

# Analysis of federal and unitary government



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A central government also known as a national government and in federal states, the federal government is the government at the level of the nation-state. The structure of central governments varies from institution to institution. Many countries have created autonomous regions by delegating powers from the central government to governments at a sub national level, such as a regional, local, or state level. Based on a broad definition of a basic political system, there are two or more levels of government that exist within an established territory and govern through common institutions with overlapping or shared powers as prescribed by a constitution or other law. Usual responsibilities of this level of government which are not granted to lower levels are maintaining national security and exercising international diplomacy, including the right to sign binding treaties. Basically, the central government has the power to make laws for the whole country, in contrast with local governments.

Generally, the difference between a central government and a federal central government is that the autonomous statuses of self-governing regions exists by the sufferance of the central government and are often created through a process of devolution. As such they may be unilaterally revoked with a simple change in the law. An example of this was done in 1973 when the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 abolished the government of Northern Ireland which had been created under the Government of Ireland Act 1920. It is common for a federal central government to be brought into being by agreement between a number of formally independent states and therefore its powers to affect the status of the balance of powers is significantly smaller (i. e. The United States). Thus

federal central governments are often established voluntarily from ‘below’ whereas devolution grants self-government from ‘above’.

What is unitary government?

In a unitary government, the central government possesses much authority and decision-making power. Local governing bodies simply serve as administrative arms of the central government. Great Britain is a familiar example of a unitary government; individual British counties have little of the power commonly exercised by American states. France, with 90 departments grouped into 36 provinces, also has a unitary form of government. It is important, however, to note that unitary governments are not inherently less democratic than other forms (Sanford 10).

Power is distributed completely opposite of a unitary government in a confederate government. Local governments protect and preserve their own authority by forming a weak central government. The United States has briefly employed confederate systems of government, in the Articles of Confederation, whose weaknesses led to the current federal system, and in the southern states’ attempts to form the Confederate States of America (Sanford 10).

In a federal government, power is split between a central government authority and its constituent states. Usually, an overriding law of the land, known as a constitution, allocates duties, rights, and privileges to each level of government. The constitution usually defines how power is shared between national, state, and local governments; the power to amend this

constitution is usually granted to the citizens or their governmental representatives (Sanford 10-11).

A second way by which governments may be classified is according to decision-making power. There are two basic categories in which governments are classified. In a totalitarian government, the power of rulers is not limited by outside forces, such as elections or public opinion. Totalitarian systems also restrict personal freedom in most cases.

How does unitary government differ from a federal government?

In a unitary government the power is held by one central authority but in a federal government, the power is divided between national (federal) government and local (state) governments.

Federal government

has multiple hierarchy levels, with both the central authority and the states (or provinces) both being sovereign.

the central (national) rules override the state rules has a balance between them. IE the US shared between national and local levels. In a federal form of government, the term “ federal” is also used to refer to the national level of government.

Unitary government

there is no hierarchy of sovereign powers.

states have no authority to pass their own laws, and the central (national) govt can order the states to do anything — just like a state can order a town to do anything, because the town is not sovereign.

is the federal government has a huge percentage of the power. IE Japan

## **What are the advantages and disadvantages to a unitary system as a form of government?**

**A unitary government is a government, usually some form of democracy, where the vast majority of authority is held by the federal government. In its most pure form, there nothing in between local and federal governments.**

Advantages: Single, all decisive legislative and/or executive offices. Usually more efficient use of tax dollars (fewer people trying to get in on the money).

Simpler management of an economy. Smaller government.

Disadvantages: Single, all decisive legislative and/or executive offices. Little in the way of power balances. Slow government response (for instance no state National Guard that could be dispatched in emergency, troops would have to be mobilized from national authority). Easily loses track of local issues. Is an incredibly divisive form of government (everyone is forced to compete with everyone else for priority). Since its trying to take the place of federal and state governments, unitary governments typical get bloated and bogged down. Huge bureaucracy (yes even larger that what this country has).

There are two types, the first is the traditional unitary government. Simply all the authority resides at a national level.

The second is a “ devolved government.” There is more local authority, however the federal authority has the right to override local decisions. This allows local authorities to handle more of the mundane duties. Results in a smaller federal government. The UK would be an example of a devolved government, minus the Queen.

### Advantages of Federalism

Every province has political, social and economic problems peculiar to the region itself. Provincial government representatives live in close proximity to the people and are most of the times from the same community, so that they are in a better position to understand these problems and offer unique solutions for them. For example, traffic congestion in Oahu, Hawaii is a problem that can be best solved by the local government, keeping local factors in mind, rather than by somebody living in New York.

Federalism offers representation to different populations. Citizens of various provinces may have different aspirations, ethnicity and follow different cultures. The central government can sometimes overlook these differences and adopt policies which cater to the majority. This is where the regional government steps in. While formulating policies, local needs, tastes and opinions are given due consideration by the state governments. Rights of the minorities are protected too. For example, in states like Arizona where there is a large Hispanic population and therefore, a large number of schools provide bilingual education.

State governments have the freedom to adopt policies which may not be followed nationally or by any other state. For example, same sex marriages

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are not recognized by the federal government of USA but they are given legal status within the states of Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont and Massachusetts.

Division of work between the central and the regional governments leads to optimum utilization of resources. The central government can concentrate more on international affairs and defense of the country while the provincial government can cater to the local needs.

Federalism has room for innovation and experimentation. Two local governments can have two different approaches to bring reforms in any area of public domain, be it taxation or education. The comparison of the results of these policies can give a clear idea of which policy is better and thus, can be adopted in the future.

Federalism no doubt has many positives vis a vis Communism or Imperialism but still some political scientists often raise questions about advantages of Federalism.

#### Disadvantages of Federalism

Sharing of power between the Center and the states includes both advantages and disadvantages of federation. Sometimes there can be overlapping of work and subsequent confusion regarding who is responsible for what. For example, when typhoon Katrina hit Greater New Orleans, USA, in 2005, there was delay in the rescue work as there was confusion between the state governments and the federal government on who is responsible for which disaster management work. This resulted in the loss of many lives.

Federal system of government is very expensive as more people are elected to office, both at the state and the center, than necessary. Thus, it is often said that only rich countries can afford it. Too many elected representatives with overlapping roles may also lead to corruption.

Federalism leads to unnecessary competition between different regions. There can be a rebellion by a regional government against the national government too. Both scenarios pose a threat to the countries' integrity.

Federalism promotes regional inequalities. Natural resources, industries, employment opportunities differ from region to region. Hence earnings and wealth are unevenly distributed. Rich states offer more opportunities and benefits to its citizens than poor states can. Thus, the gap between rich and poor states widens.

Federalism can make the state governments selfish and concerned only about their own region's progress. They can formulate policies which might be detrimental to other regions. For example, pollution from a province which is promoting industrialization in a big way can affect another region which depends solely on agriculture and cause crop damage.

Federalism does not eliminate poverty. Even in New York, there are poor neighborhoods like Harlem with a majority of black population. The reason for this may be that during policy framing, it is the intellectuals and not the masses who are invited by the local government. These intellectuals may not understand the local needs properly and thus, policies might not yield good results.



Thus, it is understandable that there have been both advantages and disadvantages of Federalism in USA. There is a general feeling that the rights of the minorities, like blacks, are compromised in USA. But at the same time, USA now has a democratically elected African American President. Similarly, there have been advantages and disadvantages of federalism in other countries as well. For federalism to be truly successful it should be accompanied by other ideals like Secularism, Democracy and Liberalism.