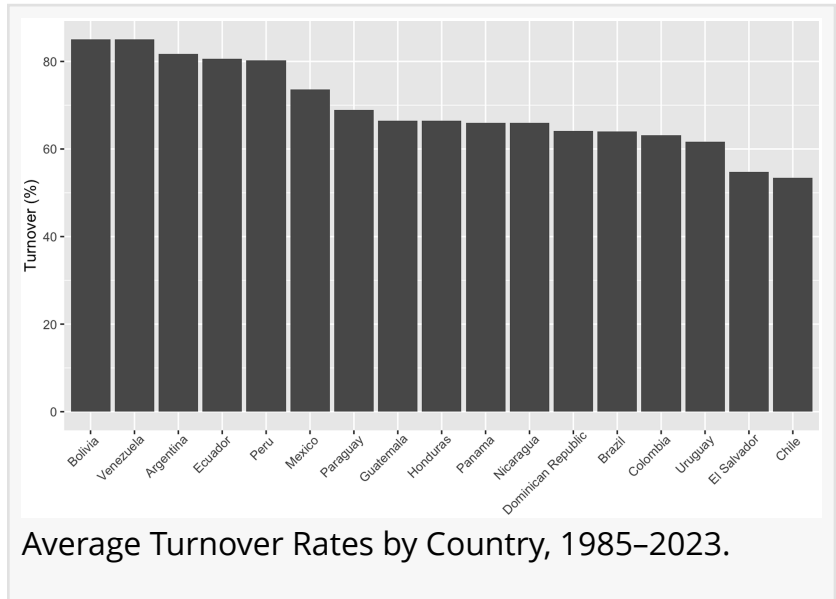


# Extreme turnover of Latin American legislators highlights political instability in the region

PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC, May 12, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new [study](#) led by Karel Kouba from the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, reveals unprecedentedly high rates of legislative turnover in Latin America, raising concerns about democratic stability and governance quality in the region. Published by Cambridge University Press in Latin American Politics and Society, the [article](#) studies how institutional settings affect legislative turnover across 204 elections in 17 Latin American countries from 1985 to 2023.



Legislative turnover—the percentage of legislators replaced after each election—is found to average around 70% across Latin America, far surpassing turnover rates observed in Europe (where typically only 30% to 40% legislators are newcomers), the United States, or even other emerging democracies. In some countries, like Bolivia and Ecuador, turnover rates exceed 80%, signaling a profound instability within national parliaments.

Moreover, even in countries where personnel stability has been relatively high - in El Salvador and Chile - turnover has risen sharply in recent elections, reflecting the decay of their once stable party systems. Very low legislative turnover has in turn become typical of the region's most recent dictatorship, Nicaragua.

Karel Kouba, the lead researcher from Charles University's Faculty of Arts, emphasizes the dual consequences of extreme turnover. "On one hand, high turnover can prevent the entrenchment of oligarchies within democratic institutions," Kouba explains. "On the other, extreme turnover rates witnessed in some countries may undermine policy continuity, weaken legislative professionalism and damage existing party-voter linkages."

Kouba and his co-author Michael Weiss identified critical institutional factors driving high turnover rates: longer legislative terms, staggered elections, and legislator term limits significantly boost legislator replacement. "Unlike presidential term limits whose adoption in the region has served to strengthen democracy, the effects of legislative term limits which function in six Latin American countries may impact democratic governance negatively," explains Kouba.

The findings challenge recent political reforms promoting legislative term limits, suggesting they may unintentionally exacerbate instability and legislative inefficiency. "Term limits, meant to foster the renewal of political elites, contribute to extreme rates of turnover that amplify political instability," Kouba points out. "This makes legislative bodies vulnerable to continual policy disruptions, weakening parliamentary efficiency."

Both authors for the first time collected data on every single legislator elected in Latin America since 1980s. Identifying if they were newcomers or incumbents, this has allowed them to calculate turnover rates in the region for the first time for such a long period of time and reveal many surprising patterns. This new dataset, made publicly available by the researchers, offers valuable tools for policymakers, scholars, and political institutions striving to balance democratic renewal with governmental stability.

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