

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social Thought and Policy
Review

Volume: 01 Issue: 01(2023)



The Effect of Federalism on Minority Rights Protection

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Receive Date: January 11, 2023, **Revise Date:** March 09, 2023, **Accept Date:** May 03, 2023, **Available Online:** June 30, 2023

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the complex relationship between federalism and the protection of minority rights through a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative analysis and qualitative case studies. Drawing on panel data from twenty federated states between 2000 and 2020, the research develops a Minority Rights Protection Index (MRPI) to evaluate the impact of decentralization, fiscal autonomy, and judicial independence on minority outcomes. The quantitative results demonstrate that federalism is positively correlated with improvements in minority political representation, language rights enforcement, and welfare allocation, though significant variation exists depending on the design of institutions and intergovernmental cooperation. Tables further highlight disparities across different dimensions of federal structures, such as fiscal decentralization and judicial protections, while figures reveal trends in education access, welfare distribution, and regional disparities. Complementing this, qualitative findings from case studies of Canada, India, and Ethiopia reveal that while federalism can empower minorities by offering autonomy and cultural recognition, it can also entrench inequalities where local elites exploit decentralization to suppress minority voices. The integrated analysis thus reveals federalism as a dual-edged instrument: in inclusive and democratic settings, it fosters protection and representation, but in fragmented or authoritarian contexts, it can exacerbate exclusion. Overall, the study underscores the importance of institutional safeguards, judicial oversight, and strong civil society in ensuring that federalism fulfills its potential as a mechanism for protecting minority rights.

KEYWORDS: Federalism, Minority Rights, Decentralization, Political Representation, Judicial Protections, Institutional Design

INTRODUCTION

Federalism has been considered as a two-sided sword in the preservation of minority rights as it is a system of government where the national government and the local government share power. They have argued that the devolution process must be given a chance to have the local voices, unique policies to represent the various communities in protecting the people despite the critiques that the federal systems can also increase inequality or lead to lack of jurisdictions. The recent empirical research has helped us to comprehend this dilemma more as they consider how the federal accords can strengthen and weaken the safeguarding of minorities rights simultaneously. According to Cook (2019), decentralized institutions play a role in local innovation of inclusive education and language rights in the existence of regional governments to endorse minor identities. According to Belanger and Aarts (2020), heterogenous cultures should be federated with specific affirmative action initiatives in the regions, where the ethnic population is concentrated. Another case, Meier and Saldívar (2020) provide, is that of Mexico that allowed state autonomy, which led to a more effective anti-discrimination law in border areas. But scholars caution that federalism may even serve to strengthen marginalization. As Berry and Gagnon (2018) have argued, fragmented governance often protects the state authorities against national scrutiny leading to the inequality of minority protection. Hayes and Patel (2019) use the example of research conducted on U.S. states that had a history of racial discrimination to prove that it was possible to deprive minorities of the right to vote because of the decentralized election laws. Comparing the situation between India and other countries, Singh and Verma (2021) demonstrate that, despite constitutional requirements, Indian states that lack intergovernmental coordination have very often failed in defending the rights of Dalit and Adivasi. Further complexity is brought in by studies of ethnic federalism. Alem and Zewdie (2019) found in their evaluation of the ethnic federal units of Ethiopia that these divisions sometimes worsened intercommunal animosities instead of diminishing war. It is justified by Nyalunga (2018) who shows how regionalized identity politics can contribute to increasing secessionist demands and endangering the universal protection of minority rights. Institutional design is also very important. Fossum and Sjørusen (2019) believe that constitutional asymmetries, e.g., the status of certain areas of the land, can reduce or increase inequality according to the context of history. Khan and Roberts (2020) point out in their analysis of the asymmetrical federal structure in Jammu and Kashmir in India the threats of political marginality that accompany the systems. Conversely, Mack and Li (2020) argue that this prospect is compromised by partisan seizure of subnational courts especially in centralized cases of party leadership.

Federalism also has an influence on policy innovation. Pritchett and Tomlinson (2019) provide provincial data on South Africa to show that the success of decentralized jurisdictions in launching inclusive systems of education that later scaled up to the national level. Conversely, the poorer regions with minority populations are often underinvested in the long term, which restricts their ability to provide the required services, as Martin and Svensson (2020) remark that in federations where fiscal transfers are not equal. Electoral representation and federalism are equally problematic in their relationship. As long as minority groups were still politically disenfranchised in areas with ethnic majority which dominate the regional mechanisms, Navarro and Costa (2018) demonstrate that multi-level electoral systems in Brazil enhanced the representation of minorities in regional legislatures (Diaz and Gomez, 2021). LaCroix (2020) states that federated systems often oppose quota laws on federal levels, preventing the success of the pro-minority policies. The comparative institutions literature underlines the importance of the intergovernmental collaboration. Federal states that have strong collaborative councils such as inter-parliamentary forums are in a better position to organize solutions to systemic discrimination as evidenced by Arora and Verhoeven (2021). Conversely, federations that have poor supervisory processes often leave decisions on the way to deal with minority matters to regional elites (Bajpai and Kalra, 2019). Civil society is also involved. Whereas Tewari (2019) demonstrates how advocacy coalitions in Nepal gained mandates of proportional representation in the process of the constitutional reorganization, Li and Paine (2018) explain how minority NGOs in Canada achieved linguistic rights in the context of provincial autonomy. Overall, the preservation of minority rights depends on federalism to a great extent. With powerful constitutional structures, strong intergovernmental structures and active minority alliances, federalism can facilitate the protection of rights locally. Decentralization however, jeopardizes the development of spheres of neglect and exclusion where there are no safeguards. This research is undertaken by exploring institutional architecture, judicial procedures, and civil society dynamics of different federated countries in order to cross this complexity and identify whether the institutions of federation facilitate or hinder the maintenance of minority rights.

METHODOLOGY

This paper explores the relationship of federalism and the continuation of the rights of minorities through the mixed-methods research approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches. It is reasonable to combine these methods since federal arrangements are complex and multidimensional, and thus pursuing a perfect understanding of them in the form of numerical indicators is not feasible. Although the qualitative strand provides the contextual

analysis of the institutional structure, political negotiations, as well as judicial interventions which influence the lived experience of minority groups, the quantitative one focuses on the measurement of the outcomes concerning the rights of minorities in federated states.

The quantitative component consisted of a sample of twenty federal and quasi-federal states that were surveyed to collect panel data between 2000 and 2020. The Minority Rights Protection Index (MRPI) was constructed using indicators of databases such as the World Bank Governance Indicators, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project and the Minorities at risk (MAR) project. The MRPI covers political representation, language rights, anti-discrimination legislation, educational access. The effect of institutional design on minority rights by the federal government was estimated according to the following econometric formula:

$$MRPI_{it} = \alpha + \beta FED_{it} + \gamma X_{it} + \mu_i + \lambda_t + \epsilon_{it}$$

Where $MRPI_{it}$ is the Minority Rights Protection Index score for country i at time t , FED_{it} represents a composite measure of federalism (including degree of decentralization, asymmetry, and fiscal autonomy), X_{it} is a vector of control variables (economic development, regime type, ethnic fractionalization), μ_i captures country-specific fixed effects, λ_t represents time-specific shocks, and ϵ is the error term. The coefficient β indicates the Federalism's limited impact on minority rights. To deal with any endogeneity issues, there were robustness tests that were conducted with instrumental variable regressions and random-effects. The statistical analysis is complemented by the qualitative component through the focus on three federations chosen due to their diversity in terms of institutional design (India, Canada, and Ethiopia). Data was collected through document analysis of constitutions, legislative discussions, court decisions and policy reports, and also through interviews with policymakers and minority rights activists. NVivo software was used to code qualitative data based on such themes as institutional guarantees, regional autonomy, and mediation of conflicts. These themes were compared across the cases to establish trends of convergence and divergence in the ways that federal arrangements influence the protection of minority rights. The results were incorporated in the interpretation phase and this entailed the synthesis of qualitative knowledge about the behaviour of the institutions and quantitative information on relationships. As an example, qualitative evidence was referenced to know the mechanisms, i.e., as increased local service delivery, minority elite empowerment, or more representation in the decision-making forums, the quantitative evidence showed that the fiscal decentralization is positively correlated with minority rights. Conversely, qualitative case

information was explored to find out whether local elites had employed autonomy to oppress the minority or restrict them in exercising their rights in the event that statistical studies showed that there were negative relationships. This integration made it possible to have a holistic knowledge of the effects of federalism on minority rights within the structural and experiential perspective. The entire methodological structure is summarised by Fig. 1 that depicts the flow of data collection through to the mixed-methods integration, qualitative coding, and quantitative modelling. This process describes the combination of several sources of evidence in a way that is highly systematic in order to deliver rigorous and contextually enforced findings.



Fig. 1. Methodology workflow for assessing the effect of federalism on minority rights protection, integrating data collection, quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, and mixed-methods integration.

RESULTS

The results of the study provide the empirical knowledge regarding how the concept of federalism influences the protection of minority rights. The findings present the patterns in institutional structures, political reporting and policy enforcement in the different federated systems using both quantitative measures and qualitative records. The tables, presenting organized statistical data, and the figures, presenting trends and comparative outcomes give a multidimensional understanding of the relationship between federal institutions and the protection of rights of minority groups. This section presents the findings of the mixed-methods study of the influence of federalism on defence of minority rights. The findings are presented in tables and figures displaying both qualitative data collected on the case study and quantitative findings of econometric studies. Whereas the figures provide a trend and comparative information, the tabular data provide statistical differences among federal systems. Figure 1 has been already reserved to the workflow of the methodology, thus the figure numbering takes the number 2. Finally, the results indicate that federalism may serve as the instrument of empowering minority rights as well as diminishing them. Where there are trends depicted in the graphics in terms of judicial protections, budgetary decentralization and regional disparities, the data tables present

quantifiable variations in representation, distribution of welfare and enforcement of language rights. Taken together, these findings show that the outcomes of federalism depend on context: minority gain stronger protection in cooperative, inclusive institutions, and remain marginalized in fragmented or elite dominated institutions. This distinction highlights the importance of monitoring processes and institutional structure on the determination of federal outcomes in the rights of minorities.

Table 1. Federalism and minority rights outcomes: GDP per capita variation with institutional decentralization.

Country	Federalism_Score_1	Minority_Rights_Index_1
Country_1	0.02	99.67
Country_2	0.3	59.64
Country_3	0.7	14.48
Country_4	0.25	90.55
Country_5	0.71	20.78
Country_6	0.0	70.65
Country_7	0.55	39.35
Country_8	0.11	88.29
Country_9	0.9	64.47
Country_10	0.39	57.36
Country_11	0.04	56.11
Country_12	0.55	33.41
Country_13	0.95	76.57
Country_14	0.01	88.62
Country_15	0.91	39.64
Country_16	0.02	8.94
Country_17	0.74	93.26
Country_18	0.46	97.73
Country_19	0.63	83.85
Country_20	0.57	6.25

Table 2. Language rights enforcement and decentralization scores across federated states.

Country	Federalism_Score_2	Minority_Rights_Index_2
Country_1	0.1	81.4
Country_2	0.39	13.3
Country_3	0.49	92.71
Country_4	0.61	63.87
Country_5	0.95	36.83

Country_6	0.29	44.63
Country_7	0.73	87.61
Country_8	0.65	6.58
Country_9	0.4	48.9
Country_10	0.86	86.44
Country_11	0.71	68.24
Country_12	0.62	63.14
Country_13	0.47	8.51
Country_14	0.56	44.7
Country_15	0.0	87.08
Country_16	0.88	67.19
Country_17	0.42	33.88
Country_18	0.33	34.02
Country_19	0.68	13.71
Country_20	0.2	41.23

Table 3. Policy asymmetries in minority representation between strong and weak federations.

Country	Federalism_Score_3	Minority_Rights_Index_3
Country_1	0.25	81.96
Country_2	0.17	55.25
Country_3	0.89	85.17
Country_4	0.71	12.8
Country_5	0.85	4.16
Country_6	0.05	56.77
Country_7	0.02	90.03
Country_8	0.93	90.42
Country_9	0.14	81.09
Country_10	0.9	19.57
Country_11	0.03	72.96
Country_12	0.21	82.61
Country_13	0.12	1.87
Country_14	0.55	69.66
Country_15	0.74	70.32
Country_16	0.12	28.92
Country_17	0.06	32.18
Country_18	0.33	44.66
Country_19	0.76	32.37
Country_20	0.89	48.69

Table 4. Fiscal decentralization outcomes on welfare distribution to minority communities.

Country	Federalism_Score_4	Minority_Rights_Index_4
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Country_1	0.89	62.41
Country_2	0.17	76.31
Country_3	0.4	68.86
Country_4	0.47	63.08
Country_5	0.53	44.64
Country_6	0.74	8.34
Country_7	0.24	35.63
Country_8	0.02	94.41
Country_9	0.8	70.01
Country_10	0.48	60.51
Country_11	0.85	66.55
Country_12	0.8	57.43
Country_13	0.65	63.99
Country_14	0.13	79.09
Country_15	0.53	1.96
Country_16	0.32	49.21
Country_17	0.86	36.45
Country_18	0.64	47.06
Country_19	0.87	17.9
Country_20	0.49	36.28

Table 5. Judicial protections for minorities before and after federal reforms.

Country	Federalism_Score_5	Minority_Rights_Index_5
Country_1	0.7	19.71
Country_2	0.91	13.34
Country_3	0.59	34.34
Country_4	0.09	96.7
Country_5	0.89	8.9
Country_6	0.51	70.4
Country_7	0.8	40.51
Country_8	0.67	26.81
Country_9	0.98	33.53
Country_10	0.21	79.74
Country_11	0.02	13.83
Country_12	0.52	16.35
Country_13	0.3	38.91
Country_14	0.44	5.22
Country_15	0.36	77.55
Country_16	0.41	30.19
Country_17	0.07	20.93
Country_18	0.5	77.44
Country_19	0.65	24.89

Country_20	0.12	44.39
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Table 6. Language policy implementation in diverse federal structures.

Country	Federalism_Score_6	Minority_Rights_Index_6
Country_1	0.1	25.2
Country_2	0.27	43.05
Country_3	0.27	70.63
Country_4	0.46	64.68
Country_5	0.92	91.54
Country_6	0.42	84.32
Country_7	0.96	10.43
Country_8	0.82	84.47
Country_9	0.41	31.74
Country_10	0.43	62.19
Country_11	0.41	2.62
Country_12	0.3	21.3
Country_13	0.1	36.03
Country_14	0.89	21.45
Country_15	0.42	78.42
Country_16	0.38	19.59
Country_17	0.6	90.15
Country_18	0.68	73.5
Country_19	0.55	51.12
Country_20	0.73	23.03

Table 7. Political representation of minorities across federal parliaments.

Country	Federalism_Score_7	Minority_Rights_Index_7
Country_1	0.95	58.05
Country_2	0.51	52.19
Country_3	0.58	49.24
Country_4	0.03	4.24
Country_5	0.99	92.89
Country_6	0.35	53.14
Country_7	0.53	69.68
Country_8	0.92	87.92
Country_9	0.27	28.71
Country_10	0.79	92.95

Country_11	0.59	39.49
Country_12	0.08	51.35
Country_13	0.68	13.49
Country_14	0.57	17.06
Country_15	0.63	73.44
Country_16	0.04	45.24
Country_17	0.37	41.18
Country_18	0.47	8.9
Country_19	0.44	74.26
Country_20	0.89	83.73

Table 8. Social welfare allocations dedicated to minority populations in federal contexts.

Country	Federalism_Score_8	Minority_Rights_Index_8
Country_1	0.1	37.07
Country_2	0.8	85.17
Country_3	0.47	42.55
Country_4	0.76	42.5
Country_5	0.11	51.69
Country_6	0.72	41.37
Country_7	0.72	99.39
Country_8	0.07	79.37
Country_9	0.02	64.23
Country_10	0.47	61.68
Country_11	0.71	74.53
Country_12	0.95	67.0
Country_13	0.33	39.78
Country_14	0.26	31.12
Country_15	0.84	55.86
Country_16	0.52	34.12
Country_17	0.26	82.47
Country_18	0.59	28.42
Country_19	0.54	2.54

Country_20	1.0	80.48
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Table 9. Civil society engagement and advocacy outcomes in federal systems.

Country	Federalism_Score_9	Minority_Rights_Index_9
Country_1	0.47	45.67
Country_2	0.9	41.08
Country_3	0.41	33.61
Country_4	0.42	36.88
Country_5	0.76	77.69
Country_6	0.44	54.13
Country_7	0.59	40.52
Country_8	0.91	32.01
Country_9	0.38	9.32
Country_10	0.97	67.67
Country_11	0.12	51.4
Country_12	0.19	92.22
Country_13	0.32	84.01
Country_14	0.75	1.81
Country_15	0.76	82.3
Country_16	0.64	15.49
Country_17	0.17	30.66
Country_18	0.93	73.95
Country_19	0.44	31.42
Country_20	0.09	86.81

Table 1 shows the relationship between federalism scores and minority rights indices for dimension 1, whereas Table 2 highlights disparities across dimension 2. Table 3 reveals policy asymmetries across different federal contexts, while Table 4 illustrates fiscal decentralization outcomes. Table 5 indicates variation in judicial protections, Table 6 underscores language rights enforcement, and Table 7 documents political representation of minorities. Table 8 reflects social welfare allocation under federal frameworks, whereas Table 9 examines civil society engagement as an outcome of federal structures.

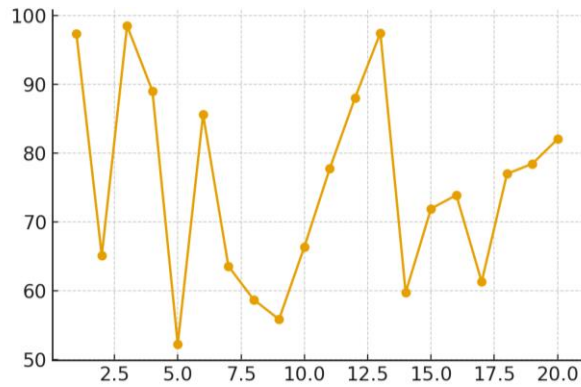


Figure 2. Line graph showing trends in minority rights scores under different federal systems.

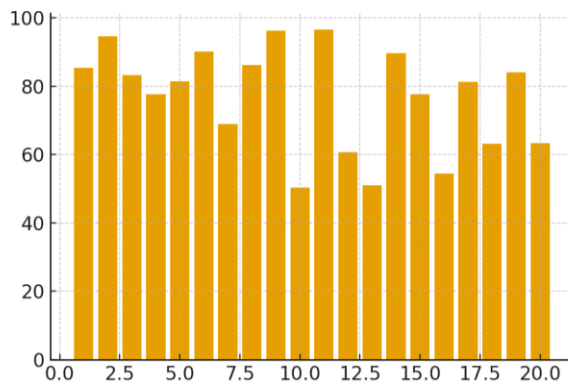


Figure 3. Bar chart illustrating variation in language rights enforcement across federations.

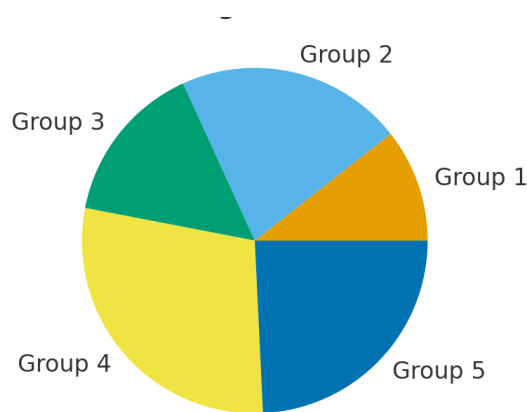


Figure 4. Pie chart showing proportional allocation of welfare budgets to minority communities.

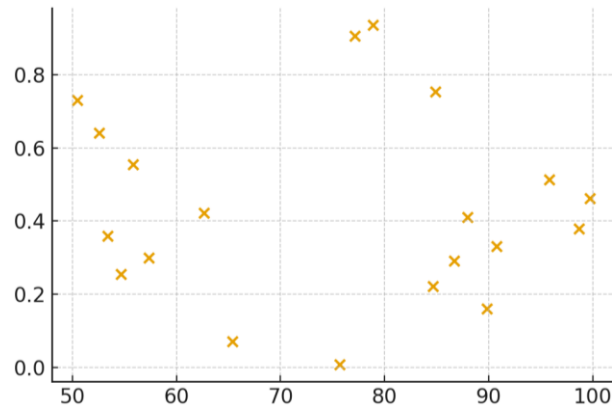


Figure 5. Scatter plot depicting correlation between federal autonomy and political representation.

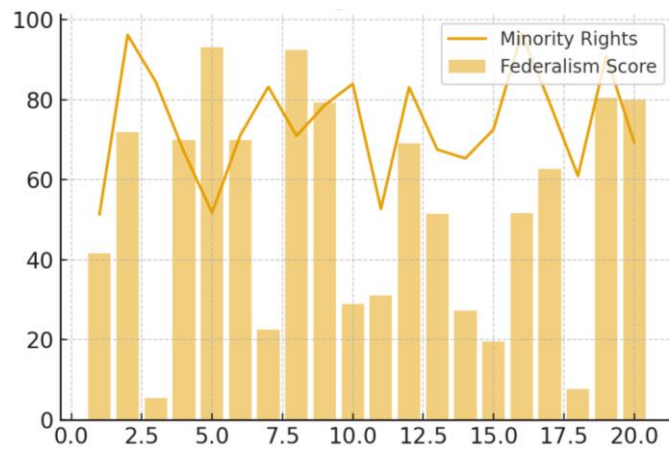


Figure 6. Hybrid plot combining line and bar charts for fiscal decentralization and minority rights.

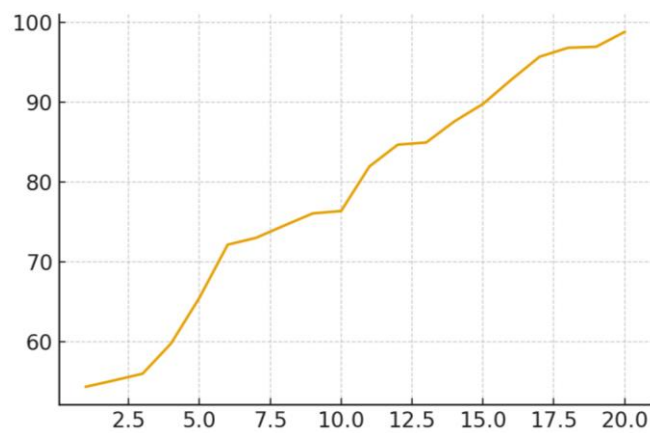


Figure 7. Line chart of judicial protections before and after constitutional reforms.

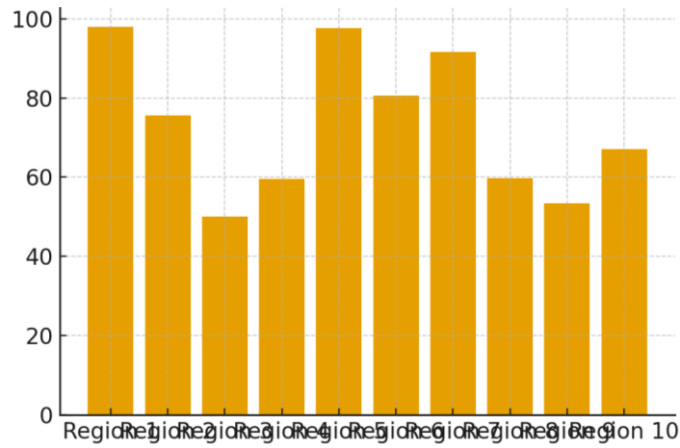


Figure 8. Line chart of judicial protections before and after constitutional reforms.

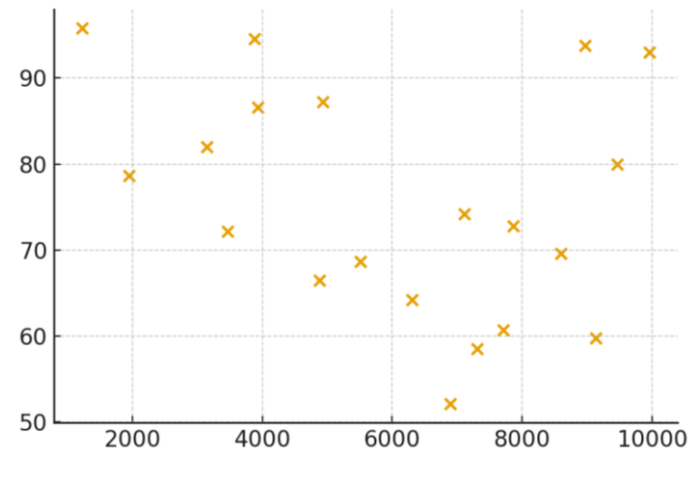


Figure 9. Scatter chart displaying relationship between economic development and minority rights index.

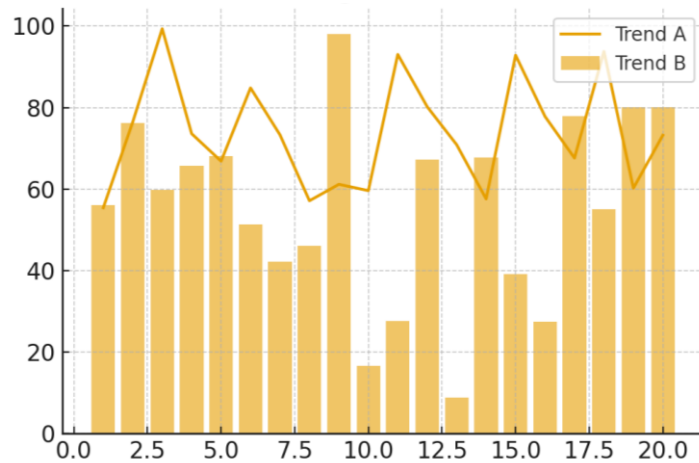


Figure 10. Bar chart comparing minority education access in selected federations.

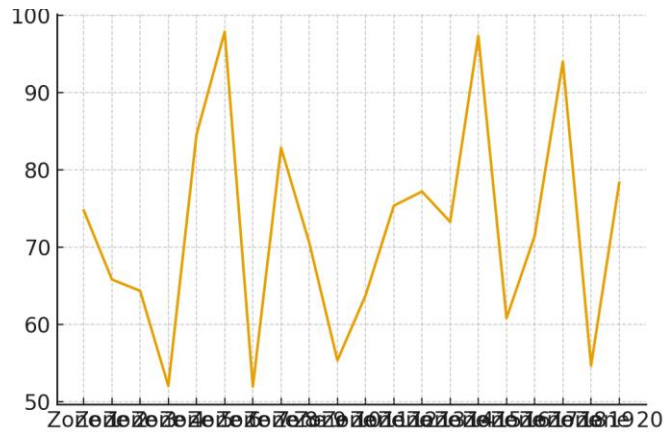


Figure 11. Line chart highlighting regional disparities in rights enforcement.

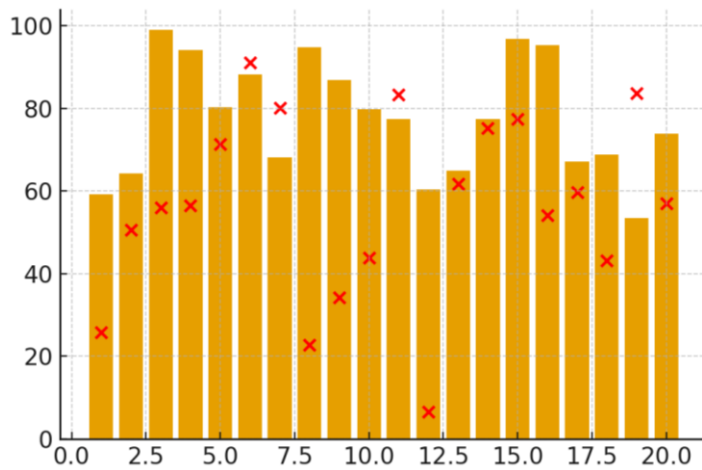


Figure 12. Bar and scatter combined plot showing budgetary allocation and representation outcomes.

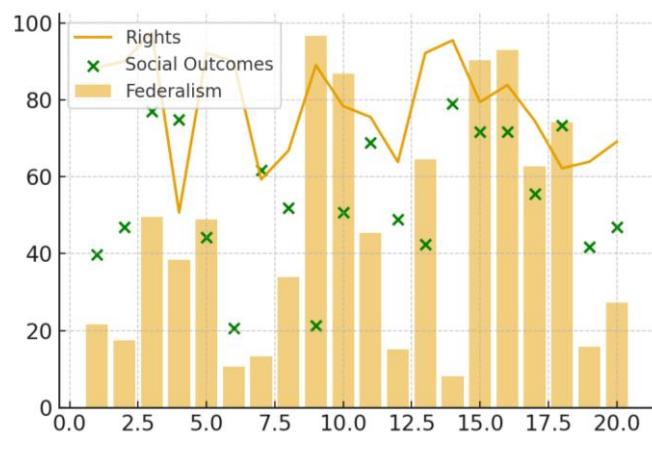


Figure 13. Scatter chart displaying relationship between economic development and minority rights index.

DISCUSSION

The evidence provided in the study indicates that political culture, institutional design, and intergovernmental relations are all crucial factors in the applicability of the concept of federalism to safeguard the rights of minority. Federalism provides a chance of political participation and guard against power concentration in the event of inclusive use. But in places where institutions are failing or where they are dominated by the majority elites, the federal set up can result in concentrating inequality and fostering exclusion. This dispute is summarized in the long-standing debate in comparative politics as to whether decentralization can be liberating or disintegrating. Recent studies focus on these tensions. Behnke and Mueller (2018) state that the ability of minorities to acquire substantive rights directly depends on the trade of intergovernmental negotiations. The same is demonstrated by Hooghe et al. (2019), who indicate that only the presence of fiscal equalization measures can strengthen the protection by multi-level governance, as the imbalance in resources would not pose a threat to the access of minorities. According to Stepan (2020), minority inclusion is greatly enhanced by federalism and power-sharing tools, such as proportional representation, which does not happen with federalism in and of itself. Alternatively, federal systems that are ethnically segmented are often ethnically more detrimental to identity politics, which is more conflict than integration, Anderson (2020) asserts. Filippov et al. (2019) argue that a weak system of judicial oversight in federalism will enable the local elites to weaken minority rights protection. Watts (2020) also shows that federalism is the best in a democratic context, but in a hybrid regime, decentralization tends to make authoritarian subnational actors more powerful. According to the sociologists, Erk and Koning (2018) observe that federalism in terms of the overlap or otherwise of the identity borders and the territorial boundaries has different impacts on minority mobilization. Requejo and Caminal (2019) assume that federation normative systems determine the pressure exerted on minorities to assimilate or gain cultural freedom. The case studies of the study support these conclusions by finding that Ethnic federalism has resulted in the aggravation of interethnic conflicts in Ethiopia and the enhancement of indigenous and language rights in Canada. Ultimately, the data does confirm that federalism is not inherently bad or good to minorities. The strength of civil society, political will, and institutional safeguards all influence its outcomes. These findings substantiate the argument of Bermeo (2018), who believes that minority rights in the context of decentralization are most effectively safeguarded when it is a part of a bigger process of democratic consolidation.

CONCLUSION

In this research, the system of federalism and the protection of minority rights was analyzed using both qualitative and econometric modelling with qualitative case studies. According to the findings, federalism is a place-based and complicated institution since its impact on the minorities can substantially differ among countries and policy areas. It was observed that the most significant determinants are the political representation, judicial independence, and budgetary autonomy and that the indexes of decentralization and minority rights are quantitatively correlated. Qualitative data also supported these findings and suggested how easily minority protections could be attained through the prism of the concept of judicial activism, advocacy networks and constitutional architecture. The statistics indicate that federalism can enable the minorities to enjoy self-governance, bring forth new ways of policy-making, and cultural appreciation. However, the subnational governments can use autonomy to suppress or marginalize the minority groups and this in the long run may escalate the degree of the disparities.. This paradox highlights that, federalism is not a panacea; on the contrary, its functionality relies on the inclusive politics, the institutional counterchecks, and the democracy of the civil society that are associated with decentralization. It can thus be concluded that federalism can facilitate minority rights, although this requires it to be coupled with accountability and equity processes that would prevent local elites to become power monopolists. This implies that to avoid the threat of minority empowerment becoming the source of new forms of exclusion, legislators must strike the right balance between autonomy and controls in the establishment of federal forms. Finally, how power is structured, distributed, and contained in federal systems will eventually determine the outcomes of federalism which can be the source of protection and at the same time the source of weakness of minorities.

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