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Q4(a)

Legitimacy adds positive value to political authority and obligation. Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 1 · 20 marks · Concept of power, hegemony, ideology and legitimacy.

Concept of power, hegemony, ideology and legitimacy.

Core demand of the question

- Define legitimacy, authority, and political obligation (20 marks)
- Show how legitimacy adds positive value rather than mere survival of rule
- Discuss with **Weber**, **Locke**, Habermas, and **Beetham**
- Use democratic and authoritarian illustrations

Revision summary

Authority is recognised command; obligation is the reason to obey; legitimacy is the rightfulness that joins them.

Weber's traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational types explain why people experience rule as more than force.

Locke grounds obligation in consent and trust; Habermas in public reason; **Beetham** in legality, justifiability, and expressed consent.

Legitimacy adds positive value by making rule compatible with dignity and by making obedience civic rather than merely prudent.

Emergency politics and basic-structure judicial review illustrate the loss and the institutional claim of that value.

Introduction

Political authority is the recognised right to issue binding commands. Political obligation is the citizen's reason to obey those commands as more than fear of punishment. **Legitimacy** is the quality that makes authority and obligation rightful. The statement that legitimacy adds positive value is correct: it turns power into authority and habit into duty.

Body

Distinctions

Power can exist as force. **Dahl**'s A-over-B relation may rest on a gun. Authority exists when B takes A's command as entitled. Obligation exists when B has a moral or civic reason to comply. **Max Weber** made legitimacy the sociological hinge: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational types explain why obedience is experienced as rightful. Without some such belief, rule is occupation.

- **Positive value means this:** legitimacy does not only help a regime last. It makes rule compatible with dignity. **Locke's** trust and consent give obligation a moral source; when the trust breaks, obligation lapses and revolution becomes thinkable. **Habermas adds that in modernity, legitimacy should be discursively generated: law that could meet the agreement of those affected.** **David Beetham** specifies legality, justifiability in terms of shared beliefs, and expressed consent.

How the value is added

A tax paid because the budget was debated and the government can be dismissed is different from a levy extracted by terror, even if both fill a treasury. **Gramsci's** hegemony can manufacture a look of legitimacy; that is why indoctrination is a counterfeit of the same need. India's Emergency showed how quickly constitutional authority can be displaced, and how much the 1977 vote mattered as a restoration of consent.

Authoritarian regimes still seek coronation myths, development performance, or sacred kingship, which proves **Weber's** point: they too want positive value, not only fear. The democratic claim is that only revisable consent and public reason supply a legitimacy adequate to free persons. **Rawls's** well-ordered society is a picture of institutions that citizens can affirm.

Discussion

The statement should be accepted. Legitimacy adds positive value to authority by converting command into recognised office, and to obligation by converting obedience into civic duty. It also has a critical edge: if legitimacy is missing, authority is hollow and obligation is only prudence. Courts that invoke the basic structure in **Kesavananda Bharati** are claiming a legitimacy higher than a passing statute. That is positive value in institutional form.

Flow diagram

Power -> Authority
Legitimacy -> Authority
Legitimacy -> Obligation
Legitimacy -> Weber types
Legitimacy -> Habermas public reason
Fear alone -> Brittle domination

Conclusion

Legitimacy is what makes political authority rightful and political obligation more than fear. **Weber, Locke, Habermas, and Beetham** describe that added value in sociological, contractual, discursive, and empirical terms. Democracies institutionalise it as consent and law; dictatorships counterfeit it. In both cases the need for legitimacy shows that power alone is not yet political rule in the full sense.

Facts & figures

Weber

Legitimate domination is obedience experienced as rightful; the three pure types are traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational.

Beetham

Legitimacy requires conformity to rules, justifiability of rules by shared beliefs, and evidence of consent.

Emergency, 1975-77

Suspension of ordinary constitutional politics showed how authority without revisable consent loses democratic legitimacy.

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