

50 KEYWORDS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FOR MAINS 2026

1. Post-modernism

The idea that there is no single universal way of understanding society or administration different groups may have different realities and needs.

For. e.g. A tribal community and an urban middle-class group may require different approaches to development.

2. New Localism

Giving greater power and responsibility to local actors to solve problems according to local conditions.

A district allowing Gram Panchayats to design local livelihood programmes according to village needs.

3. Glocalisation

Combining global ideas with local needs and conditions.

A global digital-payment technology being adapted to India's rural users and local languages.

4. Precariat

A class of people living with insecure jobs, uncertain income and weak employment protection.

A platform delivery worker who has no permanent employment or social security.

5. Governmentality

The way governments influence people's behaviour not only through laws but also through knowledge, rules, incentives and self-discipline.

Health campaigns encouraging citizens to voluntarily adopt sanitation practices.

6. Hollow State

A situation where the government does not directly provide many services but manages networks of private and voluntary organisations that provide them.

A government contracting a private agency to operate a public service while retaining regulatory control.

7. Social Capital

Trust, relationships and networks that help people cooperate for common purposes. Villagers collectively maintain a water body through community trust.

8. Social Exclusion

The process by which some groups are systematically prevented from fully participating in society or accessing opportunities. Persons with disabilities being unable to access government buildings because of lack of ramps.

9. Social Equity

Ensuring that public administration provides fair opportunities and outcomes, especially for disadvantaged groups. Reservation policies helping historically disadvantaged communities access public employment.

10. Administrative Ecology

The idea that administration is influenced by its social, political, economic and cultural environment. Local caste structures influencing the implementation of welfare programmes.

11. Prismatic Society

Riggs' concept of a society where modern and traditional institutions exist together, creating administrative contradictions. Modern laws for recruitment exist alongside informal political recommendations.

12. Formalism

A situation where there is a large gap between officially prescribed rules and actual behaviour. Rules require transparent recruitment, but informal recommendations influence appointments.

13. Sala Model

Riggs' model of a prismatic administrative structure where formal rules coexist with informal practices and particularistic relationships. A government office formally follows merit rules while informal influence affects decisions.

14. Polycentric Governance

A system where multiple independent centres participate in making and implementing decisions. A city's water management involving the municipality, state agencies, communities and private providers.

15. Network Governance

Governance through interdependent networks of government, private organisations and civil society rather than government acting alone.

Government, NGOs and companies jointly implementing a healthcare programme.

16. Co-production

When citizens and government jointly produce a public service. Residents and the municipality jointly maintain neighbourhood cleanliness.

17. Collaborative Governance

The government and different stakeholders jointly discuss, decide and implement solutions. Government departments, NGOs and local communities jointly prepare a watershed plan.

18. Metagovernance

The government steers, coordinates and sets rules for networks rather than directly controlling everything. Government coordinating NGOs and private hospitals during a health emergency.

19. New Public Governance

An approach that sees public services as the product of networks, partnerships and collaboration, not government alone. Government working with NGOs and communities to improve nutrition outcomes.

20. New Public Management

Managing government is more like a performance-oriented organisation, using competition, targets and managerial techniques. Linking a public agency's performance evaluation to measurable service-delivery targets.

21. Neo-Weberian State

A model combining professional, rule-based bureaucracy with modern managerial methods and citizen responsiveness. A ministry retaining permanent professional officials while introducing outcome-based performance management.

22. Digital-era Governance

Using digital technology to create integrated, simpler and citizen-oriented government services. A citizen accessing multiple government certificates through a single online portal.

23. Platform Governance

Using a digital platform as a common infrastructure through which government, citizens and service providers interact. A government platform connecting farmers with subsidy, market and advisory services.

24. Algorithmic Governance

Using computer algorithms and data to support or automate government decisions. An algorithm identifying potentially fraudulent welfare claims for further verification.

25. Street-Level Bureaucracy

The frontline officials who directly interact with citizens and therefore exercise considerable discretion in implementing policies. A teacher deciding how to implement a government education programme in a school.

26. Administrative Discretion

The freedom given to officials to choose among lawful options while implementing a policy. A District Magistrate deciding how to prioritise relief distribution during a flood.

27. Bounded Rationality

The idea that officials cannot make perfectly rational decisions because they have limited information, time and mental capacity.

An officer chooses a satisfactory flood-relief plan because there is insufficient time to evaluate every possible option.

28. Incrementalism

Making policy through small, gradual changes rather than completely redesigning it. Increasing a welfare programme's coverage gradually instead of replacing the entire system.

29. Mixed Scanning

Combining broad long-term planning with detailed examination of selected issues. The government sets a long-term energy strategy but closely studies only the most critical energy projects.

30. Garbage Can Model

The idea that organisational decisions may emerge from the random meeting of problems, solutions, participants and opportunities.

A solution developed earlier being adopted when a suitable administrative problem suddenly arises.

31. Organisational Culture

The shared values, habits and informal practices that influence how an organisation behaves. An office where senior officers encourage employees to openly report mistakes develops a learning culture.

32. Administrative Culture

The broader values, attitudes and behavioural patterns that shape administrative institutions and officials. A culture of strict hierarchy may discourage junior officials from questioning senior decisions.

33. Goal Displacement

When following organisational rules or procedures becomes more important than achieving the original objective. An officer rejects genuine welfare beneficiaries because their documents do not perfectly match procedural requirements.

34. Trained Incapacity

When professional training or established habits become so rigid that they prevent a person from adapting to new situations. An official continues using outdated procedures even after digital alternatives are introduced.

35. Clientelism

A relationship where powerful actors provide benefits or favours in exchange for loyalty or political support. A politician securing government benefits for supporters in return for electoral loyalty.

36. Rent-seeking

Trying to obtain economic benefits through political or administrative influence rather than productive activity. A business lobbying for a special licence that gives it an unfair advantage.

37. Principal Agent Problem

A situation where the person entrusted to act on someone's behalf may pursue their own interests because the principal cannot fully monitor them.

Citizens cannot continuously monitor how a government official uses administrative discretion.

38. Moral Hazard

When people take greater risks because they do not bear the full consequences of their actions. A government agency may spend carelessly if it expects another authority to cover its losses.

39. Adverse Selection

A situation where lack of information causes the wrong people or products to be selected. A government contractor hides its poor past performance and gets selected because the department lacks adequate information.

40. Government Failure

A situation where government intervention produces inefficient or undesirable outcomes. A poorly designed subsidy encouraging excessive use of a scarce resource.

41. Administrative State

A state where bureaucratic and executive agencies play a major role in making and implementing public policy. A regulatory authority making detailed rules governing a sector under powers given by Parliament.

42. Developmental State

A state with a strong and capable administration actively directing economic and social development. South Korea's bureaucracy plays a major role in industrial development.

43. Embedded Autonomy

A bureaucracy having enough independence to act professionally while maintaining strong links with society and the economy.

A professional industrial-policy bureaucracy working closely with businesses without becoming controlled by them.

44. Under-administration

A situation where the state has insufficient administrative presence or capacity to perform necessary functions. Remote villages having government schemes on paper but almost no officials to deliver them.

45. Over-administration

A situation where there is excessive administrative control, regulation and procedural interference. A small business needing numerous approvals from different departments before starting operations.

46. Administrative Capacity

The ability of government institutions to design, coordinate and effectively implement policies. A state government's ability to rapidly implement a large vaccination programme.

47. Resilience Governance

The ability of governance systems and communities to prepare for, absorb, adapt to and recover from shocks. A coastal district maintaining cyclone shelters and evacuation systems to recover quickly after a cyclone.

48. Mission-mode Administration

Administration organised around a specific goal, fixed timeline and measurable outcomes, often cutting across departments. A time-bound government campaign to eliminate a particular disease.

49. Whole-of-Government Approach

Different government departments working together instead of operating in separate silos. Health, education, sanitation and rural-development departments jointly addressing malnutrition.

50. Public Value

The benefit or value created for society through legitimate and effective government action. A public transport system that reduces congestion, pollution and travel costs creates public value.