Decentralization as a Post-Conflict Strategy

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Definitions

- **Decentralization** is “as a process, as the set of policies, electoral reforms or constitutional reforms that transfer responsibilities, resources or authority from higher to lower levels of governance” (Falleti 2010).

- **Federalism** is “a political organization in which the activities of government are divided between regional governments and a central government in such a way that each kind of government has some activities on which it makes final decisions” (Riker 1964).
Literature on decentralization

- Territorial power sharing
  - Lijphart; Hechter; McGarry & O’Leary
  - Critique: Bunce; Snyder; Roeder & Rothchild

- Fiscal federalism
  - Tiebout; Oatley

- Decentralization in Latin America
Decentralization in the conflict-resolution literature

- Liberal peacebuilding after end of Cold War
- Peacebuilding as statebuilding after 9/11
  - Barnett 2006; Paris and Sisk 2009
- The “decentralization turn”:
  - Faguet, Fox & Poeschl. 2014. “Does decentralization strengthen or weaken the state?” LSE Research Online.
Conclusions from the general literature

- Reviews:
  - Siegle and O’Mahony. 2006. “Assessing the Merits of Decentralization as a Conflict Mitigation Strategy.” USAID.
- Most studies concern conflict in multi-ethnic states
- Some evidence for pacifying effect
- Yet several risks: a history of conflict, corruption, poverty, uneven resources
  - Cederman et al. 2015. “Autonomy in the shadow of conflict.” *APSR*: difficult after conflict, decentralization needs central power sharing; massive endogeneity
Decentralization and conflict in Colombia

- No secession since 1903
- Left-right ideology rather than ethnicity
- Extensive decentralization
  - Direct election of mayors from 1988
  - Direct election of governors from 1991
  - Major transfers of resources
Explaining civil-war onset and recurrence

1. Underdevelopment
   - Collier and Hoeffler 2004.
   - Reducing poverty through economic development and public goods provision.

2. State weakness
   - Fearon and Laitin 2003.
   - Guaranteeing security through strengthened state capacity.

3. State illegitimacy
   - Addressing grievances by reducing economic and political inequality.
1. Development and state effectiveness through decentralization?

- Provided fiscal federalism works
- But efficiency loss and quality of public goods could decline in periphery (e.g. Triesman 2007)

**Evidence:**
- Faguet and Sánchez. 2014. “Decentralization and access to social services in Colombia.” *Public Choice*
- Strong improvements in provision of education and health!

- Yet only one aspect of development
2. State strength through decentralization?

- Decentralization risks undermining security
  - Roeder and Rothchild (2005): “institutional weapons”

- Evidence:
  - Capture of local government by regional militias on left and right

- However, focus on “pacification through decentralization” rather than post-conflict period

- Centralization may not work better
3. State legitimacy through decentralization?

- Addressing grievances by bringing government closer to the people
- Reduction of inequality
- Participation and dignity
- But capture and corruption could undermine legitimacy
- Evidence:
  - Reforms improve perceptions of accountability in case of administrative and fiscal but not political decentralization.
Conclusions

- Territorial state reach is still a challenge not secession
- Decentralization has improved state effectiveness and legitimacy but potential for “extortive intermediation” remains (Gutiérrez Sanín 2010)
- Yet stronger state and less conflict today
- “Decentralization that strengthens ties with the center” (Siegle and O’Mahony 2009)
  - downward and upward accountability, audits, transparency, combating crime, standardized education of local civil servants
- Need to upgrade regional level (Gutiérrez Sanín 2010; Ospina 2013).