

THE PRESS AND COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING:
A STUDY OF NEWSPAPER CONTENT DURING THE
HARRIS COUNTY HOSPITAL DISTRICT ELECTIONS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Political Science
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
. Master of Arts

by
Marvin Payne Berry
January 1967

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ABSTRACT

Though there is disagreement among political scientists as to the relative importance of daily metropolitan newspapers as a medium of political communication, most would agree that this section of the press has definite import for the political system. A citizen in a democratic community must rely, in part, upon the metropolitan press for information on which to form opinions concerning political issues within the community.

A group of traditions concerning the role of the newspapers have evolved over time in this country, which serve as an ideal model guiding newspapermen as they perform their editorial and reportorial functions. These idealized norms, garnered from journalism textbooks and writings of the journalism fraternity, are detailed in the first chapter. Studies have shown, however, that newspapermen are also influenced by socially and organizationally determined norms of the larger community outside the journalism profession. A discrepancy thus seems to exist between idealized journalist norms and actual behavior.

A typology of editors is described, in which, viewed as one extreme of a continuum, the "community-editor" is portrayed. The community-editor type works with other community leaders, employing the newspaper to promote a goal of these leaders. On the other hand, the opposite type, called

the "journalist-editor", is guided by idealized journalistic norms. He makes claims for the power of the press in political communication, viewing the institutional role of the newspaper as an objective reporter of news and as a watch dog of community interest.

In this case study, the content, during the Harris County Hospital District elections, of three metropolitan daily newspapers is examined to determine if these newspapers reflect more nearly the community-editor type than the journalist-editor type of newspaperman behavior. Measurements of emphasis, using techniques of content analysis, are employed to determine the objectivity of the newspapers as political communicators and the extent to which they acted as promoters during the elections. It is concluded that, although making a show of objectivity, two newspapers manipulated emphasis given to certain issues to achieve policy ends, and might be more nearly classed as community-editor oriented. The other paper is found to approximate more nearly the journalist-editor type of behavior. The reason advanced for this difference in newspaper behavior was a difference in newspaper ownership. The two newspapers approximating community-editor orientation were locally owned, whereas the journalist-editor type was owned and managed by a national chain.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Though disagreeing as to its relative importance, generally political scientists would agree with V. O. Key that, as part of the mass communications media, the press¹ "certainly has import for the political system." A citizen in a democratic system depends heavily on the press for information upon which to base his political behavior. Thomas Jefferson recognized the importance of this when he stated "the only security of all is in a free press. The force of public opinion cannot be resisted when permitted freely to be expressed."²

THE ROLE OF THE PRESS IN PUBLIC OPINION FORMATION

Public opinion is not a constant set of values, against which issues can be judged as good or bad. Rather, it develops around issues which are presented to the community for consideration during a period of community decision making. Issues may be generated by government, or by other

¹V. O. Key, Public Opinion and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 370.

²Thomas Jefferson, To Lafayette, The Works of Thomas Jefferson, ed. Paul Lewiston Ford (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904-05) XV, p. 491.

groups and individuals with vested interests to promote. The promotional information from these sources, and other information of a non-promotional nature necessary to permit citizens to form an opinion, must be communicated to the citizen through the mass media, of which the press is an old and important member.³

An Idealized Conceptual Model

Historically, to help guide the newspapers in their performance as a medium influencing public opinion, certain idealized journalistic norms have evolved, which might be characterized as traditions of professional journalism.⁴ These institutional norms, which set out idealized prescriptions concerning the functions of the press in political communication, influence the role conception held by newspapers as they perform their newspaper tasks both in reportorial and editorial positions. Such idealized norms are to be found in such sources as journalism textbooks, in speeches by members of the journalism fraternity, and in canons of journalism as set out by journalism associations. As with most ideals, such norms are broad in wording, without much detail on methods of implementation. These glorious traditions are sounded by newspapermen also as justification for

³ Dan Nimmo, Newsgathering in Washington (New York: Atherton Press, 1964), p. 5.

⁴ Warren Breed, "Social Control in the News Room" Social Forces Vol. 33, 1955, p. 326.

the continued existence of the press as an institution.⁵ In short, they represent an idealized picture of what a newspaper ought to be as an influential medium in public opinion formulation.

Willard Grosvenor Bleyer, for many years director of the School of Journalism at the University of Wisconsin, has outlined three model functions which the press should perform in formulating public opinion.⁶ Around each of these three functions have evolved clusters of idealized journalistic norms which delineate a professional standard of performance, against which newspapermen can and do judge their own achievements. The first model function of a newspaper, according to Professor Bleyer, is that "it must furnish the days' news in as complete and accurate a form as possible ..
"⁷ Broadly, this function embraces the category of news reporting, which, under the libertarian independent tradition of the press in this country, operates under an idealized prescription of objectivity.⁸ An objective attitude requires reporters to remain aloof and detached from

⁵Silas Bent, "Crusading, A Neglected Story," The Press and Society, George L. Bird and Fredric E. Merwin, editors (New York, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1951), p. 368.

⁶Willard Grosvenor Bleyer, "Does Press Merit Privileged Place?", Editor and Publisher, Vol. 67, 1934, p. 214-216.

⁷Ibid., p. 214.

⁸Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson, Wilbur Schramm, Four Theories of the Press, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 61.

the events and issues about which they write. Since reporters are, ideally, emotionally removed from political arenas, they theoretically have an opportunity to provide an impartial, adequate, fair, sincere, truthful, accurate, decent, and responsible coverage of political news. Idealized journalistic norms require that reporters provide such coverage.⁹ Reportorial objectivity requires that newspaper opinion and bias be limited to the editorial stories, where they are clearly labeled as opinion.

Because of the emphasis on impartial and objective news reporting, the role of the press, at least in its reporting capacity, is conceptualized in idealized terms as a common carrier of political information.¹⁰ One editor has suggested that the sole justification for the constitutional protection accorded the press is to allow the news media an opportunity to provide this common carrier service in the transmission of political news.¹¹ Ideally, then, in the common carrier conceptualization all political opinions should have an equal opportunity for public access, and all sides of all issues should be carried, through the medium

⁹American Society of Newspaper Editors, "The Canons of Journalism", Bird and Merwin, op. cit., p. 108.

¹⁰V. O. Key, op. cit., p. 391.

¹¹James S. Pope, "On Understanding the Press," Nieman Reports, Vol. 2, 1948, p. 7.

of the press, acting as a disinterested channel of communication. Claims have been advanced that the press, by virtue of its objective attitude and its common carrier position, reflects accurately the society around it.¹² In this view the role of the press is seen as "a mirror by which its readers may see the world about them."¹³

Even staunch defenders of the journalistic conception of objectivity admit that a mass of unrelated facts and opinions can be confusing and misleading. The Commission on the Free Press, in its model code for the contemporary press, requires that the accounts of the news be placed in a "context which gives them meaning."¹⁴ Professor Bleyer provides a remedy for this deficiency in describing the second model function of a newspaper in public opinion formation. A newspaper "must explain and interpret current news and current issues in order to aid readers to form intelligent opinions."¹⁵ This function of political news

¹² L. N. Flint, The Conscience of the Newspaper (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, 1947), p. 71.

¹³ Charles W. Smith, Public Opinion in a Democracy (New York, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1939), p. 75.

¹⁴ Commission on Freedom of the Press, Robert M. Hutchins, Chairman, A Free and Responsible Press (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 79.

¹⁵ Bleyer, op. cit., p. 215.

interpretation has been accomplished on the national level by signed feature stories from news associations, such as Associated Press and United Press International, and by the writings of syndicated news columnists: on the local level, this function has been assigned to reporters, and editors, who produce in feature articles and editorials interpretive accounts of political news.¹⁶ Ideally, this should provide balance and perspective to straight news stories; by the addition of background "color" and by relating sets of facts in an objectively viewed context, readers should be able to make sense out of the news they have read. In essence, newspapers, in this interpretive function, serve as teachers to the reading public, and, ideally, in an impartial manner.¹⁷

Historically, newspapers have expressed within their pages, in one form or other, editorial opinions. At times, such editorial bias openly permeated the news reporting function, but under modern journalistic ethics, newspaper opinion has been relegated to the editorial page.¹⁸ The crusading, leading, guiding newspaper is a glorious part of

¹⁶Fredrick E. Merwin, "The Reporting of Public Affairs", The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 219, Jan. 1942.

¹⁷Robert J. Blakely, "The Responsibilities of an Editor", Wilbur Schramm, Editor, Communications in Modern Society (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1948), p. 235.

¹⁸Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, op. cit.

the tradition of the American press.¹⁹ The leadership function of the newspaper in formulating public opinion is expressed by Bleyer:

The newspaper must guide public opinion, after presenting impartially both sides of every issue, by pointing out to readers what measures seem to promise the greater good for the greater number.²⁰

Early in the history of this country, Thomas Jefferson in discussing the press's leadership role in the political process, pointed out that "the government should not be without censors, and where the press is free, no one ever will."²¹ More recently, Fredric E. Merwin has stated that "press criticism in the field of public affairs probably represents the most significant justification of the first amendment to the Constitution."²² Under idealized norms, then, the press, in clearly labeled editorials, is permitted, and even expected, to act both as a judge of the relative merits of political issues and as a critic, or "watch dog", of governmental actions.

¹⁹Robert J. Blakely, "The Responsibilities of an Editor", Wilbur Schramm, Editor, Communications in Modern Society (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1948), pp. 235-236.

²⁰Bleyer, op. cit.

²¹Thomas Jefferson to the President of the United States, September 9, 1792, op. cit. VII, p. 146.

²²Fredric E. Merwin, "The Reporting of Government News", Bird and Merwin, Editors, The Press and Society (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1951), p. 215.

Findings From Related Studies

In the preparation and editing of newspaper political content, the idealized conceptual model of the newspaper's function which has been outlined has some bearing on what and how such material is printed. A significant factor in the behavior of a newspaperman, as with any actor in a process of interaction is the concept he has of his role.²³ Recent studies have stressed, however, that the political performance of the press does not take place in isolation, and that there are factors other than idealized norms bearing on the selection and display of political news by the newspaperman. Some of these factors are the news sources of newspapermen, the conceptions newspapermen have of their reading audiences, and the newspaperman's own political orientations. The interlocking roles of newspaper reporters and columnists and their news sources has been researched on the national level, for example, by Dan Nimmo,²⁴ and on the local level by Walter Gieber and Walter Johnson.²⁵ Warren Breed has examined factors, such as job security and ambition, which influence newsmen in writing and editing

²³Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957) p. 369.

²⁴See Dan Nimmo, op. cit.

²⁵Walter Gieber and Walter Johnson, "The City Hall Beat": "A Study of Reporter and Source Roles" Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 38, 1961. pp. 289-297.

stories,²⁶ and has studied how one newspaper influences the contents of another.²⁷ David White has, through the "gate-keeper" studies, pointed out some factors influencing editorial behavior in the selection of news stories.²⁸ All these efforts have a common element in that they draw attention to the "interaction of idealized journalistic norms and ethics with socially and organizationally determined norms of the larger community" in diverse circumstances and levels of status.²⁹

In a study of newspaper leadership more pertinent to this paper, Alex Edelstein and J. Blaine Schulz sought to identify the extent of the leadership role accorded the local newspaper editor by the local community power structure and to compare this set of expectations with the editor's

²⁶ Warren Breed, "Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis" Social Forces, Vol. 33, 1955, pp. 326-335.

²⁷ Warren Breed, "Newspaper Opinion Leaders and Processes of Standardization", Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 32, 1955, pp. 277-284.

²⁸ David Manning White "The Gate Keeper": A Case Study in the Selection of News", Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 27, 1950. pp. 283-290.

²⁹ Alex S. Edelstein and J. Blaine Schulz, "The Leadership Role of the Weekly Newspaper as Seen by Community Leaders: A Sociological Perspective" Lewis Anthony Dexter and David Manning White, Editors, People, Society, and Mass Communications (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), p. 233.

actual performance.³⁰ Factors such as idealized journalistic norms, the editor's sense of community identification, and the editor's perception of the power structure of the local community and its needs were studied to determine the extent to which they guided editor behavior. The study found that, within the community power structure, "a permissive environment does exist for journalistic ideology."³¹ At the same time, the study concluded that "the power structure must be considered by the editor in any program he may visualize."³² Arriving at a typology of editors, Edelstein and Schulz described one group as "community editors" who clearly perceived the power structure and who typically work jointly with community leaders in areas of controversy, leaving the initiative to such leaders.³³ The operating mode of such community editors is portrayed by Edelstein and Schulz as a public relations technique, similar to the technique employed by community leaders:

These editors described their formula for getting things done as follows: (1) Get a feeling for community attitudes'; (2) talk over the project with community leaders; (3) work personally 'behind the scenes' with leaders and others; (4) employ the newspapers to publicize activities and keep the project underway.³⁴

On the other hand, another type of editor, which

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 220-236. ³¹ Ibid., p. 235. ³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 234. ³⁴ Ibid.

Edelstein and Schulz labeled the "journalist-editor", makes claims for the power of the press, and holds a much stronger identification with journalist ideology.³⁵ He talks of holding up a mirror to the community by printing all the facts, which he views as a "professional imperative."³⁶ His relations to community leaders is expressed as an "armed truce".³⁷ Of the editors interviewed by Edelstein and Schulz only twenty percent expressed journalist-editor ideology, and even in this group, few behaved in accordance with their verbalized beliefs.³⁸

Evidence from these studies seems to point up a discrepancy between idealized journalist norms and actual behavior, and even a conflict among different idealized norms. In many cases, the "facts" which a reporter writes are taken from a mimeographed press release from a public figure or group.³⁹ However, "the carrying of publicity in the news columns in the guise of news matter" has been condemned by the American Newspaper Guild in a statement on newspaper ethics.⁴⁰ Alfred McLung Lee points out that historically press agency preceeded reporters as a source of news, and that the press has continued to be susceptible

³⁵ Ibid., p. 235. ³⁶ Ibid. ³⁷ Ibid. ³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ V. O. Key, op. cit., p. 392.

⁴⁰ George A. Brandenburg, "Newspaper Guild Adopts Ethics Code", Editor and Publisher, Vol. 67, June 16, 1934, p. 15.

to manipulation.⁴¹ "The press tends to be permeated with
 partisan interpretation."⁴² Newspaper editorial policy
 also may find its way into news presentation, though not
 labeled as such. V. O. Key has stated this thesis, with
 which we would agree:

Even in its most biased reporting of public
 affairs the modern newspaper makes a show of ob-
 jectivity and often seeks to achieve its policy
 ends, not by editorializing directly in the news,
 but by manipulating the emphasis ⁴³given to news
 themes in accord with its policy.

RESEARCH FOCUS AND ANALYSIS

This inquiry is a case study, which focuses on the
 political news content and editorial behavior found in
 three metropolitan daily newspapers during a process of
 community decision making. The objective of this study is
 to examine this news content and editorial behavior to
 determine to what extent it approximates idealized journa-
 listic norms. The principal research tool employed in this
 inquiry is that of the content analysis. Throughout this
 study four questions will be considered. First, did the
 newspapers, through their editorial content, exhibit com-
 munity leadership by acting as judges on the merits of

⁴¹ Alfred McLung Lee, The Daily Newspaper in America
 (New York: The McMillan Company, 1947), p. 462.

⁴² V. O. Key, op. cit., p. 392.

⁴³ Ibid.

political issues and by acting as critics of government actions which they deemed not in the public interest? Second, did the newspapers rely upon press releases and press conferences from officials, individuals, and groups involved with the community conflict as their major source of political news in reporting the hospital district controversy? Third, was the editorial comment clearly separated from the factual and interpretive news stories? Finally, assuming a show of objectivity, did the newspapers editorialize in the factual and interpretive news stories by manipulating the emphasis given news themes which accorded with newspaper policy?

The political conflict in this case study concerns the efforts of the metropolitan community enclosed within the boundaries of Harris County to decide whether the hospital district should be formed to support the community's public hospitalization program. Problems involving the creation of special districts to administer and finance such local matters as schools, public health, water supplies, and other local government functions, are constantly faced by growing metropolitan areas. In this respect, the present case under study is typical. The hospital district

⁴⁴Woodworth G. Thrombley, "Special Districts and Authorities in Texas", Public Affairs Series No. 39 (Austin, Texas: Institute of Public Affairs, University of Texas, 1959), p. 80.

controversy was chosen for the subject of this inquiry because it represents a particularly good case in which to examine the value of the newspaper in community political conflict. This controversy raised articulate and determined opposition which drew the press into the battle. It is somewhat unique, in that the controversy was not resolved in one campaign, but was the subject of five separate election campaigns spread over a time period of ten years. This unique feature is of value to the efforts of this study, because the performance of the newspaper can be viewed in each election and compared with its performance in the other elections.

Another unique aspect of the case in this study is that three separately owned metropolitan daily newspapers were published during the first three of the campaigns. In many metropolitan areas daily newspaper coverage is a monopoly of one publisher, and this trend of concentration⁴⁵ seems to be increasing. The presence of more than one paper in this case allowed for a comparison of frequency and emphasis placed by each newspaper on themes or issues, together with a comparison of their editorial policies concerning these issues. Two of the three newspapers, the Houston Post, and the Houston Chronicle were owned by local publishers, while the Houston Press was a part of the

⁴⁵ Morris L. Ernst, The First Freedom, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1946), p. 68.

Scripps-Howard national chain. These variables would seem to be of importance in the question of community leadership by the press.

Studies of the press's role in formulating public opinion have tended to concentrate on national and even state levels. But the increasing importance of the political problems faced by the expanding metropolitan areas seem to warrant a focus on communication studies of the local government level. Such a consideration has prompted the efforts of this study.

PLAN OF THE STUDY

Since the election issues concerning the formation of the Harris County Hospital District can best be understood in light of the controversy which surrounded the joint Harris County and City of Houston charity hospital program prior to the elections, the second chapter contains a historical survey of that charity hospital program. Although this information is drawn in part from government documents, the major source is from the stories carried by the three metropolitan newspapers, since this study focuses on newspaper content during the elections.

In Chapter III, concepts and methods used to organize news data for content analysis are outlined. Research dimensions are made more explicit and research indicators are detailed. Included at the end of this chapter are a

series of tables, which are placed there rather than in an appendix because they contain general statistical material pertinent to the following chapters and could not logically be included in any particular one of those succeeding chapters.

The more empirical part of this study is contained in the fourth and fifth chapters. There, issues or theme categories are defined and the development of each theme is traced through the five hospital district elections. Statistical tables on the thematic content of the newspapers are included in these two chapters. Chapter IV covers themes which were used at times to oppose the hospital district, while Chapter V contains those themes expounded mainly by hospital district supporters. Chapter VI contains a summary of the study findings along with conclusions based on these study findings. In addition, certain unsubstantiated speculations on the data are offered, suggesting areas for further research.

CHAPTER II

THE CITY - COUNTY CHARITY HOSPITAL:

A HISTORICAL SURVEY

The City of Houston recognized its responsibility to its indigent ill in its early growth by establishing a hospital for the needy under the supervision and management of the city government. Prior to the year 1923, Houston had already set up its own municipal hospital devoted to the care of the indigent ill. As early as 1923, however, the City of Houston and Harris County governments attempted a cooperative charity hospital venture, recognizing that the area to be served and the means of financing had to be more than city wide.

THE FIRST CITY-COUNTY HOSPITAL: 1923-1938

On February 12, 1923, a contract was executed between the Commissioner's Court and the Houston City Council, which provided for both the operation and construction of a new¹ charity hospital. Both city and county agreed to pay one hundred thousand dollars each for construction purposes, with the hospital to be built on land provided by the city. The value of the land was to be credited to the one hundred² thousand dollar share of the city. Under terms of the

¹Minutes of the Commissioners Court, V: 94.

²Ibid.

1923 agreement, both city and county were to jointly own the hospital in proportion to the amount each contributed to its construction.³ Joint city-county operational financing was based on a formula whereby an average cost per "patient day" was computed. This average cost was multiplied by the number of county "patient days" incurred during the month to determine the county's share of the operating expenses.⁴ All other operating expenses were to be borne by the city.⁵

The 1923 agreement specified that the city-county hospital was to be administered by a Board of Managers, four of whom were to be appointed by the City Council and four by the County Commissioner's Court, and operated under the leadership of a Chairman appointed jointly by the city and county.⁶ Serving as ex-officio members on the Board of managers were the city and county health officers and the Secretary of the Houston Hospital Foundation.⁷ The agreement further provided that the hospital would be managed by the City of Houston in the same manner that the city had operated the older municipal hospital.⁸ The first city-county hospital, named Jefferson Davis Hospital, resulted from this joint effort, and was administered under the 1923 agreement until January 1, 1938.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

JEFFERSON DAVIS CITY-COUNTY HOSPITAL 1938-1961

On October 7, 1935, the Federal Government offered aid to the City of Houston and Harris County jointly in financing construction and in equipping of a new and larger hospital and nurses home. Under the terms of this offer, the Federal Government was to pay 45% of the cost, not to exceed ninety thousand dollars.⁹ Both city and county governments accepted this offer. On November 2, 1935, the city and county agreed to erect such a hospital building as a joint effort.¹⁰ The county was to pay for one-third of the land and for one-half the cost of the building not borne by the Federal Government, while the city was to pay for two-thirds of the land cost and for one-half of the city-county share.¹¹ This effort was to result in the second Jefferson Davis Hospital, which was completed in 1938 and located on Buffalo Drive.

The agreement to build the new Jefferson Davis Hospital had not included provisions for administering and financing the hospital once it was completed. Prior to completion of the hospital construction a management board was formed, based on the old 1923 agreement, except that

⁹ Houston Chronicle, October 8, 1935.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Houston City Council, CG: 1.

¹¹ Ibid.

the number of the county and city appointees had risen to
¹²
 six each. Ex-officio officers were the same except for
¹³
 the addition of the Director of the Hospital Staff. Rules
 prescribed by this body were subject to the approval of
¹⁴
 both the city and county governments.

The issue of financing the new city-county hospital
 was not solved so readily. At first, the Commissioner's
 Court attempted to apply the plan devised under the first
¹⁵
 joint contract of 1923, but the city rejected these terms.
 Subsequent negotiations produced an agreement which was
 supposed to last only during the year of 1938, although
 this agreement continued as the basis of financing for
 several more years. Under this pact, the county was obli-
 gated to pay twenty percent of the operating expenses of
 the hospital, not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars
 per year. However, the county gained more control over
¹⁶
 hospital expenditures and administration.

Although the 1938 hospital operation financing agree-
 ment between the City of Houston and Harris County purported
 to be controlling only for the remainder of that year, it
 was continued as a working agreement for eight more years.

¹² Houston City Code, 1938, Sec. 21-1.

¹³ Ibid. ¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Commissioners Court, 5:717.

¹⁶ Minutes of the Houston City Council, JJ:94.
 Also see Minutes of Commissioners Court, 6: 497.

On June 10, 1940, the Commissioner's Court passed a motion to continue sharing Jefferson Davis Hospital operations cost with the City of Houston under terms of the 1938 pact.¹⁷ Again, on May 21, 1941, the Commissioner's Court reaffirmed the 1938 contract.¹⁸ On January 28, 1946, the Commissioners Court, by a motion, raised its share of Jefferson Davis Hospital operating expenses to 25 percent of such yearly expenses.¹⁹ This ratio continued through 1947. On February 18, 1948, the Commissioner's Court appropriated three hundred thousand dollars for the operation of Jefferson Davis Hospital and provided that the county's share be increased from 25 percent to 30 percent of the actual operating and maintenance costs, less any amount received by the City of Houston as refunds from patients other than paupers.²⁰

Only charity cases were allowed admission to the Jefferson Davis Hospital when it opened. This decision was a continuation of the policy which had existed at the old Houston Municipal Hospital and at the original city-county hospital. The 1942 Houston City Code stated, unequivocally that "Jefferson Davis is for charity patients only. Patients in a position to pay for hospital care shall not be

¹⁷ Minutes of the Commissioners Court, 9: 546.

¹⁸ Minutes of the Commissioners Court, 9: 686.

¹⁹ Minutes of the Commissioners Court, 16: 215.

²⁰ Minutes of the Commissioners Court, 20: 206.

admitted."²¹ In order to screen applicants, the 1942 code provided that "all admissions to the hospital shall be made with approval either of the city health officer or the county health officer."²² Except for emergencies, all cases were to go through the social service department for screening before admission.²³ Even emergency cases had to be investigated as soon as possible, and if the history showed that the patient was not entitled to admission as a charity case, such a patient was not to be admitted, but was to be transferred to another hospital.²⁴ Harris County residents who were non-residents of the City of Houston were required to secure a permit from the county health officer in order to enter the hospital.²⁵ The Jefferson Davis Hospital professional staff was made up of volunteer physicians drawn from the membership of the Harris County Medical Society. Control of the medical staff rested with the Director of the Hospital Staff, a member of the Harris County Medical Society and an ex-officio officer of the Jefferson Davis Hospital management board.²⁶

In succeeding years after the opening of Jefferson Davis City-County Hospital several policy changes were made concerning the admission of patients and the control of the

²¹Houston City Code, 1958, Sec. 21-18.

²²Ibid. ²³Ibid. ²⁴Ibid. ²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Houston Post, October 18, 1961.

professional staff. On June 7, 1944, the Houston City Council, by an ordinance, provided for the admission of pay patients to Jefferson Davis Hospital.²⁷ A principal reason advanced for this change in policy was a shortage of hospital beds in Harris County and the inability of existing hospitals to provide more because of World War II. The ordinance stated that as many beds as "practical" should be set aside for pay patients for the "duration of the hospital emergency."²⁸ Where other conditions were equal, however, indigent patients were to be given priority over pay patients for hospital beds and services.²⁹ As further restriction on pay patients, beds were not allotted to "elective surgical pay patients or to non-acutely ill medical pay patients."³⁰

Under the 1944 ordinance, Jefferson Davis was required to charge fees comparable to other hospitals in Houston, including fees for such services as x-ray, anaesthetic and laboratory work.³¹ Such fees were paid over into the general fund of the city. With prosperous times and an increased amount of hospitalization insurance coverage, some patients at Jefferson Davis Hospital were able to pay for a substantial part of their treatment. Fees from Jefferson Davis were to become a large amount, though since they were

²⁷ Houston City Code, 1958, Sec. 21-28.

²⁸ Ibid. ²⁹ Ibid. ³⁰ Ibid. ³¹ Ibid.

placed in the general fund, they were not credited to hos-
³²
 pital expenses.

Medical staff members of the regular Jefferson Davis Hospital staff were accorded, under the 1944 ordinance, with privilege of treating pay patients in the hospital. In addition to the regular staff a "courtesy staff" was created. Membership of this "courtesy staff" was open to any physician who had made written application to Jefferson Davis Hospital³³ and who had been approved by the "efficiency committee." Such membership was for one year renewable periods, subject³⁴ to the continued approval by the "efficiency committee". Privileges of the courtesy staff were limited to "the atten-³⁵dance of their own pay patients." Control of the professional aspects of the Jefferson Davis Hospital Staff remained³⁶ with the Director of the Staff.

In 1949, the Jefferson Davis Hospital board of managers placed control of the hospital's professional staff under direction of the Baylor University School of Medicine, which had moved to Houston in 1943. By a ten year agreement, Baylor University was obligated to furnish a complete professional staff, including residents and interns. Salaries of residents and interns was to be paid, however, by the hospital. In turn, Baylor University was given the right to

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

use Jefferson Davis as a teaching facility.³⁷ The policy changes in the admission of pay patients which allowed staff doctors to use Jefferson Davis for their private practice, coupled with the restrictions of hospital staff membership to personnel of Baylor Medical School, tended to create a climate of distrust between doctors in private practice and members of the Medical School staff. This tension was to become more acute as Baylor sought better physical accommodations in the Texas Medical Center.

TOWARD A NEW HOSPITAL

On July 20, 1949, Houston Mayor Oscar Hoscombe announced to the Houston City Council that H. R. Cullen, a prominent Houston philanthropist, had offered 1.5 million dollars to be used in erecting a new 600 bed charity hospital at the Texas Medical Center, located in the south
38
Houston area. Under terms of this offer, the City of Houston was to add to the building fund 1.7 million dollars which it had gained through the sale of bonds voted in the 1946 election for a tuberculosis hospital. As Mayor Holcombe outlined the plan, an effort would be made to secure an additional 1.5 million dollars from the M. D. Anderson Foundation. Since the Anderson Foundation had a vested interest

³⁷ Houston Post, January 3, 1949.

³⁸ Houston Chronicle, July 20, 1949.

in the Texas Medical Center, it was hoped that the new hospital would receive additional financial support from the foundation. The plan also called for application for federal funds under the Hill-Burton act. A total of five million dollars in construction money was the proposed goal.³⁹ Under Mayor Holcombe's proposal, Jefferson Davis Hospital was to be converted to a tuberculosis hospital upon completion of the new charity hospital. City Attorney Will Sears expressed a belief that it would be possible to use the city's tuberculosis hospital bond funds for the new hospital "since the city will get a tuberculosis hospital out of the proposals."⁴⁰

A Community Project

The fact that the new hospital would serve as a teaching facility was a significant factor in the selection of the Texas Medical Center site. Mayor Holcombe stated that the new general charity hospital would work with Baylor Medical School and the Texas Medical Center in the same manner in which "John Sealy Hospital in Galveston works with the University of Texas Medical School."⁴¹ The strong linkage between the new hospital, the Texas Medical Center, and Baylor University School was emphasized by John G. Dudley,

³⁹

Ibid.

⁴⁰

Ibid.

⁴¹

Houston Chronicle, July 21, 1949.

Administrator of Houston Memorial Hospital and president of the Houston Area Hospital Council. He stated in a press release, that Houston would be greatly benefitted by such a move, particularly the Texas Medical Center "where the new hospital will fill a sore need for teaching beds."⁴²

Enthusiasm for the new charity hospital was voiced by several prominent citizens in subsequent press releases, which appeared in the Chronicle, Post and Press. Dr. Denton Kerr, Chairman of the Harris County Medical Society and Chairman of the City Health Board stated, "It's the best news I've heard. I think it will help a great deal."⁴³ Dr. L. F. Schumaker, member of the Council on Medical Education and Hospitals for Texas State Medical Association called the plan "one of the greatest steps ever to be taken in medical education in Texas."⁴⁴ The plan, he pointed out, would put the Texas Medical Center "twenty five years ahead of its development," and stated that "surely no one could oppose the idea."⁴⁵

Endorsing the Texas Medical Center site, Dr. David Greer, President of the Texas Children's Foundation, remarked that a fine charity hospital would be the one thing on which "greatness of the Texas Medical Center must be based."⁴⁶ The

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Houston Chronicle, July 21, 1949.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

newspaper accounts indicated an outburst of enthusiasm for the hospital from many sources and a glow of civic pride in the undertaking. This enthusiasm was especially warm among supporters of Baylor University Medical School. Though there had been an acute shortage of hospital beds, it was significant that the needs of the charity hospital were not stressed in the initial announcement so much as the teaching aspects of the hospital and advantage of the Texas Medical Center location. Endorsement also came from city and county officials who were in favor of the proposed hospital on several counts. Though Jefferson Davis Hospital was only eleven years old, it was already becoming crowded with charity patients. Growth trends seemed to indicate that this problem would become even more acute in time. Further, the new hospital would help solve the tuberculosis hospital question by allowing conversion of Jefferson Davis to a tuberculosis facility. This aspect was pointed out by the Chronicle, in⁴⁷ an editorial approving the new construction.

On August 3, 1949, shortly after his original announcement regarding the charity hospital construction, Mayor Holcombe revealed, through a Houston Chronicle story, that the scope of the proposed construction had grown from a five million dollar to a 7.5 million dollar facility. He stated that the increased money would be used to build an

⁴⁷Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, August 7, 1949.

outstanding outpatient clinic as a part of the new hospital. Listing the proposed sources of funds, he pointed out that the county government had been asked to hold a 1.5 million dollar bond election to secure charity hospital construction money, which would be added to the 1.7 million from the city tuberculosis hospital bonds already voted, the 1.5 million dollars each from the Cullen and Anderson Foundations, and the .5 million dollar state money pledged to build a tuberculosis hospital.

More plans for the proposed hospital were revealed in a Houston Chronicle story on August 9, 1949, which stated that Alfred C. Finn had been chosen as architect for the new charity hospital, with H. E. Maddox and C. A. Johnson as associates. In the story the purpose of the proposed outpatient clinic was outlined as a teaching facility for Texas Medical Center schools, including Baylor University School of Medicine, Texas University Postgraduate School, University of Houston School of Optometry, and the Texas University School of Dentistry. Though there had been some talk of placing the new outpatient clinic in a building separated from the proposed charity hospital building, local government officials decided to include the clinic within the hospital building, due to opposition, expressed by doctors in private practice, to the clinic's growing scope. The governing board of the new charity hospital was to have control of operations of the clinic. Inclusion of the clinic,

argued these officials, would relieve the other hospitals in the Texas Medical Center from having to devote large outpatient clinic space in their building plans.⁴⁸

A building committee for the new charity hospital was formed, consisting of Ben Taub, Chairman of the Jefferson Davis Hospital Board, H. R. Cullen, Col. W. B. Bates, County Judge Glenn A. Perry and Houston Mayor Oscar Holcombe. To assist them the building committee proposed a technical advisory committee composed of representatives from Baylor University College of Medicine and the University of Texas Medical units at the Texas Medical Center, the President of Harris County Medical Society, and the Chief of Staff at Jefferson Davis City-County Hospital.⁴⁹ Charity hospital financing which had been hoped for began to take shape with the passage of the county's 1.5 million dollar hospital bond issue on January 27, 1950. The M. D. Anderson Foundation made an offer to match the 1.5 million dollar Cullen Foundation grant, contingent on construction of the new hospital within three years and on inclusion of a major outpatient clinic in that hospital.⁵⁰

On June 13, 1951, the City of Houston passed an ordinance approving an agreement between the Anderson Founda-

⁴⁸Houston Chronicle, August 9, 1949.

⁴⁹Houston Chronicle, August 9, 1949.

⁵⁰Houston Chronicle, January 27, 1950.

tion, the Cullen Foundation, the Texas Medical Center, Inc., the City of Houston and Harris County for the construction⁵¹ of a new 7.5 million dollar city-county charity hospital. The ordinance approved selection of Alfred Finn and Associates as architects for the new charity facility. It was agreed that if federal money could not be obtained, the hospital would be built with the six million dollars then available. Harris County Commissioners Court, by a July 10, 1951 resolution, approved the agreement to build the⁵² new hospital. The county's resolution stipulated that the county would in no way be bound or obligated to pay any definite proportion of the maintenance or operation of the new hospital facilities. However, in the last paragraph of the agreement the city and county recognized a moral obligation to provide a budget for operation of the new city⁵³ hospital.

Though the city-county agreement contained no definite provision for operation financing of the new hospital, architects were instructed to proceed with preparation of plans for the proposed facility. The plans were to be drawn so that the size of the hospital could be doubled from six

⁵¹ Minutes of the Houston City Council, VV: 165.

⁵² Minutes of the Commissioners Court, 22: 325.

⁵³ Ibid.

hundred to twelve hundred beds.⁵⁴ Col. W. B. Bates, in discussing operations financing, pointed out that the city and county would have two years to work out the problems, since construction would take that long.⁵⁵ County Judge Bob Casey complained that operations financing should have been taken care of before the county voted on bonds, though he noted that the vote was before he assumed office. Casey offered as a possibility for operations financing the creation of a hospital district, which was then being explored as a public hospital financing plan by many Texas metropolitan areas.⁵⁶

After plans for the proposed hospital were submitted to the city and county the hospital committee disclosed that the six million dollars originally proposed for construction was totally inadequate, due to the postwar inflation. Further, the finished plans had evolved with eleven stories, four more than originally proposed. Consequently, the hospital committee appealed for an additional 4.5 million dollars each from the city and county governments to build what had become a sixteen million dollar facility. Bond elections for this amount were set for both city and county.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Houston Chronicle, July 8, 1951.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Houston Chronicle, July 8, 1951.

⁵⁷Houston Chronicle, October 21, 1952.

Very little publicity was given to the proposed city and county bond issues prior to the actual elections. There appeared to be no concerted plan to assure their passage. Apparently, government officials and Baylor supporters who desired passage of these bonds, thought that a community consensus existed as to the desirability of their passage, and expected them to receive approval. Endorsements in the form of editorials were published by the Houston Chronicle and the Houston Post several days before both the city and county elections. The Houston Press took no stand on these issues and, in fact, took very little note of either bond vote except to report on the result of the election. On October 31, 1952, four days prior to the county bond election, the Chronicle wrote:

The present city-county charity hospital, Jefferson Davis on Buffalo Drive, is overtaxed to handle its patient load with the five hundred beds it has. Passage of the bonds is in the best interests of the community.⁵⁸

On August 23, 1952, the 4.5 million city bond issue for the new charity hospital passed by a vote of 21,028 to 11,924. In November of the same year, county hospital bonds in the same amount were approved by a vote of 104,413 to 44,153. Thus it would appear that a consensus did in fact exist within Harris County on the desire to build a new charity hospital.

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Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, October 31, 1952.

From Consensus to Conflict

Following passage of the county bonds, County Judge Bob Casey commented that the resulting funds would finance a great charity hospital with a "first class diagnostic clinic second to none in the United States."⁵⁹ It was this planned diagnostic clinic, however, which triggered determined and organized opposition to further charity hospital efforts, and replaced a seeming consensus among community leaders with the seeds of political conflict. The proposed diagnostic clinic was to operate on a pay and charity basis, handling patients sent to the clinic by physicians for diagnosis by medical specialists. The Houston Chronicle, on May 1, 1953, noted in a straight story that Houston doctors disagreed on how the giant diagnostic clinic for the proposed city-county hospital should be operated and that this might cause another delay in the erection of the sixteen million dollar institution. There appeared to be very violent disagreement within the Harris County Medical profession on the proposed clinic and hospital.

Physicians objected to the proposed clinic because it would care for both pay and charity patients; because it would give doctors on the clinic staff an advantage over physicians in private practice; and because it would be

⁵⁹ The Houston Post, November 5, 1952.

mixing government and private medicine.⁶⁰ Dr. John K. Glen, President of the Harris County Medical Society and a member of the technical advisory body assisting the hospital building committee, voiced objections to the pay clinic, calling it a duplication of service already existing in private hospitals in the medical center.⁶¹ The physician's opposition was reported in all three newspapers in some detail. Feature stories on the conflict were carried in the Houston Chronicle.

Objections of the medical fraternity to the proposed outpatient clinic were serious enough to give the hospital proponents some concern. While acknowledging that Baylor University and the Texas Medical Center directors were anxious to obtain a large teaching clinic as a part of the new charity hospital, city and county officials realized that unless Harris County physicians were satisfied with the facilities and organization of the hospital, it risked being a failure. Dr. Fredrick C. Elliot, executive director of the Texas Medical Center, noted that there had been a "misunderstanding" among doctors "over details of the clinic," but predicted that plans would be "worked out" so as not to cause any delay in construction of the new hospital.⁶² The beginning of construction of the new hospital, however, was

⁶⁰ Houston Chronicle, May 1, 1953.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

delayed. Plans for the proposed pay diagnostic clinic were withdrawn by the hospital building committee, and a "research institute" was substituted for the clinic. Upon removal of the clinic from hospital plans, the Cullen and Anderson Foundations withdrew 250,000 dollars each from their pledges of 1.5 million dollars.⁶³

Efforts to resolve the problems of the proposed new hospital continued. On July 9, 1953, a meeting between Houston Mayor Roy Hofheinz, County Judge Bob Casey, Harris County Medical Society officials, Baylor Medical School Dean Stanley Olsen, and Baylor representative Leon Jaworski was held to determine what money was available and to decide whether efforts should be made to seek federal funds to aid in construction.⁶⁴ Federal funds in the amount of 1.5 million dollars were applied for under the Hill-Burton act and were granted on February 16, 1954, contingent on commencement of construction by March, 1956.⁶⁵ This federal money brought the total available construction funds to 15,600,000.00 dollars. On January 25, 1954, Ben Taub, Chairman of the Charity Hospital Board and a member of the Charity Hospital Building Committee, stated, in a press release to the Houston Chronicle, that hospital plans were ready and predicted that construction bids would be taken

⁶³Houston Post, July 7, 1953.

⁶⁴Houston Chronicle, July 9, 1953.

⁶⁵Houston Post, February 16, 1954.

in the fall of 1954.

It was revealed by Mayor Roy Hofheinz in a Houston Chronicle story on November 17, 1954, that consideration was being given by the hospital building committee to adding a receiving hospital located north of Buffalo Bayou as a unit of the proposed new city-county hospital. Hofheinz's announcement came after City Councilman George Kessler had pointed out that construction of the city-county hospital in the Texas Medical Center left the north side of Houston without facilities. The north side, Kessler had argued, was the area most in need of charity hospital facilities. Such⁶⁶ a branch hospital plan, however, was not adopted.

By the fall of 1954, the city and county officials were ready to advertise for bids on the proposed charity hospital. Everything seemed complete except for the question of operating funds for the hospital upon its completion. The question of the source of these funds had been mostly ignored in public statements by city and county officials, though it was recognized that the hospital operating budget would be much greater after construction of the new facility. City and county leaders, however, had been working to help secure passage of a state constitutional amendment authorizing the creation of a hospital district as a source of funds and had been successful in their efforts.

⁶⁶

Houston Chronicle, November 17, 1964.

THE HOSPITAL DISTRICT QUESTION

On November 24, 1954, County Judge Bob Casey noted that the county was ready to go ahead with construction of the new hospital except for the possibility of the creation of a hospital district in Harris County to finance operations of that hospital.⁶⁷ Casey thought that the establishment

of a hospital district and the beginning of a new hospital construction should coincide. On April 30, 1955, the Houston Chronicle revealed that city and county officials had agreed to postpone hospital construction until a hospital district election was held. The Commissioner's Court, on presentation of proper petitions, set up an election to be held September 17, 1955, placing before the voters the question of the creation of a hospital district. The hospital district's authority was set out to build, equip and operate a charity hospital. It was to be able to levy a seventy five cent real property tax per one hundred dollar valuation based on the county assessment

⁶⁸ratio. The hospital issue was not the sole question put before the Harris County voters in this election. In addition, five bond issues for the existing navigation district, one road bond issue, and a freeway wheel tax were presented to the voters on the same ballot. On September

⁶⁷Houston Chronicle, November 24, 1954.

⁶⁸Houston Post, September 4, 1955.

17, 1955, the participating voters of Harris County voted, 30,667 to 10,405, against the formation of a hospital district in Harris County, as well as defeating all bond issues.⁶⁹ Only the wheel tax received voter approval.

Defeat of the hospital district prevented construction of the sixteen million dollar city-county charity hospital in the Texas Medical Center. On February 7, 1956, in a Houston Chronicle story, Houston Mayor Oscar Holcombe questioned the need for a sixteen million dollar hospital, quoting statistics which showed that in the prior five years the number of families which could qualify for charity care had decreased from 31 percent to 26 percent of the county's population. Federal Hill-Burton money of 1.5 million was withdrawn by the Federal Government from funds available to the county for charity hospital construction⁷⁰ on March 12, 1956.

Since the question of actual need seemed to need some objective analysis, city and county officials sought to bring in an expert opinion. City and county governments paid sixteen thousand dollars each to Ross Garrett and Associates, a Chicago based hospital consulting firm, to conduct a survey of the needs and available resources in⁷¹ the city-county hospital program. In his report Ross

⁶⁹Houston Post, September 17, 1955.

⁷⁰Houston Chronicle, March 12, 1956.

⁷¹Houston Post, February 28, 1956.

Garrett recommended construction of a new 350 bed general charity hospital, remodeling of Jefferson Davis Hospital into a 307 bed hospital for chronic diseases, and construction of a new tuberculosis hospital near the Jefferson Davis Hospital. It did not outline a financing plan to pay for the operation of these hospitals.⁷²

In order to pay for the operation of any hospital built under recommendations of the Garrett survey, it was apparent that the financing issue had to be faced again. The city had begun to insist that the county take over the entire financial burden of this charity hospital program. Consequently, the Harris County Hospital District Association, under the chairmanship of Louis Welch, circulated petitions for a second hospital district election, which was set for August 24, 1957. The hospital district was the sole issue on the ballot. Voters, in the smallest turnout of all five hospital district elections, defeated the proposal by a vote of 20,371 to 8,198.⁷³ Again, city and county officials decided not to build a new charity hospital. Instead, plans were discussed for enlarging the Jefferson Davis outpatient clinic.⁷⁴ After two defeats for the hospital district, there appeared to be no way of taking on

⁷²Houston Post, June 27, 1956.

⁷³Houston Post, August 24, 1957.

⁷⁴Houston Chronicle, August 26, 1957.

enlarged financial responsibilities, which the new hospital would have imposed. Events followed, however, which resurrected the plans for a new charity hospital.

An outbreak of staphylococcus infection in the Jefferson Davis maternity ward, killing eighteen newly born babies occurred in the spring of 1958. At approximately the same time, hospital accreditation, accorded by the American Hospital Association, was withdrawn from Jefferson Davis Hospital because of the delay in furnishing adequate facilities to relieve the overcrowded conditions. These events led the city and county governments to appoint a special hospital committee to inquire into the charity hospital program and to chart a course of action. The committee recommended that a new twelve million dollar hospital be built at the Texas
75
Medical Center.

In perhaps the most bitter political battle fought over the charity hospital program, the Harris County Medical Society attacked the proposed Texas Medical Center site. Petitions were circulated by the medical group which forced the city to hold a referendum on the location of the proposed hospital. The three Houston newspapers maintained an editorially neutral position on this question. On July 26, 1958, by a vote of 41,949 to 38,738, voters approved the Texas Medical Center site. A construction contract for the

new hospital was let to the Manhattan Construction Company on May 10, 1960.⁷⁶ This hospital, which was named Ben Taub, was equipped with 350 beds and cost nine million dollars. To finance operations of the new hospital, a third hospital district election was held October 21, 1961, while construction of Ben Taub was still underway. Paired with a flood control bond issue, which incidentally passed, the hospital district was defeated by a vote of 27,934 to 5,881.⁷⁷

The new Ben Taub hospital opened its doors to the public in 1963. All charity work formerly carried out in Jefferson Davis was transferred to Ben Taub while renovation was carried out at the old hospital. When both hospitals were completed, the operations budget for charity hospitals had increased to over eight million dollars, almost twice the former Jefferson Davis Hospital budget. Two more hospital district elections were held in 1965 to produce an adequate source of operating revenue for the charity hospital system. The first election, involving only the hospital district, was held on January 23, 1965, and failed by a vote of 53,876 to 44,905.⁷⁸ The second was called less than a year later on November 20, 1965, which coincided with state

⁷⁶Houston Post, May 10, 1960.

⁷⁷Houston Chronicle, October 21, 1961.

⁷⁸Houston Post, January 23, 1965.

and local elections. It passed by almost a two to one margin,
with a total vote of 68,756 to 38,923.⁷⁹

⁷⁹Houston Post, November 20, 1965.

CHAPTER III

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The more empirical part of this inquiry, found in the succeeding chapters, focuses on the political content of the Houston Chronicle, the Houston Post, and the Houston Press during the five hospital district campaigns.

DESCRIPTION AND ORGANIZATION OF DATA

Raw data for this study consists of all material concerning the hospital district election found in these three daily newspapers during a two week period immediately preceeding each election. Only those stories which contained explicit reference to the hospital district problem were included in the basic data. Admittedly, this did not include all the stories found in these papers on public hospitilization, public health, and general medicine. However, there was not an appreciable amount of added emphasis on such subjects by the newspapers during the time periods examined. Samples taken from the three newspapers revealed that approximately the same amount of column inches devoted to public and private medicine appeared

before and after the elections, excluding the hospital district stories. This served as justification for limiting the study to specific hospital district stories, coupled with the difficulties of identifying which, if any, of the other medically oriented stories were pertinent to the study.

In order to establish comparability between materials it was necessary to choose for study purposes stories published during a definite and uniform period before each election. Investigation disclosed that over eighty percent of the pertinent stories, as previously defined, occurred within a period of two weeks prior to each election. This fact served as the basis for choosing as study material newspapers published in a two week period before each election.

The raw data quite naturally was gathered in categories consisting of (1) straight stories, (2) feature stories and (3) editorials. These, respectively, correspond somewhat to the journalistic functions of reporting, interpreting and guiding. Of course, there is no such clear cut division of function since straight stories and editorials can and do contain interpretation. A straight story, ideally written by a reporter in an objective manner, would contain "the facts of the day", and would either come from a news source such as a press release or press

conference, or from the efforts of the reporter to seek out factual material. Such straight stories might also contain some background material in order to aid the reader in interpretation, but ideally the primary emphasis in a straight story should be an objective reporting of events.¹

Feature stories were identified by content, and usually, though not always, carried a by-line identifying the reporter who wrote the story. A feature story, ideally, ties together factual stories to present a coherent picture, and might be said to represent the situation as observed by the feature story reporter.² In light of Breed's study,³ on social control in the newsroom, such feature stories might also be expected to reflect the editorial policy of the newspaper, and this hypothesis is examined in the following chapters.

Editorials are traditionally the views of the newspaper editor. There is some argument over whether editorials ought to be thought of as speaking for newspaper management.⁴ In any event, this type of story ideally fulfills

¹James Russell Wiggins, "The News Is the First Concern of the Press", Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 23, p.20.

²Fredrick E. Merwin, "The Reporting of Government News", Bird and Merwin, Editors, The Press and Society, op. cit., p. 215.

³Warren Breed, "Social Control in the Newsroom", Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 38, 1961, p. 289-297.

⁴Charles Merz, "The Editorial Page", The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 219, January 1942, p. 140.

the function of guiding, by expressing an opinion on issues and by criticizing behavior of government and community leaders. In this study, only articles clearly labeled as editorials, though they may have appeared on other than editorial pages, were classified as editorial. Letters to the editor were included in the raw data, but were not classified as editorial material. The function of these letters is discussed in Chapter VI.

The raw data was further categorized by its separation according to its thematic or issue content. An organizing proposition of this study holds that in situations of political conflict, one or more topics of dispute or argument are present, or later arise. These topics, or areas of dispute, are commonly called issues, and in this study, are also referred to as themes. Such issues or themes are the nuclei about which public opinion tends to coalesce.⁵ Some groups within a political dispute seize upon certain of these issues to support their position, while opposing factions will seek to discover and emphasize other issues which will uphold their own interests. It should be noted that these issues or themes may be expressed to either support or oppose a position, but usually an issue will lend itself better to one side in a dispute than to the other.

⁵ Leonard W. Dobb, Public Opinion and Propoganda (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1948), p. 35.

In the present study four basic themes were discovered in the hospital district campaign. Two of these, emphasized by those groups opposing the hospital district, are labeled in this study as "scope of government" and "administrative reform," and are defined, with illustration of their development, in Chapter IV. Supporters of the hospital district relied principally upon two themes which are labeled in this study as "humanitarian appeals" and "economic considerations." These themes are explored in Chapter V.

DIMENSIONS AND INDICATORS OF THE STUDY

Collection and organization of this raw data, employing in some instances rather sophisticated techniques of content analysis and in other instances less complex methods, was made in light of the theoretical framework described above and in Chapter I. The objective of this analysis was to produce indicators which would support conclusions or answers to the four questions outlined in that chapter. Straight stories were examined to determine the news source of the reporter. In the majority of cases this source was explicitly named in the story, and in some others it could be inferred. The reason for this examination was to determine, at least as reflected in the overt behavior observed, the dependence of newspaper reporters on prepared press releases and press conferences for their news sources.

Editorials appearing in the Chronicle, Post and Press were studied to determine (1) if the newspapers took an editorial position on the hospital district and (2) if during the campaign the newspapers were critical of community leaders, particularly those leaders who were also local government officials. Evidence for this determination required no special technique of analysis. A determination of editorial position was gained by reading what the newspaper stated in clearly labeled editorial articles. Throughout this paper, any reference to an editorial policy or position of one of the newspapers is based only on this explicit policy statement, or lack of such statement, by the newspapers.

A study was also made of the degree of editorial flexibility and leadership, which required by a more sophisticated technique. One evidence of flexibility would of course be evident if a newspaper changes from supporting to opposing the hospital district or vice-versa in different elections. Another indicator of flexibility should be found in the variation in emphasis, if any, placed on different themes or issues by editorials written in the five hospital district campaigns. To determine this variation in editorial thematic emphasis, the more involved technique of content analysis was employed.

After having determined newspaper policy as stated

in editorial articles, straight and feature stories were examined to determine how much editorial bias was reflected in these straight and feature stories, and, if such bias existed, how it was evidenced. The techniques of content analysis were employed to furnish indications for this study of editorial bias.

CONTENT ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED

Theme Frequency Analysis

Using a technique of content analysis suggested by Ole R. Holsti,⁶ feature, straight and editorial stories from the Houston Chronicle, the Houston Post, and the Houston Press were analyzed to determine the frequency of occurrence of and the amount of emphasis given to the four basic themes or issues found in the five hospital district elections. In the compilation of statistical tables on these themes, material from the Houston Press has not been included, due to three factors. First, the Press did not take an editorial position on any hospital district election. In the elections held while the Press was being published, the Press did not write a feature or editorial story concerning the hospital district election. Secondly, the

⁶Ole R. Holsti, Robert C. North, M. Georgre Zaninovich, and Diana A. Zinnes, Content Analysis (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1963), p. 7

amount of material found in the Press' straight stories was extremely small compared to the Chronicle and Post, as shown in Tables IV, page 60, Table V, page 61, and Table VI, page 62. Third, the Press published only during the first three of the five elections, suspending publication in 1964. For these reasons, the Press is not included in the frequency-intensity analysis, though tables on story frequency and total column inches are noted at the end of this chapter respectively, on page 59 and page 62. Material from the Press is used in tracing theme development and in analyzing the total performance of the newspapers in the hospital district elections.

Individual paragraphs from the stories found in the Post and Chronicle were used as the unit of study in this frequency and emphasis analysis. While content analysis may generally employ the unit sentence, or in the case of complex sentence the unit statement, the paragraph was ✓
7 deemed sufficient refinement for the purpose of this study. It was found that most of the newspaper paragraphs expressed only one theme, since they usually contained at most one or two sentences. Even much longer paragraphs usually embodied one theme.

✓ In order to assure that unit paragraphs would be judged in their proper context, the paragraphs were clas-

⁷
Ibid., p. 49.

sified into theme categories at the same time the paragraphs were transferred from microfilm records of the complete story to prepared forms. Though approximately ninety five percent of unit paragraph classification was accomplished by only one judge, thirty seven paragraphs from three random samples of stories were classified into themes by two judges as a test for reliability. Judge reliability was computed by dividing the number of category assignments on which both judges agreed by the sum, of all category assignments by all judges. Out of a sample of thirty seven unit paragraphs, judge reliability was computed as 97.8 percent. This amount of agreement, it was believed, indicated both an acceptable amount of judge reliability and a sufficient degree of category reliability.

A total of 1208 unit paragraphs were used in this study, of which 624 came from the Houston Post, and 584 came from the Houston Chronicle. After the 1208 unit paragraphs had been divided into theme categories, a frequency ratio (FR) was determined by using the formula $FR = \frac{N}{T}$ where N represents the number of unit paragraphs found in a single theme category during one election, and T represents the total unit paragraphs included in the study. Frequency ratios were broken down for editorials, feature stories and straight stories. In order to make the FR number more manageable, it was multiplied by one hundred before being

tabulated.

Theme Intensity Measurement by Pair Comparison

Using the "pair comparison" scaling technique as suggested by Dina A. Zinnes,⁸ a relative measure was determined of the intensity or emphasis given to a theme by each of the unit paragraphs. Under this method ten samples of unit paragraphs were chosen at random from the total universe of 1208 unit paragraphs. Forty five possible pairs were obtained from these ten samples.

A pair comparison judgement was made on each of these forty five pairs. In making the comparison, judgement of a "winner" was reached on the basis of this question: which of these two unit paragraphs represents the most intense expression of a given theme? While making judgement an image of each of the four themes was kept in mind by the judge.

In each pair comparison a "winner" received one vote. After all forty five pairs had been judged, the total number of votes for each unit paragraph was computed. From this computation a hierachical ordering for the ten unit paragraphs was obtained, with the highest ranking going to the unit paragraph with the greatest number of votes, descending to the unit paragraph with the least votes.

⁸Holsti, North, Zaninovich and Zinnes, op. cit., pp. 79-89.

Judge reliability in arriving at differences of intensity in unit paragraphs was determined by the number of "ties" produced in the ranking of these ten paragraphs. A total of four sets of ten samples each were ranked as described above. In two attempts no "ties" occurred, which indicated judge consistency in evaluating the intensity of paragraphs. In the remaining two sets, one "tie" occurred in each, and this was held to be within permissible limits.⁹ This consistency of ranking also indicated an acceptable degree of distinctness in the items being judged, and indicated a reasonable reliability in the theme concepts employed in this study.

Since the unit paragraph samples were chosen at random from the total universe of unit paragraphs, it was assumed that each of these represented an example of theme expression intensity for a ten point scale. By combining every two degrees on this ten point scale a five point scale was achieved. Ranked unit paragraphs from all four sets of trials were ordered in this manner. Thus a sort of "ruler" was produced consisting of five degrees of intensity, ranging from "least intense" to "most intense". Each degree of intensity contained eight unit paragraph samples.

Using this "ruler" as a reference, forty random

⁹
Ibid.

sample unit paragraphs were scaled. Each unit paragraph was compared to the "ruler" by asking the question: what group of statements does this unit paragraph most resemble in terms of intensity of theme expression? The answer to this question determined the scale value of each unit paragraph. In a test for judge reliability as recommended by Zinnes,¹⁰ the forty samples were scaled twice by the same judge. A difference between the first and second trials was three in forty choices, and each different choice varied by one degree of intensity.

The remaining universe of 1128 unit paragraphs was then scaled by comparison with the "ruler". Each of the five resulting intensity groupings was broken down into five election year categories, which were further divided into the four theme classifications. A further division by editorial, straight and feature story type produced a total of three hundred groupings. In order to determine a ratio of prominence, PR, a formula $PR = \frac{N \times I}{F}$ was used, in which N represented the number of unit paragraphs in that grouping; I represented the intensity scale computed for these unit paragraphs, and F represented the total universe of unit paragraphs in the study. This ratio of prominence, or emphasis factor, served as an index to determine the relative value of importance given each theme by the newspapers

¹⁰ Ibid.

during each election. Before recording this data in tabular form the PR number was multiplied by one hundred to make it more manageable.

TABLE I
NUMBER OF STORIES BY STORY TYPE

	<u>HOUSTON CHRONICLE</u>					<u>TOTAL</u>
	<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>	
Straight	10	12	5	20	6	53
Feature	5	8	0	2	3	18
Editorial	1	4	1	7	6	19
Letter to Editor	1	4	1	3	5	14
Total	17	28	7	32	20	104

TABLE II
NUMBER OF STORIES BY STORY TYPE

	<u>HOUSTON POST</u>					
	<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Straight	6	17	3	16	13	55
Feature	2	4	0	2	4	12
Editorial	2	2	2	21	3	30
Letter to Editor	1	6	5	8	13	33
Totals	11	29	10	47	33	130

TABLE 'III
NUMBER OF STORIES BY TYPE
HOUSTON PRESS

	<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>
Straight	3	1	1
Feature	0	0	2
Editorial	0	0	0
Letter to Editor	0	1	1
Total	3	2	4

TABLE IV
COVERAGE IN COLUMN INCHES BY STORY TYPE

	<u>HOUSTON CHRONICLE</u>					
	<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Straight	115	171	121	282	91	780
Feature	143	175	0	82	150	550
Editorial	4	79	5	57	106	251
Letter to Editor	4	20	4	17	21	66
Total	266	445	130	438	368	1647

TABLE V
COVERAGE IN COLUMN INCHES BY STORY TYPE

	<u>HOUSTON POST</u>					
	<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Straight	133	224	71	216	146	790
Feature	118	194	0	65	107	484
Editorial	18	16	30	119	43	226
Letter to Editor	7	23	22	52	62	166
Total	276	457	123	452	358	1666

TABLE VI
 COVERAGE IN COLUMN INCHES BY STORY TYPE
HOUSTON PRESS

	<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>
Straight	19	10	12
Feature	0	0	13
Editorial	0	0	0
Letter to Editor	0	2	2
Total	19	12	27

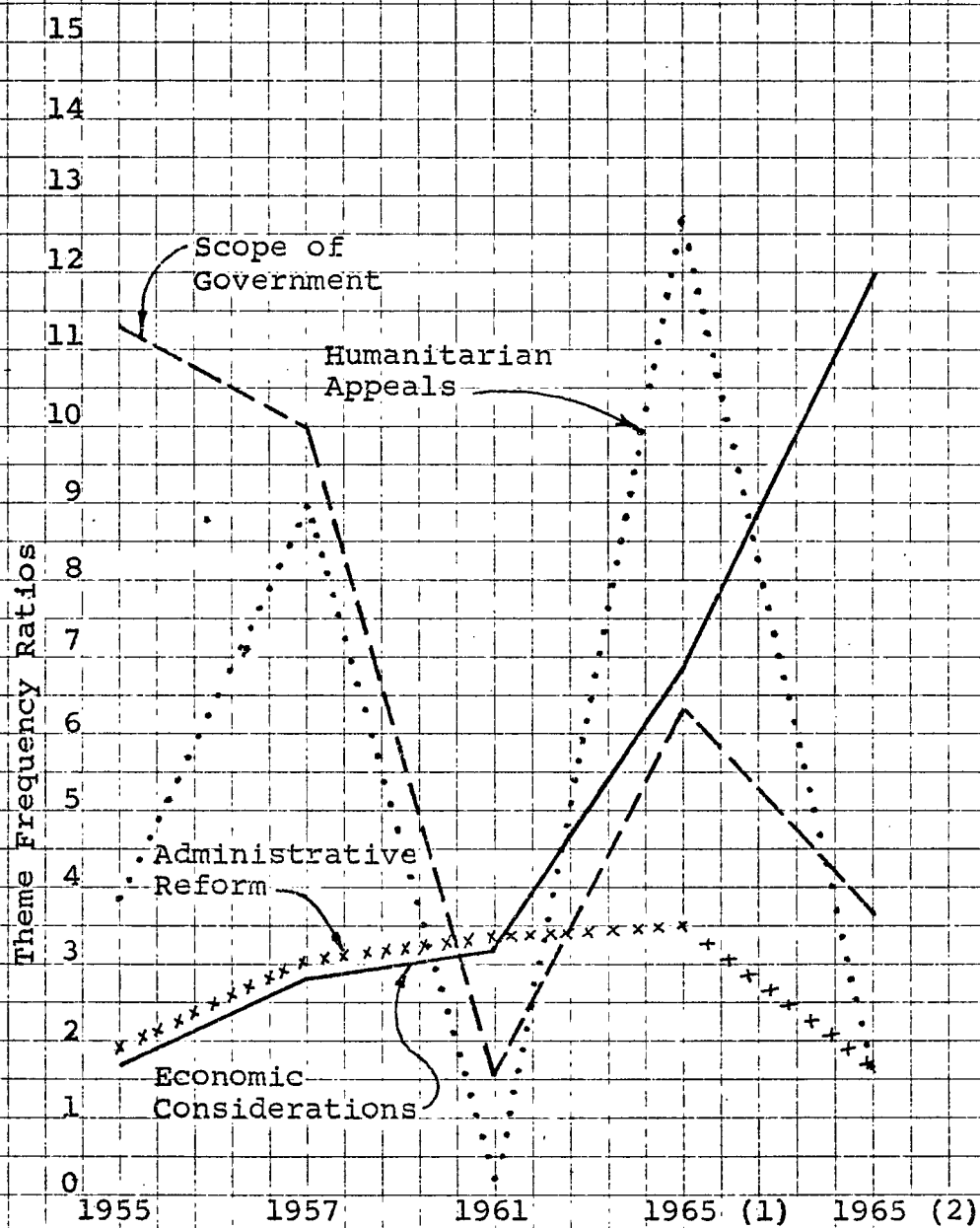


FIGURE 1

THEME FREQUENCY RATIOS
COMBINED FOR CHRONICLE AND POST

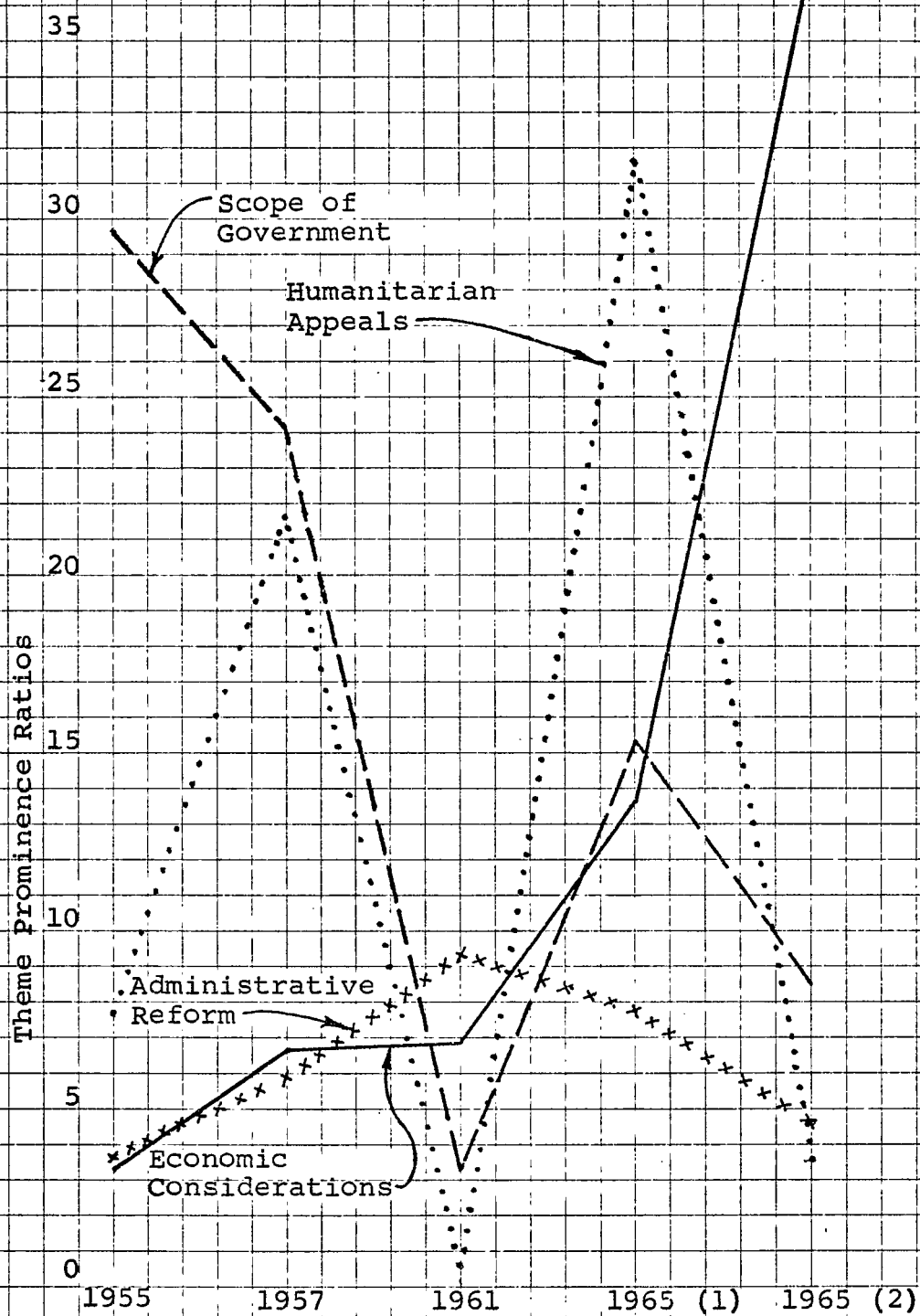


FIGURE 2

THEME PROMINENCE RATIOS
COMBINED FOR CHRONICLE AND POST

CHAPTER IV

HOSPITAL DISTRICT ISSUES:

THE AMOUNT AND TYPE OF GOVERNMENT

Two themes which occurred in the hospital district conflict have been referred to in this paper as the scope of government and administrative reform. These themes have been grouped together in this chapter for two reasons. First, they are in some respects closely allied. Secondly, these themes or issues were used in the principal arguments against creation of the hospital district. It should be emphasized that this was not always the case, as hospital supporters at times employed these themes in their arguments, especially in the case of the administrative reform theme. The scope of government theme, however, was skillfully utilized by hospital district opponents.

THE SCOPE OF GOVERNMENT THEME

The term scope of government as used in this paper is concerned with the quantity of public resources devoted to the indigent hospital program. This issue involves the ideological question of whether local government ought to enlarge its efforts in caring for the indigent sick. In light of this issue, disputants took their stands, based not on the needs of the patients being cared for, but on their

conceptions of the proper limits of local government action in the field of public hospitalization. In essence this issue deals with the relative merits of enlarged public responsibility for medical care as opposed to the retention of this responsibility by the private sector of the community.

Though the Chronicle published six more stories than the Post in the two week period prior to the 1955 hospital district campaign, the total number of column inches devoted to the subject by each paper is remarkably similar. A comparison of Table IV, page 60, and Table V, page 61, reveals that the Post, with 276 column inches, published slightly more than the 266 column inches which appeared in the Chronicle. Further comparison reveals that editorial comment accounted for only a small amount of the total coverage in either paper: by far the greater amount of space was devoted to feature and straight stories. While the Post gave more emphasis to straight stories and the Chronicle devoted more space to feature stories, there is not a significant difference between the two papers in their straight and feature coverage.

This similarity lends added import to the difference found between the two newspapers in the frequency and prominence ratios on the scope of government theme. Table VII, page 67, shows a total frequency ratio of 3.98 in the Post for this theme, while the Chronicle featured the scope of

TABLE VII
FREQUENCY RATIO BY STORY TYPE

		<u>SCOPE OF GOVERNMENT</u>				
<u>Post</u>		<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>
	Straight	2.07	2.65	.50	2.07	1.08
	Feature	1.41	2.23	.00	.66	.25
	Editorial	.50	.25	.00	.25	.00
	Total	3.98	5.13	.50	3.48	1.33
 <u>Chronicle</u>						
	Straight	3.48	2.15	.70	2.31	1.74
	Feature	3.64	1.99	.00	.50	.33
	Editorial	.16	.75	.25	.50	.16
	Total	7.28	4.89	.95	3.31	2.23

TABLE VIII
FREQUENCY RATIO BY STORY TYPE

		<u>SCOPE OF GOVERNMENT</u>				
<u>Post</u>		<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>
	Straight	4.80	5.46	0.70	3.22	2.23
	Feature	4.13	5.54	0.00	2.15	.91
	Editorial	2.31	1.07	0.00	.91	0.00
	Total	11.24	12.07	0.70	6.28	3.14
 <u>Chronicle</u>						
	Straight	6.95	4.80	1.49	3.65	3.16
	Feature	10.76	4.30	0.00	2.23	.83
	Editorial	.82	2.90	.99	3.22	1.49
	Total	18.53	12.00	2.48	9.10	5.48

government theme almost twice that amount. When viewed in terms of story type, Table VII, page 67, reveals that the Chronicle devoted one third more space than the Post to the scope of government theme in straight stories, and more than twice as much space in feature stories. Strangely enough, in the editorial comments, the Post employed this theme over three times as much as the Chronicle, though the amount of editorial comment by either paper is relatively small when compared to the space devoted to straight and feature stories.

That the Chronicle emphasized this theme more than the Post is shown again in Table VIII, page 68, which shows a prominence ratio of 18.53 for the Chronicle and 11.24 for the Post. Straight and feature stories again account for the largest part of the emphasis accorded the scope of government theme in both newspapers. As with the degree of frequency, the prominence accorded this theme in the Chronicle is about one third greater than the Post in straight stories, and over twice as great in feature stories.

To sum up, since the total column inches for both papers in the first hospital district campaign is quite similar, it is clear that the Chronicle accorded a much greater emphasis to the scope of government theme than did the Post, and that this greater emphasis occurred principally in straight and feature stories. Some of the differ-

ence might be accounted for by several factors, such as a difference in editorial and reportorial personnel and access to different sources of news. However, the most significant reason lies in the difference in editorial policy of these two papers toward the hospital district during the 1955 election campaign. Though it had editorially supported the voting of city and county bonds to build a new charity hospital in 1952, the Chronicle opposed creation of the hospital district in the 1955 vote. The Post, on the other hand, offered editorial support to formation of a hospital district.

The Chronicle's reliance on the scope of government theme, in opposing the hospital district is clearly indicated in an editorial published in that newspaper. On September 13, 1955, the Chronicle recommended defeat of the hospital district proposition, stating that creation of a "new taxing agency which would add fifty percent to the county's tax bill" would be "unjustifiable" unless absolute need were shown. The article maintained that indigent medical care should have to compete with the "multitudenous other needs of the community" for financing. With the exception of comparatively minor changes in Jefferson Davis, which would be absorbed by the existing tax rates, the Chronicle recommended keeping the area of indigent hospital facilities and services within the limits then occupied.¹

¹Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, September 13, 1965.

In the 1955 hospital district election opponents of the hospital district were both determined and articulate. In prepared press releases the opponents employed the arguments based on the scope of government theme to attack the district. These releases were used in both papers in straight and feature stories. Further, groups which favored the hospital district spent much of their efforts in answering these attacks. The initiative in choosing the 1955 campaign issue seemed to rest primarily with the opposition forces. Hospital district supporters were mostly on the defensive. Thus, even in the Post, which supported the district, it is not surprising to find a large emphasis in straight and feature stories devoted to the scope of government issue. Hospital district opponents seized every opportunity to get publicity in the newspapers. Figures 1, page 63, and figure 2, page 64, show that the scope of government theme was the most frequently mentioned and most prominent of all themes in the first election.

Tom Martin, in a Post feature story, identified the organized opponents to the hospital district as the Tax Research Association and the executive board of the Harris County Medical Society.² The Tax Research Association, in a prepared statement, objected to creating a new governmental

²The Houston Post, September 4, 1955.

agency "at a time when governments are aiming at unified³ and centralized control of government functions." Further study should be done on the advisability of the hospital building program, the Tax Research Association argument continued, because in "these times of unparalleled prosperity, more and more people are able to pay for medical care."⁴ Since the charity hospital could collect from patients who were able to pay, it would compete with other hospitals in the county which were run on a non-profit basis.⁵

Both the Tax Research Association and the Harris County Medical Society objected to giving public hospitalization special treatment in the competition for public funds by the creation of a special taxing district. Such a precedent, argued the medical society, in a statement issued by the society president, would cause other governmental agencies to seek status independent of city and county rule.⁶ The physicians further argued that creation of the hospital district would allow the district to contract with the federal government for treatment of patients, and the medical group objected to the idea of the federal government contracting for medical care with a hospital supported by local tax money.⁷

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

In answer to the hospital district critics, Dr. Stanley W. Olsen, Dean of the Baylor University School of Medicine, issued a statement in which he pointed out that "all-out participation" of the Harris County Medical Society in the hospital district election had been marked by a number of "startling and unprecedented" departures⁸ from the traditional role physicians generally play. Dean Olsen attributed the medical society's actions to a "violent fear of socialized medicine."⁹ Though he could see no more evidence of socialized medicine in the creation of the hospital district than in the work already being done at Jefferson Davis Hospital, Dean Olsen remarked that "you can find something under any bed if you look long enough."¹⁰

Although sympathizing with the medical society's fears of socialized medicine, County Judge Bob Casey defended the hospital district. In a press conference, he reminded critics that the Commissioners court was "not prone to furnish charity hospitalization at the taxpayer's expense to those able to pay."¹¹ Pointing to the importance of the scope of government theme, the Post editorialized that the principal issue in the 1955 hospital district

⁸Houston Chronicle, September 9, 1955.

⁹Ibid. ¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Houston Post, September 16, 1955.

election was whether the people of Harris County were
 "willing to provide adequate medical care for the indi-
¹²
 gent?"

In the second hospital district campaign, preceding the 1957 election, both newspapers show a similar prominence ratio on the scope of government theme, with 12.07 for the Post and 12.00 for the Chronicle. Since both newspapers supported the hospital district in the second election, this similarity is not surprising. On August 23, 1957, the Post editorially commented:

Too long we have neglected the problem of the charity hospital. It is a critical problem, and its solution can no longer be delayed. The city and county have a moral as well as a legal obligation to take care of the indigent sick.¹³

In an editorial the Chronicle endorsed the district, defending it in terms of the scope of government issue. It stated:

The State constitution placed the responsibility of providing medical care for the indigent sick on each county. That is proper. Each community should take care of its own unfortunate.¹⁴

Viewing both papers together, Table VII, page 67, and Table VIII, page 68, show that, while in 1957 the scope of government theme has large ratios of frequency

¹² Editorial in the Houston Post, September 14, 1955.

¹³ Editorial in the Houston Post, August 23, 1957.

¹⁴ Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, August 23, 1957.

and of prominence, the totals are less than in the 1955 campaign. Moreover, Table IV, page 60, and Table V, page 61, shows that both the Chronicle and the Post devoted more column inches of space to the hospital district controversy in 1957 than in 1955, which would indicate a relative decline in emphasis accorded by the newspapers to the scope of government theme. This is shown graphically in Figure 2, page 64. This indicates that the question as to the proper limits of local government in public hospitalization was still unresolved, and that it still occupied an important place in the dispute. However, the relative decrease in emphasis can be attributed to a better organized campaign by the hospital district supporters. As they moved to the offensive, these proponents, including now both newspapers, interjected other issues into the campaign.

Defenders of the hospital district had now set up a public relations campaign in which, through prepared statements initiated by important citizens, they sought to turn the scope of government theme to their advantage. Ben C. Belt, President of the Houston Chamber of Commerce, endorsed the hospital district, stating that the Chamber recognized the need to enlarge and broaden hospital facilities, and that the Chamber "believed the creation of a

hospital district would be a sound procedure."¹⁵ R. E. Smith, a prominent financier, announced that he was for more hospital facilities for those who are unable to pay,¹⁶ and for that reason, he supported the hospital district. The Harris County Medical Society seemed to be less unified than before. Dr. Alexander, a Pasadena physician, stated, "If it takes a hospital district to open up these expansion plans, then I am for it."¹⁷ Marguerite Johnson, in a Post feature article, stated:

The charity hospital is necessary to the entire fabric of medical research and teaching from which every person now living may potentially benefit.¹⁸

Opposition arguments emphasizing the scope of government theme came from the same sources as in the 1955 elections. Paul C. Roemer, president of the Harris County Taxpayers League, released a statement in which he declared, "The idea of a separate district with the power to tax is basically wrong."¹⁹ Four days before the second election, the Harris County Medical Board announced its opposition through a press release from its jurisprudence board. Objecting to any relative increase in the dimensions of the

¹⁵Houston Post, August 11, 1957.

¹⁶Houston Post, August 13, 1957.

¹⁷Houston Chronicle, August 21, 1957.

¹⁸Houston Post, August 23, 1957.

¹⁹Houston Post, August 22, 1957.

indigent medical care program, the physicians maintained the normal increase in property values would allow the County over the years to provide better facilities.²⁰ In a prepared brochure, parts of which were quoted in the Chronicle and Post straight stories, the Tax Research Association pointed out that the city and the county were in "excellent condition financially" and implied that a tax district would be unwise.²¹

Table VII, page 67, shows a combined frequency ratio for the scope of government theme of only 1.50 in the 1961 elections, and Table VIII, page 68, shows a combined prominence ratio of only 3.18. This decline in emphasis over past elections cannot be explained satisfactorily without reference to the 1958 referendum submitted to the Houston voters concerning the proposed site of the new charity hospital. Though a decision had been made in 1958 by city and county officials to proceed with construction of the new charity hospital, the Harris County Medical Society bitterly opposed its location. One of the principal arguments concerned the proper limits of the public sphere in charity hospitalization. Dr. Jared E. Clarke

²⁰Houston Post, August 21, 1957.

²¹Houston Chronicle, August 21, 1957.

stated that "some of the Baylor staff might be permitted to use facilities in the new hospital to conduct their private practices."²² The physicians also insisted that the charity patients having hospitalization be released to private hospitals "as soon as possible."²³

In the referendum vote following the bitter controversy, the medical fraternity received its first defeat. Contrary to the physicians' desires, the Texas Medical Center site was chosen by the voters of Houston. By the 1961 election, a major battle in the area of the scope of government had already been waged. This could account for the relative position of the scope of government theme in the third election. By approving construction of the new charity hospital and by fixing its site, a political decision had already been made by the public and their elected officials to enlarge the public sphere in public hospitalization to some degree.

The issue of whether to further enlarge the public sphere in charity hospitalization met a determined indifference from many voters. Pasadena Mayor Comer Whitaker noted this apathy, remarking in a press interview concerning the hospital district that "we haven't discussed it

²² The Houston Chronicle, May 7, 1958.

²³ Ibid.

much."²⁴ South Houston Mayor, G. W. Christy, echoed this sentiment, stating that "I don't know about the hospital district. Many think its just one more taxation scheme for a tax weary people."²⁵ Table IV, page 60, and Table V, page 61, show a total coverage of 253 column inches devoted to the hospital district in the two papers during the two week study preceding the 1961 election, accurately reflecting an overall apathy by the newspapers on most issues in that election. Though the Post opposed the hospital district in the 1961 campaign, while the Chronicle supported the district, neither paper stressed the scope of government issue. Since there was general apathy toward the election by almost everyone except local government officials, there were few press releases, except from local government officials, and very little mention in those of the scope of government theme.

In the first 1965 campaign, both the Chronicle and the Post assumed an editorial position favoring creation of the hospital district. Thus, it is not surprising to find a similarity between the two papers in their frequency and prominence ratios on this issue in straight and feature stories. Taking both papers as a whole, the scope of government issue received more emphasis than in the pre-

²⁴Houston Chronicle, October 15, 1961.

²⁵Ibid.

ceeding election. Despite this higher ranking, the scope of government issue was mostly a rear guard battle area as compared with the earlier elections. Hospital district opposition fighting in the scope of government theme came from several new groups, at least new in name. These groups lacked the prestige of the earlier group. The Harris County Medical Society adopted a neutral course in its press releases, though admitting to a bad split within its ranks on the hospital district question.

It was in reply to the newer opponents that the Chronicle wrote several editorial paragraphs, which account for the relatively high prominence ratio for the Chronicle editorials on the scope of government theme in the first 1965 campaign. One of these newer opponents was the "People for Democratic Freedom", an anonymous group, which circulated a yellow handbill editorially denounced by the Chronicle as a scurrilous attack on the hospital district. The handbill argued that the hospital district would be
²⁶
 "socialism at home", to which the Chronicle replied:

We always thought socialism was the fault of big centralized government and that the way to stop socialism was to show local responsibility. 'Socialism at home' is a contradiction in terms. The creation of a hospital district is a chance to show how much the people of Harris County really want local government.²⁷

²⁶ Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, January 10, 1965.

²⁷ Ibid.

Opposition to the district was also expressed by a
 right wing group called the Conservative Action Committee.²⁸
 The Tri-County Junior Chamber of Commerce, meeting in Katy,
 issued a publicity statement unanimously opposing the hos-
 pital district, calling it a "step toward socialized medi-
 cine" primarily benefitting the "negroid (sic) race."²⁹

By the second 1965 election, the issue of enlarging
 the scope of government had been decided. All that remained
 to decide was the way in which it would be done. The
Chronicle registers a higher ratio of prominence than the
Post in the last election on the scope of government issue
 because it sought editorially to convince the "hard-core"
 still opposing the hospital district that their cause was
 lost, while the Post, at least in editorials, ignored this
 protest group. Opponents to the hospital district fell
 into two classes, the Chronicle stated, in an editorial,
 one of which was a small hard-core group who were deter-
 mined "to sacrifice the welfare of this county's indigent
 ill, to avoid any increase in taxes", and one of
 which was a "confused group".³⁰

Carl S. Smith, County tax assessor and collector, in
 an obvious publicity release, attempted to show that crea-
 tion of the hospital district would not result in a net

²⁸Houston Chronicle, January 14, 1965.

²⁹Houston Post, January 14, 1965.

³⁰Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, November 15, 1965.

increase in the scope of government because the hospital district still rested with the commissioners court.³¹ Perhaps this bit of political sophistry was indicative of the acumen which proponents of the hospital district had amassed enabling them to secure passage for the district in the second 1965 election.

THE THEME OF ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM

As an issue, administrative reform deals primarily with efficiency. The primary question raised in this issue is whether joint control in administration and leadership is better than single control and sole responsibility. Administrative reform is mostly a pragmatic theme. It is concerned with those measures which will produce the best results. Business leaders, in issuing a statement concerning the hospital district, tended to rely on this issue for a large part of their argument. The theme of administrative reform differs from the scope of government and humanitarian appeals themes in that it appeals to reason rather than to the emotions.

In the hospital district conflict, the theme of administrative reform was a major issue in only one campaign. It was persistently present to some degree, but it was

³¹

Houston Chronicle, November 15, 1965.

never exploited by hospital district supporters as it might have been. There were two areas in the hospital district conflict in which questions of divided responsibility of leadership and control were present. First, the theme was raised concerning the relative merits of dual control by the city and county over the public hospital system. In this respect it was primarily a supportive theme for the district. It stressed in this area the need to remove the hospital program from "politics". Second, divided responsibility in control of the professional medical staff in the hospital system was a point in controversy, and it was this aspect of the issue of administrative reform which was employed by the Post to oppose the hospital district. In the first two hospital district election campaigns the issue of administrative reform was raised in only one of these areas.

Table IX, page 84, shows a total frequency ratio for both papers of only 1.82 for the administrative reform theme in the 1955 election. There is, however, a difference between the frequency ratios and the prominence ratios of the Chronicle and the Post on this issue, which might be attributed to the difference in editorial policy which each paper had toward the hospital district. The difference in emphasis occurs in straight and feature stories, since neither paper used this theme in editorial comment during the 1955 election. This emphasis should not be

TABLE IX
FREQUENCY RATIO BY STORY TYPE

		ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM				
		<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>
<u>Post</u>						
	Straight	.83	1.32	2.15	1.32	.16
	Feature	.33	.33	.00	.16	.33
	Editorial	.00	.25	1.16	.00	.16
	Total	1.16	1.90	3.31	1.48	.66
<u>Chronicle</u>						
	Straight	.41	.70	.00	1.15	.41
	Feature	.25	.33	.00	.70	.33
	Editorial	.00	.00	.00	.16	.24
	Total	.66	1.03	.00	2.01	.98

TABLE X

PROMINENCE RATIO BY STORY TYPE

ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM

<u>Post</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>
Straight	1.66	2.48	4.47	2.30	.24
Feature	.83	.75	0.00	.41	.70
Editorial	.00	1.00	4.64	.00	.82
Total	2.49	4.23	9.11	2.71	1.76
 <u>Chronicle</u>					
Straight	.75	1.16	.00	2.48	1.16
Feature	.25	.70	.00	1.66	.57
Editorial	.00	.00	.00	.83	.91
Total	1.00	1.86	.00	4.97	2.65

overemphasized, since the issue did not constitute a major argument in any except the third election. In the first election, the issue of administrative reform was used mostly by proponents of the hospital district. The Post, since it favored the district, used this theme more frequently and with more emphasis than did the Chronicle. Aubrey Calvin, Chairman of the Harris County Hospital District Association, in a Post story, called it "good business" to replace the "split and chaotic city-county authority."³² The net effect of the hospital district, Calvin contended, would be to allow a board appointed by the commissioners court "to devote full time to running the district in an efficient and economical manner."³³ A hospital district would be similar to the then existing Harris County Flood Control District, Calvin argued, in that it would be able to handle county-wide problems³⁴ "efficiently under only one authority".

Though the issue of administrative reform shows a combined total prominence ratio of only 3.49 in the first election, it increases to 6.09 in the 1957 campaign. By the second election campaign, the issue of administrative reform was emphasized by the hospital district supporters,

³² Houston Post, September 4, 1955.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

who stressed the argument that the charity hospital program should be removed from the political battle between city and county. In an interview with the Chronicle, Tol Terrel, president-elect of the American Hospital Association, while visiting in Houston, pointed out that a county-wide hospital district "takes politics out of hospital budgeting", by removing the management of the hospitals from "the whimsies of political budgeteers and putting it in the hands of trained administrators".³⁵ A Post editorial, on August 22, 1957, pointed out that the "long-talked about" new hospital had become a "political football" as City Hall and County Court House argued over the question of responsibility.³⁶ The proposed hospital district, pointed out the Post, would take the matter out of politics.³⁷

Table X, page 85, shows a prominence ratio of 4.23 on the administrative reform theme in the 1957 election, compared to 1.86 for the Chronicle. This is accounted for in part by the editorial emphasis given this theme by the Post, while the Chronicle did not openly editorialize on the issue of administrative reform. It can also be attributed to a series of supposedly straight stories, without any bylines, which occurred daily on the front page of the

³⁵ Houston Chronicle, August 20, 1957.

³⁶ Editorial in the Houston Post, August 22, 1957.

³⁷ Ibid.

Post. These stories were, in effect, planted editorials, though not labeled as such, and designed to keep the campaign before the public. Serving the same purpose as an editorial in that they presented a consistent viewpoint, these stories appeared, each day, as "statements" from influential citizens. Many of these employed the theme of administrative reform. O'Banion Williams, a Houston business executive, rejected divided responsibility as an "efficient administrative set up".³⁸ James E. Elkins, a prominent civic leader, referred to the joint city-county administration of the charity hospital as "badly scattered administration."³⁹ If the city-county operations were taken out of politics by the hospital district, the taxpayers money would be "spent more wisely, go farther, and accomplish more," asserted⁴⁰ John Freeman, a Texas Medical Center board member.

It is of interest that, although the peak frequency ratio for the administrative reform issue occurred during the first 1965 election, the preceeding 1961 campaign was the peak period of intensity for this issue. As can be seen from Table IX, page 84, all mention of the administrative reform issue came from the Post in the 1961 election;

³⁸Houston Post, August 20, 1957.

³⁹Houston Post, August 13, 1957.

⁴⁰Houston Post, August 18, 1957.

it was around this issue that the Post, for the first and only time, opposed creation of the hospital district.

The Post's opposition was a protest against the possibility of divided responsibility in controlling the professional staffing of the charity hospitals. In an effort to placate the medical fraternity, city and county officials offered partial control of professional staffing to the Harris County Medical Society and the University of Texas Post-graduate School of Medicine. It was apparently hoped by the city and county that this offering would bring support for the hospital district or at least quiet any active opposition. Though smarting from the 1958 charity hospital site referendum defeat, the medical group was still expressing anger at Baylor's sole control of the charity hospital staff.⁴¹

Emphasis in the Post on this issue was divided somewhat evenly between editorial and straight stories. In an editorial dated October 18, 1961, the Post questioned whether or not the Commissioner's Court was going to allow professional staffing control to be divided between the Harris County Medical Society and the two medical schools. If such a divided responsibility were allowed, the Post maintained, "conflict and confusion" would result, which would not be in the best interests of the indigent patients.

⁴¹

Houston Post, October 19, 1961.

Under such a divided control, the editorial continued, the quality of medical care would deteriorate. The Post refused to sanction the hospital district unless Commissioner's Court gave assurance that control of professional staffing would rest only with Baylor Medical School.⁴² In a story dated October 19, the Post reported that a poll of the County Commissioners had been conducted by the newspaper, and that all the commissioners had "kept the door open to finding a way to provide beds in the hospital for use by the Medical Society and the University of Texas Post-graduate School of Medicine", in addition to Baylor. Just prior to the 1961 election, the Post took an editorial⁴³ position against the hospital district.

It is quite significant that the Chronicle took no note of the plan which county officials had for dividing professional control of staffing in the charity hospital. Though the Chronicle displayed a certain apathy in the 1961 campaign, it nevertheless stated openly in editorial articles that it favored creation of the hospital district. In straight, feature and editorial stories, the Chronicle avoided any comment on the plan for divided control, as reported in the Post, and in fact, did not even mention it.

⁴² Editorial in the Houston Post, October 18, 1961.

⁴³ Editorial in the Houston Post, October 21, 1961.

Perhaps, because of its editorial stand, the Post overplayed this issue, but the difference between the two newspapers' coverage on this issue, viewed in terms of their editorial positions, is a significant example of how the news was given editorial slant, even in straight and feature stories.

In the last two elections, both the Chronicle and the Post supported the hospital district plan. Both papers gave the theme of administrative reform a relatively high degree of frequency and emphasis, especially in the first 1965 election. Before the fourth election, a Chronicle editorial noted that "city and county governments have been arguing since 1923" over which had responsibility to finance the charity hospital.⁴⁴ As the editorial pointed out, the citizens of Harris County, which of course included the citizens of Houston, and the charity patients were caught in the middle of the argument.⁴⁵ After 42 years of bickering, the Chronicle felt that it was time to put hospital authority in a hospital district "that cannot pass the buck."⁴⁶ In several feature stories, before the first 1965 election, the Chronicle stated this indictment of divided city-county efforts in a relatively emphatic manner. In a

⁴⁴ Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, January 15, 1965.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

feature story titled "Crisis of Conscience: The Hospital District", Chronicle reporter Saul Friedman wrote:

How will the district change things? The board will have the authority to set its own budget according to the amount of revenue expected from taxes. No more will City or County hold the purse strings: no more will the City or County be able to cut the funds so that needed personnel cannot be hired.⁴⁷

Much of the material on the administrative reform theme in the first 1965 election, in both the Chronicle and Post, came from straight stories reporting statements released by hospital district proponents. In a mild self-reproach, former County Judge Casey pointed out that the hospital district would "eliminate dual controls and responsibility," which have generated friction in the past.⁴⁸ Attorney Joe Albritton, Baylor Medical School Board of Trustee Chairman, noted that "it is difficult for two different political bodies to administer the same function."⁴⁹ Gail Whitcomb, Houston Chamber of Commerce President, favored creation of the hospital district because it would "allow greater efficiency ... in operation of the area's Charity hospitals."⁵⁰

In the last hospital district election, newspaper coverage involving the administrative reform theme centered

⁴⁷Houston Chronicle, January 17, 1965.

⁴⁸Houston Chronicle, January 22, 1965.

⁴⁹Houston Post, January 17, 1965.

⁵⁰Houston Chronicle, January 22, 1965.

mostly about an action taken by the Commissioners Court. Prior to the final election, the court appointed an advisory committee of thirteen prominent citizens to assist the court in selecting a charity hospital management board in the event that the hospital district passed. In editorials, the two papers applauded this action of the Commissioner's Court. The Chronicle argued that the court had given the "strongest pledge possible" that, in the event of hospital district approval, the hospital would "be removed⁵¹ from local politics to the maximum degree." Along similar lines, the Post praised the caliber of the advisory committee, and pointed out that this action by the Commissioner's Court should "lay rest to those fears that⁵² the court might appoint a political board of rubber stamps."

It is of interest that the Houston Board of Realtors, an important group which had actively opposed the hospital district in all prior elections, capitulated in the last election campaign, and chose the administrative reform theme in its surrender statement. A statement from the Realtor Board endorsed the hospital district, noting that the board of managers and the administrative staff of the charity hospital had "compiled an excellent record of

⁵¹ Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, November 9, 1965.

⁵² Editorial in the Houston Post, November 8, 1965.

performance under financial handicap."⁵³ Because of this performance, the statement urged, the charity hospital staff should be rewarded with a stable budget which could be counted on each year," removed from the influence of political pressures."⁵⁴

⁵³ Houston Post, November 12, 1965.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER V

HOSPITAL DISTRICT ISSUES:

NEEDS OF CARE AND PROGRAM COSTS

Though the following themes were used occasionally by hospital district opponents, they were, in the main, employed by those individuals and groups seeking approval for the district. While these two themes are quite different, one logically follows the other. If the argument of humanitarian appeals, which calls for better charity hospital care, is accepted, then the next question facing voters concerns the least expensive way to satisfy this need. This question of costs is the subject matter of the theme of economic considerations.

THE THEME OF HUMANITARIAN APPEAL

Central to the theme of humanitarian appeal is the ideal of quality of care. By quality is meant the type of response by the voter and by responsible public officials to the needs of indigent patients in the city-county hospitals and to the needs of those who treated these patients. Found in this theme, as employed by hospital district supporters, is an implicit, and often explicit, accusation of guilt toward those voters and public officials because of their failure to provide sufficient money to properly care for the indigent sick, because of their indifference to the

negligence in patient treatment found in the city-county hospitals, and because of their indifference to the low morale found among the indigent patients and the city-county hospital staff. In all the arguments occurring in this theme, the needs of the indigent patients took preference over any other consideration. In short, this theme is charged with an ideological content which aimed at evoking a high degree of emotional response from the voters.

In the 1955 hospital district election campaign, the issue of humanitarian appeal did not receive as much mention as in later campaigns, particularly in 1957 and the first 1965 elections. Table XI, page 97, shows a total frequency ratio for the Post and Chronicle of only 3.87 in the 1955 elections. The intensity accorded this issue in the 1955 election was also relatively small as compared to the prominence ratio of the same issue in later elections. Though the Post shows a much larger prominence ratio than the Chronicle, this lack of emphasis on the humanitarian appeal theme in the Chronicle can be explained in part by that paper's opposition to the hospital district. No mention of any overcrowded or sub-standard charity hospital conditions was found in the Chronicle's editorials, and the straight and feature stories in the Chronicle emphasized the issue much less than did the Post. In a straight

TABLE XI
FREQUENCY RATIO BY STORY TYPE

		HUMANITARIAN APPEALS				
		<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>
<u>Post</u>						
	Straight	.99	1.60	.00	3.89	1.15
	Feature	1.57	1.49	.00	1.60	.50
	Editorial	.08	.33	.00	2.24	.00
	Total	2.64	3.42	.00	7.73	1.65
<u>Chronicle</u>						
	Straight	.57	2.24	.16	1.82	.00
	Feature	.66	2.24	.00	1.99	.00
	Editorial	.00	1.15	.00	1.40	.00
	Total	1.23	5.63	.16	5.21	.00

TABLE XII
INTENSITY RATIO BY STORY TYPE

		HUMANITARIAN APPEALS				
		<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>
<u>Post</u>						
	Straight	1.32	3.64	.00	6.62	2.31
	Feature	3.81	3.97	.00	3.89	1.32
	Editorial	.33	1.32	.00	8.36	.00
	Total	5.46	8.93	.00	18.87	3.63
<u>Chronicle</u>						
	Straight	.91	4.06	.16	2.81	.00
	Feature	1.07	4.72	.00	4.78	.00
	Editorial	.00	4.14	.00	5.29	.00
	Total	1.98	12.92	.16	12.88	.00

story the Chronicle did report the charity hospital manager's claim of "ample evidence" that Jefferson Davis hospital was "grossly overcrowded".¹ In the same story, the Chronicle reported a statement from the Harris County Tuberculosis Hospital Association's board of directors in which the board claimed that at least "five hundred active and contagious cases of tuberculosis were walking Houston streets" because of insufficient hospital space.² In all, however, the Chronicle did not display any concern over the treatment given indigent patients prior to the 1955 election. This is especially noteworthy when considered against the Chronicle's stand supporting the 1952 county bonds to build the new charity hospital. That stand was based on the need to remedy the overcrowded and ill equipped Jefferson Davis.

Although there was a difference between the two papers in editorial policy during the 1955 hospital district election, the Post did not strongly emphasize the humanitarian appeal theme in its editorial stories. It did mildly note in an editorial that the voters should endorse the hospital district because the "need for progress in hospital care and treatment" for the county's indigent

¹ Houston Chronicle, September 15, 1955.

² Ibid.

was "apparent".³ Most of the Post's emphasis came in straight and feature stories. In a feature story, Post reporter Jean Walsh noted that "gross-over-loading of emergency rooms and outpatient departments" occurred in Jefferson Davis Hospital which in turn led to "overcrowding in x-ray and laboratory departments".⁴ In the same story, inadequate funds were blamed for "unfair salaries" paid to hospital employees which, stated the reporter, led to a "constant turnover of personnel in the lowest salary levels."⁵ Along the same line of thought, the Jefferson Davis Board of Managers, in a press release printed in a Post straight story, pointed out that none of the charity hospital employees had received a 15 percent salary increase given to all other city employees in October of 1954, because a 7 percent reduction had been imposed on the charity hospital's budget.⁶ Exclusive of residents and interns, the managers' statement continued, the average salary was "2,117 dollars per year - an average exceeded by all other departments in the city".⁷

The humanitarian appeal theme was argued by opposing

³Houston Post, September 18, 1955.

⁴Houston Post, September 9, 1955.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Houston Post, September 9, 1955.

⁷Ibid.

factions over the question of whether Jefferson Davis Hospital was really overcrowded. In a press statement, the Jefferson Davis Board of Managers denied the claims of the Tax Research Association that in the first six months of 1955 the hospital had an occupancy rate of only 79 percent of its 521 beds. Occupancy rates had been over 80 percent for the preceeding five years, stated the board, and in any event, occupancy rates did not truly reflect the charity hospital's problems. Since these rates were kept within accepted standards, continued the board, the end result was that "persons who needed to be in a hospital bed were forced to stay on their feet" and to be treated as out-⁸patients in the clinic. As a whole, however, the theme of humanitarian appeal was simply not a major issue in the first hospital district election. It was treated mostly in terms of statistics. Though the idea of eliminating unnecessary human suffering was used as an argument by the Post, really emotional treatment of the humanitarian appeal issue did not occur in the 1955 campaign.

By the second campaign in 1957, an emotional appeal to the feelings of the voters was strongly expressed by hospital district proponents. As noted in Table XII, page 98, the combined prominence ratio of the humanitarian appeal theme jumped from 7.44 in 1955 to 21.85 in 1957, a three-

⁸Ibid.

fold increase. The Chronicle, which had reversed its editorial position on the hospital district, registered in the 1957 election campaign both the highest frequency ratio and the high prominence ratio on the humanitarian appeal theme of all elections, though the combined total of the Post and Chronicle was higher in a subsequent election.

A comparison of Table IV, page 60, and Table V, page 61, reveals that the Post, in the 1957 election, published slightly more column inches on the hospital district in straight and feature stories than did the Chronicle. Yet the Chronicle, as shown in Table XI, page 97, and Table XII, page 98, has a substantially higher frequency and prominence ratio on the humanitarian theme than the Post. Much of the Chronicle's use of this theme occurred in editorials, although prominence was divided almost evenly between straight, feature and editorial stories. The emphasis given this theme by the Chronicle in the 1957 election is especially interesting compared to the emphasis accorded to this theme by the Chronicle in the preceeding election, when that paper had an opposing editorial policy. Through a series of feature articles on the hospital district proposal, the Chronicle detailed conditions at the Jefferson Davis Hospital in language much more emotional than in the first election. Mayor Oscar Holcombe was quoted describing conditions in the outpatient clinic at the Jefferson Davis Hospital:

The Mayor said he went to the hospital to 'mosey around'. It was raining, and the outpatient clinic was so crowded that people were standing out in the rain. It was like putting cattle in a cattle car, and a pretty crowded cattle car at that; the Mayor said pointedly. 'That just ought not to be allowed in a civilized community, it's terrible'.⁹

One physician was portrayed in a Chronicle feature story, as amazed at the amount and quality of work done in spite of the crowded conditions. He stated that because of these crowded conditions, "some of (the patients) die before we get to them".¹⁰ In an editorial, the Chronicle called the tuberculosis hospital at Jefferson Davis a "disgrace", explaining that doctors and nurses were having to "struggle along in poorly equipped, deteriorating shacks".¹¹ County Judge Bob Casey released a statement calling the hospital conditions "terrible".¹² The health section committee of the Council of Churches in Greater Houston issued a statement to the press that all pastors in the council were being asked to explain to their congregations the "critical need for help".¹³ Though their statements were somewhat muted in tone, Mayor Ben Johnson of Shoreacres, Mayor Robert Hitchcock of Hilshire Village, Mayor A. J. Holden of Jacinto City and Mayor Arthur Miller of Katy, in statements

⁹Houston Chronicle, August 11, 1957.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, August 19, 1957.

¹²Houston Chronicle, August 11, 1957.

¹³Houston Chronicle, August 16, 1957.

appearing in a Chronicle straight story, urged passage of the hospital district in terms of the humanitarian appeal¹⁴ theme. In a feature story on August 11, 1957, a Chronicle reporter drew a bleak picture of hospital conditions. "Walk into the emergency room on a Saturday night and the impres-¹⁵sion is that a major disaster has hit." Through the editorial, the Chronicle charged the voters with a choice in the 1957 campaign: "provide adequate medical care for the indigent sick or let them suffer."¹⁶

In a statement to the Post, Dr. J. L. Dickenson, a Jefferson Davis Staff Member, termed the hospital situation¹⁷ as "impossible." Jean Walsh, reporting in a feature article for the Post, noted that the need for additional hospital facilities was "critical" and that the existing¹⁸ hospital was a "disgrace". Lamar J. Fleming, Jr., a prominent Houston attorney, was quoted in a Post story as being "ashamed of the inadequacy" of Harris County public hospital facilities, and as stating that he could not "face my con-¹⁹science" if he failed to vote for the hospital district.

¹⁴Houston Chronicle, August 22, 1957.

¹⁵Houston Chronicle, August 23, 1957.

¹⁶Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, August 23, 1957.

¹⁷Houston Post, August 17, 1957.

¹⁸Houston Post, August 12, 1957.

¹⁹Houston Post, August 23, 1957.

Evoking civic pride, the Post, in an editorial, spoke out against the "deplorable conditions for the indigent sick" in "booming, progressive Harris County".²⁰ Further, the Post stated that if the "seriousness of the need" and the importance of the election to "destitute suffering humanity" were appreciated by the voters, approval would be given to the hospital district.²¹ Perhaps such appreciation was not awakened in the voters by the efforts of the Post and Chronicle, as approval of the district was not given in the 1957 election.

The relatively small effort given to the humanitarian appeal theme in the 1961 election seems particularly interesting when compared to the concerted emphasis of the 1957 campaign. As shown in Table XI, page 97, there was no mention of this theme by the Post in the 1961 election and the Chronicle has a frequency ratio of only .16. Since the humanitarian appeal theme was used primarily by the proponents of the hospital district, the Post's restraint on this issue can be explained by its switch to an opposition position. An overall apathy and disinterest is the explanation which seems to fit the Chronicle's lack of enthusiasm on this theme. What few mentions of the humanitarian appeal theme which appeared in the Chronicle were low in intensity

²⁰ Houston Post, August 22, 1957.

²¹ Ibid.

producing a total prominence ratio of .16, and these few items were not found in editorial or feature stories.

In an October 21, 1961 straight story, the Chronicle indicated that, though county officials had expressed a need for the district, "there has been little organized opposition - and just as little organized support" for creation of a hospital district. Figure 1, page 63, and Figure 2, page 64 show the relative apathy displayed by both papers. Since about one half the construction work on the new Ben Taub charity hospital was complete during the 1961 hospital district election, and the other half was underway, the public may have felt it had "done something" to alleviate the "terrible conditions" which had been described in the 1957 campaign, and hence was also apathetic.

As shown in Table XI, page 97, the humanitarian appeal theme in the first 1965 hospital district election campaign reaches its highest frequency ratio, viewing as a whole the combined totals of the Chronicle and the Post. While there is noted a high frequency ratio on this theme for both papers in straight and feature stories, the frequency ratio on this theme in editorial stories is higher than in any other of the elections. Both papers embarked on a crusade, in the old fashioned traditions of journalism. The humanitarian appeal theme was employed emphatically. Table XII, page 98, shows a combined prominence ratio on this

theme in the two papers of 31.75, one third larger than the nearest combined total of 20.85 registered in the 1957 elections.

An important reason on the humanitarian appeal theme is found in a novel published in 1964 and written by Jan De Hartog, entitled The Hospital.²² Dutch citizen De Hartog, who moved to Houston in 1961 to teach a creative writing course at the University of Houston, was a member of the Quaker religious sect, and shortly after his arrival in Houston, the local Quaker group entered into a period of voluntary service at the Jefferson Davis Hospital. Serving as a volunteer orderly at the charity hospital during the years 1962 and 1963, De Hartog gathered material for his novel. When published in 1964, the book depicted in unfavorable terms the conditions existing in the charity hospitals, both at Jefferson Davis and at the new Ben Taub. Excerpts from the book were published in serial form in the Post. De Hartog appeared on national television and radio, where he protested conditions at Jefferson Davis and Ben Taub hospitals. His novel was a best seller in the Houston area in 1964. During the first 1965 hospital district campaign, this book was the launching point for a drive by both newspapers to secure passage of the hospital district, based to a large degree on

²² Jan De Hartog, The Hospital (New York: Atheneum Press, 1964).

the humanitarian theme.

In an editorial the Chronicle sounded the tone of the humanitarian appeal theme:

Morality cannot be shelved in favor of a primary concern for dollars and money is not the issue: care and concern for patients are (the issue). By the use of the ballots, (the voters) can round up their compassion for sick people, their wounded civic pride over substandard conditions at the Ben Taub, Jefferson Davis hospitals and their frustration that funds urgently needed were inadequate for years.²³

Along this same line, the Chronicle recalled in the editorial that a newspaper picture on the hospital district question had been televised nationally, which showed "foul cockroach trying to squeeze in a patient's trachea tube."²⁴ Public apathy, the Chronicle charged, had allowed charity to become a "mockery".²⁵

A comparison of column inches devoted to the first 1965 hospital district campaign, shows that the Chronicle accorded more space in straight stories than the Post. Yet the Post, as shown in Table XI, page 97, has a frequency ratio on the humanitarian appeals theme of 3.89 in straight stories, as compared to 1.82 for the Chronicle. During the two week period before the first 1965 election, a daily story appeared on the front pages of the Post, based on

²³ Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, January 21, 1965.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

statements from prominent citizens, and employing in many cases, the humanitarian appeals theme.

Dr. Maurice J. Meynier, a Houston physician who had hitherto opposed the hospital district, noted in a Post story crowding and understaffing were the "principal explanation" for many of the charity hospital tragedies that "have made the newspaper headlines."²⁶ The Post quoted United States Representative Bob Casey, who attributed the prior hospital defeats to the lack of success in "showing sufficient need", and who said he believed that "such need had become apparent"²⁷ with the "tremendous growth of Harris County and the erection of the new hospital."²⁸ Representative Albert Thomas stated in the Post that creation of the district would "remove a blot" on the image of the "sixth largest city in the world."²⁹

In feature stories and editorials, the Post took a more emotional tone. Miriam Kass, a Post reporter, posed as an indigent seeking medical care at the Ben Taub outpatient clinic, and after waiting for nine hours to be treated, she wrote, "Damn them, whoever they are. Damn them for doing this to us."³⁰ In an editorial in January 17, 1965, the

²⁶Houston Post, January 14, 1965.

²⁷Houston Post, January 20, 1965.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Houston Post, January 17, 1965.

³⁰Houston Post, January 17, 1965.

Post took note of the "cockroaches crawling over sick people in the charity hospital," reasoning that Harris County would not allow this to mar "our proud image".³¹ A very emotional editorial, signed by Franklin Reed, chief editorial writer for the Post, protested against "the clinical way" everyone was approaching the hospital district.³² The editorial continued in this same vein:

We are too aloof, too detached. An issue that should be at least half compassion is at least four-fifths fact and figure, question and answer. I'm like everyone else. Broke. But if I can't somehow swing two dollars a month to help provide adequate care for the needy then I had better give up; I'm a complete failure. I want to do something. I want to commit an overt Christian act.³³

In a kind of climax to this effort, Jan De Hartog wrote a letter published on the Post's editorial page and printed in italics, in which he described the hospital district question as a "humanitarian and not a political issue."³⁴ Noting that he had avoided the "political conflict" surrounding the hospital district question, and that he did not know "politically" whether such a district was "wise or unwise," De Hartog professed that his concern for the "reality of the hospital: the nurses, the doctors, the

³¹Houston Post, January 22, 1965.

³²Ibid.

³³Houston Post, January 23, 1965.

³⁴Houston Post, January 23, 1965.

patients".³⁵ De Hartog stated that the election, instead of being politics was a "matter of the principle that 2000 years ago made a man get off his horse to help another man fallen by the wayside."³⁶ By a "no" vote, De Hartog continued, Houston risked the danger of "getting the name of Belsen on the Bayou."³⁷

On the day after the first 1954 election, De Hartog was quoted in a Post story, in which he interpreted the hospital district defeat to mean that he had been mistaken when he assumed that "Houston would do something about the scandalous conditions if only it could be made aware of them."³⁸ Apparently, however, both newspapers, as well as other groups supporting the hospital district, reasoned that De Hartog's mission had been accomplished in the first 1965 election. In the last election, the humanitarian appeal theme was omitted almost entirely from the Post editorials, appearing only in straight and feature stories. Only through news releases provided by groups friendly to the hospital district did any mention of humanitarian appeal appear in the Post, and these produced a prominence ratio of only 3.63, a very small figure when compared to

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Houston Post, January 24, 1965.

the preceeding election. The Chronicle's mention of the humanitarian appeal theme was completely omitted in straight features or editorial articles during the two weeks preceeding the last election. In comparing the last two elections, it would appear that there was almost as concerted a drive among community leaders and the newspapers to eliminate mention of the humanitarian appeal theme in the last election as there was to include it in the first 1965 campaign.

THE THEME OF ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

As implied by the name, the theme of economic considerations had to do primarily with relative dollar costs which would be incurred by taxpayers in the event of adoption of one of the various plans offered for financing an expanded charity hospital program in Harris County. This theme was divided into three main arguments. One argument, used mainly in supporting the district, concerned the justice of the relative costs borne by city and county taxpayers under the existing tax levies. The question was asked; are city taxpayers paying more than their fair share of the operating costs in Harris County charity hospital operations under existing conditions?

Another part of the economic considerations theme involved the degree to which city and county taxes already in existence would change after passage of the district. That is, the argument centered around the total amount of

tax difference which would be present after creation of the hospital district. Because of the almost certain net increase in taxes due to follow creation of the hospital district, this part of the economic considerations theme was used by hospital district opponents.

The third part of the economic considerations theme involved the dispute as to whether a hospital district was the cheapest way to effect an expanded charity hospital program, presupposing that such a program was desirable. Part of this theme was used as a supportive argument for the hospital district and was the principal argument used in the development of the economic considerations theme. Because of its principally supportive character, the theme of economic considerations is grouped together with the humanitarian appeal theme in this chapter.

Of the four theme classifications used in this study, only the theme of economic considerations begins in the first election at a relatively low level of frequency and intensity and proceeds steadily to a peak in the last election campaign. Table XIII, page 114, shows a total frequency ratio in the first election campaign of 1.91, of which 1.66 is attributed to the Post. Opposing the hospital district, the Chronicle almost completely eliminated mention of the economic considerations theme in the first election. All the arguments outlined above as part of the economic considerations theme were employed by the Post in

TABLE XIII
FREQUENCY RATIO BY STORY TYPE
ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

<u>Post</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>
Straight	.58	.41	1.82	2.48	1.32
Feature	.83	.25	.00	1.73	1.16
Editorial	.25	.00	.00	.25	1.73
Total	1.66	.66	1.82	4.46	4.21
 <u>Chronicle</u>					
Straight	.25	.91	1.16	1.99	1.16
Feature	.00	1.32	.00	.41	2.07
Editorial	.00	.08	.25	.00	3.64
Total	.25	2.31	1.41	2.40	6.87

TABLE XIV
PROMINENCE RATIO BY STORY TYPE

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS		<u>1955</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1965(1)</u>	<u>1965(2)</u>
<u>Post</u>						
	Straight	.83	.83	4.00	4.55	3.80
	Feature	1.73	.66	.00	3.64	3.49
	Editorial	.58	.00	.00	.83	9.11
	Total	3.14	1.43	4.00	9.02	16.40
<u>Chronicle</u>						
	Straight	.33	1.15	2.15	3.39	2.15
	Feature	.00	3.64	.00	1.15	4.55
	Editorial	.00	.16	.75	.00	14.59
	Total	.33	4.95	2.90	4.54	21.29

the first election. However, the intensity of these arguments was not great, as shown in Table XIV, page 115. The prominence ratio of the economic considerations theme is only 3.14 for the Post in 1955, and only 3.47 for a combined total of both papers.

Quoted in the Post, Houston Mayor Roy Hofheinz held no hope for a reduction in existing city taxes should the 1955 hospital district proposal secure passage. He stated instead that if the two million dollars spent annually by the city on charity hospital operations were returned to the city's general fund "there would be no necessity for a tax increase at the city level in 1956."¹ Though avoiding mention of any specific amount, County Judge Bob Casey predicted in a Post straight story, that a county tax reduction² would ensue if the hospital district were approved. In a Post feature article, a Tax Research Association statement was quoted, which noted that "no assurance has been given" that taxes in city and county formerly devoted to the charity hospital would be eliminated if the hospital district³ were created. In most of these statements, hope for a future tax reduction of existing taxes was voiced, though in a somewhat subdued tone.

¹Houston Post, September 4, 1955.

²Houston Post, September 8, 1955.

³Houston Post, September 4, 1955.

Terming the hospital district "good government", Aubrey Calvin, Harris County Hospital District Association chairman, attacked, in a Post straight story, the taxing inequity which "socks the Houston taxpayer double," pointing out that the hospital district would replace the "fantastic double taxing of Houstonians" with a "single county-wide hospital tax."⁴ In a curious kind of reasoning, the Harris County Medical Society voiced an objection in a Post feature story, stating that "an additional property tax would be unfair to county taxpayers."⁵ An argument which was to become more important in later elections was set forth by a Post editorial. Increasing assessed valuations on county tax rolls to raise the money needed for expanding charity hospital services would be a "most expensive - and a foolish way - to do it," argued the Post.⁶ In the long run, continued the editorial, a hospital district would be "the cheapest and soundest financing plan possible" because raising city and county tax valuations for financing purposes would mean a greater net tax increase to both city and county taxpayers than a hospital district, since state taxes would increase as valuations increased.⁷ None of the County com-

⁴Houston Post, September 16, 1955.

⁵Houston Post, September 4, 1955. italics added

⁶Editorial in the Houston Post, September 16, 1955.

⁷Ibid.

missioners publicly advocated any such increases in assessed valuations, since such a position would have been politically unsound.

In the second election, the Chronicle gave more coverage to the theme of economic considerations than did the Post. The principal argument used by the Chronicle under this theme category concerned the disproportionate share of hospital operating expenses borne by city taxpayers. This emphasis occurred in a feature story devoted entirely to the subject of taxation. Under a headline "Tax Burden Would be More Equitable," the Chronicle, in a feature story, pointed out that city taxpayers were supplying 70 percent of the tax supporting charity hospitals, while county taxpayers were paying only 30 percent. But, because Houston taxpayers paid county taxes, they were actually paying 92 percent of the county hospital costs.⁸ Such an arrangement, the Chronicle labeled as "illogical and inequitable".⁹

Jean Walsh, a Post reporter, stated in a feature article that the city had voiced determination to turn the entire tax burden over to the county at some future date,¹⁰

⁸ Houston Chronicle, August 13, 1957.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Houston Post, August 11, 1957.

and that, in the event this occurred, the Hospital District would provide the cheapest method for financing the operation. City tax revenues could not be increased to pay for expanded charity hospital operations, the Chronicle noted in a feature story, because city tax rates were at their legal limit, and an increase in county tax assessment ratios would mean an increase in state taxes, which are based on county assessments.¹¹ This, argued the Chronicle, left only the hospital district as a possibility for financing the charity hospitals. The Chronicle noted that both city and county officials had promised, prior to the 1957 election campaign, "to cut the city and county (tax) rates" if the district were approved, although a specific amount of tax cut was not mentioned by those officials.¹²

In the 1961 election campaign both County Judge Bill Elliot and Mayor Lewis Cutrer pledged, in press interviews to the Post to reduce county and city taxes if the hospital district were approved, and stated that the amount of tax cut would be equal to the amount then being spent to operate Jefferson Davis and the tuberculosis hospitals.¹³ Having offered a tax cut, County Judge Elliot estimated that Harris

¹¹Houston Chronicle, August 13, 1957.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Houston Post, October 21, 1961.

County would need 6.5 million dollars a year for charity hospital support if the district were not approved, but he hastened to add that "the Commissioners Court was not threatening a tax increase if the hospital district failed to pass."¹⁴

Both the Chronicle and the Post displayed about the same frequency ratio on the issue of economic considerations in the 1961 election, even though the Post opposed the hospital district in that campaign. It is significant, however, that most of the use of this theme occurred in straight stories. These stories reflected the point of views, of hospital district partisans, which in this election were local government officials, more than the editorial policy of the newspapers. To support this argument, Table XIV, page 115, shows a higher prominence ratio for the Post on the issue in 1961 than the Chronicle, even though the Post opposed the hospital district. A study of the straight stories in the Chronicle and the Post reveals that the majority of interest, and expressions of that interest, in the 1961 election came from city and county officials, who had a pressing economic problem with which to contend. County and city governments were faced with financing an expanded operation with the opening of Ben Taub, and they were desperately seeking a solution. An

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Houston Post, October 21, 1961.

examination of the Post's stories during the two week period before the 1961 election leaves the impression that the interest in money matters by local officials was emphasized by the Post so that the newspaper, which opposed the district, could denounce this preoccupation with money in a self righteous manner. In an editorial supporting the district, the Chronicle, listing "cogent reasons" why the voters should approve the district, noted that the new 9.5 million dollar charity hospital would be open within nine months and that "there is no money for its operation".¹⁵

As in most of the preceeding elections, the Post's and Chronicle's prominence ratios for the economic considerations theme in the first 1965 election are about twice the frequency ratios for that election, indicating a relatively mild emphasis on this theme. A larger frequency ratio than in 1961 is rated for both papers. A frequency ratio of 4.46 appears for the Post, which is a decided increase over prior elections, and a larger increase than the Chronicle. Most of the difference between the frequency ratios of the two papers can be attributed to a long feature story which appeared in the Post devoted entirely to the economic considerations theme. County and city officials in their public statements stressed this

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Editorial in the Houston Chronicle, October 19, 1961.

theme and were so quoted in straight stories in both papers.

Unlike the 1961 campaign, city and county officials, in the first 1965 election, did not indicate a tax cut equivalent to the charity hospital budget in the event of hospital district approval. A "material rollback" in taxes was all the Houston City Council would pledge: Mayor Welch indicated this rollback to be at most a tax cut of ten¹⁶ cents per one hundred dollar assessed valuation. A tax reduction might not be possible at all, Mayor Welch stated, since there were so many "critical city needs".¹⁷ County officials pledged a five cents per one hundred dollar assessed valuation cut, somewhat less than an equivalent tax¹⁸ cut.

More than in any preceeding election, mention was made in the first 1965 election of hospital district alternates. Noting that county officials were on record as firmly opposed to any increase in tax assessment ratios, and that money could not be raised, Mayor Welch indicated, in a press release, that a reduction in needed city services could be expected should the hospital district fail.¹⁹ In a Post feature story, county officials pointed out that should the voters turn down the hospital district, the

¹⁶Houston Chronicle, January 13, 1965.

¹⁷Houston Post, January 12, 1965.

¹⁸Houston Chronicle, January 13, 1965.

¹⁹Houston Post, January 10, 1965.

county "could eventually be forced to almost double property valuations" to raise the needed money, and that this would be more expensive than the district plan.²⁰ County Judge Elliot, in a Chronicle straight story, expressed this same idea when he stated:

We have got to get across to the people that a hospital district simply enables the county to levy taxes to support the hospital operation,²¹ without increasing state taxes at the same time.

In all mentions of possible alternates, there was very little threat that the county would actually raise tax assessment ratios. Repeatedly, County Commissioners declared against any increase in assessment ratios and most newspaper stories which mentioned this alternate did so in a manner which seemed to almost preclude such a possibility. The Chronicle quoted Gail Whitcomb, President of the Chamber of Commerce, who made perhaps the strongest statement concerning alternatives to the hospital district. He noted that "the city and county face the alternative of raising assessment levels" if the hospital district did not pass, "thereby increasing the taxes" imposed by the school district and the state.²²

The last election was characterized by a very high degree of emphasis on the theme of economic considerations.

²⁰Houston Post, January 21, 1965.

²¹Houston Chronicle, January 20, 1965.

²²Houston Chronicle, January 14, 1965.

The frequency ratios for this theme are high with a 4.21 for the Post and 6.87 for the Chronicle, and the prominence ratios are over three times as large as the frequency ratios with 16.4 for the Post and 21.29 for the Chronicle. This intense theme emphasis occurred in a large measure in editorials appearing in both the Post and the Chronicle. A comparison of Table XIV, page 115, with Tables VIII, page 68, Table X, page 85, and Table XII, page 98, shows that the largest prominence ratio expressed in editorials occurred in the last 1965 campaign based on the economic considerations theme. Straight and feature stories also contained prominent expression of this theme, though not as great as the editorial emphasis. This theme centered around a very explicit threat to the taxpayer. What had only been hinted at in the preceeding elections was openly and forcefully presented in the final campaign.

Dispensing with any but "hard headed, practical business matters", the Post editorialized that "the hospital district financing method would be the cheapest way for the property owners in the "long run".²³ County Judge Bill Elliot and a majority of the Commissioners Court, in several press releases, announced that if the hospital district failed to pass, the county government would still take over

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Editorial in the Houston Post, November 11, 1965.

sole responsibility for the charity hospital operations, financing such operations through an increase in tax assessment ratios.²⁴ If this method were used, the Post editorialized, state and school district taxes would increase so much that an extra dollar would have to be raised²⁵ for every two dollars going to the charity hospital funds. Both papers emphasized the finality and reality of this threat. A Post editorial stated:

County officials and responsible leaders of the community felt that, before officials raise both the state and county taxes of property owners, the taxpayers should be given another chance to save themselves money. They will have that chance November 20²⁶ and it may be the last one they will ever have.

²⁴Houston Post, November 18, 1965.

²⁵Editorial in the Houston Post, November 20, 1965.

²⁶Editorial in the Houston Post, November 11, 1965.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions derived from this inquiry, it should be emphasized, are limited in scope by the fact that they are products of a case study. Because of this limitation, no claims are made for the validity of the conclusions outside the particular case in point. All that can be claimed for this inquiry is that it tends to validate or deny in this particular instance certain findings from other studies which have been set forth in the theoretical framework set out at the beginning of this paper.

LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE EDITORIAL FUNCTION OF THE NEWSPAPER

Of the three newspapers included in this study, two, the Chronicle and the Post, continually exhibited community leadership by assuming a clearly supportive or opposing editorial position in the political conflict surrounding the hospital district, while the third, the Press, continuously displayed an editorially neutral position. The attitude of non-alignment exhibited by the Press cannot be attributed to either an implicit hostility toward or a tacit approval of the proposed special district. Such reasons for this attitude of neutrality are not evident from a study of the material found in the Press. It is evident, from the

material which the Press printed on the hospital district conflict, that the non-alignment was accompanied by a posture of indifference to the whole matter of indigent hospitalization.

Even as far back as the 1952 city and county bond elections to provide money to build Ben Taub Hospital, the Press exhibited no editorial interest in the problem of charity hospital services and facilities. Perhaps one reason which might be assigned to the reticence of the Press toward involvement in the hospital district controversy was its absentee ownership and its position as a member of the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain. The Press, more than the Chronicle or Post, could be identified with the journalist-editor orientation. Getting behind a community project and using the newspaper for promotional purposes was certainly not evidenced by the Press in the conflicts surrounding the charity hospital.

Since the Press was owned by a national chain, the editor's role conception, including his sense of community identification and his perception of the local power structure and its needs, may have been different from that of the two locally owned newspapers. In a sense the Press' relationship with community leaders was a sort of "armed truce", as evidenced by lack of cooperation between community leaders and the Press in the hospital district conflict.

In this sense, the Press might be characterized as responsive¹ to journalistic ideology. In any event, the indifference in response of the Press to the hospital district problem raises a question as to whether this lack of leadership was symptomatic of the infirmities which led to the Press' demise.

On the other hand, both the Chronicle and the Post, during each of the pre-election campaigns before the five hospital district elections, clearly stated, in articles plainly labeled as editorials, their positions with regard to creation of the proposed special district. In none of these instances did the Chronicle or the Post fail to provide guidance for their readers. Rather, both, in editorials, pointed out to their readers what seemed to the newspapers as the course in each election which would produce the greatest good for the greatest number. In this respect both the Chronicle and the Post fulfilled model journalistic standards of behavior.

There is some evidence that, in performing this function of guidance, both the Chronicle and the Post were acting as "community-editor" types rather than "journalist-editor"² types. This is especially evidenced by the per-

¹Cf. Edelstein and Schulz, "The Leadership Role of the Weekly Newspaper as Seen by Community Leaders, A Sociological Perspective", op. cit.; p. 235.

²Ibid.

formance of these two newspapers in the last two elections. During those campaigns, the editorial comment of the Chronicle and the Post tended to promote themes which were also being employed as promotional issues in press releases by community leaders. Editorially, the two papers tended to disregard those issues not used by community leaders as promotional material in those campaigns. Of course, issues waxed and waned in relative importance during the five elections independently of the promotional emphasis of newspapers and community leaders, but the correlation between leader and editorial emphasis on certain themes suggests a collusion. In the last election, particularly, there seemed to be an overall agreement between hospital district supporters and the two newspapers to exclude almost all but the theme of economic considerations.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to judge whether such actions are desirable or not, but simply to point out that such an organized and apparently planned promotional effort seemed to be present. Consulting with community leaders is a part of the "community editor" pattern, and would seem to be indicated in the editorial behavior of the Chronicle and Post, especially during the last two elections.

As detailed in the first chapter, the model editorial function of a newspaper contains another part, the area of criticism, in which the role of the newspaper is characterized

as a "watchdog of government".³ Though this term might more popularly be applied to muckraking exposes, it would seem to apply whenever the press opposes governmental actions. Such opposition could only exist if the press were independent of government influence. The Chronicle in 1955, and especially in the Post in 1961, exhibited, by their opposition to the proposed hospital district, an independence of thought and action from local government officials, who tried in every election to secure passage of the hospital district. This opposition by the two newspapers was a criticism of local government actions, and in this sense, the Chronicle and the Post filled the model journalistic role of critics.

Independence from local government control does not seem to be necessarily the same thing as the "armed truce" with community leaders which characterize the journalist-editor typology. In times of political conflict, leadership in a community would appear to be split into opposing factions. This is implicit in the term "political conflict". Probably several members of the Harris County Medical Society and members of the Harris County Board of Realtors qualified as community leaders, under almost any criteria, and they were in opposition to other community leaders from

³Cf. Fredrick E. Merwin, "The Reporting of Government News", op. cit., p. 215.

local government, from Baylor Medical School and from the Texas Medical Center. Viewed in this manner, the actions of the two newspapers in opposing the hospital were not evidence so much of an "armed truce" with community leaders, but instead evidenced promotional cooperation with a segment of the community leadership who shared views similar to those of the two newspapers. Only incidentally were newspapers in opposition to local government officials, if the actions of the papers are seen from this viewpoint. It would be possible, because of the referendum ability, for groups other than local government officials to initiate programs and to translate these programs into government action. In such cases, local government officials might oppose the proposed programs, so that local government actions might not necessarily coincide with the wishes of local government officials. The semantics of the phrase "watchdog of government" as applied to newspapers could bear further study, though it is outside the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the editorial actions of the Chronicle and the Post were, in two instances at least, clearly opposed to the stated interests and intentions of local government officials.

Usually included in the editorial function of the newspapers are letters from subscribers to the editor, printed in most cases on the editorial page. These letters are thought of traditionally as editorial in nature, since

they tend to express, not necessarily fact, but opinion. Though it was suspected that editorial bias might be present in the editorial selection of letters for publication, such bias was not proved or disproved. Most letters were too incoherent to determine what themes or issues were being discussed by the letter writers. The only significance found in letters to the editor, at least in the Chronicle and the Post, is that the number of letters about the hospital district which were printed increased from the first to the last election. This may have been the result of editorial emphasis by the newspaper on the campaign as a whole, or may have resulted from reader interest, or from a combination of these reasons.

NEWS SOURCES

As evidenced in the coverage of the hospital district elections, the Chronicle and the Post depended in a large measure for their straight story content on promotional material in the form of prepared statements and news conference releases by opposing factions in the political conflict. By acting as a channel through which promotional messages could flow, the newspapers allowed both sides of the dispute an opportunity, if the disputants were sufficiently articulate, to sell the public on their viewpoints. This was manifestly revealed, for example, in the first

election when the Post, which approved of the district, permitted a determined and outspoken opposition to use its pages to exhibit promotional material opposing the district. The Chronicle displayed the same susceptibility to manipulation in the second election. Perhaps this apparent susceptibility to manipulation may have been allowed by the newspapers in order to create an impression of objectivity. Hospital district supporters apparently had equal, or even better than equal, access to this publicity channel, when the papers were editorially committed to the district.

A study of the story sources seems to indicate that reporters depended to a large degree upon prepared statements for story subject matter. This apparent dependence tended to create, in day to day stories, a set of polarized views on the hospital district question. Instead of a "mirror of the days events", straight stories were, in most cases, promotional messages, usually printed with little or no interpretive or background comment. To an extent, some feature stories continued this barrage of promotional messages, though in a somewhat different manner. Feature stories contain several promotional statements from each faction, with background material of a non-promotional nature scattered through the article. Some feature stories, particularly in the Chronicle during the second election and the Post in the fourth election, contained evidence of

considerable research by reporters, which resulted in a coherent and penetrating interpretation of the issues in the hospital district campaign.

Viewed individually, most straight stories in all the newspapers appear objective or factual in content. Though straight stories contain some background material, evident editorial bias is not present, as such, in most straight stories, taken individually. Editorial policy in the Chronicle and Post was reflected at times in feature story comments, though not identified as such, and could be recognized provided the reader already knew the editorial position of the newspaper. Feature stories were printed with much less frequency, however, than were straight stories. It would seem to have been difficult for a reader to have determined the editorial position of the Chronicle or Post from reading only one issue in each election, excluding clearly labeled editorials. There was a show of impartiality, in most straight stories, and to a lesser degree, in most feature stories, viewed individually.

EDITORIAL BIAS IN STRAIGHT AND FEATURE STORIES

While it would have been difficult for a reader of either the Chronicle or Post to have determined, by reading any one issue of that paper before each election, the editorial position of that paper without resort to clearly

labeled editorial articles, it would have been equally as difficult for that reader to have missed that paper's editorial positions if he had read all the issues for a period of two weeks prior to each election, again excluding editorial articles. It is evident that the Chronicle and the Post, by varying frequency of use and amount of emphasis, employed certain themes to promote their editorial stands in the straight and feature stories on the hospital district. Such themes were either emphasized by frequent use and/or by forcefully phrasing to present a viewpoint, or else such themes were toned down, sometimes entirely omitted, again to promote an editorial position.

During the first and third election campaigns, in which the Chronicle and Post were on opposite sides, a contrast of the two papers' emphasis on certain issues in straight and feature stories most clearly illustrates this thematic manipulation by both newspapers. In the first election, for example, the Chronicle emphasized the scope of government theme, and almost ignored the humanitarian appeals and economic considerations themes; the former theme tended to support the Chronicle's stand, while the latter two themes did not offer this support. Contrasted with the Post's emphasis on these same issues, thematic manipulation by both papers seems evident, though both papers gave an appearance of objectivity.

COMMUNITY-EDITOR AND JOURNALIST-EDITOR ORIENTATION

In the hospital district elections, both the Chronicle and the Post might be characterized more accurately as "community-editor" oriented, rather than "journalist-editor" oriented. Perhaps the clearest examples of this orientation are found in the fourth and fifth hospital district elections, where both papers worked with community leaders along planned lines of promotion, and employed their pages "to keep things going". Edelstein and Schulz have pointed out the "dysfunctional" nature of journalist-editor ideology, and have suggested that such expectation or role conception may actually be harmful to the efforts of a newspaper to promote community welfare.⁴ Such journalist ideology "is intended to promote community welfare (but) it⁵ often breaks down operational and communication networks". By serving as a channel for promotional messages, and by acting as an agent to keep projects moving, newspapers participate in community life in a leadership position. It may be impossible for them to do so otherwise, if they wish to take an active part in local affairs.

⁴ Cf. Edelstein and Schulz, op. cit., p. 235.

⁵ Ibid.

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