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The military and political ouster of Honduran president Manuel Zelaya on June 28 was a painful reminder of a not-too-distant past when governments in the region were routinely overturned. Coups don’t take place in vacuums. For months, Honduras has been living a political crisis as President Zelaya attempted to lift presidential term limits. His insistence on continuing Sunday’s “referendum” or “poll” on the issue — even after the country’s Supreme Court and Congress had declared it illegal — was the straw that broke the camel’s back.

Those of us watching CNN en Español on Sunday witnessed the political coup in progress. We went from a live transmission from the San José, Costa Rica, airport — where President Zelaya said he had been kidnapped by the Honduran military and transported out of the country against his will — to watching the secretary of the Honduran Congress read a letter of resignation from President Zelaya and his cabinet. Two minutes later, President Zelaya emphatically denied stepping down from office or writing the letter. Yet Congress continued its extraordinary session and unanimously accepted his “resignation.”

Congressmen from Zelaya’s Partido Liberal, as well as from other parties, expressed their sadness for “having” to resort to such “necessary” measures. The unanimity of the resolution sends a clear message about Zelaya’s lack of support. We could argue that for all members of Congress — the majority of which is from Zelaya’s party — to agree on this radical measure, Zelaya must have been doing his job very poorly. Assuming this was the case, and assuming all democratic channels to replace Zelaya had been exhausted, the next step in a democracy would have been to wait until his term expires in six months.

Regardless of the reason or the context, a military coup is an unacceptable method of replacing a democratically elected president. This is a huge step back on the road toward democratic consolidation in the hemisphere. And unfortunately, given President Zelaya’s inflammatory rhetoric about Honduras’ elites, his fall from power will further deepen social divisions in the hemisphere’s third-poorest country.