

How Elite Groups Entrench Their Dominance Through Law and Economics?

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Abstract. By studying the two periods in British history influenced by the Enlightenment movement, we can gain a deeper understanding of how elite groups solidify their dominance across various social contexts. Understanding the historical mechanisms of this entrenchment enables us to mitigate similar mistakes and risks in the future. We have analyzed some essays that explore how elite groups maintained their dominance during these two periods. Our findings reveal that in the 16th century, the monarch, who represented the elite at the time, used religion to consolidate their power. They achieved this by merging political and religious authorities, which subsequently led to the potential for abuses of power. We believe that such risks can be mitigated while still preserving the influence of the monarchy, by separating church and state but allowing the monarch to exert influence through a council. Under the capitalist society of the 19th century, research proved that elite groups consolidated their absolute power through legal regulations, economic limitations, and tax rates. The connection between and details within the case study is shown, along with further analysis of relating documents and societal issues worth discussing.

Keywords: Royal supremacy, religious disadvantage, Capitalism dominance, Legal control, Tax regulations, Economic limitations.

1. Introduction

The Enlightenment movement has distinctly divided Western history into two distinct periods: one characterized by monarch dominance and the other defined by the emergence of capitalism. This evolution in historical epochs has indirectly led to a transformation in the composition of the dominant group. This shift in dominant groups subsequently compelled the elite, especially those of British origin, to adopt innovative strategies to consolidate their control. Nevertheless, both these methods of dominance—originating from the 16th and 18th centuries, respectively—are not without their share of predicaments that necessitate resolution. By scrutinizing these two disparate eras of human society, a deeper comprehension of historical contexts can be attained. We maintain the viewpoint that a more just and balanced society can be erected based on insights from past experiences. This involves a thorough examination of issues that have the potential to undermine societal stability, followed by the identification of plausible remedies. This essay aims to achieve several objectives: firstly, to shed light on how elite groups established and fortified their dominance during the 16th and 18th centuries by examining representative cases from both periods; secondly, to analyze the conflicts and challenges arising within the domains of religion, economy, and laws due to unscientific or inequitable governance approaches; and finally, to present potential solutions that could effectively tackle the aforementioned issues.

2. Case Description

2.1. The case of the 16th Century

The first case is on how the elite group entrenched their dominance in the 16th century on the aspect of religion by using Henry the Eighth, who is the center of the monarchy, as a representation of the elite status. Henry the Eighth used to be a faithful fellow of the Roman Catholic Church and has even once been given the title of "Defender of the Faith" to award his loyalty. However, a serious conflict

between him and the Holy See takes place later when he wants to divorce his first wife. This unlucky wife was named Catherine and she was given up by Henry the Eighth simply because Henry believed that she would never be able to provide him with a son. This event, has, to some extent, acted as a catalyst for the enactment of the Acts of Supremacy in 1534 [1].

The acts of supremacy have many significant consequences in different aspects. When it comes to the aspect of religion, the most obvious consequence was that it split the Church of England (also known as the Anglican Church) from the Roman Catholic Church. Additionally, this act also declared the English monarch the only supreme head of the Church of England [2]. This marked a rejection of papal authority and endowed the English monarchy with the ultimate power in both religious and political matters within the realm. The document solidified the dominance of the English Monarch, representing the elite ruling class, in religious affairs [3,4].

Furthermore, the Acts of Supremacy augmented Henry's authority within the realm of law. After the enactment, he was allowed and empowered to legislate on some specific religious matters and church affairs. Subsequent legislation, such as the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874, demonstrated the state's legal oversight of religious practices within the Church of England, regulating worship and managing practices [5].

Upon a comprehensive examination of how the English elite solidified their dominance in both religious and legal realms during the 16th century, particularly through the Acts of Supremacy, it becomes evident that those so-called legal changes were also strategically designed to enhance the monarch's authority in religious affairs. Therefore, we can somehow get the conclusion that the elite group in the 16th century basically entrench their dominance by entrenching their religious control by using both direct and indirect methods. However, the approach of consolidating power by intertwining public spirituality with government control and effectively aligning the church with the state may have also led to future complications.

2.2. The case of 18th Century

The second case is about how elite groups entrenched their dominance after the evolutionary change during the period from the 18th to the 20th century, which from agrarian economies with mercantilism to industrialization, monopoly capitalism, state intervention, and globalization. The emphasis shifted from the state control of trade and accumulation of wealth through exports, to dominating industries and creating labor laws, then to deregulation, privatization, and free market policies.

This case study focuses on elite groups reinforcing their absolute power and dominance in a society through law and economics during the 19th century under a capitalist society. The 19th century, after the period of Enlightenment where ideologies such as open-mindedness and liberalism were promoted, along with how the state government should be separated from the religious branch of a nation, was a time of significant social and economic transformation, marked by the rise of extremely powerful elites such as entrepreneurs and businessmen. Elites utilized economic limitations, taxation policies, and legal frameworks to consolidate and perpetuate dominance, specially shown in the example of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Being industrialized, the concentration of wealth gathered in in hands of a few, which as industrialization advanced, traditional hierarchies evolved, along with opportunities to entrench dominance.

Generally, by using capitalism as a system of control enforced on a society, elites owned and controlled the means of production, extracted surplus value from laborers, influenced government policies so they would benefit the rich, and concentrated wealth in their hands to accumulate vast fortunes.

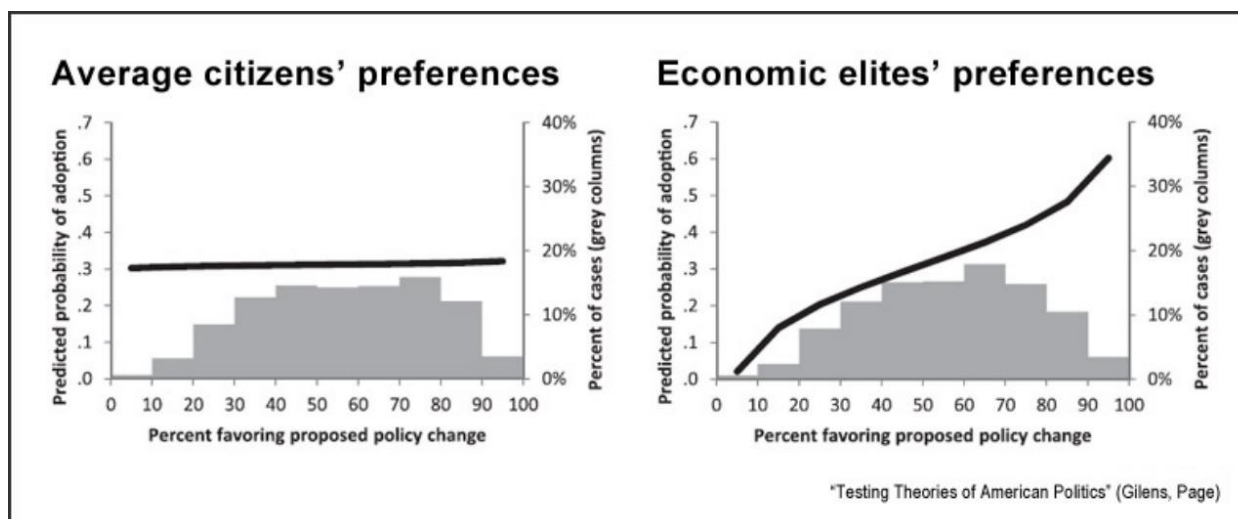


Figure 1. The percent favoring proposed policy change

As shown in Figure 1, economic elites had increasing preferences favoring the proposed policy changes being made, as they had control and influence over established government policies, with benefits leaning towards the rich.

Through legislation and legal practices, as well as economic enforcements, elite capitalists entrenched and consolidated their dominance through the property rights and contracts, anti-union and anti-worker legislation, and monopoly and antitrust laws, three different categories to showcase the enforcement and restriction imposed on the mass. The absolute right of speech belonged to the elites, allowing them to control multiple aspects of society. Elites secured their wealth and assets through laws that protected their rights over privatized properties and ensured contract enforcements. This allowed for gathering significant resources that formed the foundation for extended economic growth and expansion. The Enclosure Acts set during the 17th to 19th century in Britain allowed for wealthy landowners to privatize capitals legitimately through laws. This consolidation granted capitalists greater control over resources. When they were concerned about the growing power of labor unions and worker movements that could challenge their authority, they restricted collective labor unions, which made it difficult for workers to organize or negotiate for better wages and working conditions. This was a form of forced silence from the citizens, not letting them complain or speak up for themselves, and creating a utopian world for the mass. It is more clearly demonstrated how elite groups approached issues regarding power and wealth, along with solutions that aided them in gaining dominance and a higher social status. The Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 suppressed workers in making attempts to form trading unions and collective bargaining for better quality of life. It made it illegal for employees to form labor unions and prosecuted the leaders, which was a method to limit the power of the working class from exceeding elite control. Monopolies and trusts were established to dominate entire industries, giving them immense economic power. They could dictate prices, control supply, and eliminate competition, enhancing their entrenchment by restricting the growth and development of emerging entrepreneurs which would reinforce their position and power. The British East India Company, as an example of Britain dictating the economy in established colonies, monopolized trade, holding territorial control over the colonies, forcing the native race to do labor work for the Europeans. This dictation in the economy also emphasized cooperation between rich and influential companies to protect interests in restricting new players in an industry.

Through tax regulations, elites consolidated their power through promoting favorable tax rates for the wealthy, creating tax loopholes and deductions to benefit themselves by gaining advantage from the poor, and building public infrastructures as ways to persuade individuals to connect with and trust elites. These methods prioritize the needs of people experiencing poverty and create benefits and convenience for them, even though the elites create influence and take advantage. Taxation policies were manipulated and designed to protect wealth and property. Regressive taxation imposed higher burdens on the lower classes, ensuring the wealthy paid proportionally less of their income in taxes.

The Corn Laws were a system of tax reforms that protected domestic grain prices, which favored the empowered landowners and burdened the poor by higher food prices. The affluent elites used their financial resources and legal expertise to exploit tax loopholes and thus taking advantage of deductions being not accessible to the lower classes. This reduced their tax liabilities and made it seem that the poor were benefitted even though profit went to owned industries by the rich. The Window Tax, from the 17th to 19th centuries, were set where only the individuals with wealth and power could afford to have fewer windows or having more cost-effective materials to reduce tax responsibilities, where the less affluent had to pay higher proportions of their income to match this form of taxation. By benefitting the public and providing subsidies for them, the elites made it seem so their projects were committed to the well-being of the citizens, even though it was a trick to make them more supportive and submissive to the dominant rule of elite groups. The construction of railway improved transportation and efficiency for the people, but also facilitated the flow of goods, benefitting their industries in the end by securing profit for their projects.

3. Analysis on the Problems

However, several problems might emerge due to these methods of dominance entrenchment mentioned in the former mentioned two cases. In the first case, during the reign of Henry the Eighth, the interweaving of church and state introduced multifaceted dynamics that both strengthened and constrained the power of the monarch. This fusion led to societal tensions, especially when religion was wielded as a political tool.

The decision of Henry the Eighth to place himself at the forefront of religious matters effectively monopolized spiritual guidance. This move, while consolidating power both politically and religiously, also exposed the church to the fluctuating whims of politics and potential controversies. Such centralization of religious authority under the monarchy hinted at potential abuses of power, where religious decisions might be swayed more by political agendas than genuine spiritual concerns. Within the backdrop of the English Reformation, such classification morphed into a mechanism for control [6]. By delineating what was deemed "acceptable" within the Church of England, the monarchy could quell dissenting religious perspectives, further cementing its dominance. Furthermore, the consolidation of religious and political power in the hands of the English elite, as manifested through the Acts of Supremacy, hinted at a potential void in checks and balances. The state's legal purview over religious practices, exemplified by the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874, accentuates the potential for state overreach into individual spiritual domains [7]. In essence, the Acts of Supremacy and the inception of the Church of England not only bolstered the monarchy's authority but also set the stage for potential conflicts between personal spiritual beliefs and state-sanctioned religious practices. The fusion of church and state, while fostering a unified national identity, also sparked questions about religious freedom, state intervention, and the genuine essence of spiritual expression within a politically governed religious framework [7].

For the second case, the existing problems of the used methods according to some former research papers are listed below: John Passant explores key historical events in English tax history, specifically the Magna Carta of 1215, the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, and the English Revolution from 1640 to 1649. The articles emphasize the relationship between tax, class divisions, and revolts, with taxation being portrayed as an expression of and a cause for class divisions which often lead to conflicts in between members of the ruling elite and with the people. Individual action of the working class was written as the key to understanding the complexity of war, tax, democracy, and rebellion. Tax can be a spark for rebellion and resistance against struggles for freedom. The relationship between taxation and consent reflects the development of a tax-based states serving in the interests of the elites, as well as points out the limitations, which a capitalist society ignores the role of ordinary people. Majid Khosravini examines the rise of right-wing populism in Western countries, focusing on how political elites strategically use economic grievances and social media to promote xenophobic discourses [8]. By introducing right-wing populism, it criticizes economic liberalism, free movement of capital and

labor, and deregulation of financial markets. Political elites strategically aligned with public issues and manipulated public opinion, using economic structures to maintain control. It breaks the seemingly ideal society with liberalism into the tricks and methods used by the elites to benefit themselves instead of the bigger community [9]. Elites directed public attention away from core issues and broke down complex problems like economic globalization to anti-immigration rhetoric. Matthias Doepke and Fabrizio Zilibotti explores the transformation of social order during the British Industrial Revolution, focusing on the rise of industrial capitalists from the middle classes and the decline of the landed elite. The paper illustrates how preferences and values were shaped by economic conditions, leading to the stratification of society and economic inequality. Elite groups use this to entrench their dominance through cultivation of specific values and attitudes. The lower classes were left with little opportunities for upward mobility, directing to social unrest and instability, challenging the long-term sustainability of the ruling class. The interesting connection between financial development and class differences investigates how dominance shifts depending on financial market conditions.

The purpose of law comes with its punishments when people go against it, such as penalty fines and forcing individuals into jail, into an environment that is hostile and inhumane. Control of the elites were shown when they “break the law” and use their wealth to show signs of absolute power compared to the rest. This idea links back to Qin Shi Huang’s school of thought, legalism, where he believes only harsh punishments can make a society peaceful and prosperous as humans are evil by nature and would not follow a ruler unless it is forced. Machiavelli’s *The Prince* additionally points out the advantage of rulers taking fear rather than love as it is more powerful and efficient in terms of ruling a society and keeping it under control [10].

4. Suggestions

We believe that the problem mentioned in case one is rooted in the relationship between the monarch (ruling status) and the religion. Obviously, religion is a mental and psychological control that rules the public in a different way from what the monarch does. Combining religious power and monarch by using a single individual (Henry the Eighth) as the bridge will lead to a sense of threat in the heart of the local public of abuses of power. Furthermore, if the monarch becomes the only supreme head of the church, there will be an unavoidable void in checks and balances.

To mitigate the concerns of concentrated power and potential abuses, it is vital to maintain separation to some extent between religious and political authority. This could involve establishing an ecclesiastical body that operates independently from the monarchy, with its own leadership and decision-making processes. This separation ensures that religious matters remain free from undue political influence. However, in order to entrench the dominance of the elite group, it is still essential to preserve the ability of the monarch and church to influence each other in a way in which the monarch takes its lead. A councils would provide recommendations to the monarch and religious leaders, helping to prevent unilateral decisions and encourage more inclusive governance.

For the second case study, the origin and formation of a typical capitalist society significantly contributed to the complications and conflicts existing inside. There were high levels of wealth gaps, with the few capitalists thriving at the top of the pyramid while individuals with lower social status stayed at the bottom, consistently working hard for the elites. Taxes were said to directly connect with conflict, reflecting the harm it brings to the less advantaged ones paying higher portions of their earnings while the rich were comfortable with preferable tax rates benefiting them. Another clear problem was the manipulation of public decision and how elites used economic structures to reinforce their dominance in industries and public sectors which is seemingly unintentional for the rest.

It is imperative that antitrust laws implemented against monopolies of capitalists are in place and nationalistic populism is spreading, instead of constant capitalism. Antitrust laws should be further enhanced and developed in order to promote healthy competition and preventing monopolies, working towards more fair distribution on economic opportunities as well as wealth. This addresses

abusive behavior by dominant companies, eliminating monopolies to control prices and deal exclusively. It also prohibits collusions amongst competing firms such as fixing prices and market allocation agreements, which would improve production quality and reduce harms to customers. Populism, contrasting with economic liberalism, is interesting in the way that individuals are not personally aware of the inequalities within the capitalist society, with public opinions and propagandas showcasing only what the government wishes citizens to see. People are being manipulated into thinking capitalism is basically socialism and liberalism, in which public sectors are shared by all the stakeholders instead of being private sector investments earning profit. In this sense, populism is actually useful in at least making the society seem more equal as people existing under that environment did not notice major differences between social classes and how the people were used to create greater profit for the rich. This image is closer to being utopian rather than a community with citizens being self-aware of the inequalities they are experiencing.

5. Conclusion

Different society answer the question of how elite group entrench their dominance in a different manner. We believe that studying and analyzing how past society ruling status root their dominance can help provide a deeper understanding and inspiration on how the society should work in the modern society. We have done case studies on the two time periods, before and after the enlightenment movement in early Britten. We found that law have long been a ruling tool both directly and indirectly and while in 16th century elite groups use religion as a ruling tool, elite status in 18th century will choose to use economic and monetary policies. People who want get to know the analyze of those two cases will be suggested to take a look on our essay. However, since we have little time to do deeper research on both cases or more cases, our conclusion and result are somehow biased. Furthermore, since both of us are not yet university students, the studying method we are using will not be that professional and therefore our some of our points might be not that solid and valid. We hope that in the future, more analyze of the historical case will be made and as a result people can have a better understanding on how modern society should be ruled to make it more stable and prosperous.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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