Inside Countries

Although comparative politics is conventionally seen as the study of politics across countries, the field has a longstanding and increasingly prominent tradition in national contexts, focusing on subnational units, institutions, actors, and processes. This book offers the first comprehensive assessment of the substantive, theoretical, and methodological contributions of subnational research to comparative politics. With empirical chapters from across the contemporary Global South, including India, Mexico, and China, as well as Russia, the contributors show how subnational research provides useful insights about major substantive themes in political science, from regimes and representation, to states and security, to social and economic development. In addition to methodological chapters with specific guidance about best practices for doing subnational research, this volume also proposes a set of strategies for subnational research, assesses their strengths and weaknesses, and offers illustrative empirical applications.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This collective volume stems from a series of invitations. The first invitation came in 2010 from Bryon Moraski and Michael Bernhard, both at the University of Florida, in their capacities as Editors of Comparative Democratization, the newsletter of the Comparative Democratization Section of the American Political Science Association (APSA). They invited Richard Snyder, who had previously published on the subnational comparative method, to participate in a symposium on subnational research on democratization proposed by Agustina Giraudy. Giraudy had recently completed her PhD at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and her dissertation on the persistence of subnational undemocratic regimes in Argentina and Mexico had won the Comparative Democratization Section’s Juan J. Linz Prize for the Best Dissertation in the Comparative Study of Democracy. Snyder, in turn, invited Eduardo Moncada, then an advanced doctoral student at Brown University and completing a subnational dissertation on violent cities in Colombia, to collaborate with him in writing the piece for Comparative Democratization. As a result of our participation in this symposium, and aware of exciting subnational research by young scholars working on other important substantive topics across the globe in addition to democratization, we decided to invite some of the best of these scholars to collaborate with us. The goal was to produce a collective volume that not only highlighted the theoretical and methodological contributions of subnational research but also offered compelling exemplars of how it can be used to tackle a broad range of humanly important problems. The volume, in turn, would help publicize and consolidate the increasingly prominent role of subnational research as a powerful option for doing comparative politics.

Taking advantage of Snyder’s access to staff and organizational resources as director of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) at Brown University, we organized an initial conference in May 2013 on “Subnational Research in Comparative Politics” at Brown’s Watson Institute
for International and Public Affairs. At the conference, most of the contributors to the volume presented initial drafts of the chapters that appear here. A second conference, at which the contributors presented revised versions of their papers, was held at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University in March 2014, under the auspices of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, where Giraudy, by then an assistant professor at American University’s School of International Service, had recently held a two-year post-doctoral fellowship. The chapters collected here are carefully and, in most cases, substantially revised versions of papers presented at the Brown and Harvard conferences.

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