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# The Glue of the Union: On Federalism as a Safeguard

 THE HINDU

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# The Glue of the Union: On Federalism as a Safeguard

 **The Hindu** 12 June 2026 **GS2**

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"Federalism is often treated as a turf war between the Centre and states. But is it better understood as a safeguard for democracy itself, and what is at stake when the balance tilts?"*

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Hindu](#)

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources **HOW**

## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Recurring **frictions between the Centre and the states**, over finances, Governors, central agencies and Concurrent List subjects, keep **federalism** at the centre of India's political debate. For an aspirant, this is a core **GS2 (polity, federalism) lead**. The key reframing: federalism is not merely an administrative arrangement or a turf war, but a **constitutional safeguard** against the over-concentration of power, a feature of democracy itself.

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Indian **federalism** divides power between the Union and the states and is part of the Constitution's **basic structure**. It accommodates diversity, brings government closer to people and **disperses power**. Contemporary frictions, over finances, Governors, central agencies and Concurrent List subjects, test this balance. A strong Centre is legitimate, but **over-centralisation** is not. The answer is **cooperative, not coercive, federalism**.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
<b>Seventh Schedule</b>	Union, State and Concurrent Lists	The division of powers
<b>Basic structure</b>	Federalism is part of it	The balance cannot be destroyed
<b>Fiscal federalism</b>	Sharing of taxes and devolution	A recurring point of friction
<b>Cooperative federalism</b>	Centre and states as partners	The constructive model

## THE ANALYSIS: WHY FEDERALISM IS A SAFEGUARD

- ❶ **It divides power.** The Seventh Schedule splits authority between the Union and the states, dispersing power.
- ❷ **It is constitutionally protected.** The Supreme Court has held federalism to be part of the basic structure.
- ❸ **It accommodates diversity.** A federal structure suits India's vast linguistic and cultural variety.
- ❹ **Over-centralisation is the risk.** A Centre that erodes state autonomy weakens democracy, not just the states.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

*the Seventh Schedule (Union, State, Concurrent Lists); Articles 245 to 263; federalism as part of the basic structure (S.R. Bommai, 1994). Fiscal: the Finance Commission (Article 280); the GST Council (Article 279A); centrally sponsored schemes; vertical and horizontal devolution. Coordination: the Inter-State Council (Article 263); the role of the Governor (Article 200); the NITI Aayog as a forum. Concepts: "cooperative federalism," "competitive federalism," "coercive federalism"; the strong-Centre bias of the Constitution. Linkage: democracy, diversity and accountability.*

## THE DEBATE

**Argument for a strong Centre:** National unity, coordinated policy and security require central capacity; excessive state autonomy can fragment the country.

**Argument for state autonomy:** Over-centralisation in finance, administration and agencies erodes the autonomy the Constitution guarantees, weakening democracy.

**The balanced verdict:** Strength and over-centralisation are different things. India's founders built a strong Union, but the goal is **cooperative federalism**: a Centre that leads without hoarding power, and states with the autonomy and resources the Constitution promises.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

*A weak answer treats Centre-State friction as a contest for power. The strong answer asks what the division of power is for, dispersing authority to protect democracy and diversity, and judges each friction against that purpose. The move is from “who should win” to “what does the balance protect.” The same lens applies to the separation of powers and to checks and balances generally.*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Seventh Schedule divides power (Union/State/Concurrent) -> federalism disperses authority. The protection: basic structure shields the balance. The risk: over-centralisation (finance, Governors, agencies) -> erodes state autonomy -> weakens democracy. The fix: cooperative federalism (Inter-State Council + fair devolution + restraint + dialogue) -> balance preserved.

## THE WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Revive and use the Inter-State Council** and other coordination forums.
- 2 **Ensure fair and predictable fiscal devolution** through the Finance Commission and the GST Council.
- 3 **Use central powers with restraint**, including the office of the Governor and central agencies.
- 4 **Resolve disputes through dialogue** and constitutional mechanisms rather than confrontation.

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

*“Indian federalism is a constitutional safeguard against the over-concentration of power.” Examine the contemporary frictions in Centre-State relations and the way forward. (250 words)*

*“Federalism holds a diverse Union together by sharing power, not hoarding it; protecting that balance is owed to the Constitution, not to any party.”*

*Seventh Schedule · basic structure (S.R. Bommai, 1994) · Finance Commission (Art 280) · GST Council (Art 279A) · Inter-State Council (Art 263) · Governor (Art 200).*

*Is federalism better understood as a safeguard for democracy than as a contest between the Centre and states?*

*Connects to GS2 PYQs on the federal structure, fiscal federalism and Centre-State relations; a probable question is the safeguard-versus-turf-war framing above.*

*today’s Assam-Nagaland oil-pact article (cooperative federalism in action); static GS2 on the federal structure and constitutional bodies.*

**Sources:** *The Hindu, Supreme Court of India, Inter-State Council Secretariat*

Source: *The Glue of the Union: On Federalism as a Safeguard* — [Ujyari.com](http://Ujyari.com) | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

### ● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

**Federalism in India is not merely an administrative convenience but a constitutional safeguard against the over-concentration of power, and protecting the balance between the Centre and the states is essential to democracy, diversity and accountability, not just a matter of political rivalry.**

#### ✓ SUPPORTING

- The Constitution divides powers between the Union and states and protects this division, so federalism is part of the basic structure.
- Over-centralisation, in finance, in administration and in the use of central agencies, can weaken the autonomy the Constitution guarantees the states.

- A genuine federal balance accommodates India's diversity and brings government closer to the people, strengthening accountability.

### **COUNTER**

Some argue that a strong Centre is necessary for national unity, coordinated policy and security, and that excessive state autonomy can fragment the country.

### **WAY FORWARD**

Strengthen federal institutions (the Inter-State Council, the Finance Commission and the GST Council), ensure fair fiscal devolution, use central powers with restraint, and resolve disputes through dialogue and constitutional mechanisms.

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## **MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

### **QUESTION**

*"Indian federalism is a constitutional safeguard against the over-concentration of power." Examine the contemporary frictions in Centre-State relations and the way forward. (250 words)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Federalism is often discussed as a contest between the Centre and the states, a question of who wins. That framing misses its deeper purpose: the federal structure is a safeguard, a way of dividing power so that no single level can monopolise it.

### **BODY**

The Indian Constitution establishes a federal structure with a strong unitary bias, dividing powers through the Union, State and Concurrent Lists of the Seventh Schedule. The Supreme Court has held federalism to be part of the basic structure of the Constitution, meaning the federal balance cannot be destroyed even by amendment.

This matters because the division of power is not an end in itself but a means: it accommodates India's vast diversity of language, culture and need; it brings government closer to the people; and, crucially, it

disperses power so that it cannot be over-concentrated at the centre. Contemporary frictions, over the sharing of taxes and the role of the Finance Commission, over the powers of Governors, over central agencies and centrally sponsored schemes, and over Concurrent List subjects such as education, are real, and they test this balance.

The counter-argument that a strong Centre is necessary for unity, coordinated policy and security is not baseless; India's founders deliberately built a strong Union, and national challenges do require central capacity. But strength and over-centralisation are different things, and a Centre that erodes the autonomy the Constitution guarantees the states weakens the very democracy it claims to serve. The way forward is to make federalism cooperative rather than coercive: revive the Inter-State Council, ensure fair and predictable fiscal devolution, use central powers with restraint, and resolve disputes through dialogue and constitutional bodies rather than confrontation.

### CONCLUSION

Federalism is the glue that holds a diverse Union together by sharing power, not hoarding it. Protecting that balance is a duty owed not to any party but to the Constitution and to democracy itself.

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