

Call for papers

**REVISITING UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN FEDERAL COUNTRIES:  
CHANGING CONCEPTS, REFORM PROPOSALS AND  
NEW INSTITUTIONAL REALITIES**

This proposal for the next **IACFS Conference during 2-3 October 2015** sponsored by the Canada Research Chair in Quebec and Canadian Studies (CREQC)/Interdisciplinary Research Center on Diversity and Democracy (CRIDAQ) based at UQAM in **Montréal** is designed to revisit the basic theme of "unity and diversity" that remains at the heart of research into federalism and federation. This conference theme has not been directly addressed by the IACFS for well over a decade and it is time for us to take another look at its contemporary relevance to ascertain how far the bifocal relationship between unity and diversity has evolved and has been translated into changing conceptual lenses, practical reform proposals and in some cases new institutional practices.

As Daniel Elazar has argued, these two concepts should not be seen not as polar opposites but rather as congruent partners in the federal idea. The opposite of unity is not diversity; it is disunity while the opposite of diversity is a singular uniform homogeneity. The essence of the federal idea is that these two concepts can be situated comfortably together to produce a particular kind of unity: federal unity. It is important to place this fundamental conceptual partnership in different empirical contexts because each federal or federalizing country has its own historical specificity so that unity and diversity will play out very differently in each case. There are different understandings as to what these concepts mean and how they have changed over time. The original conceptual basis may have changed due to new socio-economic or cultural-ideological challenges that render it less relevant or redundant leading to the emergence of new or revised concepts that will more accurately reflect these new realities and govern practical approaches to meeting emerging challenges.

So it will be important for each participant to begin their contributions with a brief summary of what they take unity and diversity to mean in their own case studies, whether it is spelled out in the written constitution or in some other way. This will represent the original conceptual benchmark against which scholars can demonstrate its subsequent evolution. It is precisely from this approach that new reform proposals are generated signalling the practical responses to new realities that ultimately give way to new institutional practices. So the logic runs in the following way: original conceptual framework of 'unity and diversity'; challenges to its explanatory capacity as a direct result of new social realities; conceptual responses to these contemporary changes leading to concept reformation; the emergence of practical reform proposals in each federal country (even if not implemented); and new institutional practices in politics, public policy, constitutional law, economic changes and societal/sociological relationships.

Conference participants are invited to present papers in different disciplines with different approaches but with a uniformity of purpose.

Put a different way, they will proceed in the direction indicated above: begin with the original conceptual framework that identifies unity and diversity; the contemporary empirical challenges to it; the conceptual response(s) pointing up how far this has had to change; practical reform proposals; and, finally new institutional realities, such as constitutional, legal and political practices. In this way the participants will connect concepts to individual case studies in order to explain how the conceptual partnership of unity and diversity has evolved from the past to the present in each federal country. The papers can therefore summarise the interaction of unity and diversity both on a conceptual and an empirical basis.

### **Summary: Five Steps**

- 1 Introduction: the original conceptual understanding of what unity and diversity mean in each case study and how it is expressed. eg, values and principles in the preamble to the written constitution, historical traditions and legacies.
- 2 Contemporary empirical change and challenges to this understanding. eg, new social cleavages having constitutional and/or political salience, new political movements, civil society mobilisation.
- 3 Conceptual reactions and responses to these empirical challenges and changes leading to conceptual reformation. eg, public discourses, parliamentary debates, media analyses of how far the public understanding of 'unity and diversity' has been compelled to rethink and revise this understanding. eg, undermining 'diversity' or preferring 'unity' over 'diversity', constitutional cases, political debates/public discourse(s).
- 4 Inclusion of any practical reform proposals [even if not implemented] that demonstrate a constitutional and/or political discourse[s] derived from and based upon this new conceptual understanding of how and why the meaning of the 'unity and diversity' axis has changed.
- 5 New institutional practices: constitutional, political, legal, economic and sociological Changes and reforms. Are there any tangible, concrete empirical institutional outcomes that have appeared to reflect the contemporary realities born of conceptual change. eg, senate reform; parliamentary declarations and legislative changes; institutional change and innovations; [eg, Council of the Federation in Canada, 2004] + informal practices revolving around new conventions; new forms of political and economic behaviour; new organised interest groups; and/or civil society activism.

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