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Canadian Federalism and the Recognition of Linguistic Diversity: Seeking a Balance

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Summary

This paper considers federalism from several perspectives: as a mechanism to manage conflict, as a shield to protect minority and territorial interests, and as a facilitator of multiple manifestations of policy innovations. In particular, it reviews linguistic policies to illustrate how Canada accommodates a national minority within a multinational state. The author concludes that the language battles fought in Quebec have created more room for minority communities to secure rights elsewhere in Canada. Two types of language rights are considered: personal (held by an individual) and territorial (based on the region where an individual resides). As a bilingual country, Canada does not fit wholly into either category. It has created a type of institutional bilingualism, whereby the federal government takes steps to ensure the rights of linguistic minorities and allows provinces to exercise control over language policy. This results in considerable variance in language policies.