Class 10 Political Science Chapter 2: Federalism - Notes, Important Questions and MCQs (2026-27)

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These Federalism Class 10 notes cover Class 10 Political Science Chapter 2 completely: what federalism is, its key features, coming together and holding together federations, what makes India a federal country (three lists, special provisions, Union Territories, amendment procedure), how federalism is practised (linguistic states, language policy, Centre-State relations), linguistic diversity, and decentralisation through panchayats and municipalities after the 1992 amendment.

You also get comparison tables, the three lists at a glance, the local government structure, NCERT-style questions with answers, 10 MCQs and a free PDF with no signup.

Use the table of contents below to jump to the part you need, or read top to bottom for a complete revision of the chapter.

Table of Contents

- Chapter Overview
- Important Topics and Concepts
- Federal vs Unitary Government
- Coming Together vs Holding Together
- Local Government Before and After 1992
- Three Lists of the Indian Constitution
- Important Definitions and Terms
- Short Answer Questions
- Long Answer Questions
- MCQs with Answers
- Quick Revision Points
- Chapter Summary
- Exam Tips and PYQ Pattern
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Conclusion

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Chapter Overview

Vertical division of power among different levels of government is one of the major forms of power sharing, commonly called federalism. Only 25 of the world’s 193 countries are federal, but their citizens make up 40 per cent of the world’s population; most large countries are federations.

The chapter explains the theory of federalism, the federal provisions of the Indian Constitution,

Important Topics and Concepts

What is federalism?

- Federalism is a system of government in which power is divided between a central authority and various constituent units of the country.
- Usually there are two levels: a government for the entire country responsible for subjects of common national interest, and governments of provinces or states that look after day-to-day administration. Both enjoy power independent of each other.
- In 1993, Belgium gave its regional governments constitutional powers no longer dependent on the centre, shifting from a unitary to a federal system. Sri Lanka remains, for all practical purposes, unitary; Tamil leaders want it to become federal.
- In a unitary system, there is only one level of government or sub-units are subordinate to the centre, which can order them. In a federal system, the central government cannot order the state government; both are separately answerable to the people.

Key features of federalism

- There are two or more levels (tiers) of government.
- Different tiers govern the same citizens, but each has its own jurisdiction in legislation, taxation and administration.
- The jurisdictions of each tier are specified in the constitution, so their existence and authority are constitutionally guaranteed.
- Fundamental provisions of the constitution cannot be unilaterally changed by one level; changes need the consent of both levels.
- Courts interpret the constitution and the powers of different levels; the highest court acts as an umpire in disputes.
- Sources of revenue for each level are clearly specified to ensure financial autonomy.
- Federalism has dual objectives: to safeguard and promote the unity of the country and to accommodate regional diversity. An ideal federal system needs mutual trust and an agreement to live together.

Coming together and holding together federations

- Coming together: independent states come together on their own to form a bigger unit, pooling sovereignty while retaining identity to increase security. Examples: USA, Switzerland, Australia. Constituent states usually have equal power and are strong vis-à-vis the federal government.
- Holding together: a large country decides to divide its power between constituent states and the national government. Examples: India, Spain, Belgium. The central government tends to be more powerful, and units often have unequal powers, some with special powers.

What makes India a federal country?

- India became independent after a painful partition, and several princely states joined the country. The Constitution declared India a Union of States; though it did not use the word federation, the Indian Union is based on federal principles.

- Originally a two-tier system (Union and State governments); later a third tier of Panchayats and Municipalities was added.
- The Constitution provides a three-fold distribution of legislative powers through the Union List, State List and Concurrent List.
- Residuary subjects: subjects not in any list, or new ones like computer software, are under the Union Government.

The three lists

- Union List: subjects of national importance such as defence, foreign affairs, banking, communications and currency, needing a uniform national policy; only the Union Government can make laws on them.
- State List: subjects of state and local importance such as police, trade, commerce, agriculture and irrigation; only State Governments can make laws on them.
- Concurrent List: subjects of common interest such as education, forest, trade unions, marriage, adoption and succession; both can make laws, but if they conflict, the Union law prevails.

Unequal powers, Union Territories and amendments

- As a holding together federation, Indian states do not have identical powers. States such as Assam, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram enjoy special powers under Article 371 due to their social and historical circumstances, especially to protect land rights of indigenous peoples, their culture and preferential employment.
- Union Territories such as Chandigarh, Lakshadweep and Delhi are too small to be states and could not be merged with existing states; the Central Government has special powers in running them.
- Changing the power-sharing arrangement is not easy: an amendment must be passed by both Houses of Parliament with at least two-thirds majority and ratified by the legislatures of at least half of the States.
- The judiciary oversees constitutional provisions; High Courts and the Supreme Court decide disputes on division of powers.
- Union and State Governments can levy taxes to raise resources.

How is federalism practised? Linguistic states

- Constitutional provisions are necessary but not sufficient; the real success of Indian federalism is due to the nature of democratic politics, which made the spirit of federalism, respect for diversity and desire to live together shared ideals.
- The creation of linguistic states was the first major test. Boundaries of old states were changed so that people speaking the same language lived in the same state.
- Some states were created on the basis of culture, ethnicity or geography, such as Nagaland, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand.
- Leaders feared linguistic states would cause disintegration, but they have made the country more united and administration easier.

Language policy

- The Constitution did not give any language the status of national language. Hindi was identified as the official language.

- Besides Hindi, 21 other languages are Scheduled Languages; candidates for Central Government examinations can use any of them. States have their own official languages.
- Use of English for official purposes was to stop in 1965, but non-Hindi states, especially Tamil Nadu (where the movement turned violent), demanded its continuation. The Centre agreed to continue English with Hindi. Critics say this favoured the English-speaking elite.
- Promotion of Hindi continues, but it cannot be imposed on states. This flexibility helped India avoid Sri Lanka's situation.

Centre-State relations

- For a long time, the same party ruled the Centre and most states, so states did not exercise their autonomy. When rival parties ruled states, the Centre often misused the Constitution to dismiss state governments, undermining federalism.
- After 1990, regional parties rose and coalition governments became common at the Centre, as no single party got a clear majority in the Lok Sabha.
- This created a new culture of power sharing and respect for state autonomy, supported by a major Supreme Court judgement that made arbitrary dismissal of state governments difficult.

Linguistic diversity of India

- The 2011 Census recorded more than 1,300 distinct mother tongues, grouped into 121 major languages; 22 are in the Eighth Schedule (Scheduled Languages).
- Hindi is the mother tongue of about 44 per cent of Indians; with second and third language speakers it was still under 50 per cent in 2011.
- Only 0.02 per cent recorded English as their mother tongue; another 11 per cent knew it as a second or third language.

Decentralisation in India

- States in India are as large as European countries (Uttar Pradesh is bigger than Russia in population; Maharashtra is about as big as Germany), so power sharing within states is needed.
- Decentralisation means taking power away from Central and State governments and giving it to local government.
- Basic idea: many problems are best settled locally; people know local problems and better ways to spend money; it allows direct participation and builds democratic habits. It realises the principle of local self-government.
- Earlier, panchayats and municipalities were under state control, elections were irregular and they lacked powers and resources.

The 1992 constitutional amendment

- Regular elections to local government bodies are constitutionally mandatory.
- Seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes in elected bodies and executive heads.
- At least one-third of all positions are reserved for women.
- An independent State Election Commission in each state conducts panchayat and municipal elections.
- State governments must share some powers and revenue with local bodies; the nature of sharing varies from state to state.

Structure of local government

- Rural (panchayati raj): each village or group of villages has a gram panchayat of ward members (panch) and a president (sarpanch), directly elected by adults. It works under the gram sabha, which includes all voters and meets at least twice or thrice a year to approve the budget and review performance.
- A few gram panchayats form a panchayat samiti (block or mandal), whose members are elected by panchayat members.
- All panchayat samitis in a district form the zilla parishad; most members are elected, and Lok Sabha MPs, MLAs and some officials are also members. The chairperson is its political head.
- Urban: municipalities in towns and municipal corporations in big cities, controlled by elected bodies. The municipal chairperson heads a municipality; the mayor heads a municipal corporation.
- This is the largest experiment in democracy in the world, with about 36 lakh elected representatives. It has deepened democracy and increased women's representation, but gram sabhas are not held regularly and states have not transferred enough powers and resources.

An experiment in Brazil: Porto Alegre

Porto Alegre combined decentralisation with participatory democracy. A parallel organisation alongside the municipal council lets its nearly 13 lakh people help make the city budget through sector (ward) meetings and city-wide meetings; about 20,000 people take part each year. This ensured money is not spent only on rich colonies: buses now run to poor colonies and slum dwellers cannot be evicted without resettlement. A similar experiment has taken place in parts of Kerala.

Federal vs Unitary Government

The NCERT question on the main difference.

Federal	Unitary
Two or more levels of government with their own powers	One level, or sub-units subordinate to the centre
Centre cannot order the states	Centre can pass orders to provincial or local governments
Powers guaranteed by the constitution	Powers given by the centre can be withdrawn
Each level separately answerable to the people	Sub-units answerable to the centre
Examples: India, USA, Belgium (after 1993)	Examples: Sri Lanka, United Kingdom

Coming Together vs Holding Together

A common 3-mark comparison.

Coming together	Holding together
Independent states join to form a bigger unit	A large country divides power among states
States pool sovereignty and keep identity for security	Centre shares power to hold diversity together

Coming together	Holding together
States usually have equal power	Units often have unequal powers; some get special status
States strong vis-à-vis federal government	Central government more powerful
USA, Switzerland, Australia	India, Spain, Belgium

Local Government Before and After 1992

The NCERT question on two differences.

Before 1992	After 1992
Elections not held regularly	Regular elections mandatory
No reservation guaranteed	Seats reserved for SC, ST, OBC and one-third for women
Under direct state control	State Election Commission conducts elections
No powers or resources of their own	States must share some powers and revenue

Three Lists of the Indian Constitution

List	Subjects	Who makes laws
Union List	Defence, foreign affairs, banking, communications, currency	Union Government only
State List	Police, trade, commerce, agriculture, irrigation	State Governments only
Concurrent List	Education, forest, trade unions, marriage, adoption, succession	Both; Union law prevails in conflict
Residuary subjects	Subjects not in any list, e.g. computer software	Union Government

Important Definitions and Terms

Term	Meaning
Federalism	A system in which power is divided between a central authority and constituent units
Jurisdiction	The area over which someone has legal authority, by territory or subjects
Unitary government	System with one level of government or sub-units subordinate to the centre
Coming together federation	Federation formed by independent states joining together
Holding together federation	Federation formed when a large country divides power among units
Residuary subjects	Subjects not in any of the three lists; under the Union
Union Territory	Area run by the Central Government with fewer powers than a state
Scheduled Languages	22 languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution
Coalition government	Government formed by at least two political parties with a common programme
Decentralisation	Taking power from Central and State governments and giving it to local

Term	Meaning
	government
Gram sabha	All voters of a village, which supervises the gram panchayat
Zilla parishad	District-level body formed by all panchayat samitis of a district
Mayor	Political head of a municipal corporation

Short Answer Questions

Q1. What is the main difference between a federal and a unitary government?

In a federal government, power is divided between the centre and constituent units, each with constitutionally guaranteed powers, and the centre cannot order the states. In a unitary government, sub-units are subordinate to the centre, which can order them. India is federal; Sri Lanka is unitary.

Q2. What are the dual objectives of federalism?

To safeguard and promote the unity of the country, and at the same time to accommodate regional diversity.

Q3. Distinguish between coming together and holding together federations.

In coming together federations like the USA, independent states join to form a bigger unit and usually have equal power. In holding together federations like India, a large country divides power among states, and the centre tends to be more powerful.

Q4. What are residuary subjects?

Subjects that do not fall in the Union, State or Concurrent Lists, or that came up after the Constitution was made, such as computer software. The Union Government has the power to make laws on them.

Q5. How has the formation of linguistic states strengthened Indian federalism?

Grouping people who speak the same language into one state made administration easier and, contrary to fears of disintegration, made the country more united.

Q6. Point out one feature of Indian federalism similar to and one different from Belgium.

Similar: both are holding together federations where power is shared between the centre and states (regions). Different: Belgium has a community government for language groups, which India does not have.

Q7. State any two differences between local government before and after 1992.

Before 1992, elections were irregular and local bodies had no powers or resources of their own. After 1992, regular elections are mandatory and states must share some powers and revenue with local bodies.

Q8. Why is decentralisation important?

Many problems are best solved locally because people know their local problems and how to spend money efficiently. It allows people to participate directly in decision making and builds a habit of democratic participation.

Long Answer Questions

Q1. Describe the key features of federalism.

Two or more levels of government.

Each tier governs the same citizens but has its own jurisdiction in legislation, taxation and administration.

Jurisdictions are specified in the constitution, guaranteeing each tier's existence and authority.

Fundamental provisions cannot be changed unilaterally by one level.

Courts interpret the constitution and act as umpire in disputes.

Sources of revenue are specified for financial autonomy.

Q2. How is federalism practised in India? Explain.

Linguistic states: boundaries were redrawn so speakers of one language lived in one state; some states were formed on cultural, ethnic or geographical grounds. This strengthened unity.

Language policy: no national language; Hindi as official language with 21 other Scheduled Languages; English continued alongside Hindi after protests; Hindi not imposed.

Centre-State relations: after 1990, regional parties and coalition governments created a culture of power sharing and respect for state autonomy.

A Supreme Court judgement made arbitrary dismissal of state governments difficult.

Decentralisation through panchayats and municipalities added a third tier.

Q3. Explain the provisions of the 1992 constitutional amendment for local government and assess its working.

Regular elections to local bodies are mandatory.

Reservation of seats for SCs, STs and OBCs, and at least one-third for women.

State Election Commissions conduct local elections.

States must share some powers and revenue with local bodies.

About 36 lakh elected representatives make it the largest experiment in democracy; it has deepened democracy and increased women's voice.

But gram sabhas are not held regularly and states have not transferred enough powers and resources.

MCQs with Answers

1. How many of the world's 193 countries have federal political systems?(a) 15 (b) 25 (c) 40 (d) 60Answer: (b) 25

2. Which of these is a coming together federation?(a) India (b) Spain (c) USA (d) BelgiumAnswer: (c) USA

3. Which subject is in the Union List?(a) Police (b) Agriculture (c) Defence (d) EducationAnswer: (c) Defence

4. Education is a subject in the(a) Union List (b) State List (c) Concurrent List (d) Residuary

5. If Union and State laws on a Concurrent subject conflict,(a) State law prevails (b) Union law prevails (c) Supreme Court makes a new law (d) Both are cancelledAnswer: (b) Union law prevails

6. Special powers for states like Nagaland and Mizoram are given under(a) Article 356 (b) Article 370 (c) Article 371 (d) Article 21Answer: (c) Article 371

7. How many languages are in the Eighth Schedule?(a) 14 (b) 18 (c) 22 (d) 121Answer: (c) 22

8. After the 1992 amendment, the share of positions reserved for women in local bodies is at least(a) One-fourth (b) One-third (c) One-half (d) Two-thirdsAnswer: (b) One-third

9. The political head of a municipal corporation is the(a) Sarpanch (b) Mayor (c) Collector (d) Municipal chairpersonAnswer: (b) Mayor

10. Belgium shifted from a unitary to a federal government in(a) 1970 (b) 1980 (c) 1993 (d) 2001Answer: (c) 1993

Quick Revision Points

- Federalism: power divided between centre and constituent units.
- 25 of 193 countries are federal; 40% of world population.
- Belgium became federal in 1993; Sri Lanka unitary.
- Six features: tiers, jurisdiction, constitutional guarantee, joint consent for change, courts as umpire, financial autonomy.
- Dual objectives: unity and accommodation of diversity.
- Coming together (USA, Switzerland, Australia) vs holding together (India, Spain, Belgium).
- Three lists: Union, State, Concurrent; residuary with Union.
- Article 371: special powers for Assam, Nagaland, Arunachal, Mizoram.
- Union Territories: Chandigarh, Lakshadweep, Delhi.
- Amendment: two-thirds of both Houses + half the states.
- Linguistic states made India more united.
- Language policy: Hindi official, 22 Scheduled Languages, English continued.
- After 1990: regional parties, coalitions, SC judgement.
- Hindi ~44% mother tongue (2011).
- 1992 amendment: regular elections, reservations, one-third women, SEC, sharing powers.
- Gram sabha, gram panchayat, panchayat samiti, zilla parishad; municipality, municipal corporation (mayor).
- 36 lakh elected representatives; Porto Alegre experiment.

Chapter Summary

Federalism divides power between a central authority and constituent units, aiming to promote national unity while accommodating diversity. Federations may be coming together (USA) or holding together (India). India is a Union of States with a three-fold division of powers through the Union, State and Concurrent Lists, special provisions for some states, Union Territories, a rigid amendment procedure and an independent judiciary.

Indian federalism has succeeded because of democratic politics: linguistic states, a flexible language policy and improved Centre-State relations after the rise of regional parties and

Exam Tips and PYQ Pattern

- Learn the six features of federalism and the three lists with examples.
- Coming together vs holding together and federal vs unitary are common comparison questions.
- The 1992 amendment provisions are asked very often.
- Map work in exercises: locate Manipur, Sikkim, Chhattisgarh and Goa.
- Case-based questions may use the language table or Porto Alegre example.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is federalism?

A system of government in which power is divided between a central authority and its constituent units.

Is India a federal country?

Yes. Though the Constitution calls India a Union of States, it is based on federal principles with a division of powers.

What are the three lists?

The Union List, State List and Concurrent List, which divide legislative powers between the Union and the States.

Is Federalism in the 2026-27 syllabus?

Yes. It is Chapter 2 of Democratic Politics II for 2026-27.

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Conclusion

Federalism shows how India keeps a vast and diverse country united by sharing power among the Union, the States and local governments. Revise the features, the three lists, the comparison tables and the 1992 amendment to answer every question with confidence.

More Notes: Class 10 Political Science Chapter 1: Power-sharing notes | Class 10 Political Science Chapter 3: Gender, Religion and Caste notes | Class 10 Political Science Chapter 1: Power-sharing notes | Class 10 Political Science Chapter 3: Gender, Religion and Caste notes | All Class 10 Social Science notes

Author Bio: Written and reviewed by the Nextoper Editorial Team, a group of CBSE social science educators who build chapter notes directly from the NCERT textbook and past board paper patterns.

Freshness Note: These notes follow the NCERT Class 10 Political Science textbook, Democratic Politics – II (Reprint 2026-27), and the CBSE syllabus for the 2026-27 session. Last checked on