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Q6(b)

According to Mills, "Elites rule in institutional terms rather than psychological terms." Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- According to **Mills**, "Elites rule in institutional terms rather than psychological terms." Comment
- Keep the comment within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

- **Mills**: power elite rules via commanding institutions, not psychology.

Corporation, military, and political directorates interlock.

Weber and **Michels** support the office view.

Gramsci, Lukes, and feminist theory add consent and gender.

Bourdieu's habitus is socialised psyche, not **Mills**'s rejected mass mind.

- **Comment**: right as a method; incomplete as a full map of rule.

Introduction

C. Wright **Mills** argued that the American power elite rules because it commands the commanding institutions of corporation, military, and state. Psychology of "great men" or crowd moods does not explain that command. The sentence is a method rule: look at offices, not at souls.

Body

What **Mills** meant

- The Power Elite (1956) fused three institutional hierarchies. Interlocking directorates, careers, and social traffic make a coherent minority.
- **Pareto**'s residues and Le Bon's crowds are the psychological rivals he rejected as sufficient.
- Rule is the capacity of those institutions to set war, work, and welfare.

Comment: strength

- **Max Weber** already made office and party central. **Mills** specified a mid-century United States.
- It travels to India as IAS-corporate-party nexuses better than as a theory of national character.
- Robert **Michels**'s oligarchy is institutional, which supports **Mills**.

Comment: limits

- Gramsci's hegemony and Steven Lukes's third face add consent and preference-shaping that are not only boardrooms.
- **Feminist theory:** households and gendered institutions also rule, which Mills underplayed.
- Psychology is not zero. Selection into elites still uses habitus, after Pierre Bourdieu, which is socialised psyche, not Mills's target.

Verdict

- Right against great-man and mass-mind stories.
- Incomplete if institutions are read without ideology and gender.

Flow diagram

Corporation military state -> Elite rule
Great man crowd mind -> Insufficient
Mills -> Corporation military state
Hegemony gender -> Needed extras

Conclusion

- **Mills's sentence is sound:** elites rule through institutional command, not through a special psychology of leaders or masses. Comment: keep the institutional test; add hegemony, gender, and habitus so the office is not a hollow box. Pareto's circulation still occurs, but inside those institutions.

Facts & figures

Mills

The Power Elite: institutional fusion, not psychological types, explains rule.

Pareto

Circulation of elites with a more psychological residue theory that Mills set aside as sufficient cause.

Michels

Oligarchy as an organisational, hence institutional, outcome.

Weber

Legal-rational office as the modern form of domination.