

demonstrates that even in a context of ongoing large-scale corruption, pursuing a problem-solving approach to policy development is far more likely to yield positive results than an insulated powering strategy.

Judith Teichman  
University of Toronto

---

Carlos Gervasoni, *Hybrid Regimes within Democracies: Fiscal Federalism and Subnational Rentier States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Maps, figures, tables, abbreviations, bibliography, index, 308 pp.; hardcover \$105, ebook \$84.

Decades after the completion of national-level transitions to democracy in Latin America, the persistence of subnational political regimes that fall well short of democracy has emerged as a major area of scholarly interest. Why has democracy often proved to be so elusive at the subnational level, and what explains the reality that subnational regimes within the same country can differ so radically in the quality of democracy? Carlos Gervasoni's much-anticipated new book is a pivotal contribution to the vibrant literature that has emerged in the last decade on the causes and consequences of subnational regimes, a literature that his earlier publications (especially his 2010 article in *World Politics*) have already helped to shape and inspire.

*Hybrid Regimes within Democracies* points strongly toward fiscal institutions as the main determinant of subnational regime type. More specifically, Gervasoni's "rentier theory of subnational democracy" hypothesizes that reliance on federal subsidies, in the form of fiscal transfers from the national government, is what has enabled provincial rulers in Argentina to undermine democracy in their jurisdictions. Gervasoni provides extensive statistical evidence demonstrating that less-democratic regimes indeed tend to occur in rentier provinces; provinces whose revenues instead come from taxes collected by provincial governments themselves have been able to construct more democratic regimes.

This tightly argued and carefully executed book makes a number of signal contributions. As reflected in the titles Gervasoni gives to parts 1 and 2, his purposes are both descriptive and explanatory. Unlike many books in political science that tend to privilege causal over descriptive inference, Gervasoni is as interested in description as in explanation and is willing to do the work of first developing robust descriptive inferences before turning to causation. The book devotes a great deal of attention to the description of subnational democracy as the central outcome of interest, disaggregating this concept into components and subcomponents and developing a tailored measurement strategy for each. Given greater problems of data scarcity at the subnational level relative to the national level, where students of democracy have tended to focus their attention, this is a smart move, and one that other researchers should emulate. Gervasoni shows us why measuring democracy is harder at the subnational level than at the national level and why the approach to measurement must be even more rigorous.

Gervasoni also does a brilliant job at demonstrating how objective and subjective indices can be combined in ways that make it possible to take advantage of the

distinctive strengths of each. Particularly noteworthy is the Survey of Experts on Provincial Politics that he conducted for the 2003–7 gubernatorial period by identifying and surveying 155 provincial experts, each of whom was asked 105 questions about the state of politics in their home province. No one else has done this; as Gervasoni notes, the only other similar indices ask experts in the national capital to score subnational units (as in the Russian case).

Gervasoni makes a very convincing argument for why it is better to consult with experts in the provinces themselves, in terms of the quality of information at their disposal, though this is significantly more challenging to pull off as a coordination exercise for the researcher. He then uses his two indices to identify fascinating patterns in terms of what hybrid regimes actually look like at the provincial level. For example, Gervasoni finds that hybrid provincial regimes tend to score quite high on measures of inclusivity, but generally lack institutional checks. Altogether, the descriptive findings are sobering, including the reality that fully one-third of all Argentine provinces have failed to experience alternation in power since the transition to democracy in 1983, and that overall, there is no evidence in Argentina that subnational democracy has strengthened over time.

*Hybrid Regimes within Democracies* is just as significant a contribution at the theoretical level. The major theoretical innovation comes from the astuteness with which Gervasoni has identified similarities between the “resource curse” literature, which scholars have developed to explain how natural resource rents undermine democracy at the national level, and the subnational phenomena he is seeking to explain in Argentina. By “climbing the ladder of abstraction” and focusing not on resource rents, as most scholars have, but rather on fiscal rents more generally, Gervasoni draws to the book audiences who are not chiefly interested in subnational dynamics or even in Latin America, but who are interested in the political dynamics associated with rentier states.

In addition to enabling him to build bridges to (and expand the scope of) the resource curse literature, Gervasoni’s singular focus on fiscal rents as his sole causal variable is also what most distinguishes his work from the two other major extant books on subnational democracy in Latin America, by Edward Gibson and Agustina Giraudy, both of whom have eschewed purely structural accounts like Gervasoni’s in favor of more interactive approaches that combine attention to structure and agency. In part, this difference can be explained by divergence in the specification of their outcomes of interest; whereas Gervasoni is explaining regime type, Gibson and Giraudy focus more on regime change. Still, reading these three important books together, it can be hard to reconcile the mostly static picture that Gervasoni paints, in which fiscal rules and their regime consequences have been largely consistent since 1983, with the much more dynamic and contingent landscape that emerges in Gibson’s *Boundary Control* (2013) and Giraudy’s *Democrats and Autocrats* (2015). Given the stability of fiscal rules in Argentina since the dictatorship, regime changes of the sort that interest Gibson and Giraudy would be mostly unintelligible if one were to apply Gervasoni’s narrower theoretical framework.

More generally, if the emerging literature on subnational regimes can be divided between scholars who use either structural or agential approaches and who privilege either national or subnational causes, Gervasoni's approach places him squarely in the camp of those who emphasize national and structural causes. For him, it is national revenue-sharing rules that generate the structural sources of non-democratic behavior in the provinces. At the same time, despite the overwhelmingly structural logic of his rentier theory, Gervasoni emphasizes that greater attention to agency is necessary to uncover specific causal mechanisms. At the end of chapter 6 he presents qualitative evidence to confirm the operation of the "spending effect" as the pathway that connects rents, on the one hand, with regime type, on the other, and to question the relevance of the "taxation effect" and the "repression effect" as two other possible pathways.

One of the appeals of Gervasoni's highly parsimonious account—as opposed to other approaches that give greater play to partisan, cultural, or otherwise local sources of nondemocracy—is that it should be readily applicable to other countries besides Argentina. As scholars seek to replicate and test his rentier theory of subnational democracy, however, they should keep in mind a few related institutional variables that probably contribute a great deal to the outcome Gervasoni identifies. First is the type and amount of constitutional authority of the subnational units in question. As Gervasoni notes, Argentine provinces are among the most authoritative subnational units in the world, with nearly as much authority as U.S. states and German *länder*. Do fiscal rents undermine democracy in the way we see in Argentina when subnational governments have far less authority at their disposal? In symmetrical federations like Argentina, this cannot, of course, explain the within-country variation that Gervasoni examines, since all subnational units have the same formal authority, but the rentier theory may have less purchase in countries that deny subnational governments meaningful authority.

Second is the degree of malapportionment in the electoral system. Argentine electoral institutions hugely overrepresent sparsely populated provinces, not just in the Senate but in the lower chamber as well, which Gervasoni also acknowledges. It is difficult to imagine how national electoral systems that come closer to the "one person, one vote" rule could sustain over many decades the kinds of extreme rentier outcomes that we see in the Argentine case. Colombia is a case in point: sparsely populated oil-producing departments were ultimately unable to defend rules introduced in the 1991 Constitutional Assembly that gave them 80 percent of oil revenues, which subsequent legislatures replaced with new rules that share revenues more evenly across all departments. Other country cases should be able to tell us more about subnational authority and electoral malapportionment as possible scope conditions for Gervasoni's elegant theory.

Finally, while Gervasoni's book diverges from other important works in this literature by focusing on subnational regime type rather than regime change, what can his approach tell us about the prospects for regime transformation in Argentina? The answer is that the reform landscape looks decidedly bleak, since it all comes down to the urgency of changing the rules that govern revenue sharing

in Argentina. Those rules, Gervasoni argues, have been stable since the end of the dictatorship and are designed in national legislative bodies that overrepresent rentier provinces themselves.

One is struck by the seeming inadequacy of some of the change-inducing mechanisms that other scholars, like Gibson and Giraudy, have identified in their books on democratic regime transformation, including the “plural cities” phenomenon, which Gibson sees as a potential Achilles heel of authoritarian governors, and the possibility of provincial-level elite divisions and mass opposition emphasized by Giraudy. If Gervasoni is right, efforts to democratize Argentina’s many hybrid provincial regimes will logically have to prioritize rule change at the center, not necessarily to reverse the provinces’ fateful decision in the 1930s to delegate taxing authority to the federal government, but to rewrite the rules so that the size of transfers is determined by criteria like population density, developmental needs, and local tax effort.

Kent Eaton

University of California, Santa Cruz

---

Lindsay Mayka, *Building Participatory Institutions in Latin America: Reform Coalitions and Institutional Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Figures, tables, bibliography, index, 320 pp.; hardcover \$99.99, ebook \$80.

The participatory wave in Latin America—when civil society organizations, governments, multilateral development banks, and many other actors promoted mechanisms to make consultation and collective policymaking routine—is now more than three decades old. It had important roots in the region’s democratic transitions, as well as in changing development discourses that saw participation as contributing to greater governing effectiveness. Some of the new participatory institutions met those expectations, while many more failed to do so or never even really got started. Lindsay Mayka’s excellent new book provides a reflective roadmap for understanding the patterns of successes and failures, drawing on close study of four Brazilian and Colombian initiatives.

The initiatives Mayka studies are all nationally mandated local-level councils, chosen because they present a big logistical and political challenge, as well as being normatively important in their policy areas: health (Brazil and Colombia), social assistance (Brazil), and planning (Colombia). The health councils of Brazil are well established and highly successful, while Colombia’s planning councils hardly even were created—at their peak, they existed, weakly, in about one-third of localities. The others fall in between in their outcomes, with the Brazilian institutions as a whole much stronger than the Colombian ones.

The book is satisfyingly precise in its definitions and justifications of just what success might look like for such institutions. Mayka begins with central design issues like the development of strong and specific prerogatives and decisionmaking powers for participants in the councils that are backed up with enforcement powers. She goes on to look for extensive implementing practices, including the widespread cre-