

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 20 marks

Provide a comparative analysis of behavioural and institutional approach to the study of political theory.

FLOW SNAPSHOT

how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1: two stages — institutional (formal structures) vs behavioural (actual conduct). R2: structure vs behaviour — each one face, neither complete.

Body flow

Institutional: **Van Dyke's** definition → organs + constitution → Aristotle, **Bryce** → behavioural reaction: **Merriam** → **Easton** "actual human being to the centre" → contrast: macro-formal vs micro-scientific; state vs individual.

Counter-view

Each incomplete — institutionalism too descriptive (weak for developing societies); behaviouralism neglects values (**Strauss**); technique over theory (**Parsons**).

Conclusion routes

R1: complementary, not rival — institution = skeleton, behaviour = life within. R2: form + conduct = the complete study.

The institutional & behavioural approaches mark two stages in the study of politics, one traditional, one contemporary. The institutional approach studies the formal structures of government; the behavioural approach studies the actual conduct of political actors.

Van Dyke defines an institution as "any persistent system of activities & expectations, or any stable pattern of group behaviour." Close to the legal approach, the institutional view studies the legislature, executive, judiciary and constitution, descending from Aristotle's classification of governments & James Bryce's studies. Its strength is a clear map of formal structures.

Behaviouralism arose as a reaction against this formalism. Graham Wallas, Arthur Bentley & Charles Merriam turned attention to how people actually behave. David Easton sought "to elevate the actual human being to the centre of attention."

The contrast is sharp, Institutionalism is descriptive & macro-formal, its unit the state & constitution; behaviouralism is scientific and micro-level, its unit the individual and group. One sees politics as institutional authority, the other as observable behaviour.

Neither is sufficient alone. Institutionalism is too descriptive, ignoring behaviour and social & economic forces, which makes it weak for developing societies. Behaviouralism, through value-neutrality, neglects values, justice and rights; Leo Strauss saw this as a crisis of theory, and Talcott Parsons noted it changed technique more than theory. The two are therefore complementary: institutionalism supplies the skeleton, behaviouralism the life within it.