

SEE ALSO: Bourdieu, Pierre; Cultural Capital; Culture; Culture Industries; Distinction; Elites; Globalization, Culture and; Highbrow/Lowbrow; Mass Culture and Mass Society; Media; Media and Consumer Culture; Music; Popular Culture; Television; Williams, Raymond

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elites

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“History is a graveyard of aristocracies.” With this phrase the Italian Vilfredo Pareto, who introduced the word elite in social sciences, formulated his idea of the decline and fall of elites, especially the political elite. For both him and Gaetano Mosca, the second founding father, the key concept was the circulation of elites (Bottomore 1993: 35). Many of these early writings on elites have a moral trademark. This can be seen in Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (1513), where he gives a somewhat cynical but insightful analysis of the behavior of a ruler, but also provided instructions on how to act.

Theoreticians like Pareto and Mosca, but also the German Robert Michels (who formulated the famous “iron law of oligarchy” based on the inevitability of minority rule within the German Social Democratic Party), hold strong opinions on how elites should act and how their positions can be justified. The rightful behavior of elites is still, of course, fiercely debated in the public arena, but less so in modern social research on elites.

Today, the word elites is used in a very wide sense, for instance by speaking of a “sport elite.” Nevertheless, in modern studies, elites are usually defined as the incumbents of top positions in both the public and private sector, like members of parliament or boards of executives. The focus is on the individual characteristics of these incumbents, the extent to which they are interconnected with each other, or the chance that people with certain characteristics are able to obtain such an elite position. However, the problem of sampling is transferred from individuals with high qualities to institutions (their influence in society is sometimes debated).

Information on elites (after all, public figures who draw much attention from the media) is easy to collect. Biographical summaries abound, both for the public and private sector, but publications like *Who’s Who* are always a collection of persons where the criteria of inclusion of people, the rich and famous, very much depend on the bias of the editors and the information does not always have the quality required for thorough social research. However, many printed sources exist and are useful in situations where specialized surveys or interviews are difficult and certainly expensive (Moyser & Wagstaffe 1987; Bürklin et al. 1997).

By emphasizing the circulation of elites, Pareto and Mosca tend to underestimate the potential of elites to adapt to changing circumstances. Today, questions about openness or closeness of certain institutions and the chance that a particular person with certain characteristics will occupy an elite position are at the top of the agenda for sociological elite studies. Such investigations can be incorporated into the wider field of social stratification and mobility. Thus, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes the process of *reproduction* of elites through scholarly and cultural capital and

spends much time in describing the French elite schools, les *Grandes Écoles*. A large study conducted by Bürklin et al. (1997) on members of the German elites in several public and private sectors tried to answer the question of whether elites from East Germany have been integrated into the local and national elites from West Germany.

Studies on elites can be summarized by means of two dichotomies. The first is directed to questions on *horizontal* and *vertical* integration. A classical study on horizontal integration of the American elite is C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite* (1956). Mills wanted to show that the governmental, military, and business elites – all male, white, and Christian – are highly interconnected. The term *pantouflage* is used in France to describe the quite common shift of the French governing elites from the public to private sector and vice versa. In societies with cleavages along religious lines elites from each group are sometimes able to cooperate at the national level. On the borderline between studies of corporate networks based on linkages between corporations, created through multiple functions of some members of the boards of executives, and elite studies, is work by Windolf (2002). Vertical integration deals with the question how representative are incumbents with respect to the population as a whole. Usually, they are not representative and elites prefer contacts among their own kind than with people 'below'. Much debate on the trust of citizens in democratic institutions can be seen in the light of a steady decline of vertical integration.

The second dichotomy is between an *individualistic* and a *structural* approach. The first emphasizes the characteristics of individual persons, while the latter focuses on the links between these individuals and larger structures ranging from family connections to common membership in an institution, past or present. Many studies within the individualistic approach focus on parliamentary representatives (Best & Cotta 2000), other political figures, or civil servants (Page & Wright 1999). Families can be seen as a separate research unit, where both approaches are incorporated. Harbor barons or industrial families sometimes show a great ability to stay in top positions, creating an almost dynastic continuity. In contrast to the

accepted open and meritocratic character of modern societies, research shows that the ability to obtain an elite position in the Dutch nobility, an elite based on birth, has hardly declined during the twentieth century, although nobility is often seen as a relic from the past in Dutch public opinion (Schijf et al. 2004).

Very much in the tradition of research on social mobility, the German sociologist Hartman (2002) looked at the social background of engineers, lawyers, and economists who finished their high school education in 1955, 1965, 1975, and 1985. He then examined who was able to reach an elite position later in life. His conclusion is that the openness of the German educational system has increased, but that this is not true for the chance of obtaining an elite position, which still depends on an appropriate high social background. This use of longitudinal data seems to be promising for elite research in the future, because this research focus on the chances of obtaining such an elite position for a large group of persons and therefore highlights the openness or closedness of a society as a whole.

During the twentieth century many members of local elites became members of national elites. Today, one can see rapid development of a global economy, increasing popularity of international business schools, and the availability of large-scale international communication. Nevertheless, although rather scarce, research shows (e.g., Hartman 1999) that so far there are few indications of the rise of an international business elite. In the boards of executives in countries like France, Germany, Great Britain, and the US, the overwhelmingly majority of members of these boards have the same nationality as the countries where these corporations are located. The only exceptions are foreign subsidiaries. Many executives had educational careers in their country of birth. This might change in the future, but it is very likely that top managers will follow a mainly local career instead of a global one. With the development of the European Union and its institutions, there might be an international bureaucratic elite in the making, but that is still not certain.

Other research topics on elites are less developed. For instance, little knowledge is available about the lifestyle of the elites or the neighborhoods they live in. The study by Pinçon and

Pinçon-Charlot (1989) on elite quarters in Paris offers an inspiring example of such research. The present research on elites also shows much emphasis on formal characteristics of incumbents. Far less information is available on how elites operate in (in)formal settings, or how the horizontal connections really work.

Evidence of much modern research shows that countries where no dramatic changes have taken place show a remarkable stability in their elites. Of course, the circulation of political elites often happens due to regular elections as part of the democratic process, but other groups or families turn out to be able to maintain elite positions over several generations by adapting to new circumstances.

SEE ALSO: Bourdieu, Pierre; Elite Culture; Michels, Robert; Mills, C. Wright; Pareto, Vilfredo; Power Elite

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Ellis, Havelock (1859–1939)

Jeffrey Weeks

Havelock Ellis, editor, critic, essayist, and pioneer sexologist, was born on February 2, 1859 in Croydon, Surrey. His father was a sea captain and rarely at home, so Ellis's mother was the dominant influence in his early life. She was an ardent evangelical Christian who had experienced a conversion at the age of 17, but Ellis early on slipped away from the more rigid aspects of her faith. He was provided with a basic education in private schools in south London, but his main education derived from wide reading. The crucial formative influence was his stay in Australia for four years from the age of 16.

Here, in the outback, in almost total isolation, he began to experience conflicts in his awakening sexual life and in his spiritual outlook. Born in the year of the first publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, Ellis was a child of a new scientific optimism, unattracted to a religious world outlook which he saw as dying, but repelled by the absorption of science into a chilly utilitarianism. It was in this state of mind that he reread a book by James Hinton, a writer on political, social, religious, and sexual matters, entitled *Life in Nature* (1862). The book sparked a spiritual transformation. In particular, for the young Ellis, the belief that sexual freedom could bring in a new age of happiness helped direct him towards the scientific study of sex. To prepare him for this, he resolved to train as a doctor, and returned to London in April 1879 ready to face his new life.

His actual work as a doctor was spasmodic. During his training and in the years that followed his real preoccupation was with his literary and scientific studies. The London of the 1880s was a focus of intense intellectual and political ferment, and Ellis immersed himself in this new culture. Through his involvement in various progressive groupings he met many of the radical luminaries of the time. He began editing and writing, publishing essays on religion, philosophy, travel, and politics. However, Ellis was never a political activist. Even as a