



Mains Practice Question

Q. Parliamentary committees play an important role in exercising effective control over executive. How far do you agree with the argument that role of parliamentary committees has been declining in Indian Parliamentary functioning? (250 Words)

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Approach

- Start your answer with a brief introduction about Parliamentary committees.
- Discuss their role in parliamentary functioning.
- Talk about reasons with data about their declining role.
- Conclude with way forward approach.

Introduction

- A Parliamentary Committee (PC) is a panel of MPs that is appointed or elected by the House or nominated by the Speaker/Chairman.
- The committee works **under the direction of the Speaker/chairman**, and it presents its report to the House or to the Speaker/chairman. These committees play a **critical role in scrutinizing bills, budgets, and policies, and provide oversight and accountability of the executive.**

Role of Parliamentary Committees

- **Provides a Check on the Executive:**
 - Although committee recommendations are not binding on the government, their reports create a public record of the consultations that took place and **put pressure on the government to reconsider its stand on debatable provisions.**
 - By virtue of being closed-door and away from the public eye, **discussions in committee meetings are also more collaborative**, with MPs feeling less pressured to posture for media galleries.
- **Provides Legislative Expertise:**
 - Most MPs are not subject matter experts on the topics being discussed. Parliamentary committees are meant to help MPs seek expertise and give them time to think about issues in detail.
- **Acts as Mini-Parliament:**
 - These committees act as a mini parliament, as they have MPs representing different parties are elected into them through a system of the single transferable vote, in roughly the same proportion as their strength in Parliament.
- **Instrument for Detailed Scrutiny:**
 - When bills are referred to these committees, they are examined closely and inputs are sought from various external stakeholders, including the public.

Declining Role of Parliamentary Committees

- **Matters not referred to PCs:** According to data by PRS Legislative Research, the proportion of Bills referred to Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs) has decreased in recent

years.

- During the course of the **17th Lok Sabha, only 14 Bills** have been **referred for further examination so far**.
- **Just 25% of the bills were referred to DRSCs in 16th Lok Sabha** against 60% in 14th Lok Sabha and 71% in 15th Lok Sabha.
- Important Acts of Parliament, such as the **Farm bills and revocation of Article 370, were not processed by any House committee**, and instead, passed by the government using their majority.
- **Low attendance of MPs:** Many committees have **struggled to achieve the quorum** required for meetings, leading to delays and adjournments.
 - This undermines the spirit of these committees and reduces their effectiveness.
- **Too many ministries come under the purview of a single committee:** which makes it challenging for the committee members to scrutinize all the Bills and proposals adequately.
- **Short Tenure:** The constitution of DRSCs for a year **leaves very little time for specialization**, which can lead to **a lack of continuity** and inadequate scrutiny of legislation.
- **Party Politics: MPs often act along party lines rather than being agents of the legislature** to hold the executive accountable.
 - MPs are expected to approach parliamentary committee work with an open mind and engage in constructive scrutiny, but party politics often takes precedence, leading to a decline in the effectiveness of these committees.

Measures to Strengthen Parliamentary Committees

- **The 2nd ARC recommended that parliamentary committees should have greater autonomy** in setting their agenda, be provided with adequate resources and research support, and have **continuity of members** to ensure institutional memory.
- The **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC)** also recommended **strengthening parliamentary committees** by ensuring that their recommendations are followed up on and implemented by the executive.
- There should be **greater representation from all parties on parliamentary committees**, and their proceedings should be made more accessible to the public through the use of technology.

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