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Q1(a)

Behavioral approach to Political Science.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 1 · 10 marks · Political Theory

Political Theory: meaning and approaches.

Core demand of the question

- Define the behavioural approach to political science (10 marks)
- Show its units, method, and the behavioural revolution
- Name **Easton**, **Dahl**, Almond, and Verba
- State post-behavioural limits

Revision summary

The behavioural approach studies observable political behaviour, attitudes, and systems rather than constitutions alone.

Easton defined politics as the authoritative allocation of values in a system of demand, support, and output.

Dahl tested power through actual decisions; Almond and Verba linked democracy to **civic culture**.

The method is empirical, comparative, and often quantitative.

Post-behavioural and institutional critics restored justice, the state, and rules that surveys cannot invent.

Introduction

The behavioural approach studies politics through observable acts, attitudes, and regularities rather than through the wording of constitutions alone. It asks how people vote, demand, support, and obey. **David Easton** and **Robert Dahl** made this the mid-twentieth-century programme of political science.

Body**What it studies**

Behaviouralists take the unit of analysis as behaviour that can be described and, where possible, measured: voting, party identification, elite decision, and civic attitude. **Easton** defined politics as the authoritative allocation of values and pictured a political system with inputs of demand and support and outputs of decisions. **Dahl** studied who actually prevails in community decisions, which is a behavioural test of power. **Gabriel Almond** and **Sidney Verba** linked stable democracy to a **civic culture** of attitudes, not only to a written constitution.

The method is empirical, comparative, and often quantitative. Concepts should be operationalised. The Chicago school and **Charles Merriam** prepared the ground. The claim

was that political science could accumulate findings across countries instead of restating legal forms.

Limits

Critics said the approach evacuated justice, the state, and historical structure. Easton's own post-behavioural turn after 1969 asked for relevance. New institutionalists later showed that similar attitudes produce different outcomes under different rules. The approach remains necessary for what citizens and elites actually do. It is not a complete theory of right or of constitutional design.

Flow diagram

Behavioural approach -> Observable acts and attitudes

Behavioural approach -> Easton system

Behavioural approach -> Dahl decisions

Behavioural approach -> Civic culture

Behavioural approach -> Post-behavioural limits

Conclusion

The behavioural approach made political science a study of observable political conduct, systems, and attitudes. Easton, Dahl, Almond, and Verba set its core. It must sit beside institutions and normative theory, because measurement does not by itself say which allocation of values is just.

Facts & figures

Easton

Politics as the authoritative allocation of values; the political system as inputs of demand and support with outputs of decisions.

Dahl

Community studies asked who prevails in key decisions, a behavioural test of the claim that a closed elite always rules.

Civic culture

Almond and Verba treated a mix of participant, subject, and parochial attitudes as a condition of stable democracy.