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Q8

Case study. In a modern democratic polity, there is a concept of the political executive and permanent executive. Elected people's representatives form the political executive and bureaucracy forms the permanent executive. Ministers frame policy decisions and bureaucrats execute these. In the initial decades after independence, the relationship between the permanent executive and the political executive were characterized by mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation, without encroaching upon each other's domain. However, in the subsequent decades, the situation has changed. There are instances of the political executive insisting upon the permanent executive to follow its agenda. Respect for an appreciation of upright bureaucrats has declined. There is an increasing tendency among the political executive to get involved in routine administrative matters such as transfers, posting, etc. Under this scenario, there is a definitive trend towards 'politicization of bureaucracy'. The rising materialism and acquisitiveness in social life have also adversely impacted upon the ethical values of both the permanent executive and the political executive. What are the consequences of this 'politicization of bureaucracy'? Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · GS IV · 20 marks · Ethics Case Studies

Case Studies on above issues.

Core demand of the question

- In a democracy the political executive frames policy and the permanent executive implements it. Mutual respect has given way to pressure on agenda, transfers and postings, declining respect for upright officers, materialism, and a trend of politicization of bureaucracy
- What are the consequences of this politicization of bureaucracy? Discuss

Revision summary

Politicization means party agenda, transfer pressure and falling respect for upright officers.

Consequences are timid advice, selective schemes, a transfer market, more graft and collapsed public trust.

Accepting it as democracy, or a sabotaging service, both fail.

The sound path is ministerial policy with recorded, impartial implementation.

Lawful doors include Conduct Rules, **Article 311**, civil-service boards as in T. S. R. Subramanian, RTI and ARC ethics reforms.

Introduction

Ministers are meant to set lawful policy; civil servants are meant to execute it without becoming a faction. The case describes pressure on agenda, capture of transfers, falling respect for upright officers, and greed on both sides. The question is what that politicization does to the Republic.

Body

Stakeholders

- Citizens who need impartial service.
- The political executive, which holds a democratic mandate.
- The permanent executive, which holds continuity and file memory.
- Upright officers and the juniors who watch what happens to them.
- Courts, auditors, and the **Election Commission**, who need a machine that still tells the truth.

Ethical issues

- **Neutrality versus responsiveness:** a civil servant must be responsive to a lawful manifesto, not to a party's private revenge list.
- **Integrity of transfers:** posting as punishment for honesty is a market in fear.
- Materialism that turns both minister and secretary toward contracts as personal harvest.
- **Values at stake:** impartiality, courage, selflessness (Nolan), and the constitutional duty of equal protection.

Consequences of politicization of bureaucracy

- Policy becomes a pamphlet. Files are written to please a faction, so the next government wastes years reversing notes rather than delivering schools.
- **Implementation turns selective:** a scheme is fast in a favoured mandal and dead in an opposition one, which breaks **Article 14** in the field.
- Fear replaces advice. Ministers then hear only what they like, and disasters (a collapsed bridge, a communal failure) arrive as surprises.
- **Transfer industry:** officers spend energy on patrons, not on drainage. Institutional memory dies because no one sits long enough to finish a reform.
- Upright officers are isolated; the lesson to probationers is that integrity is a career tax. The service then adverse-selects for pliability.
- **Corruption rises:** a politicized desk is a desk that already sold the rule, so a tender is only one more sale.
- Public trust falls. People approach the party office instead of the tehsil, which is the death of Weberian bureaucracy and the birth of a courtier State.
- Internal security and regulation suffer when police and inspectors become party tools; the honest trader and the lonely complainant lose the referee.
- International and investor credibility suffer when a contract depends on a faction remaining in power.
- **Materialism on both sides feeds a spiral:** the politician wants a loyal collector of funds; the officer wants a "wet" posting; each confirms the other's cynicism.

Options for the system (merit and demerit)

- **Option 1:** Accept politicization as "real democracy".
- **Merit:** a minister feels unobstructed.
- **Demerit:** the Constitution's equal rule dies; every election becomes a purge.
- **Option 2:** A civil service that refuses all political contact and sabotages a new government.
- **Merit:** none that ethics can use.
- **Demerit:** this is another faction, only in khaki files.
- **Option 3:** Restore the split: ministers set lawful policy; officers advise in writing, implement without targeting opponents, and use statutory shields on transfers and sanctions.
- **Merit:** democracy plus a referee.
- **Demerit:** requires political self-restraint and a Cabinet that values bad news.

Reasoned action

- Consequences should be answered by design, not by sermons alone.
- **Lawful doors:** the **All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968** on political neutrality; the Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964; the **Representation of the People Act, 1951** and the Model Code for election periods; **Article 311** protections against arbitrary dismissal; and, where enacted, civil services boards for transfers as the Supreme Court discussed in **T. S. R. Subramanian v. Union of India (2013)**.
- Record advice on file. An oral "do it" that is illegal should meet a written refusal.
- Empanelment and postings should weigh integrity, not only a minister's comfort.
- The **Second Administrative Reforms Commission's** ethics recommendations - codes, values, and reducing arbitrary transfer - remain the institutional repair.
- Citizens should use the Right to Information Act, 2005 on transfers and tenders so that politicization has a paper trail.
- Materialism is answered by lifestyle audit, published assets, and social honour for the officer who is not rich after twenty years of wet postings.

Flow diagram

Politicization -> Fear and pliant advice
 Politicization -> Transfer as weapon
 Fear and pliant advice -> Selective implementation
 Transfer as weapon -> Corruption and lost trust
 Written advice and transfer boards -> Lawful neutrality

Conclusion

Politicization of bureaucracy makes policy factional, advice timid, transfers a market, and corruption easier. The cost is paid by the citizen who no longer meets a referee. The repair is recorded advice, lawful transfer boards, Conduct Rules on neutrality, and leaders who can hear a no.

Facts & figures

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

The Supreme Court directed civil services boards and greater stability of tenure to curb arbitrary transfers; implementation has been uneven.

All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968

Require political neutrality and integrity of All India Service officers.

Article 311, Constitution of India

Protects civil servants against dismissal, removal or reduction in rank except by the prescribed process.

Second Administrative Reforms Commission

Recommended ethics in governance, including codes, values training and limits on arbitrary transfer.

Model Code of Conduct

Election-time restraint on using the machinery for party gain; a seasonal reminder of the year-round duty of neutrality.

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