I

Introduction

Our universe is not local.

– Brian Greene

In 1983 the luminous December sun shone on the nation's capital as Raúl Alfonsín, the newly inaugurated Argentine president, waved to enthusiastic crowds from his open-topped car. The crowds cheered not only the man wearing the sash but also the political event he embodied – the birth of a new democracy. Furthermore, the horrors and the drama of the years leading to this event gave national and international observers alike the sense that Argentina had finally turned its back on a long legacy of authoritarian politics. This transition to democracy was for real, and the political officials getting ready to govern, with all their weaknesses and predictable missteps along the way, would never again permit authoritarian rulers to control power in the nation's capital.

At around the same time, far from the glare of the national press corps, and even farther from international scrutiny, an old political boss stepped assuredly into the gubernatorial palace of the northern province of Santiago del Estero. The surroundings were familiar to him. Carlos Arturo Juárez had first been elected governor of Santiago in 1949 and now looked forward to a third term in office. Juárez had been the province's puppet master for more than three decades. In the course of his career, he had maneuvered skillfully against challenges to his hold on the province from party rivals, including from the great Juan Perón himself. He had also prevailed against several military governments, whose occupations he waited out in comfortable exile financed by provincial construction magnates made wealthy during his terms in office. In 1983 he returned from one such period of exile, and his loyal local Peronist Party machine mobilized to hand him another election victory. As he surveyed the political landscape of a province he had not seen for seven years, Juárez

remarked casually to a reporter, “Santiago del Estero is Carlos Arturo Juárez. I say it without vanity.”

Over the next 20 years, as the national democratic regime moved toward consolidation, Juárez busily secured an authoritarian regime in the province of Santiago del Estero. He isolated, co-opted, or repressed local opposition parties. Reforms of the provincial constitution expanded the governor’s powers and the Peronist Party’s control over provincial institutions. A vast patronage machine linked job security for most of the gainfully employed population to loyalty to the provincial caudillo and guaranteed wealth for local business elites who curried his favor. Where institutional control and patronage failed to neutralize opponents, outright repression filled the void. Juarista informants kept close watch on public sector employees, and deviant political behavior was punished with job loss or violence from vigilante groups. A feared provincial intelligence system also reported directly to the governor; it was led by a chief of police whose previous job experience included oversight of the detention, torture, and disappearance of local inhabitants during the 1976–83 military dictatorship.

The provincial caudillo’s cult of personality was everywhere evident. Students graduating from public high schools found letters with their diplomas reminding them of their debt to the great leader for the education they had received. Announcers on the public address system of the capital city’s racetrack called on sparse crowds of gamblers to give thanks to the governor for the glorious weather they were enjoying. Bricks piled on construction sites were engraved with his name (or that of his wife and political partner) by obsequious construction contractors. The 14-story luxury hotel that soared above the squat skyline of the capital city was named “Carlos V,” not after some distant European monarch, but in honor of Carlos Arturo Juárez’s fifth gubernatorial term.

That an authoritarian Santiago del Estero could survive and prosper in a democratic Argentina is a remarkable story, but it is far from unusual. Change the proper names in this narrative (and perhaps some of its more outrageous features), and it describes politics in any of the local authoritarian enclaves that dot the landscapes of democratic countries around the world. The field of democratization studies has tended to focus on national politics, and rightly so, given the global scope of national transitions to democracy in recent decades. The establishment of a national democratic government, however, is but one step in the long and complex process of democratic development within the nation-state. By no means does it ensure the diffusion of democratic practices and institutions throughout the many layers of polity and society, even in countries with long histories of national democratic rule. “Subnational authoritarianism” was a massive fact of political life in the United States until the middle of the twentieth century. It is also currently a fact of life in many democracies in the developing and postcommunist world. The unevenness of democratic governance across the national territory can be slight, with no more

2 “El fin de un poder caudillista que duró más de medio siglo,” La Nación, April 2, 2004, 10.
Introduction

than minor differences from jurisdiction to jurisdiction in the transparency of electoral procedures or the rule of law. Yet these differences can also be dramatic, with full-blown authoritarian subnational governments depriving local inhabitants of rights and liberties enjoyed by residents of other provinces in the same country.

This phenomenon has remained largely undertheorized by political scientists. Scholars of U.S. history and political development have produced a plethora of studies about politics in the American southern states during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, few efforts place these states’ politics in a comparative context or use them to shape the theoretical study of democracy. As a result, the most extreme case of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement of citizens in the history of democracy lies largely outside the theoretical scrutiny of the comparative democratization field.

Until recently the study of subnational authoritarianism outside the United States was a rare event. A small number of prescient works brought the phenomenon to the attention of the scholarly community in the 1990s. More recently a wave of scholarship in the field of comparative politics has explored the phenomenon in different cross-national contexts.

Nevertheless, many of the processes that feed or starve subnational authoritarianism continue to be shrouded in mystery. Furthermore, as Jonathan Fox


Boundary Control

put it well nearly 20 years ago, “analysts of national politics tend to treat authoritarian enclaves as exceptions, while analysts of local politics rarely put them in national context.” 6 Seen as a phenomenon confined to the physical peripheries of nations, its study has long been relegated to the figurative peripheries of comparative politics. Subnational authoritarian enclaves are often viewed as remote aberrations, lying physically beyond the reach of the legal and political authority of the national state, in regions impenetrable by central authority, and whose deviation from national democratic norms increases as one moves farther from metropolitan centers. Subnational authoritarianism in the nationally democratic state is thus seen as a result of intrinsic characteristics of the authoritarian enclaves (a term that lends an air of isolation and uniqueness to the phenomenon) combined with the limited ability of central authorities to extend their influence across territory. This view is evocative of Jeffrey Herbst’s reflections about state-building problems in Africa, where state builders find themselves unable to effectively “broadcast power” across large physical distances. 7

Evidence from the Western Hemisphere, however, suggests a different interpretation. Subnational authoritarianism in this region exists and often flourishes not in inchoate nation-states but in highly institutionalized countries. The U.S. central government effectively “broadcast” its power across a continent in the 19th and 20th centuries. It developed infrastructure networks, conquered territory held by other countries, successfully waged a civil war against secessionism, fought and won two world wars, and became a global superpower with proclaimed aspirations to spread democracy around the world. The democratic national government of the United States held sway over the planet, but did not challenge authoritarian political systems within its own borders until the second half of the 20th century. In Latin America subnational authoritarianism exists in comparatively well-developed states, which have unquestioned sovereignty within well-defined borders and often the ability to crush local challenges with dispatch.

In these institutional contexts, the persistence of local authoritarianism has little to do with the physical difficulties of controlling territory or the remoteness of authoritarian jurisdictions. It is part and parcel of everyday politics within the modern nation-state. It results from strategies of territorial control by local elites and from strategies of governance and coalition-building by national democratically elected leaders. A first step in demystifying the phenomenon thus involves exposing the territorial dimensions of power within modern nation-states. This requires mapping how political institutions are organized across territory, how they distribute power between political actors, and how they shape political preferences and coalition-building. It also involves opening the black box of subnational jurisdictions, shedding light on institutional strategies of political control and how they are linked to the national territorial system.

Introduction

In this way we can gain a nuanced view of the layered dynamics of political control in the democratic nation-state. We can also gain insights into how these dynamics often yield models of political governance in which, to quote one author, “the authoritarian dimension intermixes complexly and powerfully with the democratic one.”

Charting the institutional dynamics of subnational authoritarianism can also reveal ways in which it can unravel. The cross-national scholarship on democratization has revealed myriad ways in which conflict patterns in authoritarian countries lead to democratic openings, but understanding how these transitions might take place in subnational jurisdictions requires some modification of the theoretical lenses traditionally used at the national level. The institutional entanglement that exists between the national and the subnational in any territorial system, with regular and substantial interaction between central and local governments, adds layers of complexity and meaning to subnational democratization processes rarely found in conflicts over national democratization.

The existence of a democratic national government alongside an authoritarian subnational government creates a situation of regime juxtaposition. Two levels of government with jurisdiction over the same territory operate under different regimes, understood as the set of norms, rules, and practices that govern the selection and behavior of state leaders. Regime juxtaposition creates ongoing tensions between local and national arenas and presents strategic challenges for subnational authoritarian elites (as well as opportunities for local oppositions) that do not exist when national and subnational regime types coincide. In these contexts political pressures from national politics are potential catalysts for subnational change. Authoritarian incumbents dedicate major efforts to insulate their jurisdictions from such pressures and to limit access by local oppositions to national allies and resources. These “boundary control” efforts involve institutional strategies in multiple territorial arenas. Continuity or change in subnational authoritarianism is thus driven not by local causes alone but also by interactions between local politics and the national territorial system in which they are embedded.

This is a book about subnational authoritarianism and democratization. It explores strategic and institutional dynamics that perpetuate subnational authoritarian regimes as well as the political mechanisms that undermine them. The point of departure is the situation of regime juxtaposition within the nation-state, in which a national democratic government exists alongside authoritarian subnational governments. The book addresses three core questions:

1. What political factors explain the existence of subnational authoritarian jurisdictions in the democratic nation-state?

---

2. What regular and observable conflict patterns does this situation of regime juxtaposition generate?

3. What explains varying patterns of subnational authoritarianism and subnational democratization across time and space?

The answers that are developed in the book’s chapters can be summarized as follows. First, the maintenance of subnational authoritarian enclaves in a nationally democratic country is driven by strategic interactions between local and national politics. Social, economic, or cultural factors intrinsic to the jurisdictions may contribute to the local authoritarian situation, but in the face of a democratized central government, subnational authoritarian enclaves must be nurtured and maintained by politics. The endurance of subnational authoritarianism is thus driven by active strategies of institutional and political control by local incumbents, as well as by strategic interactions and coalition-building between local and (often “democratic”) national leaders.

The answer to the second question is that the situation of regime juxtaposition creates an ongoing struggle between provincial incumbents and oppositions to control the scope of provincial conflict. This is the fundamental conflict pattern created by regime juxtaposition, and it is referred to in this book as “boundary control.” In struggles over boundary control, authoritarian incumbents prevail when the scope of conflict is localized. They are threatened when provincial conflict becomes nationalized. Fights over subnational democratization are thus characterized by struggles between “boundary-opening” and “boundary-closing” agents to shape the territorial reach of political action and the number of actors who are party to local conflicts.

Finally, any theory of subnational democratization must be rooted in theories of territorial politics. The book thus develops theory about how countries are organized territorially. It also argues that the territorial organization of countries has major effects on patterns of subnational authoritarianism and democratization. Through comparative case studies of three federal countries it reveals how institutional variations in “territorial regimes” affect how subnational authoritarian regimes are made and unmade.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to theory-building. It situates the subject of subnational democratization within the broader literatures on comparative politics and democratization. It makes the case that conflicts over subnational democratization are distinct from those at the national level, and it provides conceptual and theoretical ideas for analyzing the political terrain on which these conflicts unfold. It also develops a theory of subnational authoritarianism and democratization and identifies constituent mechanisms that are reproduced across countries and historical periods. These mechanisms are fleshed out in three illustrative case studies of federal countries in the Western Hemisphere. Chapter 3 examines the most spectacular case of subnational authoritarianism in the history of democracy: the rise and maintenance of the “Solid South” in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Chapters 4 and 5 examine two contemporary cases from Latin America, Argentina and
Introduction

Mexico, where subnational authoritarianism has persisted well after the countries’ national governments became democratized. A comparative analysis in the conclusion addresses the differences and commonalities of the three experiences and reflects on their connections to federalism and to power relationships between political actors on both sides of the boundary-control divide. In this way, through theory-building and detailed empirical comparisons, the book offers readers new insights into how democracy spreads (or does not spread) within the nation-state.

Acknowledgments

During the many years of writing this book, I benefited from intellectual exchanges with several people who generously gave insights, advice, and logistical help. A first round of thanks goes to my colleagues at Northwestern University, many of whom carefully read and commented on the manuscript in its various stages. I am indebted to Jeffrey Winters for the many hours of reading, thought, and conversation he dedicated to my research project. I am also grateful to James Farr, Daniel Galvin, Kenneth Janda, James Mahoney, Will Reno, Ben Ross Schneider, and Kathleen Thelen. My students (well, some of them are now prominent professors, but old habits die hard) nurtured and pushed me forward when my energy sagged. Julieta Suárez Cao has read every word and vetted (and sometimes vetoed) every idea in this book. Ernesto Calvo, Teri Caraway, and Tulia Falleti – trusted friends and colleagues – were there from the project’s inception. Salma Al Shami was an incisive theoretical critic. I am also indebted to Mariana Borges, Jennifer Cyr, Gustavo Duncan, Carlos Freytes, Claudia López, Juan Cruz Olmeda, Sylvia Otero, and Alvaro Villagrán. Northwestern University, the Howard Foundation of Brown University, and the Searle Kinship Foundation generously provided me with leave time and resources to complete this project at critical points along the way.

In Argentina the late novelist, playwright, and democracy activist, Raúl Dargolzetz, as well as Horacio Cao, enriched my understanding of Santiago del Estero’s politics beyond measure, giving me intimate views of its most inaccessible political and physical spaces. Enrique Zuleta Puceiro was an invaluable advisor during my many field research trips to Argentina. I am also indebted to Jacqueline Behrend, Carlos Gervasoni, and Augustina Giraudy, who are each producing cutting-edge scholarship on problems of subnational democracy. I am grateful to Blanca Heredia, Carlos Elizondo, and Ivana de la Cruz for intellectual and logistical support during many visits to Mexico. I am also indebted to Vicente de la Cruz, Isidoro Yescas Martínez, Fausto Díaz Montes, and Victor Raúl Martínez Vázquez – scholars and political actors in Oaxaca working on the frontlines of democratization struggles in their state.

I wrote two chapters of this book in the congenial and stimulating intellectual environment of Nuffield College, Oxford University, in spring 2011. I am particularly grateful to Laurence Whitehead and Desmond King for making that stay possible and for their close engagement with my work. I am also
grateful to Oxford scholars Nancy Bermeo, Giovanni Cappoccia, Enrique Posada Carbó, Leigh Payne, Timothy J. Power, Cindy Skatch, and Maya Tudor for hospitality and intellectual exchange.

Robert Mickey enriched my understanding of U.S. southern politics enormously and was a valued interlocutor about the comparative significance of the region’s turbulent experiences with democratic politics. I am also grateful to Diana Beliard, Allyson Benton, Catherine Boone, Ana Grzymala Busse, Devin Caughey, David Collier, Jorge Dominguez, Julián Durazo Herrmann, Robert Kaufman, Steven Levitsky, Scott Mainwaring, María Victoria Murillo, the late Guillermo O’Donnell, Hector Schamis, Richard Snyder, Alfred Stepan, Evelyn Huber Stephens, Susan Stokes, and Deborah Yashar.

I was fortunate to work with Lewis Bateman, Senior Editor at Cambridge University Press. Lew’s confidence in this project when it was only half-written motivated me greatly as I pushed ahead toward completion. Gail Chalew was the best copy editor an author could hope for. Peggy Rote of Aptara, Inc., managed the production process impeccably and with good cheer.

And now to the help of loved ones . . . Patrick Gibson, Alex Gibson, and Henry Gibson kept me focused on the real-world implications of my work through their skeptical and often illuminating questions. Judy Gibson was ever supportive throughout this process. My father, Eduardo Gibson, was a meticulous reader of drafts. I only wish he were here today to see the final product. My mother, Rita Gibson, and my sister Jennifer (to whom this book is dedicated), gave me a sanctuary in Cape Cod for writing, thinking, eating gluten-free food, and making key breakthroughs when the project felt hopelessly stalled.

Caryn Tomasiewicz supported me with patience, wit, and love during the final years of writing. Gracias, polaquita. I will also remember the Highlands Ranch Public Library in Colorado very fondly, for offering spacious and cozy facilities (with a fireplace!) for writing large parts of this book.
All of my maps have been overthrown.  

Jeff Tweedy¹

To ordinary individuals the pains and trials of authoritarianism delivered by local authorities may be hard to distinguish from those delivered by national authorities. “National” versus “subnational” authoritarianism may be inconsequential distinctions to people experiencing the dreary poverty of rights of autocratic rule. Yet the territorial source of authoritarian rule is consequential—it is consequential for politics and it is consequential for theory. Political actors in struggles for local democratization face strategic and institutional challenges that are quite different from those faced by protagonists of national democratization struggles. Similarly, social scientists seeking to understand subnational authoritarianism’s dynamics must address hierarchies and mechanisms that are unique to the internal territorial organization of countries.

A focus on subnational processes of authoritarianism and democratization demands not only a shift in the scale of observation but also a new set of theoretical lenses that help us see political dynamics invisible to those focusing on national units. Thus the study of subnational democratization should not be seen as a theoretical derivative of national democratization, wherein the main challenge lies in identifying which theories developed for the study of countries can be transferred to the study of provinces. It is a field with theoretical and empirical challenges that, although overlapping in many ways with its “parent” field, are unique to the subnational level of analysis. Subnational democratization is not democratization in short pants.

Therefore, this chapter’s objectives are to map the political terrain on which conflicts over subnational democratization unfold and to reveal their unique patterns and mechanisms of political action. After reviewing unit-of-analysis

issues in the study of democratization, the chapter turns to theory-building. It first builds on theories of “territorial politics” to reveal strategic and institutional conflict patterns within nation-states. It then links these patterns to a theory of subnational authoritarianism and democratization.

I. UNIT-OF-ANALYSIS ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF DEMOCRATIZATION

Democratization and the Nation Fixation

The national orientation of democratization studies was well reflected in the title of a pioneering article in the contemporary wave of scholarship. In 1984, Samuel Huntington titled the article as follows: “Will More Countries Become Democratic?” It was a reasonable question to ask at the time. In a period when national authoritarian governments were giving way to democratically elected governments in much of the world, it would indeed have been odd if he had not focused on the national dynamics of regime change. However, even then, writers with a nuanced understanding of domestic politics might have rephrased Huntington’s question as something that captured better what he was really asking. This rephrasing might have gone something like this: “Will More National Governments Become Democratic?” A scholar with a keen sense of the internal territorial heterogeneity of countries might have opted for a cumbersome but even more accurate phrasing: “Will the Best-Known Places of More Countries Become Democratic?” It is unlikely that articles framed in this way would have resonated very much with scholarly audiences at the time (let alone survived the average journal peer-review process), but at least their authors would have had the consolation of knowing that they were framing their questions accurately and perhaps were ahead of their time.

Yet such authors would have run afoul of what might be termed a “nation fixation” in democratization studies – the tendency to look to national units of analysis to measure and to explain the spread (or nonspread) of democracy. Conceptually, the nation fixation meant that democracy and democratization were perceived as national phenomena: the nation-state was the unit of analysis at which they could be apprehended. Inevitably the concept was operationalized as the democratization of the national government.

We see this nation fixation in influential contemporary cross-national measurements of democracy. Freedom House, coding Argentina’s political regime according to national political rights and civil liberties in the late 1980s, classified the country as “Free” during the very period in which authoritarian rule

---
