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Q8

Civil Society Organizations are often perceived as being anti-State actors than non-State actors. Do you agree? Justify.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS II · 10 marks · Development Processes and NGOs

Development processes and the development industry - the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

Core demand of the question

- Define civil society organisations as non-State actors
- Explain why they are often labelled anti-State
- Take a position with Indian examples on both cooperation and contest
- Use FCRA, RTI and movement history without treating dissent as sedition

Revision summary

Civil society organisations are non-State associations, not a fourth branch and not by default enemies of the State.

India's RTI law, disaster relief and many welfare deliveries were built with CSOs.

Protest and PIL are adversarial uses of **Articles 19 and 32**, which the Constitution invites.

FCRA tightening and some shutdowns feed the anti-State image; abuse of funds should be prosecuted as abuse, not as a theory of NGOs.

The accurate label is non-State; anti-State needs facts.

Introduction

- **Civil society organisations are non-State:** they are not the legislature, the ministry or the regiment. They are associations that organise citizens - unions, mahila mandals, think tanks, church and mosque societies, campaign groups. Calling them **anti-State** confuses **contest** with **enmity**. A constitutional State expects contest. An insecure State names it as anti-national.

Body

Non-State, not anti-State

MKSS and the National Campaign for People's Right to Information produced the **RTI Act, 2005** with the State, after struggle. **SEWA** bargains with municipalities. **Goonj, Akshaya Patra** and disaster NGOs deliver beside the SDM. Professional bodies draft standards the ministry later gazettes. This is **complementary** power, which **2nd ARC** and the National Policy on the **Voluntary Sector (2007)** already described.

Protest is still non-State. **Narmada Bachao**, farm-law sit-ins, anti-CAA shaheen bags, and environmental groups fighting a poorly done EIA are **adversarial**. Adversarial is not the same as secessionist. **S.R. Bommai** treated dissent and secular contest as part of constitutional politics. **PUCL** litigation on encounter killings and privacy sits in the Supreme Court, which is itself a State organ.

Why the anti-State image

Governments dislike being mapped. **FCRA** amendments (2020) tightened foreign funds, office-bearers, and transfers; groups such as **Amnesty India** wound down operations. Some organisations have mixed advocacy with foreign campaigns in ways that belong in a democracy's argument, not in a raid's press note. A few have been violent or fraudulent; those are police cases, not a theory of civil society.

- **The image also comes from elite capture:** the same English-speaking NGO that files a PIL may not represent the Gram Sabha (**Xaxa** noted this in tribal areas). That is a legitimacy problem, not proof that the association is an enemy of India.

Position

The perception is **partly earned where opacity and foreign-funded politics hide**, and **mostly over-broad** where it paints RTI users, environmental appraisers and women's groups as anti-State. A Republic that wrote **Articles 19 and 21** needs non-State actors who can sue it. The healthy pattern is **regulated, transparent, contestable** civil society - **FCRA as a window, not as a gag** - and a State confident enough to lose a case and still govern.

Agreeing fully with the "anti-State" label would erase the RTI Act's parentage and the vaccine-and-ration partners of 2020. Disagreeing blindly would ignore money trails. The just middle is **non-State by definition, anti-State only by specific proof**.

Flow diagram

CSO -> Non-State
 Non-State -> Cooperate RTI service
 Non-State -> Adversarial PIL protest
 Adversarial PIL protest -> not automatically Anti-State

Conclusion

CSOs are non-State actors. Some oppose particular policies; that is constitutional contest. A few abuse funds or platforms; that is a criminal or regulatory fact. The blanket 'anti-State' tag is a poor map of Indian civil society.

Facts & figures

RTI Act, 2005

Grew from a rural campaign (MKSS and allies) into a central transparency statute - civil society as co-author of State law.

FCRA amendments, 2020

Restricted sub-granting, mixed receipts and office tenure for foreign-funded associations, shrinking some advocacy groups.

National Policy on the Voluntary Sector, 2007

Union statement that treated the voluntary sector as a partner in development, not as an enemy.

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