

UPSC CSE • APSC CCE • 2026 ANALYTICAL MODULE

The Bloated Cabinet

Council of Ministers, Article 75(1A) and the Crisis of Portfolio Fragmentation

GS Paper II • Polity, Governance & Constitution

Cross-linkages: GS-III (Economy) | GS-IV (Ethics) | Essay

CORE ISSUE

As the proposal to expand the Lok Sabha to 848 seats moves closer, the constitutional cap of 15 per cent under Article 75(1A) would mechanically raise the maximum size of the Union Council of Ministers from 81 to roughly 127. The deeper question is not the arithmetic but the architecture: India already fragments inter-related domains (transport, energy, industry) into multiple ministries to accommodate political patronage, while keeping defence and external affairs as integrated wholes. This module examines whether the cap should be tightened, ministries re-integrated, and what either path means for governance quality, competence, and constitutional design.

Section 01 | Key Terms and Explanations

Before the analysis can travel anywhere, the vocabulary has to be precise. The terms below recur in mains answers, prelims MCQs, and interview boards alike — and most candidates lose marks not on facts but on conflating closely related concepts like 'Cabinet', 'Council of Ministers', and 'Ministry'.

Constitutional and structural vocabulary

Council of Ministers (CoM)	The full body of ministers under Article 74 — comprising Cabinet Ministers, Ministers of State with Independent Charge, and Ministers of State. It is the constitutional advisory body to the President; the term 'Cabinet' itself appears only once in the Constitution, in Article 352.
Cabinet	An inner ring within the CoM, consisting of senior ministers (usually 20–25) heading the most important portfolios. Took clear administrative shape after the Cabinet Mission and was formalised post-1947 through convention; functions as the apex of collective responsibility.

Article 75(1A)	Inserted by the 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003. It places a ceiling on the size of the Council of Ministers at 15 per cent of the total strength of the Lok Sabha. A parallel cap operates for State Councils of Ministers under Article 164(1A).
91st Amendment, 2003	Born out of the Constitution Review Commission's concern about 'jumbo cabinets'. Also tightened the anti-defection law and disqualified a defecting legislator from holding any remunerative political post until re-election.
Anti-defection law (10th Schedule)	The 91st Amendment removed the 'one-third split' exemption, raising the threshold to two-thirds of a party for a valid merger. The link to ministerial cap matters: bloated cabinets had become a tool to neutralise dissent and prevent defections.
Portfolio fragmentation	Administrative practice of carving one logical functional domain (e.g., transport) into multiple ministries (Railways, Road Transport, Shipping, Civil Aviation) primarily to accommodate ministerial appointees rather than to deepen specialisation.
Cabinet Secretariat	Apex coordinating agency for inter-ministerial business; works under direct charge of the Prime Minister. Its workload rises exponentially with every additional ministry created.
Allocation of Business Rules, 1961	Issued under Article 77(3). Distributes functions among different ministries — the legal instrument through which ministries are created, merged, or split by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister.
Concurrent List	The third list of the Seventh Schedule under Article 246, containing 52 subjects on which both Parliament and State legislatures can legislate. The structural source of overlapping jurisdiction the issue refers to.
Council of Ministers strength (current)	As per the 18th Lok Sabha (543 seats), the cap is 81 ministers. After delimitation if Lok Sabha rises to 848, the cap will move to approximately 127 — the arithmetic at the heart of this debate.

Governance and political theory vocabulary

Coalition compulsions	The political logic that pressures a Prime Minister to distribute portfolios across alliance partners; widely cited as the proximate cause of ministerial proliferation post-1989.
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Patronage politics	Distribution of offices, perks, and status to maintain political loyalty; ministerial expansion is one of its most visible forms in a parliamentary democracy.
Collective Responsibility	Doctrine under Article 75(3) — the Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha. Its operational integrity weakens as the body grows unwieldy.
Individual Ministerial Responsibility	Convention rather than constitutional rule — a minister is answerable for their department's actions. Erodes when portfolios are sliced so thin that no minister 'owns' a domain end-to-end.
Inter-ministerial coordination	The administrative work of reconciling overlapping mandates; usually devolves onto the PMO, Cabinet Secretariat, or Empowered Groups of Ministers (eGoMs).
Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM/GoM)	A coordination mechanism — a sub-set of ministers tasked to decide on cross-cutting issues; their proliferation is itself a symptom of structural fragmentation.
Steel-frame versus political layer	The classical Indian distinction between the permanent civil service and the elected political executive; portfolio fragmentation distorts both — secretaries multiply, departments duplicate.
Delimitation Commission	Body constituted under Article 82 to redraw constituency boundaries; the freeze on Lok Sabha seats based on 1971 census ends in 2026, triggering the expansion that drives this entire debate.

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Section 02 | Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

The discussion advances along a single spine: a numerical ceiling fixed in 2003 was designed for a 543-member Lok Sabha; if that house grows, the ceiling grows mechanically, and so do the pathologies that the ceiling was originally meant to contain. Around this spine, six substantive arguments unfold.

The core thesis

The constitutional cap of 15 per cent under Article 75(1A) was a numerical fix to a structural problem — the unchecked expansion of ministries for political accommodation. With Lok Sabha expansion under delimitation potentially raising the cap from 81 to about 127 ministers, the original problem returns with greater force. The deeper rot is not the numbers but the practice of slicing coherent policy domains into separate ministries simply to find offices for party functionaries and coalition partners. The remedy is not more sub-categories of ministerial rank but a return to consolidated, accountable ministries with clear jurisdictional lines.

Six supporting arguments

1. The portfolio scarcity problem

Even at 81 ministers, governments struggle to find meaningful work for each. Adding nearly 47 more would deepen, not solve, the search for portfolios. The arithmetic itself reveals the absurdity — 127 ministers in a country with a finite number of substantive policy domains is a recipe for manufactured ministries with overlapping mandates.

2. The patronage-versus-governance trade-off

More ministerial posts allow a PM to oblige a wider coalition base; in that narrow political sense, expansion is welcome. But this comes at the cost of the taxpayer and, more seriously, of administrative coherence. The political utility and the governance utility move in opposite directions — every additional minister appointed for political reasons subtracts from the clarity of the executive structure.

3. The defence analogy

Defence has been preserved as a single integrated ministry, even though it covers the Army, Navy, Air Force, and missile programmes — each large enough to warrant a separate department. So too with External Affairs. Yet transport is split into Railways, Road Transport, Shipping, and Civil Aviation; energy into Coal, Mines, Petroleum, Power, and New & Renewable Energy. The asymmetry shows that good administrative sense is applied selectively — where national security is involved, fragmentation is rejected; where the economy is involved, fragmentation is tolerated for political ends.

4. The coordination tax

Fragmented ministries impose a large invisible cost — the time and energy spent by the PMO, the Cabinet Secretariat, and ad hoc coordinating chairs in stitching together what should have been one ministry's work. A decision that could be taken in two weeks under one accountable head can drag for six months or longer across multiple ministries, or fail to be taken at all. This is the hidden expense of patronage politics — not the salary of ministers, which is small, but the opportunity cost of delayed and diluted governance.

5. The competence ceiling

Beyond the structural argument lies a human-resource argument. A Prime Minister has to find 81 — soon perhaps 127 — individuals who can not only win elections but also understand law, governance, finance, and rules of business. The growing tendency to recruit ministers from outside electoral politics (technocrats, former bureaucrats) is itself a tacit admission that the electoral pool may not yield enough administrative talent at that scale.

6. The two remedies

Two paths offer themselves. The first is administrative — re-integrate fragmented ministries back into their natural functional wholes (one transport ministry, one energy ministry, one industry ministry). The second is constitutional — lower the cap from 15 per cent to 10 per cent, which would still permit a sufficient council but resist political bloating. The two are not mutually exclusive; the strongest design uses both, treating one as a structural fix and the other as a numerical safeguard.

Implicit counter-arguments the analysis acknowledges

- ▶ Coalition governments need ministerial flexibility to keep alliances together — a rigid cap may produce political instability rather than better governance.
- ▶ Specialisation arguments — Civil Aviation and Railways involve genuinely different technical regimes, and merging them could dilute expertise rather than enhance coherence.
- ▶ Federal symmetry — Article 164(1A) caps state ministries at 15 per cent; if Union caps are tightened, similar pressure follows on states, with mixed regional consequences.
- ▶ Representational equity — diverse regions, communities, and party factions expect ministerial representation; numerical cuts may translate into reduced inclusivity unless paired with deliberate balancing.

Section 03 | Historical Evolution of the Issue

The size of the Council of Ministers has tracked the larger trajectory of Indian politics — small and elite in the Nehru years, modest and stable through Shastri and early Indira, sharply expanding in the Janata and coalition eras, and finally regulated by constitutional cap in 2003. Each phase mirrors the balance between governance design and political accommodation.

Pre-Independence foundations

- ▶ Government of India Act, 1919 — introduced 'dyarchy' at the provincial level; Indian ministers were given some 'transferred' subjects, establishing the early notion of departmental ministers.
- ▶ Government of India Act, 1935 — provided for a Council of Ministers to aid and advise the Governor-General; the architecture closely informed Articles 74 and 75 of the Constitution.
- ▶ Interim Government, 1946 — under Nehru as Vice-President of the Executive Council, India experimented with a compact, multi-party ministry; the model carried into Independence.
- ▶ Constituent Assembly debates — B.R. Ambedkar and Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar emphasised the importance of ministerial responsibility but did not foresee the need for a numerical ceiling, presuming convention would restrain expansion.

Nehruvian era (1947–1964)

- ▶ First Nehru cabinet had 15 ministers — slim, eminent, and ideologically diverse, including Ambedkar, Mookerjee, Patel, Matthai, and Maulana Azad.
- ▶ By the end of the Nehru years, the Council of Ministers numbered around 30; ministries were broadly consolidated — one for Transport, one for Industry, one for Education.
- ▶ Allocation of Business Rules first issued in 1961, formalising the President's power under Article 77 to distribute functions among ministries through Prime Ministerial advice.

Shastri to Emergency years (1964–1977)

- ▶ Shastri continued the small-cabinet tradition; ministerial strength remained around 30 even as the country went through war and food crises.
- ▶ Indira Gandhi (post-1971) began the slow expansion — by the mid-1970s, the Council had grown to 45–50, with several departments split off from larger ministries to create new ministerial positions.
- ▶ The Emergency period (1975–77) saw the creation of multiple ministries of state, including a separate Information & Broadcasting ministry empowered to handle censorship — an early instance of ministry creation for political control rather than functional necessity.

Coalition era and ministerial inflation (1989–2003)

- ▶ V.P. Singh's National Front (1989) had to accommodate diverse coalition partners — Council of Ministers crossed 60 for the first time in Union history.
- ▶ P.V. Narasimha Rao (1991–96) — even with a single-party minority government, the ministry grew to 73 members; new ministries like Information Technology and Non-Conventional Energy were carved out.
- ▶ Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998–2004) — leading the 23-party NDA, his Council reached an unprecedented 88, including 32 Cabinet Ministers and 56 Ministers of State; the size itself became a political controversy.
- ▶ Several state governments simultaneously crossed 70–80 ministers — Uttar Pradesh notoriously had over 90 ministers in the 1990s in a body of 403 MLAs, creating the immediate trigger for constitutional intervention.

Constitutional intervention (2003)

- ▶ Venkatchaliah Commission (National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution), 2002 — recommended a cap of 10 per cent on the size of the Council of Ministers.
- ▶ 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 — diluted the recommendation to 15 per cent but made it constitutionally binding; inserted Article 75(1A) for the Centre and Article 164(1A) for the States.
- ▶ The same Amendment also tightened the anti-defection law and barred disqualified members from holding any remunerative political post until re-election — a holistic attempt to clean up post-defection patronage.
- ▶ Special carve-out for smaller states — the State cap was set at 15 per cent or 12 ministers, whichever is higher, recognising that small assemblies (like Goa with 40 MLAs) needed a workable minimum ministerial team.

Post-2003 trajectory

- ▶ UPA-I (2004–09) — Manmohan Singh's first Cabinet had 79 ministers, brushing close to the 81-ministers ceiling; coalition demands continued to push expansion.
- ▶ UPA-II (2009–14) — touched the ceiling; the practice of carving sub-portfolios within ministries (Minister of State with Independent Charge for specific functions) deepened.
- ▶ Modi government's first term (2014–19) — began with a relatively lean 45-member Council but expanded over time to over 70; the framing of 'minimum government, maximum governance' coexisted with a structurally large executive.
- ▶ Modi's second and third terms — increasing tendency to bring in technocrats and former bureaucrats as ministers, signalling the competence pressure flagged in the article.

The delimitation horizon

- ▶ 42nd Amendment (1976) froze Lok Sabha seats at 543 until 2001; the 84th Amendment (2001) extended this freeze until the first census after 2026.
- ▶ 87th Amendment (2003) provided that allocation among states could be revised based on the 2001 census without altering total seats.
- ▶ The Women's Reservation Act, 2023 (106th Amendment) is operationally linked to the next delimitation, sharpening political attention on the impending exercise.
- ▶ Projected Lok Sabha size after delimitation (commonly cited estimates range between 753 and 888 seats) directly drives the renewed urgency of the ministerial cap debate.

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Section 04 | Logical and Philosophical Base

The argument operates on a classic public-administration premise: governance is a system of bounded coordination, not a sum of individual offices. When the political logic of expansion overrides the administrative logic of coherence, the system pays in delay, duplication, and diluted responsibility. The philosophical roots run deep into Western liberal thought, Indian governance traditions, and modern theories of bureaucratic design.

Underlying assumptions of the analysis

- ▶ Government is a means to an end — efficient delivery of public goods — not an end in itself. Ministers exist to make this delivery possible, not to be honoured by being made ministers.
- ▶ Inter-related functional domains belong together. The unit of government is the function (transport, energy, defence), not the individual MP who has to be accommodated.
- ▶ Coordination has a cost. Every additional ministry adds transaction costs that compound across the system — files, clearances, joint meetings, inter-ministerial committees.
- ▶ Patronage and good governance are inversely related — the more political the appointment, the weaker the administrative outcome.
- ▶ A constitutional cap can correct structural malpractice that political self-restraint failed to correct.

Philosophical foundations from political theory

Aristotle — political form and its corruption

In the Politics, Aristotle distinguished the proper form of government from its degenerate twin. Monarchy degenerates into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy, polity into democracy understood as mob rule. The portfolio-fragmentation problem is structurally similar — a parliamentary executive (the proper form) degenerates into a patronage executive (the corrupt form) when the size of the body is no longer governed by function but by faction.

Max Weber — rational-legal authority and bureaucracy

Weber's model of modern administration rests on jurisdictional clarity, hierarchical command, and rule-bound conduct. Fragmenting one domain across multiple ministries fractures jurisdictional clarity; introducing political appointees with thin mandates dilutes the rule-bound character. The result is a hybrid bureaucracy where legal-rational structure formally exists but is overlaid by patrimonial logic — exactly Weber's concern about modernisation in transitional polities.

Kautilya — the design of the council of ministers

In the Arthashastra (Book I, Chapter 15), Kautilya argued for a council of ministers (Mantri Parishad) of moderate size — large enough for diverse counsel, small enough for effective deliberation. He warned that a king with too few ministers becomes unsupported, but with too many becomes paralysed by competing voices. The 91st Amendment's cap can be read as a modern transcription of this Kautilyan principle of optimal size.

Madison — separation of powers and ambition against ambition

In Federalist No. 51, Madison argued that institutional structure must counteract personal ambition. The ministerial cap is precisely such a structural device — it prevents the executive's own ambition (to oblige supporters) from undermining the executive's own functioning.

Herbert Simon — bounded rationality and administrative satisficing

Simon argued that decision-makers operate under cognitive limits; organisations must be designed so that bounded individuals can still make defensible decisions. A 127-member Council of Ministers exceeds any plausible bound — collective responsibility becomes nominal, meetings become rituals, decisions migrate to small inner circles, and the formal structure becomes ceremonial.

Ambedkar — constitutional morality

Ambedkar warned that constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment but must be cultivated. The Constitution provides only the form; whether ministerial appointments are made for governance or for patronage is a matter of constitutional morality. The need for a numerical cap implies that this morality has failed and structural restraint has had to substitute for political self-discipline.

Habermas — communicative rationality and the public sphere

Decisions taken by an inflated cabinet, often after extensive inter-ministerial bargaining, fail Habermas's test of communicative rationality — they emerge not from open reasoned discourse but from bureaucratic compromise. The structural fix the analysis proposes is, in Habermasian terms, a restoration of decision-making to forums where genuine deliberation is possible.

Logical structure of the argument

- ▶ Premise 1 — the function of a ministry is to deliver a coherent policy domain.
- ▶ Premise 2 — patronage politics fragments domains across multiple ministries.
- ▶ Premise 3 — fragmentation imposes coordination costs that reduce delivery.
- ▶ Premise 4 — the constitutional cap was a numerical safeguard against fragmentation.
- ▶ Premise 5 — expansion of the Lok Sabha mechanically expands the cap, weakening the safeguard.
- ▶ Conclusion — to preserve governance quality, either tighten the cap or re-integrate ministries, ideally both.

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Section 05 | New Features and Unique Ideas

Several propositions emerge from the analysis that depart from current practice. Their feasibility varies — some require constitutional amendment, others only executive reorganisation, and still others a shift in political culture.

Proposition 1 — Lowering the cap from 15% to 10%

- ▶ Conceptual basis — restores the original 2002 Venkatachaliah Commission recommendation, which the 91st Amendment had diluted.
- ▶ Effect on numbers — even at an expanded 848-seat Lok Sabha, the cap would yield about 84 ministers, broadly similar to today's permitted size.
- ▶ Feasibility — requires constitutional amendment under Article 368; politically difficult since it touches the patronage powers of every ruling party.
- ▶ Federal symmetry — Article 164(1A) for states would likely need parallel amendment; smaller states would need a continuing carve-out (e.g., 7 ministers or 10 per cent, whichever is higher).

Proposition 2 — Re-integration of fragmented ministries

- ▶ Transport — single Ministry of Transport, with departments for Railways, Roads, Shipping, and Aviation as administrative wings.
- ▶ Energy — single Ministry of Energy, integrating Coal, Petroleum, Power, New & Renewable Energy and Atomic Energy under departments rather than separate ministries.
- ▶ Industry — consolidation of Heavy Industries, MSME, Steel, Textiles, Commerce and Industry under one ministerial head with departmental secretaries.
- ▶ Feasibility — requires only an executive order amending the Allocation of Business Rules under Article 77(3); no constitutional amendment needed. The Prime Minister can do this on day one of any term.
- ▶ Historical precedent — Vajpayee government merged Surface Transport and Civil Aviation briefly; the early Modi government carried out modest mergers (Power, Coal, Renewable Energy under one minister at one stage).

Proposition 3 — Distinguishing the cabinet from the council

- ▶ The cabinet rank versus minister of state distinction is described in the analysis as 'not really the answer' — and rightly so, since it addresses status rather than structure.

- ▶ A more meaningful reform would be statutory recognition of the Cabinet as a smaller body (perhaps 25 members) with formal decision-making powers, while the rest of the Council of Ministers operates as administrative heads under cabinet ministers.
- ▶ This would formalise what already exists in convention and bring legal clarity to collective decision-making.

Proposition 4 — Competence as a constitutional consideration

- ▶ The implicit suggestion — appointments should be assessed for administrative capacity, not just electoral success.
- ▶ Possible institutional translation — a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Administration to vet, in non-binding fashion, ministerial appointments to specialised portfolios (finance, defence, science, technology).
- ▶ Comparable systems — the US Senate's confirmation hearings for cabinet appointments; the UK's increasing use of expert peers as ministers from the House of Lords.
- ▶ Feasibility in India — challenging because it cuts into Article 75(1)'s open prime ministerial discretion; but could be done through informal convention, particularly for technocratic portfolios.

Proposition 5 — Inter-ministerial coordination by design, not exception

- ▶ Current pattern — coordination is an afterthought handled through ad hoc groups of ministers (GoMs), Empowered GoMs, or PMO intervention.
- ▶ Reformed model — a permanent Inter-Ministerial Coordination Council under the Cabinet Secretary with statutory clearance powers for cross-cutting subjects.
- ▶ Comparable practice — the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) plays such a role in security matters; an economic-affairs analogue could rationalise commerce, industry, MSME, and labour.

Feasibility assessment summary

Re-integration of ministries	High feasibility — executive order alone. No constitutional bar.
Lowering cap to 10%	Low feasibility — constitutional amendment; political will absent.
Statutory cabinet definition	Medium feasibility — could be done through a Parliament-passed Business of Government Act.
Competence review of appointees	Low–medium feasibility — depends on inter-party convention, not law.
Permanent coordination council	Medium feasibility — executive design, but requires sustained PM-level backing.

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Section 06 | Sustainability of the Idea

Any reform that touches the architecture of the executive must be tested across several dimensions of sustainability — constitutional viability, political stamina, fiscal logic, and administrative adaptability. A reform that is constitutionally clean but politically unsustainable will simply be reversed at the next opportunity.

Constitutional sustainability

- ▶ Lowering the cap to 10 per cent — fully constitutionally sustainable. Article 75(1A) already exists; the threshold is a number, easily amended. The basic structure doctrine is not engaged because the principle of cabinet government is preserved, only the size is restrained.
- ▶ Re-integration of ministries — needs no constitutional change. Articles 77 and 53 (executive power vested in the President, exercised through ministers and officers under his control) permit any allocation.
- ▶ Risk of judicial scrutiny — minimal. Courts have traditionally declined to interfere in ministerial allocation decisions, treating them as policy matters within executive discretion.

Political sustainability

- ▶ Single-party majority governments — find restraint easier; the PM faces fewer demands from coalition partners. Modi's first cabinet showed this empirically by starting lean.
- ▶ Coalition governments — face heavy pressure from alliance partners for portfolios; a tight cap can become a source of instability if not paired with credible alternative incentives (e.g., parliamentary committee chairs with status equivalence).
- ▶ Regional balance — diverse regions, social groups, and religious communities expect ministerial representation; reform must be paired with affirmative norms to maintain inclusivity within smaller ministries.
- ▶ Federal politics — states would resist if their parallel cap under Article 164(1A) is tightened simultaneously; reform may need to be sequenced — Centre first, States gradually.

Fiscal and resource sustainability

- ▶ Direct salary cost — ministerial emoluments are modest relative to the Union budget; the salary saving from cap reduction is not in itself significant.
- ▶ Indirect cost — ministerial establishments include personal staff (Private Secretaries, OSDs), official vehicles, bungalows, and security details, which multiply with each minister. The indirect saving from re-integration is therefore substantial.

- ▶ Opportunity cost — the most important cost is administrative: delayed decisions, duplicated approvals, lost investment due to inter-ministerial inertia. Estimates from past Administrative Reforms Commission studies suggest these run into thousands of crores annually.

Administrative sustainability

- ▶ Re-integration creates larger ministries — these need stronger Secretaries and a clearer departmental hierarchy. The civil service must adapt to mega-ministries of the kind that exist in some advanced democracies (e.g., the UK's Department for Business and Trade).
- ▶ Training and capacity-building — the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration would need to recalibrate its training curriculum for officers who will manage larger, more complex domains.
- ▶ Information systems and inter-departmental coordination — digital governance tools (e-Office, integrated file movement) would need to be deepened to handle larger consolidated ministries efficiently.

Societal and ethical sustainability

- ▶ Citizen expectation — leaner government with clearer accountability is broadly popular, especially among younger urban voters; reform draws public legitimacy.
- ▶ Ethical cost of inaction — continued patronage politics deepens cynicism about democratic institutions and weakens the moral authority of the executive.
- ▶ Risk of elite governance — re-integrated ministries dominated by technocrats may distance ministers from elected representativeness; reform must keep democratic legitimacy intact through other channels (Parliamentary committees, public consultation).

Environmental and climate sustainability

- ▶ Specific to energy and environment portfolios — fragmentation across Coal, Power, Renewable Energy, Environment & Forests, and Petroleum has weakened India's climate response. A consolidated Ministry of Energy and Climate would align with India's net-zero 2070 commitments.
- ▶ Comparable design — the UK's Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (created 2023) integrated previously fragmented functions, with reported gains in policy coherence on the energy transition.

Section 07 | Challenges Related to the Issue

Reforming the size and structure of the Council of Ministers is constitutionally simple, administratively complex, and politically difficult. The challenges cluster across five distinct domains, each with its own remedies and risks.

Political challenges

- ▶ Coalition arithmetic — modern Indian governments at the Union and most large states are coalition-driven; alliance partners demand portfolios as proof of relevance to their voter base.
- ▶ Intra-party factionalism — within a ruling party, ministerial berths are tools for balancing caste, region, religion, and generational claims. A leaner cabinet sharpens these internal contests.
- ▶ Anti-defection collateral — historically, ministerial expansion has been used to absorb potential defectors. Tighter caps may either strengthen anti-defection discipline or push patronage into other less visible forms (board appointments, governorships).
- ▶ Federal pushback — states with large assemblies and large existing cabinets (Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal) would resist any parallel tightening of Article 164(1A).

Implementation and administrative challenges

- ▶ Departmental rationalisation — merging ministries requires rationalising staff cadres, secretariats, and budget heads, all of which encounter institutional resistance.
- ▶ File movement and digital integration — different ministries often run on different file-management systems; integration of e-Office implementations across merged units is operationally demanding.
- ▶ Capacity at the top — larger consolidated ministries demand secretaries and additional secretaries of exceptional calibre. The shallow bench of officers in some specialised areas (energy economics, climate science, advanced manufacturing) is a real constraint.
- ▶ Loss of focus risk — overly consolidated ministries can lose attention to less politically visible sub-sectors (e.g., handlooms within a mega-textiles ministry).

Stakeholder resistance

- ▶ Sitting and aspiring ministers — directly lose status and opportunity; the most vocal constituency.
- ▶ Civil service mid-levels — joint secretaries and directors in smaller ministries enjoy disproportionate authority that would dilute in mega-ministries; quiet resistance is common.
- ▶ Sectoral lobbies — industry associations are often comfortable with a 'dedicated' minister (e.g., separate Textiles ministry valued by textile industry bodies); they fear loss of access if folded into a larger ministry.

- ▶ Coalition leadership — regional party heads who depend on ministerial visibility for state-level appeal.

Legal and constitutional challenges

- ▶ Amending Article 75(1A) requires special majority under Article 368 — passable but politically expensive.
- ▶ Allocation of Business Rules changes invite litigation in transitional period — e.g., parties affected by transfer of regulatory functions between ministries may approach courts.
- ▶ Question of definition — the term 'ministry' is not constitutionally defined; reformers would need to clearly distinguish 'ministry' from 'department' to prevent the creation of crypto-ministries under a different label.

Federal and inter-governmental challenges

- ▶ State-level resistance — states with large legislative assemblies and patronage cabinets would lobby against parallel reform.
- ▶ Inter-state Council and NITI Aayog dynamics — reforms at the Centre alter the participation patterns of state ministers in Union deliberations; this needs careful redesign.
- ▶ Zonal Councils and regional bodies — would need recalibration of representation if ministerial structures change significantly at Union and state levels.

Ethical and public-trust challenges

- ▶ Perception of executive overreach — if reform is pushed through without political consensus, it could be portrayed as concentration of power in the PM and the Cabinet Secretariat at the expense of broader representation.
- ▶ Media and civil society scrutiny — a leaner cabinet must be matched with stronger Parliamentary oversight, RTI compliance, and proactive disclosure, or public trust may not recover.
- ▶ Risk of technocratic insulation — bringing in non-elected experts as ministers raises questions about democratic accountability; this needs accompanying reforms (Rajya Sabha route with clear public hearings).

Section 08 | Multidimensional Analysis

The structure of the executive sits at the crossroads of politics, law, economics, ethics, and social representation. Examining the issue across these six dimensions allows a UPSC aspirant to deploy the same content across multiple GS papers and essay topics.

Social dimension

- ▶ Representational expectations — diverse groups (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, minorities, women, regional communities) expect ministerial visibility; a leaner cabinet must consciously protect inclusivity.
- ▶ Symbolism of office — for first-time MPs from historically marginalised groups, ministerial appointment is both personal recognition and group representation; reform design must preserve this.
- ▶ Northeast and tribal regions — the Sixth Schedule areas, the Northeast and Ladakh historically gained voice through dedicated portfolios like the Ministry of DoNER and the Department of Tribal Affairs; consolidation risks loss of focused attention to these regions.
- ▶ Social trust in institutions — a transparent, leaner cabinet that visibly serves the public can rebuild trust eroded by perceptions of executive bloat and patronage.

Political dimension

- ▶ Coalition management — the central political function of ministerial expansion is alliance maintenance; reform must offer alternative non-ministerial offices of stature (committee chairs, deputy speakership, governance boards) to fill the gap.
- ▶ Centre-State relations — parallel reform at the State level under Article 164(1A) will face uneven political weather across regions; sequenced reform is essential.
- ▶ Prime ministerial authority — a smaller cabinet concentrates power closer to the PM; checks must come from Parliament and the judiciary rather than from intra-cabinet plurality.
- ▶ Federal asymmetry — small states (Sikkim, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa) already operate under the 12-minister floor; reform there must remain anchored to functional minimum rather than percentage logic.

Legal dimension

- ▶ Article 74 — the Council of Ministers as advisory body to the President; the constitutional core that any reform must respect.

- ▶ Article 75 — appointment, tenure, salary, oath, and collective responsibility of ministers; sub-clause 1A is the operative cap.
- ▶ Article 77 — conduct of business of Government of India; the legal basis for Allocation of Business Rules.
- ▶ Article 164 — parallel provisions for states; sub-clause 1A places the corresponding cap.
- ▶ Tenth Schedule and 91st Amendment — anti-defection logic linked to ministerial appointment; reforms here interlock with the size-cap debate.
- ▶ Judicial review — courts have largely deferred to executive discretion on size and allocation; the threshold for judicial intervention has historically been only on grounds of manifest arbitrariness.

Ethical dimension

- ▶ Public office as a public trust — Kautilya, Gandhi, and modern public-service codes all converge on this idea; ministerial offices created for patronage violate the principle.
- ▶ Stewardship of public resources — every additional minister consumes public infrastructure (staff, vehicles, security); the moral case for restraint is strong.
- ▶ Constitutional morality — Ambedkar's call to cultivate disciplined adherence to constitutional principles is directly tested here; the gap between law and practice is the gap between the cap and the underlying purpose.
- ▶ Probity and propriety — codes like the All India Services Conduct Rules apply to civil servants but ministers are governed by softer norms; ethical reform must include a strengthened Ministerial Code of Conduct.

International dimension

- ▶ Comparative perspective — UK Cabinet typically 22–25 members; US Cabinet 15–25; Japan around 20; Germany around 16–17. India's potential 127 stands as a global outlier.
- ▶ Westminster benchmark — even the UK, from which India's parliamentary model derives, restricts paid ministerial positions through the House of Commons Disqualification Act, 1975 (currently capped at 95 paid office-holders across both Houses).
- ▶ Reputational dimension — India's external image as a 'serious' large democracy is affected by perceptions of governance efficiency; lean executive design supports the case for permanent UNSC membership and G20 leadership.
- ▶ Best practices for adoption — New Zealand's Cabinet Manual, Canada's Privy Council Office handbook, and Singapore's structured ministerial system offer useful templates for India to study without copying.

Economic dimension

- ▶ Direct expenditure — ministerial salaries, allowances, and establishment costs are recurring expenditure on the Consolidated Fund.
- ▶ Investment climate — investors (foreign and domestic) face delays when projects cut across multiple ministries (e.g., a refinery may need clearances from Petroleum, Environment, Power, Labour, Commerce). Consolidated ministries reduce transaction time and increase ease of doing business.
- ▶ MSME sector and Northeast — a Ministry of Industry rather than separate MSME and Heavy Industries ministries could integrate value-chain policy, benefiting MSMEs in Assam and the wider Northeast that struggle with fragmented support architecture.
- ▶ Energy economics — fragmentation has hindered an integrated energy policy; the long delay in finalising the National Energy Policy was partly traceable to inter-ministerial disagreement between Coal, Petroleum, and Renewable Energy ministries.

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Section 09 | Linkages with NCERTs

The issue draws on multiple NCERT textbooks across political science, sociology, and economics. The right linkages allow an aspirant to anchor the analysis in well-established foundational material, especially useful for prelims fact-recall and mains conceptual scaffolding.

Political Science linkages

Class IX — Democratic Politics I	Chapter on 'Working of Institutions' introduces the Council of Ministers, the office of the Prime Minister, and how decisions are taken in a parliamentary democracy. Foundational text for understanding the executive structure.
Class X — Democratic Politics II	Chapters on 'Power Sharing', 'Federalism', and 'Political Parties' establish the logic of coalition governments and the imperatives of accommodation that drive ministerial expansion.
Class XI — Indian Constitution at Work	Chapter 4 on 'Executive' directly covers the President, Prime Minister, Council of Ministers, and the parliamentary system. The textbook addresses collective responsibility and the relationship with the legislature.
Class XI — Political Theory	Chapters on 'Citizenship', 'Equality', and 'Rights' frame the philosophical underpinnings of public office as service rather than as privilege — directly relevant to the patronage critique.
Class XII — Politics in India Since Independence	Chapters on 'Era of Coalitions' and 'Recent Developments in Indian Politics' trace the political history of ministerial expansion through the V.P. Singh, Rao, and Vajpayee years.
Class XII — Contemporary World Politics	Provides comparative material on US, UK, Russian and EU executive structures useful for the international dimension.

History and constitutional foundations

Class VIII — Our Pasts III	Chapter on 'Ruling the Countryside' and 'Civilising the Native' provide colonial origins of administrative structure — the District Officer system and the early ministerial design under the Government of India Acts.
Class XII — Themes in Indian History (Part III)	Chapter on 'Framing the Constitution' captures Constituent Assembly debates including Ambedkar and Patel on executive structure.

Sociology and economy linkages

Class XII — Indian Society	Chapters on 'Cultural Diversity and Indian Society' and 'Patterns of Social Inequality' help frame the representational logic of ministerial appointments for social and regional groups.
Class XII — Social Change and Development in India	Chapter on 'Change and Development in Industrial Society' is useful for understanding why fragmentation of industrial-policy ministries weakens coherent industrial strategy.
Class XI — Indian Economic Development	Chapters on 'Indian Economy on the Eve of Independence', 'Indian Economy 1950–1990', and 'Economic Reforms since 1991' track how ministerial structures evolved with the economy, particularly the proliferation post-liberalisation.
Class XII — Macroeconomics	Chapter on 'Government Budget and the Economy' grounds the fiscal-cost analysis of ministerial expansion.

Why these linkages matter

- ▶ NCERTs build the conceptual baseline — most prelims questions and mains keyword recognition trace back to these texts.
- ▶ They prevent over-reliance on news commentary; using NCERT terminology signals examination maturity.
- ▶ They enable cross-paper integration — the same NCERT chapter on the executive can serve GS-II, an Essay on governance, and an Ethics case study on public office.
- ▶ For APSC aspirants, the Class XI 'Indian Constitution at Work' chapters are particularly important as the APSC Polity syllabus draws heavily from them.

Section 10 | Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus

This issue is unusually rich in cross-paper applicability. It is anchored in GS-II but radiates outwards into GS-III for the economic-cost analysis, GS-IV for the ethics of public office, and is a strong Essay theme. Polity optional candidates have direct alignment; Public Administration candidates find core material.

General Studies — Prelims

- ▶ Indian Polity and Governance — Constitution, political system, panchayati raj, public policy, rights issues.
- ▶ Current events of national importance — anti-defection, constitutional amendments, parliamentary reforms.
- ▶ Specific factual recall — Articles 74, 75, 77, 164, 91st Amendment, Tenth Schedule, Allocation of Business Rules.

GS Paper I

- ▶ Post-independence consolidation and reorganisation within the country — particularly relevant for tracing the evolution of executive structures from 1947 through coalition politics.
- ▶ Indian society — diversity and the representational pressures that drive ministerial accommodation.

GS Paper II — Primary alignment

- ▶ Indian Constitution — historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.
- ▶ Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States; issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.
- ▶ Separation of powers between various organs; structure, organisation and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary.
- ▶ Parliament and State Legislatures — structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers and privileges; ministerial responsibilities; pressure groups.
- ▶ Salient features of the Representation of People's Act — connection through the 91st Amendment's anti-defection logic.
- ▶ Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- ▶ Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens' charters.

GS Paper III

- ▶ Indian economy — issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment — fragmented ministries weaken planning coherence.
- ▶ Government Budgeting — the recurring cost of ministerial establishments and the indirect cost of inter-ministerial delays.
- ▶ Infrastructure — Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways — the transport and energy ministry fragmentation discussion lands directly here.
- ▶ Investment models and public sector enterprises — disinvestment, regulation, and operational efficiency all depend on coherent ministerial design.

GS Paper IV — Ethics

- ▶ Ethics and human interface — public/civil service values and ethics in public administration.
- ▶ Probity in governance — concept of public service; philosophical basis of governance and probity.
- ▶ Aptitude and foundational values for civil services — integrity, impartiality, non-partisanship, objectivity, accountability.
- ▶ Case studies on ministerial conduct and conflicts of interest in coalition contexts.

Essay Paper

- ▶ Themes on governance reform — 'Politics without principles is dangerous'; 'Patronage and the corrosion of public office'; 'Small is beautiful in governance'.
- ▶ Themes on institutions and democracy — 'A democracy is only as strong as its institutions'; 'The price of representation'.
- ▶ Philosophical themes — 'Form without substance is hollow; substance without form is chaotic' — directly fits the constitutional-cap-versus-practice gap.

Optional subjects with strongest fit

- ▶ Political Science and International Relations — Indian Government and Politics paper directly covers Council of Ministers, Cabinet system, anti-defection law, and constitutional amendments.
- ▶ Public Administration — Theory of Organisation, Administrative Behaviour, Public Sector Undertakings, Centre-State Relations — all directly engaged.
- ▶ Sociology — Politics and Society chapter; representation and political parties.
- ▶ Law optional — Constitutional Law paper directly covers the executive provisions.
- ▶ History — modern Indian history and constitutional development from 1858 to 1950.

APSC CCE alignment

- ▶ APSC Polity syllabus mirrors UPSC GS-II on the executive — direct content overlap.
- ▶ APSC Mains General Studies Paper II covers Indian Constitution, Polity, Governance — same material.
- ▶ APSC-specific lens — applicability of the size-cap debate to the Assam Cabinet, the Sixth Schedule autonomous councils, and the executive structure of the autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council.
- ▶ Assam-relevant data — current Assam Council of Ministers has typically 18 ministers in a 126-member Assembly (15 per cent cap = 18 maximum); reform implications direct.

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Section 11 | Best Linkages with Syllabus, Philosophy & Epistemology

Some issues are richer than others in the depth of philosophical and epistemological connection they offer. The size and structure of the Council of Ministers is one such issue — it touches the foundational question of how a polity organises power, accountability, and knowledge. Mastery here pays dividends across multiple papers and the interview.

Strongest syllabus anchors

- ▶ GS-II — Executive and Parliament (the bullseye); Constitutional amendments; Centre-State relations through Article 164(1A) parallels.
- ▶ GS-IV — Probity in governance and the ethical foundations of public office.
- ▶ Essay — governance, institutional design, and the relationship between political form and substance.
- ▶ Optional Political Science — Indian Government, parliamentary system, anti-defection law.

Philosophical integration

Kautilyan optimal-council principle

In the Arthashastra, the king is advised to keep his council neither too small (risking unsupported decisions) nor too large (risking deadlock from competing voices). Three to four ministers were suggested for sustained deliberation, with broader consultations on extraordinary matters. The principle of optimal size is ancient and Indian — and the 91st Amendment can be read as a modern statutory transcription of this principle.

Madisonian institutional design

Madison's argument in Federalist Nos. 47–51 — that institutional structures must counteract personal ambition — applies directly. The cap is a structural device that the executive imposes on itself, knowing that political incentives push towards expansion. In Madisonian terms, the Constitution must constrain those who write it.

Aristotelian functional differentiation

Aristotle distinguished governance functions by their natural ends. Each function deserves a unit of governance proportionate to its weight. Slicing one function into many for political reasons creates 'unnatural' divisions — what Aristotle would have called governance against its proper telos.

Ambedkarite constitutional morality

Ambedkar warned that without constitutional morality, the form of the Constitution becomes a hollow shell. The need to legislate a numerical cap on cabinet size is itself a verdict on the deficit of constitutional morality among political actors. The way forward must therefore be both legal restraint and cultural cultivation.

Habermasian deliberative democracy

Genuine deliberation requires forums of manageable size in which reasoned discourse can occur. A 127-member cabinet is not such a forum. Habermas would diagnose this as a colonisation of the public-decision sphere by strategic bargaining — what should be communicative reasoning becomes coalition management.

Gandhian trusteeship

Gandhi's idea of trusteeship — that those in power hold authority in trust for the public — applies as much to ministers as to industrialists. Every ministerial post that exists for patronage rather than function violates this trusteeship. The reform debate is therefore not merely administrative but ethical at its core.

Epistemological angles

Bounded rationality (Herbert Simon)

Decision-makers operate under cognitive limits. A council of ministers is not just a political body but an epistemic one — a knowledge-aggregating forum. Beyond a certain size, the marginal informational contribution of an additional minister falls to zero or below; the body becomes worse at processing knowledge, not better.

Specialisation versus integration

The epistemological argument for separate ministries (specialisation) is real — civil aviation does involve different knowledge from railways. But specialisation can be preserved at the departmental level under one ministerial head. The right unit of integration is the policy domain (transport, energy), not the technical sub-field. This distinguishes administrative coherence from technical depth.

Tacit knowledge and institutional memory (Polanyi, Nonaka)

Fragmenting ministries destroys institutional memory at the boundaries — knowledge accumulated through joint working over years dissipates when separation creates rival fiefdoms. Re-integration recovers tacit knowledge through shared structures, files, and personnel.

Information asymmetry and principal-agent design

Citizens (principals) delegate authority to ministers (agents). A fragmented executive creates multiple agents for one function, each with incentives to claim credit and shift blame. Consolidation reduces

information asymmetry and clarifies accountability — a basic principle of institutional economics from Akerlof and Stiglitz onwards.

Why this multi-layered framing matters in examination

- ▶ Mains answers that combine constitutional provision (Article 75(1A)), historical evolution (Venkatachaliah Commission, 91st Amendment), and philosophical foundation (Kautilya, Madison, Ambedkar) stand out as integrated thinking.
- ▶ Essays gain depth when administrative reform is connected to ethical foundations — patronage, trusteeship, public office as service.
- ▶ Interview boards reward candidates who can move fluidly between the concrete (current size of cabinet) and the conceptual (optimal size principle from Arthashastra).
- ▶ Ethics paper case studies on conflicts of interest, integrity, and probity acquire constitutional anchoring through this material.

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Section 12 | Way Forward

A reform agenda must be incremental, multi-layered, and political-economy aware. Pushing for a single dramatic intervention is likely to fail; building reform across constitutional, statutory, executive, and conventional layers offers a more sustainable path. The recommendations below are sequenced from the most easily achievable to the most ambitious.

Immediate executive measures (no constitutional change needed)

- ▶ Re-integrate fragmented ministries through amendment of the Allocation of Business Rules — one Ministry of Transport, one Ministry of Energy, one Ministry of Industry, each with departments under unified ministerial leadership.
- ▶ Publish a Cabinet Manual on the lines of New Zealand and the UK, codifying the conventions of ministerial appointment, conduct, and dismissal, with public disclosure of the Allocation of Business.
- ▶ Strengthen the Cabinet Secretariat as the primary coordinating body, reducing reliance on ad hoc Groups of Ministers.
- ▶ Mandate a Parliamentary review of new ministry creation — the Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice could review proposed structural changes.

Statutory and institutional reforms

- ▶ Enact a Business of Government Act that defines 'ministry', 'department', and 'minister', preventing the creation of crypto-ministries through label changes.
- ▶ Statutorily clarify the distinction between the Cabinet (smaller, formally empowered) and the Council of Ministers (full body); link salary and protocol to functional designation rather than political accommodation.
- ▶ Establish a permanent Inter-Ministerial Coordination Mechanism under the Cabinet Secretary with statutory clearance powers for cross-cutting subjects (energy, urban, industry, infrastructure).
- ▶ Strengthen Ministerial Code of Conduct with mandatory disclosure of conflicts of interest, recusal protocols, and a Standards Commission to enforce them.

Constitutional reform (medium-to-long term)

- ▶ Amend Article 75(1A) to reduce the cap from 15 per cent to 10 per cent, restoring the original Venkatchaliah recommendation.
- ▶ Amend Article 164(1A) in parallel for State Councils of Ministers, with a floor of 7 or 8 ministers for small states to maintain workability.

- ▶ Through the 106th Amendment review window (post-2026 delimitation), package executive reform with the larger Lok Sabha expansion as a single constitutional moment.
- ▶ Introduce a statutory cap on paid office-holders across both Houses of Parliament, learning from the UK's House of Commons Disqualification Act, 1975.

Political and conventional reforms

- ▶ Cross-party agreement (a Cabinet Compact) on ministerial cap and ministerial allocation principles, ratified by major national and regional parties — converting a contested issue into a shared norm.
- ▶ Stronger Parliamentary committees with substantive policy roles — committee chairmanships made attractive enough to absorb some of the patronage demand currently met by ministerial expansion.
- ▶ Public budgeting transparency — annual disclosure of ministerial establishment costs in the Union Budget documents, increasing public awareness.
- ▶ Capacity-building for ministers — a Cabinet Office training programme, mandatory onboarding on rules of business, finance, and law for new ministers.

Federal and APSC-relevant measures

- ▶ Assam — current Cabinet operates near the Article 164(1A) cap; reform at the Union level should be matched with state-level consolidation, especially in areas like Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Fisheries, and Sericulture which often run as separate departments.
- ▶ Sixth Schedule and BTC — autonomous councils should be encouraged to adopt similar structural consolidation, with the Bodoland Peace Accord framework offering a template for inter-departmental coordination.
- ▶ North Eastern Council — could be the natural inter-state body to harmonise ministerial structures across NE states for issues like border management, infrastructure, and tribal welfare.
- ▶ Sectoral focus — given the Northeast's industrial profile (Numaligarh Refinery, Oil India, tea, silk, handlooms, bamboo), a consolidated Industry-Commerce-MSME framework at both Centre and state level would streamline policy delivery.

Long-term cultural shift

- ▶ Civic education through NCERT textbooks and university curricula on the constitutional logic of executive design and the cost of patronage politics.
- ▶ Media and academic scrutiny — sustained reporting and research on the link between ministerial expansion and governance quality, anchoring reform in evidence.
- ▶ Civil society engagement — think tanks, governance watchdogs, and citizen movements pushing for transparent ministerial design as a benchmark of democratic health.

- ▶ International benchmarking — periodic comparative reports placing India's executive structure alongside major democracies, normalising the case for restraint.

The strategic insight

Reform of the executive size is not a one-step legal act but a multi-decadal political-cultural project. The 91st Amendment was the first stage; the next stage must combine constitutional refinement, executive reorganisation, and a cultural shift in how political parties think about ministerial office. The delimitation window in 2026–27 is the rare alignment when such reform becomes thinkable.

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Section 13 | Previous Years' UPSC and APSC Questions

UPSC and APSC have probed this terrain repeatedly — through prelims questions on the 91st Amendment, mains questions on the parliamentary executive, anti-defection law, federalism, and Centre-State coordination, and through ethics case studies on conflicts of interest in public office. The following compilation groups them by year and paper, including thematically adjacent questions even where the wording differs.

UPSC CSE — Prelims (selected directly relevant)

- ▶ 2023 — A question on the constitutional provisions relating to anti-defection law (Tenth Schedule and 91st Amendment linkage).
- ▶ 2022 — Regarding the office of the Lok Sabha Speaker, which of the following statements are correct? (Tests structural understanding of Parliament-Executive interface).
- ▶ 2021 — With reference to the Constitution of India, consider the following statements about the executive — questions on collective responsibility, council of ministers, and Article 75.
- ▶ 2020 — Statements on the disqualification of MLAs on the ground of defection.
- ▶ 2017 — The Parliament of India exercises control over the functions of the Council of Ministers through which mechanisms? (1) Adjournment motion (2) Question Hour (3) Supplementary questions.
- ▶ 2015 — Which of the following are the methods of Parliamentary control over public finance in India?
- ▶ 2013 — Which one of the following statements is correct regarding the Cabinet Committees?
- ▶ 2012 — Which of the following provisions of the Constitution does India have a feature of parliamentary form of Government?

UPSC CSE — Mains GS Paper II

- ▶ 2024 — 'Discuss the role of Presiding Officers of state legislatures in maintaining order and impartiality in conducting legislative work and in facilitating the best practices of the parliamentary form of government.'
- ▶ 2023 — 'Discuss the role of the Vice-President of India as the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.' (Tests understanding of parliamentary-executive interface.)
- ▶ 2022 — 'Discuss the role of the Parliamentary Forums for the effective functioning of Indian legislative process.'
- ▶ 2021 — 'Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct.'

- ▶ 2020 — 'Indian constitutional scheme envisages a parliamentary form of government and a representative democracy. Discuss the significance of the 'collective responsibility' of the Council of Ministers in this context.'
- ▶ 2019 — 'Individual Parliamentarian's role as the national lawmaker is on the decline, which in turn, has adversely impacted the quality of debates and their outcome. Discuss.'
- ▶ 2018 — 'How is the Finance Commission of India constituted? What do you know about the terms of reference of the recently constituted Finance Commission?' (Federal-executive structure.)
- ▶ 2017 — 'To what extent is Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, that grants a special status to Jammu & Kashmir, in harmony with the principle of Cooperative Federalism?'
- ▶ 2016 — 'Discuss the essentials of the 69th Constitutional Amendment Act and anomalies, if any that have led to recent reported conflicts between the elected representatives and the institution of the Lieutenant Governor.' (Council of Ministers structure at NCT level.)
- ▶ 2014 — 'In absence of well-educated and organised local level government system, 'Panchayats' and 'Samitis' have remained mainly political institutions and not effective instruments of governance. Critically discuss.'
- ▶ 2013 — 'Discuss Section 66A of IT Act, with reference to its alleged violation of Article 19 of the Constitution.' (Tests executive-legislature-judiciary interface.)

UPSC CSE — Mains GS Paper IV (Ethics)

- ▶ 2023 — Case study on a minister's conflict of interest between portfolio and family business holdings.
- ▶ 2022 — 'Probity in public life is the foundation of an effective democracy. Discuss.'
- ▶ 2021 — Case study on a public servant under political pressure to allocate contracts.
- ▶ 2019 — 'What is meant by ethical governance? How does increasing the proportion of ethical and accountable practices in governance lead to better administration?'
- ▶ 2018 — 'The current society is plagued with the increased complexities of values. In this reference, what do you understand by probity in public life?'

UPSC CSE — Essay Paper

- ▶ 2023 — 'Visionary decision-making happens at the intersection of intuition and logic.'
- ▶ 2022 — 'A good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge.'
- ▶ 2021 — 'Patriarchy is the least noticed yet most significant structure of social inequality.'
- ▶ 2019 — 'Politics, bereft of ethics, is a disaster.'
- ▶ 2018 — 'A people that values its privileges above its principles loses both.'
- ▶ 2017 — 'Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.' (Applicable to public service motivation.)

- ▶ 2016 — 'Cooperative federalism: Myth or reality.'
- ▶ 2015 — 'Lending hands to someone is better than giving a dole.'

APSC CCE — Prelims and Mains (illustrative)

- ▶ APSC Mains GS-II (2022) — 'Discuss the role of the Council of Ministers in the Indian parliamentary system with special reference to the principle of collective responsibility.'
- ▶ APSC Mains GS-II (2021) — 'Examine the significance of the 91st Constitutional Amendment Act in strengthening parliamentary democracy in India.'
- ▶ APSC Mains GS-II (2020) — 'Analyse the relationship between the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers in India.'
- ▶ APSC Mains GS-II (2019) — 'Discuss the anti-defection law in India with special reference to its impact on legislative behaviour.'
- ▶ APSC Mains GS-II (2018) — 'Examine the role of the Governor in the state administration with special reference to Assam.'
- ▶ APSC Prelims (2022) — Question on the maximum size of the State Council of Ministers under Article 164(1A) of the Constitution.
- ▶ APSC Prelims (2021) — Question on the 91st Amendment provisions related to anti-defection.
- ▶ APSC Prelims (2019) — Question on the appointment and tenure of ministers under Article 75 and 164.
- ▶ APSC Mains Essay (recurring) — themes on governance reform, ethical politics in Assam and the North East, and federal cooperation.

Thematically adjacent questions

- ▶ Questions on coalition government dynamics, federalism stress points, anti-defection working, Centre-State relations, and parliamentary committees frequently engage the same conceptual material.
- ▶ Ethics case studies on patronage, conflict of interest, and probity in public life are direct extensions of this issue.
- ▶ Optional Political Science papers on Indian Government and Politics routinely ask about cabinet structure, prime ministerial power, and executive reform.

Section 14 | Model Answers

Two of the most directly relevant past mains questions are addressed below in the UPSC format — introduction, body, conclusion — each within roughly 250 words. The structure prioritises constitutional anchoring, evolutionary context, multi-dimensional analysis, and a forward-looking close.

Model Answer 1

Question (UPSC 2020 GS-II)

Indian constitutional scheme envisages a parliamentary form of government and a representative democracy. Discuss the significance of the 'collective responsibility' of the Council of Ministers in this context. (250 words)

Introduction — The doctrine of collective responsibility, enshrined in Article 75(3) of the Constitution, makes the Council of Ministers collectively answerable to the Lok Sabha. It is the constitutional thread that binds India's parliamentary democracy together, ensuring that the executive remains continuously accountable to the elected House and through it, to the people.

Body — First, collective responsibility ensures unity of executive action — once a decision is taken in cabinet, every minister must publicly support it or resign. Second, it provides a mechanism for democratic check: a no-confidence motion against any one minister effectively tests the entire government. Third, it reinforces cabinet government as the working core of parliamentary democracy, distinct from the looser American or French executive models.

However, the doctrine faces challenges in modern conditions. The 91st Amendment's 15 per cent cap under Article 75(1A) reflects an effort to keep the Council compact enough for genuine collective deliberation. Yet portfolio fragmentation across multiple ministries — transport split into Railways, Roads, Shipping, Civil Aviation; energy split across Coal, Petroleum, Power — has weakened the integrative spirit of the doctrine. Coalition governments add further strain, where decisions sometimes get formalised in cabinet only after alliance bargaining outside it.

Conclusion — Collective responsibility is more than a procedural rule — it is the ethical anchor of cabinet government, embedding what Ambedkar called constitutional morality into daily executive practice. Strengthening it requires both legal restraint on cabinet expansion and renewal of the deliberative culture that gave the doctrine its meaning. As India approaches the delimitation horizon and the prospect of a much larger Council of Ministers, preserving the substance of collective responsibility behind its constitutional form becomes an urgent task.



Model Answer 2

Question (APSC Mains GS-II, 2021)

Examine the significance of the 91st Constitutional Amendment Act in strengthening parliamentary democracy in India. (250 words)

Introduction — The 91st Constitutional Amendment Act of 2003 was a landmark structural reform aimed at curbing the twin pathologies of bloated cabinets and political defections. By inserting Article 75(1A) and Article 164(1A), it capped the size of the Council of Ministers at 15 per cent of the legislative body, and through amendments to the Tenth Schedule it raised the threshold for valid party splits from one-third to two-thirds.

Body — First, it addressed jumbo cabinets that had emerged during the coalition era — Vajpayee's cabinet had touched 88 members, and several states had cabinets exceeding 60. Second, by disqualifying defectors from holding remunerative political posts until re-election, it closed a major loophole that had encouraged horse-trading. Third, it strengthened the federal principle by applying parallel limits to both Union and State governments. Fourth, it indirectly enhanced the doctrine of collective responsibility by keeping the Council compact enough for genuine deliberation.

Limitations remain. The 15 per cent threshold was a dilution of the Venkatachaliah Commission's recommended 10 per cent. Portfolio fragmentation continues — splitting transport and energy across multiple ministries circumvents the spirit of the cap. Anti-defection enforcement still depends on the Speaker, raising impartiality concerns. The looming Lok Sabha expansion may push the Union cap towards 127 ministers, reviving the original problem.

Conclusion — The 91st Amendment was a vital constitutional response to a serious democratic deficit. Its success lies in establishing a structural restraint where political self-restraint had failed. Further reform — including a tighter cap, re-integration of fragmented ministries, and stronger anti-defection enforcement — is needed to fulfil the original vision of leaner, more accountable, and more deliberative parliamentary government.



Section ∞ | Why This Matters for UPSC & Notes Strategy

Why this issue is UPSC-relevant

- ▶ Hits the constitutional core — Articles 74, 75, 77, 164 are foundational; mastery here pays across multiple papers.

- ▶ Cross-paper applicability — GS-II for polity, GS-III for governance and economy, GS-IV for ethics, Essay for political theory, optional Political Science and Public Administration.
- ▶ Topical alignment — delimitation due in 2026–27, Women's Reservation operationalisation linked to it, and active public debate make this a high-probability mains theme.
- ▶ Philosophical depth — connects to Kautilya, Aristotle, Madison, Weber, Ambedkar, Habermas — an interview-grade integration opportunity.
- ▶ APSC relevance — direct application to Assam's Cabinet size, Sixth Schedule autonomous councils, and BTC governance.

Note-making tips

- ▶ Build a single integrated note across the four constitutional articles (74, 75, 77, 164) with the 91st Amendment as the central pivot.
- ▶ Maintain a separate timeline table — pre-1947, Nehru, Shastri, Indira, Janata, Coalition era, 91st Amendment, post-2003 — for quick revision before mains.
- ▶ Memorise a small set of crisp comparative numbers — UK ~25, US ~15–25, Germany ~17, India current ~80, projected ~127 — these single-line comparisons add weight to answers.
- ▶ Connect each section of this module to a corresponding Essay quote or philosopher — Madison for institutional design, Kautilya for optimal size, Ambedkar for constitutional morality, Gandhi for trusteeship.
- ▶ Map the issue to NCERTs — Class XI Indian Constitution at Work and Class XII Politics in India Since Independence are the primary anchors.
- ▶ For APSC, maintain a one-page sheet on Assam Cabinet size, Sixth Schedule executive structures, BTC governance, and parallel application of Article 164(1A) — this captures the regional lens that APSC examiners reward.
- ▶ Practice the model-answer structure — introduction with constitutional anchor, body with three to four sub-arguments and an evolutionary line, conclusion that offers a way forward; this template can be adapted across multiple questions from this material.

◆ END OF MODULE ◆