

5 Types of Government (I)

5.1 UNITARY SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

A unitary government exists where there is a predominant central government which has created subordinate local levels of government under it. The central government creates the local governments by Acts of Parliament which stipulate their functions and powers. The central government also delimits the territorial boundaries of the local governments and may alter their powers at any time. The central government usually has a central legislature which is the supreme law-making body. A good example of this type of government is that of Great Britain. For instance, the British central government with its headquarters in London created its subordinate local authorities variously called boroughs, county boroughs, municipalities, etc. The distinguishing index of a unitary government is that the subordinate local levels of government known as local authorities are the creatures of the central government. The local authorities derive their powers from the central government. See the diagram below.

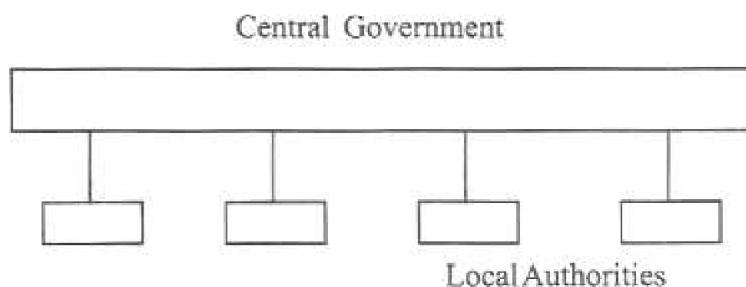


Figure 5.1

From the diagram, you will see that there is a central government with national legislature. It may be unicameral or bicameral. The whole country is broken into relatively equal units for local administration. The central government determines all things happening to the local authorities and indeed, the whole country is governed as a unit like in Britain. The legislature consists of the House of Lords and House of Commons. The Queen-in-Parliament makes all the laws for the country although the subordinate authorities may make regulations on areas which the national government allows.

The unitary arrangement is a direct contrast of the federal system of government. In a federal system of government, both the central government and the component governments derive their powers from a common source known as the Constitution. Neither the central nor the component governments creates the other. The component states of a federation are also not local authorities in the unitary government's sense. The federal constitution defines the powers and functions of both the central and component governments in a federation and also defines the nature of relationship between the two of them. Unlike the unitary system in which the central government has the power to abolish a local authority, the central government in a federation cannot abolish a component government.

Features of Unitary System of Government

The unitary system of government is characterised by the following:

- (a) **One Predominant Central Government:** There exists a predominant central government for the whole country. It is the central legislature which makes all the laws for the whole country.
- (b) **Subordinate Local Authorities:** Within the unitary system of government, there exists subordinate levels of local government whose powers derive from the central government. These sub-units of

local government are usually referred to as local authorities. They are given different names in different countries.

- (c) **Centralised National Administration:** Government and administration are centralised. As a result, there is no sharing of power by a constitution between the central government and the local levels of government.
- (d) **No Dual Obedience of Citizens:** The citizens owe their obedience and loyalty to only the central government.

Conditions for Adopting Unitary System of Government

- (i) **Small Population:** A unitary system of government is adopted where the population of a country is small e.g. Gambia with a population of less than half a million.
- (ii) **Small Territorial Area:** If the territorial land area is small, a unitary system of government is adopted e.g. Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, etc.
- (iii) **Relatively Homogeneous Population:** Countries whose population is relatively uniform in culture, history, tribe, religion and language, usually adopt this system of government e.g. France.
- (iv) **Poor Natural and Economic Resources:** Some countries adopt this system of government because they do not have adequate natural and economic resources e.g. Gambia.
- (v) **Ability to Maintain Internal Security and Resist External Aggression:** A State should be able to maintain internal security and resist external aggression. Where a country has very low military capability to defend itself against external aggression, unitary system is quite unsuitable. Such country should team up with another country to form a federal system.

Merits of Unitary System of Government

- (i) **Cheap to Run:** Unitary system of government is less expensive to run. This is because it uses a limited number of public personnel who claim wages from the public purse. It does not duplicate office and institutions and there is a single line of command which makes for efficiency and effectiveness.
- (ii) **Administrative Flexibility:** In a unitary State, the constitution is more flexible. It is not difficult to operate.
- (iii) **Quick Decision:** Unitary system of government facilitates quick and swift legislative and administrative decisions. In a federal system, decisions on certain issues requires the federal government's consultations with state governments and agreements with them. But in a unitary system, powers are centralised and the central government takes final decisions on all matters of government.
- (iv) **Minimum Tension:** There is less tension and conflict between the central government and the component units, as the component units are subordinates and agents of the central government. They are created by the central government which has the power to abolish them.
- (v) **Boundary Disputes:** There is absence of boundary disputes as one finds in a federal system as there is only one centralised government to which every citizen gives all his loyalties.
- (vi) **Strong Government:** Unitary government generally gives effect to a strong, viable and stable government. It ensures national integration and unity.
- (vii) **Central Planning:** It ensures centralised planning which fosters rapid development. It gives a strong sense of direction.

Demerits of Unitary System of Government

- (i) **Prone to Dictatorship:** In the absence of a strong and effective opposition, the executive, be it a cabinet, a clique or an individual, can become dictatorial.
- (ii) **Subordination of Local Authorities:** The activities of all the institutions of government, all local levels of government and administration, are overshadowed by one predominant, all powerful, centralised government and administration.
- (iii) **Suppression of Desire for Local Autonomy:** The desire of local communities for either autonomy or independence in certain socio-cultural matters is stifled. The only opportunity open to a unitary system of government to preserve and retain the desire of local communities for either autonomy or independence in certain socio-cultural matters is stifled. The only opportunity open to a unitary system of government to preserve and retain the desire for local autonomy is by what is referred to as ‘devolution’ of powers e.g. Northern Ireland; in Great Britain, is granted home rule.
- (iv) **Absence of Local Participation:** In a unitary system, government is not brought near to the people and there is no high incidence of people’s participation in government.
- (v) **Lack of Uniformity in Development:** Unitary system of government does not facilitate even development of the nation.

5.2 FEDERAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

A federal system of government exists where there is a central government in charge of the whole country, and at the same time, there are other units of government which derive their powers from the constitution. In this manner, the powers of government and administration are shared between two levels of government namely, the federal, and the component units of government. The component governments are described in various ways by various nations as regions, state provinces, cantons, etc. The relation between the central government and the component governments can easily be understood from the diagram below.

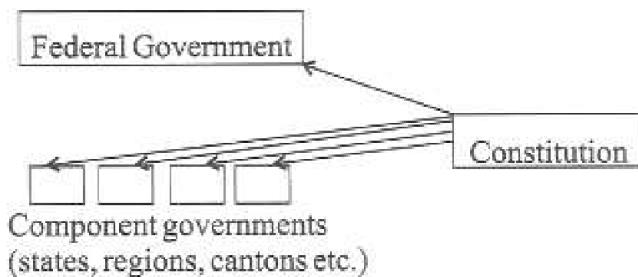


Figure 5. 2

Features of Federal System of Government

- (i) **Dual Level of Government and Administration:** Federal system of government is characterised by dual levels of government and administration, the federal and the component governments.
- (ii) **Division of Powers:** The powers of government and administration are shared or divided between the two levels of government, each of which exercises some degree of independence or autonomy in its area of authority.
- (iii) **Written Constitution:** Federal governments are invariably run with written constitutions which can be described as a form of documentary agreement between the federal government, its component governments and their citizens on how best to conduct their common affairs or live and work together.
- (iv) **Rigid Constitution:** A federal government usually has rigid constitution. The amendment procedure is not easy. It is purposely and consciously made difficult to amend, to ensure that no

level of government or group of governments can single-handedly proceed to amend the constitution without the cooperation of or being in consultation with, the others.

- (v) **Dual Public Services:** Federal systems of government operate dual public service structures. In Nigeria, there exists a federal public service and state public services.
- (vi) **Dual Legal Structures:** There are many legal systems in this type of government. These are federal legal institutions such as the supreme court, other federal courts and states' high courts and their subordinate courts. Every citizen within the federal territory is obligated to obey two forms of laws, federal law and state law. In Federal system of government, the role of the supreme court is crucial. The supreme court is constitutionally charged with the task of interpreting the constitution and having the final say on what it is. It plays the role of a great umpire in federal government and politics. The supreme court declares any violation of the federal constitution *ultra vires* or run unconstitutional. i.e. 'null and void' This shows that the supreme court, in a federal system, is the custodian of the constitution.
- (vii) **Supremacy of the Constitution:** In a federal system of government, the constitution is invariably supreme. By this supremacy, we mean that the constitution is the supreme, fundamental law of the land. Every institution of government, executive, legislature and judiciary, derives its powers and functions from the constitution.
- (viii) **Equal Representation in the Upper House of Parliament:** In a federal system of government, all the component units of the federation are equally represented in the Upper House of the national legislature. Whereas, representation in the Lower House of Parliament caters for popular interest, in the Upper House, representation is a means of ensuring the identity and the equality of all federating units of the federation.
- (ix) **Presence of Inter-Governmental Agencies:** Federal system of government is often characterised by the presence of inter-state or inter-governmental administration agencies which provide services for groups of the states of the federation. Examples are the Eastern Services Interim Administrative Liabilities Authority (ESIALA), the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), the Federal Public Service Commission and Police Service Commission, etc.

Conditions Necessary for Federalism

There are certain conditions which must exist before a State adopts the federal system of government. These are:

- (a) **Desire to Unite:** There must be a desire among political communities to unite and form a federal union. Unless this inborn desire exists among the federating communities, nations or states, all talk about the establishment of a federal system of government is a waste of time. If not, political frictions and tensions will so mount that it would be difficult to run the government.
- (b) **Diverse National Characteristics:** The country wishing to form a federal system of government, must naturally possess diverse national characteristics such as differences in language, culture, religion, tribe or race, etc., all of which can be transcended by the formation of a federal system of government. Examples of countries with diverse national characteristics which also have federal governments are Nigeria, the United States of America, India, Australia, Switzerland, etc.
- (c) **Abundance of Natural Resources:** There must exist an abundance of human and material resources, if a federal system of government is to be organised. This is very important because federations provide for dual levels of government and administration. Such resources will be needed to man and fund the institutions of government at all levels.
- (d) **Geographical Nearness:** The countries or units wishing to form a federal state should be physically near to one another. They should not be widely separated by another nation, a big mountain or sea. When units of a federation are physically wide apart, they cannot enjoy the full benefits of their union. Moreover, there would be great problems of maintaining national integration and unity.

- (e) **Absence of Domination by any Component Unit:** In a federal System, the component units should be relatively equal such that none of the units will be more powerful than all the units combined together. An example of this negative situation was Nigeria during the first republic when Northern Nigeria was larger than the rest of the regions. But with the creation of the 12 states in 1967 and later, 21 states in 1987, a proper foundation for federalism was created in Nigeria.

Necessary Political Institutions in Federal States

- (i) **National-oriented Political Parties:** Unless there exist political parties which are national in outlook and orientation, it will not be easy to run an ideal federal system of government.
- (ii) **Supremacy of Judiciary:** Experience has shown that federal governments and politics cannot succeed unless there exists an institutionalised umpire, usually a juridical body such as the supreme court. To the judiciary belongs the onerous task and power to interpret the federal constitution and other related laws in a manner which is impartial. The personnel of the judiciary should neither belong to the federal nor to the component governments as public officers. They must enjoy and be guaranteed such independence that enables them to discharge their functions boldly and fearlessly.
- (iii) **Bicameral Legislature:** A bicameral legislature is essential as it balances popular representation with the equal representation of all the component units in the Upper House of Parliament. If all the prerequisites are there, then the conditions for the establishment of Federal System of government have been satisfied.

Reasons Why Nations Go Federal

Many reasons can be given to show why many nations opt for the federal system of government. Among the reasons include the following:

- (a) **Defence and Security:** The desire may exist either among sovereign independent States or political communities for joining together to form a federal union so as to enjoy the benefits of security and defence. Fear of domination by powerful groups may push nations into federal unions.
- (b) **Vast Territorial and Geographical Size:** When the territory of a country is too large to allow easy and effective government from the centre, then the only suitable form of government open to that country is federal system of government. This the only system that guarantees local autonomy under which distinctive communities in the federation are given opportunities to give expression to their differences of culture, custom and tradition. The examples of countries with vast territorial sizes which are federal are the United States of America (USA), India, Nigeria, Canada, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, etc.
- (c) **Abundance of Natural Resources:** Nations which have an abundance of natural resources of both men and materials often go federal. They invariably opt for the federal system because they have the resources of men and materials to fund, run and organise the institutions of federal system of government. Federations consist of dual levels of government, together with federal corporations, authorities, and inter-state agencies. All these institutions require funds as well as administrative personnels. Nations which command the abundance of these resources such as USA, India, Nigeria, etc. can always afford to go federal.
- (d) **Desire for Local Autonomy and Independence:** Most political communities are prepared to join or remain as long as possible in a federation, provided their desire for local autonomy and independence is guaranteed in the system. Local autonomy is needed because of the existence of cultural diversity.
- (e) **Past Historic Links in Government, Business, Commerce, and Trade:** People who have had past links in business, trade and commerce often realise the need to form a federal union. Cameroon was formerly part of Nigeria.

- (f) **The Inspiration of the US Federal Model:** Many nations in the world today are inspired by the success and achievements of the federal model of the United States of America.

From the reasons why nations opt for the federal system of government given above, one finds that federal government does not exist by chance. There are several factors which combine to make nations adopt the federal system of government.

In the final analysis, federal governments are difficult to run and organise. They too, like other types of government, have their problems which are discussed fully below.

Problems of Federation

- (a) The Problem of Structure or Size of Units:** A basic problem of federation is the issue of structure i.e. the number of autonomous political units which constitute the federal union, or alternatively stated, the many component states, regions, cantons, provinces, areas, etc. that make up the federal union for effective operation. Nigeria at present has thirty-six states., USA has fifty states, USSR has eighteen republics, India has seventeen states, Switzerland has twenty-two cantons, Canada has nine provinces, etc. The map below illustrates the attempts made to solve the problem of the number of political units needed to break up the federation.



Figure 5.3: Map of Nigeria showing the 36 states and Abuja

- (b) Creation of States:** Related to the problem of structure is that of creation of more states. Government, in a federation, comes up in the context of pluralism. There exists wide and diverse national characteristics, differences in language, culture, custom, tradition, religion, growth and development rate. So, these socio-cultural, economic and political factors make federal government and federal politics unique. No matter what the federal authorities may do to satisfy the aspirations of the component units, there are always political leaders and critics who take advantage of the problems of their specific areas in the federation, to demand for the creation of more states. In a federation, there are laid down constitutional procedures for the creation of more states. In some federal states, there may be need for constitutional amendment; in others, there may be need for a referendum, and it is not easy to get all the component units to support the proposal for the creation of more states. The problem lies in the fact that denial of the creation of states' status to a people in a federation may either alienate them from the federal government or lead to outright secession and civil war.

(c) The Problem of Minorities: The structural organisation of federal system breeds minorities and the problem of minorities. Federal governments are invariably put to the task of how best to deal with the problem of minorities. In most federal systems, the minorities feel cheated or denied of certain constitutional rights. For instance, in Nigeria, certain minority areas e.g. Ogoja, Afikpo,

Opobo, the riverine areas of Nigeria, are either centres of food production or exploitation of natural resources from which the federal government derives its revenue. The people in these areas often, rightly too, feel that they are not adequately compensated by the federal government in the disbursement of federal revenues. Some feel that what belongs to them either naturally or constitutionally is taken away from them and given to areas which, in terms of economic or geographical position, are better than they are. These feelings, real or imaginary, creates problems of politics in a federation. In order to find solutions to them, federal governments are often beset with devising principles and institutions such as minority commissions, federal minority boards and agencies to meet the political and social rights of the minorities in the federation.

- (d) **Dearth of Natural Resources:** Most federations lack adequate natural, human and material resources to enable them do a number of things without which the federal government would be difficult or almost impossible to run. The most important is to match the constitutional responsibilities and functions of each level of government with adequate resources. If the resources are not available, neither the federal nor its component units would be able to do its constitutional duties well. The institutions with which federal system of government needs to work well are many. They consist of government (federal or states) commissions, corporations, authorities and inter-state agencies, all of which need huge sums of resources for effective operation. These institutions, together with the institutions of government organised at dual or more levels, in addition to their public services, require manpower to function well. If there is dearth of manpower, federal government will find it difficult to operate effectively. It will not be able to man well federal, state, and local government institutions.
- (e) **Revenue Allocation:** The structure of a federal organisation is such that it generates a lot of hot politics. Every component state would like to take home to its state of origin more of the federal revenue funds than would constitutionally accrue to it. In Nigeria, in previous years, the amount of hot politics which revenue allocation generated in the political system was sufficient to destabilise the country. Such problem that revenue sharing generates in the political system is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. USA, India, Australia and so forth face similar problems. All these countries have evolved principles such as the principles of need, derivation, equality of all the states, landmass, and of balanced development. Specific sums of money are set and shared among the component units on the basis of each of these principles. Certain political institutions such as the national revenue commissions, revenue boards and, in Australia, loan councils, are established to monitor revenue on a continuing basis in order to remove it from the area of federal politics.
- (f) **Border Disputes and Inter-state Conflicts:** Many federations are victims of border clashes and border disputes among their component units. Federal government is faced with the problem of settling disputes among its component states arising from border disputes between two or more states. Such disputes raise constitutional issues which, if not tackled in time, may generate civil strife and tension or even civil war in the federation.
- (g) **Federal and State Conflicts:** In federal states, conflict situation often arises between the federal government and a component state or group of states. This does not always make for national unity and political stability. The conflict between federal Nigeria (1966-70) and the Eastern states (Biafra) resulted in a 30-month civil war with considerable losses on both sides of the conflict.

Merits of Federalism

- (a) **Unity in Diversity:** Federal system of government is a means of maintaining unity in diversity. It is the only form of governmental machinery which can best be used to transcend diverse national characteristics; multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, cultural, religious and other diversities which maximised the benefits of unity in diversity. It affords practising countries the opportunity of

balancing the two needs for (a) representation based on equality of component units in the Upper House and (b) representation based on equality of the people in the Lower House of Parliament.

- (b) **Pooling Resources Together:** Federalism enables the federating units to pool their resources together and enables them to enjoy many economic advantages which stem from unity in diversity. These include:
- (i) the creation of large markets for trade and commerce;
 - (ii) the opportunity to undertake large-scale planning, joint administrative organs and ventures;
 - (iii) the possibility for facilitating the mobility of the factors of production and the attainment of a higher degree of resource mobilisation;
 - (iv) the opportunity to enjoy common tariffs, thereby, removing obstacles to trade and commerce;
 - (v) the promotion and achievement of territorial specialisation within the federation.
- (c) **Protection of Minority Interests:** Federalism is a device for protection of the interests and aspirations of minority groups. The federal constitution often guarantees them protection and security which allays their fears in the federation. The federal constitution might reserve certain substantive posts such as secretary of the federal government for the minority areas, or it might establish boards which look after minority interests and aspirations in order to increase their sense of belonging.
- (d) **Written Constitution:** Federal governments invariably adopt written constitutions. Written constitution helps to minimise arguments and controversies, thereby fostering common understanding.
- (e) **Rigid Laws:** Federalism provides for rigid constitution and rigid process for making fundamental changes in the constitution or machinery of government. It invariably provides for laid down procedures for doing a number of things like:
- (a) creation of more states;
 - (b) amending the constitution;
 - (c) assumption of certain offices in the federation, etc.

The rigidity of these rules promotes democracy and guarantees order and political stability. This rigidity ensures that neither the federal nor the state levels of government and administration can effect major fundamental changes in the law without consulting one another and the country at large.

- (f) **Creation of Employment Opportunities:** Federal system of government creates employment opportunities because it provides for dual or more levels of government and administration. By this means, it makes for optimum use of manpower and material resources.
- (g) **Administrative Convenience:** Federalism makes for administrative convenience. It does not only require that federal laws apply throughout the country, it also accommodates local needs to be catered for by the component units. This requirement guarantees flexibility in government and administration. Areas which cannot be easily reached by the central authority are reached through their state or local governments which are the integral parts of the federal system.
- (h) **Division of Powers:** Federal constitution shares powers between the centre and the component units. It also assigns constitution duties and functions and sets legal limits beyond which political institutions - the legislature, executive, and judiciary, including groups, organisations and individuals cannot easily go and escape without being punished by federal law. The division of powers and functions makes it possible for the component units of government to mind their affairs and be wary against violating the provisions of the constitution.

Demerits of Federalism

- (a) **Dual Allegiance:** The citizens of a federal state owe dual allegiance. They owe allegiance to the federal and component governments at one and the same time. There is the tendency in some federal states for the citizens' allegiance to their states of origin to be greater than that of the federal state. This may create problems of loyalty.
- (b) **Excessive Legalism:** Federal system of government involves the application at the same time of several legal systems like the constitution, which is the fundamental law of the land, the statutes of the federal parliament, the statutes of the parliaments of the component governments, the executive-made laws (statutory instruments) of both the federal and component governments, the bye-laws of individual local government areas, and the vast body of customs and traditions of the multiethnic, social, cultural and political characteristics of the federation. This makes the judicial branch of federal system constantly occupied in sorting out matters of governmental and administrative legalism.
- (c) **Hot Politics:** The structural organisation of federal states generates a lot of hot politics in revenue allocation. After the Ibadan Conference of 1950, a revenue allocation commission was appointed to report on revenue allocation of the country to fit in with the new constitution (1951). This commission recommended certain principles such as derivation, need, and national interest which served the conditions of the time. In subsequent years, revenue allocation continued to generate hot politics in the Nigerian political system. As time went on, revenue allocation came to be described as the 'national cake'. Today, in most modern federations, attempts have been made to establish revenue allocation authorities, boards, commissions, or councils whose duty it is to monitor revenue allocation on a continuing basis in order to minimise the heat which it generates in federal government and politics.
- (d) **Demands for the Creation of More States:** Federations are very often prone to the demands for the creation of more states. This demand, in most cases, emanates from the political communities in the federation which are actually or potentially, minorities. In some cases, when these demands are not readily granted, those communities feel frustrated and may be easily alienated from the federal government. The structural and plural character of federation may be the source of prejudices, true or false, originating from the remote parts of the federation against the federal authorities.
- (e) **Possibility of Secession:** Federal governments and federal organisations call for good government and adequate distribution of resources to all the component parts of the federation, or else political communities which feel cheated may want to secede from the federal union and assert their sovereignty as independent States or nations. Examples of this were Biafra in Nigeria, and Bangladesh in the federation of Eastern and Western Pakistan. If federal organisations fail to provide good government, then secession potentials are bound to be high. Perhaps, it is part of its design to reduce the potential of secession that federal governments emphasise federal character, and federal presence in the distribution of rewards, amenities and resources in a federation.
- (f) **Unsuitable for Emergency Situations:** Federal constitutions are invariably too rigid that they do not allow quick decisions to be taken in times of emergency.
- (g) **Ethnic or Racial Politics:** The structure of federal system of government generates ethnic or racial politics. Experience in the Nigerian first and second republics showed that politicians use ethnicity to achieve selfish objectives. It is a big factor in federal government and politics since ethnicity has a decisive influence on government action and processes of decision making in federal states. Ethnic rivalry for either leadership or office holding in federal structures is one of the effects of ethnocentrism in federal government and politics. In conclusion, ethnic or racial politics is a contradiction which many federal states cannot easily rise above.

5.3 CONFEDERAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

Confederal system of government is found where there exists sovereign independent states or nations which have come together to form a confederal union government. The union government may be likened to an association of independent states in which each component unit is free to have its armed forces, currency, etc., including the free determination of its mode of foreign relations with other countries. The confederal arrangement makes the central government weak. The central or general union government depends on the support, moral, financial or otherwise, of the component units of the confederation. In true confederation, each component unit is guaranteed the right to secede from the confederal union.

Confederal form of government is not popular in the world today. However, an example of confederal government was the historic German confederation of the first quarter of the 19th century under the leadership of Austria. A second example of a confederal form of government was the United States of America between 1783 - 1789. During the American experience of confederation, each of the component units was independent of one another; their rates of growth and development differed. A confederation is, therefore, an association of sovereign independent states in which the central government is weak vis-a-vis the component units. The diagram below illustrates confederal form of government.

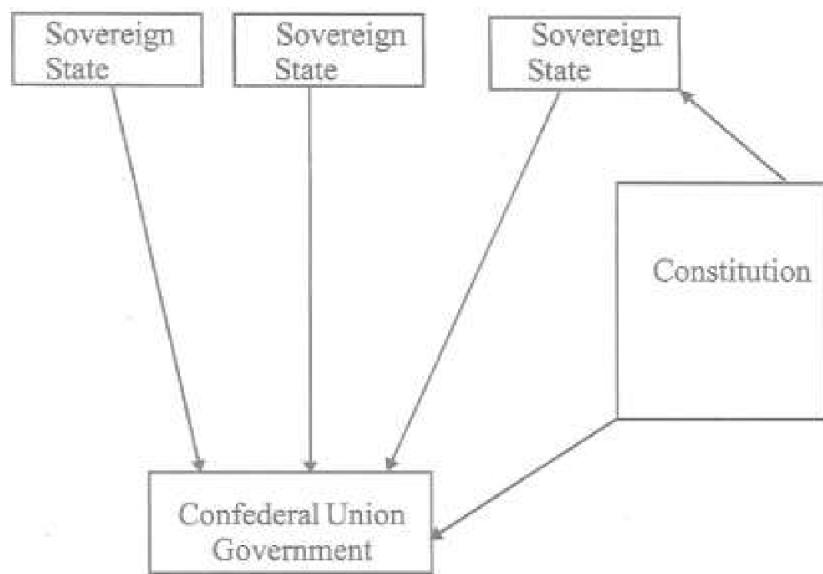


Figure 5.4: Illustration of a confederal form of government

In a confederation, some component units may be poor, others may be rich. This means that at any time, there are different stages of economic, cultural and technological growth. The central government lacks the power to institute measures to ensure balanced or even development of all parts of the confederation. Confederations have emerged and disintegrated in the past. Experience has shown that nations have always moved from confederation to federation and not vice versa.

Features of Confederal System of Government

- (i) **Weak Central Government:** The principal feature of confederal system of government is a weak central government which is devoid of the powers to compel its component units to do its will.
- (ii) **Derived Existence:** Confederal government has no independent sources of revenue. The life of the union government depends upon the support, moral or financial, which the component units are ready at any time to give. In this context, it has or enjoys derived existence. If the component units decide to starve it of funds, it fails or collapses.
- (iii) **Sovereign Independent Components:** Each unit of a confederal union enjoys sovereign independence from the centre and enjoys the right to opt out or secede from the confederal union.

(iv) Freedom of Units to Organise Diplomatic Missions Abroad :

Both the confederal government and component units are free to maintain independent diplomatic missions abroad. In this context, it is easy to subvert the confederal union government or government of some other unit in the confederation.

(v) Conflict of Allegiance: Confederal union government breeds conflict of loyalties. There is the tendency of one level of government claiming more allegiance of the citizens than the other. In most cases, there is the tendency for local loyalty to transcend national loyalty.

Merits of Confederal System of Government

- (i) Governance over a Wide Territory:** Confederalism encourages the establishment of government with powers of governance and influence over a wide territorial area.
- (ii) Separate Development:** It provides a system under which component states or community groups grow and develop at their own pace or rate.
- (iii) Common Service Agencies:** It enables common service agencies or inter-governmental institutions to grow in aid of the machinery of government and administration.
- (iv) Emergence of New Nations:** The secession of a component unit or a federation may lead to the emergence of a new nation which may soon become recognised within the community of nations.

Demerits of Confederal System of Government

Many reasons abound to show why modern nations no longer opt for confederal form of government. Among these reasons are:

- (i) Weak Centre:** Confederal system of government always has a weak centre, owing largely to the fact that it depends for its existence on the support, moral or financial, of component units of the confederation. It lacks the power to compel component units to do its bidding.
- (ii) Susceptibility to Secession:** The structural arrangement of confederal union leads it very easily to secession.
- (iii) Difficulty in Achieving National Unity:** In confederal union, it is always difficult to achieve national unity. It has rather high potentials for disintegration.
- (iv) Divided Loyalty:** The citizens of confederal union owe more loyalty or allegiance to their states of origin than to the confederal government.
- (v) Problem of National Integration:** The structural and political arrangements of confederation do not encourage national unity or national integration. Diverse national characteristics are potent sources of disintegration.

The German confederation of the 19th century under the Austrian leadership and USA (1783 - 1789), are typical examples of confederations that did not last.

Comparison Between Federal and Confederal Systems of Government

On the surface, confederal union system of government resembles, in terms of structural organisation, federal system of government, but in terms of institutional arrangement and mode of operations, both differ substantially in the following ways:

Federal System

1. Federal system of government has a strong central government.
2. Federal system of government allows some degree of autonomy to the component units.
3. Federal system of government does not allow its component units to maintain diplomatic missions abroad. Only the central government does.
4. Federal system of government maintains a supreme constitution as the fundamental law of the land.
5. Federal system of government recognises and institutes measures for even development.
6. Federal system of government makes provision for a Supreme Court as the interpreter and impartial custodian of the constitution.
7. Federal system of government does not allow the component units the right of secession. Secession may lead to civil war.
8. Federal system of government is built on the insolubility of the federal union. It, therefore, encourages national unity and national integration.

Confederal System

- Confederal system of government has a weak central government.
- Confederal union government permits absolute autonomy to the component units of government.
- Confederal union permits its component units to maintain diplomatic missions abroad.
- Confederal union government may or may not adopt a supreme constitution.
- Confederal system of government allows for differential stages of growth and development of component units.
- Confederal system has no need for such a juridical body performing similar functions since sovereignty of the component units is guaranteed in the units.
- Confederal union allows its component parts the right of secession, which, whenever occurs, may lead to the disintegration of the confederation.
- Confederal system does not encourage national unity and national integration.

As for the similarities in both systems, the following takes care of them:

1. Both federal and confederal systems of government claim *dual allegiance* from their citizens.
2. The two systems run *dual autonomous governmental structures*.
3. Federal and confederal systems both provide for a *framework law* known as federal constitution in federalism and confederal constitution in confederalism.
4. Both federal and confederal systems make use of inter-governmental agencies, otherwise referred to as 'common service agencies'.

KEY POINTS

Unitary System of Government

Definition: A government is said to be unitary if there exists in a given territory a predominant central government which has created subordinate levels of government called local authorities, all of which derive their operating powers directly from the central government.

Federal System of Government

Definition: A government is said to be federal wherever there exists a general or central government which shares the powers of government and administration between itself and its component units in such a way that neither is a creature of or subordinate to the other. In other words, both levels of governmental authorities, namely the central and the unit governments, have derived their operating powers and functions from a common source of authority known as the federal constitution.

Confederal System of Government

Definition: A confederation is a union of sovereign independent states with a weak central government.

SAMPLE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Essay Questions

1. What are the main features of a unitary system of government?
2. Discuss the characteristic features of a federal system of government.
3. Outline the main differences between federal and confederal systems of government.
4. State clearly the merits and demerits of a federal system of government.
5. Compare and contrast unitary and federal systems of government.

Objective Questions

1. Any system of government in which one level of government exercises an overwhelmingly predominant authority vis-a-vis the subordinate level of administration can best be described as a
 - (a) federal system.
 - (b) confederal system.
 - (c) parliamentary system.
 - (d) unitary system.
2. The principal demerit of confederal system of government is
 - (a) the tendency of the confederal state to be too large in size or territory.
 - (b) the existence of independent sovereign states.
 - (c) the weakness of the central government.
 - (d) the unrepresentative character of the confederal state.
3. Whilst confederation recognises the right of the component units to secede; federation, on the other hand, treats secession or attempts at secession as
 - (a) an irresponsible measure.
 - (b) an arbitrary measure.
 - (c) an ill-considered option.
 - (d) an illegal measure.
4. In a unitary system of government, the relationship between the central and local government authorities is based on the principle of
 - (a) co-ordinate relationship between the centre and the local areas.
 - (b) dependence of the local authority on the central government.
 - (c) equality between the central and the local government.
 - (d) mutual co-operation between the centre and the local government.

5. Sovereignty of constituent units is an indispensable feature of
 - (a) federal system of government.
 - (b) confederal system of government.
 - (c) presidential system of government.
 - (d) parliamentary system of government.

Answers to Objective Questions

1. d
2. c
3. d
4. b
5. b