



Mains Practice Question

Q. "State legislatures in India are increasingly becoming mere ratification chambers rather than deliberative bodies." Discuss. (150 words)

03 Dec, 2024 GS Paper 2 Polity & Governance

Approach:

- Introduce the answer by mentioning the constitutional provision related to State Legislature
- Highlight the Functions of State Legislatures in India:
- Give Evidence of State Legislatures as Ratification Chambers
- Delve into the Factors Contributing to the Decline
- Suggest Measures to Reinvigorate State Legislatures
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction:

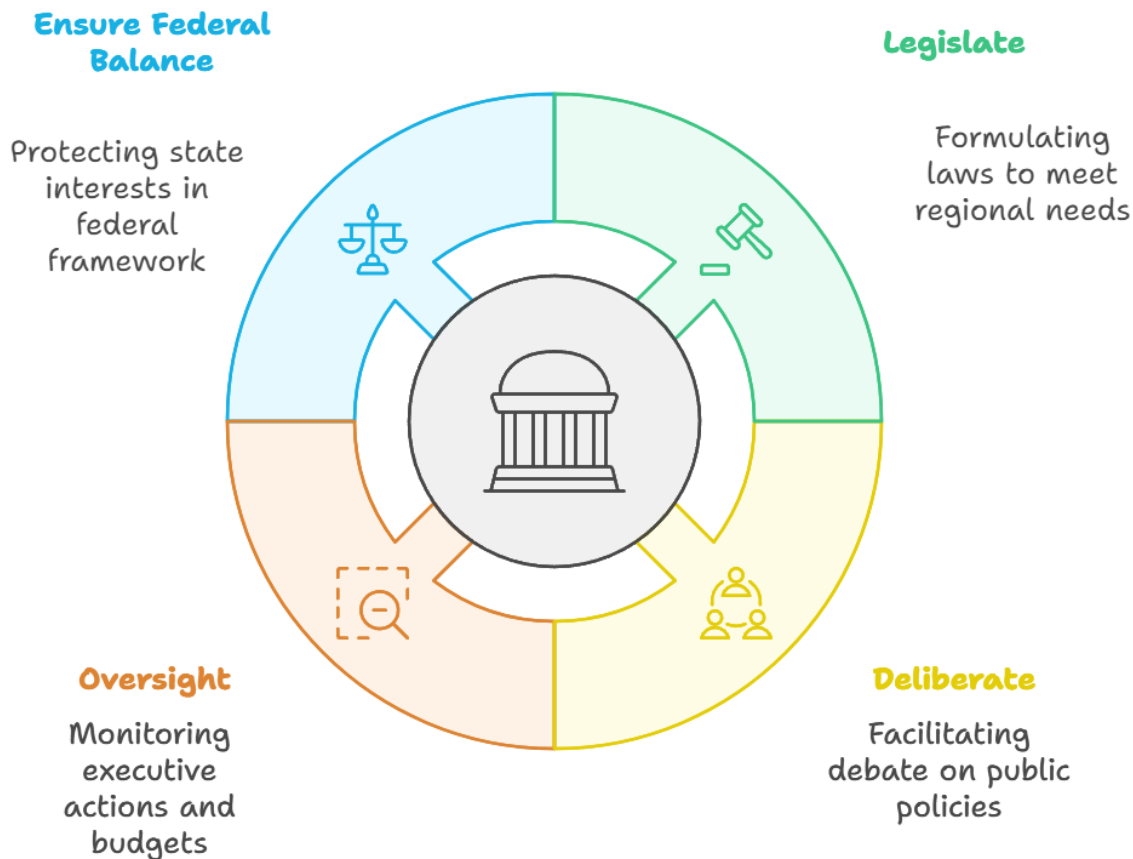
The **State Legislature in India** is governed by various constitutional provisions under **Part VI of the Constitution of India**, tasked with making laws, debating public policies, and holding the executive accountable.

- State legislatures, **once vibrant forums for rigorous debates and policy-making**, are now perceived as losing their **deliberative character**, often functioning as mere extensions of the executive, **rubber-stamping decisions with minimal scrutiny**.

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Functions of State Legislatures in India



State Legislatures Functioned as Vibrant Forums:

Historically, state legislatures in India played a crucial role as vibrant forums for debate, policy-making, and holding the executive accountable.

- **Rigorous Debates in Early Decades of Independence:** During the 1950s and 1960s, state legislatures were known for intense debates on key issues such as land reforms, education policies, and industrial development.
 - **For example,** the West Bengal Assembly engaged in **prolonged debates on the Operation Barga program**, showcasing detailed discussions on the implications for farmers and landowners
- **Collaborative Law-Making:** State legislatures actively contributed to framing transformative laws, such as **Kerala's Land Reform Act (1963)** that Witnessed exhaustive debates with detailed input from legislators, leading to effective implementation

Evidence of State Legislatures as Ratification Chambers:

- **Decline in Sitting Days:** In recent years, state legislatures have convened for fewer days annually. The number of average sitting days has declined steadily from 2016 to 2022
 - The **28 State Assemblies met for 21 days on average in 2022.**
- **Hasty Passage of Bills:** Many state assemblies pass bills without adequate debate. For example:
 - In 2022, 9 States, including **Bihar, Gujarat, Punjab and West Bengal, passed all bills within a day of introduction.**
- **Weak Legislative Committees:** Unlike Parliament, state legislatures seldom rely on committees for in-depth discussions.
 - This undermines detailed scrutiny of laws, as seen in the **Karnataka Assembly**, where less than 5% of bills were sent to committees.
- **Overuse of Ordinances:** Ordinances bypass legislative debate. In Kerala, **51 ordinances were**

issued within two weeks after a session ended, and 44 were promulgated 20 days before a session began, highlighting the executive's dominance over legislative processes.

- **Reduced Participation of Legislators:** State Legislators often focus more on local constituency issues rather than engaging in legislative discussions.
 - Instances of **disruptions, adjournments, and lack of quorum** further reflect diminishing legislative engagement.

Measures to Reinvigorate State Legislatures

- **Mandatory Minimum Sitting Days:** Introduce constitutional provisions to ensure state legislatures meet for at least 50-70 days annually, as suggested by various committees.
- **Strengthen Committee Systems:** Institutionalize subject-specific committees for detailed examination of bills and policies. For example, emulating the **Public Accounts Committee** of Parliament.
- **Capacity Building for Legislators:** Provide legislators with training and access to research facilities, enabling informed debate and policy making.
- **Encourage Public Participation:** Promote citizen engagement in the legislative process through **public consultations** and pre-legislative scrutiny.

Conclusion

State legislatures, as the bedrock of India's federal democracy, must evolve from their current state of dormancy and reclaim their role as vibrant deliberative forums. Strengthening institutional mechanisms, ensuring legislative accountability, and fostering a culture of informed debate are critical to reversing the trend of reduced deliberative functioning.

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