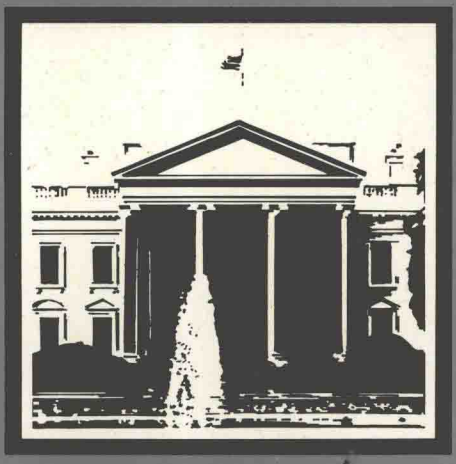
Analyzing the Presidency

second edition



Robert E. DiClerico, Editor

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ANALYZING THE PRESIDENCY

second edition

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Preface

Over the course of U.S. history, the office of the presidency has come to dominate the American political landscape. This development grew out of the handiwork of the Founding Fathers. They decided on a single rather than plural executive, and in doing so created the only institution in U.S. national government capable of speaking with one voice. In addition, the words they wrote into Article II of the Constitution, which established the presidency, were brief and often ambiguous, thereby providing the necessary opening for activist presidents who would one day seek to broaden the scope of the office. But changes and events—including the expanding role of the federal government, the growing involvement of the United States in international affairs, and the advent of mass communications—also combined with the constitutional structure to make the presidency the focal point of the U.S. political system and an energizing force.

I have taught a course on this fascinating institution during each of the last fifteen years. In assembling materials for the course, I routinely searched for a suitable collection of readings to assign students. None of the available readers left me wholly satisfied, however. Some fell well short of covering the major topics typically considered in a course on the presidency. Others provided the necessary breadth of coverage, but included only one selection under many of the topics considered. Still others were deficient on both counts.

This book represents an attempt to overcome these deficiencies. It does, I believe, cover those aspects of the presidency essential to a comprehensive understanding of the institution. Moreover, it seeks as well to achieve a greater degree of depth by providing at least two selections for each of the major topics. There is a total of 18 readings, which are organized into eight topic chapters (*Presidential Selection; Presidential Character; The President and the Public; The President and Congress; The President and the Bureaucracy; The President and the Media; The President and the Vice President; The President and the Policy-Making Process: Domestic and Foreign Policy*). Each topic chapter begins with a general examination and review of the topic as it is addressed in the readings in the chapter. Among the authors included, some are scholars; some are current or former public officials; and some combine experience in both academia and government. All have written essays that are both cogent and readable.

Changes to this edition Since the first edition of this book, the press of events and more recent scholarship have necessitated changes for this second edition. Accordingly, in five of the eight chapters at least one of the selections has been replaced with a new article; and in chapters 4 (The President and Congress) and 5 (The President and the Bureaucracy), all the selections have been changed. As with the first edition, I made every effort to include articles that reflect the thinking of both scholars and practitioners of government.

Acknowledgments I appreciate the useful suggestions from political scientists at colleges and universities who used the first edition and who communicated with The Dushkin Publishing Group. Throughout the completion of this project, I was most fortunate to have the assistance of Marguerite L. Egan of the DPG. Her formidable talents as a facilitator lessened my own burdens considerably.

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Introduction

The modern presidency is vastly different from the administrations of earlier presidents. The mass media, the bureaucracy, political parties, public perceptions and Congress are all major actors on the modern presidential stage. In many practical ways the power of the president is limited. Congress has enacted legislation designed to restrict the freedom of presidential action in the area of military intervention abroad, and other entrenched interests can make change a difficult and slow process. In this environment, the ability of the president to persuade and communicate can often be of greater importance than his executive powers.

The chapters that follow examine the personal and institutional forces that shape a president's tenure. Because it is the most basic issue, in chapter 1 experts explore the ways in which we select our president. No further analysis is possible until we understand who the people are who become president and what the process is that selects them. Our process is demonstrably different from that of other Western democracies, and our entire political system is affected accordingly.

This theme is expanded upon in chapter 2 as a psychological model is applied to the presidency and the people who hold the office. Political success or failure can often be as dependent upon a president's personal character traits as upon the political environment in which he must operate. This personal component must be understood in order for us to make reasonable decisions concerning our political future.

Once in office, a president must contend with public perceptions of the job he is doing. As is made clear in chapter 3, we hold many expectations of our president, and many of them are contradictory. The ability of a president to deal with these conflicting expectations can determine public perceptions, which in turn can be translated into political power or political impotence.

It is in his dealings with the Congress that public perceptions are translated into practical victories or defeats. A president, such as Ronald Reagan, who was perceived as having massive public support, can create legislative programs that a less popular president could never achieve. This is one of the many senses in which perception becomes reality in the political world.

The implementation of legislative programs is the next obstacle to be faced by a president. Laws must be administered, and that can be done by career civil servants with enthusiasm or sullen acquiescence. In the Reagan administration, Americans witnessed a change of direction in many departments of the federal government.

Most of the perceptions that Americans hold concerning the character of their presidents are formed through the images presented by the mass media. Modern presidents, to a degree beyond the imagination of earlier leaders, can reach people in their own living rooms. The power to shape these impressions and perceptions

in large part rests in the hands of the television, radio, and newspaper commentators who offer on-the-spot analysis of speeches and presidential initiatives. Since we have seen how perception can become reality, the media are in a position to wield great power. The approach that a president takes toward the media can determine much of the nature of his administration.

The presidency is, of course, intensely political in its nature. All of the aspects discussed above must ultimately be converted into governmental policy. Within this policy-making process, perceptions and political realities are weighed and examined. Just as the president must deal with external institutions, there are political struggles among advisers for access to the president, and there are different perspectives on policy issues that the president must resolve. In addition, Congress has dramatic influence that must be considered when formulating policy. In recent years, the role of the vice president has grown in these questions of policy formulation.

These are some of the questions that must be asked in order for us to gain an understanding of the presidency in America today. The essays presented here are the views of experts from inside and outside of government. We may agree or disagree with their assessments, but it is critical that we raise these questions in a democratic system.

Contents

Chapter One

Presidential Selection

Scholars and politicians have long recognized that the nominating process is the most critical stage in elections. As the eminent student of politics E. E. Schattschneider observed, "The definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power."[1] Nor was this point lost on the notorious political practitioner Boss Tweed, who was fond of reminding his compatriots, "I don't care who does the electin', so long as I do the nominatin'."

Among the democracies of the world, America is unique in the extent to which its citizens are accorded a significant role in determining who the choices will be on election day. Such was not always the case, however. From 1800–1824, presidential candidates were nominated by the members of their respective parties in Congress. But the congressional caucus gradually fell into disrepute as criticism mounted against placing the nominating decision in the hands of so few people. After a brief transition period, during which time candidates were nominated by state legislatures or local conventions, the political parties instituted a new system—the national convention. Under this system, each state party established procedures for selecting delegates to represent it at the national convention. In certain states, some or all of the delegates were appointed by state party leaders. The most common practice, however, was for state parties to choose delegates through a multi-stage caucus/convention system, which began at the precinct level and progressed on up to the state party convention.

While the national convention certainly broadened participation beyond what had existed under the congressional caucus system, by the turn of the century it, too, came under fire for being subject to near-total manipulation by party bosses. As a consequence, reform-minded Progressives championed the idea of presidential primaries in which voters themselves would choose the delegates to represent their states at the national conventions. This method of selection gained in popularity, and by 1916 twenty-six states had adopted it. In subsequent years, however, enthusiasm for the primary waned for a variety of reasons. Party leaders were understandably opposed to this method because they could not exercise much control over it. In addition, the financial costs were high, voter turnout was disappointing, and many presidential candidates declined to enter them.

Up until 1972, any individual seeking the presidential nomination was confronted with one overriding reality—in order to win, he was compelled to gain the support of party leaders. This was so because a substantial majority of delegates were chosen not in the primaries, but rather by the appointment or caucus/convention methods, both of which were controlled by the party elites. Primaries, though not completely ignored by most candidates, were entered selectively and viewed principally as a means of demonstrating vote-getting ability to party elites.

The Democrats' 1968 nominating contest not only exemplified this reality but also served as a catalyst for changing it.

As the campaign season opened in 1968, President Johnson saw his Vietnam policy challenged by the little-known antiwar candidate, Eugene McCarthy. Initially given little chance of unseating an incumbent, McCarthy's surprisingly successful showing in the New Hampshire primary encouraged Robert Kennedy to enter the race also. The combined support for each of these candidates ultimately convinced Lyndon Johnson to withdraw. It was not until late April 1968 that Vice President Humphrey, with the blessing of the White House, threw his hat into the ring. Significantly, by this late date the filing deadlines for entering the primaries had passed in all but one state. The Democrats' presidential campaign, which had already been characterized by the unexpected, took another dramatic turn in early June when Robert Kennedy was assassinated just minutes after his big win in the California primary. With this untoward event, the field was now narrowed to McCarthy and Humphrey. This did not prove to be much of a contest, however. The vice president easily won on the first ballot at the Democratic National Convention—he garnered nearly three times the number of delegate votes as his opponent. That Humphrey was able to capture the nomination without having entered a single primary was dramatic testimony to the locus of power in the nominating process. He commanded the support of the party leaders. McCarthy did not.

The outcome of the 1968 convention left many McCarthy and Kennedy supporters bitter and disillusioned with the nominating process. Not only had the Democrats chosen a standard-bearer whose views on the Vietnam war differed little from President Johnson, but in contrast to McCarthy and Kennedy, Humphrey had not taken his case to the people in the primaries. In addition, McCarthy supporters charged that they had repeatedly been the victims of arbitrary rules and procedures used by some state parties in selecting delegates.

These complaints gave rise to calls for more democracy in the nominating process, and the Democratic party ultimately responded with a series of reforms that were implemented in 1972. These changes may be broadly characterized as follows:

1. establishment of uniform and detailed procedures for selecting delegates via the caucus/convention method;
2. a significant reduction in the number of delegates who could be appointed and a prohibition against reserving delegate slots for party and elected officials;
3. a requirement that state parties take immediate steps to increase the number of blacks, women, and young people in their state delegations;
4. the allocation of delegates on a proportional basis so as to ensure that caucus and primary results would more accurately reflect voter preferences.

Taking its cue from the Democrats, the Republican party also reformed its caucus/convention procedures and abolished reserved delegate slots for party and elected officials. It did not, however, require the allocation of delegates on a proportional basis and merely encouraged states to include more blacks, women, and young people in their delegations. Although some of these party reforms were modified in subsequent years, and others added, the overall goal of expanding participation in the nominating process has not been compromised.

These reforms were accompanied by a highly significant parallel development—an increase in the number of primaries. More specifically, in 1968 there were only seventeen Democratic party primaries and sixteen Republican ones. In both parties, moreover, only about third of the delegates were chosen in these primary contests. By 1980, however, the number of primaries had grown to thirty-five for the Democrats and thirty-four for the Republicans, and for each party, some seventy-five percent of convention delegates are now being chosen by this method. Although none of the reforms either urged or required states to choose their delegates in primaries, several factors appear to have fostered this increase. It seems likely that some states, perceiving a broad-based sentiment for greater participation in the nominating process, understandably saw the primary as the most democratic method for selecting delegates. Others felt that a switch from caucuses to primaries would bring their state greater media attention. Still others appear to have believed that the procedural reforms made by the Democratic party could be implemented more easily in primaries. Finally, to the extent that some of the procedural reforms curbed the ability of state and local party leaders to manipulate the caucus/conventions, these leaders now saw the primaries as less susceptible to control by insurgent elements within the party.

In any event, both the increase in primaries and the party reforms all but eliminated the once crucial role played by the party elites in choosing a nominee. To be sure, the Democratic party sought to restore some of their influence by reserving fourteen percent of the delegate slots at its 1984 convention exclusively for members of Congress and state and local party officials. This percentage was increased slightly to 15.5 percent for 1988. These changes, however, have not altered the fact that those seeking the presidency must now take their case to the people through the myriad primaries.

The reformed nominating process may allow for broader and more direct participation by the electorate; nevertheless, some critics seriously question whether it necessarily yields the best results. The two selections that follow give voice to these concerns. Anthony King contrasts the American and British selection processes with respect to the *type* of candidates running, *who* chooses them, and *how* they are chosen. He concludes that the American nominating process produces individuals lacking in the experience, political skills, and alliances necessary to govern effectively. Thomas Cronin and Robert Loevy are not happy with the existing system either. As an alternative, they propose that we adopt a national pre-primary convention that, they argue, would shorten the campaign, reduce media influence, enhance the deliberative nature of conventions, and tie candidates more closely to their parties.

Notes

1. E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 68.

1.1

Anthony King

How Not to Select Presidential Candidates: A View from Europe

Anthony King is professor of government at the University of Essex in England and the author of The British Prime Minister: A Reader *and* The New American Political System. *In this essay he contrasts the American and British selection processes with respect to who the candidates are; who chooses them; and how they are chosen. By doing so, he presents an interesting perspective on the American process. He concludes that the American process yields individuals who lack the experience, political skills, and alliances necessary to govern effectively.*

All over Europe in the autumn of 1980, wherever people met to talk politics, there was only one topic of conversation: How on earth had a great country like the United States, filled with talented men and women, managed to land itself with two such second- (or was it third-?) rate presidential candidates as Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan?

Europe's political leaders had, of course, to be circumspect in what they said publicly; but the press had no such inhibitions. Newspapers like *Le Monde* of Paris and the *Neue Zurcher Zeitung* were tepid in their response to the two candidates. Leading British newspapers were more outspoken:

> In Europe, there is great bewilderment that the Americans should be landing themselves with a choice between two such mediocre figures. *(Financial Times)*
>
> It is no wonder that Americans feel that there has been some malfunction of their political system. The President talks perfectly good sense, but his reasonable words and good intentions are somehow converted into unsuccessful policies. Governor Reagan does not sound sensible at all. *(The Times)*
>
> In short, neither of the two main candidates gives much impression of knowing how they want to lead America in the complicated and difficult years ahead . . . One sighs for a man of stature. *(Daily Telegraph)*[1]

Asked to develop their views of the two men in more detail, the great majority of Euorpean politicians and public officials would probably have responded roughly like this:

From *The American Elections of 1980*, edited by Austin Ranney. (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981.) Reprinted with the permission of the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

> Carter? a Nice enough chap in his way. Certainly well-meaning, undoubtedly intelligent—but, as we all know, hopelessly inept. Raises issues, claims to attach great importance to them, then unexpectedly drops them, often with the result that friends and allies are left out on a limb. No consistent goals or policies; no follow-through. Treats everything on a case-by-case basis: cannot seem to see that in politics everything is interconnected. A curious tendency to moralize everything: whoever heard of a *moral* energy policy!? Came to Washington knowing little about Europe; after nearly four years, has seemingly learned almost nothing. Surrounds himself with people who are as ignorant of the world as he is. In short, a decent man but hopelessly out of his depth.
>
> Reagan? Probably no better than Carter, possibly a good deal worse. Like Carter, a man with no real experience of national-level politics; like Carter, too, a man with no previous experience of foreign affairs. An accomplished platform performer, but apparently without any real grasp of the complexity of economic and foreign-affairs issues. Evidently not very bright: seems actually to believe his simple-minded slogans! Said to be lazy. To be sure, a tolerable governor of California, but then that was hardly a difficult post to fill with the state's economy growing as fast as it then was. Most that can be hoped for: that Reagan would choose able people, then delegate a good deal of authority to them. In short, possibly a disaster, at best a sort of down-market Eisenhower.[2]

Such views may have been unfair; they may have been ill informed. But they were certainly widely—indeed almost universally—held in Europe in 1980. This chapter seeks to explain how two men who probably could not have been selected in any European country could become their parties' presidential nominees in the United States, and at the same time to point up certain contrasts between European methods of selecting party leaders and the methods currently being employed in America. Before we proceed, however, it is worth making the point that the views just expressed of Carter and Reagan were not confined to skeptical, world-weary Europeans; they were widely held in the United States itself.

American Views of Carter and Reagan

The available evidence suggests that the two main presidential candidates in 1980 were less well thought of by the American people than any other pair of candidates since at least the 1930s. To a remarkable degree, the year's political jokes were aimed not at Carter or Reagan separately but at the two together. A bumper sticker to be seen in the streets of New York read: "Your candidate is even worse than my candidate." The *Cincinnati Enquirer* published a cartoon showing a campaign committee room with two entrances. The sign outside one read, "Anybody but Carter Hdqtrs," the sign outside the other, "Anybody but Reagan Hdqtrs." The committee room was manned by John Anderson. The cover of *Public Opinion* magazine in June/July 1980 depicted a man wearing four campaign buttons on his lapel. The first three were for Carter, Reagan, and Anderson; the fourth said, "No thanks."[3]

Likewise, the views of newspapers and magazines in America were very similar to those of the European press. "The present prospects are dismaying," the *New York Times* commented in July. The *Washington Post* remarked somewhat later in the campaign: