



## Citizen Charters in Public Service Delivery : A Systematic Literature Review

Dr. Chandan Singh

Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Government College Uklana

Savita

Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Smt. A.A.A. Govt. P.G. College, Kalka  
(Panchkula)

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**Abstract :-** Citizen Charters as a reform agenda originated in the UK in the early 90s and were subsequently adopted by numerous developed and developing states. Citizen Charter aims to enhance public sector organisations' service delivery, transparency, efficiency, and accountability. Initiated by UK Prime Minister John Major in 1991, this concept decentralises public service focus to ordinary citizens, emphasising their rights and active participation. It is viewed as a powerful tool for improving service standards, ensuring accountability and transparency, and empowering citizens. The concept involves a shift towards customer-led services, and its primary goal is to establish a mutual understanding between citizens and service providers.

**Keywords :-** Citizen Charter, Citizen-Centric Governance, Public Service Delivery, Transparency.

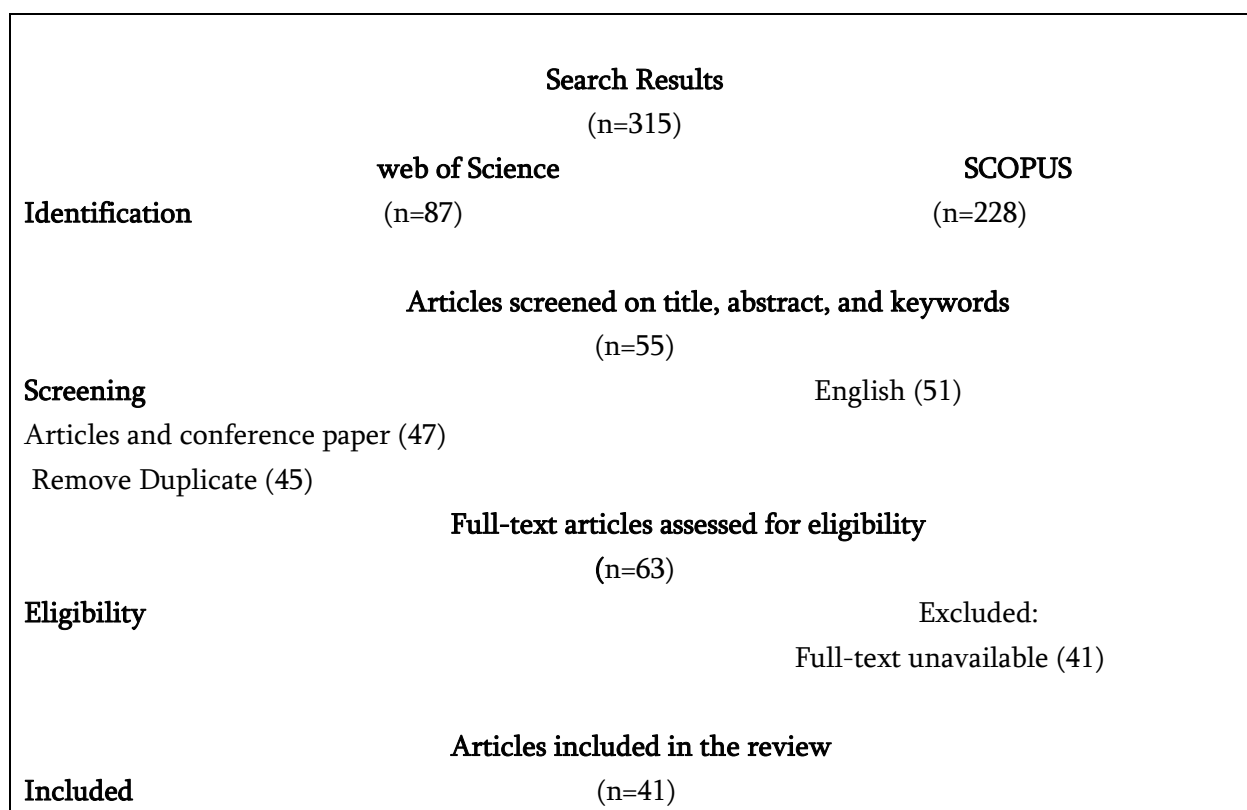
Despite their potential benefits, Citizen Charters face challenges such as inadequate awareness, lack of enforcement mechanisms, bureaucratic resistance, and potential symbolic gestures without genuine commitment. Recent research explores integrating technology, particularly e-governance platforms, to enhance accessibility and interactivity. The role of social media in citizen-government interactions is also emerging as a relevant area of interest.

Citizen Charters are recognised for their dual role in informing citizens about their rights and holding public agencies accountable. They are seen as tools for achieving citizen-centric governance, providing quality services, fostering responsibility and responsiveness among civil servants, and reducing opportunities for corruption through increased transparency. However, the literature acknowledges that their effectiveness can be compromised by the absence of clear vision and mission statements, neglect of service standards and timelines, and the lack of specific timeframes for grievance redressal in some organisations. The literature focuses on citizen charters' origins, objectives and impact, emerging challenges, and leveraging evolving technologies for more responsive and accountable governance.

**Methodology for Literature Review-** Two academic databases, Web of Science and Scopus, were used to conduct the systematic literature review. The researcher systematically reviewed the literature using the

“Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses” (PRISMA) approach. A search using the term "Citizens Charter" in the title, abstract or keywords was conducted on May 23, 2022. Full-text peer-reviewed publications and conference papers were the main focus of the inclusion criteria. The first search retained 45 references after duplicates were removed. During the second phase, the researcher removed four papers unavailable in full-text format. The remaining 41 references were 23 research publications and 18 conference papers. The methodology for the literature review is mentioned in the table below.

**Table 2.3**  
*PRISMA Flow Chart for Citizen Charter*



*Source: Prepared by researcher (2023)*

**Introduction-** Citizens' charters play a vital role in contemporary governance by providing clear guidelines outlining people's expectations, rights and privileges when interacting with public service providers. This systematic literature review offers a thorough analysis of research on citizen charters about public service delivery. This review provides insights into the objectives, impacts, challenges and future directions for implementing the Citizens Charter by systematically examining academic contributions. The adoption of citizen-centric approaches by governments globally requires a deeper understanding of the function and efficacy of citizen charters to promote responsible and accountable public service delivery.

**Origin and Purpose of Citizen's Charter-** The reform agenda known as the Citizen's Charter first emerged in the United Kingdom during the early 1990s (Mullen, 2006). This innovative concept aimed to enhance service delivery, transparency, efficiency, and accountability within state-operated public service organisations. Introduced by UK Prime Minister John Major in 1991, the Citizen's Charter marked a

significant advancement in civil service reform, gaining recognition and widespread acceptance globally among developed and developing nations (Schiavo, 2000).

The core idea behind the Citizen's Charter was to establish clear targets for service providers across various public services, ranging from hospitals and prisons to local government offices and fire services (Mullen, 2006). Prime Minister John Major emphasised that the charter program sought improved ways of translating financial investments into enhanced services (James et al., 2005; Kavanagh, 2009). The concept shifted the focus of client/public service from the government bureaucracy to ordinary citizens, empowering them with a more direct role.

As defined by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), the Citizens' Charter represents an understanding between ordinary citizens and public service providers. This agreement outlines the quantity and quality of public services which citizens can expect in exchange for their taxes or fees. The primary objective in designing the Citizen's Charter is to make public service provision more customer-centric and less producer-driven, aligning with the vision of being more people-oriented (Public Affairs Centre, 2007).

Citizen Charters are recognised as powerful tools for elevating standards of public service, enhancing accountability and transparency in service delivery, and reinforcing democratic principles while empowering citizens (Gavin, Drewry, 2005). Governments adopt citizens' charters to ensure better services, enhance consumer satisfaction, foster strong relationships with citizens, and promote a more people-oriented approach (Handbook, Citizens' Charter, 2008). In essence, a Citizen's Charter embodies the mutual understanding between citizens and service providers regarding the nature of services the latter is obligated to provide (Lo Schiavo, 1999). The fundamental idea is to establish quality standards, measure performance against them, and improve standards through the pressure users can exert on service providers, facilitated by openness and information on standards and actual quality levels.

**Impact of Citizen Charter on Service Delivery-** Hood and Dixon (2015) underscore in their research the dual functionality of citizen charters, highlighting their role in informing citizens about their rights and holding public agencies accountable for service delivery. Positioned as a pivotal tool for achieving citizen-centric governance, the Citizens' Charter delivers quality services while fostering increased responsibility and responsiveness among civil servants. This document is founded on mutual trust between organisations and citizens, embodying fundamental principles such as access, courtesy, information, openness, transparency, redress, and value for money (Garg, 2014, pp. 236–237).

Furthermore, Citizens' Charters play a crucial role in minimising opportunities for corruption by enhancing transparency and educating citizens about their rights, as emphasised by Post and Agarwal (2011, p. 2). The potential benefits extend to fostering greater public satisfaction, enhancing accountability, monitoring effectiveness, increasing transparency, improving overall performance, reducing corruption opportunities, creating a more professional and client-responsive environment, and elevating the quality of service delivery (Post & Agarwal, 2011, p. 1). The comprehensive impact of citizens' charters thus encompasses not only the empowerment of citizens but also the enhancement of governance effectiveness and service quality.

**Challenges in the Implementation of Citizen Charter in Public Organizations-** Despite their potential advantages, Citizen Charters encounter several challenges, as highlighted by scholars like Peters (1998) and Joshi (2013). These challenges include insufficient awareness, ineffective enforcement mechanisms, and resistance from bureaucratic entities. Critics, including Peters and Pierre (2004), argue that Citizen Charters may risk becoming symbolic gestures lacking genuine commitment to organisational change within public institutions.

A significant concern raised by the IIPA's Report on Citizen Charter in India (2008, p. 11-12) is the inadequate communication of the organisational 'vision' in most reviewed Charters, with approximately 60% lacking this crucial element. Similarly, the 'mission' articulation was absent in almost 40% of the reviewed Charters. Service standards and timelines, vital components of Citizen Charters, were neglected in a substantial portion of the organisations under review. Approximately 43% of the Charters did not mention service delivery standards, and around 38% lacked service quality standards. Furthermore, almost 41% of the Charters failed to specify any timeframe for addressing public grievances. These deficiencies underscore the need for improvement in the comprehensiveness and communication of Citizen Charters to ensure their effectiveness in promoting accountability and service quality within public organisations.

**Suggestions to Improve Implementation of Citizen's Charter-** A multifaceted strategy is imperative to improve the implementation of Citizen Charters in public organisations. First and foremost, extensive public awareness campaigns need to be initiated to enlighten citizens about their rights and the advantages offered by the Citizen Charter. This outreach should employ diverse communication channels, including social media, community events, and traditional media (Linders, 2012).

Equally crucial are capacity-building and training programs for public service providers, ensuring a profound understanding and strict adherence to the principles outlined in the Citizen Charter. Introducing a systematic feedback mechanism facilitated through technology empowers citizens to provide real-time feedback on service quality and adherence to the Charter. Integrating technology, mainly through e-governance platforms, can enhance accessibility and interactivity, enabling efficient monitoring and evaluation, as emphasised by Moon (2019, p. 132-134).

Establishing citizen committees or forums overseeing Charter adherence is recommended to promote citizen engagement. Regular audits, leadership commitment, and periodic reviews that update and enhance Citizen Charters based on feedback and evolving needs are integral elements of a successful implementation strategy, as noted in the (2nd ARC, 4th Report p. 167). Lastly, leveraging social media platforms for communication and updates can further amplify the overall effectiveness of Citizen Charters. These measures collectively enable governments and public service organisations to establish a more responsive, accountable, and citizen-centric governance framework.

**Conclusion-** Every organisation has formulated Citizens' Charter to make the service provider aware of their duties and responsibilities for providing services to the citizens within a reasonable time frame. Citizens' Charter addressed the challenge of service delivery and citizen-centric administration. The literature on citizen charters reflects a multifaceted exploration of their origins, objectives, impact, and challenges. While considerable progress has been made in understanding their potential benefits, ongoing research is essential

to address emerging challenges and leverage new technologies for more responsive and accountable governance.

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