



Measuring Subnational Democracy

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Abstract

Social scientists and practitioners have been limited in their work by the paucity of data about subnational institutions and practices. Such data could help scholars refine regime typologies, improve theories of democratization and regime change, better understand subnational democracy, and illuminate issues of development, conflict, and governance. They could also enable democracy and development advocates to design more effective programs and officials to create better policies. This paper addresses the lack of data by introducing 22 subnational measures from a new dataset, Varieties of Democracy. Validity tests demonstrate that the measures' strengths outweigh their weaknesses. The measures excel in covering all subnational levels for most countries, capturing different elements of subnational elections, and including a variety of dimensions of elections and civil liberties. The measures also offer unmatched global and temporal coverage. The paper demonstrates how these strengths can provide scholars and practitioners with the benefits described above.

Introduction

A democratic country should provide responsive government institutions and political freedoms throughout its territory. Every province, city, and village should afford its residents with these guarantees. The importance of subnational democracy has been emphasized most prominently by the United Nations, which has set as an objective to “[e]nsure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.”ⁱ Yet, scholars have found that even in numerous countries that we label as democratic or democratizing democracy does not exist throughout the territories. In their work, practitioners and scholars tend to overlook this in-country variation by treating a country where democracy is absent at the local level or from a large swath of territory the same as a country with democratic institutions and practices throughout its territory. Attention to subnational politics can enable practitioners to develop democracy-promotion programs and foreign policies better suited to particular countries. It can also help scholars refine regime typologies and improve theories of democratization and regime change. These benefits have been largely out of reach, however, because crossnational democracy indices have failed to measure subnational institutions and practices.

To help address this problem, this paper introduces a set of subnational measures from the new Varieties of Democracy dataset (V-Dem). Twenty-two indicators of subnational institutions and practices cover all countries of the world, except microstates, from 1900 to 2012. They provide information about typical institutions and practices, but also about variation and outliers. The measures are derived from country expert responses to V-Dem survey instruments and are available free-of-charge on the internet.ⁱⁱ Beyond introducing these measures, the purpose of this paper is to validate them and demonstrate their utility. The analysis shows that the measures capture all subnational levels for most countries, elements of subnational elections, and a variety of dimensions of elections and civil liberties. The measures also offer excellent global and temporal coverage. The measures are weaker in capturing multiple meanings of government authority and constraints and providing valid data about when subnational elections are held. On balance, the strengths outweigh the weaknesses, making the measures useful to improving regime typologies and theories of regime change as well as to better understanding development, conflict, governance, and, of course, subnational politics.

The paper proceeds by documenting the paucity of subnational data from other sources. I then describe the conceptualization and operationalization of the V-Dem subnational indicators to show how they help fill this void. The next section assesses the quality of the V-Dem measures by examining their face and content validity, the data generation process, and the

measures' convergent validity. The final section demonstrates how the measures can illuminate questions of importance in social science and assist practitioners.

Limited Data from Other Sources

Other than from V-Dem, global, time series data about subnational democratic institutions and practices are not available. Most sources of subnational information examine administrative structure, government performance, and decentralization,ⁱⁱⁱ not democratic institutions or processes. Global regime and democracy datasets, such as Freedom House, Polity, and Boix, Miller, and Rosato do not provide subnational measures. Nearly all datasets that do focus on subnational democracy provide data for only one part of the world. The Council of Europe's *Structure and Operation of Local and Regional Democracy* reports on European countries, for example.^{iv} Those that do cover numerous parts of the world do not include all countries and provide data for only one year or a short period of time. An additional problem is that data are often not comparable across countries. For example, the Global Observatory on Local Democracy and Decentralisation (GOLD) has profiles of 101 countries, but the data provided are not consistent across countries.^v

A swell of subnational democracy research beginning in the 1990s has provided valuable findings about subnational regimes but no global datasets. Most studies examine only one to four provinces in a country. Data from this literature are further limited by level, geography and time. Most data are from the regional level, to the exclusion of the local level. Moreover, most of the work has been done in Latin America and Russia. Most commonly studied are Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Russia, but also Germany, India, Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines, South Africa, and the United States.^{vi} Most of these countries are large and were federalist and recently politically liberalized when they were investigated. These similarities further reduce the diversity of the data. Data from different works are not comparable because scholars have used different conceptualizations and operationalizations, and crossnational studies are rare. Consequently, it is impossible to build a global dataset from existing works. Finally, temporal coverage is limited; most of the studies are of the third wave era.

In sum, neither existing datasets nor the subnational democracy literature provides us with global, time series data on subnational institutions and practices. To address this problem, the first step in creating the V-Dem indicators was to conceptualize the term "subnational democracy."

Conceptualization of Subnational Democracy for V-Dem

For a territory within a country to be characterized as more or less democratic it must exist as an administrative unit with its own government.^{vii} Subnational government makes subnational democracy possible while also contributing to the extent of democracy in a country. Proximity of government can facilitate citizens' political engagement and thus increase the extent of participation in the country. This reflects the view of democracy that emphasizes participation.

The subnational government is more democratic if its offices are elected through free and fair elections. This follows from the electoral principle of democracy, and it promotes the participatory principle of democracy by allowing citizens to vote for more officials. It is also important that the elected offices have authority relative to unelected offices and can constrain the actions of unelected officials. This enables elected officials to act on voters' preferences and citizens, through the electoral process, to limit the actions of government. These practices allow for responsive government, the essence of democracy.^{viii} To facilitate the freeness and fairness of the elections and enable citizens to engage with these offices, respect for civil liberties in the subnational units is essential. This draws on the liberal principle of democracy.

Following from this logic, the V-Dem subnational indicators include three fundamental elements of democracy— elections, government authority and constraints, and civil liberties. And, the indicators reflect three of the main principles of democracy—participatory, electoral, and liberal.^{ix}

Operationalization of V-Dem Subnational Indicators

Two challenges must be overcome in order to translate this conceptualization of subnational democracy into measurements: multiple subnational levels and many subnational units. To address the first problem, country experts identified two subnational levels for data collection— regional, meaning the second-highest level of government, just below the national government, and local, meaning the level below the region. The appendix provides a complete list of variables, including these, v2elreggov and v2ellocgov. (Details about the experts appear in Data Generation Process below.) To deal with countries that have more than two subnational levels, the survey instructs the experts to select the regional level and the local level “that, in practice, has the most responsibilities (e.g. making laws, providing primary education, maintaining roads, policing, etc.) and resources to carry out those responsibilities.”

The number of subnational units within a single country can be large. For example, Brazil has 5,562 *municípios*, composing just one of its levels of subnational government.^x Thus, it was not feasible to create a global dataset that measures the extent of democracy in each unit. Rather the V-Dem indicators collect data about subnational averages, distributions, and outliers. For example, to evaluate the freeness and fairness of subnational elections, the survey first asks about elections on average (v2elffelr): “Taking all aspects of the pre-election period, election day, and the post-election process into account, would you consider subnational elections (regional and local, as previously identified) to be free and fair on average?” Experts then respond to questions about the distribution (v2elsnlff): “Does the freeness and fairness of subnational elections vary across different areas of the country?” Finally, the experts provide information about the outliers (v2elsnless, v2elsnlpop, v2elsnlfc, v2elsnmore, v2elsnmpop, v2elsnmrhc). They identify the areas with significantly less free and fair elections and significantly more free and fair elections, estimate the percentages of the country’s population living in each, and identify characteristics shared by each type of outlier. The approach to measuring civil liberties is similar with two exceptions (v2clrgunev, v2clsnpct, v2clrgstch, v2clsnlpct, v2clrgwkch). First, because subnational units do not typically codify civil liberties, the average can be found using the civil liberties indicators or indices for the country as a whole rather than a specific subnational measure.^{xi} Second, to avoid expert fatigue, the civil liberties survey did not ask experts to name specific geographic areas where government respect for civil liberties is significantly stronger and areas where it is significantly weaker. We also suspected that these areas should overlap at least somewhat with areas with more or less free and fair elections due to the importance of rights to election quality.

For other elements of subnational democracy the measures provide only information about averages for empirical and practical reasons. The existence of subnational government and subnational offices and their relative power are likely less variable than the quality of subnational elections, for example. Existing research on subnational democracy provides support for this. This more limited approach was taken for the other concepts also because of finite resources.

Following from this conceptualization and operationalization, 22 indicators were created. Four address the existence of subnational government, four the presence of subnational elections, two the authority of subnational elected offices, seven the freeness and fairness of subnational elections, and five civil liberties.^{xii}

Quality of V-Dem Subnational Measures

To what extent do the indicators of subnational democracy generate valid measures? In other words do they capture the intended concepts? To check for this I analyze the face and content validity, data generation process, and convergent validity.

Face Validity

A strong correspondence between the measures and the underlying concepts is apparent, indicating face validity. Face validity is a judgement that “the operationalization seems like a good translation of the construct.”^{xiii} I checked the face validity of the indicators by having V-Dem colleagues, 13 scholars of subnational democracy, and country experts participating in a V-Dem pilot of 12 countries comment on them.^{xiv} After some adjustments to the indicators, V-Dem colleagues and subnational democracy scholars evaluated them again, and I made final changes based on their ideas. Readers themselves can assess the face validity of the indicators by examining each and reviewing the evaluation below.

To capture the concept of “subnational,” V-Dem begins with experts’ identifications of local and regional government levels (v2elreggov and v2ellocgov). The clarifications regarding how to identify a level, described above and in the appendix, would seem to increase the validity of the responses. A second step in data collection, explained below in the Data Generation Process section, further increases our confidence.

For the democratic elements—elections, government authority and constraints, and civil liberties—the correspondence between the measures and underlying concepts is strengthened through a variety of techniques. First, *de facto*, rather than *de jure*, data are collected. The underlying concepts are about practice, and experts are, in fact, reporting on what has happened instead of recounting what laws mandate. The careful question wording, including the clarification sections, also increases the face validity. These clarifications help overcome measurement challenges. For example, what does “elected” mean at the subnational level? The survey specifies for the regional offices question (v2elsrgel):

“Elected” refers to offices that are directly elected by citizens or indirectly elected by a regional elected assembly. All other methods of obtaining office – including appointment by higher or lower levels of government – are considered to be non-elected. In classifying a position as elected one is making no judgments about the freeness/fairness of the election or the relative extent of suffrage. One is simply

indicating that there is an election and that the winner of that election (however conducted) generally takes office.

The survey provides a comparable clarification for the local level. The Data Generation Process section describes an additional data collection technique to strengthen validity for these two questions.

In sum, the correspondence between the measures of the democracy elements and the underlying concepts seems to be good, as suggested by the face validity tests conducted by various groups and the correspondence of the measures to the subnational levels and the *de facto* elements of democracy.

Content Validity

Relative to face validity, content validity is slightly weaker. Content validity is the measure's inclusion of all of the meanings of the concept. The task of measuring rich concepts like elections for subnational units for all countries of the world is an enormous task, so, given resource constraints, the indicators cannot capture all meanings. This is evident for both concepts, subnational and democracy, although of the three democratic elements it is a problem just for government authority and constraints.

Concentrating on two levels means that, for most countries, we are collecting data about all subnational levels. Approximately 56 percent of countries have two subnational levels and 18 percent have one, based on a sample of 82 countries from GOLD's Local Governments in the World database.^{xv} Nearly all countries with more than two subnational levels have only three, so data for most, but not all, of their subnational levels have been collected. We are capturing most meanings of the concept "subnational".

For the democratic elements, content validity is relatively strong for elections and civil liberties and weaker for government authority and constraints. The electoral element has high content validity because it captures the multiple pathways through which elections matter to democracy: the existence of elected offices at regional and local levels and the holding of subnational elections enable citizens to participate (v2elsrgel, v2ellocelc, v2elffelrbin), free and fair election results reflect citizens' preferences (v2elffelr), and regional and local elected officials have authority relative to non-elected officials to act on those preferences (v2elrgpwr, v2ellocpwr). Moreover, the concept of free and fair elections is operationalized broadly so as to include many meanings of the concept: experts take "all aspects of the pre-election period, election day, and the post-election process into account" (v2elffelr). Similarly, V-Dem provides a

rich picture of civil liberties. In the civil liberties section 25 measures, such as freedom from political killings, appear. Sections on media, political parties and civil society include other civil liberties measures, such as freedom of expression. Indicators capturing distributions and outliers then apply this information about country averages to the subnational level. Including measures of distributions and outliers, rather than just averages, further increases the content validity of the electoral and civil liberties elements.

Of the three democratic elements, government authority and constraints has the lowest content validity. Experts provide information about the power of elected offices relative to unelected offices but, given greater resources and unlimited expert energy, additional, more detailed information could have been solicited about specific powers and limitations.

Overall, the V-Dem measures capture all the subnational levels for most countries, many aspects of elections, and different estimates of elections and civil liberties. The measures are less successful in including many meanings of government authority and constraints.

Data Generation Process

The data generation process increases the validity of the resulting measures through careful recruitment of country experts, reliance on multiple country experts, use of a measurement model to aggregate the data, and, for some indicators, a two-pronged data collection approach.^{xvi} This section describes the process in brief, focusing on how it relates to the subnational indicators in particular.

Country experts exclusively provide the data for subnational indicators, with the exceptions of v2elreggov, v2ellocgov, v2elsrgel, and v2ellocelc for which V-Dem research assistants also gather information. Typically five experts provide information for each country-year. The V-Dem team selects individuals who are, most importantly, deeply knowledgeable about a country and about one or more substantive areas. More than 80 percent of all experts hold Ph.D.s. or M.A.s and work at some type of research institution. Individuals are also recruited based on their impartiality and connection to the country. To help ensure impartiality, those who are or have been closely associated with political parties, politically affiliated think-tanks, or senior government officials are not considered. Typically three of the five experts are nationals or permanent residents of the country they are coding, so they are deeply connected to the country. This global recruitment helps avoid Western and Northern bias. It also is particularly advantageous for historical data. Nationals especially, relative to non-residents, are likely to have considerable historical knowledge, as are those receiving graduate training outside U.S. programs, which tend to underemphasize study of history. Finally, seriousness of purpose

and diversity of the coders' professional background, such as employment at different universities, is taken into account in recruitment.^{xvii} Experts respond to questions organized into topical surveys in an online interface. Each completes only those surveys in his or her area(s) of expertise. All the subnational indicators, except those about civil liberties, appear in the election survey. Those about civil liberties appear in the civil liberties survey. So, experts on each of these topics are being asked to characterize elections or civil liberties both nationally and subnationally.

Reliance on multiple experts for each country-year improves the quality of the measures. A measurement model aggregates the data generated by the experts so that one data point exists for each country-year. The measurement model corrects for systematic bias in coders' answers by examining patterns in expert disagreement, and thus increases the validity of the resulting measures. The model adjusts for experts' own reported confidence in each response they give and the tendency of "domestic" coders to provide less favorable evaluations.^{xviii}

For four of the indicators, we did not rely exclusively on the experts but instead used a two-pronged data collection approach in order to increase the validity of the measures. For the existence of local and regional government (v2ellogov, v2elreggov), V-Dem research assistants doublechecked the data the experts generated and arbitrated disagreements among their responses using information from the statoids.com database and country-specific sources.^{xix} The staff also used the names of regional and local government units the experts provided (v2elregnam, v2ellocnam) to determine whether experts for a particular country-year were, in fact, identifying the same subnational level and to resolve conflicts, as needed. This approach gives us high confidence that these measures are valid.

We also used a two-pronged approach to collect data about which offices, if any, are elected at the regional and local level (v2elsrgel and v2ellocelc). In cases of significant disagreement among experts, aggregating their responses did not generate a single mode and thus measure. In these instances, V-Dem staff adjudicated among responses by reviewing and cross-referencing academic articles and books for the correct information. Despite their factual nature, these questions often generated disagreement. Disagreement among experts tended to occur when countries exhibited specific types of conditions or characteristics: 1) when there had been a national political crisis and subnational elected officials stayed in office and future elections were suspended or cancelled, 2) when two regional executives existed, such as a nationally-appointed official and a second elected by the regional assembly, 3) when the timing of the implementation of a new constitution or electoral law was not clear. Time and staff constraints limited us to

adjudicating only those country years where a mode was not generated. Users should thus be aware that other data points do not necessarily represent unanimity among the experts.^{xx}

This review of the data generation process suggests that the procedures do not introduce bias and do generate quality data. Among the indicators, however, we have less confidence about the measures of whether offices are elected at the regional and local levels.

Convergent Validity

The V-Dem measures closely match data from other sources. In other words, convergent validity, correspondence between two measures of the same underlying concept, is high. Scant existing data limit the scope of convergent validity testing. Also, some existing data were used in the two-pronged data collection approaches described above, so they cannot be used for convergent validity tests. That said, it is possible to compare multiple V-Dem measures with findings from subnational democracy research.^{xxi}

The first test compares V-Dem measures about unevenness in subnational elections freeness and fairness and respect for civil liberties— v2elsnlsff and v2clrgunev—with existing sources. For comparison with v2elsnlsff, a source had to examine the conduct of subnational elections, not subnational conduct of national elections. For comparison with v2clrgunev, the source had to focus on civil liberties, such as freedom of expression and association, rather than voting rights. This limited the number of comparisons with v2clrgunev because subnational democracy research has focused more on elections than civil liberties.

The extent of correspondence is illustrated in Table 1. The first column lists the countries and years for which a particular source, cited in the second column, uncovered unevenness.^{xxii} Using the V-Dem measures we calculated the average level of unevenness in freeness and fairness of subnational elections and respect for civil liberties for each time period under consideration. For this table, the unevenness variables are standardized, so that a score of zero represents the overall mean across all countries and a score of one represents one standard deviation from the mean. So, a positive value in column four or five indicates that the V-Dem measures show above average unevenness for subnational election freeness and fairness or respect for civil liberties, respectively. A positive value, thus, represents a match between a V-Dem measure and the account in the existing source. An “NA” indicates that the existing source did not examine that type of unevenness. The values in the parentheses in the last two columns are ratios of years, indicating for how many of the years identified by the source V-Dem shows above average unevenness for each variable. In sum, V-Dem measures match all existing sources for subnational elections freeness and fairness data and all but one for respect for civil liberties

measures. In 36 of the 41 elections sources and 10 of the 11 the civil liberties sources V-Dem identifies the same number of years as having above average unevenness.

Table 1: Convergent Validity Test for Unevenness

Positive values in the last two columns indicate that V-Dem finds above average unevenness and thus matches the sources. The ratios in those columns indicate for how many of the years identified by the source V-Dem shows above average unevenness.+

Country and Years Source Identifies with Unevenness	Source	Freeness and Fairness (v2elsnlsff)	Civil Liberties (v2clrgunev)
Argentina 1983-2009	Behrend	1.232 (27/27)	NA
Argentina 1983-2003	Gervasoni (2010, "Rentier")	1.167 (21/21)	NA
Argentina 2003-2007	Gervasoni (2010, "Measuring")	1.459 (5/5)	NA
Argentina 1983-2005	Gibson (2005)	1.193 (23/23)	NA
Argentina 1983-2010	Gibson (2013)	1.240 (28/28)	NA
Argentina 1983-2006	Giraudy (2010, 2013, 2015)	1.204 (24/24)	NA
Argentina 1997-2009	Giraudy (2015)	1.459 (13/13)	NA
Brazil 1982-1998	Borges	0.396 (10/17)	NA
Brazil 1970-2010	Herrmann (2014)	0.361 (29/41)	NA
Brazil 2002-2006	Montero	0.722 (5/5)	NA
India 1993-2002	Beer and Mitchell	0.503 (10/10)	NA
India 1970s-1990s	Lankina and Getachew (2012)	0.701 (30/30)	NA
India 1947-2010	Tudor and Ziegfeld	0.580 (61/64)	NA
Kyrgyzstan 1997	McMann	0.633 (1/1)	1.016 (1/1)
Mexico 1980-2000	Beer	1.111 (21/21)	NA
Mexico 1990-1999	Beer and Mitchell	1.178 (10/10)	1.838 (10/10)
Mexico 1994-2009	Benton	1.017 (16/16)	NA
Mexico 2008-2010	Danielson, et al.	0.958 (3/3)	NA
Mexico 1995-2010	Eisenstadt	0.997 (16/16)	NA
Mexico 1989-2004	Eisenstadt and Rios	1.115 (16/16)	NA
Mexico 1986-2004	Gibson (2005)	1.103 (19/19)	NA
Mexico 1998-2010	Gibson (2013)	0.958 (13/13)	NA
Mexico 1977-1988	Gilley	1.036 (12/12)	2.114 (12/12)

Mexico 1997-2006	Giraudy (2010, 2013)	0.958 (10/10)	NA
Mexico 1997-2009	Giraudy (2015)	0.958 (13/13)	NA
Mexico 1986-2006	Herrmann	1.089 (21/21)	1.798 (21/21)
Mexico 1988-2000	Lawson	1.157 (13/13)	1.859 (13/13)
Mexico 1950-1989	Magaloni, et al.	1.029 (40/40)	NA
Mexico 1997-2008	Rebolledo	0.958 (12/12)	1.562 (12/12)
Philippines 1896*-1995	Sidel (1999 and 2014)	1.556 (96/96)	1.263 (96/96)
Russia 1990-1999	Hale	1.423 (10/10)	NA
Russia 1999-2004	Lankina and Getachew	1.614 (6/6)	NA
Russia 1997	McMann and Petrov	1.730 (1/1)	NA
Russia 1991-2000	Moraski and Reisinger (2003)	1.524 (10/10)	NA
Russia 1991-2001	Petrov	1.528 (11/11)	-0.096 (0/11)
Russia 1991-2005	Saikkonen	1.521 (15/15)	NA
South Africa 1994-1999	Munro	0.494 (6/6)	NA
U.S. 1890*-1960s	Gibson (2013)	0.454 (70/70)	NA
U.S. 1940s	Hill	0.385 (10/10)	2.138 (10/10)
U.S. 1890*-1970	Mickey (2008)	0.450 (70/71)	2.043 (71/71)
U.S. 1890*-1972	Mickey (2015)	0.441 (72/73)	1.987 (73/73)
Total		0.923 (370/386)	1.531 (202/213)
+ Average unevenness is calculated on a standardized scale.			
* V-Dem begins with 1900, so earlier data from sources is not used.			
** The total ratios count unique country-years; they do not count the same country-year more than once.			

An additional comparison can be made with the V-Dem indicators that identify outliers and their characteristics. We first identified a country and time period covered by an existing case or country statistical study. For each of the outlier variables, we then designated the comparison a match when one or more V-Dem experts named the specific subnational unit(s) (e.g. Oaxaca) or provided a general descriptor (e.g. South) that corresponded to the specific subnational unit(s) (e.g. Oaxaca) or general descriptor (e.g. South) that the source identified. We also considered a match to exist when the V-Dem experts identified additional outliers that did not contradict the information in the existing source because they were asked to identify all outliers, whereas most sources do not investigate all outliers in a country. When the V-Dem expert responses did not

capture all the information in the existing source or the V-Dem generalization did not fit every single subnational unit named in the existing source, we designated this as a “partial” match. For each of the characteristics variables, the V-Dem experts chose from among 20 descriptive characteristics, such as rural or urban. To determine whether there was a match required careful reading of the existing sources and, in some cases, research with additional materials, to learn about the characteristics of the outliers the sources identified.

The match rate for all the variables was quite high. As indicated in Table 2 across all the variables, V-Dem measures did not match at all only one source. This was for Kyrgyzstan for v2elsnless because V-Dem experts did not agree. Complete match rates were otherwise high, with percentages in the 80s or 90s for four of the six variables. The lower match rates for v2elsnless and v2elsnmore are attributable to V-Dem experts not capturing all the information published in works by Gervasoni and Giraudy, which provide data for all the regional units within their countries of study. In all the analyses, except for Kyrgyzstan, the V-Dem experts’ responses were consistent with each other making comparisons with existing sources more straightforward.

Table 2: Convergent Validity Test for Additional V-Dem Indicators percentage (frequency)

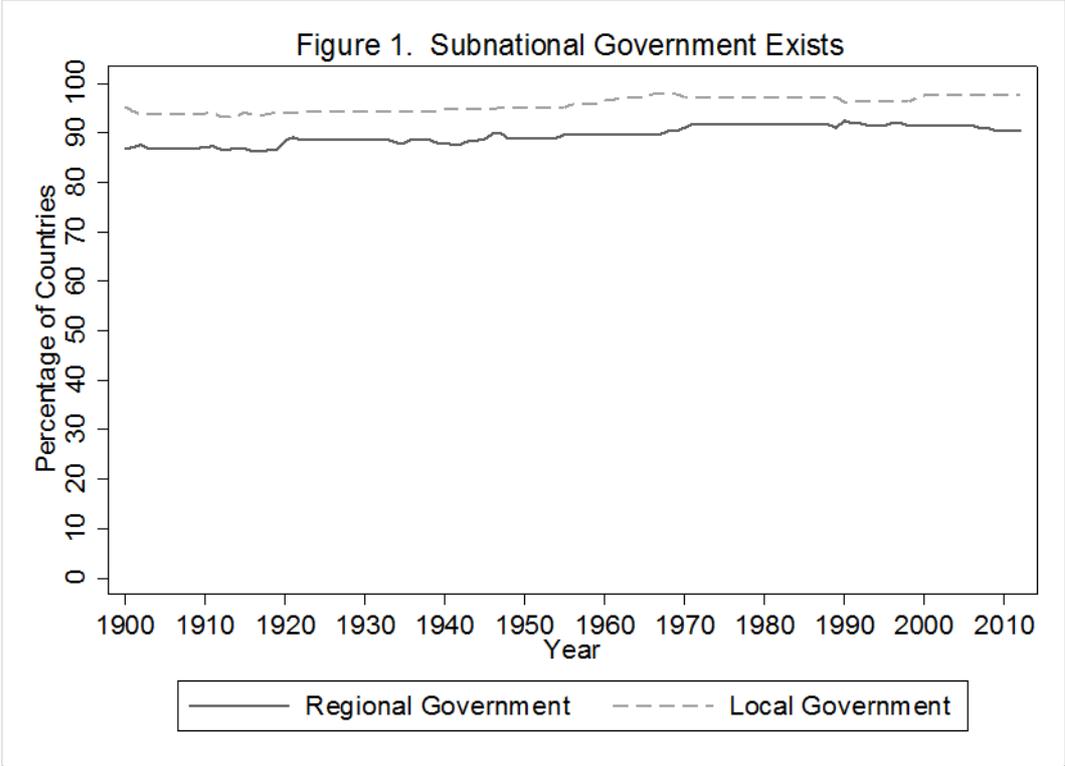
	v2elsnless	v2elsnmore	v2elsnlfc	v2elsnmrhc	v2clrgstch	v2clrgwkch
Complete Match	70 (21)	47 (9)	96 (23)	83 (10)	83 (5)	83 (10)
Partial Match	27 (8)	53 (10)	4 (1)	17 (2)	17 (1)	17 (2)
No Match	3 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Total	100 (30)	100 (19)	100 (24)	100 (12)	100 (6)	100 (12)

Existing sources enabled us to conduct two different convergent validity tests on a total of eight indicators. The fact that the V-Dem measures match much of the rich data from the literature increases confidence in the validity of the V-Dem indicators.

Utility Demonstration

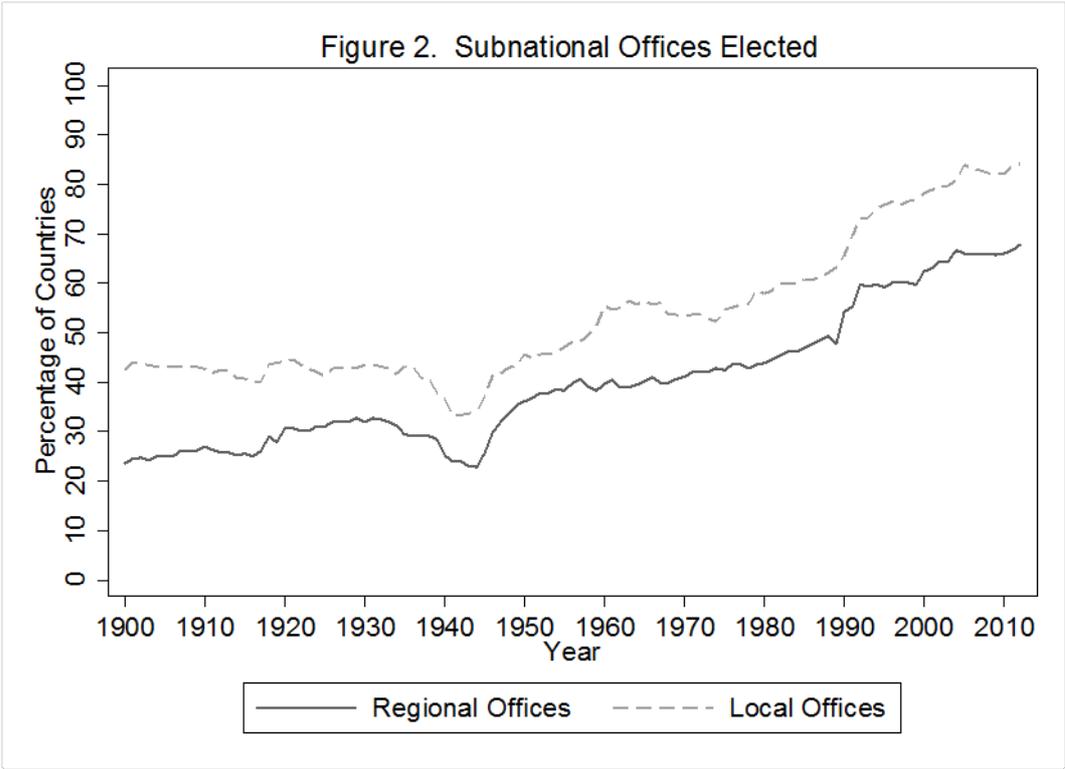
The V-Dem measures are not only valid, but also useful. They highlight the importance of considering subnational government and democracy in global, regional, and country research, program development, and policymaking. The measures are also helpful in illuminating many of the central issues of social science, including regimes and regime change, as well as development, conflict and governance. This knowledge can, in turn, help democracy advocates create more effective programs and foreign officials make better policies.

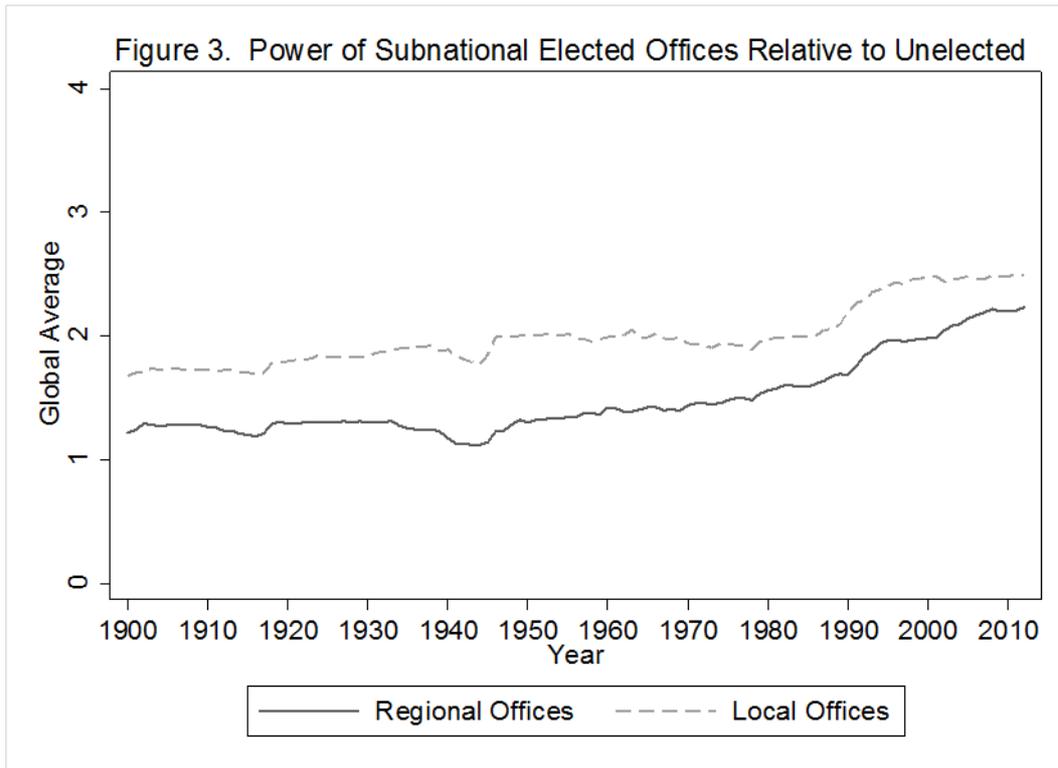
The V-Dem measures remind us of the prevalence of subnational governments and thus the value of studying them to better understand countries' politics and the importance of addressing them in programs and policies. The proportions of countries with regional government and with local government have been consistently high over time (Figure 1). These statistics reflect simply the presence of government, not its authority or regime type—characteristics captured by other measures and illustrated below. As of 2012, 91 percent of countries had regional government, and 98 percent had local government.



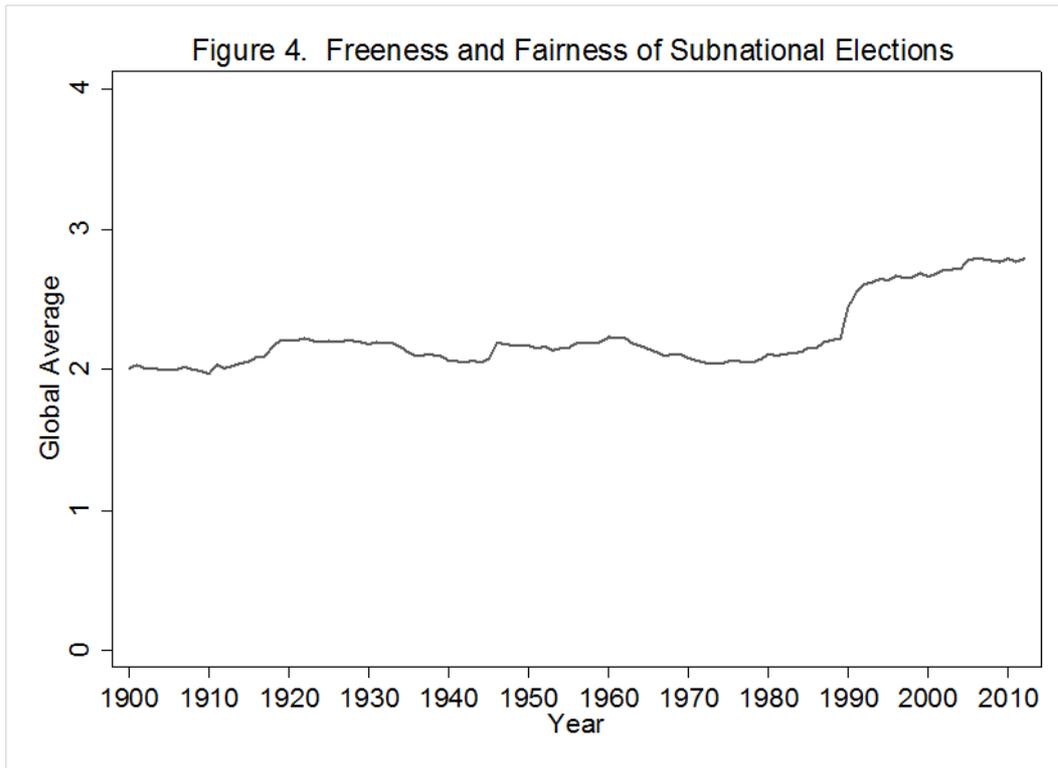
A comprehensive understanding of democracy in a country requires examination of regional and local politics because democratic institutions and practices exist at these levels as well. This knowledge is also crucial to advocates who are designing and implementing programs to democratize countries and officials who develop foreign policies based, in part, on countries'

level of democracy. The percentages of countries with regional elected offices and with local elected offices has increased, with 68 percent of countries having some regional elected offices in 2012 and 84 percent of countries having some local elected offices in 2012 (Figure 2). Ninety-one percent of the countries had elected office at at least one of these levels that year. Moreover, the power of elected offices relative to non-elected offices is growing (Figure 3). In 2012, the global averages for each level fell between values two, meaning, elected and non-elected offices are approximately equal in power at the level, and three, meaning most non-elected offices are subordinate to elected offices.

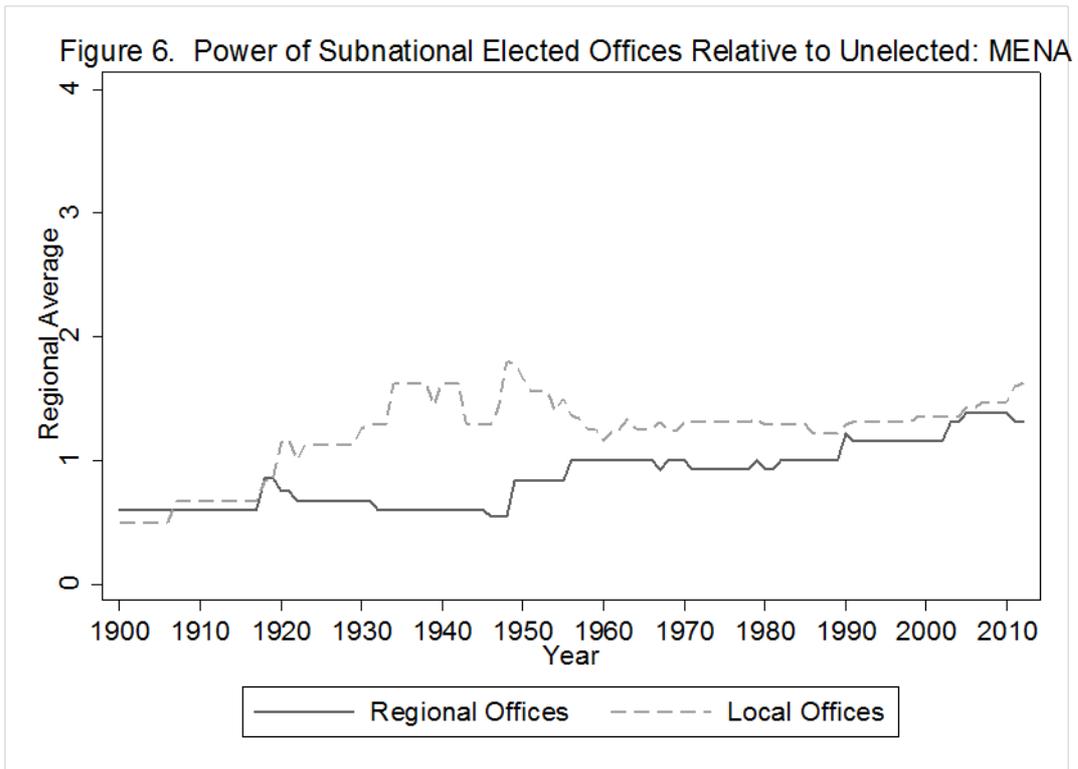
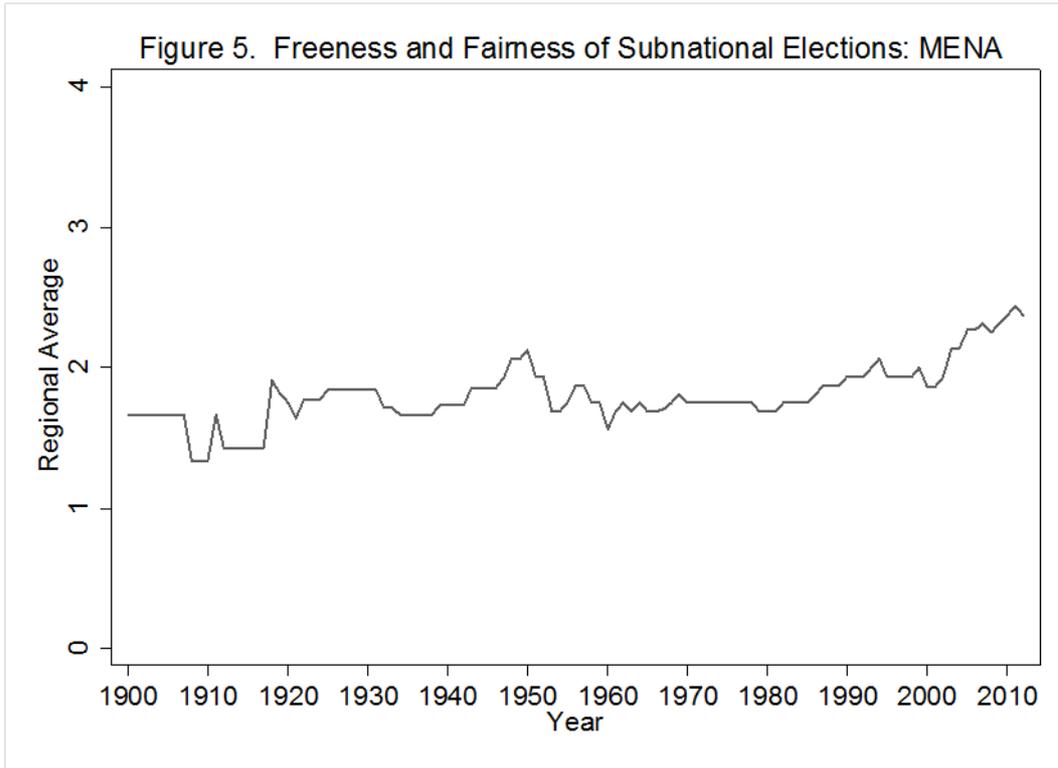




As the power of elected office has increased relative to non-elected offices, their elections have also become freer and fairer (Figure 4). On average subnational elections around the world had improved from value two, where there was “substantial competition and freedom of participation but there were also significant irregularities. It is hard to determine whether the irregularities affected the outcome or not (who won office)”. By 2012 the global average approached value three, where there were “deficiencies and some degree of fraud and irregularities but these did not in the end affect the outcome (who won office).”^{xxxiii}



The V-Dem measures also emphasize the importance of examining subnational politics in regions and countries of the world. This is valuable information for practitioners working in particular locations. For example, in MENA, as in the world, the freeness and fairness of subnational elections has increased in recent decades (Figure 5). The upward trend in MENA precedes the Arab Spring by decades, perhaps coming as a surprise since authoritarianism was viewed as having such a stronghold in these years.^{xxiv} However, while subnational elections have grown more free and fair, elected offices remain subordinate to unelected offices, unlike in much the world. Local and regional offices’ relative power falls closest to value one, meaning “[s]ome elected offices are subordinate to non-elected offices;” they do not reach two, where “[e]lected and non-elected offices are approximately equal in power” (Figure 6).



Regional and country-level analysis with V-Dem subnational measures can also provide helpful insights, not only about local and regional politics, but also broader phenomena. For example, according to V-Dem measures, among countries that were part of the Arab Spring, Tunisia was unique, having both elected subnational government and an increase in the freeness

and fairness of subnational elections beforehand. The subnational elections improved only slightly: irregularities affected the outcome but there was some competition—a value of one. Nonetheless, the country is distinctive from others, such as Egypt where there was not a recent history of subnational elected offices and Yemen where there was not a recent, sustained improvement in the quality of subnational elections. Conceivably, the experience with subnational elected government and the improvement in subnational election quality in Tunisia might have contributed to the country being the site of the first ouster and, what many have called, the only Arab Spring success. This example suggests that subnational democratization might facilitate national political openings.

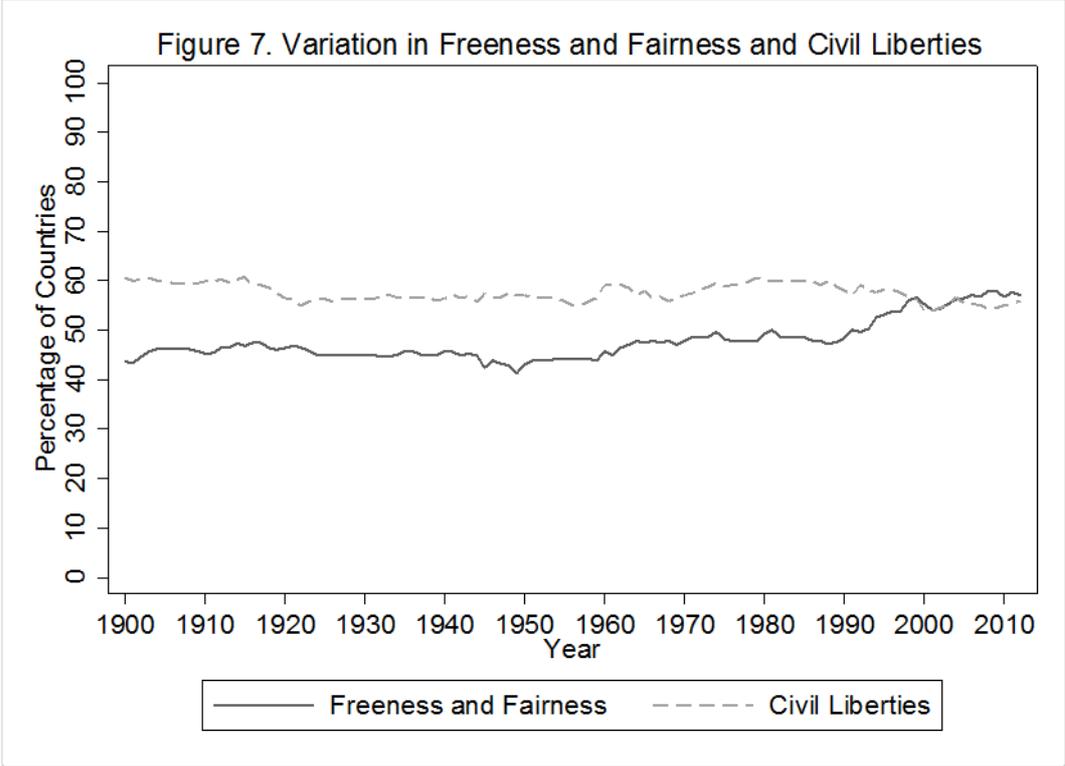
The role of subnational developments in national political openings is only one of many avenues of research facilitated by V-Dem subnational measures. The measures can also enhance our understanding of regimes. When we characterize a country along the authoritarian to democratic spectrum, it makes sense to consider not just the national institutions and practices but the subnational ones too. The V-Dem measures reveal to what extent democratic institutions and practices extend down to different levels of government and consistently across a country to help us gauge the degree of democracy in a country. This information is available globally and across time.

By enabling scholars to treat countries as heterogeneous units, the V-Dem measures expand the possibilities for refining regime typologies. In particular the concept of “hybrid regime” could use fine-tuning. Defined as a regime “combining democratic and authoritarian elements,”^{xxv} the concept has evolved to a catch-all category with an enormous number of subtypes. The extent to which democratic institutions and practices extend down to all levels of government and throughout the territory of a country can be important dimensions on which to distinguish among hybrid regimes. More fine-tuned regime types can be helpful to practitioners in their creation of programs and policies.

For a country to be truly democratic, democratic rights and institutions must exist throughout its territory. V-Dem measures can help us uncover the obstacles to this. Preliminary analysis with the measures shows that subnational regime variation is common when certain geographic and demographic characteristics increase social heterogeneity and other challenges to broadcasting power, thus making it difficult for the national government to control subnational political units.^{xxvi}

V-Dem measures can also reveal how subnational regime variation has been overcome to create true democracies—information important to both scholars and practitioners. The measures demonstrate that subnational regime variation is not just a modern problem.

Approximately 50 to 60 percent of countries have experienced some or significant unevenness in government respect for civil liberties throughout the years (Figure 7). Unevenness in the freeness and fairness of subnational elections has generally crept upward over time from around 45 percent to near 60 percent. Further research using the V-Dem measures can reveal how this problem has been overcome in some countries historically.



Understanding how democratic institutions and practices develop throughout a country is part of the story linking democratic transition to democratic consolidation. Currently the different schools of democratization thought implicitly assume democracy will automatically spread throughout a country once national elites introduce competitive elections and (expanded) civil liberties or the country’s socioeconomic conditions make it ripe for democracy. The V-Dem measures and prior research demonstrate that this is not the case. The V-Dem measures can illuminate this issue and thus help explain the process between democratic transition and consolidation.

V-Dem measures can also clarify the relationships between institutions and practices at different levels, which are important to our understanding of regime types and regime change, and specifically democracy and democratization. Consider the interaction between national and subnational elections. Academics and practitioners typically overlook any connections between them. The V-Dem measures reveal the connections between national and subnational elections showing that two scenarios are common. Preliminary analysis indicates that in some countries a

democratic-leaning national government introduces both competitive, free and fair subnational and national elections at the same time or in quick succession. More interesting is the second scenario where the holding of relatively free and fair subnational elections over time forces authoritarian national leaders to eventually introduce competitive, free and fair national elections.^{xxvii}

The V-Dem subnational indicators hold promise for helping us improve our regime typologies and theories of democratization and, more broadly, regime change. They also will be helpful to understanding subnational democracy in particular. The outlier questions will enable scholars to identify specific subnational political units or areas of countries with subnational political units that have different institutions and practices from others in the country. Previously identifying these enclaves has been a time-consuming, labor-intensive task. With V-Dem measures new lines of inquiry are also possible: For example, are enclaves that are less democratic or more democratic than their national regimes more common? Research has tended to focus on less democratic enclaves, driven in part by the logic that a national regime would not let a more democratic enclave exist.^{xxviii} Preliminary research with the V-Dem measures suggests that enclaves exist in both countries with democratic national governments and those with non-democratic national governments; approximately 30 percent of countries with civil liberties or election unevenness in 2012 had authoritarian national regimes.

Beyond questions of regimes, regime change, and subnational democracy, the V-Dem subnational indicators can help scholars study a wide variety of different issues. Increasingly scholars have been studying central questions of social science at the subnational level because of methodological advantages.^{xxix} However, this approach has been hampered because of the paucity of data. V-Dem measures will facilitate the study of democracy's impact on development and on conflict, for example. There are also subnational-related questions that scholars will be able to investigate more effectively, such as decentralization's and federalism's impact on democracy, subnational politics' impact on distribution and national reform, and subnational institutions' effect on party politics, clientelism, and political participation. Findings from these studies can assist practitioners in the fields of development, conflict, and governance.

Greater attention to subnational institutions and practices can help social scientists refine regime typologies, improve theories of democratization and regime change, better understand subnational democracy, and illuminate issues of development, conflict, and governance. Findings from this research and basic subnational information itself can enable democracy advocates to design better programs and foreign officials to make better policies. The V-Dem measures can facilitate achievement of these objectives.

The measures suffer from weaknesses, but they also have significant strengths. The measures are weaker in capturing multiple meanings of government authority and constraints and providing highly valid data about when subnational elections are held. They do, however, capture all subnational levels for most countries, different elements of subnational elections, and a variety of dimensions of both elections and civil liberties well. The measures also offer excellent global and temporal coverage. As global, times series measures, the V-Dem subnational indicators overcome a significant data void and consequently hold considerable promise for improved and new research and better programs and policy.

Notes

- ⁱ "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 2015.
- ⁱⁱ The dataset is available at <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/>. Updating to the current year and plans to collect data for the microstates are in progress.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See, for example, The Fiscal Austerity and Urban Innovation Project (FAUI), <http://faii.uchicago.edu/>; Daniel Treisman's decentralization dataset, <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/treisman/Pages/publishedpapers.html> and Hooghe, et al. 2016.
- ^{iv} "Structure and Operation of Local and Regional Democracy" 2014.
- ^v "Decentralization and Local Government in the World: Country Profiles" 2008.
- ^{vi} See Table 1 for the distribution of studies across countries.
- ^{vii} For V-Dem's purposes, democracy is an attribute of polities.
- ^{viii} Dahl 1971.
- ^{ix} For a discussion of these principles, see Coppedge, et al. 2011.
- ^x "Decentralization and Local Government in the World: Country Profiles" 2008.
- ^{xi} See the codebook for details, Coppedge, et al. 2015b.
- ^{xii} Other V-Dem indicators, such as those about political parties and the judiciary, also consider subnational practices and institutions, although not as directly. See Coppedge, et al. 2015b.
- ^{xiii} Trochim, et al. 2016.
- ^{xiv} Pilot countries included two dissimilar countries from each region of the world.
- ^{xv} "Decentralization and Local Government in the World: Country Profiles" 2008.
- ^{xvi} On examining the data generation process, see McMann, et al. 2016.
- ^{xvii} Coppedge, et al. 2015a.
- ^{xviii} Pemstein, et al. 2015; Coppedge, et al. 2015a.
- ^{xix} The site statoids.com provides information about subdivisions of countries with short descriptions of change over times.
- ^{xx} The data generation process can also be evaluated by the extent of missing data. The percentage of missing measures is in the single digits or zero for most of the subnational indicators, and the missing data are attributable to administrative oversights that are now being corrected. Six variables (v2elsnlpop, v2elsnmpop, v2elsnlfc, v2elsnmrfc, v2clrgstch, v2clrgwkch)—all measures of outliers—are missing 20 to 40 percent of their data. We suspected these questions would be difficult for experts to answer, and the surveys instructed them to not answer what they did not know. These variables should be used cautiously because of the missingness. For the other 16 indicators, this is not a complication.
- ^{xxi} Existing sources do not provide data to enable convergent validity testing for the indicators for outlier population estimates, subnational election freeness and fairness, and the power of elected offices.
- ^{xxii} Scholars have not researched when democratic institutions and practices are consistent within countries, so we are not able to conduct such convergent validity tests.
- ^{xxiii} Figures 3 and 4 can be calculated an alternative way because experts are asked in prior questions "generally" whether offices are elected. As a result of this, experts can indicate that offices are generally not elected but then respond about the exceptionally elected offices for the questions on relative power and exceptional elections for the question about freeness and fairness. When country-years in which no elected offices existed (both v2elsrgel and v2ellocelc equal zero) are excluded, the increase in Figure 3 is still visible, albeit from the mid-20th century, and the lines shift upward. For Figure 4 there is only a minor change: in the first half of the 20th century the line shifts upward closer to the midpoint between values two and three.
- ^{xxiv} Bellin 2012.
- ^{xxv} Diamond 2002.
- ^{xxvi} McMann, et al. "Governing Countries: A Theory of Subnational Regime Variation."
- ^{xxvii} McMann 2015.
- ^{xxviii} Linz and Stepan 1996.
- ^{xxix} Giraudy, et al.

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Appendix

v2elreggov: Regional government exists

Question: Is there a regional government?

Clarification: Regional government is typically the second-highest level of government, just below the national government. There are many names for units at this level; some common ones are regions, provinces, states, departments, and cantons.

Countries with more than two subnational levels may have multiple levels that fit the definition of regional government. If this is the case, for all questions about regional government please code the regional level that, in practice, has the most responsibilities (e.g. making laws, providing primary, education, maintaining roads, policing, etc.) and resources to carry out those responsibilities.

Some countries are so small that, now or in earlier time periods, they have only local government and not regional government. If this is the case, please code this question as “0” for the appropriate time period.

If you have questions about identifying the regional government for your country, please send an email inquiry to your Regional manager (RM) or to V-Dem (using the email contact designated for your country).

Responses:

0: No.

1: Yes.

v2elregnam: Regional government name

Question: What is the term(s) for the regional government units?

Clarification: If different types of units exist at this single level of regional government use multiple terms such as “provinces and federal city.” If the language of politics in your country is not English, please use whatever language is commonly used. For example, in Germany regional units are called “Lander.”

Responses: Text

v2elsrgel: Regional government elected

Question: At the regional level, are government offices elected in practice?

Clarification: “Government offices” here refers to a regional executive and a regional assembly, not a judiciary and not minor bureaucrats. An executive is a single individual (or a very small group) (e.g., a governor). An assembly is a larger body of officials, who may be divided into two chambers.

“Elected” refers to offices that are directly elected by citizens or indirectly elected by a regional elected assembly. All other methods of obtaining office – including appointment by higher or lower levels of government – are considered to be non- elected.

In classifying a position as elected one is making no judgments about the freeness/fairness of the election or the relative extent of suffrage. One is simply indicating that there is an election and that the winner of that election (however conducted) generally takes office.

Responses:

- 0: Generally, offices at the regional level are not elected.
- 1: Generally, the regional executive is elected but not the assembly.
- 2: Generally, the regional assembly is elected but not the executive.
- 3: Generally, the regional executive is elected and there is no assembly.
- 4: Generally, the regional assembly is elected and there is no executive.
- 5: Generally, the regional executive and assembly are elected.

v2elrgpwr: Regional offices relative power

Question: How would you characterize the relative power, in practice, of elected and non-elected offices at the regional level?

Clarification: We are concerned with the relative power of regional offices to each other, not the power of regional offices relative to higher or lower levels of government.

Please consider only major offices, such as the executive, assembly, and judiciary, not those of minor bureaucrats. (A body of government officials, such as an assembly or judiciary, counts as one office.)

An office is "subordinate" if its officeholders can be chosen and removed by another office or if its decisions can be blocked or modified by another office, but it cannot similarly constrain the other office.

Responses:

- 0: All or nearly all elected offices are subordinate to non-elected offices at the regional level.
- 1: Some elected offices are subordinate to non-elected offices at the regional level.
- 2: Elected and non-elected offices are approximately equal in power at the regional level.
- 3: Most non-elected offices are subordinate to elected offices at the regional level.
- 4: All or nearly all non-elected offices are subordinate to elected offices at the regional level.

v2ellocgov: Local Government Exists

Question: Is there a local government?

Clarification: Local government refers to the level of government below the regional government. There are many names for units at this level; some common ones are counties, communes, cities, municipalities, towns, rural municipalities, and villages.

Countries with more than two subnational levels may have multiple levels that fit the definition of local government. If this is the case, please code the local level that, in practice, has the most responsibilities (e.g. making laws, providing primary, education, maintaining roads, policing, etc.) and resources to carry out those responsibilities.

Responses:

- 0: No.
- 1: Yes.

v2ellocnam: Local Government Name

Question: What is the term(s) for the local government units?

Clarification: If different types of units exist at this single level of local government, use multiple terms. For example, different terms may be needed for rural and urban units. If the language of politics in your country is not English, please use whatever language is commonly used. For example, in Mexico local units are called “Municipios.”

Responses: Text

v2ellocelc: Local Government Elected

Question: At the local level, are government (local government) offices elected in practice?

Clarification: [Note to reader: clarification is the same as for v2elsrgel, except “local,” rather than “regional,” and “mayor” as the example are used here.]

Responses:

- 0: Generally, offices at the local level are not elected.
- 1: Generally, the local executive is elected but not the assembly.
- 2: Generally, the local assembly is elected but not the executive.
- 3: Generally, the local executive is elected and there is no assembly.
- 4: Generally, the local assembly is elected and there is no executive.
- 5: Generally, the local executive and assembly are elected.

v2ellocpwr: Local offices relative power

Question: How would you characterize the relative power, in practice, of elected and non-elected offices at the local level?

Clarification: We are concerned with the relative power of local offices to each other, not the power of local offices relative to higher levels of government. [Note to reader: “Offices” and “subordinate” are also defined here, as they are for v2elrgpwr.]

Responses:

- 0: All or nearly all elected offices are subordinate to non-elected offices at the local level.
- 1: Some elected offices are subordinate to non-elected offices at the local level.
- 2: Elected and non-elected offices are approximately equal in power at the local level.
- 3: Most non-elected offices are subordinate to elected offices at the local level.
- 4: All or nearly all non-elected offices are subordinate to elected offices at the local level.

v2elffelr: Subnational elections free and fair

Question: Taking all aspects of the pre-election period, election day, and the post-election process into account, would you consider subnational elections (regional and local, as previously identified) to be free and fair on average?

Clarification: This question refers to subnational levels that have elected offices and elections. It does not refer to subnational levels without elected offices and elections. If there were no subnational elections in any of the years covered in this survey, choose option 5.

“Free and fair” refers to all aspects of the election process except the extent of suffrage (by law). Thus, a free and fair election may occur even if the law excludes significant groups (we measure that issue separately).

Responses:

0: No, not at all. The elections were fundamentally flawed and the official results had little if anything to do with the 'will of the people' (who won office).

1: Not really. While the elections allowed for some competition, the irregularities in the end affected the outcome of the elections (who won office).

2: Ambiguous. There was substantial competition and freedom of participation but there were also significant irregularities. It is hard to determine whether the irregularities affected the outcome or not (who won office).

3: Yes, somewhat. There were deficiencies and some degree of fraud and irregularities but these did not in the end affect the outcome (who won office).

4: Yes. There was some amount of human error and logistical restrictions but these were largely unintentional and without significant consequences.

v2elffelrbin: Subnational elections

Question: Are subnational elections held?

Responses:

0: No.

1: Yes.

Note: The former category “5” from variable v2elffelr is recoded as a separate variable (v2elffelrbin). If a coder chose the 5th category in the original question, she receives 0 in the new “v2elffelrbin” variable (corresponding to the answer, no, there were no subnational elections); otherwise she receives 1 (yes, there are subnational elections held).

v2elsnlsff: Subnational election unevenness

Question: Does the freeness and fairness of subnational elections vary across different areas of the country?

Clarification: Subnational elections refer to elections to regional or local offices, as specified above.

Responses:

0: No. Subnational elections in most or all areas of the country are equally free and fair (or, alternatively, equally not free and not fair).

1: Somewhat. Subnational elections in some areas of the country are somewhat more free and fair (or, alternatively, somewhat less free and fair) than subnational elections in other areas of the country.

2: Yes. Subnational elections in some areas of the country are significantly more free and fair (or, alternatively, significantly less free and fair) than subnational elections in other areas of the country.

v2elsnless: Subnational election area less free and fair name

Question: In which areas of the country are subnational elections significantly less free and fair than the country average for subnational elections?

Clarification: If providing names of all the relevant territorial units is not possible, use broad categories (for example, “the North”).

Responses: Text

v2elsnlpop: Subnational election area less free and fair population

Question: What percentage (%) of the total population of the country lives in the areas you designated as having elections that are significantly less free and fair?

Responses: Percent

v2elsnlfc: Subnational election area less free and fair characteristics

Question: How would you describe the areas of the country in which elections are significantly less free and fair?

Clarification: Choose all that apply.

Responses:

0: Rural. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_0]

1: Urban. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_1]

2: Areas that are less economically developed. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_2]

3: Areas that are more economically developed. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_3]

4: Inside the capital city. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_4]

5: Outside the capital city. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_5]

6: North. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_6]

7: South. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_7]

8: West. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_8]

9: East. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_9]

10: Areas of civil unrest (including areas where insurgent groups are active). (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_10]

11: Areas where illicit activity is widespread. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_11]

12: Areas that are very sparsely populated. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_12]

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- 13: Areas that are remote (difficult to reach by available transportation, for example). (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_13]
14: Areas where there are indigenous populations. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_14]
15: Areas where the national ruling party or group is strong. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_15]
16: Areas where the national ruling party or group is weak. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_16]
17: Areas that were subject to a longer period of foreign rule. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_17]
18: Areas that were subject to a shorter period of foreign rule. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_18]
19: Areas that were recently subject to foreign rule. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_19]
20: Areas that have not recently been subject to foreign rule. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_20]
21: None of the above. (0=No, 1=Yes) [v2elsnlfc_21]

v2elsnmore: Subnational election area more free and fair name

Question: In which areas of the country are subnational elections significantly more free and fair than the country average for subnational elections?

Clarification: If providing names of all the relevant territorial units is not possible, use broad categories (for example, “the North”).

Responses: Text

v2elsnmpop: Subnational election area more free and fair population

Question: What percentage (%) of the total population of the country lives in the areas you designated as having elections that are significantly more free and fair?

Responses: Percent

v2elsnmrfc: Subnational election area more free and fair characteristics

Question: How would you describe the areas of the country in which elections are significantly more free and fair?

Clarification: Choose all that apply.

Responses: [Note to reader: Same as for v2elsnlfc.]

v2clrgunev: Subnational civil liberties unevenness

Question: Does government respect for civil liberties vary across different areas of the country?

Responses:

0: No. Government officials in most or all areas of the country equally respect (or, alternatively, equally do not respect) civil liberties.

1: Somewhat. Government officials in some areas of the country respect civil liberties somewhat more (or, alternatively, somewhat less) than government officials in other areas of the country.

2: Yes. Government officials in some areas of the country respect civil liberties significantly more (or, alternatively, significantly less) than government officials in other areas of the country.

v2clsnpct: Stronger civil liberties population

Question: What percentage (%) of the total population of the country lives in the areas where government officials' respect for civil liberties is significantly stronger than the country average?

Responses: Percent

v2clrgstch: Stronger respect for civil liberties characteristics

Question: How would you describe the areas of the country where government officials' respect for civil liberties is significantly stronger?

Clarification: Choose all that apply.

Responses: [Note to reader: Same as for v2elsnlfc.]

v2clsnlpct: Weaker civil liberties population

Question: What percentage (%) of the total population of the country lives in the areas where government officials' respect for civil liberties is significantly weaker than the country average?

Responses: Percent

v2clrgwkch: Weaker civil liberties characteristics

Question: How would you describe the areas of the country where government officials' respect for civil liberties is significantly weaker?

Clarification: Choose all that apply.

Responses: [Note to reader: Same as for v2elsnlfc.]