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The IAS Cadre System

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The IAS Cadre System

An IAS officer serves most of a career in one state, and the Centre decides which one. A new rule since January 2026 changes how that choice is made. This lesson explains the cadre, the old and new allocation rules, and the posts that tie an officer to the Centre.

Must know: the cadre, the zones and the groups

1 What is a cadre, and who controls an IAS officer?

A cadre is the State, or group of States, where an IAS officer works for most of a career. The officer is recruited by the Union, but serves a State. This is why the service is called an All-India Service.

Which Article creates the All-India Services?

Article 312 makes them possible. The Rajya Sabha must first pass a resolution in the national interest. At least two-thirds of the members present and voting must support it. Parliament may then create a service common to the Union and the States by law.

Article 312(2) treats the IAS and the IPS, as they stood when the Constitution began, as services created under this Article. The Indian Forest Service was added later in 1966 under the same power.



Writers' Building, Kolkata, built in 1777 for East India Company clerks and later a state government seat. Photo: Apurv013, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons. Cropped.

Which law runs the services day to day?

The All-India Services Act of 1951 is the main law. It lets the Central Government make rules. The rules are made after consulting the State governments concerned. Article 312 covers recruitment and conditions of service.

Who controls an IAS officer?

NCERT gives the short answer. An IAS or IPS officer is assigned to a State and works under the State government. Yet the officer is appointed by the Centre. The officer can go back into central service. NCERT says only the Centre can take disciplinary action. In law, Rule 7 of the AIS (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969 shares this power. The

State can start proceedings and impose the penalties allowed to it. Dismissal, removal and compulsory retirement need an order of the Central Government (Rule 7(2)).

> **Quick check 1.** Parliament can create a new All-India Service only after a Rajya Sabha resolution with two-thirds support. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: constitutionofindia.in; lawbhoomi.com; ips.gov.in; ncert.nic.in; indiaheritage.in

2 How did the 2017 five-zone policy work?

The Centre finalised a new cadre policy on 23 August 2017, per the Morung Express. PIB says the Government issued the revised policy on 5 September 2017, effective with the 2017 Civil Services Examination. It split the 26 cadres into five zones. The stated aim was national integration. Officers would get a chance to work in a State that was not their home.

Which cadres sat in which zone?

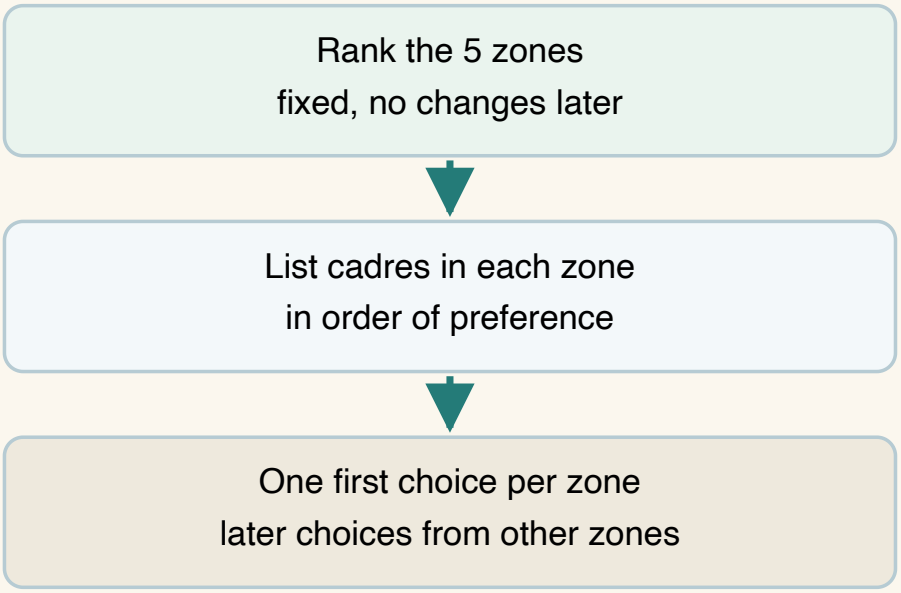
- Zone I: AGMUT, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Rajasthan and Haryana.
- Zone II: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha.
- Zone III: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.
- Zone IV: West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam-Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura and Nagaland.
- Zone V: Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

How did a candidate choose?

First, the candidate ranked the five zones in descending order. These ranks could not be changed later. Then the candidate listed the cadres inside each zone in order of preference.

A candidate could pick only one cadre from a zone as a first choice. The later choices had to come from other zones. This pushed candidates to spread their top preferences across the country.

> **Quick check 2.** Under the 2017 policy, a candidate could name any number of cadres from one zone as top choices. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓



Choices spread across zones. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: morungexpress.com; tribuneindia.com; pib.gov.in

3 What changed in January 2026?

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) issued a new policy order. News reports date it 23 January 2026. It took effect with the Civil Services Examination 2026 and the Indian Forest Service Examination 2026. It abolished the five zones.

What replaced the zones?

All State and joint cadres were arranged in alphabetical order. They were then divided into four groups.

- Group I: AGMUT, Andhra Pradesh, Assam-Meghalaya, Bihar and Chhattisgarh.
- Group II: Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh.
- Group III: Maharashtra, Manipur, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim and Tamil Nadu.
- Group IV: Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Counting the cadres in the four groups gives 25.

Why are there 25 cadres and not 26?

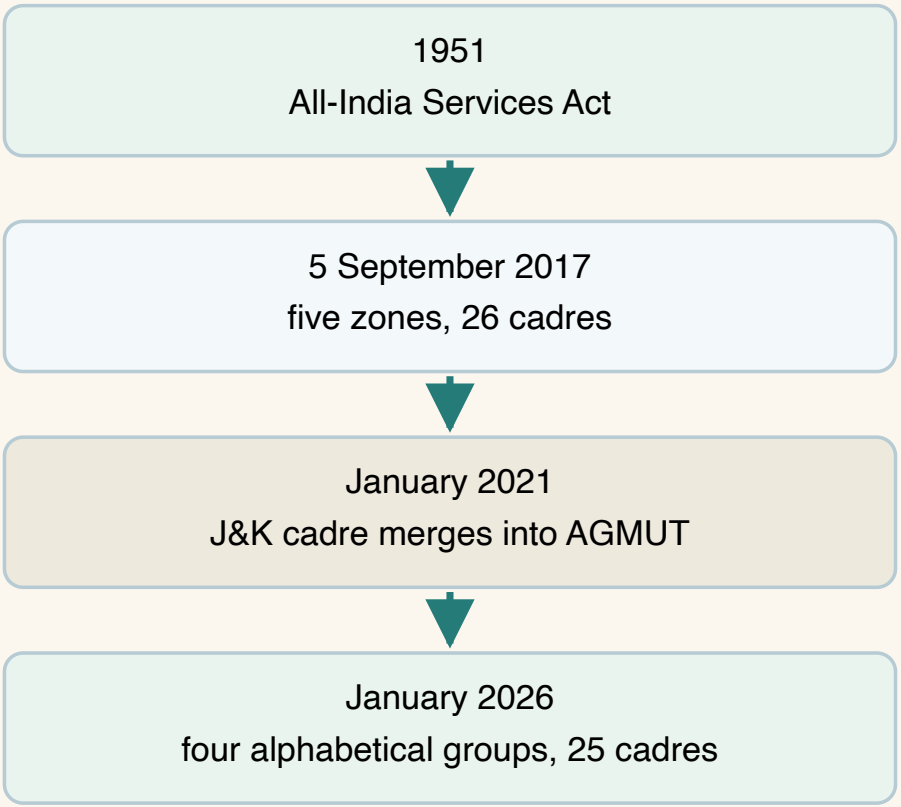
The 2017 list had 26 cadres, with Jammu and Kashmir as its own cadre. The J&K cadre of IAS, IPS and Forest Service officers was merged into AGMUT on 7 January 2021. This lesson reads the fall from 26 to 25 as the result of that merger. The order itself does not say so. The old version of this page said 2020, but the notification is dated January 2021.

How are vacancies counted?

Ministries work out vacancies from the cadre gap. The gap is measured on 1 January of the year after the examination year. States send their requirements by 31 January.

The reports opened for this lesson do not state a reason for the change. We should not guess one.

> **Quick check 3.** Since the 2026 order, State cadres are arranged alphabetically into four groups. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓



Four steps in the rules. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: greaterkashmir.com; thesecretariat.in; tribuneindia.com; prsindia.org

4 How are insiders and outsiders chosen?

An insider is an officer allotted to their own home State. An outsider is posted to a State that is not their home. The mix is the heart of the system.

What is the 1:2 ratio?

A study of IAS allocation describes the ratio of insider to outsider vacancies as 1:2. In a repeating sequence, vacancies go to outsider, insider, outsider. That works out to about one officer in three at home. This is our arithmetic. The study describes the rule in force during the 1976-2005 study period, which was reformed in 2008.

How does the 2026 order handle insiders?

Insider vacancies are filled by a cycle-based slotting system. A candidate must say they want their home cadre. Otherwise, the order says, they will not be considered for it at all.

How are outsider vacancies filled?

Outsider vacancies follow a roster. The roster works in two stages. Candidates with benchmark disabilities go first. Other candidates follow.

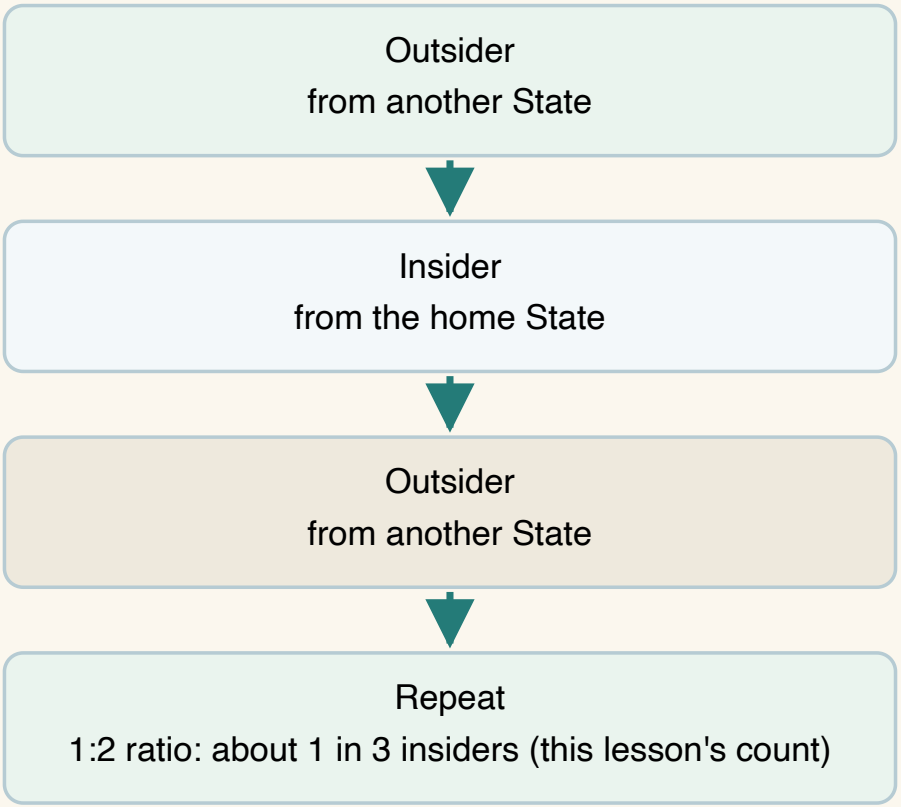
What did Haryana receive in 2024?

Haryana is a recent example. It received six new IAS officers from the 2024 batch. Only two were from Haryana, and four came from outside.

The State has a sanctioned strength of 215 IAS posts. It was short of about 30 officers.

Quick check 4. A candidate who does not state a wish for the home cadre can still be given it as an insider. *(True or False?)*

See answer ↓



The 1:2 pattern. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: guoxu.org; greaterkashmir.com; tribuneindia.com

Good to know: deputation and the Chief Secretary

5 What is the Central Deputation Reserve?

Some IAS officers work for the Union government. This is called central deputation. The Centre needs a pool of officers for its ministries. The Central Deputation Reserve (CDR) is that pool.

How big can the reserve be?

The IAS (Fixation of Cadre Strength) Regulations, 1955 allow a reserve of up to 40 per cent of the senior duty posts of a cadre. That is a ceiling. It is not a fixed share.

Which rule governs deputation?

Rule 6(1) of the IAS (Cadre) Rules, 1954 covers central deputation. It works by consultation between the Centre and the State.

Why was the rule in the news?

DoPT started a proposal on 20 December 2021 to amend Rule 6(1). The aim was to let the Centre override a State's objection. Nine States opposed it, and eight consented. A minister's reply on 9 February 2022 said the comments were being examined. Devdiscourse reports it in the Lok Sabha. EastMojo reports it in the Rajya Sabha.

Sources: eastmojo.com; devdiscourse.com

6 Who is a State's Chief Secretary?

The Chief Secretary is the senior-most civil servant of a State.

Who appoints the Chief Secretary?

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission called the Chief Secretary the senior-most officer of the State. It proposed a collegium to send a panel of names for the Chief Minister. The order may carry the Governor's name.

Why do people say the Governor appoints?

Article 166(1) says all executive action of a State government is expressed in the name of the Governor. So the order may carry the Governor's name. That is why the Governor looks like the appointing authority.

Does the post have a fixed tenure?

No. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission found that the length of tenure is uncertain and transfers are frequent. It proposed a tenure of two years.

How did UPSC test this?

UPSC Civil Services Prelims 2016 asked two statements. The Governor appoints the Chief Secretary. The Chief Secretary has a fixed tenure. UPSC's key treats statement 1 as incorrect, and the answer is (d).

> **Quick check 5.** A State's Chief Secretary has a fixed tenure set by the Constitution. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: slideshare.net; constitutionofindia.in; upsc.gov.in

Great to know: the design and the differences

7 Why is the system built this way?

Several rules point the same way. They spread officers across the country and keep a link to the Centre. This is our reading of the federal balance behind the All-India Services.

What did the 2017 policy say about its purpose?

The 2017 reports give the aim in plain words. Officers should work in a State that is not their home. This builds national integration of the bureaucracy.

How do the rules fit together?

- Recruitment is central. The Union recruits officers.
- Posting is by cadre. A State runs the officer's daily work.
- By this lesson's count, the 1:2 vacancy ratio from the Guo Xu study gives insiders about one vacancy in three.
- The reserve lets the Centre borrow officers for its own work.

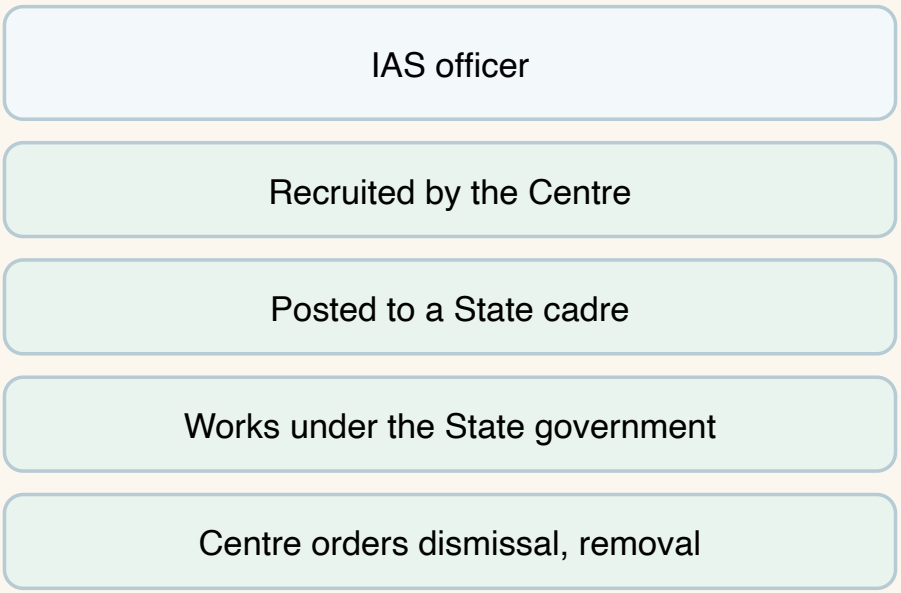
- Discipline is shared under Rule 7 of the 1969 Rules. Dismissal, removal and compulsory retirement need a Central order.

What is the link to Article 311?

The site’s lesson on Article 311 explains the safeguards that protect civil servants from dismissal.

What did the old zone rule try to prevent?

Under the zones, a candidate could choose only one cadre from each zone as a first preference. That stopped a candidate from naming only neighbouring States.



Shared control. Original explanatory diagram.

Sources: morungexpress.com; ncert.nic.in; tribuneindia.com

8 Where do sources differ?

Reports on a new policy often differ in small details. A careful learner notes the differences. Then use the most official source.

What is the date of the 2026 order?

Greater Kashmir says the policy was issued by the Union Personnel Ministry on 23 January. The Secretariat page carries only a byline of 27 January 2026. We read this as a publication date, not a second order date. That is our inference. This lesson uses 23 January.

Is the number of cadres 25 or 26?

The 2017 policy had 26 cadres. The 2026 groups list 25. The J&K merger of January 2021 is the likely reason for the gap. The 25 is worked out by this lesson from the group list. No official source states it.

Is the 1:2 ratio in the 2026 order?

The 1:2 ratio is clear for the older rule. The 2026 reports speak of a cycle-based slotting system. They do not repeat the ratio. Treat 1:2 as the long-standing pattern.

Does NCERT disagree with any of this?

No conflict was found. NCERT only covers the broad picture of All-India Services. It does not describe the zone or group rules.

Sources: greaterkashmir.com; thesecretariat.in; ncert.nic.in

Review the feedback after each answer. The understanding-check score lasts for this page session.

Reset the checks when you want another attempt. This score is separate from the Native Practice score below.

Questions to think through

Why does the Centre, not the State, recruit an IAS officer?

The service is common to the Union and the States. A central recruiter can keep one standard and let officers move. This is our reading of the design.

Why might a State want more insiders?

By this lesson's count, the older 1:2 ratio leaves insiders about one vacancy in three. The 2017 reports give the aim as national integration.

Why would a State object to a bigger central reserve?

More officers on central work means fewer at home. This is our reading. Haryana was short of about 30 of its 215 sanctioned posts.

Why is "who appoints the Chief Secretary" a favourite trap?

An order may carry the Governor's name, so it can look like a Governor's choice. UPSC's key says the Governor does not appoint. Separate the form of an order from the real decision.

Practice MCQs

1. Which Article of the Constitution empowers Parliament to create All-India Services like the IAS?

A. Article 315

B. Article 356

C. Article 312

D. Article 280

See answer ↓

2. On 23 January 2026, DoPT replaced the five-zone cadre allocation system with what?

A. A single national merit list

B. A four-group alphabetical framework

C. A return to pure state-wise choice

D. A lottery-based system

See answer ↓

3. The five-zone Cadre Allocation Policy, first applied to the 2017 batch of IAS officers, was notified by which body?

A. The Election Commission of India

B. The Ministry of Home Affairs

C. The Department of Personnel and Training

D. The Union Public Service Commission

See answer ↓

4. Consider these two statements about IAS cadre allocation.

Statement 1: The Central Deputation Reserve sets aside cadre strength for officers on deputation to the Union government.

Statement 2: The insider-outsider ratio keeps roughly two-thirds of a cadre's officers as outsiders.

Which statement(s) is/are correct?

A. Only Statement 1 is correct

B. Only Statement 2 is correct

C. Neither statement is correct

D. Both statements are correct

See answer ↓

5. The All-India Services Act, the primary statute governing cadre rules for the IAS and IPS, was enacted in which year?

A. 1935

B. 1947

C. 1951

D. 1966

See answer ↓

6. Consider the following statements:

1. The Chief Secretary in a State is appointed by the Governor of that State.

2. The Chief Secretary in a State has a fixed tenure.

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

See answer ↓

7. The Central Deputation Reserve of a cadre can be at most what share of its senior duty posts?

A. 20 per cent

B. 40 per cent

C. 50 per cent

D. 33 per cent

See answer ↓

8. Under the 2026 cadre allocation order, vacancies are worked out from the cadre gap on which date?

A. 1 January of the year after the examination year

B. 31 March of the examination year

C. The day the result is declared

D. 1 January of the examination year

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** Article 312 lets Parliament create All-India Services common to the Union and the States. The Rajya Sabha must first pass a resolution backed by two-thirds of members present and voting. ↑ Q1
2. **B.** The 2026 order arranged the State and joint cadres alphabetically into four groups. It replaced the five zones. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** The Central Government issued the five-zone policy on 5 September 2017, effective with the 2017 Civil Services Examination. The Department of Personnel and Training is the cadre-controlling authority for the IAS under the 2026 policy. ↑ Q3
4. **D.** Both are correct. The reserve can take up to 40 per cent of senior duty posts for central deputation. A study of the allocation rule over 1976-2005 gives the insider to outsider ratio of vacancies as 1:2. ↑ Q4
5. **C.** The All-India Services Act is Act 61 of 1951. It lets the Central Government make rules after consulting the State governments. The Indian Forest Service came later, in 1966. ↑ Q5
6. **D.** The answer is (d), neither 1 nor 2. UPSC's key treats statement 1 as incorrect. The Second ARC found tenure uncertain and proposed two years. ↑ Q6
7. **B.** The IAS (Fixation of Cadre Strength) Regulations, 1955 allow a reserve of up to 40 per cent of senior duty posts. It is a ceiling, not a fixed share. ↑ Q7
8. **A.** The order counts the cadre gap on 1 January of the year after the examination year. States then send their requirements by 31 January. ↑ Q8

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** Article 312 needs a Rajya Sabha resolution with at least two-thirds of members present and voting. ↑ 1
2. **False.** this is false. A candidate could pick only one cadre from a zone as a first choice. ↑ 2
3. **True.** The 2026 order arranged the State and joint cadres alphabetically into four groups. ↑ 3
4. **False.** this is false. The order says such a candidate is not considered for the home cadre at all. ↑ 4

5. **False.** this is false. The Second ARC found the length of tenure uncertain and proposed two years. ↑ 5

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