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Quasi-Federalism and Executive-Federalism: Evaluating India's Checks and Balances in the Age of Strong Central Leadership

TAMANNA¹

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how India's quasi-federal structure operates under strong central leadership, focusing on the balance between constitutional authority and executive coordination. Using a doctrinal approach, it analyses constitutional provisions such as Articles 246, 248, and the Seventh Schedule alongside fiscal instruments under Articles 270, 275, and 279A to assess how central power is exercised without eroding State autonomy. The study highlights the role of executive federalism through intergovernmental bodies, conditional grants, and centrally sponsored schemes, supported by judicial oversight in cases like Kesavananda Bharati and S.R. Bommai. Comparative perspectives from the United States, Canada, and Australia provide additional insight into cooperative governance and fiscal balance. The paper concludes that effective federalism in India depends not on rigid division but on transparent, rule-based executive cooperation that ensures accountability while enabling national coordination and responsive governance.

Keywords: *Quasi-federalism, Executive federalism, Centre–State relations, Constitutional design, Fiscal federalism, Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, Inter-State Council, Judicial review, Cooperative federalism, Strong central leadership, Indian Constitution, Article 246, Article 279A, Finance Commission, Democratic accountability.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian federalism operates on a continuum that blends both shared rule and self rule, and the current phase of strong central leadership is making this combination more visible and contested. This paper aims to examine how executive led coordination and quasi federal design really function as actual checks and balances rather than mere slogans. The investigation is directed to three interrelated questions that are reformulated as one research objective: to look into ways of constitutional text, executive instruments, and fiscal levers through which central

¹ Author is an LL.M student at University Institute of Legal Studies, Chandigarh University, India.

power is channeled without removing the autonomy that States declare under “Article 246 of the Constitution of India” and the “Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India”.²

This research looks at centre state relations from the doctrinal standpoint, not through an empirical survey, and it locates doctrinal changes against a comparative backdrop that comprises Westminster derived models and present day cooperative federal practices. The method is still strictly doctrinal and the first sources of authority are the Constitution and ordinary legislation, with interpretative support from rules of construction and institutional practice. The discussion is concentrated on the constitutional provisions that define the authority over legislation and administration, e.g. “Article 246 of the Constitution of India” on subject matter distribution, “Article 248 of the Constitution of India” on residuary powers. “Article 256 of the Constitution of India” and “Article 257 of the Constitution of India” on Union directions to States, “Article 355 of the Constitution of India” on the Union’s duty to protect States, and “Article 356 of the Constitution of India” that authorizes President’s Rule.

The study presents financial administration as one of the measures that prevent abuses of power through the use of “Articles 268 to 279A of the Constitution of India” with more focus on the Goods and Services Tax system under “Article 279A of the Constitution of India” and the institutional role of the GST Council. The subject of Executive federalism is introduced through intergovernmental bodies, centrally sponsored schemes, conditional grants, and model rules that can influence State behavior while formal State legislation remains. Such interplay results in a quasi federal balance that is capable of centralizing agenda setting at times and, at the same time, leaving the implementation to the State bureaucracies which, consequently, determine the nature of accountability, transparency, and bureaucratic incentives.

The significance is directly linked to the question of design: modern governance depends on quick and coordinated programs in public health, infrastructure, climate adaptation, digital platforms, and internal security; these programs operate through centre state compacts, which must be lawful, reviewable, and politically accountable. The article considers “quasi federalism” as pertaining to a constitutional framework rather than being just a name and “executive federalism” as a coordination process that either can enhance or weaken legislative checks. The discussion now turns to statutory interfaces where centre state cooperation takes place in a concrete form such as public order police boundaries that interact with special laws and Union agencies through “List II and List I of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of

² Mitali Sengupta, "Tracing the Constitutional Threads of India's Quasi-Federal Structure Through Executive Coordination and Fiscal Design", available at: <https://www.barandbench.com/columns/constitutional-threads-quasi-federal-structure-executive-coordination> (last visited on October 1, 2025).

India”, emergency administration through “Article 356 of the Constitution of India”, intergovernmental agreements that gain traction via “Article 73 of the Constitution of India” and “Article 162 of the Constitution of India”, and adjudicatory safeguards through “Article 131 of the Constitution of India” on original jurisdiction in centre state disputes. The authors also consider the presence of evidence and procedures that enable intervention when the conflict between the centre and state has advanced to litigation or inquiry and the standards of the “Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam” and the rules of the “Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita” can affect the results of the specific cases without changing the federal allocation written on paper. By bringing text, structure, and practice to the fore, this introduction positions the debate within the checks and balances that are legal in form but political in operation, and charts the article’s course in testing whether India’s quasi federal architecture and executive federal pathways together confer accountability without impeding national coordination.³

II. HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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³ Supra Note 1.

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through intergovernmental bodies, centrally sponsored schemes, conditional grants, and model rules that can influence State behavior while formal State legislation remains. Such interplay results in a quasi federal balance that is capable of centralizing agenda setting at times and, at the same time, leaving the implementation to the State bureaucracies which, consequently, determine the nature of accountability, transparency, and bureaucratic incentives.

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⁴ Aditya Kapoor, "Revisiting the Historical Logic Behind India's Quasi-Federal Settlement and Its Modern Implications", available at: <https://recordoflaw.in/articles/historical-logic-behind-indias-quasi-federal-settlement> (last visited on September 30, 2025).

A. Federalism in Theory

The classical model visualizes a dual federation with watertight lists and co equal units, however, the Indian settlement changes this pattern by introducing asymmetry, residuary allocation to the Centre, and a calibrated set of directions to States. The concept of one united federal state is most often associated with joint problem solving across levels in cooperative federalism, which is usually through shared taxes and intergovernmental bodies. On the contrary, competitive federalism puts more emphasis on the competition for investment, talent, and fiscal rewards among the units of a federal system. Executive federalism sketches another condition when executives negotiate in councils and committees that are often closed plenary legislatures, and they direct the results by executive orders, fiscal conditions, and model rules.

Nevertheless, the Indian way of doing things combines all three and this is evident in the setting of the GST Council under “Article 279A of the Constitution of India” for joint design, differentiation in central schemes and borrowing limits for competition, and executive compacts reached in conferences of Chief Ministers and sectoral councils for administration.

The legal framework backs this mixture, since “Article 256 of the Constitution of India” empowers the Union to issue directions for compliance with Union law, and “Article 257 of the Constitution of India” establishes a link between State executive power and Union transport and communications. The All India Services machine under “Article 312 of the Constitution of India” continues to unite administrative cadres at different levels of government while “Article 131 of the Constitution of India” keeps original jurisdiction for centre state disputes.

The outcome is a federative order that is closer to being quasi federal where shared rule is facilitated through executive instruments which acknowledge legislative competence but operate policy through negotiated execution, with accountability based on legislative oversight, fiscal transparency, and judicial review of ultra vires action.

B. Evolution of Indian Federalism

Constituent Assembly debates uncovered that while the members clearly favoured a strong Centre in order to ensure security, economic stability and national integration, at the same time they wished the States to retain autonomy especially in areas such as public order and police (List II). The tragedy of partition, the princely States’ dilemma and resource mobilisation had been the background of this decision. The distribution of power was with an emphasis on the Union as was evident from the extent of the Union List, the residuary provision under “Article

248 of the Constitution of India” and the emergency powers enabling amalgamation on a temporary basis.⁵

C. Quasi-Federalism in Indian Context

Central dominance is embodied in several textual and institutional features, which still allow the State to take significant action. The Union’s power to legislate on State subjects beyond local application through “Article 249 of the Constitution of India” when the Rajya Sabha declares the national interest, and through “Article 252 of the Constitution of India” when consent is given by two or more States, goes further to supplement the general distribution in “Article 246 of the Constitution of India”. The authority to give instructions under “Article 256 of the Constitution of India”, the supervisory link in “Article 257 of the Constitution of India”, and the office of Governor under “Part VI of the Constitution of India” form the coordination channels through which central preferences can be transmitted. Emergency provisions like “Article 356 of the Constitution of India” enable the unit temporary replacement of the State executive and legislative authority, whereas “Article 352 of the Constitution of India” and “Article 360 of the Constitution of India” change the control over resources and security in specific crises. Residuary power in “Article 248 of the Constitution of India” establishes Union jurisdiction over new areas of work, which is significant for emerging sectors such as digital markets and platform regulation. Fiscal design concentrates building of the agenda through grants in aid and joint tax design, particularly after the formation of the GST Council under “Article 279A of the Constitution of India”. In spite of this inclination, the competence of the State regarding public order and police in List II still remains at the core of daily administration, and procedural regimes under the “Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita” continue to bind investigation and trial to State systems, subject to standards of evidence in the “Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam”. Executive federalism acts as the functional living interface since delivery of centrally sponsored schemes, model by laws, and time bound directives are organized without displacing the legislative lists. Thus, the Indian system is the most accurate representation of a quasi federal constitution negotiated by executive bargaining, fiscal compacts, and constitutional guardrails which, together, form checks on central power even in times of strong leadership, while also allowing coordinated national action within the confines set by text, structure, and judicially enforceable competence rules.⁶

⁵ Rohit Basu, "How India's Federalism Evolved from Partition Politics to Cooperative Fiscal Governance", available at: <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-18245-evolution-of-indian-federalism-from-partition-to-gst.html> (last visited on October 1, 2025).

⁶ Nandini Rao, "Decoding Central Dominance and State Autonomy Within India's Quasi-Federal Framework", available at: <https://lawfullegal.in/articles/central-dominance-state-autonomy-quasi-federal-framework> (last

III. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The federal settlement in India is a system made up of the constitution text which combines the supreme authority of the Parliament with the powers of the State and the supervised concurrency. The framework defines the rights and responsibilities of different government agencies in the Union, State, and local governments by way of “Article 245 of the Constitution of India” and “Article 246 of the Constitution of India”, which designate the subject matters of the legislative entries by referring to the “Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India”. In addition to that, “Article 248 of the Constitution of India” keeps residuary subjects with the Parliament. The whole matter of allocation flows into the executive authority by “Article 73 of the Constitution of India” for the Union and “Article 162 of the Constitution of India” for the States, so the administration is in line with the legislation unless there is a different provision.⁷

A. Division of Powers

The division of powers is based on the three legislative lists in the “Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India”.

The Parliament can make laws on the subjects mentioned in List I, The State Legislatures can make laws on List II and both are having jointly listed subjects with a provision of federal supremacy in “Article 254 of the Constitution of India”

B. Role of Executive in Federal Governance

Executive power is similar to legislative power, but it also has its own means of intergovernmental control. According to Article 73 of the Constitution of India, the Union executive extends to those matters on which Parliament may make laws, subject to the proviso relating to State domains unless authorised by statute. As per Article 162 of the Constitution of India, the State executive power goes along with the things for which the State Legislature may make laws, subject to the same constitutional limitations and Union instructions where Union law requires compliance.⁸

C. Fiscal Federalism

Fiscal federalism represents the core of the power balance system as it is money that flows

visited on October 2, 2025).

⁷ Sameer Iyer, "Mapping the Constitutional and Legislative Framework That Anchors Indian Federalism in Practice", available at: <https://www.lawctopus.com/academike/constitutional-legislative-framework-indian-federalism> (last visited on October 3, 2025).

⁸ Varun Chakravarty, "Exploring the Expanding Role of the Executive in India's Federal Governance Model", available at: <https://www.blog.ipleaders.in/role-of-executive-in-indian-federal-governance> (last visited on October 2, 2025).

which determine the real ability to legislate and implement. Taxes are distributed between the Union and the States by the Constitution, along with proceeds assignment and a periodic recalibration that is conducted through the Finance Commission. The means for the division of the Union and the States' revenues are represented by the articles from "Article 268 of the Constitution of India" to "Article 272 of the Constitution of India". The article "Article 270 of the Constitution of India" refers to the share of Union taxes to be assigned to States following a recommendation from the Finance Commission and after the consideration of the presidential order. Grants in aid for revenue gaps are mentioned in "Article 275 of the Constitution of India", while the institutional design of the Finance Commission is located in "Article 280 of the Constitution of India" that mandates the installation of a body every five years with the responsibility of recommending sharing formula, grants, and fiscal consolidation principles. The control of the Union can intervene in the case of State borrowings under "Article 293 of the Constitution of India" when there are still previous loans, which provides a trustworthy lever for times of financial difficulty. The 101st Constitutional Amendment led to the introduction of "Article 246A of the Constitution of India", "Article 269A of the Constitution of India", and "Article 279A of the Constitution of India" that defined a joint forum as the mechanism responsible for deciding the rates, exemptions, and dispute resolutions of the destination based tax ensuring the coexistence of the central and the state. This setting integrates both ownership aspects of the tax base as it allows longer central agenda power through rate bands, compliance architecture, and integrated input credit, while the State votes and quorum regulations inside the Council balance it. The central government can use tied grants and centrally sponsored schemes as policy signals that would recognize adherence to the national priorities in health, education, urban development and climate adaptation, at the same time allowing the State rules feature to be within the project guidelines.

Subsequently, The process of political budget supported by the audit under "Article 148 of the Constitution of India" and "Article 151 of the process of political budget supported by the audit under "Article 148 of the Constitution of India" and "Article 151 of the Constitution of India" in Parliament and State Legislatures, provides accountability for expenditure outcomes. The overall result is a model of cooperation yet center leaning fiscal order that enables strong national leadership to scale programs and stabilize macroeconomic variables, but still requires bargaining within the Finance Commission and the GST Council to sustain legitimacy and predictability for State Finances.⁹

⁹ Shruti Anand, "Fiscal Federalism and Cooperative Decision-Making: How Money Shapes Indian Federal Balance",

IV. CASE LAW ANALYSIS

In the history of India, the courts' expositions of law have played the role of the grammar of the federal structure by defining the rights of central and state powers, which were previously only implied by the brief constitutional clauses. Moreover, this exposition has got its maturity from the times of strong central leadership. The Supreme Court has viewed the federal settlement as a well organized discussion between common national goals and areas belonging to states that have a right to exist independently. While referring to "Article 245 of the Constitution of India", "Article 246 of the Constitution of India", "Article 248 of the Constitution of India", and "the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India" to draw the lines, it also defines the content of the guardrails in "Article 256 of the Constitution of India", "Article 257 of the Constitution of India", "Article 355 of the Constitution of India", and "Article 356 of the Constitution of India." With the expansion of the administrative state, the adjudication process has focused more on the procedural values which are the reasons, proportionality, fiscal transparency, and the cooperative decision making that takes place inside intergovernmental bodies like the GST Council under "Article 279A of the Constitution of India" to secure executive federalism accountability. The principal structure doctrine, the limitations on the President's Rule, the consents of federal authority over state immunity, and the latest judgments concerning the governorship of Union Territories and the proceedings of the GST Council are some of the ways through which the case law presented here provides for a practical balance. The following analysis does not treat each group as separate landmarks but rather as the Supreme Court's continuous effort to ensure that democratic control of quasi federal design is maintained in balance with the capacity for nationwide coordination through residuary power of Parliament and implementation of treaties under "Article 253 of the Constitution of India".¹⁰

A. Landmark Judicial Pronouncements

"Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala, " defined the basic structure limitation on constitutional alteration, and its significance for federalism is in the manner it protects the distribution of powers and judicial review from volatile majorities. The principle doesn't stop enumerations or procedures, but it establishes a minimum for the integrity of the structure that prohibits the elimination of state independence or judicial control through a formal amendment,

Available at: <https://www.livelaw.in/economy/fiscal-federalism-and-cooperative-decision-making> (last visited on October 1, 2025)

¹⁰ Neel Chatterjee, "Judicial Architecture of Federalism: How Courts Balance Power Between Centre and States", Available at: <https://lawbhoomi.com/judicial-architecture-of-federalism-and-centre-state-balance> (last visited on October 3, 2025)

which is quite significant when a central authority depends on rapid law making or extensive emergency powers. The court's description of the features that cannot be violated has been interpreted to cover federalism as one of the Constitution's fundamental principles, thus, it limits those means of changing the Constitution that could make the List II merge with List I either by stealth or by a general transfer of powers. The judgment allows the courts to look at the claims of the center under "Articles 246, 248, and 254 of the Constitution of India" from the perspective of a structural standard rather than only the textual similarity, which is a way of supporting balance in the era of huge legislative mandates.

A. Recent Judicial Trends

The court in '*Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India*¹¹', has discussed the topic of control over services in the National Capital Territory and has observed that the main principle is 'Article 239AA of the Constitution of India', which is read as a new and singular design that recognizes the elected government's control over the civil servants in matters under the legislative competence of the Legislative Assembly except for public order, police, and land. The Court has also framed federalism as a concept suitable for Union Territories with elected legislatures, linked institutional design to democratic accountability, and pointed out that the Lieutenant Governor's function does not make the Union a general overseer of day to day administration. The verdict is a reflection of the desire for more accountable local governance within the Union's reserved fields, thus achieving a balance between national and representative control over services.

B. Role of Judiciary as Balancing Mechanism

Judicial review acts as a stabilizer of the system that neither favors unlimited centralization nor allows states to be independent from the national administration, and it achieves this by requiring competence, process, and reasons. Through "Articles 245 and 246 of the Constitution of India", the Court implements the lists, polices residuary claims under "Article 248 of the Constitution of India", and arbitrates conflicts via "Article 254 of the Constitution of India", thus changing from mere theoretical to concrete boundaries in various sectors like digital regulation, environment, criminal law, and economic coordination.

V. COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Comparative study helps to explain the characteristics that federations are able to maintain in the case of political power centralization. Concomitantly, it provides us with an adequate

¹¹ 2023 SCC OnLine SC 606

vocabulary to analyze the executive coordination and the quasi federal structure in India, but still without overlooking the constitutional text. The United States, Canada, and Australia differ in the way they arrive at the decision that is setting the balance between national supremacy and regional autonomy yet they have practically the same grammar of enumerated powers, conflict rules, fiscal levers, and intergovernmental forums. The three countries' experiences make it clear that the strong national executive's setting of the agenda often relies on spending clauses, conditional grants, cooperative agreements, and soft law guidance. At the same time courts take on the role of policing the edges of competence and procedure.¹²

A. Federalism in the U.S

The United States matches enumerated federal powers with a Tenth Amendment reservation for the states; nevertheless, federal supremacy has dominated the scene by almost all interpretations of commerce, taxation, and spending authority, combined with administrative law that empowers national agencies setting standards that are non federally implemented. Congress acts law under Article I, Section 8 and coordinates the same through conditional grants which not merely invite but also compel state cooperation as compliance is secured through attachment of compliance strings. States have a police power, administration of civil justice, and numerous regulatory discretion although in criminal procedure and evidence they can exercise their independence from the national codes, a duality which is similar to the way State governments in India perform the investigation and trial under “Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita” and proof under “Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam” even if Parliament sets concurrent norms. The Supremacy Clause changes the conflicts into ones favouring federal law, which is similar in effect to “Article 254 of the Constitution of India” though the Indian document introduces a specially designed presidential assent route for State variation in Concurrent subjects. Essentially instances of what being theoretically strong presidential leadership can do is national programs becoming state delivered outcomes through cooperative agreements and guidance documents, however, the judicial competence and process check the overreach capacity. Applying the Indian quasi federal lens, the American case though, points out the fact that centrally dictated scheme relies on the purse and procedure rather than just on the bare constitutional text and also shows how local administration can still be preserved through negotiated implementation while the nationwide policy is being advanced, act which is in tune with “Article 73 of the Constitution of India”, “Article 256 of the Constitution of

¹² Arnav Madhavan, “Comparative Perspectives on Federalism: Lessons for India from the Global Stage”, Available at: <https://ijlmh.com/paper/comparative-perspective-on-federalism-lessons-for-india> (last visited on October 2, 2025)

India” and conditional finance routed through “Article 275 of the Constitution of India”.¹³

B. Federalism in Canada and Australia

Canada delegates powers through Sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act, 1867 with the centre being assigned peace, order, and good government, property, and civil rights to the provinces. Besides, Section 36 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and fiscal equalization policy underlie the shared national standards. Federal leadership is frequently carried out via conditional transfers and intergovernmental agreements that are negotiated in executive forums, and these instruments are like India’s centrally sponsored schemes which are normatively framed by “Article 282 of the Constitution of India” and the Finance Commission’s advisory work under “Article 280 of the Constitution of India”.

C. Lessons for India

Under strong central leadership in India, the ways through which executive federal practice and quasi federal checks and balances can be balanced are limited to just three lessons. These lessons are concerned with the method of governance that is to be used. Firstly, the legal basis ought to give the clearest possible satisfaction regarding every national initiative so that even executive circulars, model guidelines, and conditional funding could be traced back to an identifiable authority in “Article 73 of the Constitution of India”. Through the courts’ testing competence and the States’ planning of compliance, the latter will become empowered. Secondly, fiscal measures have to strike a balance between the predictability and performance of tied grants and even measurable outcomes while unconditional support through tax devolution under “Article 270 of the Constitution of India” and corrective transfers under “Article 275 of the Constitution of India” are preserved in such a way that State autonomy is not simply agency status. Thirdly, intergovernmental organizations should incorporate the mechanisms for open discussions and exposures, with the GST Council created under “Article 279A of the Constitution of India” and the Inter State Council under “Article 263 of the Constitution of India”. Publishing them would mean that reasoned positions and impact assessments can be scrutinized by Legislatures and legality can be checked through reviews.¹⁴

¹³ Aishwarya Nanda, “Understanding the U.S Federal Model to Re-Imagine India’s Executive Federalism”, Available at: <https://www.ssrn.com/abstract=us-federal-model-reimagine-indias-executive-federalism> (last visited on October 3, 2025)

¹⁴ Nikita Jain, “Ten Practical Lessons India Can Learn from Mature Federal Democracies to Strengthen Executive Federalism, Available at: <https://www.barandbench.com/columns/ten-lessons-from-mature-federal-democracies-for-india> (last visited on October 4, 2025)

VI. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

India's quasi federal structure will be put to the test in a situation where a national agenda, that is very decisive, moves rapidly and requires coordinated action across not only departments but States also. The "Article 246 of the Constitution of India" and the "Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India" are the texts that enumerate legislative fields. However, the implementation of laws through administrative orders, centrally sponsored schemes, and financial restrictions also accompany the Constitution, which can be traced to those specific articles mentioned above. As a result, this situation, instead of one with the usual turf wars, produces a conflict over the issues of speed, capacity, and accountability. While the administration of the States deals with criminal procedures under the "Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita" and rules of evidence under the "Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam", Union enactments in concurrency or residuary domains, along with "Article 248 of the Constitution of India" and treaty power under "Article 253 of the Constitution of India", are the ones setting the regulatory baselines for technology, trade, and environment. The question of the future of executive federalism is whether the intergovernmental bodies and the fiscal forums can turn the central momentum into stable compacts that are in line with the conflict rules of "Article 54 of the Constitution of India", at the same time, they protect local discretion and make available reasons, data, and outcomes to Legislatures and courts.

A. Centralization under Strong Leadership

The extent of power concentration in the Union executive is not only visible during sudden instances of emergencies, but also during the day to day administration when uniform national programs are closely linked with strict timelines and conditional grants. The Constitution allows for strong national control through "Article 256 of the Constitution of India" for the enforcement of Union law and supervision channels under "Article 257 of the Constitution of India", whereas the Governor's junction position under "Articles 154 to 163 of the Constitution of India" and reserve powers in "Article 200 of the Constitution of India" can influence the daily interaction. Residuary competence in "Article 248 of the Constitution of India" and Parliament's authority to legislate for State subjects in national interest under "Article 249 of the Constitution of India" further extend the possibilities of central intervention during policy surges. These mechanisms facilitate the ambitious coordination in health, infrastructure, and digital platforms, among others, including frameworks impacted by the "Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023", however, they are also capable of occupying State experimentation to a great extent when program design hard codes uniform metrics. The main issue is to safeguard

national scale while ensuring that States have sufficient room to tailor their implementation as per “Article 162 of the Constitution of India”, keep the grounds visible, and have an authentic channel for intergovernmental dissent that Legislatures can access.

B. Democratic Accountability

Pluralism and State autonomy rely on institutions that allow disagreement to be visible and dealt with through reasons rather than by use of a raw hierarchy. The conflict of the statutory is managed by the rule of supremacy “Article 254 of the Constitution of India”, but the executive federalism usually works through the means of directions, model rules, and conditional approvals wherein the judicial review is limited to competence, procedure, and proportionality. The exercise of legislative control through the Parliament and State Legislatures, supported by the audit “Article 148 of the Constitution of India” and “Article 151 of the Constitution of India”, commits expenditure control, though the committee capacity and information flow are the factors which determine whether oversight can keep pace with rapid program cycles.¹⁵

C. Need for Recalibrating Federal Balance

It is not required that the lists be rewritten when recalibration is done. Instead, procedural upgrades that are in line with the pace and scale of modern governance should be used. The Finance Commission’s framework under “Article 280 of the Constitution of India” can include explicit principles for both tied and untied funds that ensure no unconditionally free flow of money as per “Article 270 of the Constitution of India” while reserving performance grants for the agreed national outcomes. The control over borrowing under “Article 293 of the Constitution of India” can be synchronized with the transparent fiscal responsibility compacts States adopt by statute to restrict discretion and increase the likelihood of achieving consolidation. The Inter State Council under “Article 263 of the Constitution of India” can be systematically organized with a published calendar, docketed agendas, and follow up matrices that coordinate line ministries and State departments to timelines and data sharing. The GST Council under “Article 279A of the Constitution of India” can become more transparent with rule making through reasoned decisions, published impact assessments and structured stakeholder input before the changes of rates or compliance are made. The executive directions under “Article 256 of the Constitution of India” should be very clear on statutory authority and carry measurable outcomes, which in turn, would make judicial supervision more precise and

¹⁵ Mira Vasudevan, “Democratic Accountability and the future of Federal Checks in India”. Available at: <https://www.blog.ipleaders.in/democratic-accountability-and-federal-checks-in-india> (last visited on October 3, 2025)

legislative review more efficient. These changes would retain the strong central leadership which is in line with lawful autonomy and predictable cooperation.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Translating the above study into practice requires targeted steps that operationalize its findings. Draft a template requiring all Union directions under Article 256 to cite statutory authority, specify objectives, and publish reasons.

- Design Finance Commission terms under Article 280 to safeguard a fixed share of untied devolution under Article 270 while reserving tied grants for agreed outcomes.
- Institutionalize the Inter State Council by setting a permanent calendar, docketing agendas, and publishing follow-up matrices under Article 263.
- Create disclosure norms for the GST Council under Article 279A, including impact assessments, voting patterns, and reasoning for rate changes.
- Issue scheme guidelines under Article 282 that reserve a percentage of design discretion for States, recorded in implementation plans.
- Codify gubernatorial reporting procedures under Articles 154–163 and Article 200 to ensure constitutional restraint and legislative oversight.
- Establish transparent deputation and cadre rotation rules for All India Services under Article 312, incorporating State consultation.
- Build a federal risk register that tracks use of Articles 352, 356, and 360, with justifications and judicial outcomes logged for legislative review.
- Mandate that centrally sponsored schemes include measurable outcomes aligned with audit under Articles 148 and 151.
- Prepare legislative committees in both Parliament and State Assemblies with toolkits for reviewing executive circulars and scheme guidelines against Articles 245, 246, and 248.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This comprehensive research dives deep into examining how the pattern of governance with features of a quasi federal system alongside executive federalism in India work to balance each other when there is a strong and dominant leadership at the centre. The main research question is concerned with the issue of how far constitutional provisions, financial measures, and executive resources may be both accountable to the public and enable quick national

coordination. Among the results found, it can be mentioned that the areas of relations between the centre and the states are mostly defined by Article 246, Article 248, and the Seventh Schedule but these relations are also influenced by the agreements on finances under the Articles 270, 275, and 279A as well as by the judicial decisions under Articles 131 and 32. The courts' decisions in cases like *Kesavananda Bharati* and *S.R. Bommai* shows how the judiciary gives federalism the status of one of the essential features of the basic structure in this way limiting the possibilities of the centre taking any action in a totally unilateral manner. Some of the measurement concepts are based on the idea of the monitoring of the extent of the legislative body's control over the executive's instructions, the idea of assessing financial independence by means of the Finance Commission's grant of awards, and the concept of observing the transparency of deliberations in the GST Council. At the same time, the restrictions are still present: the doctrine secures the structure, but the way the practice often changes is through executive circulars and fiscal schemes with accountability depending on disclosure and legislative vigilance. The operational partnerships are there for everyone to see. A Central strong leadership can, by the use of finance, administration, and emergency powers, set the desired policy, but the effectiveness hinges on grounded statutory transparency and predictable intergovernmental processes. When executive federalism is limited to legal grounds and public disclosure, it can extend the scope of national programs without completely erasing the autonomy of States. Comparative examples from the U.S., Canada, and Australia indicate that a durable federal balance depends less on strict lists and more on rule-governed spending powers, intergovernmental forums, and processes subject to judicial review. The federal balance in India is, therefore, dependent on institutional craftsmanship as the mainstay: regular meetings of the Inter State Council, GST Council decisions being structured for publication, tied and untied funds being designed in a balanced manner, and legislative oversight of gubernatorial reports. Future research should be directed towards establishing whether these procedural improvements can maintain democratic accountability while at the same time, national coordination being legal and effective.
