Decentralization and Political Opposition in Contemporary Africa: Evidence from Sudan and Ethiopia

Elliott Green[1]

Department of International Development, London School of Economics, UK

Abstract:

A growing literature in political science has examined the impact of democratization on decentralization without much attention, however, to how decentralization influences political opposition movements. In order to help fill this gap, in this article I examine two case studies of decentralization in Africa, namely Sudan's experiment with decentralization in the 1970s and Ethiopia's more recent experience with decentralization since the 1990s. In the former case political opposition pressured the government to abandon decentralization in the South, leading to a renewed civil war and a successful coup d'état, while in the latter case the political opposition has both remained fragmented and failed to gain a foothold in a series of national elections. I argue that the key reason for these divergent outcomes was the differing equality of decentralization. More specifically, inasmuch as Sudanese decentralization initially only applied to the South, political opposition in the North remained united and instead focused its attentions on Khartoum. In Ethiopia, however, President Zenawi's regime introduced an equitable form of ethnic federalism across eleven regions, which quickly became a site for political party competition and fragmentation. This article thus suggests that equitable decentralization can promote opposition political party fragmentation.

Keywords: Decentralization; Democratization; Federalism; Ethiopia; Sudan.

[1] Email: e.d.green@lse.ac.uk.

Introduction

In recent years democratization and decentralization have both become important topics in African politics. These two topics have become important inasmuch as many African states have both democratized and decentralized since the early 1990s, with some evidence that democratization, especially the existence of strong national political parties and local elections, may improve the outcomes of decentralization.[1] However, there has been little attention on the reverse process of how decentralization influences democratization. More specifically, there is a paucity of literature on how decentralization programmes have influenced the formation of opposition political movements, whose existence is considered a key – if not *the* key – feature of a functioning democracy.[2] Indeed, much of the literature suggests that the relationship is not at all clear, in that the data does not clearly point to a positive or negative impact of decentralization or federalism on democracy.[3]

In order to help fill this gap, in this article I examine two divergent outcomes of decentralization on opposition political parties in modern Africa, namely Sudan and Ethiopia. Two of Africa's largest and most populated countries, these two neighbouring states present very comparable case studies for an examination into the relationship between decentralization and opposition politics. Historically both countries have suffered from numerous civil wars, famines and violent regime changes, and both border other countries which have suffered from similar problems. Thus they are ideal for a 'most similar' case study comparison.[4]

Despite these similarities, however, I show here how decentralization in Ethiopia since the 1990s has contributed to the splintering of political opposition while in Sudan decentralization in the 1970s instead contributed to the strengthening of political opposition which subsequently overthrew the government. In probing the relationship between decentralization and political opposition in these two countries I argue that the key reason for these divergent outcomes was the differing equality of decentralization across the two cases. More specifically, Sudanese decentralization initially only applied to the South, where it was successful in encouraging political division. However, northern Sudan did not have a regional government, and thus political opposition in the North focused its attentions on Khartoum rather than on local governments. President Ja'afar

Nimeiri's opponents were consequently able to force his hand in abolishing the Southern Regional Assembly and introducing *sharia* law in 1983, thus leading the country back into civil war and a successful coup d'état in 1985. On the other hand, in Ethiopia President Meles Zenawi's regime introduced an equitable form of ethnic federalism in 1991, whereby the whole country was divided up into eleven federal regions. These regions were created to have equal amounts of power in their relations with the central government and quickly became a site for political party competition and fragmentation, thereby allowing Zenawi's regime to sponsor a series of multi-party elections which the government subsequently won.

In the rest of the article I briefly examine theories of decentralization and political opposition before a detailed examination of the two case studies. In both cases the analysis is historical in nature with reference to government and other documents as well as secondary material. I then briefly examine the two additional case studies of Mali and Nigeria before concluding with some broader thoughts on decentralization and democratization.

Theories of Decentralization and Political Opposition

In this section I present a variety of theoretical expectations of the interaction between decentralization and political opposition. Before beginning, however, I should note that decentralization here simply refers to the removal of power over the collection and/or allocation of public resources from the central government level to a level or levels beneath it. As such, this definition captures both federalism and devolution but not deconcentration, where administrative personnel are dispersed from the centre to the periphery but power still resides in the centre.[5]

By this logic, decentralization should encourage political opposition if it helps to remove power from the centre to the regions where opposition politicians stand a better chance of being elected. Indeed, Patrick Heller suggests that in South Africa there has been a consensus around decentralization for this reason, inasmuch as opposition parties welcomed the opportunity to counter the national government at the local level.[6] On the other hand, decentralization can have zero or even negative effects on political opposition if it allows local governments to be captured by elites allied with the central government who are not interested in promoting political competition,

an idea that goes at least as far back as James Madison's writings in *The Federalist Papers* (1787). Within Africa evidence suggests that in such states as Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, governments have all used decentralization as a mechanism to further their political power at the local level.[7] In this sense the relationship between decentralization and opposition politics appears just as ambiguous as the effects of decentralization on democratization more generally.[8]

The effects of decentralization on opposition politics may, however, be less equivocal. Indeed, recent cross-national evidence suggests that political decentralization may increase the formation and strength of regional political parties, in that the creation of regional legislatures increases the chances of regional political parties' ability to govern.[9] Case studies from Latin America suggest that politicians like Hugo Chavez in Venezuela have benefited from the fragmentation of political parties introduced by decentralization policies of the 1990s, whereby the political opposition now merely consists of an 'inchoate collection' of small local parties and organizations.[10] In Costa Rica decentralization has been accompanied by a rise both in the number of political parties more generally and those only competing in local elections,[11] while in Uganda decentralization has created incentives for national opposition leaders to resign from Parliament in order to compete for powerful local government positions.[12]

However, it remains unclear as to how different types of decentralization can lead to varying outcomes on political opposition. In particular most of the aforementioned studies fail to acknowledge that decentralization can vary within countries as well as across them, at the very least due to the varying nature of local political economies.[13] Moreover, governments can also choose to create decentralized governments in a particular area or to create an equitable system of decentralized government across the whole country. In the former case such a strategy may be a sensible solution to a regional civil war where the peace process involves the devolution of power.[14] However, the risk is that those regions which do not receive decentralized governments may complain of unfair treatment and threaten the government. Indeed, this is precisely what happened in Uganda in the 1960s, when a mixed federal and unitary system led to political conflict between a party based in the Buganda federal state and other parties and eventually led to a number of coups d'état and descent into political instability. Similarly, where any one decentralized

or federal region is overwhelmingly larger than others, for instance in a ethnic-majority country like the USSR where local governments are drawn on ethnic lines, there exists similar potential for peripheral revolt.[15] Thus the second alternative is to decentralize equitably across the country, which imposes additional costs on the government and removes yet more power from the centre but which can also promote more long term stability, in part by fragmenting local opposition parties.

We would thus expect that these two different types of decentralization – which I label here unequal and equitable decentralization, respectively – would have differential effects on political opposition. Indeed, the experience of decentralization in Ethiopia and Sudan confirms this proposition. In both cases governments have decentralized power away from the centre, but equitable decentralization in contemporary Ethiopia has sponsored regional political party competition, while in Sudan decentralization in the 1970s was only successful in spurring local political competition in the South. However, it was the lack of decentralization in northern Sudan that led to strong opposition political pressure on Nimeiri to renege on the Addis Ababa Agreement that concluded Sudan's first civil war, leading to a resumption of the civil war and eventually Nimeiri's toppling in a coup d'état.

The Case Studies

[Insert Table 1 here]

Both Ethiopia and Sudan suffered from devastating civil wars in the late twentieth century, which have contributed to their low levels of development. The two case studies have much in common: as noted in Table 1, they are both among the largest states in Africa by geographic size and population and are comparable in their high levels of ethnic fractionalization as well; indeed, neither country has an ethnic majority and both are split between Muslims and Christians. Both countries qualify as 'anocracies,' defined as those countries which are neither full dictatorships nor full democracies,[16] and both have had a history of failed government attempts to impose a single state language and religion on its citizens (Arabic and Islam in Sudan; Amharic and Orthodox Christianity in Ethiopia). While Ethiopia is poorer and less developed than Sudan, much of

Sudan's wealth is concentrated in the oil industry and the country maintains one of the highest public debt/GDP burdens in the world,[17] which means that both countries are among the poorest countries in the world by any measure. Finally, under the two periods in question both countries received large quantities of American aid which helped to maintain the Zenawi and Nimeiri governments in power.[18]

The decentralization policies in both cases have much in common as well. In both countries decentralization was designed as part of a civil war settlement, with former rebel groups incorporated into local and national government and the new local government structure guaranteed in a new constitution. Decentralization policies created new tiers of local government which had control over various types of government expenditures, especially health and education. Finally, however, local governments did not control any major sources of revenue collection, relying upon central government transfers for the vast majority of their budgets in both cases.[19]

Yet, despite these similarities, each country had vastly different outcomes from their respective experiments with decentralization. More specifically, decentralization in Sudan between 1972 and 1983 ended in failure and a return to civil war and autocracy while Ethiopia's more recent experiments with ethnic federalism since 1994 have promoted opposition political party fragmentation while also preventing a return to civil war. I now examine the particular effects of decentralization on political opposition in each case.

Sudan

In May 1969 Ja'afar Nimeiri took power in Sudan in a coup d'état, overthrowing the government of President Ismail al-Azhari. Nimeiri and his Revolutionary Command Council were initially quite radical, with policies including a shift in foreign policy allegiances from West to East and a commitment to a political federation with Libya and Egypt. Yet Nimeiri's regime was unstable from the beginning, with his first prime minister lasting only five months in office due to his pro-Communist leanings. Moreover, in 1970 Nimeiri confronted the potentially dangerous group of Islamic Mahdist followers known as the *Ansar*, crushing their protests in Omdurman and killing

their leader, the Imam al-Hadi; in response the leader of the Umma party and former Prime Minister (1966-67), Sadiq al-Mahdi, fled into exile in Egypt.

During this consolidation of power Nimeiri's government passed numerous reforms, including a law on bank nationalization in 1970 and a new constitution in 1973. One of these initiatives was the decentralization of power away from Khartoum, which resulted in arguably 'one of the most extensive schemes of devolution ever undertaken in a developing nation,'[20] in two forms. First, the government passed the People's Local Government Act in 1971, which decentralized power to a hierarchical structure of local councils. These councils were elected directly at the village level, with indirect elections up to the provincial level. The provinces – which numbered 10 at the time of the new constitution in 1973 – were governed by an executive council and commissioner, who was appointed by and responsible to the President. In a further bout of decentralization, in 1977 Nimeiri's government announced that national budgeting would be decentralized from central ministries to the provincial level, and in 1979 he abolished eight ministries which had previously opposed decentralization and whose functions had already been devolved to the provinces. Finally, Nimeiri increased the number of provinces from nine to eighteen between 1972 and 1976, which doubled the number of provinces in both the North (six to twelve) and South (three to six).[21]

Sudan's second form of decentralization, which was more important for its future political trajectory, was at the regional level. The Addis Ababa Agreement that ended Sudan's first civil war between the government and the Southern Sudanese Liberation Movement (SSLM) led to the creation of the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) and its governing Higher Executive Council (HEC). The Agreement and the subsequent 1973 constitution allowed for elections to the SRA, half of which was composed of single-member constituencies and half of special interest constituencies such as the police, armed forces, farmers, the youth and women.[22] The HEC President was to be elected by the SRA subject to the approval of Nimeiri, who initially chose his minister of Southern Affairs, the Dinka politician Abel Alier.

On the one hand the new SRA was a huge success in that it drew large amounts of local interest; in the 1973 election, for instance, 349 candidates competed for 57 seats in the SRA. However, the arrangement would turn out to be problematic as the South was split both politically

and ethnically. Alier, for a start, was increasingly accused of being biased towards Dinkas, and Lagu was elected as HEC President in 1978, only to be removed in 1980 when he was in turn accused of favouring Equatorians in his administration. Alier was then re-elected to power but was dismissed in 1981 for questioning the growing discussion – which was led in part by Lagu – in favour of abolishing the SRA; in his place Nimeiri appointed General Gismallah 'Abdullah Rasas, a southern Muslim. Elections to the SRA in 1982 brought Joseph Tembura, a Zande from western Equatoria, to power in a coalition that supported further decentralization of power away from Juba and Khartoum towards the provinces.[23]

This political turmoil in the South could be interpreted as a sign of failure for southern Sudanese, who saw little developmental progress during their thirteen years of autonomous government. However, this instability was actually a success inasmuch as Nimeiri was concerned, since it decentralized political opposition to his rule: in the words of one commentator, 'regional autonomy for Southerners did not only mean coming to terms with Northerners, it meant essentially coming to terms with themselves'.[24] In this setting, although political parties were officially banned, the pre-SSLM divisions of the South came again to the fore in a variety of ways. The South was split between Dinka and other ethnic groups (including Acholi, Bari, Madi, Nuer, Shilluk and Zande), 'insiders' who had worked for the government in Khartoum and 'outsiders' who had fought against the government, multiple factions in the two former political parties of the Sudan African National Union and the Southern Front, and its three constituent provinces.[25] All of the policies discussed in the SRA thus pitted various groups against each other, whether as regards to the official language of the South or the creation of the Jonglei Canal, among other issues.[26]

While successful in keeping the South divided, this policy 'allowed southern politicians to stay in their own regional government and denied Nimeiri the support of the only group in society deeply committed to the settlement'.[27] Indeed, many in the North found it intolerable that the South was initially created as Sudan's only regional government. This 'growing discontent' was especially prominent in western Sudan: in 1975 Nimeiri saw off a coup led by disaffected Westerners in the army 'who deeply resented the neglect of the west by Khartoum, which had been made all the more visible after the granting of autonomy to southern Sudan'.[28] Thus, partially in response to this discontent and partially as a means to diminish the power of his political rivals in

Khartoum, Nimeiri's government split the North into five regions in its Regional Government Act of 1980. The Act abolished provinces as the highest level of local government in favour of regions,[29] which were to be governed by a Governor, Council of Ministers and People's Regional Assembly (PRA). The PRAs were constituted along the lines of the SRA, with a similar number of members (between 50 and 70), a large number of whom were elected to represent geographic constituencies with most of the others elected to represent women, farmers, the army and other special groups; as with the SRA the terms were for four years.[30]

This decision, however, was very much a case of too little, too late for Nimeiri, whose opposition had been growing in strength in Khartoum for a number of years. In particular his earlier decision to turn Sudan into a one-party state under the aegis of the Sudan Socialist Union (SSU) did little to neutralize his Islamic opposition; most prominent were al-Mahdi and the Umma party alongside Hassan al-Turabi's Islamic Charter Front (ICF), which had held cabinet posts and parliamentary seats in the 1960s. In the early 1970s Turabi and al-Mahdi both left Sudan for Libya, where they and the former Minister of Finance Sharif al-Hindi joined together to found the National Front and launched a very-nearly successful coup d'etat against Nimeiri in 1976. Nimeiri's response to the coup was to invite National Front leaders back to Sudan in 1977 in what he called National Reconciliation; al-Sharif did not return but al-Mahdi and Turabi did, becoming a member of the SSU Political Bureau and Attorney General, respectively.

The price for this reconciliation, however, was that Turabi became gradually more powerful within the SSU. He developed links with a growing number of Islamic banks from other Arab countries such as the Faisal Islamic bank from Saudi Arabia, eventually acquiring a network of some 500 companies worth more than $500 million by the 1980s.[31] Turabi's growing strength, along with the gradual economic collapse of Sudan's economy due to increasing external debt and inflation and a sharp decline in cotton exports, meant that Nimeiri was increasingly constrained in his ability to ignore Northern political dissent. Thus Nimeiri decided to abolish the SRA in favour of three new provinces of Bahr al-Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile in June 1983, before proclaiming *sharia* law throughout Sudan in October 1983. His efforts temporarily placated the Northern opposition but plunged Sudan into a new civil war in the South, this time against the Sudanese People's Liberation Army. Nimeiri would last in office less than two more years: his attempts to

turn against the ICF and al-Turabi, whom he imprisoned in March 1985, led directly to popular protests and a successful coup d'état the next month. Turabi, of course, also initiated the coup d'état in 1989 that brought the current President Omar al-Bahir to power; despite a falling out between the two Turabi nonetheless remains a potent force within Sudanese politics.

This brief exposition of decentralization under Nimeiri shows that the collapse of the South's democratic autonomy and the return to civil war in Sudan came not from a renewed sense of opposition in the South but from Nimeiri's attempts to placate his Northern opposition. It was the lack of decentralization in the North that allowed Nimeiri's opponents there to target his regime instead of squabble amongst themselves: hypothetically, if he had created one or more regions in the North at the same time as the Southern region, Nimeiri could have encouraged divisions among his opposition rather than unity. Indeed, despite Northern Sudan's portrayal as a homogenous Muslim Arab area, it is ethnically, geographically and religiously split,[32] particularly between the east and extreme north, whose residents tend more towards the Khatmiyya Sufi order and the Democratic Unionist Party, and the west, which leans more towards the aforementioned *Ansar* movement and the Umma Party. Instead, however, Turabi and the ICF were able to draw cross-regional support and eventually lead Sudan towards a renewed civil war, *sharia* law and Nimeiri's eventual downfall.

Ethiopia

Unlike Sudan, Ethiopia's experience with decentralization has proven much more successful. Since the early 1990s Ethiopia has transitioned from a Marxist autocracy mired in civil war and famine to a country with regular elections and one of the more stable governments in the region. Meles Zenawi's Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power by overthrowing the Mengistu regime in May 1991, and immediately opened up political space to more than 25 political groups in a national conference in July 1991. In 1992 the regime held regional elections, followed by a referendum on a new constitution in 1994 and general elections in 1995 and 2000. While most opposition parties boycotted the 1995 and 2000 parliamentary elections, they nonetheless participated in local elections, with fierce electoral

competition in the Somali state, for example, between two local parties in the 1995 elections.[33] After Zenawi's government eliminated a 500-signature requirement for parliamentary candidates and guaranteed access to state-owned media for all parties, opposition parties joined together in two coalitions to compete openly with the EPRDF in 2005, marking Ethiopia's first ever multi-party, competitive democratic election in its history. Similarly, in 2010 Ethiopia held its second multi-party election, with very poor results for the political opposition and subsequent accusations of vote-rigging but also with considerably less electoral violence than occurred in the 2005 election. Moreover, data from the first three of these elections suggest an increasing number of political parties, registered candidates and opposition party support over time,[34] and similar metrics suggest Ethiopia remains considerably more peaceful and stable than its neighbours.[35]

In the past, one of Ethiopia's greatest problems, as with other similar countries in Africa, has been the accommodation of its ethnic diversity.[36] Indeed, previous regimes have attempted to foster a common Ethiopian nationalism and downplay ethnicity, with Emperor Hailie Selassie's attempt to promote Amharic as the sole state language only leading to strong opposition from ethnic minorities. The military junta which overthrew Selassie in 1974 also attempted to manage Ethiopia's ethnic diversity by dividing the country unequally into five autonomous regions and twenty-four administrative regions in their 1987 constitution, which, however, did little to stop the civil war which eventually overthrew them in 1991.[37]

In contrast to previous governments, the Zenawi regime has focused its efforts on promoting rather than neglecting ethnicity, as it created a system of ethnic federalism enshrined in its 1994 constitution. This system, originally proclaimed by the victorious EPRDF in its National Conference on Peace and Democracy in 1991, is federal in that it grants all constituent units the same rights to their own constitutions, legislatures, and public policies on issues other than national defence, financial and monetary policy, post and telecommunications and overall national development issues. Each region is comprised of various zones and districts and governed by a regional council and President who, if they so chose, could choose to secede from Ethiopia upon reaching a 2/3 majority vote in the council and a majority vote in a regional referendum. As in the United States, the national constitution can only be amended with a majority vote in two-thirds of the regional councils. The only legal preferential treatment to any one ethnic group or region was

the proclamation of Amharic as the language of central government; however, each regional government is free to choose its own working language. While states vary radically in size from Oromia state (24 million people) to Harari (less than 200,000), relatively equally-sized electoral constituencies determine the number of each states' representatives in the lower House and the size of each state's population determines the number of its representatives in the upper House.[38] Finally, issues raised by Henry Hale about the problems of unusually large federal states – defined as those that encompass either the majority of a country's population or 20% more than the next largest state – are not present in Ethiopia, as the next most-populous state after Oromia (33% of the population) is Amhara state, with 23% of the population.[39]

By encouraging the ethnicization of local politics, the ethnic federal system has prevented the development of coherent and powerful opposition parties that could threaten the rule of the EPRDF except in unstable coalitions. This ethnicization of politics has proceeded in two key ways. First, by encouraging political divisions to be drawn along ethnic lines, the government has thereby both sparked demands by ethnic entrepreneurs for their own ethnically-defined districts and encouraged the formation of new ethnic groups such as the Silt'i people in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) for the purposes of claiming new ethnic territories as well.[40] In this sense Ethiopia is no different from Uganda, where demands for new districts preoccupy local politics across the country and divert attention away from opposition politics in Kampala.[41]

Secondly, politics has also been ethnicized in Ethiopia in the way that the country's regions were created in the 1990s. Indeed, contrary to popular belief very few of Ethiopia's regions even approach ethnic homogeneity, with ethnic majorities only in Afar, Amhara, Harari, Somali, Oromia and Tigray states. Moreover, of these states three are split among religious lines: Oromia is split evenly between Muslims (47.5% of the population) and Orthodox Christians (30.5%), Harari region – which has only developed an Oromo ethnic majority since the region was created – has a large (27.1%) Christian majority and Amhara region has a significant (17.2%) Muslim minority.[42] What this means is that only three of Ethiopia's eleven regions can be said to be more than 90% ethnically and religious homogenous.

As for other regions, the SNNPR is explicitly multiethnic, while there is no ethnic majority in Addis Ababa, Benishangul-Gumuz, Dire Dawa and Gambela regions. What this has meant is that political party competition has been easy to foster in the heterogeneous states, with strong conflict in the SNNPR, for example, between five major parties over the number and borders of sub-regions or zones and the state's borders with Gambella region.[43] Similarly, ethnic conflict between the two major ethnic groups of Gambella region, the Anywaa and Nuer, has preoccupied politics there, with comparable issues in Benshangul-Gumuz region.[44]

In contrast to these more heterogeneous states, in the more homogenous regions such as Amhara, Somali, Afar and Oromia, the EPRDF has co-opted regional parties and oppressed others, many of which have drawn funding from Eritrea.[45] However, ethnic homogeneity did not prevented the Somali region and others from developing internal political conflict between various political parties in the 1990s. Indeed, even after the EPRDF forced these various factions into a single party – the Somali People's Democratic Party – in 1998, the party broke into internal conflict soon after its creation.[46]

The devolution of political authority to the regions has meant that the Zenawi regime has encouraged the growth of unstable opposition coalitions. Indeed, the only three opposition groups to receive parliamentary seats in 2005 consisted of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM), based in Oromia state, and two political coalitions. The first of these coalitions, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), consisted of four parties, none of which claimed to be ethnically-based. The CUD thus functioned somewhat like a nationalist party, in that its members opposed the division of Ethiopia along ethnic lines and resented the loss of Eritrea, desiring at the bare minimum to redraw the borders between the two countries. As such it drew support from urban areas and the historic ruling ethnic group of Ethiopia, the Amhara, winning 137 of 138 seats in Addis Ababa and 36% of the seats in Amhara state. Inasmuch as most of its leadership was also Amharic, it did not, however, receive more than 12% of the vote in any other state in the 2005 election.[47]

The other political opposition party was the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), which supported more devolved power away from Addis Ababa towards the regions. The UEDF, which was formed initially by Ethiopian expatriates in 2003, is made up in part of ethnic political

parties from the Afar, Amhara, Gambella, Oromo, Tigray and Southern regions. As to be expected, however, the UEDF 'was an odd alliance, brining together parties holding contradictory positions on the questions of land and ethnicity – the perennial controversies in modern Ethiopian politics'.[48] In the 2005 election it was led by the chairman of an Oromo ethnic political party with a vice-chairman from SNNPR; it was thus no surprise when it won some 20% and 11% of the seats in Oromia region and SNNPR, respectively, the only two regions where it picked up seats in the lower House in Addis Ababa.

The political protests that arose after the May 2005 election led to great instability within these two coalitions. Both split on the issue of whether to take up their seats in parliament, with most UEDF members choosing to do so while most CUD members did not. This led to a revolt within the CUD, with one of its strongest constituent parties, the United Ethiopian Democratic Party-Medhin (UEDP-Medhin), voting to leave the coalition. One of the key differences between the two factions in the CUD was that the UEDP-Medhin had its support concentrated in Addis Ababa while the other faction had more support among the Amhara in Addis Ababa and Amhara region.[49] In the end the government arrested the top CUD leadership for two years, and after their release in 2007 the CUD split again, with one group keeping the name while the rest of the party has taken the name of Unity for Justice and Democracy.[50] Due to having even less in common than the CUD member parties, the UEDF split after the 2005 elections was swift. With expatriates unwilling to support those in the UEDF willing to take their parliamentary seats, the UEDF Executive Council stripped the coalition's chairman and vice-chairman of their positions and closed its offices within Ethiopia by early 2006.[51] Despite continued activity among the Ethiopian Diaspora, the UEDF nonetheless failed to nominate candidates for more than 0.5% of the posts up for grab in the 2008 local government elections, which it subsequently boycotted. Its constituent parties arose again in 2010 as the Medrek (meaning 'the Forum' in Amharic) coalition, which consisted of eight mostly regionally-based parties who could not even agree on such basic principles as federalism, relations with Eritrea and land ownership.[52] In the end despite managing to win some 30% of the vote nationwide Medrek only picked up one seat inasmuch as their vote tally was spread across the whole country.

The Ethiopian experience thus demonstrates how the Zenawi regime has been able to encourage the fragmentation of political opposition along ethnic/regional lines through the promotion of a system of ethnic federalism. Unlike in Nimeiri's Sudan, decentralization in Ethiopia has encouraged the formation and fragmentation of regional political parties which have taken attention away from Addis Ababa. Indeed, the largest and most populated state, Oromia, is the one that poses the most serious potential threat of secession and civil war; nonetheless, in the 2005 election the Zenawi regime was able to successfully encourage competition between all the three major opposition groups (CUD, OFDM and UEDF) in Oromia. Indeed, more generally a functioning multi-party system has developed across most regions, with only a minority dominated by one party.[53]

At the national level, however, the Zenawi regime is uninterested in opening up political space for its competition, going so far as to throw CUD leaders in jail for two years, kill some 200 post-election opposition protesters in 2005 and clamp down on freedom of the press.[54] The 2010 elections, while less violent, were still considered problematic inasmuch as opposition party members were harassed and lost almost all but two seats in the national parliament.[55] Yet, as far as elections continue to take place, the process of democratization by elections noted by Staffan Lindberg in other African contexts could continue to promote democratization in Ethiopia.[56] Moreover, in the way that the government subsequently allocated financial disbursements to areas which supported the opposition in 2005, Ethiopia better resembles other post-Communist authoritarian democracies like Russia than neighbours like Eritrea or Somalia.[57] Time will of course tell what the future trajectory of democratization in Ethiopia will be, but it is at least certain that democracy has taken hold more profoundly than it did in Nimeiri's Sudan.

Additional Case Studies

There is considerable evidence from elsewhere in Africa that back up the argument presented here that equitable decentralization leads to opposition fragmentation, in particular from Mali and Nigeria. In the former case the Tuarag rebellion that began in June 1990 was similar to that of Southern Sudan in its origins in longstanding regional underdevelopment and a lack of

representation in the central government.[58] Decentralization was in large part undertaken as a means to resolve Tuarag rebellions in the North, but 'public concerns with… [the 1991 Peace] Accords, which were widely interpreted as giving autonomy to the North, led to more attacks conducted by dissatisfied sections of the armed forces'.[59] However, after a change of government President Alpha Konaré implemented a new decentralization program across the entire country in the mid-1990s. In fact, the worry that uneven decentralization would be politically unstable was clear in Mali at the time:

> One political consequence of giving autonomy to the northern regions and not to the southern regions might have been a loss of support for the government in the heavily populated south. This possibility was the subject of some debate at the National Conference, as delegates rejected the notion of a special statute for the north… Extending the benefits of local autonomy to all regions served to legitimize government policy towards the north as well as to involve a greater segment of society in the new democratic regime.[60]

Thus, as in Ethiopia, regional elections in 1998-99 saw competition between some thirty different political parties, whose entry into *commune*-level governments has allowed the ruling regime to co-opt the opposition effectively.[61]

The other obvious success story in this regard is Nigeria, whose initial configuration across three relatively ethnically homogenous federal regions led in part to the Biafra secession crisis of the late 1960s. One of the key problems in Nigeria at the time was that while technically all three regions had equal powers, the Northern state was far larger than the other two and thus, with a majority of the country's population, was able to dominate national politics.[62] In response Nigeria's military rulers both tripled the number of states and altered the system of federal transfers in order to create local demands for new states, which continued to be created in 1976, 1987, 1991 and 1996. As a result Nigeria continues to see large amounts of local-level conflict but no more secessionist movements; it has also seen a gradual process of democratization unfold since the end of military rule in 1999.[63]

Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that decentralization gave space to political opposition in southern Sudan in the 1970s and Ethiopia today, whereas a lack of decentralization in northern Sudan in the 1970s led to a resumption of civil war and the fall of the Nimeiri regime while equitable decentralization in contemporary Ethiopia has fractured the political landscape and allowed the current government to maintain itself in power. I thus suggest that equitable political decentralization can promote the fragmentation of political opposition, while unequal decentralization can instead allow political opposition to empower itself and threaten central government power.

There are at least two lessons to be drawn from this argument. First and foremost, decentralization can fragment opposition politics only when it is implemented universally and not just in troublesome areas. The difference between the unequal decentralization of Sudan in the 1970s and of Ethiopia in the 1980s, contrasts strongly with the Zenawi government's more equitable decentralization in Ethiopia in the 1990s. Thus current debates about *federo* (federalism) in Uganda, in particular the argument that a federal state for the Buganda region could be re-created without implementing a federal system throughout the whole country,[64] would benefit from the evidence presented here. My argument would also suggest that the unequal system of decentralization in Tanzania – whereby Zanzibar enjoys semi-federal autonomy not granted to any other region, resulting in a perennial source of conflict within Tanzanian politics – could be amended to balance Zanzibar with a federal state of Tanganyika, as has been suggested numerous times by Tanzanians themselves.[65] In this sense this paper adds to literature on asymmetric federalism that suggest that such systems only work when the semi-autonomous region or province is peripheral both politically and geographically.[66]

Second, however, a word of caution should be raised. The article suggests that the political fragmentation that results from equitable decentralization may help to maintain national stability in countries like Ethiopia which have a long history of civil war. Yet, the obvious downside in this respect is the way in which decentralization also encourages local conflicts, many of which can have lasting effects. In particular, the political divisions in southern Sudan mentioned above have arguably re-emerged in the present post-conflict environment,[67] while Mahmood Mamdani argues that the 1980 Regional Government Act was responsible for encouraging higher levels of internal

ethnic conflict in Darfur that later helped to lead to violent civil war.[68] Similarly, in Ethiopia decentralization may have increased local conflict over land, for instance between pastoralists in the Oromia region.[69]

Thus, in both cases a trade-off clearly exists between local and national political opposition movements. However, perhaps local conflict should be seen as the lesser of two evils and thus, at least in the cases of Ethiopia, Mali and Nigeria, as a successful mechanism for preventing large-scale civil war. This cautious conclusion thus suggests that more research into the relationship between decentralization is necessary, especially as events continue to unfold in Ethiopia, Sudan and elsewhere.

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	Ethiopia	Sudan
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Case Studies		
Population	79.22m	38.56m
Km²	1.10m	2.51m
Ethnic Fractionalisation	0.72	0.71
Largest Ethnic Group (%)	Amhara (38%)	Arab (49%)
Polity IV (2008)	1	-4

Sources: CIA World Factbook, Alesina et al., 2003, Polity IV, UNDP

[1] Crook, 'Decentralization and Poverty Reduction'; Enikolpov and Zhuravskaya, 'Decentralization and Political Institutions', 45.

[2] Przeworski, 'Self-Enforcing Democracy'.

[3] Treisman, *The Architecture of Government*, 264-267.

[4] Gerring, *Case Study Research*.

[5] Schneider, 'Decentralization'.

[6] Heller, 'Moving the State', 144.

[7] Crook, 'Decentralization and Poverty Reduction', 85.

[8] Kulipossa, 'Decentralization and Democracy', Treisman, *The Architecture of Government*.

[9] Brancati, 'The Origins and Strengths of Regional Parties'; Chhibber and Kollman, *The Formation of National Party Systems*; Harbers, 'Decentralization and the Development of Nationalized Party Systems'; Van Cott, 'Institutional Change and Ethnic Parties'.

[10] Sabatini, 'Decentralization and Political Parties', 144.

[11] Ryan, 'Decentralization and Democratic Instability', 85.

[12] Green, 'Decentralization and Conflict in Uganda', 434.

[13] Boone, 'Decentralization as Political Strategy'.

[14] Bigombe, Collier, and Sambanis, 'Policies for Building Post-Conflict Peace'.

[15] Hale, 'Divided We Stand'.

[16] More specifically, anocracies are those countries which have a Polity IV score between -5 and 5, with -10 a full dictatorship and 10 a full democracy.

[17] CIA World Factbook (2010). https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/su.html

[18] Woodward, *US Foreign Policy and the Horn of Africa*.

[19] Kasfir, 'Southern Sudanese Politics'; Keller and Smith, 'Obstacles to Implementing Territorial Decentralization'; Rondinelli, 'Administrative Decentralization'.

[20] Rondinelli, 'Administrative Decentralization', 596.

[21] Kasfir, 'Southern Sudanese Politics', 144; Rondinelli, 'Administrative Decentralization'.

[22] Kasfir, 'Southern Sudanese Politics', 165.

[23] Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, 133-135; Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, 52-54.

[24] Hamid, 'Confrontation and Reconciliation', 327.

[25] The South was and is also split in four ways religiously between animists, Catholics, Protestants and Muslims.

[26] Kasfir, 'Southern Sudanese Politics', 162-164.

[27] Atlas and Licklider, 'Conflict Among Former Allies', 40.

[28] Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, 127, 130.

[29] The next-highest level of government was thus the Area or District.

[30] Alassam, 'Regional Government', 116.

[31] Gallab, *The First Islamic Republic*, 91-92.

[32] De Waal, 'Who are the Darfurians?'; Morton, 'Ethnicity and Politics'.

[33] Samatar, 'Ethiopian Federalism', 1142.

[34] Abbay, 'Diversity and Democracy'; Tronvoll, 'Ambiguous Elections', 456.

[35] The Correlates of War dataset on intra-state (i.e., civil) war does not list any wars in Ethiopia since 1991. While some 200 people died in Ethiopian election violence in 2005, roughly 1100 people died in the 2007 election in neighbouring Kenya, which has half of Ethiopia's population and a much longer history of democratic elections. (See Smith, 'Explaining Violence'). Most of Somalia has remained in a state of civil war and anarchy since 1991. Eritrea is a one-party state and is currently the only country in Africa without regularly scheduled national elections.

[36] Alesina et al., 'Fractionalization'.

[37] Fisseha-Tsion, 'Highlights of the Constitution', p. 170.

[38] Each state is guaranteed a minimum of one representative in the upper House, increasing by one with each million of its population. See Part 2, Article 61, clause 2 of the 1994 Ethiopian Constitution; Government of Ethiopia, *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.*

[39] Hale, 'Divided We Stand'.

[40] Abbink, 'The Ethiopian Second Republic', 15.

[41] Green, 'Patronage, District Creation and Reform in Uganda'.

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[44] Chanie, 'Clientelism and Ethiopia's Post-1991 Decentralization'; Feyissa, 'The Experience of Gambella State'.

[45] Africa Research Bulletin, 'Ethiopia'.

[46] Samatar, 'Ethiopian Federalism', 1146-1148.

[47] See the African Elections Database, http://africanelections.tripod.com/et_2005state.html.

[48] Arriola, 'Ethnicity, Economic Conditions and Opposition Support', 119.

[49] A third party member of the CUD was led by the Gurage native Berhanu Nega, thus explaining why the party picked up support in the Gurage part of SNNPR.

[50] Abbay, ' Diversity and Democracy'.

[51] Lyons, 'Conflict-Generated Diasporas'.

[52] Sansculotte-Greenidge, 'A Contest of Visions', 225.

[53] Arriola, 'Ethnicity, Economic Conditions and Opposition Support', 123.

[54] Tronvoll, 'Ambiguous Elections'.

[55] See the African Elections Database, http://africanelections.tripod.com/et_2010state.html

[56] Lindberg, *Democracy and Elections in Africa*.

[57] Ishiyama, 'The Politics of Appeasement'.

[58] Storholt, 'Lessons Learned'.

[59] Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, 'Senegal and Mali', 257.

[60] Seely, 'A Political Analysis of Decentralization', 516.

[61] Seely, 'A Political Analysis of Decentralization'.

[62] Hale, 'Divided We Stand', 183, 188-189.

[63] Suberu, 'Federalism and the Management of Ethnic Conflict'.

[64] Green, 'Ethnicity and the Politics of Land Tenure Reform'.

[65] Presidential Commission on Single-Party or Multi-Party System in Tanzania, *Report and Recommendations*.

[66] Horowitz, 'The Many Uses of Federalism'.

[67] Branch and Mampilly, 'Winning the War'.

[68] Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors*, 188.

[69] Tache and Oba, 'Policy-Driven Inter-Ethnic Conflicts'.