

**THE MOST PREDICTABLE NEW THEMES FOR CASE STUDY
UPSC CORE GROUP 2026**

- 1. FCRA & CSOs**
- 2. LGBT and legal/moral dilemmas**
- 3. Bangladeshi Migrants-refoulement**
- 4. AI-predictive policing/Deepfakes/Generative Misinformation**
- 5. Welfare Exclusion, Biometric Governance, and Social Equity**
- 6. Political Advertising, Dark Patterns & Cognitive Manipulation**
- 7. Media Integrity, Social Media Polarization, and Free Speech**
- 8. Weaponization of Interdependence, Geopolitical Ethics & Cyber Warfare**

CASE STUDY: CSO AND FCRA

You are posted as the District Magistrate (DM) of a socio-economically backward district in India. An international non-governmental organization (INGO) has been active in your district for the past decade, funding local civil society groups to run crucial grassroots interventions in primary health, elementary education, and women's self-help group (SHG) empowerment. Due to long-standing state capacity gaps, thousands of vulnerable rural households rely on these non-state programs for basic survival, healthcare, and educational access.

Recently, you receive a confidential report from central intelligence agencies indicating that a significant portion of this foreign funding is being systematically diverted. The report alleges that these funds are being routed through domestic shell channels to finance local political activities and mobilize violent public protests against a proposed national highway and industrial corridor project in your district. Intelligence suggests that these engineered protests aim to stall key infrastructure initiatives and destabilize local public order under the guise of grassroots activism.

The legal framework governing foreign contributions (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act - FCRA) strictly prohibits the utilization of foreign funds for political activities or actions detrimental to public interest and national security. However, taking immediate punitive action—such as freezing bank accounts or suspending the operations of these NGOs—will result in the sudden collapse of essential healthcare and education programs, leaving thousands of poor beneficiaries without aid. On the other hand, permitting unchecked operations compromises sovereign integrity, rule of law, and regional development.

Local political representatives are demanding an immediate ban on the NGO, while local tribal unions and activist networks threaten district-wide agitation if the NGO's activities are disrupted.

Based on the scenario above, answer the following questions:

- a) Identify the ethical dilemmas faced by you as per the scenario.
- b) Critically evaluate the merits and demerits of the options available to you as the District Magistrate.
- c) Discuss your immediate and long-term course of action to address the crisis. How will you ensure zero tolerance for illegal foreign funding and national security threats while safeguarding the welfare of innocent poor beneficiaries? Justify your strategy using administrative principles and ethical frameworks.

ANS. HINTS**Scenario Description**

As the District Magistrate, the approach should be to adhere to the **core responsibility** of legal compliance by reminding, on the one hand, **“where law ends, tyranny begins” of Locke** and on the other, **“law is the bottom-line, not ceiling” of Martin Luther King Jr.**

Stakeholder Mapping

1. **District Magistrate & Administration:** Responsible for upholding statutory compliance
2. **Vulnerable Beneficiaries (Rural Households, Women, Children):** Reliant on grassroots health, education, and SHG programs.
3. **International & Local NGOs:** Key non-state service providers
4. **Local Resident Population & Tribal Unions:** Concerned about displacement and rights regarding the industrial project
5. **Central Intelligence & Home Ministry:** Tasked with identifying illicit foreign funding networks

Ethical Dilemmas

1. **Voluntarism vs. rule of law(liberty vs. law)**
 2. **Self-regulation vs. statutory regulations**
 3. **Welfare of Vulnerable Citizens vs. Sovereign Integrity**
 4. **Statutory Compliance (FCRA) vs. Humanitarian Continuity**
 5. **Welfare dependence vs. cost of aid**
 6. **Short-Term Administrative Shock vs. Long-Term State Credibility**
 7. **State Capacity Deficit vs. Non-State Dependency**
 8. **Individual Guilt of NGO Management vs. Collective Punishment of Beneficiaries**
- **Constitutional Morality & Case Laws:**
 - In **Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF) v. Union of India (2020)**, Court upheld FCRA but **doctrine of proportionality** without arbitrarily stifling legitimate civil society advocacy.
 - **Ethical Philosophy:**
 - **Aristotelian Golden Mean (Doctrine of the Mean)**
 - **Kantian Deontology**
 - **John Rawls’ Difference Principle**

"National security without human rights is a facade; human rights without national security is an impossibility." — Kofi Annan

Conclusion

"Poverty must not be an excuse for subversion, nor must national security become a pretext for neglecting the poor; a civilized state secures its borders while serving its most vulnerable." — Jawaharlal Nehru

CASE STUDY: LGBT AND LEGAL/MORAL DILEMMAS

You are a senior Chief Medical Officer (CMO) appointed as the Chairperson of the newly formed State Medical Board under the Transgender Persons Amendment Act, 2026. The law mandates that your board must physically and psychologically evaluate all applicants before the District Magistrate can issue an official gender identity certificate.

A young trans-masculine individual, accompanied by a human rights lawyer, appears before your board. The applicant refuses to undergo an anatomical examination, citing the Supreme Court's NALSA (2014) judgment and arguing that a physical evaluation violates their fundamental right to privacy under Article 21. They demand that you sign off on their self-perceived identity based on their psychological evaluation alone.

Concurrently, your board members—who are senior conservative physicians—insist on a full physical assessment, arguing that the 2026 Amendment strictly obligates them to verify biological or clinical criteria to prevent legal misuse or fraud. They warn you that bypasses could lead to administrative disciplinary action against the board by the Ministry.

Furthermore, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has just issued an advisory criticizing the law's rollback of self-identification, leaving the entire administrative framework in a state of high ethical tension.

- a) Identify the conflicting ethical values, legal mandates, and stakeholders in this scenario.
- b) Evaluate the options available to you as the Chairperson of the Medical Board, keeping in mind your dual duties as a medical professional and a state administrator.
- c) What will be your course of action in the given case study?

ANS. HINTS**Scenario description**

As the Chairperson one should go with '**Veil of ignorance**' of John Rawls as well as his '**differential principle**' to take a fair stand ensuring legality and dignity of human.

"Gender is not a fixed, biological fact, but a continuous performance... To force it into rigid biological verification is an act of institutional violence." — Judith Butler

Conflicting Legal Mandates: The Transgender Persons Amendment Act 2026 vs. **NALSA v. Union of India (2014)** judgment by the Supreme Court

Ethical dilemmas

- **Legality vs dignity**
- **Autonomy vs. Paternalistic Verification**
- **Medical Ethics vs. Administrative Duty**
- **Duty vs responsibility**
- **Statute vs Judicial precedent**

Conclusion

"Discretion in the hands of an administrator is not a license to be arbitrary; it is a sacred trust to inject compassion where the letter of the law is blind." — Aristotle

"Public office is public trust"—Charles Summer

CASE STUDY: MIGRANTS, BORDER SECURITY & DUE PROCESS DILEMMA

You are the District Magistrate (DM) of a sensitive border district in an Indian state bordering a neighboring nation. The district experiences high rates of seasonal internal labor migration from neighboring eastern states, as well as documented instances of illegal cross-border infiltration. During a routine night patrol, local police and border security personnel conduct a search drive in an informal settlement of construction workers. Acting on suspicions raised by language dialect and lack of physical voter cards, the local police detain a family of five—including an eight-month pregnant woman and two minor children.

The security forces classify the family as "illegal infiltrators" and request their immediate summary removal ("pushback") across the international border, citing intelligence inputs about heightened cross-border security threats and instructions from higher authorities to act swiftly against unauthorized stays.

Relatives of the family, accompanied by local civil society members and labor union representatives, gather outside your office. They present verified digital copies of Indian land records, Aadhaar numbers, and local panchayat domicile certificates proving the family are Indian citizens from a neighboring state who migrated for work. They argue that summarily expelling the family without presenting them before a Magistrate or a Foreigners Tribunal is an extrajudicial act that violates fundamental constitutional rights.

Meanwhile, local political groups and border security officials pressure you to proceed with the expulsion, arguing that administrative delays create security vulnerabilities, encourage illegal settlements, and undermine national security.

- a) Discuss the ethical dilemmas faced by you as the District Magistrate in this case.
- b) Outline your step-by-step course of action to resolve the situation, balancing national security imperatives with constitutional rights and human dignity.
- c) What long-term policy measures would you suggest to prevent the wrongful profiling and arbitrary detention of internal labor migrants?

ANS.

As the District Magistrate, one is bound by the **oath of office to uphold the Constitution of India**, balancing sovereign border security imperatives with the fundamental rights and human dignity.

Stakeholder Mapping

- **Primary Stakeholders:** Detained migrant family (vulnerable pregnant woman and minor children facing potential statelessness), District Magistrate.
- **Secondary Stakeholders:** Border Security Forces & Police, Civil Society Organizations & Labor Unions, Local Public & Political Groups.

Ethical Dilemmas

1. **No harm principle vs. rule of law**
2. **National Security vs. Constitutional Rights (Article 21 & 22)**
3. **Rule of Law vs. Administrative Expediency**
4. **Compassion vs. Neutrality**
5. **Evidence vs. perception**
6. **Inter-State Integration vs. Regional Profiling**
7. **Institutional Hierarchy vs. Moral Conscience**

Conclusion

"Borders are non-negotiable for national identity, but human dignity does not end where borders begin." — Michael Walzer

"The true test of a democracy is how it treats its most vulnerable minorities and poorest citizens under the shadow of state power." — Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer

THEMES RELATED TO AI

1. **AI-predictive policing/Deepfakes/Generative Misinformation**
2. **Welfare Exclusion, Biometric Governance, and Social Equity**
3. **Political Advertising, Dark Patterns & Cognitive Manipulation**
4. **Media Integrity, Social Media Polarization, and Free Speech**

CASE STUDY: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, DATA PRIVACY, AND TECH ETHICS

You are the District Collector (DC) of a fast-growing metro district. To streamline social welfare delivery and combat severe budget leakages, the state government has mandated the rollout of "Jan-Drishti," an AI-driven predictive governance and biometric authentication platform.

The algorithm aggregates citizens' private data—including land registry records, banking transactions via open APIs, mobile location metadata, and facial recognition scans at government distribution outlets—to create an automated "Need Index." Citizens scoring below a certain threshold are automatically flagged as ineligible for subsidized housing, medical aid, and ration allocations.

Within three months of implementation, over 12,000 genuine beneficiaries, primarily elderly individuals, manual laborers with worn finger-patterns, and illiterate rural migrants, have been abruptly cut off from essential food and healthcare subsidies due to algorithmic false negatives and biometric mismatches.

A whistleblower from the private tech consortium that developed Jan-Drishti leaks internal documents showing that unencrypted citizen data and behavioural metadata are being stored on private cloud servers, with clauses in the vendor contract allowing the firm to monetize anonymized citizen profiles for commercial credit scoring.

A tragic death of an elderly woman denied emergency hospital admission due to an AI "eligibility flag" triggers widespread protests. Local activists accuse the administration of using a "black-box automated panopticon" that denies basic fundamental rights without any right to appeal. The Chief Secretary calls an emergency meeting and instructs you to "contain the public protests immediately, ensure 100% digital rollout compliance as mandated by the cabinet, and avoid cancelling the vendor contract to prevent heavy contractual penalty fees."

1. Identify the ethical issues and conflict of interest involved in this scenario.
2. Identify the conflict of interest involved in this scenario.
3. Evaluate the options available to you as the District Collector and choose the most appropriate, giving reasons.
4. Outline your step-by-step course of action to resolve the crisis while balancing technological efficiency, administrative duty, data privacy, and human dignity.

ANS. HINTS**Scenario Description**

As the District Collector the approach will be to keep human above technological subordination through AI Ethics and 7-sutras of AI GG 2025

"Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master." — Christian Lous Lange

Key Stakeholders Mapping

- **Marginalized Beneficiaries (Elderly, Laborers, Migrants)**
- **District Collector & District Administration**
- **State Government & Chief Secretary**
- **Private Tech Consortium (Vendor)**
- **General Public, Activists, & Media**

Ethical Issues Involved

- AI Hallucination
- Technocratic Determinism vs. Human Dignity (Article 21)
- Procedural Injustice & Black-Box Governance
- Fiduciary Breach & Surveillance Capitalism
- Systemic Bias & Exclusion Errors
- Dehumanization

ETHICAL DILEMMAS

- Constitutional Duty vs. Executive Pressure
- Public Welfare vs. Vendor Protection
- Data Sovereignty vs. Commercial Monetization
- Technological Speed vs. Administrative Accountability

STEPS

- Appoint Ethical AI Audit Panel
- "Human-in-the-Loop" Governance
- UNESCO AI ETHICS 2021
- 7-SUTRA AI GG 2025
- EXPLANABILITY
- BLACKBOX TO SANDBOX

Conclusion

"The true test of a democracy is not the sophistication of its technology, but the dignity it guarantees to its poorest citizen." — Justice D.Y. Chandrachud

"The real danger is not that computers will begin to think like men, but that men will begin to think like computers." — Sydney J. Harris

CASE STUDY: DEEFAKE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

You are the Superintendent of Police (Cyber Cell) of a district heading into Assembly elections in 48 hours. A hyper-realistic AI video goes viral on a messaging platform, showing a candidate "confessing" to a corruption deal in his own voice. Forensic analysis confirms it is a deepfake, generated using a cloned voice model built from the candidate's public speeches. Under the new IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2026, platforms must act within 36 hours for such misinformation — but the video has already reached 3 million views and is being amplified through WhatsApp forwards untraceable by platforms.

Simultaneously, the rival candidate's supporters claim the confession is genuine and that the "deepfake" defence is itself a cover-up — a version of the "liar's dividend," where the mere existence of deepfake technology lets real wrongdoing be dismissed as fake. Law and order is fragile; a communally sensitive locality is on edge. You have limited forensic staff and a shrinking election-silence window.

Based on the above:

- a) Identify the ethical dilemmas you face.
- b) Critically evaluate the options available to you.
- c) Outline your course of action with justification.

ANS.

Scenario Description

The scenario demands to act with wisdom and ethical responsibility of Max Weber.

"Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts." — Daniel Patrick Moynihan

Stakeholders: SP Cyber Cell, Election Commission, candidates, platforms, voters, communally sensitive locality.

Ethical Dilemmas:

- 1. Speed vs. Accuracy**
- 2. Free Expression vs. Content Takedown**
- 3. Liar's Dividend**
- 4. Platform Jurisdiction vs. Encrypted Virality]**
- 5. Neutrality vs. Political Pressure**

Examples: 2024 Lok Sabha polls saw a 280% rise in deepfake attempts, including AI-cloned voices of deceased leaders and fabricated Amit Shah reservation remarks; Ireland's 2025 presidential election saw a deepfake showing a candidate "withdrawing."

"Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master." — Christian Lous Lange

Conclusion

"The real danger is not that computers will begin to think like men, but that men will begin to think like computers." — Sydney J. Harris

CASE STUDY : AI AND WELFARE PROGRAM

You are the District Programme Coordinator for MGNREGS in a remote, socio-economically backward district. The government has mandated a facial recognition-based mobile application for daily attendance to eliminate corruption. Within a month of its rollout, local village supervisors and workers stage a protest outside your office. They demonstrate that due to erratic cellular connectivity, physical changes in workers' faces due to aging/manual labour, and software glitches, nearly 30% of genuine workers are failing the biometric match, leading to an automatic forfeiture of their daily wages.

The workers are on the brink of starvation as this is their primary source of income. However, your ministry headquarters is monitoring the app data strictly and commends your district for a 30% reduction in suspicious expenditure, viewing it as a success against corruption.

- a) Identify the ethical dilemmas faced by you in this situation.
- b) Evaluate the options available to you as a responsible civil servant.
- c) What long-term measures would you propose to balance fiscal transparency with the right to livelihood?

ANS. HINTS**Scenario description**

This crisis reflects the classic analogy of **the digital phantom**. As the District Programme Coordinator, the approach should be of **objectivity and probity** by treating **public office as public trust**.

"The law of the state must be a shield to protect life, not a digital sieve that strains out the livelihoods of the poor." — Amartya Sen

Ethical Dilemmas:

1. **Technological Determinism vs. Human Dignity**
2. **Fiscal Efficiency vs. Social Justice (Errors of Exclusion)**
3. **Bureaucratic Obedience vs. Ethical Responsibility**
4. **Objectivity vs. Loyalty and fraternity**

Conclusion

"The baseline of a democratic institution is that the vulnerabilities of the marginalized must be met with structural protection, not technological skepticism." — John Rawls

"Public service is the highest duty" - Woodrow Wilson.

CASE STUDY: THE GRID BLACKOUT AND CYBER WARFARE

You are the National Cyber Security Coordinator. A sudden cascading power outage strikes three states, disabling hospital backup systems in one district for 40 minutes before restoration — during which two ICU patients die. Forensic teams trace the intrusion to malware planted months earlier in a SCADA vendor's software update, a supply-chain compromise attributed with "high confidence" (but not absolute certainty) to a state-linked hostile actor, consistent with the global pattern of infrastructure-targeting cyber operations documented through 2025–26.

The Cabinet Committee on Security wants immediate public attribution and a retaliatory cyber strike on the adversary's infrastructure. Your technical team cautions that attribution, while strong, isn't courtroom-certain, and that retaliation against civilian-adjacent infrastructure could violate customary international law principles (as reflected in the Tallinn Manual) and risk uncontrolled escalation. Meanwhile, public anger over the hospital deaths is mounting, and opposition parties demand answers within 48 hours.

Based on the above:

- a) Identify the ethical dilemmas you face.
- b) Evaluate the merits and demerits of the response options.
- c) Recommend a course of action with justification.

ANS.HINTS

Protecting national security is the utmost responsibility as per the **Hobbes' social contract** and the given situation reminds of the recent alleged hacking of classified confidentiality of Indian nuclear power plants.

Stakeholders: NCSC & Cabinet Committee on Security; hospital patients/families; SCADA vendor; adversary state; international community/allies.

a) Ethical Dilemmas

- **Certainty vs. Urgency**
- **Deterrence vs. Escalation**
- **Proportionality vs. Political Pressure**
- **Civilian Harm Avoidance**
- **Transparency vs. National Security Secrecy**

Examples: 2025–26 saw parallel cyber fronts in nearly every major regional conflict, with 444 documented telecom-sector security incidents in 2025 alone; sustained state-linked pressure on Ukrainian/NATO energy and communication infrastructure.

Conclusion

"The next world war will be a cyberwar" is a warning, not a wish — the measure of statecraft is keeping it from coming true.

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them. True accountability cannot be outsourced." — Albert Einstein

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." — Martin Luther King Jr.