



The Latest Research

Federalism in the United States is dynamic. The roles and responsibilities of federal and state governments are constantly evolving based on political and economic context, policy demands and innovation, Supreme Court rulings, and the political philosophies, ideological preferences, and partisan fortunes of lawmakers at both levels of government. Current scholars of federalism find themselves in a particularly interesting period in the development of intergovernmental relations. The worst of the recession is over, yet fiscal stresses remain. Federal, state, and local governments are trying to reset their relationships with each other to deal most effectively with what comes next—but no one is sure what comes next.

Below are summaries of some of the most recent research on federalism. Two constant themes emerge from this stream of scholarship: First, intergovernmental relations have undergone and are currently undergoing dramatic changes, and, second, those changes have enormous implications not just for politics and policy but also for the day-to-day lives of citizens.

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- **Bowling, Cynthia J., and J. Mitchel Pickerill.** “Fragmented Federalism: The State of American Federalism 2012–13,” *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 43 (2013): 315–356.

The scholarly journal *Publius* periodically publishes articles by scholars of state politics on the state of American federalism. This article introduces an entire issue of that journal devoted to academic studies of the current climate of state–federal relations. As Bowling

and Pickerill conclude, these relations are, “arguably, more chaotic, complex and contentious than ever before.” There seems to be less and less of a broad, coherent philosophy governing intergovernmental relations and more and more marriages of policy convenience when the ideological and partisan stars line up—and the pursuit of bitter and acrimonious divorces when they do not. The bottom-line conclusion here is that increasingly intense partisan and ideological differences are creating gridlock in the federal system just as they have done in Congress. States are seeking to pursue their own policy paths in areas such as gay marriage, fracking, health care, immigration, and gun control—embracing federal guidance when it fits local politics and forcefully rejecting that guidance when it does not. The result is not only a patchwork of policies but heightened intergovernmental conflict.

- **Rivlin, Alice.** “Rethinking Federalism for More Effective Governance.” *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 42 (2012): 387–400.

In this article, Rivlin argues that the realities of post-recession governance create a pressing need for a reconsideration of the relationship between state and federal governments. In particular, Rivlin pushes for two key reforms. First, she argues that state and federal governments should rethink their job responsibilities. Rather than taking on increasingly shared responsibilities in areas such as education, she suggests, one level of government should take primary responsibility. Who gets the job should depend on who is best positioned

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