

Political Sociology

Ruling elites & Masses

Elite Theory

By

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Elite Theory

- ◎ The Italians developed classical elite theory eg. Pareto (1848-1923), in opposition to marxist theory
- ◎ Pareto emphasised the importance of the psychological characteristics of elites which made them superior to the masses & unable them to gain & hold power
- ◎ Pareto saw measurable traits through psychological evidence of characteristics traits
- ◎ Lions achieves power through incisive action & the use of force
- ◎ Foxes rule by cunning
- ◎ Elites tend to circulate, with lions being replaced by Foxes and Foxes being replaced by lions

According to Vilfredo Pareto

- The governing elite is that small number of individuals who have succeeded and exercise ruling functions politically and socially”.
- “In every society, there is a class of people who have the highest insight in their branch of activity and to that class, can be given the name of elite.”

Supporters of their theory

- Vilfredo Pareto
- G. Mosca
- Robert Michels
- C. Wright Mills
- Harold Lasswell

Characteristics of political elites

- Small in number
- Organised
- Open Entry
- Monopoly over political power
- Open competition among different elite classes
- Conscious of their interests
- Absence of absolutism

Main features of elitist theory


- Inevitability of political elites in every society
- In every society there are two classes
- Iron law of oligarchy
- Democratic method of appointing and dismissing of the policymakers
- Plurality of elites
- Leadership is necessary for democracy

Elite theory of masses

- In every society there is a class of people which is though smallest number but has more control over political power the power belonging to this class occupy command officers and provide leadership in ruling affairs of the society and this class of the people is known as elite


According to Gaetano Mosca

- To Mosca democracy was government of the people it might even be government for the people but it could never be government by the people.
- Elite rule remained inevitable
- Democracy could be no more than representative government with an elite representing the interest of the people.

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- Despite his leanings towards democracy, Mosca retained his pessimistic view of the masses. They lacked the capacity for self government and required the leadership and guidance of an elite
 - Mosca thus remained elitist to the last

Criticism of elitist theory

- Lack of faith in common people
- It is conservative theory
- Elites cannot maintain equilibrium in society
- This theory is silent about democratic society
- This theory gives more importance to ideology
- This theory gives no importance to men

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- Leaders are given undue importance
 - This theory does not give due importance to public opinion
 - This theory is against the principle of social and economic equality
 - What should be the basis of political elite
 - Protection of the interest of capitalism



Thank You..