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Introduction: Studying Presidents and the Presidency

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Chapter 1

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On January 20, 2021, Joseph R. Biden Jr. took the oath of office as the 46th president of the United States. Biden had won the presidency during an unprecedented campaign amid a global pandemic marked by stay-at-home orders and numerous other COVID-19 restrictions. Inauguration day was also unprecedented, as Washington D.C. was on lockdown due to security concerns stemming from the January 6, 2021, riots at the U.S. Capitol, along with the day's festivities being dominated by social distancing, face mask requirements, and limited capacity at all events. In addition, convinced that he had won in a landslide and that the election had been stolen from him, Donald Trump refused to concede, and became the first outgoing president to not attend his successor's inaugural since Andrew Johnson in 1869. Also, that month, Trump became the first president to be impeached twice. With seven days left in his term, on January 13th, the House of Representatives passed one article of impeachment for incitement of insurrection, just one week after a violent mob of Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol as members of Congress, in a joint session presided by Vice President Mike Pence, were meeting to certify the electoral votes declaring Biden the victor over Trump in the 2020 presidential election. One month later, and after leaving office, Trump was acquitted in the Senate by a vote of 57-43, falling short of the two-thirds majority necessary for conviction.

As the chaotic events of January 2021 showed, traditions and norms surrounding the presidential election process, as well as the expected peaceful transition of power from one administration to the next, are never guaranteed. Both the 2020 presidential election as well as

the Biden transition fuelled an already hyper-partisan and volatile political environment driven by deep partisan division. Biden won the Electoral College by 306 to 232 (a simple majority of 270 out of 538 is needed), and the popular vote by approximately 81 million to Trump's 74 million. Trump's refusal to concede led to his campaign's legal team filing more than 60 lawsuits in both state and federal courts, claiming voter fraud and various other irregularities (all cases were ultimately dismissed). Congress met on January 6th to count and certify the Electoral College vote as required by the U.S. Constitution for what is normally a pro forma, ceremonial event. Congressional Republicans, however, signalled they would raise objections to the vote count in several states, and Trump was also pressuring Vice President Mike Pence, both publicly and privately, to overturn the results of the election in his capacity as the presiding officer of the Senate, suggesting that the vice president could refuse to accept the results in certain states, therefore giving the victory to Trump. Pence defied Trump by stating "my considered judgement that my oath to support and defend the Constitution constrains me from claiming unilateral authority to determine which electoral votes should be counted and which should not."[1]

For weeks prior, Trump had been calling for his supporters to stage a massive protest outside of the U.S. Capitol during the congressional vote count and certification. In one tweet, Trump wrote "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!" On the morning of the 6th, tens of thousands of protesters gathered on the Ellipse for a "Save America" rally. Trump spoke to the crowd for nearly an hour, repeatedly telling them that the election had been stolen and that they needed to "fight like hell" and "take back our country." After marching down Pennsylvania Avenue, the mob violently stormed the U.S. Capitol and rioters occupied the building for several hours as lawmakers and journalists were evacuated and forced to shelter in place. Several offices within the Capitol, including the office of Speaker of the House Nancy

Pelosi (D-CA), were vandalized and looted. The violent mob smashed windows, destroyed signs and other property, and stole items from both the House and Senate chambers. In addition, many of the rioters chanted "hang Mike Pence" after erecting gallows outside the building. Due to the violent attack, a Capitol Police officer, Brian D. Sicknick, died from injuries sustained while being physically assaulted by the rioters. Four other deaths occurred, including one rioter who was shot by police. More than 100 police officers were injured.

Historically, a presidential inauguration represents an important political ritual for American citizens, as it serves as a time of renewal of faith in the U.S. constitutional system to witness the peaceful transition of power from one leader to the next. Presidents look to the inauguration, and in particular the inaugural address, as an opportunity to set the tone for their tenure in office with both the public and other political actors, and most use the event as an opportunity to talk about broader political principles and their vision for the country. Aside from the constitutional requirement that presidents must take the oath of office, inaugurations are one of the many symbolic acts in which a president engages, and it is the first time that they address the American public—the national constituency that they uniquely represent within the political system—as president. Each president also faces unique circumstances on the day they take office, and therefore may have different strategies and goals that they and their advisors are attempting to achieve.[2]

While not the first president to take the oath of office with numerous ongoing political or policy crises, Biden nonetheless faced several unique challenges in delivering his inaugural address. Expectations ran high that a seasoned politician like Biden (at 78, he became the oldest president ever inaugurated) could return the nation to a more "normal" state of governance after

four tumultuous years of the Trump presidency (the first president to serve with no prior political or military experience). In his address, Biden stated:

> This is America's day. This is democracy's day. A day of history and hope. Of renewal and resolve. Through a crucible for the ages America has been tested anew and America has risen to the challenge. Today, we celebrate the triumph not of a candidate, but of a cause, the cause of democracy. The will of the people has been heard and the will of the people has been heeded. We have learned again that democracy is precious. Democracy is fragile. And at this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed. So now, on this hallowed ground where just days ago violence sought to shake this Capitol's very foundation, we come together as one nation, under God, indivisible, to carry out the peaceful transfer of power as we have for more than two centuries. We look ahead in our uniquely American way – restless, bold, optimistic – and set our sights on the nation we know we can be and we must be.[3]

Despite the chaos and upheaval in the weeks following the election, the constitutional requirements of the inauguration had been met, and the government continued to function. Once again, the United States had seen an eventual peaceful transition of power, though many political observers had been concerned about that tradition continuing. Nonetheless, Biden began his presidential term facing several domestic, economic, and foreign policy challenges with his Democratic Party holding minimal majorities in both houses of Congress.

In addition to the political, constitutional, and symbolic significance of presidential inaugurals, the start of a new presidential administration also serves as a milestone for those who study the presidency—a brand new president and administration to assess and analyze. The study

of the American presidency, both as a political institution along with those who have held the office, is one of the most fascinating and dynamic fields of study within political science. While the framers of the U.S. Constitution may have envisioned coequal branches among the legislative, executive, and judiciary, the powers of the presidency have expanded throughout the past century as contemporary American presidents, for better or worse, have often been the driving force behind policymaking at both the national and international levels. As such, the actions of the current administration, as well as other recent administrations, raise numerous questions for scholars to consider about the powers of the office, the complex nature in which presidents shape the policy agenda, and various other aspects of governing.

Biden and his four most recent predecessors—Donald Trump, Barack Obama, George W. Bush, and Bill Clinton—have opened myriad avenues of analysis regarding a broad spectrum of issues for presidency scholars, both as individual political actors as well as the institutional implications of their actions while in office. For example, Biden has been tasked with navigating the U.S. through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the many implications that has had on the economy as well as domestic policy matters. Foreign policy has also dominated the first two years of Biden's presidency with the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in August 2021 and then the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Trump took office in January 2017 having shocked the political world with his upset victory over Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election. While Trump won the Electoral College, he lost the popular vote to Clinton by roughly 3 million ballots. As a political outsider with an unconventional style of governing, highlighted by his constant use of Twitter to attack opponents and lack of governing experience, Trump and many of his policies struggled to resonate with voters beyond his loyal base of supporters who cheered his politically incorrect language and behavior as attempts to

shake up the Washington establishment. While Trump enjoyed some policy successes, like tax reform in 2017, as well as the creation of COVID-19 vaccines (dubbed Operation Warp Speed) and the Abraham Accords (between Israel and the United Arab Emirates) in 2020 among them, his perpetual approval rating well below 50 percent during his four years in office coupled with a sustained opposition movement among both Democrats and traditional Republicans to the Trump presidency created limited opportunities to govern effectively.

Prior to Trump, Obama took office at a time of economic crisis, as the United States faced the most daunting economic downturn and recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. In addition, the new commander in chief inherited two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, both initiated by his immediate predecessor as part of the War on Terror. Expectations for Obama's presidency were high—his supporters expected him to fix the economy, bring home American troops from the Middle East, reform health care, and heal the partisan divide in the nation as part of a new post-racial era in American politics. However, Obama left office in 2017 with a mixed record—major initiatives on health care and the environment had been enacted, though devastating losses for the Democratic Party at all levels of government during Obama's time in office meant a likely reversal for many of the accomplishments. For George W. Bush, one major component of his eight years in office will forever be linked to the expansion of presidential war powers in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. In addition, the Bush years will also be remembered for an increasing budget deficit, the prominence of a socially conservative policy agenda, and an escalation of partisanship at the national level. While Bill Clinton may have left office with a budget surplus, his time in office was marked by six years of divided government, an impeachment, and his ability to politically outmaneuver his political

opponents through strong political and communication skills (which also contributed to the partisan divide in Washington).

These presidencies and related topics are just a sampling of issues that animate current research on the American presidency. That research, in turn, also animates how presidency courses are taught at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. While presidential studies itself is considered a subfield within the discipline of political science, numerous subfields within presidential studies have also emerged as part of the growing literature on both presidents and the presidency. For example, presidential/congressional relations, presidential powers, the executive branch as a political institution, and the public aspects of the presidency are just a few of the areas where scholars have focused their attention to better understand (and sometimes predict the actions of) the president, their staff, and/or other relevant political actors within the executive branch. In addition, interdisciplinary research on the presidency has merged the growing literature in political science with that of psychology, history, communication, economics, and sociology, among others. As a result, both the quality and quantity of research devoted to presidents and the presidency continues to grow.

This chapter provides an overview of presidential studies and the current state of presidency research. Having a better understanding of topics such as the different eras usually associated with the presidency and the methods of study used by presidency scholars can aid students in learning about the various facets of the institution of the presidency as well as those who have held the office. This chapter considers the general categories used to organize presidents and their presidencies by historical eras, which provides a sense of how the institution itself, along with the day-to-day job responsibilities of the president, has evolved throughout U.S. history. Next, the state of presidency research is considered, including how the various

methodological tools now available to presidency scholars have greatly expanded our understanding of presidents as political actors and the presidency as a political institution. Finally, the plan of the book explains how the essays in this volume illustrate the new and emerging trends within presidential studies and how that research provides both a guide and a basis for analysis of the presidency for students. If the 2020 presidential election, the presidential transition, and the early months of the Biden administration show us nothing else, it is that the presidency continues to challenge the conventional wisdom of presidency scholars while forging new areas of research and exploration.

Presidential Eras

The American presidency remains one of the most fascinating institutions in history, and the powers and intricacies of the office seem to defy comparison to anything before or since. Individual presidents have come and gone, serving their country with varying degrees of success, but the presidency as an institution remains a focal point of political power both nationally and internationally. The presidency of the eighteenth century, as outlined by the framers of the U.S. Constitution, may seem weak compared to the powers that had emerged by the start of the twenty-first century, but the essential characteristics of the American presidency are as recognizable today as they were nearly 240 years ago. Despite wars, scandals, economic turbulence, and even assassinations, the presidency has endured and is one of the most resilient political structures ever created. Still, the powers of the office, along with the public presence of presidents themselves, have varied at different times due to different circumstances (political and otherwise). Generally, the history of the presidency can be divided into three eras: the traditional presidency, the modern presidency, and the postmodern/contemporary presidency.[4]

The traditional presidency includes those presidents from the late eighteenth century until the turn of the twentieth century who "performed within modest limits and largely with unmemorable results." The most notable presidencies during this time include George Washington (1789–1797), Thomas Jefferson (1801–1809), Andrew Jackson (1829–1837), and Abraham Lincoln (1861–1865), all of whom are "towering exceptions" during an era when presidential powers remained modest and limited.[5] Truth be told, the presidency was not a coveted prize for most founding-era politicians, nor was the associated role of commander-in-chief. Particularly during the late eighteenth century, talented public officials had little incentive to seek an office whose risks and uncertainties outweighed the potential benefits, as the presidency offered modest prestige, narrow authority, and meager resources. In most cases, governors of politically prominent states, such as New York, Massachusetts, and Virginia, wielded more power and prestige than the nation's presidents. Although American presidents of the early republic were honored and respected by their fellow Americans for their service and contributions prior to 1789, they occupied an office that was unassuming and limited, which is just what the framers of the Constitution had intended. Similarly, throughout the nineteenth century, most presidents merely carried out the laws passed by Congress, which assumed the role of the dominant policymaking branch. Despite the political reforms of the 1820s and 1830s, which opened the electoral process to middle- and lower-income voters and eased restrictions on office holding, presidents, for the most part, remained passive participants in national policymaking.

The potential power of the presidency, particularly in shaping the national agenda, waging wars, and connecting with the American public, would not be tapped until the twentieth century. The development of the modern presidency, with all its power and bureaucratic

machinery, laid waste to the modestly crafted, humble office erected by the framers. Of the three branches of government, the executive has travelled farthest from its origins and least resembles the intent of its creators. Theodore Roosevelt (1901–1909) and Woodrow Wilson (1913–1921) were its "architects, as asserters of bold undertakings in domestic and foreign affairs, as gifted mobilizers of public opinion, as inducers of congressional concurrence."[6] With the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, a dramatic expansion of the size and power of the federal government began. FDR's presidency (1933–1945) brought with it important changes that would define the modern presidency: enhanced presidential staff resources, a greater presidential role in policymaking, a stronger relationship with the mass public, and a greater presence in the foreign policy arena. Two themes also emerge in explaining the modern presidency, including an increase in expectations for presidential leadership and increased presidential capacity to lead.[7]

These changes were a direct result of FDR's New Deal as well as U.S. involvement in World War II. During this time, the presidency surpassed Congress and political parties as the "leading instrument of popular rule."[8] Harry Truman (1945–1953) and Dwight Eisenhower (1953–1961) continued the influence of the presidency as the lead actor in domestic and international affairs due in part to the Cold War as well as the growth of the U.S. economy. The public presidency would also continue to expand, especially as John F. Kennedy (1961–1963) ushered in the use of television as a potential governing tool.[9] This era is also marked by U.S. dominance as a global and economic superpower, which allowed presidents to pursue extensive domestic policy agendas such as Lyndon Johnson's (1963–1969) Great Society and the War on Poverty as well as foreign policy objectives such as containing the spread of communism. Yet, the failure of U.S. containment policy in Vietnam would call into question the powers of the modern presidency; both Johnson and Richard Nixon (1969–1974) would be labeled "imperial"

presidents for their actions in Vietnam and for Nixon's involvement in and eventual resignation due to Watergate.[10]

By the mid-1970s, with Nixon's resignation and the end of the Vietnam War, the modern presidency had been diminished as necessary resources for presidential power fell "well short of the tasks [presidents were] expected to perform and the challenges to be faced."[11] Some scholars began to argue that the American presidency had entered a new "postmodern" or "contemporary" phase.[12] By the 1980s, not only had divided government become more common (with the White House controlled by one political party and at least one house of Congress controlled by the other) but increasing budget deficits and a rising national debt left presidents fewer opportunities to pursue an aggressive domestic agenda through new federal programs. Instead, Ronald Reagan's (1981–1989) electoral success and popularity was based in part on his promise to reduce the size and power of the federal government. In addition, as the Cold War ended, cooperation in what George H. W. Bush (1989–1993) called "the new world order" became more important than protecting the United States from the spread of communism and the imminent threat of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union.

The challenges faced by Bill Clinton (1993–2001), George W. Bush (2001–2009), Barack Obama (2009–2017), and Donald Trump (2017-2021) represent both the increased powers and diminished capacities of governing that have evolved in recent decades. All four administrations faced trying economic circumstances that severely limited presidential powers over the domestic policymaking agenda. However, Bush expanded presidential war powers with military actions in both Afghanistan and Iraq to pre-empt and prevent potential threats to national security (known as the Bush Doctrine). In addition, all four presidents had to contend with a political environment dominated by hyper-partisanship and fuelled by unyielding, yet

fragmented, news media coverage,[13] a situation that grew worse in the aftermath of Trump's election in 2016 due in part to his unconventional approach to governing and use of social media.

President-Centered Approaches

In 1977, Hugh Heclo published a report for the Ford Foundation on the state of research devoted to the presidency, concluding that while the topic itself was "probably already overwritten," there existed "immense gaps and deficiencies" stemming from a lack of empirical research and too much attention paid to topics such as presidential power, personalities, and decision making during a crisis.[14] At the time, many presidency scholars were focusing much of their attention on the presidencies of Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, and topics such as the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, and Watergate fell nicely into the familiar research categories prominent by the mid-1970s. The same categories and themes had been present since the 1825 publication of *The Presidency of the United States* by Augustus B. Woodward, a small pamphlet considered to be the first study of the presidency as a social and political institution. Those categories of study included (1) the man, (2) public politics, (3) Washington politics, (4) executive politics, and (5) didactic reviews (attempts to synthesize the other categories and draw lessons from the presidency).[15] Heclo argued that the field of presidential studies needed more reliance on primary documents, a better understanding of how the presidency works day-to-day (in order to help it perform better), and a broader, more interdisciplinary approach.[16] Despite several "well-intentioned publications" on the presidency, "presidential studies have coasted on the reputations of a few rightfully respected classics on the Presidency and on secondary literature and anecdotes produced by former participants."[17]

Following Heclo's lead, by the early 1980s, presidency scholars began reassessing the trends of their research. Different types of presidential scholarship had emerged during distinct periods, including studies that focused on the formal powers of the executive office, a psychoanalytic approach to understanding the behaviors of presidents, and the informal power structure within the White House and its impact on presidential leadership.[18] Presidential research also tended to focus on a "political-actor perspective," a president-centered approach that often relied on descriptive analyses or anecdotal comparisons between presidents, and suffered from what many scholars referred to as the infamous "n = 1" syndrome.[19]

In 1983, George C. Edwards III and Stephen J. Wayne published *Studying the Presidency*, an edited volume analyzing the state of the subfield and its various methodological approaches. At the time, presidency scholars were just beginning to grapple with the question of how to more systematically study both presidents and the presidency in a method more befitting the social sciences, generally and political science, specifically. More "theoretically sophisticated and empirically relevant" work was necessary to expand the presidency literature to keep pace with the "phenomenal growth of the presidency: the expansion of its powers, the enlargement of its staff, the evolution of its processes."[20] Challenges in studying the presidency had often come from the unavailability of data, the lack of measurable (particularly quantitative) indicators, an absence of theory, and a lack of transparence for scholars in the behind-the-scenes day-to-day White House operations, all of which "impede the collection and analysis of data, thereby discouraging empirical research." As a result, little about the presidency had lent itself to quantitative and comparative study, other than public opinion, voting studies, and legislative scorecards.[21]

By the early 1990s, a robust discussion had emerged among presidency scholars on how to develop a more rigorous and systematic approach more befitting the traditions of political science to study both the president and the presidency. According to Gary King and Lyn Ragsdale, "We believe that scholars must concentrate on two important steps to understand the American presidency more fully. First, scholars must move from anecdotal observation to systematic description.... Second, anecdotal observation leaves citizens and scholars without a reliable basis for comparison and analysis.... Presidency watchers of all kinds have an interest in eliminating anecdotal observation and thus reducing the chasm between information and meaning."[22] Many scholars have maintained an emphasis on presidential leadership and its importance in understanding the role of the president in both policymaking and governing, yet, at the same time began to change the direction of research by relying on a broader theoretical perspective and including extensive data for comparative analysis. Many still rely on Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power*, first published in 1960, for at least a starting point in their research, while also recognizing the limitations that an individual president can face in effecting political change.[23]

Specific topics contributing to the growing literature on presidential leadership consider changes in the political environment,[24] the institutionalization of and leadership within the executive branch,[25] policymaking and the president's relationship with Congress,[26] and the public presidency and changes in White House communication strategies.[27] For example, according to Samuel Kernell, presidents of the modern era began to "go public," a strategy where the president sells his programs directly to the American people. Going public, which Kernell argues is contradictory to some views of democratic theory, became more common because of a weakened party system, split-ticket voting, divided government, increased power of interest

groups, and the growth of mass communication systems.[28] More recent scholarship has expanded on Kernell's work, and in doing so has questioned its accuracy due to recent changes in the political and media environment. Edwards argues that presidential messaging is not always successful in changing public opinion on certain issues.[29] And, Jeffrey Cohen argues that the polarization of political parties and the growth and fragmentation of media sources now force presidents to develop innovative public strategies to target key constituencies, a dramatic shift from the more simplified view of going public to a national audience as first argued by Kernell in the 1980s.[30]

Leadership style and presidential personality have also remained salient topics of research. According to Fred Greenstein, the presidential "difference," that is, determining the effect that a president can have on the many facets of his administration, can be best understood by understanding the following factors: public communication skills, organizational capacity, political skill, policy vision, cognitive style, and emotional intelligence.[31] The relevance of James David Barber's work on presidential character is still debated due to its categorization based on psychology and personality types—levels of activity as either active or passive, and affect (or feelings) toward activity as either positive or negative, which point to a president's deeper layers of personality and how that will determine his success or failure.[32] Seeking to better understand the effect of a president's personality on his administration's successes and failures, along with the notion of "presidential greatness," represents another line of inquiry among those scholars interested in the president-centered approach.[33] Perhaps presidential leadership is best summed up by Bert Rockman, who argues that as a topic of study, it is both fascinating and complex that presidents may vary in temperaments, but all are confronted with

similar pressures while in office—"it is the manipulable factor in a sea of largely nonmanipulable forces."[34]

Presidency-Centered Approaches

In contrast are scholars who support an institutional approach to studying the presidency, arguing that it is the institution itself—and not individual presidents—that shapes presidential behavior and political outcomes. Many scholars argue that the presidency became institutionalized and politicized throughout the twentieth century, leaving the president as an individual mostly irrelevant in most decision-making processes. Therefore, scholars should rely on a methodological approach, such as rational choice modeling of presidential theory building, as opposed to wasting time trying to understand the role of presidential leadership.[35] For example, Terry Moe explains how presidents are unique in having considerable resources and strategies at their disposal in their job of governing day-to-day. Congress, in comparison, cannot match these executive branch resources in terms of expertise, experience, and information, while the president can act unilaterally in some instances, as well as more swiftly and decisively. Presidents can also make sure that appointees within the executive branch are loyal (similar to political patronage), and can also centralize decision making within the White House to increase power (policy decisions and implementation, such as through executive orders).[36] Other quantitative approaches have emerged to better understand specific aspects of the presidency as an institution, including unilateral actions by presidents,[37] public appeals,[38] presidential control of the bureaucracy,[39] and war powers.[40]

Other institutional approaches include "new institutionalism," which looks beyond institutions to also include an analysis of the ideas and people that influence those institutions.

For example, Stephen Skowronek provides a theory of "political time" by offering a cyclical explanation of presidential power. When presidents takes office, the political environment that they encounter is due in part to the actions of predecessors as well as recent national and world events. As such, the circumstances, or the "political time," in which a president finds themselves in office, will determine how much opportunity they have to enact policy changes.[41]

Louis Fisher has provided an extensive analysis on the legal and constitutional aspects of the presidency, including presidential war powers and the separation of powers between the president and Congress. He argues that the presidency as an institution and the powers that belong to individual presidents are best understood by recognizing that both the presidency and Congress operate within a political environment that also includes the judiciary, the bureaucracy, independent regulatory commissions, political parties, state and local governments, interest groups, and other nations. A president's power, therefore, is determined by cooperation and/or resistance from Congress, the Courts, or other political institutions with whom the president and the executive branch must share power.[42]

Lyn Ragsdale's research relies on three dimensions to explain the presidency as an institution: organization, behavior, and structure. Presidents can make marginal changes to the organization of the presidency, but the office is not reinvented with each new occupant in the White House. She argues that it is through rigorous data analysis across several presidencies that can explain the president's role within the institution of the presidency; ultimately, "the institution of the presidency shapes presidents as much as presidents, during their short tenures, shape the institution."[43]

Erwin Hargrove provides a compelling discussion of how to maintain the debate over the relevance of presidential leadership while still moving forward in developing better research

patterns for the discipline. The individuality of the president is still an important consideration, including the effect on events and institutions, but only if historical situations and other environmental factors are considered as well. Therefore, individuals do make a difference, but Hargrove wants to know under what conditions this occurs, since the "relative importance of leaders varies across institutions and across time and place." A president, then, deals with practices that are institutionalized, as well as those that are not. These two approaches allow for the consideration of presidential leadership while still providing explanations about the institutional nature of the presidency.[44]

While every significant work on the presidency cannot be included here, it is important to note that since the discussion began nearly five decades ago on how to improve the study of the presidency within political science, many notable contributions to the literature have been made by scholars relying on a variety of methodological and/or theoretical perspectives. In addition, the debate among presidency scholars now has the depth and breadth that was missing several decades ago, and healthy disagreements exist on not only what questions should be asked, but how they should be answered. In 2009, an issue of *Presidential Studies Quarterly* included a symposium on the state of presidency research, which highlighted the progress made, touting some of the most influential works being done within the subfield. Broadly speaking, key areas of current research include the president's influence, if any, over public opinion,[45] presidential war powers and other constitutional concerns,[46] presidential control (or lack thereof) over executive branch agencies and the policy agenda,[47] and the president's relationship with the news media,[48] to name just a few. While presidency scholars may disagree on how to approach these and other relevant questions, most would agree that the evolution within presidential studies has had a positive effect on our understanding of the dynamic political institution that is

the presidency. As Kenneth R. Mayer puts it, "We have theories that are useful in analyzing presidential policy making, unilateral action, legislative strategy, and institutional structure. We have hypotheses, data, and tests. We have unanswered questions. And perhaps most importantly, we have challenges to the conventional wisdom, all of which make the subfield a far more interesting place."[49]

Plan of the Book

This volume takes a current look at the various issues facing the presidency and provides a "state-of-the-art" overview of current trends in the field of presidency research. The collected essays represent concise and engaging discussions on relevant topics within presidency research (and those topics most commonly covered in courses on the presidency) written by some of the leading scholars in the field of presidency research. Each chapter provides a discussion that tells readers "this is what political scientists know" from the perspective of issues and challenges facing the current and most recent administrations. The goal of the book is to bring together disciplinary debates (for example, the presidency-centered v. president-centered approach to studying the presidency) along with current-event driven discussions about the contemporary presidency.

To begin, Victoria A. Farrar-Myers considers the president's relationship to the Constitution in Chapter 2 and concludes that the recent expansion of presidential powers will continue to provoke controversy about the president's role within a separated system for years to come. In Chapter 3, Sharece Thrower examines the more specific constitutional debate over unilateral powers and how presidents have relied on what at times has been a controversial interpretation of presidential powers to govern. The next five chapters look at the president's

connection to the political system as well as the public. In Chapter 4, Randall E. Adkins assesses presidential campaigns and elections in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential campaign, and analyzes key changes (including campaign finance, the frontloading of the primary process, and overall candidate strategies) to the process since the early 1970s. In Chapter 5, Julia R. Azari considers the connection of presidential governance to political parties and concludes that the president–party relationship is perhaps currently undergoing a major transformation. Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha explains, in Chapter 6, the lengths that presidents and their advisors now go to in an attempt to shape news coverage and the overall public image of the presidency, yet even the most skilled communicators still face many challenges in this regard. In Chapter 7, Diane J. Heith shows how presidents now rely on public opinion polls to enhance their leadership of the American public yet explains how the trend of constant polling in recent White Houses may also constrain a president's ability to lead. And in Chapter 8, Caroline Heldman looks at intersectionality and the presidency, examining how issues of diversity and equity have brought changes to how presidents govern and respond to the American electorate.

Next, we consider the relationship between the presidency and the other two branches of government. In Chapter 9, Brandon Rottinghaus considers recent trends in the executive-legislative relationship and concludes that one branch is not completely dominant over the other since each can hold a political advantage at different times and in using unique governing tools. Nancy Kassop explains in Chapter 10 that the relationship between the president and the federal judiciary has many legal as well as political facets, especially when considering the importance of making a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court. Those who work within the White House, as well as the executive branch as an institution, also offer compelling areas of research. Matthew J. Dickinson considers the crucial link between presidential power, White House staff,

and executive branch effectiveness in Chapter 11, showing the challenges that presidents face in managing the many agencies and personnel that make up the federal bureaucracy.

The president's role in the policymaking process at both the national and international levels is considered in the final two chapters. Regarding domestic policy, Jeremy L. Strickler concludes in Chapter 12 that presidents may have expanded their role in recent years as the chief domestic policymaker, yet many political challenges exist that limit the president's ability to implement a domestic policy agenda. And in Chapter 13, Meena Bose shows the evolution of presidential power regarding foreign policy and suggests that while presidents bear primary responsibility in this area, Congress still maintains an important constitutional function in pursuing foreign policy objectives.

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[1] Glenn Thrush and Michael Gold, "Washington Braces for a Volatile Day as Trump Seeks to Disrupt a Moment of Democratic Triumph," *New York Times*, January 6, 2021, www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/us/politics/washington-braces-for-a-volatile-day-as-trump-seeks-to-disrupt-a-moment-of-democratic-triumph.html.

[2] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Deeds Done in Words: Presidential Rhetoric and the Genres of Governance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 14–27.

[3] "Inaugural Address by President Joseph R. Biden Jr.," January 20, 2021, www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/01/20/inaugural-address-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr/.

[4] Louis W. Koenig, *The Chief Executive*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 2–3. See also Lori Cox Han and Diane J. Heith, *Presidents and the American Presidency*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), Chapter 1.

[5] Koenig, 2.

[6] Ibid., 3.

[7] Jeffrey Cohen and David Nice, *The Presidency* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 53–59; and Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776–2018*, 8th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2020), 347–350.

[8] Milkis and Nelson, 348.

[9] See Lori Cox Han, *Governing From Center Stage: White House Communication Strategies During the Television Age of Politics* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2001), Chapter 2.

[10] The term "imperial president" is most often associated with the book of the same title by historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. in which he discusses the modern presidency. See Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

[11] Koenig, 4.

[12] For example, see, Ryan Barilleaux, *The Post-Modern Presidency: The Office after Ronald Reagan* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Richard Rose, *The Postmodern President*, 2nd ed. (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1991); and Steven Schier, ed., *The Postmodern Presidency: Bill Clinton's Legacy in U.S. Politics* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

[13] Joseph A. Pika, John Anthony Maltese, and Andrew Rudalevige, *The Politics of the Presidency*, 10th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2021), 1.

[14] Hugh Heclo, *Studying the Presidency: A Report to the Ford Foundation* (New York: Ford Foundation Press, 1977b), 5–6.

[15] Ibid., 7–8.

[16] Ibid., 31–45.

[17] Ibid., 30.

[18] George C. Edwards III, John H. Kessel, and Bert A. Rockman, *Researching the Presidency: Vital Questions, New Approaches* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), 3–5.

[19] Lyn Ragsdale, *Vital Statistics on the Presidency,* 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2014), 1–3.

[20] Stephen J. Wayne, "An Introduction to Research on the Presidency," in *Studying the Presidency*, eds. George C. Edwards III and Stephen J. Wayne (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 4.

[21] Ibid., 5–6.

[22] Gary King and Lyn Ragsdale, *The Elusive Executive: Discovering Statistical Patterns in the Presidency* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1988), 2–5.

[23] Early examples include works such as George C. Edwards III, *At the Margins: Presidential Leadership of Congress* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Mark A. Peterson, *Legislating Together: The White House and Capitol Hill from Eisenhower to Reagan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Samuel Kernell, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1986).

[24] For example, see John H. Kessel, *Presidents, the Presidency, and the Political Environment* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001); Thomas E. Cronin, Michael A. Genovese, and Meena Bose, *The Paradoxes of the American Presidency*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), and Brandon J. Rottinghaus, "Going Partisan: Presidential Leadership in a Polarized Political Environment," *Issues in Governance Studies* 62 (October 2013).

[25] For example, see Stephen Hess and James P. Pfiffner, *Organizing the Presidency*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2020), John Burke, *The Institutional Presidency: Organizing and Managing the White House from FDR to Clinton*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns

Hopkins University Press, 2000); Thomas J. Weko, *The Politicizing Presidency: The White House Personnel Office, 1948–1994* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995), and Shirley Anne Warshaw, *The Keys to Power: Managing the Presidency*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[26] For example, see Jeffrey E. Cohen, *The President on Capitol Hill: A Theory of Presidential Influence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); Charles O. Jones, *Separate but Equal Branches: Congress and the Presidency*, 2nd ed. (New York: Chatham House, 1999); and Michael A. Genovese, Todd L. Belt, and William W. Lammers, *The Presidency and Domestic Policy: Comparing Leadership Styles, FDR to Obama* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[27] For example, see Samuel Kernell, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2007); Jeffrey K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Han, *Governing from Center Stage*, Stephen J. Farnsworth, *Presidential Communication and Character: White House News Management from Clinton and Cable to Twitter and Trump* (New York: Routledge, 2018), Joshua M. Scacco and Kevin Coe, *The Ubiquitous Presidency: Presidential Communication and Digital Democracy in Tumultuous Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), and Diane J. Heith, *The End of the Rhetorical Presidency? Public Leadership in the Trump Era* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

[28] Kernell, *Going Public*, 4th ed., 10–11.

[29] See George C. Edwards III, *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

[30] See Jeffrey E. Cohen, *Going Local: Presidential Leadership in the Post-Broadcast Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[31] See Fred I. Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Barack Obama*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[32] See James David Barber, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*, rev. 4th ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 2008).

[33] For example, see Cronin, Genovese, and Bose, 39-41. See also Marc Landy and Sidney M. Milkis, *Presidential Greatness* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), Robert K. Murray and Tim H. Blessing, *Greatness in the White House: Rating the Presidents from George Washington through Ronald Reagan*, 2nd ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "The Ultimate Approval Rating," *New York Times Magazine*, December 15, 1996, 46–51; and Brandon Rottinghaus and Justin S. Vaughn, "Measuring Obama against the Great Presidents," *Brookings*, February 13, 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2015/02/13/measuring-obama-against-the-great-presidents/.

[34] Bert A. Rockman, "The Leadership Style of George Bush," in *The Bush Presidency: First Appraisals*, eds. Colin Campbell and Bert A. Rockman (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1991), 2.

[35] Examples of this approach include Terry M. Moe, "The Politicized Presidency," in *The New Direction in American Politics*, eds. John E. Chubb and Paul E. Peterson (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1985); Moe, "Presidents, Institutions, and Theory," in *Researching the Presidency*; Burke, *The Institutional Presidency*; Burke, *The Institutional Presidency*; and Weko, *The Politicizing Presidency*.

[36] For an excellent discussion of Moe's work in this area, see Cohen and Nice, *The Presidency*, 57–59.

[37] For example, see Jeffrey Crouch, Mark J. Rozell, and Mitchel A. Sollenberger, *The Unitary Executive Theory: A Danger to Constitutional Government* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020); Graham G. Dodds, *The Unitary Presidency* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Andrew Rudalevige, *By Executive Order: Bureaucratic Management and the Limits of Presidential Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021); William G. Howell, *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Ryan J. Barilleaux and Christopher S. Kelley, eds., *The Unitary Executive and the Modern Presidency* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010).

[38] For example, see Brandice Canes-Wrone, *Who's Leading Whom?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); B. Dan Wood, *The Politics of Economic Leadership: The Causes and Consequences of Presidential Rhetoric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Daniel E. Ponder, *Presidential Leverage: Presidents, Approval, and the American State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).

[39] For example, see Andrew Rudalevige, *Managing the President's Program: Presidential Leadership and Legislative Policy Formation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); and David E. Lewis, *The Politics of Presidential Appointments: Political Control and Bureaucratic Performance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[40] For example, see Douglas L. Kriner, *After the Rubicon: Congress, Presidents, and the Politics of Waging War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Chris Edelson, *Emergency Presidential Power: From the Drafting of the Constitution to the War on Terror* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013); and Michael A. Genovese and David Gray Adler, *The War Power in an Age of Terrorism: Debating Presidential Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

[41] See Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1993).

[42] See Louis Fisher, *The Politics of Shared Power: Congress and the Executive*, 4th ed. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998).

[43] Ragsdale, 7–13.

[44] Erwin C. Hargrove, "Presidential Personality and Leadership Style," in *Researching the Presidency*, 69–72.

[45] For example, see Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*; Canes-Wrone, *Who Leads Whom?*; and Diane J. Heith, *Polling to Govern: Public Opinion and Presidential Leadership* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[46] For example, see Louis Fisher, *Presidential War Power*, 2nd rev. ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), and William G. Howell and Jon C. Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather: Congressional Checks on Presidential War Powers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[47] For example, see Rudalevige, *Managing the President's Program*; and Kenneth R. Mayer, *With the Stroke of a Pen: Executive Orders and Presidential Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[48] For example, see Jeffrey E. Cohen, *The Presidency in the Era of 24-Hour News* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Martha Joynt Kumar, *Managing the President's Message: The White House Communications Operation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Diane J. Heith, *The Presidential Road Show: Public Leadership in an Era of Party Polarization and Media Fragmentation* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2013); and Lori Cox Han, *A*

Presidency Upstaged: The Public Presidency of George H. W. Bush (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011).

[49] Kenneth R. Mayer, "Thoughts on 'The Revolution in Presidential Studies,'" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39 (2009): 781–785.