Q1(a)

Discuss the political economy approach to the comparative analysis of politics.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · PSIR GS 2 · 10 marks · Comparative Politics

Comparative Politics: Nature and major approaches; political economy and political sociology perspectives; limitations of the comparative method.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the political economy approach to the comparative analysis of politics
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Political economy joins the study of power with the study of wealth.

Marx and Wallerstein locate States in production and in a hierarchical world-economy.

Almond's functions describe roles; they do not explain ownership and dependence.

Alavi's overdeveloped State is a comparative PE thesis about post-colonial bureaucracy.

The method compares markets, classes, and external ties, not only constitutions.

Introduction

The political economy approach studies power and wealth together. Comparative politics is not only constitutions and votes. It is how States, classes, and markets shape one another across countries.

Body

What the approach claims

- Politics allocates scarce resources. Economics sets who can organise and who must obey.
- Karl Marx treated the mode of production as the deep structure of the State. Later writers kept the link without always keeping revolution.
- Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system places each State in a core, semi-periphery, or periphery. Comparison then starts from position in a capitalist world-economy, not from isolated national cultures.

How it differs from other maps

- Gabriel Almond's structural-functionalism compared roles and political culture. Political economy asks who owns, who taxes, and who is dependent on foreign capital.
- Behavioural surveys can miss class, land, oil, and aid. Dependency writers treated those as the real independent variables.
- **Hamza Alavi's overdeveloped post-colonial State is a political-economy claim:** the colonial bureaucracy and army stand over a weak indigenous bourgeoisie.

What it helps compare

- Why some democracies tax capital lightly, why militaries run industrial policy, and why welfare arrived late in labour-surplus societies.
- Why India, a large home market, and a small commodity exporter do not travel the same path even if both are labelled developing.

Flow diagram

Political economy -> Class and capital

Political economy -> Wallerstein world-system

Political economy -> State tax and force

Class and capital -> Comparative politics

Wallerstein world-system -> Comparative politics

State tax and force -> Comparative politics

Conclusion

The political economy approach compares States as organisers of production, class, and external dependence. Almond's functions still describe institutions. They do not replace class, capital, and world-system position as causes.

Facts & figures

Wallerstein
World-system analysis treats States as units inside a capitalist hierarchy, not as matched laboratories.

Almond
Structural-functional comparison of interest articulation, aggregation, and political culture, a rival to PE.

Hamza Alavi
The post-colonial State as overdeveloped relative to the indigenous bourgeoisie, a PE reading of Pakistan and similar cases.

Marx
Mode of production and class as the starting point for comparing political forms.