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Federalism and Consociational Regimes

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Federalism and consociationalism are useful means of understanding political systems. Federalism and consociationalism are both based on compound majoritarianism rather than simple majoritarianism, and both represent modern attempts to accommodate democratic complexity and pluralism, but the two systems are not quite symmetrical, and territorial organization is not the only characteristic that differentiates them. Instead, it can be said that federalism relates to the form of a polity, while consociationalism relates to the character of a regime. To the extent that federalism may also function as the character of a regime, then federalism and consociationalism may be more symmetrical. One of the ambiguities of federalism is that it is often both form and regime. Consociationalism, however, relates only to regime.

FEDERALISM AND CONSOCIATIONALISM COMPARED

This symposium provides an opportunity to make a second cut at delineating the relationship between federalism and consociationalism. My first thoughts on that relationship led to the suggestion that the only difference between federalism and consociationalism is the territorial issue. Using the classificatory terminology of biology, I concluded that federalism is the genus and consociationalism one of its several species.¹ My conclusions are summarized in graphic form in Table 1, which presents a taxonomy of compound political structures utilizing federal principles in the political, economic, and religious spheres. The relationship between the various political forms is presented in Figure 1. The variety of federal arrangements may also be classified as to whether their primary basis is territorial or consociational as in Figure 2.

A closer examination, however, suggests that there is another dimension to their differences which must be identified in order to understand the linkages between the two concepts. Let us examine these differences, step by step.

Arend Lijphart describes both federalism and consociationalism as forms of non-majoritarian, as distinct from majoritarian, democracy, which he defines exclusively as the Westminster system. While I accept the basic distinction, I would like to redefine it as a distinction between simple majoritarianism and politics based upon *compound majorities*—in short, compound majoritarianism. The Westminster system is no doubt the primary example of

¹Daniel J. Elazar, "The Ends of Federalism," *Partnership in Federalism*, ed. Max Frenkel (Bern: Peter Lang, 1977).

TABLE 1
Taxonomy of Compound Political Structures

Political	Economic	Religious	Principal Characteristics
Union	Multi-Division Corporation	Episcopal Church Polity	Clearly bounded territorial constituent units regain "municipal" powers concentrated in the common government.
Consociation	Guild System	Ethnic Congregations (in centralized or hierarchical church)	Non-territorial constituent units share power concentrated in common overarching government.
Fuercy	Conglomerate		Constituent units empowered through bilateral charters concluded with overarching government.
Federation	Economic Community	Presbyterian Church Polity	Strong self-government constituent unity linked within strong but limited overarching government.
Federacy	Conglomerate, if the constituent units are represented in the overall management structure		
	Customs Union	Autocephalic Church (linked polity of larger hierarchical church)	Asymmetrical permanent linkage between two self-government units with the larger having specific powers within the smaller in exchange for specific privileges. Bonds can only be dissolved by mutual consent.
Associated State			Same as Federacy but bonds can be dissolved unilaterally by either party.
Condominium	Joint Stock Company		Joint rule or control by two units over a third or over some common territory or enterprise.
Confederation	Common Market	Congregational Union or Federation	Strong self-governing constituent units permanently linked by loose, limited purpose common government.
League	Free Trade Area	Congregational Convention	Loose but permanent linkage for limited purposes without common government with some joint body or secretariat.
Inter-Jurisdictional Functional Authorities	Joint Enterprises	Board of Missions	Joint or common entities organized the constituting units to undertake special tasks.

simple majoritarian democracy, though presumably there are also Jacobin systems of simple majoritarianism which are democratic—France, for example. (It is possible to draw contrasts between Westminster and Jacobin democracy in the way that we are drawing contrasts between federal and consociational democracy, but that is not our task here.)

The term “compound majoritarianism” is derived from Publius’ argument in *Federalist* No. 51, where Madison presents the compound republic as the best republican remedy for republican diseases, in contrast with the simple single republic. The idea of compound versus simple majoritarianism is a subsidiary concept. The term has the advantage of breadth and accuracy since it does not reject majority rule but sees majorities as being compounded either from distinct territories (territorial democracy) or concurrent groups (consociationalism) rather than being counted through simple addition.

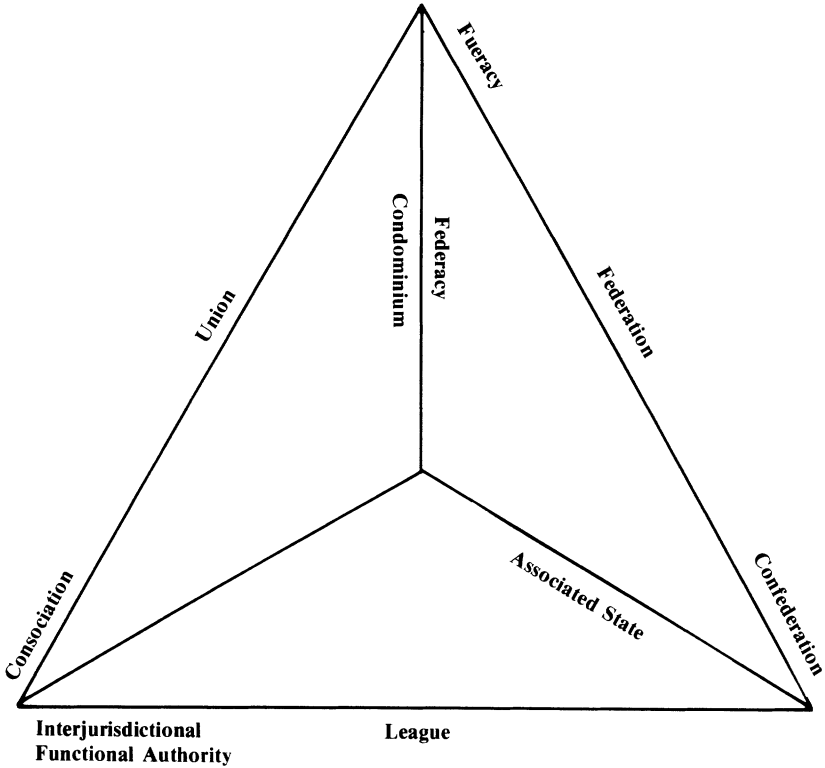
Therein lies the basic similarity between federal and consociational polities. The differences can be seen to lie in the way in which the majorities are compounded. Federal systems are dependent upon dispersed majorities, generally territorially based, whereas consociational systems are dependent upon concurrent majorities, generally a-territorial in character. Both involve the systemic building of a more substantial consensus than is the case in simple majoritarian systems. The prominent examples of dispersed majorities in federal systems are well known (e.g., presidential elections in the United States, constitutional referenda in Switzerland, and the states as single constituencies in the congressional elections in Brazil). Equally well known are the concurrent majority systems in consociational polities (e.g., the three “pillars” in The Netherlands, the Austrian grand coalition, and the camps and parties in Israel). In both cases, it is not that the majority does not rule, but that the character of the majority coalition and the effort needed to build it are more substantial, and designed to generate broader consensus within the polity as a whole.

In discussions of federalism and consociationalism, the former is usually presented as quite rigid while the latter is presented as extraordinarily flexible. From one perspective, federal systems are more rigid in the sense that federal arrangements are anchored in constitutions establishing relatively clear-cut frameworks of governmental organization which cannot easily be ignored. Consociational arrangements are far more informal, at most acquiring concrete expression through individual legislative acts directed at specific issues, such as language rights or the distribution of support for public institutions, without being anchored in a comprehensive constitutional framework. Seen from the consociational perspective, federalism must appear to be more rigid.

SIX AMBIGUITIES

This is not the entire story, however, because federalism has a number of ambiguities associated with it, as is the case with any classic

FIGURE 1
Forms of Federal Arrangements



term.² Elsewhere, I have identified six basic ambiguities associated with federalism as a theoretical and operational concept: (1) Federalism involves both structures and processes of government. (2) Federalism is directed to the achievement and maintenance of both unity and diversity. (3) Federalism is both a political and social phenomenon. (4) Federalism concerns both means and ends. (5) Federalism is pursued for both limited and comprehensive purposes. (6) There are several varieties of political arrangements to which the term “federal” has properly been applied. All this has led some political scientists to reject the term as a useful vehicle for political analysis.³ But as many of us have argued, that is not necessarily the appropriate conclusion to draw any more than it is in connection with terms like “democracy” which are equally complex and ambiguous. Quite to the contrary, the ambiguities testify

²Ibid.

³Cf. S. Rufus Davis, *The Federal Principle* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978) and Deil S. Wright, *Understanding Intergovernmental Relations* (1st ed.; North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press, 1978). Wright has since changed his opinion in this regard.

FIGURE 2
Varieties of Federal Arrangements (with Selected Examples)

Basis				
<i>Territorial</i>				
Solomon Islands	Argentina Australia Brazil Germany Malaysia Mexico USA Venezuela		Denmark- Faeroes	Arab League ASEAN NATO
Italy South Africa United Kingdom	Austria Canada Nigeria Pakistan Switzerland	EEC	Netherlands- Neth. Antilles	British Common- wealth
Form: Union	Federation	Confederation	Federacy	League
Belgium Burma China Colombia Equatorial Guinea Netherlands Tanzania	Czechoslovakia India USSR Yugoslavia		Finland- Aaland USA- Puerto Rico	
Israel Lebanon				
<i>Consociational</i>				

to the richness of the term and its importance in the real world of politics as well as political discourse.

Let us take these six ambiguities as the basis for comparing federalism and consociationalism. Federalism is most commonly perceived to be a matter

of governmental structure.⁴ If a political system is established by compact and has at least two “arenas,” “planes,” “spheres,” “tiers,” or “levels” of government, each endowed with independent legitimacy and a constitutionally guaranteed place in the overall system, and possessing its own set of institutions, powers, and responsibilities, it is deemed to be federal. Proponents of federalism properly argue that this structural dimension is a key to the operationalization of the federal principle because it creates a firm institutional framework for the achievement of the goals for which federalism was instituted in the first place. This perception is accurate enough as far as it goes.

In the earlier stages of the study of modern federalism, structural considerations were not only first and foremost, but essentially the be-all and end-all of the concern for federal arrangements, the assumption being that the introduction of a proper federal structure would create a functioning federal system. Students of federalism have come to understand the limits of, as well as the necessities for, a structural approach to federalism. This recognition was born out of experience; many polities with federal structures were not all that federal in practice—the structures masked a centralized concentration of power that stood in direct contradiction to the federal principle.

Federalism is as much a matter of process as of structure, particularly if process is broadly defined to include a political cultural dimension as well.⁵ Elements of a federal process include a sense of partnership on the part of the parties to the federal compact, manifested through negotiated cooperation on issues and programs and based on a commitment to open bargaining between all parties to an issue in such a way as to strive for consensus or, failing that, an accommodation which protects the fundamental integrity of all the partners. Only in those polities where the processes of government reflect federal principles is the structure of federalism meaningful.

In the course of identifying the importance of process, the issue was posed in such a way as to question whether federalism was a matter of structure or process, with the two juxtaposed to make it seem as if an either/or proposition were involved. In fact, federalism must combine both structure and process. That, indeed, is what creates a federal system. Where a federal structure exists without a correspondingly federal process, there is evidence to indicate that it may have some impact on processes of governance, even if the latter are not ultimately federal, but that, in the last analysis, its impact will be secondary. This seems to be the case in the USSR and in certain Latin American polities.⁶

⁴For a theory of federalism emphasizing its structural character, see K.C. Wheare, *Federal Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁵Carl J. Friedrich has emphasized federalism as process. See, in particular, his *Trends of Federalism in Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1968).

⁶See, for example, Walter Kolarz, *Russia and Her Colonies* (New York: Praeger, 1955); Robert J. Osborn, *The Evolution of Soviet Politics* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1974); and Frank Sherwood, *Institutionalizing the Grass Roots in Brazil* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing, 1967).

We know relatively little about federal processes or the extent to which they are a prerequisite for the establishment of either a federal structure or structures which can accommodate the process. There is some reason to believe that a federal process can exist in a very attenuated way without a federal structure, but even there it must ultimately acquire some structural recognition. Figure 3 suggests a tentative classification of currently extant federal polities, and selected others, with regard to their structures and processes based on assessment of currently available evidence. The figure illustrates how structure alone is not sufficient in determining the federal character of any particular polity. The groupings in the figure are themselves of interest, with the Anglo-American, Western European, Communist bloc, Latin American, Afro-Asian, and Middle Eastern countries tending to concentrate in particular segments of the matrix.

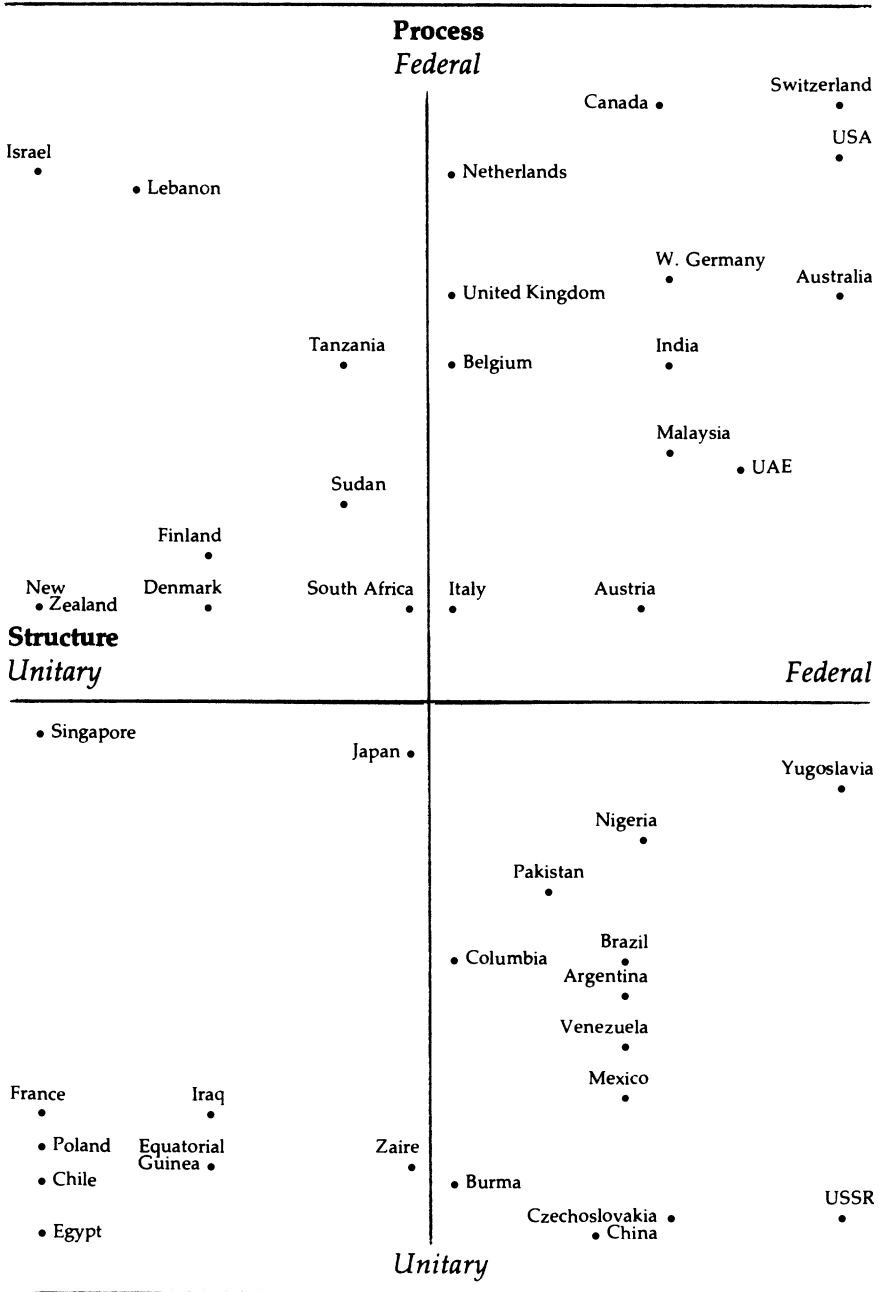
While federalism involves both structures and processes of government, consociationalism involves processes only. These processes may be embodied in law at some point, as indicated above, but the closest they come to being embodied in formal structures is through the party system, which is rarely constitutionalized as such. It is the particular process—admittedly institutionalized—of concurrent power sharing that is the principal feature of consociationalism. These processes are subject to change with relative ease when the conditions that generated them change. Both federalism and consociationalism are directed to the achievement and maintenance of both unity and diversity.

With regard to federalism, this ambiguity is reflected in a certain terminological confusion. The terms “federalism,” “federalist,” and “federalize” are commonly used to describe both the process of political unification and the maintenance of the diffusion of political power. More than one discussion of federalism has foundered upon a basic misunderstanding on the part of the parties involved, as to which sense of the term is being used. In fact, the ambiguity is a real one to the extent that federalism and its related terms do express both processes simultaneously. Federalizing does involve both the creation and maintenance of unity and the diffusion of power in the name of diversity. Indeed, that is why federalism and, presumably, consociationalism as well, is not to be located on the centralization-decentralization continuum but on a different continuum altogether, one that is predicated on non-centralization, or the effective combination of unity and diversity.⁷

When discussing federalism or consociationalism, it is a mistake to present unity and diversity as opposites. Unity should be contrasted with disunity and diversity with homogeneity, emphasizing the political dimensions and implications of each. Figure 4 suggests the likely results if the two are correlated in this manner.

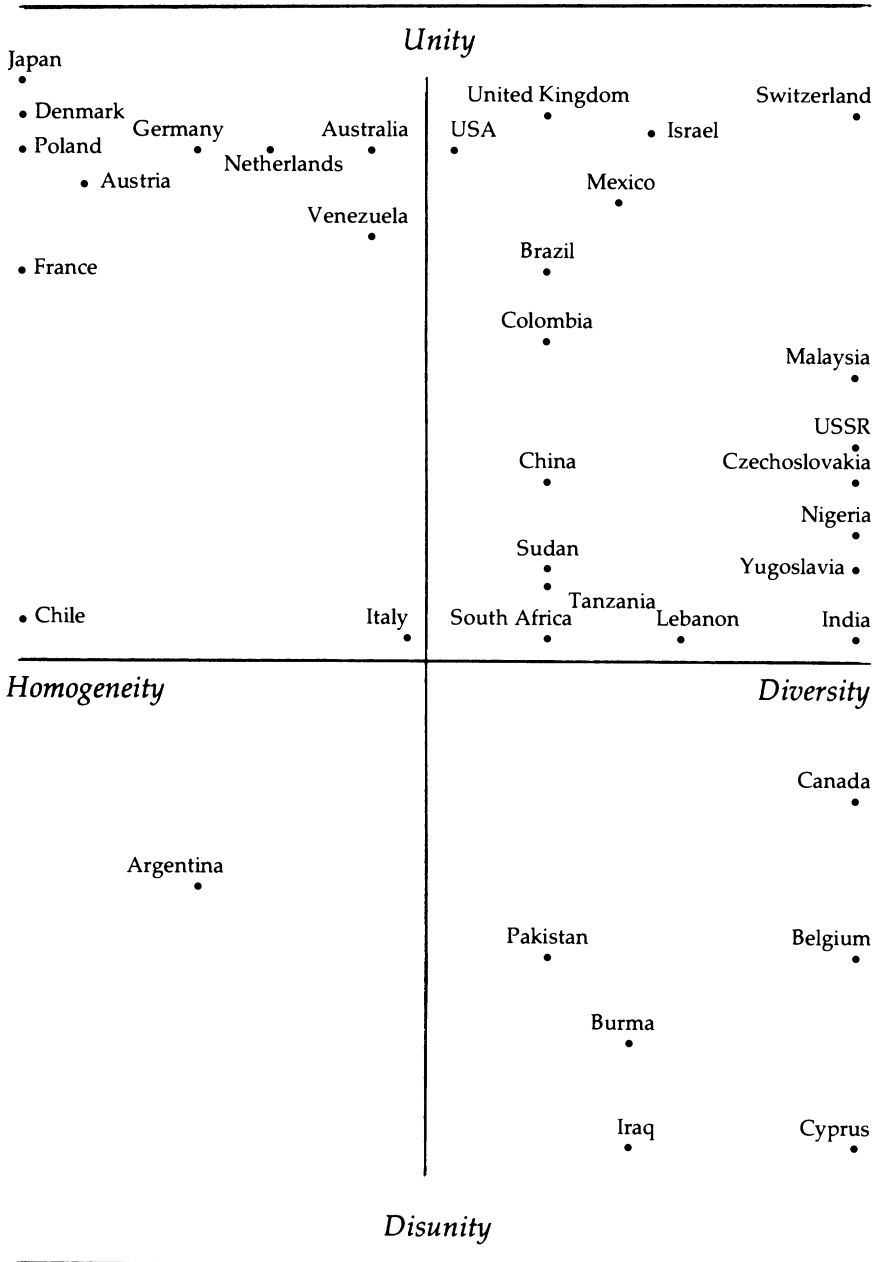
⁷For a further discussion of non-centralization versus decentralization, see Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View from the States* (3rd ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 2 and passim.

FIGURE 3
Structure and Process in Federal and Selected Non-Federal Polities



Both federalism and consociationalism are political and social phenomena, with consociationalism perhaps even more of a social phenomenon than

FIGURE 4
Unity and Diversity in Selected Federal and Non-Federal Systems



federalism. Federalism as a political phenomenon, understood according to the modern meaning of “political,” is essentially limited to relations among governments or polities. This conception of federalism is most widespread

today, particularly in federal systems. (Pre-modern and, most particularly, classical thought, understood "political" to include both the political and social dimensions because the polity was viewed as comprehensive.) At least since the nineteenth century, however, there has been a parallel conceptualization of federalism as what, in modern practice, is termed a social phenomenon.

This conceptualization manifests itself in two ways. The first has to do with the proper relationships among people as individuals, or in families and groups, as well as in their capacity as citizens, whereby they relate to each other federally, that is to say, as partners respectful of each others' integrity while cooperating for the common good in every aspect of life, not just in the political realm. This latter emphasis was developed primarily by French and Russian thinkers, who did not live within federal polities, but who sought federal solutions to social problems and saw in federalism the possibility to achieve harmonious social relationships as well as an appropriate form of political organization.⁸ The second emphasizes the existence of essentially permanent religious, ethnic, cultural, or social groups, "camps" or "pillars," around which a particular polity is organized. It is to these that consociationalism is addressed.

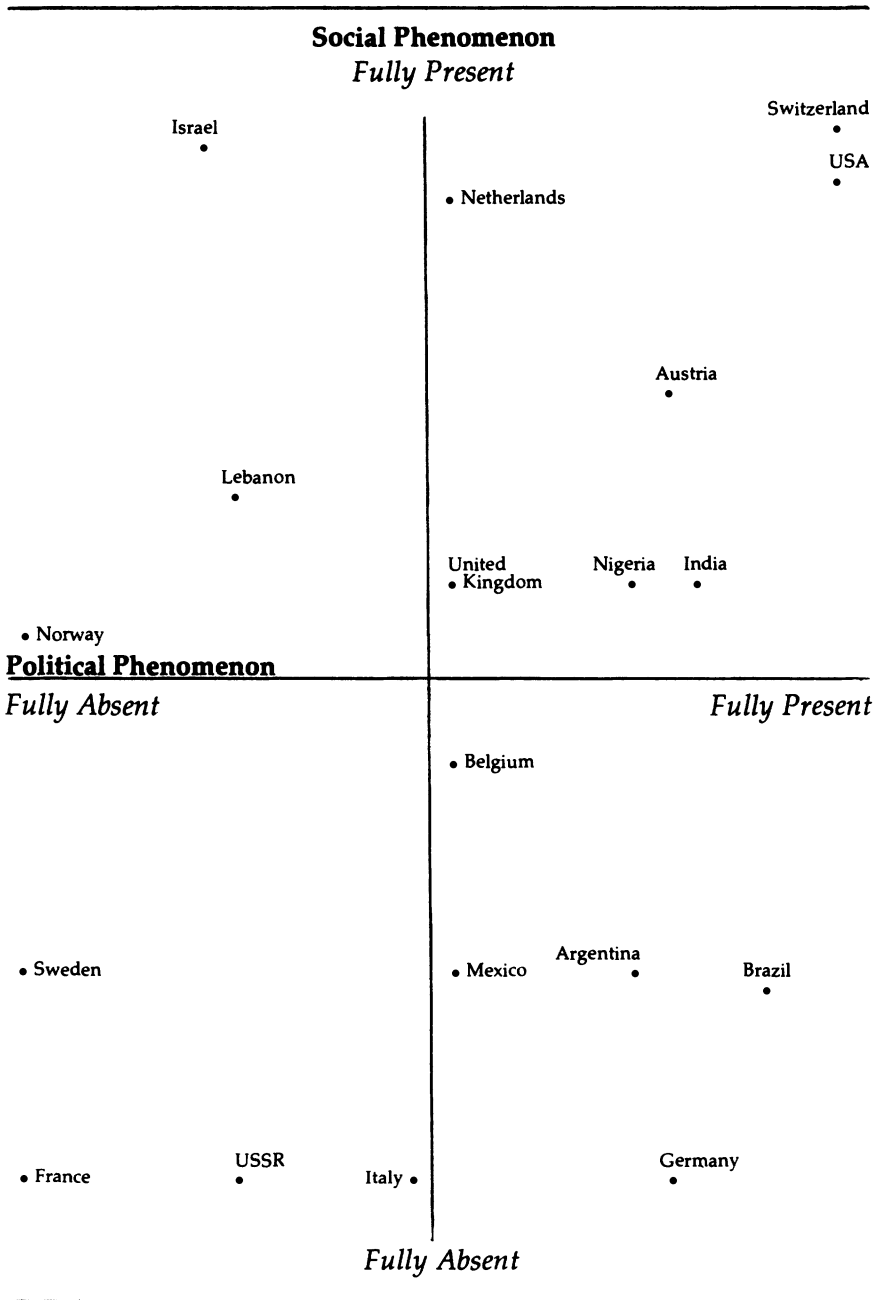
While most federal polities are not consciously informed by the idea of federalism as a social phenomenon, and either tend to ignore or reject it, the most successful ones actually do reflect the social dimension of federalism along with a federal political structure and a set of explicitly federal political processes. At the same time, there are nations and peoples which manifest the social dimension of federalism without its explicitly political dimension, although even in such cases, the social phenomena require and obtain some political expression.⁹ Figure 5 suggests a classification of selected federal and non-federal polities on the basis of a correlation of these two dimensions. The assessment of the political dimension is based upon the results of the classification in Figure 3. Thus the USSR scores low on that dimension despite its structure. The assessment of the social dimension is based upon the degree of what can be termed consociational behavior present in a particular polity.

While the matter has not been discussed by students of consociationalism, I conclude from their writings that consociationalism is even more likely than federalism to be a means rather than an end. Advocates of federalism (as

⁸See, for example, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Du Principe fédératif* (Paris, 1963); Yves Simon, "A Note on Proudhon's Federalism," trans. Vukan Kuic, *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 3 (Spring 1973): 19-30; and Robert Aron and Alexandre Marc, *Principes du Fédéralisme* (Paris: Le Portulan, 1948). See also *Le Fédéralisme et Alexandre Marc* (Lausanne: Centre de Recherches Européennes, 1974) for a recent restatement of this perspective.

⁹Several Indian scholars have suggested to this writer that such Third World nations as India and the Arabs should be considered "federal nations," that is to say, peoples who sense themselves to be united as a single nation but at the same time divided into subnational groupings that are fully articulated in their own right through significant linguistic, religious, or sociocultural differences. This could represent a third dimension to federalism as a social phenomenon in the sense suggested here.

FIGURE 5
Federalism as Social and Political Phenomena in Selected Polities



a theoretical formulation and as a way to resolve practical political problems) have treated federal arrangements both as means and ends, with the distinc-

tion usually remaining implicit in their argument rather than being made explicitly. Simply put, there are those who see federalism and federal arrangements as means to obtain ends external to them, such as political unification, democracy, popular self-government, the accommodation of diversity, and so on. They are not particularly interested in federalism as such, but in the utility of federal arrangements to achieve what to them are larger ends. Their commitment to federal arrangements and principles will exist only as long as they conceive them to be useful in attaining those larger ends.¹⁰

On the other hand, there are those who see in federalism—and most particularly in the realization of the federal idea—an end in itself. They hold that the kind of relationships, which federalism is designed to produce, represent their acme of political and human relationships. To them federalism is not a tool for achieving other goals but embodies the goals themselves as well as the means for their attainment or realization. By and large, those who see federalism as an end minimize the distinction between means and ends, at least in this context, holding instead that the ends must embody the means and that the two are interdependent.

Consociational regimes tend to be the results of a compromise achieved out of necessity among camps which, if they had their way, would seek domination or elimination of each other but which have come to recognize that the internal balance of power in the polity does not permit that to happen. Hence such regimes are means of reconciliation but cannot be ends in and of themselves. Empirically, it seems that the moment enough people in the polity are no longer committed to the various camps, the consociational regime itself loses all meaning for them. Indeed, it becomes dysfunctional in their eyes—an artificial barrier to equal opportunity, access, and representation. The decline of consociationalism in The Netherlands, Austria, Israel, and Lebanon in the past half generation are cases in point.¹¹

Closely connected to the ambiguities regarding means and ends and federalism as a political or social phenomenon is the question of whether federalism is to be regarded as limited or comprehensive in scope. Even among those who view federalism as an end, there are several different perspectives. There are those who see politics as the sum and substance of human interaction, at least beyond the arena of the family, and federalism as the sum and substance of politics, so that, for them, federalism becomes the comprehen-

¹⁰The articles in Valerie Earle, ed., *Federalism: Infinite Variety in Theory and Practice* (Itasca, Ill.: F.E. Peacock, 1958) and Aaron Wildavsky, ed., *American Federalism in Perspective* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967) emphasize various dimensions of federalism as a unifying force and as a means to maintain diversity. In connection with the former, see also William H. Riker, *Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964) and with the latter, Ivo D. Duchacek, *Comparative Federalism: The Territorial Dimension of Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970).

¹¹Cf. Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation* (2nd ed.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) and Gerhard Lehmbuch, "A Non-Competitive Pattern of Conflict Management in Liberal Democracies: The Case of Switzerland, Austria and Lebanon" (Paper presented at the Seventh World Congress, International Political Science Association, Brussels, September 1967) and Daniel J. Elazar, *Israel: From Ideological to Territorial Democracy* (New York: General Learning Press, 1971).

sive end.¹² Others see federalism as one among several ends to be weighed in relation to those others and balanced with them.¹³ On the other hand, there are those who see federalism as no more than a means to achieve their particular ends-in-view, but the most comprehensive means.¹⁴ They would be prepared to argue that a proper political system must be federal in its structure and processes but that the goals of federalism as such are directed (i.e., limited) to achieving ends external to it. Still others would argue that federalism is simply one of several means to attain certain political ends, perhaps even a valuable one, but no more than that.¹⁵

Clearly, there is a close relationship between those who see federalism as a comprehensive end and those who perceive it as having both political and social dimensions. Similarly, those who see federalism as one comprehensive end may be more likely to emphasize the strictly political character of the federal principle—which is almost certain to be the case for those who see federalism as a limited means for achieving certain other goals. There has not been any suggestion that consociationalism is pursued for more than the limited purposes involved in regime maintenance; it is not comprehensive in its purposes because it does grow out of a particular kind of compromise, though perhaps it could be comprehensive under certain circumstances. Finally, while there are several varieties of federal arrangements (see Figure 1), consociationalism is more narrowly conceived.

FEDERALISM AS FORM; CONSOCIATIONALISM AS REGIME

A major conclusion that can be drawn from all of this is that federalism is a matter of the form of a polity while consociationalism refers to a polity's regime. The term "form" is used here in its classic sense of a permanent arrangement which permeates and shapes every aspect of the polity and is constitutionally anchored. One particularly useful piece of evidence in this regard is that, with one possible exception, no polity which has survived as a federal system for at least fifteen years has ever abandoned federalism of its own accord.¹⁶ Otherwise the federal form was abandoned only as a result

¹²Morton Grodzins emphasized his view that federalism, like all forms of government, must be judged as a means of fostering democratic ends in *The American System: A New View of Government in the United States* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1956). Amitai Etzioni discussed federalism as a means to attain political integration in *Political Unification* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965).

¹³See, for example, the works of Proudhon, Marc, and DeRougement. Martin Buber treats federalism as means and end in *Paths in Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958) and *Kingship to God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

¹⁴Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*. See, also, Patrick Riley, "Rousseau as a Theorist of National and International Federalism," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 3 (Spring 1973): 5–18.

¹⁵See, for example, Davis, *The Federal Principle*.

¹⁶The one possible exception is Colombia, which, in its early years as an independent state, was formally federal but so racked by civil wars that the federal constitution was never fully implemented. After nearly thirty years of civil strife, it formally abandoned federalism in favor of a unitary decentralized constitution.

of conquest by an external power, as in the case of the United Provinces of The Netherlands and ancient Israel. In some cases, such as Switzerland, even foreign conquest was not able to bring about the abandonment of federalism. To say this does not mean that the character of federalism within the federal polity does not undergo change over time; but the changes take place within the context of federalism, which persists in some meaningful way. The most common changes have to do with the distribution of power between federal and constituent governments. Elsewhere I have suggested that this is not a matter of simple centralization or decentralization, but something far more complex because of the polycentric and non-centralized character of federal systems.¹⁷

A second piece of supporting evidence is that consociational regimes tend to be longer lived when they function within federal polities. Thus, Switzerland is perhaps the best rooted consociational regime. Belgium has preserved consociationalism as it has become more federal, while The Netherlands has lost it for lack of a federal base.¹⁸

The work of Lijphart and others has emphasized the regime character of consociationalism. Lijphart has presented this evidence in connection with his argument that federalism is primarily territorial, and consociationalism primarily non-territorial. The list of attributes of each, which he presents, emphasizes his point. For federalism he identifies five principal attributes:

1. A written constitution which specifies the division of power and guarantees to both the central and regional governments that their allotted powers cannot be taken away;
2. A bicameral legislature in which one chamber represents the people at large and the other the component units of the federation;
3. Over-representation of the smaller component units in the federal chamber of the bicameral legislature;
4. The right of the component units to be involved in the process of amending the federal constitution but to change their own constitutions unilaterally;
5. Decentralized government, that is, the regional government's share of power in a federation is relatively large compared to that of regional governments in unitary states.¹⁹

All of the foregoing are constitutionally guaranteed as part of the form of polity.

On the other hand,

consociational democracy can be defined in terms of two primary attributes—grand coalitions and segmental autonomy—and two secondary characteristics—proportionality and minority veto. Grand coalition, also called powersharing, means that the political leaders of all the significant segments of a plural, deeply

¹⁷Elazar, "The Ends of Federalism" and *American Federalism: A View from the States*, Chapter 1.

¹⁸Martin O. Heisler, ed., *Politics in Europe* (New York: David McKay Co., 1974) and Kenneth McRae, *Consociational Democracy* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974).

¹⁹Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation*.

divided society, jointly govern the country. Segmental autonomy means that the decision-making is delegated to the separate segments as much as possible. Proportionality is the basic consociational standard of political representation, civil service appointments, and the allocation of public funds, etc. The veto is a guarantee for minorities that they will not be outvoted by majorities when their vital interest is at stake.²⁰

None of the foregoing need be constitutionalized, and it is rare that any are.

This point is further strengthened by the recent history of consociational regimes. The Netherlands, presented by Lijphart as the classical model of consociationalism, has, by his account, been declining as a consociational regime since the late 1960s, and may no longer be one.²¹ Consociationalism in Israel is rapidly giving way to something else as Israel transforms itself from an ideological to a territorial democracy.²² Lebanon's consociational regime broke down in civil war in the mid-1970s and, at this rate, seems unlikely to be restored unless some territorial base is provided for the various minorities (itself an almost impossible task given the patterns of settlement in the country which led to a consociational solution in the first place).²³ Consociationalism can barely be said to have lasted a decade in Cyprus and has now been replaced by a *de facto* partition of the island into two territorial states.²⁴ Belgium has had more success in retaining its consociational arrangements primarily because it has moved in the direction of formal federation along territorial lines.²⁵

In sum, consociationalism appears to be a relatively transient arrangement. Indeed, the classic consociations seem to last for about two generations before giving way to some other form of regime, which, coincidentally or not, is about the length of time that a majority party maintains its majority coalition intact in two-party systems. This has been true for the United States over the entire course of its history as an independent nation.²⁶ It seems to be true for other democratic polities as well, hence it may teach us something about the lifetime of coalitions and their survival capacities.

THE ISSUE OF DEMOCRACY

Students of consociationalism have made the point that consociational

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Cf. Daniel J. Elazar, *Israel: From Territorial to Ideological Democracy* and Howard Pen-
niman, ed., *Israel at the Polls, 1977* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1979).

²³Leonard Binder, *Politics in Lebanon* (New York: John Wiley, 1966) and Yosef Olmert, "Wasted Time in Lebanon," *The Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 20 May 1983.

²⁴*Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 1982, vol. 28, s.v. "Cyprus," pp. 31601b-31602.

²⁵Aristide R. Zolberg, "Splitting the Difference: Federalization Without Federalism in Belgium," *Ethnic Conflict in the Western World*, ed. Milton J. Esman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 103-142.

²⁶Daniel J. Elazar, "The Generational Rhythm of American Politics," *American Politics Quarterly* 6 (January 1978): 55-94.

regimes are by nature democratic as distinct from federal systems which may or may not be. This is a more problematic issue for two reasons, one of which is internal to consociational regimes and the other of which has to do with the usage of consociational and federal arrangements in non-democratic systems. With regard to the first, it is generally agreed that consociational regimes are based upon the agreement of elites, each of which must be capable of maintaining control over its own segment in the grand coalition. Thus the segments themselves have to be quite hierarchical, but at the very least governed by the people selected to be at the top. So while the regime-wide coalition may be democratic, there is no guarantee that democracy will prevail within the segments themselves. Certainly, there cannot be decentralization within the segments if the segmental leadership is to be able to commit its segment to the terms of the grand coalition agreement. Intra-segmental centralization has, indeed, been a trademark of all consociational systems, except for Switzerland where the deeply rooted federal system has functioned as a countervailing force.²⁷

Elsewhere I have suggested that there are three basic models of the polity. One is the hierarchical model in which power is organized in pyramidal fashion and is, accordingly, concentrated at the top. A second model involves a strong center with an appropriate periphery, where power is concentrated in the center although the center itself may be composed of representatives of the periphery. Finally there is the cybernetic model in which power is distributed through a matrix of centers and in which the general government provides the frame for the matrix.²⁸ Consociational regimes can be said to be manifestations of the first or second models but are precluded from being manifestations of the third because of the necessity for intersegmental control. Federal systems, on the other hand, are based upon the third model with its multi-centric form and non-centralized organization of power. Hence they have the possibility of being more democratic in their internal organization.

Beyond that, there are indeed regimes which claim to be consociational and are even acknowledged as such by students of consociationalism which cannot be called democratic. Lebanon is a clear example of one such system. Even before the civil war, when its consociational regime was working, the segments were at best governed by oligarchies of traditional notables drawn from a handful of ruling families.²⁹ The Lebanese state maintained the trappings of democracy in the form of elections, but it was quite clear that the authority to rule was in the hands of this very small group, which conducted the negotiations within and between the various segments. The Republic of South Africa, which has always considered itself as having consociational leanings, is now in the process of amending its constitution to provide for

²⁷Heisler, *Politics in Europe*.

²⁸Cf. Martin Landau, "Federalism, Redundancy and System Reliability" and Vincent Ostrom, "Can Federalism Make a Difference?" *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 3 (Fall 1973).

²⁹Binder, *Politics in Lebanon*.

a presidential system of government with three chambers in the national parliament—one representing whites, the second, coloreds and the third, Asians—with the president and the president's council being explicitly defined as consociational and indeed resembling consociational regimes elsewhere. Undoubtedly there will be considerable dispute as to whether this arrangement is democratic.³⁰

It is true that the overwhelming majority of consociational regimes are democratic in character and that consociationalism was developed as a form of democratic regime, but even it can be used for other purposes. So, too, federalism was invented as a means to foster democratic republicanism or popular government in the terminology of the eighteenth-century United States. Federal systems have always been introduced in the name of popular government, even where they have been a sham. There are only a few exceptions to this rule, such as the United Arab Emirates, where the federation is a federation of absolutist states and power is shared among their rulers. But even in the Soviet bloc, federalism is presumably designed to add at least another dimension to the people's democracy. It is true that there are two kinds of federal systems—those in which the purpose of federalism is to share power broadly, pure and simple, and those in which the purpose of federalism is to give individual national communities a share in the power of the state. The former is more simply devoted to advancing the cause of popular government, while the latter may rely upon other mechanisms for securing popular government and merely add federalism as an extra device.³¹

RECONCILIATION

What we have before us are two very useful means of conceptualizing and describing actual political systems, both of which are based upon compound rather than simple majoritarianism. Each not only reflects a different means of organizing such polities, but the two are not quite symmetrical, since federalism relates to the form of the polity and consociationalism relates to the character of the regime. To the extent that federalism goes beyond form to function as the character of the regime as well, the two relate to each other on a more symmetrical basis. It is one of the ambiguities of federalism that it is often both form and regime. Consociationalism, on the other hand, relates only to regime. This may make it easier to link consociationalism with democratic regimes than federalism, which often provides a form intended to be democratic but in fact serves as a platform upon which are erected very undemocratic regimes. Nevertheless, both originated in the effort to establish democratic republics, an effort that reflected the political wisdom that popular government is not only not enhanced by simple majoritarianism but is often defeated by it, since civil society in a democracy is both complex and

³⁰*Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1982*, vol. 28, s.v. "South Africa," pp. 36538a-31657.

³¹Cf. Daniel J. Elazar, *Exploring Federalism* (forthcoming).

pluralistic, and both its complexities and pluralism must be properly accommodated in and by the polity.