

Federalism

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Abstract

This short research defines Federalism. Also included are advantages and disadvantages of a Federalism government.

Federalism

Definition

According to Cornell University, Federalism is defined as

Federalism is a system of government in which the same territory is controlled by two levels of government. Generally, an overarching national government governs issues that affect the entire country, and smaller subdivisions govern issues of local concern. Both the national government and the smaller political subdivisions have the power to make laws and both have a certain level of autonomy from each other. The United States has a federal system of governance consisting of the national or federal government, and the government of the individual states. (Retrieved from <http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/federalism> June 4, 2014).

Reasons for Change

The founding fathers were concerned about the two types of government that were currently in place: 1. Articles of Confederation and 2. Unitary System. This created a dichotomous system of government. The Articles of Confederation focused on a weak central government and a strong state government. The Unitary system (still used today) focused on a strong central government. Essentially, “Federalism is a compromise meant to eliminate the disadvantages of both systems. In a federal system, power is shared by the national and state governments” (Retrieved from <http://www.ushistory.org/gov/3.asp> June 4, 2014).

Consequences

Although the theory behind Federalism seems that it would be an impeccable system of power between state and central government, there are consequences to this system. A perfect illustration of this power struggle can be seen as a major cause of the Civil War.

Advantages

An obvious advantage of Federalism is the center of power is distributed throughout America. Another advantage is, according to Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis,

“Federalism also promotes policy innovation. The Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis described the fifty states as "laboratories of democracy." States, as well as the national government, can learn from each other's successes and failures.”

Disadvantages

A major disadvantage to Federalism is that a certain state may have certain laws and regulations that are in stark contrast to adjoining states. An example in Utah would be that gambling is against the law, yet it is legal in Nevada. There are concerns that criminal activity would be brought to Utah (or through Utah as has been seen with drug trafficking), that would otherwise have been avoided if Nevada shared Utah's vision of laws and regulations.

Another disadvantage may be

“As states compete for business and investment, businesses can forum shop for states with the lowest taxes, fewest regulations and best business climate. This puts states in competition with each other and can exert downward pressure on taxes (which may contribute to a greater quality of life for citizens through better schools and hospitals) and regulations (which may result in healthier environment and safer products)”

(n.d.). Retrieved June 4, 2014, from <https://dls.dcccd.edu/usgov1-4/federalism-pros-and-cons>).

Conclusion

Federalism, although not a perfect system, has many more advantages than the two original governments. Federalism also distributes the power between our federal government and the states, so in this sense it creates a checks and balance system.

According to Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to Judge William Johnson, June 12, 1823

“The States can best govern our home concerns and the general government our foreign ones. I wish, therefore . . . never to see all offices transferred to Washington, where, further withdrawn from the eyes of the people, they may more secretly be bought and sold at market.”

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