Polity & Governance · GS - II

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

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2026	GS - II	Polity & Governance

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Generalist administration, broad perspective, coordination, policy implementation, district administration, flexibility, specialisation gap, complex governance, domain expertise, lateral entry, training, institutional capacity

Model Answer

The generalist structure of the Indian Civil Services has historically supported administrative coordination and policy implementation across diverse regions and sectors. Generalist officers can develop a broad understanding of governance, coordinate among departments and respond flexibly to emerging administrative challenges.

The district administration illustrates this advantage, where officers handle multiple functions ranging from development programmes and law and order to disaster management and electoral administration. A common administrative cadre can also strengthen institutional continuity and national integration.

However, contemporary governance increasingly involves complex domains such as artificial intelligence, climate change, public health, cybersecurity and financial regulation, where specialised expertise is essential. Excessive dependence on generalist administrators may result in insufficient domain knowledge and dependence on external technical agencies.

The solution is not to abandon the generalist model but to combine it with stronger specialisation. Domain-based postings, continuous professional training, expert recruitment, lateral induction and multidisciplinary teams can improve administrative capacity.

Thus, the generalist structure remains valuable for coordination and public administration, but contemporary governance requires a balanced model integrating generalist leadership with specialised expertise.

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