

Decentralised Governance Crafting Effective Democracies around the World

Jean-Paul Faguet and Sarmistha Pal: 'Decentralised Governance Crafting Effective Democracies around the World' (LSE Press 2023)

Hira Maroof¹

The book *Decentralised Governance: Crafting Effective Democracies around the World* authored by Jean-Paul Faguet and Sarmistha Pal covers the overarching theme of decentralised governance exhibiting its merits and demerits. For over six decades, decentralisation has garnered the attention of worldwide academicians, scholars, researchers, and policymakers. The revival of decentralisation in the mid-twentieth century sparked a seminal shift in the literature, with global demand for decentralisation and the need to strengthen local politics through power devolution. This book highlights that decentralisation brings government closer to people, enhancing their responsiveness.

The book stands out for its empirical inquiry of the available literature, aiming to fill gaps by addressing the conditions, empirical evidence, and nuanced explanations of decentralisation. The authors have explored the factors which can either improve or impair governance, shedding light on various aspects of decentralisation that can bolster local politics.

The central theme of the book revolves around the complexities and challenges regarding the implementation of decentralisation, recommending the diverse reforms for it. By incorporating theoretical

¹ Reviewer is a Research Intern at Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Pakistan.

Hira Maroof

analyses with empirical data, the authors gauge decentralisation's impact on politics, economics, and overall growth through case studies, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Colombia, China, and Ghana. The book sets the stage with a historical overview of decentralisation, with particular attention to the disruptions in its implementation in the regions mentioned above, critically examining its practice.

Fauget and Pal examine the interplay of decentralisation with politics at local and national levels, analysing its reforms in different countries. The authors seek to address the intricate complexities of decentralisation and its benefits, guided by the literature's demands and policy consensus. A peculiarly notable aspect of this book is its clear definition of decentralisation, which differentiates it from other related themes that have caused confusion in previous studies.

The authors then delve into the rationale behind the need for decentralisation, focusing on its theoretical and practical aspects. They draw attention to both the positive and negative aspects of decentralisation, employing methodological approaches to propose better solutions and laying the foundation for effective policy formulation. The book also stresses the significance of fiscal decentralisation with data from Indonesia, elucidating how co-partisanship between local elites and parliamentarians due to party politics can hinder local political progress. This brings to light multiple variables that must be considered while researching decentralisation.

Divided into three parts and twelve chapters, this book provides a rich analysis of decentralised governance and its impact on various countries. Contributions from different authors, particularly from developing countries, offer a harmonious blend of qualitative and quantitative analysis throughout the chapters.

Three major case studies have been drawn from the South Asian region, focusing on declining barriers which have allowed the emergence of local politicians, therefore, increasing political contestation and providing capable and deserving candidates a platform. The authors comprehensively analyse the difficulties, faced by different states due to elite politics, clientelism, and corruption, which impede the design and implementation of decentralisation projects.

In the case of Pakistan, the authors have documented institutional changes under autocratic regimes that have led to the rise of dynastic politics, replacing party politics. This consolidation of dynastic politics has also influenced subnational levels, capturing local bureaucracy and entrenching clientelism by elected politicians.

The study explores how central authorities under autocratic regimes can use decentralisation as a tool to consolidate dynastic politics. Additionally, Fauget and Pal conduct micro-level analyses to comprehend the functioning of decentralisation under different forms of government and within diverse social contexts across different institutions.

Concerning China and Kenya, the authors have discussed how religious factors and local-level corruption distort the overall design of decentralisation, yielding mixed results. These findings illustrate the confluence of elite politics and clientelism as noteworthy hurdles to effective decentralisation.

Part three of the book focuses on mechanism design, discussing non-political factors, and the significance of strengthening decentralisation beyond local elections and political incentives.

By incorporating primary data and acknowledging technological advancements, the authors emphasise the potential benefits of digital

Hira Maroof

tools in decentralisation efforts. It has been identified that new institutional structures and digital incentives can benefit from the decentralisation process. However, the authors leave out to address micro-level issues, highlighting the under-representation of minority voices crucial for the ultimate transfer of power to local authorities. Moreover, there is a lack of data from many rural areas, which undermines the comprehensiveness of its quantitative analysis. The book also falls short of recommending effective strategies for mitigating the challenges faced by decentralisation.

The complexity of the subject suggests that it may be challenging to generalise the findings. Despite drawing on various case studies, the book does not fully address the broader implications of decentralisation across different contexts, even though these insights are useful.

The book provides a valuable discourse for those interested in decentralisation. It is a commendable analysis that transcends interstate exchanges. The authors have covered diverse dimensions, incorporating political, economic, and social contexts to determine decentralisation's outcomes. Each chapter on decentralisation from various regions serves as a roadmap and a source of hope, encompassing the voices chanting for change.

The factors which are important for power devolution are well observed making this book an excellent addition to the current literature. Civil servants, policymakers, and researchers in international relations, political economy, and public administration will benefit immensely from the valuable insights on decentralisation offered in this book.■