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The RAI travels to Latin America: Measuring regional authority under regime change

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a new dataset on regional authority in 27 Latin American and Caribbean countries for 1950–2010 based on the Regional Authority Index (RAI), which makes it possible to compare regional authority over time and across regions. We explain conceptualization, operationalization, and coding decisions with the aim of making judgments explicit, and therefore open to amendment or refutation. We present substantive observations about the variation across countries and over time and discuss the implications and challenges of expanding the RAI to contexts in which democracy and authoritarianism alternate.

KEYWORDS Multilevel governance; decentralization; Latin America; measurement; democracy

An extensive literature has investigated the sources and consequences of decentralization in Latin America, generating diverse and sophisticated theories. Yet while theorizing has been concerned with subnational authority broadly conceived – the extent to which subnational governments have the legal capacity to make binding decisions- the available measures often use spending or revenue as a proxy for decentralization (e.g. Daughters and Harper 2007; Escobar-Lemmon 2001; Stegarescu 2005). This is problematic to the extent that central governments provide subnational actors with money yet tell them how to spend it.

Our purpose in this article is therefore to bring measurement of the structure of government more in line with the way political scientists have conceived it. We introduce a new measure of regionalization – the Regional Authority Index (RAI) – and describe how it is applied to Latin America and the Caribbean.

The RAI includes 27 countries in the region on an annual basis from 1950 to 2010 (Hooghe et al. 2016).¹ We disaggregate regional authority in 10

dimensions across 2 domains: self-rule, the authority a regional government exercises within its territorial jurisdiction; and shared rule, the authority a regional government (co)exercises in the country as a whole. Here we describe our measurement instrument as applied to Latin America. We make our conceptual and measurement decisions explicit by defining coding rules, collating examples, and deliberating ambiguities. Additionally, we explain the challenges that this measurement instrument faces in Latin America, and most particularly in cases of alternation between authoritarian and democratic rule. Our aim is to distinguish regional authority from those variables that are used to explain subnational authority, including the character of the regime.

In the final section, we illustrate how the RAI helps us probe the intricate connection between democratization and regionalization. We explore general patterns of association between the RAI and regime type, and we suggest that the relationship is not constant over time. Over the past six decades, the pace of regional reform and regime change has quickened, there is now greater divergence among Latin American countries in how regionalization and democratization are connected than in 1950. On average, democratization has lifted the lid on pressures for decentralization, but it has also increased the menu options for democratic rulers seeking to manipulate territorial organization for political ends.

Measuring regional authority

Previous measures

The most refined and widely used data on regional government in Latin America and the Caribbean are financial data provided by the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank (Daughters and Harper 2007; Escobar-Lemmon 2001; Stegarescu 2005). These data have been used to good effect, but a) they do not distinguish among levels of regional government and b) they do not directly measure regional authority. It is one thing for a regional government to collect taxes or spend, but quite another to set the rate or base of taxes, or determine spending priorities. *Departamentos* in Uruguay, for example, spend more than twice as much as a proportion of total government expenditure as those in Bolivia (15.4% versus 7.2%), but have less authority over taxes (Daughters and Harper 2007, 224).

Measures that seek more direct estimates of regional authority often rely on the distinction between federal and non-federal countries (Arzaghi and Henderson 2005; Inman 2008), but this distinction is insensitive to variation within these categories (Rodden 2004, 2006; Schakel 2008). Decentralization is often the result of ongoing political choice (Eaton 2008), so we would

expect more fluidity in the authority wielded by subnational governments than in the federal vs. unitary categorization. Several countries including federal Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico and non-federal Bolivia, Colombia, and Uruguay have seen considerable regionalization without crossing the unitary-federal divide.

A useful categorization of state structure is the tripartite distinction between fiscal, administrative, and political decentralization (Falleti 2005; Montero and Samuels 2004). Fiscal decentralization is control over subnational revenue generation and spending; administrative decentralization is the authority of subnational governments to set goals and implement policies; and political decentralization refers to direct elections for subnational offices. These distinctions have proven valuable, for example, in analysing sequences of reform (Falleti 2010), but they have not been quantified on an annual basis and are concerned exclusively with the authority of a regional government in its own region, and hence, only tap self-rule.

We might wish to know how the authority of regions influences the rules of the game in the country as a whole. To what degree does the central state have the last word on constitutional change? This goes to the core of the federal-unitary distinction, but one cannot assume that regional governments in a federal regime can block constitutional change while those in a unitary regime cannot.

Related to this, there is the question of the role of regional governments in national law making. Are they represented in a national legislature, and if so, to what effect? Can regional governments co-determine the proportion of national tax revenue that accrues to them? Do they have routinized access to extra-legislative channels to influence, or bind, the national government? To what extent, in short, do regional governments share rule in the country as a whole?

It is useful, as well, to disaggregate the capacity of a regional government to exert authority within its own jurisdiction. On fiscal decentralization, one needs to pin down whether a regional government can control the base and rate of major and/or minor taxes and the degree to which it can autonomously borrow. On administrative decentralization, it is vital to estimate whether the central government can veto regional government and the kinds of policies over which regional governments exert authority. On political decentralization, one might distinguish between indirect and direct election of offices, and further, between the election of regional governors and regional assemblies.

The issues raised here are diverse, but researchable. They take an important step forward in pressing an abstract concept, regional authority, into indicators that can be assessed by observing public institutions, and that may help researchers resolve differences of interpretation by examining the evidence.

The Regional Authority Index

Our unit of analysis is the regional government, defined as government between the local and the national levels having an average population greater than 150,000. Regional governments are generally organized at non-intersecting tiers, whereby each government has the same authoritative competences. Where this is the case, we evaluate regions on a tier-by-tier basis, but if a regional government has special competences, we code it separately. The intuition is to think of an individual citizen as nested within a set of regional jurisdictions that jointly exert authority. Hence, country scores can be interpreted as estimates of the authority exercised by a country's regional governments over its citizens.

Municipal decentralization falls outside the current scope of the RAI, except where regions – usually national capitals – combine the status of a municipality with that of a special region. Our study highlights the need to make headway in theorizing and estimating local governance if we wish to have a fuller understanding of governance across scale.²

The dependent variable is the authority exercised by a regional government. Authority is conceived as legitimate power recognized as binding because it is derived from accepted principles of governance (Dahl 1968). We operationalize regional authority in two domains: *Self-rule* is the authority that a regional government exercises in its own territory while *Shared rule* is the authority that a regional government co-exercises in the country as a whole. This distinction is widely used in the study of decentralization and federalism (Elazar 1987; Hooghe and Marks 2013; Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel 2010; Lane and Ersson 1999; Riker 1964; Stepan, Linz, and Yadav 2011). We disaggregate these domains in 10 dimensions, each of which is indicated by institutional alternatives for a region or regional tier that can be reliably assessed using constitutions, laws, executive orders, and government documents. Table 1 reproduces the domains, dimensions, and indicators.³

Self-rule is composed of five dimensions. *Institutional depth* is the extent to which a regional government can make autonomous policy decisions, independent from control by the central state. While a deconcentrated government is subordinate to the centre, a decentralized government can make autonomous decisions. Scores at the upper range distinguish between regional governments that are subject, or not, to a central government veto. *Policy scope* taps the breadth of policy authority of a regional government within its jurisdiction. Does the regional government have authority over economic, cultural-educational, welfare, policing, own institutional setup, and local government; does it have residual powers; do its competences extend to immigration or citizenship? Regional policy authority is crucial for understanding potential conflict between the national and regional governments over the design and implementation of policies (Eaton 2017;

Table 1. Self-rule and Shared rule

Self-rule: The authority exercised by a regional government over those who live in the region.			
Institutional depth	The extent to which a regional government is autonomous rather than deconcentrated.	0-3	<p>0 No functioning general-purpose administration at regional level.</p> <p>1 Deconcentrated, general-purpose, administration.</p> <p>2 Non-deconcentrated, general-purpose, administration subject to central government veto.</p> <p>3 Non-deconcentrated, general-purpose, administration not subject to central government veto.</p>
Policy scope	The range of policies for which a regional government is responsible.	0-4	<p>0 Very weak authoritative competencies in a), b), c), d).</p> <p>1 Authoritative competencies in a), b), c) or d) whereby a) economic policy; b) cultural-educational policy; c) welfare policy; d) one of the following: residual powers, police, own institutional set-up, local government.</p> <p>2 Authoritative competencies in at least two of a), b), c), or d).</p> <p>3 Authoritative competencies in d) and at least two of a), b), or c).</p> <p>4 Criteria for 3 plus authority over immigration or citizenship.</p>
Fiscal autonomy	The extent to which a regional government can independently tax its population.	0-4	<p>0 Central government sets base and rate of all regional taxes.</p> <p>1 Regional government sets the rate of minor taxes.</p> <p>2 Regional government sets base and rate of minor taxes.</p> <p>3 Regional government sets the rate of at least one major tax: personal income, corporate, value added, or sales tax.</p> <p>4 Regional government sets base and rate of at least one major tax.</p>
Borrowing autonomy	The extent to which a regional government can borrow	0-3	<p>0 The region does not borrow (e.g. centrally imposed rules prohibit borrowing).</p> <p>1 The region may borrow under prior authorization (<i>ex ante</i>) by the central government and with one or more of the following centrally imposed restrictions: a. golden rule (e.g. no borrowing to cover current account deficits) b. no foreign borrowing or borrowing from the central bank c. no borrowing above a ceiling d. borrowing is limited to specific purposes.</p> <p>2 The region may borrow without prior authorization and under one or more of a), b), c), d).</p> <p>3 The region may borrow without centrally imposed restrictions.</p>
Representation	The extent to which a region has an independent legislature and executive	0-4	<p>0 No regional assembly.</p> <p>1 Indirectly elected regional assembly.</p> <p>2 Directly elected assembly.</p> <p>Executive:</p> <p>0 Regional executive appointed by central government.</p> <p>1 Dual executive appointed by central government and regional assembly.</p> <p>2 Regional executive is appointed by a regional assembly or directly elected.</p>

Shared rule: The authority exercised by a regional government or its representatives in the country as a whole.

Law making	The extent to which regional representatives co-determine national legislation.	0-2	0.5	Regions are the unit of representation in a national legislature.
			0.5	Regional governments designate representatives in a national legislature.
			0.5	Regions have majority representation in a national legislature based on regional representation.
			0.5	The legislature based on regional representation has extensive legislative authority.
Executive control	The extent to which a regional government co-determines national policy in intergovernmental meetings.	0-2	0	No routine meetings between central and regional governments to negotiate policy.
			1	Routine meetings between central and regional governments <i>without</i> legally binding authority.
			2	Routine meetings between central and regional governments <i>with</i> legally binding authority.
Fiscal control	The extent to which regional representatives co-determine the distribution of national tax revenues.	0-2	0	Neither the regional governments nor their representatives in a national legislature are consulted over the distribution of national tax revenues.
			1	Regional governments or their representatives in a national legislature negotiate over the distribution of tax revenues, but do not have a veto.
			2	Regional governments or their representatives in a national legislature have a veto over the distribution of tax revenues.
Borrowing control	The extent to which a regional government co-determines subnational and national borrowing constraints.	0-2	0	Regional governments are not routinely consulted over borrowing constraints.
			1	Regional governments negotiate routinely over borrowing constraints but do not have a veto.
			2	Regional governments negotiate routinely over borrowing constraints and have a veto.
Constitutional reform	The extent to which regional representatives co-determine constitutional change.	0-4	0	The central government or national electorate can unilaterally reform the constitution.
			1	A national legislature based on regional representation can propose or postpone constitutional reform, raise the decision hurdle in the other chamber, require a second vote in the other chamber, or require a popular referendum.
			2	Regional governments or their representatives in a national legislature propose or postpone constitutional reform, raise the decision hurdle in the other chamber, require a second vote in the other chamber, or require a popular referendum.
			3	A legislature based on regional representation can veto constitutional change; <u>or</u> constitutional change requires a referendum based on the principle of equal regional representation.
			4	Regional governments or their representatives in a national legislature can veto constitutional change.

Niedzwiecki 2016, 2018). *Fiscal autonomy* tells us what authority a regional government has over taxation within its jurisdiction. What is a regional government's authority to set the base or rate of minor or major taxes in its jurisdiction? This dimension is concerned with the authority of a government to determine the *rules* for taxation, rather than spending levels. *Borrowing autonomy* estimates the extent of centrally imposed restrictions on the capacity of a regional government to independently contract debt on international or domestic financial markets. *Representation* tracks whether a regional government has a locally elected legislature; whether it is directly or indirectly elected; and whether the region's executive is appointed by the central government, dual (i.e. co-appointed by the centre), or independently elected (either by the citizens or the regional assembly).

Shared rule is also composed of five dimensions. *Law making* evaluates how the region is represented at the national level; whether it has minority or majority representation in a territorial chamber; and the legislative scope of that chamber. *Executive control* assesses whether regional governments have routine meetings with the central government and whether their decisions are advisory or binding. *Fiscal control* evaluates the role of regions in determining the territorial distribution of central tax revenue. *Borrowing control* assesses whether regional governments have a say over borrowing restrictions. *Constitutional reform* gauges what authority a regional government or regional electorate has to propose, postpone, or block constitutional change.

A regional government can exercise shared rule bilaterally with the centre (i.e. a region acting alone) or multilaterally alongside other regions (i.e. contingent on coordination with other regions in the same tier).

Numerical estimates of the dimensions for each region or country can be arithmetically summed or used as indicators of a latent variable. It does not make much difference which approach one chooses because the Pearson correlation between additive and factor scores is 0.99. The Cronbach's alpha is 0.867, which is well above the conventional threshold of 0.7 for an index. A single-factor solution using polychoric correlations for 2010 accounts for 66% of the variance in the indicators. When we impose a two-factor solution, nine of ten indicators load strongly on one latent factor and weakly on the other. In all, the solution is broadly consistent with the theoretical distinction between self-rule and shared rule (Table 2).

Our focus here is chiefly at the country level, but it is worth noting that the information allows comparison among individual regions. Attention to the complexity of authority and its multiple indicators produces more reliable estimation than country-level analysis composed of just one, two, or three elements because combining observations reduces the random error of the latent variable (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008; Marks 2007).

Table 2. Polychoric factor analysis.

Components	Single-factor solution	Two-factor solution	
		Self-rule	Shared rule
Institutional depth	0.82	0.89	0.03
Policy scope	0.89	0.94	0.05
Fiscal autonomy	0.76	0.39	0.48
Borrowing autonomy	0.89	0.86	0.14
Representation	0.77	0.99	−0.20
Law making	0.62	0.11	0.61
Executive control	0.79	0.12	0.80
Fiscal control	0.67	−0.08	0.87
Borrowing control	0.60	−0.18	0.90
Constitutional reform	0.66	0.13	0.64
Eigenvalue	5.67	4.86	4.54
Chi-squared	291.04	291.04	
Explained variance (%)	65.9		0.53
Factor correlation			

Notes: Principal components factor analysis, promax non-orthogonal rotation, listwise deletion. $n = 27$ (country scores in 2010). For the two-factor solution, the highest score for each dimension is in bold.

The RAI taps legal authority, which directs us to legal documents – constitutions, framework laws, ordinary laws, executive orders, decrees, court rulings, etc. However, what is written and what is practiced may differ. Some written rules never make it into practice. If the constitution states that regional governments may tax their own populations, yet enabling legislation was never passed, then we do not consider the regions to have fiscal authority. This was, for example, the case in *departamentos* and *provincias* in Peru (see C 1979, Article 257; Dickovick 2004, 7). With the same logic, we code the date a reform (or election) takes place, not the date written in legislation. In Argentina’s senate, for example, there was a 17-year lag between the 1994 Constitution’s promise of direct elections and its implementation. Finally, we code regularized and explicit norms that do not make it into written texts. A regime that establishes the norm that it can routinely sack regional governors clearly diminishes the authority of regional executives – a practice in Argentina, for example, where federal intervention was routinized despite being formally designated only for use in case of emergency (C 1994, Art. 6). However, one must take care to encompass only institutionalized practice, not exogenous influences such as the charisma of a political leader or the many factors that can affect the ability of a government to achieve its goals.

Regional authority across time and space

Nineteen of the 27 Latin American countries have at least one intermediate tier of governance in 2010; two of these (Chile and Peru) have two tiers. Only seven countries have no intermediate government between the local and national. Fourteen countries have had differentiated regions, i.e.

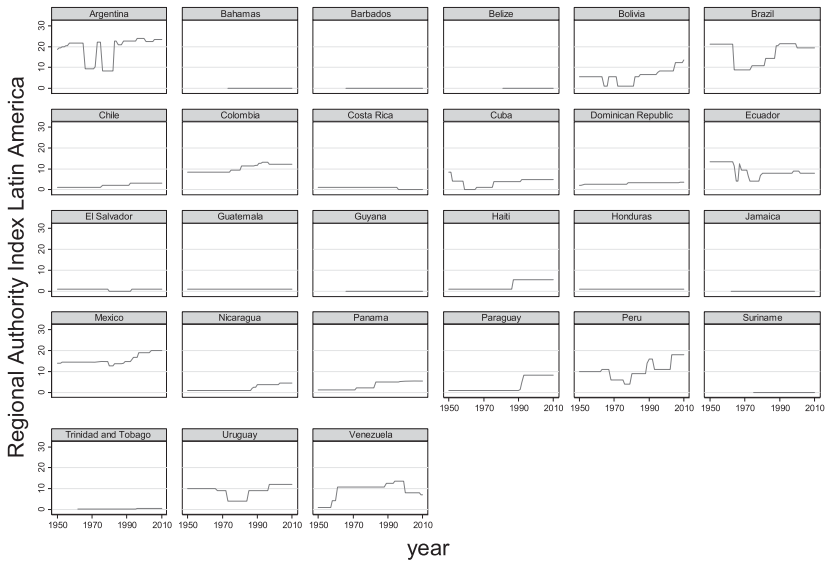


Figure 1. Country trends 1950–2010.

regions with authoritative competences that distinguish them from other regions in the same country.⁴

Figure 1 presents country scores for 1950–2010. The picture is diverse, both cross-nationally and over time. Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina are the most regionalized, while Venezuela (nominally federal) has relatively weak regions. The RAI detects considerable cross-national and over-time variation within the non-federal category, as exhibited by the trends in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay.

There has been a definite secular upswing in regional authority in Latin America over the past 60 years, and at the same time, variation among countries has increased. The standard deviation in the RAI for 20 countries is 6.6 in 1950; in 2010, it is 7.2. In 1950, all 20 independent Latin American countries had some form of intermediate government, but only Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, and Mexico had regional government with an RAI greater than 10. By 2010, Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, and Uruguay were also in this group.⁵ Fourteen countries have become more regionalized by one or more points, nine have the same score, and four have become less regionalized (Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, and Ecuador).

Figure 2 summarizes average RAI score across 27 Latin American countries from 1950 to 2010. The imposition of military rule in the 1960s and 1970s in several countries is evident, as is the effect of the third wave of democracy from the early 1980s. The average level of regionalization in 1950 was reached again in 1990.

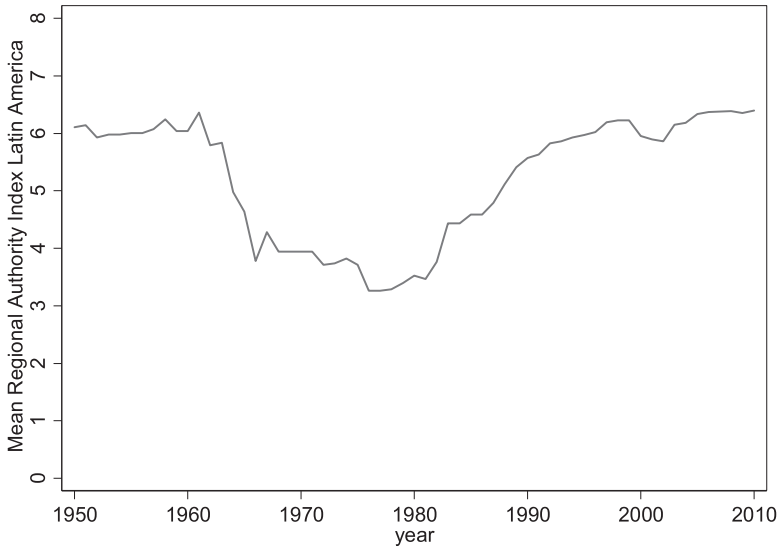


Figure 2. Evolution of regional authority in Latin America from 1950 to 2010.

Note: Average RAI across the 27 Latin American countries for 1950–2010.

Patterns in self-rule and shared rule

Components of regional authority tend to move together, but there is nevertheless interesting variation. [Figure 3](#) portrays the evolution in self-rule. The solid black line captures the surge in elected regional assemblies and executives that took place after democratization from 1980. Representation is the dimension that recovered fastest, but also the one that surpassed earlier levels most markedly. In 1950, 9 of the 20 countries had directly or indirectly elected executives or assemblies, but only Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay had both. By 2010, 16 countries had directly or indirectly elected regional executives or assemblies, and Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela had both.⁶

The policy competences of regional governments have broadened substantially. In 1950, just three countries had regions with authoritative competences in at least two major policy areas; in 2010, eight countries had them. Average regional fiscal autonomy has inched up slightly. In 2010, regions in five countries had some capacity to control the base or rate of taxes.

[Figure 4](#) shows that the changes in regional shared rule have been smaller. Whereas self-rule can be reformed in ways that do not affect a country's central political institutions, shared rule engages law making, policy making, fiscal and borrowing control, and constitutional reform for the country as a whole. Overall, regional authority in law-making and constitutional reform has decreased. This was due to the reform or abolition of territorially-based

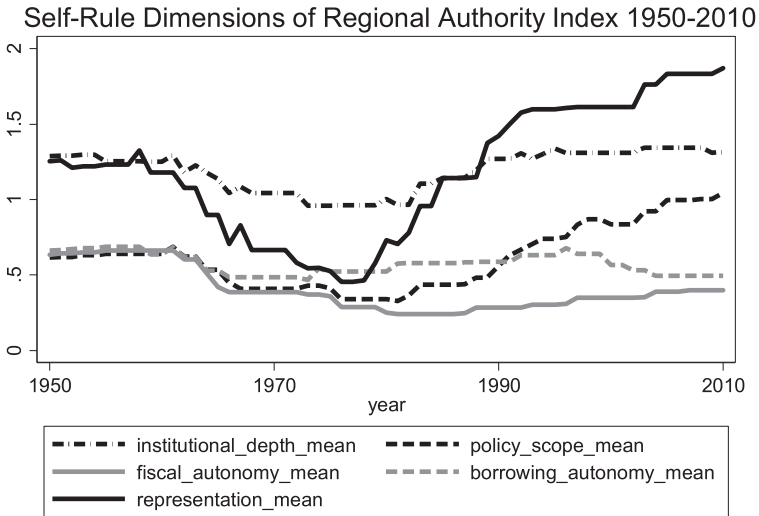


Figure 3. Evolution of self-rule dimensions 1950–2010.

Note: Average scores across Latin American countries with continuous data for 1950–2010. Scales differ: institutional depth (0–3), policy scope (0–4), fiscal autonomy (0–4), borrowing autonomy (0–3), and representation (0–4). Country scores can be higher if there is more than one tier. Only Chile (since 1976) and Peru have two tiers (Peru had three tiers for 1989–1992).

second chambers in Colombia, Cuba, and Ecuador.⁷ Fiscal control has remained relatively static, while borrowing control and executive control have inched up. In 1950, routinized intergovernmental bargaining on

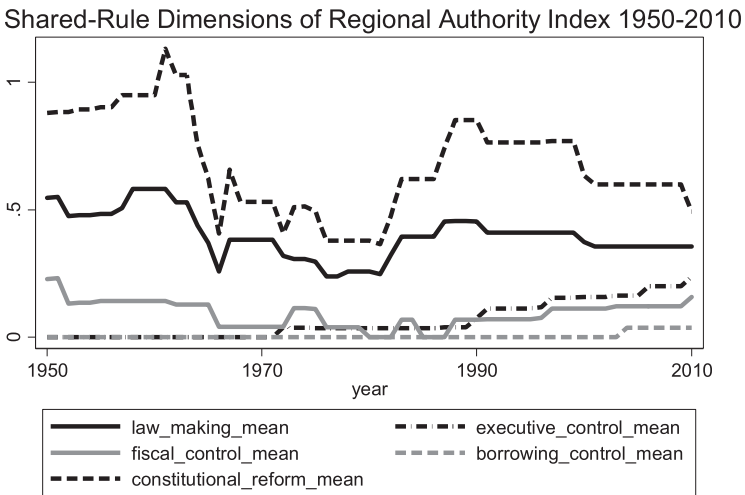


Figure 4. Evolution of shared rule dimensions 1950–2010.

Note: Average scores across the Latin American countries with continuous data for 1950–2010. Scales differ: law making, executive control, fiscal control, and borrowing control (0–2), and constitutional reform (0–3).

borrowing and executive policy was virtually unknown, but by 2010 regional governments in five countries had access to such tools.

Differentiated governance

A striking feature of regional governance worldwide is the rise in differentiated governance: the proliferation of institutional arrangements that provide individual regions with authoritative competences that distinguish them from other regions in the same country (Hooghe and Marks 2016). This trend is also observable in Latin America.

We distinguish three types of differentiated regions. An asymmetric region falls under a country-wide constitutional structure but scores differently on one or more dimensions of the RAI. An autonomous region is exempt from the country-wide constitutional framework and receives special treatment as an individual jurisdiction in a bilateral relationship with the centre. A dependency is a region – often a colony or frontier territory – subject to direct rule by the centre.

Table 3 compares asymmetric, autonomous, and dependency arrangements over three time points. Differentiation has increased – with the notable exception of dependency.

Until the 1980s dependency was common in Latin America. Several countries possess inaccessible and scarcely populated territories with indigenous minorities, and the dominant rationale for dependency was the perceived national interest in direct federal control. In the 1980s and 1990s dependencies in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico were absorbed into the national territorial system with the same authority as existing decentralized regions. By 2010, just three dependencies – all centrally governed – survived: the *Distrito Federal* in Venezuela; the *dependencias*, a group of islands with some 3,000 inhabitants off the coast of Caracas; and *Isla de la Juventud* in Cuba.

In contrast, autonomous and asymmetric regions have proliferated – from 2 in 1950 to 22 in 2010. Autonomous and asymmetric regions arise chiefly from communal and ethnic difference. Tobago was granted self-rule within Trinidad and Tobago in 1980. The Galápagos Islands of Ecuador achieved autonomy in 1998. Special autonomous regions for indigenous communities have been created in Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Colombia, alongside five *comarcas* in Panamá, which have existed with varying degrees of institutionalization since the early twentieth century.

Table 3. Asymmetric, autonomous, and dependency regions over three time periods.

	1950	1980	2010
Autonomy	2 (1)	4 (1)	19 (7)
Asymmetry	0	0	3 (1)
Dependency	34 (6)	24 (6)	3 (0)

Note: Figures in brackets refer to capital regions.

The new indigenous territories in Bolivia have less authority than traditional regions, but are in transition (Faguet 2013). In Colombia, the *resguardos indígenas* and the special archipelago region of San Andrés, Providencia & Santa Catalina also have slightly lower levels of regional authority. In Panama and Nicaragua, these special territories have higher levels of authority than the rest of the tier. Since 2010, the resource-rich region of Gran Chaco in southern Bolivia has a special statute.

A second source of differential empowerment arises from capital regions. Capital regions play a distinct role as potential sites for protest or revolt, and their proximity to national power makes them desirable bases for political entrepreneurs with national ambition. All of this may induce an authoritarian ruler to place the capital under direct control. In contrast, democratic rulers may be more responsive to their special functionality, and grant them differentiated authority. Hence, in 1950, six of the seven capital regions with a differentiated status were dependencies. By 2010, eight capital regions with differentiated status were autonomous or asymmetrical.

Latin America has fewer differentiated regions than Europe or North America, and these regions are not uncommonly authoritatively weaker than standard regions in the same country. Perhaps this is due to later (re)democratization. However, the politics of indigenous mobilization is opening up opportunities for territorial restructuring (Eisenstadt 2011; Faguet 2013; Van Cott 2005; Yashar 1999, 2005). One plausible future trend, then, is the proliferation of special arrangements for territorial minorities.

Measuring regional authority under regime change

The RAI is conceptually distinct from regime type and this guides our coding. Keeping these two concepts separate is vital for generating hypotheses on the relationship between democratization and regionalization. There are wide differences in the degree to which authoritarian regimes control the military, the legislature, and subnational governments. There are also wide differences in the degree to which purportedly democratic regimes allow subnational elections. We reflect these nuances in the measurement instrument.

Where an authoritarian regime takes legal or executive steps to reduce the autonomy of regional authorities, we lower the score for the affected indicator. Institutional depth drops from its maximum to an intermediate score in Brazil in 1964 to reflect the legal constraints on state government imposed by the military regime. While Brazilian *estados* maintained some fiscal autonomy and policy scope, the military government regularly used its decree powers to intervene. It replaced direct with indirect elections for governors, thus affecting the representation dimension. The 1967 constitution did away with the notion that *estados* were self-governing. All this underpins the observation that military rule impaired the authority of Brazilian states

without reducing them to deconcentrated units (Dickovick 2004; Eaton 2001; Falletti 2011; Wilson et al. 2008). One can debate the timing: 1964, when the regime assumed power and passed several disempowering pieces of legislation, or 1967, when state self-governance was constitutionally limited. We select the early date because it appears more consistent with facts on the ground, such as the replacement of opposition governors as early as 1964 and the passing of the first of the *Atos Institucionais*.

The nuance of coding under authoritarian rule is also illustrated as the military period in Brazil draws to a close. While democratic transition is generally marked in 1985, the shift in regional authority came earlier as part of the *abertura* process. Competitive elections for governors and the legalization of political parties in regional and local elections took place before democratic presidential elections, so regional authority begins to creep up in 1982.

Authoritarian regimes rarely abolish subnational institutions. Two partial exceptions are Cuba and Chile. The Castro revolution initially sidelined provincial and municipal institutions in favour of sectoral *juntas* (Roman 2003a, 2003b). The system failed and in 1966 the regime reintroduced local and provincial general-purpose government with representative institutions (Malinowitz 2006; Mendez Delgado and Lloret Feijoo 2007). We reflect this in our coding by reducing institutional depth to 0 for 1959–1965 and bringing it back to 1 with the revival of territorial regional government. Chile entered the Pinochet military regime (1973–1987) with two tiers of deconcentrated government: *departamentos* and *provincias*. The regime sustained *provincias*, abolished *departamentos*, and created a new upper layer of 15 deconcentrated *regiones* in an effort to deliver economic development to Pinochet's primarily non-urban constituencies (Eaton 2004).

Authoritarianism constrains representation if elections for subnational executives or legislatures are suspended or abolished, but authoritarian rulers do not always suspend subnational elections. Argentina illustrates the range of choice. The 1955 military coup ousted the national government but left provincial institutions intact (Eaton 2004, 71). During the *Revolución Argentina* (1966–1972), all elected governors were replaced by central government appointees. Provincial legislative responsibilities were put under control of the (now appointed) provincial executive. During the 1976–1982 dictatorship, the provincial assemblies were disbanded and the military distributed control over provincial administration in equal shares amongst the army, navy, and air force (Eaton 2004, 71 and 117–118; Falletti 2010). Representation has the maximum score under the first military regime, but 0 under the second and third.

The military regime in Brazil (1964–1985) was more measured. Initially, it maintained direct elections for governors and assemblies, and later an indirect system was introduced whereby assemblies chose governors from a central government list (Samuels and Abrucio 2000, 48–9). In contrast to the

authoritarian regimes in Chile and Argentina, elections were never cancelled, but representative authority was restricted. Governors could be replaced by the military regime (and some 25% were in 1964 alone), and direct elections for assemblies took place under a new constitutional framework restricting political parties and civil liberties. Our scoring reflects the contrasting strategies of the military in Argentina and Brazil: a sharp drop from the maximum to the minimum score on representation in Argentina and an intermediate score for both assembly and executive in Brazil.

The PRI regime in Mexico pursued an alternative path. *Estado* governors were directly elected from 1917, but the president had the right to remove elected governors and appoint new ones. We conceive this as a 'dual executive' because it is in part centrally and in part locally appointed. Executive representation changes from 1 to 2 in 1989 when the first non-PRI governor won the gubernatorial election in Baja California, which broke the pattern.

Shared-rule dimensions also vary in their sensitivity to regime change. If the central legislature is dissolved, suspended, or disempowered, this affects shared rule. The capacity of regional governments to co-determine national legislation is almost certainly reduced, and their role in constitutional reform may also be affected. Fiscal control and executive control appear less tightly coupled to regime change. Overall, shifts in shared rule under authoritarianism tend to be less severe.

Democracy and regional authority

Democratization has long been associated with rising decentralization in Latin America and beyond (Crook and Manor 1998; Diamond and Tsalik 1999).⁸ The general argument is that democracy opens the door to demands that were previously suppressed (Huber and Stephens 2012). This includes demands for greater self-rule from geographically concentrated groups that see themselves as distinctive (Brancati 2008; Hooghe and Marks 2016; Massetti and Schakel 2016). Falletti (2010, 185) observes an intimate connection between democratization and decentralization in Brazil: 'decentralization demands ... were imbued with the discourse of democratization'. Grindle (2007, 18) argues that 'audacious reforms' decentralizing authority in Argentina, Bolivia, and Venezuela were designed to strengthen democracy.

However, the outcome is 'neither simple nor straightforward' (Eaton 2004, 16; Gibson 2004; Montero and Samuels 2004). While there are strong grounds for expecting authoritarian regimes to be less decentralized than democratic ones, the history of Latin America provides several examples where democrats have sought centralization and authoritarians have sought decentralization. Case studies suggest that the effect of regime type on regional authority is complex (Eaton 2001; Samuels 2004). Hence, it may be best to conceive authoritarianism as a dimmer rather than an on/off light switch.

Moreover, other factors may mediate the link between democracy and regional authority. Eaton (2004, 17) suggests that the interplay of democracy and regionalization is historically contingent. For example, democratization in early twentieth century Argentina and Uruguay led to the centralization of political authority rather than the reverse, but democratization in the late 1980s and 1990s was in most countries associated with decentralization (see below). Several scholars emphasize party competition as a mediating factor. Studying decentralization in Bolivia and Colombia, O'Neill (2005) argues that decentralization is a function of the anticipated electoral trade-off for national parties in diffusing authority across national and subnational arenas. Willis, Garman, and Haggard (1999) and Eaton (2001, 2004) propose that decentralization occurs to the extent that subnational elites broker candidate selection for national elections.

Path dependence may also play a role. Comparing decentralization in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, Falleti (2010) finds that sequencing mediates the effect of democracy on decentralization. Reforms where political decentralization is prior to fiscal or administrative decentralization lead to deeper decentralization. Charting decentralization in Brazil, Samuels (2004) emphasizes that military regimes may be the ones initiating decentralization to undercut oppositional forces (see also Eaton [2006] on Chile). Comparing decentralization in Bolivia and Pakistan, Faguet and Shami (2015) argue that decentralization reforms often display instrumental incoherence: they are solutions to short-term political problems of leaders, such as winning the next election, with long-term systemic consequences that may produce deep structural change.

Theoretical expectations about democratization and regionalization are more refined than the available evidence. Here we place our dataset on regional authority before Latin American scholars and pair it with measures of democratization as a step towards more valid inference. Our purpose here is to examine plausible patterns of regionalization and democratization in order to signpost some fruitful lines for future comparative inquiry.

We begin by empirically corroborating the overall association between regional authority and democracy. Figure 5 plots standardized average readings by year for each measure against the RAI average for all Latin American countries. There are several widely used measures of democracy for Latin American countries, including the Polity IV index, the two-dimensional measure developed by Coppedge, Alvarez, and Maldonado (2008), Freedom House, and Varieties of Democracy (Coppedge et al. 2017). Democracy and regional authority move broadly in tandem. In the rest of the analysis, we use Varieties of Democracy because it has the fullest overlap with our dataset.⁹

We also detect a robust positive association between regime *change* and *change* in regional authority. Table 4 summarizes fixed effects regressions that estimate change in RAI as a function of change in democracy. Pooling

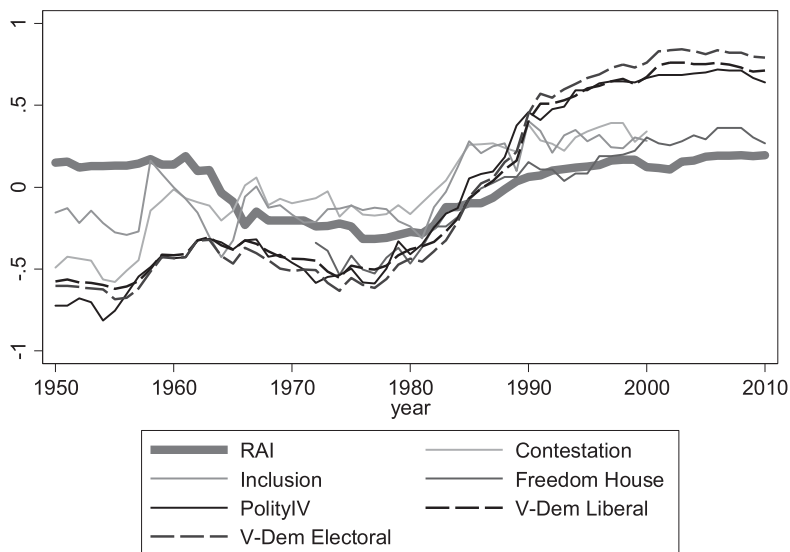


Figure 5. Regional authority and democracy over time.

Notes: N = annual readings for 1950–2010 for all Latin American countries. Values are standardized across years and countries. For Polity IV data we use the polity2 score which summarizes democracy and authority estimates; for the Coppedge, Alvarez, and Maldonado (2008) contestation and inclusion measures we use the standardized factor scores recommended by the authors for comparative analysis; for Freedom House we sum the political and civil rights dimensions and reverse so that higher scores indicate more democracy; for Varieties of Democracy (Coppedge et al. 2017) we use the Liberal (v2x_libdem) and Electoral (v2x_polyarchy) dimensions.

time series compounds inferential threats such as longitudinal heteroskedasticity and correlation of standard errors, and this complicates the choice of an optimal estimator (Stock and Watson 2008). Moreover, the panel is unbalanced because some countries became independent after 1950. Hence, our exploration of how democracy influences regional authority looks for consistency across a variety of model specifications. All independent variables have a one-year time lag. Table 4 begins on the left with a bivariate model. Model 2 examines democracy under the controls of population, affluence, territorial ethnicity, and a year count to address pressures of time in an unbalanced panel. Model 3 adds a lagged dependent variable to address autocorrelation and substantive time effects. The lagged model also allows us to control for possible endogenous development of regional authority (Wooldridge 2002). Across all specifications, change in democracy strongly predicts change in RAI.

The effect of regime change may ebb and flow over time, perhaps mediated by exogenous factors, and so the final three models examine the association for three sub-periods: 1950–1970, 1970–1990, and 1990–2010. We find the effect of regime change to be robust across shorter time periods as well as across the entire six decades.¹⁰ Democracy (or the lack of

Table 4. Fixed effects model of democracy and regional authority.

	DV = change in regional authority					
	(1) Bivariate	(2) Full model	(3) Model with LDV	(4) 1950–1970	(5) 1970–1990	(6) 1990–2010
Democracy _{t-1}	8.92*** (1.52)	9.65*** (2.14)	1.02** (0.39)	14.47*** (3.39)	7.87*** (2.17)	9.36*** (1.73)
Population _{t-1}		-0.47 (3.03)	-0.08 (0.40)	34.52* (19.73)	-6.55 (5.98)	3.07 (7.86)
Affluence _{t-1}		-0.92 (1.95)	0.31 (0.21)	-15.10* (7.38)	1.56 (1.62)	1.72 (2.18)
Ethnicity _{t-1}		-7.90 (9.00)	-1.23 (1.01)	-33.51*** (8.93)	0.11 (13.34)	-4.32* (2.33)
Year		0.00 (0.03)	0.86 (0.03)	-0.41 (0.25)	0.11* (0.06)	-0.03 (0.06)
Regional authority _{t-1}			0.86*** (0.03)			
Constant	2.48*** (0.50)	0.87 (39.58)	-4.28 (7.07)	735.57* (419.56)	-190.19* (0.06)	53.06 (85.72)
CONTROLS	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
R2 within	0.38	0.39	0.83	0.45	0.32	0.45
AIC	5967	5780	4023	1391	1844	1290
N	1419	1381	1381	364	492	500

Sources: Democracy: V-Dem's Liberal democracy index; Population: Population logged (Penn World Tables 8.0); Affluence: GDP per capita (Penn World Tables 8.0); Ethnicity: The probability that two randomly selected individuals in a country belong to different ethnic, linguistic, or religious groups (Alesina et al. 2003).

Note: Fixed effects with robust clustered standard errors.

it) appears to be the most powerful predictor of change in regional authority in Latin America.

These aggregate trends mask more nuanced associations between the different dimensions of the RAI and democracy, which is consistent with the conceptualization of authoritarianism as a dimmer rather than a switch. The RAI measure helps identify which components of authority are more vulnerable to authoritarianism. Indeed, [Figure 3](#) shows that representation is the most directly affected dimension during a democratic breakdown. Subnational elections are often the first target of an authoritarian regime. Institutional depth and policy scope also decrease, albeit to a lesser degree. Fiscal and borrowing autonomy appear relatively unaffected. In the domain of shared rule, [Figure 4](#) reveals that constitutional reform and law making are the only dimensions that co-vary with change in regime type, probably due to their closer association with national and subnational representative institutions.

Taken together, this suggests that the political-institutional dimensions of the RAI are more closely tied to regime change than are the fiscal dimensions. One possible explanation is that authoritarian leaders may use the wallet (in this case, decentralized fiscal policy) to cut the ground from under the democratic opposition. To the extent that authoritarian-controlled governments can keep delivering public goods, perhaps support for democratic opposition

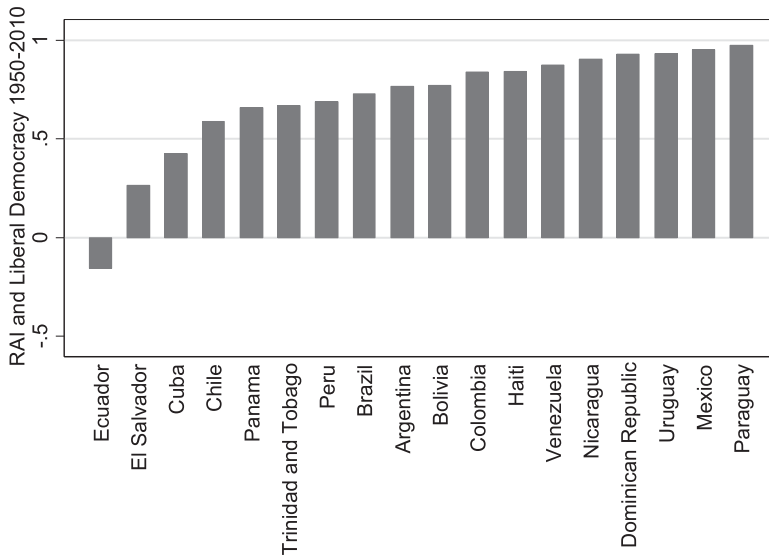


Figure 6. Correlation between RAI and V-Dem Liberal democracy in individual countries for 1950–2010.

will erode. Conversely and consistently, Stoyan and Niedzwiecki (2018) find that the political dimensions of self-rule, rather than the fiscal dimensions, are associated with increased democratic participation. They explain this as the result of an enhanced sense of empowerment and accountability among citizens following political decentralization.

The two processes also tend to move together when we look at individual countries. Figure 6 displays bivariate correlations between the RAI and V-Dem’s Liberal democracy index for 18 Latin American countries.¹¹ The association is positive in 17 countries and exceeds 0.50 for 15 of these, with an average association of 0.70. One country – Ecuador – appears to go against the grain: the association between democracy and regional authority is negative, and Ecuador’s overall RAI score in 2010 is 5.5 points lower than in 1950. Two factors account for this. First, at the transition to democracy in 1979, the bicameral parliament became unicameral, with the knock-on effect that provinces lost shared rule in law making and constitutional reform through their representation in the senate. The second factor is the haphazard implementation of far-reaching decentralization laws introduced under democracy. The 1998 constitution established decentralized administration as a fundamental principle of the state, and set out a process for optional decentralization whereby individual provinces and municipalities could apply for new competences and resources. All but six policy areas (among them defence and foreign policy) were eligible for decentralization. However, the transfer process has been hindered by bureaucratic obstruction, opposition from

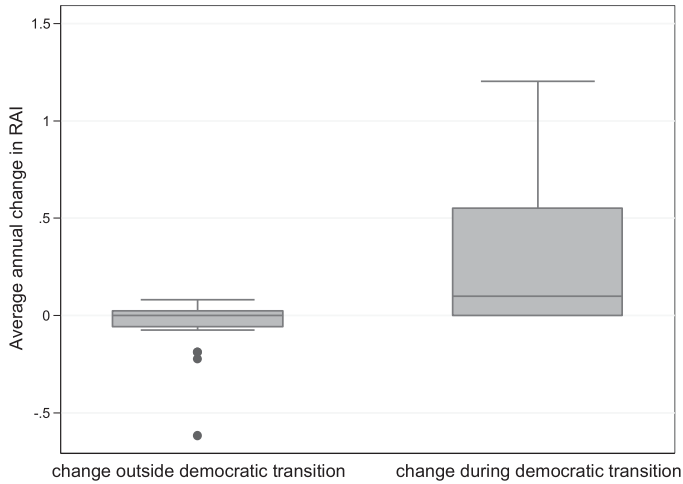


Figure 7. Democratic transition and decentralization.

Note: The horizontal line indicates the median, the boxes the interquartile range, the whiskers the 5–95 percentiles, and the dots values that are two standard deviations out from the mean. Three countries show large *negative* annual change in regional authority outside democratic consolidation: Argentina (–0.62), Ecuador (–0.20), and Brazil (–0.19).

public sector unions, and sharp conflicts about fiscal transfers in times of scarcity, as well as by an apparent reluctance among many subnational governments to take on greater policy responsibilities (Faust and Harbers 2012; Frank 2007). Hence, Ecuador illustrates how weak implementation can create a gap between decentralization intent and practice.

A final argument relates decentralization to democratic transition.¹² This claim emphasizes punctuated change, and anticipates that decentralization is most likely during democratic transition. Normalization after military rule may well be the most common path in Latin America. Figure 7 shows that there is a lot to be said for this when we examine 23 Latin American countries for which we have both RAI and democracy scores. The box plot on the right summarizes annual change in regional authority during periods of democratic transition while that on the left does the same for non-transition periods. The contrast is stark: there is a much larger average increase in regional authority during transition periods than at other times. A difference of means test finds the contrast to be significant.¹³

Conclusion

This paper sets out an annual measure of regional authority for 27 Latin America and Caribbean countries since 1950. Our focus is on legal authority, so we steer clear of informal conditions – party political structures, clientelism, the effect of individual leaders – on the ground that it is useful to keep these

separate if we wish to evaluate their independent causal effects. Regional authority is broken down into 10 dimensions which capture the extent to which a regional government exercises authority over those who live in the region (self-rule) and the extent to which it co-exercises authority in the country (shared rule). The measure is designed to pick up variation at the level of the individual region rather than the regional tier, which is particularly helpful in mapping differentiated governance for Latin America's indigenous peoples.

Any measure of regional authority for Latin America and the Caribbean must come to grips with how authoritarianism impinges on regional authority. This requires an instrument that is sensitive to the shades of gray between liberal democracy and authoritarianism. Indeed, authoritarian rule constrains but does not necessarily neutralize regional authority, and we discuss how our measure can pick up variation.

Overall, regional authority co-varies with democracy in Latin America across countries and time. This fine-grained measure allows us to engage a number of questions relating to regional authority and democratization. If an authoritarian regime violates individual rights, can these rights be protected at the regional level? If authoritarian governments concentrate central power, to what extent can regional governments resist central imperatives? When can one observe more than deconcentration of authority under an authoritarian regime?

Our effort to conceptualize and code regional authority contributes to the broader literature on multilevel governance.¹⁴ There is much here that would repay detailed investigation. To begin with, the relationship between regime type and regional authority merits further analysis. Additionally, some small and relatively ethnically homogenous countries have created differentiated regions with substantial political authority for indigenous communities (Nicaragua and Panama), while some larger and more diverse states have been reluctant (Brazil, Mexico, Peru). Some of the most stable democratic regimes in Latin America have centrally appointed regional executives (Chile and Costa Rica), while more fragile democracies have introduced regional elections (Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru). The purpose of the RAI is to help to uncover these and other puzzles.

Notes

1. The entire project encompasses 81 countries including 11 in South-East Asia and the Pacific, all EU and OECD member states, and 10 in Europe beyond the EU, as well as all of Latin America (Hooghe et al. 2016).
2. This work is underway. Andreas Ladner and colleagues developed a local government index modeled on the RAI for 39 European countries (Ladner, Keuffer, and Baldersheim 2016). And our RAI team is working on an update of

the RAI index for 90+ countries that will include estimates of self-rule and shared rule for metropolitan governance.

3. The data are available on <http://garymarks.web.unc.edu> and <http://saraniedzwiecki.com/data>.
4. Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad & Tobago, and Venezuela. In five of those, this region is the capital (Argentina, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Paraguay, and Mexico).
5. Ecuador falls off the 10+ list because its RAI decreased to 8.0 in 2010.
6. In Bolivia, Colombia, and Nicaragua, special autonomous regions have directly elected assemblies and executives. In Panama, some indigenous communities have indirectly elected assemblies, and others directly elected assemblies; executives are headed by a local representative and a government appointee.
7. Haiti is the only country that has gone in the opposite direction.
8. Regional authority in Latin America has been shaped by its interaction with democracy and authoritarianism. Most research considers national polities as the sole unit of observation for regime type, an assumption shared by the major indices of political regime (Coppedge, Alvarez, and Maldonado 2008; Marshall and Jaggers 2002; V-DEM). However, there is a burgeoning literature that investigates how democracy and authoritarianism may coexist across tiers (Gervasoni 2010; Gibson 2012; Giraudy 2014; Harbers and Ingram 2014). Multilevel governance opens up the possibility of examining the interplay between regimes at different levels. Authoritarian central regimes may leave regional authority untouched; national democratic regimes may harbor repressive regional governments. The recently released VDEM data set contains a series of questions about regional democracy, which make it possible to estimate the *average* quality of democracy, but not democracy at the level of the individual region (see McMann 2016).
9. The findings reported here are broadly consistent across all four measures of democracy.
10. Lags of two or three years produce similar results.
11. The positive association between democracy and regional authority is robust when we correlate levels or changes in V-Dem and the RAI.
12. A related but different argument connects regime volatility with regional authority volatility (Hooghe and Marks 2016, 55–57). This effect is sharpest in federations, where the powers of constituent units are constitutionally entrenched. A comparison of regional authority in 11 federations finds that federations experiencing regime volatility (including four Latin American countries) witness three to four times as many reforms than stable democratic federations. Moreover, these reforms tend to have large substantive effects. In the absence of regime instability, federal countries experience very few reforms, and when they do engage in reform, it tends to fluctuate around the status quo. Hence, more frequent regime change in Latin America compared with the OECD helps explain why regional authority is more volatile.
13. On average, regional authority increases annually by 0.30 points in a year of democratic transition, while it decreases by -0.04 points on average in a non-transition year ($p < .005$). A country receives a score of 1 if it is in a democratic transition period, which is any 10 years following a Polity shift from a score of 5 (or lower) on the -10 to $+10$ scale to a score of 6 or higher *and* when the Polity score does not drop below 6 during the following nine years. All other

years, including periods of stable democracy, are coded zero. We experimented with variations on these criteria with no appreciably different results.

14. For an excellent summary of the literature on subnational politics, see Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder ([forthcoming](#)).

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