

## A Proposal for Research in Political and Social Science

Title of Project: The Politists of Rhode Island  
Duration of Project: Three years (July 1, 1951 - June 30, 1954)  
Project Director: Alfred de Grazia

### I. THE GENERAL PROPOSAL

It is proposed to isolate, interview personally, analyze the behavior of, and describe the estimated 12,000 men and women of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations who are deemed by the application of appropriate indices to be politically occupied and influential in an informal and formal sense; it is proposed to analyze the positions held by such persons, their degree of communication with the other elements of the 12,000, their peer, subordinate and superordinate communications, the sources of the attitudes (the conflicts and discrepancies, as well as the community) among the group, and to discover the sources of influential decision in the politics of the State; it is finally proposed to show the effects of different modes of mobility (including formal types of selection) on the constitution and decisions of the politists (the 12,000), and to show how the informal and formal power structure in Rhode Island relates to the economic structure, the ecology, the social mobility of the population, and the distribution of beliefs about the government held by the population as a whole.

### II. THE ANTECEDENTS OF THIS STUDY

The antecedents of this study may be grouped as follows:

1. Intimate studies of politicians at work: examples are Gosnell's study of Negro politicians and ward committeemen in Chicago; Forthall and Salter's studies of precinct committeemen and politicians; Josephson's study of the politics of two generations ago.
2. Sociometric studies of executive and youth groups: examples are the studies of executives by Carroll Shartle; of youth groups by Jennings and the Laboratory for Research in Social Relations of the University of Minnesota.

3. Personality studies of leaders and politicians: examples are Lasswell's studies of administrators, politicians, and judges.
4. Studies of functional and social traits among political élites: examples are Thomas', Laski's, and Kingsley's studies of segments of the British élite; Almond's study of American opinion and foreign policy; Hyneman's study of the occupations of American legislators; Heinberg's study of French cabinet officers. Relevant also is Taussig and Joselyn's study of American business leaders.
5. Representation, election, and selection studies: examples are A. De Grazia's studies of representation and of election and selection methods by standardized criteria.
6. Studies of the political community, ideology, and consensus: examples are the works of Bagshot, Dewey, Lippmann, S. De Grazia, Perry Miller.
7. Studies of social mobility, social class, and political mobility: examples are the Centers, Warner, and Hollingshead studies of social class, the studies of Michels of oligarchic tendencies in organization, and of Pareto and Michels on political mobility (circulation of élites).
8. Studies of the extent of political activity: an example would be the study by Woodward et.al. of the dissemination of political activity among the population as a whole.
9. In addition to the foregoing studies, the theme of this project dwells on several constant and important problems of American life, as discussed in writings too numerous and varied to be listed here. Several phrases from American public discussion illuminate the connection between this study and these persistent problems of American life, viz. "freedom of opportunity;" the relation between political power and economic controls; the "apathy" of the citizenry; government from "behind the scenes;" "the people know best;" the necessity of elections for the control of public officials and the degree to which elections control, influence, or determine policy; and the degree to which the actual officers of the public are distinct and have a distinct interest from that of the public.

### III. THE GENERAL IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY TO SOCIAL SCIENCE

A1. No one has hitherto studied systematically and in detail the total composition of the politically influential elements of a society. The social and economic complexity of Rhode Island, combined with its relative isolation and integrity as a state of the Union, brings the problem mechanically within the realm of practical study.

A2. Another reason for the partial or defective nature of antecedent studies has been the failure to employ direct field survey methods that are more accurate, exhaustive, and manageable than the traditional method of relying on published sources, remotely relevant indices, and sporadic personal encounters.

A3. The scope of previous studies has been limited to a segment of the total politist group, even when excellent study design has been used.

A4. Furthermore, as in many areas of the social sciences hitherto, some writers have over-emphasized formal traits and official leadership in studying ruling groups while others have ignored the operations of formal structure in contributing to the character of the ruling group.

B1. In several of its facets, the present study design may have to rely upon sampling of the politist or non-politist population of Rhode Island (the latter being the more likely). But, on the whole, the study is directed at achieving a knowledge of the total population in regard to a number of the more crucial variables. This is an important aspect of the study, not because samples cannot be relied on for many important questions of social class, political mobility, and politist traits, but because the network of political communication and the relationship of political communications to other economic and social channels, when traced in a total population, presents a unique opportunity to establish direct measures of intensity and extent of influences which must be measured indirectly and by means of intervening variables if sampling is used.

B2. Another methodological result of this use of a total population will be to build a bridge between the concepts of sample surveys and the traditional concepts of political science and sociology which are derived from the admittedly inaccurate attempts or estimates of observers to intuit the whole network of relationships. Perhaps, as a result, traditional concepts will receive more rigorous definition and theories hitherto considered mal-adapted to sampling surveys will acquire a new utility.

B3. A final important result of employing the total population will be that key influentials, of extraordinary powers in the society, will become part of the study, thus giving a marked advantage over the tendency of sampling studies to portray the mean of the population, and to fail to describe the median when the deviation is great.

C1. This study is expected to have significance for the general theory of social science and for the various disciplines separately. While directed principally at a problem of central concern to political science, it will have relevance for key problems in other disciplines. Thus, it may provide an alternative approach to the study of influence in society to the Marxist theory of economic determinism and to various approaches which exaggerate methodologically the influence of economic determinants on political structure, notably as in the writings of Charles A. Beard and Robert Brady.

C2. Moving into the field of sociology, to take another example, this study may provide a counterweight to the studies of social class, notably those of Lloyd Warner and associates, which largely ignore the role of democratic politics in establishing a form of social (political) mobility, mitigating constantly and even destroying like leucocytes the economic and social conditions establishing social rigidities.

C3. Shifting now to a related but distinct field, that of population, it is hoped that this study may produce findings of the relative fertility of the various elements of the politist class, the relative amounts of miscegenation among the politists by contrast with corresponding individuals in the population at large, and the significance of the achievement of the political influence for the rate of physical mobility of the families involved, in the present and next generation.

C4. With relation to the discipline of anthropology, the effort of this study to establish the degree of integration of the politists as a group and of the politists with the general population will perhaps prove helpful to the further development of the concept of culture, insofar as there are major equivalencies between the meaning given to community in this study and to the concept of culture.

C5. Finally, the relation of this study to various problems of psychology is close. Speaking psychologically, the conception of the study as a whole is significantly similar to the demands of students of group dynamics for an operational situation in which the forces act interconnectedly and may be viewed as a topological field; and again, the discrete problems connected with the questionnaires, interviewing, and attitude studies in this project provide a gateway to related materials in behavioral psychology. We cannot but believe, in sum, that the project is situated at a crossroads of the various disciplines and that its method and findings will ramify afterwards in more than a single direction.

#### IV. THE METHOD TO BE FOLLOWED GENERALLY IN THIS STUDY

A. Of the three years of this study of the politists of Rhode Island, the first year is to be devoted to gathering and assimilating library materials on the subject of the study, consultation with experts experienced in related studies, the preparation and pre-testing of the techniques of the study, and the establishment of key definitions and indices. The second year is to be devoted to the field survey and the third year to the analysis of the materials and the writing of the main reports on the study.

B1. Previous estimates of A. De Grazia and an article by Woodward et.al. set the ratio of politically occupied in America to the adult population at about one to thirty. By interview with obvious political conoscenti, this estimate will be checked. This figure will provide the size of the politically occupied group in Rhode Island, that is, those who over a long period of time spend unusual amounts of time in political attention and activity, the "politists." In Rhode Island, with its population of about 750,000, the number of politists, for the purpose of initiating the study, would be about 12,500.

B2. There would be constructed a census of the politists:

- a. All officeholders, public and quasi-public (e.g. Community Chest) of a stipulated formal level of decision would be included in the population to be studied.
- b. All private individuals of a stipulated informal degree of attention and influence would also be included. These would include those who have regular contacts with officeholders on an influential level (both in the state and local governments and with Washington officials); those who occupy key positions in pressure groups; those who are associated with "public" movements, public opinion agencies, or "public assemblies" of a significant character and likelihood of influence.

(In the case of both a. and b. the definitions of influence, attention, and levels of authority will be made as rigorous as possible and a standard of equivalencies of influence will be constructed.)

B3. For each politist, a record will be established (transferable to IBM cards) to include the following categories of information:

Name, position (formal), other positions, income, sources of income, age, religion, address, place of birth, number of changes of address per decade, national origin(s), social memberships, marital status, number of children, education, party affiliation, previous informal and formal political positions, past and present work experience, special skills, mode of ingress into politics and date of ingress (NB politics broadly defined as preoccupied with political decisions). A description of those with whom he spends most time (description composed of ten key variables like religion, occupation, income). A description of all his contacts for three days running (again composed of key variables, including superordinates and subordinates). A

description of his five "most important" decisions during the last three days. Responses to query: who are the ten most powerful men in the state; should elective offices be few in number; what groups are most powerful in state and local politics; should a teacher of civics tell her students to make compromises in public affairs or to "stick up for what they think is right" always.

Techniques for the establishment of the record of an individual politician: personal interview, repeat interview, informants, records, mail questionnaire.

B4. The major aims of the analysis of the materials just described have been indicated in the sections above, The General Proposal and The General Importance of the Study to Social Science. More specifically, the politician population will be cross-tabulated or correlated, if necessary, to indicate the social strata represented in it, the social mobility in it, the effect of entrance upon political affairs to social mobility, the actual power, and the formal power of the elements of the politician population, the distribution of skills, the actual network of relationships within the politicians as shown by sociometric tests, the intra-politicians clusters and their composition, the divergencies among the politicians on the several ideological questions; the communications of the politician group with the general population, the organizational channels of communication between the politicians and the general population, the actual decisions made, the distribution of political attention among the politicians.

V. COSTS OF THIS STUDY

First Year, 1951-1952

2,080		Clerk-Typist-Interviewer (12 months, July 1, 1951 - July 1, 1952)
2,080	1040	2 Interviewers (half-time, Jan. 1, 1952 - July 1, 1952)
	1040	
650		Mimeographing (questionnaires, reports) and Supplies
125		Statistical Services
2,700		Release of half of teaching time
700		Travel (including interviewers' expenses, conferences for interchange and borrowing of schedules, materials, and skills of the Laboratory for Research in Social Relations, U. of Minnesota; Institute of Social Relations, U. of Michigan; Department of Social Relations, Harvard U.)
525		Consultants (2 for one week each; 1 from U. of Chicago, \$300; 1 from Columbia, \$225)
<u>8,860</u>		

Second Year, 1952-1953

1,040		Clerk-Typist (half-time)
2,470		Chief Interviewer
14,560	2080	7 Interviewers
	2080	
	2080	
	2080	
	2080	
	2080	
	2080	
2,080		1 Interviewing Secretary
3,900	1300	3 Graduate Assistants (coders, analyzers, library research)
	1300	
	1300	
5,900		Travel and Consultation (interviewers @ average \$.50 per interview, provides additionally for 1 consultant from 1,000 miles' distance, 1 consultant from New York - New England area, New England travel by staff)
225		Mimeographing and Supplies
2,800		Statistical Services
2,700		For release of teaching time
<u>35,675</u>		

Third Year, 1953-1954

2,600		Clerk-Typist
2,600	1300	2 Graduate Assistants
	1300	
3,200		Statistical Clerk
40		Supplies
1,200		Statistical Services
<u>9,640</u>		

Total for three-year period = \$54,175