

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

---

Volume 9 | Issue 2

---

2026

© 2026 International Journal of Law Management & Humanities

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlmh.com/>

Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (<https://www.vidhiaagaz.com/>)

---

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of **any suggestions or complaints**, kindly contact [support@vidhiaagaz.com](mailto:support@vidhiaagaz.com).

---

**To submit your Manuscript** for Publication in the **International Journal of Law Management & Humanities**, kindly email your Manuscript to [submission@ijlmh.com](mailto:submission@ijlmh.com).

---

# Polarization and Power Sharing: Reimagining Federalism for Democratic Resilience

---

AYUSHIBA JADEJA<sup>1</sup> AND HANSHIKHA DALMIA<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*This paper analyses how partisan polarisation impacts on democratic governance with federal systems and the challenges it causes on the institutional stability and intergovernmental relations. It studies how federal systems, which were created to balance unity and diversity, are now under pressure because political polarization is making it harder for central and state governments to cooperate and maintain the balance. On the comparative perspective, paper shows how when political parties' followers grow more divided and hostile, the exiting power faces the problems between the different levels of the government. Instead of cooperating, each side starts to fight over who should have the authority. The system can become fairer, less dominated by one power by allowing flexibility, independence, cooperation and respect among the governments of different level. Determining the stability in the divided federal democracies depends on the institutions that balance unity and cooperation with regional independence so that democracy doesn't break down under polarisation.*

**Keywords:** *Democratic Governance, Federal Structures, Partisan Polarization, Intergovernmental Relations, Institutional Stability*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The federal system of India is a dynamic political structure that has changed over centuries through colonial legislation like the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935. The Act of 1919 Act introduced “dyarchy” in provinces where Indian ministers were elected and had powers over some local aspects like education and health. The critical areas like finance and law remained under the control of British governors. Thereafter, the act of 1935 introduced a federal structure that divided powers between the central government and the provinces with the help of separate federal, provincial and concurrent lists of subjects. The act granted full provincial autonomy and created bi-cameral Institutions. Thus, the federal structure of India

---

<sup>1</sup> Author is a Student at Marwadi University, Rajkot, Gujarat, India.

<sup>2</sup> Author is a Student at Marwadi University, Rajkot, Gujarat, India.

represents the country's diversity in terms of language, religion, culture, and regional identities. India's model of federalism is often called the "Quasi-federal", which means the centre has more power than the states. The quasi-federal structure was adopted to maintain national unity and accommodate diversity. But this act often results in different challenges because of political polarisation increased by multi-party competition and differing political alignments between the centre and the states. Also, institutions like the Planning Commission & its successor, NITI Aayog play an important role in encouraging cooperative federalism by integrating state interests into national policy-making. This research paper examines the historical evolution of Indian federalism, the impact of the political party dynamics on federal relations and the institutional mechanisms improving cooperation between the centre and states.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **A. Historical Evolution of Indian Federalism**

Naik and Kumar (2016) explain that Indian federalism grew from the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935. These laws tried to accommodate India's huge cultural, linguistic, and regional diversity. In the beginning, most political demands were about identity, but in recent years the focus has shifted to reducing regional inequalities and encouraging development. India chose a "holding together" model of federation, instead of a "coming together" type, so that the country could stay united while handling its diversity. The Constitution calls India a "Union of States" instead of a "federation" to show that national unity was given priority even while allowing for local aspirations.

### **B. Federal Structure and Power Dynamics**

Malik (2019) points out that power in India is divided into three lists: central, state, and concurrent. But the central government has more powers, especially for subjects not listed. Because of this, India is described as quasi-federal, meaning it looks federal but with a strong central authority. This was the choice of the Constitution's makers, who feared that too much state power could break the country's unity. Court decisions over time have supported this arrangement, showing that states do have powers, but the centre can step in when national interests are at risk.

### **C. Political Polarisation and Intergovernmental Tensions**

Naik (2016) and Sarangi & Pai (2009) note that the rise of regional parties and identity-based movements has caused frequent conflicts between the centre and the states, especially when their ruling parties are political rivals. The central government controls the main areas and has

the power to impose President's Rule under Article 356. This has often been criticised as reducing state independence and weakening federal principles during political conflicts.

#### **D. Mechanisms for Power Sharing and Cooperative Federalism**

Institutions like the Inter-State Council, Finance Commission, NITI Aayog, and Zonal Councils help bring the centre and states together to solve disputes and work on common goals. Malik (2019) highlights how these bodies aim to encourage cooperative federalism, where both levels of government jointly make policies and decisions. Despite this, problems remain especially the unequal distribution of resources and lack of proper consultation. Many scholars agree that if India wants to keep its federal system strong, these cooperative mechanisms must be strengthened to balance central power with state needs.

### **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research has applied the qualitative methodology, on the basis of reviews of primary documents like the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935, constitutional debates and secondary literature on Indian federalism and political parties. The study includes a comparative analysis that would highlight the evolution of institutions and political impacts on the federal structure. Other analysis reviews the changes from the Planning Commission to NITI Aayog and their role in cooperative federalism.

### **IV. DISCUSSION**

#### **A. History of Indian federalism and the Acts of 1919 and 1935**

The 1919 Act of the Government of India was introduced immediately after World War I. This act introduced "dyarchy" at the provincial level which divided the governance into two categories: transferred subjects managed by the elected Indian ministers and reserved subjects remained to the British governors. This act also introduced the communal electorates, that reinforced religious identity politics under the colonial rule. (Basu, D. D. ,2019) (Government of India Act 1919, 2022)

The Act of 1935 proposed an All-India Federation that included provinces as well as the princely states. The full federalism was never attained because of the refusal of the princely states. This act abolished the dyarchy and granted the provinces more power (Government of India Act 1935, 2024). The legislative powers were divided into three lists: the Federal List which is controlled by the Centre, covered national interests like defence and foreign affairs; the provincial list, controlled by the provinces included local governance and agriculture and the Concurrent List which allowed both the Centre and the Provinces authority over some cases

like criminal law. (Goyal, R, 2024)

A federal court was also established to resolve the disputes that may take place between the state and the centre. It introduced the bicameral legislature in most of provinces and expanded the electorate through direct elections (Kaushik, S. K. N., 2016). But all the important powers remained with the governor-generals who played the role of agents of the crown and had veto and emergency powers. This showed the partial transfer of sovereignty.

The act of 1935 laid the foundation for India's federal constitution that included balancing the local autonomy with the centre with more power. (Vedantu, 2025)

### **B. Adoption of the Quasi-federal structure in 1947**

The Constituent Assembly had to consider India's geographical, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity during the framing of the constitution. For India, it was difficult to adopt pure federalism, like the USA because there were chances of alienation of the diverse regions.

The solution for this was a quasi-federal system where sovereignty can be divided constitutionally, but the centre had more powers for maintaining order, integrity and unity. There are articles like 356 (President's rule in the states) give power to the centre to interfere in the states under some circumstances. (Vajiram & Ravi, 2025)

The constitution provides a clear division of legislative powers into union, state and concurrent lists; an independent judiciary and many mechanisms for intergovernmental coordination. This structure allows the flexibility and enables the centre to control the states at the time of emergencies and respecting their provincial autonomy in normal times.

The quasi-federal model is a practical option for India's political and social situation. It validates the need for cohesion and development, managing the interests of a diverse federation under a broader democratic framework. (Ramesh, J, 2021)

### **C. Multi-party System and its impact on Federalism**

India's political party system has transformed from one-party dominance to a multi-party democracy which is marked by regional parties asserting significant influence. Initially, the Congress party maintained the power at the centre and in most states, which resulted in centralised federalism (Wikipedia Contributors. 2005)

When the same party is at power at both centre and states, governance tends to be more likely to follow the policies properly but it also risks the regional diversity and issues to be suppressed. Uniform policy implementation can sometimes ignore the local specific characteristics. On the other hand, when different parties are in power at the centre and the states, states may criticise

the central policies and focus more on the state specific affairs and negotiate for alternate solution that benefits the both, state and the centre. (Singh, M, 2025)

This plurality adds charm to the democratic representation but also possesses challenges like policy deadlocks, politicalisation of federal grants and increased demand of state autonomy. Coalition governments and alliances have introduced a new complexity, compelling the centre to accommodate diverse political aspirations through bargaining rather than command.

Political polarisation can shift federalism from cooperative to confrontational modes, impacts the governance quality and national integration. however, it also encourages decentralisation and accountability in federal relations.

#### **D. Planning Commission and NITI Aayog in Cooperative Federalism**

The Planning Commission was established in 1950 for economic planning, drafting Five-Year Plans with a centralised approach. It improved the resource allocation and development but its top focus was to limit the participation of states in Decision-making which led to criticism of non-justifiable representation of the regional needs and lack of cooperative governance.

NITI Aayog was created in 2015 as a successor to the Planning Commission. It enshrines the cooperative federalism by promoting a shared vision. Today, it serves as a platform where states and the centre cooperate in policy making, innovation and implementation. It was designed as a 'think tank' and a policy advisory body that encourages states' participation in decision making. (NITI Aayog: A New Institution of Cooperative Federalism, 2025)

NITI Aayog's emphasis on cooperative negotiation, joint problem solving and fostering the competitive federalism creates space for state-level solutions to enhance the national importance and make federalism more inclusive and responsive

This evolution shows India's innovation in federal democratic governance, addressing political realities and development challenges for more effective cooperation between the state and the centre.

### **V. ANALYSIS**

India's federal system has changed over time as the country has kept trying to adjust the balance of power between the centre and the state and also making space for the huge diversity. The Government of India Act introduced the idea of a federal system and gave some powers but it was limited because of the interests of the British rulers and the difficult political situation at that time. (NEXT IAS, 2024)

The federal constitution was made with the clear aim of keeping the country united, avoiding

division and ensuring democratic rule. At the same time, a variety of political parties and their alliances that are subject to change influence how federalism works and often encourage centralisation while also bringing challenges like polarisation and conflict.

Institutions like NITI Aayog mark an important step towards cooperative federalism. They bring together policy cooperation with decentralisation, which is very important for solving today's political and developmental challenges.

In the future, the strength of Indian federalism will depend on building stronger cooperation, respecting constitutional independence and handling the political differences in order to protect both unity and diversity.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Indian Federalism is a system shaped by India's history, politics, and society. The Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935 laid the foundation by introducing concepts like dyarchy, provincial autonomy and the division of powers. After independence, India chose a federal constitution that aimed to balance national unity with the need to give states enough independence, making it suitable for the country's diverse and complex reality.

The growth of a multi-party system adds both energy and challenges to how the central and state governments work together in India. This affects the governance and democracy in many ways. The succession from the Planning Commission to NITI Aayog shows how institutions can adapt and support the cooperative federalism, which is important for governance that is inclusive and effective.

Keeping a balance in a federal democracy needs political maturity, respect for institutions and new ideas. Both the centre and the state should work together in a democratic way to strengthen the nation and maintain harmony.

\*\*\*\*\*

**VII. REFERENCES**

1. Basu, D. D. (2019). *Introduction to the Constitution of India* (24th ed.). LexisNexis.
2. Goyal, R. (2024). Impact of Party System on Indian Federalism. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 12(4).
3. Government of India Act 1919. (2022). Constitution of India. Retrieved from <https://www.constitutionofindia.net/historical-constitution/government-of-india-act-1919/>
4. Government of India Act 1935. (2024). Constitution of India. Retrieved from <https://www.constitutionofindia.net/historical-constitution/government-of-india-act-1935/>
5. Kaushik, S. K. N. (2016). *Federalism and the Formation of States in India*. Institute for Social and Economic Change.
6. NITI Aayog: A New Institution of Cooperative Federalism. (2025). Retrieved from <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/planning-commission-of-india/>
7. Ramesh, J. (2021). *Reflections on the Quasi-Federal Democracy in India*. Drishti IAS.
8. Singh, M. (2025). *Federalism in India: Balancing Centre, State, and Party Interests*. Universal Institutions.
9. Vajiram & Ravi. (2025). *Federalism in Indian Polity: Significance and Features*. Retrieved from <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/federalism-in-indian-polity/>
10. Vedantu. (2025). *Government of India Acts*. Retrieved from <https://www.vedantu.com/history/government-of-india-acts>
11. Wikipedia Contributors. (2005). *Government of India Act 1935*. Wikipedia. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government\\_of\\_India\\_Act\\_1935](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_India_Act_1935)
12. NEXT IAS. (2024). *Government of India Act 1935: Features & Analysis*. Retrieved from <https://www.nextias.com/blog/government-of-india-act/>

\*\*\*\*\*