

The Last Cacique

Leadership and Politics in a Puerto Rican City



Jorge Heine

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THE LAST CACIQUE



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Jorge Heine

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*For my father-in-law, Dr. Juan E. Acevedo,
who taught me so much about Mayagüez and about life*

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PREFACE

This study received its original impetus from a long-standing puzzle to which I am still unable to provide a satisfactory answer. Most students of Latin American politics would agree to the proposition that individual leaders, from Simón Bolívar to Fidel Castro, have played a decisive role in shaping the course of the region's history. Yet in contrast with countries like the United States and the United Kingdom (where the impact of individual political leaders has been tempered by the growth and development of strong and stable political institutions), our understanding of what these leaders actually *do* to exercise such influence remains sketchy and superficial.

The fact is that empirical research—as opposed to hagiography—about the life and work of Latin American political leaders is extremely sparse. Whereas even the most obscure U.S. president has at least a couple of decent biographies to his credit, solid studies about the sort of political leadership exercised by Latin America's many prominent leaders during the course of this century can probably be counted on the fingers of two hands.

Unable to provide an answer to this puzzle, I decided to test the waters of leadership research myself. The result is this book. The primary focus of this study is the leadership exercised by Mayor Benjamín Cole of Mayagüez during nineteen of the twenty-four years he held office. Some of the questions investigated in this study are the following: What do mayors do to attain their objectives? How do they manage to overcome the many obstacles they face? What makes an “effective” mayor? What approaches to political problem solving do such mayors use?

In trying to answer those questions through a detailed examination of Mayor Cole's career, I have also attempted to describe the dynamics of local politics in a particular Puerto Rican municipio, dynamics that are in many ways quite different from those of islandwide politics. This is not to say, however, that Mayagüez should be considered a typical Puerto Rican municipio. In a variety of ways, it differs markedly from the other seventy-seven municipalities. But precisely because of its deviant character it has the potential for a fruitful and rewarding case study. An understanding of the patterns of political behavior that have made Mayagüez into such a special case on Puerto Rico's political landscape should, in fact, make it possible for us to start to understand the sources of some of the broader currents of change that swept the island from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Over the course of the four years of research and writing taken up by this study, many people provided invaluable assistance. Professors Charles Drekeimer and Heinz Eulau were invariably helpful and patient in discharging their duties as members of my dissertation committee. Robert Anderson, whose own book on Puerto Rican political parties remains the standard reference work on the subject, read large portions of the manuscript and provided extremely helpful comments and suggestions. My colleague, anthropologist Manuel Valdés Pizzini, shared with me his extensive knowledge of the anthropological literature on Puerto Rico's urban scene. Professor Fernando Rivera, of the Business Administration School at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez graciously spent many hours at his computer with me, helping me to organize and analyze voting data. My father-in-law, Juan E. Acevedo, filled many gaps in my knowledge of Mayagüez history and politics. My former assistant at the Caribbean Institute and Study Center for Latin America (CISCLA), Sylvia Potter, typed every page of the manuscript through its many drafts. Without her incredible speed, accuracy, and commitment to high-quality work this study would have taken far longer.

The two institutions I was associated with while doing this study also assisted me in important ways. A faculty research grant from Inter American University's Research Institute for the 1983–84 academic year allowed me to get started on the project. A teaching load reduc-

tion during 1986 and the first semester of 1987 from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez made it possible to find the time to write up my findings.

There would not have been much to write about, though, if it had not been for the many knowledgeable informants willing to spend hours on end answering the questions of someone who as recently as 1972 had never even heard of Mayagüez. The unwillingness of the members of Puerto Rico's political elite to open up to interviewers undertaking social science research has been one of the major obstacles faced by the island's political scientists. I was fortunate enough to find several informants who were extremely candid. Without their cooperation, much of what I consider to be the most valuable and significant empirical findings of this study would not have found their way to these pages.

My greatest intellectual debt, though, is to two people who have never met and who have come to the study of politics from very different backgrounds, yet who are remarkably alike in those virtues that mark a true scholar. One of them is my good friend and sometime coauthor, Juan M. García-Passalacqua. His enormous knowledge of Puerto Rican politics is matched only by his insatiable intellectual curiosity and the generosity with which he is willing to share his many ideas and insights. His help and advice in developing some of the key arguments presented in this study have been invaluable. Throughout my graduate studies as well as during the long years of dissertation work, my adviser, Professor Richard Fagen, was the very embodiment of what a mentor should be. His support and faith in what seemed to many people an unpromising subject were decisive in helping to bring the project to completion. His intellectual rigor and keen analytic mind helped to give whatever coherence the arguments of this study have attained. Any shortcomings to be found in the pages that follow remain, of course, strictly my own responsibility.

THE LAST CACIQUE

1 LEADERSHIP, URBAN GOVERNANCE, AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN PUERTO RICO

At his unprecedented fifth inauguration as mayor of Mayagüez on a cool Monday evening in January 1985, Benjamín Cole must have had good reason to be happy with himself. He had already held the mayor's office for a full sixteen years, the longest consecutive period of time in Mayagüez' 225-year history. Sometime in 1986 he would become the mayor who had held the office for the longest time ever. On November 6, by some seven thousand votes, Cole had trounced an opponent half his age and had achieved his biggest margin of victory since first running for office. His daughter Evelyn had just been appointed executive director of the Youth Office in La Fortaleza (the Puerto Rican governor's mansion), one of the choicest appointments in Puerto Rico for a young man or woman bent on a political career. Another daughter, Nereidita, the master of ceremonies that evening, had just been appointed to her first job, deputy director of the Office of Puerto Rico in Washington, D.C.

Still, despite the understandable euphoria on the podium and in the Plaza Colón, where a crowd of five thousand had gathered for the ceremony, most people were startled when Mayor Cole announced toward the end of his speech that he would run again in 1988, serving notice to any potential candidates that he had no intention of leaving the field to anybody else. It was vintage Cole.

To gain a proper perspective on one of the most fascinating political success stories in modern Puerto Rico, it is necessary to hark back to 1968. The November elections that year marked a decisive turning point in Puerto Rican politics. For the first time since its

founding in 1938, the ruling Popular Democratic party (PDP) had lost a general election. For the first time in the postwar period, the pro-statehood movement moved from the political wilderness into the governorship, with Luis A. Ferré and his New Progressive party (NPP) winning the elections a scarce nine months after the NPP was founded. Ferré and the NPP were propelled into power by a division within the Popular Democratic Party (known as *populares*) that led to incumbent governor Roberto Sánchez Vilella's running under the banner of a splinter party (Partido del Pueblo) and winning enough votes to defeat Luis Negrón López, the candidate of the PDP.¹ The event marked the end of the Muñoz era, in which Luis Muñoz Marín, one of the Caribbean's most charismatic leaders, headed a remarkable process of economic and social change ("a century of economic growth in a single decade," in the words of *The Economist*). The changes had transformed Puerto Rico from a poor colonial backwater into one of the territories with the highest standard of living in the region.²

It was also in 1968 that Benjamín Cole, a former member of the Puerto Rican House of Representatives and former postmaster, was elected mayor of Mayagüez under the banner of the then-embattled Popular Democratic party. As a representative of the PDP, Cole was a lone figure among the newly emerging NPP mayors in Puerto Rico's larger cities, such as San Juan and Ponce. Over the following years he quickly established himself as the undisputed political boss in western Puerto Rico, the region in which Mayagüez is the administrative and commercial capital. Cole built an effective and well-oiled political machine,³ heading the PDP-controlled Puerto Rican Mayors' Association and becoming one of the three or four most influential power brokers in his party. What makes Cole's case analytically interesting, though, is its exceptionalism—the fact that his success and achievements run against the grain of broader macropolitical trends in Puerto Rico.

The first exceptional element in the Cole story is that he established his reputation as a "mayor's mayor" while his party, the Popular Democratic party, was the opposition for twelve of the first sixteen years he held office. In his first term, Cole faced a situation no mayor of Mayagüez in the previous twenty years had ever faced: There

was no popular in the governor's mansion.⁴ In Puerto Rico's highly centralized political system, local access to budgetary allocations distributed by the state government depends heavily on partisan considerations; municipalities controlled by the ruling party are systematically favored over those in which the opposition is in charge. In some townships, this partisanship is administered through *mini-alcaldías* (mini-mayoralties), in which the losing mayoral candidate from the party in control of the state government opens an office that quite openly distributes patronage jobs and allocates state funds for a variety of purposes. Agencies with large budgets and loosely defined mandates like the Administración de Derecho al Trabajo (ADT; Right to Work Administration) and, on a smaller scale, the governor's Youth Office, also channel their job-creating funds to party members, focusing on party-controlled areas. The possibilities for regularly and systematically favoring loyal townships and mayors are endless—all utilities are state-owned, law enforcement agencies are centralized statewide, and a single, mammoth Education Department with an \$800 million budget is controlled from San Juan. Full advantage is taken of these opportunities. With the municipalities' meager budgets, carrying out even the minimal duties of keeping the town clean and building some roads can become a major challenge if no collaboration is forthcoming from the state government.

The second exceptional element in the Cole story is that the seventies and early eighties, the years of Cole's second, third, and fourth terms, are in marked contrast with the fifties and sixties in that they were mostly years of economic stagnation and recession. During this period, Puerto Rico's seemingly endless boom came to a screeching halt, severely affected by the 1973 oil shock and U.S. recessions. After average annual growth rates of between 5 and 6 percent from 1950 to 1970 (with peaks as high as 10 percent in 1962 and 14 percent in 1970), the Puerto Rican economy entered a downward spiral, with actual *negative* growth in 1974 and 1975 (0.1 and 2.5 percent, respectively) and again in 1982 and 1983 (3.9 and 2.2 percent, respectively). Skyrocketing unemployment more than doubled from 10 percent in 1970 to 22 percent in 1977, reaching an all-time high of 23.5 percent in 1983.⁵

Not surprisingly, the period was a particularly difficult one for political incumbents—indeed, from 1968 to 1984 all incumbent governors except one lost their re-election bids. The single exception was Carlos Romero Barceló, who was re-elected by only the thinnest of margins and who lost control of both chambers of the legislature.⁶ Of Puerto Rico's ten largest municipalities, there is not one in which the same mayor has managed to stay in office since 1968; the closest approximation is Ramón Luis Rivera of Bayamón, who was elected in 1976. Relatively rapid mayoral turnover has been the rule in Puerto Rico's larger urban centers.

The third exceptional element in the Cole story is that Mayagüez has emerged as the only significant major urban area in Puerto Rico in which the pro-statehood New Progressive party has failed to establish itself as the leading political party. The NPP has undisputed political control not only in the capital city of San Juan and such adjoining areas as Bayamón and Guaynabo but also in other large cities throughout the island, like Ponce. In 1976, Mayagüez was the *sole* municipality among the twelve largest in Puerto Rico to be won by the Popular Democratic party. In 1980, Caguas and Mayagüez were the only PDP bastions in this group. Although Mayagüez is, according to the 1980 census, 89 percent urban, it has thus failed to join the islandwide trend of close association and correlation between urbanization and support for the pro-statehood movement that has been conclusively established by recent electoral studies.⁷

The incumbency of Mayor Benjamín Cole in Mayagüez, then, embodied an important exception to broader macropolitical trends in Puerto Rico. What are the roots of this exceptionalism? What political and administrative tools did Cole use to become one of the most successful and effective mayors in the history of Puerto Rico? What sort of leadership was exercised by this man of rather fragile health and unimposing presence, whose popularity and political support in western Puerto Rico are unquestionable? An effort to provide an answer to these and related questions necessarily leads one into the almost un-researched territory of local politics in Puerto Rico at a time when, in the words of one analyst, "The transition of leadership from 'insular' to 'local' is the key Puerto Rican phenomenon of the 1980's."⁸ Mayors

and municipalities are displaying growing signs of restlessness and dissatisfaction vis à vis the state government, and many observers are predicting a major shift in the political balance toward much greater autonomy and responsibility for local governments. Evidence of this shift is already available in the introduction of the two-ballot system (one for islandwide candidates and another for local ones) that was used for the first time in the November 1984 elections.⁹

Urbanization and Voting Behavior

An examination of the geographic distribution of support of the two major parties reveals that two quite different Puerto Ricos are emerging, much as Britain is divided between a Labor-controlled North and a Tory South, or the United States between a Republican West and a Democratic East. Although until 1964 the populares had never lost a single *municipio* (municipality), when the NPP won its first gubernatorial election in 1968 it also won nine of the ten largest municipalities, most around the metropolitan San Juan area. Far from being an anomaly resulting from the division of the PDP in 1968, these victories were only the beginning of a pattern that would establish itself over the next four general elections (see fig. 1.1). The blue banners of the NPP extended themselves systematically not only throughout the larger San Juan area but also as far east as Fajardo and as far west as Arecibo. Twenty-one municipios are located on Puerto Rico's north coast (of which nineteen are predominantly urban and only two rural) and they include 49 percent of Puerto Rico's population. In 1980, the NPP won fifteen of these municipios and the PDP only six. The remaining fifty-seven municipios are scattered throughout the rest of the island and contain 51 percent of the population. Only seventeen are urban and forty are predominantly rural. The NPP won only sixteen of the fifty-seven, compared with the PDP's forty-one.¹⁰

Survey research is badly needed to examine the causes of the NPP's systematic victory, but there is little doubt about the correlation between urbanization and NPP support. Over the past two decades, urban growth in Puerto Rico has been concentrated largely on its North Coast strip, in the Arecibo-Fajardo corridor—precisely the area

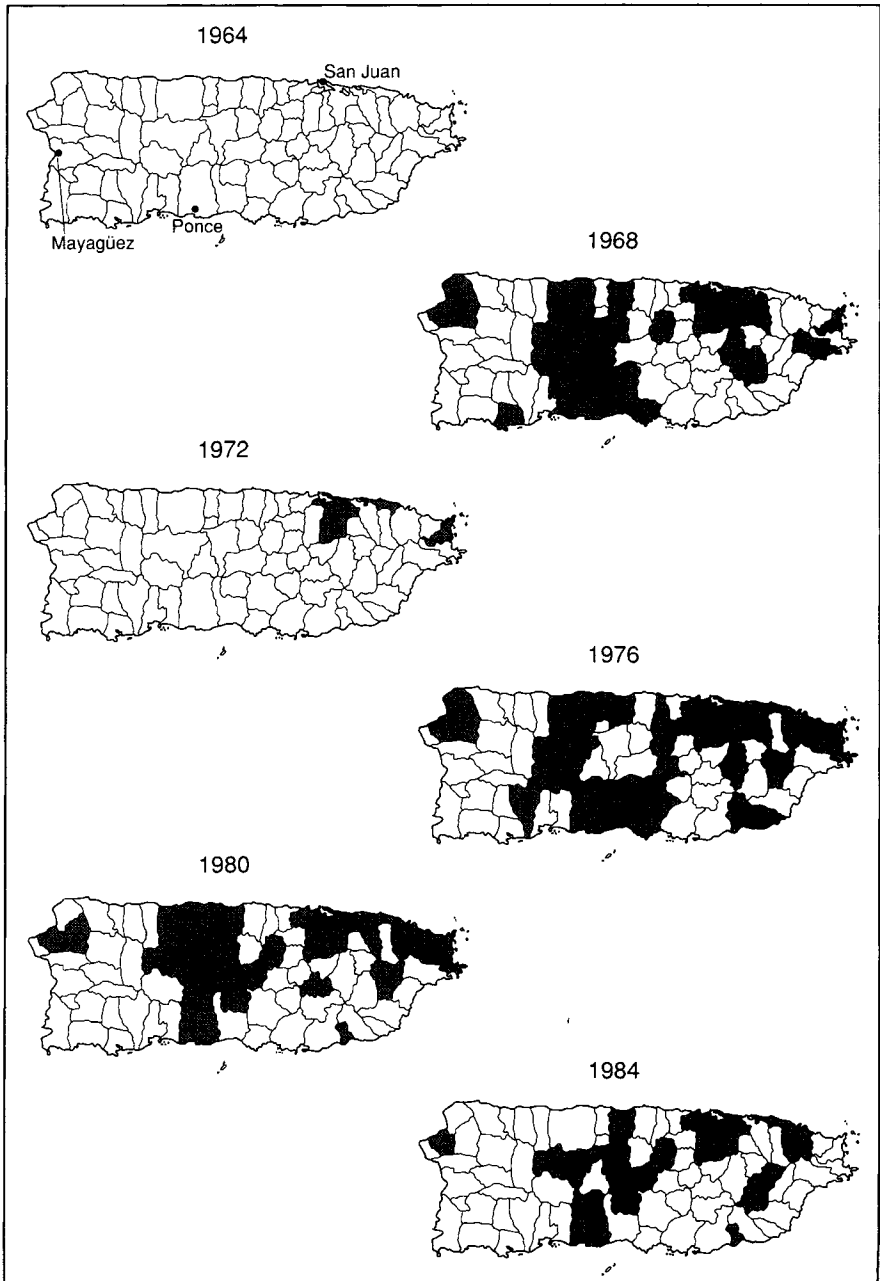


Figure 1.1 Municipios Won by the New Progressive Party, 1964–84 Elections

that has become an NPP bastion. Of the nine cities that had the largest population increase between 1960 and 1980, only Ponce and Mayagüez were not in the northern corridor. Only Mayagüez has remained steadily under PDP control.

This correlation between urban support for the NPP and rural support for the PDP obtains not only in comparisons between municipios but also within them. If one takes as the unit of analysis the *barrio* (district) rather than the municipio, one finds that the rural/urban cleavage also tends to reflect itself quite distinctly in markedly different patterns of voting behavior.

For example, in Bayamón—Puerto Rico's second largest city and for all practical purposes a suburb of San Juan—the remaining rural barrios still tend to throw their support behind the PDP. In 1980, for example, the NPP received 50 percent (44,395) of Bayamón's urban sector votes, while the PDP received 42 percent (36,945). In the rural sectors, the NPP had 43 percent of the votes (5,294), with 53 percent (6,521) going to the PDP.¹¹ The consequence of this behavior is an almost exact reversal of the voting patterns obtaining in the rest of the locality. This, of course, tends to suggest the importance of the sociological (as opposed to the purely political) origins of this behavior. It would seem that although a majority of the rural residents of Bayamón are as available to be coopted into the extensive patronage network and to receive the many benefits that this, one of the richest and best-managed municipalities is able to bestow on its citizens, they still prefer to vote for the PDP because "that is the way peasants vote."

The implications for future political trends in Puerto Rico of this phenomenon should be obvious. A full two-thirds of the population already lives in urban areas, in contrast to the one-third who lived in such areas in 1940. Given the island's small size (3,400 square miles) and high population density (almost one thousand people per square mile), the likelihood of a single gigantic metropolitan area covering practically all of the island no longer seems a very distant possibility. And, if the patterns that have emerged since 1968 continue to assert themselves, the likelihood of a political system as thoroughly dominated by the NPP as it was by the PDP in the fifties must at least be seriously considered.

To assume that such political developments will *necessarily* occur would, of course, be sociological overdeterminism. Such an assumption would imply that certain features of the social structure—in this case, the degree of urbanization—have an overbearing and irresistible impact on the political system. In short, the implication would be that the actions of politicians don't matter very much because voter preferences would be determined by more impersonal social forces. That, of course, is not the case in Puerto Rico or anywhere else. In fact, although the process of urbanization has continued unabated, support for the NPP peaked at 48 percent of the vote in the 1976 elections. The NPP lost the 1984 gubernatorial elections, and several municipios that are the core of the urban northern corridor (such as Carolina) came back to the PDP fold in 1984. Moreover, one municipio that is 89 percent urban has remained steadily beyond the grasp of the NPP: Mayagüez.

Theoretical Framework

The problem, then, is straightforward: What explains the continued hold of the Popular Democratic party in Mayagüez at a time when all of Puerto Rico's largest urban areas have either become firm bastions of the New Progressive party or, at a minimum, have had an alternation in power between the two major Puerto Rican political parties? The present study attempts to provide an answer to this question. Looking at Mayagüez as a deviant case within the Puerto Rican political system may also offer an increased understanding of the broader currents of political change that swept across Puerto Rico from the sixties to the eighties.

The primary focus of this study is the political leadership exercised by Mayor Cole in his years in office from 1969 to 1986. Rather than approaching political leadership as a set of traits of the individual leader, however, this study views it as essentially a dynamic relationship, an interaction between leader and followers, in which each influences and feeds on the other. Contextual variables have a significant, if not determining, impact in this interaction.¹² In this regard, less attention is devoted to elaborating some list of the features or

characteristics of any given leader and their presumed relevance for success or failure than to what the leader actually *does*—the concrete tasks he or she performs in discharging leadership functions. The focus is on the tasks performed, the resources brought to bear on them, the manner in which tasks are approached, the question of whether both instrumental tasks (those needed to mobilize followers to do whatever they are supposed to do) and affection tasks (those needed to keep followers' adherence to the group or organization) are performed well or badly, and so on. The danger of relying on leadership as an explanatory category is that it is often used as a residual variable. As James MacGregor Burns stated in 1978, "Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth."¹³ If this phenomenon is to be understood, task research is imperative.

In the study of Puerto Rican politics the concept of charismatic leadership has received particular attention, both formally and informally. There is a long tradition in Puerto Rican historiography based on the *procerato* ("great men") approach to national history.¹⁴ For the purposes of this study, however, the concept of "political entrepreneur" is much more useful and appropriate. It is particularly appropriate for mayors, who have to deal with a largely unglamorous set of duties with generally scarce resources.

Originally derived from economics, the concept of political entrepreneurship is useful not only for understanding coalition building but also for examining the behavior of individual political leaders with high achievement objectives but relatively low power resources. For a leader in such a position, the key question becomes how to pyramid those resources—i.e., how to invest them in such a fashion that they will multiply rapidly, thus providing the leader with the means to reach his or her goals. The key to the success of the political entrepreneur is this ability to *create* new resources rather than being content with complaining about the small size of the budget, legislative constraints, or other obstacles.

The utility of this concept is considerable because it allows one to link three sets of variables that often are studied in isolation: political system variables, role tasks of the leader, and personality variables.

As Richard Neustadt has argued in his study of the U.S. presidency (and the case can be made equally well about other political leaders that reach high executive office), political executives have at their disposal two types of power: type 1 (formal) powers, which are largely constitutional and legal, and type 2 (informal) powers, which will depend on the leader's ability to develop a solid and professional reputation as a person who "gets things done."¹⁵

Type 1 powers (constitutional, legal, bureaucratic) are generally not sufficient to achieve the executive's goals, but a proper use of them can lead to augmenting type 2 powers. Only through such use—developing a reputation among other actors as a hard-nosed bargainer who invariably gets what he or she wants—will the executive be able to accomplish his or her goals. Being able to instill a reasonable amount of fear among followers, subordinates, and rivals is part of the secret for such a reputation, as is a good sense of priorities and keeping one's word and one's bargains.¹⁶ A political leader with a high quotient of political entrepreneurship will use all available resources to increase power and reputation, thus producing a cumulative effect that will considerably augment those very resources.

Once the leader's willingness and disposition to engage in political entrepreneurship are established, the next question concerns the leader's approach—in other words, what is the leader's political style? This term is often used somewhat loosely; following George, *political style* is defined here as the "way to make resources work to meet one's needs using the appropriate opportunities for it."

One of the more useful conceptualizations of political style is that provided by Barber in *Presidential Character*.¹⁷ According to Barber, presidents (and any other elected executives, one might add) engage in three major role functions: rhetoric (words), business (work), and personal relations (people).

In this context, a would-be leader's *motives* (needs) combined with his or her *resources* (skills, competencies) at the appropriate *opportunities* will lead to "rehearsals"—occasions on which the leader finds out whether he or she has what it takes to be a politician and on which the first independent political success is of particular

significance. An event of this nature, marked by the individual's gaining a certain amount of self-confidence and often combined with a growing self-image as a leader and/or the sudden emergence to public notoriety, will be decisive for the development of a certain regular action pattern, a set of responses used by the leader to meet different situations, challenges, or problems—in short, the individual's political style.

Such a conceptualization, and the tripartite division into rhetoric, business, and personal relations, has obvious advantages. First, it alludes to a specific set of activities that develop over time, while highlighting one experience (or set of experiences) as particularly important. Second, it is comprehensive, covering the main activities in which a politician must engage. Third, it has a general character that is not tied to any specific public office, allowing us to measure the development of political style over time in different offices occupied by the same leader.

It would be fair to say that after a certain amount of time every political leader—and certainly every professional politician —develops a distinctive political style, whose proper identification and characterization will shed important light on the analysis of leadership behavior. In marked contrast with other linguistic domains, however, style in politics is a value-free term: It does not make sense to say that one leader has more (or less) political style than another.

To evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of one political leader over another, one must therefore turn to the concept of political skill. According to Dahl, "skill in politics is the ability to gain more influence than others, using the same resources."¹⁸ Although useful, this definition is still somewhat vague and general. What specific abilities allow one politician to gain more influence than another, given the same amount of resources? Following George, and linking skill to particular role tasks, it is useful, as a first step, to decompose skill into two distinct sets of abilities:

1. The abilities required to make the correct diagnosis of a situation perceived as relevant to the leader; i.e., the politician as *clinician*.

2. The abilities to act on the situation; i.e., the politician as *surgeon*.

A highly skilled leader will presumably excel at both, but one cannot assume that both aspects will invariably coexist at the same level or to the same degree in the same person. Relevant for both aspects is the capacity to acquire and process information (from the media, from especially commissioned reports, and from followers), as well as the ability to take independent advice and to avoid falling prey to the sycophants that surround every leader. Even so, one must keep in mind that the practice of politics is marked by uncertainty and that it is generally impossible (and impractical) for political leaders to acquire all relevant information to appraise and act on a given problem. As Dahl has stated,

Surrounded by uncertainty, the politician himself necessarily *imputes* a structure and meaning to the situation that goes beyond empirical evidence and scientific modes of analysis. What the politician imputes to the situation depends, in sum, not only on the information at his disposal but also on his own inner predispositions.¹⁹

Dahl thus underlines the importance of the link between political skill and the political style of the leader. But perhaps the most thorough and systematic conceptualization of political skill is provided by Bardach in his *The Skill Factor in Politics*. For Bardach, “skill is a quality of political action. . . . The action is political problem solving, and the qualities of skill are *efficiency, inventiveness* and *creativity*.”²⁰

And in a succinct and incisive definition of what a “political problem” is, Bardach continued,

The success of a policy proposal ultimately means receiving authorization from officials (“the authorities”) with the prerogative to give it or withhold it. This in turn depends on the proposal’s winning a certain amount of support.²¹

This authorization requires essentially four tasks:

1. Coming up with a proposal that will be acceptable.
2. Convincing those affected to register their support.

3. Standing up against attacks from opposing groups or leaders.
4. Managing the whole process for its duration; i.e., acting as a political entrepreneur.

To achieve a goal, the political entrepreneur has to gather support, mobilize resources and allies, outmaneuver opponents, and build and maintain effectiveness. In Bardach's words, "obtaining consensus from a set of sufficiently weighty interests to win a major policy victory is the entrepreneur's basic objective."²²

To sum up, political entrepreneur is a rich and synthetic concept that allows one to link many key dimensions and variables in political analysis. It is particularly useful when applied with the concepts of political style and political skill, which moves one from the general image of the leader as manager and developer of resources to the specific tasks faced by politicians (as distinct from those of business people). The concept of political entrepreneurship is, however, likely to be more useful when applied to certain categories of political leaders than to others. For example, concepts such as charismatic leadership will be of far greater analytic value in studying leaders of politico-religious movements. Research on mayors, who face a considerable array of problems with often meager resources, is likely to benefit particularly from the application of the concept of political entrepreneurship.

If the reasons for any given mayor's "success" or lack thereof are to be addressed effectively, however, a framework specifically designed to measure mayoral performance (rather than that of presidents or prime ministers, for example) is needed. This is particularly important for the purposes of this study. Benjamín Cole was the undisputed head of the Popular Democratic party in Mayagüez and western Puerto Rico, and he derived an important measure of support from the long-standing PDP tradition in the city. But he was also a highly effective mayor, who made Mayagüez into Puerto Rico's "city that works." He has an impressive list of public works, recreational facilities, and improved public services to his credit. A key question is thus how he managed to achieve this, given the highly unfavorable

political environment in Puerto Rico and the recessionary economic situation. What makes a mayor effective?

Research on mayors in Puerto Rico is virtually nonexistent and I am not familiar with any comparative research on the political behavior of mayors in the Caribbean or Latin America, although extensive research on local and urban politics in Latin America has been undertaken.²³ Within the extensive body of writings on mayors in the United States, one first-rate study—*Mayors in Action: Five Approaches to Urban Governance* by John P. Kotter and Paul R. Lawrence—has developed a middle-range theory about the political behavior of mayors of intermediate-size cities in the United States.²⁴

A Coalignment Theory of Mayoral Leadership Behavior

Basing their findings on an extensive comparative research project of the performance of twenty mayors in different cities throughout the United States, Kotter and Lawrence set forth a highly imaginative but solidly grounded framework for assessing mayoral leadership. The framework's potential usefulness and applicability go well beyond the specific leadership role of mayors.

After reviewing the existing literature on mayoral behavior,²⁵ Kotter and Lawrence constructed from it nine different behavioral models.²⁶ They found all of them lacking and set about developing their own model. Asking what a mayor actually does, they came up with three answers: A mayor determines what she or he wants to happen in the city (agenda setting), goes about obtaining the appropriate resources to achieve those goals (resource management), and actually takes the necessary steps to achieve the objectives (execution).

As to the first task, setting an agenda, Kotter and Lawrence's findings led them to identify four basic patterns in the process by which mayors go about setting their goals and objectives. The patterns cover a wide range. At one end is the most short-term "muddling through," in which the agenda is determined on a day-to-day basis in an essentially reactive manner; the mayor is a fire-fighter, managing the city from crisis to crisis and from complaint to complaint. At the other extreme is the most ambitious rational-deductive process; the mayor is

an urban planner, thinking as much as a quarter of a century ahead and developing yearly, monthly, weekly, and daily agendas that derive logically from each other. Between these two extremes fall the majority of mayors, who rely on operative procedures that combine some planning with a considerable amount of improvisation and muddling through.

In this context, the mayor's domain—his or her self-defined area of competence—becomes critical. In contrast with other political executives, such as cabinet members, for example, mayors tend to have considerable latitude in defining their domain. A positive correlation tends to exist between the size of this domain and the degree to which mayors use a rational, deductive planning process in establishing their agenda.

Setting goals, however, is only the first step. The second, resource management, consists of raising the necessary resources (political, economic, and bureaucratic) for accomplishing the goals. In this area, the relationship between the mayor and his environment is decisive. In Kotter and Lawrence's terminology, "network building and maintenance" will have an important impact on the mayor's ability to raise those resources. The mayor's relations with state and federal government, city bureaucracy, local business and labor groups, representatives of the press, and different civic organizations will be crucial. To an important degree, these relations will determine whether the mayor will obtain the necessary tools to fix the city's problems and channel it along the lines he or she thinks it ought to go. Quite apart from the crucial access to economic resources and political support, these relations will remove potential opposition to projects and ensure a flow of valuable advice—or fail to do these things. Examining not only the *scope* of the mayor's network (the number of groups and institutions the mayor actively cultivates and works on) but also the *nature* of the relationship with each of them is therefore of analytic interest. One must ask whether the relations are of a strictly utilitarian character, based on discrete exchanges, or based on coercion, coercion, charismatic appeal, or some other network-building process.

Moreover, mayors may try to shape or reshape these networks in a variety of ways (through changes in the membership and structure

of the various groups, for example) to facilitate cooperative relations. The mayor can do little to reshape federal or even state government, but he or she has some instruments available to change the ways and orientation of the city bureaucracy. Over time, a skilled mayor can also have some impact on the priorities, leadership, and other aspects of business and labor groups and of civic associations in the city.

A critical element in this context is the mayor's staff. Appropriately used, that staff can become an important multiplier and extension of the mayor's efforts, providing often crucial input into the three central tasks of agenda setting, resource raising, and project implementation. Somewhat surprisingly, Kotter and Lawrence found that only two of the twenty mayors they studied developed a staff in the mayor's office (as distinct from the city bureaucracy *per se*) that was of substantial help in the mayor's endeavors. They attribute this to the tension between resourcefulness, talent, and analytical capabilities on the one hand, and unswerving political and personal loyalty on the other. Given the uncertainty of the environment they generally have to operate in, mayors want to ensure an important degree of predictability and control in the one place they can: the mayor's office. Accordingly, political loyalty becomes the foremost criterion for staff selection, to the detriment of more capable (but more independent-minded) candidates. Yet the evidence indicates that mayors who are able to overcome this urge to exercise total control over their subordinates and who are willing to run the risk of hiring top-flight professionals may also have a much more lasting impact on their cities than those who stick to a quintessentially loyal but mediocre staff.

Moving from network building to task accomplishment, Kotter and Lawrence identified three distinct mayoral task accomplishment patterns: bureaucratic, entrepreneurial, and individualistic. Each calls on quite different talents and abilities, and each offers its own advantages and disadvantages.

Drawing from their findings in all of these different areas, Kotter and Lawrence then proceeded to build their own models of mayoral behavior, quite different and distinct from those previously identified in the literature. They constructed five types, ranging from the "minimum mayor" (the ceremonial mayor whose time is spent mostly on

cutting ribbons and inaugurating boutiques) to the “program entrepreneur,” a mayor who has an elaborate agenda-setting process, uses all network-building processes very skillfully, relies on a capable staff, and uses all three task-accomplishment processes, especially the entrepreneurial ones. In between these two polar extremes they located three other types. The “caretaker mayor” is slightly above the minimum mayor in use of the different available resources and has only a limited vision of what ought to be done in the city in the medium and long term. The personality/individualist mayor is a leader who relies in an important measure on his or her own personal appeal and on some purposive appeal in network building. This mayor has no staff, may have a medium-term agenda, and relies mostly on his or her personal initiatives to “get things done.” Another type is the “executive,” with a considerably larger domain than the first three types, a large network, and a greater reliance on the entrepreneurial task accomplishment. The executive mayor’s rule may in fact lead to some permanent changes in the city, which is rarely the case for any of the other types except the program entrepreneur.

One of Kotter and Lawrence’s main conclusions, however, is that the quest for a single “best mayor” is ultimately futile. Rather, they identified a set of four key variables—the mayor, the mayor’s agenda, the mayor’s network, and the city—that will have a determining impact on any given mayor’s performance. A decisive factor here is coalignment among these variables, with two sets of dynamic relationships: one between the mayor and the contextual variables, and the other among the contextual variables themselves. The point is that for the mayor to be able to continue in office (to be re-elected) there must be an important degree of correspondence between (a) the mayor as a leader; (b) the mayor’s program and objectives; (c) the various groups and individuals with influence in the city; and (d) the traditions, nature, and “objective needs” of the city. A mayor with an ambitious agenda may or may not have a larger impact than one with a much more restricted agenda. The impact will depend on whether the size of the agenda is matched by an equivalent network-building and maintenance process, the mayor’s own leadership skills, and the extant traditions and political culture of the city, which may or may not

be receptive to large-scale efforts at social change and transformation. The sequence of these interactions can be graphically described (see fig. 1.2).

Any severe disjuncture between these variables will lead to an unstable situation and change (i.e., the mayor's failure to be re-elected):

A successful administration is a behavioral pattern of a particular set of processes that is feasible and stable in the short run; this set of processes, moreover, has a desired impact on a number of key variables, serving to create or maintain a simultaneous alignment among those variables.²⁷

This approach to the study of mayoral behavior has a number of distinct advantages. It puts the mayor at center stage, but it maintains a focus on the dynamic interaction between the leader (the mayor), the followers (the mayor's political party, staff, part of the city bureaucracy, and other supporters), and the environment (the city itself, po-

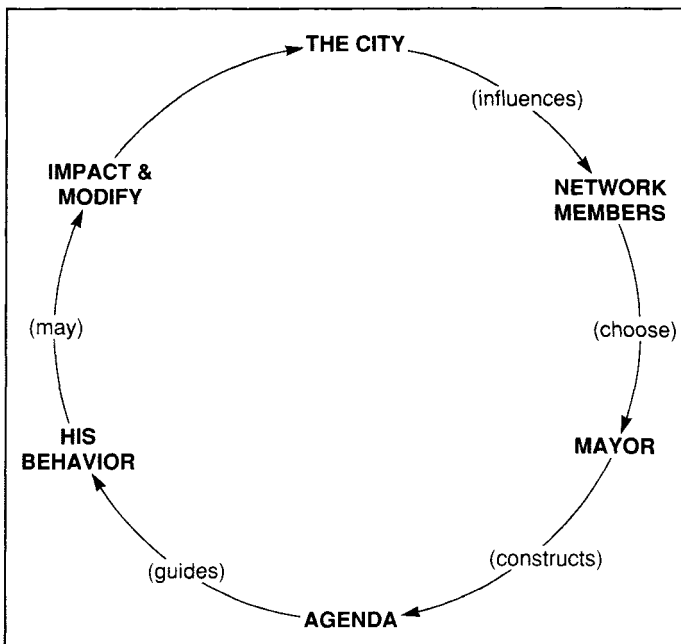


Figure 1.2 Cities, Mayors, and Coalignment

litical rivals and enemies, opposing groups, and other levels of government). This allows one to examine the degree to which a mayor's political style and skills enable the mayor to act as a political entrepreneur setting up plans and projects (the mayoral agenda), commandeer the necessary resources (through network building and maintenance), and bring them to fruition (task accomplishment).

This approach thus provides a useful linkage between structure and process in the study of mayors, as political entrepreneurship does in the study of political leadership more generally.

How Applicable to Mayagüez?

There are significant differences between the twenty intermediate-size cities that provided the sample database for *Mayors in Action* and the case of Mayagüez. The first and most important relates to political culture. Mayagüez is located in Spanish-speaking Puerto Rico, not in the continental United States, and the political behavior of Puerto Ricans as well as their political belief systems differ in a variety of respects from those of Americans. Political participation, for example, is much higher in Puerto Rico; voter turnout fluctuates between 80 and 85 percent, in contrast with the approximately 50 percent turnout in U.S. presidential elections.

Mayagüez's population of 100,000 is also significantly smaller than the median population (around 500,000) of the cities Kotter and Lawrence selected for their study. In addition, Puerto Rico's political system is much more centralized than those existing in most U.S. states. As mentioned earlier, in Puerto Rico, all public education and public utilities are controlled and administered by the state, as were all law enforcement agencies until very recently. This centralization means that a narrower range of tasks is performed by the municipal administration.

These differences between the U.S. and Puerto Rican cases, however, do not obscure the fact that important commonalities also exist. First, Puerto Rico's municipal government system is closely modeled on the one existing in the United States. It is specifically a variant of the strong mayor, weak council system, although the power of the

mayor is somewhat circumscribed by a degree of financial and legal vulnerability in comparison with the state government (reflecting again the high centralization of the Puerto Rican polity).

The second important similarity is that, coinciding with the election of Benjamín Cole as mayor of Mayagüez, Puerto Rico moved from a one-party-dominant system, in many ways similar to Mexico's, to a two-party system similar to that of the United States. In this two-party system, alternation in power between the two main parties has become almost a rule.

The third difference relates to Mayagüez's size. Its population of 100,000 and the diversified nature of its economy, with commercial, industrial, and agricultural activities and a significant number of educational institutions and public agencies, provide a sufficiently broad range of problems and issues to make the comparison with somewhat larger U.S. cities meaningful.

The fourth and final similarity is that because Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory, Mayagüez, like all the cities examined by Kotter and Lawrence, is affected by and can act on the U.S. federal government. This is an increasingly important factor not only in the American urban scene, but in Puerto Rican cities as well.

The conditions are right for a creative adaptation of Kotter and Lawrence's framework to the study of mayoral leadership in Mayagüez. The key question then becomes the extent to which coalignment theory can further an understanding of Mayagüez's exceptionalism. This exceptionalism takes the form of continued control by the Popular Democratic party, under the leadership of Mayor Benjamín Cole, at a time when all other major urban centers in Puerto Rico either came under permanent control of the pro-statehood New Progressive party (as in San Juan since 1968 and in Ponce and Bayamón since 1976) or, at a minimum, under control that alternated between both leading parties (as in Arecibo and Caguas).

A full understanding of the Mayagüez political scene is impossible without an understanding of the nature and dynamics of local politics in Puerto Rico. That topic is the subject of chapter 2.