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The Subnational Roots of Democratic Stability

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Subnational Roots of Democratic Stability

by

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Do opposition-led subnational governments reduce opportunities for the national government to undermine democracy? Over 89% of democratic country-years after 1990 consist of *multi-level* democracies. Control over subnational government provides opposition parties with state resources and visibility, which allow them to: (a) become more competitive in national elections, (b) incentivize office-seeking MPs to exert more legislative constraints, and (c) ultimately reduce executive aggrandizement. Leveraging close races for highest subnational executive office in Latin America (1990–2021), I find that oppositions experience electoral gains of 17 percentage points in national legislative elections in states they marginally won. At the country level, I employ panel models and the newly assembled *Subnational Elections Database* — the largest dataset on subnational election outcomes, which covers results from 84 democracies (1990–2021). These analyses reveal that subnational opposition control, even in unitary countries, increases horizontal accountability and reduces aggrandizement in the form of constitutional violations. Overall, in stark contrast to subnational governments as "laboratories against democracy" in the U.S. in recent years (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018;

Grumbach 2022), this research illustrates that oppositions since 1990 have better protected democracy against executive aggrandizement when they exerted more subnational control.

The dissertation of Julian Michel is approved.

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To my parents, brothers, and Claudia for their unconditional support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures

List of Tables

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

If the defining issue of the 21st century truly is the contest between democracy and autocracy as rival modes of organizing politics, as President Biden has repeatedly emphasized, then recent developments paint a grim picture: Democratic backsliding appears to be deepening. According to observers, the world has entered a "third wave of autocratization" (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019) in which 42% of the world's population witnessed a decline in democratic quality in 2022 (V-Dem 2023a). After the Cold War, executive aggrandizement replaced military coups as the primary way in which democracies came under attack (Bermeo 2016). Executive aggrandizement occurs when a *democratically elected president or prime minister weakens checks on their power to reduce the opposition's ability to compete in free and fair elections.* Typically, executive aggrandizement consists of limiting the independence or jurisdictions of courts, reducing opportunities for legislative oversight, curtailing media freedoms, eroding constitutional protections for political minorities, declaring states of emergency, removing term limits, or disregarding election outcomes.

Thus, a key puzzle is: Why are some elected leaders able to subvert democratic institutions to prolong their rule, whereas others are not? I follow the recent literature arguing that democratic institutions are self-enforcing when opposition parties are able to deter elected leaders from concentrating power (Przeworski 2022; Helmke, Kroeger, and Paine 2022). One key resource that the opposition in democracies often has access to, albeit to varying extents, is subnational executive office: governor- and mayorships. Descriptively, over 89% of democratic country-years after 1990 contain elected subnational executive office. In contrast

to the image of "the executive" undermining other branches of government, significant executive authority can be controlled by the opposition. In Latin America and the Caribbean, as this study reveals, opposition parties won 54.15% of races for directly-elected governor- and key mayorships under democracy (1990–2021). These are typically among a country's most visible and authoritative offices, which I argue makes them important elements of the balance of power between ruling and opposition parties.

Yet, despite prominent examples of subnational opposition to executive aggrandizement in Morales' Bolivia, Modi's India, Erdoğan's Turkey, and the United States under Trump, the current literature on democratic backsliding—with rare exceptions[1]—does not place an explanatory role on which party controls subnational governments. In adjacent literatures, however, subnational control has been established as regime-relevant in less likely settings: Subnational governments provided resources that enabled oppositions to become more competitive and ultimately achieve a liberalizing electoral outcome in the Mexican democratization in 2000 (Lucardi 2016; Magaloni 2006). Research on competitive authoritarianism has long treated regime party control over subnational administrations, which constitute sites of cooptation and low-intensity repression, as critical for regime stability.[2] The literature on party formation and survival under democracy frequently characterizes subnational governments as electoral springboards which provide resources that allow opposition parties to become more competitive when out of power nationally (Cyr 2017; Holland 2016; Eaton 2017). In light of prominent examples of subnational opposition to aggrandizement[3] and related literature's emphasis on the role of subnational control for the prospects of democratization, I ask in this dissertation: *Can patterns of subnational control help explain why some democracies experience executive aggrandizement while others do not?*

1. These include Grumbach (2022) and Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), but here subnational governments are tools of illiberal parties seeking to undermine democracy, not—as in this work—resources that allow the opposition to better defend democracy.

2. For a review of this research, see Hassan, Mattingly, and Nugent 2022.

3. These will be discussed in more depth in section 3.1.

At the same time, there are valid reasons to believe that subnational control does not matter for democratic stability or only under specific conditions: In unitary countries, political majorities at the center may recentralize authority and resources. With subnational administrations often relying heavily on intergovernmental transfers, they may lack the fiscal autonomy to oppose majorities at the center. If we assume that subnational election outcomes mirror (a) the popularity of the chief executive or (b) the extent to which aggrandizement has undermined subnational electoral competitiveness, we may question any causal role of subnational control, which would be epiphenomenal. Further, whatever the reason that voters supported more subnational opposition candidates, this reason may confound the relation between subnational opposition control and outcomes of interest. In this discourse, my contribution is to (a) motivate why subnational control affects executive aggrandizement and (b) to provide the most systematic empirical evidence, relying on novel data and robust identification strategies whenever possible, that subnational opposition control indeed reduces subsequent opportunities for executive aggrandizement. Crucially, exploiting outcomes of close subnational elections as plausibly exogenous sources of opposition strength will enable me to establish that subnational control is *not simply a reflection of* popular opposition support, but *has an independent effect on* the opposition's subsequent electoral performance in national-level elections.

In my theoretical framework, opposition access to subnational government matters for democratic stability by affecting *how much* and *through which strategies* oppositions constrain the national executive. The first step of my argument is that control of highest subnational office enhances the opposition's electoral competitiveness. These offices provide access to the state: elected governors and mayors typically have the power to make appointments to their administrations, to influence how budgets are spent, and at times even to collect taxes. The more state resources fall to one party alone, the easier it is to bind political elites and voters to that party (Levitsky and Way 2010; Magaloni 2006). Occupying subnational offices also increases the opposition's political visibility: subnational offices are

opportunities for the opposition to demonstrate that they govern better and are a political alternative to the chief executive (Lucardi 2016; Sells 2020; Farole 2021).

In the second step, an opposition that is more electorally competitive due to subnational office should behave differently from one with less subnational control. More electorally competitive oppositions should be more likely to choose institutional strategies over extra-institutional collective action to challenge the chief executive. In particular, they should be better able to preserve the loyalty of office-seeking opposition MPs, thereby maintaining horizontal checks on the national executive.[4] Subnational governments—as electoral springboards—help opposition parties bind office-seeking MPs and incentivize them to take an assertive stance in their exercise of legislative constraints on the national executive. Facing more disciplined and sizable opposition in the national parliament, chief executives should be less able to rewrite constitutions and change policies to disadvantage opposition parties. Further, if aggrandizement requires the compliance of subnational incumbents—who may administer national elections or may have leeway in whether to implement the leader's policies—subnational opposition control intensifies the leader's principal-agent problems.

In stark contrast, opportunities to resist executive aggrandizement likely are diminished where the leader's party dominates subnational office: state resources may be used by aligned mayors and governors to disincentivize opposition; horizontal accountability decreases when opposition MPs become acquiescent or defect to the chief executive after losing subnational allies; and extra-institutional opposition runs higher risks of being seen as the actual threat to democracy.

Recent opposition victories in subnational races in India (2023), Poland (2018), and Turkey (2019, 2024) may appear to support the view that subnational offices are resources oppositions can use to better check the national executive. Yet, such observations risk conflating the value of mayor- and governorship with the underlying popularity of the op-

4. Such checks may increase when oppositions attract defectors from governing parties, whose MPs are also office-seeking and consider the allocation of subnational electoral springboards.

position. By using original data on gubernatorial and key mayoral races in democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean (1990–2021) and employing a close-election discontinuity design, I can causally identify the effects of subnational office. While the choice of potentially constraining institutions rarely, if ever, is random (Pepinsky 2014), I test implications of my theory by leveraging quasi-randomness in opposition access to such institutions. The discontinuity analysis reveals that opposition victories in close subnational races increase their state-level vote in national lower house elections by 17 percentage points. Further, I analyze newly assembled data on parties' subnational control in 84 of 106 democracies with subnational elections between 1990 and 2021. Fixed effects panel analyses suggest that higher subnational opposition control (a) increases horizontal checks on the national executive, even outside federal and bicameral democracies, and (b) decreases extra-institutional mass mobilization.

The research gap I address is the following: We increasingly know when and why voters elect presidents with questionable democratic credentials (Graham and Svolik 2020; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Foa 2021; Frederiksen 2022). Once elected, chief executives can only undermine democratic institutions in their favor if there is no opposition strong enough to deter them (Waldner and Lust 2018; Corrales 2018; Helmke, Kroeger, and Paine 2022). Yet, measures of opposition party strength typically capture national-level seat shares and the ability to field candidates (e.g., Düpont et al. 2022; Pérez-Liñán, Schmidt, and Vairo 2019). How much the opposition occupies subnational executive offices—and whether these help deter aggrandizement—has not been evaluated systematically. This is surprising given the vast qualitative evidence on the role of subnational opposition to aggrandizement in Bolivia, India, Poland, and Turkey. While intuitions about subnational checks on national leaders go back to at least Montesquieu and De Tocqueville, the backsliding literature has neither clarified the theoretical logic linking subnational control to democratic stability nor provided systematic, robust evidence on this relation. Leveraging the newly assembled *Subnational Elections Database*, the most comprehensive dataset on subnational election outcomes after

1990, I test whether chief executives are less able to undermine democracy the less their party is in subnational control. I find that opposition-led subnational administrations (a) increase horizontal checks on the national executive and (b) enable oppositions to better contest within rather than outside elections. Overall, in stark contrast to subnational government as "laboratories against democracy" in the U.S. in recent years (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Grumbach 2022), this research shows how oppositions since 1990 have better protected democracy against executive aggrandizement when they exerted more subnational control.

1.1 Advancing the Literature on Democratic Stability

This research seeks to contribute to multiple strands in the literature on democratic stability: Most fundamentally, my argument speaks to the work on self-enforcing democratic institutions (Przeworski 1991; Weingast 1997; Fearon 2011).[5] Opposition parties as (a) agents of horizontal accountability and (b) the electoral alternative to the incumbent in the voter's exercise of vertical accountability are crucial to keeping leaders from aggrandizing. In the conventional "balance-of-power" framework, aggrandizement occurs when the opposition becomes too weak. In the words of Przeworski (2022, 17): "It must be in the best interest of the democratic rulers to stop short of monopolizing power given the potential reactions of the opposition and it must be in the best interest of the opposition to participate peacefully given that the incumbent stops." But what, then, empowers opposition parties to better constrain the national executive?

The study of democratic breakdowns has long occupied a preeminent role in Comparative Politics (Almond and Verba 1963; Linz 1978; Capoccia 2005). Only recently have authors started to explore the increasingly gradual backsliding of democracy, conducted by elected leaders, that may or may not end democratic rule (Bermeo 2016; Waldner and Lust 2018;

5. Regarding the concept of self-enforcing institutions, I follow Meng (2020)'s suggestion that for institutions to be self-enforcing, they need to both incentivize and empower actors to defend the institutional order and punish transgressions.

Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Building on a vast literature on transitions to autocracy,[6] arguably most work on backsliding has focused on the vertical relationship between citizens and the elected national government. Scholars sought to explain why citizens, at times even in developed, supposedly "consolidated" democracies such as the United States, were willing to elect presidents who then would use their authority to weaken democratic institutions. According to a prominent view, citizens are more likely to elect "undemocratic" candidates the more they are dissatisfied with previous democratic elites, who did not deliver economically (Kriesi et al. 2006; Kriesi et al. 2012; Norris and Inglehart 2019), were ineffective at providing public goods (Foa 2021) or seen as self-serving and corrupt (Levitsky and Loxton 2013; Carrión 2022, 31f.). Other influential research highlighted the role of (affective) polarization, which induces citizens to compromise democratic principles for their policy goals if undermining democracy allows their side to stay in power (Graham and Svolik 2020; Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022; Fossati, Muhtadi, and Warburton 2022; Şaşmaz, Yagci, and Ziblatt 2022).

However, recent contributions criticize the emphasis on public opinion and vote choice. For instance, Bartels (2023) shows how public opinion in Europe remained highly stable around episodes of backsliding and that eventual aggrandizers typically came to power running on moderate platforms. Relatedly, Chiopris, Nalepa, and Vanberg (2021) argue that voters can hardly discern who would aggrandize ex-ante and may not even recognize it once it occurs. Even when they do, citizens face collective action problems (Weingast 1997) and by definition become less able to hold leaders vertically accountable the more aggrandizement has proceeded. Finally, selecting "good" leaders is insufficient to ensure democracy-preserving behavior once elected (Przeworski 1991, 2022; Helmke, Kroeger, and Paine 2022). Even conceding that some presidents hold profound normative commitments to

6. This research, too broad to be summarized here, has largely examined the institutional (Linz 1990; Mainwaring 1993; Lijphart et al. 1999), economic (Przeworski et al. 2000; Svolik 2008, 2015) and attitudinal (Welzel 2013; Almond and Verba 1963) correlates associated with democratic reversals. It also had to account for military coups as a key pathway of breakdown (Maeda 2010; Svolik 2015).

democratic rule (Mainwaring 2022), it remains unclear how such leaders unilaterally could credibly commit not to undermine democracy if given the chance. It is for this reason that the "balance-of-power" framework highlights the opposition's ability to impose costs on aggrandizing behavior that, when high enough, preserves the democratic status quo between elections (Waldner and Lust 2018; Corrales 2018; Helmke, Kroeger, and Paine 2022).

A burgeoning literature explores how strategic choices by the opposition influence regime trajectories (Gamboa 2017, 2022; Somer, McCoy, and Luke 2021; Tomini, Gibril, and Bochev 2022). Where opposition parties fail to enter electoral alliances (Selçuk and Hekimci 2020; Gandhi and Ong 2019), employ extra-institutional strategies (Gamboa 2022), or play into the leader's polarizing rhetoric (Wuthrich and Ingleby 2020), they are less likely to defeat the aggrandizer. I complement this literature by identifying the effects of one type of opposition resource: subnational executive office. While it is conventional wisdom that higher opposition representation in institutions of horizontal accountability helps constrain the executive,[7] the recent literature on backsliding largely overlooks the role of subnational government in shaping national democracy. A prominent exception shows that subnational governments in the U.S. have been tools for an illiberal party seeking to reduce democratic qualities at regional and national levels (Grumbach 2022; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). In contrast, this research explores how checks on the national executive—commonly seen as the main threat to democracy after the Cold War—depend on the opposition's subnational control.

While local control over offices and institutions by a hegemonic party has long been acknowledged as crucial for cultivating support under electoral authoritarianism (Magaloni 2006; Reuter et al. 2016; McLellan 2020; Hassan, Mattingly, and Nugent 2022), recent work on democratic stability emphasizes *the extent of* subnational authority over *who* controls it. Rich scholarship on decentralization and federalism as forms of dispersive powersharing explores how the relative authority vested in subnational and national governments affects

7. Intuitively, these constraining effects materialize particularly where the opposition is sizable enough to block constitutional and policy change (e.g., Pérez-Liñán, Schmidt, and Vairo 2019).

democratic stability and intergroup conflict (Graham, Miller, and Strøm 2017; Treisman 2007; Lijphart 2004; Diamond and Tsalik 1999; Kaufman, Kelemen, and Kolcak 2024). In the abstract, such power-sharing institutions are thought of as stabilizing democracy by facilitating the self-government of different groups at lower tiers of government, while enabling access to shared rule at the national level. Additionally, the transfer of power to lower tiers of government has been argued to improve democratic performance by allowing for more targeted and efficient public goods provision if preferences vary across units and cross-unit externalities are low (Oates 1972), more opportunities for citizens to internalize democratic norms via local political participation (Mill 1861), and higher responsiveness where government is "closer to the people" (World Bank 1997) and competes with other units for mobile capital and citizens (Tiebout 1956).[8] However, the existence of dispersive power-sharing institutions only indicates whether such power-sharing is theoretically possible – not how much it is realized. Vertically dispersed authority can still be largely controlled by one party.

Further, neither *the extent of* subnational authority nor *who* controls it might influence democratic stability if such authority can easily be recentralized. Indeed, some aggrandizers recentralize, particularly in already authoritarian settings. Precisely because subnational offices are tools the opposition can use to challenge the leader, successful aggrandizers attempted to marginalize them: by reducing fiscal transfers (Eaton 2013), coopting or removing unaligned incumbents (Buckley et al. 2022; Tutkal 2022), reassigning competencies to other administrative levels (Dickovick 2007), or creating novel ones (Gel'man and Ryzhenkov 2011; Weyland 2013). Yet, even in non-federal settings undergoing aggrandizement subnational office has been remarkably sticky. As McLellan (2020, 26) notes, "[a]ttempts to recentralize in democracies and autocracies alike have been slow and expensive, met with popular discontent and were seldom successful in suppressing powerful local actors." In Latin America after

8. Despite their theoretical appeal, the empirical evidence for these accounts is mixed at best (Treisman 2007).

1990, for instance, only Fujimori's autogolpe abolished regional elections, while oppositions in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador continued to obtain subnational office despite significant aggrandizement. As aggrandizement tends to proceed gradually, oppositions can utilize their resources to resist (Gamboa 2022). But are governor- and mayorships resources that oppositions can leverage to combat or even deter aggrandizement? Whereas earlier research saw the most extreme cases of recentralization as evidence that subnational executives do not affect regime change because they are easily removed by popular presidents, this study seeks to analyze more systematically if patterns of subnational control influence whether the national executive can undermine democracy.

1.2 Conceptualizing Executive Aggrandizement

Executive aggrandizement is a specific type of regime change through which a democracy becomes less democratic. A regime is a "set of formal and/or informal rules for choosing leaders and policies" (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014). Regimes are electoral democracies if they meet Dahl's criteria of participation and contestation: freedoms of association and expression exist, suffrage is (near) universal, regularly occurring elections are clean, and officials are elected (Dahl 2008; Coppedge 2017). Given that elections can ultimately only be considered free and fair if opposition members enjoy significant civil and political liberties, liberal democracies additionally provide equality before the law, individual liberties, and more constraints on the executive (O'Donnell 2001; Diamond 2002). Democracy slides back when there is a "weakening or disassembling of a given set of democratic institutions" (Bermeo 2016, 16) of which executive aggrandizement is a subtype.

Executive aggrandizement consists of a *democratically elected president or prime minister weakening checks on their own power to reduce the opposition's ability to compete in free and fair elections.* In the abstract, checks are limits on what the chief executive can unilaterally decide in terms of their survival in office or selecting policies. Not every reduction

in such checks constitutes aggrandizement:[9] It is easy to imagine a setting with numerous veto players rendering policy change next to impossible (Tsebelis 1995, 2002), where removing veto players can increase democratic quality.[10] Similarly, not every state of emergency empowering the executive adversely affects the underlying electoral playing-field.[11] For this reason, aggrandizement necessitates that oppositions are unduly disadvantaged by the removal of checks, which here will be interpreted broadly to include reductions not only in the democratic qualities of the electoral framework (e.g., infringing political rights; disregarding election results) but also in dimensions of liberal democracy (e.g., reducing media freedoms; eroding legislative oversight).[12] Against Bermeo's prominent definition of aggrandizement as "changes that hamper the power of opposition forces to challenge executive preferences" (Bermeo 2016, 10), my discussion highlights that oppositions can be too constraining (see also Levitsky and Ziblatt 2023), meaning that we should not define aggrandizement merely as actions that reduce horizontal checks or weaken the opposition. Instead, we need an absolute reference point—the ability of the opposition to compete in free and fair elections—to differentiate aggrandizement from normatively unproblematic or even desirable instances of strengthening the national executive.

While it is theoretically possible to imagine reductions in (a) civil rights and liberties or (b) the power allocation between the three branches of government that do not disadvantage the opposition electorally—e.g., if rights and liberties were reduced equally for both gov-

9. In fact, stable democracy is consistent with many configurations regarding the relative authority of the national executive (Shugart and Carey 1992).

10. For a discussion of how an alleged "tyranny of the minority" unduly undermines the policy space of political majorities in the contemporary U.S., see Levitsky and Ziblatt 2023.

11. If the status quo favors the opposition, e.g., when it packed the court while last in government, a potential unpacking of the court would only constitute aggrandizement if it affected the opposition's ability to compete in free and fair elections.

12. In the special case of an anti-democratic opposition party, the literature on "combative" and "militant democracy" suggests that the national executive can forbid such parties to run or even dissolve them (Capoccia 2013; Loewenstein 1937). This would not be considered aggrandizement if such actions preserve the overall opposition's ability to compete electorally.

ernment and opposition supporters—this would not constitute aggrandizement as I define it. This approach follows Laebens (2023), Haggard and Kaufman (2021), Waldner and Lust (2018), and Huq and Ginsburg (2018) by excluding such hypothetical situations,[13] but differs from these by not requiring *simultaneous* reductions in dimensions other than the free and fairness of elections. In practice, civil rights and liberties alongside horizontal constraints on the national executive are devices that protect the opposition's ability to compete in free and fair elections in the future. In a "balance-of-power" framework, defining aggrandizement in a way that requires the opposition to be disadvantaged by the leader then motivates why oppositions have an incentive to prevent and counteract aggrandizement. Were we to define aggrandizement without reference to the opposition's ability to compete, its incentive to check the leader would be conditional on whether it prefers lower levels of civil liberties or fewer constraints on the national executive. Further, I also do not consider recentralization to be a form of aggrandizement because (national) democracy does not conceptually require the existence of autonomous subnational governments (Hooghe et al. 2016).

Whereas the concept of democratic backsliding is agnostic about which branch of government is undermining democracy, executive aggrandizement originates from the national-level executive. Thus, while opposition parties can engage in backsliding—e.g., via national parliament (Ecuador in the late 1990s to mid-2000s) or the highest courts (attempts in Turkey to declare the governing party unconstitutional in 2008)—they, by definition, can only be the target, not the perpetrating actor, of executive aggrandizement. In contrast to definitions of democratic backsliding (Bermeo 2016; Waldner and Lust 2018; Haggard and Kaufman 2021), I don't require actions to be legal, institutional, or to affect democracy through incremental changes over time. Therefore, "incumbent takeovers" (Svolik 2015; Baturo and Tolstrup 2022) and "autogolpes" (Przeworski et al. 2000, 21) are instances of executive aggrandizement. As aggrandizement occurs from a democratic starting point, it is conceptually

13. Note that Haggard and Kaufman (2021), Waldner and Lust (2018), and Huq and Ginsburg (2018) conceptualize broader concepts of "backsliding" and "retrogression," respectively.

distinct from executive-driven reductions in democratic quality under autocracy.[14] In contrast to democratic reversals (Svolik 2015), aggrandizement may or may not cause a regime to fall below minimal thresholds of electoral democracy.

The definition of executive aggrandizement requires us to delineate which actors are considered part of the national executive. If checks are reduced by actions of the chief executive's party or political allies in the courts, parliament, or constitutional assemblies, I assume that this was at the order of the chief executive, and thus may constitute aggrandizement. As my theoretical framework will be at the party level—treating each governing and opposition party as a unitary actor—I do not engage with the conversation around rival party elites as checks on chief executives (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Frantz et al. 2021) in the main analysis. However, I relax this unitary actor assumption in section 3.4.6. While I will reference "the opposition" at times, I do not disregard the often severe coordination problems between opposition parties (Eaton 2017; Gandhi and Ong 2019).[15] Empirically, this will be addressed in robustness checks when including measures of the fragmentation of subnational offices across opposition parties (appendix 5.17). To acknowledge that national executives can consist of coalition governments, with coalition partners potentially being unwilling to cooperate in efforts to aggrandize (Haggard and Kaufman 2021), country-level results will be presented for both narrow (only the leader's party) and broad (governing parties) definitions of which parties constitute the national executive. Conceptually, an opposition party is every party that is outside the national executive. Whereas leaders may collaborate with the opposition to create barriers to entry to prevent future opposition parties from emerging, as in Katz and Mair (1995)'s cartel party thesis, executive aggrandizement disadvantages the *existing* opposition.

Before outlining the plan of this book, I preview the key operationalizations I will rely

14. On types of reductions in democratic quality under different regime types, see Lührmann and Lindberg 2019. For a study of power concentration in the executive under authoritarianism, see Dresden and Howard 2016.

15. Note, however, that my theory does not require oppositions to coordinate.

on: First, I distinguish between opportunities for—and actual—executive aggrandizement. This distinction reflects the idea that the intentionality of the chief executive may determine whether they exploit reduced checks to undermine institutional checks such as the constitution (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013; Mainwaring 2022). Opportunities for aggrandizement crucially rely on the horizontal constraints chief executives face (O'Donnell 1998). Such horizontal constraints will be operationalized via V-Dem's horizontal accountability index. The V-Dem project also provides the main measure of executive aggrandizement: whether the national executive respects the constitution. Constitutional constraints are a classic check on chief executives, violations of which classify as aggrandizement (e.g., term limit violations (Versteeg et al. 2020)). Further, I examine two additional dimensions of aggrandizement, again operationalized with V-Dem data: media censorship and the repression of civil society. As secondary measures in the country-level analysis, I will also examine other widely-used outcomes in the backsliding literature: liberal democracy, political liberties, and freedoms of expression, but acknowledge that V-Dem's measurements for these capture all reductions in these dimensions, not only those caused by the chief executive.

1.3 Plan of the Book

After having previewed the empirical approach and main findings and having outlined both the contribution to the literature on democratic stability and the conceptual framework, the next chapter introduces the reader to the theoretical framework.

In terms of theoretical setup, the main prediction will be that subnational opposition control reduces opportunities for—and actual—executive aggrandizement. If we think of subnational governments as "electoral springboards" which provide resources parties can use in future contests at different levels, controlling them allows the opposition to better incentivize its office-seeking MPs to remain loyal to the opposition and take an assertive stance in their exercise of horizontal accountability. As the Federalists noted centuries ago:

"Ambition must be made to counteract ambition" (Madison 1788). Applied to modern multi-level democracies, the extent to which office-seeking MPs side with the opposition and engage in horizontal oversight depends on whether they believe doing so would be in their (career) interest. Knowing that they will have subnational allies and resources in the next elections, and are part of a more competitive party, they are more willing to horizontally check the national executive even before the next elections. Insofar as MPs from both governing and opposition parties consider which side promises better prospects of career advancement, more competitive oppositions, particularly in settings with weakly institutionalized parties and frequent party switching, should be better at preserving existing and attracting new MPs to their cause. The relation between higher subnational opposition control and subsequent increases in legislative constraints on the national executive is expected to hold also in unitary democracies where subnational units cannot rely on national upper chambers to exercise horizontal oversight.

Why would we believe that subnational governments are electoral springboards? Subnational governments increase the opposition's electoral competitiveness because they provide *state access* and *political visibility*. The former entails access to fiscal and administrative resources, which allow oppositions to (a) better bind supporters between elections and (b) engage in administrative resistance to aggrandizement (e.g., when subnational governments select election officials or redistricting committees). Political visibility combines opportunities to engage in valence messaging, build party brands and reputations, and signal that the national incumbent can be electorally defeated. In a second step, oppositions with more state access and higher visibility should be (a) better able to contest in elections and (b) less likely to engage in extra-institutional mass mobilization (as the main alternative to electoral, institutional strategies to challenge the chief executive). Overall, this section develops two main hypotheses and two mechanism tests:

$H1_a$—***Opportunities for Aggrandizement*:** The more the opposition wins governorships and key mayorships, the higher horizontal constraints on the national executive will be.

$H1_b$—***Actual Aggrandizement*:** The more the opposition wins governorships and key mayorships, the less likely executive aggrandizement in the form of constitutional violations will be.

H_{M1}—***Electoral Competitiveness*:** Subnational opposition victories in close elections increase the opposition's local vote share in subsequent national lower house elections.

H_{M2}—***Mass Mobilization*:** The more the opposition wins governor- and key mayorships, the smaller and less frequent pro-democracy mass mobilizations will be.

In the third chapter, these theoretical expectations are tested empirically at the country level. To do so, I constructed the *Subnational Elections Database* – the most comprehensive dataset on subnational election outcomes after the Cold War covering 84 of 106 politically decentralized democracies (1990–2021). This dataset provides, among others, the measurement for the main independent variable of "subnational control" which captures the share of highest subnational offices won by opposition parties. After describing the dataset and providing descriptive statistics, I present the main country-level analysis of subnational control's impact on opportunities for—and actual—executive aggrandizement between the subnational election year and the following one. These analyses show that subnational opposition control is positively associated with horizontal constraints, even in unitary and unicameral democracies (**$H1_a$**). It also positively affects the national executive's respect for the constitution, with constitutional transgressions being a classic form of aggrandizement (**$H1_b$**). I show similar evidence for measures of liberal democracy and its subdimensions but acknowledge that these—along with horizontal constraints—are not exclusively affected by the national executive's behavior. Consistent with my theoretical framework, changes in legislative oversight are driving the main results for horizontal accountability. Results are similar for broad

and narrow conceptions of opposition: the former treats all parties other than the leader's as opposition, whereas the latter treats all parties other than the largest three governing parties as per the Database of Political Institutions (Scartascini, Cruz, and Keefer 2021) as opposition. Findings are also stable when exposed to a large battery of robustness checks, including restricting the analysis to unitary and unicameral democracies. Finally, I provide suggestive evidence that subnational opposition control reduces pro-democracy mass mobilization ($\mathbf{H_{M2}}$), with effects being particularly significant and large at lower levels of electoral democracy.

Further, I address four potential objections in more detail:

1. that popular leader support may confound the relation between subnational control and subsequent aggrandizement,

2. that how subnational resources affect national-level regime change may depend on the intentions of actors holding these resources,

3. that subnational opposition access may affect resistance actors other than the opposition, and rival party elites in the chief executive's party in particular, and

4. that recentralization—or the threat thereof—may negate any constraining effect subnational opposition may otherwise have.

For the first, I document that controlling for measures of leader popularity (presidential vote share and leader party vote share) does not change results for subnational control. This helps defend against the claim that subnational control is merely mirroring leader (party) support. Additionally, support for a causal *empowering* effect of winning governor- and key mayorships in Latin America will be presented in chapter four. For the second and third potential objections, I will test implications by relying on party-level coding of (1) whether parties accepted democratic norms before elections and (2) levels of party personalization, both of which are provided by the Variety of Parties project ("V-Party," Düpont et al. 2022).

The results suggest that the intentionality of opposition parties regarding the acceptance of democratic norms cannot better account for observed changes in horizontal oversight relative to the "balance-of-power" framework. Further, country-level recentralization by elected leaders is exceptionally rare under democracy and does not occur when the opposition is particularly weak. Only the third objection about subnational control affecting rival regime party elites' ability to constrain their leader sees some empirical support, potentially pointing toward a separate channel through which subnational control matters.

Chapter four then moves to state-level analyses, which explore the effects of the opposition winning highest directly elected subnational executive office in Latin America and the Caribbean (1990–2021). I first describe the state-level component of the *Subnational Elections Database* and provide descriptive insights. Then, I motivate using a close-election discontinuity design to causally identify whether oppositions indeed become more competitive in national legislative elections where they won highest subnational executive office in a close election. The main finding of this analysis is that, at both party- and opposition levels, oppositions become more competitive where they win close subnational races relative to where they barely lost ($\mathbf{H_{M1}}$). These effects are estimated to range between 12 and 17 percentage points more state-level votes that a marginally winning opposition receives and, thus, are remarkably large. Combined with earlier results on mass mobilization, this suggests that opposition parties are better able to compete electorally over engaging in extra-institutional mass mobilization where they won more subnational elections. I characterize the analysis for electoral competitiveness as a mechanism test, which assumes that better opposition results 2–5 years (median: 3) after having won a close subnational race are indicative of the opposition party already having been perceived as more competitive by MPs in the year after subnational elections (in which changes in opportunities for—and actual—aggrandizement are captured). The findings on electoral competitiveness are particularly credible as victories in very close elections are plausibly exogenous to variables we associate with more successful oppositions.

In the conclusion, I summarize the main contributions of this dissertation: Patterns of subnational control under democracy hold explanatory value for (1) horizontal constraints shaping opportunities for aggrandizement and (2) actual executive aggrandizement. In terms of mechanism tests, opposition parties are more able to contest electorally and avoid mass mobilization after they won more subnational offices. I outline the limitations of the evidence presented as well as opportunities for future investigation. Finally, I reflect on the policy implications of this research.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Theorizing the Link Between Subnational Control and Democratic Stability

In this section, I explain how opposition parties utilize subnational incumbency, and the state access and political visibility it provides, to become more competitive in national elections. Oppositions anticipating that they will be more competitive then rely less on extra-institutional strategies of challenging the national executive and are better able to preserve the loyalty of its office-seeking MPs on which horizontal accountability depends. Together, potential aggrandizers facing a more competitive, cohesive opposition and fewer aligned administrations should be less able to undermine democracy.

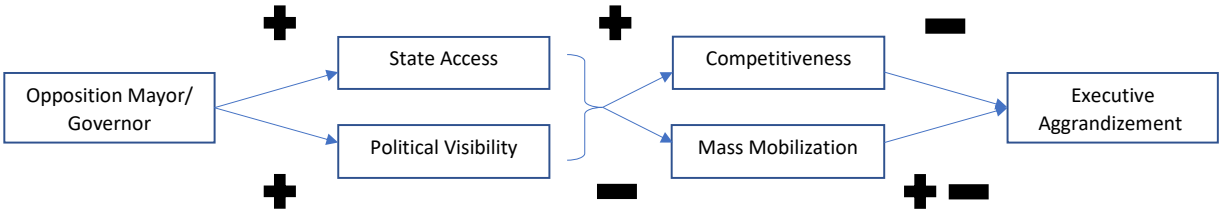

Figure 2.1: Theoretical Model

2.1.1 State Access

To begin with, these offices provide access to the state: elected governors and mayors typically make appointments to their administrations, influence how budgets are spent, and at

times even collect taxes. The more state resources fall to one party alone, the easier it is for that party to undermine electoral competitiveness (Levitsky and Way 2002; Magaloni 2006). Subnational state spending is significant: The most comprehensive data comprising 69 democracies in 2020 indicates that, on average, 44.7% of government spending in federal and 20.6% in unitary regimes is conducted, albeit not necessarily decided over, by subnational governments.[1]

Why is the opposition's ability to use subnational administrations to make appointments relevant for democratic stability? After losing national elections, the opposition domestically can survive in two institutions "to fight another day" (Whitehead 2007): national parliament and subnational offices. In administratively decentralized settings, governors and mayors make appointments to their—in comparison to MP staff sizes—large administrations. Opposition parties utilize this to bind key political supporters and staff while out of power nationally. The access to local party brokers and state resources plays a prominent role in accounts of clientelism and "machine politics" under democracy (Dixit and Londregan 1996; Stokes et al. 2013; Mares and Young 2019; Oliveros 2021). Such brokers help national party elites overcome issues of information asymmetry – who best to target with scarce resources to maximize political returns (Szwarcberg 2012). In addition, they also mobilize supporters (Nichter 2018; Tavits 2012), including local organized interest and civil society groups (Samuels and Zucco 2015), thereby incentivizing the party's politicians not to defect to other parties (Arriola et al. 2022; Desposato and Scheiner 2008; Desposato 2006). Even for programmatic parties, being able to bind experts should allow them to offer a better program in subsequent elections, with party employees also contributing to efforts to mobilize citizens in elections. In both clientelistic and programmatic parties, office-seeking opposition MPs as key agents of horizontal accountability should thus see higher value in remaining loyal

1. Own calculation employing subnational spending data from OECD-SNFG (2022) and using V-Dem's electoral democracy index to identify democracies ($v2x\_polyarchy \geq 0.5$; V-Dem 2023b).

to the opposition the more it holds subnational office.[2] Without such instrumental appeal, many opposition parties simply vanish after suffering elite defections (Cyr 2017). In short, subnational incumbency helps preserve the organizational strength of opposition parties. Such parties, then, should be better able to maintain horizontal constraints and challenge the chief executive in national elections.

In addition to the right to appoint, incumbents gain access to municipal and regional budgets. In fiscally decentralized settings, they can tax and borrow (Hooghe et al. 2016). Fiscal autonomy blunts the effects of politicized intergovernmental transfers. Even though intergovernmental transfers to unaligned subnational executives are typically smaller (Brollo and Nannicini 2012; Lara and Toro 2019), they can accrue locally sourced revenue streams. These can consist of local fees and licenses that, for example, contribute over $4 Billion to Istanbul's municipal budget annually (Esen and Gumuscu 2019). In Sierra Leone, the opposition mayor in the capital invested heavily into property tax collection—more than doubling property tax revenue in a year—to compensate for reductions in transfers of 30-40% (FCC 2022). Successful aggrandizers at times reduced the fiscal autonomy of unaligned subnational incumbents (Dickovick and Eaton 2013), but even reduced budgets give the opposition more resources than where it did not win to begin with. Ultimately, access to state resources enables the opposition to more effectively compete for political power. Referring to Venezuela's national elections after the opposition had previously lost almost all subnational offices in 2004, Corrales and Penfold-Becerra (2007, 106) note: "The opposition campaigns with words; the state, with words plus money."[3]

2. Government MPs also consider whether their party is sufficiently competitive to promise future office. Here, opposition competitiveness gives government MPs an exit option, which can affect horizontal accountability when it allows them to (a) vote against their party or (b) defect to the opposition. On party switching for vote- and office-seeking purposes, see Mershon and Shvetsova 2008; O'brien and Shomer 2013; Kerevel 2014; Klein 2021; Aldrich and Bianco 1992. On exit options enabling voting against governing parties regarding term limit removal, see McKie 2019.

3. The Chávez administration profited at crucial moments from surging world market prices for oil and gas. In already authoritarian Russia, natural resource rents facilitated Putin's efforts to create a hegemonic party that coopted many previously unaligned subnational incumbents before regional elections were abolished (Reuter 2017).

2.1.2 Political Visibility

Occupying subnational office increases the opposition's visibility: These provide opportunities to demonstrate that they govern better and are a political alternative to the chief executive (Lucardi 2016; Sells 2020; Farole 2021). Incumbents, including at subnational levels, typically enjoy preferential media access and more coverage (Boas and Hidalgo 2011; Prior 2006). This visibility enables the opposition to (1) engage in valence messaging, (2) develop its party brand, and (3) signal that the national executive can be electorally defeated.

In polarized settings, local incumbents have the advantage of focusing on "bread and butter" issues. By emphasizing local problem-solving, a valence appeal, they give the chief executive neither visibility nor an obvious line of attack (Wuthrich and Ingleby 2020). Incumbents benefit in subsequent campaigns from being able to talk about their political experience and what they have previously accomplished for their community (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2020). Subnational accomplishments help develop personal and party brands (Holland 2016; Lupu 2016, 33), which range from "defenders of liberal democracy,"[4] "competent managers,"[5] "capable of good governance,"[6] to "tough on crime." Striking examples of this brand-building through subnational incumbency include eventual aggrandizers such as Philippines's Duterte and Colombia's Uribe whose presidential campaigns heavily relied on their subnational experience in "mano dura" approaches to security challenges.[7] Istanbul mayor İmamoğlu leveraged his "access to the books" to contrast his government

4. In the U.S., various Democrat-controlled cities gained international visibility as "sanctuary cities," while Democratic governors helped the party further its brand as the one expanding access to the vote.

5. President Macri developed such a national reputation as mayor of Buenos Aires (Vommaro 2023).

6. See Holland 2016 on El Salvador's FMLN.

7. Similarly, El Salvador's aggrandizing president Bukele leveraged his mayorship of San Salvador to gain and consolidate an independent profile, later allowing him to successfully run for president under his newly-founded "Nueva Ideas" party. These examples highlight that subnational offices can be springboards for illiberal actors as well, with more ambiguous consequences for long-term democracy. My analysis will examine changes in opportunities for—and actual—aggrandizement in the year after subnational elections, thus does not allow for statements about more long-term effects.

with the corruption and largesse under the previous AKP mayorship (NYT 2019).[8] Overall, subnational incumbency allows politicians to deliver a "proof of concept" of how they would govern nationally if given the chance, which is an opportunity to gain a valence advantage and develop their national profile.

Even beyond an incumbent's performance, subnational election results can influence national elections. Subnational victories are often described as invigorating the opposition (Council on Foreign Relations 2019; Time 2020; Yavuz and Koç 2024), whereas defeats legitimize the aggrandizer (Smyth and Turovsky 2018). From this perspective, subnational elections—when won by the opposition—signal the aggrandizer's vulnerability in national elections. This belief that the national executive can be defeated is essential to mobilize supporters in elections (Ong 2022).

2.1.3 Subnational Opposition Control Enables Institutional Resistance to Aggrandizement

How exactly do oppositions more competitive due to subnational office become more able to engage in institutional resistance to executive aggrandizement, and horizontal oversight in particular? If we acknowledge that opposition MPs are key agents of horizontal accountability (e.g., O'Donnell 1998) and that MPs are office-seeking actors (e.g., Downs 1957; Mayhew 1974; Aldrich 1995),[9] then the opposition's ability to engage in horizontal oversight can be argued to depend on the electoral competitiveness of the opposition. Crucially, MPs consider their own career interests when deciding whether to side with the opposition and engage in horizontal oversight. While the opposition as a whole by definition has an incentive to pre-

8. Previous scholarship on the merits of decentralization has suggested subnational incumbency may enable gaining a valence advantage in weak democracies: According to Fox (1994, 106), "rising democratic leaders can most credibly challenge the corrupt old ways if they are forearmed with successful records in local government."

9. These offices need not necessarily be political ones but can include lucrative positions in the bureaucracy (Gingerich 2013; Kerevel 2015).

vent aggrandizement as it reduces its future ability to compete electorally, individual MPs can decide to become acquiescent or even switch their affiliation to the government *if this promises better career advancement*. Similarly, government MPs are more likely to defect the lower the competitiveness of governing parties (McKie 2019). In short, by influencing relative electoral competitiveness, the allocation of subnational electoral springboards between opposition and governing parties should influence the levels of legislative oversight over the national executive between elections.

Empirically, there is a substantial observational literature documenting party-switching by national MPs toward more electorally competitive parties for office- and reelection-seeking purposes: This phenomenon has been observed in settings as diverse as Italy (1988–2000; Heller and Mershon 2008), Malawi (1994–2007; Young 2014), Mexico (1997–2009; Kerevel 2014), Poland (1993–2005; McMenamin and Gwiazda 2011), Romania (1992–2008; Gherghina 2016), Ukraine (1998–2002; Thames 2007), and Zambia (1991–2016; Arriola et al. 2022). According to one review of the literature on legislative party switching, "[t]he available data largely corroborate the notion that politicians as strategic actors choose party affiliations so as to enhance their electoral prospects" (Mershon 2014, 420) and that "representatives gravitate to governing (presidential) parties"(421). At least two empirical studies have suggested a link between subnational control and party-switching: In Brazil, MPs have been shown to switch toward the governor's party because "politicians who place a premium on delivering pork prefer membership in parties that control access to the resources of the state" (Desposato and Scheiner 2008, 510). In contrast, Mershon (2008) discusses how subnational outcomes induce party-switching by signalling the relative popularity of parties.

Aside from party-switching, levels of horizontal accountability can also be affected by legislators' voting patterns: whether MPs side with or oppose the national executive. Here, an emerging literature on "coalitional presidentialism" has documented how presidents, especially those whose parties do not hold legislative majorities, use their access to state resources to incentivize unaligned MPs to support their legislative agendas (Chaisty, Cheeseman, and

Power 2018; Kellam 2015; Acosta 2009).[10] Opposition MPs are receptive to such transfers because these are thought to further their office-seeking goals: "[Unaligned] legislators engage in pork barrel politics because they want deliverables, thus allowing them to credit-claim within their districts" (Chaisty, Cheeseman, and Power 2018, 20). While this literature has focused on the chief executive's use of central resources, the idea can be extended to subnational state resources: Oppositions with high subnational control can reassure their MPs that they will have subnational allies and state resources in future elections, thereby MPs need to rely less on exchanging legislative support for transfers by the chief executive to realize their office-seeking goals.

Whereas party-switching and legislative support for office seeking purposes can operate in both unitary and federal democracies, we may expect a particularly clear relationship between subnational control and horizontal accountability in federal countries. In these, subnational incumbency may entail the authority to activate judicial review by the highest courts, thereby giving the opposition more institutional options to (indirectly) engage in horizontal oversight.[11] Where national-level upper chambers consist of delegates selected by subnational governments, as in Germany, legislative constraints mechanically depend on who governs at subnational tiers.[12] Ultimately, the chief executive's control over upper and lower houses is thought to enable aggrandizement (Pérez-Liñán, Schmidt, and Vairo 2019, but see Helmke 2017).[13]

10. On the idea that chief executives can increase the winset for policy change via side payments, particularly where party discipline of opposition parties is low, see also Tsebelis 2002.

11. Scholars have also suggested that courts in settings experiencing democratic backsliding have been more likely to side with a more competitive opposition (Laebens and Lührmann 2021).

12. Strikingly, my empirical analysis will show that subnational opposition control influences legislative constraints even outside federal or bicameral democracies, and those without upper chambers.

13. As Haggard and Kaufman (2021, 40) note, "[l]egislative control allows executives to stack the judiciary and independent executive agencies, including election monitoring bodies, with loyalists." Intuitively, many kinds of constitutional and legislative change empowering the chief executive at the expense of the electoral competitiveness of the opposition should depend on whether the chief executive has—or can organize—the required legislative majorities. Even in its absence, constitutional change may still be feasible via referenda.

Opposition-led administrations may also enable administrative resistance to executive aggrandizement. Elected leaders at the center should be less able to undermine elections where subnational opposition executives appoint election officials and redistricting committees or can rely on party bureaucrats to monitor the vote process.[14] Insofar as aggrandizement requires compliance by subnational incumbents, opposition-controlled administrations amplify the leader's principal-agent problems.[15] More generally, these administrations should be less willing to implement the "punishment regime" characteristic of competitive authoritarian regimes aggrandizers are moving toward. In these, aligned administrations provide benefits such as welfare services to regime supporters, while withholding them from opponents (Mares and Young 2019; Hassan, Mattingly, and Nugent 2022; Magaloni 2006), some of whom are also targeted with repression, ranging from politically motivated lawsuits (Varol 2014) to imprisonment (Buckley et al. 2022). In my theory, the leader's subnational control enables them to rely on "backsliding agents" instead of facing "institutional resisters" (Tomini, Gibril, and Bochev 2022), thereby reducing agency costs of moving toward and maintaining competitive authoritarianism.[16,17]

To summarize, oppositions controlling more subnational governments should better preserve horizontal constraints on the national executive for three reasons: (1) more competitive oppositions can better attract the loyalty of MPs as key agents of horizontal accountability,

14. For instance, Argentinian parties "consider the presence of party representatives in polling stations (partisan monitors) on Election Day essential to guaranteeing fair elections" (Oliveros 2021, 390).

15. See Landau, H. Wiseman, and Wiseman 2020 for a discussion of subnational non-compliance under the Trump presidency. Stenberg and O'Dwyer (2023) provide evidence that unaligned municipalities were less likely to adopt illiberal policies in Poland.

16. Even facing subnational allies, agency costs exist as President Trump's attempt to convince fellow Republican Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to alter Georgia's 2020 Presidential Election vote count illustrates.

17. Similar to the incentives of MPs, we may think of bureaucrats as "institutional resisters" as likely profiting when they are associated with a party that continues to head their administration (see also, Oliveros 2021). In that sense, even bureaucrats may be sensitive to the relative competitiveness between parties. If this weren't the case, we would need an additional link in the visualization of my theoretical framework: state access directly negatively affects aggrandizement via the selection of bureaucrats.

(2) subnational control under federalism may increase access to national upper chambers and highest courts, and (3) opposition-led administrations entail opportunities for administrative resistance. Thus, subnational opposition control should enable institutional resistance to executive aggrandizement.

2.1.4 Subnational Opposition Control Reduces Opposition's Willingness to Engage in Extra-Institutional Resistance

Access to subnational administrations, and the state resources and political visibility they provide, influences the opposition's strategic choices. Oppositions have to decide how much to challenge the leader within as opposed to outside the electoral framework. Successful opposition to aggrandizement at times entails mass protests to impose costs on the leader (Versteeg et al. 2020; Laebens and Lührmann 2021). Similarly, prominent accounts of democratization have long emphasized the ability to mobilize citizens in protests as a type of "de facto power" influencing regime change (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Boix 2003). Recent examples of pro-democratic mass protests include the 2018 protests in Paraguay that deterred the president from evading term limits, the 2019 protests over alleged electoral fraud in Bolivia that helped remove Evo Morales, and the 2023 protests in defense of judicial independence in Israel. Typically, such protest is situated in urban centers because they offer (a) proximity to national-level state institutions to be disrupted, (b) the post-materialist, state-independent middle class most willing to engage in protest (Lipset 1959; Welzel 2013), and (c) the spatial proximity and networks that help protesters overcome collective action problems (Beissinger 2022). Whereas facing the state implies facing the enemy for a pro-democratic protester under dictatorship (Beissinger 2022), in politically decentralized democracies subnational executives can be aligned with the protesters. Indeed, as I will discuss in section 3.1, there are instances in which subnational opposition incumbents leverage their visibility to mobilize supporters in defense of democratic institutions. From this perspective, we might argue that subnational opposition incumbency should increase

pro-democracy mass mobilization as it conveys state access and visibility that may facilitate such mobilization.

Yet, turning from *ability* to *motive*, the recent backsliding literature has converged around the view that oppositions under democracy should "play the institutional game" when possible, or else risk being perceived as the actual threat to democracy in settings where both the leader and the opposition face legitimacy constraints and claim to act in defense of democracy (Gamboa 2022, 2017; Cleary and Öztürk 2022).[18] As the imprisonment of Bolivian protest leader and opposition governor Luis Camacho in December 2022 exemplifies, what was a successful mass mobilization against an aggrandizing president (Evo Morales) in 2019 for some is an unconstitutional violation of the democratic process for others, that can legitimize repression of the opposition.[19] Public opinion may shift against the opposition, particularly where it fails to adopt a principled, non-violent form of contentious action (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011).

In essence, my argument is that subnational access enables opposition parties to exercise institutional strategies (preserve horizontal constraints and better contest the next national elections) and avoid riskier extra-institutional options: If the opposition believes it can end aggrandizement by winning national elections, as in Bolsonaro's Brazil and Trump's America, it can focus on the next election.[20] An opposition that believes it cannot achieve alternation via institutional means has to consider more risky alternatives (Cleary and Öztürk 2022).[21] If subnational offices indeed increase electoral competitiveness, as I argue, then oppositions

18. In contrast, under authoritarianism election boycotts can allow opposition parties to not legitimize fraudulent elections.

19. See also Gamboa (2022)'s discussion of how extra-institutional opposition to Chávez in Venezuela backfired.

20. A party's preference for institutional strategies of contesting for office via elections for some is a defining criterion of parties (e.g., Aldrich 1995). In contrast, social movements seek to accomplish social change via mobilization, among other strategies.

21. As I discuss in section 3.1, mass mobilization at times helped defend democracy. However, it is riskier than resistance within institutional channels, particularly when violent or when seeking to remove elected incumbents (Gamboa 2022).

with higher subnational control should be more willing to contest within rather than outside elections. Thus, we would expect less mass mobilization when oppositions are more electorally competitive due to subnational access. This is also because supporters may be harder to mobilize in protests where subnational victories signal that positive change via institutional means is within reach. In short, subnational governments as electoral springboards open up opportunities for national-level institutional strategies. These allow them to refrain from mass protests that may backfire particularly when violence and radical extra-institutional goals cannot be avoided.

2.1.5 Hypotheses

Overall, I am examining the following two main hypotheses and two mechanism tests.

$H1_a$—***Opportunities for Aggrandizement*:** The more the opposition wins governorships and key mayorships, the higher horizontal constraints on the national executive will be.

$H1_b$—***Actual Aggrandizement*:** The more the opposition wins governorships and key mayorships, the less likely executive aggrandizement in the form of constitutional violations will be.

H_{M1}—***Electoral Competitiveness*:** Subnational opposition victories in close elections increase the opposition's local vote share in subsequent national lower house elections.

H_{M2}—***Mass Mobilization*:** The more the opposition wins governor- and key mayorships, the smaller and less frequent pro-democracy mass mobilizations will be.

2.2 Addressing Arguments for Why Subnational Control May Not Matter

Before moving to the empirical analysis, I anticipate and address challenges to my argument, many of which will subsequently motivate empirical tests and robustness checks in sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.5.

A first line of objections would emphasize that effects of subnational office as a resource in national-level contestation over regime type depend on the normative preferences of those holding this resource. From this view, only oppositions with normative commitments to democracy would be willing to defend democracy. In contrast, the "balance-of-power" framework assumes that—by virtue of being in the opposition and aggrandizement by definition disadvantaging the opposition—*any kind of* opposition is willing to prevent and counteract aggrandizement. A different ideational criticism would point toward the intentionality of the chief executive: Only leaders lacking normative commitments to democracy require being checked (Mainwaring 2022; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013).[22] In my version of the "balance-of-power" framework, leaders' normative commitments are endogenous to the constraints they face and cannot be measured with certainty ex-ante. The latter is because some leaders came into office through moderate, democracy-affirming campaigns just to change their behavior once insufficiently checked in office (Bartels 2023). However, I acknowledge the role of leader intent by emphasizing horizontal constraints—as shaping *opportunities for* aggrandizement—as the primary outcome, which leaves open whether leaders leverage being checked less to aggrandize. Empirically, I cannot address leader intent due to sample size restrictions. However, I provide empirical evidence suggesting that pre-election coding of an opposition party's commitment to democratic norms cannot help explain outcomes better than the "balance-of-power" framework (see section 3.4.5).

22. In the words of the Federalists (Madison 1788): "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."

A second line of objections would hold that subnational incumbency may fail to yield returns when chief executives recentralize resources or authority to the extent that lower-level administrations can no longer fulfill what they promised to accomplish. The more recentralization occurs, the more should we be surprised by subsequent findings that subnational incumbency appears to allow oppositions (a) to become more electorally competitive and (b) to better exercise horizontal checks on the national executive. Indeed, there is empirical evidence that subnational governments often lack fiscal autonomy and, especially under aggrandizement, may be targeted by (fiscal) recentralization efforts (Eaton 2013).[23] Yet, recentralization fundamentally implies an attribution question where the opposition is only adversely impacted electorally if voters attribute lower subnational resources, and likely performance, to the opposition as opposed to the recentralizing national government.[24] The idea that voters would change their support to the recentralizing national executive because of recentralization also assumes a state-dependent citizenry unwilling or unable to make ideologic investments into the defense of democracy. This arguably poorly reflects the urban, cosmopolitan areas oppositions under aggrandizement tend to perform most strongly in. In polarized settings, it is easy to argue that an unaligned center taking away resources from certain areas is the very proof oppositions can point to to convince affected citizens that the center is not acting in their interest.[25] While deserving further investigation, it may also not be coincidental that some of the most extensive recentralization occurred in regimes in which leaders could rely on surging natural resource rents to coopt and compensate subnational interests (e.g., in Russia (Reuter 2017) and Venezuela). Thus, there are valid theoretical

23. See also Drapalova 2023 on the aggrandizer's toolkit for hindering unaligned subnational governments from governing effectively.

24. Subnational incumbents have publicly highlighted recentralization – and resulting resource constraints: In Turkey, Istanbul mayor İmamoğlu repeatedly stressed service delivery successes in the face of budget cuts. In Sierra Leone, capital city mayor Aki-Sawyerr similarly emphasized accomplishments in the provision of public goods despite much reduced intergovernmental transfers (FCC 2022).

25. This may help explain why some forms of recentralization do not withdraw resources from recipients but merely change which level of government is delivering them, thereby altering who recipients attribute delivered services or transfers to.

reasons to believe that recentralization can only be used under very specific circumstances to marginalize oppositions. Empirically, I will show that reductions in regional authority under democracy are rare and do not occur at moments in which the opposition is particularly weak (section 3.4.7).

While I will dedicate particular emphasis to four potential counterarguments—(1) popular leader support confounding the relation between subnational control and aggrandizement, (2) actor intentionality conditioning effects of resource access, (3) how resistance actors other than opposition parties may be affected by patterns of subnational control, and (4) the negating effects of recentralization—there are many more that I will address empirically. For instance, I will show that effects of subnational control hold even when excluding federal countries or those where upper chambers are indirectly selected at subnational tiers. Other robustness checks will show that results do not depend on (a) the inclusion of low-quality subnational elections, (b) non-simultaneous national and subnational elections, (c) cases with national elections the year after subnational ones, or (d) whether estimated models include variables for both subnational and national-legislative control, which are positively correlated. While concerns of confounding necessitate extensive robustness checks in the country-level analyses, they do not pertain to the discontinuity analysis to be conducted: Effects of obtaining subnational office are plausibly independent of any possible confounding variable when we compare settings in which oppositions barely win subnational elections to those where they barely lost. Overall, my results will strongly suggest that we should think of subnational control as having an independent effect on (a) national-level executive aggrandizement and (b) party performance in subsequent national legislative elections.

2.3 Scope Conditions

While formal prerogatives of subnational offices vary tremendously (Treisman 2002; Hooghe et al. 2016), my argument requires them to be neither ceremonial nor appointed. Where

leaders at the center could remove subnational executives for political reasons, I would not expect these offices to pose a constraint.[26] All democracies, even rich and durable ones such as the United States, can experience aggrandizement but have to be politically decentralized for my theory to operate. Restricting the scope to resistance against ongoing aggrandizement would miss all instances of oppositions constraining the leader such that leaders did not even attempt to aggrandize.[27] In a party-centric "balance-of-power" framework, it is assumed that politicians contesting for (subnational) offices typically are affiliated with parties. Therefore, my theory does not apply to countries in which parties are not a relevant grouping for politicians or in which electoral rules require candidates to run as independents. Consequently, I will exclude democracies with non-partisan subnational elections from the analysis.[28] My argument refrains from overly optimistic assumptions about the opposition: I don't require governors and mayors to have obtained office in free and fair elections themselves to have an incentive to check the national executive (on authoritarian enclaves see Gibson 2005; Giraudy 2015; McMann et al. 2021). I also don't assume that opposition parties have an intrinsic preference for democracy. While politically organized minorities may value democracy intrinsically (Rovny 2023), other types of oppositions can be "semi-" or "disloyal" (Linz 1978) or even "anti-system" (Sartori 1976).[29] Clearly, opposition control

26. Cases in which constitutions allow federal intervention on the grounds of preserving territorial integrity or a subnational body not fulfilling its constitutional purpose, as in Argentina and India, will be included in the analysis.

27. Indeed, it would be impossible to learn whether subnational control predicts the onset of aggrandizement when only studying cases in which leaders attempted to undermine democracy (Geddes 2003).

28. For a list of cases, see appendix 5.21.

29. Concerning intentionality, the "balance-of-power" framework characterizes the chief executive as the main risk to democratic stability. While some may be committed democrats not wishing to engage in aggrandizement even if given the chance (Mainwaring 2022; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013), this intent is to some extent endogenous to how much they are checked by the opposition. Without being able to discern regime-related intent ex-ante, it is prudent to characterize every democratically-elected national executive as a potential aggrandizer. In terms of analysis, if this pessimistic assumption—all national executives having a desire to change the playing field in their favor—were too strong, it should make it harder to find effects: Subnational opposition control would only be relevant in the presence of an aspiring aggrandizer, not a committed democrat.

has at times reduced local democratic quality as oppositions too can be in cahoots with organized crime, implement caudillo rule, or create local authoritarian enclaves (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2023; Behrend 2011; Gingerich 2013; Grumbach 2022; Došek 2024). Yet, my concern is with constraints on the national executive, not local democratic quality.[30] On a temporal dimension, the "balance-of-power" framework seeks to explain how the *current* opposition uses its resources to check the national executive. As an opposition party after turnover can enter the national executive, an opposition's subnational access at time t is not necessarily beneficial for checks on the national executive after turnover at time t_1: subnational electoral springboards may empower an opposition to an extent that it can engage in aggrandizement once it becomes the national executive.[31] In my framework, opposition parties, even those without normative commitments to democracy,[32] are motivated to oppose aggrandizement to preserve the electoral playing field that enables their access to office, resources, and policymaking.[33]

30. In fact, subnational authoritarian enclaves may be particularly potent springboards to national office (e.g., as suggested by several presidential backgrounds in Argentina). In the United States, gerrymandering by Democrats likely enabled them to better constrain Donald Trump. These examples highlight that undemocratic subnational practices may not necessarily be bad for national democracy if they empower actors willing to constrain the national executive (see also Gervasoni 2024).

31. For this reason, I will explore changes in outcome variables between the subnational election year and the following one, while also showing robustness of results depending on whether national elections occurred or not.

32. For instance, parts of the Bolivian opposition around Luis Camacho and "Creemos" would by many not be considered intrinsically pro-democracy, but they mobilized against Evo Morales's executive aggrandizement because it would have disadvantaged them.

33. Note that this scope condition is at the party level: Individual party members may choose to join the aggrandizer, but the opposition party—which by definition would be disadvantaged by aggrandizement—is assumed to have the incentive to prevent and counteract the leader's attempt to skew the electoral playing field.

CHAPTER 3

Empirical Analysis

3.1 Motivating Examples

As my theory would suggest, there is substantial qualitative evidence that opposition parties leverage subnational incumbency to oppose aggrandizers. A relevant counterfactual is to ask whether regimes in Turkey, Poland, and Hungary would have been less democratic had surprise opposition victories in Istanbul, Warsaw, and Budapest not occurred. According to a Hungarian opposition MP, Gergely Karacsony's victory in the Budapest mayoral elections "brought a spiritual boost" as before then "people just did not believe it was possible to win against Orban" (Time 2020). Przybylski (2018, 63) argues that "the most important counterweight to rising illiberalism in Poland lies in the country's decentralized political structure, with its strong local governments."[1] Similarly, Varshney (2022, 60f.) points toward unaligned state governments in India as sources of "countervailing power" opposition parties can use when "the ruling party at the center. . . egregiously breaks democratic norms." Ganguly (2023, 151) concurs that "[s]tate governments and regional parties have been helping to safeguard democracy" against Modi's BJP. Mukherji (2024, 23) notes that "[t]he most promising avenue of democratic resistance in India today is at the subnational level" and discusses how oppositions can build voter linkages at subnational levels in efforts to become more competitive in national elections. In Sierra Leone, capital city opposition mayor Aki-Sawyerr helped organize a parallel vote tally in efforts to make vote fraud more visible and

1. Indeed, Stenberg and O'Dwyer (2023) provide evidence that unaligned municipalities were less likely to adopt illiberal policies in Poland.

costly, results of which provided a crucial reference point in the 2023 general elections.[2] In the United States under President Trump, "federalism was in fact crucial to the capacity of American democracy to survive" because "state governments had robust control over key government functions, in particular state judiciaries and the administration of federal elections" (Kaufman, Kelemen, and Kolcak 2024, 6).[3] President Erdoğan reportedly went so far as to say that "[i]f we lose Istanbul, we lose Turkey" (The Atlantic 2019). While Erdoğan remained victorious in the next presidential elections despite having lost Istanbul, his most visible challenger, Istanbul mayor İmamoğlu, would five years later credit the opposition's subnational governance performance, the "Istanbul model," that allowed the opposition to present a "coherent and credible alternative for governance" inducing voters "to change their preferences and reject populist authoritarianism" in the stunning 2024 opposition victory in Turkey, which he believed would mark "the end of the erosion of democracy" in Turkey (İmamoğlu 2024). Reflecting on the significance of the opposition's subnational access in Turkey, Yavuz and Koç (2024, 103f.) argue: "The [opposition] mayors of Istanbul and Ankara, who each secured re-election with significantly increased voter support, stand out as rising stars who can leverage the budgets of their major cities to bolster their profiles ahead of the next presidential election, expected in 2028."

The qualitative literature on aggrandizement in Latin America often points to opposition governors and mayors as particularly visible opponents of aggrandizing presidents. Focusing on the 20 Latin American chief executives Gamboa (2022)[4] identifies as having

2. Yet, this example also highlights the adverse, even violent, environment in which visible opposition under aggrandizement at times has to operate, as captured in the BBC documentary "Mayor on the Frontline: Democracy in Crisis" (BBC 2023).

3. On this point, see also Landau, H. Wiseman, and Wiseman 2020 and Landau, H. J. Wiseman, and Wiseman 2020. On unaligned state government's ability to use the judiciary to check the national executive in U.S. federalism, see Bulman-Pozen 2012.

4. This data collection by Gamboa (2022) builds on Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013). The 20 presidents with hegemonic aspirations between 1990 and 2020 are: Argentina: Carlos Menem (1989–99). Bolivia: Evo Morales (2006–2019). Brazil: Fernando Collor de Mello (1990–92); Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022). Colombia: Alvaro Uribe (2002–10). Dominican Republic: Joaquin Balaguer (1986–96). Ecuador: Abdala Bucaram (1996–97); Lucio Gutierrez (2003–05); Rafael Correa (2007–17). Guatemala: Jorge Serrano Elias (1991–93);

had the intention to undermine democracy after 1990, we find that several faced critical subnational opposition. Relevant examples include Guayaquil mayor Jaime Nebot mobilizing protests against Rafael Correa in Ecuador (Eaton 2013; Reuters 2008).[5] Even before, Nebot had been the key figure in the protests against Lucio Gutiérrez in 2005 (De la Torre 2008, 207f.). In Bolivia, regional opposition executives in the Media Luna departments and Cochabamba succeeded in mobilizing influential protests against Morales' proposed "Oruro Constitution," which were instrumental in limiting presidential prerogatives in the eventual new constitution (Corrales 2018, chapter 6). However, the Bolivian case also highlights how mass protests run risks of backfiring (e.g., by legitimizing repression and decreasing legitimacy, as the imprisonment of Santa Cruz Governor Camacho in 2022 exemplifies). In Argentina, with its decentralized party system, governors—according to two observers—"have constituted a more relevant counterweight to the presidential authority than congress or the judiciary" (Spiller and Tommasi 2008, 91), in part because "political careers are usually province-based," with "keys to career advancement [being] held by the provincial leaders of the parties to which legislators belong" (90f.). According to Melo and Pereira (2024), Brazil's democracy survived Bolsonaro's efforts to aggrandize also because "[p]owerful state governors countervail presidential power," with particularly São Paulo governor João Doria "acting as a formidable rival to Bolsonaro" (10).[6] In Venezuela, losing over 90% of races for both governor- and mayorships in the October 2004 elections influenced the opposition's decision to boycott the 2005 legislative elections – which together significantly enabled Chávez

Alfonso Antonio Portillo (2000–04). Honduras: Hose Manuel Zelaya (2006–09); Juan Orlando Hernandez (2014–22). Nicaragua: Arnoldo Aleman (1997–2002); Daniel Ortega (2007–). Peru: Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000); Ollanta Humala (2011–16). Paraguay: Raul Cubas (1998–99). El Salvador: Nayib Bukele (2019–). Venezuela: Hugo Chávez (1999–2013).

5. Note that the existence of opposition-led protests against aggrandizement in opposition-led states is not inconsistent with my theoretical framework: These can be successful, but if indeed riskier than electoral, institutional strategies, should be less likely to occur *country-wide* when oppositions are more electorally competitive due to controlling more subnational governments.

6. Interestingly, these authors emphasize the sheer size of the São Paulo administration, which they note employs ten percent more citizens than the federal government (Melo and Pereira 2024, 10).

to push through democracy-eroding reforms (Gamboa 2022). As Gamboa (2017) notes, this aggrandizement was also facilitated by the backfiring of the opposition's protest-based strategy, which helped Chávez cast it as the true threat to democracy. Nonetheless, the main challengers to Chávez and Maduro in presidential elections between 2000 and 2018 were opposition governors (Polga-Hecimovich 2022; Cyr 2017, chapter 6).[7] As Cyr (2017, 7) explains, Acción Democrática's survival in subnational office enabled it to "return to national politics as the territorial anchor of the opposition to Chávez." Writing about Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela during executive aggrandizement, Eaton (2013, 429) holds that "the shelter provided by sub-national governments was critical for opposition groups – both those who hoped to use them as a toehold to launch national movements that challenge twenty-first-century socialism, and those who simply wanted to pursue alternative market-oriented projects in the territorial units."[8]

These motivating examples illustrate the key mechanisms proposed: Subnational state access, particularly to budgets and hiring, allows opposition parties to (1) survive and "fight another day" as in Ecuador and Venezuela,[9] (2) to intensify principal-agent problems the chief executive faces when aggrandizing (as in the United States and Poland), and (3) ultimately to use subnational resources to become more competitive in national elections (e.g., in Turkey). We also see clear evidence of oppositions leveraging the visibility subnational

7. Similar to Venezuela, the Hungarian opposition in the 2010 elections lost subnational control even in many historically progressive strongholds such as Budapest. Yet, as discussed, some of the most visible opposition to Orban's Fidesz party emerged out of subnational executive office. Note that both Venezuela and Hungary at later stages of aggrandizement were no longer considered democracies, thus fall outside the scope of this study.

8. Similarly, De la Torre and Ortiz Lemos (2016, 236) describe the opposition's subnational strategy against Correa as follows: "After unsuccessfully using congress to resist Correa after he got to office, many parties simply collapsed and disappeared, while others retreated to local politics. The strategy of the old and new political opposition has been to challenge Correa locally. His administration imposed candidates that alienated local constituencies, and supported incumbents such as Quito's former mayor who had low popularity levels. The goal of the opposition was to win over Correa's constituencies at the local level."

9. While readers may be surprised to see Venezuela used as an exemplary case, given that it has witnessed some of the most profound aggrandizement of any regime since 1999, it helps clarify the counter-factual condition: Had the Venezuelan opposition not maintained control of two governorships in 2004, subsequent aggrandizement would have been even more pronounced.

office conveys to (a) develop personal and party brands (e.g., the mayors of Istanbul and Ankara) and (b) signal supporters that they can still win elections (e.g., in Hungary). In a second step, the link between increased opposition competitiveness and more horizontally constrained national executives even before the next national elections is best exemplified by Argentina and Brazil, where Members of Parliament face incentives to side with governors from their states who often control local electoral machines and influence nominations for the next national legislative elections. Yet, as Cyr (2017) and Eaton (2013) note, subnational party survival allows opposition parties to better preserve the loyalty of their MPs and ward off defections. Thus, the link between electoral competitiveness and more horizontal constraints is not confined to federal systems with decentralized party nominations. Finally, the Bolivian and Venezuelan cases demonstrate how pro-democracy mass mobilization can backfire, with arguably more positive effects in the first Morales presidency (also see the discussion of South Korea in Laebens and Lührmann 2021).

Yet, precisely because subnational offices empower the opposition, aggrandizers seek to marginalize them. This tension is evident in the following quote from Warsaw mayor Rafal Trzaskowski: The relations between the national executive and unaligned subnational executives "are an all-out war in case of Poland, Hungary, and Turkey ... because we are enemy number one. They want to centralize power, they want to change the parameters of the game, and they are doing it wisely" (Trzaskowski 2022). Indeed, prominent examples of aggrandizers recentralizing authority or undermining the ability of the subnational opposition to govern—from Putin's "power vertical," over Indira Gandhi's state of exception in India and Chávez's efforts to marginalize the opposition mayor in Caracas,[10] to the criminalization and removal of opposition incumbents during the first Morales presidency in Bolivia[11]—raise the question of whether subnational resources are meaningful tools for the

10. The Venezuelan case also shows how local actors can be weakened by the duplication of subnational institutions (Polga-Hecimovich 2022). In Nicaragua, Ortega weakened local opposition by creating "Citizens' Power Councils" (Anderson and Dodd 2009).

11. In Erdoğan's Turkey, dozens of Kurdish mayors were removed due to alleged ties to the PKK, even

opposition in national-level contestation over regime type. More recent examples include Nayib Bukele's efforts to reorganize subnational boundaries in a way that reduces the opposition's subnational electoral prospects, Erdoğan's attempts to steal subnational elections in Istanbul,[12] and the recentralization under Saied in Tunisia.[13] While many of these examples unfolded in already-authoritarian settings thereby falling outside my scope—e.g., the recentralization under Putin in the early 2000s—others did not. Overall, while aggrandizers often faced prominent subnational opposition, these examples cannot establish whether it was subnational office that enabled opposition parties to more effectively oppose or even deter aggrandizement.[14] This is because case study-based evidence, while illuminating potential mechanisms, cannot on its own separate effects of the underlying opposition popularity from the effect of controlling subnational government. Indeed, a skeptic may read positive examples of subnational opposition as simply indicating a more popular opposition, denying any causal role of controlling subnational office. Similarly, while there are prominent examples of aggrandizers marginalizing subnational opposition, we cannot infer from these observations that subnational opposition control cannot help explain why some chief executives attempt and succeed with aggrandizement.

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before the 2016 coup attempt (Tutkal 2022). In the 2024 Presidential elections, this seems to have backfired with removals being a "critical reason the majority of the Kurds voted for opposition parties and candidates to end the president's reign" (Yavuz and Koç 2024, 105).

12. Note that these attempts to rerun the Istanbul local elections backfired and ultimately increased the opposition vote (Svolik 2023).

13. In Ecuador, Rafael Correa engaged in "recentralizing measures meant to undermine conservative opposition elites in Guayaquil" (Bermeo 2016, 12). In Hungary, Orban engaged in administrative and fiscal recentralization while also creating a parallel district-level administration stacked with Fidesz supporters (Kovarek and Littvay 2022).

14. It is also noteworthy that opposition parties at times were willing to support constitutional changes in return for concessions that included more subnational control. For instance, Carlos Menem secured opposition support for allowing presidents to run for two consecutive terms in return for transforming the mayorship of Buenos Aires into an elected office the opposition was almost certain to win. Indeed, opposition parties made good use of this specific office with mayors De la Rua (UCR) and Macri (Propuesta Republicana) assuming the country's presidency in 1999 and 2015, respectively. In Bolivia, parts of the opposition agreed to a constitutional draft that slightly increased presidential powers in return for "huge concessions" (Corrales 2018, 165) concerning subnational autonomy.

3.2 Defining the Universe of Cases: Democracies with Subnational Elections

I restrict my country- and state-level analyses to democratic country-years (cutoff: V-Dem's $v2x\_polyarchy \geq 0.5$) between 1990 and 2021 with elected subnational executive office at the municipal ($v2\_ellocelc = 1; 3; 5$) or state ($v2\_elsrgel = 1; 3; 5$) level (Coppedge et al. 2023).[15,16] A subnational executive is considered elected if the office holder assumed office through (a) a direct election in the subnational entity or (b) an indirect one in a subnational assembly that itself was directly elected from within the subnational entity. Out of the resulting 2499 democratic country-years with elected subnational executive office, 49.9% have only local elections, 3% only regional elections (e.g., South Korea 1991-94, Uruguay 1990-2008), and 47.1% have both local and regional elections.

3.3 Introducing the Subnational Elections Database

Even though subnational executives under democracy typically rank among the most authoritative offices, lead administrations that account for 21 and 45% of all government spending in unitary and federal systems, respectively (OECD-SNFG 2022), are considered key actors in distributive politics (Novaes 2018; Stokes et al. 2013), service provision (Akhtari, Moreira, and Trucco 2022; Niedzwiecki 2018), party formation and survival (Cyr 2017; Sells 2020),

15. Restricting the analysis to democracies implies that I cannot make inferences about resistance to autocratization unfolding in already authoritarian regimes. Autocracies are excluded because subnational elections in such regimes are less likely to be meaningful.

16. Due to well-known differences in the conceptualizations and measurements of democracy (Munck and Verkuilen 2002; Lueders and Lust 2018), I cross-validate the V-Dem data with other widely-used indices in the field: All but three democratic V-Dem country-years qualify as "free" according to Freedom House 2020 ($fh\_status \leq 2.5$; 1990–2018). Boix et al.'s dichotomous measure of democracy yields congruent classifications in 95.4% of country-years (1990–2020, Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013, updated with data from Miller 2021). For the Polity V measure, this value is 98.1% ($polity2 \geq 6$; 1990–2019, Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2002). Note that this cross-validation assessed the share of V-Dem democracies also considered democratic in other measures, not the overall congruence of regime classifications.

subnational democratic stability (Gibson 2005; Grumbach 2022), and efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals,[17] there currently is no comprehensive data on subnational election outcomes under democracy.

At present, the highest-coverage data is provided by Schakel (2021) who measures party-level vote shares in gubernatorial elections for 30 developed democracies (1945–2015). At the country level, Coppedge et al. (2023) measure whether one party controls most subnational governments in at least 66% of subnational units – a measure too coarse to capture most variation in subnational control. Overall, we thus frequently lack systematic data on subnational election outcomes, even for democracies after 1990.

To fill this gap, I constructed the *Subnational Elections Database.* This dataset has two components. The first captures (1) gubernatorial and mayoral election results, (2) subnational electoral system design, (3) candidate identities and party affiliations, and (4)—for close elections—indicators of candidate quality, all for politically decentralized democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean (1990–2021).[18,19] This dataset is at the state-subnational election year level: For each state, I targeted the race for the *highest elected subnational executive authority.*[20] Where gubernatorial elections do not exist, I select one mayoral contest per state by first giving preference to the race in the national capital, then evaluating whether the state contains a city that is among the country's ten most populous, and other-

17. According to the OECD, "65% of the 169 targets behind the 17 SDGs will not be reached without engagement of local and regional governments" (OECD 2019).

18. This region was selected because democracies were overwhelmingly politically decentralized with directly elected subnational governments, display variation in executive aggrandizement, and provide national lower house elections in which results can be measured at the state level.

19. Politically decentralized here refers exclusively to whether executive offices are allocated in subnational elections.

20. This selection attempts to include the most authoritative office in a given state, but I acknowledge that there are settings in which third-tier administrations may be better resourced and impactful than those on the second tier. Unfortunately, there is no data that would allow us to establish relative authority across tiers, which is why I target *highest* subnational authorities.

wise selecting the mayoral race in the state capital.[21] For instance, if the U.S. were included and had no elections for governors, I would select mayoral elections for Los Angeles over the one in the state capital of Sacramento for the state of California.[22] This state-level data will be used in section 3.5 to test whether close subnational opposition victories lead to subsequent electoral gains in state-level vote shares in national lower house elections ($\mathbf{H_{M1}}$).

The *database's* second component moves beyond Latin America: At the country level, I measure the share of highest subnational executive offices obtained by party for regular subnational election years. This information was available for 50 of 106 democracies with subnational elections after 1990. For an additional 34 democracies, I included shares of subnational legislative office holders by party instead.[23] It is this data which, after parties are coded as opposition or government (a step explained in section 3.4), yields the opposition's country-level share of highest subnational (executive) offices obtained in a regular subnational election year. I refer to this variable as the opposition's *subnational control*. It will constitute the main independent variable in the country-level analysis to test if subnational opposition control shapes subsequent opportunities for ($\mathbf{H1_a}$)—and actual ($\mathbf{H1_b}$)—aggrandizement and pro-democracy mass mobilization ($\mathbf{H_{M2}}$). Among the remaining 22 democracies without information on subnational victories by party,[24] we find countries with non-partisan subna-

21. To identify the most populous city by state in 2021, I rely on the World Cities Database, the UN's city population data, and the World Population Review.

22. Including mayoral elections in a state-level analysis implies that mayors affect the outcome of interest—here subsequent electoral performance in national elections—even in those areas of their state that fell outside their mayoralty. As we would expect, I find that effects are stronger for gubernatorial elections (appendix 5.9). The decision to conduct state-level analyses was taken out of necessity: State-level national lower house election data, used to measure my outcome of electoral performance in one mechanism test, is available via the Constituency Level Elections Archive (Kollman et al. 2016), whereas even more disaggregated data was not consistently available and would have needed to be painstakingly collected.

23. These typically were cases with indirectly elected executives. Results are robust to excluding these. In terms of research design, including subnational MPs over indirectly elected executives is preferable if the selection of the latter is affected by the strength of the national executive: strong leaders being able to make side payments to get their co-partisans indirectly elected to highest subnational executive office.

24. In a previous version, only 20 cases were mentioned as missing. This is because reported results erroneously relied on incomplete data from Sao Tome and Principe as well as Canada, which are excluded in this version. The main results, except one specification in the mass mobilization analysis which now yields

tional elections (e.g., Bhutan and Timor-Leste) and those with unavailable or incomplete data (e.g., Papua New Guinea).[25] To not overrepresent countries in which subnational election years vary by subnational unit, I aggregated office shares to obtain one measure of subnational control in years in which a majority of subnational elections take place or, if there is no such year, national lower house election years.[26] My focus on highest subnational executives implies that the type of office included can change across years for a given country, for instance, when regional elections are introduced (e.g., Chile in 2021 or Bolivia in 2005). Overall, this data contains 468 subnational election years, which—given the median term length of four years—capture 74.9% of all democratic years with subnational elections globally (1990–2021). For a table of included and missing countries, see appendices 5.20 and 5.21. In the appendix, I also provide coding schemes for the country-level data (appendix 5.4), state-level election results (appendix 5.5), state-level electoral frameworks (appendix 5.6), and candidate characteristics for close subnational elections (appendix 5.7).

To construct the country-level component of the *Subnational Elections Database*, I relied on official subnational election results as published by the respective electoral agencies when available. While V-Dem provides information on the existence of elected subnational office, there is no source measuring years of regular subnational elections. Thus, as a first step, I constructed this data by relying on the websites of electoral agencies, country-specific research on subnational elections, and Wikipedia. One challenge in coding highest subnational offices by party was to distinguish parties from (a) factions and (b) coalitions. Further, parties may run under a local label that—by name—is not easily recognizable as associated with that party. To overcome these challenges, I first learned about which national-level

less significant results, are not affected by excluding these cases with incomplete data.

25. Where there is not a single highest elected subnational authority across the territory, as in the U.K., all offices governing an entity considered in the ISO 3166-2 norm as constituting a first-level subdivision were included.

26. Such aggregation was performed for 15 out of 84 countries. These were almost exclusively federal systems. For a list of countries with heterogeneous subnational election timing, see appendix 5.20.

parties existed by examining the DPI (Scartascini, Cruz, and Keefer 2021), "Who Governs?" (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020), and CLEA (Kollman et al. 2016). Second, I studied which parties and coalitions ran in subnational elections according to the respective electoral agency, country-specific newspaper coverage as well as Wikipedia.[27] Ultimately, my team and I were searching for sources that allocated highest offices obtained by party for the set of parties the aforementioned datasets suggest were "core parties" at that time.[28] For other entities obtaining subnational office, we examined whether they were local manifestations of national parties or not (e.g., parties with purely local and regional ambitions which therefore wouldn't be found in the three datasets on party performance or cabinet representation at the national level). In my party-level analysis, both factions and local manifestations of national parties would fall under that party. While subnational coalitions may consist of multiple (national) parties, my interest is in which party occupies highest office. Thus, only the party obtaining the office is recognized, not the coalition's other parties that didn't fill the governor- or mayorship. Whenever possible, country-level results were double-checked with a different source from the one referenced initially. The resulting dataset—the *Subnational Elections Database*—is the most comprehensive dataset on subnational election outcomes in democracies between 1990 and 2021.[29]

In terms of descriptive sample characteristics of the country-level data, oppositions defined broadly won 62% of highest subnational offices and 49% in the narrow definition. These values are similar to the opposition's seat share in the national lower house, which is 47% in the narrow definition and 60% when we treat all parties other than the leader's as opposi-

27. Note that Wikipedia is a widely-used source in this type of research, with datasets such as V-Party and "Party Facts" (Döring and Regel 2019) relying on it.

28. I gratefully acknowledge excellent research assistance by Hiara Balanza, Jorge García, Stephanie Guarachi, André Ibañez, and Bridger Murray. I also thank Mariya Sytnik for her support with the data collection on Russian-speaking countries.

29. An extension of this data collection to the periods 1945–1990 and 2022–2023 has, pending further quality checks and verification of sources, been completed. All data will be made available at a dedicated project website at "https://julianmichel.net/subnational-elections-database/" upon the publication of associated journal articles.

tion. The average level of electoral democracy is 0.77 on a scale from 0–1, a relatively high level of electoral democracy that corresponds to Brazil's democracy score in 2023. Relatedly, average legislative and judicial constraints on the national executive are high: 0.81 and 0.82 on a scale from 0–1, respectively. Of all subnational election years in the data, 61% represent regional elections and 39% local ones.

Table 3.1: Summary Statistics: Country-Level Analysis

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Independent Variables					
Subnational Control (Opp. (Broad))	0.62	0.24	0	1	436
Subnational Control (Opp. (Narrow))	0.49	0.24	0	1	436
Outcomes					
Horizontal Accountability	1.2	0.65	-0.81	2.4	436
Legislative Constraints	0.81	0.17	0.11	0.99	436
Judicial Constraints	0.82	0.17	0.17	0.99	436
CSO Repression	2.2	0.81	-0.85	3.3	436
Media Censorship	1.9	0.95	-0.99	3.5	436
Political Liberties	0.9	0.076	0.53	0.99	436
Freedom of Expression	0.89	0.098	0.53	0.99	436
Ntl. Exe. Respects Constitution	1.6	0.82	-0.7	3.5	436
Liberal Democracy	0.66	0.18	0.27	0.9	436
Outcomes: Mechanism Test H_{M2}					
Pro-Democracy Mass Mobilization	-0.35	1.1	-2.1	3.3	437
Controls					
National Control (Opp. (Broad))	0.6	0.15	0.13	1	436
National Control (Opp. (Narrow))	0.47	0.13	0.0043	1	436
Electoral Democracy	0.77	0.13	0.5	0.92	436
Age Democracy	36	36	1	171	436
Regional Democracy	0.66	0.18	0.2	0.88	436
Inflation	18	170	-9.7	2737	436
GDP/Cap (Thousands)	20	20	0.39	107	436
GDP Growth	2.5	4.4	-16	40	436
Resource Rents/GDP	0.83	1.9	0	16	436
Urbanization	67	17	16	98	436
General					
Elected Regional Office (Binary)	0.61	0.49	0	1	436
Year	2007	8.6	1990	2021	436

Notes: The table shows summary statistics for variables included in the national-level analysis.

3.4 Country-Level Analyses: Effects of Subnational Control in 84 Democracies

Are democracies more vulnerable to executive aggrandizement when parties in national government control more subnational governments? To test this hypothesis, I leverage the national-level data on *subnational control* in 84 democracies (1990–2021).[30] In the dichotomous coding of national government status, I rely on the Database of Political Institutions (DPI) (Scartascini, Cruz, and Keefer 2021), which identifies the up to three parties in the national executive with the largest lower house seat share. The decision to use the DPI reflects that the research design requires a measure of government affiliation as of January 1st of a year—as opposed to the July 1st measurement in "Who Governs?" (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020)[31]—and that all three widely-used measures of government affiliation do not fully capture small parties in support of the national executive.[32] In the following analyses, I will employ two different conceptualizations of the national executive: A preferred narrow one in which only the leader's party is considered and a broad one that considers the largest three government parties. I prefer the former as available evidence suggests that coalition partners appear to serve as checks against the leader's attempt to aggrandize (Haggard and Kaufman 2021). Opposition-controlled office is any office not held by the national executive, which includes independents and exclusively local or regional parties. In an ideal world, more information on smaller parties' positions toward the national executive would be available, including from potential 4th and 5th parties in the national executive in highly

30. Interpreting election results as indicating subnational control assumes that winners took office and kept it until the following year in which outcomes are measured.

31. Additionally, "Who Governs?"'s emphasis on cabinet members' party affiliations risked miscategorizing parties as government if individual opposition party members were coopted into the government, while their party remained in opposition.

32. The DPI only identifies the largest three parties in support of the national executive. V-Party has information on all parties receiving over 5% of votes in national lower-house elections – data that is measured at the national election year level. "Who Governs?" identifies parties whose members occupy office in the national executive, which is narrower than the DPI's focus on support of the national executive, but also broader when opposition parties have individual members accept office in the national executive.

fragmented party systems such as in Brazil, but also parties with purely local and regional ambitions contesting subnational elections but not national ones. With this information unavailable, my dichotomous coding of government-opposition allows me to make statements about the effects of subnational control outside (a) the leader's party and (b) the largest three government parties as identified by the DPI.

3.4.1 Descriptive Analysis

I first establish that national executives vary significantly in how much they govern at highest subnational tiers. Although most control legislative majorities, as theories of coalition formation would predict, the same does not hold for subnational offices. Plotting national (lower house) against subnational control, both ranging from "-1" ("complete opposition control") to "1" ("complete government control"),[33] we find they are positively correlated, with substantial underlying variation (Figure 3.1).

Once we no longer consider multiple government parties but exclusively the leader's, we recognize that leaders rarely control sizable majorities of subnational offices. Exceptions include those brought to power by well-known hegemonic parties such as South Africa's Congress Party (ANC) and Paraguay's Partido Colorado (ANR-PC), but also subsequent aggrandizers (e.g., Orban, Hungary 2010; Figure 3.2).

In terms of temporal trend (1990–2021), parties of chief executives have captured on average between 30 and 45% of highest subnational offices in a given year (figure 3.3a). One noticeable outlier is the year 1997, which saw election years in only eight countries, including the one-sided Sri Lankan Local Elections, in which the ruling party won over 80% of seats. In my data, leader parties control 38% of such offices on average. Once we consider the largest three governing parties, the average subnational control by the national government rises to 51%. In terms of temporal variation, we see similar patterns of subnational control

33. These measures are created by subtracting the opposition's from the government's share of offices.

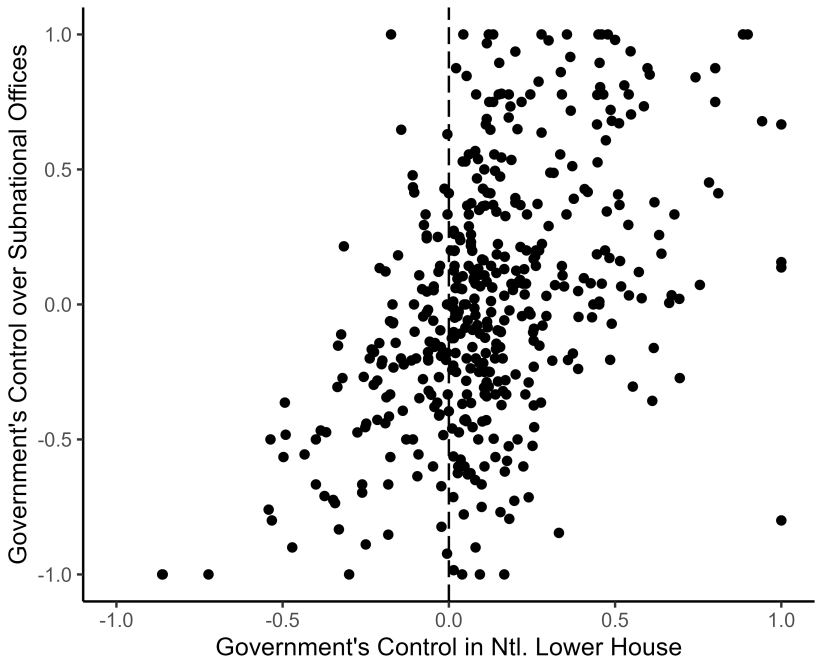


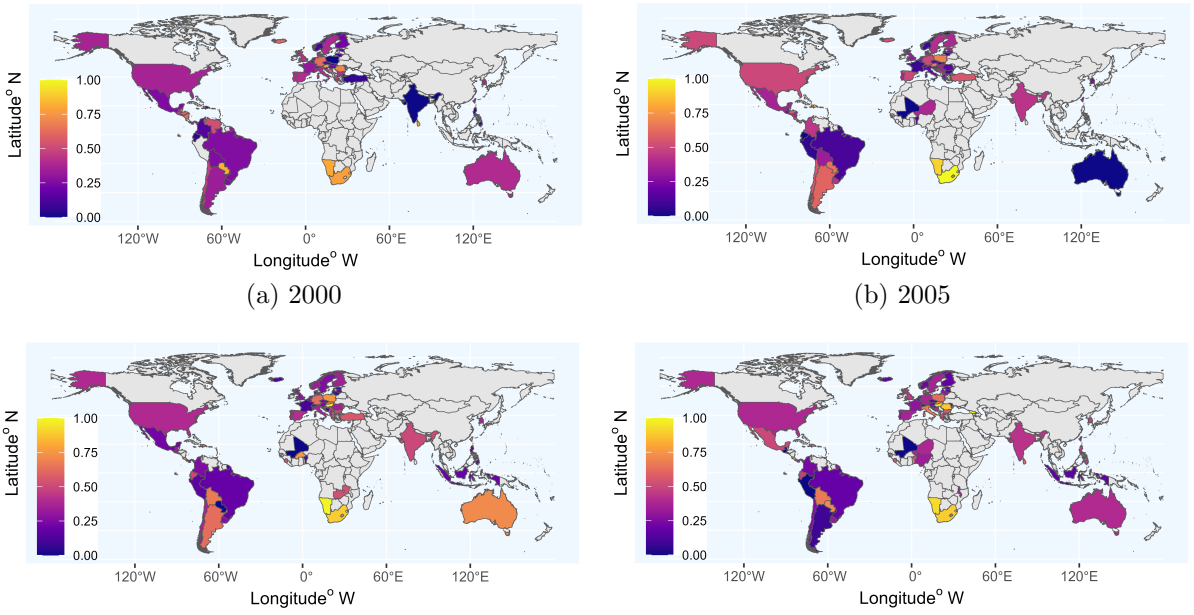
Figure 3.1: Scatterplot: National vs. Subnational Control by Parties in National Government

Notes: This figure presents the largest three governing parties' share of highest subnational office against their national lower house seat share for subnational election years in democracies with subnational elections (1990–2021). Government affiliation is coded via the DPI (as of January 1st after a subnational election year).

across broad and narrow definitions of government: more variation in early years when fewer countries were democratic, but ultimately no clear upward trend over time in either measure. Thus, at least for countries qualifying as electoral democracies at the national level, it is not apparent that governing parties win more subnational elections than they used to.

The variation in subnational control between years is slightly more pronounced than in leader party seat share in the national lower house, which tends to fluctuate around a seat share of 40% (figure 3.3b). Here, the year 1997 again is somewhat of an outlier. Ultimately, when comparing average levels of subnational and national control for subnational election years, both trends are quite similar across years.

Plotting the leader's subnational control against the country's level of electoral democracy in the subnational election year, we find that leaders tend to have higher subnational

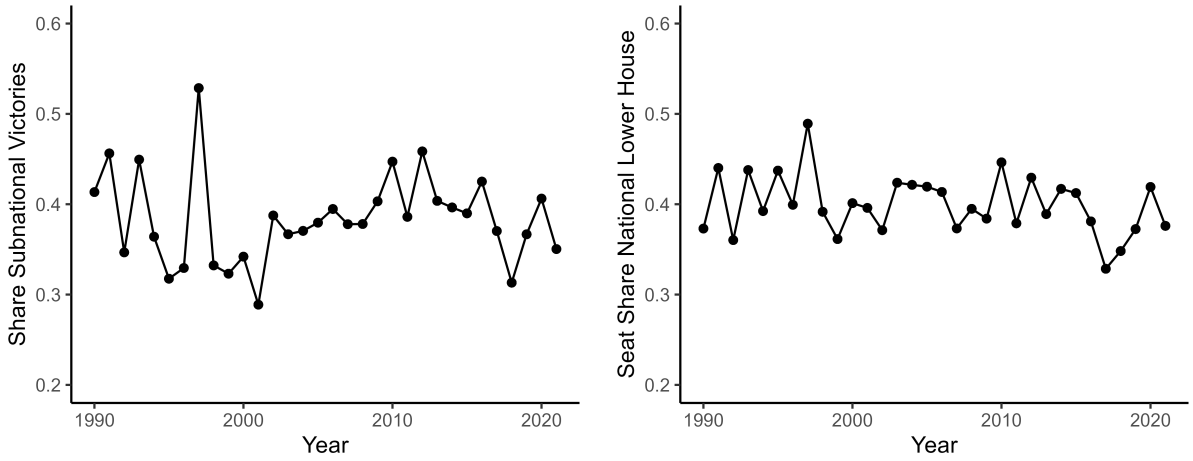


(a) 2000 (b) 2005

(c) 2010 (d) 2015

Figure 3.2: Subnational Control, Leader's Party (as of Jan. 1st after Last Subn. Elections)

Notes: This figure presents the leader party's share of highest subnational office they won in the last subnational elections as of a given reference year for democracies with subnational elections. Leader party is coded via the DPI (as of January 1st after the last subnational election year).



(a) Subnational Control

(b) National (Legislative) Control

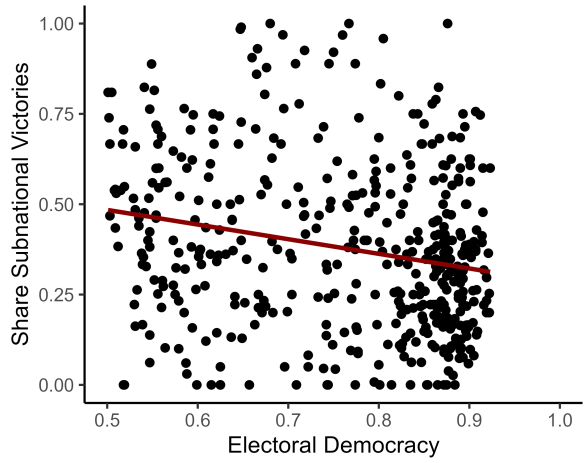
Figure 3.3: Scatterplot: Leader's Control by Year (Only Subnational Election Years)

Notes: This figure presents yearly averages of the leader's control (a) at highest subnational levels and (b) the national lower house for subnational election years. Chief executive party information is taken from the DPI (as of January 1st after a subnational election year). If chief executives are coded as independent, the party supporting the national government that has the largest seat share in the national lower house is entered.

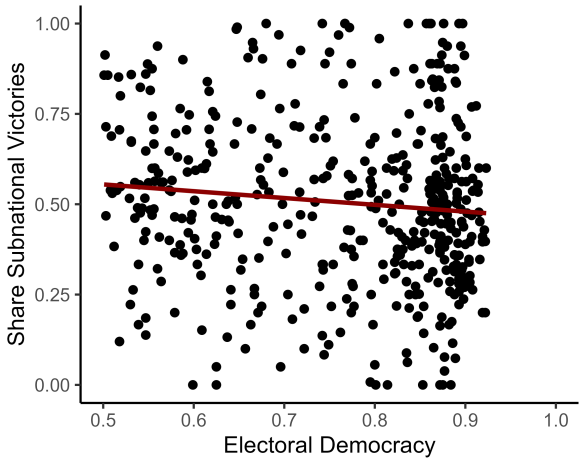
control at lower levels of electoral democracy (figure 3.4a). Perhaps unexpectedly, there are several examples of leaders at very high levels of democracy failing to obtain a single highest subnational office, such as Emmanuel Macron's "Renaissance" party in the French 2021 Regional Elections. An example of very high subnational seat shares by the leader at high levels of democracy is given by Victor Orban's "Fidesz" party in the Hungarian 2010 General Elections, where it claimed over 90% of offices (electoral democracy score: 0.81). Yet, the association between electoral democracy and subnational control diminishes substantially when considering the largest three governing parties (figure 3.4b). In this graph, we find more national governments controlling all highest subnational governments, as in the "grand coalition" between Christian and Social Democrats underlying the first Merkel cabinet in Germany (2005–2009).

Focusing on exclusively the leader's party again, we can examine whether the negative correlation between subnational control and electoral democracy emerges from particular types of democracy. Comparing the association across presidential and non-presidential democracies, we find a similar weakly negative correlation in both plots (figure 3.5a,b). Separating between unitary and non-unitary democracies, a negative correlation only emerges for unitary systems (figure 3.5c,d). Interestingly, unitary democracies appear to be more likely to have chief executives whose parties control majorities of subnational offices. Distinguishing between systems with highest subnational elections situated at local and regional levels, respectively, there is no clear difference in the correlation between subnational control and electoral democracy (figure 3.6a,b). Yet, we do detect a pronounced difference when plotting countries according to whether highest executives were coded or not. In this exercise, we find that the correlation is noticeably more negative for countries without highest executives coded (figure 3.6c,d). In these, the measure of subnational control captures the country-wide share of MPs in highest subnational parliaments. As will be discussed, the main country-level results will hold when excluding these observations.

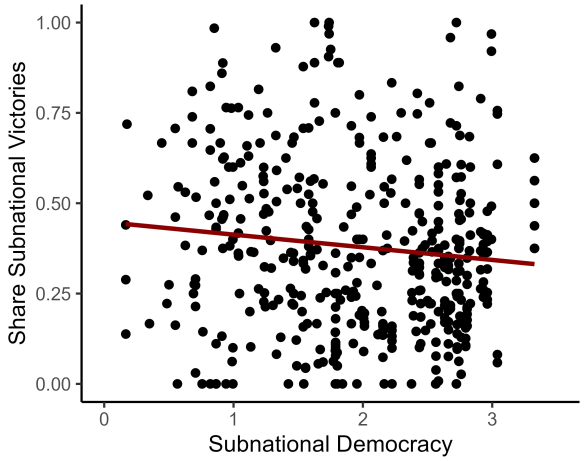
From a research-design perspective, we may also be interested in plotting the quality of



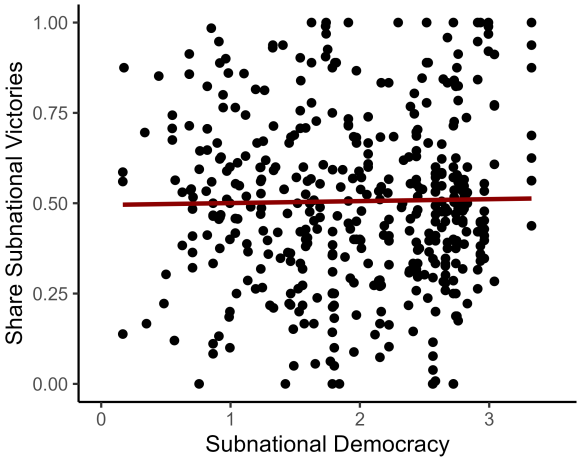
(a) Leader's Subn. Control & Ntl. Democracy



(b) Gov.'s Subn. Control & Ntl. Democracy



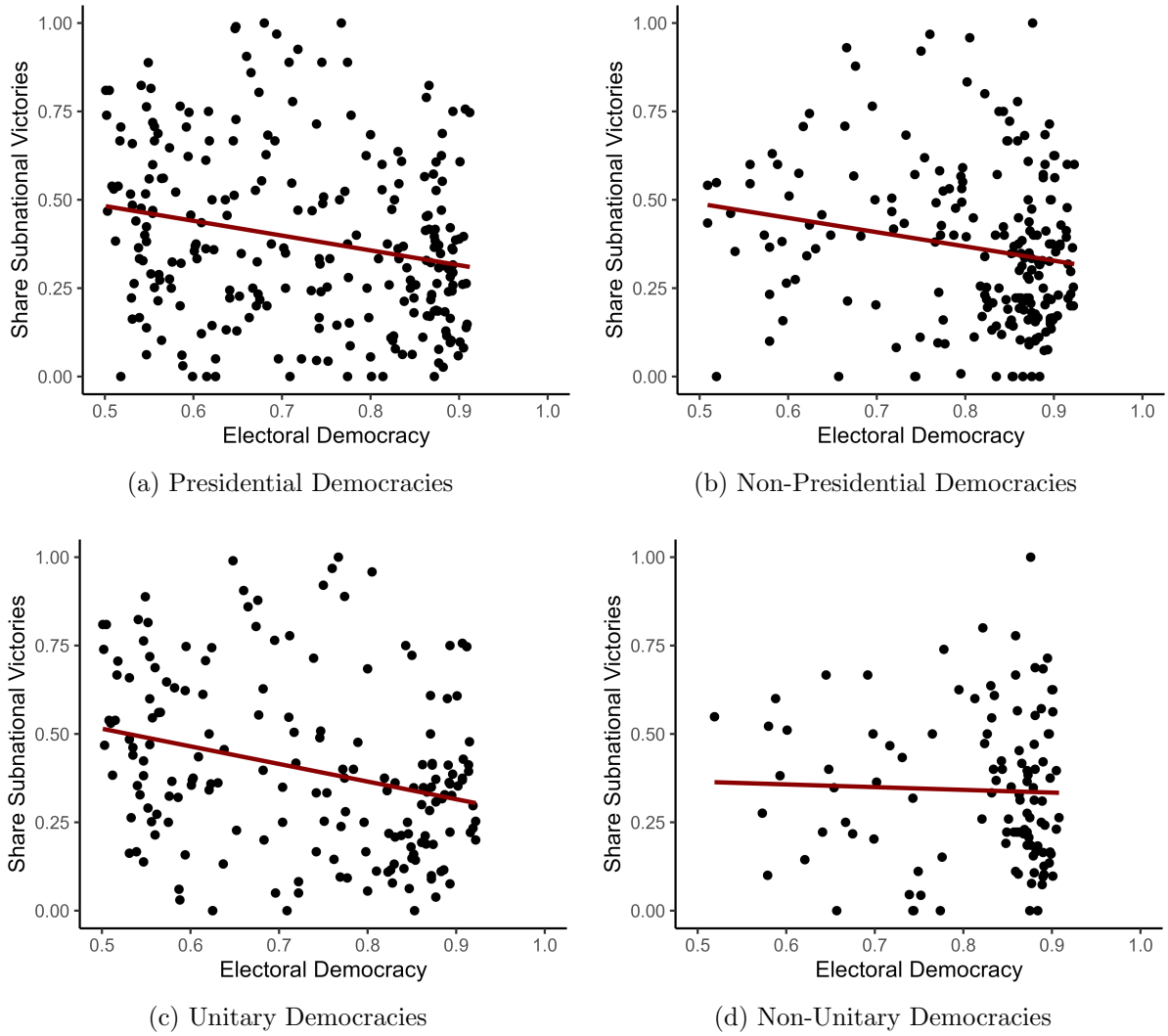
(c) Leader's Subn. Control & Subn. Democracy



(d) Gov.'s Subn. Control & Subn. Democracy

Figure 3.4: Scatterplots: Subn. Control and Quality of National/ Subnational Democracy

Notes: This figure presents the national government's share of highest subnational office against national or subnational democracy scores for subnational election years in democracies with subnational elections (1990–2021). Government affiliation is coded via the DPI (as of January 1st after a subnational election year). Information on national (electoral) democracy and subnational democracy is taken from V-Dem.



(a) Presidential Democracies

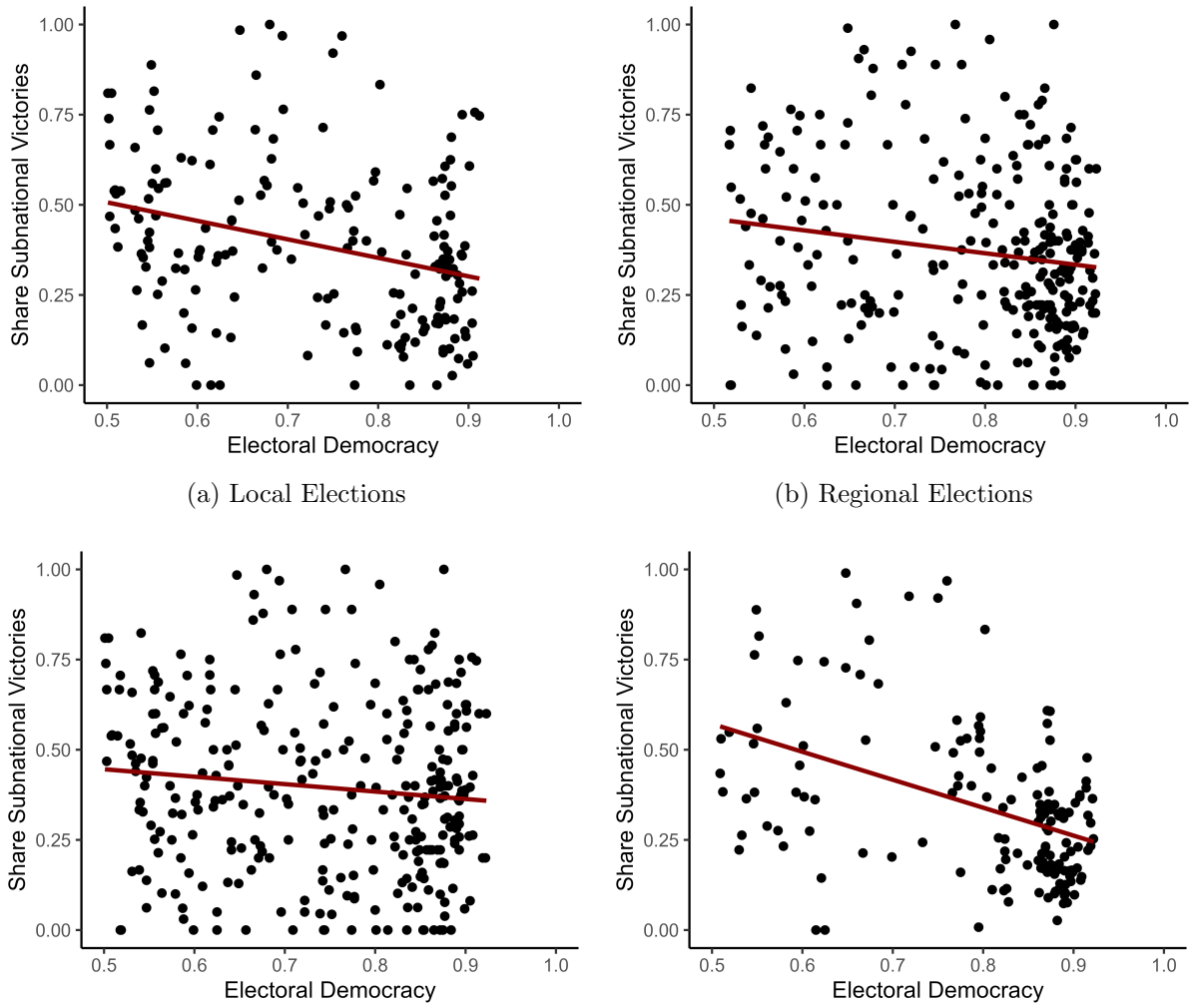
(b) Non-Presidential Democracies

(c) Unitary Democracies

(d) Non-Unitary Democracies

Figure 3.5: Scatterplots: Leader Party's Subn. Control and Quality of National Democracy

Notes: This figure presents leader party shares of highest subnational office against national electoral democracy scores for subnational election years in democracies with subnational elections (1990–2021). Government affiliation is coded via the DPI (as of January 1st after a subnational election year). Information on national (electoral) democracy is taken from V-Dem. Other data sources are: presidentialism (Bjørnskov and Rode 2020) and unitarism (Wig, Hegre, and Regan 2015). Missingness in presidentialism and unitarism codings implies that panels (a)–(d) do not show all observations.



(a) Local Elections

(b) Regional Elections

(c) Highest Exe. Coded

(d) Not Highest Exe. Coded

Figure 3.6: Scatterplots: Leader Party's Subn. Control and Quality of Ntl. Democracy II

Notes: This figure presents leader party shares of highest subnational office against national electoral democracy scores for subnational election years in democracies with subnational elections (1990–2021). Government affiliation is coded via the DPI (as of January 1st after a subnational election year). Information on national (electoral) democracy and local/ regional elections is taken from V-Dem. Other data sources are: highest executive coded (Michel 2023).

subnational democracy against subnational control. Should we observe a strong association, this could suggest that subnational outcomes are a function of the quality of subnational democracy, with leaders obtaining better results where elections are less free and fair. We find that the direction of the association depends on whether we employ a broad or narrow definition of government. In a broad definition, governing parties perform better at higher levels of subnational democracy, whereas the opposite association emerges when analyzing exclusively the leader's subnational control (figure 3.4c,d).

In what settings do subnational and national (legislative) control by the leader's party diverge? As I will include both variables in the country-level analysis, the variation used to estimate effects of subnational control will largely come from units in which subnational and national control differ. Understanding the characteristics of these units not only helps contextualize subsequent findings but also can point toward potential confounders and desirable robustness checks. To capture differences in the leader's subnational and national control, I subtract the national legislative office share from the share of highest subnational offices. Thus, the measure, which I refer to as *relative control*, ranges from "-1" (leader controls all seats in national parliament but no highest subnational offices) to "1" (leader controls all highest subnational offices but no seats in the national lower house). On a temporal dimension, relative control has remained highly stable since 1990 (figure 3.14).

Once we plot relative control against electoral democracy scores for the year of subnational elections, we find a weak negative association such that higher-quality democracies tend to have slightly lower levels of subnational control relative to national control (figure 3.8a). The plot shows also that the variation in relative control does not emerge particularly from certain levels of electoral democracy. The same holds for levels of subnational democracy (figure 3.8b), which is important because we otherwise may have been concerned that subsequent findings are driven by units with lower levels of subnational democracy. A related concern is that variation comes primarily from young, consolidating democracies, with findings potentially being less applicable to old, established democracies. However, when

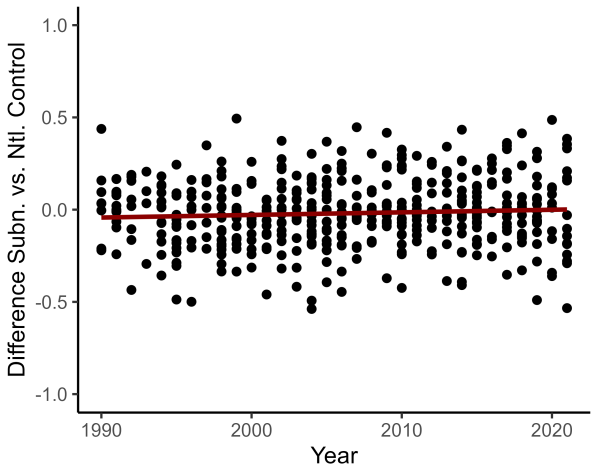


Figure 3.7: Scatterplot: Difference Subn. and National Control of Leader Party by Year

Notes: This figure presents leader party relative control for subnational election years under democracy (1990–2021).

plotting the measure of relative control against the age of national democracy, we find they are almost perfectly uncorrelated (figure 3.8c). Plotting relative control against the logged level of economic development also yields no correlation (figure 3.8d). Separating between presidential and non-presidential democracies, the latter including both parliamentary and semi-presidential systems, we again find no clear relation between relative control and levels of electoral democracy (figure 3.9a,b). This exercise illustrates, however, that presidential democracies in comparison tend to cluster at lower levels of electoral democracy. Similarly, a larger share of lower-quality electoral democracies is found in unitary systems, while both unitary and non-unitary ones display no clear relation between relative control and electoral democracy (figure 3.9c,d). Separating between democracies with regional elections and those with only local ones, we again find no association between relative control and electoral democracy (figure 3.10a,b). Finally, while we may believe that relative control should take more extreme values where national and subnational elections do not take place in the same year, I find little evidence that the simultaneity between subnational and national legislative elections is associated with relative control (figure 3.10c,d). Overall, this exercise highlighted how relative control, and its relationship to national-level electoral democracy,

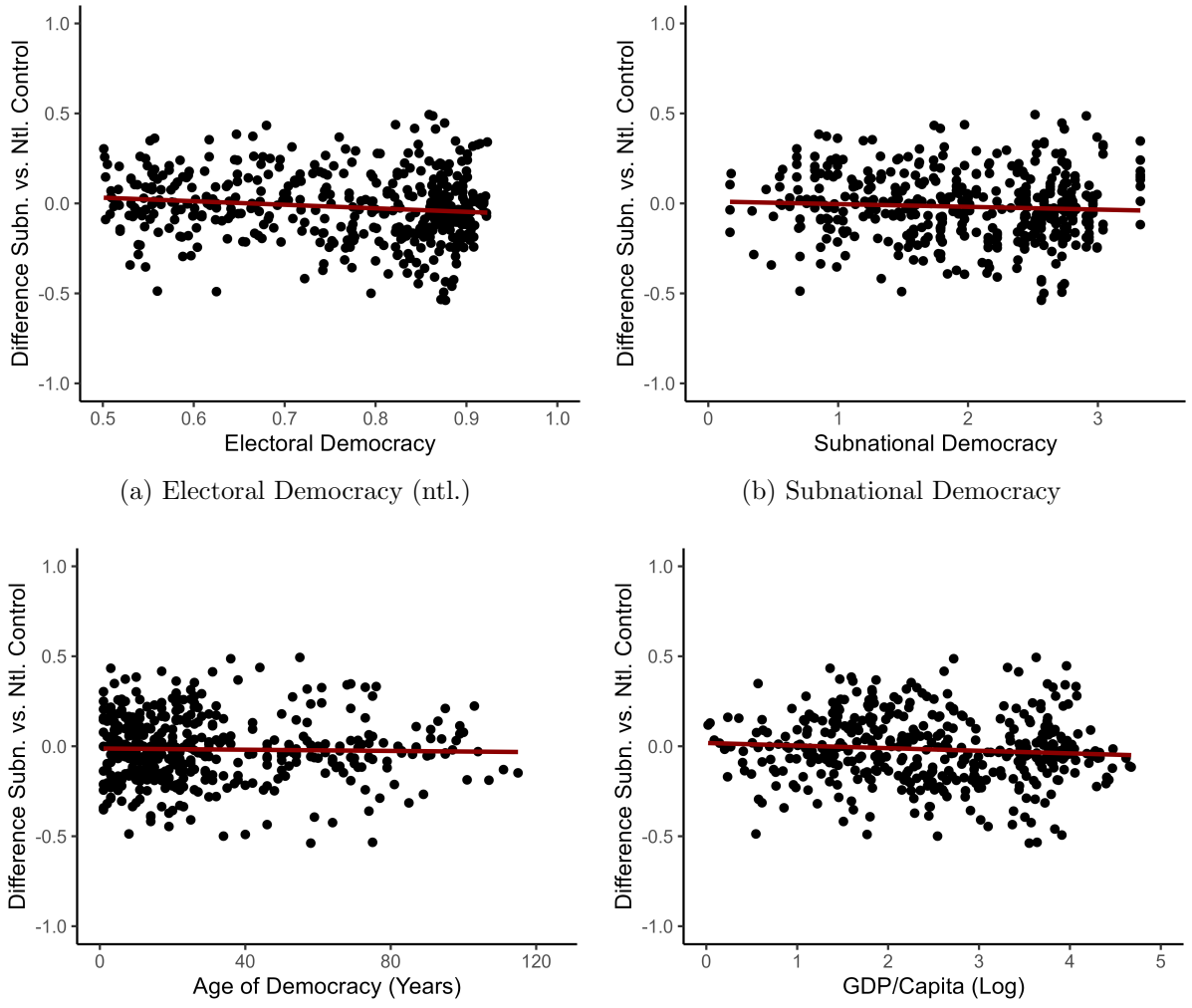
do not differ noticeably across values of a range of variables, which bolsters the external validity of subsequent findings as variation in subnational control—as distinct from national legislative control—does not appear to emerge at certain levels of democracy or levels of economic development. In the following, this variation will be used to analyze changes in dependent variables between the subnational election year and the following one.

3.4.2 Does Subnational Control Affect Executive Aggrandizement?

To test whether patterns of subnational control are associated with executive aggrandizement, I employ two-way fixed effects panel analyses. In the analysis, I control for the level of *electoral democracy* as more democratic countries have been shown to face lower risks of democratic reversals (Svolik 2015).[34] Additionally, I include *GDP per capita* which is expected to be negatively associated with aggrandizement (Boese et al. 2021; Przeworski et al. 2000). Other economic controls are the *growth rate*, *inflation*, and *resource rents/GDP*. Whereas positive growth should stabilize democracies (Haggard and Kaufman 1995), higher inflation and dependence on resource rents should be destabilizing (Mainwaring 2022; Mazzuca 2013). Further, the *urban population share* captures that more urban societies may more easily engage in pro-democratic protest (Glaeser and Steinberg 2017). The opposition's lower house seat share ("*national control*") influences whether it can block legislation and constitutional change (Pérez-Liñán, Schmidt, and Vairo 2019; Haggard and Kaufman 2021). Other controls include the average level of regional electoral democracy ("*regional democracy*") to capture diffusion effects (Gleditsch and Ward 2006) and the "*age of democracy*." I also add the lagged dependent variable as less constrained chief executives should be more able to reduce checks even further.[35] Cluster-robust standard errors are employed throughout. Countries with only one election year between 1990 and 2021 are dropped,

34. This control variable will not be included in the analysis of liberal democracy because, as I will control for the lagged DV, the conceptual overlap between liberal and electoral democracy would have been substantial.

35. To address potential "Nickell" bias, I reestimate models without the lagged DV (appendix 5.14).



(a) Electoral Democracy (ntl.)

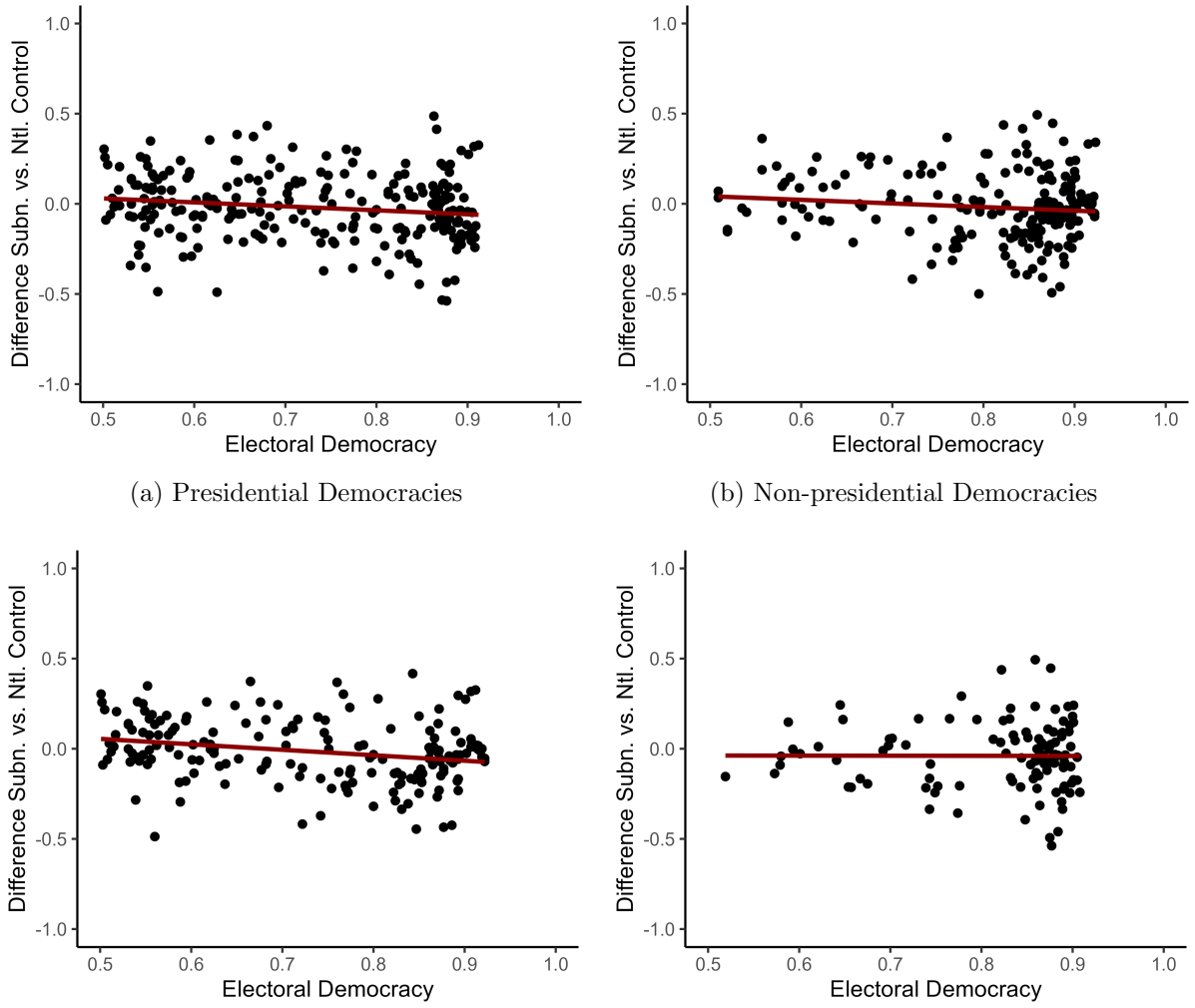
(b) Subnational Democracy

(c) Age of Democracy

(d) GDP/Capita (log)

Figure 3.8: Scatterplots: Relative Control by Leader's Party

Notes: This figure presents leader party relative control against (a) national electoral democracy, (b) subnational democracy, (c) age of national democracy, and (d) logged GDP/capita (in constant 2015 $, thousands) in democracies with subnational elections (1990–2021). Chief executive affiliation is coded via the DPI (as of January 1st after a subnational election year). Information on national (electoral) democracy, local/ regional elections, and the age of democracy is taken from V-Dem. Other data sources are: GDP/capita (World Bank 2023b) and relative control (Michel 2023; Scartascini, Cruz, and Keefer 2021).



(a) Presidential Democracies

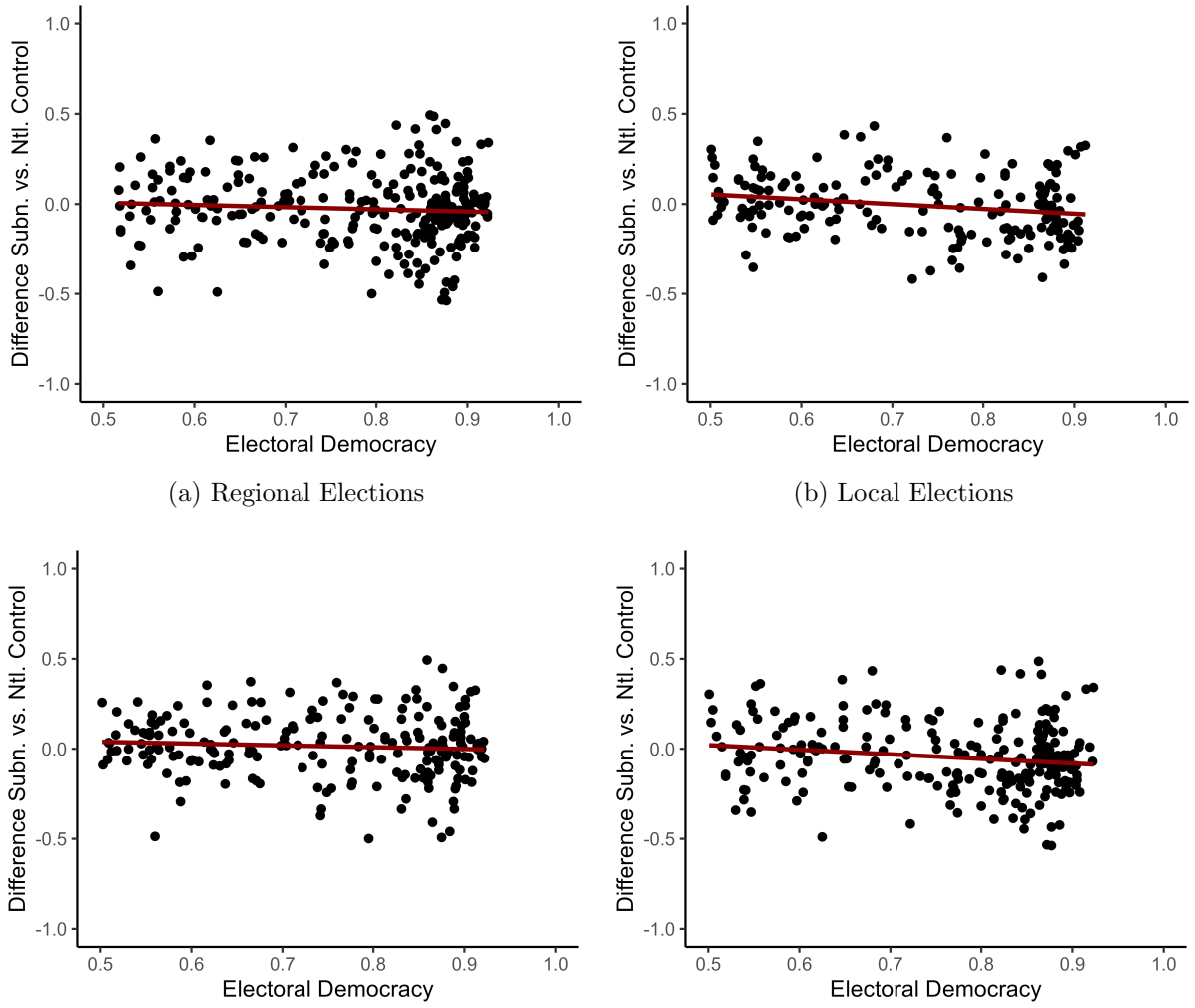
(b) Non-presidential Democracies

(c) Unitary Democracies

(d) Non-Unitary Democracies

Figure 3.9: Scatterplots: Relative Control by Leader's Party by Level of Electoral Democracy for Subsets of Democracies

Notes: This figure presents leader party relative control by type of democracy—presidential or not (panels a and b) and unitary or not (panels c and d)—in democracies with subnational elections (1990–2021). Chief executive affiliation is coded via the DPI (as of January 1st after a subnational election year). Information on national (electoral) democracy is taken from V-Dem. Other data sources are: presidentialism (Bjørnskov and Rode 2020), unitarism (Wig, Hegre, and Regan 2015), and relative control (Michel 2023; Scartascini, Cruz, and Keefer 2021). Missingness in presidentialism and unitarism codings implies that panels a–d do not show all observations.



(a) Regional Elections

(b) Local Elections

(c) Simultaneous Elections

(d) Non-Simultaneous Elections

Figure 3.10: Scatterplots: Relative Control by Leader's Party by Level of Electoral Democracy for Subsets of Elections

Notes: This figure presents leader party relative control by type of democracy—regional elections or not (panels a and b) and subnational and national elections in the same year or not (panels c and d)—in democracies with subnational elections (1990–2021). Chief executive affiliation is coded via the DPI (as of January 1st after a subnational election year). Information on national (electoral) democracy, regional/ local elections, and election simultaneity is taken from V-Dem. Other data sources are: relative control (Michel 2023; Scartascini, Cruz, and Keefer 2021).

leaving 78 democracies with between two and ten subnational election years, for a total of 436 observations with complete covariate information. Summary statistics and data sources are presented in table 3.1 and appendix 5.1.5, respectively. For V-Dem items used, I provide question wordings and index components in appendix 5.19.

Examining aggrandizement in the year after subnational elections reduces my ability to detect reductions in vertical accountability as few countries hold national elections that year. Between elections, aggrandizement becomes likelier if institutions of horizontal accountability—particularly national parliament and the highest courts—check the national executive less. To capture changes in horizontal accountability, I rely on V-Dem's horizontal accountability index, which measures the extent to which the "legislature; the judiciary; and specific oversight agencies such as ombudsmen, prosecutor and comptroller generals" are able and willing to "oversee the government by demanding information, questioning officials and punishing improper behavior" (V-Dem 2023b, 291).[36] Horizontal constraints can be affected by aggrandizement—e.g., when laws are changed to reduce legislative oversight—but also by the opposition's willingness to engage in oversight. Thus, horizontal accountability is best interpreted as shaping *opportunities for aggrandizement*.[37] To disaggregate horizontal accountability, I use indices of judicial and legislative constraints.[38]

Yet, more opportunities to aggrandize do not necessarily give rise to more aggrandizement. Therefore, I explore three outcome measures of *actual* aggrandizement. First, to get more directly at the national executive's behavior, I examine how frequently the chief exec-

36. V-Dem defines "the government" as exclusively referring to *national* institutions (V-Dem 2023b, 415).

37. Treating opportunities for aggrandizement as the main outcome of interest leaves open whether the chief executive would utilize being checked less to undermine democracy, thus allowing me to make weaker assumptions about their intentionality. On chief executives' normative commitments to democracy, see Mainwaring 2022; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013.

38. Should subnational control matter primarily for horizontal accountability by enabling opposition-led subnational units to activate judicial review, we would believe that judicial constraints should be more clearly affected. In contrast, if the effects of legislative constraints were more pronounced, even outside legislatures with upper houses composed of delegates of subnational governments, this would support my theory about office-seeking MPs considering opposition access to subnational governments when deciding which party to side with and how assertive to be in their exercise of horizontal accountability.

utive and cabinet members violate the constitution. Constitutional constraints are a classic check on chief executives, violations of which classify as aggrandizement (e.g., term limit violations (Versteeg et al. 2020)). Second, as free media and a vibrant civil society enable holding the national executive accountable (Lührmann, Marquardt, and Mechkova 2020), I also consider the national executive's censorship efforts and repression of civil society organizations. Yet, I treat these as secondary measures given that the media and civil society as enablers of "diagonal accountability" (Lührmann, Marquardt, and Mechkova 2020) may be seen as less direct constraints on the national executive than constitutional provisions.

Thus, three indicators of aggrandizement directly capture the national executive's behavior, whereas all other indicators used in this part of the analysis may be affected by the opposition's behavior. While these three measures do not capture all possible pathways of aggrandizement outlined in section 1.2, they constitute the only V-Dem measures that isolate dimensions of reductions in democratic quality exclusively brought about by the national executive.[39]

To conclude the list of outcome measures, I also explore three items capturing democratic quality more broadly. While these intuitively are not only affected by the national executive, they allow me to test if subnational opposition control is associated with subsequent changes in democracy measures particularly prominent in the literature on democratic backsliding. Since political liberties might be targeted even between elections, I examine indices of political liberties and freedom of expression.[40] Finally, all dimensions of aggrandizement should ultimately be reflected in the regime's liberal democracy score.

The empirical setup is as follows: A party's governmental affiliation is evaluated on

39. While there are increasing efforts to measure democratic backsliding in a way that relies less on expert assessments—for a motivation, see Little and Meng 2023—V-Dem's expert codings continue to constitute the state-of-the-art data on the quality of democracy.

40. Note that despite the reference to the government in the question wording for *freedom of expression*, the government is not the exclusive reference category in most indicators used. Therefore, this should not be seen as an indicator of aggrandizement.

January 1st after the subnational election year. In the dichotomous coding of governmental affiliation, opposition refers to either all parties other than the leader's party ("broad," model 1)[41] or all parties not coded as government by the DPI ("narrow," model 2).[42] Dependent variables take their value on December 31st of the year after subnational elections. Thus, I estimate changes in checks on the national executive during the year following subnational elections.[43] Coefficients for the lagged dependent variable, electoral democracy, and regional democracy will only be reported in the appendix for better readability.

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{Aggr,i_{t+1}} = \beta * Subnational\,Control_{i_t} \\ + \gamma * \mathbf{Z}_{i_t} + \alpha_i + \mu_t \\ + \epsilon_{i_t} \end{aligned} \tag{3.1}$$

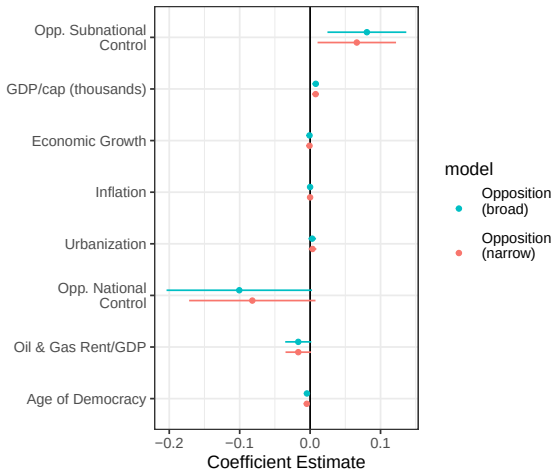
where $Y_{Aggr,i_{t+1}}$ is the change in an outcome in country i between time t_0 and time t_{+1}, the independent variable *Subnational Control* refers to the share of highest subnational offices won by the opposition in subnational election year t, $\mathbf{Z}_{i_t}$ is a vector of country-level covariates at the end of year t, α_i and μ_t represent country- and year-fixed effects, respectively, and the error term is given by ϵ_{i_t}. The coefficient β, then, captures the effect of subnational opposition control on the change in the outcome between the subnational election year and the one after.

We find that oppositions that control more highest subnational offices exert more horizontal checks after the following year. This effect is significant at the 1%-level in model 1 and the 5%-level in model 2. In substantive terms, increasing the opposition's subnational control by one standard deviation has positive effects on horizontal accountability similar to increasing GDP/capita by $2,370. As expected, higher levels of economic development are

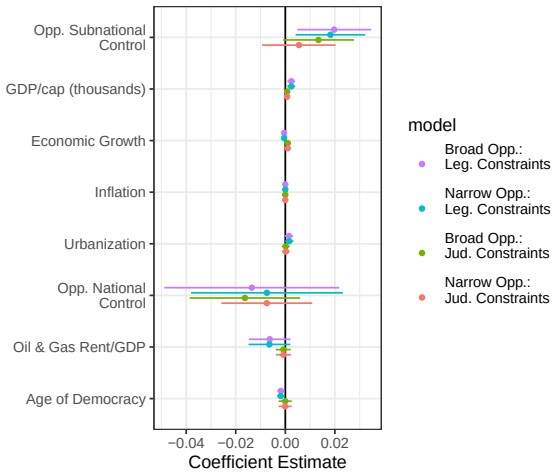
41. On coalition partners opposing aggrandizement, see Haggard and Kaufman 2021.

42. Where the DPI coded chief executives as independent, the largest governing party's seat share was entered.

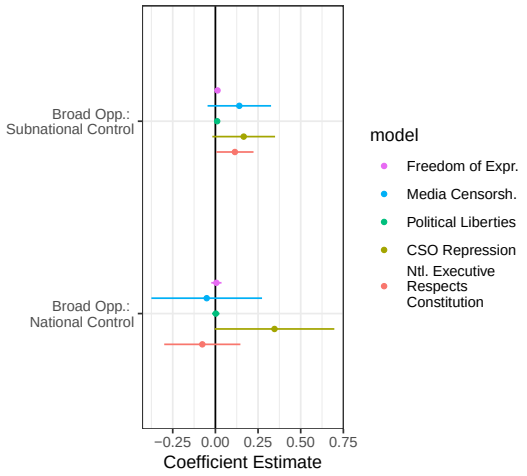
43. Note that I avoid selection issues by requiring subnational election years, not the following one during which aggrandizement is evaluated, to occur under electoral democracy.



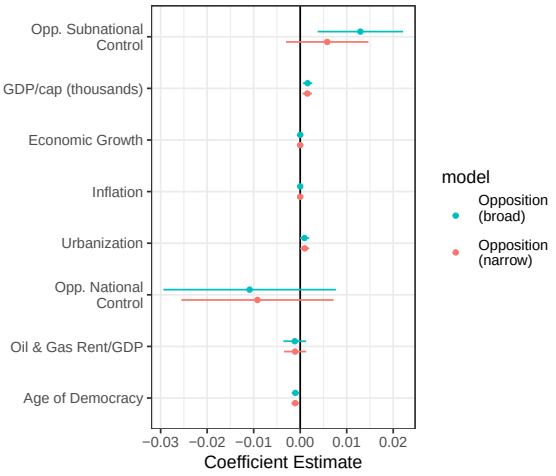
(a) Horizontal Accountability



(b) Legislative vs. Judicial Constraints



(c) Other Aggrandizement



(d) Liberal Democracy

Figure 3.11: Coefficient Plots: Dimensions of Aggrandizement

Notes: For standardized results, see appendix 5.1.1. Full results are presented in appendix 5.1.8.

associated with increases in horizontal accountability, whereas resource rents are negatively correlated at the 10%-significance level. Interestingly, higher seat shares in the national lower house by the national executive are positively associated with horizontal accountability. While seemingly counterintuitive, this supports Helmke (2017)'s finding that presidents with weak support in parliament are more likely to start interbranch conflicts.[44] Younger democracies are more likely to experience increases in horizontal accountability. Domestic and regional levels of electoral democracy are insignificant, as are urbanization rates.

When separating legislative and judicial constraints on the national executive, we see that higher subnational opposition control clearly positively affects legislative constraints (at the 1%- and 5%-levels), but not judicial ones (Figure 3.11b). This is consistent with my theoretical framework in which subnational opposition access allows it to better incentivize MPs to engage in horizontal oversight – as opposed to a primarily judicial mechanism in which subnationally strong oppositions may have more opportunities to activate judicial review by the highest courts. Moving from *opportunities for* to *actual* aggrandizement, Figure 3.11c shows that the opposition's subnational control is positively associated with the national executive's respect for the constitution (significant at the 5%-level). Additionally, we find that coefficients for civil society repression, efforts to censor the media, and freedom of expression have the expected direction and border conventional significance thresholds, while positive effects for political liberties are significant at the 5%-level. Finally, at the most aggregated level, liberal democracy declines when the leader's party exerts higher subnational control (significant at the 1%-level, Figure 3.11d). Standardized results reveal that changing subnational opposition control by one standard deviation leads to changes at the order of 2–5 percent of a standard deviation in the outcome. While clearly smaller than

44. Yet, this finding contradicts a widely-held intuition that leaders with strong support in national parliament, particularly if they hold the majorities needed to change constitutions, are most likely to aggrandize (Pérez-Liñán, Schmidt, and Vairo 2019). However, such research was unable to control for subnational control and typically focused on one region only (Latin America), thereby excluding many of the more stable democracies with hegemonic parties. Empirically, point estimates for national control are relatively robust to whether—and how—we include a measure of subnational control into the estimation, but coefficients for national control are not always statistically significant (appendix 5.16).

effects of economic development and the age of democracy, these effects are comparable to or larger than effects of national control, economic growth, inflation, and regional democracy (appendix 5.1.1).[45]

In terms of robustness checks for the effects of subnational control on horizontal accountability, controlling for governing parties' legislative and presidential vote shares in the final election round yields similar results (appendix 5.11). This robustness check alleviates concerns that subnational control might proxy for underlying differences in the popularity of or support for the national executive vis-a-vis the opposition. They also hold when excluding cases in which subnational elections were of lower democratic quality, such as Colombia in the early 2000s, where armed groups interfered with subnational electoral processes (appendix 5.11, model 5), and when controlling for the quality of subnational democracy (appendix 5.12, model 2). Thus, my findings are not driven by undemocratic subnational elections, which may have given rise to concerns that stronger chief executives may have already undermined subnational elections before attacking national-level democratic institutions, thereby inducing an association between less subnational opposition representation (as subnational elections were more skewed) and subsequent aggrandizement at the national level.[46] We obtain similar results when excluding cases in which national elections were held the year after subnational elections (appendix 5.13, model 2). These complicate the analysis as chief executives may have changed during the following year, risking misattribution of the change in outcomes after turnover to the chief executive previously in office. In this specification, given my interest in horizontal checks, removing national elections as exercises of vertical accountability also allows for a cleaner analysis of horizontal constraints. This test

45. Effect sizes for subnational control are likely lower boundaries of the true effect because we can think of the subnational election year—as the baseline from which change to the following one occurs—as partially treated: constraining effects materialize already after subnational elections in the subnational election year, thereby reducing the estimated change from the partially treated baseline year to the fully treated following one.

46. On aggrandizers undermining subnational democracy in Poland, see O'Dwyer and Stenberg 2022; Jakli and Stenberg 2021.

also highlights that the documented changes in horizontal accountability do not depend on national elections increasing the opposition's national legislative seat shares.[47] Controlling for whether national legislative elections coincided with subnational ones, or simply dropping non-simultaneous subnational elections, does not alter findings (appendix 5.13, models 3-4). These robustness checks get at the concern that, for non-simultaneous elections and thinking of elections as surveys of political preferences, more recent subnational election outcomes would proxy for differential underlying popularity that is not yet represented in national-level election outcomes. Removing country years with indirectly elected upper chambers, in which subnational outcomes could affect horizontal accountability mechanically via the composition of the upper chamber, also yields comparable results (appendix 5.13, model 5), as does excluding observations with appointed or any upper chamber (appendix 5.17, models 4-5).

Importantly, results also persist after subsetting to non-federal democracies: Against perspectives that subnational control in unitary settings should not matter (e.g., Kaufman, Kelemen, and Kolcak 2024), I find effects are not limited to federal democracies where subnational authority tends to be better protected constitutionally (appendix 5.8). This is consistent with my theoretical framework of subnational governments—as electoral springboards conveying resources, not necessarily constitutional prerogatives—providing incentives to national members of parliament to check the national executive. In a separate check, I demonstrate robustness to only including those 50 countries with highest subnational executives coded (appendix 5.17). This addresses concerns around unit homogeneity: that in a non-negligible set of 34 countries, subnational control reflected seat shares in highest subnational parliaments. Given the positive correlation between subnational and national control, a further concern pertains to multicollinearity. Yet, dropping the measure of national control or including it as a majority or supermajority dummy does not change results

47. As national elections can lead to turnover, parties in opposition at time $t0$ gaining legislators in national elections at time $t1$ is not unambiguously good for preventing aggrandizement: the opposition party can be in government one year later, with additional legislators facilitating aggrandizement.

(appendix 5.15). We might believe that effects of subnational opposition control depend on how much offices are concentrated in a small number of opposition parties, with opposition fragmentation creating coordination problems that reduce their ability to check the leader (on opposition fragmentation and coordination, see Eaton 2017). Yet, interacting subnational control with an opposition fragmentation dummy does not alter results (appendix 5.17, model 3). Lagging controls by an additional year also preserves findings (appendix 5.17, model 1). Finally, findings persist after dropping the three country-years coded as experiencing coups the year after subnational elections (appendix 5.18), country-years in which the leader controls over three-fourths of subnational offices, Bosnia and Herzegovina as a clear outlier, and years affected by the Covid-19 pandemic (appendix 5.12, models 3-5).

Two-way fixed effects models with continuous treatments are identified under assumptions of (1) strong parallel trends, (2) no anticipation of treatment, and (3) treatment effect homogeneity (Callaway, Goodman-Bacon, and Sant'Anna 2021, 33f.). Specifically, strong parallel trends require that the average change in the outcome for any given value of subnational control is equal between those who experienced this value and those who did not. To defend this assumption, I conduct placebo tests which show that subnational control does not predict prior changes and levels in horizontal accountability (appendix 5.6). This also bolsters the "no anticipation" assumption, as preemptive changes in accountability in anticipation of subnational election outcomes would have materialized in differential pre-trends.

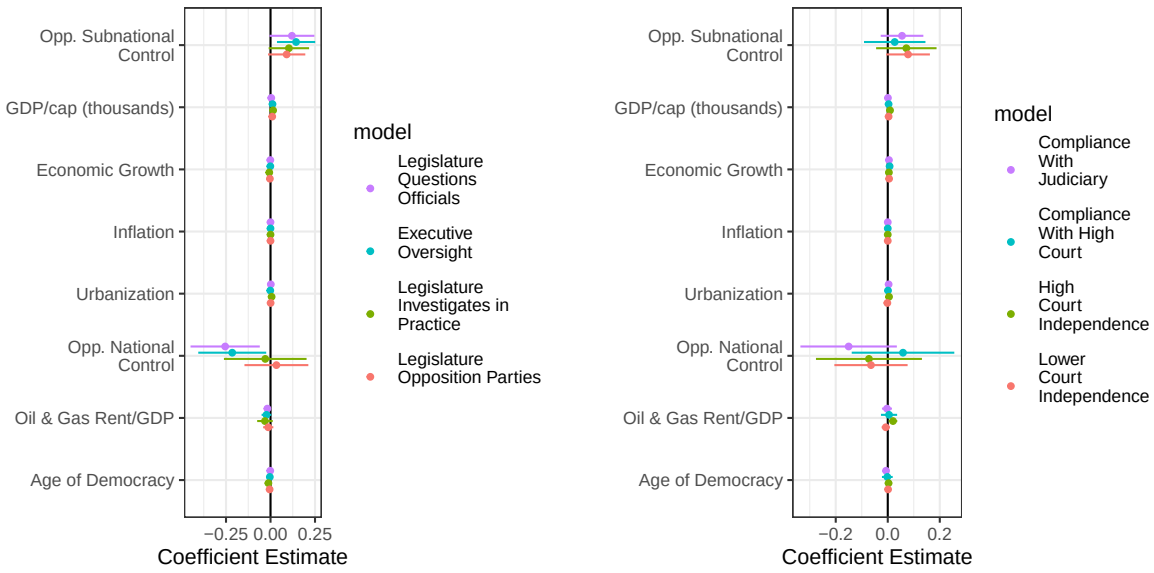
The assumption of treatment effect homogeneity would be violated if opposition access to subnational government had stronger effects in some types of regimes or time periods than others. For instance, we might believe that effects are weaker in unitary democracies, those having elected local but not regional governments, or in which regional governments have less authority. Splitting the sample accordingly, I find that treatment effects appear homogeneous across unitary and non-unitary democracies (appendix 5.8). Reassuringly, effects continue to be substantive and positive when only looking at municipal governments or low levels of regional authority (appendix 5.9). On a temporal dimension, effects appear larger after 2005

and a preceding negative trend in horizontal accountability,[48] but substantive interpretations continue to be the same across subsamples (appendix 5.10).

A final econometric concern in panel models which include lagged dependent variables is "Nickell bias," particularly if the number of time periods per unit is relatively limited, as was the case here. Substantively, the motivation to include the lagged dependent variable was that chief executives who weakened checks in the past should be even more able to weaken checks further. Crucially, my results do not depend on the inclusion of the lagged dependent variable (appendix 5.14).

48. The latter result is also substantively meaningful: Subnational opposition victories have slightly larger effects when horizontal accountability had come under attack previously. This guards against criticisms suggesting that my framework may work less well the more horizontal checks have been eroded.

3.4.3 Disaggregating Horizontal Accountability to Substantiate Causal Mechanisms



(a) Legislative Constraints

(b) Judicial Constraints

Figure 3.12: Coefficient Plots: Disaggregating Legislative and Judicial Accountability

Notes: These analyses report point estimates for the effect of subnational opposition control on the indicators V-Dem uses to construct the legislative and judicial constraints indices, respectively. For judicial constraints, I do not report the indicator of "respect for the constitution" as it was discussed as the main measure of executive aggrandizement.

By disaggregating the V-Dem indices for legislative and judicial constraints on the national executive, we can gain further insights into how exactly subnational opposition control increases horizontal accountability. For indicators of legislative constraints, I find that all four effects are significant at conventional levels and similar in substantive size. Consistent with my theory that access to subnational office and resources allows oppositions to bind and incentivize MPs to become more assertive vis-a-vis the national executive, I find significant and positive effects of subnational opposition control on whether the opposition is "able to exercise oversight and investigatory functions against the wishes of the governing party or coalition" ("v2lgoppart," V-Dem 2023b, 152). Similarly, effects on the question-

ing and investigating of the national executive by the national legislature are comparable in significance and size, again highlighting that national MPs are more likely to engange in horizontal oversight in settings where the national executive to be constrained controls fewer subnational governments. Interestingly, I also find support for administrative resistance: More opposition-led subnational governments are associated with more administrative checks. Here, "unconstitutional, illegal, or unethical activity" is more likely to be followed by the "comptroller general, general prosecutor, or ombudsman" questioning and investigating, who ultimately become more likely to "issue an unfavorable decision or report" ("v2lgotovst," V-Dem 2023b, 151). This may suggest that even nominally independent agents are sensitive to the relative competitiveness of opposition and government, and become less assertive the more national governing parties also control subnational administrations.[49]

Consistent with the null result reported previously that subnational control is not associated with judicial constraints, I find that opposition control has no effect on the national executive's compliance with the judiciary and the high court. The latter are also not more independent where oppositions control more subnational units (the point estimate is positive but insignificant). Alone effects for lower court independence are positive and significant at the 10%-level. Intuitively, such courts may be (a) selected by subnational governments or (b) affected in their autonomy by subnational legislation and constitutions. This may help explain why lower courts appear to be more able to follow the law over the wishes of the national executive where oppositions control more subnational governments.

In summary, disaggregating dimensions of legislative and judicial constraints on the national executive lends support to the proposed mechanisms: Opposition-led subnational governments help constrain the national executive indirectly via the national parliament which

49. An alternative interpretation would be to argue that subnational governments may have influence on the selection of these agents which, if true, may allow the opposition to select more critical, assertive individuals where it controls more subnational governments. Yet, I am not aware of any systematic research into how these offices are filled for democracies after 1990.

engages in more horizontal oversight the higher subnational opposition control is.[50] Additionally, I found effects on administrative resistance to the national executive. Finally, most dimensions of judicial constraints were insignificant, with only the lower courts—intuitively, closest to subnational governments—appearing to be affected by who controls subnational administrations.

In the following, I address what are likely the four main objections to the results presented so far: (1) that the relationship between subnational control and opportunities for—and actual—aggrandizement may be confounded by the popularity of the chief executive, (2) that how subnational resources affect national-level regime change may depend on the intentionality of actors holding resources, (3) that subnational opposition access may affect resistance actors other than the opposition – and rival party elites in the chief executive's party in particular, and (4) that recentralization, or the threat thereof, may negate any constraining effect subnational opposition may otherwise have.

On a theoretical level, these are reasonable objections, which can be tested empirically. To preview the main findings that will be presented in the following sections: Against views that the popularity of the chief executive serves as a confounder, I show that results persist even when controlling for measures of leader and leader party support and preview RDD results demonstrating a causal effect of subnational opposition incumbency (after close races) on subsequent electoral performance in national legislative elections. I do not find evidence that an intentionality-centered framework can better account for changes in horizontal accountability or executive aggrandizement. The picture is more complicated for the third objection – that subnational control may affect how much rival party elites can constrain party leaders inside governing parties. In some specifications, leaders are better able to personalize their party when oppositions control fewer subnational offices. This is consistent with a view in which competitive oppositions allow rival party elites in governing parties to

50. Note that the results for horizontal accountability held even in unitary, unicameral democracies, meaning that this relationship is not driven by subnational governments selecting members of national upper houses in a number of federal systems.

be more assertive as their threat of exiting is more credible (McKie 2019). Finally, recentralization under democracy, at least when examining the termination of subnational elections or reductions in regional authority, appears to be exceptionally rare, with the latter occurring when the opposition is not particularly weak in terms of subnational control.

3.4.4 Challenge 1: Leader Support as a Confounding Variable

As subnational control cannot be randomly assigned, a valid concern with my country-level results is given by unobserved time-variant confounders. In particular, we may believe that the popular support of the leader determines (a) opposition performance in subnational elections and (b) subsequent aggrandizement. Indeed, it is easy to identify cases with highly popular chief executives in which the opposition performed poorly in lower-level contests and later could not prevent aggrandizement. One dramatic case is Orban's Hungary, where the opposition's implosion in the 2010 elections would have been unthinkable if it had not been for the infamous "Öszöd speech" by prior Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, in which the leader of the Socialist Party—Fidesz's main rival—openly admitted to having lied to the electorate for more than a year. Orban, by virtue of being highly popular relative to the opposition, may have been not only more able to win local and national elections but also to undermine democratic institutions. Similarly, Chávez in Venezuela, leveraged the at times surging natural resource rents and dissatisfaction with former governing parties Acción Democrática and COPEI to decisively win elections (with the 2004 regional elections being particularly one-sided) and engage in aggrandizement. Yet, there are also examples of highly popular leaders unable to aggrandize, such as Uribe in Colombia (Gamboa 2022). As this discussion shows, leader support likely is a particularly crucial potential confounder that needs to be addressed empirically.

Fortunately, as discussed above, we can control for the leader party's lower house vote shares in addition to its seat shares and still obtain the result that subnational opposition control helps (a) increase horizontal constraints and (b) reduce executive aggrandize-

ment. Further, adding a control for presidential vote shares, thereby only including cases with directly elected chief executives, yields similar results (see section 3.4.2). I considered also controlling for "executive approval" as measured by the Executive Approval Project (Martínez-Gallardo et al. 2024) but decided against it because the main measure with high coverage appears to not cleanly separate national and subnational executives.

While there is no design-based solution to the issue of confounding given the observational nature of the subnational elections data, my empirical approach does address issues of reverse causality. It seems plausible that executive aggrandizement makes it more difficult for opposition parties to compete in subnational elections.[51] For this reason, I controlled for the level of electoral democracy during the subnational election year. More generally, the estimation approach taken attempted to control for a range of commonly used variables in the study of regime change—measured in the subnational election year—to then estimate relatively short-term changes in the outcome from the subnational election year to the following one. As I showed earlier in my defense of parallel trends in section 3.4.2, it is not the case that realized levels of subnational control can predict preceding changes in, and levels of, horizontal accountability in the three years prior to subnational elections (see appendix 5.1.3). In other words, lower subnational opposition control is on average not a product of already-weakening horizontal checks at the national level in the years leading up to subnational elections. Further, the temporal logic of my estimation makes reverse causality impossible: The changes during the year after subnational elections cannot account for subnational election outcomes the year before.

Ultimately, the most convincing analysis that subnational control is not merely a reflection of relative popularity between the opposition and governing parties, but also an independent source of subsequent popular support will be the regression discontinuity design analysis to be discussed in section 3.5. The causal effect of occupying an office—as

51. Indeed, the definition of aggrandizement requires that weakened checks on the national executive reduce the opposition's ability to compete in free and fair elections.

distinct from the underlying popularity of a party or politician, or any other possible confounder—can only be identified in very close races: The intuition is that if races in which the opposition marginally wins and loses are on average identical in their characteristics at the cutoff, we can identify the effect of winning office on outcomes of interest for such close elections. I will show that close subnational opposition victories in democratic Latin America allow the opposition to perform substantially better in national lower-house elections.[52]

3.4.5 Challenge 2: Subnational Control in an Intentionality-Centered Framework

In this section, I relax the assumptions underlying the "balance-of-power" framework that all types of opposition parties would use their authority to check the chief executive. In the current literature on democratic backsliding, some authors argue that we cannot deduce intentionality based on a government-opposition dichotomy and that normative beliefs help explain how political elites use their authority and resources in national-level contestation over regime change (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013; Mainwaring 2022; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).[53] One prominent empirical example of an illiberal opposition party using subnational authority to reduce national-level democracy has been the Republican Party under President Biden in the United States (Grumbach 2022; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).[54] While regional governments typically lack the authority to directly set parameters of na-

52. In theory, one could leverage a similar design to estimate effects on country-level outcomes: e.g., changes in horizontal accountability conditional on whether the opposition won one more close subnational election than the government. However, moving the analysis to the country-subnational election year level—as opposed to the state-subnational election year level the discontinuity design will be situated at—would reduce available units to just over 100, too few for meaningful estimation. Yet, extending the state-level data beyond Latin America could make such an approach feasible in the future.

53. Earlier research on regime change also stressed regime-related intent when arguing that some parties are "semi-" or "disloyal" (Linz 1978) to democracy or even "anti-system" (Sartori 1976; Capoccia 2002).

54. However, we should be careful not to generalize from U.S. experience: U.S. governors preside over some of the world's most authoritative regional governments (Hooghe et al. 2016) and appear quite exceptional in their influence over the parameters of national-level elections (e.g., in terms of suffrage restrictions or redistricting) (Eaton and Giraudy 2023).

tional elections, a more salient concern is whether "semi-loyal" oppositions would side with aggrandizers rather than oppose them (similar to Linz 1978). Others have emphasized the intentionality of the chief executive: According to one argument, political elites in Argentina were unwilling to undermine its democracy despite facing relatively weak checks because of normative commitments to democracy resulting from experiences with repressive military dictatorship (Mainwaring 2022). Similarly, the existence of hegemonic parties under democracy not engaging in executive aggrandizement—for instance, Japan's Liberal Democratic Party prior to 1994—further supports that some chief executives may simply be *unwilling* to aggrandize. Observational evidence suggests that candidates engaging in anti-pluralist rhetoric before elections indeed tend to take illiberal actions once they assume highest office (Medzihorsky and Lindberg 2024; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Crucially, these arguments assume that intentionality can validly be measured ex-ante[55] and is at least partially independent of the checks exercised on chief executives.

In an intentionality-centered framework, subnational control matters conditional on the normative preferences of parties exercising it: Only chief executives with illiberal intent are threats to democracy that need to be checked. The presence of illiberal leaders would be a scope condition. In their absence, whether leaders are checked would not affect democratic stability as the leader simply has no intent to undermine it. Alternatively, we can relax assumptions about the intentionality of the opposition: Only liberal oppositions use subnational resources to check chief executives.

Fortunately, the V-Party project has recently made party-level expert coding of "anti-pluralism" for 178 countries in the period of 1970–2019 available. In this coding, values address "To what extent does the party show a lacking commitment to democratic norms prior to elections?" (Lindberg et al. 2022, 21), which is an index composed of four variables

55. This is a very strong assumption: In the words of Frantz, Kendall-Taylor, and Wright (2024, 7): "As observers, it is impossible to know a priori the personality 'type' of a leader we are dealing with: one whose ambitions will be restrained by the rules of the democratic game or one whose aspirations know no bounds... Expert assessments of personality are likely endogenous to the outcome the researcher seeks to explain."

referring to the party leadership: (1) whether political opponents are personally attacked and demonized ("v2paopresp"), (2) commitment to "free and fair elections with multiple parties, freedom of speech, media, assembly and association" ("v2paplur," Lindberg et al. 2022, 27), (3) commitment to minority rights ("v2paminor"), and (4) rejection of political violence against political opponents ("v2paviol"). This index is available for parties receiving at least 5% in national lower house elections and coded for national legislative election years.[56]

Descriptively, 326 unique parties in the data contest at least one subnational and two national legislative elections successfully enough to enter the dataset between 1990 and 2019 for a total of 1,388 party-subnational election year observations. This is slightly less than half of all party-subnational election units measured in the *Subnational Elections Database* (46.7%). However, they control 81.3% of all subnational offices and 74.3% of national lower house seats allocated in my data.

I characterize a party as anti-pluralist if it scores in the lowest quartile of the empirical distribution in my data ($v2xpa\_antiplural \geq 0.359$ on a scale from "0" (= pluralist) to "1" (= anti-pluralist)), a cutoff point that corresponds to the Republican Party in the U.S. in 2006.[57] This admittedly permissive criterion strikes a balance between (a) sample size demands and (b) selecting anti-pluralist parties with face validity. However, even with this permissive threshold of what I consider an anti-pluralist party, only 45 of 463 subnational election years under democracy (1990–2021) display a chief executive whose party showed such a lack of commitment to democratic norms before elections.[58] Therefore, I focus my analysis on the intentionality of opposition parties.

We can incorporate normative preferences of the opposition by arguing that only pluralist oppositions would choose to constrain the chief executive. I subtract from the overall

56. When matching this data to the *Subnational Elections Database*, I use V-Party information for the last national legislative elections if national and subnational election years do not coincide.

57. Under the Trump presidency, this value changed to "0.719" in 2018 as the last year with data available.

58. Note that aggrandizers in Europe often did not display their intent before elections and only revealed it after being insufficiently checked once in office (Bartels 2023).

opposition's subnational seat share those seats held by opposition parties qualifying as anti-pluralist, yielding a measure of *subnational control of the pluralist opposition.*[59] Descriptive statistics reveal that of the 62% of highest subnational offices held by opposition parties, 51 percentage points are held by pluralist oppositions and 11 percentage points by anti-pluralist opposition parties, respectively.

59. This implies that oppositions not coded by V-Party are treated as "pluralist" parties.

Table 3.2: Summary Statistics: Addressing Challenges

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Indep. Variables – Intentionality					
Subn. Control (Pluralist Opp., broad)	0.51	0.28	0	1	405
Subn. Control (Anti-pluralist Opp., broad)	0.11	0.21	0	1	405
Outcomes – Intentionality					
Horizontal Accountability (t1)	1.2	0.66	-0.81	2.4	405
Ntl. Exe. Respects Constitution (t1)	1.6	0.83	-0.7	3.5	405
Controls – Intentionality					
National Control (all opp.)	0.61	0.15	0.2	1	405
Electoral Democracy	0.77	0.13	0.5	0.92	405
Age Democracy	37	36	1	171	405
Regional Democracy	0.66	0.18	0.2	0.88	405
Inflation	19	176	-9.7	2737	405
GDP/Cap (Thousands)	20	21	0.52	107	405
GDP Growth	2.4	4.2	-14	40	405
Resource Rents/GDP	0.86	2	0	16	405
Urbanization	68	17	18	98	405
Indep. Variables – Personalization					
Subnational Control (all parties)	0.25	0.2	0.0031	1	1388
Subnational Control (gov. parties)	0.29	0.22	0.005	1	720
Subnational Control (ruling parties)	0.4	0.22	0.0079	1	366
Outcomes – Personalization					
Party Personalization (t1, all parties)	-0.61	1.3	-2.9	3.3	1057
Nomination Decentraliz. (t1, all parties)	0.86	1.2	-2.8	4.7	1057
Party Personalization (t1, gov. parties)	-0.6	1.3	-2.7	3.3	561
Nomin. Decentraliz. (t1, gov. parties)	0.91	1.2	-2.8	4.7	561
Party Personalization (t1, ruling parties)	-0.36	1.2	-2.5	3.3	296
Nomin. Decentraliz. (t1, ruling parties)	0.92	1.3	-2.8	3.2	296
Controls – Personalization					
National Control (gov. parties)	0.27	0.17	0.017	0.9	717
Clientelism (gov. parties)	-0.31	1.5	-2.7	3.6	720
Local Party Activists (gov. parties)	0.98	1.3	-2.6	3.2	707
Indep. Variables – Recentralization					
Subnational Control (Opp., broad)	0.64	0.21	0	1	321
Outcomes – Recentralization					
Change: Regional Authority (t1-t0)	0.078	0.8	-6	7	321

Notes: The table shows summary statistics for variables included the party-level and national-level analyses conducted to address potential challenges to the main country-level results presented.

I then rerun the main analyses, using this measure instead of "subnational opposition control," while otherwise following all parameters of the earlier analysis.[60] Analyzing changes in horizontal accountability between the subnational election year and the following year, I find that the coefficient for *subnational control of the pluralist opposition* shrinks by about 50% relative to the earlier one for "subnational opposition control." The statistical significance drops from the 1%-level to falling just outside the 10%-level (appendix 5.22, models 1–2). We obtain similar results when analyzing changes in respect for the constitution as my primary measure of actual aggrandizement: The earlier point estimate shrinks by over two-thirds and is no longer statistically significant when only considering subnational control by pluralist oppositions (appendix 5.22, models 3–4). While this analysis relied on a about 10% smaller sample, this alone can hardly account for the substantial drops in statistical significance. Overall, these findings seem to support the "balance-of-power" framework over this version of an "intentionality-centered" framework: general—and not only pluralist—opposition control matters most and that even an illiberal opposition uses its subnational control to better constrain the national executive. This finding is intuitive: Even an illiberal opposition party such as the contemporary Republican Party in the United States has an incentive to constrain the chief executive to preserve its ability to compete in future elections.[61]

Yet, proponents of intentionality-centered explanations may argue that subnational control by an illiberal opposition may adversely affect democracy in ways other than exercising horizontal constraints. First, illiberal oppositions in the rare setting where subnational executives can set parameters of national democracy directly may engage in vote suppression and disenfranchisement (e.g., Grumbach 2022). This is correct, as the United States under President Biden exemplifies, but it poses no challenge to my empirical analysis: If certain types of subnational opposition control are damaging to national democracy, it should make

60. Due to missingness in and the shorter temporal scope of V-Party, I lose slightly less than 10% of the units included in the main analyses.

61. For a recent empirical example, see the Santa Cruz-based opposition around Fernando Camacho and "Creemos" mobilizing against what they perceived to be flawed presidential elections in 2019.

us more surprised by my finding that *average* subnational opposition control appears to have positive effects, even on liberal democracy (see section 3.4.2). Second, illiberal oppositions may use subnational electoral springboards to obtain the position of chief executive in the future, potentially enabling aggrandizement after the next national elections. Indeed, there are prominent examples of this phenomenon (El Salvador - Bukele, Colombia - Uribe, Turkey - Erdoğan, Philippines - Duterte). But we need to remember that my theory—and the "balance-of-power" framework more generally—make statements about how office allocations between governing and opposition parties affect democracy *before a new configuration of government and opposition emerges, e.g., due to turnover after national elections*. Consequently, my estimation examined changes between the subnational election year and the following one. How longer-term changes in democratic quality, and especially those after the next national elections, are affected by subnational opposition access appears more complicated: if the illiberal opposition fails to achieve a turnover, its initial subnational control may be positive for national democracy insofar as it allows it "to fight another day" and better preserve horizontal constraints on the national executive in the medium-term. However, if the illiberal opposition succeeds in capturing highest national executive office, its initial subnational control may have enabled post-turnover aggrandizement. While my analysis does not attempt to capture such medium- and long-term effects, future research should examine if subnational opposition control by illiberal parties makes it more likely to capture the national executive in the following.

3.4.6 Challenge 3: Subnational Control and Alternative Resistance Actors

A third line of criticism would point toward resistance actors other than opposition parties and how these are affected by patterns of subnational control. These include rival party elites within the leader's party and the military.[62] While the role of the military was addressed by providing robustness checks showing that results hold even when excluding coup

62. For a review of types of resistance actors, see Tomini, Gibril, and Bochev 2022.

years (section 3.4.2), we can examine how rival elites in the leader's party change their behavior vis-a-vis the leader based on patterns of subnational control. If this relation exists, it would point toward an additional mechanism through which subnational control affects aggrandizement. On a theoretical level, subnational offices may give rival party elites an independent opportunity to gain visibility and access to resources, similar to how oppositions use such offices.[63] For instance, Gervasoni (2024, 229) argues that "within the same party, a subnational ruler may 'counteract the ambition' (and therefore limit the power) of a national co-partisan." Similarly, Kaufman, Kelemen, and Kolcak (2024, 2) hypothesize that "[i]n some cases, autocratic initiatives at the national level may be resisted by locally based politicians within the aspiring autocrats' party." An empirical example is given by Argentina under President Menem (Levitsky and Murillo 2008, 20):

> Argentine presidents are also constrained by other democratically elected actors, particularly governors. Governors and other provincial bosses are powerful players in Argentine politics, not least because they often dominate the nomination process for national legislators. Because most legislators owe their nomination to a provincial boss rather than the national party leadership, discipline within the PJ's legislative block hinges to a considerable degree on the president's ability to maintain the support of the governors. Thus, even powerful Peronist presidents such as Menem and Kirchner have never been able to govern unilaterally, as Chávez has done in Venezuela. Rather, they have governed in coalition with—and with the negotiated consent of—party bosses.

However, this perspective of intra-party checks on chief executives would suggest that the relative subnational control between government and opposition may be less relevant for how constrained the leader is if subnational access simply determines *which* resistance

63. Indeed, much of the literature reviewed earlier in motivating state access and visibility as resources that increase electoral competitiveness referred to parties in general, not opposition parties exclusively.

actor is more empowered. In short, if it is true that rival party elites resist aggrandizement more when they have subnational control, this should make us more surprised by the earlier results on opposition subnational access reducing subsequent opportunities for, and actual, aggrandizement.

In the previous analyses, parties were treated as unitary actors: Co-partisans of the chief executive would support efforts to aggrandize. This unitary actor assumption appears intuitive if we argue that both the leader and their co-partisans have an electoral incentive to disadvantage the opposition, thereby gaining privileged access to resources and policy-making. Yet, some forms of aggrandizement also influence the relative power between the chief executive and co-partisans. For instance, term limit evasions take away opportunities for other party elites to compete for highest executive office. Efforts to marginalize highest courts and the national parliament likely reduce the influence of co-partisans holding office in these bodies. Similarly, enabling presidents to rule by decree decreases party elites' legislative competencies. More generally, a competitive opposition provides exit opportunities for the leader's co-partisans (McKie 2019), from whose perspective access to office and resources may not only be threatened by losing in an election but also by becoming more dependent on the chief executive. As Rhodes-Purdy and Madrid (2020, 322) describe, "[rival] party leaders will often defend democracy because they see a dominant president as a threat to their own influence and career advancement." In fact, rival party elites have been characterized as "guardrails of democracy" – a first line of defense against chief executives with hegemonic aspirations (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). A related literature on party personalization under democracy has recently emerged that measures the influence of the leader relative to rival party elites and members more generally. These authors find that chief executives with more personalized parties tend to be damaging to democracy (Frantz et al. 2021; Frantz, Kendall-Taylor, and Wright 2024; Rhodes-Purdy and Madrid 2020). The literature on authoritarianism, as the type of regime aggrandizers are moving toward, also highlights conflicts of interest and commitment problems between the leader and rival elites

(Svolik 2012). Empirically, successful aggrandizers often relied on a personalist party they founded, as in Orban's Hungary (Fidesz), Bukele's El Salvador (Nueva Ideas), and Chávez's Venezuela (Movimiento V República).

Thus, we want to relax the unitary actor assumption and investigate empirically whether parties that gain more subnational control are subsequently less personalized. I use party-level information provided by V-Party on party personalism and the leader's relative influence on candidate nomination (Düpont et al. 2022). Note that this data is only available for parties obtaining at least 5% of the national-level vote in national legislative election years. Further, I will restrict the analysis to parties obtaining at least one highest subnational office in a regular subnational election year. In terms of estimation strategy, I predict the change in the dependent variable between the subnational election year and the next national legislative election year in which this party contested successfully enough to enter the V-Party data.[64] To do this, I estimate two-way fixed effects models with party- and year-fixed effects. As the party-level coding is only available for national election years, which may not be subnational election years, I use the last available pre-treatment values: The level of party personalism in the subnational election year would be taken from the last national legislative election year.[65]

The measure of *party personalization* is an expert-coded survey response to the question "To what extent is this party a vehicle for the personal will and priorities of one individual leader?," values of which originally ranged between "0" ("The party is not focused on the personal will and priorities of one individual leader.") and "4" ("The party is solely focused on the personal will and priorities of one individual party leader.") (Lindberg et al. 2022, 35).[66] In aggregating responses of different experts, this variable was rescaled and—in my

64. The median temporal distance in the data is three years, with only 12 observations displaying a temporal gap of six years or more.

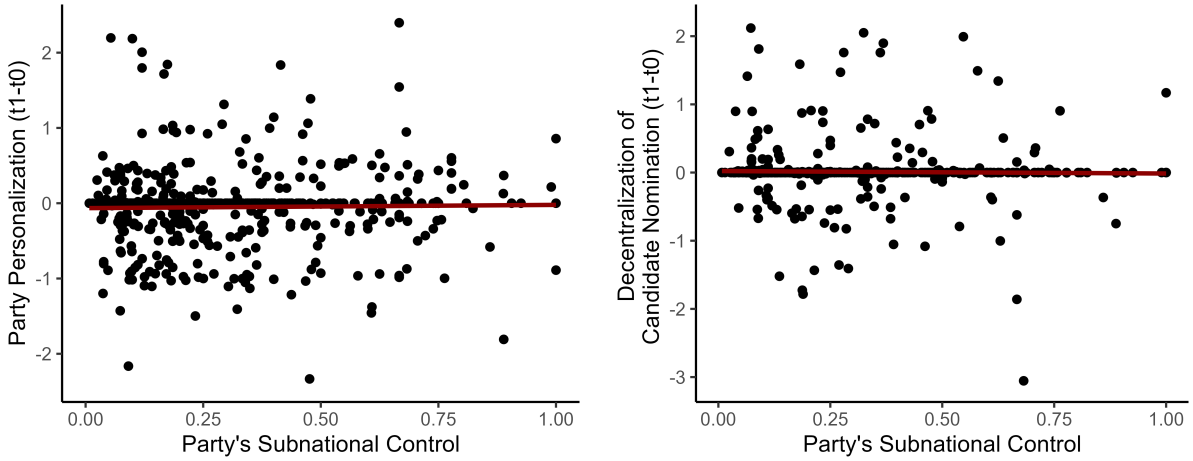
65. For this part of the analysis, I exclusively rely on V-Party's conceptualization of a core party when matching entities between election years ("*vspaid*").

66. An assumption is that the "individual leader" this item refers to for the leader's party is indeed the

data—varies between "-2.91" and "3.33", with higher values indicating more personalization. As a secondary measure, I also examine control over party nominations, as party leaders should be particularly powerful where they can decide the career prospects of other party elites. The measure of *party nominations* captures the decentralization of the nomination process, as experts code "Which of the following options best describes the process by which the party decides on candidates for the national legislative elections?," with answers ranging from "The party leader unilaterally decides on which candidates will run for the party in national legislative elections." to "All registered voters decide on which candidates will run for the party in national legislative elections in primaries/caucuses" (Lindberg et al. 2022, 34). In contrast to the measure of "party personalization," the party leader is most authoritative at low values of "party nominations."

In the following estimations, I control for a set of party-level covariates that V-Party provides: A dummy that takes the value of "1" if the party supports the newly constituted national government, seat share in the national lower house ("v2paseatshare"), the extent to which the party engaged in clientelistic exchanges for electoral purposes ("v2paclient"), and the extent to which local party activists and personnel are active in and before elections ("v2paactcom"). Given the inclusion of party-level and year-fixed effects, I also control for unobserved time-specific shocks and time-invariant unobserved party-level characteristics. While novel V-Party data enables such a party-level analysis spanning hundreds of parties from 77 countries, there are more covariates we could ideally control for. Combined with the assumption that party leaders are indeed chief executives for parties occupying highest executive office, this means that we should interpret the following results with care. The association between a party's subnational control and party personalization and centralization of candidate nominations, respectively, will be presented for three datasets: all parties, parties supporting the national government ($v2pagovsup = 0; 1; 2$), and chief executive parties

chief executive (or, if this is not the case, that they and chief executives can be thought of as unitary actors regarding their incentives to aggrandize).



(a) Party Personalization (b) Decentralization of Candidate Nomination

Figure 3.13: Scatterplot: Governing Parties' Subnational Control and Change in Relative Within-Party Authority

Notes: This figure presents scatterplots of governing parties' subnational control against the change in (a) party personalization and (b) decentralization of candidate nomination between the subnational election year and the next national legislative elections. As V-Party information only exists for national election years, for non-simultaneous elections, for which V-Party offers no data at the time of subnational elections, baseline outcome values were taken from the last national election year.

($v2pagovsup = 0$).

For a first descriptive overview, I plot governing parties' office shares at highest subnational levels against the change in party personalization and candidate nominations between the subnational election year and the following national legislative one. In both plots, the association between subnational control and outcomes of interest is almost perfectly flat. Based on the two bivariate associations alone, we would not believe that there is a relationship (figure 3.13).

Starting with the effects of subnational control on party personalization, we find no effect when including all parties (p-value: 0.52; full results presented in appendix 5.23). Subsetting to parties supporting the national government, which includes those represented in national government and those supporting it without holding cabinet office, we interestingly see large and significant positive effects: Government parties with more subnational control tend to

be more personalized at the time of the next national legislative elections (p-value: 0.016). This association also holds, if slightly weaker, when only examining the chief executive's party (p-value: 0.053). These findings indicate that rival party elites do not pose more substantial checks on the party leader when the party controls subnational offices. The results for governing parties may suggest the opposite: Leaders are more able to personalize parties after the party obtains higher levels of subnational control. As I control for the party's lower-house seat share as a proxy for its underlying popularity, I do not believe that this result merely reflects a "second-order election" effect where highly popular leaders allow the party to win subnational and national elections, and then use their popularity to overcome checks within the party. Possibly, this result could reflect Robert Michels's "iron law of oligarchy" in which parties become more centralized as they increase their membership and assume more government authority (Michels 1915). As some parties are founded as personalist vehicles (Frantz, Kendall-Taylor, and Wright 2024), this association could simply imply that rival party elites demand more authority within the party after the party loses subnational offices. Alternatively, rival elites may have lower incentives to oppose the leader where they have more access to executive office at subnational levels, perhaps because their threat to exit is less credible (McKie 2019).

While more research on this relationship is warranted, it is important to reflect on the temporal sequence of the outcome variables presented. Whereas earlier findings showed effects of subnational opposition access on horizontal constraints and executive aggrandizement the year after, the results for party personalization occur for the median observation three years after subnational elections. Therefore, the results for party personalization may be affected by reduced levels of horizontal accountability: leaders who successfully weaken horizontal checks are later more able to gain control over their party.

Now turning to the extent to which candidate nominations are centralized, I do not find evidence in any of the three specifications—all parties, governing parties, only leader parties—that a party's subnational control can help account for changes in candidate nom-

ination modalities between the subnational election year and the next national legislative election year (appendix 5.24).

Overall, this evidence suggests that subnational opposition control does not affect how candidates are nominated, with more mixed findings for party personalization. If it were true that governing parties become more personalized after they win more subnational offices, this would point to an additional mechanism for why subnational opposition access matters: it helps prevent party personalization in governing parties. While research has just begun to uncover effects of party personalism, we unfortunately lack comparable evidence on why parties personalize, with existing research highlighting systemic factors such as the media landscape having facilitated personalism (Frantz, Kendall-Taylor, and Wright 2024). The evidence presented here—which covered hundreds of parties representing vast majorities of highest subnational as well as national legislative offices allocated under democracy (1990–2021)—suggests that access to subnational office may help explain why governing parties become more or less personalized over time.

3.4.7 Challenge 4: Subnational Control and Recentralization

A fourth line of criticism could insist that chief executives—particularly in unitary democracies—may recentralize authority and resources (Dickovick and Eaton 2013), thereby limiting what subnational opposition can accomplish. The more this was true, the more should we be surprised by earlier empirical results showing that subnational opposition access matters for horizontal accountability and executive aggrandizement, even in unitary countries. Conceptually, recentralization can pertain to fiscal resources, administrative capacities and prerogatives, and even the termination of elections for subnational offices (political recentralization). Empirically, it is exceptionally rare that a country qualifying as at least an electoral democracy ($v2x\_polyarchy \geq 0.5$) had regionally and/ or locally elected executives and/ or councils but not the year after. Only four country-years out of 2,804 between 1990

and 2021 display such recentralization.[67] Even conditioning on the previous—and not the current—year having been democratic, which allows democratic reversals to occur in the current year, yields a similar amount of removals of subnational elected office.[68] In line with my earlier discussion of political recentralization in Latin America under aggrandizement, this highlights that democratic oppositions typically can continue to contest for subnational office even when facing an aggrandizing chief executive.[69]

The more prominent types of recentralization under democracy likely are fiscal and administrative. One way to operationalize the authority of regional administrations across fiscal, administrative, and political dimensions is the "Regional Authority Index" (Hooghe et al. 2016) which measures "financial, legal, policy, representational, and constitutional competencies of individual regions and regional tiers on an annual basis" (4) which exists for 96 countries with regional administrations between 1950 and 2018. Note that regional authority values can exist for settings that enter the *Subnational Elections Database* with local elections – e.g., when regional offices are appointed. For the subnational election years in my data, plotting the change in regional authority to the following year against the opposition's subnational seat share reveals that (1) reductions in regional authority have been rare, (2) that strong subnational oppositions were more likely to see increases in regional authority, and (3) that the most notable reductions in regional authority did not occur when the opposition was particularly weak.

In summary, I tested empirical implications of theoretically plausible objections to the main country-level results on subnational control and subsequent opportunities for—and

67. This uses V-Dem's variables for regionally ("v2elsrgel") and locally elected office ("v2ellocelc"). Missing values are treated as indicative of the absence of subnational elected office, as these variables are missing if no such office exists anymore.

68. In this setup, five removals of local and four of regional elected office can be documented. The composition of cases is slightly different as coup years enter this set of cases (e.g., Fiji 2006).

69. As Hugo Chávez's removal of the national upper house reminds us, a reform that constituted one of the most significant reductions in regional authority in post-1990 democracies, the ending of subnational elections is the most dramatic, but not the only form of political recentralization.

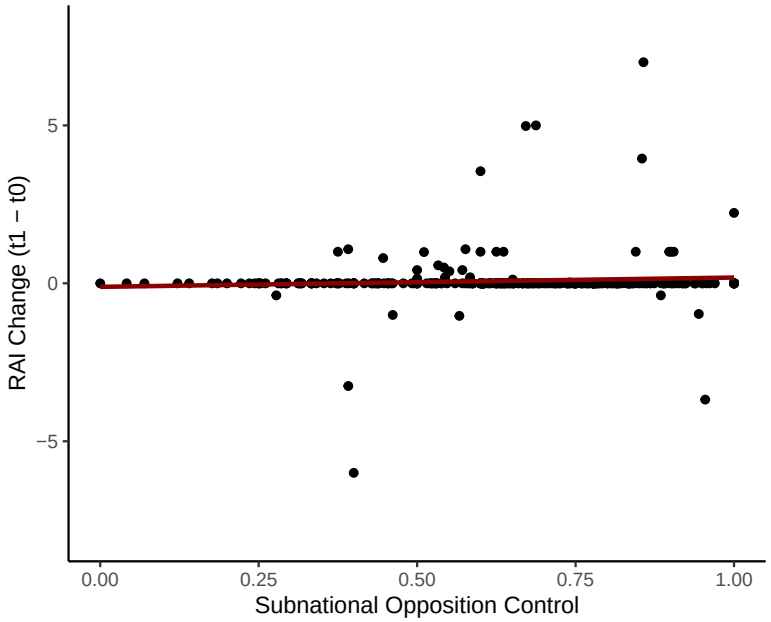


Figure 3.14: Scatterplot: Recentralization and Subnational Opposition Control

Notes: This figure presents the opposition's (defined broadly) subnational control for subnational election years under democracy (1990–2018) plotted against the change in Regional Authority scores of the subnational election year relative to the next one. Higher RAI values indicate more regional authority.

actual—aggrandizement. Most importantly, against challenges of the confoundedness of subnational control and aggrandizement by the popularity of the chief executive, I showed that findings persist even when controlling for presidential and governing party vote shares in lower house elections. Section 3.5 will further support that subnational control, when obtained in very close elections, not simply reflects differences in underlying popularity or *in any other potential confounders* but has an independent, causal effect on subsequent electoral performance in national lower house elections in democratic Latin America (1990–2021). Further, I did not find evidence that an intentionality-centered framework focusing exclusively on the pluralist opposition can better account for changes in horizontal accountability or executive aggrandizement. The picture is more complicated for the third objection – that subnational control may affect how much rival party elites can constrain party leaders inside governing parties. In some specifications, party leaders were shown to be more able to personalize their party when oppositions control fewer subnational offices. Competitive

oppositions may allow rival party elites in governing parties to be more assertive as their threat of exiting is more credible (McKie 2019). Finally, recentralization under democracy in the forms of the termination of subnational elections or reductions in regional authority is exceptionally rare, with the latter occurring in country years in which the opposition is not particularly weak in terms of subnational control. Overall, these findings should reassure us of the explanatory potential of subnational control for executive aggrandizement in a "balance-of-power" framework. In the next section, the final one to rely on country-level evidence, I test whether subnational opposition control reduces extra-institutional mass mobilization (mechanism $\mathbf{H_{M2}}$).

3.4.8 Subnational Control and Pro-Democracy Mass Mobilization

Is pro-democracy mass mobilization influenced by who governs at subnational levels? If oppositions are more able to select institutional strategies after obtaining subnational access, we would expect less mass mobilization when oppositions control more governor- and mayorships. I follow the previous estimation strategy by estimating two-way fixed effects panel models. To operationalize pro-democracy mass mobilization, I use V-Dem's measure of "Mobilization for democracy," which asks "how frequent and large have events of mass mobilization for pro-democratic aims been?" (V-Dem 2023b, 229), with higher values indicating larger and more numerous pro-democracy mobilizations.[70,71]

In this analysis, I estimate pro-democracy mass mobilizations in the year after the subnational elections as a function of the opposition's *subnational control*, seat share in the national lower house ("*national control*"), level of *electoral democracy*, *GDP/capita*, *GDP growth*, *inflation*, *urbanization*, *pro-democracy mobilizations (lagged)*, and average *regional levels of pro-democracy mobilization*. As before, control variables are measured at the end

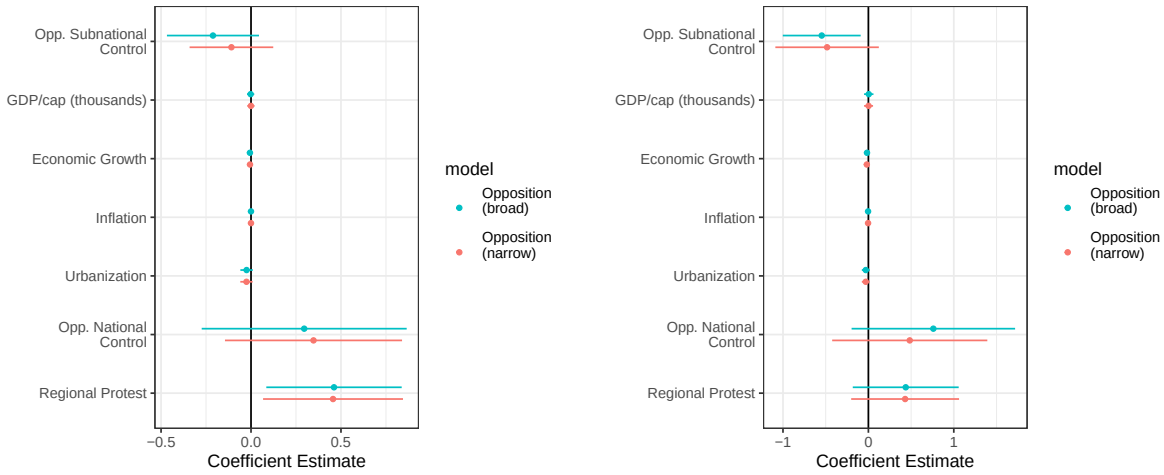
70. While the scale's ends are not theoretically pre-determined, the range of pro-democracy mobilization in t_{+1} is from "-2.13" to "3.31" in my data. See appendix 3.1 for descriptive statistics.

71. For a cross-validation of this measure, see Hellmeier and Bernhard 2023.

of the subnational election year and government affiliation at the start of the following one. Fixed effects are included to control for unobserved, time-invariant country-level confounders and those that are time-specific and country-invariant. All results report cluster-robust standard errors. Coefficients for lagged mobilization and electoral democracy are not shown to ensure better readability (Figure 3.15).

National-level seat shares and the level of democracy are included to capture the extent to which opposition parties can rely on national-level institutional channels in aggregating dissent with the national government (Moseley 2015; Boulding 2010; Tilly 1977). Further, controls for levels of economic development and the urbanization rate account for modernization theory's prediction that rising income and urbanization, either directly or through their effects on post-material values and access to education, facilitate collective action in support of democracy (Welzel 2013; Lipset 1959; Beissinger 2022). Negative economic growth and high inflation, by causing economic dissatisfaction with incumbents, should lead to more protest, albeit the literature is divided over whether these would be pro-democratic (Brancati 2014; Ash 2023). Regional and domestic levels of mobilization account for diffusion effects and protest trajectories, respectively (for a discussion, see Brancati and Lucardi 2019, 2356ff.).

Using the data on subnational elections under democracy (1990–2021) with complete covariate information (n=437), we find suggestive evidence that subnational opposition control is associated with less pro-democracy mass mobilization (figure 3.15a model 1, barely missing significance at the 10%-level). Yet, this relationship is insignificant when considering the subnational control of oppositions defined narrowly (model 2). Importantly, in an exploratory step, when subsetting the data to democracies below the median value of electoral democracy ("v2x_polyarchy" ≤ 0.815), we see clear negative effects of subnational opposition control: Moving from complete subnational control by the leader's party to complete opposition control decreases pro-democracy mass mobilization by slightly less than half a standard deviation (figure 3.15b model 1, significant at the 5%-level). This supports that dissent is



(a) All Democracies

(b) Democracies Below Median

Figure 3.15: Coefficient Plots: Subnational Control and Pro-Democracy Mobilization

Notes: Full results are presented in appendix 5.25.

articulated more outside of institutions the less institutional access opposition parties have (similar to Cleary and Öztürk 2022). Yet, this pattern does not hold for opposition access to national parliament, which is insignificant across specifications. The rationale for excluding higher-quality democracies in the second analysis was (a) the descriptive fact that fewer pro-democracy mobilizations occur at high levels of democracy (Hellmeier and Bernhard 2023) and (b), relatedly, concerns that ceiling effects (little need for pro-democracy mobilization when democracy is already high quality) reduce variation in the outcome variable. Overall, this evidence, while suggestive, illustrates that pro-democracy mobilizations are less sizable and frequent, particularly at lower levels of democracy, when the leader's party controls less subnational office.

When interpreting these associations, we need to acknowledge ecological inference concerns: The measure used does not exclusively capture protests organized or associated with opposition parties, nor is it sufficiently disaggregated spatially to enable a state-level analy-

sis.[72] For instance, chief executives themselves might call for mass mobilization in attempts to reaffirm democratic norms and signal the strength of the pro-democracy camp, for instance, relative to a rising anti-system opposition party starting to obtain regional authority. Thus, a careful interpretation of the findings presented is to see them as suggestive evidence that country-level pro-democracy mass mobilization increases when oppositions won fewer subnational offices. Qualitative evidence by Cleary and Öztürk (2022) suggests a potentially causal role of "cornered oppositions" lacking institutional access who therefore become more likely to engage in extra-institutional mobilization.

3.5 State-Level Analyses: Subnational Victories and Performance in National Legislative Elections in Latin America

In my theoretical framework, oppositions better preserve horizontal constraints and select institutional over extra-institutional strategies because subnational incumbency increases their electoral competitiveness. A causally-identifiable implication of the competitiveness hypothesis ($\mathbf{H_{M1}}$) is that oppositions perform better in national lower house elections in states where they marginally won highest executive office.

While some readers may believe that parties with more resources and visibility should intuitively perform better in future elections, the literature suggests that this may not necessarily be the case. A sizable body of well-identified research examines whether subnational victories influence future election outcomes at the same ("incumbency effects") or higher levels ("reverse coattail effects"). Empirically, there is some evidence that mayoral incumbency—typically in settings with elected regional authorities, such that mayoralities constitute a third-level authority—can cause *incumbency disadvantages*. Klašnja (2015) finds that parties marginally winning mayoral elections in Romania are 11 percentage points less likely

72. Such data does exist in the form of GDELT (Leetaru and Schrodt 2013), however, is prohibitively costly to access.

to win the next mayoral race, which they attribute to voters punishing corrupt incumbents. Klašnja and Titiunik (2017) show that subnational incumbency disadvantages materialize only in those three out of six Latin American countries in their study that have term limits, which they interpret to mean that the absence of future electoral accountability induces incumbents to engage in rent-seeking. They also document how a more institutionalized party, the PT in Brazil, is more able to discipline its lower-level incumbents. Novaes and Schiumerini (2022) report evidence from Brazil that electoral consequences of subnational incumbency depend on price shocks of export goods relevant to the local economy: Incumbency yields positive returns when exports are more profitable. Turning to effects on higher order-elections, research on Brazil documents that close mayoral victories increase a party's local vote share in national legislative elections by 2% (Ventura 2021), which the author attributes to voter's increased access to national-level funds, particularly where subnational incumbents are from parties with a large presence in the national legislature. Feierherd (2020), also researching Brazilian mayoral elections, finds that subnational incumbency only hurts a party's upticket candidates when parties have clear party labels.

Yet, there are good reasons why these findings should not generalize to my setting of examining (a) exclusively the highest subnational authorities and (b) effects on higher-order elections ("reverse coattail effects" rather than "incumbency effects"). Highest subnational authorities tend to be more visible than lower-order incumbents, arguably making rent-seeking and corruption easier to detect and thus costlier. Further, gubernatorial candidates, relative to mayoral ones, are more likely to be screened to be in line with the national party's position, in which the former often hold leadership positions and have reasonable expectations to occupy national-level office should the party perform well. Therefore, we may believe that rent-seeking at the party's expense—as a major cause of mayoral incumbency disadvantage—should not be as prevalent for regional incumbents. Empirically, I will show that opposition parties in Latin America experience large electoral gains on average where they won highest subnational office – a finding that suggests that the "incumbency

disadvantages" found by earlier studies on third-level administrative tiers do not apply to how second-level authorities in Latin America affect subsequent higher-order elections.

For this mechanism test, I conduct state-level analyses focusing only on subnational units in democratic Latin America and the Caribbean with direct, majoritarian elections for the highest subnational authority.[73] I also exclude subnational races for which national lower house elections in t_{+1} had not occurred as of December 2022. Consistent with the scope conditions outlined in section 2.3, I do not restrict the data to cases of ongoing aggrandizement, meaning that reported results should not be interpreted as referring to this subset of democracies.

As my identification strategy will rely on identifying close gubernatorial and mayoral elections, my first task is to document the election result for the highest subnational executive authority by state.[74] More specifically, I collect the vote shares and party affiliations of the top four contenders in the *final* election round. If a candidate runs for a temporary electoral coalition or alliance, I treat votes for that candidate as having been given to the party the candidate is affiliated with. More durable alliances that contest multiple state and national elections consecutively, such as Chile's *Alianza por Chile* and *Concertación*, are treated as parties. To obtain official election results, I utilize electoral commission reports and data, election handbooks, governmental gazettes, international monitor reports, existing datasets,[75] websites of subnational offices, and newspapers. In some cases, I also approached local and regional administrations directly. The resulting dataset is comprehensive, except

73. My empirical design requires me to focus on direct elections. This excludes countries with indirect elections: Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Bolivia up to 1999, Chile in 1992, Costa Rica in 1998, and Nicaragua in 1990. Chilean elections in 1996 and 2000 are also excluded because the party list with the most votes did not necessarily obtain the mayorship.

74. For the coding scheme, see appendix 5.5.

75. I am grateful to researchers at Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Económico (CEDE) at Universidad de Los Andes for sharing data on Colombian elections (Pachón, Sánchez Torres, et al. 2014). For Uruguay, electoral results were taken from the "Boreluy" R package, which is provided by researchers at Unidad de Métodos y Acceso a Datos (UMAD), Universidad de la República, Uruguay (Schmidt, Cardarello, and Luján 2022).

for two gubernatorial election years in Ecuador in the early 1990s and the 1993 municipal elections in Honduras.[76]

To understand what a close election is in a given system, I also measure design elements of the electoral framework (e.g., whether an election is direct or the existence of a two-round system).[77] The information was almost exclusively coded from constitutions and electoral laws and double-checked with secondary sources (e.g., Molina and Hernández 1998; Došek 2019).[78]

In terms of data set construction, I followed several of the principles that underlay the country-level data collection described previously: (a) a preference for official election data sources and (b) using the DPI (Scartascini, Cruz, and Keefer 2021), "Who Governs?" (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020), and CLEA (Kollman et al. 2016) along with Wikipedia to understand which national-level parties existed at the time of subnational elections. A key challenge in coding party affiliations of candidates was to distinguish parties from (a) factions and (b) coalitions. Due to the demands of the close-election design to be performed, I could not simply aggregate vote shares at the party level (a) if the subnational electoral system allowed multiple candidates of the same party to run and (b) aggregation occurred at the candidate level. In such settings, both best-performing candidates could be affiliated with the same party.[79] In other settings, e.g., where double-simultaneous vote is practiced ("ley de lemas"), as in parts of Argentina, multiple party members may contest for the same office, but aggregation would be at the party list level. Here, following the logic of the aggregation rule, close elections would occur when vote shares between party lists are close.

76. I am grateful to Presidenta del Consejo Nacional Electoral de Ecuador, Señora Atamaint, for confirming that the election data for Ecuador is unavailable. Regarding the 1993 elections in Honduras, sources differed in whether these were direct subnational elections, but results were unavailable regardless.

77. The coding scheme can be found in appendix 5.6.

78. I gratefully acknowledge RA support financed by Cesi Cruz that enabled parts of this data collection.

79. As I explain later, such races would not enter the analysis as both candidates would have the same government/opposition affiliation.

One difficulty was to recognize candidates affiliated with national-level parties, but who ran under a local electoral vehicle or as independents. This occurred, for instance, when such politicians lost the internal nomination process. For any candidate not running under the label of a national party, my team and I looked for qualitative evidence in newspaper articles and Wikipedia to understand their affiliation with parties in national government. When these candidates were identified as being affiliated with a party in national government, they were coded as "national government." In the rare case that a candidate is a member of a national-level party, but runs for a different national-level party, I prioritized which party they ran for. True independents and genuine local and regional parties—in a coding scheme in which you are either affiliated with a party in national government or by default coded as opposition—are considered opposition. This coding rule risks misclassifying such actors who—without being affiliated with a party in national government—do support it politically. Importantly, as I will only draw inferences from settings in which an opposition party runs against a party in national government in terms of the party affiliation of the top two contestants, such "hidden government supporters" would only enter the analysis as "opposition" if their close election was with a party in national government. In other words, the government affiliation of the party they competed against helps defend coding unaffiliated candidates and local or regional parties as opposition.[80]

A further challenge in the preparation of this analysis was linking parties contesting subnational elections to those running in the next national legislative elections. This was necessary because of my interest in understanding how subnational incumbency affects the party's state-level vote share in the next national legislative race. Due to the temporal gap of typically 2–5 years (median: 3) between the independent and dependent variable, parties may have changed their name, merged with other parties under a new label, split or ceased to exist, or decided to contest national elections as a coalition (with votes at the coalition,

80. This coding procedure is conservative: Should I erroneously compare the government to "hidden government supporters," I should be less likely to find treatment effects.

not party level).[81] Thus, automatic matches based on party labels were at times not feasible, requiring me to set coding criteria where party labels changed. Empirically, in 7% of contests in the data, the party label a party ran under at subnational levels is not the same as the one it used in the next national legislative elections. In the simple case of a party changing its name, I would match this party's former and new labels (while documenting both separately in the dataset). The more difficult case was dealing with individual parties that merged with other parties or contested national elections as a coalition. My options were to (a) enter the merged party's/ coalition's national legislative vote share, (b) enter a vote share of "0," or (c) drop these cases (based on a post-treatment characteristic of merging/ coalition formation after subnational elections). I opted for entering the merged party's/ coalition's vote share, which I argue was the conservative coding decision: If subnational offices are resources that empower parties in national elections, then losers of subnational contests should be more likely to merge or form coalitions – thinking of mergers and coalitions as "weapons of the weak" parties only opt for when they cannot obtain national office on their own (Ibenskas 2016). As my analysis will compare opposition parties winning and losing subnational races, allowing parties to profit in their national performance from coalitions and mergers should benefit losing oppositions more, thus making detecting a difference in national performance between winning and losing oppositions harder. In the rare case of party splits, in theory, one may find multiple parties in national legislative elections that had their roots in one party contesting subnational elections. Here, I matched based on party label (as typically the original label was kept by one side) unless the qualitative literature suggested that a vast majority of the original party had defected such that the new party could be considered the true successor. Due to the qualitative decisions involved in matching in this small but non-negligible sample of cases, the dataset identifies (a) party names at the time of subnational and national elections, respectively, and (b) sources employed for coding.

81. As I explain later, subnational candidates who were independents and local/ regional parties receive the national legislative vote share of "0."

3.5.1 Operationalizations

A party is considered to be in national government if it is represented in cabinet at the time of subnational elections according to the *"Who Governs?"* dataset (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020).[82] If subnational and national elections are held simultaneously on the same day, a party is coded as "opposition" if not represented in the newly formed cabinet. In rare cases, a cabinet member is affiliated with a party that *"V-Party"* (Düpont et al. 2022) and the *"Database of Political Institutions"* (Scartascini, Cruz, and Keefer 2021) characterize as an opposition party.[83] In those cases, I coded the party as "opposition." Independent candidates are coded as "opposition" if they ran against a candidate from a governing party. State-level lower house election results are provided by the *"Constituency-Level Elections Archive"* (Kollman et al. 2016), which I updated for my countries through the end of 2022.[84]

3.5.2 Characteristics of Subnational Races in Latin America After 1990

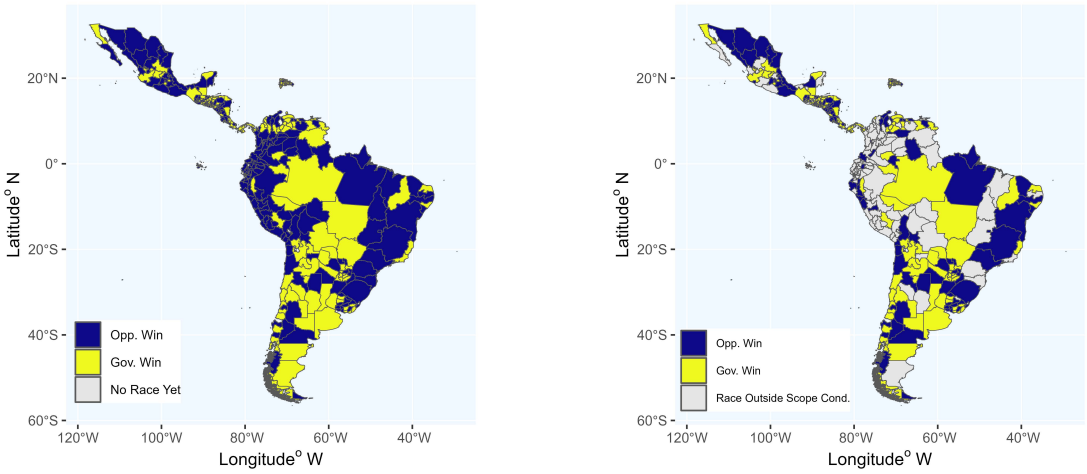
Overall, I observe 1,917 races for highest subnational executive offices across 371 states and 18 countries in democratic Latin America and the Caribbean after 1990. Of those, 71.4% (n=1,368) display the winner/runner-up constellation of theoretical interest in which an opposition party challenged one in national government. States in which either both (n=147, 7.6%) or neither (n=402, 21%) of the two top contestants were affiliated with the national executive will not enter this analysis. This excludes, for instance, most races of Peru where national parties have been increasingly uncompetitive in subnational races (Zavaleta

82. If party membership in cabinets changed between the annual July 1st "Who Governs?" codings, I also consulted "V-Party," the "DPI," and Wikipedia to establish cabinet representation on the day of subnational elections.

83. As V-Party data is coded at the time of national elections, it was only considered for simultaneous elections.

84. Where data is more fine-grained, I aggregated party-level vote shares to the state level. In mixed electoral systems that allocate seats both through party lists and single-member districts, I rely on votes for state-level party lists. One exception is Bolivia for which I focused on all single-member districts in a given state because the party-list vote was fused with the presidential vote in some election years.

2022). At the other extreme, many races in Colombia in the 1990s were excluded because opposition parties were not represented among the top two contestants.[85] To illustrate the data structure, Figure 3.16a displays outcomes of the last subnational race per state as of December 2005, which then are subset to government-vs.-opposition races in Figure 3.16b. Table 3.3 offers descriptive information on countries and offices included.



(a) All Races

(b) Only Gov.-vs.-Opp.

Figure 3.16: Outcome of Last Subnational Race by State (Dec. 2005)

Notes: Outcome of last election under democracy as of Dec. 31st, 2005. Government affiliation evaluated the day of subnational elections. Two states that had not had elections at that point shown in grey. In Figure b, states with opp-vs.-opp/ gov-vs.-gov contests also shown in grey. Countries outside the study are not shown. Venezuelan gubernatorial elections of 2000 included as the country reverted to authoritarianism in 2002.

85. To be clear, whereas the country-level results reflected all subnational units in selected countries, this analysis imposes an empirical scope condition such that results only speak to settings with a party in national government being in a (close) subnational race with an opposition party.

Table 3.3: Subnational Elections Database: Overview

	Years	First Obs. Election	Office Type	# Races	# Races: Gov/Opp	# Close G/O Races (±2.5%)
Argentina	1990-2021	1991	State	190	170	23
Bolivia	1999-2019	1999	State (2005-)	45	35	4
Brazil	1990-2021	1990	State	216	130	20
Chile	2004-2021	2004	Municipal	59	52	10
Colombia	1991-2021	1991	State	248	131	21
Costa Rica	2002-2021	2002	Municipal	35	31	4
Dominican Rep.	1996-2021	1998	Municipal	159	150	38
Ecuador	1990-2021	1996	State	114	58	10
El Salvador	1999-2020	2000	Municipal	98	79	17
Guatemala	1997-2021	1999	Municipal	108	56	9
Honduras	1991-2008	1997	Municipal	54	54	14
Mexico	1996-2021	1997	State	131	116	27
Nicaragua	1996-2006	1996	Municipal	34	33	6
Panama	1991-2021	1994	Municipal	46	42	5
Paraguay	1993-2021	1993	State	90	86	19
Peru	2001-2021	2002	State	104	21	5
Uruguay	1990-2021	1994	State	95	62	13
Venezuela	1990-2002	1992	State	91	62	18
N				1,917	1,368	263

Notes: The table displays descriptive information for LAC democracies with direct elections for subnational executive office. Races for which subsequent national lower house elections occurred after 2022 are excluded. Both regular and irregular elections included.

How competitive are subnational races in Latin America and the Caribbean? Of the 1,368 races of theoretical interest, 263 display two-party vote share differences[86] below five percentage points, of which 47.5% are won by the opposition. The median difference across all 1,368 races is 14.82 percentage points. Fortunately, many close races exist on which my identification strategy relies, but inferences based on such close elections cannot be extrapolated to less competitive states. Note that results from close subnational races under democracy also do not speak to effects of subnational victories *in settings with ongoing aggrandizement*. Indeed, my scope is *all* politically decentralized democracies with direct

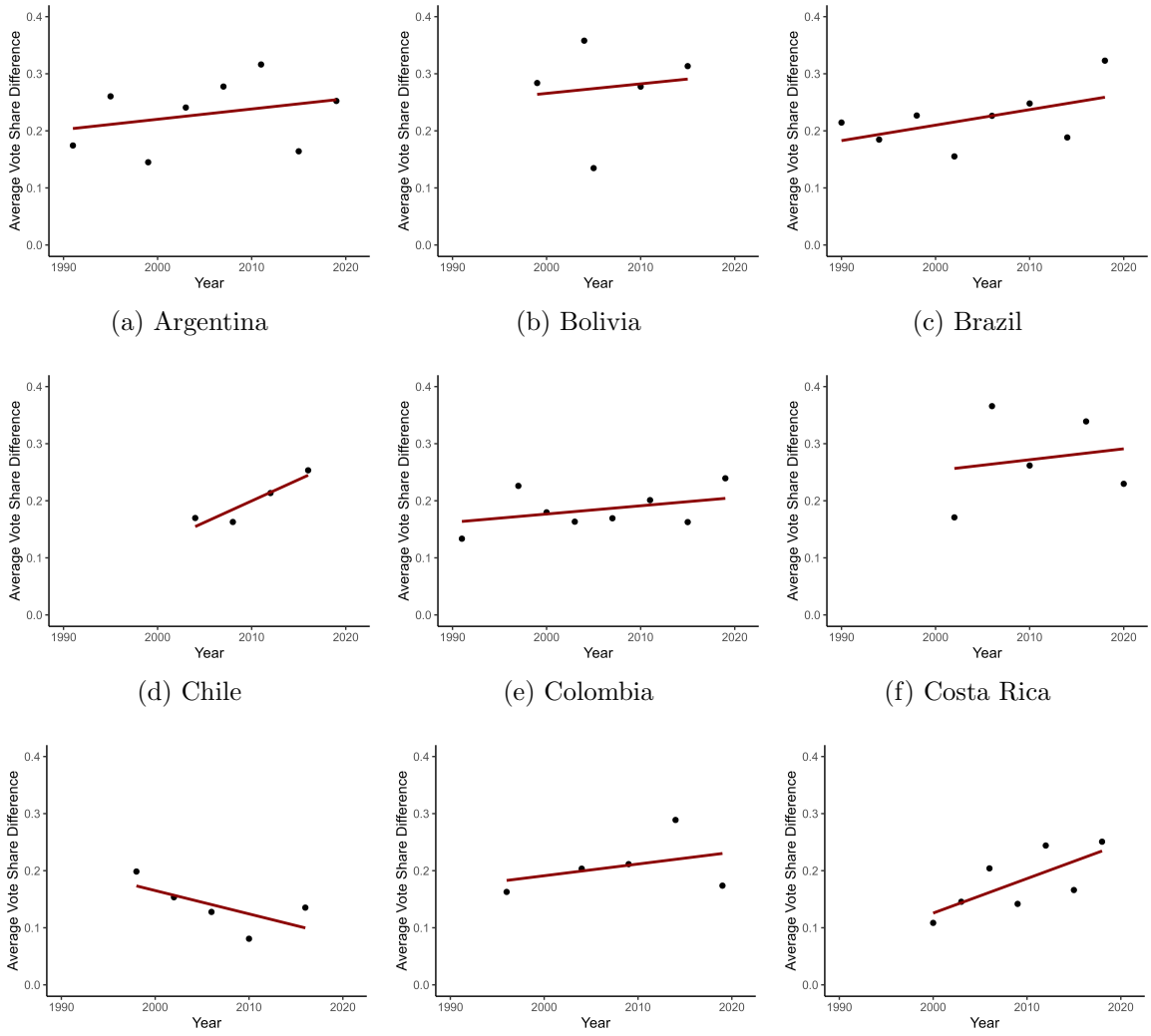
86. This is the vote share difference between the top two parties when only considering votes given to these parties. This measure is more conservative than absolute share differences and is typically used when comparing settings with diverging numbers of competing parties.

subnational elections in Latin America (1990–2021). A comparable analysis restricted to settings with ongoing aggrandizement would also be practically infeasible due to insufficient sample size unless we were willing to look beyond highest subnational executives.

Interestingly, in 16 of 18 Latin American democracies, elections for highest subnational executive office have become less competitive since 1990 (figure 3.17). Only in the Dominican Republic and Panama has the average two-party vote share difference between the top two contestants become smaller over time. For many countries, average vote share differences are around 20 percentage points, equivalent to a 60% to 40% race in a two-party setting. Averages are noticeably higher in Bolivia and Costa Rica. In the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Paraguay they tend to be slightly lower, thus making it more likely that subnational races will enter the close election sample to be used subsequently.

To visualize the closeness of subnational elections by subnational unit, I present maps showing vote share differences between the top two contestants as of the last subnational race for given reference years (figure 3.19). We find a significant amount of within-country variation in subnational competitiveness. As the literature on authoritarian enclaves under democracy would have suggested, we detect some strikingly uncompetitive states in Argentina (e.g. San Luis) and Brazil (e.g., Bahia), but even these display variation over time. Note that only units shown in the brightest yellow—the most competitive settings—may enter the close-election discontinuity design to be performed (if they are sufficiently close and constitute a government-vs.-opposition race in terms of the top two contestants). We see that the most competitive states are dispersed across countries and that several states continue to be highly competitive.

In a final descriptive step, we may ask what characterizes settings with close subnational elections. As state-level data is still relatively scarce for most variables of interest, I can only examine subnational Gross National Income, Human Development, population size,



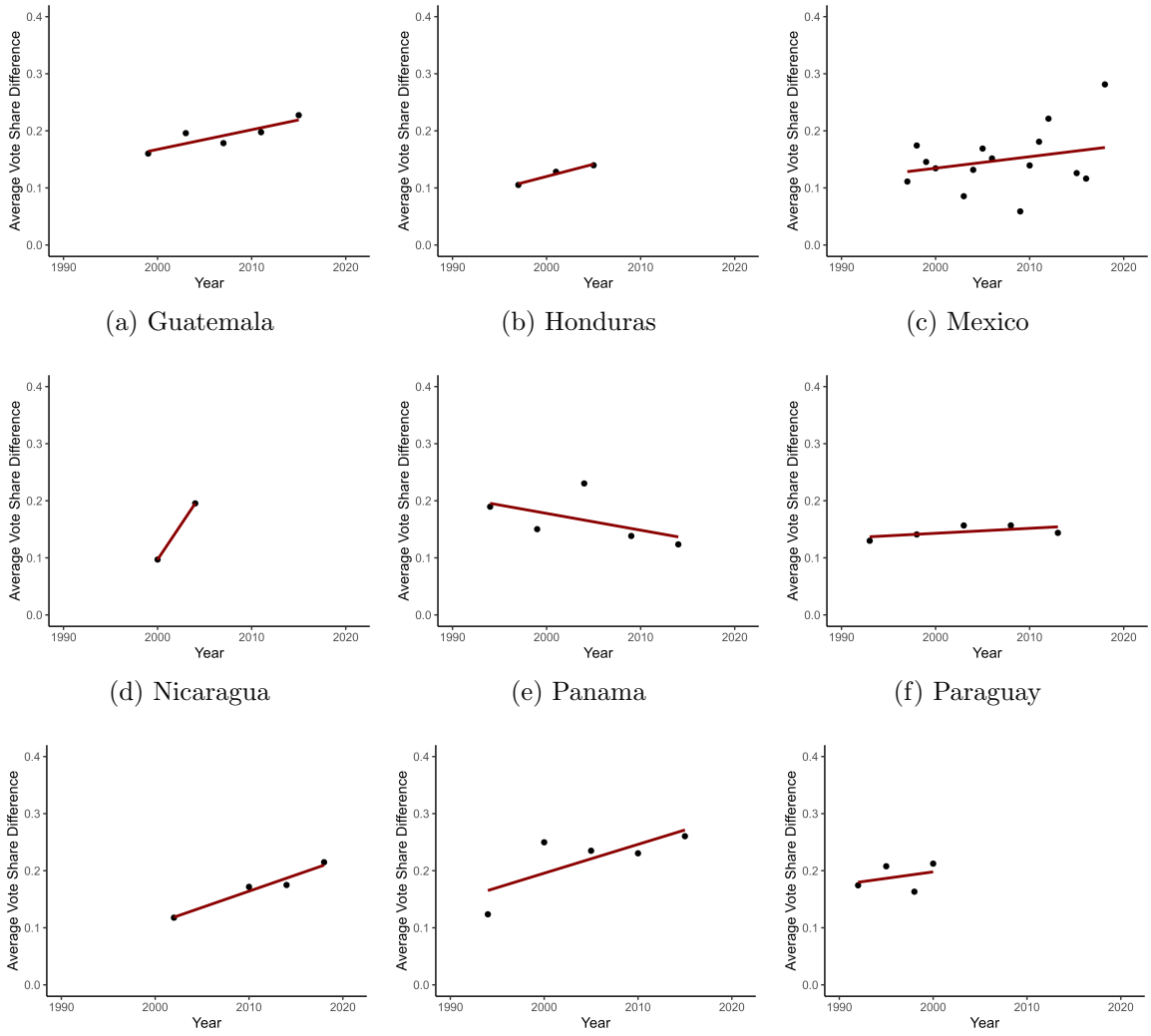
(a) Argentina (b) Bolivia (c) Brazil

(d) Chile (e) Colombia (f) Costa Rica

(g) Dominican Republic (h) Ecuador (i) El Salvador

Figure 3.17: Average Vote Share Difference by Country (1990–2021), Part 1

Notes: These figures present the average two-party vote share difference between the top two contestants for highest subnational executive office. Only election years included in which at least five races took place. All 1,917 races under democracy, irrespective of government-opposition status of the race, are included.



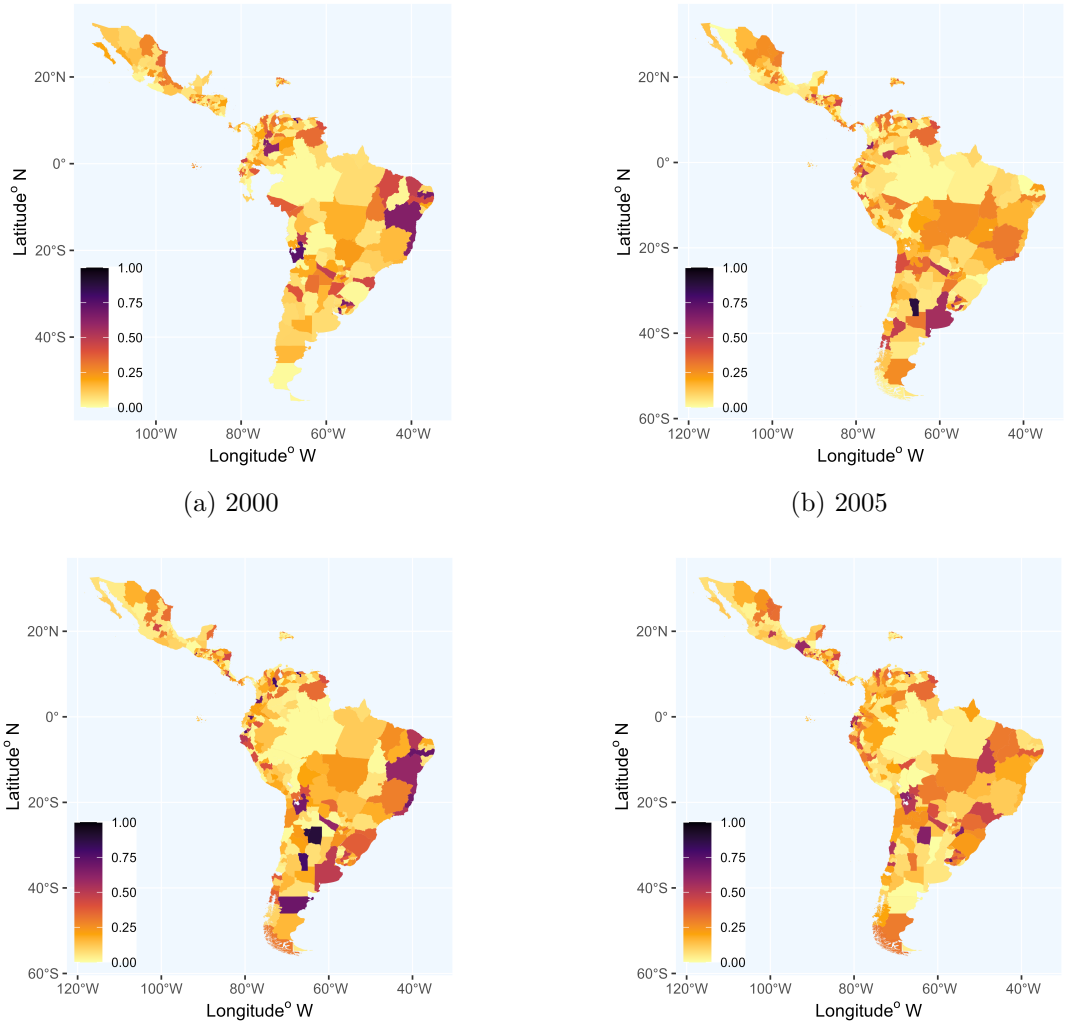
(a) Guatemala (b) Honduras (c) Mexico

(d) Nicaragua (e) Panama (f) Paraguay

(g) Peru (h) Uruguay (i) Venezuela

Figure 3.18: Average Vote Share Difference by Country (1990–2021), Part 2

Notes: These figures present the average two-party vote share difference between the top two contestants for highest subnational executive office. Only election years included in which at least five races took place. All 1,917 races under democracy, irrespective of government-opposition status of the race, are included.



(a) 2000

(b) 2005

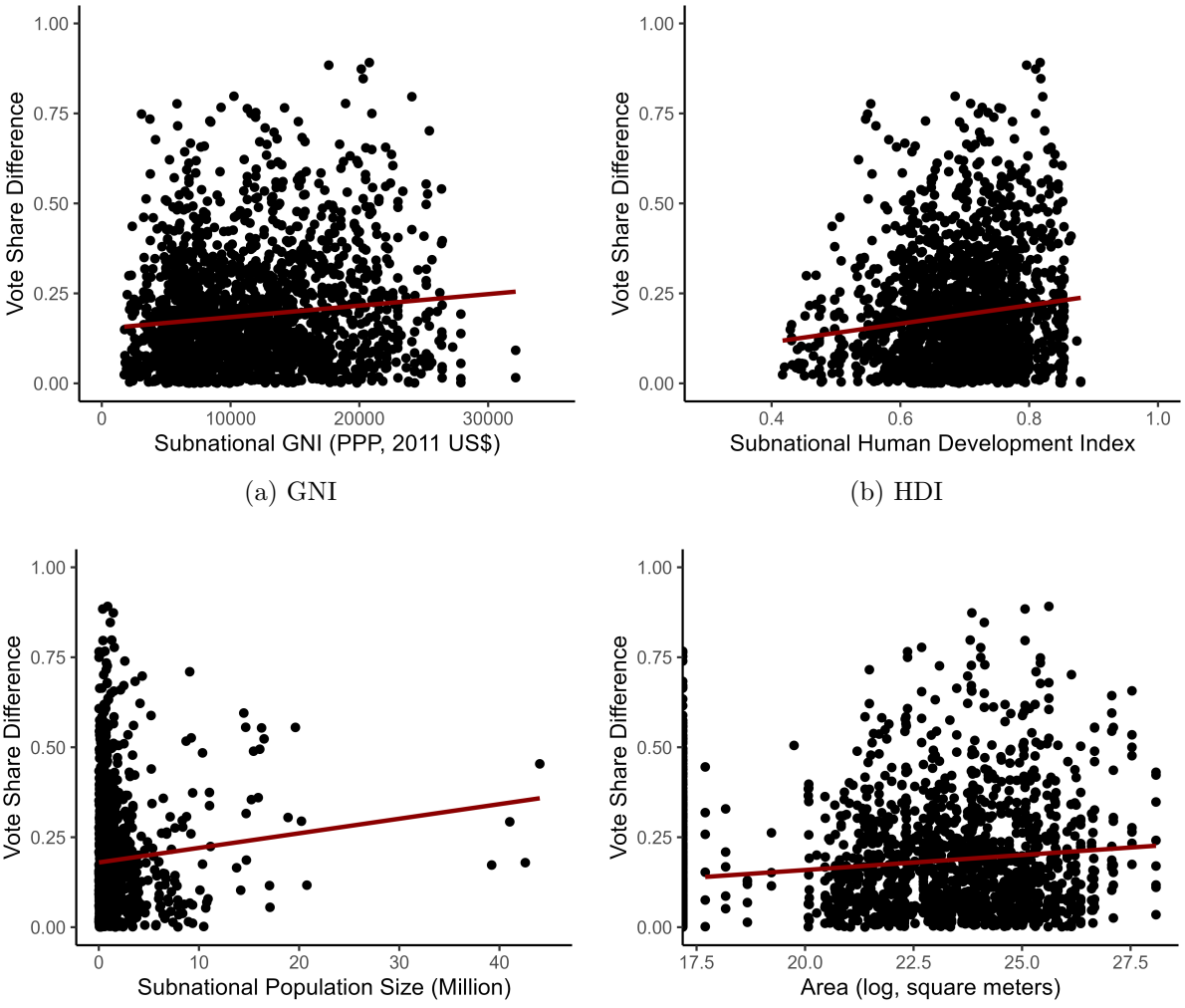
(c) 2010

(d) 2015

Figure 3.19: Vote Share Difference in Last Subnational Race Under Democracy

Notes: This figure presents the two-party vote share differences between the top two contestants in the last race for highest subnational office under democracy as of Dec. 31st of a reference year. Countries not included, e.g., because they were not democratic yet, are not shown. If a country reverts to authoritarianism, the last subnational race under democracy is presented. All 1,917 races under democracy, irrespective of government-opposition status of the race, are included.

and area. Here, we find that subnational races tend to be closer at lower levels of GNI, HDI, population size, and area (figure 3.20).



(a) GNI

(b) HDI

(c) Population

(d) Area

Figure 3.20: State-Level Characteristics and Closeness of Subnational Races

Notes: This figure presents the two-party vote share differences between the top two contestants in the last race for highest subnational office under democracy as of Dec. 31st of a reference year plotted against state-level characteristics. All 1,917 races under democracy, irrespective of government-opposition status of the race, are included. Due to missingness in population size, not all units entered panel c.

3.5.3 Identification Approach: The Close-Election Discontinuity Design

All research on the effect of constraining institutions must grapple with two issues: First, institutions do not exist independently from the institutional choices of those actors they seek to constrain (endogeneity issue; see the discussion in Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018). Second, institutional choices are the product of potentially countless variables that affect actor preferences and resources — variables which may confound the relation between the institution and outcome of interest (Pepinsky 2014). Thus, any analysis comparing settings with and without such institutions will face significant challenges to causal inference. For this reason, I test implications of my theory by exploiting quasi-random variation in opposition access to these institutions.

The standard quasi-experimental design to identify the effects of electoral victories on outcomes is the close-election regression discontinuity design (RDD) (Lee, Moretti, and Butler 2004; Eggers et al. 2015). The crucial identification assumption is that potential outcomes are continuous around the electoral cutoff. Such inference is threatened if one side can manipulate whether it barely wins ("sorting"). In my case, I estimate differences in state-level vote shares in national lower house elections in the election year after a subnational election between a state in which the opposition won a close subnational race and one where it barely lost.[87]

87. Employing a discontinuity design implies valuing internal over external validity: Estimated local average treatment effects do not speak to elections that were not close. In my case, treatment effects represent a comparatively large set of countries, thus yielding higher external validity than many other RDD analyses.

$$
\begin{aligned}
Y_{Opp,i_{t+1}} = \alpha &+ \beta_1 * treatment\,(Opposition\,Victory)_{i_t} \\
&+ f(running\,variable\,(OppositionPartyVoteShare\ -\ GovPartyVoteShare)_{i_t}) \\
&+ \epsilon_{i_t}
\end{aligned}
\tag{3.2}
$$

where $Y_{Opp,i_{t+1}}$ is an opposition party's vote share in national lower house elections in state i at time t_{+1},[88] the treatment dummy refers to a subnational opposition victory (1 = opposition won), and the running variable equals the two-party vote share difference between this opposition party and the party in national government (positive values indicate the opposition won the governor-/mayorship). The function f of the forcing variable takes the form of a second-order polynomial with triangular Kernel weights. The parameter β_1, then, captures the causal effect of an opposition victory in state i on its subsequent state-level vote share in national lower house elections at time t_{+1}.

This research design is similar to those used in studies of "incumbency" and "reverse coattail" effects (Ventura 2021; Feierherd 2020; Klašnja and Titiunik 2017; Eggers et al. 2015), indeed it is an analysis of "reverse coattails," but it is distinct in its emphasis on the most important subnational office by state for a whole continent over multiple decades. If governors and mayors help their parties get access to national parliament, then this should be most evident for those incumbents included here. As previous studies almost exclusively examined mayoral coattails, even where elected governors existed, our generalizations about the political role of subnational authorities in national elections risk drawing particularly from arguably less important offices. Only studying highest subnational executives, however, comes at the cost of having to estimate effects across countries (for RDD analyses that

88. Even if national legislative elections follow subnational ones in the same year, the national election year in which the dependent variable is measured is restricted to occur after the subnational election year.

pool across countries, see Eggers et al. 2015 and Klašnja and Titiunik 2017, 146). For this reason, it is imperative to document that states on both sides of the discontinuity are similar on average, even though the closeness of the election—often characterized as leading to an outcome that is "as-if-random"—should help achieve balance in expectation.

3.5.4 Establishing the Validity of the RD Design

Although the identifying assumption of continuous potential outcomes around the cutoff point cannot be directly tested, several diagnostic tests exist that help detect violations. If candidates affiliated with national government who would otherwise have lost by a small margin could nonetheless obtain office—e.g., through post-electoral manipulation of the vote count, successful court challenges, having the election repeated, or by preemptively reintensifying campaign efforts—, we would expect them to win many more close elections than they lose. Density tests by McCrary (2008) (p-value: 0.467) and Cattaneo, Jansson, and Ma (2020) (p-value: 0.4296) suggest that this is not the case.[89] Further, I observe no state-level imbalances around the electoral cutoff in terms of geographic area, human development, Gross National Income, life expectancy, and population size between states in which oppositions marginally win and lose (see appendix 5.32). Most importantly, I also find that prior local political competitiveness, both when operationalized as the margin of victory in the previous subnational gov.-vs.-opp. race or the state-level margin of victory in the last national lower house elections, is comparable. This balance is confirmed by placebo tests with pre-treatment covariates at the country and state levels. Of 21 covariates, only two are imbalanced at the 5%-level, which is one more than we would have predicted based on

89. Even though there is country-specific evidence that electoral manipulations in subnational elections have occurred (Cantú 2014), such sorting would need to be highly precise to undermine RDD estimates (Eggers et al. 2015). Due to the principal-agent problem involved in most forms of electoral manipulation, where leaders rely on local agents to manipulate the count or staff ballots (Rundlett and Svolik 2016), it is unlikely that fraud allowed parties to turn an otherwise close loss into a close victory.

statistical chance (appendices 5.33–5.37).

There are also substantive reasons to believe that subnational contests are meaningful. My focus on democratic country-years with subnational elections helps alleviate concerns about systematic manipulation of such contests (as they occurred in already authoritarian Venezuela in 2008) or politically motivated annulments (Turkey in 2019).

The causal effect of obtaining subnational office can only be isolated if close opposition winners and losers are comparable. For instance, if marginally winning candidates were more educated or socially embedded, these traits could affect performance in subsequent legislative elections. Thus, candidate covariate imbalances around the electoral threshold can render subnational victories a bundled treatment (Marshall 2022). To detect potential imbalances, I collected information on standard indicators of candidate quality for all subnational elections with a two-party vote share difference of five percentage points or less. In line with the idea that subnational victories make politicians more visible, more candidate information was available for politicians winning close contests (see appendix 5.31).[90] While some may interpret this as a causally-identified estimate of the visibility channel in my theoretical framework, the availability of online information is only a poor indicator of how visible candidates were in their constituencies at the time of elections. Comparing close opposition winners and losers, and averaging across candidates for whom information was available, we find balance in terms of whether they were born in the state they ran in, educational attainment, and their birth year, but winning opposition candidates tend to skew slightly more male and have less prior political experience. The same pattern emerges for close winners and losers affiliated with national government.[91]

90. RAs exclusively relied on online sources and had a search time of up to 15 minutes per candidate. They were given information on the contest, party affiliation, and candidate name, and instructed to code values as of the time of the subnational election.

91. These differences are not large and may simply reflect media biases in terms of which candidates get

Finally, leveraging close subnational elections to predict performance in subsequent national ones poses a challenge if parties decide not to contest the latter. Subsetting the analysis only to parties contesting can induce post-treatment bias (Eggers 2017; De Magalhaes 2015). In fact, my theory would predict that opposition parties are more likely to run in states where they won subnational elections. Visually inspecting the likelihood of running around the cutoff suggests that it is reasonably balanced (see appendix 5.3). To avoid subsetting on post-treatment variables, parties not contesting national legislative elections in a state receive the vote share of "0." Only 6.03% of all opposition parties finishing in the top two in the subnational race do not contest subsequent legislative elections in their state, which includes regional parties (e.g., "Ucayali Región Con Futuro" or "Renovador de Salta"), but also those with national ambitions that contest in some but not all states (e.g., Colombia's "Movimiento de Salvación Nacional"). Of these "non-contesters," 42.8% won the subnational election. In the sensitive range of close races, seven winning and seven losing parties choose not to contest legislative elections in their state.

3.5.5 Do Subnational Victories Increase Electoral Competitiveness?

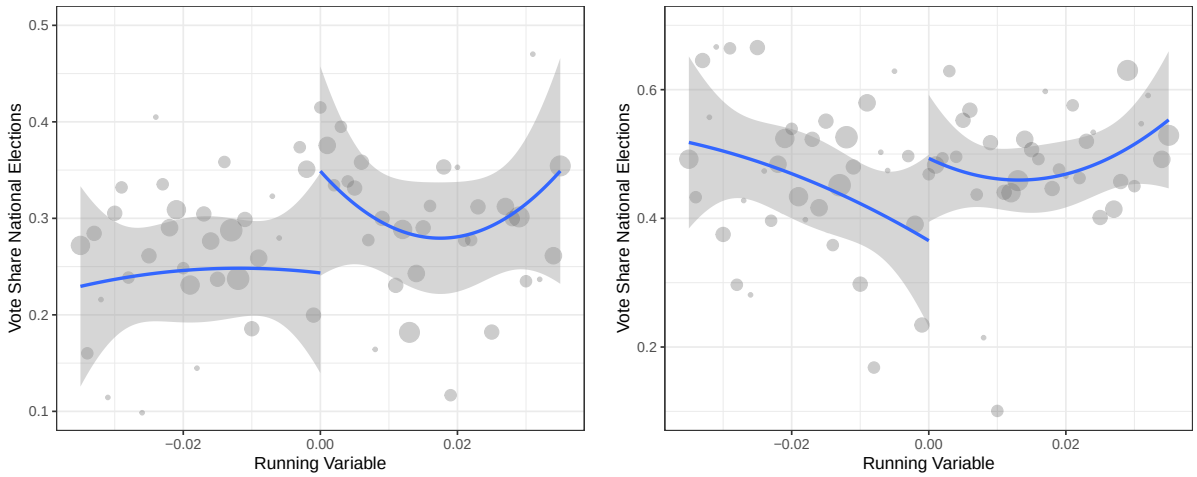
Does subnational control cause the opposition to become more electorally competitive in national elections? If this were true, we would expect the opposition vote in national lower house elections to jump at the discontinuity where it barely won close subnational elections. As I discussed earlier, extant research on mayoral incumbency effects often found incumbency disadvantages (Klašnja 2015; Feierherd 2020). Thus, it is not self-evident that controlling subnational office conveys advantages, here for national-level legislative elections. For a first visual inspection, see Figure 3.21, which plots opposition parties' subnational (two-party) vote share differences against their subsequent national legislative vote shares. Figure 3.21a

more coverage and therefore could be coded.

only considers the opposition party that contested a close subnational race, whereas Figure 3.21b depicts the aggregate opposition vote share. Points represent vote share averages of parties falling into a given 0.001 increment of the running variable – with between one and seven party vote shares being reflected in each point. Fitting an unweighted quadratic regression line, we indeed detect a jump at the discontinuity in both plots. Opposition parties seem to perform better in national lower house elections in states where they won close subnational elections. Note also how opposition victories profoundly reduce the variance of subsequent national-level performances when we look at aggregate opposition vote shares: Lacking subnational executive office, some oppositions perform very poorly, whereas they tend to receive between 40 and 50% where they obtained subnational control. Parties are included irrespective of whether they contested the next national elections, which explains some negative outliers on the y-axis (e.g., local and regional parties not contesting nationally, thus entering with a "0" as national lower house vote share). Yet, as I discuss, non-contesting parties are perfectly balanced across oppositions winning and losing close subnational elections, and thus cannot account for the differences observed.[92]

While useful to convey the underlying data structure, the visual inspection cannot substitute for the discontinuity analysis. To obtain unbiased estimates, we want to shrink the bandwidth determining which races enter the estimation to close elections. Yet, the smaller the bandwidth, the fewer races you include, and the less precise your estimates are (a bias-variance trade-off). As the widely-employed data-driven bandwidth selection procedure by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) yields an unreasonably wide bandwidth of two-party vote share differences of over ±20%, which cannot be considered close elections, I

92. As observations closer to the discontinuity have more influence on the difference in outcomes at the discontinuity, we might still believe that non-contesting parties influence this difference. To guard against this view, I will present results from a "donut RDD" in which the closest observations are dropped, which yields comparable results.



(a) Party-Level

(b) All Opposition Parties

Figure 3.21: Scatterplot: Close Subnational Races and Next Lower House Vote Share

Notes: For subnational elections in Latin America in the range of close elections (±3.5%), this figure plots the opposition's subnational two-party vote share against their state-level vote share in the next national legislative elections. Panel a presents results for the specific opposition party, panel b aggregates vote share in national legislative elections across opposition parties. Points represent averages of between 1 and 7 opposition parties scoring in a 0.1% increment on the x-dimension, with larger points representing more parties.

restricted this procedure to races within a ±10% margin.[93] The optimal bandwidth thus selected, ±3.5%, includes all gov.-vs.-opp. races in which the opposition wins or loses with two-party vote share differences of at most 3.5 percentage points. In two-party contests, this is equivalent to the opposition obtaining between 48.25 and 51.75% of votes. As is common practice, I use a local 2nd-order polynomial RD estimator with robust, bias-corrected confidence intervals.

Exclusively focusing on these close races, the result is that opposition parties perform substantially better where they won. The main treatment effect in model 1 is large; an opposition party that marginally wins highest executive office in their state obtains a 17.3 p.p. larger vote share in subsequent lower house elections relative to one that marginally loses. This effect is significant at the 10%-level and is robust to including a set of state-level control variables[94] in model 2. Substantive effect sizes continue to be large when broadening the bandwidth and altering polynomial size in models 3 and 4. This robustness is reassuring given concerns over misspecification and overfitting in small bandwidths. Extending the bandwidth to races within a ±10% margin in model 5 reduces the estimated effect to 12.1 p.p. (again significant at the 10%-level). In appendix 5.26, I show that results are relatively robust to selecting a ±1% bandwidth and to excluding the closest races (±0.5% margin).

Note that estimating effects of subnational victory is not the same as of the incumbent still being in place at the time of the national legislative election. The more incumbents prematurely exit, the less should we see an effect of them having won the subnational race. In fact, out of all 125 "close" opposition winners, exactly 10.4% were no longer in office at

93. This ±10% margin is the widest considered close by the literature (e.g., Eggers et al. 2015).

94. Throughout this article, RDD specifications with controls include geographic area (log), level of human development, population (log), a regional election dummy, an indefinite reelection possible dummy, and a dummy for two-round subnational electoral systems.

Table 3.4: Subnational Victory and Vote Share in National Lower House Elections

DV: Vote Share in Lower House Elec.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Bandwidth	±3.5%	±3.7%	±5%	±5%	±10%
Polynomial	2	2	2	1	2
Estimate	0.173	0.176	0.164	0.123	0.121
P-Value	(0.098)	(0.057)	(0.074)	(0.083)	(0.064)
Covariates	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (Left, Right)	(95, 94)	(100, 98)	(138, 125)	(138, 125)	(274, 252)

Notes: The table reports the main RD results of opposition victories in the race for that state's highest subnational executive office on the opposition's state-level lower house election vote shares. In model 2, including covariates extends the optimal bandwidth.

the start of the year of their final term.[95] While very few of these incumbents were removed against their will, the existence of incumbents not completing their term suggests that the estimated effects above may be downwardly biased. Another source of downward bias is positive externalities: If highly visible subnational opposition executives, e.g., by building a reputation that does not stop at the boundaries of the state they were elected in, positively influence their party's performance even in states the party initially lost subnational elections in, we would underestimate effects of subnational victories.[96]

Strikingly, when aggregating vote shares for all opposition parties that obtained at least 5 percent of votes in the national lower house elections in that state, substantive effects are even larger and more precisely estimated. A subnational victory by an opposition party increases the aggregate opposition vote in subsequent national lower house elections in that state by more than 18.8 percentage points relative to one in which a party in national government won a close subnational race (appendix 5.27). Across specifications, this relationship is

95. Out of these 13, three stepped down to run for higher office, two due to health reasons, one died (for natural reasons), one was removed by regional parliament for political reasons, four were removed on criminal charges (three for contract irregularities/ misuse of public funds; one for murder), one had their election annulled by the electoral tribunal, and one other was removed by a national court for unclear reasons. For two, incumbency in their term's final year could not be verified.

96. In future research, I plan to estimate these cross-state externalities by estimating the effect of close subnational victories on vote shares in neighboring states.

significant at the 1%-significance level. Whereas the party-level results could not rule out that subnational outcomes merely shift votes between opposition parties, the aggregate results demonstrate that the opposition as a whole performs better where an opposition party won. Further, close subnational opposition victories allow on average one more opposition party to obtain more than 5% of votes in lower house elections in that state (appendix 5.30). Finally, subnational victories affect neither the total number of contesting parties nor the number of parties receiving at least 1% of votes (appendices 5.28, 5.29).

To summarize, both at the party and opposition levels, oppositions become more electorally competitive in national elections where they marginally won highest subnational executive office. This is consistent with my theory in which state access and political visibility allow the opposition to perform better in national legislative elections. In my larger framework, it is this increased competitiveness that helps opposition parties to better preserve the loyalty of their MPs or even attract party switchers looking for subnational electoral springboards, both of which help it exercise legislative checks even before the next national elections.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Whereas democracies used to die in coups, they are now much more likely to be weakened by democratically elected leaders themselves. So much so that average democratic qualities "are back to 1989 levels," with only 13% of citizens worldwide currently living in a liberal democracy (Alizada et al. 2022, 6). In contrast to the image of "the executive" undermining other branches of government, modern democracies overwhelmingly allocate executive authority in both national and subnational elections. Descriptively, I relied on subnational election outcomes in 84 of 106 politically decentralized democracies after 1990 to show that national governments vary profoundly in how much they also govern at highest subnational tiers. Therefore, we may wonder whether De Tocqueville and Montesquieu were correct to think that the national executive can more easily undermine democracy the more it also controls subnational administrations.

In this dissertation, I argued that opposition parties are more able to prevent executive aggrandizement the more they hold mayoral and gubernatorial offices. These provide state access and political visibility, which enable the opposition to better contest electorally and avoid extra-institutional mass mobilization. Even before national elections, competitive oppositions constrain the national executive more as they can better incentivize office-seeking MPs to take an assertive stance in their exercise of horizontal accountability. In one mechanism test, I leveraged a close-election discontinuity design and almost the complete universe of highest subnational races under democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean (1990–

2021). It demonstrated that opposition parties increase their vote share by 12 to 17 percentage points in national lower house elections in states where they won close subnational races against the national executive. As a second mechanism test, I examined whether country-level patterns of subnational control influence pro-democracy mass mobilization (1990–2021). I found it was rarer where chief executives exerted less subnational control, especially at lower levels of electoral democracy. Finally, panel analyses yielded that horizontal checks on the national executive, and particularly checks emanating from the national parliament, increase the year after subnational elections when opposition parties won more subnational offices. This finding held across a large battery of robustness checks, including restricting the analysis to unitary and unicameral democracies. Overall, subnational offices are not only a resource for opposition parties to become more electorally viable, but also directly affect the extent to which the national executive is horizontally constrained. While opposition-led states can at times be "laboratories against democracy" (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Grumbach 2022), they have on average been *bulwarks against executive aggrandizement* after the Cold War.

In terms of theoretical contributions, I first advance the literature on opposition parties and democratic stability. The evidence presented highlights the value of the "balance-of-power framework" (Waldner and Lust 2018; Helmke, Kroeger, and Paine 2022): oppositions leverage the (institutional) resources they can draw on to better check the national executive. Here, however, my research shifted the focus to *the politics of resistance to aggrandizement* by emphasizing the career and reelection concerns of national legislators as key agents of horizontal accountability. As "ambition must be made to counteract ambition" (Madison 1788), horizontal constraints depend on how credibly the opposition can promise future office access. Highest subnational governments as potent electoral springboards—adding 12 to 17 percentage points more votes to parties marginally winning subnational races in democratic Latin America (1990–2021)—help parties bind national legislators and consequently preserve

legislative constraints. Where subnational governments directly set parameters of national democracy, opposition-led states also amplify the principal-agent problems potential aggrandizers face. Whereas much current work on oppositions and democratic stability emphasizes the role of strategic choices (Gamboa 2022; Somer, McCoy, and Luke 2021), my results for subnational opposition control's negative effects on pro-democracy mass mobilization, while suggestive, illustrate that we should not treat opposition strategies as exogenous. It appears that "cornered" oppositions with scarce access to subnational electoral springboards are subsequently associated with more extra-institutional, protest-based strategies (similar to Cleary and Öztürk 2022). Yet, my results also support Gamboa (2022)'s main claim of the desirability of institutional opposition strategies for democratic stability, while going one step further by showing how such strategies depend on initial subnational access.

Second, I contribute to the literature on multi-level governance and democratic stability. Whereas canonical research on the effects of federalism and decentralization on democratic stability emphasized *the extent of* subnational authority (Lijphart 2004; Diamond and Tsalik 1999; Graham, Miller, and Strøm 2017), my work illustrates that subnational authority matters *conditional on who controls it*. While we know much about why subnational entities can remain markedly less democratic than the national regime over time (Giraudy 2015; Gibson 2005; Behrend 2011), as Gervasoni (2024, 228) notes, research on subnational influences on national-level aggrandizement has remained scarce. Here, I conducted—to my knowledge—the most comprehensive investigation to date. The findings indicate that U.S.-centric characterizations of subnational governments as "laboratories of democratic backsliding" (Grumbach 2022) should not be generalized. Instead, subnational control empowers oppositions to check national leaders, thus helping defend against executive aggrandizement as the most severe threat to contemporary democratic stability. While some authors theorized that such checks may exist in federal countries (Diamond and Tsalik 1999), with case study-

based work suggesting that these may be limited to particularly authoritative subnational governments under federalism (Kaufman, Kelemen, and Kolcak 2024), I find that subnational constraints on chief executives are not exclusive to federal countries. This reflects a key contribution of my theory: Whereas these authors focused on the formal authority of subnational governments under federalism, I emphasized the link between subnational electoral springboards and horizontal accountability – one that is not limited to federal systems. Consistent with Gervasoni (2024)'s discussion, I document that even illiberal oppositions help exercise legislative constraints.

Ultimately, the big picture contribution is as follows: Subnational control matters for democratic stability. While it has long been argued to be crucial for the durability of competitive authoritarianism (Magaloni 2006; McLellan 2020; Hassan, Mattingly, and Nugent 2022) and party formation and survival under democracy (Cyr 2017; Eaton 2013), I show that subnational control affects whether democratically elected chief executives can aggrandize. Thus, in contrast to invoking the image of "the executive" undermining democracy, research on leader-driven democratic backsliding has to take seriously that most modern democracies are characterized by multi-level governance. Subnational governments constitute a consequential opposition resource in national-level contestation over regime change.

This research also makes important empirical contributions, not least by providing the *Subnational Elections Database* as the largest dataset on which party won highest subnational offices in democracies after 1990. Based on this data, I offered novel descriptive insights into subnational elections under democracy: Leader parties rarely win sizable majorities of highest subnational offices. Even where subnational and national elections are simultaneous, governing parties' subnational office shares are rather imperfectly correlated with their seat shares in the national lower house. In Latin America, races for governor- and key mayorships have become less competitive in 16 of 18 democracies in recent decades. Aside from

these descriptive findings, I also presented novel "reverse coattail" effects: Whereas earlier work on the role of subnational incumbents in national-level elections—owing to sample size issues—almost exclusively examined mayoral coattails even where elected governors existed (Ventura 2021; Feierherd 2020), my data allows me to estimate such effects for *highest subnational executives* in 18 countries over multiple decades. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the estimated coattails of 12 to 17 percentage points in national lower house elections are larger than most reported effects for mayors. While the use of close-election discontinuity designs in this kind of analysis is hardly novel, in the study of regime change where plausibly exogenous variation in actor resources is hard to come by, close elections constitute a rare opportunity for causal identification. In the future, I plan to examine whether close election outcomes help predict patterns of party switching of national legislators elected in these states, as my argument would suggest. Once the state-level data is extended beyond Latin America, such an approach may even help identify rare outcomes such as pro-democracy mass mobilization. In the analysis presented, the discontinuity design showed that subnational governments (won in close races) are independent sources of subsequent national-legislative competitiveness.

While my immediate goal was to improve our understanding of when chief executives can get away with aggrandizement, the *Subnational Elections Database* will enable research on other important questions: When do powerful subnational executives undermine local democratic quality? Are development and corruption levels affected when regional and national officeholders are from different parties? Does subnational incumbency satisfy or embolden leaders of ethnic groups contemplating secessionism or even insurgency? Precisely because governors and mayors under democracy are overwhelmingly independently elected and hold real authority (Hooghe et al. 2016) will knowing who governed cities and regions help us better understand high-stakes outcomes: how much the poor can access scarce state services (Boulding and Holzner 2021; Stokes et al. 2013), whether subnational politicians implement

or obstruct development projects (Cruz and Schneider 2017), whether local natural resources are protected or exploited (Burgess et al. 2012; Pailler 2018), and ultimately who gets to be descriptively and substantively represented (Dahl 2005; Goyal and Sells 2023). In short, to better explain outcomes we need to combine available data on the extent of regional and local authority with information on who exercised those.

While my findings challenge how we currently think about the role of subnational governments in national-level executive aggrandizement, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the evidence presented. First, the country-level results based on two-way fixed-effects analyses should be interpreted with care given the absence of random assignment and the possibility of omitted time-variant confounders. Second, my design does not allow for statements about how the channels of electoral competitiveness and mass mobilization interact. Third, on a temporal dimension, the very springboards enabling oppositions to better contest elections and preserve horizontal constraints may have detrimental long-term consequences for democracy if they provided resources to illiberal actors themselves trying to aggrandize after alternation in the national executive occurred (e.g., El Salvador under Bukele, the Philippines under Duterte or Colombia under Uribe).[1] Future research should explore such "reverse coattail" effects for illiberal parties. Fourth, the party-centered "balance-of-power" framework has little to say about how exposure to (il)liberal actors at subnational levels may affect national democracy via attitudinal channels, which were outside the scope of this study. Survey-based research, when combined with the *Subnational Election Database*, should explore how exposure to different types of subnational incumbents (e.g., opposition vs. government; liberal vs. illiberal) influences affective polarization and citizens' willingness to sanction executive aggrandizers. Fifth, the role of the opposition appears more complicated than the "balance-of-power" framework suggests when we study

1. See also Dinas et al. 2016 on the rise of "Golden Dawn," a radical right party in Greece.

forms of democratic backsliding other than aggrandizement: Here, the opposition too can undermine national democratic quality (as in the United States during the Biden presidency). Yet, I find significant positive effects for opposition subnational control on an aggregated measure of liberal democracy (see section 3.4.2).

This research illuminates promising paths for future research. For instance, with this investigation having been limited to electoral democracies, other research should explore whether subnational access empowers oppositions to resist autocratization in already authoritarian settings. Further, as this study demonstrated, highest direct subnational elections in Latin America have in most countries become less competitive over time. Research should explore why this is the case and whether this pattern extends to other regions (on these questions, also see Pérez Sandoval 2023). Additionally, I found preliminary evidence that chief executives may be more able to personalize their parties when the party has higher subnational control. Here, we need more research on the conditions under which rival party elites have the motive and opportunity to constrain their party leaders, thereby serving as "guardrails of democracy" (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). It would also be fruitful to examine the effects of subnational control conditional on types of opposition—e.g., in terms of their ideologic profile aside from a regime dimension—and the characteristics of units in which they get elected (degree of urbanization or population and GDP shares). For instance: Is subnational opposition control more potent when it emerges in urban, cosmopolitan settings such as Istanbul, Warsaw, and Budapest (as modernization theory would suggest)? Or is it more impactful when it reflects deeply ingrained religious and ethnolinguistic divisions as in contemporary India (as a variant of "pluralism by default" (Way 2015) in which ideational cleavages make it more difficult for one party to monopolize state access)? Lastly, research on resistance to executive aggrandizement would do well to (a) further disaggregate ways in which chief executives undermine democracy and (b) explore how different types of aggran-

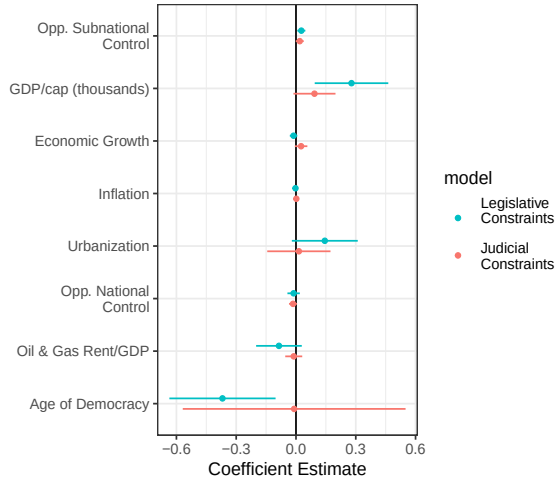
dizement can be blocked by different sets of resistance actors, potentially leveraging different resources and strategies. For instance, opposition MPs in legislatures typically help block constitutional and policy change empowering the chief executive but may be less impactful in forms of aggrandizement that do not require the approval of the national legislature.

Finally, this research yields policy-relevant insights: When deciding how much to invest in lower-level elections, opposition parties need to know the value of subnational office in opposing aggrandizement. From this perspective, my findings illustrate the value of "bottom-up" strategies for preventing and combating aggrandizement: Capturing subnational governments helps the opposition preserve horizontal constraints and avoid riskier extra-institutional mobilization. With 68% of the world population living in cities by 2050 (UN DESA 2018), the fate of democracy is increasingly decided in urban areas. Therefore, a critical question for future scholarship is whether aggrandizers with political control in urban areas (e.g., Turkey's Erdoğan until 2019) are more likely to establish authoritarianism than those who face opposition mayors in major cities (e.g., Bolivia's Morales, Thailand's Shinawatra, or Trump in the U.S.). While subnational opposition control was negatively associated with subsequent mass mobilization at the country level, who governs at subnational tiers could explain within-country variation in protest behavior if opposition governors help organize or shield protests. If democracy promotion by IOs enabled aggrandizement by strengthening chief executives vis-à-vis alternative domestic actors (Meyerrose 2020), this research suggests that unaligned subnational executives can be a leverage point international actors should target to preserve a level playing field. Lastly, designers of political institutions will want to consider that subnational offices, when in opposition hands, do appear to be a "countermajoritarian" tool oppositions use to preserve both a competitive electoral playing field and horizontal checks on the national executive.

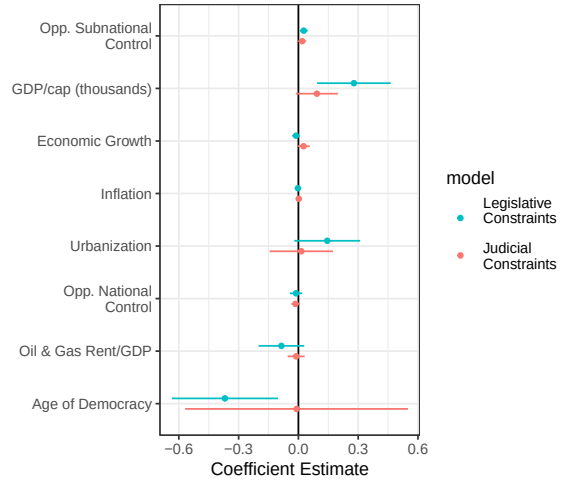
APPENDIX

5.1 Appendix: Country-Level Analysis: Subnational Control – Executive Aggrandizement

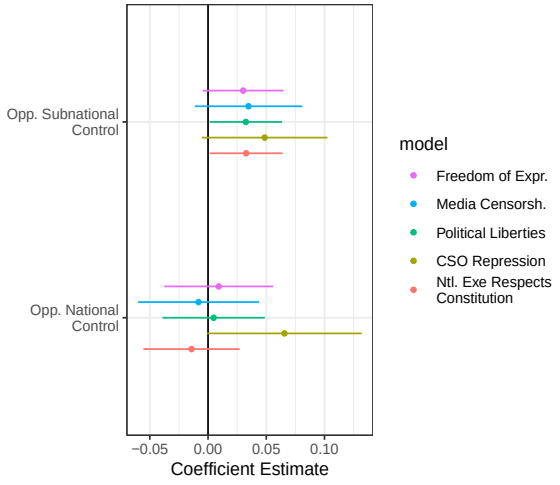
5.1.1 Main Results With Z-Transformed Data (Broad Def. of Opposition)



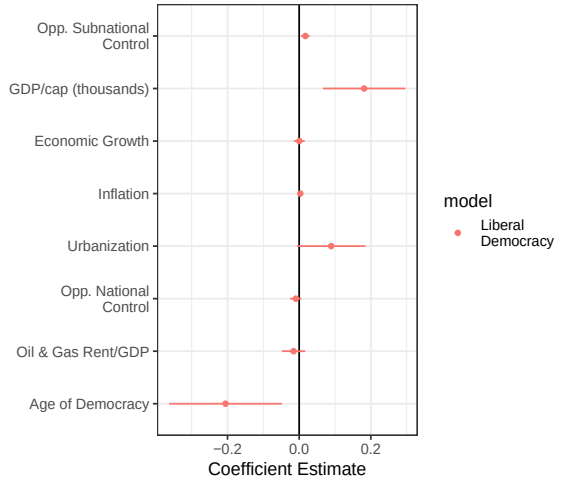
(a) Horizontal Accountability



(b) Legislative vs. Judicial Constraints



(c) Other Aggrandizement



(d) Liberal Democracy

Figure 5.1: Standardized Coefficient Plots: Opposition's Subnational Control and Aggrandizement

Table 5.1: Full Standardized Results: Horizontal Accountability, Legislative Constraints, Judicial Constraints, and Liberal Democracy

Model:	Horizontal Account. (Broad Opp.)	Legisl. Constraints (Broad Opp.)	Judicial Constraints (Broad Opp.)	Liberal Democracy (Broad Opp.)
Lagged DV	0.87 (0.000)	0.9 (0.000)	0.91 (0.000)	0.94 (0.000)
Subnational Control	0.029 (0.005)	0.027 (0.0099)	0.019 (0.067)	0.017 (0.006)
Electoral Democracy	0.0008 (0.99)	-0.036 (0.54)	0.018 (0.72)	/ /
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.25 (0.001)	0.279 (0.003)	0.09 (0.086)	0.18 (0.002)
GDP Growth	-0.006 (0.55)	-0.012 (0.21)	0.026 (0.11)	0.0003 (0.97)
Inflation	-0.002 (0.44)	-0.003 (0.52)	0.002 (0.59)	0.003 (0.13)
Urbanization	0.08 (0.29)	0.14 (0.09)	0.014 (0.86)	0.089 (0.07)
National Control	-0.024 (0.06)	-0.012 (0.45)	-0.015 (0.15)	-0.009 (0.25)
Regional Democracy	-0.038 (0.64)	-0.08 (0.36)	-0.007 (0.944)	-0.14 (0.015)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.06 (0.08)	-0.085 (0.145)	-0.011 (0.6)	-0.016 (0.35)
Age of Democracy	-0.25 (0.002)	-0.37 (0.007)	-0.009 (0.97)	-0.21 (0.01)
N	436	436	436	436

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on horizontal accountability (model 1), legislative constraints (model 2), judicial constraints (model 3), and liberal democracy (model 4). Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed. P-Values reported in parentheses.

Table 5.2: Full Standardized Results: Other Indicators of Exec. Aggrandizement

Model:	Freedom of Expression (Broad Opp.)	Media Censorship (Broad Opp.)	Political Liberties (Broad Opp.)	CSO Repression (Broad Opp.)	Ntl. Exe. Respects Constitution (Broad Opp.)
Lagged DV	0.82	0.69	0.84	0.58	0.68
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Subnational Control	0.03	0.035	0.032	0.05	0.033
	(0.089)	(0.14)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.04)
Electoral Democracy	0.1	0.19	0.075	0.32	0.07
	(0.27)	(0.02)	(0.34)	(0.003)	(0.14)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.22	0.28	0.32	0.35	0.26
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.009)	(0.07)	(0.003)
GDP Growth	0.004	0.015	0.02	0.03	0.02
	(0.77)	(0.44)	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.12)
Inflation	0.003	0.001	-0.003	0.001	0.003
	(0.55)	(0.92)	(0.49)	(0.9)	(0.45)
Urbanization	0.16	0.17	0.09	0.07	0.07
	(0.11)	(0.17)	(0.31)	(0.65)	(0.55)
National Control	0.009	-0.008	0.005	0.07	-0.014
	(0.7)	(0.76)	(0.83)	(0.054)	(0.5)
Regional Democracy	-0.21	0.038	-0.27	-0.35	-0.029
	(0.21)	(0.36)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.79)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.03	-0.02	-0.003	0.04	-0.08
	(0.21)	(0.44)	(0.87)	(0.37)	(0.0002)
Age of Democracy	-0.28	-0.4	-0.286	-0.36	0.05
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.72)
N	436	436	436	436	436

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on freedom of expression (model 1), media censorship (model 2), political liberties (model 3), repression of civil society (model 4), and the national executive's respect for the constitution. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed. P-Values reported in parentheses.

5.1.2 Complete Results for Main Models

Table 5.3: Full Results: Horizontal Accountability and Liberal Democracy

Model:	Horizontal Account. (Broad Opp.)	Horizontal Account. (Narrow Opp.)	Liberal Democracy (Broad Opp.)	Liberal Democracy (Narrow Opp.)
Lagged DV	0.873 (0.000)	0.876 (0.000)	0.94 (0.000)	0.95 (0.000)
Subnational Control	0.081 (0.005)	0.066 (0.02)	0.013 (0.006)	0.006 (0.2)
Electoral Democracy	0.004 (0.99)	-0.017 (0.95)	/ /	/ /
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008 (0.001)	0.0078 (0.001)	0.0016 (0.002)	0.0015 (0.004)
GDP Growth	-0.0008 (0.55)	-0.0009 (0.54)	-0.00001 (0.97)	-0.00001 (0.97)
Inflation	-0.00001 (0.44)	-0.000 (0.4)	0.00001 (0.97)	0.0000 (0.16)
Urbanization	0.003 (0.29)	0.0034 (0.22)	0.0009 (0.069)	0.001 (0.05)
National Control	-0.1 (0.06)	-0.08 (0.007)	-0.01 (0.25)	-0.009 (0.27)
Regional Democracy	-0.14 (0.64)	-0.15 (0.62)	-0.139 (0.015)	-0.145 (0.011)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.017 (0.08)	-0.017 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.35)	-0.001 (0.37)
Age of Democracy	-0.005 (0.002)	-0.005 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.011)	-0.001 (0.008)
N	436	436	436	436

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined either broadly or narrowly) on horizontal accountability (models 1-2) and liberal democracy (models 3-4). Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed. P-Values reported in parentheses.

Table 5.4: Full Results: Legislative and Judicial Constraints

Model:	Legislative Constraints (Broad Opp.)	Legislative Constraints (Narrow Opp.)	Judicial Constraints (Broad Opp.)	Judicial Constraints (Narrow Opp.)
Lagged DV	0.909 (0.000)	0.91 (0.000)	0.92 (0.000)	0.92 (0.000)
Subnational Control	0.02 (0.0099)	0.018 (0.012)	0.013 (0.07)	0.006 (0.47)
Electoral Democracy	-0.0049 (0.54)	-0.053 (0.52)	0.024 (0.72)	0.026 (0.69)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.0024 (0.003)	0.0024 (0.004)	0.0008 (0.09)	0.0007 (0.108)
GDP Growth	-0.00049 (0.21)	-0.00048 (0.2)	0.0009 (0.11)	0.001 (0.13)
Inflation	-0.0000 (0.52)	-0.000 (0.48)	0.0000 (0.59)	0.0000 (0.65)
Urbanization	0.0015 (0.09)	0.0016 (0.067)	0.0001 (0.86)	0.002 (0.79)
National Control	-0.014 (0.45)	-0.0074 (0.64)	-0.016 (0.15)	-0.0075 (0.43)
Regional Democracy	-0.08 (0.64)	-0.08 (0.36)	-0.0069 (0.94)	-0.017 (0.86)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.006 (0.14)	-0.0064 (0.14)	-0.0008 (0.60)	-0.0008 (0.62)
Age of Democracy	-0.0018 (0.007)	-0.0019 (0.004)	-0.00004 (0.97)	-0.00009 (0.95)
N	436	436	436	436

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined either broadly or narrowly) on legislative constraints (models 1-2) and judicial constraints (models 3-4). Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed. P-Values reported in parentheses.

Table 5.5: Full Results: Other Indicators of Executive Aggrandizement

Model:	Freedom of Expression (Broad Opp.)	Media Censorship (Broad Opp.)	Political Liberties (Broad Opp.)	CSO Repression (Broad Opp.)	Ntl. Exe. Respects Constitution (Broad Opp.)
Lagged DV	0.847	0.7	0.87	0.59	0.69
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Subnational Control	0.012	0.14	0.01	0.166	0.114
	(0.09)	(0.14)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.04)
Electoral Democracy	0.077	-1.4	0.04	0.2	0.48
	(0.27)	(0.02)	(0.34)	(0.002)	(0.135)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.0011	0.013	0.001	0.014	0.011
	(0.076)	(0.09)	(0.009)	(0.07)	(0.003)
GDP Growth	0.0001	0.003	0.0004	0.0056	0.0046
	(0.77)	(0.44)	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.12)
Inflation	0.0000	0.000	-0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
	(0.55)	(0.92)	(0.485)	(0.9)	(0.45)
Urbanization	0.001	0.01	0.0004	0.003	0.003
	(0.11)	(0.17)	(0.31)	(0.65)	(0.55)
National Control	0.006	-0.05	0.0024	0.346	-0.077
	(0.7)	(0.76)	(0.83)	(0.054)	(0.5)
Regional Democracy	-0.12	0.2	-0.12	-1.64	-0.132
	(0.21)	(0.81)	(0.09)	(0.085)	(0.794)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.001	-0.009	-0.0001	0.014	-0.028
	(0.21)	(0.44)	(0.87)	(0.37)	(0.0002)
Age of Democracy	-0.0078	-0.011	-0.0006	-0.008	0.0011
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.116)	(0.13)	(0.72)
N	436	436	436	436	436

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on five indicators of aggrandizement. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed. P-Values reported in parentheses.

5.1.3 Defending Identification Assumptions

Table 5.6: Parallel Trends: Placebo Tests on Preceding Changes in Horizontal Accountability

Model:	Original ($t_1 - t_0$)	$t_0 - t_{-1}$	$t_{-1} - t_{-2}$	$t_{-2} - t_{-3}$
Subnational Control	0.08	0.024	0.05	0.008
	(0.005)	(0.38)	(0.2)	(0.88)
Electoral Democracy	0.004	0.2	-0.16	-0.13
	(0.99)	(0.15)	(0.57)	(0.68)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008	0.003	0.009	0.003
	(0.001)	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.55)
GDP Growth	-0.0008	0.0004	-0.003	0.0006
	(0.55)	(0.9)	(0.28)	(0.9)
Inflation	-0.00001	0.00003	-0.00001	0.0001
	(0.44)	(0.14)	(0.71)	(0.0002)
Urbanization	0.003	-0.004	0.002	0.004
	(0.29)	(0.13)	(0.59)	(0.31)
National Control	-0.1	0.06	-0.05	0.07
	(0.06)	(0.27)	(0.41)	(0.61)
Regional Democracy	-0.14	-0.2	-0.76	-0.024
	(0.64)	(0.71)	(0.2)	(0.69)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.017	0.003	-0.012	0.005
	(0.08)	(0.54)	(0.14)	(0.62)
Age of Democracy	-0.005	0.006	-0.008	-0.006
	(0.002)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.17)
N	436	436	436	436

Notes: The table reports results for placebo tests of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on prior changes of horizontal accountability. Year t_0 refers to the subnational election year. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

Table 5.7: Parallel Trends: Placebo Tests on Preceding Levels of Horizontal Accountability

Model:	t_0	t_{-1}	t_{-2}
Subnational Control	0.064	0.04	-0.014
	(0.23)	(0.41)	(0.82)
Electoral Democracy	2.4	2.3	2.4
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	-0.0005	-0.004	-0.012
	(0.89)	(0.35)	(0.03)
GDP Growth	-0.002	-0.003	0.007
	(0.27)	(0.35)	(0.08)
Inflation	-0.00001	-0.0003	-0.00002
	(0.71)	(0.09)	(0.6)
Urbanization	-0.01	-0.006	-0.008
	(0.0045)	(0.08)	(0.08)
National Control	0.18	0.12	0.18
	(0.02)	(0.12)	(0.11)
Regional Democracy	0.58	0.78	1.55
	(0.3)	(0.15)	(0.02)
Resource Rents/GDP	0.005	0.002	0.014
	(0.71)	(0.87)	(0.22)
Age of Democracy	0.006	0.0006	0.009
	(0.004)	(0.88)	(0.07)
N	436	436	436

Notes: The table reports results for placebo tests of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on prior levels of horizontal accountability. Year t_0 refers to the subnational election year. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

Table 5.8: Treatment Effect Homogeneity Across Types of Democracies

Model:	Original	Presidential	Non-Presidential	Unitary	Non-Unitary
Lagged DV	0.873	0.94	0.64	0.88	0.55
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Subnational Control	0.08	0.092	0.063	0.098	0.13
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.09)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Electoral Democracy	0.004	0.16	-0.1	0.046	0.074
	(0.99)	(0.55)	(0.78)	(0.86)	(0.88)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008	0.006	0.007	0.013	0.004
	(0.001)	(0.09)	(0.28)	(0.002)	(0.24)
GDP Growth	-0.0008	-0.002	0.0024	-0.002	-0.0005
	(0.55)	(0.23)	(0.28)	(0.34)	(0.87)
Inflation	-0.00001	-0.00002	-0.0002	0.0003	0.00001
	(0.44)	(0.18)	(0.41)	(0.52)	(0.93)
Urbanization	0.003	0.005	-0.002	0.008	-0.007
	(0.29)	(0.14)	(0.35)	(0.07)	(0.12)
National Control	-0.1	-0.16	-0.06	-0.14	0.15
	(0.06)	(0.025)	(0.4)	(0.099)	(0.12)
Regional Democracy	-0.14	-0.13	-0.28	-0.03	0.64
	(0.64)	(0.75)	(0.37)	(0.95)	(0.09)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.017	-0.03	-0.002	-0.02	-0.001
	(0.08)	(0.02)	(0.89)	(0.014)	(0.92)
Age of Democracy	-0.005	-0.003	-0.01	-0.005	-0.005
	(0.002)	(0.16)	(0.001)	(0.15)	(0.01)
N	436	230	206	248	157

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on horizontal accountability. Models differ in how democracies are subset: Model 1: full sample. Model 2: Only presidential democracies. Model 3: Only parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies. Model 4: Only unitary democracies. Model 5: Only federations and confederations. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed. Coding of unitarism is NA for 31 country years, thus cases included do not total 436.

Table 5.9: Treatment Effect Homogeneity Across Office Types

Model:	Original	Local Elections	Regional Elections	Low RAI	High RAI
Lagged DV	0.873	0.73	0.91	0.78	0.81
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Subnational Control	0.08	0.04	0.1	0.092	0.038
	(0.005)	(0.18)	(0.015)	(0.001)	(0.47)
Electoral Democracy	0.004	1.08	-0.04	0.43	0.05
	(0.99)	(0.0003)	(0.91)	(0.07)	(0.89)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008	0.004	0.007	0.008	0.006
	(0.001)	(0.45)	(0.003)	(0.2)	(0.006)
GDP Growth	-0.0008	-0.003	0.0000	-0.002	-0.0014
	(0.55)	(0.07)	(0.99)	(0.44)	(0.37)
Inflation	-0.00001	0.0002	-0.00002	0.0003	-0.00001
	(0.44)	(0.64)	(0.048)	(0.11)	(0.24)
Urbanization	0.003	-0.003	-0.002	0.014	-0.004
	(0.29)	(0.45)	(0.43)	(0.001)	(0.1)
National Control	-0.1	-0.16	-0.08	-0.06	0.014
	(0.06)	(0.13)	(0.2)	(0.22)	(0.85)
Regional Democracy	-0.14	-0.75	0.026	0.36	0.3
	(0.64)	(0.24)	(0.93)	(0.49)	(0.33)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.017	0.004	-0.02	0.002	-0.02
	(0.08)	(0.79)	(0.02)	(0.68)	(0.18)
Age of Democracy	-0.005	0.0007	-0.004	0.01	0.001
	(0.002)	(0.78)	(0.005)	(0.001)	(0.54)
N	436	169	267	161	158

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on horizontal accountability. Model 1: original model. Model 2: only municipal offices. Model 3: only regional offices. Model 4: Only country-years with below-median regional authority (RAI <= 9.78). Model 5: Only country-years with above-median regional authority (RAI > 9.78). Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed. Coding of regional authority is NA for 117 country-years, thus cases included do not total 436.

Table 5.10: Treatment Effect Homogeneity Across Time and Pre-Trend

Model:	Original	Year($\leq$ 2005)	Year($>$ 2005)	Neg. Pre-Trend	Positive Pre-Trend
Lagged DV	0.873	0.5	0.93	0.71	0.76
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Subnational Control	0.08	0.038	0.11	0.12	0.07
	(0.005)	(0.26)	(0.013)	(0.018)	(0.14)
Electoral Democracy	0.004	-0.4	0.3	0.77	-0.48
	(0.99)	(0.26)	(0.49)	(0.07)	(0.18)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008	0.0004	0.02	0.009	0.005
	(0.001)	(0.9)	(0.0003)	(0.005)	(0.13)
GDP Growth	-0.0008	-0.004	0.001	-0.002	0.003
	(0.55)	(0.003)	(0.75)	(0.11)	(0.23)
Inflation	-0.00001	0.00001	0.003	-0.00004	-0.00001
	(0.44)	(0.95)	(0.18)	(0.14)	(0.52)
Urbanization	0.003	-0.006	0.01	0.003	0.0007
	(0.29)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.42)	(0.83)
National Control	-0.1	-0.04	-0.24	-0.04	0.29
	(0.06)	(0.59)	(0.03)	(0.55)	(0.001)
Regional Democracy	-0.14	0.29	-0.04	-0.2	0.49
	(0.64)	(0.67)	(0.96)	(0.6)	(0.22)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.017	-0.02	-0.02	0.005	-0.003
	(0.08)	(0.13)	(0.06)	(0.45)	(0.81)
Age of Democracy	-0.005	/	-0.004	-0.002	0.007
	(0.002)	/	(0.06)	(0.19)	(0.06)
N	436	197	239	200	236

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on horizontal accountability. Model 1: original model. Model 2: only years up to and including 2005. Model 3: only years after 2005. Model 4: Only country years with a negative change in horizontal accountability (between the subnational election year and the one before). Model 5: Only country years with a positive preceding change in horizontal accountability. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

5.1.4 Robustness: Additional Model Specifications

Table 5.11: Robustness Check: Main Results for Additional Specifications

Model:	Original	Control: Government VS	Control: President VS	Control: President VS + Gov. VS	High-Quality Subn. Elections
Lagged DV	0.873 (0.000)	0.85 (0.000)	0.9 (0.000)	0.92 (0.000)	0.87 (0.000)
Subnational Control	0.08 (0.005)	0.094 (0.003)	0.096 (0.029)	0.11 (0.014)	0.08 (0.006)
Electoral Democracy	0.004 (0.99)	0.14 (0.61)	-0.13 (0.69)	-0.12 (0.72)	0.003 (0.99)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008 (0.001)	0.007 (0.003)	0.01 (0.02)	0.009 (0.02)	0.008 (0.0005)
GDP Growth	-0.0008 (0.55)	-0.003 (0.07)	-0.005 (0.05)	-0.005 (0.03)	0.003 (0.23)
Inflation	-0.00001 (0.44)	-0.00001 (0.33)	-0.00002 (0.23)	-0.00002 (0.26)	-0.0008 (0.58)
Urbanization	0.003 (0.29)	0.003 (0.36)	0.005 (0.31)	0.005 (0.3)	0.003 (0.26)
National Control	-0.1 (0.06)	-0.08 (0.17)	-0.09 (0.23)	-0.1 (0.17)	-0.11 (0.05)
Regional Democracy	-0.14 (0.64)	0.008 (0.98)	0.43 (0.42)	0.52 (0.31)	-0.13 (0.67)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.017 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.08)
Age of Democracy	-0.005 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.07)	-0.004 (0.36)	-0.004 (0.37)	-0.005 (0.001)
Government VS	/ /	-0.0005 (0.06)	/ /	-0.0008 (0.02)	/ /
President VS	/ /	/ /	0.0003 (0.72)	0.0002 (0.82)	/ /
N	436	406	201	201	429

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on horizontal accountability. Model 1: Original results. Model 2: Controlling for DPI measure of vote share by government parties in the last ntl. lower house elections (as of January 1st the year after subnational elections). Model 3: Controlling for DPI measure of the president's vote share in the final presidential election round. Model 4: Controlling for both presidential and governmental lower house elections vote share. Model 5: Dropped seven subnational elections which V-Dem coded as not free and fair (v2elffelr_ord <= 2; while the national regime was democratic). Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

Table 5.12: Robustness Check: Main Results for Additional Specifications II

Model:	Original	Control: Subnational Democracy	Without Extreme Subn. Control	Without Bosnia and Herzegovina	Year ¡ 2019
Lagged DV	0.873 (0.000)	0.88 (0.000)	0.86 (0.000)	0.87 (0.000)	0.83 (0.000)
Subnational Control	0.08 (0.005)	0.079 (0.005)	0.09 (0.02)	0.085 (0.004)	0.06 (0.02)
Electoral Democracy	0.004 (0.99)	0.1 (0.71)	-0.18 (0.53)	0.017 (0.95)	0.25 (0.16)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008 (0.001)	0.008 (0.001)	0.007 (0.002)	0.008 (0.0004)	0.006 (0.005)
GDP Growth	-0.0008 (0.55)	-0.0007 (0.63)	-0.001 (0.49)	-0.0009 (0.58)	-0.002 (0.19)
Inflation	-0.00001 (0.44)	-0.00001 (0.24)	-0.00001 (0.35)	-0.0000 (0.43)	0.0000 (0.94)
Urbanization	0.003 (0.29)	0.003 (0.36)	0.002 (0.54)	0.003 (0.3)	0.0035 (0.17)
National Control	-0.1 (0.06)	-0.1 (0.07)	-0.085 (0.16)	-0.1 (0.053)	0.015 (0.97)
Regional Democracy	-0.14 (0.64)	-0.17 (0.55)	-0.16 (0.62)	-0.14 (0.64)	-0.12 (0.71)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.017 (0.08)	-0.016 (0.08)	-0.018 (0.05)	-0.017 (0.08)	-0.013 (0.28)
Age of Democracy	-0.005 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.005 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.28)
Subnational Democracy	/ /	-0.034 (0.17)	/ /	/ /	/ /
N	436	435	398	429	391

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on horizontal accountability. Model 1: Original results. Model 2: Controlling for V-Dem measure of the quality of subnational elections. Model 3: Cases in which chief executive has subnational control of at least 75% excluded. Model 4: Excluded outlier of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Model 5: Excluded years after 2018. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

Table 5.13: Robustness Check: Simultaneous Elections; Indirectly-Elected Upper Chambers

Model:	Original	No Ntl. Legisl. Elections (t_{+1})	Added: Simultaneous Elections Dummy	Only Simultaneous Elections	No Indirectly Elected Upper Chambers
Lagged DV	0.873 (0.000)	0.92 (0.000)	0.88 (0.000)	0.88 (0.000)	0.89 (0.000)
Subnational Control	0.08 (0.005)	0.083 (0.005)	0.076 (0.011)	0.084 (0.09)	0.074 (0.009)
Electoral Democracy	0.004 (0.99)	-0.04 (0.91)	-0.003 (0.99)	-0.02 (0.94)	0.003 (0.99)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008 (0.001)	0.007 (0.006)	0.008 (0.001)	0.01 (0.001)	0.01 (0.0001)
GDP Growth	-0.0008 (0.55)	-0.001 (0.55)	-0.001 (0.53)	-0.005 (0.04)	-0.001 (0.59)
Inflation	-0.0000 (0.44)	-0.0000 (0.94)	-0.0000 (0.41)	-0.0000 (0.89)	-0.0000 (0.31)
Urbanization	0.003 (0.29)	0.005 (0.07)	0.003 (0.3)	0.013 (0.001)	0.004 (0.25)
National Control	-0.1 (0.06)	-0.1 (0.08)	-0.09 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.56)	-0.11 (0.05)
Regional Democracy	-0.14 (0.64)	-0.22 (0.46)	-0.16 (0.58)	-0.14 (0.62)	-0.2 (0.6)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.017 (0.08)	-0.006 (0.24)	-0.02 (0.06)	0.009 (0.33)	-0.02 (0.07)
Age of Democracy	-0.005 (0.002)	-0.005 (0.000)	-0.005 (0.002)	-0.01 (0.001)	-0.005 (0.001)
Simultaneous Election	/ /	/ /	-0.02 (0.41)	/ /	/ /
N	436	357	436	205	366

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on horizontal accountability. Model 1: Original results. Model 2: Dropped units with ntl. legislative elections the year after subnational ones. Model 3: Added dummy for whether subnational elections occurred in the same year as ntl. legisl. ones. Model 4: Dropped units in which subnational elections were not simultaneous with ntl. legisl. ones. Model 5: Dropped units with indirectly elected upper chambers. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

Table 5.14: Robustness Check: Main Results Without Lagged Outcome

DV:	Horiz. Acc.	Acc. - Leg.	Acc. - Jud.	Ntl. Executive Respects Constitution	Liberal Democracy
Subnational Control	0.137	0.045	0.006	0.117	0.036
	(0.025)	(0.009)	(0.72)	(0.26)	(0.015)
Electoral Democracy	2.2	0.65	0.71	2.78	/
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	/
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008	0.003	0.001	0.01	0.002
	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.66)	(0.09)	(0.02)
GDP Growth	-0.003	-0.001	0.002	0.005	0.0002
	(0.22)	(0.05)	(0.12)	(0.36)	(0.79)
Inflation	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000	0.0000	-0.0000
	(0.46)	(0.18)	(0.03)	(0.71)	(0.55)
Urbanization	-0.006	-0.001	-0.0004	0.006	0.001
	(0.23)	(0.94)	(0.84)	(0.49)	(0.35)
National Control	0.05	-0.1	0.03	-0.15	0.06
	(0.48)	(0.08)	(0.44)	(0.43)	(0.06)
Regional Democracy	0.37	-0.23	-0.22	-0.39	0.14
	(0.56)	(0.29)	(0.41)	(0.67)	(0.45)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.01	-0.003	-0.003	-0.03	-0.004
	(0.33)	(0.57)	(0.52)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Age of Democracy	0.001	-0.0008	-0.001	0.009	-0.0003
	(0.62)	(0.45)	(0.78)	(0.08)	(0.84)
N	436	436	436	436	436

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on indicators of aggrandizement. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Lagged dependent variable dropped in contrast to models discussed in the main text. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

Table 5.15: Robustness Check: Coefficients of Opposition's Subnational Control Across Measures of National Control

Model:	Original	Dropped	D(<0.5)	D(<0.34)	Quadratic
Lagged DV	0.873	0.86	0.87	0.87	0.87
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Subnational Control	0.08	0.059	0.064	0.06	0.08
	(0.005)	(0.019)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.006)
Electoral Democracy	0.004	-0.015	0.003	-0.014	0.002
	(0.99)	(0.96)	(0.99)	(0.96)	(0.99)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
GDP Growth	-0.0008	-0.0005	-0.0005	-0.0006	-0.0008
	(0.55)	(0.71)	(0.71)	(0.66)	(0.53)
Inflation	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000
	(0.44)	(0.45)	(0.44)	(0.45)	(0.45)
Urbanization	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.003
	(0.29)	(0.24)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.28)
National Control	-0.1	/	/	/	-0.18
	(0.06)	/	/	/	(0.28)
Regional Democracy	-0.14	-0.18	-0.18	-0.16	-0.13
	(0.64)	(0.56)	(0.56)	(0.59)	(0.65)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.017	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.08)	(0.053)	(0.07)	(0.59)	(0.07)
Age of Democracy	-0.005	/	-0.004	-0.004	-0.004
	(0.002)	/	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Majority Dummy	/	/	0.02	/	/
	/	/	(0.25)	/	/
Supermajority Dummy	/	/	/	0.009	/
	/	/	/	(0.08)	/
(Subnational Control)²	/	/	/	/	0.06
	/	/	/	/	(0.65)
N	436	436	436	436	436

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on horizontal accountability. Models differ in whether and, if so, how the leader's seat share in the national lower house is included: Model 1: original. Model 2: national control not included. Models 3 and 4: Dummies that take the value of "1" if the leader has a majority or supermajority in the lower house, respectively. Model 5: both a linear and a quadratic term for seat share included. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

Table 5.16: Robustness Check: Coefficients of Opposition's National Control Across Measures of Subnational Control

Model:	Original	Dropped	D(<0.5)	D(<0.34)	Quadratic
Lagged DV	0.873	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.87
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Subnational Control	0.08	/	/	/	-0.026
	(0.005)	/	/	/	(0.81)
Electoral Democracy	0.004	0.019	0.02	0.017	-0.008
	(0.99)	(0.95)	(0.95)	(0.95)	(0.33)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)
GDP Growth	-0.0008	-0.0009	-0.0008	-0.001	-0.0007
	(0.55)	(0.54)	(0.57)	(0.44)	(0.6)
Inflation	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000
	(0.44)	(0.35)	(0.38)	(0.23)	(0.52)
Urbanization	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.003
	(0.29)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.29)	(0.29)
National Control	-0.1	-0.04	-0.05	-0.07	-0.11
	(0.06)	(0.41)	(0.26)	(0.22)	(0.04)
Regional Democracy	-0.14	-0.24	-0.24	-0.26	-0.12
	(0.64)	(0.42)	(0.44)	(0.38)	(0.69)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.017	-0.017	-0.016	-0.02	-0.017
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Age of Democracy	-0.005	-0.005	-0.005	-0.005	-0.005
	(0.002)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Majority Dummy	/	/	-0.01	/	/
	/	/	(0.22)	/	/
Supermajority Dummy	/	/	/	-0.03	/
	/	/	/	(0.07)	/
(National Control)²	/	/	/	/	0.09
	/	/	/	/	(0.33)
N	436	436	436	436	436

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of national control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on horizontal accountability. Models differ in whether and, if so, how the leader's subnational control is included: Model 1: original. Model 2: subnational control not included. Models 3 and 4: Dummies that take the value of "1" if the leader has a majority or supermajority of highest subnational offices, respectively. Model 5: both a linear and a quadratic term for subnational control included. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

Table 5.17: Robustness Check: Coefficients of Opposition's Subnational Control Across Specifications

Model:	Controls: Additional Lag	Core Countries	Subn. Control * Opp. Fragment.	Upper-House Not Appointed	No Upper-House
Lagged DV	0.71	0.91	0.87	0.88	0.91
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Subnational Control	0.11	0.095	0.1	0.077	0.106
	(0.011)	(0.005)	(0.044)	(0.012)	(0.005)
Electoral Democracy	0.32	-0.24	-0.005	0.09	0.44
	(0.25)	(0.29)	(0.99)	(0.77)	(0.21)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.009	0.013	0.008	0.01	0.011
	(0.003)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.014)
GDP Growth	-0.001	-0.002	-0.0008	-0.0005	0.0004
	(0.64)	(0.25)	(0.56)	(0.78)	(0.87)
Inflation	-0.0001	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0007
	(0.002)	(0.73)	(0.52)	(0.15)	(0.04)
Urbanization	-0.001	0.01	0.003	0.005	0.002
	(0.87)	(0.002)	(0.28)	(0.16)	(0.59)
National Control	0.02	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1	-0.2
	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.01)
Regional Democracy	-0.23	0.13	-0.12	-0.17	-0.28
	(0.64)	(0.58)	(0.69)	(0.68)	(0.53)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.005
	(0.14)	(0.048)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.29)
Age of Democracy	0.003	-0.005	-0.004	-0.006	-0.0002
	(0.45)	(0.009)	(0.002)	(0.000)	(0.94)
Opp. Fragmentation	/	/	0.019	/	/
	/	/	(0.54)	/	/
*Subn. Control * Opp. Fragm.*	/	/	-0.03	/	/
	/	/	(0.58)	/	/
N	391	295	436	337	216

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on horizontal accountability. Model 1: Controls - except for national control - lagged by an additional year. Model 2: Only those 50 countries included for which the highest subnational executive office was measured. Model 3: Interaction between opposition fragmentation dummy and subnational control. The dummy takes on the value of 1 if the Herfindahl index of how subnational offices are allocated across oppositions is above the median of 0.4747. Models 4 and 5: Exclude observations with any appointed upper house members or all upper houses. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

Table 5.18: Robustness Check: Main Results Without Coup Years

DV:	Horiz. Acc.	Acc. - Leg.	Acc. - Jud.	Ntl. Executive Respects Constit.	Liberal Democracy
Lagged DV	0.87	0.91	0.92	0.67	0.94
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Subnational Control	0.08	0.02	0.014	0.115	0.013
	(0.005)	(0.0096)	(0.049)	(0.042)	(0.006)
Electoral Democracy	0.0003	-0.05	0.01	0.485	/
	(0.999)	(0.29)	(0.84)	(0.14)	/
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008	0.002	0.0007	0.01	0.002
	(0.0005)	(0.003)	(0.097)	(0.004)	(0.002)
GDP Growth	-0.001	-0.0004	0.0001	0.002	-0.0003
	(0.47)	(0.31)	(0.72)	(0.55)	(0.25)
Inflation	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000	0.0000	-0.0000
	(0.46)	(0.57)	(0.64)	(0.53)	(0.17)
Urbanization	0.003	0.001	0.0003	0.003	0.0009
	(0.32)	(0.1)	(0.71)	(0.55)	(0.08)
National Control	-0.1	-0.01	-0.007	-0.04	-0.007
	(0.07)	(0.45)	(0.49)	(0.71)	(0.45)
Regional Democracy	-0.11	-0.08	0.02	0.004	-0.12
	(0.71)	(0.38)	(0.81)	(0.99)	(0.03)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.02	-0.006	-0.002	-0.03	-0.001
	(0.07)	(0.15)	(0.19)	(0.000)	(0.23)
Age of Democracy	-0.004	-0.002	0.0003	0.003	-0.0009
	(0.002)	(0.006)	(0.79)	(0.35)	(0.01)
N	433	433	433	433	433

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on indicators of aggrandizement. Model 1: Horizontal accountability. Model 2: Legislative constraints. Model 3: Judicial constraints. Model 4: V-Dem's measure on whether the national executive respects the constitution. Model 5: Liberal democracy. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

5.1.5 Data Sources: Country-Level Analysis

Variable	Source
Indep. Variables	
Subn. Contr. (Leader)	Subnational Elections Database (redacted)
Subn. Contr. (All Gov.)	Subnational Elections Database (redacted)
Outcomes	
Horiz. Acc.	V-Dem (2023b, 291) ("v2x_horacc")
Leg. Constr.	V-Dem (2023b, 50) ("v2xlg_legcon")
Jud. Constr.	V-Dem (2023b, 50) ("v2x_jucon")
CSO Repression	V-Dem (2023b, 196) ("v2csreprss")
Media Censors.	V-Dem (2023b, 201) ("v2mecenefm")
Pol. Liberties	V-Dem (2023b, 297) ("v2x_clpol")
Fr. of Expression	V-Dem (2023b, 311) ("v2x_freexp")
Ntl. Exe. Resp. Constit.	V-Dem (2023b, 115) ("v2exrescon")
Liberal Democracy	V-Dem (2023b, 45) ("v2x_libdem")
Pro-Democr. Mass Mobil.	V-Dem (2023b, 229) ("v2cademmob")
Controls	
Nat. Contr. (Leader)	DPI (Scartascini et al. 2021)
Nat. Contr. (All Gov.)	DPI (Scartascini et al. 2021)
Elec. Democr.	V-Dem (2023b, 44) ("v2x_polyarchy")
Age Democr.	Constructed (V-Dem's "v2x_polyarchy")
Reg. Democr.	Constructed (V-Dem's"v2x_polyarchy","e_regionpol")
Inflation	World Bank (2023b)
GDP/Cap	World Bank (2023b)
GDP Growth	World Bank (2023b)
Resource Rents/GDP	World Bank (2023b)
Urbanization	World Bank (2023b)
General	
Elec. Reg. Office	V-Dem (2023b, 44) ("v2elsrgel", "v2ellocelc")

Notes: The table shows data sources for variables included in the national-level analysis.

5.1.6 V-Dem Items and Index Components

Table 5.19: Description of V-Dem Question Wording and Index Components

Indicator	Wording	Indice Construction
Horizontal Accountability	"To what extent is the ideal of horizontal government accountability achieved?"	High court independence, Lower court independence, Compliance with high court, Compliance with judiciary, Executive respects constitution, Executive oversight (by comptroller general, general prosecutor, or ombudsman), Legislature investigates in practice, Legislature bicameral, Legislature questions officials in practice v2lgqstexp
Legislative Constraints (on the national executive)	"To what extent are the legislature and government agencies e.g., comptroller general, general prosecutor, or ombudsman capable of questioning, investigating, and exercising oversight over the executive?"	Executive oversight (by comptroller general, general prosecutor, or ombudsman), Legislature investigates in practice, Legislature questions officials in practice, Legislature opposition parties
Judicial Constraints (on the national executive)	"To what extent does the executive respect the constitution and comply with court rulings, and to what extent is the judiciary able to act in an independent fashion?"	Executive respects constitution, Compliance with judiciary, Compliance with high court, High court independence, Lower court independence

National Executive Respects the Constitution	"Do members of the executive (the head of state, the head of government, and cabinet ministers) respect the constitution?"	/
CSO Repression	"Does the government attempt to repress civil society organizations (CSOs)?"	/
Media Censorship	"Does the government directly or indirectly attempt to censor the print or broadcast media?"	
Political Liberties	"To what extent are political liberties respected?"	Government censorship effort, Harassment of journalists, Media self-censorship, Freedom of discussion for men, Freedom of discussion for women, Party ban, Barriers to parties, Opposition parties autonomy, CSO entry and exit, CSO repression
Freedom of Expression	"To what extent does government respect press and media freedom, the freedom of ordinary people to discuss political matters at home and in the public sphere, as well as the freedom of academic and cultural expression?"	Government censorship effort, Harassment of journalists, Media self-censorship, Freedom of discussion for men, Freedom of discussion for women, Freedom of academic and cultural expression
Electoral Democracy	"To what extent is the ideal of electoral democracy in its fullest sense achieved?"	indices of: freedom of association, clean elections, freedom of expression, elected officials, and suffrage ($\text{v2x}_s uffr$)

Liberal Democracy	"To what extent is the ideal of liberal democracy achieved?"	Electoral democracy, equality before the law and individual liberties, judicial constraints on the executive, and legislative constraints on the executive
Pro-Democracy Mass Mobilization	"In this year, how frequent and large have events of mass mobilization for pro-democratic aims been?"	/

Notes: Source: V-Dem 2023b.

5.1.7 Overview: Included and Excluded Countries

Table 5.20: Sample Description: Included Countries

Country	Years	Regional	Office	Highest Exe	Aggregated
Albania	2007 – 2015	0	Mayor	1	0
Argentina	1991 – 2019	1	Governor	1	1
Australia	1993 – 2019	1	Premier & Chief Minister	1	1
Austria	1990 – 2019	1	Governor	1	1
Belgium	1995 – 2019	1	Regional MP	0	0
Benin	2002 – 2015	0	Mun./ Local Councillor	0	0
Bolivia	1995 – 2021	0[2]	Mayor, Governor	1	0
Bosnia & Herz.	1997 – 2021	1	Governor, Premier	1	0
Brazil	1990 – 2018	1	Governor	1	0
Bulgaria	1991 – 2019	0	Mayor	1	0
Burkina Faso	2006 – 2016	0	Local Councillor	0	0
Cape Verde	1991 – 2020	0	Local MP[3]	(0)	0
Chile	1992 – 2021	0[4]	Mayor, Governor	1	0
Colombia	1991 – 2019	1	Governor	1	0
Costa Rica	2002 – 2020	0	Mayor	1	0
Croatia	2001 – 2020	1	Prefect	1	0
Cyprus	1991 – 2006	0	Mayor	1	0
Czech Republic	2000 – 2020	0[5]	Local/ Regional MPs[6]	(0)	0
Denmark	1993 – 2021	1	Regional MP, Council Pres.	0[7]	0

2. Bolivia introduced regional elections in 2005.

3. For 2012, presidents of the municipal chamber were coded.

4. Chile introduced regional elections in 2021.

5. From 2000 onwards, regional elections were coded.

6. For 2016 and 2020, governors were coded.

7. From 2009 onwards, council presidents were coded.

Dom. Republic	1998 – 2020	0	Mayor	1	0
Ecuador	1992 – 2019	1	Prefect	1	0
El Salvador	2000 – 2018	0	Mayor	1	0
Estonia	1999 – 2021	0	Local Councilor	0[8]	0
Fiji	2005	0	Mayor	1	0
Finland	1992 – 2021	0	Local MP	0	0
France	1992 – 2021	1	Regional President	1	0
Gambia	2018	0	Local MP	0	0
Georgia	2006 – 2021	0	Mayor[9]	(1)	0
Germany	1990 – 2021	1	Minister President	1	1
Greece	1990 – 2019	1[10]	Prefect, Governor	1	0
Guatemala	1999 – 2019	0	Mayor	1	0
Honduras	1997 – 2005	0	Mayor	1	0
Hungary	1994 – 2014	1	Assembly Pres., Mayor	1	0
Iceland	1990 – 2018	0	Local MP	0	0
India	1991 – 2014	1	Chief Minister	1	1
Indonesia	2010 – 2018	1	Governor	1	1
Italy	1990 – 2020	1	Regional President	1	1
Ivory Coast	2018	1	Regional President	1	0
Latvia	2001 – 2021	0	Local MP	0	0
Lesotho	2005 – 2017	0	Local MP	0	0
Lithuania	1995 – 2019	0	Local MP, Mayor	(0)[11]	0
Luxembourg	1999 – 2017	0	Local MP	0	0
Malawi	2014	0	District Councillor	0	0
Maldives	2011 – 2021	0	Local MPs	0	0
Mali	2004 – 2016	0	Local MPs	0	0

8. For four country years, there is some missingness in cities whose councilors could be coded.

9. For 2006, local MPs were coded.

10. For 1990, local elections were coded.

11. For 2015 and 2019, mayors were coded.

Malta	1996 – 2019	0	Local MP	0	1
Mauritius	2001 – 2021	0	Local MP	0	0
Mexico	2000 – 2018	1	Governor	1	1
Moldova	1995 – 2019	1	District Councillor	0	0
Montenegro	2004 – 2012	0	Mayor	1	1
Namibia	1992 – 2020	1	Regional MP	0	0
Nepal	2017	1	Regional MP	0	0
Netherlands	1991 – 2019	1	Regional MP	0	0
Nicaragua	1996 – 2004	0	Mayor	1	0
Niger	2004, 2020	0	Local MPs	0	0
Nigeria	2014 – 2019	1	Governor	1	0
North Macedonia	2005 – 2021	0	Mayor	1	0
Norway	1991 – 2019	0	Local MPs	0	0
Panama	1994 – 2009	0	Mayor	1	0
Paraguay	1993 – 2018	1	Governor	1	0
Peru	2002 – 2018	1	Regional President	1	0
Philippines	1992 – 2016	1	Governor	1	0
Poland	1990 – 2018	0	Mayor[12]	1	0
Portugal	1993 – 2021	0	Mayor	1	0
Romania	1992 – 2020	0	County Council President	1	0
Serbia	2004 – 2012	0	Mayor	1	0
Sierra Leone	2008 – 2018	0	District Chairperson	1	0
Slovakia	1998 – 2017	1[13]	Governor	1	0
Slovenia	1994 – 2018	0	Mayor	1	0
South Africa	1999 – 2019	1	Premier	1	0
South Korea	1995 – 2018	1	Governor	1	0
Spain	1991 – 2019	1	Regional President	1	1
Sri Lanka	1997 – 2018	0	Local MPs	0	0

12. For 1990, local councillors were coded.

13. For 1998, local elections were coded.

Sweden	1991 – 2018	1	Regional Councillor	0	0
Switzerland	1991 – 2019	1	Reg. Exec. Council Members	1	1
Taiwan	1997 – 2018	1	Magistrate, Mayor	1	1
Tunisia	2018	0	Local MPs	0	0
Turkey	1994 – 2002	0	Mayor	1	0
Ukraine	2006, 2020	1	Regional MPs	0	0
United Kingdom	1991 – 2019	1	Multiple[14]	(0)	1
United States	1990 – 2018	1	Governor	1	1
Uruguay	1994 – 2020	1	Intendent	1	0
Venezuela	1992 – 2000	1	Governor	1	0
Zambia	2006 – 2011	0	Local MPs	0	0

Notes: The table shows countries and offices included in the national-level analysis. *Years* refers to the first and last subnational election included. *Regional* is "1" if highest elected subnational office is at the regional level. *Office type* explains which office was coded. If multiple offices are listed, this means that different subnational election years had different office types coded, e.g., because regional elections were introduced. *Highest Exe.* is "1" if the highest subnational executive could be coded. *Aggregated* is "1" if subnational units varied in their election timing, requiring aggregation of country-level subnational control across years.

14. All offices considered in the ISO 3166-2 norm as constituting a first-level subdivision were included.

Table 5.21: Sample Description: Excluded Countries

Country	Years	Reason Excluded
Armenia	2021	Missing Data[15]
Bangladesh	1994 – 2000	Missing Data[16]
Bhutan	2011 – 2021	Non-partisan
Canada	1990 – 2022	Incomplete data
Comoros	2006 – 2014	Missing Data
Guyana	2020	Missing Data
Israel	1993 – 2018	Non-partisan
Jamaica	1990 – 2020	Missing Data
Japan	1991 – 2019	Non-partisan
Kosovo	2002 – 2021	Other[17]
Lebanon	2010 – 2016	Non-partisan
Madagascar	1995 – 2008	Missing Data
New Zealand	1992 – 2019	Non-partisan
Palestine	2004 – 2005	Missing Data
Papua New Guinea	1992 – 2002	Missing Data
Russia	1992	Missing Data
Sao Tome and Principe	1995 – 2022	Incomplete data[18]
Senegal	1996 – 2022	Missing Data
Solomon Islands	1990 – 2020	Missing Data
Timor-Leste	2005 – 2016	Non-partisan
Trinidad and Tobago	1990 – 2020	Missing Data
Vanuatu	1990 – 2020	Missing Data

15. Additionally, only a tiny share of subnational units had elections that year.

16. Data is available, but language barrier was insurmountable.

17. Data collected, but other datasets typically lacked information, so had to be excluded in the analyses.

18. Data collected only pertained to Principe, not Sao Tome.

Notes: The table shows countries and offices excluded in the national-level analysis despite them meeting the scope conditions of being at least electoral democracies and having elections for subnational executive office.

5.1.8 Original Results vs. Intentionality Analysis

Table 5.22: Original vs. Intentionality-Centered Analysis

Model:	Original: Horizontal Account. (Broad Opp.)	Horizontal Account. (Liberal Opp.)	Original: Exe. Respects Constitution (Broad Opp.)	Exe. Respects Constitution (Liberal Opp.)
Lagged DV	0.873 (0.000)	0.858 (0.000)	0.69 (0.000)	0.67 (0.000)
Subnational Control	0.081 (0.005)	0.039 (0.128)	0.114 (0.04)	0.035 (0.48)
Electoral Democracy	0.004 (0.99)	0.14 (0.58)	0.48 (0.135)	0.32 (0.4)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	0.008 (0.001)	0.006 (0.004)	0.011 (0.003)	0.009 (0.01)
GDP Growth	-0.0008 (0.55)	-0.0003 (0.82)	0.0046 (0.12)	0.004 (0.29)
Inflation	-0.00001 (0.44)	-0.00001 (0.14)	0.0000 (0.45)	0.0000 (0.18)
Urbanization	0.003 (0.29)	0.0014 (0.22)	0.003 (0.55)	0.008 (0.17)
National Control	-0.1 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.42)	-0.077 (0.5)	0.06 (0.55)
Regional Democracy	-0.14 (0.64)	-0.22 (0.41)	-0.132 (0.794)	-0.49 (0.39)
Resource Rents/GDP	-0.017 (0.08)	-0.019 (0.03)	-0.028 (0.0002)	-0.024 (0.006)
Age of Democracy	-0.005 (0.002)	-0.005 (0.001)	0.0011 (0.72)	0.0008 (0.82)
N	436	405	436	405

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined broadly) on horizontal accountability (models 1-2) and the national executive's respect for the constitution (models 3-4). In specifications 2 and 4, opposition subnational control only includes pluralist opposition parties ($v2xpa\_antiplural < 0.359$). Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed. P-Values reported in parentheses.

5.1.9 Party Personalization and Candidate Nomination Analyses

Table 5.23: Party Personalization

Model:	All Parties	Governing Parties	Leader Parties
Lagged DV	0.33 (0.000)	0.23 (0.01)	0.26 (0.011)
Subnational Control	0.13 (0.52)	0.68 (0.02)	0.51 (0.05)
National Control	-0.23 (0.44)	-0.23 (0.47)	0.43 (0.000)
Gvt. Dummy	0.016 (0.68)	/ /	/ /
Clientelism	-0.002 (0.97)	0.064 (0.37)	0.03 (0.69)
Local Org. Strength	-0.03 (0.54)	-0.008 (0.92)	0.17 (0.17)
N	1,050	559	294

Notes: The table reports party-level results for subnational control on changes in party personalization between subnational election years and the next national legislative ones. Specifications all include party- and year fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

Table 5.24: Party Nomination Decentralization

Model:	All Parties	Governing Parties	Leader Parties
Lagged DV	0.23	0.31	0.29
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.014)
Subnational Control	-0.1	0.07	0.2
	(0.35)	(0.65)	(0.23)
National Control	0.12	-0.08	-0.495
	(0.44)	(0.82)	(0.36)
Gvt. Dummy	-0.016	/	/
	(0.45)	/	/
Clientelism	-0.02	-0.08	0.04
	(0.79)	(0.47)	(0.74)
Local Org. Strength	0.02	-0.04	-0.18
	(0.57)	(0.36)	(0.017)
N	1,050	559	294

Notes: The table reports party-level results for subnational control on changes in candidate nomination decentralization between subnational election years and the next national legislative ones. Specifications all include party- and year-fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed.

5.2 Appendix: Country-Level Analysis: Subnational Control – Pro-Democracy Mass Mobilization

Table 5.25: Full Results: Pro-Democracy Mass Mobilization

Model:	All Democracies (Broad Opp.)	All Democracies (Narrow Opp.)	Democracies Below Median (Broad Opp.)	Democracies Below Median (Nar. Opp.)
Lagged DV	0.43 (0.000)	0.42 (0.000)	0.49 (0.000)	0.49 (0.000)
Subnational Control	-0.21 (0.106)	-0.11 (0.36)	-0.546 (0.02)	-0.48 (0.12)
Electoral Democracy	-0.996 (0.36)	-1.027 (0.34)	-1.31 (0.347)	-1.082 (0.392)
GDP/Capita (thousands)	-0.0021 (0.84)	-0.0005 (0.96)	0.0043 (0.877)	0.002 (0.94)
GDP Growth	-0.006 (0.46)	-0.0056 (0.488)	-0.016 (0.128)	-0.018 (0.077)
Inflation	-0.0002 (0.006)	-0.0002 (0.005)	-0.0038 (0.044)	-0.0037 (0.045)
Urbanization	-0.025 (0.165)	-0.025 (0.15)	-0.03 (0.2)	-0.031 (0.189)
National Control	0.296 (0.31)	0.347 (0.17)	0.761 (0.12)	0.484 (0.298)
Regional Protest	0.46 (0.017)	0.456 (0.02)	0.437 (0.169)	0.43 (0.184)
N	437	437	217	217

Notes: Results for the effect of subnational control by opposition parties (defined either broadly or narrowly) on pro-democracy mass mobilization. The third and fourth specifications only include data for democracies with electoral democracy values smaller than or equal to 0.8155. Specifications all include two-way fixed effects. Cluster-robust standard errors employed. P-Values reported in parentheses.

5.3 Appendix: RDD Subnational Incumbency – National Performance

5.3.1 Additional RDD Specifications

Table 5.26: Subn. Opp. Victory Increases Vote Share in Ntl. Legis. Elections

	①	②	③	④
Bandwidth	±3.5%	±3.5%	±1%	±3.5%
Polynomial	2	1	1	1
Estimate	0.173	0.159	0.204	0.255
P-Value	(0.098)	(0.084)	(0.136)	(0.159)
Covariates	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (Left, Right)	(95, 94)	(95, 94)	(21, 24)	(84, 81)

Notes: Main RD results of state-level lower house election vote shares as a function of the opposition party's two-party vote share difference in the race for that state's highest subnational executive office. Model 1: main RD result. Model 2: main specification, now with first-order polynomial. Model 3: 1% bandwidth. Model 4: Donut RD model that excluded races within a 0.5% margin. Only government-vs.-opposition subnational races included in terms of affiliations of the top two contestants.

Table 5.27: Subn. Opp. Victory Increases Cumulative Opposition Vote Share in National Legislative Elections

	①	②	③	④
Bandwidth	±3.5%	±3.5%	±5%	±5%
Polynomial	2	2	1	2
Estimate	0.242	0.282	0.188	0.254
P-Value	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.005)	(0.002)
Covariates	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (Left, Right)	(95, 94)	(95, 94)	(138, 125)	(138, 125)

Notes: RD results of state-level lower house election vote shares of all opposition parties combined as a function of the opposition party's two-party vote share difference in the race for that state's highest subnational executive office. Model 1: main specification. Model 2: main specification, now with covariate adjustment. Model 3: 5% bandwidth and first-order polynomial. Model 4: 5% bandwidth and second-order polynomial. Only government-vs.-opposition subnational races included in terms of affiliations of the top two contestants. Parties only entered if they received at least 5% of valid state-level votes in the national lower house elections.

Table 5.28: Subn. Opp. Victory and Total Number of Relevant Contesting Parties in National Lower House Elections

	①	②	③	④
Bandwidth	±3.5%	±3.5%	±5%	±5%
Polynomial	2	2	1	2
Estimate	0.355	0.389	0.793	0.52
P-Value	(0.851)	(0.809)	(0.47)	(0.709)
Covariates	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (Left, Right)	(95, 94)	(95, 94)	(138, 125)	(138, 125)

Notes: RD results of the number of parties obtaining at least 1% of votes in the national lower house elections in that state as a function of the opposition party's two-party vote share difference in the race for that state's highest subnational executive office. Model 1: main specification. Model 2: main specification, now with covariate adjustment. Model 3: 5% bandwidth and first-order polynomial. Model 4: 5% bandwidth and second-order polynomial. Only government-vs.-opposition subnational races included.

Table 5.29: Subn. Opp. Victory and Total Number of Contesting Parties

	①	②	③	④
Bandwidth	±3.5%	±3.5%	±5%	±5%
Polynomial	2	2	1	2
Estimate	6.943	5.298	2.844	4.321
P-Value	(0.227)	(0.289)	(0.424)	(0.325)
Covariates	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (Left, Right)	(95, 94)	(95, 94)	(138, 125)	(138, 125)

Notes: RD results of the number of all parties contesting the national lower house elections in that state, now irrespective of obtained vote share, as a function of the opposition party's two-party vote share difference in the race for that state's highest subnational executive office. Model 1: main specification. Model 2: main specification, now with covariate adjustment. Model 3: 5% bandwidth and first-order polynomial. Model 4: 5% bandwidth and second-order polynomial. Only subnational races included in which an opposition and a party in national government are represented among the top two contestants.

Table 5.30: Subn. Opp. Victory Increases Total Number of Relevant Opposition Parties in National Lower House Elections

	①	②	③	④
Bandwidth	±3.5%	±3.5%	±5%	±5%
Polynomial	2	2	1	2
Estimate	0.881	1.066	0.862	0.865
P-Value	(0.048)	(0.026)	(0.014)	(0.043)
Covariates	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (Left, Right)	(95, 94)	(95, 94)	(138, 125)	(138, 125)

Notes: RD results of the number of opposition parties contesting the national lower house elections in that state that receive at least 5% of the state-level vote as a function of the opposition party's two-party vote share difference in the race for that state's highest subnational executive office. Model 1: main specification. Model 2: main specification, now with covariate adjustment. Model 3: 5% bandwidth and first-order polynomial. Model 4: 5% bandwidth and second-order polynomial. Only subnational races included in which an opposition and a party in national government are represented among the top two contestants.

5.3.2 Balance: Candidate Characteristics

Table 5.31: Candidate Characteristics in Close Subnational Races by Opposition Status and Subnational Outcome

	Opp (W)	Opp (L)	Gov (W)	Gov (L)	N(info available)
Pol. Experience	0.823	0.888	0.776	0.859	308
Higher Education	0.934	0.925	0.974	0.926	275
Home Region	0.703	0.721	0.756	0.759	274
Birth Year	1955	1952	1957	1955	288
Gender	0.939	0.877	0.939	0.889	447
NA Share	0.3775	0.4575	0.4	0.5075	/
N	125	138	138	125	526

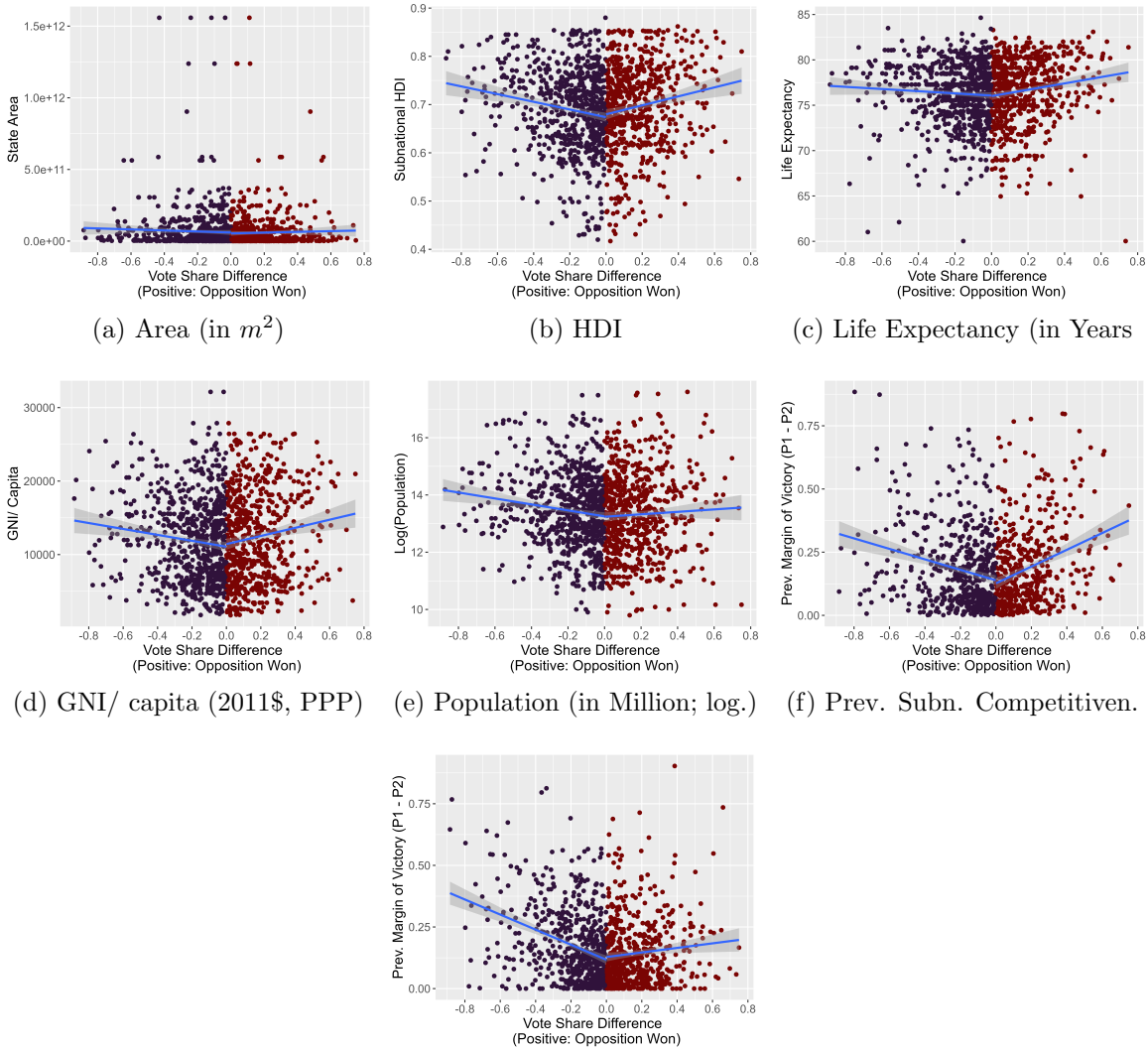
Notes: The table reports candidate characteristics for the top-two contestants in close subnational races (running variable: ±10%). Values represent averages for whom information was available. To describe variables: Political experience is "1" if the candidate occupied prior political office. Higher education is "1" if college was attended. Home region is "1" if candidate born in the state that they then ran in. Gender = "1" if male.

5.3.3 Balance: State-Level Characteristics

Table 5.32: Covariate Balance: Two-Sided T-Tests Across Bandwidths

	±3.5%	±5%	±10%	Full
Subn. Area (in m^2)	0.821	0.966	0.73	0.286
Subn. HDI	0.872	0.864	0.889	0.147
Subn. Life Exp.	0.493	0.914	0.504	0.075
Subn. GNI	0.74	0.944	0.838	0.091
Subn. Pop. (log)	0.664	0.867	0.96	0.059
Subn. Margin of Vic. (t_{-1})	0.828	0.655	0.877	0.573
Ntl. Legisl. Margin of Vic. (t_{-1})	0.499	0.42	0.222	0.000
N	189	263	526	1,368

Notes: The table reports p-values for two-sided t-tests to detect state-level covariate imbalances. Only gov-vs.-opp races included. Bandwidths refer to the two-party vote share difference between the government and opposition party.



(a) Area (in m^2)

(b) HDI

(c) Life Expectancy (in Years

(d) GNI/ capita (2011$, PPP)

(e) Population (in Million; log.)

(f) Prev. Subn. Competitiven.

(g) Prev. Ntl. Legisl. Compet.

Figure 5.2: State-Level Balance in Pre-Treatment Covariates

Sources: geoBoundaries Project; Runfola et al. (2020). Global Data Lab; Smits and Permanyer (2019). World Bank (2023a). Subnational Elections Database; Michel (2023). CLEA; Kollman et al. (2016).

5.3.4 Balance: Placebo RDDs With State-Level Pre-Treatment Covariates

Table 5.33: Robustness Checks: State-Level Placebo RDDs 1

DV:	Area (billion m^2)	HDI	GNI	Life Expectancy
Estimate (Opp. Victory)	2.07	-0.058	-2962	-3.1
P-Value	(0.47)	(0.08)	(0.27)	(0.04)
Covariates	No	No	No	No
N	189	189	189	189

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational opposition victories on state-level pre-treatment covariates for the optimal bandwidth, ±3.5%, used in the main RDD specification. Only gov-vs.-opp races included. Outcomes are as follows: Model 1: Geographic area. Model 2: Human Development Index. Model 3: Gross National Income. Model 4: Life Expectancy.

Table 5.34: Robustness Checks: State-Level Placebo RDDs 2

DV:	Population (1000s)	Lagged Forcing Variable	Lagged Legislative VS-Difference
Estimate (Opp. Victory)	1115	-0.014	-0.064
P-Value	(0.19)	(0.822)	(0.29)
Covariates	No	No	No
N	189	135	154

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational opposition victories on state-level pre-treatment covariates for the optimal bandwidth, ±3.5%, used in the main RDD specification. Only gov-vs.-opp races included. Outcomes are as follows: Model 1: Population size in thousands. Model 2: Vote share difference in previous Gov-vs.-Opp subnational race. Model 3: Vote Share Difference between top two parties in previous national lower house elections (in that state).

5.3.5 Balance: Placebo RDDs With Country-Level Pre-Treatment Covariates

Table 5.35: Robustness Checks: Country-Level Placebo RDDs 1

DV:	Elec. Democr.	Lib. Democr.	Subn. El. Quality	Leg. Vote Share	Pres. Vote Share
Estimate (Opp. Victory)	-0.036	-0.049	-0.134	-0.21	-1.2
P-Value	(0.49)	(0.52)	(0.7)	(0.97)	(0.76)
Covariates	No	No	No	No	No
N	189	189	189	189	189

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational opposition victories on country-level pre-treatment covariates for the optimal bandwidth, ±3.5%, used in the main RDD specification. Only gov-vs.-opp races included. Outcomes all rely on V-Dem data and are as follows: Model 1: Electoral democracy index. Model 2: Liberal democracy index. Model 3: Subnational elections free and fair. Model 4: Vote share of largest (lower chamber) party in previous national legislative elections. Model 5: Vote share of president in previous presidential elections.

Table 5.36: Robustness Checks: Country-Level Placebo RDDs 2

DV:	GDP/Capita	Inflation	Oil Rent/ GDP	Gas Rent/ GDP	Share Pop. Urban
Estimate (Opp. Victory)	-2049	29	-1.56	-0.35	-0.447
P-Value	(0.24)	(0.46)	(0.51)	(0.23)	(0.92)
Covariates	No	No	No	No	No
N	185	155	189	189	189

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational opposition victories on country-level pre-treatment covariates for the optimal bandwidth, ±3.5%, used in the main RDD specification. Only gov-vs.-opp races included. Outcomes are as follows: Model 1: GDP/capita. Model 2: Inflation rate. Model 3: Oil rent/ GDP. Model 4: Gas rent/GDP. Model 5: Share of population residing in urban area.

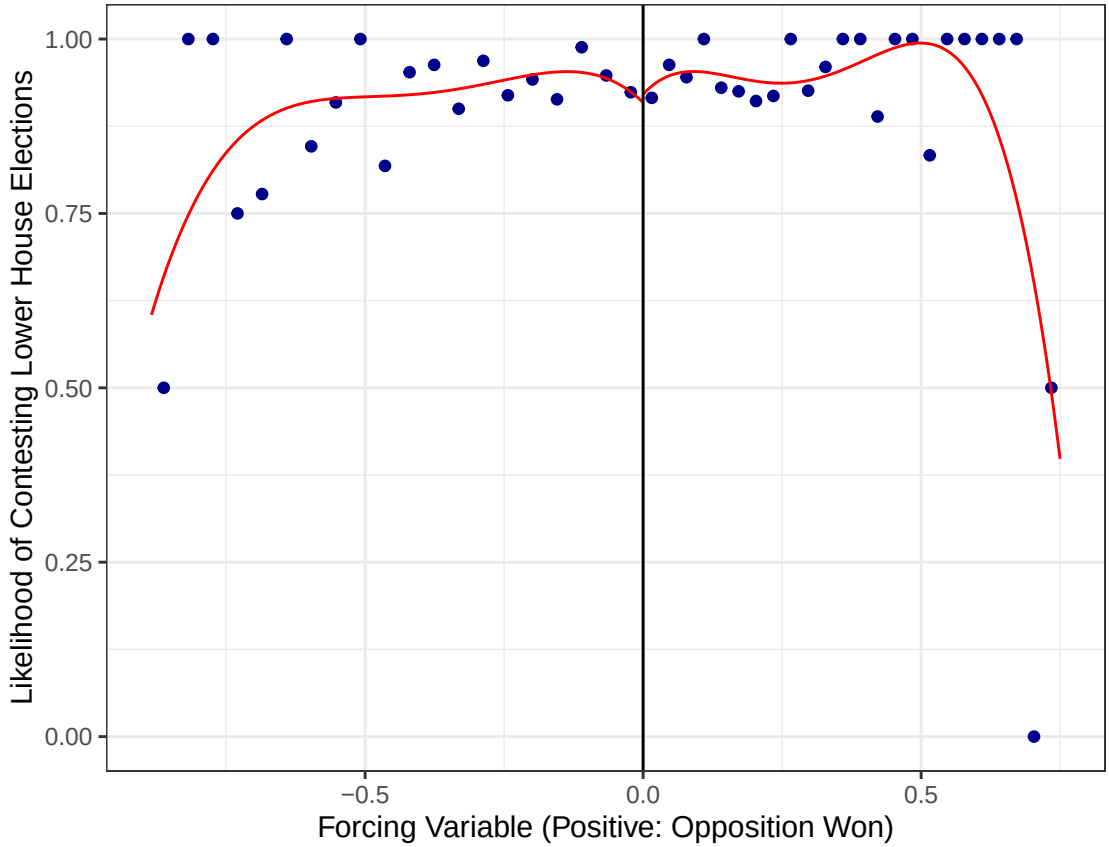
Table 5.37: Robustness Checks: Country-Level Placebo RDDs 3

DV:	Unemployed (Share)	Protest	RAI	Year
Estimate (Opp. Victory)	0.828	0.116	1.79	-6.82
P-Value	(0.56)	(0.8)	(0.61)	(0.041)
Covariates	No	No	No	No
N	160	189	189	189

Notes: The table reports results for the effect of subnational opposition victories on country-level pre-treatment covariates for the optimal bandwidth, ±3.5%, used in the main RDD specification. Only gov-vs.-opp races included. Outcomes are as follows: Model 1: Share unemployed of labor force. Model 2: Frequency & size of pro-democracy mass mobilization. Model 3: Regional Authority score. Model 4: Subnational Election Year.

5.3.6 Balance: Likelihood of Contesting Next Legislative Elections

Figure 5.3: RD Plot: Probability of Contesting Lower House Elections



5.3.7 Summary Statistics: State-Level Analysis

Table 5.38: Summary Statistics: State-Level Analysis

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Independent Variable					
Subnational Opp. Party Vote Share (Absolute)	0.4	0.13	0.05	0.82	1,368
Running Variable (Opp_{VS}-Gov_{VS} (Two-Party))	-0.02	0.25	-0.88	0.75	1,368
Outcomes					
Lower House Opposition Party Vote Share	0.26	0.16	0	0.71	1,368
Close Elec.: Aggr. Opposition Vote Share	0.48	0.16	0	0.93	263
Secondary Outcomes					
Close Elec.: Number Parties Contesting	12.35	9.14	2	55	263
Close Elec.: Number Parties Contesting (1%+)	6.83	3.43	2	23	263
Close Elec.: No. Opp. Parties Contesting (5%+)	2.28	1.05	1	6	263
Controls					
Subn. HDI	0.69	0.09	0.42	0.88	1,368
Subn. Population Size (Million)	1.75	3.82	0.02	44.02	1,368
Regional Elections Dummy	0.62	0.49	0	1	1,368
No Term Limit Dummy	0.6	0.49	0	1	1,368
Two-Round System Dummy	0.15	0.36	0	1	1,368
Area (log)	23.39	1.87	17.7	28.07	1,368
General					
Subnational Election Year	2006	7.63	1990	2020	1,368
National Lower House Election Year	2009	7.76	1993	2022	1,368
Opposition Party Contests Nationally	0.94	0.24	0	1	1,368

Notes: The table shows summary statistics for variables included in the state-level analysis. All outcomes refer to state-level characteristics of the election for the national lower house. Missing values for population size were extrapolated.

5.4 Appendix: Coding Schemes

Coding Scheme: Country-Level Subnational Election Outcomes (1990-2021)

1. Country (pre-coded)
2. Year (of regular subnational elections)
3. Elected regional office exists (1 = yes, 0 = no) (pre-coded)
4. Name of administrative division (in English; e.g., state, region, province, municipality, etc.)
5. Wikipedia link with background on this administrative division
6. Name of office included (e.g., governor or mayor)
7. Election date (only include if all elections at that level for that year take place the same day; format: mm/dd/yyyy)
8. Number of seats allocated that year
9. Number of seats allocated that year that were coded (e.g., were allocated to a party or identified as having been won by independents)
10. Party 1: Name of party that won the most seats that year
    - 10.1. Number of seats obtained
    - 10.2. WhoGov: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)[1]
    - 10.3. WhoGov: Is the regime leader from this party? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    - 10.4. VParty: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    - 10.5. VParty: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    - 10.6. DPI: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    - 10.7. DPI: Seat Share in Last National Lower House Elections
    - 10.8. DPI: Party Ideology
    - 10.9. DPI: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
11. Party 2: Name of party that won second most seats that year
    - 11.1. Number of seats obtained
    - 11.2. WhoGov: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    - 11.3. WhoGov: Is the regime leader from this party? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    - 11.4. VParty: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    - 11.5. VParty: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    - 11.6. DPI: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    - 11.7. DPI: Seat Share in Last National Lower House Elections
    - 11.8. DPI: Party Ideology
    - 11.9. DPI: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)

[1] As there is no perfect identifier across datasets, information from Who Governs, VParty, and DPI had to be manually matched based on party names. As explained in the main text, definitions of what constitutes the national government – as well as relevance thresholds employed for inclusion in the dataset – differ across these sources.

Figure 5.4: Coding Scheme: Country-Level Subnational Election Outcomes

12. Party 3: Name of party that won third most seats that year

    12.1. Number of seats obtained
    12.2. WhoGov: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    12.3. WhoGov: Is the regime leader from this party? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    12.4. VParty: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    12.5. VParty: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    12.6. DPI: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    12.7. DPI: Seat Share in Last National Lower House Elections
    12.8. DPI: Party Ideology
    12.9. DPI: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)

13. Party 4: Name of party that won fourth most seats that year

    13.1. Number of seats obtained
    13.2. WhoGov: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    13.3. WhoGov: Is the regime leader from this party? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    13.4. VParty: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    13.5. VParty: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    13.6. DPI: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    13.7. DPI: Seat Share in Last National Lower House Elections
    13.8. DPI: Party Ideology
    13.9. DPI: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)

14. Party 5: Name of party that won fifth most seats that year

    14.1. Number of seats obtained
    14.2. WhoGov: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    14.3. WhoGov: Is the regime leader from this party? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    14.4. VParty: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    14.5. VParty: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    14.6. DPI: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    14.7. DPI: Seat Share in Last National Lower House Elections
    14.8. DPI: Party Ideology
    14.9. DPI: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)

15. Party 6: Name of party that won sixth most seats that year

    15.1. Number of seats obtained
    15.2. WhoGov: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    15.3. WhoGov: Is the regime leader from this party? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    15.4. VParty: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    15.5. VParty: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    15.6. DPI: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    15.7. DPI: Seat Share in Last National Lower House Elections
    15.8. DPI: Party Ideology
    15.9. DPI: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)

16. Party 7: Name of party that won seventh most seats that year

    16.1. Number of seats obtained
    16.2. WhoGov: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    16.3. WhoGov: Is the regime leader from this party? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    16.4. VParty: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    16.5. VParty: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    16.6. DPI: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    16.7. DPI: Seat Share in Last National Lower House Elections
    16.8. DPI: Party Ideology
    16.9. DPI: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)

17. Party 8: Name of party that won eighth most seats that year

    17.1. Number of seats obtained
    17.2. WhoGov: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    17.3. WhoGov: Is the regime leader from this party? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    17.4. VParty: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    17.5. VParty: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    17.6. DPI: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    17.7. DPI: Seat Share in Last National Lower House Elections
    17.8. DPI: Party Ideology
    17.9. DPI: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)

18. Party 9: Name of party that won ninth most seats that year

    18.1. Number of seats obtained
    18.2. WhoGov: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    18.3. WhoGov: Is the regime leader from this party? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    18.4. VParty: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    18.5. VParty: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)
    18.6. DPI: Party Identifier (Party Abbreviation)
    18.7. DPI: Seat Share in Last National Lower House Elections
    18.8. DPI: Party Ideology
    18.9. DPI: Is party part of the national executive? (1 = yes, 0 = no, empty if no information)

19. Certainty of Coding (0 = low, 1 = medium, 2 = high)

20. Sources (please include URLs)

21. Comments

Julian Michel
Last Updated: 04/11/2022

Coding Scheme: Subnational Election Results in Latin America (1990-2021)

Note: Information for I-IV is preloaded by me, so you don't need to code it.

General Information & Incumbency: Regional Elections

I. Country
II. Year
III. State
IV. Does elected regional office exist in democratic country-year? (If not, skip V-X.)
V. Incumbent Governor (January 1st) (If vacant, enter NA.) (Please copy paste names so that they are exactly the same!)
VI. Party of incumbent Governor (January 1st)
VII. If incumbent changed over last year, why did this change occur?
- No change (0)
- Concluded term and did not seek reelection (1)
- Concluded term, sought reelection, but lost (2)
- Did not conclude term – stepped down to run for or be appointed to higher office (3)
- Did not conclude term – stepped down after losing political support (4)
- Did not conclude term – stepped down due to health issues or natural death (5)
- Did not conclude term – stepped down for personal reasons (6)
- Did not conclude term – recalled in a recall election (7)
- Did not conclude term – recalled by subnational council (8)
- Did not conclude term – recalled by president (9)
- Did not conclude term – lost office due to criminal investigation or imprisonment (10)
- Did not conclude term – irregularly removed (e.g., killed or placed under house arrest) (11)
- Did not conclude term – office was abolished (12)
- Other – please specify (13)
- Not clear why incumbent changed (14)

VIII. Level of certainty of governor coding (0= low, 1=intermediate, 2=high)
IX. Sources governor coding (open entry format – please include reference to all sources you used and downloaded)

Regional Election Results

X. Election for governor position that year (0= No, 1 = Yes) (answer a-t only if "Yes")
a. On which exact date took the election place? (if multiple, list last day of first election round) (format: mm/dd, so for January 12th it would be 01/12)
b. Name of candidate who received the most votes (if vote for party list and/ or indirect election, leave blank; if multiple rounds, enter values for last round)
c. Name of party this candidate ran for (if independent, say independent)

Figure 5.5: Coding Scheme: State-Level Election Results in Latin America

d. Percentage of votes this candidate received (out of all votes cast, including invalid and blank ones; if votes are cast for parties, list party vote share)[1]
e. If indirect election: Number of councilors obtained by the party[2]
f. Name of candidate with second-most votes
g. Name of party this candidate ran for
h. Percentage of votes this candidate received
i. If indirect election: Number of councilors obtained by the party
j. Name of candidate with third-most votes
k. Name of party this candidate ran for
l. Percentage of votes this candidate received
m. If indirect election: Number of councilors obtained by the party
n. Name of candidate with fourth-most votes
o. Name of party this candidate ran for
p. Percentage of votes this candidate received
q. If indirect election: Number of councilors obtained by the party
r. If indirect election: Total number of councilors in the council
s. Level of certainty of governor election coding (0= low, 1=intermediate, 2=high)
t. Sources governor election coding (open entry format)

General Information & Incumbency: Local Elections

XI. Does elected local office exist in democratic country-year? (If not, continue with XV) (preloaded)
XII. City name (preloaded)[3]
XIII. Incumbent mayor (January 1st) (if vacant, enter NA)
  a. Party of incumbent mayor
  b. If incumbent changed over last year, why did this change occur?
    - No change (0)
    - Concluded term and did not seek reelection (1)
    - Concluded term, sought reelection, but lost (2)
    - Did not conclude term – stepped down to run for or be appointed to higher office (3)
    - Did not conclude term – stepped down after losing political support (4)
    - Did not conclude term – stepped down due to health issues or natural death (5)
    - Did not conclude term – stepped down for personal reasons (6)
    - Did not conclude term – recalled in a recall election (7)
    - Did not conclude term – recalled by subnational council (8)
    - Did not conclude term – recalled by president (9)
    - Did not conclude term – lost office due to criminal investigation or imprisonment (10)

[1] Note that some sources used were not explicit about whether vote shares pertained only to valid or all votes cast.
[2] Note that information for indirectly elected subnational governments did ultimately not enter the analysis.
[3] One city by state was chosen in the following order: (a) national capital, (b) city that is among the country's ten most populous, (c) state capital. Initially, we also coded a number of municipal elections for countries with regional elected office, but this data was eventually not used in the analysis.

- Did not conclude term – irregularly removed (e.g., killed or placed under house arrest) (11)
- Did not conclude term – office was abolished (12)
- Other – please specify (13)
- Not clear why incumbent changed (14)

c. Level of certainty of mayor coding (0= low, 1=intermediate, 2=high)
d. Sources mayor coding (open entry format)

Local Election Results

XIV. Election for mayoral position that year? (0=No, 1=Yes) (answer a-t only if "Yes")
a. On which exact date took the election place? (if multiple, list last day of first election round) (format: mm/dd, so for January 12th it would be 01/12)
b. Name of candidate who received the most votes (if vote for party list and/ or indirect election, leave blank; if multiple rounds, enter values for last round)
c. Name of party this candidate ran for (if independent, state "independent")
d. Percentage of votes this candidate received (out of all votes cast, including invalid and blank ones; if votes are made for parties, list party vote share)
e. If indirect election: Number of councilors obtained by the party
f. Name of candidate with second-most votes
g. Name of party this candidate ran for
h. Percentage of votes this candidate received
i. If indirect election: Number of councilors obtained by the party
j. Name of candidate with third-most votes
k. Name of party this candidate ran for
l. Percentage of votes this candidate received
m. If indirect election: Number of councilors obtained by the party
n. Name of candidate with fourth-most votes
o. Name of party this candidate ran for
p. Percentage of votes this candidate received
q. If indirect election: Number of councilors obtained by the party
r. If indirect election: Total number of councilors in the council
s. Level of certainty of mayor election coding (0= low, 1=intermediate, 2=high)
t. Sources mayor election coding (open entry format)

XV. Were regular municipal elections held that year? (only code a-k if "Yes")
a. Which number of mayor positions did the most successful party receive?
b. Name of party that won most mayorships
c. Which number of mayor positions did the second-most successful party receive?
d. Name of party that won second-most mayorships
e. Which number of mayor positions did the third-most successful party receive?
f. Name of party that won third-most mayorships
g. Which number of mayor positions did the fourth-most successful party receive?

h. Name of party that won fourth-most mayorships
i. Number of total mayoral positions contested during regular municipal elections that year?
j. Level of certainty of overall mayor election coding (0= low, 1=intermediate, 2=high)
k. Sources overall mayor election coding (open entry format)

XVI. Comments

Julian Michel
06/21/2022

Coding Scheme: Framework of Local and Regional Elections (1990-2021)

1. Administrative Tier
    - Regional (1)
    - Municipal (2)

2. Election Years Covered (e.g., 1990-2021)

3. What is the scope of the coverage? (Which units are governed by these rules? All or only some units at this administrative tier?)
    - Universal coverage (1)
    - Geographically-defined coverage (2)
        - Which geographic logic determines coverage? (E.g., states have their own rules. Open entry.)
    - Population-based coverage (2)
        - Which population-based logic determines coverage? (E.g., at which population sizes do rules change? E.g., cities with more than 100k citizens vs. smaller ones. Open entry.)

4. Type of Electoral System
    - Direct election of head of executive (1)
        - Absolute majority needed? (I)
            - When do candidates enter a second round? Explain in words.
        - Relative majority needed? (II)
        - Other (III)
            - Explain in words.
    - Indirect election of head of executive (2)
        - Type of electoral system for the legislative body electing the executive? (E.g., for regional parliamentarians or city councilors. Options taken from IDEA 2005.)
            - First Past the Post (1)
            - Block Vote (2)
            - Party Block Vote (3)
            - Alternative Vote (4)
            - Two-Round System (5)
            - List Proportional Representation (6)
            - Single Transferable Vote (7)
            - Mixed Member Proportional (8)
            - Parallel System (9)
            - Single Non-Transferable Vote (10)
            - Limited Vote (11)
            - Borda Count (12)
            - Other (13) - please explain in words.
        - Which decision rule is applied to elect members of the legislative body? (Select all that apply – e.g., a mixed system may have multiple.)
            - Absolute majority
            - Relative majority
            - Proportional representation

Figure 5.6: Coding Scheme: Subnational Electoral System Design in Latin America

                - ❖ How many seats allocated in district?
                - ❖ Aggregation of votes to party level?
            - Other – please explain
        - Are there additional seats allocated – either to strengthen the winners or compensate losers of the electoral allocation of seats? If so, which? Explain in words.
        - How do members elect the head of the executive?
            - Consensus (1)
            - Supermajority (2)
            - Absolute majority (3)
            - Relative majority (4)
            - Other (5) – please explain
        - Are elections staggered? (staggered means some council members are up for reelection while others are not; e.g., as in the U.S. Senate)
            - Yes
                - ❖ In which temporal interval? (e.g., every 2 years half the council gets elected – explain in words.)
            - No
        - How many votes does each citizen have? (e.g., one vs. one for each councilor to be elected)
        - What are citizens voting for?
            - Candidate
            - Party list
            - Mixed (e.g., they can choose a list or a candidate)
- Other (3)
    - Please explain in words.

5. Term Duration for the executive (in years)

6. Term limits for executive
    - None (1)
    - One term (2)
    - Two consecutive terms (3)
    - Two non-consecutive terms (e.g., incumbent has to step down, but can run again after someone else had the office for a term; but only possible once) (4)
    - More than two non-consecutive terms (5)

7. Who can recall the executive head? (Select all that apply)
    - President (1)
        - Are there special circumstances that need to occur for the president to have the right to remove the executive head? If so, which?
    - National Ministry of Local Affairs (2)
        - Are there special circumstances that need to occur for the National Ministry of Local Affairs to have the right to remove the executive head? If so, which?
    - Council at that administrative tier (3)
    - Citizens in a recall election (4)

    - What requirements are needed for it to be successful (e.g., turnout and vote share)? Describe in words.
- Other (5) – Please explain in words.

8. Is there a quota? (E.g., based on gender, ethnicity or other ascriptive identity categories)
    - No (1)
    - Gender quota (2)
    - Quota for indigenous or ethnic group (3)
    - Other – please explain (4)

9. What type of legal framework governs elections? (Select all that apply)
    - Constitution (1)
    - National law or decree (2)
    - State law or decree (3)
    - Municipal law or decree (4)

10. Name of document(s) used

11. Comments

Julian Michel
12/20/2022

Coding Scheme – Candidate Characteristics

Note that except for the last question, all questions are evaluated at the time the candidate ran for this election. This means if their characteristics changed after the election, this is not reflected in the coding. For example, when a candidate attended university only after the election, it would be coded as "did not attend university."

1. Does the candidate have prior political experience in elected public office? (E.g., as a member of a city council or regional/ national parliament. Judges/ constitutional assembly can be elected, too. If indirectly elected, it counts too – appointed does not.)
    - No (0)
    - Yes (1)
    - No information (-99)

1.1. If yes, at which level?
    - Local (0)
    - Regional (1)
    - National (2)
    - International (3)

2. In which year was the candidate first associated with this party (e.g., as a member or candidate)? List the year, or "NA" if no information or unclear.

3. Did the candidate attend university? (Note: Not important whether they completed a degree.)
    - No (0)
    - Yes (1)
    - No information (-99)

4. What was the candidate's last known occupation before becoming a politician? (List in words. If they became a politician right after school, note "student".)

5. Was the candidate born in the region for which they are competing for office in this election?
    - No (0)
    - Yes (1)
    - No information (-99)

6. What is the candidate's year of birth? (Open entry)

7. What is the candidate's gender?
    - Female (0)
    - Male (1)
    - Other (2)

Figure 5.7: Coding Scheme: Candidate Characteristics in Close Latin American Elections

8. Was the candidate previously a member of an intermediary organization? (E.g., NGOs, unions, or civil society organizations)
    - No (0)
    - Yes (1)
    - No information (-99)

9. Was the candidate previously involved in mobilizing protests?
    - No (0)
    - Yes (1)
    - No information (-99)

10. Was the candidate – either before or after the election – sentenced by a court for illegal activity?
    - No (0)
    - Yes (1)
    - No information (-99)

    10.1. If yes, when was the candidate sentenced?
    - Only before the election (0)
    - Only after the election (1)
    - Both before and after the election (2)
    - No information (-99)

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