



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Analyze the importance of Parliamentary Committees in the Indian legislative process. Suggest measures to enhance their effectiveness in scrutinizing government policies. **(250 words)**

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### Introduction

**Parliamentary committees** referred to as the "**watchdogs of democracy**," play a pivotal role in the Indian legislative process. They serve as crucial intermediaries between the government and the legislature, ensuring **transparency, accountability, and effective governance**.

- However, a mere **25% of introduced bills** underwent committee referral during the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, a stark contrast to the **71%** and **60%** referral rates in the **15<sup>th</sup>** and **14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha**, respectively.

### Body

#### Importance of Parliamentary Committees:

- **Detailed Scrutiny of Bills:** Parliamentary Committees allow for **in-depth examination** of proposed legislation outside the time constraints of parliament sessions.
  - **Example:** The **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill, 2011** underwent extensive scrutiny by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice.
- **Expertise and Specialization:** Committees comprise members with specific knowledge in relevant fields, enabling more informed decision-making.
  - **Example:** The **Standing Committee on Finance**, often led by experienced economists or former finance ministers, provides expert analysis on complex financial matters.
    - In 2016, this committee played a crucial role in examining the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code** before its enactment.
- **Bipartisan Cooperation:** Committees foster a more collaborative environment away from the adversarial atmosphere of the main chambers.
  - **Example:** The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs**, comprising members from various parties, has often reached consensus on sensitive issues like internal security and federalism.
- **Government Accountability:** Committees summon government officials and ministers for questioning, enhancing executive accountability.
  - **Example:** In 2020, the Standing Committee on Information Technology summoned **Facebook executives** to discuss data privacy concerns and content moderation policies.
- **Public participation:** Committees often invite expert testimony and public input, broadening the base of consultation.
  - **Example:** The **Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019** invited comments from the public and heard testimonies from tech companies, civil society organizations, and legal experts.

#### Challenges Related to Parliamentary Committees:

- **Limited powers:** Parliamentary committees in India have advisory roles and their recommendations are **not binding on the government**.
  - This can limit their effectiveness in influencing policy and legislation..
- **Low Attendance and Participation:** A 2019 report stated that attendance of MPs in Committee meetings was **about 50%**, which is lower than the **84% attendance seen during the Parliament sittings**, reducing the quality of deliberations and scrutiny.
- **Lack of Subject Matter Expertise and Followup:** Members may not always have specialized knowledge in the areas they are overseeing, potentially affecting the depth of scrutiny.
  - Also, there's often a lack of robust mechanisms to follow up on committee recommendations and ensure their implementation.
- **Political partisanship: Sometimes, political affiliations can influence committee proceedings, potentially compromising objective analysis.**
  - In 2023, the walkout of opposition members from the **Joint Committee examining the Personal Data Protection Bill** over disagreements on the committee's functioning.
- **Delays in Forming Committees:** Nearly **3 months since the Lok Sabha Election 2024**, the standing committees have not yet been constituted.

### Measures to Enhance the Effectiveness of Parliamentary Committees:

- **Mandatory Consideration of Committee Reports:** Make it compulsory for parliament to discuss and vote on major recommendations of committee reports.
  - **Example:** In the UK, **many committee reports** are debated on the floor of the **House of Commons**, ensuring their findings receive proper attention.
- **Increase Public Engagement:** Broadcast committee proceedings and create user-friendly platforms for public input.
- **Strengthen Research Support:** Provide committees with dedicated research staff and resources to conduct independent analysis.
- **Ensure Proportional Representation:** Revise committee appointment processes to better reflect the composition of parliament and include opposition members in leadership roles.
- **Grant more Investigative Powers:** Empower committees with additional tools to access information and compel testimony.
- **Increase the Number of Subject-specific Committees:** Create more specialized committees to cover emerging policy areas.
  - **Example:** India could consider establishing dedicated committees on areas like **climate change, artificial intelligence, or cybersecurity** to address contemporary challenges.

### Conclusion

Parliamentary committees are **indispensable** to the Indian legislative process. By implementing measures to enhance their effectiveness, such as mandatory consideration of committee reports India can foster a more **informed, accountable, and participatory democracy**