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## Empirical and Theoretical Frontiers of Subnational Research in Comparative Politics

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Subnational research (SNR) plays a growing and increasingly prominent role in comparative politics. It advances knowledge about fundamental themes that define the field, including regimes, states, and development. The contributions to this volume show how looking inside countries provides a powerful way to discover new and humanly important phenomena hidden from view by the dominant national lens. Moreover, SNR spurs theoretical innovation, especially multilevel theory building; offers new strategies for comparative research; and can be combined fruitfully with vanguard methodologies.<sup>1</sup> These achievements of SNR point to key areas where more work needs to be done. In this concluding chapter, we discuss empirical and theoretical challenges for future research.

### I I. I EMPIRICAL FRONTIERS: COLLECTING, STANDARDIZING, AND AGGREGATING SUBNATIONAL DATA

A major empirical challenge of SNR concerns the availability of subnational data. The “whole-nation bias” (Rokkan, 1970, p. 49) in comparative politics historically led to a focus that emphasized country-level data.<sup>2</sup> As a result, a gap exists in the availability of comprehensive, systematic, and readily accessible subnational data. Although subnational researchers have slowly but

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<sup>1</sup> For further examples of the substantive, theoretical, and methodological contributions of recent subnational research, see Sybbilis and Centeno (2017).

<sup>2</sup> Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002, p. 307) discuss a related problem, “methodological nationalism,” which they argue “reduces the analytical focus to the boundaries of the nation-state.”

steadily started to fill this data gap by carrying out the vital and often painstaking work of collecting and organizing qualitative and quantitative subnational data,<sup>3</sup> important hurdles remain. These obstacles include a scarcity of cross-sectional subnational data, which constrains case selection, descriptive analysis, and hypothesis testing, as well as a lack of historical subnational datasets, which hampers longitudinal research.

The production and collection of subnational data is especially difficult in the Global South, where limited state capacity and resources, informality, and armed conflict, among other factors, can hinder the ability of both national and subnational government agencies to consistently gather systematic data on which social scientists can draw (see Auerbach, LeBas, Post, & Weitz-Shapiro, 2018).<sup>4</sup> This problem is especially acute in the many policy areas that are now administered by local governments as a result of the wave of decentralization in the late twentieth century. Local government agencies across much of the Global South simply lack the institutional infrastructure, technical expertise, and resources to develop and systematically implement measures for evaluating trends and outcomes across policy areas.

Subnational researchers have tackled the problem of data scarcity by turning to new tools for spatial analysis. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) has enabled the construction of new datasets both for discrete spatial objects, such as borders of countries, regions, cities, and villages, and for continuous variables over space, such as population density, violence, economic productivity, and topographical elevation (Gleditsch & Weidmann, 2012, p. 465). High-resolution satellite imagery and other remote sensing tools offer further exciting possibilities for generating new subnational data (Auerbach, LeBas, Post, & Weitz-Shapiro, 2018). For example, satellite imagery makes it possible to collect data about inaccessible places, such as conflict zones that pose high safety risks to researchers.<sup>5</sup> Satellite imagery can be combined with other kinds of geocoded information to provide rich new subnational data, as seen in Nemeth et al. (2014), which uses multiple forms of geocoded data to gain fresh insights into the causes of domestic terrorism. Likewise, recent studies of civil war have successfully harnessed GIS and spatial data to produce fine-

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Baldwin (2014); Cammett and Issar (2010); Charron and Lapuente (2013); Díaz-Rioseco (2016); Durán-Martínez (2018); Giraudy (2015); Ingram (2016); Hollenbach et al. (2016); Niedzwiecki (2018); Touchton and Wampler (2014); Trejo and Ley (2018); Freidenberg and Suárez-Cao (2014); Resnick (2014); Rodrigues-Silveira (2012); Steele (2011); Yasuda (2017); Zukerman-Daly (2012).

<sup>4</sup> See Lecours and Hallen (2016) for a vivid example of how the lack of data collection by Latin American national and subnational governments on the number of tobacco-related deaths hinders the adoption of potentially life-saving public health policies. See also Nori-Sarma et al. (2017) on the challenges researchers face in obtaining and deciphering municipal-level mortality registry data.

<sup>5</sup> As King (2009) notes, satellite imagery can also help researchers overcome barriers posed by the absence of reliable official government statistics.

grained subnational data and measures of key variables.<sup>6</sup> The proliferation of satellite and geocoded data as a way to address the problem of subnational data scarcity, however, raises another problem: the use of different measures and scales across studies. This underscores the importance of recent efforts to standardize subnational data on armed conflict and political violence along these and other dimensions.<sup>7</sup> Still, as Imke Harbers and Matthew C. Ingram remind us in Chapter 2, the spatial perspective arrived later in political science than in other social science disciplines, and the spatially attuned studies seen in recent research on armed conflict and violence are still the exception and not the rule.

Another important task facing future subnational research concerns the lack of historical datasets on key political processes and policy areas. Recent research on subnational democracy provides an illustrative example. Because of the lack of historical datasets about subnational regimes (McMann, 2018), the vast majority of these studies focuses on the Third Wave democratization period (1974–2010), when subnational data became more readily available.<sup>8</sup> This temporal data limitation imposes an important constraint on our understanding of subnational political regime dynamics. Many of the outcomes we seek to explain result not from swift shocks but from gradual changes in institutions that unfold over long periods of time (Pierson, 2003; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, p. 3). Subnational democratization can be both a result and cause of slow-moving processes, and good longitudinal data is thus required to understand its origins and consequences.

An important effort to supply systematic subnational data on political regimes that span longer periods of time can be seen in the Varieties of Democracy dataset (V-Dem), which bills itself as “the largest database on democracy in history.” V-Dem has recently added 22 indicators of subnational democratic institutions and practices for all countries, except microstates, from 1900 to 2012. This will help equip researchers to assess the evolution of subnational regimes, develop more sophisticated descriptive analysis, and test hypotheses across time periods both within countries and across subnational units in multiple countries.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Buhaug and Rød (2006); Hegre et al. (2009); Lyall (2009); Østby et al. (2009); Schutte and Weidmann (2011). See also Hollenbach et al. (2016) for a study that combines satellite imagery and other kinds of geocoded data to analyze state-building and resource allocation across territory in post-conflict settings.

<sup>7</sup> An innovative example is the xSub initiative, based at the University of Michigan, which aggregates and harmonizes subnational data on violence around the world. See <http://www.cross-sub.org>; and Zhukov et al. (2017) on the initiative’s rationale and objectives. Available at: [https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/zhukov/wp-content/uploads/sites/140/2017/08/xSub\\_Aug2017pdf](https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/zhukov/wp-content/uploads/sites/140/2017/08/xSub_Aug2017pdf) (last accessed January 1, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Solt (2003); Benton (2012); Borges (2007); Gervasoni (2010); Giraudy (2010, 2013, 2015); Lankina and Getachew (2006, 2012); Rebolledo (2011); and Reisinger and Moraski (2010).

The work on state capacity by Mariano Sánchez-Talanquer (n.d.) offers another good example of a recent effort to widen the temporal scope of subnational data. Focusing on Colombia and Mexico, Sánchez-Talanquer aims to explain striking variation in the ability of modern states in the Global South to provide security, collect taxes, acquire knowledge about their societies, and improve the welfare of citizens. Combining newly uncovered archival documents and other unexamined primary sources with historical census data and contemporary measures of state activity, he offers fine-grained subnational data at the municipal and submunicipal levels on taxation, construction of mass education systems, extension of state systems of civil registration, provision of local security, and other core state activities. The new georeferenced historical datasets are analyzed with a variety of causal identification strategies, including spatial statistics and other quantitative techniques that exploit discontinuities between neighboring municipalities. Together with qualitative analysis of primary evidence, these quantitative tests show that domestic struggles and cleavages, not interstate warfare and external threats, determined the types of state capacity that developed as well as their geographical distribution within countries.

In addition to the collection and standardization of subnational data, another task for future SNR concerns aggregation – that is, assessing how subnational variation affects national-level concepts and measures of regimes, states, and development. For example, as discussed in Chapter 1 and also Chapter 5 by Caroline Beer, Chapter 9 by Sunila Kale and Nimah Mazaheri, and Chapter 8 by Prerna Singh, SNR shows that wide variation exists inside countries in the extension of political and social rights.<sup>9</sup> Yet existing national measures of democracy, authoritarianism, state capacity, and welfare states fail to consider the extent to which these phenomena are uniformly present across the national territory. As Agustina Giraudy and Jennifer Pribble (2018) argue, the lack of a territorial component in national-level concepts and measures severely hampers our understanding of key political phenomena.

Consider research on democracy and universal welfare states.<sup>10</sup> Conceptually, full democracy and welfare state universalism both rest on the idea that all citizens, regardless of where they reside in a country, will have an equal opportunity to exercise their political and social rights. In other words, a full democracy and a universal welfare state can be said to exist only if all citizens across all the national territory can vote, engage in civic activities, express their thoughts freely, and have access to health care and education as well as other forms of social protection. Although a territorially even distribution of political and social rights is implicitly a core attribute of democracy and welfare universalism, it has not been incorporated explicitly into national-level

<sup>9</sup> See also Luna and Medel (2017).

<sup>10</sup> This and the next paragraph draw on Giraudy and Pribble (2018).

measures of these concepts.<sup>11</sup> Empirically, because existing national-level measures of democracy and welfare state universalism do not account for the uneven territorial extension of rights, they provide limited, and potentially misleading, information for assessing whether countries are fully democratic and universalistic in the provision of welfare benefits.

Giraudy and Pribble (2018) thus propose Territorial Gini Indexes, which they use to adjust existing national-level measures of democracy and welfare state universalism. In turn, Giraudy and Pribble use the resulting Adjusted Measures of Democracy/Welfare State Universalism to show that certain Latin American countries that are celebrated for advances toward full democracy and welfare universalism appear less impressive when territorial variation in the extension of political and social rights is considered. For example, the performance of Chile, widely viewed as a regional leader in achieving welfare state universalism, looks far less impressive when the national measure of universalism is adjusted for territorial inequality.<sup>12</sup> With regard to democracy, Argentina and Mexico perform less well with the new national Adjusted Measure of Democracy than with unadjusted national measures, and, contrary to conventional wisdom, Mexico surprisingly performs better than Argentina in the 1990s. Including within-country territorial variation in national-level measures of welfare states and democracy thus offers an alternative and more accurate assessment.

In sum, by drawing on innovative techniques such as these for collecting, standardizing, and aggregating subnational data, researchers can make further progress in overcoming the empirical challenges to SNR posed by the scarcity of subnational datasets.

#### 11.2 THEORETICAL FRONTIERS: CHALLENGES OF SUBNATIONAL UNIT SELECTION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEORY-BUILDING

The welcome efforts to increase the supply and variety of subnational data raise theoretical challenges.<sup>13</sup> As Robert A. Dahl cautioned about the worldwide explosion in the amount of social science data over the past 50 years, “The problem now is an excess of information . . . Theoretical frameworks are crucial for dealing with all this information, because information that can’t be tied to a theoretical framework just becomes a book of facts, or random

<sup>11</sup> This mismatch between the definitions of these concepts and their operationalization results in a lack of what Goertz (2006) calls “concept-measure consistency.”

<sup>12</sup> See Otero-Bahamon (in press) for a related study of “social subnational inequality” in contemporary Latin America.

<sup>13</sup> See Branch (2016) on the theoretical and conceptual challenges that the GIS revolution poses for scholars of international relations.

knowledge” (Munck & Snyder, 2007, p. 145). Several key theoretical issues arising from the proliferation of new subnational data merit emphasis.

As discussed in Chapter 1, a subnational focus offers researchers the exciting possibility of working with a far larger and more diverse set of territorial units of analysis. While this opens opportunities for innovative research designs, it also poses challenges of selecting the appropriate unit. Hillel Soifer’s Chapter 3 addresses this problem of unit selection, noting that subnational research faces a conundrum, long recognized by geographers yet seldom addressed by political scientists: the modifiable areal unit problem, or MAUP. The MAUP stems from the fact that, according to the geographer Stan Openshaw (1984, p. 3), the spatial units in many studies are “arbitrary, modifiable, and subject to the whims and fancies of whoever is doing, or did, the aggregating.” Moreover, the relationships among variables can be extremely sensitive to changes in both the size and shape of the areal unit used to measure the data. Openshaw (1984, p. 22ff) highlights the potentially devastating consequences of the MAUP for statistical inference: aggregating the same data into different spatial units can produce correlation coefficients for a single pair of variables ranging from  $-0.93$  to  $+0.99$  (Soifer & Alvarez, 2017, p. 3). The implications of the MAUP for social science research are quite significant. For example, Cho and Baer (2011, pp. 416–418) show that research on racial attitudes in the United States employs a wide variety of different units of analysis, including census block groups, census tracts, cities, metropolitan areas, counties, states, parishes, public housing projects, and even prison cells. In turn, findings and conclusions about the determinants of racial attitudes vary across studies using different units. Soifer succinctly summarizes the consequences of the MAUP: “as the unit of analysis varies, so too will our results.”

To manage the problems posed by this sensitivity of results to changes in units, Soifer recommends that the choice of units “should begin with theory” – that is, with the causal claim the researcher wants to evaluate. He proposes dividing theories into three categories: those that are *unit-independent* and can apply to any unit of analysis; those that are *unit-specific* and apply only to particular units of analysis; and those that are *unit-limiting* because they can be evaluated with some units of analysis yet not others.<sup>14</sup> Ana Arjona’s Chapter 7 in this volume offers a good example of unit selection driven by theory that is “unit-limiting.” She argues that localities, which include a variety of small units such as neighborhoods, hamlets, and villages, are the appropriate units for making causal claims about civilian cooperation with rebels during civil wars. This is because these small units comprise the spatial context, or what she calls the “locus of choice,” where civilians make decisions about whether to cooperate with or, alternatively, resist efforts by rebel organizations to

<sup>14</sup> Singh (2017) distinguishes between theories developed at the subnational level that are scalable to the national level and those that are not scalable, that is, “unit specific” in Soifer’s terms. In his Chapter 3, Soifer notes that unit-independent theories are rare in political science, because most causal claims are only applicable in certain contexts.

establish their rule. Moreover, a focus on subnational units facilitates more precise conceptualization of the different forms that civilian cooperation and noncooperation alike can take. Arjona harnesses a subnational perspective to develop a more nuanced typology of civilian behavior in conflict zones. Making this conceptual advance requires shifting from a focus on national-level determinants of civilian behavior in wartime settings to a subnational approach centered on the specific locality where these consequential choices occur.<sup>15</sup> Arjona's theory-driven selection of local units of analysis thus provides a foundation for a stronger understanding of civilian cooperation in civil wars.

Theoretical considerations can also lead scholars to combine different kinds of subnational units in a single study. Although these units may differ in important respects, they can be analytically equivalent from the standpoint of the theory the researcher is building or testing. This principle of cross-system equivalence, which is routinely invoked as a guide for developing valid indicators in comparative research (Przeworski & Teune, 1970), can also help scholars address the challenge of unit selection. For example, the level at which collective bargaining between workers and employers takes place varies across countries and also across sectors within countries, ranging from the company to industry to national levels.<sup>16</sup> Achieving cross-system equivalence in a comparative study of labor politics may thus require a focus on different kinds of units depending on the locus of collective bargaining.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, similar political duties and powers may be located at quite different levels of government across countries, rendering municipalities in one country and states in another analytically equivalent units. An illustrative study that combines national and subnational units is Patrick Heller's (2001) comparative analysis of democratic decentralization in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, the Indian state of Kerala, and the country of South Africa. Despite the fact that these three cases are very different kinds of units – that is, a city, a state, and a country – Heller justifies the comparison because they share a key political attribute: All were governed by grassroots, left-of-center political parties. Still, the three cases vary in the degree to which marginalized societal groups were incorporated into decision-making about the allocation of public resources. To explain the contrasting roles of marginalized groups, Heller focuses on a pair of critical relations, state–civil society and political party–social movements, at the city, state, or national level depending on the case.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> In her Chapter 7, Arjona discusses three seminal works that paved the way for the shift to the local level in the study of civilian behavior during civil wars: Peterson (2001); Wood (2003); and Kalyvas (2006).

<sup>16</sup> See Hsueh (2011) for a comparative study of subnational variation in government–business relations across economic sectors in China.

<sup>17</sup> See Locke and Thelen (1995) on ways to achieve equivalence in comparative research through what they call “contextualized comparisons” that focus on different, yet analytically equivalent, factors across cases.

<sup>18</sup> Gallagher's (2016) study of the judicial fate of cases of homicides and disappearances in domestic courts in Mexico and Colombia offers another good example of combining

In addition to cross-system equivalence, another rationale for juxtaposing different kinds of units concerns “matched comparisons” that can help control for variables across cases. Consider a subnational comparative study of Argentina and India where the size of the population is an explanatory or control variable. The population of 10 of India’s 29 states is greater than the entire population of Argentina (41.22 million in 2010), with India’s largest state, Uttar Pradesh, alone having a population (199.58 million in 2011) nearly five times the size of Argentina’s.<sup>19</sup> Matching subnational units on the basis of population may thus require studying different kinds of units in each country, for example cities in India and provinces in Argentina. By bringing into focus a wide variety of different units inside countries, a subnational perspective gives researchers greater flexibility to select units of analysis in ways that bolster cross-system equivalence and strengthen comparative research design. Taking advantage of this increased maneuverability, however, requires researchers to make effective use of theory to guide the choice of units.

But formal administrative units – e.g., a city, county, or a state – do not necessarily map neatly onto the *subjective* understandings individuals hold of the spatial contexts that inform their political perceptions and behavior. This potential disjuncture between objective and subjective understandings of context has important theoretical implications. For example, in their study of how context shapes racial prejudice, Wong et al. (2012) add a map-drawing exercise to a survey questionnaire as a way to probe whether the administratively defined territorial boundaries of the area where respondents’ houses are located overlap with their perceptions of the spatial boundaries of their “local communities.” Gauging the overlap between objective and subjective boundaries is important because existing theory predicts that individuals’ perceptions about demographics in the places they live – conventionally measured by using objective administrative units – have a strong effect on whether they see racial outsiders as threats. Wong et al. (2012) find striking discrepancies between the formal and subjective units of analysis: Respondents tend to define their communities subjectively as small locales inside the objective, formal administrative units that researchers normally rely on. Moreover, the accuracy of respondents’ perceptions of the racial composition of units decreases as the scale increases beyond their subjectively defined understandings of their communities. One strategy to mitigate this discrepancy between objective and subjective units of analysis and, more broadly, the MAUP, is for researchers to

subnational and national units. She analyzes subnational data from three Mexican states (Chihuahua, Guerrero, Nuevo Leon) alongside national-level data from Colombia.

<sup>19</sup> The 10 Indian states with populations larger than Argentina’s in 2016 were Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh. Data on the population of India’s states are from India Ministry of Home Affairs, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner (2011, Map 5). Data on Argentina’s population are from the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs: <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DataQuery/> (last accessed: July 14, 2018).

test whether their findings hold at multiple scales (Wong et al., 2012, p. 1157; Soifer, Chapter 3 in this volume). A subnational approach can help implement this recommendation for assessing the robustness of findings by offering researchers a diverse set of units of analysis at different scales.

Another theoretical challenge facing future SNR concerns the distinction between jurisdictional, or formal, and non-jurisdictional, or informal, units that we introduced in Chapter 1. Again, it is helpful to refer to Soifer's Chapter 3, which notes that jurisdictional units often have an advantage regarding data availability, because many measures of phenomena of interest to social scientists are produced by government agencies. Consequently, electoral, economic, and demographic data are often aggregated at the scale of jurisdictional units, such as districts, municipalities, states, provinces, and departments. However, many important phenomena of interest are non-jurisdictional, because they are not contained by formal jurisdictional units, such as criminal groups and other violent non-state actors, vector-borne infectious diseases and other public health threats, environmental degradation, pollution, and natural disasters. The "shapes" of phenomena such as these do not fit neatly, if at all, into the formal grids defined by jurisdictional units. Not only do they cut across jurisdictional boundaries, including international borders, but their spatial distribution and, hence, density can also vary widely both within and across formal jurisdictions.<sup>20</sup> How should researchers handle these "unbound" phenomena that do not fit into jurisdictional units?

One approach to unbound phenomena involves using raster, or grid squares, comprised of standardized rectangles to divide up the area of a country, thereby dispensing with formal jurisdictional units altogether.<sup>21</sup> This approach offers an advantage, especially to those who prefer experimental methods, because it reduces the risk that unit boundaries are endogenous to the outcomes of interest: Raster boundaries are far less likely than political and administrative boundaries to be related causally and systematically to variables of interest to researchers. Still, a raster approach will likely face daunting data challenges, because official and other kinds of data are very unlikely to be collected at the raster level. Moreover, the challenges posed by the incongruence, or lack of "fit," between unbound phenomena and subnational jurisdictional units will not necessarily be surmounted by substituting raster for jurisdictional units.

Regarding the limits of raster as a technique for managing unbound phenomena, it is appropriate to consider James C. Scott's (1998) concept of "high modernism" – that is, the simplifying and standardizing schemes that states devise to render legible, administer, and govern societies. Scott shows the unintended, sometimes tragic, consequences stemming from the failure of these

<sup>20</sup> The GIS technique of "hot spot" mapping is premised on spatial variation in the density of phenomena, such as crime.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Gleditsch & Weidmann (2012), and Tollefsen et al. (2012), as discussed in Soifer's Chapter 3.

simplifying schemes to consider the complexity and unpredictability of the social and natural worlds. Jurisdictional units can be interpreted as instances of high modernism, potentially vulnerable to the pernicious consequences that Scott argues result from simplifying state schemes. From this standpoint, using a raster grid of standardized rectangles to try to get beyond the limitations of subnational jurisdictional units for studying unbound phenomena would seem to be an exercise in an even higher modernism that may, like state simplifications, prove woefully inadequate for comprehending the phenomena of interest.

An alternative approach to unbound phenomena, rather than dispensing with jurisdictional units by turning to raster, takes the incongruence, or lack of “fit,” between unbound phenomena and formal jurisdictions as an opportunity for theory-building. For example, Richard Snyder and Angélica Durán-Martínez (2009a, 2009b) focus on a major change in the boundaries of law enforcement districts in Mexico in the late 1990s, showing how this resulted in a new map of territorially fragmented districts for the administration of justice. Moreover, whereas the geographical distribution of drug-trafficking organizations, the so-called Tijuana, Sinaloa, Gulf and Juárez “cartels,” was aligned with the old jurisdictional map, which had divided the country into three large and contiguous administrative districts in the North, Center, and South, the new jurisdictional map undid this spatial alignment.<sup>22</sup> The resulting lack of fit between the redrawn law enforcement map and the geographic distribution of criminal organizations, in turn, fostered both a breakdown of the long-standing state-sponsored protection racket and a massive increase in violence.

The factors that shape the internal dynamics and durability of informal and non-jurisdictional units, such as squatter settlements, regional economies, and criminal fiefdoms, offer further opportunities for theory building. For example, Eduardo Moncada (in press) explores why business firms targeted for illicit taxation by criminal organizations pursue strikingly different forms of resistance, ranging from armed rebellion to peaceful and discreet everyday negotiations. These varied forms of resistance, in turn, have contrasting consequences for the scope and maintenance of criminal fiefdoms that extend across both formal (e.g., an entire municipality) and informal (e.g., a handful of city street blocks) jurisdictions. Moncada proposes and tests a new theory that explains the strategies of resistance to criminal extortion pursued by firms as the result of their economic and political resources, especially how much access they have to financial capital and the state’s coercive apparatus.

A further theoretical frontier of SNR concerns subnational units of analysis that are *non-territorial*, such as ethnic and other societal groups, especially ones that are not geographically concentrated. Examples of non-territorial

<sup>22</sup> The undoing of the old spatial alignment between jurisdictional districts of law enforcement, on the one hand, and the geographical distribution of drug-trafficking organizations, on the other, was no accident. It was part of a package of anti-corruption reforms introduced by Mexico’s federal government in the mid-1990s (Snyder & Durán-Martínez, 2009a, pp. 264–265).

subnational units include ethnic minorities in interwar Europe that were geographically dispersed inside countries, such as the Russians in Latvia, the Jews in Lithuania, and the Protestants in Ireland (Coakley, 1994). Non-territorial units are, by definition, unbound – that is, they cut across and are contained neither by formal or informal territorial subnational units. This incongruence between non-territorial and territorial subnational units produces a dilemma in the case of geographically dispersed ethnic minorities, because the lack of territories where minorities are dominant precludes the possibility of their exercising autonomy or self-government on a territorial basis through federalism or other mechanisms for devolving power to subnational units.<sup>23</sup> Still, just as research on the lack of fit between unbound phenomena and jurisdictional subnational units has spurred analytic and theoretical innovation, the incongruence between non-territorial and territorial subnational units, both formal and informal, may also offer fruitful opportunities for theory building.

### 11.3 CONCLUSION: ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE ACROSS SCALES

SNR offers a venerable, powerful, and exciting way to do comparative politics. As seen in the contributions to this volume, SNR has made important substantive, theoretical, and methodological contributions to political science. Still, as noted in Chapter 1, we do not claim that all comparative research should be subnational. The nation-state continues to stand as the constitutive unit of global politics, with citizenship and political identities routinely defined in terms of countries. The demand for social science research with a national focus is strong, and it will surely remain so. Just as we do not seek to displace national-level research, we also do not aim to carve out a segregated separate sphere for subnational work. Instead, we hope to foster greater engagement among scholars who study the same or similar problems at different scales. The potential for such cross-scale engagement to advance knowledge can be seen in the recent efforts already discussed to improve national measures of democracy and social welfare by including subnational data on spatial variation. The promise of cross-scale dialogue is further illustrated by the examples this book offers of multilevel theory-building that combines national and subnational perspectives to achieve more powerful explanations of phenomena ranging from women's rights (Beer's Chapter 5) to economic development (Rithmire's Chapter 10) and human security (Trejo and Ley's Chapter 6). We hope this book will inspire others to address empirical and theoretical challenges like these as they seek to understand the many humanly important problems both across and inside countries.

<sup>23</sup> On “non-territorial autonomy” as a plausible alternative for such groups, see Coakley (1994).

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