



Institut für Föderalismus
Institut du Fédéralisme
Institute of Federalism

IFF Working Paper Online No 54

More power to the States (sub-national governments): Who will do that in India?

DATTA POLLY

February 2026

Citation: Datta, P., More power to the States (sub-national governments): Who will do that in India?, IFF Working Paper Online No 54, Fribourg, February 2026.

<https://doi.org/10.51363/unifr.diff.2026.54>

University of Fribourg
Institute of Federalism
Av. Beauregard 1
CH-1700 Fribourg

Phone +41 (0) 26 300 81 25

www.federalism.ch



UNIVERSITÉ DE FRIBOURG FACULTÉ DE DROIT
UNIVERSITÄT FREIBURG RECHTSWISSENSCHAFTLICHE FAKULTÄT

The IFF Working Paper Online series and other publications of the Institute of Federalism, Fribourg are available on the IFF website www.unifr.ch/federalism/en/research/.

© IFF, 2026

Institute of Federalism, University of Fribourg

Avenue Beauregard 1

1700 Fribourg

Switzerland

federalism@unifr.ch



This work is published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0): <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>.

Author: Polly Datta

The papers are published in the name of the author(s). Her/his view does not necessarily reflect the view of the Institute of Federalism.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51363/unifr.diff.2026.54>

ISSN: 2813-5261 (Online)

Table of Contents

A) Introduction	4
B) Evolution of federal aspirations: Political parties in India.....	6
1. Evolution of federal aspirations: The Indian National Congress (INC)	9
2. Evolution of federal aspirations: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	12
C) Stands on federalism: Pro-federal regional parties	15
1. Diehard federalists.....	15
2. Pro-federal forces	19
3. Demands formulated by the pro-federal political parties on federal aspirations.	19
D) Extent of influence of regional federalists on the Central Policy & promises made by them	20
1. Influence of regional parties on the Central polity: Centralized era	21
2. Influence of regional parties on the Central polity: Coalition era	22
3. Saga of making promises and extent of keeping those.....	24
3.1 Promise made by the Janata coalition government (1977-79)	24
3.2 Promises kept by the Janata coalition government (1977-79)	24
3.3 Promises made by the successive coalition governments (1989-2014)	25
3.4 Promises kept by the successive coalition governments (1989-2014)	26
E) Concluding observations	30
References	33
Tables and Boxes	42

Abstract

In recent years, grave concerns have been expressed from many quarters at deepening unitary features of Indian federation and consequent deterioration of Indian federal ethos since 2014 when a national party-the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) got the absolute majority in two successive parliamentary elections held in 2014 & 2019 without having to depend on regional forces in forming Central governments while ending the two and a half decades long coalition era (1989-2014). During the period of coalition, pro-federal regional political parties started being part of the various Central governments. And hence they not only had some policy making space but also enjoyed greater bargaining power thereby managed to exert various types of both quantitative and qualitative influences on the Central polity. Therefore, the question remains as to why such continuous assault on Indian federal spirit could not be checked. The study opines that regional federalists so far have come up with immediate interest-driven, short-lived hence occasional outbursts on the question of the States' (sub-national governments') autonomy either collectively or individually. These trends might have led to reinforcing unitary bias of Indian federation instead of setting an example of better 'federal political culture.'

Keywords

Indian federation; pro-federal; regional political party; more autonomy; regional federalists; diehard federalists

A) Introduction

This study aims at analyzing the extent to which regional federalists¹ i.e., regional political parties—mostly based in certain regions in India—who are strong advocates of the States' (sub-national governments) autonomy, have shown their reluctance in bringing institutional strengthening of Centre (national)-State (sub-national) relations. Regional federalists started enjoying political space in Indian national polity with the inception of the 'coalition era' (1989-2014) i.e., the period when national parties failed to secure majority seats at the successive parliamentary elections (General Elections (GE) and consequently allied with the regional forces. Moreover, with the beginning of the economic liberalization (1991) and consequent collapse of the centralized Plan era, these regional forces also began to experience economic policy making freedom in dealing with national as well as foreign investors for the development of their respective regions. Contrary to usual expectation, the newfound political and economic space enjoyed by these regional federalists, did not translate into more power to the States in Indian federal polity (Karat, 2004:4).

In recent years, grave concerns have been expressed from many quarters at deepening unitary features of Indian federation. It is felt that the pre-existing trends of qualitative and quantitative deterioration of the federal structure of India have worsened even further with the emergence of re-nationalization since 2014 (Schakel et al, 2019: 330). The era of re-nationalization emerged when a national party—the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) got the absolute majority in two successive parliamentary elections held in 2014 & 2019 without having to depend on regional forces in forming Central governments (ibid.).

However, despite this major victory of the BJP, regional parties as a whole did not experience any significant loss since 2014 both in terms of vote share and seats in Indian Parliament. As estimated, in 1991, regional parties secured a 44 % vote share and 179 seats and in 2019, regional parties got the same vote share, with 187 seats in Indian Parliament. Hence “the aggregate numbers suggest they are back to where they started” (The Asia Dialogue, July 17, 2019; also see Vaishnav & Hinton, 2019:22; Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2009: Para 9).

Many opine that India is a 'quasi-federal' country meaning, it is a federal country with strong centripetal bias as spelt in its Constitution. At the time of framing the Indian Constitution, it was expected that this unitary bias would be used only in case of emergency and sparingly. But in reality, unitary trends of Indian federation reared their heads quite often even during the coalition era i.e., during the heyday of regional federalists.

As per the common perception, the extent to which the centripetal bias will be kept under check depends very much on two things e.g., (i) assertion and strength of pro-federal regional forces that are expected to exert pressure on Central dispensations for upholding federal spirit and; (ii) the degree of institutional strengthening of federal structure in general and fiscal relations in

¹The terminology 'federalists' has often been used in the literature of Indian federal system while referring to the political parties (i.e., both the regional and national) that uphold the federal spirits of the country and are the strongest advocates and votaries of greater autonomy and more power for the States (sub-national governments) (see The Indian Express (April 21, 2012), “Reluctant federalists”, -- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/reluctant-federalists/>, accessed February 16, 2026

particular. This is expected to lead to de-politicization of federal grants, streamlining the mechanisms of inter-governmental resource transfers and to minimize discretionary elements of legislative, executive and financial aspects of Centre-State relations.

Now the question remains as to why institutional strengthening of federal India did not take place during the coalition era as expected and why federal spirit of India has further worsened since the re-nationalization (2014)? Such a worrisome situation emerged despite the fact that the beginning of the era of re-nationalization has not been able to make a significant dent in the pre-existing strength enjoyed by the regional pro-federal forces and diehard federalists. Hence their capacity to exert influence on national polity to pursue the path of true federal India did not seem to receive any major blow. Only qualitative change that happened during the era of re-nationalization is that the regional political forces are no longer in a position to 'make or break' the Central government because the BJP alone managed to secure the required majority since 2014.

This paper intends to focus on stands of the national parties² as well as pro-federal regional forces on federalism and how such position has evolved over time with the change in power dynamics of Indian polity. Views of national parties i.e., the Indian National Congress (INC) and the BJP have been dealt with because although national parties are usually having pro-unitary stands yet while being part of the various coalition governments and/or when their nation-wide political dominance came under threat from time to time, they seemed to have taken more pro-federal positions than otherwise.

In addition, it needs to be found out the extent of influence the regional federalists had on national polity hence bargaining power they enjoyed with the dominant coalition partner (s) at the Centre both collectively and individually during the coalition era (1989-2014). Despite such political domination, it remains to be seen the degree to which regional federalists have failed to establish adequate checks and balances in keeping unitary and discretionary trends of Indian federal structure under control.

The paper would be organized in the following manner: **Part B** of this study intends to describe how stands of various political parties-including national ones viz. the INC and the BJP-on federalism have evolved over time with the change of power dynamics of Indian polity.

Part C of this study describes the aspirations of pro-federal forces regarding the desired framework of Indian federalism as expressed in various forums i.e., both formal and informal.

Part D of this study aims at finding out the extent of influence the regional federalists had on national polity both collectively and individually during the coalition era (1989-2014). In addition, this section wants to see what kind of electoral promises were made by these regional federalists in strengthening Indian federal structure while being part of various coalition governments at the Centre and the extent to which such promises were kept.

Part E offers concluding observations of the study.

²In the literature of political economy of Centre-State relations, Indian national parties are usually referred to as only two political parties viz. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC). This is different from the definition of national parties offered by the Election Commission of India.

B) Evolution of federal aspirations: Political parties in India

Regional parties emerged as a force to be reckoned with after the 4th General Election (GE) (parliamentary election) (1967) of India when the INC lost its political control in half of the States thereby ending one-party rule in India. Since then, Centre-State relations gained greater prominence as an issue in the political system and the slogan- ‘more powers to the States’ became one of the important agendas of various political parties.

On the basis of the stated positions on this issue, Maheswari (1971) attempted to classify political parties into three groups. First, there are a few political parties e.g., the INC who believe in status-quo and do not advocate any change in the existing structure and pattern of Centre-State relations. Political parties belonging to the second group take the polar opposite position as they strongly stand up for radical restructuring of the existing federal framework through drastic amendment of the Constitution. Prominent members of this group are; Communist Party of India (CPI); Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)); *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (DMK); *All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (AIADMK) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). Finally, the third group of political parties accepts the present constitutional structure for they feel that the degree of autonomy for the States is possible within the constitutional framework while changing the machinery and the style of functioning of the existing federal structure (ibid: 1192-1194). As more and more regional parties sprouted, developed and captured power in various States since 1980s, the third group grew in number due to the addition of new converts.

However, during the coalition era (1989-2014), above mentioned categorization seems to have got blurred. In the pre-coalition literature, a national party-the INC was perceived as an unequivocal unitarist. With the emergence of multi-party rule, although pre-dominant position of these national parties continued to be pro-unitary, yet when their survival in various coalition governments is dependent on regional parties, they tend to become more accommodative towards the federal aspirations of constituent groups (The Hindu, February 14, 2022). Further, when their nation-wide political dominance comes under threat from time to time (e.g., when they are out of power for a longer period), they seemed to have taken more pro-federal stance than otherwise³ to be discussed in detail in the subsequent section. In striking contrast, when their positions are well embedded in national as well as various State polity, not only granting more autonomy to the States find no place in their successive Election Manifestos (EMs) but also they boastfully claim that desired level of federalism has already been achieved on account of initiatives taken by them. For instance, having consolidated its position in Indian polity at the Central as well as the State levels, the BJP in its EM of the 17th GE (2019) boastfully declared that “we have set an example of inclusive federal governance...” (ibid). Similarly, the INC after

³The INC lost its political control in several States of the country in 1967. Confronted with this situation, the then Prime Minister (PM), Ms. Gandhi emphasized on the importance of working of a “more vigorous practicing federalism (in governance) with multiple parties and coalitions in power” (Punchhi Commission (2010), Vol. I: xviii). Moreover, in order to address growing demand for the States’ autonomy, Ms. Gandhi-led INC Central government appointed the First Administrative Reforms Commission (FARC) which submitted- Report on Centre-State Relationships in June 1969. However, unitary tone of the INC was reinforced, when the INC won the 5th General Election (GE) (1971) with huge majority as well as the Legislative Assembly Elections (LAEs) in majority of the States in 1972 (ibid).

having enjoyed two successive terms in the Indian Parliament (2004-09 & 2009-14), had stated in its EM of the 16th GE (2014) that “The Indian National Congress has made seminal contributions to India’s unity, integrity, secular polity and democratic federalism” (ibid).

It is worth noting that although the two national parties e.g., the INC—a traditional unitarist and the BJP seems to have been trading the same path while exhibiting their pro-unitary bias (although for the BJP, it became much prominent since 2014), yet their journeys are significantly different since the inception. When the INC maintained its pro-unitary stand consistently except for being part of various coalition governments, the BJP’s position has all along been a bit ambivalent.

This is due to the fact that the BJP erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangha (BJS) mainly remained confined to State-level party till the late 1980 and was yet to get consolidated in national politics. Such political reality and electoral compulsion might have had triggered the BJP to become an ardent advocate of the States’ autonomy since its establishment in 1980. However, as they consolidated their position in national polity more prominently since the late 1990s, their strong advocacy for the States’ autonomy got faded gradually and the party started mirroring the traditional unitarist-INC on many counts. For example, when the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) II (1999-04) coalition government was in power, a debate entitled “Increasing erosion of federal principles in Centre-State relations due to the Union Government usurping the powers of the State Governments”, took place at *Rajya Sabha* (Upper House of the Indian Parliament). The motion was opposed both by the BJP and the INC (Rajya Sabha Debate (a), August 3, 2001). Likewise, in recently held *Rajya Sabha* debate, the INC and the BJP unanimously resisted the motion entitled “Amending Constitution for bringing back subjects transferred from State List to Concurrent List” (Rajya Sabha Debate, November 29, 2019).

This trend got culminated in 2014 and more conspicuously since 2019 when the BJP won the two successive GEs e.g., 16th GE (2014) and 17th GE (2019) with absolute majority under the leadership of Mr. Modi—the Prime Minister (PM) of India without having to crutch on regional parties for its survival (popularly termed as Modi-era). This phenomenon has ended the two and a half decades long ‘coalition era’ (1989-2014) while giving rise to “re-nationalisation of Indian politics” (Schakel et al, 2019: 330).

So far as pro-federal and diehard federalists are concerned, regardless of the above-mentioned categorization, political reality of the coalition era and the period that followed, gave rise to different types of reconfigurations. Slogan for ‘more power to the States’ started to get influenced by electoral calculations and coalition politics. Consequently, immediate political as well as economic interests of these regional political forces seem to have surpassed the very demand for more executive, legislative and financial autonomy to be granted to the States. This eventually gave rise to four types of situations.

First, pro-federal parties that are ruling in various States and are politically aligned with the various Central governments, tend to give the impression that they have little conflict with the Centre. Their grievances are mostly submissive while they receive favourable treatments and more discretionary resources approved by the Centre that the opposition-ruled States lose out on

(Financial Express, October 19, 2021). (viz. Janata Dal (United) JD (U) based in Bihar till 9th August 2022 and partly Biju Janata Dal (BJD) based in Orissa⁴ during the Modi era).

Second, discontent regarding usurping the power of the States largely comes from the opposition-ruled States (ibid). Therefore, States that are ruled by the regional parties who are not politically aligned with the Centre. In addition, the opposition-ruled States consistently made allegations against the Centre for being partial to the politically aligned States⁵. For example, of late, regional forces that are presently in power in various States and are not politically-aligned with the Modi government, have become significantly more vocal and have been the flag bearers of upholding the demand for more autonomy to the States (viz. Trinamool Congress (TMC); Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM); Shiv Sena; Telengana Rashtriya Samiti (TRS) &YSR Congress Party). However, their discontents, as observed in a large body of literature, are mostly situation-driven occasional outbursts hence are short-lived.

It is worth noting that during the entire coalition era and the period that followed, political alignment of these pro-federal forces changed frequently as with the alteration of power dynamics at the Centre, pro-federal regional parties often changed their coalition partners. Consequently, States that were considered privileged and politically favoured turned into non-privileged ones and hence they immediately got bogged into accusing the Centre of being anti-federal and discriminatory. While newly privileged ones became busy with extracting federal resources and political benefits as much as they could bargain for (**Box 1**).

Third, a few pro-federal regional parties that are neither holding any power in any State nor are they politically aligned to the ruling Centre, tend to lose their enthusiasm in their advocacy for strengthening the States' autonomy compared to their past activism on this matter. Of late, significantly vocal pro-federal forces like Telugu Desam Party (TDP) based in the State of Andhra Pradesh and Samajwadi Party (SP) based in the State of Uttar Pradesh that neither have political proximity to the Modi government nor being in the State power, seem to have been less motivated and proactive on this issue.

Finally, politically aligned pro-federal regional parties that are not in the State power also remain less proactive on this issue partly due to the fact that they do not want to displease the Central boss and partly on account of not having any stake in pursuing this objective. Therefore, for being out of power, neither they are under any electoral compulsion to please their voters by

⁴For details see -The Wire (August 16, 2019), "More ally than enemy: BJP and BJD's strange connection in Odisha"- <https://thewire.in/government/more-ally-than-enemy-bjp-and-bjds-strange-connection-in-odisha> , accessed February 16, 2026

⁵From time to time, this observation has been made in a scattered manner in a large body of literature. For instance, see Dalip Singh (2000), "Restructuring our federal polity need for fresh perspective on autonomy"—

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000806/edit.htm#1>, accessed February 16, 2026

Financial Express (October 19, 2021), "Balance of federalism: What separates the politics from constitutionality in matters of Centre vs state?"--<https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/balance-of-federalism-what-separates-the-politics-from-constitutionality-in-matters-of-centre-vs-state/2352180/>, accessed February 16, 2026

extracting more discretionary funds from the Centre nor are they triggered by any anti-federal agenda pursued by the Centre that could have affected them practically had they been in State power. Hence, they lack necessary impetus to vent out their grievances against the Centre. For example, diehard federalists viz. the AIADMK (based in the State of Tamil Nadu) and the SAD (based in the State of Punjab till the time they left the alliance with the BJP i.e., September 2020) could fall into this category.

1. Evolution of federal aspirations: The Indian National Congress (INC)

As mentioned above, the INC is a reluctant federalist and statusquoist and the party has been sticking to this stand consistently since Independence. In their successive Election Manifestos (EMs) i.e., from the 1st GE (1952)⁶ till the 16th GE (2014), the INC did not utter a single word on the States' autonomy except for the 17th GE (2019). Fast erosion of the INC's political base was witnessed after the 16th GE (2014) when the party managed to win only 44 Member of Parliament (MP) seats out of total 543 MP seats in the Indian Parliament. This corresponded with the strong emergence of the BJP- its political rival- as almost a single national party both at the Central as well as at the State-level polity. That resulted in gross centralization of power and consequent eruption of discords between the States and the BJP-led Centre.

Confronted with this existential threat, the INC in its EM of the 17th GE (2019), for the first time ever since Independence and in a significant departure from the past, promised to restore autonomy of the States. As its EM of the 17th GE (2019) emphasized that the States will be given executive and legislative rights on 'Subjects' that tend to fall in their natural domain. The EM of INC says, some legislative fields from List III (Concurrent List) to List II (State List) will be transferred while giving primacy to the State governments in subjects such as school education, primary and secondary health care, child nutrition, drinking water, sanitation and distribution of electricity (Election Manifestos (EM), INC, 17th GE: 2019). As per the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, Subjects that fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Centre, the States and that are dealt by both the Centre and the States are denoted as the Centre List, the State List and the Concurrent List respectively.

This promise is meant to address the States' longstanding contention that the Centre has so far made inroads into the State List and eventually transformed the Concurrent List into *de facto* Centre List. However, soon after the 17th GE (2019) was over, as the electoral compulsion was no longer relevant, the INC seemed to have reverted to its past position of being unitarist. In the *Rajya Sabha* (Upper House) debate (2019) on the motion entitled "Amending Constitution for bringing back subjects transferred from State List to Concurrent List", the INC leader, Mr. Jairam Ramesh, opposed this motion and said: "Tinkering with the Seventh Schedule will open up a Pandora's box". In addition, he stressed that giving the residuary powers i.e., the subjects that are not mentioned in either of these Lists, "from the Centre to the States... will be a very retrogressive move" (*Rajya Sabha Debate*, November 29, 2019).

⁶ Election Manifestoes (EMs) of the INC from the 1st GE (1952) to the 10th GE (1991), see http://ir.unishivaji.ac.in:8080/jspui/bitstream/123456789/3478/7/07_Chapter%202.pdf, accessed March 2024. Available upon request.

It is worth mentioning that even when the INC was part of various coalition governments that survived on the support of several pro-federal forces (i.e., United Front (UF) (1996-98) and two successive United Progressive Alliance (UPA) I (2004-09) and UPA II (2009-14) governments), the issue of empowering the States did not find any place in the INC's EMs of respective GEs. However, Common Minimum Programmes (CMPs)-that was adopted on the basis of consensus reached among all the pro-federal regional forces that partnered with the INC in these three coalition governments, did mention about altering the present federal structure of India with a view to grant more power to the States.

Moreover, the INC's position as expressed before the Sarkaria (1988) and the Punchhi (2010) Commissions bears the testimony to the fact that they have no qualms of being unapologetically unitary. The INC stressed on many occasions that Indian federation needs 'strong Centre' for balanced economic development and national integrity and unity. Thus the INC reiterated its position before these two Commissions by declaring that present federal structure of India is robust hence does not need any change, however, the party felt the necessity of activating inter-governmental consultative forums (viz. Inter-State Council (ISC) & National Development Council (NDC) for upholding the ethos of cooperative federalism (For details see Part II of the Sarkaria Commission (1988) & Supplementary Vol. III, Punchhi Commission (2010).

The necessity of having 'strong Centre' in Indian federation also appealed to almost all the diehard federalists along with moderate pro-federal forces. However, as urged by them, such 'strong Centre' is desirable only when it is combined with the 'strong States' for they feel that 'strong Centre' do not have any contradiction with the 'strong States' (Bhattacharyya, 2001: 52-54; Khan, 2003: 184; Firstpost, December 10, 2016). This view was also endorsed by the NCWRC (2002)⁷

The INC, that hitherto justified the notion of the 'strong Centre' for preserving national unity and integrity and attaining regional balance, seemed to have got overpowered by this argument (viz. 'strong Centre' is desirable only when it is combined with the 'strong States') made by these pro-federal regional forces and took three-pronged strategies since the mid-1980s, which is coterminous with the emergence of coalition politics.

One, the INC became quite proactive in revitalizing Local Governments (LGs) (i.e., both *Panchayat* (Rural Local Government) & Urban Local Government) in general and *Panchayat* in particular that were in moribund state since Independence. Two, during the course of championing the cause of reactivation and empowerment of LGs, the States were allegedly bypassed as a middle tier of government in Indian federation although LGs falls under the States' jurisdiction (Chandrashekar, 1989:1434; Mitra, 2005: 2226; Hirway, 1989). Finally, in their political rhetoric, the INC started accusing the States of not devolving enough power to LGs instead the States are, as alleged by the INC, only busy with seeking for more autonomy from the Centre (Rajya Sabha Debate (a): August 3, 2001 & Rajya Sabha Debate: November 29, 2019).

⁷As uttered by the NCRWC (2002), "The Commission feels that there is no dichotomy between a strong Union and strong States. Both are needed. The relationship between the Union and the States is a relationship between the whole body and its parts. For the body being healthy it is necessary that its parts are strong" (NCRWC, 2002, Vol. I: Para 8.1.5).

Such activism of the INC in upholding the issue of decentralization was doubted by many. Because revitalization of LGs did not find any place in their political, administrative and legal discourses since Independence. Successive EMs of the INC remained completely silent on this issue till the late 1980s⁸. The origin of such neglect can be traced back to the time of Constituent Assembly (1947-49) that was constituted for drafting the Indian Constitution and was mainly dominated by the INC. As observed, LGs did not receive adequate attention by the INC in the Constituent Assembly debate. It was because of fierce persuasion and consistent insistence of the pro-*Panchayat* Gandhian lobby, the subject *Panchayat* was included as an afterthought without granting LGs any constitutional status while leaving them at the States' discretion (Hirway, 1989: 1663).

Since the late 1980s, the INC started emphasizing on the virtues of 'decentralization' while upholding the issue of revitalization of LGs in a consistent manner. However, as alleged, at the same time the party kept on launching bitter attacks on the opposition-ruled State governments while jeopardizing Centre-State relations (Khan, 2003: 181). The INC's attempt of providing constitutional status to *Panchayat* (64th Amendment Bill, 1989) was perceived as a new onslaught on the constitutional role and functions of the States. It was feared that the Centre will keep a direct hold over *Panchayat* bodies by funding them from Delhi without virtually any reference to the State governments (Chandrashekar, 1989:1434; Mitra, 2005: 2226).

Successive EMs of the INC since 1998 till 2019 did mention that the party intends to transfer Central funds directly to LGs for undertaking various rural development and anti-poverty programmes which is called Centrally Sponsored Schemes⁹ (CSSs). In many instances, this apprehension came true when funds earmarked for the CSSs were transferred by the INC-led Central governments directly to LGs or parastatal bodies while bypassing the State budgets¹⁰. Therefore, such sudden activism of reactivating LGs was labelled as 'centralized attempt of decentralization' that is mainly geared to weaken the States' autonomy (Hirway, 1989).

The INC-led Central government (1991-96) finally managed to provide constitutional status to LGs through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA), 1993. Since that period, the INC in their successive EMs, boasted about promoting decentralization by granting constitutional status to LGs as a third-tier government in Indian federation while remaining completely silent on empowering the States. However, in an attempt to provide an inclusive tone, successive EMs of the INC since 1998, emphasized that the party believes in 'strong Centre', 'strong

⁸The subject 'Panchayat' was briefly mentioned in the EMs of the 3rd GE (1962) and the 4th GE (1967) of the INC. Inclusion of the subject 'Panchayat' can be attributed to the recommendations made by the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957) constituted by the INC-led Central government to review the state of Panchayats in the country. The Committee urged that revival of Panchayats is necessary because Panchayats had seemed to be in a better position to execute various Central rural welfare schemes viz. Community Development Programme and National Extension Service more efficiently than that of local bureaucrats.

⁹The Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSSs) are designed unilaterally by the Centre but implemented by the States. The CSSs are largely funded by the Centre with defined States' share.

¹⁰See minutes of the meetings of the Inter-State Council (ISC) & Minutes of the meetings of the National Development Council (NDC) where the States have expressed this concern.

States' and 'strong LGs'. In their political rhetoric, they, however, continued to accuse the States of not devolving adequate power to LGs for enabling them to function effectively. Instead of doing that, as criticized by the INC, the States rather prefer to blame the Centre for not giving them adequate autonomy (Rajya Sabha Debate (a): August 3, 2001 & Rajya Sabha Debate: November 29, 2019).

2. Evolution of federal aspirations: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

It should be noted that the stand of the BJP on this issue was not as consistent as the INC. The BJP, the erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangha (BJS) (founded in 1951), was perhaps the only party to advocate for a unitary Indian state (Sharma, 1969: 40-41; Maheswari, 1971:1192) while expressing their concern over 'Dangers of Federation'¹¹. The BJS went to the extent of saying that it would amend the Constitution and declare India as a unitary nation. Such unitary structure appears to be required to build homogeneous and monolithic (i.e., 'one country one nation and one culture') theocratic Indian state based on *Hinduva* (Sharma, 1969; Lahiry, 2005:835).

However, the irony is, in their perception of unitary nation, the BJS did not want the States to exist at all (Deccan Chronicle, March 15, 2021), yet at the same time they strongly stood for empowering LGs. Hence their advocacy for unitary form of government came with decentralization of powers to LGs (Adeney, 2005:100). Till the 4th GE (1967), Election Manifestos (EMs) of the BJS proposed for unitary system while eliminating the State governments as a stratum between the district and the Central government (Sharma, 1969: 41). This might sound counter-intuitive and paradoxical but as the BJS believed, "In fact decentralisation is possible only when there is a single fountain-head of authority."¹² However, if the States got abolished, the party failed to explain "...what mechanism of administration would come between the Union government and the village" (Deccan Chronicle, March 15, 2021).

Further, the concept of federal structure was strongly opposed by the BJS on the ground that this had so far led to rising tide of sub-national tendencies. Federal aspirations, as the BJS believed, has the potential to divide the country into antagonistic States hence are an obstacle to national solidarity and therefore, achieving a unitary Indian state (Lahiry, 2005:839, also see¹³). They were even against the use of the nomenclature 'State' to refer to a unit of the Indian federation and often demanded that these units be called 'Provinces'. During the time of British India which had predominantly unitary system, Provinces (present States) lacked any substantial power. As per the BJS's notion, the word 'State' implied some degree of sovereignty and, therefore, has the potential to lead to disintegration (Frontline, August 18-31, 2001). Following the same rationale, any regional assertion i.e., demand for regional autonomy along with formation of linguistic States were vehemently opposed by the BJS (The Wire, September 30, 2019).

However, the BJS had utilized the State system for electoral and parliamentary purposes despite its deliberation to abolish it. The more the party achieved success in electoral politics particular-

¹¹ <https://www.bjp.org/dr-syama-prasad-mookerjee>, accessed February 16, 2026

¹² <http://www.deendayalupadhyay.org/replied.html>, accessed March 2024. Available upon request.

¹³ <https://deendayalupadhyaya.org/thoughts/the-state/>, accessed February 16, 2026

ly at the State level, the more it became accommodative in the question of upholding the rights of the States. The BJS emerged as a strong force by winning 35 Member of Parliament (MP) seats with 9.31% votes in the 4th GE (1967). The BJS's performances in Legislative Assembly Elections (LAE), that are held at the State level, were even more spectacular as it became number two all India party and won 268 Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) seats in several LAEs held in 1967¹⁴. The BJS also became major partner of various coalition governments formed in several States e.g., Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar while giving up its political catholicity in regard to selection of its allies (Chakrabarty, 2008:128-131). The BJS even allied with the diehard federalists like Communist & Socialist parties along the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) that were ideologically diametrically opposed to the party. This political alliance with the Communist & Socialist parties along the SAD surprised many since the BJS, in the past, had demanded for banning of the Communist Party of India (CPI) (Pillai, 1966:79) and on many occasions, the BJS labelled the SAD as 'communal'. Yet pragmatic electoral compulsion made them political partners (Sharma, 1969: 53).

All these political developments might have persuaded the BJS to accept the desirability of a federal set up in India. As for the first time in 1971, the BJS not only dropped its traditional advocacy of a unitary state for India but also the party put emphasis on various aspects of the States' autonomy though it was in a nascent stage. In the EM of the 5th GE (1971)¹⁵, the BJS demanded for establishment of an inter-governmental consultative forum i.e., Inter-State Council (ISC) with a view to facilitate the process of making the voice of the States heard. It needs to be noted, the ISC had not been constituted so far though the provision of which was given in the Indian Constitution (Article 263). In addition, the demand for statehood for Delhi was made by the BJS. The BJS pursued this agenda probably because the party secured an absolute majority in the then Delhi Metropolitan Council (Sharma, 1969: 79).

The BJS was one of the important constituents of the Janata Party that led the first non-INC coalition government (1977-79) at the Centre. At the State level, when the Janata Party took power in seven States (e.g. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, the BJS dominated many of these State governments and occupied the Chief Minister's (CM) post in Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan (Sridharan, 2018: 86). In Punjab, the party formed a coalition government with the SAD (1977-1980) (Khan, 2003: 179). Following the collapse of the Janata coalition government, the BJS left the Janata Party, and on April 6, 1980, formed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The BJP's rise in State politics seems to be quite dramatic as within just one decade of its establishment, the party formed State governments on its own for the first time ever in the States like Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh and entered into coalition governments with the Janata Dal in Rajasthan and in Gujarat in 1990 (Sridharan, 2018:86).

Electoral compulsion at the State level might have forced the BJP to take a U-turn on the issue of autonomy of the States. The BJS that wanted the States to wither away, its offspring—the BJP, in a complete departure from its earlier position, became one of the ardent advocates of the States' empowerment. Views expressed by the BJP on the States' autonomy, in the following platforms viz. Srinagar Conclave (1983) of opposition Chief Ministers; the BJP's Election

¹⁴ <https://www.bjp.org/historyanddevelopment>, accessed February 16, 2026

¹⁵ <https://library.bjp.org/jspui/handle/123456789/2614>, accessed February 16, 2026

Manifestos (EMs) of successive General Elections (GEs) since 1984 along with the party's stand, as put forward before both the Sarkaria Commission (1988) & Punchhi Commission (2010), bear the testimony to that. The pro-State stand of the BJP more or less continued till the 15th GE (2009) despite the fact that the BJP had already tested power at the national level while being part of a coalition government-the National Front (NF) (1989-91). In addition, the BJP itself led two successive coalition Central governments e.g., National Democratic Alliance (NDA) I (1998-99) and NDA II (1999-2004).

On the eve of the 16th GE (2014), when the party was on the verge of being emerged as the single largest party with absolute majority while ending the two and a half decades long coalition era (1989-2014), it upheld the notion of 'cooperative federalism' in their EM of the 16th GE (2014) while putting much less emphasis on the question of the States' autonomy. In their EM of the 17th GE (2019), the BJP made a complete U-turn. As the pre-existing contentious issues regarding the Centre-State relations-that the BJP had been mentioning in their successive EMs since the 8th GE (1984)-was missing in entirety in the EM of the 17th GE (2019). Instead, cooperation was sought from the States while upholding the notion of 'Team India' that was expected to be based on the idea of 'cooperative federalism'.

In addition, a new coinage was introduced in the BJP's political rhetoric viz. 'double-engine government' that implies, the "BJP-led Centre will be more than willing to share its largesse with states ruled by the party." (The New Indian Express, May 27, 2022). Many opine that the notion of 'double engine government' is nothing but "a sinister euphemism for dictatorship in which a single party is seeking absolute control of a nation as large and diverse as India" (Hindustan Times, January 24, 2022). This leads us to believe that the concepts of 'cooperative federalism' and 'double-engine government' as upheld by the BJP since 2014 do not encourage opposition, differing views and opinions between the States and the Centre. Instead, unquestioned loyalty and submission is sought in exchange of rewards to be doled out by the Centre.

Two national parties viz. the INC and the BJP (since its establishment in 1980), although began their journeys differently, over time their stands on the issue of federalism seems to have become alike on several counts. The coinage of 'double engine government' as framed by the BJP, was not used by the INC, yet the INC on many occasions upheld the benefit of one-party rule. As early as in 1972, former Prime Minister (PM) and the leader of the INC, Ms. Gandhi emphasized the benefit of the 'same party rule' and stressed that the State governments should be "in tune with the government at the Centre, accept its policies and be willing to implement its programme". (Punchhi Commission (2010), Vol.I: xviii). Late Rajiv Gandhi-leader of the INC and former PM of India, more like his mother (Ms. Gandhi) also emphasized the virtues of one-party rule both at the Center and in the States for greater unity and integrity of the nation (Dua, 1985:793). In a similar manner, Rahul Gandhi son of late Rajiv Gandhi and the present INC leader, in the same vein said that it is better to have governments of the same party at the Centre as well as in the States to implement various welfare schemes and projects (Hindustan Times, April 11, 2009).

In addition, for both these national parties, the urge for empowering LGs came along with the attempt of weakening the middle tier of the Indian federation viz. the States with a view to reaching out to the electorate at the grassroots level directly. Further, both these national parties felt the necessity of activation of inter-governmental consultative forums viz. the ISC & the NDC and also two of them talk of cooperative federalism, yet none of these parties took any attempt to make these forums effectively functional¹⁶ (see Table 3). Finally, from time to time, when these two national parties managed to get themselves comfortably positioned in the Indian polity, they boastfully declared that on account of their proactive efforts, India has become a true federal country as discussed above.

C) Stands on federalism: Pro-federal regional parties

1. Diehard federalists

Prima facie the slogan for ‘more power to the States’ as raised by various pro-federal regional parties, seems to have emanated from rectifying the unitary bias of Indian federation. However, closer examination regarding the origin of the formulation of demands related to the States’ autonomy shows that the concern for protecting and upholding regional chauvinism, pride, culture and language seem to be the main driving force of raising such demand. That got eventually translated into the advocacy for strengthening the States’ power. As these pro-federal regional forces including diehard federalists started capturing power in many States, they increasingly realized that without achieving certain degree of constitutional federalism i.e., constitutional safeguards of the States’ power along with institutional strengthening of federal norms, regional interests and development cannot be protected and achieved. However, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and its breakaway faction-the Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI (M) (established in 1964) that are normally considered diehard federalists, do not seem to have any deep-seated regional agenda.

Communist Party of India (CPI) & Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M): The CPI and the CPI (M) have so far been the most vocal, articulate and consistent political parties in demanding a complete review of the existing arrangement in the sphere of Centre-State relations while amending the Constitution. Yet their unequivocal advocacy for radical restructuring of existing Indian federal arrangements seemed to have been partly eclipsed by their overzealous position of upholding regional chauvinism and pride of West Bengal-an Indian State where these Communist parties ruled for three and a half decades (1977-2011). They used to raise frequent slogans like ‘the State of West Bengal is subjected to politically motivated discriminations by the Centre’ and ‘step motherly treatments are meted out to the State (West Bengal) by the Centre’. These political rhetorics were often used during the time when the CPI (M)-led Left Front (LF) (including the CPI), ruled the State-West Bengal uninterruptedly for 34 years (1977-2011). However, intensity of these slogans lasted more pronouncedly roughly from 1977 to

¹⁶ The INC started mentioning about reactivating the ISC and the NDC roughly since the early 1980s in a sporadic manner. The BJP, on the contrary, consistently demanded for effective functioning of these inter-governmental consultative bodies since its inception (1980). For details see, the BJPs EMs of 8th GE (1984), 9th GE (1989), 10th GE (1991), 11th GE (1996), 15th GE (2009) & 16th GE (2014). Finally in the EM of the 17th GE (2019), the BJP committed to uphold ‘cooperative federalism’ that presumably focuses on strengthening institutional mechanism for inter-governmental consultations.

1990 i.e., till the inception of the coalition era (1989-2004). Thereafter, both the CPI & the CPI (M) became the key players in forming various coalition governments at the Centre¹⁷. Hence the slogan probably lost its relevance to a certain extent.

Theoretically, as opined, Marxism and federalism are opposed to each other. Since for Marxists, class consciousness is the real consciousness. Federalism, by contrast, is not a class principle, but based on the non-class identities such as language, tribe, and region (Bhattacharyya, 2001:42-49). Despite such political orthodoxy, the undivided CPI's stand on federation was evident as early as in the EM (1946) of Provincial election of British India. Where the CPI proposed that future India could be a "confederation of free nation-states which were based on each regional unit" (ibid). The party further felt that a solution to India's problem of national unity lies in the federal structure (ibid). However, during the time of the Constituent Assembly debate (1946-50) with regard to the prospective shape of the Indian federation, a lone member of the CPI in the Constituent Assembly rather focused on securing the provision for freedom of speech in the future Indian Constitution (Scroll.in: November 19, 2018).

After Independence, the CPI stood for greater autonomy of the States as evidenced in their successive EMs. In their EM of the 1st GE (1952) (Sen, 1960: 74-80), the party demanded that the States be granted wider power. In their EM of the 2nd GE (1957) more specific position was taken by the party as it was on the verge of capturing power in a State of Kerala that became a first democratically elected Communist government in India (1957) (Basu, undated: 30). The CPI demanded that the States should be vested with wider power, especially in the sphere of finance (ibid: 30). The CPI-led State government in Kerala was dismissed by the Central government in 1959 while exercising the discretionary power (Article 356) enjoyed by the Governor (*de facto* the Centre) of the State. This led to bitter struggle between the Centre and the party. The party stressed in the EM of the 3rd GE (1962)¹⁸ that the power of the Central government to dismiss any State government so long as the latter enjoys the confidence of the State Assembly must be annulled (ibid: 20-21). In their successive EMs and party literature, the CPI and its breakaway faction-the CPI (M) (1964) became one of the ardent advocates of granting more executive, legislative and financial power to the States while amending the Constitution. Memorandum on the Centre-State Relations (1977) passed by the Left Front (LF) government of West Bengal appears to be one of the important landmarks in this direction wherein the party demanded that, wherever the word 'Union' has been used in the Constitution, it should be substituted by the word 'Federation'.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) & All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AI-ADMK): The roots of the Tamil Nadu-based party the DMK erstwhile Dravidar Kazhagam (DK) (1944) lie in the Self Respect Movement that discarded dominance of *Brahmins* (that occupies the highest position in the caste-based Hindu religion) in all walks of life in British south India in general and later on, in the State of Tamil Nadu in particular. However, over the years, the DK's discontent did not remain confined to anti-*Brahmins* only but was also extended to north Indians in general. When India got Independence, the DK viewed it as the transfer of power from the British to the *Brahmin-Bania* (trader/merchant) and north Indians combine who,

¹⁷ For detail see the author's Ph. D thesis entitled "Centripetal Bias in the Federal Fiscal Relations in India--Growing Regional Disparity and Perception of Discrimination—A Case Study of West Bengal".

¹⁸ <https://www.marxists.org/subject/india/cpi/1962-election-manifesto.pdf>, accessed February 16, 2026

as alleged by the party, occupied all the important positions of Independent India. The DK predicted that an Independent India would bring south Indians, especially *Tamils* (inhabitants of the State of Tamil Nadu) under the dominance of *Brahmins* and north Indians. Eventually an independent nation called *Dravida Nadu* was sought for by the DK and later on by the DMK in order to protect the interest of *Tamils* (Omvedt: 2005; The Indian Express, April 19, 2017; The Indian Express, July 8, 2022).

The DMK eventually dropped its secessionist ideology in the wake of the enactment of the 16th Constitution Amendment Act in 1963 (also known as the Anti-Secessionist Amendment) that banned any party with sectarian principles from contesting elections. Consequently, the DMK preferred to keep the issue of *Dravida Nadu* i.e., the demand for an independent nation for *Tamils* on the backburner (ibid). However, from time to time, such demand kept on surfacing in a softer rigor till date. Recently a fresh round of demand for *Dravida Nadu* came to the fore. One of the DMK leaders opined that “if the central government did not give Tamil Nadu greater autonomy, the DMK would be compelled to revive the demand for a ‘separate state’. Since the party feels that only a separate nation for *Tamils* (viz. *Dravida Nadu*) are able to fulfil their aspirations (The Indian Express, July 8, 2022).

While being unable to pursue this sectarian agenda (viz. *Dravida Nadu*) officially, the DMK increasingly shifted its focus to the perceived disparity between the North and South India. The DMK feels that the ‘South’ in general has all along been neglected by delays in sanctioning development projects and allotment of funds by the Centre dominated by the leaders of northern region (India Today, July 22, 2013). Pre-existing trend of the North vs. South tension got further inflamed in recent times, when the DMK complained that *Tamil* culture, language and their regional identity are under threat as the southern regions of India are being constantly invaded by north Indians (Organiser, June 7, 2022; The Commune, June 6, 2022).

However, these two trends viz. upholding regional pride, interest and demand for strengthening Indian federalism have been going side by side for the DMK. The party has become one of the ardent advocates of protecting the interest of southern region of India. This coupled with championing federal spirit of India has also become one of the focal points of the DMK’s politics. The party first captured power in the State of Tamil Nadu in 1967 with absolute majority. Having assumed office, the DMK might have realized that without adequate constitutional safeguards to be granted to the States in Indian federation, regional aspirations of *Tamils* cannot be protected. Since then, the party has been consistently upholding the cause of autonomy of the States by radical restructuring of the Constitution along the federal lines. Rajamannar Committee (1971) that was appointed by the DMK-led Tamil Nadu State government gave the most proactive recommendations on this area.

Of late, the DMK has been at loggerheads with the Centre ever since it assumed office on May 7, 2021. Official statements of the DMK-led government in Tamil Nadu started referring to the Central government as the ‘Union’ and never as the ‘Centre’. This was consciously brought in by the DMK reflecting its position on federalism. As the party opines that when national government is described as ‘Centre’ not ‘Union’-a nomenclature that was also used in the Indian Constitution-it entails a certain bias in favour of the Union government and hence suffers from hierarchical connotation (Times of India, June 24, 2021).

The AIADMK a breakaway faction of the DMK founded in 1972 also became one of the chief supporters of the States' autonomy. Much like the DMK, the AIADMK has all along insisted that appropriate changes in the present Constitution should be made in order to strengthen federalism in India.

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD): On the eve of Indian Independence and the Partition that followed, *Sikh* community (the main support base of the SAD) was afraid that their religious and cultural identity will be seriously affected since *Sikhs* would have had to get dispersed into two independent nations in the making e.g., India and Pakistan. The SAD sought for the protection of the religious and cultural interests of the *Sikhs* in a memorandum submitted by them before the British Cabinet Mission (1946)¹⁹. In the Constituent Assembly, a lone member of the SAD advocated for securing the rights for *Sikh* community as well as other minorities (The Print, October 13, 2018). In Independent India, the SAD demanded for *Sikh* autonomous region where they will be entitled to frame its own internal constitutions and can exercise all the powers except for Foreign Relations, Defence, Currency and General Communications²⁰. This demand is still raised by radical *Sikh* outfits. This proposed confederation, as believed by them, would provide them a self-autonomous region where interests of *Sikhs* i.e., their language, culture and religion (*Sikhism*) would be protected (EPW, January 26, 1991: 140). However, the SAD eventually realized that, only powerful State in Indian federation would help them in achieving this goal (Constitution of SAD: 2; The Indian Express, December 23, 2021).

Since then, Punjab based faction-ridden SAD erstwhile Akali Dal became one of the most vocal and ardent advocates of bringing radical changes in the entire structure of Centre-State relations through constitutional amendment as evidenced from the successive resolutions taken by the party i.e., Batala Resolution (1968); Anandpur Sahib Resolution (1973); the Resolution of Ludhiana Conference (1978) and the Punjab Accord (1985). In the Batala Conference (1968) the SAD demanded 'correction' of the Constitution of India on a true federal basis while ensuring greater autonomy of the States (The Tribune, August 6, 2019). The SAD also wanted to incorporate the expression 'federal' in the Constitution to characterize the republic of India by 're-writing' the Constitution (Babushahi, May 15, 2012). However, for SAD seeking for true federal shape of India went hand in hand with protecting *Sikh* interests and minorities till date. The constitution of the SAD proclaims that "To safeguard the religious and linguistic minorities ... it has become imperative that the Indian Constitutional structure be given a real federal shape..." (Constitution of SAD: 2; The Indian Express, December 23, 2021).

The SAD was considered one of the consistent political allies of the BJP (since its establishment in 1980). Therefore, as expected, the party did not raise its voice against serious onslaughts on Indian federal structure that have taken place successively since 2014. However, of late, it started taking refuge to its previous pro-federal position as the party opines that the SAD has a rich history of fighting to protect the rights of the *Sikhs* and voicing for federalism (Hindustan Times, December 15, 2021). And the party, as vowed by them, will remain committed to the cause of strengthening federal nature of the country (The Print, February 26, 2022).

¹⁹ <https://www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/akali-dal-central/>, accessed February 16, 2026

²⁰ <http://www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/the-modern-history-of-sikhs-1947-present/anandpur-sahib-resolution>, accessed February 16, 2026

2. Pro-federal forces

The 1980s was a period when significant number of regional parties sprouted, developed and captured power in various States and eventually became major pro-federal forces. Of them, Telugu Desam Party (TDP) (Andhra Pradesh); Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) (Assam); Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) (Jammu & Kashmir) along with Janata Dal a break-away factions of the Janata Party and its various incarnations (viz. Janata Dal (United) (JD) (U) (Bihar); Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) (Bihar); Biju Janata Dal (BJD) (Orissa) and Samajwadi Party (SP) (Uttar Pradesh) started championing the cause of federalism.

In recent years, as a result of reconfiguration of political dynamics both at the Central and the State level, a new set of regional parties gained strength by capturing power in various States e.g., YSR Congress Party (Andhra Pradesh); Telengana Rashtriya Samiti (TRS) (Telangana); Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) (Jharkhand); Shiv Sena (Maharashtra); Trinamool Congress (TMC) (West Bengal); Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) (Delhi Union Territory). These parties became quite pro-active in protecting the autonomy of the States.

However, as opined by many, immediate provocations i.e., various forms of Central attacks on their autonomy might have led them to get engaged in this issue. For instance, the brazen misuse of power of Governors in various opposition-ruled States made Shiv Sena TMC, JMM and AAP to take a relook at the Centre-State relations (The Shillong Times, February 16, 2022; The Week, February 15, 2022). Mr. Uddhav Thackeray, the leader of the Shiv Sena called for 'National Debate on Federalism' (The Economic Times, October 16, 2021). Similarly, the TRS felt that policies adopted by the Centre are taking away the powers of the States while damaging the federal setup and the party urged that all the State Legislatures should discuss and condemn these anti-federal policies (The Siasat Daily, March 15, 2022). Interference of the Lieutenant Governor (the constitutional & executive head of Union Territories (UTs) in the administrative matters of the AAP-led Delhi UT government on a regular basis, might have compelled the party to take an initiative to organize a conclave- Centre-State Relationship of CMs (The Hindu, October 1, 2015).

3. Demands formulated by the pro-federal political parties on federal aspirations.

Lack of formal and institutional arrangements of inter-governmental consultative forums in India poses difficulty in getting comprehensive views and aspirations of the States regarding their demands for more executive, legislative and financial autonomy.

The Inter-State Council (ISC)-a constitutional platform for holding dialogues between the Centre and the States-was constituted only in 1990 yet it remained completely dysfunctional immediately after its establishment. Therefore, between 1991 and 1996 no meetings of the ISC were convened by the INC-led minority Central government which was supported by a diehard federalist like the AIADMK (Table 3). Erstwhile National Development Council (NDC) now Governing Council-the forum for discussion and deliberation on State Plans-too has become 'ritualistic' and 'ceremonial' as the meetings 'leaves little scope for a meaningful dialogue'. By and large this trend continued till date to be discussed in the subsequent section of the study.

It was expected that establishment of the ISC in 1990 "would obviate the need for frequent ad hoc conferences of Chief Ministers to discuss policy issues or review important programmes" (SARC, 2008, Para: 14.3.1.1.8). Contrary to these expectations, the whole coalition era wit-

nessed proliferation of such ad hoc meetings convened mainly by the Chief Ministers (CMs) of the opposition-ruled States, instead of getting lessened (ibid). Therefore, even during the coalition period, pro-federal forces rather preferred to use these informal forums for inter-State consultations than pursuing the goal of institutional strengthening of inter-governmental consultative forums (viz. ISC & NDC).

So in order to get articulated and structured views of the States, we need to mainly rely on informal platforms i.e., ad hoc meetings of the CMs of the opposition-ruled States that has been taking place since as early as in 1969 to date along with political literature such as Election Manifestos (EMs) of several political parties.

In addition, a few institutional platforms that are in place help us to get a bird's eye view on the States' concerns over erosion of federal principles. As per the existing norms, the States are putting forward their fiscal demands before the Union Finance Commissions (UFCs) (viz. Memorandum to the UFCs), constituted every five years to recommend on quantum of Central resources to be distributed among the States. In addition, minutes of the meetings of the NDCs are also available in the public domain where deliberation on National Plan along with approval of the State Plans were carried out until the abolition of the Planning Commission (1st January 2015). Moreover, proceedings of the meetings of the ISCs held so far along with views expressed by various political parties-led State governments before the ISC meetings can be studied. Further, a few debates on Center-State relations that have taken place from time to time in Rajya Sabha (Upper House), and Lok Sabha (Lower House) of Indian Parliament can also be considered.

This apart, probably the first and best-recorded public document is the Part II of the Sarkaria Commission's Report (1988) and Supplementary Vol. III of the report of the Punchhi Commission (2010) wherein responses of the State and Central governments along with various political parties to the questionnaires provided by these Commissions are provided. These documentations help us to get articulate positions of these stakeholders on their aspirations of having greater autonomy with regard to legislative, executive and fiscal aspects of Indian federation (see Box 2). It is worth noting that the FARC (1969) also had the privilege to have discussions with various political parties along with the State governments (ibid: 1-2). However, to the best of our knowledge, views expressed by them before the FARC (1969) are not in the public domain.

D) Extent of influence of regional federalists on the Central Policy & promises made by them

An analysis based on the experiences gathered from several federal countries shows that the greater the collective strengths & bargaining power of federalists in a country, the better would be the 'federal political culture'. This observation leads us to believe that the extent to which two countervailing tendencies i.e., centripetal and centrifugal forces would be operating in a federal country depends very much on the degree of control federalists are able to exercise over national as well as sub-national governments (Pai, 1990:414).

In Indian context, as mentioned above, diehard federalists' advocacy of federalism has been powerful all along i.e., ever since India achieved its Independence and they were eventually supported by increasing number of pro-federal forces particularly since 1980s. Therefore, it

leads us to believe that these pro-federal forces had their fair share in Central polity and hence, might have managed to exert greater influence on the successive Central governments by various measures.

Concerned parties, however, observe that the virtual absence of ‘federalist lobby’ in the Constituent Assembly (9th Dec. 1946-24th Jan. 1950) (where Indian Constitution was framed)-dominated mainly by the INC-is one of the main reasons for having unitary bias of the Indian federal structure (The Tribune, August 6, 2000). As mentioned earlier, two members from diehard federalists e.g., the CPI and the SAD, primarily focused on freedom of speech and protection of rights of minorities respectively instead of taking part in the debate that centred on as to how Indian federation would be shaped.

1. Influence of regional parties on the Central polity: Centralized era

It is worth mentioning, even during the era of centralized federalism (1947-67) when all the States and the Centre were ruled by the same political party viz. the INC, there had been a significant presence of diehard federalists like the CPI, the CPI (M) (since 1964), the SAD and the DMK in the Indian Parliament. In the first three GEs (parliamentary elections), the CPI alone occupied the second position and was granted the status of the main opposition party in the Indian Parliament. Again, in the 5th GE (1971), the CPI (M) was able to hold the second position (Table 1). Surprisingly, despite these political and numerical strengths enjoyed by these diehard federalists in Indian polity, ideological compatibility of achieving the common goal (viz. true federal spirit with more autonomy to the States) did not bring them together with a view to form a ‘Federalist Block/Federalist Lobby’ either within the Indian Parliament or outside. This proposed Block could have given them collective bargaining power in their endeavour for revoking unitary features of Indian federation thereby providing considerable constitutional safeguards to the States.

When these federalists in India failed to come up with any collective bargaining power, one of the prominent leaders of the Bharatiya Jana Sangha (BJS) (now the BJP)-Dr. Shyamaprasad Mokherjee took an attempt to form the National Democratic Front (NDF), consisting of the opposition forces in the Indian Parliament just after the 1st General Election (GE) (1952). This step was undertaken by the BJS in order to bring all the anti-INC political parties under one umbrella²¹. The irony is, the SAD-a diehard federalist became one of the constituents of this NDF, led by the BJS-an ardent advocate of pursuing unitary structure of India. As mentioned earlier, the BJS entered into a political arrangement with other parties including the SAD and reached its highest water mark in the 4th GE (1967) when the BJS won 35 MP seats in the Indian Parliament. Much like the NDF, the BJS again formed an ‘Opposition Bloc’ in 1967 while uniting 100 MPs in the Parliament and the SAD was one of the components of this Bloc (Sunday Guardian, October 20, 2018).

At the State-level too, during the same time, the CPI, the CPI (M) and the SAD formed a coalition government in the State of Punjab while allying with an anti-federal force-the BJS in 1967 (Chakrabarty, 2008:128-131; for SAD also see The Indian Express, December 23, 2021).

²¹ <https://www.bjp.org/historyanddevelopment>, accessed February 16, 2026

Again, a diehard federalist-the SAD did not have any qualm in forming coalition government with the BJS in Punjab during 1977-80 (Khan, 2003:179).

Similarly, another diehard federalist-the DMK entered into electoral coalition with the INC-a staunch unitary force- at the State (Legislative Assembly Election (LAE) as well as parliamentary elections (GEs) since as early as 1971. Afterwards, particularly since 1977 i.e., from the 7th GE (1977), the AIADMK-a diehard federalist started forming electoral alliance with the INC. However, during the later period, the AIADMK became one of the consistent allies of the BJP (Oneindia, February 22, 2019). Likewise, the CPI (M)-led Left Front came to an agreement on adjustments for all the Member of Parliament (MP) seats (except one) in West Bengal in the 6th GE (1977) with the Janata Party-where one of the important constituents was the BJS (The Indian Express, February 11, 2017).

Thus, diehard federalists in India, as discussed above, were frequently seen entering comfortably into electoral and non-electoral alliances with the unitarists viz. the INC and the BJS since as early as 1952. It can be recalled that the BJS (now the BJP) was not only a staunch unitarist but also the party even wanted to abolish the system of 'State' as a middle tier of government in the Indian federation. Yet, much to our surprise, ideological compatibility of these pro-federal forces has never brought them together as a united force. Till date no 'Federalist Block' is in existence. This is despite the fact that over the last few decades, these federalists have been well positioned, and their electoral bargaining power went from strength to strength in Indian polity particularly since 1980s.

It is a widely held view that federalists in India have so far remained a fragmented force and often are functioning at cross purposes. One group of federalists (politically aligned with the Centre) tends to be busy with getting favourable treatments from the Centre even when federal norms are severely violated. And another group of federalists (non-politically aligned with the Centre) are bogged with accusing the Centre of giving them discretionary treatments while remain confined to sporadic outbursts on the question of strengthening Centre-State relations.

2. Influence of regional parties on the Central polity: Coalition era

For the first time in Indian polity, a significant number of diehard federalists along with pro-federal forces came together when the INC that ruled Indian Parliament uninterruptedly since the 1st GE (1952) lost political power in the 6th GE (1977) and the Janata Party-led first non-INC coalition government at the Centre (1977-79) was formed. Many regional federalists supported the coalition government and held ministerial position.

During the later period the Janata Dal-a breakaway faction of Janata Party and its various incarnations led two tri-coalitional governments at the Centre viz. National Front (NF) (1989-91) and United Front (UF) (1996-98) and these coalition governments were supported by various regional along with two national parties i.e., the BJP and the INC respectively. In addition, four successive bi-coalitional governments were formed at the Centre viz. the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) I (1998-99) and NDA II (1999-2004) along with the INC-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) I (2004-09) and UPA II (2009-14) with the support of various pro-federal forces and diehard federalists (**Table 7**).

With a view to figuring out the extent of influence pro-federal political parties had on these coalitional governments, numerical strengths of these regional parties (both individual and col-

lective) require to be looked at. Besides, three qualitative aspects also need to be taken into account in order to assess lobbying power of these federalists both collectively and individually in furthering the cause of institutionalizing and strengthening the autonomy of the States in Indian federation. These are as follows:

One, there is a more likelihood that the degree of bargaining power of regional parties that held important Cabinet Ministerial positions could be higher in pursuing institutional strengthening of Indian federal characters than that of those who only supported from outside. However, holding important portfolios by the regional federalists in these coalition governments did not always depend on the numerical strengths of these parties. For example, the CPI (M) got significant number of MP seats (32 MPs) in the 11th GE (1996), yet the party chose not to hold any Cabinet Ministry in the UF coalition government (1996-98) instead, preferred to support the government from outside. But the CPI that got only 12 MP seats, held two important Cabinet Ministries e.g., Union Home Ministry and Agriculture Ministry in the UF coalition government. Similarly, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) that had 16 MP seats and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) that had only 5 MP seats also got various Ministries in the UF coalition government (Business Line, January 20, 2018).

Two, during the coalition era, a few regional parties became formidable and pivotal partners since they held the key to the survival of these coalitions and hence are instrumental in breaking and making these governments (Iyer, 2011: 23-28). Therefore, due to their more privileged position than other allies, they seemed to have extracted greater largesse and political benefits from the dominant coalition partner hence expected to have greater bargaining power (ibid). It is to be noted that status of these pivotal parties depends more on other circumstances i.e., whether it is a swing or consistent alliance and hence less on the numerical strengths of these parties in the coalition governments. As observed, consistent allies (e.g. SAD-BJP (1997-2020); Shiv Sena-BJP (1989-2019) are those whose loyalty is time-tested and therefore does not need extra attention and bribery to keep them in alliance. On the contrary, pivotal parties are mainly swing parties i.e., inconsistent allies that need to be enticed to make them stay in the coalition. For example, the AIADMK that mostly had allied with the INC (till 1996) decided to form alliance with the BJP in 1998. This made them a swing ally e.g., pivotal party in the BJP-led NDA I government (1998-99). Another example is the TDP who left its longstanding alliance with the other non-BJP political parties in the 12th GE (1999) and became part of the BJP-led NDA II government (1999-04). These swing allies became pivotal coalition partners and seemed to have had significant control over these coalition governments.

Finally, a few diehard federalists exerted greater influence on Central polity by entering pre-electoral alliance in the State Legislative Assembly Elections (LAEs) of their respective States in a deal in which the concerned regional party contested most of the State Legislative Assembly seats while leaving most of the General Election (GE) seats to the national parties. It seems to be mutually beneficial for both. For national parties, by tactful bargaining and seat sharing with regional allies, they manage to make their presence felt in the States where its electoral base was marginal or absent previously. And for regional parties, they are able to exert influences on the Central polity both overtly (when national parties in power) and covertly i.e., by being able to make their cross-States presence thereby expanding their political base in other States even when these national parties are not ruling at the Centre.

It must be noted that two diehard federalists viz. the DMK & the AIADMK alternatively allied with both the national parties (e.g., the INC and the BJP) since as early as 1971 while making

seat adjustments with them in both GEs and LAEs. Thus, over the last five decades i.e., since 1970s, whichever government was in power at the Centre, either of these two diehard federalists was part of it while holding important portfolios in the cabinet of the successive Central governments. This trend has been continuing till date. The AIADMK is currently in alliance with the BJP. However, as per the latest report, the AIADMK has left the BJP alliance (Hindustan Times, September 25, 2023). This allowed these *Dravidian* diehard federalists (viz. the DMK & the AIADMK) to have influence on the Centre uninterruptedly for the last several decades (Oneindia, February 22, 2019; Vanitha, 2014).

3. Saga of making promises and extent of keeping those

3.1 *Promise made by the Janata coalition government (1977-79)*

Much before the commencement of the full-fledged coalition era (1989-2014), India witnessed the Janata Party-led coalition government (1977-79). That ended four decades long one-party (INC) domination at the Centre. In its Election Manifesto (EM) of the 6th GE (1977), Janata Party felt that a high degree of centralization or the concentration of power is inconsistent with democracy and so it promised for restoration of democracy and federalism in its EM. Further, the party put emphasis on taking necessary steps towards decentralization of economic and political power (EIR, 1977).

3.2 *Promises kept by the Janata coalition government (1977-79)*

Political analysts feel that the Janata conglomerate (due to its ideological feud) failed to honour the commitments contained in its EM. The Janata Party, right from the beginning, was reluctant to concede the regional demands for institutional reforms in federal structure and greater devolution of resources. Many pro-federal forces that supported the government asked the Janata party-led government to take a good hard look at restructuring the Centre-State relations in line with true federal spirit. For instance, the CPI (M)-led Left Front government of West Bengal put forward a document-Memorandum on the Centre-State Relations (1977) and asked the government to hold a national level discussion on it. The Memorandum sought for bringing fundamental changes in the Indian Constitution in order to eliminate unitary bias of the Indian federal structure (Khan, 2003:177).

The Prime Minister (PM)-Morarji Desai of Janata coalition government turned down the demand for any radical reorientation in the existing Centre-State relations while he had considered that the present federal arrangements as depicted in the Indian Constitution is time-tested which required no change. Thus, practically no institutional reforms were undertaken during Janata era (Ray, 1982: 1621; Lieten, 1980-81:22-23; Sathyamurthy, 1983: 578). No subjects were transferred from the Concurrent List to the State List that were encroached upon by the Centre during the Emergency (1975-77) that had been imposed by the INC-led Central government in an attempt to centralize power (Rajya Sabha Debate, November 29, 2019). However, a few of anti-democratic clauses-that were inserted in the Constitution during the Emergency-were repealed by the 44th Amendment Act (1978) introduced by the Janata government (Ray, 1981:1380). Many opine that an important segment of the Janata party-the BJS (now the BJP) whose stand was conspicuously anti-federal, fervently opposed to the devolution of more power to the States (Lieten, 1980-81: 22).

It may be noted that, Congress for Democracy (CFD)-a breakaway faction of the INC which was one of the four constituents of the Janata Party emerged as the champion of federalism both in its verbal campaign and in their EM of the 6th GE (1977) (Azam, 1977: 393). However, as mentioned above, although the Janata coalition government was supported by a few diehard federalists viz. the CPI (M), the DMK and the SAD yet it is reported that these pro-federal forces had no significant lobbying power within the Janata coalition government (Lieten, 1980-81:22) which is difficult for us to grasp.

It is understandable that a short-lived Janata Coalition government might have not had much opportunity to bring radical institutional reforms in the Indian federal structure, yet operational streamlining could have been done as recommended by the FARC (1969) in its report on Centre-State Relationships. The FARC (1969) did not advocate for changing the Constitution instead, the Commission focused on functional aspects of Centre-State relations while ensuring procedural transparency (ibid: i-ii) and touched on almost all the issues that pro-federal forces demanded (**Box 3**). Many of the recommendations of FARC (1969) are still relevant yet remained unimplemented till date.

The Janata party had promised for restoration of democracy and federalism in its EM (1977) (The Indian Express, February 11, 2017). However, the attack on the States' autonomy reached a crescendo in 1977. After having assumed power, its first act was to dismiss all the INC-led State governments by invoking Article 356. As expected, same political vendetta continued when the INC-led Central government had also dismissed all the Janata Party-led State governments after having returned to power at the Centre in 1980 (The Statesman, April 12, 2012).

The present malpractice of removing sitting Governors (that were appointed by the previous Central governments) before their terms was over by the newly elected Central government began in 1977 too. The Janata Party-led coalition government replaced Governors appointed by the previous INC regime (The Hindu, July 7, 2014). So instead of setting the example of improved federal culture, centripetal bias in the Indian federation got further deepened despite the significant presence of pro-federal forces in the Janata coalition government.

3.3 *Promises made by the successive coalition governments (1989-2014)*

After the Janata experiment (1977-79), two tri-coalitional governments led by the Janata Dal (e.g., National Front (NF) (1989-91); United Front (UF) (1996-98) and supported by various regional parties and national parties (the BJP & the INC) were in existence. In addition, four bi-coalitional governments (e.g., National Democratic Alliance (NDA) I (1998-99); NDA II (1999-04); United Progressive Alliance (UPA) I (2004-09) and UPA II (2009-14) led by the BJP and the INC were formed.

These coalition governments were functioning on the basis of common approach i.e., Common Minimum Programme (CMP) to major policy matters as decided by all the coalition partners. However, the NF (1989-91) that had commitment to a less centralized federation had no CMP (The Indian Express, December 23, 2010). The CMPs of all these coalition governments promised to rectify the imbalances in the Indian federal structure as mentioned below. It is to be noted that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the BJP, referred their CMP as 'The National Agenda for Governance' (NAG).

The CMPs of all the successive coalition governments, no matter whether it is led and supported by the Janata Dal or the BJP or even by the INC who is considered a 'reluctant federalist', made promises of granting more legislative, executive and financial autonomy of the States in the following areas: First, it was emphasized that various forms of Central interventions into the States' matters will be stopped. In addition, special mention was placed on transferring major volumes of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSSs) to the States with funds that are mostly undertaken on the subjects that fall under the States' jurisdiction by the Centre. Second, these CMPs urged that financial power and space of the States will be expanded. Third, these CMPs promised that inter-governmental consultative forums viz. the NDC and the ISC will be activated. Finally, all these CMPs intended to set up commissions that will be entrusted with looking into the matter of restructuring the Centre-State relations along federal lines (**Table 2**).

As evidenced from the **Table 2**, promises made by various coalition governments over the period of two and half decades represent a mirror image hence on many issues; it is difficult to spot the differences. This leads us to believe that these coalition governments that were survived on the support extended by the pro-federal forces, eventually failed to live up to the expectations of pro-federal electorates.

3.4 *Promises kept by the successive coalition governments (1989-2014)*

So far as keeping of promises with regard to executive and legislative autonomy is concerned, it is observed by the SARC (2008) that many of the matters that are discussed in the Inter-State Council (ISC) meetings (till the 10th ISC, 2006) have not been simply accepted by these coalition governments (ibid, Para, 14.3.1.1.6) (**Table 4**). Some important decisions of the ISC meetings are, however, 'Accepted in Principle' that means leaving these issues in cold storage and hence has not been acted upon till date to be discussed in the later part of the study.

The UF (1996-98) government put special emphasis on the fact that Article 356 of the Constitution—that gives the Centre a discretionary power to dismiss elected State governments will be amended in the light of the landmark judgment of the Supreme Court (S.R Bommai Vs, Union of India, 11th March, 1994) in order to prevent the misuse of this constitutional provision. However, as evidenced from **row I (c) of Table 4**, no amendment was introduced in this regard. Further, the UF coalition government promised that prompt Central assent to the State Bills on matters within the States' jurisdiction will be ensured. Here too, no action was taken by any coalition government till 2006 (see **row 1 (a) of Table 4**). Later on, Punchhi Commission (2010) also fixed certain norms in this regard (see **row I (b) of Table 5**), however, it remained unimplemented too. Even the INC-led UPA II government that constituted the Punchhi Commission (2010), failed to act on these recommendations (see endnote xxiv).

The Centre's intrusion into the subject matters that fall under the States' jurisdiction as enumerated in the State List and the Concurrent List (concurrent jurisdiction of both the Centre & the States), have never been stopped. Instead, such Central intervention has grown over the years and persisted even during the coalition era. These coalition governments failed to do anything worthwhile in restoring subjects (viz. 'Education') which were originally under the State List yet were transferred to the Concurrent List during the 42nd amendment to the Constitution at the time of Emergency (1975-77) imposed by the INC-led Central government (Rajya Sabha Debate, November 29, 2019). The CSSs have all along remained a major bone of contention between the Centre and the States that have also proliferated over the years both in terms of num-

bers and quantum of Central funds being spent on these CSS (EPW, November 23, 1996:3034; The Wire, February 14, 2019; The Print, December 11, 2020).

The UF coalition government (1996-98) also promised that greater freedom be granted to the States in drawing up State Plans. The States so far set a few parameters with a view to ensure their role and ownership in formulation and approval of National as well as State Plans. This includes, providing constitutional status to the Planning Commission (PC) as well as the NDC; having representation of the States in the Secretariat of the PC; ensuring ‘focused’ and ‘structured’ discussion at the NDC with the advanced agenda and increasing the duration and frequency of the NDC meetings. Unfortunately, none of these demands was taken care of as discussed in a large body of literature (see **Box 2**).

One of the worrisome aspects of the coalition era is that the period not only witnessed non-fulfilment of promises made by the federalists, but also gross violation of federal principles is made by them while using of all the unitary features of the Indian Constitution that they themselves wanted to rectify.

The case in point is the role and function of Governors who are constitutional and executive heads of the States. Federalists have repeatedly opposed the partisan role of the Governors and wanted that the discretionary power of the Governors be curbed, and certain norms be fixed for appointing and removal of the Governors by the Centre. Because it had become a usual practice to remove Governors with the change of political power at the Centre and appoint politically inclined persons as Governors by the Centre.

The FARC (1969) along with Sarkaria (1988), NCRWC (2002) and Punchhi (2010) Commissions recommended for measures to streamline this matter (see **row I (a) & (b) of Table 5**). However, instead of implementing these recommendations, successive coalition governments seemed to have followed in the footsteps of their predecessors. As a consequence, partisan role of Governors continued while violating all the norms. The Janata Dal-led NF (1989-91) government dismissed 15 Governors who had been appointed during the previous INC regime (The Arunachal Times February 17, 2022).

In addition, all the coalition governments resorted to one of the most contentions and anti-federal provisions in the Indian Constitution viz. Article 356 that has so far been allegedly used to dismiss the opposition-ruled State governments by the Centre (**Table 6**). Again, the use of the Article by various Central governments as evidenced in **the Table 6** is just a tip of the iceberg since it failed to depict the situation when various coalition governments were on the verge of imposing Article 356 but for various reasons could not do so. As the promise made by the UF government (1996-98) in their CMP of preventing the misuse of the Article 356 was violated when it had intended to impose President’s rule in two opposition-ruled States e.g., Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat while applying Article 356 (India Today, March 25, 2013). The BJP-led NDA-II government also took attempts to introduce President’s rule not once but twice in Bihar but could not do so due to short of required numbers in the *Rajya Sabha* (Upper House) (Deccan Herald, August 17, 2018).

All the CMPs of coalition governments made a promise to activate inter-governmental consultative forums like the ISC and the NDC. The ISC was constituted by the Janata Dal-led NF (1989-91) government on 28th May 1990 yet the basic structure of it remained highly centralized. The ISC was designed as a recommendatory body that takes final decision through consensus. How-

ever, on such consensus, ‘the decision of the Chairman (Prime Minister) shall be final’²². Besides, the Secretariat of the ISC is also appointed by the Chairman ‘as it thinks fit (see endnote xxi) which makes it a ‘toothless entity’ (Livemint, November, 20, 2015) and hence “it ceased to be an independent body” as one of the members of 14th UFC feels (The Print, November 19, 2020).

As per the mandate of the ISC (viz. clause 5 (a), of the Procedure of the Council) “the Council shall meet at least thrice in every year” (see endnote xxii). As evident from **Table 3**, almost all the coalition Central governments violated this mandate some even did it brazenly. No meeting was held during the INC-led minority government (1991-96), although this was not a coalition government, yet it lacked an absolute majority in the Parliament by a few seats and was supported by a diehard federalist-AIADMK. One cannot deny that it was during the BJP-led two NDA coalition governments (e.g., NDA I (1998-99) & (NDA II (1999-04), ISC meetings were held much more frequently i.e., during the span of six years of their tenure, four ISC meetings were held although as per the mandate, minimum of 18 meetings should have been taken place. The UPA II (2009-14) completely violated the mandate when no ISC meeting was convened while only two meetings were held during the UPA I (2004-09) regime (**Table 3**).

Another inter-governmental consultative forum-the National Development Council (NDC), as mentioned above, wherein deliberations and approval of State Plans used to take place till the abolition of the Planning Commission (PC) (1st January 2015). Unlike the ISC, the NDC was not a constitutional body. The States repeatedly demanded that the NDC be given constitutional status and the representations from the States in the PC be ensured. So far as procedural aspect is concerned, it was emphasized that agenda of the NDC be decided by both the Centre and the States and such agenda be provided well in advance. In addition, the States urged that the discussion on State and National Plan should be held with longer duration. In order to achieve this, the States stressed that the NDC meetings be held more frequently (at least once in every quarter) (**Box 2**).

However, it was noticed that in 11 years of multi-party coalition/minority governments i.e., from Nov-Dec 1989 to 2000, it had nine meetings with an average of 0.8 meetings per year. Further, the total duration of a NDC meeting was too short to accommodate all the CMs’ detailed conversations regarding the State Plans (The Hindu, January 29, 2002; The Hindu, December 27, 2012). Further, instead of unstructured discussions, focused deliberations in the NDC were sought for by the States. None of these issues was taken care of by the successive coalition governments even though promises made in this respect in their CMPs.

The CMPs of all the coalition governments intended to appoint a committee that were expected to take a relook at the Centre-State relations. However, none of them had taken any attempt to implement recommendations made by the previous Commissions. Therefore, although the UF government (1996-98) committed in their CMP that there will be an immediate appointment of “a high-level committee to review and update the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commis-

²² https://interstatecouncil.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/gazette_1.pdf, accessed March 2024. Available upon request.

sion”, the report of the said committee has never been into the public domain, nor has it yet been reported that the Committee did actually function²³.

The proposal to review the Constitution was one of the promises made by the NDA I government in their National Agenda and eventually they appointed the NCRWC (2002). Much like the Sarkaria Commission (1988), most of the recommendations made by the NCRWC (2002) related to strengthening the federal ethos of the country too remained unimplemented²⁴.

It was mentioned in the CMP of the UPA I that a new commission will be set up while keeping in view the sea changes that had taken place in the polity and the economy of India since the Sarkaria Commission had submitted its report in 1988. In pursuing their promise, the UPA I government appointed the Punchhi Commission (2010). **Box 3 & Table 5** clearly indicates that, crucial recommendations made by all the INC-led Central government appointed Commissions i.e., FARC (1969) (**Box 3**); Sarkaria Commission (1988) and Punchhi Commission (2010) (**Table 5**) were more or less alike. Hence none of their recommendations were taken care of by the party itself along with pro-federal forces that allied with them.

²³The Rediff (undated), “UF's Common Minimum Programme falls short of promises”-

<http://www.rediff.com/news/jun/09cmp.htm>, accessed February 16, 2026

²⁴From time to time, various stakeholders demanded for implementation of the recommendations made by the various commissions on Centre-State relations viz Sarkaria (1988); NCRWC (2002) & Punchhi (2010) Commissions. None of the Central governments seemed to have taken care of that including the past and ongoing BJP-led governments. As observed with respect to the implementation status of the recommendations made by the Sarkaria Commission (1988), “Paradoxically barring the period between 1998 and 2004, when the BJP headed the coalition government at the Centre, the party was one of the constant advocates of accepting the Commission’s recommendations” For details see-The Federal (May 8 2021), “Federalism: Modi the PM champions what Modi the CM did not”--

<https://thefederal.com/opinion/federalism-modi-the-pm-champions-what-modi-the-cm-did-not/>, accessed February 16, 2026

Also see; The Wire (February 3 2022), “As CM, Narendra Modi echoed Rahul Gandhi’s statement on India as ‘Union of States’ many times”-- <https://thewire.in/politics/narendra-modi-rahul-gandhi-union-of-states-india>, Lok Sabha Debate (May 21, 2012), “Discussing regarding Centre-State Relations”, accessed February 16, 2026 - <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/23710238/>, Rajya Sabha, Debate (August 3, 2001), Resolution Re ‘Increasing erosion of federal principles in Centre-State relations due to the Union Government usurping the powers of the State Governments’, accessed February 16, 2026

https://rsdebate.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/21922/1/PD_193_03082001_10_p262_p305_13.pdf, accessed February 16, 2026, The Marxist (2008), “Approach paper on restructuring of Centre-State relations”, Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)), Volume XXIV, No. 3, July-September-
https://cpim.org/marxist/200803_marxist-centre-state%20relations.pdf, accessed February 16, 2026, A few years ago, at the 11th ISC meeting (2016), several opposition CMs demanded for implementation of the recommendations of these commissions. For details see-Deccan Chronicle (July 23, 2016), “On federalism, just walk the talk.” --. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/op-ed/230716/on-federalism-just-walk-the-talk.html>, accessed February 16, 2026

Therefore, in sum, pivotal aspects of the recommendations made by all these Commissions related to legislative, executive and financial autonomy of the States remained by and large the same over the last few decades. Thus there will be real difficulties in spotting differences on three aspects; (i) promises made by the successive coalition governments in providing greater autonomy to the States (**Table 2**), (ii) sources of irritations in the sphere of Centre-State relations as expressed by the States till date (**Box 2**) and (iii) basic nature of the recommendations made by these Commissions in order to rectify these maladies (**Table 5**). This leads us to believe that there has not only been stagnancy in this area, but over time, it actually got deteriorated no matter whichever government has been in power.

E) Concluding observations

In recent years, grave concerns have been expressed from many quarters at deepening unitary features of Indian federation and consequent deterioration of Indian federal ethos when the BJP, led by the PM-Mr. Modi, got the absolute majority in two successive GEs held in 2014 & 2019 without having to depend on regional forces in forming these two consecutive Central governments. However, despite this major victory of the BJP, regional parties as a whole that by and large have pro-federal orientations, did not experience any significant loss since 2014 both in terms of vote share and seats in the Indian Parliament. So the question remains as to why such continuous assault on Indian federal spirit could not be checked.

Centre-State relations as an issue in the political system gained greater prominence and the slogan 'more powers to the States', as raised by the pro-federal forces, became one of the important electoral agendas of various political parties since 1967 that continues till date. With a view to describe various political parties' stand on this issue, past (i.e., pre-coalition) literature on Centre-State relations starts from the axiom that the national parties are anti-federal while regional parties are by and large pro-federal.

A national party-the INC was perceived as an unequivocal unitarist or euphemistically speaking- 'reluctant federalist'. Who believes in status-quo and is reluctant to bring any change in the existing structure and pattern of Centre-State relations that has a distinct centripetal bias.

In striking contrast, regional parties at large were treated as homogeneous entities regardless of their power dynamics both at the Central as well as State levels along with their political equation with the Central partner. Therefore, their perceived unanimous stand on advocacy of true federal India was hardly questioned. Instead, regional parties as a whole were seen as a homogeneous group of rebels who fight against their common enemy viz. the unitary Centre in a unified manner. Only difference among them, as depicted in the pre-coalition literature, is that some regional forces are diehard federalists i.e., believe in radical restructuring of Indian federal structure while amending the Constitution while others are simply moderate pro-federal forces that pursue functional aspects of federalism while accepting the sanctity of the Constitution. With the emergence of multi-party rule and more pronouncedly during the coalition era, this sharp line of demarcation between the regional and national parties got blurred. Moreover, pro-federal regional parties hardly behaved as uniformly as expected. Even many a time, they started functioning at cross purposes. This trend continues to date.

So far as national parties are concerned, although pre-dominant position of these parties continued to be pro-unitary, yet when their survival in various coalition governments was dependent on regional parties, they tend to become more accommodative towards the federal aspirations of constituent groups. Further, from time to time, when their nation-wide political dominance came under threat (e.g., when they are out of power for a longer period), they seemed to have taken more pro-federal stance than otherwise.

It is worth noting that although the two national parties e.g., the INC-a traditional unitarist and the BJP seems to have been trading the same path while exhibiting their pro-unitary bias (for the BJP, it became much prominent since 2014), yet their journeys are significantly different since the inception. When the INC maintained its pro-unitary stand consistently except for being part of various coalition governments, the BJP's position has all along been a bit ambivalent.

This is due to the fact that the BJP erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangha (BJS) mainly remained confined to State-level party till the late 1980s and was yet to get consolidated in national politics. Such political reality and electoral compulsion triggered the BJP to be an ardent advocate of the States' autonomy since its establishment in 1980. However, as they consolidated their position in national polity more prominently since the late 1990s, their strong advocacy for the States' autonomy got faded gradually and the party started mirroring the traditional unitarist-the INC on many issues.

Prima facie the slogan for 'more power to the States', as raised by various pro-federal regional parties, seems to have emanated exclusively from rectifying the unitary bias of Indian federation. However, closer examination regarding the origin of the formulation of this demand shows that the concern for protecting and upholding regional chauvinism, pride, culture and language seem to be the main driving force that got eventually translated into the advocacy of strengthening the States' power.

As these regional bosses started capturing power in many States, they increasingly realized that without achieving certain degree of constitutional federalism, i.e. having adequate safeguards in the Constitution along with acquiring procedural transparency where norms and formula based functional federalism is ensured, regional interests and development cannot be protected and attained.

This concern made them articulate their demand more pronouncedly and systematically since the early 1980s that corresponds with the period when regional parties at large started capturing power in various Indian States. Moderate pro-federal regional parties accept the present constitutional structure for they feel that the degree of autonomy of the States is possible within the constitutional framework while merely changing the machinery and the style of functioning of the existing federal structure. Diehard federalists, however, strongly stand up for radical restructuring of the existing federal framework through drastic amendment of the Constitution.

As this demand gained momentum, the national parties were eventually compelled to set up several Commissions that were asked to review the matter regarding the Centre-State relations. These Commissions constituted so far (viz. FARC (1969); Sarkaria Commission (1988); NCWRC (2002) and Punchhi Commission (2010), seemed to have been in agreement with the grievances expressed by these regional parties regarding the existence of centripetal bias of the Indian federation. And hence these Commissions recommended for streamlining functional

aspects of Indian federalism while accepting the sanctity of the Constitution. They urged for ensuring formula and norm-based federal structure where procedural transparency and ownership of the States in all matters that affect them can be institutionalized.

The coalition era gave an opportunity to the pro-federal regional parties to persuade the national parties i.e., major coalition partners-the INC & the BJP to include federal agendas in their electoral promises. Eventually various coalition governments came up with Common Minimum Programme (CMP) (when led by the INC & others) or The National Agenda for Governance (NAG) (when led by the BJP). It was expected that all the constituents of the successive coalition governments will pursue this common goal as depicted in their respective CMPs & NAGs.

During the period of coalition, when these regional parties started being part of various Central governments, they not only had some policy making space but also enjoyed greater bargaining power while they managed to exert various types of quantitative and qualitative influences on the Central polity. With a view to figuring out the extent of control that pro-federal political parties had over these coalitional governments, numerical strengths of these regional parties (both individual and collective) require to be looked at. Besides, several qualitative areas also need to be considered in order to assess potential lobbying power of these federalists both collectively and individually in furthering the cause of institutionalizing and strengthening the autonomy of the States in Indian federation.

This new-found empowerment of regional parties created the potential of putting their long-standing objectives of restructuring Indian federal system along true federal lines into practice. However, not only promises made by them as part of various coalitions were not kept, but also these coalition governments, supported by pro-federal forces, are often seen frequently resorting to anti-federal provisions of the Constitution.

This coalition era even failed to live up to the expectations of all the pro-federal parameters set by these regional parties themselves. Recommendations made by the successive Commissions on Centre-State relations remained unimplemented during this period too. As a consequence, it would be difficult to spot differences among three distinct aspects of this era when juxtaposed with one another viz., (i) promises made by the successive coalition governments; (ii) recommendations made by the various Commissions on Centre-State relations and (iii) grievances expressed by the States regarding their autonomy (including that expressed recently).

This worrisome situation might have caused by the fact that Indian federalists have never taken an attempt to form a non-electoral common platform like 'Federal Block'. This proposed forum could have facilitated the path of pursuing their unanimous goal- 'more power to the States' in a continual and robust manner. On the contrary, regional federalists so far have come up with immediate interest-driven, short-lived hence occasional outbursts on the question of the States' autonomy either collectively or individually. These trends might have led to reinforcing unitary bias of Indian federation instead of setting an example of better 'federal political culture'.

References

- Adeney, Katharine. "Hindu Nationalists and Federal Structures in an Era of Nationalism." 2005. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334443349>.
- Azam, K. J. "The Sixth General Elections: A Study of the Election Manifestos of the National Parties." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 3 (1977): 375–394. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4185480>.
- Basu, J., ed. *Documents of the Communist Movement in India*. Vol. 8. Undated. <https://www.marxists.org/subject/india/cpi/documents-of-communist-movement/volume-viii-1957.pdf>.
- Bhattacharyya, Harihar. "Indian Federalism and Indian Communism: Conflict and Collaboration." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 62, no. 1 (2001): 41–60. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42753652>.
- Chakrabarty, Bidyut. *Indian Politics and Society Since Independence: Events, Processes and Ideology*. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Chandrashekar, B. K. "Panchayati Raj Bill: The Real Flaw." *Economic & Political Weekly* (July 1, 1989): 1433–1435.
- Dua, D. B. "Presidential Rule in India: A Study in Crisis Politics." *Asian Survey* 19, no. 6 (1979): 611–626. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2643898>.
- Dua, D. B. "Federalism or Patrimonialism: The Making and Unmaking of Chief Ministers in India." *Asian Survey* 25, no. 8 (1985): 793–804. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2644110>.
- Hirway, Indira. "Panchayati Raj at Crossroads." *Economic & Political Weekly* 24, no. 29 (1989): 1664–1666.
- Iyer, Indira. *Fiscal Competition, Collusion and Soft Budget Constraints in a Federal Setup*. PhD diss., George Washington University, 2011.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe, and Gilles Verniers. "India's 2009 Elections: The Resilience of Regionalism and Ethnicity." *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 3 (2009).
- Jha, Pranay. "India's Cooperative Federalism during the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Indian Journal of Public Administration* 68, no. 2 (2022): 245–256. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/00195561211072568>.
- Karat, Prakash. "Federalism and the Political System in India." *The Marxist* 20, no. 3 (2004): 1–9. <https://www.cpim.org/marxist/200403-federalism-prakash.pdf>.
- Khan, M. G. "Coalition Government and Federal System in India." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 64, nos. 3–4 (2003): 167–190. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41855780>.

Lahiry, Sukumar. "Jana Sangha and Bharatiya Janata Party: A Comparative Assessment of Their Philosophy and Strategy." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 66, no. 4 (2005): 831–850. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41856171>.

Lieten, G. K. "Janata as a Continuity of the System." *Social Scientist* 9, nos. 5–6 (1980–81): 14–35. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/352040>.

Maheswari, B. L. "Centre-State Relations, Issue Awareness and Party Positions." *Economic & Political Weekly* (June 12, 1971): 1191–1194.

Mitra, Ashok. "Centre-State Relations: A Return of Old Suspicions." *Economic & Political Weekly* (May 28–June 4, 2005): 2225–2227.

Omvedt, Gail. "The Dravidian Movement." 2005. <https://velivada.com/2018/06/05/the-dravidian-movement/>.

Pai, Sudha. "Regional Parties and the Emerging Pattern of Politics in India." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 3 (1990): 393–415. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41855505>.

Paliwal, R. K. *Role of Jana Sangh in Janata Party*. MPhil diss., Aligarh Muslim University, 1983. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/144514661.pdf>.

Pillai, K. R. "Jan Sangh—A Rightist Opposition to the Congress Party." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 27, no. 2 (1966): 67–81. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41854178>.

Ray, Amal. "Legitimacy Crisis in Centre-State Relations." *Economic & Political Weekly* (August 22, 1981): 1380–1384.

Ray, Amal. "From Consensus to Confrontation: Federal Politics in India." *Economic & Political Weekly* (October 2, 1982): 1619–1624.

Rodden, Jonathan, and Steven W. Duke. "The Shifting Political Economy of Redistribution in the Indian Federation." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Society for New Institutional Economics, Tucson, AZ, September 30–October 3, 2004. <http://web.mit.edu/jrodden/www/materials/rodden.wilkinson.isnie2004.pdf>.

Sadanandan, Anoop. "Bridling Central Tyranny in India: How Regional Parties Restrain the Federal Government." *Asian Survey* 52, no. 2 (2012): 247–269.

Sathyamurthy, T. V. "Centre-State Relations: Southern Chief Ministers' Meetings." *Economic & Political Weekly* 18, no. 15 (1983): 576–579.

Schakel, Arjan H., et al. "India after the 2014 General Elections: BJP Dominance and the Crisis of the Third-Party System." *Regional and Federal Studies* 29, no. 3 (2019): 329–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2019.1614921>.

Sen, Mohit, ed. *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*. Vol. 8 (1951–56). 1960. <https://www.marxists.org/subject/india/cpi/documents-of-history-of-cpi/volume-viii-1951-1956.pdf>.

Sharma, Pradeep. *Bharatiya Jana Sangha: The Development of a Political Party in India*. Master's thesis, Kansas State University, 1969. <https://core.ac.uk/download/33370290.pdf>.

Sridharan, E. "Coalition Congruence in India's Federal System." In *Coalition Politics and Federalism*, edited by Adrián Albala and Josep M. Reniu. Cham: Springer, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75100-9_5.

Tummala, Krishna K. "India's Federalism under Stress." *Asian Survey* 32, no. 6 (1992): 538–553.

Vaishnav, Milan, and Jamie Hinton. *The Dawn of India's Fourth Party System*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Working Paper, September 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/09/05/dawn-of-india-s-fourth-party-system-pub-79759>.

Vanitha, S. "Government and Politics of Tamil Nadu." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 75, no. 2 (2014): 327–342. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24701140>.

NEWSPAPERS & OTHER SOURCES

DNA India. "Sarkaria Commission's Guidelines Come into Focus." January 25, 2006. http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_sarkaria-commissions-guidelines-come-into-focus_1009496.

Tax India Online (TIOL). "Put NDC Above Politics and Redefine Its Role." October 25, 2011. https://taxindiaonline.com/RC2/inside2.php3?filename=bnews_detail.php3&newsid=13492.

The Statesman. "Federal Friction: India Needs a Cooperative Structure of Governance." April 12, 2012. http://thestatesman.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=406356&catid=38.

The Siasat Daily. "Centre Damaging Federal Setup, 'Double Engine' a Myth: KCR." March 15, 2022. <https://www.siasat.com/centre-damaging-federal-setup-double-engine-a-myth-kcr-2291232/>.

The Shillong Times. "Chief Ministers Meeting to Save Federalism Is Significant." February 16, 2022. <https://theshillongtimes.com/2022/02/16/chief-ministers-meeting-to-save-federalism-is-significant/>.

The Commune. "Instances When DMK Leaders Made Remarks against North Indians." June 6, 2022. <https://thecommunemag.com/instances-when-dmk-leaders-made-remarks-against-north-indians/>.

Organiser. "Tamil Nadu: DMK Ministers Launched Politics of South vs North India." June 7, 2022. <https://organiser.org/2022/06/07/84668/bharat/tamil-nadu-dmk-ministers-launched-politics-of-south-vs-north-india/>.

Oneindia. "DMK–Congress: Frenemies' First Lok Sabha Alliance Dates Back to 1971." February 22, 2019. <https://www.oneindia.com/india/dmk-congress-frenemies-first-lok-sabha-alliance-dates-back-to-1971-2855157.html>.

Deccan Herald. “When Vajpayee Erred in Imposing President’s Rule in Bihar.” August 17, 2018. <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/when-vajpayee-erred-imposing-687955.html>.

Babushahi. “Badal Raised the Issue of Rewriting the Indian Constitution.” May 15, 2012. <https://www.babushahi.com/opinion.php?oid=193>.

The Sunday Guardian. “Time to Remember Jana Sangh’s History.” October 20, 2018. <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/time-remember-jana-sanghs-history>.

Deccan Chronicle. “BJP Has Never Spelt Out What ‘Parivartan’ It Hopes to Bring.” March 15, 2021. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/columnists/150321/aakar-patel-bjp-has-never-spelt-out-what-parivartan-it-hopes-t.html>.

The Economic Times. “At Dussehra Rally, Uddhav Thackeray Takes Aim at Several Political ‘Ravanas’.” October 16, 2021. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/at-dussehra-rally-uddhav-thackeray-takes-aim-at-several-political-ravanas/articleshow/87056017.cms>.

The Week. “Non-BJP CMs Conclave: Understanding M.K. Stalin’s Fight for State Rights.” February 15, 2022. <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2022/02/15/non-bjp-cms-conclave-understanding-mk-stalin-fight-for-state-rights.html>.

The New Indian Express. “States’ Fight for Financial Autonomy.” May 27, 2022. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/editorials/2022/may/27/states-fight-for-financial-autonomy-2458470.html>.

The Tribune. “Article 370: SAD ‘Dumps’ Its Core Ideology of Federalism.” August 6, 2019. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/punjab/article-370-sad-dumps-its-core-ideology-of-federalism-813427>.

The Tribune. “Restructuring Our Federal Polity: Need for Fresh Perspective on Autonomy.” August 6, 2000. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000806/edit.htm#1>.

BusinessLine. “BusinessLine Twenty Years Ago Today: Indrajit Gupta Gets Home; Commerce for Ramaiah.” January 20, 2018. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/businessline-twenty-years-ago-today-indrajit-gupta-gets-home-commerce-for-ramaiah/article8788732.ece>.

Scroll.in. “It Was India’s Constitution That Made the Emergency Possible.” November 19, 2018. <https://scroll.in/article/902583/it-was-indias-constitution-that-made-the-emergency-possible-though-many-opposed-the-measures>.

Outlook India. “SC Expresses Anguish over Non-Implementation of Sarkaria Report.” September 28, 2005. <http://news.outlookindia.com/items.aspx?artid=325714>.

The Times of India. “Debate in Tamil Nadu House: Stalin Insists on Using the Word ‘Union,’ Not ‘Centre’.” June 24, 2021. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/not-a-crime-well-continue-to-use-ondriya-arasu-says-tamil-nadu-cm-m-k-stalin/articleshow/83797098.cms>.

The Financial Express. “Balance of Federalism: What Separates the Politics from Constitutionality in Matters of Centre vs State?” October 19, 2021. <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/balance-of-federalism-what-separates-the-politics-from-constitutionality-in-matters-of-centre-vs-state/2352180/>.

The Indian Express. “In Congress’s Coalition of the Unwilling, Leaders Can Connect but Parties Cannot.” December 23, 2010. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/in-congress-s-coalition-of-the-unwilling-leaders-can-connect-but-parties-cannot/728346/0>.

The Indian Express. “February 11, 1977: Forty Years Ago—Janata Manifesto.” February 11, 2017. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/february-11-1977-forty-years-ago-janata-manifesto-4518368/>.

The Indian Express. “Explained: A Short History of the Demand for ‘Dravida Nadu,’ and Its Evolution.” July 8, 2022. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-a-short-history-of-the-demand-for-a-dravida-nadu-its-evolution-8013279/>.

The Indian Express. “Periyar and the Dravidian Movement in Tamil Nadu.” April 19, 2017. <https://indianexpress.com/article/research/aiadm-k-sasikala-panneerselvam-jayalalithaa-tamil-nadu-dravidian-movement-4619852/>.

The Indian Express. “The Same Old Coalition.” June 8, 2018. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/bjp-congress-bsp-jdu-samajwadi-opposition-alliance-2019-elections-5208680/>.

The Indian Express. “Tewari Asks Akalis to Clarify Stand on Uniform Civil Code.” April 9, 2014. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/tewari-asks-akalis-to-clarify-stand-on-uniform-civil-code/>.

The Indian Express. “Shiromani Akali Dal Turns 100: Its Journey So Far, and Punjab’s.” December 23, 2021. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/shiromani-akali-dal-sad-history-punjab-7684166/>.

The Indian Express. “10 Years Ago, Modi as CM Had Flagged UPA Threat; Federal Shoe Now on the Other Foot.” June 4, 2021. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/10-yrs-ago-modi-as-cm-had-flagged-upa-threat-federal-shoe-now-on-the-other-foot-7343235/>.

The Hindu. “Governors in the Firing Line.” July 7, 2014. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/Governors-in-the-firing-line/article11255891.ece>.

The Hindu. “The Democratisation of Politics.” February 2, 2003. <http://hindu.com/thehindu/lr/2003/02/02/stories/2003020200180300.htm>.

The Hindu. “Role of Inter-Governmental Agencies.” January 29, 2002. <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/op/2002/01/29/stories/2002012900090100.htm>.

The Hindu. “Centre-State Relations: Centre of the Debate.” February 14, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-hindus-editorial-on-centre-state-relations-and-a-political-plan/article65049711.ece>.

The Hindu. “Centre Ruling States by Proxy: Kejriwal.” October 1, 2015. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Centre-ruling-States-by-proxy-Kejriwal/article60226834.ece>.

The Hindu. “The Janata Parivar in Electoral Politics: A Timeline.” April 15, 2015. <https://www.thehindu.com/specials/timelines/the-janata-experiment/article62051482.ece>.

The Hindu. “Jayalalithaa ‘Humiliated,’ Walks Out of NDC Meeting.” December 27, 2012. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/jayalalithaa-humiliated-walks-out-of-ndc-meeting/article4244531.ece>.

Hindustan Times. “Double-Engine Govt Euphemism for Dictatorship, Says Yashwant Sinha.” January 24, 2022. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/doubleengine-govt-euphemism-for-dictatorship-says-yashwant-sinha-101643020509000.html>.

Hindustan Times. “It Is Good to Have Govts of Same Party in Centre, State: Rahul.” April 11, 2009. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/it-is-good-to-have-govts-of-same-party-in-centre-state-rahul/story-e6vgYrcE7nFTko4evNICxO.html>.

Hindustan Times. “SAD Marks 100 Years, Calls for Joint Front of Regional Parties to Strengthen Federalism.” December 15, 2021. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/sad-calls-for-joint-front-of-regional-parties-to-strengthen-federalism-101639511884173.html>.

Hindustan Times. “‘Unanimous Decision’: AIADMK Pulls Out of BJP-Led National Democratic Alliance.” September 25, 2023. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/aiadmk-pulls-out-of-bjp-led-national-democratic-alliance-101695652503581.html>.

Firstpost. “Does Jayalalithaa’s Death Signal the Fall of Federalism in Indian Democracy?” December 10, 2016. <https://www.firstpost.com/india/does-jayalalithaas-death-signal-the-fall-of-federalism-in-indian-democracy-3149792.html>.

The Arunachal Times. “The Assault on Federalism.” February 17, 2022. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2022/02/17/the-assault-on-federalism/>.

India Today. “Conclave of Four Southern Non-Congress (I) Chief Ministers Surprisingly Low-Key.” July 22, 2013. <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/special-report/story/19830415-conclave-of-four-southern-non-congressi-chief-ministers-surprisingly-low-key-770599-2013-07-22>.

India Today. “Evolve a Consensus on the Norms for Imposing President’s Rule.” March 25, 2013. <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/editors-note/story/19980629-evolve-a-consensus-on-the-norms-for-imposing-presidents-rule-825213-1998-06-28>.

The Print. “Without Planning Commission, States and Centre Need Forum for Policy Dialogue: N.K. Singh.” December 11, 2020. <https://theprint.in/economy/without-planning-commission-states-centre-need-forum-for-policy-dialogue-n-k-singh/565158/>.

The Print. “Sardar Hukam Singh, a Minority Rights Champion in Constituent Assembly.” October 13, 2018. <https://theprint.in/forgotten-founders/sardar-hukam-singh-a-minority-rights-champion-in-constituent-assembly/132147/>.

The Print. “How Rising Centre-State Friction Is Chipping Away at Modi’s ‘Cooperative Federalism’ Mantra.” November 19, 2020. <https://theprint.in/india/governance/how-rising-centre-state-friction-is-chipping-away-at-modis-cooperative-federalism-mantra/546883/>.

The Print. “SAD Will Fight for Federalism, Save Punjab from Starvation: Sukhbir Badal on Changed BBMB Norms.” February 26, 2022. <https://theprint.in/india/sad-will-fight-for-federalism-save-punjab-from-starvation-sukhbir-badal-on-changed-bbmb-norms/849465/>.

Mint. “Emergency and Janata Era.” May 16, 2014. <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/fUZH3KhNn5LCw7FSNmphfK/Emergency-and-Janata-era.html>.

Mint. “Will Bihar Results Drive Cooperative Federalism?” November 20, 2015. <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/tpa47rW3ddSZ6bePH28g9K/Will-Bihar-results-drive-cooperative-federalism.html>.

The Wire. “Centre Granting Flexibility to States Is Crucial to India’s Development.” February 14, 2019. <https://thewire.in/government/centre-granting-flexibility-to-states-is-crucial-to-indias-development>.

The Wire. “The Sangh’s Ideology against Federalism Underlies the Centre’s Move in J&K.” September 30, 2019. <https://thewire.in/government/the-sanghs-ideology-against-federalism-underlies-the-centres-move-in-jk>.

The Asia Dialogue. “Where Are India’s Regional Parties Heading?” July 17, 2019. <https://theasiadialogue.com/2019/07/17/where-are-indias-regional-parties-heading/>.

JOURNALS & OTHERS

Economic & Political Weekly. “Centre-State Relations.” February 11, 1989, 271–272.

Economic & Political Weekly. “Punjab: Diversionary Manoeuvre.” January 26, 1991, 140.

Economic & Political Weekly. “Centre and States: Article 356.” April 6, 1991, 856–857.

Economic & Political Weekly. “Centre-State Relations: Proof of the Pudding.” *Economic & Political Weekly* 31, no. 25 (June 22, 1996): 1557.

Economic & Political Weekly. “Centrally Sponsored Schemes: Round the Mulberry Bush.” November 23, 1996, 3034.

Frontline. “On Contentious Territory.” 18, no. 17 (August 18–31, 2001). <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1817/18171060.htm>.

Executive Intelligence Review. “Asia.” 4, no. 9 (February 29, 1977): Asia 5–Asia 7. New York.

Janata Weekly. “Why Janata Party Parted with Jan Sangh over RSS.” <https://janataweekly.org/why-janata-party-parted-with-jan-sangh-over-rss/>.

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). *Constitution of Shiromani Akali Dal*. Accessed online. <https://hindi.eci.gov.in/files/file/4901-shiromani-akali-dal/>.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "Resolution on Centre's Assault on the Federal Structure of the Indian Union." National Executive Meeting, Patna (Bihar), June 13, 2010.

http://www.bjp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=197.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "Political Resolution: UPA a Grave Threat to Our Federalism." National Executive Committee Meeting, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), June 3–4, 2011.

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA PUBLICATIONS

Government of India. *First Administrative Reforms Commission: Report on Centre-State Relationships*. New Delhi: Government of India, 1969.

Government of India. *Commission on Centre-State Relations: Report (Sarkaria Commission)*. Part I and Part II. New Delhi: Government of India, 1988.

Government of India. *National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC): Report*. Vols. I–II. New Delhi: Government of India, 2002.

Government of India. *Second Administrative Reforms Commission: Seventh Report, Capacity Building for Conflict Resolution*. New Delhi: Government of India, February 2008.

Government of India. *Commission on Centre-State Relations: Report (Punchhi Commission)*. Vols. I–VIII. New Delhi: Government of India, March 2010.

Government of India. *Commission on Centre-State Relations: Responses from Stakeholders, Supplementary Volume III (Punchhi Commission)*. New Delhi: Government of India, March 2010.

Rajya Sabha Debate. "Resolution Re: Amending Constitution for Bringing Back Subjects Transferred from State List to Concurrent List." Debate, November 29, 2019.

<https://cms.rajyasabha.nic.in/UploadedFiles/Debates/VerbatimDebates/250/29112019/Fullday.pdf>.

Rajya Sabha Debate (a). "Resolution Re: Increasing Erosion of Federal Principles in Centre-State Relations Due to the Union Government Usurping the Powers of the State Governments." Debate, August 3, 2001.

https://rsdebate.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/21922/1/PD_193_03082001_10_p262_p305_13.pdf.

Rajya Sabha Debate (b). "Resolution Re: Flood Situation in the Country Caused by Heavy Rains, Resulting in Loss of Lives, Property and Crops." Debate, August 3, 2001.

<http://164.100.47.5/newsynopsis1/englishsessionno/193/03082001.htm>.

Lok Sabha Debate. "Discussion Regarding Centre-State Relations." Debate, May 21, 2012.

<https://indiankanoon.org/doc/23710238/>.

Government of Tamil Nadu. *Report of the Centre-State Relations Inquiry Committee (Rajamannar Committee)*. Chennai: Government of Tamil Nadu, 1971.

https://www.tamildigitallibrary.in/admin/assets/book/TVA_BOK_0009072_Report_of_the_cent-re-state_relations_inquiry_committee.pdf.

ELECTION MANIFESTOES OF VARIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). *Election Manifestoes*. Various years.

Indian National Congress (INC). *Election Manifestoes*. Various years.

Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI[M]). *Election Manifestoes*. Various years.

Communist Party of India (CPI). *Election Manifestoes*. Various years.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). *Election Manifestoes*. Various years.

All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). *Election Manifestoes*. Various years.

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). *Election Manifestoes*. Various years.

United Front. *Election Manifestoes*. 1996–1998.

National Democratic Alliance (NDA-I). *Election Manifesto*. 1998–1999.

National Democratic Alliance (NDA-II). *Election Manifesto*. 1999–2004.

United Progressive Alliance (UPA-I). *Election Manifesto*. 2004–2009.

Tables and Boxes

Table: 1

Presence of diehard federalists in the Indian Parliament (*Lok Sabha*) during the first five General Elections (GEs)

Diehard federalists	1 st GE (1952)	2 nd GE (1957)	3 rd GE (1962)	4 th GE (1967)	5 th GE (1971)
Communist Party of India (CPI)	16	27	29	23	23
Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI (M)	--	--	--	19	25
Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)	4	0	3	3#	1
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)	--	2@	7	25	23
Total strength of diehard federalists	20	29	39	70	72

Sources: Compiled from various documents

@For the DMK, it was the first national election, and the party won 2 MP seats. Due to the non-recognition of various State level parties such as the DMK, the party had been grouped under independent parties.-- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1957_Indian_general_election_in_Madras

#Akali Dal (Sant Fatheh Singh) got 3 MP seats; Akali Dal (Tara Singh) got no MP seats

Table: 2
Promises made by the various Central coalition governments (1989-2014)

Common Minimum Programme (CMP)# of the United Front (UF) government (1996-1998)	The National Agenda for Governance of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) I (1998-99) & the NDA II (1999-2004) governments	Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-I (2004-2009) & the UPA-II (2009-14) @ governments
Appointment of a commission to review Centre-State relations		
The Sarkaria Commission gave its report over 10 years ago. The UF government will immediately appoint a High-Level Committee to review and update the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission (1988)	• Suitable steps will be taken to ensure harmonious Centre-State relations in the light of the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission • Appointment of a commission to review the Constitution to ensure harmonious Centre-State relations	The Sarkaria Commission (1988) had last looked at the issue of Centre-State relations over two decades ago. A new commission will be set up for this purpose, keeping in view the sea-changes that have taken place in the polity and economy of India since then
Devolution of more financial power to the States		
The proposed Commission will also look into the vital question of devolution of financial powers from the Central government to the State governments.	Devolution of more financial and administrative powers and functions to the States	• The share of the States in the single, divisible pool of taxes will be enhanced. • The issue of payment of royalties to the States in the area of minerals will be reviewed
Minimizing Central intrusion into the States' matter via Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS)		
Transfer of most CSSs to the States	--	All CSSs, except in national priority areas like family planning will be transferred to the States
Re-activating inter-governmental consultative forums-National Development Council (NDC) & Inter-State Council (ISC)		
Reactivating and energizing the NDC & the ISC	--	The NDC will be made as a more effective instrument of cooperative federalism. The ISC will be activated

Sources: Election Manifestoes of the various coalition governments viz. United Front (1996-98); National Democratic Alliance (NDA-I) (1998-99); National Democratic Alliance (NDA-II) (1999-04); United Progressive Alliance (UPA-I) (2004-09).

Note: The National Front (1989-91) government did not have any Common Minimum Programme (CMP). For details see- The Indian Express (December 23, 2010), “In Congress’s coalition of the unwilling, leaders can connect but parties cannot”--<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/in-congress-s-coalition-of-the-unwilling-leaders-can-connect-but-parties-cannot/728346/0>

The UPA II (2009-14) government too did not have a CMP. However, it was decided that common issues as depicted in the election manifestos of other allied regional political parties will be included in building a common agenda. For details see- The Indian Express (May 20, 2009), “Cong downplays demand for Common Minimum Programme”- <https://indianexpress.com/article/political-pulse/cong-downplays-demand-for-common-minimum-programme/>
#In addition, the UF coalition government (1996-98) promised in their CMP that immediate action will be taken in areas such as; (i) providing greater autonomy to the States in determining development priorities (ii) granting greater freedom to the States in drawing up State Plans (iii) giving prompt Central assent to the State Bills on matters within the States’ jurisdiction (v) amending Article 356 of the Constitution in the light of the recent decisions of the Supreme Court (Bommai judgement)¹ to prevent the misuse of this constitutional provision.

Table:3**Number of 'full Council'@ meetings of the Inter-State Council (ISC) held since its inception (1990)**

	Governments at the Centre	'Full Council' meetings of the ISC held during the tenure of the various Central governments since its inception (1990)	Total number of 'Full Council' meetings of the ISC held since its inception (1990)
1	National Front Govt. (1989-91)	1 st ISC meeting (1990)	1
2	Indian National Congress (INC) Govt. (1991-96)	None	0
3	United Front Govt. (1996-98)	2 nd ISC meeting (1996), 3 rd ISC meeting (17.7. 1997) & 4 th ISC meeting (28.11,1997)	3
4	National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-I (1998-99) & NDA-II (1999-2004) Govt.	5 th ISC meeting (1999), 6 th ISC meeting (2000), 7 th (2001) & 8 th ISC meeting (2003)	4
5	United Progressive Alliance (UPA-I (2004-09) & UPA-II (2009-14) Govt.	9 th ISC meeting (2005) & 10 th ISC meeting (2006)	2
7	National Democratic Alliance (NDA) (2014-19) (Modi Govt.)	11 th ISC meeting (2016)	1
8	National Democratic Alliance (NDA) (2019- as of 31 st Dec. 22) (Modi Govt.)	None	0
	Total number of ISC meetings held		11

Source : <http://interstatecouncil.nic.in/isc-meetings/>

@Since the ISC's inception (1990) till date, 'full Council' (consisting of all the members) of the ISC met only eleven times i.e., roughly once in three years

Table:4**Implementation status of the decisions taken at the Inter-State Council (ISC) meetings as mentioned in SARC (2008) report.**

No.	Decisions taken at the ISC meetings	Status of implementation
1	Discretionary power exercised by the Governors	
1 (a)	Articles 200 and 201 of the Constitution should be amended laying down time limits of one month for Governor and four months for the President respectively for assenting to Bills, failing which the Bill would be deemed to have been passed	Not accepted
1 (b)	Retaining Article 365 (dealing with powers of the Union to issue directions to the States in matters following within its executive powers) subject to its sparing application	Accepted
1 (c)	Article 356 may be invoked only sparingly. Safeguards contained in the Bommai Judgment@ which have already become the law of the land, are adequate to prevent misuse of the article.	Agreed in principle, but no amendment in the Constitution was deemed necessary in view of Article 141
2	Removal and appointment of the Governors	
2 (a)	Obligatory consultations with the State Chief Ministers before appointing the Governors	Not accepted
3	Legislative & Executive autonomy of the States	
3 (a)	Transfer of 'residuary powers' from the Union to the Concurrent List	Not accepted
3 (b)	Prior consultation with the States, except in cases of urgency, for enacting legislations in subjects that fall under the Concurrent List	Accepted in principle

Source: Second Administrative Reform Commission (SARC) (February 2008), Seventh Report, Capacity Building for Conflict Resolution Government of India (GoI), New Delhi: Para 14.3.1.1.6-- https://darpg.gov.in/sites/default/files/capacity_building7.pdf
 @ see endnote i

Table:5**Recommendations made by the successive Commissions on Centre-State Relations**

Sarkaria Commission (1988)	NCRWC (2002)	Punchhi Commission (2010)
1. Executive & legislative autonomy of the States	1. Executive & legislative autonomy of the States	1. Executive & legislative autonomy of the States
a. Streamlining the process of Appointment & Removal of Governor-a Constitutional Head of a State		
<u>Appointment & Removal of the Governor:-</u> Only non-political person and a person not belonging to the State should be appointed as Governor of the concerned State. In appointing Governor, consultation by the Union Government with the state's Chief minister should be made obligatory (and not as a matter of convention) and for this purpose, a Constitutional amendment will be necessary. The Governor's tenure of office of five years in a State should not be disturbed except very rarely and that too, for some extremely compelling reason	<u>Appointment & Removal of the Governor:-</u> Only non-political person and a person not belonging to the State should be appointed as Governor of the concerned State. Governor of a State should be appointed by the President, after consultation with the Chief Minister of that State. Normally the five-year term should be adhered to, and removal or transfer of the Governor should be by following a similar procedure as for appointment i.e. after consultation with the Chief Minister of the concerned State.	<u>Appointment & Removal of the Governor:-</u> Only non-political person and a person not belonging to the State should be appointed as Governor of the concerned State. <u>The</u> Governor should be given fixed five-year tenure, and their removal should not be at the sweet will of the government at the Centre. An appropriate procedure under which a Governor, who is to be removed, for whatever reasons, be developed and the concerned Governor be given an opportunity to defend his position.

b. Discretionary powers of the Governors be curbed		
• <u>Dismissing an elected State government (Article 356):</u> This provision should be used as a measure of last resort, and it be described as an extraordinary provision. • <u>Reserving State Bills for indefinite period (Article 200 & 201):</u> Needless reservation of State Bills for the President's consideration should be avoided. Bills should be reserved only in exceptional circumstances, as indicated by the Commission. The Governor should take decision regarding Bills for the President's consideration within a period not exceeding one month from the date on which the Bill is presented to him	• <u>Dismissing an elected State government (Article 356):</u> Article 356 must be used sparingly and only as a remedy of the last resort. Limiting the misuse of this Article lies in creating adequate safeguards in the Constitutional provision. • <u>Reserving State Bills for indefinite period (Article 200 & 201):</u> There should be a time-limit - say a period of six months – within which the Governor should take a decision whether to grant assent or to reserve a Bill for consideration of the President. If the Bill is reserved for consideration of the President, there should be a time-limit, say of three months, within which the President should take a decision	• <u>Dismissing an elected State government (Article 356):</u> To check its misuse by the Centre, “localizing emergency provisions” is suggested where localized areas i.e., either a district or parts of a district of a State be brought under the Governor's rule • <u>Reserving State Bills for indefinite period (Article 200 & 201):</u> The Governor should make his decision on the Bill within a maximum period of six months after submission to him. The President should be able to decide consenting or withholding consent in reasonable time say six months. The decision of the Governor & President be communicated to the State
c. The States' say in the matter of the Concurrent List be considered		
<u>Concurrent List:</u> There should be a firm convention of Union-State consultation regarding legislation on an item in the Concurrent List. This convention should be strictly adhered to, except in rare and exceptional cases of extreme urgency or emergency	<u>Concurrent List:</u> It is essential to institutionalize the process of consultation between the Union and the States on legislation under the Concurrent List	<u>Concurrent List:</u> For cultivating better Centre-State relations and to facilitate effective implementation of the laws on the subjects fall in the Concurrent List, it is necessary that some broad agreement is reached between the Union and the States before introducing legislation in the Parliament on matters in the Concurrent List. The existing arrangements in this regard require institutionalization through the Inter-State

		Council (ISC)
2. Financial autonomy of the States be enhanced	2. Financial autonomy of the States be enhanced	2 Financial autonomies of the States be enhanced
• <u>Surcharge and Cess:</u> Cesses be levied by the Union Government in view of meeting the special needs and for limited durations and for specific purposes only. Likewise, the surcharge on Income Tax should not be levied by the Union Government except for a specific purpose and for a strictly limited period only. • <u>Service Tax:</u> Not Applicable • <u>Market Borrowing:</u> The Union Government should give its consent freely to the States for borrowing from banks and financial institutions. • <u>Royalty on minerals and coal:</u> The review of the royalty rates on minerals should be made every two years and well in time, as and when they fall due. The same procedure should also apply to royalty on petroleum and natural gas.	• <u>Surcharge and Cess:</u> There should be a public policy to move decisively in the direction of doing away with the surcharges as part of the Union's fiscal armoury. • <u>Service Tax:</u> Present mechanism of imposition of service tax only by the Centre fail to tap the full potential of the service sector of a vast range of services which are primarily local in nature. The States be empowered to levy State level service taxes through Constitutional amendment. • <u>Market Borrowing:</u> No Recommendation was made. • <u>Royalty on minerals and coal:</u> No Recommendation was made.	• <u>Surcharge and Cess:</u> Central government should review all the existing cesses and surcharges with a view to bringing down their share in the gross tax revenue of the Centre. • <u>Service Tax:</u> Jurisdiction of taxation of services between the Centre and the States should be clearly demarcated and the States should be empowered to tax services which are of local nature and to introduce these changes, the Constitution may be suitably amended. Service tax should be brought under the divisible pool. • <u>Market Borrowing:</u> As long as the States remain within the overall borrowing ceilings fixed for them by the Central government and fiscal deficit targets fixed under their own Fiscal Responsibility & Budget Management (FRBM) laws, the States should have access to the market without requiring the Central government's approval. • <u>Royalty on minerals and coal:</u> The royalty rates on major minerals should be revised at least every three years without any delay. The States should be properly compensated for

		any delay in the revision of royalty beyond three years
3. The States' role in the inter-governmental resource transfer institutions (UFC & PC) be ensured	3. The States' role in the inter-governmental resource transfer institutions (UFC & PC) be ensured	3 The States' role in the inter-governmental resource transfer institutions (UFC & PC) be ensured
• <u>Union Finance Commission (UFC):</u> Although there is no need to formalize the process of consultation with the States in finalizing the Terms of References (ToRs) of the UFCs. Nonetheless, it is desirable that this healthy practice of informal consultation with the States in this matter should continue. • <u>Planning Commission (PC):</u> Full and effective consultation with the States at all stages of the Planning process should be assured by the PC	• <u>Union Finance Commission (UFC):</u> It is desirable to associate the States more actively in deciding the additional ToRs of the UFCs, preferably by having the National Development Council (NDC) to endorse the additional ToR. • <u>Planning Commission (PC):</u> No Recommendation	• <u>Union Finance Commission (UFC):</u> There should be an effective mechanism to involve the States in the finalization of the ToRs of the UFCs • <u>Planning Commission (PC):</u> The PC may finalise the Five-Year Plans in consultation with the States to ensure broad correspondence with the national objectives. Further, detailed exercise of approving the States' annual Plans may not be necessary. The States should be given freedom to pursue their Plan according to their own needs and priorities within the framework of nationally accepted priorities.
4. Inter-governmental consultative mechanisms be activated	4 Inter-governmental consultative mechanisms be activated	4 Inter-governmental consultative mechanisms be activated
• <u>Inter-State Council (ISC):</u> ISC should be constituted under the Article 263 of the Constitution • <u>National Development Council (NDC):</u> The NDC should be given Constitutional status and be made to function more effectively. The NDC can emerge as the highest political level Inter-governmental body for giving a direction and thrust to planned development of the country. Being the supreme inter-governmental body for all matters re-	• <u>Inter-State Council (ISC):</u> Individual and collective consultation with the States should be undertaken through the ISC. The ISC Order (1990), issued by the President for constitution of ISC, may clearly specify the subject matters that should form part of consultation in the ISC as mentioned in the clause 4(b) of the Order (1990) # • <u>National Development Council (NDC):</u> The ambit of the NDC should be widened beyond the Five Year and the Annual Plans. The NDC meetings	• <u>Inter-State Council (ISC):</u> The ISC should be activated and meet more frequently. It should be the highest coordination body. The ISC can meet to resolve contentious issues affecting all the States, like royalties, land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement, etc. • <u>National Development Council (NDC):</u> The time is ripe to activate forum like NDC.

lated to socio-economic development, it is necessary that NDC should be renamed and reconstituted as National Economic and Development Council (NEDC) by the Presidential Order	be convened more frequently to test ideas and evaluate experience in policy formulation and implementation in areas where both the Union and the States are interested in the sake of social and economic development	
---	---	--

Source: Commission on Centre-State Relations Report (1988), (**Sarkaria Commission**), Part I & Part II Government of India (GoI), New Delhi; The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (**NCRWC**) (2002); Vol. I & Vol. II, GoI, New Delhi; Commission on Centre-State Relations Report (March 2010), (**Punchhi Commission**), Volume I to VIII, GoI, New Delhi
http://interstatecouncil.nic.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/gazette_1.pdf

Table: 6**Dismissal of the elected State governments by using Article 356 of the Constitution by various Central governments**

Number of times Article 356 were applied during the collation era		Number of times Article 356 were applied during the non-coalition era	
Tenure of various coalition Central governments	Number of times Article 356 were used	Tenure of various non-coalition Central governments	Number of times Article 356 were used
1977-79 (Janata Govt.)	23	1952-57 (INC Govt.)	3
1989-91 (National Front Govt.)	7	1957-62 (INC Govt.)	3
1996-98 (United Front Govt.)	1	1962-67 (INC Govt.)	5
1998-99 (National Democratic Alliance (NDA-I) Govt.)	0	1967-70 (INC Govt.)	11
1999-04 (National Democratic Alliance (NDA-II) Govt.)	4	1971-77 (INC Govt.)	19
2004-09 (United Progressive Alliance (UPA-I) Govt.)	7	1980-84 (INC Govt.)	17
2009-14 (United Progressive Alliance (UPA-II) Govt.)	3	1984-89 (INC Govt.)	6
		1991-96 (INC Govt.)	11
		2014-19 (BJP Govt.)	6#
		2019-till date (BJP Govt.)	2##

Source: Livemint (February 11, 2015), “Has Article 356 been the Centre’s AK-56?”--<https://www.livemint.com/Politics/x3cSvcJAHtHZmdwPONeCI/Has-Article-356-been-the-Centres-AK56.html>

During the period of the first term of the Modi government (2014-19), President’s rule was imposed as many as 6 times viz. Maharashtra (2014); Arunachal Pradesh (2016); Uttarakhand (2016) & Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). In J&K alone, President’s rule was imposed thrice i.e., from January 9 (2015) to March 1 (2015); from January 8 (2016) to April 4 (2016) and from June 19 (2018) to October 30 (2019). For details see—Business Standard (undated), “What is the Presi-

dent's rule"-<https://www.business-standard.com/about/what-is-president-s-rule/1> & Factly (September 30, 2020), "President's rule is imposed even during Narendra Modi as Prime Minister"-- <https://factly.in/presidents-rule-is-imposed-even-during-narendra-modi-as-prime-minister/>

##President's rule was imposed in Maharashtra on 12-11-2019 due to political instability which was eventually revoked on 23-11-2019 (see <https://www.business-standard.com/about/what-is-president-s-rule/1>). President's rule was also imposed in Puducherry on February 22, 2022 (see The Indian Express (February 25, 2022) "President's Rule imposed in Puducherry"--<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/presidents-rule-imposed-in-puducherry-7204735/>)

Note: Indian National Congress (INC); Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

Table: 7**Presence of pro-federal forces in the successive coalition governments at the Centre**

Name of the coalition governments (Tenure)	Pro-federal and diehard federalists that supported coalition governments
Janata Party (1977-79)	DMK, SAD, AIADMK & CPI (M)-led Left Front (including CPI)
Janata Dal led- National Front (NF) (1989-91)	TDP, AGP, DMK & CPI (M)-led-Left Front (including CPI)
Janata Dal led- United Front (UF) (1996-98)	DMK, AGP, TDP, JKNC, CPI (M)-led Left Front (including CPI) & Samajwadi Party
BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA-I) (1998-99)	AIADMK, SAD, Janata Party, Samta Party@, BJD & MDMK
BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA-II) (1999-04)	DMK, TDP, Samta Party, BJD, SAD, MDMK, & Janata Party
INC-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA-I) (2004-09)	RJD, DMK, MDMK & CPI(M)-led Left Front (including CPI)
INC-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA-II) (2009-2014)	DMK, JKNC, RJD, Janata Dal

Sources: Compiled from various documents

Note: Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK); All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK); Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (JKNC); Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD); Communist Party of India (CPI); Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)); Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD); Biju Janata Dal (BJD); Asom Gana Parishad (AGP); Telugu Desam Party (TDP); Indian National Congress (INC); Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

@ Former Samta Party now Janata Dal (United) JD (U) led by Mr. Nitish Kumar in Bihar

Box: 1**Allegations made by the States for being subjected to politically motivated discrimination.**

- In 2011, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu-Ms. Jayalalitha of AIADMK, which was not allied with the UPA-II government (2009-14), had accused the Centre of discriminating her State as compared to West Bengal. Despite repeated requests for special assistance, as complained by her, funds were not provided to Tamil Nadu while a special package had been given to West Bengal for the only reason, as perceived by her, the Trinamool Congress (TMC)-led West Bengal was allied with the UPA II government (The Indian Express (October 22, 2011), “UPA reducing states to glorified municipal corporations: Jaya”, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/upa-reducing-states-to-glorified-municipal-corporations-jaya/864030/0>
- During the NDA I & II regime, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)-led government of Bihar, which was not allied with the NDA, blamed the Central government for treating them unfavourably compared to Andhra Pradesh (the State was ruled by the TDP that was one of the coalition partners of the NDA) when the later received \$763 million in Additional Central Assistance (ACA) for externally aided projects in State Plans while Bihar, with larger population and much greater levels of poverty than Andhra Pradesh, got a paltry \$67 million (Rodden, J & Duke, S. W, (September 17, 2004), “The Shifting Political Economy of Redistribution in the Indian Federation”- Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the International Society for New Institutional Economics Tucson, AZ September 30-October 3, 2004- <http://web.mit.edu/jrodden/www/materials/rodden.wilkinson.isnie2004.pdf>
- The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) from Orissa, that did not have electoral coalition with the UPA-I (2004-09) government, complained that, though the State was as badly off as Bihar, yet the RJD-led Bihar that was a major coalition partner in the UPA-I government had received a special allotment for Rs.3000 crores (\$652 million) in the Centre’s anti-poverty programmes while Orissa received nothing. So discriminatory treatment had been meted out to the State, as felt by the BJD (ibid.).

Box: 2**Areas where the States' autonomy is continually usurped, as perceived by various regional political parties.****1. Legislative and executive power of the States should not be shrinking.**

- ✓ Partisan role of the Governors in exercising its discretionary power be curbed.
 - Dismissal of the elected State governments while applying Article 356 be stopped
 - Reserving State Bills for consideration of the Governors be streamlined
- ✓ Appointment & removal of the Governors should not be done at the discretion of the Centre.
- ✓ 'Residuary power' be granted to the States.

2. Erosion of fiscal power and space of the States needs to be stopped.

- ✓ Devolution of more fiscal power to the States
 - Assignment of buoyant and elastic sources of revenue to the States
 - Residuary power to tax be granted to the States.
- ✓ % share of the States in total pool of the Central taxes (divisible pool) be hiked
- ✓ Shrinking of divisible pool on account of following reasons be stopped:
 - Non-sharable cesses & surcharges
 - Through manipulation of Terms of References (ToRs) of the Union Finance Commissions (UFCs)
- ✓ Other factors affecting fiscal space of the States negatively be taken care of
 - Share of the States in market borrowing be hiked
 - Rate of royalty on mineral and coal should be revised more frequently & be paid on ad valorem basis.

3. Inter-governmental resource transfers be carried out effectively.

- ✓ The States' voice in the UFCs & the Planning Commission be ensured.
- ✓ All Central transfers to the States be unconditional.
- ✓ All Central transfers to the States be devolved through statutory bodies and be formulaic.

4. **The Central intrusion into the States' matter causing erosion of fiscal and legal autonomy of the States be stopped.**
 - ✓ The number of the Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) in areas that fall under the States' jurisdiction be kept minimum & the States' roles and preferences be prioritized.
 - ✓ The Centre's encroachment upon the Concurrent List & making it *de facto* Centre List be stopped.
 - ✓ The Centre's intrusion into the State List be stopped.

5. **The States' roles and ownerships in the following Central bodies that are having centralized mode of operations should be ensured:**
 - ✓ **Calamity Relief:** An institutional framework (while including the States' role) be developed in assessing the extent of damage caused by a calamity in the concerned States and consequent allocation of the Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) given by the Centre. This can be pursued with a view to stop Central government's arbitrariness in distributing CRF among the affected States while ensuring depoliticization of disbursing the CRF.
 - ✓ **Public Distribution System (PDS):** State-specific socio-economic conditions should be taken into account while fixing criteria for distributing food grains among the States under PDS. In addition, there should be representatives of the State governments in the Food Corporation of India (FCI) that procures food grains to be required for PDS.
 - ✓ **Minimum Support Price (MSP):** Representatives of the State governments be included in the Central agency-Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) that fixes MSP in order to take into account the States' views before fixing MSP.

6. **Inter-governmental consultative forums viz. Inter-State Council (ISC) & National Development Council (NDC) be activated.**
 - ✓ The ISC should be made the supreme body to decide all major Centre-State issues.
 - ✓ The ISC's decision should be made binding on the Centre through a constitutional amendment.
 - ✓ The NDC be given constitutional status.
 - ✓ The agenda of the NDC should be decided by both the Centre and the States
 - ✓ The agenda of the NDC meetings be provided well in advance instead of being hastily imposed by the Centre at the last minute.
 - ✓ Focused and structured deliberations need to be pursued at the NDC where each issue should be discussed with longer duration.
 - ✓ The NDC meetings be held more frequently (at least once in every quarter)

Source: Compiled from various documents viz. minutes of the meetings of the Inter-State Council (ISC); Minutes of the meetings of the National Development Council (NDC); views expressed by various political parties-led State governments before the ISC & the NDC; Conclaves and informal meetings of Chief Minister (CMs) of the opposition ruled States; The Election Manifestoes (EMs) of several political parties; Memorandum submitted by the various State governments to the Union Finance Commissions (UFCs); Debates on Center-State relations in Rajya Sabha (Upper House) and Lok Sabha (Lower House) & Responses of the State and Central governments along with various political parties to the questionnaires provided by the Sarkaria Commission (1988) (Part II) and Punchhi Commission (2010) (Responses from Stakeholders, Supplementary Volume III)

<u>Box: 3</u> <u>Recommendations made by the First Administrative Reform Commission (FARC), Report on Centre-State Relationships (1969)</u>
Governor's post be streamlined and certain guidelines be formulated in exercising discretionary powers of the Governors
Appointment of the Governors - A person to be appointed as a Governor should be one who has had a long experience in public life and administration and can be trusted to rise above party prejudices. The convention of consulting the concerned Chief Minister of the State before appointing a Governor is a healthy one and may continue. Discretionary power to be exercised by the Governors. - It is necessary to keep the office of the Governor above controversies. In making the reports to the President (for imposition of Article 356), the Governor must act according to his own judgment and in such cases, as far as possible, he will take his Chief Minister into confidence except for special circumstances. Before the Governor makes a report about a threatened emergency, the Governor should have exhausted his own right to advice and warn so that his Ministry would have no grievance that it has; been kept in the dark. - Initially, guidelines for the Governors regarding exercise of their powers, both discretionary and constitutional, be formulated by the Inter-State Council. After acceptance by the Union (Central) Government, these guidelines could be issued in the name of the President and laid before the Parliament. Reservation the State Bills by the Governors passed by the State Legislature for the consideration of the President. - The Governors should reserve the Bills for the Presidential consideration only in special circumstances such as those in which there is clear violation of some fundamental rights or a patent unconstitutionality. Presidential intervention would also be required in the event of conflict with the Central Law.
The number of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSSs) be kept minimum & the States' roles and preferences be prioritized
The number of CSSs should be kept to the minimum and the criteria, to be laid down for determining which projects should be Centrally sponsored, be applied strictly. The role of the Central Ministries and Departments with regard to subjects falling within the State List,

should follow the guidelines as mentioned below: • The role of the Centre in the subjects specified in the State List be confined to that “of pioneer, guide, disseminator of information, and overall planner and evaluator”. • In pursuing the CSSs, uniform approach cannot necessarily be adopted throughout the whole country. • In undertaking the CSSs, the fullest possible discretion should be given to the States to pursue their policies and measures according to their ideologies and programmes in the areas falling within the State List
Greater freedom be provided to the States in pursuing State Plans; Central Plan assistance for State Plans be formulaic & Central Plan assistance to the States should be dealt by a statutory body
• As the Planning Commission is not a constitutional body, it would be desirable for another body created by law, to be entrusted with the responsibility of formulating the principles governing the allocation of Central Plan grants to the States. Since the Union Finance Commission is a statutory body, it can be entrusted with this task. • Simplification of the procedure is required in providing Central Plan assistance to the State Plans in order to ensure the States’ autonomy in the selection of their programmes and to the lessening of the control by the Centre in this regard. • With a view to give full latitude to the States to pursue their development path according to their needs and requirements, detailed sectoral planning, including preparation and execution of individual schemes and programmes, should be left to the State governments. • There has been a need for enunciation of well-defined principles, in the light of which Central Plan grants to the States could be made.
Inter-State Council (ISC) be activated and its decision, though advisory in nature, may be accepted by the Central government
• An ISC should be constituted under the Article 263 of the Constitution and would consist of the representatives of the Central government, State Governments and of the Opposition in the Parliament. • The ISC would be an appropriate body to discuss and formulate the guidelines that concerns both the States and the Centre. • These guidelines may thereafter be accepted by the Central government and be issued in the name of the President. • The guidelines so issued by the ISC, may be placed before both the Houses of Parliament. (i.e., Upper House (<i>Rajya Sabha</i>) & Lower House (<i>Lok Sabha</i>)) • The ISC’s decisions, though advisory in nature, must be able to carry weight with the Centre and the State governments.

Source: First Administrative Reform Commission (FARC) on Centre-State Relationships (1969), Government of India (GoI), New Delhi

¹In a landmark judgment of the Supreme Court (S.R Bommai Vs, Union of India, 11th March, 1994) which is popularly known as ‘Bommai Judgement’, the apex Court intended to prevent the misuse of Article 356. The Article had so far been, as felt, frequently exercised by the Centre in dismissing democratically elected State governments on the pretext of breakdown of law-and-order situation of the concerned State.
