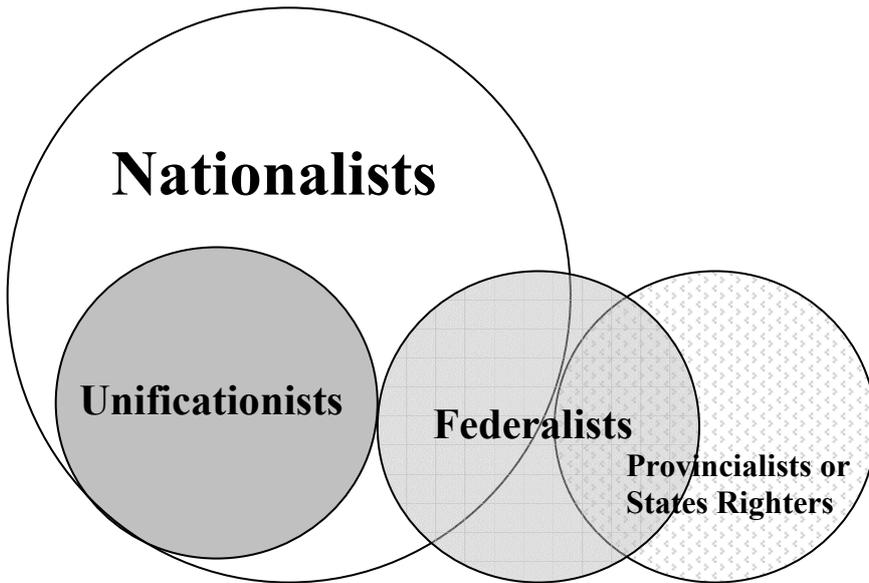


## The Dominance of Nationalism in Australia From Federation Till Current Times



Many **nationalists** are unificationists, and some are federalists, but most are neutral in relation to the federal-unitary divide and consider the federal-unitary divide largely unimportant in theory and especially in practice. The federal-unitary divide is in any event better described as a continuum than a dichotomy.

**Unificationists** support a unitary system of government in which only the national government hosts full sovereignty, and generally support strong local/regional government to provide effective decentralisation.

**Federalists** support a federal system of government for Australia in which national and sub-national governments share sovereignty.

**Provincialists** include federalists and also separationists who'd prefer to see parts of Australia form separate countries via secession. Provincialists believe sub-national sovereignty is more valuable than national sovereignty.

**The vast majority of Australians in modern times are nationalists and many are unificationists. Most Australians don't understand the difference between federal and unitary systems, and wouldn't consider this distinction significant even if they understood it, noting that federalism is a vague concept in theory and especially in practice.**

The 'Fathers of Federation' have often been misinterpreted as strong supporters of federalism, when most in fact were nationalists, and many were unificationists – or "amalgamationists", as demonstrated by the following selection of quotes from the Federation Conference of 1890 and the Federation Conventions of 1897 and 1898:

Samuel Griffith (QLD) at the Melbourne Federation Conference on 10 February 1890:

If possible, let us get a complete Federal Parliament and Federal Executive, one dominion with no rivalries – no customs rivalries at any rate, amongst ourselves. If we cannot get all that let us get as much of it as we can. ... Every step in advance is something gained. If we can get a Federal Government even with limited powers, let us have it; but of course we should prefer to attain the end we have in view at the earliest possible moment, and with the least intervals, because I recognise this, that every imperfect step we make is a halting place, and it may be some time before we can move from it. Therefore, I would desire to go as far as we can now. ... There are some things which it is quite clear, the separate provincial governments cannot do properly or efficiently, although they may do them in some sort of way. ... There must be some day a fiscal union. ... I maintain that federation without fiscal union would be better than no federation at all. ... Suppose we had a Central Government for defence, uniform laws, the regulation of trade and commerce externally, the post-office, sea fisheries, &c., and the colonies still held separate custom tariffs, we should be so much better off by reason of the regulation of things I have named by a Central Government, and as regards fiscal matters we should be no worse off than we are now. And there would be this advantage, that under the new arrangements the absurdity of fighting one another by customs tariffs would become so apparent that before very long they would be given up.

Dr. John Cockburn (SA) in Adelaide on 30 March 1897 (see transcript p. 340):

... in so many speeches we have heard hon. members who hold similar views to those I hold in general politics, speak in favour of unification and not Federation. I do not think we were ever sent here to consider unification; we were sent here to frame a Federation ...

Mr William Lyne (NSW) in Adelaide on 15 April 1897 (see transcript p. 653)

Some hon. member has suggested unification. I say: far better go for unification than for a Federation which is going to tie our hands behind our backs for all time ...

Mr William Lyne (NSW) in Sydney on 15 September 1897 (see transcript p. 599)

... as the debates proceeded in Adelaide, as I had time to think what the result of federation on the lines of equal state representation would be, my ideas have converged very much in the direction of some sort of unification.

Mr Bernhard Wise (NSW) in Sydney on 17 September 1897 (see transcript pp. 755-6)

For my part, I do not hesitate to declare myself an advocate of and a believer in unification. I have always believed in unification. ... I would be glad if Victoria had never separated from New South Wales. I would like to see Tasmania annexed to this colony, and I would like South Australia to form part of our western boundary; and I would not be averse to extending the jurisdiction of New South Wales to the farthest west of this continent; but I recognise, and have always recognised, that we cannot frame any scheme of federation except by recognising the equal existence – the broad, independent, national existence of all these colonies.

Mr Alfred Deakin (VIC) and Mr Edmund Barton (NSW) in Melbourne on 24 January 1898 (see transcript p. 202):

Mr. DEAKIN (Victoria). –

...

It is impossible to refuse to permit the settlement of great federal issues by the Federal Government simply because they involve dangers, unless the Federal Government is to deal with only minor and unimportant questions, and to be a kind of glorified Federal Council, instead of, as we intend, the popular and central Government of the whole of Australia.

Mr. BARTON. -

That is an argument for unification.

Mr. DEAKIN. -

All arguments for federation are arguments for that degree of unification necessary for national interests and national ends.

Mr George Reid (NSW) in Melbourne on 8 February 1898 (see transcript p. 675)

I, personally, would not mind unification at all.

Sir John Forrest (WA) in Melbourne on 1 March 1898 (see transcript p. 1705)

... we shall be acting wisely, and certainly consistently, if we leave to the Federal Government, which, of course, represents the Federal Parliament, the disposition of all the offices of the state. If they are worthy to appoint to the great offices of Judges of the High Court, I can see no reason whatever why they should not also be entrusted with the appointment of the Governors of the states. I do not believe that the present plan, if continued, will work well. It is no use trying to deceive ourselves by thinking that the states will be absolutely independent of the Federal Government.

Sir John Downer (SA) in Melbourne on 8 March 1898 (see transcript p. 2034)

I hate the word "unification," and will not use it. I have said before that there is much to be said for amalgamation. I can understand that there might be an immense amount of money saved by amalgamation in the way of carrying on the government of the country, and there might be an immense amount of force from the head of the Commonwealth which you cannot get from the partial disintegration which is involved even in federation. But it is not our mission to establish an amalgamation of these colonies. We are here under Bills passed by our various colonies, and there is a claim for federation, and not a claim for merging the colonies in one common concern.

Sir Richard Baker (SA) in Melbourne on 17 March 1898 (see transcript p. 2482)

I invite the honorable and learned member (Mr. Higgins) to consider this point: If the people of the smaller states are willing to adopt the type of government suggested by our Victorian friends, we can save the expense of ten Houses of Legislature and five Governors, and we can become a truly united people. But we have been sent here to frame a scheme of federation, not of amalgamation.

**Mark Drummond (markld@ozemail.com.au, phone 02 6255 0772)**

**22 October 2008**

See also Appendix 3A, titled 'Pre-Federation Unification Proposals', from the 2007 PhD thesis titled *Costing Constitutional Change: Estimates of the Financial Benefits of New States, Regional Governments, Unification and Related Reforms* (available in full online via <http://erl.canberra.edu.au/public/adt-AUC20080825.143939/>).