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Empirical explorations in Veracruz and Gujarat

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THE REPRESSION OF BOUNDARY-BLURRING ACTORS IN SUBNATIONAL UNDEMOCRATIC REGIMES

Empirical explorations in Veracruz and Gujarat

Jos Midas Bartman



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- **ADR** - Association for Democratic Reforms, an Indian NGO that works in the area of electoral reform
- **BJP** - Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian People's Party, a right-wing Hindu-nationalist party in India
- **CBI** – Central Bureau of Investigation, the premier investigation agency of India
- **CHRI** - Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, an international NGO working in the area of human rights
- **CPI** – Communist Party of India, a national party in India
- **CPJ** – Committee to Protect Journalists, American NGO that promotes press freedom and the rights of journalists
- **INC** – India National Congress, aka Congress or Congress party, the first political party of India, and principal leader of the Indian independence movement
- **INEGI** - Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, The National Institute of Statistics and Geography, an autonomous statistical agency of the Federal government of Mexico.
- **IPS** - Indian Police Service, federal police force that replaced the Indian Imperial police in 1948
- **NGO** – Non-governmental organization
- **NEW** - National Election Watch, an Indian NGO that works in the area of electoral reform
- **OHCHR** - Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, department of the Secretariat of the United Nations that aims to protect and promote human rights
- **PAN** - Partido Acción Nacional, National Action Party, conservative party in Mexico
- **PRD** - Partido de la Revolución Democrática, Party of the Democratic Revolution, left-wing splinter party from the PRI in Mexico
- **PRI** - Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, dominant party in Mexico until 2000
- **RSS** - Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, non-governmental right-wing organization in India that is based on the ideology of Hindu nationalism
- **SDF** - Sikkim Democratic Front, Regional political party in the Indian state of Sikkim
- **SINAIS** – Sistema Nacional de información de Salud, National Health Information System, an organization that is part of the Ministry of Health, in charge of collecting death certificates.
- **SNSP** - Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, National Public Security System, homicide registration system that is part of the Mexican Ministry of Home Affairs
- **V-Dem**, Varieties of Democracy, independent institute that collects data on democracy
- **VHP** – Vishva Hindu Parishad, non-governmental right-wing organization in India that is based on the ideology of Hindu nationalism

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1. MURDER IN MEXICO

On 31 August 2015, journalist Rubén Espinosa from Veracruz, Mexico, was found murdered in a suburban neighbourhood of Mexico City. Together with activist friend Nadia Vera, two flatmates and a housekeeper, he was tortured before being shot in the head (Goldman, 2015). Rubén Espinosa worked as a freelance photojournalist for critical national magazines such as *Cuartoscuro* and *Proceso*. One of his most recently published photographs had accompanied an article that was highly critical of the governor Javier Duarte de Ochoa, who was then governor of the state of Veracruz. Published in *Proceso*, the article was titled “Veracruz: Estado sin Ley” (Veracruz: a Lawless State); the photograph portrayed the governor in an unflattering light, wearing a state police cap with his belly hanging over his belt (Goldman, 2015; “La Foto de Rubén Espinosa,” 2015). Civil society organizations like Article 19 declared that the killing of Rubén Espinosa had to do with his work as a journalist, and possibly with this latest article (Goldman, 2015).

The initial reason to write this dissertation did not emanate from the killing of Rubén Espinosa, but the event constituted a real-life academic, societal and personal puzzle that had a substantial impact it’s trajectory. In the first place, I started to research authoritarian practices at the subnational level. Rubén Espinosa was a pivotal figure during the early stages of the fieldwork that I did for this dissertation. In 2015, I conducted inductive fieldwork in Mexico City and the state of Veracruz, during which we spoke extensively, and during which he gave me access to his fellow journalists, activists, policymakers, and other actors. Rubén Espinosa himself explained during an interview that the ultimate price of his work was death (Interview Rubén Espinosa, 2016). Two months after the conversation, his murder took place.

Before Rubén Espinosa was murdered, I went to Veracruz with the objective of investigating how the subnational political elite used repression. Back then, the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes - subnational regions that are less democratic than the national centre - had already demonstrated how such regimes are skilful in surviving democratization by sustaining a strong power imbalance between themselves and local opposition parties (Gibson, 2005; Giraudy, 2013; Harbers & Ingram 2013). But there was much less known about whether and how political elites of such regimes use repression. Veracruz was a state where the same political party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), had been in power since the 1920s, and could for that reason – and other reasons - be considered a subnational undemocratic regime (Giraudy, 2013). As a result, Veracruz was an obvious place to start investigating how a political elite of a subnational undemocratic regime used repression.

Rubén Espinosa was murdered shortly after I left Veracruz. I then faced the question: Is this what repression by the subnational political elite looks like? And if it is repression, *why* was Rubén Espinosa targeted? Of course, during fieldwork I already interviewed dozens of journalists, including Rubén Espinosa himself, who complained about being targeted by the subnational government. Also, the representatives of human rights NGOs that I visited in Mexico City and Veracruz spoke about the targeting of journalists in Veracruz. But while the idea of journalists being targeted by a subnational political elite was not new, it was still a rather abstract phenomenon to me. The killing of Rubén Espinosa made these questions very personal.

The aftermath of Rubén Espinosa's murder shaped the direction of this dissertation even further. Rubén Espinosa's friends and colleagues, with whom I was in contact on a weekly basis, claimed that governor Duarte de Ochoa sanctioned his murder. Governor Duarte called this accusation "a "public lynching" to cover up the real culprits (Goldman, 2015). In addition, the Mexican Federal District Attorney, Rodolfo Ríos Garza, claimed during a press conference shortly after the murder that the killing should not be seen in relation to Espinosa's work as a critical journalist (Goldman, 2015). When I started writing about the issue of the 'targeting' of critical journalists in Mexico, and presented draft papers about the topic, the idea of subnational political elites being involved in the targeting of local, critical journalists was often met with scepticism by scholars. 'Why would subnational political elites do it?' 'How can they benefit from targeting local journalists?' 'Are they not just targeted by drug cartels?'

Indeed, why would they? This persistent question accentuated that before understanding 'how' political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes use repression, it is important to understand what makes certain actors so vulnerable to repression. Of course, there might be different reasons behind different types of repression. The repression of minorities, opposition parties, or women, might all have different causes. But the murder of Rubén Espinosa led me to think particularly about why local journalists would face repression. Do they pose a threat to political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes? And, in what ways other than murder are actors like Rubén Espinosa repressed?

This introduction proceeds by moving away from the reflection on the killing of Rubén Espinosa. I will explain the focus and scope of this dissertation, both in terms of the geography and the actors that I have studied. Thereafter, I will explain which literature helps to understand the phenomenon of interest of this dissertation and to which I aim to contribute. After that, I explain the relevance and importance of answering the specific research questions of interest. Finally, I provide an explanation of the structure of the dissertation and explain which specific sub-questions each chapter answers.

2. FOCUS AND SCOPE

In terms of actors, this dissertation goes beyond Rubén Espinosa, and even beyond local, critical journalists. Rather, I look at actors that spread compromising information about the subnational political elite – for example about the involvement of this political elite in crime, corruption or human rights violations. Even more specifically, I look at the actors that spread such compromising information beyond subnational borders to the national public sphere and to central institutions. I define such actors as 'boundary-blurring actors' and conceptualize them in more detail in the theory chapter. Such actors *can* be local critical journalists but do not have to be. They can also be activists, whistle-blowers or local investigators for example. In terms of geography, this thesis is concerned with subnational undemocratic regimes, which I define as second-level administrative units, states and provinces that are undemocratic but are embedded in a democracy. Combining the scope in terms of actors and geography, the general focus of this dissertation lies on the repression of boundary-blurring actors by political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes. The specific cases that I investigate are Veracruz in Mexico and Gujarat in India.

This dissertation aims to contribute to the development of knowledge about how subnational undemocratic regimes use repression within their multi-level setting. This means that I analyze repression with regards to vertical relationships between political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes and the national centre. While the focus of this dissertation lies on Veracruz (Mexico) and Gujarat (India), I will demonstrate in the following sections – and more in detail in the research design chapter – that these subnational undemocratic regimes are part of a larger, global class of subnational undemocratic regimes that are embedded in democracies. The theory that I develop examines how such regimes experience uncertainty as a result of their embeddedness within a democracy (which I conceptualize later as 'subnational power uncertainty'), how boundary-blurring actors can increase this uncertainty, and how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes respond to this by using repression.

2a. The Geographical Scope of Subnational Undemocratic Regimes

The state of Veracruz under Governor Duarte de Ochoa (2010-2016), and Gujarat in the period 2002-2014, are part of a class of undemocratic political entities in the world that are embedded in democracies. In the most elementary sense, the broader phenomenon of subnational undemocratic regimes stems from the fact that, for many countries, the enforcement of democratic principles does not penetrate each

region to the same degree (O'Donnell, 1993). Especially new democracies in the post-communist world and the Global South suffer from an unequal distribution of democratic institutions across subnational territories. Latin American countries like Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil suffer from what O'Donnell (1993: 6) has called 'high territorial and functional heterogeneity.' In relation to democracy, this entails that in the subnational jurisdictions where democratic institutions function the least, public officials are elected, but elections are often based on 'personalism, familism, prebendalism, clientelism' (1993: 6).

Although Latin American states and provinces lie at the centre of gravity when it comes to the debate about subnational undemocratic regimes, the phenomenon is relevant far beyond. In Kazakhstan (McMann, 2006), India (Tudor & Ziegfeld, 2016; Harbers, Bartman, & van Wingerden, 2019), and the Philippines (Sidel, 2014), subnational undemocratic regimes have been observed. Although the exact nature of subnational undemocratic regimes might vary across cases, the essence is similar: the quality of democratic citizenship varies regionally as a result of crippled democratic institutions in some subnational parts of the country. Examples of such crippled institutions range from partisan local courts (Ingram, 2015) to systemic vote buying during subnational elections (Serra, 2016). The most scrutinized dimension of democracy in the debate on subnational undemocratic regimes has been electoral competition, or rather, the lack thereof. The canary in the coalmine for this phenomenon, and the most frequently used indicator for it, is a lack of political turnover (Giraudy, 2015).

Having problems with democratic institutions is what distinguishes subnational undemocratic regimes from subnational democratic regimes. To illustrate, the Indian state of Kerala has been renowned for its high levels of political competition over the past decades, while certain Indian states have witnessed such problems with free and fair elections that they can be rendered undemocratic (Harbers *et al.*, 2019). Bihar, for example, witnessed widespread and systemic levels of electoral violence in the period 1985-2013, while Sikkim's incumbent Sikkim Democratic Front party faced almost no political opposition in the period 1994-2019 (Harbers *et al.*, 2019).

Simultaneously, subnational undemocratic regimes are also different from national-level undemocratic regimes, since the former are embedded in a democracy. A fundamental difference between subnational and national undemocratic regimes is the distribution of powers between them and their surrounding territories: subnational undemocratic regimes can be powerful but are not sovereign. They share their powers and responsibilities with the national level more than countries share their powers on the international stage. The effect is that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes have certain limitations: they cannot – for example – alter the constitution

or completely abolish elections. This means that subnational undemocratic regimes are not, as Gibson (2013: 10) describes it, undemocratic regimes in ‘short pants’; the phenomenon is not the same as national-level undemocratic regimes but at a different level of analysis. The ‘embeddedness’ of subnational undemocratic regimes comes with its own specific dynamics, which gives the study of subnational undemocratic regimes unique empirical and conceptual challenges (Gibson, 2013).

2b. The scope of boundary-blurring actors.

Certain actors face specific danger in subnational undemocratic regimes. When Rubén Espinosa was murdered, in 2015, he was the 10th local, critical journalist that was killed in Veracruz since 2011 (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2015b). At the time, Rubén Espinosa, his friends, and his colleagues, often spoke about the recent deaths of two of their fellow journalists and friends: Moisés Sánchez Cerezo and Regina Martínez. Moisés Sánchez was a critical journalist from Veracruz and was found murdered in 2015, a few months before Rubén Espinosa was murdered. He was decapitated alive (Martínez Ahrens, 2015), which according to a forensic photographer I interviewed was done by ‘real professionals’ (Interview Sofia, 2016). Regina Martínez was found strangled to death in her bathroom in April 2012 (Carrasco Araizaga, 2013). The man who was arrested pled guilty to her murder but later withdrew his confession and claimed that subnational authorities tortured him and forced him to confess the crime (Carrasco Araizaga, 2013).

While Veracruz was notorious in terms of the danger for journalists, other states also dealt with the killing of local journalists and attacks on critical media (Bartman, 2018). In addition, they faced more than just murder. Article 19, a press freedom NGO, reported a plethora of attacks, including cyberattacks and harassment in certain Mexican states (Article 19, 2017). But the problem of attacks on local, critical journalists is also not just Mexican. Globally, local journalists that report about topics like crime or corruption are now more often the targets of homicide than war correspondents (Cottle, Sambrook, & Mosdell, 2016). An important reason is that, while war correspondents can leave frontline hazards periodically, journalists that write about topics like corruption in their own country cannot (Feinstein, 2013). Puzzlingly, such dangerous environments for journalists include many democracies, such as Mexico, Nigeria and the Philippines (Lührmann, *et al.*, 2017).

Being a local journalist per se is not what makes these actors vulnerable in subnational undemocratic regimes. It is rather about what they do as journalists. It is unlikely that Rubén Espinosa would have been murdered if he was only reporting about sport. I argue throughout this dissertation that it is the ability of such actors to expand compromising information – for example about corruption, embezzlement,

or connections between the subnational political elite and organized crime groups – that can enhance the threats that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes already experience. As I argue more systematically in the following theory chapter, subnational undemocratic regimes face a dual threat: losing subnational elections and facing intervention from central institutions. Building on Schattschneider (1975) and Gibson (2013), I argue that the expansion of compromising information across subnational borders can increase the threat of outside intervention. Thereby, actors like Rubén Espinosa increase the insecurity of these regimes.

Not every journalist is working on expanding the scope of compromising information. Conversely, there are actors that are not journalists that do, such as local investigators, whistle-blowers or activists. To give another example: in India, Right to Information (RTI) activists that try to expose the scandals of corrupt elected officials, which often involves subnational political elites, face harassment, assault, and murder (Pati, 2016; Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, n.d.). These incidents remind us of the fact that other actors apart from journalists are considered as a threat to subnational political elites. Who engages in the expansion of compromising information may change over time and space.

While two empirical chapters zoom in on journalists, this dissertation focuses more broadly on actors with the ability to expand the scope of compromising information, regardless of their official profession. I define these actors – also more systematically in chapter 2 – as boundary-blurring actors. Thus, while I focus on boundary-blurring actors in general in terms of developing theory, I zoom in on specific sub-classes of boundary-blurring actors in this dissertation. Just as Veracruz and Gujarat are examples of subnational undemocratic regimes, the actors that I study in these regions are examples of boundary-blurring actors in general. Thereby, the scope of the theory of this dissertation becomes 'boundary-blurring actors in subnational undemocratic regimes.' In chapter 3, I will explain which actors I exactly investigate, why I focus on Mexico (Veracruz) and India (Gujarat) in the first place, and how my cases relate to one another.

3. THE EXTANT LITERATURE

Which existing literature can already help us to better understand the murder of Rubén Espinosa? Generally, which literature already contributes to understanding the repression of boundary-blurring actors by political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes? There are roughly three strands of literature that assist us to understand the phenomenon better: the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes, the

literature on repression, and the literature that considers how authoritarian regimes deal with information.

The literature on subnational undemocratic regimes is based on the premise that institutional configurations vary across subnational units. While the importance of subnational democracy was already highlighted in Dahl's (1971) canonical *Polyarchy*, the literature has burgeoned over the past decade – coinciding with the growing availability of subnational data – and has demonstrated that subnational undemocratic regimes are more than passive holdouts from authoritarian periods. Political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes are skilful in surviving democratization by sustaining a strong power imbalance between themselves and local opposition parties (Gibson, 2005; Giraudy, 2013; Harbers & Ingram, 2013). As I will explain further in the theory chapter, this power imbalance entails that subnational undemocratic regimes can often offer more in return for a vote than opposition parties, as well as being able to take more away from citizens that express dissent than opposition parties. In terms of rewards, political elites can use clientelism to maintain political support (Durazo Herrmann, 2010). In terms of punishments, political elites – that often have a strong influence on the economy that provides them with their clientelist means (Sidel, 2014) – can damage people's livelihoods, for example by hurting dissenters in their professional careers (McMann, 2006).

While the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes has convincingly demonstrated that democracy at the centre does not necessarily trickle down to the subnational level, an issue with this literature is that it has primarily revolved around electoral competition and has paid scant attention to whether, why, and how the political elites of these regimes repress. Giraudy (2010: 56) suggests that this lag in terms of our knowledge about how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress has to do with the fact that data on the violations of civil rights and liberties is much scarcer and more ambiguous than electoral data. Observations like the targeting of journalists in democracy intuitively lead us to think about problems with subnational democracy, but the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes does not provide much explanation when it comes to how these two phenomena relate.

Because the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes revolves around electoral dynamics and has paid scant attention to repression, it makes sense to turn to the literature that deals specifically with repression when it comes to gaining an understanding of phenomena like the murder of Rubén Espinosa. But in spite of increasing efforts to understand repression at the subnational level, the literature on repression has suffered from what Snyder (2001) calls 'methodological nationalism.' The bulk of the literature, including Davenport (2007), Gallagher and Hanson (2009),

Gerschewski (2013), Ezrow and Frantz (2011), and Svolik (2012), has focused exclusively on how repression is exercised by national-level regimes.

When it comes to repression, it is sometimes assumed that the central government is the executor of it, instead of subnational political elites, or – for example – economic elites. To illustrate: Gohdes and Carey (2017) argue that the killing of a journalist is a sign of deteriorating respect for human rights. If a government orders the killing of a journalist, argue the authors, it is willing to use extreme measures to eliminate the threat posed by the uncontrolled flow of information (Gohdes & Carey, 2017). But events like the murder of Rubén Espinosa remind us of the fact that not only central governments are accused of targeting journalists, but also subnational governments, and warn us not to assume that repression is always sanctioned by the central government.

Fortunately, there *are* efforts to measure and analyze repression at the subnational level. An important example is the V-Dem data project, which now includes a measure of subnational ‘unevenness’ of civil liberties for example, and has an indicator that can identify regions where civil liberties are violated the most (Coppedge *et al.*, 2018; 65, 165; McMann, 2016). An important finding from this data is that these hotbeds of repression can also be found within democracies. Such efforts, in combination with the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes, tell us there is subnational variation in repression. These findings thereby help to contextualize and nuance phenomena like the killing of Rubén Espinosa, but still do not provide an understanding of it.

In addition to the data that measures repression subnationally, there exist a handful of efforts to understand how subnational political elites use repression. First of all, there is evidence in the context of Africa that political elites are more likely to use lethal force against protests in rural areas than in urban areas (Christensen, 2017). The reason is that national level and subnational level leaders ‘feel especially threatened by large protests in capitals and other major cities’ and need to use a ‘lighter touch’ to avoid an angry response to repression (Christensen, 2017: 1518). Leaders thus align levels of repression with the perceived threat levels.

Another finding is that, in Mexico, increased state capacity of subnational political elites results in a decrease in crackdowns on demonstrations, because state capacity gives subnational political elites more clout to resolve conflict in non-violent manners (Sullivan, 2013). When states lack strong state capacity, protest management is more likely to break down, eventually making the use of repression more likely. In the context of India, Beer and Mitchell (2006) and Vadlamannati (2008) demonstrate that there is strong subnational variation in terms of human rights violations across states and that states that are ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) witness higher levels of human rights violations. The authors give several possible explanations for

this observation. First of all, the BJP has created a culture of impunity, and lower-level police forces could feel emboldened by subnational political elites to harass and repress citizens (Beer & Mitchell, 2006: 1003). Secondly, the authors argue that subnational political elites of the BJP provoke communal riots in order to gain electoral control, which is consequently met with repression (Ibid., 1003).

More than the V-DEM data project, these abovementioned efforts try to make the link between subnational political elites and repression. They demonstrate that the repression is something that can be organized beneath the central government. More than that, they demonstrate that subnational political elites can be resourceful and calculative when it comes to using repression, just like the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes has shown that subnational political elites can be skilful in skewing the electoral playing field in their favour.

This finding that subnational political elites are important actors when it comes to repression also results in new research agendas, specifically in relation to the question of *how* they do it. So far, the subnational study of repression is primarily focused on the repression of protestors (Christensen, 2017; Sullivan, 2013) and the analysis of multiple-component indices of human rights violations (Beer & Mitchell, 2006). Also, although Sullivan (2013) and Beer and Mitchell (2006) make the connection between subnational political elites and repression – namely that subnational political elites of the BJP repress more in India (Beer & Mitchell, 2006) and that political elites of relatively rich Mexican states repress less because they have more means of co-optation (Sullivan, 2013) – the authors provide a horizontal comparison of repression between states. How repression work in terms of the vertical relation between subnational political elites and the national centre remains unexplored. However, and as I will explain in more detail in the theory chapter, the embeddedness of subnational undemocratic regimes is a reason to do so.

In summary, the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes and the literature on repression tell us that when we observe repression in a country, this does not automatically imply that the central government is the executioner. Subnational political elites can also organize repression to fend off threats. But so far, the literature has not provided an understanding of why certain actors – like Rubén Espinosa – are vulnerable and how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors. To answer this question, the literature that considers how authoritarian regimes and subnational undemocratic regimes deal with information helps to give direction.

Taking the step back to national-level authoritarian regimes, it is widely accepted that regimes benefit from controlling information flows (Schedler, 2013; Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011; Gerschewski, 2013). Generally speaking, authoritarian regimes benefit

from controlling and/or manipulating both incoming and outgoing information flows. On the one hand, they need information from and about the population. On the other hand, they aim to expose the population to certain information about the regime. Schedler (2013: 37) argues that authoritarian regimes operate in an 'opaque' present in which they do not have full control over incoming and outgoing information, which results in the fact that they are never fully aware of how secure they are. While this uncertainty is 'fundamental, endogenous, and irresolvable' (Schedler, 2013: 12), authoritarian regimes try to minimize uncertainties. In terms of controlling the inflow of information, authoritarian regimes can try to generate information about citizens by for example surveying them (Geddes & Zaller, 1989), holding referendums (Collin, 2019), or holding elections (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009).

In addition, authoritarian regimes also benefit from controlling outgoing information flows: from the regime to the population. Even dictatorships like China and the ones in the Middle East need popular support (Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011; Gerschewski, 2013). The same counts for more open authoritarian regimes (Geddes & Zaller, 1989) and competitive authoritarian regimes (Schedler, 2013). A crucial part of achieving this is to influence information about the regimes through manipulation, repression, censorship and propaganda (Geddes & Zaller, 1989).

Crucially, Schedler (2013) demonstrates that authoritarian regimes can be hurt by information, and therefore try to repress its free flow in various ways. But, how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes deal with information flows is much less known. While Christensen (2017) and Sullivan (2013) have shown how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes also use repression to counter threats, we do not know how the unique dynamic of being embedded in a democracy relates to the manner in which these elites are affected by and potentially use repression.

Some of the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes connects to the literature on how national-level authoritarian regimes deal with information. While Schedler (2013) talks about links between the regime and the population, Gibson (2013) explains how undemocratic regimes must monopolize 'flows' and 'linkages' with the central regime. These flows and linkages encompass issues that do not relate to information, such as fiscal transfers from the centre to a subnational undemocratic regime (Gibson, 2013). But Gibson also argues that one aspect of boundary control is that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes must keep conflicts with the subnational opposition local. He thereby refers to Schattschneider's (1975) logic that weak oppositions benefit from augmenting the scope of conflicts by involving central party officials in local affairs, while local power-holders are better off with isolated conflicts.

In the next chapter, I extend the theory of boundary control by arguing that it has an important information aspect to it. On the one hand, the multi-level setting – which

Gibson (2013) also analyzes – of which political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes are part is important to understand the threats that these elites face. On the other hand, it is important to understand how information works with respect to this multi-level context. Ultimately, I propose that boundary-blurring actors can increase the power uncertainty of political elites in subnational undemocratic regimes, by spreading certain information beyond subnational borders. To investigate this, I ask the research questions: 1) *How do boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty?* and 2) *How do political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors?*

4. RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE: DECLINE FREEDOM AND INCREASING DECENTRALIZATION

Why is it important to understand the repression of boundary-blurring actors by political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes? As explained from the start, the focus on boundary-blurring actors was in part inspired by a very critical event, and a real-live puzzle that emerged during the aftermath. At the same time, however, there are more objective reasons why it is so important to specifically look at the repression of boundary-blurring actors by subnational undemocratic regimes. The first one is the fact that there is an alarming increase in violence that is specifically targeted towards people that – at least at first sight – qualify as boundary-blurring actors, such as journalists (Lührmann, *et al.* 2017). This violence towards journalists is part of a global decline in terms of freedom of expression (Dunham, Nelson, & Aghekyan, 2015). As Lührmann, *et al.* (2017) explain, the decline in press freedom is symptomatic of the current global trend of democratic backsliding. In backsliding electoral democracies like India, and backsliding liberal democracies like the United States, freedom of expression is under pressure.

To advance our understanding of the attacks on actors like journalists, we must bring in the subnational dimension. In many countries, subnational political elites have far-reaching powers. Federalism is part of constitutional arrangements for some countries like India and the United States. In addition, there has been a global decentralization trend in recent decades. As Harbers (2010: 2) writes: ‘Especially in new democracies, decentralization is seen as an integral part of state modernization programs.’ Decentralization thus has a certain momentum. Ultimately, it is this decentralization that gives political elites the autonomy and power to establish things like dominant party rule. It also means – relating back to Gohdes & Carey (2017) – that we cannot assume that national governments are primarily responsible for the repression of journalists.

Although there is enough reason to believe that subnational political elites are involved in repressing actors like journalists, there is little theorization that helps us to understand this when we jump from the national level to the subnational level. Part of the relevance of this dissertation is that it combines investigating the repression of a certain type of actor that is under threat with the subnational level. This opens up possibilities of contributing to different literatures. Firstly, this dissertation contributes to understanding the repression of information-bearers like journalists – which I define as boundary-blurring actors – which are not only on the radar of subnational scholars but also scholars that study those actors on other levels of analysis. Secondly, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of the workings of multi-level settings – specifically the understanding of how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes function within their multi-level setting.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

The main research questions that guide this dissertation are 1) *how* do boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty, and 2) *how* do political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress them? I start answering these questions by providing a deeper understanding of the strategic position in which political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes find themselves. In chapter 2 – the theory chapter – I explain this by taking a deep dive into the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes. I conceptualize subnational undemocratic regimes and argue on the basis of existing literature that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes face fundamental uncertainty that is different from the national-level uncertainty that Schedler (2013) explains. As a result of their embeddedness in a multi-level setting, subnational undemocratic regimes face a dual threat: losing elections and facing interference by central institutions. While these threats are integral to the multi-level setting in which the political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes find themselves, I propose that boundary-blurring actors can feed into these threats.

Borrowing from Schattschneider's (1975) vocabulary, I argue that boundary-blurring actors are actors that can extend the scope of compromising information. Since subnational undemocratic regimes often coexist with a weak rule of law, I argue that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes often have certain skeletons in the closet – in other words, compromising information – on issues like corruption, embezzlement, and human rights violations. When boundary-blurring actors spread the scope of this information to the subnational electorate, the national public

sphere, or directly to central institutions, this can enhance the threats that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes already experience.

In Chapter 3, I lay out the research design that I will use to answer the research question of this dissertation. I do this by explaining the universe of cases from which I selected research contexts, cases, and about which I seek to develop theory. My research contexts are countries in which subnational political elites have: 1) a high degree of autonomy but can also potentially face intervention, and where 2) the institutional setting consists of a democracy at the national centre, which has a certain level of state capacity. My universe of cases consists of the subnational undemocratic regimes that lie within these contexts. Thereafter, I explain my choices regarding the selection of cases from within this case universe. Most crucially, I explain why Mexico and India are the research contexts that I opted for, and Veracruz and Gujarat are the cases that I selected.

In the second part of Chapter 3, I explain the methodologies that I have used. I devote most attention to fieldwork methods since fieldwork constitutes the most important methodological effort of this dissertation. I explain how I dealt with getting access to respondents, and protecting them and myself. Thereafter, I discuss tools that I used during fieldwork and afterwards, such as semi-structured interviews and process tracing.

Chapter 4 lays the groundwork for the answers to the research questions. In this chapter, I focus on Mexico and identify a specific sub-class of boundary-blurring actors in the country. This identification is based on the fact that journalists can increase subnational power uncertainty for subnational political elites by expanding the scope of compromising information. After selecting journalists as a sub-class of boundary-blurring actors, I analyze data about the attacks on journalists, zoom in specifically on homicide data, and demonstrate that in many Mexican states, journalists are a specifically targeted subgroup of the population. I will also demonstrate that this targetedness varies subnationally. Finally, I demonstrate in the chapter that the targetedness of journalists is likely to be connected to their boundary-blurring role.

The empirical analysis of Chapter 4 identifies the states with high levels of targetedness of journalists. This allows the selection of one specific state: Veracruz. Based on fieldwork data, I trace how journalists face repression apart from homicide. One of the findings is that the repression rarely consists of one event but is often diverse and incremental. Also, repression is conducted in an opaque manner, including collaboration between the subnational political elite and non-state actors.

While Chapter 4 and 5 demonstrate how a specific category of boundary-blurring actors – journalists – expand the scope of different types of compromising information, chapter 6 zooms in on what actors did in relation to one specific event.

With the use of process tracing, I analyze how certain actors tried to extend the scope of compromising information related to the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat, during which thousands of people died and the subnational government was accused of sanctioning the riots. Limiting the scope of the analysis to one specific, extreme event allows the category of boundary-blurring actors to be kept open, and facilitates an inductive analysis of whether and how boundary-blurring actors extend the scope of compromising information. I found that similar dynamics as in Veracruz – such as the incremental and opaque nature of repression – were at play in Gujarat. However, through process tracing, I was able to disentangle this process even more.

In the conclusion chapter, I discuss the continuities and differences across the cases that I empirically explored. There are certain continuities across the different cases that validate my theory and help to understand which findings are integral to how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress. I start in the conclusion chapter by identifying the general characteristics of how boundary-blurring actors can expand the scope of compromising information, and I lay out the distinct pathways that boundary-blurring actors follow with regards to the spread of compromising information. Thereafter, I explain the continuity in terms of how boundary-blurring actors are repressed. I argue that the embeddedness of the two subnational undemocratic regimes – Veracruz and Gujarat – in democracies privileged certain repressive dynamics. At least partly as a result of embeddedness itself, political elites used opaque repressive acts, collaborations with non-state actors, and incremental repression towards boundary-blurring actors. After that, I explain why the repression of boundary-blurring actors was generally speaking more violent in Veracruz than in Gujarat. Finally, I discuss the implications of the findings of this dissertation for the existing literature. Ultimately, this study hopes to contribute to the understanding tragic events like the killing of Rubén Espinosa. While understanding such events does not automatically lead to improvement, it could ultimately improve our recognition of the vulnerabilities of certain actors, and the responsibilities of others.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework

1. INTRODUCTION

In the introduction chapter, I demonstrated how existing empirical insights have already generated more attention for subnational regimes in political science and more specifically the study of democracy (Snyder, 2001). This shift has created the insight that in a part of the democratic world, especially in large federal countries, certain subnational regimes combine electoral dominance with a weak rule of law (Gibson, 2010; Giraudy, 2010; Faughnan, Hiskey, & Revey, 2014). The result is that in such countries - like India, Mexico, Argentina or the Philippines - the answer to the question of whether a person lives in a democracy, and has access to its culminating democratic rights, largely depends on the state or province where he or she lives.

This notion has allowed for the emergence of a subnational research agenda in its own right, which has generated a plethora of interesting insights for the study of democracy. Beer and Mitchell (2006), for example, have shown how India's outlier status in terms of combining a poor human rights record with a good electoral democracy record depends partly on certain subnational regimes that are more repressive than others, and not just on the central government. Giraudy (2010) has in turn advanced our understanding of how subnational regimes deal with elections, and can eventually undermine and distort them, just like national regimes can. Also, Gibson (2013) has demonstrated how subnational undemocratic regimes aim to shape the national centre by forming alliances with the central political elite, in order to remain in power at the subnational level.

These findings do not merely constitute a set of empirical insights. They also challenge the theoretical lens that is predominantly used in the study of democracy, in which the national regime is put centre stage. Analyzing political systems at the subnational level – in this case subnational undemocratic regimes – involves the attribution of agency to subnational regimes. Seen through this lens, political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes are part of a multi-level system: they are key to shaping both the subnational and national political arena, rather than just being part of the national system. This dissertation deals with a specific puzzle, namely how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors within that system. While this is unexplored territory, this puzzle is informed by a set of theoretical ideas that are used more broadly in the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes and national-level undemocratic regimes.

Theory here is understood in line with Collins (1986), who describes it as “a generalized and coherent body of ideas, which explain the range of variations in the empirical world in terms of general principles” (p. 1345). In this case, I explain what concepts like subnational undemocratic regimes, boundary-blurring actors,

subnational power uncertainty and repression mean, and how they relate. This theoretical ‘body of ideas’ that I present rests on the assumption that subnational undemocratic regimes matter, and that they have a certain level of agency. In terms of explaining how subnational undemocratic regimes operate strategically, this chapter synthesizes a part of the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes and expands upon it by explaining how political elites of subnational undemocratic elites can be affected by boundary-blurring actors.

This chapter proceeds with the conceptualization of subnational undemocratic regimes. Thereafter, I explain how subnational undemocratic regimes sustain themselves in relation to their subnational electorate. In Section 3, I explain how subnational undemocratic regimes sustain themselves domestically. In Section 4, I reflect on the ‘embeddedness’ of subnational undemocratic regimes in national democracies, and the strategic consequences this embeddedness has. I expand this by outlining scenarios in which subnational undemocratic regimes can be undermined in Section 5. I refer to the uncertainty that both the national centre and the subnational electorate can bring about as ‘subnational power uncertainty.’ In the remainder of the chapter, I argue that boundary-blurring actors, who have the ability to spread compromising information about subnational political elites to the subnational, and sometimes also the national public, can influence subnational power uncertainty. Building on Gibson (2013), who argues that subnational undemocratic regimes must engage in boundary control by making sure that central power holders do not ally with the subnational opposition, I argue that controlling boundary-blurring actors is equally important because they increase subnational power uncertainty. For this reason, subnational undemocratic regimes have incentives to repress boundary-blurring actors.

2. SUBNATIONAL UNDEMOCRATIC REGIMES

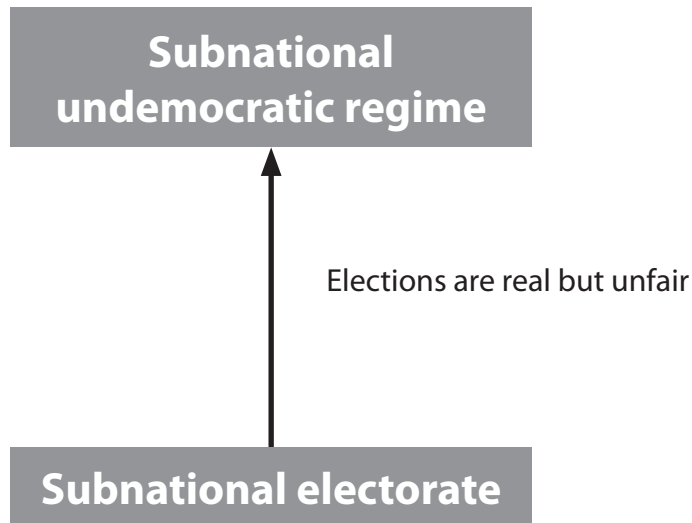
Subnational regimes consist of actors and institutions that are involved in the government of subnational political territories – states, in this dissertation. Subnational political elites – such as governors, chief ministers, ministers, and other actors – are the most powerful actors in terms of shaping political outcomes in these territories. However, as Schedler (2013) notes, political elites never inherit an ‘institutional tabula rasa’ (2013, p. 61). Instead, subnational regimes also consist of institutions that were found in earlier periods. Thereby, subnational undemocratic regimes are by definition historically loaded, since they are not just shaped by existing political elites but also by their predecessors.

Subnational undemocratic regimes are a specific type of subnational regime. In the most elementary sense, subnational undemocratic regimes are subnational regimes with elections that do not live up to democratic standards. This is problematic for citizens of subnational undemocratic regimes. Even from the perspective of a minimal interpretation of democracy, its primary function is that elected political elites can be held accountable for their performance in office. Although elections might not always guarantee respect for political rights or civil liberties, elections constitute what Schedler (2015) has called an 'infrastructure of accountability' that enables voters to punish elites for their actions.

In subnational undemocratic regimes this mechanism is distorted, because the elections in which subnational political elites participate – and sometimes (partly) organize – are what Levitsky and Way (2010) would call 'real but unfair.' Elections are meaningful, and not necessarily completely fraudulent, but the playing field is heavily skewed in favour of the incumbent party. This translates into weak opposition parties and often-infrequent turnover of subnational governments (Giraudy, 2010). The Indian state Gujarat, where the BJP has been in power since 1998 and a case study for this dissertation, is such an example (Harbers *et al.*, 2019). But there are more extreme examples of subnational regions where opposition parties are crippled and incumbents experience no turnover. In multiple Mexican states, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) has been in power since the 1920s. In Argentina, Governor Carlos Arturo Juárez ruled the Province of Santiago del Estero for half a century (with a brief intermezzo) after assuming the governorship in 1949 (Gibson, 2005). In the Indian state of Sikkim, Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling has been in power since 1994 (Harbers *et al.*, 2019), with some terms having virtually no opposition. In 2009, his party won all seats in the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim (Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, 2009).

Such uncompetitive subnational regimes, which are embedded in nationally competitive democracies, are what Giraudy (2015) has referred to as subnational undemocratic regimes (or SURs). While the threat of elections is real for the political elite of a subnational regime, they are often unfair enough to undermine their effectiveness for holding elected leaders accountable (see Figure 1). This phenomenon is a fact of life in many electoral democracies, ranging from Latin America, which is the region that has received most attention with regards to the topic, to Africa and Asia (Sidel, 2014), and is historically connected to an even wider set of cases that includes the southern states of the US (Mickey, 2015).

Figure 1. The support for subnational undemocratic regimes during elections



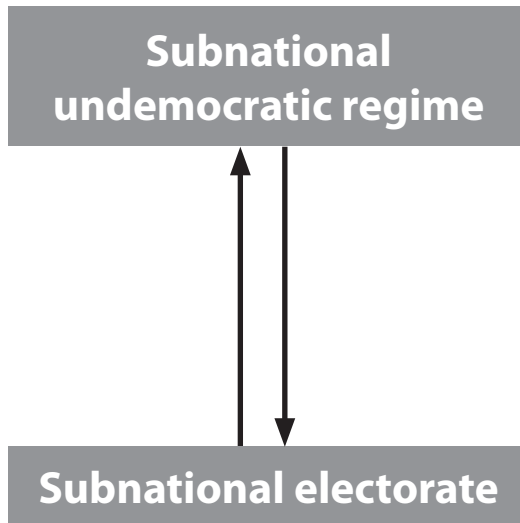
Key (1949) provided one of the earliest accounts of subnational undemocratic regimes by trying to explain why states in the south of the United States remained remarkably uncompetitive in the period 1890–1972, where democracy on the central level was already consolidated. Decades later, O’Donnell (1993) grafted the observations of V.O. Key to a new time period and to different geographical locations, by arguing that in many young democracies, especially in Latin America, the rule of law has been weak in some parts of the countries. He referred to areas where the rule of law is weak as ‘brown zones.’ In these brown zones, democracy has little substance, because the central state does not effectively enforce democratic principles, such as equality before the law. Concurrently, O’Donnell (1993) noted that the unequal spread of democratic institutions within countries was exacerbated by decentralization reforms during the 1980s.

Thus, the early authors on subnational undemocratic regimes convincingly argued that democratization at the central level does not necessarily imply that democracy is guaranteed at the subnational level. This finding is especially fundamental in light of the Huntingtonian (1991) democratization literature that tacitly assumed that democratization is merely a national process and has paid little to no attention to the subnational variation in terms of democracy. The early accounts of subnational undemocratic regimes by Key (1949) and O’Donnell (1993) have convincingly shown that democratization does not always trickle down to all levels of government.

3. HOW DO SUBNATIONAL UNDEMOCRATIC REGIMES SUSTAIN THEMSELVES DOMESTICALLY?

A new wave of scholarship has proven that subnational undemocratic regimes are not just passive relics from authoritarian periods, but that subnational political elites are resourceful in surviving democratization by sustaining a strong power imbalance between themselves and local opposition parties (Gibson, 2005; Giraudy, 2013; Harbers & Ingram, 2013). A key factor of this power imbalance is that subnational undemocratic regimes can often offer more in return for a vote than opposition parties as well as being able to take more away from citizens that express dissent than opposition parties. Incumbent parties of subnational undemocratic regimes often have more access to the means of co-optation (Sidel, 2014), funding political campaigns (Durazo Herrmann, 2010), and coercion (McMann, 2006). Thus, elections are not only real but unfair in and of themselves, but because subnational undemocratic regimes actively employ strategies to achieve this end. Hence it is shown in Figure 2 that the subnational electorate supports a subnational undemocratic regime in elections that are real but unfair because of the abilities of subnational undemocratic regimes to offer certain things to the electorate.

Figure 2. The relationship between subnational undemocratic regimes and their subnational electorates.



The upward arrow represents the support for a subnational undemocratic regime (rewards) or the lack thereof (punishment). The downward represents the strategies that subnational undemocratic regimes employ to win real but unfair elections.

One example of how subnational undemocratic regimes create a power imbalance between themselves and opposition parties comes from Durazo Herrmann (2010). Using Oaxaca (Mexico) as a case study, he illustrated how subnational undemocratic regimes can survive democratization by relying on what he calls 'neo-patrimonial networks'. According to the author, the strong ties between the corporate and business elites have created a 'complex network of social and political intermediation channels centered in the subnational government and based on a clientelist exchange of material and symbolic goods against unconditional political support' (Durazo Herrmann, 2010, p. 91). Strong ties between local governments and business elites are thus very important to uphold a clientelist network in which voters eventually support the incumbent parties in exchange for material support.

Political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes use the local economy more generally in order to skew the electoral playing field in their favour. Sidel (2014) explains that poverty and insecurity interact with clientelism. According to the author, poverty and insecurity make subnational electorates susceptible to monetary incentives and clientelist inducements, which weaken mechanisms of accountability. He also argues that when subnational undemocratic regimes exercise power over local economies, it often means that the political and economic elites are intertwined and thus share an interest in skewing the level playing field in favour of the incumbent. McMann (2006) argues for a similar reason that subnational undemocratic regimes are to be found in areas where subnational political elites have a relatively high stake in the local economy. However, she attributes a slightly different mechanism to the observation that having influence over the local economy benefits subnational undemocratic regimes. Instead of emphasizing clientelism, she argues that employees of state-owned companies are not likely to dissent because they fear the loss of their livelihoods. Yet, both authors emphasize that a tight grip on the local economy, whether in the shape of the interdependence of business elites and political elites or the large presence of state-owned companies, contributes to the survival of subnational undemocratic regimes.

In spite of the success that subnational undemocratic regimes can have in sustaining themselves domestically, this success is also dependent on how successfully the political elites of these regimes maintain their relationship with the centre. Gervasoni (2010) explains subnational undemocratic regime survival from a perspective that also involves economic influence, arguing that subnational undemocratic regimes are likely to be found in states where governments receive relatively large amounts of central transfers, and can thereby practically forgo local taxation. States that receive a relatively high amount of such "rents", which are often small states, can use their resources to sabotage the electoral playing field. This rentier explanation

of subnational undemocratic regime survival connects to the other literature in the sense that it considers the curbing of the subnational electoral playing field as a key factor. However, it also highlights the embeddedness of subnational undemocratic regimes in a multi-level political system and the dependence on the centre.

4. MULTI-LEVEL EMBEDDEDNESS

In spite of the agency that subnational undemocratic regimes have in order to sustain themselves domestically, they are part of a multi-level system and highly depend on the centre. Largely in line with Gibson (2013), the centre here refers to the multitude of national-level state institutions. These can be government ministries, prosecutors and legal institutions, the national government, electoral oversight bodies, and so on. This dependence of a subnational undemocratic regime on the support, or at least the tolerance, of the centre, is defined here as multi-level embeddedness (or just embeddedness). I argue here that embeddedness has multiple fundamental characteristics, regardless of the spatio-temporal context, that are important in understanding the strategic position of subnational undemocratic regimes.

First of all, embeddedness entails certain *a priori* limitations for a subnational undemocratic regime. Even though subnational political elites of subnational regimes can engage in undemocratic practices, there are certain limitations to how far such regimes can go with these practices. As Gibson (2013: 27) puts it: 'A provincial military government would be very difficult to sustain in a nationally democratic country, except in extreme situations of civil conflict.' In this way, the embeddedness of a subnational undemocratic regime differs crucially from the embeddedness in which national-level undemocratic regimes find themselves. Personal dictatorships, such as Turkmenistan under Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, or military dictatorships, such as Myanmar under the military junta, usually survive in a largely democratic international order, without intervention from outside. Scaling down one level of administration, such a constellation would become hard to imagine.

The reason why it is so hard to imagine a subnational undemocratic regime installing a military dictatorship within a democratic country relates to the second characteristic of embeddedness – namely that the threat of central institutions interfering in subnational undemocratic regimes is ever-present. Central institutions can aim to democratize subnational territories or punish subnational elites for their undemocratic practices. In most decentralized countries there are formal and informal mechanisms of accountability between central institutions and subnational political elites. Although central institutions, especially the central government (Gibson, 2013; Rebolledo, 2011), can have reasons to restrain from interference, the consequences

of intervention by a central institution can be dire and are therefore feared by the power-holders of subnational undemocratic regimes. While the threat of punishment will be discussed more in detail in the next section, it is important to understand that in relation to embeddedness, in the constellation in which subnational undemocratic regimes find themselves, there exists a fundamental threat of outside interference.

The third characteristic of embeddedness is that it implies a multilevel playing field for both a subnational undemocratic regime and a centre. So far claims like 'there is mutual dependence between a centre and a subnational undemocratic regime' have relied on the assumption that the subnational undemocratic regime and the centre are two separable entities. While national institutions and subnational institutions might be theoretically separable, the subnational and national spheres are not separate to the same degree that the national and the international sphere are separate. While there are legal-political borders that separate subnational jurisdictions, subnational borders are also porous and are not strictly controlled by subnational undemocratic regimes even in the most decentralized settings. Citizens of subnational undemocratic regimes are part of both the subnational and the national sphere. And although the informational sphere might have a subnational dimension, in the form of subnational media outlets for example, information can easily move across boundaries.

Political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes operate in a multi-level constellation, in which the central government has reasons to tolerate them. One important reason for this tolerance is that central governments rely heavily on subnational co-allies during elections and mid-term races, both in terms of resources and in terms of manpower (Gibson, 2013; Langston, 2017). But when subnational political elites are not allied with the central government party, the central government also has reasons to allow subnational undemocratic regimes ruled by an opposition party. The reason is that since political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes have weak programmatic ties with their electorate, they can support national-level policy-making in exchange for tolerance from the centre (Rebolledo, 2011). This is for example how Democratic political elites of the authoritarian southern states in the US sustained their relations with the Republican federal government (Mickey, 2015.) However, this predisposition does not mean that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes can be comfortable. The next section deals with the concrete threats that subnational undemocratic regimes experience and the subsequent section deals with the question of how this multi-level context affects the way in which a subnational undemocratic regime needs to operate to survive.

5. SUBNATIONAL POWER UNCERTAINTY

The mechanisms by which political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes can be undermined can be divided into two. First, since elections in subnational undemocratic regimes are real but unfair, a subnational undemocratic regime can still be electorally defeated. Examples from Latin America and India demonstrate that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes can be beaten, especially when opposition parties manage to form broad coalitions (Tudor & Ziegfeld, 2016). This possibility of losing elections relates to the *a priori* limitations that embeddedness imposes on subnational undemocratic regimes; because of embeddedness, subnational undemocratic regimes cannot abolish elections, but can only try to undermine them. Subnational undemocratic regimes can experience the threat of being electorally defeated throughout the period of their rule, even though a long electoral winning streak might suggest otherwise.

The second threat to the rule of a subnational undemocratic regime is interference by national-level actors. It is constitutive of embeddedness that a subnational undemocratic regime can face interference by institutions that are typically found in the capital, such as a high court, supreme court, intelligence bureau, electoral committee, prosecutor, committee holding a parliamentary inquiry, and so on. These central-level institutions potentially have leverage over a subnational undemocratic regime. The nature of this leverage does not only differ per central institution but can vary over time as well, and also depends on the constitutional, historical and party-political context of the country. In some instances, co-partisans of subnational elites in the capital may also be able to exert leverage through intra-party channels.

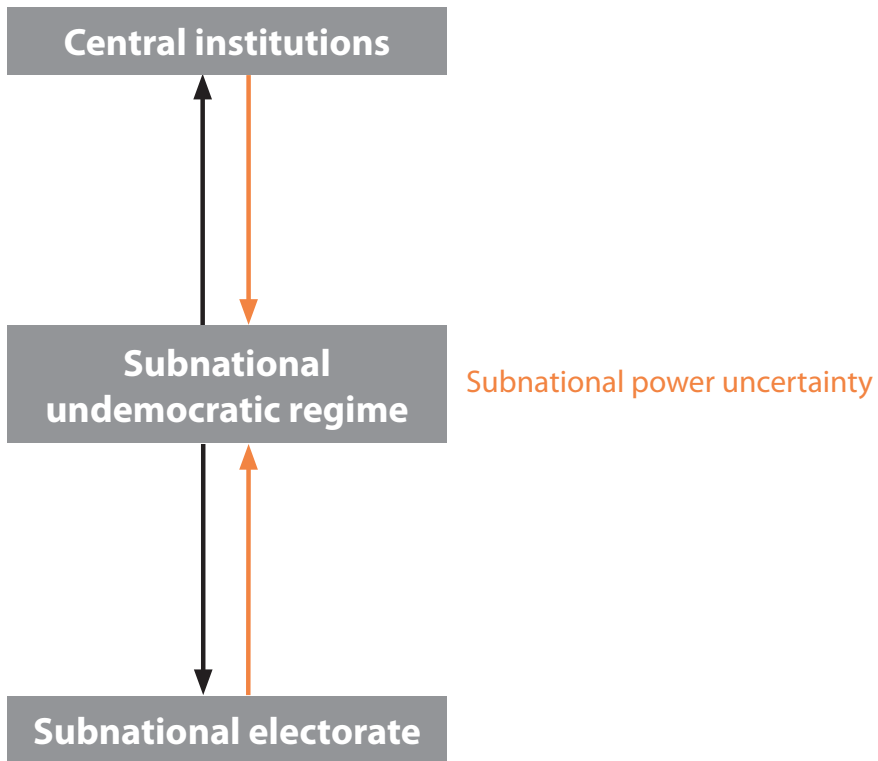
In the most positive scenario from the perspective of a political elite of a subnational undemocratic regime, central institutions do not interfere in their political projects, and the national incumbent party and national officials give a certain amount of political and fiscal support (Gervasoni, 2010; Gibson, 2013). In an already less ideal scenario for a subnational undemocratic regime, the central government could take away some fiscal resources, or undermine the subnational undemocratic regime's authority. An example of the latter is that party elites in the capital can put pressure on subnational co-partisans and make them do things they would otherwise not do. In a parliamentary system like India for example, a Chief Minister - the *de facto* head of the state - can be re-elected infinitely, but at the same time, Chief Ministers can face pressure from the national party to resign.

Another form of formal interference is judicial interference. While opposition parties can be weak in subnational undemocratic regimes, subnational judicial institutions can hurt the political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes by prosecuting

them for corruption or embezzlement among other things. However, it is far from a given that subnational judicial institutions have the willingness or capacity to this. The fact that a subnational undemocratic regime can exist within a democracy already signals that there are problems with the rule of law. Simultaneously, subnational undemocratic regimes benefit from keeping courts politicized and subordinate, for example by creating opportunities for judges to make career transitions from and to politics (Ingram, 2015).

Central judicial institutions are often harder to influence and the highest judicial institutions that are found in the centre, like high courts or supreme courts, can also interfere in subnational undemocratic regimes. Even in decentralized democracies, central judicial institutions are the highest authorities when it comes to the protection of the constitution or safeguarding electoral procedures. Possible reasons to interfere in a subnational undemocratic regime include human rights violations or voter fraud. Often, subnational undemocratic regimes are involved in issues that they could potentially be punished for legally. This relates back to O'Donnell's (1993) notion that subnational undemocratic regimes are to be found in regions where there are weak institutions and where there are difficulties with the enforcement of the rule of law. Subnational undemocratic regimes are territories that are often plagued with problems related to weak institutions such as corruption, criminal violence and human rights abuses. Federal prosecutors can decide to investigate the role of a subnational leader in corruption or crime and thereby pose a serious threat to a subnational undemocratic regime.

In the worst-case scenario, the political elite of a subnational undemocratic regime can face far-reaching formal interference induced by a central institution, which can result in a change of government or imprisonment. In addition to prosecution, there are also constitutional mechanisms in many federal countries that allow the federal government to remove subnational executives from power if they violate constitutional norms and principles. Such a dismissal can be executed in a plethora of ways, depending on whether the subnational undemocratic regime is embedded in a presidential system or a parliamentary system, and depending on other country-specific (constitutional) arrangements. While these mechanisms are often codified in law, the use of them is not always fixed and can depend on political considerations. Facing judicial interference or other forms of federal interference is thus an uncertain scenario for subnational undemocratic regimes.

Figure 3: Subnational power uncertainty

The orange arrows represent the origins of subnational power uncertainty, namely the uncertainty about the support of central institutions and the subnational electorate.

6. BOUNDARY CONTROL AND SUBNATIONAL POWER UNCERTAINTY

Political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes benefit from minimizing the chances of interference. To do so, they engage in what Gibson (2013) refers to as boundary control. With boundary control, he refers to the strategic set of actions they employ towards central institutions in order to strengthen their own position. According to Gibson, subnational undemocratic regimes must monopolize 'flows' and 'linkages' with the central regime. This encompasses actions such as exercising control over legislative committees that appropriate fiscal transfers. In addition, however, one aspect of boundary control is that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes must keep conflicts with opposition local. He thereby refers to the Schattschneideran (1975) logic that weak oppositions benefit from augmenting

the scope of conflicts by involving central public officials or legal actors in local affairs, while local power holders are better off with isolated conflicts.

Adding to Gibson's theoretical framework, it is argued here that even in the case that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes engage successfully in Gibson's version of boundary control, subnational power uncertainty continues to exist. Just like national-level authoritarian regimes operate in an 'opaque present', and are never fully aware of how secure they are (Schedler, 2013, p. 37), it is innate to subnational power uncertainty that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes cannot fully gauge the risk of intervention by the central institutions. Even when political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes successfully cut off local opposition from central allies, they cannot thereby guarantee non-interference.

One reason for this is the fact that central institutions can experience pressure from the national public sphere to interfere, which puts pressure on the direct relationship between the central institutions and a subnational undemocratic regime. Central institutions are embedded in the national public sphere and in case certain compromising information about a subnational undemocratic regime becomes widely known in the national public sphere, this could put pressure on central institutions to interfere, or it could prevent central institutions from denying or downplaying the compromising information.

For this reason, I argue here that a part of the success of subnational undemocratic regimes depends on their ability to keep compromising information local or even entirely secret. From the perspective of the political elite of a subnational undemocratic regime, compromising information that reaches the national public sphere increases subnational power uncertainty. In a scenario in which a subnational undemocratic regime is plagued with scandals, such as human rights abuses, embezzlement or other issues, the uncertainty about central institutions interfering is high. This implies something that has been touched upon briefly by Gibson (2013), but has otherwise been close to absent in the debate on subnational undemocratic regimes so far – namely that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes benefit not only from controlling material flows and linkages, but also from controlling information flows and linkages.

7. COMPROMISING INFORMATION AND SUBNATIONAL POWER UNCERTAINTY.

Political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes are not just sensitive to compromising information because it can reach their own subnational electorate, but also because it can reach central level institutions, either directly or via the

national public sphere. As argued earlier, it is constitutive of embeddedness that the subnational and national spheres are part of the same multi-level system. Information can potentially flow out of the territories of subnational undemocratic regimes, and compromising issues in the subnational realm have the potential to become national issues. It thereby has the potential to affect both mechanisms that create uncertainty for subnational undemocratic regimes: losing elections and facing interference.

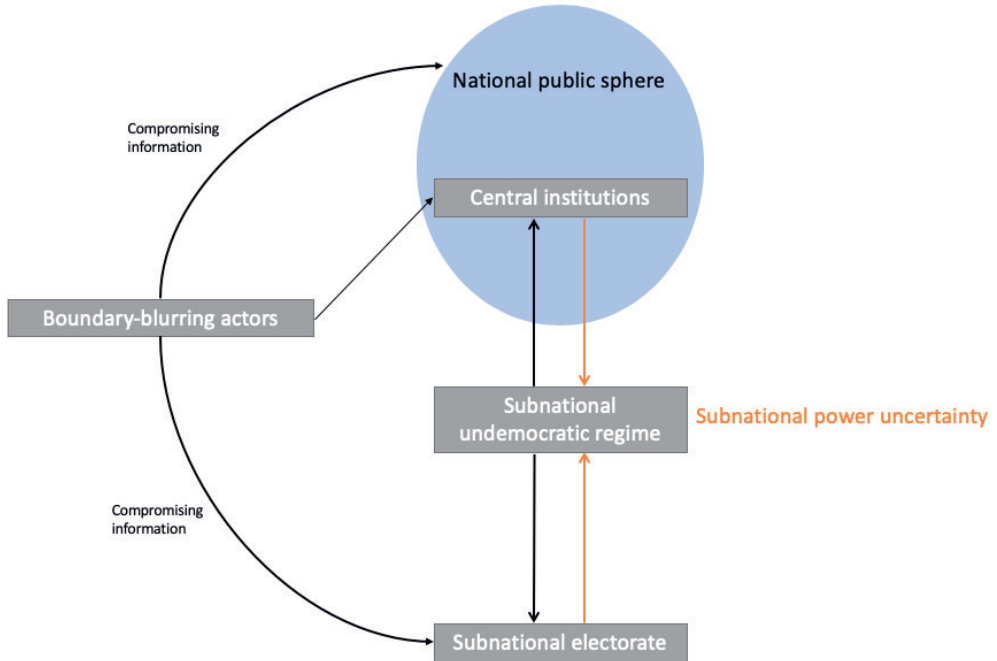
In practice, political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes are often involved in issues like corruption, connections with organized crime, or other sorts of power abuse (Faughnan *et al.*, 2014). These are the skeletons in the closet that can increase subnational power uncertainty in case they become known. It could give opposition parties the edge during elections, and/or it could put pressure on central institutions to interfere in a subnational undemocratic regime.

While it may be tempting to assume that compromising information is simply found where compromising actions take place, the relationship between compromising actions and the actual compromising information is indirect. An important characteristic about so-called skeletons in the closet is that someone has to open the door of the closet before they actually fall out. Without actors that make compromising actions public, the information does not become damaging.

This is exactly what certain actors do. Journalists, human rights activists, information activists, lawyers, whistle-blowers or prosecutors can reveal the skeletons in the closet and make them known to the central institutions either directly or via the public sphere. Journalists may publish compromising information that involves the subnational political elite. Prosecutors and lawyers can go to court. Whistle-blowers can do either. In essence, these actors mediate information from the actual event itself to the public sphere and central institutions. To remain close to the logic of extending the scope of conflicts, these actors do not extend conflicts by allying with political elites at the centre, but by extending the scope of information to the subnational and national public sphere and central institutions.

While potentially compromising information will not become actually compromising if they stay within a small circle of people, it is not exactly clear which threshold potentially compromising information needs to reach in order for it to become a threat. Actors that carry compromising information can extend the scope of the information to an important part of the subnational population, or it is possible that it is picked up beyond subnational boundaries and becomes a national issue. The fact that the subnational information sphere is part of the national territory makes this a possible scenario. For this reason, actors who disseminate compromising information are defined here as boundary-blurring actors. Figure 4 shows how boundary-blurring actors relate to subnational undemocratic regimes and subnational power uncertainty.

Figure 4. The relationship between boundary-blurring actors and subnational power uncertainty.



Boundary-blurring actors differ substantially from what Gibson (2005) calls ‘boundary-opening agents.’ With boundary-opening agents, Gibson emphasizes the actors that are able to nationalize local conflicts. However, he mostly refers to boundary-opening agents as subnational opposition groups that participate in the local struggle for power, or the national actors that become involved in local conflicts by seeking alliances with local opposition groups. As opposed to boundary-opening agents, boundary-blurring actors are typically not politicians. However, their actions can have an effect on local power structures, but this happens by involving the subnational electorate, subnational judicial institutions, or central institutions via the public sphere. Boundary-blurring actors can thereby be as important for local politics as boundary-opening agents but have received much less attention in debates on subnational undemocratic regimes.

8. BOUNDARY-BLURRING ACTORS AND REPRESSION

Boundary-blurring actors can be a threat to subnational undemocratic regimes, because they increase subnational power uncertainty. From that, the expectation follows that subnational undemocratic regimes specifically target boundary-blurring actors in order to neutralize this threat. This can be done in various ways, for example via co-optation or through (financially) disincentivizing the profession that connects to boundary-blurring actors, such as investigative journalism. However, even if many potential boundary-blurring actors are co-opted there will always be a need for repression, since not everybody is bribable. Therefore: the first question of this dissertation is *how* boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty, and the second question builds on the first, to ask: if boundary-blurring actors are indeed repressed, then in what way?

Repression is defined here as the curtailing of political rights, civil rights, or physical integrity rights, orchestrated by a state actor. Civil and political rights are what Goldstein (1978) would call ‘first amendment-type rights’ and include rights such as the freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom to boycott, freedom of speech and freedom to go on strike (Goldstein 1978, pp. xxx–xxx). Physical integrity rights are, according to Davenport, ‘concerned with individual survival and security, such as freedom from torture, “disappearance,” imprisonment, extrajudicial execution, and mass killing’ (Davenport, 2007, pp. 2-3). These rights can also be abused without a state actor being involved in the orchestration of it, but such events are beyond the scope of this study.

Including cases where non-state actors use repression against civilians would mean that, for example, the disappearance of certain criminal actors, executed by members of a rival criminal gang would fall within the scope of this study. While such violations of civil, political, and physical integrity rights by non-state actors can be as dire as violations of these rights by state actors, they have little to do with the theoretical interest of this dissertation, i.e. how subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors in a multi-level setting. One must however concede that the distinction is easier to make in theory than in practice, since it can sometimes be unclear whether a state actor has been involved in the violation of rights. The standard in this dissertation is that there is a valid suspicion that the subnational political elite is involved in the orchestration of repression, and that is related to subnational power uncertainty.

When it comes to repression, the political science literature has suffered from what Snyder (2001) would call ‘methodological nationalism.’ Authors like Davenport (2007), Gallagher and Hanson (2009), Gerschewski (2013), Ezrow and Frantz (2011), and Svolik (2012) have focused exclusively on how repression is used at the national level. Yet, the subnational study of repression has gained momentum over the past years, and

there is an increasing acknowledgment of the fact that the levels of repression can vary substantially within countries (Beer & Mitchell, 2006; Bartman, 2018; Coppedge *et al.*, 2018; Christensen, 2017). But so far, the subnational analysis of repression is primarily based on the horizontal comparison of repression between states. How repression work in terms of the vertical relation between subnational political elites and the national centre remains unexplored.

This chapter has reflected on the strategic position of subnational undemocratic regimes and has made the case that there are reasons to expect that boundary-blurring actors are repressed. This expectation should not be conflated with an expectation that only boundary-blurring actors face repression or that boundary-blurring actors only face repression. Minorities, for instance, can be repressed by subnational undemocratic regimes, for example by having their physical integrity rights violated. Boundary-blurring actors can also be subjected to co-optation or other types of persuasion, which are not repressive. However, the argument of this chapter is that boundary-blurring actors have a certain disruptive capacity and are therefore expected to be specifically targeted with repression.

Subnational undemocratic regimes often align with territories with a weak rule of law, and have already proven that they do not stick to the rule of leaving office when unpopular. Thereby, subnational undemocratic regimes signal a certain amount of intolerance towards political opposition, which raises the expectation that they are also willing to repress the people that threaten their rule. However, subnational undemocratic regimes need not be the only subnational regimes that use repression. Subnational democratic regimes can use repression too and might even also specifically target boundary-blurring actors. However, they are not the object of this research, since this dissertation ultimately aims to contribute to the understanding of the ways in which subnational undemocratic regimes survive in a multi-level system.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Debates about subnational undemocratic regimes have progressed substantially over the past decades. This has been rendered possible by the theoretical notion that subnational territories matter crucially for our understanding of politics. However, so far the existing debate has said little about how repression is organized by political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes. This dissertation deals with the specific question of whether and how subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors. This theory chapter has provided the theoretical foundation for why boundary-blurring actors are targeted to begin with.

One important part of this foundation is the notion of subnational power uncertainty. I argue that because elections are real but unfair in subnational undemocratic regimes, subnational undemocratic regimes face a dual threat: being electorally defeated and facing interference by central institutions. Building on the work of Schattschneider (1975) as well as Gibson (2013), I argue that those actors that are able to expand the scope of a conflict can augment this threat. Boundary-blurring actors who are able to provide compromising information about a local, subnational undemocratic regime – and to bring it to the attention of both national and subnational audiences – are crucial, since local electorates may then create subnational power uncertainty by voting, or central institutions may subsequently interfere in subnational politics. Therefore, political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes aim to neutralize the threat of boundary-blurring actors and target them with multiple power tools, such as co-optation and repression. This dissertation is concerned with the latter.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

1. INTRODUCTION

In the introduction chapter, I explained why it is important to understand *how* boundary-blurring actors create subnational power uncertainty and *how* political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors. In the the last chapter, I provided the theoretical underpinnings of these questions and explained that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes experience subnational power uncertainty. The reason to expect that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors, I concluded, is that these actors can increase the uncertainty that these political elites experience. In this chapter, I reflect on the research design-related and methodological steps that I took to answer the research questions.

An important element of this dissertation is that it is multi-sited (Marcus, 1995). The idea behind doing multi-sited research is that it allows tracing of the continuities and differences of findings across these different locations. At the same time, analyzing more than one case opens the possibility of zooming in on different parts of the theory in each geographical setting, for example by looking at different sub-classes of boundary-blurring actors and different types of compromising information. Rather than testing theory, the intention of applying this variation is to explore the continuities and differences of findings across actors and regions.

Each empirical chapter of this dissertation constitutes an independent building block. In the first empirical I zoom in on a specific type of boundary-blurring actors –journalists – in a specific country: Mexico. I use expert interviews and analyze state-level homicide data to inquire whether journalists are a specifically targeted subgroup of the population, and if so, why this is the case. In the second empirical chapter, I zoom in on one subnational undemocratic regime in Mexico, Veracruz, and explore in that particular context how journalists increased subnational power uncertainty and how they were repressed. To achieve that, I rely primarily on fieldwork interviews. I continue in the third empirical chapter by zooming in on a specific historical period in a geographical location, Gujarat in India, and explore what type of actors, beyond journalists, engaged in boundary-blurring actions and how they were repressed. For this part, I use process tracing.

This chapter further explores the research design and methodologies that are used in this dissertation to answer the research questions. This is divided into two parts. In the first part, I identify the universe of cases in which I am interested and explain the decisions related to case selection. In the second part, I reflect on the methodologies that I use in the empirical chapters of this dissertation.

2. CASE CHARACTERISTICS

This dissertation empirically explores the research questions in completely different settings. The reason for this relates to the more general ambition of this dissertation to contribute to the building of multi-level theory. As Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder (2019) highlight, a specific contribution that subnational research can make to comparative politics is the building of multi-level theories (2019, p. 5). Selecting two comparable multi-level settings in terms of decentralization in otherwise very different geographical and historical contexts, and empirically exploring the similarities and differences between them, allows for the construction of theory about the workings of these multi-level settings. This ambition also connects to previous efforts by authors like Gibson (2005), Giraudy (2015), McMann (2006) and Sidel (2014) who compare different cases to build theory about how subnational undemocratic regimes embedded in a multi-level setting work.

In line with the above-mentioned authors, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the development of theory in the context of a specific type of multi-level setting. The universe of cases from which I select my cases consists of subnational undemocratic regimes that have a high degree of autonomy, but can also potentially face intervention. Secondly, the institutional setting of which these regimes are part consists of a democracy at the national centre and varying levels of democratization at the subnational level. The national centre should have a certain level of state capacity: in the absence of a minimal degree of state capacity, intervention in subnational politics would be hard to imagine. Thus, subnational undemocratic regimes that are found in the Philippines (Sidel, 2014), Mexico (Gibson, 2013), India (Harbers *et al.*, 2019), Argentina (Giraudy, 2010; Gervasoni, 2010) and Brazil (Durazo Herrmann, 2017) are all part of this universe of cases. In these multi-level settings, I study *how* boundary-blurring actors create subnational power uncertainty and *how* political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors while being embedded in such systems can be studied. In the following sections, I explain why I selected Mexico and India as research contexts and Veracruz and Gujarat as cases.

3. MEXICO AND INDIA

Mexico, a federal country, was the first multi-level setting from which I selected a subnational entity. The primary reason to start in Mexico was that it has already been the centre of attention when it comes to the study of subnational undemocratic

regimes (Gibson, 2005, 2010, 2013; Giraudy, 2010, 2013). Together with Argentina, Brazil, and a handful of other countries, Mexico has served as an important case for developing a deeper understanding of how subnational undemocratic regimes and their subnational political elites function. Therefore, we already know from existing scholarship that Mexico is a country where subnational undemocratic regimes are to be found (Giraudy, 2010, 2013). Additionally, we know from the existing literature that Mexico has all the institutional characteristics that I presented in section 2. It is a country in which political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes have a high degree of autonomy, but can at the same time potentially face intervention (Gibson, 2013; Harbers, 2010). Secondly, the institutional setting of which these subnational political elites are part consists of a democracy at the national centre, which has a certain level of state capacity, and varying levels of democratization at the subnational level (Gibson, 2013; Giraudy, 2013).

Although I elaborate more on contextual characteristics in the empirical chapters, I reflect here, at an elementary level, on the extent to which these previous conditions are present in the research contexts that I selected. To start with Mexico: it is what Harbers (2010, p. 10) calls 'a new democracy that has undergone significant decentralization.' Democratization in Mexico, kick-started by the historical loss of the PRI in 2000 (Barracca, 2004) following a 71-year lock on office, has coincided with decentralization efforts, strengthening states and making governors very powerful political actors (Ward, Rodriguez, Enrique, & Rodríguez, 1999). While governors were almost replaced at will by the president before Mexico's decentralization – backed by a constitutional provision that was crafted against the backdrop of 'belligerent regionalism' (Harbers, 2010, p. 70) – this changed under President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000). He took a more hands-off approach, even before he introduced a comprehensive decentralization plan that gave governors even more power vis-à-vis the president (Harbers, 2010; Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2015).

Zedillo's decentralization plan included fiscal decentralization and the guarantee of free and fair state-level elections, which gave governors more democratic legitimacy vis-à-vis the president. Since these efforts, judicial or executive intervention has generally only occurred when the subnational political elite has become a serious embarrassment to the central government (Hernández-Rodríguez, 2003, pp. 1005-1006). Still, while the fate of subnational political elites could become uncertain in such a case of embarrassment, intervention in Mexican states was never entirely predictable. Harbers (2010) explains that in spite of this criterion of embarrassment, certain governors have survived scandals concerning human rights violations and involvement in organized crime. This uncertainty connects to the high degree of autonomy in combination with the potential of intervention.

The second multi-level setting that was selected is India. The reason for this selection is threefold. First of all, India is not located in Latin America, but in a completely different geographical location, with a different historical context. At the same time, authors including Tudor and Ziegfeld (2016), Beer and Mitchell (2006) and Harbers, Bartman, and van Wingerden (2019) have also laid bare that India has the institutional characteristics that I presented in section 2. India is a country where subnational political elites have a high degree of autonomy but can also potentially face intervention. Also, the institutional setting consists of a democracy at the national centre, which has a certain level of state capacity, and varying levels of democratization at the subnational level. Third, India is relatively unexplored when it comes to the study of political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes, in spite of its merit of being by far the largest democracy in the world (Harbers *et al.*, 2019). Compared to Latin America, India has received scant attention within the burgeoning comparative literature on subnational regimes. This is surprising because of the vastness of India. The population of the state of Uttar Pradesh alone is larger than the population of Brazil, the most populous country in Latin America (Stancati, 2011). The quality of democracy at the state level thereby affects an extraordinary number of citizens.

Despite this lack of attention, recent scholarly efforts have uncovered the subnational differences in terms of democracy. To begin with democracy at the national level, India has been a democracy since its independence in 1947, with only a brief intermezzo during the emergency period in 1975-1977 under Indira Gandhi. At the same time, there is meaningful variation in terms of the levels of democracy at the subnational level. Tudor and Ziegfeld (2016) explain how in many Indian states Congress did not face viable opposition in the first decades after independence. Harbers *et al.* (2019) show that even though Congress has lost this hegemonic position in many states, the Bharatiya Janata Party, Communist Party of India, and local parties became hegemonic party systems in their own right in certain states. In such states, opposition parties have also failed to form a viable alternative to the incumbent. While some states, like Kerala for example, have excelled in terms of electoral competition, Gujarat and West Bengal – up till 2011 – are notable examples of states with low levels of political competition (Harbers, *et al.*, 2019).

Alongside this mix of democracy at the centre and varying levels of democracy at the subnational level, India is a decentralized country where central institutions have certain discretionary powers vis-à-vis the subnational governments. Although Indian states have their independent government, these institutions can eventually punish political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes. Examples of such institutions are the Supreme Court of India, and the President's Rule. The President's Rule is a tool

that the President of India has to suspend a subnational government and replace the elected Chief Minister – the head of the subnational government – with a centrally appointed governor (Harbers *et al.*, 2019). In practice, it is the de facto leader of the government, the Prime Minister, who can order this President’s Rule via the President (Harbers *et al.*, 2019, pp. 1161-1162).

Concluding, both Mexico and India have embedded subnational undemocratic regimes within their territory that experience subnational power uncertainty. India and Mexico are both countries in which the institutional setting is such that subnational undemocratic regimes can remain in power or emerge, and where there is subnational variation in terms of democracy. In addition, these countries are also contexts in which subnational political elites have a high degree of autonomy. At the same time however, central governments – and other central institutions – can ultimately sanction subnational political elites.

4. SUBNATIONAL CASES

Selecting India and Mexico as two contexts was only the first step within the case selection process. The second phase of the case selection process was to select subnational undemocratic regimes within these two countries, which are suited for further in-depth fieldwork studies aimed at answering the research questions. In Mexico, Veracruz was selected, and in India, Gujarat was selected. This section explains why the subnational cases were selected, and empirical chapters 5 and 6 start by reflecting more on the background of each case.

4a. Veracruz

The selection of Veracruz as the subnational Mexican case is based on the targetedness of a particular sub-class of boundary-blurring actors in that state: journalists. In Chapter 4, I arrive at that finding by asking who Mexico’s boundary-blurring actors are. After making the argument that critical, investigative journalists are good examples of boundary-blurring actors because they can increase subnational power uncertainty, I compare the homicide probabilities of journalists with homicide probabilities of journalists across Mexican states. This comparison shows that Veracruz experienced high levels of journalist targetedness, which made it a likely place to find repression of boundary-blurring actors such as journalists. In addition to this I conducted expert interviews, which I explain in further detail in section 5c, confirming the notion that Veracruz was a likely place to find the repression of journalists.

The advantage of selecting the case of Veracruz on the basis of the targetedness of journalists is that it provides a lot of information about how a specific group increased subnational power uncertainty and how a specific group was repressed. Thereby, it provides some first answers to the research questions of this dissertation. However, it leaves the question of how other types of boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty, and how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress other boundary-blurring actors, unanswered. For this reason, the Gujarati case looks at a broader group of boundary-blurring actors.

4b. Gujarat

In the case of India, I did not select a specific type of boundary-blurring actors but a specific historical event: the aftermath of the communal riots that took place in 2002. This major and infamous event caused power uncertainty for the state's elite for many years afterwards. The primary reason was that it was debated to what extent the subnational political elite of Gujarat was responsible for the communal riots, which left an estimated 2000 people dead (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2016; Davies & Nyland, 2005, p. 111). The subnational political elite was both accused of not doing enough to contain the conflict and of sanctioning the communal riots (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2016; Davies & Nyland, 2005, p. 111). While in the case of Veracruz I looked specifically at a sub-class of boundary-blurring actors, in the case of Gujarat I did not look at a sub-class of boundary-blurring actors based on their profession, but selected them because they spread compromising information concerning the communal riots. Limiting the scope of the analysis to a specific – extreme – event of compromising information enabled me to keep the category of boundary-blurring actors open and inductively analyze which actors engaged in boundary-blurring actions. It furthermore enables an analysis of how specific sub-classes of boundary-blurring actors increased subnational power uncertainty and the various ways in which the political elite of Gujarat repressed different types of boundary-blurring actors.

5. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The fact that every chapter constitutes an independent building block also resulted in different strategies of data collection. To answer the question of *how* boundary-blurring actors create subnational power uncertainty in Chapter 4, I combine a mix of semi-structured interviews made during my fieldwork in Mexico City with an analysis of different secondary data sources like newspaper articles. In addition, to get a deeper understanding of whether and where journalists are targeted, and how

this targetedness relates to subnational democracy, I use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Chapter 5 zooms in on a specific category of boundary-blurring actors – journalists – in Veracruz, and answers the question how they increased subnational power uncertainty and how they were repressed. The chapter is based on semi-structured interviews that were collected during fieldwork in Veracruz. In Chapter 6, I investigate *how* boundary-blurring actors increased subnational power uncertainty in the aftermath of the communal riots in Gujarat, and *how* the subnational political elite repressed them. Because I look at a specific historical event, I use process tracing, based on fieldwork interviews and news articles, to achieve this. In the following sub-sections, I explain these methods of data collection in more detail.

5a. Quantitative data analysis

In Chapter 4, I lay the groundwork for answering the research questions. In this chapter, I look at Mexico and identify a specific sub-class of boundary-blurring actors in the country. While expert interviews helped to identify journalists as boundary-blurring actors, they provided insufficient evidence for the notion that journalists were targeted because of their profession, and perhaps their boundary-blurring role. Since political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes deny their involvement in the murder of journalists and Mexico also suffers from rampant criminal violence that also victimizes non-journalists, it is hard to establish on the basis of interview material that journalists are specifically targeted. Data from Article 19 – the press freedom NGO that is closest to the fire when it comes to attacks on journalists – allowed me to explore the degree to which journalists are a targeted subgroup of the population in Mexican states, with regards to homicide. Rather than using this analysis to make the claim that journalists are targeted *by* political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes, it allowed to see whether journalists are targeted *in* subnational undemocratic regimes. Simultaneously, it allowed me to select a state in which this level of targetedness was striking.

The quantitative data analysis in Chapter 4 is intertwined with the qualitative data: I formulate propositions on the basis of qualitative data and collect and analyze the quantitative data thereafter. For this reason, I will explain most of the data-related and methodology-related issues of the quantitative data analysis in Chapter 4 itself. In summary: I calculate the homicide probabilities among the general population and among the sub-population of journalists, and subsequently compare them for each Mexican state. Thereafter I conduct an exact binomial test to exclude the possibility that the differences in homicide probabilities are the result of coincidence.

5b. Fieldwork

The most important data collection effort for this dissertation was the fieldwork that I conducted in Mexico and India, primarily in the states of Veracruz and Gujarat. The objective of these fieldwork trips was to gain an in-depth and micro-dynamic understanding of the questions of *how* boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty and *how* political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress them. The fieldwork interviews are both about the perceptions of respondents in relation to why they are targeted, and about material events, such as the murder of a respondent's colleague, a threat they received, or being fired as a result of spreading the scope of compromising information. To get an in-depth insight into the views of respondents, I interviewed them more than once. I also spoke to a relatively large number of people, sometimes on a regular basis, to triangulate their views with those of others.

In 2015, I spent three weeks in Mexico City – two upon arrival and one before leaving – and four months in the state of Veracruz. In Veracruz, I spoke with 41 journalists, 10 of whom I interviewed. While meeting and interviewing journalists was the main objective of the fieldwork in Veracruz, I sought to triangulate their views with people outside the community of targeted journalists. Because this community was rather closed, and they feared other public officials, I was cautious about attempting to meet with public officials. Still, in consultation with one of my journalist contacts, I met with a judge and police commander of a central Veracruz town (the name of which is not revealed for safety reasons), a press officer of the PRI, and three human rights activists. I interviewed the judge and police commander of the central Veracruz town because a journalist contact wrote a story about vigilantes combating a drug trafficking organization, Los Zetas, in the town. He explained to have received death threats because his reporting pinpointed the failing provision of security by the subnational government. The aim of conducting interviews in the town was to triangulate these statements. The interviews with the human rights activists and a press officer of the PRI were aimed at triangulating the views of journalists more generally.

In Mexico City, I was able to speak with a larger variety of actors. This is because many relevant institutions are based in Mexico City, and also because I was not in the vicinity of these journalists. For example, I spoke with two members of the Mexican intelligence community, who talked about using repression towards both journalists and rival politicians of their employers. Therefore I was able to get an important insight into how journalists are repressed. Interviewing such actors in Veracruz would have been too risky. In Mexico City I also interviewed a former special agent of the FBI, and a forensic photographer, to get a perspective on why journalists in Veracruz were

often tortured before being murdered, and what the political logic was behind using torture. I also interviewed experts that worked for civil society organizations: the director of Article 19 Mexico, a monitoring and evaluation analyst of Freedom House, an employee of Amnesty International Mexico, and two employees of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Mexico. These interviews had multiple aims: to get their views on my choice of Veracruz as a case study, to get access to the journalist community in Veracruz, and to triangulate the views of journalists with experts that had a more zoomed-out perspective on the topic. Finally, I interviewed three renowned Mexican journalists in San Diego and Amsterdam.

In 2016, I spent four months in Gujarat and in 2017 I returned to India for another three weeks of fieldwork in Gujarat and Delhi. In India, I interviewed fewer, but more powerful people. The reason for this difference relates to the difference in focus between the chapters on Veracruz and Gujarat. As opposed to the chapter on Veracruz, Chapter 6 is not about the repression of a certain sub-class of boundary-blurring actors, but an extreme case of compromising information: the alleged involvement of the subnational political elite in the communal riots of 2002. The people that carried compromising information on this event were often people that were high up in the political hierarchy themselves. For example, I spoke repeatedly with three of the most important former security officials of the state and the former Chief Minister, three prominent investigative journalists, a Jesuit priest, and a professor of economics. These were all important boundary-blurring actors that accused the Gujarati subnational political elite of sanctioning the communal riots. In addition to these prominent actors, I also interviewed multiple survivors of the riots, and multiple activists, in order to get a more complete picture of the event itself. In Delhi, I interviewed two journalists from a magazine that reported on the communal riots: *Tehelka*. In addition, I interviewed three lawyers that worked at the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court and two lawyers of the Supreme Court. This was to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which central institutions can intervene in subnational politics. In Appendix 4 I provide a complete – partly anonymized – overview of my respondents.

5c. Access & security measures for Mexico

My fieldwork started in 2015 in Mexico City, where I met people from human rights organizations and other international organizations. While the idea was to plan a fieldwork trip to Veracruz – where I knew, on the basis of journalists' homicide data, that journalists faced high levels of targeting – I spent two weeks in the capital to talk to human rights practitioners to also ask their opinion. I spoke to people from Article 19, Amnesty International, Freedom House, the Office of the High Commissioner of

Human Rights, and people that were experts on the topic but did not work for these institutions. These conversations confirmed that Veracruz is a state where journalists were targeted with repression. In addition, Article 19 Mexico provided me with data on the attacks on journalists – which I use in Chapter 4 – that confirmed this even more. These expert interviews not only helped me to select a fieldwork case, but they also provided data and helped me to answer my research questions.

Veracruz was considered an extremely dangerous place for journalists at the time of fieldwork, both by Mexicans, and by international organizations that kept track of attacks on journalists. In addition, Veracruz was a strategically important place for drug trafficking organizations because of its large port and relatively high levels of crime in general. This was enough reason to think about safety precautions, and about ways in which the security of my respondents and myself could be maximized.

This strategy consisted of multiple steps. First of all, I thought about a precaution against escalating threats in case of a rapidly deteriorating security situation. Together with my supervisors and the corporate risk manager of the University of Amsterdam, I insured myself with a private security company called the Ackerman Group. This organization would act in the event of something like kidnapping for ransom – which is a common phenomenon in Veracruz, and Mexico more in generally – or if I was exposed to another deteriorating security situation. In addition, the company had a 24-hour hotline that could be used throughout my fieldwork period and could provide me with security-related information that was less aggregated than the information that embassies and foreign ministries could provide.

This emergency strategy was supplemented with a strategy that I would use on a day-to-day basis. This strategy consisted of the prioritization of the protection of my sources (see section 5d), relative openness about what I was doing in Veracruz, and a slow transition into the field. The value of this latter element is perhaps the least tangible, but nonetheless crucial. Without a slow pace in terms of getting into the community of journalists in Veracruz, it is questionable whether I would have gained access in the first place. Also, I considered being in a rush to get ‘data’ potentially harmful with regard to the security of my respondents and myself, since it would have put pressure on arranging meetings and interviews without having the time to assess the security situation. An important security measure was thus simply the relatively long time – four months – I was granted to do fieldwork.

The transition into the community of journalists started with a meeting with the security team of Article 19, which is in contact with journalists that are targeted on a daily basis. They brought me in contact with two local Veracruzán journalists, Rubén Espinosa and Salvador, who would meet me and get me acquainted with the situation in Veracruz. In addition, I could stay in the house of a Mexican friend in a suburban

neighbourhood of Puerto Veracruz, the state's largest city. From that position, I started to meet with my contacts in the most informal settings possible, such as taking a walk on the street, or meeting in a coffee house or *mescalería* – a local bar. These meetings helped to build trust and friendship between my respondents and I.

Slowly but surely, I started to plan more structured interviews with Rubén Espinosa and Salvador outside of the city centre. We met in quiet cafés where they knew the owners, and where they had the feeling they were safest. At the same time, they started to introduce me to their fellow journalists, who I then also met. With most of them, I met in Puerto Veracruz (the largest city) and Xalapa (the capital). In almost all cases I let my respondents decide where to meet and trusted their judgment with regard to what was a safe place. In most cases, these were public places with some people around but not too many.

The idea of 'snowballing' my way slowly into the journalist community was to make journalists comfortable with my presence. Having plenty of time in Veracruz was meant to give journalists the time to assess whether and where they would meet with me. When I met with them, I was completely open about my research objectives. In case authorities or suspicious actors questioned me, the idea was also to be open about the fact that I was a social scientist and was doing research in Veracruz. However, the idea was to frame my research in depoliticized terms. I would emphasize my position as a scholar, rather than being a journalist.

Ultimately, I never had to explain my research to people that I did not want to. More generally, I did not feel under threat, apart from one occasion during which one of my contacts told me to go 'back to Mexico City for a little while' and come back after to make sure my presence would not be too obvious. This reminded me of the fact that threats do not have to be visible, and that were it always possible to anticipate threats, not as many journalists in Veracruz would have been murdered.

Two months after fieldwork my contact Rubén Espinosa was tortured and murdered, as I described in more detail in the introduction chapter. Almost immediately after, my other contact Salvador fled to Chile to avoid the same fate. While I experienced this as very extreme, I knew that in reality, to use slightly positivist language, I 'selected myself into' the situation. Such brutal murders and forced displacements also took place before I started my fieldwork, and it would be unrealistic to expect that these killings would stop after it. Still, these murders gave substantial direction to this dissertation – as I explained in the introduction chapter – and also gave direction in terms of research ethics, for example about whether or not to anonymize my interviews. As a result of these extreme events, although I had planned to go back to Veracruz for fieldwork, I did not return. Additionally, I decided to anonymize all my interviews, with the exception of the interviews with people that

were later murdered and about whom the information that makes them vulnerable is already publicly available. While I will continue to reflect on these matters in the upcoming sections, the book 'Research, Ethics, and Risk, in the Authoritarian Field,' for which my fieldwork has served as a contribution, takes a deeper dive into themes related to precarious fieldwork and also discusses topics like 'mental impact,' which I will not discuss in this dissertation.

5d. Access & security measures for India

In India, I decided to use the same strategy of prioritizing the protection of my sources, relative openness about my research ambitions and transitioning slowly into the field. To start with the latter, just like in Veracruz, I started my fieldwork with having a few reliable and helpful contacts that helped me to gain access to the people I wanted to speak to. But instead of going to the capital first, to speak to practitioners and experts, I went straight to Gujarat. The reason was that I already had a preliminary network there. I spent 6 months in West Bengal to research Maoist cadres two years prior to my fieldwork in Gujarat. As a result, some well-connected trade unionists were able to put me in contact with Gujarati people that were willing to help me gain access to those who had been engaged in information politics regarding the 2002 massacres.

The first fieldwork period in Gujarat, in 2014, lasted 4 months. I spent most of the time in Ahmedabad, where most of the boundary-blurring actors that I interviewed resided. In addition, I occasionally travelled to Gandhinagar – the political capital of Gujarat – for interviews. While I tried to transition slowly into the field, the relationships that I built with my respondents were less informal than in Veracruz. Although I did meet my respondents for less structured meetings, I did not hang out in cafes with them. Instead, I mostly met them in their houses. As I knew from earlier visits to India, it is commonplace to invite someone into your house as a sign of politeness. Still, during first meetings I sought to establish a personal connection before talking about repression. I let them ask questions about me, my research interests, and other issues before I asked to meet for an interview.

While murder was far less common in Gujarat than in Veracruz, and my respondents did not talk about their tortured and murdered friends, meeting with my respondents in their houses revealed that they sometimes experienced insecurities. Some of my respondents were guarded by private security or by military police with machine guns that guarded their houses. Therefore, I was reminded of the fact that even though Gujarat seemed safer, I could not take this relative safety for granted.

In addition to having the time to let my respondents decide about whether and how to meet me, I planned to be relatively open about my research should I face

questions by authorities or suspicious actors. I memorized a depoliticized story that consisted of concepts like ‘party politics in Gujarat.’ Yet, also in the case of Gujarat, I never had to talk about my research to people that I did not trust. After returning from the field for several months, I went back to New Delhi for interviews with journalists that worked in Gujarat but were based in New Delhi, and to interview people that worked for judicial institutions.

5e. Sampling, protection of sources and respondents

During fieldwork, I used the snowball sampling method, also called the chain-referral method (Tansey, 2007). Compared to other types of non-probability sampling, such as quota sampling or convenience sampling, snowball sampling can be used when populations are ‘hidden’ (Babbie, 1995). Research on issues like illegal activities is an example where such a strategy is useful (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). In the case of interviewing boundary-blurring actors, such as journalists, this strategy is not of lesser importance. Also for my fieldwork, the population of interest was only partly known and started to become visible after months of fieldwork.

Apart from the fact that snowball sampling is a fitting sampling strategy when a population is hidden, or at least partly hidden, and it is not possible to identify your population beforehand, it still gives possibilities to steer the sampling process, and to ensure that the sampling remains within the boundaries of the research (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Here the practice of doing research was messier. Because I was not yet completely focused on boundary-blurring actors when I entered the field, but it was partly my fieldwork experience that gave this direction, I interviewed people that now fall outside of the scope of my research. This was especially the case in Mexico, where my focus on boundary-blurring actors emerged. There, I interviewed local activists and vigilantes in rural Veracruz, for example, who I did not count as boundary-blurring actors. But this is a problem of having too much data rather than too little.

In terms of protecting the identity of my respondents, I chose the ‘hardware option’ within the Authoritarianism in a Global Age team. In short, this means that data is saved on hard disks instead of external servers. The direct trade-off is that data becomes less vulnerable to online theft but more vulnerable to non-digital theft. For this dissertation, I anonymized most of my interviews – which means that I gave them a pseudonym that consists only of a first name – since the majority of my respondents had received some form of repression or could be vulnerable to it in the future. Respondents are not anonymized if they have since been killed or the information that makes them vulnerable is already publicly available. In Appendix 4, the information about the respondents that can give away their identity is

censored. The recording notes and the non-anonymized list of respondents are kept by me on an offline laptop and stored for 10 years by the principal investigator of the Authoritarianism in a Global Age project. Only the dissertation committee and members of the project are granted access to these documents, upon request.

I refer to the people that I spoke to as respondents here. The problem with the term respondents – or perhaps worse: ‘informants’ – is that it can obscure the fact that ‘respondents’ are not just responding to questions but are also part of an interactive process of knowledge sharing. Having said that, the terms ‘research participants’ or ‘interlocutors’ – referring to the mutual process of unlocking and interpreting information – can obscure the power that a researcher has to influence research outcomes. For this reason, I use the term respondents while noting that – of course – my respondents were not *just* respondents.

5f. Unstructured and semi-structured interviews

For all of my fieldwork, in Mexico City, Veracruz, Gujarat, and New Delhi, I used a mix of unstructured and semi-structured interviews. As I explained in the previous sections, I often had informal meetings with my respondents before planning more structured interviews. This was especially the case with respondents that found themselves in a precarious security situation. In such cases, in the initial meeting I did not take notes, but in later conversations I asked if I could record the conversation or could take notes. In the case of interviews with boundary-blurring actors, I ended up structuring my interviews more. While my interviews were not based on questionnaires, I wrote down what I ultimately wanted to know and get out of the interview. This resulted in writing down some interview objectives.

To conclude, the level of structure of the interviews ultimately depended on the setting and the security situation of my respondent. Apart from my interviews with boundary-blurring actors, I also interviewed experts and politicians. These were generally, but not always, much more structured, since the settings in which the interviews took place were more formal. To give the most structured interview as an example: I spoke to the public relations officer of a PRI Deputy from Veracruz, who wanted me to send a list of questions in advance of the interview. After sending the list of questions, he sent me back his response. The strong disadvantage of this procedure was that by the formal character of the correspondence, I was unable to ask direct questions about repression. For this reason, I preferred more informal meetings. In contrast with the previous example, I also spoke to a young intelligence officer in Mexico City, via a friend in Mexico City. During that conversation, which did not take place in an office but at my friend’s house, he was brutally open about repressing journalists.

5g. Process tracing

Chapter 6, which deals with the repression of boundary-blurring actors in Gujarat, zooms in on a specific historical event: the aftermath of the communal riots. Because this chapter focuses on a specific historical event, it allows the use of process tracing and the analysis of how repression evolves over a specific period of time. Process tracing here is understood as a qualitative methodology that can inductively lay bare causal mechanisms. However, more broadly, process tracing is suitable to bring ‘theory and data in close proximity’ (Checkel, 2005, p. 22) by analyzing ‘highly specific events and processes,’ in which direct witnesses to the events in question are included (Ibid., 2005, p. 22). In the case of Gujarat, I use these advantages of process tracing not to look at causal mechanisms, but to unravel the dynamic processes that constitute the answers to the how-questions.

To lay bare the actual processes, it was crucial to sort data on the basis of chronology. Concretely, this meant that I looked at the dynamics between the expansion of information by boundary-blurring actors and repression, in the fifteen years after the communal riots. Most of data that I used for this was the fieldwork interview data that I gathered in Gujarat, but I complemented it with newspaper data. When it comes to certain specific events, I reconstructed processes on the basis of a combination of both. The benefit of process tracing is that it allows a more detailed exploration of patterns. Following certain actors over time gives a more fine-grained answer to *how* boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty and *how* political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress them.

This chapter has explained the case selection and data-collection methods of this dissertation, which I use in the upcoming three empirical chapters. This first is the next chapter, which empirically explores my theory in Mexico. In that chapter, I provide the first answers to the research questions by looking at how a specific subclass of boundary-blurring actors – journalists – can increase subnational power uncertainty for political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes and how political elites of these regimes repress them.

CHAPTER 4

The Targeting of Journalists in Mexico¹

1. INTRODUCTION

In September 2014, in Mexico, the Cancún-based – but more widely circulated – investigative magazine *Luces del Siglo* won a court decision that ordered the Quintana Roo state government to stop “cloning” the covers of its weekly editions and spreading fake versions of the magazine via social networks (Agren, 2014; “Gobernador de Q. Roo,” 2014). A federal judge prohibited members of the government of Quintana Roo from taking covers with critical headlines and swapping the text and artwork for headlines more favourable to subnational public officials (Agren, 2014; “Gobernador de Q. Roo,” 2014). This is a practical example of how subnational political elites in Mexico care about compromising information, and how they try to deal with it.

The first objective of this chapter is to investigate whether and how boundary-blurring actors can increase subnational power uncertainty in Mexico. I do that by zooming in on a particular sub-class of boundary-blurring actors: journalists. The second objective is to build a bridge between the question of how these boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty, and the question of how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress them. While I do not answer this latter question in this chapter, I analysis state-level patterns in terms of the targetedness of journalists. I demonstrate that journalists are not just an important group of boundary-blurring actors, but that they are also a specifically targeted subgroup of the population in multiple Mexican states.

The analysis of the targetedness of journalists demonstrates that journalists are targeted *in* subnational undemocratic regimes and that their targeting is unlikely to be a corollary of general or organized criminal violence. These findings raise the suspicion that journalists are indeed targeted by the political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes. For this reason, I use my state-level analysis of patterns of journalist targeting as a tool to select a subnational undemocratic regime where journalists experience high levels of targeting. Selecting such a case provides the groundwork to further investigate *how* journalists increase subnational power uncertainty and *how* the political elite of a particular subnational undemocratic regime represses journalists.

This chapter proceeds by explaining how certain journalists stand out as boundary-blurring actors in Mexico, and by investigating whether and how they can create subnational power uncertainty for subnational political elites. In Section 3, I demonstrate that attacks on journalists vary substantially across Mexican states. After that I zoom in on the most severe type of attacks that journalists face in Mexico: homicides. In order to analyze whether journalist killings in Mexico are targeted, journalist homicide rates are compared with general homicide rates and an exact

binomial test is executed to account for coincidence. In Section 4, I argue on the basis of organized crime homicide data that organized crime alone cannot account for the targetedness of journalists, and in Section 5 I argue that this targetedness is especially prominent in those states that have structural problems with democracy. This latter argument foreshadows Chapter 5, which continues with an in-depth case study of a subnational undemocratic regime to investigate how journalists are targeted in such a state.

2. JOURNALISTS AND SUBNATIONAL POWER UNCERTAINTY IN MEXICO

To recapitulate one of the central theoretical mechanisms of this dissertation: The spread of compromising information can enhance subnational power uncertainty by increasing the risk of losing future elections and increasing the risk of interference by central institutions. So far, however, this is a theory that has not been empirically explored, albeit one drawn from multiple existing theoretical and empirical insights. Even the question of whether boundary-blurring actors that increase subnational power uncertainty really exist is not empirically explored yet. In this chapter I argue that boundary-blurring actors do indeed exist, at least in the case of Mexico, and that they can be a threat to the subnational political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes.

2a. Boundary-blurring actors in Mexico

I argue that certain journalists, specifically critical and investigative journalists, are an important subclass of boundary-blurring actors in Mexico. Critical not in the sense that they criticize government policies in broad terms, but in the sense that they investigate or report on issues like corruption, embezzlement, human rights abuses, and the link between organized crime and politics. These are topics I defined in the theory chapter as ‘compromising information.’ In addition, these boundary-blurring actors are journalists that investigate or report on these issues at the subnational level, and not at the central level. However, while they write about issues that mainly concern the subnational political elite, they are not only able to reach a part of the subnational electorate, but also potentially the national public sphere.

In Mexico, corruption and political links with organized crime are widespread. This could lead to the expectation that reporting about such instances does not have an effect on the people that engage in these practices. Especially because, as

discussed in the next sections, subnational political elites more often than not go unpunished for issues like corruption. I argue, however, that critical journalists can still have an effect on subnational undemocratic regimes. In Section 2c, I argue that critical journalists can increase subnational power uncertainty, especially when they are able to 'prove' a certain act of power abuse and are able to extend the scope of such compromising information.

While critical journalists in Mexico are an important group of boundary-blurring actors, this does not mean that they are the only ones. A local investigator, human rights lawyer, whistle-blower, activist, or group of publicity-seeking citizens can engage in similar activities to critical journalists. While I argue on the basis of anecdotal historical material and expert interviews that critical journalists are an important group of boundary-blurring actors in Mexico, this should not be confused with the notion that they are the only boundary-blurring actors.

In addition to the substantial argument that critical journalists can increase subnational power uncertainty, journalists are the subclass of potential boundary-blurring actors in Mexico about which there is systematic and reliable data available. Throughout this chapter, I use several data sources, including census data and data about attacks on journalists. Mexican census data shows how many journalists live in each region, and Article 19 data can be used to analyze how many of those face attacks. While it would be interesting to look at other types of boundary-blurring actors, similar data on activists or whistle-blowers is unavailable in Mexico.

2b. Press freedom in Mexico

Before I analyze how journalists can have an impact on subnational power uncertainty in Mexico, it is crucial to note that Mexican journalists do not operate in a free and open environment to begin with. In 2015, the year renowned journalist Rubén Espinosa was killed, Freedom House defined the press in Mexico as 'not free,' stating that Mexico had experienced a five-year period of decline in press freedom since 2010 (Freedom House, 2015). An important part of the designation of 'unfree' resulted from the limited pluralism within the Mexican media landscape and the dependence of media on government money.

The lack of pluralism within Mexico's media landscape is reflected in both newspaper and broadcasting media. To start with the latter, Freedom House reported in 2015 that 70% of the television market is controlled by Televisa, which maintains a close relationship with the PRI and was even accused of colluding with the then PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto during the election campaign of 2012 (Freedom House, 2015). In terms of newspaper media, Freedom House reports government

advertisements as one of the main problems in terms of a free press. In 2015, the central Mexican government spent \$905 million on government advertisements in newspapers, leading to many newspaper outlets slanting their news coverage in order to get more favourable contracts with the government (Freedom House, 2015). In addition, state governments spend large sums of money on advertisements, with the exact amount spent often opaque (Ruelas Serna & Dupuy, 2013).

In addition to the co-optation of media outlets in Mexico, uncritical, slanted or partisan journalism can also result from a direct relationship between government officials and journalists. Hughes and Márquez-Ramírez (2017) explain that self-censorship is widespread in Mexico and that journalists are often lured into envelope journalism, meaning that they write certain articles in exchange for money or refrain from writing certain articles in exchange for money. While Chapter 5 reflects more in depth on how envelope journalism works in practice at the subnational level, zooming in on the state of Veracruz, it is important for this chapter to understand that envelope journalism constitutes an important limitation in terms of press freedom in Mexico.

That there are certain limitations to press freedom in Mexico does not therefore imply that critical media and critical journalists do not exist at all. There are newspapers that report about compromising information, both in the capital and in Mexican states. Notable examples of critical media in the capital are *La Jornada*, *Proceso*, *Sin Embargo*, *Animal Político*, and *Cuartoscuro*. *La Jornada* is a leading left-wing Mexico City newspaper, which has a reputation of reporting critically. Although it received \$1 million in 2017 in exchange for government advertisements in order to stay out of financial peril, it has been known to criticize subnational political elites (Ahmed, 2017). *Proceso* is an investigative journal that has the strongest reputation in terms of spreading compromising information and has brought numerous corruption scandals to light. Essentially, it is their purpose to spread compromising information. *Sin Embargo* and *Animal Político* are critical online magazines, and *Cuartoscuro* is a critical photojournalism magazine.

Critical media outlets in Mexico can sometimes publish compromising information about the country's political elite. A notorious example of such an event is the casa blanca scandal during which journalist Carmen Aristegui revealed that a favoured government contractor built a multi-million dollar house for the president and his wife (Tuckman, 2016). While the scandal did not have immediate personal consequences for the president or his surrounding political elite, it did lead to a decrease in the popularity of his government (Ibid., 2016).

Media outlets from the capital do not just operate in the capital itself but also have correspondents at the subnational level in Mexico. In addition, there are also journalists that work for state-level media outlets and report about compromising information. There are also independent critical journalists that collaborate with both state-level media outlets and national-level media outlets at the same time. I demonstrate in the next section how these journalists can spread compromising information about subnational political elites and can thereby increase power uncertainty. This subnational power uncertainty differs from the uncertainty that a national-level political elite can experience, because subnational political elites in Mexico suffer more from the threat of interference by central institutions than the national political elite.

2c. The impact of journalists on subnational political elites in Mexico

Is there empirical evidence that compromising information can threaten subnational political elites in Mexico, and that critical journalists play a role in this mechanism by increasing subnational power uncertainty? First of all, it is important to note that certain actions which have the potential to become compromising information may never reach the public sphere. As the previously used ‘skeletons in the closet’ metaphor already suggests, certain compromising information can simply remain hidden. But what is more important is that compromising information regarding subnational political elites can go unpunished even if it is uncovered and becomes known to the subnational electorate and/or the national public sphere. Members of subnational political elites in Mexico, including governors, who have been formally accused of crimes relating to embezzlement and corruption have, more often than not, not faced any juridical process or alternation in power as a result (Langston, 2017).

In addition to the possible non-occurrence of punishment by the subnational electorate or the interference of central judicial institutions, the central political elites in Mexico have a history of abstaining from internally prosecuting subnational co-partisans that have been formally accused of activities like corruption and embezzlement (Langston, 2017). The reason for the party elite not to interfere as a result of compromising information becoming public is the same as the reason behind the central party elite allowing subnational undemocratic regimes: the president and the central party elite in Mexico rely heavily on subnational co-allies during elections and mid-term races, both in terms of resources and manpower (Ibid., 2017).

Compromising information that reaches the subnational electorate and/or national public sphere does not automatically lead to intervention by central institutions in

Mexico. However the crucial point is that it *can*. Certain events, all taking place in the last five years, show that political elites of certain Mexican states have been affected by the spread of compromising information up to the point that governors have fled their state in order to avoid criminal prosecution. Below I reflect on such instances of subnational power uncertainty.

Roberto Borge, former governor of the state of Quintana Roo, fled the state after media reports by critical journalists accused him of embezzling public funds (Águila Arreola, 2016). After a journalist presented the evidence of embezzlement to the Chamber of Deputies, NGOs and activists demanded his impeachment (Varillas, 2016). In a similar vein, César Duarte, former governor of Chihuahua, was accused of running a year-long embezzlement scheme by the journalist Miroslava Breach (“UN Announces Award,” 2018). After the news spread widely in Mexico, the governor fled to the United States, where he was found months later (“Fugitive Chihuahua Governor,” 2018). A similar course of events took place with governors Duarte de Ochoa from Veracruz and Tomás Yarrington from Tamaulipas. Tomás Yarrington was accused of corruption and being involved in organized crime –specifically of having connections to the Zetas organized crime group – after which he fled to Italy (Agren, 2017a). Governor Javier Duarte de Ochoa fled to Guatemala after investigative reporters from the website *Animal Politico* reported that he and his close associates siphoned millions of pesos into a series of shell corporations (Agren, 2017a). After these accusations, the federal Attorney General filed organized crime charges (“¿Se Le Escapó Javier,” 2016; Malkin, 2017; Noel, 2019).

These relatively recent events demonstrate that, although corruption and embezzlement are widespread in Mexico, subnational political elites can experience an increase in subnational power uncertainty when journalists are able to provide evidence of corruption to the point that it becomes undeniable, and/or are able to publish details of such actions on a wide scale. The fact that governors flee after compromising information becomes publicly known means that they do not trust blindly that central institutions will neither interfere nor prosecute them. This relates to the concept of subnational power uncertainty: compromising information increases uncertainty, rather than being an absolute guarantee of interference by central institutions or losing state elections. Moreover, these events highlight that journalists are important boundary-blurring actors in getting compromising information out into the public realm, thereby affecting the fate of subnational political elites. Multiple important actors of Mexico’s civil society endorse the notion that critical journalists can adversely affect the fate of subnational political elites. Dario Ramirez, then director of Article 19 Mexico and Central America, explained this during an interview:

'Journalists can cause trouble for the people at the top in certain states. In a state like Veracruz the PRI is quite comfortable. Imagine that in certain states the PRI has been in power since the Mexican Revolution. That's longer than the Soviet Union existed. So they have learned how to deal with the elections. And journalists that are not working for bribes can sometimes hurt them when they report about something that really shows how corrupt or criminal someone is. I mean in Mexico corruption is widespread, but the question is whether it really becomes undeniable. In that way, journalists can be more of a threat to these regimes than the opposition parties' (Interview Darío Ramírez, 2015).

While Article 19 is an NGO that focuses specifically on the freedom of speech and freedom of the press, other NGOs also affirmed the importance of journalists when it comes to the uncertainty that subnational political elites experience. An associate human rights expert from the United Nations Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights explained:

'This is Mexico. Things are so corrupt here. The PRI is entirely corrupt and especially certain states are just crazy. Everybody knows it here, everybody. It's not a secret. But yes, if certain things become known or get out of hand then this might be a problem for the people involved. A mayor organizing a party together with narcos, or a governor having huge pieces of land which that person cannot possibly own with his salary could be that. If journalists or investigators find this out, this might be a problem' (Interview Emmanuel, 2015).

A monitoring and evaluation analyst of Freedom House, working in Mexico City, affirmed the notion that journalists can cause trouble for subnational political elites:

'Some journalists can cause trouble for the elites. I mean Mexico is still a democracy. We all know that there is a lot of corruption here but if it comes out for example that Enrique Peña Nieto has bought a multi-million dollar house for his wife then this is still a problem. The same counts for a governor or some high-level official. Not every secret comes out in the end. So investigations matter at the end of the day. And there are some journalists that write about these issues' (interview Camila, 2015).

Also in the eyes of experts that were interviewed, critical journalists that investigate and report about compromising information involving these subnational political elites seem to create vulnerability for these elites, which in this dissertation is defined as subnational power uncertainty. The investigations of journalists can either inform

central institutions about compromising information that was unknown before, or they can put pressure on central institutions to interfere in subnational politics by getting the compromising information into the national public sphere.

There are concrete examples of critical journalists having a direct effect on central institutions that can affect subnational political elites. But in addition, it is likely that the subnational power uncertainty also diffuses. While it did not come out of the data directly, it is likely that when a governor of one state flees as a result of critical news reports, political elites of other states with skeletons in their closet also experience uncertainty, because they fear that the same could happen to them. It is therefore not unreasonable to imagine that reports of critical journalists have affected subnational power uncertainty beyond the subnational political elites that they are spreading information about. However, while there are good reasons to expect that subnational political elites fear this, this mechanism could not be established by the data.

3. THE TARGETING OF JOURNALISTS IN MEXICAN STATES

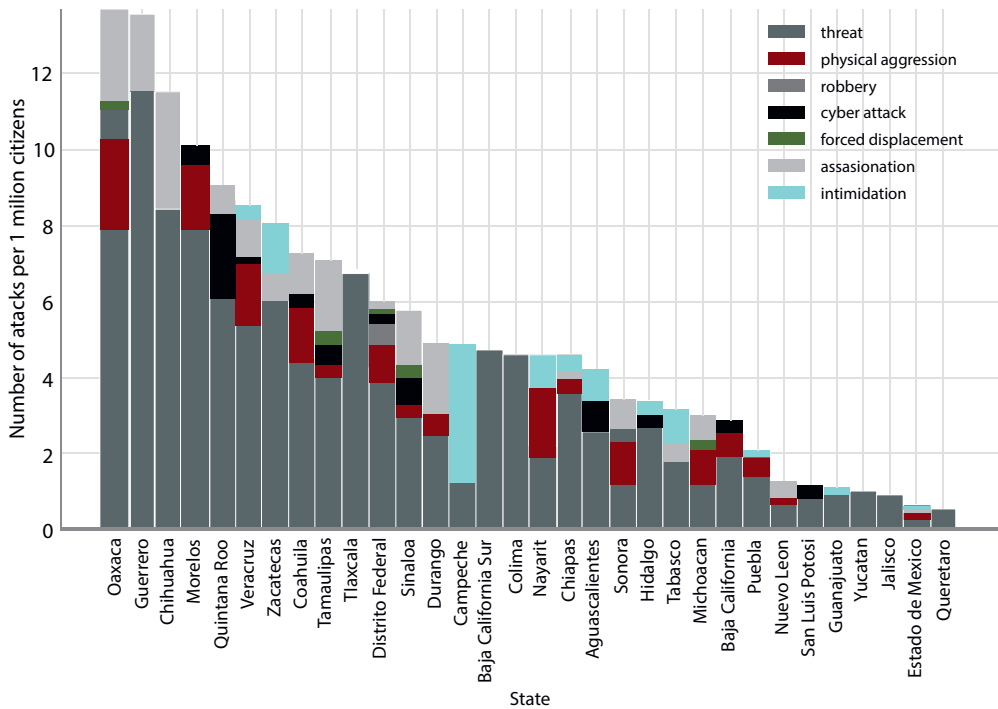
The fact that journalists can be a threat to subnational political elites that have certain skeletons in the closet is a reason to expect that the actors that can be affected by these journalists may target them with repression. While the next sub-sections do not investigate the direct link between subnational political elites and repression towards journalists, it explores data on the attacks on journalists. After that, I investigate on the basis of homicide data whether 1) there is subnational variation in terms of the attacks on journalists in Mexico, and 2) whether they are a targeted subgroup of the population in certain Mexican states.

3a. Attacks on journalists in Mexico

While there are multiple non-governmental organizations concerned with the freedom of the press in Mexico, such as Freedom House and Amnesty International, Article 19 is the organization that is closest to the fire when it comes to attacks on journalists in Mexican states. Their Mexico City-based office staff is in touch with critical journalists on a regular basis and systematically documents attacks on journalists in Mexico. They have a research team that keeps track of the attacks on journalists by keeping direct contact with journalists, systematically looking at news articles, and cross-checking newspaper articles about attacks on journalists with fieldwork-based investigations (Interview Valentina, 2017). In order to have a complete picture their raw database, which runs from 2007 to 2013, was made available for this study and

reveals strong variation in terms of attacks on journalists. Attacks include threats, physical attacks, attacks on the property of journalists such as their cameras, cyber attacks, assassination, and forced displacement. In total 1982 attacks on journalists took place in Mexico in the period 2007–2013. The stacked bar graph of Figure 5 gives a state-level overview of the seven categories of attacks that Article 19 distinguishes in their database and shows the state-level unevenness of these attacks.

Figure 5: Different types of attacks on journalists across Mexican states



This figure demonstrates the seven types of attacks on journalists that Article 19 distinguishes per million citizens. ‘Threat’ denotes an indirect verbal threat, for example over the phone. ‘Physical aggression’ means any type of infringement apart from assassination. ‘Cyber attack’ denotes any type of attack that is directed towards a journalist, including DDoS attacks on the platforms in which journalists write or store their articles. ‘Forced displacement’ refers to journalists that flee their homes as a result of any other type of attack. Finally, ‘intimidation’ includes threats that are directed towards journalists on the street (Article 19, 2017). The data is based on a combination of newspaper data collection and self-reporting, which means that individuals can be represented more than once in the data.

3b. Journalist homicides in Mexico

Among all the different types of attacks on journalists in Mexico, homicides are the gravest, most concrete, and most disruptive. Article 19 reports that 64 journalists

were assassinated in the period 2007 – 2013 (Article 19, 2017). This makes Mexico, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (2019), one of the most dangerous countries to work in as a journalist. It is important to note that this high level of journalist killings fits the disturbing global trend that local journalists are now more often the targets of homicide than war correspondents (Cottle *et al.*, 2016). Unlike war correspondents, who can leave frontline hazards periodically, local Mexican journalists cannot (Feinstein, 2013).

While homicides are very concrete and observable events in comparison to cyber attacks for example, in Mexico it is often unclear who the culprits of the homicides are, and so the precise nature of the relationship between journalists murders and subnational political elites is unknown. This relates to Mexico's weak rule of law, emblematic of which is the high levels of crime that remain in legal limbo (Buscaglia & Ulen, 1997): Homicide leads to an arrest in only 20% of cases (Leucona, 2010); while around 90% of convictions in Mexico are currently based on confessions, with virtually no physical evidence ("Criminal Justice in Mexico," 2016) and only in a minority of cases do defendants appear before a judge (Ibid., 2016). While judicial institutions often fail to investigate serious crimes like murder, convictions can be dubious, highlighting not only that many guilty go free but also that innocent people are falsely convicted. The weak rule of law is also evidenced by how human rights violations and attacks against the press are judicially addressed. In terms of journalist killings, 91% of the cases are not dealt with by the law (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2019; 2020), and on the rare occasions that the killing of a journalist leads to arrests, convictions are often considered scapegoating events by critics ("Mexican Photojournalist Found Dead," 2015). Equally in the case of attacks on journalists, only a negligible number have been addressed (Article 19, 2017).

3c. Two competing narratives about journalist homicides

An important aspect of journalist homicides in Mexico is that since the investigations into the murder of journalists usually do not reveal perpetrators or their paymasters, it remains unclear whether critical journalists are targeted or not, and whether subnational political elites are involved in these killings. Are journalists in Mexico the victims of general violence, or (perhaps politically) targeted violence? General violence (or general criminal violence) refers to the type of criminal violence that is not targeted towards a certain group, like journalists. Either organized crime groups or individual aggressors can instigate this type of violence. The high levels of homicides and organized crime homicides in Mexico make it hard to judge whether the killing of a journalist is the result of general violence or targeted, and even political, violence (Schedler, 2014). In the following sub-sections I outline two

separate narratives: journalists as victims of general criminal violence and journalists as victims of targeted political violence. Both narratives end with the formulation of the observable implications of these narratives and their connecting propositions that will be empirically tested. Eventually, the testing of these propositions establishes whether journalists are targeted in Mexican states, and more generally, whether they are targeted in subnational undemocratic regimes.

3d. Journalists as the victims of general violence

The general violence problem in Mexico is hard to overestimate. While Mexico's homicide rate – 21.1 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2016 – is close to the Latin American regional average (Heinle, Rodríguez Ferreira, & Shirk, 2017), homicides have left more than 10,000 people dead each year since 2007 (INEGI, 2018). This violence has been increasing since Felipe Calderón declared a war on drug trafficking organizations in 2007 and increased military actions against drug trafficking organizations (Ibid., 2018). Using data on organized crime, Schedler (2015) shows that over 16,000 homicides in 2011 can be attributed to organized crime.

The official narrative in Mexico is that the murders of journalists are untargeted and apolitical. Local and federal officials in Mexico systematically claim that journalists are the unfortunate victims of rampant general violence. They generally deny that journalist murders are politically motivated, even when such allegations are made. In 2015, after critical photojournalist Rubén Espinosa was murdered in Veracruz, public concerns were raised about the involvement of state-level officials in the murder and even about the involvement of the Governor of Veracruz. As a response to these accusations, the state government of Veracruz denied any involvement in the murder and pointed to general violence instead (“Mexican Photojournalist Found Dead,” 2015). The Governor of Veracruz declared that the accusation that the murder was a targeted act of repression was a “public lynching” to cover up the real culprits (Goldman, 2015).

Generally, federal officials also dismiss claims that the murder of journalists is politically motivated. To continue with the example of the Rubén Espinosa murder, Federal District Attorney Rodolfo Ríos Garza claimed during a press conference shortly after the homicide that the killing should not be seen in relation to Espinosa's work as a critical journalist (Goldman, 2015; Consultor Online MX, 2015). Another federal official also dismissed the claim that the killing of Rubén Espinosa was politically motivated. He emphasized the fact that there is a federal mechanism to protect threatened journalists in Mexico. One of the federal provisions is that journalists can request protection. He explained that Rubén Espinosa never did this, and that

it was thereby not logical to connect the murder to his work (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2015b).

The narrative of murdered journalists as non-targeted and apolitical is far from limited to the state of Veracruz: such sentiments are widely voiced in Mexico, at both the federal level and state level. To follow up with one more example: on June 2017, when the burnt remains of Salvador Adame, a journalist from Michoacán, were found, state-level officials reacted in a similar way to the Rubén Espinosa case. In spite of the allegations that the murder was political, prosecutor José Martín Godoy stated that the murder was not connected to the journalist's work, but rather the result of a "personal dispute" (Agren, 2017b).

Rampant criminal violence in Mexico, which affects not only journalists but also many other citizens, makes it difficult to know whether journalists are targeted because of their work or for political reasons. The official narrative holds that attacks on journalists are a corollary of high levels of violence. In a country with low levels of violence, this argument would be unimaginable. In addition, the manner in which journalists are killed does not always suggest that they were targeted. While most journalists were abducted from their homes or on the street and killed shortly thereafter, some incidents appear more chaotic and spontaneous. To illustrate: the murder of Rubén Espinosa left four others present in the apartment dead (Goldman, 2015). Although this number of people being killed together with a journalist might be uniquely high, journalists do sometimes get killed together with bystanders, which strengthens the idea that journalists can be the victims of general criminal violence.

The official narrative that journalists are the victims of general criminal violence has an important observable implication, namely that journalists would be at the same risk of being murdered as the general population. This leads to the first testable proposition:

P1: The probability of homicide among journalists is not significantly different from the probability of homicide among the general population.

3e. Journalists as the victims of targeted political violence

Both NGO representatives and journalists contest the view that journalists are merely the victims of general violence. Instead, they claim that journalists are targeted because of their work and that state governments are often involved in the repression of journalists. During fieldwork, NGO representatives pointed out that one of the reasons they believe state governments are involved in the silencing of journalists is

that those killed are often the ones who write negatively about state governments. The director of Article 19 told me in an interview:

'It is an illusion to think that the journalists that are getting killed are just at the wrong place at the wrong time. The journalists that are killed are often the ones that write not just about criminality, but about how politicians are involved in criminality or about how they are involved in corruption. When they write about criminality, it is about the relationship between politicians and organized crime, or about the lack of willingness of states to do something about certain crimes. When it comes to attacks on journalists, be it a killing or an online attack, we are often quite sure that the government has been behind it. But if you ask if I can prove it, I must say no' (Interview with Darío Ramírez, 2015).

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) collects data on the main issues that murdered journalists have covered (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2015c). A large share indeed delved into sensitive topics: 31% wrote about corruption and 24% more generally about politics (Ibid., 2015c). After the killing of Salvador Adame in Michoacán, his family emphasized that he avoided writing about organized crime, but wrote very critically about local politics (Agren, 2017a; 2017b). In addition, journalists have also themselves explained that they have been afraid of being harmed or killed after writing critically about state-level public officials.

In the interviews I held with critical journalists, they explained that they were afraid of being harmed or killed after writing critically about state-level public officials. Another journalist from Veracruz explained how he was threatened after reporting on people who had taken to policing their own town, given the inaction of state police:

'I am writing about a group of people that have taken weapons in their own hands. In a town in the centre of Veracruz these people patrol the streets, and not the state police. The state police has done nothing against the criminality there. The people were so fed up, that they now do the police work themselves. I made a clip about it and wrote about it for several media outlets. I knew this would be dangerous. The state government has so far denied the existence of vigilante groups that fill the vacuum of the state. Reporting about this makes the government angry because it makes them look dysfunctional. So, since publishing I have received phone calls with threats. It's the same thing with publishing crime statistics. I once reported about crime statistics and was harassed by the police. It shames the government' (Interview Salvador, 2015).

Another journalist from Veracruz claimed that journalists are targeted because state governments fear the spread of negative media attention:

‘The government of Veracruz is concerned with not letting people in the capital know that something happened here in Veracruz. They only care about that. If something happens – to me, for example – and it’s only known here in Veracruz, they don’t care... But if something about violence or corruption gets published in the capital of the country or outside of the country, that shames the Veracruz government and makes it worried’ (Interview Mateo, 2015).

While this quote concerns the political elite of Veracruz in particular, NGOs have highlighted their belief that political targeting of journalists is far from unique to Veracruz. They claim that the population of critical journalists is targeted throughout Mexico to varying degrees depending on the state in which they work. The interview statements by critical journalists and by Article 19 clearly reject the idea that journalists are the victims of general criminal violence, and also suggest that they are often politically targeted. The observable implication of this narrative is twofold. First, it suggests that journalists have a higher risk of getting killed than members of the general population. This results in a second proposition, which is the opposite of proposition 1:

P2a: The homicide probability among the subpopulation of journalists is higher than the homicide probability among the general population.

The second observable implication relates not just to the targeting of journalists, but the role that subnational politics plays in these killings. My informants, both journalists and NGO representatives, contended that state-level representatives target journalists for political purposes. This second narrative implies that attacks on journalists are not just a corollary of general crime, and that patterns of general criminal violence and violence towards journalists are not the same. This leads to the third proposition:

P2b. Differences in homicide probabilities among the general population and among the subpopulation of journalists vary across states: The states that are the most dangerous for journalists are not the same states that are the most dangerous for the general population.

3f. Data to test propositions

The propositions arising from the two competing narratives can be tested by: 1) comparing homicide probabilities for journalists and the general population, at both the country and state levels; and 2) by testing whether the differences in homicide probabilities are statistically significant. I do the latter with an exact binomial test that calculates the probability of the observed number of journalists being killed, in each state and in Mexico as a whole. The exact binomial test accounts for differences in the size of the populations. If the probability for journalists to be victims of homicide is higher than for the general population and it is statistically significant, this would suggest that violence against journalists is a distinct phenomenon from general criminal violence.

The comparison of homicide probabilities and the additional exact binomial test are based on four figures: the population of each state, the number of homicides in each state, the number of journalists in each state, and the number of killed journalists in each state. The National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) updates the homicide count every year (INEGI, 2018), based on death certificates collected by the Secretaría de Salud, of which the National Health Information System (SINAIS) is a part. While SINAIS is in charge of collecting death certificates, INEGI is in charge of tallying them. Heinle, Rodríguez Ferreira, and Shirk (2017) and Calderón, Robles, Díaz-Cayeros, and Magaloni (2015) elaborate on other sources that collect data on homicides. One of them is the Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (SNSP). In terms of reliability, Calderón *et al.* (2015) point out that there might be a subnational bias in the SNSP data because of local incentives to under-report or over-report homicides. Since death certificate data is less sensitive to such political pressures, the INEGI data is therefore better suited for the subnational comparison than the SNSP data. While the INEGI data is available for the period 2007–2016, the last population census in Mexico was conducted in 2010. Since population size is not constant, using data that precedes and succeeds the census for the same number of years minimizes problems, thus only the data from 2007–2013 was used.

For the number of killed journalists I use data from Article 19, and use the 2007–2013 period to align the data with the general homicide data and the census data. The CPJ also holds records of killed journalists, but they count only 41 killed journalists in the period 1992–2017 (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2019) compared to the 88 murders reported by Article 19 in the period 2000–2015 (Article 19, 2017). The underreporting is likely related to the CPJ's own estimation of whether a homicide was targeted or not. Since these estimations are not conclusive and not required to test the propositions, I include all journalist homicides reported by Article 19.

While the Article 19 data might include cases in which it is considered unlikely that a journalist was the victim of a targeted homicide, I include these observations, since the probability for journalists to be murdered must be based on the total number.

The two other figures needed to perform the test are the total population of each state and the total population of journalists. Both the general population size and journalist population size are based on the 2010 census (INEGI, 2010). To establish homicide probabilities for journalists, the size of the journalist population in each state and in Mexico as a whole was calculated on the basis of data on professions (INEGI, 2010). An advantage of using census data is that it is based on self-identification and includes not only salaried journalists and editorial staff but also freelance journalists. It might be that among the population of journalists there are people that identify with journalism, but work for bribes because of low wages in the field; but taking all self-identified journalists into account only makes the test more conservative.

Using an exact binomial test (for a goodness of fit explanation see Appendix 1), the proposition that journalists are more likely to be murdered than members of the general population was tested. This test calculates the probability of seeing k (or more than k) journalists killed in a state with a population of n people, given that the probability of being killed is the same for journalists as for the general population (Equation 1). If significant, it indicates that the homicide probability for journalists differs from that for the general population. For more detail on this test, see Appendix 1.

The test assumes that homicides are independently and identically distributed (iid) across the population (Hazewinkel, 2001). When the homicides are independent, the inter-event distribution follows a geometrical distribution. Appendix 1 shows that homicides are indeed geometrically distributed. I also examined the temporal clustering of observations and found only minor clustering, lower than for most other social phenomena (Goh & Barabasi, 2008; Garcia-Bernardo, Dodds, & Johnson, 2016).

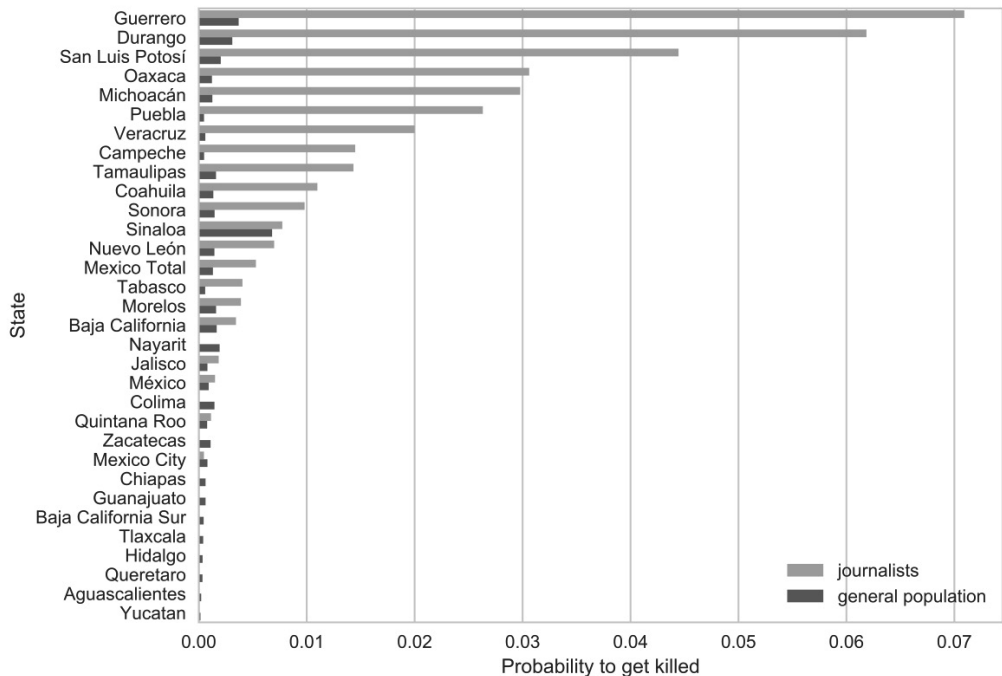
$$P(K \geq k) = \sum_{i=k}^n p^i * (1 - p)^{n-i} \binom{n}{i}$$

Eq 1. Where n = number of journalists, p = homicide probability of the population, and k = number of assassinated journalists.

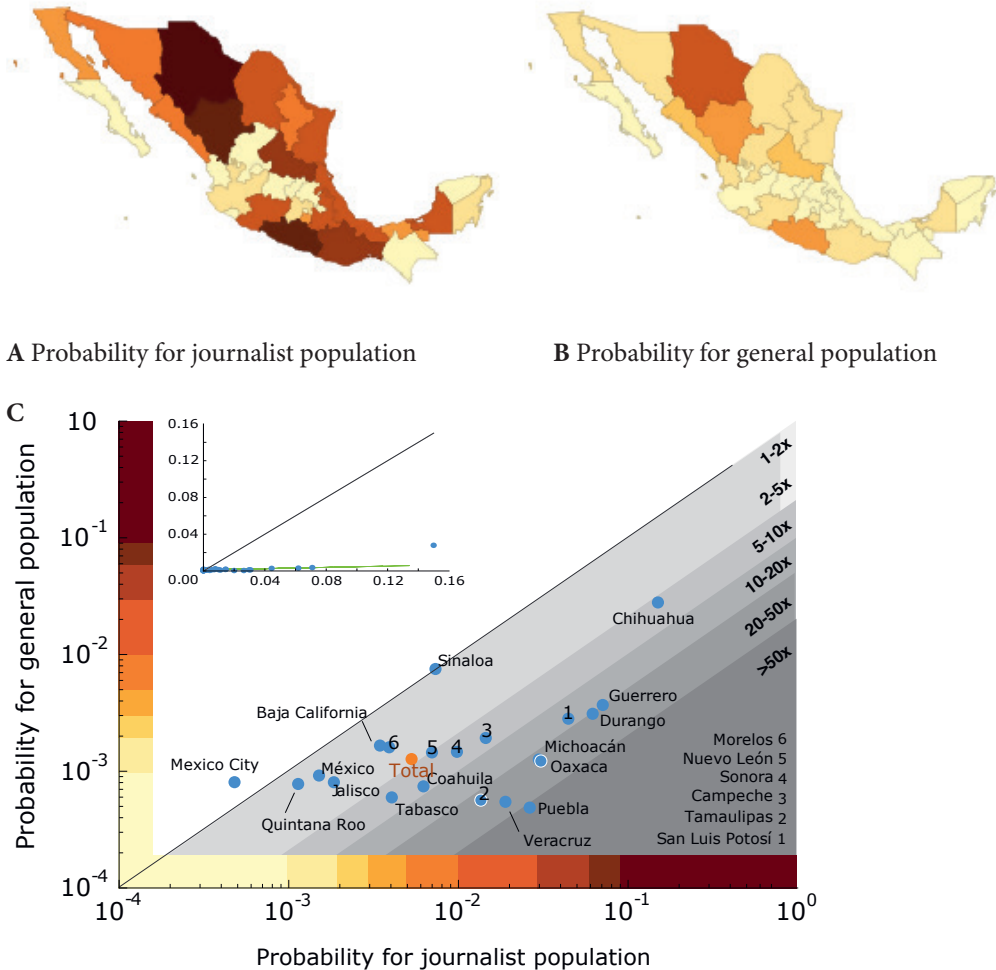
3g. Analysis

Figure 6 illustrates the probability of being a victim of homicide as an individual from the general population, and as an individual that is part of the subpopulation of journalists, for the entire period 2007–2013. For the majority of states, the observed homicide probability for journalists is much higher than for the general population. Figures 7a and 7b show these homicide probabilities geographically, by means of a colour scale. While some states are dark on both maps, such as Chihuahua in the north of the country, the map depicting the homicide probability for journalists is generally much darker. This is reflected by Figure 7c, which shows that for Mexico as a whole, journalists have a much higher risk of being murdered than members of the general population: the homicide probability for the general population is 0.001 (1 in 1,000) and for journalists 0.005 (1 in 200). For states located on the diagonal line, the homicide probability of the total population would be equal to the homicide probability of the journalist population, while the further away from this diagonal line, the larger the differences between the probabilities.

Figure 6. Comparison of homicide probabilities: Journalists and the general population (2007–2013).



Note: The probability of being a victim of homicide for the total population (dark) and for journalists (light) for each state in the period 2007–2013. For visual reasons, Chihuahua has been omitted from the figure because of its extreme values for both variables: 0.15 for journalists and 0.028 for the general population.

Figure 7: Homicide probabilities in Mexico

Note: Maps 7A and 7B visualize homicide probabilities among the total population and among the journalist population, respectively. The colours correspond to the colour scale of the x-axis and y-axis in Figure 7C. The x-axis and y-axis are on a log-scale for visualization purposes.

The second striking observation is the extent of divergence between homicide probabilities for the general population and for journalists across states. Figure 7c shows that the homicide probabilities of the two populations are comparable in the state of Baja California, while in Veracruz, the probability of journalists being killed (2%) is approximately 40 times higher than for the general population (0.06%). Although Veracruz is at one end of the spectrum, the map shows that it is far from unique, and highlights states like Puebla, Durango, Oaxaca and Michoacán as being similarly dangerous for journalists. Thus far, the findings support the idea that

journalists are the victims of targeted killings rather than general violence. They also support the idea that there is significant variation across states in the extent to which journalists' lives are in danger.

Table 1: P-Values

State	P-values exact binomial test
Baja California	0.1238
Campeche	0.0080
Coahuila	0.9789
Chihuahua	*0.0000
Mexico City	0.8006
Durango	*0.0000
Guerrero	*0.0001
Jalisco	0.0714
México	0.1006
Michoacán	*0.0000
Morelos	0.0643
Nuevo León	*0.0003
Oaxaca	*0.0000
Puebla	*0.0000
Quintana Roo	0.1505
San Luis Potosí	*0.0001
Sinaloa	0.5955
Sonora	*0.0003
Tabasco	*0.0034
Tamaulipas	*0.0000
Veracruz	*0.0000
Mexico Total	*0.0000

The analysis shows that the difference between homicide probabilities for journalists and the general population is conspicuous. Table 1 shows the p-values of the exact binomial test for all 21 states in which journalists were killed during the time period under investigation. The homicide probability for journalists differs significantly in 13 of the 21 states at the 5% level (including Mexico total), and in 18 of the 21 states at the 10% level, meaning that for these states the differences in homicide probabilities are highly unlikely to be the result of coincidence. In the states where differences were not significant, it means that coincidence cannot be excluded as an explanation of the differences in homicide probabilities. This provides strong support for propositions

2a and 2b, as opposed to proposition 1. Generally speaking, homicide probabilities are much higher for journalists than for the general population in Mexico. However, the probabilities vary across states: the states that are most dangerous for journalists are not the states that are the most dangerous in terms of general violence and vice versa.

3h. Reflections on the robustness of the test

One criticism that might be raised about the analysis concerns the assumption underlying the comparison of homicide probabilities and the exact binomial test, namely that journalists are *a priori* as likely to be killed as members of the general population. Since journalists often run towards danger to cover violent events, rather than away from it, it is plausible that they have a higher likelihood of finding themselves in harm's way. For example, journalists would have a higher *a priori* risk of being killed in war situations as bystanders succumbing to crossfire. But the evidence shows that journalists in Mexico are rarely killed by crossfire. The database on the circumstances of these homicides maintained by Article 19 shows that journalists are assassinated execution-style instead of being killed in crossfire (Article 19, 2017). Being dragged from one's house or car should not be considered an *a priori* risk of being a journalist, and it is certainly not a pattern found across other democratic countries. This is even more the case since journalists, who are often university educated and live in middle-class neighbourhoods, are generally speaking not part of the socio-economic groups most likely to be victimized by violent crime (Brookman, 2005). While the socio-economic position of journalists might vary across countries and journalists in Mexico do not have high salaries, it is unlikely that the targeting of journalists in Mexico originates from the fact that they live in poor and marginalized areas that are prone to violent crime.

Even though there might be other vulnerable groups among the general population, ranging from other boundary-blurring actors to people that for example live in marginalized areas, comparing the journalist population with the general population accounts for a conservative test. First, as noted earlier, journalists are generally speaking part of the middle class, which has a relatively low *a priori* risk of being killed (Brookman, 2005). But perhaps more importantly, the test outlined in this chapter takes all journalists into account rather than the much smaller subgroup of critical journalists. Defining journalists in broad terms, and calculating the homicide probability for the entire population of journalists, including those who never write about controversial political or social issues and who do not cover violent events, makes the test fairly conservative. Data by Article 19 clearly shows that murdered

journalists tended to cover controversial topics at the intersection of crime and politics. Their research and my own interviews also suggest that “critical journalists” – that is, those who report critically about public officials – are at a higher risk of being murdered than journalists who take a less confrontational stance in their reporting. However, subdividing both the journalist population and the general population into high- and low-risk groups would be a slippery slope. Comparing the subgroup of all journalists with the general population is therefore the clearest way to make comparisons and to establish that violence against journalists is distinct from overall violence.

4. ACCOUNTING FOR OBSERVED PATTERNS

While the patterns in the data clearly show that journalists are targeted in Mexico, and that this level of targetedness varies across Mexican states, there are still various ways to interpret the exact nature of the violence against journalists. It is unclear at this point whether subnational political elites are involved in the orchestration of journalist killings, and if so, to what extent. One view could still be that journalists are only the victims of organized crime instead of general criminal violence. According to this view, the level of targetedness varies across states as a result of the varying levels and nature of organized crime. According to Holland and Rios (2017), the fragmentation and rivalry between criminal organizations creates incentives to leak information to journalists in order to discredit rivals and to encourage law enforcement to act against them. In their explanation, the violence towards journalists is therefore targeted criminal violence, which is distinct from political targeting, because it does not include the involvement of a public official in the orchestration of the violence.

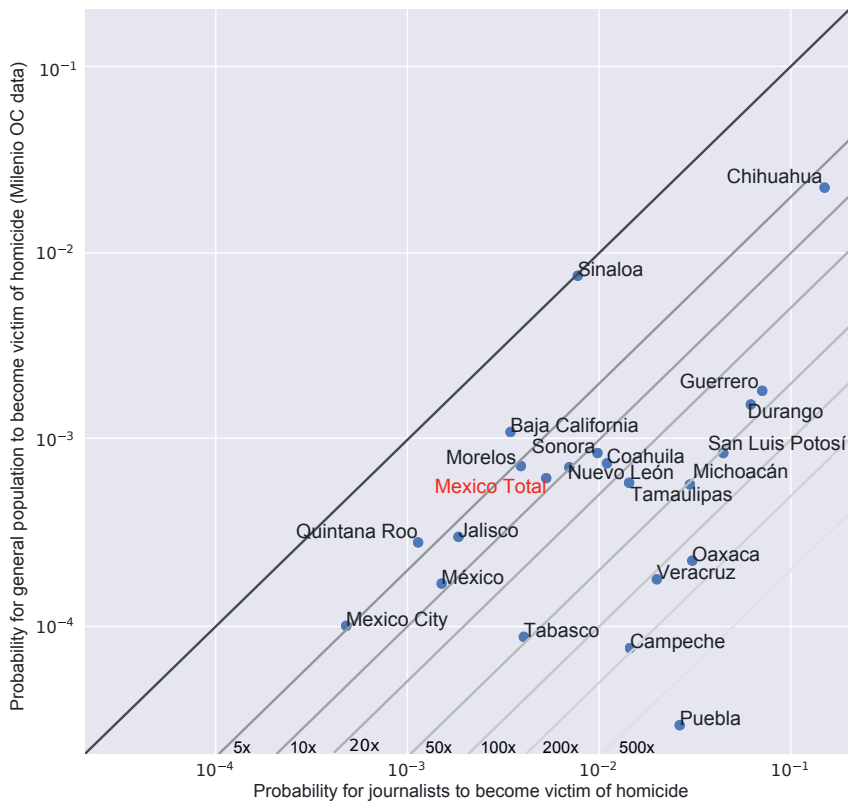
While targeted criminal violence is likely to account for some journalist killings, it is unlikely that organized crime alone accounts for all these killings, nor is it likely to explain all the state-level variation in terms of journalist killings. While Holland and Rios (2017) are right in pointing out that critical journalists can be a threat to organized crime groups, a similar argument can be made for subnational political elites. To further bolster the argument that organized crime does not explain all the variation in terms of journalist targetedness, the homicide rate comparison that was presented in 3g was conducted with organized crime homicide data instead of general homicide data. Figure 8 shows the outcome of this replication.

Figure 8 shows that in many states the probability of journalists being killed is much higher than the probability of being killed as a result of organized crime homicide. While this was already the case with the general homicide data in section

3g, this pattern is augmented because organized crime homicides are a subset of general homicides. In other words, there are always more homicides than organized crime homicides in Mexican states, since a part of the homicide data consists of non-organized homicides.

More importantly, in light of the organized crime explanation of high journalists homicide rates and state-level variation in terms of those homicides, the divergence between organized crime homicide probabilities and journalist homicide probabilities largely resembles the divergence between general homicide probabilities and journalist homicide probabilities. States that experience a strong difference between the general homicide probability and the journalist homicide probability also experience this difference in terms of organized crime homicides. In Sinaloa, journalists do not have a higher probability of becoming a victim of homicide than the general population, while in Veracruz and Puebla they run a much higher risk. These patterns do not change with organized crime homicide data, which runs counter to the idea that journalist homicides are just a corollary of regional patterns of organized crime violence.

Figure 8: General population vs journalist homicide probabilities



The replication of homicide comparisons with Milenio data emphasizes the unlikelihood that the state-level variation in terms of targetedness of journalists is only caused by organized crime. Especially in the group of states that experience high levels of journalist homicides and relatively low levels of general homicides and organized crime homicides, it is unlikely that general and organized crime explains the targeting of journalists. Instead, in states like Oaxaca, Veracruz, Campeche, and Tabasco, subnational political elites are likely to be involved in the targeting of journalists in some way.

In addition to the above, the notion of violence against journalists as being the result of organized crime – rather than politically targeted violence – runs counter to the perceptions of NGOs and the journalists I interviewed. According to journalists, subnational political elites are often more than feckless bystanders, unable to uphold the rule of law. Rather, some local and state-level public officials actively collude with violent actors to repress critical voices. Furthermore, NGOs have emphasized that subnational public officials are involved in the targeting of journalists.

This connects to the Article 19 data, which highlights that in the case of some of the attacks and threats that journalists receive, public officials of state governments are identified as perpetrators (Article 19, 2017). In other words, while it may not be observed directly that journalist homicides are political, other types of attacks are sometimes observably political, because the state-level public officials are identified. As explained before, part of the Article 19 database is based on self-reporting by journalists. Some journalists have highlighted in their reports to Article 19 that public officials directly threatened or attacked them. In interviews with the Columbia Journalism Review, journalists from several states, including Veracruz and Michoacán, talked about how they were attacked by public officials. One journalist explained how a public official tortured her with a power drill (Harp, 2017).

5. THE KILLING OF JOURNALISTS IN SUBNATIONAL UNDEMOCRATIC REGIMES

So far, this chapter has demonstrated that critical journalists that specialize in local politics of subnational undemocratic regimes are important boundary-blurring actors in Mexico, and that the attacks on journalists are spread unequally across Mexican states. In addition, in many Mexican states, journalists are a specifically targeted subgroup of the population. The differences between journalist homicide probabilities and general homicide probabilities vary across Mexican states, and

these uneven levels of targetedness in Mexican states cannot be easily attributed to criminal violence or organized criminal violence alone.

These above-mentioned findings constitute the first empirical validation of my theory. In Section 2c I showed that subnational political elites that have certain skeletons in the closet have reasons to fear critical journalists for their potential to spread the scope of compromising information. Journalists have increased subnational power uncertainty in the past. I argued, therefore, that the subnational political elites have incentives to target these journalists. While I already argued in the theory chapter that such a mechanism logically comes forth out of embeddedness and subnational power uncertainty, the findings about journalists in Mexico empirically validate the existence of this mechanism. Thus far, I have looked at the relationship between the targeting of journalists and Mexican states in general, and not particularly within subnational undemocratic regimes. A question that remains is whether journalists are also targeted in subnational undemocratic regimes, and perhaps more in subnational undemocratic regimes than in other geographical locations.

Theoretically, there is no strong reason to assume that journalists are never targeted in subnational *democratic* regimes. The political elites of subnational democratic regimes – which engage in elections that are real *and* fair – can also have skeletons in the closet, such as corruption scandals or connections between subnational politics and organized crime. And journalists could also affect the political elites of these regimes in the same way they can affect subnational political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes.

Interestingly, the states that experienced high levels of journalist targeting were also subnational undemocratic regimes. The literature on subnational undemocratic regimes has often used states like Oaxaca, Puebla, Tabasco and Veracruz as quintessential examples of subnational undemocratic regimes. In terms of Giraudy's (2013) subnational undemocratic regime index² the states where journalists experienced high levels of targetedness – Veracruz, Oaxaca, Puebla, Campeche, Tabasco – are undemocratic. Giraudy (2015) explains how the PRI regimes in Veracruz and Puebla were able to remain undemocratic even after national democratization – fending off national interference by giving legislative support to non-PRI presidents (Madrado, 2007) – while in Oaxaca the political elite used dubious electoral procedures

2 This index is based on four dimensions: 1) turnover, 2) executive contestation, 3) legislative contestation, and 4) clean elections Giraudy (2015).

and political dissidents and opponents were repressed (Giraudy, 2015, p. 270). The PRI governments of Puebla and Oaxaca lost elections in 2011 and 2010 respectively. In Tabasco the PRI lost elections in 2015, and in Veracruz in 2016, both after the 2007-2013 period used for the quantitative analysis in this chapter. Only Puebla and Oaxaca experienced turnover within the 2007-2013 period. Nevertheless, in the period 2007-2010 both states were notoriously undemocratic. Ultimately, this means that, in Mexico, journalists are targeted in subnational undemocratic regimes.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter constituted a first empirical exploration of my theory about *how* boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty and *how* political elites repress boundary-blurring actors. I did this by looking at a specific sub-class of boundary-blurring actors – journalists – in a specific country: Mexico. I identified critical, and especially critical investigative journalists as an important subclass of boundary-blurring actors in subnational undemocratic regimes in Mexico. After selecting critical journalists as a subclass, I analyzed data about attacks on journalists, zoomed in on homicide data, and demonstrated that in many Mexican states journalists are a specifically targeted subgroup of the population. I also demonstrated that this targetedness, and the state-level divergence in terms of targetedness, is unlikely to be a corollary of general or organized crime. Last, I demonstrated that the states in which journalists experience the most extreme levels of targeting all started off in 2007 as subnational undemocratic regimes. This indicates that critical journalists are targeted *in* subnational undemocratic regimes and raises the question of whether they are targeted by the subnational political elites of these regimes.

The first finding of this chapter is that critical journalists are an important subclass of boundary-blurring actors in Mexican subnational undemocratic regimes. While there are other actors that could also be defined as boundary-blurring actors, I demonstrated that journalists have increased subnational power uncertainty for subnational political elites. Governors of various Mexican states have fled after journalists published about their involvement in corruption or embezzlement, or their connections with organized crime groups. While they sometimes published in national media, making compromising information available within the national public sphere, they also directed information directly to central institutions. For example, NGOs and activists demanded the impeachment of the Governor of Quintana Roo, Roberto Borge, after a journalist presented the evidence of embezzlement to

the Chamber of Deputies (Varillas, 2016). In addition to these actions, representatives of NGOs that I interviewed during fieldwork emphasized that local investigative journalists can become a threat to subnational political elites when they spread information about corruption, embezzlement and connections with organized crime to the national public sphere.

The findings of this chapter functioned as a plausibility probe for the theory of this dissertation, and lay the groundwork for answering *how* boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty and *how* political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress them. The first related finding is that, when it comes to homicide, journalists are a targeted subgroup of the population in multiple Mexican states. In addition, the level of targeting that journalists experience varies across Mexican states. When a journalist gets murdered in Mexico, it is often debated whether they were targeted because of their work. The official narrative has been that journalists are the victims of general criminal violence instead of targeted, and perhaps political, violence. However, on the basis of a state-level comparison between general homicide data and journalist homicide data, and with the use of a binomial testing procedure, I empirically demonstrated that this explanation does not hold for many states.

The targetedness of journalists in certain Mexican states does still not mean that subnational political elites are involved in these killings. Holland and Rios (2017) argued that organized crime groups also have reasons to target those journalists that write about them. However, the third finding of this chapter is that the targetedness of journalists, and the state-level variation in terms of this targetedness, cannot be attributed solely to organized crime. On the basis of Milenio organized crime data, I demonstrated that levels of difference between organized crime homicide probabilities and journalist homicide probabilities largely resemble the divergence between general homicide probabilities and journalist homicide probabilities. This supports the idea that subnational political elites are also likely to account for some of the targeting.

While the fact that journalists can increase subnational power uncertainty – and are targeted in some states because of this – constitutes the main contribution of this chapter, the targeting of journalists by specific political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes is fundamentally hard to observe. Altogether, this chapter has laid the groundwork for the next chapters. It has mostly done so by proving that an important subcategory of boundary-blurring actors is targeted *in* subnational undemocratic regimes, rather than *by* the subnational political elites of these regimes. Even though the targeting of journalists is extremely difficult to explain by general

or organized crime, the results of this chapter beg for a subnational analysis of the targeting of journalists in order to gain a deeper understanding of the link between boundary-blurring actors and political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes. The next chapter zooms in on a subnational undemocratic regime where journalists experienced high levels of targeting: Veracruz. That chapter will continue with the empirical exploration of *how* boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty and *how* the political elite represses them.

CHAPTER 5

The Repression of Journalists in Veracruz

Notification: *this chapter contains violent and disturbing content*

1. INTRODUCTION

With over 8 million citizens, Veracruz is one of Mexico's most populous 32 states (INEGI, 2015). Its coastline stretches along a substantial part of Mexico's access to the Gulf of Mexico; this was unsurprisingly where the Spanish conquistadores arrived first, and began to construct Mexico's first colonial cities (Altman, Cline, & Pescador, 2003). Since the colonial era, the native populations of Veracruz have mixed with both Spanish people and African slave populations. Currently, Veracruz is one of Mexico's most multi-ethnic states (Saragoza, Ambrosi, & Zárate, 2012). At the same time, Veracruz comes fourth when it comes to the relative number of people living below the poverty line (Saragoza *et al.*, 2012). While Xalapa is the capital city of the state of Veracruz, Puerto Veracruz is the largest city, and economically the most important. These were the two most important destinations for the months of fieldwork that were conducted.

On 15 April 2017, the Governor of Veracruz, Javier Duarte de Ochoa, was arrested in Guatemala. One-and-a-half years after the fieldwork was conducted for this chapter he faced accusations of corruption and embezzlement. After investigative news reports pointed at systematic embezzlement by the governor, he fled the state, and interim governor Flavino Ríos Alvarado took over (Marcial Perez, 2016). The interim governor himself was later also arrested for helping Javier Duarte de Ochoa with his escape from Veracruz (Marcial Perez, 2016). Months after these events, as investigations about Javier Duarte developed, it became clear that he embezzled a substantial portion of the state's revenues, and reports came out about Duarte running a scheme in which water was sold as chemotherapy in a child hospital (García, 2017).

While accusations of corruption were rife during the 2015 fieldwork period in Veracruz, there were no clear indications that Javier Duarte would not make it to the end of his term. Even though political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes like the one in Veracruz always experience subnational power uncertainty, and this does not depend on the fact that Javier Duarte was arrested during his term, it *did* become an example of how the political elite of a subnational undemocratic regime can face far-reaching interference.

Chapter 4 demonstrated that Veracruz belongs to the group of Mexican states with a strong divergence between journalist homicide probabilities, general homicide probabilities and organized crime probabilities. Journalists in Veracruz have a strikingly high probability of getting murdered in comparison to the general population. In addition, Veracruz has experienced fundamental problems with democracy. In states like Veracruz, critical journalists are able to create insecurities

for the political elite by expanding the scope of compromising information. In light of this, I proposed that the targeting of critical journalists is likely to be related to repression by the subnational political elite. However, *how* journalists increase subnational power uncertainty and how they are repressed in such a specific state -- in this case Veracruz -- has been not been explained so far.

This chapter moves away from journalist killings on the Mexican level and asks the question of *how* a specific subclass of boundary-blurring actors – journalists – increase subnational power uncertainty and are repressed in a particular state: Veracruz. A group of critical journalists in Veracruz was extensively interviewed during fieldwork to gain this perspective. I answer these questions primarily on the basis of interviews with targeted journalists. First of all, I explain what journalists do in order to increase subnational power uncertainty, which forms the essence of why they are repressed. I then argue that, as a result, critical journalists experience a diverse set of repressive actions. In terms of how they are repressed, journalists experience that repression is always around and that one of these repressive actions could hit them at any moment. Secondly, critical journalists experience their repression as an incremental process: they are repressed with the least visibility possible and with the highest possible deniability, but they subsequently can expect heavier types of repression if they continue to write about compromising information. Thirdly, critical journalists in Veracruz are confronted with the collusion between state-level politics and organized crime, which leads them to be disoriented about who represses them. In addition, they perceive this relationship between state-level politics and organized crime as a strategy to intimidate critical journalists, and a way for the state to be able to deny involvement in their repression.

This chapter begins by providing a list of journalists that were killed in the period 2008–2015, since these killings constitute an important part of the research, and provide key context for the interview data that is used later in the chapter. The chapter continues by providing a deeper understanding of Veracruz as a subnational undemocratic regime. I do this by answering the question of why Veracruz is a subnational undemocratic regime, and how it is undemocratic. I argue that Veracruz constitutes an unequivocal case of a subnational undemocratic regime in the relevant research period and that simultaneously, just like other subnational undemocratic regimes, elites experienced subnational power uncertainty. In addition, I argue that the climate for critical journalists is precarious, partly because of structural factors, but also partly because of attempts by the subnational government to undermine critical journalism. Public officials from the subnational government try to lure critical journalists into envelope journalism. When critical journalists choose to maintain their integrity in the face of these bribes, they face repression.

2a. Veracruz as a Graveyard for Journalists

In Mexico, Veracruz has become known as a graveyard for journalists. Apart from its colonial history and its tourist destinations for people from Mexico City, Veracruz is now also referred to as the one state where journalists often get killed. Veracruz has gained this reputation both in Mexico and beyond. International media have covered Veracruz with titles like: ‘Veracruz, One of the Most Dangerous Places in the World to Be a Journalist’ (North, 2018), and Veracruz has been often referred to as the ‘epicentre’ of violence against journalists, in Latin America, and even in the world (Bargent, 2017).

As this chapter progresses, the killing of multiple journalists will be discussed. Since journalist killings take place frequently in Veracruz, naturally some respondents mentioned these killings. They may relate to these killings because they have known a certain colleague that was murdered; alternatively they may know about the killing and are extra fearful for their own lives because of it. In order to contextualize the mentioning of the names of killed journalists, I provide a list of journalists that were killed in Veracruz in the period 2007–2015 in this section.

On 14 December 2008, Raúl Martínez López was killed in Poza Rica (“Periodista es Asesinado en,” 2009). On 24 February 2009, journalist Luis Daniel Méndez Hernández was found shot four times in the back in the Huasteca region in Veracruz (“Periodista es Asesinado en,” 2009). On 20 April 2010, Evaristo Ortega Zárate disappeared and was never subsequently found (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). Noel López Olguín was killed on 31 May 2011 (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2011c). On 20 June, Miguel Ángel López Velasco and his son Miscal López Solana, who both worked for the newspaper *Notiver*, were killed (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2011b); during a raid on their home, their Miguel Ángel's wife, Miscal's mother, was also shot. On 26 July, Yolanda Ordaz de la Cruz became the third journalist from the staff of *Notiver* to be murdered that year (“Mexico: Missing Journalist,” 2011). She disappeared on 24 July and was found beheaded two days later. On 20 September, 2011, Manuel Gabriel Fonseca Hernández disappeared and was never subsequently found (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2011a). On 28 April 2012, *Proceso* journalist Regina Martínez Pérez was found beaten and strangled to death in her bathroom (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2012). 3 May 2012 is possibly the bloodiest day in Veracruz's history of violence against journalists. On that day, ironically World Press Freedom Day, Gabriel Hugo Córdoba, Guillermo Luna Varela, Esteban Rodríguez and Ana Irasema Becerra Jiménez were all found dismembered in plastic bags (Hernandez, 2012). On 14 June, Víctor Manuel Báez Chino was found killed in Xalapa (“Asesinan a Reportero,” 2012). On 25 July 2012, Miguel Morales Estrada was found murdered in Poza Rica, close to Puerto Veracruz. Two days later, Sergio Landa Rosales was officially declared

disappeared (“Journalist kidnapped,” 2012). On 5 February 2014, Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz was found murdered (“Encuentran Cuerpo De Periodista,” 2014). On 2 January 2015, nine people dressed in civilian clothing and wearing ski masks kidnapped Moisés Sánchez Cerezo. On the 24th of that month, the mutilated pieces of his body were found in plastic bags that had been left on the street. Forensic investigations confirmed that his throat was cut open by his executioners and he was decapitated alive (Martínez Ahrens, 2015). On 2 July 2015, Juan Mendoza Delgado was found murdered (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2015a). On 1 August 2015, Rubén Espinosa, a journalist for *Proceso*, was found killed together with multiple friends and a housekeeper (“Asesinan en el DF a Rubén Espinosa,” 2015). On the 13th of that month, Juan Heriberto Santos Cabrera was found killed (Gómez, 2015).

Impunity has been the norm in the case of journalist killings in Veracruz. Serious investigations that led to the culprits of the murders were not conducted in any of the cases. In the Rubén Espinosa case, two men that were previously prosecuted for crimes were incarcerated. However, even in this case doubts were raised about whether the two were the real culprits or whether they served as scapegoats in order to prevent the need for further investigations, possibly even about the link between the subnational political elite and the killing. In the case of Regina Martínez, a man was arrested and charged with homicide with robbery. While he initially pled guilty, he later withdrew his plea, stating that he was tortured by the authorities and forced to admit the crime (Carrasco Araizaga, 2013). As Chapter 4 already demonstrated, judicial investigations into journalist killings are often dubious – if they take place at all – and do not provide much guidance when it comes to the questions of whether journalists are targeted with repression. Veracruz is an extreme example of a Mexican state where judicial investigations do not contribute to the improvement of our understanding of how these killings relate to repression by the political elite of a subnational undemocratic regime.

2b. Veracruz as a Subnational Undemocratic Regime

Veracruz was an unequivocal case of a subnational undemocratic regime during the period of Javier Duarte’s incumbency in 2010-2016, and in the period during which these journalist killings took place. The primary reason for this is that during and before this period, state elections in Veracruz were real but unfair. This does not imply that elections were rigged, but means that the opposition was crippled to the degree that they were unable to play a meaningful part in elections. Below, I explain how certain structural conditions that have been identified in the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes as being favourable for such regimes have supported subnational undemocraticness in Veracruz: a large poor and rural population, the

port of Veracruz as an important source of revenue, and low tax autonomy supported one-party dominance in Veracruz. But before explaining the implications of these conditions, I will first reflect on the degree of dominance of the PRI in Veracruz.

Giraudy's (2013) Subnational Undemocratic Regime Index provides a tool to analyze variation in terms of democraticness across Mexican states. In essence, Giraudy's (2013) index aims to capture Levitsky and Way's (2010) real-but-unfairness of elections. The index aims to measure the electoral dominance of political parties in Mexican states and leaves no doubt about the position of Veracruz in Mexico for the last year of the index: 2009. According to the index, Veracruz was on the extreme side when it comes to subnational undemocraticness in Mexico in 2009, a year before Javier Duarte took office and four years before fieldwork was conducted in Veracruz. However, Veracruz was not unique. States like Oaxaca, Tabasco and Puebla were even less democratic in that year. While Giraudy's (2013) index stops in 2009, it is argued here that Veracruz was a subnational undemocratic regime at the time the fieldwork was conducted.

By the time fieldwork started in Veracruz, in 2015, the PRI had ruled Veracruz uninterruptedly for 86 years. Also after 2009, turnover remained absent in Veracruz. One reason to characterize Veracruz as a subnational undemocratic regime is that the turnover, which is an important indicator of the real-but-unfairness of elections in Giraudy's Index has remained absent since 2009. Ultimately, electoral turnover is the most important way of distinguishing between democratic and non-democratic regimes. While it is important for democracies that opposition parties can exist and grow strong, it is even more important that they can also really win elections. This is what distinguishes turnover from other indicators of subnational democraticness such as the margin of victory or the strength of the opposition.

Gibson (2013) and Giraudy (2013) argue that the absence of turnover in subnational undemocratic regimes does not imply that there is no competitiveness at all (Gibson, 2013; Giraudy, 2013). Also in Veracruz, the margin of victory that PRI enjoyed during gubernatorial elections in Veracruz has not always been convincing. In terms of executive contestation, which is also an indicator within Giraudy's (2013) SUR Index, and in line with Gibson (2013), Veracruz shows that while the margin of victory is an important indicator of how democratic a state is, subnational undemocratic regimes do not always need to win elections with a landslide. In 2010 the gubernatorial candidate Miguel Ángel Yunes - Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) - lost the elections against Javier Ochoa de Duarte (PRI) by only three percentage points, while PAN won the most seats in congress (Arteaga, 2016). This relative success of Miguel Ángel Yunes was only possible after PAN and the left-wing Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) united in a single coalition, which was able to provide an alternative to the

historically strong PRI. While the PAN-PRD coalition eventually lost the elections in Veracruz, the coalition did prove able to oust the PRI elsewhere, by winning gubernatorial elections in the former key PRI states of Oaxaca, Puebla and Sinaloa.

Veracruz has been a subnational undemocratic regime whose political elite experienced subnational power uncertainty. In terms of the uncertainty induced by the subnational electorate, subnational power uncertainty experienced by the regime in Veracruz became clear during the 2010 elections, but clearest in 2016. After the elections in 2016 Veracruz experienced turnover, during which Miguel Ángel Yunes edged out his rival cousin, Héctor Yunes Landa, who ran for the PRI (Domínguez, 2016). He thereby replaced the Interim Governor Flavíno Ríos Alvarado, who had replaced Governor Javier Ochoa Duarte after Duarte was arrested during his term. Flavíno Ríos Alvarado was himself later arrested on allegations of helping Duarte with his initial escape (Asmann & Thompson, 2017). The turnover that took place during the 2016 elections thus coincided with the criminal prosecution of two governors. This demonstrates how subnational power uncertainty in Veracruz was not just related to state-level elections, but also to the possible interference of central institutions, in this case by prosecutors.

While strictly speaking beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is worth reflecting on whether Veracruz remained undemocratic after the abovementioned events. While absence of turnover is perhaps the most important indicator of subnational undemocratic rule, Durazo Herrmann (2012) calls for caution when it comes to drawing conclusions from turnover after decades of subnational undemocratic rule. In Oaxaca, turnover during gubernatorial elections resulted in the circulation of subnational political elites instead of ending undemocratic rule. The reason for this is that opposition parties stimulated broad coalition-building around one opposition candidate to unite an otherwise fragmented opposition and thereby stand a chance of defeating the incumbent (Durazo Herrmann, 2012). This focus on a single opposition leader eases programmatic discussion and means that the newly elected opposition can be open to personnel from the previous subnational political elite that decides to change political clothes. The fact that Oaxaca experienced this previously illustrated political change leaves the question of whether Veracruz has ceased to be a subnational undemocratic regime after Duarte's rule – and after the actual fieldwork for this dissertation – open-ended. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to assess whether the turnover in Veracruz has brought about systemic change or elite rotation. What is key is that the case of Veracruz in the period 2010–2016 presents an unequivocal case of a subnational undemocratic regime.

3. THE FUNCTIONING OF VERACRUZ AS A SUBNATIONAL UNDEMOCRATIC REGIME

In the theory section, I explained in abstract terms how subnational undemocratic regimes manage to remain undemocratic in spite of national-level democratization. More specifically, within the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes, Mexico is considered an important case that provides a deeper understanding of how subnational undemocratic regimes function (Giraudy, 2013; O'Donnell, 1993; Gibson, 2005, 2013). However, the subnational undemocratic nature of Veracruz as a specific case is relatively unexplored. The PRI ruled for 86 years in Veracruz before it was finally defeated, and thereby compares to states like Oaxaca, Tabasco and Puebla. However, even after the PRI was defeated in these states, it managed to hold on to power in Veracruz. This begs the question of how the PRI was able to thwart competition in Veracruz. In this section I will explain how a relatively large poor and rural population, access to natural resources, and relatively little fiscal autonomy helped the PRI to remain dominant in Veracruz. The argument here is not that the subnational undemocratic regime in Veracruz *only* used the repression of boundary-blurring actors. Rather, it is argued that there are several structural factors and actions that the regime exploited, but which were not enough to avoid subnational power uncertainty, so the regime *also* used the repression of boundary-blurring actors.

There are structural factors and actions that have supported subnational undemocraticness in Veracruz. The first one relates to the economic and demographic conditions of its population. Among Mexican states, Veracruz ranks third when it comes to the relative size of the rural population and fourth for the relative segment of people that live below the poverty line (Saragoza *et al.*, 2012). The poverty that Veracruz experiences is known to be a trigger of clientelism (Durazo Herrmann, 2010; Sidel, 2014). According to Durazo Herrmann (2010), large rural populations in Mexican states have supported subnational undemocratic regimes. In rural Mexican states, the PRI has been the natural intermediary between rural populations and the state. In conclusion, the rural context and the poverty in Veracruz have enabled the state's subnational undemocratic regime to use its resources to gain political support.

The second structural factor that has supported the subnational undemocratic PRI regime in Veracruz historically relates to its economy. In Veracruz, the federal government generates an inordinate amount of income by the extraction of oil, and activities that relate to its large port in Puerto Veracruz (Saragoza *et al.*, 2012). Historically, the revenues from these industries that the federal government has gained have been used lavishly for the financing of political campaigns by the PRI both centrally and in Veracruz (Saragoza *et al.*, 2012). But although this is an important

historical factor, it provides little explanation for the PRI's success in Veracruz during the non-PRI Fox (2000-2006) and Calderón (2006-2012) terms, during which time the PRI regime in Veracruz lacked an incumbent political ally at the centre.

Important explanations of the PRI's success in Veracruz after the PRI was defeated during the presidential elections in 2000 come from Rebolledo (2011) and Giraudy (2015). Rebolledo explains that after the PRI lost national elections, the PRI states in Mexico cooperated with PAN in Congress in order to prevent the reduction of revenues by the central government. Since Veracruz was dependent on these and lacked a potential tool to bypass cooperation with the president, it had to be cooperative with the centre instead. As a result, the central government did not employ strategies to weaken the subnational regime in Veracruz (Giraudy, 2015).

There are certain identifiable structural factors that have contributed specifically to the persistence of subnational undemocraticness in Veracruz, and there are strategies that the regime in Veracruz has actively used to stay in power. But to return to the argument made in section 2a, the regime in Veracruz still experienced subnational power uncertainty. During the elections within the 2000–2016 period, the PRI in Veracruz witnessed how their party was defeated in other states, or experienced unconvincing margins of victory. Simultaneously, as argued in Chapter 4, in the decade before the PRI was defeated in Veracruz, multiple public officials of subnational undemocratic regimes fled judicial interference in the form of criminal charges. Veracruz has thus been historically a subnational undemocratic regime that has been able to remain dominant because of several structural factors and actions. At the same time, it has also experienced subnational power uncertainty.

4. THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND JOURNALISTS IN VERACRUZ

The political elite in Veracruz is part of a subnational undemocratic regime and at the same time has experienced subnational power uncertainty. Chapter 4 demonstrated that critical journalists in Mexico can increase this subnational power uncertainty by reporting on compromising information. Such critical journalists also exist in Veracruz, but their number is limited. The reason for this is that it is extremely hard to operate as a critical journalist in Veracruz. The regime in Veracruz takes active measures to make it difficult for critical journalists to operate and tries to control information flows. It also uses non-repressive actions to achieve these aims.

4a. The Media Landscape in Veracruz

As explained in the previous chapter, Mexico experiences fundamental problems with its free press. While there are critical media in Mexico, the environment for critical media to operate is dire. In Veracruz, a mix of both critical and non-critical news is available. There is a plethora of local newspapers in Veracruz, reporting about local news, either at the municipality or state level. Notable examples are *La Jornada de Veracruz*, *Notiver*, *El Dictamen*, and *El Diario de Xalapa*. Some of these newspapers include critical news and even compromising information about state-level officials. But they have also been widely accused of engaging in self-censorship and being dependent on state government advertising (Márquez-Ramírez, 2017).

As opposed to the federal investments in government commercials, the state-level expenditures of the government of Veracruz on media or advertising are opaque. Fundar, an independent media watchdog in Mexico, has investigated the level of openness about state-level government expenditures and the expenditures themselves, and reported that Veracruz scored the worst in terms of openness in the period 2010–2013 (Ruelas Serna & Dupuy, 2013). Fundar defines Veracruz as a champion of opacity, giving little to no information away about their expenditures on advertisements. While this means that no figures are available, and thus the spending cannot be definitively condemned, the fact that the subnational regime is unwilling to provide details on their media expenditures should not be considered a good sign.

The problem of government advertisements is that it can create an ‘I don’t pay you to criticize me’ dynamic that hinders critical news coverage. But this is only one part of a climate that hinders critical journalists from operating freely in Veracruz. A second dynamic regards the fact that journalists have low wages, and that the journalists that aim to write critically about the state government are destined to earn even less, because they are highly unlikely to get paid by government officials. While the minimum wage for journalists in Mexico is \$13 per day, which is comparable to the national average wage, journalists in states like Veracruz sometimes only earn \$11 per day, if they have a salaried position at all (Matous, 2014). One way to increase this wage is to engage in envelope journalism. This means that articles are written for public officials in exchange for money. However, in this case journalists are paid directly, instead of via the newspapers or magazines. One journalist from Puerto Veracruz described the phenomenon of envelope journalism in Veracruz as follows:

Here in Veracruz, 99% of the journalists work for bribes. This is just the situation here. Everybody does this. There are only a few people that don't do this. The salaries are very low for journalists, and you can barely make ends meet as a journalist. You really don't make a lot. And also, the quality of journalism is very poor here, especially of local

newspapers. You see that girl pouring coffee? They could ask here to write something. Someone official can basically ask anyone to write something. And people who engage in this really call themselves journalists (Interview Rebeca, 2015).

Another journalist emphasized that fear is not the only reason for journalists to stop writing critically, but that financial incentives also play a role:

'There are two ways to get to self-censure. One is by fear. But if you sell your information, your camera, your pen, your profession, for money --that's when you are no longer a journalist. The only thing you are doing is to damage even more this already hurt society that lives in this country. This great country, right? Because to me it is not "this shit country", like it is for a lot of people, it is the shit people that also live in this country' (Interview Rubén Espinosa, 2015).

One journalist explained how public officials in Veracruz created events during which public officials could speak to larger groups of journalists at the same time:

'Sometimes they invite you for a breakfast meeting in Xalapa. I have been there once myself. It's sort of official and fancy, and public officials just tell them what to write basically. And also, these journalists that sometimes write for money are not the journalists that are going to write critically. This is the climate here, this is how it works' (Interview Sergio, 2015).

A public relations officer of a state deputy of the PRI in Veracruz explained something that connected to the perception of envelope journalism by these two journalists:

'I am not a fan of local newspapers. A lot of journalists here are very rude and offensive. They are like mercenaries. That's not journalism. But you can invite journalists for breakfast, give them a ride, or leave a note of 500 [pesos] to a reporter. It is often cheaper to give a reporter something than to pay for an advertisement' (Interview Laura, 2015)

In spite of a climate in which it is hard for journalists and media to commit to critical journalism, there *are* critical media and journalists to be found in Veracruz. While local newspapers can sometimes be critical towards a municipality-level or state-level official, the most critical media are those that were discussed in the previous chapter, with their headquarters in the capital, but local correspondents in Veracruz, such as *La Jornada*, *Proceso*, *Animal Político*, *Cuartoscuro* and *Sin Embargo*. The news from these media outlets is available in both Veracruz and in the capital, or is published online.

4b. Critical journalists in Veracruz

4b1. Expanding and proving compromising information

Critical journalists in Veracruz that are willing to investigate and publish compromising information need to be willing to earn a limited amount of money, since they are writing articles or publishing photos that are incompatible with accepting bribes on a structural basis. At the same time, there is a limited amount of media that reports about compromising information. The result is that critical journalists in Veracruz often work for multiple media outlets at the same time. They can publish in local newspapers, but also try to publish things in media platforms that are based in Mexico City, or based online. They are often aware of the fact that the impact of publishing compromising information in media in the capital has more impact than just publishing it locally. One journalist from Veracruz explained:

'The government is not concerned about letting someone know that something happened in Veracruz. They don't care. But if something gets published in the main city of the country or outside of the country, they start caring and they start taking part in the investigation. It is the same with our colleagues, when they are killed. When somebody here in the centre of Veracruz is killed and nobody in the Federal District knows about it, nothing will be done. If they know it there, things start to move' (Interview Mateo, 2015).

Apart from the realization that the expansion of compromising information can affect the people that these journalists write about, they also have a strong sense that they are operating in a context of corruption, but that 'proving' corruption is what really makes a difference and can affect the people that they write about. In other words, there is a difference between writing an opinion piece in which broad claims are made about a governor or a government official being corrupt, and concrete investigative reports about the disappearance of money, or a meeting between a government official and an organized crime leader. One journalist from Puerto Veracruz described this in the following way:

You have to understand how corrupt this place is. It's very, very corrupt. And in a way, everybody knows it. It's common here in Mexico and people do not live under the illusion that there is no corruption. But, look at me, the point here is that when something really comes out, then it becomes a problem. We know that at the health department here, things are not allocated. We know it because they really have not been delivering here. But now I am starting to look at their bookkeeping and figured out that something is really wrong. This is the point where it becomes dangerous. When I publish about this I will be a target right away (Interview Rebeca, 2015).

Trying to prove facts about corruption or about the link between organized crime and public officials is not the only strategy for critical journalists. Neither is the expansion of information by publishing online or in Mexico City-based media. However, there are strategies that journalists are aware of. Journalists know that their writings have more impact when they include evidence of corruption or when they are published in the capital. It also affects themselves, since, as I argue in Section 5b, journalists are repressed on the basis of how determined they are to expand the scope of compromising information.

4b2. Keeping a small but dense network

Critical journalists in Veracruz have little financial incentive to continue spreading compromising information. Furthermore, they run considerable safety risks by doing what they do. Becoming a journalist that spreads compromising information means taking the decision to live an extremely insecure life. People within the community of critical journalists have therefore argued that their community is small, connected and idealistic. Most journalists knew about each other or were friends, experienced a sense of urgency in their work, and were deeply opposed to the regime in Veracruz. One journalist explained:

'All of that puts us at risk. There are only a few of us journalists that are dedicated to this here in Veracruz. Maybe twenty, maximum thirty. We are spread all over the state. From north to south, to the centre of Veracruz. But we are just a few' (Interview Rebeca, 2015).

Another journalist explained that the group of critical journalists in Veracruz are in close contact in order to discuss issues like risk:

'Mateo and Salvador are friends. We all know each other. We are one community that is connected because of our commitment to show the truth here and by the death of our friends. 11 journalists have been killed here since 2010. Probably you know these numbers. We are at constant risk here. We cannot do much, but we do try to contact each other. When something strange happens we only have each other. We do not have a lot of people to trust' (Interview Clara, 2015).

Apart from being a small and tightly connected group, critical journalists are strongly opposed to the regime of Veracruz, combine their journalist activities with activist activities, and are idealistic. One journalist explained:

'If we are not doing this, nobody is. There are a lot of journalists here in Veracruz, but not many that are writing about these issues we write about. This is just a very small group. But everybody knows that if we don't do it, then nobody does it. We are really the last ones left here doing this kind of work. And we know that in the end, death is the ultimate price we will pay for it' (Interview Rubén Espinosa, 2015).

The network of critical journalists in Veracruz operated within a tightly connected and small network of colleagues. They considered this crucial for their safety and in order to continue to cover and spread compromising stories about the subnational political elite. All of these critical journalists were aware of the fact that proving and expanding compromising information has an effect on the regime, and thus on their own targetedness. They are aware of the danger they pose vis-à-vis the regime. In addition, they are aware of the risk that is posed to themselves when it comes to writing about compromising information. This also creates a sense of antipathy and revulsion towards those colleagues that work for bribes. One journalist explained:

'Here it doesn't mean anything when you go to journalism school. You take your classes, graduate, and then start working for bribes. There is so much bullshit journalism here. It's really bad. It's so sad to see so many journalists just working for this corrupt system. But well you at least know that you will be safe in that case' (Interview Salvador, 2015).

Interviews with critical journalists demonstrated that there was quite a sharp distinction between critical and non-critical journalists. The journalists that were interviewed all explained that they never wrote in exchange for money. This does not mean that there exists nothing in between the sharp critical/non-critical divide in Veracruz. However, the group of journalists interviewed rejected the taking of bribes in absolute terms. Not taking bribes – either from the government or any other political actors – and reporting about compromising information is considered a full-time lifestyle.

5. THE REPRESSION OF JOURNALISTS IN VERACRUZ

Critical journalists in Mexico choose to work in a precarious environment in which many journalists do not choose to work. Part of this relates to the difficult economic climate in which journalists work, but another critical part of this precariousness is the risk that critical journalists face in doing their job. When critical journalists in Veracruz decide to continue to publish compromising information – especially by proving and expanding it – they also face repression.

Before gaining a deeper understanding of how critical journalists are repressed in Veracruz, it is important to acknowledge that repression in Veracruz, just as in the rest of Mexico, is often hard to observe. In the theory section, repression was defined as something that is orchestrated partly or fully by a state actor. Chapter 4 demonstrated how the involvement of state actors in the targeting of journalists is opaque. In Veracruz, the poor official investigations into the murders of journalists have left doubt about the involvement of state-level officials: these mismanagements are arguably intentional, and therefore could be seen as acts of repression. While 91% of the cases remain judicially unaddressed, only one case in Veracruz is known during which a journalist killing was judicially addressed (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2019).

While the involvement of public officials in journalist killings in Veracruz is shrouded in uncertainty, repression can sometimes be observed out in the open. Journalists face harassment, threats, and lootings that are observably executed by state-level police, also in Veracruz (Article 19, 2017). However, in these cases too, the link between high-level public officials within the subnational regime and the executors of repression on the streets is unclear. What is available is the perspective of critical journalists themselves about their repression. The next sections delve into these perspectives.

5a. Repression is diverse and always around

Critical journalists in Veracruz experience their own repression as diverse. They can be harassed, attacked and threatened – or face cyber-attacks, and even killings. Critical journalists in Veracruz often described repression as a risk that was always looming. Journalists were not just afraid of one type of repression, but were expecting to be repressed in various ways:

‘So many of our colleagues got killed over the last year. You probably know already that 11 of our colleagues were killed over the past few years. But this is only the very heavy repression. Then there is also the day-to-day struggle that journalists face. The endless beatings and the endless harassment on the street is something that we have to deal with constantly, every day’ (Interview Salvador, 2015).

Another journalist from Puerto Veracruz explained how she feared that she might be harassed as soon as she walked out of the interview. In addition, she was afraid that she could be wiretapped during the interview, and only wanted to meet in a coffee house in one of Veracruz’s busiest shopping malls.

'Here in Veracruz anything can happen any time. Basically you don't know when you are going to be harassed. It's really quite scary. I am walking here now but as soon as I go outside someone might attack me and there is nobody to help. There is nobody you can trust here in Veracruz. In fact, right now I am probably being tapped. This is what happens frequently, I am discussing some things with a colleague or my boss and you can actually hear that someone is tapping in. In fact, it happened just now when I called my boss about an article. I think that I was being tapped. It was to be expected (Interview Rebeca, 2015).

Another journalist that was based in Xalapa explained how he experienced the threat of being harassed and considered buying a gun to protect himself.

'I have been beaten up a few times and my camera got stolen once. Also, recently one of my good colleagues and friends got murdered... You might have heard about this. Her name was Regina Martinez. And she is not the first one and also not the last one that got killed. It's so dangerous to do the work we do that at the moment I am not thinking of having children. It is just too dangerous. You might have noticed that many of us don't have children and are somewhat young. The reason is the danger. And it put me in a really strange dilemma, cause I am thinking at the moment of buying a gun. But what do I become when I buy a gun... I am becoming one of them. It's strange. Its difficult' (Interview Javier, 2015)

Another journalist from Xalapa described how he feared meeting colleagues in the centre of the city, especially the main square (El Zocalo), where public officials would walk around and meet as well.

'When I want to talk about my work, or meet with colleagues, I mostly meet outside of the busy centre. This square is not a friendly place. It's full of politicians and public officials. I would never go to talk about work in one of those coffee places. It could be that one of Duarte's friends is sitting there and having coffee. That means it is unsafe for us. The reason I met with you right here is because I did not meet you before. I know that you spoke to Salvador and Samuel, so at least I have some reason to trust you, but look if you follow me, let's go to a place that is owned by a friend. I know that we can trust it there and we can talk (Interview Rubén Espinosa, 2015).

5b. The Incrementality of Repression

Repression in Veracruz can be manifested in diverse ways, and journalists in Veracruz often experience that the threat of some kind of repressive act is always around. But this does not mean that these journalists experience repression as a cascade

of actions without any form of logic. While journalists experience diversity in terms of repressive actions, they also experience incrementality in their repression. This incrementality does not imply that that critical journalists know exactly which type of repression is next to come, but that heavy forms of repression are often preceded by lighter forms of repression, and co-optation attempts. The more critical journalists keep on writing about compromising information in spite of the efforts to stop this, the heavier the repression that the journalists suffer becomes:

'One of the things you need to realize is that repression is just one thing here and that the people that are attacked in this state were all offered money before they were attacked. Look, the government knows all of us here. They do not attack right away but first try to make you stop writing in other ways. They give you an envelope with some money with the message that you should lower your voice a bit. This is how it started with me as well. But I refused the money and kept on doing my work. After that I started receiving the phone calls and the death threats' (Interview Salvador, 2015).

The same journalist explained about how his repression worsened after he continued writing, especially about the relationship between the government of Veracruz and organized crime. He said:

'I am interested in the relationship between Duarte's government and organized crime in Veracruz. So, when I first refused to take the money from the government, and I kept on writing, I was threatened. But that was still something that did not get me really scared. What happened is that at some point I was told that I would be killed if I continued to write. That did catch my attention. I realized that from that point onwards that I was at a risk that many other people also took but paid with their lives. But I did not stop writing anyway.' (Interview Salvador, 2015).

A close friend of Salvador, Rubén Espinosa, told a similar story about the incremental nature of his repression. Two months before he was murdered, he explained to me how he faced light forms of repression and heavier forms later:

'I am particularly interested in social movements in Veracruz, activists and so on. But I have been especially reporting about the violence against these activists, and also the violence against my fellow journalists. When I started writing these articles and started publishing shocking pictures about it, I first got offered the 'money to buy water,' ha ha. Ok I told them to go away. I continued and from that moment started receiving threats after I published something critical about the government. When I published something

that was really about corruption or the link between the Zetas and the government I would receive death threats. Once I saw mysterious people walking in front of my house. Once I was kidnapped and miraculously released, and once I knew that what I wrote was so damaging that I fled to DF' [Mexico City] (Interview Rubén Espinosa, 2015).

Another journalist from Puerto Veracruz explained that she had also experienced how her repression had worsened over the course of her career:

'It started with the minor threats. Just on the street you know. But it got worse and worse. After I started writing about corruption I started to receive phone calls from people that told me they were worried about my safety. How does that feel when someone tells you that they are worried about your safety? That feels like someone is really threatening you. Again, at the moment I am researching the disappearance of money in the health department. After I published one article about this, the portal of the magazine I worked for was blocked. After the second one, they called me up to tell me simply that they were going to kill me (Interview Rebeca, 2015).

Another journalist from Xalapa explained a story about how he experienced a similar pattern of repression. He explained that for him death threats were combined with attacks on the streets:

'When I started to work as a journalist I was afraid of the dangers of course. Especially when it comes to writing about the relationship between organized crime and politics here. In the beginning, when I was not writing that much about it, I experienced relatively few attacks on the street. When I became more critical in my writings these attacks increased a lot. I am really sure that people on the street here know who I am, even lowly police people. The government of Veracruz is basically a Politburo where it is discussed who to attack. After I wrote an article once, which included phrases like 'corrupt government' and so on, I was chased on the streets and got beaten up. It was a scary experience because I had no idea when and whether it would stop. This was the moment when I started to be familiar with the border of what you can write about here. I continued though, which resulted in people stalking me and sending me death threats, which was the scariest thing that happened to me. I was really scared for my life' (Interview Sergio, 2015).

Although journalists in Veracruz experienced a diverse set of repression, the type of repression they faced was experienced as random. But heavier forms of repression followed lighter forms of repression and co-optation attempts over time. This emphasizes the perseverance of journalists when it comes to continuing the spread

of compromising information. But it also says something about the way in which repression is conducted. On the basis of the stories of journalists themselves, the executors of repression seem to be calculative, deeming heavy forms of repression only necessary when journalists continued with the spread of compromising information.

5c. The lack of clarity about the identity of the perpetrators of repression

The repression that critical journalists in Veracruz experience comes with a lot of insecurity. For critical journalists it seems that repression is always around. The only certainty that they experience is that repression will become worse over time if they continue publishing compromising information. Also, some journalists explain that right after the publishing of an article that contains compromising information, they fear or experience a repressive response. Yet although repression becomes worse, they do not know exactly what to expect. In addition, they are also insecure about from whom to expect the eventual repressive action. Although they accuse the state government of being ultimately responsible for the repression, they often explain a strong linkage between the subnational government, organized crime groups, and even the military:

‘The problem here is that you can be attacked by anyone and it’s hard to know who you can trust. The police here are so corrupt. If the government want the police to send a threat or a message, this would be so easy. But a few years ago the Marinas (marines) came to Veracruz to take over from the local police. The Marinas are basically part of the Mexican Army. Well, now for us this means that we have one more party to really fear. I have had a threat from one of the Marinas on the street, who asked me if I want to end up like Regina Martinez, who is a colleague that got killed recently. Here we are afraid of everybody with authority (Interview Salvador, 2015).

Another journalist explained how she was afraid not only of people in uniform, such as the army, but also other civilians:

‘I have been attacked once by a person who was not a police agent or anything. I was walking on the street with my camera and got beaten up. I did not expect this to happen. But it did. And then also the people who get murdered here... it’s always unclear who is behind it. When people get killed, sometimes the people that go to the house to pick that person up are recognized as federal police or as local police, but not always. Sometimes there are unrecognizable people’ (Interview Clara, 2015).

Rubén Espinosa explained how he expected that the subnational government was behind the threats that he received, but that he also sometimes received threats from organized crime groups, whose relationship to the government was unclear:

'Here the state government... we always have to fear them. And we cannot trust the federal forces either; they are just as dangerous. There is a federal mechanism to protect journalists, for which we can sign up. But the really critical journalists like me don't do that. It's even too risky to have our names there on a paper. I was threatened so many times. The police interrogated me after writing about the governor. Twice I had to flee this state. I wrote certain things about corruption and I started receiving threatening phone calls. So I fled to the capital. At some point I was even kidnapped by Los Zetas [a drug trafficking organisation]. They interrogated me and for some reason let me go. Also this time it was about an article written about the governor' (Interview Rubén Espinosa, 2015).

He continued:

'When I was once kidnapped by Los Zetas, I knew for sure that they were sent by the government. Ha ha, they even told me to stop writing about 'hot' government topics. It's strange that they released me. I have also been attacked and harassed by people that I don't know of course, but do you think that this comes from nothing? No my friend, ha ha. In fact, I am telling you right now that if I ever get killed, I know that Duarte is responsible himself. He hates us' (Interview Rubén Espinosa, 2015).

Another journalist explained how he was once personally threatened by Duarte:

'After I published photos about students that were shot in their student home, Duarte claimed that I should be in prison. The same happened to my friend that we'll speak with tomorrow, the son of Moisez Sanchez. After his father was killed, he went to the streets claiming that the murder of his father was a political murder. Duarte gave a statement afterwards, saying that his son should not pursue the same career as his father. So in a way, that was a direct threat as well' (Interview Mateo, 2015).

In that same interview Mateo also claimed that he was reluctant to trust anyone, as he feared that the government would be able to make civilians attack him:

'I have experienced random strangers that stood in front of my house and when I came out they shouted: Mateo, we are worried about you, this is not going to end well for you. Well, I have never seen these people before and they knew my name. Can you imagine? It's not like they were people from the neighbourhood or something. These people were obviously instructed by someone in office' (Interview Mateo, 2015).

When it comes to the murdering of journalists in Veracruz, colleagues of these murdered journalists were often convinced that the murders were ordered by someone from within the government, but also emphasized that they expected other types of actors to be involved. A journalist, who also worked as a forensic photographer, explained how she expected that the actual killings are executed by what she called 'professionals':

'For the government here it's easy. You just have to hire someone for some pesos. There are enough people that are willing to kill here. You have the narcos that know how to kill. For them it's just work. They are professionals. It's work for them. Some people within narco groups are specialized in this. I have taken photos of the journalists that were killed. I could see that for this person it was a casual killing. She was cut up into pieces. I mean, her limbs and her head were cut off her body and it was all together put into a bag. There are places on the body where it's the easiest to cut right. This person clearly knew this and did a very professional job' (Interview Sofia, 2015).

The forensic photographer continued by saying that there is a clear message in killings that includes the gratuitous display of corpses. She explained how she perceived that the display of these bodies were a way of warning other journalists:

'It's clear you know. Why would you hang a body on a bridge or in this case cut a body up in pieces? It's the most horrific thing. It's to shock people. It's to give a clear message about what could happen to them. It's a sign. It's a letter to their friends basically. And the point is, every journalist gets the message here in Veracruz. At the same time, it's easy to deny the involvement of politicians. There are no good investigations. But the point is that everyone will think of this dismembered body' (Interview Sofia, 2015).

Another journalist from Puerto Veracruz explained how he thought that the presence of organized crime groups gave politicians in Veracruz the ability to deny involvement in repression:

'Veracruz is a narco state; everybody knows that. But most of us don't write about narco traffic. We are just critical journalists that are honest about our politicians. But when something happens to us, it's always 'narco this or that'. Of course, I am not saying that narcos never do something. But it's clear that politicians initiate violence towards us and they can always blame it on the narcos' (Interview Mateo, 2015).

The lack of clarity about the perpetrators entails multiple insecurities. While critical journalists can be directly threatened by a high-level politician, they mostly experience threats or attacks from people they do not recognize, which can be someone in uniform, someone that can be identified as part of an organized crime group or someone that cannot be identified as part of any group or institution. The result is that critical journalists experience generalized fear, not knowing from whom to expect the next repressive action. In addition, some of these journalists express that organized crime gives state-level politicians a way of plausibly denying any involvement in their repression. These journalists consider this smokescreen an important part of their repression.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 4 demonstrated that Veracruz is a state with relatively high levels of journalist-targeting – in terms of homicide – and is also a subnational undemocratic regime. On the basis of this finding, and on the basis of expert interviews which I presented in Chapter 4, I selected Veracruz for more in-depth fieldwork research. In this chapter, I contributed to the main research questions by analysing how a specific sub-class of boundary blurring actors – journalists – increased subnational power uncertainty in a specific state: Veracruz. Secondly, I looked at how they were repressed as a result. I found that critical journalists in Veracruz were very aware of the fact that they could hurt the subnational political elite most when they published information about corruption, crime and embezzlement in Mexico City-based media outlets. In addition, they realized that proving certain compromising information increased their impact and kept a small and dense network to protect themselves. As a result of their actions, they faced a diverse set of repression that was incremental by nature, and was executed by unknown actors.

In spite of the historical dominance of the PRI in Veracruz, I have made the argument that subnational political elites in Veracruz have experienced subnational power uncertainty. In line with the theoretical framework of this book, I have argued that the subnational political elite in Veracruz has perceived uncertainty about whether they would win subnational elections, and about whether they would be safe from interference by a central level institution. As a result of subnational power uncertainty, the subnational undemocratic regime in Veracruz has tried to undermine critical media there. Just like in other Mexican states, the expansion of compromising information about the regime in Veracruz can increase subnational power uncertainty. The result of this is that critical media outlets in Veracruz have

been stifled in different ways. For critical media it is hard to exist because of the fact that the government of Veracruz is a large funder of the media. But in addition, journalists are lured into envelope journalism and are offered money by government officials in exchange for positive news coverage.

In spite of an unfree media landscape in Veracruz, certain critical journalists have tried to uncover and publish compromising stories involving the subnational political elite. They have focused on trying to publish their stories in media outlets that are based in Mexico City. In the view of these journalists, publishing compromising stories in the capital could catch the attention of national level institutions, and make them 'care' about Veracruz. In addition, they claimed that proving compromising and publishing tangible, compromising facts about the subnational political elite increased the impact of their story and in their eyes increased insecurity for this elite. Finally, also related to how boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty, journalists kept a close and dense network in order to experience a sense of security and thereby be able to continue to publish compromising stories.

As a result of their actions, journalists experienced repression. First of all, these acts of repression were diverse, ranging from cyber-attacks to threats and physical attacks. Journalists experienced a generalized sense of fear and had the feeling that they could face repressive action at any moment. Secondly, although repression was diverse, journalists explained that their repression was incremental: heavy and violent forms of repression, such as kidnapping or murder, were often preceded with co-optation attempts and lighter forms of repression. Lastly, journalists did not know from whom to expect an act of repression. While they were convinced that the subnational political elite was behind their repression, they also feared the police, the military, and other civilians. Critical journalists in Veracruz experienced this as part of a strategy by the subnational government. The government gave clear signs to journalists that they should stop spreading compromising information, and then subsequently denied any involvement in the ensuing repression of journalists, pointing at criminal violence instead.

This chapter has added another piece to the puzzle when it comes to the question of how boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty and how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress them. While it was already shown in Chapter 4 that repression of journalists in Mexico entails more than murder, this chapter was able to lay bare some of the dynamics of repression. One of them is the incremental nature of repression, which is something that was not uncovered with the quantitative data used in Chapter 4. While quantitative data can demonstrate that overall levels of repression increase or decrease, it does not show the increase related to one specific person. In addition, the interviews with journalists

emphasized that journalists themselves found that the subnational political elite created a sense of deniability by exposing journalists to repression from different actors, such as the military or civilians.

While this chapter showed that repression can be incremental, it did not tease out the dynamic relationship between the actions of boundary-blurring actors and the response of the subnational political elite. Because of the finding that repression was typically incremental, it is useful to reconstruct the entire timeline after an event that may compromise the subnational elite. That is what is done in the next chapter. Also, while this chapter has focused solely on journalists, the next chapter will open up the category of boundary-blurring actors, and zoom in on a specific time period – instead of a specific sub-class of boundary-blurring actors – in order to uncover the dynamic.

CHAPTER 6

Boundary-blurring actors in Gujarat

Notification: this chapter contains violent and disturbing content

1. INTRODUCTION

On 14 April 2011, Sanjiv Bhatt, the former most important security advisor of the Chief Minister of Gujarat (India), filed an affidavit at the Supreme Court of India. He claimed in the affidavit that the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi (Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP) instructed him to let Hindus 'vent out their anger' against Muslims during the violent communal riots that shocked Gujarat in 2002 and left an estimated 2000 people dead (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2016; Davies & Nyland, 2005, p. 111). With this compromising piece of information, Sanjiv Bhatt accused the subnational political elite – consisting of Modi, his most trusted ministers, high-level security personnel and party leaders, and allied high-level non-state actors – of sanctioning a deathly communal riot.

This is only one example that shows that while the communal riots were long over in Gujarat, boundary-blurring actors – in this example Sanjiv Bhatt, an actor who used to be part of the subnational political elite himself – extended the scope of certain compromising information beyond state boundaries by bringing it to a central institution. Thereby, such actors increased subnational power uncertainty for the Gujarati subnational political elite. In the theory chapter, I argued that it is not only opposition parties that can increase subnational power uncertainty by forming strategic alliances with the centre. Boundary blurring actors, who are able to extend the scope of compromising information to the subnational electorate and/or central institution, can cause this uncertainty as well. For this reason, it was proposed that boundary-blurring actors are likely targets of repression.

While Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrated how a specific category of boundary-blurring actors – journalists – increased subnational power uncertainty, this chapter zooms in on what actors did in relation to one specific event. I use process tracing to analyze how certain actors increased subnational power uncertainty during the aftermath of the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat. Limiting the scope of the analysis to one specific event enables me to keep the category of boundary-blurring actors open and to analyze inductively how they engaged in boundary-blurring actions. By bringing the empirical study to India, it can be seen whether boundary-blurring actors are important, and repressed, in a different country to Mexico, but with a similar federal institutional set-up.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how specific boundary-blurring actions have been a critical strategy for certain actors to undermine the subnational political elite. By extending the scope of compromising information after the communal riots, these boundary-blurring actors have increased subnational power uncertainty and have been repressed as a result. I also demonstrate that boundary-blurring actors can

be diverse in terms of their profession. The danger they face rather depends on the compromising information they possess, their position, and their ability to extend the scope of compromising information. The process tracing part of this chapter lays bare the dynamic relationship between the actions of boundary-blurring actors and their repression, and shows how these boundary-blurring actors have faced many varieties of repression, ranging from professional degradation – such as job loss and ‘punishment postings’ – to violent repression.

This chapter proceeds by explaining India’s federal institutional context, which gives rise to different levels of democracy and subnational power uncertainty. In India even electorally dominant subnational political elites experience subnational power uncertainty. Therefore, I propose that Gujarat in the period 2001–2014 constitutes a compelling case to analyze how boundary-blurring actors increased subnational power uncertainty and how they were repressed, and a likely case to find such repression. Section 4 provides the actual empirical analysis that is based on process tracing, which is understood as the methodology that is suitable to bring ‘theory and data in close proximity’ (Checkel, 2005, p. 22) by analysing ‘highly specific events and processes,’ in which direct witnesses to the events in question are included.

2. FEDERALISM, VARIATION IN SUBNATIONAL DEMOCRACY, AND SUBNATIONAL POWER UNCERTAINTY IN INDIA

Since its independence in 1947, India has been a federation. Federalism in India emerged as a means of managing ethnic and linguistic diversity (Staniland, 2015). In a federal system, especially when democratic, different ethnic and linguistic groups can have more autonomy by electing subnational governments that have far-reaching powers. Simultaneously, demands for independence in the form of creating a new state are easier to make in India than in a unitary system like Sri Lanka (Staniland, 2015).

India is a country where subnational political elites have a certain degree of autonomy. However, despite the autonomy that Indian states have, they also experience embeddedness, which means that there are certain limits to subnational rule. There are multiple institutions that ought to keep subnational political elites in check in India. On the one hand, there are subnational elections during which the elected section of the subnational political elite, consisting of the Chief Minister and his/her most trusted ministers, can lose their elected position. The indirect result of the political party section of the subnational political elite losing power is that the non-elected section, consisting of high-level party leaders and actors of non-state

organizations that are allied to the elected section, also loses power.

On the other hand, Indian subnational political elites experience top-down subnational power uncertainty. There are central institutions, like the central government, the Central Bureau of Investigation, and the Supreme Court, that have certain powers vis-à-vis the states and their subnational political elites. Ultimately, these institutions interfere in subnational politics, for example if subnational political elites are not able to prevent the breakdown of the rule of law or when they engage in criminal activities.

The manner in which these constraining mechanisms function in India is far from always fair; they do not always function in the way they are supposed to. India's subnational political elites sometimes manage to skew the electoral playing field in their favour and thereby decrease the effect of elections (Tudor & Ziegfeld, 2015). Simultaneously, the interference by India's federal government is not only motivated by guaranteeing law and order when the subnational government fails to do so. Party political power struggles often condition the manner in which central institutions intervene in subnational politics, and the President's Rule – which I will discuss in the upcoming sections – has been used to undermine local opposition parties (Kochanek & Hardgrave, 2007).

2a. Variation in subnational democracy in India

India is not only a federal country, but also a federal democracy. At the centre, India has had a parliamentary democracy since its independence in 1947. General elections are held every five years on the basis of universal suffrage and a first-past-the-post electoral system (Brass, 2010), and where turnover takes place regularly (Basu, 2009). The only period that is sometimes defined as non-democratic was during the emergency period (1975-1977) under Indira Gandhi, during which democratic institutions, such as elections, were temporarily suspended.

One threat to subnational democracy in India is electoral violence. Over the past two decades, there have been subnational elections in India that were so violent that they could not be labelled as clean (Harbers *et al.*, 2019). Notable examples of states where such violence have taken place are Bihar, and those states affected by Maoist violence (Harbers *et al.*, 2019). Indian Naxalites, mostly present in the east of India, have boycotted elections in multiple areas over the years, and have managed to disrupt people's abilities to cast their vote without the risk of physical harm (Hoelscher, Miklian, & Vadlamannati, 2012; Harbers *et al.*, 2019).

Another threat to subnational democracy, and of most relevance to this thesis, is the lack of political competition that subnational governments face. When opposition parties are crippled, for example by being fragmented or lacking

organizational resources, the mechanism by which subnational political elites can be held accountable by their electorate is flawed. While examples of such dominant/hegemonic party regimes are widely discussed in Latin America (Gibson, 2013), India has drawn much less attention regarding this phenomenon.

Tudor and Ziegfeld (2015) are among the few that have demonstrated that dominant/hegemonic party regimes have also existed in India. In the period after independence (1947-1989) there was no viable alternative to the Indian National Congress party in many states, which translated into the absence of turnover. While the lack of turnover can be an indication of both voter satisfaction and a crippled opposition, Tudor and Ziegfeld (2015) suggest that it has historically been indicative of opposition parties' lack of organizational capacity.

But while Congress had established hegemonic party rule in certain states in the period after independence, other parties have also established hegemonic party rule in certain states more recently (Harbers *et al.*, 2019). In West Bengal, for example, the Communist Party of India (CPI) dominated Bengali politics, with the same Chief Minister continuing in power for 33 years, before losing the elections in 2011. In Gujarat, the BJP, Congress' most important rival, has been dominant since 1998. In Sikkim, the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) has won five consecutive elections since the start of its incumbency in 1994, and not a single Legislative Assembly seat was occupied by the opposition in the period 2009-2014 (Harbers *et al.*, 2019).

2b. Subnational power uncertainty in India

While elections in some of the most uncompetitive states might be unfair in the sense that incumbent parties have an advantage during the elections, elections are still *real*. Subnational political elites cannot completely rig the elections to the extent that they are entirely certain about electoral victory (Harbers *et al.*, 2019, p. 17). The Indian Election Commission (ECI), which is the central institution that manages and monitors state elections and is highly regarded for its integrity, guards India against such levels of electoral malpractice (Gilmartin & Moog, 2012, p. 138; Rudolph & Rudolph, 2002). While the power uncertainty that comes from elections – horizontal subnational power uncertainty – varies across states and is less present for dominant/hegemonic party systems, it is never completely gone.

There are multiple empirical examples of dominant/hegemonic party regimes unexpectedly losing elections. For instance, after a very long period of CPI dominance in West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress hardliner Mamata Banerjee unexpectedly won in 2011. In 2018, Congress defeated the incumbent BJP in Chhattisgarh, during elections that were boycotted by the Maoists (Singh, 2018). This defeat happened after 15 years of dominance by the BJP.

Subnational power uncertainty can also come from above in India. India's federal set-up comes with far-reaching responsibilities for India's states and their political elites. Law and order responsibilities are mostly state matters, and each state has its own parliament (Vidhan Saba) and elected head of state (Chief Minister). But even though subnational political elites in India have far-reaching autonomy, like taking care of law and order responsibilities, India is still a 'Union' of states (National Portal of India, n.d.), in which the central government and other central institutions have certain discretionary powers vis-à-vis the states. With these powers, central institutions can overrule or punish subnational political elites.

An important mechanism that relates to subnational power uncertainty is the possibility of *executive intervention*. One of the most crucial discretionary powers that the Union Government in India has is the President's Rule (Staniland, 2015; Harbers *et al.*, 2019; National Portal of India, n.d.). The President's Rule consists of an article in the Indian constitution (Article 365) that allows the central government to replace a state government with a centrally appointed governor (National Portal of India, n.d.). The President's Rule is supposed to be only applied in rare circumstances, namely when there is a far-reaching breakdown of the rule of law and a state government is 'unable to maintain the constitutional machinery' of the government (Hewitt & Rai, 2010).

While the central government can use the President's Rule as it is intended, it can also use it for partisan and centralization purposes (Hewitt & Rai, 2010). Central governments in India have tried to undermine local opposition parties and misused the President's Rule to "intimidate recalcitrant state governments" (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2012, p. 232). An example is the President's Rule that the central government invoked after the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in Uttar Pradesh, which ignited Hindu-Muslim riots. While the central government did not impose a President's Rule during the riots, the central Congress government dissolved three BJP governments (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan) in the aftermath of the demolition – despite two of the three states not experiencing any violent incident – because of the rather vague accusation that the BJP states were home to the 'seismic vibration of unconstitutional action' (Mahapatra, 2017). The interpretation of what constitutes a breakdown of the rule of law is thus debated, and in regards to Babri Masjid, the opposition accused Congress itself of using the demolition of the mosque as an excuse to intervene in opposition states (Mahapatra, 2017).

In addition to the executive intervention, in which the federal government is the initiating actor, India's federalism also allows for *judicial intervention*. While district courts and high courts can prosecute members of subnational political elites, central institutions can also take the initiative to prosecute members of subnational political elites (World Justice Project, 2016). The Central Bureau of Investigation

(CBI), the premier investigative agency in India, can start criminal investigations into subnational political elites without the consent of states (Supreme Court of India, 2018). The Supreme Court in India can also initiate CBI investigations without the consent of states, and has the power of original jurisdiction (World Justice Project, 2016; Supreme Court of India, 2018; Supreme Court of India, 2014). As opposed to many other Supreme Courts in the world, the Supreme Court of India is not only the final court of appeal: it has the mandate to appeal jurisdiction in which lower courts' decisions are reviewed, but also the power to hear cases for the first time (Supreme Court of India, 2014). In addition, the Supreme Court can 'take cognizance' of matters on its own without anyone else drawing attention to them (aka 'suo moto' ability), which means that the Supreme Court can 'take action' without an Attorney General or Solicitor General asking for an investigation.

Subnational political elites have been able to co-opt lower level courts in the past, while they have not been able to co-opt the Supreme Court or the CBI (Banerjee, 2012). To give a recent example of the co-optation of a lower court: in 2018, the Karnataka High Court suspended a judge after it became clear that he had accepted a bribe by a Karnataka Minister, who was accused of being involved in a corruption scandal himself. The corruption case of the judge became known following a CBI investigation (Banerjee, 2012). After the incident, former Indian Chief Justice (head of the Supreme Court) V.N. Khare, who had worked both for the lower judiciary and the Supreme Court himself, explained in an interview with *Outlook India* that these types of bribes are rampant in India at the state level. He stated that '*Corruption in the lower courts is no secret. Sometimes, in the high court as well, cases of corruption have surfaced, but in my experience while I was in the Supreme Court, I have not witnessed anything similar*' (Banerjee, 2012). This independence is what makes central judicial institutions more dangerous for subnational political elites than local judicial institutions.

Judicial interference is especially important in light of the fact that members of subnational political elites can engage in criminal activities. According to the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and the National Election Watch (NEW), over 30% of members of parliament and members of the Legislative Assemblies (subnational parliaments) are facing or have faced criminal charges (National Election Watch, 2018; "791 Cases Against MPs," 2018). While lower courts can prosecute members of the subnational political elite for crimes that relate to their power position (e.g. corruption or embezzlement) this prosecution often does not take place ("791 Cases Against MPs," 2018). Ultimately, the Supreme Court can step in in such cases, and initiate investigations.

To conclude, federalism in India implies a high level of autonomy for subnational political elites. However, central institutions can still intervene on certain occasions.

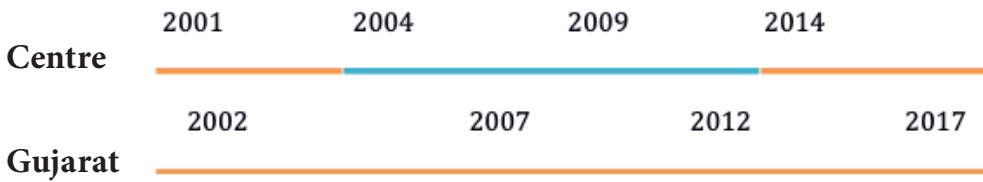
Subnational political elites cannot curb the threat of intervention, since there are institutions at the central level that cannot be controlled by subnational political elites.

Subnational power uncertainty in India comes from different sides at the same time and can vary in terms of intensity. As argued throughout the previous sections, subnational power uncertainty in India is not something that can be curtailed, be it from the threat of central interference or the threat of losing elections. At the same time, the level of threat to subnational political elites can vary. The threat of elections depends on how skewed the playing field is but also on things that happen during a political campaign for example, and how much popularity a political party enjoys. The threat of a President's Rule can depend on the alliance with the centre, and judicial intervention can depend on the motivation and capability that central judicial institutions have to intervene in subnational politics.

2c. Subnational Power Uncertainty: The case of Gujarat

This chapter continues by looking at a specific event of compromising information at a specific location. As argued in the methodology chapter of this dissertation, Gujarat in the period 2001-2014 constitutes a case where there is a high likelihood of finding repression of boundary-blurring actors. The Gujarati subnational political elite experienced a constitutional crisis *during* the communal riots and *afterwards* had to deal with the accusation that it did too little to prevent them, and even that it sanctioned the violence. This is a scenario where it can be expected that boundary-blurring actors increased subnational power uncertainty by extending the scope of conflict. The upcoming sections involve process-tracing *how* boundary-blurring actors increased subnational power uncertainty, and *how* they were repressed as a result. Only looking at one important but specific event of 'compromising information,' namely compromising information related to the communal riots, allows me to open up the category of boundary-blurring actors.

While it is argued that subnational political elites cannot completely curb the threat of intervention by central institutions or the threat of losing elections, the strategic positioning of the Gujarat political elite vis-à-vis the centre and vis-à-vis the subnational electorate in the period 2001–2014 is important. In terms of this strategic position, two things must be taken into account. First of all, as Figure 9 demonstrates, there is the position of the subnational political elite vis-à-vis the central government. While being allied with the central government does not mean that the subnational political elite does not experience any threat from the centre, it is expected that the threat from the centre is heavier when the rival Congress party is incumbent.

Figure 9. Ruling party in the central government and in Gujarat

* Orange depicts the BJP and blue depicts Congress. The dates represent the years during which elections took place.

The second important background factor is the winning streak of the BJP, which starts in 1998, and, as Figure 9 also shows, continues until the time of writing of this dissertation. It must be kept in mind that this is an observation that is made in hindsight. The winning streak does say something about the fact that the BJP has managed to curb the electoral playing field in its favour, but this does not mean that the subnational political elite never faced the threat of losing elections. As I argue in the upcoming sections, the communal riots started against the backdrop of the threat of losing elections.

In addition to these two strategic factors, it is essential to understand that the subnational political elite does not consist solely of important BJP actors. As explained in the theory chapter, the political elite is used to describe the most powerful actors in terms of shaping political outcomes in these territories. While the incumbent BJP is the most important part of the subnational political elite, there are some organizations that do not directly engage in elections but are part of the political elite.

The Sangh Parivar, a group of non-state Hindu-nationalist organizations, has been intertwined with the BJP elite to the extent that they are dependent on its success and failure in Gujarat (Berenschot, 2011). Examples of these organizations include the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Bajrang Dal, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The BJP is considered the political wing of the larger RSS organisation and the RSS is largely responsible for the selection of BJP leaders, and supports its political campaigns (Banerjee, 1991), which means that their leaders are essential for the shaping of politics in Gujarat. In the period 2001–2014, the political elite in Gujarat thus consisted of high-ranking actors within both the government and these non-governmental organizations.

3a. Modi's controversial start as the Chief Minister of Gujarat

The exact manner in which Narendra Modi took office as the Chief Minister of Gujarat is unknown and was likely the result of backstage political decision-making (Phadnis, 2009). His predecessor Keshubhai Patel officially resigned due to failing

health. However, prior to his resignation, Keshubhai Patel also faced accusations of power abuse, corruption, and the mismanagement of a disaster relief programme aimed at supporting the victims of the 2001 earthquake in Bhuj (Phadnis, 2009). Most importantly, the BJP lost multiple seats during by-elections, which are considered an important indicator of how a political party is doing between elections. This is likely to have spurred the national BJP leadership to introduce a new BJP candidate, which was the Hindu-nationalist hardliner Narendra Modi (Jaffrelot, 2012). On 7 October, Modi officially took office as the Chief Minister of Gujarat.

Only a few months after Modi was sworn into office, something took place that would spark one of the most violent periods of Gujarat's history. On 27 February 2002, a train carrying a group of Hindu pilgrims (Kar Sevaks) on the Sabarmati train line close to Godhra, not far from the capital Ahmedabad, was completely burned out. Fifty-nine people burned to death, including a substantial number of Hindu pilgrims bound for Ahmedabad after attending a religious ceremony ("Suspended Gujarat IPS Officer Sanjiv Bhatt," 2015).

The Godhra train burning sparked fierce reactions from the local BJP leadership, including Modi himself. The BJP government defined the train burning as an 'organized attack by Muslims' ("My Govt is Being Defamed," 2002). But while the official narrative was that the train was set ablaze by a 'mob' of Muslims, critics, consisting of activists and members from opposition parties, challenged this narrative from the start and referred to the train burning as an accident and even a BJP conspiracy ("My Govt is Being Defamed," 2002).

On the day of the train burning, the Gujarati government installed an investigation team under the supervision of the Nanavati–Shah commission, led by retired Supreme Court judges G.T. Nanavati and K.G. Shah (later replaced by Akshay H. Metha, making it the Nanavati–Metha commission). The commission was mandated with the investigation of the train burning. On 3 March, the commission became officially operational and started its investigations. While it was expected that the commission would be able to present its findings months after the train burning, the commission eventually received 24 extensions and the eventual presentation of the findings was delayed for years ("Godhra Commission Not to Seek Extension", 2014). This was partly due to the fact that the mandate of the commission got expanded over the years as other violent events followed the Godhra train burning.

3b. The communal riots of 2002

Despite the dramatic nature of the train burning, it is mostly viewed as the antecedent of an even bloodier event. The day after the train burning, the charred bodies of the victims were brought to a hospital in Ahmedabad, which stirred up 'communal

passions' among Hindus in the city ("Decision to Bring Godhra Victims' Bodies," 2016; "Suspended Gujarat IPS Officer Sanjiv Bhatt," 2015). Immediately afterwards, the VHP announced a general strike (bandh). Although the Supreme Court of India had ruled such strikes unconstitutional because of the often-violent effects, the Gujarati government decided not to take action against it (Shani, 2007). Also in this case, the strike heralded three days of bloody rioting between Hindus and Muslims. During these ensuing riots, an estimated 2000 people were murdered, of which a large majority was Muslim (Davies & Nyland, 2005, p. 111). Many of these killings were combined with rape, gang rape, mutilation, and the destruction of property. An estimated 100,000 Muslim houses were completely destroyed (Davies & Nyland, 2005, p. 111).

3b1. Lacking government and police action, and the emergence of boundary-blurring actors

During the communal riots there was immediate condemnation about the manner in which the Gujarati government handled the riots. Right before the onset of the riots, both opposition parties and critics within the subnational political elite itself opposed the idea of the charred bodies being brought to Ahmedabad, as this was expected to provoke communal tensions ("Suspended Gujarat IPS Officer Sanjiv Bhatt," 2015). One of the critics within the subnational political elite itself was Haren Pandya, who was the Home Minister of Gujarat ("Suspended Gujarat IPS Officer Sanjiv Bhatt," 2015). He publicly opposed the idea of bringing the charred bodies to Ahmedabad, and also opposed the idea of allowing a general strike to take place ("Suspended Gujarat IPS Officer Sanjiv Bhatt," 2015). However, Modi and most of his ministers ignored his objection, leading to the bodies eventually being brought to Ahmedabad.

When the riots were in full swing, criticism soon shifted from the lack of prevention to criticism about the lack of intervention. Politicians from opposition parties and human rights NGOs condemned the lack of police action during the communal riots (Human Rights Watch, 2003). The police failed to prevent carefully executed massacres like the Naroda Patiya massacre, during which 97 Muslims were killed and victims were gang raped and burned alive (Human Rights Watch, 2003). During this particular massacre, which became known as one of the most gruesome, people were also 'chased into huge pits' after they were 'set on fire with LPG cylinders' (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

The lack of police action ignited criticism towards the subnational political elite of Gujarat, or what is locally called 'the Modi entourage' (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2016), consisting of 'Modi, his most trusted ministers, security personnel, and high-level RSS and VHP figures' (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2016). While there was widespread

condemnation about the lack of strong police action, some important actors within the police crushed the rioting mobs with force. One of the most notable of such cases was Rahul Sharma, Indian Police Service (IPS) Superintendent of the Police in Gujarat at the time of the riots, responsible for keeping law and order in 'one of the most ethnically problematic districts' of Ahmedabad: Bhavnagar (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017). On 28 February, he ordered police to open fire on a group of Hindu extremists who were on their way to attack a Muslim school. Rahul Sharma suggested that this decision ruffled the feathers of the subnational political elite. He stated fifteen years later during an interview:

'On the 27th February, the riots started. In the afternoon, on the 28th it was escalating. I was the superintendent of the police at that time. I was working in Bhavnagar district. Most notable was the saving of 400 school children at a Muslim religious institution. They were surrounded by a mob of 5,000-10,000 people. But we were able to reach there and then we brutally intervened. This was not liked by Modi and his cronies at all' (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017).

Modi and his 'surrounding ministers' rejected the police intervention by Rahul Sharma (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017). Other actors from within the police, including Sanjiv Bhatt, the highest security advisor of Modi, and R.B. Sreekumar, Director General of the Gujarat Intelligence Bureau, supported Rahul Sharma and his intervention in the communal riots and thereby started to oppose the subnational political elite that they themselves were part of (interview Rahul Sharma, 2017). These actors later became important boundary-blurring actors.

3b2. Subnational power uncertainty during the communal riots

The previously mentioned actors, such as Rahul Sharma, increased subnational power uncertainty in the aftermath of the riots, because they tried to extend the scope of compromising information. But they also created subnational power uncertainty in a more immediate sense. As mentioned in the previous sub-section, Rahul Sharma was criticized by his superiors. After Rahul Sharma overpowered the Hindu rioters in Bhavnagar, he was promptly accused by Modi of victimizing 'a disproportionate number of Hindus' (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017) and 'trying to seek cheap publicity and act like a hero' (Nag, 2013). This highlighted the 'breakdown of the rule of law' (Sreekumar, 2012) and 'signalled' to the national public and the central government that the subnational government was not willing to do all that it could to prevent the further breakdown of the rule of law (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017).

The hostilities between top police officials and their superiors contributed to increasing subnational power uncertainty by opening a debate about the implementation of a President's Rule (Interview Amrita, 2017). A President's Rule was the most logical type of interference from the centre since the communal riots arguably constituted a breakdown of the rule of law, and the function of the President's Rule is to restore the rule of law by handing over law and order responsibilities to the centre. However, at the time the BJP was in power at the centre. The President's Rule was an 'option that was indeed discussed' (Interview Bhavani, 2017). Amrita, a journalist working for the renowned Delhi-based investigative magazine *Tehelka*, explained *how* the option of a President's Rule was discussed at the time of the communal riots:

'At the time, the BJP was in power in Delhi. So there was less reason to invoke a President's Rule compared to a situation in which there was a Congress government. If Congress was in power, a President's Rule would have been very likely, I mean Congress has played this card for much less reason than the riots. However, the problem for Modi was that at the time of the riots, the President of India [Abdul Kalam] was known for not being a Modi fan. Many people at the time thought that therefore perhaps it would happen' (Interview Amrita, 2017).

While Amrita gave a political reason for why a President's Rule could have been invoked, people from within the judiciary gave different reasons for why the President's Rule should or should not have been invoked at the time. One judge from the High Court, who was not involved in the case himself but spoke from his position as a legal scholar, emphasized that any constitutional crisis must spread 'beyond the boundaries of the state' before a President's Rule can be invoked (Interview Vinod, 2017). If a crisis is limited to within the state's borders it is 'not up to the Union Government to interfere' (Interview Vinod, 2017). But in addition to this statement, a lawyer for the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court, who also attended the interview with the judge from the High Court, contested the judge's view after the meeting:

'I actually do not agree with him here. He is known to be a supporter of the BJP, but also the argument is not complete. A President's Rule can definitely be used during communal riots, also without it going beyond the state borders. It is true that this is a criterion, but President's Rules have been used without this criterion [applying]. In 1992, a Hindu mob demolished the Babri Masjid. I think you know about this incident right? At the time, the riots were less catastrophic, much less. But there was a President's Rule invoked in the aftermath of the demolition. So, actually, there was a juridical precedent. Also, it was clear

that the subnational government did not want its police to intervene. This was a reason to expect that the riots would get much more out of control' (Interview Manish, 2017).

While there was a debate about the legitimacy of a President's Rule during the riots, a President's Rule was not invoked after all. Still, on 18 July 2002, Modi stepped down voluntarily by asking the governor of Gujarat to dissolve the Legislative Assembly and call for fresh elections ("Gujarat Chief Minister Resigns," 2002). Modi explained at the time: "We have decided to dissolve the assembly and seek a fresh mandate from the electorate" ("Gujarat Chief Minister Resigns," 2002). Thus, while the subnational power uncertainty from above did not materialize, Modi called for new elections because he assumed he would win them (Langa, 2012).

3c. Boundary-blurring actions and repression during the early aftermath of the riots

While Narendra Modi wanted early elections in August because of favourable polls (Venkatesan, 2002a, 2002b; Langa, 2012), the Indian Election Commission ruled out new elections because of the recent communal violence (Venkatesan, 2002a, 2002b). R.B. Sreekumar provoked this delay by meeting with the Chief Election Commissioner, James Michael Lyngdoh, and making the claim in that meeting that the law and order situation in Gujarat was not conducive to free and fair elections (Venkatesan, 2002a, 2002b). As a result, the Election Commission of India stated that 'the wounds of communal divide following the riots have not yet healed' and delayed the elections to December (Venkatesan, 2002a, 2002b; Waldman, 2002), a decision which was upheld by the Supreme Court in October. Subsequently, R. B. Sreekumar was denied his planned promotion to Director General of the Gujarat police (Venkatesan, 2002a, 2002b).

Although the elections were delayed, Modi immediately launched his campaign in the summer of 2002, and critics soon complained that Modi was using inflammatory anti-Muslim language during his political campaign. In the run-up to the elections, at the beginning of September 2002, the National Commission for Minorities (NCM), an institution that is part of the Indian Union Government and is authorized to gather information on minorities and advise the Union Government about the protection of minorities vis-à-vis Indian states (National Commission for Minorities, 2015), asked the Modi government to provide a report about statements that Modi allegedly made on 9 September during his political campaign. Modi was accused of using inflammatory speech and possibly hate speech, by allegedly calling Muslim relief camps, where displaced victims of the communal riots were based, 'child-breeding centres' (Mishra, 2012).

Upon the request of the National Commission for Minorities to provide a report or tape of the speech, the Modi government responded by claiming that such files did not exist (“Should We Run Relief”, 2002). But the recordings did exist and three senior officials from the State Intelligence Bureau, Sanjiv Bhatt among them, decided to hand over the tapes to the National Commission for Minorities on their own initiative (“Should We Run Relief”, 2002). Immediately afterwards they were transferred to a position at the Reserve Police Training Camp, which was considered one of the lowest positions for security officers. Sanjiv Bhatt explained how he considered this a ‘punishment posting’:

‘You have to understand the implications of the speech. This was a very provocative speech and was shortly after the riots. It really proved Modi’s intentions and that this could bring him down. He denied that he made any statement concerning Muslims, but I was the most senior officer at the State Intelligence Bureau at the time and we taped all speeches as a routine procedure. We simply had the tapes. We sent the tapes and immediately after I got what we call a punishment posting. We were sent to the State Reserve Police Training College, which is considered the lowest post possible for an IPS officer’ (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2016).

While state elections generally constitute a threat to subnational political elites in India, the Gujarati elections on 22 December 2002 gave Modi more power than ever before. After a fierce and Hindu nationalist-focused campaign, the BJP won a landslide victory in the state and gained an absolute majority in the Legislative Assembly (Election Commission of India, 2002). With this victory, Modi not only gained more legislative control, but also increased his legitimacy during a controversial period, after initially becoming Chief Minister through selection rather than election.

While the elections could initially be considered a threat to the subnational political elite, they turned out to be advantageous to them. Still, even during the elections, the threat to the subnational political elite did not only come from the direction of the subnational electorate. Interference by central institutions was looming – this time the National Commission for Minorities in particular. High-ranking police officers like Sanjiv Bhatt contributed to this threat by expanding the scope of compromising information. In this case, the compromising information was the hate speech which Modi had used to bolster his political campaign.

3d. Complicity in the communal riots

Interference by the National Commission for Minorities failed to materialize, allegedly (although this cannot be established) because it did not want to risk conflict with

the ruling party (Rangarajan, 2002). But this non-interference did not herald an end to the spread of compromising information and subnational power uncertainty. The election results increased the already existing suspicion about the intentions behind Modi's resignation among his critics (also among scholars like Jaffrelot, 2013). They complained that the elections were used calculatedly to gain both legitimacy and more control in Gujarat. However, using elections in his favour was not something Modi could be punished for, since this did not represent any form of power abuse. More important was the fact that Modi's opponents shifted their accusations from the claim that the 'Modi entourage' did not interfere enough in the communal riots to the accusation that the subnational political elite was 'complicit' in the riots and even 'sanctioned' them (Khetan, 2007). As a result, the threat from the centre remained, while internal threats to the rule of the Gujarati subnational political elite were arguably at an all-time low. This threat followed the subnational political elite throughout Modi's entire period as the Chief Minister of Gujarat and was also increased by certain actors that tried to spread compromising information.

On 26 March 2002, Rahul Sharma, the police officer that prevented a Hindu mob from attacking the Islamic school in the district of Bhavnagar, was taken 'out of the field' and transferred to a low-profile post at the Ahmedabad control room (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2016). Modi, and some other members of the subnational political elite, criticized him for his interventions during the riots and deplored the alleged 'disproportionate amount of Hindus' that fell victim to his intervention (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2016), but he was convinced that the decision was made to keep him quiet:

'Now what was the reaction of the state after that? I joined as a superintendent of that district [Bhavnagar] on 16 February 2002. So just about 11 days before the Godhra train incident. And I was transferred out of the district on the 26 March 2002. So within a period of 38 days, an officer who successfully controls the riots is transferred while the general advice is to keep people at stable positions. This is not a normal procedure. What is the message you think? I was punished for my actions and it was a clear sign for others that they should not mess with the plans of those at the top. We were the people with the information about what happened during the riots, and they did not want trouble from us' (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017).

Both Sanjiv Bhatt and Rahul Sharma were thus transferred to what they referred to as 'punishment postings'. However, they were not fired, because they were working as Indian Police Service (IPS) officers, recruited by the central government and appointed by the president, and thus could not be fired by the subnational government. The

subnational government, with the Chief Minister as the most important decision-maker, could however transfer IPS officers to other posts. Sanjiv Bhatt explained:

'We are appointed by the president, so even the Chief Minister could not fire us. Of course, he wanted this but he could not. That's why we were transferred to meaningless positions. It is clear that Modi and his cronies were behind our transitions. These things are all decided at the very top' (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2017).

The result of transferring Rahul Sharma out of the field was that from his new position – at the Crime Branch office – he was in a position to initiate the collection of telephone data from the days of the communal riots. On the basis of the requested Cellforce and AT&T data he was able to geolocate key actors during the communal riots and was able to listen to voice calls that were made. This telephone data potentially contained evidence that people from the political elite were complicit in the communal riots. He explained:

'As fate would have it, by some bad decision, they associated me with the intervention in the riots and gave me an office post to keep me quiet. But I am an engineer, graduated [from] a good university. I knew how you can collect phone data. I collected all the mobile phone data of that period [the period of the communal riots] in Ahmedabad city. In these records, we could see the location of the phone. We had this intel about the mobs, 'cause they primarily worked with mobile phones' (Interview Rahul Sharma).

He continued by explaining how the data worked:

'How it works is that you have several poles in the city that can decide the angle of the mobile phone that someone is using. But there are more of these poles, and if you look at the angle of multiple poles towards a phone, you could estimate the location of the mobile phone quite accurately. You have to understand the scope of this data gathering. We [at the Crime Branch] located all the mobile phones. I could now pinpoint who was where at what time. A very powerful database. In the end, the High Court of Gujarat has relied exclusively on this database. So here was scientific and documented evidence, and a police officer that was not bending' (interview Rahul Sharma, 2017).

After the collection of the data, Rahul Sharma sent the data to his superior, head of the Crime Branch, P.P. Pandey. But Pandey claimed that the files were not sent to him and that they 'got lost in the process' ("Guj Top Cop Charged," 2011, Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017), and immediately afterwards, Rahul Sharma was charged

with ‘misconduct’ (“Guj Top Cop Charged,” 2011). On 5 July 2004, however, Rahul Sharma revealed that he kept a copy of the files at his house, and decided to send it to central level institutions and the media. He shared the files with the Nanavati–Shah commission – which got its mandate extended to investigate not only the train burning but also the communal riots – the Banerjee Commission (which I will explain in the next section), and also reached out to the media (“Godhra Commission Not to Seek Extension,” 2014; Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017). To be sure it would not be spirited away, he put the data on a public forum: ‘I had put it on a public forum. It was out! Newspapers were writing about it. It exposed all the movement of politicians and senior police officers. There was no escape’ (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017). A week after he did this Rahul Sharma was transferred again, but this time to a ‘remote place’ in the south of Gujarat, where he was unable to continue his investigative work (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017). He explained:

‘But ultimately the consequence is that you are out of the service. The CM [Chief Minister] cannot sack you, but he can use those pain pricks in order to inflict minor punishments. He may stop your salary by not posting you at a place at all for example. Ultimately he is a powerful man. I was in an open battle with the government so it had consequences’ (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017).

In 2004, the same year that Rahul Sharma was transferred from his position and had started to collect his phone data, Haren Pandya, the former Home Minister of Gujarat who had criticized his own government in 2002 for allowing the charred victims of the Godhra train burning to be brought to Ahmedabad, resigned from his post for unknown reasons (Subrahmaniam, 2012). Shortly after, on 26 March that year, unidentified assailants murdered him in his car after he came back from a walk in a park (Subrahmaniam, 2012). While people from opposition parties and Haren Pandya’s family raised suspicions that the murder was orchestrated by people from within the subnational political elite, investigations never implicated anyone within this elite (Subrahmaniam, 2012).

Sanjiv Bhatt claimed during an interview that a known criminal from Hyderabad, Asgar, informed him about the fact that in 2003 he received the order to murder Haren Pandya from terrorist suspect Sohrabuddin Sheikh (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2017). Sanjiv Bhatt went with the information to Home Minister Amit Shah, who told Bhatt ‘not to speak about it to anyone’ (Bhattacharya, 2011). Sohrabuddin Sheikh was later himself killed, at the alleged behest of Amit Shah, who was subsequently prosecuted for the killing of Sohrabuddin Sheikh by the Supreme Court (“Who is Amit Shah?,” 2013). While the link between Amit Shah and the Haren Pandya killing

remains unclear, Sanjiv Bhatt argued Amit Shah is also the person who commissioned the Pandya murder.

Both the relocating of Rahul Sharma and the killing of Haren Pandya relate in their own way to the idea that the subnational political elite was complicit in the communal riots. Sending the phone data that could potentially prove this complicity to the investigative commissions and the media was an attempt to spread the scope of compromising information to a central institution and to the national public. At this point, the boundary-blurring actor Rahul Sharma no longer trusted local institutions, his political superiors or local judicial institutions (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017). As a result of the threat that these actions posed, the subnational political elite tried to get rid of him (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017). In the case of Haren Pandya, there was suspicion about the involvement of the subnational political elite in his killing, but no proof of it. Later on, it did become clear that Haren Pandya had engaged in a boundary-blurring action before he was assassinated.

3e. Turnover at the centre

In April and May 2004, general elections took place in India, which were won by the United Progressive Alliance, which was made up of 15 parties including Congress (Election Commission of India, 2004). After a record period of eight years of non-Congress rule at the centre, Congress regained control, and Manmohan Singh was sworn in as the new Prime Minister. One of the results was that the new government requested (and was granted) the transfer of Rahul Sharma from Gujarat to the CBI. Only four months later, in September 2004, the central government installed its own special investigation team to investigate the cause of the Godhra train burning in Gujarat: the Banerjee Commission. At that point in time, the Navanati–Shah Commission, invoked by the Gujarati government, had not yet presented any findings. As a result, the two investigation teams worked simultaneously in Gujarat for a short period.

In 2005, before the Navanati–Shah commission published its report, the Banerjee Commission presented its report in which the claim that a mob of Muslims caused the train burning was rejected (Jaffrelot, 2012). Instead, the report concluded that the train burning was the result of an ‘accidental fire’ (Jaffrelot, 2012, p. 80), a finding that was at odds with the official stance of the Gujarati government. Shortly after the Banerjee report came out, the Gujarati High Court called it ‘unconstitutional, illegal and null and void’ (Nussbaum, 2008, p. 81). The government claimed that the publication of the report was an attempt by Congress to gain an advantage in the elections in Bihar, which were to be held shortly after the report’s release (“Godhra Report Attempt to Help Laloo: Bjp,” 2005).

The manner in which the United Progressive Alliance government tried to influence the Godhra investigations, by installing its own investigative commission, shows not only how the scope of compromising information reached far beyond the state borders, but also how change of power at the centre created new subnational power uncertainty for the Gujarati subnational political elite. The installation of an investigative commission can be considered a small intervention by the centre. While the intervention was not as heavy as a President's Rule, and the Gujarati High Court dismissed the mandate of the Banerjee report, it was not meaningless either, as it signalled the willingness of the centre to be involved in the subnational conflict. While the High Court rejected the legality of the report ("Godhra Report Attempt to Help Laloo: Bjp," 2005), the intention of the BJP to stir up communal tensions after the Godhra train burning remained an unfinished debate.

3f. Pushing the boundaries further

In 2005, more actors that accused the subnational political elite of complicity in the communal riots tried to expand the boundaries of compromising information. At this stage, the existing compromising information, like the tapes that Rahul Sharma had spread, were not yet affecting the subnational political elite, and the Banerjee report had been dismissed. A new important figure that emerged was Cedric Prakash, a Jesuit priest and director of Human Rights NGO Prashant, who had been doing reconciliation work between Muslims and Hindus since the communal riots.

Cedric Prakash aimed to make compromising information internationally available and contacted several US Congressmen about the complicity of the subnational political elite of Gujarat in the riots (Interview Cedric Prakash, 2016). These Congressmen wrote a letter to the US State Department in which they demanded that the State Department deny Modi a US visa, which he needed for a visit to New York. He planned this trip to address Indian-Americans during a rally at Madison Square Garden (Bose, 2016). As a result, the State Department organized a hearing, at which Cedric Prakash testified (Interview Cedric Prakash, 2016). He claimed that some attackers used voter lists to track Muslims during the riots, with assistance from within the police and the subnational government (Interview Cedric Prakash, 2016). As a result, the US Congress appealed to the Religious Freedom Act and denied Modi a US visa (Mann, 2014).

About a month after this judgment, unknown people raided and ransacked the office of Prashant, the organization where Cedric Prakash was the director. The same week, the police placed a camera in front of the building – according to Cedric Prakash, with the intention to spy on him. He explained during an interview 11 years later:

'We came into the office and they basically wrecked the entire place. They took a lot of documents and even some computers. Also, you see the camera right there [right across the street]? This is to spy on us. Since the raid, sometimes people on motorcycles tell me that they know what I am doing and so on... it's part of the same thing. Do you see the guy with the sunglasses there? He is not doing anything apart from looking at the entrance of the building. Maybe he is a spy, it's very possible. Modi's men can be anywhere' (Interview Cedric Prakash, 2017).

Two years later, in 2007, a year before the Nanavati–Metha Commission was supposed to present its findings on the communal riots, journalists from the investigative magazine *Tehelka* started flying into Gujarat to interview people like Sanjiv Bhatt and Cedric Prakash. They also conducted sting operations and released new compromising information. The first was a video in which Babhubai Patel (aka Babu Bajrangi), a close ally of Modi and leader of the Bajrang Dal (a wing of the VHP, which is closely linked to the BJP party), claimed to be responsible for massacres during the communal riots. He stated on tape that he supervised the slaughter of 91 Muslim men and women at Naroda Patiya. In addition, he bragged about overseeing the rape of a pregnant woman, during which her womb was slit open, and her foetus was thrown onto a fire. Babhubai Patel also claimed that Narendra Modi had tried to subvert judicial procedures like the Nanavati–Metha investigations (Majumder, 2007; Interview Amrita, 2017; Interview Gaurika, 2017). Amrita, an editor, and journalist for *Tehelka*, explained the impact of their reports:

'Tehelka always had a special role. If we published something here in Delhi, we knew that it was often taken over by the English press. Because our status was as such that we were considered a reliable source of information. We often were followed by journalists from for example the Hindustan Times or The Hindu. So now we started these operations in Gujarat, so it had an immediate impact on the public' (Interview Amrita, 2017).

In line with the importance that Amrita assigned to *Tehelka*, the *Hindustan Times* indeed took over the story about Babhubai Patel ("Top RSS, VHP Men Behind 2002 Riots," 2007) Amrita also described that after the first sting operation, 'police officers started to trail all *Tehelka* journalists from the airport' when they came into Ahmedabad (Interview Amrita, 2017). She explained how these were state intelligence police officers and that they would not detain *Tehelka* reporters because that 'would be too... problematic' (Interview Amrita, 2017). Instead, she explained that 'they would just follow us and question [us] or detain the people that we spoke to' (Interview Amrita, 2017).

But this did not prevent *Tehelka* from engaging in more sting operations. In the same year, it conducted a sting operation during which Arvind Pandya, a close ally of Modi and counsel of the Gujarati government, explained that the BJP elite controlled the Nanavati–Metha Commission. This revelation happened during a time when the Commission was already being criticized for having a pro–BJP bias (Khetan, 2007). Shortly after the operation, on 7 November 2007, *Tehelka* published the complete investigative document, called ‘The Truths: Gujarat 2002’ (also called Operation Kalank), which was based on their six-month investigation in Gujarat. *Tehelka* collaborated with national television station ‘Aaj Tak’ to screen several of the compromising tapes that they took during sting operations (Khetan, 2007).

In the *Tehelka* document, more key figures were accused of being involved in the communal riots. Among them were BJP parliamentarians, such as Hareesh Bhat, and key actors from the RSS and the VHP. While these actors were not at the commanding heights of the subnational political elite, they were still a part of it, and claimed that they were in contact with the top of the subnational political elite during the riots. Hareesh Bhat, for example, claimed on tape that Modi gave him ‘three days to do what he wanted’ during the riots (Khetan, 2007). Other actors stated that ‘Modi told them to stop after three days, and thanked them’ (Khetan, 2007). According to *Tehelka*, these statements proved that the riots had the ‘sanction’ of the subnational political elite, including the very top: Chief Minister Narendra Modi.

An employee of *Tehelka* explained how the shadowing of *Tehelka* journalists only increased:

‘Modi started using his police forces a lot. A lot. Including intelligence. One police officer who happened to have been my classmate I met at some point. I told him that I worked for Tehelka now. He worked as a police officer for Modi. He explained to me that his task was now to shadow Tehelka journalists wherever they would go. Also, they were looking at what we did in our lives and they tried to see whether they could find a scandal about us. Later this became really important. Our former editor-in-chief at some point faced sexual offence accusations. I mean, maybe this was a genuine complaint, but maybe it was something the BJP had up its sleeve. In the end, I don’t know. But for my taste, it was all a bit too advantageous for the BJP in Gujarat’ (Interview Inderdeep, 2017).

The same year that *Tehelka* published their report, the influential New Delhi–based English language news magazine *Outlook* also published a compromising story. *Outlook* revealed that they interviewed Haren Pandya, who was killed in 2003, ‘on the record’ back in 2002. During that interview, Haren Pandya claimed that he was at a security meeting during the riots in which Modi told his highest police officer, Sanjiv

Bhatt, to let 'people vent their frustration and not come in the way of the Hindu backlash' ("A Midnight Meeting," 2007). *Outlook* claimed that Pandya disclosed the information on the condition of confidentiality, as he was afraid to be killed, primarily because of his already critical view of the role of the BJP during the riots ("A Midnight Meeting," 2007).

Boundary-blurring actors like Cedric Prakash and journalists from *Tehelka* and *Outlook* contributed to the expansion of compromising information. Because of them, the notion that the subnational political elite of Gujarat was complicit in the riots or even sanctioned them was an issue discussed far beyond Gujarat's borders. People that notified US Congressmen and testified at the US State Department, like Cedric Prakash, involved the United States in the matter. This involvement resulted in a very unusual type of 'interference,' namely the denial of a visa from another country. But that did not create the subnational power uncertainty that central institutions can create. The journalists from *Tehelka* and *Outlook* did not reach these central Indian institutions directly but had put the most compromising information, which could potentially count as evidence, out in the open. While to my knowledge *Outlook* was spared any sanctions, as we have discussed, *Tehelka* journalists and people like Cedric Prakash, the actors that were the most persistent in expanding compromising information, did face repression. The office of Cedric Prakash was ransacked after he testified at the State Department and he has experienced camera surveillance ever since. *Tehelka* was spied on by people from within the Gujarati police force and according to Amrita, the rape scandal that the editor-in-chief of *Tehelka* faced was possibly set up by the Gujarati subnational political elite.

3g. The expansion of judicial involvement

In March 2008, when suspicion about the complicity of the Gujarati political elite in the riots was at an all-time high as a result of the compromising information coming out of Gujarat, the Indian Supreme Court decided to step in (Nussbaum, 2008). While the scope of the conflict had broadened during the previous years, local Gujarati courts had so far only acquitted people high in the ranks of organizations like the BJP, RSS, and VHP (Nussbaum, 2008). The Supreme Court of India accused the Gujarati courts of having a BJP bias (Nussbaum, 2008; Lubin, Davis, & Krishnan, 2010). As a result, the Supreme Court transferred over 2,000 criminal cases to the Mumbai High Court and ordered the creation of a Special Investigations Team (SIT) in order to investigate key cases concerning the riots, including the involvement of members from the subnational political elite (Nussbaum, 2008). The appointment procedure of the SIT was controversial, however. Since the Gujarati High Court was responsible for appointing judicial officers, half of the ground team consisted of Gujarati police

officers, who were susceptible to blackmailing by the subnational political elite (Jaffrelot, 2012). For that reason, multiple independent prosecutors from outside Gujarat resigned due to their own inability to function (Jaffrelot, 2012, p. 83). The investigation by the SIT thus failed to deliver an independent investigation.

A few years after the interference of the Supreme Court, certain actors continued to expand the scope of compromising information. In 2009, Suresh Metha, former Chief Minister – and Minister of Industries during the communal riots –, stated in the national media that his former colleagues purposefully let the communal riots happen, but that the existing investigations were not well equipped to investigate this. He stated that Modi and close colleagues should be ‘cross-examined’ by the Nanavati–Metha commission or at the Supreme Court (Interview Suresh Metha, 2016; “Cross-Examine Modi on 2002 Riots,” 2009).

Two years later, on 14 April 2011, Sanjiv Bhatt, the most important IPS officer under Modi at the time of the riots, who was responsible for Gujarat’s internal security, border and coastal security, security of vital installations, and Narendra Modi’s personal security, independently filed an affidavit against Modi at the Supreme Court. In the affidavit, he claimed that during the security meeting at Modi’s house on the day of the communal riots, Modi gave him the order to let Hindus ‘vent out their anger’ (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2016). This claim was similar to what the assassinated Haren Pandya confidentially told *Outlook India* years before. However, it is unclear why Sanjiv Bhatt waited so long to share these details. According to Amrita, this could have to do with first wanting to save his own career (Interview Amrita, 2017).

On the 16 August, two days after he filed his affidavit at the Supreme Court, Sanjiv Bhatt was suspended and his house was raided as well (“Suspended Gujarat IPS Officer Sanjiv Bhatt,” 2015; Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2016). He explained about the experience:

‘It was very intimidating and blatant. The accusations they came up with were very light and common. You do not raid a house because of such accusations. It was to intimidate me and have a reason to suspend me. If they could have fired me they would have’ (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2016).

At the same time as the house raid, the government of Gujarat withdrew an application that appealed to the Gujarat High Court in 1990 to drop a charge that was filed against Sanjiv Bhatt. The charge was about Bhatt’s involvement in a custodial death case. As a result of this withdrawal, the Gujarat High Court started a new investigation into Bhatt’s involvement in the custodial killing (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2016).

3h. From subnational power uncertainty to power consolidation

In 2011, after receiving 24 extensions, the Nanavati–Metha report came out and concluded that a mob of 1,000–2,000 Muslims committed an arson attack on the train (“Godhra Verdict,” 2011). The report eventually consisted of more than 2000 pages and nine volumes (“2002 Post-Godhra Riots,” 2016). On the basis of the Nanavati–Metha investigations, a Gujarat court convicted 31 people. The Gujarat High Court later upheld this judgment (Mandhani, 2017). Yet the cause of the train burning and the impartiality of the Nanavati–Metha commission have remained contested over the years. Multiple scholars have emphasized the lack of comprehensive and detailed evidence on which the Nanavati–Metha investigations were based, while some non-BJP politicians and Indian journalists, and human rights NGOs, have accused the commission of mistreating witnesses (Amnesty International, 2005; Williams, 2011; Jaffrelot, 2012; Mitta, 2014). Nussbaum (2008) has gone a step further by describing the event as a pre-planned conspiracy by the Gujarati political elite to ‘gain popularity’ among Hindu voters.

On the 10 April 2012 the Supreme Court ruled, on the basis of the SIT and Navanati–Shah investigations, that there was no evidence to prosecute the top of the subnational political elite for their role in the communal riots. However, some prominent figures, including *Tehelka*-exposed Babhubai Patel, and possibly most prominently Maya Kodnani, former Minister of State for Women and Child Development, were convicted of orchestrating mass murder (Sanyal, 2012). But the top figures of the subnational political elite, like Narendra Modi and his most trusted ministers and RSS/VHP allies, were not convicted for their involvement in the riots. The Supreme Court acquitted Modi. Amir Shah was granted bail by the Supreme Court, as it said it did not having enough evidence to convict him of the murder of Sohrabuddin Sheikh (“Who is Amit Shah?,” 2013). The top of the subnational political elite of Gujarat thereby remained relatively unharmed, and actors like Modi and Amit Shah could continue their political careers. With the verdict, Gujarati’s boundary-blurring actors were left with few tools to undermine the Gujarati political elite. Rahul Sharma explained:

‘The problem is, courts do not investigate. The error that the Supreme Court made is in the selection of the investigative team. Who were the members? They were Modi’s men. The rest of the operational officers of the Special Investigative Team appointed by the Supreme Court who were involved, were all part of the government of Gujarat. They were Modi’s men! He [Modi] has not himself interrogated any of the witnesses. In fact, I offered my help. I called him up from a confidential phone number. I said I can help. I was on the ground anyway. I got refused. So the plan is very clear. Make some arrests, create some façades, do some scapegoating, as long as it doesn’t reach the top. So with this judgment, we knew that it was over’ (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017).

After his acquittal, Modi was nominated by his party to run for Prime Minister during the general elections of 2014. He won these elections and was sworn in as the Prime Minister of India on 6 March 2014. Amit Shah became the President of the BJP, and the US lifted its visa ban shortly after Modi became Prime Minister (Mann, 2014). This transition from subnational power to national power also affected the repression of boundary-blurring actors.

While the repression by *national* political elites is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the transition of power of Modi and his allies from the subnational to the national level sheds light on certain limitations that were present at the subnational level. Before Modi became Prime Minister, Rahul Sharma was placed in a position at the Central Bureau of Investigation at the request of the Union Government (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2016). This meant that he became a boundary-blurring actor from Gujarat that now worked for 'one of the few central institutions that would investigate power abuse by CMs from the BJP' (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2016). He stated that 'the BJP people would therefore call it the Congress Bureau of Investigation' (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2016).

In the period 2004–2014, Congress was in power at the centre, and Rahul Sharma claimed that he was therefore 'kind of protected' at the CBI (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017). But after Modi won the elections, he lost this protection and the new government immediately filed 39 charge sheets against him (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2016). He explained:

'They installed a new superior officer who was a Modi confidant. He knew that if he would harass me he would be supported [by] the government. In tandem with the government, my superior filed 39 charges against me. Thirty-nine, ha ha ha ha. So, it went on and on and on. I had already taken a stand, so I did not bend. It became a detailed battle. One charge sheet for example was even about a typo error. I was charged with 'negligence.' It was pure harassment. They made sure that during the whole period I was trying to fend off all these charges. I even received 10 more afterwards. Another one included 'misconduct' also on the basis of a typo error' (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017).

As a result of these harassments, Rahul Sharma decided to quit his service in the IPS and started a law firm. On 9 August 2015, Modi removed Sanjiv Bhatt from the IPS on the basis of 'unauthorized absence' (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2016; "Suspended Gujarat IPS Officer Sanjiv Bhatt," 2015) – something that he was not authorized to do as a Chief Minister but could do when he became Prime Minister. Bhatt explained that 'removing me... was basically the first thing that Modi did when he became the PM' (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2017).

4. CONCLUSIONS

In 2002, the bloodiest riot took place in India since partition, during which around 2,000 people were killed. Most of those murdered were Muslims. During the aftermath of the riots, the subnational political elite had a proverbial skeleton in the closet. The skeleton in the closet for the subnational political elite was the information that could prove that they did not do enough to prevent the violence from taking place, and moreover that they even sanctioned the violence. While political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes always experience subnational power uncertainty, this compromising information about the subnational political elite fed into subnational power uncertainty in concrete ways, and led to both the threat of a President's Rule and to judicial interference throughout the 12-year aftermath of the communal riots.

This chapter showed how a variety of actors engaged in boundary-blurring actions during the aftermath of the riots. Among the group of boundary-blurring actors were outside-in journalists (New Delhi-based journalists that travelled to Gujarat to pick up compromising information about the subnational political elite), and former political insiders (who had easy access to compromising information because of their closeness to the subnational political elite). As time passed after the communal riots, local institutions did not hold the subnational political elite accountable for the sanctioning of the communal riots: elections only consolidated the power of the political elite, and investigations by lower courts did not lead to the arrest of members of this elite. But boundary-blurring actors spread compromising pieces of information to the national public sphere and central institutions, thus extending the scope of compromising information. The first finding of this chapter is that high-level security officials evolved as an important subcategory of boundary-blurring actors. Interestingly, these actors – like Sanjiv Bhatt and Rahul Sharma – were part of the subnational political elite themselves: they were among the most important security actors in the state, and were among Modi's inner circle. This gave them different instruments, more credibility, and most likely affected the manner in which they were repressed compared to other boundary-blurring actors.

In terms of the instruments that high-level security officials had to extend the scope of compromising information, they had a unique combination of access to information and knowledge of institutions. Their closeness to the subnational political elite gave them easier access to compromising information than other boundary-blurring actors. For example, outside-in journalists had to talk to people that were in possession of compromising information, while high-level security officials were on top of the information. In addition, they had knowledge of, and proximity to, important institutions. Sanjiv Bhatt could directly reach out to the

National Commission for Minorities with the taped speeches of Modi, and Rahul Sharma could reach out to the CBI with the phone data that he had gathered about a part of the subnational political elite. Knowledge of such institutions enabled them to spread compromising information directly to institutions that had the power to be involved in subnational politics.

In addition to the instruments that these actors had to extend the scope of compromising information, their position also gave them a certain amount of attention and credibility when they came into conflict with the subnational political elite. For example, the fact that one of the main security actors, Rahul Sharma, intervened in the communal riots and was punished afterwards, caught the attention of newspapers and caused discussion about possible central intervention. When Sanjiv Bhatt filed an affidavit, this became national news, which Sanjiv Bhatt referred to as 'an open battle' (Interview Sanjiv Bhatt, 2017). This battle got more attention because of the fact that Sanjiv Bhatt was one of the most important security officials of the state during the communal riots. Thus, while these actors could reach out to central institutions, they simultaneously reached the broader national public sphere.

Another aspect that distinguished high-level security officials from all the other boundary-blurring actors is that they were first and foremost repressed with legal, and relatively subtle actions. They received professional demotions, which they referred to as 'punishment postings.' Apart from the raid on Sanjiv Bhatt's house after he filed his affidavit, the actions that eventually neutralized Sanjiv Bhatt and Rahul Sharma consisted of such punishment postings and what they called 'legal harassment' (Interview Rahul Sharma, 2017). This meant that while high-level security officials had a unique combination of access to compromising information, and knowledge of institutions to spread it, the subnational political elite also had a unique possibility to punish them. While severely repressing high-level security officials would have plausibly been very costly for the subnational political elite, they had the opportunity to hurt them in their professional position.

The situation in which high-level security officials found themselves connects to the national-level literature on intra-elite struggle and defectors. In his work on the politics of authoritarian rule, Svobik (2012) argues that, for authoritarian regimes, people within the 'gates of the presidential palace' can be as threatening as the people outside of those gates (2012, p. 5). Svobik (2012) explains how intra-elite struggle can result in the threat of a coup d'états. In addition, both Svobik (2012) and Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2011) explain how national-level authoritarian regimes never have complete information about the support they have from within their elite circle. Apart from coup d'états, actors from within the political elite can defect and join forces with the opposition. This dynamic looks different for political

elites of subnational undemocratic regimes. Both coup d'états and popular uprisings are prevented in subnational undemocratic regimes because of their embeddedness in a democratic state; Sanjiv Bhatt and Rahul Sharma could not lead a coup d'état without central institutions interfering.

But what the actions of high-ranking security officials do show, is that even though they cannot stage a coup d'état, they can still be dangerous by 'defecting' in their own way. Defection – if we were to call it that – is dangerous in a different manner at the subnational level because subnational power uncertainty is different than national-level uncertainty. For national-level authoritarian regimes, defection means that the opposition, that aims to undermine the political elite via a popular uprising, gets support from the inside. Thereby, opposition parties – which struggle by definition to gauge the chances of the success of their revolt (Svolik, 2012) – gain momentum. For subnational undemocratic regimes, where political elites can be punished by central institutions, rather than popular revolt or a coup d'état, it is the compromising information that 'defecting' boundary-blurring actors take with them that matters. Ultimately, Rahul Sharma and Sanjiv Bhatt also showed that even though people who are (partially) dependent on the subnational political elite in terms of their career and livelihoods are less likely to dissent, as McMann (2006) argues, they can be very threatening *when* they do. It just depends on the positionality of these actors and their access to compromising information, and their ability to spread it. Even if just a handful of such actors decide to spread compromising information about the subnational political elite directly to central institutions, this can be a threat for the political elite of a subnational undemocratic regime.

A separate finding of this chapter is that while local journalists did not evolve as boundary-blurring actors, there were outside-in journalists that did. These were mostly journalists working for central news outlets that collaborated with local witnesses. *Outlook* for example, which is a central news outlet, interviewed Haren Pandya to get information about the orders that the subnational political elite gave in response to the communal riots. *Tehelka* journalists jetted into Gujarat for months to engage in a sting operation with the same purpose. This sting operation is telling about the level of secrecy that was present. Apparently, there were no local news outlets up to the task of trying to break through the secrecy. Only a few central outlets used unconventional journalistic strategies. These journalists were not subnational actors, but actors that blurred the boundaries from the outside in. In conjunction with boundary-blurring actors from within the subnational territory and people that were taped undercover, they picked up compromising information rather than spread it.

The first implication of this finding relates to the conceptualization of boundary-blurring actors in the theory chapter. While I did not define boundary-blurring actors

as actors that work primarily from within the subnational region, almost all of the boundary-blurring actors that I interviewed did work from the inside out rather than outside in. While they therefore fall within the scope of my definition, these actors are unique in terms of their geographical position, which was distant from the subnational political elite compared to other boundary-blurring actors. This geographical distance also entailed a socio-political positionality that protected them from severe types of repression.

Overall, this dissertation has shown how the specific positionality for boundary-blurring actors results in opportunities, but also vulnerabilities and protection when it comes to repression. Outside-in journalists needed to search for compromising information but had direct access to the national public sphere and were protected from severe repression because of their distance from the regime and their notoriety. According to *Tehelka* journalist Amrita, this notoriety would make very violent forms of repression 'too obvious' (Interview Amrita, 2017). At the same time, the subnational political elite could not hurt them with punishment postings. Instead, they could only be spied on, and their respondents were harassed instead of them. High-level security officials had the advantage of having easy access to compromising information, but were within the reach of the subnational political elite when it comes to repression. They were most likely protected from severe repression because of their renown. But they could be hit multiple times with attacks on their professional careers, which was a repressive measure that outside-in journalists were protected against.

In addition to outside-in journalists and high-ranking security officials, there were Cedric Prakash and Suresh Metha. In their cases it is also likely that their positionality played a role in the way they were repressed. Suresh Metha was the former Chief Minister of Gujarat, and therefore had easy reach to the national public sphere. Since he was the former Chief Minister, he was relatively protected. As opposed to that, Cedric Prakash was an activist. His office was ransacked, and he was threatened immediately after his boundary-blurring actions. While this also might have to do with the fact that Cedric Prakash was more aggressive in his boundary-blurring activities, it is difficult to say which actions were more threatening to the subnational political elite. Also, when it comes to these actors, positionality affected their weakness and protection.

In addition to the finding that positionality is important when it comes to the manner in which boundary-blurring actors are repressed, it seems that repression has an incremental and iterative character. Apart from Haren Pandya, whose murder was probably orchestrated by the subnational political elite, boundary-blurring actors faced increasing repression when they continued expanding compromising information. The dynamic between Sanjiv Bhatt and Rahul Sharma on the one hand,

and the subnational political elite on the other, was a cat-and-mouse game in which the subnational political elite tried to neutralize former political insiders, and in which Rahul Sharma and Sanjiv Bhatt continued to expand compromising information even more. The fact that Sanjiv Bhatt was removed from office immediately after Modi became Prime Minister signifies the limits that the subnational political elite had in terms of repression – limits which were removed once he became the chief federal executive of the country.

But the observation of incrementality also holds for other boundary-blurring actors, such as for *Tehelka* journalists and people like Cedric Prakash. These actors faced increasing surveillance and intimidation over time, and faced repression that they interpreted as messages from the political elite: future boundary-blurring actions would come with a price tag. This did not depend on the positionality of boundary-blurring actors, but applied to all of them.

The last finding of this chapter is that boundary-blurring actors were only occasionally able to identify the agents of repression. This was the case with punishment postings, which were overseen by the chief ministers. But mostly boundary-blurring actors were not able to pinpoint the executors of repression, as was the case with the ransacking of the office of Cedric Prakash, and the surveillance of journalists. In such instances, boundary-blurring actors referred to ‘Modi’s men,’ and presumed the subnational political elite to be behind the repression, but did not know who the actual executors were.

This finding about incremental and opaque repression has implications for the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes. It connects to Gibson’s (2013: 27) thesis that it is hard to imagine a military dictatorship inside a democracy. Just like it is hard to imagine a military dictatorship in a democracy, it is also hard to imagine an openly repressive hegemonic party regime within a democracy. Rather, subnational political elites do what they can to prevent boundary-blurring actors from spreading compromising information, and are willing to use repression, but they use it with caution. This also has implications for existing quantitative work on repression by subnational political elites. Beer and Mitchell (2006), Sullivan (2013), Vadlamannati (2008) and Christensen (2017) all measure subnational levels of repression with snapshot indicators, including extrajudicial killings or the number of people killed in protests. But such operationalizations ignore the subtle and incremental aspects of repression. In Gujarat, during the aftermath of the riots, subtle and incremental aspects were important for the subnational political elite’s efforts to undermine boundary-blurring actors.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions

1. INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I sought to understand how boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty and how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors. In the theory chapter, I proposed on the basis of multiple existing scholarly insights that the political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes experience subnational power uncertainty: they experience the dual threat of losing subnational elections and interference by central institutions. As a consequence of this dual threat, they benefit from controlling the scope of compromising information about the subnational political elite. I proposed that for this reason, boundary-blurring actors – actors that have the ability to expand the scope of compromising information about the subnational political elite – are especially vulnerable to repression.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation constituted the first empirical exploration of how boundary-blurring actors can increase subnational power uncertainty. I demonstrated that critical journalists in Mexico can increase subnational power uncertainty by expanding the scope of compromising information and are targeted in subnational undemocratic regimes. This analysis also resulted in the selection of a case where journalists experienced high levels of targeting: Veracruz. Chapter 5 constituted an empirical exploration of how journalists were repressed in Veracruz. After that in a different context, instead of analyzing one group of boundary-blurring actors, I analyzed a specific historical period in which the subnational political elite of Gujarat (India) experienced subnational power uncertainty. By focusing on a historical event instead of a subset of boundary-blurring actors, I was able to unpack the category of boundary-blurring actors, and analyzed which actors engaged in boundary-blurring actions.

Together, the three empirical chapters of this dissertation have empirically explored how boundary-blurring increase subnational power uncertainty, and investigated how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors. In this concluding chapter, I explain what the implications are of the findings of each chapter, as well as the implications of the continuities and differences across the two subnational cases that I have studied, and what these mean for the scope of my findings.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF FINDINGS

While Gibson (2013) argues that subnational undemocratic regimes need to keep conflicts local in order to prevent opposition parties from getting more powerful, I argue that the control of conflict also has an important information aspect. I argued that the scope of conflict, or more accurately the scope of compromising information, affects the subnational power uncertainty in which the political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes find themselves. Actors that can increase the scope of compromising information, which I define as boundary-blurring actors, can thereby affect subnational power uncertainty.

I now explain these dynamics in three steps. First, the reason why the political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes experience subnational power uncertainty is because they face a dual threat: being electorally defeated by opposition parties and facing interference by central institutions. On the one hand, central institutions, like judicial institutions or the central government itself, can interfere in subnational undemocratic regimes. On the other hand, subnational undemocratic regimes can lose elections: since subnational undemocratic regimes are embedded in democracies, they can manipulate elections or try to skew the electoral playing field in their favour but cannot completely rig them. Elections are what Levitsky and Way (2010, p. 1) would call 'real but unfair.'

Second, while Schedler calls the uncertainty that national authoritarian regimes face 'fundamental, endogenous, and irresolvable' (Schedler, 2013, p. 12), I argue that these threats are at least as 'fundamental, endogenous, and irresolvable' on the subnational level. The exact threat that comes from elections or central institutions can differ over time and space. However, political elites cannot completely curb this threat, just as they cannot completely curb the threat of elections.

Third, I posited that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes can try to minimize subnational power uncertainty by trying to limit the scope of compromising information about the subnational political elite. At the same time, I propose that the actors that are able to extend the scope of compromising information about the political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes, which can range from information about corruption and embezzlement to human rights abuses, can cause an increase in subnational power uncertainty. This, I argue, is the reason why subnational political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors.

In this concluding chapter, I will explain on the basis of my empirical chapters how boundary-blurring actors can increase subnational power uncertainty. Broadly speaking, they can achieve this by gaining access to compromising information and

trying to spread it via different pathways to the national-public sphere and by directly connecting to central institutions. As a result of the threat that boundary-blurring actors pose, I argue that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes can try to eliminate the threat of boundary-blurring actors with repression. This then leads to the question of how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors. I argue that political elites repress in an incremental and opaque manner. Political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes often build up their repression against boundary-blurring actors, and only use violent forms of repression when boundary-blurring actors continue with their actions. In addition, repression – especially the violent forms – is exercised in an opaque manner that includes collaboration between the subnational political elite and non-state actors.

3. CONTINUITY AND DIFFERENCES ACROSS CASES

Each empirical chapter constitutes an independent building block of this dissertation. In the first empirical chapter, I looked at a subcategory of boundary-blurring actors, journalists, and showed how they can increase subnational power uncertainty for political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes. Thereafter, I proposed that if journalists are repressed by political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes, they should – as a minimum – be a targeted subgroup of the population in subnational undemocratic regimes. Since Mexico deals with a rampant criminal violence problem, it was unclear whether these journalists were specifically targeted, or whether they were victims of criminal violence just like the rest of the population. On the basis of a comparison of homicide rates, I demonstrated that journalists are indeed a specifically targeted subgroup of the population. In a majority of Mexican states – and cumulatively – journalists have a much higher probability of getting murdered than the general population. Also, they are targeted in subnational undemocratic regimes.

In the second empirical chapter, I looked at one particular subnational undemocratic regime where journalists were a targeted subgroup of the population: Veracruz. I demonstrated that local journalists increased subnational power uncertainty. They did this by being able to gain access to compromising information – for example about embezzlement – and by spreading it to the national public sphere. Concretely, they were able to publish about compromising information in national news outlets.

In addition to explaining how journalists in Veracruz increased subnational power uncertainty, I explained not only that they were repressed as a result of their actions, but also *how* these boundary-blurring actors were repressed. In the third empirical

chapter, I zoomed in on a specific historical period in a different subnational undemocratic regime. With the use of process tracing, I looked at what type of actors, beyond journalists, engaged in boundary-blurring actions and looked at how these different actors spread the scope of compromising information and increased subnational power uncertainty, and how they were repressed. Although each chapter bore out my theory by looking at different actors and different locations, there are certain similar findings across the different cases that validate and expand my theory and there are differences that are worth discussing.

3a. Uncertainty vs. punishment

Before reflecting on the ways in which boundary-blurring actors created subnational power uncertainty, it is important to emphasize that the creation of uncertainty is different from doing direct damage to the subnational political elite. Based on the interviews – and some additional observations, like Mexican governors fleeing their state after boundary-blurring actions and the threat of intervention by central institutions – I have demonstrated that boundary-blurring actors can increase subnational power uncertainty. But this dissertation does not hold a precise view on which type of boundary-blurring action most results in real damage – as opposed to a perceived threat – to a regime. The effect of information on real punishment or loss of power – instead of uncertainty – is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

That uncertainty is different from direct damage to the subnational political elite is once more highlighted by the fact that subnational power uncertainty led to completely different outcomes across my two cases. In the case of Veracruz, uncertainty eventually turned into the imprisonment of Governor Duarte, after he was charged with criminal association and money laundering (Agren, 2018). Narendra Modi, on the other hand, was nominated by his party to run for Prime Minister during the general elections of 2014, after his acquittal by the Supreme Court for his involvement in the communal riots (Mann, 2014). After that, he won the Indian general election twice.

While it is not unrealistic to think that the spread of compromising information affected the fate of Governor Duarte, this does not mean that Narendra Modi experienced less uncertainty. Neither subnational political elites nor boundary-blurring actors know the exact level of threat that a subnational political elite faces. It is the uncertainty, to use Schedler's (2013, p.12) wording, which means that subnational political elites cannot just 'sit back and relax.'

3b. The nature of boundary-blurring

In the theory chapter, I posited that in practice, political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes are often involved in issues like corruption, connections with organized crime, or other sorts of power abuse (Faughnan *et al.*, 2014). It followed, then, that this compromising information could increase subnational power uncertainty if it became known within the national public sphere or by central institutions.

Before reflecting on the general characteristics in terms of the ways in which boundary-blurring actors can increase subnational power uncertainty, it is important to note that this uncertainty became manifest in different ways in my two cases. The threat from central institutions was different in both cases for example: in Veracruz, and Mexico more generally, the central threat mostly came from the fact that subnational political elites in Mexican states can face judicial interference when corruption, embezzlement or collaboration with organized crime organizations becomes undeniable. In the past, investigative journalists in Mexico have sometimes succeeded in increasing this insecurity by publishing reports about such topics. In the case of India, I demonstrated that the main threats from the centre are the President's Rule and judicial interference. In the case of Gujarat specifically, these threats were amplified after the communal riots, when the subnational political elite faced accusations of failing to prevent them.

So, what did boundary-blurring actors do to increase subnational power uncertainty and eventually become targets of repression? The answer to this question is that these actors achieved this, regardless of the intentionality, in various ways, but that certain elements must be present in order to have an effect. First of all, there is the necessity of having (gained) access to compromising information. Without this access, actors cannot increase subnational power uncertainty. They cannot create subnational power uncertainty by spreading broad criticism towards the subnational political elite. In Mexico, journalists did not increase subnational power uncertainty by just being critical, or just writing critical essays about policies of the subnational political elite. The same is true for Gujarat: boundary-blurring actors were not just criticizing the Gujarati government in broad terms. While boundary-blurring actors *can* engage in mudslinging, in neither of these two states were boundary-blurring actors claiming that they affected the subnational political elite – or were repressed – after they merely publicly criticized this elite.

What matters is the degree to which boundary-blurring actors are able to 'prove' compromising information, and thereby make it undeniable. This ability can depend on the positionality of a boundary-blurring actor. For example, there was the compromising information that Modi gave his most important security advisor the order not to interfere in the communal riots. The fact that Sanjiv Bhatt had

access to this information was necessary to increase subnational power uncertainty. But simultaneously, the fact that Sanjiv Bhatt had a high level of proximity to the subnational political elite was partly what made the information so compromising. The information would have been easier to deny in the hypothetical case that someone with much less proximity to the subnational political elite – for example someone from an opposition party or an activist – had said the same thing. In Sanjiv Bhatt’s case, his positionality made the compromising information less easy to deny.

As opposed to high-level security officials in Gujarat, who had easy access to compromising information, *Tehelka* journalists had to jet into Gujarat to search for such information. What made the information that they spread so compromising was that they were able to videotape their informants. They videotaped people from within the subnational political elite claiming that the communal riots were sanctioned by the subnational political elite. This videotaping was an essential part of the compromising information.

In addition to *Tehelka* journalists, other journalists in Mexico also demonstrated that the ability to prove information is important. I explained how there were Mexican journalists that went to the Mexican Chamber of Deputies to accuse Governor Roberto Borge of running an embezzlement scheme. This was not compromising because of the accusation itself, but also because they proved it in the form of a follow-the-money investigation.

My second finding about how boundary-blurring actors create subnational power uncertainty is that, in addition to the necessity of having or gaining access to compromising information, there are two different pathways of spreading compromising information that can be identified: having access to the national public sphere, or having access to central institutions. Without a connection to one (or both) of these routes, compromising information cannot increase the risk of central institutions intervening.

One example of the national public sphere route consists of the actions by the community of journalists in Veracruz, who tried to publish articles about embezzlement and corruption by Governor Duarte in national-level news media. What is important for this national public sphere route is that boundary-blurring actors have access to a broader public or have access to the platforms that can connect them to a broad public. Journalists have an advantage when it comes to this route, since the objective of spreading information to a broader public is constitutive of their profession. However, being a journalist is not a guarantee of achieving this. Journalists in Veracruz tried hard to publish compromising information in national media, but did not always succeed. They had to cooperate with their connections in both Veracruz and Mexico City to get something published in national news

outlets, and sometimes these attempts failed. In addition, the fact that Sajiv Bhatt and Rahul Sharma were also able to follow this route means that it is not necessary to be a journalist to reach the national public sphere. In their cases, the type of compromising information that they possessed, which was based on their access and their positionality, helped them to reach national news media.

One example of the central institutions' route is the Mexican journalists that presented the evidence of Roberto Borge embezzling public funds to the Chamber of Deputies, after which he fled the state (Varillas, 2016). A second example is Sanjiv Bhatt, who filed an affidavit at the Indian Supreme Court in which he claimed that Modi gave him the order not to intervene in the communal riots. A third example is Rahul Sharma, who shared telephone data – which included compromising conversations between people from within the Gujarati subnational political elite – with the Banerjee Commission, which was investigating the role of the subnational political elite in the communal riots.

3c. How were boundary-blurring actors repressed?

In both Veracruz and Gujarat, boundary-blurring actors experienced repression, which was in their eyes orchestrated by the subnational political elite. Sometimes, acts of repression were observable, like in the case of the punishment posting of security officials in Gujarat or in the case of the open harassment of journalists by the police in Veracruz. But more often than not, repression was not observable, and especially not the relationship between the subnational political elite and the actual acts of repression.

3c1. Opacity and relations between non-state actors and subnational political elites

The observation that repression is hard to observe was relevant in both Veracruz and Gujarat. In Veracruz, journalists did not know from where to expect an act of violence. All they knew is that they were in danger after reporting compromising information. They were afraid of the state police, the army and civilians. In Gujarat, boundary-blurring actors also experienced a generalized fear of repression. They suffered from attacks by the police, but also from attacks by what they referred to as 'Modi's men,' who were not clearly representing the state.

This relates to another important observation. In both Veracruz and Gujarat, there was collaboration between state and non-state actors for repressive purposes. In Veracruz, journalists addressed the entanglement between the subnational political elite and organized crime groups. In Gujarat, boundary-blurring actors referred to Hindu-nationalist organizations like the VHP and the RSS when it came to their repression.

It can be argued that it is logical to find all sorts of opacities and relationships between state and non-state actors in subnational undemocratic regimes, *regardless* of the actions by boundary-blurring actors. Of course, there is something about the undemocratic context itself, in which the subnational political elites find themselves, that privileges these collaborations. Subnational political elites must also collaborate with non-state actors when it comes to clientelist practices and exerting (non-repressive) influence over news media (Durazo Herrmann, 2017). But it also serves the purpose of making repression more deniable.

Rather, it is plausible that the embeddedness of subnational undemocratic regimes privileges opaque types of repression, and stimulates collaboration between state and non-state actors. Just like ‘it is hard to imagine a military dictatorship inside a democracy’ (Gibson: 2013: 27), it is also hard to find political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes that openly kill their enemies. The reason in both cases is that there would be the threat of interfering central institutions. If political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes openly repressed boundary-blurring actors, this would become compromising information in itself, which these political elites try to avoid spreading.

3c2. Incrementality

A finding that came to the fore in both Veracruz and in Gujarat was the incrementality of repression. After interviewing critical journalists extensively, it became clear that even though it was one of the bloodiest regions for journalists, with one of the highest murder probabilities for them, critical journalists often experienced an entire range of repressive acts before they were murdered. Journalists first experienced co-optation attempts, then light forms of repression, and when they continued to publish compromising information they experienced violent forms of repression.

I deepened this understanding of incrementality with the use of process tracing in Gujarat. Using process tracing, I laid bare how repression almost resembled a cat-and-mouse game in which the subnational political elite tried to neutralize high-level security officials and in which high-level security officials continued to expand compromising information even more. Top security advisors faced ‘little pain pricks’ after their actions. The little pain pricks, consisting of punishment postings to more junior positions, were later supplemented with legal harassments and eventually also house raids. Journalists faced surveillance, but this surveillance increased in intensity and eventually their respondents were harassed and threatened.

While incrementality looked different in both contexts, its presence was a general feature in both cases. The finding of incrementality relates to the finding of the opaqueness and the relations between state and non-state actors. All these findings

are about repressing boundary-blurring actors with limited visibility, and both findings relate to the embeddedness of subnational undemocratic regimes, where central institutions can interfere and subnational political elites benefit from hiding repression.

3c3. Levels of violence

The fact that repression was incremental and opaque does not mean that repression was *never* blatant. Journalists in Mexico got murdered, and they claimed that the subnational political elite ordered the murder of their fellow journalists. In Gujarat, actors like Sanjiv Bhatt and Cedric Prakash faced harassment and the ransacking of their homes and offices. In addition, people like Sanjiv Bhatt still claim that the subnational political elite is responsible for the killing of Haren Pandya. Although violent forms of repression took place in Gujarat, they were not as prominent as in Veracruz, where many journalists got tortured and murdered. This difference begs the question of why the levels of violence differed so sharply.

The first explanation for the difference in terms of the levels of violence is that the general levels of violence across cases also differed. Mexico suffers more from violent crime than India, and Veracruz more than Gujarat. To compare, in 2013 the homicide rate in Veracruz was 11.3 per 100,000 people (Secretariado Ejecutivo, 2013), and in Gujarat 1.85 per 100,000 (National Crime Records Bureau, 2019). In 2018, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (n.d.) ranked Mexico 20th in terms of intentional homicide and India 120th. This implies that there are strong differences in terms of violent crime that does not involve boundary-blurring actors.

In addition to these figures, journalists in Veracruz did not just complain about the entanglement between the subnational political elites and organized crime but claimed that the boundary between the subnational political elite and criminal organizations was almost non-existent. This degree of entanglement between the subnational political elite and organized crime was also demonstrated by the fact that before I did my fieldwork research in Veracruz, the federal marines had taken over law and order responsibilities of the state police forces. During fieldwork, it was common to see heavily armed, and often masked, marines standing guard on pick-up trucks. Sometimes, when I met a respondent on a busy square, we took a detour to a quiet place, to avoid passing the military trucks. Such a context was not present in Gujarat.

The reason why this difference in terms of the violent crime context is likely to matter is because high levels of violence make violent repression more deniable. In Chapter 4, I explained in detail how subnational political elites, including the one in Veracruz, hide behind criminal violence problems when journalists get murdered. In

a context without rampant criminal violence problems, this would be unimaginable. Thus, while the violence against journalists in Mexican states cannot be seen as a corollary of general crime or organized crime, the criminal violence context shapes the possibilities to hide it better.

The second explanation of the difference in violence relates to the different positionality of the actors. In Veracruz, I interviewed relatively unknown journalists, while in Gujarat I also interviewed top-level security officials and journalists that worked for renowned New Delhi-based media. In Gujarat, top security officials could be repressed by hurting them in their professional position. Since journalists in Veracruz did not work for the government, repressing them in such a way was impossible. Thus, the fact that top security officials were political insiders created an opportunity for the subnational political elite to repress these actors without engaging in violence. In addition, there is the issue of costs. Sanjiv Bhatt's affidavit became national news. Although he did need constant police protection afterwards, it is not hard to imagine that the political costs of killing Sanjiv Bhatt would be higher than killing a local journalist in Veracruz.

In addition to top security officials, the journalists that were important boundary-blurring actors in Gujarat did not have the same positionality as the journalists in Veracruz. Journalists in Gujarat flew into the state from Delhi, and were not living in Gujarat. When I visited the *Tehelka* office in Delhi to interview the journalists that were doing sting operations in the aftermath of the communal riots, I had already visited Veracruz and asked *Tehelka* journalists whether some of their colleagues faced lethal repression. One of them responded by saying that killing them would be 'too obvious' and 'catch way too much attention that they don't want' (Interview Amrita, 2017).

There are two additional explanations for the differences in violence that are intuitive, but weaker than the first explanations. First of all, it could be argued that the differences in violence are a result of the fact that there were different agents of repression across the two cases: in Veracruz, my respondents pointed at criminal organizations, and in Gujarat my respondents pointed at Hindu nationalist organizations. It is intuitive to imagine that the difference in terms of the violence across my cases has to do with the fact that criminal organizations in Veracruz are more violent than the executors of repression in Gujarat. But the communal riots in Gujarat have demonstrated that Hindu nationalist organizations are very capable of engaging in the most gruesome types of violence like gang rape and infanticide. More recently, the RSS has also been implicated in lynching Muslims (Griswold, 2019). This makes the explanation that the different levels of violence originate from the fact that agents of repression are naturally more violent in Veracruz than in Gujarat much less convincing.

A final explanation for the different levels of violence, which is intuitive but unconvincing, is that journalists in Veracruz were more threatening to the subnational political elite than boundary-blurring actors were in Gujarat. On the one hand, the empirical chapters of this dissertation have shown how boundary-blurring actors are exposed to higher levels of repression when they stepped up their boundary-blurring actions, and that the heaviness of repression is indeed linked to the intensity of boundary-blurring actions. However, boundary-blurring actors in Gujarat posed serious and direct threats to the subnational political elite. Perhaps the most threatening boundary-blurring action was the filing of an affidavit by Sanjiv Bhatt, in which he accused the very top of the subnational political elite of having sanctioned the communal riots. This makes the explanation much less convincing.

Ultimately, it cannot be fully established whether the first or the second explanation is the most significant when it comes to differences in violence. But together, they may account for the difference in terms of violence across Gujarat and Veracruz. As a result, it is not unreasonable to propose more generally that boundary-blurring actors are more vulnerable to violent forms of repression in contexts where criminal violence is rampant and where they have a limited amount of visibility.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LITERATURE

The findings of this dissertation have implications for different strands of literature. At the same time, these findings can be seen as part of a specific direction of subnational comparative research. Giraudy *et al.* (2019) identify different ways in which subnational research can contribute to comparative research substantively, methodologically and theoretically. One specific contribution, to which the findings of this dissertation connect, is that they make it 'easier to build multilevel theories that explain outcomes caused by variables at different scales' (Giraudy *et al.*, 2019, p. 5).

Broadly speaking, the findings of this dissertation contribute to the building of multi-level theory. The findings, both in terms of how boundary-blurring actors create subnational power uncertainty and in terms of how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress them, are inextricably connected to their multi-level context. They are not about subnational political elites *per se*, but about subnational political elites which are embedded in the national-level setting. Apart from this direction, the findings of this dissertation have multiple implications for the existing literature in which this study is embedded. I will discuss these in the following subsections.

4a. Boundary-blurring actors and subnational power uncertainty

In the theory chapter of this dissertation, I argued that the research question that I have answered relates to the study of subnational undemocratic regimes, the study of repression, and the study of how authoritarian regimes deal with information. Here I discuss the implications of this dissertation's findings for these three strands of literature. This dissertation's answer to the question of how boundary-blurring actors create subnational power uncertainty speaks to the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes as well as the literature on repression and the literature on the way in which authoritarian regimes deal with information flows.

This dissertation has shown how subnational power uncertainty works. Most authors that study the ways in which subnational undemocratic regimes sustain themselves emphasize the manner in which these regimes deal with elections. This dissertation builds on the scarce but existing efforts – for example by Harbers (2010) and Gibson (2013) – that aim to understand the relations between political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes and the centre. Existing scholarly work by these authors has already explained that central institutions can punish subnational political elites. In connection to this existing work, this dissertation has argued that we should see political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes as entities that are fundamentally uncertain because of the fact that the possible threat of intervention and losing elections is always present. Even if we do not look at the actions by boundary-blurring actors, there is subnational power uncertainty.

The findings of this dissertation about how boundary-blurring actors create subnational power uncertainty also relate to existing work by Schattschneider (1975) and Gibson (2013). Schattschneider explains that weak oppositions benefit from augmenting the scope of conflicts by involving central party officials in local affairs, while local power holders are better off with isolated conflicts. Gibson (2013) grafted this logic to the study of subnational undemocratic regimes. He argued that the political elites of these regimes must engage in 'boundary control' by making sure that central power holders do not ally with the subnational opposition. But I have demonstrated that boundary-blurring actors can increase subnational power uncertainty by gaining access to information, gaining access to the national public sphere or directly to central institutions, and trying to 'prove' compromising information. In other words, this dissertation adds to the works of Gibson (2013) and Schattschneider (1975) by demonstrating that boundary control has an important information dimension.

Following up on the finding that boundary-blurring actors can increase subnational power uncertainty, this dissertation has argued that political elites target boundary-blurring actors for this reason. Repression is an important part of

the toolkit that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes have at their disposal. While the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes has focused more on the ways in which subnational political elites try to skew the electoral playing field in their favour (Giraudy, 2012; Gibson, 2005; Giraudy, 2013; Harbers & Ingram, 2013), this dissertation connects to authors like Sullivan (2013) and Christensen (2017), who already demonstrated that subnational political elites can use repression.

Yet, while Sullivan (2013, 2019) and Christensen (2017) look at the way in which protestors are repressed during demonstrations at the subnational level, this dissertation looks specifically at repression of boundary-blurring actors. While responses to protests have been an important way of assessing the level of repressiveness of a subnational political elite, there might be more indicators to assess this. One of them is how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes treat boundary-blurring actors.

In addition to the abovementioned implications, the findings about *how* boundary-blurring actors create subnational power uncertainty challenge the implicit assumption that repression is something that is primarily exercised by national-level regimes, which underlies some of the work on repression. Still, an important part of the repression literature (e.g. Davenport, 2007; Gallagher & Hanson, 2009; Gerschewski, 2013; Ezrow & Frantz, 2011; Svolik, 2012), and also the most recent databases on democracy, like Freedom House and V-DEM, operationalize and measure repression as something that happens in a country, and not on the subnational level. In line with Beer and Mitchell (2006), Christensen (2017) and Sullivan (2013), I have shown that repression cannot just have a subnational locus but can also be organized by subnational political elites.

This also connects to the work of Gohdes and Carey (2017), who are concerned with the repression of journalists at the global level. In a study that finds itself on the intersection between the literature on repression and the literature on the way regimes deal with information flows, Gohdes and Carey (2017) argue that ‘the killing of a journalist is a sign of deteriorating respect for human rights. If a government orders the killing of a journalist, it is willing to use extreme measures to eliminate the threat posed by the uncontrolled flow of information’ (Gohdes & Carey, 2017, p. 53). They argue that killing journalists becomes needed when these regimes engage in human rights violations to stay in power.

But also in this case, it is conceivable that the findings of the authors say little about central governments. While the causal relationship that the authors describe only involves central governments, the findings of the authors could be partly based on an accumulation of what happens at the subnational level. I argued that journalist murders in Mexico – an important country in their dataset – should not be considered

national-level observations, since subnational political elites are responsible for some of the violence against journalists rather than ‘the government.’ The same could count for other countries in their dataset. This might be especially, but not only, relevant in federal countries like Brazil and India, where – just like in Mexico – subnational political elites have relatively high levels of autonomy compared to the federal state. As a result, the observation that the killing of journalists precludes increased human rights violations could be – at least in part – an accumulation of what is happening at the subnational level.

Moving away from the previous implications, there is another implication that this dissertation has for the work of Gohdes and Carey (2017). Gohdes and Carey (2017) look specifically at the attacks on journalists, because of the fact that they are the ones that can report about issues like human rights violations. But I have demonstrated in this dissertation that journalists are not the only actors that can be involved in spreading compromising information. Gohdes and Carey (2017, p. 157) look at journalists because governments target them when they ‘contradict their policies’ or ‘offend them.’ But other actors, such as human rights activists, can have the same abilities as journalists. As I also demonstrated, such actors cannot only contradict policies but really spread compromising information, just like journalists sometimes can. It is not unlikely that for these reasons such actors are targeted to the same degree as journalists. It therefore might be that the killing of non-journalist boundary-blurring actors is also a good predictor of increased periods of human rights violations.

The final implication of this dissertation’s findings about how boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty relates to Svoblik’s (2012) work on the politics of authoritarian rule. In his work, Svoblik argues that national-level authoritarian regimes are uncertain about the support they have within their elite circle, just as they are uncertain about their popular support. He describes how people inside the ‘gates of the presidential palace’ can be as threatening as the people outside of those gates for authoritarian regimes (2012, p. 5). Svoblik (2012) explains how intra-elite struggle can result in the threat of coup d’états. In addition, both Svoblik (2012) and Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2011) explain how actors from within the political elite can defect and join forces with the opposition. But military coupes are prevented in subnational undemocratic regimes because of their embeddedness in a democratic state.

Rahul Sharma and Sanjiv Bhatt were ‘defecting’ in the sense that they were part of the elite themselves but made the step from being part of it to opposing it. But they were not dangerous because they joined a revolt in the traditional sense of the word. When it comes to revolt in national-level regimes, this mostly refers to actors

from within the regime that joins forces with a revolting opposition, which gives this opposition a boost. In the case of the 'defectors' in Gujarat, it was rather the information that they took with them that was important. Compromising information can also be dangerous for national-level undemocratic leaders, e.g. Malaysia's Najib Razak was arrested and lost elections after large-scale corruption became undeniable (Ellis-Petersen, 2018). It could also be that defectors at the national level can cause uncertainty because of the information they take with them, this is perhaps more relevant for *subnational* undemocratic regimes. The reason is that subnational undemocratic regimes can be punished more easily by central institutions when the scope of compromising information is expanded. Thus, it could be argued that defecting is both important on the national and the subnational levels, but that they are important for different reasons.

4b. Boundary-blurring actors and repression

The implications of the answer to the question of how subnational political elites repress boundary-blurring actors are both methodological and epistemological. One implication adds to the literature on political repression. Davenport (2007) notes that by most accounts, repression involves Goldstein's (1978, p. xxvii) definition: 'the actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and/or beliefs perceived to be challenging to government personnel, practices or institutions.' While this definition is useful in its own right, looking beyond the 'actual or threatened use of physical sanctions' helped to explain the manner in which boundary-blurring actors were deterred in their activities.

My case studies show how boundary-blurring activities were deterred by both violent and non-violent actions. Journalists in Veracruz were threatened with physical violence and even killed. But I also observed how boundary-blurring actors faced punishment postings, and what they called 'legal harassment.' These latter measures were intentionally set up to deter boundary-blurring actors in their actions but did not include the actual or threatened use of physical sanctions. This emphasizes how, if I had only looked at 'the actual or threatened use of physical sanctions,' I would not have been able to fully understand the last part: 'detering specific activities and/or beliefs perceived to be challenging to government personnel, practices or institutions.'

The second implication for the literature on repression is epistemological and deals with the ways in which repression can be studied. The fieldwork that was done for this dissertation, and specifically the process-tracing part, demonstrated that

the incremental nature of repression had an important impact on certain actors. For example, Rahul Sharma, the top security official that engaged in boundary-blurring actions in Gujarat, only stopped his actions after years of ‘pain pricks.’ While quantitatively measuring repression could be used to see if levels of repression are going up or down in a certain state, it is more difficult to measure whether repression increases or decreases towards one specific person. Elucidating such dynamics were a specific merit of process tracing. Though the use of process tracing is uncommon in the study of repression, this dissertation shows that it deserves recognition, especially when it comes to the question of *how* repression is used in a specific context.

The last contribution to the literature on repression relates to the previous epistemological point. In Veracruz, critical journalists were continuously afraid for their lives and sometimes stopped their work as a result. When Rubén Espinosa was murdered, his best friend Salvador, an equally perseverant critical journalist, fled to Chile and stopped writing critically about the subnational political elite. In other words, repression can create an observable event and an unobservable event – or at least one that is much harder to observe in practice – at the same time. On the one hand, there is a murdered journalist, and on the other hand there is a journalist that will no longer be repressed, because he is too afraid to continue doing critical work.

The implication of this observation relates to concerns by authors like Landman and Carvalho (2009) and Lukes (2005), who explain that one of the problems of measuring human rights violations and repression is that it is hard to capture things that are not being done because of fear. In relation to the case study of Veracruz it begs the question whether low levels of journalist murders in the near future would really represent low levels of repression, or whether journalists have just become too afraid to work. This adds nuance to databases that measure human rights violations or repression at the subnational level, like human rights data from India’s State Department used by Beer and Mitchell (2006).

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This dissertation started with a reflection on the murder of Rubén Espinosa. This event, and its aftermath, shaped the direction of this dissertation. Was the subnational political elite behind the killing? And if so, why would the subnational political elite target a journalist like Rubén Espinosa? At the time, these were questions that were poorly understood. This dissertation has explained *how* boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty and *how* political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress them. Thereby, observations such as the killing of Rubén

Espinosa can be better understood. Actors that have access to certain compromising information, and have access to the national public sphere or central institutions, can cause extra insecurity for the political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes and are therefore vulnerable. Political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes can have the ability, and need, to repress the actors that can cause insecurities.

Political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes rarely repress openly. In light of the strategic position in which political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes are embedded, using repression openly is unstrategic. Even though national-level undemocratic regimes also have incentives to cover up repression, and there is a global trend from overt to covert repression (DeMeritt, 2016), political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes might have even more incentives. First of all because of their embeddedness, which is different from the embeddedness of national-level undemocratic regimes. And secondly because they lack the formal means to conduct repression that some national-level undemocratic regimes do have. To conclude, just as the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes has explained that subnational undemocratic regimes lack the means to dissolve elections, they also lack the means to formally and openly repress.

Instead of openly using repression, it is more logical for political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes to try to co-opt, use repression in an incremental way, and create or use opacity around repression. In the case of a more violent type of repression, it makes sense to shield the public from it by collaborating with non-state actors. In addition, while this is not the main topic of this dissertation, it is likely that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes learn how to repress along the way. At least, this dissertation shows that political elites can be adaptive when it comes to repression. Incrementality implies that subnational political elites are able to tweak their repressive strategy depending on the type of actor they are dealing with and depending on the effect that repressive acts have.

The quest for political elites to repress with the least amount of public visibility challenges our ability to observe it. Answering the questions *how* boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty, and *how* political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress them, would not have been possible without a zoomed-in lens. Only this zoomed-in focus allowed me to observe – sometimes unexpected – acts of repression such as trying to hurt boundary-blurring actors in their professional career. This warns against too-fast operationalization and measurement of repression. As long as political elites are crafty, adaptive, and have the ability to diversify and tailor repression depending on a specific threat, it is crucial to deeply understand both the threat and the response. Merely counting bodies – to put it purposefully blunt – would not help much to understand the repression of

boundary-blurring actors in Gujarat and Veracruz and would perhaps be misleading.

The findings of this dissertation also open up new research agendas about how to understand repression. The most obvious questions coming forth from this dissertation relate to the way in which my findings travel. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, Veracruz and Gujarat are part of a universe of cases for which it is expected that my findings are relevant. Ultimately, phenomena like embeddedness and subnational power uncertainty are not specifically related to Veracruz and Gujarat but are connected to that universe of cases. Therefore, it is expected that findings relating to how boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty and *how* they are repressed are relevant in other subnational undemocratic regimes.

A third cluster of questions relates to the concept of subnational power uncertainty, which was conceptualized in the dissertation. I explained how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes are fundamentally uncertain. But I also explained that uncertainty is not the same as being punished. How subnational political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes are undermined is only partly understood. We know bits about how they can lose elections and bits about how central institutions can play a role in democratizing subnational undemocratic regimes, but we do not know everything. We do not know whether there is, for example, a certain threshold of compromising information that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes can deal with. Perhaps, the scope of compromising information can be measured in the future to see how that relates to intervention.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: BINOMIAL TEST AND DISTRIBUTION OF TIME BETWEEN KILLINGS

Binomial test

In the case of a larger N , a t-test or z-test would be conducted to test whether probabilities significantly differ. When it comes to matters like age or weight, the law of large numbers prescribes that the mean will eventually follow a normal distribution. While a binomial distribution is well approximated by a normal distribution in the case of large numbers, the demand is that $n \cdot p \geq 5$ and $n \cdot (1-p) \geq 5$. In the specific case of killings of journalists, which is a phenomenon that does not occur in large numbers, we cannot make this assumption. For this reason, an exact binomial test is used.

With the exact binomial test, one can check the likelihood of an observed (or greater) number of events occurring, assuming a certain probability for the event to happen. The standard example is the coin toss, where the assumed probability of the event of heads (or tails) is 0.5. If one counts only one heads in a hundred throws, this is evidence that the assumed probability of 0.5 is wrong. While this test is appropriate in this context, readers may wonder why other tests, such as a z-test for two proportions or a chi-squared test, were not used. The reason is that we are not dealing with two samples from two populations, for which the value of the governing parameter (in this case the probability for success or failure) is unknown. Instead, we are dealing with two populations for which it is unclear whether one is a random subset (that is, a random sample) of the other with respect to the governing parameter, or whether they are distinct populations. In any case, for the general population the value of the governing parameter is known. The records kept by INEGI are not an estimate or approximation, but the actual total number of killings. It follows that the exact binomial test is appropriate to test whether journalists are a random sample of the total population in their chances of being killed, or whether they are a distinct population with a higher risk.

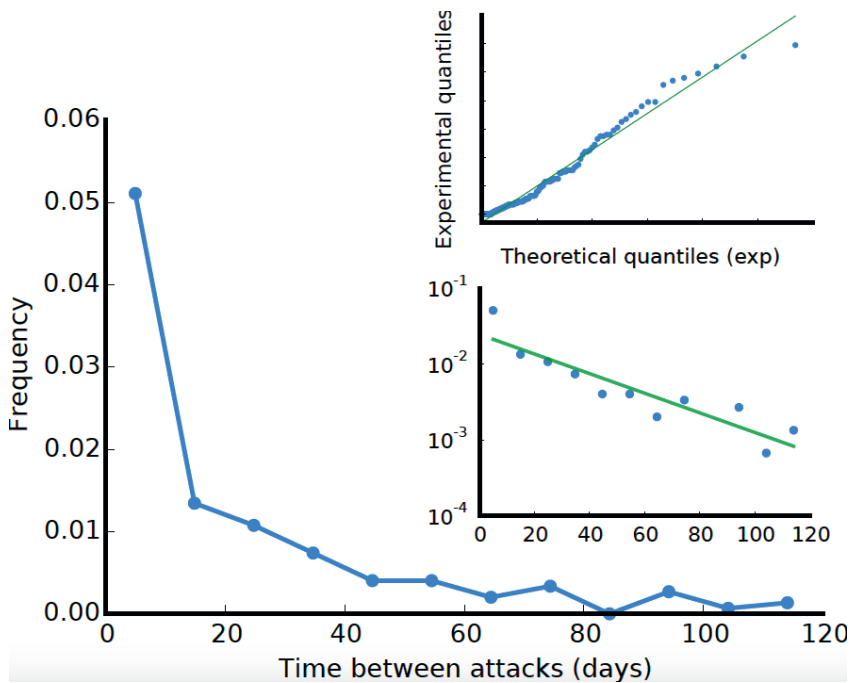
Distribution of time between killings

The most important requirement for the exact binomial test results to be valid is the independence of events. The binomial distribution deals with the number of “successes” (in this case, killings) in a fixed number of independent trials, also called Bernoulli trials (Hazewinkel, 2001). One way of showing independence of the Bernoulli trials is to analyze the time between successful events (the cases of assassinations). Namely, if the events modelled by repeated Bernoulli trials are

distributed independently, then the time between the successful events should follow a geometrical distribution. This geometrical distribution approximates an exponential distribution, which is similar, but looks less smooth than an exponential distribution, due to the fact that the exponential distribution comes about during a Poisson process, the continuous counterpart of the discrete repeated Bernoulli trials (Cooper, 2005).

Figure 10 shows that the time between the killings of journalists indeed follows a geometrical distribution with minor clustering. Considering that many other phenomena are clustered (Goh & Barabasi, 2008; Garcia-Bernardo *et al.*, 2016), this minor clustering is inconsequential for the test. For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient to note that the assassinations of journalists can be approximated with a model of independent events.

Figure 10: Distribution of time between killings



APPENDIX 2 LIST OF INTERVIEW PARTNERS

Respondents were not anonymized if 1) they have since been killed, or 2) the information that makes them vulnerable is already publicly available.

Mexico

N	Name	Pseudonym	Profession at the time of interview + Short bio	Location and period of Interview	Type of data storage
1		Amelia	Journalist Amelia is an award-winning investigative journalist that wrote extensively about the connection between drug cartels and the Mexican government. She received numerous death threats and eventually moved to the United States as a result.	I interviewed Amelia in 2017 in Amsterdam .	Notes
2		Andrea	Journalist and blogger Andrea was a critical journalist and blogger who was living in Mexico City, but was writing about the government of Veracruz.	I spoke with Andrea in Mexico City in August 2015.	Notes
3		Ariana	Whistle-blower I interviewed Ariana about the way in which the Mexican government and state governments use online repression and try to control online content. As a whistleblower, she was familiar with these phenomena.	I interviewed Ariana in Mexico City in April 2015.	Voice recorder
4		Camilio	Journalist Camilio was a critical journalist who wrote for for a daily national newspaper.	I interviewed Camilio in 2015, during my final week in Puerto Veracruz .	Notes
5		Carolina	Journalist Carolina is one of the most well-known journalists in Mexico. She wrote extensively about government corruption and was fired after being too critical towards the PRI government.	I interviewed Carolina in Amsterdam in 2017.	Notes

6	Clara	<p>Journalist and activist</p> <p>Clara is a critical journalist and activist who writes for multiple news outlets in Veracruz and campaigned against attacks on journalists.</p>	I interviewed Clara in Xalapa , during the third month of fieldwork in 2015.	Voice recorder + notes
7	Iker	<p>Analyst at Article 19 Mexico</p> <p>Iker was the employee at Article 19 that eventually invited me for the interview with Darío Ramirez. He also provided me with information about the mechanisms that exist to protect journalists in Mexico.</p>	I interviewed Iker before I went to Mexico City in 2015, from Amsterdam , and later interviewed him in Mexico City before interviewing Darío Ramirez.	Notes
8	Diego	<p>Special Agent at the National Intelligence Centre</p> <p>I interviewed Diego about repressive strategies of state governments and political parties. He also spoke about repression of journalists.</p>	I interviewed Diego in Mexico in August 2015.	Voice recorder
9	Emilio	<p>Journalist</p> <p>Emilio is a critical journalist in Puerto Veracruz, who also campaigned for press freedom. He talked about the repression of journalists, including himself.</p>	I interviewed Emilio in Puerto Veracruz in April 2015.	Notes
10	Emmanuel	<p>Human rights officer at the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico.</p> <p>Emmanuel talked extensively about the repression of journalists and the failed protection of journalists by the government.</p>	I interviewed Emmanuel in Mexico City in March 2015.	Voice recorder
11	Fernando	<p>Journalist</p> <p>Fernando is a Mexico City-based journalist. He reported about organized crime and corruption and received numerous death threats. He talked extensively about the repression of journalists, including himself.</p>	I interviewed Fernando in April 2017 in San Diego .	Voice recorder + notes

12	Salvador	<p>Journalist</p> <p>Salvador was primarily involved in reporting about corruption, embezzlement, and violent crime. He was working mostly on a freelance basis, for newspapers in both Veracruz and Mexico City. Salvador was considered one of the most fearless journalists by his friends, and all his friends and colleagues expressed concerns about his safety. He talked extensively about the repression of journalists including himself.</p>	<p>I interviewed Salvador throughout my fieldwork period in Veracruz in 2015, starting with an informal conversation in the border town Boca del Rio and later interviewing him in several places in Puerto Veracruz.</p>	Voice recorder + notes
13	Gael	<p>Journalist</p> <p>Gael was a critical journalist who wrote for multiple Veracruz media outlets and media outlets in Mexico City.</p>	<p>I interviewed Gael in a café in Puerto Veracruz during the second month of my stay in 2015.</p>	Notes
14	Ignacio	<p>Intelligence community</p> <p>Ignacio was an intelligence agent based in Mexico City. He knew a lot about government repression and shared his thoughts about why and how subnational governments repress.</p>	<p>I interviewed Ignacio in his own car while he was driving in Mexico City. This took place during the first week of my stay in Mexico City in 2015.</p>	Voice recorder (short part) + notes
15	Javier	<p>Journalist</p> <p>Javier was a critical journalist in Veracruz and spoke extensively about the repression of journalists, including himself.</p>	<p>In 2015 I interviewed Javier during the second month of my stay in Puerto Veracruz.</p>	Voice recorder (Skype interview)
16	Juan Pablo	<p>Journalist and blogger</p> <p>Juan Pablo is a blogger that writes critically about the PRI government.</p>	<p>I interviewed Juan Pablo in Mexico City in August 2015.</p>	Notes
17	Lucia	<p>Human rights expert at Amnesty International Mexico</p> <p>Lucia spoke extensively about the state-level repression in Mexico and the repression of journalists in Veracruz.</p>	<p>I interviewed Lucia in Mexico City during the first week of fieldwork in 2015.</p>	Voice recorder

18	Marcel	<p>Human rights officer at the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico</p> <p>Marcel is an expert on human rights violations in Mexico. I interviewed him about the errors and anomalies in the official investigations of journalist killings.</p>	I interviewed Marcel at the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico City in April 2015.	Voice recorder
19	Mariana	<p>Journalist and teacher</p> <p>Mariana was a critical journalist, who reported about corruption on a freelance basis.</p>	I interviewed Mariana in May 2015 in Puerto Veracruz .	Voice recorder
20	Mateo	<p>Journalist</p> <p>Mateo was primarily involved in reporting about social movements, crime, and corruption. He was working mostly on a freelance basis, for newspapers in both Veracruz and Mexico City.</p>	I interviewed Mateo in Puerto Veracruz in April and July 2015 in the city of Puerto Veracruz .	Voice recorder + notes
21	Peter	<p>Former FBI Special Agent</p> <p>Peter had extensive experience in combating drug trafficking organizations in Mexico and had expertise and experience with regards to the relations between drug trafficking organizations and subnational governments in Mexico.</p>	I interviewed Peter over the phone from Amsterdam prior to my fieldwork in 2015 and also over the phone from Mexico City .	Notes + encrypted email
22	Rebeca	<p>Journalist</p> <p>Rebeca was an investigative journalist based in Veracruz. She was involved in uncovering a corruption scandal and talked extensively about the repression of journalists</p>	I interviewed Rebeca multiple times in Puerto Veracruz during my fieldwork in 2015 .	Voice recorder
23	Rodrigo	<p>Police commander</p> <p>Rodrigo, a police commander of a village in central Veracruz, talked extensively about a vigilante group that was active in the village and the dangers of reporting about the group.</p>	I interviewed Rodrigo in *** in July 2015.	Voice recorder

24	Samuel	Activist Samuel was part of the community of critical journalists. He was an activist rather than a journalist and was part of a broader left-wing community, fiercely opposed to the PRI government.	I interviewed Samuel many times in 2015, during my fieldwork in Puerto Veracruz .	Voice recorder + notes
25	Sergio	(Photo) journalist Sergio was a critical journalist in Veracruz and wrote for multiple media outlets. He talked extensively about the repression of his colleagues and himself.	I interviewed Sergio in Puerto Veracruz in June 2015.	Notes
26	Sofia	Forensic journalist Sofia worked as a forensic journalist, which meant that, among other things, she reported about violent crime in Mexico City. She also visited Veracruz for work. She spoke about the manner in which journalists were murdered and what that revealed about the perpetrators.	During my 2015 fieldwork period, I met Sofia a few times in 2015 in Mexico City , both in the first week of fieldwork and in the last week, right before leaving	Voice recorder
27	Thiago	Judge Thiago, a judge in ***, spoke extensively about cartel and vigilante activity in the region and spoke about why it is so dangerous to report about these groups.	I interviewed Thiago in *** in July in 2015	Voice recorder
28	Valentina	Data analyst at Article 19 Mexico	I interviewed Valentina in 2015 in Mexico City , and two years later in Amsterdam	Voice recorder + notes
29	Laura	Public Relations Officer of a State Deputy in Veracruz I got in touch with Laura via a Mexican friend and was able to interview her about her relationship with journalists under the conditions of anonymity.	I interviewed Laura in Mexico City in 2015, during the final part of my stay.	

30	Christiane Coste	Monitoring and Evaluation Analyst at Freedom House (specialized in Mexico).	I interviewed Christiane Coste when I was in Mexico City in 2015 (June). But since she was not in Mexico herself at the time we did the interview over Skype.	Voice recorder (Skype interview)
31	Rubén Espinosa	(Photo) journalist Rubén Espinosa was a journalist and photojournalist interested in social movements, such as student movements and anarchist movements. He was also reporting about corruption, and about the killing of his colleague journalists such as Moises Sanchez. He was murdered in 2015.	I met Rubén Espinosa continuously throughout my fieldwork period in 2015, both in Xalapa –where he lived – and Puerto Veracruz , where he sometimes worked and stayed.	Voice recorder + notes
32	Dario Ramirez	Director of Article 19 Mexico Dario is one of the most vocal press freedom advocates in Mexico. He was pivotal when it came to getting access to the community of critical journalists in Veracruz.	I interviewed Dario Ramirez in May 2015 in Mexico City before I went to Veracruz.	Voice recorder + encrypted email

India

N	Name	Pseudonym	Profession at the time of interview	Location and period of Interview	Type of data storage
1		Aarushi	Academic and activist Aarushi was an academic and a women's rights activist. She also wrote critical articles about Narendra Modi.	I interviewed Aarushi multiple times in Ahmedabad in October 2016.	Notes
2		Amrita	Journalist Amrita worked as a journalist for the investigative magazine <i>Tehelka</i> . She was involved in the sting operations that were conducted after the communal riots, and that helped to shed light on the involvement of the subnational political elite in the communal riots.	I interviewed Amrita in 2017 during my second –two week – fieldwork trip in New Delhi .	Voice recorder
3		Ananya	Survivor of the communal riots Ananya is one of the Hindu survivors of the communal riots that I got in touch with and that supports Modi. Nevertheless, she talked extensively about repression in Ahmedabad.	I interviewed Ananya repeatedly during the first fieldwork trip in 2016 in Ahmedabad .	Notes
4		Anjan	Scholar and activist Anjan is a well-known critic of Narendra Modi. After the communal riots, he started criticizing the government for its role in the communal riots.	I interviewed Anjan in Ahmedabad , during the first month of my stay in 2016.	Voice recorder
5		Bhavani	Lawyer Bhavani was a lawyer at the Supreme Court of India and the Delhi High Court.	I interviewed Bhavani during my second fieldwork trip in Delhi in 2017.	Notes
6		Cheta	Journalist Cheta was a journalist and activist who wrote in Gujarati media outlets about the Modi government and about Modi as the Chief Minister of Gujarat.	I interviewed Cheta over Skype in Ahmedabad , in 2016.	Notes

7	Dhruv	Scholar and activist Dhruv is an expert in Hindu nationalism and criticized Narendra Modi for purposefully stoking up communal tensions, even before the communal riots started.	I interviewed Dhruv in Ahmedabad during the second and third months of my fieldwork in 2016.	Voice recorder
8	Devika	Artist, activist, and communal riot survivor Devika survived the communal riots, which were rampant in her neighbourhood. She was one of the few people that I could find that supported Modi and deemed the communal riots necessary. Because her husband worked for the military, she could talk about how repression is organized in Gujarat.	I interviewed Devika in her house in Ahmedabad during the second month of my fieldwork trip in January 2017.	Notes
9	Gaurika	Journalist Gaurika worked as a journalist and writer. She interviewed Modi a few times and claimed to have received personal threats from him. She mostly interviewed victims of torture and gang rape and claimed that the subnational government was involved in these actions.	I interviewed Gaurika in Ahmedabad in March 2016.	Voice recorder
10	Inderdeep	Former employee of <i>Tehelka</i> who was involved in the sting operations in Gujarat that were aimed at uncovering the role of the subnational political elite in the 2002 communal riots.	I interviewed Inderdeep during the second fieldwork period in 2017, in Delhi .	Voice recorder
11	Isha	Journalist Isha is a journalist, who wrote for multiple media platforms and talked about the repression of journalists in Gujarat.	I interviewed Isha during my short second fieldwork trip in Delhi in 2017.	Notes
12	Kabir	Scholar and activist Kabir is one of the fiercest critics of Narendra Modi. He is a political scientist and writes critically about Modi on a regular basis. He is also trusted among the scholarly community in Ahmedabad.	Kabir is a scholar. I interviewed him over Skype from Ahmedabad in February 2016.	Notes

13	Kajal	Lawyer Kajal worked at the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court of India. She is an expert in constitutional law.	I interviewed Kajal during my second fieldwork trip to Delhi in November 2017 .	Voice recorder
14	Kamal	Activist and labour unionist Kamal is an activist, trade unionist, and fierce critic of Narendra Modi.	I interviewed Kamal over Skype during the third month of fieldwork in Ahmedabad in February 2016.	Notes
15	Kiara	Investigator and activist Kiara is an activist and investigated human rights violations in Gujarat and Jharkhand. We spoke extensively about repression after the communal riots.	I interviewed Kiara in Ahmedabad in March 2016 in Ahmedabad .	Voice recorder + Notes + email-interview
16	Manish	Lawyer Manish is a lawyer at the Delhi High Court. We spoke about when and how a central government can interfere in subnational politics.	I interviewed Manish during my second fieldwork trip to Delhi in 2017.	Voice recorder
17	Rajesh	Policy advisor Rajesh is a staff member at the Indian Human Rights Commission. I mainly interviewed him about the types of actors that were vulnerable to repression.	I interviewed Rajesh over the phone from Amsterdam in between my two Indian fieldwork trips in 2017.	Notes + email-interview
18	Sai	Activist and trade unionist Sai was a pivotal figure when it came to getting access to actors such as Sanjiv Bhatt and Rahul Sharma. He was a well-known and trusted left-wing trade unionist and I interviewed him about repression during the aftermath of the communal riots.	I interviewed Sai in Vadovara in April 2016.	Notes
19	Siddarth	Activist Siddarth was a fierce critic of Narendra Modi.	I interviewed Siddarth over Skype in Ahmedabad in April 2016 .	Notes
20	Vinod	Judge Vinod is a judge at the Delhi High Court. He claims that it was right that Narendra Modi did not receive a President's Rule during the communal riots.	I interviewed Vinod in his office at the Delhi High Court on my second fieldwork trip in 2017.	Voice recorder

21	Cedric Prakash	<p>Jesuit priest</p> <p>Cedric Prakash was a Jesuit priest in Ahmedabad, and director of the organization Prashant. He did reconciliatory work between Hindus and Muslims and was one of the fiercest critics of Modi. He claimed that Modi purposefully stoked up communal tensions, even before the riots.</p>	<p>I interviewed Cedric Prakash in Ahmedabad in February 2016.</p>	Voice recorder + notes
22	Sanjiv Bhatt	<p>Former high-ranked Indian Police Service officer</p> <p>Sanjiv Bhatt was responsible for the internal security of Gujarat and personal security of Narendra Modi.</p>	<p>I interviewed Sanjiv Bhatt in his guarded house in Ahmedabad, during the first two weeks of my fieldwork, during my second fieldwork trip, and in 2017 when he was visiting Amsterdam for a holiday.</p>	Voice recorder + notes
23	Suresh Metha	<p>Former Chief Minister (1995-1996)</p> <p>Suresh Metha was the predecessor of Narendra Modi and served as the Minister of Industry in the period 2008-2002, partly under Modi. He later opposed Narendra Modi's leadership and was one of the actors in Gujarat that claimed that the communal riots were sanctioned by Modi.</p>	<p>I interviewed Suresh Metha in his house Gandhinagar and in his state residence in Ahmedabad in March 2016.</p>	Voice recorder
24	Rahul Sharma	<p>Former high-ranked Indian Police Service Officer</p> <p>Rahul Sharma was one of the high ranked officers of the Indian Police force, during the communal riots in 2002.</p>	<p>I interviewed Rahul Sharma during my second fieldwork trip in 2017 in Ahmedabad.</p>	Voice recorder
25	R.B. Sreekumar	<p>Former high-ranked Indian Police Service Officer</p> <p>R.B. Sreekumar was one of the high ranked officers of the Indian Police Force that backed the claim of Sanjiv Bhatt that Narendra Modi sanctioned the communal riots.</p>	<p>I interviewed R.B. Sreekumar during my second fieldwork trip to Ahmedabad in 2017.</p>	Notes

Summary / Samenvatting

SUMMARY

The decline in press freedom and freedom of expression are an important part of the current global trend of democratic backsliding. Over the past years, there has been an alarming increase in violence that is specifically targeted towards people that try to hold political elites accountable by reporting about their actions to the public. These can be – and often are – journalists, but can also be other actors like activists or whistle-blowers. The repression of such actors constitutes both a human tragedy and a tragedy for democracy. When actors like journalists are not able to publish freely on matters of public interest, including the abuse of power by the authorities, voters are not able to form opinions freely. Thereby, the opportunity to hold political leaders accountable during elections would indeed be fictitious. This research aims to contribute to our understanding of the repression of information-bearers like journalists.

In this dissertation, I argue that in order to advance our understanding with regards to the attacks on actors like journalists, we have to look at subnational political elites. In chapter 1, the introduction chapter, I explain that in many countries, subnational political elites have far-reaching powers. Federalism is part of constitutional arrangements for some countries like India and the United States. Also, there has been a global decentralization trend in recent decades. Especially in new democracies - for example in Latin America - decentralization is seen as an integral part of state modernization programs. Decentralization thus has a certain momentum and has made subnational political elites more important.

Existing literature has found that in decentralized countries subnational political elites- that rule states or provinces - can remain undemocratic despite democratization at the national centre. Examples of these subnational undemocratic regimes are found in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the United States under Jim Crow. We know from existing literature that political elites of these regimes can use repression against political opponents and that they benefit from being isolated. By keeping political conflicts isolated, they aim to decrease the risk of interference by central institutions, which can range from taking away fiscal resources to starting criminal investigations. But we lack a systematic understanding of why and how these political elites repress the actors that spread compromising information about them from the subnational to the national public sphere, which I call 'boundary-blurring actors' in this dissertation. We know a lot about why and how the elites of undemocratic countries try to control information flows and target actors like journalists. But scaling down to political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes – which find

themselves in a different institutional setting – this understanding wanes. We also lack an understanding of the problems that boundary-blurring actors can cause for political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes. Furthermore, we lack an understanding of how political elites repress these actors while being embedded in a national democracy. As a result of this gap I define my research questions in chapter 1 as: 1) How do boundary-blurring actors increase subnational power uncertainty? 2) How do political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress boundary-blurring actors?

In chapter 2, the theory chapter, I explain the most important concepts of this dissertation and provide the theoretical foundation for why subnational undemocratic regimes target boundary-blurring actors. One important foundation of this theory is the notion of subnational power uncertainty. I argue that although political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes can be in power for a long time, these elites experience a dual-threat: being electorally defeated and facing interference by central institutions. Political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes can skew the electoral playing field in their favour, but cannot fully rig elections. Simultaneously, these elites can try to optimize relations with the centre – for example by giving the central government various types of political support, but can never fully take away the risk of central institutions interfering in subnational politics. Building on the work of Schattschneider and Gibson, I argue that those actors that can expand the scope of a conflict can augment these uncertainties. Boundary-blurring actors who are able to spread compromising information about the subnational undemocratic regime – and bring it to the attention of both national and subnational audiences – are crucial. As a result of their actions, compromising information about the political elite of a subnational undemocratic regime can become known in the national public sphere and can put pressure on central institutions to interfere in subnational politics. Therefore, I propose, political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes aim to neutralize the threat of boundary-blurring actors and target them with multiple power tools, such as repression.

In Chapter 3, I explain both my research design and the methodologies that I have used to empirically explore my theory. I start by explaining the universe of cases from which I selected the research contexts and cases. My research contexts are countries in which subnational political elites have: 1) a high degree of autonomy but can also potentially face interference, and where 2) the institutional setting consists of a democracy at the national centre, which has a certain level of state capacity. Most crucially, I explain why Mexico and India are the research contexts that I opted for, and Veracruz and Gujarat are the cases that I selected. In both of these states, I

have conducted months of fieldwork to be able to answer my research questions. In chapter 3, I explain how I dealt with getting access to my respondents, and how I tried to protect them and myself during fieldwork. Thereafter, I discuss the tools that I used during my fieldwork and afterwards, such as semi-structured interviews, process tracing, and some statistical analysis.

In chapter 4, I lay the groundwork for the answers to the two research questions. In this chapter, I focus on Mexico and identify a specific sub-class of boundary-blurring actors in the country: journalists. This identification is based on the fact that journalists in Mexico can increase subnational power uncertainty for subnational political elites by expanding the scope of compromising information. After selecting journalists as a sub-class of boundary-blurring actors, I analyze data about the attacks on journalists, zoom in specifically on homicide data, and demonstrate that in many Mexican states, journalists are a specifically targeted subgroup of the population. I demonstrate that the level of targeting varies subnationally. Finally, I demonstrate in the chapter that the targetedness of journalists is connected to their boundary-blurring role.

The empirical analysis of Chapter 4 identifies the Mexican states with high levels of targetedness of journalists. This allows the selection of one specific state where journalists seem to be targeted: Veracruz. In chapter 5, I trace how journalists increase subnational power uncertainty for the subnational political elite and investigate how they are repressed. One of the findings is that the repression rarely consists of one event but is incremental: heavy forms of repression are often preceded by lighter forms of repression, and co-optation attempts. Also, repression is often conducted in an opaque manner, including collaboration between the subnational political elite and non-state actors, such as organized crime groups.

As opposed to chapters 4 and 5, in chapter 6 I zoom in on what boundary-blurring actors did in relation to one specific event. With the use of process tracing, I analyze how certain actors tried to extend the scope of compromising information related to the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat. During these riots, thousands of people died and the subnational government was accused of sanctioning the riots. Limiting the scope of the analysis to one specific, extreme event allowed the category of boundary-blurring actors to be kept open, and allowed me to observe how other actors, such as political insiders and activists engaged in boundary-blurring actions. It, moreover, facilitated an inductive analysis of whether and how these boundary-blurring actors extend the scope of compromising information. I found that similar dynamics were at play in Gujarat as in Veracruz, such as the incremental and opaque nature of repression. For example, whereas journalists in Veracruz pointed at the relationship between local public officials and organized crime groups, boundary-

blurring actors in Gujarat pointed at the relationship between Hindu-nationalist NGO's and local public officials. Through process tracing, I was able to disentangle these processes even more and show in a detailed manner how boundary-blurring actors are repressed after each boundary-blurring action.

In the concluding chapter, I demonstrate that there are continuities across the different cases that I studied. For example, the uncertainty that boundary-blurring actors cause for political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes partly depends on the extent to which they can prove the compromising information. I also outline the distinct routes that boundary-blurring actors followed – both in Veracruz and Gujarat - with regards to the spread of compromising information: the central institution route and the national public sphere route. An example of the national public sphere route is the publishing of articles in national media. An example of the central institutions route is the filing of an affidavit at a supreme court that incriminates the subnational political elite.

In the concluding chapter, I also explain the continuity in terms of how boundary-blurring actors are repressed. I argue that the embeddedness of the subnational undemocratic regimes that I studied in national democracies privileges certain repressive strategies. At least partly as a result of this embeddedness itself, political elites in both cases used opaque repressive acts, collaborations with non-state actors, and incremental repression towards boundary-blurring actors. Finally, I discuss the implications of the findings of this dissertation for the existing literature. This dissertation emphasizes that repression is an important part of the toolkit of political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes. Another implication is that phenomena like the repression of protesters during demonstrations are not the only indicators of repression. The levels of repression used against boundary-blurring actors can be an important way of assessing the level of repressiveness of a subnational political elite. Ultimately, this study hopes to contribute to the understanding of tragic events, like the killing of journalists in Veracruz. While understanding such events does not automatically lead to improvement, it could ultimately improve our recognition of the vulnerabilities of certain actors and the responsibilities of others.

SAMENVATTING

Het afnemen van persvrijheid en de vrijheid van meningsuiting zijn nauw verbonden met de wereldwijde democratische terugval waar we ons momenteel in bevinden. De laatste jaren heeft het geweld tegen actoren die politieke elites verantwoordelijk willen houden voor wat ze doen steeds alarmerender vormen aangenomen. Dit soort actoren zijn doorgaans journalisten, maar kunnen ook andere mensen zijn zoals activisten of klokkenluiders. De repressie van deze actoren is natuurlijk een tragedie voor de betrokken mensen zelf, maar ook voor de democratie als zodanig. Als journalisten niet vrij over onderwerpen kunnen publiceren die van publiek belang zijn, kunnen stemgerechtigden ook hun opinies niet onbelemmerd vormen. Daarmee wordt ook de mogelijkheid om politieke elites verantwoordelijk te houden voor hun handelen tijdens verkiezingen fictief. Met dit onderzoek beoog ik een beter inzicht te verschaffen in de repressie van actoren zoals journalisten.

In dit proefschrift betoog ik dat als we aanvallen op actoren zoals journalisten beter willen begrijpen, we naar naar subnationale politieke elites moeten kijken. In hoofdstuk 1, de inleiding, laat ik zien dat in veel landen subnationale politieke elites veel autonomie en macht hebben. India en de Verenigde Staten bijvoorbeeld zijn grondwettelijk federale staten. Voorts wordt in nieuwe democratieën, bijvoorbeeld in Latijns-Amerika, decentralisering vaak gezien als een belangrijk onderdeel van de modernisering van het staatsbestel. Doordat decentralisatie de laatste decennia een bepaald momentum heeft verkregen, zijn subnationale politieke elites machtiger geworden.

Onderzoek heeft laten zien dat in gedecentraliseerde landen, subnationale politieke elites soms op ondemocratische wijze kunnen blijven functioneren ondanks democratisering op nationaal niveau. Voorbeelden vinden we in Azië, Latijns-Amerika, Afrika en de Verenigde Staten ten tijde van de Jim Crow-wetten. Onderzoek wijst verder uit dat de politieke elites van deze regimes aan repressie kunnen doen en dat ze baat hebben bij relatieve isolatie. Door politieke conflicten lokaal te houden vermijden deze politieke elites inmenging van centrale instituties, die kan variëren van fiscale sancties tot het starten van strafrechtelijk onderzoek. Maar tot dusver ontbreekt er een diepgaand inzicht in de manier waarop die elites de actoren onderdrukken die belastende informatie over die elites verspreiden naar de nationale publieke sfeer, in dit proefschrift 'grensvervagende actoren' genoemd. We weten veel over waarom en hoe nationale ondemocratische regimes informatiestromen proberen te beïnvloeden en actoren zoals journalisten onderdrukken. Maar als het gaat om subnationale politieke elites, die zich in een andere institutioneel speelveld bevinden, is de kennis die we hebben minder toereikend. Het ontbreekt ons aan

een goed inzicht in de manier waarop grensvervagende actoren problemen kunnen veroorzaken voor de politieke elites van subnationale ondemocratische regimes zoals het ons ook ontbreekt aan een goed inzicht in de manier waarop die elites grensvervagende actoren onderdrukken. Mijn onderzoeksvragen definiëer ik daarom als volgt: 1) hoe kunnen grensvervagende actoren de onzekerheid van subnationale elites omtrent hun machtspositie beïnvloeden? 2) Hoe onderdrukken politieke elites van subnationale ondemocratische regimes grensvervagende actoren?

In hoofdstuk 2, het theoretisch hoofdstuk, geef ik uitleg over de belangrijkste concepten die ten grondslag liggen aan mijn proefschrift, en leg ik uit wat de theoretische basis is op grond waarvan politieke elites van subnationale ondemocratische regimes grensvervagende actoren onderdrukken. Een belangrijk onderdeel van mijn theorie wordt gevormd door de onzekerheid van subnationale elites over hun machtspositie: subnationale machtsonzekerheid. Ik toon aan aan dat politieke elites van subnationale ondemocratische regimes weliswaar lang aan de macht kunnen blijven, maar dat ze met een dubbele bedreiging worden geconfronteerd: het lijden van een verkiezingsnederlaag en de inmenging van centrale instituties. Politieke elites van subnationale ondemocratische regimes kunnen het electorale speelveld wel beïnvloeden, maar de verkiezingen niet in zijn geheel stelen. Tegelijkertijd kunnen deze elites hun relaties met het centrum optimaliseren, bijvoorbeeld door het verstrekken van politieke steun, maar toch kunnen zij nooit de kans op inmening van centrale instituties wegnemen. Voortbordurend op het werk van Schattschneider en Gibson beargumenteer ik dat actoren die het bereik van belastende informatie over de politieke elites van subnationale ondemocratische regimes kunnen vergroten, van cruciaal belang zijn. Zij kunnen ervoor zorgen dat belastende informatie bekend wordt bij het grote publiek en zo de druk op centrale instituties vergroten om zich te mengen in subnationale politiek. Daarom verwacht ik dat politieke elites van subnationale ondemocratische regimes deze actoren proberen te onderdrukken.

In hoofdstuk 3 geef ik uitleg over mijn onderzoeksopzet en de methodologieën die ik heb gebruikt om mijn theorie empirisch te verkennen. Ik begin met het definiëren van het veld waaruit ik mijn specifieke onderzoekscontexten en -casussen heb geselecteerd. Mijn onderzoekscontexten bestaan uit landen waarin politieke elites: 1) een hoge mate van autonomie hebben maar, in potentie, ook met inmenging geconfronteerd kunnen worden, en waar 2) het institutionele speelveld bestaat uit een democratie op nationaal niveau, die ook een bepaalde capaciteit heeft. Belangrijk in hoofdstuk 3 is mijn uitleg van de vraag waarom ik heb gekozen voor Mexico en India als onderzoekscontexten, en Veracruz en Gujarat als casussen. Met het oog op het beantwoorden van mijn onderzoeksvragen heb ik in beide staten maandenlang

veldwerk gedaan. Ik leg in dit hoofdstuk uit hoe ik, tijdens dit veldwerk, toegang heb verkregen tot mijn respondenten en heb getracht zorg te dragen voor de veiligheid van zowel mijn respondenten als mijzelf. Daarna geef ik uitleg over de methoden die ik heb gebruikt tijdens en na mijn veldwerk, zoals semi-gestructureerde interviews, *process tracing*, en statistische analyse.

In hoofdstuk 4 leg ik de basis voor de antwoorden op mijn twee onderzoeksvragen. In dit hoofdstuk richt ik me op Mexico en identificeer ik een specifieke sub-groep van grensvervagende actoren: journalisten. Die identificatie is gebaseerd op het feit dat in Mexico journalisten het bereik van belastende informatie over politieke elites van subnationale ondemocratische regimes kunnen vergroten. Na het selecteren van journalisten als sub-groep binnen grensverleggende actoren, analyseer ik data op het gebied van aanvallen op journalisten. Ik richt mij specifiek op moorden op journalisten, en laat zien dat journalisten als subgroep binnen de gehele populatie een specifiek doelwit vormen. Ik toon aan dat dit te maken heeft met de grensvervagende rol die ze spelen.

In de empirische analyse van hoofdstuk 4 licht ik die Mexicaanse staten uit waarin journalisten een veel grotere kans hebben vermoord te worden ten opzichten van de gehele populatie. Dat maakt het mogelijk om een specifieke staat te selecteren waar journalisten vaak doelwit zijn van moord: Veracruz. In hoofdstuk 5 onderzoek ik hoe journalisten machtsonzekerheid vergroten voor de subnationale politieke elite in Veracruz en hoe ze vervolgens onderdrukt worden. Een van de bevindingen is dat de repressie zelden uit een enkele actie bestaat, maar incrementeel is: zware vormen van repressie volgen op mindere vormen van repressie en pogingen tot omkoping. Daarnaast wordt repressie vaak op ondoorzichtige manieren uitgevoerd, waarbij subnationale politieke elites samenwerken met niet-statelijke actoren.

In tegenstelling tot de hoofdstukken 4 en 5, kijk ik in hoofdstuk 6 naar de daden van grensvervagende actoren tijdens een specifieke gebeurtenis. Door middel van *process tracing* analyseer ik hoe grensvervagende actoren het bereik van belastende informatie gerelateerd aan de religieuze rellen in Gujarat in 2002, vergrootten. Gedurende de rellen stierven er duizenden mensen en werd de subnationale politieke elite beschuldigd van betrokkenheid bij het geweld. Het beperken van de analyse tot een specifieke gebeurtenis geeft me de mogelijkheid om de categorie grensvervagende actoren' open te houden en te kijken hoe andere actoren, zoals activisten en ontstemden binnen de subnationale politieke elite zelf, ook grensvervagende handelingen verrichtten. Deze beperking tot een specifieke gebeurtenis bevordert ook een inductieve analyse van de manier waarop grensvervagende actoren het bereik van belastende informatie vergrootten. Ik zag dat er sprake was van een vergelijkbare dynamiek in Veracruz en Gujarat,

zoals de toenemende en ondoorzichtige aard van de repressie. Waar journalisten in Veracruz spraken over de samenwerking tussen ambtenaren en georganiseerde misdaad, wezen grensverleggende actoren in Gujarat op de samenwerking tussen ambtenaren en hindunationalistische NGO's. Door middel van *process tracing* heb ik deze dynamiek kunnen ontwarren en laat ik in detail zien hoe grensvervagende actoren onderdrukking ervaren na elke grensvervagende actie.

In de conclusie van dit proefschrift toon ik de mate van continuïteit aan die er bestaat tussen de casussen die ik heb bestudeerd. Een voorbeeld is dat de onzekerheid die grensvervagende actoren kunnen veroorzaken voor de politieke elites van subnationale ondemocratische regimes, voor een deel afhankelijk is van de mate waarin ze de belastende informatie kunnen bewijzen. Ook beschrijf ik de verschillende routes die grensvervagende actoren in Veracruz en Gujarat bewandelden met betrekking tot het verspreiden van belastende informatie: de centrale institutieroute en de nationale publieke sfeerroute. Een voorbeeld van de nationale publieke sfeerroute is het publiceren van belastende informatie in nationale media. Een voorbeeld van de centrale institutieroute is het afleggen van een beëdigde verklaring (Affidavit) bij het Hoogerechtshof (Supreme Court) waarin belastende informatie over de subnationale politieke elite aan het licht komt.

Naast de continuïteit op het gebied van de manier waarop grensvervagende actoren subnationale machtsonzekerheid vergroten, geef ik in de conclusie ook een verklaring voor de continuïteit in de manier waarop die actoren onderdrukt worden. Ik beargumenteer dat de inbedding van subnationale ondemocratische regimes in nationale democratieën, bepaalde repressieve strategieën begunstigt. In ieder geval ten dele als gevolg van deze inbedding zelf, gebruikten de politieke elites van beide staten die ik heb onderzocht ondoorzichtige en toenemende vormen van onderdrukking, en werkten ze samen met niet-statelijke actoren. Tot slot leg ik in de conclusies uit wat de implicaties van mijn bevindingen zijn voor de bestaande literatuur. Dit proefschrift benadrukt dat onderdrukking een belangrijk instrument is voor de politieke elites van subnationale regimes. Een andere implicatie is dat fenomenen als onderdrukking van demonstranten tijdens demonstraties niet de enige mogelijke indicatoren zijn voor de mate waarin subnationale politieke elites aan onderdrukking doen. De repressie van grensvervagende actoren kan een belangrijke manier zijn om die mate van onderdrukking aan te duiden. Uiteindelijk hoop ik met dit onderzoek iets toe te voegen aan het begrip van tragische gebeurtenissen zoals moorden op journalisten in Veracruz. Hoewel dit begrip zich natuurlijk niet meteen leidt tot verbetering, zou het wel kunnen resulteren in een beter inzicht in de kwetsbaarheden van bepaalde actoren, en de verantwoordelijkheden van anderen.



THE REPRESSION OF BOUNDARY-BLURRING ACTORS IN SUBNATIONAL UNDEMOCRATIC REGIMES

Empirical explorations in Veracruz and Gujarat

Jos Midas Bartman

Subnational political elites can remain undemocratic despite democratization at the national centre. This book investigates why and how political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes repress 'boundary-blurring actors.' I theorize that political elites of subnational undemocratic regimes experience subnational power uncertainty and that boundary-blurring actors can increase this uncertainty by spreading compromising information about these elites to the national public sphere. As a result, repression is used against them. I empirically explore this theory in Veracruz (Mexico) and Gujarat (India).