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Sommario/riassunto

In a world where federal states seem to exist precariously, politicians and academics from around the globe continue to look to Canada as a model of federalism. And yet, our own system of organization and governance also appears strained: Quebec nationalism, First Nations' claims, the regionalization of party politics, and the uneven and shifting delivery of essential services have all altered the face of federal politics. Federalism explains how Canada came to be a federation (what reasons there were for it, and against it, historically); what the challenges to federalism currently are; and how we might fortify some areas of weakness in the federal system. Jennifer Smith argues that federalism is part of the democratic problem now; however, reformed, it can be part of the solution. Since theorists disagree on the democratic credentials of federalism, it is essential to look at how a real federal system operates. Smith examines the origins of Canadian federalism and its special features, then analyzes it in relation to the benchmarks of the Canadian Democratic Audit project: responsiveness, inclusiveness, and participation. Finding that Canadian federalism falls short on each benchmark, she recommends changes ranging from virtual regionalism to a Council of the Federation that includes Aboriginal representatives. Democracy is about more than the House of Commons or elections. It is also about federalism. This sparkling account of Canadian federalism is a must-read for students and scholars of Canadian politics, politicians and policymakers, and those who care about Canadian democracy.