

PRESIDENCY RESEARCH



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I. NEWS AND NOTES

EDITORS NOTE: You'll notice that this issue is quite a bit shorter than past issues. This was done to enable us to make the transition to a self-supporting subsection of the APSA. Up until now, the newsletter was subsidized in part by contributions from the APSA. Now we are paying our own way. By the Fall 1990 edition, we should have accumulated sufficient funds from our increased membership fees to afford a wider selection of articles and a larger, more readable format.

GERALD R. FORD FOUNDATION AWARDS: The Gerald R. Ford Foundation awards grants of up to \$2000 to cover travel and other expenses for research in the Gerald R. Ford Library's archival collections. For information contact David Horrocks, Gerald R. Ford Library, 1000 Beal Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI 48109; telephone (313) 668-2218. The next deadline for applying is September 15, 1990.

EISENHOWER SYMPOSIUM AT GETTYSBURG COLLEGE: As part of a series of national celebrations observing the centennial of President Eisenhower's birth, Gettysburg College will be hosting a symposium entitled: "The Eisenhower Legacy." The symposium will be held on the Gettysburg College campus October 11-13, 1990. It will examine the impact on successive presidencies of the policies initiated during the Eisenhower Administration. Symposium panels will include such topics as: Civil Rights, Nuclear Strategies, Containment, Elections, Economic Policy, Press Relations, White House Structure, Bureaucracy, Foreign Policy, Executive-Legislative Relations, Domestic Policy, and Political Leadership. For further information contact: Shirley Anne Warshaw, Director, Eisenhower Symposium, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg Pennsylvania 17325-1486; telephone (717) 337-6863.

THE POLITICS OF ABORTION RIGHTS: The American Politics Quarterly invites submissions for its upcoming symposium issue on "The Politics of Abortion Rights" to be published late in 1992. The debate over abortion has had an impact on many elements of American politics at all levels of government, including voting behavior, interest group and party activity, legislative and judicial behavior, and executive action. Any of these aspects, and others related to abortion politics and policy, would be appropriate subjects for the symposium we are planning. Papers comparing the U.S. to other nations are appropriate as long as the U.S. is a major focus. By sponsoring a symposium on this controversial issue, the editors of APQ hope to draw together the diverse literature on the politics of abortion policy, stimulate new research, and in so doing to shed light on several aspects of American politics.

The deadline for submission of manuscripts is November 1, 1991. Obviously, we are looking for scholarly manuscripts, not advocacy tracts. All papers will be sent for anonymous review to three referees, APQ's regular review process.

II. ARTICLES

Stability, Recurrence, and Development
in the American Presidency

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Among the pleasures of reading the literature on the American presidency is experiencing the diverse, indeed clashing views of the office as expounded by various authors. Different scholars portray the chief executive as powerful or weak, dangerous or vital, independent or contingent, comprehensible or opaque, and central or peripheral, depending on their philosophical assumptions, methodological training, partisan biases, and the era in which they write. Although most or all of the views expressed on the presidency are probably correct from one point of view, the variegated sum they produce suggests that a more comprehensive perspective might be useful in bringing order to the turmoil.

One of the most important ways in which presidential scholars differ is in their understanding of the way the office has either remained basically the same, or altered, through history. This is crucial because a notion of stability and change is a vital component of a theory of the way the chief executive fits into the political system as a whole. As we move away from academic specialty, and toward a comprehensive view of behavior and institutions, it becomes more important to overcome limited, isolated perspectives on portions of American politics.

Everyone recognizes that the presidency has exhibited both stability and change, and is continuing to do so. Disparate observers, however, put different emphases on various aspects of the office's historical experience. Since some of the greatest differences in the world are differences of degree, the diverse emphases can consequently result in quite distinctive portraits of the institution. The reader of the literature must therefore become accustomed to confronting a presidency that retains today the essential characteristics it acquired under George Washington, yet has experienced two hundred years of cyclical patterns of power and policy concerns, and yet again has evolved in such a manner that it is not only strikingly different from the office in the first administration, but which continues to change in a relatively linear manner.

One might be tempted to conclude that not all these views of the presidency can be correct, but that would be a mistake. They are not wrong, but incomplete. The purpose of this essay is not to criticize some or all of the works that have been published on the most important institution in our system, but to suggest that all might become even more informative if they were viewed as part of an integrated perspective that incorporated both stable elements and different kinds of historical change.

Endurance and Alteration

One of the complications of studying stability and change in the presidency is that scholars vary in other ways than in their attitude to those two concepts. Some have studied presidential influence over Congress, some the popularity of the incumbent, some his ability to form and hold together coalitions, and so on. A discussion of stability and change must therefore take on the nature of a two-by-two table, with the focus of the scholar on one axis and the perspective on change on another. (This table could of course be made infinitely complicated by additions of other axes into other dimensions to accommodate the scholars' methodology, partisan leanings, etc.--but two will do for present purposes). The goal of the present discussion is not to consider the scholarly focus; it is included to make the table more comprehensible.

Looking at the top section of the table, then, some investigators have stressed those aspects of the presidency that seem constant over history. Once again, let it be said clearly that nobody is foolish enough to assume that the office has experienced no change at all. Rather, some scholars choose to emphasize enduring principles that condition its evolution. Chief among these stable aspects of the presidency is its position in the Constitutional system of separated powers. Writers such as Herman Pritchett have repeatedly stressed the extent to which the presidency is embedded in system of mutual dependency, a system that frequently allows other institutions to stymie the chief executive's intentions (Pritchett, 1974). Similarly, Bruce Buchanan highlights the "trans-historical presidential experience, capable of influencing any incumbent," largely, he argues, to the detriment of desirable behavior (Buchanan, 1978, 2). On the more positive side, Richard Pious has viewed Constitutional prerogatives as a permanent source of presidential strength (Pious, 1979).

On the other hand, the notion that some aspects of the presidential experience wax and wane has long attracted students of the office. The idea of cycles tends to have been split into two components, with some observers examining rhythms of change within each administration, and others detecting long-term cycles that are connected to the larger evolution of the political system.

In terms of intra-administration cycles, there are a variety of theories about presidential success with Congress being greater earlier in the first term (Light, 1982, 36), about the incumbent's popularity decaying over his tenure in office (Mueller, 1970), and about the sorts of policy concerns that dominate at different points in his tenure (Kessel, 1974), among other subjects. Similarly, there is a branch of the subfield that investigates recurring actions by presidents that are determined by the two-year and four-year cycle of national elections (Tufte, 1978). If true, of course, these theories of changes in each administration mean that the presidential situation exhibits a more-or-less regular pulse as administrations succeed one another.

There are also notions of long-term cycles. Most of these rest on an understanding of periodic recomposition of party coalitions in American history, and therefore owe an intellectual debt to theories of "critical realignment" (Key, 1955; Burnham, 1970). Stephen Skowronek, for example, has posited a group of presidents whom we remember as "great," largely, he argues, because they were "first in political time"

