



Mains Practice Question

Q. Parliamentary committees are an essential part of Indian democracy while they face several challenges and limitations in their functioning. Discuss the role and challenges of parliamentary committees in India. (250 words)

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Approach

- Start your answer with a brief introduction of parliamentary committees and mention the constitutional provisions for their authority.
- Describe the role and significance of parliamentary committees in various aspects of governance.
- Highlight the challenges and limitations faced by parliamentary committees.
- Suggest some measures to improve the functioning and effectiveness of parliamentary committees.

Introduction

A Parliamentary Committee is a panel of MPs that is appointed or elected by the House or nominated by the Speaker/Chairman. They draw their authority from Article 105 and Article 118. They are an essential part of Indian democracy as they perform various roles and functions that enhance the quality and effectiveness of the legislative process.

Body

Some of the roles and functions of parliamentary committees:

- They provide legislative expertise and scrutiny to the bills and policies proposed by the government.
- They examine the bills in detail and suggest amendments or modifications based on their findings and recommendations.
- They act as a mini parliament, representing the views and interests of different parties, regions, and sections of society.
- They provide a platform for deliberation, consultation, and consensus-building among the MPs.
- They oversee the executive branch and hold it accountable for its actions and performance.
- They monitor the implementation of laws, policies, schemes, and budgets by the ministries and departments.
- They also examine matters of public interest and importance.
- They facilitate public participation and transparency in the legislative process.
- They invite experts, stakeholders, civil society groups, and citizens to give their opinions and suggestions on various issues.

Challenges and limitations faced by parliamentary committees:

- **Poor referral rate:** Only a few bills are referred to the committees for further examination. Many bills are passed without adequate scrutiny or discussion on the floor of the house.
- **Recommendatory nature:** The committees do not have adequate powers to enforce their

recommendations. The government is **not bound to accept or implement** them. The committees also **do not have any follow-up mechanism** to track the status of their recommendations.

- **Shortage of time and resources:** The committees have to deal with a large number of bills and issues within a **limited time frame**. They often lack sufficient staff, research support, data, and information to undertake comprehensive studies.
- **Low attendance of MPs:** The attendance of MPs at the committee meetings is often low due to various reasons such as conflicting schedules, political pressures, lack of interest, or incentives.
- **Too many ministries under a committee:** The departmental standing committees have to oversee multiple ministries and subjects that are not related or coherent. This leads to a lack of focus, depth, and specialization in the committee work.

Some of the possible measures to improve the functioning of parliamentary committees:

- **Increasing the referral rate:** More bills should be referred to the committees for detailed examination and scrutiny. The rules and procedures should be amended to make it mandatory or desirable to refer all bills to the committees.
- **Enhancing the powers:** The committees should be given more powers to enforce their recommendations or seek responses from the government. The government should also be made accountable for accepting or rejecting the committee recommendations.
- **Providing more time and resources:** The committees should be given more time and resources to conduct their work effectively. They should be provided with adequate staff, research support, data, and information. They should also be allowed to use modern technology and tools for their work.
- **Improving the attendance of MPs:** The attendance of MPs at the committee meetings should be improved by providing incentives, penalties, or recognition. The MPs should also be made aware of the importance and benefits of committee work.
- **Rationalizing the number of ministries under a committee:** The number of ministries and subjects under a committee should be reduced or rationalized to ensure focus, depth, and specialization in the committee work. The subjects should be grouped according to their relevance or coherence.

Conclusion

Parliamentary committees are crucial for Indian democracy, enhancing legislative processes. They face challenges, but by strengthening and reforming the parliamentary committees, the role and relevance of parliament in Indian democracy can be revived and improved.