

Bachrach P. *The theory of democratic elitism: a critique.*  
Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1967. 109 p.  
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This essay is a critical analysis of the prevailing theory of democracy. The theory's primary objective is to legitimate elite power and the minimization of citizen participation. I argue that the theory is fundamentally defective on both normative and empirical grounds. [The *SSCI*® indicates that this book has been cited in over 185 publications.]

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It is somewhat disconcerting to realize that one's radical ideas of the past are now accepted by one's peers as sound and worthwhile. In my case this was not so 20 years ago when the concept of nondcision making<sup>1</sup> was found to be basically defective in articles published in the leading political science journal, the *American Political Science Review*. The editors of the *Review*, for reasons known only to them, thought it appropriate to accept for publication, over the course of a few years, not

one or two, but three articles, all emphasizing the unscientific nature of the nondcision-making concept.

The publication of *The Theory of Democratic Elitism* also appeared to receive a cool reception by the profession. Only one journal considered it sufficiently worthy to review. And it found the essay devoid of merit.

Today, two decades later, both works are *Citation Classics* and have been translated into more than several foreign languages and reprinted widely in political and social-science anthologies. What is the significance of this transformation? In my judgment it primarily reflects a healthy division—not unique to political science—between mainstream and radical political scientists, a division in which radical scholars have had some influence in changing the orientation and direction of the discipline. Two of the foremost political scientists, Robert A. Dahl<sup>2</sup> and Charles E. Lindblom,<sup>3</sup> who were formerly leading defenders of democratic elitism, for example, now argue<sup>4,5</sup> that the power structure in America must be radically altered to promote democracy and individual dignity.

Notwithstanding radical influence within its ranks, political science has a long way to go in reordering its priorities as to what constitutes the important issues for it to focus upon before it begins to make a meaningful contribution to the intellectual life of the nation.

1. Bachrach P & Baratz M S. Two faces of power. *Amer. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 56:947-52, 1962. (Cited 270 times since 1966.) [See also: Bachrach P & Baratz M. Citation Classic. (Smelser N J, comp.) *Contemporary classics in the social and behavioral sciences*. Philadelphia: ISI Press, 1987. p. 329.]
2. Dahl R A. *Who governs? Democracy and power in an American city*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961. 355 p. (Cited 275 times since 1966.)
3. Braybrooke D & Lindblom C E. *A strategy of decision: policy evaluation as a social process*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963. 268 p.
4. Dahl R A. *A preface to economic democracy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985. 184 p.
5. Lindblom C E. *Politics and markets: the world's political-economic systems*. New York: Basic, 1977. 403 p. (Cited 90 times.)