

**WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com**

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

[ask@wrapexams.com](mailto:ask@wrapexams.com) · +91 85951 84903 · [wrapexams.com](https://wrapexams.com)

Q2(a)

## **Success of contemporary democracies lies in the State limiting its own power. Explain**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 1 · 20 marks · Political Theory

Political Theory: meaning and approaches.

### **Core demand of the question**

- Success of contemporary democracies lies in the State limiting its own power. Explain. (20 marks)

### **Revision summary**

Democratic success is majority rule under rules that bind the state itself.

**Locke's** trust, **Mill's** liberty, and **Dahl's** polyarchy name those limits in theory.

India institutionalises them in Part III, **Articles 32 and 226**, federal distribution, and Kesavananda's basic structure.

The Emergency showed that elections without those limits do not preserve democracy.

Limitation targets arbitrary power, not the state's lawful capacity to tax, defend, and provide welfare.

### **Introduction**

Contemporary democracy is not only majority election. It is majority election inside rules that bind the state itself. The claim is that those democracies last when public power is legally limited, contestable, and removable, not when the state can do anything a winning coalition wants.

### **Body**

#### **What limitation means**

- **Locke** treated government as a trust for life, liberty, and estate, not as **Hobbes's** unlimited sword once authorised.
- **J. S. Mill** required representative government plus liberty of thought, so that the state cannot close discussion.
- **Robert Dahl** defined polyarchy by inclusive contestation: elections, opposition, and associational freedom, which are limits on monopoly.
- **Constitutionalism writes those limits:** a higher law, an independent court, a fixed term, and a public budget.
- Limitation is of arbitrary power. It is not a claim that the state must be weak in capacity to tax, defend, or run welfare.

#### **How contemporary democracies institutionalise the limit**

- A written or conventional constitution separates offices so that the same person does not make, execute, and judge the law in one act.
- Fundamental rights, in India Part III, and writs under **Articles 32 and 226**, let persons sue the state.
- **Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)** held that Parliament cannot destroy the Constitution's basic structure, which is a limit on the amending state itself.
- Independent election authorities, a free press, and opposition parties make removal of rulers possible without civil war.
- Federal distribution, as in **Articles 245 to 263**, and local bodies after the **73rd and 74th Amendments**, split power so that one centre does not hold every function.

### Why success depends on this

- Unchecked executive power produces emergency rule, as in 1975-77, which showed that elections alone do not keep a democracy if the state can suspend the conditions of opposition.
- **Foucault's** disciplinary power shows that limitation must reach police, prison, and surveillance practice, not only the statute book.
- **Easton's** systems language still applies: support collapses when outputs are experienced as predation rather than as authoritative allocation under rules.
- **Comparative failure of electoral autocracies shows the same:** ballots without limits on the incumbent are not a successful democracy.

### What the statement does not say

- A developmental or welfare state can be strong in resources and still limited in procedure, which is **Rawls's** well-ordered society rather than a night-watchman minimum.
- Communitarian writers such as **Sandel** and **Walzer** warn that a state limited only for unencumbered individuals may ignore social goods; that is a debate about the content of limits, not a licence for unlimited power.
- **Granville Austin** described the Indian Constitution as a seamless web of democracy, social revolution, and unity; each strand requires a state that can act and a state that can be refused.
- Success therefore lies in self-limitation as law, not in the disappearance of public power.

### Flow diagram

Democratic success -> State limits itself  
 State limits itself -> Rights and writs  
 State limits itself -> Contestation Dahl  
 State limits itself -> Basic structure  
 State limits itself -> Federal and local split

### Conclusion

Contemporary democracies succeed when the state binds its own power by rights, contestation, federal splits, and higher-law review. **Locke**, Mill, and Dahl state the theory. Indian **Articles 32 and 226** and **Kesavananda** state the practice. Capacity for welfare is compatible with that limit; arbitrary concentration is not.

### Facts & figures

**Articles 32 and 226**

Writ jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and High Courts against the state for enforcement of rights and for other purposes.

**Kesavananda Bharati (1973)**

Held that the amending power cannot destroy the Constitution's basic structure.

**Dahl's polyarchy**

A regime of inclusive contestation: elections, opposition, and freedom of association.

**Emergency, 1975-77**

Internal emergency under **Article 352**; later 44th Amendment tightened conditions, a lesson in unlimited executive power.

**73rd and 74th Amendments**

Constitutional third tier that splits functions away from a single state centre.

---

WRAP Exams · Write. Read. Analyse. Practice. · <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/psir-gs-1/2023/success-of-contemporary-democracies-lies-in-the-state-limiting-its-own-power-explain/> · [ask@wrapexams.com](mailto:ask@wrapexams.com) · [wrapexams.com](https://wrapexams.com)