Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México
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Departamento Académico de Ciencia Política
Political Science Department

Working Paper Series

"The Politics of Elite Punishment: Why Some Corrupt Presidents Are prosecuted but not others?"

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Working paper # 2013-001

http://departamentodecienciapolitica.itam.mx

Very Rough Draft-v.1.2:
Comments Welcomed

The Politics of Elite Punishment: Why Some Corrupt Presidents Are prosecuted but not others?[1]

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Abstract

By looking at history books and the daily news we systematically observe a significant amount of information about presidents' suspected, and sometimes proved, illicit acts in all countries. Nevertheless, prosecution of presidents is a relatively rare event; an even rarer event is their conviction. Why? The existing literature on corruption has not sufficiently focused its attention on the chief executive and we still have no plausible answers to this inquire. Presidential corruption is usually a symptom of a rotten political system; punishing such behavior is a credible signal that nobody is untouchable, thus, providing the correct incentives for political actors. As opposed to bureaucratic corruption, much fewer individuals directly participate on elite corruption, making it more difficult to identify and measure. A main hypothesis of this paper is that prosecution of presidents is used strategically by their political enemies. It is not only whether the "right" institutions exist—a necessary condition—but also whether politicians decide to use them or not. To add to our knowledge on presidential corruption and punishment, I utilize data from all Latin American and the United States presidents from 1950 to 2010 analyzed by regression and matching techniques to inquire into the determinants of presidential prosecution and conviction. I find evidence showing that politics play a significant role on whether presidents are prosecuted and convicted. Presidents with worse-off economic performance, thus more unpopular, are more vulnerable to prosecutions and convictions. Similarly, post-Cold War executives—when international pressure for clean governments has been relatively stronger—are more likely to be prosecuted and declared guilty.

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[1] Paper presented at the 2011 American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA, Aug 31-Sep 4, 2011.

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1- Introduction

Urban legends abound in all countries about presidents' abuses of power and immense fortunes. History books and daily newspapers are filled with accusations of presidents' misbehavior. Political actors systematically incriminate each other on corruption allegations. Nevertheless, formal prosecution of presidents—current and former—is a rare event; an even rarer event is that prosecuted presidents are found guilty and sent to jail. It does not seem that the reason is as simple as linked to the incentives that institutions provide for misbehavior; corruption is endemic to all societies on different degrees and forms, and there are multiple cases of corrupt behavior in democratic countries (Whitehead, 2005; Golden, 2006).[3] If we compare countries with similar corruption rankings, we will find significant variance on whether executives whom are suspected of corruption are prosecuted. In a nutshell, there is a significant gap between actual prosecutions and the alleged misbehavior of presidents that has not been explained. Why so few (allegedly) corrupt presidents are prosecuted? Of the prosecuted presidents, why only a handful are found guilty?

This paper aims at providing some basic elements to understand under which set of circumstances presidents are prosecuted and convicted. This paper is very much exploratory of the different potential hypothesis explaining why so few allegedly corrupt presidents are prosecuted and of the ways in which we may empirically test those hypotheses.

The main claim of this work is that prosecution of presidents, current and former, is used strategically by their political enemies. Prosecutions should be more likely when there are electoral returns; unpopular presidents are then an easier target for pressing formal charges.

To inquire into the topic I employ regression analysis and matching techniques using the case of Latin America from 1950 to 2010. I utilize a dataset constructed by the author that

[3] See also the edited volume by Heidenheimer et al. (1989) for a good compilation of case studies and comparative analyses of corruption around the globe.

records scandal episodes, prosecutions, and convictions of presidents of Latin American nations and the United States for that period. I find that the strongest predictor of presidential prosecution and conviction is executives' economic performance in office—approximated by the average change on GDP per capita. When a president has performed bad in office—while holding the level of democraticness constant—the likelihood of being prosecuted and convicted increases significantly. I interpret this as a proxy for the potential popularity of the president and, thus, the costs and benefits that accusers face when pressing charges on an executive.

I take a quite general definition of corruption in this paper. I use Nye's (1967) definition of corruption as the illicit use of public office for private gain. This includes such behavior as bribery (use of a reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust); nepotism (bestowal of patronage by reason of relationship rather than merit); and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private uses). I interchangeably use the terms corruption and misbehavior throughout this paper.

Measuring and testing on the determinants of corruption is a difficult enterprise because of the nature of the data (Lancaster and Montinola, 2001; Seligson, 2006; Treisman, 2006), and it gets worse when we focus on presidential corruption. The empirical challenge of this research topic is not so much on figuring out which presidents are corrupt and have been punished—for which documental research of media and biographical sources are widely available—but on exhaustively stating which presidents were actually corrupt and have not been punished.

On the substantive side, a main problem with corruption is the absence of credible threats of punishment for violators. In systems in which executives are the core political actors, punishing presidents carry the strongest deterrent message for political actors: if a president is punished for corrupt behavior, then anyone can be punished. And presidential

corruption is no minor thing, despite the fact that it involves only a handful of people; for instance, Whitehead (1989:785) estimates that from 1952-1961 presidential fortunes from corruption in Latin America balanced around $2,000 million dollars, which is a huge amount if we compare it to the $789 million dollars that the sub-continent received on official grants for promoting development in the same period of time.

Moreover, a corrupt president would likely signal a corrupt regime. Widespread corruption is a major concern for democratic stability (Johnston 2005; Seligson 2002 and 2006; O'Donnell, 1994). It is common that citizens have strong suspicions about their leaders' honesty in office; data from the 2004 survey of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) shows that when citizens are asked about the degree of corruption of their presidents on a 1 to 10 scale, 44.3% of Latin American citizens groups on the 3 most corrupt points of the scale, while the 3 less corrupt points of the scale only adds to 16.2% of citizens.[4] This is not harmless; there is evidence of the negative impact of corruption on citizens' opinions about the legitimacy of the political system, which is a critical element of democratic stability (Seligson, 2006).

I state in the following section the main hypotheses building on the existing literatures on corruption and presidencies. Then, I outline a model explaining the circumstances under which potential accusers of presidents have incentives to prosecute them. In the fourth section I empirically explore the determinants of prosecutions and convictions. I conclude with an agenda for future research on the topic.

[4] Source: The Americas Barometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), www.lapopsurveys.org.

2- Existing hypotheses on presidential corruption

While there is a relatively developed literature on the determinants of corruption, especially on bureaucratic or first-floor corruption,[5] there few studies specific to presidential corruption.

Presidential corruption differentiates on various dimensions from bureaucratic and legislative corruption, which forces us to think differently about presidential corruption. Chief executives' corruption involves fewer direct participants than bureaucratic corruption. Confessions of direct participants of bureaucratic corruption are not so difficult to obtain with adequate survey techniques, but confessions of direct participants on presidential corruption have significant negative implications for those confessing them; it is usually media investigations that discover elites' illicit acts. Cleaning a bureaucratic office from first-floor corruption is usually rewarded by voters to the ruling party, but prosecuting a president usually harms his political party.

Taking pieces of information from different literatures—especially the literature on bureaucratic corruption and presidential systems—I outline various hypotheses that may explain the circumstances under which corrupt presidents are prosecuted, most hypotheses can plausibly be extended analogously to the case of convictions.

H1: *Presidents are more likely to be prosecuted when there are sufficient political gains to his accusers*. This is the core hypothesis I support in this paper. Even though we may suppose that citizens and opposition parties always want to see a corrupt president punished, there are many circumstances under which it may not be the case. This hypothesis implies that given that a president has been corrupt, we should not observe any formal accusation unless

[5] See Morris and Blake (2009) and Treisman (2006) for good reviews on the determinants of corruption.

there is sufficient demand for it. For the case of impeachment, which is very much related to prosecutions, Pérez-Liñán (2007) provides a similar argument. He claims that impeachment is used strategically by opponents to presidents as a "legal" way to overthrown presidents in Latin America, and not so much as a legal mean to systematically punish misbehavior.

Restating this first hypothesis with respect to voters, we have that:

H1a: *Presidents are more likely to be prosecuted when there are sufficient rewards from voters*. If there is not a sufficient demand from voters to punish a corrupt executive, then, the potential political gains from prosecuting a president may not be high enough to overcome the costs of prosecution. Nieto (2004) argues similarly, he states that pressure from below is a necessary condition for anti-corruption reform. In many cases, there is plenty of evidence showing that voters tend not to punish corrupt behavior by their representatives (Kurer, 2001; Golden, 2005). Moreover, there is evidence showing that the judgment of history tends to be lenient with executives regarding corruption, as long as they perform well (Romero, 2011). Similarly, Knight (1996:225-227) argues that corruption should be more punished on harsh economic times. A bad performance in office places a president in a quite vulnerable situation; it is relatively cheap for its political enemies to go after him, and citizens may likely reward the action. If presidential corruption involves delivering goods to clienteles, then presidential corruption would actually be rewarded, as argued by Manzetti and Wilson (2007).

H2: *Presidents are more likely to be prosecuted when there are potential viable accusers that are not corrupt*. By viable I mean actors with sufficient power to prosecute presidents beyond symbolic or media accusations. If the whole system is corrupt, then nobody is in a good

position to accuse, since it would open the possibility that the accuser would eventually end up prosecuted as well.

This is observed in countries with hegemonic regimes in which the core political actors are colluded as Mexico during the PRI regime (Magaloni, 2006); or we may observe it in places in which there is an apparent plurality but actors are colluded and protect each other, such as in the case of post-war Italy (Golden and Chang, 2001), or in Colombia during the National Front era (1958-1974) in which the main political actors agreed on a power-sharing arrangement.

We can extend this hypothesis to the individual level to explain why and when presidents decide to prosecute former presidents:

H2a: *Former presidents are more likely to be prosecuted if the current president is not corrupt*. This hypothesis assumes that corrupt presidents follows a mafia-like behavior in which the president at time *t* does not prosecutes presidents from time *t-n* in fear that he will establish a standard and presidents from *t+n* would prosecute him. If this is the case, we would observe that once a president is prosecuted the likelihood of another president being prosecuted increases.

Romero (2005) explains how this mechanism worked for the case of Mexico during the PRI's hegemonic regime. Even in the case of high conflict between a president and his predecessor, no president was prosecuted in this period. In cases of allegedly corrupt presidents that were not formally prosecuted, their punishment may be of a different kind, such as exile, political ostracism, or a negative place in history books.

H3: *Presidents are more likely to be prosecuted when the disruption costs on the political system are low*. Prosecuting a president, especially an acting president may generate

negative externalities to the political system as a whole that may represent a higher cost than the benefits of curving elites' corruption.

If the disruption costs are high and presidents know this, then they would have incentives for corruption up to the threshold in which they perceive that it is not acceptable by potential accusers. A related argument would be that corruption helps to grease the system; it is a sort of necessary bad for the system to work, such as Evans (2004) for the case of pork spending. These arguments are based on Nye (1967) and Huntington (1968, 64); but have been widely disregarded since then (Seligson, 2002:411-414).

In general, during the Cold War international allies, countries and organizations, seemed to no be willing to push for corrupt leaders' prosecution as long as they were trustable allies. In the 1990s the trend changed and much attention has been devoted to corruption in developing countries, but things have not changed that much at the grand corruption level and have mostly focused on bureaucratic corruption (Morris and Blake, 2009:5-7).

This hypothesis also fits the case of pacted transitions, in which recently inaugurated democratic governments pact with the previous authoritarian regime to not to punished them in exchange for a smooth transition to democracy. The Spanish and the Chilean transitions are good examples of this, at least on its first phase.

H4: *Presidents are less likely to be prosecuted in nations and times when it is "customary" that presidents misbehave while in office.* This is a cultural hypothesis. If the common understanding in a society is that all presidents will be corrupt, then, they will be. It is a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. If this is the case, then we should observe little variation on presidential corruption across time in a same country, which does not seem to be the case; as with many cultural arguments, it became circular.

Related arguments link specific characteristics of societies to corruption. Neddler (1968, c.f. in Whitehead, 1989:788-789) argued that socio-racial characteristics explained the prevalence of graft; he claimed that mulatto countries are more prone to corruption because of the absence of an entrenched upper class that would have a governing ethic with a sense of *noblesse oblige*; Whitehead (1989) shows that there is no evidence supporting this hypothesis.

Despite that this hypothesis seems unlikely, it does point to the existence of different tolerance thresholds for presidents misbehavior, which seems plausible.

H5: *Presidents are more likely to be prosecuted when the "right" institutions exist*. This hypothesis is very much the focus of the current literature on bureaucratic corruption that links the lack of particular institutions to corrupt behavior. For instance, the existence of elections (Weyland, 1998; Zovatto, 2000), party and electoral systems (Weyland, 1998; Skidmore, 1999; Geddes and Neto, 1999), lack of constraints and oligopolic economic structures (Colanzingari and Rose-Ackerman, 1998); or the lack of countervailing actions (Alam, 1995). Similarly, Huntington (1968) argued that corruption should be more prevalent during modernization phase.

3- A Model on Punishment of Presidential Misbehavior

In this section I outline a theory that explains the circumstances under which potential accusers of presidents have incentives to prosecute them. The model considers 3 actors: the President, the Accuser, and the Citizens. The Accuser is anyone that has sufficient authority to begin the formal prosecution of the president. It may be Congress through an

impeachment process, the courts, a fiscal, or even an international organization. The Citizens is a collective body deciding whether to punish the President for his misbehavior.

Figure 1 describes the sequence of the decisions and the pay-offs for the Accuser at the end of every branch. It is a quite simple decision-making model. I describe below the pay-offs.

(a) The top outcome implies that the President has been corrupt, the Citizens want to punish the President's misbehavior and the Accuser decides to prosecute. Here the Accuser receives the public credit for his action (C) but risks a future retaliation (R) with probability alpha (α), which can be, for instance, a counter-claim for corruption acts of the Accuser or members of his party.

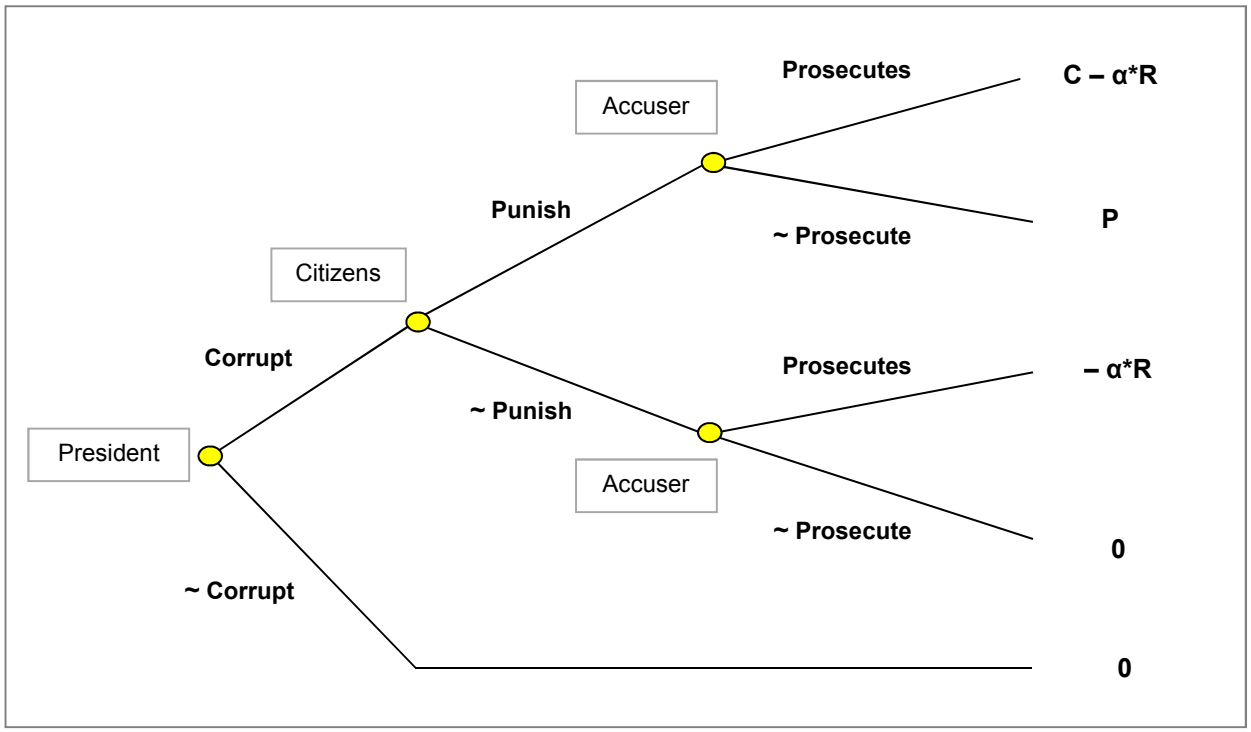
(b) If the Accuser decides not to prosecute, even if the President is corrupt and the Citizens demand punishment, then, the Accuser can only have political gains (P) at the elite level, which is a sort of collusion among political actors.

(c) If the Citizens are not willing to punish the President, but the Accuser decides to prosecute him, then the Accuser only risks a future retaliation (R) with probability alpha (α) with no gains.

(d) But if the Accuser decides not to prosecute, given that there are no demands from the Citizens for such action, then there no gains or losses.

(e) Finally, the Accuser has no gains or losses if the president is not corrupt.

Figure 1 – Accuser's Decision Tree and Payoffs



Given this setting, we can inquire now into specific conditions that may incentive potential accusers to prosecute corrupt presidents. This simple model provides two sorts of scenarios: **(1)** If citizens want to punish a corrupt president, then the accuser would act only if

$C - \alpha^*R > P$,

That is, if the credit the accuser would receive minus the expected retaliation costs exceeds the political gains from not prosecuting. This inequality is more likely to hold if, *ceteris paribus*, as the political gains of not prosecuting gets smaller, and or, the expected probability of retaliation tends to zero. This configures to a political system in which the accuser is honest and political elites are not colluded.

If we re-state this in terms of the retaliation costs, we have that,

$C - P > \alpha^*R$,

In this case, we should observe the prosecution of a corrupt executive if the benefits that the citizens provide the accuser are bigger than the benefits that political elites provide this actor. This is basically a political system in which voters are more relevant than elites for accusers.

(2) The second scenario to inquire is when citizens do not want to punish a corrupt executive or they simply do not care about it. In this case, we should observe prosecutions if,

$- \alpha * R > 0$,

This is not feasible, given that retaliation costs are expressed in negative terms. The prediction of the model, then, is that we should not observe prosecutions if the accuser do not have any gain from citizens.

[TO BE FURTHER DEVELOPED]

4- Empirics on Presidential Prosecution and Conviction

In this section I describe and explore the determinants of presidential prosecution and conviction using data from Latin American countries and the United States from the first president of each nation that ruled in the decade of the 1950s to those ending their terms up to 2010. The units of observation are presidential terms, if a president was reelected, then every term is a separate observation, for a total of 402 cases.[6] The dataset considers variables coded by the author and data from pre-existing sources, such as the World Development Indicators (The World Bank, 2011), the Penn World Tables (Heston et al.,

[6] See Appendix A for the number of cases by country included in the sample.

2011), the Database of Political Institutions (Beck et al., 2001), and the Polity IV Project (Marshall et al., 2010).

I first describe the dependent variables of this study: prosecution and conviction. I then explore the determinants of these two phenomenons.

The Dependent Variables: Prosecution and Conviction

The variables on prosecution and conviction were constructed by the author using biographical and historical sources, printed and electronic. Some sources were common to all countries: the U.S. Department of State Background Notes,[7] Wikipedia,[8] the CIDOB Foundation,[9] Cockcroft (2002), and Del Pozo (2002). In addition, we consulted specific academic and news sources—mostly the main newspapers for each country—to inquire into specific presidents and episodes that were not reported in the main sources or that were incomplete. As expected, the information on most recent executives is abundant, but quite scarce for presidents away in time, especially for those that did not conduct any outstanding—positive or negative—actions while in office.[10]

Table 1 shows the proportion of scandals and prosecution episodes of the presidents in sample.

[7] http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/.
[8] http://es.wikipedia.org and http://en.wikipedia.org.
[9] http://www.cidob.org/es/documentacion/biografias_lideres_politicos/(filtro)/pais.
[10] Due to reasons of space, I do not include here the exhaustive list of sources that were consulted. It is available upon request to the author.

Table 1- Scandals and prosecutions (N=402)

Involved in scandals	**49.5%** (n=199)
Prosecuted in office	**4.2%** (n=17)
Prosecuted out of office	**11.4%** (n=46)
Total prosecuted	**14.4%** (n=58)

Source: Coded by the author from the U.S. Department of State Background Notes, Wikipedia, the CIDOB Foundation, Cockcroft (2002), Del Pozo (2002), and electronic news sources by country.

From the sources consulted, we find that half of the presidents in sample were subject to some kind of scandal. This is a difficult variable to measure. The criterion to label a piece of information as "scandal" is that the information contained, if true, would constitute an illegal act for which the president could plausibly be formally accused. Of course, the problem here is the "if true" clause; we may suspect of significant biases from the sources denouncing corruption acts (Seligson, 2002: 415-6). There are few attempts to systematically code corruption scandals, such as Whitehead (1989) for Latin America or Pharr (2005) for Japan. For a sample of 402 presidential terms in 19 countries from the 1950s to 2010, an exhaustive search would imply consulting local newspapers in-site for every country in sample since searches in newspapers through the Internet are usually limited to the 2000s, in some cases to the 1990s, and very few if we go further back in time. Likely the 49.5% that we found underestimates the number of scandals.

Data regarding prosecutions and convictions is much more trustable, since these are highly publicized events that are a core part of a country's history and of presidents biographies, thus, most secondary sources dealing with the time-period or the specific president would report the event. A president is coded as "prosecuted" if there was a formal

process accusing him of some illicit activity, including impeachment trials. We find that a total of 58 presidents have been prosecuted in Latin America and the United States from 1950 to date, 14.4% of the total, although, five presidents were accused both during their terms and afterwards, making 63 the number of formal prosecutions.

I divide prosecutions in-office from prosecutions out-of-office, because there should be differences on the logics of both types. If corrupts, presidents out-of-office lose most of the means they had in power to hide their illicit acts, especially if a different party or faction wins the election. From the data in Table 1, it can be observed that it is almost 3 times more likely to be prosecuted after the presidential term is over than during the term in office.

Table 2 shows the fate of the presidents whom were formally accused. From the prosecuted executives 4 out of every 10 are put in jail; from those, 60% is found guilty at the end of the trial; few spend large amounts of time behind bars. Of those 58 presidents that were prosecuted, A third was found guilty, another third is exonerated, and the remaining third was pardoned, their trial override, or died before the process ended.

Table 2 – Fate of the Prosecuted Presidents

	Of the total (n=402)	Of the prosecuted (n=58)
Imprisoned	8.2%	43.1%
Guilty	4.7%	32.8%
Guilty, but latter pardoned or modified the court's ruling	1.0%	6.9%
Not guilty	5.0%	34.5%
Not yet decided or died before the process ended	3.0%	20.7%
Overridden or prescribed	0.7%	5.2%

Source: Coded by the author from the U.S. Department of State Background Notes, Wikipedia, the CIDOB Foundation, Cockcroft (2002), Del Pozo (2002), and electronic news sources by country.

As shown in Table 2, a third of the prosecuted presidents are found guilty. It is not obvious in principle if this is a "low" or a "high" proportion. On the one hand, it may be argued that, given the relevance of the presidential figure, if somebody is going to formally accuse an executive, the case should be a solid one. But, on the other hand, under certain circumstances it may be the case that such accusations are politically motivated and, thus, we observe an inflation of unfounded prosecutions.

These numbers gives us clues of the relative risk of the job, but not necessarily about how much misbehavior is actually punished. In order to assess it, we would need to first determine whether a president was corrupt or not and then if he was punished or not. This is not a straightforward task, but can be somehow approximated. For a start point, we can plausibly assume that it is highly unlikely that all corrupt presidents are prosecuted. Thus, registered prosecutions are not a good way to approximate actual presidential misbehavior.[11]

Given the hidden nature of elite's corruption, another alternative would be to approximate presidential misbehavior through reports from the media or from historians; nevertheless, this sources are not fully trustable as I stated in previous paragraphs in coincidence with previous works, such as Moody (1989:879-82) and Sherman (1989).

A better option, although still imperfect, to approximate presidential misbehavior independently from actual prosecutions and reported scandals is to assume that if a system provides incentives for misbehavior, then, it is highly likely that, on average, presidents would misbehave, even if we do not observe it and is not punished. If this is plausible, then a good

[11] In that sense, Seligson (2002:414) notes that "early efforts [to account for corruption] were based on the criminology approach that used official police and court records: one could simply count the number of arrests and convictions for corruption in a given country. The main difficulty with such an approach, of course, is the spuriousness of the measure: the more vigilant the authorities, the more arrests and convictions—completely independent of the corruption rate itself. Thus, in highly corrupt countries there may be virtually no enforcement, while in 'squeaky clean' countries there may be frequent arrests and convictions for even minor infractions. For the most part, this approach has been abandoned."

proxy to presidential misbehavior would be the level of democraticness of a country; this variable would control for the checks and balances that presidents face during their tenure in office, thus, for the institutional incentives for misbehavior. Although, it would not control for the individual propensity of every president to misbehave.

Given this assumption and almost by definition, *ceteris paribus*, we would expect more cases of misbehavior in a non-democratic country than in a democratic country; however, we would also expect to observe a bigger proportion of prosecutions, relative to the number of corrupt presidents, in democracies than in non-democracies. Nevertheless, it is unclear what to expect of the absolute numbers of prosecutions, since we do not know the actual number of corrupt presidents.

A first crude approach to the data shows that 1 out of every 5 presidents in democracies—coded as democracy if the *democ* variable in the Polity IV dataset has a positive value—is prosecuted, which is half of the proportion of prosecuted presidents in non-democracies—coded as non-democracy if the *democ* variable in the Polity IV dataset has a value of zero (Table 3).

Table 3 – Prosecuted Presidents by Type of Regime

	Prosecuted overall	Prosecuted in-office	Prosecuted out-of-office
Democracy	20.6	5.1	16.0
Non-democracy	9.7	3.5	7.9

Source: Coded by the author from the U.S. Department of State Background Notes, Wikipedia, the CIDOB Foundation, Cockcroft (2002), Del Pozo (2002), and electronic news sources by country.

If it is the case that most presidents are prosecuted in democracies, then, this data shows that at least 1 out of every 5 presidents would be seriously suspected of misbehavior in non-

democratic regimes, but only half of them would be prosecuted; this is obviously a quite conservative estimate.

Cross-tabs are a good first look to the data, but can also be tricky information, since it does not control for any third variable. To verify this, and have a better understating of this relationship, I implement a quasi-experiment to explain the occurrence of a prosecution (outcome) given a treatment (democratic institutions as a proxy for the level of systemic corruption). The propensity score predicts the likelihood of a country being a democracy as a function of its GDP per capita and its trade openness.

Table 4 shows the results of the estimations of the matching procedures using the Nearest Neighbor and Kernel methods for both in-term and out-of-term prosecutions. It can be observed that there is no strong evidence supporting any systematic effect of being a democracy on the likelihood of being prosecuted; the only weakly significant difference is of out-of-term prosecutions with the Nearest Neighbor method, but not with the Kernel estimation.[12]

Table 4 – ATT Estimations of Matching Methods for Prosecutions

Outcome	Method	n. treated	n. control	ATT	Std. Err.	t	Sign.
In-term	Nearest Neighbor	164	74	-0.018	0.026	-0.700	0.3117
In-term	Kernel	164	168	-0.026	0.019	-1.408	0.1479
Out-of-term	Nearest Neighbor	164	74	-0.152	0.077	-1.980	0.0566
Out-of-term	Kernel	164	168	-0.056	0.041	-1.356	0.1589

[12] I do not include the complete output of the estimation of the propensity scores and the matching due to space reasons. It is available upon request to the author.

Once I have described the content and logic of the variables, I proceed to explore the determinants of prosecution and conviction.

Determinants of prosecution

As I did in the previous section, I explore the determinants of presidential prosecution by separating the episodes in-office and out-of-office. Given the distribution of the data, I utilize a *rare events logit* model (Tomz, King, and Zeng, 1999) clustered by country using robust standard errors. This model is appropriate when the proportion of the observed phenomenon is relatively small as in the case of prosecutions.[13] The cluster for country controls for suspected heterogeneity across countries given homogeneous conditions within countries. The units of observation are presidential periods, most utilized data comes originally in time periods of year, I average them for every presidential period in sample.

An ideal model specification would have included proxies for all the hypotheses stated in section 2 of this paper; nevertheless, data availability conditioned the specification of the model. I specified two models for every dependent variable. The first one maximizes the sample size and the second model aims at testing more hypotheses, although the sample size is significantly reduced with the subsequent differences on data distributions.[14]

The basic model considers five independent variables:

(a) *Democraticness* as a proxy for the sort of incentives that institutions provide for presidential misbehavior. This variable is the Polity2 score from the Polity IV dataset.

(b) The *average GDP per capita change* during the presidential term as a proxy for the executive's performance in office. This variable comes from the Penn World Tables.

[13] See King and Zeng (2001) for further details of the rare events logit model.
[14] See Appendix B for a comparison on the descriptive data for both sub-samples.

(c) Whether there was a *military* acting as president or if it was a military junta. This was coded by the author.

(d) Two variables indicating different periods of time that the literature has pointed as less or more prone for prosecutions. First, the Cold War period (1946 to 1991) in which the literature have stated that it was not in the interest of the main countries and international organizations to pressure for anti-corruption policies in Latin America (Morris and Blake, 2009). Second, the Neoliberal period (1985-1999) in which some authors argue that has been an real increase on corruption—and not only on denounces—as a result of the change towards market oriented policies that generated an increase on opportunities for corruption (Manzetti and Blake, 1997; Weyland, 1998).

The extended model considers five additional variables; the cost is a reduction in sample size from 367 to only 149 observations. Three variables measure power distribution: united government from the Database of Political Institutions (DPI), opposition and government fractionalization (both form the DPI). I include a variable on electoral fraud from the DPI a dummy variable indicating whether there were serious suspicions of fraud in the election of the executive; a president that arrived at office suspected of electoral fraud is a good candidate for a corrupt administration. Finally, I include a variable measuring the average age of the presidents' political party; this variable works as a proxy for the potential strength of the party and its likely survival after the president lefts office and his only effective defense may come from within his political party.

Table 5 shows the results of the regression models. There are significant differences between the two models because of the different samples utilized. While not fully specified, the results of the first model seem to be more robust.

Table 5 – Rare Events Logit model

Dependent variables: Prosecution in-term and out-of-term

	1	2	3	4
	In-term	**In-term**	**Out-of-term**	**Out-of-term**
Democraticness	-0.20***	-0.28**	-0.12***	-0.05
GDP pc change	-0.07**	-0.04	-0.05*	-0.02
Military government	-1.19*		-0.41	-0.29
Cold War	-3.31***	-2.53	-2.31***	-0.48
Neoliberal	-0.36	0.52	0.19	-0.04
United government		-2.05		0.20
Electoral fraud				-0.05
Party age		0.01		-0.01*
Opposition fractionalization		0.15		-0.04
Government fractionalization		-0.30		-0.57
Number of observations	367	149	367	149

Note: Military government and fraud are not included in model 2 because both variables predicted failure perfectly given the subsample for the regression.

To facilitate understanding of the regression results, Graph 1 shows, *ceteris paribus*, the average change (at the dot) on the dependent variable *prosecution in-office* produced by the specific independent variable when it varies from its minimum to its maximum while holding everything else constant. The lines up and down the circle are the 95% confidence interval of the prediction.

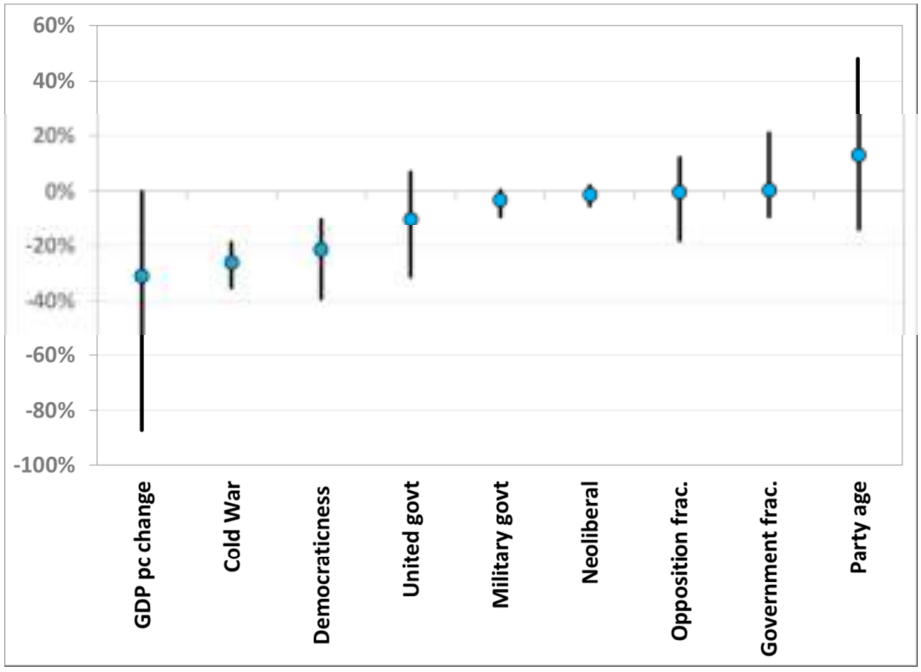
Since the model controls for the level of democratization—as a proxy for the incentives for misbehavior that a president faces—the effect of the remaining variables are explanations on the differences between two presidents with equivalent incentives for corruption, and we may assume that on average they would be equally corrupt, that increases the likelihood of being prosecuted.

It can be seen from Graph 1 that the biggest average effect is of GDP per capita change. Holding all other variables constant, a president with the highest GPD per capita growth (15.7%) in sample is more than 30% less likely to be prosecuted than the president with the lowest economic growth in sample (-38%). This result makes sense with the political motivation hypothesis, presidents with lower popular support are more vulnerable to political attacks and its prosecution would likely report political gains for his opponents.

The dummy on Cold War is also significant and has a big impact on the likelihood of prosecuting a president; Cold War presidents were almost 30% less likely to be prosecuted than presidents in office after 1991. This result confirms the hypothesis of a weaker international pressure to cleaner governments at that period. There is not however evidence of a higher number of prosecutions in the Neoliberal period.

In the extended model, none of the additional independent variables came out significant.

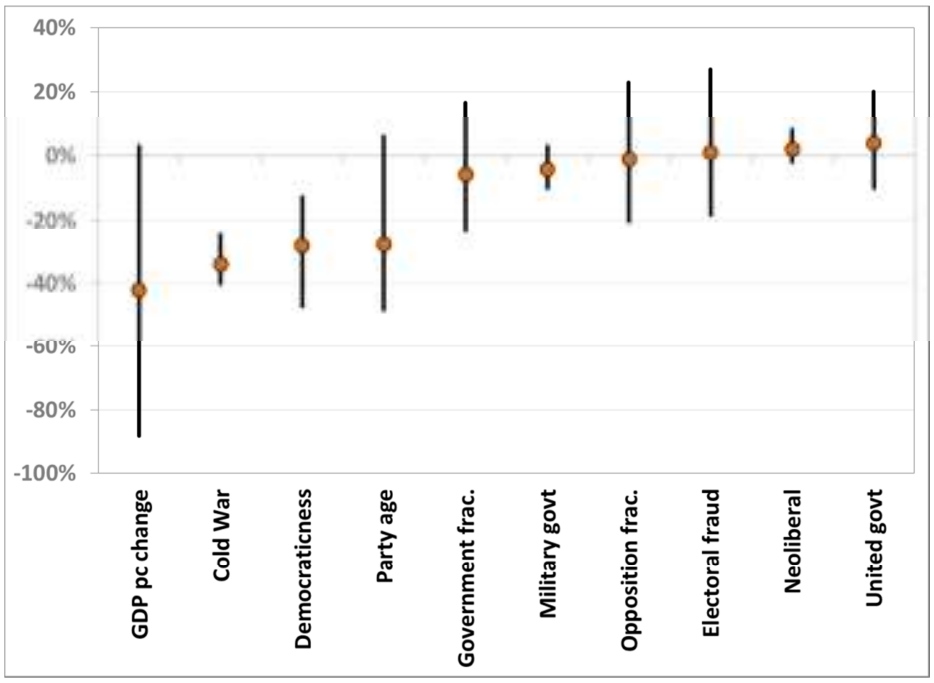
Average change in probability of *prosecution in-office* when every variable changes from minimum to maximum with confidence intervals for the prediction



The results for prosecutions out-of-office as dependent variable are similar, but there are some interesting differences. Graph 2 shows the marginal effects of the explanatory variables when they vary from its minimum to its maximum. As in the case of in-office prosecutions, presidents' economic performance is the strongest predictor of prosecution. *Ceteris paribus*, presidents ruling in bad economic times are much more likely—more than 40% in the extreme case—to be prosecuted. Similarly, presidents ruling in the post-Cold War period are more than 30% more likely to be prosecuted than their predecessors in the Cold War period, and there is no effect on the likelihood of being prosecuted of ruling in the Neoliberal period.

A difference with prosecutions in-office is that the age of the presidents' party has a negative effect on the probability of being prosecuted, even though it is weakly significant. Executives affiliated to older parties are less likely of being prosecuted once they have left office. It seems plausible to assume that older parties have a more stable structure that can act as support for the president in office and once he has finished his term in office; under many circumstances the party may have sufficient interests to undercover its executive's illicit acts in order to keep the value of the party label.

Graph 2 – Change in probability of *prosecution out-of-office* when every variable changes from minimum to maximum with confidence intervals for the prediction



Determinants of Conviction

Once I have inquired into the main determinants of prosecution, I turn to the determinants of conviction. I utilize a multinomial logit model with robust standard errors and clustered by country. To make models comparable with the ones used to explain prosecutions, I specify this model using the same set of independent variables of the basic model using to predict prosecutions.[15] The dependent variable considers five categories. The first four are referred to prosecuted presidents; once presidents are formally accused they can be (1) declared not guilty of the charges, (2) declared guilty of the charges, (3) some are pardoned after being

[15] See the complete output of the model in Appendix B. I do not specify the extended model for convictions because of the small number of cases that are insufficient to estimate the five categories of the dependent variable in a multinomial logit model.

declared guilty, or (4) the trial can be overridden or prescribed for a variety of reasons, included the death of the president. To complete the alternatives the last category considers (5) not prosecuted presidents.

The results of the model for convictions are in the same line of the models for prosecutions. Table 6 shows the marginal change on the probability of observing each of the five categories of the dependent variable when, *ceteris paribus*, every independent variable changes from its minimum to its maximum.

Table 6 – Change in the probability of observing every category of the DV when the variables change from its minimum to its maximum

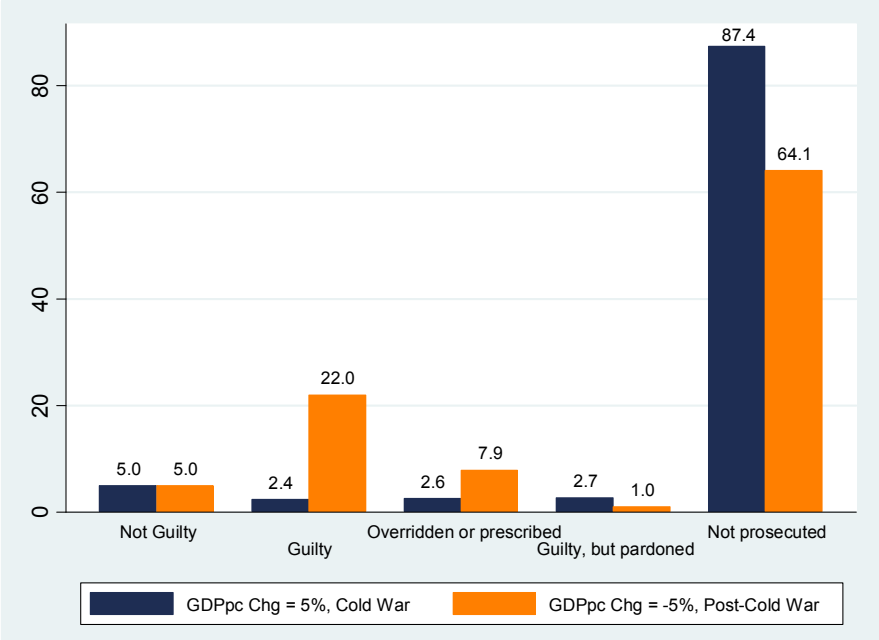
	Not guilty	Guilty	Guilty, but pardoned	Overridden or prescribed	Not prosecuted
Democraticness	0.0%	**-8.1%**	0.0%	-0.8%	**8.8%**
PIB pc change	0.1%	**-28.4%**	0.0%	**-4.2%**	**32.5%**
Military govt.	**-5.8%**	0.8%	0.0%	**3.8%**	1.2%
Cold War	-0.1%	**-13.9%**	1.5%	**-4.5%**	**17.0%**
Neoliberal	0.1%	0.9%	0.1%	**4.8%**	**-5.8%**

Given that a president has been formally prosecuted, the model does not shed much light on specific determinants impacting the likelihood of being declared not guilty. The only significant variable is the existence of a military executive; when a military, an individual or a Junta, heads the executive it is 5.8% less likely to be exonerated.

Regarding the likelihood of being declared guilty the determinants are practically the same as the determinants of prosecution. Holding the level of democraticness constant as a proxy for equally corrupt executives, a bad economic performance and being president in the post-Cold War era significantly increases the likelihood of being declared guilty.

To illustrate the magnitude of the impact, Graph 3 shows two different scenarios. *Ceteris paribus*, the first one considers a hypothetical president that achieved a yearly average of 5% growth of the GDP per capita and ruled during the Cold War period. The second scenario is a sort of opposite of the first one, it is a hypothetical president that decreased the GDP per capita on an average of 5% during his tenure in office and ruled after the Cold War. It can be observed that by varying these two variables the chances of being found guilty, given that a president has been prosecuted is modified on almost 20%.

Graph 3 – Model simulations for the likelihood of observing every category in two scenarios



The model cannot accurately estimate any significant effect of the independent variables on the category of *guilty, but latter pardoned*, likely because the proportion is of only 1%. On the subject of *overridden or prescribed* trials a positive average change of the GPD per capita results in a decrease of the likelihood of the trial being turned down or suspended, but

in a much lesser magnitude than the likelihood of being declared guilty; that is, given that a president has been prosecuted, if his economic performance was positive, then his likeliest future is of the trial being overridden or prescribed. Individuals ruling in military regimes alone or as part of a junta have the highest likelihood of their trials being overridden or prescribed as compared to being declared not-guilty.

4- Conclusions and Future Agenda

This paper is a first approach to the topic of presidential misbehavior and its punishment. It contributes to the development of our understanding of this topic on two main fronts. First, by outlining the elements of a theory explaining the circumstances under which corrupt executives would be formally punished; and, second, by exploring into the empirical determinants of presidents' prosecution and conviction.

I find evidence supporting that, *ceteris paribus*, the political calculus of those actors with the authority to prosecute and convict presidents, current and former, plays a significant role in determining whether an executive is prosecuted and then declared guilty of the charges. A president's economic performance in office has a significant impact on the likelihood of presidents being formally accused and convicted. Good economic performance substantively immunizes presidents against judicial procedures for suspected illicit acts likely because of popular support; as opposed to bad economic performance, which lets executives quite vulnerable to be punished for misbehaviors.

Outside pressure also seems to be relevant for prosecuting and convicting a president. Low pressure during the Cold War resulted in a lower likelihood of prosecution as compared to the post-Cold War era. But I found no evidence supporting the hypothesis of higher prosecutions or convictions in the Neoliberal period.

There is still much to be inquired on this topic. Throughout the empirical section of the paper I pointed out the limitations of the data, some are improvable by adding further observations and archive analysis country-by-country. In that sense, further research should expand beyond Latin America. Increasing the number of countries in sample would also allow for testing hypothesis regarding institutional variables, which tend to have small or null variance within countries. Although, collecting data on the specific institutions related to corruption across time and countries is not an easy task.

As a starting point, I have used in this paper a wide definition of corruption that considers all types of presidential misbehavior, both because this paper has a general focus on illicit conducts of executives and its punishment, but we could gain further understanding of the topic by disaggregating the types of causes for prosecution.

Finally, Non-parametric methods shall provide estimates for this kind of data that can be contrasted with their parametric alternative for providing more confidence on the results.

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Appendix A – Descriptive Data by Country

	In office			Out of office			In and out of office		
	Not prosecuted	Prosecuted	Total	Not prosecuted	Prosecuted	Total	No scandal	Scandal(s)	Total
ARG	33	2	35	29	6	35	24	11	35
BOL	40	0	40	34	6	40	20	20	40
BRA	22	1	23	23	0	23	12	11	23
CHL	10	1	11	10	1	11	4	7	11
COL	17	2	19	18	1	19	8	11	19
CRI	14	1	15	12	3	15	9	6	15
DOM	28	0	28	27	1	28	6	22	28
ECU	27	1	28	23	5	28	14	14	28
GUA	23	1	24	18	6	24	14	10	24
HND	17	1	18	17	1	18	11	7	18
MEX	10	1	11	8	3	11	3	8	11
NIC	17	0	17	16	1	17	9	8	17
PAN	21	2	23	21	2	23	5	18	23
PER	17	1	18	16	2	18	9	9	18
PRY	9	0	9	5	4	9	1	8	9
SLV	19	0	19	19	0	19	12	7	19
URY	27	0	27	25	2	27	21	6	27
USA	15	2	17	17	0	17	8	9	17
VEN	19	1	20	18	2	20	13	7	20
Total	385	17	402	356	46	402	203	199	402

	Not imprissoned	Imprissoned	Total
ARG	0	6	6
BOL	4	2	6
BRA	1	0	1
CHL	2	0	2
COL	3	0	3
CRI	2	2	4
DOM	0	1	1
ECU	3	3	6
GUA	5	1	6
HND	2	0	2
MEX	3	0	3
NIC	0	1	1
PAN	2	2	4
PER	1	1	2
PRY	2	2	4
URY	0	2	2
USA	2	0	2
VEN	1	2	3
Total	33	25	58

	Not guilty	Guilty	Guilty, but latter pardoned or modified the court's ruling	Not yet decided or died before the process ended	Prescribed or overridden	Total
ARG	1	4	1	0	0	6
BOL	3	2	0	1	0	6
BRA	0	1	0	0	0	1
CHL	1	0	0	0	1	2
COL	0	0	1	1	1	3
CRI	2	2	0	0	0	4
DOM	0	0	1	0	0	1
ECU	5	0	0	1	0	6
GUA	1	1	0	4	0	6
HND	1	1	0	0	0	2
MEX	2	1	0	0	0	3
NIC	0	0	0	1	0	1
PAN	1	1	0	2	0	4
PER	0	1	0	0	1	2
PRY	2	1	0	1	0	4
SLV	0	0	0	0	0	0
URY	0	2	0	0	0	2
USA	1	0	1	0	0	2
VEN	0	2	0	1	0	3
Total	20	19	4	12	3	58

Appendix B – Descriptive and Models' additional data

	Mean		Std. Dev.		Minimum		Maximum	
	n=367	n=149	n=367	n=149	n=367	n=149	n=367	n=149
Prosecuted in-term	0.04	0.07	0.20	0.25	0	0	1	1
Prosecuted out	0.13	0.22	0.33	0.41	0	0	1	1
Democraticness	2.29	6.63	6.22	3.78	-9	-8.1	10	10
PIB PC change	0.93	0.84	4.13	2.65	-38.0	-9.1	15.7	6.8
Military govt	0.31	0.09	0.46	0.29	0	0	1	1
Cold War	0.73	0.34	0.45	0.48	0	0	1	1
Neoliberal	0.22	0.51	0.41	0.50	0	0	1	1
United govt.		0.34		0.43		0		1
Electoral fraud		0.11		0.29		0		1
Party age		47.8		45.2		4.5		173
Opposition frac.		0.46		0.27		0		0.96
Government frac.		0.18		0.24		0		0.77

Multinomial logit

```
. listcoef

mlogit (N=367): Factor Change in the Odds of guilty

Variable: polity2_p4 (sd=6.2226852)
Odds comparing    |
Alternative 1     |
to Alternative 2  |      b         z     P>|z|     e^b   e^bStdX
------------------+------------------------------------------------
Not_guil-Guilty   |   0.07599    0.782   0.434   1.0789   1.6045
Not_guil-Override |   0.00914    0.098   0.922   1.0092   1.0585
Not_guil-Guilty,_ |  -0.04823   -0.388   0.698   0.9529   0.7407
Not_guil-Not_pros |  -0.00793   -0.106   0.915   0.9921   0.9518
Guilty  -Not_guil |  -0.07599   -0.782   0.434   0.9268   0.6232
Guilty  -Override |  -0.06684   -0.987   0.324   0.9353   0.6597
Guilty  -Guilty,_ |  -0.12422   -1.059   0.289   0.8832   0.4616
Guilty  -Not_pros |  -0.08392   -1.284   0.199   0.9195   0.5932
Override-Not_guil |  -0.00914   -0.098   0.922   0.9909   0.9447
Override-Guilty   |   0.06684    0.987   0.324   1.0691   1.5158
Override-Guilty,_ |  -0.05738   -0.464   0.643   0.9442   0.6998
Override-Not_pros |  -0.01708   -0.287   0.774   0.9831   0.8992
Guilty,_-Not_guil |   0.04823    0.388   0.698   1.0494   1.3500
Guilty,_-Guilty   |   0.12422    1.059   0.289   1.1323   2.1662
Guilty,_-Override |   0.05738    0.464   0.643   1.0591   1.4291
Guilty,_-Not_pros |   0.04030    0.425   0.671   1.0411   1.2850
Not_pros-Not_guil |   0.00793    0.106   0.915   1.0080   1.0506
Not_pros-Guilty   |   0.08392    1.284   0.199   1.0875   1.6857
Not_pros-Override |   0.01708    0.287   0.774   1.0172   1.1121
Not_pros-Guilty,_ |  -0.04030   -0.425   0.671   0.9605   0.7782
-------------------------------------------------------------------

Variable: grgdpch_pwt (sd=4.125331)
Odds comparing    |
Alternative 1     |
to Alternative 2  |      b         z     P>|z|     e^b   e^bStdX
------------------+------------------------------------------------
Not_guil-Guilty   |   0.07605    1.129   0.259   1.0790   1.3685
Not_guil-Override |   0.04370    0.512   0.609   1.0447   1.1975
Not_guil-Guilty,_ |  -0.01164   -0.159   0.874   0.9884   0.9531
Not_guil-Not_pros |   0.01655    0.244   0.807   1.0167   1.0707
Guilty  -Not_guil |  -0.07605   -1.129   0.259   0.9268   0.7307
Guilty  -Override |  -0.03235   -0.633   0.526   0.9682   0.8751
Guilty  -Guilty,_ |  -0.08769   -2.499   0.012   0.9160   0.6965
Guilty  -Not_pros |  -0.05949   -1.717   0.086   0.9422   0.7824
Override-Not_guil |  -0.04370   -0.512   0.609   0.9572   0.8350
Override-Guilty   |   0.03235    0.633   0.526   1.0329   1.1428
Override-Guilty,_ |  -0.05534   -1.182   0.237   0.9462   0.7959
Override-Not_pros |  -0.02714   -0.552   0.581   0.9732   0.8941
Guilty,_-Not_guil |   0.01164    0.159   0.874   1.0117   1.0492
Guilty,_-Guilty   |   0.08769    2.499   0.012   1.0916   1.4358
Guilty,_-Override |   0.05534    1.182   0.237   1.0569   1.2565
Guilty,_-Not_pros |   0.02820    1.174   0.241   1.0286   1.1234
Not_pros-Not_guil |  -0.01655   -0.244   0.807   0.9836   0.9340
Not_pros-Guilty   |   0.05949    1.717   0.086   1.0613   1.2782
Not_pros-Override |   0.02714    0.552   0.581   1.0275   1.1185
Not_pros-Guilty,_ |  -0.02820   -1.174   0.241   0.9722   0.8902
-------------------------------------------------------------------
```

```
Variable: military (sd=.46338195)
Odds comparing    |
Alternative 1     |
to Alternative 2  |      b         z     P>|z|     e^b   e^bStdX
------------------+------------------------------------------------
Not_guil-Guilty   | -14.26675  -18.789   0.000   0.0000   0.0013
Not_guil-Override | -15.04244  -16.331   0.000   0.0000   0.0009
Not_guil-Guilty,_ | -15.21414  -15.268   0.000   0.0000   0.0009
Not_guil-Not_pros | -14.09349  -20.272   0.000   0.0000   0.0015
Guilty  -Not_guil |  14.26675   18.789   0.000 1.57e+06 743.1923
Guilty  -Override |  -0.77569   -1.187   0.235   0.4604   0.6981
Guilty  -Guilty,_ |  -0.94739   -1.278   0.201   0.3878   0.6447
Guilty  -Not_pros |   0.17326    0.437   0.662   1.1892   1.0836
Override-Not_guil |  15.04244   16.331   0.000 3.41e+061064.6419
Override-Guilty   |   0.77569    1.187   0.235   2.1721   1.4325
Override-Guilty,_ |  -0.17171   -0.182   0.855   0.8422   0.9235
Override-Not_pros |   0.94895    2.007   0.045   2.5830   1.5523
Guilty,_-Not_guil |  15.21414   15.268   0.000 4.05e+061152.8126
Guilty,_-Guilty   |   0.94739    1.278   0.201   2.5790   1.5512
Guilty,_-Override |   0.17171    0.182   0.855   1.1873   1.0828
Guilty,_-Not_pros |   1.12066    1.525   0.127   3.0669   1.6808
Not_pros-Not_guil |  14.09349   20.272   0.000 1.32e+06 685.8560
Not_pros-Guilty   |  -0.17326   -0.437   0.662   0.8409   0.9229
Not_pros-Override |  -0.94895   -2.007   0.045   0.3871   0.6442
Not_pros-Guilty,_ |  -1.12066   -1.525   0.127   0.3261   0.5949
------------------------------------------------------------------

Variable: coldwar (sd=.44584311)
Odds comparing    |
Alternative 1     |
to Alternative 2  |      b         z     P>|z|     e^b   e^bStdX
------------------+------------------------------------------------
Not_guil-Guilty   |   0.96754    0.979   0.328   2.6315   1.5394
Not_guil-Override |   0.15971    0.143   0.886   1.1732   1.0738
Not_guil-Guilty,_ | -16.22557  -15.940   0.000   0.0000   0.0007
Not_guil-Not_pros |  -1.11371   -2.468   0.014   0.3283   0.6086
Guilty  -Not_guil |  -0.96754   -0.979   0.328   0.3800   0.6496
Guilty  -Override |  -0.80782   -0.705   0.481   0.4458   0.6976
Guilty  -Guilty,_ | -17.19311  -13.431   0.000   0.0000   0.0005
Guilty  -Not_pros |  -2.08125   -2.383   0.017   0.1248   0.3954
Override-Not_guil |  -0.15971   -0.143   0.886   0.8524   0.9313
Override-Guilty   |   0.80782    0.705   0.481   2.2430   1.4336
Override-Guilty,_ | -16.38528  -12.216   0.000   0.0000   0.0007
Override-Not_pros |  -1.27343   -1.187   0.235   0.2799   0.5668
Guilty,_-Not_guil |  16.22557   15.940   0.000 1.11e+071385.8357
Guilty,_-Guilty   |  17.19311   13.431   0.000 2.93e+072133.3049
Guilty,_-Override |  16.38528   12.216   0.000 1.31e+071488.1156
Guilty,_-Not_pros |  15.11186   17.136   0.000 3.66e+06 843.4636
Not_pros-Not_guil |   1.11371    2.468   0.014   3.0456   1.6430
Not_pros-Guilty   |   2.08125    2.383   0.017   8.0145   2.5292
Not_pros-Override |   1.27343    1.187   0.235   3.5731   1.7643
Not_pros-Guilty,_ | -15.11186  -17.136   0.000   0.0000   0.0012
------------------------------------------------------------------
```

Variable: neoliberal (sd=.41343988)

Odds comparing Alternative 1 to Alternative 2	b	z	P>|z|	e^b	e^bStdX
Not_guil-Guilty	0.58739	0.747	0.455	1.7993	1.2749
Not_guil-Override	-0.26322	-0.306	0.760	0.7686	0.8969
Not_guil-Guilty,_	-0.62446	-0.387	0.698	0.5356	0.7725
Not_guil-Not_pros	0.84520	1.854	0.064	2.3285	1.4183
Guilty -Not_guil	-0.58739	-0.747	0.455	0.5558	0.7844
Guilty -Override	-0.85062	-0.918	0.358	0.4272	0.7035
Guilty -Guilty,_	-1.21185	-0.745	0.456	0.2976	0.6059
Guilty -Not_pros	0.25781	0.450	0.652	1.2941	1.1125
Override-Not_guil	0.26322	0.306	0.760	1.3011	1.1150
Override-Guilty	0.85062	0.918	0.358	2.3411	1.4215
Override-Guilty,_	-0.36123	-0.218	0.827	0.6968	0.8613
Override-Not_pros	1.10843	1.448	0.148	3.0296	1.5813
Guilty,_-Not_guil	0.62446	0.387	0.698	1.8672	1.2946
Guilty,_-Guilty	1.21185	0.745	0.456	3.3597	1.6504
Guilty,_-Override	0.36123	0.218	0.827	1.4351	1.1611
Guilty,_-Not_pros	1.46966	0.975	0.330	4.3478	1.8361
Not_pros-Not_guil	-0.84520	-1.854	0.064	0.4295	0.7051
Not_pros-Guilty	-0.25781	-0.450	0.652	0.7727	0.8989
Not_pros-Override	-1.10843	-1.448	0.148	0.3301	0.6324
Not_pros-Guilty,_	-1.46966	-0.975	0.330	0.2300	0.5446