

# Economic Survival Mode and its Detrimental Effect on the Rule of Law: A Case Study in Argentina

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Scholars have struggled to understand why the rule of law, a fundamental pillar of liberal democracy that prevents leaders from consolidating power, has been so difficult to cultivate in emerging Latin American democracies. I attempt to address this issue by evaluating the condition of the rule of law in Argentina, one of Latin America's most important and representative countries. I compared two presidents of different ideologies, Carlos Saul Menem (1989-1999) and Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007) and to what extent they adhered to the rule of law based on the number and scope of presidential decrees, the relationship between the president and the Supreme Court, and the presidents' policies on human rights abuses. My research defies the conventional method of focusing on the judicial branch and instead takes an executive-focused approach, because a strong executive has historically been the greatest threat to the rule of law in Argentina. I collected my data from published articles and newspapers – it is largely based on current events. I concluded from my research that presidents of all ideologies tend to consolidate power. I also found that constituents reward presidents that resolve economic problems (even if only temporarily) by allowing them to expand their power. This means that economic crisis is bad for democracy because it shifts citizen priorities to economic recovery rather than the development of democracy. Accordingly, US foreign policy should focus on providing economic stability and developing a strong middle class rather than focusing exclusively on elections.