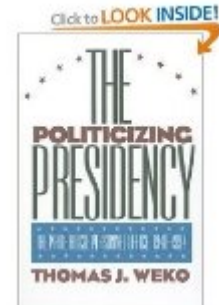


**Thomas J. Weko.** *The Politicizing Presidency: The White House Personnel Office, 1948-1994.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995. xi + 224 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-0695-5.



**Reviewed by** Douglas J. Hoekstra

**Published on** H-Pol (September, 1997)

In 1887 President Cleveland would answer the White House phone. In 1950 President Truman had only two White House aides assisting him in filling almost twenty-two thousand presidentially appointed posts. In 1980 the Reagan transition organization of five hundred paid staff spent more than four million dollars of federal and private funds in the post-election effort to centralize control over policy, budgeting, and appointments. Ed Meese, Reagan's closest policy advisor, stated the intent clearly: "control of appointments had to be centralized and controlled tightly by President Reagan and a few others on the White House staff." [1] Reagan marks the outer bounds of the struggle since mid-century to extend presidential control by centralizing authority in an expanding White House staff charged with overseeing presidential appointments, while politicizing the federal bureaucracy through efforts to push presidential loyalists "deep into the agencies of the Executive Office and the executive branch." [2]

In examining these trends in the modern executive, *The Politicizing Presidency* seeks to an-

swer paired questions of interest to both scholars and citizens: "First, why have presidents tried to centralize authority in a vastly larger and more specialized White House Office? Second, what are the consequences of centralization: has it made the executive branch more responsive to presidential leadership, or simply yielded a bloated and unmanageable White House Office?" [3]

Thomas J. Weko skillfully draws upon White House files, archives, and extensive personal interviews with executive branch veterans in order to trace the evolution of the White House Personnel Office from 1948-1994. This potentially arid topic becomes an interesting story of changes in the relationships between individuals in the presidency and the institutional apparatus of the modern office, as well as a test of "rational choice institutionalism" as an explanation of the impulse toward centralization. Weko's study may also suggest how rational choice premises can limit historical research.

ORIGINS, CONSEQUENCES, AND SECOND THOUGHTS

The institutional recasting of the executive office is embedded in rival views of executive power within an administrative state. Following a Revolution, largely fought against the stated excesses of executive power, the Articles of Confederation failed to establish a unified executive authority. The successor Constitution of 1787 seemed to assume that "in republican government, the legislative authority necessarily predominates,"[4] but also left available in Article II an undefined "executive power." Hamilton publicly interpreted the new constitutional order as enhancing "energy in the executive" as the "leading character in the definition of good government,"[5] but Jefferson (whose presidential practice proved more expansive than his rhetoric) warned that "an elective despotism was not the government we fought for." [6] Inheriting this mixed tradition, the "pre-modern" presidents could seek policy leadership through national crisis and personal skills, but lacked the ideological and organizational basis for asserting the claims of "centralization" and "politicization" Weko finds common in their mid-twentieth century successors. However, with the increased scale and centralization of the emerging modern economy, a revised Hamiltonianism provided a rationale for the president's new role in an administrative state.

The original Hamiltonian executive stood as a potential check on popular will,[7] but progressive reformers reconstructed the presidency: the president, as a national officer with a national constituency, would speak directly to and for "the people" and, through election, would then become the principle instrument of popular rule, which in turn legitimated presidential dominance over the growing executive bureaucracy.[8] Such dominance could be exercised on behalf of the new "positive" rights of economic and social security called for in Franklin D. Roosevelt's new "economic constitutional order,"[9] but it also represented a democratic answer to a Weberian dilemma. Max Weber had viewed accelerating bureaucratic control, "the exercise of control on the basis of knowl-

edge,"[10] as the hallmark of modern societies. In the progressive view, democracy could be brought to bureaucracy through an executive exercising control over the bureaucracy as legitimated by presidential election. Such power was not uncontested by Congressional interests and those disturbed by this neo-Hamiltonianism, but the progressive perspective was generally supported with institutional change and advisory recommendations. The creation of the Bureau of the Budget in 1921 and its enlargement during the fashioning of the New Deal, the creation of the Executive Office of the President by Franklin Roosevelt, the expansion in the number of presidential appointees within the executive branch,[11] and the growth of the Presidential Personnel Office, on which Weko focuses, all emerge as institutional correlatives of the progressive theory of the administrative state.

A steady line of advisory committees ratified the presidents proper role as central manager of the executive bureaucracy. The Brownlow Committee of 1937 called for reorganization into "twelve great departments directly responsible in administration to the Chief Executive," arguing that "those who waver at the sight of needed power are false friends of modern democracy." [12] The Hoover Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch called again for expanding presidential staff, and a "clear line of command from top to bottom." [13] The Heineman task force, reporting to Lyndon Johnson, urged new tools for presidential management against the challenges of "powerful legislative committees, well-organized interest groups, entrenched bureau chiefs with narrow program mandates, and the career civil service." [14] The President's Advisory Council on Executive Organization successfully recommended to Nixon new mechanisms of executive control through a Domestic Council in the White House and a reformulation of the Bureau of the Budget into the Office of Management and Budget. Only with the Watergate scandals did the advisory ranks break, the 1974 report of the National Acad-

emy of Public Administration shifting to criticism of the "closed hierarchical model" and embracing what former advisory committees had sought to overcome: "The Federal executive is necessarily pluralistic." [15] Academic analysis followed roughly the same pattern of sustained enthusiasm for presidential dominance in the executive branch, followed by sobering second thoughts. By the 1960's, scholarly embrace of the power-seeking presidency was commonplace. Schlesinger's historical portrait placed Roosevelt at the center of the expanding American state of the 1930's, James MacGregor Burns saw strengthened parties and presidents as the rightful remedy for a system "designed for deadlock" and Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power* gave theoretical ballast to these views. [16] Neustadt rejected as misconceived the Eisenhower attempt at collegial decision-making within the executive branch. Maximizing presidential power was legitimate and improved national policy, [17] with Neustadt's influential book presented as a strategic guide for power-seeking presidents: "My theme is personal power and its politics: What it is, how to get it, how to keep it, how to use it." [18] However, the Watergate scandal elicited second thoughts, and the Nixon and Reagan presidencies showed that attempts to enhance presidential control over the executive bureaucracy could serve more conservative ends than scholars had originally assumed. Scholars with connections to Republican administrations continued to find utility in the "administrative presidency." [19] In terms of political practice, more conservative presidents faced hostility from many career officials, [20] and in terms of political theory efforts to control appointments and move decisions into the White House, maximized "popular control over the bureaucratic and technocratic power centers," and linked "the political ideas that win elections and the policies of government." [21] For others, second thoughts on executive dominance now emerged: with Watergate looming, Schlesinger returned with a new account of *The Imperial Presidency*. [22] Critics ar-

gued that centralization of responsibility in the expanding White House staff harmfully reduced the traditional roles of cabinet and party officials, while the modern Executive Office became a "powerful inner sanctum of government, isolated from traditional constitutional checks and balances." The Volcker Commission warned that politicizing executive agencies might actually "dilute the President's ability to develop and enforce a coherent program," [23] and Hugh Heclo argued that "personal loyalties fail to substitute for the institutional services the executive needs." [24] Other critics focused more on the political theory animating attempts to move power toward the presidency, with scholars such as Lowi, Tulis and Milkis locating defects in the resulting populist and "personal" presidency, overburdened with popular expectation and erosive of civic discourse. [25] Analysis of the causes of the continuing tendencies also varied. While Lowi, Tulis and Milkis focused on defective theory, other analysts saw the presidency as an inherently personal institution, with impulses toward centralization varying by individual strategy, character, or will, while others emphasized the sheer acceleration in the business of government facing all modern presidents. [26] In sum, the empirical causes, normative implications and consequences for governance of the "politicizing presidency" draw varied and shifting scholarly assessments. Stepping onto this contested terrain, Weko brings a clarifying account of institutional development, some assessment of the results of the "politicizing presidency," and a test of the developing theory of "rational choice institutionalism."

#### THE POLITICIZED PRESIDENCY

Why have modern presidents sought centralized authority through the agency of their expanding White House Office? Weko argues that, though presidential workloads and staff have both grown, their relationship is not "regular and predictable." Alternative "president-centered explanations" of the long term growth of the White

House overlook pronounced variations in work habits and policy goals. Looking to "forces outside of the Oval Office that have pushed all modern presidents in the same direction" can provide better theory: "Presidency scholarship should yield presidency theory," and such theory is "best constructed by emphasizing simplicity and parsimony." [27] Under the tenets of "rational choice individualism," [28] institutions such as the presidency "induce" preferences in their occupants, and these preferences in turn shape such institutions as the White House Office. Modern presidents are expected by modern publics to govern--to shape, propose, pass, and administer national policy--and yet continue to be checked by the traditional separation of powers, as well as constraints of time and knowledge and bureaucratic inertia; thus, they logically turn to the most available and flexible resources, least controlled by others--which induces presidents to use the available White House Office, simultaneously pulling decision-making into the closest presidential circles and using appointment powers to "presidentialize" institutions with other agendas and loyalties. This "elegant and parsimonious" rational choice approach rests on the premise that the presidency is best understood by omitting personal factors and treating presidents as "generic actors" facing a situational gap between expectation and capacity, which gives rise to the inexorably "politicizing presidency." Weko's contribution is to test this theory against the evolution of the Presidential Personnel Office. The PPO is a part of the White House Office and screens and recommends appointees for the president. Reflecting both "centralizing" and "politicizing" tendencies, the "aggrandizement" of the PPO is traced across ten presidential administrations from 1948-1994. Drawing upon extensive interviews and White House documents, Weko develops a skillful historical account of the evolving size and prerogatives of the modern PPO. [29]

In this contemporary history, both "centralization" and "politicization" tendencies move in

the same direction over the 1948-1994 period, in part driven by "the changing shape of electoral politics." At mid-century the Democratic party could claim the major role in Truman's personnel choices. Party leaders remained the dominant figures in the politics of presidential nomination, the party provided campaign organization in the general election, and Louis Johnson, treasurer of the Democratic National Committee, was Truman's link to campaign contributors. After Truman's election, the party could take priority in proposing executive personnel, while "the President's staff would simply serve as a repository for names presented to it." [30]

Party influence over appointments declined dramatically as the modern party system emerged. With the rise of primaries, presidential candidates increasingly built their own campaign organizations, organized their own finances, mobilized their own issue activists, and employed their own polling in the struggle for nomination. Owing much less to party, President Kennedy marked the post-Truman shift, relying on "personal organization" for both the winning of office and the staffing of government. Meanwhile, modern presidents emerging from a party system in which nomination necessitated constant popular appeals governed increasingly through strategies of "going public." [31] With televised rhetoric less mediated by party structure, Kennedy's attempt to control personnel decisions was accelerated by Lyndon Johnson, while Republicans followed a broadly similar track. Eisenhower's anti-party animus was overcome by party dominance of appointments, but Nixon marked the transition to candidate-centered electoral politics, combined with what the President saw as bureaucratic and congressional resistance. By 1970, Nixon moved to centralize personnel decisions in the White House, where Fred Malek operated with little concern for party interests.

Nor could departmental heads or the organized groups in "policy networks" fully resist the

emerging centralization. Past presidential politics, as exemplified by Truman, relied upon the president's ability to forge reciprocal relationships with departmental heads and the organized groups in "policy networks," with political appointments as the currency of reciprocity. From the mid-1960's to the second half of the 1970's, modern politics shifted presidential interests: "going public" via television became as crucial as relations with interest groups, and Cabinet members found it difficult to deliver blocs of votes in an increasingly fragmented Congress, while a popular opinion only weakly bound to political parties seemed increasingly influenced by "news about presidents," thus lessening departmental autonomy as presidents sought administrations speaking to the camera with "one voice." [32] From the presidential perspective, it was now necessary to centralize both public relations and policy formulation within the expanding Executive Office of the President.

However, Weko notes that the process of inexorable centralization predicted by the rational choice analysis of change in the presidential environment has not occurred. The initial presidential effort to "control the bureaucracy" encounters--and produces--new constraints (indeed, the current size of the Presidential Personnel Office is about the same as two decades ago). The decline of party has been accompanied by the rise of new groups--candidate organizations, ideological groups such as feminists and the Christian right, and in the policy realm, foundations and think tanks--all of them jostling claimants for position similar to the political parties of the past; and simultaneously, as centralization continued in such organs as the PPO, "it has become more costly to monitor the performance of its members and to coordinate its work and reconcile its conflicts with other staff units." [33]

What, then, have been the consequences of the aggrandizement over time by the White House Personnel Office (WHPO)? To what extent, does it

give presidents new conflicts and bloated White House staffs, or more responsive appointees in a more univocal administration? Weko argues that presidents can get more "responsiveness," but that such gains arise from "the confluence of two conditions: centralized control over staffing and access to fairly homogeneous networks of politics and clientele." Weko proposes a test of the "confluence" hypothesis by examining presidential control over the HEW/HHS [34] Department in the Nixon and Reagan presidencies.

Reagan represents a confluence of appointment control and homogeneous political networks while Nixon exemplifies the opposite, beginning his presidency with more de-centralized appointments, a narrower network of political supports, and a party more heterogeneous than the 1980's Republicans. This contrast is "a critical test," for "if control and responsiveness can be sustained in a setting that is this inhospitable to conservative Republican presidents, then it should be able to thrive throughout the executive branch." [35] Weko details the results: Nixon experienced major problems with an unresponsive HEW, but won a more "quiescent" HEW by exerting more control over personnel after the 1972 election, until Watergate again eroded HEW responsiveness. In contrast, appointments to HHS were thoroughly structured by Reagans' staff, which "mitigated conflict" and produced a department much more responsive to presidential perspectives. However, when Margaret Heckler, a liberal Republican, briefly headed HHS, an appointments deadlock with the White House resulted, and even after her departure Reagan's second term was marked by ebbing though still considerable influence over HHS. Given the array of potential rivals, "sustaining systematic influence over the staffing of an administration is a precarious business for the WHPO." Nonetheless, Weko's conclusion is that, from a president's perspective, and especially if the factors of control over appointments and homogeneity of political networks coincide, exerting White House control

over political appointments is one of the "fairly reliable instruments of presidential leadership," even in "hard cases" such as HEW/HHS.[36] Weko also provides a perspective beyond the presidential preoccupation with responsiveness and control, noting the problems arising in the trend toward centralization in the White House. Burgeoning demands and expectations are drawn toward the White House, conflicts formerly played out in the departments are brought into the Executive Office, departmental-White House stalemates can occur as administrators view WHPO demands as narrowly "political," and the growing personnel office becomes "a more difficult organization to monitor." However, these problems may be part of the "inescapable tension between elections and governance" and sometimes represent a desirable conflict between "the broad, national concerns represented by presidents (and their aides) against parochial and clientele-dominated concerns of departments." [37] Weko concedes that politicizing and centralizing trends permit "relatively narrow sorts of political concerns to crowd out the programmatic perspectives of departments and their allies," marking an "equivocal, even harmful development for the capabilities of the administrative establishment." Current reformers thus call for reducing appointive posts or renewing the search for "neutral competence." Weko argues that his study, premised on the rational choice claim that modern "presidents are institutionally induced to centralize," makes irrelevant the urgings of reform, absent a change in "the institutions that presidents inhabit." Public expectation is crucial: "because the public does not hold presidents accountable for disrupting the continuity and integrity of the administrative establishment, presidents simply have no incentive to worry about its health." [38] And so Weko's search for pattern in the administrative particularities of the WHPO since 1948 returns to one of the basic theoretical and practical questions: "How much difference do leaders make?" Weko's answer is clear. "In the end, leaders do make a dif-

ference, I believe, but institutions matter, and matter far more." Presidential "dispositions" may drive them to seek specific changes, but successful alteration can only occur within the boundaries set by the established expectations and needs of others. Exceeding these boundaries--somewhat awkwardly labeled "institutional"--produces "resistance, criticism, and retaliation," as shown in the costs incurred both by Nixon's "aggressive centralization" [39] and Carter's attempt to return to the decentralized appointments characteristic of the Truman and Eisenhower presidencies. It is the shifting environment of the modern presidency, signified by the decline of party constraint, the fragmenting of power within Congress, and the rise of the increasingly plebiscitarian and media-centered presidency--in which "going centralized" is driven by the same political urgencies as the strategy of "going public"--that constitutes the basic explanation of the aggregate trends toward "centralization" and "politicization" from 1948 to 1994. Though Weko notes that the continued growth of the WHPO predicted by "rational choice institutionalism" has not occurred, he concludes that "the central claim of the rational choice approach"--presidents are institutionally induced to centralize"--is supported by his study. "Rational choice accounts remain the most fruitful and promising way of theorizing about the presidency." [40]

#### "RATIONAL CHOICE HISTORY" AND THE SEARCH FOR THEORY

Whatever the merits of such theoretical claims, Weko's study of *The Politicizing Presidency* is marked by scholarly virtues. It is thorough in its research, using multiple documentary sources and over one hundred interviews. Weko offers interesting hypotheses--for example, on the importance of homogeneity in the president's political network--and also develops limited tests of central hypotheses, as in his evaluation of the effects of "centralization" in HEW/HHS for presidents Nixon and Reagan. Weko's factual account also reveals

through its accumulating details dramatic changes in American politics (for example, presidential appointments are now largely directed to the proliferating posts atop the bureaucracy, while at the outset of FDR's presidency 98.5% of presidential appointments were to the field positions more desired by party leaders).[41] Moreover, *The Politicizing Presidency* elaborates a careful discussion of the range of consequences flowing from the sustained impulse toward centralization, considering systemic as well as presidential effects. Most of all, though, Weko brings readers a strong narrative of the modern presidential struggle for greater administrative control, its partial successes and seemingly constant erosion. There is much to be learned from Weko's work.

This book may not only be good, but also important. It appears at the nexus of institutional change in the presidency and conceptual change among those presidential scholars turning toward both (or either) historical and rational choice approaches to analysis of the presidency, and so it may shed light on how useful historical and rational choice approaches may be in understanding presidents and the presidency.

A contrast of Stephen Skowronek's *The Politics Presidents Make*,[42] which encompasses the full range of presidential history, and Weko's analysis of modern administrative history since 1948 suggests possible problems in Weko's history. Skowronek uses history to challenge the convention of separating the pre-modern presidents from their "modern" (or post-F.D.R) successors, arguing for cyclical similarities of situation between presidents separated in time.[43] In contrast, Weko's more limited post-1948 history seems to revive the distinction Skowronek challenged: modern presidents are different than their predecessors and face a "post-party" environment of new supplicants and new expectations which eventually push them all toward the strategies of "politicization" and "centralization." One of the in-

herent problems with historical approaches is that we are rarely sure when "enough" history has been reviewed, and this may be the case for Weko's analysis. Weko's stated intention is for a historical review back to 1948, and that project is carried off with thorough documentary skill. However, a fuller historical account might well reveal that, though the presidential impulses toward "politicization" took different institutional forms (Andrew Jackson lacked a White House Personnel Office), they were more present and more successful in earlier presidencies than Weko's thesis of contemporary change allows, suggesting a more evolutionary than disjunctive change in politicizing strategies.

Nor can we fully trace the historical significance of the administrative centralization Weko describes with the approach taken. The author presents the trends described as mainly responses to determining shifts in the modern political universe of the president, with centralization accelerating over contemporary time until rising political "costs" limit its further increase. However, without a fuller elaboration of an historical baseline or theoretical standard for what constitutes essential practice in the American polity,[44] it is difficult to judge not only how disjunctive or evolutionary is the move toward administrative centralization, but also whether these changes should be regarded as fundamental or peripheral in American governance and the presidency. The fuller significance of the centralizing trends examined also could be clarified by linking them not just to the particular changes in parties, primaries, and organized groups that Weko describes, but also to the altered understanding of the role of the state and/or procedural norms which underlie these institutional changes. Such a widening of the analytical lens, however, seems unlikely, given Weko's embrace of "rational choice institutionalism."

Confronted with the particularities of widely varying presidents, as well as the limited number

of actual presidents, and the full range of variables potentially impinging on executive behavior, presidential scholars hunger for a theoretical approach which would bring focus to their field and parsimony to their hypotheses.[45] Rational choice approaches are newly regnant in analyses of the institutional systems and voting choices of the Congress (though counter-views have also developed)[46] and thus have appeal to scholars in a field where theory has proved elusive. Weko shares this desire, but the link between the rational choice theory he praises as most "fruitful" and the historical patterns he traces is rather loose. The theoretical base of *The Politicizing Presidency* is given rather short attention, in contrast to the documentary richness of its empirical findings. Indeed, one of the ironic strengths of Weko's account of executive "politicization" is that it calls into question whether these developments can be fully framed by the rational choice premises embraced. Weko seems to see the best evidence for the rational choice assumption that presidential behavior is "institutionally induced," (with much less attention to "personal" factors) as consisting of the general direction of change: for those individual presidents beginning with different strategies (such as Carter and Nixon), the eventual shift was toward the institutionally induced strategies of "politicization" and "centralization," while the aggregate measures linked to these White House strategies, such as numbers of personnel in the executive office or in the WHPO, show increases from 1948-1994.

However, an approach which privileges a "generic presidency" may account for an oddity in Weko's research--"staff" appear, "institutions" change, and the "White House" acts, but rarely does the particular president appear, with his own views on politicizing and centralizing. Weko is hardly simplistic--he concedes that presidents and their "dispositions" "do make a difference," but "institutions matter, and matter far more"

largely by setting the "boundaries" within which presidents must act.[47]

However, Weko's rational choice perspective seems a rather blunt instrument for handling the presidential variations in the story he tells, as he seems to recognize. For example, though it is true that the size of the WHPO staff increases from 1948-1994, it is equally true that pronounced variation in staff size occurs between presidencies, with the largest relative increases seeming to fall in the Johnson and first term Reagan presidencies.[48] Just as Jimmy Carter's belief in "cabinet government" withdrew presidential preference from appointment decisions and was "altogether at odds with what rational choice accounts would lead us to expect," so too the irregular presidential responses to presumably "systemic" pressures "raise serious questions about explanations of the presidency's evolution that argue that the PPO's evolution is institutionally induced." [49]

Having forthrightly acknowledged the anomalous, Weko seems to temper the original hypothesis that presidential behavior is institutionally induced by noting that "presidents with ambitious policy aims" such as Johnson and Reagan have been the chief proponents of aggressive centralization, but concludes that they cannot exceed "institutionally defined boundaries" based in "the needs, demands, and expectations of other leaders." [50] This formulation seems to return presidents to their role as more than occasional independent variables--indeed, research more specifically examining particular presidents might reveal them to be more the architects of centralization than simply respondents to institutional pressure.

One of the additional problems arising from the de-emphasis of the presidential person is that leadership situations here defined by the "systemic" features apparent to retrospective analysis may have been perceived very differently by the particular presidents placed in the flux of a political environment imperfectly or differently under-



stood. Even the modern arrival of the "centralization" strategy, supposedly the product of the "systemic," depends on individual presidents with particular policy hopes and views of their office. For example, *Politicizing* points out that both the political opportunity and the accepted rationale for strategies of centralization existed well before they were finally employed by Kennedy and Johnson, Eisenhower having resisted the "systemic" pressures already in place.[51] This implies more centrality to presidential belief than the "systemic" view encourages. Weko also sees the homogeneity of a president's "network of politicians and clientele" as one of the conditions promoting "responsiveness"[52] from those who serve him, but does not discuss the degree to which presidential politicians can create their own networks, sustaining them with the public beliefs articulated: contrast, for example the "homogeneous" network Weko locates for the consistently conservative Reagan, with the more "heterogeneous" networks sustained by the more ambiguous Clinton or Nixon. In short, Weko's own analysis raises questions about the adequacy of the theoretical stance adopted.

The rational choice approach seems to seek higher levels of abstraction at the cost of stripping from the office of the presidency the formative impacts of particular presidents acting in imperfectly known situations. In contrast, the irregularities of presidential response (and non-response) to the allegedly systemic, as well as Weko's own instances of presidential initiative, offer a possible counter-narrative—one in which the most "policy ambitious" presidents, facing indeterminate situations created by the decline of party, forge the means of "politicization" and "centralization" later followed in more muted form by less ambitious successors. Singular individuals, occupying an office variably defined, may press outward the theoretical boxes to which they are consigned by views of the "generic presidency."

The rational choice influence on Weko's historical account also seems apparent in the treatment of political ideas. The presidential responses of "politicization" and "centralization" are "induced" by an array of "institutional" changes; as parties decline, new candidate and ideological organizations arise, television and the "technologies" of "professional public relations and public opinion polling" reshape "electoral politics in the 1960s" and public expectations increasingly center on the presidency as "accountable for the performance of government." [53] In this process of change, altered political thought seems epiphenomenal, with causation located in the political shifts noted. The extent to which political ideas might be constitutive of political actions promoting and shaping these new institutions and expectations is not fully considered.[54] As a result, the causal interpretation Weko advances is uninterrogated by scholarship, suggesting the salience of changing political ideas in both pushing and legitimating the strategies of centralization on which Weko focuses. This can be seen in the shifting political thought underlying the emergence of the rhetorical presidency, the growing critique of separated powers, the new view of the presidency as the proper center of American politics, the reform of parties and the movement toward direct primaries, and the New Deal view of executive power in an "economic constitutional order"—not to mention the role of scholars in dissolving the traditional distinction between policy and administration.[55] Additionally, the upper and lower "boundaries" on politicizing strategies may have their roots not just in the immediate "needs" of other political actors, but in the persistent constitutional and ideological tensions in an ambivalent presidency, where expansive assertions of Hamiltonian power are eventually undercut by the constitutional counterweights of a Madisonian politics, and in a politics characterized by an historically shaped "anti-leadership" creed.[56] Presumably tutored by the rational choice perspective on political motivation, Weko skips these possible

links in the causal chain despite the shifts of thought prior to the changes in parties and technology he treats as causal. At minimum, Weko's account should confront and recognize these alternative perspectives and the challenge they present to his narrower causality.

Incorporating an assessment of how these political ideas opened the way for the tendencies Weko examines could have enriched an analysis in which politicization is seen as only a strategic response to political exigency. Rational choice premises unduly limit parts of Weko's history. The considerable strengths of Weko's scholarship remain, as well as his honesty in noting where his contemporary history implies limits in the rational choice perspective. However, the general tendencies seem clear: the logic of rational choice is that of parsimony, stripping away the presumably extraneous, thinning descriptions of unspecified variables and making simplified assumptions about political behavior in order to test specific hypotheses along a narrowed range of presidential behavior; the logic of the historical method teaches attention to the complexity of the causal chain, to the simultaneous presence of multiple causes and to the knowledge gained through thick description of the accumulating interplay of institutional and social practice, theoretical precept and individual propensity. It is not, as sometimes claimed, that "theory" can only be advanced by one approach, but that the different approaches tend to generate different kinds of theory: metaphorically, history tends to teach us about the forest, while rational choice draws our attention to only particular trees. These tendencies are concretely revealed in Weko's *Politicizing Presidency*. Weko's informative narrative is sufficiently grounded in careful and detailed scholarship that its historical particularities make problematic some of the premises of "rational choice," while the latter approach simultaneously obscures the role of individuals and ideas in re-shaping the modern presidency. Weko's book exemplifies the

difficulties of presidential theory and the strengths of presidential scholarship.

Notes:

[1]. Thomas J. Weko, *The Politicizing Presidency: The White House Personnel Office, 1948-1994* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pp. 15, 90.

[2]. Ibid, p. 1.

[3]. Ibid., p. ix.

[4]. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay (with introduction by Clinton Rossiter), *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1961, original work published in 1787-88), p. 322.

[5]. Ibid, p. 423.

[6]. Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia" in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *The Portable Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Viking Press 1975, original work published in 1787), p. 167.

[7]. *Federalist Papers*, p. 432.

[8]. For examples of such advocacy and analysis, see Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1963, original work published in 1909) and Jeffrey K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1987).

[9]. Sidney M. Milkis, "The Presidency, Democratic Reform, and Constitutional Change," *PS*, 20 (Summer 1987), p. 631.

[10]. Richard Nathan, *The Administrative Presidency* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1983), p. 85.

[11]. Weko, p. 1.

[12]. Nathan, p. 87.

[13]. Ibid, p. 88.

[14]. Ibid.

[15]. Ibid, p. 89.

[16]. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt*, 3 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1957-60); James MacGregor Burns, *The Deadlock of Democ-*

racy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 6; Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960).

[17]. Douglas J. Hoekstra, "Presidential Power and Presidential Purpose," *The Review of Politics*, 47 (October 1985), pp. 567-8.

[18]. Hoekstra, p. 43.

[19]. Nathan, pp. vii, 1-14, 82-93.

[20]. Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman, "Clashing Beliefs Within the Executive Branch," *American Political Science Review*, 70 (June 1976).

[21]. Nathan, 93; Edward J. Lynch, "No, We Don't Have Too Many Political Appointees," *The Bureaucrat* (April 1991), p. 55.

[22]. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

[23]. Thomas Cronin, "The Swelling of the Presidency: Can Anyone Reverse the Tide?" in Peter Woll, ed., *Debating American Government* (Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1988), p. 221; Volcker Commission, *Leadership for America: Rebuilding the Public Service, Report of the National Commission on the Public Service* (Washington, D.C.: 1989), p. 18.

[24]. Hugh Heclo, *A Government of Strangers: Executive Politics in Washington* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1977), p. 214.

[25]. Theodore J. Lowi, *The Personal President: Power Invested, Promise Unfulfilled* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Tulis; Sidney M. Milkis, "The Presidency and Political Parties," in Michael Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1989).

[26]. Weko, pp. 7-8.

[27]. Ibid, pp. ix, 8-9.

[28]. Weko draws from premises elaborated by Terry Moe. For example, see "Presidents, Institutions, and Theory," in George Edwards, John H. Kessell, and Bert A. Rockman, eds. *Researching*

*the Presidency: Vital Questions, New Approaches* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), pp. 337-85.

[29]. Weko, pp. 9-11.

[30]. Ibid, 20, 35.

[31]. Ibid, pp. 25, 156.

[32]. Ibid, pp. 64-5.

[33]. Ibid, p. 78.

[34]. The departmental title of "Health, Education, and Welfare" was changed to "Health and Human Services."

[35]. Ibid, p. 128.

[36]. Ibid, pp. 141-3, 146.

[37]. Ibid, pp. 151-2.

[38]. Ibid, pp. 156-8.

[39]. Ibid, pp. 109, 118.

[40]. Ibid, pp. 155-6.

[41]. Ibid, p. 25.

[42]. Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership From John Adams to George Bush* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993).

[43]. For further discussion, see Douglas J. Hoekstra, "The Politics of Politics: Notes on Skowronek," paper delivered at Annual meeting of Midwest Political Science Association, April 18-20, 1996, Chicago, Illinois.

[44]. Tulis, p. 9.

[45]. See Edwards.

[46]. For an effective contrast, see David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974) and Joseph M. Bessette, *The Mild Voice of Reason: Deliberative Democracy and American National Government* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[47]. Weko, p. 109.

[48]. Weko, note Figure A.1, p. 160.

[49]. Ibid, pp. 85, 108.

[50]. Ibid, pp. 108-9.

[51]. Ibid, p. 128.

[52]. Ibid, p. 128.

[53]. Ibid, pp. 14, 24, 78.

[54]. Tulis, p. 17.

[55]. Tulis, *Rhetorical Presidency*; Lowi, *Personal President*; Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Milkis, "The Presidency, Democratic Reform, and Constitutional Change," 631-632; Nathan, *Administrative Presidency*, 8.

[56]. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., *Taming the Prince: The Ambivalence of Modern Executive Power* (New York: Macmillan, 1989); Sidney Milkis, "What Politics Do Presidents Make?" in "Polity Forum: The Politics Presidents Make," *Polity*, 37 (Spring 1995); Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: the Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981).

Copyright (c) 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU. [The book review editor for H-Pol is Lex Renda <renlex@csd.uwm.edu>].

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-pol>

**Citation:** Douglas J. Hoekstra. Review of Weko, Thomas J. *The Politicizing Presidency: The White House Personnel Office, 1948-1994*. H-Pol, H-Net Reviews. September, 1997.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1316>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.