

**Can decentralized forest governance mitigate domination by state and local elites? Evidence from India's Shiwaliks**

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**Reluctance of the state to relinquish control, and appropriation of benefits by local elites, are two key factors affecting the success of decentralized forest governance in developing countries. We provide empirical details on how these two dominant actors affect the functioning of village institutions created under decentralization initiatives. We examined the experiences of two prominent Hill Resource Management Societies in India's Shiwalik hills and found that the performance of these institutions depends critically on the role of local elites. The strength of their positioning determines the state's ability to obstruct decentralization processes and to appropriate benefits from forests.**

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