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Lecture: The Political Elite and the Process of Democratization	عنوان المحاضرة باللغة الانجليزية
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محتوى المحاضرة

Introduction

Good day, everyone. Today we will be discussing the concept of the **political elite** and its relationship to the process of **democratization**. We will explore how the political elite plays a central role in shaping democratic norms and how their actions can either promote *or hinder the development of democracy*.

By the end of this lecture, you should have a deeper understanding of the concept of political elites, their role in democratization, and how they can support or challenge the process of democratic transition.

1. What is the Political Elite?

The term "political elite" refers to a small group of individuals who hold significant power and influence over political decision-making within a society. These individuals often occupy key positions within government, political parties, businesses, and other influential institutions.

Political elites typically have access to resources, information, and networks that enable them to shape public policies, laws, and the overall political environment. They can come from various backgrounds, such as political, military, or economic elites, but their common feature is their ability to influence the direction of the state and society.

2. The Role of Political Elites in Democratization

Democratization refers to the transition from a non-democratic or authoritarian regime to a democratic form of governance. This process is often complex and gradual, involving significant political, social, and cultural changes. Political elites play a key role in this process, especially in the early stages of democratization.

In the early phases of democratization, political elites are often the **key actors** responsible for promoting democratic values and norms. Unlike a fully-formed democracy, which develops over time, democratization is a **process** that requires active involvement from these elites. Their commitment to democratic ideals is crucial for establishing a new democratic political order.

Here are some specific ways in which the political elite influences democratization:

1. **Formulating Pro-Democratic Policies:** Political elites are often responsible for drafting laws and policies that support democratic principles, such as human rights, free elections, and the rule of law. Their decisions in this area shape the legal and institutional frameworks that underpin democracy.
2. **Promoting Democratic Norms:** The political elite can foster democratic norms and values, including tolerance, pluralism, and respect for differences. They can set an example for society by adhering to democratic principles themselves and promoting them in the public sphere.
3. **Building Consensus:** During the early stages of democratization, political elites often need to come together to build a **broad-based consensus**. They must agree on the basic principles of democracy and work together to establish stable political institutions. This often involves negotiating between different political, ethnic, or religious groups that may have previously been in conflict.
4. **Encouraging Civic Participation:** Political elites can also play an essential role in **engaging citizens** in the democratic process. They can promote political participation by encouraging free speech, supporting civil society organizations, and ensuring that elections are fair and transparent.

3. The Political Elite and Inclusive Democracy

A significant aspect of the political elite's role in democratization is the **promotion of inclusive democracy**. In many cases, countries transitioning to democracy have experienced deep divisions along ethnic, religious, or ideological lines. These divisions can hinder the process of democratization if political elites do not make efforts to bridge these gaps.

By **adhering to democratic norms** and working to include historically marginalized groups, the political elite can help to create a more inclusive and cohesive democratic society. This process requires a commitment to **equality** and the elimination of exclusionary practices that may have been prevalent under previous regimes.

A notable example of this is **Nelson Mandela's leadership in South Africa**. Mandela, as a political elite figure, played a central role in encouraging **national unity** and promoting pro-democratic values in a society deeply divided by racial and ethnic conflict. Through his actions and speeches, Mandela helped to build a vision of a **democratic, inclusive South Africa**, where all people, regardless of race or background, would have equal rights and

opportunities. His leadership was instrumental in moving South Africa away from the legacy of apartheid toward a more democratic future.

4. Phases of Democratization and the Changing Role of the Elite

The role of the political elite can vary during different phases of democratization. Early on, elites are key to initiating democratic reforms. However, as democracy becomes more entrenched, the role of elites shifts. Let's look at the different phases of democratization:

- **Phase 1: The Elite Bargain** – In the initial stage, political elites are the primary drivers of change. They may negotiate with authoritarian regimes or other elite groups to create a new political system. These negotiations often result in a "bargain" that sets the foundation for future democratic governance.
- **Phase 2: Institutionalization of Democracy** – Once democratic institutions are established, the role of elites shifts towards ensuring that these institutions function effectively. This includes strengthening political parties, ensuring free and fair elections, and developing the rule of law.
- **Phase 3: Consolidation** – In this phase, democracy becomes more stable. The elite's role is to ensure that democratic practices are fully embedded in society and that the democratic system is resilient to challenges. Political elites must continue to promote democratic values and prevent any backslide into authoritarianism.

5. How Political Elites Can Support Democratic Transition

To support democratic transition, political elites must take several critical steps:

1. **Commitment to Democracy:** Political elites must demonstrate a clear commitment to democratic principles, both in their policies and in their personal conduct. This means upholding the rule of law, ensuring that institutions remain independent, and respecting the rights of citizens.
2. **Fostering Political Pluralism:** A key aspect of democratization is the promotion of **political pluralism**—the idea that multiple political parties, interest groups, and ideologies should coexist and compete freely in the political system. Elites must ensure that there is room for diverse voices and that the political environment is open to new ideas and perspectives.
3. **Promoting Social Justice:** Democratization is not just about political processes; it also requires addressing issues of social inequality. Political elites can support democratization by promoting **social justice**, ensuring that marginalized groups have a voice in the political process and that their needs are addressed.
4. **Building National Unity:** Political elites can help bridge divides in society by fostering a sense of shared identity. By emphasizing **national unity** over division, elites can ensure that democratization does not become a source of conflict but rather a means of uniting the population under common democratic values.
5. **Strengthening Civil Society:** A healthy democracy relies on a vibrant civil society. Political elites should support the development of non-governmental organizations, media, and other institutions that can hold the government accountable and promote democratic values at the grassroots level.

Conclusion

To sum up, the political elite plays a crucial role in the process of democratization. Their decisions, actions, and commitment to democratic norms can either help or hinder the development of democracy in a society. In the early stages of democratization, elites are essential in shaping democratic institutions, promoting inclusive practices, and fostering national unity. As the process progresses, their role shifts to consolidating democracy, ensuring that it becomes stable and resilient.

The success of democratization depends not just on the formal structures of government but on the commitment of political elites to uphold democratic principles and engage in inclusive, forward-thinking leadership. Political elites must remain vigilant in promoting democratic values, ensuring that the process of democratization is not just about changing political systems, but about creating a society that is more just, inclusive, and participatory.

