

Book Notes: Federalism, by Jennifer Smith

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FEDERALISM, BY JENNIFER SMITH. VANCOUVER: UBC PRESS FOR THE CENTRE FOR CANADIAN STUDIES AT MOUNT ALLISON UNIVERSITY, 2004, Pp. xvi + 192. \$65.00 hardcover, \$22.95 paper.

BY CHRISTINE BAHREY

Although Canada is perceived to be an example of a successful democracy on a world scale, recent characterizations of the “democratic deficit” and “democratic malaise” in Canada have prompted a critical evaluation of the practices, institutions, and decision-making bodies of Canadian democracy. *Federalism* is one of nine volumes in the Canadian Democratic Audit Series, providing a survey of the state of Canadian democracy, an assessment of the ways in which the Canadian federal system enhance or diminish democracy, and an evaluation of reform proposals designed to enhance both Canadian democracy and Canadian federalism.

Before turning to the audit itself, Jennifer Smith explores the definition of the term federalism, outlines the origins of the federal system, and addresses the characteristics and design of the Canadian system. Smith then approaches the audit with three main benchmarks: the inclusiveness of citizens in political and governmental activities; the participation by citizens, beyond voting, in the political process; and the responsiveness of governments to the demands and concerns of the citizens. Who is in? What can they do? What can they expect?

The author concludes that Canadian federalism fails with respect to all three of the democratic audit’s standards-inclusiveness, participation, and responsiveness-and makes the case for change. Of all of the reform proposals which Smith sets out, the most compelling is the change from an appointed to an elected Senate. However, she recognizes that this appears to require a formal amendment of the Canadian Constitution. The remaining proposed changes are refreshingly practical: the establishment of a Council of the Federation that includes the Aboriginal governments; the introduction of the federal legislature into the selection of federally appointed judges, including those of the Supreme Court of Canada; and “virtual regionalism” in the Atlantic Provinces. Smith thus brings a balanced and realistic perspective to the idea of a reformed Canadian federalism.
