

# Federalism in the Twenty-First Century: Trends and Prospects

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# What is federalism?

- Two orders of government (central/regional) each with independent powers
- Constitutionally created—not creature of other order (vs. unitary or confederal)
- Arbitration mechanism for constitution, usually a court
- Democratic: goes with divided power, rule of law
- Special federal protections: upper house; amendment formula; court composition; language

# Variety of federations: societies

- 25 in world and 40% of population
- All democracies with very large populations or territories
- Some small countries with great social diversity: language, ethnicity, religion, regions
- High, middle and low income countries

# Variety of federations: institutions

- Legislative-executive arrangements:
  - Parliamentary
  - Presidential
  - Mixed
- Upper houses:
  - directly-indirectly elected
  - powers
- Electoral and party systems
- Protections of minority rights
- Distribution of powers
- Fiscal sharing

# Politics and Language

- Not all 25 federations always meet all elements of definition
- Experts sometimes disagree
- In some countries ‘federal’ carries negative political baggage: South Africa, Spain, Indonesia —even India
- Issue is not use of word ‘federal’, but value of ‘tool kit’ of federal techniques
- Every country must find its own formula

# Classic Federations

- United States (1780)
- Switzerland (1848)
- Canada (1867)
- Australia (1901)
- Germany (1871-1918) (1948)
- Austria (1918-1933) (1945)
  
- All are now well established and successful but three broke down at some point in their history

# Latin American Federations

- Venezuela (1811)
- Mexico (1824)
- Argentina (1853)
- Brazil (1891)
  
- History of military rule and major constitutional rewrites
- Transition to democracy in late twentieth century
  - All but Venezuela now quite stable democracies

# Post-Colonial Federations

- **Continuing:**
  - India (1950)
  - Malaysia (1948 and 1963) (lost Singapore)
  - Nigeria (1954)
  - Pakistan (1956) (lost Bangladesh)
- **Failed**
  - West Indies (1958)
  - Indochina (1945-7)
  - French West Africa and Mali (1959)
  - Indonesia (1945-9)
  - Uganda
  - Central African Federation

# New Wave of Federalism

- Post-Soviet federations
- Federations emerging from unitary regimes
- European Union
- Post-conflict situations
  
- Mixed picture regarding prospects

# Federalism and the ex- Soviet Bloc

- Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia were nominal, not real, federations. Power was always centralized in the party and courts not independent.
- They did not survive the transition to democracy
- However, Russia, which was half the Soviet Union held together as a federation. Though Putin has moved to centralize, still a federation

# New federations emerging peacefully from unitary systems

## Established

- Belgium
- Spain
- South Africa
- United Kingdom?

## Potential

- Philippines
- Indonesia
- Italy
- Bolivia

# The European Union

- Unique regim
  - Federal: Parliament, Court
  - Confederal: Council of Ministers
- Central motivation was to bring peace to Europe but now much broader
- Started from different functional focus than most federations: economic, not defence and foreign policy

# New federations emerging from post-conflict situations

## Established

- Bosnia
- Ethiopia
- Iraq
- Sudan
- South Africa

## Potential

- Sri Lanka
- Somalia
- Congo
- Cyprus
- Nepal

# Bosnia

- Federal regime imposed by Dayton accord
- Very small country
- Elaborate mechanisms for protecting three communities at centre: not functional

# Ethiopia

- Federal regime emerged from victorious revolution—liberation armies based in different regions
- Highly diverse society, undeveloped politics
- Significant push to develop regional structures and politics
- Still one party in control at both levels, but party competition becoming more active

# Iraq

- Federalism only solution acceptable to Kurds
- Highly decentralized design but not yet implemented. Many unresolved issues
- Oil dependent state
- Emergence of sectarian politics
- An asymmetric model?

# Sudan

- Federal solution central to Comprehensive Peace Agreement
- Special features:
  - Government of national unity
  - Eventual referendum on southern independence
  - South Sudan as federation within federation
  - Oil revenue sharing
- Transitional period before elections
- Unresolved problems of Darfur and North-east

# South Africa

- African National Congress traditionally opposed federalism
- But agreed:
  - Inkatha
  - Europeans
  - Asians
- Needed to create provinces
- Successful transition to democracy

# Innovations in New Federations

- Territorial and cultural federalism: Belgian model
- Asymmetry:
  - Spanish separate treaties with autonomous communities
  - UK: Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland
  - Sudan: federation within a federation
- Constitution-making:
  - Reconciliation and constitution-making in South Africa
- Federalism at the centre
  - 50-50 Cabinet, ‘alarm bells’ in Belgium
  - Mixed executive in Iraq

# Conditions for Federal Success

- Federal culture: can be very divided, but need some elements of shared identity and respect for difference, tolerance; cross-cutting cleavages
- Federal politics: rule of law, leaders (Nehru, Mandele, Trudeau), political game (peaceful, democratic)
- Federal techniques: fiscal federalism, ethnic and language laws, decentralization; consociationalism

# Federalism and Democracy

- Federalism is a democractic form of government so the first pre-condition of federalism is a democractic environment.
- If this exists, the question becomes what will better 'fit' or stabilize a particular democracy: a unitary or federal form.
- Federalism is basic to the stability of many democracies

# Federalism in 21st Century

- Federalism will receive more attention in 21st century because of
  - Democraticization in complex societies
  - International pressures to keep countries united
  - Push for local voice in established democracies
- Will be especially important in Africa and Asia: could a democratic China not be federal?
- However, federalism, like unitary regimes, cannot always succeed. Part of larger challenge of democracy