

Foundations of Unitary and Federal Systems: A Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

This manuscript provides a multi-dimensional assessment of the key factors influencing their effectiveness by conducting a comparative analysis of the theoretical foundations, structural features, and political-practical dimensions of unitary and federal governance systems. In a unitary system, the centralized structure of authority and policy uniformity ensure administrative efficiency, rapid decision-making, and national unity. However, it carries the potential or risk of not adequately protecting regional diversity, cultural identity, and local participation. The federal system offers the potential to ensure regional autonomy, participation in local policymaking, and justice and inclusion in a multicultural society through a multi-tiered governance structure. However, it faces several challenges such as administrative duplication, policy inconsistency, constitutional complexity, and regional disparities. This research adopts a secondary source-based analysis, which systematically collects and analyzes existing literature, academic journals, historical records, legal documents, and comparative studies. Ultimately, the comparative perspective makes it clear that choosing a state structure requires a holistic assessment of multidimensional factors such as socio-cultural diversity, administrative capacity, legal infrastructure, and citizen participation. This provides sound practical guidance for policymakers and constitutional scholars.

Keywords: unitary system, federal system, governance structure, socio-cultural diversity

Introduction

In determining the structure of the state and the form of governance, unitary and federal systems have been established as two major frameworks in political science. “The concepts of unitary and federal forms of government are fundamental to the organization and distribution of political power within a state”, (SK Bose, 2025, p. 115). These systems are the fundamental theoretical basis for determining the distribution of power, governance, and the nature of citizen-state relations. In a unitary system, power is centralized, which brings uniformity in policies, laws, and administrative practices in the state. “A unitary government is a kind of government system in which a single power, which is known as the central government, controls the whole government”, (Kandel, 2024, p. 18). According to its proponents, such a system believes that it brings national integrity, decision-making, coordination, and implementation. In contrast, a federal system is based on the principle of separation of powers, where powers are divided between the central and regional governments. “The units demand a large

measure of autonomy which can be provided only in a federal structure”, (Mahajan V. D., 2016, p. 422). It promotes diversity, autonomy, and participatory governance. The historical development, constitutional structure, and political culture of both these systems manifest themselves differently in different countries, which makes comparative studies more relevant.

Unitary and federal systems have their own distinct characteristics in terms of political stability, governance efficiency, and democratic consolidation. “Under a unitary system, a country is administered as one component and one central authority over the whole country”, (Mumba, 2014, p. 1). Unitary systems bring uniformity in policy-making and implementation through a strong central government, which maintains stability and strong control over national policies and strategies. However, federal systems are able to address diverse identities and needs by delegating power to local or regional governments. This primarily strengthens participatory democracy, local development, and pluralistic representation. For these reasons, these systems have been adopted according to ethnic diversity and political aspirations. “Definitions differ fundamentally as to whether “federalism” is a term used for all kinds of federal (multi-level) systems according to the “integrative” theory¹¹ of federalism or only for federal nation states”, (Gampe, 2005, p. 1299). Therefore, a comparative study of the foundations of unitary and federal systems helps in a multi-dimensional analysis of state structure.

From the perspective of comparative politics, these systems are not only structures of governance, but also philosophical approaches to state-building and the balance of power. “The growth of executive and judicial powers, often at the expense of Congress, can be attributed in large measure to emergence of political parties”, (Carey, 2009, p. 294). He argues, “Presidents, more frequently than not, have sought to advance purely institutional interests, to a great degree motivated by their desire to secure a “legacy” that will be looked upon favorably by future generations” (p.295). Countries like France and Japan have sought to maintain stability and unity through unitary systems, while the United States, India, and Germany have balanced autonomy and diversity through federal structures. Such examples show that the choice of a system of governance is not only a constitutional decision but also a result of history, society, geography, and identity, and should be understood as such. Comparatively, countries that adopt a unitary system strengthen national unity through centralization of power, while federal systems strengthen regional representation and citizen empowerment through decentralization of power. Therefore, a comparative analysis of these systems provides a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of the nature of governance, the policy-making process, and the practice of democracy.

This study is of great importance for understanding the intellectual and practical meaning of state systems from a comparative perspective of political science. First, it will highlight the theoretical basis and historical development of the system of governance, which will clarify the relationship between unitary and federal structures. Second, this study will evaluate the comparative impact of these systems on the practical aspects of policy-making, power-distribution and balance of power. Third, it

can provide guidance to state policy-makers on the appropriate system of governance for states like Nepal, which are multicultural, multi-ethnic and undergoing transformation into a federal system. In addition, the study will make a theoretical contribution to finding a balance between state-building, stability and democratic depth in the context of federalism and unitarianism. Ultimately, the research on this topic will present a political science perspective, clarifying the philosophical basis of governance systems, the interrelationship between constitutional practice and policy implementation. It will not only analyze the relationship between central and decentralized power, but also aspects such as the structural depth of democracy, public participation and the efficiency of governance in an in-depth manner. Therefore, this study is considered relevant and necessary from all academic, theoretical and policy perspectives in the comparative discussion of state systems and governance structures.

Methodology

This research has adopted a qualitative research method based entirely on secondary data. Since the main objective of the research is to conduct a comparative study of the theoretical and practical foundations of unitary and federal systems of governance, it has used various existing literature, government policy documents, constitutional provisions, journal articles, books, academic research and reports of international organizations as the main sources, without using primary data such as interviews or surveys. During the collection of material, available documents related to the governance structure, distribution of powers and historical developments of different countries of the world have been systematically collected, classified and analyzed. Through this, issues such as the use and control of state power, political stability and the balance of union-unity have been compared from a philosophical and institutional perspective. The research has mainly attempted to clarify the relationships between the theoretical foundations and practical results of unitary and federal systems by adopting a historical-analytical and comparative-structural approach.

Since all types of data and references used in this study are based on secondary sources, a critical review has also been conducted to ensure their reliability, contextual suitability and comparative usability. By comparing the arguments, definitions and conclusions in each source through the content analysis method, the basic elements of unitary and federal governance systems, such as power distribution, autonomy, accountability and policy implementation, have been studied in depth. Theoretically, the research has combined the perspectives of comparative politics and institutional analysis to highlight the relationship and differences between governance structures. Ultimately, the analysis obtained through this method aims to explain the comparative dimensions of the philosophical and institutional approaches of unitary and federal systems and present conclusions about political stability, democratic empowerment and decentralization of power in a scientific manner.

Literature Review

The literature review of this study covers the perspectives of leading scholars who have developed theories on the theoretical foundations, historical development, structural features, and practical implications of unitary and federal state systems. By analyzing the models, constitutional structures, power-sharing, and centralization or decentralization debates in different countries from a comparative perspective, the available literature further highlights the fundamental differences between the two systems, common features, and the transformation of the models that have evolved over time. This literature review section provides an overview of the major debates on this topic and lays the intellectual groundwork for the subsequent analysis.

Foundations of unitary and federal systems

The early intellectual debates about the two main models of state structure; unitary and federal systems are deeply intertwined with political theory, constitutional history, and administrative management. “Bodin’s insistence that sovereigns should not tax subjects without their consent may be a medieval residue to his theory and is inconsistent with his theory of absolute sovereignty”, (Andrew, 2011, p. 81). Bodin (1576) considered the integrity of sovereignty and central authority as the core characteristic of the state, while Montesquieu, Madison, and Hamilton interpreted the separation of powers and a multi-centered political structure as indispensable prerequisites for state stability. “It was not the detailed checks and balances that the Founding Fathers devised that secured this but the culture of respect for the rule of law to which their efforts gave birth”, (Kemp, 2010, p. 56). Early literature presented the unitary system as a model that was simple, management-friendly, and capable of rapid decision-making. In contrast, the federal system was described as an effective mechanism for preserving diversity, plurality, and local autonomy, supported by the concept of “shared rule and self-rule.”

Relationship between constitutionalism, sovereignty, and state structure

There is a vast literature on the nature of constitutionalism and sovereignty to understand the basic elements of federal and unitary models. K.C. Wheare (1963) has defined federalism as essentially a “constitutional separation of powers” that ensures clarity of authority between the two levels. In unitary systems, sovereignty is concentrated at the center, as parliament is considered the central source. “This means that regional or local governments derive their authority from the central government and can be created or dissolved at its discretion”, (SK Bose et. al., 2025, p. 115). Federalist scholars such as Burgess and Elazar have considered multi-tier governance and shared sovereignty as characteristics of the federal model. “In simple terms, this is to prevent one branch from absorbing all powers available in the government and help protect democracy by inspiring responsibility and balance among the institutions”, (Sharma, 2024, p. 74). In the past, the literature on the supremacy of parliament in the unitary model based on the British tradition, the “rational unitary system” based on the French tradition, and the “decentralized unitary state” developed by Scandinavian countries have clarified the multi-dimensionality of unitarianism.

Political centralization vs. decentralization

The main difference between unitary and federal systems is seen in the specific nature of "centralization" and "decentralization". "Decentralization is a commonly chosen policy by developing nations whose new governments represent a significant regime change", (Alston, 2025, p. 1). Administrative science scholars Rondinelli, Cheema and Manor have studied in detail the impact of decentralization on local government, regional autonomy and public service delivery. The literature shows that even in unitary systems, if the division of powers, local autonomy and regional institutional structures are strengthened, it can have a very practical impact similar to the federal model. France, Japan, Norway, Nepal (post-2015 structure) and the UK show that they can develop towards the devolution model. In the federal model, a tradition of studying center-state/province relations, revenue allocation, constitutional amendment and intergovernmental coordination had developed.

Development of two models

Historians and comparative political analysts have analyzed the emergence of federal and unitary models in relation to social structure, ethno-linguistic diversity, economic centralization, and power-political dynamics. "There is a concentration of powers in a unitary government; the central government can do whatever it pleases; there is absolutely no check on its authority", (Mahajan V. D., 2016). He states, "The division of powers is not similar in all cases". The federal structures of the United States and Switzerland are examples of historical compromise or "coming-together federalism." "Holding-together federalism" seen in India, Belgium, Ethiopia, and Nepal has been interpreted as a tool for managing diversity and resolving political instability. "Studies on the "structure" debate have found that state structure is fundamentally interrelated with electoral systems, party competition, the nature of the nation-building process, and social pluralism.

Impact on governance, policy implementation, and public service delivery

A large body of comparative literature has developed on the effects of unitary and federal systems in terms of good governance, accountability, transparency, and policy effectiveness. Scholars such as Watts, Lijphart, and Ostrom have argued that federal systems facilitate pluralism, participation, and the adaptation of policies to local needs. However, other literatures have noted that federal models present implementation challenges due to policy coordination, revenue sharing, and dual jurisdiction. "The constitution clearly defines the jurisdiction of the two sets of government, national and regional, it establishes and any change desired to be made therein can be effected by amending the Constitution in accordance with the prescribed procedure", (Kapur, 2016). Studies have shown that policy implementation is simpler, more direct, and faster in unitary systems, but there have also been debates about the dangers of over-centralization and the neglect of local needs. Case studies are available on the effects of both models in education, health, infrastructure, social security, and emergency management.

Unitary and federal systems in the modern world

Since the 1990s, the unitary and federal models have been reinterpreted under the influence of state transformation, democratic transition, economic liberalization, and identity politics. “Federalism has been chosen to bring together formerly separate units into a new country, or to rearrange a previously unitary country, and even as a product of both processes together”, (Raj, 2010, p. 3). Contemporary literature, especially the multilevel governance (MLG) theory of Hooghe and Marks, and the decentralization studies of the OECD and UNDP, argue that the two traditional models should now be understood as a "continuum". Some countries have moved from a union to a more centralized model, such as Russia, some from a unitary to a semi-federal structure, such as Belgium, Nepal, and some countries have a mix of features of both models.

South Asian context

“After independence, it was challenging for the leadership of congress to address the question of diversity in India. Diversity is considered very positive concerning creativity, development, and prosperity if it is rightly utilized for that particular cause”, (abdul Shakoor chandio, 2024). The literature has noted that state structures in South Asia are deeply influenced by political history, diversity, and party competition. Available academic writings on India’s federalism, Pakistan’s unstable federal structure, Sri Lanka’s failed decentralization efforts, and Nepal’s post-2015 “federal-unitary hybrid” model further clarify the regional context. South Asian studies have noted that identity politics, ethno-linguistic diversity, balance of power, and maturity of governance institutions play a decisive role in the comparison between federalism and unitarianism. In the context of Nepal, the literature on territorial delimitation, revenue autonomy, intergovernmental relations, and local governance dynamics is expanding, which has enriched the comparative analysis.

Result and Discussion

This Results and Discussion section presents the main findings, analyses and their implications from the research as a whole. The factual data, comparative observations and explanatory conclusions related to the study’s objectives, methods and theoretical basis are analyzed in an integrated manner. The results obtained are not limited to a mere descriptive statement; they are critically discussed on how they relate to existing theories, infrastructures, political structures, social diversity and the impact of governance models. In particular, the results and discussion of this study clarify the basis, structure, inclusiveness, power-distribution, legal framework and administrative effectiveness of unitary and federal systems through a detailed comparative analysis. This section aims to explain from an academic perspective what the research showed, why it showed and what its practical or theoretical implications are.

Main results of the study

The main results of this research show that the fundamental difference between unitary and federal systems is not limited to structural and constitutional forms. Both systems are multi-dimensional models formed by the interrelation of many complex factors such as the historical origin, social structure, cultural diversity, political stability, balance of

power and economic organization of a country. Unitary systems are fundamentally based on central sovereignty, which prioritizes policy-making, legal structure, administrative coordination, national unity and common identity. This system strengthens uniformity and uniformity in governance. This makes it particularly effective in states with small territories, homogeneous social structures or unified political traditions. In contrast, federal systems are based on the principle of dual sovereignty. Where both the federal center and the provinces/states have constitutionally specified powers. The results clearly show that federal models generally develop from a collective understanding of multi-ethnic, multilingual, geographically broad, and historically independent political units. “Local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affair sunder their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population”, (Offerdal, 2025, p. 94). These diversities make federal systems a suitable structure to encourage local autonomy, regional representation, and participatory governance.

As a second conclusion, the study found that the benefits and limitations of both systems are manifested differently in terms of practical outcomes. Unitary systems provide speed in policy implementation, reduced administrative costs, legal uniformity, and a strong foundation for national coordination. However, there are some difficulties in effectively implementing the demands of the people based on regional diversity, local needs, or identity. In contrast to the federal system, the expansion of local powers facilitates regional adaptation, identity security, autonomy, and policy innovation. However, problems such as power-sharing between the center and the provinces, challenges in coordination, and high administrative costs can be seen. “Governance structures in South Asia exhibit considerable variation, with significant implications for public sector reform trajectories”, (Mohna, 2024, p. 12). The third important result of the study is that both systems appear to be mixed in practice rather than being implemented purely. For example, unitary states such as France, Japan, and Ethiopia have adopted decentralization. Similarly, federal countries such as Germany, India, and the United States also experience more centralization in some areas. In conclusion, the main observation of the study confirms that the effectiveness of a unitary or federal system in a given country is determined by that country's history, social structure, economic capacity, political culture, and contemporary development needs.

Foundations of Governance: Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of the basis of unitary and federal systems of governance makes it clear that these two structures are not just different models of administrative management. They are deeply intertwined with the historical formation, cultural structure, political ideology and socio-economic development experience of any nation. The basis of the unitary system is based on central sovereignty. Where, the nation is conceived as a unified, indivisible and unipolar power structure. In this model, high priority is given to an independent legal system, uniform policy-making, centrally directed administrative coordination and national identity. The main basis of the unitary

idea seen in states like France, Japan, China and Nepal (pre-federalism) is related to political unity, national security interests, administrative integrity and historical-central thinking. Comparative analysis shows that the birth of the unitary system is often associated with the decisive stages of national identity formation, the emergence of the modern nation-state and the initial processes of state consolidation. This system attempts to streamline the state through a common legal structure and uniform administrative practices. This facilitates policy agility, coordination, and centralized leadership.

The structural basis of the federal system focuses on diversity, autonomy and cooperation. Where the state is interpreted as a political union with multi-level sovereignty. In this model, regional self-government, protected rights of regional identity and constitutionally guaranteed powers between the union and the states form the core of the political-institutional structure. The political principles seen in federal countries such as Germany, India, Switzerland, the US, and Australia show that the birth of federalism is inspired by diversity management, identity protection and geopolitical necessity. “In this system of government, independent states constitutionally form a central government to fulfill some of their common objectives and retain their separate independence in other matters”, (Bhandari, 2071 BS, p. 21). The results of comparative analysis show that the federal structure seeks to institutionally protect the coexistence of many community-cultural groups within a single national identity. It encourages states to have policy independence, regional planning and social adaptation. Which makes local governance more effective. However, since this model is completely dependent on center-state cooperation, constitutional clarity and balance of power, the complexity of management is relatively high. Which of the two structures is appropriate is determined by a combination of a country's historical background, social structure, political stability, economic capacity, and development needs. Therefore, comparative analysis suggests that the basis of governance is more dynamic and context-dependent than a static concept.

Table No 1

Historical and social foundations of a unitary federal system

| Foundations | Unitary system | Federal system |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Historical Origins | From a centralized state or a unified national movement | With the consent of various states/provinces |
| Social structure | Relatively homogeneous | Multicultural, multilingual, heterogeneous |
| Geopolitics | Small/medium-sized countries | Large land area or diverse geographical area |
| Nation-building philosophy | Unity-centered | Unity in diversity |

Source: Author's development.

Consequences of legal and constitutional grounds

A comparative assessment of the legal and constitutional foundations of unitary and federal systems of government makes it clear that these foundations are major determinants that directly affect the structure, institutions, distribution of powers, and

governance dynamics of any nation. In a unitary system, the constitution structures the center in a way that grants supreme authority. Where lawmaking, administrative control, national security, economic policy, and almost all-important areas of policymaking are vested in the center. Such a constitutional structure can result in legal uniformity, ease of policy implementation, administrative clarity, and strengthened national unity. The constitutional design seen in unitary countries like France, Japan, and early Nepal has formalized the centralization of power and further facilitated the implementation of uniform rules and laws throughout the state. However, studies show that this centralization can sometimes create difficulties in adequately addressing local needs, diverse identities, and regional problems. Because sufficient constitutional authority is not provided to modify policies according to local contexts. Therefore, while the legal-constitutional structure is a strong foundation for effective state governance in a unitary system, it may appear limited in terms of managing social diversity.

The opposite structure is seen in federal systems of government. Where the constitution provides a multi-tiered legal structure that clearly divides powers between the union and the states. Federal constitutions usually present three types of powers; the federal list, the state list and the common/concurrent list. According to which, the states acquire the constitutional right to make and implement their own laws. This facilitates policy making according to local needs, regional development strategies, the protection of diverse identities and autonomous administrative decisions. The results of the study show that in federal countries such as Germany, India, Switzerland and the United States, such legal-constitutional framework has played an important role in strengthening regional innovation, participatory governance and policy solutions that are suitable for the needs of multicultural societies. However, this type of constitutional structure can create challenges such as coordination of powers between the center and the states, policy legitimacy, legal conflicts and dual exercise of powers in the common list. There is a possibility that the states that have been granted more autonomous powers may disagree with the center or have different views on legal interpretation. This sometimes creates a situation where the stability of the federal structure is questioned. However, a comparative analysis shows that federalism is effective in managing diversity and local self-government, while the unitary model is more capable of national coordination and agile governance. The main difference between the two is the distribution of constitutional powers.

Table No 2

Major differences in constitutional structure

| Elements | Unitary system | Federal system |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Sovereignty | In the center | Both in the Union and the Provinces |
| Constitution | Generally, authority is distributed at the same level. | Often a dual division of rights |
| Court structure | Integrated Court System | Multi-tier (state/federal) courts |
| Financial structure | At the main revenue center | Also, with the Tax and Revenue Department |

Source: Author's development.

Practical exercises in power distribution and their consequences

The practical experience of unitary and federal countries such as Nepal, India, the UK, and Canada shows that the distribution of power is not only determined by the constitutional structure. It is also guided by political culture, competition between parties, electoral systems, and the quality of citizen-state relations. In unitary countries, power is usually concentrated at the center, which facilitates policy consistency, rapid decision-making, and centralized mobilization of resources. However, when the delegation of power to the local level is weak, inequality in service delivery, indifference to local needs, and administrative over-centralization are seen. The decentralization practice of the UK, local autonomy in Japan, and the transition to a federal structure in Nepal after 2072 show that legal structures alone are not sufficient to make the distribution of power effective. The institutional capacity of the local level, financial autonomy, the efficiency of public representatives, and the functional coordination between the federal-provincial-local levels are very decisive. Case studies from many countries have shown that, despite clear legal provisions, in practice, ambiguity, dual jurisdiction, competition between agencies, and political interference further weaken the distribution of power.

In federal countries, especially India, Germany and Canada, the experience of the government shows that the main basis for the successful devolution of power is "intergovernmental relations". In which financial transfers, equalization grants, joint councils or intergovernmental coordination mechanisms are seen to operate effectively. Provincial autonomy in a federal system strengthens the appropriate identification and solution of local needs. However, if there is no high-level cooperation between the center and the provinces, policy duplication, imbalance in development, power struggle and national interest may be weakened. Mechanisms such as the GST Council in India, the Council of the Federation in Canada and the Bundesrat in Germany institutionalize the devolution of power and provide stability to the operation of federalism. In Nepal, too, problems such as delays in the formulation of federal laws, structural weaknesses at the provincial-local levels and staff adjustment are seen. Which have challenged the practical aspects of devolution of power. Therefore, experience teaches us that practical coordination, financial transparency, capacity development, and political will are more important than laws or constitutions to make power-sharing a reality.

Interrelationship between constitutional structure and institutional governance

The constitutional structure and the interrelationship between the various institutions of the state, such as the executive, legislature, judiciary and local bodies, determine the viability of any unitary or federal system. Because the constitution only establishes the framework for the distribution of powers, its effective functioning depends on the capacity, legal clarity, procedural correctness and political culture of the institutions. Comparative studies of many countries show that in unitary systems, the constitution is often centrally-centered. This provides policy uniformity but can also lead to excessive bureaucratic control over the functioning of the institutions. On the other hand, in federal systems, the constitution provides specific powers, taxation freedom and

independent administrative structures to different levels of government. This encourages institutions to act autonomously.

However, when coordination is weak, the risk of policy duplication, power struggles and budgetary imbalances can also increase. "Countries with federal political systems are controlled by two governments: the first is the central government; and the other is the government that controls the political units of that state, often called states, countries, or regions", (Rasheed). In India, Canada and Germany, when the constitution provides for detailed provisions on the center-state relationship, a clear division of labor and dispute resolution mechanisms between institutions seem to be effective. In Nepal, although the federal constitutional structure has created a new framework, there has been a "gap" between the constitutional structure and institutional practice due to delays in the creation of laws, regulations, personnel adjustment, and intergovernmental coordination mechanisms. "The Constitution allocated legislative, executive, and judicial powers across these levels, with 35 exclusive powers to the federal government, 21 to provincial governments, and 22 to local governments", (Ayadi, 2025, p. 6). This teaches us that institutions must work with adequate resources and capacity to put the constitution into practice. Political leadership must prioritize constitutional implementation. Otherwise, all systems, whether unitary or federal, suffer from institutional weaknesses, ambiguity of authority, and policy imbalances.

Comparison between bases in Nepal, India, Germany and France

The state foundations of all four countries - Nepal, India, France and Germany - are formed from different historical experiences, political developments and constitutional structures. Although both Nepal and India are based on federal democratic structures, there are many differences in their origin process, background of constitution-making and mechanisms of federalism. "Federalism, a new democratic political system, was introduced in Nepal because of people's frustration over a century-long capital-city-centric governance system, the feudal system behavior of mainstream political parties, weak service delivery and growing inequality in the country", (Kharel, 2022, p. 45). In Nepal, federalism came as a solution to the long-standing problem of transition process and centralization of power. In India, federalism developed due to colonial disintegration, linguistic-cultural diversity and vast geographical size. When Nepal institutionalized federalism through the 2072 constitution, many structures were reorganized at once. However, in India, the federal political structure has been expanding since 1950 through a gradual, trial-based, institution-strengthening process.

More clear distinction is made when comparing France and Germany. France is a country with a traditionally centralized unitary system. In which the "republican universalism" concept of the state has made uniformity, the supremacy of the center, and administrative equality the main basis. However, in recent decades, France has been practicing a "decentralized unitary state". Although it has given powers to local levels, the dominance of the center still seems to be strong. On the other hand, Germany is a state with a highly developed, institutionalized, coordinated federal system. In which

the constitutional autonomy of the Länder (provinces), center-state cooperation through the Bundesrat system, and the dual structure of power are very strong. German federalism has developed through state-reconstruction, post-conflict stability, and democratic institutionalization. Which has succeeded in becoming one of the most mature models of federalism.

Overall, Nepal and India are federal states, but while India's federalism appears to be a "decentralization of accumulated power", Nepal's federalism is in the nature of "new structure-building". France, although unitary, is oriented towards gradual decentralization, while Germany is a country that implements highly institutionalized federalism. Thus, when comparing the four countries, it becomes clear that the structure of state foundations does not depend solely on the constitution; rather, history, political culture, state size, diversity, administrative experience, and social structure determine their form.

Discussion of structural-political factors influencing system selection

The structural factors influencing the choice of a unitary or federal system are mainly related to the geographical size of the state, population distribution, ethno-linguistic diversity, nature of economic resources and administrative capacity. In countries with large geographical areas, uneven geographical structure, linguistic-ethnic diversity and regional imbalance, a federal structure is often considered appropriate. Because it provides a means of self-government to diverse communities and constitutionally protects local identities. India and Germany are excellent examples of these structural reasons. Where federalism was not just a political option but a result of historical necessity of the situation. Similarly, in countries with small geographical areas, similar population density, uniform administrative structure and low identity-based political conflict, a unitary system seems to have been more effective. The experience of countries such as France and Japan shows that when structural divisions within the state are not sharp, then maintaining policy uniformity at the center is administratively economical and practical. All these structural elements form an important basis for choosing a system because the size and diversity of the state directly relate to how centralized or decentralized the governance system can be.

Political reasons are more decisive in the choice of system. "In a unitary government there is no constitutional division of powers between the center and the states, but in a federal government this division is a must", (Agarwal, 2004, p. 293). The power relations of the state, the extent of nation-building, the character of political parties, and the level of public participation in governance determine the form of the system. For example, where political parties are highly centralized, the center has to play a major role in strengthening national unity. That is, where stability is a primary need, a unitary system is often chosen. In France, republican universalism and a strong central executive have made the unitary structure long-term. On the other hand, where political inclusiveness, recognition of multiple identities, and local autonomy are important in production and operation, a federal or highly decentralized unitary system is considered appropriate. For example, India, Switzerland, and Germany are countries in this

category. Federalism in Nepal was motivated by political reasons because long-term centralization, uneven development, identity-based dissatisfaction, and intense demands for local autonomy made the federal structure emerge as a necessary path, not an alternative. In this way, the choice of system is not determined solely by structural or political factors, but rather the mutual influence of both components, historical experience, social structure, and the nature of the balance of power together create the final form of the state's governance system.

Table No 3

Comparative indicators of governance outcomes

| Result indicator | Unitary system | Federal system |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Decision speed | Sharp | Medium-slow |
| Local autonomy | Limited-moderate | High |
| Inclusivity | Medium | High |
| Policy-implementation | Uniform | Diversity-based |
| Cost | Less | Relatively more |

Source: Author's development.

Analysis of the results

Overall, the findings of this study provide analytical value in that the fate of unitary and federal systems is not limited to the constitutional structure alone, but is directly linked to the historical background, cultural diversity, dynamics of the balance of power, and the level of political practice of the country. It suggests that the success of a system of governance is determined not by its form—whether merely unitary or federal—but by how power is distributed within that system, how responsive institutions are, and how well citizens' expectations are addressed. The comparison of Nepal, India, and Germany makes it clear that federalism is not an option but a necessity in diverse plural societies. Whereas unitarianism may be more effective in countries with uniform administrative structures and strong centralist traditions. This study provides a scientific basis for system selection to be based on an analysis of the country-specific socio-political structure. The traditional value of understanding governance models in a unified manner provides policymakers, academic researchers, and constitutional scholars with important contributions in both theoretical and practical directions for selecting and modifying the country's governance structure.

Conclusion

The above analysis, while comparing unitary and federal systems of governance, shows that the effectiveness of any state structure is not determined by a universally applicable model. Rather, the historical circumstances, level of political institutionalization, social diversity and geopolitical structures of each country directly shape the nature and capacity of the system it adopts. A comparison of the structural features of Nepal, India and Germany reinforces the proposition that unitary or federal systems of governance are not political constructs based on a single dimension. These structures are multifaceted responses arising from the historical continuity of state-building, sensitivity to power distribution and the need for social integration. Federal structures

provide the capacity to strengthen diversity management, local autonomy and participatory governance. Similarly, unitary structures prioritize policy coherence, national uniformity and administrative efficiency. The study findings confirm that ‘context-appropriate governance structures’, rather than the concept of ‘best governance model’, are a strong basis for political stability and inclusive development.

Moreover, the available evidence proves that the effectiveness of a governance system does not depend solely on the constitutional structure. The political behavior that operates it, institutional maturity, intergovernmental coordination, financial transparency, and citizen inclusion make the system successful or unsuccessful in practice. For neo-federal states like Nepal, establishing institutional stability, regional capacity development, and clarity in the distribution of powers are indispensable foundations for sustainable stability. In contrast, in traditional unitary states like France, the gradual decentralization exercise is restructuring the unitary model in a timely manner by creating a balance between centrality and locality. This further confirms that the real evaluation of a governance system should be based on the improvements it has brought to people's lives, how responsible the use of state power has been, and how effective it has been in reducing political and developmental inequalities. In this regard, comparative studies provide important contributions from both theoretical and practical levels in the selection and its modification.

Declaration

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