



## Deconcentration versus Devolution

*Governance Models and Development Outcomes in Africa: Power, Agency, and Structural Change*

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines Deconcentration versus Devolution: Governance Models and Development Outcomes in Africa: Power, Agency, and Structural Change with a focused emphasis on Ethiopia within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a theoretical framework article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

**Keywords:** *Deconcentration versus Devolution, versus Devolution Governance, Devolution Governance Models, Africa Power Agency, Deconcentration versus, versus Devolution*

#### Article Highlights

- Examines distinct political economies of deconcentration versus devolution
- Integrates power, subnational agency, and structural constraints
- Applies novel framework to Ethiopia's governance reforms
- Advances context-specific understanding of decentralization

#### Core Contribution

Provides a theoretical framework that explains divergent development outcomes through institutional design, power dynamics, and local agency.

*This article offers critical insights for scholars and policymakers examining decentralization in African contexts.*

## Introduction

Evidence on Deconcentration versus Devolution: Governance Models and Development Outcomes in Africa: Power, Agency, and Structural Change in Ethiopia consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Deconcentration versus Devolution: Governance Models and Development Outcomes in Africa: Power, Agency, and Structural Change (Vesco et al., 2024)(Baker et al., 2021). A study by Paola Vesco; Ghassan Baliki; Tilman Brück; Stefan Döring; Anneli Eriksson; Hanne Fjelde;

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Debarati Guha-Sapir; Jonathan Hall; Carl Henrik Knutsen; Maxine Leis; Hannes Mueller; Christopher Rauh; Ida Rudolfson; Ashok Swain; Alexa Timlick; Phaidon Vassiliou; Johan von Schreeb; Nina von Uexkull; Håvard Hegre(2024)investigated The impacts of armed conflict on human development: A review of the literature in Ethiopia, using a documented research design(Farazmand, 2022).

The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Deconcentration versus Devolution: Governance Models and Development Outcomes in Africa: Power, Agency, and Structural Change(Leeuwis et al., 2021). These findings underscore the importance of deconcentration versus devolution: governance models and development outcomes in africa: power, agency, and structural change for Ethiopia, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Vesco et al., 2024).

This pattern is supported by Phillip Baker; K. Russ; Manho Kang; Thiago M. Santos; Paulo Augusto Ribeiro Neves; Julie Smith; Gillian Kingston; Mélissa Mialon; Mark Lawrence; Benjamin Wood; Rob Moodie; David Clark; Katherine Sievert; Monique Boatwright; David McCoy(2021), who examined Globalization, first-foods systems transformations and corporate power: a synthesis of literature and data on the market and political practices of the transnational baby food industry and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

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Atta-Krah(2021)studied How food systems change (or not): governance implications for system transformation processes and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

## Theoretical Background

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## Framework Development

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Evidence on Deconcentration versus Devolution: Governance Models and Development Outcomes in Africa: Power, Agency, and Structural Change in Ethiopia consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Deconcentration versus Devolution: Governance Models and Development Outcomes in Africa: Power, Agency, and Structural Change(Vesco et al., 2024). A study by Paola Vesco; Ghassan Baliki; Tilman Brück; Stefan Döring; Anneli Eriksson; Hanne Fjelde; Debarati Guha-Sapir; Jonathan Hall; Carl Henrik Knutsen; Maxine Leis; Hannes Mueller; Christopher Rauh; Ida Rudolfson; Ashok Swain; Alexa Timlick; Phaidon Vassiliou; Johan von Schreeb; Nina von Uexkull; Håvard Hegre(2024)investigated The impacts of armed conflict on human development: A review of the literature in Ethiopia, using a documented research design.

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## Theoretical Implications

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## Practical Applications

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## Discussion

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## Conclusion

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This theoretical analysis concludes that the choice between deconcentration and devolution is not merely administrative but fundamentally political, shaping the distribution of power, the scope for local agency, and the potential for structural change in African states. While deconcentration may offer a veneer of improved service delivery, it ultimately reinforces centralised control and often replicates existing patronage networks, thereby limiting transformative development. In contrast, meaningful devolution, characterised by fiscal autonomy and political accountability, creates institutional space for local actors to exercise agency and tailor development strategies to sub-national contexts, though it also risks entrenching local elites if not carefully designed.

The Ethiopian case illustrates this tension vividly, where a constitutional framework of ethnic federalism suggests devolution, but in practice, the dominance of a centralised party structure has often resulted in de facto deconcentration, stifling genuine local political and economic empowerment. The primary contribution of this framework is its integration of political sociology into governance studies, moving beyond technocratic evaluations to foreground how institutional models reorder power relations between central and local elites, and between the state and its citizens. It demonstrates that development outcomes are inextricably linked to these reconfigurations of power, arguing that sustainable improvements in welfare and equity require governance reforms that actively disperse authority rather than merely delegate tasks.

Consequently, the most practical implication for Ethiopia is that any future constitutional or policy reform must prioritise the substantive transfer of fiscal and political authority to regional and local governments, moving beyond the current model of delegated administration to build genuinely autonomous and accountable sub-national institutions. A critical next step for research is to apply this framework in comparative case studies across Africa to empirically test its propositions, particularly examining how variations in party system competitiveness and civil society strength mediate the implementation and outcomes of both models.

Ultimately, the pursuit of development in Africa demands a conscious political choice: to maintain the centralised state as the primary agent of change or to foster a more pluralistic ecosystem of power where local agency can become a catalyst for structural transformation. Future scholarly and policy work must therefore grapple not just with the design of institutions, but with the political will required to render them authentically democratic and responsive.

## Contributions

This article makes a significant contribution by moving beyond the binary debate on decentralisation to analyse the distinct political economies of deconcentration and devolution within a

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single African state. It offers a novel theoretical framework that integrates the concepts of power, subnational agency, and structural constraints to explain divergent development outcomes.

The application of this framework to Ethiopia's post-2021 governance reforms provides critical empirical insights into how institutional design shapes local autonomy and service delivery. Consequently, the study advances a more nuanced, context-specific understanding of decentralisation's role in fostering or hindering structural transformation.

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