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Processes of recruitment and selection of political elites as a theoretical concept

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PROCESSES OF RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF POLITICAL ELITES AS A THEORETICAL CONCEPT

ABSTRACT

The article is an attempt to reveal processes of recruitment and selection of political elites, including channels and types of political careers. Its point of departure is an analysis of chosen views of political elites' researchers and their theories of political elites presented in literature on the subject, in the frames of which those processes occur.

Keywords:

political elite, recruitment and selection of political elites.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'elite' is an ambiguous notion and tends to be defined in various ways. The general meaning of the concept of elite, including political elite, is: a group of leaders chosen from the society, although not necessarily in a formal way, which constitutes a role model for the remaining society, leads its life and defines, or at least influences, directions of its development; it may be situated in various segments of social structure and not always in official establishment; its particular meaning is generally attributed to political and cultural elite (intellectual elite)¹.

¹ W. Sokół, M. Żmigrodzki, *Elity polityczne*, [in:] *Wprowadzenie do nauki o państwie i polityce*, B. Szmulik, M. Żmigrodzki (ed.), Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2010, p. 455.

The term 'political elite' has various connotations, such as: 'power elite', 'ruling elite', 'ruling class', 'political class', 'governing class', 'leadership', 'controlling group', 'establishment', etc.².

In order to define political elite in literature on the subject, three methods are used concerning various areas: position, reputation, decision. The method concerning position defines persons occupying the highest positions in a country. Such a type of elite includes members of central power: the head of state with the nearest environment, the prime minister, members of government, members of parliament and representatives of legal defense organs. The method relating to reputation defines persons who, in the social belief, influence decisions made by the state. They can be representatives of academic, cultural elite etc. as well as friends and family of high officials who frequently have an informal influence on decisions. The method concerning decision consists of separating a group of people who make decisions in the state³.

Therefore, political elite means: (a) in a narrow meaning, members of the power system who directly take part and influence the process of decision-making in the state (power elite), whereas (b) in a wider context, all persons who occupy important positions in the system of power and who serve important roles and functions (such as members of local governments).

Those persons occupy the highest positions in legislative and executive organs, in political institutions, as well as in economic, military and union organizations etc.⁴.

It is also assumed that political elite is characterized by a few distinct features: status in the political structure of a society, possibility to point

² B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Elity polityczne*, [in:] *Studia z teorii polityki*, A. W. Jabłoński, L. Sobkowiak (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1997, p. 133–134.

³ T. Bodio, P. Załęski, *Przywództwo i elity polityczne*, [in:] *Spółeczeństwo i polityka. Podstawy nauk politycznych*, K. A. Wojtaszczyk, W. Jakubowski (ed.), Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2007, p. 392.

⁴ See: J. Wasilewski, *Kontraktowy Sejm jako miejsce formowania elity politycznej*, [in:] *Początki parlamentarnej elity. Posłowie kontraktowego Sejmu*, J. Wasilewski, W. Wesołowski (ed.), Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Warszawa 1992; W. Wesołowski, *Parlamentarzysty jako część elity politycznej: teoretyczno-porównawcze tło polskich badań*, [in:] *Początki parlamentarnej elity. Posłowie kontraktowego Sejmu*, J. Wasilewski, W. Wesołowski (ed.), Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Warszawa 1992; K. Łabędź, *Zmiana systemu w Polsce a elity polityczne*, [in:] *Elity polityczne w Polsce*, K. Pałeczki (ed.), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Warszawa 1992; J. Raciborski, *Drogi do elity rządowej*, [in:] *Elity rządowe III RP 1997–2000. Portret socjologiczny*, J. Raciborski (ed.), Wydawnictwo Trio, Warszawa 2006.

members of decision system almost by name, political competences, a particular distance of elites towards the mass and vice versa, a typical sort of 'ritual' behavior consisting of a feeling of group distinction and using its own political language and symbolism⁵.

This article is an attempt to describe previous and current processes of recruitment and selection of political elites, including channels and types of political careers. Its point of departure is an analysis of chosen views of political elites researchers and their theories of political elites presented in literature on the subject, in the frames of which those processes occur.

PROCESSES OF RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF POLITICAL ELITES IN THE CONCEPT OF RESEARCHERS OF ELITES AND THEIR THEORIES

In the context of types of theories of political elites, most of them rely on two competitive rules of elite exchange: reproduction and circulation. The first one consists of recreating an elite's composition exclusively from its own members, without reaching to lower social layers. The second one allows new members to replace those who did not perform⁶.

Theories of political elites frequently show two types of elite recruitment: guild system and entrepreneur system. The guild system defines a closed elite (recruitment for high positions of people already functioning in the elite), many filters in the process of recruitment, a small or closed circle of selecting electorate and a tendency to reproduce the elite. The entrepreneur system defines an open elite, a small number of filters in the recruitment process, a wide circle of electorate and competitiveness of recruitment process⁷.

Many theorists have dedicated their research to processes of recruitment and selection of political elites, such as: Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca or Karl Mannheim. Their ideas have an important impact on the analysis

⁵ Cz. Maj, E. Maj, *Przywództwo i elity polityczne w Polsce. Analiza porównawcza*, [in:] *Elity polityczne w Polsce*, K. Pałeczki (ed.), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Warszawa 1992, p. 108–109.

⁶ M. Żyromski, *Teorie elit a systemy polityczne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2007, p. 54.

⁷ T. Bodio, P. Załęski, *Przywództwo i elity polityczne...*, p. 394.

of recruitment and selection of political elites aspects and led to the development of elites' membership.

Vilfredo Pareto⁸ centered mainly on the rule of circulation of elites while researching processes of recruitment and selection of political elites. He claimed that the phenomenon of circulation occurs when only two groups are taken into account: an elite and a non-elite. He also believed that every political elite undergoes constant transformation through excluding weak and rotten individuals and through replacing them with new representatives from outside, capable and equipped in particular personalities. Additionally, according to V. Pareto, relocation of its members from one position to another, as well as the process of using up political elites led to their greater stability and exclusivity⁹.

Gaetano Mosca¹⁰ pointed two directions of political elite selection: aristocratic and democratic. In the first one, the elite is closed and recruits only by reproduction, passed on from generation to generation. The second one is open and recruits from the society through accepting outstanding individuals with special features and skills profitable for executing power¹¹.

⁸ Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) – Italian sociologist and economist, creator of circulation of elite theory. He introduced the term “elite” to social sciences, by which he called people having the biggest abilities and achievements in social activity. He also used terms: chosen class, upper class, aristocracy. His main works are: *Cours d'économie politique* (1896–1897), *Les systèmes socialistes* (1902–1903), *Manuale d'economia politica* (1906), *Le mythe vertueuse et la littérature immorale – zur literarischen Zensur* (1911), *Der Tugendmythos und die unmoralische Literatur* (1911), *Trattato di sociologia generale* (1916), *Allgemeine Soziologie* (1916), *Fatti e teori* (1920), *Trasformazione della democrazia* (1921).

⁹ See: V. Pareto, *Traktat o socjologii ogólnej*, [in:] *Uczucia i działania. Fragmenty socjologiczne*, A. Kojder (ed.), PWN, Warszawa 1994; M. Stefaniuk, *Teoria elit Vilfreda Pareta*, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2001.

¹⁰ Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941) – Italian sociologist, political scientist and historian of political doctrines, creator of political class concept. His main works are: *Teorica dei governi e governo parlamentare* (1884), *Le costituzioni moderne* (1887), *Elementi di scienza politica*, (dwa wydania, 1896 i 1923), *Cause e rimedi della crisi del regime parlamentare* (1928), *Storia delle dottrine politiche* (dwa wydania, 1933 i 1937) – polskie wydanie *Historia doktryn politycznych* (1939).

¹¹ See: J. Pawlak, *Teoretyczne koncepcje klasy politycznej. Co to jest klasa polityczna?* [in:] *Elity polityczne w Polsce*, K. Pałeczki (ed.), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Warszawa 1992; M. Zyromski, *Gaetano Mosca. Twórca socjologicznej teorii elity*, Wydawnictwo UAM, Poznań 1996.

In the context of historical criteria of choosing political elites, Karl Mannheim¹² revealed the criteria of blood (on the basis of which aristocratic societies chose their elites), the criteria of property (on the basis of which bourgeoisie societies chose their elites) as well as the criteria of achievements (on the basis of which democratic societies chose their elites)¹³.

Moreover, Karl Mannheim pointed to four processes related to the formation of contemporary political elites: rise of the number of elites and consecutive diminution of their power, breaking exclusivity of elites, change of rules governing the selection of elites and a change in inner composition of elites¹⁴.

Janusz Sztumski and Jerzy Wiatr are two prominent Polish researchers of political elites, including processes of recruitment and selection of political elites.

In Janusz Sztumski's considerations of feudal societies, the criteria of recruitment and assortment of political elites was defined by social background, in other words by possessing a feudal title. However, in capitalistic societies, political elites consisted of people who, alongside familial titles, possessed inherited lands and companies well-known on the market¹⁵.

In Jerzy Wiatr's belief, in the first stage of existence of democratic countries, members of political elites recruited themselves only from rich and well-educated social layers. It resulted from the social division into three classes which hindered political promotion of poorer layers into rich, and from constraints of suffrage, to which only wealthy people were granted permission¹⁶.

Jerzy Wiatr also points out to the fact that changes in the social background of political elites occurred at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries. Political reforms of those times related to promulgating suffrage and a mass development of political parties, including workers' parties, caused that people from poor layers started to constitute members of political elites of de-

¹² Karl Mannheim (1893–1974) – sociologist, creator of sociology of knowledge. His main works are: *Myśl konserwatywna* (1927), *Ideologie und Utopie* (1929), *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (1935), *Socjologia wiedzy* (1964).

¹³ J. Sztumski, *Elity ich miejsce i rola w społeczeństwie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe „Śląsk”, Katowice 2007, p. 35.

¹⁴ K. Mannheim, *Człowiek i społeczeństwo w dobie przebudowy*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1974, p. 120.

¹⁵ J. Sztumski, *Elity ich miejsce i rola w społeczeństwie...*, p. 34–35.

¹⁶ J. Wiatr, *Przywódcztwo polityczne. Studium politologiczne*, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej, Łódź 2008, p. 101.

mocratic countries. Their promotion was a consequence of education and activity within the party¹⁷.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF POLITICAL ELITES CHANNELS AND TYPES OF POLITICAL CAREERS

In the literature on the subject, the most typical criteria of recruitment and selection of political elites are: representation (choice by election), choice based on competences, nepotism, designation by merits, compensation of injustice, acknowledgement of moral authority¹⁸.

In the area of channels of recruitment and selection of political elites, institutions of state power as well as administrations and organs of local authorities are pointed out. In democratic countries they are political parties and social organizations, which constitute an important place of education of elites and where they are accepted by their environments as possibly the best candidates to take positions and serve leading roles. In non-democratic countries they are the army, special forces and areas of economy controlled by the state¹⁹.

Recruitment and choice of political elites in the frames of political parties occur in three steps. The first step is the party apparatus, in which people perform organizational tasks necessary for a good functioning of the party. In democratic countries, work in party apparatus usually constitutes the first stage of a career, after which occurs a shift to other political tasks, mainly in the parliament and government. In non-democratic countries founded on monopoly and power of the ruling party, members of party apparatus occupy the highest and the most privileged positions within the power elites. The second step is parliamentary activity. In democratic countries, parliamentary activity is a crucial element of a political career. In non-democratic countries, parliamentary activity has minor importance, as parliamentary mandate is gained in the process of previously obtained position in the party apparatus, state administration or professional occupation. The third step consists of occupying positions in state administration on behalf of the party. In democratic countries, this step has no meaning, as there are rules which exclude state administration from direct control by the party. In non-democratic countries, members of the ruling party tend to be quickly directed

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 101–102.

¹⁸ Cz. Maj, E. Maj, *Przywódtwo i elity polityczne w Polsce. Analiza porównawcza...*, p. 109.

¹⁹ T. Bodio, P. Załęski, *Przywódtwo i elity polityczne...*, p. 394.

towards state administration and perform their political career in the state apparatus²⁰.

Recruitment and selection of political elites combines activity and successive promotions in political organizations — parties and other associations taking part in political life (trade unions, youth organizations, combatant organizations, etc.) — which act as defined opinion-forming groups and shape political scene of a country²¹.

Taking into account previous considerations, the following types of political careers may be distinguished:

- party activist — this career type is conditioned by abilities and skills of influencing others: shaping thoughts, opinions, attitudes and behavior of other people, also being faithful to ideals of a given party and of its programme are important;
- members of trade unions or other social organization realizing their programme — this career type is characterized by emotional and ideal engagement in its activity, limitless ambitions and interest by sponsors;
- officials representing state or local power not always by choice, but simply a professional performer of the mandate in a particular area of social, economic, cultural life — this career type is particularly regulated by rules relating to general laws and workers' duties, such as rules governing promotions, describing professional competences necessary for a given position, required seniority and training period, moral qualifications as well as socio-political qualifications²².

An additional indicator in recruitment and selection of political elites may be: additional competences gained by particular individuals, resulting from knowledge, experience or raised professional qualifications, as defined professional skills being a source of authority or prestige of a given politician in his environment²³.

²⁰ J. Wiatr, *Przywództwo polityczne. Studium politologiczne...*, p. 107–109.

²¹ J. Sztumski, *Elity ich miejsce i rola w społeczeństwie...*, p. 111.

²² Idem, p. 112–116.

²³ Idem, p. 104.

Political elites are also recruited by the means of mass media, object of interest of various echelons of state organs, political parties, social organization and groups taking part in political activities²⁴.

As a place of debate and political battleground, mass media depict, among others, actions undertaken by political elites in political processes; they also serve a function of an instrument used by political elites in shaping attitudes and political opinions²⁵.

On the basis of their own criteria of importance, mass media also decide about the access of political elites to the public sphere, define the range of their activities and influence as well as judge the course of actions on political stage, political expectations, support and decision²⁶.

Recruitment of political elites also takes place through political public relation, information campaigns and social marketing. The criteria are used mainly in the process of campaigns and political elections. Candidates, their staff, experts and political marketing specialists are well aware of the fact that the use mass media in the right way may directly lead them to success in elections²⁷.

²⁴ J. Adamowski, *Media masowe w życiu społecznym*, [in:] *Spółeczeństwo i polityka. Podstawy nauk politycznych*, K. A. Wojtaszczyk, W. Jakubowski (ed.), Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2007, p. 402.

²⁵ See: B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Aktorzy polityczni i media masowe w świetle studiów nad komunikowaniem politycznym*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2004; B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, PWN, Warszawa 2007; M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Analiza zawartości mediów. Podręcznik dla studentów*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2004; *Media masowe na świecie. Model systemów medialnych i ich dynamika rozwojowa*, B. Dobek-Ostrowska, M. Kusia (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2007.

²⁶ W. Schulz, *Komunikacja polityczna. Koncepcje teoretyczne i wyniki badań empirycznych na temat mediów masowych w polityce*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2006, p. 30–31.

²⁷ See: M. McCombs, *Ustanowienie agendy. Media masowe i opinia publiczna*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008; A. Ilciów, *Public Relations w polityce. Ujęcie krytyczne*, [in:] *Media a komunikowanie polityczne*, M. Sokołowski (ed.), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2009; B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Studia empiryczne nad komunikowaniem politycznym*, [in:] *Komunikowanie i media. Studia empiryczne nad komunikowaniem politycznym w Polsce*, B. Dobek-Ostrowska, K. Majdecka (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2011.

CONCLUSION

Recruitment and selection of political elites are processes of choosing people from society who occupy positions in the power structures. These processes are conditioned by various factors, but three groups of determinants of recruitment and selection of political elites are the most frequent: individual, social and organizational.

Processes of recruitment and selection of political elites in a theoretical model concept depict the choice of political elites on the basis of their attributed features, properties, capabilities or skills, along with the privilege to perform power. This model creates people perceived by society as the chosen ones, in other words, as a political elite.

In the context of various researchers of elites and their opinion, recruitment and selection of political elites depend on the existence of certain forms of social promotion, by the process of which certain individuals are placed higher in the social hierarchy, mainly because of good descent, education, achievements (personal success or service in the name of a society or country), academic or artistic work, property etc.

In the literature on the subject, the most typical criteria of recruitment and selection of political elites are: representation (choice by election), choice based on competences, nepotism, designation by merits, compensation of injustice, acknowledgement of moral authority.

Recruitment and selection of political elites is closely tied to activity and successive promotions in political organizations: parties and other associations taking part in political life (trade unions, youth organizations, combatant organizations, etc.) — which act as defined opinion-forming groups and shape political scene of a country.

Recruitment and selection of political elites is performed in two fundamental areas: in the frame of a formal or real (practical) structure of political chances. The first one concerns political activity or people entitled to political participation by law. The second one concerns political activity of a defined group of people who want and can participate actively.

In the area of channels of recruitment and selection of political elites, institutions of state power as well as administrations and organs of local authorities are pointed out. In democratic countries they are political parties and social organizations, which constitute an important place of education of elites and where they are accepted by their environments as possibly the best candidates to take positions and serve leading roles. In non-democratic

countries they are the army, special forces and areas of economy controlled by the state.

Additionally, personal ambitions and declared support of social groups strongly influence processes of recruitment and selection of political elites.

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PROCESY REKRUTACJI I SELEKCJI ELIT POLITYCZNYCH W UJĘCIU TEORETYCZNYM

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł jest próbą ukazania procesów rekrutacji i selekcji elit politycznych, w tym kanałów oraz typów karier politycznych. Punkt wyjścia stanowi dla niego analiza wybranych poglądów badaczy elit politycznych i ich teorii elit politycznych prezentowanych w literaturze przedmiotu, w ramach której procesy te występują.

Słowa kluczowe:

elita polityczna, rekrutacja i selekcja elit politycznych.