



Mains Practice Question

Case Studies

A Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), known for his principled stand on various issues and unwavering commitment to his political party, decides to defect to another party. He justifies his decision by citing ideological differences and the need to better serve his constituents. However, his decision is widely criticized as opportunistic and a betrayal of the trust placed in him by his constituents and party members. The Chief Minister, who is from the ruling party, alleges that the defections were orchestrated through unethical means, including promises of positions and financial incentives.

As an aspiring civil servant, analyze the ethical implications of political defections. Discuss the challenges faced by lawmakers in balancing their ideological beliefs, party loyalty, and responsibilities towards constituents. Suggest measures to address the issue of political defections while upholding democratic values and integrity in governance.

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Approach

- Start the answer with the explanation of political defections.
- Discuss the various ethical implications of political defections.
- Explain the challenges faced by lawmakers in balancing their different ideological beliefs.
- Suggest measures to address the issue of political defections while upholding democratic values.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Political defection, the act of changing one's allegiance or party affiliation, is a complex issue with profound ethical implications in a democratic system. It raises questions about the balance between ideological beliefs, party loyalty, and responsibilities towards constituents. Addressing this issue requires a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by lawmakers and the need for measures to uphold democratic values and integrity in governance.

Body

Ethical Implications of Political Defections:

- **Betrayal of Trust:**
 - Defections often betray the trust of constituents who voted for a particular ideology or party platform.
 - Elected representatives owe a moral obligation to uphold the wishes and interests of their electorate, which defections may violate.
 - When members of the British Parliament or the United States Congress vote against the party line, it is usually because they disagree with the party's position on a particular piece of legislation or topic, or because their constituents don't support the party line.
 - Regrettably, principles are rarely at play when Indian lawmakers depart

from Parliament or legislative assemblies.

▪ **Erosion of Democratic Principles:**

- Defections undermine the fundamental principle of representative democracy, where voters choose representatives based on party affiliations and ideologies.
- It raises questions about the sincerity of elected officials in fulfilling their electoral promises.

▪ **Ethical Dilemma for Lawmakers:**

- Lawmakers face a moral dilemma between their personal convictions, party loyalty, and constituents' interests.
- Balancing these conflicting interests while ensuring ethical conduct becomes challenging.

Challenges Faced by Lawmakers:

▪ **Ideological Conflict:**

- Lawmakers often grapple with conflicting ideologies between their party's stance and their personal beliefs.
- This conflict can push them towards defection to a party aligning more closely with their convictions.

▪ **Pressure from Party Leadership:**

- Party discipline and the fear of reprisal from party leadership can coerce lawmakers into staying loyal despite ideological differences.
- This pressure compromises their autonomy and ethical decision-making.

▪ **Constituent Expectations:**

- Elected representatives are accountable to their constituents for delivering on campaign promises and representing their interests.
- However, defections can lead to a breach of trust and disillusionment among voters.

Measures to Address Political Defections:

▪ **Strengthen Anti-Defection Laws:**

- Enforce stricter penalties for defections, including disqualification from holding public office or contesting elections.
- Implement mechanisms for expeditious resolution of defection cases to deter opportunistic switching.
 - Twenty-three of the Commonwealth's 53 countries have some form of anti-defection legislation on the books. When a lawmaker in Bangladesh, Kenya, South Africa, or Singapore stops being a member of the party or is expelled from the party, he is automatically disqualified from office under the anti-defection law.

▪ **Promote Intra-Party Democracy:**

- Nurture a culture of internal democracy within political parties, allowing members to voice dissent and influence party decisions.
- Transparent candidate selection processes can reduce grievances and minimize incentives for defection.

▪ **Empower Independent Institutions:**

- Empower independent electoral bodies and anti-corruption agencies to monitor and investigate instances of defection.
- Ensure timely intervention to uphold the integrity of the electoral process and deter unethical behavior.

▪ **Enhance Civic Education:**

- Educate citizens about the importance of political accountability and the consequences of defections.
- Encourage active participation in the democratic process to hold elected representatives accountable for their actions.

Example:

Anti-Defection Law in India:

▪ **Background:**

- India's Anti-Defection Law, enacted through the 52nd Amendment to the Constitution in 1985, aimed to curb political defections.
- It prohibits elected representatives from switching parties without facing disqualification unless under certain specified conditions.
- **Impact:**
 - The law has acted as a deterrent against large-scale defections, preserving the stability of governments at the state and national levels.
 - However, loopholes and ambiguities in the law have led to instances of its circumvention, diluting its effectiveness.
- **Lessons Learned:**
 - The Indian experience highlights the importance of continuous review and refinement of anti-defection legislation to address emerging challenges.
 - Striking a balance between preserving democratic principles and preventing opportunistic defections remains an ongoing challenge.

Conclusion

Political defections pose significant ethical challenges for lawmakers, requiring them to balance party loyalty, ideological beliefs, and responsibilities towards constituents. Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach, including strengthening anti-defection laws, promoting internal party democracy, and enhancing accountability to constituents. Upholding democratic values and integrity in governance is essential to ensure that political defections do not undermine the trust of the electorate in the democratic process.

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