GOVT 20.4 FEDERALISM AND DECENTRALIZATION

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 11:15 AM - 12:20 PM
Instructor: Jason Sorens
Email: Jason.P.Sorens@dartmouth.edu
Blitz for appointment, 209 Silsby

Course Description

In this course, we consider arguments for and against federalism and the territorial decentralization of power, taking into account economic, security, and sociocultural aspects. Some scholars argue that federalism can provide a “credible commitment” to market incentives, boosting economic growth. Others claim that decentralization can prevent or settle ethnic and secessionist conflicts. Still others provide a skeptical case against these alleged benefits. Sophisticated advocates of federalism argue that decentralized institutions must be designed well in order to work properly, and so we will pay careful attention to the different forms and dimensions of decentralization around the world.

We will consider the following questions, among others:

1. Do federal grants to state and local governments undermine fiscal rectitude and local autonomy?
2. Does the ability to “vote with your feet” discourage political malfeasance in a decentralized system?
3. When does federalism reduce or inflame ethnic tensions and secessionism?
4. What causes federalism to persist, to erode over time, or even to collapse?
5. How well do decentralized systems respect civil and personal liberties and promote democratic accountability?
6. What about “federalizing up”? Does the deepened European Union on balance represent a new competitive-federal or cartel-federal system?

This topic is very timely with the ongoing debates over the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and the Supreme Court decision in *NFIB v. Sebelius* striking down “coercive” federal matching grants to the states, as well as with growing movements abroad for autonomy and independence, in places such as Catalonia, Scotland, and Flanders.

The goals of the course are as follows:

1. To understand the different facets of decentralization and how the world’s federations vary along those dimensions;
2. To understand the theoretical intuition behind different models of decentralized governance, such as Tiebout sorting, market-preserving federalism, and cartel federalism;
3. To know the broad outlines of the evolution of federalism in the United States and to understand political explanations of that evolution;
4. To be able to critique and advance your own arguments about federal reforms using sound evidence and social-scientific logic.

Course Requirements and Grading

Assignments

Class will combine lectures and discussion sessions, and attendance is required. You must do all the reading for a particular class meeting before that class. Class participation (criteria discussed in class) comprises 20% of your course grade. There are two 1600-word essays on assigned topics, which will count as 12.5% of your grade each. There will be two short-answer quizzes, worth 10% of your grade each. There will be a take-home essay final exam, due Tuesday September 1 at 4 PM at my office (209 Silsby), which counts for 35% of your course grade. Like the short papers, this exam must meet all the requirements of a standard academic paper, including citations of sources.

Absences, Late Work

Excused absences from in-class assignments must be discussed with the instructor. In the case of a scheduled, College-sponsored or College-recognized, extracurricular event, you must inform me at least a week in advance to make alternative arrangements. For family and medical emergencies, you must obtain documentation and contact me as soon as practicable after returning to campus. For take-home assignments, I do not offer extensions except in extraordinary cases of family and medical emergencies, but you may obtain permission to submit an assignment electronically.

Work that is late without an excuse will be deducted half a letter grade up to a week, a letter grade at a week, and another letter grade at each week thereafter.

Topics and Readings

Concepts


  Class canceled Saturday 6/27 - meet during X hour Tuesday 6/30


Economic Effects of Federalism and Decentralization

Theory

• Beramendi, “Federalism,” pp. 759-769. (Wednesday 7/1)


No class Friday 7/3 (holiday)

• Anderson, Fiscal Federalism, pp. 9-49. (Monday 7/6)


Quiz #1

• Anderson, pp. 50-67. (Wednesday 7/8)


• Treisman, Daniel (2007), The Architecture of Government (New York: Cambridge University Press), pp. 75-87, 99-103. (Friday 7/10)

Short paper #1 topic announced

Recommended reading:


Historical Perspectives


• The Federalist, no. 39. (Monday 7/13)
Europe and Canada


Recommended reading:


United States


- Greve, pp. 177-220. (Monday 7/20)

- Figure: Federal, State, and Local Own-Source Revenue in the United States, 1907 to present. (Wednesday 7/22)


Developing World


  Short paper #1 due


Recommended reading:
Security and Social Effects of Federalism and Decentralization

Theory and Overview


Recommended reading:


Western Europe and United States


Recommended reading:

Causes of Federalism and Decentralization  


Developing World
- Bunce, Valerie (1999), Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), pp. 130-142. (Friday 8/7)

Recommended reading:

Causes of Federalism and Decentralization
- Beramendi, “Federalism,” pp. 769-775. (Wednesday 8/12)  
  Short paper #2 due
- Sorens, Jason (2012), Secessionism: Identity, Interest, and Strategy (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press), pp. 49-50, 139-152. (Wednesday 8/19)
  Quiz #2

Frontiers in Federalism
(Wednesday 8/26)

*Final exam distributed*

Recommended reading: