



2025-2026
Lincoln-Douglas Debate
Sourcebook Case 1

**A federal system of government is superior to a
unitary system of government.**

Negative Case: Individual Rights

"The rights of the individual should be the primary object of all governments." ("Mercy") It is because I agree with American revolutionary Mercy Otis Warren that I stand resolved:

A federalist system of government is NOT superior to a unitary system of government

Before we go any further, let's establish what exactly we are going to be discussing today.

Def 1) Unitary Government

"A unitary state, or unitary government, is a political system where ultimate governing power is concentrated in a single national authority." ("Unitary")

Def 2) Federalist Government

"Unlike in a unitary state, sovereignty in federal political orders is non-centralized [...] between at least two levels so that units at each level have final authority and can be self-governing [...]. Citizens thus have political obligations to, or have their rights secured by, two authorities." ("Federalism")

In the course of this debate, we will be discussing these two systems of government and why you should value a unitary system over a federalist system. To accomplish this goal, I propose a universal value that we can use to weigh the two sides of the debate.

Value: Individual Rights

The Declaration of Independence states that men "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." It continues, "to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men." (Jefferson) The genius of the American revolution was that their new government's sole objective was the protection of the individual rights of the people. It is the affirmative position today that the protection of individual rights ought to continue to be the primary and only objective of government. Thus, whichever side of the debate best upholds this Value deserves your ballot. The Criterion I will use in this round is "Justice". Whichever side better upholds Justice also protects individual rights and should win this debate round.

To demonstrate why the negative side best upholds Justice, I am going to present three contentions:

1) Federalist systems lack uniformity

Federalist systems are designed to lack uniformity. Since each State can make its own laws in many areas, it is obvious that these laws won't be the same from State to State. For example, the Death Penalty is legal in 27 states, but prohibited in 23 others.

The Affirmative might argue that the National government can impose uniform laws, but this is more theory than fact. The recent Supreme Court decision striking down *Roe v Wade* sent the authority to regulate abortion back to the States, intentionally creating a variety of different laws regarding abortion.

2) Lack of uniform laws leads to injustice

Justice is the idea that people are to be treated impartially and fairly by the law, and where the accused receives a morally right consequence merited by their actions (Cornell).

If the law is impartial, then the same punishment should apply to the same crime, regardless of who committed the crime or where it was committed. If the death penalty is a morally right consequence for murder, how can this consequence not be imposed if the crime was committed in 23 states where the death penalty is illegal. (Death Penalty Info) On the other hand, if the death penalty is not a morally right consequence, how is it Justice to sentence people to death in 27 other States?

If you agree that Justice is impartial and requires the application of consistent morally right consequences for crimes, then the patchwork structure of a Federalist system is unjust.

3) Unitary systems protect all citizens equally

A fundamental tenet of a Just government is equality under the law. However, State laws in Federalist systems favor the interests of the majority in that State. You could be in the majority in one state, but if you move to another where you are a minority, you might not have the same rights. As George Orwell wrote in *Animal Farm*, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." (Orwell)

For example, from 1787 until 1863, the US Constitution did not outlaw slavery. As a result, slavery was legal in some States. Free states voted to outlaw slavery, and this conflict of justice and lack of equal protection ultimately led to the Civil War.

My opponent can talk about how a Federalist system prevents tyranny and allows for experimentation in the "laboratory of democracy". I stand resolved that inequality and injustice is tyranny, and experiments should never infringe on our rights to "justice for all". A Unitary

government provides Justice by protecting everyone's rights. For this reason, I urge to you vote for Negative in today's debate round.

Works Cited

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