

# **Federalism and Public Policy**

Power Distribution in American Governance  
POSC 315: Introduction to Public Policy  
Lecture 3.2

Summer 2025

California State University, Fullerton

**What is Federalism?**

# Federalism Defined

## Definition

**Federalism:** The division of power between a central government and regional governments

*The distribution of power and authority on a geographical basis.*

## Core Features

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- The founders believed that federalism would protect liberty
- Protects against **factions**: groups of citizens who have a common interest in some proposal that would either violate the rights of other citizens or harm the nation

# The Founders' View

## Governance Benefits

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- Prevents faction dominance
- State policy experimentation
- Government closer to people

## Democratic Benefits



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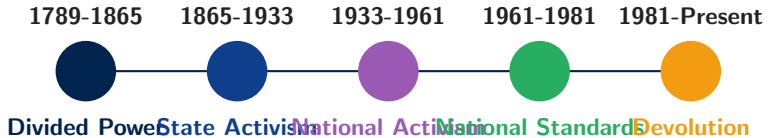
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## Democratic Benefits

- Increases political participation
- More effective government
- More access points to government
- Increases policy innovation

# Eras of Federalism



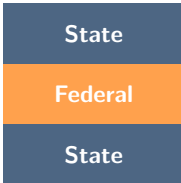
# Models of Federalism

(from the Literature)

# Five Models of Federalism



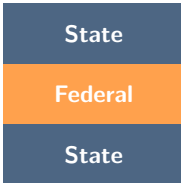
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**"Layer Cake"  
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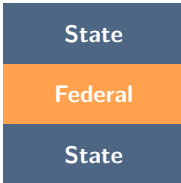
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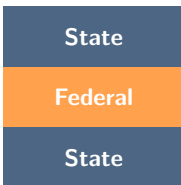
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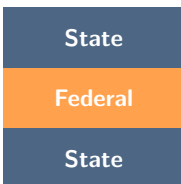


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- Overall: State-centered federalism

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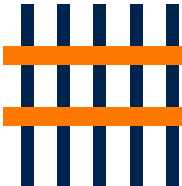
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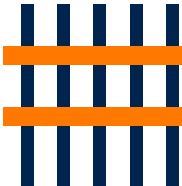
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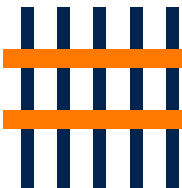
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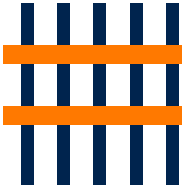


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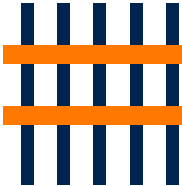
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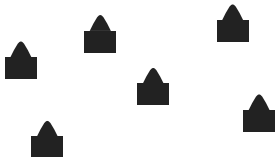
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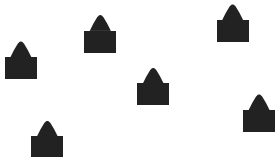
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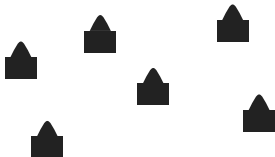


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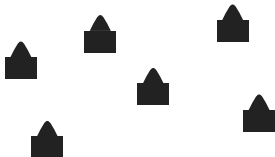
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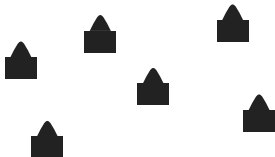
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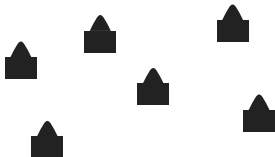
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# Federalism in Practice

Policy Implementation in a Federal System



*“It is one of the happy incidents of the federal system that a single courageous State may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country.”*

*— Justice Louis Brandeis (1932)*



# State Policy Innovation



## **State Laboratories**

States experiment with  
different policy  
approaches



## **Policy Diffusion**

Successful policies  
spread across states



## **Comparative Analysis**

Which approaches  
work best?

# Federal-State Coordination

## Federal Tools

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- Categorical grants
- Block grants
- Mandates
- Regulatory frameworks

## State Implementation

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## Federal Tools

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## State Implementation

- Administrative adaptation
- Supplemental funding
- Waiver requests
- Local distribution

# Understanding Federalism

Is Key to Understanding American Policy Design  
and Implementation