

Authoritarians and Democrats: Regime Transition in Latin America (Pitt Latin American Studies)

REGIMES, COMPETITION, AND MILITARY COUPS IN LATIN AMERICA*

By Fabrice Lehoucq
University of North Carolina, Greensboro
Fabrice_Lehoucq@uncg.edu

And

Anibal Pérez-Liñán
University of Pittsburgh
anibal.perez.linan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper advances the use of political variables in cross-national studies of political instability. It systematically assesses whether open political competition reduces the likelihood of a coup and moderates the legacy of political instability. We employ an original dataset of coup reports, electoral returns, and socio-economic data spanning the twentieth century in 18 Latin American countries. Our models generate support for two central claims: recent experience with military coups increases the risk of new coups, but not in fully democratic regimes and non-democratic political systems face a higher risk of being overthrown than democratic ones. Coups do not vary with levels of development or of inequality, economic growth rates, the legislative powers of the presidency, or the behavior of regional neighbors. This paper raises implications for central debates in democratization studies, comparative political economy, and executive-legislative relations.

*Paper Presented at the 2009 Meetings of the American Political Science Association, Toronto, Canada.

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