



Federalism

When diverse groups of free people — with different languages, religious faiths, or cultural norms — choose to live under an agreed constitutional framework, they expect a degree of local autonomy and equal economic and social opportunities. A federal system of government — power shared at the local, regional, and national levels — empowers elected officials who design and administer policies tailored to local and regional needs. They work in partnership with a national government and with each other to solve the many problems the nation faces.

✦ Federalism is a system of shared power and decision-making between two or more freely elected governments with authority over the same people and geographical area. It grants and protects decision-making ability where results are most immediately felt — in local communities, as well as at higher levels of government.

✦ Federalism fosters government accountability to the people and encourages citizen participation and civic responsibility by allowing local governments to design and administer local laws.

✦ A federal system is strengthened by a written constitution granting authority and outlining the scope of shared responsibilities enjoyed by each level of government.

✦ While it is generally agreed that local governments should satisfy local needs, some issues are best left to the national government. Defense, international treaties, federal budgets, and postal services are often cited as examples.

✦ Local ordinances reflect the preferences by which local communities choose to live — police and fire patrols, school administration, and local health and building regulations are often designed and

administered locally.

✦ Intergovernmental relations means that various governments in a federal state (national, regional, and local) work together when issues of statutory authority imply the need to address issues cooperatively. The national government often has authority to mediate disputes between regions.

✦ In a geographically large and economically diverse nation, disparities in income and social welfare among regions can be addressed by the national government through policies that redistribute tax revenues.

✦ A federal system is responsive and inclusive. Citizens are free to run for government positions at all levels — local and regional governments offer the most positions and, perhaps, the most opportunity to make a difference in their communities.

✦ Federalism provides multiple opportunities for political parties to serve their constituents. Even if a particular party does not hold a majority in the national legislature or the executive, it is permitted to participate at the regional and local levels.