes are only a transitional regime type while others insist on their stable (persisting) character. The aim of this article was to explore the causes of the incumbents' electoral (in)stability in hybrid regimes in Latin America. For that purpose, an instructive comparison of 18 cases of national presidential elections – eleven of incumbent victory and seven that led to a victory of the opposition - was carried out in the years between 1990 and 2014. The text assessed the validity of the two main sets of hypotheses. The first highlighted the strategy on the part of the opposition forces and the second referred to the context in which the opposition political forces operate. The analysis concluded that while the unification of the opposition as the main strategy to win elections did not appear to be a prominent factor in the explanation of hybrid regime stability, the contextual variables – strategy on the part of the incumbent and the previous performance of the candidates' platforms in local elections – seemed to bear some explanatory power. Results obtained in this analysis are handicapped by a relative small sample of data but present a promising venue for future analysis. Future research can confirm our result on a bigger sample or compare our theory with other explanations about electoral (in)stability in hybrid regimes.

**Key words:** Hybrid Regimes, Stability, Opposition, Election, Latin America

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## Introduction

One of the phenomena inseparably associated with the so-called third wave of democratisation is the existence of political regimes combining the elements of democracy and authoritarianism, which the contemporary political science terms as hybrid regimes. Although the political science theory still perceives hybrid regimes as an unstable form of political organisation (Shevtsova, 2001; Donno, 2013), the empirical reality proves that some of them show relatively high durability (Menocal et al., 2008, p. 31; Ekman, 2010, p. 5, 9 – 11; Diver, 2014, 2). This fact naturally brings our attention to their functioning.

So far most authors focused on hybrid regimes in an effort to explore the causes of their origin (Levitsky, Loxton, 2013). Alternatively, scholars focused on the prediction of possibilities for future democratisation (Levitsky, Way, 2010; Ekman, 2010, Mainwaring, Perez-Liñán, 2014). Current research about functioning of hybrid regimes is quite underdeveloped. Although most theorists of hybrid regimes agree that it concerns the political regimes with a real, but unfair competition between the incumbent and the opposition, few of them have attempted to explain why the incumbent wins the elections only in some hybrid regimes and in some does not.

One of the exceptions is the work by **Bunce** and **Wolchik** (2010, 2011). However, their work dealt only with the post-communist part of Europe and neglected some variables that we think might help us explain the described problem. We are interested only in the factors explaining electoral change of incumbent in office regardless of possible democratisation, because the empirical reality proves that the incumbent's election defeat does not necessarily mean democratisation, but for example, the continuation of the hybrid regime under another incumbent.

This text will attempt to explain the contrast between the electoral change and electoral stability of incumbent in hybrid regimes in Latin America. For this purpose, we have performed an instructive comparison of 17 presidential hybrid regime elections in Latin America<sup>2</sup> in 1990–2014. The intention of this text is to contribute to the debate about elections in hybrid regimes in Latin America.

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<sup>2</sup> The cases selected in this study correspond to the countries of the continental Latin America that share common Spanish or Portuguese colonial legacy. It means that Belize, French Guyana, Guyana, Surinam are excluded from the analysis because of the different historical and cultural trajectory, as well as Caribbean island states as a Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominican Republic, Jamaica and so on.

## 1 Theories and hypotheses

As already mentioned, our definition of the electoral change or stability is followed by the operationalisation of **Ian O. Smith** (2014, pp. 755–756) and **Valerie Bunce** and **Sharon Wolchik** (2010) in terms of the incumbent's defeat or victory. Despite some shortcomings in terms of equal conditions, the elections in hybrid regimes still have a degree of unpredictability, thus allowing the opposition to confront the regime in a real and non-violent way. Therefore, both the opposition and the government see the elections as a primary means for gaining and keeping the political power (Howard, Roessler, 2006, Pp. 367–368; Smith, 2014, p. 746; Schedler, 2006, Pp. 3, 12; Levitsky, Way, 2010, Pp. 12–13).

The incumbent is defined rather on the party than personal basis since, thanks to the political platform, the incumbent remains. This has been proved by the existing research showing that a personal change of the incumbent candidate<sup>3</sup> does not guarantee liberalisation (cf. Howard, Roessler, 2006, p. 376) or different election results (Bunce, Wolchik, 2010, p. 54). We work with the narrower concept of the political (parliamentary) opposition (cf. Brack, Weinblum, 2011), whose objective is to confront the government, since elections are our unit of analysis and the electoral change of the incumbent is a dependent variable. Therefore, we will proceed from the classic definitions of the opposition by **Robert Dahl** (1973) and **G. Ionescu** and **I. De Madariaga** (1968).

Our text works with the assumption that in order to explain the result of elections in the uneven conditions of hybrid regimes (Levitsky, Way, 2010), it is essential to pay attention to a detailed analysis of the interaction between the ruling elites and the opposition, taking into account also the factors on the side of the general public. However, elections don't take place in a vacuum and we also need to pay attention to the structural factors that influence the character of the electoral contest (cf. Kriesi, 2004; Meyer, 2004). Because our text aims at explaining the causes of electoral change or electoral stability of particular examples of elections, we mostly take into account structural factors which can be described as short-term or medium-term.

In spite of the existence of uneven conditions during elections, the opposition in a hybrid regime can provide a real government alternative when choosing an

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<sup>3</sup> Presidents can deal with the constitutional constraints of re-election by using several strategies, such as the candidacy of a close incumbent's ally, etc. (Bunce, Wolchik, 2010, Pp. 43–44).

adequate strategy (Diamond, 2002, p. 24). In this respect, we assume that the unification of the opposition with the aim to confront the incumbent in presidential elections is essential (cf. Van de Walle, 2006, p. 78). It is much harder for the government elites to defeat or persecute opposition which is united (Howard, Roessler, 2006, p. 371; Donno, 2013, p. 706). The unified opposition can also mobilise voters to vote against the incumbent by invoking the impression that a change is possible and that to vote the opposition is not pointless (cf. Howard, Roessler, 2006, p. 371). The unity of the opposition<sup>4</sup> is then operationalised as the ability of the opposition to form a strategic coalition or rather present a strong and united front behind its candidate. Such a coalition can have both formal and informal character, and the absence and presence of the opposition alliance is also distinguished<sup>5</sup>. Our theoretical assumption is that in the elections, where the opposition forms a strategic coalition to support the opposition candidate, it is more likely the incumbent will be defeated in the elections than in the election where there is no such opposition coalition (cf. Howard, Roessler, 2006; Bunce et al., 2010).

Also of importance are the factors on the side of the incumbent. In our paper, we focus on two such factors: the first one stems from the previously outlined assumption that united (and strong) opposition poses a significant threat for the government. Therefore, we will concentrate on the government strategies to convince part of the opposition, operationalised as the incumbent's ability to create a coalition<sup>6</sup> with an opposition (non-governmental) party, or with a completely new party or subject. We assume that the existence of such a

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<sup>4</sup> The electoral coalition, whose common goal is to beat the current incumbent, can be formed by ideologically distant and very diverse subjects; therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between this concept and the cohesion of the opposition, which implies a certain degree of organisational or ideological unification (cf. Howard, Roessler, 2006, p. 371; Bratton, van de Walle, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> We will also distinguish between a broad coalition (only few smaller political parties are not included in the coalition; there are not many competing opposition blocks; the total number of presidential candidates is smaller, coalition comprises ideologically different parties), a partial coalition (integrating more opposition parties; quite a few opposition parties remain outside the coalition, or the opposition coalition has to face another opposition alliance), and minority coalition (combining two or three small parties; the candidates are supported only rhetorically; there is a large number of opposition candidates). Only the first situation (a broad coalition) clearly indicates the united opposition, while the second (a partial coalition) may oscillate between two extremes, from a rather unified to a greatly fragmented opposition. The third situation (a minority coalition) clearly shows the opposition forces are divided.

<sup>6</sup> This coalition may take the form of an official expression of support to the government candidate by the opposition party.

strategic coalition with an opposition party greatly increases the incumbent's chances of success<sup>7</sup>. In addition to the absence of such a coalition in the studied elections, we will also look at any changes on the supply side, i.e., if the president strived to be re-elected or not. Based on the previous research we do not assume that a personal change of the incumbent (or the existence of institutional limits on their re-election) has a major impact on the electoral stability of incumbent (Howard, Roessler, 2006; Bunce, Wolchik, 2010).

The last factor that could lead to a deeper understanding of the issue that's being analysed is the distribution of political power on the local level. Here, we work with the assumption that success in local elections may serve the opposition as a springboard effect for future success in national elections by increasing the legitimacy of the opposition parties (Peterson, Wallinder, 2011, p. 6). With a presence in local representative bodies, opposition politicians get the necessary (professional) political skills and other important sources (Edwards, McCarthy, 2004, Pp. 125–128) which may be critical to their future electoral activities, for example, profiling new popular personalities in the opposition, relationships with other political parties, and contacts and deepening links with the civil society. To explore the local political context, we will analyse the strength of the opposition resulting from local elections in relation to the incumbent. Particularly, we will compare the percentages of mayor posts won by the main opposition parties in the studied presidential elections with the percentages won by the government<sup>8</sup>. We expect then that the stronger the opposition and, on the contrary, the weaker the performance of the incumbent in local elections, the more likely is the electoral victory of the opposition in the following presidential elections.

## **2 Alternative explanation and problem of endogeneity**

In addition to the presented theoretical framework, there are other factors with a potential impact on the electoral change/stability in hybrid regimes. Firstly, it is the capacity of the state to provide essential public services and to obtain the sources necessary for the performance of these functions (Diver,

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<sup>7</sup> Van de Walle says that incumbent should keep on their core supporters on his side and prevent desertion to the opposition to win the elections (2006: p. 78). In this sense, we are expanding the argument with the incumbent's ability to attract part of the (opposition) forces.

<sup>8</sup> If there was an opposition coalition in the studied presidential elections, a share of mayor posts has been for the whole coalition. The same is true for the incumbent.

2014, Pp. 13–14; Slater, 2012). If the state is unable to meet its obligations, it undermines its legitimacy (Kuthy, 2011, p. 50), there is a rising dissatisfaction with the government elites (cf. Sánchez, p. 498), and the chances of opposition success in the electoral race increase. The capacity of the state will be analysed through citizen's perceptions. For this purpose, the data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) database will be used.

Another explanation is based on the knowledge of the key impact of economic factors on the regime stability (cf. Lipset, 1959; Przeworski, Limongi, 1997). A bad economic situation undermines the legitimacy of the government party (Roberts, Wibbels, 1999, p. 584; Bunce, Wolchik, 2010, p. 49) and makes it difficult to maintain the clientelist networks (cf. Case, 2006, p. 112; Howard, Roessler, 2006, Pp. 372–373). This should lead to the outflow of the votes from the incumbent (cf. Kramer, 1971, Pp. 140–141; Roberts, Wibbels, 1999, p. 577). A bad economic situation we define as a presence of economic crisis<sup>9</sup> which has been present for the period of two years before the studied elections.

Other possible economic explanation takes into account the key characteristics of hybrid regimes, namely the linkage of the government parties to the state (Menocal et. al., 2008, p. 34). Thus, the government manoeuvring ability depends on the extent to which the economy is controlled by the state. A high level of nationalisation and state regulations increases the power of the ruling party, and vice versa<sup>10</sup> (Greene, 2010, Pp. 808–822; Weyland, 2013, Pp. 28–29). The degree of the state control over the economy will be analysed using the Index of Economic Freedom, Heritage Foundation indicator<sup>11</sup>.

The last issue connected with the aim of our paper is the question of endogeneity. The formation of an opposition coalition may be an endogenous part of the previously started process of regime liberalisation, not its cause, because the regime weakening increases the opportunities of the opposition,

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<sup>9</sup> The economic crisis will be operationalised as a drop in the GDP per capita of 5% or more in two consecutive years or, as the annual growth in inflation of 50% and more (cf. Levitsky, Loxton, 2013, p. 114). This variable will be analysed using the World Bank Development Indicators database.

<sup>10</sup> These differences in using the state resources indicate the asymmetry between the left and the right, which is further intensified by populist tendencies of the governments in Latin American regimes (cf. Freidenberg, 2011a)

<sup>11</sup> In the evaluation of economic freedom on the basis of the Index of Economic Freedom, we proceeded in the same way as Levitsky and Loxton (2013). We monitored the value in the year of the presidential election. The regimes with the economy assessment value above 60 have been classified as liberal, the regimes with the assessment value below 50 as nationalised (statist), the regimes with the assessment value between 50 and 60 as mixed (Levitsky, Loxton, 2013, p. 114).

which is then motivated to cooperate (cf. Bunce, Wolchik, 2010, p. 50). To be sure, however, we have also included the variable of the *previous regime liberalisation* in our analysis. This variable will be explored through changes in the value of the political rights score of the Freedom House database. The variable measures the previous regime liberalisation by subtracting the score in the year of the studied elections from the beginning of the electoral period. If the regime had not undergone any preceding liberalisation, the final value will be equal to zero or negative. Positive values indicate previously initiated regime liberalisation<sup>12</sup>.

### 3 Classification of hybrid regimes

In this paper, we only consider regimes to be hybrid if they are characterised by the existence of competitive but unfair elections and the absence of tutelary influence (Gilbert and Mohseni, 2011, p. 280). Therefore, we work with a set of regimes which – in fact – corresponds with the category of competitive authoritarianism of **Levitsky and Way** (2010, p. 5). Since the goal of this text is to compare elections throughout Latin America, we have decided to use quantitative data to keep as much consistency across the studied cases as possible. Although we take elections as the unit of our analysis, we have decided to classify political regimes in the observed time frame not only in the election year, but always in the whole electoral term, because one of the key variables are the results of the incumbent and opposition in the previous local elections which were supposed to be held in the same context (in the hybrid regime setting). Thus, we've only included those of examples of Latin American regimes of 1990-2014 in our study that fall into the delineated category and which existed for at least one electoral term.

Considering the known problems with quantitative classification of hybrid regimes, (cf. Mainwaring, Brinks, Pérez-Liñán, 2001; Gilbert, Mohseni, 2011), we used individual variables that meet the needs of the three-dimensional classification of hybrid regimes instead of composite score of any actual dataset (for instance PolityIV or Freedom House). For the first dimension (electoral competition), we used the EXREC score from PolityIV in the same way as **Farid Guliyev** mentioned in his study (2012). Our classification of second dimension

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<sup>12</sup> In this example, it would mean that the "electoral change of the incumbent" would rather manifest itself in more liberal regimes, and the studied factors would be only accompanying phenomena of liberalisation.

(fairness of the competition) is based on **Gilbert and Mohseni's** recommendations and we use POLCOMP variable from PolityIV dataset. To determine the last dimension of our classification, i.e. the tutelary interference, we have used the existing Latin America dataset created by **Mainwaring, Pérez-Liñán and Brinks** for the years of 1990–2010. For the years of 2010–2014, we have created our own classification<sup>13</sup> according to the criteria used by the aforementioned authors (Mainwaring et al, 2001, Pp. 46–48).

**Table 1: An overview of studied presidential election**

| Country   | Incumbent victory | Country   | Opposition victory |
|-----------|-------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| Peru      | 1995              | Ecuador   | 2006               |
| Paraguay  | 2003              | Paraguay  | 2008               |
| Colombia  | 2006              | Colombia  | 1998               |
| Ecuador   | 2009              | Colombia  | 2002               |
| Bolivia   | 2009              | Bolivia   | 2005               |
| Ecuador   | 2013              | Nicaragua | 2006               |
| Bolivia   | 2014              | Mexico    | 2000               |
| Colombia  | 2014              |           |                    |
| Nicaragua | 1996              |           |                    |
| Nicaragua | 2001              |           |                    |
| Colombia  | 2010              |           |                    |

Source: Authors' Survey

## 4 Analysis

Before we proceed to the analysis of the assumptions derived from the presented theoretical framework, it is necessary to look at the longer-term liberalisation trends in the regimes, since they can affect electoral stability of incumbent instead of the studied variables. Mainly in the cases in which the incumbent lost the elections, the identification of the ongoing process of liberalisation would mean that a potential existence of a broader opposition coalition and its successful performance in local elections cannot be seen as the only cause of the incumbent's election defeat, but rather as an epiphenomenal of the previously started process of a gradual liberalisation of the regime.

<sup>13</sup> We excluded Venezuela due to the strong influence of the army between the years 2001-2008 which in our theoretical conception of hybrid regimes represents tutelary interference. After 2008 we coded Venezuela as authoritarian regime.

**Table 2: Liberalisation trends in analysed cases**

| <b>Case</b> | <b>Year</b> | <b>Score</b> |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Peru        | 1995        | -2           |
| Nicaragua   | 1996        | 1            |
| Nicaragua   | 2001        | 0            |
| Paraguay    | 2003        | 1            |
| Colombia    | 2006        | 1            |
| Ecuador     | 2009        | 0            |
| Bolivia     | 2009        | 0            |
| Colombia    | 2010        | 0            |
| Ecuador     | 2013        | 0            |
| Bolivia     | 2014        | 0            |
| Colombia    | 2014        | 0            |
| Colombia    | 1998        | 0            |
| Mexico      | 2000        | 2            |
| Colombia    | 2002        | -1           |
| Bolivia     | 2005        | 0            |
| Ecuador     | 2006        | 0            |
| Nicaragua   | 2006        | 0            |
| Paraguay    | 2008        | 0            |

Source: Authors' Survey

The data in Table 2 illustrate the fact that from the states where the opposition defeated the incumbent, only Mexico shows signs of substantial liberalisation of the regime, which had been initiated before the period we studied. For these reasons, Mexico will not be included in the subsequent analysis because the electoral instability of incumbent seems to be a part of a long-term liberalisation process of regime and not the result of the analysed (mostly medium-term and short-term) factors. The factors could accelerate the process, but not initiate it. In the second group of examples, we can observe a process of gradual liberalisation only in three of the eleven studied regimes; however, the process has a very slight tendency and it should rather complicate

the position of the incumbent. If our assumptions are correct, this fact, together with the existence of a strong and united opposition should lead to the incumbent's election defeat.

One of the main theoretical assumptions of the text is that the unification of the opposition should lead to the incumbent's election defeat. On the contrary, if the opposition is fragmented and its individual parts act in an atomized way, the incumbent has a far greater chance to keep the power.

**Table 3: Political scoring of the cases: alliances, coalitions, and local strength**

| The incumbent won         | The election year | The continuity of the incumbent/ partisan formation | The opposition coalition (type) | The incumbent's coalition |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Peru</b>               | 1995              | yes/yes   | yes (partial)                   | no                        |
| <b>Nicaragua</b>          | 1996              | no / partially                                      | yes (minority)                  | no (splitting)            |
| <b>Nicaragua</b>          | 2001              | no/yes  | yes (broad)                     | no                        |
| <b>Paraguay</b>           | 2003              | no/yes  | no                              | no                        |
| <b>Colombia</b>           | 2006              | no/yes  | yes (minority)                  | yes                       |
| <b>Ecuador</b>            | 2009              | yes/yes   | yes (minority)                  | yes                       |
| <b>Bolivia</b>            | 2009              | yes/yes   | yes (partial)                   | yes                       |
| <b>Colombia</b>           | 2010              | no / partially                                      | yes (minority)                  | yes                       |
| <b>Ecuador</b>            | 2013              | yes/yes   | yes (partial)                   | yes/no                    |
| <b>Bolivia</b>            | 2014              | yes/yes   | yes (minority)                  | no                        |
| <b>Colombia</b>           | 2014              | yes/yes   | yes (minority)                  | yes/no                    |
| <b>The opposition won</b> |                   |   |                                 |                           |
| <b>Colombia</b>           | 1998              | no/yes  | yes (partial)                   | no (splitting)            |
| <b>Colombia</b>           | 2002              | no/yes  | yes (partial)                   | no (splitting)            |
| <b>Bolivia</b>            | 2005              | no/yes  | yes (minority)                  | no                        |
| <b>Ecuador</b>            | 2006              | no/yes  | yes (partial)                   | no                        |
| <b>Nicaragua</b>          | 2006              | no/yes  | no                              | no (splitting)            |
| <b>Paraguay</b>           | 2008              | no/yes  | yes (broad)                     | no (splitting)            |

| The incumbent won         | The year of municipal elections | % mayors; the incumbent <sup>a</sup> (coalition; 2nd round) | % mayors; main opposition <sup>b</sup> | Winner - local el. <sup>c</sup> |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------|
| <b>Peru</b>               | 1993                            | X   | 40% (traditional parties)              | independent                     |
| <b>Nicaragua</b>          | 1990; 1996                      | 76.34% (1990); 63.44% (1996)                                | 23.65% (1990); 35% (1996)              | incumbent                       |
| <b>Nicaragua</b>          | 2000                            | 63.10%  | 34.90%                                 | incumbent                       |
| <b>Paraguay</b>           | 2001                            | 65.89%  | 30.84%                                 | incumbent                       |
| <b>Colombia</b>           | 2003                            | 33.44%  | 2%                                     | incumbent                       |
| <b>Ecuador</b>            | 2004                            | 37%   | 10%                                    | incumbent                       |
| <b>Bolivia</b>            | 2004                            | 38.60%  | 11.90%                                 | incumbent                       |
| <b>Colombia</b>           | 2007                            | 29.38% (80.47%)   | 5.57%                                  | incumbent                       |
| <b>Ecuador</b>            | 2009                            | 33.48%  | 5.40%                                  | incumbent                       |
| <b>Bolivia</b>            | 2010                            | 68.55%  | 10.40%                                 | incumbent                       |
| <b>Colombia</b>           | 2011                            | 54% (59.04%)  | X                                      | incumbent                       |
| <b>The opposition won</b> |                                 |   |  |                                 |
| <b>Colombia</b>           | 1997                            | 40.11%  | 30.68%                                 | incumbent                       |
| <b>Colombia</b>           | 2000                            | 23.11%  | X                                      | opposition                      |
| <b>Bolivia</b>            | 2004                            | 7.60%   | 38%                                    | opposition                      |
| <b>Ecuador</b>            | 2004                            | 10.38%  | 8.50%                                  | opposition                      |
| <b>Nicaragua</b>          | 2004                            | 37.50%  | 57.24%                                 | opposition                      |
| <b>Paraguay</b>           | 2006                            | 66.09%  | 30%                                    | incumbent                       |

Source: Authors' Survey

As can be observed in Table 3, wide opposition coalitions have been a very rare phenomenon in the studied elections. Out of the 17 cases, we can specifically identify only two indisputable cases of a majority opposition coalition: in Nicaragua in 2001<sup>14</sup>, where the incumbent won the elections, and in

<sup>14</sup> A few months before the elections in 2001, the political alliance, *Convergencia Nacional*, was established, including Ortega's *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* and other political formations and personalities (e.g. *Movimiento Renovador Sandinista*; *La Unión Demócrata Cristiana*; *El Movimiento de Unidad Cristiana*; and an important segment of the movement *la Resistencia Nicaragüense*; *El movimiento indígena de RAAN*) (Téllez, 2004; Envío, 2001). Besides

Paraguay in 2008<sup>15</sup>, where the incumbent lost.

On the other end of the continuum, there are cases where no opposition alliance (Paraguay 2003) or only a minority coalition has been identified<sup>16</sup>. Despite its similarities in the inability or unwillingness of opposition forces to coalesce, these variants are present both in the elections won by the incumbent and in the elections won by the opposition. This fact, together with the above mentioned examples of the broad opposition coalition equally distributed in both groups of examples, at least questions the theoretical assumption of the impact of strategic decisions of the opposition to unite on its electoral performance.

This conclusion remains valid even if we look more closely at borderline cases, characterised by a form of pre-election cooperation of the opposition which, however, is not as broad as in Paraguay (2008) and Nicaragua (2001). These so-called partial coalitions also exist in both election groups. Peru (1995)<sup>17</sup>, Ecuador (2013)<sup>18</sup>, and Bolivia (2009)<sup>19</sup> represent almost a unified

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this alliance and winning Liberals, only one opposition party took part in the presidential elections (Partido Conservador).

<sup>15</sup> In 2007, a broad Alianza Patriótica para el Cambio united not only the left-oriented parties (Partido País Solidario; Partido movimiento al Socialismo; Partido Frente Amplio; PRF; PDC, and Partido Encuentro Nacional), but also the Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico with centre-right orientation to confront government of Partido Colorado (USAID, 2009, p. 4, *La última hora*, 2007), The UNACE party, one of the few that did not join the alliance, had an obvious personal linkage to the existing governmental structures of the Colorado party; therefore, it clearly is not a classic opposition party. Its leader and founder, General Lino Cesar Oviedo Silva, belonged to the military part of the party for years. His personal links to the government are also confirmed in the public campaign led by the current President Duarte in support of the amnesty for General Oviedo, convicted for an attempted coup against President Wasmosy in April 1996 (ABC, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Sometimes, the opposition forces divide. For example in Nicaragua in 2006 the opposition won, despite the fact that the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista left the Convergencia Nacional coalition, created before the presidential election in 2001 (*Latinoamerica Libre*, b.r.). However, the winning Nicaraguan opposition owes a lot to the electoral reform, which enabled Ortega to win with only 38% of votes (Martí i Puig, 2008, p. 288). The Bolivian elections in 2014 were a specific case. Although only four candidates ran against President Morales, their ambitions and reluctance to agree on a consensual candidate prevented the unification of the opposition (Arroyo, 2014). Therefore, the opposition coalition Unidad demócrata, which was shortly before the elections abandoned by the Nuevo Poder Ciudadano of Senator Germán Antel (*La Razón*, 2014), is considered a minority coalition.

<sup>17</sup> In the 1995 elections, many opponents of the regime from various movements united to support the candidacy of the former UN Secretary, General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, in the coalition Unión por el Perú, but quite a many parties remained outside the coalition and suggested their own candidates (Crabtree, 1995, Pp. 13–15).

<sup>18</sup> The CREO coalition (Creando oportunidades), formed for elections in 2013, united a number of opposition parties, including some traditional ones, such as the Izquierda democrática, el Partido

strategy of the opposition for the elections when the incumbent lost. The elections in Colombia (1998; 2002) then bring the correlation between the existence of a partial opposition coalition and the incumbent's election defeat.

Therefore, the studied examples do not prove a causal relationship between the dis/unity of opposition, and the electoral in/stability of the incumbent because both the elections with a broad opposition coalition and elections with a large number of independent opposition parties seem to be almost evenly dispersed across the two groups of cases.

However, if we examine the factors related to the incumbent's ability or willingness to create an (in)formal alliance with the opposition (non-governmental) party, an interesting pattern can be seen. When the opposition won, the ruling political formation always took part in the elections alone, or it even split up<sup>20</sup>. In the second group, i.e., when the incumbent won the elections, this pattern is less clear: either a new government coalition was formed, or the incumbent ran as an independent candidate. Despite this variance, it is necessary to point out that if the incumbent managed to gain the support of any opposition actor (six examples in total), he succeeded to keep the office.

On the contrary, the personal continuity on the side of the president does not

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social cristiano, el Partido liberal radical ecuatoriano or the popular party of the Mayor of Guayaquil, Jaime Nebota. However, the existence of another opposition coalition, the Unidad Plurinacional (Pachakutik, MPD, RED, Poder Popular, Participación, Socialismo Revolucionario, and Montecristi Vive) and a number of other independent candidates supported by both left and right opposition parties (PRIAN; PSP) lead rather to the disunity of the Ecuadorian opposition forces. (cf. Ortiz de Zárate, 2015; *The Economist*, 2013; *World elections*, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Before the presidential elections in Bolivia in 2009, the coalition of the Plan Progreso para Bolivia – Convergencia Nacional was created. It unified the predominantly centre-right parties (Nueva Fuerza Republicana; the Plan Progreso para Bolivia; Partido Popular, Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario; and Autonomía para Bolivia). A few other parties remained outside the coalition, and although the list of presidential candidates was the shortest in Bolivia's democratic history, there were still seven candidates against the government of Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party (cf. Leitner, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> In Colombia (1998), the government Partido Liberal was divided into the supporters and opponents of the current President Ernest Samper because of the 8,000 Process scandal (Vergara, 1998, p. 26). The splitting on the incumbent's side also happened in Nicaragua (2006). To protest against the agreement between ex-President Arnoldo Alemán and Daniel Ortega from 2000, the dissidents from the government Partido Liberal Constitucionalista formed the Alianza Liberal Nicaraguense and supported their own presidential candidate Montealegre (Latinoamerica Libre, b.r.). The presidential elections in Colombia in 2002 were characterised by disputes over the possible presidential candidate in the ruling Partido Conservador, which finally resulted in its withdrawal from the elections. The last example is the splitting of the Partido Colorado in Paraguay (2008) because of the re-election effort of the current President Duarte (USAID, 2009, p. 4).

seem to have any impact on the electoral stability of incumbent, defined on party base. The situations when the incumbent (i.e. the ruling political formation/s) won the elections can be almost evenly divided into the elections when a specific presidential candidate sought re-election (6 examples) and the elections when the party or movement of the current President supported a new candidate (5 examples).

The comparison of the electoral results of the incumbent and the results of the opposition in local elections between the two groups of cases clearly shows there is a specific pattern of relations between the actors' performance at the local and national level. In ten of the eleven examples of the incumbent's victory in the presidential elections, the incumbent usually won with a significant majority over the main challenger in the previous local elections. The only exception was Peru, where the winners of local elections in 1993 were independent candidates while both government and traditional opposition parties met a big failure (Planas, 2000, p. 268; Shidlo and Dietz, 1998, p. 214; Roberts, 2006, p. 95). This case thus would neither confirm nor disprove our hypothesis, since both the government and the opposition lost in the elections. However, President **Fujimori's** strategic negotiations after the local elections redirected assumed advantage, based on the local distribution of the power, to the government administration. By centralising the municipal funds and limiting the competence of municipalities, **Fujimori** managed to get the local governments under control. To avoid the risk of a significant reduction of sources and competencies and to ensure the necessary functioning of their municipalities, the mayors actually had to support the government (Rospigliosi, 1998, p. 419). Despite his electoral failure, **Fujimori** was able to get the support of the mayors and use the potential arising from the local distribution of the power for the subsequent presidential elections in 1995.

The success of the opposition in local elections, in all the cases (4 in total) led to the defeat of the current incumbent, which supports our theoretical assumption of the so-called springboard effect of local elections<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore,

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<sup>21</sup> The Colombian elections in 2002 were an interesting phenomenon: the Partido Conservador of the ruling government coalition withdrew its candidate from the elections at the last moment due to the poor performance in the polls and ultimately supported the opposition candidate, Álvaro Uribe. However, we consider these elections as the incumbent's election defeat because the Partido Conservador declared and stuck to its intention to support its own candidate to the last minute and withdrew from the competition only due to disputes after the unsuccessful parliamentary elections. Therefore, its ultimate recourse to Uribe is rather a rational attempt to save the ailing and crisis-

the analysis of the results shows that the ability of the incumbent to win the elections does not depend on specific identity of opposition parties that had succeeded at the local level, but rather on the overall distribution of the political power between the government and the opposition in local elections in general.

We must, however, draw attention to two deviant cases defying the empirically documented pattern: the presidential elections in Colombia (1998) and in Paraguay (2008), where the incumbent was defeated despite its victory in the previous municipal elections<sup>22</sup>. However, a closer examination of the specific circumstances of the local and the subsequent presidential elections helps us explain this deviation from the observed pattern.

As far as the Colombian case is concerned, the municipal elections in 1997 were held in the atmosphere of fear and intimidation. Candidates massively withdrew from the elections due to kidnappings, murders and threats of violence from guerilla movements<sup>23</sup>. Others persuaded their voter not to vote for them (Schemo, 1997; Latin American Report N°37, 2011). In 22 municipalities, the electoral process was stopped, and in many others, elections were influenced by the guerilla and paramilitaries<sup>24</sup>. In such conditions the real election winner was the abstention<sup>25</sup>, i.e. the elections cannot be used for the purposes of our analysis, since the results would be undisputedly distorted.

In case of Paraguay, the splitting of the government Partido Colorado<sup>26</sup> could significantly lower the supposed incumbent's potential gained at the local level. Moreover, President **Nicanor Duarte** in an attempt to be re-elected, even at the cost of bending the judicial power, antagonised a large part of the public. This

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ridden party (Ámbito, 2002). Besides, Álvaro Uribe strongly spoke out against the current administration of Andrés Pastrana, elected with the support of the Partido Conservador, although the party distanced itself from Pastrana during his term in office (cf. Ramírez Peñalosa, 2010, p. 10–11).

<sup>22</sup> In Colombia, the incumbent lost in the second round of the presidential elections, but won in the first one, which means the government and opposition power was very balanced.

<sup>23</sup> According to the federal electoral registry, 15 % of regional elections were paralysed because of the withdrawal of candidates (Schemo, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Guerrillas (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) called for a boycott of the elections and violently sabotaged the electoral process in many places (Schemo, 1997; Latin American Report N°37 2011).

<sup>25</sup> For example, in San Francisco, Antioquia province, only 18 voters came to vote, while the remaining 6,482 stayed at home. In one village in the province of Meta, three voters were enough to vote the mayor (Schemo, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> The split into two main movements (Castiglioni versus Duarte) was caused by the President's effort to get re-elected (USAID, 2009, p. 4).

situation helped the opposition to unite and organise mass protests against him (De Riz Conicet, 2007, p. 7). So again, this was a very specific situation, which rather complicates the interpretation of the case, because the government party had no specific potential from local elections when it consequently split up.

## 5 Alternative explanations

As noted in the theoretical part, the state capacity has a major impact on the regime stability since meeting the needs of relevant groups in the society produces the necessary legitimacy of the regime and allows the current government to keep the power (Kuthy, 2011, p. 50). Looking at the evaluation of the regime functioning from the citizens' point of view, it is clear that in most of the studied cases, there was a clear relation between the citizens' satisfaction with the work of the government and the subsequent election outcome of the incumbent. Although the aforementioned data should not be overestimated, for it was not available in all the studied cases, it quite clearly shows that if the government's work was assessed positively, the opposition failed to defeat the incumbent.

**Table 4: State capacity through the public' perceptions**

| Country <sup>27</sup> | year | corruption <sup>28</sup> | poverty | security | trust | eval. <sup>29</sup> |
|-----------------------|------|--------------------------|---------|----------|-------|---------------------|
| Nicaragua             | 2001 | 3.92                     | 3.56    | 4.4      | 4.5   | good                |
| Paraguay              | 2003 | 4.01                     | 3.8     | 3.71     | 4.19  | good                |
| Colombia              | 2006 | 4.26                     | 4.38    | 3.98     | 4.23  | mediocre            |
| Ecuador               | 2009 | 4.41                     | 4.57    | 4.38     | 4.77  | good                |
| Bolivia               | 2009 | 3.78                     | x       | 3.81     | 4.49  | good                |
| Colombia              | 2010 | 3.1                      | x       | 3.43     | 3.66  | mediocre            |
| Colombia              | 2014 | 4.09                     | 3.77    | 4.64     | 4.68  | good                |

<sup>27</sup> Source: The authors using the data from the LAPOP database. Average answers to the following questions are monitored: To what extent the government fights against corruption and poverty? To what extent does it increase the security of the citizens? How much do you trust the national government?

<sup>28</sup> The level of corruption in the studied states has also been analysed, using the Corruption Perception Index Amnesty International. However, the results were very similar, so we did not include them in our analysis.

<sup>29</sup> The most frequent answer to the following question is stated: "Would you say that the performance of the current president (...) is: very good/good/neither good nor bad/bad/very poor?"

|           |      |      |      |      |      |          |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|----------|
|           |      |      |      |      |      |          |
| Colombia  | 1998 | 2.06 | 2.07 | 2.39 | 2.28 | mediocre |
| Colombia  | 2002 | 1.86 | 2.02 | 1.87 | 2.3  | bad      |
| Nicaragua | 2006 | 3.52 | 3.76 | x    | x    | mediocre |
| Paraguay  | 2008 | 3.07 | 2.71 | 3.02 | 3.24 | mediocre |

Source: Authors' Survey

The explanatory potential of economic explanations in the studied cases is not too large. The assumption of economic crisis as a cause of the electoral defeat of incumbent has not been confirmed, because the incumbent managed to defend their position in all cases when the crisis had occurred. The degree of economic freedom shows that the incumbent was never defeated if the state had intervened significantly in the economy.

**Table 5: Economic Factors: presence of the crisis and level of statism of the economy**

| <sup>30</sup> Country | year | crisis <sup>31</sup> | statism <sup>32</sup> |
|-----------------------|------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Peru                  | 1995 | no                   | NA                    |
| Nicaragua             | 1996 | no                   | NA                    |
| Nicaragua             | 2001 | no                   | mixed                 |
| Paraguay              | 2003 | yes                  | mixed                 |
| Colombia              | 2006 | no                   | liberal               |
| Ecuador               | 2009 | yes                  | mixed                 |
| Bolivia               | 2009 | no                   | mixed                 |
| Colombia              | 2010 | no                   | liberal               |
| Ecuador               | 2013 | no                   | statist               |
| Bolivia               | 2014 | no                   | statist               |
| Colombia              | 2014 | no                   | liberal               |
| Colombia              | 1998 | no                   | liberal               |
| Colombia              | 2002 | no                   | liberal               |
| Bolivia               | 2005 | no                   | mixed                 |

<sup>30</sup> Source: The authors.

<sup>31</sup> Based on the World Bank data.

<sup>32</sup> Based on the Heritage Foundation Index of Economic Freedom.

|           |      |    |       |
|-----------|------|----|-------|
| Ecuador   | 2006 | no | mixed |
| Nicaragua | 2006 | no | mixed |
| Paraguay  | 2008 | no | mixed |

Source: Authors' Survey

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to explain differences in electoral stability of incumbents in Latin American hybrid regimes. The analysis of 17 presidential elections in Bolivia, Colombia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Peru, and Paraguay in 1990–2014 shows that the incumbent's electoral success is mainly influenced by the configuration of the power from previous local elections and the its ability to create a strategic alliance with a (non-governmental) opposition party.

Contrary to the expectations, the cases studied have not confirmed a causal relationship between the opposition unity and the incumbent's electoral defeat. Based on the analysis of local elections, the assumption of "springboard" effect has been confirmed and in all studied cases, the success of the opposition in local elections led to the current incumbent's defeat. Furthermore, the analysis of the results shows that the incumbent's ability to maintain presidential office does not depend on a specific identity of the opposition parties that had succeeded at the previous local elections, but rather on the overall distribution of the political power between the government and the opposition at local level.

The explanatory potential of the tested alternative explanations is rather limited in the analysed cases. In this respect, the most promising is the evaluation of the state capacity from the citizens' (voters') point of view. The data presented show that the government's ability to provide basic services and general satisfaction with its performance impact the incumbent's chances of election victory. On the other hand, the results obtained are handicapped by a relatively small sample of data obtained. Alternative explanations of economic nature do not have a great impact on the stability of the cases studied. The assumption of the economic crisis as a cause of the incumbent's electoral instability has not been confirmed. Therefore, it seems that the ruling elites are not always punished for the poor economic performance of the country, as is often assumed. The degree of economic freedom then shows that the incumbent was never defeated if the state intervened significantly in the economy.

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