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Q2(b)

What are the distinctive features of the post-modern state in the advanced capitalist economies? Analyse.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · State in comparative perspective

State in comparative perspective: Characteristics and changing nature of the State in capitalist and socialist economies, and, advanced industrial and developing societies.

Core demand of the question

- Define the post-modern state against the modern Westphalian territorial state
- List distinctive features in advanced capitalist economies
- **Analyse:** pooling of sovereignty, regulation, identity, market, security residual

Revision summary

The post-modern state, especially in the EU core, pools sovereignty, lives by regulation and rights, and has often subcontracted hard security to NATO.

Advanced capitalist features include post-industrial production, welfare-regulatory capacity and networked authority with firms and courts.

Cooper's post-modern zone is an IR shorthand, not the end of the state.

Brexit, borders and rearmament show reversibility.

The type is a phase of the capitalist core, not a universal stage of history.

Introduction

The **modern state** in the Westphalian picture is territorial, sovereign and war-capable, with a clear inside and outside. The **post-modern state**, a term used in European international thought for **advanced capitalist** polities especially in the **European Union**, is a state that has **pooled** parts of that sovereignty, thickened regulation, and shifted legitimacy toward rights, markets and identity rather than toward mass conscription and border conquest. The question asks for distinctive features and for analysis, not for a claim that the state has vanished.

Body

Distinctive features

First, **pooled and legalised sovereignty**. EU members apply directly effective European law, share a single market, and in the eurozone share a currency without a full federal treasury. Borders inside Schengen are thin for people even when they remain real for migration politics. Second, the **regulatory and welfare state**: risk is managed through agencies, social insurance and consumer law more than through imperial tariffs. Third, **post-industrial capitalism**: finance, services and global production chains, which **Wallerstein** would still place in the core of the world-economy, reduce the old national factory as the sole material base. Fourth, **identity and rights politics**: gender, race, sexuality and multicultural claims

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become first-order, alongside class. Fifth, **networked security**: **NATO** and U.S. guarantees have allowed many West European states to under-provide national armies relative to a classical modern state, a bargain now under stress after Russia's war. Sixth, **porous authority**: firms, ratings agencies, Brussels, and courts share the stage with the cabinet, which is the domestic face of the transnational actors problem.

Robert Cooper's typology of pre-modern, modern and post-modern zones is the usual IR shortcut: the EU as a post-modern security community internally, still meeting a modern Russia and a pre-modern belt of state failure at the edges.

Analysis

These features are **real in Western Europe, Canada, Japan and parts of the Anglosphere**, and uneven in the United States, which is advanced capitalist but still a hard military sovereign. The post-modern state is not weak in surveillance or in tax capacity. It is weak in the classical sense of **autonomous war-making** when it has subcontracted security to an alliance.

Analysis must also note **reversibility**. **Brexit** showed that pooling can be politically rejected. Border fences, industrial policy and tariff talk in the 2020s show the modern territorial state returning inside post-modern economies. **Gramsci** would ask whether the historic bloc of embedded liberalism still produces consent. When consent thins, the post-modern state looks like a market without a nation, and populist parties demand a modern border again.

So the distinctive features are legal pooling, regulation, post-industrial core production, rights-based legitimacy and alliance security. They describe a **historical phase of the capitalist core**, not a destiny for every state.

Flow diagram

Modern Westphalian state -> Territory war sovereignty

Post-modern state -> Pooled law market rights

Post-modern state -> NATO and regulation

War and populism -.press. -> Post-modern state

Conclusion

In advanced capitalist economies the post-modern state is territorial still, but it shares law, money and market rules, and it has lived under alliance security. Those features are distinctive. They are under pressure from war, migration politics and industrial policy, which pull the modern state back into view.

Facts & figures

Single market and euro

Deep economic integration that a classical modern state would treat as core sovereign instruments.

Schengen

Internal free movement among members, with external border politics remaining explosive.

Cooper typology

Pre-modern, modern and post-modern zones used to contrast EU internal peace with external hard-power neighbours.

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