



PROJECT MUSE®

Argentine Democracy

Levitsky, Steven, Murillo, María Victoria

Published by Penn State University Press

Levitsky, Steven and María Victoria Murillo.

Argentine Democracy: The Politics of Institutional Weakness.

Penn State University Press, 2005.

Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/7435.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/7435>



Introduction

Steven Levitsky and María Victoria Murillo

Between 1989 and 2003, Argentine politics seemed to go full circle: from basket case to international poster child, and back to basket case. During the early 1990s, Argentina was widely hailed as a successful case of market-oriented reform. The far-reaching economic transformation undertaken by President Carlos Menem put an end to a severe hyperinflationary crisis. Unlike other radical reform cases in Latin America, these reforms were undertaken in a context of full-scale democracy. Less than a decade later, however, Argentina plunged into another round of crisis. Massive antigovernment protests, a string of presidential resignations, a debt default, and a collapse into economic depression brought democratic institutions to the brink of rupture. For both Argentines and outside observers, this sudden reversal of fortune seemed eerily familiar: twentieth-century Argentine history was marked by a succession of short-lived miracles followed by extraordinary collapses. Yet the 2001–2 crisis broke with past patterns in an important way. The armed forces, which had toppled six governments between 1930 and 1976, remained on the sidelines, and core democratic institutions remained intact. Amid the worst economic crisis in its history, Argentine democracy proved to be strikingly robust.

This book examines both continuity and change in contemporary Argentine politics. On the one hand, it seeks to explain why Argentina's post-1983 democracy has proven more stable than its predecessors (and many other Latin American democracies). On the other hand, it seeks to explain the country's persistent failure to build enduring political and economic institutions and its continued propensity toward crisis. The chapters in the

volume cover a broad range of issues critical to understanding contemporary Argentine politics, including the politics (and legacies) of the Menem government's economic reforms, the evolving role of democratic institutions such as Congress and the judiciary, the transformation (and persistent strength) of Peronism, the crisis of non-Peronist parties, and changing patterns of social and political protest.

From a theoretical standpoint, the chapters focus on five central themes: (1) the causes and consequences of institutional weakness; (2) tensions between radical economic reform and democracy; (3) party system change and the crisis of political representation; (4) the link between sub-national- and national-level politics; and (5) the transformation of state-society relations in the postcorporatist era. In this brief introduction, we present an overview of these themes.

THE POLITICS OF INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESS

The book's central theoretical focus is institutional weakness. By institutions, we mean the humanly devised rules and procedures—both formal and informal—that constrain and enable the behavior of political actors.¹ Following North (1990a, 4–5), we distinguish between institutions (the “rules of the game”) and organizations (the “players”). Indeed, few cases illustrate the value of this distinction more clearly than Argentina, where powerful organizations—including trade unions, guerrillas, and the Peronist and Radical parties—have long coexisted with weak rules.²

The institutionalist approach that dominated the study of Latin American politics during the 1990s centered primarily on issues of formal institutional design.³ Given the extensive political and economic reforms undertaken during this period, such a focus is hardly surprising. Yet attention to institutional design has obscured another critical dimension: that of institutional *strength*.⁴ Institutional strength may be conceptualized along two dimensions: (1) *enforcement*, or the degree to which the rules that exist on paper are complied with in practice; and (2) *stability*, or the

1. This definition is in line with those of North (1990a, 3–4), O'Donnell (1994, 57–59), and Carey (2000, 735).

2. Indeed, between 1955 and 1983, parties and unions showed extraordinary resilience amid repeated changes in electoral rules and labor legislation.

3. See Shugart and Carey 1992, Linz and Valenzuela 1994, Carey and Shugart 1995 and 1998, Mainwaring and Shugart 1997, Shugart and Haggard 2001, and Morgenstern and Nacif 2002.

4. Exceptions include Mainwaring and Scully 1995, McGuire 1997, and Mainwaring 1999.

degree to which rules survive minor fluctuations in the distribution of power and preferences, such that actors develop shared expectations based on past behavior. Analyses of political institutions often take for granted that rules are routinely enforced and at least minimally stable. Yet in reality, institutions vary considerably on both of these dimensions. Indeed, as Samuel Huntington (1968) argued nearly four decades ago, a major problem in much of the developing world is that institutions of a variety of types have consistently failed to take root. This remains the case in much of Latin America. In the absence of stable and effective rules of the game, both democracy and development are difficult to sustain (O'Donnell 1993, 1994).

Treating enforcement and stability as dimensions along which formal institutions vary—rather than as assumptions—permits us to analyze a broader universe of institutional phenomena. Latin American political institutions, like those throughout the world, are characterized by a mix of stability and fluidity, enforcement and evasion, and formality and informality.

The volume's chapters highlight this variation in Argentina. Some Argentine institutions, including aspects of the federal system, the electoral system, and—since 1983—democracy itself, have proven remarkably robust. Yet Argentina is also plagued by widespread institutional weakness. During the twentieth century, the country experienced a level of institutional instability that was remarkable even for Latin America (Nino 1992). Successive military coups—fourteen military presidents governed the country between 1930 and 1983—repeatedly removed presidents, legislators, and Supreme Court justices before the end of their mandates. Between 1928 and 2003, only two elected presidents—Juan Perón and Carlos Menem—completed their full terms in office, and both Perón and Menem rewrote the constitution to prolong their presidencies. Between 1960 and 1999, notwithstanding a constitutional guarantee of lifetime tenure, Supreme Court justices remained in office, on average, for fewer than four years (Spiller and Tommasi 2000, 22–23). The rules governing executive-legislative relations, elections, and the tax and financial systems were equally fluid. Indeed, in many areas of political and economic life, whenever existing formal rules and procedures were perceived to harm the short-term interests of powerful actors, the rules were circumvented, manipulated, or changed.

The political and economic consequences of institutional weakness were often devastating. In the absence of stable rules of the game, politics became a Hobbesian world of high uncertainty, narrow time horizons, and low trust in which political and economic actors routinely engaged in

short-sighted and socially irresponsible behavior (Nino 1992; O'Donnell 1993, 1994). The result was a seemingly endless cycle of political instability and economic failure. Indeed, institutional instability is a major reason why Argentine democracy has consistently underperformed—relative to its level of development—since 1930.⁵

The Argentine case thus points to the importance of moving beyond institutional design to gain a better understanding of the causes and consequences of institutional weakness. Beginning with the historical overview in Chapter 1, several of the contributions to this volume address these questions. The chapter by Mariano Tommasi and Pablo Spiller examines the macroeconomic effects of institutional instability. Tommasi and Spiller argue that the macroeconomic policy instability that plagued Argentina for much of the twentieth century is as important a source of economic underperformance as poor policy design. Policy instability heightens actors' uncertainty and shortens their time horizons, which undermines the cooperation and intertemporal bargains that are so critical to stable growth. Among other factors, the authors locate the cause of Argentine policy fluidity in the instability of the country's overall institutional (regime-level) context between 1930 and 1983.

The chapters by Steven Levitsky and Gretchen Helmke examine the *political* effects of institutional weakness. Levitsky argues that the absence of stable and binding internal rules frequently creates disorder and conflict within the (Peronist) Partido Justicialista (PJ), but that this internal fluidity also enhances the party's flexibility and adaptive capacity. Indeed, institutional weakness was a major reason why Peronism was able to transform so rapidly from a labor-based party into a vehicle for far-reaching neoliberal reform. Helmke examines the effects of institutional weakness in executive–Supreme Court relations. Argentina's 1853 constitution guarantees Supreme Court justices lifetime tenure, which should permit justices to act with considerable independence of the executive. Yet as Helmke shows, this constitutional guarantee has been routinely violated since the 1940s, as incoming (civilian and military) governments have repeatedly removed unfriendly justices and replaced them with allies. Rather than the independent judiciary prescribed by the Constitution, then, Helmke finds a pattern of “strategic defection,” in which justices support the executive while its hold on power is firm but then defect to the opposition when they suspect that the government is on its way out.

The book's conclusion examines the theoretical implications of institu-

5. As Przeworski and Limongi point out, Argentina is the wealthiest country in history (in terms of per capita income) to suffer a democratic breakdown (1997, 170).

tional weakness. It argues that much of the comparative politics literature on institutions is based on the assumption that formal rules are stable and effective—an assumption that does not hold up well in much of Latin America. The conclusion then uses the Argentine case to develop some initial hypotheses about the causes and consequences of institutional weakness.

COMBINING DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC REFORM

The book also revisits recent debates about the relationship between democracy and radical market-oriented reform. Much of the early literature on the politics of economic liberalization was pessimistic about the compatibility of democracy and market reform. Because of the status quo bias of voters (Fernández and Rodrik 1991) and the influence of concentrated reform “losers” (Haggard and Kaufman 1992, 1995), reform was said to be more likely to be achieved under nondemocratic regimes. At the very least, it was said to require a substantial concentration of executive power (Przeworski 1991; Haggard and Kaufman 1992, 1995), which, according to several authors, tended to reduce accountability and citizen participation (O’Donnell 1994; Oxhorn and Ducatenzeiler 1998). More recent scholarship has pointed to conditions under which far-reaching liberalizing reforms were possible under democracy. For example, scholars highlighted the role of hyperinflationary crises in generating public support for radical reform (Weyland 2002b), and in encouraging politicians to undertake those reforms (Stokes 2001).⁶

A second strand of scholarship focused on the construction and maintenance of pro-reform coalitions through policy concessions and side payments that compensated potential economic “losers” (Gibson 1997; Murillo 1997, 2001, 2002) and, in some cases, transformed them into winners (Corrales 1998; Etchemendy 2001). A third group of scholars highlighted the role of strong governing parties, legislative coalitions, and unified government in achieving policy reform under democracy (Shugart and Haggard 2001; Corrales 2002). Taken together, this research pointed to the political nature of economic reform processes, and it suggested that political factors such as public opinion, coalition-building, and institutions could facilitate market reforms under democracy.

The Argentine case both confirms and raises questions about these the-

6. Some scholars argued that market reforms can serve democratic goals by breaking ties between economic and political elites, reducing corruption and rent-seeking, and dispersing power. See, for example, Domínguez 1998, 73.

ories. Argentina was arguably the most radical case of economic reform undertaken in Latin America during the 1990s, and it was the only case in which radical reform was successfully implemented under democracy. The Menem government's success in carrying out these reforms offers evidence of how hyperinflation may generate public support for risk-laden policies (Palermo and Torre 1992; Weyland 2002b), and the success of the 1991 Convertibility Law in ending hyperinflation showed how economic stabilization can be used to build electoral support for reform-oriented governments (Etchegaray and Elordi 2001). The Argentine reforms also highlight the crucial role of disciplined governing parties. Peronism not only provided the Menem government with a stable legislative majority (Mustapic 2001; Corrales 2002), but it also played a central role in defusing working- and lower-class protest (Auyero 2000; Levitsky 2003).

Finally, the Argentine case highlights the importance of constructing and maintaining reform coalitions, which often entails political and policy exchanges that compensate potential "losers" under reform. As Sebastian Etchemendy's chapter demonstrates, the Menem government used a series of concessions and side payments to gain or maintain the support of powerful industrialists and trade unions during the early and mid-1990s. Without the cooperation of these potential losers, the Menem reforms would have been extremely difficult to carry out under democracy. Similarly, Kent Eaton's chapter highlights the role of provincial governors in making or breaking reform programs. Thus, the 1992 Coparticipation Agreement between Menem and the governors, which reduced the percentage of federal tax revenues distributed to the provinces but guaranteed the provinces a minimum revenue floor, was critical to the success of the government's fiscal adjustment during the early 1990s.

Yet the Argentine case also raises questions about the longer-term compatibility of democracy and radical market-oriented reform. The Argentine reforms—and the political process that made them possible—were decidedly double-edged. Although convertibility ended hyperinflation, it was a highly rigid policy solution that both eroded export competitiveness and limited the government's capacity to respond to external shocks. Side payments to unions and industrialists helped to limit social protest and distributive conflict, and concessions to Peronist governors helped to ensure legislative discipline and electoral support in the provinces (Jones and Hwang, this volume; Gibson and Calvo 2000; Calvo and Murillo, this volume). Yet these concessions had significant negative effects over the course of the decade. As Etchemendy shows, the very coalition that made the Menem reforms possible also prevented the government from taking

steps to enhance Argentina's export competitiveness or attending to the growing pool of unemployed workers. And as Eaton argues, the provincial revenue floor (*piso mínimo*) established by the 1992 Coparticipation Agreement created a devastating fiscal burden after the economy slid into recession in 1998. Each of these consequences contributed in an important way to the 2001 political-economic crisis.

In retrospect, then, the Menem reforms were marked by an important paradox. On the one hand, it can be plausibly argued that the speed and extent of the Menem reforms would not have been possible—at least not under democracy—without convertibility and a series of political and policy deals with governors, unions, and industrialists. On the other hand, these facilitating conditions *were themselves causes of the post-Menemist crisis*. This outcome—together with crises in other “poster child” cases (e.g., Bolivia, Dominican Republic, and Peru) and a troubling decline in public support for democracy in much of the region⁷—raises serious questions about the longer-term sustainability of radical economic reform.

POLITICAL PARTIES, REPRESENTATION, AND DEMOCRACY

A third theme of the volume is that of political parties and contemporary crises of representation in Latin America. Recent literature has pointed to the importance of strong parties and institutionalized party systems in building and maintaining democracy in Latin America (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Roberts 1998; Mainwaring 1999; Corrales 2001; Levitsky and Cameron 2003). At the same time, however, scholars have pointed to a disturbing regional trend: in many countries, economic crisis and radical market reform generated severe crises of representation, which led, in some cases, to the collapse of established parties and the rise of antisystem or “neopopulist” outsiders (Perelli 1995; Roberts 1995; Weyland 1999; Cavarozzi and Abal Medina 2003). In much of Latin America, party weakness and party system fragmentation were associated with executive-legislative conflict, policy failure, problems of governability, and the crisis or breakdown of democratic regimes (Mainwaring and Scully 1995).

Argentina offers an interesting case with respect to these regional trends. Although the party system's hegemonic tendencies and failure to effectively represent powerful socioeconomic actors undermined regime

7. See the *Economist*, August 14, 2004, p. 35.

stability during much of the twentieth century,⁸ the post-1983 party system was more competitive and integrative, and thus was more conducive to regime stability. At the heart of this change was Peronism. As Levitsky's chapter shows, the PJ's transformation from a labor-based party into a patronage-based machine facilitated its survival in the neoliberal era. Because it was the most powerful political force in the country, Peronism's adaptation and survival was critical to democratic governance. The PJ's persistent legislative strength helped prevent the kind of executive-legislative deadlock that undermined governability in Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Peru in the early 1990s. In addition, the PJ's continued electoral success reduced the space for "neopopulist" outsiders of the kind seen in countries like Peru, Venezuela, and Ecuador (Roberts 1995; Weyland 1999).

After 1999, the party system fell into crisis. As the chapter by Juan Carlos Torre shows, the disastrous performance of the Alianza por el Trabajo, la Educación, y la Justicia—a coalition of the centrist Radical Civic Union (UCR) and the center-left Front for a Country in Solidarity (FREPASO)—government between 1999 and 2001 generated a severe crisis of political representation, which led to the massive protests of December 2001, a large-scale citizen assault on the political class that was crystallized in the widely heard slogan "Throw everyone out!" Yet as Torre notes, anti-party sentiment was not as widespread as the protests seemed to suggest. Rather, it was largely confined to (non-Peronist) urban and educated middle-class Argentines, who had historically backed the UCR and smaller center-left and center-right parties. The failure of the Alianza alienated many of these voters, who expressed their disaffection first by abandoning the UCR and FREPASO (in the October 2001 midterm election) and later through protest against the political establishment. Hence, whereas Peronism's electoral base remained largely intact during and after the 2001–2 crisis, the UCR and FREPASO virtually collapsed.

The post-1999 Argentine party system thus appears to have suffered a *partial* collapse. Peronism's electoral resilience prevented a full-scale party system collapse along the lines of Venezuela and Peru. However, unlike in Chile, Mexico, Uruguay, and even Brazil, no stable partisan alternative emerged to represent disaffected or previously excluded voters in Argentina. The failure of FREPASO, the center-right Action for the Republic, and other new parties to build national organizations and enduring linkages to voters left non-Peronist forces fragmented and disorganized. As a result,

8. See O'Donnell 1973, Cavarozzi 1986, Gibson 1996, and McGuire 1997.

the predominantly middle-class non-Peronist electorate has become increasingly volatile.

FEDERALISM AND THE LINK BETWEEN SUBNATIONAL AND NATIONAL POLITICS

Recent analyses of Latin America politics have pointed to the importance of subnational political processes in shaping national-level political and economic outcomes.⁹ Although Latin American politics have traditionally been characterized as highly centralized (Wiarda 1973; Veliz 1980), democratization in federalist countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, plus far-reaching decentralizing reforms in countries like Bolivia, Colombia, and Venezuela, drew attention to the role of local and provincial politics in the region (Penfold 1999; O'Neill 2003). Subnational politics are increasingly seen as critical to electoral and legislative outcomes (Samuels and Snyder 2001; Samuels 2003), and powerful governors in Brazil, Argentina, and—increasingly—Mexico are said to be important veto players in the policymaking process (Ames 2002; Faletti 2003).

Subnational politics are crucial to understanding national-level politics and policymaking in Argentina.¹⁰ Although Argentina has maintained a federal system since 1853, regime instability and authoritarian rule obscured the importance of the provinces during much of the twentieth century. Yet provincial governors tend to accumulate enormous power under democratic rule. Indeed, as Eaton's chapter demonstrates, the governors proved to be powerful—and at times decisive—players under both Menem and his successors.

The chapters by Jones and Hwang and Calvo and Murillo highlight how the provinces shape national-level democratic politics in Argentina. In their analysis of Argentine legislative politics, Jones and Hwang argue that whereas the most important unit of analysis in studying the U.S. Congress is the individual legislator, the key unit of analysis in Argentina is the provincial party boss (frequently the governor). Individual legislators are elected on provincial party lists, and in most provinces, control over local patronage resources allows governors to control the list-making process. Legislators thus depend heavily on provincial bosses to advance their political careers, which means that governors exert substantial influence over

9. See Gibson 1997 and 2004; Garman, Haggard, and Willis 2001; Snyder 2000a; Eaton 2002; Rodden and Wibbels 2002; and O'Neill 2003.

10. See Calvo and Abal Medina 2001, Saiegh and Tommasi 1999c, Remmer and Wibbels 2001, and Gibson and Calvo 2000.

the legislative process. In effect, the Congress is run by a cartel of provincial bosses. Contrary to analyses that have depicted Argentine presidents as dominating Congress, then, Jones and Hwang argue that executives must negotiate the support of the governors to get bills through the legislature.

Calvo and Murillo examine the link between provincial electoral politics and national-level political outcomes. They argue that the weakness of non-Peronist parties in the peripheral provinces, Peronism's more effective use of patronage resources in the electoral arena, and the overrepresentation of peripheral provinces in Congress gave the PJ a virtual lock over the Senate and a majority of governorships during the post-1983 period. These dynamics effectively ensure divided government when non-Peronist parties capture the presidency, as occurred under both Alfonsín (1983–89) and the Alianza (1999–2001). Calvo and Murillo argue that this inability to build stable subnational (and hence legislative) coalitions was a major reason why both the Alfonsín and Alianza governments fell victim to governability crises.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS IN THE POSTCORPORATIST ERA

A fifth theme is the transformation of state-society relations in the postcorporatist era. During much of the twentieth century, corporatist institutions served as a primary mechanism of state-society linkage in many Latin American countries (Collier and Collier 1979, 1991). Under the old "state-centric matrix" (Cavarozzi 1994), corporatist labor and peasant organizations emerged as the most important representatives of popular sector interests. In several countries, labor movements became privileged—and powerful—sociopolitical actors. The political and economic liberalization processes of the 1980s and 1990s undermined the state-centric matrix, weakening—and in some cases, destroying—traditional corporatist arrangements linking state and society (Oxhorn 1998). The growth of the urban informal sector and subsequent decline in union memberships reduced once powerful labor movements to increasingly marginal players in the political arena. As unions weakened, many turned inward, protecting their remaining memberships and organizations (Murillo and Schrank, forthcoming), but growing increasingly unrepresentative of the—largely unorganized—urban popular sectors.

The weakening of corporatist institutions gave rise to a variety of new organizations, identities, and forms of social protest (Chalmers, Martin,

and Piester 1997; López Maya 1999). For some scholars, the new postcorporatist scenario opened up promising new avenues for grassroots participation and alternative—and potentially more democratic—patterns of representation (Fox 1994; Chalmers, Martin, and Piester 1997). In this scenario, the decline of populism and corporatism paves the way for increased popular sector participation through social movements, identity-based movements, NGOs, civic associations, and other components of an emerging civil society. Other scholars have painted a less optimistic picture of postcorporatist Latin America (Oxhorn 1998; Roberts 1998, 2002; Auyero 2000). These scholars view the decline of organized labor and traditional left-wing and populist parties as leading to the fragmentation and demobilization of the popular sectors. They envision not vibrant popular and civic organizations but a scenario in which the poor are increasingly organized along clientelist lines and subject to plebiscitarian and even authoritarian appeals.

Argentina represents a crucial case of the transformation of state-society linkages. The Peronist labor movement, represented by the General Labor Confederation (CGT) was one of the most powerful in postwar Latin America; and Argentina's corporatist institutions were among the most developed in the region. Beginning in the mid-1970s, however, the industrial unions that had been the core of the Peronist movement were weakened by far-reaching social structural change. The trade opening undertaken by the 1976–83 military government decimated the industrial workforce. The number of blue-collar workers declined by more than 10 percent between 1975 and 1985 (Palomino 1987), and many leading industrial unions lost between a third and a half of their memberships (Abós 1986, 189). By the mid-1980s, the largest unions in the CGT were located in the public and service sectors (Godio, Palomino, and Wachendorfer 1988). Labor was further weakened during the 1990s. The Menem reforms reduced the size of the industrial and public sectors and triggered a steep increase in unemployment.¹¹ At the same time, the informal sector expanded rapidly (CEPAL 1999), as did the percentage of the workforce working under “precarious” conditions (without contracts and benefits) (Lindemboim, Cerino, and González 2000).

Although unions preserved their organizational structures during the 1990s (Murillo 1997, 2001), their influence waned considerably. The CGT ceased to be a major player in the policymaking arena, and powerful

11. Public sector employment (as a percentage of total employment) was slashed by nearly a third during the Menem period (CEPAL 1999) even as provincial-level public sector employment increased (Orlanski 1994).

unions turned increasingly away from collective demand-making, limiting themselves primarily to the delivery of selective or club goods. Labor's influence in the political arena also declined. As Peronism shifted its urban organization from unions to clientelist networks, union representation in the PJ leadership and in Congress fell precipitously (Levitsky 2003).

The decline of corporatism gave rise to new forms of social organization and protest. Among the middle classes, the post-1983 period saw the unprecedented emergence of civic groups organized around issues of citizen rights and government accountability. As the chapter by Enrique Peruzzotti argues, these new citizen demands were rooted in the "rights-oriented" political culture that emerged in the aftermath of the 1976–83 dictatorship. This cultural shift was manifested in the powerful human rights movement during the 1980s. Although the human rights movement weakened during the Menem years, it engendered a multitude of smaller "rights-oriented" groups aimed at fostering civic participation and government accountability (Peruzzotti 2002a). Buttressed by the rise of watchdog journalism, the new "politics of accountability" played an important role in denouncing and publicizing government abuses during the 1990s.

Among the working and lower classes, several patterns emerged. First, labor protest was increasingly confined to provincial public sector employees (Farinetti 2002). Because public sector employment had such a profound community-wide impact in many peripheral provinces, these protests frequently brought public workers together with pensioners, unemployed workers, and community activists (Auyero 2003; Murillo and Ronconi 2004). Although these protests nourished the provincial branches of the militant Congress of Argentine Workers (CTA), which actively organized unemployed workers (Svampa and Pereyra 2003), they rarely took on a national character.

The post-1989 period also saw the emergence of several new forms of popular sector protest, including provincial "uprisings" (*puebladas*), semi-organized looting, and most notably, blockades of major roads and highways organized by unemployed people (*piqueteros*) seeking public sector jobs or unemployment aid. These emerging patterns of protest are analyzed in the chapter by Javier Auyero. Although the *piqueteros* first emerged in the interior provinces during the 1990s, they spread quickly to the urban regions.¹² By 2002, *piquetero* groups had crystallized into several

12. The growth of the movement was assisted by the influx of former union activists and by the De la Rúa government's decision to allow local *piquetero* organizations to distribute unemployment aid (Svampa and Pereyra 2003).

national organizations and had effectively displaced the CGT as the most important channel for popular sector protest. Organized along territorial, rather than sectoral lines, *piquetero* groups used their access to government subsidy programs as selective incentives to build and maintain their organizations. Through 2005, however, the *piqueteros* had not emerged as a coherent national-level actor. Rather, the movement remained fragmented politically, with some groups aligning themselves with militant left-wing parties and others establishing ties to local Peronist machines.

Although *piquetes*, *puebladas*, and other popular sector protests appear to represent a sharp break with the top-down patterns of popular organization characteristic of corporatism and clientelism, Auyero argues that the break is not as radical or discontinuous as it may appear. The participants in provincial riots and urban lootings are frequently embedded in (and mobilized by) the very clientelist networks that they are said to replace, and the resources for at least some of these new popular protests are often drawn from partisan and other not-so-new channels. Auyero's chapter thus warns against drawing a stark dichotomy between "old" top-down forms of organization and "new" bottom-up forms. Many of the most dynamic social movements in contemporary Argentina combine important elements of new and old.

Indeed, notwithstanding the high-profile nature of *piquetero* protests, much of the urban poor was incorporated into clientelist networks during the 1990s. Widespread unemployment, economic scarcity, and state retrenchment increased the influence of local brokers and party bosses (usually Peronist) who could provide access to public jobs and other state resources (Auyero 2000; Gibson and Calvo 2000; Levitsky 2003). Hence, although clientelism was hardly new in Argentina, particularly in the poor interior provinces, it took on enormous social and political importance—and spread increasingly to urban areas—after 1989.

In sum, as elsewhere in Latin America, Argentina's emerging postcorporatist scenario reveals a trend away from national-level collective organizations and nationally defined class identities toward localized, territorially defined identities. Most of the new social actors—including the CTA, *piqueteros*, and rights-oriented groups based in the middle class—resist close ties to the state. Emerging social organizations have yet to forge strong national collective identities and have increasingly abandoned demands for material public goods. Material demands have largely been reduced to private goods (in the form of clientelism) or club goods (those limited to group members), such as the side payments offered to union members during the 1990s and state subsidies distributed to *piqueteros* after 2001. To the extent that civic and social organizations demand public goods,

these demands are limited to nonmaterial issues such as rights, justice, and more recently, public security.

THE ARGENTINE CASE AND THEORY BUILDING IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Within the field of comparative politics, Argentina is known—indeed, famous—for its exceptionalism. In both politics and economics, the country's twentieth-century development is said to defy conventional theory (Nun 1967; Huntington 1968; O'Donnell 1973; Mallon and Sourrouille 1975; Waisman 1987; Adelman 1994; Przeworski and Limongi 1997). For example, Argentina has been cast as a case of a wealthy country that experienced a “reversal” of development (Waisman 1987; also Adelman 1994) and military coups despite a comparatively high level of socioeconomic development and a large, educated middle class (Nun 1967; Huntington 1968, 83–84; O'Donnell 1973). In some cases, scholars simply pointed to Argentina as a curious but theoretically unimportant outlier (Przeworski and Limongi 1997). In others, scholars developed specific—idiographic—explanations of Argentine “exceptionalism” (Peralta-Ramos 1978; Waisman 1987). Another group of scholars has used analyses of the Argentine case to both critique existing approaches and develop alternative theories that extend beyond Argentina.¹³

In many respects, this volume follows in the last tradition. It uses the Argentine case to highlight limitations in the existing literature on political institutions and to develop some hypotheses about the causes and consequences of institutional weakness that can help refine that literature. We do not, however, treat Argentina as an exceptional case. Institutional weakness is widespread in much of the developing and postcommunist worlds. Indeed, cases of stable and widely enforced political institutions (such as the United States and other advanced industrialized democracies) are relatively uncommon. Hence, Argentina, with its unstable and weakly enforced institutions, is representative of a much larger universe of cases than the handful of advanced industrialized democracies upon which most of the leading theories of democratic institutions are based.

The Argentine case is thus an excellent one from which to build hypotheses about the causes and effects of institutional weakness. Country studies can (and frequently do) play an important role in building and testing theories in comparative politics (Eckstein 1975; George and Bennett 2004).

13. The most influential of these studies is, of course, O'Donnell 1973.

Individual countries do not necessarily represent single cases or observations. Rather, the comparative method may be used within country studies to increase the number of observable implications of hypotheses in a variety of ways (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). For example, subnational comparisons of provinces or regions, economic sectors, or sector-level organizations (such as unions) allow scholars to engage in systematic comparison while holding historical, cultural, macroeconomic, and national institutional factors constant (Snyder 2001b).¹⁴ Alternatively, studies of national level institutions such as legislatures or Supreme Courts may increase the number of observable implications by comparing those institutions over time, analyzing—usually via quantitative methods—high-frequency events within those institutions (such as legislative votes or Supreme Court rulings), or shifting the level of analysis to individual bureaucrats, legislators, or legislative committees.¹⁵

A critical advantage of subnational comparison is that it enhances unit homogeneity. Although unit homogeneity is generally a standard assumption in quantitative analysis, these assumptions often do not hold in cross-national comparative research. Political, economic, and cultural differences between countries often ensure that political structures or rules that appear similar on paper function quite differently in practice. By ensuring greater homogeneity along these dimensions, within-country comparisons can enhance our confidence in the validity of our findings.

The value of within-country comparison is clearly seen in the case of the United States. Notwithstanding its single-country status, the United States has been a rich source for theory building in a range of areas, including voting behavior, executive-legislative relations, legislative politics, judicial systems, bureaucracies, and political parties and party systems.¹⁶ Within-country analyses of the United States benefited from the fact that they could hold a number of important variables constant, including the country's extraordinarily stable macroinstitutional context.

The Argentine case may be similarly useful in theory building, in part because it offers such a distinct institutional setting. In contrast to the United States, the Argentine macroinstitutional environment is character-

14. For subnational comparisons across a single policy dimension, see Locke 1995 and Snyder 2001a. For cross-sectional comparisons within and across countries, see Vogel 1996 and Murillo 2001.

15. In explaining why his study of Brazilian political institutions and their effect on policymaking is not a case study, Ames (2002, 33) describes how a large number of observations derived from a variety of quantitative and qualitative data provides variation in measures across states, time periods, and levels of government.

16. Weingast (2002) and Orren and Skowronek (2002) provide excellent summaries of these literatures from rational choice and historical institutionalist perspectives, respectively.

ized by pervasive *instability*, which allows scholars to use the comparative method to generate and test theories about how actors and institutions operate in a context of institutional weakness. The chapters in this volume employ within-country comparisons in a variety of ways, including comparisons across subnational territorial units (Calvo and Murillo, Auyero), economic sectors (Etchemendy), and policy areas (Tommasi and Spiller). Others compare national-level institutions over time (Eaton, Helmke, Jones and Hwang). Each of these analyses uses the Argentine case to generate, test, or refine theories whose application extends well beyond Argentina.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

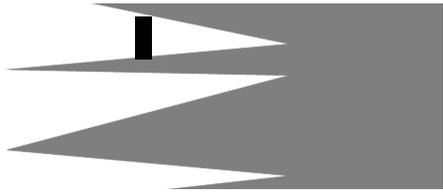
The book proceeds in the following way. Chapter 1, by Levitsky and Murillo, provides an overview of contemporary Argentine politics. The chapters that follow are organized into four sections. The first section focuses on the politics of economic policymaking and reform. Chapter 2, by Tommasi and Spiller, analyzes the causes and consequences of Argentina's long pattern of policymaking instability. Chapter 3, by Etchemendy, examines the politics of the Menem reforms, showing how the construction of a pro-reform coalition both facilitated radical reform and helped to undermine the longer-term sustainability of the reforms. Chapter 4, by Eaton, analyzes the relationship between the executive branch and the provinces and its fiscal impact during the Menemist and post-Menemist periods.

The second section looks at Argentina's democratic institutions after 1989. Chapter 5, by Jones and Hwang, focuses on Congress, and particularly the crucial link between provincial bosses and the organization of the legislature. Chapter 6, by Helmke, analyzes the behavior of the Supreme Court under Menem and his successors.

The third section examines changes and continuities in the party system. Chapter 7, by Levitsky, examines the post-1983 transformation of Peronism, arguing that the PJ's weakly institutionalized party structure enabled it to adapt and survive in the neoliberal era. Chapter 8, by Torre, looks at the non-Peronist parties, showing how the dramatic failures of the UCR and FREPASO triggered a profound crisis of representation among the Argentine middle classes. Chapter 9, by Calvo and Murillo, shows how the persistent strength of clientelist organization in the peripheral provinces and the overrepresentation of those provinces in Congress have assured the PJ a virtual lock on the Senate, making it extremely difficult for non-Peronist parties to govern.

The final section of the book focuses on new forms of sociopolitical organization and protest. Chapter 10, by Peruzzotti, examines the emergence of new (predominantly middle-class) “rights oriented” civic movements during the post-1983 period. Chapter 11, by Auyero, focuses on working- and lower-class protest, examining the origins of the street blockades, lootings, and other forms of protest seen during the 2001–2 crisis.

The conclusion, by Levitsky and Murillo, examines the origins and consequences of institutional instability in Argentina, as well as its implications for institutionalist theories in comparative politics.



Institutions, Actors, and the Politics of Economic Reform

