At the most basic level federalism is a way of organizing a country territorially. Why should this matter so much to politics? This seminar will address this question and will explore its implications in several domains. These will include the interconnections between federalism and democracy, federalism and political order, federalism and economics, and federalism and institutional development. We will also explore theoretical debates about federalism’s institutional structure, how it evolves, and how it shapes important political outcomes.

“Comparative federalism” has become a rather hot topic in political science, and like most “hot” topics, it is marked by considerable conceptual confusion and massive amounts of information that are only partially made sense of by theory. By the end of this seminar you should have an idea of the state of the debate in this field, and you will also have a good sense of just how much more needs to be done.

Course requirements: The most important assignment is a research paper of about 20 pages that applies some of the theoretical literatures we address to a country (or countries) of your choice. However, participation in class discussion and short written assignments that show a critical grappling with the readings will also be important. Here is the breakdown:

Weekly requirements: Timely reading of weekly assignments and active participation in seminar discussion. Students will turn in a commentary on the weekly readings to be submitted at the beginning of each class. The commentaries are intended to help you unify the readings and raise questions for class discussion. They can consist of 2 or more questions on the readings, or a more general set of comments. The commentaries should reflect a critical analysis of the readings. As the semester progresses, they should reflect an 'accumulated wisdom,' that is, issues raised in earlier weeks should be brought in to challenge or analyze the current week's readings. Each student will turn in 5 commentaries in the quarter (including the week(s) for which oral presentations are made). They should be NO MORE than one and a half to two pages double-spaced. The instructor will evaluate these on a scale of "excellent, good, fair, poor."

Student presentations: Five-minute oral presentations on selected readings to initiate class discussion (the number of presentations for each student will depend on class size). Note: the presentations are not to be a summary of the readings (everyone will have read the assigned
pieces), but a set of comments or questions to get discussion rolling. This norm will be enforced ruthlessly by the instructor.

**Final research paper**: This assignment will be an opportunity for you to delve into a country, region, or topic that is of interest to you, applying the theoretical questions we will be discussing in the class. Basically, this assignment will be about exploring problems of federalism within an empirical context or larger theoretical debate that is of interest to you. The paper should be between 20 to 30 pages in length. It will be due on Friday, December 7.

**Approximate grade distribution**: class participation, weekly questions, and oral presentations: 50 percent. Final assignment: 50 percent.

The following books have been ordered for purchase (and are at Norris):


Most assigned journal articles will either be posted on our courseinfo website or are available as downloads from Northwestern’s library (“electronic resources”). In some cases where book sections or chapters are assigned, we will arrange to have them available for photocopying.

**September 27**: Introduction

**October 4**: What is Federalism? And why should we care?

**Readings**:


**October 11:** “Designing” Federal Systems: A rational-normative approach to understanding federalism:

**Readings:**


**October 18:** Federalism and Democracy: A view from the United States

**Readings:**


**October 25:** Fiscal Federalism

**Readings:**


**Recommended:**

November 1: Origins and Evolution of Federalism ("Big Bang" theories and transitions from unitary states to federalism).

Readings:


November 8: Multinationalism and Federalism

Readings:


November 15: Federalism, Coalition-Building, and Policy-Making (boy, does federalism “matter”):

Readings:


**Recommended:**


**November 29:** Federalism and Political Parties

**Readings:**


**December 4: Democratization and Federalism**


