

Federalized Party Systems and Subnational Party Competition:

Theory and an Empirical Application to Argentina

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In 1949 V.O. Key wrote about the importance of state-level “one-party systems” in the southern United States for organizing local authoritarian rule in a nationally competitive party system.¹ Key’s study documented a phenomenon that continues to pose theoretical puzzles to contemporary scholarship on party systems: the simultaneous existence of competitive party politics and noncompetitive party politics in one national party system. In addition to documenting U.S. party system dynamics at the subnational level that were distinct from those at the national level, Key also uncovered important institutional interactions between noncompetitive state party systems and the competitive national party system.

These findings (and many others that followed about U.S. state party politics) provided significant possibilities for theory building about parties and party systems. However, this theoretical promise was stifled by two subsequent developments in political science. The first was the impermeability of boundaries between American and comparative politics, which relieved Americanist scholars of the burdens of generalization and comparative theory builders of the burden of paying close attention to U.S. evidence. The second was the theoretical development of comparative literatures on party systems, whose most influential scholars overlooked or rejected the incorporation of subnational contexts into their theorizing about party systems. As a result, scholars of American politics developed an extensive empirical literature on

state party politics while comparative theorizing about parties and party systems remained oblivious to the theoretical implications of this trend.

Today there is new interest in how and why the quality of democracy varies across subnational territorial units of countries.² Party system dynamics are a crucial piece of the puzzle. However, the comparative literature on parties and party systems offers few theoretical tools to scholars interested in this topic. This is because in that theoretical tradition party systems are conceived of and measured nationally. Their systemic properties are assessed at the national level, and the indicators used to measure those properties are national (usually votes for national offices or seats in national legislatures). This practice has created a situation of conceptual and measurement incompleteness that hinders new discoveries in the study of party competition across jurisdictional boundaries of the nation-state.

As a corrective to this situation, this article reconceptualizes a party system that incorporates subnational party systems into the conceptual mapping of party politics. A large number of polities with federalized territorial structures possess subnational party systems that contain all the properties normally attributed to systems by social scientists. The party systems in such polities, which we label “federalized party systems,” are characterized by distinctive patterns of party competition for subnational offices, be it for seats in provincial legislatures, control of municipalities, or control of executive positions for states, provinces, or autonomous regions. Party competition for such offices is also governed by constitutional arrangements or laws regulating elections and party competition whose scope is limited to the subnational territorial jurisdiction.

Theorization and measurement of party politics in federalized polities must thus start from a new conceptualization that sees their party systems as composed of both a national party

subsystem and subnational party subsystems.³ Subnational party systems are not only shapers of power in local politics. They also affect key outcomes in national party politics. A complete picture of the structure and dynamics of party competition in federalized polities must distinguish between these separate party subsystems or analyze the variations and interactions between them.

This article develops the federalized party system model, defining federalized party systems as those in which more than one territorially delimited party system operates. It presents a new metric, the “summary measure of congruence,” that measures dispersion in patterns of electoral competition between national and subnational subsystems of a federalized party system. The article then showcases the analytical usefulness of these contributions with an in-depth empirical analysis of one federalized party system, Argentina.

Theoretical Problems in the Study of Subnational Party Systems

The field of U.S. studies has a long tradition of scholarship on state-level party politics. Cross-state comparisons include such classic works as V. O. Key's study of southern political and party systems and Austin Ranney and Willmoore Kendall's study of party competition in several U.S. states.⁴ More recent works also compare contemporary patterns of state party organization,⁵ as well as competition and party leadership behavior across U.S. states.⁶ The bulk of these authors implicitly or explicitly recognize the empirical existence of party systems operating at the state level. However, the theoretical status of such systems remains undeveloped. Their systemic interactions with the national party system are largely unaddressed, and there are no efforts to pose questions about their dynamics within a national party system in ways that would travel beyond the U.S. case.

The comparative politics literature on parties in federal systems offers a far thinner array of studies of subnational party politics, but the patterns in this literature hew closely to those in the U.S. literature. Studies examine within-party dynamics, office seeker strategies, and competitive interactions patterns between parties at the local level. The empirical existence of subnational party systems is similarly recognized, but it is not a focus of theoretical explanation or analysis. Where subnational systems are addressed, the quest tends to be the idiographic explanation of their origins, structure, or dynamics.

Thus, in the American politics and comparative politics literature subnational party systems are recognized as a widespread empirical phenomenon, but this recognition has not been captured in theories of parties and party systems. In fact, the dominant theoretical literatures on party systems tend to treat subnational party systems much like unwelcome members of a club. Their presence is grudgingly recognized, but no efforts are made to integrate them as fully equal

members. The usual treatments are either to ignore them and deny their importance, or to address them inconsistently, acknowledging their existence and affiliation at some moments, but treating them as outsiders at other moments.

Both patterns are present in the party systems literature. Alan Ware is among the most direct. Writing on parties in federal regimes, he states that “in any federal country there may well be significant differences between the policies and interests represented by a party at the national level and those represented at the state level. . . . But that does not mean that we should include patterns of state party systems in our classification of the national party system.”⁷ Ware thus acknowledges the existence of state party systems but refuses to grant them full membership in his classification of party systems. He justifies this subsequently with the assertion that they tend not to matter to the development of national party systems, although he offers no evidence on behalf of this assertion.

Giovanni Sartori, the most influential writer on party systems, handles subnational party systems similarly, with a reluctance to conceive of them as systems proper.⁸ Subnational party systems fit uncomfortably in his theoretical party system scheme. This is reflected in the inconsistent treatment he gives them in the few pages devoted to them in his classic work on parties and party systems.

Sartori’s theoretical dismissal of subnational party systems seems primarily conditioned by a skeptical view of the potential levels of autonomy that can exist between levels of government in federalized systems. Criticizing Key’s characterization of southern polities as “single party” regimes, Sartori warns against assuming equivalence between a subnational state and a national state:

The states of the Union are not sovereign...the single states are granted only a subordinate and limited autonomy. Hence Florida or Louisiana are not states in the sense in which Mexico and Tanzania are such. We encounter, again, the unit jump fallacy: a sub-state, i.e., a member of a federal state, is made equal to a sovereign state.⁹

A state is thus not a “State.” Its limited and subordinate autonomy puts its “boundedness,” its separateness from the national system, into question. One inference Sartori draws from this (and an important basis for his criticism of Key’s use of the “single party” concept for southern states) is that in a nationally democratic country, authoritarianism at the state or provincial level cannot exist. The “limited and subordinate autonomy” of the states in a national system of “constitutional rule that protects the inalienable rights of the citizens” makes such a concept nonsensical, no matter how “disturbing” or “significant” local “deviations from patterns established by the constitution” may be. Therefore, as Sartori writes, “Southern politics has little to do with establishing or disestablishing a democracy.”¹⁰

The logical inference of this view for party systems analysis is that subnational party systems also cannot exist. Sartori defends this in the face of clearly observable contrary patterns in the United States by suggesting that what is at work is a “two tier” party system:

The complication or, better, the complexity of the matter stems from the fact that the United States owe to their federal structure a *two-tier party system*, one state-narrow and one nationwide. It follows from this that each level is of itself incomplete and/or reflective of the other level.¹¹

If the subnational level, as a “tier,” is of itself incomplete or simply reflective of the national level, then by the rules of systems theory it cannot properly be considered a system. However, in a discussion immediately following, Sartori turns to party systems terminology when dealing with U.S. state party politics. He analyzes “state party systems” according to internal competitive dynamics and classifies them according to categories he uses at the national level:

The states of the Union have displayed over the period 1870–1950 two fundamental patterns: (i) two-party competitive (9 states) or cyclically competitive (12 states); (ii) one-party predominant (27 states).¹²

How Sartori reconciles this classificatory exercise with his earlier position about the lack of subsystem autonomy of states in relation to the national level is unclear. It seems that, having warned against “unit-jump fallacies,” Sartori then engages in just such a fallacy. Subnational units are analyzed in terms of systemic properties conceived for the national level. It appears that a state is indeed a “State” after all.

The important point about Sartori’s brief discussion of subnational party politics in federal countries is not that his arguments are invalid. It is that they are inconsistent. And this inconsistency is rooted in the fact that the theoretical apparatus he is working with, one which apprehends the systemic properties of party competition exclusively at the national level, fits poorly with the empirical world he is studying. It is a prominent example of the conceptual incompleteness that is endemic to the party systems literature, and that has hindered theoretical understanding of federalized political systems.¹³

The solution is simple, and utilizes the very tools of systems analysis that underpin the theoretical literature on parties and party systems. It is a reconceptualization of party politics in federalized polities that incorporates subnational party systems into the conceptual mapping of party politics.

A Reconceptualization of Party Systems: The Federalized Party System

The first step in developing this reconceptualization is to clarify our use of the term “system.”

The properties of a system as an analytical tool vary widely across scientific disciplines, reflecting the numerous domains to which the concept has been applied. However, it is possible to provide a relatively precise definition of a system based on a few core properties. Robert Jervis summarizes its defining characteristics: “We are dealing with a system when (a) a set of units or elements is interconnected so that changes in some elements or their relations produce changes in other parts of the system, and (b) the entire system exhibits properties and behaviors that are different from those of the parts.”¹⁴ To these defining properties we can add that a system must possess clear boundaries that permit us to distinguish the system from other entities with which it interacts.¹⁵ Having a clear sense of the system’s boundaries is crucial to assessing changes in its autonomy, or its subsystem autonomy if it operates in the context of a larger system. Subsystem autonomy is a critical variable property that shapes systemic disruption and evolution.

The step from an abstract definition of a system to a concrete definition of a party system is straightforward, and such definitions abound with considerable consistency in the party systems literature. All definitions, with minor modifications, agree that a party system can be seen as patterns of interaction and competition between political parties.¹⁶ The primary units of

the party system are the individual parties, whose identity and dynamics are separate from those of the system as a whole. Sartori writes that “a party system is precisely the system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition,” and notes further that these interactions are “conducive to, and result from, subsystem autonomy.”¹⁷

As demonstrated below, subnational party systems possess these very properties and should be given full membership in the conceptual realm of party systems scholarship. The “federalized party system” concept permits us to do that. In federalized polities, provinces or states possess political systems of their own, with varying degrees of subnational autonomy, political constitutions, and political offices that apply exclusively to subnational jurisdictions. These subnational political systems also possess party systems of their own, with patterns of competition that are unique to them and that are shaped by the local institutional context in which they operate.

The Federalized Party System Defined A federalized party system is one in which more than one territorially delimited party system operates. That is, in addition to the national party system, which is organized for the capture of national offices, a federalized party system contains subnational party systems organized for the capture of subnational offices. Their systemic properties may be congruent or incongruent with the format of the national party system. The federalized party system is displayed schematically in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 here]

The basic properties of a federalized party system are as follows:

1. Its primary internal units are national and subnational party subsystems.
2. The component parts of national or subnational party systems are political parties, and the boundaries are provided by the pattern of interaction between them.
3. National and subnational party systems operate within political systems that are distinct to each territorial level. A necessary condition for the existence of a subnational party system is the existence of local offices or legislative seats that are objects of competition between political parties. In addition, such competition is governed by local constitutions and/or electoral laws that are specific to the subnational jurisdiction. The degree to which local authorities can independently write local electoral laws is an important indicator of subsystem autonomy.
4. An individual party can (and often does) operate simultaneously in more than one party system. It can thus be a component part of separate and distinct patterns of interaction at the same moment in time.
5. Patterns of interaction between national and subnational party systems are conditioned by the specific institutional, material, and immaterial linkages between them. Individual political parties are the main institutional linkages between the national and subnational party subsystems. Other possible linkages would include communication flows, resource flows, coalitions, and government institutions with jurisdiction over multiple territorial arenas.
6. Transformations of subnational party systems follow a) changes endogenous to their own political system, and b) interaction with other party systems. Endogenous changes would generally involve (i) the electoral system, and (ii) the constitutional structure; exogenous changes would be conditioned by (iii) the degree of subsystem autonomy.¹⁸

A Measure of Party Competition in Federalized Party Systems

One significant challenge to the study of federalized party systems is capturing and summarizing the variations in party competition between national and subnational party subsystems. To illustrate, Figure 2 presents visual displays of patterns of competition in Argentina, a party system that possess the properties we have attributed to federalized party systems. These are snapshot representations of “congruence” or “incongruence” in party competition between national and subnational party systems as measured by the effective number of parties competing for offices at each jurisdictional level in a particular year. We use the Laakso-Taagepera index for measuring the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) in a party system.¹⁹ The elections being compared are for the presidency and provincial governorships. Our focus on executive elections allows us to keep the district size constant and therefore to control for the effects of district magnitude on the number of parties.²⁰

[Figure 2 here]

The figures show that subnational party politics display congruent patterns of competition in some periods and incongruent patterns in others. Argentina thus displays important variations in the congruence of party competition patterns across jurisdictional levels. However, the effective number of parties competing for executive offices was especially varied in 1999, 2003 and 2007, both between provinces and in relation to the national party system.

The “summary measure of congruence” captures the average differences in effective numbers of parties between the national and subnational systems, as well as the variance between the subnational party systems themselves. Coefficients for each of these are displayed in

Table 1. The summary measure apprehends levels of congruence (closer to zero) and incongruence (far from zero).²¹

[Table 1 here]

The data reveal that the trend over time in Argentina's federalized party system has been a growing level of incongruence. The system was fairly congruent and stable in the first decade after the 1983 national transition to democracy. However, our measurement shows a marked shift toward incongruence in 1999. This was due primarily to changes at the provincial level, since, as can be seen in Figure 1, the effective number of parties in the 1999 presidential election was fairly similar to those of the preceding contests. The trend toward incongruence intensified in 2003, and while much of this was due to greater variance between provinces, it was compounded by changes in national party competition. High levels of incongruence in Argentina's federalized party system continued into 2007.

In addition, our measures reveal that the evolution of Argentina's federalized party system toward incongruence was taking place as early as 1999. That the shifts at this time were being driven by subnational party system changes could not have been visible by observation and measure of the national party system alone. The reconceptualizations and measures we provide thus permit us to apprehend key transformations within party systems that would go unnoticed by those employing the national-centric measures that have dominated the comparative study of party systems and party system nationalization.

As demonstrated below, the rising levels of incongruence after this period resulted from action by local incumbents and party leaders taking advantage of the subsystemic autonomy of

provincial political systems, to insulate their provinces from national competitive pressures. In selected provinces these actions resulted in shifts from competitive party politics to noncompetitive party politics. The case studies presented here reveal key mechanisms driving this phenomenon, as well as system-wide consequences.

Subnational Party Systems in Argentina: Dynamics of Power and Change

Argentina is a federal republic, with a presidential executive and a bicameral national legislature. The country's twenty-four provincial districts enjoy considerable formal political autonomy. Each province elects its national legislators by popular vote and is governed by its own constitution, drafted by local constituent assemblies. All provinces elect governors and provincial legislators by popular vote. The similarities end there, however. Argentina is a mosaic of distinctive provincial political regimes. The structure, size, and powers of provincial legislative branches vary considerably. Eight provinces have bicameral legislatures, while the other sixteen provinces have unicameral legislatures. Furthermore, each province is responsible for designing the electoral laws and districting arrangements that govern the election of representatives to provincial legislatures. This variability of electoral systems is made all the more complex by a wave of provincial electoral reforms that began shortly after the return to democratic rule in 1983 and has continued to this day. In general terms, these alterations sought to change the nature of gubernatorial mandates by getting rid of term limits and allowing indefinite reelection, and to build in marked majoritarian and partisan biases in the electoral rules in order to magnify incumbent party advantage.²²

While the constitution grants Argentine provinces considerable subsystem autonomy in the country's federal system, it also gives the federal government a powerful instrument for

disrupting that autonomy on an ad hoc basis. Article Six of the constitution grants the central government powers of “federal intervention” that allow it to remove provincial authorities from office in the event of local political or military crises that threaten “the republican form of government.” The power of federal intervention in Argentina is thus an institutional variable that can affect the systemic autonomy of subnational party systems during the course of interactions between units of the federalized party system.

In the Argentine federal system, provincial politics is a major power base for national politicians.²³ Control over the provincial polity determines which politicians become influential within the national party, and grants membership in the gubernatorial coalitions that make or break presidential contenders. Until the 2007 elections, every president since 1989 (who served more than two days in office) has been a former governor or subnational chief executive.

Subnational Elections in Argentina: Comparing Gubernatorial Elections with Provincial Legislative Elections Assessing the competitive state of subnational party politics in Argentina requires a deeper probe into the federalized party system. The frequency distributions for the twenty-year period provided in Table 2 contrast party dominance in gubernatorial races with party control of provincial legislative seats. They reveal interesting trends over time.

Gubernatorial elections are often observed to gauge local competitive patterns, and the data in Table 2 present a mixed view. Over this period Argentina’s federalized party system was characterized mostly by competitive subnational party systems. On average, 84 percent of gubernatorial races were won with a small majority or plurality going to the first place party, even though there has been a slight but clearly declining trend, from a high of 92 percent in 1983 to a low of 78 percent in 2007. However, the trend has also been toward a greater number of

provinces with noncompetitive gubernatorial races. In 2007 22 percent of gubernatorial races (six in total) were won with 60 percent or more of the vote.²⁴

Competitions for control of subnational legislatures have been considerably less competitive than gubernatorial races. In 2003 one-third of the country's provincial legislatures were controlled by a party with over 60 percent of the seats. This figure increased to 37 percent in 2007. Another interesting contrast can be seen at the lower ends of the vote/seat percentage range. In 2003 56 percent of provinces elected their governors with 50 percent of the vote or less. In 2007 61 percent did so. However, in only 21 percent of provinces the governor's party controlled less than 50 percent of the vote in 2003 and 2007, and these percentages have hovered at those levels (or below) since 1987. Clearly, then, the relatively competitive picture afforded by gubernatorial electoral results is tempered by observation of party control of subnational legislative institutions.

The trends since the late 1980s indicate a steady increase in the percentage of provinces in which the incumbent party has won a supermajority of legislative seats. In 1987 the figure was 20 percent; in 2007 it was 37 percent.

[Table 2 here]

The data reveal a varied competitive pattern of subnational party politics in Argentina. In some cases provincial politics mirror national competitive trends. In others they clearly do not. Several provincial party systems are competitive and even fragmented. On the other hand, a significant number of provincial party systems present profiles that raise questions about their competitiveness, with some showing evidence of domination by a hegemonic provincial party.

Whether these patterns reflect actual restrictions on competition at the subnational level can only be determined through close observation of specific cases. Furthermore, any claim about the existence of subnational hegemonic party politics is a statement not only about structure and outcomes but also of intent. In Sartori's classification the key difference between a competitive party system and a hegemonic party system is one of design. In the latter systems electoral and political institutions that govern party interaction are intended by their designers to ensure the victory of the hegemonic party.²⁵ This intent can only be ascertained by observing the actors and processes that put those institutions in place. Therefore, this study turns from quantitative electoral indicators to a qualitative analysis of actors and institutional characteristics of selected cases and from static comparisons of multiple cases to longitudinal analyses of the selected cases.

The case studies are the southern province of Santa Cruz and the northwestern province of Catamarca. Following a trend repeated in a large number of provinces, party system dynamics in Santa Cruz and Catamarca were altered substantially in the twenty three years since the national transition to democracy. Between 1983 and 2003 Santa Cruz evolved from a subnational competitive system to a hegemonic party system. Catamarca did the same between 1983 and 1990 but reverted to competitive party politics after 1991. Thus they are highly useful cases to examine the processes of transformation of subnational party systems. In tracing the oscillation between situations of party competition and party hegemony, they also reveal much about general processes of transformation of subnational party competition in federalized party systems.

Case Studies of Subnational Party System Transformation: From Competitive to Hegemonic Systems (and Back)

Constructing a Hegemonic Party System: Santa Cruz In the years following the 1983 democratic transition in Argentina, the province of Santa Cruz possessed a competitive party system, and the first series of provincial elections showed the governing Peronist Party (*Partido Justicialista*, PJ) and the opposition Radical Party (*Unión Cívica Radical*, UCR) to be evenly matched. Furthermore, a proportional representation electoral system, applied to a single district (the province), generated a proportional allocation of seats in the unicameral provincial legislature.

In 1983 the Peronist Party controlled the governorship and a 54 percent majority in the legislature. In 1985 the national Radical Party swept the national legislative midterm elections. The effects of the national elections spilled into the provincial arena, and the Peronist Party lost its local legislative majority. It maintained a razor-thin advantage thanks to the vice governor's power to cast tie-breaking votes in the legislature. Yet another evenly matched contest between the two parties took place in the 1987 provincial elections. The PJ won the governorship by an extremely slim margin (723 votes). In the legislature the parties were tied, with twelve seats controlled by each political party.

The ongoing UCR challenge was not the only problem threatening the governing party's slim hold on the provincial political system. The national Peronist Party was being torn apart by internal factional conflict. This struggle was reproduced in varying degrees (and with varying ideological manifestations) in many provinces, including Santa Cruz. Local party leaders came upon an institutional solution to this problem, a solution that would not only help them deal with

internal factionalism but would also eventually allow them to break the electoral impasse with the Radical Party and build a Peronist majority in subsequent elections.

Santa Cruz Peronists borrowed from the strategic playbook of Peronists from another provincial party system facing similar challenges. In the western province of San Luis local Peronists had experimented successfully in 1986 with an electoral system known as *ley de lemas* (apparentement), in which primaries and the general election are folded into one event.²⁶ Party factions present candidates as factions (*sublemas*) to the electorate in the general election. The party (*lema*) that wins the election is the party whose factions cumulatively gather the most votes. The candidate from the first place faction of the winning party wins the seat or office. Emulating their counterparts in San Luis Province, Santa Cruz Peronists adopted the ley de lemas system for their party in 1989 legislative elections.

The ley de lemas system succeeded in keeping the PJ together and helped generate Peronist electoral majorities in the elections of 1989, 1991, and 1993, when party factions could not agree on unified candidacies. The party discontinued the ley de lemas system in 1995. By then it had become unified internally under the leadership of Néstor Kirchner, who in 1991 won the provincial governorship.

In 1994 Governor Kirchner availed himself of the Peronist legislative majority to enact a constitutional reform that permitted the reelection of the governor for two consecutive terms and introduced new gubernatorial powers to invoke plebiscites and referenda. Kirchner subsequently won reelection in 1995, and the PJ held onto its legislative majority. However, a continuing challenge for the Peronist party was the competitive nature of urban politics in the province. The Radical Party won control of the provincial capital city in 1989, and over the years continued to consolidate its electoral strength in other urban municipalities as well.

As Governor Kirchner's second term in office approached its conclusion in 1998, he pushed for a second constitutional reform. Invoking his new plebiscitary powers, he organized a referendum to approve amendment of the provincial constitution. The "yes" position won with 57 percent of the vote, and led to the enactment of the 1999 provincial constitution.²⁷

Under the new constitution, which stands unmodified to this day, the governor is entitled to run for reelection without term limits. The electoral system for provincial deputies has also been changed, which has dealt effectively with the challenge by urban-based opposition parties. The legislature is now elected under a mixed-member electoral system. Ten members are elected in a province-wide single district by a proportional representation formula (as before). The other fourteen are elected in single-member districts that represent each provincial department. One result of this combination of electoral rules is a majoritarian bias in the system.²⁸ However, more significant was the introduction of a marked partisan bias that favored the Peronist Party. The division of the province into fourteen districts generated a malapportionment of seats that overrepresented rural areas (PJ bastions) and underrepresented urban areas. As a result, Santa Cruz is today the most malapportioned province in Argentina.²⁹ Twenty-eight percent of the population elects a majority in the legislature.

[Figure 3 here]

Figure 3 shows the evolution of party control of the legislature between 1983 and 2007. Since the 1999 constitutional reform, the legislature has been overwhelmingly controlled by the Peronist Party. The numbers also show the partisan bias the constitutional reforms introduced into the electoral system. In 1999, with less than 45 percent of the votes, the party gained 66

percent of the seats, increasing its vote-seat premium by a factor of eight over 1997. In 2003 it won a spectacular 92 percent of seats in the legislature, with 66 percent of votes cast for that body. In 2007 the pattern continued. With 61 percent of the votes the party captured 84 percent of the seats.

During the late 1990s, consolidation of local Peronist control was given a boost by the rising fortunes of the province's governor in the national Peronist Party, which only increased the autonomy of local power holders from outside influences. Néstor Kirchner was an important player in the network of governors that dominated presidential politics, and in 2003 he won the presidency. In that year, the Peronist party in Santa Cruz won the governorship for the sixth consecutive time since 1983, with 62 percent of the vote. As the President-elect prepared to leave Santa Cruz to assume his new duties, he reportedly left his gubernatorial successor with this parting message: "I am not giving you the province; I am lending it to you."³⁰

Constructing and Dismantling a Hegemonic Party System: Catamarca The northwestern province of Catamarca, like many other provinces in the northern Argentine interior, has been historically associated in the public mind with patrimonial rule, authoritarianism, and economic backwardness. For decades it was ruled by the Saadi family clan, whose power resided in its control over the provincial Peronist Party, a party that held every governorship during periods of elected government since the late 1940s. This control over provincial political life had permitted the crafting of a provincial political system whose electoral system, distribution of patronage resources, and political dependence of the provincial judiciary had made it difficult over the decades for opposition parties to challenge the Peronist Party's control over the provincial polity.

In 1983, however, events in the national political system put pressure on the provincial electoral status quo. The end of the seven-year military regime and a national presidential victory by the Radical Party helped the provincial Radical Party mount a major electoral challenge. The PJ won the governorship, but with a 39 percent plurality—only 3 percentage points more than the UCR's vote total. In legislative races the disparities were similar. The Peronist Party received 41 percent of the vote, against 37 percent for the Radical Party. However, the design of provincial electoral institutions cushioned the election's effects on the Peronist Party. Thanks to a supermajoritarian bias built into the electoral system, the Peronist Party received 60 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies.³¹ In addition, the provincial senate greatly overrepresented underpopulated rural areas that served as Peronist electoral bastions. The provincial senate was composed of one senator from each of the sixteen provincial departments and the elections were decided by plurality. In 1983 the Peronist party captured 63 percent of senate seats with 49 percent of the popular vote.

Radical Party advances continued through the 1985 legislative elections, but an opportunity for local Peronists to deal institutionally with competitive pressures came with the 1987 provincial elections. Peronists around the country scored electoral comebacks against the Radical Party, and in Catamarca they won the governorship, expanded their majority in the Chamber of Deputies, and held onto a two-thirds majority in the provincial senate. Taking advantage of this turn of events, the Peronist leadership launched a constitutional reform aimed at enhancing gubernatorial incumbency advantages and reforming the electoral system. However, the PJ did not have the required supermajority in the lower chamber to call for a constitutional convention. In a dizzying series of maneuvers that ultimately led the Radicals to abstain in protest from elections to a constitutional convention, the PJ managed not only to pass the law mandating the constitutional reform but also to control 100 percent of seats at the convention charged with drafting the new constitution.³²

Holding a monopoly at the convention, the PJ was able to obtain the indefinite reelection of the governor. The constitutional reform also increased the number of deputies in the lower house, and the convention members charged the provincial legislature with designing a proportional representation method for electing these deputies after the constitutional convention. The design was breathtakingly Machiavellian. The Peronist-controlled legislature produced a proportional representation system for the distribution of minority party seats, but retained the supermajoritarian prize of 60 percent of the seats for the first place party. In this way opposition parties were dealt a double blow. The supermajoritarian bias of the previous system was retained, favoring the first place party. And the new proportional representation distribution formula for minority parties further divided potential opposition challenges to the Peronist

party.³³ The 1989 midterm elections gave 64 percent of lower chamber seats (with 51 percent of the popular vote) and 88 percent of senate seats to the PJ.

The year 1989 was clearly the apogee of the Saadi clan's dominance, via the Peronist Party, of Catamarcan politics. Their control of the province was remarkable, even by the political standards governing provincial politics in the northern and western regions of the country at the time. The Saadi-influenced Peronist Party was buttressed also by vast patronage resources and a political machine that controlled the countryside, the provincial police, and the local judiciary. Furthermore, the Saadi family successfully managed to keep the party unified in their province despite divisions in the national party and many of the provincial parties.

This period of hegemony would not last, however. It would be ended by a convergence of national and provincial developments. The first was an intra-Peronist factional struggle—not within the provincial Peronist Party, but between the national Peronist Party and leaders of the provincial party. The Saadi family members were long-time rivals of the recently elected President Carlos Saúl Menem, the former governor and patriarch of neighboring La Rioja province. The President's opportunity to strike against his local rivals came in 1990, when a political scandal shook the provincial political establishment. The sons of influential families were implicated in a grisly and complex case involving the rape and murder of a young girl. In the face of local judicial inaction, provincial civil society reacted fiercely, organizing mass demonstrations that drew national attention. Seizing the opportunity created by the local crisis, the central government used its legal powers to break the autonomy of the provincial political system and ordered a federal takeover of all branches of the provincial government.

The federal intervention in Catamarca dismantled the institutional arrangements that gave the Saadi family control over the provincial political system. National authorities repealed the

institutional rules that secured supermajoritarian control of the legislature. They also changed the electoral system for provincial deputies to a real proportional representation system to ensure a fairer allocation of seats between parties. In addition, federal officials decreed the expiration of all elective and judicial mandates, as well as the reform of the provincial administration and the police force that had buttressed the Saadi family's power.³⁴

Figure 4 shows the impact of the federal intervention's reforms on competitive dynamics in Catamarca. A competitive party system has resulted from the abrupt loss of subsystem autonomy suffered by the provincial party system. Since 1991 the province has been governed by a front composed of the UCR, an anti-Saadi Peronist Party faction, and other forces. They have not changed the electoral system or reformed the provincial constitution.

[Figure 4 here]

These Argentine provincial case studies establish that, against the assumptions of party systems theorists, noncompetitive party subsystems can exist alongside competitive national and subnational party subsystems. They also highlight this as one notable feature of Argentina's federalized party system. Furthermore, the case studies reveal that the competitive dynamics of such systems can change, and that change is driven both by endogenous dynamics and interaction with other units of the federalized party system. This analysis shows that the three components of our modified version of Sartori's transformation rules for party systems gave considerable analytical leverage for fleshing out these dynamics of change. Changes in provincial constitutional structure and electoral systems by local power holders shifted the

competitive dynamics of subnational party systems. The degree of subsystem autonomy of the provincial party system helped shape the permanence or discontinuity of these shifts.

Conclusion

“Hegemony is incubated from below”

Natalio Botana³⁵

Theory has been slow in catching up to mounting evidence that subnational party systems are important to power and competition in federalized polities. Such polities have long been ill-served by whole-nation biases in the party systems literature that conceive and measure party systems in national terms, and that erase subnational party systems from the conceptual mapping of party politics.

Reconceptualizing party systems in federalized polities makes the theoretical and comparative analysis of subnational party politics possible using analytical tools of the literature on parties and party systems. The concept of federalized party system denotes one in which more than one territorially delimited party system operates. In addition to the national party system, which is organized for the capture of national offices, a federalized party system contains subnational party systems organized for the capture of subnational offices. A full understanding of party competition in federalized party systems thus requires consideration of these separate party subsystems, as well as the interactions between them.

Potentially varied competitive scenarios in federalized polities when subnational party systems are accounted for can be measured to indicate those patterns and to enhance cross-national comparison. The case of Argentina provides a closer look at the structure of a federalized party system, its systemic dynamics, and patterns of change. It also suggests that the

study of subnational party systems is relevant not only for learning about subnational politics but also for understanding important outcomes in national party systems.

The reason for this is system effects. In Argentina success in provincial party politics helped launch the governor of a remote and small province to the national presidency. Control of a polity of 200,000 people and an infinitesimal share of the national GDP would not by themselves have made such an outcome likely. Governor Kirchner's national success was due to the system effects of the federalized polity, which magnified his influence and projected him onto the national stage. The same can be said for recent predecessors from small provinces—Carlos Saúl Menem (ex-governor of La Rioja province), who served as President from 1989 to 1999; and Adolfo Rodríguez Súa (ex-governor of San Luis province), who served briefly as president in early 2002.³⁶ Such is the case in many federalized polities, where system effects make subnational party systems forgers of national leaders and shapers of power in national party systems. This makes the study of subnational party politics all the more pressing as we seek to understand the dynamics and quality of democratic politics in federalized polities.

Writing about the current empirical universe of party systems and its implications for future research, Peter Mair noted a narrowing of competitive scenarios and their clustering around a particular pattern. He wrote that, in an era in which “two-party systems in a strict sense are hard to find, and if examples of polarized pluralism are also thin on the ground, then, perforce, most systems tend to crowd into the category of moderate pluralism.”³⁷ If we expand our conceptual lens to the subnational level, however, this assessment no longer holds true. A far wider array of competitive scenarios becomes available for analysis, and our understanding of party systems and politics in democratic regimes becomes greatly enriched. This article identifies one scenario, the subnational hegemonic party, a finding that suggests that the long moribund

field of study of hegemonic party systems is more relevant to the study of contemporary democratic politics in many countries than national-centric approaches would reveal. New light on other phenomena, such the anti-system effects of regional parties, ecological determinants of party alignments, or the coexistence of polarized and moderate competitive patterns within federalized polities, may also lead scholars to reconsider how party systems are structured and changed over time. Subnational party systems have long been condemned to obscurity and isolation by the theoretical approaches of our discipline. Revising those approaches offers promising possibilities for uncovering new and complex institutional realities in contemporary party politics.

NOTES

1. V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1949).
2. See, among others, Richard Snyder, *Politics after Neoliberalism: Reregulation in Mexico* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); David Samuels, *Ambition, Federalism, and Legislative Politics in Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Richard Snyder and David Samuels, "Legislative Malapportionment in Latin America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives," in Edward L. Gibson, ed., *Federalism and Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Jonathan Fox, "Latin

America's Emerging Local Politics," *Journal of Democracy*, 5 (April 1994), 105–16; Edward L. Gibson, "Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries," *World Politics*, 58 (October 2005), 101–32; R. Mickey, "Paths Out of Dixie: The Decay of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944–1972" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2005); Kelly McMann, *Economic Autonomy and Democracy: Hybrid Regimes in Russia and Kyrgyzstan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

3. In systems theory "sub-systems" are the analytical equivalent of "systems," except that they are units of a larger system and thus interact with the other units (subsystems) of the larger system.

4. Austin Ranney and Willmoore Kendall, *Democracy and the American Party System* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1956).

5. David R. Mayhew, *Placing Parties in American Politics: Organization, Electoral Settings, and Government Activity in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

6. Joseph A. Schlesinger, *Political Parties and the Winning of Office* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

7. Alan Ware, *Political Parties and Party Systems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 183.

8. Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

9. *Ibid.*, 83.

10. *Ibid.*, 83.

11. *Ibid.*, 83.

12. *Ibid.*, 84–85.

13. This tendency has naturally spilled into the realms of operationalization and measurement. For instance, in assessing how “nationalized” or “localized” a party system is, different authors measure the extent to which patterns of party competition spread uniformly across national territory. See, among others, E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1960); Mark Jones and Scott Mainwaring, “The Nationalization of Parties and Party Systems: An Empirical Measure and an Application to the Americas,” *Party Politics*, 9 (March 2003), 139–66; Daniele Caramani, *The Nationalization of Politics: The Formation of National Electorates and Party Systems in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Pradeep Chhibber and Ken Kollman, *The Formation of National Party Systems: Federalism and Party Competition in Canada, Great Britain, India, and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). The problem is that all measures used in these studies are based on competition for national offices or seats. The one important exception is Lori Thorlakson, who incorporates subnational electoral results along with national results in her measures of party and party system integration across jurisdictions. However, the scope of our article differs theoretically from Thorlakson’s, in its development of the systemic dynamics of federalized party systems, and in measurement, in that it captures these dynamics in our summary measure of congruence between national and subnational party systems. Thorlakson, “An Institutional Explanation of Party System Congruence: Evidence from Six Federations,” *European Journal of Political Research*, 46 (January 2007), 69–95.
14. Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 6.
15. See David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (London: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 62.

16. See, for example, Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 51; and Ware, *Political Parties*, 7.

17. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, 44–45.

18. This follows Sartori's transformation rules for party systems (Ibid., 291), with a modification in item (iii), which in Sartori's words reads as "the degree of international autonomy." Our modification adjusts for Sartori's national bias without violating to the spirit of the condition.

19. The formula for the ENEP is $(\sum v_i^2)^{-1}$ where v_i stands for the quotient of votes of each party in a certain district. Markku Laakso and Rein Taagepera, "The Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe," *Comparative Political Studies*, 12 (April 1979), 3–27.

20. See Rein Taagepera and Matthew Shugart, "Predicting the Number of Parties: A Quantitative Model of Duverger's Mechanical Effect," *American Political Science Review*, 87 (June 1993), 455–64.

21. We develop a measure of mean squared divergence (MSD). The formula is $MSD = [1/N * \sum (s_i - n)^2 + 1/(N-1) * \sum [(s_i - \text{average}(s))^2]$; where s_i stands for the effective number of parties in each of the subnational party systems, n for the effective number of parties at the national party systems, and N for the total number of subnational party systems in each case. Our measure thus captures the interactive dynamics within and between party systems at both jurisdictional levels. In Thorlakson's case, the measure of congruence of effective number of parties is calculated as the standard deviations of effective number of parties across all jurisdictional levels, without differentiating whether these are national or subnational (Thorlakson, "Party System Congruence," 78).

22. Ernesto Calvo and Juan Pablo Micozzi, “The Governor’s Backyard: A Seat-Vote Model of Electoral Reform for Subnational Multi-Party Races,” *The Journal of Politics*, 67 (November 2005), 1050–74.

23. For an analysis of the power of provincial party bosses in Argentina, see Mark Jones and Wonjae Hwang, “Provincial Party Bosses: Keystone of the Argentine Congress,” in Steven Levitsky and María Victoria Murillo, eds., *Argentine Democracy: The Politics of Institutional Weakness* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2005).

24. In four of these provinces the vote totals gathered by the first place party exceeded 76 percent. Furthermore, 63 percent of Argentina’s provinces between 1983 and 2007 experienced one or no turnovers in gubernatorial elections. Figures calculated from the Ministry of the Interior.

25. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, 230–33. However, we are running afoul of Sartori’s theoretical view of such systems, which by definition and logic must be national in scope.

26. Julieta Suarez-Cao, “Arquitectura del legislativo provincial: los casos de San Luis y Tucumán,” paper presented at the XXIII International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington, DC, September 6–8, 2001.

27. Flavio Fuertes, “Ni mayoritario ni proporcional: nuevos sistemas electorales, los casos de Santa Cruz, Río Negro y Santiago del Estero,” paper presented at the XXIII International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington, DC, September 6–8, 2001, 39.

28. The way in which the majoritarian bias was strengthened is twofold: by adding these plurality-elected deputies in single member districts and by reducing the district magnitude from twenty-four to ten in the single district.

29. Based on calculations using the Loosemore and Hanby Index of malapportionment, as developed by Snyder and Samuels.

30. *La Nación*, September 9, 2004.

31. The Chamber of Deputies was composed of thirty-three members elected in a single district with an electoral system that provided 60 percent of the seats to the party with most votes and 40 percent to the second place party.

32. The electoral system for the constitutional convention was extremely complicated and explicitly designed to prejudice opposition parties. See Leandro Carrera, “Procesos de reforma electoral en las provincias de Catamarca y Jujuy: 1983–1999,” paper presented at the XXIII International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington, DC, September 6–8, 2001.

33. The system’s details laid bare its anti-opposition party biases. For parties surpassing the 3 percent threshold, the conversion of seats into votes was 60 percent to the first place party, and 40 percent divided as follows: five to the second party, three to the third, and one to fourth.

34. Carrera, “Procesos de reforma,” 5.

35. *La Nación*, May 4, 2006.

36. The three individuals were also the main contenders in the 2003 presidential elections, which Kirchner won.

37. Mair, *Party System Change*, 205–06.