

## Hybrid Regimes within Democracies

From the racially segregated “Jim Crow” US South to the many electoral but hardly democratic local regimes in Argentina and other federal democracies, the political rights of citizens around the world are often curtailed by powerful subnational rulers. *Hybrid Regimes within Democracies* presents the first comprehensive study of democracy and authoritarianism in all the subnational units of a federation. The book focuses on Argentina, but also contains a comparative chapter that considers seven other countries including Germany, Mexico, and the United States. The in-depth and multidimensional description of subnational regimes in all Argentine provinces is complemented with an innovative explanation for the large differences between those that are democratic and those that are “hybrid” – complex combinations of democratic and authoritarian elements. Putting forward and testing an original theory of subnational democracy, Gervasoni extends the rentier-state explanatory logic from resource rents to the more general concept of “fiscal rents,” including “fiscal federalism rents,” and from the national to the subnational level.

**Carlos Gervasoni** is Associate Professor of Political Science and International Studies at Universidad Torcuato Di Tella (Buenos Aires, Argentina). His articles have appeared in journals such as *Comparative Political Studies*, *Democratization*, *Party Politics*, *Política y Gobierno*, and *World Politics*. He is a regional manager for the Varieties of Democracy project and a member of the 2015 Argentine Panel Election Study research team. His research on subnational regimes has been supported by a National Science Foundation award.

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## *Fiscal Federalism and Subnational Rentier States*

CARLOS GERVASONI

*Universidad Torcuato Di Tella*



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*To the memory of my father Carlos Rafael Gervasoni.*

*To my mother Kety.*

*To Sybil and our wonderful son Federico.*

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## Preface and Acknowledgments

This book is a way of expressing frustration about the politics of Argentina, my country. Following the principle that one can use normative considerations for choosing a research topic, though not for drawing empirical conclusions about it, I decided to study the places from which came those, in my opinion, deplorable presidents who dominated Argentine politics in the 1990s and 2000s – Peronists Carlos Menem and Néstor Kirchner. Their seemingly sharp ideological differences – the former a “newborn” neoconservative, the latter a populist and alleged leftist – may have hidden for some the many similarities between them. Of all of these – both frequently overstepped constitutional rules, both filled important government positions with unqualified relatives and friends, both led utterly corrupt administrations, both were rich, both were Peronist – there is one that escapes most analyses: before becoming presidents, they were the hegemonic governors of provinces that – as documented in this book – are among the country’s least democratic. La Rioja and Santa Cruz seem to have served Menem and Kirchner, respectively, as training camps from where to launch their bid for the presidency, which they exercised in ways comparable to the way they ruled those provinces. Their fellow satraps, such as Vicente and Ramón Saadi (Catamarca), Gildo Insfrán (Formosa), or Carlos Juárez and Gerardo Zamora (Santiago del Estero) likely had, or have, similar dreams.

That the governors of two of the demographically smallest Argentine provinces (together they account for 1.5 percent of the country’s population) were able to prevail over those of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Santa Fe, or Mendoza – which contain 60 percent of the country’s population – may be more than a coincidence. In fact, a third Peronist governor of a small and hardly democratic province – Adolfo Rodríguez Saá of San Luis – also occupied the presidency briefly during the political crisis of 2001–2002. There seems to be a political logic at work: “executive malapportionment” (each province, small or large, has one governor) is compounded by the fact that small provinces are heavily subsidized by Argentina’s fiscal federalism, and by the fact that these subsidies

allow their rulers to establish hegemonic regimes which, in turn, are functional for their national political careers. The governors of Buenos Aires or Santa Fe have to make do with comparatively little national fiscal support and face strong provincial challengers; the governors of La Rioja and Santa Cruz, on the other hand, can rely on plentiful “free” fiscal resources – what I call “fiscal federalism rents” – and have little to worry about in terms of the provincial opposition.

In summary, if the causal logic uncovered in the pages ahead is correct, we Argentines have given ourselves institutions of fiscal federalism that subsidize the emergence and survival of semi-authoritarian provincial bosses that have good chances of becoming presidents, and that typically bring their undemocratic ways with them on their trips from La Rioja, San Luis, or Santa Cruz to the capital city of Buenos Aires. The concepts, theories, and evidence I present help us better understand the type of provincial regimes they led (and the more democratic regimes in other provinces) and the causes that account for the coexistence of more and less democratic provinces under the same national regime.

Beyond my normative inclinations, this book is an attempt to remediate what Robert Dahl called a “grave omission” of his influential *Polyarchy*, that is, the neglect of subnational regimes. I had the good fortune to do my doctoral research under one of Dahl’s Yale students, Michael Coppedge. A superb advisor, Michael helped me turn some rudimentary ideas about provincial regimes in Argentina into the set of theoretically grounded and methodologically sound (or so I hope) descriptive and causal inferences that structure this book. If its motivation has been largely normative, its execution has been as scientific as the capacities of its author permitted. Dahl and the other founding parents of the study of political regimes (such as Juan Linz, Michael’s dissertation advisor) were morally appalled by the realities of twentieth-century authoritarianisms and totalitarianisms, and responded by launching a scientific research program that has proved fruitful, cumulative, and influential. I take pride in working within it, and in helping fill gaps that the founders alerted us to. The realities I react to, fortunately, are far from the horrors of Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union that they had in mind. But as a liberal democrat who is always wary of the state’s potential oppressive deviations, and as an Argentine who has seen his own state murder its own citizens (first under the Juan Perón–Isabel Perón [1973–1976] administration, when a government-sponsored paramilitary force [the *Triple A*, or *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*] committed hundreds of crimes, and then, on a much larger scale, under the 1976–1983 military dictatorship) I do not underestimate the potential threats to freedom that emerge even from elected governments. However undemocratic the administrations of governors such as Menem or Kirchner may have been, they were very far from these horrors. Many citizens in their provinces, however, had their political rights restricted, and all the country’s citizens started to live in a less democratic national regime when Menem and Kirchner became presidents. Menem,

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for example, quickly packed the Supreme Court with a group of loyal and often-unqualified cronies that made a joke of judicial checks and balances. Kirchner, among other things, targeted one of the most basic pillars of democracy – the critical media. No wonder: there are hardly any independent judges in La Rioja and hardly any independent media outlets in Santa Cruz. The first instinct of these leaders was to reproduce at the national level the hegemonic realities they had become used to in their provinces. They sometimes succeeded and sometimes failed, but they never ceased to be a danger for the political rights of Argentines. Democracy is at times blatantly and bloodily prevented or suppressed, by the Hitlers, Stalins, and Videlas of this world, but at other times it is less cruelly undermined from within, for example by the Kirchners, Menems, and Wallaces of the subnational world.

I wrote this book with the Enlightenment's faith in rational and empirical knowledge as a tool for social improvement. I do not ignore that, in the realm of policymaking, political interests more often than not trump scientific argument, but trust that a clearer understanding of politics is a precondition for positive change. The book presents a description of subnational regimes in Argentina (including a comparison with several other countries around the world) and an anatomy of the typical undemocratic practices found in them. It also presents a theory that identifies a very clear culprit for low levels of subnational democracy. In showing that provinces such as Formosa, La Rioja, San Luis, Santa Cruz, and Santiago del Estero are much less democratic than others such as Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Entre Ríos, Mendoza, or Santa Fe, and in arguing that the difference lies (to a large extent) in the former's access to plentiful federal subsidies (or *fiscal federalism rents*), this book hopes to help Argentines understand our own country, help scholars understand subnational regimes, and help make those regimes more democratic.

The following pages would have never been written without the great personal and intellectual support of a wonderful group of professors at the Department of Political Science and the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame, especially Michael Coppedge, Frances Hagopian, and Scott Mainwaring. I have seen them teach great, well-prepared courses, work hard at advising students, make an effort to be as fair as humanly possible in their decisions, and be truly humble regarding their own academic achievements. In making tough decisions about advisors during my doctorate, I applied the rule of always working with people who are professionally *and* morally good. The rule worked as wonderfully as ever. Along with Benjamin Radcliff, who provided the outside view of an Americanist (and *non*-Latino-americanist comparativist), the rigor and insightfulness of an amazingly published social scientist, and the normative commitment of a good heart, Michael, Fran, and Scott supported my research beyond duty. I run out of words to express my appreciation and thankfulness toward them.

I owe an immense intellectual debt to Michael Coppedge. His wonderful seminars on the causes, consequences, and measurement of democracy,

his constant disposition to talk during long hours, his wise suggestions, and his personal support were critical in producing the research I present below. Inadvertently, he taught me a lesson or two about how to combine rigorous academic work with an open mind, and with sincere respect for the different points of views in the literature and in the seminar room.

I also greatly benefited from the seminars, ideas, advice, and support of Fran Hagopian and Scott Mainwaring. Fran always goes the extra mile. Even after leaving Notre Dame, she made a special effort to remain a member of my committee, and worked as hard as ever. Intellectual breadth and depth, commitment to teaching and advising, personal warmth: a perfect combination that has greatly benefited all of her lucky graduate students.

Scott Mainwaring has been a key figure in my academic career since I met him at a SAAP (Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Político) conference in Mar del Plata more than twenty years ago. I had graduated from Stanford University with an MA in Political Science and another one in Latin American Studies, and, after a few years back in Argentina, was thinking about a pursuing a doctorate. Scott's academic reputation and his leadership at Notre Dame and the Kellogg Institute were already well-established, so I was pleasantly surprised that he persistently and convincingly argued that Notre Dame would be an excellent place for me – he was right. I have been privileged to have him as a professor, advisor, coauthor, and friend. As the Director of the Kellogg Institute, as a professor of two wonderful seminars, and as a member of my dissertation committee, Scott was a central figure in my graduate school years. That he found time to teach well, advise sensibly, and publish influentially while directing a large and complex research organization is a professional feat that his students all admire. That he was at the same time demanding, respectful, supportive, generous, humble, and warm is a personal feat that we are all thankful for.

I am also truly grateful to many other professors who as teachers, occasional advisors, directors of graduate studies, department chairs, or just hallway conversationalists, contributed to my education and research at Notre Dame. Benjamin Radcliff and Tim Scully taught excellent classes and provided interesting and diverse perspectives on comparative politics. Wendy Hunter and Kurt Weyland from University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) spent a year at the Kellogg Institute, taught an amazing class on the Causes and Consequences of Market Reform, and provided those of us in that seminar with excellent academic advice. I also had the privilege of taking a class with the late Guillermo O'Donnell, Argentina's most prestigious political scientist and a leading figure in the discipline worldwide. I was lucky to have great professors in American Politics (my second field) too: Christina Wolbrecht and David Campbell. For my methodological training I am thankful to Andy Gould, David Nickerson, Scott Maxwell (at the Department of Psychology), and Richard Williams (at the Department of Sociology). Debra Javeline gave me her expert feedback on the design of the questionnaire for the Survey of Experts on Provincial Politics.



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A special word on the Kellogg Institute and its staff. I always thought of the Institute as a second department, with its own set of guest scholars and speakers, conferences, and research funding opportunities. I made sure I made the most of the many great minds the Kellogg Institute brought to campus. Among others, I had the chance to listen to and meet with Daniel Brinks, Miguel Centeno, David Collier, Vladimir Gel'man, Clark Gibson, Kenneth Greene, Axel Hadenius, Miriam Kornblith, Margaret Levi, Steve Levitsky, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, Tim Power, Donna Lee Van Cott, Lucan Way, Nina Wiesehomeier, and Deborah Yashar. The Kellogg's staff was always helpful, efficient, and nice: at the risk of forgetting some of the many people who are or were at the Kellogg during my years there, I would like to mention Judy Bartlett, Ted Beatty, Dawn Dinovo, Therese Hanlon, Peg Hartman, July Jack, Elizabeth Rankin, Holly Rivers, Sharon Schierling, David Seymour, Christopher Welna, and Denise Wright. My gratitude goes also, and very especially, to the late Scott Van Jacob, a superb Latin American bibliographer and a great man.

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Much of this book, and especially the Survey of Experts on Provincial Politics, benefited from the work of great research assistants. María Marta Maroto helped me with countless aspects of the research from the project's conception, and did so with rigor, responsibility, enthusiasm, and good judgment. Andrea Cavalli and Adrián Lucardi were critical to the success of the expert survey, and they conducted, along with María Marta, most of the interviews. The three of them traveled for long weeks to cover each of Argentina's twenty-three provinces, and did a superb job of contacting and interviewing dozens of experts. They also coded the questionnaires, always working with great professionalism and sagacity. In Buenos Aires, María Eugenia Wolcoff assisted me in coordinating the fieldwork and conducted several interviews, doing so with dedication, congeniality, and youthful enthusiasm. Julieta Altieri, Tomás Bieda, Victoria Romano Florit, Jimena Sánchez, and Geraldine Sznec provided excellent research assistance to collect secondary data on the eight countries included in the comparative Chapter 7. Nicole Dipp and Federico Méndez Casanave assisted me in collecting and organizing bibliographic and journalistic evidence about Argentina's provincial regimes. Tomás Listrani carefully and skillfully designed the three maps that appear in the book. I am very thankful to all of them.

I owe much to the 155 experts interviewed for the Survey of Experts on Provincial Politics. Their names (except for a few who preferred to maintain their anonymity) can be found in the online appendix.<sup>1</sup> Much of the knowledge generated by the survey would have been impossible without their own knowledge and willingness to share it.

I conducted much of the research for this book while I was working for universities in Argentina between 2008 and 2018. During 2008, I taught at

<sup>1</sup> At [www.utdt.edu/profesores/cgervasoni](http://www.utdt.edu/profesores/cgervasoni).

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Universidad Católica Argentina, Universidad del CEMA, Universidad de San Andrés, and Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, and in all of them I found good colleagues to discuss my ideas with. In 2009, I started a full-time position at the Department of Political Science and International Studies at Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, where I had also taught for several years before I left for my Ph.D. at Notre Dame. I am grateful for the intellectual stimulation and pluralism that I have always found at the department and the university. I am very proud to belong to them.

My wonderful family has had a huge role in this book. My mother Kety and my father Carlos (who passed away in 2013) are, in many ways, the distal causes of it – not only because of their support and love throughout my life, but because of their moral education and example. I was lucky to be able to spend much time with Carlos before he became ill with cancer, and during the tough months that ensued. In the sadness and pain of the last days, he remained calm, sober, and selfless. He left teaching those around him a lesson in strength, endurance, and dignity. I admired him and loved him very much.

My wife Sybil, who happens to be an accomplished political scientist, supported me in every way and gave me advice about countless aspects of the book. She has been, throughout our many years together, a loving partner and a kind heart. Federico, our son and our masterwork, grew together with the ideas I present in this book. Inevitably he has been, like Arthur Stinchcombe's wife, "alternately a hindrance and a help," but always a great source of pride, satisfaction, and joy – and the lucky target of tons of care and love. As I was putting the final touches on these pages, he repeatedly came into my home office to ask, "Hey Daddy, how is the book going?"

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Some of the research I conducted for this book has been published in the form of journal articles and book chapters. In the early stages I wrote some pieces in Spanish, which were published in the Argentine journals *Colección, Boletín de Política Comparada*, and *Aportes para el Estado y la Administración Gubernamental*. More recently I published some of my descriptive and explanatory findings in *World Politics* (Gervasoni 2010a), the *Journal of Politics in Latin America* (Gervasoni 2010b), and in two book chapters (Gervasoni 2016a, 2016b). Portions of the book draw on these pieces.

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## Abbreviations

ACLP	Alvarez, Cheibub, Limongi and Przeworski
CSDI	Comparative Subnational Democracy Index
CM	Carlos Menem
NK	Néstor Kirchner
PJ	Partido Justicialista (aka <i>Partido Peronista</i> or <i>Peronism</i> )
RA	Raúl Alfonsín
SDI	Subnational Democracy Index
SEPP	Survey of Experts on Provincial Politics
UCR	Unión Cívica Radical (aka <i>Partido Radical</i> or <i>Radicalism</i> )
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy Project

### Provinces

PBA	Buenos Aires
CF	Capital Federal (or Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, or CABA)
CAT	Catamarca
CHA	Chaco
CHU	Chubut
CBA	Córdoba
CTS	Corrientes
ER	Entre Ríos
FSA	Formosa
JUJ	Jujuy
LP	La Pampa

LR	La Rioja
MZA	Mendoza
MIS	Misiones
NEU	Neuquén
RN	Río Negro
STA	Salta
SJ	San Juan
SL	San Luis
SC	Santa Cruz
SF	Santa Fe
SE	Santiago del Estero
TF	Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur
TUC	Tucumán