



Meritocracy and political elite. Meritocratic political elite

Nazaraliyeva Nargiza

Department of "Political Science" of the
National University of Uzbekistan
2nd year student

Abstract:

This article discusses the meritocracy system, its principles, achievements and shortcomings, the theory of political elites, different views on these concepts, their characteristics and interdependence.

Keywords: Meritocracy, political elite, personnel selection, fair management, management by worthy.

Introduction

In political literature, the "political elite", which has various names such as "ruling class", "management class", "the highest class", is the main force that moves the power. The so-called "meritocracy" concept comes into play when attracting the most worthy representatives to the political elite. Any political elite formed on the basis of merit system can be believed to exercise fair and pure power. Below, we will delve deeper into the issue of the essence and interdependence of these concepts.

Meritocracy is a system or ideology in which people are recognized and duly rewarded based on their abilities, skills and achievements, not on factors such as social class, economic capabilities, or family affiliation, or patronage. If we give a definition of the concept itself, meritocracy is a form of management based on the principle of individual ability. The word "meritocracy" is taken from

French (“merit”-“worthy”, “capable”). This term was first used by English sociologist Michael Young in his work "The Rise of Meritocracy 1870-2033"¹.

In a society based on meritocratic principles, power and all positions of management and influence are acquired through ability, hard work or high qualifications. Its main features are:

- Equal opportunities: meritocracy focuses on providing equal opportunities to all individuals, regardless of their background, to demonstrate their abilities and talents;
- Education and qualifications: in meritocratic systems, the attributes of education and qualifications are often dominant in evaluating the characteristics and capabilities of a person;
- Performance-based development: in a meritocracy, people are rewarded and promoted based on their performance, achievements, and contribution to society or a particular field.

The form of management characterized by the above-mentioned features is called the form of meritocratic management. Meritocracy is one of the systems that can be found in democratic and non-democratic forms of government.

A group of influential people who have significant power and influence in the political sphere is called "political elite". People belonging to the political elite often have the right to preferentially participate in decision-making processes and are the main subjects in the formation of policies and management. The term "Elite" is originally derived from the french word "elite" which means “the best”, “the chosen one”. The term is specific to the fields of sociology and political science, and the system of views in political science was defined by the Italian political scientists G. Mosca and V. Pareto, who are recognized as the most famous classical representatives of the elite theory.

The political elite is characterized as follows:

- Positions of power: political elites typically consist of high-ranking officials, politicians, and influential figures who hold positions of authority within government or political organizations;
- Networks and connections: political elites often have strong relationships and connections with other influential people, which allows them to influence decision-making processes;
- Strong resource sources: they often have resources such as funds, media platforms and databases, which further strengthen their power.

There are many views on the issue of the political elite, and they complement each other or partially differ. For example, Vilfredo Pareto's elite theory focuses on the movement of the elite in society. He noted that societies experience a constant change of ruling elite, that is, over time, one group is replaced by another, and thus there is a turnover of political elites in society². Gaetano Mosca's "ruling class" theory emphasizes the inevitability of elite rule in society. According to him, every society is governed by a ruling class that takes power and controls the state apparatus. This ruling class maintains its rule through a combination of coercion, manipulation, and acquiescence³. German sociologist and politician Max Weber put forward the idea that the political elite plays the role of bureaucracy and rational-legal authority in the formation of power. According to him, the political elite is a group of individuals who have special knowledge, skills and experience that enable effective management of society and decision-making⁴. American sociologist Charles R. Mills explains the role of the elite in the management more broadly, defining it as a small group of

¹ Michael Young: The Rise of the Meritocracy/Pre-publication version on British Journal of Educational Studies/2011

² Vilfredo Pareto: The Rise and Fall of the Elites/The Bedminster Press/1968/<https://archive.org/details/risefallofelites0000pare>

³ James H.Meisel: The Myth of the Ruling Class. Gaetano Mosca and the Elite/1962/<https://archive.org/details/mythofrulingclass0000mies>

⁴ <https://fs2.american.edu/dfagel/www/class%20readings/weber/politicsasavocation.pdf>

individuals who have significant influence and decision-making power in society. An elite is a group of political, economic, and military leaders who work together to maintain their positions of power and control society⁵.

We can say that the mentioned ideas are important in revealing the essence of the elite and serve as a paradigm of the elite. In general, the political elite is a group of high-ranking people who have privileged power, resources, and wide rights in management and are able to influence the life of society through these advantages.

When we talk about meritocracy, we see a society where only deserving people are recognized and only deserving people are encouraged. The concept of meritocracy shows the need to reward and recognize individuals on the basis of their services and abilities, determined by their activities and contributions to society.

A meritocratic society focuses on equal opportunities, which means that everyone should have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities, regardless of their background. This often involves implementing quality education and training programs to ensure that people have the tools they need to succeed. Education and skills play an important role in meritocratic systems. A person's performance is generally evaluated based on educational achievements, such as degrees, certifications, or specialized training and experience. The main idea is that those who spend time and effort to acquire knowledge and skills should be given the opportunity to get ahead. In meritocracy, the "promotion" of individuals is usually based on self-improvement, hard work. Individuals who consistently demonstrate their abilities and achieve outstanding results are rewarded with promotions, higher salaries, or other forms of recognition. This attitude encourages competition and motivates individuals to continuously improve their skills and strive for excellence.

Bearing in mind that positions of power and influence must be achieved through a fair and transparent process, the following is envisaged:

- Equal opportunity: meritocracy advocates an environment where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. At the heart of this is equal access to education, self-improvement and any other resources necessary for people to develop their abilities and skills.
- Fair competition: meritocracy emphasizes fair competition. In this, people are evaluated and rewarded based on their activities and achievements. That is, nepotism (personal bias, familiarity), favoritism and discrimination should not play a role in decision-making processes.
- Personal responsibility: Meritocracy emphasizes individual action and responsibility. In this case, people act for their own achievements and are responsible for their own actions.
- Performance-based rewards: In a merit system, rewards and positions of power are distributed based on an individual's performance and contribution to society. High achievers are recognized and rewarded more.
- Transparency and Accountability: Meritocracy ensures transparency in decision-making processes and accountability for those in positions of power. It provides that decisions should be made on the basis of objective criteria and that those in power should be held accountable for their actions.

There are many examples of how the meritocracy system is recognized as an effective system by many politicians and powerful politicians. For example, the former Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, expressed the following thoughts about meritocracy in one of her speeches: "Meritocracy is

⁵ Charles Wright Mills: The Power Elite/1956

a very necessary tool for a fair and efficient society. It ensures that individuals are rewarded based on their ability and achievements, not their background or connections.” French President Emmanuel Macron: "Meritocracy is the basis of strong power." This system ensures that those with skills and abilities, regardless of their social or economic background, are given the opportunity to lead." Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe emphasizes that the merit system is the driving force behind the success of the Japanese people, it allows individuals to rise based on their achievements, which leads to a strong and competitive society.

The fact that power is in the hands of those who deserve it is the main factor of a prosperous society can also be the reason for the widespread recognition of meritocracy.

Below we will consider the important aspects of meritocracy in the political elite, which is considered fair due to its characteristics.

From the point of view of political science, it shows that power and influence in societies are mainly controlled by a small group of individuals or an organization. This elite, called the ruling class or power elite, has influence in various aspects of society, including: government, business, mass media, and other influential institutions. In addition to shaping and controlling public policy, they exert their power through various means, such as lobbying, finance, resource allocation, and control. Critics of political elite theory argue that it oversimplifies complex political dynamics and fails to account for the diversity of interests and power dynamics in society. Political decision-making is not carried out by the will of the majority or the general public, but by a select few individuals who have important resources such as wealth, social status, or political connections. They explain that meritocracy is necessary for us precisely because of this aspect. That is, emphasizing that the role of the political elite in the life of the state and society is important, that it is necessary to prevent conflict of interests, to regulate the interests of the majority through the minority, and that this minority group must consist of qualified persons who deserve power. The political elite really deserves it if the personnel with limited economic opportunities, who are not related to the "big people at the top", have high qualifications in their field, "know their work" and have achieved sufficient achievements, are attracted to management positions. If it is filled with those who are, it will serve as a decisive factor in the development of both the society and the state.

An example of this is the achievements of Singapore in a short period of time. In this country, individuals are selected not based on factors such as social status or political connections, but based on their abilities and achievements, and the country's political elite, in turn, is composed of highly educated and qualified, talented individuals⁶. Meanwhile, the ruling People's Movement Party has been in power since Singapore's independence in 1965, and the party's success has been attributed to attracting talented leaders. A meritocratic society was built in the country. This has enabled Singapore to attract and retain top talent, driving innovation and economic growth. Also, the emphasis on meritocracy created a level playing field for all Singaporeans, ensured that hard work was rewarded, and increased trust in the government. Statistics prove this: in the early years of Singapore's independence, half of the population was illiterate, and the GDP per capita was 516 US dollars. According to the reports published by the International Monetary Fund in 2022, this indicator reached 51 thousand 162 US dollars and was recorded in 11th place among the countries of the world. Singapore's commitment to meritocracy has not only contributed to its impressive economic development, but also fostered a sense of community cohesion and national pride.

⁶ <https://www.forwardsingapore.gov.sg/stories/revisiting-meritocracy>

Another country that has achieved success through the merit system is Germany. Special attention to meritocracy in the country allowed it to train highly qualified and competitive personnel, and based on this ideology, a strong education system was introduced. Germany also has a strong apprenticeship system, which allows people to gain practical skills and experience in various fields, further increasing their employability⁷. In addition, South Korea, which has introduced a strong education system and a system of selecting students for its best universities based only on academic achievements and abilities, not economic opportunities, provides social assistance to the poor, and promotes their equality through comprehensive provision. Sweden, which has a specialised riding system, can also be cited as an example.

Admittedly, meritocracy is not without flaws. This system can lead to a lack of opportunities for the less well-off population of the society, and as a result, social and economic inequalities arise and persist. In addition, due to the emphasis on individual achievements and abilities, the value of team efforts and cooperation is likely to be devalued. There is also a sense of constant competition and individualism that destroys social unity and harmony. This can foster a culture of self-interest rather than collective well-being, leading to social divisions and a lack of empathy for the less successful. Another aspect is that in a meritocratic society there can be a strong pressure to constantly prove oneself and achieve success. This factor is likely to lead to high levels of stress and anxiety, as people feel the need to constantly compete and excel in order to maintain their status or opportunities. Meritocracy often ignores the systemic problems and biases that prevent certain groups from succeeding. Factors such as race, gender, and socio-economic status that can limit individual resources and opportunities cannot be overcome, or simply do not recognize the existence of societies and systems where such ideological views exist.

There are several countries that oppose meritocracy or implement policies contrary to its principles. For example, China has a special system of "guanxi" contacts, which often play an important role in promotion and obtaining privileges. This is the result of ideas like nepotism and favoritism that undermine the concept of meritocracy.

Another example is that the ruling regime in North Korea has a strict hierarchy and power is concentrated in the hands of a few established individuals. Opportunities for advancement and "promotion" are often based on loyalty to the regime rather than personal qualities or abilities. In some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, there is a strong emphasis on family ties and tribal affiliation, which can limit opportunities for those who do not have connections to influential people or come from high-ranking families.

In addition, some countries may favor other values or systems over meritocracy. For example, in communist countries like Cuba or Vietnam, the emphasis is often on collective welfare and equal distribution of resources.

In some cases, opposition to meritocracy may stem from concerns about social inequality and its contribution to perpetuating existing inequalities. This system can lead to the concentration of power and resources in the hands of a few individuals who have access to them in advance, and to the exclusion of others.

Nevertheless, taking into account the wide range of positive features of meritocracy, there is no doubt that its support and implementation will give us positive results based on the experience of countries that have reached a new stage of development as a result of it. To promote a sense of justice

⁷ <https://engelsbergideas.com/notebook/imperial-germany-mighty-power-or-modern-meritocracy/>

and equal opportunities for all representatives of society, to attract qualified personnel to the fields suitable for them, taking into account the specific skills and abilities of qualified personnel, - to create an atmosphere of confidence that they will be adequately encouraged for their actions, especially the upper layer, which in some sense is a "mirror" of the state power - the use of this system in the composition of the political elite is considered to be the most effective step towards fair governance can be concluded. This directly serves as the main tool for achieving sustainable development of a prosperous society and state.

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