

International Journal Research Publication Analysis

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SEPARATION OF POWERS AND EXECUTIVE DOMINANCE A DEEP INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE OF PRESIDENTIAL, PARLIAMENTARY, AND HYBRID GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS COMPREHENSIVE ACADEMIC RESEARCH PAPER MODULE 3: THEORIES AND FORMS OF GOVERNANCE

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Article Received: 02 September 2026

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Article Revised: 22 September 2026

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Published on: 13 October 2026

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.5559>

1. INTRODUCTION: Meaning, Theories, and Classifications of State Structures

Governance represents the foundational framework through which human societies organize political power, distribute public authority, formulate collective rules, and allocate resources. In political science and constitutional theory, the structural architecture of a state determines not merely the efficiency of administration, but the preservation of individual liberty against state overreach. Classical political philosophers—from Aristotle and Polybius to John Locke, Montesquieu, and James Madison—recognized that unchecked power inevitably corrupts. Consequently, the study of governance is fundamentally an inquiry into institutional design: how power is acquired, exercised, checked, and restrained.

Epistemological Baseline: State structures are classified primarily across two theoretical axes: the vertical distribution of power (unitary versus federal polities) and the horizontal distribution of power (parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential systems).

At the center of horizontal distribution lies the doctrine of the *Separation of Powers*. Formally articulated by Montesquieu in *De l'esprit des lois* (1748), the theory posits that political liberty requires the legislative, executive, and judicial functions of government to be housed in distinct, autonomous institutions. When these powers accumulate in the same hands or the same body of magistrates, tyrannical governance follows. However, pure separation is largely a theoretical abstraction. Modern democracies operate under systems of institutional interdependence and overlapping authority, commonly described as "separate institutions sharing powers."

2. Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of State Architecture

To understand executive dominance, one must first map the structural coordinates of modern states. Vertically, states choose between unitary and federal models. In a unitary system, such as the United Kingdom or France, supreme legislative authority rests with a central national government, and subnational units derive their powers entirely through central devolution. Conversely, federal systems, such as the United States, India, Canada, and Germany, establish a constitutional division of powers between a central federal government and constituent states or provinces. Federalism acts as a vital vertical check, preventing the total centralization of state apparatuses.

Horizontally, however, the interaction between the executive and legislative branches defines the day-to-day survival and operation of democratic regimes. Political scientists distinguish these primarily through electoral mandates and survival conditions. In presidential regimes, the executive and legislature enjoy independent electoral legitimacy and fixed terms. Neither can dissolve the other under normal circumstances. In parliamentary regimes, the executive originates from within the legislature and depends entirely upon its continuous confidence.

Institutional Mechanics: The horizontal axis determines whether an executive is prone to adversarial gridlock (presidentialism) or internal legislative dominance and cabinet hegemony (parliamentarism).

These structural distinctions profoundly influence how public policy is formulated. In federal-parliamentary hybrids, the tension between centralizing administrative impulses and decentralized regional interests generates a complex arena where executive power must constantly negotiate federal compacts while maintaining legislative discipline.

3. Structural Comparison: Presidential versus Parliamentary Systems

The comparative analysis of presidentialism and parliamentarism reveals contrasting trade-offs between stability, accountability, and responsiveness.

Institutional Metric	Presidentialism (e.g., United States)	Parliamentarism (e.g., UK / India)
Executive Source	Direct/indirect popular mandate independent of the legislature.	Drawn from parliamentary membership; executive is part of the legislature.
Tenure & Removal	Rigid fixed terms; removal requires extraordinary impeachment.	Flexible tenure; government falls instantly upon losing a no-confidence vote.
Party Discipline	Relatively loose; legislators often vote based on local or constituent interests.	Extremely rigid; strict party whips ensure cohesive bloc voting.
Executive Dominance	Prone to legislative gridlock and partisan polarization; mitigated by executive orders.	Prone to cabinet dictatorship and bypassing of parliamentary debate.

In presidential systems like the United States, rigid separation creates mutual vetoes. The executive can veto legislation, while the legislature controls appropriations, confirms appointments, and ratifies treaties. While this design minimizes hasty legislation, it breeds crippling gridlock during periods of divided government. When the executive and legislative majorities belong to opposing political parties, policy stagnation can paralyze state administration.

Conversely, parliamentary systems avoid gridlock through the fusion of powers. The executive commands a legislative majority, ensuring seamless policy enactment. However, this same fusion concentrates immense power in the Prime Minister and cabinet, frequently sidelining rank-and-file legislators.

4. The Rise of Executive Dominance in Modern Democracies

Despite foundational constitutional safeguards, contemporary democratic governance across both presidential and parliamentary models has experienced a pronounced concentration of power within the executive branch. This phenomenon—often termed executive aggrandizement or managerial governance—is driven by modern socioeconomic complexities, national security imperatives, economic crises, and the rapid pace of technological transformation. Legislatures, by their very deliberative nature, are ill-equipped to manage continuous, fast-moving crises, leading to a structural delegation of authority to executive agencies.

Parliamentary Overreach Cabinet dominance, strict party whips, and guillotine motions compress debate, turning legislatures into policy-approval rubber stamps.

Presidential Unilateralism Executive orders, national emergency declarations, and administrative rule-making bypass congressional deadlocks.

In parliamentary systems, party discipline is the primary vector of executive dominance. Because the survival of the government depends on maintaining legislative majorities, governing parties enforce strict loyalty. Members of Parliament who dissent risk expulsion or denial of re-nomination. Consequently, major legislative bills are drafted entirely within bureaucratic ministries and passed with minimal substantive amendment.

In presidential systems, executives circumvent legislative resistance by expanding unilateral powers, issuing executive directives, utilizing administrative discretion, and asserting broad inherent powers in foreign policy and national security. This erodes the horizontal checks envisioned by constitutional framers.

5. Constitutional Realities in India: The Hybrid Experiment

The Indian Constitution represents a monumental study in institutional hybridization. Framed by the

Constituent Assembly under Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, India deliberately adopted a Westminster-style parliamentary framework while embedding powerful federal features, an independent judiciary, and an enforceable Bill of Rights (Part III). Executive power is formally vested in the President (Article 53), but real executive authority rests with the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers (Article 74), who are collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha.

At the same time, India's federal structure grants significant legislative competence to state legislatures. However, the Indian constitutional design incorporates robust centralizing provisions—such as Article 356 (President's Rule), emergency powers, and comprehensive concurrent legislative lists—giving the Union government formidable leverage over states.

The Anti-Defection Paradox: The Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, enacted in 1985 to curb political corruption, strictly penalizes legislative defection. In practice, it institutionalizes absolute party discipline, severely restricting individual parliamentarians from exercising independent judgment.

Consequently, the Indian Parliament frequently operates under executive dominance. Bills are routinely introduced and passed with limited committee scrutiny. To counteract this centralizing tendency, the Indian judiciary has assumed a uniquely proactive role. Through Public Interest Litigation (PIL) and the doctrine of the *Basic Structure* (established in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, 1973), the Supreme Court exercises rigorous judicial review, invalidating constitutional amendments and executive overreaches that threaten foundational democratic principles.

6. CONCLUSION: Assessing Democratic Resilience Against Executive Overreach

The comparative investigation of separation of powers and executive dominance demonstrates that no institutional model possesses an absolute immunity to democratic erosion. Whether operating within the adversarial gridlock of presidential systems or the cabinet hegemony of parliamentary frameworks, modern democracies face continuous pressures toward executive centralization. Parchment barriers and constitutional clauses alone are insufficient to deter overreach; institutional durability requires constant political vigilance, civic engagement, and adherence to unwritten constitutional norms.

As states confront multifaceted contemporary crises—ranging from global economic volatility and public health emergencies to digital surveillance and national security threats—executives will inevitably claim expanded emergency authorities. However, unchecked executive expansion transforms constitutional republics into elective dictatorships.

Final Analytical Synthesis: Preserving democratic governance requires active inter-branch friction, vibrant parliamentary debate, fearless judicial review, investigative journalism, and an active citizenry willing to defend institutional boundaries.

India's constitutional journey illustrates that hybrid models can successfully sustain diverse, pluralistic societies only when all organs of the state respect their institutional boundaries. The enduring resilience of a democracy is measured not by the absence of executive power, but by the strength and integrity of the mechanisms designed to hold that power accountable.