Subnational Undemocratic Regime Continuity in Mexico
Agustina Giraudy

in Democrats and Autocrats: Pathways of Subnational Undemocratic Regime Continuity within Democratic Countries

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This chapter compares the influence of presidential power on SUR continuity in two Mexican SURs during the years of the first two PAN administrations, under Presidents Vincente Fox and Felipe Calderón. Unlike in Argentina, Presidents Fox and Calderón could count on loyal copartisans at local government levels to foster the national-local alliances necessary to challenge subnational rulers’ power from within. As the results of the analyses depict, partisan presidential power was strong in Puebla, leading to SUR reproduction from above. In Oaxaca, in contrast, partisan presidential power was ineffective, prompting Presidents Fox and Calderón to strategically oppose and weaken the regime. Still, because autocrats managed to ensure party elite unity they were able to uphold the SUR’s local power and sustain the regime in power. These results again underscore the extent to which within-country differences between SURs dramatically affect different SURs’ chances of maintaining power.

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This chapter presents in-depth qualitative evidence, comparing two Argentine SURs under Presidents Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner: one in which presidential fiscal power over the SUR was strong, leading to SUR reproduction from above (La Rioja), and one in which presidential power over subnational autocrats was low, leading to SUR weakening from above (San Luis). Evidence from the two SURs demonstrates that presidents hold greater power over SURs that are financially vulnerable and this incentivizes presidents to sustain the existence of the SUR (as in La Rioja). The study of San Luis reveals that local variables, such as party elite unity and mass support explain the capacity of SUR incumbents to sustain the regime despite presidential strategies of regime weakening. This evidence further highlights the importance of recognizing how within-country differences between SURs influence the likelihood of an SUR retaining power.