



Decentralization and Conflict

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Introduction: Why decentralization and conflict prevention?

- The collapse of centralized political systems
- The rise of identity group politics
- Various types of inequality
- → Question on how decentralization could work for the purpose of conflict prevention.

Decentralization is a broad concept

- Political, administrative and financial dimensions
- Territorial decentralization and non-territorial decentralization.
- Decentralization in a unitary state and federal state.



Power elite's motivations for decentralization

- 1. Governance Design
- 2. Public Sector Reform
- 3. Elite Capture

1. Governance Design

- ◆ This is a motivation to make decentralization the determining factor in governance of the country.
- ◆ This is related to allocating power between identity groups and historical backgrounds.
- ◆ Democratization is also a major factor.
- ◆ Respect to regional languages and cultures are also related.



2. Public Sector Reform

- ◆ This motivation seeks to use decentralization as a solution for economic governance.
- ◆ It is claimed that moving decision-making authority and service providers closer to the citizens is a better solution.
- ◆ Donors are involved in the reform (from structural adjustment to service delivery to the poor) .

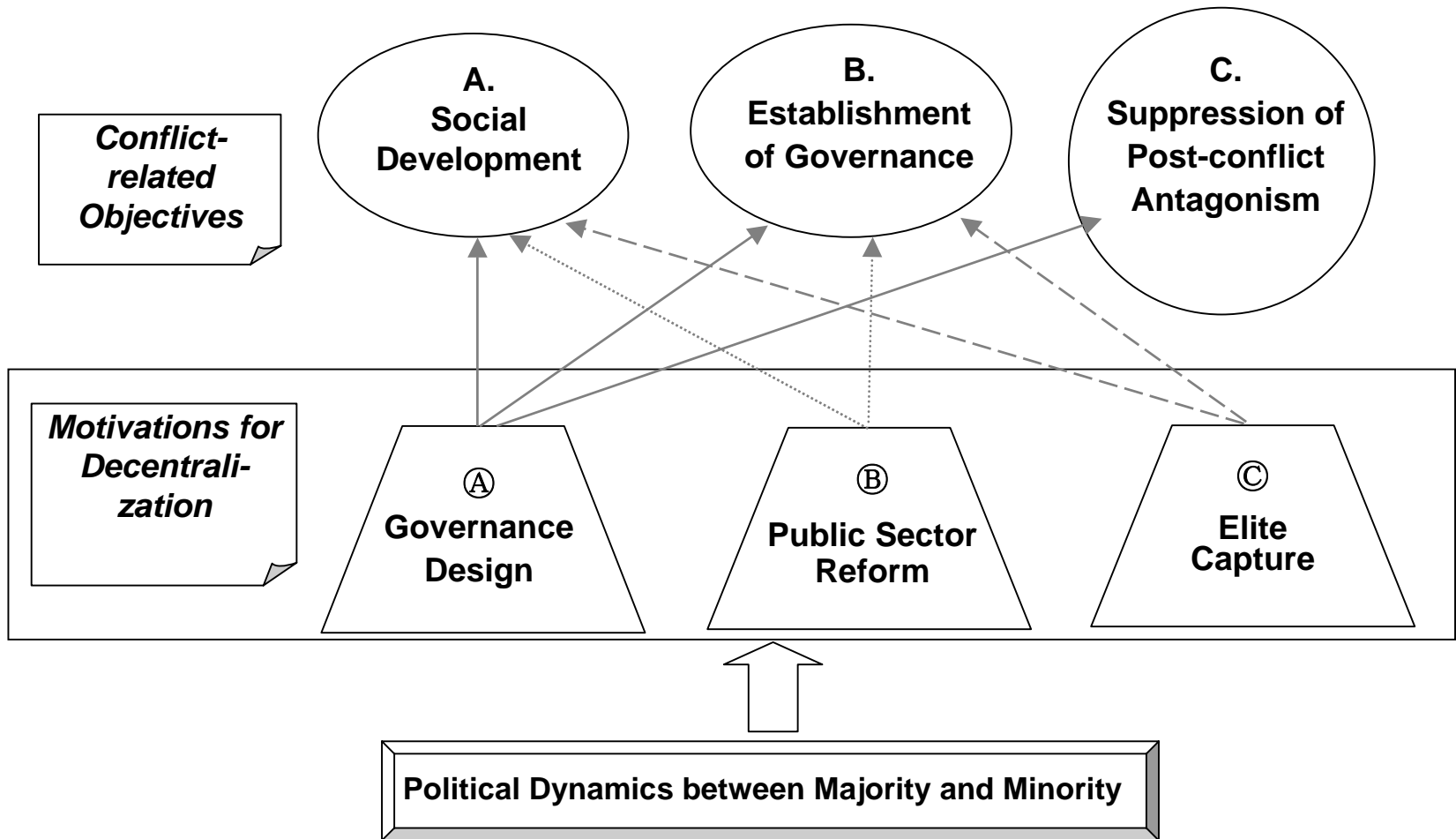
3. Elite Capture

- ◆ This is a personal motivation of the power elite which is inherent to decentralization.
- ◆ The patronage of the powerful exerts strong control over politics and influences the allocation of resources in developing countries.
- ◆ To get and share elite capture, power elites in the central government and local side elites collude.

Linkage between Decentralization and Conflict

- The overall factor of majority and minority political dynamics affects the three general motivations for decentralization.
- These motivations produce a variety of policy objectives for decentralization.
 - Social Development
 - Establishment of Governance
 - Suppression of Post-conflict Antagonism

Analytical Framework for Decentralization and Conflict Prevention



Source: created by the author. (Note): Arrows do not connect all motivations and objectives.



Political Dynamics of Majorities and Minorities

- Minority's motivations for initiating conflict are affected by group internal structure and mutual interaction with the majority.
- Minorities will be motivated to move towards secessionism when they are geographically cohesive and culturally independent.
- When they are dispersed, they will attempt to overthrow the majority's government.

Territorial Conflict in Africa

- Territorial conflict has been of marginal importance due to abundance of land.
- However, once separatist insurgencies arise, there emerge great human costs.
- There is a forecast that the movements toward autonomy and territorial assertion will continue to increase.
- These movements seem to suggest the increasing importance of decentralization.



New Minorities

- New minorities can be created within independent states and newly decentralized units.
- Consideration needs to be given to new minorities.

Conflict-related Objectives of Decentralization

Type	A. Promotion of Social Development	B. Establishment of Governance	C. Suppression of Post-conflict Antagonism
Effect	Decentralization, through the fair allocation of resources, promotes social development and maintains cooperation amongst groups.	Decentralization strengthens the elements of self determination for minorities through a set framework and the government achieves legitimacy.	Decentralization is introduced as an element for supporting power-sharing within post-conflict societies.
Risk	Monopolization of resource allocation between power elites in the central and local governments. Leaving intra-group inequality untouched.	Invigoration of local parties and systems lays the groundwork for future separatist movements and suppression of new minorities.	Promotes the artificial maintenance of the current situation and prevents the formation of intrinsic governance.
Relationship to Conflict	Easing of tension between groups as a result of social development.	Acceptance of participation by minorities and the control of conflict.	Directly puts the burden of conflict prevention on the shoulders of those involved in conflict.

Decentralization for Promotion of Social Development

- This type can lead to the elimination of conflict by supplying services
- Its results are seen in hindsight and diverse.
- This type works well under countries with steady economic growth, but does not work well in countries with reallocation problems.

Decentralization for Promotion of Social Development - Cont'd

- In Kenya and the Philippine, legislature-led financial decentralization stands out, but no coordinated relationship with administration; and participation is weak.
- The suggested risk of this type is domination by power elites: the collusion between central and local elites.

Decentralization for Establishment of Governance

- This Type clearly aims at conflict prevention through governance framework.
- Federalism, political decentralization and non-territorial decentralization (consociationalism) are dominant forms.
- Typical examples are Uganda and Ethiopia. They have drastic formula for facilitating participation with hidden motives of power elites to control the state.

Decentralization for Establishment of Governance – Cont'd

- Risks are that minority power elites are able to increase their political power within decentralized units and promote discontent with the central authority.
- An example is Columbian municipalities which were oppressed by mafia and other armed groups. Decentralization without public order becomes problematic.

Decentralization for Suppression of Post-conflict Antagonism

- Post-conflict decentralization is not easy. There is a risk of disintegration and political re-centralization.
- A typical policy is consociational democracy which reflects devolution and power-sharing.
- The interim constitution of South Africa in 1993 adopted this type, but has been replaced by majority-rule politics.

Decentralization for Suppression of Post-conflict Antagonism – Cont'd

- The Risk is the fixation of present ethnicity situation, externally driven process.
- The segmented election system in Bosnia was not suited for ethnic reconciliation, one vote carrying a different weight among ethnicities.
- Using the country's traditional allocation will reignite discontent, while using new allocation runs the risk of inefficiency.

Implications: Policy Prescription

- Decentralization could serve for improving equality and enhancing social justice by potentially lessening psychological discontent of minority group.
- The state can be revived by adopting a best framework of governance.
- Decentralization is one of the elements achieving better governance.

Implications: Transitional Patterns

- Countries sometimes do not adopt appropriate policy objectives. Decentralization is a transition process and reflects the state of national reconciliation.
- The governance-oriented decentralization engender a risk of secession, but when mixed with the decentralization that aims at social development and donor assistance, the resistance would be alleviated.

Implications: Development Policies

- The managers of donor agencies should take account of the geography and the trends of poverty and identity groups in targeting their operations.
- Decentralization policy needs to be viable for diminishing the socio-economic imbalance of the regions. They should recognize conflict prevention potentials as well as the risks posed by decentralization.

Implications: Development Policies

– Cont'd

- The mainstream approach of poverty reduction is to focus on absolute poverty. From the standpoint of conflict prevention, inequality and relative poverty are also important.
- When fairness in allocation is ensured through decentralization, minorities are likely to trust the majority government.