

Global Trends in the Nature of Intergovernmental Relations and Public Service Efficiencies

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2025.10020022>

Received: 28 January 2025; Accepted: 04 February 2025; Published: 06 March 2025

ABSTRACT

Intergovernmental relations (IGR) and bureaucratic decentralization are pivotal in realizing an efficient public service in every country. It ensures autonomy, enabling smoother governance and more effective decision-making across arms and levels of government. This study examined the global trends in the nature of intergovernmental relations (IGR) and how they impact on efficient public service delivery. It took into account a succinct insight into at least one country in each continent of the world. Countries such the United States of America, Argentina, Australia and Germany were used to drive home the point that effective IGR and bureaucratic decentralization have led to greater degree of efficiency in the public service of those countries. In the comparative study, India and Nigeria still experience poor public service outcome due to the porous nature of their IGR. Relying heavily on secondary sources and literatures, the study highlighted key differences and similarities in the intergovernmental relations (IGR) frameworks of these countries. Using that same method, the work provided insights into Nigeria's challenges and potential solutions. The study revealed that effective IGR and decentralization in the United States, Argentina, Germany and Australia have amounted to efficient public service whilst the reverse is seen in Nigeria where over poor IGR and centralization have led to inefficient public service and by extension aggravated tensions and resentment among the citizens. The study recommended the potential benefits of adopting best practices from the U.S., Germany, Australia and Argentina in order to enhance decentralization, encourage autonomy and efficiency of the public service.

Keywords: Intergovernmental Relations (IGR), Decentralization, Bureaucracy, Public Service, Autonomy, Governance, etc.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major features of federalism is Intergovernmental Relations (IGR). This idea for an effective distribution and separation of power has been a tool upon which the effectiveness the federal system is measured. The concept, *federalism* — derived from the Latin word '*foedus*' (alliances) is central to the idea of that system of government in which power is constitutionally divided between a central (national) government and subnational units - such as states or provinces (Etymology online Dictionary). This division of powers necessitates interactions and cooperation between these levels of government, giving rise to intergovernmental relations. Thus, IGR is not only a feature but a functional necessity of federalism, ensuring that different levels of government work together to achieve common goals while respecting their constitutional mandates (Poirier & Saunders, 2015).

Central to Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) is the idea of cooperation among the different levels of government within a state. It is from this point, that one can view politics as act of man meant for interaction and cooperation. The verb 'to cooperate' is originally from the combination of the Latin prefix '*co-*' (together) and '*operari*' (to work). Etymologically, to cooperate means to work together (Etymology Online Dictionary). This fundamental idea of cooperation underpins the structure of governance systems, where the interplay between central, regional, and local governments forms the backbone of effective administration. In practice, IGR is not merely about coexistence but about coordinated efforts to ensure that public policies are implemented efficiently and that public services reach every segment of society. This interaction demands a

delicate balance of authority, responsibility and resource-sharing, often influenced by the political, economic, and cultural contexts of a state.

IGR is an important issue of concern for any political and administrative system, either federal or unitary (Lan, 2003). However, the term IGR originated in the United States and has been most frequently used in federal systems contexts (Kapucu et al., 2010). Here are other terms that connote similar meanings. For instance, in unitary systems such as in the United Kingdom and China, the term central-local relations is more commonplace to identify independent and interdependent relations between the central or national government and subnational entities. Intergovernmental management is another word choice adopted by some public administration scholars who emphasize the role of public administrators in IGR (Lowatcharin & Crumpton, 2019).

Therefore, intergovernmental relations (IGR) play a central role in shaping governance structures and the efficiency of public service delivery across the globe. At the heart of these relations lies the tension between bureaucratic centralization and decentralization, both of which significantly influence the flow and operation of public services. Bureaucratic centralization, while aiming to standardize policies and enhance oversight, often leads to administrative bottlenecks and reduced autonomy for subnational governments. Conversely, trends in decentralization highlight a push toward improved public service efficiency through localized governance.

This essay explores global trends in IGR, examining how effective IGR and varying degrees of bureaucratic decentralization impact on the efficiency of the public services in different countries. Based on the above objective, this research question is proposed for this work: How does intergovernmental relations and bureaucratic decentralization impact on the efficiency of public service in different countries of the world?

The answer to this question requires analyzing the balance between central control and local autonomy these countries. It requires examining how decentralized structures empower local governments to make decisions tailored to their specific contexts, thereby enhancing service delivery. Conversely, the study must also consider instances where decentralization might lead to inefficiencies, such as duplication of efforts, uneven resource distribution, or lack of coordination among various levels of government. By exploring case studies from countries with different governance models—ranging from highly centralized to deeply decentralized systems—this research aims to uncover patterns, challenges, and best practices that illustrate the impact of intergovernmental relations and bureaucratic decentralization on public service efficiency.

LITERATURES REVIEW

The term IGR has a long and widespread usage among scholars, practitioners and public officials. The usage and practice predate its conceptual formation. Professor William Anderson in 1930s was the first to introduce the term in an academic discourse. It was further developed by W Brook Graves—an editor with special Annual issues in 1940 in a work titled – Inter – Governmental relations in the United States. He has written twenty – five articles covering: Federal – state, federal – local, inter – state, regional and inter – local relationships and he later produced the Magnum opus of the field – American Inter – Governmental Relations (Dickson, 2022).

Intergovernmental relations refer to the ways in which different levels of government—like federal, state, and local—work together, share responsibilities, and manage their interactions to govern effectively. It is like a team effort where each player has a role, but they need to communicate and cooperate to achieve common goals for the benefit of the people. For Anyim et al, (2018), intergovernmental relation is a robust way of systematically engaging the state in the efficient and effective relationship, mutual co-operation, collaboration, understanding and synergy among the tiers and institutions of government in handling and addressing the business of governance. This synergy is essential in realizing an efficient public service.

In public administration literatures, the term public service has become a contested concept which can best be understood in the way the word is used and practiced in the constitution of the various countries of the world. Despite this, the function and purpose as well as the expectation of public service in terms of service delivery remain the same all over the countries. Drawing from international research evidence, public service varies in

terms of management, function, and uses. Spicker (2009) argues that the best way to understand any term is the way it is used and practiced. For instance, the publication of the UK Cabinet Office (2008) did not provide a definition of public service but described public service as services such as education, health, policing, and defense. Public services from a holistic view are those services funded by the money accrued through taxation from the general public and for the benefits of the public. These are organized services responsible for managing and controlling the resources of the state on behalf of the general public who are actually the owners of the resources. These services are run and controlled by either the elected or appointed government offices. The management of these services could be federal, state, or local government depending on the country.

Gboyega (2004) describes public service as service in any government capacity such as elected or appointed members of the legislature, executive, judiciary, ministries, boards and statutory corporation, and members of the armed forces at all levels of government. All these ministries, corporations, and parastatals that government controls are regarded as public sectors, and staff and employees working for the provision of services to the citizens are called public servants. Faseluka (2010) buttresses the understanding of public service as the totality of the services directed to the management of human, material, and financial resources of the state for the provision of welfare services to the general public.

Therefore, public service refers to the system, institutions, and personnel through which a government operates to deliver goods, services, and administrative support to its citizens. It encompasses all activities performed by government agencies and organizations to implement public policies, maintain order, and promote societal welfare. Public service includes essential functions such as healthcare, education, infrastructure development, security, and social services. It is characterized by its focus on serving the public interest, being funded primarily by public resources, and operating under the principles of transparency, accountability and equity.

Public service efficiency refers to the ability of government institutions, systems, and personnel to deliver high-quality goods and services to the public in a timely, cost-effective, and equitable manner. It emphasizes achieving optimal outputs from limited resources while ensuring that the needs and expectations of citizens are met. Key elements of public service efficiency include:

1. **Cost-effectiveness:** Ensuring resources (financial, human, and material) are used in a way that minimizes waste while maximizing service delivery outcomes.
2. **Timeliness:** Providing services promptly to meet public demands and deadlines without unnecessary delays.
3. **Quality of Service:** Delivering services that are relevant, reliable, and meet the standards expected by the citizens.
4. **Equity:** Ensuring fair and impartial access to services across all segments of society, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups.
5. **Accountability and Transparency:** Operating under principles that ensure public servants are answerable for their actions and that decisions are open to scrutiny.
6. **Effectiveness:** Achieving desired outcomes in addressing public needs, implementing policies, and fulfilling government objectives.

In essence, public service efficiency is a measure of how well the public service fulfills its mandate of implementing policies and delivering services to improve societal welfare. It is often evaluated by comparing inputs (resources) and outputs (services or benefits delivered) while considering the overall impact on citizen satisfaction and societal development.

The provision of efficient public service delivery is impossible without effective intergovernmental relations. This is because intergovernmental relations serve as the framework through which various levels and arms of government coordinate their roles, share resources, and collaborate to address societal needs. An underlying—often unstated—assumption is that intergovernmental coordination mechanisms are in place to make sure that

governments at different levels cooperate and coordinate their efforts (Jandrevska, 2024). Intergovernmental relations are fundamentally organized into two important dimensions: vertical and horizontal, which can significantly enhance governance:

1. Vertical intergovernmental relations refer to the interactions that occur between different levels of government, such as national and subnational entities. Local governments (LGs) can effectively advocate for their interests through structured channels, including national, regional, or specialized associations and consultation bodies. These formal relationships empower LGs to engage meaningfully with higher levels of government.
2. Horizontal intergovernmental relations emphasize collaboration among local governments to achieve shared objectives. By working together through inter-municipal initiatives—such as regional conferences, joint utility services, budgetary collaborations, or coordinated municipal departments—local governments can pool resources and expertise. This collaborative approach is especially beneficial for smaller regional local governments (RLGs), as it often provides a viable alternative to amalgamation, allowing them to maintain their identity while maximizing efficiency.

According to Jandrevska (2024), combining both dimensions of intergovernmental relations leads to more efficient public service. It promotes cooperation on shared responsibilities and facilitates better policy implementation across various levels of government, ultimately contributing to the overall success of public service and community development.

The assertion by Jandrevska (2024) that a multilevel public sector can produce more responsive and efficient outcomes compared to a centralized public sector resonates with similar arguments in decentralization and intergovernmental relations (IGR) literature. Central to this argument is the assumption that effective intergovernmental coordination mechanisms—both vertical and horizontal—are essential to achieving enhanced governance. Vertical and horizontal intergovernmental relations form the backbone of these mechanisms and foster collaboration, resource-sharing, and policy coherence across different government tiers.

Vertical intergovernmental relations, as described by Jandrevska (2024), emphasize interactions between different levels of government, such as national and subnational entities. This view aligns with Oates (1972), who argued in the theory of fiscal federalism that subnational governments play a crucial role in tailoring public services to local preferences and conditions. Both Jandrevska (2024) and Oates (1972) highlight the importance of empowering local governments (LGs) through formalized mechanisms such as national associations and consultation bodies to advocate for their interests. This ensures that local voices are integrated into broader policy frameworks.

In the context of this study, intergovernmental relations focus on the administrative mechanisms through which various levels and arms of government interact, negotiate and collaborate to address the complexities of governance. Thus, by implication, we shall be considering extensively the vertical and horizontal categories in intergovernmental relations. This approach provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing how government institutions coordinate their roles and share responsibilities in a way that promotes effective public service delivery. Vertical relations highlight the dynamics between different tiers of government—federal, state, and local—ensuring that policies are implemented cohesively across all levels. Horizontal relations, on the other hand, emphasize the need for synergy among the Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary at the same level of governance to maintain balance, prevent power conflicts, and uphold the rule of law. This approach is crucial for understanding the interplay of authority and cooperation required to manage the complexities of modern governance, particularly in a federal system where overlapping jurisdictions and competing interests often require carefully designed mechanisms of collaboration and dispute resolution. These collaborations are shaped by distinct models of authority—coordinate, inclusive, and overlapping—that determine the nature and extent of cooperation or competition among governmental tiers. These models, as conceptualized by scholars, reveal the diverse ways governments share power, resolve conflicts and implement public policies to achieve common goals. Understanding these dynamics is essential for examining how intergovernmental relations influence public service efficiency and the broader governance outcomes in different countries. Through this lens, the study comparatively examines how the balance between autonomy and cooperation, between

centralization and decentralization, between bureaucratization and debureaucratization, shapes intergovernmental relations and impacts on the efficiency of the public service.

Ideas from some literatures underscore the pivotal role of both vertical and horizontal intergovernmental relations (IGR) in enhancing efficient public service delivery. Authors consistently emphasize that effective vertical and horizontal IGR are crucial for cohesive policy implementation and service delivery. Malan (2012) highlighted intergovernmental relations as encompassing both vertical and horizontal interactions, are essential for coordinated governance and efficient public service delivery in South Africa. Similarly, the Department of Cooperative Governance (2011) underscores the importance of both vertical and horizontal collaboration in achieving national development goals. While there is consensus on the importance of IGR, authors diverge in their analysis of challenges and effectiveness. Malan (2012) identifies challenges in the South African context, such as unclear mandates and coordination issues, which hinder both vertical and horizontal IGR. In contrast, the Department of Cooperative Governance (2011) proposes policy reforms to enhance cooperative governance, focusing on improving both vertical and horizontal relations through better-defined roles and increased capacity building.

The relationship between effective intergovernmental relations (IGR) and efficient public service delivery has been a subject of interest for scholars and policymakers worldwide. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that well-coordinated and cooperative intergovernmental systems can significantly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public services. A study by Posner (2017) analyzed the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in the United States. The research found that states with robust intergovernmental collaboration with federal agencies experienced smoother implementation of the ACA and improved access to healthcare services. Conversely, states with weaker cooperation faced challenges, such as delayed rollouts and lower public trust in the program. The study concluded that streamlined federal-state relations can optimize the delivery of complex public services like healthcare.

A study by Steytler and Powell (2020) examined the relationship between intergovernmental coordination and service delivery in municipalities. The findings indicated that municipalities with strong support from provincial and national governments performed better in delivering basic services such as water and electricity. The research highlighted the importance of clear communication channels and shared responsibilities in achieving efficiency.

Hooghe and Marks (2019) conducted a comparative study of EU-funded regional development projects across member states. The research found that regions with better integration of EU directives into national and local policies experienced faster project implementation and improved public service outcomes. The study underscored the role of intergovernmental funding mechanisms and accountability structures in ensuring service efficiency.

Empirical studies on Nigeria's federal structure, such as those by Ayoade and Ogundiya (2019), reveal mixed outcomes of intergovernmental relations on service delivery. States with more autonomous decision-making capabilities often outperform those heavily dependent on the federal government. However, inefficiencies in revenue allocation and overlapping responsibilities have been cited as impediments. The study recommended improving intergovernmental communication and reducing political interference to enhance public service delivery.

A study by Boadway and Watts (2018) analyzed intergovernmental funding and policy coordination in healthcare and education. Provinces with well-aligned policies and funding agreements with the federal government reported better outcomes in patient care and educational achievements. The research emphasized the importance of fiscal transfers and collaborative policymaking.

A study by Sharma et al. (2021) focused on India's rural development programs, particularly the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The research highlighted those states with better coordination between central and local governments delivered the scheme more effectively. Factors such as timely fund disbursement, regular monitoring, and local capacity-building were critical in achieving program goals.

Anderson (2013) opined that intergovernmental relations are pivotal for cohesive policy implementation across various governmental tiers. He further wrote that effective vertical IGR is essential for coordinated governance and efficient public service delivery.

Fessha (2020) examines the organization and purpose of horizontal intergovernmental forums in Kenya, Spain, and Canada, highlighting their role in fostering cooperation and policy coherence. The study reveals that while these forums aim to enhance collaboration, their effectiveness varies based on constitutional frameworks and political contexts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided a unique lens to assess IGR. Jüptner et al. (2021) analyze the behavior of individual government levels during the pandemic's first wave in Central and Eastern European countries, noting that both vertical and horizontal IGR were tested, revealing strengths and weaknesses in crisis response mechanisms. Study by Bergström et al. (2022) revealed that a special issue on comparative intergovernmental relations and the COVID-19 pandemic across ten European countries highlights varying policy responses, emphasizing the role of both vertical and horizontal IGR in managing the crisis.

Chepkorir and Omwenga (2023) investigated the effects of IGR on public service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya. Their study concluded that effective public relations, dispute resolution mechanisms, capacity building, and mutual support among government entities positively influence service delivery. They recommend that county governments prioritize citizen needs, establish efficient dispute settlement procedures, and enhance capacity-building initiatives to improve public services.

Despite the extensive body of literature emphasizing the importance of vertical and horizontal intergovernmental relations in enhancing public service delivery, comparative studies focusing on the contextual dynamics of IGR frameworks in different countries remain scarce. While many studies have examined IGR within the context of individual nations—such as the United States, South Africa, Canada, and Nigeria—few have undertaken a comparative approach to investigate how varying institutional designs, political cultures, and administrative capacities influence the efficiency of public service delivery across countries.

Existing studies tend to focus on the following:

1. **Single-country contexts:** Studies like those by Malan (2012) and Ayoade & Ogundiya (2019) largely analyze IGR within specific national frameworks, without exploring cross-national dynamics.
2. **Sector-specific investigations:** Research such as Posner (2017) and Sharma et al. (2021) concentrate on specific sectors like healthcare and rural development, leaving gaps in understanding how IGR affects broader governance and public service delivery across multiple sectors.
3. **Static analyses:** The majority of existing studies fail to consider the evolving nature of IGR frameworks, particularly in response to global phenomena like economic crises or pandemics. For example, Bergström et al. (2022) and Jüptner et al. (2021) explored IGR during the COVID-19 pandemic but focused mainly on crisis response without a broader contextual analysis of regular public service delivery.

A key gap lies in the lack of comparative cross-country studies that integrate multidimensional analysis. This includes an assessment of vertical and horizontal IGR in fostering efficient public services in some countries of world under the federal system.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides a structured lens to analyze the relationship between intergovernmental relations (IGR) and public service efficiency within the context of federal systems. The proposed framework integrates theoretical constructs from key governance theory, emphasizing multilevel governance, collaborative governance, decentralization and administrative autonomy. This theory elucidates the nature of vertical and horizontal intergovernmental relations and their implications for public service delivery.

In the light of the above, multilevel governance theory offers a lens to examine the interaction between different levels of government, highlighting the complexity and interdependence inherent in federal systems.

The Multilevel Governance (MLG) Theory was first articulated by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks in the early 1990s. Their seminal work emerged from studies on European integration and the evolving dynamics of governance in the European Union (EU). Specifically, their 1996 publication, *Europe with the Regions: Channels of Regional Representation in the European Union*, marked a foundational point for MLG theory. Subsequent elaborations, such as their 2001 work *Multi-level Governance and European Integration*, further developed the concept.

The Multilevel Governance (MLG) theory emphasizes that governments at various arms and levels—federal, state, and local—share overlapping authority and responsibility, necessitating effective intergovernmental relations (IGR) characterized by coordination, cooperation, and conflict resolution mechanisms. It posits that policy implementation and public service delivery are optimized when actors across these levels work collaboratively rather than competitively. This theory is highly relevant to the study as it underscores the need for a cohesive framework for analyzing vertical IGR, particularly focusing on how federal and subnational governments coordinate roles, share resources, and align their efforts to enhance the efficiency of public service delivery.

By incorporating MLG theory, this seminar work can systematically analyze the interplay of governance arms and levels and their influence on service delivery efficiency. The theory's focus on coordination, inclusivity, and adaptability offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of IGR and their implications for public service outcomes.

Global trends in Nature of Intergovernmental Relations and Public Service Efficiencies

In order to shed light on this topic, global trends in the nature of intergovernmental relations (IGR) and public service efficiencies will be exposed through a comparative analysis of how administrative cum bureaucratic decentralization has impacted on the public service of some countries across the globe. This analysis will examine the interplay between vertical and horizontal dimensions of IGR, highlighting examples from various countries to understand how these relationships impact the efficiency of public services. By comparing approaches from developed and developing nations, as well as crisis-driven and routine governance contexts, the discussion aims to identify best practices and challenges in fostering efficient, accountable, and responsive public service systems.

A recent report by LoGov in Jandrevska (2024) critically evaluated the effectiveness of intergovernmental coordinating mechanisms across local, regional, and national governments in 15 countries, offering insights into how diverse governance models influence collaboration and service delivery. The analysis highlighted best practices from countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain, South Africa, India, and Canada, focusing on strategies that enhance cooperation, balance urban-rural interests, and empower Local Government Associations (LGAs) in policy advocacy. By emphasizing the importance of coordinated intergovernmental relations in promoting governance resilience and efficient service delivery, the report serves as a comprehensive guide for strengthening frameworks globally, showcasing adaptable approaches to address the unique challenges of different political and administrative contexts.

This earlier comparative endeavour contributes significantly to the logic of this seminar work by providing a practical evaluation of intergovernmental coordinating mechanisms across diverse countries, directly informing the study of how bureaucratic centralization impacts public service efficiencies. By highlighting best practices from countries like United States, Germany, Australia, and China, it underscores the value of collaborative frameworks that balance regional and national interests, which can offer insights into improving the public service delivery in varied political systems. This analysis enriches the seminar's exploration by offering concrete examples of effective governance strategies, demonstrating how adaptable mechanisms can overcome bureaucratic hurdles and enhance intergovernmental relations for more efficient public service provision globally.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The United States America's geographical administrative divisions consist of a federal system, which includes 50 states, several territories, and a capital district, Washington, D.C. Each state has its own government with significant legislative, executive, and judicial powers, creating a decentralized structure that facilitates localized governance (Kettunen & Juntunen, 2022). The states are further divided into counties, municipalities, and special districts, which provide localized services and governance (Berman & Jacobson, 2021). While the federal government maintains authority over issues like defense and foreign policy, states handle a wide range of domestic matters, from education to law enforcement, allowing for a balance between local autonomy and national coordination (Peters & Pierre, 2020). These divisions reflect a federal system designed to address the diverse needs of a vast country while maintaining the cohesion necessary for unified national governance.

Within the North American region, the United States of America stands as a shining example of how robust and coordinated intergovernmental relations (IGR) and a decentralized bureaucracy contribute to efficient public service delivery. The United States has a particularly decentralized form of federalism that provides important authority to multiple levels of government (Grumbach & Michener, 2022). The U.S. federal system allows states and local governments to exercise significant legislative and executive functions, fostering innovation and responsiveness at all levels (Wollmann, 2003). Local governments, often referred to as 'laboratories of democracy,' have pioneered alternative governance approaches that have influenced state and federal strategies, particularly in addressing shared policy challenges (Cho & Wright, 2004). The Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) highlights how collaboration among local jurisdictions has enhanced the effectiveness of public services and demonstrated the diminishing role of hierarchical coordination in governance (Peters, 2001). Furthermore, Tepperman (2016) notes that decentralized systems allow states to outperform the federal government in critical areas such as security management. These examples underscore the significance of United State of America's decentralized IGR framework in achieving governance efficiency and public service innovations.

The United States (U.S), much like its long established, English-speaking federal counterparts Canada and Australia, made no formal provision for IGR within its federal structure. The U.S. constitution created a clear separation of powers between the central (federal) and CU (state) governments, with federal laws or treaties being supreme instances in which state laws conflict with federal legislation (Smith 2010). Over time, constitutional interpretation by the Courts led to erosion of state powers and increasing centralization, with the federal government gaining more authority in range of policy areas. Consequently, IGR processes developed over time from minor, minimal interactions between the federal and state orders, to a dynamic and complex series of relationships. Today, IGR in the U.S. is characterized by this complexity, and as no single institution or order of government can control the governance system, mutual accommodation between the different orders of government is generally necessary for policy implementation (Smith 2015). While the federal government often acts 'coercively' (primarily through use of financial incentives) in the creation and development of policy, there is a considerable degree of necessary cooperation in relation to implementation (Smith, 2015; 2010). One of the most significant recent developments in U.S. IGR was the creation in 2017 of a bipartisan Speaker's Task Force on Intergovernmental Affairs, comprised of congressional members and an advisory council drawing from state, local, and indigenous associations. The closest the U.S. came to an Apex-level IGR institution was the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR). The ACIR was created in 1959, and was comprised of twenty-six members from federal, state, and local governments (McDowell, 1997). The ACIR provided recommendations on a variety of IGR-related issues. The Commission reached its peak in size, budget, and influence in the 1970s, but was eliminated in 1996 due to federal spending cuts and amid an increasingly partisan political environment (Conlan, 2006; McDowell, 1997). Bipartisan legislation to restore the ACIR was introduced in the House of Representatives in July of 2019. The bill proposes having the new ACIR include not only federal, state, and local governments, but also indigenous tribal governments (HR, 2019).

The presidential system of government affords the national U.S. legislature considerable influence in constructing the framework of IGR in the country. Known as Congress, the legislature consists of two chambers: the Senate; and the House of Representatives. Two representatives from each state, constituting a

total membership of 100 Senators, comprise the Senate. The 435 seats in the House of Representatives are distributed between the states according to their respective populations (Smith 2015). Through enacting and approving legislation, as well as providing financial incentives for the states to implement the respective policies, Congress shapes the IGR system, but has little involvement in monitoring day-to-day IGR. While state legislatures are able to create laws in their areas of competence, the importance of these institutions in relation to coordination with the federal order is minimal in comparison to informal interaction processes among the executive branches (Smith 2015). Informal IGR based on the personal relationships developed and maintained by members of the executive branches of governments are crucial in the United States. As no constitutional or statutory forums exist to facilitate communication or policy coordination between the different orders of government, state and local officials are one of a number of different interest groups competing with others for influence over federal policy making. This results in an increased emphasis on lobbying of members of the federal executive (or alternatively of members of Congress).

There are, however, a number of ‘professional associations’ operating in the United States which do facilitate some intergovernmental cooperation. Members of these organizations typically hold a specific office or post within the executive branch of the state government, while the associations themselves may be established along national, partisan, or regional lines (Smith, 2015). The most prominent of these organizations is the National Governors Association (NGA). The NGA brings together (with occasional exceptions) all of the heads of the government of the states in annual meetings to develop and approve policy positions on national issues. These positions are communicated to members of Congress by NGA staff, while individual governors perform the same function by providing testimony at Congressional hearings and lobbying members of Congress or the executive. The President typically attends the annual Washington DC meeting of the NGA, providing an opportunity for the highest-level members of the executive from both orders to interact. As it is comprised of both Democratic and Republican Governors, it can be challenging for the NGA to reach the super-majority required to adopt an official position on a variety of key issues (NGA, 2018; Smith, 2015). There is, however, no coordinated or cooperative process by which formal agenda items may be developed or follow-up action initiated between the two orders. The majority of presidents since Lyndon B. Johnson have maintained an office responsible for IGR- the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. Officials focus primarily on liaison activities – that is, facilitating informal policy coordination between the different orders of government – rather than influencing the development of IGR policy (Smith, 2015). In addition to the national association, there are a number of partisan and regional associations which perform similar functions: the Democratic Governors Association; the Republican Governors Association; and the Western Governors Association, which includes governors from nineteen different States in the western half of the continental United States. Furthermore, there are numerous specialized associations focused on specific issues related to IGR, including the National Association of Secretaries of State, National Association of Insurance Commissioners, and Conference of State Bank Supervisors.

The intergovernmental relations (IGR) system in the United States has a profound impact on the efficiency of public service delivery, with both positive and negative effects. The decentralized nature of IGR allows states and local governments to exercise significant authority over domestic policy areas, which has led to more responsive and innovative service delivery models. In healthcare, state and local governments have substantial autonomy, resulting in diverse approaches to public health policy and service delivery. According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), approximately 30% of U.S. healthcare spending is directed at Medicaid, a state-run program that varies by state in terms of eligibility, services, and benefits. States that have expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), such as California and New York, have seen improved health outcomes. For example, California’s expansion led to a reduction in its uninsured rate from 17% in 2013 to 7% in 2019 (California Department of Health Care Services, 2019). In contrast, states that did not expand Medicaid, like Texas, still face a 17.5% uninsured rate, the highest in the nation (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2020). This disparity highlights how state-level autonomy in healthcare under IGR can lead to differing levels of access and quality of service.

In the education sector, IGR has led to varied outcomes across states. For instance, state-level governance has resulted in significant differences in public education quality, as shown by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In 2019, the average 8th-grade reading score in Massachusetts was 282, compared to 252 in Mississippi, a difference of 30 points (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

These disparities are attributed to differing state-level policies, funding mechanisms, and local governance in education.

The decentralized system also influences public safety, with local police and law enforcement agencies tailoring their approaches to crime and safety based on regional needs. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that the national crime rate dropped by 49% between 1993 and 2019, but the extent of this decline has varied by state and locality. States like New York and California, which have invested heavily in community policing and crime prevention programs, have seen more significant reductions in violent crime compared to states like Alaska, where crime rates remain higher due to different local law enforcement strategies (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019). This suggests that decentralized law enforcement policies, shaped by local governments, can directly impact the effectiveness of public safety measures.

The financial aspect of IGR is crucial in determining how efficiently public services are delivered. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, state and local governments collectively spent \$3.1 trillion on public services in 2017, with significant variation in how these funds are allocated. For example, states like New York and California, which contribute more to federal revenue, receive a higher per capita federal grant allocation for education, healthcare, and infrastructure, compared to less populous states like Wyoming. This results in unequal public service outcomes in different states. The disparities in per capita federal aid can be significant, with states like Mississippi receiving about \$3,800 per person in federal funding, while states like New Jersey receive only \$2,000 per person (National Association of State Budget Officers, 2020).

Social welfare programs, including unemployment insurance and housing assistance, are also affected by IGR. States administer unemployment benefits, but the level of benefits and eligibility criteria vary significantly. In 2020, while the federal government provided a \$600 per week unemployment benefit supplement during the COVID-19 pandemic, states like New York and California were able to administer these benefits more efficiently due to their more robust state systems. Conversely, states with less comprehensive state-level unemployment systems, such as Florida, faced significant delays in processing claims, highlighting the impact of decentralized administration on service delivery efficiency (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020).

IGR also influences environmental policies, where local governments often take a leading role in addressing regional concerns. California's state-level policies on emissions reductions, such as its Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32), have set ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while other states with less stringent policies have not seen comparable results. In 2019, California's emissions per capita were 30% lower than the national average, reflecting the state's proactive stance on environmental regulation (California Air Resources Board, 2019). This example illustrates how decentralized IGR enables states to tailor their environmental policies based on local priorities, which can lead to more efficient outcomes.

The decentralized nature of IGR in the U.S. allows for a dynamic, responsive approach to public service delivery, with varying degrees of success across different sectors. States with robust governance frameworks, such as California and New York, tend to achieve more efficient outcomes in healthcare, education, and disaster management, while states with less developed systems face challenges in providing equitable services. The efficiency of public service delivery in the U.S. is heavily influenced by the relationship between federal, state, and local governments, with successful collaboration yielding positive results, and lack of coordination leading to inefficiencies.

ARGENTINA

Argentina, one of the countries in South American Continent, operates a federal system of government. Its political structure is based on the Constitution of 1853, which establishes Argentina as a federal republic. The country is divided into 23 provinces and one autonomous city (Buenos Aires), each of which has its own constitution, government, and legislature. These provinces enjoy significant autonomy in areas such as education, law enforcement, and taxation, making Argentina a classic example of a federal government system.

IGR in Argentina is often considered by observers to be weak, despite a constitutional foundation which in theory establishes decentralization and provincial autonomy as key elements of the federal architecture. A

broadly dualist federation, with the central and CU (provincial) orders each possessing their own legislation, programs, regulatory agencies and judges, Argentina's constitution did not initially provide any explicit IGR framework until a 1994 revision entrenched coordination between the orders of government, particularly in fiscal areas, for the first time (Carnota 2015; 2010). But although the framework for Argentinean IGR has been established, it effectively remains unfulfilled. Instead, Argentinean federalism is generally characterized by the dominance of the executive branch and political parties, congressional inaction, uneven fiscal allocation, and a high degree of centralization. IGR is conducted mostly on an informal, ad hoc basis (Chattopadhyay & Whittington, 2019).

While the second chamber of the national legislature – the Senate – technically represents the provinces, with three senators for each of the twenty-three provinces and the city of Buenos Aires, in practice senators represent political parties dominated by national figures. Senators typically operate along partisan political party lines which transcend provincial boundaries (Carnota 2015). Moreover, the constitution contains a supremacy clause which outlines that in the event of a conflict between federal and provincial law, the former prevails (with the exception of particular provincial competences). The supremacy of national, as opposed to sub-national, government in Argentinean IGR is also reflected in the dominant role played by the executive, particularly the president, in driving the process. This is sometimes referred to as 'hyper-presidentialism'. The Argentinean national executive is comprised only of the president, and there is no constitutional requirement for regional or ethnic representation in cabinet positions. There is no formal institutional forum for executive IGR in Argentina. Instead, the president meets with small groups of individual provincial governors (the heads of CU governments) on an ad hoc basis. Often these meetings are convened on a partisan basis – i.e. a meeting between the president and all the governors from their political party. Meetings are typically focused on fiscal transfers to the provinces, budget matters, and federal public works. The president chairs the meetings, and there is no formal voting process (Carnota 2015). The importance of the informal aspects of IGR are thus very significant in Argentina.

The centralized nature of Argentina's intergovernmental relations (IGR) has exacerbated disparities in public service delivery across provinces, largely due to uneven fiscal allocations. For instance, in 2020, Buenos Aires province received over 30% of federal transfers, while sparsely populated provinces like Tierra del Fuego received less than 1%, reflecting significant regional disparities in resource distribution (Ministry of Economy, Argentina, 2020). This inequity directly impacts the quality of public services such as healthcare, where infant mortality rates in poorer provinces like Chaco (10.4 per 1,000 live births) are nearly double those in Buenos Aires City (5.6 per 1,000 live births) as of 2019 (Argentine Ministry of Health, 2021). As of 2019, federal transfers accounted for over 70% of provincial revenues in poorer provinces such as Santiago del Estero, highlighting their heavy dependence on the central government (OECD, 2020). This dependency undermines provinces' capacity to plan and execute sustainable public services, leaving them vulnerable to delays and political discretion in fund allocation.

The informal, ad hoc nature of IGR interactions also undermines coordination in public health services. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted these issues, with provinces often competing for scarce medical supplies and vaccines due to the absence of a centralized procurement and distribution strategy. Wealthier provinces like Buenos Aires were able to secure better resources, while less affluent ones struggled, leading to higher mortality rates in regions such as Jujuy and Misiones (Argentine Ministry of Health, 2021).

In the education sector, for instance, disparities in provincial investments have led to unequal access to quality schooling. In 2020, Buenos Aires City spent \$2,400 per student annually, compared to only \$850 in impoverished regions like Formosa (World Bank, 2022). These disparities contribute to significant gaps in educational outcomes, such as secondary school completion rates, which stand at 90% in Buenos Aires City but drop to 60% in northern provinces.

AUSTRALIA

The Commonwealth of Australia, one of the major countries in the Pacific and Antarctica, is geographically divided into six states and two territories. The six states are New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania. Each state is distinct in its geographic features, ranging from the

temperate forests of Tasmania to the arid outback of Western Australia. In addition to the states, Australia also includes two internal territories: the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), which houses the capital city, Canberra, and the Northern Territory, which is known for its vast deserts and iconic natural landmarks like Uluru. These regions differ significantly in terms of climate, population density, and economic focus, such as Queensland's tourism industry or South Australia's focus on manufacturing and renewable energy (Australian States and Territories, 2023; Geography of Australia, 2023). The geographical divisions of Australia are essential in understanding its administrative structure, as each state has its own government with significant powers in areas such as health, education, and transport. These divisions reflect both the historical development of the nation and the diverse ecological and cultural characteristics of each region (Geography of Australia, 2023).

In Australia, IGR processes developed incrementally, progressively, and pragmatically in response to need as closer coordination between the orders of government became essential. The Australian constitution established a dualist structure with clear delineation of competences between the central (Commonwealth) and CU (States and Territories) governments. Moreover, IGR was not a prominent feature of the federal architecture. Consequently, IGR institutions and processes developed over time, and have been led primarily by the Commonwealth government (Phillimore, 2010; Phillimore and Harwood, 2015).

Australian IGR has been characterized by an increasing engagement with IGR, accompanied by a general trend of centralization and an expansion of central government powers (Phillimore 2010; Phillimore and Harwood, 2015). Informal IGR is crucial, and the central government retains influential financial, legal and political levers which can be leveraged if its desired outcomes are not being met. Australian IGR demonstrates strong features of Executive Federalism, reflected by the most significant intergovernmental body, the vertical Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The most important vertical apex IGR mechanism in Australia is COAG, which was established in 1992 through an informal agreement between the prime minister and the state premiers. There remains no formal intergovernmental agreement or legislation establishing the Council, and it is therefore an informal mechanism the operation of which has shifted over time. COAG is comprised of the head of the Commonwealth government (the prime minister), the heads of the State and Territory governments (premiers and chief ministers), and the head of the Australian Local Government Association. The Council aims to facilitate consensus among the Australian governments in national policy areas and provide a means through which collaborative approaches can be developed on contentious issues. Meetings of COAG are called and chaired by the prime minister, who also sets the agenda (Phillimore, 2010). COAG usually meets twice a year. However, meetings are convened as needed and at times the Council has met up to four times in a single year. COAG may also settle issues out-of-session by correspondence (Phillimore and Harwood, 2015). Decision making in COAG is taken by consensus, and while not formally or legally binding, the heads of government are expected to abide by them. The outcomes of COAG meetings are contained in public communiqués published at the end of each meeting. Where formal agreements are reached, these may be embodied in intergovernmental agreements, including National Agreements and National Partnership Agreements. While COAG is a forum for cooperation and collaboration between the different orders of government in Australia, some argue that the Commonwealth Government is the 'first among equals' within the Council, due to the fact that the power to convene and set the agenda is held by the prime minister. Moreover, the Commonwealth government provides the administrative facility required for its function in the form of the COAG secretariat, which is housed within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Phillimore, 2010). In addition to COAG, the States and Territories have their own horizontal coordination body, the Council for the Australian Federation. Established via a memorandum of understanding signed between the CU governments in 2006, CAF represented a significant development in a country in which horizontal IGR has traditionally been weak. CAF is comprised of the premiers and chief ministers of the States and Territories, and is modeled on Canada's Council of the Federation. It meets at least once per year to discuss matters related to COAG, or issues of cross-jurisdictional importance. Unlike COAG, CAF has a rotating chair and its secretariat is funded by all members, but similar to the vertical body, the focus is on consensus decision making and decisions are not formally binding (Phillimore and Harwood, 2015). Ministerial Councils, at a lower level, are informal instruments in which ministers with responsibility for specific policy areas or sectors from different orders meet on a regular basis to discuss areas of common interest [Phillimore 2010, 14]. While their operation varies, increasingly the formation and agendas of these

ministerial meetings are established by COAG. Importantly, COAG also deals with issue of intergovernmental fiscal issues. While the Commonwealth Grants Commission establishes the technical basis for equalization grants, principles are negotiated at the COAG level. Despite the general dominance of the executive branch in IGR, some legislative mechanisms have facilitated coronation. At the national level, the second chamber - the Senate – is comprised of representatives of the States and Territories. There are no meaningful formal cooperative mechanisms between Commonwealth Parliament and the legislatures of the States and Territories (Phillimore, 2015). However, the States and Territories have the ability to refer powers to the Commonwealth, such as the regulation of corporations and securities for example (Phillimore 2010). In addition, mirror and template legislation has been used extensively in Australia to ensure a degree of legislative harmonization across the federation (Phillimore and Harwood, 2015).

With regard to intergovernmental performance measurement, Australia's Report on Government Services (RoGS) is one of the most highly institutionalized cooperative benchmarking mechanisms in a federal system. The RoGS was first produced in 1995 as a result of the Review of Government Service Provision, which established a systematic approach to reporting comparative data on the effectiveness and efficiency of government services (Banks and Macdonald 2010). Every year, the Australian governments cooperate in producing the report, which in 2017 contained performance information on six 'social services', encompassing seventeen service areas (Report on Government Services, 2017). Designed as a collaborative and consensual exercise, the Commonwealth Government plays a facilitative role in its production, as opposed to a coercive or directive role. The RoGS is primarily designed as a tool of government which aims to promote better service outcomes and provide comparative performance information which allows Australian governments to learn from each other's experiences. The equity, efficiency, and effectiveness of service areas are assessed, and the production of the report is overseen by a Steering Committee comprised of senior officials from central agencies (the departments of first ministers, and treasury and finance). Furthermore, the RoGS operates with an impartial chairman and secretariat, thereby facilitating a collaborative and cooperative environment. The RoGS can be seen as one of the success stories of Australian cooperative federalism, facilitating agreement among the various orders of government within the country about what matters in terms of performance, and enabling the collection and publication of robust data to inform performance comparisons on an array of potentially sensitive issues (Banks and Macdonald, 2010).

GERMANY

Germany, one of the countries in the continent of Europe, stands as a viable example of a country whose intergovernmental relations and bureaucratic decentralization could be studied. The Federal Republic of Germany is a federal state divided into 16 Länder (states), each possessing its own constitution, government and parliament. These Länder are further subdivided into regions (Regierungsbezirke), districts (Landkreise), and municipalities, which handle local administration. The federal system in Germany grants significant powers to the Länder, especially in areas such as education, policing, and cultural affairs, while the federal government retains authority over national issues such as defense, foreign policy, and taxation (Auel, 2014). This structure promotes a balance between centralization and decentralization, allowing regional governments to cater to local needs while ensuring national cohesion (Benz, 2020). The Länder's involvement in decision-making at the federal level, particularly through the Bundesrat (Federal Council), ensures that state interests are well-represented in the legislative process, fostering a collaborative governance environment (Goetz, 2021).

The highly integrated federal architecture of Germany is mirrored in a highly integrated, cooperative form of IGR, with strongly developed and institutionalized legislative and executive mechanisms for interaction between different orders of government. The German constitution establishes the central (federal) and CU orders of government. In Germany, the CUs are the sixteen Länder and the division of competences between this order and the federal government encourages a highly cooperative system which is sometimes referred to as 'intra-state federalism'. The German federal architecture divides competences in such as fashion that the different levels of government are required to work with one another in order to achieve national policy coherence. The federal government possesses nearly all of the legislative powers (with the exception of some that are the exclusive domain of the Länder), while the Länder possess nearly all of the administrative

competences, and are responsible for the implementation of federal laws (Lhotta & von Blumenthal 2015). As the consequence of this division of powers is necessary coordination and cooperation of the different orders, IGR are used to variously develop, approve, and implement federal legislation.

Germany has a strong, institutional mechanism for IGR embedded into the structure of the federal legislature. Comprised of two separate chambers, the Bundestag and the Bundesrat, it is the second chamber, the Bundesrat which is the key IGR arena. The Bundesrat, which consists of representatives of the Länder government, must approve every important federal law, as well as any encroachment by the federal government on the Länder's implementation of federal laws. The Bundesrat representatives are bound by the decisions of their respective governments, and thus ensure that CUs are involved in the process of passing national legislation. While the Bundesrat does have the power to veto legislation, in practice this right is rarely exercised, and on the whole both chambers demonstrate a willingness to cooperate. Alongside the strong IGR processes built into the structure of the legislature, an series of apex-level executive mechanisms, complemented by a large number of working groups and committees, further bolster the cooperative IGR approach adopted in Germany. With reference to article 31 of the Standing Orders of the German Government, the Federal Chancellor invites the heads of the Länder government to informal discussions at least twice per year. These meetings are designed to help coordinate governance at both levels of the federal system, to mitigate conflicts, and to help communicate political agendas. These discussions are strictly confidential, and the conclusions of the meetings are not necessarily communicated to the public, although in the past some outcomes have been presented at press conferences. Conferences of the Ministerpräsidenten (heads of the Länder government) represent the peak horizontal IGR forum. These conferences are a long-established practice which predates the formation of the Federal Republic. Conferences of the Ministerpräsidenten take place at least four times per year, with sessions prepared and hosted by the chairing Land, and with each Land serving as chair for a period of one year. Decisions are typically reached through a process of compromise, and may take the form of mutual agreements on standards for Land legislation, and common positions in relation to European institutions or negotiations with the federal government (Lhotta & von Blumenthal, 2015; 2010). As noted above, in addition to apex-level executive mechanisms, there are a number of complementary, lower-level IGR instruments, most notably sectoral ministers' conferences (Lhotta & von Blumenthal 2015). These conferences are primarily horizontal forums convening sectoral ministers from the different Länder, but the federal government is often involved to varying extents – sometimes as a full member, and other times as a guest. Furthermore, executives from Länder in the same region with mutual interests engage in various forms of informal interaction.

Intergovernmental relations (IGR) in Germany, with its highly cooperative federal system, have had a significant impact on the efficiency of public service delivery. Germany's health system is largely decentralized, with states (Länder) playing a critical role in the management and delivery of healthcare services. In 2018, Germany spent approximately 11.3% of its GDP on healthcare, a figure comparable to other developed nations (OECD, 2020). The division of responsibilities between the federal government and Länder allows for region-specific healthcare policies. For instance, Länder have significant influence over the management of hospitals and the distribution of health personnel, contributing to efficient resource allocation. This decentralized model has helped Germany maintain a robust healthcare system with relatively high access to services, with nearly 100% of the population covered by statutory health insurance as of 2019 (OECD, 2020).

In Germany, education is primarily managed by the Länder, and this decentralized control has allowed for tailored education policies to address regional needs. According to the OECD (2020), Germany's education spending stood at 4.9% of its GDP in 2019, with a notable increase in investment in digital education tools and vocational training programs. The Länder's involvement in local education systems results in diverse educational offerings, particularly in vocational education and training (VET), which has been a key factor in reducing youth unemployment rates. In 2020, the youth unemployment rate in Germany was just 5.5%, one of the lowest in Europe (OECD, 2020).

Germany's IGR structure, especially its focus on cooperation between the federal and state governments, has significantly contributed to public safety. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Germany's response was marked by a strong collaboration between the federal government and the Länder, with each state implementing

tailored measures based on local conditions. A study conducted by the Robert Koch Institute (2020) found that Germany's coordinated IGR approach led to one of the lowest case fatality rates in Europe at 3.4% by mid-2020, compared to the European average of 5.5%. This highlights the efficiency of Germany's decentralized decision-making in a crisis.

Germany's decentralized federal system has also contributed to the efficiency of energy policy implementation. The Energiewende, Germany's transition to renewable energy, has seen substantial involvement from regional governments in implementing energy policies. In 2020, renewable energy sources accounted for over 50% of Germany's electricity consumption (Agora Energiewende, 2020). This high level of renewable energy adoption is partly due to the Länder's autonomy in energy policy, which has enabled region-specific renewable energy initiatives, such as solar power projects in southern Germany and wind farms in northern states.

The division of administrative responsibilities between the federal government and the Länder has resulted in improved efficiency in the public administration sector. A report by the Bertelsmann Stiftung (2019) noted that Germany ranks highly in terms of e-government services, with over 70% of public services available online across various states. This digitalization of public services has significantly increased efficiency, particularly in areas like business registration and tax filing, making government services more accessible and reducing the administrative burden on citizens and businesses.

These statistics and figures clearly illustrate how Germany's system of IGR, with its emphasis on cooperation and decentralized decision-making, has enhanced the efficiency of public service delivery across multiple sectors.

INDIA

India operates under a federal system of governance, defined by the Constitution of India, which is the supreme legal document outlining the division of powers and responsibilities between the central government and the state governments. The concept of federalism in India is characterized by a strong central government with states having significant, but limited autonomy. This centralization is partly due to the historical context, where the framers of the Constitution sought to create a unified nation post-independence while ensuring regional diversity.

The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, sets out the framework for intergovernmental relations (IGR) through a dual polity consisting of the Union (Central) government and the States. The Constitution outlines the allocation of powers in three distinct lists: the Union List, the State List, and the Concurrent List. The Union List contains subjects on which only the central government can legislate, such as defense, foreign affairs, and communications. The State List contains subjects on which only the state governments can legislate, including police, public health, and agriculture. The Concurrent List, which includes subjects like criminal law and marriage, allows both central and state governments to legislate, but in case of a conflict, the central law prevails (Constitution of India, Article 246).

One key feature of India's IGR system is the supremacy of the central government in case of conflicts. Article 249 of the Constitution provides the central government with the power to legislate on matters in the State List in national interest, further emphasizing the centralization of power. Additionally, the use of the Interstate Council, established by Article 263, plays a crucial role in coordinating and facilitating dialogue between the central and state governments on matters of common interest. This body was envisioned to improve cooperation and resolve conflicts that arise in federal relations.

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A critical aspect of IGR in India is fiscal relations. The division of financial resources between the central government and the states is a fundamental issue in Indian federalism. The Finance Commission, established under Article 280 of the Constitution, is tasked with recommending the distribution of taxes between the Union and the States. This body plays a significant role in ensuring that states have adequate resources for governance while also maintaining fiscal unity in the country. The financial devolution process has been contentious, with states often calling for a larger share of the central revenue pool. The 14th Finance Commission, for example, recommended that 42% of the central government's tax revenues be transferred to the states, a decision that was widely hailed as a positive step toward strengthening fiscal federalism (14th Finance Commission Report, 2015).

However, despite these mechanisms, the fiscal autonomy of states remains a contested issue. Critics argue that the central government's control over substantial portions of revenue, as well as its power to impose mandates on states, limits the financial independence of states. Moreover, the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017, which unified the country's tax system, shifted significant financial power to the central government, leading some to argue that it diminished the financial sovereignty of states (Rao, 2018).

Another important element of IGR in India is the role of the President of India and the Governors of States. The President, as the nominal head of the executive, has the power to dissolve the lower house of Parliament and call for elections, but his powers are exercised on the advice of the Prime Minister. In terms of IGR, the President can use their discretion to address state-related issues when conflicts arise. Similarly, the Governor of each state, appointed by the President, plays a role in maintaining federal relations at the state level. The Governor has the authority to ensure that state legislation is consistent with the Constitution and can withhold assent to state bills that may be deemed unconstitutional.

The judiciary in India plays a critical role in interpreting the Constitution and resolving disputes between the central government and states. The Supreme Court of India is the final authority in resolving disputes that involve intergovernmental relations. The power of judicial review enables the Court to adjudicate on matters where there is a conflict between state and central legislation, ensuring that the division of powers is respected. Notable cases, such as the *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), have established principles of federalism and the protection of state autonomy. The Court emphasized that while the central government may intervene in a state's affairs, it must respect the autonomy of states in matters defined in the Constitution.

While the formal framework for IGR in India is well established, there remain several challenges in its implementation. The centralized nature of the Indian political system has often led to friction between the central government and the states, especially regarding fiscal devolution, control over natural resources, and the imposition of national laws on state affairs. The lack of robust mechanisms for addressing disputes between states and the center, and the absence of a regular institutionalized mechanism for coordination, often results in ad hoc decision-making. Additionally, the increasing dominance of the executive branch, particularly the office of the Prime Minister, in matters of national importance has further centralized power, reducing the effectiveness of cooperative federalism.

India's intergovernmental relations are shaped by a constitutional framework that provides for federalism, but with significant centralizing tendencies. The division of powers between the Union and the States, as well as fiscal and judicial mechanisms for resolving conflicts, are central to the functioning of India's federal system. However, the dominance of the central government in financial matters, combined with an executive-led

decision-making process, poses challenges to the full realization of federalism. Efforts to strengthen cooperative federalism and address these challenges will require a more institutionalized approach to coordination and a greater emphasis on state autonomy in policy-making.

The overall implication of India's intergovernmental relations (IGR) on public service delivery is multifaceted, as it involves the complex interaction between the central and state governments in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs. While the centralization of authority ensures uniformity in key national policies (e.g., education, health, and infrastructure), it can limit the flexibility of state governments to tailor programs to local needs. This has led to disparities in service delivery, as states with different socio-economic and cultural contexts often require customized solutions. For example, healthcare and education delivery prove to be more efficient in states with stronger fiscal autonomy or better implementation mechanisms. States with greater financial resources can invest more in infrastructure, healthcare, and education, leading to better public service outcomes. For example, states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which have comparatively higher fiscal autonomy, perform better in health and education metrics, while poorer states may struggle to meet these needs.

The judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court of India, plays a critical role in interpreting the Constitution and resolving conflicts between the Union and the States. This judicial oversight ensures that the division of powers is respected, and disputes are settled, which is vital for maintaining stability in the federal system. Judicial decisions that clarify the roles and responsibilities of the central and state governments contribute to more effective governance. For example, the S.R. Bommai case (1994) reinforced state autonomy, particularly in matters that affect local governance. This has allowed state governments to implement their own policies more effectively, though sometimes delays in court rulings or lack of clarity in decisions can slow down public service reforms.

The impact of India's IGR on public service delivery is both positive and negative. On the one hand, federalism allows for the tailoring of policies to meet local needs, leading to more responsive governance in certain areas. On the other hand, the strong centralization of power, particularly in fiscal matters, often limits the autonomy of states and creates inefficiencies in service delivery. While the mechanisms for resolving conflicts and coordinating between the center and states exist, their inconsistent application and occasional lack of clarity in policy execution hinder optimal service delivery outcomes.

NIGERIA

In Nigeria, the practice of intergovernmental relations (IGR) and decentralization reflects the country's federal structure, comprising the federal, state, and local government tiers. The 1999 constitution of the FRN as the legal framework that created the levels of government that serve as structures defines the functions and powers of each level and agencies using exclusive, concurrent and residual legislative lists thereby making cooperation an important prerequisite for governance in Nigeria (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2009).

Intergovernmental relations (IGR) therefore provide a platform for series of legal, political and administrative relationships between levels of government with varying degrees of autonomy (Ijimakinwa, Zinsu & Osakede, 2015). This explains the general of IGR as the transaction between levels of government of either national or regional or among federal, state and local governments (Ajulor & Okewale, 2011). The Nigerian federal system of government, IGR would mean relationships existing amongst the various levels of government (federal, state and local government), and their agencies through various ministries, departments and parastatals. At this, Usman and Erunke (2012) observe that IGR in Nigeria exists at 6 levels and stages of government and its agencies thus:

- i. Federal –State Relations
- ii. Federal – State - Local Relations
- iii. Federal - Local Relations

- iv. State – State (Inter-state) Relations
- v. State – Local Relations
- vi. Local – Local (Inter-Local) Relations.

The nature of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria is characterized by a complex and dynamic interaction between the federal government and the 36 state governments and between the states and the local governments. At the structural level, the practice of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria is far from the realities seen in other federal systems like Canada, the United States of America, India and Australia. The efficiency seen even lower than those seen in centralized countries such as China, United Kingdom and some countries of the MENA region. Architects of the current operational intergovernmental relations in Nigeria have erroneously neglected the need to reflect the principles of theory and practice of federalism in the world over which has arguably made the 1999 Nigerian constitution defective. It was on this defective note that even the Nigeria's fourth republic was inaugurated (Chiamogu, 2020).

A balance sheet of intergovernmental relations under successive governments in Nigeria summarizes the fact that the whole processes and arrangements have been and are still marred with problems and conflicts which are structural and operational in nature. Of course, the problems are generic as they are traceable to the formative years of the country when it was still under full blown colonialism. Unfortunately, the political elites who inherited the postcolonial Nigerian political structures have surprisingly found it difficult to surmount these challenges and have failed to evolve a truly adaptable pragmatic intergovernmental arrangement devoid of mundane primordial sentiments that have bedeviled the practice of federalism in Nigeria.

The method of dividing powers between the federal and sub-national governments in Nigeria has created a system where the federal government holds disproportionate power, leaving the sub-national governments relatively weak and heavily reliant on federal directives. This imbalance has significantly influenced the nature of intergovernmental relations and the practice of administrative and bureaucratic decentralization in the country. Federal theorists have debated the ideal power dynamics within federations, with no consensus on whether central or sub-national governments should dominate. However, in Nigeria's federal structure, the concentration of power at the center shapes intergovernmental interactions and determines administrative capacities. This centralization limits the autonomy and effectiveness of state and local governments, undermining the principles of decentralization and creating challenges in policy implementation and efficient public service across the three tiers of government.

The lopsided nature of the intergovernmental relations in Nigeria is reflected in the administrative imbalance seen in 1999 constitution. The federal constitution empowered the federal government to allocate to itself juicy and lucrative responsibilities such as federation account, control of arms, ammunition and explosives, aviation, census, defense, foreign policy, currency etc. with huge financial attractions. Instructively, only the federal government can legislate on the matters contained in the exclusive list. The concurrent list which accommodates joint legislative powers by both federal and state governments on such matters as university, primary education, revenue allocation, tax collection, electric power, agricultural development etc. is overwhelmingly dominated by the federal government in practice. The state governments are subordinate even in their primary areas of jurisdiction made possible by the provisions of the 1999 constitution. Indeed, the preamble to the concurrent list of the 1999 constitution prescribes that: subject to this constitution, the National Assembly may by an Act make provisions for all matters in that list including those on revenue allocation, statistics, agriculture, health and education (FGN, 1999). This provision has made the states subservient to the 'almighty' federal government even on their constitutional responsibilities and powers.

The nature of bureaucratic decentralization in Nigeria reflects the broader challenges and complexities of its federal system. Bureaucratic decentralization, in principle, refers to the transfer of administrative responsibilities and decision-making powers from central authorities to sub-national governments and agencies. In Nigeria, this has been implemented unevenly, with significant gaps between policy and practice. Although the federal government has outlined areas of jurisdiction for state and local governments, administrative autonomy at these sub-national levels remains constrained. This is largely due to the

concentration of power and resources at the federal level, as entrenched in the 1999 Constitution, which often overrides or undermines the capacity of state and local governments to operate independently. Moreover, Nigeria’s bureaucratic structure suffers from inefficiencies such as overlapping functions, poor inter-agency coordination, and limited accountability mechanisms. Local governments, intended as the closest tier to the people, often lack the financial and human resources necessary to execute their administrative functions effectively. Additionally, political interference and weak institutional frameworks further hamper the prospects of meaningful decentralization. This centralization of administrative control ultimately limits the ability of state and local governments to innovate or respond flexibly to local needs, reducing the overall efficiency of public service across the country.

	SUMMARY OF THE CASES						
Countries	USA	Argentina	Australia	Germany	India	Nigeria	
System of Govt.	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	
Form of Govt	Presidential	Presidential	Parliamentary	Parliamentary	Parliamentary	Presidential	
Federation Type	Dualist	Dualist	Dualist	Integrated	Dualist	Dualist	
Number of Constituent Units	50	24	8	16	36	36	
Constitutional Mandate for IGR	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	
Apex Vertical IGR Forum	None	None	COAG	Bundestrat	UG	FG	
Executive Driven	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes, but embedded in the Legislative Process	Yes	Yes	
Administrative Responsibility for IGR	White House Office of the IGR	N/A	Department of PM and Cabinet	Bundestrat	N/A	N/A	
Decision Rules	N/A	N/A	Consensus	Majority vote but Consensus in practice	Executive	Executive	
Impact on Efficient Public Service Delivery	Successful	Successful	Successful	Successful	Slightly Successful	Not Successful	

The experience of different federations in developing, implementing, utilizing, or in some cases neglecting, IGR facilitates learning about the dynamics of intergovernmental processes, and how they may be improved to promote better public service delivery. While the experiences of individual federations are always to some extent *sui generis*, and from this perspective the learning derived from them heuristic, this does not preclude the identification of transferable knowledge which may support the development of IGR moving forward. A good proxy of the efficacy of a particular IGR forum or mechanism is the frequency with which it is employed to deal with important policy matters. By this measure, some countries have clearly been more successful than others in establishing Apex IGR forums. When one looks specifically at Apex level IGR forums, a number of patterns are clearly visible.

First, whatever normative concerns might exist around the issue of democratic accountability, the most effective Apex level IGR are executive driven. Even in Germany the Bundesrat is essentially composed of state executives. In dualist federations the establishment of Apex level IGR bodies has been led by the heads of the federal government. Almost everywhere else upper houses which were designed to represent the CU's interests function along partisan lines and seldom contribute to IGR policy.

Second, the most effective forum/institutions for Apex level IGR are housed within central agencies at the federal level, or are autonomous institutions. COAG in Australia is housed within Cabinet Offices. In Germany the Bundesrat is established by the basic law. Even in the United States, where there is essentially no Apex IGR institution, the main liaison for intergovernmental affairs is housed within the White House. This location at the centre of government is important not just because it provides intergovernmental affairs departments with greater convening power, but more importantly it allows them to play an effective coordinating role across sectoral silos in government. Furthermore, the establishment of dedicated staff to manage these interactions either within with key central agencies (Cabinet Offices, PMO, etc.) or in autonomous agencies has been key to developing substantive agendas and facilitating follow-up.

Third, regardless of whether Apex IGR mechanisms are constitutionally mandated, the formalization of key IGR institutions and mechanisms can help to ensure that governments interact with one another on a regular (and ideally meaningful) basis. Where constitutional and/or statutory protections exist for the status, powers, and responsibilities of the CUs, they are less likely to feel threatened by intergovernmental interaction, particularly if IGR is accompanied by principles to guide cooperative behaviour.

Fourth, previous practice suggests that an IGR system which combines both formal and informal elements is likely to achieve better, more productive policy outcomes. Indeed, informal IGR is a necessary accompaniment to formal processes and institutions. The personal relationships and communication processes maintained between actors in different orders of government foster the respect, trust, mutuality, and willingness to engage and cooperate that is necessary for effective coordination. This is particularly important and easier to achieve in countries with fewer constituent units (Australia), than with many (United States or Germany). Where formal IGR proves deficient, informal interaction provides a bulwark against deterioration in relations that can lead to damaging conflict between orders. Even where majority decision rules exist (e.g. in the Bundesrat), the tendency can be to seek consensus on issues. Engaging in discussion and mediation is seen as an alternative to conflict and litigation. Even in dualist systems where there is no constitutional requirement to cooperate such as in Australia, negotiated settlements to disputes are the preferred option. This is because litigation is seen as a zero-sum game and potentially damaging for national cohesion, whereas negotiated outcomes on IGR issues allow all stakeholders to gain something in return for making concessions.

Finally, it is important to remember that the development or lack thereof, of effective IGR mechanisms reflects the unique, political, social, historical, and cultural contexts in which different governments interact with one another. These contexts have a profound effect on the institutions, processes, and mechanisms which comprise the practice of IGR, and their relative efficacy. Context matters and there is no single 'one-size-fits-all' solution or method of best practice. At best one can draw some lessons from these general observations which could be applicable in other countries.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria is one country whose pattern of IGR has not yielded a successful public service delivery. Mitigating the challenges posed by poor intergovernmental relations (IGR) on public service efficiency in Nigeria requires deliberate policy adjustments and institutional reforms. First, the Nigerian Constitution should be reviewed to address ambiguities and imbalances in power distribution between federal, state, and local governments. Clearer definitions of roles and responsibilities can minimize overlaps and conflicts among various arms and levels of government.

The lack of a strict constitutional and administrative framework in Nigeria's intergovernmental relations (IGR) has led to an overreliance on informal mechanisms such as personal relationships, political affiliations and executive discretion. This dynamic often skews power towards the executive arm of government, subordinating other arms and compromising their independence. Legislatures and judiciaries at both federal and state levels frequently become susceptible to the whims and caprices of the executive, undermining the checks and balances essential for democratic governance. Similarly, this overreliance distorts the relationship between the federal and state governments, with state administrations often yielding to federal pressures to secure political favor or resources. This dynamic erodes institutional integrity, leaving administrative bodies incapacitated to act independently or effectively. Consequently, governance becomes centralized in practice, even within a federal structure, sidelining collaborative and equitable policymaking.

The implications for public service delivery are profound and far-reaching. With compromised administrative bodies unable to function autonomously, inefficiencies arise in policy implementation and service delivery. Coordination between tiers of government becomes inconsistent, with executive directives often taking precedence over structured, needs-based decision-making. This results in poorly executed policies, misaligned priorities, and a failure to address local needs effectively. Moreover, the lack of transparency and accountability in informal IGR mechanisms fosters corruption and mismanagement, further impeding service delivery. The ultimate effect is a disjointed public service system incapable of meeting the needs of citizens, exacerbating inequality and diminishing public trust in governance. Institutionalizing a formal and structured IGR framework is essential to address these challenges, ensuring that governance processes are transparent, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all stakeholders.

Establishing formal and permanent IGR mechanisms to complement the already excessive informal one will do Nigeria a lot of good. This will enable representatives from all government levels foster dialogue, resolve conflicts, and promote coordinated policy implementation. Models like Germany's Bundesrat or Australia's Council of Australian Governments offer valuable insights.

Moreover, enhancing the administrative capacity of state and local governments through training, resources, and financial independence is critical. Granting these tiers greater fiscal and policy-making autonomy can empower them to deliver tailored and efficient services. Most importantly, Nigeria can draw lessons from decentralized systems like the U.S., where states exercise significant control over areas such as education and healthcare which demonstrate how sub-national units can achieve results with guided autonomy.

Implementing these strategies requires political will, stakeholder commitment, and public support. By addressing systemic challenges and promoting collaborative governance, Nigeria can enhance its public service efficiency and foster sustainable national development.

The interplay of intergovernmental relations (IGR) and bureaucratic decentralization is central to the efficiency of public service delivery in governance systems globally. Nigeria's federal structure, marred by excessive centralization and weak sub-national autonomy, contrasts starkly with the balanced frameworks of countries like the United States, Germany, and Australia. While these nations leverage decentralized governance to enhance the efficiency of the public service, Nigeria's approach undermines these principles, leading to inefficiencies and poor public service outcomes. Addressing these issues requires a deliberate shift toward fostering cooperative IGR, ensuring power-sharing aligns with constitutional mandates, and strengthening the administrative capacity of sub-national governments.

It is in line with the above that the following recommendations were made:

1. The constitution should be amended in order to clarify and balance power distribution among federal, state and local governments, reducing overlaps and conflicts.
2. Permanent intergovernmental councils should be created to facilitate dialogue, conflict resolution, and joint policy implementation among all tiers of government.
3. Enhance fiscal and policy-making autonomy for state and local governments to promote innovative and tailored public service solutions.
4. The federal government must invest in training and resource allocation for state and local government officials to improve administrative efficiency and accountability.

Strengthening Nigeria's intergovernmental relations requires more than structural reforms; it demands a cultural shift toward collaboration and mutual respect across all levels of government. By learning from global best practices while addressing context-specific challenges, Nigeria can enhance the efficiency of its public service and pave the way for sustainable development.

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