

Unit 2. Federalism as a Political System - 1

FEDERALISM

OVERVIEW



Federalism in context

Federalism: What is it?

When does federalism make sense?

The critique of federalism

In defence of federalism

Some specific concerns

Concluding observations

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FEDERALISM IN CONTEXT

Globalization

Multiple governments; multiple identities

Rapid political change

24 federations

40% of the world's population (2 billion people)

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FEDERALISM: WHAT IS IT?

Constitutional government: shared rule and self rule

Two orders of government, both relating directly to citizens

Distribution of power and revenue sources between the two orders of government

Representation of regions in the centre, often in an upper house

Basic rules normally amendable only with consent of constituent units

Umpire to settle disputes – courts or referendums

Intergovernmental relations for overlapping concerns

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Within this framework, great variety

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WHEN DOES FEDERALISM MAKE SENSE?

In very large countries

When accommodating history, tradition and local loyalties as new states are being formed

When accommodating significant ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious differentiation in existing states

When there is a mix of these factors

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THE CRITIQUE OF FEDERALISM

Complex, slow to change, tolerates uneven development and regional inequality, duplicates functions and services

The allocation of responsibilities and resources to two orders of government is difficult

Thought to be an expensive system of government

‘Minorities within minorities’ problem

Unstable: A halfway house *en route* to secession

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IN DEFENCE OF FEDERALISM

Helps to establish peace and security, construct common values, and foster pluralist democracy

Protects and moderates human diversity

‘Losers’ at the national level can become ‘winners’ at the regional level

Increases political participation, with multiple access points; greater choice

Encourages experimentation

Brings government closer to the people, fosters responsive administration

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CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

No magic bullet. Federalism by itself is not ‘The Answer’

Federal government is constitutional government

For countries in crisis, federalism is often the ‘least bad option’ – better than any of the alternatives that present themselves. Everyone’s second choice.

Federalism is typically built on hard-won compromise, where no party is in a position to win absolute victory

