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Q1(b)

Why should impartiality and nonpartisanship be considered as foundational values in public services, especially in the present day socio-political context? Illustrate your answer with examples.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · GS IV · 10 marks · Probity in Governance

Probity in Governance: Concept of public service; Philosophical basis of governance and probity; Information sharing and transparency in government, Right to Information, Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen's Charters, Work culture, Quality of service delivery, Utilization of public funds, challenges of corruption.

Core demand of the question

- Why should impartiality and non-partisanship be considered as foundational values in public services, especially in the present day socio-political context? Illustrate your answer with examples

Revision summary

Impartiality is equal treatment by law and facts; non-partisanship is service to the Constitution rather than to a party.

They are foundational because every other skill becomes a tool of faction if they are missing.

Today's socio-political heat - identity, social media, coalitions and punitive transfers - makes them both harder and more necessary.

Illustrations include election duty, communal policing, welfare lists, recruitment and disaster camps.

Conduct Rules, speaking orders, RTI and stable tenure are the practical supports.

Introduction

Public service is other people's power held in trust. Impartiality is the same law and the same queue for friend and stranger. Non-partisanship is service to the Constitution, not to a party colour. In a loud, identity-rich democracy they are not ornaments. They are the floor.

Body**Meaning of the two values**

- Impartiality means decisions follow statute, facts and recorded reasons, not caste, religion, region, kinship or a minister's private list.
- **Article 14 of the Constitution of India is impartiality in legal form:** equality before the law and equal protection of the laws.
- Non-partisanship means the permanent executive implements the lawful policy of whichever government the people have chosen, without becoming a cadre of that party or of the last one.
- The **All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968** and the **Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964** forbid political activity and require integrity; they are the conduct floor of these values.

- Impartiality is about persons at the counter. Non-partisanship is about parties and factions in the secretariat. Both protect the citizen who has no patron.

Why they are foundational

- Without impartiality, the State is a private club. A ration card, a police first information report and a tender become gifts.
- Without non-partisanship, every election becomes a purge of files and postings, so policy has no memory and honesty has no career.
- Foundational means other skills rest on them. A brilliant engineer who allots water only to his caste has failed as a public servant.
- Democratic legitimacy needs a referee. People accept a hard decision more easily if they believe the officer was not scoring for a side.
- **The present socio-political context makes this harder and more necessary:** 24-hour media, social-media rumours, identity mobilisation, coalition arithmetic, and the use of transfer as a whip.

Present-day illustrations

- **Election duty:** the Election Commission of India and the Model Code of Conduct work only if returning officers and police are non-partisan. A booth that "belongs" to a party is the opposite of a republic.
- **Communal or caste tension:** an impartial district magistrate who files cases on facts, not on who shouted louder, is worth more than a curfew speech.
- **Welfare targeting:** Direct Benefit Transfer and published beneficiary lists are machines of impartiality; a handwritten list in a party office is not.
- **Recruitment and transfers:** a civil-services board and recorded reasons, as the Supreme Court urged in *T. S. R. Subramanian v. Union of India (2013)*, protect non-partisan tenure; a midnight transfer of an honest collector is the present-day disease.
- **Policing:** a first information report refused because the accused is politically useful is a daily collapse of impartiality.
- **Social media:** an officer who forwards a party meme from an official handle has already chosen a side; silence and a speaking order are the ethical reply.
- **Coalition and federal friction:** implementing a Union scheme in a State ruled by another party, or a State scheme after a change of government, is the test of non-partisanship.
- **Example of failure:** targeting a community in a citizenship or police drive because it is electorally useful. Example of success: the same disaster relief camp for every flooded ward, with published allotment.

How to keep the values alive

- Written reasons, e-procurement, video of hearings, and the Right to Information Act, 2005 make partiality visible.
- Training must treat neutrality as a skill under pressure, not as a slogan in the academy.
- **Leadership example:** a secretary who refuses to cook a file for a donor sets the only standard juniors will copy.

Flow diagram

Public service -> Impartiality
Public service -> Non-partisanship
Impartiality -> Article 14 equal treatment
Non-partisanship -> Constitution not party
Media identity transfers -> Present-day test
Article 14 equal treatment -> Citizen trust
Constitution not party -> Citizen trust

Conclusion

Impartiality and non-partisanship are foundational because public power is legitimate only as a referee. In today's identity politics, media heat and transfer culture they are harder, and therefore more central. A skilled partisan in office is not a civil servant.

Facts & figures

Article 14, Constitution of India

Equality before the law and equal protection of the laws; the constitutional core of impartiality.

All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968

Require political neutrality and integrity of All India Service officers.

Model Code of Conduct

Election-time restraint on using the government machine for party gain; a seasonal public test of non-partisanship.

T. S. R. Subramanian v. Union of India, 2013

The Supreme Court directed civil services boards and greater stability of tenure to curb arbitrary, partisan transfers.

Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964

Union conduct rules that forbid political activity unbecoming of a government servant and require integrity.

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