INTL8300
Special Topics in Comparative Politics:
The Political Economy of Federalism and Decentralization
University of Georgia
Department of International Affairs
Candler Hall 117, Wednesday 6:50-9:50pm

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Course Description: The structure of government has changed dramatically since the mid-twentieth century. Not only has authority been transferred upward to organizations like the European Union, but it has also been shifted downward, with significant functions and competencies being transferred to subnational levels of government. Indeed, where changes in the structure of government have taken place since the end of the Second World War it has mostly been to the effect of increasing rather than decreasing subnational autonomy. This course examines theories and empirical studies that explore the causes and consequences of these trends. In so doing, the course surveys an area of research that became one of political science’s most vibrant “growth industries” after long having occupied a niche in the discipline. We will review the theoretical literature on federalism and decentralization and study how decentralized systems work in practice in diverse settings around the world.

The course is organized into three main parts. We begin by asking why states decentralize. We will take economic theories of federalism as our starting point, but we quickly move beyond them by introducing identity and party politics. In the second part of the course we ask why federations form. We will examine whether federations as diverse as the United States, Belgium, Argentina, and the European Union have formed for similar reasons? Do federal countries necessitate a specific type of contract and if so what are key characteristics of this contract? In the third and final part of the course we will examine the implications of decentralization for governance, accountability and policy outcomes. Does decentralization make government more efficient and more responsive to citizens? Does decentralization have implications for redistributive policies and equality? How does it affect civil conflict in ethnically divided countries?

Readings:

Assignments: Because the course is meant to help students design empirical research projects, the main assignment is a final analytical paper. In this paper (15-20 pages), you will be expected to formulate a research puzzle, review competing theories, develop your own hypotheses and do the empirical research to test your hypotheses. You will hold a
conference like presentation on your research on the last day of class (19 April), where you will receive feedback from a discussant assigned to you. The final paper is due on May 15, 2017.

Students also chose three weeks for which they will write a short 1-2 page paper reacting to the readings. These papers may critique both theoretical and empirical aspects of the readings, discuss possible extensions and empirical applications or propose alternative approaches. They will form the basis for a more active role for the student in leading this week’s discussion and will be circulated by Sunday night before the class.

Grading is as follows:
- Short papers: 15% each
- Participation: 15%
- Final paper: 40%

**January 11: Introduction and Course Organization**


**PART I: WHY DECENTRALIZE?**

**January 18: The Optimal Assignment of Governmental Authority**


**January 25: Identity Politics and Decentralization**

February 1: Party Politics and Decentralization

**PART II: WHY COME TOGETHER?**

February 8. Federalism

February 15: Consociationalism and Interdependence

February 22: Measuring Decentralization and Federalism
March 1: The European Union


**Springbreak**

**PART III: OUTCOMES**

March 15: Does Decentralization Constrain Leviathan?


March 22: Is There a Race-to-the-bottom in Social Policy?


March 29: Veto Points or Laboratories of Democracy?


**April 5: Accountability in Decentralized Systems**

**April 12: Conflict in Decentralized Systems**

**April 19: Presentation of Research papers**

**April 26: No class, ECPR Workshop** “The Spatial Reconfiguration of Public Policy in Multi-Level Systems”