

Compare and contrast pluralist and ruling elite accounts

Politics



'Power is an inherently unequal relationship comprising an attempt to by one person or group to secure compliance from or enforce dependence upon another person or group' (Stephen Lukes). In a pluralist political system, it is impossible for any one group to dominate all of government. Government is responsive to a plurality of groups which represent a plurality of interests and control diverse political resources. 'Among the constant facts to be found in all political systems, one is so obvious that it is apparent to the most casual eye: in all societies two classes of people appear-a class that rules and a class that is ruled (Mosca).

In this essay I will look at the similarities and differences of pluralism and the ruling elite in both the UK and in the US. Pluralism being that not one single group can be in power and the ruling elite theory states that there is only one group in power, which also shares a common set of interests. Pluralism is a political system in which pressure groups and other organisations seek to control government policy through the process of lobbying. These lobbies can become terrifically powerful. Pluralists claim that their system makes government more democratic by keeping representative politicians in check between elections.

They argue that an election is to blunt an instrument for a democracy as a voter must chose between two parties neither of which supports a policy that he might think very important. An individual can then use the lobbying system to bring attention to that issue. They maintain that all these lobbies will be in equal and opposite directions resulting in lively politics and healthy debate. For example while green peace is lobbying for higher road taxes oil companies will just as vehemently argue against them.

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There are other ways in which the proletariat can express its views besides voting and through pressure groups: In a free market they can boycott certain products or only buy " free trade" goods. They can also buy shares in companies to wield ownership rights. Government can also consult the people directly through referenda and local elections. In the US, the parties are more decentralized which makes them weaker as the political power is more spread out, so they do not benefit from power of numbers. Whereas the UK, the parties are more centralized, which makes them stronger.

The UK do benefit from power of numbers. 'Elitism' is the name usually given to a theory associated with a group of social scientists who wrote in Europe in the latter decades of the nineteenth and the early decades of the present century. The social scientists such as Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto and Robert Michels, did not have identical views they just shared common concerns and were concerned with many common historical problems: hence they are usually grouped together into the category of elitists. The power in elitism is more concentrated than it is with pluralism, in which power is diffused.

Elitism involves a minority ruling over the majority. The minority are the people who have power and who control. It governs their own interests and the best economic interests to their own country. The ruling elite theory is more than just top-decision making positions. The ruling elite theory can be defined by the 3C's, consciousness, coherence and conspiracy.

Consciousness, means that the elite group see themselves as a small distinct

group, which must be in agreement at all times. Coherence means that the elite groups share a common set of interests.

Conspiracy means that the elite groups will not always act in a secretive fashion but that it has the power to combine for the purpose of common action. With the ruling elite, new members would be recruited when members of the elite may leave due to death. The elite argue that recruitment is controlled by the elite itself. Entry into elite depends on the individual being sponsored by the ruling elite itself. In pluralism, to enter a group is not as difficult. As groups in pluralism are joined together due to interests and what they believe in, e. g. reen peace and students.

So, for anyone to enter they just have to believe in what they are arguing for. Pluralists can fight for what they believe in whenever they want to.

Lobbying helps the group gets there views and opinions across to the government, if the group believe strongly enough in what they are fighting for, the politicians in power may eventually agree with what the groups have to say. The ruling elites are different in the way that the decisions cannot be altered by any pressure groups. Once they have made a decision they stick to it.

Even though many people's views and opinions are not listened to, the people also want to be ruled by elite. They have a psychological need to identify rulers and to follow them. The similarities they both have, is that they are parties of power. They have the power to change things going on in the country. They both make decisions in order to do better for their own country. Although decisions are made in different ways and by different

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people, overall pluralists and the ruling elite make decisions on what they think is best for themselves and for the people.