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Q1(d)**Legitimacy is always a 'social construct'.**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2026 · PSIR GS 1 · 10 marks · Political Theory

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Political Theory: meaning and approaches.

DEMAND

- Examine how legitimacy is fundamentally a social construct rather than a purely legal or coercive phenomenon

REVISION MAP

- Legitimacy is a social construct based on shared beliefs and norms, not just laws or force.
- It transforms raw political power into accepted, voluntary authority.
- **Max Weber** showed that obedience relies on people believing authority is valid-whether traditional, charismatic, or legal.
- Thinkers like Gramsci and Habermas proved that ruling systems build consent through culture and communication, not coercion.
- Collective perceptions of justice and representation determine whether rulers have the moral right to govern.
- As social values and rights consciousness evolve across history, the standards for a legitimate order change too.
- Legitimacy is an ongoing achievement that requires continuous alignment with societal expectations to survive.

INTRODUCTION

Legitimacy transforms raw power into accepted authority by embedding political domination within the normative framework of society. Far from being an objective legal attribute, it is an inter-subjective social construct sustained by shared beliefs and institutional practices.

BODY**Sociological Foundations**

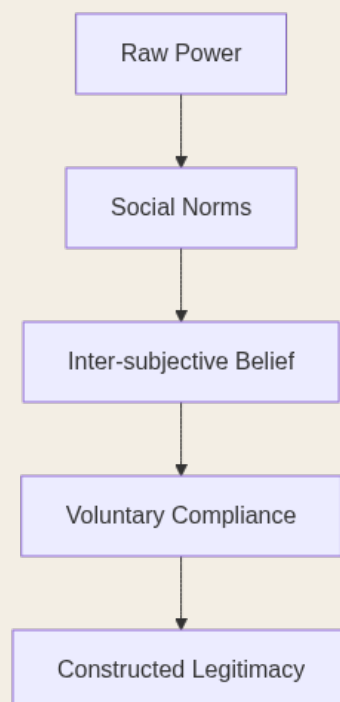
- **Weberian Authority:** **Max Weber** identified belief in validity-traditional, charismatic, or rational-legal-as the core pillar determining why commands are obeyed voluntarily.

- **Normative Consensus:** Antonio Gramsci and Habermas argued that hegemony and communicative action construct consent through cultural and social institutions rather than coercion.

Social Construction Dynamics

- **Inter-subjective Belief:** Legitimacy relies on the collective perception of justice, representation, and the moral right of rulers to exercise power.
- **Evolving Standards:** What constitutes a legitimate order shifts across historical epochs, reflecting changing social values, rights consciousness, and economic structures.

Flow diagram



CONCLUSION

Legitimacy remains an ongoing social achievement rather than a permanent institutional asset. Its survival depends on continuous alignment with evolving societal expectations and norms.

FACTS & FIGURES

Max Weber's Theory of Authority

Categorized legitimate domination into traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal ideal types.

Jürgen Habermas's Legitimacy Crisis

Highlighted how late capitalist societies face crises when administrative outputs fail to match socio-cultural expectations.

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