

WHERE THIS PAPER CAME FROM

Mains 2026 · General Studies II

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

We are not saying that every question could be completely answered from old UPSC papers or from DAW and the Sherlocking Simulators. That is not possible, and we will not pretend it is.

What we are showing is this: most of this paper came from familiar ground. A student who had gone through past-year questions, read the basic books, and practised answer writing had already met most of what this paper asks, only in different words.

This is why we keep repeating the same four things:

- Past-year questions show you what UPSC likes to ask, and how it asks.
- Basic sources give you the material.
- Answer-writing practice, DAW and the Simulators, trains you to brainstorm and structure an answer within time.
- The last piece is mindset. Go in expecting new words on familiar ground. Do not let a new-looking question shake you.

Where a link is only partial, we have said so on that page. Where a topic was simply new, we have said that too. No link here has been stretched.

Every quoted question is word for word from the actual papers and booklets. Compiled on 23 August 2026.

HOW MUCH OF EACH ANSWER WAS WITHIN REACH

These numbers are rough estimates, not measurements. For each question we asked one thing: a student who studied past-year questions, read the basic sources, and practised with DAW and the Simulators, how much of a full answer could that student build? The rest is execution: turning what you know into a written answer, within time, in the exam hall. That too is a skill, and practice builds it.

We have kept every number conservative, and none goes above 80 percent, because even a familiar question still has to be written well in the exam hall.

QUESTION	TOPIC	WITHIN REACH
Q1	Privacy and the transgender law	about 70%
Q2	Women's reservation	about 80%
Q3	The Speaker and anti-defection	about 80%
Q4	Right to vote and voter rolls	about 80%
Q5	NCSC and NCST powers	about 75%
Q6	Tribal development policy	about 75%
Q7	Malnutrition beyond health	about 80%
Q8	Generalist civil services	about 75%
Q9	IPMDA, SAGAR and the Quad	about 65%
Q10	BRICS and the Global South	about 75%
Q11	The Governor and assent	about 80%
Q12	Judicial legislation and the living will	about 75%
Q13	Asymmetric federalism	about 80%
Q14	India and the US model	about 75%
Q15	Pressure groups and corporate power	about 75%
Q16	Transparency and trust	about 80%
Q17	Rights-based welfare	about 80%
Q18	Education: welfare or investment	about 80%
Q19	The diaspora as a living bridge	about 75%
Q20	China's BRI in South Asia	about 75%

Q1 · 10 MARKS

Right to privacy relating to self-identity is very dear to every human being and well protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. In this context, examine the effect of the amendment in 2026, to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Article 21 protects life and liberty, and courts have read privacy into it. Self-identity means the right to say who you are, including your gender. The question asks how the 2026 amendment to the transgender law affects this right.

IN SHORT The privacy question returns. Our practice covered its base.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *“Right to privacy is intrinsic to life and personal liberty and is inherently protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. Explain. In this reference, discuss the law relating to DNA testing of a child in the womb to establish its paternity.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The 2026 question opens with nearly the same sentence. DNA testing then, gender identity now.

2017 *“Examine the scope of Fundamental Rights in the light of the latest judgement of the Supreme Court on Right to Privacy.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The privacy judgment on which the whole answer stands.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q14 *“Judicial interpretation has made Article 21 an open-ended reservoir of new socio-economic and digital rights. Elaborate, with its limits.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Identity as a new right read into Article 21, the NALSA to Puttaswamy chain, was our full question.

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q12 *“The Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, now in force, tilt the balance towards the State's access to data and away from the citizen's right to privacy and to information.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Privacy against the State, practised on data protection. Test the amendment on one point: does it respect a person's right to declare their own identity?

Q2 · 10 MARKS

“Women as a class neither belong to a minority group nor are they regarded as forming a backward class.” In the light of this statement, discuss the evolution of women's reservation from local bodies to Parliament.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Women got one-third of panchayat seats in 1993. The 106th Amendment of 2023 promises the same in the Lok Sabha. The question asks you to trace this journey.

IN SHORT The whole journey was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2019 *“The reservation of seats for women in the institutions of local self-government has had a limited impact on the patriarchal character of the Indian Political Process. Comment.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The middle of the story: what panchayat reservation changed, and what it did not.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Wed Q1 *“The one-third reservation of seats for women in panchayats reshaped local politics yet entrenched proxy rule through the 'sarpanch-pati.' Reserving seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will reproduce this proxy representation rather than transcend it. How far do you agree?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question held the whole arc: panchayat reservation, the sarpanch-pati problem, and whether Parliament's version will repeat it.

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q1 *“Women's reservation in legislatures is tied to the first delimitation after the next Census. Discuss how this linkage shapes its timing, and the federal concerns a population-based delimitation raises.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Parliament end: why the new law waits for a census and delimitation.

Q3 · 10 MARKS

Examine whether the constitutional office of the Lok Sabha Speaker has become vulnerable to partisan politics under the current anti-defection regime. What institutional changes are required to ensure the neutrality of the Lok Sabha Speaker in managing a polarised House?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The Speaker decides defection cases, but belongs to a party. The question asks whether this makes the office partisan, and what would fix it.

IN SHORT Both halves were in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 *“Once a Speaker, Always a Speaker!” Do you think this practice should be adopted to impart objectivity to the office of the Speaker of Lok Sabha?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The fix itself was the question: should a Speaker leave party politics for good.

2013 *“The role of individual MPs (Members of Parliament) has diminished over the years... How far can this be attributed to the anti-defection law...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The anti-defection law's cost, asked long ago.

2023 *“Discuss the role of Presiding Officers of state legislatures in maintaining order and impartiality in conducting legislative work.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Impartiality of presiding officers, asked recently.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q5 *“Explain why Speaker-led adjudication of Tenth Schedule disqualifications breeds partisan delay, and why an independent tribunal is proposed instead.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Both halves of the exam question in one practice stem: why the Speaker's defection power invites bias, and the independent tribunal as the cure.

DAW 2026 · W1 Fri Q4 *“A bill is certified a Money Bill by the Speaker, leaving the Rajya Sabha only to recommend, and the certification is contested. When the Speaker's word is final, how far is bicameralism left intact?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The second place the office bends: a Money Bill certificate no one can appeal.

Q4 · 10 MARKS

Is the right to vote a fundamental right? Discuss the position of the Election Commission of India while undertaking the revision of electoral rolls. Can it also examine the question of citizenship of voters?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Voting is a right given by law, not a fundamental right, though the Constitution promises adult suffrage. The question asks about this, and whether the Election Commission can check citizenship while cleaning voter rolls.

IN SHORT The exact controversy was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2019 *“On what grounds can a people's representative be disqualified under the Representation of the People Act, 1951?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The legal frame: elections run under the Representation of the People Act.

2018 *“In light of the recent controversy regarding the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), what are the challenges before the Election Commission of India to ensure the trustworthiness of elections in India?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Commission's credibility questioned, then over EVMs.

2022 *“Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Commission's powers, through the Model Code.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q3 *“The Supreme Court has upheld the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, including its power to examine citizenship. Discuss the basis of this power...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question named the same roll revision, citizenship check included. The tension to argue: cleaner rolls against the risk of striking off real voters.

Q5 · 10 MARKS

Do constitutional bodies like the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) possess adequate enforcement powers to secure substantive social equality? Suggest measures to enhance their institutional effectiveness.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The NCSC and NCST are constitutional bodies meant to protect SCs and STs. They can inquire like courts, but mostly they can only recommend. The question asks whether their powers are enough.

IN SHORT The same design question, with different commissions, was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 “Whether the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) can enforce the implementation of constitutional reservation for the Scheduled Castes in religious minority institutions? Examine.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same commission, the same doubt about its teeth.

2018 “Multiplicity of various commissions for the vulnerable sections of society leads to problems of overlapping jurisdiction and duplication of functions. Is it better to merge all commissions into an umbrella Human Rights Commission?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Too many commissions, too little power.

2020 “Which steps are required for the constitutionalization of a Commission? Do you think imparting constitutionality to the National Commission for Women would ensure greater gender justice and empowerment in India? Give reasons.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Does constitutional status change anything?

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q15 “The NHRC, the NCBC and the National Commission for Women differ in their constitutional or statutory standing, the independence of their composition, and whether their orders bind or only recommend.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question asked it of three other commissions. The hinge is the same: they recommend, they rarely bind. The fixes transfer: time-bound replies, reports before Parliament, real powers to act.

Q6 · 10 MARKS

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance? Justify your answer.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Tribal development policy promises land rights, self-rule and protection from displacement. The question asks whether the promise is kept on the ground.

IN SHORT Three tests of this policy were practised.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2025 *“Does tribal development in India centre around two axes, those of displacement and of rehabilitation? Give your opinion.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same policy, questioned in GS1 last year.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

Simulator GS1 · Set B · Q17 *“Do you think tribal displacement in India persists mainly because the design of forest and land entitlements is outrun by resource extraction and weak rehabilitation?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The displacement test: entitlements losing to extraction.

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q14 *“In the devolution of powers to local bodies, the transfer of functions has run ahead of the transfer of finances. Explain the reasons for this gap... with reference to Fifth Schedule areas and the PESA Act”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The self-rule test: PESA strong on paper, thin on the ground.

DAW 2026 · W3 Wed Q1 *“A tiger reserve seeks to relocate a village whose residents hold Forest Rights Act titles.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The consent test: relocation against Forest Rights Act titles. One pattern across all three: good law, weak delivery.

Q7 · 10 MARKS

Malnutrition in India is not merely a public health concern; it is also a challenge of social equity, human development and effective welfare governance. Discuss.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Malnutrition is not just about health. It decides who grows, who learns, who earns. The question asks you to see it as a problem of fairness, human development and governance.

IN SHORT The same reframe was itself asked in 2018.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 *“How far do you agree with the view that the focus on lack of availability of food as the main cause of hunger takes the attention away from ineffective human development policies in India?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Hunger as a policy failure, not a food shortage. The exam's exact angle.

2024 *“Poverty and malnutrition create a vicious cycle, adversely affecting human capital formation. What steps can be taken to break the cycle?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Malnutrition eating into human capital.

2019 *“There is a growing divergence in the relationship between poverty and hunger in India. The shrinking of social expenditure by the government is forcing the poor to spend more on non-food essential items, squeezing their food budget. Elucidate.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Poverty falling while hunger stays.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Sat Q3 *“India's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) has fallen sharply over the past decade, yet child undernutrition has barely improved and India's Global Hunger Index ranking remains poor.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The fairness side: averages improve, children stay stunted.

Simulator Essay · Set B · Q6 *“India's granaries overflow even as its children grow up too short for their age.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The whole claim in one line. The governance side: why POSHAN and ICDS deliver less than promised.

Q8 · 10 MARKS

Analyse the advantages and limitations of the generalist structure of the Indian Civil Services in contemporary governance.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT IAS officers are generalists: they move between departments rather than mastering one field. The question asks what this gives us and what it costs.

IN SHORT The advantages, the limits and the fixes were each practised.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2014 *“Has the Cadre based Civil Services Organization been the cause of slow change in India? Critically examine.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The limit itself asked: has the cadre system slowed change?

2017 *“Initially, Civil Services in India were designed to achieve the goals of neutrality and effectiveness, which seems to be lacking in the present context. Do you agree with the view that drastic reforms are required in Civil Services? Comment.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The reform question, asked directly.

2020 *“Institutional quality is a crucial driver of economic performance.’ In this context, suggest reforms in Civil Service for strengthening democracy.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Reform again, for the economy's sake.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q8 *“Discuss reforms to make the higher civil services both politically neutral and responsive, and how capacity-building can reconcile the two.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The measures half was our full question.

DAW 2026 · W8 Sat Q4 *“Sardar Patel defended a permanent civil service for its insulation from political change, yet every civil servant must loyally carry out the distinct agenda of each elected government in turn.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The advantage half: Patel's case for a permanent service.

DAW 2025 · W6D1 *“How does a culture of 'zero tolerance for mistakes' in a bureaucracy negatively impact an officer's dedication to taking innovative and bold decisions?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The limit half: punish every mistake and officers stop deciding. Fixes to name: Mission Karmayogi, lateral entry, longer tenures.

Q9 · 10 MARKS

“IPMDA (Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness) bridges the gap between India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision and the Quad's collective Indo-Pacific strategy.” Make a critical assessment of the statement focusing on IPMDA.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT IPMDA shares sea-watching data among Indo-Pacific countries. SAGAR is India's own vision of a safe neighbourhood at sea. The question asks whether IPMDA joins the two.

IN SHORT The maritime groupings question comes almost every year.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 “Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)’ is transforming itself into a trade bloc from a military alliance in present times...”

HOW IT CONNECTS The Quad, asked directly.

2021 “The newly tri-nation partnership AUKUS is aimed at countering China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. Is it going to supersede the existing partnerships in the region?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The groupings question, again.

2013 “What do you understand by 'The String of Pearls'? How does it impact India?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Why India watches the sea: the original threat picture.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W7 Mon Q1 “Groupings like the Quad and the India-Israel-United States-United Arab Emirates (I2U2) bloc issue joint declarations for years without treaties or secretariats. Comment on what they have actually delivered...”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question asked the exact test: what have these groupings actually delivered? IPMDA is the Quad's clearest delivery: shared eyes on the sea.

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q19 “Narrow sea routes such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab-el-Mandeb carry much of India's energy and trade, making the security of sea lines of communication central to its Indo-Pacific strategy.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The SAGAR half: why sea lanes are central to India's security.

Q10 · 10 MARKS

“BRICS acts as a powerful counterweight in global governance, actively amplifying the voice and influence of the Global South.” Explain the role of BRICS in projecting itself as an alternative to other groupings.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT BRICS groups Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and newer members. The question asks whether it truly balances Western-led institutions and speaks for the Global South.

IN SHORT We set the BRICS question in June, for this very year.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2013 *“The World Bank and the IMF, collectively known as the Bretton Woods Institutions, are the two inter-governmental pillars supporting the structure of the world's economic and financial order.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The institutions BRICS stands against were asked directly. The New Development Bank is the counter to name.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q19 *“India's chairmanship of BRICS in 2026 offers it an opportunity to consolidate its leadership of the Global South. In view of the cohesion challenges of the expanded grouping, critically evaluate this claim.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question named India's 2026 chairmanship, with both sides ready: the platform, and the strain inside a bigger club.

DAW 2026 · W7 Mon Q2 *“India presents itself as the voice of the Global South, yet as it grows richer its interests on carbon, trade and debt part ways with the poorest nations.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Global South claim, with its own counter: can a richer India still speak for the poorest?

Q11 · 15 MARKS

Discuss the position of the Governor in the federal polity of India. What is the nature of his power while giving assent to a bill passed by the State Legislature? Is he bound by the aid and advice of his Council of Ministers in all his functions?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The Governor can sign a State bill, hold it back, or send it to the President. The question asks the nature of this power, and whether he is always bound by the elected government's advice.

IN SHORT The assent question, in its current form, was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2022 *“Discuss the essential conditions for exercise of the legislative powers by the Governor. Discuss the legality of re-promulgation of ordinances by the Governor without placing them before the Legislature.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Governor's law-making role, asked directly.

2018 *“Whether the Supreme Court Judgement (July 2018) can settle the political tussle between the Lt. Governor and the elected government of Delhi? Examine.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS An appointed head against an elected government, the Delhi version.

2016 *“Discuss the essentials of the 69th Constitutional Amendment Act and anomalies, if any, that have led to recent reported conflicts between the elected representatives and the institution of the Lieutenant Governor...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same friction, earlier.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q1 *“On a Bill under Article 200, the Governor may assent, withhold assent, or reserve it for the President. Examine the limits of this discretion and whether courts can remedy prolonged inaction.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question named the same battle: the options under Article 200, and whether courts can push a Governor who sits on a bill.

DAW 2026 · W1 Fri Q2 *“The President normally acts on the advice of the Council of Ministers, yet a hung mandate or a contested bill can reopen genuine choice.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Aid and advice, practised one office up: bound as a rule, free at the named edges. The same answer fits the Governor.

Q12 · 15 MARKS

What is meant by judicial legislation? In this context, discuss the verdicts of the apex court allowing “passive euthanasia” and a “living will”.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT When courts lay down rules where no law exists, it is called judicial legislation. The court allowed passive euthanasia, letting a dying patient go, and the living will, writing your wishes in advance. The question asks about both.

IN SHORT The term itself was a question in 2020.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 “Judicial Legislation is antithetical to the doctrine of separation of powers as envisaged in the Indian Constitution.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The exact words, asked before.

2024 “Explain the reasons for the growth of public interest litigation in India. As a result of it, has the Indian Supreme Court emerged as the world's most powerful judiciary?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Courts making law through public interest cases.

2014 “Starting from inventing the 'basic structure' doctrine, the judiciary has played a highly proactive role in ensuring that India develops into a thriving democracy.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The long arc of judicial activism.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W1 Tue Q2 “When Parliament lays down only the principle and a ministry writes the rules, who is really making the law?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same doctrine, practised on the executive: who should make law, and where the line sits.

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q14 “Judicial interpretation has made Article 21 an open-ended reservoir of new socio-economic and digital rights.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The euthanasia half: dignity read into Article 21. The case to cite: Common Cause, 2018.

Q13 · 15 MARKS

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT India gives some regions special arrangements: Union Territories, Article 371 provisions, tribal schedules. That is asymmetric federalism, unequal on purpose. The question asks how well it accommodates diversity, and how disputes can be settled better.

IN SHORT The exact phrase was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2014 *“Though the federal principle is dominant in our Constitution and that principle is one of its basic features, it is equally true that federalism under the Indian Constitution leans in favour of a strong Centre...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The frame: our federalism tilts toward the Centre.

2015 *“The concept of cooperative federalism has been increasingly emphasized in recent years. Highlight the drawbacks in the existing structure and the extent to which cooperative federalism would answer the shortcomings.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The machinery and its gaps.

2023 *“Explain the significance of the 101st Constitutional Amendment Act. To what extent does it reflect the accommodative spirit of federalism?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Accommodation, in the same word.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q4 *“Compare and contrast a Union Territory having a legislature with a full-fledged State, and locate this within India's asymmetric federalism.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question used the exact phrase, asymmetric federalism, through Union Territories.

DAW 2026 · W1 Thu Q2 *“Article 371 provisions were meant to be temporary, yet endure. What does their persistence reveal about Indian federalism?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The evidence: special provisions that never expired.

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q13 *“The cooperative-federalism machinery, namely the Inter-State Council, the Zonal Councils and the NITI Aayog Governing Council, remains largely advisory.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The dispute half: the councils exist but only advise. The fix: give them teeth and a calendar.

Q14 · 15 MARKS

Examine how the separation of powers is practised in India compared to the rigid presidential model of the United States of America. In this context, compare the actual authority of the Indian Prime Minister with that of the President of the USA.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT America separates its President from its Congress strictly. India fuses them: the Prime Minister sits inside Parliament. The question asks you to compare the two, and the real power of the PM against the US President.

IN SHORT The doctrine was asked in 2019. The American side is textbook.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2019 *“Do you think that the Constitution of India does not accept the principle of strict separation of powers; rather, it is based on the principle of 'checks and balances'? Explain.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Asked straight: India runs on checks and balances, not sealed compartments.

2014 *“The size of the cabinet should be as big as governmental work justifies and as big as the Prime Minister can manage as a team.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Prime Minister's real span of control.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W1 Wed Q2 *“In the light of coalition allies and even ministers now dissenting in public without resigning, how far does the unwritten convention of collective responsibility still bind the Council of Ministers?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS How our executive actually works, which the comparison turns on. The line that scores: the PM is stronger at home than a US President, yet lives or dies by the House's numbers.

Q15 · 15 MARKS

To what extent do pressure groups, social movements and corporate lobbies deepen pluralistic democracy in India by representing excluded interests? Analyse whether the growing convergence of corporate wealth and political power poses a threat to the autonomy of formal democratic institutions.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Pressure groups, movements and corporate lobbies all push governments from outside. The question asks whether they deepen democracy by speaking for the excluded, or whether money and power together threaten it.

IN SHORT Pressure groups come almost every year. The corporate half was asked in 2021.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2013 *“Pressure group politics is sometimes seen as the informal face of politics. With regards to the above, assess the structure and functioning of pressure groups in India.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Pressure groups, asked directly.

2021 *“Pressure Groups play a vital role in influencing public policy making in India.’ Explain how business associations contribute to public policies.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The corporate half, asked through business associations.

2025 *“What are environmental pressure groups? Discuss their role in raising awareness, influencing policies and advocating for environmental protection in India.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS And again last year, through environmental groups.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Fri Q3 *“Tighter foreign-funding rules and the labelling of advocacy groups as anti-development have curbed the watchdog role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs)... suggest measures to regulate NGOs without disabling their watchdog role.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The democracy-deepening half: civil society speaking for the excluded, and how to regulate without silencing.

DAW 2026 · W1 Fri Q1 *“Trade-union decline in India is better explained by liberalisation than by the unions’ own politicisation.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS One pressure group traced across time. The corporate half of the answer: election funding, lobbying without a law, captured regulators.

Q16 · 15 MARKS

“Transparency and accountability in governance are not about controlling corruption but about creating the trust of stakeholders in the policy process by following the Rule of Law and Participatory Governance.” Comment.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The statement says transparency is not about catching thieves. It is about earning people's trust through fair rules and participation. The question asks you to comment.

IN SHORT The trust idea was practised in three questions.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 *“The Citizen's Charter is an ideal instrument of organisational transparency and accountability, but it has its own limitations. Identify the limitations and suggest measures for greater effectiveness of the Citizen's Charters.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS A transparency tool and its limits.

2013 *“Though Citizens' charters have been formulated by many public service delivery organizations, there is no corresponding improvement in the level of citizens' satisfaction and quality of services being provided. Analyse.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The exam's exact problem: the process exists, trust does not follow.

2018 *“e-Governance is not only about utilization of the power of new technology, but also about the critical importance of the 'use value' of information. Explain.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Information matters only if citizens can use it.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W1 Wed Q3 *“At a jan sunwai under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), villagers reading the muster roll expose works paid for but never built. Comment on the potential and limits of social audit.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Participation building trust, in one scene: villagers reading the muster roll aloud.

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q16 *“Social audits and outcome-based budgeting, meant to make welfare delivery answerable to beneficiaries, have largely become procedural rituals.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The trust test asked straight: the audits exist, do they convince anyone?

DAW 2026 · W8 Thu Q2 *“The Right to Information (RTI) Act promised an informed citizenry, yet the applicant today meets delay, evasion and a mounting backlog of appeals.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The transparency law, measured by what a citizen actually faces.

Q17 · 15 MARKS

Can the constitutional mandate of rights-based welfare be effectively realised in the context of non-integrated governance and minimal public investment? Examine.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The Constitution and laws promise welfare as a right: food, work, education. The question asks whether rights can be delivered when departments do not work together and money is short.

IN SHORT The exam's exact axis was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2021 *“Performance of welfare schemes that are implemented for vulnerable sections is not so effective due to the absence of their awareness and active involvement at all stages of the policy process. Discuss.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The delivery gap: schemes without people's involvement.

2023 *“Development and welfare schemes for the vulnerable, by its nature, are discriminatory in approach.’ Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The design critique: welfare that divides.

2013 *“Electronic cash transfer system for the welfare schemes is an ambitious project to minimize corruption, eliminate wastage and facilitate reforms. Comment.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The delivery machinery, asked early.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Fri Q4 *“Most welfare in India is delivered as discretionary schemes a government can expand or withdraw at will, while only a few benefits are legal entitlements. To what extent should welfare in India be founded on justiciable rights?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question was the same axis: rights against schemes. The line that holds the answer: a right without money and coordination behaves like a scheme.

DAW 2026 · W8 Thu Q5 *“Welfare entitlements remain anchored to a single registered home, leaving India's hundreds of millions of internal migrants uncovered at both origin and destination...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Weak coordination in one case: the migrant covered nowhere.

Q18 · 15 MARKS

Should education be treated primarily as a welfare obligation of the state or as a strategic investment for building a globally competitive, knowledge-driven nation? Critically evaluate.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Is education the state's duty of care, or the nation's investment in competing with the world? The question asks you to weigh both.

IN SHORT Both sides were in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2015 *"The quality of higher education in India requires major improvement to make it internationally competitive."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The investment half.

2020 *"National Education Policy 2020 is in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goal-4 (2030). It intends to restructure and reorient the education system in India. Critically examine the statement."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The welfare half: education as a development promise.

2023 *"Skill development programmes have succeeded in increasing human resources supply to various sectors. In the context of the statement, analyze the linkages between education, skill, and employment."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The bridge between the two: education, skill, employment.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q18 *"India's education system produces degrees, not employability. Elucidate, and indicate how the National Education Policy, 2020 can narrow this gap."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The investment half, with the fix attached: degrees without employability, and NEP to close the gap.

DAW 2026 · W8 Sat Q2 *"The Right to Education Act drove enrolment above 96 percent, yet surveys find nearly half of Class-5 children cannot read a Class-2 text."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The welfare half, measured by outcomes: enrolment near-complete, learning far behind.

Simulator Essay · Set A · Q6 *"A degree opens the gate, but the classroom decides who ever reaches it."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The whole debate in one line. The point to land: a system that fails to teach fails both ways.

Q19 · 15 MARKS

“India's global diaspora acts as a living bridge, as a critical economic factor and knowledge network in transforming cultural heritage into geopolitical influence and strategic leverage worldwide.” Critically examine this statement.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Indians abroad are called a living bridge: they send money home, build networks, carry culture, and win friends for India. The question asks you to test this claim.

IN SHORT The diaspora question returns. Both its sides were practised.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 “Indian diaspora has a decisive role to play in the politics and economy of America and European Countries.’ Comment with examples.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same claim of influence, six years earlier.

2017 “Indian Diaspora has an important role to play in South-East Asian countries' economy and society. Appraise the role of the Indian Diaspora in South-East Asia in this context.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question, for another region.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS1 · Set B · Q10 “Compare the older indenture-era Indian diaspora with the recent skilled migrant, and explain why the former is often more culturally rooted.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Who the diaspora actually is, old and new. Set in GS1, asked in GS2.

DAW 2025 · W7D4 “The relationship between India and Canada has recently been under strain. Analyze the key irritants in the bilateral relationship and their impact on the Indian diaspora.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The testing half: what happens when politics strains the bridge. The Canada case.

Q20 · 15 MARKS

“China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has transformed South Asia from a regional space into a theatre of great power competition.” Analyse the strategic implications of the BRI for India's security and regional influence in South Asia.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT China's Belt and Road builds ports and roads across India's neighbourhood. The question asks what this does to India's security and standing in South Asia.

IN SHORT The lineage is old: 2013's String of Pearls grew into this.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2017 “China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop potential military power status in Asia. In the light of this statement, discuss its impact on India as her neighbour.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The parent question: China's economics as strategy, on India's doorstep.

2013 “What do you understand by 'The String of Pearls'? How does it impact India?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The grandparent: the same encirclement, before the BRI name.

2016 “Increasing cross-border terrorist attacks in India and growing interference in the internal affairs of member-states by Pakistan are not conducive for the future of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation).”

HOW IT CONNECTS The neighbourhood under strain, then too.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W7 Wed Q1 “Despite 'Neighbourhood First', India's influence in South Asia has slipped. How far is this loss of ground of India's own making?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The influence half: how much lost ground is India's own doing.

DAW 2026 · W7 Tue Q2 “The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor must cross a region in conflict and raise vast financing before it can move a single container.”

HOW IT CONNECTS India's corridor answer to the BRI.

DAW 2026 · W7 Fri Q2 “An adversary spreads disinformation, funds proxies and applies economic pressure, all while staying below the threshold that would justify a military response.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The security half: pressure kept below open war. Cases to name: Hambantota, Gwadar, the Maldives turn.

FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

Mains is never 'moderate' or 'tough' or 'easy'. Those words belong to next-day reviews, not to this exam.

Year after year, Mains is theme repetition. This year said it loudly. Even then, it is not simple. The marks go to those who have internalised the basic content, practised answer writing enough, and walked in with self-belief.

And remember one thing about the cutoff: it is decided by relative performance. Everyone in that hall faced the same paper you did. If it felt hard, it felt hard to everyone. Your preparation decides where you stand, not the paper's mood. So let no one frighten you about it. Whenever fear spreads, someone appears selling a shortcut. You do not need a shortcut. You need the basics, practice, and patience.

If these three lines settle in early, the road becomes calm:

PYQs are the key.

Answer writing is the art.

Relative performance decides the outcome.

We wish you the very best for your result, and for everything ahead.

FREE GUIDANCE

Every free resource is at unlockias.in.

Stuck somewhere, or need direction? Ask on our Telegram channel [UPSCneil](https://t.me/UPSCneil).

MODULE QUERIES

Ping us directly at [@helpdeskupsc](https://t.me/helpdeskupsc) on Telegram, or call or message [+91 91130 79224](tel:+919113079224).

With best wishes,

Team UnlockIAS