

PSIR Power 50 – Day 1 Capsule + Practice Qs

Hello Aspirants,

Welcome to **Day 1** of your **PSIR Power 50** revision. In this concise capsule, you'll revisit every key concept and scholar's insight covered in our Foundation Course in the topic- **Political Theory**.

Revise the topic thoroughly, and if you are unable to recall any part of the summary content given below, refer to your class notes and handouts. If you are already confident with the topic, you can proceed directly to the practice questions and start writing.

Please note that UPSC has asked **8 ten-mark questions, 3 fifteen-mark questions, and 1 twenty-mark question** from this topic in last 12 years.

1. Why Politics?

- From Greek **polis** (city-state). Politics is “the art of the possible,” the craft of reconciling differences to reach *binding collective decisions*.
- Aristotle**: “Man is by nature a political animal.”
- Politics is power-laden—acquiring, retaining, exercising it. **Garner's** state-centric maxim—“Political science starts and ends with the state”—now competes with society-wide readings.

2. Political Theory vs Political Science

Axis	Political Theory	Political Science
Focus	Why / should? (conceptual)	What / how? (empirical)
Method	Abstract reflection	Observation, statistics
Scope	Timeless, universal (— Germino)	Context-bound generalisations
Bridge	Theory supplies the ideas, science tests them	

3. Political Philosophy, Theory, Ideology, Thought – Know the Splits

Category	Core Question	Scholars / Pointers
Political Philosophy	What ought to be? justice, liberty, equality	Plato, Aristotle, John Rawls (normative)
Political Theory	Explains political phenomena, may borrow from philosophy	Leo Strauss calls it the search for the “right & good order.”
Ideology	Programmatic, dogmatic defence of power	Karl Marx , liberalism, feminism...
Political Thought	Time- & place-bound communal ideas	Machiavelli , British idealists etc.

“Every political philosopher is a theorist, but not every theorist a philosopher.” — exam-worthy line.

4. Five-Stage evolution of Political Science

1. **Greek–Ethical** – **Aristotle** dubs it the “*master science*”; **Barker** calls it *architectonic*.
2. **Medieval–Theological** – **St Augustine**, **St Thomas Aquinas** fuse politics with salvation.
3. **Renaissance / Enlightenment** – **Machiavelli** separates power from morality; **Hobbes**, **Locke**, **Rousseau**, **Montesquieu** add social contract, rights, separation of powers.
4. **Behavioural Turn** – stats & surveys; **David Easton** wants politics “as it is, not as it ought.”
5. **Post-Behaviouralism** – Easton’s “*Credo of Relevance*” reunites values with data.

5. Approaches & Their Critics

Approach	One-liner	Champion	Classic Critique
Historical	“History is the root; PS the fruit.”	Sabine, Machiavelli, Laski	Over-traditional, state-centric
Sociological	Politics embedded in social structure	Catlin	Can downplay institutions
Philosophical	Purpose & morality of rule	Leo Strauss	Relativity of values (— Isaiah Berlin)
Empirical vs Normative	Facts vs ought	John Locke, Mill, Marx, Easton vs Plato, Aristotle, Rawls	Each calls the other incomplete

Jacobson warns against both *scientism* & *moralism*; balance is key.

6. Normative ↔ Empirical Debate (Rapid Grid)

Normative	Empirical
“Best possible prescription”	“Describe, explain, predict”
Plato – knowledge state	Locke – property & consent
Rawls – fairness	Easton – systems analysis

7. Textual vs Contextual Interpretation

- **Textual**: text as timeless artefact; risk = anachronism (think *virtù* vs *virtue*).
- **Contextual**: embed writings in economic-political milieu.
 - **C.B. Macpherson** reads **Locke** through emergent bourgeois lens.
 - **James Tully** situates Locke’s property theory amid dissenters’ rights.
- Critics ask: if every text is context-bound, can old ideas still guide today?

8. Key Quotes

- “Politics is the authoritative allocation of values.” — **Easton**
- “History is the best guide to politics.” — **Machiavelli**
- “Without science, theory is worthless ethical residue.” — paraphrasing **Jacobson**
- “Man is a political animal.” — **Aristotle**

9. Positivism → Behaviouralism: “Count what is, ignore what ought.”

Building-block	Quick take	Must-cite names
Positivism	Social science should mimic natural science; <i>value-free knowledge monopoly</i>	Auguste Comte (root), Logical Positivists
Behaviouralism	Systematic, empirical study of <i>individual & group behaviour</i>	Charles Merriam, Gabriel Almond, V.O. Key, Harold Lasswell, Herbert Tingsten
Seeds	Post-WW I; bloomed after WW II	Frank Kent encouraged statistics in politics

David Easton distilled *eight foundations*—**Regularities** · **Verification** · **Techniques** · **Quantification** · **Value-Neutrality** · **Systematization** · **Pure Science** · **Integration**.

10. Why Behaviouralism peaked – and cracked

Achievements

Precision, survey tools, comparative data; made political science look “scientific.”

Limitations

1. **Over-complication** – jargon > clarity.
2. **Reductionism** – numbers flatten nuance.
3. **Reality gap** – “ivory-tower” retreat (critique by **Leo Strauss**).
4. **Ethical vacuum** – values labelled *metaphysical*.
5. **Status-quo bias** – avoided big moral questions.

(Expect a 10-marker in O-AWFG T-1.)

11. Post-Behaviouralism – Easton’s Credo of Relevance

- **Trigger:** 1960s crises—war, poverty, civil rights.
- **Intellectual sparks:** **Thomas Kuhn** (paradigms) · **Karl Popper** (falsification).
- **Mantra:** “Substance before technique.” — **Easton, 1969 APSA Address**
- **Five watch-words:** **Action** · **Relevance** · **Social change** · **Values** · **Reality-connection**.

“To know is to bear responsibility for acting.” — **Easton**

Critiques

- **Philip Beardsley:** science vs relevance is a *false dichotomy*.
- Still leans on **systems theory** it once denounced (**Waldo:** “raving, rumbling structure without destiny”).

(Expect a 15-marker in ATS T-1)

12. Critical School: Behaviouralism = Status-quo Science?

Critic	Charge
Dante Germino	“Quantification without reflection” killed political theory.
Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer	<i>Instrumental rationality</i> props up capitalism.

Jürgen Habermas	Technology now colonises <i>lifeworld</i> ; Behaviouralism applauds.
Herbert Marcuse	Mass media creates <i>one-dimensional man</i> , dampening revolt.

Yet even critics admit Behaviouralism's *technique revolution* (see **Talcott Parsons**).
New topic?

13. Decline → Resurgence of Political Theory

Why it declined (per Easton)

Historicism · Moral relativism · Hyper-factualism · Science fetish.

*Mid-century verdict (**Alfred Cobban**): theory “played no role” in both capitalism & communism.

Why it bounced back

Catalyst	Thinker & Text
Experience as philosophy	Michael Oakeshott – <i>Experience and Its Modes</i>
Lost public realm	Hannah Arendt – <i>The Human Condition</i>
Return to classics	Leo Strauss
Justice re-imagined	John Rawls – <i>A Theory of Justice</i>
Democracy, property, class	C.B. Macpherson

Scholar Index –

Adorno · Alfred Cobban · Aristotle · Auguste Comte · Barker · Beardsley · Berlin · British Idealists (Bradley, Bosanquet) · Charles Merriam · C.B. Macpherson · Dante Germino · David Easton · Frank Kent · Gabriel Almond · Garner · Harold Lasswell · Hannah Arendt · Herbert Marcuse · Herbert Tingsten · Hobbes · Isaiah Berlin · J.S. Mill · James Tully · Jürgen Habermas · Karl Marx · Karl Popper · Leo Strauss · Locke · Logical Positivists · Laski · Machiavelli · Michael Oakeshott · Montesquieu · Philip Beardsley · Plato · Rousseau · Sabine · St Augustine · St Thomas Aquinas · Talcott Parsons · Thomas Kuhn · V.O. Key · Waldo (Dwight)

(Cohort 1 of O-AWFG & ATS programmes, starting **11 June**, will track these shifts through and my evaluation will be looking for the contextual mentioning of these scholars in your copies)

Practice Questions (Write before 4 p.m.)

1. Write on the Systems Approach. (UPSC 2022, 10 m)
2. ‘Credo of Relevance’ in post-behaviouralism advocates the importance of action science. Analyse. (UPSC 2023, 15 m)
3. Elucidate the meanings inherent in the term ‘political’ with appropriate illustrations. (UPSC 2024, 20 m)

✦ Model answers drop this evening on the Telegram channel:

<https://t.me/psirbyamitpratap> – keep notifications on.

A quick note on submissions of copies and mentorship



- **2025 Mains writers: Cohort 1 of O-AWFG** kicks off **11 June** and **ATS** on **15 June**. The above practice set will serve as your *revision tool* for Test 1, just **do not miss booking your mentorship sessions** for personalised feedback especially for starting tests. Come with your evaluated test copies.
- **2026 Mains writers** - keep uploading through your usual dashboard—today's capsule aligns with your Week 1.
- Alternate between **mini-tests (O-AWFG)** and **full mocks (ATS)** has been designed to tackle speed, content depth, and structured revision—line-by-line evaluation pinpoints your weaknesses and errors. Follow your **PSIR O-AWFG & ATS** schedule and use the model answers **to enrich your content**, as rankers recommended based on their own success.

Happy writing—see you tomorrow with Day 2!

—Amit Pratap Singh & Team

