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# Federalism: An Introduction

George Anderson  
*Forum of Federations*

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# Preface

This introduction to federalism has been written primarily for practitioners of government—politicians, government officials, journalists, members of non-governmental and international organizations and concerned citizens—who have a practical interest in federalism, probably focused on federalism in their own or other specific countries. They might ask, ‘What can I learn from the experience of other federal countries that might help me better understand the nature, choices, and even limitations that this country might face in modifying or developing its form of federalism?’ At the same time, it is hoped that students of federalism find the book a useful, concise overview.

The book’s language is simple, with a minimum of jargon, no footnotes, and no references to particular authors. It gives the essential points in a direct, bottom-line way useful to people engaged in political debate or policy making.

There can be no one recipe for federalism. Every society is complex and its character is shaped by many factors. Thus, this book is less about ‘how to do’ and more about ‘what to consider’. It outlines what factors might be relevant and gives a sense of how they might play out. The catalogue of factors can never be complete and some factors could play out quite differently, depending on context. So the information provided here needs to be joined with a good knowledge of the country of particular interest. Even so, sophisticated constitutional authors have sometimes been surprised at how their designs have worked in practice.

The book falls into 10 chapters, which are divided into sections, each of which starts with a brief statement in bold type that outlines the key points of the section. It is possible to get a quick overview of the whole



book simply by reading these short statements. Elaboration follows that further develops the ideas and introduces additional material. As well, there are boxes with examples of the experience of different federations in relation to a particular aspect of federalism. The boxes are illustrative, not comprehensive: they provide a sense of the range of possibilities. They can be skipped or read at choice. It is hoped this way of presenting the material promotes flexible use, facilitates understanding, and responds to the different needs of readers. This is an introduction and many readers will wish to deepen their knowledge. If the book inspires further reading, so much the better: a brief list of suggestions is provided at the end of the text.

The Forum of Federations is active on 6 continents and envisages making extensive use of this book, which I wrote to respond to a need we saw for a concise, non-academic overview of federalism. We would be grateful for any suggestions to improve subsequent editions.

**George Anderson,  
President and CEO,  
Forum of Federations**