R. Gibbins, “Federalism and Regional Alienation,” in Mellon and Westmacott, eds., *Challenges to Canadian Federalism* (1997)

**Overview**

Regionalism is unavoidable in a country of Canada’s size and complexity. Regions – be they provinces, the northern territories, or more abstract amalgamations such as the West and Atlantic Canada – differ substantially in their economic foundations, socio-demographic composition and political cultures. Piece looks at answering the question – to what extent do our political institutions moderate or exacerbate regional conflict or regional alienation?

**Regionalism – Definition:** the intrusion of territorially-based interests, values, and identities into national political life

**Background**

* Regional communities provide the societal foundations for federalism and for the provincial govts that in turn protect and promote regional communities in the face of homogenizing pressures from the national community
* Regional communities led to adoption of federalism in first place – and have continued to sustain
* “Politically, we come to see ourselves as British Columbians or New Brunswickers rather than in terms of class, ethnicity, or gender because our political institutions push us in that direction”
  + This is seriously debatable – this things can often be conflated (Acadians with Atlantic Canada, etc) – moreover this seems very much like a white man’s point of view
* Federal states seek a balance between protecting and transcending regional diversity – but the constitutional division of powers is not enough to meet the integrative aspects of federalism
  + MUST also have an effective voice within national political institutions
* Interstate federalism: two forms of protection for regions:

1. From federal division of powers between national and provincial governments – never worked very well for Western Cdns (i.e. NEP)
2. Through the participation of provincial governments in national politics (esp. by Premiers) – this branch of federalism often characterized by sustained intergovernmental conflict

* Intrastate federalism: found *within* the institutions of the national government, and particularly within Parliament

1. Through the representative performance of MPs and Senators (and though the methods by which SCC judges are appointed has also been a matter of debate, the SCC judges do not act in manner to represent their regions)
   1. Intrastate federalism of this nature weakened through strict party control
2. The Cabinet – is meant to be representative (of region, ethnicity, gender) though it often falls short in at least the latter 2 categories. Moreover, cabinet deliberations are shrouded in secrecy, and thus regional representation in this respect is neither seen nor heard

* Intrastate reform has not been successful by western actors. Over the past 80 years, western Cdns have pushed for: reduced party discipline, nonpartisanship, new political parties altogether, electoral reform, Senate reform, and now decentralization. Lack of a consistent remedy has hindered progress (though this has not been the only obstacle)
* Push from West failed to take root in either Atlantic Canada (which arguably has been dealt a better hand – in the Intrastate game) – or in central Canada

**Conclusion:** Cdn political institutions do a reasonable job in maintaining the federal balance between the protection of regional interests and the promotion of national integration