To what extent does public support for subnational officials fluctuate in response to local rather than national performance? Are the policy failures of subnational officials reliably punished by voters? Drawing upon both individual and aggregate level data, this article attempts to shed new light on these questions about the politics of decentralization by exploring electoral outcomes and public opinion at the subnational level in Argentina. Consistent with referendum voting models, this analysis suggests that the fate of candidates in both national and subnational elections is shaped by the performance of the incumbent presidential administration. Moreover, to the extent that subnational performance has an electoral impact, voters do not necessarily respond in ways that enhance electoral accountability. Voters not only blame and reward subnational officials for national performance, but also attribute responsibility for subnational performance to national authorities. The implications with respect to the impact of decentralized decision making on democratic accountability are decidedly mixed and anything but consistent with the argument that decentralization results in a closer match between citizen preferences and the allocation of public resources.

Fuelled by optimistic assumptions about the benefits of decentralization, governments around the world have been devolving a broad array of administrative, political and economic responsibilities to local and regional authorities. While the global process of democratization has unquestionably contributed to this trend, pivotal questions regarding the relationship between democracy and decentralization remain largely unanswered. Does decentralization bring government ‘closer to the people’, as its proponents suggest, limiting the exercise of arbitrary authority and shifting policy more closely into line with citizen preferences? And how do democratic politics condition the impact of decentralization? Does the logic of political competition alter the incentives for effective policy performance at the subnational level? To what extent are the economic costs and benefits of decentralization conditioned by the responsiveness of officials to local electorates?

Such questions are of fundamental importance for the study of both political decentralization and democratic accountability. At the present stage of research, however, it is only possible to offer tentative answers. The reason is that prior comparative work on decentralization has focused less on democratic politics than upon economic performance. The findings of the available literature are nevertheless theoretically suggestive because they run diametrically counter to the logic buttressing the global shift towards decentralization. Far from enhancing public sector efficiency in accordance with the traditional literature on ‘market-preserving federalism’,¹ recent research on developing
and emerging market nations indicates that decentralization, especially within the framework of federal systems such as Argentina, Brazil and Russia, may generate economic distortions that increase national budgetary deficits, undermine macro-economic stability and jeopardize economic performance.\(^2\)

The standard presumption is that the inconsistencies between established theory and recent empirical evidence are a product of institutional deficiencies that prevent decentralization from achieving its expected benefits. Particular emphasis has been placed on the absence of ‘hard’ budget constraints capable of limiting opportunities for subnational officials to ‘overfish’ common pool resources or otherwise adopt imprudent economic policies.\(^3\) The key implication of this line of analysis is that the logic of subnational politics collides with economic wisdom. What remains unclear is whether the root of the problem is a tendency for subnational officials to be overly responsive to the demands of local electorates or, rather, a fundamental lack of democratic accountability. A growing body of evidence points in the direction of the latter;\(^4\) but even if the economic costs of decentralized decision making can be attributed to electoral demands, the impact of decentralization needs to be understood less in terms of budgetary processes or other specific institutional issues than as a product of the political incentives shaping the behaviour of subnational politicians. Obviously, if political conditions fail to create incentives for local or regional politicians to deliver public goods or otherwise respond to the needs and interests of citizens, decentralization is unlikely to generate its anticipated benefits, regardless of budgetary constraints or other controls on subnational policy choice.

Drawing upon both individual and aggregate level data, this article attempts to further our understanding of the political incentives shaping subnational decision making by exploring electoral outcomes and public opinion at the provincial level in Argentina in the post-1983 period. Consistent with prior research on the United States, our analysis suggest that the incentives facing subnational officials are skewed by the propensity of voters to punish and reward incumbents at the subnational level in accordance with the performance of the national administration. At the same time, we find evidence that voters factor subnational performance into their voting choices, albeit not necessarily in ways that enhance democratic accountability.


PRIOR RESEARCH

Prior research on democratic accountability at the subnational level has drawn heavily upon the referendum voting model, which attributes electoral outcomes at all levels of governance to the performance of the national administration. Strong presidential approval ratings and/or positive trends in the national economy are expected to redound to the advantage of the incumbent party at both the national and local level. National performance failures, by contrast, are expected to work against the electoral success of candidates affiliated with the incumbent administration’s party. An extensive body of research confirms that the model performs well in predicting electoral outcomes at the aggregate level, both in the United States and elsewhere. Nevertheless, the relative importance of national and subnational conditions for explaining voting behaviour at the subnational level has yet to be fully resolved.

At the aggregate level, there is at least some limited evidence to suggest that local policies or economic conditions influence subnational electoral outcomes. The relevance of subnational performance has also been demonstrated by studies utilizing individual-level data. The findings of this latter body of research, however, are far from consistent. Studies drawing on survey data variously emphasize the importance of national economic conditions, subnational conditions or some combination of the two. These inconsistencies reflect variations in model specification, especially with respect to the definition of


the dependent variable, as well as serious problems of data availability. Typically, survey researchers have been forced to analyse subnational electoral behaviour on the basis of snapshots of public opinion in a single election, often in a small number of states. The difficulty is that until recently, individual data on subnational voting intentions drawn from random samples of voters were relatively rare for the United States and virtually non-existent elsewhere. Given the wider availability of longitudinal data on presidential approval, national economic performance and electoral outcomes, the tradition of aggregate research on subnational elections has therefore operated at something of an advantage.

In attempting to develop a more complete understanding of democratic politics at the subnational level, research drawing upon individual survey responses has nevertheless offered a useful complement to research focused on the aggregate level of analysis. First, survey research on subnational electoral behaviour is capable of directly addressing the micro-level assumptions underpinning the interpretation of aggregate electoral results. Without data on political attitudes, it is difficult to determine whether or not voters successfully differentiate between the performance of national and local officials, much less to show that decentralization brings public policy into line with citizen preferences. Secondly, survey research has provided evidence to suggest that the subnational political realm may be at least partially insulated from national trends, thereby helping to make sense of the behaviour of subnational politicians who campaign for public office on the basis of local issues, presumably with the expectation that voters will take subnational performance into account in casting their ballots. Thirdly, research based on individual-level data has enhanced our understanding of subnational elections by demonstrating the enormous potential for voter confusion about the policy responsibilities of public officials. Even in a political context characterized by a relatively educated citizenry, the fragmentation of decision-making authority is associated with substantial service attribution error, undermining prospects for citizen control and effective democratic government.

In the last analysis, however, the discrepancies between the findings of the separate strands of research on subnational voting leave the question of democratic accountability very much open to question. There is a substantial body of evidence to suggest that decentralization is unlikely to bring government policy into closer alignment with voter preferences because the electorate responds principally to the performance of the national government, largely ignoring the functional responsibilities of subnational officials. By contrast, a mounting body of survey evidence indicates that at least in some times and places voters in subnational elections respond to the performance of subnational rather than national officials or to some combination of national and subnational performance. Such findings clearly establish greater room for optimism regarding the capacity of decentralization to enhance public service delivery and improve the alignment of government policies with citizen preferences.

The debate over the politics of decentralization is further complicated by issues of

(\textit{Footnote continued})


cross-national differences. Variations in levels of citizen education, electoral rules, clientelistic behaviour, party system structure and other electoral system characteristics might all be expected to shape the relative responsiveness of subnational electoral outcomes to national performance. Concurrent elections, for example, reduce the insulation of subnational politics from national trends. The extent of political decentralization is also likely to have significant effects, augmenting the impact of national trends on subnational electoral contests in highly centralized systems and, at the opposite extreme, producing the possibility of ‘reverse coattails’ effects, as suggested by recent research on Brazil. These considerations call into question the broader comparative relevance of a body of research that has been largely limited to the study of state politics in a single nation and underline the theoretical importance of extending research on subnational voting to other political contexts.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This article attempts to shed new light on the politics of decentralization by combining the strengths of two largely disparate research traditions and applying their insights to the study of subnational elections in the less industrialized world. In the subsequent analysis, we draw upon both aggregate and individual-level data to explore the relative responsiveness of subnational electorates to national and subnational policy performance.

Our theoretical analysis builds directly on prior research. In accordance with the referendum voting model, we begin by assuming that the level of political support for subnational candidates is shaped by a combination of partisan affiliation and the performance of the national administration. At the aggregate level of analysis, this assumption implies that the level of electoral support for candidates affiliated with the party controlling the national government will reflect the performance of the national economy and/or public approval ratings of the national administration. For the analysis of individual-level data, it is assumed that support for subnational candidates will vary with partisan identification as well as with presidential approval and/or assessments of national economic performance. The more positive an individual’s assessment of the president and/or the performance of the national economy, the greater the likelihood that s/he will support subnational candidates affiliated with the president’s party.

Because we also seek to incorporate the insights derived from recent survey research, we further assume that voters respond to performance at the subnational level. Accordingly, we relate variations in electoral support for subnational candidates to subnational as well as national performance, incorporating into our aggregate analysis indicators of subnational economic performance, and into our individual-level analysis approval ratings of subnational incumbents and/or assessments of subnational economic performance. Pursuant to the logic underpinning the referendum voting model, we assume that the possibilities for error in performance attribution are likely to be considerable and biased by partisanship. Nevertheless, to the extent that subnational performance matters, we expect to find at least some evidence that voters differentiate between in-party and out-party incumbents and punish or reward parties at the subnational level accordingly.

Finally, we build on the assumption that incumbency, budgetary flows and presidential

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coattails convey political advantages. Hence we expect that candidates of the incumbent administration’s party will enjoy higher levels of electoral support in subnational units where their co-religionists are in charge than in other political units, not least because the government party will be better positioned to channel political resources to its candidates. Building on the US literature,\textsuperscript{13} we also assume that politicians can influence election outcomes through budgetary allocations, creating opportunities for the national administration to increase support for the presidential party by means of fiscal transfers. Accordingly, we expect that the higher the level of national transfers relative to subnational revenue sources, the greater the level of support for the presidential party at the subnational level. In accordance with prior research on electoral timing,\textsuperscript{14} we additionally expect that support for the party of the incumbent president will tend to decline in interim or non-concurrent elections.

Drawing upon the preceding theoretical considerations, our statistical analysis is designed to address two sets of relatively straightforward research hypotheses. At the aggregate level of analysis, we anticipate that support for the national in-party will vary across subnational units in accordance with the following five hypotheses:

\textbf{H1}: The level of electoral support for candidates of the national in-party at the subnational level varies directly with the aggregate level of support for the national administration and/or national economic performance.

\textbf{H2}: The level of support for candidates of the national in-party at the subnational level varies directly with subnational performance in political units controlled by the national in-party and indirectly with subnational performance in political units controlled by national out-parties.

\textbf{H3}: The level of support for candidates of the national in-party at the subnational level varies directly with in-party control of subnational government.

\textbf{H4}: The level of support for candidates of the national in-party at the subnational level varies directly with the relative importance of national budgetary transfers to the subnational level.

\textbf{H5}: The level of support for candidates of the national in-party at the subnational level varies directly with electoral simultaneity.

At the individual level of analysis, we draw upon a similar set of hypotheses to explain variations in subnational voting intentions:

\textbf{H6}: Voter support for candidates of the national in-party at the subnational level varies directly with individual evaluations of the performance of the national economy and/or the national executive.

\textbf{H7}: Voter support for candidates of the national in-party at the subnational level varies directly with individual evaluations of the performance of the subnational economy and/or the subnational executive in political units controlled by the national in-party and indirectly with individual evaluations of performance in political units controlled by the national out-party.


H8: Voter support for candidates of the national in-party at the subnational level varies with partisan identification.

To assess these hypotheses, we draw upon two simple models of subnational electoral choice. At the aggregate level of analysis, the model assumes the following form:

\[ V_t = b_0 + b_1 X_{1t} + b_2 X_{2t} + b_3 X_{3t} + b_4 X_{4t} + b_5 X_{5t} + b_6 X_{6t} + b_7 X_{7t-1}, \]

where \( V_t \) is the percentage vote received in the election by the president’s party; \( X_{1t} \) = national economic performance; \( X_{2t} \) = approval ratings of the national executive; \( X_{3t} \) = subnational economic performance; \( X_{4t} \) = opposition control of subnational government; \( X_{5t} \) = mid-term election; \( X_{6t} \) = national budgetary transfers; \( X_{7t-1} \) = first-order lag of the dependent variable.

At the individual level of analysis, \( V_t \) measures the intention of individual voters to cast their ballots for candidates of the national in-party in subnational elections. The independent variables in the model likewise measure individual responses to survey questions. \( X_{1t} \) measures citizen assessments of national economic performance; \( X_{2t} \) citizen assessments of the performance of the national executive; \( X_{3t} \) assessments of the performance of the subnational economy; \( X_{4t} \) assessments of the performance of the subnational executive; and \( X_{5t} \) partisan identification. The expectation is that the signs of these variables in the individual-level model will differ across subnational units, depending on the partisan affiliation of their incumbent administrations.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

Data for the analysis are drawn from the study of electoral outcomes and electoral behaviour at the Argentine provincial level. We focus on Argentina for both theoretical and methodological reasons. First, given recent trends in the less industrialized world, we are interested in exploring the impact of decentralization outside of the US context, where most prior research on subnational electoral behaviour has been conducted. It is only by extending the geographical boundaries within which hypotheses about subnational voting are formulated and tested that we will be able to arrive at a more adequate understanding of subnational electoral accountability.

Secondly, Argentina represents a particularly useful case for analysing subnational electoral accountability because, by comparative standards, it is a highly decentralized country. According to the Inter-American Development Bank,\(^{15}\) no country in Latin America is more decentralized than Argentina, despite the relative prevalence of federalism in the region. As of the early 1990s, the Argentine provinces had assumed a major role in the delivery of public services and accounted for more than 90 per cent of public spending on primary and secondary education, as well as more than 90 per cent of spending on public housing, 74 per cent on public health, 50 per cent on public safety and justice, and 57 per cent on infrastructure and services.\(^ {16}\) The Argentine political system is also composed of political units that hold regular elections for provincial executive and legislative office, making it possible to assess electoral accountability at the subnational

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level. As in the United States, subnational executive positions also convey considerable political power and visibility on the national political stage. Three of the four presidents elected to office in Argentina since the return to democracy in 1983 had served previously as provincial governors.

Thirdly, subnational political units in Argentina are not of recent formation but rather date back to the constitution of the republic as a federation in the nineteenth century. Provincial politics thus constitutes a traditional rather than new realm of political activity, with relatively well-established political roles, institutions and boundaries.

Fourthly, by the standards of most other less industrialized and emerging market nations, Argentine parties are relatively well institutionalized and play a powerful role in structuring electoral competition. Since the late 1940s, the two main partisan competitors have been the Peronist party (or Partido Justicialista, PJ) and Radical party (or Unión Cívica Radical). While third parties have enjoyed some success at the provincial level and, in recent elections, forced the Radicals to participate in a political coalition known as the Alianza (or Alliance) to compete successfully at the national level, electoral competition has continued to be structured around the same basic two-party political contours as in the past. Compared to the highly fragmented and personalistic party systems found in other parts of Latin America and the less industrialized world, Argentine parties have thus helped to clarify political responsibility and provided voters with the capacity to discriminate successfully between the ‘ins’ and the ‘outs’.

Fifthly, Argentine politics is of considerable importance in its own right. Notwithstanding its continuing economic travails, Argentina remains one of the most important countries in Latin America, and its political experience continues to influence other states in the region. The capacity of the Argentine electorate to punish or reward the performance of state or local officials reliably also has implications for democratic countries outside of Latin America that are attempting to enhance the delivery of public services through decentralized political institutions.

Finally, to assess the issue of subnational electoral accountability at both the aggregate and individual levels, certain data requirements have to be met. These include the availability of reliable data on a reasonably large series of subnational electoral contests, consistent data on national and subnational performance, and survey data on public opinion at the subnational level. Outside of the advanced industrial world, each of these requirements poses major data-gathering challenges. The availability of data at the provincial level was therefore an important consideration in the selection of the Argentine case.

Taken together, these characteristics of the Argentine political system, especially the importance of subnational politics and the relative strength and coherence of the Argentine party system, suggest that the Argentine case is particularly well tailored to explore questions about subnational political accountability. If voters fail to differentiate successfully between the policy responsibilities of national and subnational officials in a highly decentralized and traditionally federal nation such as Argentina, the probabilities of finding such evidence elsewhere must be considered rather remote. Likewise, if voters have difficulty in identifying the incumbents responsible for policy outcomes in a political system characterized by a high level of continuity in two-party competition, electoral accountability elsewhere might well be expected to be even more highly attenuated. In this sense, Argentina resembles what Eckstein describes as a ‘most likely’ case – a case ideally suited to assess the electoral incentives shaping subnational decision making. 17

Accordingly, our research falls squarely within the case-study tradition, with an exclusive focus on Argentina. At the same time, however, our research design involves comparisons across time and political units as well as among individuals. In adopting this strategy, we are able to multiply the observable implications of our research question\textsuperscript{18} and increase the number of observations,\textsuperscript{19} thus avoiding common problems of inference associated with small-\textit{n} studies.

For the aggregate-level analysis, our approach is that of pooled cross-sectional time-series analysis, which involves comparisons of electoral results across provincial units over the 1983–2001 time period. Beginning with an analysis of votes for candidates of the incumbent president’s party in subnational elections, we attempt to assess the relative responsiveness of subnational electoral contests to national and subnational performance. In addressing data at the individual level of analysis, we are engaging in a large-\textit{n} cross-sectional analysis, exploring the impact of assessments of performance at the national and subnational level upon the voting choices of individuals operating within the framework of particular subnational units.

**SUBNATIONAL VOTING AT THE AGGREGATE LEVEL OF ANALYSIS**

To explore the political accountability of subnational officials, we begin by evaluating the adequacy of our aggregate model of subnational electoral outcomes on the basis of the Argentine evidence. The dependent variable in the model, which is the percentage vote for candidates of the incumbent president’s party, is measured at the provincial level on the basis of results for both gubernatorial and provincial deputy elections. The lagged dependent variable for each type of election is included in the analysis to provide a basis for assessing shifts in electoral support relative to the previous election. With 1983 as a baseline (the year of transition from authoritarianism to democracy), the analysis covers four gubernatorial and ten provincial legislative contests in Argentina’s twenty-three provinces.\textsuperscript{20}

In terms of the independent variables, our analysis draws on a variety of different indicators. First, to assess provincial performance, we rely upon two indicators: the annual rate of provincial unemployment, weighted for the electoral month, and the fiscal performance of the provincial administration. Based on prior research in both the US and Argentine contexts,\textsuperscript{21} we expect both unemployment and deficit spending to be electorally


\textsuperscript{20} For the analysis of gubernatorial elections, the resulting number of cases is 90 and for the analysis of provincial legislative results is 128. Missing electoral data are a problem only with respect to legislative elections. Out of total of 177 possible observations for provincial legislative elections, our data cover 130, or approximately 73 per cent of the cases. No province was completely excluded from the analysis of provincial legislative elections because of missing data. It may be noted that the missing data reflect the limitations of federal electoral records, which do not cover all provincial elections. Some gaps in the series were filled by consulting official sources at the subnational level, but the obstacles to such research, including missing or (in the case of the province of Santiago del Estero) destroyed electoral records are considerable. In the province of Tierra del Fuego, despite the availability of electoral data, two years (1985 and 1987) had to be excluded because of missing unemployment data at the provincial level, reducing the total number of cases in our analysis to 128 provincial legislative elections.

\textsuperscript{21} Peltzman, ‘Voters as Fiscal Conservatives’; Porto and Porto, ‘Fiscal Decentralization and Voters’ Choices as Control’. 
unpopular. Secondly, for national performance, we draw upon three indicators: the presidential approval rating (lagged six months with respect to the election in question); the monthly change in the consumer price index, lagged one month with respect to the election; and the annual rate of national unemployment, weighted for the electoral month. It may be noted that according to Argentine survey data, inflation and unemployment rank as the most electorally salient dimensions of economic performance in the post-1983 period.

The operationalization of the remaining variables is relatively straightforward. To assess the impact of national fiscal transfers, we utilize the ratio of provincial to national revenues, which we expect to carry a negative sign. Given the long-standing importance of patronage flows in Argentine politics, the highly politicized nature of federal transfers and the budgetary powers of the national executive, we assume that the lower the level of local taxation and revenue generation relative to the flow of national transfers, the higher the likelihood of voting for the national in-party. Our operationalization is thus designed to capture the efforts of the president’s party to influence elections. Clearly, to the extent that the measure merely reflects long-standing variations in relative provincial fiscal autonomy, no relationship is likely to be found between the vote for the presidential party and the ratio of provincial to national revenues. Finally, partisan control of the provincial government and electoral timing are measured on the basis of dummy variables, coded 1 for opposition governors and interim elections and otherwise as 0. Each of these indicators and the sources for all data are described in greater detail in Appendix A.

For the analysis of aggregate electoral results, we rely upon ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with panel-corrected standard errors to address problems of heteroscedasticity. Given the lack of clear statistical conventions for the analysis of cross-sectional time-series data, we have cross-checked our results utilizing robust standard errors clustered by province. The results of these alternative estimations are virtually identical to those reported below.

Table 1 reports the results for three different specifications of our basic model for gubernatorial and provincial deputy elections. The first model reported in the table represents our most comprehensive model inasmuch as it includes both aggregate presidential approval and national economic performance among the independent variables. To address problems of multicollinearity generated by the high correlation between presidential approval and national unemployment ($r = -0.76$), our second model focuses strictly on national performance as measured by inflation and unemployment. Thirdly, to address the possibility that provincial incumbency conditions election outcomes in accordance with the idea of restricted in-party culpability, we compare the

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22 It should be noted that this operationalization, as well as others for economic performance reported below, explicitly takes into account variations in provincial electoral schedules. The weighted indicators were calculated on the basis of the following formula: $\rho = \rho_{t-1} \times (12 - \sigma_{o})/12 + (\rho_{o} \times (\sigma_{o}/12))$, where $\rho$ is the annual economic indicator, $\sigma$ the month of the election, and $t$ the election year. For example, if an election was held in March of 1997, we would multiply the 1996 annual indicator by 9/12 and add it to the 1997 annual indicator multiplied by 3/12.

23 Although Tierra del Fuego only held its first gubernatorial election in 1991, electoral contests for territorial (later provincial) legislators were held every two years for the entire period. For the 1983–89 period, the dummy variable for partisan control was coded 0 to reflect the dependent status of the territory upon the national government.


impact of local economic performance across in-party and out-party provinces on the basis of an interaction term involving provincial employment. Although incumbency \textit{per se} is less important in a country with closed-list proportional representation than in a candidate-centred system such as the United States, the third model specification tests for the possibility that the attribution of credit or blame to the presidential party for local policy performance is likely to be strongest in provinces controlled by that party.

The results of the aggregate analysis are largely consistent with theoretical expectation as well as the findings of prior aggregate research. As indicated by the values for $R^2$, which offers a rough assessment of the explanatory power of our models, the analysis also offers a relatively strong basis for understanding variations in electoral support at the provincial level in Argentina. The central thrust of the findings points towards the importance of national influences on subnational electoral outcomes. In both gubernatorial and provincial legislative elections, the fortunes of candidates from the presidential party fluctuate with national economic performance, especially levels of national unemployment and inflation. In the estimations for provincial legislative elections, we also find some evidence that presidential popularity conditions electoral outcomes at the provincial level. The latter result is even stronger if national unemployment is removed from the analysis to address the problem of multicollinearity generated by that variable’s strong correlation with presidential approval. National level factors appear to have a weaker effect in gubernatorial than provincial legislative elections. We assume this pattern reflects the propensity of gubernatorial races to be driven more by the personality of the candidates and less by the performance of the presidential administration, enabling governors in provinces such as La Pampa, Santa Cruz and San Luis to be re-elected for three or more terms despite major shifts in the electoral performance of their party at the national level.

Also relevant in the expected direction are the variables assessing budgetary transfers, opposition control and electoral timing. The lower the level of provincial revenues relative to the flow of national transfers, the higher the vote for the presidential party. Thus, Argentine presidents definitely have political incentives for funnelling resources to the subnational level.\textsuperscript{26} Support for the president’s co-religionists at the provincial level also varies with local political control with provinces governed by the opposition returning a lower vote for candidates of the presidential party than provinces under in-party control. Finally, as in prior research on the United States, the results suggest that the vote for the presidential party at the subnational level declines during mid-term elections.

Less consistent with theoretical expectation are the results for subnational policy performance. First, although provincial unemployment is widely regarded as politically sensitive in the Argentine context, its impact on electoral outcomes is weak. Multicollinearity is partially responsible, but even with both presidential approval and national unemployment removed from the estimates, the coefficient for provincial unemployment remains insignificant in the equation for gubernatorial elections and only achieves significance at the 0.05 level in the equation for provincial legislatures. Moreover, our third model specification indicates that sensitivity to provincial performance does not vary with

\textsuperscript{26} It may be noted that these findings are robust to changes in time period and the partisanship of the national president. Hence, in contrast to E. Calvo and Maria Victoria Murillo, ‘Who Delivers? Partisan Clients in the Argentine Electoral Market’, \textit{American Journal of Political Science}, 48 (2004), 750–1, we find that federal transfers generate electoral benefits for the political party controlling the presidency, whether it is the Radical Civic Union (1983–89), the Peronist Party (1989–99), or the Alianza (1999–2001).
### Table 1: Electoral Support for the Incumbent Presidential Party in the Argentine Provinces, 1983–2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Governorship</th>
<th>Provincial Legislature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Approval</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proincional Unemployment</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.31)</td>
<td>(0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prov. Unem. × Opp. Gov.</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.48)</td>
<td>(0.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Unemployment</td>
<td>-1.67*</td>
<td>-2.03***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.80)</td>
<td>(0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.23)</td>
<td>(0.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.88)</td>
<td>(2.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Balance</td>
<td>20.59*</td>
<td>19.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition Governor</td>
<td>-7.69**</td>
<td>-7.94**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.76)</td>
<td>(2.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Election</td>
<td>-18.98***</td>
<td>-20.05***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.18)</td>
<td>(3.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Incumbent Vote</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>63.40***</td>
<td>72.60***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(14.91)</td>
<td>(8.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Squared</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald Test</td>
<td>145.89***</td>
<td>140.17***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Entries represent unstandardized regression coefficients with panel corrected standard errors in parentheses. *p ≤ 0.05, **p ≤ 0.01, ***p ≤ 0.001.
partisan control at the provincial level as might be predicted on the basis of the notion of restricted party culpability.

Provincial fiscal performance has a more significant impact on electoral shifts, but the results also fail to comport fully with theoretical expectation. While statistically significant in most of the estimations, the positive coefficients for fiscal balance in Table 1 indicate that provincial deficits undermine rather than foster support for the party of the president. Further analysis utilizing interaction terms to assess differences between government-controlled and opposition-controlled provinces reveals that the findings reported in Table 1 revolve mainly around opposition provinces; i.e., when opposition governors run high deficits, the vote for the president’s party declines, while surpluses in opposition-controlled provinces work in favour of the national administration. Although voters might conceivably be rewarding opposition governors for deficit spending, the sign for fiscal balance is positive for both government-controlled and opposition-controlled provinces.27 Clearly, if voters were rewarding local incumbents for deficits, the signs for the fiscal balance variable should be reversed in government and opposition controlled provinces. Analysis of budgetary data also reveals that the propensity for deficit spending is more marked in opposition than government controlled provinces. The logical implication is that the national government reaps the blame or credit for provincial fiscal performance, creating incentives for opposition governors to abandon fiscal responsibility.

Thus, at the aggregate level of analysis, electoral outcomes in Argentina largely conform to the dominant conclusion drawn from aggregate research on the US states: subnational elections tend to function as referendums on presidential policies. From this perspective, officials at the state or provincial level are punished or rewarded mainly in accordance with presidential popularity and/or the performance of the national economy rather than for their success or failure in carrying out their functional responsibilities at the subnational level. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that subnational performance also matters, although not in ways that bolster a ‘policy accountability’ account of the political process. Rather, the credit (or blame) for subnational performance redounds to the advantage (or disadvantage) of the presidential party. Such conclusions clearly imply that, subnational politicians, especially those from the opposition party, have few incentives either to select policies preferred by the local electorate or to manage the local economy responsibly. As suggested by Chubb: ‘If there is little evidence that state politicians are blamed or rewarded in accordance to their performances at economic management, there is reason to question how substantially those politicians are guided by the belief that they will be.’28

SUBNATIONAL VOTING AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

The preceding analysis of aggregate electoral results is constructed around assumptions about the perceptions and motivations of individual voters. The connections between the micro-level and macro-level of analysis are not directly examined, however, leaving open to investigation the propensity of individual voters to differentiate between national and subnational performance. To address these issues more explicitly, we shift the focus of

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27 We relied on the use of a split-sample strategy as well as the introduction of interaction terms to come to these conclusions. The two strategies produced consistently positive coefficients in in-party and opposition-controlled provinces, indicating that the reward for fiscal surpluses accrues to the president’s party, and not merely the provincial incumbent. Tables are available from the authors upon request.

analysis from aggregate-level to individual-level data, drawing upon subnational survey evidence to explore the linkage between individual perceptions of performance and electoral choice.

The evidence for the analysis is drawn from a survey of voter attitudes taken prior to the provincial elections of 1998–99. The survey was based on random samples of voters in six Argentine provinces: Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Misiones, Córdoba, Chaco and Mendoza. Approximately 500 citizens were surveyed in each of the provinces, yielding a total sample of 3,100. While the six provinces included in the survey are not necessarily typical or fully representative of Argentine political realities, taken together they account for approximately 65 per cent of the country’s total population and 55 per cent of its gross domestic product. The six provinces are also quite diverse, varying widely in size, regional location and wealth, as well as in terms of issues of particular significance for this study. At the time of the survey, two of the provinces (Chaco and Córdoba) were under the control of the opposition party, while the other four were governed by the party of the incumbent Peronist president (as compared to fourteen of twenty-four at the national level). The economic difficulties that voters were experiencing at the provincial level also differed significantly, with official provincial unemployment ranging from a high of 13.5 per cent in Santa Fe to a low of 4.8 per cent in Misiones, as compared to a national figure of 12.4 per cent.

The survey was conducted in the midst of an electoral campaign in which voters were selecting officials at all levels of government, from the president down to provincial legislators. Voter choices at the subnational level were thus made within the context of an election involving the most visible national office, potentially biasing the results in favour of an emphasis upon national rather than subnational issues. Concurrence, however, has been a regular feature of elections in Argentina. Four of the five sets of gubernatorial elections that have been held since the return to democracy in 1983 have coincided with presidential elections, and with the 1995 reduction in length of the presidential mandate, concurrence has increased. From this perspective, 1999 was not an anomalous election year; nevertheless, the relevance of the findings reported below for other political settings

29 Our study relies on surveys conducted by Mori-Argentina in cities of over 20,000 inhabitants in the six provinces between 26 September and 10 October 1998. Households were selected using a random process, and those interviewed by gender and age quotas. We would like to thank Mori-Argentina for graciously providing us with data that allow us to compare the impact of national performance on electoral orientations in multiple provinces at a single point in time. It may be noted that the time gap separating the survey from some of the elections, which were staggered over the December 1998–October 1999 period, is a potential source of concern; however, given the choice of relying upon a single survey that holds the national political and economic context constant and multiple surveys taken at different points in time in different provinces, we opted for the former. Our central theoretical interest is less the prediction of particular electoral outcomes than the assessment of the relative weight of national and provincial conditions in individual vote choice. Nevertheless, we compared the aggregation of vote intentions obtained from the 1998 surveys to the actual 1999 gubernatorial electoral outcomes. Our analysis showed that the error attribution with respect to PJ vote (our pivotal dependent variable) does not vary across the provinces in relation to the relative proximity of the election to the survey. We also cross-checked our findings by comparing the results of our 1998 survey in the Province of Mendoza with a survey asking the same questions a few months before the 1999 elections in the same province. Although the number of non-voters was comparatively smaller in the latter, we obtained very similar results when running our model for that province at the two points in time. The main difference was that proximity to the actual election enhanced the importance of national relative to provincial influences on vote choice, which, if anything, strengthens our central conclusions regarding the importance of national forces in subnational elections.

30 Unemployment rates in the included Argentine provinces, October 1998, are as follows: Buenos Aires, 12.7 per cent; Chaco, 11.3 per cent; Cordoba, 11.6 per cent; Mendoza, 5.7 per cent; Misiones, 4.8 per cent; Santa Fe, 13.5 per cent; and, in total, Argentina 12.4 per cent.
obviously needs to be evaluated in the light of the issue of electoral simultaneity or near-simultaneity.

The model that we utilize to analyse the subnational survey data is designed to parallel that used to estimate the aggregate electoral results. The basic dependent variable is gubernatorial voting intention, which we initially code on the basis of a dummy variable as 1 for respondents favouring the candidate of the incumbent president’s party and otherwise as 0. To operationalize the independent variables, we rely upon responses to four questions regarding national and subnational performance. The first asks respondents to rate the current economic situation of the country on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with the value of 5 representing a very positive evaluation. The second question asks respondents to assess the economic situation of their province relative to the rest of the country on a scale of 3 ranging from worse to better. The remaining two questions ask voters to evaluate the president of the country and the governor of their province on a scale of 1 to 5, with the upper end of the scale again coded as a very positive evaluation.

In addition to these questions regarding policy performance, we include in our model partisanship, educational background, gender and age. The precise language used to elicit responses to these and other survey questions are detailed in Appendix B together with the relevant codings.

Given the dichotomous nature of our dependent variable, we rely upon logistic regression analysis to estimate our basic model of individual vote choice. Since the sampling strategy was stratified by province, we draw upon robust standard errors clustered by province to assess statistical significance. Because the impact of perceptions of provincial performance on gubernatorial vote choice is expected to vary with provincial leadership, the results for provinces controlled by the government and those under opposition control are reported separately.

The estimates presented in Table 2 largely conform to the findings of recent individual-level research on the US states as well as the theoretical expectations outlined above. Vote choice in subnational elections in Argentina reflects assessments of national as well as provincial level performance. Both presidential and gubernatorial approval have a significant impact on gubernatorial vote choice. Assessments of economic performance, by contrast, have a less consistent impact. Whereas the coefficient for provincial performance is statistically significant, assessments of national economic performance do not significantly influence the gubernatorial vote in either government-controlled or opposition-controlled provinces. Multicollinearity does not account for this difference. The remaining variables largely cut in the expected direction, with identification with the national ruling Partido Justicialista (PJ) working strongly in favour of an in-party voting intention at the gubernatorial level and opposition sympathies operating in the opposite direction. The impact of education also accords with expectation, although the negative impact of secondary and higher education training is more evident in the provinces controlled by the governing PJ than in opposition provinces. Finally, the sign for gender indicates female support for candidates of the PJ.

The relative importance of national and provincial assessments for vote choice is explored further in Table 3, which reports the conditional probability of a vote for the incumbent national party in gubernatorial elections. These probabilities are computed with the help of CLARIFY software solely on the basis of statistically significant coefficients. 31

A graphic representation of the probabilities reported in Table 3 can be found in Appendix C along with their confidence intervals. The results suggest that in both in-party and opposition provinces the propensity to vote for the party of the incumbent president in gubernatorial elections is dominated by a combination of presidential and gubernatorial approval and that the impact of those assessments tends to be quite symmetrical.

To illustrate this point, a voter living in a province with an opposition governor, who perceives the performance of the governor as very bad, but who conforms to the mean with respect to all of the other variables in the model, will vote for the national incumbent party with a probability of 40 per cent. Another voter in that province who regards the governor’s performance as very good, by contrast, will vote for the national incumbent party with a probability of only 8 per cent, implying a 32 percentage point decline in the probability of support. Likewise, as gubernatorial approval shifts from its lowest to highest level in provinces controlled by the party of the president, the probability of voting for the president’s party increases by 38 percentage points. The results are also rather similar across government and opposition provinces for presidential approval. The probability of a vote for the president’s party in in-party provinces increases by 25 percentage points with
### Table 3

**Predicted Probability of Voting for the President’s Party in the 1999 Gubernatorial Election**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In-party provinces</th>
<th>Opposition provinces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidential Approval</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very bad</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gubernatorial Approval</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very bad</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provincial Economic Evaluations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes:* Entries are predicted probabilities of voting for the president’s party in gubernatorial elections. The probabilities were computed with the help of the CLARIFY software (see fn. 31 for reference) on the basis of the results presented in Table 2. All of the variables of the model are set to their mean, except for the indicated variables. There are no predictions for national economic evaluations given that the coefficient is not statistically significant.

A shift from very low to very high presidential approval ratings, as compared to an increase of 28 percentage points for opposition provinces.

Provincial economic evaluations are significantly less important. As provincial economic evaluations increase from the lowest to the highest level with all of the other variables set at their mean, the probability of voting for the party of the incumbent president in in-party provinces increases by 9 percentage points, whereas in opposition provinces the shift from ‘Very bad’ to ‘Very good’ evaluations translates into a 4 percentage point decline in the probability of voting for the presidential party. Thus overall the gubernatorial vote seems more strongly affected by leadership approval ratings than by economic performance, whether national or local.

Using CLARIFY to simulate the behaviour of specific types of voters, we can ascertain that the independent effect of both presidential approval and gubernatorial approval has the potential to move the probability of a voter supporting the president’s party above or below the 50 per cent mark, i.e., changing vote intention. To this end, we take the example of a female voter in her mid-40s, living in an opposition province, with a completed primary education, and no strong partisan ties with either the PJ or Alianza.\(^{32}\) If she perceives the performance of the governor as very bad, but conforms to the mean with respect to the other

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\(^{32}\) In the sample, females are on average 42 years old, and 62 per cent of them have a primary school degree or less.
### Bivariate Probit Regression Results for Presidential Party Vote Choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In-party provinces</th>
<th>Opposition provinces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>Gubernatorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Approval</td>
<td>0.30***</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Economic</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluations</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gubernatorial Approval</td>
<td>0.28***</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Economic</td>
<td>0.17***</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluations</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PJ Partisanship</td>
<td>1.80***</td>
<td>1.58***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCR/Alianza Partisanship</td>
<td>-1.63***</td>
<td>-1.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.33***</td>
<td>-0.51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.34*</td>
<td>0.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.05***</td>
<td>-0.11***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.43)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald Test</td>
<td>7.22**</td>
<td>13.72***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries are maximum likelihood estimates with robust standard errors clustered by province in parentheses. *p ≤ 0.05 **p ≤ 0.01 ***p ≤ 0.001
attitudinal variables in the model (i.e., presidential approval, national economic assessments and provincial economic assessments), she will vote for the president’s party with a probability of 61 per cent. If that same voter regarded the governor’s performance as very good, however, she would vote for the president’s party with a probability of only 17 per cent. Alternatively, if our hypothetical female voter lived in a province controlled by the party of the president, the shift in gubernatorial approval from its minimum to maximum would change her probability of voting for the president’s party from 36 per cent to 74 per cent. Similarly, the probability of our hypothetical voter in an in-party province supporting the president’s party moves from 46 to 71 per cent with a shift from very low to very high presidential approval ratings, as compared to the move from 15 to 56 per cent in opposition provinces.

While the preceding results offer some support for a ‘policy accountability’ model of subnational voting, the analysis of individual level data nevertheless suggests that the accountability of subnational politicians to local electorates is attenuated by the importance of national influences on electoral choice. Presidential approval operates as a significant determinant of the vote in every specification we have estimated, including models for the support of the gubernatorial party in opposition provinces. Disaggregating the analysis to focus upon the results for individual provinces reinforces the importance of national influences. After political party identification, the single most consistent influence on electoral choice is presidential approval, which is statistically significant across the full range of models in all but one province, Misiones.

With assessments of the president carrying over so consistently to the gubernatorial level, the incentives for provincial authorities to be guided by the preferences of the electorate are diluted, leaving the door open to competing claims, including personalism, cronyism, clientelism and other non-democratic sources of policy influence. At the same time, the evidence presented here is not fully consistent with a simple referendum voting model. The linkage between provincial economic evaluations and gubernatorial voting intention evidenced in Table 2, as well as the impact of gubernatorial approval, point to a more complex model of electoral choice in which voters cast their ballots at the subnational level, looking simultaneously at both national and subnational performance. The calculus motivating voters is thus too complex and/or confused to be captured adequately by either a simple referendum voting model or its provincial policy responsibility alternative.

Simultaneous analysis of the vote choice for president and governor clarifies this point further. Drawing upon the base specification of our vote choice model, the bivariate probit regression results presented in Table 4 point to a high level of overlap in the variables that condition vote choice for national and subnational candidates. Voters in Argentina not only have difficulty distinguishing national from provincial economic performance; their assessments of candidates competing for executive office at the national and subnational levels also respond to similar sets of variables, yielding findings that suggest that vote choices in gubernatorial and presidential elections are not independent of one another. In both sets of estimates, the error terms for the equations for gubernatorial and presidential vote choice are correlated at the 0.01 level.

Perhaps most surprising are the coefficients suggesting that gubernatorial approval and provincial economic evaluations significantly increase the probability of support for the presidential candidate of the national ruling party. It should be emphasized that this result is not an artefact of the bivariate statistical methodology. Straightforward probit estimations of presidential voting intention yield similar results, pointing to the possibility
of considerable interpenetration of provincial and national political assessments. Argentine voters credit (blame) national officials for provincial performance and credit (or blame) provincial authorities for national policy performance, suggesting they have some difficulty drawing distinctions between the two sets of political authorities. Hence, although survey evidence indicates that provincial performance matters for subnational elections, there is also reason to suggest that there exists considerable linkage between provincial and national assessments and interaction between vote choices at different levels of government.

CONCLUSION

Consistent with expectations, the Argentine experience over the past two decades offers considerable support for the referendum voting model that has been utilized to analyse state-level elections in the United States. Evidence drawn from both the aggregate and individual level of analysis indicates that vote choice in provincial elections is heavily influenced by the track record of the national administration. At the same time, however, our findings point to a more complex picture of voting behaviour than can be adequately captured by either the simple referendum voting model or its ‘functional responsibility’ alternative. Although assessments of the state of the national economy and/or presidential performance consistently influence subnational vote choice, both aggregate and individual-level results indicate that voters also factor subnational performance into their choice of subnational candidates. Complicating the picture still further is the evidence regarding the interdependence of assessments and choice processes across levels of government. Contrary to the hierarchical model of influence presupposed by the referendum voting model, not only do assessments of national performance influence subnational elections; subnational assessments also influence the choices of voters in national elections in accordance with what might be described as a ‘reverse coattails’ effect.

Notwithstanding these complexities, the overall pattern of influences on subnational elections implies that provincial officials in Argentina are unlikely to be held fully accountable for their policy performance. If the national economy is booming and presidential popularity high, the chances of electoral success or failure at the subnational level are more likely to be shaped by partisan affiliation than by the effectiveness of provincial management. By the same token, national economic decline and low presidential popularity are likely to work against the election of the president’s co-religionists at the subnational level, no matter how positive the latter’s own track record of performance.

Under these conditions, the incentives for effective subnational governance are likely to be attenuated, albeit not entirely absent. As suggested by both the individual and aggregate results, Argentine voters do take subnational performance into account in casting their ballots at the provincial level. Provincial officials thus confront at least some countervailing pressures to perform in accordance with the preferences of local electorates. Given the complex interpenetration of national and subnational political assessments, these pressures from below may be reinforced by others from above as national party leaders seek to protect themselves from bearing the costs of subnational policy failure. The heavy weight of national performance on subnational electoral choice, however, suggests that the overall balance is likely to be struck in favour of limited subnational electoral accountability, especially since pivotal dimensions of subnational administration are systematically attributed to national rather than local policy decisions. Hence, positive
provincial fiscal performance enhances the electoral prospects of the president’s party in provincial elections, regardless of partisan control at the subnational level.

While these findings are not necessarily generalizable to other national contexts, key features of the Argentine situation underline their potentially broader comparative significance. First, whereas most prior research on state or local elections has focused on the advanced capitalist nations, the Argentine experience offers insights into subnational politics in a less industrialized and potentially less information-rich setting—a setting of greater relevance to the majority of states in the world system. Secondly, while the broader significance of the preceding results is conditioned by the limitations of the available data, the importance of provincial units coupled with the structure of the party system suggest that the biases flowing from the analysis of the Argentine experience, if any, are weighted in the direction of subnational accountability. The lack of clarity about policy responsibility in the Argentine setting consequently has important implications for a much wider range of countries.

For the analysis of the political economy of decentralized decision making, the findings presented here therefore take on particular significance. Contrary to the assumption that political decentralization will result in an improved fit between citizen preferences and policy outcomes, the Argentine experience suggests just the opposite. The attenuation of policy responsibility at the provincial level has limited the incentives for public officials to be responsive to voters and thereby exacerbated outstanding problems of democratic accountability. From this perspective, decentralization may represent less a panacea for the failures of public sectors in less industrialized nations than a potential source of additional difficulty. In the Argentine case, decentralization exacerbated, rather than alleviated, pre-existing problems of public sector management, leading to mounting provincial spending, unsustainable debt burdens, and, eventually, macro-economic breakdown. Whether or not this experience is replicated elsewhere, our findings emphasize that the search for administrative solutions to unresolved problems of state capacity needs to proceed hand in hand with careful analysis of the political incentives driving policy formation.

The findings of this analysis also have important implications for the study of subnational elections elsewhere. First, the comparison of aggregate and individual-level models of vote choice in Argentina offers fresh insights into the discrepancies among prior studies of subnational voting. Our findings parallel those for the United States inasmuch as we uncover relatively strong, albeit somewhat mixed, evidence that elections conform to a referendum voting pattern at the aggregate level of analysis. At the individual level of analysis, however, the evidence points to a much more complicated picture, not consistent with either a referendum voting or policy responsibility model of electoral behaviour. These differences, which may reflect variations in the relative breadth of the indicators available to assess subnational performance at the individual and aggregate levels of analysis, underline the problems of drawing inferences about individual behaviour from macro-level results as well as the advantages of research that integrates the two kinds of evidence.

Secondly, our findings underline the potential utility of analysing subnational voting in conjunction with national voting. The complex mixture of national and provincial assessments shaping voting at both the subnational and national level in Argentina indicates the potential perils of drawing inferences from the analysis of gubernatorial elections in isolation from national ones. The evidence that voters take provincial performance into account in casting their ballots not only for governors but also presidents
undercuts both the policy responsibility and referendum voting account of elections; likewise, the impact of presidential approval on provincial elections refutes any effort to describe the situation in terms of ‘reverse coattails’.

Thirdly, our research further suggests that unless future studies include both national and subnational performance among the variables conditioning voting behaviour, researchers will continue to find openings for diverse interpretations of common situations, undermining efforts to generate a cumulative body of research. ‘Reverse coattails’, ‘referendum voting’ and ‘policy responsibility’ models may all capture elements of the vote choice, but taken in isolation, each model provides an incomplete account of electoral accountability. The challenge is to design studies capable of capturing all three dimensions of the situation.

Finally, our study clearly underscores the need for further research to explore the factors that shape the relative willingness and capacity of voters to differentiate between the policy responsibilities of national and subnational officials. Under what conditions are voters most likely to hold subnational officials responsible for their policy performance? The results presented above point to the potential relevance of factors such as electoral concurrence, but there are many outstanding issues that need to be addressed. Does subnational electoral accountability vary with the institutional arrangements governing electoral competition, the allocation of functional responsibilities across levels of government, or governmental transparency? How important are interest group organization and mobilization or related dimensions of the electoral environment? And to what extent do individual-level characteristics, such as media exposure or campaign attentiveness, shape the propensity of voters to distinguish between national and local policy performance? Obviously, answering these and other related questions about variations in subnational electoral accountability will require new sources of data to allow researchers to compare the impact of policy performance across different areas of functional responsibility, assess the importance of variations in context, and measure more directly the attribution of responsibility at the individual level of analysis.

**APPENDIX A: VARIABLES USED IN THE AGGREGATE LEVEL ANALYSIS**

*Dependent Variables*

The dependent variables consist of the percentage of the vote obtained by the party of the president in (a) gubernatorial elections and (b) provincial legislative elections between 1983 and 2001. Provincial legislative elections are held every two years, except in the provinces of Entre Ríos, La Pampa, Neuquén, Río Negro, Santa Fe and San Juan, where they have been held every four years. Where second-round elections were held to determine the winner of gubernatorial elections (Chubut, 1991; Corrientes, 1997; and Tierra del Fuego, 1999), we have relied on the results of the first round. *Sources:* (1) Ministerio del Interior, Dirección Nacional Electoral, *Elecciones Nacionales, Escrutinio Definitivo* (Buenos Aires: unpublished data); (2) *Guía Electoral de la República Argentina, 1983–1999* (Buenos Aires: Carlos Castro, 1999); (3) unpublished official electoral records for the provinces of Santiago del Estero, Mendoza and Córdoba.

*Independent Variables*

*Presidential approval.* Percentage of respondents who approve of the president, six months prior to the election according to public opinion surveys with national representative samples. *Source:* unpublished data, Mora y Araujo & Asociados, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2000.

*Inflation.* Monthly change in the consumer price index lagged one month with respect to the data of the


*Ratio of provincial to national revenues.* Ratio of total provincial revenues to total national revenue transfers. *Source*: unpublished data, Ministerio de Economía, Argentina.


**APPENDIX B: DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY QUESTIONS USED IN THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL ANALYSIS**

*Vote choice:* ¿Por qué partido piensa votar en las próximas elecciones a Gobernador en la Provincia de _____? [Which party are you considering voting for in the upcoming gubernatorial election in the province of _____?]

1. Partido Justicialista – PJ
2. Alianza Frepaso – UCR
3. Frepaso
4. UCR
5. Otro [Other]
96. En blanco [Blank] (recoded as missing)
97. Ninguno – no va a votar [Will not vote] (recoded as missing)
98. No sabe – esta indeciso [Don’t know] (recoded as missing)
99. No responde [No response] (recoded as missing)

*Presidential approval:* ¿Cómo evalúa usted la gestión de Carlos Menem como presidente? [How would you characterize Carlos Menem’s performance as President?]

1. Muy mala [Very bad]
2. Mala [Bad]
3. Ni buena ni mala [Not bad, nor good]
4. Buena [Good]
5. Muy Buena [Very good]
99. No sabe/no responde [Don’t know, No response] (recoded as missing)

*National economic situation:* ¿Cómo calificaría usted la situación económica actual del país? [How would you characterize the current national economic situation?]

1. Muy mala [Very bad]
2. Mala [Bad]
3. Ni buena ni mala [Not bad, nor good]
4. Buena [Good]
5. Muy Buena [Very good]
99. No sabe/no responde [Don’t know, No response] (recoded as missing)

*Gubernatorial approval:* ¿Cómo evalúa usted ______ como gobernador de _____? [How would you characterize ______’s performance as Governor of _____?]

1. Muy mala [Very bad]
2. Mala [Bad]
3. Ni buena ni mala [Not bad, nor good]
4. Buena [Good]
5. Muy Buena [Very good]
99. No sabe/no responde [Don’t know, No response] (recoded as missing)
Provincial economic situation: En su opinión ¿la situación general de la Provincia de _____ es mejor, igual o peor que la del resto del país? [In your opinion, is the economic situation of your province _____ than that of the rest of the country?]

1. Peor [Worse]
2. Igual [Same]
3. Mejor [Better]
99. No sabe/no responde [Don’t know, No response] (recoded as missing)

Partisanship: En términos generales, ¿usted diría que se siente muy lejos, lejos, ni cerca ni lejos, cerca o muy cerca del Partido Justicialista?. ¿Y del FREPASO?, ¿Y de la UCR? [How close to you feel to these political parties?]

1. Muy lejos [Very far] (recoded as ‘0’)
2. Lejos [Far] (recoded as ‘0’)
3. Ni cerca ni lejos [Not far, nor close] (recoded as ‘0’)
4. Cerca [Close] (recoded as ‘1’)
5. Muy cerca [Very close] (recoded as ‘1’)
6. No sabe/no responde [Don’t know, No response] (recoded as missing)

Education: ¿Podría decirme qué estudios cursó? [What is your level of education?]

1. Sin estudios [None] (recoded as ‘1’)
2. Primario incompleto [Primary incomplete] (recoded as ‘1’)
3. Primario completo [Primary complete] (recoded as ‘1’)
4. Secundario incompleto [Secondary incomplete] (recoded as ‘1’)
5. Secundario completo [Secondary complete] (recoded as ‘2’)
6. Terciario incompleto [Tertiary incomplete] (recoded as ‘2’)
7. Terciario completo [Tertiary complete] (recoded as ‘3’)
8. Universitario incompleto [University incomplete] (recoded as ‘3’)
9. Universitario completo [University complete] (recoded as ‘3’)
10. Posgrado [Post-graduate] (recoded as ‘3’)

Female: Sexo [Gender]
0. Male
1. Female

Age: ¿Podría decirme su edad? [Tell me your age.] Actual age of respondent
APPENDIX C: GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF THE CONDITIONAL PROBABILITIES REPORTED IN TABLE 3

In-Party Provinces

Opposition Provinces

Note: The area contained between the lines represents the 95 per cent confidence interval as generated by the robust specification of the error terms offered by the CLARIFY software (see fn. 31 for reference).