
A Study of the Community Power Structure of Durant, Oklahoma

JOHN KOZLOW, Southeastern State College, Durant

This study is an attempt to explore the community power structure of Durant, Oklahoma. The study formulates the hypothesis that organizational influence in Durant will follow a hierarchical pattern which will be consistent from issue to issue. The methodology used in this study is similar to that developed by Wagner et al. (1964) in a study of Oklahoma City.

Durant is a county seat of approximately 11,000 people, located in rural southeastern Oklahoma. It has a council-manager system of government and is in an economically underdeveloped area. Farming and ranching are among the chief means of livelihood for many people in the county; the primary business in town is retail trade. One of Oklahoma's six state colleges is located here.

PROCEDURE

Testing of the hypothesis was done by first selecting issues of local interest. Thirteen groups were then chosen to be ranked in relative position to each other on their assessed influence on each of these issues and because they are common groups which can be found in towns of comparable size.

The "panel of experts" approach was used for the ranking of the groups. Twenty judges were selected from a list of men who were possible judges on the basis of their assumed knowledge of Durant. This group represents a cross section of the leaders of the town. Judges were selected in such a manner as to prevent any judge from being involved with more than three of the groups ranked (see Wagner et al., 1964). Each judge was asked to rank each interest group on its relative influence on each issue. A mean rank score for each group on each issue was then calculated (Table I).

RESULTS

A clearer picture of the results can be seen by converting the means of Table I into simple rank order by giving a rank of one to the lowest mean score and so on (Table II).

The level of consistency of the rankings was tested by statistical analysis, using Kendalls' *Coefficient of Concordance W*. The data yielded a statistically significant degree ($W = 0.54, P < 0.01$) of concordance of

TABLE I. MEAN* RANK FOR EACH OF THIRTEEN GROUPS ON EACH OF NINE ISSUES.**

	**1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
School Board	2.4	9.2	6.7	2.9	3.3	7.9	8.1	9.4	8.5
Veterans Organizations	10.8	9.8	10.0	9.9	10.8	9.9	9.5	7.7	8.4
Radio	4.4	3.2	3.7	4.8	3.3	3.3	4.0	2.9	4.4
Newspaper	4.1	3.1	3.1	4.9	3.2	3.0	3.6	2.7	3.8
Lions Club	7.3	5.9	4.5	7.4	5.5	5.6	4.9	6.6	6.7
County Officers	5.2	8.4	8.6	8.4	8.6	8.2	7.6	4.6	6.3
Ministers	8.3	8.0	7.5	5.9	8.3	7.7	7.8	8.2	6.3
Rotary	8.2	6.2	5.4	8.2	7.0	6.3	5.9	7.5	7.4
College Administration	6.6	9.3	9.3	3.8	6.4	8.3	8.8	9.2	8.9
Professional People	5.7	4.5	5.3	6.5	5.3	3.9	5.2	5.8	3.9
Kiwanis	8.9	7.5	6.4	8.9	7.9	7.5	6.9	8.7	8.2
Business Leaders	4.6	1.6	3.6	5.3	3.8	2.5	2.3	5.1	3.7
Democratic Party	9.5	9.8	11.3	9.3	10.3	9.7	10.7	5.8	6.7

*Means are not all based on the same *N* since some judges disqualified themselves for judging the influence of some groups.

**1—School Consolidation
 2—City Sales Tax
 3—City Swimming Pool
 4—Faculty Integration
 5—School Bond Issue
 6—Water Sewage Issue
 7—Street Construction
 8—Elections
 9—Crime-Legal Code

ranks. This may represent a more significant level of agreement than the *W* of 0.67 obtained in the Wagner et al. (1964) study, because of the greater number of issues and institutions ranked. The Oklahoma City study covered 10 groups on only four issues.

The mean rank of each organization on all issues, converted into simple ranks, is shown in Table III. The radio and newspaper were grouped together into local news media to more easily reach conclusions concerning the influence of the news media. These conclusions are as follows:

(1) — There is a definite hierarchical structure in Durant which is fairly consistent on most issues and is represented by the local news media, primarily the newspaper, and also the business leaders in town.

TABLE II. SIMPLE RANK FOR EACH OF THIRTEEN GROUPS ON EACH OF NINE ISSUES.

	*1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
School Board	1	10	8	1	3	9	10	13	12
Veterans Organizations	13	13	12	13	13	13	12	9	11
Radio	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	4
Newspaper	2	2	1	4	1	2	2	1	2
Lions Club	8	5	4	8	6	5	4	7	6
County Officers	5	9	10	10	11	10	8	3	8
Ministers	10	8	9	6	10	8	9	10	5
Rotary	9	6	6	9	8	6	6	8	9
College Administration	7	11	11	2	7	11	11	12	13
Professional People	6	4	5	7	5	4	5	5	3
Kiwanis	11	7	7	11	9	7	7	11	10
Business Leaders	4	1	2	5	4	1	1	4	1
Democratic Party	12	12	13	12	12	12	13	6	7

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(2) — While the level of consistency is high ($W = 0.54$), it seems that the power hierarchy is flexible enough to permit some variation on certain issues. This indicates that any change in the status quo would require support from these two groups except on all but the most intensely desired changes.

(3) — The high ranking of the news media may not be an accurate rank. While the news media does have a high level of influence, it seems that this is due to the news media being the organ of the business leaders for the public expression of their feelings.

(4) — The business leader group seems actually to consist of several levels. This observation will require further study for verification.

TABLE III. COMPOSITE RANK OF GROUP INFLUENCE IN DURANT ON ALL ISSUES.

Simple Rank	Mean Rank
1 Local News Media	2.685
2 Business Leaders	2.875
3 Professional People	5.500
4 Lions Club	6.250
5 Rotarians	8.370
6 School Board	8.380
7 County Officials	9.250
8 Ministers and Church Leaders	9.375
9 Kiwanis Club	10.000
10 College Administration	10.625
11 Democrat Party	12.375
12 Veterans Organization	12.625

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the hypothesis is true. A weakness in the method seems to be that some rankings are not in keeping with the actual situation. Validation techniques will have to be established to demonstrate that a judge's perception of a hierarchy is accurate. A conclusion reached is that some interest groups were perhaps ranked not as to their real influence but as to what the judge felt their influence should be.

SUMMARY

This paper is an attempt to determine the nature of the power structure in Durant by examining the influence of organized groups on certain issues. This study indicates that there is a hierarchical structure of group power in Durant which is consistent from one issue to another. A number of conclusions are reached concerning the community power structure of Durant. These conclusions point to a need for a further study to either refute or verify these conclusions as several questions were raised by the study. It would appear that the method, which to date has been used only in the study of large cities, is a fruitful area for research in a small town such as Durant.

LITERATURE CITED

- Wagner, Stanley P., Wayne Viney, Judy McClung, and Andrea Larson. 1966. An empirical method for the study of community power: an examination of power in Oklahoma City. Proc. Okla. Acad. Sci. 46:166-170.