

PSIR Power 50 – Day 7 Capsule: Power + Practice Qs

Hello Aspirants

Here, I give you the summarised version of everything that I taught you in this topic in PSIR Optional Foundation classes. If you are not able to recall the concept or scholar, then go back to class notes and handouts.

UPSC has asked **4 ten-mark questions, 5 fifteen-mark questions, and 2 twenty-mark question** from this topic in last 12 years.

1. Concept & Definitions

- **Power** = capacity to effect outcomes in social interaction (**Nivedita Menon**).
- **Robert A. Dahl**: “A has power over B when A gets B to do what B would not otherwise do.” → implies power is individual *and* domination—both later disputed.

2. Contemporary Re-frames

- **Hannah Arendt**: power is “**power to**”—an enabling force that appears when people act collectively.
- **Talcott Parsons**: political power, like money, circulates as a **facilitative currency** securing obligations.
- Debate shifts from individual domination to collective capacity & structural influence.

3. Steven Lukes – Three Dimensions

1. **Decision-making**: overt contest of interests.
2. **Agenda-setting**: exclusion of issues from debate.
3. **Thought control**: shaping perceptions and preferences.

4. Competing Macro-Perspectives

- **Liberal**: sovereignty of the people; state serves public interest.
- **Marxist**: bourgeois domination over proletariat.
- **Pluralist (Robert Dahl)**: democracy as **polyarchy**—multiple groups share influence.
- **Elitist**: power always concentrated in a minority.

5. Classic Elite Theorists

Scholar & Work	Core Thesis	Key Terms
Vilfredo Pareto – <i>Mind and Society</i>	Circulation of Elites : society oscillates between “ foxes ” (cunning, commercial) and “ lions ” (force, hierarchy).	Foxes · Lions
Gaetano Mosca – <i>The Ruling Class</i> (1896)	Oligarchy is universal; complexity breeds a specialized governing minority.	Inevitability · Elite rotation
Robert Michels – <i>Political Parties</i> (1911)	Iron Law of Oligarchy : growth → bureaucracy → leadership monopoly, even in democracies.	Bureaucratization
Charles Wright Mills – <i>The Power Elite</i> (1956)	U.S. ruled by interlocking political-military-corporate elite; public democracy becomes managed democracy .	Power elite · Managed democracy

6. Ideology, Hegemony & Legitimacy Links

- Elite dominance persists by manufacturing **legitimacy** (norm acceptance) and **hegemony** (consent via ideas, per later neo-Gramscian readings).

- Media, law, and institutions help entrench elite narratives, rendering domination less visible.

7. Pluralist Theory of Power – Robert A. Dahl

- Who Governs?** (New Haven study): U.S. not an oligarchy; power **dispersed among competing interest groups**.
- Polyarchy**: high participation + contestation; multiple centres of influence.
- Deformed polyarchy** (with **Charles E. Lindblom**): corporate actors tilt the field—power *unevenly* dispersed.

8. Gramscian Lens –

- Power sustained by **hegemony** (not just domination and coercion but also consent) in civil society; ideology absorbs shocks, keeps elite dominance intact.

9. Feminist Re-readings of Power

Scholar	Core Insight
Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf	Early critique of gendered power.
Simone de Beauvoir – <i>The Second Sex</i>	Women constructed as “ the Other ”.
bell hooks	Patriarchy harms men and women; intersection with race/class.
Carole Pateman – <i>The Sexual Contract</i>	Social contract theory masks women’s exclusion.
Gayle Rubin – <i>The Traffic in Women</i>	Sexuality commodified in patriarchal exchange.
Kimberlé Crenshaw	Intersectionality : overlapping oppressions.
Sandra Harding	Standpoint theory ; knowledge production embeds patriarchy.

10. Authority, Legitimacy & Types – Max Weber

- Legitimate power = authority** (consented power).
- Traditional** (custom), **Charismatic** (personal magnetism), **Rational-legal** (rule-bound bureaucracy).
- De jure** vs **de facto** authority: legal right vs actual control (e.g., military coup).

11. Post-Modern Conception – Michel Foucault

- From state-centred repression to **productive, networked power**.
- Power/Knowledge** nexus creates *regimes of truth*.
- Discursive formations** shift meanings over eras (e.g., madness).
- Bio-power**: governance of life (health, reproduction, death).
- Governmentality**: self-regulation through normalized norms.

12. Panopticon & Institutions

- Borrowing **Jeremy Bentham’s** design, Foucault shows prisons, schools, hospitals as sites of **self-surveillance**; power omnipresent yet always facing potential **resistance**.

Scholars Index:

Hannah Arendt | Jeremy Bentham | Simone de Beauvoir | Kimberlé Crenshaw | Robert

A. Dahl | Michel Foucault | Antonio Gramsci | Sandra Harding | bell hooks | Charles E. Lindblom | Steven Lukes | Nivedita Menon | Robert Michels | Charles Wright Mills | Gaetano Mosca | Talcott Parsons | Carole Pateman | Vilfredo Pareto | Gayle Rubin | Max Weber | Mary Wollstonecraft | Virginia Woolf

(Cohort 1 of PSIR 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.)

Question 1. Write on the Bases of Power. [2022 / 10 m]

Question 2. Discuss the 'crisis of legitimacy' in capitalist societies. (Habermas). [2015/20m]

Question 3. - Examine the liberal theory of State in contemporary politics. (UPSC 2022, 20 m)

📌 Model answers drop this evening on the Telegram channel:
<https://t.me/psirbyamitpratap> – keep notifications on.

See you tomorrow on Day 8. Keep practicing!

—Amit Pratap Singh & Team

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. This topic is in test 4 of PSIR-AWFG and ATS 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.