Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work) Chapter 7: Federalism - Notes, Important Questions and MCQs (2026-27)

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These Class 11 Political Science Chapter 7 notes cover “Federalism” from the NCERT textbook Indian Constitution at Work (2026-27): what federalism is, lessons from the West Indies and Nigeria, federalism in the Indian Constitution, the division of powers through three lists, why India has a strong Centre, conflicts in Indian federalism, and special provisions for some states – with tables, Q&A, 10 MCQs and a free PDF.

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Chapter Overview

Federalism is an arrangement in which there are two sets of governments – one for the whole country and others for regions – each with its own powers defined by a written constitution. It allows unity while respecting diversity.

The Indian Constitution does not use the word “federation” but describes India as a “Union of States”. It divides powers through the Union, State and Concurrent Lists, with residuary powers and many emergency powers given to the Centre. This strong-Centre design has produced tensions over autonomy, the Governor’s role and President’s Rule.

Important Topics and Concepts

What is Federalism?

- Two sets of governments: national and state (and later local).
- Powers divided by a written constitution; each level is autonomous in its sphere.
- An independent judiciary settles disputes between levels.
- Federalism succeeds when people trust each other and share a sense of unity.
- West Indies federation (1958) dissolved in 1962; Nigeria's federation saw conflict because regions and communities did not trust each other.

Federalism in the Indian Constitution

- India is a "Union of States" – states cannot secede.
- Division of powers through three lists in the Seventh Schedule.
- Union List: defence, foreign affairs, banking, currency, railways.
- State List: police, agriculture, public health, local government.
- Concurrent List: education, forests, marriage, trade unions – both can legislate, Union law prevails.
- Residuary powers belong to the Union.

Federalism with a Strong Centre

- Centre can alter state boundaries and create new states by law.
- Emergency provisions give the Centre wide powers.
- Financial dependence of states on Union grants and tax shares.
- Governor appointed by the Centre; Parliament can legislate on State List in some situations (e.g. Rajya Sabha resolution).
- Integrated judiciary and all-India services also centralise.

Conflicts in Indian Federalism

- Centre–state relations change with politics: one-party dominance, then rise of regional parties and coalitions.
- Demands for autonomy: more powers, financial resources, administrative and cultural autonomy (language).
- Role of Governors and use of Article 356 (President's Rule) have been controversial; the Sarkaria Commission (1983) recommended reforms.
- Demands for new states; inter-state disputes over boundaries and river waters.

Special Provisions

- Some states have special provisions due to history or culture – e.g. north-eastern states (Nagaland, Mizoram), hill states, and provisions for tribal areas.
- Jammu and Kashmir had special status under Article 370, which required the state's concurrence for many Union laws.
- This special status no longer exists: the J&K Reorganisation Act 2019 bifurcated the state into two Union Territories.
- Asymmetric arrangements show federalism can accommodate diversity.

Division of Powers

Most-asked table.

List	Who legislates	Examples
Union List	Parliament	Defence, foreign affairs, banking, railways, currency
State List	State legislatures	Police, agriculture, public health, local government
Concurrent List	Both (Union prevails)	Education, forests, marriage, trade unions
Residuary	Parliament	Subjects not in any list

Features Making the Indian Centre Strong

Feature	Effect
Power to alter state boundaries	Centre can reorganise states
Emergency provisions	Centre can take over state powers
Financial control	States depend on Union grants
Governor appointed by Centre	Can recommend President’s Rule
Residuary powers with Union	Centre legislates on new subjects
Integrated judiciary and all-India services	Uniform administration

Important Definitions and Terms

Term	Meaning
Federalism	Division of power between national and regional governments
Union of States	India’s description in the Constitution
Union List	Subjects for Parliament
State List	Subjects for state legislatures
Concurrent List	Subjects for both
Residuary powers	Powers on subjects not listed
Article 356	President’s Rule in a state
Autonomy	Self-governance within the federation
Secession	Breaking away from the country
Sarkaria Commission	1983 commission on Centre–state relations

Short Answer Questions

Q1. What is federalism?

A system with two levels of government whose powers are divided by a written constitution.

Q2. Why did the West Indies federation fail?

Lack of trust and agreement among the units; it was dissolved in 1962.

Union List, State List and Concurrent List.

Q4. Who has residuary powers in India?

The Union government.

Q5. What happens if Union and state laws conflict on a Concurrent subject?

The Union law prevails.

Q6. What is Article 356?

It allows President's Rule in a state when its government cannot function constitutionally.

Q7. Give two areas of demand for state autonomy.

Financial resources and cultural/linguistic autonomy.

Q8. What happened to Article 370 status of J&K?

It no longer exists; the 2019 Reorganisation Act made J&K and Ladakh Union Territories.

Long Answer Questions

Q1. Explain the features of Indian federalism.

Two levels of government with divided powers.

Three lists in the Seventh Schedule.

Written constitution and independent judiciary.

Union of States – no right to secede.

Strong Centre with residuary and emergency powers.

Q2. Why does India have a strong Centre?

Need for unity after Partition and to integrate princely states.

Socio-economic development required central planning.

Diversity required a strong binding authority.

Security threats and need for stability.

Hence boundary, emergency and financial powers with the Centre.

Q3. Describe the major conflicts in Indian federalism.

Demands for greater autonomy – financial, administrative, cultural.

Controversial role of Governors.

Misuse of Article 356 for political reasons.

Demands for new states.

Inter-state disputes over boundaries and river waters.

MCQs with Answers

1. India is described as a(a) federation (b) Union of States (c) confederation (d) unitary stateAnswer: (b) Union of States

3. Education is in the(a) Union List (b) State List (c) Concurrent List (d) noneAnswer: (c) Concurrent List

4. Residuary powers are with the(a) states (b) Union (c) President (d) Supreme CourtAnswer: (b) Union

5. President’s Rule is under Article(a) 352 (b) 356 (c) 360 (d) 370Answer: (b) 356

6. Sarkaria Commission was set up in(a) 1969 (b) 1983 (c) 1990 (d) 2004Answer: (b) 1983

7. West Indies federation was dissolved in(a) 1958 (b) 1962 (c) 1971 (d) 1983Answer: (b) 1962

8. Governor is appointed by the(a) Chief Minister (b) President (c) Speaker (d) peopleAnswer: (b) President

9. J&K was reorganised into Union Territories in(a) 2014 (b) 2019 (c) 2021 (d) 2009Answer: (b) 2019

10. Conflict on a Concurrent subject is resolved in favour of(a) state law (b) Union law (c) both (d) neitherAnswer: (b) Union law

Quick Revision Points

- Federalism: two levels, written constitution, judiciary.
- West Indies and Nigeria lessons.
- Three lists + residuary with Union.
- Strong Centre features.
- Conflicts: autonomy, Governor, Art. 356, new states, interstate disputes.
- Special provisions; Art. 370 status ended 2019.

Chapter Summary

Federalism divides power between national and regional governments under a written constitution. Its success depends on trust and shared identity, as the West Indies and Nigeria examples show.

India is a Union of States with powers divided through Union, State and Concurrent Lists and a strong Centre holding residuary, emergency and financial powers. This has led to tensions over autonomy, Governors, Article 356, new states and inter-state disputes, while special provisions for some states show flexibility.

Exam Tips and PYQ Pattern

- Learn the three lists with two examples each.
- Strong-Centre features are a common 5-mark answer.
- Mention Sarkaria Commission when discussing Article 356.
- Use West Indies and Nigeria as examples.
- State the current position of J&K accurately.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this chapter in the 2026-27 CBSE syllabus?

Yes. It is part of the NCERT Class 11 Political Science textbook “Indian Constitution at Work”, prescribed in the CBSE 2026-27 syllabus.

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Yes. Use the free PDF link at the top of this page – no signup needed.

What are the three lists in the Indian Constitution?

The Union List, State List and Concurrent List in the Seventh Schedule.

Why is the Indian Centre called strong?

It holds residuary powers, emergency powers, financial control and power to alter state boundaries.

Conclusion

Federalism explains how India balances unity and diversity. Learn the lists and strong-Centre tables, practise the Q&A here and save the free PDF for revision.

More Notes: Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work) Chapter 6: Judiciary notes | Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work) Chapter 8: Local Governments notes | All Class 11 Political Science notes

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

Freshness Note: These notes follow the NCERT Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work) textbook, Indian Constitution at Work (NCERT reprint 2026-27, rationalised syllabus), and the CBSE syllabus for the 2026-27 session. Last checked on 25 November 2026.