

So Close Yet so Far: Subnational Democracy in Ethnically Divided Societies

Many democratic newcomers from the 1990s, among which post-Yugoslav countries started implementing decentralization reforms as means to democratize and in some cases additionally accommodate ethnic diversity. Particularly multiethnic states and their respective subnational units have been considered laboratories for democracy where international actors continuously advocate and invest in decentralization reforms (Basta et al. 2015). Macedonia and Kosovo for instance are already considered successful cases of democratization and peaceful conflict resolution through decentralization (Swisspeace, IDEA). But how do these conclusions come about?

There have not been many comparative studies on what happened with democracy in a post-federal, multiethnic setting in the subnational arena (Illner 2003, Kleibrink 2015). A general opinion pertains that local politics is merely a rehearsal for national one in post-Yugoslav countries (Nikolov 2013). On the other hand, democratization is an uneven process (Dahl 1971, O'Donnell 1993, Snyder 2001, Treisman 2007, Bolken 2016), and some municipalities are regarded as more advanced than others by international actors, policy research and assessments from the Council of Europe in these countries.

Thus, there are three objectives of this dissertation. First I aim to develop a *typology of subnational regimes* in unitary, ethnically divided societies where decentralization has been used both as a democratizing tool and conflict management mechanism. Second, I will evaluate the *impact of combinations of decentralization factors together with the inevitable influence of international facilitation of decentralization processes on the types of subnational regimes*. Third, I will empirically assess *what is a certain subnational regime type good for*. I specifically will focus on subnational democracy. In other words, I will look at subnational democracy both as an outcome as well as a factor for policy outcomes.

Units of analysis are municipalities in three ethnically diverse, post-Yugoslav countries: Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro, which all have similar background conditions, they are ethnically diverse, have decentralization reforms ongoing, and zoom into their local democratization. I will look at two points of time: once at the beginning of the decentralization reforms in the early 2000s, and at present. Initially I intend to apply fsQCA and further case studies.

Addressing the issue of subnational regimes is not only important for the study of democracy, but precisely because of lack of such studies, I argue, we lack understanding on how to evaluate peace preserving decentralization. This warrants going a step back to regime trends within a country. Furthermore, international actors that largely impact democratization processes, especially at the local level, I argue have to be part of the equation in ethnically divided societies.