

Qno: Mark Rorv examined the concept of legitimacy of Administrative State which arises from the assumptions that governments make about the 'people'.

a) What are the threats to the legitimacy of government in modern democracies? Explain these only through the concept of Biopolitics.

ANSWER

① INTRODUCTION:

In modern democracies, the legitimacy of any government does not only depend on its legal-political power. Rather, the perception of citizens of the governing ability of the ruling class is equally important in creating legitimacy. Biopolitical governance affects the public trust and perception of citizens. Thus, citizens trust governments not simply because they exist but by how well they govern the population fairly and transparently.

② Threats to Modern Democracies

(A) Excessive Mass Surveillance

When governments treat citizens as biological subjects to be controlled rather than served, legitimacy erodes. Recently, the report of LTMS (Lawful Intercept Management System) digitally surveilling 4 million mobile phones and firewall systems (WMS 2.0) installed to inspect internet traffic have created a legitimacy crisis by controlling both digital and electronic media through PEMRA and PSCA Acts 2002 and 2016.

(B) Technocratic Rule over Grassroots Participation

Rule by experts and bureaucrats have reduced governance and maximize government. It replaces grassroots democratic participation wherein citizens feel alienated from the ruling elites. It reduces governance from a democratic

process to a technocratic one, prioritizing efficiency over public participation.

"The establishment of PCC (Pakistan Crypto Council) ^{in 2025} without public

consultation exhibit policy exclusivity." — SSRN

(C) Rising Elite Capture

The elites have captured the governance systems, leaving the ordinary people to fend for themselves. It creates a trust deficit between the ruled and the ruling ones.

In the US under President Trump, the richest 1% will receive \$117bn in net tax cuts in 2026. Thus, such elite-driven policies

(D) Growing Economic Fragility

When economic benefits are concentrated among a few, it erodes the governments' legitimacy.

For instance, in Bangladesh, mass protests over job quota system for loyalists of Sheikh Hasina's party shows how economic decisions affect

the political legitimacy of governments. Bangladesh lost over half of Nepal's GDP (\$22.5bn)

(E) Suspension of Local Democracy

Central governments often suspend local councils to impose top-down decisions on citizens. This way, citizens do not have a say in governance matters. For instance, the KMC stopped Green Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).

It was because the federal authorities started working on it without obtaining a NOC from the KMC (Karachi Metropolitan Corporation).

Thus, sidelining local democracy weakens central governance.

(F) Restrictions on Free Speech

Legitimacy is not just about formal laws or political authority. When a government bans speech, it weakens the social contract with the citizens. For instance, Nepal's government banned 26 major social media platforms.

The Youth took to streets and the bannelled back.
"When governments silence critics,
they erode their own legitimacy" — Mark Bein

(C) Non-Transparent Governance

Legitimacy depends on accountability not just in letter but in true spirit. People should feel governance is fair and transparent. Governments should therefore be open to criticism. However, the recent anti-corruption protests in Mongol shows that transparency should be seen to be present. The PM lost a no-confidence vote and resigned.

(H) Blurred Accountability in Networked Governance

Governance in modern context involves many state and non-state actors. This blurs the lines of accountability. The public feels unable to hold the elected bodies accountable. For instance, in Public-Private partnerships, contracts are poorly defined, with no public checks to ensure

proper accountability. Many IPPs use less than 50% capacity, governments have to pay them more in dollars. The end consumer has to pay more electricity charges to inefficient plants.

“Circular debt runs in trillions (2.4 tr as of 2025), consuming 2.1% of GDP” — Economic Survey, 2025

(F) Extreme Political Polarization

Extreme political polarization also undermines government legitimacy. Political freedom is a must to ensure citizens a say in political affairs equally. For instance, the ATK protests over wheat and electricity subsidies demands by ATAC (Awami Joint Action Committee), eroding the government's right to govern.

(G) Growing Social Disparities

Unequal social privileges and disparities in basic services such as the provision of water,

sanitation, health, and education, erodes public trust in government institutions. For instance, nearly 50% of Karachi's population lacks regular access to municipal water and resorts to purchasing water from private tankers at inflated prices.

"Constant supply of social services renews legitimacy" — Mark Bevir

(K) Institutional Weaknesses

Exploiting gaps in laws, rules, or institutional procedures for vested interests undermines governments' legitimacy. For instance, the power elites in Pakistan do not update the amended FPTP system (First-past-the-post). Instead, they retain it to consolidate their own power.

"GE-2024 show that 73% of NA winners and 81% of provincial assembly winners took less than 50% of polled votes" — ECP 2025.

③ Critical Analysis

Longstanding electoral democracies have faced decline in popular legitimacy and participation. This is not just a crisis of public opinion but a structural issue rooted in the evolution of governance practices.

The transformation of centralized and hierarchical governance to a more decentralized and networked governance. Power is dispersed across multiple actors and institutions, blurring the lines of accountability and transparency. Thus, governance should be more participatory and less predatory.

④ Conclusion

Thus, it could be concluded in the end that modern democracies are facing threats across multiple arenas ranging from socio-economic and political to legal. Governance have become more networked and less transparent in its practices. Thus, it should neither micromanage (hierarchical) nor ignore (autocratic) individuals.

Even the governance practices have shifted from sovereign power (laws and decrees) to biopower (institutions and norms).