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Q4(c)

Do you think that legitimacy acquired by consent or manufactured by indoctrination is an essential element in maintenance of political rule? Justify your answer with relevant examples

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 1 · 15 marks · Indian Nationalism

Indian Nationalism: Political Strategies of India's Freedom Struggle; Perspectives on Indian National Movement; Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Ambedkar, and the socialists.

Core demand of the question

- Define legitimacy as the rightfulness of rule, not only as survival of a regime
- Distinguish consent from indoctrination as sources of that rightfulness, or of its appearance
- Argue that some form of legitimacy is essential to durable political rule
- **Justify with examples:** liberal democracies, colonial and authoritarian indoctrination, totalitarian ideology

Revision summary

Legitimacy is the rightfulness of command, which **Weber** placed at the centre of political sociology.

Consent, in **Locke**, **Rousseau**, and democratic procedures, authorises rule; Habermas ties modern legitimacy to public reason.

Indoctrination manufactures belief through ideology, schooling, and propaganda, as **Arendt** showed in totalitarianism and as colonial missions also did.

Gramsci's hegemony and democratic propaganda show that manufactured consent can appear inside civil society, not only in dictatorships.

Some legitimacy is essential to maintain political rule; consent is the form that remains compatible with freedom, while indoctrination is a costly counterfeit.

Introduction

Political rule can rest on habit, fear, or bread. It lasts as political rule when those who obey take the ruler to have a right to command. That is **legitimacy**. **Max Weber** made it the central sociological question. The further question is whether legitimacy acquired by consent and legitimacy manufactured by indoctrination are equally 'essential'. They are both effective in different ways. Only consent, however, is essential to rule that can call itself political rather than merely successful domination.

Body

Consent

Locke and **Rousseau** treat consent as the moral source of authority. Elections and dissent are its modern forms. **Beetham** adds legality, justifiability, and expressed consent. **Habermas** ties modern legitimacy to public reason rather than to sacred kingship. India's Emergency showed how quickly consent yields to ordinance, and how much electoral restoration mattered.

Indoctrination

Indoctrination manufactures the appearance of right. **Plato's** noble lie, **Arendt's** totalitarian ideology, fascist and Stalinist cults, and colonial civilising missions all make domination look rightful. **Gramsci's** hegemony sits between a free yes and a gun. Market democracies can manufacture consent too, which is why the distinction is a matter of degree as well as of regime type.

Is legitimacy essential?

Yes. Pure coercion is brittle. **Weber's** traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational types all answer the need for a story of right. Indoctrination can hold a regime until the story cracks, as wartime mobilisation and personality cults show. Consent holds it with less terror and more capacity to correct error, which is the open society in another key. Some legitimacy is essential to political rule as more than occupation. Consent is the form adequate to a free people; indoctrination is a counterfeit that still proves the need for legitimacy rather than for fear alone.

Flow diagram

Legitimacy -> Consent
Legitimacy -> Indoctrination
Consent -> Durable free rule
Indoctrination -> Apparent rightfulness
Fear alone -> Brittle domination

Conclusion

Legitimacy is essential because no durable political order lives on fear alone. Consent authorises; indoctrination counterfeits. Both can keep a regime standing. Only consent, revisable in public, keeps rule political in the liberal and democratic sense. Examples from elections, Emergency, colonial missions, and totalitarian ideology all show the same need and the two opposed ways of meeting it.

Facts & figures

Weber's types

Traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational legitimacy are three ways obedience is experienced as rightful rather than as mere force.

Emergency, 1975-77

India's Emergency showed how quickly constitutional consent can be displaced, and how electoral restoration reopened a legitimacy claim.

Arendt

Totalitarian ideology and terror seek to make domination look like the law of nature or history, a limit case of manufactured legitimacy.

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