RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Effectiveness of the Elite in the Process of Social Transformation : A Sociological Approach

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Abstract

There is no doubt that the development and progress of any human society depend on its political, cultural, economic, social, scientific, and religious elites. These elites play a prominent and effective role in the processes of change that society undergoes, given their central position in driving progress. This places upon them a high level of responsibility, since not every elite is capable of promoting societal advancement unless it is truly effective.

The elite are distinguished from the rest of society by their scientific, intellectual, and cultural level, which enables them to lead the wheel of development and progress through the ideas, opinions, programs, and constructive plans they contribute to achieving social prosperity and guiding society along the path of civilization. A reading of history shows that societies, in their civilizational movement, are not driven by the masses or the general public, but rather are led by the elite or a selected vanguard from among them, capable of guiding society and bringing about positive change within it.

This leads us to raise the following questions:
- What are the conditions that must be available in the elite in order for them to lead society?
- What are the factors that help them become effective in the process of positive social transformation?

Introduction

There is no doubt that the development and progress of any human society depend on its political, cultural, economic, social, scientific, and religious elites, as they play a prominent and effective role in the processes of change that society undergoes due to their central role in driving progress. This places upon these elites a high level of responsibility, since not every elite is capable of achieving societal advancement unless it is effective. The elite are distinguished from the

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rest of society by their scientific, intellectual, and cultural level, which enables them to lead the wheel of development and progress through the ideas, opinions, programs, and constructive plans they contribute in order to achieve societal prosperity and guide society along the path of civilization.

A reading of history shows that societies, in their civilizational movement, are not driven by the masses or the general public, but rather are led by the elite or a selected vanguard from among them, capable of guiding society and bringing about positive change within it. This leads us to raise the following questions: What are the conditions that must be available in the elite in order for them to lead society? And what are the factors that help them become effective in the process of positive social transformation?

Objectives of the Study

1.   To identify the concept of the elite.

2.   To highlight the most important roles played by elites in society.

3.   To enrich libraries and research centers with such studies, especially since they are rare to the best of the researcher's knowledge

4.   To address the need for such studies through which elites and their role in the process of social development can be understood.

1. Definition of Concepts

1.1 The Elite

In *Lisān al-ʿArab* by Ibn Manẓūr, the elite (*nukhba*) is defined as follows: "*Nakhaba* means to select or choose; and the elite of a people are their chosen or best members" (Vol. 26, p. 4373).

In the Oxford English Dictionary, *elite* is defined as "the select group; the upper class; the elite." French dictionaries define it as referring to persons and groups who participate in shaping the history of a given community through the power they possess or the influence they exercise, whether through decision-making or through the ideas they adopt as their guiding principles. It also refers to a selected minority from a social group (a society, a state, a religious sect, or a political party) that usually exercises influence within that group, often by virtue of its actual or presumed special talents.

1.1.1 Types of Elites

1. The Political Elite

The Dictionary of Political and International Terms indicates that the term *elite* corresponds in Arabic to *al-ṣafwa* (the select or upper group), meaning the upper stratum of society. They are an influential minority that governs the majority and plays a leading political role in managing their communities through the spontaneous recognition granted to them in their capacity as leaders (Badawi, 1989, pp. 52–53).

2. The Religious Elite

In Islamic contexts, this refers to religious scholars and authorities, and in Christian contexts, to clergy. They exercise authority over people's hearts in proportion to their level of religiosity. The religious elite constitute a socio-religious milieu referring to a category that enjoys a distinguished level of religious knowledge and related functions such as issuing fatwas, adjudication, and teaching. They possess religious and scholarly authority, exert influence over other social groups, and have shared interests and roles (Hadhri, 2013, p. 56).

3. The Social Elite

This usually refers to the upper class of society with the highest level of social influence. The social elite are opinion leaders who shape public opinion and influence its trends and orientations within society.

4. The Cultural Elite

They include intellectuals, scholars in various fields, and political activists (HamdiSocio Blog, 2019).

2.1 Society

Linguistically, as stated in *Al-Maʿānī Dictionary*, society refers to a group of people who depend on one another, live together, are bound by common relations and interests, and are governed by shared customs, traditions, and laws (Almaany, 2019).

Technically, society can be defined as a large number of settled individuals who are connected by social relations and shared interests, accompanied by systems aimed at regulating their behavior and existing under the authority of governance (Al-Jazouli, n.d.). Society is also a group of living persons rather than merely a set of ideas; these persons are self-sufficient, enduring, and composed of males and females. Sociologists describe society as the largest group to which individuals can belong, possessing the capacity for self-adaptation and continuity over time (Mawdoo3, 2019).

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3.1 Social Transformation

Linguistically, transformation means to change something from one state to another, that is, to alter or modify it (Murtada, 1965, p. 286).

Terminologically, social transformation refers to any change that occurs in social systems, structures, and institutions—whether structural or functional—over a specific period of time. It also refers to forms of development that affect the social system, that is, that influence the structure and functions of society (Madkour, 1975, p. 165). It further denotes a change in the formal or substantive condition from one form or place to another in a successive manner (New Webster's Dictionary).

4.1 Leadership

Linguistically, leadership refers to the quality of the leader or the position in which leadership is exercised (*Al-Munjid*, 1987, p. 822).

Terminologically, leadership is the activity exercised by a person who occupies a functional position within a usually formal hierarchical structure that grants him or her the necessary resources to lead. Leaders are those who are above us, who sit at the top of the hierarchy, or who preside over us (Grint, 2013, p. 12).

2. Main Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Elites

Elite theory has its roots in ancient Greek political thought. Early research trends sought to identify who governs or who controls the apex of the political system in order to determine the nature of the regime and distinguish between democratic, autocratic, and oligarchic systems.

The foundational contributions to elite theory were made by three Italian political thinkers. Pareto argued that elites should be intelligent, which distinguishes them from the rest of society, but that power is the decisive criterion for moving from the non-governing elite to the governing elite. Mosca replaced the concept of the elite with that of the political class, viewing history as the history of ruling political classes. Michels emphasized that elites should be defined not by personal traits but by institutional position and degree of power exercised.

C. Wright Mills argued that political decision-making is controlled by a political, economic, and military elite, forming what he called the "power elite."

Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter developed further theoretical approaches, arguing that direct democracy is impractical in large societies and that effective governance requires technical expertise, making elite leadership functionally necessary, though it should be constrained by law and institutions (Al-Ghazi, 2019).

3. Sources of Elite Formation

Every society has its own elites, since temporal and spatial conditions constitute the direct factor in the formation and production of elites. Most thinkers and specialists agree that there are two main sources for elite formation (Kebar, 2013, p. 221):

1. Formal Source

Elite formation takes place in a directed manner within official institutions and for specific, pre-planned objectives. For example, universities work to produce their own elites, and merchants and businesspeople also create their elites through higher schools of business administration and similar institutions.

2. Informal Source

Any individual not affiliated with a specific class or group may succeed in various fields of social life and enter the world of elites. This is increasingly common today, and such individuals include scientists, writers, artists, athletes, and others.

The role and influence of elites in the social arena vary according to the prevailing system in each society. The degree of awareness—whether within society, within the governing system, or among the elites themselves—determines the level of their activity and effectiveness.

4. Characteristics and Features of the Elite

Some researchers focus on a set of psychological and rational considerations such as intelligence, shrewdness, creativity, willpower, ambition, diligence, financial resources, moral value, good reputation, fame, and professional experience across different fields. These psychological and social traits enable their bearers to influence others and exercise dominance over them.

All of this means that elites possess intellectual, moral, human, and social capital that enables them to play an effective role in the social life of society. Hence, elites are often described as constituting the spirit of the nation and its moral and human strength (Tofta, 2015, p. 32).

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The attributes that the elite must possess in terms of their effectiveness in society are as follows: The elite and their impact on the formation and stability of societies and on shaping systems of governance and thought. Arab Democratic Center, cited from the website: www.democraticac.de, accessed on 16/11/2019:

• Relatively small in number, as they constitute a select group; therefore, they are homogeneous, united, self-aware, and characterized by the ability to preserve themselves.

• Enjoying a high social status (politicians, religious leaders, intellectuals, and businesspeople).

• Holding the sources of political power (the political elite) and playing an active role in policy-making and in implementing political programs.

• The ability to make decisions.

• Guiding citizens toward the social values in which they believe.

• Their members are formed and supported to assume important positions in society (the reins of power).

• The ability to direct participation and economic activity through control over the means of production.

• Influencing belief systems through preachers or the religious elite.

• The ability to modify citizens' behaviors and promote ideas that serve the ruling system and legitimize its performance. Some view elites as a mixture of groups and contradictions that defend interests as well as ideas and orientations.

• Independence, in the sense that they are not held accountable for their actions by any other party; they alone decide on issues and solve problems according to their own interests and perceptions.

5- The role of the elite as a fundamental actor in the process of social transformation: The process of social transformation is manifested primarily through the activities and contributions of the various formal and informal bodies that constitute society, through their functions aimed at developing and advancing society within the accelerated dynamics of globalization. These bodies include:

5-A- Civil society organizations: These are considered the primary and most active elements in social transformation and include:

1- Associations: legally licensed groupings formed by individuals working to achieve defined objectives in social fields or to represent certain persons or professions.

2- Non-governmental organizations: similar to associations in structure and objectives, but their activity has a global dimension and their funding is often unknown.

3- Trade unions: bodies associated with social and labor movements, especially in defending workers' rights and students, and are considered strong social partners.

4- Opposition political parties: peaceful, democratic opposition parties are a pillar of civil society due to their links with networks of activists, associations, and the media.

5- Clubs: organizations formed for leisure, sports, or cultural activities.

6- Independent press: one of the platforms relied upon to protect democracy and civil society, inform public opinion, expose violations of law, and combat corruption. (Abdallah Kabbār, previous reference, p. 223).

5-B- Official organizations and institutions: These include political institutions (elected councils and legislative bodies), economic institutions (productive and profit-oriented enterprises), social institutions (health and education), cultural institutions, and others.

Accordingly, the role and duty of the elite toward society is as follows (Mohamed Fourati, *The Role of the Elite in Democratic Change... Absence or Marginalization?*, Al-Fajr News, 14/06/2010):

The foremost priority of the intellectual elite is the production of ideas, the protection of achievements from loss, the fight against corruption, the defense of the public interest, and the exposure of threats facing nations. Society needs a genuine role for the intellectual elite to help overcome backwardness and to achieve justice, democracy, freedom of opinion and expression, and equality.

The strategic role of the elite is to create awareness and disseminate knowledge within society, as no society can fulfill its duties or overcome its problems without awareness.

The intellectual cannot be isolated from society nor adopt orientations that contradict it; harmony and common ground are necessary. A society disconnected from its elite remains backward, whereas a society that cooperates with its elite becomes advanced and progressive.

Study Results (Results of the Study)

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Based on the study presented on the role of the elite in the process of social transformation, and by projecting the real roles of elites as active agents in the development and advancement of society onto our current reality, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Positive social transformation cannot occur without the contribution and leadership of elites in all political, economic, social, and cultural fields.

- The more active the elites are in responding to events and engaging positively with the rapidly changing social dynamics, the more the social transformation is characterized by positivity.

- Direct engagement of elites with society, by being present on the ground and experiencing various social conditions, allows them to understand the problems faced by society, enabling them to propose effective solutions.

- Contributions of elites from various disciplines through their ideas, opinions, and guidance significantly and effectively lead the process of development and advancement.

- Cases of backwardness and chaos due to poor management, misjudgment, and bad planning, which many social institutions suffer from, and which have led to the deterioration and collapse of numerous regimes, are primarily caused by the absence of effective elites or the negative loyalty of elites toward decision-makers.

- Most social problems and various disturbances in Third World and Arab countries are caused by the absence of elites. This is either due to their deliberate marginalization by decision-makers, or because their activity is limited to research centers and academic institutions, avoiding direct contact with social realities due to personal convictions or fear of confronting societal challenges.

Recommendations and Proposals

- It is necessary to involve elites from various political, social, and economic disciplines in planning, management, and decision-making within political, economic, and social institutions.

- Engage research centers, laboratories, and universities in the development process by benefiting from their scientific achievements and applying them in real-world contexts.

- Examine and learn from the experiences of pioneering countries in development.

- Conduct evaluative studies by experts representing the elite to assess the performance of various organizations and institutions across different fields, diagnose weaknesses, and provide effective solutions to promote positive social transformation.

- Develop educational programs and curricula that are both advanced and aligned with current social realities in schools and universities to prepare and train effective elites from within society, fully aware of its conditions.

Conclusion

The elite represents the select echelon of society and leads its growth and development through the process of transformation, which is a necessary response to the accelerated global dynamics in societies. The pattern of social transformation depends on the nature of the elite:

- If the elite is positive, active, and liberated from constraints that may hinder its activity, with constructive ideas, plans, and guidance, it can achieve and contribute significantly to qualitative and positive social transformation.

- Conversely, if the elite is inactive, detached from societal realities, or intellectually and practically constrained within narrow limits, it becomes an obstacle to societal development and may contribute to a negative direction in social transformation.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with generally accepted ethical standards in social science research. The research is theoretical and analytical in nature and does not involve human subjects, personal data, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. All sources used in this study have been properly cited, and the principles of academic integrity, originality, and transparency were strictly observed. The authors affirm that the manuscript does not contain any form of plagiarism or unethical academic practice.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed substantially to the conception and development of this manuscript. Nebeg Aimed was responsible for the conceptual framework, theoretical analysis, and drafting of the initial manuscript. Belahmari Bachir contributed to the sociological interpretation, literature review, and critical revision of the manuscript. Boumediene Hadjadj participated in refining the analytical arguments, structuring the discussion, and reviewing the final version of

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the paper. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Acknowledgements

Funding

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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