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Q13

While the national political parties in India favour centralisation, the regional parties are in favour of State autonomy." Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · GS II · 15 marks · Governance and Policy

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Core demand of the question

- While the national political parties in India favour centralisation, the regional parties favour State autonomy. Comment

Revision summary

National parties have an organisational bias toward a strong Centre, concurrent legislation and nationwide schemes.

Regional parties have an organisational bias toward State autonomy, language and control of local patronage.

Coalition years showed regional parties making Union policy, which softens the contrast.

The same party talks autonomy in Opposition and accepts Union instruments in office.

The statement is a useful tendency, not a law.

Impersonal federal institutions matter more than assuming party type will protect the State List.

Introduction

National parties recruit, fund, and campaign across the Union, so they often prefer a strong Centre, common markets, and All-India services. Regional parties live off a State's language, caste coalition, and fiscal grievance, so they demand autonomy. The comment is a useful first cut, not a law of Indian federalism, because coalitions and centrally sponsored schemes pull both types of party toward the same purse.

Body**Why national parties lean to centralisation**

- A national party seeks a single message, a single campaign machine, and interchangeable ministers; concurrent-list legislation, the IAS/IPS, and the [Election Commission](#)'s nationwide writ serve that machine.
- Goods and Services Tax, a national security narrative, and centrally sponsored schemes let a ruling national party claim delivery in every district, which is politically cheaper than negotiating twenty different State models.
- [Article 356](#), the Governor, and residual power in [Article 248](#) have historically been more congenial to parties that expect to occupy Raisina Hill than to those that never do.

- National parties also contain State units that bargain internally; centralisation is often intra-party as much as Centre-versus-State.

Why regional parties lean to State autonomy

- Regional parties are organised to win a Legislative Assembly first; control of land, police, education, and local recruitment is their patronage core, which they defend as federalism.
- They use the Rajya Sabha, inter-State councils, and special-category or package politics to extract Union money while resisting Union conditions on language, recruitment, and farm or education reform.
- **Sarkaria** and **Punchhi Commission** themes - consultation before **Article 356**, restraint on the Governor, and respect for the State List - are easier for a regional party to champion because it does not expect to wield 356 itself next year.
- Subnational identity (language, tribe, region) is their electoral brand; autonomy is that brand in constitutional vocabulary.

Why the dichotomy overstates the case

- From 1989 to 2014, regional parties at the Centre in coalitions actually wrote national policy; they were not secessionists, they were bargainers for portfolios and packages.
- National parties in Opposition in a State discover State rights overnight; regional parties in a Union coalition accept GST, CBI, and central schemes that they denounce when out of that coalition.
- Some regional parties prefer a strong Centre against a neighbouring State (river disputes, border, migrants); autonomy is then selective.
- The 1990s economic reforms were midwived by a minority national government with regional support; centralisation of markets can coexist with political regionalisation.

A fair comment

- **As a tendency, the statement holds:** national parties have an organisational interest in a thick Union, regional parties in a thick State.
- **As an iron rule it fails:** money, security, and office pull both toward opportunistic federalism.
- Healthy federalism needs the **Election Commission**, **Finance Commission**, and **GST Council** to bind whoever is in office, not a hope that party type will reliably defend the State List.

Flow diagram

National parties -> Strong Centre common market AIS
Regional parties -> State List language packages
National parties -> Office at Union
Regional parties -> Office at Union
Office at Union -> Opportunistic federalism

Conclusion

National parties do favour centralisation and regional parties do favour State autonomy, because that is how each wins elections. Coalitions, GST, and centrally sponsored schemes blur the line, so the comment is a tendency, not a constitutional destiny.

Facts & figures

Seventh Schedule

Union, State and Concurrent Lists; political fights over autonomy are fights over who legislates and spends on those subjects.

Article 356

President's rule in a State; historically used more readily by national parties in office at the Centre, and denounced by regional parties.

GST Council

Constitutional federal body on GST; both national and regional governments sit there, which complicates a simple centralisation story.

Sarkaria Commission

Examined Centre-State relations and recommended restraint on **Article 356** and more consultation - a text regional parties often cite.

Coalition era (c. 1989-2014)

Period in which regional parties routinely entered Union cabinets, showing they seek a share of the Centre, not only distance from it.

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