

A, Global Dialogue on Federalism

BOOKLET SERIES VOLUME 9

DIALOGUES ON POLITICAL PARTIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY  
IN FEDERAL COUNTRIES

Reference, government

## A Global Dialogue on Federalism

*Focusing on important themes of federal governance through country case studies that illustrate federalism's diversity, challenges, and opportunities*

This booklet is the ninth in a series created to provide accessible and comparative information on federal systems. The corresponding book series offers a comprehensive exploration of selected themes while the booklets provide the reader with highlights of each topic, serving as an entry point to the books.

The first booklet featured constitutional origins, structure, and change; the second explored the distribution of powers and responsibilities; the third examined legislative, executive, and judicial governance; the fourth considered fiscal federalism; the fifth focused on foreign relations; the sixth delved into local government and metropolitan regions, the seventh analyzed diversity and unity; the eight compared intergovernmental relations. This ninth booklet in the series features 12 federal countries: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States.

The booklet and book series emerged from the Global Dialogue on Federalism, a joint program of the Forum of Federations and the International Association of Centers for Federal Studies (IACFS). The program creates forums around the world through which experts exchange experiences, ideas, and academic research to identify emerging challenges and inspire new solutions.

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IN FEDERAL COUNTRIES

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AND KARL NERENBERG

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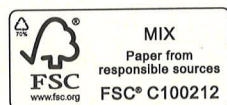
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## Preface

We are pleased to introduce this booklet on *Political Parties and Civil Society*, volume nine in the Global Dialogue Booklet series. This booklet offers a comparative overview of the subject across twelve federal systems, including: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland and the United States. Each of these countries has something unique to bring to this important examination of a vital and basic element of democracy.

Over-all, what a reader might conclude from this Booklet is that the political party system of each federal country appears to have developed in its own distinct way, and indeed this in turn has had an impact in the federalization of these countries. The fact of a multi-level, federal system has significant implications for political parties, but there are also many other crucial historic and cultural factors.

And so, at one end of the spectrum we have the Belgian system, where all parties are, in essence, linguistic and regional; while, at the other end, there is the American system where, its two party system consisting of the Democrats and Republicans at levels of government. Between the two, there are countries such as Canada and India, where there is a mixture of national and regional/provincial parties at the sub-national and federal levels of government.

The Canadian case is interesting, and illustrative of how difficult it can often be for outsiders to penetrate the subtle, complex — and not always rational or logical — folkways of a country's party system.

In 1998, the erstwhile leader of Canada's federal Progressive Conservative Party took over the leadership of the Liberal Party of Quebec (ultimately getting elected Premier of that province). At the time, many foreign observers asked why the onetime Conservative had chosen to switch parties. The answer was that he had not, necessarily, given up being a *federal* Conservative. The Liberal Party of *Quebec* is a distinct entity from the Liberal Party of *Canada*, and one can be, simultaneously, a provincial Liberal and federal Conservative — as, indeed, many are. In Canada, this is not true of all parties, or all provinces, and you almost have to be part of the local political culture to appreciate those distinctions.

The articles in the volume give the reader a privileged, “insider’s perspective” on this sort of complex phenomenon. The articles will enable you to understand the American, German, Indian or South African party systems in much the same way as well-informed citizens of those countries do. In India, for example, the proliferation of regional parties and the advent of coalition governments at the national level have contributed to the federalization of the political system. This has simultaneously led to the emergence, as Sandeep Shastri notes, of a dualist structure when it comes to competitive party politics — with multi-party competition at the federal level and bi-partisan competition within the states.

Political parties are as crucial to healthy democracies as constitutions, yet they do not always receive the respect they are due. We too often think of constitutional democracy as noble and enlightened, while “politics” can be crass and very down-to-earth. This booklet affirms the central and vital role of political parties in the practice of democratic federalism.

What follows is as much a descriptive as a theoretical exercise. The authors provide a guided tour over the rough and irregular terrain of their countries’ civil society and political party systems — and it is a fascinating tour, at that. The authors’ observations are acute and insightful, and often unsparing. They show you their own countries’ “rough terrain” as it is — hills, valleys, swamps, rocky crags and all!

That is why booklets such as this one, and the series of which it is a part, can be of such value. They can provide practitioners and researchers alike with a window into the real-life challenges of federalism in vastly different political, cultural and economic circumstances. We hope that, in so doing, we help improve both the practice and the understanding of federalism as a worldwide phenomenon.

In due course this booklet will be followed by a more comprehensive book on the same topic, wherein the authors of the booklet explore the theme in further detail. Both publications, which are part of the Global Dialogue on Federalism Series, are the outcome of a greater project led by two partner organizations, the Forum of Federations and the International Association of Centers for Federal Studies.

The Global Dialogue program explores federal governance by theme and aims to bring experts together to inspire new ideas and fill a gap in the comparative literature on federal governance. After presenting the ninth booklet in seven years, we note that these handy publications are becoming an indispensable reference document on their own, delivering instant comparative information on various topics in a concise format. It is not surprising that the previous volumes proved to be very popular and have been translated into numerous languages, including Arabic and Kurdish.

In this Booklet, the various aspects of political parties and civil society are described in country chapters entitled “Dialogue Insights”. The chapters are introduced by a text of comparative reflections written by Klaus Detterbeck

and Wolfgang Renzsch the theme coordinators. A glossary at the end of the booklet enhances the knowledge-sharing and educational vocation of this publication.

The questions the authors address include:

- How important are political parties and civil society organizations for the actual working of the federal system?
- In which ways do parties and civil society organizations have an impact and, specifically, what is their political role in federalism (e.g., as forces of national integration and/or regional pressure, as informal channels of intergovernmental bargaining, or as mediators or agents of territorial conflict)?
- What can we say about the dynamics of change? Do changes in party politics and civil society affect the guiding ideas, institutions and public policies of a federal system, even if there are no constitutional changes?
- What is the relation between parties and civil society?
- Is there a clear separation between the two types of political organization or are there elements that are interlocking?
- Is there competition between parties and civil society in the pursuit of political influence?
- Are territorial conflicts and the future of the federation an important source of political conflict?
- How important are regionalist and ethno-nationalist parties and civil society organizations? In what ways are such cleavages accommodated within the federal system?

These are only a small number of the questions that this series of articles addresses. As do some federal systems, this Booklet takes an *asymmetric* approach to its subject. The articles do not all answer the same questions, in an identical way. True to their own circumstances and cultures, the authors have examined the subject in a variety of ways, which underscores the diversity and complexity of federalism as it is practiced.

What makes the Global Dialogue booklet and book series nearly unique is the process by which the publications are generated.

Each theme process entails multiple stages, starting with the selection of a “theme coordinator”. It is this person’s task to create an internationally comprehensive set of questions covering institutional provisions and how they work in practice, based on the most current research. These sets of questions are the foundation of the program, as they guide the dialogue at the roundtables and ensure consistency in the book chapters. The roundtables themselves are led by a “country coordinator”, and are organized concurrently in twelve chosen countries.

To create the most accurate picture of the situation in each country, the country coordinators invite a group of practicing and academic experts with diverse viewpoints and experience who are prepared to share with and learn from others in a non-politicized environment. At the end of the day, the

coordinators are equipped to write an article that reflects the highlights of the dialogue from each country roundtable. The articles presented here have been generated from such an exchange.

Once each country has held its roundtable, representatives gather at an international roundtable to identify commonalities and differences and to generate new insights. Such insights are incorporated into the country chapters in the aforementioned theme book. The chapters reflect the fact that their authors were able to explore the theme from a global vantage point, resulting in a truly comparative exploration of the topic.

The success of the Global Dialogue Program depends fully on the engagement of a variety of organizations and dedicated individuals. For their generous financial support we would like to thank the Government of Canada and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The International Roundtable in Berlin, Germany was made possible with generous support from the Academy of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. We also wish in particular to acknowledge the experts who took part in the dialogue events for providing a diversity of perspectives that helped to shape the articles themselves. Klaus Detterbeck and Wolfgang Renzsch the Theme Coordinators, John Kincaid, Senior Editor of the book series, and the rest of the Global Dialogue Editorial Board have offered their invaluable advice and expertise. Thank you to Alan Fenna for doing the painstaking work of creating the glossary. We would like to acknowledge the support offered by several staff members at the Forum of Federations: Rhonda Dumas, Phillip Gonzalez, Roderick Macdonell, Chris Randall, and Carl Stieren. We would like to thank the staff at Imprimerie Gauvin for their important assistance in the printing process. Finally, we thank the staff at McGill-Queen's University Press for offering their support and advice throughout the publication process.

The Global Dialogue on Federalism Series continues the Forum of Federations' tradition of publishing either independently or in partnership with other organizations.

The Forum has produced a variety of books and multimedia material. For further information on the Forum's publications and activities, refer to the Forum's website at [www.forumfed.org](http://www.forumfed.org). The website contains links to other organizations and an on-line library which includes Global Dialogue articles and chapters.

The increasing body of literature produced by the Forum of Federations and the International Association of Centers for Federal Studies aims to encourage practitioners and scholars to use the knowledge gained to devise new solutions and to join the many active participants around the world in the growing international network on federalism. We welcome feedback and suggestions on how these series can be improved to serve this goal.

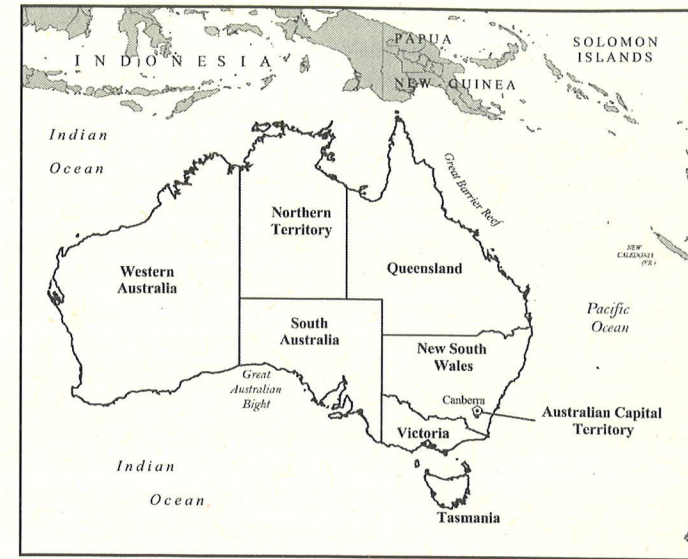
POLITICAL PARTIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY  
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representing specific federal units. South Africa can be seen as approaching this model best, whereas hegemony has become challenged in Malaysia and Mexico and has faded in India. The centralized Nigerian federation has given rise to a hegemonic position of the party holding the presidency;

- a cooperative model: federal systems in which vertically integrated parties organize a coordinated process of policy-making. Party negotiations, both internally and between parties in intergovernmental arenas, structure federal dynamics. While partisan veto players are important, strong cooperation between party governments at different levels may shift the balance towards federal centralization. Germany falls most clearly into this category, arguably Australia could be added;
- a competitive model: federal systems in which a holding-together centre is confronted with strong regional forces heading towards increased autonomy. Political negotiations inside the multi-level organizations and between parties are of crucial importance for federal dynamics. The latter may tend more strongly towards state decentralization. Among our country cases, Spain and (with some peculiarities) Belgium fulfil the criteria here;
- a decentralized model: federal systems in which regional autonomy is a vital aspect of both political parties and the federal design. The focus of parties is on the regional level with national organizations playing a coordinating role. Federal negotiations between territorial levels of government have a rather bureaucratic outlook and are less party-based. Switzerland and the USA come close to this model, Australia may also be placed in this category.
- a bifurcated model: federal systems in which the lack of vertical party integration accentuates the differences between territorial arenas. Parties stick to their specific constituencies which have a regional and/or linguistic basis. Intergovernmental relations between territorial levels may either be troubled by party conflict or removed from party politics via a more executive style of federalism. Canada (with different modes of integration among the major parties) and Belgium (without a single polity-wide party) resemble this model.

### Concluding Remarks

Federal institutions, party competition and civil society are far from being static. There is permanent movement within all three spheres, making the interaction between them highly dynamic. The country dialogues aptly demonstrate the significant amount of changes that federal democracies have experienced in recent decades. Change has to do with the transformation of governance within nation-states. Yet, change has also been triggered by new forces within civil society and new dynamics of party competition. With the growing multiplicity and heterogeneity of political actors, the processes of interest mediation in federal systems have become more complex. Profound changes in the social and political bases of compound polities are providing new challenges for theorists and practitioners of federalism.



## Australia: The Decline of Party Allegiance

NORMAN ABJORENSEN

For the best part of a century, Australia has operated under a classic two-party system (or, to some, a two-and-a-half party system, if one includes rural-based Nationals, formerly known as the Country Party). In line with that of many other western democracies, Australia is experiencing a declining allegiance to its major political parties, as the parties themselves decline in membership — phenomena that reflect long-term social change, with significant implications for civil society.

At the creation of the Australian federation in 1901, the new and rising Australian Labor Party, with its origins in the industrial labour movement, vied with liberal protectionists and conservative free traders for influence in the new parliament which, by the second election in 1903, had divided into three roughly equal groups. The instability and uncertainty brought about by shifting alliances drove the protectionists and free traders to bury their differences and unite against the Labor Party in 1909 in a so-called *Fusion*. The resulting two-party system has prevailed since then.

For much of the twentieth century, political struggles were essentially class-based, with industrial and agricultural workers supporting the Labor Party and urban professionals, the middle classes and land owners supporting

the non-Labor parties which have gone under a variety of names. For 70 of those 100 years, the major non-Labor party governed in coalition with the smaller rural non-Labor party. The Labor Party, in government less often, suffered three damaging splits in that period: over conscription in the First World War, policy responses to the Great Depression in 1931-1932 and over the issue of communist influence in the trade unions in the 1950s.

Gradual changes in post-war society saw a rapid expansion of tertiary education, along with a decline in the agricultural workforce and a steady growth in the services sector as manufacturing — most of it sustained through high tariff protection — gradually became less significant as a major employment sector.

The Liberal Party, formed in 1944, strove to emulate Labor in forming a mass party with a permanent secretariat, and reached out to many workers in the lower middle class with a message based on greater prosperity and a fear of communism. Labor, for its part, also began to target the middle classes as the old class-based paradigm became blurred.

The blurring of hitherto sharp class lines has had a significant impact on the way in which people tend to self-identify and on the parties themselves.

The blurring of hitherto sharp class lines has had a significant impact on the way in which people tend to self-identify and on the parties themselves. Up until 1970, close to 90 per cent of the electorate professed a strong allegiance to one or other of the major parties, and electoral contests were regularly targeted at the so-called “swing voters” who comprised the other 10 per cent.

With compulsory voting in Australia since the 1920s, election campaigns too often resembled bidding wars to secure the uncommitted vote.

Data collected in the continuing Australian Political Attitudes and Australian Election Study surveys show a steady decline since 1970 in the number of people identifying with one or the other main parties — the percentage having fallen in 2004 to 77 per cent. The measured shift has been split between those who identify with a minor party and those who no longer identify with any party at all. Since the early 1990s, there has been a doubling of those identifying with minority parties, most notably the now defunct Australian Democrats and the rising Greens. Even more significant, however, has been the four-fold increase since 1970 of those who do not identify with any party at all. There are also perceived changes within these aggregate trends. For instance there is a noticeable decline in the strength of party identification.

While all parties, with the possible exception of the Greens, report a declining membership base, precise figures of party membership tend to be closely guarded. However, there are reports from each of the major parties in different states that have found their way into the public arena and that suggest a remarkably similar picture of both decline and disengagement.

In 2005, when the Labor Party opened the election of its national president to the party rank-and-file, 39,000 ballot papers were distributed but only 19,000 returned. This suggests a very small proportion of the Australian populations of about 21 million are party members, active or otherwise. A report in 2005 on the Labor Party in New South Wales, Australia's most populous state, revealed just 8000 members in that state who worked for a living (that is, excluding retired people) out of a total workforce of 3.25 million.

A continuing problem for Labor is its reliance on the union movement, itself in sharp decline, with coverage of less than 15 per cent of the private sector workforce. Given the unions' decisive influence in party counsels, Labor finds it increasingly difficult to break its traditional shackles to the union movement regardless of its declining adherence in the broader working community.

Similarly, in Victoria, Australia's second most populous state, where the conservative Liberal Party has traditionally been strong, an internal party review in 2008 showed that it had just 13,000 members, down from a peak of 46,000 in 1950 out of a much smaller population. More tellingly, the Liberal Party's median age stood at 62 against a median age of the population of 43. This suggests that citizen participation in political parties is neither extensive nor representative of the wider population.

There is also evidence of growing disenchantment with politics and politicians. While in many countries this can be reflected in a low voter turnout, Australia's compulsory voting sees it manifested in other ways, such as voters increasingly resorting to a split vote in supporting a major party for the House of Representatives but a minor party for the proportionally-elected upper house, the Senate.

This apparent decline in the social bases of both parties stands in contrast to the Greens, who now have members in most state parliaments as well as the Federal Senate. The Greens grew out of the environmental social movement of the 1980s and even today resemble a social movement more than they do a political party, with their rejection of hierarchical structures and commitment to member participation in policy development. A steadily increasing Green vote in inner urban electorates is now threatening a traditional Labor stronghold and this trend, if continued, suggests longer term realignment. It could also cause a “re-think” of how parties organize and relate to their bases.

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