

PYQ Vault

560

questions

50

days

10

years of PYQs

DAY 28

State in Comparative Perspective · 5 questions

Every question carries a *Flow Snapshot* — and a handwritten model answer on the channel. No PYQ will be unfamiliar.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2015 · 10 marks

Do you subscribe to the view that the modern constructs of the state and politics are pre-eminently Euro-Centric and not indigenous and appropriate for the analysis of non-western societies?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 qualified yes → modern state a European, Westphalian creation → imported onto a pre-modern base

R2 state and politics as Western categories → misfire outside the West → but reworked, not junked

Body flow

European state: sovereignty, monopoly of violence, Westphalia → imported institution / **Alavi's** overdeveloped state, no indigenous bourgeoisie → modernization theory charged with Eurocentrism → borrowed categories fail locally / **Riggs's** prismatic society: form vs practice → West on rule of law, developing societies on identity → **Pye's** communal, loyalty-based process → **Kothari**: caste as the axis of mobilisation

Counter-view

the same scholarship reworks the categories rather than discarding them → **Chandhoke** against universal models, for the specificity of colonial history → vocabulary can travel once adjusted

Conclusion routes

R1 Euro-centric in origin, misleading if applied mechanically

R2 serviceable once indigenised, not to be abandoned

The modern state is a European creation i.e. territorial, sovereign, and defined by its monopoly over legitimate violence, born of the Westphalian settlement. Carried into post-colonial societies, it arrives as an imported institution set atop a pre-modern base.

Hamza Alavi calls that in overdeveloped state a colonial bureaucratic - military apparatus that grew, unlike in the West, without an indigenous bourgeoisie beneath it. The modernization theories applied to these societies were themselves later criticised for Eurocentrism.

F.W. Riggs's prismatic society shows the gap between formal rules and actual practice, where tradition and modernity coexist.

Politics repeats the pattern i.e. where the West runs on the rule of law, developing societies run on identity. Lucian Pye finds a communal, loyalty-based process.

Rajni Kothari shows caste as the axis of Indian mobilisation.

Neera Chandhoke rejects universal models and insists on the specificity of each colonial history.

The constructs are therefore Euro-Centric in origin & misleading when applied mechanically, but serviceable once indigenised, not abandoned.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 10 marks

Describe the changing nature of the State in the developing societies in the context of inclusive growth in the 21st century.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 developing State = apparatus inherited from colonial rule → early form concentrated growth, ill-suited to inclusion

R2 nature has since shifted → from a structure that monopolised development → to one built for inclusive growth

Body flow

Myrdal's soft state: no social discipline, spares the rich → non-inclusive → **Riggs's** prismatic society / bazaar-canteen favours the wealthy, family-community monopolise development → **Alavi's** overdeveloped state atop a transitional socio-economic base → shift from state-led development → market reforms (India's mixed-market model; China's capitalist economy under a socialist polity) → globalization aggravates inequality (99% vs 1%, social unrest) → 21st-century inclusion turn: participative culture, ICT / JAM-Jan Dhan; RTI strengthens the political arena; welfare + affirmative action → structural change → developmental-state debate: inclusive growth rests on state capacity to penetrate society (East Asia)

Counter-view

market-led globalization deepened inequality; the soft / overdeveloped state's incapacity to discipline elites limits how far the inclusion turn can reach

Conclusion routes

R1 nature moved from a soft, elite-shielding apparatus → an active enabler of inclusion

R2 the inclusion turn is real but conditional → holds only where the State can discipline the powerful / build developmental capacity

The state in developing societies began as an apparatus inherited from colonial rule, ill-suited to inclusive growth. Its nature has shifted from a structure that concentrated development in a few hands toward one built for inclusion.

Gunnar Myrdal's soft state lacked the capacity to impose social discipline and was reluctant to enforce laws against the rich, so growth stayed non-inclusive. F.W. Riggs's prismatic society showed that in its bazaar-canteen economy bargaining power favoured the wealthy and family & community influence monopolised development. Hamza Alavi's overdeveloped state sat atop a socio-economic base still in transition.

The State then moved from state-led development to market reforms. For example, India's mixed market model, China's capitalist economy under a socialist polity. But globalization aggravated inequality, producing the 99% versus 1% effect & social unrest.

The 21st century marks a turn toward inclusion. A participative culture and ICT-driven delivery, such as Jan Dhan with the JAM trinity, advance economic inclusion. The developmental-state debate ties inclusive growth to the State's capacity to penetrate society, as East Asia showed.

The developing State has therefore moved from a soft apparatus shielding elites to an active enabler of inclusion, its success resting on the capacity to discipline the powerful.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 20 marks

“The post-colonial state was thought of an entity that stood outside and above society as an autonomous agency.” Explain.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 state an imported institution, not organic growth → read as standing outside / above society, self-directing → but appearance only; autonomy relative
R2 received view: post-colonial state autonomous, above society → claim to be tested → thesis: real as appearance, relative in fact

Body flow

weak civil society → state as transformation engine, looms above → **Alavi's overdeveloped state**: colonial-built over-powerful apparatus, developed machinery on a transitional base → imported on pre-modern society = “outside” → mediates among indigenous bourgeoisie, landed classes, metropolitan capital → captured by none = relative autonomy = “above” → **Poulantzas**: class equilibrium, long-term dominant-class interests

Counter-view

autonomy never absolute → **Shivji & Saul**: bureaucracy itself a dominant class → state a class instrument *within* society, not above → external limit: neo-colonialism + **Wallerstein's** world-systems → complete autonomy denied

Conclusion routes

R1 image = appearance, not full reality → autonomy real but relative (colonial inheritance + class balance)
R2 genuine autonomy needs self-reliant development → India the exception: democracy with development

In post-colonial societies the modern state was not an organic growth but an institution imported from colonial rule. Hence it was viewed as a self-directing agency, not an expression of the forces beneath it.

At independence, with civil society still weak, the state stepped in as the engine of transformation, looming above society rather than resting on it. Hamza Alavi argued that many such states inherited an excessively powerful bureaucratic-military apparatus built for colonial rather than popular needs.

A fully developed state machinery atop a socio-economic base still in transition. Unlike the West, where the state grew with an indigenous bourgeoisie, it was imposed on a pre-modern society, and stood outside it. No single propertied group controlled the state. It mediated among the indigenous bourgeoisie, the landed classes and metropolitan capital and captured by none, kept a relative autonomy.

Nicos Poulantzas argues the state secures class equilibrium while retaining relative autonomy and serving the long-term interests of the dominant classes. But the autonomy was never absolute. Issa Shivji and John Saul showed the bureaucracy could itself harden into a dominant class tied to transnational capital. The state then stands not above society but as a class instrument within it.

Externally, neo-colonial dependence and Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory denied complete autonomy. A state bound to the core cannot stand free of it.

Its autonomy was real but relative, a product of colonial inheritance and class balance rather than freedom from society. Genuine autonomy needs self-reliant development. India remains the exception that held democracy and development together.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 10 marks

What are the difficulties faced by a political theorist in comparing the States?

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 comparison assumes like units on a common scale → States are not like units → theorist meets variety, context, bias

R2 States differ in kind, not just degree → any yardstick carries the theorist's own assumptions

Body flow

wide variation, democracies to authoritarian → **Lijphart**, *Patterns of Democracy* → universal criterion elusive → unique cultural / historical context → developed grew organically vs developing inherited imposed colonial institutions + patronage → developmental gap (US vs India) breaks like-for-like → indicator choice (GDP, human-rights) drives result → researcher bias, tilt toward Western models → dynamism, analyses date fast → endogeneity + uneven data

Counter-view

interpretation itself contested → **Fukuyama** "End of History" vs **Huntington** "Clash of Civilizations" → same world, opposite readings

Conclusion routes

R1 comparison possible but never neutral → chosen measure shapes the verdict

R2 theorist must stay self-aware → name the yardstick and its bias rather than claim neutrality

Comparison assumes that states are like units measured against a common standard. The political theorist who compares them faces problems of variety, context and bias that no neutral yardstick settles.

Political systems run from stable democracies to authoritarian regimes, and as Arend Lijphart shows in *Patterns of Democracy*, even democracies differ sharply in design. A universal measure of comparison stays elusive.

Each state carries its own cultural and historical context. Developed states grew organically over centuries, while many developing ones inherited institutions imposed by colonial rule, with patronage running top to bottom.

The choice of indicators, GDP or human-rights records, drives the result and selection reflects the researcher's bias, often toward Western models.

Political landscapes shift with elections and world events, so analyses date fast. Isolating variables, fixing cause and finding comparable data all remain hard.

Interpretation is contested too. Francis Fukuyama's "End of History" and Samuel P. Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" read the same world in opposite ways.

Comparison stays possible, but never neutral. The measure a theorist chooses shapes the verdict reached.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 15 marks

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

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 centralised modern state → decentralised, flexible, fragmented order → authority dispersed + reshaped, not removed
R2 drivers: globalization + technology + cultural pluralism → state commands less, coordinates more

Body flow

sovereignty erodes (EU, WTO, MNC networks) → **Held**: cosmopolitan democracy + multilevel governance (authority moves up / out) → **Jessop**: hollowed-out state, functions outsourced to firms / NGOs / local govt via privatisation-deregulation-PPP (authority moves down) → identity fragments: **Foucault** + **Butler** (race, gender, sexuality) → **Fraser**: redistribution balanced with recognition → power changes form: **Deleuze** society of control (surveillance + data as rule) → governance provisional: **Bauman** liquid modernity (crisis management over long-term planning)

Counter-view

“state retreats / loses relevance under globalization” reading ↔ state persists, reshaped as coordinator

Conclusion routes

R1 state = less a central authority, more a mediator among globalization, identity, technology
R2 its power survives only by managing actors it can no longer command alone

In the advanced capitalist economies, the centralised modern state has given way to a decentralised, flexible and fragmented order, shaped by globalization, technology and cultural pluralism.

Its distinctive feature is not the disappearance of the state but dispersal and reshaping of its authority i.e. outward, downward and inward so that it commands less and coordinates more. States now sit inside the EU, the WTO and dense networks of multinational firms, so decisions once taken at home are shared across borders.

David Held analyses this through cosmopolitan democracy & multi level governance, where authority moves above the nation. Bob Jessop describes hollowed-out state, one that keeps its formal shell while outsourcing functions to private firms, NGOs and local government through privatisation, deregulation and public-private partnerships.

Michel Foucault and Judith Butler highlight plural identities of race, gender and sexuality, while Nancy Fraser gives the state a new task i.e. balancing redistribution with recognition.

Gilles Deleuze points to a society of control, where constant digital surveillance and the collection of personal data become new instruments of rule. Governance also turns provisional: in Zygmunt Bauman's liquid modernity, short-term crisis management steadily replaces long-term planning.

The post-modern state works less as a central authority and more as a mediator, coordinating the forces of globalization, the claims of identity and the reach of technology. Its power survives, but only by managing actors it can no longer direct on its own.

PYQ VAULT · DAY 28 · STATE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

All 5 questions — PDF + handwritten answers

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