

# Pathways of Subnational Undemocratic Regime Erosion: Varieties of Federalism in the Americas

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Recent scholarship has examined the persistence and erosion of subnational undemocratic regimes (SURs) within nationally democratic countries. This article analyzes how “varieties of federalism” generate different levels of subnational unit autonomy (SUA), which in turn shape distinct pathways of SUR erosion. Because SURs across federations do not enjoy the same degree of autonomy, the coalitions required to weaken them vary. In high-SUA federations, SUR erosion typically demands broad coalitions spanning all three federal branches and sometimes the military. In low-SUA federations, informal partisan agreements may suffice, while medium-SUA systems tend to exhibit intermediate patterns that require moderately encompassing coalitions. Coalition dynamics are especially important in presidential federations, where coordination among federal branches might not be possible for SUR erosion. We show this argument through a comparative historical analysis of Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States, demonstrating how cross-national differences in six key federal institutions generate distinct pathways of SUR erosion.

*Key words:* varieties of federalism; democracy; subnational; erosion; regime juxtaposition.

Scholars have made significant progress in the study of subnational undemocratic regimes (SURs), examining why many of them survived national transitions to democracy, how central governments often seek their reproduction rather than elimination, and what explains their erosion (Gibson 2005, 2013; Giraudy 2010, 2015; Gervasoni 2010, 2018). To explain subnational transitions to democracy, some have

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emphasized top-down efforts by national governments to democratize SURs through the breaching of governors' attempts at "boundary control" (Gibson 2005), while others privilege subnational causes, including the cohesiveness of state and party institutions within each SUR (Mickey 2015).<sup>1</sup> To date, however, scholars have paid little attention to the federal institutional context in which SURs are embedded, which is our starting point. We argue that specific institutions of federalism—whose design and operation vary widely across countries—shape the opportunities and constraints that national and subnational actors face when attempting to weaken these subnational regimes. Placing federal institutions at the center of the analysis allows us to bridge national and subnational levels of analysis and undertake the kind of cross-national-subnational comparisons that are largely absent from existing scholarship.

We argue that "varieties of federalism" result in different types of subnational unit autonomy (SUA), with important implications for the kinds of pathways that can lead to SUR erosion.<sup>2</sup> Simply put, we hypothesize that, the greater the autonomy, the broader the coalition that opponents of SURs will likely have to construct. Our theory suggests that, in federal systems with high levels of SUA, the erosion of SURs tends to involve broad pro-subnational democracy coalitions. In such contexts, it may be that SUR erosion can only take place through institutionally-encompassing alliances that include all three branches of the federal government—and, in some cases, even the military. These broad coalitions are more likely to have the institutional reach necessary to challenge SURs endowed with strong autonomy and robust defenses against both federal encroachment and the subnational regime opponents who are demanding regime change. We refer to this first possible pathway as *multi-branch erosion*. Conversely, in federal systems with limited SUA, SUR erosion is unlikely to demand the formal participation of all three federal branches and may in fact occur merely through informal agreements between political parties. In these cases, fewer institutional actors tend to be involved because subnational autocrats wield far weaker institutional safeguards against federal encroachments—a dynamic we term *partisan erosion*. Between these two extremes in federal systems where SUA is at a medium level, we anticipate the salience of moderately encompassing coalitions to weaken SURs. These coalitions can take a variety of forms in response to specific institutional designs. For example, in federal systems that recognize the constitutional independence of municipalities, it is possible to identify a pathway of *inter-governmental erosion* in the form of coalitions that unite municipal with federal actors in order to erode SURs at the intermediate level of government. In federal systems that enable the center to intervene and dismiss individual provincial governments on a temporary basis, we are likely to see more irregular and intermittent patterns of subnational democratization, which we characterize as *episodic erosion*.<sup>3</sup>

Using comparative historical analysis and building on our other work on the origins and persistence of SURs in the Americas (Eaton and Giraudy Forthcoming), we study the distinctive pathways of SUR erosion in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States. Unlike almost all other federations in the world, these four American cases combine federalism with presidentialism, an institutional arrangement that likely complicates the ability of the center to achieve subnational democratization because it divides power between separately-constituted executive and legislative branches. This separation of powers puts a premium on the construction of coalitions to erode SURs, but how that erosion actually takes place reflects differences in how federalism is designed in each case. Our goal is simply to show that SURs in the Americas have been eroded in markedly different ways, and that cross-national variation in six key federal institutions does indeed help us understand these pathways of erosion. Building on Gibson's (2012) distinction between "center-led" and "party-led" transitions to subnational democracy, we argue that paying greater attention to the "varieties of federalism" helps to show that center-led transitions can in fact take a number of distinct forms, including the four that we identify in this article.

In the United States, which is characterized by much higher levels of SUA than the three Latin American cases, we find a pathway of multi-branch erosion whereby an institutionally complex coalition of all three federal branches was necessary to end SURs in the South. For subnational democratization to be finally achieved in the 1960s and 1970s, Congress had to pass the 1964 Civil Rights and 1965 Voting Rights Acts, the judiciary had to intervene through a lengthy series of decisions beginning with *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, and the executive branch ultimately had to send in the National Guard. In Mexico, by contrast, a purely partisan and informal coalition between the countries' three main parties in the so-called Pact for Mexico in 2012 sufficed to overcome the very limited autonomy of the governors. Low levels of SUA in Mexico made it impossible for governors to resist this *ad hoc* inter-party pact, which introduced changes that significantly undermined gubernatorial authority over state-level electoral institutions. Argentina and Brazil can be seen as intermediate cases in the sense that they are both marked by medium levels of SUA, but for different institutional reasons. In Argentina, undemocratic governors were vulnerable because of the institution of federal intervention, which enabled the center to remove provincial governments "from above." In Brazil, undemocratic governors were vulnerable because of the institution of municipal autonomy "from below," which facilitated an inter-governmental pro-democracy coalition between municipal and federal actors, linking together the country's first-ever Workers' Party President on the one hand and progressive mayors on the other hand.

The article is divided into two main sections and a conclusion. The next section advances definitions of SURs and SUR erosion, as well as our argument about varieties of federalism, SUA types, and pathways of SUR erosion. This section is

followed by case studies of four federal countries: Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States. The article concludes with a summary of the argument and a discussion of the distinct implications of the pathways we have identified.

## Varieties of federalism, types of SUA, and pathways of SUR erosion

Before turning to pathways of SUR decline, definitions of SURs and SUR erosion are in order. These regimes exist at the intermediate level of governance, functioning at the provincial or state level rather than at the municipal or local level. While mayors can certainly govern in an undemocratic fashion at the municipal level, municipalities do not tend to create their own distinct political regimes, which has led scholars of subnational regime juxtaposition to focus on intermediate-level regimes in states and provinces. Scholars have shown, however, that municipalities can play a key role in destabilizing SURs from within (Gibson 2013; Giraudy 2015).

SURs are civilian electoral regimes that occupy a hybrid space between full authoritarianism and full democracy. As Giraudy (2015, 7) explains, “SURs can be clearly distinguished from subnational authoritarian regimes because they hold regular, multiparty elections.” In these regimes, universal suffrage is the norm, citizens can organize public protests, opposition parties are able to win legislative seats or control municipalities, and the media is not entirely subjected to censorship or totalitarian control. However, what differentiates SURs from fully democratic subnational regimes is the extent to which opposition parties can effectively challenge and defeat undemocratic incumbents. According to Giraudy (2015), subnational incumbents in SURs systematically obstruct the opposition’s ability to gain control of state-level government positions, ensuring the continued dominance of the ruling party or political elite through a range of undemocratic, informal, and sometimes illegal tactics. Regarding SUR erosion, the specialized literature concurs that the electoral defeat or displacement of autocratic incumbents—whether through democratic elections, federal intervention, or premature exit from office—constitutes a necessary but not sufficient condition for the weakening of SURs (Behrend 2011; Gibson 2013). Erosion begins, albeit sometimes temporarily or reversibly, once subnational autocratic incumbents relinquish power.

Building on scholars of federalism, we depart from the notion that federal systems differ significantly in terms of the autonomy they grant to subnational units (Rodden 2009; Beramendi and León 2015; Hooghe et al. 2016). All federations combine elements of self-rule (i.e., the authority of subnational units within their territorial jurisdiction), and shared rule (i.e., the authority a subnational unit (co)exercises in the country as a whole) (Hooghe et al. 2016). However, institutions of self-rule and shared rule across federal countries are combined in ways that guarantee subnational governments very different levels of SUA to manage their own affairs, including

lawmaking, administration, tax collection, electoral and political rule-making, and judiciary functions.

Drawing on these insights, we argue that SUA is a by-product of “subnational insulation” and “subnational influence.” Broadly speaking, insulation, which can be thought of as a synonym for “self-rule,” denotes the institutional features of federalism that allow subnational units and actors to fend off federal government’s encroachments over subnational governments and territories. Examples include delegation to subnational jurisdictions to set their own electoral rules, to borrow, to decide on a range of local policies (i.e., security, housing, or education), and to independently tax citizens. Insulation is enhanced when the governments of these units cannot be dismissed via federal intervention “from above,” and when they do not have to grapple with municipalities “from below” whose autonomy is constitutionally protected. It is important to emphasize that what we are measuring and analyzing here are *institutional* (and rather stable) sources of autonomy rather than autonomy that might result from other sources, including the organization of political parties.

In contrast to insulation, influence is closer to “shared rule” and refers to the capacity of governors to induce federal governments to take certain actions and thereby shape national politics. While influence does not directly boost SUA, it increases the costs of meddling in subnational politics for federal governments. For instance, if governors from sparsely apopulated states have a disproportionate presence in the federal Congress, it is more costly for presidents to carry out actions against governors from these districts, as they, with their control over legislative delegations, are in a strong position to be effective opponents in the national Congress. As a result, the possibility of federal meddling in local politics decreases, and SUA, by default, increases.

When combined, different levels of influence and insulation result in various SUA types as captured in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Types of SUA in federal systems.

	High	<b>Medium SUA</b>	<b>Full SUA</b>
<b>Subnational insulation</b>	Low	<b>Limited SUA</b>	<b>Medium SUA</b>
		Low	High
		<b>Subnational influence</b>	

Cases in quadrant II experience the fullest version of subnational autonomy. Not only are the constituent units of the federation relatively free from pressures above and below in terms of how they exercise self-rule, but they also enjoy extensive forms of leverage at the national level. Quadrant III represents a situation where constituent units likewise benefit from robust mechanisms of shared rule at the center but are not sheltered from attempts to encroach on their autonomy on the part of other governmental actors. In quadrant IV, constituent units have limited leverage at the national level, either because the Senate is not a territorial chamber or does not wield powers equal to the lower chamber, and these units are likewise poorly insulated vis-a-vis other levels of government. Finally, constituent units in quadrant I are relatively impervious to outside pressures (from above or below) but have limited leverage at the national level. We suspect this combination may be quite rare (and we see no Latin American examples) perhaps because self-rule without robust shared rule to defend it is an unstable equilibrium (Shair-Rosenfield 2022).

Our argument about SUR erosion contends that each type of SUA may engender different pathways of SUR decline. To advance this second building block of our theory, we draw on the literature on subnational regimes. Gibson (2005, 2013) and Giraudy (2010, 2015) show that SUA from the federal government is key for SUR continuity because higher levels of SUA enable subnational autocrats to resist the democratizing efforts of national actors in subnational units.<sup>4</sup> We concur with the view that SUA enhances the prospects for SUR entrenchment, but refine the argument (1) by emphasizing that SUA is not equivalent across federal countries, and (2) by showing, as a result, that different types of SUA may trigger alternative pathways of SUR erosion.

Coalitions are critical for SUR erosion, especially in presidential systems where it cannot be presumed that the different branches of the federal government will act in concert against SURs. In federal countries where subnational units enjoy full SUA, we propose that dismantling SURs will be more politically and institutionally challenging, with important implications for the coalition necessary to achieve erosion. This is because full SUA provides SURs with multiple institutional resources to resist interference from the federal government so long as that intervention is sporadic, uncoordinated, or emanating from a single branch. SUR erosion is probable only if a robust and comprehensive coalition can be formed, typically comprising all three branches of the federal government—legislative, judicial, and executive (with the later potentially including recourse to military action and coercive forms of intervention). We call this pathway of SUR erosion multi-branch to convey the sense that it is an institutionally demanding one, bringing to bear the full power of the center.

In contrast, in federal systems where SUA is limited, SUR erosion can be achieved through significantly narrower and less inclusive pro-democracy coalitions. Since subnational autocrats in these contexts lack strong institutional protections against federal intervention, fewer external actors are needed to erode their regimes, and the requisite coalition could be minimalist in an institutional sense. For example, where governors do not have much influence in the national legislative branch due to low SUA, the party in control of the executive branch may itself be able to bring about the erosion of SURs. If instead the incumbent party can only govern in coalition with other parties, national party leaders can collectively decide to act together against undemocratic governors without worrying that the federal Congress will do much to defend SURs. These partisan pathways of erosion are more likely in the context of high levels of party discipline, where governors have little power within their parties.

In between the extremes of high and low SUA, how can SURs with medium levels of SUA be dismantled? Here we expect a great deal of heterogeneity, based in part on whether a country is positioned in quadrant I or III. As noted above, stable SURs in quadrant I may be infrequent precisely because they have no national leverage to defend themselves from center-led attempts at erosion. Quadrant III, however, is more theoretically interesting precisely because SURs in this category do indeed wield high levels of national influence. Here we argue that the particular institutional sources of their (lack of) insulation are what matter. For SURs in quadrant III that are poorly insulated from below because of municipal autonomy, intergovernmental erosion is possible through federal-municipal coalitions to attack SURs in the middle. In contrast, for SURs in quadrant III that can easily suppress municipal resistance but may be removed through the institution of federal intervention, erosion is likely to occur in a more erratic and episodic fashion, depending on the often short-term political calculations of the federal executive.

Emphasizing differences in the institutional sources of SURs' autonomy, and hence in the coalitions that lead to their erosion, does not mean that non-institutional factors are irrelevant. Instead, our institutional approach can be combined with alternative explanations that emphasize such factors as economic development, fiscal crises, political scandals, and grassroots opposition. The reformist energy unleashed by these various factors may be enough to erode even SURs with high levels of autonomy, but our core theoretical claim is that higher levels of SUA will make this a harder outcome to achieve.

## **Empirical analysis: the United States, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina**

We begin the empirical analysis by measuring subnational influence and subnational insulation across our cases. Due to our theoretical interest in presidential forms of

federalism that put the onus on coalition building, we focus on the universe of cases in the Americas: Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States.<sup>5</sup> To operationalize and measure influence and insulation in these four cases, we focus on six key dimensions that the literature has highlighted as either increasing or diminishing influence and insulation (Tsebelis and Money 1997; Stepan 2004; Fenwick 2016; Hooghe et al. 2016). For the former, we include (1) levels of malapportionment in the territorial chamber, (2) policy scope of the territorial chamber, and (3) subnational jurisdictions' control over federal elections. Higher levels in each of these institutional features of federal systems enhance SUA. Malapportionment boosts the national leverage of the constituent units that are more rural, sparsely populated, and less economically vibrant (Samuels and Snyder 2001), all of which generate more permissive conditions for the formation of SURs. At the same time, malapportionment is only truly significant if the relevant territorial chamber has legislative power equal to the lower chamber. Subnational control over federal elections is more unusual and represents an institutional prerogative that profoundly enhances the ability of a federation's constituent units to exert influence at the center.

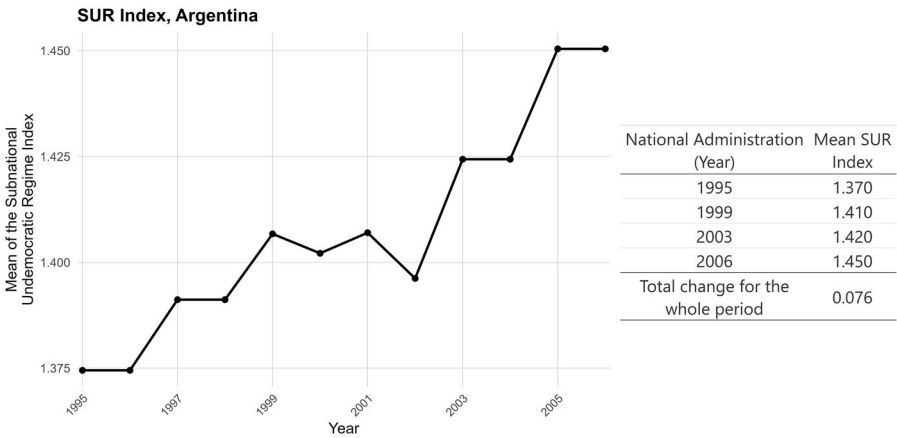
For insulation, we focus on (1) the prerogative of federal intervention, (2) the ability of states and provinces to exert control over the municipalities within their borders, and (3) control over the design of subnational institutions (i.e., Supreme Courts, legislatures, electoral commissions). Where the federal government is unable to constitutionally remove an autocratic governor from office, SURs have less cause to worry about federal encroachment. Likewise, when the constituent units of a federation can unilaterally decide upon whatever resources and responsibilities are assigned to municipalities, this prerogative also reinforces SUA. Perhaps most importantly, states and provinces with the freedom to design subnational institutions—especially rules used to elect subnational authorities—thereby experience an important form of autonomy.

To calculate differences in SUA across Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States, we give a score of 1 to each country where any of the six selected dimensions is present. Conversely, we assign a value of zero where they are absent. As Table 2 reveals, the United States gets the highest possible score and falls into the category of Full SUA.<sup>6</sup> Mexico is the polar opposite, obtaining a score of zero across all six dimensions, and becoming the exemplary case of Limited SUA in the Americas. Argentina and Brazil are intermediary cases; interestingly, while they score the same on subnational influence, they diverge in their sources of subnational insulation in ways that come to the fore in our case studies below.

While the different institutional designs summarized in Table 2 encouraged the formation of different kinds of coalitions to erode SURs, as we trace in the following section, erosion did indeed occur in all four cases. A vast literature on partisan realignment in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s has extensively documented the end of hegemonic control by the Democratic Party under the Solid South, along with its replacement by “robust Republican state parties” (Mickey 2015, 340). But

**Table 2.** SUA types in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States.

		Argentina	Brazil	Mexico	United States
<b>Subnational influence</b>	Malapportionment	1	1	0	1
	Policy scope (bicameral symmetry)	1	1	0	1
	Control over federal elections	0	0	0	1
<b>Subnational Insulation</b>	Absence of federal intervention	0	1	0	1
	Lack of municipal empowerment	1	0	0	1
	Control over subnational institutions	1	0	0	1
		4	3	0	6
		<b>Medium SUA</b>	<b>Medium SUA</b>	<b>Limited SUA</b>	<b>Full SUA</b>

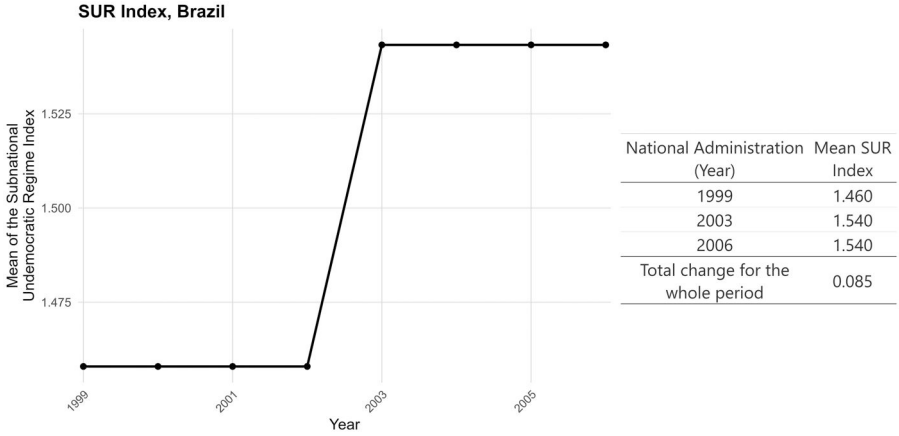


**Figure 1.** Argentina’s SUR erosion.

Source: Subnational Democracy Indices (SPP: 2025).

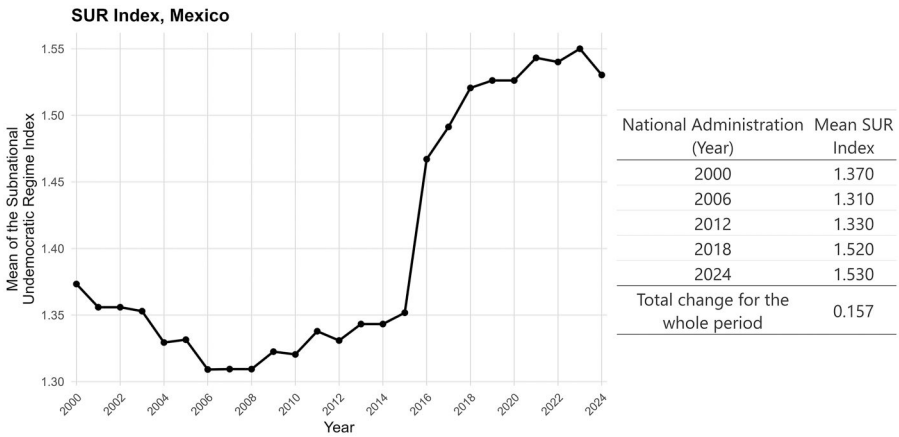
erosion also clearly took place in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, as can be seen in figures 1–6.

The Subnational Politics Project SUR Index shows that in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, SURs have eroded, with higher levels of the SUR Index indicating higher



**Figure 2.** Brazil’s SUR erosion.

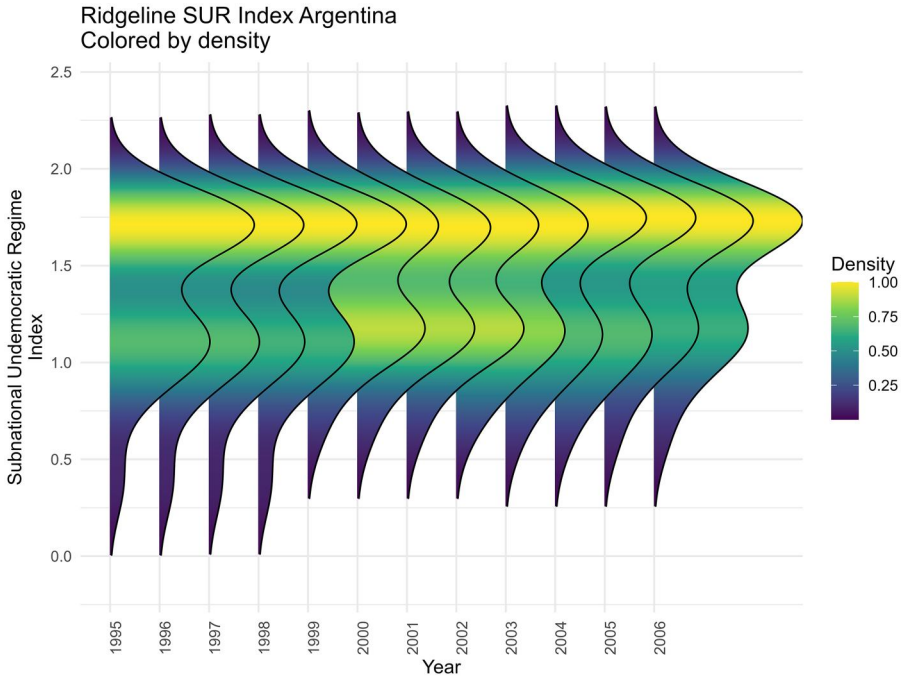
Source: Subnational Democracy Indices (SPP: 2025).



**Figure 3.** Mexico’s SUR erosion.

Source: Subnational Democracy Indices (SPP 2025).

levels of subnational democracy (fig. 1–3). To further unpack erosion, we use Density Plots to show the distribution of states/provinces for different values of the SUR Index, with density represented by color (yellow = highest density, blue = lowest) (fig. 4–6). Consistent with our argument of SUR erosion, these figures show that a substantial number of states/provinces moved from being SURs at the beginning of each country’s period (lower mode) to becoming more democratic (upper mode). Across all countries, there is a systematic shift upward in the central tendency of the



**Figure 4.** Argentina's Ridgeline plot SUR Index.

Source: Subnational Democracy Indices (SPP 2025).

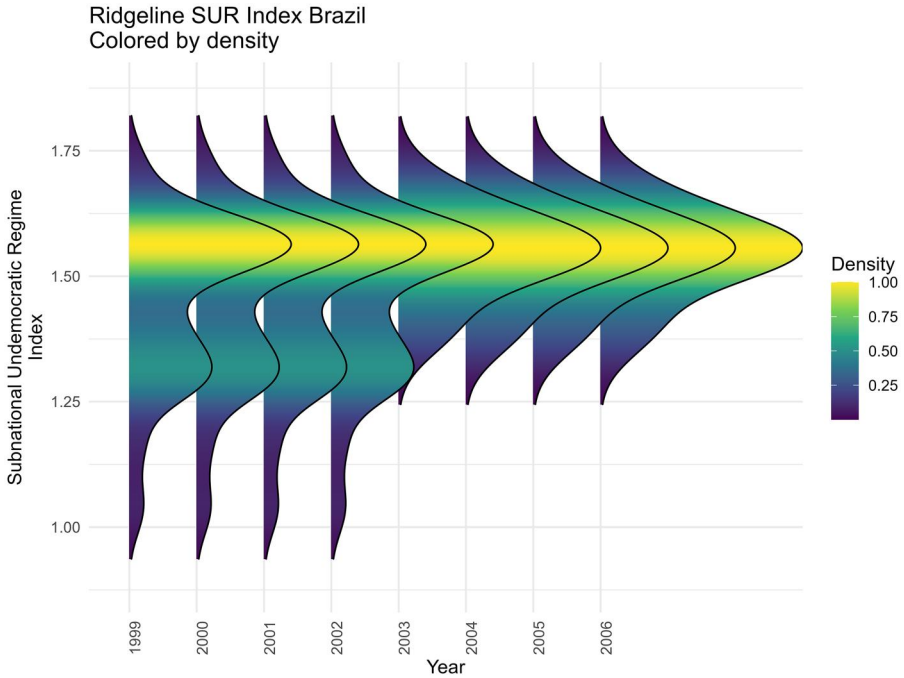
SUR index, indicating that, over time, more states and provinces exhibit slightly higher SUR scores (i.e., higher levels of subnational democracy).

## Pathways of SUR erosion: a comparative historical analysis

Turning to our comparative historical analysis, the case studies below explain how we have scored our four countries on each of the six institutional dimensions included in Table 1. After explaining our scoring decisions, the case studies then show how different levels of autonomy led to the emergence of different types of coalitions to erode SURs in each case.

### The United States: full autonomy and multi-branch SUR erosion

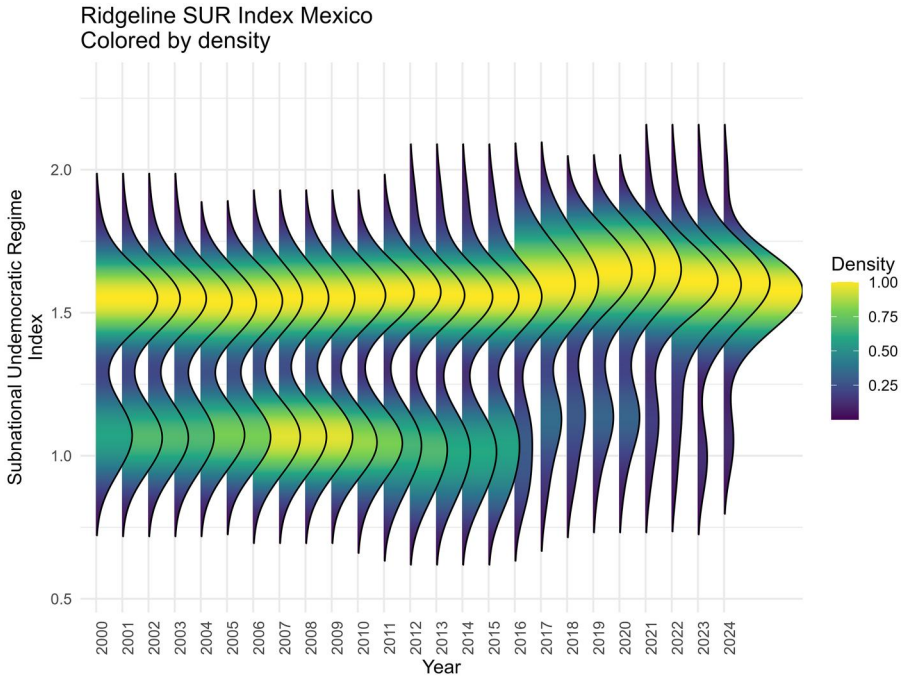
Reflecting its "coming together" origins, US-style federalism has generated the highest levels of autonomy for SURs in our comparison set. From the collapse of Reconstruction and the rewriting of state constitutions in the 1890s until the subnational democratic transitions that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, the states of the former Confederacy built and defended robust SURs under the control of



**Figure 5.** Brazil's Ridgeline plot SUR Index.

Source: Subnational Democracy Indices (SPP 2025).

southern Democrats (Mickey 2015). Due to widespread restrictions on universal suffrage and the reality that opposition parties could not really defeat incumbents during Jim Crow, many scholars have labelled these subnational regimes as fully authoritarian rather than merely undemocratic (Gibson 2013; Mickey 2015); in our view, they represent the most extreme form of SURs. Once created at the end of the nineteenth century, these SURs would prove to be remarkably resilient and virtually impregnable, remaining in place for nearly eight decades despite massive socioeconomic, demographic, and geopolitical changes in the United States over this time period. While the United States could have experienced a purely partisan pathway of erosion, the decentralized nature of parties in the United States foreclosed this possibility, and the extreme autonomy enjoyed by SURs was overcome only through an extraordinary coalition of all three branches at the federal level, including the dramatic use of coercive assets. In the words of King and Lieberman (2021), presidents in the executive branch had to mobilize other parts of the American state, overcoming its fragmentary nature, to democratize the South through a more “forceful” form of federalism.



**Figure 6.** Mexico's Ridgeline plot SUR Index.

Source: Subnational Democracy Indices (SPP 2025).

Full autonomy for SURs in the United States can be understood as the result of high levels of both subnational insulation and influence, placing the United States squarely in quadrant II above. Southern Democrats constructed SURs through state statutes, state constitutional provisions, and state violence. Their ability to do so was not a foregone conclusion, but rather depended on key decisions by the US Supreme Court after the Civil War that limited the applicability to the states of the US Bill of Rights, as well as the 14th and 15th Amendments. In *U.S. v. Cruikshank* (1876), the Court ruled that neither the First nor Second Amendments limited the powers of state governments. In 1903, *Giles v. Harris* then upheld states' ability to impose requirements for voter registration, and *James v. Bowman* restricted Congress's authority to enforce the 15th Amendment. These decisions were followed in 1906 by *Hodges v. U.S.*, which limited the power of Congress to make laws under the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment by ruling that the federal legislature does not have the right to protect labor contracts from racially motivated bias (Key 1949). In addition to extensive subnational control over the design of subnational institutions, southern Democrats were also able to insulate SURs through the White Primary (Mickey 2015, 97).

Not only were southern Democrats sufficiently insulated to design state institutions to their liking (our sixth dimension of SUA), but they were also protected from threats that might have arisen from below and from above them in the political system (i.e., dimensions four and five). In the United States, substate governments (e.g., municipalities and counties) are mere “creatures of the states,” which serves to insulate state-level autocrats from the democratizing pressures that often emerge from more progressive urban jurisdictions. Especially as the twentieth century unfolded, the practice of preemption served as a powerful tool for SUR maintenance (Mickey 2015, 12; Schragger 2019). Southern incumbent Democrats were also protected from above due to the absence of a rule enabling the federal government to dismiss state governments (Gibson 2013, 76).

Turning from insulation to influence, the US Senate played a critical role in the maintenance of robust SURs in the Solid South due to high levels of malapportionment and symmetry between the two legislative federal chambers (i.e., the first and second dimensions in Table 2). While the first of these practices alone would have boosted the prospects for SUR survival, when combined with the Senate’s role as a legislative body equal to the House, malapportionment had a much stronger effect. Referred to as the Great Compromise, the decision to allow each state to elect the same number of Senators regardless of size was a major concession to the smaller states, including southern states, where non-citizenship for enslaved people reduced the size of the voting population. Over the course of the twentieth century, southern Senators killed legislation passed by the House that would have helped to democratize the South, including attempts to pass antilynching legislation in 1922, 1935 and 1937–1938, to abolish poll taxes in 1942, 1944, and 1946, and to eliminate literacy tests in 1962 (Wiris 2021, 123).

The last mechanism of subnational influence at the center is the most unusual: the extensive control that US states play in regulating and administering federal elections (dimension six in Table 2). In the United States, states control the (re)districting of all seats in the lower chamber as well as rules governing the eligibility to vote in federal elections. As Rocco argues (2021, 301), the states in the US Constitution operate the very infrastructure of democracy and are not mere “laboratories.” In addition to the possibility of manipulating who can vote in federal elections, the United States further empowers the states by using an electoral college to select the president, with state legislatures able to determine how these electors are selected and whether to certify presidential results.

Given the extreme autonomy enjoyed by SURs in the United States, subnational democratization was possible thanks to repeated and multiple forms of intervention by all three federal branches: legislative, judicial, and executive. One of the most distinctive aspects of the erosion process in the United States was the extent to which actions taken by the different branches reinforced one another. Two specific examples of this inter-branch action deserve emphasis, acknowledging that the

erosion process was a highly complicated one as it unfolded in the aftermath of World War II. First, the erosion of SURs required a crucial reversal on the part of the federal legislature, especially the Senate, given the role it had long played as an institutional backstop for white supremacy. But the House also played a critical role, and SUR erosion could not have happened without congressional passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act. It is also clear that these critical legislative actions depended on leadership from the White House (King and Lieberman 2021), most importantly Lyndon Johnson's aggressive support for civil rights legislation after the assassination of John Kennedy, whose support had been more tepid.

As a second example, SUR erosion required coordinated action by the judicial and executive branches. Just as necessary as legislative actions were a series of judicial decisions beginning in *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) through which the Supreme Court threw its weight behind subnational democratization, which also reversed the persistent role it had played as a bulwark of autocratic rule under Jim Crow. As Gibson and King show, the democratization of the South required a "quiet jurisprudential revolution," culminating in decisions by the Supreme Court that reversed its fateful 1876 decisions and finally nationalized the Bill of Rights (2004, 36–39). Subsequently, "the federal judiciary, from the Supreme Court to the federal courts, closed ranks behind the decision" (Gibson and King 2016, 38). The ability to sue districts that refused to desegregate helped propel forward the protracted process of subnational democratization. Some key judicial actions in the area of desegregation, however, required reinforcement from the executive branch in response to foot-dragging and resistance on the part of southern Democrats (Mickey 2015; King and Lieberman 2021). To enforce judicial decisions, SUR erosion ultimately required presidential decisions to deploy the national guard, including in states like Arkansas and Mississippi, in order to force SURs to comply with federal mandates. In no Latin American cases of SUR erosion do we see a deployment of coercive assets or important rulings by the supreme courts.

Compared to the three other cases, SUR erosion in the United States took the most obvious form as the Democratic party lost its stranglehold over the Solid South and states across the former confederacy experienced Republican gains in the 1980s and 1990s—despite the persistence of cross-state variation (Mickey 2015, 338–40).

### **Mexico: limited autonomy and multi-party SUR erosion**

In contrast to the United States, Mexican SURs have enjoyed very limited forms of autonomy characterized by weak national influence and limited insulation. While autocratic governors emerged as important actors during and after Mexico's national-level transition to democracy in the 1990s and 2000s (Díaz-Cayeros 2004), they were ultimately powerless to resist pro-democracy changes introduced in 2012 through the so-called "Pact for Mexico" during the Peña Nieto administration. As a result, they

have been significantly restricted in their ability to manipulate subnational electoral outcomes. Denied the sources of autonomy that enabled their counterparts in the United States to resist and delay subnational democratization, Mexican governors had no choice but to acquiesce to the Pact for Mexico's democratizing reforms once they were hammered out by leaders from the country's three main parties: the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the National Action Party (PAN), and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Mexico thus represents the smoothest case of SUR erosion through a quite informal and short-lived inter-party coalition.

The success of Mexico's national transition from single-party rule by the PRI threw into sharp relief not just the persistence but the strengthening of SURs in numerous Mexican states (Gibson 2005; Giraudy 2015). According to Giraudy (2015, 42), "at least 15 out of 32 states (46.87%) remained undemocratic after national democratization." In the last decade of the twentieth and first decade of the twenty-first centuries, these SURs were politically significant, but their significance was not due to any underlying institutional sources of autonomy. Indeed, SURs were missing all six institutional dimensions of SUA included in Table 2 above. Autocratic governors in Mexico can be and have been removed through federal intervention (dimension four), and face municipalities whose autonomy is formally recognized in the constitution (dimension five)—even if Mexican municipalities are far less empowered constitutionally than their counterparts in Brazil, as discussed below. Mexican states play no role in the administration of federal elections (dimension three). In terms of state elections (dimension six), electoral reforms in 1996 barred the states from not following "all of the mechanisms used in federal-level elections" (Reza-Ochoa 2004, 293). That same year, important reforms were introduced that made the Mexican Senate much less of a territorial body by doubling its size and distributing half of the new seats in a nationwide district (rather than dividing them equally among states). In addition to this reduction in malapportionment (dimension one), the Senate has never been a coequal body with the lower chamber (dimension two), which retains exclusive authority over fiscal legislation (Gibson 2013).

In the absence of institutional sources of autonomy in Mexico, it is changes in the party system that infused importance into SURs, only to subsequently lead to their erosion. When the PRI finally lost its grip on the presidency in 2000, power within the party quickly shifted downward to its governors, who continued to govern a majority of states and who, in many cases, engaged in authoritarian practices despite democratization at the national level. Governors belonging to the PRI kept the party alive after losing the presidency (Langston 2017) and emerged as the major counterweight to both PAN Presidents: Vicente Fox (2000–2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006–2012). Most importantly, autocratic governors were able to continue to engage in various forms of subnational electoral fraud through the control they exerted over the state-level electoral boards (Organismos Públicos Locales Electorales or OPLEs) that were established with the 1996 creation of the Federal Electoral

Institute (IFE) (Cantú 2014). Much of the credit for the democratization of national elections in Mexico has (deservedly) been given to the IFE, whose national councilors came to enjoy significant independence from political parties (Selee and Peschard 2010). Nevertheless, the OPLEs that served as the IFE's counterparts in the 32 states were subject to widespread gubernatorial control and manipulation—forms of “authoritarian regression” (*involución autoritaria*) that were repeatedly denounced by the PAN and PRD.

Ironically, it was the return of the PRI to the presidency in 2012 with the election of Enrique Peña Nieto that set in motion the electoral reforms that have significantly weakened SURs. Upon taking office without a majority in Congress, Peña Nieto entered into a pact (i.e., the Pact for Mexico) with the leaders of the opposition PAN and PRD parties to institute a sweeping set of reforms that touched on everything from education and telecommunications to labor protections and public finance. Most important for our purposes, PAN and PRD leaders were able to condition their support for the president's signature reforms in the energy sector on his acceptance of a comprehensive “political-electoral reform” that involved changes in 31 articles of the constitution (Báez and Eaton 2025). The central change involved the nationalization of control over subnational elections by replacing the Instituto *Federal* Electoral with the Instituto *Nacional* Electoral (INE). Under the pact, the PAN and PRD were able to insist on the OPLEs' subordination to the national (and politically autonomous) council of the INE, which gained the right to appoint and remove all members of the OPLEs and to directly assume OPLE functions when only four out of eleven national INE councilors voted to do so (Senado de la República 2013; Woldenberg 2013; McNally 2014). More indirectly, this 2014 “political-electoral” reform also replaced the old federal electoral code with a series of new laws that force subnational governments to comply with a standardized set of procedures vis-à-vis electoral institutions, electoral crimes, and electoral challenges—all of which were designed to erode SURs.

Although the Pact for Mexico thus involved a direct assault on subnational prerogatives vis-à-vis elections, governors were powerless to challenge the juggernaut of this tripartite partisan agreement between the leaders of the PAN, PRD, and PRI. Across Mexico, state legislatures quickly approved the constitutional amendments associated with the Pact, including those that took away their control over subnational elections. This otherwise surprising outcome may be partially explained by the fact that the Mexican Constitution only requires that a simple majority of states approve these amendments for them to take effect, and that it does not allow states to introduce any changes to these reforms (Báez 2019). More importantly, this outcome reflects the nature of Mexico's relatively disciplined and programmatic party system (Ochoa-Reza 2004, 257). Once the substance of reforms was successfully bargained over and agreed to by national party leaders, Mexican governors simply did not enjoy the more robust forms of autonomy that would have

increased their ability to resist. Governors were thus reduced from a position of political preeminence to subservience, not because of any underlying change in their institutional sources of autonomy, which had always been weak in Mexican federalism, but rather as a result purely of changes in the partisan balance of powers and party alliances. More comprehensive coalitions that included the increasingly independent Mexican judiciary certainly could have emerged to erode SURs, but were unnecessary in the context of such limited levels of SUA.

Demanded by the opposition PAN and PRD parties as a way to eliminate autocratic PRI governors and prevent their manipulation of subnational electoral outcomes, the “political-electoral” reform at the heart of the Pact for Mexico largely succeeded in its purpose. While SUR erosion ultimately requires more than just party alternation, the PRI went from controlling twenty states across the country at the start of the Peña Nieto presidency in 2012 to just two by 2023 (Domínguez 2023).

### **Brazil: medium autonomy and intergovernmental SUR erosion**

Brazil lies between the extremes of the United States and Mexico in terms of the medium level of autonomy that its version of federalism has afforded SURs. Like the United States, Brazilian SURs have benefitted from a powerful Senate (dimension two) and even higher levels of malapportionment than in the United States (dimension one), institutional rules that have led scholars to identify Brazil’s federalism as one of the most “demos-constraining” cases in the world (Stepan 2004, 58). Brazilian states, however, play no role in federal elections and cannot design their own subnational electoral institutions (dimensions three and six). Our fourth dimension (federal intervention) is the hardest to score. Article 34 of the Constitution states that “the union shall not intervene in the states” except under certain conditions, some of which are to defend municipal autonomy and if a state “fails to deliver to the municipalities the tax revenues established in this Constitution, within the periods of time set forth by law.” Cognizant of the fact that federal intervention has never occurred in Brazil since re-democratization (Souza 2016, 201), we score Brazil as lacking federal intervention.

What is clear is that the greatest threat to SURs comes from below through the empowerment of municipalities (dimension five). Drawing on scholarship that has sought to explain the decline of state-level political machines and the erosion of traditional political families since 2000 (Borges 2011; Montero 2012; Alves and Hunter 2017), our analysis of Brazil emphasizes the importance of this fifth dimension. Simply put, the elevation of municipalities in the 1988 Constitution made possible the formation of powerful municipal-federal coalitions that have worked to undermine the very foundations of SURs, especially in the poorer states of the North and Northeast.

Across the twentieth century, as Brazil’s national regime shifted back and forth between democracy and autocracy, one source of SUR continuity in the states was

the absence of municipal autonomy. Beginning in 1890 with the design of Brazil's first constitution as a republic, governors "argued that municipalities were fundamental to the power-generating capacity of the states" (Fenwick 2016, 88) and successfully vetoed municipal decentralization. According to the system of "coronelismo" that dominated Brazil's first republic (1889–1930), governors' vast patronage control over municipalities was critical for their ability to dominate national-level politics through the (in)famous "politics of the governors" (Leal 1949). Political control over mayors through extensive patron–client relations survived Brazil's first experience with democratization (1946–1964), when oligarchic families were able to maintain state-level control in numerous states even as progressive actors strengthened at the national level. Bureaucratic authoritarianism (1964–1985) then reinforced the rule of traditional political families in many states as the military worked extensively with governors who represented oligarchic interests (Hagopian 1996).

While the restoration of democracy and the writing of a new constitution in 1988 in many ways reflected the continuing power of the governors, it also included a major departure in its treatment of municipalities. The 1988 Constitution can be seen as a bargain between regressive forces that sought to re-empower the states as the bastions of oligarchic rule and progressive forces who lobbied the constituent assembly for changes that would empower municipalities, exactly because their traditional lack of autonomy had long functioned as a pillar of oligarchic rule at the subnational level (Souza 1997). On the one hand, governors were able to leverage the legitimacy they enjoyed after the reintroduction of gubernatorial elections in 1982 (eight years before the election of a civilian president), and successfully demanded generous fiscal transfers from the center that would sustain their political domination (Abrucio 1998; Borges 2011). On the other hand, governors were forced to accept "the constitutional recognition of municipalities as an order of government distinct from the states (Fenwick 2016, 74)," which "permits municipalities *de jure* to be political competitors for authority with both the national government and the states, and gives them *de jure* authority to engage with either level of government (Fenwick 2016, 44)."

The elevation of municipalities in Brazilian federalism has been positive for democracy in numerous respects, including the much-studied phenomenon of participatory budgeting (Abers 2000; Wampler, Sugiyama, and Touchton 2022), but for our purposes, the key point is that it has weakened SURs. According to André Borges and Celina Souza, the decline in what has alternately been described as hybrid regimes, illiberal structures, political machines, and bastions of the oligarchy is due mostly to the declining ability of governors to use clientelism as a means of reinforcing their political domination over poorer voters. These voters have been made far less vulnerable to clientelism thanks to efforts by the federal government, working in concert with municipalities across Brazil, to provide a better social safety net, especially after the 2002 rise to the presidency of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores or PT). The positive effects of the municipal–federal alliance were

especially pronounced in the education and health sectors, as seen in the Bolsa Familia program and the Unified Health System (Niedzwiecki 2018).

According to Borges, “social and economic policies implemented by the federal government under PT rule undermined subnational patron-client networks by improving the life conditions of the poorest sections of the electorate” (2011, 21), particularly “in the urban informal sector and in low-productivity primary activities” (2011, 22). In the state of Bahia, Souza explains how one of Brazil’s most entrenched family clans (under the control of Antonio Carlos Magalhães) was finally defeated in 2006 once his patronage machine was challenged by the combination of federal anti-poverty policies and “the strengthening of local governments” (2016, 222). Ultimately, by “avoiding governors” (Fenwick 2016), federal–municipal alliances facilitated the adoption of policies that attacked the very source of autocratic power. In addition to liberating mayors from gubernatorial control, the constitutional elevation of municipalities also facilitated policy coordination between mayors in horizontal relationships that often function independently of state-level oversight (Sugiyama 2012). Ultimately, the intergovernmental pathway of erosion that we emphasize worked in tandem with the “policy-led transition” thesis, which also emphasizes the key role played by urban mobilization and municipal organizing by the PT in the democratization of Brazil’s northern and northeastern states (Montero 2012; Van Dyck and Montero 2015).<sup>7</sup>

Whereas SUR erosion is seen most clearly in the subnational electoral defeats of a single party in the United States and Mexico (the Democrats in the former and the PRI in the latter), Brazil’s more fragmented party system reflects a more complicated reality. Perhaps the symbolically most important sign of erosion was the PT’s 2006 victory against the Magalhaes clan in Bahia, but that same year, the parties of traditional elites were also defeated in Ceará, Maranhão, Pernambuco, and Sergipe (Van Dyck and Montero 2015). According to Borges (2011, 172), the erosion process in Brazil can also be seen in the substantial decreases that took place in the distance between the most and least competitive states from 1998 to 2010.

### **Argentina: medium autonomy and federal interventions**

Argentina represents a case of medium SUA rooted in its combination of high subnational influence and low subnational insulation. As shown in Table 2, Argentina scores similarly to Brazil on the influence dimensions—most notably due to a strongly malapportioned Senate (dimension one) that distributes three seats to each province (Gibson and Calvo 2000; Samuels and Snyder 2001). This feature provides provincial elites with substantial leverage vis-à-vis presidents and gives subnational autocrats power to negotiate prerogatives with the federal government (Gibson and Calvo 2000; Gibson 2005, 2015; Giraudy 2010). Like in the rest of the Latin American federations, Argentine provinces, do not play a role in federal elections (dimension three) but, unlike Brazil and Mexico and similar to the United

States, they can design their own subnational electoral institutions (dimension six), which has made Argentina one of the federal countries with the highest cross-provincial institutional variation in the Americas. Most notably, Argentina's medium SUA is primarily determined by the constitutional power of federal intervention (dimension four), which allows the national government to remove governors and other political officials from office and install a federally appointed interventor until elections are held again [articles 6 and 75 (31) of the Argentine constitution]. This institutional feature sharply reduces provincial protection "from above," even as governors remain institutionally shielded "from below" by the absence of constitutionally autonomous municipalities. Combined, these features place Argentina in quadrant III, where governors are influential national actors but are simultaneously exposed to central government encroachments—especially when coalitions between the president and Congress make federal intervention politically possible.

These institutional characteristics set the stage for Argentina's episodic pathway of SUR erosion. Unlike the United States, where multi-branch action was necessary, or Mexico, where low autonomy was conducive to a partisan pathway of SUR weakening, Argentina's medium-SUA configuration has incentivized erosion through short-lived political coalitions at the center, enabling presidents to selectively dismantle SURs. Because this pathway of erosion depends on congressional support, the use of this institution has historically reflected episodic alignments among national actors rather than sustained democratizing trajectories, like in the United States or in Brazil. Indeed, [Behrend \(2016, 92–98\)](#) argues that democratization in the Argentine provinces has unfolded in a punctuated fashion, with interventions deployed for mixed motives—including partisan realignment, electoral interests, and crisis management.

Following the return to national democracy in 1983, Presidents in Argentina confronted entrenched non-democratic provincial elites, many of whom had governed uninterrupted since the later years of the military dictatorship (1976–1983) ([Giraudy 2015](#); [Behrend 2016](#); [Gervasoni 2018](#)). These elites and their associated political parties typically ruled the northern provinces of Catamarca, Santiago del Estero, San Luis, and Salta, and some Patagonian provinces like Neuquén. Since the transition to national democracy, federal interventions to dismantle SURs were negotiated case by case, revealing how SUR erosion depended on national legislative bargains. Interventions in provinces such as Tucumán (1991), Corrientes (1992), Catamarca (1991), Santiago del Estero (1991), for instance, emerged from temporary executive–legislative alignments rather than from a coordinated, multi-branch democratizing strategy, as observed in other federal countries in the Americas. As [Behrend \(2016\)](#) notes, many of these federal interventions removed individual autocrats, enabled alternation in power, but did not fully restructure the dense networks of patronage that underpinned SURs. The result was often temporary displacement rather than deep institutional reform of SURs. However, subnational

autocrats were forced to step down, and new parties came to power at the executive and legislative levels, opening up a pathway toward SUR erosion.

Most of this SUR erosion occurred in the 1990s, under the Peronist administration of Carlos Menem (1989–1999). Interestingly, President Menem used federal intervention selectively to dismantle SURs in non-allied provinces, while turning a blind eye to undemocratic practices in provinces dominated by his associates. In fact, surging federal transfers enabled allied governors to consolidate rentier-style SURs rooted in fiscal dependency (Gervasoni 2010, 2018). When provincial autocrats defected from Menem's coalition or created national-level liabilities; however, the federal government acted swiftly, invoking federal intervention to weaken or remove them. The interventions in Corrientes (1999) and Santiago del Estero (1991) were formally justified as responses to provincial crises that triggered pro-democracy mobilization (Behrend 2016), but they also served to undermine the power of Menem's opponents, many of whom were electorally marginalized after the intervention. Likewise, the 1991 intervention in Catamarca—provoked by human rights and murder scandals involving the Saadi clan, a faction within Peronism—facilitated alternation in power by enabling the UCR to govern the province for the first time since the national democratic transition. In short, SUR erosion in the 1990s occurred when pro-democracy coalitions at the center could be assembled and when the persistence of SURs threatened the political or electoral priorities of the national government.

The 2000s witnessed a second wave of SUR erosion in Argentina. Under President Néstor Kirchner, federal intervention regained prominence as a mechanism to excise entrenched provincial autocratic enclaves whose corruption, human rights abuses, and impunity had become politically costly (Gibson 2005, 2013). The most notable case was the 2004 intervention in Santiago del Estero, where the long-standing Juárez dynasty faced intense national scrutiny over corruption, human-rights violations, and the murder of two local young women (i.e., the so-called “doble crimen de la Dársena” in 2003). President Kirchner, backed by a majority in Congress, used federal intervention to remove Governor Mercedes “Nina” Aragonés de Juárez, intervene in the provincial legislature, and dismantle the provincial security apparatus that underpinned Juárez family rule (Gibson 2005, Behrend 2016).

Since the transition to national democracy in 1983, SUR erosion in Argentina occurred not because of a coherent national democratization strategy, like in the United States, but was instead propelled when shifting political incentives at the center produced fleeting pro-federal and pro-democracy intervention coalitions in Congress. The episodic pathway of SUR erosion was, for the most, part initiated when subnational autocrats became too challenging to the incumbent president, and when they posed electoral liabilities to the federal government. Federal interventions removed several of the most entrenched subnational autocrats in Argentina, disrupting dynastic control in provinces like Santiago del Estero (1991, 2004), Corrientes (1999), and Catamarca (1991). As opposed to other cases studied in this

article, the durability of SUR erosion therefore depended less on institutional transformation inside the provinces and more on the stability of these central coalitions. Hence, as Behrend (2016) argues, some of these provinces later became less democratic. Yet, the long-standing dominance of autocratic rule weakened, electoral competition expanded, and party turnover became a reality. In short, federal interventions, albeit episodic, created institutional openings for subnational democratization and their cumulative effect weakened Argentina's SURs.

## Conclusion

Drawing on the notion that not all federal systems are alike, this article leverages cross-national variation in federal institutions to show that “varieties of federalism” matter for SUR erosion. Differences across federal systems result in different types of SUA, and this autonomy, in turn, triggers different pathways of SUR erosion. In full SUA federations, where subnational regimes possess strong institutional defenses against federal intervention, as we find in the United States, SUR erosion likely necessitates a broad, institutionally encompassing coalition that includes all three branches of the federal government and, in some cases, the military. Conversely, in low-SUA contexts, where subnational autocrats have fewer institutional protections, as we find in Mexico, SURs can be more easily eroded through informal agreements between political parties without the formal involvement of multiple federal branches. Finally, in medium-SUA systems, we find moderately encompassing coalitions that fall between these two extremes. As the case of Brazil shows, in federations where municipalities enjoy constitutional independence, coalitions between municipal and federal actors can play a key role in dismantling subnational autocracies at the state or provincial level. Where municipalities are denied this kind of independence from the provinces where they are located, as in Argentina, short-term coalitions between the executive and legislative branches resulted in the use of federal interventions in specific provinces.

If different kinds of coalitions emerge in response to different levels of SUA, the four different pathways of erosion that result are likely to be quite distinct in terms of their durability. For our case of limited SUA, the pathway of SUR erosion in Mexico in 2012 depended on short-term political calculations among the country's three dominant parties—parties that less than a decade later were displaced by the rise of an entirely new party (Morena). The shift in Mexico after 2018 from a multi-party and fragmented party system (which produced the Pact for Mexico and SUR erosion) back to a single-party hegemonic system under Morena could easily reproduce a more permissive environment for SURs. In other words, this partisan pathway can be quick and effective for SUR weakening, but unstable. For our case of full SUA, the difficulty of securing the intervention of all three federal branches would perhaps suggest that SURs are indeed a thing of the past in the United States.

However, while this three-pronged strategy worked in the 1960s and 1970s, the passage of time shows that it is also clearly vulnerable to the political composition of all three branches. On critical issues like voting rights (especially in the 2013 *Shelby vs. Holder* decision), the Supreme Court, in particular, has moved back toward a states' rights position of the sort that underscores the importance of the underlying (and unchanged) sources of full autonomy that are at the heart of US federalism. The differences that we have emphasized between our two cases of medium SUA likewise have implications for SUR weakening. In Brazil, inter-governmental erosion appears as potentially the most durable pathway because of the way that municipal and federal actors came together to weaken the very foundation of oligarchic rule in the Brazilian states, which has been poverty itself. In Argentina, in contrast, the heavy reliance on federal intervention often just led to the replacement of one SUR by another.

Finally, although we focus in this article on governors who try to use the various degrees of subnational autonomy that federalism has given them to defend SURs, it is important to note that governors can also use this same autonomy as a critical safeguard against federal encroachments by both democratic and autocratic leaders. Indeed, different levels of SUA have played a key role in shaping the ability of national democratic backsliders to erode democracy. In the United States, full SUA helped checked autocratizing behaviors by President Donald Trump in his first term (Kaufman, Kelemen, and Kolcak 2024). As Jenna Bednar observes, "the same decentralization of election administration that has so often allowed local authoritarian enclaves to emerge seems to have served to protect American democracy when an aspiring autocrat sought to consolidate power at the national level" (5). Conversely, in Mexico, where SUA is low, governors have been unable to check incipient national democratic erosion. Mexican governors lacked the institutional safeguards necessary to resist federal encroachments and were largely unable to counter President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's (2018–2024) efforts to undermine national democracy. His administration weakened independent institutions, such as the National Electoral Institute (INE) and the judiciary, without significant institutional resistance from subnational actors. In other words, subnational autonomy is neither inherently positive nor negative for democracy; subnational actors can use it to either promote or undermine democratic outcomes, but how they actually do so is shaped by the different varieties of federalism.

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## Notes

1. See also McMann (2010) and Whitehead and Behrend (2016).
2. As a simplifying assumption to facilitate cross-national analysis, we assume democratizing intent on the part of national government. This assumption is a plausible one considering the time periods in the three cases we study here but is not necessarily true more generally (see Giraudy 2010, 2015). We return to this issue in the conclusion.
3. While our focus here is on SURs within national democratic regimes, the framework we propose in this paper could also be used to study the opposite configuration: the construction and continuity of subnational democratic regimes within national autocracies.
4. Gibson (2005, 2013) assumes that national level actors always have democratizing intentions for subnational units. Giraudy (2015) challenges that assumption.
5. Per its constitution, Venezuela is a federal system, but the governments of Hugo Chávez (1998–2013) and Nicolás Maduro (2013–present) have turned the country into a de facto hyper-centralized territorial regime. Unlike all the other federal countries in the Americas, Canada has a parliamentary system and a Senate that does not serve as a chamber for the representation of territorial interests. Outside the Americas, Nigerian federalism has been combined with presidentialism and parliamentarism in different periods.
6. Eaton and Giraudy (2025) argue that the United States offers a more permissive environment for the construction of SURs than any Latin American case.
7. For the rival argument that the rise of the PT in autocratic states like Bahia merely replicated rather than displaced illiberal practices, see Alves and Hunter (2017).

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