

Edward C. Banfield, *Political Influence: A New Theory of Urban Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1961/1965).

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Edward G. Banfield

Political Influence

A New Theory
Of Urban Politics

Over Study



A FREE PRESS PAPERBACK
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

Political Influence

BY EDWARD C. BANFIELD



THE FREE PRESS, *New York*
COLLIER-MACMILLAN LIMITED, *London*

Preface

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Printed in the United States of America

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Collier-Macmillan Canada, Ltd., Toronto, Ontario

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 60-12182

FIRST FREE PRESS PAPERBACK EDITION 1965

Third printing December 1968

This study was financed by the Governmental Affairs Foundation with funds from the Edgar B. Stern Family Fund. The sponsors gave the author the utmost freedom in the formulation of the problem and in the design and execution of the research. Their only requirement was that it delineate political realities — “influence” was the key category — which should be taken into account by anyone seeking to bring about an improvement in the structure of government in the metropolitan area of Chicago. With a very few exceptions, proposals for metropolitan reorganization have failed to win acceptance in the United States. A better understanding of the workings of influence in the metropolitan areas, the sponsors reasoned, might lead to sounder and more feasible proposals for reform. It was not a part of the author’s task to propose any reforms, however, or even to suggest the tactics that reformers should follow in Chicago. While the author sincerely hopes that the sponsors’ purposes are served by the study, these were not the only ones he had in mind in making the study.

Peter B. Clark is the principal author of Chapter 5, “The Fort Dearborn Project.” Interviews collected by him have been used in other chapters as well, and a general debt is owed him for advice and criticism.

Dr. Luther Gulick, president of the Public Administration Institute, and Professor Norton E. Long, now of Northwestern University, initiated the study and have encouraged and stimulated it in many ways. Warm thanks are due them both.

Acknowledgement and appreciation are also due two students, Miss Mary Cahn and Robert F. Stout, who assisted in the interviewing, and several friends and colleagues who read part or all of the manuscript. Professors Gilbert Y. Steiner, of the University of Illinois, and Grant McConnell, Herbert J. Storing, and James Q. Wilson, of the University of Chicago, made many valuable suggestions. Professors Richard Meier, of the University of Michigan, and Walter Isard, of the University of Pennsylvania, commented helpfully on Chapter 11, as did Professors Jerome Rothenberg, of the University of Chicago, and Charles E. Lindblom, of Yale University, on the first draft of Chapter 12. My old friend and collaborator, Martin Meyerson, who got me interested in urban affairs in the first place, was a lively and provocative critic, and the Joint Center for Urban Studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, of which he is Director, made its facilities available generously in the final stages of the work.

E. C. B.

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POLITICAL INFLUENCE

I

Introduction

This is a study of the way influence works in a large American city. Its purpose is twofold: to describe and analyze an urban political system in one of its aspects and to contribute to the theoretical understanding of influence in political settings of all kinds.

By "influence" is meant ability to get others to act, think, or feel as one intends.¹ A mayor who persuades voters to approve a bond issue exercises influence. A businessman whose promises of support induce a mayor to take action exercises influence. A precinct captain who controls votes by doing favors exercises influence. A department head who improves the morale of his subordinates exercises influence.

To concert activity for any purpose — to arrange a picnic, build a building, or pass an ordinance, for example — a more or less elaborate system of influence must be created: the appropriate people must be persuaded, deceived, coerced, inveigled, or otherwise induced to do what is required of them. Any co-operative activity — and so any organization, formal or informal, ephemeral or lasting — may be viewed as a system of influence.² This is as true of the co-operative activity called government as of any other.

Government, from this standpoint, consists of acts of influence, acts which proceed from many quarters (e.g., the businessman as well as the mayor) and which produce their effect in many ways

(e.g., by reasonable discussion as well as the authority of office). To study the patterns of influence by which action is concerted in public matters is to study government.

Any empirical study must reflect the criteria, implicit or explicit, by which it is decided what data are relevant and what are not. The criteria of relevance employed here — the conceptual scheme, in other words — may conveniently be summarized under four leading questions:

① Who has influence and who is subject to it? A person does not, of course, have the same influence (as he has the same muscular strength) in every encounter. To ask which of several persons has the most influence is meaningless unless it is specified, influence with whom? With the mayor? The city-planning commission? The press? Similarly, the range of matters to which influence extends must be specified. A department head has great influence with regard to the affairs of his own department, but he may have little or none with regard to that of other departments. Thus the relevant questions are: Who has influence with whom and with regard to what? And (the mirror image, so to speak, of the first question): who can be influenced by whom with regard to what?

② How does influence "work"? What is wanted is a description of the means the influencer employs (or could employ) to affect the behavior of the influencee and of how these means act upon the motivations and expectations of the influencee. From this standpoint, the following distinctions are almost inescapable: (a) influence which rests upon a sense of obligation ("authority," "respect"); (b) influence which depends upon the wish of the influencee to gratify the influencer ("friendship," "benevolence"); (c) influence which works by improving the logic or the information of the influencee ("rational persuasion"); (d) influence which works by changing the influencee's perception of the behavior alternatives open to him or his evaluation of them, and which does so otherwise than by rational persuasion (e.g., "selling," "suggestion," "fraud," "deception"), and (e) influence which works by changing the behavior alternatives objectively open to the influencee, thus either absolutely precluding him from adopting an alternative unacceptable to the influencer ("coercion") or inducing him to select as his preferred (or least objectionable)

alternative the one chosen for him by the influencer ("positive or negative inducement"). These are analytical distinctions, of course, and a concrete act of influence is almost always a mixture of these elements. (A mayor, for example, is likely to employ in a single act of influence the authority of his office, the respect he commands as a man, rational persuasion, "selling," and perhaps both rewards and punishments as well.) The mixtures into which these analytical elements are characteristically combined are therefore particularly relevant to a description of influence.

③ What are the terms upon which influence is expended? When one speaks of the influence of a person, the reference is usually not to what he is doing or has done but rather to what he could do if he tried. A governor, for example, is not without influence merely because he does not choose to exercise any. The pertinent question, usually, is not how the governor does change the situation but how he could change it. It is seldom enough, however, to know that a person could (or could not) achieve a certain result by exerting all of his influence. Usually there are circumstances that prevent him from exercising more than a part of it. A man with a very modest property may, strictly speaking, have the ability to take a luxury cruise around the world, but he is not likely to take one because he has a family to feed, clothe, and shelter. Similarly, a governor may have ample influence to secure the passage of a certain bill but may fail to exercise it because he must save his influence for other uses.

Thus there are really two separate questions: What is A's ability to achieve the intended result? And, what is his ability to achieve it without incurring disadvantages ("costs") which he regards as equal to or greater than the advantage of the result?

Ideally, one would like to have a complete schedule of the amounts of influence the actor could exercise under all possible "cost" conditions. How much of his legislative program could the governor get approved by the legislature if he were willing to accept any sacrifice whatever (e.g. even impeachment for bribing legislators)? How much could he get accepted if he were willing to make a somewhat smaller sacrifice (e.g., loss of the chance of re-election)? How much if he were to sacrifice still less (e.g.,

hard work, day and night, persuading legislators)? How much if he were willing to make no sacrifice at all?

4. *How is action concerted by influence?* A political situation may often be viewed as one in which a proposal is to be adopted or not adopted. From this standpoint, it is relevant to inquire what acts are necessary for the adoption of the proposal, on what terms the actors who have it within their ability to give or withhold these acts can be influenced to give (or withhold) them, and through what mechanisms these terms can all be arranged (or not arranged) so that the proposal will be adopted (or not adopted).

In the following chapters this conceptual scheme is employed successively at three levels of generality. At the first and lowest level are six case studies of political influence in Chicago (Chapters 2 through 7). These tell in considerable detail how influence was used in certain recent civic controversies. Each case study is intended to answer all of the leading questions listed above.

At the second level of generality are three chapters (Chapters 8 through 10) which interpret the case studies, drawing from them a set of "low level" empirical generalizations. These generalizations also answer, although less comprehensively, the leading questions listed above.

The picture that emerges from these chapters should not be taken as typical of all metropolitan political systems. New York is very different politically from Chicago, and Los Angeles is still more different; the political system of every major metropolitan area, in fact, has some striking peculiarities. Until social scientists have made more progress in the comparative study of political systems, the observations that can be made about the similarities and differences of these cities will be too impressionistic to be of much value.³ One of the purposes of the present study is to help prepare the way for systematic comparative analysis.

At the third and highest level of generality are two chapters (Chapters 11 and 12) in which an effort is made to explore the logical structure of certain aspects of influence. These chapters generalize further some of the material of the earlier chapters and they restate certain empirical generalizations as analytical ones. Both of these chapters go beyond the empirical material and

present theories which apply generally to situations involving political influence.

The advantage of studying government as patterns of influence is that attention is directed beyond the legal-formal arrangements by which things are "supposed" to be done to the much more complicated ones by which they are "really" done. It may be that the mayor and the other officials are mere puppets who dance on strings pulled by private persons from behind the scenes. If this is the case, a study which limits itself to an account of the legal-formal relations of the mayor and the officials is so incomplete as to be downright untruthful.

As this suggests, the appropriateness of the category "influence" for the study of government depends in part upon how wide the discrepancy is between the way the city is "supposed" to be run and the way it "really" is run. If, indeed, nothing were ever done except upon the basis of a purely official exercise of authority, i.e., if no unofficial influence were ever brought to bear, the use of "influence" as a guiding concept would be awkward and perverse. "Official authority" would be enough. In fact, of course, some "outside" influence almost always exists; no matter how conscientious (or how jealous of his authority!) an official may be, he is not — and in a democracy nobody thinks he should be — an "unmoved mover." Yet some governments are influenced from the "outside" relatively little and then only in ways that are easy to see; "influence" is probably not a reasonable way to approach the study of governments such as these.

The current popularity in the United States of the influence approach to the study of the community is to be accounted for in part by the importance of "outside" influence in official decisions. Just how important these influences are is a matter of opinion. Some writers, impressed with inequalities of wealth and status and inferring from these corresponding inequalities of influence, have concluded that what we have been taught to call democracy is mostly sham. The formal machinery of government, they say, is really of little importance. The big decisions are made elsewhere. They are made by private persons, especially the very rich, who meet in homes and clubhouses to "set the line on policy"

