

ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND THE TYPE AND METHOD OF PRESIDENTIAL TERM LIMIT EVASION

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Abstract:

We argue that macroeconomic performance shapes the evasion of presidential term limits in two ways: first, by influencing the decision to extend, abolish, or simply avoid term limits, and second, by shaping the choice to rely on judicial decisions, legislative action, or a public referendum for implementation. Drawing on the theory of retrospective economic voting, we argue that strong economic performance increases the likelihood of evasion types and methods subject to voter participation in the process, such as extending and abolishing term limits and employing public referendum. Weak economic performance, by contrast, encourages presidents to avoid term limits altogether or adopt evasion methods that allow them to mitigate public scrutiny. We collect new data that codes details about the methods used in more than 80 instances of presidential term limit violations globally and find robust empirical support for these claims. We find particularly strong evidence that increases in unemployment are associated with a higher risk of avoidance, since this strategy allows presidents to stay in office while evading punishment at the polls. Faster rates of economic growth, by contrast, are associated with greater risk of extending and abolishing term limits, and the use of public referenda that legitimate these changes.

Introduction

When do presidents attempt to overstay their constitutionally mandated term limits? Few questions are as pressing for contemporary democratization scholars. Though once viewed as the domain of unconstrained autocrats for whom constitutional provisions were mere window dressing, presidential term limit evasions are increasing in frequency and occurring in a more diverse range of regimes. Indeed, almost half of presidential term limit violations since 1990 occurred in countries that met minimal thresholds for electoral democracy, including Bolivia, Senegal, Zambia, Argentina, Paraguay, Ecuador, Panama, and Burkina Faso, to name a few.

Violating presidential term limits is a bright-line marker of a democratic regime's survival prospects. These events undermine executive constraints, increase levels of regime personalization, and reduce horizontal accountability between executives and rival branches and vertical accountability between executives and voters.¹ Even unsuccessful attempts to extend presidential tenure are ominous signs of a leader's commitment to the rule of law, competition, and constitutional constraints. In short, overstaying constitutional term limits is an ideal-type indicator of the institutional subversion and executive aggrandizement central to democracy's contemporary challenges.²

Of course many presidents, even in nascent or fragile democratic settings, abide by constitutional limits on their power. A variety of studies, especially those from new democracies in sub-Saharan Africa, even point to encouraging signs where executive term limits are increasingly respected.³ Nevertheless, attempts to violate term limits remain frequent and, given their centrality in models of democratic regime breakdown, warrant a careful examination of the circumstances in which leaders are likely to initiate such actions.

Our paper contributes to a growing literature that catalogs the variety of term limit evasions – such as extending, abolishing, or simply avoiding these limits – as well as a set of factors associated with higher risks of such actions.⁴ Prior work tends to emphasize individual leader characteristics like age, professional background, and personality,⁵ or institutional configurations, such as presidential party seat share in the legislature or the degree of electoral uncertainty.⁶ By contrast, we emphasize macroeconomic performance, a subject that has not been studied in this context. We begin with a general theoretical argument that macroeconomic performance has a positive impact on the likelihood of such attempts, largely by reducing the risks inherent in these decisions. Strong economic performance creates positive retrospective evaluations by citizens and additional economic resources to fund public goods that may further boost approval ratings generally and legislators’ willingness to take the president’s side on such controversial moves.

More specifically, we argue that economic performance shapes two strategic choices that presidents make in their quest to overstay. The first concerns the type of evasion, namely whether they seek to permanently alter the constitution via extending or abolishing term limits, or simply avoid them. The second concerns the methods employed. Presidents can seek judicial decisions declaring their efforts to overstay legal, pursue legislative action that enables additional terms, or present such actions to the voting public for approval via referendums. A key distinction between the various types and methods of evasion is the extent to which they provide an opportunity for public participation in the process. Constitutional amendments and referenda, for instance, require public approval either directly via the ballot box or indirectly via the development of supportive legislative coalitions. Avoiding term limits and seeking judicial approval, by contrast, allows presidents to minimize public participation – and the possibility of

backlash – in the process. We argue that stronger economic performance should make the former type of actions more likely. Conversely, weaker economic performance should encourage presidents to adopt the latter strategies, since they allow presidents to stay in office while avoiding punishment at the polls.

We develop new data that code the type of evasion attempt and method of evasion in more than 80 instances globally. We use these new data, along with multiple indicators of economic performance, in a quantitative analysis of our hypotheses. Our results provide strong support for these arguments, especially how increases in the rate of economic growth are associated with a greater willingness to extend and abolish term limits and to seek public approval via referenda. By contrast, high levels of unemployment – a key component of citizen’s retrospective evaluations of economic performance – are associated with a higher risk of avoiding term limits, since this strategy allows presidents to stay in office while evading punishment at the polls. Collectively our findings offer important extensions to the existing literature that identifies the determinants of presidential term limit violations, and our new data can be used to further refine a number of related questions on the topic.

Beyond this, our work also contributes to larger debates in the field about the global state of democracy. Provocative new research suggests that recent academic (and public) concerns about a global democratic recession do not reflect empirical reality. Little and Meng argue that claims of a global democratic retrenchment rely on democracy indicators that are more subjective, while less subjective measures of democratic quality globally paint a less gloomy picture.⁷ Triesman argues that any global backsliding is not historically unusual and easily explained by the levels of modernization and relatively weak institutional settings of new democracies.⁸ These papers have set off a debate that our paper cannot resolve.⁹ Instead, we

argue that one can remain agnostic about whether a global wave of democratic retrenchment has occurred while still taking seriously the threat to individual democratic regime survival that comes from elected presidents seeking to overstay their time in office. Understanding system level trends is important, yet these efforts should not crowd out analyses of the specific factors that shape within-country declines in democratic quality, or understanding how and why steps toward regime breakdown occur.

Explaining Term Limit Violations: Leaders vs. Institutions

We build on established scholarship that identifies factors associated with term limit violations, especially the recent work that views these evasions through the lens of executive aggrandizement and democratic backsliding.¹⁰ A prominent division in current work is between studies emphasizing individual leader characteristics and those focusing on institutional factors.

For instance, Corrales focuses on Latin America and finds that presidential popularity predicts evasion attempts.¹¹ Others emphasize the professional background of leaders as a risk factor. Baturo presents evidence that presidents with military backgrounds, as well as first independence leaders who can claim a ‘father of the nation’ mantle, are more likely to attempt to stay in office.¹² Cassani similarly emphasizes military backgrounds as a risk factor in sub-Saharan African regimes.¹³ Most recently, Arana Araya’s work highlights political inexperience and dominant personality traits as risk factors for challenging presidential term limits.¹⁴

By contrast, another body of work argues that executive term limit violations are more common under institutional arrangements that advantage presidents relative to other actors, including legislatures, parties, and judiciaries. For instance, McKie argues that high levels of electoral competition reduces the risk of an evasion attempt, largely by reducing the leverage that

presidents have over their co-partisans in the legislature.¹⁵ Specifically, highly competitive political environments provide a signal to legislators that supporting the president's effort to contravene term limits may jeopardize their own political survival.

Other studies emphasize the features of president's own parties, generally arguing that more institutionalized parties reduce the likelihood of an evasion attempt.¹⁶ For example, Corrales suggests that institutionalized parties have longer time horizons and expect to regain the presidency in the future, thus reducing the willingness of rank-and-file members to accommodate an evasion attempt.¹⁷ By contrast, presidents who are able to 'personalize' their ruling parties – generally understood to mean instances where individual leaders' personality trumps institutions and rules – are associated with increased risk of democratic erosion.¹⁸

Negretto also adopts an institutional perspective, but emphasizes short term shifts in the partisan balance between the president's party and the main legislative opposition party.¹⁹ Specifically, shifts in this balance toward the president's party increase the risk of term limit evasions by strengthening the loyalty of co-partisans and weakening the capacity of opposition parties. However, these shifts occur in different institutional settings, and historical legacies of executive alternation can constrain term limit evasion attempts. A related study by Lotfy also suggests that a broad set of institutions, including the independence of high courts, the age and institutionalization of the ruling party, and the strength of opposition parties, constrain president's attempts at circumventing constitutional term limits.²⁰

This typology of leader traits versus institutions does not capture all prior studies on the correlates of term limit evasion. For instance, a few studies emphasize the role of the international environment in containing leader's impulses to extend their time in office. Cassani, identifies a positive contagion effect from regional partners in sub-Saharan African

democracies.²¹ When presidents from fellow regional organization member states abide by constitutional term limits, the risk of a term limit violation decreases. Lotfy, however, presents evidence that suggests this same regional diffusion effect can work in the opposite direction; when regional neighbors have a history of presidential term limit evasion, the risk of a similar action domestically rises significantly.²²

Noticeably absent is an emphasis on economic performance, which is surprising given the central role socioeconomic factors play in the general literature on democratic transition and survival.²³ When economic issues have been emphasized, it is either in relation to the post-tenure fates and economic opportunities of presidents, such as Baturo's claim that term limit violations are more likely when leaders place higher economic value on holding public office, or the extent to which an economy is dependent on foreign aid which captures whether donors can pressure elected leaders to leave office.²⁴ As such, the theoretical importance of economic performance on the risk of term limit evasion remains largely un-examined, a gap we address in the following section.

How Economic Performance Shapes Presidential Term Limit Evasion

Presidents need not have dictatorial impulses or desires for personal enrichment to be tempted to overstay their constitutionally specified term limits. Some may seek the additional years to enjoy the intrinsic reward of the office, while others value the extended time to pursue key policy outcomes.²⁵ Others may be motivated by a pragmatic desire to ensure their party's continued electoral success, since complying with term limits dramatically increases the odds of an opposition victory.²⁶

Nevertheless, evasion attempts are politically risky. Term limits are generally popular and particularly supported by citizens who have experienced a prior episode of executive term limit evasion.²⁷ There are also a number of ways that such efforts can backfire and pave the way for the president's removal from office. For instance, attempts to overstay can spawn widespread and destabilizing protests from civil society that boost the electoral fortunes of opposition candidates, as in Senegal in 2012.²⁸ Alternatively, these attempts can be used as justification for a coup d'état, as in Honduras in 2009.²⁹ Even if these outcomes are avoided, seeking constitutionally prohibited additional terms can fracture a president's legislative majority and negate further achievement of policy goals, as in Zambia in 2001 and Malawi in 2002/3.³⁰ Minimizing this risk is thus key to understanding when presidents attempt to evade term limits. While some of the factors emphasized in prior studies –professional backgrounds and power imbalances between presidents and legislatures, for instance – can be viewed through this theoretical lens, we argue that macroeconomic performance has a strong influence on the risk that presidents face when considering a term limit evasion.

We draw on theories of retrospective economic voting to argue that strong macroeconomic performance reduces these risks, and thus is positively associated with evasion attempts. Our argument builds on canonical versions of “blind retrospection” which emphasize a reward-punishment mechanism. Potential voters draw on their own personal pocketbook assessments, along with sociotropic views of economic performance more generally, to either reward incumbents with reelection, or replace them with challengers.³¹ A wide array of studies offer empirical support for this general argument, especially the finding that strong economic performance boosts incumbents' performance at the polls.³² One difference between these studies and the issue examined here is that presidents' attempts to overstay do not always

coincide with public approval via an electoral process. Nevertheless, the general idea that strong economic performance increases incumbents' public support suggests that, by similar mechanisms, it also reduces the risk that term limit evasion attempts backfire. The net result is a positive association between economic performance and attempts to evade term limits.

Extensions to the retrospective economic voting theories also support this argument. For instance, a number of studies suggest that the link between economic performance and the reward-punishment mechanism is strongest when political institutions allow citizens to assign clear responsibility for economic policymaking³³ and especially when voters have a clear opportunity to act upon these evaluations,³⁴ settings that describe presidential systems. The political business cycle literature also regularly finds that re-election focused incumbents engage in strategic fiscal expansion before voters head to the polls.³⁵ As above, this literature tends to focus on incumbent vote share rather than term limit evasion, but we suggest that a similar mechanism exists when it comes to citizens choosing (not) to sanction a president for an attempted term limit violation.

Thus far our theory adopts a simplistic view of term limit evasion. In practice, however, presidents face a number of strategic choices in their quest to overstay. First, presidents confront a central dilemma about the type of evasion they pursue. On the one hand, incumbents can pursue extension or abolishment of term limits via constitutional amendment or even wholesale constitutional replacement. For instance, presidents sought to *extend* term limits (including changing laws on term length and rules about consecutive re-election) in Ecuador (2009), Bolivia (2009), and Angola (2010). Others attempted to *abolish* term limits altogether, as in Cameroon (2008), Honduras (2015), or Venezuela (2009).

On the other hand, some incumbents opt to *avoid* existing term limits.³⁶ The simplest version of avoidance is to delay the contestation of an election where they are constitutionally barred from competing. Outright delay is rare in regimes with minimal levels of multiparty competition, yet not unprecedented. For instance, Joseph Kabila (Democratic Republic of the Congo) delayed the originally scheduled presidential election in 2016 – where victory would have started an unconstitutional third term – until 2018.³⁷ In other instances, presidents can avoid term limits by appealing to separate actors who provide favorable reinterpretations of existing constitutional provisions. Consider, for example, the efforts of Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaoré, who announced in August 2005 his intention to run a third time despite a constitutional amendment passed in 2000 that restricted presidents to two terms. Supporters of Compaoré countered that the amendment should not apply to a third term, on the grounds that he was currently serving as President when the amendment passed, and thus the first term did not count against the newly-established limits. In October of 2005 the country's Constitutional Council agreed, permitting Compaoré to run again, and ultimately hold on to power for nearly a decade longer.³⁸

Beyond the type of evasion, incumbent presidents also face a strategic choice over the method by which they pursue additional time in office. We emphasize three methods that capture the range of options. First, some presidents pursue favorable decisions from nominally non-partisan bodies which facilitate their contestation of otherwise unconstitutional additional terms. The vast majority of these focus on the judicial branch, as the above noted example of Compaoré in Burkina Faso illustrates. A similar process occurred in Kazakhstan in 2001 when the Constitutional Council ruled that the post-Soviet constitution containing term limits did not apply to first President Nazarbayev, given his role of 'father' of the nation.³⁹ Within this category we

also include a few similar instances which involve an appeal to an administrative, but not necessarily judicial, actor. For instance, in Uzbekistan in 2007 and again in 2015 the Central Election Commission ruled that constitutional term limits did not apply to President Islam Karimov, since amendments specifying those limits were adopted after his prior terms had been served.⁴⁰ Given the dominance of the judiciary in this method, however, we describe these as *judicial decision* methods of term limit evasion.

A second approach involves the elected legislative branch. Legislatures can provide similar assistance in reinterpreting existing constitutional rules. They also provide accommodating settings to extend or abolish term limits altogether. We describe these collective methods as relying on *legislative action*. For example, legislative allies of Peru's President Alberto Fujimori passed a law in 1999 that avoided counting his first term, since it started before the 1993 constitutional revision that established term limits.⁴¹ Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega took advantage of a new legislative majority in 2014 to push through bills that eliminated presidential term limits.⁴² Even when incumbents face some opposition to these changes, including from within their own party, presidents can wield their political influence and resources to ensure passage, as in Uganda in 2005 when President Yoweri Museveni engineered an overwhelming parliamentary vote in favor of removing term limits.⁴³

Third, presidents can hold a *public referendum* which provides opportunities for voters to approve new constitutional language which extends an incumbent's time in office. These direct appeals to voters are common, occurring in nearly one-third of the total cases we describe in the sections that follow, including in Ecuador (2009), Tunisia (2002), Rwanda (2015), and Venezuela (1999, 2007, and 2009). Seeking public approval of constitutional changes regarding term limits is understandable; few other methods confer such legitimacy to these efforts to

consolidate power, even if the referendum process is not fully free and fair or boycotted by opposition parties, as was the case in several of the instances noted above.

These evasion types and methods vary by the degree to which each requires presidents to face the public, and by extension the degree to which this opportunity for public participation exposes presidents' evasion attempts to a potential backlash. Extending or abolishing term limits, for instance, requires constitutional amendments which expose incumbents to voters, albeit sometimes indirectly via citizens' role in electing and maintaining a supportive legislative coalition for the actions. Such exposure is minimized when presidents opt to avoid term limits altogether.

A similar divide exists between the various evasion methods. Asking for citizens to approve term limit changes via referendum puts incumbents' fate directly in the hands of an unpredictable voting public. Incumbents who lean on an accommodating legislature must ensure that the body contains enough supporters, which implies that these legislators must feel sufficiently insulated from their constituents to take such unpopular positions without risking their own political survival. By sharp contrast, appeals to the judiciary provide a pathway for presidents to retain power while minimizing the opportunities for public participation or input on the process.

We draw on this central distinction to extend our theoretical argument emphasizing economic performance. Specifically, we argue that stronger economic performance is associated with a greater risk of evasion types and methods that rely on public participation.⁴⁴ Incumbents presiding over strong economic records are more likely to enjoy the positive benefits of retrospective voters and feel empowered to seek the permanence of term limit extension or abolishment. A similar logic applies to reliance on referenda to evade term limits. Seeking

public approval of constitutional changes is a high risk and high reward approach, which should be more likely in the context of strong economic performance. Moreover, robust economic performance provides leaders with access to additional revenues that can be used for building and maintaining legislative support coalitions via private goods.⁴⁵ Legislators who can count on greater resources from the president may feel less constrained to honor prior constitutional provisions. A similar retrospective economic voting mechanism applies to legislators seeking their own reelection. Stronger economic performance boosts their approval ratings and vote share and can mitigate any voter anger regarding these constitutional changes. In sum, presidents should be particularly likely to pursue these public-facing evasion types (*extend*, *abolish*) and methods (*legislative action*, *public referendum*) when economic performance is strong.

By contrast, we argue that poor economic performance does not reduce the value of holding additional terms or the intrinsic desire of presidents to hold on to power. Nor does it commit incumbents to abide by limits on their reelection. It does, however, reduce the levels of public support and approval that incumbent presidents can draw upon, which shapes the type of evasion they pursue and the specific methods employed. Specifically, poor economic performance should encourage incumbents to *avoid* term limits altogether. Poor economic performance should also encourage incumbent presidents to adopt distinct methods of evasion, especially appeals to *judicial decisions*. These strategies provide a pathway for presidents to retain power while minimizing the opportunities for mass publics to vote against them in elections for previously disallowed terms. This represents a more attractive choice when economic performance has been poor. The section that follows describes our empirical approach to evaluating these theoretical expectations.

Empirical Approach

We begin by introducing new data that identify the types and methods of term limit evasion described above. Our disaggregation of evasion type (*extend*, *abolish*, and *avoid*) mirrors an established convention in the field, while our focus on evasion method (*judicial decision*, *legislative action*, and *public referendum*) extends a measurement approach initially developed by Lotfy.⁴⁶ Our process begins with two existing datasets that identify all episodes where incumbent presidents sought to overstay their constitutional term limits. The two sources contain important conceptual differences in the identification of a term limit evasion attempt. McKie's work, for instance, records the year in which an incumbent (or their proxies in the legislature) initiated a change to the electoral calendar or rules regarding the length of presidential terms, the number of terms allowed, or other limitations on serving consecutive terms. Versteeg et al.'s data, by contrast, record the year in which previously unconstitutional terms began, even if the constitutional amendment or decision enabling this additional term happened in a prior year.⁴⁷ This conceptual difference notwithstanding, the identification of evasion attempts is largely the same across both sources. Combining these sources to identify all relevant attempts (subject to the additional sample criteria described below) yields 81 distinct events. Given our specific theoretical emphasis, we adopt the former's approach and record the year in which the evasion attempt occurred.

Our data contribution begins by coding each event with a primary evasion type: *extend* term limits, *abolish* term limits, or *avoid* term limits. For the last category we further distinguish between avoidance via outright delay or an election and avoidance via a separate actors' constitutional reinterpretation, though given the small number of instances of outright delay we

tend to combine these avoidance types for subsequent empirical analysis.⁴⁸ We also code a primary evasion method: *judicial decision*, *legislative action*, and *public referendum*.

We use data from a variety of sources to make these determinations, including primary sources describing constitutional revisions, news reporting, secondary analysis by scholars, and the reporting of think tanks and non-governmental organizations. In the vast majority of events, coding the primary type and method is straightforward. In some events, however, incumbents pursued two methods over the duration of the attempt. In these instances, we code the event according to the final strategy employed. For example, most public referendums follow legislative approval of amendment language. Yet since the results of the referendum determines the implementation of the constitutional changes, we code these events as examples of the *referendum* method.

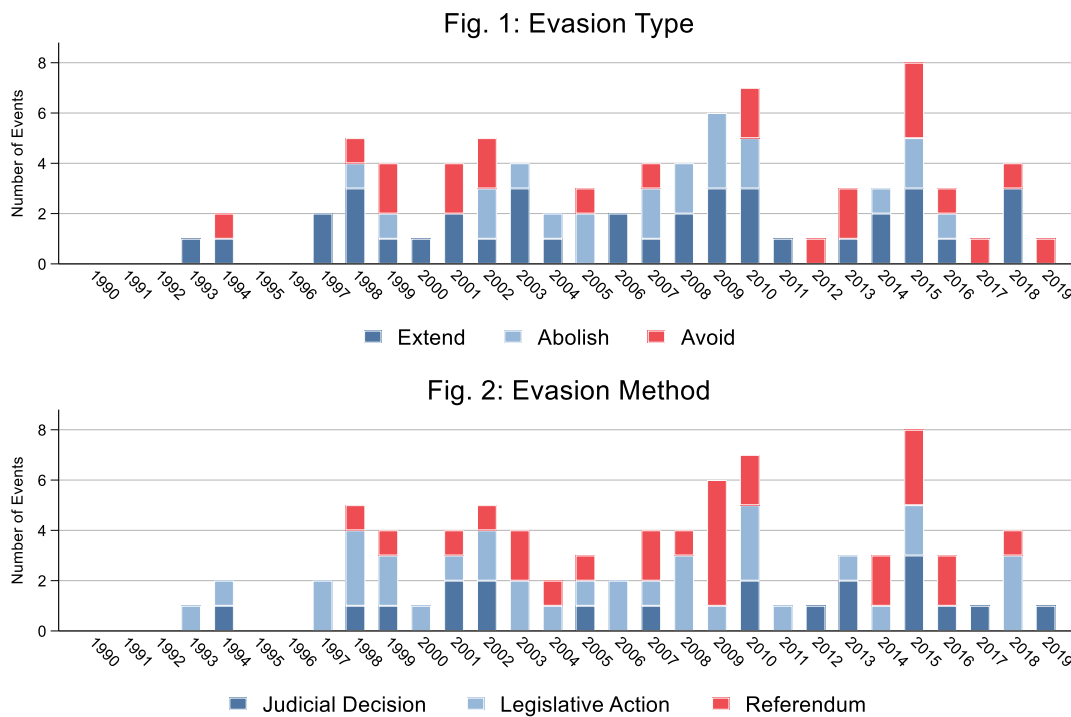
Table 1 summarizes the data along these two dimensions, including the number of observations in the full dataset and in the main estimation sample we report below (that is, subject to missing data for other regression model covariates). Figures 1 and 2 visualize the distribution of evasion types and methods over the time sample analyzed.

Table 1: Distribution of Presidential Term Limit Evasions, by Type and Method

Type	Method			Total
	<i>Judicial Decision</i>	<i>Legislative Action</i>	<i>Public Referendum</i>	
<i>Extend Term Limits</i>	0	22 (20)	16	38
<i>Abolish Term Limits</i>	0	11 (9)	10	21
<i>Avoid Term Limits (Delay)</i>	6 (3)	0	0	6
<i>Avoid Term Limits (Reinterpret)</i>	14 (11)	2	0	16
Total	20	35	26	81 (71)

Note: Cells report number of Presidential Term Limit Evasions, by Type and Method. Numbers in parentheses reflect total events included in baseline regression estimation sample. See text for coding details.

Figures 1 and 2: Presidential Term Limit Violation Patterns, 1990-2019



To test the hypotheses elaborated above, we assemble a panel dataset consisting of presidential regimes in Third-Wave of democracy regions, from 1990 to 2019.⁴⁹ We rely on

Bjørnskov and Rode's data, which updates the classic Dictatorship-Development data to identify Presidential regimes.⁵⁰ Given our emphasis on retrospective economic voting, we exclude regimes that do not contest multiparty elections for the executive and legislature. More precisely, we use the Varieties of Democracy *Regimes of the World* classification and exclude regimes identified as closed autocracies.⁵¹ These sample composition rules mirror those employed in prior studies, including McKie.⁵²

We use our new data to construct a series of dependent variables which identify whether an attempt to evade executive term limits (or a specific type and method of attempt) occurred in a given country-year. The first is a simple binary variable pooling all evasion attempts together. We then construct a series of categorical dependent variables. The first focuses on evasion types, separating years where presidents respected term limits (0) from those where leaders attempted to *extend* (1) term limits, *abolish* (2) term limits, and *avoid* (3) term limits. The second follows a similar construction but distinguishes non-event years (0) from the three evasion methods: *judicial decision* (1), *legislative action* (2), and *public referendum* (3).

We measure macroeconomic performance with two separate variables that accord with our emphasis on retrospective voting. First, we include the rate of economic growth, specifically the annual percentage growth rate in GDP in constant local currencies. This focus on economic growth rates captures a broad measure of macroeconomic performance. We also measure the rate of unemployment as a share of total labor force, using International Labour Organization estimates. A number of studies in the retrospective voting literature suggests that unemployment rates are powerful heuristics for overall economic performance, due mainly to the ease with which citizens can observe and understand them relative to more abstract indicators. Citizens' retrospective evaluations also react more rapidly to changes in unemployment, which further

renders this a reasonable approach to evaluating the hypotheses above.⁵³ Each of these variables is drawn from the World Bank's OpenData, and enters the regression with a one-year lag, to better capture the temporal dynamics discussed in our theory.⁵⁴ Descriptive statistics are reported in our appendix.

We include additional variables to address potential confounders. All models include a measure of *income per capita* and a country's *electoral democracy index*. The first captures the general expectation that democracy's consolidation is aided by economic modernization, while the second accounts for regime differences within our sample of countries. We use data from Bolt and van Zanden and the Varieties of Democracy project, respectively.⁵⁵ We also estimate models which include a number of additional control variables. These include a binary indicator for whether a president is eligible for re-election at their expiration of their current term, the total number of years an executive has served in office, whether an executive is from a right ideological political party, the total vote share of government parties in the legislature, and whether an executive has a military background. Each of these variables captures a factor that prior research has identified as potentially related to term limit violations.⁵⁶ As with the key independent variables, these control variables enter the regression with a one-year lag.

Results and Discussion

We begin our analyses with a simple test of the association between economic performance and term limit evasion. We estimate linear probability models using the binary dependent variable capturing country-years with any evasion attempt. We present these results in Table 2, including the baseline specification as well as the second model that includes additional covariates described above. Each model contains country fixed effects and clustered standard

errors. As these are linear probability models with a binary dependent variable, the coefficients are not directly interpretable, nor can they be interpreted as changes in predicted probabilities of observing an attempt corresponding to some shift in an independent variable. However, Timoneda recommends this approach over conditional logistic regression for panel data with relatively rare binary dependent variables, as is the case in our dataset.⁵⁷ We report alternative approaches in the appendix, though the results are substantively identical.

The results in Table 2 offer some initial evidence that macroeconomic performance is associated with higher risk of term limit evasion, specifically through the positive and statistically significant coefficient for *economic growth*. Given the inclusion of country fixed effects, this finding should be interpreted as a measure of the within-country impact; when a country's economy is growing faster, presidents are more likely to attempt an executive term limit evasion. The relationship persists even when controlling for a larger set of potential confounders, including total time in office, ideology, and the vote share of government parties. However, the regression coefficients for the *unemployment* variable are not significantly different from zero in either model.

Table 2: Linear Probability Models with Country Fixed Effects

	(1)	(2)
Economic growth	0.001** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)
Unemployment	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)
Income per capita (log)	0.024* (0.012)	0.022 (0.015)
Electoral democracy index	-0.098*** (0.035)	-0.129* (0.066)
Eligible for reelection		-0.065*** (0.014)
Vote share of government parties		-0.000 (0.000)
Executive years in office		0.001** (0.001)
Right executive		0.003 (0.015)
Military background		0.015 (0.023)
Constant	-0.131 (0.099)	-0.073 (0.110)
Observations	2,129	1,819
Number of countries	86	79

Note: Dependent variable is a dummy variable for any ETL evasion attempt. Clustered standard errors in parentheses. Sample is Presidential regimes in Third Wave Regions with competitive legislative elections, 1992-2019. All independent variables lagged one year.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Does the impact of economic performance differ if we distinguish between evasion types, as suggested above? Table 3 presents a set of similar regressions, only this time we use our categorical dependent variable which separates years without evasion attempts (0, the reference category) from those where presidents attempted to *extend* (1), *abolish* (2), or *avoid* (3) term limits. Given this construction, we estimate these regressions with multinomial logistic regression, and once again include country fixed effects and cluster standard errors on

countries.⁵⁸ As in Table 2, we first present a baseline model and then a second model with the additional covariates.

The results in Table 3 provide immediate evidence supporting our argument that economic performance shapes the type of evasion that incumbents pursue. Specifically, the multinomial logistic regression coefficients for *economic growth* are positive and statistically significant in the first two equations, but not the third, indicating that increases in *economic growth* are associated with an higher likelihood of *extend* and *abolish* attempts, relative to the reference category of no attempts, but that there is no impact on the likelihood of *avoid* attempts. Moreover, the coefficient is larger in the *abolish* equation than in the *extend* equation, suggesting that increases in economic growth may offer a particularly conducive environment for the most durable of these evasion attempts, namely outright abolishment. By sharp contrast, the coefficients for *unemployment* demonstrate the exact opposite patterns. Specifically, the coefficient for *unemployment* is positive and statistically significant in the *avoid* equation but not statistically significant in the equations for *extend* and *abolish* evasions. These patterns are identical when the regressions include the additional control variables, though the difference in coefficient size for *economic growth* between the equations for *extend* and *abolish* diminishes.

Note that although each of these statistically significant coefficients are positive, higher values of each economic variable indicate something dramatically different. An increase in *unemployment* suggests a deterioration of economic performance in a metric that is particularly salient and easily observable for voters. Thus, the substantive interpretation of the results in Table 3 supports our argument, namely that incumbents presiding over poor economic performance still seek to extend their tenure but adopt strategies that allow them to avoid the direct judgement of dissatisfied voting publics.

Before proceeding, we also note a few interesting findings from the covariates included in the model. The coefficient for *electoral democracy* is negative and statistically significant in equations examining term limit abolishment and avoidance, but not statistically significant in equations examining term limit extension. This suggests that presidents operating in more democratic environments are less likely to employ the most transparent approaches to overstaying, but that the extent of democracy has no impact on the likelihood that a president pursues the less obvious approach of extending term limit rules. Additionally, incumbents who have served longer tenures already are at greater risk of extending and avoiding term limits. Unsurprisingly, term limit extension and abolishment are less likely when incumbents are eligible for reelection under the current rules. Finally, Table 3 suggests that incumbents from ideologically right parties are more likely to *avoid* term limits, while incumbents with a military background are more likely to *abolish*.

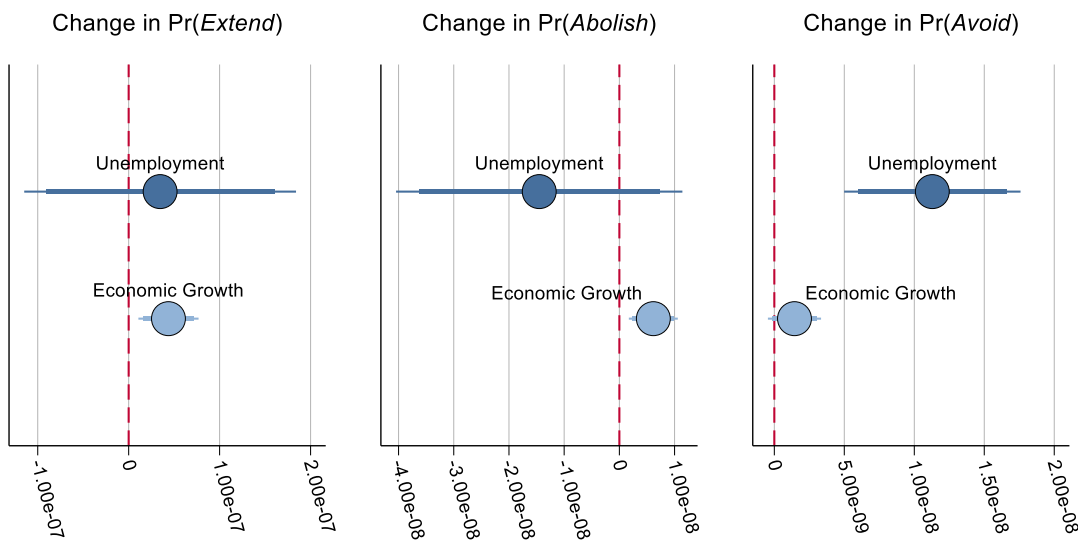
Table 3: Multinomial Logistic Regression Results

	<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>		
	Extend	Abolish	Avoid	Extend	Abolish	Avoid
Economic growth	0.074** (0.034)	0.124*** (0.047)	0.078 (0.064)	0.103* (0.054)	0.112*** (0.042)	0.108 (0.074)
Unemployment	0.036 (0.083)	-0.143 (0.110)	0.417** (0.209)	-0.028 (0.115)	-0.172 (0.235)	0.484** (0.192)
Income per capita (log)	0.341 (0.624)	0.152 (0.948)	1.146 (1.133)	-0.208 (0.764)	2.035 (1.336)	1.475 (1.042)
Electoral democracy index	1.071 (2.268)	-9.046** (4.101)	-4.978*** (1.518)	-1.577 (5.329)	-15.857** (6.390)	-4.668*** (1.702)
Eligible for reelection				-2.921*** (0.565)	-3.817*** (0.898)	-1.346 (0.860)
Vote share of government parties				0.008 (0.008)	-0.011 (0.007)	-0.010 (0.014)
Executive years in office				0.115*** (0.038)	-0.005 (0.042)	0.057* (0.033)
Right executive				-0.203 (0.749)	-14.521*** (1.076)	1.140* (0.629)
Military background				0.221 (1.608)	14.930*** (0.743)	1.162 (1.004)
Constant	-25.038*** (5.251)	-18.224** (8.103)	-34.449*** (10.169)	-17.721** (6.912)	-36.698*** (10.715)	-37.217*** (9.256)
Observations	2,129	2,129	2,129	1,819	1,819	1,819
Number of countries	86	86	86	79	79	79
Country dummies included?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Note: Dependent variable is ordered categorical variable (0 = respect term limits, 1 = extend term limits, 2 = abolish term limits, 3 = avoid term limits). "0 /respect term limits" is the reference level. Clustered standard errors in parentheses. Sample is Presidential regimes in Third Wave Regions with competitive legislative elections, 1992-2019. All independent variables lagged one year. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

In Figure 3, we return to emphasizing economic factors and visualize the substantive impact of our results in the form of changes in the predicted probabilities of each type of term limit evasion. Specifically, we present the changes in predicted probability of each evasion type relative to the reference category corresponding to an increase in each economic variable from values at the 25th percentile to the 75th percentile of sample values. All other covariates are held at sample mean values. We also include estimated 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals. As the figure indicates, such an increase in the rate of *unemployment* has a positive and statistically significant impact on the probability of *avoid* but no impact on the probability of *extend* or *abolish*. A similar increase in *economic growth*, by contrast, has the exact opposite impact, namely significantly increasing the risk of an *extend* or *abolish* evasion, but with no impact on the relative risk of *avoid*.

Figure 3: Change in Predicted Probability of Evasion Type



Note: Based on Multinomial Logistic Regression reported in Table 3 Model 1. Change in predicted probability for a 25th-75th percentile increase in the independent variable. 90 and 95 percent CIs reported. All other covariates held at sample mean values.

Recall that we expect economic performance to have similar impacts on the various methods of term limit evasion. Stronger economic performance should increase the likelihood that evasions occur through public-facing strategies including *legislative action* and a *public referendum*, while poor economic performance should increase the likelihood that incumbents seek a *judicial decision* to shield their attempt to overstay from public participation and scrutiny. We test these expectations by following the same approach as above, though the dependent variable now includes each specific method as a category, with no attempt at term limit evasion as the reference category. Table 4 presents multinomial logistic regression models, with and without the extended set of control variables.

The results in Model 1 support these general expectations, particularly as it relates to *judicial decisions* and *public referendum*. The former is much more likely if unemployment has recently increased; the coefficient for *unemployment* is positive and statistically significant in the *judicial decision* equation. Increases in *economic growth*, by contrast, have a positive and statistically significant association with the likelihood of a *public referendum*. In other words, presidents overseeing rapidly growing economies feel empowered to seek public approval of their efforts to extend their time in office. However, neither measure of economic performance has a statistically significant impact on the likelihood of a *legislative action* method of evasion. Regarding control variables in Model 1, increases in overall levels of wealth increase the likelihood of *public referendum* on term limit evasion, whereas increases in the level of *electoral democracy* reduce the risk of *judicial decisions* and *legislative action*, but have no associated with the risk of *public referendum*.

Model 2 includes the additional control variables and the findings are largely similar, with one exception. Both measures of economic performance have positive and statistically

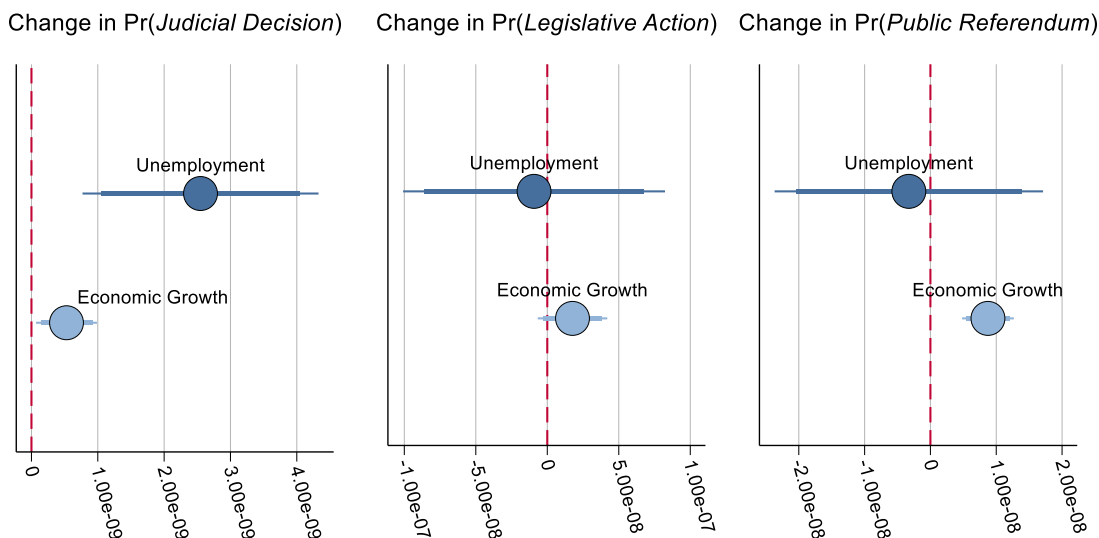
significant coefficients in the *judicial decision* equation. Note that, given the underlying economic factors measured, this suggests that positive performance (increases in *economic growth*) and negative performance (increases in *unemployment*) increase the risk that presidents seek a sympathetic judiciary to extend their tenure. However, the substantive effect of *unemployment* is considerably larger than that for *economic growth*, which we view as consistent with our theoretical expectations. We provide this substantive interpretation in the form of changes in predicted probabilities associated with 25th to 75th percentile increases in each key economic indicator, as above. Figure 4 plots these effects for each specific evasion method, along with 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals.

Table 4: Multinomial Logistic Regression Results

	<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>		
	Judicial Decision	Legislative Action	Public Referendum	Judicial Decision	Legislative Action	Public Referendum
Economic growth	0.107 (0.066)	0.042 (0.031)	0.128*** (0.044)	0.139* (0.075)	0.075 (0.058)	0.115*** (0.041)
Unemployment	0.363* (0.190)	-0.012 (0.062)	-0.028 (0.085)	0.434** (0.175)	0.030 (0.109)	-0.104 (0.108)
Income per capita (log)	0.839 (1.314)	0.265 (0.621)	1.391** (0.699)	1.120 (1.053)	1.459** (0.622)	0.545 (1.296)
Electoral democracy index	-3.717** (1.875)	-4.286** (1.742)	-1.671 (1.670)	-3.076 (3.044)	-14.627*** (4.559)	2.123 (4.321)
Eligible for reelection				-1.408 (0.961)	-3.775*** (0.816)	-2.638*** (0.519)
Vote share of government parties				-0.006 (0.016)	0.014 (0.010)	-0.007 (0.008)
Executive years in office				0.052 (0.033)	0.052 (0.033)	0.093 (0.065)
Right executive				0.894 (0.607)	0.725 (0.790)	-16.547*** (0.670)
Military background				1.978 (1.314)	0.686 (1.370)	0.832 (1.351)
Constant	-33.035*** (11.166)	-22.648*** (4.885)	-32.180*** (6.030)	-35.617*** (8.860)	-25.869*** (5.305)	-24.811** (9.805)
Observations / Countries	2,129 / 86	2,129 / 86	2,129 / 86	1,819 / 79	1,819 / 79	1,819 / 79
Country dummies included?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Note: Dependent variable is ordered categorical variable distinguishing the method of term limit violation (0 = respect term limits, 1 = judicial decision, 2 = legislative action, 3 = public referendum). "0/respect term limits" is the reference level. Clustered standard errors in parentheses. Sample is Presidential regimes in Third Wave Regions with competitive legislative elections, 1992-2019. All independent variables lagged one year. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Figure 4: Change in Predicted Probability of Evasion Method

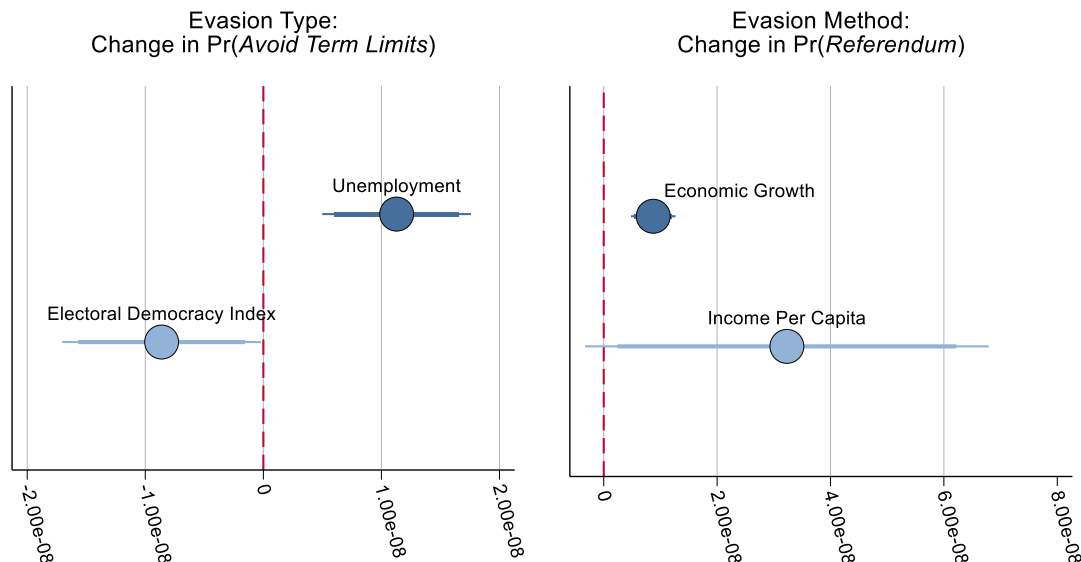


Note: Based on Multinomial Logistic Regression reported in Table 4 Model 1. Change in predicted probability for a 25th-75th percentile increase in the independent variable. 90 and 95 percent CIs reported. All other covariates held at sample mean values.

The findings are clearest in the first and third panels. Increases in the rate of *unemployment* are associated with a significantly increased risk of leaders seeking a sympathetic decision regarding term limit rules from the judiciary. Sharp increases in unemployment create dangerous political conditions for incumbents, as retrospective voters view incumbents less favorably and become more inclined to support political challengers. By contrast, the strongest findings on the impact of *economic growth* are in the likelihood of pursuing term limit evasion via a *public referendum*. Growing economies improve voters' egocentric and sociotropic views of the economy, generating more favorable attitudes towards incumbents. These favorable views empower incumbents to seek the additional legitimacy conferred via public approval of constitutional term limit changes.

We conclude with brief examination of the relative impacts of these economic factors. We compare some of these estimated changes in predicted probabilities with the analogous impacts from other variables in the model. Figure 5 reports these comparative effect sizes, though given space constraints we present the impacts on only one specific evasion type and one evasion method. The panel on the left reports the estimated change in predicted probability of an *avoid* evasion given a 25th to 75th percentile change in *unemployment* and the same magnitude shift in *electoral democracy*. The positive impact of *unemployment* on the likelihood of avoiding term limits exceeds, in relative terms, the negative impact of *electoral democracy*. Note that this simulated shift in *electoral democracy* entails an increase from about 0.3 to 0.6, on the scale, or about the difference between Angola and Mexico. The panel on the right focuses on the probability of a *public referendum*, and contrasts the impact of *economic growth* to a measure of *income per capita*. The relative impact of the former is considerably smaller than the latter, though note that the percentile shift examined entails an increase in growth rates from about 2.3% annually to around 6% annually, whereas the same shift in income per capita terms simulates the much larger change from around \$1800 in annual per capita income to more than \$8,000.

Figure 5: Comparing Effect Sizes Across Independent Variables on Evasion Type and Method



Note: Based on Multinomial Logistic Regressions reported in Table 3 (first panel) and Table 4 (second panel). Change in predicted probability of specified outcome for a 25th-75th percentile increase in the independent variable. 90 and 95 percent CIs reported. All other covariates held at sample mean values.

The results we present here are robust to a number of different modeling approaches, which we report in the Appendix. These exercises focus on our use of linear probability models for the binary dependent variable and multinomial logistic regression for the categorical versions, sample composition to further account for constitutional characteristics including public amendment provisions, and different lag structures for the independent variables. We refer the interested reader to these supplemental results, though we note here that our core findings persist across all of these robustness exercises.

Conclusion

By now there is widespread agreement that executive aggrandizement is central to the challenges facing democracies in the twenty-first century. Such a conclusion does not depend on

resolving debates about whether there is a global wave of democratic backsliding or the argument that backsliding is concentrated in regimes for which the odds of survival were low.⁵⁹ In fact, implicit in our work is that idea that efforts to understand system level trends should not crowd out careful analyses of the specific factors that shape within-country declines in democratic quality, or understanding how and why key steps toward regime breakdown, like the presidential term limit violations we study here, occur.

We emphasized the risk that incumbent presidents face when attempting to evade constitutional term limits. Theoretically, we argued that well-performing economies help minimize this risk through a mechanism emphasizing economic retrospective voting. Incumbents presiding over strong economic records are more likely to enjoy the positive benefits of retrospective voters, and thus are empowered to seek the permanence of term limit extension or abolishment. They are also more likely to submit these changes for public approval via referendums. By contrast, poor economic performance renders certain types of evasion attempts – those that allow incumbents to avoid term limits, and those where the decision is delegated to unelected bodies like judiciaries – more likely.

We developed novel data that distinguished between evasion types and methods and presented robust empirical evidence supporting our theoretical expectations. Most notable is our finding that increases in unemployment – a particularly visible and salient economic indicator – is associated with significantly increased risk of avoidance. By contrast, the impact of increases in overall economic growth are largest when it comes to raising the risk of term limit extension and abolition, and seeking legitimation via public referendum specifically. High rates of economic performance are thus a double-edged sword when it comes to understanding the

survival of democracy, as they aid in regime consolidation generally but may also provide fertile ground for a particularly durable form of executive aggrandizement.

Our results also contribute to broader debates on the causes of democratic backsliding. Interestingly, Waldner and Lust minimize political economy explanations of backsliding, arguing that most studies connecting broad rates of economic development to the persistence of democracy or autocracy have yet to solve endogeneity issues.⁶⁰ The focus on a specific action – attempting to change term limits – rather than general levels of democracy or autocracy helps resolve some of these endogeneity concerns. We hope our findings encourage future scholars to give macroeconomic conditions the same kind of attention that other factors, such as polarization and populism, have recently garnered.

Finally, our argument and data provide a number of useful directions for future work. For instance, our work has treated economic performance as separate from leader traits and other institutional features. Is there an interactive effect where stronger economic performance is particularly likely to spark an oversteering attempt when leaders are already popular, or enjoy a partisan advantage in the legislature? Of course, follow up studies can also examine certain strategies are associated with greater success rates – though this too is likely to be crowded by issues of endogeneity. Nevertheless, we hope this paper can serve as a touchpoint for future work that explores the role of term limits evasions in shaping the global democracy landscape.

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Notes

1. Maboudi, Nadi, and Eisenstadt, “Render unto Ceaser”; Baturo, *Democracy, Dictatorship, and Term Limits*; Frantz et al. “Personalist Ruling Parties”; Laebens, “Beyond Democratic Backsliding.”
2. Bermeo, “On Democratic Backsliding”; Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*; Chernyykh and Svolik, “Third-party Actors.”
3. Casani, “Law-abiders, lame ducks”; Posner and Young, “Term Limits.”
4. Baturo, *Democracy, Dictatorship, and Term Limits*; Lotfy, “Institutional Constraints”; McKie, “Presidential Term Limit Contravention.”
5. Arana Araya, “Dominant Personality”; Baturo “The Stakes of Losing.”
6. Negretto, “Tinkering with Executive Term Limits”; McKie “Presidential Term Limit Contravention.”
7. Little and Meng, “Measuring Democratic Backsliding.”
8. Triesman, “How Great.”
9. Knutsen et al, “Conceptual and Measurement Issues”; Weitzel et al., “Measuring Backsliding.”
10. Bermeo, “On Democratic Backsliding.”
11. Corrales, “Can Anyone Stop.”
12. Baturo, “The Stakes of Losing”; Baturo, *Democracy, Dictatorship, and Term Limits*.
13. Cassani, “Autocratisation by Term Limits.”
14. Arana Araya, “Dominant Personality.”
15. McKie, “Presidential Term Limit Contravention.”
16. Kouba, “Party Institutionalization and the Removal.”
17. Corrales, “Can Anyone Stop”
18. Frantz et al., “Personalist Ruling Parties.” Note that these authors examine increases in political polarization and other destabilizing trends, but not term limit evasion directly.
19. Negretto, “Tinkering with Executive Term Limits.”
20. Lotfy, “Institutional Constraints.”
21. Cassani, “Law-abiders, lame ducks.”
22. Lotfy, “Institutional Constraints.”
23. Haggard and Kaufman, *The Political Economy*; Bernhard, Nordstrom, and Reenock, “Economic Performance.”
24. On the former, see Baturo, “The Stakes of Losing”; see also Fruhsorfer and Hudson, “Costs and Benefits.” On the latter, see Posner and Young, “Term Limits”; see also Norwack and Leininger, “Protecting Democracy.”
25. Baturo and Elgie, “Presidential Term Limits,” 6.
26. Cheeseman, “Should I Stay.”
27. Dulani, “African Publics”; McKie and Carlson, “Do Contravention Attempts.”
28. Heyl, “Senegal (1970-2016).”
29. Muñoz-Portillo and Treminio, “The Politics of.”
30. Cheeseman, “Should I Stay.”
31. Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*; Healy and Malhotra, “Retrospective Voting”; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, “Economic Determinants.”
32. Duch and Stevenson, “Assessing the Magnitude”; Lewis-Beck, “Comparative Economic Voting”; Lewis-Beck and Paldam, “Economic Voting: An Introduction.”

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33. Powell and Whitten, “A Cross-National”; Duch and Stevenson, “Assessing the Magnitude.”
 34. Hellwig and Samuels, “Electoral Accountability”; Persson, Roland, and Tabellini, “Separation of Powers.”
 35. Nordhaus, “The Political Business Cycle.”
 36. Our approach here is informed by Versteeg et al. who separate ‘evasion through amendment’ from all other ‘evasion without amendment’ approaches, as well as an established literature that distinguishes evasion attempts according to their emphasis on avoidance, extension, and abolishment. For the former see Versteeg et al., “The Law and Politics.” For the latter, see Baturo “*Continuismo* in Comparison”; Lotfy “Institutional Constraints”; McKie “Presidential Term Limit Contravention.”
 37. Gettleman, “Power Struggle Propels.”
 38. Taoko and Corwell, “Burkina Faso’s President Resigns.”
 39. Nurumov and Vashchanka “Presidential Term Limits”
 40. Stern “Uzbekistan Re-Elects.”
 41. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World*.
 42. Castro, “Nicaragua Scraps Term Limits.”
 43. Nkuubi, “Taming Executive Power.”
 44. Though we take care to distinguish between evasion types (*extend*, *abolish*, and *avoid*) and evasion methods (*judicial decision*, *legislative action*, and *public referendum*), we conceptualize these as two distinct choices, rather than comprising a two-stage process. In other words, though certain patterns are more common – such as abolishing term limits via public referendum, or avoiding term limits via judicial decision – these are empirical regularities rather than sequential or path-dependent choices.
 45. Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*.
 46. On types, see Versteeg et al., “The Law and Politics;” Baturo “*Continuismo* in Comparison”; and McKie “Presidential Term Limit Contravention.” On methods, see Lotfy “Institutional Constraints.”
 47. McKie, “Presidential Term Limit Contravention”; Versteeg et al., “The Law and Politics.” McKie describes her dataset as beginning in 1975 so as to capture the entirety of the Third Wave of democracy, yet there are no recorded term limit evasion attempts until 1993. Consequently, we focus on the time period 1990 – 2019 for our analysis.
 48. In our appendix we show that the results are substantively identical if we separate our ‘delay’ from ‘reinterpretation’ types of term limit avoidance.
 49. We identify Third-Wave regions by excluding countries from the regions of North America, Western, Northern, and Southern Europe, and Australia and New Zealand.
 50. Bjørnskov and Rode, “Regime Types and Regime Change”; Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland, “Democracy and Dictatorship.”
 51. Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg, “Regimes of the World.”
 52. McKie, “Presidential Term Limit Contravention”
 53. Conover, Feldman, and Knight, “Judging Inflation and Unemployment”; Helgason and Mérola, “Employment Insecurity.”
 54. World Bank, *World Development Indicators*. In the appendix we assess the robustness of these results to a two-year lag and a three-year moving average. The results are substantively identical.
 55. Bolt and Zanden, “Maddison style Estimates”; Teorell et al., “Measuring Polyarchy.”

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56. These variables are drawn from Cruz, Keefer, and Scarsatini, “Database of Political Institutions.”
57. Timoneda, “Estimating Group Fixed Effects.”
58. Our appendix also reports additional analyses probing the robustness of these results, specifically by replacing the categorical versions of the dependent variable with a series of binary measures distinguishing various strategies from non-event years and estimating a series of linear probability models with fixed effects. These also generate substantively identical findings to those discussed in the main manuscript.
59. Triesman, “How Great.”
60. Waldner and Lust, “Unwelcome Change.”

ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND THE TYPE AND METHOD OF PRESIDENTIAL TERM LIMIT EVASION

Supplemental Materials / Appendix

Contents

Table 2A: Conditional Logistic Regression with Country Fixed Effects

- This table replicates the results in Table 2 (main m.s.) using conditional logistic regression with country fixed effects. The results are substantively identical to those presented in Table 2 which employed linear probability models

Table 3A: Linear Probability Models with Country Fixed Effects

- This table replicates the core results presented in Tables 3 and 4 (main m.s.) using linear probability models with country fixed effects. Rather than estimating regressions with multinomial logistic regression, we create a series of binary dependent variables distinguishing the various types of term limit violations (left panel: *extend*, *abolish*, *avoid*) and methods (right panel: *judicial decision*, *legislative action*, *public referendum*). We then use each new measure as the dependent variable in a separate linear probability model regression. The substantive results are identical to those we discuss in the manuscript, suggesting that our conclusions are not dependent on our use of multinomial logistic regression.

Table 4A: Multinomial Logistic Regressions Results, Separate Delay and Reinterpret Avoid Types

- This table replicates the core results presented in Table 3 (main m.s.) but separates out the “Avoid” attempts into two categories: delay, and reinterpretation. Table 1 (main m.s.) presents these descriptively as two separate categories, as the associated text describes, though given the small number of *delay* episodes the main results use a dependent variable construction that merges the two categories together. Table 4A in the appendix assesses the consequences of this decision, and shows that the main substantive results are not dependent on this approach. Specifically, increase in unemployment are still positively and significantly associated with the risk of both avoidance strategies.

Table 5A: Multinomial Logistic Regressions Results, Sample limited to Countries with “Amendable” Constitutions

- This table examines the sensitivity of the results in Table 4 (main m.s.), which examines the method employed to engage in a presidential term limit violation. It does so in two different fashions. First, the sample is limited to only those countries with ‘amendable’ constitutions. Second, the models contain an additional covariate which distinguishes countries whose constitutions contain a public amendment provision (1) from those without (0). The results in this appendix table are nearly identical to those reported in the main manuscript. Collectively, this suggests that our results do not simply reflect constitutional restrictions on whether public referendums are allowed or required for amendment.

Table 6A: Examining Multinomial Logistic Regression Coefficient Sensitivity to Lag Structure

- This table examines the sensitivity of the main results in Tables 2 and 3 (main m.s.) to different lags and measurement approaches for the key independent variables. Specifically, we re-estimate the models using a two-year lag (top panel) and a three-year moving average (bottom panel). The substantive results of these exercises are virtually identical to those presented in the main manuscript.

Table 7A: Controlling for *party institutionalization*

- This table re-estimates the core findings on the correlates of evasion type and method while controlling for a measure of party institutionalization, from the Varieties of Democracy. For ease of reading, we omit all other control variables from the presentation. The substantive results are identical to those presented in the main manuscript.

Table 8A and 9A: Descriptive Statistics and Sample Composition

Table 2A: Conditional Logistic Regression with Country Fixed Effects

	(1)	(2)
Economic growth	0.079*** (0.029)	0.091*** (0.033)
Unemployment	0.041 (0.063)	0.074 (0.073)
Income per capita (log)	0.682 (0.524)	0.694 (0.721)
Electoral democracy index	-3.136* (1.616)	-4.850** (2.353)
Eligible for reelection		-2.063*** (0.443)
Vote share of government parties		-0.001 (0.006)
Executive years in office		0.063** (0.030)
Right executive		0.184 (0.503)
Military background		0.833 (0.785)
Observations	1,216	1,075
Number of countries	47	45

Dependent variable is a dummy variable for any ETL evasion attempt. Sample is Presidential regimes in Third Wave Regions with competitive legislative elections, 1992-2019. All independent variables lagged one year. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table 3A: Linear Probability Models with Country Fixed Effects

	<i>Dependent Variables: Binary Measures of Each Evasion Type</i>			<i>Dependent Variables: Binary Measures of Each Evasion Method</i>		
	Extend	Abolish	Avoid	Judicial Decision	Legislative Action	Public Referendum
Economic Growth	0.001** (0.000)	0.001* (0.001)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.002** (0.001)
Unemployment	0.000 (0.001)	-0.002* (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)	0.002* (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)
Observations / Countries	1,819 / 79	1,819 / 79	1,819 / 79	1,819 / 79	1,819 / 79	1,819 / 79
Other Covariates Included?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects included?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Table presents linear probability model regression coefficients for the key independent variables. Each column uses a separate binary dependent variable identifying episodes of the specific ETL evasion type or method, respectively. Model specifications follow those reported in Table 3 (Model 2) and Table 4 (Model 2) respectively, although control variable coefficients are not reported. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table 4A: Multinomial Logistic Regression Results, Separate Delay and Reinterpret Avoid Types

	Extend	Abolish	Avoid - Delay	Avoid - Reinterpret
Economic growth	0.074** (0.034)	0.124*** (0.047)	0.190** (0.078)	0.053 (0.081)
Unemployment	0.035 (0.083)	-0.143 (0.110)	1.798** (0.758)	0.330* (0.189)
Income per capita (log)	0.338 (0.623)	0.151 (0.948)	0.557 (3.921)	0.453 (1.256)
Electoral democracy index	1.062 (2.271)	-9.061** (4.110)	-0.612 (4.784)	-6.041*** (1.640)
Constant	-26.005*** (5.244)	-19.270** (8.102)	-55.866** (22.145)	-28.807*** (10.765)
Observations	2,129	2,129	2,129	2,129
Number of countries	86	86	86	86
Country dummies included?	yes	yes	yes	yes

Note: Dependent variable is ordered categorical variable (0 = respect term limits, 1 = extend term limits, 2 = abolish term limits, 3 = avoid term limits / delay, 4 = avoid term limits / reinterpret). "0 /respect term limits" is the reference level. Clustered standard errors in parentheses. Sample is Presidential regimes in Third Wave Regions with competitive legislative elections, 1992-2019. All independent variables lagged one year. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 5A: Multinomial Logistic Regression Results, Sample limited to Countries with “Amendable” Constitutions

	<i>Add "Public Amendment Provision"</i>			<i>Add additional controls</i>		
	Judicial Decision	Legislative Action	Public Referendum	Judicial Decision	Legislative Action	Public Referendum
Economic growth	0.105* (0.062)	0.030 (0.032)	0.121*** (0.046)	0.134* (0.072)	0.056 (0.056)	0.111*** (0.041)
Unemployment	0.368* (0.188)	-0.035 (0.061)	-0.068 (0.112)	0.440** (0.190)	0.008 (0.105)	-0.080 (0.144)
Income per capita (log)	0.867 (1.182)	0.072 (0.623)	1.191 (0.888)	1.296 (1.187)	1.209** (0.518)	1.182 (1.521)
Electoral democracy index	-4.317** (1.733)	-4.173** (1.712)	2.367 (2.980)	-3.656 (2.938)	-13.708*** (4.013)	4.077 (5.776)
Public amendment provision	-0.408 (1.287)	0.271 (1.091)	0.976 (0.889)	-0.542 (1.060)	14.948*** (1.033)	-0.631 (1.876)
Eligible for reelection				-1.396 (0.946)	-3.648*** (0.728)	-2.647*** (0.624)
Vote share of gov. parties				-0.008 (0.016)	0.013 (0.011)	-0.004 (0.009)
Executive years in office				0.051 (0.034)	0.032 (0.030)	0.079 (0.071)
Right executive				0.911 (0.601)	0.637 (0.798)	-15.699*** (0.676)
Military background				2.064 (1.439)	0.709 (1.294)	1.514 (1.923)
Observations	2,024	2,024	2,024	1,748	1,748	1,748
Number of countries	79	79	79	77	77	77
Country dummies included?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Dependent variable is ordered categorical variable distinguishing the method of term limit evasion (0 = respect term limits, 1 = judicial decision, 2 = legislative action, 3 = public referendum). "0 /respect term limits" is the reference level. Clustered standard errors in parentheses. Sample is Presidential regimes in Third Wave Regions with competitive legislative elections, 1992-2019. All independent variables lagged one year. Constant included but omitted from table. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 6A: Examining Multinomial Logistic Regression Coefficient Sensitivity to Lag Structure

		<i>Dependent Variable: Evasion Type</i>			<i>Dependent Variable: Evasion Method</i>		
		Extend	Abolish	Avoid	Judicial Decision	Legislative Action	Public Referendum
<i>Main Independent Variables</i>							
<i>Two-Year Lag</i>	Economic Growth	0.082** (0.037)	0.093** (0.037)	0.098* (0.060)	0.137** (0.066)	0.062 (0.051)	0.087** (0.038)
	Unemployment	-0.102 (0.099)	-0.158 (0.102)	0.407*** (0.152)	0.389** (0.159)	-0.080 (0.078)	-0.131* (0.070)
<i>Main Independent Variables</i>							
<i>Three-Year Moving Average</i>	Economic Growth	0.207*** (0.078)	0.251** (0.104)	-0.085 (0.082)	-0.064 (0.095)	0.101 (0.096)	0.260*** (0.068)
	Unemployment	-0.110 (0.133)	-0.102 (0.162)	0.441** (0.184)	0.385** (0.177)	-0.038 (0.104)	-0.059 (0.108)
Other Covariates Included?		Yes					
Country dummies included?		Yes					

Note: Table presents multinomial logistic regression coefficients for key independent variables, across four separate regressions (two for Evasion Type, and two for Evasion Method). Models follow specifications presented in Table 3 (Model 2) and Table 4 (Model 2) respectively, though control variable coefficients omitted from table. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 7A: Multinomial Logistic Regression Coefficients, with Additional Covariate Measuring Party Institutionalization

	<i>Dependent Variable: Evasion Type</i>			<i>Dependent Variable: Evasion Method</i>		
	Extend	Abolish	Avoid	Judicial Decision	Legislative Action	Public Referendum
Economic Growth	0.104* (0.055)	0.123** (0.048)	0.108 (0.074)	0.140* (0.076)	0.075 (0.058)	0.115*** (0.041)
Unemployment	-0.029 (0.119)	-0.171 (0.276)	0.489** (0.195)	0.431** (0.176)	0.028 (0.112)	-0.103 (0.106)
Party Institutionalization	1.945 (4.934)	5.747 (5,249)	-0.857 (4.192)	0.609 (4.605)	1.675 (5.221)	0.129 (4.605)
Observations / Countries	1,810 / 79			1,810 / 79		
Other Model 2 Covariates Included?	Yes			Yes		
<i>VDem</i> Party Institutionalization included?	Yes			Yes		
Country fixed effects included?	Yes			Yes		

Note: Table presents multinomial logistic regression coefficients for key independent variables, across separate regressions (one for Evasion Type, and one for Evasion Method). Models follow specifications presented in Table 3 (Model 2) and Table 4 (Model 2) respectively, though control variable coefficients omitted from table. Key difference is inclusion of additional covariate measuring *party institutionalization* from Varieties of Democracy. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 8A: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
<i>Evasion Attempt (binary)</i>	2,129	0.03	0.18	0	1
<i>4 part categorical measure of Evasion Type (no attempt, Extend, Abolish, Avoid)</i>	2,129	0.06	0.33	0	2
<i>4 part categorical measure of Evasion Method (no attempt, Judicial Decision, Legislative Action, Referendum)</i>	2,129	0.10	0.59	0	4
<i>Economic Growth</i>	2,129	4.00	6.49	-44.9	149.97
<i>Unemployment</i>	2,129	7.66	5.37	0.32	31.84
<i>Income per capita (log)</i>	2,129	8.41	1.01	6.32	10.77
<i>Electoral Democracy Index</i>	2,129	0.48	0.21	0.08	0.92
<i>Eligible for Reelection</i>	1,896	0.70	0.46	0	1
<i>Executive Years in Office</i>	2,028	7.71	7.77	1	42
<i>Military background</i>	2,025	0.22	0.41	0	1
<i>Right Executive</i>	2,030	0.18	0.38	0	1
<i>Public Amendment Procedure</i>	2,129	0.57	0.49	0	1
<i>Vote Share of Government Parties</i>	2,034	29.51	31.47	0	100.01
<i>Party Institutionalization</i>	2,129	0.59	0.19	0.113	0.997

Table 9A: Sample Composition

Country	Year	Country	Year
Algeria	2008	Kazakhstan	2001
Angola	2010	Kazakhstan	2007
Argentina	1994	Korea, Republic of	2008
Argentina	1999	Korea, Republic of	2013
Armenia	2018	Korea, Republic of	2018
Azerbaijan	2003	Kyrgyzstan	1998
Azerbaijan	2009	Malawi	2004
Belarus	2004	Namibia	1998
Bolivia	2009	Nicaragua	2010
Bolivia	2013	Nicaragua	2014
Bolivia	2016	Niger	2009
Bolivia	2017	Nigeria	2006
Brazil	1997	Panama	1998
Brazil	2009	Panama	2014
Burkina Faso	1997	Paraguay	2007
Burkina Faso	2005	Paraguay	2018
Burkina Faso	2014	Peru	1999
Burundi	2015	Philippines	1998
Burundi	2018	Russia	2008
Cameroon	2008	Rwanda	2015
Chad	2005	Senegal	1998
Colombia	2006	Senegal	2012
Colombia	2010	Sri Lanka	2010
Congo, Republic of	2015	Sudan	2015
Costa Rica	2002	Tajikistan	2003
Côte d'Ivoire	2010	Tajikistan	2016
Dominican Republic	2002	Togo	2002
Dominican Republic	2015	Tunisia	2002
Ecuador	2009	Uganda	2005
Ecuador	2015	Uzbekistan	2007
Gabon	2003	Venezuela	1999
Guinea	2003	Venezuela	2007
Guinea-Bissau	2001	Venezuela	2009
Honduras	2010	Yemen	2001
Honduras	2015	Yemen	2011
		Zambia	2001