At a time when globalization is supposedly producing homogeneity, differences derived from ethnicity have become especially lethal. Ethnic violence within states is now much more common than interstate violence and also tends to be harder to stop. Since 1945, ethnic violence has played a major role in half of all wars, turned more than 12 million people into refugees, and caused at least 11 million deaths. Precisely because today’s wars are so often between peoples rather than states, civilian casualties have risen dramatically. Fewer than half of the casualties in World War II were noncombatants, while today some three-quarters of all war casualties are civilian.

How can states avoid ethnic violence and best accommodate multiple ethnicities? Answering this question is probably most vital where ethnic identities have a territorial base. Geographically concentrated groups can pose challenges for national political parties, for state security forces, and even for the boundaries of the state itself.

Is adopting federalism the best way to cope with territorially based diversity? A surprising and expanding range of polities seem to be leaning in a federal direction. In the past 25 years, the number of federal states among the advanced industrial societies has grown from five (Australia, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States) to seven (with the addition of Spain and Belgium). Italians voted to federalize last fall, and federalism is being debated in Corsica and the United Kingdom.
Debates about federalism have gained increasing salience in developing countries as well. In Ethiopia, after years of civil war, regional leaders adopted a federal constitution in 1995. In the Philippines, 22 out of 24 senators called publicly for federalization in November 2000. In Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid called for federalism in 1999, opening a debate that has continued well beyond his presidency. In South Africa, pro-federal opposition parties have demanded that the ruling African National Congress enforce the federal characteristics of the constitution and accord more power to provincial governments. Serious calls for federalism are now being heard in nations as diverse as Burma, Uganda, and Afghanistan. As an increasing number of poorer countries debate the merits of federalism, other countries that have long been federal have expanded the number of subunits within their boundaries. India has created nine new states since the 1970s, three of which came into being as recently as November 2000.

The increased interest in federalism is fueled by its detractors as well as by its fans. Even a glance at the headlines suggests why the concept is so controversial. The persistence of Basque terrorism, the long and deadly struggle in Kashmir, and the tragedies emerging from the breakup of Yugoslavia seem to suggest that federal formulas for accommodation are at best ineffectual and at worst deeply damaging.

The case against federalism has been made most eloquently by those studying postcommunist regimes. According to Valerie Bunce, federal systems in communist regimes contained “virtually all the building blocks that are necessary for the rise of nationalist movements and the formation of states.” These building blocks included the recognition of a common language, the creation of a nationally defined intelligentsia, the establishment of a stable core of institutions led by a nativized elite, and the allocation of political and economic resources to regional leaders who could use them for divisive, nationalist purposes. She reminds us that territorially concentrated minorities in federal systems were the only minorities that challenged state boundaries in the new regimes of postcommunist Eastern Europe, and she concludes, “If new democracies inherit a national-federal structure, they tend to be more vulnerable to secessionist pressures.”

Since the evidence for and against federalism is clearly mixed, we must weigh it as carefully as possible. Toward this end, Ugo Amoretti and I organized an international research team in 2000 to study the relative merits of federalism versus unitarism in divided societies. With the horrors of the Yugoslav breakup paramount in my mind, I expected our project to conclude that federalism exacerbated ethnic conflict. Instead, despite considering a great diversity of cases, our authors were nearly unanimous in concluding that federal institutions promote successful accommodation.

In advanced democracies with divided societies, including Switzer-
land, Belgium, Canada, and Spain, federalism has helped to keep states unified and democratic in the face of possible secession by territorially based minorities. Outside the advanced industrial societies, federalism also gets good reviews. Countries whose histories of electoral competition are long (India), short (Mexico), or mixed (Nigeria) have all evinced the positive effects of federal structures. In Russia, the fluid nature of the federal system and the constitution’s lack of specificity have created a number of bilateral relationships between the center and the regions, but have also managed to eliminate the threat of regional secession—with the obvious exception of Chechnya.

The diverse range of cases noted above helps explain the remarkable association between federalism, multinationalism, and democracy highlighted by Alfred Stepan. Though acknowledging the risks of federalism, he exposes the striking fact that “every single longstanding democracy in a multilingual and multinational polity is a federal state.” He goes on to argue that countries with high levels of ethnic and linguistic diversity—such as Russia, Indonesia, and Burma—will never become stable democracies “without workable federal systems.”

Stepan’s unequivocal prediction spurs us to think more urgently about federalism’s effects. Since institutions, like objects, are best assessed from multiple vantage points, a fair analysis requires both comparative and historical perspectives. First, and most obviously, we must ask how federal states compare with unitary states in the accommodation of territorially based minorities. Second, we must ask how federalization compares with other possible conflict-management mechanisms. Finally, we must review the historical record to learn when and why federalism fails.

Federalism versus Unitarism

A federal system exists when there is a layer of institutions between a state’s center and its localities, when this layer of institutions features its own leaders and representative bodies, and when those leaders and bodies share decision-making power with the center. Though there are strong reasons for arguing that dictatorships cannot be truly federal due to the false nature of their representative bodies, I emphasize shared decision-making powers and therefore include examples of both regime types in the federal category.

Comparative studies of federalism and unitarism are surprisingly rare. Fortunately, the data in Ted Robert Gurr’s “Minorities at Risk” (MAR) project enable us to make some preliminary but suggestive comparisons. While not directly concerned with federalism, the MAR project provides highly detailed information on a large set of minority groups in both federal and unitary states. The project offers data on all groups who 1) suffered (or benefited) from systematic discriminatory treatment; 2)
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...mobilized in defense of their self-defined interests at some time between 1945 and 1989; 3) lived in a nation whose population exceeded one million in 1985; and 4) constituted at least 1 percent of their country’s population or numbered more than 100,000. A full 112 territorially concentrated minorities in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas fit these criteria. Of these, 46 reside in federal states, and 66 reside in unitary states.

As is inevitable with any project of this scope, particular classifications and codings might be subject to debate. Nonetheless, the data do give us an opportunity to supplement and challenge conclusions drawn from case studies and to inch toward more credible generalizations about whether the successful accommodation of territorial cleavages is, in fact, more likely under federal systems than under unitary ones.8

Successful accommodation involves not the elimination of all conflict but rather the elimination of violent conflict and the lessening of the conditions that might spark violence in the future. If the diffusion of power intrinsic to federalism does in fact benefit territorially concentrated minorities, we would expect minorities in federal states to engage in fewer acts of armed rebellion, to experience lower levels of economic and political discrimination, and to harbor lower levels of grievance concerning political, economic, and cultural policy. Most of these expectations are borne out by the data. On all six dimensions of accommodation, federal regimes score better than unitary regimes (see Table 1 above).

Federal systems provide more layers of government and thus more settings for peaceful bargaining. They also give at least some regional elites a greater stake in existing political institutions. With these incentives we would expect fewer armed rebellions in federal states. In fact, the mean armed-rebellion score for federal states is less than half that for unitary states. When federal and unitary dictatorships are compared, federal systems look even better: The incidence of minority rebellion is more than four times greater in unitary dictatorships than in federal dictatorships.

Table 1—Measures of Accommodation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Accommodation</th>
<th>All States</th>
<th>Dictatorships</th>
<th>Democracies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armed Rebellion</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discrimination</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Discrimination</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Grievances</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Grievances</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Grievances</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Lower numbers mean better accommodation. Numbers are means for aggregates of all groups with scores on measure. Each coded minority group is one observation. If case had no score on measure, it was excluded. N for all states = 112. Six cases in countries that underwent regime change between 1984 and 1986 were excluded when data were sorted by regime type.
If we look at the behavior of minorities in democracies we see a different pattern—at least initially. The armed-rebellion score for minorities in federal democracies is slightly higher than that in unitary democracies. Yet a closer look reveals that the result is driven entirely by rebellions in India. If we exclude India as an outlier, the rebellion score for minorities in federal democracies drops to about half the score for unitary democracies. The divergent Indian case deserves a great deal more attention, but otherwise the differences are dramatic. No other minority in our data set in any developing-world federal democracy was engaged in armed struggle.

Is federalism associated with reduced political discrimination? There is ample reason to expect that it would be—especially for minorities that are numerically dominant in a certain region. In these cases, representatives in regional governments would suffer sanctions if they did not protect “minority” rights. The MAR data suggest that political discrimination is, in fact, lower in federal regimes (see Table 1 on the previous page). Furthermore, this difference holds among both democracies and dictatorships. Levels of economic discrimination were also significantly lower in federal than in unitary states, once again favoring federal systems among both democracies and dictatorships.

One would expect lower levels of political and economic discrimination to be associated with lower levels of grievance, and this expectation is also confirmed, for the most part, by the data. The bottom half of Table 1 compares grievance levels in three issue areas: political rights other than autonomy, economic rights, and cultural rights. Levels of grievance concerning both political and economic rights were significantly lower among minorities in federal states. Levels of grievance concerning cultural rights were lower in federal states too, though the divergence from the levels in unitary states was not statistically significant.

Although assessing grievance levels in dictatorships is probably impossible because people are forced to conceal their preferences to avoid persecution, grievance measures for democracies are less problematic. Minorities in federal democracies seem better off than their counterparts in unitary democracies in two categories: political grievances and economic grievances. Minority grievances about cultural and social rights, however, appear slightly higher in federal democracies. Although the sources of this discontent are not clear and the small magnitude of the difference may mean that the levels of grievance are essentially the same, it is intriguing that this is the only dimension of accommodation on which federal democracies fall short.

These data provide us with only a first cut at systematic comparison, but they do suggest that federal systems might indeed facilitate accommodation better than unitary systems. Since the MAR data reinforce the generally positive assessments of federalism that emerge from our case
studies, two very different sorts of evidence point us toward the same conclusion.

Alternative Explanations?

But are we mistaking the effects of federalism for the effects of something else? Although this question merits lengthy investigation, two alternative hypotheses warrant our immediate attention. The first relates to regime stability. It stands to reason that stable regimes might be better at accommodating minorities than unstable regimes. If federal regimes are more stable than unitary regimes, it is possible that our results are being driven by regime stability rather than by federalism per se.

In fact, federal states were more stable than unitary states in the period captured by the MAR data set. In 1980, when the MAR data begin, the average age of federal regimes was 20.5 years, while the average age of unitary regimes was only 14.4 years. Yet the relative superiority of federalism remains even if we control for regime longevity (see Table 2 above). These data suggest that stability, in itself, does not determine a regime’s capacity for accommodation—federalism seems to have an independent effect. It is possible, moreover, that federalism contributes to regime stability. The fact that minorities in federal states are less likely to resort to armed struggle may help to explain why.

The effects of federalism appear to be independent of regime stability, but are they independent of wealth? It makes sense that wealthier countries would be better able to accommodate minorities because they have more resources to meet public demands. In fact, when we compare federal versus unitary countries in terms of per-capita GDP, we see immediately that federal states are significantly wealthier than unitary states. There were only 18 federal states in existence in the 1980s and only 14 in our data set (due to our focus on countries with territorially concentrated minorities), but this small group includes some of the world’s richest countries. For the countries we studied, the mean per-capita GDP

| TABLE 2—Regime Duration and Minority Accommodation in Federal vs. Unitary Regimes in the 1980s |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Measures of Accommodation                     | 25 Years or Longer                           | Less Than 25 Years | Less Than 15 Years |
|                                               | Federal | Unitary | Federal | Unitary | Federal | Unitary |
| Armed Rebellion                                | 0.76    | 1.28    | 1.69    | 4.05    | 3.38    | 4.23    |
| Political Discrimination                       | 1.26    | 2.07    | 1.88    | 1.93    | 1.50    | 1.76    |
| Economic Discrimination                        | 1.14    | 2.00    | 1.75    | 1.84    | 1.25    | 1.80    |
| Political Grievances                           | 1.46    | 3.19    | 1.63    | 2.99    | 1.75    | 3.02    |
| Economic Grievances                            | 1.78    | 2.78    | 2.44    | 2.43    | 1.38    | 2.46    |
| Cultural Grievances                            | 1.82    | 2.69    | 1.63    | 2.03    | 1.50    | 2.13    |
| Number of observations                         | 8       | 9       | 4       | 20      | 2       | 15      |

Source: See Table 1 on p. 99.
Note: Analysis excludes countries that changed regime type in the 1980s. Regime duration is calculated as the number of years between the most recent coup and 1980 (for authoritarian regimes) or the number of years between the change to democracy and 1980.
Sorting our cases into three categories by wealth helps us refine our thinking about federalism’s effects (see Table 3 above). For states with a per-capita GNP of $6,000 or above, federal states appear better at accommodation on all measures. Yet when we look at cases below the $6,000 threshold, federalism’s effects are not so uniform. Unitary states score higher than federal states on the two dimensions of accommodation most directly related to economic life: economic discrimination and economic grievances. Among the poorest states, in which per-capita GDP falls below $3,000, federal states score lower than unitary states in terms of both economic and political discrimination. Thus federalism appears to have clear advantages at a certain level of development, but below that level its advantages over unitarism are less uniform.

Although the data for the poorest countries are particularly problematic, the evidence suggests that federalism might be more advantageous in some sorts of polities than in others. Of course, we should not expect any institutions to have uniform effects across dramatically different contexts. Federalism, which involves whole sets of institutions that can take majoritarian or consensual forms, is especially likely to vary in its effects.

To suggest that federalism might be less beneficial in poor countries than in rich ones is not to argue against federalism as a means of managing territorial cleavages in the developing world. To make the latter argument, one would have to illustrate that other coping mechanisms are more beneficial. How do other means of coping with territorial cleavages measure up?

**Federalization versus Other Policy Options**

Whereas federalism describes a set of institutions that make policy, federalization is the process of establishing these institutions. Thus it is a policy in itself and must be compared with other policies to be
evaluated properly. Federalization (for regions or whole countries) is neither as risky as its critics imagine nor as costly as many of its alternatives.

Leaders faced with problematic territorially based cleavages have four main policy options—besides the two extremes of doing nothing or allowing peaceful separation. These are assimilation, subsidization, party-based incorporation, and coercion.

Assimilation is not a practical option in most cases—especially after divisions have already become inflamed. Even if local social structures allow for the intermixing and intermarriage that assimilation requires, it simply takes too much time. Karl Deutsch estimated that the full assimilation of ethnic groups requires between 300 and 700 years!9 To make matters worse, we can never be certain that the process will pay off. Scholars are beginning to question the association between the degree of ethnic difference and the prevalence of ethnic conflict. Daniel Treisman found no association between ethnic difference and separatist activity in Russia, and a broad crossnational study found that neither linguistic nor religious difference predicted ethnic violence.10 Ashutosh Varshney’s work on India illustrates that ethnic conflict is more closely related to the organization of associational life than to sociological differences per se, and a crossnational study by Stephen Saidemann and R. William Ayres found that separatist movements in the 1990s were more likely to emerge from groups that had “fewer ethnic differences with their host state.”11

Subsidization is another policy that central leaders might use to mitigate conflicts based on territorial cleavages, but this policy is problematic too. First, and most obviously, many states might not have the funds necessary for even modest monetary transfers to troubled regions. Second, even when funds are available, if ethnic conflict is well advanced, majority elites at the center may not want to allocate transfers at all. Third, leaders cannot be sure what the effects of transfers will be. Transfers from central governments to poorer peripheries may have positive, conflict-reducing effects, or they may have unintended consequences. Catholics in Northern Ireland were not won over by the transfer programs of the British welfare state, and Corsican loyalty to France remains problematic despite the fact that the island receives more transfers per capita from Paris than any other region in the country. In Eastern Europe, the Soviets hoped that development programs would bolster regional loyalties both to a central state and to the Bloc itself, but their hopes were apparently in vain.12 As Donald Horowitz concluded after a crossnational study of developing states, “It may seem paradoxical that a poor region benefiting from association with more prosperous regions should want to terminate the arrangement. Yet the desire recurs.”13

A third means of coping with regional cleavages is through minority incorporation into national political parties. This mechanism has proven
successful for long periods of time in a broad range of states. In the United Kingdom, during the period when Scottish political elites were incorporated into the uppermost ranks of British parties, Scotland was rarely run by non-Scots and rarely ruled “by a party for which it had not voted.” In the very different case of India, the accommodation of territorial differences was greatly facilitated by the nationally popular and highly heterogeneous Congress Party. In Malaysia, where deep and deadly divisions between Chinese and Malays raised serious fears of civil war at independence, the interethnic coalition embodied in the Alliance Party helped guarantee decades of ethnic peace.

Yet incorporation solely through political parties is both difficult and risky. Lasting parties of any sort are notoriously difficult to create, and interethnic alliances are especially hard to forge absent watershed struggles around issues such as decolonization or regime change. In many troubled states, the time for creating multiethnic parties has probably passed. Even if the barriers to formation are surmounted, heterogeneous parties can always lose power to more homogeneous groups. The election of the Thatcherite Conservatives changed the equilibrium in Scotland and gave a mighty boost to the Scottish nationalists. An erosion of support for the Congress Party in India produced new insecurity at the center and led Indira Gandhi to use military force as part of a new accommodation formula. If a state’s accommodation formula depends on a particular party configuration, the roots of success can wither in a single election.

Whatever its shortcomings, incorporation through parties is far superior to coercion. This fourth means of accommodation is not only reprehensible from a moral perspective but usually ineffectual as well. In Sri Lanka, an armed occupation of Tamil areas, a constitution that gave the “foremost place” to Buddhism, and an exam system that excluded qualified Tamils from higher education created “a half-generation of recruits for separatist organizations.” In Turkey, property expropriations, forced resettlement, and aerial bombardment created the seeds of the Kurdish nationalist movement that emerged in the 1960s. In Mexico, the harsh repression of peaceful peasant movements in Chiapas in the 1980s laid the foundation for an armed revolutionary movement in the 1990s. In the advanced industrial societies, the dynamic is no different: Margaret Thatcher’s hard line in Northern Ireland “provided a massive boost for Sinn Fein and a recruiting bonanza for the IRA.”

The long-term costs of coercion are, almost invariably, more negative and long-lasting than its perpetrators realize. Yet even the short-term costs are far from negligible. In addition to the loss of life, the financial expenses are obvious, and they can skyrocket if the targeted minority secures foreign support. Furthermore, the institutional costs of coercion can be even higher. Engagement with noncombatants strains military
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institutions. If soldiers or officers come to see ethnic wars as unjust or unwinnable, military and political elites may grow mutually antagonistic. The dangers of such antagonism need no elaboration.

Federalism’s Effects, Real and Imagined

The adoption of federalism need not preclude subsidization or party-based incorporation, but even by itself federalization may be a relatively desirable option. Although elites at the center often fear that granting even partial autonomy will encourage violence and secession, such fears are rarely justified. In Spain and Belgium, federalization has held the growth of exclusive identities in check and stymied support for separatism. In any case, successful secessionist movements are extremely rare. Regional elites often threaten secession when they will settle for something less, as the experience of the Russian Federation demonstrates. In any case, the term “separatist” has many meanings—even for people who describe themselves as such. Only a small minority of Corsican “separatists” want outright independence from France. In Quebec, so many “separatists” sought “continued association” with Canada that the phrase was included in the most recent “separatist” referendum.

Historically, when central leaders grant increased autonomy to disaffected regions, they are usually rewarded with peace rather than instability. When Tamil nationalists in India mobilized in the early 1950s, many political actors in New Delhi feared separatism and argued for repression. When Jawaharlal Nehru gave the Tamils a separate state instead, the drive for separatism died down. In the Punjab, a Sikh separatist rebellion dragged on for years as Indira Gandhi refused concessions and tried to triumph through armed force. When a new central government allowed a series of elections, the major Sikh political party came to power, and Sikh separatism was forced “off-stage.” In Nigeria, concessions to the peoples of the Niger Delta ended Nigeria’s first violent secessionist campaign in 1966 and even brought former separatists to the side of the central government in later struggles. As William Zartman aptly puts it, “responsibility tempers demands.”

Hard-liners should remember that separatist movements are more often the stepchildren of threats than of concessions. The forced imposition of a single state language boosted separatist movements in states as varied as Spain and Sudan. The threat of an imposed state religion boosted separatism in Burma. The threats to life and livelihood from anti-Tamil riots and employment practices boosted separatist groups in Sri Lanka.

Often, it is the refusal to federalize, rather than federalism itself, that stimulates secession. Tamils in Sri Lanka began to support a violent separatist movement only in 1976, after federalization was denied. The southern Sudanese also embraced separatism only after demands for
### Table 4—Failed Federalism Outside Postcommunist Regimes in the Twentieth Century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federation</th>
<th>Foreign Pressure</th>
<th>Longevity</th>
<th>Dissolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British West Indies Federation</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>1958–62</td>
<td>Peaceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Central African Federation</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>1953–63</td>
<td>Rioting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>1953–62</td>
<td>Armed Resistance/Military Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>1961–72</td>
<td>Pres. Ahidjou unilaterally abolishes federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>UN Resolution</td>
<td>1952–62</td>
<td>Eritrean Civil War after Emperor centralizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1949–50</td>
<td>Sukarno declares unitary Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>Allies/UN</td>
<td>1951–63</td>
<td>PM Pakimi/King Idris abolish Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali Federation</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1959–60</td>
<td>Fr. Sudan (Mali) tries to centralize, Senegal withdraws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia-Singapore</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>1963–65</td>
<td>Rioting/Expulsion of Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>1947–71</td>
<td>Civil War/Separation of Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1. The federation had the support of some domestic political elites but was less popular with the public. When the federal idea was defeated by a landslide in a referendum in Jamaica, the collapse began.
2. The federation included Northern and Southern Rhodesia plus Nyasaland. It was designed “without any consultation or cooperation being sought with the Africans.” Africans were “bitterly opposed to the whole idea.” Ursula Hicks, *Federalism: Failure and Success* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 77.
3. The British insisted on a federalist solution to the ethnic diversity of Burma before it could be granted independence. Gen. Aung San persuaded many ethnic minorities to form states within a federation. The Karen leadership boycotted talks and the federation began without the borders of their state being finalized. Fighting ensued in Karen areas and in others which resented Burman domination. Disorder gave a rationale to coup makers.
4. Ahidjou came from East Cameroon which was much larger in terms of population, land, and wealth than West Cameroon. The whole existence of Cameroon was, ironically, a legacy of pre–World War I German colonialism. East and West Cameroon were legacies of Allied divisions of the German colony. See Augustine Wamala, “Federalism in Africa: Lessons for South Africa” in *Evaluating Federal Systems* (Boston: M. Nijhoff, 1994), 251–67.
5. The leaders of the new state were divided over whether federalism was desirable. The Belgians imposed a federalist constitution and the country broke into separatist and civil wars almost immediately.
6. As a former Italian colony, Eritrea was joined to Ethiopia by a U.S.-sponsored UN resolution.
7. Federalism was widely thought to be a divide-and-rule tactic aimed at saving Dutch hegemony. Those who seek federalism in Indonesia today are still struggling against this legacy.
8. The UN sought the federation of three regions controlled by Italy before World War II: Tripolitania, Fazzan, and Cyrenaica. Resistance to federalism was strongest in Tripolitania, but it was approved by a handpicked commission of local elites from each region. Cyrenaica’s amir became king of the new federalist state and eventually abolished federalism after oil was discovered in his region. Parties were banned shortly after independence. Helen Chapin Metz, ed., *Libya: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government, 1989), 34–41.
9. Both nations were part of the French Community when the Mali Federation was formed. Senegal became independent (in June 1960) and withdrew from the federation on August 20, claiming Sudan was attempting to centralize power.
10. Britain sought federation as a bulwark against a communist government after decolonization. Security concerns were so great that the British retained control of the armed forces and military affairs. The merger was hotly contested by communist parties in both states and by others who feared domination of the Malays by ethnic Chinese. The two nations’ prime ministers supported it until ethnic rioting and aggression from Indonesia made it too politically costly for Malaysia’s PM.
11. In Pakistan, it was federal borders rather than federal institutions that were imposed. M.A. Jinnah, Pakistan’s founding father, envisioned a federal state that would include the whole of Bengal, the whole of the Punjab, Kashmir, the Ranu of Kutch, Sind, Baluchistan, and the North-West Frontier. Pakistan ended up with much less than this and as a divided state with two vastly different wings separated by the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The date of Pakistan’s first federalist constitution was 1947. The Pakistanis rewrote it in 1957, but provincial autonomy was rescinded by a third constitution in 1962 and then restored by yet another constitution in 1969. Ursula Hicks, *Federalism*, 109–18.
federalization failed. The armed independence struggle launched by Eritreans in the early 1960s was brought on by the blatant violation and eventual dissolution of a federal accord.

Federalization is not a panacea and federalism is no guarantee of peace—or of anything else. There are undoubtedly situations in which such options should be spurned. Yet it is important not to reject federalism for spurious reasons, and it is historically inaccurate to argue that it brings on separatism. More comparative research is needed to explain when federalism is associated with separatism and when it is not.

We also need more comparative research on how federalism affects party systems. R. Kent Weaver’s recent work dispels a series of negative predictions. His study of federalism in advanced democracies finds “little evidence” that federalism has an independent effect on legislative fragmentation and discerns no clear relationship between federalism and the growth of antisystem parties. He finds a strong affinity between federalism and disproportional upper chambers but argues that this provides “checks and balances” that offer valuable protection for minorities. Whether these generalizations hold outside the advanced democracies merits close attention.

The Dangers of Imposed Federalism

Warnings about the dangers of federalism also merit close attention. How can we reconcile the grim reviews of federalism in postcommunist states with the decidedly more positive assessments elsewhere? Alfred Stepan gave us a sound lead in pointing to the importance of system origins. In each of the postcommunist cases, failed federalism was the legacy of imposed rule and of a past shaped by a dictatorial party. The countries that broke away from the Soviet Union had their federal status imposed on them by the very “odd empire” centered in Moscow at the end of World War II. Yugoslavia had its Soviet-model constitution imposed on it by a communist party heading a constitutional assembly in which noncommunists had no voice. In Czechoslovakia, federalism was imposed by the Soviets in 1968 as a means of isolating the Czech region, where the liberalizing forces behind the Prague Spring were based.

There are sound reasons to expect that an imposed federal system would be unlikely to last. The roots of the word federal lie in the Latin term foedus—meaning covenant or compact. Covenants have to be voluntary. As Daniel Elazar explained years ago, the federal process requires a “sense of partnership,” and such a sense cannot be imposed. Table 4 illustrates that federal systems imposed by outside forces are always troubled and usually short-lived.

Every federal system that split apart or turned toward unitarism was imposed by an outside (usually colonial) power. Like the systems that
collapsed in postcommunist Europe, these failed cases are all examples of a subtype that we might call *forced-together federalism.* This commonality among dramatically different cases is not the fruit of coincidence. It is strong evidence that federal agreements must be based on domestic covenants if they are to survive.

The list of failed cases also reveals another commonality. Each failed federal state that gave birth to a secessionist civil war was either an outright dictatorship or an inchoate regime led by a nondemocratic party. No violent separatist movement has ever succeeded in a federal democracy.

Although there is much that remains unknown about federalism and its effects, it is clear that the successful management of territorial cleavages has a great deal to do with political institutions. The necessary institutional supports are probably both federal and democratic, but this is just the beginning of an answer. There are great institutional variations within democracies and within federal systems that can make the difference between success and failure, including such technical issues as the design of electoral laws, the timing of elections, the drawing of state boundaries, and the choice between majoritarian or consensual structures. Nigeria got its institutions wrong the first time and lost at least one million people to civil war as a result. But in Nigeria and in India, leaders have been willing to undertake institutional reforms, meaning that in both states “federalism has done more to relieve or contain secessionist pressures than to stimulate them.” If political leaders are to adopt federalism voluntarily, they will have to know which institutional variations suit their countries best. This is where comparative scholarship can prove useful. Social scientists have given a great deal of attention lately to what Barry Weingast calls “market-preserving” federalism. It is time to turn our attention to “peace-preserving” federalism as well, and to study what sorts of institutions save lives.

**NOTES**

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3. These figures are from Kofi Annan, as quoted in Britannica.com: “Worlds Apart: The Roots of Regional Conflicts,” available online at www.britannica.com/worldsapart/viewpoints_print.html.


7. Valerie Bunce, Subversive Institutions, 46.

8. For more details on the nature of these data, see Ted Robert Gurr, Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts (Washington D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1993). I eliminated all the African cases from my data set because I reasoned that the state-minority dynamic would be unique where tribal identities enable the majority of the population to claim “minority” status. I also eliminated cases where territorial concentration was not known or where peoples were nomadic. This work draws on Phase I of the Gurr project, concentrating on the 1980s.


12. These points are made in the essays by Michael Keating, Marc Smyrl, and Valerie Bunce in Ugo Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo, eds., Federalism and Territorial Cleavages.


17. See the essays by Michele Angrist, Guillermo Trejo, and Michael Keating in Ugo Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo, eds., Federalism and Territorial Cleavages.

18. See the essays by Pablo Beramendi and Ramon Maiz, and by Liesbet Hooghe, in Ugo Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo, eds., Federalism and Territorial Cleavages.


23. See the article by R. Kent Weaver on pp. 111–25 of this issue.


27. In his discussion of “putting together federalism,” Stepan emphasizes the uniqueness of federations formed from coercion. See *Arguing Comparative Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 323–24. “Forced-together federalism” is a slightly different concept in that it emphasizes outside actors and relates explicitly to system frailty.