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# The Advantages and Disadvantages of Federalism, and the Difference Between the Federal System of Government and the Other Systems of Government

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of federalism. How does a federal system of government differ from other systems of government and what is the constitutional basis for nation-centered federalism?

The advantages of federalism are that it provides a local perspective on politics, and allows for local governments to handle and respond to regional issues faster than a national government. It also allows for the national government to insure that the local governments do not abuse their power, and vice-versa. Federalism creates the “laboratories of democracy” addressed in question 9. It allows for greater participation in the political process. One of the biggest disadvantages I see in federalism is lines of communication. In a federalist system you have multiple levels of government that have to communicate with each other, and sometimes things get mixed up in the process of communicating. There is no one policy for a nation, in the US there are 50 (51 including Puerto Rico) different policies for different issues. When it comes to controversial problems, such as same-sex marriage recognition, the different policies cause problems.

It differs from other systems in that the voters have a direct say in all levels of government. In a unitary system the voters choose the central government, which then chooses the regional governments. In a confederate system the votes choose independent governments, which then choose the central government. In the federal system the voters choose all levels, regional and central.

The constitutional basis for federalism has a lot to do with the founder’s experience of other systems of government. Under the Articles of Confederation the central government was too weak to deal with crises that arose, notably economic crises. A unitary system was dismissed due to wide-spread dislike of the system. A representative government was chosen, one where the people vote for all levels of government, and with a strong national government that was split between three different branches so that power could not rest solely in the hands of one.

Briefly discuss how states regulate elections in regard to existing political culture.

The biggest difference in how states regulate elections with regard to political culture is in the traditionalistic states. Traditionalistic states tend to have stricter voting laws. Take Texas and

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their recent changes to election laws for example. They have moved to make it more difficult to vote for minorities in order to maintain their system of hierarchy in politics. This is a current trend in most traditionalistic states since the repeal of the VRA, it is more noticeable in the South. In contrast is North Dakota in the moralistic division. Anyone can show up on Election Day and register to vote, and then vote. There is much more allowances for people to vote in the moralistic states than the traditionalistic.

Briefly discuss the effects of direct democracy on a state's legislative process.

Direct democracy in the forms of the initiative and referendum allow for voters to over-turn laws passed by their state legislatures. This can be beneficial or harmful. I can remember the outcry of people in my district when they voted to put fluoride in the water. The people viewed this as a good thing that the government was not doing, so brought it to the people to vote on. In some cases, such as California, these processes can directly inhibit the ability of a state legislature to legislate. Voters decided that they would limit property taxes and make it more difficult for the state to increase taxes. This came back and hurt that state financially, and it wasn't until recently that the proposition was repealed. Ultimately the system of direct democracy is a way to get around state's legislatures and do what the will of the people wants, rather than have some representative deliberate for an entire session.

How does political culture influence the role of public opinion within a state?

Public opinion is directly tied to the political culture of a state. Depending on the culture there will be different views of government. In traditionalistic states the views will tend to be more negative than in those of a moralistic state, which views government much more positively. In individualistic states government is viewed more as a means to an end, and public opinion will reflect this belief. In a traditionalistic state, due to the hierarchical nature of the political culture, public opinion will reflect the candidates themselves, and start to affect their policies if those policies go off the beaten path.

Discuss the various roles governors must assume upon taking office and the relative importance of formal and informal powers. How do governors use informal powers to push their legislative agendas?

A governor has several different roles at the state level. They are the chief legislator: they have the power to sign bills into law or to veto them; The governor has a powerful say in the budget; They are the head of state agencies: they choose who gets appointed to different state offices; They are the chief spokesperson for the state: this role is mainly used in attracting business to their state in order to increase jobs and GDP; They are the party chief in their state; they are the Commander-in-Chief of the National Guard: unless the Federal government overrides this

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control the Governor is in charge of the state's National Guard.

There are two different powers of a Governor: Formal and Informal. Informal powers are not direct powers, but come from being the Governor. With the office they can call attention to certain things, or attempt to persuade legislators to vote for something.

The formal powers are the power to appoint individuals to run governmental agencies, to prepare state budgets, which allows them to direct funds where they want, or use funds as a way to coerce legislators to vote their way, to veto, which causes legislators to be more willing to work with a governor if they feel their bill has a chance of being cut from existence, grant pardons, and call special sessions of legislatures, which is useful in dealing with one specific issue, and it only works if they already have a plan in place or the solution solved.

Governors use their informal powers, notably political influence, to push their legislative agenda. They are the head of party while in office, and can use this to influence members of their own party. They can grant favors or help fundraise for legislators. Ultimate a governor is more successful if the cooperate with the legislature.

Briefly discuss the role of lieutenant governors and state attorneys general and how those roles have changed. Why have these offices gained in political importance and power

Governors have become increasingly politically mobile; they have to deal with regional issues on top of some state issues, and even international ones. The role of lieutenant governors and attorneys general have changed because of this, and they have to take a more active role in state government. Each office used to be seen as a joke, but now, with increased responsibilities for both offices, it can be viewed as a stepping-stone in state politics, and either one of the could potentially run for the governor's office.

Discuss the comparative method and its relationship to the study of state and local politics. Are states a good unit of analysis for comparative studies?

The comparative method is used to study the differences and similarities between things, in this context state governments. It is used to find out why states do things differently, such as how much they give to public education institutions, or how much they tax things. I don't think states are the best items for a comparative study, they're good, but you could get more detailed. The "lower" you go (States, counties, cities) the more accurate information you can get. If you do a wide-range study of multiple cities in a county, and do the same for the rest of the counties in a state, you'll get a better idea of why things work the way they work in a state, and how they differ state to state.

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Discuss the importance of political culture. Compare and contrast the three primary categories of political culture.

Political culture gives us a basic idea of what a state is like politically. It tells us the likelihood that a person will vote, what their policies are like, and how they run their government. There are three different types of political culture: Moralistic, Individualistic, and Traditionalistic. The moralistic states are generally in the north and the people have a genealogy that stems from Scandinavia. Individualistic states are generally in the North-East. Traditionalistic states are in the South and their governments have a “hands-off” approach to governing.

Moralist states tend to value the community over the individual, government is a positive force, and there is more amateur participation in politics. Individualistic states are much more utilitarian, government is viewed as a means to benefit the individual, and dirty politics is much more accepted. Traditionalistic states are hierarchical, government is viewed as a means to keep the hierarchy, and government is limited.

I find that traditionalistic and moralistic states seem to be the furthest apart. Moralistic is for political participation, while traditionalistic is against; moralistic looks for the good of the community while traditionalistic is aimed more towards the individual; moralistic has a positive view of government while traditionalistic would eliminate all government if they could. The individualistic states fall in between moralistic and traditionalistic states, and much more cynical when it comes to politics.

Explain why you think US Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis once called states “laboratories of democracy.”

Because they are the innovators of policy. Take Colorado and Washington legalizing marijuana for example. We would never see this happen on a national level without it being proven to work first. States have the ability to experiment with different laws much easier than the federal government. It is much easier to pass a controversial bill in a state than at the federal level. On the flip side there is Arizona and all the crazy bills they have put forward. Ultimately, in states, the people have a greater say in what happens, what is made into law, and in this they are a “purer” form of democracy, enabling it to be more experimental.

### **Explain devolution as it relates to public policy in state governments.**

Devolution is the idea that, due to inactivity of the federal government, notably congress, states have taken on a larger role in making policy decisions. States have taken on much more responsibility than in the past and use this to implement policy they could not in the past. This allows for states to become the aforementioned “laboratories of democracy,” with increasing

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power at the state level there will be a wider variety of public policy from state to state, such as marijuana legalization or same-sex marriage legalization. Neither of those would ever have had a chance at the national level, but due to states, and the powers that the federal has given them, they have happened, and we will continue to see these two issues brought up, as well as many more.

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