

opportunistic gangs or even extremist groups (e.g. Hamas) that build legitimacy by providing those services.

Democracy at the local level broadens the basis of peace at the community, municipal, and city level. Strong systems of local democracy diffuse values of tolerance, inclusion, accountability, and citizen participation through a wider network of government and in a proliferation of arenas of interaction.

Nonetheless, we must be wary of decentralization efforts, especially in Africa. There, decentralization has been ineffective in establishing viable democratic local institutions and processes. Voter turnout and citizen involvement in city deliberations has been very low.

To what degree does local democracy feed up to the national level?

The first link between local and central is the fact that, as one of the experts noted:

Local-level conflict and violence can undermine broader attempts to consolidate peace through democracy by causing "disruptions from below" that increase insecurities, exacerbate differences, challenge capacities for security, and reinforce intolerance. Robust local democracy systems are more likely to manage and contain such disruptions from below than are municipal authorities lacking in legitimacy and the consent of the people.

Moreover, democracy at the local level can bring democracy to the widest range of actors, and allow democratic practices to permeate across a wide spectrum of people.

While we should not speed into local elections in post-conflict environments, they should possibly be held before national elections (though the usefulness of national elections for political party integration and national identity building are critical as well). Local elections can reduce uncertainty by providing insights into the strength of relative factions and parties, test the electoral administrative framework, help stabilize particularly volatile areas where power is intensely contested (as in Kosovo), and, of course, build democracy from the ground up. The reduced scale of preparing for local elections also makes them more manageable in the immediate post-conflict period.