

## GENERAL STUDIES – 4

**Q1. “Blind political loyalty can be as dangerous as political apathy.” Discuss in the context of responsible citizenship. What are the key factors shaping political attitudes among citizens? (10 Marks)**

**Answer:**

**Introduction** “The price of apathy towards public affairs is to be ruled by evil men.” — *Plato* In a democracy, **Blind loyalty to a party or leader** erodes critical thinking, while **apathy abandons collective duty**. Both pose threats to accountable governance and justice. Responsible citizenship lies in **engaged and reflective participation**, which balances commitment with conscience.

**Body**

### **Ethical Risks of Blind Political Loyalty**

- **Loss of moral autonomy:** Citizens may suspend their own judgment in favor of party line.
  - *For example*, Blind defense of corruption within one’s own party, even when evidence is compelling.
- **Erosion of justice and fairness:** Actions by favoured leaders may be excused, while similar actions by others are condemned.
  - *For example*, Rationalising hate speech by party members as “political rhetoric,” while condemning others.
- **Undermining accountability:** Leaders may evade scrutiny because followers shield them.
  - *For example*, Inducting individuals with tainted pasts into important positions citing “political necessity.”
- **Groupthink and ethical relativism:** Morality becomes relative to party identity, rather than universal values.
  - *For example*, Justifying mob violence by members of one’s own camp as “justified protest.”
- **Collapse of civic virtue:** Emotional zeal replaces reasoned debate.
  - *For example*, Online trolling of dissenters without engaging with their arguments.
- **Violation of Constitutional morality:** Prioritising loyalty to a party or identity over the Constitution’s values.
  - *For example*, Supporting legislation or acts based on religious identity rather than equal rights or merit.

## Ethical Risks of Political Apathy

- **Abdication of civic duty:** Citizens fail to uphold their role in governance by abstaining from participation.
  - *For example,* Not voting, or ignoring municipal elections and civic issues.
- **Neglect of communitarian ethics:** Community welfare depends on collective responsibility, which apathy weakens.
  - *For example,:* Failing to join or support protests or initiatives against injustices like environmental degradation.
- **Complicity by silence:** Inaction can become complicity in wrongdoing.
  - *For example,* Remaining silent in the face of communal violence or corruption in one's locale.
- **Weakening of democracy:** Low participation diminishes legitimacy and representation.
  - *For example,* Urban voter turnout often lags rural turnout, leading to skewed policy priorities.
- **Erosion of ethical citizenship:** Citizens lose qualities like empathy, critical thinking, civic courage.
  - *For example,* Ignoring issues like waste management or local pollution affecting one's neighborhood.

## Key Factors Shaping Political Attitudes

Factor	Promoting Responsible / Critical Attitude	Fostering Blind Loyalty or Apathy
Moral & Civic Education	Teaching constitutional values, debate culture, civic rights & duties. <b>For example,</b> SVEEP campaigns in schools encourage informed voting.	Absence of civic education leads to identity-based or herd-based voting. Echo chambers,
Media & Social Media	Investigative journalism, fact-checking and exposure of corruption.	misinformation and manipulative propaganda (e.g. WhatsApp rumours). Inherited party loyalty, peer
Family & Peer Influence	Ethical political discussion in family/peer circles encourages nuance.	pressure and suppression of dissent at home. Economic distress pushes
Economic Conditions	Rising aspirations, education and job security encourage demands for accountability.	people to support <b>populist freebies or clientelist politics.</b>
Religious / Cultural Identity	<b>Inclusive identity frameworks</b> that transcend sectarian divides.	Communal polarization and identity politics used to mobilize blind loyalty.

<b>Trust in Institutions Historical</b>	Credibility of Election Commission, judiciary and anti-corruption bodies sustains engagement.	<b>Disillusionment with corrupt or unresponsive institutions</b> drives withdrawal or radicalism.
<b>Consciousness</b>	Awareness of freedom struggle, social reform movements fosters <b>civic pride and duty</b> .	Selective use of historical grievances to stoke resentment or identity politics.

**Conclusion** Both blind loyalty and political apathy undermine the foundations of democracy. Responsible citizenship demands that we **participate actively, yet critically**, holding leaders to account while refusing to abandon moral agency. Only when citizens refuse to be mere blind followers or silent observers can a **vibrant, just and accountable polity flourish**.



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### Case Study Question

**Q2.** A senior High Court judge, with a distinguished tenure delivering key verdicts in constitutional and administrative matters, resigned from judicial office a year before his scheduled retirement. Within a week, he formally joined a prominent national political party. In a public ceremony attended by top political leaders, he announced his intention to contribute to nation-building through political engagement and legislative reform.

This development triggered intense debate in media and legal circles. While the legality of the decision was not questioned—since judges are free to resign—the timing and nature of the transition raised concerns. His resignation came shortly after he had presided over sensitive cases involving electoral disputes, policy decisions, and public interest litigations. The controversy deepened when, at a political rally weeks after joining the party, the former judge declared that his judicial philosophy and decisions had always been aligned with the ideology of his new political affiliation. This public admission alarmed the legal community, as many saw it as retrospectively undermining the credibility of his past judgments and casting a shadow over the impartiality of decisions delivered in politically sensitive cases. Bar associations issued strong statements warning that such remarks could erode faith in judicial independence and shake the foundations of impartial justice.

Interestingly, a parallel trend has been noted in the civil services, where IAS and IPS officers resign to join political parties. However, in these cases, public and media scrutiny has generally been less intense, focusing more on electoral prospects rather than ethical propriety.

Supporters of the judge argue that he had fulfilled his judicial obligations with integrity and simply chose another form of public service. They emphasize that his resignation was voluntary and that, as a citizen, he holds the right to participate in democratic politics.

Public opinion remains divided. While some view such transitions as a natural extension of democratic freedom, others believe that individuals occupying offices of such elevated public responsibility must observe higher thresholds of restraint, detachment, and non-alignment to preserve institutional sanctity.

#### Questions:

- a) What are the ethical and institutional implications of public servants resigning to join political parties? (10 Marks)
- b) What measures would you suggest to preserve the sanctity and neutrality of institutions such as the judiciary, while also respecting individual rights? (10 Marks)

## Answer:

### Introduction

**“Public office is a public trust.” – U.S. Supreme Court**

In a democracy, transitions from neutral constitutional roles to partisan politics raise serious concerns about institutional integrity and public trust, especially when undertaken without restraint or reflection. In 2024, **Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay of the Calcutta High Court resigned and joined the BJP** shortly after giving high-profile judgments involving education scams and the state government, triggering a nationwide debate about **judicial impartiality and public perception.**

### (a) Ethical and Institutional Implications

- **Perception of Bias** – Immediate political entry creates doubt about the neutrality of past judicial decisions.
- **Loss of Public Trust** – Erodes confidence in the judiciary’s independence and credibility.
- **Conflict of Interest** – Raises ethical concerns where recent rulings involved political parties or policy issues.
- **Blurring of Separation of Powers** – Weakens institutional boundaries between the judiciary and politics.
- **Delegitimization of Past Judgments** – Post-resignation statements aligning with party ideology taint earlier verdicts.
- **Threat to Judicial Independence** – May tempt serving judges to seek political favour in anticipation of post-retirement roles.
- **Breach of Constitutional Morality** – Undermines the ideals of restraint, neutrality, and non-partisanship expected of high offices.
- **Rise of Careerism** – Encourages public office to become a stepping-stone for political ambition rather than a service ethic.
- **Lack of Regulatory Safeguards** – Absence of a cooling-off period leaves institutions vulnerable to politicisation.

### Positive Implications of Public Servants Joining Politics

- **Exercise of Democratic Rights** – As citizens, public servants enjoy the right to political participation after resignation (Article 19(1)(a)), strengthening democratic inclusion.
- **Leveraging Administrative Experience** – Former IAS, IPS officers and judges bring governance insights and policy expertise to politics.
- **Bridging Policy–Implementation Gap** – Their experience helps craft practical and implementable policies.

- **Ethical Leadership in Politics** – Officers with reputations for integrity can set benchmarks for clean politics.
- **Strengthening Legislative Competence** – Their knowledge of law, budgeting, and institutional frameworks enriches debates and oversight.
- **Internal Reform Agents** – Having witnessed systemic challenges first-hand, they can drive institutional reforms from within politics.
- **Public Trust and Credibility** – Well-respected ex-officials may restore credibility and public trust in political parties.
- **Bridging Institutional Gaps** – Understanding judicial reasoning helps align legislation with constitutional principles, reducing friction between legislature and judiciary.

### (b) Measures to Preserve Institutional Neutrality & Public Trust

- **Statutory Cooling-Off Period (2–5 Years)** – Legally binding **waiting period** before judges and senior civil servants can join political parties or contest elections (recommended by Law Commission & 2nd ARC).
- **Codified Judicial Conduct Framework** – Enact a **Judicial Standards and Accountability Act** to regulate post-retirement conduct and preserve impartiality.
- **Ethical Conduct Charter for Public Servants** – Based on Kantian duty ethics and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s constitutional morality to ensure self-restraint and dignity.
- **Independent Ethics Commission** – Modelled on **UK’s ACOBA** to review and advise on transitions from public service to politics.
- **Media and Civil Society Vigilance** – Encourage **informed public discourse** through media, think tanks and law schools on ethical post-office transitions.
- **Reform Political Party Conduct** – Parties should adopt **voluntary codes** refraining from offering posts to recently retired judges/civil servants, respecting institutional neutrality.

### Global Best Practices

- **United Kingdom – ACOBA (Advisory Committee on Business Appointments):** Former ministers, civil servants, and judges must seek approval before accepting post-retirement roles.
- **United States:**
  - **Lifetime Ban for Federal Judges** – U.S. federal judges (including Supreme Court justices) serve for life and cannot take political posts after retirement.
  - **Hatch Act (1939):** Restricts the **political activity of serving civil servants** and prohibits federal employees from running for public office while in service.

**Conclusion** “In a democracy, the appearance of justice is as vital as justice itself.” – Lord Hewart While the right to political participation must be respected, positions of high public trust demand **greater restraint and ethical foresight**. Cooling-off periods, codified ethical charters, and voluntary political party reforms are essential **to maintain the sanctity, neutrality and credibility of institutions** like the judiciary while safeguarding democratic freedoms.



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