



Mains Practice Question

Q. “Institutional quality is a crucial driver of economic performance”. In this context suggest reforms in the Civil Service for strengthening democracy. (UPSC GS-2 Mains 2020).

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Approach

- Start the answer by mentioning the importance of civil services in a democracy.
- Mention the challenges faced by Civil Services in India and the reforms to be implemented.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Institutional quality in a democracy determines how successful the government machinery adheres to the principles of public service, rule of law, and social justice. One such institution is the Civil Services, which acts as a link between the Government & Citizenry and strengthens democracy.

However, there are many challenges faced by civil services, which act as a roadblock in the path of democracy.

Body

Challenges Faced By Civil Services in India

- **Status Quoist:** As instruments of public service, civil servants have to be ready for change. The common experience, however, is that they resist changes as they are wedded to their privileges and prospects and thereby, have become ends in themselves.
 - For example, the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution have envisaged democratic decentralization.
 - However, due to the reluctance on the part of the civil servants to accept the changes in control and accountability, the intended vision has not been achieved.
- **Rule-Book Bureaucracy:** By the rule book bureaucracy, it meant mainly following the rules and laws of the book without taking care of the actual needs of the people.
 - Due to rule book bureaucracy, some civil servants have developed the attitude of ‘bureaucratic behavior’, which evokes issues like red-tapism, the complication of procedures, and the maladapted responses of ‘bureaucratic’ organizations to the needs of the people.
- **Political Interference:** The political representative for the sake of fulfilling the populist demand, influences the functioning of administrative officials. Hence, an administrative official has to adhere to the will of the political master.
 - This interference sometimes leads to issues like corruption, arbitrary transfers of honest civil servants.

- Also, this led to substantial inefficiency where the vital positions are not held by the best officers and ultimately this can lead to institutional decline.

Civil Services Reforms

- **Prompt Delivery Of Services:** Every department should seek to simplify their processes to cut administrative delays and ensure participatory feedback mechanisms for efficient service delivery.
- **Reducing Discretion & Enhancing Accountability Mechanism:** There is an inherent need to set key responsibility/focus areas and progressively reduce discretionary aspects to evaluate civil servants.
 - Online Smart Performance Appraisal Report Recording Online Window (SPARROW) should be instituted in all central and state cadres.
 - Also, as suggested by many committees, there is a need to develop benchmarks to assess the performance of officers and compulsorily retire those deemed unable to meet the benchmarks.
- **Incorporation of Code of Ethics:** As suggested by 2nd ARC, along with streamlining of code of conduct rules, there is a need to inculcate ethical underpinning in the civil servants by implementing Code of Ethics.
 - This will sensitize civil servants to problems of people and help in the resolution of ethical dilemmas, which tend to emerge frequently in the public sphere.

Conclusion

Sardar Patel considered the civil service “the steel frame of government machinery”. However, without adequate reforms, this steel frame may start to get corrosion and may collapse. Therefore, in order to deal with present-day challenges and strengthen democracy, there is a need to carry out Civil services reforms in a holistic way.

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