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A Postfunctionalist Theory of Regional Government

An Inquiry into Regional Authority and Regional Policy Provision

The vertical structure of government has been a topic for political science for a couple of centuries, yet the causes of regional authority are still poorly understood. Abundant theories have been proposed and many case studies have been undertaken but a systematic empirical study embracing a wide range of countries, years and policies was lacking. This study presents an inquiry into regional authority and regional policy provision for 42 countries, 58 years (1950–2008) and 34 policies. By examining variation in authority and policy provision this study proposes a postfunctional theory of regional government. The results indicate that regional authority and policy provision is by and large a result of a trade-off between functionality and identity—e.g. scale effects of policies and country size and ethnic fragmentation and ethnoregional parties versus externalities. While regional authority in the early postwar decades seemed broadly consistent with a functional rationale, the force of identity seems to have increased in more recent decades. Also, identity leads to significant regionalization of policy provision, in particular of social-cultural policies. This study, thus, identifies under which conditions regional authority and regional policy provision becomes *postfunctional* and thereby has important implications for our understanding of the evolution of regional government.

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