

# Malapportionment in the Legislative and the Executive as Substitutes: Evidence from Argentina\*

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## Abstract

Existing research indicates that legislative malapportionment results from a credible commitment between elites from peripheral (smaller, rural) and core (larger, urban) regions, favoring the former. Such agreements typically arise at critical junctures like the birth of federations and constitutional conventions. Yet, there has been little focus on how these agreements might influence cabinet composition. Does legislative over-representation of rural areas extend to executive over-representation, making them complements? Or are legislative malapportionment and cabinet malapportionment substitutes, compensating the under-representation of urban areas in the legislature with over-representation in the executive? We contend that they are substitutes when core regions are economic or demographic hegemons. We evaluate this argument leveraging a novel dataset of all Argentinian ministers and legislators from its foundation in 1862 until 2015. We first confirm that legislative malapportionment has been a constant of Argentina's institutional design since the initial federal pact. Second, we show that existing literature has missed the other half of the story: cabinet malapportionment. Our analysis shows Buenos Aires has historically been over-represented in the cabinet, balancing its legislative under-representation. This over-representation in the 19th century helped the state-building project by decreasing interregional conflict. In the 20th century, Buenos Aires' dominance in the cabinet persisted, driven by its human capital and tighter political networks. These findings highlight the informal dynamics of compensation mechanisms among regional elites that enable the emergence of heterogeneous polities, including federations, and their maintenance over time.

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# 1 Introduction

Legislative malapportionment, defined as the discrepancy between the share of legislative seats and the share of population held by electoral districts (Samuels and Snyder, 2001*a*), is a widely studied source of bias in political representation. Many have examined the political and economic consequences of this institutional arrangement. Legislative malapportionment has been linked to the distortion of electoral results (Boone and Wahman, 2015), the allocation of government resources in favor of overrepresented constituencies (Ansolabehere and Snyder, 2008; Gibson, 2004; Horiuchi and Saito, 2003; Gibson and Falletti, 2004; Galiani, Torre and Torrens, 2016), uneven geographic development (e.g. Athias and Schneider, 2021; Bhavnani, 2021; Imai, 2022), and lower fiscal capacity (Ardanaz and Scartascini, 2013). The resulting consensus is that legislative malapportionment fosters unequal political representation, violating the democratic principle of “one person, one vote” (Dahl, 1956) and making it a “pathology of democratic systems” (Shugart and Taagepera, 1989, pp. 14-15).

Many studies consider malapportionment as exogenous institutional engineering while others conceive of it as endogenous to political conditions and to the balance of power between groups that surfaces at critical junctures, such as a constitutional convention, a transition to democracy, or during moments of key electoral and political reforms. According to the latter view, legislative malapportionment is the result of a bargaining process between elites and a tool for some elites and regions to preserve their economic and political interests (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2008; Bruhn, Gallego and Onorato, 2010; Ticchi and Vindigni, 2010; Ardanaz and Scartascini, 2013; Albertus and Menaldo, 2018).

This type of elite bargaining typically takes in the early period of state-building and at critical junctures—in the case of Argentina, the empirical focus of this paper, the decades following the establishment of the federation in 1860 (e.g., Reynoso, 2012). Samuels and Snyder (2001*a*) suggest that, after Latin American states emerged from colonial rule, legislative malapportionment favoring rural, smaller districts may have served as a strategic mechanism to integrate rural elites into national developmental projects and to appease secessionist tendencies of the periphery.

This pattern mirrors the concessions made to smaller (and Southern, slave-holding) states during the 1787 U.S. Constitutional Convention. One was the decision that each state would have two senators regardless of population, which Argentina adopted. Another was the “three-fifths compromise”, which meant that three-fifths of the slave population would count for determining taxes and representation in the House of Representatives. That was “a concession to the South, taxation having—at that distant time—less bite than representation. Joseph Story, the Supreme Court justice, later commented: ‘It might have been contended, with full as much property, that rice, or cotton, or tobacco, or potatoes, should have been exclusively taken into account in apportioning the representation. The truth is that the arrangement adopted by the Constitution was a matter of compromise and concession, confessedly unequal in its operation, which was indispensable to the union of States having a great diversity of interest, physical condition, an political institutions” (Balinski and Young, 2010, p. 7).

In sum, sparsely populated rural regions risk being marginalized by larger urban areas whenever representation is precisely proportional to population. Thus, legislative malapportionment becomes a compromise that favors the inclusion and cooperation of less populated rural regions and increases their incentives to partake in the state, especially in heterogeneous federal states (Riker, 1964)

Existing accounts placing legislative malapportionment front and center raise an important puzzle we address in this paper: After the foundation of a union, why wouldn’t more populous and prosperous regions renege and try to revert their fortunes in the legislative?

We argue that demographically or economically dominant regions may recoup their legislative losses by dominating the executive, an insight overlooked by existing literature. Malapportionment in the cabinet in favor of the largest and most economically powerful regions provides a compensatory mechanism for their legislative losses. In this way, the cabinet facilitates political unity during the often turbulent early decades of state-building and beyond. Such an examination seems especially important in Latin American countries, such as Argentina, where early elites borrowed

the institutional design of the United States and where presidents have long granted extensive powers to and their cabinets to the point that some regimes were categorized as hyper-presidentialist (Rose-Ackerman, Disierto and Volosin, 2011; Carmagnani, 1993).

In the period of state-building and consolidation, cabinet malapportionment in favor of large regions increases their willingness to maintain their commitment to unite or federate with smaller, rural ones because it allows them to steer public policy and protect their economic interests via the cabinet.<sup>1</sup> This, we argue, is the case of the province of Buenos Aires in Argentina. In this light, the *legislative over-representation* of smaller, rural regions and the *cabinet over-representation* of bigger, urban ones is an equilibrium that (i) fosters stability in the early stages of state-building, reducing the risk of conflict or secession by the largest regions, and (ii) helps explain why the largest regions do not deploy their economic and electoral power to modify the distribution of seats in the legislature in their favor.

Following consolidation, the largest regions may be able to maintain their overrepresentation in the cabinet—even if conflict and secessionist threats are no longer credible. First, they may concentrate the pool of most educated and experienced ministerial candidates. Economically dominant regions typically also comprise the most prepared candidates. Presidents often appoint highly educated and experienced individuals because it facilitates their reelection, signals competence, and matters for policy implementation (Alexiadou, 2016; Ricart-Huguet, 2021). Second, larger and more prosperous regions typically contain the largest elite networks and party cadres. Cadres can mobilize votes from the most populous districts and thus improve the president’s and party’s reelection prospects. Thus, the over-representation of larger, urban regions in the cabinet can help explain both a union’s emergence and endurance.

We test this argument in the case of Argentina, an archetypal example of legislative malapportionment favoring smaller, rural regions (Reynoso, 2012; Gibson and Falletti, 2004; Snyder, 2000;

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<sup>1</sup>We do not dispute that regions trade-off the benefits of size (e.g., larger countries enjoy economies of scale) with the costs of heterogeneity (of increased differences in policy preferences due to larger size (Alesina and Spolaore, 2003)). Rather, we argue that, holding such trade-off constant, economically powerful regions will be more incentivized to stay in a federation if they have more political power.

Gibson and Calvo, 2000; Samuels and Snyder, 2001*b*). The origins of Argentina’s malapportionment have been traced back to the constitution of the federation in 1853 (Reynoso, 2012). Since early times, the legislative was biased towards rural, smaller provinces in the legislature to the detriment of Buenos Aires and of Córdoba and Santa Fe, the second and third most populated provinces. That has always been the case in the Senate of Argentina where, by design, each province receives the same number of seats. In this paper, we will focus on the Chamber of Deputies or *Cámara de Diputados*, which should, but historically has not, followed a proportional representation rule.<sup>2</sup>

We leverage a novel dataset to examine the representation dynamics of the legislature and the cabinet jointly. The database comprises all Argentine diputados and ministers in the 1854-2015 period. The database includes the provinces that legislators represent and the province of birth of ministers to proxy for province-level representation yearly.

As others have extensively documented before (Gibson and Calvo, 2000; Reynoso, 2012; Cabrera, 1992, 1991), we confirm that smaller provinces have been consistently over-represented throughout most part of Argentina’s history. The pattern began in the 19th century, persisted, and became more acute in the 20th century with the 1973 and 1983 reforms undertaken by military regimes. When Argentina transitioned to democracy, 44% of the seats in the Chamber were assigned to provinces that accounted for only 31% of the national population. That distribution largely remains in place to this day, with important distributive consequences (Gibson and Calvo, 2000; Ardanaz and Scartacini, 2013).

However, we also find that these smaller provinces have been typically absent, and thus necessarily underrepresented, in the cabinet. Buenos Aires, for its part, has been over-represented in the cabinet throughout Argentina’s history. The association between representation in the Chamber and in the executive is for most part of the over 155 years we cover negative and significant. This suggests a compensation mechanism at work. Furthermore, the province and City of Buenos Aires have comprised an average of 42% of the population but 58% of the ministers between 1860 and

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<sup>2</sup>Throughout the paper we will refer to this body as ‘Chamber’ or the ‘legislature’ unless otherwise specified.

2015.<sup>3</sup> Its overrepresentation is particularly high when the president is from Buenos Aires, which is the case during half of Argentina’s history and is consistent with elite networks and the favoring of the province’s cadres as mechanisms.

We develop a historical narrative of political representation to account for the patterns of representation in the legislature and cabinet that we uncover. The narrative contains secondary sources as well as illustrative cases from our dataset. We divide Argentina’s history in three broad periods: the decades for state formation and consolidation (1860-1915), from the first elections under universal male suffrage to the end of the last military dictatorship (1916-1982), and the democratic period (1983-present). In the first period, we illustrate how the dispute between Buenos Aires and the provinces around the creation and terms of the federation resulted in the early over-representation of the provinces in the legislative *and* Buenos Aires’ over-representation in cabinets, although the first pattern would quickly turn around in favor of the hegemonic province as it became clear that the threat of secession was still present. During the period after early democratization, Buenos Aires’ representation in the executive increased, especially after becoming more and more under-represented in the Chamber due to reforms enacted in 1949, 1973, and 1983 before the transition. Finally, since then, legislative malapportionment remained largely constant, but Buenos Aires achieved to further strengthen its supremacy in the executive, even at times when the president was not from Buenos Aires.

Our paper advances several research agendas. First, it contributes to the study of representation in legislatures and cabinets in Latin America and the Global South. Although understudied, the cabinet—and not just the president—matters greatly in presidential systems and, in Latin America, cabinet ministers have extensive influence on policy (Martínez-Gallardo, 2014). We build on Martínez-Gallardo and Schleiter (2015, p. 232), who find that ministers’ appointments do not always respond to a partisan logic and that presidents need to “delegate significant authority over policy formulation, enactment, and implementation to ministers.” We advance this literature because, to date, it has largely explained the appointment of ministers through partisan rather

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<sup>3</sup>We combine ministers born in the province of Buenos Aires (*bonaerenses*) and in the City of Buenos Aires (*porteños*) because it is often difficult to ascertain whether a minister was born in the province or in the city.

than regional lenses.<sup>4</sup> Regional boundaries often overlap with sectoral economic interests and regional favoritism is pervasive (Hodler and Raschky, 2014), so the appointment of ministers can serve as a political weapon of regional elites to protect their interests.

Our focus on the cabinet is particularly pertinent because legislatures have been amply studied and yet have often been weak in Latin America and in other regions of the Global South, such as Africa, where the cabinet has been the undisputed “locus of power sharing” (Arriola and Johnson, 2014, p. 11). Whenever the legislature has limited powers, it is naive to obviate the representative dimension of the cabinet (Ricart-Huguet, 2021).

Second, we shed light on the relationship between representation in the executive and in the legislative. We are aware of only two studies with a similar goal. Hiroi and Neiva (2022) find that populous states in Brazil, though legislatively underrepresented, manage to control many of the most important offices in the country, including the national presidency, presidency of the lower house of the Congress, and federal ministers. These results from Brazil are consistent with our argument that legislative and executive representation are substitutes and we discuss them further in the conclusion. By contrast, Bhavnani (2015, 69) shows that malapportionment “doubly penalizes” large electoral districts in Indian states, a parliamentary federation. He argues that large electoral districts are underrepresented in both the legislature and in the cabinet because large parties “focus on winning relatively small constituencies.” Legislative and executive representation are complements rather than substitutes in this case. We reconcile these opposite findings by suggesting that cabinets are more likely to compensate dominant regions in presidential systems, such as Argentina and Brazil, than parliamentary ones, such as India. In presidential systems, cabinets do not emanate from parliament and thus they are less subject to a regional version of Gamson’s Law. Gamson’s Law is the empirical regularity that, in coalition governments, the shares of ministries for each party roughly correspond to their legislative shares. If we replace parties by provinces, a province’s legislative share of seats should matter more in cabinets that directly emanate from the legislature (parliamentary systems) than in those that do not (presidential systems).

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<sup>4</sup>One notable exception is Hiroi and Neiva (2022)’s work on Brazil.

Finally, our argument and results are an example of the unintended consequences of institutional reforms and of “instrumental incoherence” (Faguet and Shami, 2022). Legislative malapportionment is a constitutive feature of the Argentine federation, but we find no evidence that the over-representation of Buenos Aires in the executive was planned *ab initio* in 1860 but rather that it emerged over time as an equilibrium between the hegemon and the rest of Argentina, “the product of serious temporal and dimensional mismatch between the incentives of reformers and the effects of their reforms” sometimes. Such an arrangement allowed the smaller provinces to incorporate Buenos Aires, the most prosperous and largest province, into the federation—a necessary condition for their economic survival. Buenos Aires, for its part, has usually dominated the cabinet. This “assymetry” between the two branches appears incoherent at first but is in fact instrumental because it maintains an equilibrium in the regional distribution of power, thus maintaining the Argentine federation together.

## 2 Motivation and Puzzle

Our motivation stems from the simple insight that legislatures are only half of the story of political representation. Cabinets possess a representation dimension, de facto, (i) in regimes that are non-democratic or semi-democratic, because the legislature has limited powers, and (ii) in regimes with strong regional cleavages, as is often the case of multinational states or otherwise heterogeneous states. In spite of this, scholars have examined the distribution of power in the cabinet through ideological lenses and policy-making strategies (Alexiadou, 2016; Neto, 2006; Alemán and Tsebelis, 2011; Neto and Samuels, 2010), economic lenses (Hallerberg and Wehner, 2020; ?), partisan lenses (Martínez-Gallardo, 2014; Huber and Martínez-Gallardo, 2008), or gender lenses (Arriola and Johnson, 2014; ?) but rarely through regional lenses (Ricart-Huguet, 2021).

Argentina’s tumultuous history includes pronounced center-periphery and urban-rural cleavages and mostly semi- or non-democratic regimes prior to 1983 during which the legislature had limited power. Therefore, we examine the cabinet through regional lenses to add another layer



of complexity to the conventional wisdom that rural and smaller provinces benefited in political representation institutions after Argentina federated at the expense of Buenos Aires.

Argentina is a good case to test our more general idea that a hegemon's underrepresentation in the legislature may be compensated in the cabinets for three reasons. First, while Buenos Aires is a particularly dominant hegemon economically and demographically, many countries are regionally heterogeneous and contain a dominant region. Examples include federations such as Brazil (Sao Paulo), Canada (Ontario) and Uganda (Buganda), and unitary countries such as the United Kingdom (the Greater London Region), Peru (Lima region), and Senegal (Dakar and Thiès regions).<sup>5</sup> The great size of Argentina's territory allows a wide divergence in the natural endowments and production profiles across regions, and therefore a variety of economic interests that potentially conflict with each other.

Second, the literature on institutions has devoted particular attention to Argentina as an archetypal case of legislative malapportionment (e.g. Gibson and Falletti, 2004; Gibson and Calvo, 2000; Calvo and Murillo, 2004; Calvo and Abal Medina, 2001). However, it has overlooked political selection into Argentina's cabinets in spite of the political relevance of both ministers (Martínez-Gallardo, 2014) and the president. As perhaps a prominent political historian of Argentina put it, "Argentine federalism has always had a powerful counterpart in the presidential institution. The recreation of federalism as a republican principle went through phases of more or less personalism, but nothing prevented the role of the president from becoming the center of our institutional constellation" (Botana et al., 1991, p. 79).

Third, because this is a difficult case for our argument. The history of the origins, consolidation, and preservation of the Argentine federation is often portrayed in the historical literature as a dynamic power struggle between two pivotal entities: Buenos Aires, which served as the heart of the *Virreinato del Río de la Plata*, and the rest of the provinces or political entities that comprised the viceroyalty during the era of Spanish rule. As explained later, the history of Argentina's federation is characterized by a recurrent conflict between Buenos Aires and provinces that advocated

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<sup>5</sup>Our argument may not be relevant for small homogeneous countries such as Iceland.

for a political arrangement that would protect them from Buenos Aires' hegemony. Provincial representation in Congress and in the electoral college that appointed the President were two crucial political battles throughout the formation years. Most historical accounts portray the conclusion of this struggle in 1860 as a political loss for Buenos Aires, which received the short end of the stick ever since.

We believe that standard accounts present a puzzle: Why would Buenos Aires accept to be systematically underrepresented when it was and has always remained the most populous and prosperous province?

### **3 Empirical expectations**

We argue that the representation of districts in the legislative branch affects regional representation in cabinets. The mechanism behind this relationship is that regional elites who lose in the legislative will seek to compensate for such loss by controlling the policy-making process in the executive branch of government. Our argument has two stages. In a first moment, during the foundational moments of a union —its birth and years of early consolidation— representation in the legislative and the executive work as regional compensation mechanisms. In line with existing historiography works, we make the point that legislative malapportionment is a crucial institutional tool that serves as a “glue” for nations, particularly federations. This is so because legislative malapportionment secures the collaboration of smaller units that fear the control of bigger districts and becoming the losers of the federal arrangement. We argue, however, that bigger districts will be more inclined to give up their representation in the legislative if they achieve to be over-represented in cabinets. During these foundational moments, we propose that elites from smaller rural and bigger urban regions craft an implicit pact whereby the first group will have the upper hand in the legislative, whereas the second one will dominate the executive. Thus, cabinet malapportionment also works as the “glue” that helps explain how unions come to life and achieve to maintain together during the early years of their consolidation.

In a second stage, once the federation has been consolidated and there is no longer a credible threat of secession, we propose two other mechanisms help explain the persistence of legislative and cabinet malapportionment in the long-run. One is the presence of higher human capital and larger elite networks from where political parties can recruit high-rank cadres from. The other one is the electoral power of the more populous region, which makes the recruitment of cabinet members from this district particularly attractive since they can mobilize a large number of votes.

Our main empirical implications are the following:

1. Cabinet malapportionment is a compensation mechanism for powerful elites that lost in the legislative arena. Therefore:
  - (a) The overrepresentation in the legislative of smaller provinces is correlated with the overrepresentation the bigger and hegemonic region in cabinets.
  - (b) Absent the hegemon, this correlation should disappear or become positive since medium-sized regions do not have the political and economic to achieve compensation in the executive.

## 4 Data

We compile two different databases of political elites to shed light on the association between political representation in the legislative and in the executive, and moreover the extent to which Buenos Aires has been over-represented in cabinets across history. The first consists of data on all members of the lower chamber (*Cámara de Diputados*) and upper chamber (*Cámara de Senadores*) of Argentina's Congress between 1854 and 2015. These data were retrieved from the Congress online repository for the post-1990 period and from the *Nómina Alfabética de Diputados de la Nación (1854-1991)* for the previous period. In both cases, we gather the names of all members of Congress, their party affiliation, the province they represented, and the period of their mandates. Second, we construct an original database with biographical information of all individuals that served in cabinets between 1854 and 2015, namely presidents and ministers. The key variables

to proxy for representation are the province for which deputies were elected and the ministers' province of birth.

To construct political representation and malapportionment measures in the executive and legislative, we combine these data with population data obtained from statistical yearbooks (1854, 1855, 1857 and 1859) and all national censuses (1860, 1869, 1895, 1914, 1947, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1991, 2001, and 2010). We interpolate population by province linearly between censuses to obtain a balanced province-year population panel.

In our analyses, we aggregate the first two datasets from the individual to the province level to obtain province-year level measures of representation. These include the number and percentage of deputies and ministers for each province by year, by period, and overall. Finally, we merge the two elite datasets with the population dataset to calculate both malapportionment at the aggregate level (Section 4.1) as well as over and underrepresentation levels for each province-year (Section 5).

## 4.1 Malapportionment

We begin by calculating malapportionment in the lower chamber and in the cabinet following Samuels and Snyder (2001a, p. 655) formula:  $MAL_{leg} = 1/2 \sum_i^n |s_i - pop_i|$ , where  $s_i$  is the percentage of all legislative seats allocated to district  $i$ , and  $pop_i$  is the percentage of the overall population residing in district  $i$ . Similarly, in the cabinet,  $MAL_{exec} = 1/2 \sum_i^n |m_i - pop_i|$ , where  $m_i$  is the percentage of ministers born in district  $i$ .<sup>6</sup>

The MAL index ranges between 0 and 100 such that, in a country with 2 constituencies, if one held all seats but no voters and the other held all voters but no seats,  $MAL = 1/2 * (|100 - 0| + |0 - 100|) = 200/2 = 100$ . In reality, MAL in lower chambers is rarely above 15. A score of 10, for example, “means that 10 per cent of the seats are allocated to districts that would not receive those seats if there were no malapportionment” (Samuels and Snyder, 2001a, p. 656).

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<sup>6</sup>Also following Samuels and Snyder (2001a, p. 655), we use population rather than registered voters because “most countries apportion seats on the basis of population rather than registered voters.”

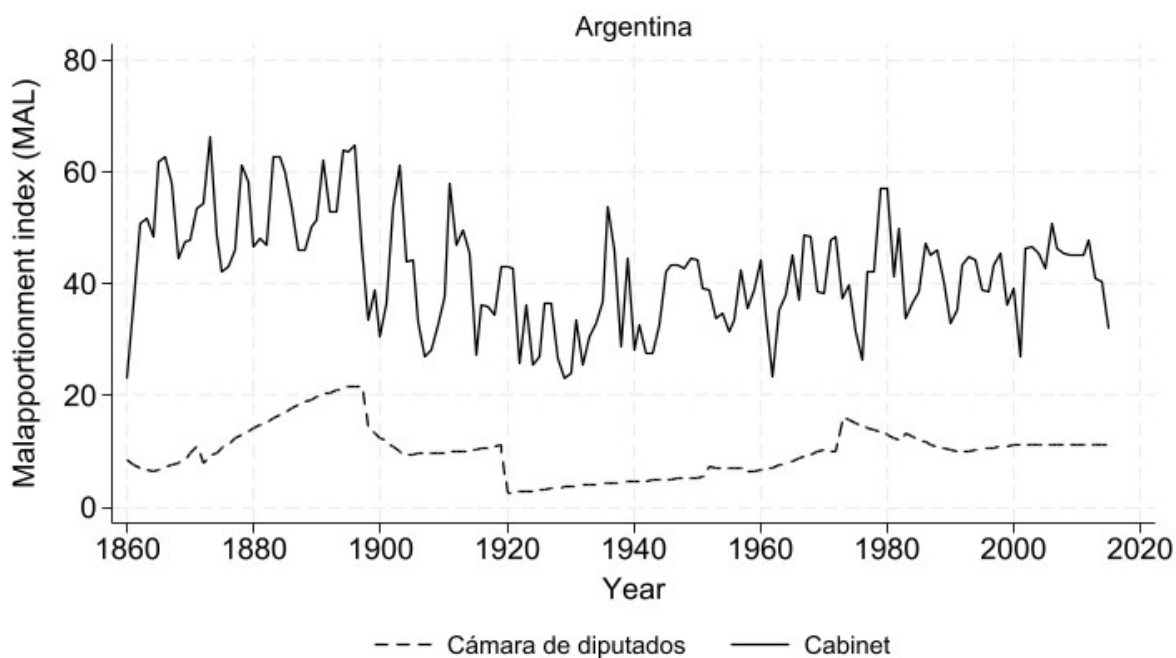


Figure 1: Malapportionment in the cabinet and in the legislature (1860-2015)

Notes: The graph shows the yearly values of the malapportionment index for Argentina’s *Cámara de Diputados* and cabinet.

Figure 1 plots the yearly levels of malapportionment in the *Cámara de Diputados* and in the cabinet from 1860, year in which Buenos Aires joined the federation, to 2015. Legislative malapportionment in Argentina is high, as is well-known, and 10.7 on average. It is even higher in the cabinet, 42.6 on average, where there is also higher variance, owing to several facts. First, malapportionment in *Diputados* changes slowly from one year to the next because population shares also change slowly, and we only observe somewhat sudden changes when politicians choose to update the allocation of seats per province. Second, cabinet seats are not allocated to provinces, so there is room for much more year-on-year variability as a result. Some of this variation is orthogonal to the minister’s province of birth because this is only one of several criteria for political selection into Argentina’s cabinet. The main one is party affiliation and others include competence, loyalty, and more recently other dimensions such as gender that are beyond the scope of this article. Third, the average cabinet size over the 1860-2015 period is only 13.6 members (the average size of the chamber is 162 deputies), so some of the 24 provinces cannot be represented in cabinet in a given

year. The size of the cabinet has increased from around 10 in the 19th century to 23 in the 21st century, but so has the number of provinces from the original 13 to the current 24.

These three observations notwithstanding should raise eyebrows. They suggest that some smaller provinces are not represented in the cabinet for decades at a time. That is indeed what we find, especially because as many as eight ministers are from Buenos Aires alone, on average. A number of provinces have been represented by fewer than 10 ministers since 1860 (Chaco, Chubut, Formosa, Misiones, Neuquen, Rio Negro) and, extreme as it may seem, one of the thirteen founding provinces (Jujuy) has never been represented in the cabinet.<sup>7</sup>

That seems problematic because, in most of Argentina's history prior to the advent of democracy in 1983, Congress was often subordinated to the Executive. That was true under semi- and non-democratic civilian regimes and even more so under military regimes. More generally, the cabinet has been an important institution to allocate resources across provinces and for distributive politics for most of Argentina's history (Bidart-Campos, 1993; Benton, 2003; Gibson and Calvo, 2000; Ardanaz, Leiras and Tommasi, 2014*a*).

Ultimately, malapportionment is an aggregate measure and the unequal representation in the cabinet could cancel out over time, such that province are underrepresented in one year but overrepresented in the next. In the remainder of the article, we examine province-level patterns in the long-run to understand the extent to which legislative and cabinet malapportionment are associated and systematic, that is, the extent to which some provinces systematically punch above their demographic weight and others below.

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<sup>7</sup>That is also true for Tierra del Fuego, but it was constituted as a province much later, in 1991.

## 5 Representation in Argentina’s legislature and executive in the long-run

Our measure of representation is the core component of MAL, such that  $s_i - pop_i > 0$  implies overrepresentation in the chamber and  $m_i - pop_i > 0$  implies overrepresentation in the cabinet whereas  $s_i - pop_i < 0$  and  $m_i - pop_i < 0$  imply underrepresentation.

We begin by visualizing average representation in the chamber and the cabinet for the entire period in Figure 2. Consistent with existing accounts (Reynoso, 2012; Bidart-Campos, 1993), the left map illustrates that Buenos Aires and the second and third largest provinces, Córdoba and Santa Fe, have been underrepresented in the *Cámara de Diputados* while most peripheral, rural provinces have been over-represented throughout history. Even the smallest province received a floor of two deputies, later three, four and eventually five since 1983 (Reynoso, 2012).

On average, Buenos Aires has comprised 41.3% of the population of Argentina but only 38.6% of its deputies. Córdoba and Santa Fe have comprised an average of 10.8% and 10.4% of the population but only 8.7% and 8.6% of the deputies. At the other extreme, a small province such as Formosa with only 0.6% of Argentina’s population obtains 2.5% of the deputies because of the floor of deputies discussed above.<sup>8</sup> To restate, this and all calculations in the article excludes the Senate, the upper chamber historically composed of two senators per province, following the US institution, that further underrepresents large provinces like Buenos Aires by design.

The patterns observed in the left map highlight our initial puzzle: Why have Buenos Aires and its influential elites not resisted their fate in the Chamber? As explained in Section 6, Buenos Aires likely derived economic benefits from joining the federation since it only consented to join in 1860 after negotiating favorable terms (Chiaromonte, 1993; Gibson and Falletti, 2004).

Our ministerial data reveals a complementary but overlooked explanation: Buenos Aires has dominated the cabinet for much of Argentina’s history. As many as 58% of ministers in Argentina’s

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<sup>8</sup>Buenos Aires (41.2%), Córdoba (10.8%) and Santa Fe (10.4%) have comprised, on average, 62.5% of Argentina’s population. None of the other provinces reaches even 5% of Argentina’s population (Entre Ríos and Tucumán, with 4.9% and 4.4%, are the fourth and fifth largest).

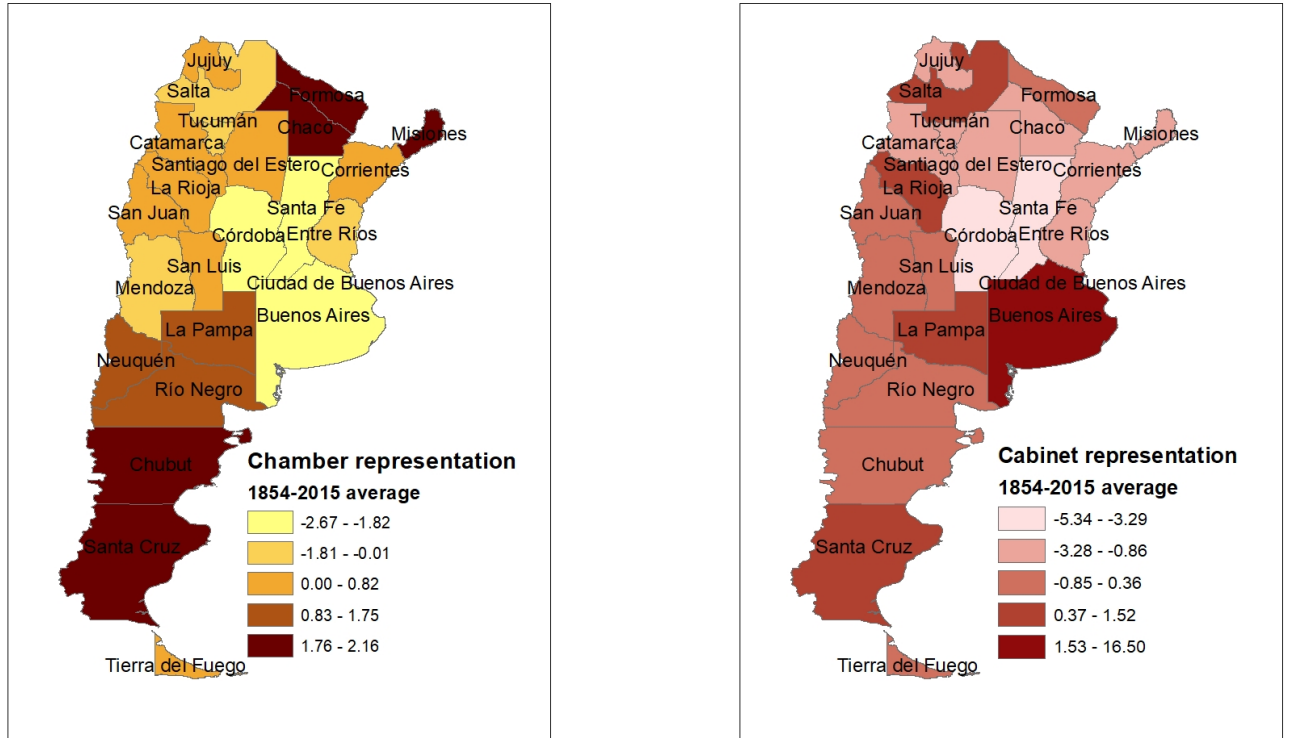


Figure 2: Share of *diputados* (left) and share of cabinet ministers (right) of Argentina between 1854 and 2015

Notes: The values in the left map result from subtracting the share of deputies representing the province from the province’s share of the population, both averaged from 1854 to 2015. Analogously, the values in the right map result from subtracting the share of ministers born in the province from the province’s share of the population. For example, the average share of the population of Cordoba over the 1854-2015 period is 10.8%. However, its average share of ministers over the same period is only 8.7%, hence its under-representation.

history (1860-2015) were *porteños* (from the port city of Buenos Aires) or *bonaerenses* (from the province of Buenos Aires) even though Buenos Aires city and province comprise “only” 41.5% of Argentina’s population, hence the 16.5% in the right map in Figure 2, which shows the birthplace of ministers aggregated by province. Such a pattern is easily missed absent individual data on the birth province of ministers.

The right map also reveals that the second and third largest provinces, Córdoba and Santa Fe, are “doubly penalized”: they are underrepresented in the legislature but are unable to recoup their losses in the cabinet. Córdoba and Santa Fe constitute 10.8% and 10.4% of Argentina’s population but only 7.8% and 5.3% of the ministers. We return to the issue of the double penalization of middle-sized provinces, a topic beyond the scope of this paper, in our conclusions. In sum, so far



we have shown that cabinet malapportionment results from systematic, long-run inequalities in political representation that have benefited Buenos Aires to the detriment of the rest.

## 5.1 Changes in the representation of Buenos Aires over time

Buenos Aires is an outlier in both maps, so we examine it more closely. Figure 3 plots the annual values for  $s_i - pop_i$  and of  $m_i - pop_i$  from 1860, when it joined the federation, until 2015. It shows what we already knew from the maps: that, most of the time, Buenos Aires has been underrepresented in the Chamber ( $s_i - pop_i < 0$ ) but overrepresented in the cabinet ( $m_i - pop_i > 0$ ).

However, plotting the annual values reveals some overlooked and important nuances. Buenos Aires (city and province) has been underrepresented in the Chamber during most of the 20th century, as is well known, but not in the 19th century. Certainly this was the case during the first few years after the creation of the federation, but Buenos Aires representation in the Chamber quickly balanced due to demographic but also political reasons we develop in our historical narrative (Section 6). The crucial point is that Buenos Aires dominance of the cabinet began early in the 19th century and has compensated for Buenos Aires' legislative underrepresentation in the legislative during much of the 20th century.

The graph sustains this point: Buenos Aires has been over-represented in the cabinet almost constantly from the 19th century, when ministerial posts were paramount to allocate and balance competing provincial interests, to the democratic 21st century. There is much variation in the degree to which Buenos Aires is over-represented in the cabinet over time. While the variation looks striking at first, it is less so when we consider that there are many factors beyond the province that affect ministerial selection including ideology, partisan cadres, loyalty, competence and, more recently, gender.

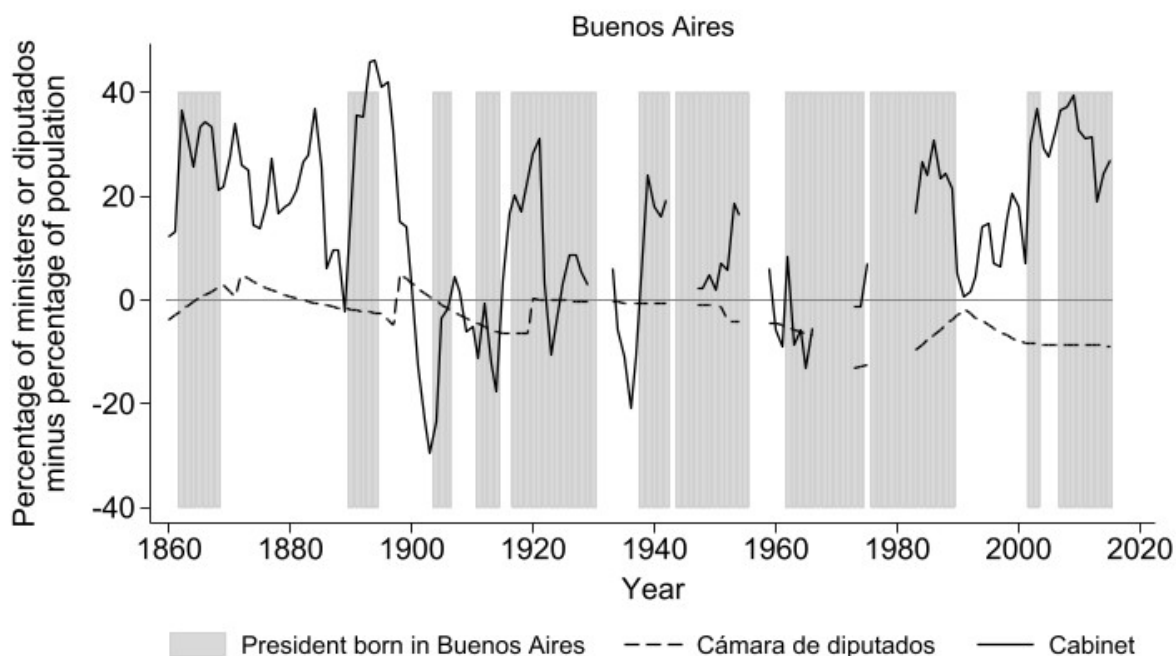


Figure 3: Over- and under-representation of Buenos Aires in the cabinet and in the legislature (1860-2015)

Notes: The graph subtracts the share of population of Buenos Aires from its share of diputados and its share of ministers. Values above 0 indicate overrepresentation and values below 0 underrepresentation. The shaded periods are those with a president born in Buenos Aires (city or province). We do not plot cabinet over-representation during military regimes, although Buenos Aires was *even more* overrepresented under military regimes. However, many military cabinets were composed of very few individuals, which makes  $m_i - pop_i$  hard to interpret.

### Proximate drivers of Buenos Aires' cabinet dominance: presidencies and military regimes

We find that a source of variation in the share of ministers from Buenos Aires is a President from Buenos Aires. The share of ministers from Buenos Aires is 68.3%, on average, when the president is from Buenos Aires (its population share in those same years is 45.1%) but the share is “only” 49.4% when the president is not from Buenos Aires (its population share in those same years is 40.6%). Figure 3 shows this pattern visually: the spikes in minister shares from Buenos Aires generally coincide with the start of mandates of presidents from Buenos Aires. They span the history of Argentina, from Bartolomé Mitre (1862-1868) to Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955, 1973-1974) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015), although she spent most part of her political career in Santa Cruz. Under her presidency, a whopping 77% of ministers were born in Buenos Aires,

In other words, one possible reason Buenos Aires has dominated the cabinet, with almost 60% of ministers in Argentina's history, is that the president has been from Buenos Aires for almost half of Argentina's history (48% of the years). This is, in turn, aided by the fact that Buenos Aires has comprised an average of 42% of the country's population, so parties have incentives to select presidential candidates from Buenos Aires to carry the city and province in the presidential election. Further, the two parties that have dominated Argentine politics in the 20th century, the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) and the Partido Justicialista (PJ/Peronism) originated in Buenos Aires, so many of their cadres also hail from Buenos Aires.<sup>9</sup>

We also look at whether Buenos Aires is more or less over-represented during military regimes. We consider here years only under military rule, where the leader is active in the military, as opposed to civilian rule, by which we mean elected leaders but also those with a military background that nonetheless ruled as civilians. By this definition, Argentina has been under military rule for roughly 30 years of its history, all of them between 1931 and 1982, and under civilian rule for the remaining 138, from 1860 until 1931 and since 1983.

Thus, we restrict the military vs. civilian comparison to the relevant period starting in 1916 (male universal suffrage transition) and ending in 1982 (Argentina became democratic in 1983). Within that period, civilian and military regimes alternated 10 times, which provides a lot of variation for the descriptive comparison.

We observe that 69% of ministers were from Buenos Aires under military rule while “only” 54% do under civilian rule during the 1916-1982 period (the average population share of Buenos Aires for the 1916-1982 period was 49%).<sup>10</sup> While cabinets are sometimes small during military regimes, such as during the triumvirate of the 1970s, the fact remains.

In the historical narrative presented on Section 6, we focus only on non-military regimes since it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess the logic of cabinet appointments during such periods where the legislative has been absent or irrelevant. In that section, we attempt to go beyond

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<sup>9</sup>We thank Juan Ignacio Máscolo for this insight.

<sup>10</sup>The share of ministers from Buenos Aires is almost the same 55%, if we consider all civilian regimes between 1860 and 2015 rather than only the ones during the 1916-1982 period.

simple provincial bias or favoritism to examine the deeper or ultimate drivers behind Buenos Aires' advantage in the executive: the compensation mechanism, as well as considerations of competence and recruitment networks.

## 5.2 Changes in the representation by province and by period

We group Argentina's history in three main historical periods to examine when representation in the cabinet and the legislature are complements or substitutes. The first period, one of state formation and characterized by political instability, ranges from the the moment Buenos Aires joined the federation in 1860 until before the first democratic election. The second one, 1916-1982, goes from the first UCR victory of the *porteño* Hipólito Irigoyen to the end of the last military rule in 1982. The last period starts in 1983 with the transition to democracy and spans until the present.

Only prior to 1915 does Buenos Aires not suffer from legislative malapportionment, arguably because it maintains a credible threat to break up the federation. The figure also makes patent that this substitution effect is *entirely* driven by Buenos Aires. Once we exclude the hegemon, as in Figure 5, the correlation is positive overall and by period, consistent with the idea that provinces that benefit from malapportionment in the legislature also tend to benefit from malapportionment in the cabinet.<sup>11</sup> In Section 6, we explain these representation patterns by period in greater detail.

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<sup>11</sup>This is partly in contrast to Bhavnani (2015), who finds that larger constituencies in India are doubly penalized in state elections because they suffer from legislative malapportionment (as does Buenos Aires) and are also less likely to be included in the state's cabinet (unlike Buenos Aires).

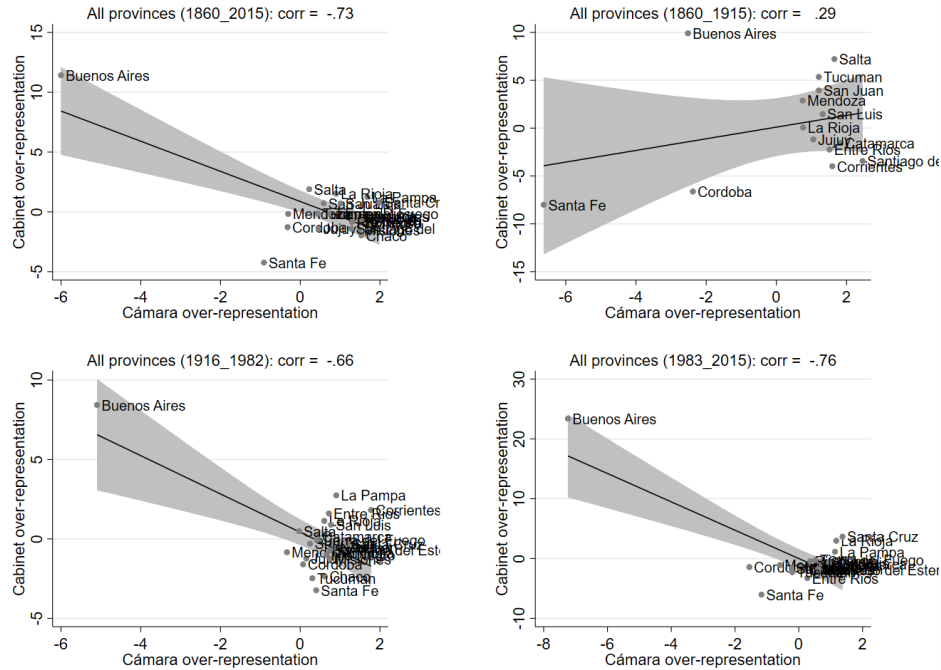


Figure 4: Representation in the cabinet and in the legislature: all provinces

Notes: The X-axis subtracts the percentage of population from the percentage of deputies ( $s_i - pop_i$ ) such that values above 0 indicate overrepresentation and below 0 underrepresentation. Analogously, the Y-axis subtracts the percentage of population from the percentage of ministers ( $m_i - pop_i$ ). Buenos Aires is an extreme outlier to the point that it shifts the correlation from negative to positive once it is excluded (Figure 5).

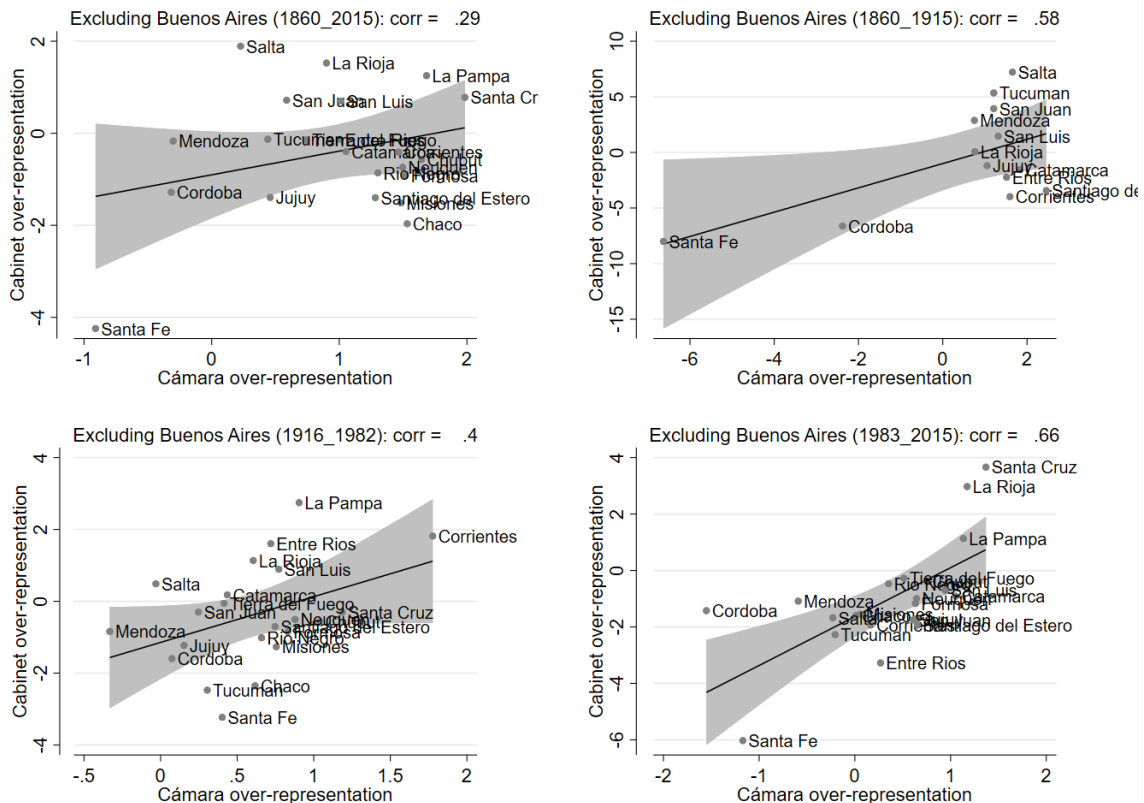


Figure 5: Representation in the cabinet and in the legislature excluding Buenos Aires

### 5.3 Panel data results

Finally, before turning to our historical analysis, we consider what we might learn from leveraging the yearly nature of our 155-year province-level panel. We try to examine the effect of legislative representation on cabinet representation by modeling whether seat shares in the legislature lead to an increase or decrease of minister shares. We estimate the following standard two-way fixed effects (FE) models:

$$m_{it} - pop_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(s_{it} - pop_{it}) + \eta_i + \gamma_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where the outcome is the percentage of ministers held by province  $i$  in year  $t$  minus the percentage of population, the predictor is the percentage of *diputados* minus the percentage of population by province  $i$  in year  $t$ , and  $\eta$  and  $\gamma$  are province and year fixed effects. While other variables (e.g., economic events and presidential elections) likely impact the distribution of cabinet seats, time-invariant provincial characteristics and province-invariant yearly changes partial out much of the variation. Models exclude years under military rule because the legislature played an insignificant role in those periods (1930-32, 1944-46, 1955-58, 1966-71, 1976-1982).

The measurement of our outcome variable merits discussion. Bhavnani (2015) uses an indicator outcome that equals one if a legislator from a given (single member) constituency in a state is also in that state’s cabinet. However, provinces elect multiple deputies and may have multiple ministers in a cabinet, so an indicator would be a rough proxy. The obvious alternative to our measure would be to use the raw share of ministers in each province-year. This approach violates two assumptions: normality and independence of observations. The percentage of ministers is 0 for 79% of the province-years, making the distribution of the variable skewed whether we log it ( $\log(y + 1)$ ) or not. Second, observations within each year are not independent and identically distributed (i.i.d.). When we know  $N - 1$  shares of ministers for a country, we know that the last share of ministers equals  $100 - \sum m_{i=1}^{N-1}$ . The problem is common in geology (e.g. soil composition), among other fields, and is known as compositional data because we have certain parts or shares

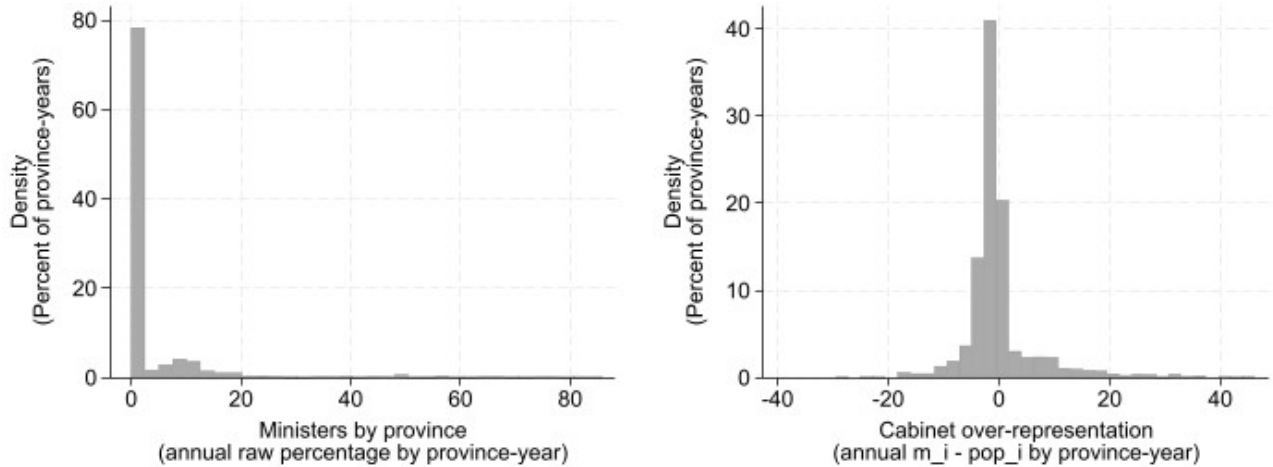


Figure 6: Distribution of raw share of ministers (left) vs. adjusted by share of population (right) by province-year

that compose a whole (Egozcue and Pawlowsky-Glahn, 2011; Ricart-Huguet, 2021). Transforming the outcome variable makes it much more likely that it satisfies the i.i.d. assumption (Katz and King, 1999). We plot the two variables to illustrate the difference (Figure 6).

The results main in Table 1 are overall consistent with the correlations aggregated by period shown in Figure 4 because  $\beta_1$  is positive for the 1860-1915 period but negative in the 20th century, especially after 1983. Specifically, a 1% increase in legislative representation by a province is associated with a 0.88% increase in its representation in the cabinet representation in the years 1860-1915 but to a 3.2% decrease since 1983. The main difference is that, once we demean year and province (fixed effects, and those of course include Buenos Aires), the 1860-2015 overall coefficient is close to 0 because the first period cancels the third.

As in the aggregated figures above, we examine whether the effect of  $s_i - pop_i$  on  $m_i - pop_i$  is more positive once we exclude Buenos Aires. To do so, we run the same models but excluding Buenos Aires in Table 2. Two of the coefficients do not change: the one for the 1860-1915, which was already positive above because Buenos Aires is not underrepresented in the chamber during that period, and 1916-1982, which remains insignificant. The other two become more positive. If we exclude Buenos Aires, a 1% increase in legislative representation by a province is associated with

Table 1: Cabinet over-representation (% ministers - % population) as a function of Cámara over-representation (% diputados - % population) by province

	1860-2015		1860-1915		1916-1982		1983-2015	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Diputados	0.37 (0.35)		0.88** (0.19)		-0.28 (0.26)		-3.20** (0.55)	
L.Diputados		0.27 (0.44)		0.72** (0.22)		-0.52* (0.24)		-3.59** (0.66)
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provinces (N)	2294	2271	784	770	751	728	759	736
Within $R^2$	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.16	0.20
Between $R^2$	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.14	0.13	0.54	0.52
Overall $R^2$	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.05	0.02	0.03	0.38	0.39

Note: Notes: †  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Clustered standard errors by province in parentheses.

Table 2: Excluding Buenos Aires: Cabinet over-representation (% ministers - % population) as a function of Cámara over-representation (% diputados - % population) by province

	1860-2015		1860-1915		1916-1982		1983-2015	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Diputados	0.80** (0.17)		0.83** (0.18)		-0.83 (1.03)		-1.09 (2.17)	
L.Diputados		0.81** (0.17)		0.77** (0.17)		-0.40 (0.82)		-0.64 (2.30)
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provinces (N)	2161	2139	728	715	707	685	726	704
Within $R^2$	0.08	0.08	0.10	0.09	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.02
Between $R^2$	0.42	0.42	0.28	0.29	0.23	0.23	0.32	0.34
Overall $R^2$	0.11	0.11	0.16	0.15	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.01

Note: Notes: †  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Clustered standard errors by province in parentheses.

a 0.8% decrease in representation in the cabinet while the 1983-2015 period becomes less negative and insignificant.

In both tables, we include models with one-year lags in case the effects of Chamber composition on cabinet composition are delayed by a year. The results do not vary because there are relatively few discrete changes in the number of deputies per province and because population shares change slowly. Ultimately, this is precisely the reason why the results in this table should be taken with more than a grain of salt. It was possible ex ante but unlikely that the share of ministers to



respond directly and year-on-year to changes in the share of diputados as inflation would respond to changes in the interest rate. In fact, the fixed effects eliminate a lot of interesting variation—for our purposes—that helps explain the aggregate patterns that we observe in the data.

## **6 Historical Narrative**

In this section, we sketch out a historical narrative to illustrate the extent to which unequal representation in cabinets is a consequence of unequal representation in the legislative. Like before, we divide Argentina’s history of representation into three main periods: the creation and early consolidation of the federation (1860-1915); the period between enfranchisement and the last military dictatorship (1916-1982); and the period post-transition to democracy (1983-2015). Relying on descriptive data from our own dataset in addition to secondary sources, we begin by showing that the formation and consolidation of the federation in the 19th century was possible due to strategic political concessions made by Buenos Aires and the provinces. Smaller provinces achieved to dominate most of the relevant political institutions (the electoral college, the Senate, and the lower chamber during some periods) since very early on. Buenos Aires, for its part, agreed to a centralized federation in exchange for maintaining economic prerogatives and, as we document, remaining dominant in the executive. For the period after the consolidation of the federation, the narrative illustrates how other factors played a role in reinforcing a distorted representation equilibrium, particularly how the higher levels of human capital and larger elite networks for cadre recruitment present in Buenos Aires help explain political selection into the executive.

### **6.1 Creation and Early Consolidation of the Federation**

#### **6.1.1 The Route to the Creation of the Federation (1831-1852)**

The period that followed the independence of Argentina from the Spanish Crown in 1810 and spanned until 1853 was marked by conflict between Buenos Aires and the provinces. Buenos Aires had a much superior administrative and political infrastructure already in the colonial period

because of its strategic geographic location in the estuary of the Río de la Plata. Its natural harbors allowed for the easy transport of export goods (including silver from Potosí in Bolivia, cattle, and timber) and granted it access to both domestic and global markets. Its control over customs and ports provided it with revenue from commerce, and the ability to levy taxes on provinces seeking to engage in trade through these vital channels. Further, many international trade routes necessitated passage through Buenos Aires. Consequently, all provinces, whether located in the far reaches of the nation or closer to Buenos Aires, had a vested interest in establishing a union that would incorporate Buenos Aires, thus giving them unrestricted access to commercial routes through the province's harbor (Botana, 1993).

A series of military conflicts between *federales* (who defended regional autonomy and pushed for a more decentralized union) and *unitarios* (who advocated for a centralized form of government where Buenos Aires would be dominant) ended in 1831, when a Federal Pact was signed between Buenos Aires and the other political entities (later provinces). This Pact was a victory for the federalist provinces because it established the decentralized *Confederación Argentina*, in which each province retained its sovereignty while some powers were delegated to a national-level *Comisión Representativa*. For the following two decades, there was persistent conflict between Buenos Aires, which championed a liberal free trade policy (and had no incentives to share its commercial rents), and the provinces, which were protectionist. The decentralized confederation failed to shield the economically disadvantaged provinces from Buenos Aires' dominance. In fact, in 1853, Buenos Aires managed to eliminate the *Comisión Representativa*, showing that a union would not be possible without its dominance.

The response of the provinces was to increasingly advocate for a *centralized* federation with a central and autonomous government that would prevent Buenos Aires (or any other) to subjugate the rest. In 1852, all provinces except for Buenos Aires signed the *Acuerdo de San Nicolás*, which established a sovereign state to rule above all individual sovereign provinces. This centralized federation, rather than a decentralized one, was a strategic move to prevent any province to subjugate the rest. However, Buenos Aires did not accept this institutional arrangement and remained autonomous.

### 6.1.2 The Creation of the Federation

The 1852 Agreement led all provinces, except for Buenos Aires, to sign a national constitution in 1853. The Constitution established a representative republican and federal form of government for the first time. Again, Buenos Aires did not sign because it was not able to impose its economic supremacy to create a unitary state dominated by it. The 1853-61 period was tense and characterized by civil conflicts between the provinces and Buenos Aires.

Buenos Aires joined the federation in 1862 after its military defeat in the *Batalla de Pavón*. The provinces agreed to a series of amendments to the Constitution that guaranteed Buenos Aires' economic autonomy, so much so that Gibson and Falletti (2004, p. 176) argue that Buenos Aires joined the federation “from a position of supremacy”. In exchange, Buenos Aires accepted to send monthly transfers to the other provinces of the union.<sup>12</sup>

Buenos Aires dominant position was reflected in the fact that the first President of the federation, Bartolomé Mitre, was from the City of Buenos Aires (*porteño*) and an well-known advocate of its interests. He assumed the presidency in 1862 with unanimous support from all provinces, starting a phase of reforms aimed at unifying the nation, among which the centralization of authority. This period begins to erode the outsized political influence of provincial leaders or *caudillos*.

For all its political power, Buenos Aires was underrepresented in the lower chamber of Congress in the first years of the federation (until 1865):  $-3.9 < s_{BuenosAires} - pop_{BuenosAires} < -1.1$ . Buenos Aires was also highly under-represented in the Electoral College, which selected both the president and vice president by simple majority rule. This latter pattern that would remain until its abolition in 1994.

We interpret Buenos Aires early underrepresentation in the Chamber and in the Electoral College as the result of a credible commitment between Buenos Aires and the provinces. The former imposed amendments to the first Constitution, including economic prerogatives while the latter maintained control in the legislature and thus some political protection from the demographic and economic hegemon.

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<sup>12</sup>We thank José Carlos Chiaramonte for this point. Authors' interview (October 13, 2023).

We argue that a less institutionalized but equally important dimension of this credible commitment was Buenos Aires' dominance of the cabinet. During Mitre's presidency, 53.5% of ministers were from Buenos Aires even though it only about 25% of the population then. This is a pattern that continued throughout the rest of the period, as shown in Table 3. Buenos Aires had at all times at least 40% of the cabinet and up to 57% in several years of Faustino Sarmiento's presidency (1868-1874).

Historical accounts of this period highlight the extent to which Buenos Aires was punished in Congress and in the Electoral College but overlook the cabinet in spite of their arguably equal importance, as suggested in a letter by President Santiago Derqui (1860-1861) to later President Mitre in 1860 expressing "the need to change the Congress *and cabinet*".<sup>13</sup> In line with this, we interpret the regional composition of cabinets as a strategic choice rather than responds to political incentives.

Two parallel developments unfolded between 1865 and 1880. On the one hand, the provinces further increased their institutional power by forming coalitions that were facilitated by their over-representation in Congress: "The Constitution of 1853 had given strong powers to the presidency. However, it also created important national arenas for the representation of provincial interests (...). The Senate, the Electoral College, which chose the president, and the informal networks of alliances between governors, ended up favoring the power of provincial coalitions. These could also decide the presidential succession" (Gibson and Falleti, 2004, p. 194). As a result, "the national government redirected economic resources to the development of the interior and [some presidents] expanded the influence of the provinces in the national political institutions" (Gibson and Falleti, 2004, p. 195).

At the same time, Buenos Aires increased its population share from 21% to 28% and its share of deputies in the Chamber to 29%, obtaining fair representation as a result of demographic changes and its capacity to threaten the stability of the federation. Further, in spite of its malapportionment in the Electoral College and the fact that there were no presidents from Buenos Aires between

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<sup>13</sup>Quote from "Vida de un héroe: biografía del brigadier general Juan Esteban Pedernera" (Luis Horacio Velazquez, p 449-462). Italics added by the authors.

1868 and 1890, Buenos Aires continued to be consistently overrepresented in the cabinet Figure 3. This is in spite of the fact that some presidents, realizing the importance of the center-periphery cleavage, gave many ministries to the provinces: “[President Domingo Sarmiento (1868-1874), from San Juan,] tried to give his cabinet a nationalist structure where different opinions would be represented, especially the men from the provinces [“the provinces” excludes Buenos Aires]. He trusted the Interior Ministry to Dr. Dalmacio Velez Sarsfield, from Córdoba (...) The Ministry of Finance to Dr. José Benjamín Gorostiaga, from Santiago del Estero (...) For Justice and Public Instruction he trusted Dr. Nicolás Avellaneda from Tucumán.”<sup>14</sup> Even during Sarmiento’s presidency, 47% of ministers came from Buenos Aires while its population was about 25%.

### 6.1.3 Early Consolidation of the Federation (1880-1916)

The federation was consolidated between 1880 and 1916, following the military defeat of Buenos Aires in 1880. The result was the unification of the federal government and the concentration of its branches in the capital city.

Buenos Aires’ military was consequential for political representation. The biased composition of the Electoral College facilitated provincial coalitions that excluded Buenos Aires from the presidency until 1890. The coalition of nine provinces (*Liga de Gobernadores*) held a significant number of electors, representing a considerable influence in the electoral process (Botana, 1993). They would use that power to agree on a consensus candidate to become the president. Between 1868 until 1910, they elected presidents from San Juan (Domingo Faustino Sarmiento), Córdoba (Miguel Ángel Juárez, José Figueroa Alcorta), Salta (José Evaristo Uriburu), Catamarca, Jujuy, La Rioja, San Luis, Santa Fe, and Santiago del Estero. Only three presidents hailed from Buenos Aires during that period (Luis Sáenz Peña, Manuel Quintana, and Roque Sáenz Peña).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Quote from “Historia de los presidentes argentinos” (Ismael Bucich Escobar, 1934, p. 143).

<sup>15</sup>“[Carlos] Pellegrini [was also from Buenos Aires but] gave the power to doctor Luis Saenz Peña, whose candidacy was the fruit of ‘the politics of agreement’ mastered by Roca and Mitre”. Quote from “Carlos Pellegrini: legislador y hombre de estado (...) His first cabinet reflected the agreement reached by Roca and General Mitre.” (Enrique Germán Hertz, 1998, p. 31-33).

Thus, Buenos Aires was not only underrepresented in the legislature and in the Electoral College but even at times in the cabinet. Its dominance in the cabinet was very much moderated such that, between 1880 and 1916, its share of ministers was only 5% higher than its share of the population on average (Figure 7). This is lower than in any other historical period. At the same time, the literature overlooks this puzzle: how Buenos Aires managed to still be overrepresented in the cabinet in spite of these structural disadvantages following military defeat in 1880. We provide three reasons.

First, the federalization of Buenos Aires and Argentina's economic boom in the late 19th century (Saylor, 2014) facilitated the exponential demographic and economic growth of the city of Buenos Aires and of the Pampas and Litoral regions, which include the province of Buenos Aires. This was to the detriment of the northern provinces, which had been economically powerful during the colonial period (e.g., Tucuman). The city and province of Buenos Aires grew from 28% of the population in 1880 to 46% in 1916, solidifying a demographic and economic hegemony that was impossible to ignore politically. Second, and relatedly, this growing demographic and economic hegemony increased the concentration of elites and PAN cadres in the city and province of Buenos Aires. Presidents from the provinces could not ignore the distribution of demographic and economic power, in other words. Third, the share of ministers from Buenos Aires was particularly high in the few cases when Buenos Aires did manage to secure the presidency, (Figure 3). Second, As shown in Table 3 all presidencies during this period over-represented Buenos Aires in their cabinets regardless of the president's place of origin. Exceptions to this rule were the second presidencies of Julio A. Roca, Manuel Quintana and Roque Saenz Peña. In these three cases Buenos Aires obtained fairly the same proportion of members of cabinet as its population.

Table 3: Proportion of ministers from Buenos Aires and other provinces by presidential administration (1860-1916)

President	Origin	% Ministers from BA	% Ministers from the rest
Justo Jose de Urquiza (1854-1860)	Entre Ríos	20	80
Santiago Derqui (1860-1861)	Córdoba	40	60
Bartolome Mitre (1861-1868)	Buenos Aires	53.33	46.67
Domingo F. Sarmiento (1868-1874)	San Juan	47.17	52.83
Nicolas Avellaneda (1874-1880)	Tucumán	46.48	53.52
Julio Argentino Roca (1880-1886)	Tucumán	52	48
Miguel Juarez Celman (1886-1890)	Córdoba	41.38	58.62
Carlos Pellegrini (1890-1892)	Buenos Aires	66.67	33.33
Luis Saenz Pena (1892-1895)	Uruguay	77.42	22.58
Jose Evaristo Uriburu (1895-1898)	Salta	63.64	36.36
Julio Argentino Roca (1898-1904)	Tucumán	24	76
Manuel Quintana (1904-1906)	Buenos Aires	37.5	62.5
Jose Figueroa Alcorta (1906-1910)	Córdoba	41.43	58.57
Roque Saenz Pena (1910-1914)	Buenos Aires	33.33	66.67
Victorino de la Plaza (1914-1916)	Salta	58.62	41.38

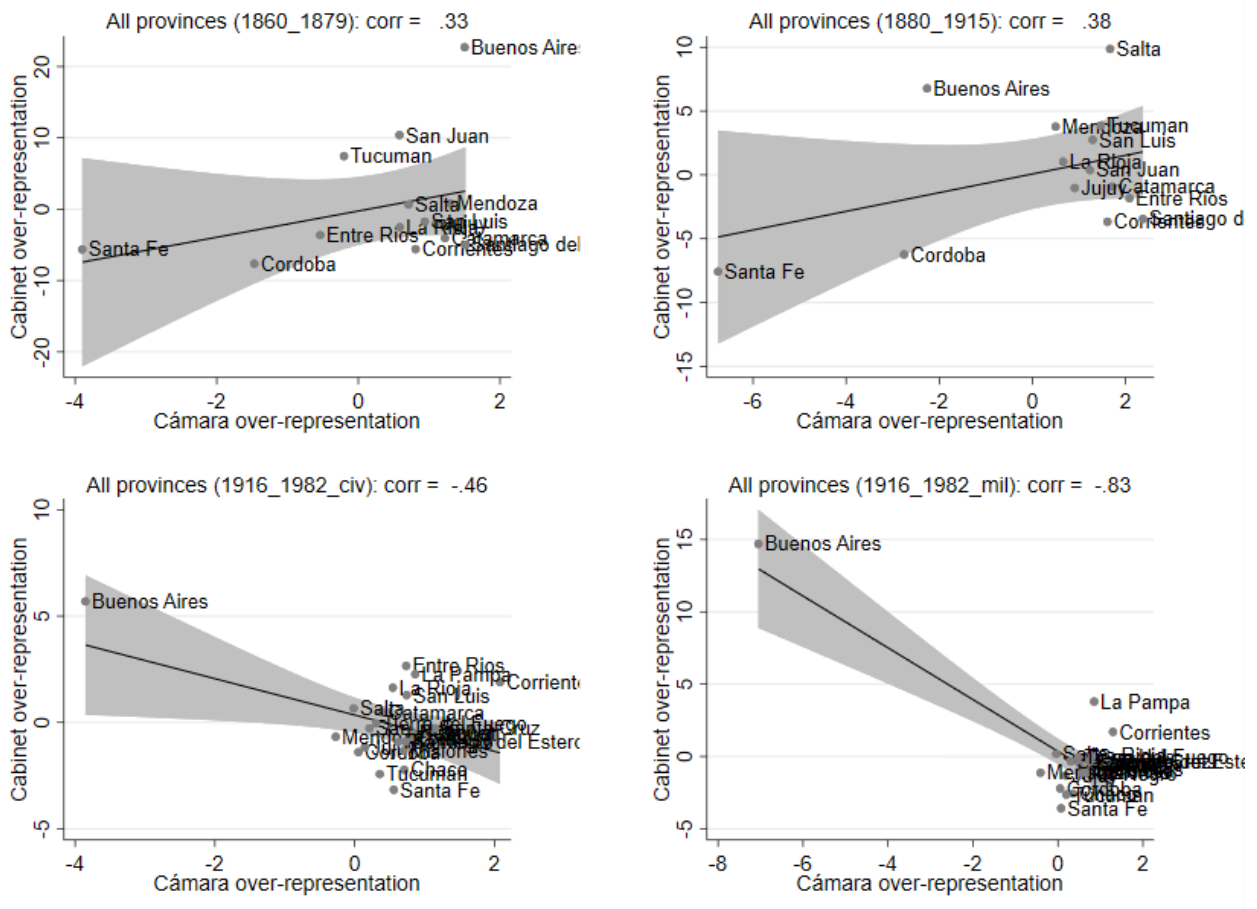


Figure 7: Representation in the cabinet and in the legislature



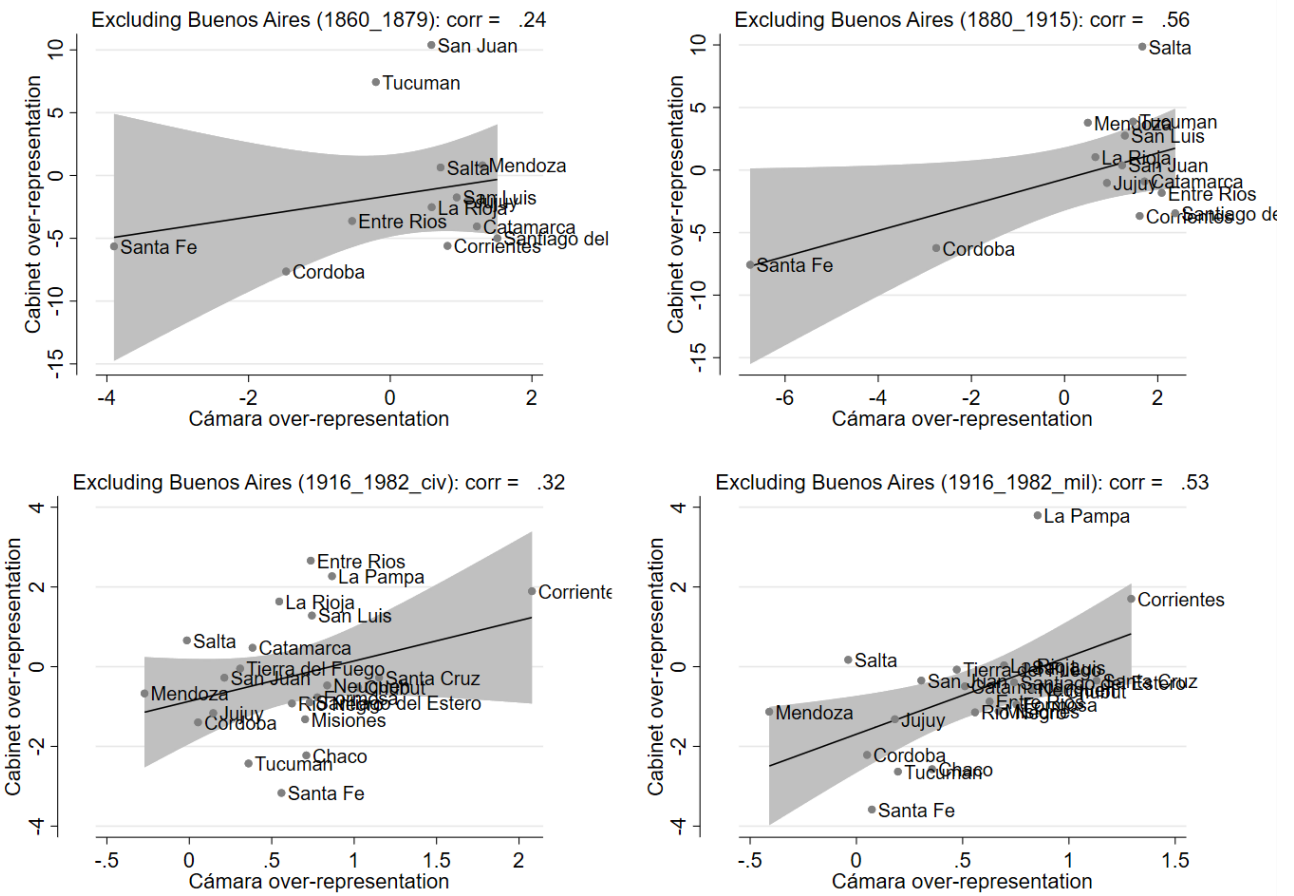


Figure 8: Representation in the cabinet and in the legislature (without Buenos Aires)

## 6.2 The Road From Universal Male Suffrage to Democracy (1916-1982)

In 1912, Argentina passed the Sáenz Peña Law, which established secret, universal, and compulsory male suffrage. This law maintained the legislative representation by province that was established in the 1898 constitutional reform. However, it introduced the election of deputies via a complete list system and established  $\frac{2}{3}$  for the most voted list and  $\frac{1}{3}$  for the list that came in second place. This was the beginning of a long period that spanned until 1983 and was marked by high regime volatility, with six military coups in total (1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966, 1973).

As Reynoso (2012) explains, the Constitution mandated that the number of deputies should have been revised following the 1914 census results, ideally by the 1916 election. However, this update was delayed until the mid-term election of 1920, when the total number of deputies was increased to 158. Consequently, Buenos Aires saw its representation grow from 48 to 74 deputies, achieving a more balanced presence in the Chamber. Despite this adjustment, Buenos Aires' population continued to rise sharply, peaking at almost 47% of the national population by the mid-1920s. Yet, despite its unprecedented demographic expansion, Buenos Aires has not received further adjustments in representation since then, leading to a gradual decline in its legislative influence.

The next critical episode in regional representation was the 1949 constitutional reform enacted by Juan Domingo Perón's government. This reform guaranteed a minimum of two deputies per province regardless of population size, deepening malapportionment in the Chamber even more since its implementation in 1952. Gibson and Calvo (2001) characterize the 1949 reform as "the first time proportional representation was directly violated" (p. 207), and a master political move of Perón, himself from Buenos Aires, who coopted the peripheral provinces leaders to support him in his crusade against metropolitan elites. From then onward, Buenos Aires would remain underrepresented in the Chamber.

According to Reynoso (2012), there were two other episodes in the twentieth century that strengthened this trend: (1) the 1972 reform that established a baseline of one deputy every

135,000 inhabitants and three additional deputies per province, and (2) the 1983 reform that established a quota of one deputy every 161,000 inhabitants and fraction of 80,500, plus a bonus of three extra deputies per province and a minimum floor of 5 deputies per province. Buenos Aires province has been the most harmed by these reforms. In addition, there were few or no adjustments to the number of representatives in the Chamber as a result of the new population census data released every 10 years, a decision that further contributed to the overrepresentation of smaller provinces.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 7 illustrates the main point of our argument. Buenos Aires, the big loser in the Chamber throughout the twentieth century was the winner in cabinets. The right-hand side graph shows the correlation between representation in the legislative and representation in the executive for the entire period is significant and negative. In other words, higher representation levels in the Chamber are associated with lower representation in cabinets. Again, and as expected, when we drop Buenos Aires from the sample, the correlation becomes positive (see the graph on the left of Figure 8), indicating that the positive correlation is purely driven by this province. Absent Buenos Aires, we observe a trend that aligns with the regional version of the Gamson Law: more weight in the legislative may lead to also having more weight in the executive.

We also present the results split between 1916-1982 civilian governments (bottom left graphs in Figures 7 and 8) and 1916-1982 military governments (bottom right graphs). The results for military governments have little meaning because the legislature typically maintained the allocation under civilian regimes but was either irrelevant or even closed, but they do show that Buenos Aires dominates military cabinets, consistent with the ideas that the overrepresentation of *porteños* and *bonaerenses* in the political and even military elite explains their strength in the executive.

Bidart-Campos (1993)'s interpretation of the endurance of legislative malapportionment is that the economic weight of the more populated provinces justified that "to smooth the quantitative differences [between larger and smaller provinces] the law had 'gifted' more *diputados* than what it

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<sup>16</sup>Reynoso (2012) explains that even though the Constitution established that the number of representatives had to be periodically adjusted to changes in population size of districts to maintain proportionality, this was barely the case. Differently from this author, who considers this to be an oversight, we see this as a political decision.

would correspond [to smaller provinces] given what would the Constitution mandated in relation to population size ” (p. 375).

We agree with this perspective, and further add that Buenos Aires economic weight was reflected in the composition of cabinets. A close look to representation in the executive during this period shows that, at the same time Buenos Aires emerged as an irreversible loser in the legislative, its representation in the executive followed the opposite trend. [Table 4](#) presents the proportion of ministers Buenos Aires and the rest of the provinces had during this period by presidential administration. The mean and median representation of Buenos Aires during this time were roughly 58%.

Like in the period before democratization, Buenos Aires elites were able to coopt the executive. Whereas the peripheral provinces, over-represented in Congress, had a high political weight and the ability to shape distributive policies through the legislative ([Gibson and Calvo, 2001](#)), Buenos Aires used its dominance in the executive to leverage the high discretion of this branch of government.

Building on our discussion, we interpret Buenos Aires’ prominent role in government cabinets was not merely coincidental. Instead, it was a strategic decision by presidents of various origins (see [Table 4](#)) to engage the Buenos Aires elite and address their underrepresentation in the legislature. Moreover, Buenos Aires was uniquely equipped to influence the executive branch. Two key advantages facilitated this: the concentration of high human capital and extensive elite networks within the province, which political parties leveraged to recruit their cadres. Consequently, Buenos Aires consistently placed more cabinet members than any other province.

### **6.3 Democracy and Unequal Representation (1983-2015)**

After the transition to democracy in 1983, the composition of the Chamber remained mostly unchanged. Buenos Aires continued to be significantly underrepresented, while the peripheral provinces maintained the disproportionate legislative representation they had secured in 1973 and 1983. Furthermore, until the constitutional reform in 1994, Buenos Aires was also at a considerable disadvantage in the electoral college. Despite having 30% of the population, the peripheral

Table 4: Proportion of ministers from Buenos Aires and other provinces by presidential administration (1916-1982)

President	Origin	% Ministers from BA	% Ministers from the Rest
Hipolito Yrigoyen (1916-1922)	Buenos Aires	64.29	35.71
Marcelo Torcuato de Alvear (1922-1928)	Buenos Aires	49.30	50.70
Hipolito Yrigoyen (1928-1930)	Buenos Aires	58.82	41.18
Jose Felix Uriburu (1930-1932)	Salta	73.33	26.67
Agustin Pedro Justo (1932-1938)	Entre Ríos	42.17	57.83
Roberto Marcelino Ortiz (1938-1942)	Buenos Aires	63.64	36.36
Ramon S Castillo (1942-1943)	Catamarca	66.67	33.33
Pedro Pedro Ramirez (1943-1944)	Entre Ríos	57.14	42.86
Edelmiro Julian Farrell (1944-1946)	Buenos Aires	59.02	40.98
Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955)	Buenos Aires	58.67	41.33
Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (1955-1958)	Córdoba	85.71	14.29
Arturo Frondizi (1958-1962)	Corrientes	55.56	44.44
Jose Maria Guido (1962-1963)	Buenos Aires	50.00	50.00
Arturo Emberto Illia (1963-1966)	Buenos Aires	41.18	58.82
Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970)	Buenos Aires	63.64	36.36
Roberto Marcelo Levingston (1970-1971)	San Luis	57.14	42.86
Alejandro Agustin Lanusse (1971-1973)	Buenos Aires	52.17	47.83
Juan Domingo Perón (1973-1974)	Buenos Aires	50.00	50.00
Maria Estela Martinez de Peron (1974-1976)	La Rioja	57.89	42.11
Jorge Rafael Videla (1976-1981)	Buenos Aires	45.45	54.55
Reynaldo Bignone (1982-1983)	Buenos Aires	68.75	31.25

provinces controlled 50% of the electoral college, accounting for 306 of the 610 electors (Gibson and Calvo, 2001, p. 206). The 1994 constitutional reform marked a pivotal shift as it replaced the electoral college with a system of direct representation, which benefited Buenos Aires, the most populous province.

The overrepresentation of smaller districts in the legislature was strategically leveraged by Carlos Menem's government (1989-1995). (Gibson and Calvo, 2001) explain that to advance structural market reforms that predominantly affected the metropolitan areas, where his core constituency was concentrated, Menem relied on the support of peripheral, smaller provinces. These

provinces, overrepresented in both chambers of the legislature, provided him with governability and a steady stream of electoral support. The authors describe this coalition as the Peronist party's "low-maintenance" coalition, contrasting it with its "high-maintenance" coalition involving metropolitan areas. The metropolitan areas contained the largest proportion of losers of the reforms, making it particularly costly to secure their support.

While Buenos Aires remained underrepresented, however, during this time it experienced a significant increase in its influence within the national cabinets. This trend aligns with the patterns shown by our data from six presidential administrations, during which Buenos Aires' share of appointed ministers ranged from 52% to 79%. Building on our analysis, this pattern of dominance served as a compensatory mechanism.

Take as an example the administration of Menem, who heavily relied in the support of the peripheral provinces to execute his economic policy platform [Gibson and Calvo \(2001\)](#). However, 52% of the ministries he appointed during his mandate were originally from Buenos Aires. Some of them are known for being representatives of urban interests, such as several representatives of labor unions who serves as ministers of labor ([Jorge Triaca and Enrique Rodriguez](#)).

?? illustrates the association between representation in the legislative and representation in the executive. In line with the compensation mechanism, this association is negative throughout the period, suggesting these two are substitutes rather than complements. However, and also in line with our argument, when we remove Buenos Aires from the sample, the correlation becomes positive. This indicates that among the rest of the provinces there is no compensation mechanism at work, instead, representation in the executive is a mirror of representation in the legislative.

Now, turning to the regional composition of national cabinets, [Table 5](#) shows the consistent dominance of Buenos Aires across presidential administrations regardless of the place of origin of the president or their political affiliation. This trend is more pronounced when the president is originally from Buenos Aires. For instance, under the administrations of Raúl Alfonsín and Eduardo Duhalde, both from and with electoral bases in Buenos Aires, 67% and 76% of ministers, respectively, were also from Buenos Aires. Notably, in this period, the largest proportion of

ministers from this province served under the administrations of Néstor Kirchner (79%), from Santa Cruz, and his successor Cristina Fernández (76%), who is originally from Buenos Aires but developed her political career in Santa Cruz.

Table 5: Proportion of ministers from Buenos Aires and other provinces by presidential administration (1983-2015)

President	Origin	% Ministers from BA	% Ministers from the rest
Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989)	Buenos Aires	67.39	32.61
Carlos Menem (1989-1999)	La Rioja	52.45	47.55
Fernando de la Rúa (1999-2001)	Córdoba	56.36	43.64
Eduardo Duhalde (2002-2003)	Buenos Aires	76.19	23.81
Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007)	Santa Cruz	79.44	20.56
Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015)	Buenos Aires	76.04	23.96

Like before, we interpret these trends as suggestive evidence that even during the period of democratic consolidation, regional representation in cabinets worked as a counter-balance to regional representation in the legislative. This is also in line with the account by Gibson and Calvo (2001, 2000), who suggest that the over-representation of peripheral provinces in the legislative operated as a counter-weight to the dominance of cadres from Buenos Aires in the higher ranks of the Peronist party (and other main parties), from where cabinet members are usually recruited from. In their own words: “The existence of a peripheral coalition of political leaders, political networks and electoral bases gave the leaders of the Peronist party a counter-weight to its own political cadres from the metropolitan region in the party organization. Internally, these politicians [from the metropolitan area] strengthened the national direction of the party in the face of the demands of metropolitan sectors highly mobilised” (Gibson and Calvo, 2001, p. 209).

## 7 Conclusion

Existing research suggests that legislative malapportionment is the result of a commitment between elites from peripheral (smaller, rural) regions and elites from core (larger, urban) regions that over-represents the former. This type of agreement is usually instigated at foundational critical

junctures, such as the birth of federations and constitutional conventions. An agreement that increases the influence of smaller regions can allay fears that they will become politically irrelevant and also prevent the country's alignment with economic policies preferred by urban elites, thus reducing the incentives of peripheral regions to break away or challenge the center. Furthermore, we know from previous studies that malapportionment indeed favours redistribution from the richer, populous regions to the poorer, smaller ones. Therefore, why would an hegemonic region, like Buenos Aires in Argentina, accept to lose legislative seats and suffer from malapportionment?

We argued that the answer to this question lies in the composition of executive cabinets. Specifically, the regional distribution of ministerial appointments serves as a compensation mechanism for losers in the legislative. Leveraging a bespoke dataset of all individuals that served in Congress and the high-ranks of the executive between the constitution of the Argentine federation in 1860 until 2015 and secondary sources, we document 155 years of changes in legislative and executive regional representation to trace the origins of biased representation in both arenas.

Our analysis reveals a negative association between representation in the legislative and the executive, entirely driven by Buenos Aires. Buenos Aires joined the federation in 1862 in a position of weakness both in the legislative and the electoral college. We document how since early on presidents from diverse origins paid special attention to the regional composition of their cabinets, where they deliberately favoured Buenos Aires, the loser in the other two main representative arenas. Although the demographic changes of the 19th century quickly gave the hegemon a balanced treatment in the lower chamber (but not in the Senate or the electoral college), this trend was permanently reverted towards the second half of the 20th century after the 1949 constitutional reform enacted by Perón's government. Since then, Buenos Aires has emerged as the clear loser in the chamber. As for the cabinet, Buenos Aires's overrepresentation has been a constant since 1862. Early on, accommodating Buenos Aires in the cabinet was imperative to maintain the hegemon in the federation and reduce the prospect of conflict. In the 20th century, we suggest that Buenos Aires' ability to compensate its loss in the legislature with more seats in the cabinet was possible due to its higher levels of human capital and the concentration of tighter social and party networks.



Beyond Argentina, our results highlight an overlooked mechanism—cabinet malapportionment—that can compensate large regions that suffer from legislative malapportionment. On the one hand, over-representation of peripheral, rural, typically more conservative regions over core, urban, liberal ones is common in Latin America and beyond (Samuels and Snyder, 2001*b*). On the other, presidential systems in which the executive branch holds substantial discretionary power over a broad array of policy domains are widespread. Notable examples include major democracies such as the United States, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, and South Korea. Thus the potential set of countries where our logic applies is large.<sup>17</sup>

We believe that our logic may be most prevalent in: (i) Regimes with strong regional or center-periphery cleavages, compared to smaller, homogeneous countries. We note this first condition concerns federations but also many unitary regimes that have strong regional or center-periphery cleavages, from Italy to Peru to Uganda and South Africa. (ii) Regimes where the legislature has some powers, compared to military dictatorships or single-party regimes where the cabinet concentrates all power.<sup>18</sup> (iii) Finally, in countries where the economically or demographically powerful provinces have the most politically prepared cadres and the most developed elite social networks.

To conclude, the regional representation patterns revealed in this paper indicate that representation in the legislative and the cabinet are substitutes for most of Argentina’s history. Buenos Aires’ over-representation in the cabinet arose as an unintended side effect of legislative malapportionment, not foreseen by the original architects of this system nor by the reformers who later intensified it (Faguet and Shami, 2022). Future research should now investigate whether cabinet malapportionment, despite being a secondary effect, yields distributive consequences similar to those identified in previous studies on legislative malapportionment (Ardanaz, Leiras and Tommasi, 2014*b*).

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<sup>17</sup>For more than a century, the “manipulation of legislative apportionment has played an important role in managing urban-rural cleavages [...] This has resulted in a strong *rural-conservative bias* that persists today in many legislatures, where many countries’ urban metropolises remain highly underrepresented. In short, malapportionment has served and continues to serve as a powerful weapon of conservative elites in Latin America” (Samuels and Snyder, 2004, p. 134).

<sup>18</sup>In dictatorships, the real selectorate is often restricted to the cabinet, to the party or to party leaders in single-party regimes, or to military elites in military regimes (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003).

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