

MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE

Multilevel governance is the pattern of distribution of authority inside and beyond the state, authority being the capacity to make binding decisions and agreements that conform to accepted rules. States with multilevel governance tend to have a decentralisation of power both at the centre of the state and across its territory. At the centre, decision-making is not vested wholly in a single individual or clique, but instead it is a responsibility that gets shared amongst more autonomous officials and bodies. Across the state's territory, authority is divested also in various regional government bodies. Similarly, all governments today tend to have some multilevel dimension in international relations.

A functionalist logic – that something exists to serve a function – and a demand for self-rule are presented as the two rationalisations for multilevel governance.

The Functionalist Perspective

Multilevel governance fulfils the need for organised distribution of public goods from the local to the global level. For instance, a local or municipal government is best placed to decide on how a local service such as the public library or the schools ought to be improved upon or changed, whereas public goods with a broad application and externality such as healthcare or pensions are best implemented by a national government. Generally, the greater the population, the greater the number of rungs or levels on the ladder of government within the state and the fewer over it.

The Self-rule Perspective

Multilevel governance is responding to the outlook of a certain group that sees itself as a separate community. The insistence of minorities for self-rule separates them from other state regions, and when central governments allow for this, the result is a *differentiated government*. Some articulations of multilevel governance are federalism, home-rule, decentralisation, confederation, and devolution.

Drivers of Multilevel Government

Substate governance has become deeply established in almost all countries as territories have secured distinct powers and government has become differentiated. Some factors driving multilevel government are:

Ethno-territorial Identity

Groups that coalesce around a regional ethnic identity can call for self-rule and force the central government to decentralise power.

Democracy

In authoritarian systems, the rulers are highly mistrustful of substate government because it can create openings for opposing power centres beyond the rulers' control. In contrast, in democracies, rulers are less preoccupied with consolidating power and willing to transfer authority out of their hands if that garners them support.

Interdependence

Trade, travel, and migration across countries have increased rapidly over the years. As a result, international coalitions have come into being to address the large-scale externalities that have arisen such as the need for trade or migration regulations, and to address security or climate change concerns. Within the state, the presence of multilevel government addresses the small-scale, socio-economic effects of such change on communities.

Affluence

Affluence demands convenience. With increases in wealth, the demand for public goods to be provided more conveniently to the citizens arises. Some of these public goods are health care, education, infrastructure, and provisions for a viable environment which are best provided by regional and local authorities who are privy to the degree of need and optimal methods of delivery.

Peace

War spurs centralisation while peace allows governments the scope to decentralise authority to regional, local, and international jurisdictions.

Effects of Multilevel Governance

Decentralisation through multilevel governance brings people closer to those who govern them and gives them better access to policymaking through elections at various levels. This in turn requires the government to be more responsive to citizens which contributes to the strengthening of democracy. Substate governance can create opportunities for minorities that allow for different power-sharing mechanisms which can be the difference between secession and the continued union of states. Multilevel governance also creates variance in policy within a country so that rather than blanket proposals, there are more accommodating options for different groups. However, poorly managed multilevel governance can also entrench or worsen territorial divisions.

Adapted from Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks and Arjan H Schakel, 'Multilevel governance' in Daniele Caramani (ed), *Comparative Politics* (OUP 2020)

Further Reading

Daniel J Elazar, *Exploring Federalism* (University of Alabama Press 1987)

Agustina Giraudy, Eduardo Moncada and Richard Snyder, *Inside Countries: Subnational Research in Comparative Politics* (Cambridge University Press 2019)

Daniel Treisman, *The Architecture of Government: Rethinking Political Decentralization* (Princeton University Press 2007)

Nawalage S. Cooray and Sirimal Abeyratne, *Decentralization and Development of Sri Lanka Within a Unitary State* (Springer Singapore 2017)