

## ДЕМОКРАТІЯ ТА СУЧАСНІ СУБ'ЄКТИ ПОЛІТИКИ

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**ELITES IN DEMOCRACY AS A COMPLEX SOCIAL SYSTEM  
(ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

*The article is devoted to elites as components of a democratic political system. It considers the essence of elitism, the characteristics of democracy, analyzes the elites in democracy. The authors highlight the main features of pluralism, compare elitism and pluralism. On the example of the American political system, they describe how elites and the masses interact with each other. The article focuses on the main issues of the elitist theory of democracy. The aim of the article is to study the correlation between elites and the masses in a democracy, as well as the role of the elite in ensuring democratic procedures on the example of the USA. The article is based on an interdisciplinary approach as well as the principles of objectivity and social approach. Research methods are methods of analysis and synthesis, historical and comparative methods.*

**Key words:** *elites, elitism, democracy, pluralism, political systems.*

**Introduction.** Elites – not masses – govern the United States. In an industrial, scientific, and nuclear age, life in a democracy, just as in a totalitarian society, is shaped by a handful of people. Major political, economic, and social decisions are made by tiny minorities, not the masses of people.

Elites are the few who have power; the masses are the many who do not. Power is deciding who gets what, when, and how; it is participation in the decisions that shape our lives; the masses are the many whose lives are shaped by institutions, events, and leaders over which they have little direct control. Political scientist Harold Lasswell writes, «The division of society into elite and mass is universal,» and even in a democracy «a few exercise a relatively great weight of power, and the many exercise comparatively little» (Lasswell & Kaplan, 1950, p. 219).

Democracy is government «by the people,» but the survival of democracy rests on the shoulders of elites. This is the irony of democracy: elites must govern wisely if government «by the people» is to survive. The masses do not lead; they follow. They respond to the attitudes, proposals, and behavior of elites.

**The aim of the article** is to study the correlation between elites and the masses in a democracy, as well as the role of the elite in ensuring democratic procedures on the example of the USA.

**Methods.** The article is based on an interdisciplinary approach as well as the principles of objectivity and social approach. Research methods are methods of analysis and synthesis, historical and comparative methods.

**Main part.** The central idea of elitism is that all societies are divided into two classes: the few who govern and the many who are governed. The Italian political scientist G. Mosca expressed this basic concept as follows:

In all societies – from societies that are very underdeveloped and have largely attained the dawnings of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies – two classes of people appear – a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all of the political functions, monopolizes power, and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent (Mosca, 1939, p. 50).

Elites, not masses, govern all societies. Elites are not a product of capitalism or socialism or industrialization or technological development. All societies – socialist and capitalist, agricultural and industrial, traditional and advanced – are governed by elites. All societies require leaders, and leaders acquire a stake in preserving the organization and their position in it. This motive gives leaders a perspective different from that of the organization's members. An elite, then, is inevitable in any social organization. As the French political scientist R. Michels put it, «He who says organization, says oligarchy» (Michels, 1962, p. 70). The same is true for societies as a whole. According to H. Lasswell, «The discovery that in all large-scale societies the decisions at any given time are typically in the hands of a small number of people» confirms a basic fact: «Government is always government by the few, whether in the name of the few, the one, or the many» (Lasswell & Lerner, 1952, p. 7).

Elitism also asserts that the few who govern are not typical of the masses who are governed. Elites control resources: power, wealth, education, prestige, status, skills of leadership, information, knowledge of political processes, ability to communicate, and organization. Elites in the United States are drawn disproportionately from wealthy, educated, prestigiously employed, socially prominent, white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant groups in society. They come from society's upper classes, those who own or control a disproportionate share of the societal institutions: industry, commerce, finance, education, the military, communications, civic organizations, and law.

Elitism, however, does not necessarily bar individuals of the lower classes from rising to the top; elite theory admits of some social mobility that enables nonelites to become elites. In fact, a certain amount of «circulation of elites» (upward mobility) is essential for the stability of the elite system. Openness in the system siphons off potentially revolutionary leadership from the lower classes; moreover, an elite system is strengthened when talented and ambitious individuals from the masses enter governing circles. However, social stability requires that movement from nonelite to elite positions be a slow, continuous assimilation rather than a rapid or revolutionary change. Only those nonelites who have demonstrated their commitment to the elite system itself and to the system's political and economic values can be admitted to the ruling class.

Elites share a general consensus about the fundamental norms of the social system. They agree on the basic rules of the game, as well as on the importance of preserving the social system. The stability of the system, and even its survival, depends on this consensus. According to D. Truman, «Being more influential, they [the elites] are privileged; and being privileged, they have, with very few exceptions, a special stake in the continuation of the system in which their privileges rest» (Truman, 1959, p. 489). Elite consensus does not prevent elite members from disagreeing or competing with each other for preeminence. But competition takes place within a very narrow range of issues, and elites agree on more matters than they disagree on. Disagreement usually occurs over means rather than ends.

In the United States, the bases of elite consensus are the sanctity of private property, limited government, and individual liberty. Political historian R. Hofstadter writes about American elite struggles:

The fierceness of political struggles has often been misleading; for the range of vision embodied by the primary contestants in the major parties has always been bounded by the horizons of property and enterprise. However much at odds on specific issues, the major political traditions have shared a belief in the rights of property, the philosophy of economic individualism, the value of competition; they have accepted the economic virtues of capitalist culture as necessary qualities of man (Hofstadter, 1948, p. viii).

Elitism implies that public policy does not reflect demands of «the people» so much as it reflects the interests and values of elites. Changes and innovations in public policy come about when elites redefine their own values. However, the general conservatism of elites – that is, their interest in preserving the system – means that changes in public policy will be incremental rather than revolutionary. Public policies are often modified but seldom replaced.

Elites may act out of narrow self-serving interest or enlightened, «public-regarding» motives. Occasionally elites abuse their powers and position and undermine mass confidence in their leadership. At other times, elites initiate reforms designed to preserve the system and restore mass support. Elitism does not necessarily mean that the masses are exploited or repressed, although these abuses are not uncommon. Elitism means only that the responsibility for mass welfare rests with elites, not with masses.

Finally, elitism assumes that the masses are largely passive, apathetic, and ill informed. Mass sentiments are manipulated by elites more often than elite values are influenced by the sentiments of the masses. Most communication between elites and masses flows downward. Masses seldom make decisions about governmental policies through elections or through evaluation of political parties' policy alternatives. For the most part, these «democratic» institutions – elections and parties – have only symbolic value: they help tie the masses to the political system by giving them a role to play on election day. Elitism contends that the masses have at best only an indirect influence over the decision-making behavior of elites.

Americans frequently misunderstand elitism because the prevailing myths and symbols are drawn from democratic theory rather than elite theory. Therefore it is important to emphasize what elitism is not as well as what it is.

Elitism does not mean that those in power continually battle against the masses or that elites always achieve their goals at the expense of the public interest. Elitism is not a conspiracy to oppress the masses. It does not imply that power is held by a single, impenetrable, monolithic body or that those in power always agree on public issues. It does not prevent power from shifting over time or prohibit the emergence of new elites. Elites may be more or less selfish and self-interested, or more or less enlightened and public-regarding. They may be more or less monolithic and cohesive, or more or less pluralistic and competitive. Power need not rest exclusively on the control of economic resources; it may rest instead on other leadership resources – organization, communication, or information. Elitism does not deny the influence of the masses on elite behavior; it holds only that elites influence masses more than masses influence elites.

In brief, elite theory may be summarized as follows:

1. Society is divided into the few who have power and the many who do not.
2. The few who govern are not typical of the masses who are governed. Elites are drawn disproportionately from the upper socioeconomic strata of society.
3. The movement of nonelites to elite positions must be slow and continuous to maintain stability and avoid revolution. Only nonelites who have accepted the basic elite consensus enter governing circles.
4. Elites share a consensus on the basic values of the social system and the preservation of the system. They disagree only on a narrow range of issues.
5. Public policy does not reflect the demands of masses but the prevailing values of the elite. Changes in public policy will be incremental rather than revolutionary.

6. Elites may act out of narrow self-serving motives and risk undermining mass support, or they may initiate reforms, curb abuse, and undertake public- regarding programs to preserve the system and their place in it.

7. Active elites are subject to relatively little direct influence from the apathetic masses. Elites influence masses more than masses influence elites.

Ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that affect one's life. Traditional democratic theory has valued popular participation as an opportunity for individual self-development: responsibility for governing one's own conduct develops one's character, self-reliance, intelligence, and moral judgment – in short, one's dignity. The classic democrat would reject even a benevolent despot who could govern in the interest of the masses. As the English political philosopher J. S. Mill asked, «What development can either their thinking or active faculties attain under it?» Thus the argument for citizen participation in public affairs depends not on its policy outcomes but on the belief that such involvement is essential to the full development of human capacities. J.S.Mill argued that people can know truth only by discovering it for themselves (Mill, 1962, p. 203).

Procedurally, in the democratic model, a society achieves popular participation through majority rule and respect for the rights of minorities. Self-development presumes self-government, and self-government comes about only by encouraging each individual to contribute to the development of public policy and by resolving conflicts over public policy through majority rule. Minorities who have had the opportunity to influence policy but whose views have not won majority support accept the decisions of majorities. In return, majorities permit minorities to attempt openly to win majority support for their views. Freedom of speech and press, freedom to dissent, and freedom to form opposition parties and organizations are essential to ensure meaningful individual participation. This freedom of expression is also critical in ascertaining the majority's real views.

The underlying value of democracy is individual dignity. Human beings, by virtue of their existence, are entitled to life, liberty, and property. A «natural law», or moral tenet, guarantees every person liberty and the right to property, and this natural law is morally superior to human law. John Locke, the English political philosopher whose writings most influenced America's founding elites, argued that even in a «state of nature» – that is, a world of no governments – an individual possesses inalienable rights to life, liberty, and property. Locke meant that these rights are independent of government; governments do not give them to individuals, and no government may legitimately take them away (Sabine, 1950, p. 541).

Locke believed that a government's purpose is to protect individual liberty. People form a «social contract» with one another to establish a government to help protect their rights; they tacitly agree to accept government authority to protect life, liberty, and property. Implicit in the social contract and the democratic notion of freedom is the belief that governmental authority and social control over the individual must be minimal. This belief calls for removing as many external restrictions, controls, and regulations on the individual as possible without violating the freedom of other citizens.

Another vital aspect of classical democracy is a belief in the equality of all people. The Declaration of Independence states that «all men are created equal». Even the Founding Fathers believed in equality for all persons before the law, regardless of their personal circumstances. A democratic society cannot judge a person by social position, economic class, creed, or race. Many early democrats also believed in political equality: equal opportunity of individuals to influence public policy. Political equality is expressed in the concept of «one person, one vote».

Over time, the notion of equality has also come to include equality of opportunity in all aspects of American life: social, educational, and economic, as well as political. Political scientist Roland Pennock writes:

The objective of equality is not merely the recognition of a certain dignity of the human being as such, but it is also to provide him with the opportunity – equal to that guaranteed to

others – for protecting and advancing his interests and developing his powers and personality (Pennock, 1962, pp. 126-127).

Thus the notion of equal opportunity has spread beyond political life to include education, employment, housing, recreation, and public accommodations. Each person has an equal opportunity to develop his or her capacities to their natural limits.

Remember, however, that the traditional democratic creed has always stressed equality of opportunity for acquiring education, wealth, and status, and not absolute equality. T. Jefferson recognized a «natural aristocracy» of talent, ambition, and industry, and liberal democrats since T. Jefferson have always accepted inequalities that arise from individual merit and hard work. Absolute equality, or «leveling», is not part of liberal democratic theory.

In summary, democratic thinking reflects the following ideas:

1. Popular participation in the decisions that shape the lives of individuals in a society.
2. Government by majority rule, with recognition of the rights of minorities to try to become majorities. These rights include the freedom of speech, press, assembly, and petition and the freedom to dissent, to form opposition parties, and to run for public office.
3. A commitment to individual dignity and the preservation of the liberal values of life, liberty, and property.
4. A commitment to equal opportunity for all individuals to develop their capacities.

Democracy requires popular participation in government. (The Greek root of the word democracy means «rule by the many».) But popular participation in government can have different meanings. To American nation's Founders, who were quite ambivalent about the wisdom of democracy, it meant that the people would be given representation in government. The Founders believed that government rests ultimately on the consent of the governed. But their notion of republicanism envisioned decision making by representatives of the people, rather than direct decision making by the people themselves. The Founders were profoundly skeptical of direct democracy, in which the people initiate and decide policy questions by popular vote (thus, the U.S. Constitution has no provision for national referenda). They had read about direct democracy in the ancient Greek city-state of Athens, and they were fearful of the «follies» of democracy.

Such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security of the rights of property and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths, J. Madison wrote (Madison, 1937). The Founders were most fearful that unrestrained majorities would threaten liberty and property and abuse minorities and individuals, «the weaker party and the obnoxious individual». They recognized the potential contradiction in democratic theory – government by majority rule can threaten the life, liberty, and property of minorities and individuals.

Yet even if it were desirable, mass government is not really feasible in a large society. Lincoln's rhetorical flourish – «a government of the people, by the people, for the people» – has no real-world meaning. What would «the people» look like if all 250 million Americans were brought together in one place?

Standing shoulder to shoulder in military formation, they would occupy an area of about sixty-six square miles.

The logistical problem of bringing 250 million bodies together is trivial, however, compared with the task of bringing about a meeting of 250 million minds. Merely to shake hands with that many people would take a century. How much discussion would it take to form a common opinion? A single round of five-minute speeches would require five thousand years. If only one percent of those present spoke, the assembly would be forced to listen to over two million speeches. People could be born, grow old and die while they waited for the assembly to make one decision.

In other words, an all-American town meeting would be the largest, longest, and most boring and frustrating meeting imaginable. What could such a meeting produce? Total paralysis. What could it do? Nothing (Schattschneider, 1969, p. 63).

The solution to the practical problem of popular government is the development of institutions of representation – elections, parties, organized interest groups – as bridges between individuals and their government. But this solution leads inevitably to elitism, not democracy.

Individuals in all societies, including democracies, confront the iron law of oligarchy. As organizations and institutions develop in society, power is concentrated in the hands of the leadership. Society becomes «a minority of directors and a majority of directed». Individuals are no match for the power of large institutions.

Power is the ability to influence people and events by granting or withholding valuable resources. To exercise power, one must control valuable resources. Resources are defined broadly to include not only wealth, but also position, status, celebrity, comfort, safety, and power itself. Most of the nation's resources are concentrated in large organizations and institutions – in corporations, banks, and financial institutions; in television networks, newspapers, and publishing empires; in organized interest groups, lobbies, and law firms; in foundations and think tanks; in civic and cultural organizations; and, most important, in government. The government is the most powerful of all these organizations, not only because it has accumulated great economic resources, but because it has a monopoly on physical coercion. Only government can legitimately imprison and execute people.

Thus, power in a democratic society is concentrated in the hands of the relatively few people who control its largest organizations and institutions. These are the people who direct, manage, and guide the programs, policies, and activities of the major institutions of society. Collectively, these people constitute the nation's elite.

In a democratic society, unlike a totalitarian one, multiple elites exist. A defining characteristic of Western democratic nations is the relative autonomy of various elites – governmental, economic, media, civic, cultural, and so on (Etzioni-Halevy, 1993). In contrast, a defining characteristic of totalitarian societies is the forced imposition of unity on elites. Fascism asserted the unity of the state in A. Hitler's words: «Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer» (one people, one state, one leader). Socialism asserts the government's control of economic as well as political resources, and communism extols «the dictatorship of the proletariat» and assigns the Communist party the exclusive right to speak for the proletariat.

But in Western democracies, elites have multiple institutional bases of power. Not all power is lodged in government, nor is all power derived from wealth. Democracies legitimize the existence of opposition parties as well as of organized interest groups. The power and independence of a media elite is a distinctive feature of U.S. democracy. Even within U.S. government, relatively autonomous multiple elites have emerged – in the Congress; in the judiciary; in the executive; and even within the executive, in a variety of bureaucratic domains. But it is really the power and autonomy of nongovernmental elites, and their recognized legitimacy, that distinguishes the elite structures of democratic nations from those of totalitarian states.

No scholar or commentator, however optimistic about life in the United States, would assert that the U.S. political system has fully realized all the goals of democracy. No one contends that citizens participate in all decisions shaping their lives or that majority preferences always prevail. Nor does anyone argue that the system always protects the rights of minorities, always preserves the values of life, liberty, and property, or provides every American with an equal opportunity to influence public policy.

However, pluralism seeks to affirm that American society is nevertheless democratic by asserting that:

1. Although citizens do not directly participate in decision making, their many leaders make decisions through a process of bargaining, accommodation, and compromise.

2. Competition among leadership groups helps protect individuals' interests. Countervailing centers of power – for example, competition among business leaders, labor leaders, and government leaders – can check one another and keep each interest from abusing its power and oppressing the individual.

3. Individuals can influence public policy by choosing among competing elites in elections. Elections and parties allow individuals to hold leaders accountable for their actions.

4. Although individuals do not participate directly in decision making, they can exert influence through participating in organized groups.

5. Leadership groups are open; new groups can form and gain access to the political system.

6. Although political influence in society is unequally distributed, power is widely dispersed. Access to decision making is often determined by how much interest people have in a particular decision. Because leadership is fluid and mobile, power depends on one's interest in public affairs, skills in leadership, information about issues, knowledge of democratic processes, and skill in organization and public relations.

7. Multiple leadership groups operate within society. Those who exercise power in one kind of decision do not necessarily exercise power in others. No single elite dominates decision making in all issues.

8. Public policy does not necessarily reflect majority preference but is an equilibrium of interest interaction – that is, competing interest group influences are more or less balanced, and the resulting policy is therefore a reasonable approximation of society's preferences.

Pluralism, then, is the belief that democratic values can be preserved in a system where multiple, competing elites determine public policy through bargaining and compromise, voters exercise meaningful choices in elections, and new elites can gain access to power.

Elite theory differs from the prevailing pluralist vision of democracy in several key respects. Both theories agree that societal decision making occurs through elite interaction, not mass participation; that the key political actors are the leaders of large organizations and institutions, not individual citizens; and that public policy generally reflects the interests of large organizations and institutions, not majority preferences. Indeed, because of these similarities, some critics of pluralism assert that it is really a disguised form of elitism – that is, elitism hiding in democratic rhetoric. Critics of pluralism have charged that pluralists are closer to the elitist position than to the democratic tradition they claim to be upholding (Bachrach, 1967, p. xi). Yet despite these recognized parallels with pluralist theory, elite theory offers a fundamentally different view of power and society.

First of all, elite theory asserts that the most important division in society is between elites and masses, between the few who govern and the many who do not. Elites in all organizations and institutions in society share a common experience – the exercise of power. Occupying positions of power provides elites with a common motive – the preservation of their organization and their position in it. Pluralism overlooks this central division of society into elites and masses and emphasizes the fragmentation of society and competition between leadership groups. Elitism emphasizes the importance to leaders of maintaining their positions of power, while pluralism emphasizes their devotion to their group interests.

Elite theory asserts that the mass membership of organizations, parties, interest groups, and institutions in society rarely exercises any direct control over the elite leadership. Group membership does not ensure effective individual participation in decision making. «The voluntary organizations or associations, which the early theorists of pluralism relied upon to sustain the individual against a unified omnipotent government, have themselves become oligarchically governed hierarchies» (Kariel, 1961, p. 74). Rarely do corporations, unions, armies, churches, governmental bureaucracies, or professional associations have any internal democratic mechanisms. They are usually run by a small elite of officers and activists. Leaders of corporations, banks, labor unions, interest groups, television networks, churches, universities, think tanks, and civic associations remain in control year after year. Very few people attend meetings, vote in organizational elections, or make their influence felt within their organization. The pluralists offer no evidence that the giant organizations and institutions in American life really represent the views or interests of their individual members.

Elite theory suggests that accommodation and compromise among leadership groups is the prevailing style of decision making, not competition and conflict. Pluralism contends that competition among leadership groups protects the individual. But why should we assume that leadership groups compete with each other? More likely, each elite group allows other elite groups to govern in their own spheres of influence without interference. According to elite theory, accommodation rather than competition is the prevailing style of elite interaction: «You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours». Where interests occasionally overlap, elite differences are compromised in order to maintain stability. It is true that multiple, relatively autonomous elites exist in a democratic society; but this multiplicity does not guarantee competition or a balance among centers of power.

Elite theory takes account of all power holders in society, private as well as public. Pluralism focuses on governmental leaders and those who interact directly with them. Because governmental leaders are chosen in elections, pluralism asserts that leaders can be held accountable to the people. But even if governmental elites can be held accountable through elections, how can corporation executives, media elites, union leaders, and other persons in positions of private leadership be held accountable? Pluralism usually dodges this important question by focusing primary attention on public, government-elite decision making and largely ignoring private, nongovernment-elite decision making. Pluralists focus on rules and orders enforced by governments, but certainly citizens' lives are vitally affected by decisions made by private institutions and organizations, among them corporations, banks, universities, television networks, and newspapers. In an ideal democracy, individuals participate in all decisions that significantly affect their lives; however, pluralism largely excludes individuals from participation in many vital decisions by claiming that these decisions are «private» in nature and not subject to public accountability.

Elitism emphasizes the shared characteristics of leaders, not only their common interest in preserving the social system and their place in it, but also their many shared experiences, values, and goals. Pluralism emphasizes diversity among leaders – differences in backgrounds, ideologies, and viewpoints. Even when elitists show that a disproportionate share of America's leadership is composed of wealthy, educated, prestigiously employed, white, upper- and upper-middle-class males, pluralists respond by asserting that these background characteristics are poor predictors of the decision-making behavior of leaders. Instead, pluralists argue that leaders' decisions are a product of their role perceptions, institutional constraints, interest group pressures, public opinion, and so on. Elitism focuses on leadership consensus, asserting that elites differ more over the means than the ends of public policy. Pluralism focuses on elite conflict, asserting that elites differ on a wide variety of issues of vital importance to society.

Finally, pluralism and elitism differ over the nature and extent of mass influences over societal decision making. Elitism asserts that elites influence masses more than masses influence elites. Communication flows primarily downward from elites to masses. An enlightened elite may choose to consider the well-being of the masses in decision making, either out of ethical principles or a desire to avoid instability and revolution. But even when elites presume to act in the interests of the masses, the elites act on their own view of what is good for the masses, not what the masses decide for themselves. In contrast, pluralists, while acknowledging that elites rather than the masses make society's decisions, nonetheless assert that the masses influence policy through both their membership in organized interest groups and their participation in elections. Interest groups, parties, and elections, according to the pluralists, provide the means by which the masses can hold elites accountable for their decisions. But elite theory contends that the principal function of elections is not to provide policy mandates to elites, but rather to legitimize elite rule by providing symbolic reassurance that democratic elites govern on behalf of the masses.

In short, while elitism and pluralism share some common views on the preeminent role of elites in a democratic society, elitism differs from pluralism in several key respects. In contrast to pluralism, elitism asserts:



1. The importance of the common elite experience – the exercise of power-in providing a compelling motive for the preservation of the system and the elites' place in it, over and above whatever other interests that elites are supposed to represent.

2. The oligarchic and undemocratic nature of societal organizations and institutions, which renders individual participation in group decision making impossible and makes accurate representation of members' views by group leaders highly problematic.

3. The prevailing style of elite interaction as accommodationist rather than competitive, with no assurance that multiple groups in society will provide balance to public policy.

4. The exercise of power by private as well as public institutions, and the realization that even if the policies of government elites could be held accountable through elections, those of corporations, banks, television networks, and other private organizations are beyond the direct control of the electorate.

5. The commonality of elite experiences, values, and goals, and the assertion that elites differ more over the means than the ends of public policy.

6. The failure of parties and elections to provide effective means by which the masses can hold elites accountable for their policy decisions.

It is the irony of democracy that the survival of democratic values – individual dignity, limited government, equality of opportunity, private property, freedom of speech and press, religious tolerance, and due process of law – depends on enlightened elites. The masses respond to the ideas and actions of elites. When elites abandon democratic principles or the masses lose confidence in elites, democracy is in peril.

Yet democratic elites do not always live up to their responsibilities to preserve the system and its values. Elite behavior is not always enlightened and farsighted, but is instead frequently shortsighted and narrowly self-serving. The relative autonomy of separate elites in a democracy – governmental, corporate, financial, media, legal, civic, and cultural – often encourages narrow visions of the common good and a willingness to sacrifice societal values for relative advantage.

Examples of narrowly self-serving elite behavior abound. Politicians resort to divisive, racial appeals or to class antagonisms – setting black against white or poor against rich – to win elections, knowing that these tactics undermine mass confidence in national leadership. Corporate officials sacrifice long-term economic growth for short-term, windfall, paper profits, knowing that the nation's competitive position in the world is undermined by shortsighted «bottom-line» policies. Banking and savings and loan executives finance risky ventures in search of quick profits, knowing that their failures will be paid for by depositors and taxpayers. Members of Congress in pursuit of personal pay and perks as well as lifetime tenure cater to the political activists in their home districts, with little regard for national concerns. Bureaucrats, seeking to expand their powers and budgets, create a regulatory quagmire and huge government deficits, disadvantaging the nation in global competition and burdening future generations with enormous debts. Interest group leaders, particularly the zealous champions of single issues, pursue their quest for special privileges, treatments, and exemptions from law, at the expense of common principles. Network television executives "hype" both news and entertainment shows with violence, scandal, corruption, and scares of various sorts, knowing that these stories undermine mass confidence in the nation's institutions. Lawyers and judges pervert the judicial process for personal advantage, drowning the nation in a sea of litigation, clogging the courts and delaying justice, reinterpreting laws and the Constitution to suit their purposes, and undermining mass respect for the law.

In short, elites do not always act with unity and purpose. They all too frequently put narrow interests ahead of broader, shared values. These behaviors grow out of the relative autonomy of various elites in a democracy. They are encouraged by the absence of any external checks on the power of elites in their various domains. The only effective check on irresponsible elite behavior is their own realization that the system itself will become endangered if such behavior continues unrestrained. So periodically elites undertake reforms, mutually agreeing to curb the most flagrant abuses of the system. The stimulus to reform is the restoration of mass

confidence in elite government, and ultimately the preservation of the elite system itself. But reforms often succeed only in creating new opportunities for abuse, changing the rules but failing to restrain self-interested elites.

But mass politics can also threaten democratic values. Despite a superficial commitment to the symbols of democracy, the masses have surprisingly weak commitments to the principles of individual liberty, toleration of diversity, and freedom of expression when required to apply these principles to despised or obnoxious groups or individuals. In contrast, elites, and the better-educated groups from which they are recruited, are generally more willing than the masses to apply democratic values to specific situations and to protect the freedoms of unpopular groups.

Masses are dangerously vulnerable to demagogic appeals to intolerance, racial hatred, anti-intellectualism, class antagonisms, anti-Semitism, and violence. Counterelites, or demagogues, are mass-oriented leaders who express hostility toward the established order and appeal to the mass sentiments. These counter-elites, whether they are on the left or right, are extremist and intolerant, impatient with due process, contemptuous of individual rights, anxious to impose their views by sweeping measures and often willing to use violence and intimidation to do so (Lipset & Raab, 1970). Right-wing counterelites talk of «the will of the people», while left-wing radicals cry, «All power to the people». Both appeal to mass extremism: the notion that compromise and coalition-building, and working within the democratic system for change, is pointless or even immoral. Democratic politics is viewed with cynicism (Bunzel, 1967). Counterelites frequently resort to conspiracy theories to incite the masses. The left charges that the capitalist conspiracy exploits and oppresses the people for its own profit and amusement; the right charges that the nation is falling prey to a communist conspiracy whose goal is to deprive the people of their liberty and property. R. Hofstadter refers to this popularity of conspiracy theories as «the paranoid style of politics» (Hofstadter, 1965). A related weapon in the arsenal of demagogues is scapegoating – the designation of particular minority groups in society as responsible for the evils suffered by the people. U.S. history has seen a variety of scapegoats, among them Catholics, immigrants, Jews, blacks, intellectuals, Communists, Wall Street bankers, and the «military- industrial complex». These tactics appeal to mass desire for simplistic solutions to societal problems. Simplistic explanations relieve the masses of the drudgery of difficult thinking and allow complex problems to be expressed in simple, emotion-laden terms. Anti-intellectualism and antirationalism are important parts of mass politics.

It is the irony of democracy that democratic values can survive only in the absence of mass political activism. Democratic values thrive best when the masses are absorbed in the problems of everyday life and involved in groups and activities that distract their attention from mass political movements. Political stability depends on mass involvement in work, family, neighborhood, trade union, hobby, church, group recreation, and other activities. When the masses become alienated from home, work, and community – when their ties to social organizations and institutions weaken – they become vulnerable to the appeals of demagogues, and democratic values are endangered.

Mass activism inspires elite repression. Mass political movements, when they gain momentum and give rise to hatred, generate fear and insecurity among elites. They respond by limiting freedom and strengthen security, banning demonstrations, investigating and harassing opposition, arresting activists, and curtailing speech, writing, and broadcasting – usually under the guise of preserving law and order. Ironically, elites resort to these repressive actions out of a genuine belief that they are necessary to preserve democratic values.

Elite theory, then, recognizes multiple threats to democracy: elite misdeeds – shortsighted and self-interested behavior that undermines popular support for the political system; mass activism – extremist and intolerant political movements, led by counterelites appealing to racial hatred, class antagonism, and personal fears; and elite repression — forced indoctrination in «political correctness»; limitations on dissent, speech, and assembly in the name of law and order; and the subversion of democratic values in a paradoxical effort to preserve the system (See Graves, 2021, pp. 1-17).

All societies are governed by elites, even democratic societies. The elitist theory of democracy is not an attack upon democracy, but rather an aid in understanding the realities of democratic politics.

Elite theory is not an apology for elite rule; it is not defense of official misdeeds or repression. Rather, it is a realistic explanation of how democracy works, how democratic values are both preserved and threatened, how elites and masses interact, how public policy is actually determined, and whose interests generally prevail (Castiglione & Pollak 2019).

Critics of this elitist theory of democracy claim that it is «conservative», that it legitimizes elite rule, that it obstructs social progress of the masses. But elite theory neither endorses nor condemns elite governance, but rather seeks to expose and analyze the way in which elites function in a democracy. It is true that elite theory denies the possibility of ever abolishing elite rule; it denies the now discredited Marxist vision of a classless, socialist society. But, by providing a better understanding of how elites in a democratic society go about gaining, exercising, and maintaining power, elite theory identifies both the obstacles and opportunities for social progress. Rather than an idealized vision of social changes through mass citizen participation, elite theory provides a realistic assessment of how and when democratic elites are moved to initiate change. It warns the naive that leaders of "citizens' movements" are themselves elites with their own self-interests (Drochon, 2020).

Elite theory poses the central questions of American politics: Who governs the nation? How do people acquire power? How are economic and political power related? What interests shaped the U.S. Constitution? How have American elites changed over two centuries? How widely is power shared in the United States today? Are leaders in government, business, banking, the media, law, foundations, interest groups, and cultural affairs separate, distinct, and competitive – or are they concentrated, interlocked, and consensual? Do elites or masses give greater support to democratic values? Are masses generally informed, sensible, and considerate – or are they largely ill informed, apathetic, and intolerant? Does public opinion shape elite behavior – or do elites shape public opinion through the mass media? How successful are media elites in molding mass opinion and influencing public debate? Are American political parties «responsible» instruments of popular control of government – or are they weakened oligarchies, dominated by ideologically motivated activists? Do elections serve as policy mandates from the people – or are they primarily an exercise in citizenship, choosing personnel, not policy? Are political campaigns designed to inform voters and assess their policy preferences – or are they expensive, commercial adventures in image-making? How politically active, informed, knowledgeable, and consistent in their views are the American people? Do organized interest groups fairly represent the views of their members – or do they reflect the views and interests of leaders who are largely out of touch with the members? Does competition among interest groups create a reasonable balance in public policy – or do the special interests dominate policy making at the expense of the mass public? How much influence do masses have over the actions of presidents, Congress, and courts? What role does the president play in America's elite system? Why are presidents more influential in shaping foreign policy than domestic policy? Is power shifting from elected officials to «faceless bureaucrats»? What are the sources of bureaucratic power, and can bureaucracy be restrained? Who do members of Congress really represent? Are members of Congress held accountable for their policy decisions by the voters back home – or are they free to pursue their personal interests in Washington, knowing that their constituents are generally unaware of their policy positions? Why are the nation's most important domestic policy questions usually decided by the most elitist branch of the government, the unelected, lifetime-tenured justices of the Supreme Court? Can political decentralization – decision making by subelites in states and communities – increase mass involvement in government? How do elites respond to mass protest movements? Do protest movements themselves become oligarchic over time and increasingly divorced from the views of the masses?

**Conclusions.** This article addresses questions such as these from the perspective of elite theory. But it also compares and evaluates the answers suggested by pluralist theory and

democratic theory. The goal is a better understanding not only of U.S. politics but also of elitism, pluralism, and democracy in a complex social system.

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**Еліти в демократії як складної соціальної системи**

**(на прикладі Сполучених Штатів Америки)**

Стаття присвячена елітам як компонентам демократичної політичної системи. Розглянуто сутність елітарності, особливості демократії, проаналізовано еліти в демократії. Автори виділяють основні риси плюралізму, порівнюють елітарність та плюралізм. На прикладі американської політичної системи вони описують, як еліти та маси взаємодіють один з одним. У статті розглянуто основні питання елітарної теорії демократії. Метою статті є дослідження співвідношення між елітами та масами в умовах демократії, а також ролі еліти в забезпеченні демократичних процедур на

прикладі Солучених Штатів Америки. Стаття базується на міждисциплінарному підході, спираючись на принципи об'єктивності та соціального підходу. Методами дослідження є методи аналізу та синтезу, історичний та порівняльний.

**Ключові слова:** еліти, елітарність, демократія, плюралізм, політичні системи.

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### **РЕЛЕВАНТНІСТЬ АБО НЕРЕЛЕВАНТНІСТЬ «МАЛИХ» ПАРТІЙ: ТЕОРЕТИЗАЦІЯ, ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ТА ВИЯВИ**

У статті структуровано та систематизовано підходи із приводу розуміння феномена «малих» партій, на цій підставі теоретизовано та схарактеризовано особливості і вияви їхньої релевантності або нерелевантності. Відповідно, дослідження актуалізоване спробою відповісти на важливе для теорії партійних систем теоретико-методологічне запитання про те, чи «малі» партії можуть бути релевантними або ж, на противагу, повинні трактуватись лише як маргінальні, зокрема залежно від їхнього розуміння, і чи здатні вони впорядковувати різноманітні форми міжпартійної змагальності на різних рівнях політики й урядування. У результаті аргументовано, що в політичній науці і досі не вироблено консолідованої позиції з приводу означення сутності та розуміння параметрів, особливостей і рамок релевантності «малих» партій. Адже з одного боку (залежно від контексту та підходу до визначення), деякі «малі» партії здатні структурувати партійні системи, а деякі – зовсім ні. З іншого ж боку, атрибут релевантності слугує бар'єром для виділення або невиділення «малих» партій. Водночас загалом констатовано, що релевантність або нерелевантність «малих» партій – це не лише атрибут партійної системи, а характеристика окремих партій на різних рівнях та стадіях їхнього життєвого циклу. Відтак вмотивовано, що «малі» партії можуть бути як релевантними, так і нерелевантними, однак нерелевантні «малі» партії все-таки можуть бути наділені (хоч це і не обов'язково) потенціалом релевантності. Це трапляється тоді, коли «малі» партії здатні мобілізувати електорат із приводу нових соціополітичних поділів і політичних ідентичностей, а тому і коригувати поведінку та ідеологічно-політичне позиціонування всіх інших, передусім основних та системних, партій, тобто тактику і напрям міжпартійної змагальності у тій чи іншій партійній системі.

**Ключові слова:** партія, «мала» партія, партійна система, міжпартійна змагальність, вибори, релевантність.

**Вступ.** У політичній науці орієнтовано з 70-х років ХХ століття, з подальшою інтенсифікацією і розширенням надалі, дослідники почали ставити й артикулювати питання про так звані «малі» партії, їхню сутність, різновиди, підстави виокремлення на тлі інших партій і загалом партійних систем тощо. Тим не менше, за орієнтовано півстоліття політологічних досліджень й досі не було вироблено цілісного уявлення про те, як доцільно розуміти так звані «малі» партії, а відтак про те, чи вони можуть бути релевантними/істотними (у партіологічному сенсі) та загалом наскільки вони є значимими у рамках різноманітних форм міжпартійної змагальності та різного дизайну партійних систем, причому як на національному, так і на субнаціональному (локальному, регіональному тощо) рівнях виборів, політики й урядування. Відповідно, це й досі ставить або ще інтенсивніше ставить на порядок денний питання про те, як можна та доцільно розуміти феномен і можливі різновиди «малих» партій, а також про те, чи мають вони