

The Crisis of Divided Government:
The Effect of Democratic Backsliding on
Legislative Oversight in Venezuela

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BACKGROUND: The aim of this research is to investigate the internal dynamics of legislative oversight over the executive during episodes of democratic backsliding in Venezuela, identifying which sub-components of legislative constraints diminish more. Using a synthetic control method, I find the rank of these factors that encompass legislative constraints on the executive vary by type of democratic backsliding episode and decrease more during regressed autocracy than democratic breakdown. This study can inform policy makers on how to design and create institutions that will resist executive aggrandizement.

THEORY

- Democratic backsliding starts with citizens’ discontent, followed by the rise of anti-pluralism, and autocratization (Lührmann, 2021).
- Horizontal accountability is the first one to fall during episodes of democratic backsliding (Sato et al., 2022).
- Episodes of regime transformation identify between different outcomes of democratization and autocratization processes; in particular, democratic breakdown is the transition between a democracy to an autocracy, while a regressed autocracy is the deepening of the autocracy itself (Maerz et al., 2021).

DATA

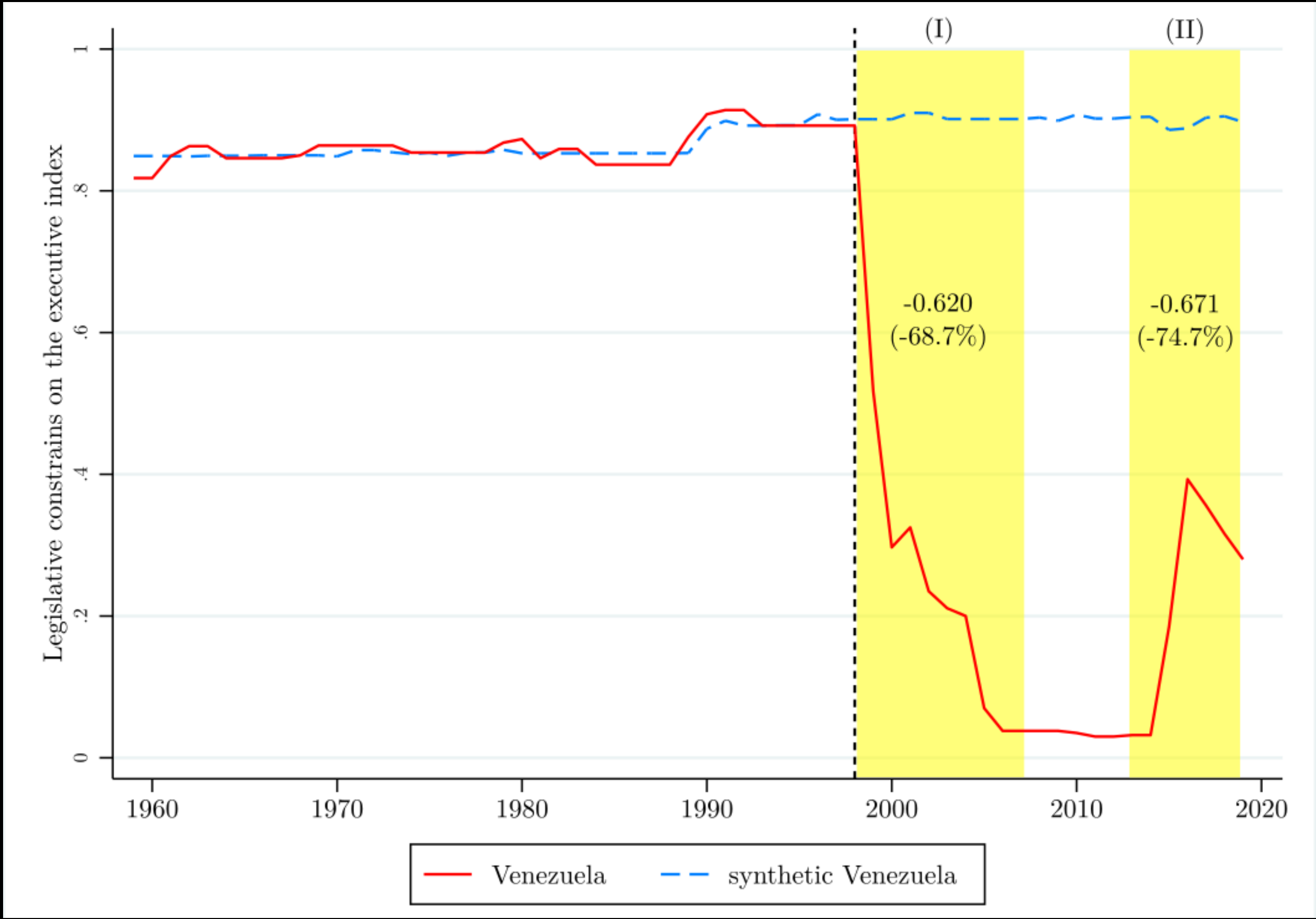
- The V-Dem Institute collects and curates the V-Dem and Episode of Regime Transformation (ERT) datasets.
- For this study, the sample consists of 37 countries between 1959 and 2019.
- The legislative constraints on the executive and its sub-components are the dependent variables. A recalculated liberal democracy index is the independent variable.

METHODS

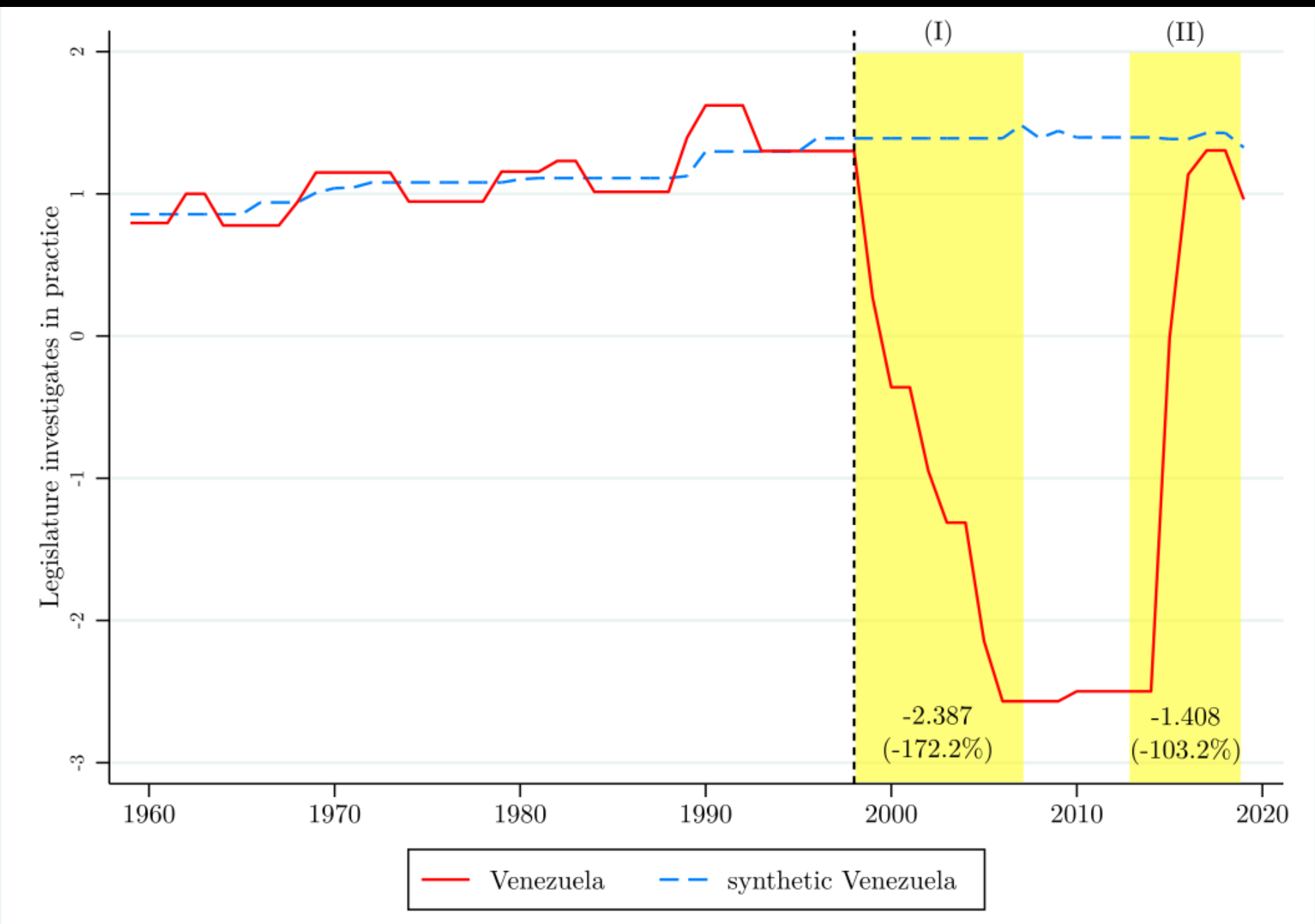
1. Selected countries that did not have an episode of democratic backsliding during the pre-treatment period (1959-1997).
2. Implemented synthetic control method following closely Abadie et al. (2010) study to determine the average treatment effect of democratic backsliding on legislative oversight overtime.



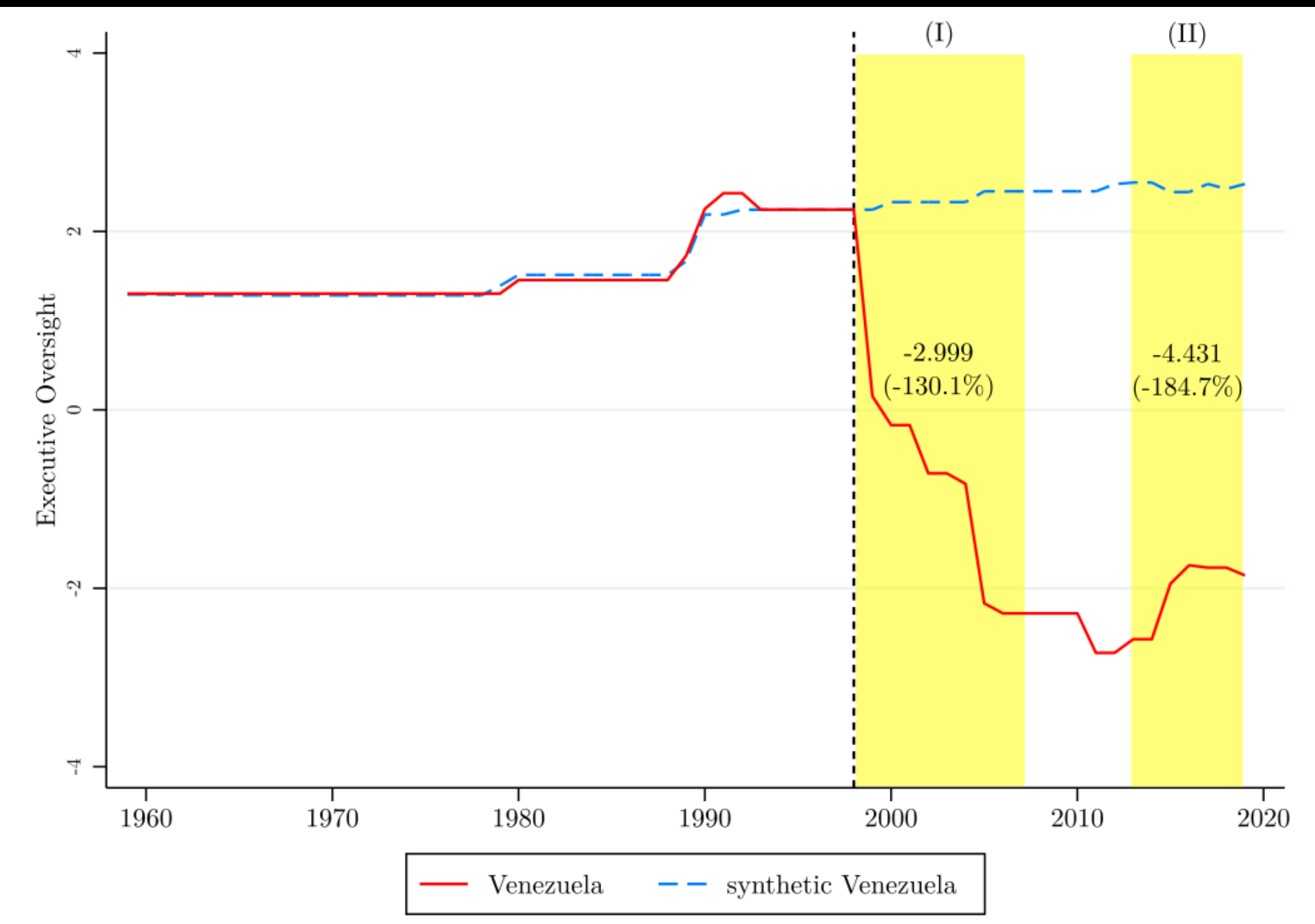
During an episode of **democratic breakdown**, executives will limit the **comptroller** function of the legislature; while in **regressed autocracy**, presidents have more power to diminish **oversight**, **the opposition**, and **ignore subpoenas**.



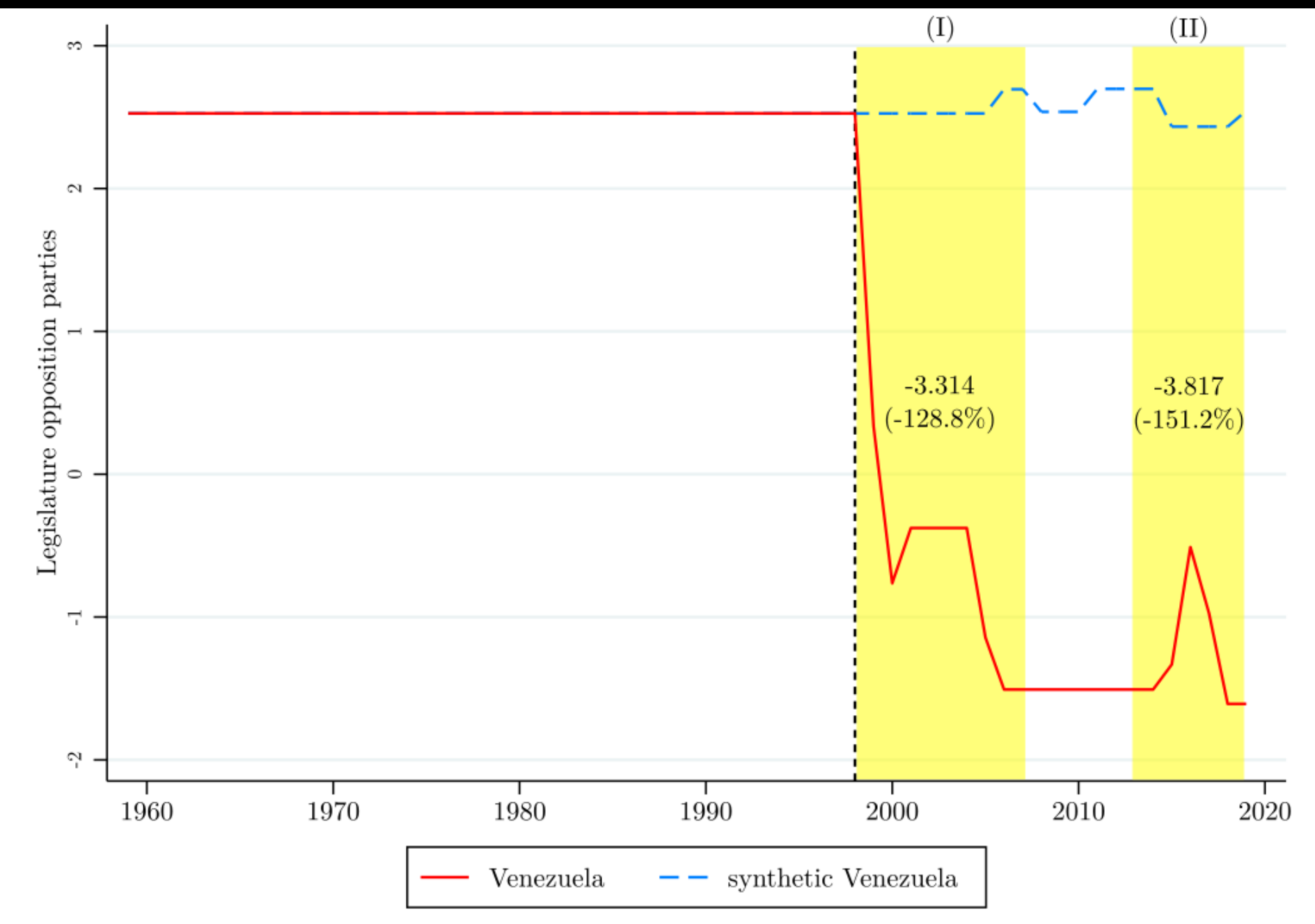
Legislative Constraints on the Executive



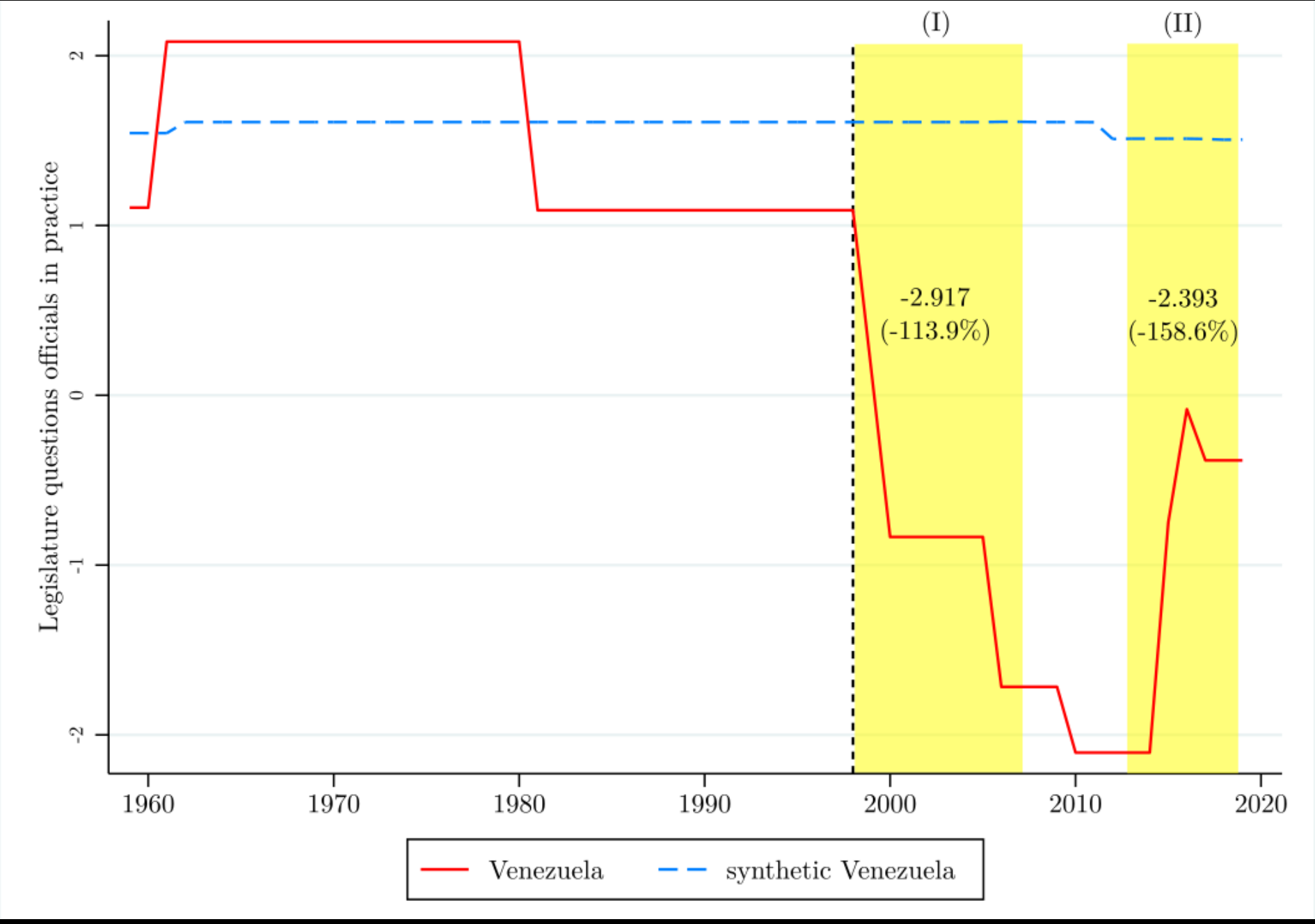
Executive Oversight



Legislature Investigates in Practice



Legislature Opposition Parties



Legislature Questions Officials in Practice

Figure 1. Average treatment effect between episodes of democratic backsliding in Venezuela: (I) from 1998 to 2007 (democratic breakdown), and (II) from 2013 to 2019 (regressed autocracy).

RESULTS

Variable	Treated	Synthetic	Control
Liberal Democracy	1.233	1.260	1.176
GDP per capita (Logged)	2.329	2.506	2.600
Population (Logged)	7.289	6.400	7.011
Lagged DV (1998)	0.892	0.901	0.718
Lagged DV (1993)	0.892	0.892	0.713
Lagged DV (1988)	0.837	0.853	0.694
Lagged DV (1983)	0.859	0.853	0.688
Lagged DV (1978)	0.854	0.854	0.692
Lagged DV (1973)	0.864	0.854	0.684
Lagged DV (1968)	0.850	0.850	0.682
Lagged DV (1963)	0.863	0.849	0.681

Table 1. Predictor balance for the first Synthetic Control Method experiment using Legislative constraints in the executive as dependent variable.

Country	Weight	Country	Weight
Australia	0	Italy	0
Austria	0	Jamaica	0
Barbados	0	Japan	0
Belgium	0	Laos	0
Canada	0	Luxembourg	0
Cape Verde	0.012	Malaysia	0
China	0	Morocco	0.163
Colombia	0	Netherlands	0
Costa Rica	0.054	New Zealand	0
Cuba	0.033	North Korea	0
Denmark	0	Norway	0
DR of the Congo	0	Saudi Arabia	0
Finland	0.738	Singapore	0
France	0	Sweden	0
Germany	0	Switzerland	0
Iceland	0	UK	0
Ireland	0	USA	0
Israel	0	Vietnam	0

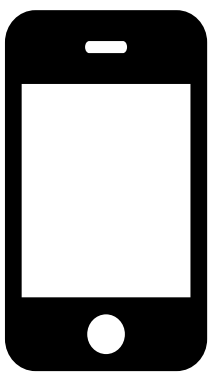
Table 2. Percentage of contribution of selected donors for the synthetic Venezuela for the first Synthetic Control Method experiment using Legislative constraints in the executive as dependent variable.

CONCLUSIONS

- There are substantive differences between different type of episodes of democratic backsliding; in regressed autocracies, presidents will have more power to diminish legislative constraints than in democratic breakdowns.
- Synthetic control methods can be used to assess changes in internal dynamics of legislative oversight during episodes of democratic backsliding.

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