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### Conceptualizing and Measuring Subnational Regimes

An Expert Survey Approach

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# **Conceptualizing and Measuring Subnational Regimes: An Expert Survey Approach**

## **Abstract**

This paper presents a conceptualization and operationalization of the degree of democracy (as opposed to the quality of democracy) in the Argentine provinces. I use a mainstream and “thick” definition of regime type, and posit that the least democratic subnational units in Argentina and other third-wave federations are better understood as hybrid regimes rather than “subnational authoritarianisms.” I discuss the implications of this conceptualization for measurement, develop a full operationalization of the concept, and present the methodological design of a survey of experts that serves as the measurement instrument. Preliminary results are presented as an illustration of the type of information that will be available once the survey is complete. Some dimensions of democracy –such as inclusion and fair counting of the votes– show little inter-provincial variance, while others –such as freedom of expression and institutional constraints on the executive– vary considerably from province to province.

Issues of conceptualization and measurement have been only lightly addressed by the recent literature on subnational regimes. Several works have highlighted the existence and analyzed the nature of “subnational authoritarianisms” in the context of national democracies, but it is often unclear what conceptual definition is used to describe these regimes as authoritarian and what operational definition is used to determine whether a given province or region is authoritarian or democratic. This paper presents the methodology (and preliminary results) of an original expert-based operationalization strategy applied to all of Argentina’s 24 subnational units for the period 2003-2007. I make three important operationalization decisions: First, at the level of conceptualization I draw upon a standard Linzean framework and the recent literature on intermediate regime types to arrive at an understanding of the least democratic regimes as “hybrid” rather than “authoritarian.” Second, in terms of measurement strategy, I decide in favor of subjective or perception-based indicators on the grounds that they are better suited to capture the subtle ways in which democracy is restricted in hybrid regimes. The perceptions that are used as the basis of measurement are those of experts on the politics on each of the provinces. Third, I explicitly address reliability issues by relying on the judgments of more than one expert per province, which allows me to assess inter-expert reliability and eventually to improve it by increasing the number of experts in those provinces with low scores.

This operationalization strategy has the following advantages: 1) it starts with an explicit and clear understanding of the concept to be measured, 2) it identifies in detail dimensions, subdimensions, components and subcomponent of this definition, 3) it develops specific indicators for each subcomponent, 4) it measures each indicator several times (by consulting more than one expert per province), 5) it assesses the uncertainty of the descriptive inferences (King, Keohane and Verba 1994), 6) and it makes the procedures public by clearly describing each of the methodological decisions made. As a result, any researcher can replicate my study in Argentina or, with little adaptation to local political contexts, in any other nation with elected and reasonably autonomous subnational governments.

## **I. The Study of Subnational Regimes**

Three decades into Huntington’s “third wave,” it is clear that the extent to which citizens of many federal democracies enjoy the benefits of political freedom varies widely, not only across socioeconomic levels and ethnic lines, but also across subnational borders. From Argentina to Brazil to India to Russia, national electoral democracies include very imperfectly democratic subnational regimes along with more democratic ones.

In his classic *Polyarchy*, Robert Dahl stressed that “even within a country, subnational units often vary in the opportunities they provide for contestation and participation” (1971, 14). He recognized that not dealing with this issue was a “grave omission” of his book. Thirty-five years later, the matter remains very much understudied. Some recent attempts to measure democracy at the national level explicitly indicate that they fail to incorporate information about subnational regimes (cf. Foweraker and Krznaric 2001, 18). For the particular case of Latin America, Guillermo O’Donnell has called attention to the matter, wondering “how one conceptualizes a polyarchical regime that may contain regional regimes that are not at all polyarchical” and pointing to “abundant journalistic information and reports of human rights

organizations, that some of these regions function in a less than polyarchical way” (O’Donnell 1999b, 315). Although there are a few recent academic case studies of subnational authoritarianisms (Cornelius 1999; Snyder 1999; Gibson 2005), they often do not provide clear definitions or operationalizations of the *degree of subnational democracy*. The only studies I am aware of which define and measure democracy systematically in all the subnational units of a country are those conducted by Kim Quaile Hill (1994) for the US and McMann (2006) for Kyrgyzstan and a large subset of the subnational units of Russia (McMann and Petrov 2000).

## II. The Background Concept: Democracy

Following Adcock and Collier (2001) in this and the next two sections I review the first three levels in the definition and measurement of concepts: the background concept, the systematized concept, and the indicators. The fourth and last level, the scoring of the cases, is explained in section VI, where the expert survey methodology is presented.

Few concepts have been more “essentially contested” than democracy. In the second half of the twentieth century the word became so prestigious and legitimizing that all types of political philosophies and political regimes tried to appropriate it. One or another “model of democracy” has been advocated by both a long tradition of liberal thought, from Locke, Montesquieu and Madison to Hayek and Nozick, and by a more recent socialist school, from Marx to Poulantzas and Macpherson (Held 1987). Likewise, both capitalistic countries with multiparty elections and communist nations with single or hegemonic parties have claimed to embody the principles of democracy.

In both intellectual circles and popular discussions democracy is associated with many different values, from political equality to economic equality, from political freedoms to civil rights, and from popular participation to human development. Katz (1997) argues that there are four main conceptions of democracy according to the value that they prioritize: popular rule, prevention of tyranny, human development, and political community. He stresses that these values are not always compatible, so that often one can be maximized only at the expense of another. Classic illustrations of these democratic dilemmas are the tension between the principles of majority rule and minority rights, or the difficult coexistence of a state that equalizes economic conditions with a state that respects individual rights.

In deciding what is the most appropriate meaning of a word (and in deriving a clear systematized concept from the noisy background) I argue that the following two guidelines should be paramount: 1) taking into account its etymological meaning and, 2) considering the sense in which the word is generally used (or at least one of the senses in which it is used, if many exist) in influential social sectors outside the academia (for example in the realm of practical politics, the media, etc.). These criteria can of course be disputed, but they are the ones I choose to follow here (and they are also explicitly or implicitly followed by most social science definitions).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Schaffer (2005) notices that political scientists tend to frequently use ordinary words with meanings very close to their ordinary meanings. His paper is titled “Why Don’t Political Scientists Coin More New Terms?”

Following these guidelines, democracy emerges as a property of governments or political regimes. The concept was originally conceived, more than 25 centuries ago, as a type of *kratos*, or rule, and still today most citizens, politicians and academics think of democracy as a characteristic of governments or regimes (as opposed to the society or the economy). The types of *kratos* that can be characterized as democratic are those based on the *demos*, the people. In effect, the Greek used the word to describe a type of rule in which the people, as they understood it, participated in the government of the *polis*. The current use of the word also reflects this original meaning: democracy is mostly thought as a system in which legitimate rule emerges from the people and in which political power is exercised directly by the people or, more frequently, by representatives elected by the people.

In its travel from ancient Athens to the modern world, democracy picked up two important meanings. The first one, originating in its marriage with liberal ideas, was freedom. The second one, emerging from the impossibility of applying direct Athenian democracy to large states, was representation (or the formation of government through the popular election of representatives). Therefore, in this paper I understand democracy, broadly speaking, not just as the rule of the people, but as a political regime in which rulers are periodically elected by the people and, once in office, exercise power in a limited way, respecting liberal political and civil rights and freedoms. This conceptualization follows the rule of avoiding maximalist and minimalist definitions (Munck and Verkuilen 2002, 9-12): it does not include attributes beyond a strictly political concept of democracy but, like other political definitions, does not leave out any of its critical attributes either. Schumpeter (1975 [1942]) and Alvarez et al. (1996), for example, also propose strictly political definitions, but they concentrate only on electoral contestation, disregarding the liberal dimension.

This is, I argue, a meaning of the word democracy that is both faithful to its Greek etymology and to the most common use of the word in mainstream media, policy and academic circles. In these circles governments are called non-democratic when they do not conduct elections (or conduct blatantly rigged ones) or when, even if popularly elected, use their power to kill, torture, censor, exile or arbitrarily incarcerate citizens.

### **II.a. Degree or Quality of Democracy?**

One increasingly popular “background concept” among the same academic circles that draw on the “liberal representative political democracy” tradition is “quality of democracy.” It has vigorously emerged in recent years, in part as a way of dealing with new democracies that conform to standard definitions but that remain somehow unsatisfactory from a normative point of view. I argue below that the concept of “quality of democracy” is still too fuzzy, too broad, and too demanding for my research goals. However, it constitutes a significant alternative, if only because several scholars to whom I have described my project have restated it as “an attempt to measure and explain the *quality of democracy* at the subnational level.”

In principle it seems reasonable to conceptualize the difference among subnational regimes in terms of the quality of democracy, especially given that in national-level democracies subnational units are required to, at least, meet minimal formal standards, such as conducting elections, allowing for freedom of expression and organization, etc. Differences between units, then, can be thought in terms of “quality,” given that all of them have the property of meeting at least minimal democratic standards. The appeal of the concept of “democratic quality” is

enhanced by the fact that it has been increasingly used in both academic and policy circles, to the point that leading scholars of democracy and democratization already refer to this literature as a “growing subfield of study” (Diamond and Morlino 2004, 20). However, I find five problems that make the use of this concept unadvisable for my goals:

1. There is no agreement on whether the quality of democracy and the degree of democracy are the same or not. The recent literature I referred to above tends to posit, explicitly or implicitly, that “quality” is different from “degree.” For example Altman and Pérez-Liñán (2002, 87) argue that there is “a substantial difference between addressing the *quality of democracy* and the *level of democratization* of a political regime” (emphasis in the original). However very prominent scholars of democracy use quality and level interchangeably. Lijphart, for example, argues that different “degrees of democracy can also be interpreted as degrees of the quality of democracy” (1999, 276).
2. Even accepting that quality is different from degree, there are other important objections to the concept of quality of democracy. It has been argued that the concept might “enshrine the particular political preferences of scholars as objective standards of quality” (Plattner 2004). This point is, of course, more general: not only the idea of quality of democracy, but the concept of democracy itself (and practically all political concepts) implies “political preferences.” I assume that Plattner meant to say that the concept of quality of democracy is more prone to the dangers of narrowly ideological or value-laden definitions than other concepts. Mazzuca (2004) makes a related point, arguing that a key problem of the concept of quality of democracy as elaborated in the volume by O’Donnell, Vargas Cullell, and Iazzetta (2004) is that it is “amphibious”, in the sense that it is at the same time prescriptive and descriptive. Both aspects should be separated into two different concepts, because there is an inevitable tension between its current two sides: “the better a concept’s normative import, the poorer its scientific performance” (Mazzuca 2004, 253).
3. Plattner (2004) also argues that it is often unclear whether the term “quality” refers only to democracy, or both to democracy and to governance. If theoretical and operational definitions of the quality of democracy include both a “democracy dimension” and a “governance dimension”, the concept becomes too wide and incoherent, as there are democracies with good and bad governance and autocracies with good and bad governance.
4. Both academic and policy or audit oriented versions of the concept tend to use many and very demanding standards. In a special issue of the *Journal of Democracy* (Vol. 15, No. 4, October 2004), eight dimensions are assessed, and two more are suggested. O’Donnell’s introductory chapter to *The Quality of Democracy. Theory and Applications* (O’Donnell, Vargas Cullell, and Iazzetta 2004) lists four general areas, 16 dimensions and sub-dimensions, and dozens of specific items that should be used to gauge the quality of democracy. Some of these items indicate normative standards much more ambitious than those implied by the very essential elements of mainstream political definitions of democracy. This is well illustrated by items such as “a climate of opinion that rejects all types of bigotry and discrimination” and the proportion of “individuals who are



unemployed” (O’Donnell 2004, 43 and 63). IDEA’s *International Handbook on Democracy Assessment* (Beetham et al. 2002) considers that democracy consists of 8 mediating values and 14 items to be assessed, including everything from economic and social rights to corruption to the democraticness of the foreign policy. A regionally pioneering audit done in Costa Rica considers 10 “domains” and 33 “aspirations”, involving everything from standards for the recruitment of public servants to the practice of democracy in NGOs to a democratic mass belief system (*Auditoria Ciudadana sobre la Calidad de la Democracia* 2001). All these conceptualizations and operationalizations go well beyond the very basic defining features of democracy I identify in this paper, to explore almost every possible normative aspect ever associated with democracy.

5. Related to the previous points, theorizations and operationalizations of the quality of democracy often extend their reach to areas that are strictly speaking not political, in the sense of not being directly related to the government, the regime, or the state. In setting standards for aspects such as civil society activism (Beetham et al. 2003, 7), the democraticness of political culture (*Auditoria Ciudadana sobre la Calidad de la Democracia* 2001, 31), or the level of homicides and armed robberies (O’Donnell 2004, 64), the concept goes well beyond the strictly political definition I use. The research goals of my project call for a far less ambitious conceptualization, one that is limited to the very central defining characteristics of democracy. Moreover, it can be argued on practical grounds that in the face of rather serious and generalized violations of the basic principles of liberal political democracy in many subnational units of third wave democracies (e.g. lack of effective competition in districts such as the Argentine provinces of Formosa and La Rioja,<sup>2</sup> or serious and widespread violations of basic civil and political rights in the provinces of San Luis, Santa Cruz, and Santiago del Estero<sup>3</sup>), it is probably more appropriate to first study these fundamental issues, and then the more numerous, complex and nuanced ones typically involved in the broad concept of quality of democracy.

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<sup>2</sup> These provinces have elections, opposition parties and other basic institutions of formal democracy, but the ruling PJ party is so hegemonic that the opposition has practically no chance of winning the governorship or a majority in the provincial legislature. When the same party is elected for seven consecutive terms by unlikely landslides and enjoys extremely large majorities in the legislature, there are only two explanations: either the incumbent party is delivering exceptionally good policy outcomes (which is clearly not the case in Formosa and La Rioja) or it has the capacity and the will to engage in practices that restrict democratic competition (from clientelistic networks to bloated politically appointed payrolls to control of the local media).

<sup>3</sup> These provinces, which are also suspect on contestation grounds, are probably the best examples of restrictions to rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of press. In San Luis the media is well under the control of the government, and the key judicial posts are so too, to the extent that recently a justice in the provincial supreme court who issued rulings against the executive was impeached and *de facto* expelled from the province. National media investigations of Santa Cruz, the second province with more employees per capita after La Rioja, report a climate of local media self-censorship and public acquiescence, based on the fear of losing some state-provided benefit, from a publicity contract to a public job to a social subsidy (see “El Feudo Austral. Santa Cruz.” *La Nacion*. Sunday January 26, 2003. Enfoques supplement. P. 1). In Santiago del Estero a judicial investigation (that only made progress after the province was federally intervened in 2003) found evidence of the existence of a political police that, among other things, engaged in torture and murder. For a recent academic analysis of the politics of this province, see Gibson (2005).

In sum, the concept of quality of democracy seems to be still too young, too fluid and too controversial to have achieved even a minimal level of consensus in the discipline. In its most prominent definitions, it is also too broad and too demanding for my research goals. The problems of democracy at the subnational level in countries like Argentina, Brazil, India or Russia call for a conceptualization that aims at the very essential characteristics of democracy. The variable I propose to define and measure, then, is the *degree of liberal representative political democracy* (henceforth degree of democracy), a clearer, narrower and normatively less demanding concept than quality of democracy.

### **III. The Systematized Concept: Liberal Representative Democracy as a Type of Political Regime**

In this section I set out to define the “systematized concept” (Adcock and Collier 2001) that I will use in the rest of the paper. To differentiate it from other meanings in the background, I call it “liberal representative democracy,” which is a type of political regime in both national and subnational polities.

In order to arrive at a clear and useful definition of the systematized concept, I propose the following rules<sup>4</sup>:

1. The definition has to be more realistic than idealistic: what democracy is in the real world of democracies more than what it ought to be in an ideal world.
2. The definition has to be relatively thick,<sup>5</sup> complex, and multidimensional (within the limits imposed by the necessity to translate the conceptual definition into an operational one). Even in a strictly political regime sense, liberal representative democracy has several dimensions. For example, the strictly democratic component –popular sovereignty–, and the liberal component –individual rights–, are conceptually different, historically independent, and sometimes empirically uncorrelated.
3. As explained above, the definition has to be strictly political: democracy is a characteristic of national, subnational and supranational regimes, not of the economy, the society, the culture, the personality of the rulers, and so forth.
4. Democracy has to be understood as a continuous, or at least ordinal, variable (as opposed to a dichotomous one). Both for theoretical and empirical reasons, I choose to follow those who think of democracy in terms of levels or degrees (Bollen 1991, Coppedge and Reinicke 1991, Dahl 1989), including a well established tradition of measurement of democracy (such as the Coppedge and Reinicke, Freedom House, Polity or Vanhanen indices). However, I believe that authors who advocate a dichotomous definition (e.g., Alvarez et al. 1996), make an important point: it is difficult to call democratic a political

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<sup>4</sup> I elaborated a first version of these rules in Gervasoni (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Here I try to follow Coppedge’s recommendations on combining “thick” conceptualizations, typical of the qualitative tradition, with rigorous operationalization amenable to subsequent quantitative analysis (Coppedge 1999).

regime, however liberal, in which rulers are not chosen in elections. Subnational regimes in national level democracies generally meet the minimal threshold (they hold multiparty elections in which, in principle, incumbents can lose), even if they vary widely in the extent to which they go beyond this formal minimum.<sup>6</sup> In sum, democracy here is conceived as a largely continuous concept, although at least one of its dimensions, contestation, has a minimum threshold which divides polities with elective rulers from monarchies, military dictatorships, single party totalitarianisms and other types of regimes in which decision makers are not chosen through competitive elections.

Following these rules, then, I set out to elaborate the “systematized concept.” First, democracy is a type of regime. Political regimes are a set of (formal or informal) rules that determine the type of actors that can occupy the main positions of government, the accepted methods to obtain those positions, and the way in which public policy decisions are made (Munck 1996; Schmitter and Karl 1991, 77).<sup>7</sup> More succinctly, a political regime can be defined as the set of rules that regulate: 1) the access to government positions and, 2) the exercise of government power. Democracy and all other regime types, therefore, are defined in terms of two sets of procedures, the first one about how power is obtained, and the second one about how power is exercised. In the case of democracy, the first set is anchored in the principle of what Katz (1997) calls *popular sovereignty* (which finds institutional expression in popular, competitive, free and fair elections), while the second derives from the principle of *limited government* (implemented through the institutions of separation of powers, checks and balances, constitutionally protected individual rights, etc.), akin to Katz’s (1997) “tyranny prevention” principle and to Held’s (1987) “protective democracy.” Recent efforts to conceptualize and measure democracy have yielded similar dimensions: Bollen and Paxton (2000, 59-60), for example, argue that liberal democracy is a political system characterized by both “democratic rule” and “political liberties.” Table 1 presents the possible regime types arising from the combination of these two principles and illustrate them with national and subnational examples.

In the table the two sets of rules are dichotomized for simplicity: power can be obtained through competitive elections or otherwise (so that all non-electorally competitive forms of access to government are conflated in one category), and power can be exercised in a limited or absolute way. The four possible combinations define four possible ideal types (although two of them, liberal democracies and authoritarianisms, are much more prevalent in the real world than the other two). Liberal democracy is defined by the combination of competitive elections and limited power. If rulers are competitively elected but exercise power with few limitations, the regime is an illiberal democracy (Diamond 1999, 42-49) or a *democradura* (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 9). Alternatively, unelected rulers may exercise power in a limited fashion, which results in liberal autocracies (Diamond 1999, 4) or *dictablandas* (O’Donnell and Schmitter

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<sup>6</sup> However, there are situations in which subnational units may be below the threshold, as it is the case when the national level authorities remove their elected rulers and appoints its own delegates (see footnote 8 for details). For example, when the Argentine provinces of Catamarca or Santiago del Estero were intervened by the national government (in 1990 and 2003, respectively), they ceased to be democracies in terms of electoral contestation, but they probably became even more liberal than before (as the federal interventors’ rule was less authoritarian than that of the removed governors).

<sup>7</sup> Here I only use Munck’s procedural dimension (the rules) and not his behavioral dimension. The latter, which refers to the acceptance of these rules by the most important political actors, may be important to characterize the level of consensus of consolidation of the regime, but not its type.

1986, 9). Finally, when rulers are not elected and power is exercised without limits, the regime type is called authoritarianism (using the word in a broad sense, including both Linz’s authoritarian and totalitarian regimes; Linz 1975).

**Table 1. The Two Dimensions and the Four Types of Regimes**

		Rules for exercising government power	
		Limited government (checks and balances, constitutional individual rights)	Absolute government (no significant constraints to the power of the rulers)
Rules for obtaining government positions	Competitive elections (principle: popular sovereignty)	<b>Liberal Democracies</b> (Argentina, France, India, USA, most Argentine provinces)	<b>Illiberal Democracies or <i>democraduras</i></b> (Chávez’s Venezuela, province of Santiago del Estero until 2003)
	Other (designation, hereditary succession, unopposed elections)	<b>Liberal Autocracies or <i>dictablandas</i></b> (Monaco, Vatican, intervened Argentine provinces)	<b>Authoritarianisms</b> (Burma, China, Cuba, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, no Argentine provinces)

The foregoing discussion leads to a first general definition of liberal democracy:

Definition 1: Liberal democracy is a type of political regime in which all significant government positions are filled directly or indirectly through contested elections, and in which government power is divided among different branches that check each other and limited by constitutionally or legally mandated political and civic liberal rights and freedoms.

### **III.a. The Other End: Authoritarianism or Hybrid Regimes?**

Although the theoretical range of the variable regime type goes from democratic to authoritarian (or totalitarian), the real range in given empirical domains may be narrower. Despite the relatively common use of the concept of authoritarianism to describe some subnational regimes in federal democracies (Cornelius 1999; Diamond 1999; Fox 1994; Gibson 2005), I believe that even the least democratic Argentine provinces do not meet the conventional definition of authoritarianism, and the same seems to be true in other third wave democratic federations such as Brazil, Mexico and Russia. Subnational units in these countries are generally far from being the kind of repressive and closed regimes that the Polity database codes as “autocracies” and Freedom House labels “not free.” That is, all of these regimes have elections (often reasonably free), real opposition parties, minority representation in the legislature, nontrivial levels of freedom of speech, and so forth. One does not find in the Argentine provinces bans on political parties, incarcerated dissidents, or totalitarian media control. Because they are embedded in a national democracy, subnational leaders are severely constrained in the extent to

which they can restrict political rights. Given that at the national level democracy is widely accepted as “the only game in town,” and that the constitution empowers national authorities to guarantee democracy in the provinces, there are strong reasons for self-interested provincial rulers to avoid blatantly authoritarian practices such as jailing opposition leaders or massively rigging elections. Such visible actions easily attract attention from the national media, hurting the chances of the perpetrators (many of whom have progressive career ambition) in national politics, and increasing the likelihood that national authorities will take corrective measures.<sup>8</sup> As Gibson (2005, 128) concludes from his case studies, sometimes “provincial democratization is an outcome of the nationalization of subnational conflict.” Finally, the fact that people can easily leave the province makes unbearably oppressive forms of authoritarianism ultimately self-defeating. In sum, the national democratic context clearly increases the costs of repression.

The less democratic provincial regimes, then, combine democratic institutions that are not just a façade with practices that are clearly if subtly authoritarian. They are well conceptualized by the recent literature on (national) hybrid regimes. The definitional traits of “illiberal democracies” (Zakaria 1997), “semi-democracies” (Mainwaring, Brinks and Pérez-Liñán 2001), “competitive authoritarianisms” (Levitsky and Way 2002), and “electoral authoritarianisms” (Schedler 2006) describe the less democratic Argentine provinces more accurately than the traditional concept of “authoritarianism” (Linz 1975). Moreover, the causal logic at work seems to be similar: just as national hybrid regimes exist to a large extent because of the need to avoid overt authoritarianism in the face of strong international pressure for democratization, subnational leaders with authoritarian projects come under intense national pressure to sustain at least minimal levels of democracy. For similar reasons, the concept of hybrid regimes has recently been used to characterize the least democratic regions of other third-wave federations (McMann 2006).

#### **IV. The Dimensions and Subdimensions of the Concept**

It is clear, then, that in this definitional perspective there are two dimensions to the concept of democracy, which I will call “access to power” and “exercise of power”.<sup>9</sup> These dimensions are conceptually different (as Table 1 illustrates), but theoretically and empirically related (Diamond 1999, 4-5). From a realist theoretical perspective, it is assumed that rulers wish to stay in power and exercise it with as few limitations as possible, while ambitious individuals excluded from top government positions wish to achieve those same positions. Given a liberal autocracy, the pressure of an opposition free to organize, speak, campaign and demonstrate typically leads to a compromise solution in which incumbent elites accept to subject their government positions to democratic competition; alternatively, these elites may decide to defend their position by repressing the opposition, thus leading to a fully authoritarian regime.

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<sup>8</sup> The most powerful instrument in this respect is the removal of provincial authorities via federal intervention, an attribution given by the national constitution to congress and the president. Sustaining democratic institutions (“guaranteeing the republican form of government,” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century language of the constitution) is one of the few justifications for interventions. Since 1983 four provinces were intervened a total of six times: Catamarca (1990), Tucumán (1991), Corrientes (1991 and 2000), and Santiago del Estero (1993 and 2004). All of them except Tucumán had doubtful democratic credentials.

<sup>9</sup> What I call dimensions and subdimensions corresponds to what Munck and Verkuilen (2002) call “attributes” and “components,” respectively.

Conversely, illiberal democracies either liberalize when the incumbent is electorally defeated, or, more frequently, they eventually slip into a full-blown authoritarianism when the incumbent decides not to face the risk of elections and cancels or rigs them. The logic of political ambition, then, makes only authoritarian and liberal democratic regimes stable. Illiberal democracies and liberal autocracies are intrinsically unstable, as indicated by their real world scarcity.

#### **IV. a. The “Access to Power” Dimension: Contested, Inclusive, and Effective Elections**

This dimension expresses the “democratic” side of “liberal democracy.” It traces back to classic Greece and to Rousseau, that is, to the tradition that emphasizes majority rule or, as I have called it in this paper, “popular sovereignty” (Katz 1997). Contemporary liberal democracies took from this tradition the idea of applying the majority principle to the election of government officials.<sup>10</sup> Drawing on Dahl (1971), Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995, 6-7), and Hadenius (1992, 49-51), I identify three sub-dimensions of the “access to power” side of democracy: contestation, inclusiveness (Dahl’s original dimensions), and effectiveness. I define them, conventionally, as follows:

1. Contestation: the extent to which individuals and groups can effectively oppose the incumbent authorities and participate in regular elections that are competitive and, therefore, reasonably likely to lead to the defeat of the incumbent. Once the minimum threshold of contestation is achieved (i.e., once rulers are chosen in reasonably free multiparty elections), there may be higher or lower levels of contestation depending on many and diverse factors, such as the degree of fairness of the elections, the level of barriers to entry of political parties, the rules of campaign financing, the level of media plurality and independence, the extent of illegitimate use of public funds for campaigning, and so forth.

2. Inclusiveness: the proportion of the adult citizenry that enjoys, legally and factually, the rights associated with political competition, especially the rights to vote and run for office. Given current standards, a polity is considered fully inclusive only when no major group of the adult population is denied these rights (retrospectively, male universal suffrage may have been considered enough in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while, prospectively, the enfranchisement of teenagers, foreign residents or felons may be required).

3. Effectiveness: Schmitter and Karl (1991, 81) make the important point that a key condition for democracy is that elected officials are not subordinated to unelected ones. Therefore, in defining and operationalizing democracy it is critical to take into account what Hadenius calls “effective elections”, that is, “whether elected organs are limited in their decision-making by instances which, for their part, have no democratic support” (Hadenius 1992, 49). There are several polities in the world in which elected officials have to yield, at least in some policy areas, to monarchs, generals, theocratic elites or unelected legislators.

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<sup>10</sup> Although the idea of popular sovereignty is better expressed in majoritarian than in proportional electoral systems and, more generally, in majoritarian than in consensus democracies (Lijphart 1999, 1-2).

#### **IV.b. The “Exercise of Power” Dimension: Institutional Constraints, Individual Liberal Rights and Independent Civil Society**

This is the “liberal” side of “liberal democracy.” It is grounded in the tradition of Western thought that emphasizes individual rights (Locke), institutional constraints on state power (Montesquieu), limits to state intervention in people’s lives (Constant), protection against the tyranny of the majority (J.S. Mill), and civil society as a counterbalance to the state (Tocqueville). Suspicious of the authoritarian impulses of the state and of unchecked majorities, this school of thought emphasized individual rights, or what some authors call minority rights. They were the early proponents of the institutions of separation of powers, checks and balances, and constitutionalism, all designed to disperse and limit state power. The final goal is to protect freedoms of “belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, assembly, demonstration, and petition” (Diamond 1999, 11). These freedoms include both those strictly necessary for effective contestation, usually known as political rights (freedom of organization, assembly, speech, publication, etc.) and those not strictly political but still important for the liberal conception of freedom, usually known as civil liberties (freedom to choose place of residence, freedom to choose employment, freedom to choose religion, freedom to travel within and outside the country, and so forth).<sup>11</sup> How are these freedoms protected? The answer to this question defines the three additional subdimensions that complete my conceptualization of the term:

4. Institutional Constraints: Classic liberals proposed the separation of powers, so that legislation, execution, and interpretation and dispute adjudication would be in different hands. Montesquieu’s idea of “checks and balances” finds institutional expression in all contemporary democracies, which to different extents separate executive, legislative and judicial functions in different bodies. Moreover, additional autonomous agencies have been created to manage specific policies (e.g., independent central banks) or to control and limit the excesses of the executive (e.g., anticorruption agencies). The latter have been labeled agencies of horizontal accountability by Guillermo O’Donnell (1999a; 2000). This dimension is often not given much consideration in conceptual or operational definitions of democracy. The Polity IV “institutional constraints on the exercise of power by the executive” (Marshall and Jaggers 2002, 13) indicator is a very consequential exception, given that it is highly correlated with the Bollen, Freedom House and Vanhanen indices of democracy, and that it “virtually determines the democracy and autocracy scale values” of the Polity scores (Gleditsch and Ward 1997, 379-380). That is, theorists and empirical researchers seem to pay more attention to factors such as elections and political rights, but it seems that the (less studied) institutional constraints on the power of the executive are an excellent proxy for the overall level of democracy. Given the historically well documented tyrannical inclinations of the state, the existence, strength and effectiveness of the separation of powers and of the agencies horizontal accountability is a key component of the “exercise of power” dimension of democracy.

5. Individual Liberal Rights: A second, if more symbolic, liberal artifact to limit state power and maximize individual liberty is the constitutional or legal protection of political rights and civil liberties. The idea here is that an explicit and clear legal statement about the freedoms

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<sup>11</sup> Even in attempts at measuring democracy that do not include indicators of liberal rights, there is a recognition that they are part of the definition (Marshall and Jaggers 2002, 13) or that they have been historically associated with the concept of democracy (Alvarez et al. 1996, 4).

that are granted to individuals would make it more costly for the state to violate them, and easier for the courts to protect them. Important scholars have argued that implicit in Dahl's two dimensions there is a third one, civil and political liberties (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995, 6-7). Of course, the fact that these freedoms are written in constitutions and laws and that they are formally protected by courts does not mean that they are factually respected. The extent to which they are, then, is a central component of the exercise of power dimension of democracy.<sup>12</sup>

6. Independent Civil Society: Finally, a more recent strain of liberal thinkers, rooted in Tocqueville's analysis of early US associational life, posits that a key condition to effectively limit state power is the existence of a strong, plural and autonomous civil society. The emphasis here is not so much on the beneficial effects of such a civil society in promoting democratic transitions, consolidation and development (cf. Diamond 1999, 233-250), but on the fact that a "flat" or state-dependent associational life usually indicates that the state makes a conscious effort to either repress or coopt independent and potentially critical social organizations. The existence of diverse and autonomous business and professional associations, labor unions, churches, think tanks, human rights organization, civic associations, charities and other voluntary associations allow individuals to face the state provided with key material, informational, and human resources embedded in social networks. The extent to which such a civil society is allowed to exist by the state is also a key element of the "exercise of power" dimension.

In sum, the concept of liberal representative democracy denotes a regime type composed of two dimensions and 6 subdimensions. Figure 1 presents the structure of the concept of democracy I have elaborated so far, going from the highest level of abstraction (the *genus*) to the lowest (the subdimensions).

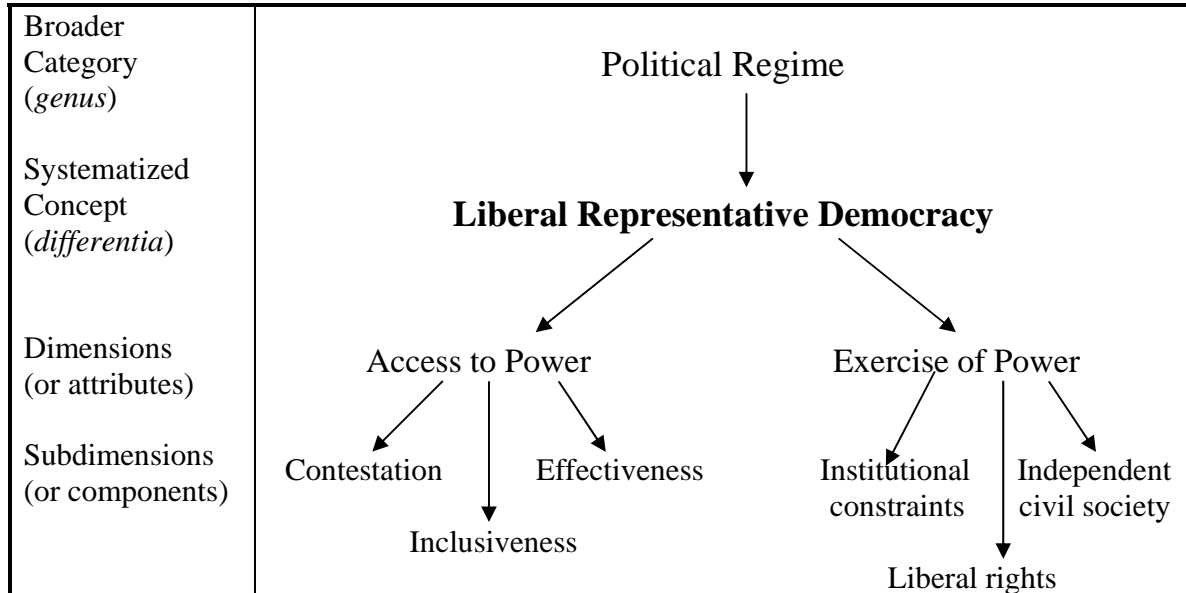
Is this disaggregation of the concept of democracy free of problems of conflation and redundancy? (Munck and Verkuilen 2002, 13-14). In terms of the latter, it seems clear that contestation, inclusiveness and effectiveness tap different aspects of the access to power dimension: the first one the existence and fairness of electoral competition for office, the second the proportion of the population which enjoys political rights, and the third the extent to which elected officials are subordinated to unelected actors. Similarly, it is clear that, in the exercise of power dimension, the effectiveness of institutional constraints, the respect of liberal rights and the independence of the civil society tap mutually exclusive aspects. Conflation, on the other hand, does seem to be a problem. The subdimensions of contestation and liberal freedoms partially overlap because both are directly related to individual liberties. In effect, contestation is basically about the right to vote and run for office, and related political freedoms (such as the freedoms of press, speech, assembly, organization, demonstration, and so forth). Moreover, the existence of these rights is conditional on the respect of more basic liberal guarantees protecting individuals from physical violence, arbitrary arrest, exile, etc. Liberal freedoms, on the other hand, includes all of these rights and several more, such as freedom of religion, freedom to travel, freedom to choose one's place of residence and occupation, etc.

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<sup>12</sup> A recent and comprehensive list of freedoms includes: "personal liberty, security, and privacy; freedom of thought, expression, and information; freedom of religion; freedom of assembly, association, and organization (including the right to form and join trade unions and political parties); freedom of movement and residence; and the right to legal defense and due process (Diamond and Morlino 2004, 26; Beetham's contribution to the same publication offers practically an identical list).



**Figure 1. Genus, Differentia, Dimensions and Subdimensions of Democracy**



Some degree of conflation seems inevitable. It is clear that conceptually the dimensions of access to power and exercise of power tap different aspects of a political regime (even if empirically democratic access to power tends to go hand in hand with liberal exercise of power). Both dimensions call for the respect of certain citizens' rights. There is, however, a difference of emphasis. Contestation stresses the respect of *political rights* in the realm of *competition for power* (campaigns, elections, media coverage of political events, etc.). Liberal rights, on the other hand, put the emphasis on more general *civil liberties*, most of which are not related to political competition most of the time. The distinction is admittedly blurry, but can be clearly illustrated: contestation's *political rights* are violated when parties are banned, elections rigged or opposition messages in the media censored; *civil liberties*, on the other hand, are violated when the state punishes citizens for their religious beliefs, their choice of residence, their dress style, their sexual orientation, their membership in a nonpolitical organization, or the number of children they have. In concrete situations it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other. When a right-wing dictatorship represses a strike of private workers against their employers, is it violating the political right to demonstrate, the civil right to strike, or both? Likewise, when a left-wing totalitarian system arrests a religious leader, is it encroaching only on the freedom of religion, or also on the political rights of assembly and organization? Still, in most cases the political or nonpolitical nature of the violation is apparent. In the operationalization of each of these dimensions I assign only *political rights* indicators to the subdimension of contestation and *civil liberties* indicators to the subdimension of liberal rights.

Having fleshed out the dimensions and subdimensions of the concept of liberal representative democracy, I now present a second, thicker and more complex, definition:

Definition 2: Liberal democracy is a type of political regime where 1) all significant executive and legislative positions are filled directly or indirectly through contested, periodic, free and fair elections in which practically all adults have equal rights to vote and run for office and all other individual and collective rights that are necessary for elections to be free and fair, and in which elected officials are not subordinated to unelected political actors, and where 2) the power of the state is divided –at least to some extent– among an executive, a legislative and a judicial branch, all of which have the capacity to limit decisions of the others, so that constitutionally or legally mandated political and civil liberal rights and freedoms are generally respected and enforced by the state, and civil society organizations are free and autonomous from state control.

Elections are competitive, free and fair to the extent that individuals and parties in the opposition have reasonable access to political and campaign resources (such as money, information, and media coverage), votes are weighted equally and counted fairly, and the results of the elections are effectively translated into government positions according to pre-established rules that provide for majoritarian or proportional election of legislators, and for a direct or indirect election of the chief executive in which the probabilities of getting elected are basically a function of the number of votes obtained.<sup>13</sup> The specific set of rights and freedoms needed to make elections competitive, free and fair can be subject to controversy, but they indisputably include the following: right to vote and run for office, form and join organizations (especially political parties), freely express opinions privately or publicly (including criticisms of government officials and policies), and have access to alternative (i.e., non monopolized by the government or any other group) sources of information. Basic liberal rights, which are preconditions for the exercise of political rights, mean that the government cannot arbitrarily harass, threaten, expropriate, incarcerate, physically harm, kill or otherwise punish citizens or organizations unless a legally-regulated judicial process establishes that there is substantive evidence that a person or organization has committed a crime (and the crime was clearly defined in existing legislation).

#### **IV.c. Components and Subcomponents of Democracy.**

In this section I present a large set of components and subcomponents into which each subdimension of democracy is disaggregated. Each subcomponent represents the end of the operationalization of a concept and is measured by one or more indicators, which in the context of my perception-based operationalization strategy, are questions in the survey of experts. The final data, then, will be the answers to those questions (aggregated by province). Table 2 is a systematization of the dimensions (column 1) and subdimensions (column 2) defined so far, plus a list of the components (column 3) and subcomponents (column 4) of each subdimension. Columns 1 through 4, then, are thought as general categories applicable to the elective subnational regimes of any country. The questions (=indicators), of course, have to be adapted to the context –in this case to the Argentine provinces– and to each particular province. Some of these indicators may be directly applicable to other countries, but some will need substantial redesigning to adapt them to different national realities.

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<sup>13</sup> This complicated formulation of the democratic rules seeks to cover even cases of countries in which candidates that come second or third in the popular election win office (as it has been the case in recent elections in Bolivia and the USA).

**Table 2. The Operational Dissagregation of the Degree of Subnational Democracy.**

<b>Dimen- sion</b>	<b>Subdi- mensions</b>	<b>Components</b>	<b>Subcomponents</b>	
<b>ACCESS  TO  POWER</b>	<b>INCLU- SION</b>	Extension of effective right to vote	Denial of right to certain individuals or groups	
		Extension of effective right to run	Denial of right to run	
	<b>CONTESTATION</b>	Fairness of elections	Fairness of electoral framework	Fairness of electoral framework
			Fairness of campaign	Fairness of campaign
			Fairness of electoral act and vote counting	Fairness of electoral act and vote counting
			Competitiveness of candidates' selection	Competitiveness of candidates' selection
		Freedom of expression	Opposition leaders	Opposition leaders
	Freedom to form/join organizat.	Critical journalists	Critical journalists	
		Politically relevant media	Politically relevant media	
		Public employees	Public employees	
<b>EFEC- TIVE- NESS</b>	Unelected local powers	General population	General population	
		Political parties	Political parties	
	Elected national powers	Unelected local powers	Unelected local powers	
<b>EXER- CISE  OF  POWER</b>	<b>INSTITU- TIONAL</b>	Legislature	Provincial legislature	
		Judiciary	Provincial justice	
		Federal justice in the province	Federal justice in the province	
	<b>CONSTR- RAINTS</b>	Agencies of Horizontal Account.	Independence of agencies of HA	
		Incumbent Party	Constraints of party on governor	
		National legislators	Senators	
	<b>LIBERAL RIGHTS</b>	Freedom of expression and information	Deputies	Deputies
			Right to alternative and diverse sources of information	Right to alternative and diverse sources of information
		Effective access to information about government	Effective access to information about government	
		Personal freedoms	Physical security	Physical security
			Privacy	Privacy
	Alternative or minority lifestyles		Alternative or minority lifestyles	
	<b>INDE- PENDENT</b>	Economic organizations	Academic freedom	Academic freedom
			Autonomous labor unions	Autonomous labor unions
<b>CIVIL SOCIETY</b>	Non-profit organizations	Autonomous business organizations	Autonomous business organizations	
		Catholic Church	Catholic Church	
Good government, political or human rights organizations	Good government, political or human rights organizations			

## V. Indicators: Perception-based or Subjective Measures of Democracy

Following Adcock and Collier (2001), in this section I go one level below the “systematized concept” to address the indicators that will be used to operationalize the concept of subnational liberal representative democracy, as defined above. Given the complexities of a “thick” concept (Coppedge 1999) such as *degree of subnational democracy*, and the additional difficulties posed by the fact that hybrid regimes restrict democracy in subtle ways, I propose to follow the subjective tradition of measurement of democracy (Bollen and Paxton 2000, 60). As opposed to the objective tradition that uses measures which do not depend on the judgment or opinion of the researcher, experts or secondary sources (e.g., Vanhanen 1990), the subjective tradition uses “perceptions-based” (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2005) indicators.<sup>14</sup> In this strategy a researcher makes an informed judgment about the status of a certain aspect of democracy in a given country using secondary sources and/or consulting country experts. This strategy is clearly illustrated by mainstream democracy measures, such as Polity IV (Jagers and Gurr 1995), Freedom House (2007, 983) ratings of political rights and civil liberties, and Coppedge and Reinecke’s Poliararchy Index (1991), all of which use a subjective strategy. Bowman et al. (2005, 940) make a strong case in favor of an index of democracy based on the judgments of experts with deep knowledge of the politics to be coded.

The subjective operationalization I propose consists of a survey of experts on the politics of the subnational units. Such strategy has to my knowledge only two precedents, carried out by Kelly McMann and Nikolai Petrov in Russia and Kyrgyzstan (McMann and Petrov 2000; McMann 2006). The main methodological difference between these surveys and my own is that the former interviewed a group of experts who resided in the capital cities and asked them to rank and rate all the regions (Kyrgyzstan) or the top ten and bottom ten regions (Russia) in terms of democracy, while mine selected a smaller set of experts for each province (most of the time residents of the province) and asked them to provide ratings only about it.

Experts are considered a more reliable source than secondary sources, in part because the latter lack the necessary level of detail and quality for several provinces, and because the subtle ways in which democracy is restricted in hybrid regimes calls for very specific pieces of information. The questionnaire of the so called *Survey of Experts on Provincial Politics (SEPP)* includes many items aimed at tapping their assessment of the situation of each subdimension in the units about which they have expertise. Ideal interviewees are local, politically independent scholars and professionals (such as journalists and consultants) with deep knowledge of their provinces’ politics. A significant disadvantage of this approach is that, due to well-known memory limitations, interviewees will only supply reliable data for recent times.

Because experts are by definition knowledgeable about many characteristics of the

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<sup>14</sup> The word “subjective” is often loaded with negative connotations. It is sometimes associated with normative biases or interested opinions. Here it is used in a straightforward neutral way, just to describe a measurement process based on informed and educated judgments of certain “subjects.” It is important to realize that some well respected and widely used databases in political science come from subjective operationalizations. This is not only the case with measures of democracy, but also with measures of corruption, for example Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index, and with measures of governance, such as the World Bank’s Governance Indicators. For a defense of the strengths of “perceptions-based” indicators over objective ones, see the methodological paper for the World Bank Governance indicators (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2005, 27-31).

political regime in place, multiple aspects of democracy beyond electoral competition and inclusion can be assessed: for example, the effectiveness of legislative and judicial checks on the executive, the level of press freedom, the civil rights situation, the prevalence of human rights violations by the provincial police, and so forth.

## **VI. Methodological design of the Survey (*Survey of Experts on Provincial Politics*)**

The *Survey of Experts on Provincial Politics* (SEPP) is a face-to-face survey conducted in each of Argentina's 24 subnational units using a questionnaire that includes approximately 150 items about the 2003-2007 period (except for two provinces off the regular electoral schedule). Fieldwork started in late April 2008 and ended in late July 2008. Below I detail the survey methodology:

**a. Questionnaire design and administration:** Given the length and complexity of the questionnaire, the survey was administered face to face by political scientists with background in Argentine provincial politics. The survey was carried out with a structured questionnaire including both closed-ended items (in which experts rate an aspect of democracy in a given province) and open-ended items (in which they can explain the reasons for their ratings, qualify their answers, or provide an answer different from those offered by the questionnaire). Given a well-documented tendency of intellectually sophisticated publics to resist the "straightjacket" of closed-ended questions (Putnam 1973; Aberbach et al. 1975), the open-ended questions also serve the purpose of allowing interviewees to elaborate their answers, which is useful both for the substantive goals of the research project and for the smooth progress of the interviews. The average length of interviews was one hour and twenty-one minutes. The questions were designed and tested so that they were clear, concrete, and unbiased. They were written following the standard advice of the literature on questionnaire design (Converse and Presser 1986; Oppenheim 1992; Foddy 1993) and elite interviewing (Dexter 1970).

**b. Questionnaire pretests:** The questionnaire was pretested in several stages. First I circulated it among advisors and colleagues.<sup>15</sup> The resulting version was then read and commented upon by the members of the fieldwork team,<sup>16</sup> which resulted in additional improvements. Subsequently the interviewers and I conducted a pretest that included 14 experts on the politics of 11 provinces. These pretests helped us identify problems such as ambiguous wording, value-laden terms, missing categories, and questions that were too demanding.

**c. Sampling:** Interviewees were intentionally selected using two broad criteria: 1) deep and broad knowledge of the politics of the province, and 2) reasonable level of independence from the provincial government and opposition. The ideal interviewee is a scholar in the social sciences, although my exploratory fieldwork in four provinces during 2006 indicated that political journalists and attorneys in the field of constitutional law are often as knowledgeable

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<sup>15</sup> Thanks to Michael Coppedge, Fran Hagopian, Scott Mainwaring, Ernesto Calvo, Agustina Giraudy, Debra Javeline, Frauke Kreuter, Marcelo Leiras, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, and Fernando Ruiz for their helpful comments on early versions of the questionnaire.

<sup>16</sup> A wonderful team of research assistants: Andrea Cavalli, Adrián Lucardi, Maria Marta Maroto and Maria Eugenia Wolcöff.

about the provincial regime as academic political scientists. As expected, finding such experts was difficult and time consuming, especially in provinces that are small, less developed and/or have no political science departments (such as Chaco, Formosa, La Pampa and Tierra del Fuego). I constructed a sample framework drawing on 1) personal academic contacts, 2) social scientist from the interior I met during the exploratory stage of fieldwork (July-August 2006), 3) colleagues from the provinces I contacted personally at the 2007 Argentine Political Association conference in Buenos Aires, 4) experts cited or interviewed in national newspapers when covering provincial politics, and 5) information provided by the political science schools and institutes of many provinces. From all of these original contacts I “snowballed” to create a larger framework. Experts with more distinguished academic, professional or journalistic credentials and experts mentioned by more sources were given priority. In the case of the most “difficult” provinces (those with smaller populations and few or no social science university departments), it was necessary to relax the criteria, sometimes interviewing prestigious political scientists who did have some kind of political position, and sometimes interviewing knowledgeable people who were not formally working in an academic, professional or journalistic capacity.<sup>17</sup> The goal was to achieve a minimum of three experts per province so that inter-expert agreement could be calculated on a relatively solid basis. Because fieldwork progressed more quickly than expected, the effective sample includes a minimum of four and a maximum of eight interviewees per province (for a total of about 124 experts, or an average of 5.17 per province). Note that there is no “small sample” problem here: this survey is different from public opinion or elite surveys, in that the goal is not to infer the characteristics of a larger population, but (as in the case of historical interviews) to systematically obtain factual information from knowledgeable sources. The measurement strategy, then, is comparable to that of the widely-used Polity IV dataset, which typically uses one coder per country, and a few coders for some countries to assess inter-coder agreement (Marshall and Jaggers 2002, 5-7). In my measure the experts function as coders, and, improving on Polity IV, every province is coded by at least four experts. In provinces in which average inter-expert agreement is high, the final number of cases will not be changed. In provinces where it is middling or low additional interviews will be conducted. The expectation is that the new interviews will improve agreement rates. Two problems may arise. First, it may occur that even with the new information reliability remains unsatisfactory (indicating that experts on this province are often in disagreement). Second, the population of experts in the “difficult” provinces may be smaller than the number of interviewees needed.

**d. Fieldwork:** Conducting 124 interviews with busy experts in 24 locations in the eighth largest country in the world poses logistic challenges. My previous experience indicated that 3 to 6 interviews can be obtained in one week. This includes finding and calling the interviewee (often multiple times) to arrange a personal meeting, traveling by bus to his/her city, and the interview itself. Such intensive fieldwork calls for a team of interviewers. A total of 5 people (including myself) completed the first stage of the fieldwork in a little over three months (it started on April 22 2008, and the last interview was conducted on July 30, 2008). We contacted

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<sup>17</sup> Although practically all the respondents were –as planned– either local social scientists or political journalists, the second requirement (political independence) was sometimes difficult to meet. The few political scientists living in the smaller, less developed provinces tend to work for the state or be active members of political parties. So in these provinces there was a clear trade-off between criteria 1 and 2. When I had no choice but to interview somebody with a government position or party affiliation, we felt they almost always responded the questions as scholars and not as politicians or government officials. The inter-observer agreement analysis will help determine whether or not these provinces were particularly problematic in terms of measurement reliability.

experts by email and/or phone a few days before visiting a given province. Those who we were able to find and reach tended to cooperate enthusiastically. There were very few outright rejections (I am currently in the process of calculating the response rate, which will in all likelihood be above 80% of all experts contacted.) To facilitate the logistics, the country was divided in six regions. Each region had a “hub” city where interviewers are based. The six regions are: 1) Pampas (hub in the city of Buenos Aires), 2) Northeast (Corrientes), 3) Northwest (Salta), 4) Cuyo (Mendoza), 5) North Patagonia (Bahia Blanca), and 6) South Patagonia (Río Gallegos). Each region was the responsibility of one of the interviewers. I personally trained the latter in four meetings, for a total of about 14 hours. In these sessions they became familiar with the general goals of the research project and the survey, the questionnaire, the techniques appropriate for conducting interviews with experts, the human subject treatment standards, and the logistic and economic issues related to the fieldwork. Interviewers acquired additional expertise during the pretesting of the questionnaire.

**e. Questionnaire administration:** All interviewees received an email requesting an interview and explaining the nature of the project, the reasons for their selection, the importance of their participation, and the anonymity of their answers. To encourage positive responses experts were offered a small gift (one of several political science books we bought) and early access to a report with the survey’s main results. Small gifts (but not money) and access to results are commonly used in elite-level interviews in Argentina, and, given certain conditions, endorsed by much of the literature on interviews (Adler and Adler 2002). The experts I surveyed during the exploratory fieldwork were for the most part willing to meet and share information with me. Nonetheless, the incentives make personal interviews easier and faster to arrange, and interviewees more willing to spend an hour and twenty minutes answering a demanding and at times tedious questionnaire. Interviews were arranged at the places and times that were convenient to the experts. Their answers were recorded on the paper questionnaire, circling the pre-coded categories for the close-ended questions and writing down the answers for the open-ended ones (thus avoiding the often unwelcome tape recorder).

**f. Questionnaire quality-control and coding:** Immediately after completion of each interview (while answers are still fresh in their memories) the interviewers checked the open-ended answers for completeness and readability. Coding was necessary only for a few questions, as the experts’ answers to the closed-ended questions are considered final codes. However, in cases in which an expert refuses to choose one of the categories of the closed-ended items, I will use the information in the open-ended follow-up question to assign a code. If this question is also unanswered (or uninformative), the item is coded as a missing value. A small number of missing values is inevitable and not particularly harmful. However, interviews with more than 20% of missing values are considered invalid and replaced by an interview with a different expert.

**g. Index construction and reliability assessment:** Given the thick and multidimensional conceptualization of democracy underlying the questionnaire, it is possible that the items are empirically multidimensional, that is, that they tap more than one aspect of subnational democracy and that these aspects are statistically independent. Therefore, once scores have been determined for each province, I will conduct factor analysis on the data for all items in all provinces to determine the number of underlying dimensions. Given the scarcity of comparative descriptive data on subnational democracy and the many and diverse components of democracy that will be measured, there is not a clear basis for holding a priori theoretical expectations about

the number and contents of the underlying dimensions. It may be the case that unidimensionality is confirmed, but it may also occur that subnational democracy has two or more empirically distinct dimensions. In either case, the dependent variable(s) will be a scale or scales constructed on the basis of the items with high loadings on the factor(s) (DeVellis 1991). I will conduct scale reliability assessments to insure that a Cronbach's alpha of 0.8 or higher is achieved.

## **VII. Preliminary Results**

The first stage of fieldwork was finished in late July 2008 (a second stage will cover only provinces for which inter-expert reliability is generally low). The questionnaires have been revised, coded, and entered into an electronic database (although a few data problems still need to be addressed). The experts' answers to the close-ended questions have been averaged to form an aggregate score for each item in each province. Inter-expert reliabilities have yet to be calculated, so the figures below are presented without any consideration to their level of certainty. In this section I present the preliminary results of several survey items (tapping four of the six subdimensions defined above: contestation, inclusiveness, institutional constraints and liberal rights) for all the 24 provinces. These descriptive results are meant to illustrate the type of information that the *SEPP* will produce once completed and to provide a cursory look at the first substantive results.

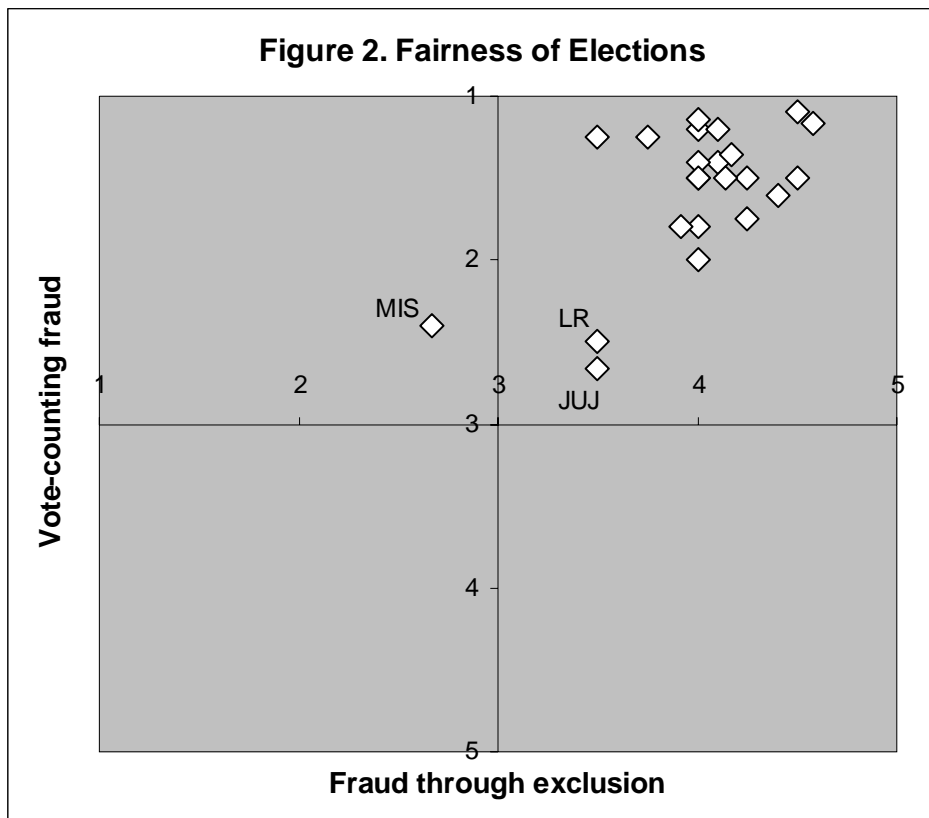
### **VII.a. Contestation**

Contestation is the only element of democracy in which all definitions, including the most minimal ones, agree. Free and fair elections for the main executive and legislative offices is the central element of this subdimension of democracy. How free and fair are provincial elections in Argentina? Figure 2 displays the results of two questions measuring the fairness of the last gubernatorial elections, that is, the extent to which some people were arbitrarily excluded from the ballot and the extent to which votes were miscounted to favor a given party. (In this and the following figures the more democratic scores correspond to the upper-right corner and the least democratic ones to the lower-left corner; this sometimes means that categories in the graphs are reversed with respect to their order in the questionnaire). The text of the questions and the answers are shown under each figure.

According to Figure 2, there are no important instances of electoral fraud. Most provinces cluster close to the democratic (upper-right) quadrant, while the lower-left quadrant is empty. These variables, then, seem to reflect a situation of relatively high and homogenous levels of electoral contestation in the provinces. However, the situation changes when we take a broader view of the electoral process. Figure 3 shows indicators of the pro-incumbent bias of the provincial media (TV in the X-axis and provincial newspapers in the Y-axis) in the most recent gubernatorial elections. The Federal Capital of Buenos Aires (CF) appears at the upper-right corner, and two other provinces are not far from there. However, all the quadrants are populated, and at least two provinces do very poorly in both TV and newspaper coverage. That is, there is considerable variance in these measures, implying that in some provinces incumbent and opposition candidates have similar access to the media, while in others incumbents get much more and better coverage than opponents. Elections in the latter cannot be considered fair even if votes are counted fairly. Another important conclusion of the figure is that, although the



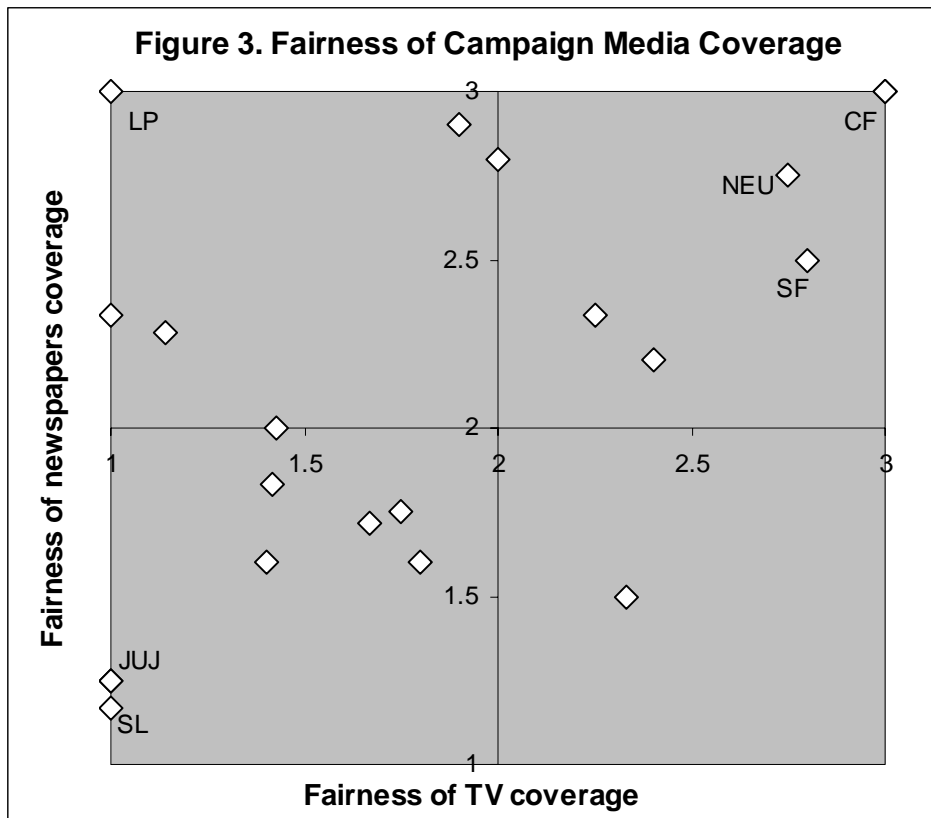
variables are positively associated, the correlation is not very strong ( $r=0.46$ ) because of off-diagonal provinces like La Pampa in which the TV is biased but the newspapers are not.



**X-Axis (Q.21):** “Sometimes citizens cannot vote because they are not given their ID cards on time, because their names do not appear on the voting rolls, etc. How serious do you think this kind of problem preventing citizens from voting was in the provincial elections of 2007? 1) Very serious, 2) quite serious, 3) somewhat serious, 4) not very serious, 5) not serious at all?”

**Y-Axis (Q.24):** “How fair was the counting of the votes by the electoral authorities? Do you believe there were 1) no irregularities in the counting of the votes, 2) few, 3) some, 4) quite a few, or 5) many irregularities in the counting of the votes?”

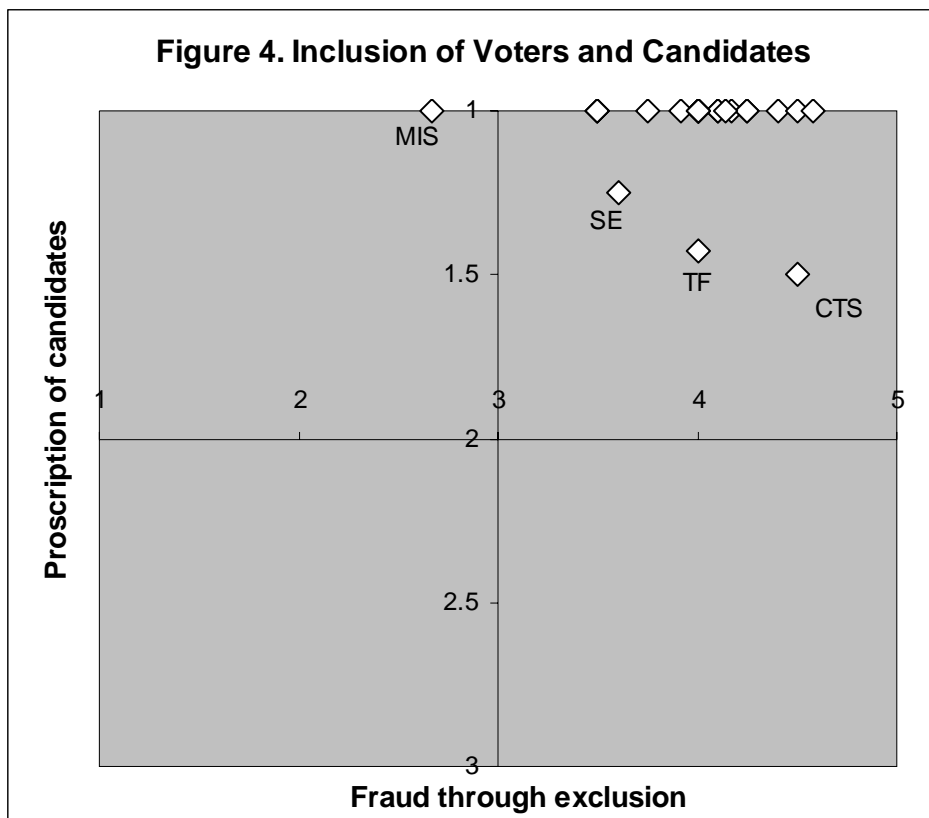
In sum, it seems that the electoral act in itself is not subject to important political manipulation in any of the provinces, but the pro-incumbency bias of the provincial media ranges from null to extremely high. Contestation, then, is in some provinces restricted in one of the most critical arenas of modern politics. As both classic liberal thinkers posited and contemporary public opinion research shows, a reasonably-informed democratic public cannot exist in the absence of media pluralism.



**X and Y Axes** (Q.32a-d). “Please think about the provincial media coverage of the 2007 electoral campaigns. We mean the coverage by the media and not the publicity of the candidates. Taking into account both the quantity and content of TV broadcasting, would you say that on average it was 1) very biased in favor of the incumbent’s gubernatorial candidate, 2) somewhat biased in favor of the incumbent’s candidate, 3) balanced (including countervailing biases), or biased in favor of the candidates of the opposition? And what about the coverage of the main provincial newspaper/s? (same response options)”

### VII.b. Inclusion

Figure 2 showed that there were little differences among provinces in terms of electoral inclusiveness. Figure 4 presents this variable again but crossed against another indicator of inclusion, the proscription of gubernatorial candidates. With only one exception, all the provinces are well within the upper-right quadrant. That is, both at the level of voters and of candidates these subnational units can be characterized, as McMann (2006) did for Russia and Kyrgyzstan, as “strong on participation, weak on contestation”: just as in those post-soviet states, in Argentina “the leaders of hybrid regimes ... seem to allow participation but stealthily undermine contestation” (p. 179-181).



**X-Axis (Q.21):** “Sometimes citizens cannot vote because they are not given their ID cards on time, because their names do not appear in the voting rolls, etc. How serious do you think this type of problems that prevent citizens from voting were in the provincial elections of 2007? 1) Very serious, 2) quite serious, 3) somewhat serious, 4) not very serious, 5) not serious at all?”

**Y-Axis (Q.26):** “A candidate can be banned openly, or, more subtly, through a doubtful interpretation of a legal requisite. Was any citizen denied, in one way or the other, the right to run for governor in the 2007 elections? 1) No, 2) yes, at least one minor candidate was denied the right to run, 3) yes, at least one candidate who was expected to be among the top vote-getters was denied the right to run.”

### VII.c. Freedom of Expression

Democracy can only function properly when citizens can voice their political views without fear of punishment. The *SEPP* includes a number of questions about freedom of expression. Two of them, one about public employees and another about the population in general, are presented in Figure 5. Only two provinces appear on the left sector of the graph, indicating that the citizens of most provinces enjoy significant levels of freedom of expression. When this attribute is evaluated only for provincial public employees, who are often thought to run larger risks if they express critical views of the government, inter-provincial differences become larger: several provinces are located in the lower half of the chart. Public employees, then, are not so free to speak about politics publicly. This is a major limitation of democracy in many provinces where most jobs (and the overwhelming majority of the best jobs) are controlled directly or indirectly by the provincial government. The finding is consistent with interpretations

of differences in subnational regimes as emerging from differences in levels of “economic autonomy” (McMann 2006; for a similar interpretation for Argentina, see Gervasoni 2006). Overall, only a few provinces are well into the upper-right quadrant. These results and the findings above on campaign coverage by the media suggest that one of the main ways in which provincial incumbents limit contestation is by restricting political communication.



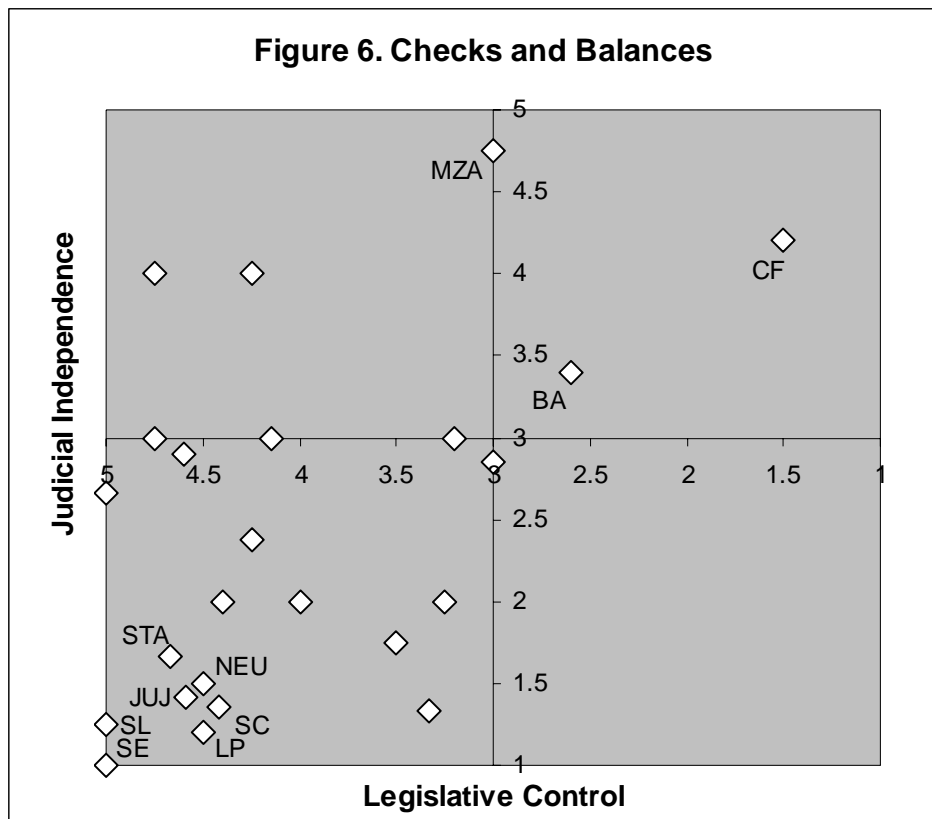
**X-Axis (Q.36):** “How free to criticize the provincial government without fear of punishment were regular citizens during 2002-2007: 1) Very free, 2) quite free, 3) somewhat free, 4) not very free, 5) not free at all?”

**Y-Axis (Q.35):** “We would like to know whether provincial public employees were at risk of being punished if they were openly critical of the administration of governor XX. Would you say that career administrative employees 1) ran serious risks such as being fired, 2) ran moderate risks such as not being promoted, or 3) did not run risks?”

#### VII.d. Checks and Balances

The SEPP assesses institutional constraints through questions about the role of the provincial legislature and the provincial supreme court of justice in functioning as limitations on the power of the executive (all of Argentina’s provinces are “presidential” and have, constitutionally, three clearly separated branches). Figure 6 shows that only the Federal Capital has effective legislative and judicial controls on the power of the executive. The provinces of Buenos Aires and Mendoza appear in relatively democratic positions too. Most notably, there is a large group of provinces clustered towards the lower-left corner. The governors of Santiago del

Estero, San Luis, Santa Cruz, La Pampa, Jujuy and other provinces enjoy almost total freedom from the other powers, a finding consistent with journalistic accounts and academic case studies (Bill Chávez 2003; Gibson 2005) of some of these provinces. Contrary to the findings above about vote-counting fraud and inclusion, the “checks and balances” subdimension appears as a deficit of democracy in many (but not all) provinces. An interesting additional finding is that provinces with decent levels of judicial independence outnumber those with effective legislative control.



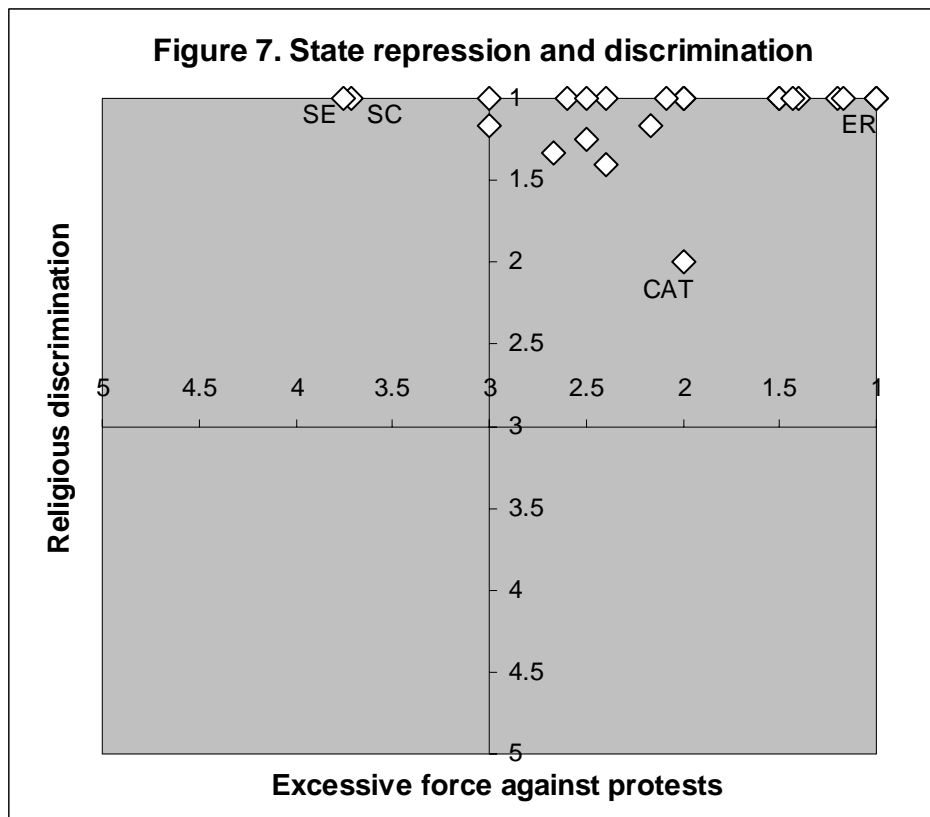
**X-Axis (Q.6):** “¿How limited was Governor XX’s power by the provincial legislature during the 2003-2007 period: 1) Very limited, 2) quite limited, 3) somewhat limited, 4) not very limited, or 5) not limited at all?”

**Y-Axis (Q.7):** “¿How many of the provincial supreme court justices were independent enough to make decisions contrary to the preferences of the XX administration: 1) No justice was independent, 2) fewer than half were independent, 3) half were independent, 4) more than half were independent, 5) all justices were independent?”

### VII.e. State Repression and Discrimination

So far I have presented some indicators with little inter-provincial heterogeneity (like those tapping inclusion and outright electoral fraud) and others that did vary considerably from province to province (such as freedom of expression and institutional constraints). The last aspect of democracy I analyze, (absence of) state repression and discrimination, combines one variable of each type. As Figure 7 shows, all provinces boast very high ratings in terms of

discrimination against religious minorities (similar results obtain with other types of discrimination). However, they do differ when repression of public demonstrations is assessed: although no province is located at the lowest level in this variable, two of them are well below the mid-value, and two more are right on it. One possible interpretation of these differences is that discrimination against minorities is hardly ever needed to keep an incumbent in power, while repression of demonstrations against the government might be.



**X-Axis (Q.47):** “Please tell me whether the police or other agents of the provincial government used excessive force against demonstrations or marches during the 2003-2007 period. [IF YES] Did this happen 2) a few times, 3) some times, 4) quite a few times, 5) many times?”

**Y-Axis (Q.50):** “I am going to mention several groups that sometimes suffer government discrimination. Did the XX administration discriminate against religious minorities such as Evangelicals, Jews or Muslims? [IF YES] Did this happen 2) a few times, 3) some times, 4) quite a few times, 5) many times?”

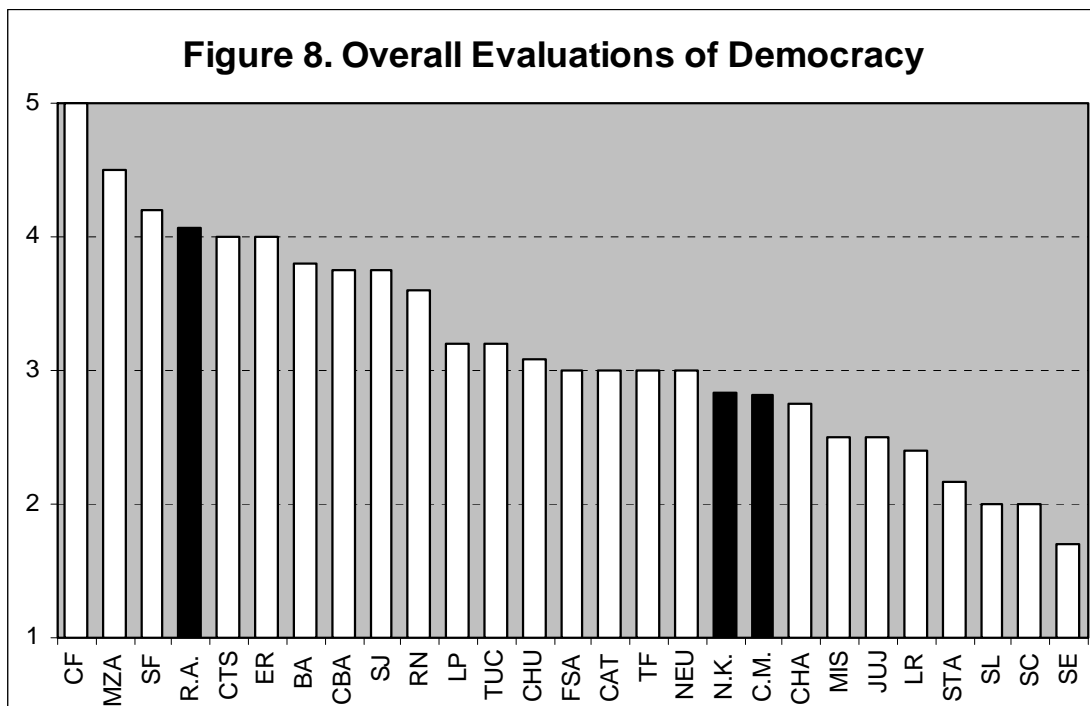
### VII.f. Overall Assessments of Democracy

As an alternative (and last) way of measuring the level of democracy in each province, a set of items towards the end of the questionnaire gave the experts a definition of democracy and asked them to rate the 2003-2007 period in their provinces and several national-level administrations. The question read as follows:

Q.52. “For the next questions I need to define democracy as ‘a political regime in which: 1) the executive and legislative branches are elected in free and fair elections with universal adult franchise, 2) there are effective checks and balances among the executive, legislative and judicial branches, and 3) basic constitutional rights such as freedom of speech are respected.’”

“I am going to mention several provincial and national governments, and I would like you to tell me, using this definition, whether each of them was very democratic, quite democratic, somewhat democratic, not very democratic or not democratic at all.”<sup>18</sup>

Each expert was asked to assess the 2003-2007, the current, and two previous provincial administrations, plus the Nestor Kirchner, Carlos Menem and Raúl Alfonsín administrations at the national level. Figure 8 presents the results (those for the national administrations are based on the opinions of all 124 experts and are highlighted in black).



The national-level ratings provide a useful (and interesting in itself) point of reference for comparison. As the figure shows, the Federal Capital, Mendoza and Santa Fe (along with the 1983-1989 Alfonsín administration) are considered basically democratic. On the other hand, the Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Carlos Menem (1989-1999) administrations are evaluated as

<sup>18</sup> Para las siguientes preguntas necesito definir la democracia como ‘un régimen político en el que: 1) los poderes ejecutivo y legislativo son elegidos en elecciones libres, justas y con voto universal, 2) hay pesos y contrapesos efectivos entre los poderes ejecutivo, legislativo y judicial, y 3) se respetan los derechos constitucionales básicos, tales como la libertad de expresión.’”

“Le voy a mencionar varios gobiernos provinciales y nacionales y quisiera que me diga, tomando en cuenta esta definición, si cada uno de ellos fue muy democrático, bastante democrático, algo democrático, poco democrático o nada democrático.”

considerable less democratic. The subnational regimes in San Luis, Santa Cruz and Santiago del Estero are seen as the least democratic, well below most other provinces. These figures (and some of the previous ones) show a wide variance in terms of degree of democracy. They also show that provinces can be more or less democratic than the national-level regime.

## **Conclusion**

As scholars of democracy turn their sights on subnational regimes, a first and basic challenge is how these should be conceptualized and measured. In the context of national-level democracies, subnational units are generally democratic from an institutional point of view. This means that there are no easy distinctions between openly authoritarian units (no elections, few substantive freedoms, etc.) and clearly democratic ones.

At the level of conceptualization I propose, first, to focus on the “level of democracy” rather than on the “quality of democracy,” second, to use a thick and multidimensional definition of democracy and, third, to think of the least democratic provinces or regions as hybrid regimes rather than as “subnational authoritarianisms”. An effective and feasible operational strategy to deal with the particular difficulty of placing regimes with a hybrid nature on the democracy-authoritarianism continuum is to assess the many aspects of democracy relying on information provided by experts with deep knowledge of subnational politics. The Survey of Experts on Provincial Politics described in this paper applied this approach to the 24 Argentine provinces, consulting between 4 and 8 experts in each of them. This strategy has several advantages: 1) experts are likely to understand the subtleties of regimes that are partly democratic and partly authoritarian, 2) experts compensate for the scarcity of appropriate secondary sources, especially for the smallest and least developed provinces, 3) because several experts per province are consulted and several questions tap each aspect of democracy, the reliability of the indicators can be assessed.

Preliminary descriptive results from the survey suggest that inter-provincial average and variance levels differ significantly across different dimensions of democracy. For example, there are reasonably good average levels and only modest variance in areas such as inclusion and fairness of the vote counting, but significant variance (and not-so-good average levels) in other aspects of democracy such as campaign media coverage, freedom of expression, and institutional constraints. Overall expert assessments of subnational democracy levels indicate that cross-provincial variance is significant, and in fact larger than over-time variance in levels of national democracy in Argentina.

Interestingly, the “strong on participation weak on contestation” (McMann 2006) pattern detected in very different national contexts is also present in the Argentine provinces. This pattern can be additionally described as “strong on strictly electoral contestation; weak on more subtle aspects of contestation”, in the sense that electoral dominance is achieved through strategies such as media control and lopsided campaign financing rather than by traditional “ballot stuffing.” Finally, a pattern that has been highlighted for many third-wave national democracies, that is, the weakness of the system of checks and balances, is also present; in several provinces the executive faces almost no institutional constraints from the legislative and judicial branches.



Further analyses of the data collected by the Survey of Experts on Provincial Politics will eventually result in an index of democracy (or several sub-indices for its dimensions and subdimensions) for the 24 Argentine provinces. It is to be hoped that new efforts to measure subnational regimes in other countries will in the not-so-distant future provide scholars of democracy with the type of regime datasets that have long been available at the national level.

## APPENDIX: Original Question Wording in Spanish

### Figure 2

**X-Axis** (Q.21): “A veces los ciudadanos no pueden votar porque no se les entrega el DNI a tiempo, porque sus nombres no aparecen en el padrón, etc. ¿Cuán graves cree usted que fueron este tipo de problemas que impiden que los ciudadanos voten en las elecciones provinciales de 2007: 1) muy graves, 2) bastante graves, 3) algo graves, 4) poco graves, o 5) nada graves?”

**Y-Axis** (Q.24). “¿Y cuán limpio fue el conteo de los votos por parte de las autoridades electorales? ¿Le parece que hubo 1) ninguna, 2) pocas, 3) algunas, 4) bastantes o 5) muchas irregularidades en el conteo de los votos?”

### Figure 3

**X and Y Axes** (Q.32a-d). “Por favor piense en la cobertura de la campaña electoral de 2007 por parte de los medios de comunicación provinciales. Nos referimos a la cobertura de los medios, y no a la publicidad de los candidatos. Considerando tanto la cantidad como el contenido de la cobertura de la TV abierta, ¿usted diría que en promedio fue 1) muy sesgada en favor del candidato a gobernador oficialista, 2) algo sesgada en favor del candidato oficialista, 3) equilibrada [incluyendo sesgos compensatorios], o sesgada en favor de candidatos opositores? ¿Y la del/de los principal/es diario/s provincial/es?”

### Figure 4

**X-Axis** (Q.21): “A veces los ciudadanos no pueden votar porque no se les entrega el DNI a tiempo, porque sus nombres no aparecen en el padrón, etc. ¿Cuán graves cree usted que fueron este tipo de problemas que impiden que los ciudadanos voten en las elecciones provinciales de 2007: 1) muy graves, 2) bastante graves, 3) algo graves, 4) poco graves, o 5) nada graves?”

**Y-Axis** (Q.26): “Un candidato puede ser proscrito en forma abierta o, más sutilmente, haciendo uso de una dudosa interpretación de un requisito legal. ¿Se le negó de una u otra forma a algún ciudadano el derecho a ser candidato a gobernador en las elecciones de 2007? 1) no se le negó el derecho a presentarse a ningún ciudadano, 2) se le negó el derecho a presentarse a un candidato menor, 3) se le negó el derecho a presentarse a un candidato que hubiera estado entre los más votados.”

### Figure 5

**X-Axis** (Q.36): “¿Cuán libres de criticar al gobierno provincial sin miedo de ser castigados eran los ciudadanos comunes durante 2003-2007? ¿1) Muy libres, 2) bastante libres, 3) algo libres, 4) poco libres o 5) nada libres?”

**Y-Axis** (Q.35): “Ahora quisiera saber si los empleados públicos provinciales corrían el riesgo de ser castigados en caso de que fueran abiertamente críticos del gobierno del gobernador XX. ¿Diría que los empleados administrativos de carrera 1) corrieron riesgos graves tales como ser despedidos, 2) riesgos moderados tales como no ser ascendidos, o 3) no corrieron riesgos?”

### Figure 6

**X-Axis** (Q.6): “¿Cuán limitado estuvo el poder del gobernador XX por la legislatura provincial durante el período 2003-2007: 1) muy, 2) bastante, 3) algo, 4) poco o 5) nada limitado?”

**Y-Axis** (Q.7): “¿Cuántos de los jueces de El Superior Tribunal de Justicia eran lo suficientemente independientes como para tomar decisiones contrarias a las preferencias del gobierno de XX: 1) ningún juez fue independiente, 2) menos de la mitad, 3) la mitad, 4) más de la mitad, o 5) todos fueron independientes?”

## Figure 7

**X-Axis (Q.47):** Por favor díganos si la policía u otros agentes del gobierno provincial usaron excesivamente la fuerza contra manifestaciones o piquetes durante el período 2002-2004. [EN CASO QUE SÍ] ¿Ocurrió 2) unas pocas veces, 3) algunas veces, 4) bastantes veces o 5) muchas veces?”

**Y-Axis (Q.50):** Voy a mencionarle una serie de grupos que a veces sufren discriminación por parte del gobierno ¿El gobierno de XX discriminó en contra de Minorías religiosas tales como evangélicos, judíos o musulmanes? [EN CASO QUE SÍ] ¿Lo hizo 2) una s pocas veces, 3) algunas veces, 4) bastantes veces o 5) muchas veces?”

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