



AXIA IAS ACADEMY



EDITORIAL ANALYSIS



JULY 27



**CONSISTENT
COMPREHENSIVE
AND CREDIBLE**



**UNIQUE AND BEST IN
QUALITY**

- 1. Do not surrender to China, do not depend on the U.S. (THE HINDU)**
- 2. Governance : Style and substance (THE HINDU BUSINESSLINE)**
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- 4. One nation, many electoral questions (THE TRIBUNE)**



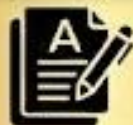
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Do not surrender to China, do not depend on the U.S.

A volatile political climate in Washington has triggered a wave of strategic anxiety in New Delhi. Buffeted by the transactional, often erratic policy shifts of the Donald Trump administration – which hit India last year with punitive tariffs on steel and aluminium, stripped its preferential trade status, and aggressively renewed ties with Islamabad while imposing irritants such as tightening H-1B visa rules – a growing chorus of domestic voices is calling for a fundamental reset of India's China policy.

Economic actors, their flawed line

The argument, championed largely by an influential business lobby, suggests that India's confrontational approach toward Beijing was overly synchronised with Washington's strategic agenda of "containment" rather than India's national interests. The lobby contends that because India remains deeply reliant on Chinese technology, supply chains, industrial inputs, and capital, a dogmatic anti-China stance ultimately stifles domestic economic growth while barely denting Beijing's economy. The core risk, critics warn, is Washington's historical pattern of tactical flip-flops – escalating tensions one day and striking bilateral deals the next – which risks leaving an overextended India strategically vulnerable to Chinese retaliation.

While the warning against subordinating Indian interests to an unpredictable Washington is entirely valid, it is not clear that this is what is occurring. In any case, the proposed alternative – a hasty, unreciprocated economic embrace of China – is a dangerous prescription. It mistakes tactical business convenience for long-term national security. A premature capitulation to Beijing ignores a decade of unprovoked hostility, deepens an asymmetric dependency, and strips India of its leverage just as the global order enters its most volatile phase since the Cold War.

Let us face it: the primary domestic driver for a China reset is an influential business lobby obsessed with short-term balance sheets. For years, parts of corporate India have argued that access to cheap Chinese capital, machinery, and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) is indispensable for India's growth. However, this view suffers from severe strategic myopia. It treats international trade as an apolitical transaction, completely divorced from the realities of comprehensive national power.

By advocating a return to the pre-2020 status quo, these economic actors choose to selectively forget a dozen years of relentless, unprovoked aggression by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The list of Beijing's hostile acts against Indian sovereignty is not a series of isolated border skirmishes; it is a coherent strategy of containment and



Shashi Tharoor

Fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram (Congress party), the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs and the Sahitya Akademi

Award-winning author of 25 books, including 'Fare India' (2011) and 'The New World Disorder' (2020)

humiliation. From Depsang (2003) and Chumar (2014) to Doklam (2017) and then the fatal clashes in the Galwan Valley (2020), China has systematically attempted to alter the Line of Actual Control (LAC) through salami-slicing tactics, unilaterally violating decades of border peace protocols. Beijing continues to aggressively assert absurd claims over the entire State of Arunachal Pradesh, renaming geographical features in places it does not control (but plans to), and luring stapled visas to residents of Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal to weaponise India's internal geography.

And then there is economic coercion. China has routinely used its manufacturing dominance as a political weapon, abruptly withholding critical machinery and industrial inputs, even weaponising its monopoly over rare earths and tunnel-boring machines during bilateral disputes, simply to inconvenience Indian industries and signal its leverage, knowing fully that India has none to exercise in return. Most alarming has been Beijing's overt, coordinated military support for Pakistan during Operation Sindoor (May 2025). By providing Islamabad with real-time tactical satellite data and intelligence, China transformed itself from a mere military supplier into an active, hostile participant in Pakistan's security architecture against India. To ignore this track record in pursuit of cheaper components is not pragmatism; it is strategic blindness.

The myth of reciprocity

The core flaw in the argument for a quick reset is the naive assumption that if India relaxes its economic guard, China will reciprocate with geopolitical goodwill. The foundational tenet of Chinese foreign policy in Asia is the establishment of a unipolar continent. Beijing does not view New Delhi as a peer, nor does it desire India to become one.

For over a decade, China has weaponised its veto at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to shield Pakistan-based terrorist organisations from international sanctions and condemnation. It has blocked India's legitimate aspirations for permanent membership in the UNSC and membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). If India opens the floodgates to Chinese capital and market access without any fundamental resolution of the border dispute or a halt to Beijing's hostile behaviour, it effectively subsidises its own encirclement. Pouring billions of dollars into Chinese coffers as a compliant consumer market merely expands the asymmetric trade deficit (China's annual surplus over India now exceeds \$100 billion). More dangerously, it hands Beijing an economic kill-switch over the Indian economy. In a future crisis, the threat of cutting off critical components could paralyse Indian industry,

rendering New Delhi incapable of independent strategic decision-making.

Advocates of a reset argue that easing economic tensions could pave the way for a permanent demarcation of the border. In reality, the opposite is true. China respects power and exploits vulnerability. If India surrenders its economic leverage and signals that it cannot sustain a prolonged stand-off, Beijing will conclude that its strategy of multi-domain pressure is working. China will simply bide its time, allowing India to grow comfortably dependent once again. When Beijing eventually decides it is ready to discuss a permanent border settlement, it will dictate terms from a position of absolute dominance. An India structurally dependent on Chinese technology and cowed by the threat of economic disruption will have no choice but to accept a deeply disadvantageous territorial status quo.

Leverage, once surrendered, cannot be easily reclaimed. The restrictions India placed on Chinese apps, investments, and telecom infrastructure post-Galwan were not just emotional reactions; they were crucial diplomatic leverage. Dismantling them for minor economic relief would be an act of unilateral disarmament.

India is undeniably in a complex position. The Trump administration's unpredictable shifts mean that relying entirely on Washington as a security guarantor is unwise, despite the enthusiasm of his emissary to India, Sergio Goro. The United States will always prioritise its own domestic and global calculations, and New Delhi must remain clear-eyed that it stands alone on the heights of Ladakh. However, realising that Washington is an unreliable partner does not mean India must run into the arms of an actively hostile neighbour. There is an immense strategic space between subordinating India's national interests to the U.S. and conceding an unconditional economic and political surrender to China.

The path India must tread

The correct path for New Delhi is one of strategic patience and internal fortifying. India must accelerate its supply chain resilience, diversify its trade partnerships across Europe, East Asia, and the Global South, and aggressively build up its domestic manufacturing capabilities – even if it comes with short-term inflationary costs. The last decade has proven that China presents a structural, generational challenge to India's rise. A hasty rethink driven by panic over Washington or the complaints of a short-term-profit-driven business lobby will only ensure that India remains permanently exposed, economically vulnerable, and strategically diminished.

We do not have to "tilt" either way. We must, instead, develop the strength to walk straight.

Realising that Washington is an unreliable partner does not mean India must run into the arms of an actively hostile neighbour

- Key Terms and Explanations
- **Strategic Autonomy:** The ability of a nation-state to make independent foreign policy decisions based on its own national interest, without being coerced or dictated to by alliances or external powers.
- **Salami Slicing Tactics:** A strategy of small, incremental military or territorial encroachments that individually seem too minor to trigger a full-scale war, but cumulatively result in substantial territorial gains over time.
- *Example:* China's step-by-step advance across various points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh, such as Depsang, Chumar, and Pangong Tso.
- **Transactional Foreign Policy:** A approach to international relations that prioritizes immediate, short-term reciprocal gains or deals over long-standing strategic alliances, shared values, or historical treaties.
- *Example:* Sudden imposition of tariffs or withdrawal of trade benefits to pressure partner nations into specific trade concessions.
- **Asymmetric Interdependence & Economic Kill-Switch:** A trade relationship where one nation is far more dependent on another for critical inputs than vice versa. The dominant nation can weaponize this reliance to paralyse the dependent nation's industrial base during a crisis.
- *Example:* India's high reliance on Chinese Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) for drug manufacturing, or critical components for solar power and electronics.
- **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP):** A preferential tariff system extended by developed nations to developing countries, offering lower or duty-free entry for targeted export products to promote economic growth.
- *Example:* The U.S. suspension of India's GSP status in 2019, which exposed Indian exporters to higher tariffs in the American market.
- **Stapled Visas & Cartographic Aggression:** Tools of diplomatic coercion where a country issues non-stamped, attached visas to residents of disputed territories to deny another nation's sovereignty, complemented by unilaterally renaming geographic features on official maps.
- *Example:* Beijing issuing stapled visas to residents of Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir, accompanied by official Chinese renamings of places in Arunachal Pradesh.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The contemporary debate surrounding India's foreign policy orientation revolves around whether New Delhi should calibrate its China stance in response to political shifts in Washington, or stick to a firm, long-term posture of economic and military deterrence.

- **The Vulnerability of Aligning with Transactional Partners**

- External shifts in major power capitals—manifested through sudden tariff hikes, tightening of skilled worker visas (such as H-1B), or abrupt strategic realignments—demonstrate the risk of over-relying on any single external security partner.

- When a major power shifts toward unilateral deal-making, partners that overextended themselves based on structural guarantees risk being left exposed to regional adversaries.

- **The Corporate Lobby's Argument vs. Strategic Reality**

- *The Business Argument:* Domestic industrial lobbies argue that strict barriers on foreign capital, machinery, and technology restrict domestic manufacturing, raise input costs, and choke growth. They advocate returning to a pre-2020 economic engagement model.

- *The Strategic Flaw:* Treating trade purely as an apolitical transaction ignores how economic dependency is converted into strategic leverage. Short-term cost savings on industrial inputs can lead to long-term national vulnerability.

- **Pattern of Unprovoked Aggression and Collusion**

- A decade of border friction along the LAC demonstrates a calculated pattern aimed at altering the territorial baseline rather than settling the border amicably.

- Beyond direct physical standoffs, military-intelligence sharing between regional rivals—such as supplying real-time tactical satellite data during border escalation—transforms economic partners into active security threats.

- **The Myth of Geopolitical Reciprocity**

- The assumption that economic concessions will translate into territorial goodwill is flawed. Regional powers pursuing regional dominance view economic openness from smaller or neighboring markets as structural submission rather than a gesture deserving equal reciprocity.

- Unilaterally lowering economic guards without resolving foundational border issues subsidizes the adversary's economic growth while leaving domestic vulnerabilities unaddressed.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Phase 1: Idealism to Conflict (1947–1962)**

- **1954:** India and China sign the Panchsheel Agreement, enshrining mutual respect for territorial integrity and non-aggression.
- **1959:** The Dalai Lama seeks asylum in India following the Tibetan uprising, heightening Chinese suspicions regarding India's strategic posture.
- **1962:** The Sino-Indian Border War erupts, exposing India's military unpreparedness and leading to loss of territory in Aksai Chin, shattering early diplomatic assumptions.

- **Phase 2: Normalization and Modus Vivendi (1988–2012)**

- **1988:** Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visits Beijing, establishing a framework to decouple economic and diplomatic relations from the unresolved border dispute.
- **1993 & 1996:** Signing of landmark agreements on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the LAC, agreeing to confidence-building measures (CBMs).
- **2001–2010:** Bilateral trade expands rapidly. China emerges as one of India's largest trading partners, though an asymmetric trade deficit begins to widen significantly.

- **Phase 3: Assertiveness and Salami Slicing (2013–2019)**

- **2013–2014:** Major border standoffs occur at Depsang and Chumar, signaling a shift toward more assertive Chinese patrolling.
- **2017:** The 73-day Doklam standoff takes place near the tri-junction with Bhutan, demonstrating India's resolve against unilateral infrastructure creation in disputed zones.
- **2019:** India opts out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), citing unaddressed trade deficits and risks to domestic manufacturing.

- **Phase 4: The Galwan Watershed and Economic Countermeasures (2020–2024)**

- **May–June 2020:** Deadly physical clashes occur in the Galwan Valley, marking the first fatal border violence along the LAC in 45 years and shattering existing border management protocols.
- **Post-2020 Security Response:** India banned over 200 Chinese digital applications, amended FDI policy via Press Note 3 to mandate prior government approval for investments from land-bordering nations, and excluded Chinese telecom firms from 5G rollouts.
- **Strategic Alignment:** India actively strengthened the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and signed foundational military agreements (LEMOA, COMCASA, BECA) with the US.

- **Phase 5: Triangular Shocks and Strategic Re-evaluation (2025–Present)**

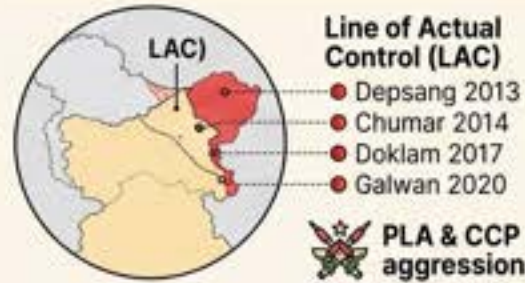
- **Global Shifts:** Protectionist tariffs, unpredictable trade policies, and visa restrictions from Washington create strategic friction for Indian policymakers.
- **Domestic Debate:** Corporate calls for easing capital and input restrictions from Beijing clash directly with the national security imperative of maintaining leverage until border disengagement is fully achieved.

CONTEXT & THE TRIGGER: VOLATILE POLITICAL CLIMATE.

US TRANSACTIONAL POLICY

-  **Punitive tariffs**
(Independent tariff at Beijing)
-  **H-1B rule tightening**
(Institutional communication, and negotiations)
-  **Islamabad ties**
(Custodial and derelict)

BEIJING'S BORDER AGGRESSION



THE ECONOMIC LOBBY'S DANGEROUS PRESCRIPTION.



BEIJING FLAWED LOGIC

- **Reliance on Chinese tech**
Chinese tech, and professional
- **Reliance on Chinese tech**
Chinese tech, capital
- **Over-synchronization with Washington**
and Washington
- **Short-term focus** on the most master flowen

STRATEGIC REALITIES & RISKS

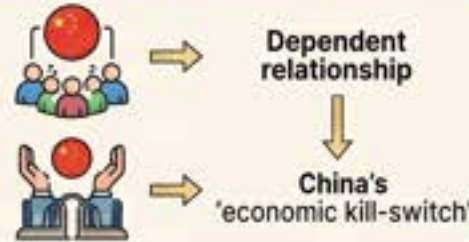


THE MYTH OF RECIPROCITY & UNILATERAL DISARMAMENT.



BEIJING'S TRUE OBJECTIVE:

- **Unipolar continent, unipolar view**
continent, peer view absent
- **Use UNSC veto** to eralore the central UNSC veto
- **Blocking NSG membership** to host



THE CORRECT PATH FORWARD: STRATEGIC PATIENCE & INTERNAL FORTIFYING



- **Accelerate supply chain resilience**
- **Diversify partners & senwite**
- **Build up domestic manufacturing**
- **Short-term inflationary costs vs. long-term exposure**

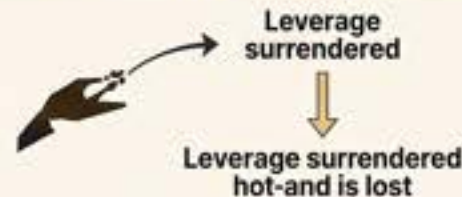
THE PATH INDIA MUST TREAD

"We must develop the strength to walk straight."

LEVERAGE DISMANTLED & DANGER OF UNRECIPROCATED EMBRACE



Post-Galwan bans (apps, FDI, telecom) trational economists, domainaner, and urereoploatcator is tmeir critical diplomatic value.



KEY TERMS DEFINED & UPSC LINKAGES

-  **Strategic Autonomy**
(Independent choice)
-  **Salami Slicing Tactics**
(Incremental border advance)
-  **Transactional Foreign Policy**
(Short-term deals)
-  **Asymmetric Interdependence & Economic Kill-Switch**
(Dependency weaponized)
-  **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)**
(Preferential trade)
-  **Stapled Visas & Cartographic Aggression**
(Unilateral border claims)
- **Transactional foreign advanc, advantee confilrations**
- **Short-term inflationary & economies t economic effects**
- **Reporrrrentre symbor trade plan**
- **Unilateral visas**

-  **GS Paper 1:**
(Geographic Frontiers)
-  **GS Paper 2:**
(Neighborhood Relations, Effect of Policies, Global Groupings)
-  **GS Paper 3:**
(Internal Security, Economic Statecraft)
-  **GS Paper 4:**
(Corporate Ethics vs National Interest)
-  **NCERTs:** Class 12 Pol Sci Class 11 Econ

- 
- **Logical and Philosophical Foundations**
 - **Realism vs. Commercial Liberalism:**
 - *Commercial Liberalism* posits that economic interdependence creates mutual vulnerabilities, rendering conflict too costly and promoting peace.
 - *Neorealism* counters that when economic interdependence is heavily asymmetrical, it becomes a weapon of coercion. The dominant economy can exploit the relationship, making national security take precedence over absolute economic gains.
 - **Kautilyan Realism (The Arthashastra):**
 - Kautilya's *Mandala Theory* recognizes that immediate neighbors often share structural rivalries (*Ari*).
 - In situations of structural asymmetry, Kautilya prescribes *Asana* (strategic waiting/patience) and *Samsraya* (building internal capacity and forming diplomatic balancings) rather than prematurely surrendering leverage (*Samadhi*) without concrete security guarantees.
 - **Thucydides' Trap and Asian Hegemony:**
 - At the systemic level, an emerging power seeking a multipolar world order cannot accept a unipolar regional order dominated by a single neighboring state.
 - Accepting economic submission in exchange for temporary trade ease consolidates a unipolar Asia, undermining the long-term goal of a balanced, multipolar international system.

- **Multidimensional Analysis**
- **Political**
- **Executive vs. Lobby Pressures:** Foreign policy formulation faces a tug-of-war between short-term corporate lobbying for cheap inputs and the national security apparatus demanding supply chain decoupling.
- **Federal Border Dynamics:** Border infrastructure development in states like Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh requires sustained political focus and local community integration to counter cartographic assertions.
- **Economic**
- **The \$100 Billion Deficit Dilemma:** India's trade deficit with China reflects structural import dependencies in critical sectors:
- **Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes:** Designed to build domestic manufacturing capacity, PLI schemes require time to scale up, creating a interim period of higher production costs.
- **Legal and Regulatory**
- **Press Note 3 (2020):** Mandates government approval for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) coming from countries sharing a land border with India, preventing opportunistic takeovers of domestic assets.
- **WTO Security Exceptions:** Invoking Article XXI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) allows states to suspend trade concessions on national security grounds during heightened geopolitical tensions.
- **Ethical**
- **Corporate Profit vs. National Sacrifice:** An ethical dilemma arises when corporate profit motives conflict with the sacrifices of armed forces maintaining vigilance on extreme high-altitude frontiers.
- **Economic Equity:** Balancing domestic manufacturing protectionism (which may drive up consumer prices in the short term) against long-term national economic resilience.
- **Social and Strategic**
- **Digital Sovereignty:** Restricting foreign applications protects citizen data privacy and counters potential cyber-warfare capabilities.
- **Human Capital Dynamics:** Shifts in Western immigration policies (e.g., H-1B visa caps) underscore the need to create advanced technology and research ecosystems within domestic borders to retain talent.

- 
- **Linkages with NCERT Textbooks**
 - **Class 12 Political Science: *Contemporary World Politics***
 - *Chapter 3: Alternative Centres of Power:* Details the rise of China's economy, its regional influence, and the historical evolution of Sino-Indian bilateral ties.
 - **Class 12 Political Science: *Politics in India Since Independence***
 - *Chapter 4: India's External Relations:* Covers the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the principles of Non-Alignment, and India's shifting security partnerships during the Cold War and post-Cold War eras.
 - **Class 11 Economics: *Indian Economic Development***
 - *Chapter 3: Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation:* Discusses integration into global trade and the challenges of import dependence vs. domestic industrialization.
 - *Chapter 10: Comparative Development Experiences of India and Its Neighbours:* Compares economic trajectories, industrial strategies, and state-led growth models between India, China, and Pakistan.

Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus

UPSC SYLLABUS MAPPING	
GS Paper 1	• Geographical Significance of Himalayan Borders • Strategic Topography of Aksai Chin & Arunachal Pradesh
GS Paper 2	• India and its Neighborhood Relations • Effect of Policies of Developed/Developing Countries • Bilateral, Regional, and Global Groupings (Quad)
GS Paper 3	• Industrial Policy, Trade Deficits, PLI Schemes • Border Area Management & Security Infrastructure • Supply Chain Resilience & Critical Technologies
GS Paper 4	• National Interest vs. Corporate Capitalist Ethics • Ethical Leadership in Foreign Policy Formulation



- **Way Forward**
- **Internal Capacity Building (Atmanirbhar Bharat 2.0):**
 - Accelerate Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes specifically for critical inputs like Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs), rare earth element processing, and semiconductor fabrication.
 - Increase national research and development (R&D) expenditure from the current ~0.7% of GDP to at least 1.5–2% to reduce technology reliance on external actors.
- **Maintaining Calibrated Economic Leverage:**
 - Avoid reversing post-2020 economic measures, such as FDI screening under Press Note 3, without verifiable and permanent disengagement along the border.
 - Use access to India's large domestic market as explicit leverage during bilateral negotiations, rather than granting unreciprocated access.
- **Supply Chain Diversification ("Friendshoring"):**
 - Deepen trade partnerships and secure Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreements (BTIAs) with trusted economic blocks, including the European Union, ASEAN, Japan, and South Korea.
 - Build resilient supply networks through initiatives like the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) launched jointly with Australia and Japan.
- **Pragmatic Multi-Alignment:**
 - Maintain active engagement in Indo-Pacific balancing frameworks like the Quad while preserving strategic partnerships across the Global South.
 - Focus on self-reliance in border security, ensuring that defense preparedness along the high-altitude frontiers does not depend on the fluctuating political wills of external powers.

UPSC Mains Questions

General Studies Paper 2 (International Relations)

- *"China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop potential leverage over Asian countries. What lies behind this strategy and how does it affect India?" (2018)*
- *"The India-USA strategic partnership is built on shared democratic values and increasing convergence of geopolitical interests. Evaluate the key challenges in this relationship in light of recent trade and economic friction." (2020)*
- *"'Critical and Emerging Technologies' are reshaping global geopolitics. Discuss how India can navigate its technological dependence on external powers while preserving its strategic autonomy." (2023)*

General Studies Paper 3 (Security & Economy)

- *"Border management is a complex task due to difficult terrain and hostile neighbors. Analyze the security challenges faced along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and suggest measures to improve border infrastructure." (2021)*

Prelims Practice Questions (UPSC & APSC Pattern)

Question 1 (Security Protocols & Agreements)

With reference to India-China border management agreements, consider the following statements:

1. The 1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility was the first formal agreement recognizing the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
2. The confidence-building measures signed in 1996 prohibit both sides from using firearms within two kilometers of the LAC.
3. Press Note 3 issued by the Government of India in 2020 allows automatic route FDI from all land-border sharing countries.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, and 3

LINE & LENGTH



TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

As things stand today, it's impossible for my generation not to hark back to 1971-75. Indira Gandhi ruled supreme and in 1972 a weekly in England called her the 'Empress of India' not only because the Congress ruled at the Centre and nearly all the States but also because there was so much popular support for her.

Then in 1973 it all started to go wrong. The movement against her started, ironically, in Gujarat, over hostel mess charges and built up into a massive wave of protests and resistance. To make things worse, 1972 and 1973 were drought years. There was an oil crisis because OPEC quadrupled crude oil prices. Inflation was at around 24 per cent and unemployment was rampant. The divided Maintenance of Internal Security Act, MISA, had been enacted. And the next general election was three years away.

Today also the next general election, if not brought forward or postponed, is 32 months away. Is this enough time for the Modi government to dampen the increasing grumbling about and against it? Or will this grumbling become sufficiently strong by then to reduce the BJP's seats in the Lok Sabha? It has only 240 now. The answer depends on how the government governs.

Governance has several aspects. One is political and administrative strength, in which this government is not lacking. Another is responsiveness, in which it is totally lacking. A third is political nimbleness, in which it would get 5/10. A fourth is integrity, in which, once again, it would get only 5/10. A fifth is fairness where, even though it does try to act fairly, the overwhelming perception is that it doesn't. A sixth is crisis management in which it would get 8/10.

There are many other things that go towards making governance good, like not equating the government with the country, not indulging in "suppression verbiage", not using strong arm methods to alter parliamentary (and assembly) level support, not learning how to use the press to support policies, like not hating any sort of criticism, not using social media to spread half-truths and so on. It's a long list of morally instigated self-restraint that simply must accompany power.

But let's just take a look at the five main attributes of good governance I listed above. The rest are first and second derivatives from them.



Governance: Style and substance

The Modi government can no longer be a hear no evil, see no evil government

FOCUS AREAS

Political strength is straightforward: the size of the parliamentary majority. But administrative strength is totally different because all Indian governments have to deal with a phenomenon that's peculiarly Indian, the constitutional inability of the boss to sack the servants. The Modi government's political strength has been nearly fully negated by this besetting administrative weakness. Simply put, it hasn't been able to deliver what its parliamentary majority has promised.

That should have made it more responsive both at the group and the

Where integrity is concerned, overall it's a more honest government politically but helpless administratively. But what the voters experience is the latter

individual levels. But the size of the parliamentary majority has induced a sense of invulnerability which has made the government excessively unresponsive or responsive only to pressure groups. The resignation of the education minister could well be a case of too little, too late.

Political nimbleness is a part of this and the reason why it scores only 5/10 in this is that it responds only when it fears a loss of votes. Big groups, financial and demographic, are therefore well served and smaller groups are ignored.

Where integrity is concerned, overall it's a more honest government politically but helpless administratively. But what the voters experience is the latter. And the Modi government has failed spectacularly in bringing government employees to heel. Indians have to bribe and bribe and bribe to receive any service from the government.

On fairness, it does far better largely on account of its extensive welfare programmes. These are caste and community blind. Yet it's seen as being

anti-minorities because of its hard-handed and appalling methods in uniting the Hindu vote.

Lately, all governments are always in what a former editor of mine used to call the coping mode. There's always a crisis. On this score, the Modi government has done very well. Even political crises have been handled well enough to prevent them from snowballing. This NECT induced crisis, after the initial mistakes, has been defused.

SO WHAT NEXT?

Nothing, however, wounds and injures politicians more than widespread ridicule and contempt. As it prepares to counter the negative perceptions, a softer approach will go a long way towards rebuilding the trust that now seems gone.

The Modi government can no longer be a hear no evil, see no evil government. It will have to, at the very least, take note of the memes and cartoons about Modi and start listening a bit more. Merely letting Dharmendra Pradhan go won't be enough.

- **Key Terms and Concepts**
- **Suppressio Veri, Suggestio Falsi**
- **Definition:** A Latin legal and philosophical maxim meaning "suppression of truth is the suggestion of falsehood." It occurs when a statement is technically true but deliberately omits critical facts, leading to a misleading conclusion.
- **Context in Governance:** Highlighting macro-level achievements (such as aggregate welfare enrollment stats) while withholding data on ground-level operational failures (such as delayed disbursements or service delivery bottlenecks).
- **Administrative Inertia & Article 311 Protections**
- **Definition:** The systemic rigidity within civil services, driven by constitutional security of tenure under Article 311 of the Indian Constitution, which makes firing or penalizing non-performing civil servants exceptionally difficult.
- **Context in Governance:** Political leaders can set ambitious policy goals, but administrative inertia can stall implementation because civil servants face few immediate consequences for inefficiency.
- **Coping Mode Governance**
- **Definition:** A reactive style of administration where the executive spends most of its energy resolving immediate operational crises rather than formulating proactive, long-term policy reforms.
- **Context in Governance:** Handling sudden public flashpoints (such as national exam paper leaks or localized agitations) through quick fixes and damage control rather than fixing systemic structural flaws ahead of time.
- **Navnirman Movement (1973–74)**
- **Definition:** A historic student-led socio-political movement in Gujarat triggered by rising college mess fees, corruption, and high food inflation, which eventually expanded into a state-wide political upheaval.
- **Context in Governance:** Shows how seemingly minor local economic grievances can snowball into major anti-establishment movements if governments ignore early warning signs.
- **Macro-Integrity vs. Micro-Bribery**
- **Definition:** The divergence between high political integrity at the top executive level (clean policy design, no major national scams) and widespread retail corruption at the local administrative level (bribes for basic citizen services).
- **Context in Governance:** Even if top leaders are seen as honest, citizens evaluate government legitimacy based on their daily interactions with street-level officials.
- **Majoritarian Insularity**
- **Definition:** A state where a strong parliamentary majority creates a false sense of security, leading the executive to ignore criticism, dismiss early warnings, and engage with feedback only when electoral losses threaten.
- **Context in Governance:** Reduces institutional agility, making the executive responsive to vocal pressure groups rather than routine citizen feedback.

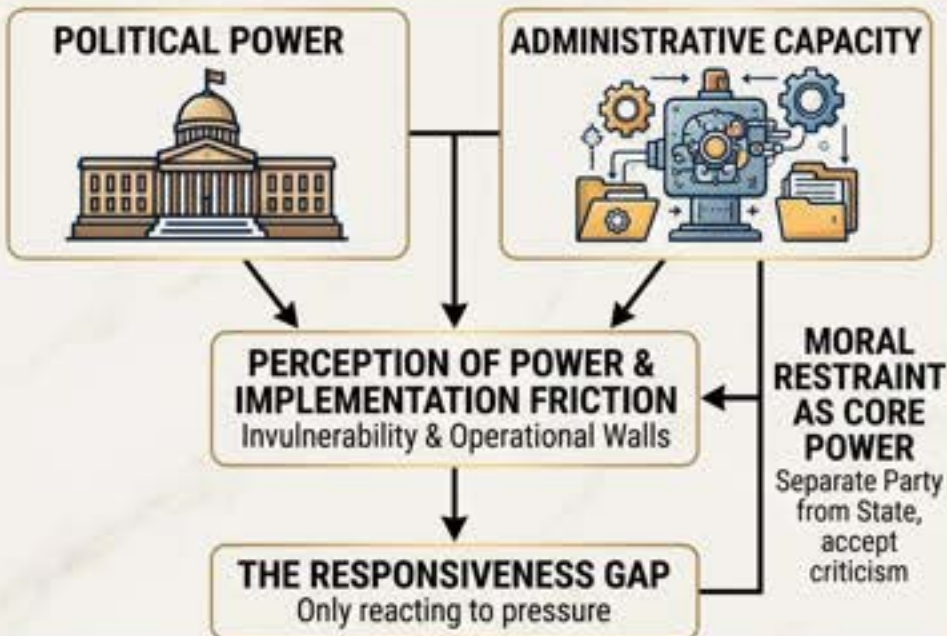
- **Main Arguments and Core Themes**
- **Dichotomy Between Political Power and Administrative Capacity**
 - A strong legislative majority gives a government political strength, but it does not guarantee administrative capacity.
 - When permanent bureaucracy lacks efficiency or accountability, political mandates fail to produce real-world results.
 - Centralized executive power often runs into operational walls when ground-level institutions are unable or unwilling to deliver.
- **The Paradox of Responsiveness**
 - Large parliamentary majorities can create institutional insularity. When governments feel electorally secure, they often ignore early signals of public dissatisfaction.
 - Responsiveness becomes reactive rather than proactive. Policy adjustments or cabinet reshuffles end up happening only after public backlash, reducing their impact.
- **Subjective Perception vs. Objective Welfare Delivery**
 - Objective success in non-discriminatory welfare schemes (like direct benefit transfers) does not automatically guarantee a perception of fairness.
 - If political rhetoric relies on social polarization or aggressive communication, the public may still perceive the state as unfair or biased, undermining the social goodwill earned through welfare programs.
- **The Friction of Everyday Retail Corruption**
 - Citizens judge government integrity through their daily interactions with lower-level officials, not macro-economic stats.
 - While policy-level corruption may drop, persistent retail bribery for basic services—like obtaining licenses, land records, or permits—erodes trust in state institutions.
- **Moral Restraint as a Core Component of Power**
 - Good governance relies on voluntary ethical boundaries beyond strict constitutional rules.
 - Maintaining long-term legitimacy requires separating party interests from state institutions, accepting constructive criticism, supporting an independent media, and avoiding misleading narratives.



- **Historical Evolution of Executive Responsiveness and Governance**
- **Post-Independence Era (1950s–1960s): Institutional Construction**
 - **Context:** Characterized by single-party dominance under the Congress, a committed nation-building agenda, and a respected civil service.
 - **Governance Style:** Paternalistic and elite-led, guided by Nehruvian state-led development.
 - **Weaknesses:** Early signs of bureaucratic red tape and slow execution, though tempered by high institutional respect and parliamentary debate.
- **The Crisis of Centralization and Agitations (1971–1975)**
 - **Context:** High executive centralization following the 1971 war victory, followed by global economic shocks (the 1973 OPEC oil shock, inflation topping 20%, and widespread droughts).
 - **Governance Style:** Highly centralized executive decision-making with low tolerance for political opposition.
 - **Turning Point:** Local protests over mess charges in Gujarat sparked the Navnirman Movement, merging with Jayaprakash Narayan's *Bihar Movement*. The government's failure to address early socio-economic grievances eventually led to the 1975 Emergency.
 - 1971 War Victory —► High Centralization —► 1973 Oil Crisis & Inflation —► Student Agitations (Gujarat/Bihar) —► Institutional Friction & Emergency (1975)
- **Coalition Era and Decentralization (1989–2014)**
 - **Context:** The rise of regional parties, coalition politics, and the 1991 LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization) reforms.
 - **Governance Style:** Negotiated governance. The executive had to stay responsive to coalition partners, civil society, and regional priorities.
 - **Weaknesses:** Policy paralysis and high-level scams, though counterbalanced by strong rights-based laws driven by civil society (like the RTI Act 2005 and MGNREGA 2005).
- **Return to Majoritarian Centralization (2014–Present)**
 - **Context:** Single-party majorities in 2014 and 2019, shifting back to a strong central executive and tech-driven direct welfare delivery (the JAM trinity).
 - **Governance Style:** Top-down execution, strong crisis response, and direct citizen outreach, paired with growing friction around administrative accountability, street-level corruption, and policy pushback (e.g., the Farm Laws agitation, exam leak issues).

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE: POWER, CAPACITY & PUBLIC TRUST

GOVERNANCE DYNAMICS: POWER vs. CAPACITY



PHILOSOPHICAL ANCHORS

1 SOCIAL CONTRACT (Locke/Rousseau):
Continuous Consent, not just elections.



2 KANTIAN ETHICS:
Absolute Truthfulness, Reject Suppressio Veri.



3 WEBERIAN BUREAUCRACY:
Accountability for Permanent Bureaucracy.



4 JUSTICE (Aristotle/Rawls):
Relational & Transactional Fairness (Welfare with Procedure).



MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

SOCIAL



Erosion of Trust
(Youth grievances, polarization).

POLITICAL



Executive Dominance vs. Oversight
(opposition pushback, federal frictions).

LEGAL



Judge: Protection (Art 311) vs. Accountability
(Preventive Laws).

ETHICAL



Ethics of Statecraft
(State != Party, Moral Restraint).

INTERNATIONAL



Global Democratic Indicators
(Media freedom, soft power, investment).

ECONOMIC



Inefficiency & Corruption
(Macro-Integrity vs. Micro-Bribery).

NCERT & UPSC SYLLABUS LINKAGES

NCERT LINKS

(C11, C12 Polity, Theory, History).



- Chapter 1
- Chapter Polity
- Chapter 2
- Chapter 3
- Chapter 3

UPSC SYLLABUS MAP

(GS 1, 2, 3, 4, Optional).



- GS 1
- GS 2
- GS 1, Subjects
- GS 3,
- GS 4, Optional

STRATEGIC WAY FORWARD



MISSION KARMAYOGI
(Civil Service Accountability)



CPGRAMS
(Proactive Grievance Redressal, AI tools)



ANTI-BRIBERY DELIVERY
(Right to Public Services Acts)



INSTITUTIONAL CONSULTATION
(Standing Committees)



5 ETHICAL COMMUNICATION
(No disinformation)

SAMPLE PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- [2023] GS 2: "Role of civil services..."
- [2022] GS 4: "Ethics of information..."
- [2021] GS 2: "Rigidity vs. efficiency..."

- **Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations**
 - **Social Contract Theory (John Locke & Jean-Jacques Rousseau)**
 - **Principle:** Political authority is a trust given by the people, requiring the executive to remain accountable and responsive.
 - **Governance Application:** A electoral victory grants authority, but daily legitimacy requires ongoing responsiveness, fairness, and institutional humility.
 - **Kantian Ethics and Categorical Imperative (Immanuel Kant)**
 - **Principle:** Actions are morally right if done out of duty, rejecting deceit or treating people merely as means to an end.
 - **Governance Application:** Rejects information control, selective truths (*suppressio veri*), or using state machinery purely for political gain. The state owes citizens transparent, honest communication.
 - **Weberian Bureaucracy and Systemic Rigidities (Max Weber)**
 - **Principle:** Legal-rational authority relies on formal rules, hierarchy, and a permanent civil service.
 - **Governance Application:** Constitutional tenure protects bureaucrats from political interference, but without internal performance measures, it can turn into an inflexible system focused on self-preservation rather than public service.
 - **Distributive vs. Relational Justice (Aristotle & John Rawls)**
 - **Principle:** Justice requires both fair distribution of resources and respectful treatment of all citizens.
 - **Governance Application:** Distributing material benefits fairly (distributive justice) is not enough if social groups feel politically marginalized or unfairly treated (relational injustice).
-

- **Multidimensional Analysis**
- **Social Dimension**
- **Erosion of Social Trust:** Unaddressed youth grievances—such as exam leaks or delayed recruitment—destroy trust in public institutions.
- **Student and Youth Mobilization:** Historically, major political movements start with youth frustrated by economic pressure and administrative failures.
- **Identity and Social Cohesion:** Using polarizing social narratives to consolidate votes breaks down civic trust, making cooperative governance much harder.
- **Political Dimension**
- **Executive Dominance vs. Legislative Oversight:** Large majorities often dilute parliamentary scrutiny, turning debates into formal rituals and pushing opposition outside official channels onto the streets.
- **Federal Friction:** Top-down administrative mandates can strain state-center relations, especially when central policies ignore regional variations.
- **Dissent as an Early Warning System:** Treating criticism as hostile political attack deprives the government of essential feedback needed to fix policy mistakes early.
- **Legal Dimension**
- **Protection vs. Accountability (Article 311):** Article 311 safeguards civil servants against arbitrary removal, but in practice, it makes firing corrupt or incompetent officials extraordinarily difficult.
- **Use of Preventive Laws:** Relying heavily on state security laws to manage public protests can undermine constitutional rights under Articles 19 and 21.
- **Ethical Dimension**
- **Ethics of Statecraft:** True governance requires moral self-restraint—distinguishing the state from the ruling party, respecting press freedom, and avoiding official disinformation.
- **Administrative Ethics:** Widespread retail corruption damages the moral legitimacy of the state, turning everyday public interactions into transactions.
- **International Dimension**
- **Global Democratic Indicators:** International perceptions of democratic health, media freedom, and civil liberties shape a country's soft power, foreign investment, and diplomatic standing.
- **Economic Vulnerability:** Global economic shocks—like oil price spikes or supply chain disruptions—test domestic resilience, showing how administrative efficiency directly impacts national security.
- **Economic Dimension**
- **Cost of Administrative Inefficiency:** Corruption and administrative friction raise business costs, suppress private investment, and waste public funds.
- **Welfare Efficiency vs. Job Creation:** Direct benefit transfers provide an essential safety net, but they cannot substitute for structural economic reforms that generate long-term employment.



- **NCERT Syllabus Linkages**
- **Class 11 Political Science: *Indian Constitution at Work***
- **Chapter 4: Executive:** Focuses on the parliamentary executive, administrative accountability, and the role and protections of civil services under Article 311.
- **Chapter 6: Judiciary:** Highlights judicial review as a check on executive overreach and administrative arbitrariness.
- **Class 11 Political Science: *Political Theory***
- **Chapter 2: Freedom:** Explains the importance of dissent, free expression, and the limits of state control.
- **Chapter 4: Social Justice:** Explores distributive justice, contrasting material resource allocation with procedural fairness.
- **Class 12 Political Science: *Politics in India Since Independence***
- **Chapter 3: Politics of Planned Development:** Covers state capacity, development models, and administrative challenges in resource delivery.
- **Chapter 6: The Crisis of Democratic Order:** Directly analyzes the 1971–1975 political crisis, the Navnirman Movement in Gujarat, the JP Movement, inflation shocks, and the 1975 Emergency.



- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper 1: History**
- **Post-Independence Consolidation:** Socio-political movements of the 1970s, political centralization, and economic crises shaping modern Indian democracy.
- **GS Paper 2: Governance, Constitution, Polity**
- **Role of Civil Services in a Democracy:** Administrative bottlenecks, civil service protection vs. accountability, and the need for structural reforms.
- **Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency, and Accountability:** Institutional responsiveness, citizen charters, and mechanisms for public grievance redressal.
- **Executive and Legislature:** Separation of powers, parliamentary oversight, and managing democratic dissent.
- **GS Paper 3: Economic Development**
- **Inclusive Growth and Issues Arising From It:** Universal welfare vs. job creation, inflation management, and reducing administrative friction for economic growth.
- **GS Paper 4: Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude**
- **Ethics in Public Administration:** Moral self-restraint in power, avoiding *suppressio veri*, administrative integrity, and fighting retail corruption.
- **Accountability and Ethical Governance:** Institutional mechanisms to ensure transparency, fairness, and public trust.
- **Optional Subjects**
- **Public Administration (Paper 1 & 2):** Civil service reform, administrative accountability, Weberian bureaucracy, executive control, and governance dynamics in India.
- **Political Science & International Relations (PSIR - Paper 1 & 2):** Hegemony, state legitimacy, grassroots movements, party systems, and political centralization.

- **Way Forward and Policy Recommendations**
- **Reforming Civil Service Accountability**
- **Modernizing Protections:** Interpret Article 311 to protect honest officers from political harassment while creating clear, streamlined paths to remove proven incompetent or corrupt personnel.
- **Enforcing FR 56(j):** Broaden periodic performance reviews under Fundamental Rule 56(j) to retire non-performing senior bureaucrats early.
- **Institutionalizing Mission Karmayogi:** Move the civil service from rule-based to role-based competency frameworks, emphasizing problem-solving and public empathy.
- **Building Proactive Grievance Redressal Systems**
- **Upgrading CPGRAMS:** Transform the Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System into an AI-driven predictive platform that flags recurring administrative delays before they spark public anger.
- **Independent Quality Audits:** Set up third-party social audits for local public services to catch service delivery failures early.
- **Eliminating Retail Corruption**
- **Statutory Service Timelines:** Pass and enforce comprehensive Right to Public Services Acts across all states, imposing automatic monetary fines on officials who fail to deliver basic services on time.
- **End-to-End Digital Workflows:** Digitally track all citizen-facing applications to eliminate human discretion and bribe-seeking opportunities.
- **Strengthening Democratic Dissent and Consultation**
- **Pre-Legislative Consultation:** Strictly follow the Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy (PLCP) by keeping draft bills open for public comment for at least 30 days before introduction in Parliament.
- **Strengthening Standing Committees:** Automatically refer all major, high-impact legislation to Parliamentary Standing Committees for detailed cross-party review.
- **Establishing Ethical Communication Standards**
- **Institutional Self-Restraint:** Set clear ethical guidelines for government communication, ensuring official channels focus on factual public information rather than party promotion.
- **Protecting Free Expression:** Protect media independence and civic criticism, treating public feedback as an essential tool for effective governance.

- **UPSC CSE Mains Questions**

- **[2023] GS Paper 2**

- *Question:* "The role of the civil services in a democracy is evolving dynamically to meet the challenges of modern governance." Discuss in the context of administrative capacity and responsiveness.

- **[2022] GS Paper 4 (Ethics)**

- *Question:* "Whistleblowing in public administration is a double-edged sword." Analyze how ethical restraint, transparency, and administrative protection interact in modern statecraft.

- **[2021] GS Paper 2**

- *Question:* Institutional quality is a crucial driver of economic performance. In this context, analyze the friction between administrative rigidity and executive decision-making in India.

- **[2020] GS Paper 2**

- *Question:* "The traditional bureaucratic structure in India needs comprehensive reform to meet modern governance demands." Discuss the institutional constraints in enforcing accountability within civil services.

- **[2019] GS Paper 2**

- *Question:* Citizen's Charters and Right to Public Services laws are considered milestone reforms in fighting retail corruption, yet their implementation remains poor. Critically evaluate.

- **[2018] GS Paper 4 (Ethics)**

- *Question:* State power must always be accompanied by moral self-restraint. Discuss the ethical principles that should guide government communication and the handling of democratic dissent.

Irom Sharmila and the power of hunger strikes



SANJOY HAZARIKA
INDEPENDENT COLUMNIST

IROM Sharmila, who undertook the world's longest hunger strike lasting nearly 16 years, says it is not the individual who counts in a strategic form of protest. She thinks popular mobilisation and support are more important. Reflecting on the recent resignation of Education Minister Dhamendra Pradhan, Sharmila says the government acquiesced because of the cross-country support for the demands of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP). People, she says, took a united stand, which is necessary for a collective goal. She was on a hunger strike in Manipur between 2000 and 2016 for the repeal of a draconian law, which drew some support but was not successful.

Sharmila, an iconic figure from the acutely troubled state of Manipur, is celebrated for her 16-year strike demanding the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), a law that has its origins in colonial times and which gives sweeping powers to Indian military personnel over life and death. Criminal

prosecution of soldiers allegedly involved in such incidents depends on Central government clearance — this has never been given in the 70 years of the law's existence.

During her marathon hunger strike, Sharmila was force-fed through a nasal drip because of a court order and official concern that it would be calamitous if she died. Through the tube, she was fed a carefully calibrated liquid diet containing protein, carbohydrates and vitamins up to three times a day. During her confinement, she would make occasional court appearances before being taken back to her hospital detention.

The police had to take her to a court in Imphal to request renewal of her detention once a year because the maximum sentence for attempt to die by suicide was one year at the time. During her incarceration, she was largely kept in a special ward in a local government hospital as she grew increasingly fragile.

Her frail appearance belied her steely resolve. A familiar media image during her fast was that of her surrounded by police with the nasal drip in place as she grew into a national and international figure, hailed as the Iron Lady of Manipur, on issues of human rights and state impunity.

While government committees have recommended repeal of the Act, partly as a confidence-building measure, the Central government has refused to bow to the



LONE PROTEST: The hunger strike of the 'Iron Lady of Manipur' lasted nearly 16 years, r/c

demand. I was a member of the Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee that had advocated repeal after holding extensive public hearings across states.

Sharmila was arrested for the first time in November 2000 for 'attempting suicide', which was then unlawful, under Section 309 of the former Indian Penal Code, and, hence, the nasal feeding. Attempted suicide is decriminalised under the new Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

Over the years, she became a figure that rallied communities across ethnicities and states, especially in the North-East. A hunger strike, Sharmila says, 'harms nobody else except our own body', noting that she did not drink a single drop of water during all the years of her fast.

'They could not punish ... that is the power' of the fast. But she also knows that the

'body deteriorates' over time. What was important, and this she underlines time and again, is 'collective unity for the cause and to work for change.'

In two telephone interviews, she spoke softly, slowly but firmly and clearly. When I talked to her, an image appeared in front of my eyes: her face, crowned by crinkled hair, wearing a determined grimace as if in pain.

She sounds disappointed that such a massive mobilisation as over the issue of education had not happened in the case of AFSPA. She believes that some people had wanted to use her for publicity and their own advantage.

She finally decided to call off the fast and contested the election against the then incumbent Chief Minister O Ibobi Singh, but lost overwhelmingly. Her political

decision led to a break with her supporters, who demanded that she continue to fast. But Sharmila stood firm — she had made her point single-handedly over 16 years. No one could challenge her integrity or commitment.

It is something that still upsets her deeply. 'They did not want me except as a martyr ... I did believe I would get support, but it never happened.'

Sharmila left Manipur and that life. She got married and now lives with her husband in Bangalore with their twin sons. Does she still think about that the earlier struggle which consumed such a large part of her life — she's now 54 — and reflect on those years?

'Our life's journey and feelings are always evolving,' she remarks. Pausing, she adds, 'It keeps changing, that was my cause in life' (at the time).

Although AFSPA remains on the statute books, the law has been withdrawn from extensive parts of Assam and Nagaland, where conditions have stabilised. Many fighting factions are smoking the peace pipe with the Centre — and with their rivals. AFSPA is still in place in Manipur, her home state, which has been caught in a brutal, traumatising three-way division along ethnic and political lines. Sharmila described conditions there as 'horrible'.

She remains committed to AFSPA's repeal, a demand that has vanished for years from the front pages and headlines. The problem, says Sharmila,

is that this is a colonial-era law that remains in use and that too in places where people look and dress differently from much of India.

If removing it is a security constraint, as pro-State media pundits and military analysts argue, then why wasn't it used during terrorist attacks on Mumbai, or in Naxalite-hit areas, she asks. AFSPA is in use in parts of the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and in the North-eastern states.

I think the reason the movement against AFSPA has not succeeded is that many Indians don't want to take a position that could be viewed as against the Army, which is seen as a pillar of the country's security. However, as some of us have pointed out — improving accountability is critical to strengthening official morale and bolstering public confidence. The other reason is anchored in what journalist Rajdeep Sardesai has spoken of — the tyranny of distance.

The issue of education galvanised everyone because it concerns everyone. The scale of outrage, media attention, mobilisation and determination shown in New Delhi by young people and their supporters was not seen in Irom Sharmila's epic fast. The use of social media and digital technology on the education issue was nothing short of spectacular; it was largely missing in Sharmila's case.

The scale of outrage, media attention, mobilisation and determination shown in Delhi by young people was not seen in Irom Sharmila's epic fast.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958**
- **Definition:** A parliamentary statute that grants special powers to the Indian Armed Forces and central paramilitary forces to maintain public order in designated "disturbed areas."
- **Core Provisions:** Under Section 4, military officers are empowered to open fire (even causing death) against persons violating public orders, destroy weapon caches or fortified positions, and arrest individuals without a warrant based on reasonable suspicion. Section 6 grants broad immunity by stipulating that no prosecution or legal proceeding can be instituted against military personnel without prior sanction from the Central Government.
- **Example:** When a state governor or the central government declares an entire region or specific districts as a "Disturbed Area" under Section 3, AFSPA automatically operationalizes, granting operational autonomy to security forces.
- **Satyagraha and Moral Fasting (Hunger Strike)**
- **Definition:** A non-violent method of resistance popularized by Mahatma Gandhi, where an individual uses self-suffering—specifically voluntary abstinence from food—to appeal to the moral conscience of the adversary and the public.
- **Core Dynamics:** Unlike coercive blackmail, classical Satyagraha relies on moral persuasion, personal sacrifice, and absolute commitment to truth (*Satya*) and non-violence (*Ahimsa*).
- **Example:** Fasting unto death undertaken to demand legal reforms or political recognition, leveraging bodily self-sacrifice to highlight perceived institutional injustice.
- **Attempt to Commit Suicide (Section 309 IPC vs. Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita)**
- **IPC Section 309:** A colonial-era legal provision under the Indian Penal Code that criminalized attempted suicide, treating self-harm as an offense punishable by imprisonment or fine. State authorities frequently used this provision to detain individuals undertaking prolonged hunger strikes and administer forced nasal feeding.
- **Modern Legislative Shift:** Under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, attempted suicide has been effectively decriminalized, shifting the state response from penal detention to medical intervention and care.
- **Tyranny of Distance**
- **Definition:** A socio-political concept describing how geographical remoteness from the political and economic center translates into institutional neglect, cultural alienation, and lower media visibility for peripheral border regions.
- **Core Dynamics:** Issues occurring in geographically remote regions often fail to generate national outrage or sustained policy responses due to structural asymmetries in media coverage and political representation.
- **Example:** Security crises in borderland areas receiving minimal public or legislative attention compared to similar issues arising closer to the national capital.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- **Collective Mobilization versus Individual Endurance**
- **The Limit of Individual Sacrifice:** Prolonged individual fasting demonstrates high personal integrity and moral fortitude, yet single-person protests face structural limitations when attempting to force policy changes without sustained mass mobilization.
- **The Power of Broad-Based Support:** Security legislation and state policies shift primarily when public outrage crosses regional boundaries and engages a wide spectrum of civil society, student movements, and urban centers. Without cross-community consensus, state machinery can isolate and manage individual fasts through medical confinement.
- **Institutional Resistance and Security Imperatives**
- **Primacy of National Security:** The central government's reluctance to repeal emergency security framework stems from an institutional reliance on armed forces for internal stability in borderland conflict zones.
- **Rejection of Expert Recommendations:** Independent committees—including the Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee (2005) and the Second Administrative Reforms Commission—advocated for repealing AFSPA and inserting its essential safeguards into standard internal security legislation. However, executive decision-making continues to prioritize military operational discretion over civilian administrative oversight.
- **Selective Application of Security Laws**
- **Geographical Disparities:** Special security regimes have historically concentrated in specific peripheral corridors, such as the North-Eastern states and Jammu & Kashmir.
- **Absence in Other Conflict Zones:** Similar statutory measures were not applied in regions dealing with Left-Wing Extremism or major urban security threats, raising questions about statutory equity and the differential handling of internal conflicts across the nation.
- **The Dissent-to-Politics Transition Dilemma**
- **Symbolic Moral Capital vs. Electoral Reality:** Transitioning from moral activism to electoral politics presents significant strategic challenges for civil rights figures.
- **Public Perception Asymmetry:** Citizens often venerate activists as pure moral symbols or political conscience-keepers, yet this public support does not automatically convert into electoral success. When activists enter party politics, they must navigate entrenched party structures, ethnic realpolitik, and resource asymmetries.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Pre-Independence Foundations (1942)**
 - **Colonial Roots:** The precursor to AFSPA was the Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance, promulgated by the British colonial administration in 1942 to suppress the Quit India Movement.
 - **Statutory Design:** The ordinance provided sweeping powers of arrest, search, and protection from legal prosecution to military personnel, establishing an operational blueprint for emergency counter-insurgency frameworks.
- **Post-Independence Enactment (1958)**
 - **Legislative Genesis:** Parliament enacted the Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act in 1958 to respond to rising Naga insurgency in the region.
 - **Expansion Across Borderlands:** As armed conflicts and sub-nationalist movements emerged across the region, the act was amended and extended to all North-Eastern states (Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh).
- **Mass Movements and Escalation (2000s)**
 - **The Malom Event:** In November 2000, an incident involving security forces at Malom, Manipur, resulted in ten civilian casualties, sparking public protests and initiating a 16-year fast demanding the complete repeal of AFSPA.
 - **Force-Feeding and Judicial Detention:** The state responded by detaining the protest leader under Section 309 of the IPC, maintaining continuous medical nutrition via nasal tube feeding in hospital custody for over a decade.
- **Institutional Inquiries and Judicial Interventions (2004–2016)**
 - **Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee (2005):** Appointed by the Union Government, the committee reviewed AFSPA and concluded that the Act had become a symbol of oppression. It recommended repealing AFSPA while incorporating necessary security provisions into the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
 - **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (5th Report):** Endorsed the Reddy Committee's findings, recommending the repeal of the law to improve governance and reduce public alienation in border states.
 - **Supreme Court Judgment (2016):** In *Extra Judicial Execution Victim Families Association (EEVFAM) v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court held that indefinite use of AFSPA undermines the rule of law. The court ruled that every questionable death caused by security forces must be subjected to thorough investigation, regardless of whether the area is declared disturbed.
- **Modern Reforms and Phased Rollbacks (2016–Present)**
 - **Decriminalization under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita:** Legislative updates modernized statutory provisions on attempted suicide, shifting the legal focus from criminal prosecution to psychological and medical care.
 - **Incremental Area Reductions:** Citing improved security situations and political negotiations, the Central Government began incrementally removing "Disturbed Area" notifications from broad areas of Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur, though core conflict pockets remain under its purview.



AXIA
IAS ACADEMY
RISE ABOVE THE REST

COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS: AFSPA, HUMAN RIGHTS, & REFORMS

CONSTITUTIONAL & PHILOSOPHICAL EQUILIBRIUM

STATE MONOPOLY
ON FORCE
(Hobbesian State)

VS

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS
(Lockean/
Constitutional Remedies
(lockean/Constitutional
text on Article 21))

UTILITARIANISM
(maximizing security)

KANTIAN DEONTOLOGY
(human dignity)

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION TIMELINE



THE AFSPA LEGAL FRAMEWORK



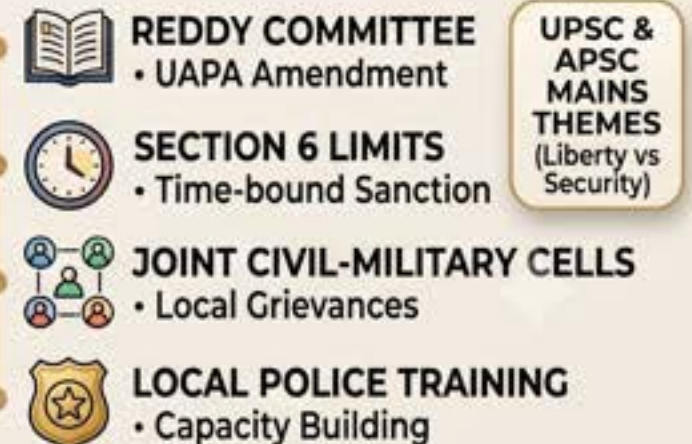
THE STRUGGLE & MOVEMENTS: INDIVIDUAL vs COLLECTIVE



MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACT MATRIX



WAY FORWARD: BALANCED REFORMS

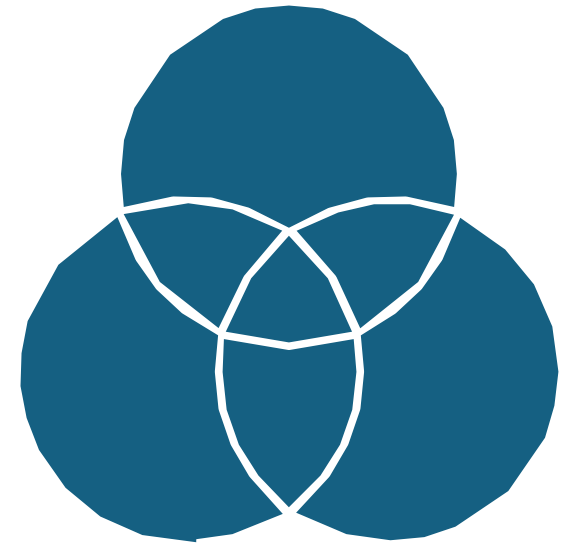


- **Logical and Philosophical Base**
- **Social Contract Theory and Sovereign Authority**
- **The Hobbesian Paradigm:** The state's primary function is maintaining public order and preserving territorial integrity. Under this framework, extraordinary security legislation is justified as a temporary sacrifice of civil liberties to prevent chaos.
- **The Lockean Counterpoint:** Political authority derives legitimacy from protecting citizens' basic rights to life, liberty, and property. When extraordinary powers lead to prolonged restrictions on basic rights, the state risks weakening the foundational social contract.
- **Gandhian Ethics of Moral Resistance**
- **The Power of Self-Suffering:** Gandhian philosophy views passive resistance (*Satyagraha*) not as a sign of weakness, but as a moral force (*Soul-Force*). By directing pain toward oneself rather than the opponent, the protester seeks to awaken the moral consciousness of the state.
- **Limits of Bodily Dissent:** When state institutions operate purely through legalism and administrative routine, self-suffering can be reduced to a managed medical situation rather than a catalyst for moral self-reflection.
- **Utilitarianism vs. Kantian Deontology**
- **Utilitarian Logic:** National security policies often rely on utilitarian reasoning: restricting individual civil rights in specific regions serves the broader national interest and internal stability.
- **Kantian Deontological Critique:** Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative holds that human beings must be treated as ends in themselves, never merely as means to an end. Subjecting citizens in conflict zones to reduced legal protection violates human dignity and bodily autonomy.

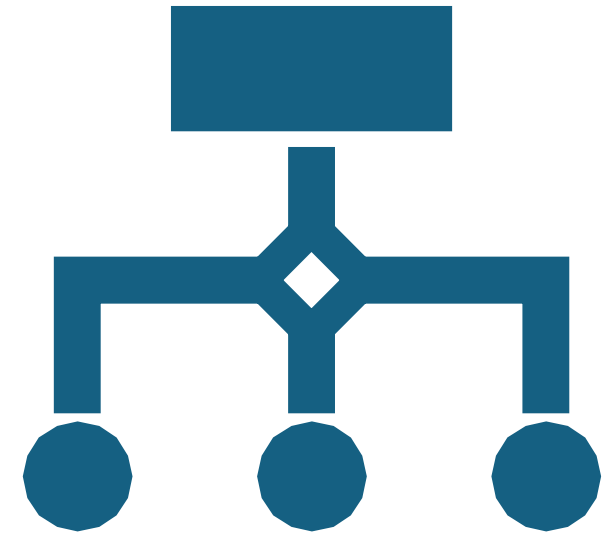


- **Multidimensional Analysis**
- **Social Dimension**
- **Psychological Trauma and Alienation:** Long-standing special security measures can create a pervasive sense of suspicion between civilian populations and state institutions, fostering intergenerational alienation.
- **Civil Society Mobilization:** In regions under long-term security laws, women-led community groups and local solidarity networks often emerge as primary defenders of civil liberties and human rights.
- **Political Dimension**
- **Center-Periphery Power Asymmetries:** Relying on central security mandates can weaken local political institutions, contributing to a democratic deficit where elected state governments yield operational authority to federal security forces.
- **Electoral Limits of Dissent:** Transforming popular moral movements into political electoral platforms remains challenging, as local voting patterns often prioritize immediate economic governance, ethnic identity, and resource distribution over ideological reforms.
- **Legal Dimension**
- **Constitutional Tension:** AFSPA's provisions present ongoing questions regarding fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution:
 - **Article 14:** Questions of equality before the law, given differential legal standards in "disturbed" versus standard areas.
 - **Article 19:** Impacts on freedom of movement and assembly under security curfews.
 - **Article 21:** Challenges regarding the right to life, personal liberty, and protection against arbitrary state action.
- **Statutory Prosecution Immunity:** Requiring executive sanction before initiating criminal proceedings against operational personnel creates procedural hurdles for victims seeking judicial remedies, conflicting with standard police accountability mechanisms.
- **Ethical Dimension**
- **State Authority vs. Human Dignity:** The ethical debate focuses on whether state security imperatives justify limiting constitutional remedies for affected populations.
- **Ethics of State Custody and Force-Feeding:** Sustaining hunger strikers via compulsory medical intervention creates an ethical conflict between preserving life and respecting individual autonomy.
- **International Dimension**
- **Human Rights Scrutiny:** International bodies, including the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), regularly evaluate extraordinary security legislation during Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR), raising questions about international covenant commitments like the ICCPR.
- **Soft Power and Global Standing:** Reconciling security measures in border regions with India's identity as a constitutional democracy is central to its international standing and diplomacy.
- **Economic Dimension**
- **Development and Investment Bottlenecks:** Prolonged security interventions and movement restrictions can discourage private investment, hamper infrastructure expansion, and limit regional development.
- **Impact on Strategic Integration:** Regions under special security regimes may struggle to leverage economic integration initiatives, such as the Act East Policy, which require stable conditions for trade and cross-border connectivity.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class 11 Political Science: *Indian Constitution at Work***
- **Chapter 2: Rights in the Indian Constitution:** Directly relevant to analyzing the scope of Article 21 (Right to Life) and the balance between individual freedoms and state security provisions.
- **Chapter 6: Judiciary:** Connects with judicial review, Public Interest Litigation (PIL), and Supreme Court rulings regarding executive accountability and armed forces immunity.
- **Class 12 Political Science: *Politics in India Since Independence***
- **Chapter 8: Regional Aspirations:** Examines the political history of the North-Eastern states, counter-insurgency operations, public alienation, and integration efforts within the Indian Union.
- **Chapter 7: Rise of Popular Movements:** Contextualizes how non-violent protests, civil society networks, and hunger strikes function as tools of democratic feedback.
- **Class 11 Sociology: *Introducing Sociology***
- **Chapter 3: Understanding Social Institutions:** Explores concepts of state legitimacy, sovereignty, force, and how local communities negotiate power with central authorities.



- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper 1: Indian Society & History**
- **Themes:** Regionalism, national integration challenges, post-independence consolidation, and grassroots social movements in peripheral regions.
- **GS Paper 2: Governance, Constitution, and Polity**
- **Themes:** Fundamental Rights (Articles 14, 19, 21), Union-State relations, executive emergency powers, statutory oversight bodies (NHRC), and judicial review of security legislation.
- **GS Paper 3: Internal Security & Economic Development**
- **Themes:** Internal security challenges in border states, counter-insurgency strategies, operational mandates of armed forces, and the Act East Policy.
- **GS Paper 4: Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude**
- **Themes:** Ethics of state power versus individual liberty, non-violent resistance, administrative empathy, Kantian ethics, and moral courage in public life.
- **Essay Paper**
- **Themes:** "Security vs. Personal Liberty," "The Power of Non-Violent Dissent," and "Bridging the Distance Between Marginalized Peripheries and Mainstream Democracy."



- 
- **Way Forward**
 - **Legislative Reform via Expert Committee Guidelines**
 - **Targeted Statutory Amendments:** Implement the Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee's key recommendations by replacing blanket security laws with precise amendments to general counter-terrorism laws (such as UAPA), ensuring statutory checks against misuse while retaining essential security powers.
 - **Institutional Transparency for Prosecution Sanctions**
 - **Time-Bound Decisions:** Establish a transparent, time-bound legal framework for evaluating Section 6 sanction requests. The Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Defence should issue reasoned orders on prosecution requests within a statutory 90-day window.
 - **Strengthening Regional Civil-Military Coordination**
 - **District-Level Oversight Units:** Establish joint civil-military human rights units at the district level—comprising local magistrates, civil society representatives, and military officers—to investigate public grievances, verify operational reports, and rebuild public trust.
 - **Modernizing Local Law and Order Capabilities**
 - **Capacity Building for State Police:** Invest in training, equipment, and intelligence capabilities for state police forces. Modernizing local police reduces reliance on federal armed forces for routine internal security tasks, enabling a gradual transition to standard policing models.
 - **Inclusive Socio-Economic Engagement**
 - **Prioritizing Political Dialogue:** Complement security management with sustained political negotiations, infrastructure development, educational expansion, and regional economic integration to address the underlying causes of alienation.

- **UPSC Mains Questions**
- **GS Paper 2 (Polity & Governance)**
 - *"The trade-off between national security imperatives and constitutional freedoms is a continuous challenge for Indian democracy."* In light of Article 21, critically analyze the legal safeguards required while applying extraordinary security laws in internal conflict zones. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
 - Discuss the recommendations of the Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee regarding AFSPA. Why have successive executive administrations faced challenges in fully implementing these recommendations? (10 Marks, 150 Words)
- **GS Paper 3 (Internal Security)**
 - Inspect the key drivers of security challenges in the North-Eastern region of India. How far has the phased withdrawal of AFSPA contributed to peace and regional development? (15 Marks, 250 Words)
 - Insurgency in border states requires moving beyond military approaches toward comprehensive political and administrative solutions. Evaluate this statement with recent regional examples. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
- **GS Paper 4 (Ethics)**
 - Compare Gandhian *Satyagraha* and moral fasting with modern civil protest movements. What ethical boundaries distinguish moral persuasion from political coercion? (10 Marks, 150 Words)



One nation, many electoral questions



ASHOK LAVASA
ELECTION COMMISSIONER

AS E Nino threatened with a scant monsoon, the Monsoon Session of Parliament started with the threat of bringing back the controversial Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, generally referred to as the ONOE (One Nation, One Election) Bill. The fact that it was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) in a Parliament that specialises in making laws with lightning speed, shows the government's rare attempt to build consensus on a Bill lacking an agreed purpose.

The outcome of the deliberations in the JPC is not known although we know it considered the report of the Ram Nath Kovind Committee, which recommended simultaneous elections. Going by the terms of the panel, its conclusions were foregone. Its task was to take the horse to the water, whether it drinks or not depends on the consensus among parliamentarians. Given the profound issues involved, that seems unlikely.

The makers of the Indian Constitution didn't stipulate simultaneous elections. They were aware that while the initial election to the Central and state legislatures would be simultaneous, it was likely for schedules to be disrupted due to political dynamics and electoral politics becoming complex and uncertain.

As Shibban Lal Saxena, a Congress leader and member of the Constituent Assembly, said, "Elections will probably be almost always going on in some province or the other" due to the constitutional provision for the dissolution of legislatures on a no-confidence motion.

Given the geographical, economic and socio-cultural diversity of the country, every region was bound to have its own problems while the nation was unified by larger national interests. The Centre and the states began their electoral journeys together but their divergent interests and the politics of contestation disturbed the cycle. Why should that uneven cycle be bothersome?

Elections in one state should be of little consequence to another. The quest for simultaneity is an artificial way of regimenting power politics that makes the managerial aspects of elections more important than the principle of federal autonomy and the zeal of imposing uniformity more obsessive than practising consensual politics.

The Statement of Objects and Reasons appended to the



CONSENSUS : The ECI should place its recommendations regarding the ONOE Bill in public domain, say

Bill speaks of elections becoming "expensive and time consuming." TT Krishnamachari, an elected member of the Constituent Assembly, had said, "Democracy is an expensive affair. If this House wants a democracy, it has got to go through the expenses of an election, once, twice, thrice, as many times as it is necessary."

Neither the Election Commission of India nor the Central government maintains consolidated accounts of the expenditure incurred in the conduct of elections. The government must place this data before the JPC and the public, including the so-called saving, aimed to be achieved by holding simultaneous elections, especially as the Bill doesn't rule out the possibility of no-confidence motions in the future and the holding of mid-

term elections. What it proposes is that such an election would be for a curtailed period to match the cycle.

It should be noted that Section 14 of the Representation of the People Act 1951, provides for the ECI to conduct elections six months "prior to the date on which the duration of the House would expire." The existing law enables the ECI to bunch together elections for efficient management without curbing the term of the elected House.

The other reason cited in the Bill is that "the imposition of MCC (Model code of conduct) in several parts of the country which are poll-bound put on hold the entire development programmes, cause disruption of normal public life, impact the functioning of services and also curtail the involvement of man-

power from their core activities to be deployed for prolonged periods for election duties."

The ECI must make public its comments on this presumption and whether the Model Code of Conduct leads to such dysfunctionality, as claimed in the Bill. The MCC, in fact, is pragmatic: it delegitimises only that which is already prohibited by law as far as the conduct of candidates and political parties is concerned. It permits all government action, except that which is with the purpose of giving unfair advantage to the ruling party. Ironically, in recent times, the ECI is repeatedly accused of being feeble in enforcing the MCC, overlooking the government's election-time largesse to voters.

The ECI must place the data of permissions sought by the government after the announcement of polls that were denied, which led to putting 'on hold' the entire development programmes. The poll period is confined to 35-40 days from announcement of dates to the declaration of results, except for the Lok Sabha polls, where elections are conducted in extended phases that can be easily compressed.

Elections are a time when political parties court the voters, wooing them with unrealistic promises and ruling parties ingratiate them with money drawn from the state exchequer, shifting the power balance in favour of the electors as politicians act servile and wily.

As soon as the ballot is cast, those elected are sucked into the power vortex that takes them far from the electors. Come election and the elector is powerful again. That's what people's power is. Simultaneous elections aim at reducing the frequency of this interaction, giving political leaders a supremacy that would convert accountability into a five-year ritual, thus betraying the spirit of electoral democracy.

The ills associated with elections are political finance, the enormous amount of money spent on elections by the candidates and the political parties, the obsession with selecting 'winnable' candidates, irrespective of their dubious records, the extraordinary viciousness in campaigning, the blatant violation of the MCC and the prolonged duration of the polls, among others. The remedy of ONOE doesn't deal with any of these.

Let the parties in power at the Centre and the states set an example by resolving not to expend public money to garner votes just before the elections, set an example by strictly adhering to the MCC, evolve a mechanism to curb the use of black money for elections and pursue the more meaningful electoral reforms languishing before the government for years.

Let the ECI place its recommendations in public domain and let the JPC weigh in on those before considering a treatment that deals with symptoms designed to suit the remedy.

Simultaneous elections will give political leaders a supremacy that would convert accountability into a five-year ritual.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Simultaneous Elections (One Nation, One Election - ONOE)**
 - **Concept:** The policy initiative aiming to synchronize elections for the **Lok Sabha** (House of the People) and all **State Legislative Assemblies** (and potentially local bodies) across India, so that voting takes place within a single designated timeframe.
 - **Example:** Instead of an elector casting a vote for the Lok Sabha in 2024 and then voting separately for their State Assembly in 2026, both votes are cast concurrently at the same polling booth using separate Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) or Control Units.
- **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**
 - **Concept:** A set of operational guidelines issued by the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** to govern the conduct of political parties and candidates during election cycles, primarily to ensure free, fair, and competitive polls.
 - **Example:** Under the MCC, a sitting government cannot announce new major welfare schemes, inaugurate projects, or utilize state assets (such as government vehicles or aircraft) for election campaigning once the election dates are officially notified.
- **Section 14 of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951**
 - **Concept:** The statutory provision that empowers the ECI to issue notifications for general elections up to **six months prior** to the natural expiration of the term of the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly.
 - **Example:** If an assembly's term naturally expires in December, the ECI can call for elections as early as June without requiring a constitutional amendment to alter the five-year term of the legislature.
- **Constructive Vote of No-Confidence**
 - **Concept:** A procedural mechanism borrowed from parliamentary systems like Germany's, where a legislature can withdraw confidence from the sitting government only if there is a simultaneous majority agreeing upon a successor government.
 - **Example:** If the Opposition moves a motion to unseat the current Chief Minister, the motion cannot pass unless the house concurrently elects a new Chief Minister in the same voting exercise, thereby avoiding premature dissolution of the assembly.
- **Truncated or Curtailed Term**
 - **Concept:** The deliberate legal or constitutional shortening of an elected legislature's standard five-year tenure in order to align its future election schedule with a broader national cycle.
 - **Example:** If a state held its regular assembly election in 2023, forcing its next election to occur concurrently with the 2029 Lok Sabha elections would require legally "curtailing" its term to roughly one year.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The debate over synchronizing elections touches upon a fundamental tension within Indian governance: balancing administrative efficiency against federal diversity and continuous democratic accountability.

- **Core Arguments for Synchronization**

- **Reduction of Governance Distraction and Policy Paralysis**

- Proponents argue that the continuous presence of elections across various states forces governments into perpetual campaign mode. This frequent imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is viewed as a hurdle that delays policy decisions, project launches, and administrative appointments.

- **Financial and Logistical Efficiency**

- Organizing frequent elections involves recurring expenditure for central and state exchequers. Beyond direct financial costs, it requires continuous deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), administrative personnel, and teachers, diverting them from core developmental, law enforcement, and educational duties.

- **Voters Fatigue and Policy Stability**

- Proponents argue that frequent polling leads to voter apathy and lower turnouts over time. A single synchronized polling period is believed to encourage higher voter participation while allowing governments to focus on long-term policy formulation without immediate populist pressures.

- **Core Arguments Against Synchronization**

- **Federalism and Regional Political Autonomy**

- The Indian Constitution establishes a federal structure where state legislatures operate as independent democratic entities. Forcing state election cycles to align with the central government risks subordinating regional concerns to national narratives, potentially marginalizing regional political parties and local development issues.

- **Erosion of Political Accountability**

- Frequent elections act as a vital check on executive authority. They give electors regular opportunities to express approval or discontent with government policies. Extending the interval of voter engagement exclusively to once every five years reduces the bargaining power of citizens and converts accountability into a periodic ritual.

- **Misinterpretation of the Model Code of Conduct**

- Critics point out that the MCC does not freeze routine governance or developmental administration; it merely prohibits new announcements designed to give an unfair advantage to the ruling party. The argument that MCC paralyzes decision-making misrepresents its legal and operational mandate.

- **Failure to Address Structural Electoral Ills**

- Synchronizing polling dates does not fix underlying problems in the political ecosystem, such as opaque campaign finance, black money in elections, candidate selection driven by winnability rather than integrity, hate speech, or weak enforcement of campaign spending limits.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
 - Understanding how India moved from simultaneous elections to a fragmented electoral schedule provides necessary historical context for evaluating current reform proposals.
- **The Initial Era (1951–1967)**
 - Following the adoption of the Constitution, general elections to the Lok Sabha and almost all State Legislative Assemblies were held simultaneously in **1951–52, 1957, 1962, and 1967**.
 - This synchronization occurred naturally because the first general elections established a common baseline across the country, and political stability at both central and state levels kept the cycles aligned.
- **Breakdown of the Cycle (1968–1970)**
 - The synchronized cycle broke down due to the premature dissolution of several State Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969 following volatile political coalitions and the frequent exercise of **Article 356** (President's Rule).
 - The cycle at the national level dissolved in **1970**, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi called for early Lok Sabha elections, decoupling central elections from state polls. Subsequent political events—such as the Emergency (1975–77) and unstable coalition governments in 1979, 1989, 1996, and 1998—further fragmented electoral calendars.
- **Institutional Debates and Commissions (1999–2018)**
 - **170th Law Commission Report (1999)**: Led by Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy, the panel recommended returning to simultaneous elections to ensure stability and reduce public expenditure.
 - **7th Report of the Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (2015)**: Formally recommended a two-phase model for conducting simultaneous elections.
 - **NITI Aayog Discussion Paper (2017)**: Highlighted the administrative burden of frequent elections and outlined a roadmap for operationalizing synchronized polling.
- **Recent Developments (2023–Present)**
 - **Ram Nath Kovind High-Level Committee (2024)**: Set up to study the feasibility of simultaneous elections, the panel recommended a phased implementation: synchronizing Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Phase 1, followed by Municipal and Panchayat elections within 100 days in Phase 2.
 - **Constitutional Amendment Initiatives**: Legislative bills aimed at providing a framework for fixed terms, truncated assemblies, and common electoral rolls have brought the issue back to parliament for review.

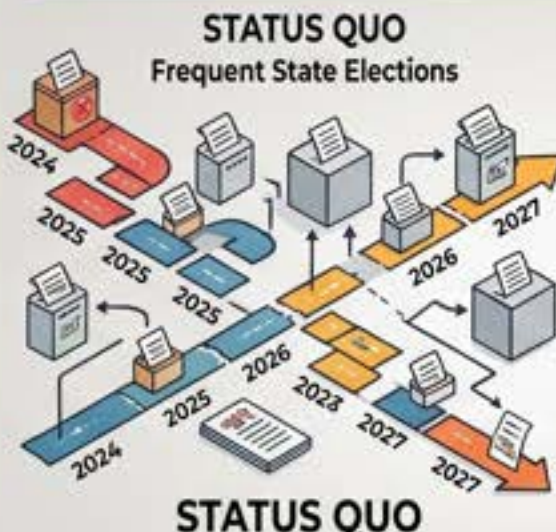
PRO COMPONENTS & ARGUMENTS (Benefits)

ADMINISTRATIVE & FISCAL EFFICIENCY

- Reduced expenditure
- Optimizes security force
- Reduces voter fatigue happy
- Curbs political populist schemes (welfare)

- Governance
- Continuous Model Code of Conduct paper
- Voter faven
- Curbs political fatigue
- pragmatic use

CORE DEBATE: SYNCHRONIZED vs FRAGMENTED ELECTIONS.



OPPONENT ARGUMENTS (Drawbacks)

FEDERALISM & DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

- SUBORDINATES REGIONAL ISSUES
- REDUCED POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY
- CONVERTS DEMOCRACY TO PERIODIC RITUAL
- DIFFERENT ELECTORAL MANDATES (Local vs National concerns)

LEGAL & CONSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

ARTICLES

- 83: House terms
- 172: Assembly terms
- 174: State Dissolution
- 356: President's Rule

AMENDMENTS IN FEDERAL RELATIONSHIP REQUIRE STATE RATIFICATION



KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT (MCC)

- new schemes
- routine work

- SECTION 14 RPA 1951**
- ECI notification,
 - 6 months flexibility

CONSTRUCTIVE VOTE OF NO-CONFIDENCE

- German-stycessor being simultaneously chosen

WAY FORWARD (Balanced Recommendations)

- GROUP ELECTIONS EXPIRING WITHIN 6 MONTHS (USE RPA flexibility)

- INTRODUCE CONSTRUCTIVE VOTE MECHANISM

- FOCUS ON FUNDAMENTAL ELECTORAL REFORMS

- Opaque campaign finance
- Internal party democracy
- Build Political Concerns



MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS (Social, Political, Economic, Ethical)

- SOCIAL**
 - Community engagement vs. fatigue or communities
 - Focus on national narrative
- POLITICAL**
 - Power shift to Center
 - Disadvantages regional parties
- ECONOMIC**
 - Less public cost, but doesn't fix political funding, doesn't fix political funding
- ETHICAL**
 - Voter bargaining power, consent vs. and-onvment
 - Consent vs. curtailment

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**
- **Managerial Efficiency vs. Participatory Democracy**
- **Managerial View:** Treats democratic processes primarily through an administrative lens, prioritizing fiscal prudence, procedural uniformity, and uninterrupted policy execution. From this perspective, frequent elections are seen as operational disruptions that slow down economic progress.
- **Participatory View:** Views democracy as an ongoing conversation between citizens and the state. Elections are not merely administrative events, but vital moments of political contestation where voters hold representatives accountable.
- **Unitary Uniformity vs. Federal Pluralism**
- **Unitary Imperative:** Assumes national stability takes precedence and that political cycles across regions should align with central timelines.
- **Federal Pluralism:** Recognizes that India is a union of states with diverse political agendas, regional priorities, and distinct socioeconomic dynamics. Forcing states into a central schedule risks undermining the federal principle enshrined in the basic structure of the Constitution.
- **Procedural Regularity vs. Substantive Accountability**
- **Procedural Regularity:** Prioritizes predictable, fixed political terms to give executives stable windows for policy implementation without the distraction of upcoming polls.
- **Substantive Accountability:** Argues that fixed terms can encourage executive indifference. Frequent electoral tests ensure that rulers remain responsive to public grievances throughout their tenure.

- **Multidimensional Analysis**
- **1. Social Dimension**
- **Voter Engagement:** Frequent elections keep civil society engaged, but can also cause voter fatigue, leading to lower turnout over time.
- **Local Issues vs. National Narratives:** Concomitant elections often lead national issues to overshadow localized socioeconomic concerns, diluting civic focus on community-level problems such as local infrastructure, primary healthcare, and regional public schools.
- **Social Cohesion:** Polling cycles can exacerbate communal or caste-based polarization. While simultaneous elections limit campaign periods, they may also compress political polarization into concentrated, high-stakes periods.
- **2. Political Dimension**
- **Impact on Regional Parties:** National political parties often benefit from wider visibility and centralized resources during combined elections, which can place smaller, regional parties with limited budgets at a competitive disadvantage.
- **Shift in Power Dynamics:** Reducing the frequency of elections diminishes opportunities for voters to signal changing political preferences, shifting power toward executive leadership over legislative bodies.
- **3. Legal and Constitutional Dimension**
- **Constitutional Amendments:** Implementing simultaneous elections requires amending several provisions, including:
 - **Article 83:** Duration of Houses of Parliament.
 - **Article 85:** Dissolution of Lok Sabha by the President.
 - **Article 172:** Duration of State Legislatures.
 - **Article 174:** Dissolution of State Assemblies.
 - **Article 356:** Imposition of President's Rule.
- **Basic Structure Challenge:** Altering the terms of elected state assemblies without their explicit consent could be challenged as a violation of **Federalism**, which is protected under the Basic Structure Doctrine (*S.R. Bommai v. Union of India, 1994*).
- **Ratification by States:** Amendments affecting central-state relations require ratification by at least half of the state legislatures under **Article 368(2)**.
- **4. Economic Dimension**
- **Public Expenditure Savings:** Holding elections together reduces public spending on security, voter rolls, transportation, and logistics managed by the ECI and state machinery.
- **Private Campaign Spending:** High spending by political parties during frequent elections injects liquidity into local informal economies. However, unchecked election spending also channels unregulated capital into the system.
- **Impact on Policy Continuity:** Fewer electoral interruptions allow for stable long-term fiscal planning, capital expenditure allocation, and predictable policy environments for investors.
- **5. Ethical Dimension**
- **Distortion of Democratic Consent:** Curtailing or extending the tenure of a democratically elected government to fit an administrative calendar alters the mandate given by voters.
- **Prioritizing Cost Over Democratic Values:** Elevating administrative efficiency and cost-saving over regional representation raises ethical concerns about prioritizing fiscal convenience over democratic principles.
- **6. International Dimension**
- **Global Models:**
 - **South Africa:** Holds national and provincial elections simultaneously every five years, operating within an integrated constitutional framework.
 - **Sweden:** Conducts national, regional, and municipal elections on the same day using a proportional representation system.
 - **Germany:** Uses a **Constructive Vote of No Confidence** to maintain legislative stability and prevent premature dissolutions without needing rigid synchronization across state levels.

- **Linkages with NCERT Textbooks**
- **Class 11 Political Science: *Indian Constitution at Work***
- **Chapter 3: Elections and Representation**
 - **Relevance:** Covers the statutory mandate of the Election Commission of India, electoral mechanisms, and the importance of free and fair elections. It helps explain why independent scheduling is central to democratic accountability.
- **Chapter 7: Federalism**
 - **Relevance:** Explores the constitutional distribution of powers between the Centre and States. It highlights why state legislative terms are protected from arbitrary central oversight.
- **Class 10 Political Science: *Democratic Politics - II***
- **Chapter 2: Federalism**
 - **Relevance:** Examines decentralization and the political autonomy of state governments. It clarifies how holding simultaneous elections affects regional political representation.
- **Chapter 6: Political Parties**
 - **Relevance:** Discusses the role of national and regional parties in candidate selection, campaign funding, and governance, offering insight into how synchronized elections might impact party competition.
- **Class 9 Political Science: *Democratic Politics - I***
- **Chapter 3: Electoral Politics**
 - **Relevance:** Introduces why elections are necessary, the voter experience, and the role of the Model Code of Conduct. It provides the basics for understanding how campaigns impact local communities.

- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper 1: Indian Society and Diversity**
- **Syllabus Topics:** Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India, Regionalism.
- **Relevance:** Explores how simultaneous elections balance national policy initiatives with regional political aspirations and local diversity.
- **GS Paper 2: Governance, Constitution, Polity**
- **Syllabus Topics:** Parliament and State Legislatures (structure, functioning), Separation of Powers, Federal Structure, Union-State Relations, Statutory Bodies (Election Commission of India), Salient Features of the Representation of People's Act.
- **Relevance:** Forms the primary thematic home for this topic. Questions assess the constitutional amendments needed for ONOE, the statutory authority under Section 14 of the RPA 1951, federal balance, and the independence of state legislative terms.
- **GS Paper 3: Economic Development and Security**
- **Syllabus Topics:** Indian Economy (Fiscal allocation), Security Forces and their Deployment.
- **Relevance:** Covers the financial efficiency of public spending during polls, logistical planning, and managing security resources like Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) during national election cycles.
- **GS Paper 4: Ethics and Human Interface**
- **Syllabus Topics:** Public/Civil Service Values, Ethics in Governance, Accountability and Ethical Dilemmas.
- **Relevance:** Evaluates the ethical trade-offs between administrative cost-efficiency and citizen-centric democratic responsiveness, as well as political finance transparency.
- **Optional Subjects**
- **Political Science & International Relations (PSIR):** Federalism, political parties, electoral behaviour, and Indian democracy.
- **Public Administration:** Administrative machinery, election administration, personnel logistics, and policy implementation.
- **Law:** Constitutional amendments, Article 368 limitations, the Basic Structure Doctrine, and electoral reform statutes.

- **Way Forward**
- **Utilize Existing Statutory Flexibility (Section 14 of RPA, 1951)**
 - Instead of introducing complex constitutional amendments to truncate assembly terms, the Election Commission of India can use its statutory authority under **Section 14 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**.
 - This allows the ECI to group elections expiring within a six-month window into synchronized phases without disrupting constitutional term limits.
- **Adopt a Constructive Vote of No Confidence**
 - To prevent frequent mid-term dissolutions of legislatures, India could adopt a modified version of the **Constructive Vote of No Confidence** used in Germany.
 - Under this system, an opposition motion to unseat an incumbent government must simultaneously elect a successor, helping prevent political instability and unnecessary snap elections.
- **Focus on Core Structural Electoral Reforms**
 - Reform efforts should focus on fixing underlying issues in the electoral system rather than just changing the polling schedule. Priority areas include:
 - **Campaign Finance Reform:** Increasing transparency in political funding and capping party expenditures.
 - **Electoral Integrity:** Enforcing strict penalties for hate speech, voter bribery, and violations of the Representation of the People Act.
 - **Internal Party Democracy:** Regulating candidate selection processes to prioritize integrity and public service over mere winnability.
- **Refine and Streamline MCC Enforcement**
 - To address concerns about policy paralysis, the ECI can update its guidelines to clarify that ongoing developmental projects, routine administrative tasks, and emergency services do not require approval during an active Model Code of Conduct.
 - Restricting MCC restrictions exclusively to new major policy announcements prevents unnecessary administrative delays without compromising electoral fairness.
- **Build Broad Consensus**
 - Major structural changes to the electoral system should rely on consensus among all parliamentary parties and state governments, rather than top-down executive decisions.
 - Open public debate, consultation with state assemblies, and scrutiny by Joint Parliamentary Committees help ensure that reforms respect India's federal diversity.

UPSC CSE Prelims Questions

Question 1 (UPSC CSE Prelims 2017)

Consider the following statements:

- 1.The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
- 2.The Union Ministry of Home Affairs decides the election schedule for the conduct of both general elections and bye-elections.
- 3.Election Commission resolves the disputes relating to splits/mergers of recognized political parties.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

Answer: (d) **Explanation:** The ECI is a three-member body (1 Chief Election Commissioner and 2 Election Commissioners). The ECI itself decides the election schedule, not the Ministry of Home Affairs. Statement 3 is correct.

Question 2 (UPSC CSE Prelims 2020)

Consider the following statements:

- 1.According to the Constitution of India, a person who is eligible to vote can be made a minister in a State for six months even if he/she is not a member of the Legislature of that State.
- 2.According to the Representation of the People Act, 1951, any person convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to imprisonment for five years is permanently disqualified from contesting an election even after his release from prison.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (d) **Explanation:** Statement 1 is incorrect because the person must meet the minimum age requirement for becoming a member of the legislature (25 years), not just voter eligibility (18 years). Statement 2 is incorrect because under Section 8 of RPA 1951, disqualification lasts for the duration of the sentence plus a period of six years post-release, not permanently.

Question 3 (UPSC CSE Prelims 2018)

Consider the following statements:

- 1.In the election for Lok Sabha or State Legislative Assembly, the winning candidate must get at least 50 percent of the votes polled to be declared elected.
- 2.According to the provisions laid down in the Constitution of India, in Lok Sabha, the Speaker's post goes to the majority party and the Deputy Speaker's to the Opposition.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (d) **Explanation:** India uses a First-Past-The-Post system where the candidate with the highest number of votes wins, even if it is under 50%. The convention regarding the Deputy Speaker is based on parliamentary consensus and practice, not explicit constitutional mandate.



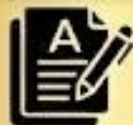
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UPSC CSE CLASSES

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FACULTY &
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