

GV101 Week 15: Federalism and Decentralisation

Questions to Consider

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Office Hours (by appointment via the [Student Hub](#)):

Thursdays, 09:30 – 10:30, CBG.4.13
Thursdays, 14:30 – 15:30, CBG.4.13

Country Questions:

- What is the territorial structure of government in your adopted country?
 - What explains this structure?
 - What do you think are the consequences of this structure?

Class Questions:

1. Clark, Golder, and Golder identify three key features of federalism (p. 323) whilst Auer does the same (pp. 421-422). What are these competing features?
 - a) How closely related are the features to each other? Are they, in fact competing?
 - b) Do you find one or the other set of features (or another way of characterising federalism) more useful? Why?
2. Clark, Golder, and Golder note that federal states constitute a minority of states internationally. Why do you think this is?
 - a) What is the distinction between federalism and devolution?
 - b) Decentralisation is suggested as an alternative to formal federalism, and it is suggested that this be measured with reference to the share of tax revenues going to central government. Do you think this is a useful measure? Why? Can you think of plausible alternative measures of decentralisation?
 - c) What do devolution and decentralisation imply about the predominance of unitary states noted initially by Clark, Golder, and Golder?
3. Clark, Golder, and Golder outline the cases made by both the advocates and detractors of federalism. Which of these cases do you find more convincing, and why?
4. Bardhan notes that there may be a trade-off between the policy efficiency of centralised government (e.g. allowing coordination to avoid spillover and duplication) and the clear lines of accountability associated with more localised government. Do you agree that this is a trade-off?
 - a) If there is a trade-off, is one element worth prioritising over the other, or are other considerations more important? Why?
 - b) Bardhan claims that localised government helps solve the principal-agent problem. Do you agree? Why?
5. Bardhan argues that an important consideration in relation to decentralisation is the risk of institutional capture by elites. What are the competing arguments suggesting that this is bigger problem for centralised and decentralised government respectively?
 - a) What three things does Bardhan suggest can reduce the likelihood of institutional capture by elites when government is decentralised? Can you think of other ways to reduce this risk?
 - b) Bardhan argues that 'decentralization, to be really effective, has to accompany serious attempts to change the existing structures of power within communities and to improve the opportunities for participation and voice and engaging the hitherto disengaged and disenfranchised in the political process.' Do you agree that this is a key condition for successful decentralisation? Why?

Additional Essential Reading Question:

6. Clark, Golder, and Golder differentiate between congruent and incongruent federalism, and between symmetric and asymmetric federalism. What are the differences between these forms of federalism?
 - a) How do the above distinctions relate to each other?
 - b) Do you think that some versions of federalism are more useful than others and, if so, which ones? Why?
 - c) How do the above distinctions relate to the distinction between coming-together and holding-together federalism?

Further Reading Questions:

7. Auer argues that, removed from loaded political and media debate, the legal position is clear: 'The EU already is, and plainly is, nothing other than a multinational federal state construction.' Do you agree? Why?
8. Auer observes that, in different contexts, federalism has been adopted by advocates of both greater and lesser centralisation to assist their causes. Similarly, Erk quotes the observation that 'like the word "democracy," federalism tends to mean different things to different people.' Do you agree that federalism is a contested concept, or is there a core agreed meaning to it?
 - a) If you agree that federalism is a contested concept, do you think that this is problematic?
9. Erk outlines four common dimensions against which federalism can be assessed. What are these dimensions?
 - a) What conclusions do the books that Erk reviews reach about each of the performance of federalism in relation to the above four dimensions?
 - b) Do you think one of those dimensions is more important than the others? Why?

Essential Readings for Next Week:

- Mark Thatcher and Alex Stone Sweet, 'Theory and Practice of Delegation to Non-Majoritarian Institutions', *West European Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2002), pp. 1-22.
- Stephen J. Choi, G. Mitu Gulati, and Eric A. Posner, 'Professionals or Politicians: The Uncertain Empirical Case for an Elected Rather than Appointed Judiciary', *The Journal of Law, Economics & Organization*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Aug., 2010), pp. 290-336.
- William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder, *Foundations of Comparative Politics* (London, Sage Publications, 2019), pp. 339-345.

Further Reading for Next Week:

The further reading questions for next week will be based on the following two sources, which you may choose to focus on:

- Simon Hix, Bjørn Høyland, and Nick Vivyan, 'From doves to hawks: A spatial analysis of voting in the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England', Vol. 49, No. 6 (Oct., 2010), pp. 731-758.
- Brandice Canes-Wrone, Tom S. Clark, and Jason P. Kelly, 'Judicial Selection and Death Penalty Decisions', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 108, No. 1 (Feb., 2014), pp. 23-39.