The combination of territorially distinctive segments and federalism’s grant of partial autonomy sometimes provides additional impetus to demands for greater autonomy. … [F]ederalism has not been markedly effective as a conflict-regulating practice.

(Nordlinger 1972, 32)

The question remains open as to what kinds or combinations of diversity are compatible with federal unity and which kinds or combinations are not.

(Elazar 1979, 29)

[Federalism is] significant at the beginning of a central government as a way to bring in regional governments with the promise of autonomy. Once the central government is actually in operation, however, what maintains or destroys local autonomy is not the more or less superficial features of federalism but the more profound characteristics of the political culture.

(Riker 1969, 142)

The twenty-first century looks likely to be as beset with conflict between religious and linguistic communities as was the twentieth. The new millennium
opened with the World Trade Center attacks—for some, confirming Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” (1996). Yet any notion of inevitable conflict between different communities is superficial. Such an approach denies that identities are malleable and situational, and that individuals have more than just one. Identities therefore cannot be homogeneous, and positing the inevitability of conflict either at the international or domestic level conceals more than is revealed.

At the domestic level, many institutional arrangements have been identified to manage diverse states or to seek to eliminate diversity (McGarry and O’Leary 1993). This study analyzes the likely effectiveness of one type of institutional design: a federation. Federal structures have often received bad press from academics, statesmen, and constitutional practitioners. Eric Nordlinger contests the effectiveness of federalism as an ethnic conflict regulation device. In the quotation at the head of the chapter he contends that federalism is likely to increase pressures for secession. Current debates over the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan reiterate these concerns. These debates focus on dangers of territorial disintegration, lack of effective central control, and the problems of minorities seeking to secede (O’Leary, McGarry, and Salih 2005; Rubin 2004).

Yet several successful multiethnic federations exist. Switzerland, Canada, and India are all good examples of this fact. Although there are many countries where federations have significantly failed to regulate ethnic conflict—Nigeria in 1966 and Pakistan in 1971—failure was not inevitable. Multiethnic states, per se, are not doomed to failure; there are always additional factors affecting their success. This study concentrates upon the institutional factors affecting that success and the main differences between federations, which include, but are not limited to, the degree of centralization, the number and composition of provincial units, the degrees of consociationalism within the federal design, and the composition of the bicameral legislature.

**Comparative Federal Problems and South Asia**

This study compares the experiences of India and Pakistan in order to draw wider theoretical conclusions. India and Pakistan have similar, if not identical, colonial backgrounds and adopted very similar federal structures after independence. This “controlled comparison” (Van Evera 1997, 56–58) facilitates concentration upon one important variable in which they differed: the design of provincial units. Their different approaches to provincial design account for many of the tensions within both countries and the relative success of India compared with that of Pakistan.