

Authoritarian Resilience: How Undemocratic Governors Persist In Argentina And Mexico

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Abstract

The topic addressed is a relevant empirical problem that has seen significant development in political science over the last decade: the coexistence of a government democratic at the national level with undemocratic regimes at the subnational level . The latter are defined as electoral regimes that are neither completely authoritarian , since they are found within a democratic country that guarantees civil liberties and party competition through elections , nor totally democratic, because the capacity of the subnational opposition to electorally defeat the party in government is seriously diminished . The official advantage is obtained by the deployment of various informal and illegal tactics , such as fraudulent maneuvers in the counting of votes, media outlets linked to the ruling party, periodic alteration of electoral rules and co - optation and intimidation of opposition leaders , among others (Giraudi , 2015 : 36) . It is important to note that the definition refers exclusively to the procedural or electoral aspect of democracy. That is, in undemocratic regimes, elections are not entirely free , competitive or fair . In this way, it differs from the concept of hybrid regimes used by some authors (Gervasoni, 2010; 2011), since this is more general and could refer to democratic weakness both in access to government and in the exercise of it. The approach to democratic processes from a territorial perspective has focused mainly on authoritarian, hybrid or undemocratic subnational regimes , addressing the questions that seek to explain their survival within democratic countries and how they can be weakened

and democratized. Basically, it is possible to distinguish two types of explanations : those that emphasize structure and those that focus on agency . In the former , Beyond the classic theory of modernization applied to the subnational level , rentism produced by fiscal federalism appears as an explanatory factor (Gervasoni, 2010), especially in the case of Argentina. In turn , in the explanations centered on the agency , the focus of strategic interaction between the national government and the subnational governments stands out , the latter having as their central government the role of the state .

Introduction

The objective of Giraudy is to maintain “boundary control” of political conflicts (Gibson, 2005). Giraudy subscribes to this second tradition , placing the interaction between the President and the governors at the centre of the analysis . However , these actors are constrained by institutional factors , such as the tax system, the type of political party to which they belong and the type of state structures they head. Given this complex combination of factors, the interaction between the President and the undemocratic governors will not be identical in all cases , but will admit diverse modalities , even within each country, triggering alternative paths for the continuity of subnational regimes . Thus, the explanation of the diverse paths that lead to the continuity of undemocratic subnational regimes will come from the interaction between the central government and the subnational governments of each country . The (in)ability of the President to exercise fiscal and/or partisan power over subnational autocrats and obtain their political cooperation allows us to explain two alternative trajectories of continuity of undemocratic subnational regimes : reproduction from above , thanks to the support of the President, or self - reproduction by the governor . This is a two-step argument. The first is centered on the ability of presidents to exercise power over subnational autocrats and gain their support . Presidential power has two sources: one economic, given by the federal funds that the governor transfers to the subunits, and another institutional, by the influence of the President on his political party . Presidents

with High levels of fiscal discretion will be able to effectively exercise their power over those subnational regimes that are fiscally dependent on the national government. On the other hand, local autocrats with more fiscal autonomy will be able to neutralize presidential power. Fiscal power is strong in the case of Argentine presidents since the restoration of democracy , especially due to the discretion in the distribution of some resources, which does not occur in the case of Mexican presidents. On the other hand, the partisan power of the President is strong when his party is highly routinized and has territorial and electoral presence in all subunits , thus allowing him to exert pressure on governors , whether they are co-partisan or opposition. The President exercises his partisan power directly over those subunits in which the autocrat is a co-partisan, while , in the case of opposition autocrats who do not control a patrimonial state structure , he will be able to impose himself on them by promoting and supporting the local opposition, forming a national - local pro-democratic coalition . The patrimonial state structure refers to three dimensions: centralization of power in the figure of the governor; ties of loyalty and dependence between followers and the local leader; and appropriation of state resources for the economic or political benefit of the governor (Giraudi, 2015: 46). If the autocrat has such a structure , patrimonial state, it will be difficult for the President to strengthen the local opposition to prevent the governor's continuity. This partisan presidential power , as the author demonstrates in the fourth chapter, that it is much stronger in the case of Mexico under the governments of the National Action Party than in Argentina during the presidencies of the Justicialist Party , especially due to the denationalization of the party system that occurred after the Menem presidencies .

The second step of the argument focuses on the consequences for regime continuity that follow from the first step, namely, the (in)effectiveness of presidential power. When presidents prevail through their fiscal or partisan resources and obtain the cooperation of subnational autocrats , they have incentives to promote the continuity of undemocratic

provincial regimes by providing them with political and economic support , since they function as allies . This is the mechanism of reproduction from above . In contrast , when presidents do not have sufficient power to obtain the cooperation of undemocratic provincial regimes , they implement policies to weaken them (promoting investigations and audits against governors , financing the local opposition, delaying or suspending federal programs , and denying discretionary transfers) . However, this presidential opposition is not sufficient to guarantee subnational regime change , but this will also depend on the ability of provincial autocrats to maintain the unity of the local party elite and / or mass support, in order to counter the presidential onslaught and maintain the status quo . When they succeed , they It is a mechanism of self -reproduction of the regime . On the contrary , when autocrats lack such capacities for self-reproduction, the democratization of the subnational regime is expected.

The argument is tested through quantitative and qualitative methodological strategies , the latter focusing on the cases of the Argentine provinces of La Rioja (fiscally dependent) and San Luis (fiscally autonomous) and the Mexican states of Oaxaca (patrimonial state structure) and Puebla (non-patrimonial state structure), from national democratization until 2009. In this way, the different trajectories of continuity of undemocratic subnational regimes in each country are explored : while La Rioja and Puebla, given the imposition of the President's fiscal/partisan power , illustrate the mechanism of reproduction from above, the cases of San Luis and Oaxaca demonstrate, on the other hand, the pattern of self -reproduction of autocrats , whether due to having fiscal autonomy , as in the first case, or a patrimonial state structure , as in the second . The quantitative analysis (chapter five) covers almost the entire last democratic period in Argentina (1990-2007) and Mexico (2000-2008), two federal countries with sufficient variation in the level of subnational democracy. The results demonstrate the validity of the argument, which can be generalized to all contemporary cases of undemocratic subnational regimes in both countries . This is possible because the author measures the degree of democracy of all subnational units , throughout

each democratic period , and thus avoids the selection bias for positive cases in qualitative analysis . However , in the final chapter she also analyses two negative cases , namely : that is, the discontinuity of undemocratic regimes , returning to Oaxaca and Puebla, but starting in 2009 .Among the contributions of Agustina Giraudy 's book , it is worth highlighting first of all that, unlike other studies, it provides variation in the mechanisms of continuity of undemocratic subnational regimes within the same country . To this end, after a detailed conceptualization and measurement, it incorporates an interesting distinction within undemocratic subnational regimes , according to the patrimonial nature of their state structure and the level of fiscal autonomy with respect to the national government, while in most of the literature they are perceived in a homogeneous manner . These differences between the subunits are what, in turn, allow for different results in the interaction of each governor with the President. Another of its strengths is the explanatory potential beyond federal countries and beyond the partisan link between the President and the governor, since as the former can obtain political benefits from both co -partisan and opposing governors, he will have an interest in co-opting and, in such case, supporting both from above .

However , the book has some weaknesses . While it adds intranational variation to the pathways of continuity of undemocratic subnational regimes, it leaves only one possible path for their breakdown and democratization : the ineffectiveness of presidential power, followed by the inability of autocrats to maintain local elite unity and /or popular support (Giraudi , 2015: 167). This would mean that the breakdown of a subnational regime that is not very democratic is not possible as long as it is an ally of the President. On the other hand, Gibson (2005), in addition to subnational transitions led by the central government , contemplated the possibility of them being led by political parties (linking local civil society with national partisan actors) . In relation to this point , Giraudy assumes that the President , whenever he can prevail over the subnational autocrat, will prefer to ensure his reproduction and obstruct

democratization in order to obtain electoral and legislative benefits. However, it does not contemplate that on certain isolated but relevant occasions, such as the nationalization of local conflicts involving an allied governor, the President will let go of his hand so as not to be affected in the public opinion and may even remove him through a federal intervention, as happened in Santiago del Estero with the Juárez family, in 1993 and 2004, under the presidencies of Menem and Kirchner, respectively (Gibson, 2005). Finally, beyond a careful presentation and integration of the causal mechanisms, these are not too novel: both the fiscal factor, the degree of dominance of the state structure by the allied governor, and the degree of control of the state structure by the allied governor. The role of the governor, as well as his interaction with the President, had already been developed in previous works (Gibson, 2005; Gervasoni, 2010). In particular, the self-reproduction modality of subnational autocrats presents a logic similar to that of “boundary control” developed by Gibson. In these cases, beyond the action of the President, Giraudy argues that governors have little control over the role of the governor.

Democratic governments can ensure their continuity as long as they maintain the unity of the local elite or the support of the masses, returning to an endogenous explanation, focused on the subnational level. However, it is not clear how they manage to maintain this partisan and electoral support or why in some provinces the governors manage to do so for decades, while in others it is impossible for them and alternation predominates. It is reasonable to assume that behind the capacity of the agency (in this case, the governor), there are more structural causes that make possible the existence and continuity of autocrats in certain provinces and not in others. That is to say, although the book is enlightening about the patterns and mechanisms of continuity of undemocratic subnational regimes, it is less precise in defining their origins and their possible breakdown or democratization.

In short, this is an important contribution to the emerging field of studies on subnational democracy, which recovers much of the most solid background in the literature and, through

precise methodological work, both quantitative and qualitative , allows us to explain different patterns of continuity of undemocratic subnational regimes within democratic countries . However , the contribution is not entirely new , both because the argument is not far from previous works , and because the cases of Argentina and Mexico have already been addressed by other authors (Gibson, 2005 ; Gervasoni, 2010; 2011). In this sense, it is a challenge to make the theory travel to other countries, whether federal or decentralized unitary .

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