



THE PRESIDENCY RECONSIDERED

Edited by

RICHARD W. WATERMAN

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F.E. PEACOCK PUBLISHERS, INC.
ITASCA, ILLINOIS

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Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 92-061956

ISBN 0-87581-368-2

Printed in the United States of America

Printing: 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Years: 1997 1996 1995 1994 1993

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PREFACE

The conceptual framework within which research is conducted affects what is studied and how it is studied, what is found and how it is interpreted. Unfortunately, even the few who have made important analytic contributions to the study of the presidency have not, as a general rule, labored to articulate the definitions, assumptions, and relationships on which their research has been predicated. As a consequence, the study of the presidency has not been marked by a great deal of conceptual clarity or even conceptual consciousness.¹

As the above quotation by Stephen Wayne suggests, a persistent criticism of the presidential literature is that it is both atheoretical and conceptually unclear. For decades presidential scholars have focused almost exclusively on case studies of particular presidents or explanations for presidential performance that are based on only one or a few presidential administrations. The result is a literature that appears to be uncoordinated, unstructured, and largely unorganized. While much has been written on the subject of the presidency, it can be argued that we know relatively little, in a systematic sense, about how the presidency has evolved or how it actually operates.

Yet, despite these criticisms, a very general theory of the presidential office has evolved in the literature over the past three decades. This theory is premised on the idea of an "expectations gap." In short, the theory posits that the public has developed inflated and, therefore, unrealistic expectations of presidential performance at the same time that the presidency's traditional political resource base has become less effectual.

The goal of this volume is to bring the idea of the "expectations gap" into a clearer conceptual focus and to provide a sounder theoretical basis for understanding the evolution of the modern presidency. The contributors to this volume accomplish this goal in two ways. First, they focus directly on the existence and the repercussions of the expectations gap. Second, they examine changing trends in the nature of the presidency's political resource base.

THE EXPECTATIONS GAP

Chapter 1 examines a fundamental question. Is there empirical evidence supporting the claim that an expectations gap actually exists? To answer this question, Arvind Raichur and Richard Waterman examine monthly Gallup public opinion data for each first-term president from Dwight Eisenhower through George Bush. They conclude from Eisenhower's presidency through that of Ronald Reagan there was a near consistent pattern of declining presidential approval ratings over time. They argue that this pattern is consistent with the idea of an expectations gap. The presidency of George Bush temporarily provided a break with this pattern. His declining approval ratings, during his third and fourth years in office, however, suggest that an expectations gap still exists. In Chapter 2, I examine how presidents have attempted to deal with this expectations gap. I present an elaboration and extension of Terry Moe's theoretical framework.² This framework consists of identifying six kinds of political resources that are available to modern presidents. These include personal, legal, electoral, external, internal, and informational political resources. I argue that public expectations have expanded at the same time that many traditional political resources (e.g., electoral and external resources) have declined in utility. As a result, presidents have developed a variety of new political resources (mostly internal and informational resources) in an attempt to close the expectations gap. Besides providing a theoretical basis for understanding the presidency, Chapter 2 also provides an organizational basis for the remainder of the volume. The following sections deal with the president's electoral, external, legal, internal-informational, and personal political resources.

ELECTORAL RESOURCES

In Chapter 3, Michael Gant and Lilliard Richardson examine how a decline in the president's electoral resources (e.g., an increasing trend toward negative voting) has had an impact on presidential relations with Congress. The chapter also empirically demonstrates how the presidency's electoral resources have declined over time and how these resources are directly related to the expectations gap.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Chapters 4 through 7 focus on the president's external political resources. In Chapter 4, Bruce Oppenheimer examines how the

changing nature of political parties has had an impact on presidential-legislative relations. He argues that the fortification of the party in governance, combined with a concomitant weakening of party loyalty among the party in the electorate, has decreased presidential success rates with Congress. In Chapter 5, B. Dan Wood examines the relationship between federalism and presidential attempts to control the bureaucracy. He analyzes enforcement data from the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Air Division and demonstrates how federalism provides a palpable constraint on presidential influence over the bureaucracy. In Chapter 6, Robert DiClerico examines how the media have contributed to the development of the expectations gap. He also identifies how presidents have developed internal political strategies and resources in an attempt to gain greater control over what the media report. He argues that this strategy served the political needs of Ronald Reagan, but was less effective in the hands of George Bush. In Chapter 7, Joseph Pika re-examines Terry Moe's theory of public expectations in order to explain why presidents have developed more sophisticated public liaison functions directly within the White House. Pika advances an interesting argument. He theorizes that the internalization and politicization of the public liaison function have actually undercut presidential influence by further raising public expectations. He contends that the process of centralizing relations with particular interest groups focuses that particular group's attention solely on the White House, rather than a cabinet department or other executive branch organization. As a result, the president is no longer insulated from direct responsibility when expectations for policy action are not achieved.

LEGAL RESOURCES

Chapters 8 and 9 shift the focus to the president's legal political resources. In Chapter 8, Robert Spitzer examines how the concept of the "separation of powers" has been reconceptualized over time. He critiques several models of executive-legislative relations including an imperial Congress/weak executive and an ineffectual Congress/ascendant president model. Spitzer then provides a spirited defense of the doctrine of the separation of powers. He argues that the separation of powers is of great importance today, given the twentieth century trend toward the accretion of presidential power. In Chapter 9, I build on the framework developed in Chapter 2. I demonstrate how recent presidents have combined a legal political resource, their constitutional appointment power, with newly evolving internal and

informational political resources in an attempt to increase their influence. By adding a mechanism for identifying and evaluating prospective appointees, I argue that presidents can now make greater use of their appointment power to advance their preferred policy objectives within the bureaucracy.

INTERNAL AND INFORMATIONAL RESOURCES

Chapter 10 examines the relationship between the president's internal and informational political resources. Peri Arnold examines how the so-called "institutional presidency" has evolved according to the general needs of each individual president. Arnold also argues that the institutional presidency developed because presidents lacked sufficient constitutional authority to compete with Congress. They also lacked the necessary political resources to satisfy escalating public expectations. As a result, beginning as early as the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, presidents began adding new centralized or internal resources, and additional means of gathering information, to their political arsenal.

PERSONAL RESOURCES

Chapters 11 and 12 focus on the president's personal resources. It is impossible to understand the success or failure of individual presidencies without focusing on the political acumen of each incumbent. With this in mind, James Anderson, in Chapter 11, examines Jimmy Carter's management style in relation to the nation's economy. Carter's diffuse leadership style and his lack of political knowledge proved to be a major impediment to the development of a successful strategy for lowering the inflation rate during the late 1970s. Rather than relying on economic experts, Carter more often than not listened to his political operatives. Also, rather than developing a clear and consistent plan to fight inflation, Carter employed a variety of new, and often untried, remedies. The end result was that inflation was not tamed and Carter was not re-elected. In Chapter 12, Cecil Crabb and Kevin Mulcahy examine how George Bush's elitist leadership style, and extraordinary experience in foreign affairs, contributed to his policy successes in the Persian Gulf War. Bush combined a number of specialists with his own extensive international contacts to build support for an escalating military presence in the Middle East. This strategy proved highly successful in the Persian Gulf, though the authors warn it has proved less successful in other settings.

POLICY-MAKING AND PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS

The final two chapters represent an attempt to do something completely different from existing volumes on the presidency and to examine the expectations gap from a unique perspective. Rather than focusing on the institutional apparatus of the presidency or particular political resources, these two chapters examine two important policy areas that have dominated the presidential agenda in recent years. In Chapter 13, Susan Hunter and Victoria Noonan examine the relationship between presidential statements and public opinion data on environmental attitudes. In Chapter 14, Joseph Stewart examines whether the recent presidential retreat on civil rights can be explained with reference to changing public attitudes and expectations.

THE INTENT OF THE BOOK

This volume is an attempt to reconsider the presidency. It is my hope that it can provide a small step in the direction of developing sounder theoretical and conceptual frameworks for understanding how the presidency operates and how the presidential office has evolved.

ENDNOTES

1. Stephen J. Wayne, "Approaches," in George C. Edwards and Stephen J. Wayne, eds., *Studying the Presidency* (Knoxville, Tenn.: U. of Tennessee Press, 1983).
2. Terry Moe, "The Politicized Presidency," in John E. Chubb and Paul E. Peterson, eds., *The New Direction in American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985), pp. 235-71.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A number of people are necessarily actively involved in compiling an edited book. I would like to begin by thanking each of the contributors to this volume. In particular I am grateful to Joe Stewart for warning me never to edit a book—advice, which like most good advice I have received over the years, I conveniently ignored. Since Joe served as a contributor to this volume, I would also like to remind him of a bit of advice that he also once gave me—never contribute a chapter to an edited volume. I am quite pleased that he ignored his own advice. Each of the other contributors also gave me useful advice in the preparation of this volume, much of which I have taken and applied.

In putting together this volume I owe much appreciation to my colleagues at the University of New Mexico, in particular Hank Jenkins-Smith, who over the years has provided continual moral support and encouragement. Karen Remmer also has been most helpful in providing me with the time to work on this volume, as well as providing strong encouragement for my overall research agenda. Finally, several of my students have been generous enough to read selections from this book, thus providing very useful feedback.

Editing a book is no easy task. This book would never have been completed if it had not been for the encouragement and hard work of Leo Wiegman of F. E. Peacock Publishers. Leo served as a true ombudsman in the preparation of this manuscript, doing everything from reading and critiquing chapters to recommending contributors for additional chapters. The hopefully high quality of this work is largely due to Leo's tireless efforts. I am greatly appreciative of his dedication and hard work. I would also like to thank Dana R. Gould for his assistance in copyediting the manuscript, as well as Mr. Ted Peacock. Finally, I would like to thank my reviewers, Roger H. Davidson, Craig A. Rimmerman, Matthew C. Moen, Mark Rozell, and Victoria A. Knelly, who provided numerous useful comments that greatly improved the quality of each chapter and the book overall.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support over the years. I would like to thank my mother, Edith Waterman, Be-

verly Elliot, and Bruce Doyle for their encouragement and support. Particularly, I would like to thank Lisa Auerbach, who suggested the title for this manuscript while we were in graduate school together. I would also like to thank Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer for graciously allowing me to use a variation of the title from their classic work on Congress. I only hope that this volume sells half as many copies. And finally I would like to thank the Boston Red Sox for providing me with the ability to deal with years of pain and frustration—the very qualities one needs while editing a manuscript.

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