Yo, CPW-type people:

It’s been a while since I last showed my face seeking your wit and wisdom. My past experiences have been painful, yet useful, sort of like eating lima beans and drinking carrot juice. Here is the first stab at beginning a chapter on my dissertation. The usual apologies apply (about typos, no data, no works cited etc.). The project has two parts. The first part will explore the relationship between governmental institutions – specifically electoral systems and federalism – and economic management on one hand, and the development of broadcasting systems on the other. The second half will look at the effects that the broadcasting systems in place have had on the level and distribution of political knowledge among the citizenry of various stable democratic countries. This chapter deals with federalism and public broadcasting governance.

Obviously any feedback is welcome. The initial central point; the correlation between federations and decentralized governance seems kind of obvious though perhaps valuable—no one has bothered to document it cross-nationally before to my knowledge. Therefore, after establishing that claim, I used this paper as almost a free-writing exercise to begin to toss out some ideas developing links between the development of federalism and public broadcasting. I need ideas along these lines to deepen this chapter. Tell me what you want to know about Canada and the U.S. to convince you of some mechanism of changes. What other countries would you want me to use? What sorts of information would you want to see in a large N data study? What other ideas can I use from Pierson and the path-dependency literature (I really want to get this idea right when talking about historical development, like I’m going to have to do in the opening three chapters.) How can I best differentiate between threshold effects and incremental changes? Should I even care? Finally, I’m using Bednar’s definition of federations. I like how she conceptualizes the idea, but she doesn’t have a comprehensive data set. Would the WDI or Heniez’s political constraints data base work better for generic coding purposes? Thanks so much.

Cheers! -Patrick

Introduction

As we saw in the last two chapters discussing the correlation between government economic intervention, proportional electoral systems and broadcasting systems; broader institutions and attitudes in a society lay a framework for more narrow policy outcomes in the existence, funding and governance of public broadcasting. This chapter continues the theme, analyzing the connections between the distribution of authority in a country’s public broadcasting system and federalism. I show that federations are much more likely than unitary governments to have decentralized broadcasting systems, in which regions have a large direct say in the governance and programming of public broadcasting. I refer to these decentralized systems as distributed broadcasting systems. Second, I theorize about the institutional shifts in federations, and the corresponding shifts in broadcasting institutions, illustrating these points with two case studies\(^1\) in the US and Canada.

\(^1\) For now, that is. I’m working on getting broader data together on funding levels and governance mechanisms to generate a large-n study illustrated by case studies.
What is a distributed broadcasting system?

To determine whether or not a system is distributed, I examine the nature of the governance structure of the public broadcasting service in relationship to regional governmental units. Broadly put, if the regions have a significant say in public broadcasting, then the system is distributed. At minimum, the concept implies that regions must have direct representation on the governing board of a public broadcast system.

Austria is the example of this minimum. The Austrian Broadcasting Network (ORF) is a national public network that until 1993 had a monopoly on terrestrial television and radio services. A 1960 Constitutional Court decision rejected a Lander challenge to the central government’s control over both radio and TV broadcasting, so there are no Lander-based or controlled networks. However, each Land gets one representative on the 35-member ORF Board of control, for a total of nine. Therefore, the Lander make up more than a quarter of the board’s voting power, which is also divided among the parties in parliament (15 seats) the viewer’s association (six seats) and the ORF’s employees’ organization (five seats) (Rosen 1988).

The maximal definition of distributed broadcasting is demonstrated by Austria’s northern neighbor Germany. Stemming from fears of the centralized propaganda broadcasting apparatus run by the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s, the German Basic Law expressly reserves the power of broadcasting to the individual Lander (Humphries 1994). Each land runs its own radio broadcasting network, like Bremen; or has a treaty with other Lander to form a regional network, like the North German Network, consisting of the five northern Lander.

In turn, each of these regional organizations banded together to form a centralized television network, the ARD, to pool content from each of the regions. Despite the central structure of the ARD, however, each regional organization retains control over content. Additionally, laws regulating advertising, ownership and frequency distribution are generated at the Lander, not federal level.
Germany does have a second national television network, the ZDF, which was formed in 1963. The federal government originally intended ZDF to be a creature run by the central government, something like a German equivalent of the British Broadcasting Corporation. However, the Lander protested the decision and won a Constitutional Court ruling that broadcasting was solely the province of the Lander. As a result, ZDF was created in a treaty among all the Lander, rather than by the federal government in Bonn.

Between these two goalposts exists a wide variety of distributed systems. In some cases, like Canada and Spain, a national public broadcaster co-exists with a variety of regional networks. Some countries have national public broadcast network made up of autonomous stations funded by a combination of federal and state funding, like the United States. Others have a nationally unified broadcaster with regionally autonomous components – like Switzerland and Belgium. Finally, some federations have no central broadcasting system, and the occasional regional government chooses to operate individual broadcasting outlets or a small network as in Mexico or Brazil.

**What a Distributed Broadcasting System is not**

The networks in distributed public broadcasting systems, like their centralized counterparts, rarely have control over the actual distribution of frequencies, technical standards of broadcasting or even basic standards for advertising or norms. Often, a centralized panel, like the U.S Federal Communications Commission or the Canadian Board of Broadcasting Governance makes these general decisions, even if regions have a great deal of power to shape broadcasting. Therefore, these technical considerations do not factor into the definition of a distributed broadcast system.

Second, the notion of distributed public broadcasting itself only speaks to the institutional features of public broadcasting, not the relative strength of the system. Distributed systems certainly can result from the inattention of the central government, as they do in Brazil and Mexico. However, they can also result from conscious design, as in Germany. Nor is there necessarily clear variation in
viewership or funding patterns traditions in public broadcasting, while the United States is comparatively weak, both in terms of funding and viewership in comparison to the distributed system of Switzerland. (Iyengar and Callahan 2009).

**Federations**

Here I use the Bednar standards to delineate federations from unitary governments (2005). Bednar conceptualizes federations as having three essential components. Countries that meet two of these criteria she defines as “quasi-federations.” Here, I define federal government as any country meeting the standards of Bednar’s definition of a quasi-federation or federation in order to capture the difference between countries that have a federal character and those that do not.

**Case selection:**

I use the polity IV scale to identify stable democracies since 1920. A stable democracy is one that scores a 5 or above of the 21-point polity authoritarian-democratic continuum for six years or more – at least one presidential election and one legislative election.

**Preliminary Results**

The results for 39 countries whose current broadcasting systems (as of 2008) I have been able to code are shown in table 1. The data show that federal states are roughly 14 times as likely to have a distributed broadcasting system as unitary states are, while only being half as likely to have a centralized public broadcasting system. The correlation between being a federation and having a distributed broadcasting system is .585.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Distributed Public</th>
<th>Centralized Public</th>
<th>No Public</th>
<th>Total row</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unitary State</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100 (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal State</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100 (39)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results in table 1 give preliminary evidence that there is a connection between federal systems and distributed public broadcasting systems. However, this conclusion, though important, is somewhat superficial and begs more detailed questions. The probabilistic nature of the correlation begs questions of about the possible path-dependent relationship between federal systems and broadcasting systems. Does a switch from a unitary government to a federation guarantee a likewise shift in broadcasting? Or does a centralized broadcaster established under a unitary government remain in place after the switch to a federal government? Might some combination of these ideas occur, with the central broadcaster retaining a role, but regional broadcasters developing alongside? Do other variables, like democratization matter in the switch? Obviously, I can’t answer all these questions in this memo, but I can illustrate these dynamics with some sample cases and provide some clues to more unified explanation of how broadcasting institutions are refracted through changes to political institutions.

One conclusion seems fairly reasonable. It intuitively seems more plausible that federalism precedes a distributed broadcasting system rather than the other way around. In the list of countries above, this certainly is the case – the United States, Canada, Switzerland and Belgium, for example, all developed their federal characters well before they developed their broadcasting systems. During re-democratization after the Second World War, both Germany and Austria became federal, and then consciously designed their broadcasting systems to have federal characteristics as well. Similar reforms to Spanish public broadcasting followed Spain’s move toward a federal structure during the 1980s.

Types of change

Pierson (2005) discusses various forms of path dependence as policies develop across time, including the threshold model and various cumulative models. Threshold models of change predict no change in the dependent variables until an increasing (or decreasing) independent variable reaches a certain critical value or tipping point at which the dependent variable changes dramatically. Models of cumulative change, in contrast, show a continuous evolution between the two variables, though the
precise mathematical nature of the function between the two variables may take a linear, exponential, or a variety of other forms.

Figure 1 graphically represents both the threshold model and cumulative models. The x-axis represents an ordinal model of Bednar’s definition of federalism – countries with zero of three features would score 0, one would score 1 etc. The y-axis represents some idealized measurement of the distribution of the broadcasting system. I present figure 1 to help conceptualize possible tests to determine the path-dependent relationship between federalism and distributed public broadcasting. Under both mechanisms, we would expect large changes in federal structure to produce large changes in broadcasting systems. However, the linear cumulative model (blue line) would predict that small changes in the federation’s structure or balance of power between the regional and national governments would produce similar small changes in the broadcasting system, while the threshold model would predict small changes in the former would likely have no effect on the latter.

![Figure 1: Possible connections between PBS and federalism](image-url)
Naturally, measuring changes in a state’s federal nature is a tricky business. Bednar has
developed quite clear conceptions what federations are, but does not develop a detailed dataset of
changes to federations over time outside of the decade 1990-2000. Currently, I also lack the detailed
data to make precise and relevant cross national and temporal connections. But the idea of examining
small changes in a country’s federal structure over time to see what sort of corresponding changes occur
in public broadcast structure seems a potentially fruitful avenue to explore. I provide two examples
here that seem to support the idea of an incremental change rather than threshold effects.

**Example 1: Canada – a decentralizing federation leads to distributed public broadcasting**

Canada’s public broadcasting system began life in 1932 as a centralized national entity with the
founding of the Canadian Radio-Broadcasting Commission, which was the forerunner to the Canadian
Broadcasting Corporation created in 1936. Though it would broadcast in both English and French, the
network was designed to be a national enterprise to unite all Canadians with a common national
outlook. The jurisdictional question was settled after Quebec’s unsuccessful 1932 challenge of the
national government’s authority to operate a radio service. The CBC operated as the sole public radio
and later TV network for the first four decades of Canadian broadcasting. However, as numerous
scholars have catalogued, Canada’s national government’s power waned starting in the 1960s with the
result that provinces took on more power to set policy (Chibber and Kollman, 2004) BEDNAR 1999).
Broadcasting was no exception. Though the BBC remained the public broadcasting behemoth in the
Canadian landscape, several provinces took the initiative to create their own broadcasting networks.
Quebec led the way in the late 1960s, with a French-speaking network; followed by Ontario in 1970,
which created two public networks – one in English and one in French. British Columbia, Alberta and
Saskatchewan fielded their own networks starting in 1981, 1983 and 1991, while Manitoba is currently
debating developing one. Two possible avenues to pin down the change regarding the bi-level structure
of Canadian broadcasting, also present in Spain, involve tracking the amount of government funding of
the CBC against the regional networks and the viewership share of each network for the dependent variable (distributed broadcasting) against changes in the independent variable of institutional design (federalism).

**Case #2: The United States: Public Broadcasting, the Great Society and the New Federalism.**

Public broadcasting in the United States has always been the sickly sibling of the robust private networks that dominate the American airwaves. The US government has never regulated broadcasting to the same extent of other democracies. Until the 1928 Radio Act, the federal government did not even act to regulate frequency allocation – a step that had been taken at least a decade earlier in the other industrialized countries. It’s no surprise then, that funding public broadcasting activities was left to individual states or localities or even individual charitable contributions, which still make up a disproportionately large base of US public broadcasting budgets in comparison to peer countries.

Until the 1930s, the U.S. was also a federation with powers primarily vested within the states. However, as numerous scholars have noted, the national government began drastically expanded its power starting with Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal programs. (Walton and Smith, Chibber and Kollman) This trend of the expansion of federal power continued through to the 1960s, with national Civil Rights legislation joining Lyndon B. Johnson’s other Great Society programs. A small afterthought to the Great Society was the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, which set up the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

CPB funds a variety of public broadcasting outlets in the United States, from direct grants to content producers – like the Children’s Television Workshop of *Sesame Street* fame to grants to local stations to help them improve technical abilities. However, one of the biggest roles of CPB is to fund the non-profit networks of National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting Service, which were created in 1970 and 1969 in part to take advantage of the new influx of federal spending.

In line with increases in other federal programs like Social Security and Medicare, the CPB received a massive increase in federal dollars relative to the size of the economy throughout the 1970s.
Funding leveled off in the 1980s and began declining from the 1990s onward, as shown in Figure 2, which shows data from the CPB’s annual revenue reports. This move is coincidental with the growth of the national government, and with the subsequent emphasis on States’ rights pushed by conservative presidents in the 1980s and legislatures in the 1990s and 2000s, when House Republicans made a strong push to eliminate the CPB. President George W. Bush also attempted to remove public broadcasting funding during the 2005 budget cycle, though he was rebuffed.

![Figure 2: public broadcasting funding vs. GDP](image)

However, when discussing spending patterns, we also need to analyze state and local spending on public broadcasting, which seems to parallel the national trajectory during the time for which data is available. Finally, the trend may also be against government spending on public broadcasting in general, and not any differentiation between a distributed and nation. Currently the data in the U.S. is inconclusive toward showing anything more than the sharp initial movement toward a nationalized Public Broadcasting system in the 1970s.