

DECENTRALIZATION INDEX¹

This index measures decentralization – the assignment of fiscal, political, and administrative responsibilities to lower levels of government² – for 49 countries at five-year intervals from 1960 to 1995. It comprises nine dimensions designed to capture decentralization’s functional complexity.

This overview has three parts. Section 1 defines the index’s various dimensions operationally. Section 2 contains notes for individual countries included in the index, and section 3 lists the sources consulted to determine country scores.

Part I: The Nine Dimensions of Decentralization

Dimension 1: Government Structure

This dimension describes the formal political structure of a country. It asks, does the country have a federal constitution? If the answer is yes, the country’s score is 4. If no, 0. The score “n.a.” means that the country was not yet independent.

A special case is the United Kingdom which does not have a formal constitution. However, its political structure is clearly unitary. Authority is highly centralized despite growing movements for autonomy in Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland is not considered in the analysis.³

Dimension 2: Selection of Regional Executive

This dimension registers whether or not a country’s regional executives are elected. If they are elected, the country receives a score of 4. If they are not elected, the score is 0.⁴ The score “n.a.” means either that the country was not yet independent or that it did not have regional executives.

As a rule, “regional” in this index refers to states or provinces. There are a few exceptions, which are noted in the country notes. For example, the regional unit used for the UK is the county or borough.

¹Compiled by Christine Kearney

² This definition is from Jennie Litvack, Junaid Ahmad, and Richard Bird, *Rethinking Decentralization in Developing Countries* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1998), 4.

³ David King, “Local Governments in Great Britain,” in *Fiscal Federalism in the European Union*, eds. Amedeo Fossati and Giorgio Panella (London: Routledge, 1999), 178-83.

⁴Note that in both dimensions 1 and 2 no distinction is made between direct and indirect election of executives.

Dimension 3: Selection of Local Executive

This dimension records whether or not a country's local executives are elected. If they are elected, the country receives a score of 4. If they are not, the score is 0. The score "n.a." means either that the country was not independent at the time or that it did not have local executives.

As a rule, "local" in this index refers to a municipality or its functional equivalent. Sometimes this determination was complicated by the existence of levels of government between the municipal and regional levels. The country notes specify the local unit(s) used for each country in the index.

Dimension 4: Override Authority

This dimension measures whether or not the central government has the legal right to override the decisions and policies of lower levels of government. If the answer is yes, the country receives a score of 0. If it is no, the score is 4.

To "override" in this context means to be able to veto without due process. Many countries have legal mechanisms for the appeal and review by higher authorities of lower-level government decisions. As a rule, these do not constitute override authority, unless they are extremely lax. Instead, override authority exists when the central government can legally deny regional and local authority with an ease that calls that very authority in to question.

Dimension 5: Revenue Raising Authority

This dimension describes sub-national governments' formal authority to raise their own revenue through taxation. That is, do they have the right to set both the base and rate of some taxes?⁵

There are three possibilities for scoring this variable. First, if both levels of sub-national government have the power to tax, then the country receives a score of 4.

Second, if one but not both sub-national levels of government has the legal authority to tax, then the country receives a score of 2.

⁵ There are other ways for local governments to obtain revenue that are not included in this variable: fees and charges, intergovernmental grants and borrowing.

Finally, if neither level of sub-national government has the legal right to tax, then the country receives a score of 0.

A score of “n.a.” means that the country was not yet independent.

The specification of this dimension is still rather crude. There is a good amount of variation among countries that the scores do not capture. In particular, the scores reflect whether or not sub-national governments have the formal authority to tax, but not the extent of this authority. Take for example the case of two hypothetical countries, A and B. In country A local governments have no taxation authority, and regional governments have the right to levy taxes on individual income, motor vehicle registration and merchandise sales. In country B local governments also have no taxation authority, and regional governments have the right to tax merchandise sales only. Clearly, country A’s sub-national governments have greater revenue-raising authority than those of country B, but in this index both countries receive a score of 2.

Another problem is that the index does not distinguish between formal authority to tax and actual use of that authority in practice. There are instances where a country’s local governments have the right on paper to tax but in practice are prohibited from, or refrain from, exercising that right. For example, in the second half of the 1970s, the commonwealth government in Australia gave its states the right to impose their own personal income tax, but sub-national governments did not take up the offer.⁶

Ideally, a decentralization index would capture these differences, but the current availability of cross-temporal and cross-national information on fiscal organization means that the index can not reliably be more specific at this time.

Dimension 6: Revenue Sharing

This dimension measures whether a country’s central government regularly and unconditionally transfers a portion of national taxes (i.e. those with nationwide bases and rates) to lower levels of government.

The “regularity” and “conditionality” of these transfers are key. The assumption is that sub-national governments’ autonomy is critically affected by their ability to finance expenditures. To the extent that they receive regular, predictable and unconditional funds from the central government, this autonomy is enhanced and vice-versa.⁷

⁶ Jon Craig, “Australia” in *Fiscal Federalism in Theory and Practice*, ed. Teresa Ter-Minassian (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 1997), 193. Australian states do exercise other taxation powers though, so this particular instance of disconnect between theory and practice does not affect the index.

In some countries (e.g. Brazil since 1988), the national constitution stipulates a fixed percentage of nationally collected taxes that must be transferred unconditionally to states and municipalities, and these funds are actually transferred. Others, such as Australia, have special institutions for determining sub-national government shares of national revenues, and while the amounts are not constitutionally mandated, they are in practice quite predictable and regular. And the states have significant discretion over how the funds are spent. Still other countries, such as Bangladesh, have legally mandated revenue sharing, but the amounts do not reliably reach the local governments they are supposed to benefit.⁸

Given these factors, there are three possibilities for scoring this dimension. First, if both levels of sub-national government regularly receive a share of national taxes, and a portion of the funds are given unconditionally, then the country receives a score of 4.

Second, if one but not both sub-national levels of government receives a regular share of national revenues, or if both receive funds, but one or the other level has no discretion over how the funds are spent, then the country receives a score of 2.

Finally, if there is no regular revenue sharing with either level of sub-national government, or if both sub-national governments receive funds, but neither has any discretion over how they are spent, then the country receives a score of 0.

The score “n.a.” means that the country was not independent at the time.

Again, because of the scarcity of reliable cross-national data on revenue sharing, the scoring of this dimension is cruder than one would like. Ideally, for instance, one would be able to specify both the magnitude and the exact degree of conditionality of intergovernmental transfers across time and countries. Such comparisons are possible for some groups of countries in some periods, but not for all 49 countries in this index from 1960-95. As more information becomes available, more gradations of revenue sharing can be specified.

Dimensions 7, 8, and 9: Authority for Education, Infrastructure, and Policing

These dimensions are grouped together because they are scored similarly.

⁷For a detailed discussion of various intergovernmental transfers, see the essays in Part I of *Fiscal Federalism in Theory and Practice*, ed. Teresa Ter-Minassian (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 1997), 3-173.

⁸Celina Souza, *Constitutional Engineering in Brazil: the Politics of Federalism and Decentralization* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 75-98; Craig, “Australia,” 179-84; and Richard C. Crook and James Manor, *Democracy and Decentralization in South Asia and West Africa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 85-135.

The “Education” dimension refers to responsibility for primary education. That is, which level of government has authority over hiring primary school teachers, as well as control over the details of the curriculum?

“Infrastructure” deals with primary authority over local highway construction. That is, which level of government decides what roads are built, where, and by whom?

“Policing” refers to principal responsibility for *local* policing. It asks which level of government handles local, ordinary crimes.

For all three dimensions, there are five possible scores.

First, if authority resides solely with the central government, the country receives a score of 0.

Second, if authority is shared between the central and regional governments, the score is 1.

Third, if authority is held solely by regional level of government, or is shared between the central and local governments, the score is 2.

Fourth, if responsibility is shared between the regional and local governments, the country is scored 3.

Finally, if authority resides solely at the local level of government, the country receives a score of 4.

A score of “n.a.” means that the country was not yet independent.

As mentioned in the discussion of dimensions 2 and 3, many countries have units of government between the state/province and the municipality (e.g. district and county governments). So the definition of what constitutes “regional” or “local” varies somewhat across countries. The country notes contain definitions for each country.

Overall Score

A country’s overall decentralization score for any given year is the simple average of its scores on these nine dimensions.

Part II: Country Notes

Algeria

Independence was gained from France on 3 July, 1962.

The regional unit of government is the *wilaya* or province. The local level includes the commune and intermediate administrative districts.

Argentina

The regional unit of government is the province. The local unit of government is the municipality. The city of Buenos Aires (which formally has municipality status) is treated as a province in the analysis.

The Argentine constitution makes no formal provision for municipal government. Each province establishes the norms for municipalities under its jurisdiction. For this reason, there is significant variation across provinces in terms of municipal responsibilities, functions and autonomy. Index data reflect conditions in the majority of provinces and municipalities.

Australia

The regional level of government consists of the six original state governments and two self-governing mainland territories. These territories receive state-like treatment. There also about 900 local government units.

The Australian constitution makes no formal provision for local governing bodies. These units fall under the legislative control of the states.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh gained formal independence in 1971.

In Bangladesh, the regional level of government includes the divisions and districts; the local level comprises the sub-districts and unions.

Brazil

The regional unit of government is the state; the local unit of government is the municipality. The Federal District (where Brasília is located) is excluded from the analysis.

Cameroon

Cameroon was formed in 1961.

The regional unit of government is the province; the local unit of government is the department.

Canada

The regional level of government in Canada consists of provinces and territories. Everything below this level is considered a local government unit.

Chile

For Chile, the regional level of government consists of the regions (including the metropolitan region of Santiago) and the provinces. The local unit of government is the commune.

China

Sub-national government in China has three levels: the province, county and municipality. In this index, the regional unit is the province, and the counties and municipalities are considered local government.

Colombia

Regional units of government include departments and national territories. The local unit of government is the municipality. The capital city is excluded from the analysis.

Czechoslovakia

Prior to reforms in the 1990s, each republic (Czech and Slovak) within Czechoslovakia had three levels of administration: region, district and municipality. For the purposes of the index, from 1960 through 1990, the regional level of government includes the regions in both republics; the local level includes the districts and municipalities.

After 1990, both republics abolished the regional tier. On 1 January 1993, Czechoslovakia dissolved, leaving the two constituent republics as separate independent states.

Ecuador

The regional level of government for Ecuador is the province. The local level is the district, which has municipal status.

Each province has an elected executive head (*prefecto*). However, in practice, the activities of provincial governments are controlled by governors appointed by the central government.

Local executives are either mayors or council leaders; they are not directly elected.

Egypt

Between 1958 and 1961, Egypt and Syria merged to form one state, the United Arab Republic. The UAR dissolved in 1961 when Syria withdrew from the union.

In 1971, Egypt joined with Libya and Syria to form the Confederation of Arab Republics. Its capital was Cairo. The confederation ended in 1979.

Because these two supranational unions were short-lived, and had negligible effects on the factors measured by this index, Egypt is considered a separate, unitary country throughout the period covered by the index.

The regional level of government used for the index is the governorate (*muhafazah*); the local level includes the districts or counties (*markaz*) and the villages (*qariyah*).

France

The regional unit used in the index for France is the region. Departments and communes are considered local government.

Germany

The regional level of government in Germany consists of the states or *länder*. Everything below this level is considered a local government unit.

Ghana

The regional unit of government in Ghana is the region. The local level of government includes districts and everything below that level.

Great Britain

Great Britain consists of England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland is not included in this index.

Sub-national government for the period of the index consists essentially of two tiers. The upper level (considered “regional” in this index) includes counties and boroughs (phased out after 1965), and the lower level (“local government” in this index) includes districts. In Scotland, as of the 1970s, the upper tier of government was called regions.

Greece

The regional unit of government in Greece is the region. The local unit of government is the department.

Hungary

The regional unit of government used for Hungary is the county. The local government unit used in the index is the town or village.

India

The regional level of government in India includes states and union territories. The local level of government consists of a variety of urban and rural bodies. The Indian Constitution did not mention local governments until 1993. Local government authority is determined by individual states and can be revoked easily.

Indonesia

The regional unit of government in Indonesia is the province. Everything below the provincial level – cities, towns, districts, and villages – are considered local government in the index.

Iraq

In Iraq, the regional unit of government is the governorate. The local level of government consists of districts and tracts.

Italy

Sub-national government in Italy consists of regions, provinces and municipalities. The regions were created in 1948, but most of them were not formally established until 1970.

In this index, from 1960 through 1970, the regional unit of government refers to the province, and the local unit refers to the municipality (or commune). After 1970, the regional unit is the region, and local government includes the provinces and municipalities.

Japan

The regional unit of government in Japan is the prefecture; the local unit of government is the municipality.

Kenya

For Kenya, the regional level of government refers to the province. The local level refers to counties and municipalities.

Korea

The structure of sub-national government in Korea has two tiers. The top tier is considered the regional level of government in this index. From 1960 through 1990 it consisted of special cities and provinces. The regional level for 1995 also included direct-control cities. The lower tier is considered the local level of government in this index. From 1960 through 1990 it consisted of cities, towns and townships. The local level for 1995 included cities, counties and autonomous districts.

Malaysia

In Malaysia, the regional level of government is the state. The local level consists of districts, sub-districts, municipalities, and villages.

Mexico

The regional level of government in Mexico includes the Federal District and states. The local unit of government is the municipality.

Mozambique

Mozambique gained independence from Portugal in 1975.

The regional unit of government is the province. The local level includes everything below the province.

Myanmar

Formerly called Burma.

The regional level of government includes states and divisions. Everything below this level is considered local government.

Nepal

The regional unit of government is the region. The local level of government includes districts and towns (or villages).

Netherlands

The regional level of government is the province. The local level of government is the municipality.

Pakistan

The regional level of government in Pakistan includes the provinces and the State of Azad Kashmir. The local level of government includes districts and *tehsils*. Federally administered districts and tribal areas are not included in the analysis.

Peru

The regional unit used for Peru is the province, and the local unit is the district. Both provinces and districts have municipal status. However, provincial municipalities have traditionally had more formal responsibilities and autonomy than district municipalities.

During the 1980s, a new regional tier of government was created: the region. However, there was widespread opposition to these new governments, and the central government refused to devolve responsibilities and fiscal control to them. Twelve regional governments were created by 1989, but the process came to an abrupt halt in April 1992, when President Fujimori dissolved the National Congress together with the recently elected regional governments. Since then the regional level of government has been emasculated to the point of virtual extinction.

For these reasons, only the Peruvian data for 1990 includes the regions in the regional level of government.

Philippines

The regional level of government includes the provinces and the national capital region. The local level of government consists of chartered cities and municipalities.

Poland

From 1960 through 1975 the regional level includes regions and districts (*voivods* and *powiaty*) and the local level includes communes (*gminy*) and towns (*miasta*). After 1975, the regional level consists of regions only.

Romania

For Romania, the regional level of government consists of the municipality of Bucharest plus the counties. The local unit of government is the municipality.

Russia

Data for 1960-90 is for the former Soviet Union (USSR).

The regional level of government consists of ethnic republics, soviet republics, an autonomous soviet republic, autonomous oblasts, autonomous okrugs, krays, and

metropolitan cities with oblast status (Moscow and Leningrad, now called St. Petersburg). These units vary in terms of degree of autonomy from the center and in ethnic mix of the population.

The local level of government is comprised of major municipalities (except Moscow and St. Petersburg), their cities and urban districts and, within non-urban areas, the rayons.

South Africa

For 1960 through 1990, the regional level of government in South Africa includes the Provinces, the Self-Governing Territories, and the TBVC (Transkei, Bophutswana, Venda, and Ciskei); the local level of government includes the Regional Service Councils, the Black Local Authorities, and the White Local Authorities.

After 1994 jurisdictions based on race were eliminated. So for 1995, the regional level includes provinces (some newly created from the old self-governing territories and TBVC) and the local level includes new metropolitan governments (whose exact structure was evolving at the time).

Spain

From 1960 through 1980, the regional level of government refers to the provinces, and the local unit of government to the municipality. After 1980, the regional level refers to the “autonomous” regions, and the local level to the provinces and municipalities.

Sri Lanka

The regional level of government is the province. Districts, municipal and urban councils are considered local government.

Syria

Between 1958 and 1961, Syria and Egypt merged to form one state, the United Arab Republic. The UAR dissolved in 1961 when Syria withdrew from the union.

In 1971, Syria joined with Libya and Egypt to form the Confederation of Arab Republics. Its capital was Cairo. The confederation ended in 1979.

Because these two supranational unions were short-lived, and had negligible effects on the factors measured by this index, Syria is considered a separate, unitary country throughout the period covered by the index.

Thailand

The regional level of government includes 73 provinces and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. The local level of government includes everything below the provincial level: municipality administrations, sanitary district administrations, and provincial administrative organizations.

Turkey

The regional level of government is the province; the local unit of government is the municipality.

Uganda

The regional level of government is the region (and for 1965, the kingdom). Local government includes the districts, towns and villages.

USA

The regional level of government is the state. The dominant form of local government varies across states. In some states (e.g. Massachusetts) the municipality is most important; in others (e.g. Maryland) counties are more significant. For the purposes of the index, anything below the state level of government is considered local government.

Venezuela

The regional of government is the state; the local unit is the municipality.

Yugoslavia

The regional unit of government used for Yugoslavia is the republic. Everything below this level is considered local government.

Zaire

The regional level of government refers to the provinces and the city of Kinshasa. Local government includes everything below the provincial level of government.

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