
Elites, elitism and society

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INTRODUCTION

It cannot be denied that there are two large groups in every society, starting from the most ancient period to the present day. From one side we have the mass and the crowd, and on the other side we have the elite and the intelligent sphere. This is an inevitable division. The elite is considered as a group that has a higher cultural level and that possesses all of the knowledge. We can use the synonym “intelligence” to describe the elite. In the traditional societies or in everyday life, the clerical elite has always played an important role starting from rites to different ceremonies, to the decision for peace or war between the tribes, nations, etc. When we come to the modern society, which is distinguished by being equipped with a scientific culture based on the experiment and on the observation, we are confronted with a liberal point of view about, if we can call it that way, about the membership to the elite, because education serves as a criterion of participation in the contemporary elite (In terms of the level of education). If they don't possess that kind of culture and education, they can fall in a social equilibrium. We can say that nowadays, there is a huge difference between the elite and the mass. The elite communicates very rarely with the mass, because the elite has

created an elitist culture that has very little to do the popular one.

1. ELITIST PERSPECTIVE

For many scholars, the “top” of political leadership hierarchy has awakened a particular research and scientific expertise interest. The beginnings of a scientific and argumentative research regarding this topic, are found in the mid-nineteenth century. Among the classics of elitism we can mention: Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Gaetano Mosca(Moska) (1857-1941) and Robert Michels (Mikels) (1876-1936). Of course, there are many other scholars (modern elitists) who have worked on this topic, trying to see it from the point of view that “today’s democratic systems are far from the real democratic ideal. The works of the classics of the elitist theory treat extensively the existence and the nature of the political elite. Classical elitists put forward the hypothesis that the inevitable rule of the minority is affirmed in every period of history. In their works, they base their theories on the studying of the empirical evidence. There are many supporters as well as there are people who partially or completely support or oppose the results of the researches that have been done by the scholars mentioned above.

These three authors share one common argument: The political power is always exercised by the privileged minority, by one elite only, in other words, in every political regime, the minority governs the mass. But what do we understand by the term “elite”? Firstly, we are concerned with the interpretation based only in the political sense, which means that we will focus only on the definition of the concept “political elite”. The “political elite” concept is complex and depending on the ideological context, we can get what its interpretation is. The researcher James Meisel points out that the features (which he calls them as 3-c) that explain the concept of the political elite are: the conscience, joint conspiracy which has to do the existence of a common will to act. According to Giovanni

Sartori, the denominations “political class”, ruling class, elite, ruling elite, ruling minority, ruling,” are different labels that show the same concept. Then, he says: the ruling class that differs from governing, is a special class, an organized minority that acts in a coordinated way...this special class will be called the political class. For Giovanni Busino "societies are permanently run by the minority, by an aristocracy, by a dominant political class, by an elite, in short, the domination of the minority over the majority is a consubstantial fact of the lives of people in society. In this line of thought, Hyppolite Taine acknowledges that "the measures have not and will never have a creative role: history is the work of great personalities or at least of the active minorities that act.

For researcher Jacques Ranciere, societies, nowadays as well as in the previous years, are organized through the interaction of the oligarchs and literally speaking, there is no democratic government. Minority always governs the majority. For C. Wright Mills, the elite of power consists of "people whose positions allow them to overcome the surrounding environment of ordinary women and men. They are in such positions that can make decisions with great consequences. For Weber, in all the societies we know, inequality appears in two dimensions: classes that differ from each other mainly for economic needs, and elites that differ from the public sphere because they have a different extent and power of influence. Here it is worth treating the resources that make it possible to generate a privileged position for the ruling elite. If the differentiation between the classes is done mainly by economic resources, the elite-based resources are more complex. Elite positions rely on economic resources, organizational resources, political resources and human resources. Resources facilitate and create the environment for a certain group of people to enjoy the right to govern. Also, the basic elements that distinguish political elites from other layers or from the public as a whole are: the role they have in political decision-making, the exercise of power, and the impact they have on the public. This is

indisputably related to the source of power they have available. For Kagan, power is related to the ability to involve others to do what you want and to stop doing what you do not want to do.

How do the ruling elites manage to accomplish this? According to Mosca, this is achieved through organization. He claims that the ruling elite, is organized in such a way as to preserve its position and interests as long as possible, even using the public means at its disposal. He bases his theory on the periods of history. According to him, the cause of elite control lies in the organizational skills of the ruling minority, which is favored by some of the features that this group has. As a result of the small number of this class, organization is easier, its members have prestige, status, wealth, influence etc. Members of the ruling minority usually have some realistic or fictitious qualities that are highly valued and have a great impact on the society they live in.

For Gaetano Mosca, there is only one form of government, and that's the oligarchic form of governance, so the dominance of a minority is present in any political regime, regardless of denominations. Likewise, in every society there are two classes of people: the rulers (these are the elites who have the political power) and the governed (the rest of the society). More specifically, Mosca states: "In all societies, from the least developed and barely reaching the threshold of civilization to the most advanced and powerful societies, two classes of people have emerged: one ruling Class and one Class that is ruled. The first class, always fewer in number, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys all the favors that this power brings, while the second class, the largest class, is governed and controlled by the first, in a form that is considered to be more or less legal, more or less arbitrary and violent, and supplies the first, at least visibly speaking, with the means of living and the instruments that are essential to the vitality of the political organization.

Legitimization, ideology, and moral reasoning of minority rule are realized through a "political formula".

According to Mosca, the political formula is necessary to justify the existence and power enjoyed by the political class, otherwise no one would admit to be governed by it. The ruling and the circulation of elite are laws that determine the social life. That can be changed or replaced by another ruling class when it loses its value or does not manage to perform its governing function. The mechanism for the replacement of the old ruling class with a new one constitutes a more modern and acceptable political formula.

Like Mosca, Pareto divided the society in two categories. For him, the elite is divided into “governing elite” and “non-governing elite”. The first one is composed by all the political influencers, whether they exercise this influence directly or indirectly. In here, there are included the members of the parliament, opposition parties, industrialists, trade union leaders, military personnel, or anyone else in society, as they exert influence on political decision-making. Regarding the ruling elite, Pareto's argumentation on the importance of factors such as wealth, origin and corruption is very interesting. He argues that “these factors are often giving priority to those less able to achieve leadership positions, especially in less technical and rational activities such as politics”. Non-governmental elites consist of leaders in each of the numerous and varied activities, but they do not affect political affairs .He admits the fact that: "Everywhere you go, there is a ruling class which is composed of a relatively small number of individuals who are in power partly through force and partly with the agreement of submissive classes, which are much larger in number.

In his research, Mikels formulated the elite's thesis saying that elite control depends on the organization: "Whoever mentions the term organization, implies the oligarchy. In any organization of any size, leadership becomes necessary for its success and survival. The nature of the organization is made in that way that it provides the group of leaders with power and

advantages, who then cannot be controlled by the successors or to take responsibility to them.

In other words, the "iron rule of the oligarchy" explains the tendency that all political organizations tend to be oligarchic. Mikels claims that most people appear to be silent on political and public affairs. Many people worry about politics only when it touches their private interests. They don't know how the political system works. The same thing happens with members of party organizations. There is a small internal group, which is the active party and is really influential. This trend exists in an inevitable manner, and even participatory or democratic structures fail to control the dominance of the organization by a dominant minority. He admits that the democratic tendency limits, but cannot prevent the oligarchic tendency. Beyond this group activity, the interest and the influence on the party can be represented in a form of a pyramid. Mikel notes that the longer the leader holds the office, the greater is going to be the influence of the leader on the masses, and the greater it becomes the independence towards them, which applies to the leaders of the political parties in Albania. Furthermore, the frequent recurrence of elections is a precautionary measure to protect democracy from the oligarchic virus. In the former communist countries there are several phenomena that emphasize and maximize the role of the political class. From what we have seen above, it also appears that even countries that have consolidated democracy, continually take care of the "oligarchic virus" in order to keep it under control. The tendency to dominate, control and command is a natural tendency to people, the question is how to stop this trend of domination "outside the legal and institutional contours" that may occur in the behavior of the political elites. How do we make democratic mechanisms work precisely in "transitional countries"? Undoubtedly, our attention is drawn towards the negative state in which some former communist states are, where the most typical example is that of Russia. In Russia, the oligarchy is no longer a trend, but a clearly

established regime. Other former communist countries are also facing with a situation similar to Russia .What is also evidenced by the authors I mentioned above is the fact that “uncontrolled” elites seriously threaten the establishment of democracy and the creation of the rule of law. In these cases, political elites appear to be all-powerful. With their political activity, they prevent the strengthening of the state and debilitate society in their struggle for institutionalization of democracy.

In the following section we will treat the role and importance of political elites in transition.

ELITES IN TRANSITION, THE FORMATION AND THEIR ROLE.

The elite in the sociological and political theory, is in fact a small group that controls and possesses the largest quantity of the national wealth, the political power and the country’s wealth.

In the debate regarding politics and the political power, a special treatment is put under the role that political elites play in determining the course that will determine the political system of a country. Elites are the main decision-makers of the largest and most important organizations of the society. The experience of the processes of political and economic change in the former communist countries has further highlighted the role and importance of this category. Due to the history of these countries, the abandonment of communism began with the “elite agreement”. If we take a look to the political elite of Albania, we will see that it hasn’t changed for the last 25 years and there is not much difference compared to the Enver’s totalitarian power. The prime minister becomes the president and the president becomes the prime minister for long periods of time. We can see that there is a fierce war between the opposing political elites.

The agreement brought about a major shift in the position of the political elites that became part of it. In political terms, "the agreement" forced the old political elites not only to leave their office, but their reformation should be far apart to that of the communist identity. It is worth mentioning what Sharp has said: the fall of a man or a clique assigned by governing positions is likely to make it possible for another group to take their place, so regarding the content, we should not be able to notice evident changes in the political system. In economic terms, the elite agreement in the former communist countries became a driver for major changes in the class economic structure. As we have said above, the multiple transformations that are happening in these countries are far more complex and difficult: they have artificially enhanced the role of the political class.

The issue as how the ruling political class (or political elite) reacts to the pressure for change (democratization) can be analyzed by various instruments of the political and sociological analysis. Thus the formation, motivation, quality of leadership, management, political and economic interests of political leaders explain to some extent the various performances that have happened in the former communist countries.

Studies show that there is a strong link between national elites and the kind or type of political regime. The composition and the functioning of the political elites is perhaps the most important determinant of the type of regime that exists in a country. In this regard, a serious study has been made by Field, Higley and Burton. Their model emphasizes the importance and the way how national elites function, and their impact on the form or type of the political regime that is imposed as a result of political behaviors and actions.

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