

Forms of Federalism in the United States

POSC 315: Introduction to Public Policy

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1. 1789–1933: Dual Federalism

- Federal role limited to “enumerated” powers prescribed in the Constitution
- Referred to as the “Layer Cake” model, wherein each level of government is supreme within its own domain of responsibilities
- Separation of power between national and state governments
- Federal and state governments are competitive in their relationship
- Overall, state-centered

2. 1933–1964: Cooperative Federalism

- Federal powers expanded to deal with the aftermath of the Great Depression
- Referred to as the “Marble Cake” model, where the Federal role is to provide resources
- Sharing of powers between the national and state governments
- Federal and state governments are cooperative in their relationships.
- Overall, nation-centered

3. 1964–1980: Creative Federalism

- Federal role expanded to deal directly with subnational local governments through the provision of categorical grants, bypassing the states (Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society programs)
- Referred to as the “Picket Fence” model, wherein the federal government directly deals with local governments in specific policy categories (pickets), such as housing, transportation, health care, etc.
- “Creative” due to provision of grants-in-aid directly to local governments, bypassing the states
- Direct linkage between federal and local governments
- Overall, weaker states

4. 1980–2012: New Federalism (Competitive Federalism)

- Federal decision on policies curtailed by converting categorical grants to block grants where states and localities have more discretion when using the funds
- Referred to as the “Pineapple Upside Down Cake” model, wherein the federal government deals directly with local governments, but state and local governments have greater discretion
- “Competitive” due to economic competition between state/local governments
- Governments are competitive in their relationships
- Overall, competitive governments

5. 2012–Present: Fragmented Federalism (Robust Federalism)

- The federal government is pursuing state-specific policies
- Federal and state governments are pursuing their own policies
- Partisan polarization and gridlock in the federal government and in the states
- Pushback from the states while at the same time facing coercive carrots and sticks from the federal government
- Collaborative policy networked relationships across all levels of government
- Prior models of federalism have been fractured; only specific aspects of extant theories explain current features of intergovernmental relations