

Does Federalism Weaken Democratic Representation?

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ABSTRACT

The framers of the U.S. Constitution explicitly designed federalism to enhance representation. By dividing powers among multiple governments, citizens are able to exert pressure on the elected officials of various governments in an effort to achieve desired outcomes. If one government is not doing what citizens prefer, they can seek it from a different government. This assumes that individuals form opinions about the functions different governments perform. Given the complexity of federalism, this may be an unrealistic assumption for many citizens. Original survey data uniquely suited to explore this question suggest that citizens do behave in a fashion consistent with the federalist framework. Moreover, the actual change in the assignment of functional responsibilities across governments behaves as if it responds to public opinion.

Few studies have focused on representational linkages in a federal system.¹ Rather, the link between mass preferences and public policy has been studied in isolation within each order of government – federal, state, or local. While this serves the purpose of parsimony, it turns a blind eye to a fundamental feature of federalism. Aside from gains in common security and a common market, federalism is also designed to enhance representation.² The framers of the U.S. Constitution aimed to strengthen accountability by structuring the political system so that “[t]he federal and state governments are in fact but different agents and trustees of the people, instituted with different powers.”³ Dividing powers among governments enhances accountability because citizens can exert pressure on the elected officials of various governments.⁴ If one government is not doing what “the people” want, they can seek it from a different government.

Yet whether this federalist theory of representation is realized in practice remains an empirical

question. In order for citizens to use one order of government to check another, they must form preferences about the things different governments should be doing and communicate these preferences to elected officials. The theory requires that citizens have preferences not only about policy outputs but also about the policy process itself. In turn, the government is expected to be responsive to both of these types of preferences. Ample evidence indicates that the policies of all orders of government respond to shifts in public opinion.⁵ However, there is mixed evidence that coherent public opinion exists with regard to issues of centralization and decentralization, which are inherent in federalism, and there is no evidence that changes in government centralization are responsive to public opinion.⁶ Federalism may be too complex to be a factor in the formation of public opinion. If this is the case, it would render the representational design of federalism ineffective.

This study explores how citizens form opinions about the way in which policy responsibility should be divided among orders of government. It articulates the assumptions underlying the federalist theory of representation, generating expectations about how this opinion process works. These expectations are then tested empirically using survey data uniquely suited to answer the questions raised in this study. Finally, attention is given to whether the government is responsive to public opinion about the division of functional responsibilities.

THE FEDERALIST THEORY OF REPRESENTATION

While political scientists have not paid much empirical attention to representational linkages in a federalist context, scholars have analyzed the writings of the framers of the federal Constitution, particularly The Federalist, to distill a federalist theory of representation.⁷ This theory provides a framework in which to study democratic responsiveness in a federal system.

The Federalist contains the ingredients for a political theory of representation rather than simply strategic arguments in a passing political debate. The framers were faced with the weighty dilemma of designing political institutions that would protect individual liberty and freedom, while providing security from both external and internal threats. Rather than rely upon the goodness of men (which is unrealistic optimism) or a powerful central government (that would likely become tyrannical and corrupt), they devised a system with multiple decision-making points, allowing opposing interest to balance out one another. By compounding smaller republics (state governments) with an overarching one (federal government), the framers believed they could successfully address the dilemma they faced.⁸

This system of “checks and balances” is self-maintaining because it creates natural incentives for ambitious elites to check one another’s power. Underlying this largely elite-centered theory of governance is a theory of representation. All governments in the compound republic, while administered by different groups of elites, are ultimately answerable to “the people.”⁹ The framers affirm in many places throughout the document that all orders of government in the federal system derive their power from citizens.¹⁰ As a prime case in point, James Madison argued that “the ultimate authority, wherever the derivative may be found, resides in the people alone.”¹¹ In designing a republican form of government, the framers attempted to avoid the vagaries of mob rule while maintaining a system accountable to individual citizens.

Placed at the center of the federal system, citizens are expected to use multiple points in the decision-making process to apply pressure on policymakers.¹² Alexander Hamilton strongly underscored the important role played by citizens in a federal system in Federalist No. 28,

Power being almost always the rival of power; the General Government will at times

stand ready to check the usurptations [sic] of the state government; and those will have the same disposition toward the General Government. The people, by throwing themselves into either scale, will infallibly make it preponderate. If their rights are invaded by either, they can make use of the other, as the instrument of redress.¹³

Implicit in the federalist theory of representation is that citizens make attributions of responsibility regarding specific aspects of the policymaking process, and link these together in a specific way. In particular, citizens must (1) form an opinion about the functions that different governments perform (functional-responsibility attribution), (2) evaluate how well different governments are performing (causal-responsibility attribution), and (3) use the first two attributions to inform an opinion about whether a different order of government should take over policymaking (solution-responsibility attribution).¹⁴ Furthermore, citizens should attribute solution responsibility to the government they believe to be functionally responsible if they believe it is doing a good job. Obversely, they should attribute solution responsibility to a different government if they believe the functionally responsible one is doing a poor job.

Given the generally low level of political knowledge and interest among Americans, it is quite possible that the federalist theory of representation demands too much from citizens.¹⁵ There is evidence that citizens use heuristics and cues taken from elite political debate when forming opinions, allowing the American public to behave in a sophisticated manner despite its dearth of political knowledge.¹⁶ Although it is possible that citizens are able to overcome the complexities of federalism in the same way, there is no guarantee. Studies that demonstrate the presence of low-information rationality in the public focus on the ability of individuals to map their issue preferences onto voting

decisions. Yet federalism, as discussed above, makes the additional assumption that citizens are capable of distinguishing among different orders of government when forming opinions not only about policy but also about how their desired policies should be implemented. Nevertheless, federalism does animate political debate in the U.S., leaving an empirical question as to whether it is reflected in public opinion.

THE FEDERALIST DIMENSION OF POLITICAL DEBATE

American politics is, in large part, driven by questions about the way in which functional responsibilities should be divided among federal, state, and local governments. The underlying cleavage in the United States, since its creation, has been over the “Great Principle,” which concerns the amount of authority that should belong to the national government.¹⁷ This necessarily entails arguments over solution responsibility. Indeed, throughout U.S. history, major political debates have almost always highlighted fundamental disagreements about the attribution of solution responsibility. Should the national government decide which states can and cannot have slaves, or should that issue be left to the states? Should the national government regulate major facets of the economy, or should that be left to the states or the private market? Should the national government implement and administer social welfare programs, or should that be left to the state or local governments? The issues may change, but the question remains the same.

Besides naked self-interest and ideological considerations, competing rationales regarding solution responsibility contain attributions of causal responsibility. Attempts to reform federalism are often “responses to perceived policy failures of the past.”¹⁸ Major transformations in the distribution of functional responsibilities that were made during the twentieth century can be understood in terms of

causal-responsibility attribution. The Great Depression highlighted the inadequacy of the state and local governments to protect and cushion society's weakest members from economic fluctuation. The national government, in contrast, seemed the most capable to provide needed centralization in economic regulation and social welfare provision. By the 1960s, these changes in solution-responsibility attribution were reflected in public policy. V. O. Key described these changes rather succinctly:

The federal government underwent a radical transformation after the Democratic victory of 1932. It had been a remote authority with a limited range of activity. It operated the postal system, improved rivers and harbors, maintained the armed forces on a scale fearsome only to banana republics, and performed other functions of which the average citizen was hardly aware. Within a brief time, it became an institution that affected intimately the lives and fortunes of most, if not all, citizens.¹⁹

Toward the end of the twentieth century, unintended consequences of centralization created by the New Deal and Great Society programs created fuel for the argument that the federal government was no longer suited to address social problems. Centralization had been done in a piecemeal fashion and resulted in a largely fragmented national administrative apparatus. Many policies were typified by lack of intergovernmental coordination and increasing intergovernmental conflict. Bureaucratic red tape seemed to become more pervasive and difficult to deal with as centralization was accompanied by additional layers of complexity.²⁰ A growing number of voices began calling for wholesale devolution of many national functions to the state and local governments. To many, the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 signaled that public preferences regarding solution responsibility had reversed since the 1930s.

As one of the most ardent proponents of devolution, Reagan underscored the link between causal- and solution-responsibility attributions when he declared in his first inaugural address, “Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem.”²¹

The connection between causal-responsibility attribution and solution-responsibility attribution is evident in the structure of most issue debates. Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones illustrate through a number of case studies that as satisfaction with the performance of a particular policy sours, the agency or government administering that program begins losing credibility, and interest groups begin lobbying for a shift in functional responsibility to a different agency or government.²² In one case study, they describe how environmentalist groups, unhappy with the federal government’s regulation of nuclear power plants, were able to shift the debate over new nuclear power plant construction to the state and local arenas in the late 1970s. In another, they discuss the national government’s response to urban decay in the 1960s. Violence and economic stagnation seemed to reach a high point in urban areas by the mid-1960s, prompting President Lyndon Johnson to lead a national assault on urban ills. Although these problems occurred in local areas, many scholars and politicians at the time argued that they were beyond local governments’ capacity to fix, suggesting that solution responsibility should be placed with the national government because it had more resources to combat the problems facing large cities. By the 1980s, urban decay had continued largely unabated and elite attitudes toward urban renewal programs had changed, viewing them as a failed national experiment. Solution responsibility was devolved to the local governments once again.²³

These examples provide suggestive evidence that federalism structures political debate among elites. When a particular order of government is handling issues in an unsatisfactory fashion, politicians,

interest groups, and scholars often advocate shifting solution responsibility to a different government. Yet do average citizens behave this way? Although there is evidence that citizens tend to attribute solution responsibility to the government they believe is more effective in an overall sense, it is unclear whether citizens make distinctions in the functions that different orders of government perform and take this into account when deciding where to attribute solution responsibility.²⁴ The essential claim underlying the federalist perspective is that citizens do make such attributions and it is this claim that is probed further in this article.

THE FEDERALIST DIMENSION OF PUBLIC OPINION

Currently, no existing survey includes items that measure functional, causal, and solution responsibility attributions. Consequently, this research relies on original survey data to explore the federalist dimension of public opinion. Representative samples were drawn from voter registration lists in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Clarksville, Tennessee, and Providence, Rhode Island, and 1,200 individuals were interviewed via telephone (approximately 400 per city) following the November 2002 elections.²⁵ These cities were chosen because they were the only three urban areas that had simultaneous elections for federal, state, and local officials, facilitating an investigation of voting behavior across orders of government.

To measure solution-responsibility attribution, respondents were asked, “what level of government do you think would do the best job when it comes to solving many of the problems and issues we face? The federal government in Washington, state governments, or local governments?” Respondents could also volunteer some other government, a combination of governments, or refuse to answer the question. A plurality of respondents (37.3 percent) preferred that the federal government

be attributed solution responsibility, followed by the state (23.8 percent) and local (12.3 percent) governments (see Table 1).

[Table 1 about here]

Causal-responsibility attribution was measured by asking respondents to rate the performance of the federal, state, and local governments on a five-point scale. Respondents tended to rate local governments better than the federal or state governments. Just over 37 percent of respondents gave local government high marks (4 or 5 on the scale) compared to 25 percent and 18 percent for national and state governments, respectively (see Table 2).

[Table 2 about here]

Functional-responsibility attribution was measured by asking respondents, “what level of government do you think currently has the most influence on public policy overall? The federal government in Washington, state governments, or local governments?” As with the item tapping solution responsibility, respondents could also volunteer some other government, a combination of governments, or refuse to answer the question. Two-thirds of respondents attributed overall functional responsibility to the federal government, followed by state (15.9 percent) and local governments (6.1 percent).

[Table 3 about here]

Although these responses are only representative of the public opinion in the cities in which the survey was conducted (i.e., rather than the entire country), these data can help us make inferences about how individuals form opinions about solution responsibility. The federalist perspective implies that individuals will attribute solution responsibility to the government they believe to be functionally

responsible when they think it is doing a good job, and they will attribute solution responsibility away from the government they deem functionally responsible if they think it is doing a poor job. Using regression analysis, this hypothesis can be modeled in the following fashion:

$$S = f(\mathbf{b}_0 + \mathbf{b}_1 F^N + \mathbf{b}_2 F^S + \mathbf{b}_3 F^L + \mathbf{b}_4 C^N + \mathbf{b}_5 C^S + \mathbf{b}_6 C^L + \mathbf{b}_7 F^N C^N + \mathbf{b}_8 F^S C^S + \mathbf{b}_9 F^L C^L + \mathbf{hZ}) \quad (1)$$

In this equation, S is the measure of solution responsibility attribution, which is coded as 1 = federal government, 2 = state government, 3 = local government, 4 = other/combination, or 5 = don't know/refuse. Three dummy variables are included that indicate whether respondents attribute functional responsibility to the national, state, or local governments. $F^N = 1$ if functional responsibility is attributed to the federal government, $F^S = 1$ if it is the state governments, and $F^L = 1$ if it is the local governments. Answers to the three job-performance items (federal, state, and local) are included to measure causal responsibility (C^N , C^S , and C^L). Finally, \mathbf{Z} is a matrix of control variables. Controls are included for partisanship, ideology, age, gender, race, education, and income to account for other individual characteristics that might be correlated with solution-responsibility attribution.²⁶

Notice that the three dummy variables indicating the government to which respondents attribute functional responsibility is multiplied by corresponding causal responsibility measures. These interaction terms provide a direct test of the federalist hypothesis that the impact of causal-responsibility attributions on the government attributed solution responsibility is conditioned by whether that level of government is also attributed functional responsibility.

Because the dependent variable is a series of categories, the most appropriate regression model is multinomial logit.²⁷ The estimates from this model can be used to calculate the probability someone would choose to attribute solution responsibility to a particular government given values they have on the independent variables. These probabilities are shown in Table 4 (estimates from the full model are reported in the appendix).²⁸ Part (a) of Table 4 shows that individuals who think the functionally responsible government is doing a good job are more likely to prefer solution responsibility to remain with that government compared to those who think it is doing a neutral job. In particular, those who view the federal government as functionally responsible and think it is doing a good job are 27.5 percent more likely to attribute it solution responsibility; those who view state government as functionally responsible and doing a good job are 34.2 percent more likely to attribute it solution responsibility; and individuals are 21.3 percent more likely to attribute solution responsibility to local government when it is appraised favorably and deemed functionally responsible. The fact that the probabilities in the off diagonals of Table 4a (with one exception) are not statistically different from zero is evidence that people are not simply attributing solution responsibility to the government they like best.²⁹ This decision is contingent on whether they also believe the particular order of government is functionally responsible.

[Table 4 about here]

Table 4b shows that when individuals attribute functional responsibility to the federal government and believe it is doing a poor job, they are more likely to prefer solution responsibility be shifted to the state or local governments compared to those who think it is doing a neutral job. Similar findings are not observed with respect to the state and local governments, though. It appears that

respondents in this sample are only punishing the federal government for doing a poor job, while the state and local governments are neither punished nor rewarded.

Taken together, the results in Table 4 largely corroborate the expectations generated by the federalist perspective. For the most part, individuals attribute solution responsibility to the order of government they believe to be functionally responsible when they think it is doing a good job, and they attribute solution responsibility away from the government they deem functionally responsible if they think it is doing a poor job.

IS FEDERALISM RESPONSIVE TO PUBLIC OPINION?

Citizens may behave in a manner that is consistent with the federalist perspective on representation, but it would all be for naught if elected representatives did not respond to public opinion about the tasks different governments should be performing. Responsiveness in a federal system must go beyond public policy outputs matching public preferences. Citizens' preferences about the locus of control over policies should be reflected in the actual assignment of functional responsibilities among the orders of government. Thus, solution-responsibility attributions made by the general public should affect what functions are performed by different governments.

If functional responsibilities change in a manner consistent with changes in public solution-responsibility attributions, then a case can be made for democratic responsiveness. Investigating this relationship requires a measure of public attitudes toward solution responsibility over time (akin to the presidential approval series continually administered by Gallup). From time to time, a number of polling organizations have asked solution-responsibility questions regarding particular issues. These questions are asked so sporadically, though, that they do not form a usable time series.³⁰ Fortunately, the now-

defunct U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) fielded a survey question that taps individuals' overall attributions of solution responsibility nearly every year starting in 1972 and ending in 1993, and in 1999, Richard Cole and John Kincaid conducted opinion research that updated this series.³¹ The same survey question was asked in each of these years, "From which level of government do you feel you get the most for your money? Federal, state, or local?" This question indirectly taps solution-responsibility attribution. Presumably, the government that gives an individual the best return on his or her tax investment would be the one to which he or she would attribute solution responsibility.

Given this broad measure of solution-responsibility attribution, an objective indicator of the overall distribution of functional responsibilities is needed. Measures of centralization seem to most accurately capture such a broad definition. A more centralized configuration would indicate that functional responsibilities tend to be placed with the national government, while a more decentralized system would indicate that the state and local governments handle a larger share of the responsibilities.³² I rely on two widely used measures of centralization: the revenue that each order of government receives from its own sources as a percent of total revenue across all governments and the percent of the public sector labor force allocated to each order of government. These measures were drawn from the ACIR's annual report Significant Features of Fiscal Federalism.³³

To analyze the match between the public's solution-responsibility attributions and the distribution of functional responsibilities over time, the time-series measures of centralization are overlaid on the time-series measure of public opinion.³⁴ In order to reduce the number of graphs shown and simplify the interpretation, each of these measures was reduced to a ratio of the percent in

the federal category to the combined percent in the state and local categories. These graphs are displayed in Figure 1. Both of the graphs suggest that the actual distribution of functional responsibilities may be responsive to the public's solution-responsibility attributions. As fewer Americans have perceived the federal government as the most suitable to handle their problems, public policy has become more decentralized.³⁵

[Figure 1 about here]

CONCLUSION

Federalism is designed to enhance representation by giving citizens multiple pressure points.³⁶ The framers of the U.S. Constitution believed that separate semi-sovereign governments would serve as a check on one another and identified citizens as one of the primary mechanisms behind this process. Their theory of federalist representation assumed that if citizens are not getting what they want from one government, they will prefer a different government to implement those policies. Is this expectation valid?

It is possible that federalism is too complex for many citizens to navigate successfully. Perhaps citizens do not make distinctions among the orders of government, rendering the representational design of federalism ineffective. Yet there is evidence that Americans might be up to the challenge. Voters hold different governments accountable for the functions they perform, and there may be a comprehensible structure underlying citizens preferences about how policy responsibilities should be structured among the federal, state, and local governments.³⁷

The contribution of this study is to demonstrate that citizens, at least in the three cities surveyed, appear to behave in a way that is consistent with the federalist perspective on representation. When

judging policy performance, citizens make distinctions in what different orders of government do, and they take these distinctions into account when deciding on which government should have the most policymaking influence. Moreover, it appears as if policymakers respond to changes in attitudes about how functional responsibilities should be distributed across the federal system. These findings are evidence that federalism may indeed enhance rather than dampen democratic representation.

Considering the dismal state of political awareness among most Americans, finding evidence of coherent public attitudes regarding the complex issue of federalism that correlate with policy allocations is extraordinary. Yet there is more work to be done explicating the causal mechanisms that underlie these relationships. To what extent do elites shape attitudes through public discourse in the news media and political campaigns? What role do exogenous shocks, such as economic fluctuations, play in focusing public attention on policy successes and failures? Are some individuals more likely behave as federalist, and if so, what are the implications for democratic representation? These questions form a broader research agenda and are ripe for future research.

APPENDIX

Below are the full parameter estimates from the multinomial logit model on which the probabilities reported in Table 4 are based. These coefficients provide some sense of how changes in values of the independent variables influence the probability an individual would choose a particular option (e.g., attributing solution responsibility to the state government) relative to some baseline (e.g., attributing solution responsibility to the federal government). However, these coefficients give little indication regarding how the independent variables influence the overall probability of attributing solution responsibility to the federal, state, or local governments. Neither the direction, nor the

statistical significance of the parameter estimates below is readily interpretable for these quantities of interest. One must transform the coefficients to calculate these probabilities, as has been done in Table 4.

[Table A1 about here]

TABLE 1
Government Attributed Solution Responsibility for Most Problems

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Federal Government	448	37.3
State Government	286	23.8
Local Government	147	12.3
Something Else	28	2.3
Combination	193	16.1
Don't Know/Refuse	98	8.2
Total	1,200	100.0

TABLE 2
Job Performance of the Federal, State, and Local Governments

Job Rating	Order of Government		
	Federal Frequency (Percent) ^a	State Frequency (Percent)	Local Frequency (Percent)
1. Very Poor Job	131 (10.9)	121 (10.2)	101 (8.4)
2. Poor Job	258 (21.5)	324 (27.0)	180 (15.0)
3. Neutral	473 (39.4)	492 (41.0)	420 (35.0)
4. Good Job	224 (18.7)	189 (15.8)	362 (30.2)
5. Very Good Job	75 (6.3)	32 (2.7)	89 (7.4)
Don't Know/Refuse	39 (3.3)	42 (3.5)	48 (4.0)
Total	1,200 (100.0)	1,200 (100.0)	1,200 (100.0)
Mean	3.05	2.92	3.34

^aSome columns do not sum to 100 percent because of rounding error.

TABLE 3
Government Attributed Functional Responsibility for Most Policies

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Federal Government	800	66.7
State Government	191	15.9
Local Government	73	6.1
Something Else	7	0.6
Combination	65	5.4
Don't Know/Refuse	64	5.3
Total	1,200	100.0

TABLE 4
The Impact of Changes in Causal Responsibility on Solution-Responsibility Attribution Given the Order of Government Attributed Functional Responsibility^c

	Order Attributed Functional Responsibility		
	Federal	State	Local
a. Positive Evaluation of Functionally Responsible Level			
Government Attributed Solution Responsibility			
Federal	27.5 ^a	0.4	1.1
State	21.1 ^a	34.2 ^a	16.1
Local	4.6	-5.2	21.3 ^b
b. Negative Evaluation of Functionally Responsible Level			
Government Attributed Solution Responsibility			
Federal	9.8	9.9	-9.2
State	21.4 ^a	22.0	26.4
Local	23.3 ^b	1.0	30.1

^ap<0.05; ^bp<0.10.

^cNumbers in cells are the changes in probability a respondent attributes solution responsibility to the order of government listed in the row headings given changes in causal-responsibility attribution (denoted in a and b) and the order of government attributed functional responsibility (shown in the column headings). These probabilities and the p-values associated with them were estimated using Clarify. See Gary King, Michael Tomz, and Jason Wittenberg, “Making the Most of Statistical Analyses: Improving Interpretation and Presentation,” American Journal of Political Science 44 (April 2000): 347-361.

TABLE A1
Multinomial Logit Estimates of Equation 1^a

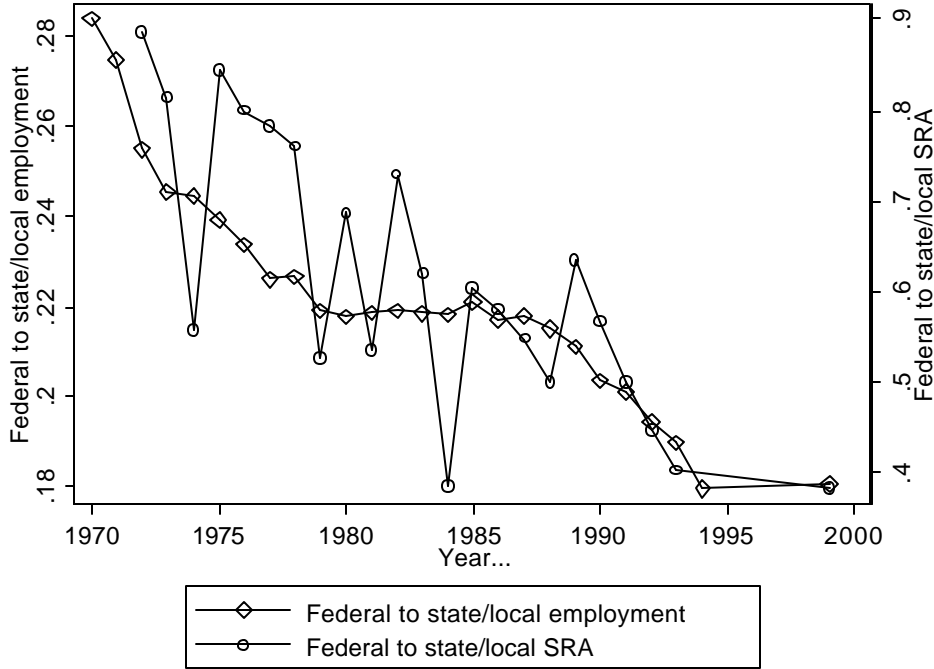
Variables ^b	Solution-Responsibility Attribution			
	State vs. Federal Coefficient (Robust s.e.)	City vs. Federal Coefficient (Robust s.e.)	Other/Combination vs. Federal Coefficient (Robust s.e.)	Don't Know vs. Federal Coefficient (Robust s.e.)
Federal FRA	0.364 (0.701)	-0.467 (0.974)	-2.384 (0.637)	-2.919 (0.936)
Federal CRA	-0.126 (0.161)	-0.391 (0.253)	-0.316 (0.176)	-0.974 (0.306)
Federal FRA X Federal SRA	-0.063 (0.197)	0.009 (0.276)	0.258 (0.202)	0.718 (0.305)
State FRA	1.208 (0.839)	-0.795 (1.068)	-1.454 (1.001)	-3.601 (1.463)
State CRA	0.232 (0.118)	0.168 (0.128)	0.202 (0.161)	0.379 (0.226)
State FRA X State CRA	-0.062 (0.204)	-0.099 (0.359)	0.029 (0.335)	0.350 (0.272)
City FRA	1.646 (2.011)	1.953 (2.125)	-1.756 (1.903)	-9.624 (2.552)
City CRA	0.037 (0.121)	0.099 (0.153)	0.177 (0.127)	-0.155 (0.184)
City FRA X City CRA	-0.447 (0.577)	-0.480 (0.634)	0.171 (0.494)	2.186 (0.608)
Partisanship	0.316 (0.137)	0.478 (0.166)	0.302 (0.179)	0.824 (0.286)
Ideology	0.221 (0.152)	0.231 (0.191)	-0.131 (0.185)	-0.488 (0.270)
Age	-0.012 (0.006)	0.008 (0.008)	0.004 (0.010)	0.014 (0.011)
Gender	-0.015 (0.221)	-0.201 (0.280)	-0.286 (0.245)	-0.151 (0.345)
Race	-0.239 (0.241)	-0.745 (0.332)	-0.330 (0.288)	0.177 (0.564)
Education	0.144 (0.085)	0.033 (0.109)	0.194 (0.096)	0.423 (0.239)
Income	-0.076 (0.045)	0.060 (0.063)	-0.058 (0.065)	0.033 (0.098)
Constant	-0.578 (0.868)	-0.430 (0.932)	0.010 (1.014)	-1.714 (1.339)
Number of observations	757			
χ^2	1423.44			
Pseudo-R ²	0.07			

^aBaseline category = attribute solution responsibility to federal government.

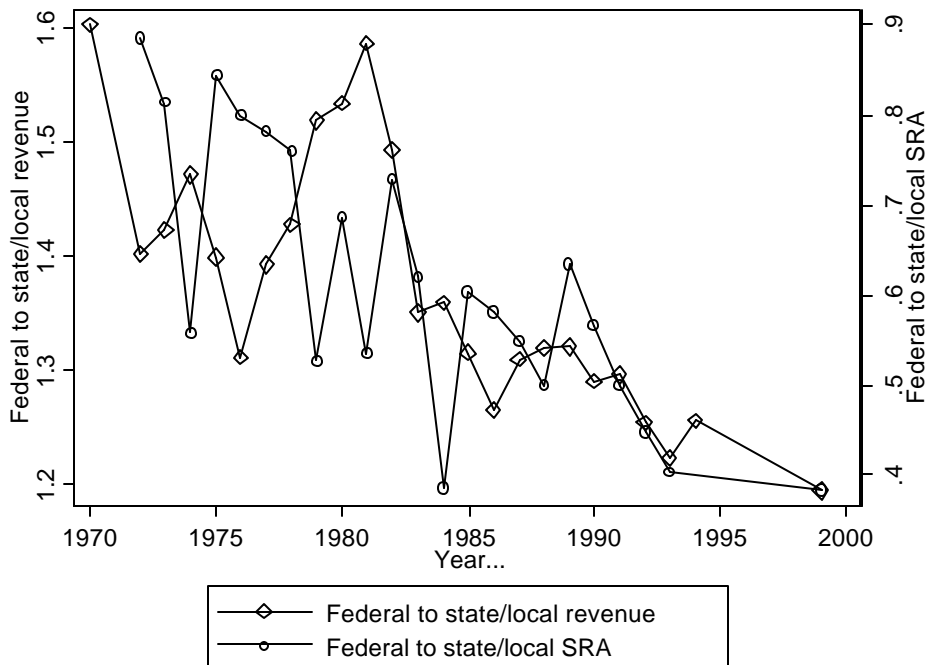
^bFRA = functional-responsibility attribution and CRA = causal-responsibility attribution.

Figure 1: The Match between the Public's Solution-Responsibility Attribution (SRA) and the Level of Centralization, 1972-1993, 1999

a. The Ratio of Federal to State and Local Employment



b. The Ratio of Federal to State and Local Revenues Received from Their Own Sources



FOOTNOTES

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⁷Beer, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Democracy in America"; Downs, "Accountability Payoffs in Federal Systems?"; Ostrom, The Political Theory of a Compound Republic.

⁸Ostrom, The Political Theory of a Compound Republic.

⁹A reasonable response to this interpretation is that the framers construed "the people" to mean well-off individuals. White men who owned land constituted the body politic, while women, poor white men, and black slaves were not included in this grand experiment of republican government. See Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It (New York: Vintage Books, 1948). Nevertheless, the framers' use of inclusive language allows future generations to interpret their theory of representation in a manner that reflects changes in core values. More important, the federalist theory must be applicable to the modern view of democracy in order for it to remain a viable normative perspective.

¹⁰Beer, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Democracy in America"; Eulau, "Polarity in Representational Federalism"; Ostrom, The Political Theory of a Compound Republic.

¹¹Madison, "No. 46," p. 237.

¹²Downs, “Accountability Payoffs in Federal Systems?”; Deborah A. Orth, “Accountability in a Federal System: The Governor, the President, and Economic Expectations,” State Politics and Policy Quarterly 1 (Winter 2001): 412-432.

¹³Alexander Hamilton, “No. 28,” The Federalist Papers, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay (Cutchogue, NY: Buccaneer Books, 1787/1992), p. 136.

¹⁴Responsibility attribution is fundamental to opinion formation. It affects what people view to be the source of a problem and what should be done to correct it. See Shanto Iyengar, Is Anyone Responsible? (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁵The literature studying Americans’ lack of political knowledge is voluminous. For a classic treatment, see Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, The American Voter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). For a more recent treatment, see Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

¹⁶For a discussion of how voters use heuristics and cues from elites, see Samuel Popkin, The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and John Zaller, The Nature and Origin of Mass Public Opinion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For a discussion of how uninformed citizens can behave in a sophisticated manner see Richard R. Lau and David P. Redlawsk, “Voting Correctly,” American Political Science Review 91 (September 1997): 585-598 and Arthur Lupia, “Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections,” American Political Science Review 88 (March 1994): 63-76.

¹⁷John H. Aldrich, Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁸Conlan, From New Federalism to Devolution, p. 2.

¹⁹V. O. Key, The Responsible Electorate (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1966), p. 31.

²⁰Theodore Lowi, The End of Liberalism (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979).

²¹Quoted in Conlan, From New Federalism to Devolution, p. 1.

²²Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, Agendas and Instability in American Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

²³Ibid.

²⁴For this evidence see, Schneider and Jacoby, “Public Attitudes toward the Policy Responsibilities of the National and State Governments”; Thompson and Elling, “Let Them Eat Marblecake.”

²⁵The survey was conducted by the survey center at the University of Houston Center for Public Policy and had a sample error rate of +/- 3.0 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

²⁶It is especially important to include controls for partisanship and ideology given that issues of federalism often break along ideological lines. Including these control variables tests whether performance evaluation has an independent affect on solution responsibility attribution. Measures of age, gender, race, education, and income were also included as covariates to control for the possibility of other confounding influences.

²⁷This regression method estimates coefficients for the independent variables with regard to each category in the dependent variable, while constraining them such that the summed probabilities for choosing each category will equal 1 for each respondent. One could create a series of dummy variables out of the dependent variable and estimate a series of logit or probit models, yet this would not constrain the cumulative probability to equal 1. In other words, such an approach would produce biased estimates. See J. Scott Long, “Regression Models for Categorical and Limited Dependent

Variables,” Advanced Quantitative Techniques in the Social Sciences, No. 7 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997).

²⁸The probabilities reported in Table 4 were calculated with the help of Clarify, which uses Monte Carlo simulation to place confidence intervals around the probabilities, allowing researchers to see if they are significantly different from zero. See Gary King, Michael Tomz, and Jason Wittenberg, “Making the Most of Statistical Analyses: Improving Interpretation and Presentation,” American Journal of Political Science 44 (April 2000): 347-361.

²⁹The one exception is that individuals who believe the national government is doing a good job *and* functionally responsible are also more likely to attribute solution responsibility to the state government relative to those who think it is doing a neutral job. Perhaps this is further evidence that many citizens have a taste for marblecake federalism. See Thompson and Elling, “Let Them Eat Marblecake.”

³⁰Greg M. Shaw and Stephanie L. Reinhart, “The Polls–Trends: Devolution and Confidence in Government,” Public Opinion Quarterly 65 (Fall 2001): 369-388.

³¹See Richard L. Cole and John Kincaid, “Public Opinion and American Federalism: Perspectives on Taxes, Spending, and Trust–An ACIR Update,” Publius: The Journal of Federalism 30 (Winter/Spring 2000): 189-201.

³²G. Ross Stephens, “State Centralization and the Erosion of Local Autonomy,” Journal of Politics 36 (February 1974): 44-76.

³³Because the ACIR stopped operation in 1996, the 1999 data were obtained directly from Bureau of Census reports in the Statistical Abstract of the United States and www.census.gov/govs/www/index.html.

³⁴With only 20 years worth of data, there are too few degrees of freedom to perform an adequate time-

series analysis that accounts for autocorrelation, the lag structure of the data, and control variables. Faced with the decision of analyzing satisfactory, but limited, data using crude methods versus not analyzing those data at all, it is more prudent to choose the former.

³⁵Notwithstanding, the caveat that correlation-does-not-presuppose-causation applies. An alternative interpretation of Figure 1 is that public opinion responds to changes in government policy. Yet keep in mind that the typically low level of public attention to politics leads to an a priori expectation of no relationship between public opinion and functional responsibility. Showing that a relationship exists at all is the contribution of this paper. Teasing apart the causal dynamics of this relationship is a ripe subject for future research.

³⁶Downs, "Accountability Payoffs in Federal Systems?"

³⁷For evidence on voting behavior see Kevin Arceneaux, The Federal Face of Democratic Representation: The Effects of Responsibility Attribution on Cross-Level Voting Behavior and Government Responsiveness in the United States (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 2003); Lonna Rae Atkeson and Randall W. Partin, "Economic and Referendum Voting: A Comparison of Gubernatorial and Senatorial Elections," American Political Science Review 89 (March 1995): 99-107; Robert M. Stein, "Economic Voting for Governor and U.S. Senator: The Electoral Consequences of Federalism," Journal of Politics 52 (February 1990): 29-53. For evidence of a structure underlying public opinion see Schneider and Jacoby, "Public Attitudes toward the Policy Responsibilities of the National and State Governments"; Thompson and Elling, "Let Them Eat Marblecake."