

Review paper

THE POLITICAL CLASS – DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS*

UDC 316.344.42:32

Georgi L. Manolov

College of Economics and Administration – Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Abstract. *This article treats the historical-political developments of the political class phenomenon. It analyses in detail the concepts of "political class", "elite" and "oligarchy", their definitions, composition and structure, and it emphasises the characteristics of oligarchy in politics. In this sense, the separate political layers and their relationship with the contemporary political oligarchy have been outlined through in-depth theoretical analysis.*

Key Words: *political elite, political class, political layers, political oligarchy, partocracy, plutocracy, political leaders.*

The matter of defining the term "political class" is still not thoroughly developed in literature. This also applies for the western social researches on this matter** and for those of the young democratic social science, where the valuable works on elite theories are very few. In this train of thought, a great part of these publications are a good first step, which, however, remains insufficient if it is not logically combined with a specific definition about the nature and structure of the authority class as a separate natural continuation of the so far examined matter. Therefore, the problem of revealing the essence of the political class, its specific characteristics and its structure in different types of societies and political systems needs a wider and more thorough research.

Received November 13, 2011 / Accepted February 05, 2012

Corresponding author: Georgi L. Manolov

College of Economics and Administration – Plovdiv, Bulgaria

* Prof. G. Manolov is President of the College of Economics and Administration – Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

** This claim has been supported in detail and proved by the Italian Prof. J. Sartori (v.: Сартори, Дж. (1992). *Теория на демокрацията. Съвременната демокрация*. Кнл 1. С.: ЦИД, 216–225).

1. CRITERIA FOR DEFINING THE POLITICAL CLASS

There are various points of view about the nature of the political class^{***} in scientific literature. The most popular of them can be grouped in the following way:

- According to some authors, the political elite are people who have the highest authority positions, which coincides with C. R. Mills' thesis and the opinion of other neoeletarists;
- Other scientists claim that "elite" means people who possess authority and influence due to authority resource control. For instance, Etzioni-Halevy shares this opinion;
- A third group of scientists define the nature of elite depending on the level of the possessed formal authority, the direct participation in making decisions and, therefore, social prestige¹.

Consequently, despite the minor theoretical differences, all three of the above concepts share the same main criteria for defining political elite, which is the formal participation in authority, making decisions and managing authority resources. However, the term "authority class" is not mentioned at all because the term "elite" is used instead.

Additional and more thorough clarity regarding the criteria of defining authority elite is introduced by J. Sartory. He specifically points out two patterns as the most important. The first of them is **the vertical criteria**, according to which a certain group of people can be defined as controlling when it is placed in a high position in the vertical social structure and, therefore, it could be said that authority is in the hands of the highest class or the so-called "actual elite". The second pattern is the **service criteria**, which is defined by the fact that a person or a group of people are on the top because they have authority and can therefore be defined as political elite. Moreover, they are on the authority top because they deserve it as they possess certain qualities. Furthermore, J. Sartory makes another theoretical specification about the term "controlling (minority) group". He emphasises on the concept that every controlling authority is political if its source is an authority position and that authority in each case is controlling when it acts through politics and provided that it strongly influences taking political decisions². Forming the above criteria for elite makes the Italian political scientist one of the few scientists who view authority class (and elite) not only in a formal research aspect. He also regards its contents, which is a profound attempt to reveal the essence of the "political class" phenomenon.

Despite the importance of the above definitions for the "political class" category, we must say that **those definitions in a way tighten the research horizons of the category. There are two main reasons to claim that: not clearing the matter of the criteria for defining the authority class as well as pointing out one or another criterion as the main (defining) one through ignoring others, which are not less essential and important.** Using such method would not allow revealing the complexity of the phenomenon and especially the complicated essence of the category ("political class"), whose characteristics are almost impossible to determinate one-sidedly or fragmentary i.e. according to

^{***} In this article the terms 'political class' and 'ruling class' are used interchangeably.

¹ See the following works: Миллс, Ч. Р. (1959). *Властвующая элита*. М., с. 24; Etzioni-Halevy, E. (1996). *The elite connection*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 9; and the collection of articles *Социална стратификация и неравенство*. С.: М-&М, 1998, с. 182.

² V.: Сартори, Дж. Ор. cit., 217–219.

one general or universal figure. Evidently, we need another, more reliable and way more rational method to find the right criteria for determination and at the same time to use figures of separate (humanitarian) sciences for collectivity when trying to understand the complicated nature of the political class.

We confirm the thesis that overcoming these methodological drawbacks is possible through applying **a more complex and thorough approach** to the definitive essence of political class. Otherwise said, several different social sciences, which despite the differences in the analysis methods they apply, keep this subject in their object-research horizon. The hereby analysis is done according to that approach.

It is theoretically known that "authority" is a central category in **political science**. Therefore, we think that authority can be defined as an essential criterion for defining political class, according to which we will motivate our opinion on the matter.

So if we use a more fundamental and precise logical succession when defining political class or if we use **a philosophical point of view**, we can define and accept two main types of criteria as **key definition criteria**. Those two types are the **content and the formal criteria**.

We can confirm this standpoint with three theoretical-methodological grounds. It is known that the philosophical category "content" characterises phenomena and processes in their structure as an entity of parts. On the other hand, the content itself always exists in some internal subordination in which the elements are differentiated in a united structure (first ground). This lets the simultaneous action of different factors, which lead to various socialistic phenomena, be reported both as an aggregate and as a reciprocity without their own structure connection being destroyed (second ground). Moreover, the external or formal marks, attributes, characteristics, sides, figures, etc. of every researched event, phenomenon or process can be outlined more clearly and determinately in the parameters of that content detachment (third ground). With the help of those grounds simultaneously overcoming the existing absolutism of one or another type of criteria (and approach) and ignoring the appliance of the formal-sociological approach becomes possible. As we mentioned, the formal-sociological approach is mainly orientated in one-sidedness and overvaluing important but independently appearing sides of the various social, political and other phenomena.

With the provided ground on the defining criteria of the authority class we can now start a more specific and detailed examination of the content criteria and its internal structure without claiming for systematic thoroughness.

Presented more widely, **the content criteria** for defining the "political class" category immanently includes some essential elements such as:

- **the top state authority-institutional pyramid**, structured according to the vertical method on pluralistic basis and formed by different political subjects (parties, organisations, movements, unions), by their representatives as well as by the respective leaders, strata, levels, etc. which directly participate in authority;
- **the way of practising authority** i.e. what the character of the governing is – democratic or undemocratic, rational or irrational and so on;
- **adequate realisation of all authority phases** in the political process – bringing out a political problem, preliminary political preparation, making a political decision, executing the accepted decisions and political balance for what is done;

- **specific functioning of the authority elite** depending on the established "normative systems (...) social norms – legal, moral, political and other"³, which determine the relations between people and social communities;
- the elite's **right and skills to control all authority resources effectively** and in the interest of the nation;
- **–final results of the authority elite's overall activity** – positive or negative, as the main criteria of the ability of one or another political class and their potential abilities to develop society.

The aggregate form of these elements of the content criteria in political life is significant and could (and actually does) give us a highly accurate answer to the question **"What is the quality of every authority class and elite?"**. Therefore we emphasise on the content criteria as the groundwork for defining the political class because without quality evolution of whichever content of the various phenomena and processes (especially in political life), it would be unnatural to think about a possible objective evaluation of the various types of socialistic phenomena.

Regardless of the secondary order of the **formal criteria** (according to our beliefs) when defining the authority class, one should not be under the impression that we underestimate their value figures. On the contrary, for the wide public opinion formal criteria (**privileges, representation, immunity and a number of other eternal symbols of authority**) practically legitimise the character of the authority class among hundred millions of people on the planet.

To support the above we must make one more founded explanation for the essence of the criteria "privileges": **not only high authority positions, not mainly making political decisions and not only control over authority resources can serve to identify a certain group of people, called "authority class". Those are rights that politicians all over the world receive legally and rightfully after the democratic choice of the sovereign nation. It is precisely privileges that are the essential criteria, according to which any political class and elite can be distinguished from all other classes in society, as far as no other social group has the "right" to define various state priorities for itself unlike the dominant authority minority and as the political priorities that authorities possess. Moreover, the right is always categorised with rules and norms, valid for the majority, while privileges always concern and are used only by the minority**, which almost has the status of a written and unwritten law when we interpret political privileges.

Based on those fundamental criteria types for defining the political class (and elite), it is time to make the next "theoretical step", which is connected with a more precise determination and structure of analytic matter, as we also make an attempt to reveal its basic contents.

³ Михайлов, Ст. (1987). *Оптимально функциониране на социалното управление*. С., с. 45.

2. DEFINITION, STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THE POLITICAL CLASS

It is clear that there are still theoretical flaws and holes in the works done on defining the term "political class (and elite)". The few specialised monographies in our country and the promiscuous cohort of terms which define political elite can serve as an example of the above statement. Such terms are, for instance, the popular combinations of words "minority elite", "authority minority", "oligarch stratum", etc. which literally crawl in the social mind without any scientific explanations of their meaning. Therefore without thoroughly analysing all scientific theories of elite, first of all we will bring out some of them, then we will define the political class itself and finally, we will distinguish a specific structure (and contents) of that class. The approach we will use here is entirely commensurate with the basic characteristics of the democratic political systems. That is where all authority minorities, layers and elites are formed. On the other hand, we are talking about the authority correlation minority-majority, which was directly formed by well-known democratic procedures and mechanisms. Finally, the essence of political class is interpreted according to two important conditions – constitution structures and processes, election campaigns and society⁴ in general. The first two of conditions are emphasised.

It could be said that after G. Moska's classical definition of the authority class, there are not many definitions of the matter, not to mention the small number of the quality ones. This concept is entirely valid for our political works too, where, with the exception of three or four monographies which include similar definitions, it is very hard to find more precise and clear definitions of the term "political class".

Therefore, we think that there is a **relevantly independent, compactly constructed, inner-structured and specific group of people called "political class"** in modern democratic societies. **This, of course, depends on the level of direct or indirect engagement of the political class in the authority structures, having immediate participation in accepting political decisions and is fully responsible for their entire execution.** However, this is only one view of the matter because one should not think we fully support G. Moska's thesis, which views "the political class" and "the authority minority" as absolutely identical terms. There is a thesis supported by a lot of Bulgarian and foreign authors, for instance Bulgarian sociologists **D. Minev and P. Kabakchieva**. In their work "The transition. Elites. Strategies", they claim that the new political class, formed in Bulgaria, can be called "authority oligarchy" because it (the oligarchy) has the entire power in its own hands⁵. However, if we put aside the accurate theory of the authors for the establishment of the post-totalitarianism oligarchy in Bulgaria, we are once again faced with the well-known blending of the meaning of the two terms "class" and "oligarchy", which, we think, is not scientifically accurate. In this train of thought, there are a number of other similar theories, which can but do not need to be listed hereby.

According to our beliefs, the essence of the category "authority class" first of all has to report the occurred changes in the development of the modern democratic societies, including deeper changes in the character of the authority institutions as well as changes in the functional responsibilities of all authority persons. Depending on that, the political class itself cannot be regarded as just a dominating minority, which possesses the entire

⁴ V.: Сартори, Дж. Ор. cit., с. 204.

⁵ V.: Минев, Д., П. Кабакчиева. (1996). *Преходът. Елити. Стратегии*. С.: Св. Кл. Охридски, 21–22.

power and huge authority resources, anymore. That is why in the second half of the technological XX century, the role of politics in the global social life grew drastically. This causes a clearer differentiation of politics as a separate specialised type of activity, which requires a wide range of specific knowledge, as well as a number of professional skills and habits. Consequently, according to M. Webber, politics has turned from a side profession to a basic essential one for a number of people in society. This is additional evidence for the importance of the political class in society, along with the business class, the middle class and the rest of the social groups.

What is the essence of this class more specifically?

If we regard it as a wider term, the **political class is a group of people, which are directly (when they are entitled with authority) or indirectly (when they are in opposition) engaged by power, making political decisions and governing the state. They possess particular privileges and professional qualities, high personal incomes and good material state. Moreover, this class has a particular structure, specific contents and different layers.** The basic essence of this class is participation in authority through "making" rational politics and making political decisions, which comply with the national state interest and social demands. This determines the stronger social positions of the authority class members, their raise above the other social groups and their high social prestige (because of their participation in authority), which also overcome a number of functional, control, national, etc. responsibilities of the authorities. This determination of the political class is deducted in **a tighter definitive sense**, which regards the formal criteria "participation in authority", which, of course, is accurate but it is insufficient for the thorough characterisation of the contents and structure of the authority class.

In **another, wider and more thorough sense**, though, a political class may be regarded as a united subordinated entity, which has its own substructure and separate parts, components and elements. Because, as any other class, the political class includes inner-established layers, which possess a lot of mutual, as well as a number of specific characteristics. Some of them are significantly essential as they define the global appearance of the authority class itself. Thus, it is important to start by clarifying the basic **structure of the political class** (see Figure 1), then to differentiate its inner elements and the relevantly tighter category boundaries. Furthermore, the matter of the authority class structure remains unclarified and underestimated in science literature, which is the main reason for the inaccurate use of the close in meaning but at the same time very different terms, such as "elite", "class", "oligarchy", "authorities", etc. Moreover the explanation of the structure differentiation of this class could let us comprehend more profoundly its political cohesion as well as the relevant independence of each element (of the authority class).

The structure differentiation of the term "political class" is also needed because of another, absolutely practical aspect: minimisation of all non-scientific concepts in society about who governs the state, and, most of all, how they do it. This is at least because the answer to the above questions in any case regard the political responsibility of the authorities in the view of the electors in the sense of different authority subjects. In this train of thoughts and based on this short argumentation, we can now start revealing the content structure of the authority class.

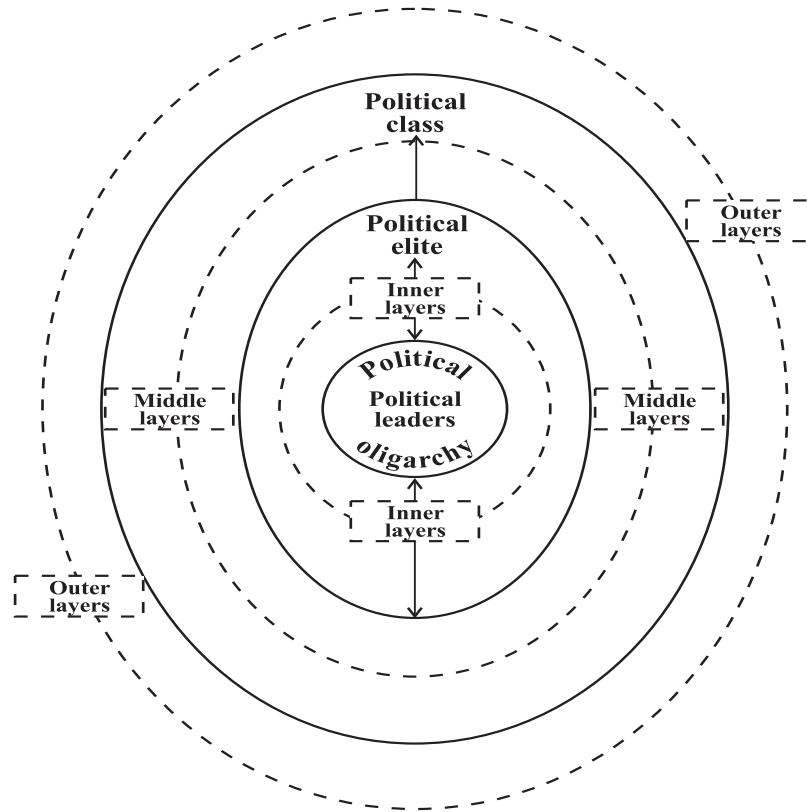


Fig. 1. Structure of the "political class" category

According to us, on the initial and more synthesised level of specification **the structure of the political class is compound by three fundamental elements (parts, components): one of them is the political elite, the other is the political oligarchy and the third is the various political layers, which gravitate in the orbit of the entire class.** All of the above elements possess immanent, detached, inner characteristics. Without considering these, their natural definition and specific characteristics and differences would hardly be fixated.

2.1. Political elite

The first key part of the authority class is definitely **the political elite**, which generally and presumingly means the persons on the top of the authority hierarchy. For instance, Etzioni-Halevy laconically defines elite as a group of people who possess power and influence society because it controls authority resources⁶. Despite the inevitable accuracy of this definition, it remains too general. It is so first of all because it does not speak about elite at all – instead it just briefly implies about political elite. Second of all, it is because

⁶ V.: Etzioni-Halevy, E. (1993). *The elite connection*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 9.

once again the meaning of the two hierarchic structures – power and elite (in politics) – is mixed together. A similar thesis is the one by Anna Krasteva. It was published in the specialised collection "The new political elite". The author claims that "political elite is the part of the political class, which really practises authority in a certain society in a certain moment"⁷. Differentiating "class" and "elite" as separate terms, A. Krasteva actually defines the essence of political elite. This should be appreciated, especially having in mind the deficit of such works in our country.

Another Bulgarian sociologist, **Al. Marinov**, also gives a meaningful definition of elite (based on the functional approach), which he does in the following way: specific minorities, which are purposively chosen to practise collective management, proposing strategies and policies; serving (elites) as a model of success and a role model; choosing leaders in different sectors of society; possessing power management mechanisms and mechanisms for influencing society and the nation⁸. Although here the text regards elites in general, the author has realised and revealed a part of the functional nature of the political elite as an actual governing activity.

In the context of these definitions we should make some explanations about the essence of the term, which regards the random use of a few elite terms (authority, management, strategic and political elite), which are used inaccurately and as synonyms. We think that their scientific differentiation could generally be the following: **authority elite** – a wider term including different minorities in itself – politically, economically, cultural, military, etc. i.e. everywhere where there is power in general and development of authority processes in society; **management elite** – a narrower term, which integrates all minorities which regard taking management decisions in different sectors of society (economical, cultural, educational, etc.); **strategic elite** - "supreme management layer in the strategically important sectors of society" (Al. Marinov). This short specification will serve to help us try to differentiate the category "political elite".

Consequently, **political elite can be defined as a small social group and the most important part of the contents of the political class, which manages, possesses and controls authority resources, is responsible for the decisions made, possesses different types of privileges and has a huge political influence in society.**

Based on the above definitions, the most essential **quality sides of the political elite** could be revealed. We can systematise those quality sides in the following way: elite legitimacy, possessing actual or potential authority, relevant independence of the separate groups of elite, management and professional skills, democratic rotation of staff, high ethic qualities, etc.*

2.2. Political oligarchy

One of the most essential structure defining components of the global contents of the authority class is **the political oligarchy. It is a limited narrow circle of the management elite in society (chosen by the supreme party elite) or such limited minority, which practically possess almost the entire political authority. Otherwise said, po-**

⁷ Кръстева, Анна. *Власт и елит в общество без гражданско общество*. – ВЪВ: *Новият политически елит*. (1994). С.: Перун-БМ, с. 14.

⁸ V.: Маринов, Ал. (2010). *Административният елит на XXI век*. С.: СИБИ, с. 54.

* The question of the merits of the political elite requires special developments that are not subject to this article.

litical oligarchy is an authority system or class, which has the greatest importance for the accuracy or inaccuracy of the decisions made because oligarchy possesses a significant part of the basic authority resources. Thus we face an over-concentration of power in a small group of people, who come from a supreme party oligarchy.

The position of the dominant oligarchic circle of people in authority regarding the governed ones comes from a principle, which **M. Veber** calls "a priority of the few"⁹, or the actual chance of the dominant minority to rapidly accomplish an agreement or make one or another important political decision. Mainly based on that principle oligarchic political groups differentiate themselves in groups which are above the elite in the hierarchy and which almost nobody controls. However they are always united around certain **political leaders**. Generally the contents of those micro-elites include the party functionaries with highest positions and responsible management posts in different political parties or the so called "**supreme party oligarchy**". That is how the dominant part of the supreme political minority in every authority institution is formed around the head party avant-garde and the staff proposals he makes after the elections (which are mainly from the party oligarchy). On the other hand, there is a relevant openness in political oligarchy in modern democratic societies, which is expressed by attracting new members to the small circle of authority minorities – party leaders, chosen functionaries, outstanding intellectuals, syndical leaders, etc. Usually those representatives of different elite minorities in society (scientists, experts, specialists) are close to the authority oligarchies or to the party, which is currently empowered. Thus, they participate in the complete frame of supreme authorities without changing the functional nature of the political oligarchy much.

However, if we have to specify the matter of **the content of the political oligarchy on the first, structural level** (see Figure 2), we would differentiate it depending on the level of managing authority in four separate parts: **1) partocracy** – it consists of supreme party leaders and governing bodies or of the so called "party oligarchy" (one of the most essential and close to the political oligarchy), which is significantly close to the true political oligarchy because usually there is constant flowing and replacing in authority depending on the election cycles. According to M. Duverge partocratic oligarchy usually has three oligarchic forms – authority elite, closed caste and inner circle¹⁰; **2) absolute oligarchy**, in which politics is a peculiar type of professional activity, a very high-income job and an unending source of privileges from all different kinds; **3) plutocracy** – this is the part of political oligarchy which has grown rich because of the continuous (or not) presence in authority; and **4) representatives of other social elites** – economical, financial, intellectual, etc. included and excluded from authority regularly depending on their loyalty to the absolute oligarchy. **Viewed as an aggregate, the four parts of the authentic political oligarchy are its quality and quantity content (about a few thousand people) in the first and most supreme level of appearance of this oligarchy in the political system.**

In order to be even more precise, we should differentiate **another structural institutional level**, which is defined only from the top of the authority vertical in political parties as well as in state institutions. On this second, functional level, there are a few types of

⁹ Вебер, М. (1992). *Социология на господството*. С.: Св. Кл. Охридски, с. 118.

¹⁰ V.: Дюверже, М. (2000). *Политические партии*. М., с. 205.

oligarchic elements; **party oligarchy, parliament oligarchy, oligarchy of the executive power, judicial oligarchy, etc.**, which can be functionally classified in the contents of the political minority, despite the fact that one of them **constantly exists** in the higher levels of authority (irreplaceable supreme magistrates). When it comes to the other part – **the replaceable oligarchy** (according to the mandate principle), when not empowered, it remains a part of the supreme oligarchy – the party oligarchy, but only until the consecutive elections, despite the fact that slight personal (oligarchic) changes are possible. Even so, staff replacements in party oligarchy do not significantly change the character or the meaning of this structural differentiation anyway.

There is also a **third level of differentiation of the political oligarchy** resulting from the pyramid structure of power. It includes **three new oligarchic sections: central** – including all other oligarchic strata as the administrative (vice-ministers, state department directors, etc.), the management (managers of big state companies), the military (supreme generals), etc., which, even indirectly, are connected to the absolute oligarchy because they serve its political decisions and this makes them a specific part of the oligarch system; **middle section** – including a small group of regional authorities, regional chairmen, judges, prosecutors, etc; **and local section** – on a municipal level where a thin oligarchic level is formed. It mainly includes state power directors, majors, chairmen of municipal councils as well as "small" local "majesties". Here, as in the second supreme level, small staff replacements are possible (and done) but this does not significantly change the state of the oligarchy structure (the third level) because both structural sections are an important staff reserve for recruiting new persons as a part of the absolute political minority.

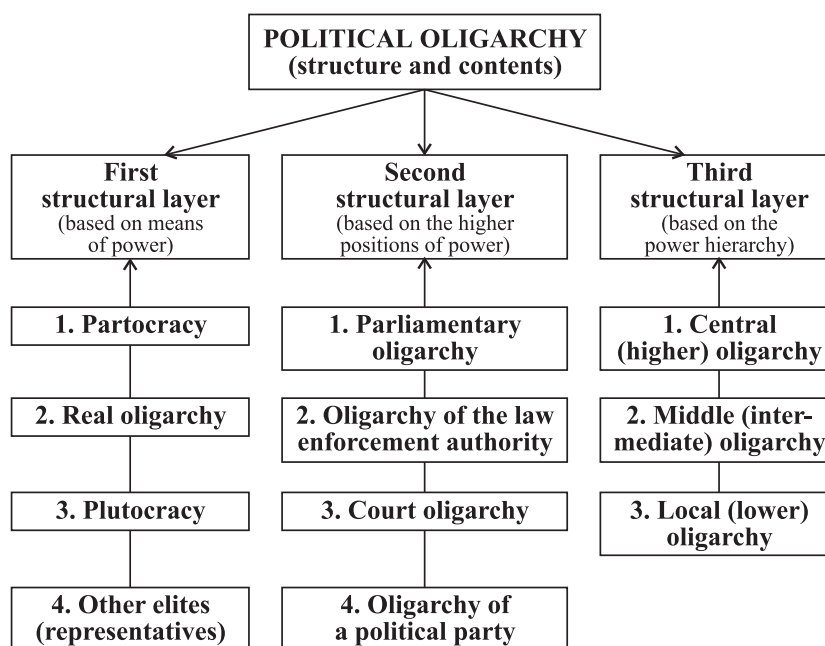


Fig. 2. Contents and structure of the political oligarchy

It is clear that there are complicated correlative bounds between the absolute political oligarchy and its differential levels. Those relations can be direct and indirect, vertical and horizontal, regarding the party or not, etc. Despite their complexity, the "functional" superiority of the political oligarchy remains untouched because it possesses the above mentioned characteristics – authority resources, political privileges and wealth. This is an irrefutable argument regarding the dominant political minority, which even made the great Aristotle define oligarchy as not only a form but also a bad form of state governing, where the entire society is ruled by a small number of people, who are differentiated from others because of their wealth.

2.3. Political layers

Before we go into a more detailed characterisation of the political layers, we ought to mark one preliminary methodological explanation about layers. Specifically in Bulgarian, the term "layer" regards mainly the so called "hierarchic aspect". Moreover, "not only in grouping in something general, in an individual body, but also in the fact that it is hierarchic, with a different level of social vertical inequality towards the other formations of the same type and kind"¹¹. In this case, revealing its hierarchic nature as the essence of the term "layer" is significantly important for the definition of the political layer in general.

From such viewpoints **the political layer is a small or big group of people, which are included in a certain hierarchy as a small circle of high-qualified specialists and experts as well as a significant number of political party activists from different social spheres (and elites), directly serving all parts of the authority class in one way or another.**

Unlike political oligarchy and authority elite, the various political layers do not have a homogeneous character and hardly ever participate in the authority hierarchy because they usually have another, nuanced purpose. Their main obligation is to serve the political elite and oligarchy with various types of expert and other activities (developing documents, programmes and platforms, preparation of project-decisions, analysis, etc.), while their secondary function is to provide a staff reserve of one or another political party elite.

The famous political scientist R. Dahl claims that "there is a significant level of specialisation in the political layer" because the members of this layer are not at all a homogeneous group "and that determines huge differences not only in the volume but also in the shape of the participation in political life". Moreover, "some people in the political layer aim to influence the governing of the country a lot more actively than others" which practically forms two types of people in the layer – the first "aiming towards influence and the second – actual influential leaders"¹².

In a more meaningful scientific sense, the various categories and layers of the political class can be differentiated according to three basic types of criteria – structural-functional indication, level of participation in political life and the number of participants in the relevant layers.

¹¹ Тилкиджиев, А. (1998). *Увод в проблематиката. Социална стратификация и неравенство*. С.: М-&М, с. 18.

¹² Дал, Р. (1996). *Съвременният политически анализ*. С.: ЦИД; Св. Кл. Охридски, 139–141.

According to **the structural-functional criteria**, political layers of the authority class can be separated into **three types: internal layers** – which include the smallest circle of (and around) party oligarchy and elite represented by the party mechanism, experts and specialists, including the supreme party staff, who have a double nature as some of them can be both a part of the oligarchy and a part of the expert-advisory personnel; **external layers** – which include representatives of other social elites (economical, financial, intellectual, scientific, cultural, etc.), executing different serving activities, supporting the expert basis of the political-oligarchic elite, a part of which in certain moments can become (and do become) representatives of the political elite itself; **and middle (boundary) layers**, whose structure is hard to define precisely because the participants of these layers are members of the external as well as members of the internal layers depending on the specific political conjuncture and the flexibility of the political elite to use them as rationally as possible for their cause. The most important characteristic of the middle layers is that they constantly flow from the internal to the external and vice versa, which is an outstanding figure for internal restructuring of the layers according to the dynamics of political life.

According to the criteria "**level of participation in political life**" **the layers are differentiated in two types: constant (active) layers** or layers that in one or another form of activity actively participate in (almost without stopping) and support the political elite through their specialised sections – sociological agencies, scientific institutes, consulting agencies, groups for expert analysis, etc.; **and temporary (passive) layers**, which sporadically serve political elite by starting their activity only on certain occasions, for instance participation in the preparation of election campaigns of political parties. The activity of those layers is very important because it increases the expert-professional sense in politics through scientifically serving the authority elites.

According to **the quantity criteria** different political layers, included in the boundary scope of the authority class, we can differentiate between **two other types: small (tight) layers** i.e. layers mainly formed on expert base, starting with experts working elsewhere but close to the relevant political power and ending with attracting elite intellectuals for individual participation in the development of essential matters which the political elite needs; **and multifold (wide) layers**, which include not only leading specialists in different spheres but a number of sympathisers, activists and other followers of the political elite (and political power) as well. They help one or another political party with the organisation of meetings and demonstrations, in election campaigns and any other public and non-public activities. The figures on the range of the political layers, multifold or small, are certainly interesting. They have been revealed by the American scientists Verba and Nay, who claim that, in the USA for instance, approximately three fourths of the adult population can be regarded as belonging to the layers¹³ mainly because they actively participate in different political activities (see Figure 3).

On balance, **there is not a huge barrier between the separate political layers despite their strict specialisation and specific activity, defined mainly by the specifics of their own structure and the various types of layers. They (the layers) have all internal contradictory characteristics (positive and negative) of the authority class, they are influenced by the political situation in the country and, thus, they frequently flow from**

¹³ Ibid. Дал., P. Op. cit., c. 140.

one to another – from their internal to their external parts and vice versa without radically changing their nature and without making the processes of dissolution and consolidation around other political-oligarchic circles and elites impossible.

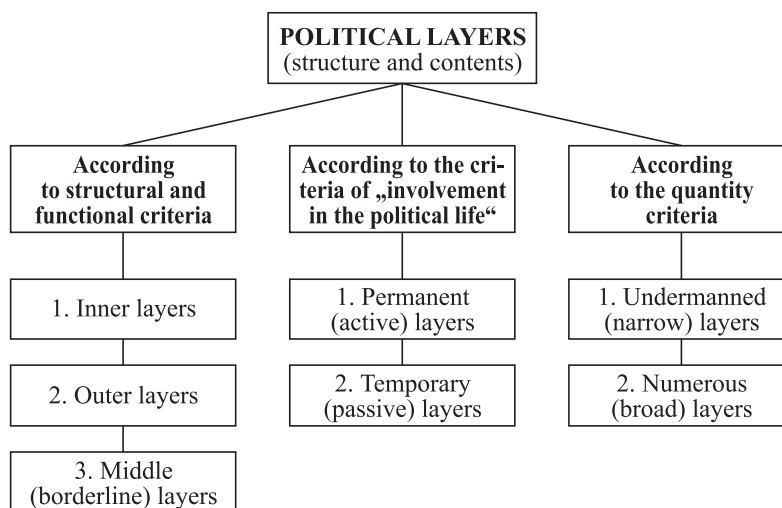


Fig. 3. Structure and content of the political layers

According to our beliefs, this is how the relatively thorough "structural-functional philosophy" of the political class looks like along with its basic elements, presented in a more general methodological viewpoint, which is based on the dynamic political processes and regularities in the politics of the modern democratic societies.

However, if we want to take a deeper look at the substantial aspects of the authority class and especially of its internal elements – political elite, oligarchy and layers, we have to emphasise some **more specific characteristics of the different elements (of the class)** in the global content range of the class. Or, "the centre of weight" here should be on the most essential features of each element separately, provided that they are all connected with one common ground – power.

Maybe the most typical **first feature** of the above mentioned elements of the authority class is that **they possess different volume of political and authority responsibilities.** Thus, the tight structure of **the political oligarchy possesses the biggest authority functions, rights and responsibilities** because it makes fateful decisions (political ones) about various state matters, as a result of which it possesses a huge amount of power, which is sometimes dispensed to just a few people. This phenomenon usually occurs when one political power manages the legislative and the executive power at the same time, which is an objective premise for total domination of oligarchy because the party leaders automatically take key positions in the supreme state authority. This results not only in concentration but also in centralisation of authority in the most limited circle of people, which, thanks to the democratic elections of the nation, is turned into a group which is higher in the hierarchy than the oligarchic stratum and has only one right – to make all important political decisions. This is probably the reason why a lot of authors (R.

Michels, M. Duverge, R. Aron and others) claim that the most essential political decisions are made by the oligarch minority of one or another party which currently governs the country. However, this is the formal side of the matter because, as practise shows, a lot of the "democratically" chosen oligarchies have led their countries and nations to horrible national disasters. **The big question here is different and has a lot deeper content level because it regards the way of finding democratic balance, which would avoid the legal possession of absolute and uncontrolled power by the political oligarchy.** Of course, the complexity of this question cannot be answered one-sidedly but at least there are democratic mechanisms for that can be found, for instance: decreasing the constitutional rights of the political oligarchy and limiting them to making only the most important part of the decisions (in extreme social situations, during war, etc.); priority development of the so called "referendum democracy" in a wide range of social matters; increasing democratic control on authority and its institutions by the citizen society; absolute appliance of transparency and publicity in the activity of supreme authority institutions; redefining the current legal norms regarding the immunity of politicians, chairmen, deputies, judges and other persons with a higher authority position, which (the norms) provide rapid appliance of court procedures, when there is obvious evidence for corruption, abuse of power, etc.

The second essential feature is of significant importance because it regards **the big role and part of the political leaders (and leadership)** in the realisation of the total governing process, in the transformation of different policies and strategies, in the circulation of political elites, etc. Specifically, political leaders are not only an organic element of the authority class but also the most important and essential engine of the "state ship".

The other specific feature differentiating the political oligarchy and part of the political elite from the surrounding layers in the frame of the authority class, is the various types of privileges, which the authorities take advantage of depending on the different ranges and positions in the supreme hierarchy of authority. We will just briefly note that the privileges of the political oligarchy (and of a part of the political elite) are a very important quality and feature, according to which we can always clearly differentiate every basic element of the authority class.

The fourth feature of the political class is basically the following: **while the dominant political minority is so conservative and unamendable to more significant staff changes, the political elite (and especially its layers) is a lot more open from the viewpoint of replaceability and renovation.** This is because they are managed by different in power and meaning authority resources – in oligarchy – the biggest, and in elite and the layers – smaller resources. This explains the excessive "closeness" of the political oligarchy compared to the relevantly "more open" character of the political elite and the surrounding layers.

The above **feature** is a the source of another feature, which regards different types of **political layers, where we can see the development of the "compressing and loosening" process of their social (and quality) contents depending on the purposes of the party central and oligarchy, on the changed political conjuncture, on the new political assignments, etc.** So the layers have a drastically more dynamic "staff streamlining", which has at least two purposes: firstly, to let oligarchy and elite chose and surround themselves with appropriate (from their point of view) personnel from various specialists from different spheres of life; and secondly, to give the same oligarchy the chance to

flexibly manage and use such experts (and representatives of the layers) and to always disengage from them when they are not needed anymore. In that way, **a manipulated inner reconstruction and movement of staff (or of parts of the elite) in the boundaries of the political class occurs in the following scheme: from the farther expert layers through the authority elite to the authority oligarchy and vice versa** (when uncomfortable and discredited politicians are dismissed). **So there is a specific rotation system of a number of concentrated circles, where, despite the democratic character of its relative responsibility, the access to huge power of some layer representatives, of a part of the political elite and in general, of new high-qualified people, can almost always be realised by the will of the absolute political oligarchy.**

Without making any claim for thoroughness, we think that this is basically the essence, structure and content of the authority class in modern democratic societies as well as some of its specific features, which result from its entire political activity.

REFERENCES

1. Вебер, М. (1992). *Социология на господството*. С.: Св. Кл. Охридски.
2. Дал, Р. (1996). *Съвременният политически анализ*. С.: ЦИД; Св. Кл. Охридски.
3. Дюверже, М. (2000). *Политическите партии*. М.
4. Кръстева, Анна. (1994). *Власт и елит в общество без гражданско общество*. – ВЪВ: Новият политически елит. С.: Перун-БМ.
5. Маринов, Ал. (2010). *Административният елит на XXI век*. С.: СИБИ.
6. Милс, Ч. Р. (1959). *Властующа елита*. М.
7. Минев, Д., П. Кабакчиева. (1996). *Преходът. Елити. Стратегии*. С.: Св. Кл. Охридски.
8. Михайлов, Ст. (1987). *Оптимално функциониране на социалното управление*. С.
9. Сартори, Дж. (1992). *Теория на демокрацията. Съвременната демокрация*. Кн. 1. С.: ЦИД.
10. *Социална стратификация и неравенство*. Сборник. С.: М-&-М, 1998.
11. Тилкиджиев, А. (1998). *Увод в проблематиката. Социална стратификация и неравенство*. С.: М-&-М.
12. Etzioni-Halevy, E. (1996). *The elite connection*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
13. Etzioni-Halevy, E. (1993). *The elite connection*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

POLITIČKA KLASA – DEFINICIJA I KARAKTERISTIKE

Georgi L. Manolov

Ovaj članak se bavi istorijsko-političkim razvojem fenomena političke klase. Detaljno su analizirani koncepti "politička klasa", "elita" i "oligarhija", njihove definicije, sastav i struktura, i stavljen je akcenat na karakteristike oligarhije u politici. U tom smislu, kroz detaljnu teorijsku analizu dat je pregled posebnih političkih slojeva i njihov odnos sa savremenom političkom oligarhijom.

Кljučне рeчи: *politička elita, politička klasa, politički slojevi, politička oligarhija, partokratija, plutokratija, politički lideri*