

## Comparative Analysis of Elite Theories of Wilfred Pareto and Gaetano Mosca

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### Abstract

*This research paper presents a comparative analysis of the elite theories of Wilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, two prominent sociologists of the early 20th century. The study explores their respective perspectives on the formation, role, and perpetuation of elites in society. By examining their key works, the paper highlights similarities and divergences in their conceptualizations of power, social hierarchy, and political leadership. Through this analysis, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of elite theories and their relevance in contemporary discussions on governance, inequality, and societal structures.*

### Introduction

The study of elite theory is an important component of modern political system. The concept of elite is not latest. It is evident in the views of Plato and Aristotle. The term Elite is used in different perspective under varied conditions for identifying its role and nature in the particular political system.

However, it received serious attention during 19<sup>th</sup> century because of two great Italian thinkers viz., Vilfredo Pareto, a Sociologist and Gaetano Mosca, a Political Scientist. The Social scientists like Robert Michels, Harold Lasswell, C.Wright Mills James Burnham, and Ortega Gasset have developed the 'Elite Theory' based on sociological, economic and psychological dimension. Karl Mannheim, Joseph Schumpeter and Anthony Downs are other leading exponents, who developed this theory under different political systems.

The term 'Elite' is derived from Latin word 'Eligere' which means to choose or pick. The term elite were first used in Military administration as a choice of persons. The Concise dictionary defines the term Elite as choice, select few or pick. According to Harper's English dictionary elites are 'Cream of Working class'. International Encyclopedia of Social Science describes 'Elite' as a group of persons possess certain fundamental features of life. It is used as 'Choice' in 14<sup>th</sup> century and Best of the best in the

15<sup>th</sup> century. The term elite were introduced to describe standard of excellence and latter extended to refer greater social groups such as highly victorious military units and upper ranks of aristocracy <sup>1</sup>. The nature of elites slowly shifted from upper-class and oligarchic elements since 19<sup>th</sup> century towards democratic elements.

It shifted from Plato's aristocratic wisdom and Aristotle's dignity of ancient period to superior groups of medieval era and then towards different and exclusive quality as the base for elites identification. The study customary serious attention and gratitude in every form of political system and became more popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Vilfredo Pareto (1842-1923):**

Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian Sociologist is regarded as major supporter of elite theory. He contributed to the 'Theory of Elites and Circulation of Elites' in his book 'The Mind & Society'. He applies socio-psychological factors to recognize the elites and their nature. According to Pareto the marked degree of qualities differ from person to person in every society.

Pareto held that the rule of each society was in the hands of a small number of people who possessed the qualities necessary to control the whole social and political power. The people who reach the highest level or peak of the society and the nation are practically the best people and they are called elite. The elite class includes all those successful people

which are at a high level in every business and in every sector of society not only lawyers, doctors, scientists, but also thieves and prostitutes <sup>2</sup>.

According to Pareto elite, we mean the small number of individuals who in each sphere of activity have succeeded and have arrived at a higher echelon in the professional hierarchy <sup>3</sup>. He defines elites as a superior class of people who have superior qualities and highest indices compared to others in their respective field. He recognized them as the best in an exacting field in each sphere who exercise reflective influence in a civil society.

He divides the society on the basis of requisite qualities and the function they undertake in civil society in an organized fashion. Pareto advises elites to hold certain qualities to maintain themselves in power. He calls the qualities as residues, on account of which an elite assume high position in a civilized society. He has given six kinds of residues: 1) persistence of aggregates 2) Sociability 3) Activity 4) Integrity 5) Sex and 6) Instinct of combinations <sup>4</sup>.

Pareto was of the opinion that elites in different professions and social spheres always come from the same class of society, those who are rich, those who are intelligent, and those who are intelligent have the ability to understand mathematics, master music and cultivate high moral character. According to Pareto, there are two types of classes in society. They are ruling (elite class) and governed (non-elite class). Pareto's study appears to have focused on the ruling elite. He asserts that the elite govern the masses by force and cunning. In his view, the ruling elite rely on both force and consensus over time to maintain its power or authority. To run a government of two conflicting qualities in his opinion all that is required is cunning like a fox and cruelty like a tiger <sup>5</sup>.

Pareto further explains that with the changing times, the needs of the society are also changing. Where the ruling elite are declining, the non-ruling elite are willing to take the place of the ruling elite and are waiting for that opportunity. Thus, from time to time, the ruling elite are ousted from power and the non-ruling class takes over, and this process continues. According to Pareto, the elite are constantly changing. What is known today as the ruling class is replaced by the non-ruling elite due to the lack of high qualities or the ability to govern

effectively. This process is called aristocratic transition. Through this process, every elite in the society is destroyed, he says.

Pareto outlines the major causes of elite transition <sup>6</sup>.

1. There is openness in the elite class, it is not closed.
2. Once in power, the elites become corrupt. As a result, their aristocracy ceases.
3. Even in the non-elite class there are many people who are endowed with certain qualities.
4. They also fell due to the small number of elites.

The above major factors accelerate the transition of the elite. This transition takes place not only in the political system but also in various spheres of human life and society. Such a (circulatory) transition must take place from the point of view of any system. But those in power are not ready to give up easily. Then there is the possibility of revolution and revolution in the society which is dangerous to the system.

Pareto outlines some measures to prevent such a harmful revolution

1. The elite class should be easily admitted to the right qualified persons from the non-elite class.
2. The elite should keep their power intact through power.

As above, Wilfred Pareto has formulated a political elite theory.

**Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941):**

Gaetano Mosca, an Italian Political Scientist developed the 'Elite Theory and Circulation of Elites' expounded by Pareto in his famous book "The Ruling Class". He adopted analytical method for his theory. According to Mosca, 'Elites in a society were nothing other than a ruling class'. He divided society as ruling and ruled class. Gaetano Mosca further developed the political elite theory and developed it from a political point of view. Mosca has divided the administration into monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, following this principle, which has existed since Aristotle. In classifying this, he emphasizes that virtually all forms of government are always controlled by the elite <sup>7</sup>.

Mosca argues that in all societies, from the least developed to the most developed. In all these societies, two classes are found, one is the ruling

class and the other is the governed class which is governed. The relationship between the two classes is sometimes based on law and sometimes on violence<sup>8</sup>. Like Pareto, Moscow believes in the theory of elite change. Attitudes to command and political control are the hallmarks of the aristocracy. But when this attitude in the ruling class diminishes and people outside the government develop this attitude and political capabilities, the old rulers are removed and a new ruling class is formed in their place. According to Moscow, after a long period of rule, the ruling class becomes incapable of providing facilities to the masses, and in such a situation a change of power becomes inevitable. The reason why the minority class succeeds in ruling over the majority class is because Moscow says that the minority class (elite class) is organized and the majority class is unorganized and all power is concentrated in the hands of the ruling class<sup>9</sup>.

Moscow has divided the elite into two. 1) Ruling class - political elite and 2) governed class - masses, He is of the opinion that the ruling class not only establishes its power in the society but also enjoys all the other benefits related to power. The elite use legal and illegal means to maintain their influence and position. Military power, prestige and administrative prowess are the basis of political superiority. In any case, the ruling class is trying to provide stability to its power. It is based on compromise and ideology to maintain our superiority. Attempts are made by the aristocracy to link values and beliefs to the public interest. Similarly, the aristocracy relies on religious and national sentiments for the purpose of establishing unity in the society<sup>10</sup>. Moscow introduced a new thing in elite theory, the white cell it puts employees, scientists, engineers, scholars or intellectuals in the new middle class. Gaetano Mosca, like Wilfred Pareto, proposes the convergence of the elite, but his basis is social, not psychological. He says that if a new source of wealth exists in the society or the practical importance of knowledge increases or the old religion is destroyed and a new religion develops or a new ideology develops in the society then confusion and conflict arises in the ruling class and a minority class develops in the lower class Which begins to struggle with the ruling class to share power<sup>11</sup>.

**Similarities between Pareto and Moscow's theory:**

1. Both have defined elite, as a ruling class.
2. Both have classified society between the ruling class and the governed class.
3. Both have called the elite a minority.
4. Both have considered the elite class to be changeable rather than static. It also explains the convergence process that takes place in the elite class.
5. The ruling class is made up of great people from different groups.
6. Both have opposed the aristocratic Marxist socialist thought<sup>12</sup>.

**Difference into Pareto and Moscow's aristocracy:**

The fundamental difference between the two theories can be stated as follows<sup>21</sup>.

1. Compared to Pareto, Moscow has elaborated on the diverse group that forms the ruling class.
2. In a different way than Pareto, Moscow has said that the elite and the masses are connected by a new middle class.
3. Pareto has given psychological support to the concept of convergence of the elite. And Moscow has given a social basis to the concept of convergence of the elite.
4. Pareto's idea is anti-democratic. Moscow, however, is not anti-democratic.
5. Pareto said that the ruling class establishes its control over power through cunning and coercion, while Moscow has proposed the concept of ruling class on the basis of high intellectual, moral and cohesiveness.

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