



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Probity and integrity are often used interchangeably in public service discourse. Examine the subtle differences between these concepts and their implications for ethical governance. **(150 words)**

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### Approach

- Introduce by defining probity and integrity
- Give differences between Probity and Integrity in Public Service and its implications
- Conclude in a balanced manner.

### Introduction

In **public service**, probity and integrity are fundamental values, often mentioned together but with distinct meanings.

- While both aim to **uphold ethical governance**, probity emphasizes **strict adherence to transparency and accountability in processes**, whereas integrity focuses on an **individual's moral commitment to honesty and ethical behavior**, even when not regulated.

### Body

#### Probity and Integrity in Public Service:

- **Scope and Application:**
  - **Probity:** Primarily concerned with **processes and institutional conduct**. It ensures that systems operate in a transparent and accountable manner.
  - **Integrity:** Focuses on the **individual's moral and ethical framework**, ensuring they do not deviate from righteous behavior, irrespective of external pressure or legal loopholes.
  - **Example:** Probity may involve **publishing the details of contracts and tenders to ensure transparency**, while integrity would **compel an official to refuse bribes and avoid corruption**, even when the process allows opportunities for personal gain.
- **Preventive vs. Personal Moral Conduct:**
  - **Probity:** Acts as a **preventive measure**, ensuring that public institutions follow ethical procedures and prevent misconduct.
  - **Integrity:** Is more **personal and intrinsic**, demanding that public officials act ethically out of their own moral commitment, even in ambiguous situations.
  - **Example:** The **Right to Information (RTI)** Act in India is a tool to promote probity in governance by allowing citizens to access government records.
    - On the other hand, an **official declining a personal favor offered by a contractor**, despite knowing they would not be caught, exemplifies integrity.
- **Public Accountability vs. Personal Accountability:**
  - **Probity:** Ensures public accountability by upholding **clear, observable standards** of conduct and preventing misconduct.
  - **Integrity:** Deals with personal accountability, ensuring an individual consistently behaves

ethically, regardless of whether their actions are observable or regulated.

- **Example:** Probity is evident in the **transparent conduct of audits in government programs like MGNREGA.**
  - Integrity would be exemplified by a district officer **who does not misrepresent data for personal gain**, even in situations where scrutiny is minimal.
- **Short-Term vs. Long-Term Ethical Impact:**
  - **Probity:** May have immediate implications, like **restoring public trust through transparency and accountability** in government operations.
  - **Integrity:** Has long-term implications for ethical governance, fostering a culture of moral responsibility that promotes sustained ethical behavior in public administration.
  - **Example:** In the **2010 Commonwealth Games corruption case**, transparency in auditing the irregularities was an example of probity.
    - The lasting impact of an officer maintaining integrity in preventing similar misappropriations in future events **shows the long-term benefits of integrity.**
- **Systemic vs. Personal Ethical Governance:**
  - **Probity:** Can be institutionalized through **laws, rules, and procedures** that promote fairness and transparency in public dealings.
  - **Integrity: Cannot be entirely institutionalized** but must be cultivated in individuals through ethical training and personal moral commitment.
  - **Example:** The **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)** ensures probity by institutionalizing mechanisms to prevent corruption and enforce accountability in public offices.
    - The personal integrity of an officer like **E. Sreedharan, known for his ethical conduct** during his leadership of the **Delhi Metro project**, demonstrates how individual commitment to **moral principles is essential**, even within systems that promote transparency.

## Conclusion

While probity and integrity **both contribute to ethical governance, their implications differ.** Probity ensures that governance systems operate transparently, but **integrity ensures that individuals within the system consistently follow ethical norms.** Together, they form the **bedrock of trust between citizens and the government**, ensuring accountability, fairness, and moral leadership in public service.