

A Concept for Measuring Control in Bureaucracies

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A Concept for Measuring Control in Bureaucracies

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I. Introduction

The idea of an operational concept of "power" has long intrigued political scientists in America, though few have attempted to devise a research program that would produce empirical verification of the hypotheses and concepts proposed about power. Such a task, this thesis contends would be valueless because it would be mostly productive only of mundane, sterile, or confusing results. The problem of observing and defining more precisely the phenomena that scholars have classified under the genus of "power" is, however, an important one-- especially for administrative science, and organization theory in particular. One prominent writer in these fields, James March, notes that the ideas of power, as applied to bureaucratic control, no longer are able to generate conclusions with a high degree of validity. They simply "have not greatly helped us to understand many of the natural social choice mechanisms to which they have traditionally been applied."¹ Edward Leonard points out, indeed, that much contemporary research concludes that power is a non-meaningful concept for systematic research and mostly irrelevant to meaningful conceptualization for operational application-- in other words, power as a concept has come to denote a large class of vague presumptions about control in human interaction, but has not provided any precise boundaries or definition of these phenomena. Continuing, Leonard questions whether power is a "catch-all term for a variety of relationships which empirically should be considered as separate?"²

The basic proposition of this thesis, then, is that where the concern of the scholar is with bureaucratic structures and human relations within them, he would produce more accurate description of the operations therein by dispensing wholly with the notion of "power" and using the concept of control. Chapter II deals specifically with this subject by reviewing the development of the idea of power in the twentieth century in the writings of philosophers like Bertrand Russell, political philosophers such as Bertrand de Jouvenel, Hans Morgenthau and others, and political scientists such as Harold Lasswell, Robert Dahl, and others. Chapter II also points out the fallacies, inconsistencies, and ambiguities in the notion of power as developed by these men. It reiterates the proposition noted above: namely, the concept of control provides an untainted idea with which to clarify human decision processes in organizations. The use of "power" for this purpose produces puzzlement for most investigators to the extent that March questions whether "power" as a concept or as a variable contributes at all to the predictive ability of a theory. In studies that use it, power "is a major intervening variable between an initial condition, defined largely in terms of the individual components of the system, and a terminal state, defined largely in terms of the system as a whole."³ It provides the investigator with a crutch that allows him to note, when something unexplainable occurs, that "power" is being exercised by one or more individuals.

By subsuming power and influence under the concept of control, organizational theorists have the means to measure the degree of importance of certain variables in the bureaucratic structure-- including behavior of members of the organization-- to the decision-making processes of the organization. Chapter III illustrates how, with

the application of decision-making theory and a fuller grasp of the decision process, the probability of certain consequences arising from certain decisions can be determined. The choice of behavior strategies that produces a change in the behavior of the members of an organization is a central variable of control. The control of a decision-maker over his subordinates and ordinates is subject to precise description, if not empirical measurement, by applying the theory noted in Chapter III. Martin Shubik partially explains this idea:

Possibly the most fundamental concept to Political Science is that of power. The study of Political Science can be defined as power. Yet . . . to the present day this concept has been elusive to the best of minds. In an elementary and highly limited way Game Theory analysis serves as a means to clarify, examine and extend some of the concepts of power.⁴

Game theory is one application of decision-making theory, and Shubik's statement applies here if "control" is substituted for "power."

Chapter IV deals more specifically with the measurement of two variables that, in turn, contribute to the measurement of control--information and communications in the organization. The two hypotheses dealt with there are that:

- (1) The greater the accessibility to information of all kinds, the more likely a decision-maker in a political organization will be able to exercise control.
- (2) The greater the ability of a decision-maker to organize his followers or subordinates, and successfully coordinate the communication of information to and from himself, and within his organization, the greater will be his ability to concentrate and increase his control through his increased capacity for making decisions with high probabilities of success.

Chapter IV shows not only that the amount of information emanating from a specific source can be measured, but also that this measurement can be predicted and is an index to the amount of disorder or instability in the system from whence the information comes.

Likewise, Chapter IV shows how the ability to describe the communications structures of an organization will produce explicit evidence of the means of control accruing to decision-makers from their ability to control information. In contemporary bureaucracies the decision-maker's ability to increase his control is facilitated and enhanced by the use of computers and cybernetic systems. These devices provide centralized information sources to him, over which he can exercise a greater ability to determine what information he will base his decisions on.

This thesis is not a research project. Rather, it is a conceptual study in political theory which provides a new perspective for analyzing organizational control. Control-- or power, as most political scientists would call it-- is not impervious to internal analysis; it does subject itself to surgery on the basis that it is an aggregate of more than a few independent variables, each affecting the decision-making processes within organizations in varying degrees. This paper investigates the efficacy of using two of these variables-- information and communications-- as indicators of the degree of control used or produced in the process of making a decision. It attempts to produce a different perspective from which to view a bureaucracy. In so doing, it implies the necessity of adopting novel methodologies for analysis. In a recent article, Sheldon Wolin notes that, "training in techniques has educational consequences for it affects the way in which the initiates

[students] will look upon the world and especially the political portion in it."⁵ In other words, the scholar's methodology often determines this viewpoint or depth of perspective before he makes his analysis. In the technologically-biased political system that is contemporary society, methodology that realizes and exploits the available technological capacity for research will be a sine qua non for future study of that political system.

PREVIEW

Notes

- ¹James March, "The Power of Power," Varieties of Political Theory, David Easton, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 68.
- ²"The Bases of Political Power: A Critical Re-Examination," (Unpublished paper prepared for delivery at the Sixty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 2-6, 1969), pp. 1, 2.
- ³March, p. 40
- ⁴"Games, Decisions, and Industrial Organization," Readings in Mathematical Social Science, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Neil W. Henry, eds. (Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1968), p. 253.
- ⁵"Political Theory As a Vocation," The American Political Science Review, v. 63 (December, 1969), p. 1064.

PREVIEW

II. The Idea of Power and the Concept of Control

The literature in political science relating to "power" is both extensive¹ and illustrative of the impact of a static idea on man's perception of politics and the state.² From the times of Plato's Republic³ and Machiavelli's writings⁴ until the present, political philosophy linked the idea of power with those of justice, law, and the traditional institutions of government. In the twentieth century the increased tempo and fluidity of politics produced a somewhat more dynamic consideration of the topic.⁵ In the last twenty-five years political science has begun to produce investigations that viewed power from non-traditional perspectives in an attempt to contrive an analytical concept to view more accurately political manipulation in the context of decision-making and dynamic human relationships.⁶

Any reading on the subject of "power" immediately produces the impression of a kaleidoscopic, all-embracing contrivance designed to explain the unexplainable. Harold Lasswell, a firm adherent of the power analysis approach in political science, is able to concede that "the term power has a semantic coat of many colors, not all of which are symbols of evil portent."⁷ However, as late as 1966, he still finds an idea of power useful, maintaining that "the function of government is power."⁸ These observations by a noted writer in the field serve as illustrative examples of the effect of this bland idea of "power" on conceptual orientation in political science. An early critic of this

approach bases much of his criticism on the limiting functions of a power approach in political research. Observing that the present orientation of political research developed from the two schools of thought concerned with the nature and characteristics of the state, and the understanding of the use and distribution of power, he argues that both suffer incompleteness.⁹ What is overwhelmingly amazing about such analyses as those which David Easton criticizes (Lasswell, Dahl, and various "statists") is the almost complete lack of concern with the new types of organizations and decision-making structures which now perform the tasks of policy-making and policy orientation of society. Lasswell is bold enough to affirm that, despite the growth and improvement of science and technology, this growth has not affected the structure of world politics;¹⁰ while Franz Neumann is yet staid enough to maintain that "the task of political theory is thus the determination of the degree to which a power group [whatever that may be] transcends its particular interests and advocates . . . universal interests."¹¹

Generally speaking, it is the contention of this paper that while some twentieth century observers have attempted to state what this elusive tool of analysis (power) is, and while they have succeeded in some cases in defining the characteristics of what to them is the focus of political research, they have failed to realize that their task, given the traditional orientation with which they burden their research, is impossible. Moreover, their objective is irrelevant to the modern imperatives and requirements of systems analysis, model-building, and middle-range theory construction, for a general theory of power likely would be meaningless to the myriad contexts of organizational decision-making in the contemporary era of technologically-based and technologically-motivated social

structures, inasmuch as the tools to derive an empirically quantifiable theory at the microanalytic level of decision-making would not be part of a general theory. While it may well be true, as some critics maintain, that the traditional institutions have become modified and remolded to accommodate technology,¹² the mere survival of these institutions is not sufficient reason to justify analyses based on their "nature," or based on how "power manifests itself in them." The object of this chapter, then, will be the analysis of important twentieth century ideas about "power," and to contrast the development of these ideas with the theoretical concept of "control," which seems to be a more empirically feasible tool for decision-making analysis. A survey of the more prominent literature is, therefore, offered in order to illustrate these criticisms more accurately, and to show how "control" would be a more accurate term than "power" in this context.

Bertrand Russell. Early in this century Bertrand Russell wrote what became the first of many works on the subject of power.¹³ His definition of power as "the production of intended effects," (which he held to be "a quantitative concept.")¹⁴ has had a lasting effect on the work of other scholars studying power.¹⁵ For this reason alone this work would deserve some comment here. Equally important, however, is Russell's early contention that the phenomenon he called power does lend itself to quantitative observation. His concern for an adequate means for the expression of the occurrence of power in various instances (he never speaks of power as any type of relationship) led him to maintain that the basic idea of social science, the fulcrum upon which research objectives rest, is the concept of power "in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics."¹⁶ It follows that the terms of power are

the only possible method of articulating generalizations about "social dynamics."¹⁷

To be sure, Russell realizes the nexus between power over the inorganic and power over the organic-- which is, for him, man. In brief, at times power can be exercised over men when the support for that power is inorganic;¹⁸ this type of power is technological power. Expanding on this important theme, he notes:

Mechanical power ... tends to generate a new mentality, which makes it more important than in any former age to find ways of controlling governments. Democracy may have become more difficult owing to technical developments, but it has also become more important. The man who has vast mechanical power at his command is likely, if uncontrolled, to feel himself a god-- not a Christian God of love, but a pagan Thor or Vulcan.¹⁹

This observation, made in 1938, becomes prophetic as decision-making activities today increasingly rely on computers and mathematical formulae, or the "mechanical power" that Russell speaks of here.

Even though Russell's work appears productive of articulating a means of identifying power and fulfilling his proposition that it lends itself to quantification, he is never really able to generate a framework to do so. A case might be made that such was not his purpose; if so then, why did he indulge in what must then be regarded as digressions concerning, first, the differentiation between power over matter and power over men; second, warnings of the danger involved in ultimate "mechanical power"; and third, the first proposition that it is indeed empirical? Evidently, the empirical aspect of the phenomenon of "power" held some attraction for him. Probably crucial to this dilemma are Russell's assumptions that the chief desires of man are power and glory; and that to obtain glory, he first must obtain power.²⁰ In other words, man, being what he is, naturally yearns for the psychic gratification

provided by admiration from others and obtained from the production of his intended effects on other men. For all that, Russell still provides no guidelines for either the empirical verification of the existence of power, or for a mathematical or other statement of the amount of power expended in a specific situation. All that can be said is that scholars can taxonomize power over men in terms of the methods used to influence individuals, or in terms of the kinds of organization used to implement these methods.²¹

On the whole, criticisms of Russell's work are of two types: one concerned with the inappropriateness of the tendency to philosophize about the manifestation of power, rather than its effects; and one reflecting dissatisfaction with the inability of his explication to satisfy the demands for empirical expression imposed by him. For instance, there is a vagueness about the use and importance of "power" in the social sciences. If the basic concept in social science is power, then, given Russell's definition of power in the organic and inorganic senses, academicians must also concern themselves with power over matter, whether or not it functions to produce power over men. Present-day normative theorists often express this criticism of behavioral theory: that is, there is altogether too much emphasis and concern with the application of pure science; and political scientists are becoming, in a real sense, engineers.²² Likewise, there is in Russell's empiricism not only normative application, but normative research methodology. In considering mechanical power, he expresses a concern for the expressions of power in democratic institutions, a normative application which illustrates Lasswell's early warning about the semantic luggage which usually accompanies any discussion of power. Finally, the most relevant criticism of Russell

deals with his idea of where "power" lies and what it is. As mentioned earlier, Russell in no way states or implies that power is any type of relation; rather, his work points to the idea that certain men possess power and may unlock a vault and expend or deposit it mostly at will. Such visualizations impose narrow strictures on the application of his concept to "social dynamics." Indeed, it is useful only in static concept of society that knows not the fluctuating decision structures, and fluid authority structures characteristic of the production of contemporary policy.

To be sure, Russell contributed a significant foundation to the study of "power." His work provided a somewhat coherent, though at times ambiguous, analysis of how men exert influence or authority over other men. Regarding his work as seminal, the criticisms made here may be unfair. They are not invalid, however, because succeeding writers based much of their work on Russell without reviewing the times and contexts in and about which they wrote. They thereby prolonged the negative effects of a static concept on their work.

De Jouvenel and d'Entreves. The works of Bertrand de Jouvenel and Alexander d'Entreves are taken together because they are complementary to each other. Indeed, d'Entreves' work often provides certain correlatives to de Jouvenel's exposition of "power." For example, de Jouvenel's view of power, in the sense Russell used it, refers to "the central governmental authority in States or communities;"²³ in like manner, d'Entreves, conceiving the state in terms of law, accordingly refers to power as "the lawful exercise of force."²⁴ Both definitions, while retaining the customary vagueness associated with the term "power," show the impression that the use of the term has had on state-

oriented political philosophy: "Power" provided an organizing principle for statist theories, and their proponents boldly grasped it as a variable which could explain the growth and continued existence of the state.

Further investigation of these two works exposes a relation to Russell's work. De Jouvenel notes that "power" cannot exist without command and obedience. Since command and obedience existed before the state, therefore so did power. Command is a sufficient condition for the existence of "power."²⁵ All of this is reminiscent of Russell's simple definition of power that results in the manifestation of command and obedience. D'Entreves points out in a similar context that it is necessary to differentiate between power and force,²⁶ intimating some factual base of power as expressed by coercive sanction. Given the fact that, according to d'Entreves, a conception of the state in legal terms is equivalent to a definition of power "as force exercised according to, and in the name of law,"²⁷ the statisticians are able to relate power to procedure and authority. Continuing in this vein, de Jouvenel had noted previously that power is authority, and, naturally enough, the existence of power created more authority.²⁸ This type of explanation of the relation between authority and power is wholly characteristic of the analyses presented by statist philosophers.

Modern Statists. The traditional writing of the statist accommodation of power has survived the growing popularity of power-scholars' accommodation of the state. Most noted are the works of Hans J. Morgenthau²⁹ and Adolf Berle.³⁰ Morgenthau's being the better-known of the two. The concern of the former is with international relations and the interactions of national governments. The motivating factor in all such relations is

power; in fact, Morgenthau notes that, "International relations, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim;"³¹ and earlier he notes that the political realist "thinks in terms of interest defined as power."³² Morgenthau then presents a definition of power, maintaining that power means the control over the minds and actions of other men by a man. Political power refers to these control relations among those who hold public authority, and between these people and the public. Political power is not, though, simply coercion and violence.³³

At this point problems occur when applying this idea of power to the manifestations, and especially the machinations of any exercise of government authority, including foreign relations. First, power in this context often has nothing whatever to do with control over the minds of men. It is almost certain that employees of the U. S. State Department, from the highest to the lowest levels, perform their duties-- engage in foreign relations and commit political acts-- in a bureaucratic context. Such men may or may not think expressly about the ideology involved in their behavior or in their bureaucratic or policy products. Unconscious effect? Perhaps. But unlikely as a general explanation for the reason that work in organizations often results from a need to survive or a liking for a specific task. Research in this area reveals that abstract satisfaction with the goals of an organization is not necessary or sufficient for satisfaction with assigned tasks.³⁴ As for Morgenthau's contention that power is the immediate goal of international relations, it appears as though he is defining power as the equivalent of ideology.

Because of his proposition that property and power are one and the same,³⁵ it seems accurate to classify Berle's extensive work on the topic

of power as essentially representative of the statist approach (assuming that a primary function of the state is the safeguarding of property and property holders). This proposition, along with the maintenance of the idea that any consideration of power must take into account the idea system held by the power holder,³⁶ is basically the essence of Berle's work. It seems that his idea of power is subject to the above criticism of Morgenthau's work. More precisely, Berle notes that some type of system of law and morals is necessary for the existence of power in order that institutions might exist for the transmission of power within them.³⁷ The tendency to attach normative judgments to power-- to repeat, a process which prevents or severely inhibits a precise concept of control-- is illustrated here.

As de Jouvenel earlier implied, Berle observes that everyone is always in a power situation, sometimes commanding, sometimes obeying.³⁸ However, what is false about power analyses to this point is the presumption that obeissance necessarily implies ideological content and/or persuasion, which is not always the case. As Alderfer has shown, and as Pugh and his associates infer, political or abstract ideological persuasion is often not necessary.³⁹ Traditional power analyses prevent or handicap observation and quantification of control as a variable in goal-achievement of organizations by attributing such normative purposes as "democratic" values and ideology to the internal workings of bureaucracies.

Modern Power Theories. So far the discussion of power has centered on the approach of state-oriented political philosophy as the basis of political analysis. There is also an approach to political analysis based on the idea of power. This second approach closely resembles

statist theory at times, but usually maintains its own identity by neglecting to mention the existence and functioning of the state as the main object of analysis. Power theorists have had a profound impact on the discipline of political science, and have precipitated increased concern in sociology and public administration about the place and relevance of this idea as a variable. This investigation presents the views of Lasswell, Dahl, and Lasswell and Kaplan as most representative of the power approach to political analysis.

Harold D. Lasswell. Harold D. Lasswell has probably had more impact on research orientations in modern political science than any other man, with the exception, perhaps, of David Easton, who brought the idea of systems analysis to the forefront of empirical consideration in the discipline. Lasswell's emphasis on power as the central value in politics, and the principle concern of political research, has influenced the framework and context of much political research. A definition of power from one of Lasswell's works is characteristic of a definition from any of his other works: Basically, power, to him, is participating in, or being in position to participate in, the making of important decisions.⁴⁰ Lasswell further maintains that any human relation is subject to becoming a power relation, and when it does, the conversion process is known as "politicizing human relations."⁴¹ Here then is an early illustration of the effect of power on politics, e. g. power is a primary characteristic of political interaction. Furthermore, the use of power as a term designates "relations in which severe deprivations are expected to follow the breach of a pattern of conduct."⁴² These characteristics of power-- that it is political, and that, as such, it involves the the imposition of sanctions which deprive some men of a value-- are

basic to his analysis and have become basic to most political analyses of power. However, to obtain a definitive and coherent view of this orientation toward power, it is sufficient to dwell at length upon Power and Society, a work Lasswell co-authored with Abraham Kaplan.⁴³

In Power and Society, the authors state that "Power is participation in the making of decisions.," and that "A decision is a policy involving severe sanctions," (in fact, without the existence of severe sanctions, there can be no policy).⁴⁴ Power, then, is a value of some sort; more explicitly, it is a value that causes other men to defer to the man that holds or exercises it.⁴⁵ Accordingly,

Power is the deference value with which political science is especially concerned; it can be described in terms of its domain, scope, weight, and coerciveness. Forms of power can be distinguished according to the value upon which power is based.⁴⁶

There are many values and value systems that form varying bases for the existence of power. An important point for this consideration is the fact that here there is recognition of the fact that power does consist of certain bases of support.

The fact that these bases are abstract "values" results from the normative attributes of the idea of power. What is problematical is a certain inferred contradiction in the description of power: namely, if power is the relational variable implied by the above definition, then how is it that it has certain forms-- based on its relevant value bases-- that can only be conceived of, in such a context, as a specified amount of something? This contradiction is irrefutable, based on the rest of the work, and the authors seem not to have recognized the implications of this problem. Moreover, it becomes sharper as an obstacle to resolving the place of power in political analysis.

Lasswell and Kaplan are among the first theorists to realize the differences between and attempt to distinguish among power, influence, and authority. For example, they define influence as "the value position and potential of a person or group." They then go on to explain that the bases of influence are "'welfare values,'" or "those [values] whose possession to a certain degree is necessary condition for the maintenance of the physical activity of a person." (These values are such things as well-being, wealth, skill, and enlightenment.)⁴⁷ All this is to show that the central distinction between power and influence is the presence of the threat of sanctions in the power relationship,⁴⁸ which exists in this relationship, because of the involvement of "deference" rather than "welfare" values. To compound the ambiguity, the authors then note that:

The most familiar base of influence and power is power itself: power over some values often constitutes the condition for influence or power over other values. Control, based on power, over power policy is political power in the narrow sense (not to be confused with . . . authority).⁴⁹

What remains puzzling after all discussion is the question of the difference between power and influence. After broaching the subject, the writers go on to explain that the bases for both are values; but they are different values, ostensibly values which are easily segregated, and whose manifestation shall enable the researcher to tell whether or not he is observing a power relation or an influence relation. The answer is still unclear after noting that the deference values for power can provide not only a base for power (which is somewhat understandable), but also a base for influence (since power is a deference value).

The definition of authority presented by Lasswell and Kaplan is not helpful in characterizing power either. "Authority is formal power." is the definition they give. This means that authority is symbolic:

that is, the actual structures for the transmission of power may have no relation to the current political formula-- a constitution, for example. In a word, if a person has authority, it means that a political "formula" assigns him power, not that he has power.⁵⁰ While this explication does indeed differentiate between power and authority-- examples of the situation described above are readily available-- there still is no meaningful exposition explaining the manifestations of power.

Power and Society is a landmark work of some value in that it proposes that the phenomena alluded to by the traditional idea of power are connected in some way to decision-making and the policy-making processes in society. It is, however, ambivalent, as exhibited by the use of the power idea as the basic explanatory variable. The writers define policy as: "a projected program of goal values and process: The policy process is the formulation, promulgation, and application of identifications, demands and expectations concerning the future interpersonal relations of the self."⁵¹ In the same context, they provide the following definition: "The exercise of influence (influence process) consists in affecting policies of others than the self."⁵² Still, there is no way to determine if participation in decision-making (affecting policies) is an example of the "influence process," or an illustration of a power relation. The presence of policies, the need for them, and the actual fact of their existence seems of secondary importance to the whole analysis, whereas, given the definitions of power, influence, and policy, some primary discussion should be devoted to the informal structures and formal institutions of organizations in which policy arises. It is these organizations, as Berle earlier noted, that make possible the environment for decision-making (although it is necessary to strip Berle's assertion of any reference to morals and systems of ideology).

Robert A. Dahl. The use of power as a determining independent variable in political research reached its climax in the work of community power studies of the past two decades.⁵³ Of these studies Robert A. Dahl's Who Governs?⁵⁴ became a classic work, although it was by no means the first, and benefited greatly from the earlier works cited above. Because of the position of Who Governs? in the literature of political science, and because of the scope of Dahl's other works, this study takes him as representative of this perspective on power research.

Dahl concedes that power is a relation among people, rather than a substance held by certain people. Furthermore, however, he uses influence and control interchangeable,⁵⁵ thereby providing the inference that in a power relation it makes little or no difference what context or boundaries exist for that relation. In another work Dahl, in fact, equates power with what he terms "coercive influence."⁵⁶ Who Governs? provides the clearest picture of this idea of influence and of Dahl's perception of power in communities.

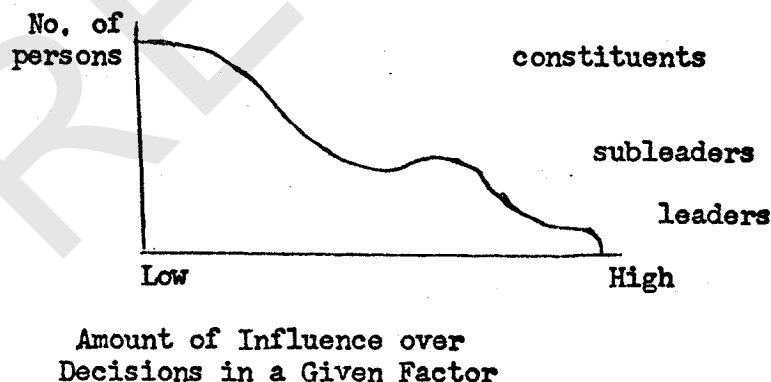


Figure 1⁵⁷

In this work, Dahl's perspective on and attitude toward power is conspicuous by the absence of any reference to the idea of power. Instead, it seems that community organization depends upon the types of