

FEDERALISM

When the Founding Fathers drafted the Constitution, they wanted to create a government different from the English monarchy. They wanted a new government aligned with their ideals of liberty and freedom. The new government would share power between the people, states, and national government. The new government was based on federalism. This form of government would preserve liberty by diffusing power.

What Is Federalism?

Federalism is a form of government where a national, or federal, government shares powers with smaller governments. These governments work together to govern one area. Federalism keeps one person or government from gaining too much power. The founders chose this system to prevent tyranny.

Federalism also gives citizens more ways to take part in the political process. Citizens can vote for more offices at the local and state levels. Citizens can reach out to more politicians to have their voices heard.

Federalism in the U.S.

In the United States, the national, state, and local governments work together. All these levels of government make rules for their citizens.

The powers of the federal government are listed in the Constitution in Article I, Section 8. The Constitution describes the powers and responsibilities of the federal government. These powers that are clearly written in the Constitution are called *enumerated powers*.

The Tenth Amendment describes the powers of the states and the people. This amendment says that if the Constitution does not give a specified power to the federal government, it belongs to the people and the states.

How Do the Federal and State Governments Share Powers?

The Constitution does not explain which powers the state and federal governments share. Shared powers are called *concurrent powers*. These include the ability to create and enforce laws, collect taxes, and establish court systems.

The federal government has many powers related to national affairs. The federal government can declare war, manage foreign affairs, and print money. It can also regulate trade between states, which is called *interstate commerce*. The federal government is also responsible for managing the United States Postal Service. This is related to interstate commerce as it facilitates the delivery of goods between states.

State Government and Local Government Powers

State and local governments are responsible for other public works and programs. These can include education, road maintenance, police departments, elections, and driver's licenses. When smaller governments manage these local affairs, they can better meet the needs of the people in their communities.

States and local governments often share powers. For example, both state and local governments have courts, like municipal courts at the local level and a state supreme court at the state level.

Schools are another institution that both levels of government have power over. State governments often set standards for education, but local governments manage smaller operations. State governments decide what students should learn in school and the requirements for graduation, but local governments can control issues like setting budgets, hiring teachers, when school starts, and when to close school for weather conditions.

Both state and local governments can manage law enforcement. The state government controls some areas of police like state troopers and highway patrol, but local governments like cities and towns have their own police departments. State troopers have jurisdiction over the whole state, but local police departments are only able to enforce the laws in their cities.

References

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