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**FAGUET, JEAN-PAUL, & PAL, SARMISTHA (EDS.) (2023).
DECENTRALISED GOVERNANCE: CRAFTING EFFECTIVE
DEMOCRACIES AROUND THE WORLD. LSE PRESS.
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Over the last twenty years, democratic backsliding has emerged as a prominent trend in global politics, making the increasing centralization of power a focal point of scholarly and political discourse. Democratically winning parties decide to change political systems and appropriate more and more spheres of life (like education, management of state-owned companies) worldwide. Thus, power – in still considered as democratic countries – is concentrated in an increasingly smaller group of decision-makers. As global democracy advocates continue to improve their approaches to countering democratic decline, editors Jean-Paul Faguet and Sarmistha Pal have collected a series of chapters that examine processes of governance decentralization in developing countries in order to analyse ways of the crafting effective democracies around the world. The main message of the book is that decentralizing authority from the national government to local authorities has the potential to strengthen democracy, give individuals more influence, enhance public services and spur economic growth in developing countries. However, there is conflicting data about when and how decentralization can yield these advantages. Under the wrong circumstances, corruption and the clientelistic distribution of public resources can weaken decentralized power or allow it to be seized by unaccountable elites. This book provides a new wave of political economics studies, combining theoretical understanding with innovative empirical research to examine these issues analytically.

The edited volume contains twelve chapters, which are separated into three parts: *i*) Taking stock of six decades of decentralisation; *ii*) Politics; and *iii*) Mechanism design, that are preceded by the introduction. It is worth noting that the authors are a combination of some of the most well-known academics in the area with early-career researchers – many of whom are themselves from developing countries which makes this publication a place of outstanding debate between different generations of scholars. By taking wide range of approaches and use of latest data as well as quantitative and qualitative methods, researchers investigate decentralization. Their goal is not only to critically analyse the past attitudes towards decentralization both in scientific and practical dimensions with supportive evidences, but also to highlight wrong assumptions in order to offer solutions that will develop and stabilize democracies through power distribution. The authors' commitment and the accompanying sense of mission are endearing, as evidenced by the quote: "As citizens, not just academics, we need to find ways to make the politics of decentralised governance function better" (p. 3).

The introduction briefly sketches the historical outline of studies on decentralization. It provides hints for reading as well as introduces fresh evidence from all over the world presented in detail in each chapter, including extensive cross-country data and in-depth analyses of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, China, Indonesia, Ghana, Kenya, and Colombia. Both democratic and autocratic regimes are examined what makes the publication not only unique but also incredibly addictive and thought-provoking. Undoubtedly, the case-countries chapters are written in journalist style. Reader can not only obtain knowledge about specific decentralization process, but also get completely immersed in reading and feel like a participant of conducted research. It is filled with experiencing a spectrum of emotions which accompany uncovering mechanisms with authors that serves devolution.

The book's strong point is the combination of threads based on the science-technology-society relationship supported with fresh data and studies that reflects the needs and reality of the contemporary world. Authors emphasize the role of science and technology that offers solutions needed to serve and develop democracy like use of AI. The description of reforms limiting corruption problems, elite capture, and political clientelism that limit the scope for decentralised governance proved by evidence from Pakistan (p. 61) presented by Dilip Mookherjee is undoubtedly surprising. Before the reform elected officials identified poor households that would receive the transfers. After creating a new households' and assets' database with the help of World Bank, new reform was introduced that

enabled use of “proxy means tests” to target the transfers. New law reduced favouritism (the role played by recipients’ connections to elected officials) and improved pro-poor targeting. Furthermore, it increased positive perceptions of social protection programmes, both in groups supporting the government and in those supporting the opposition.

One of the most attention-grabbing chapter presents the influence of voter heterogeneity, as shown in religious fractionalization on the economic consequences of municipal elections in rural China. Little did scientist conduct research on Chinese governance and decentralization practices due to autocratic leadership and its advanced invigilating tools. Thus, Monica Martinez-Bravo, Gerard Padró i Miquel, Nancy Qian, and Yang Yao focus on decentralization grassroots practices and its conditions as well as outcomes. They not only overcome the decentralization research framework by investigating the autocratic regime, but also provide promising methodological insights. The description of study let the reader understand the obstacles to defeat and provide better understanding of Chinese reforms. They find that voter heterogeneity – that is, religious fragmentation – significantly reduces the gains from introducing elections.

It is hard to find flaws in well written and engaging book like this. Although, I would consider language modifications to make it more inclusive. In introduction editors write: “We decentralise to get more heterogeneity” (p. 16). The use of language shapes reality, thus political correctness and inclusive character should be prioritised in any kind of publications especially ones encouraging democracy development and promoting diversity. It may seem the critique from sociological point of view, however the boasting inclusivity of language of this volume would be in harmony with the discussed subject. Moreover, it would provide appealing examples not only in text, but also through text. Secondly, the definition of developing countries is missing in order to clarify if authors and readers’ way of understanding are same. I would also add the explanation of chosen countries which serve as a case studies in a book. The countries represent Asia, Africa and South America. Are the developing countries in Europe worse or do not decentralize? Or the way of understanding of “developing countries” is different?

The outstanding edited volume seem to be indispensable position for position for scholars and students interested in democracy as well as social entrepreneurship, political aspects of any above – mentioned countries and power devolution. Moreover, I would highly recommend it to policymakers because of well exposed practical dimension and inspiring solutions. Some parts could

serve as addition to geography/history classes in school because of its freshness and readable character.

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