April 30, 2021

Revision Memo

Dear Editors and Anonymous Reviewers,

Please find enclosed a revised version of “The Political Origins of Education Decentralization.” I am grateful to the reviewers for an extremely careful and thoughtful reading of my manuscript. In my opinion, their engagement with my work has made the manuscript stronger.

I begin by highlighting major changes to the manuscript since its first submissions. A point-by-point reply to the reviewers follows.

Major Changes

1. R1 suggests I more fully position my argument with respect to the broader literature on decentralization. In response, I have more fully fleshed out the ways in which my work is a departure from prominent existing works, including contributions by Falleti and Niedzwiecki. My point is that these excellent contributions mostly tell us something about what happens after decentralization, but are limited in explanations for why a type of administrative decentralization (education) is pursued in the first place. I return to an earlier argument in the decentralization literature (O’Neill) to show that political calculations matter, but that it’s not always about
2. R2 notes inconsistency in the dependent variable—am I talking about decentralization outcomes or the pursuing of decentralization? My manuscript is interested in the first, but as I elaborate in my response below, this has implications for the second. I do flesh out this distinction in the paper and focus more clearly on the determinants of decisions to decentralize.
3. R1 suggests a conceptual beefing up of the article. I have redrawn the theoretical section to focus on actors and incentive
4. R1 suggests I frame the paper as theory building and suggests placing less attention to the quantative results. I agree. I have placed more focus on the case studies and the theoretical discussion as a theory building exercise with a quantitative plausibility test instead of the regression as the main part of the paper. This gives me more space to develop the theory and concepts, R1 wanted.

Reply to Reviewer 1

1. Framing: “This article should be more centered on decentralization politics in general.”

This is surely an important point. One of the reasons I have limited this discussion is the fact that most studies of decentralization and multi-level governance have a specific DV in mind – decentralization *outcomes*. For example, Falleti is interested in the ultimate balance of power across levels of government, whereas Niedzwiecki’s focus is on the implementation of social policy. By contrast, my DV is proposals of decentralization.

Nevertheless, both are important books and have inspired much of the work behind the current piece. I have thus both showed how my work is a departure from the decentralization literature generally, and builds on insights from these and other authors. Some of this is done at the front-end but it is also done in the argument section, where I’ve connected my argument to the electoral considerations both in Niedzwiecki’s work and that of Anjali Thomas.

1. Departure: “For example, how do the theory developed in the manuscript and the cases of education decentralization in El Salvador and Paraguay draw on, but also depart from, the work of Tulia Falleti?”

I confess that I’ve thought a lot about this point. I’ve concluded that Falleti doesn’t have much to say about education decentralization (understood as an administrative reform) in the *absence of political or fiscal decentralization* because she doesn’t think it likely. As she states in her book, "Although it is analytically conceivable that only one or two types of decentralization could occur, in reality, administrative, fiscal, and political decentralization are highly intertwined. For example, political decentralization is very likely to lead to demands for fiscal decentralization, which, in turn, is likely to lead to administrative decentralization.” The reason she thinks so, I would argue, springs from her analytical focus on “big countries”, whereas piecemeal decentralization initiatives are much more common in smaller, unitary countries. This is a point that also crops up in other newer work in decentralization, like Anjali Thomas’s book, which now features more prominently in my literature review. I’ve depersonalized this discussion and placed it at the beginning of the literature review. I’ll note also that the analytical point that small countries and their experiences with decentralization can inform theories of what happens in bigger countries, which only clicked for me with your engagement with my work, is now highlighted in the conclusion.

1. Concepts: “The theory section should present and elaborate on the concept of “teachers’ union link to the opposition” or OUL… Electoral competition and electoral strategy also need to be defined and discussed in more depth.”
2. Argument: “Also, why are teacher-party links so strong and stable? A central finding by Steve Levitsky and Victoria Murillo is that parties are often disloyal to unions. In the 1990s, there was partisan de-alignment, when labor-based parties imposed market-oriented reforms on longstanding union allies. So why were parties loyal to teachers? More discussion of the loyalty dilemmas of parties, and why parties might be more loyal to teachers vs. other workers would be helpful.”
3. Case Selection: “However, the fact that El Salvador was emerging from a civil war seems to strongly frame decentralization there. The author should acknowledge this difference and explain why it is not a problem for the paired comparison.”

Reply to Reviewer 2