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Q12

In the integrity index of Transparency International, India stands very low. Discuss briefly the legal, political, social and cultural factors that have caused the decline of public morality in India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · GS II · 12 marks · India and its Neighbourhood

India and its neighborhood - relations.

Core demand of the question

- In the integrity index of Transparency International, India stands very low. Discuss briefly the legal, political, social and cultural factors that have caused the decline of public morality in India

Revision summary

Transparency International's index is a perception score, but it matches weak public morality in office.

Legal delay, sanction hurdles and licence discretion lower the cost of corruption.

Election expense, criminal candidates and patronage politics set a bad example.

Society often pays speed money and expects caste or kin favours from officials.

Cultural habits of bakshish, status and jugaad excuse the decline unless shame and speedy trial return.

Introduction

Transparency International's **Corruption Perceptions Index** has often placed India in the lower half of the table. A low rank is not a court finding, but it matches a public sense that office is used for private gain. Public morality is the habit of treating public money and public power as a trust. Legal gaps, political incentives, social tolerance of the 'known person', and cultural excuses have together worn that habit down.

Body**Legal factors**

- **Laws against corruption exist:** the **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988**, the Prevention of Money-Laundering Act, 2002, and service rules. Enforcement is slow. Trials last years, so the fear of punishment is weak.
- Until the 2018 amendment line, the older PCA made even a genuine official hesitant, while the big bribe-giver often escaped. Sanction to prosecute under **Section 19** delayed cases against serving officers.
- Election law still allows large, poorly traced campaign spend. The **Representation of the People Act** punishes some corrupt practices, but black money in polls is hard to prove.
- A crowded statute book with licences, inspections and discretion creates rent. Where a clerk can delay a file, morality is tested every day.

- Whistle-blower protection and a strong, independent anti-corruption body with all-India reach remain incomplete. The Lokpal took years to become a working office after the 2013 Act.

Political factors

- High cost of elections pushes parties and candidates toward undeclared funds and toward donors who later want contracts or posts.
- Criminalisation of politics, recorded in successive Association for Democratic Reforms studies of affidavits, normalises the idea that a charge-sheet is not a bar to office.
- Patronage and the transfer-posting industry teach the cadre that loyalty to a minister can matter more than the rule book.
- Coalition arithmetic and horse-trading, including misuse of office-of-profit and floor-crossing before the **Tenth Schedule** bite, display public office as a bargain.
- Weak inner-party democracy means tickets are sold or gifted, not earned by clean local work.

Social factors

- Citizens often pay a speed money to get a ration card, a caste certificate or a police FIR, and then treat it as a service charge rather than a crime.
- Kinship, caste and community networks expect an official to 'help his own'. That social claim collides with equal treatment under **Article 14**.
- Low social shame for conspicuous wealth of a modest-salary officer, unless a sting appears on television, reduces informal control.
- Unequal access to courts and to English paperwork leaves the poor with the tout as their only broker.

Cultural factors

- A long memory of the bakshish, the gift to the official, and the idea of the mai-baap sarkar still colours the counter.
- **Status attached to a government post can slide into entitlement:** the peon and the secretary both may see the public as petitioners, not as principals.
- Jugaad as a praised skill can become a cultural cover for bending the rule 'just this once'.
- Religious and ritual giving is honourable; the line between dana and a quid pro quo donation to a party or a temple trust linked to a minister is often blurred in public talk.

A brief join

- Law without speedy trial, politics funded in the dark, a society that pays to jump the queue, and a culture that excuses the fixer, move together. The index records the result, not the first cause.

Flow diagram

Legal delay and discretion -> Decline of public morality
 Costly criminalised politics -> Decline of public morality
 Speed money and kinship -> Decline of public morality
 Patron culture and jugaad -> Decline of public morality
 Decline of public morality -> Low integrity index rank

Conclusion

India's low place on the integrity index reflects a decline in public morality fed by slow anti-corruption law, costly and criminalised politics, everyday speed money, and a culture that still treats the official as a patron. Statutes and a Lokpal are not enough unless elections are cleaner, discretion is cut, and society stops honouring the fixer.

Facts & figures

Corruption Perceptions Index

Transparency International's annual ranking of perceived public-sector corruption; India has often scored in the lower-middle band.

Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988

Principal criminal law on bribery of public servants; prosecution of serving officers needs prior sanction.

Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013

Created a national ombudsman after a long delay between statute and a working chair and bench.

ADR affidavit studies

Civil-society reading of candidate affidavits showing a high share of MPs and MLAs with criminal cases.

Right to Information Act, 2005

A legal counter to secrecy; attacks on RTI users show the social cost of asking for files.

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