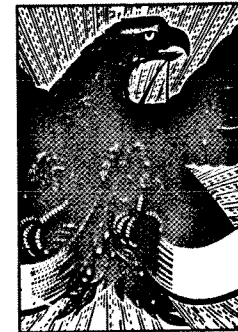


RESEARCHING THE
Presidency

VITAL QUESTIONS, NEW APPROACHES



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Presidents, Institutions, and Theory

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FOR A long time now, scholars have understood the presidency in largely personal terms, and they have invested heavily in theory and research intended to lay bare the personal foundations of presidential behavior. This is certainly reasonable. The presidency is built around the leadership of a single individual, and it is well known that personality, style, skills, and the like are important determinants of what individuals do.

But the presidency is also an institution, and the individual who occupies the office at any given time is an institutional actor, his role well specified by law and expectations, his incentives highly structured by the system. Some portion of presidential behavior, then, and perhaps a very large portion, is quite impersonal. All presidents, whatever their personalities or styles or backgrounds, should tend to behave similarly in basic respects.

In recent years, with the rise of the new institutionalism, presidential scholars have been encouraged to devote more serious attention to the institutional side of the equation (Pika, 1981; Hecl, 1977). Their models, it is commonly argued, should strive to take account of the full range of influences on presidential behavior and thus combine and assess the impacts of both personal and institutional variables. Today, there seems to be substantial agreement that this is the path to scientific progress in the field.

In my view, this widely accepted approach to progress is mistaken, and a radically different (and less popular) approach is called for. The first part of this chapter is my attempt to explain why. For reasons I will discuss at some length, I believe presidential scholars are far

more likely to be successful if they concentrate their theoretical resources on the institutional side—essentially omitting personal factors from their theories—and if they move toward a methodology that values simplicity and parsimony rather than complexity and comprehensiveness.

In the second part of the chapter, I try to illustrate more concretely what such an approach might look like by setting out an analysis of my own that highlights at least some of the basic issues an institutional theory must ultimately address. This is a limited exercise that is meant to be suggestive, even provocative. My hope is simply that it may help stimulate a productive debate—about presidents, about institutions, about theory.

The Personal Presidency

Before the behavioral revolution hit with full force, the accepted view of the presidency was institutional. Scholars studied the office and the formal structures and powers associated with it, and they accounted for these things—for the development of the presidency as an institution—by anchoring them in the constitution, in statutory law, in practice and precedent, and in history.¹

By today's standards, their institutionalism appears narrowly legalistic and devoid of politics. Edward Corwin's *The President: Office and Powers*, for instance, which first appeared in 1940 and served for years as the bible of the field, was regarded by its author as "primarily a study in American public law" (1957, vii)—hardly the sort of intensely political analysis one would now expect from institutionalists within the discipline. Yet the important point to make about traditional scholarship is not that it somehow failed to live up to modern standards, but that it abstracted the presidency from the individuals who occupied it and, in so doing, promoted a clear, simple view of what needed to be explained: the institution.

All this changed with the publication in 1960 of Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power* (1980), which brought the behavioral revolution to the study of the presidency and, for the last thirty years, has dominated its theory and research. Neustadt stood traditionalism on its head. Formal authority and structure, he argued, do not tell us what we need to know about the presidency. The foundations of pres-

idential leadership are informal and personal, and these are the things that scholars ought to be studying.

The American system of "separated institutions sharing powers" (*ibid.*, 26), as he puts it, grants the president nowhere near enough authority to exercise strong leadership. To achieve his objectives, the president needs support from other political actors, particularly in Congress and the bureaucracy, who have independent bases of power and are not formally required to follow his lead. The only way he can gain their support is through persuasion and bargaining. "Presidential power is the power to persuade" (*ibid.*, 10), and "the power to persuade is the power to bargain" (*ibid.*, 28). Neustadt's analysis is largely about how the president can develop and deploy this kind of power in an institutional world that stacks the deck against him.

The keys to success, by Neustadt's reckoning, are almost entirely personal. A strong president cannot count on others to do the persuading and bargaining for him, nor to safeguard the prime determinants of his power: his reputation within the Washington community and his prestige with the general public. The signal requirement of leadership is self-help. He must do it all himself. He must be his own power expert, his own executive assistant, his own director of intelligence—which in turn means that he must be highly skilled in the political arts, thoroughly informed about issues and strategies and personalities, deeply experienced in the ways of the political world, and enthusiastically involved in political horse-trading. It follows that only a very special person could possibly do all this and do it well, someone who comes to the job with the right psychological makeup: self-confidence, an instinct for power, a sense of purpose and direction. Strong presidential leadership calls for a man of "extraordinary temperament" (*ibid.*, 143).

Almost every aspect of Neustadt's work has had profound influence on the way the presidency is understood and studied. It is difficult to think of any book or article in any area of political science that has had greater influence and staying power than this one. Its most consequential impact is broadly methodological: with *Presidential Power*, the balance of scholarly attention shifted from the formal to the informal, from the impersonal to the personal.

This is not to say that Neustadt ignores institutions. In the first place, his explanation for the personal presidency is, in effect, institutional:

presidents are thrown back on their personal resources precisely because American institutions deny them enough formal authority for effective leadership. Moreover, in the pulling and hauling of politics, authority and structure provide presidents with vantage points that may contribute to the exercise of power.

But Neustadt's analysis, nonetheless, is not about institutions. For the most part, they provide a framework within which the relevant action takes place—and the focus is on the action, not the framework. Institutions are relegated to the background. The driving forces of presidential politics are personal. As Neustadt puts it, "My theme is personal power and its politics: what it is, how to get it, how to keep it, how to use it. . . . This is not a book about the Presidency as an organization, or as legal powers, or as precedents, or as procedures" (*ibid.*, v).

Viewed historically, there is a certain irony in this methodological shift. Neustadt's book is about the modern presidency, which, by his account and most everyone else's, was ushered in by Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. Roosevelt also happens to be Neustadt's model of the strong presidential leader—the president who relishes politics, excels at it, has a hand in every pot, and, through his own skill, knowledge, and acumen, amasses power and political success. Roosevelt was the kind of person a president should be. He had the kind of experience and skill and enthusiasm a president should have. His style of organization—flexible, competitive—was the style a president should adopt. He was the standard against which all other modern presidents should be judged. He was the embodiment of the personal presidency.

But here is the irony. At precisely the same time that Neustadt's work was reorienting scholarly thinking around the concept of the personal presidency, the presidency itself was becoming highly institutionalized. Indeed, the hallmark of the modern presidency is its growth and development as an institution. It consists of hundreds of individuals whose various roles and offices fill out a highly differentiated organizational network, the basic structure of which has gained a substantial measure of stability and uniformity across administrations (Moe, 1985; Kernell and Popkin, 1986). "Presidential behavior" is generated by all these individuals, collectively, as they go about their presidential business. It is an institutional phenomenon, not a personal one.

The modern president does not simply decide what his legislative program or budget proposal will be. Most of the decisions are actually made by aides and specialists in the White House, in the Office of Management and Budget, in the Council of Economic Advisers, in Treasury, and elsewhere. Similarly, the president does not rely much on personal lobbying to get his way in Congress. Almost all presidential lobbying is handled by his people in the White House congressional liaison office. Nor does the president have much to do with most presidential appointments. These are handled by a special personnel staff. And so it goes, for virtually all important aspects of the presidency (Arnold, 1986; Hart, 1987; Wayne, 1978).

Today's presidency is vastly different from what it was in Franklin Roosevelt's time. The roots of change can be found in the Progressive activism of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, as well as in the creation of the Bureau of the Budget in 1921. But the real transformation was initiated by Franklin Roosevelt himself, who, in fashioning his New Deal and leading the nation in war, revolutionized public expectations about the office (Greenstein, 1978). From that point on, all presidents would be held responsible for addressing every conceivable social problem, and they would be expected, through legislative leadership and executive control, to take effective action. While these expectations far outstripped the president's means of meeting them, presidents responded as best they could by incrementally developing their institutional capacity for governance. The result has been a trajectory of change in which, over the decades, policy making has become more centralized in the White House organization and the bureaucracy has become more politicized (or, more accurately, presidentialized) through appointments and top-down control (Moe, 1985; Nathan, 1983).

Probably the most dramatic upsurge in the institutional presidency came right at the beginning, during the Roosevelt years, with the creation of the Executive Office of the President and the spectacular enlargement of the Bureau of the Budget. These reforms were recommended by the Brownlow Committee, whose justification for change is one of the most quoted phrases in public administration: "The president needs help" (President's Committee on Administrative Management, 1937, 5). There is no mystery here. The president really did need help. The responsibilities of the job simply overwhelmed the president as an individual. It was impossible for any

person to do it all, or even to do most of the things that successful presidential leadership required. He needed help—an institutional capacity that, appropriately designed, would enable a small army of other people to take effective action on the president's behalf. The whole point of the Brownlow reforms, as well as the next fifty years of institutional change, was to reject the notion that presidents ought to do everything for themselves. The key to a successful presidency was not self-help. It was institutional capacity—which, in a very meaningful sense, is just the opposite of self-help.

By the time Neustadt's book had placed its indelible stamp on the scholarly mind, the personal presidency was already out of date. As scholars extolled the informal, personal aspects of the presidency, the presidency was becoming a large, complex, multifaceted institution whose "presidential behavior" could not adequately be understood in personal terms. The new methodology of the field directed attention to precisely those aspects of the presidency that were declining in importance and distracted attention from the very developments that should have been seen and studied as the essence of the modern presidency.

Struggling with the Personal Presidency

This did not mean that scholars literally began ignoring institutions, any more than Neustadt himself had ignored institutions. In terms of substantive research effort, informal and personal topics gained markedly in prominence, and this represented a genuine sea change in the field. But even during the first decade or two after Neustadt's book appeared, when its influence was greatest, some areas of study—those concerned with congressional relations (Fisher, 1972), bureaucratic politics (Destler, 1972), presidential popularity (Mueller, 1970), and White House organization (Kessel, 1975), for instance—continued to explore institutional issues and point to contextual or environmental (as well as personal) determinants of presidential behavior.

The real burden of the personal presidency, then and now, is not simply that it affects the allocation of scholarly work. It is more deeply rooted than this. It has to do with the way scholars think about the presidency and, in particular, with how they approach their fundamental task as social scientists: the task of explanation.

As a methodology, the personal presidency sets an explanatory standard that the vast majority of scholars throughout the field, even those whose concerns are largely institutional, seems to embrace. The notion is that an acceptable explanation of presidential behavior, whatever its initial level of abstraction, must eventually be anchored in an understanding of why individual presidents make the specific decisions they do. While impersonal theories (institutional or environmental, say) may help in identifying constraints on these decisions, they are incomplete. They must ultimately be grounded in personal theories—theories about values, beliefs, skills, formative experiences, and the like—if presidential behavior is to be fully explained.

This promotes enormous complications in theory and research, opening the Pandora's box of individual motivation and cognitive processes and orienting the field around untold causal mysteries. Explanation cannot center on general issues of organization and structure but must lay bare the behavior of a single person in the full flower of his uniqueness. This is the most vexing theoretical problem in all social science, and it now pervades and stifles the study of the presidency.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, presidency scholars took serious aim at issues of personal behavior.² To the extent their work can be classified as theoretical, it often relied heavily on existing theories in psychology and social psychology, theories that are tremendously complicated and diverse in what they have to say about the causal foundations of individual behavior. The paths from relevant factors—within the individual, in the individual's past, in the individual's environment—to the individual's behavior tend to be long, confusing, tortuous, and, in the end, quite uncertain. As Alexander George (1974) notes, using these theories to say something definite and systematic about the behavior of specific presidents is extraordinarily difficult and perhaps impossible.

Precisely because there was often a big gap between what these theories were able to say and what political scientists wanted to explain, scholars sometimes supplemented—or simply began—with what we might call *sui generis* theories of the presidency. Neustadt's theory of how presidents acquire personal power is one version of this: it does not derive from some larger body of theoretical work, nor does it generalize beyond the presidency.

Neither approach to theory has generated much in the way of real progress. Psychology and social psychology are far removed from what political scientists want to explain, and they have done more to complicate and confuse the study of the presidency than to resolve its major issues. *Sui generis* theories, in compensating for what these others fail to offer, tend to be specialized and logically isolated. They are internal to the presidency. They stand alone.

Most work on the presidency, moreover, cannot really be considered theoretical at all. This was a weakness of traditional political science as a whole, of course, but in most areas of the discipline it was rapidly overcome following the behavioral revolution. Not so for the presidency, and the methodology of personalism is an important reason why. It attached explanatory value to virtually everything that might influence the specific decisions of the unique human being occupying the office; and this overload, in turn, encouraged "explanation" through history, description, anecdotes, and educated judgment.

Thus, while the personal presidency revolutionized the field by rejecting the traditional focus on institutions, it also had a profoundly conservative impact: it reinforced and perpetuated the traditional *style* of analysis within the modern field. In its scholarly style, the study of the presidency continued to have more in common with history or journalism than with the study of Congress or voting behavior. Good work remained, above all else, a matter of good writing—writing so elegant, so interwoven with stories and illustrations, so flush with historical detail, that one might almost overlook its absence of theory, testing, logical rigor, objectivity, or other mainstays of modern social science.

Almost, but not entirely. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, critics were arguing that the traditional style of analysis was hindering theoretical progress and that a more systematic adherence to the scientific method was urgently needed. They also argued that the presidency had become overpersonalized, that many "nonpersonal" variables are at least as important to presidential behavior, and that progress calls for new, more broadly based perspectives that bring together the personal and nonpersonal foundations of the presidency (King, 1975; Pika, 1981; Edwards and Wayne, 1983).

At about the same time that these scientific concerns became salient, political science as a whole was swept by the new institution-

alism—adding fuel to the argument that something was wrong with the way the presidency was being studied. In virtually all areas of the discipline, scholars grew skeptical of behavioralism and the perspectives associated with it (pluralism, most notably) and showed renewed interest in the origins, structures, modes of operation, and social consequences of political institutions.

This was not a response to changes in government; institutions had not suddenly become more prevalent or powerful. It is better viewed as a methodological reawakening, a recognition that behavioralism had promoted an unbalanced view of politics and society. For most fellow travelers within the movement, the new institutionalism was an attempt to redress the imbalance by bringing institutions back in. For others, the serious institutionalists, it was more than this. It was a means of showing that institutions are fundamental and behavior largely derivative (March and Olsen, 1989).

Presidential scholars were caught up in all this, but most often as fellow travelers rather than serious institutionalists. In part this was because, unlike their colleagues in other fields, they had a practical reason for shifting course: the presidency had grown dramatically as an institution in a relatively short period of time. No methodological reawakening was necessary to see that theory and research should pay more attention to this. The more basic reason that true institutionalism never took root here, however, is that the personal presidency effectively defused any inclination to see institutions as truly fundamental.

As a result, the institutionalist critique took a form that dovetailed neatly with the scientific critique of the field's traditional style of analysis. Critics pointed out, quite rightly, that the presidency had become overpersonalized and that institutions needed to be taken more fully into account; but this entailed no radical rejection of the personal presidency. Their concern was not to shift attention from the man to the office but rather to encourage more broadly based studies that incorporate both sets of relevant factors and sort out their various effects (Pika, 1981; Hecl, 1977).

The last decade or so, not coincidentally, has been a period of change and modernization within the field. Increasingly, presidency scholars have been formulating testable theoretical models, collecting quantitative data, and carrying out statistical analyses (Edwards, 1980; King and Ragsdale, 1988; Kernell, 1978; Ostrom and Simon,

1985; Moe, 1982). They have also moved aggressively in studying the institutional presidency (Kessell, 1983, 1984; Campbell, 1986; Moe, 1985; Kernell and Popkin, 1986; Arnold, 1986; Hart, 1987) and in arguing the predominance of institutional and environmental influences on presidential behavior (Skowronek, 1984; Pious, 1979; Edwards, 1989; Peterson, 1990; Kerbel, 1991; Bunce, 1981).

But the problem remains: how can intellectual order be imposed on all this? Critics seem to place their faith in "pretheories" and empirical studies that, over a long period of time, might help sort through the geometrically increasing numbers of relevant variables. Meantime, absent an alternative methodology, the personal presidency continues to shape the way most scholars think about explanation. By default, it is the organizing conception that pulls together the mind-boggling array of relevant factors—including institutional factors—into a single framework. And it personalizes them all.

The common notion is that relevant variables help explain presidential behavior to the extent that, via causal chains that are lengthy and complicated, they ultimately affect the thinking of the man who is president. All influences find their translation through personal influences. As Joseph Pika (1981, 23) observes,

Closely associated with the personalization of research is the causal model employed even in ostensibly "institutional" research; it is, in most cases, president-centered in that environmental influences are significant only to the extent that they are mediated by presidential thinking and decisions. The presidential person is lodged in the neck of our "funnel of causality" with all other influences necessarily passing through this individualizing filter.

Most aspects of the modern institutional presidency, moreover, are doubly personalized. Not only are their effects realized through the president's personal filter, but the institution itself is taken to be highly malleable, its form intricately shaped and reshaped as presidents come and go. Each president, as an individual with a unique personality, background, and style, builds his own system of operation inside the White House and throughout the executive branch, fashioning an institutional presidency in his own image—a personal institutional presidency, as it were (e.g., Hess, 1988).

After more than a decade of intellectual ferment, the field still lacks a solid foundation. The two major lines of criticism, the scientific and the institutional, have succeeded in highlighting weaknesses

in the literature and in convincing scholars that something should be done to turn matters around. But the new enlightenment they offer is not in the end very enlightening, and it adds to the field's problems rather than resolving them. While the personal presidency already entails a theoretical perspective of forbidding complexity, the new wisdom is that the presidential world is actually far more complex still, that many more relevant variables need to be taken into account, and that progress means compiling them into comprehensive theories. This is a giant step in the wrong direction.

Presidential Style: Lessons from Organization Theory

Let's take a closer look, for instance, at presidential style. With the triumph of the personal presidency during the 1960s, style quickly emerged as one of the most important of these relevant variables. Neustadt had blazed the trail. The style best suited to strong presidential leadership, he argued, is a loose, informal, highly personalized approach to decision making and administration that ensures the president himself maximal involvement and control.

This, of course, was Roosevelt's style. Although president at a time when ideas about administration were dominated by classical organization theory—emphasizing formal structure, clear lines of authority, and other features of neat organizational hierarchies—he enthusiastically violated every one of its principles.³ He adroitly juggled subordinates to his own advantage. He gave the same responsibilities to different advisers, cultivating competition and uncertainty among them. He orchestrated everything personally from the center, ensuring that he held all the cards. To Neustadt and those who followed him, this was the way to be a good president.

The way to be a mediocre president was to do what Dwight Eisenhower did. His style—or at least the style scholars uniformly attributed to him until recently (Greenstein, 1982)—was to build his presidency around formal organization, following a nonpolitical model of bureaucratic leadership he picked up in the army. He appointed a chief of staff, Sherman Adams, who sat atop a strict White House hierarchy, managed the president's time, dealt with subordinates, and in myriad ways did what Eisenhower might have done for himself. Specialized units were created within the White House—for press relations and congressional liaison, for examples—that

delegated to staffers functions essential to presidential success. Existing units like the National Security Council were reinforced with new structures that formalized their operations. Overall, Eisenhower's approach to the presidency appeared to remove him personally from most of the action—and thus, so the conventional wisdom had it, to deny him the personal resources so necessary for strong leadership.

For many years, this simple comparison of presidential styles was widely accepted. A style built around informal arrangements and personal involvement was good. A style built around formal arrangements, specialization, and delegation was bad. As Bert Rockman (1984, 204) puts it, "The model of organization that Neustadt attributes to Franklin Roosevelt has nearly attained legendary status as a prescribed style for managing the White House."

What exactly was the basis for this belief about formal and informal styles? For the most part, it was an empirical generalization based on assessments—not entirely accurate ones—of Roosevelt and Eisenhower. As time went on, the experiences of subsequent presidents were accommodated without giving up the generalization. Kennedy, whom Neustadt admired almost as much as he did Roosevelt and whom most scholars regard as a reasonably successful president, had a collegial style consistent with the presumed requirements of self-help. Nixon, forever doomed by Watergate to disaster status (whatever his achievements in foreign and domestic policy), created a formal presidency reminiscent of Eisenhower's—a style that contributed, so they say, to his downfall.

More generally, this belief about style survived because of the confluence to two important features of the modern presidency. First, as Theodore Lowi (1985) points out, most modern presidents after Roosevelt (the lionized Kennedy aside) have been regarded as unsuccessful in major respects. Second, as the presidency has become increasingly institutionalized, presidents have naturally moved away from the informal style that Neustadt and others prescribe. Indeed, it is reasonable to suggest that no president will ever again be free to adopt this kind of style, even if he wants to (Kernell and Popkin, 1986). Thus, there are no clear-cut examples of bad presidents with informal styles (although some might try to put Carter in this category), and there are plenty of presidents who have formalized their presidencies in various ways and gone on to perform unsuccessfully.

The result is a correlation, a spurious one, that may appear to buttress the conventional wisdom.

Generalizing from a few cases is hazardous anyway, even under the best of circumstances. The more significant question is: Does this conventional wisdom have a broader theoretical basis? The answer is that it does not, outside of theories that are essentially *sui generis* to the presidency, and thus, given the inductive approach so characteristic of the literature, formulated with reference to the same small set of cases.

There has never been any justification for such an insular approach to theory within presidential studies, and this applies with a vengeance to issues of style. For within the broader, interdisciplinary field of organization theory, leadership (or managerial) style has been the subject of intensive analysis since the late 1930s. Countless studies have been carried out in a variety of organizational settings, and diverse theories have been proposed, debated, tested, and compared. Throughout, the connection between style and performance has been at the center of inquiry (Bass, 1981).

This body of work is obviously of the utmost relevance for the study of the presidential style. It represents virtually the sum total of what social science has been able to learn over the years about style and, more generally, about the exercise of leadership in organizations. If this were not enough, it also fits in beautifully with the personal presidency, for the literature on style grew out of the human relations school of organization theory, which rejected the formalism of classical theory and insisted on seeing organizations in social and personal terms. Leadership was not a matter of formal powers and roles, but of personal traits and interpersonal relationships. For the personal presidency, a more congruent body of theory and research could hardly have been asked for.

Nonetheless, presidential scholars have paid little or no attention to it (Johnson, 1974; Hess, 1988). Why would this be so? It is partly due to the field's traditional style of analysis, which promotes atheoretical lines of research. It is also due to the inclination, encouraged by the methodology of personalism, to think that presidents, the office, and the institution are all too unique to be subsumed under a more general body of work on leadership and organization. But whatever the full panoply of reasons, the fact is that presidential

scholars have failed to take advantage of what organization theory has to offer on these issues (and many others), and this has hindered their efforts to understand the presidency.⁴

What, then, are the lessons that presidential scholars ought to be—but are not—picking up on? My own views on the subject are unorthodox, so let me begin by outlining what the mainstream position would most likely be. A mainstream organization theorist would argue that cumulative scientific research over the past half century has taught us a great deal about style and its consequences and that this knowledge, above all else, is what organization theory has to contribute to the study of the presidency.

In the earliest studies, leadership was thought to be largely a matter of traits inherent in the individual—intelligence, for instance. For the most part, these were things a person either did or did not have, and they could not readily be learned or changed. Subsequent studies disavowed trait theory, arguing that an individual's style of leadership—which could in fact be learned or changed—was an important determinant of his effectiveness. Some of this work, especially in the early going, pursued the simple distinction between authoritarian and democratic styles of leadership, almost invariably showing that the latter (the normative favorite) is the more productive. More nuanced work along similar lines claimed that there are two fundamental dimensions of leadership, one employee-centered (a socioemotional, informal, democratic dimension), the other production-centered (an instrumental, formal, authoritarian dimension), and that both—but especially the former—contribute to organizational performance.

These familiar, timeworn conceptions of style continue to find their reflection in modern ideas about leadership, but several decades of painstaking research have left them hedged about by zillions of caveats and qualifications. The thrust of the modern work is that leadership is highly specific to the situation: it is contingent on the environment, the goals of the group, the nature of the members, and many other relevant variables. No one style, set of traits, or combination of these is necessarily best. Different contexts call for different types of leadership.⁵

The mainstream lesson for presidential scholars, a lesson whose foundations were already established by the 1960s, would appear to go something like this. The connection between presidential style and

presidential performance, like that between leader style and organizational performance more generally, is enormously complicated. So forget the fixation on Roosevelt. There is no one best style for presidents, any more than for other organizational leaders. The style that works best in any given situation is contingent on a whole range of relevant variables and the specific values they happen to take on in that situation. The way to understand leadership is to identify all these relevant variables, study them, and figure out how they all operate to shape the president's exercise of leadership.

My own view is less orthodox. Part of the mainstream position, I should emphasize, conveys important lessons for the study of presidential style: no single style is best, there is no theoretical basis for exalting the styles of Roosevelt or Kennedy or anybody else, and efforts to figure out which styles work best in particular situations will be extremely complicated.⁶ But these lessons do not take us very far, and they reflect a very limited brand of knowledge.

The fact is that virtually everything organization theorists have learned about leadership style is negative. Myths have been debunked and commonsense notions have been rejected. These simple ideas have been replaced, however, not by a positive understanding of leadership—by a theory that tells us what we should actually expect and why—but by “contingency theory,” which is just a label for how desperately little organization theorists have managed to learn about leadership in half a century of trying. Saying that things are complicated and situational is but another way of saying that organization theorists have only the vaguest idea what is going on.

Charles Perrow (1986), in his insightful review of the organizational literature, sums it up this way:

“Good leadership” is generally described as democratic rather than authoritarian, employee-centered rather than production-centered, concerned with human relations rather than with bureaucratic rules. . . .

The history of research in this area is one of progressive disenchantment with the above theses and progressive awareness of the complexities of human behavior and human situations. As a result of forty years of intensive research, we have a large body of information on what does *not* clearly and simply affect productivity . . . and a growing list of qualifiers and conditions that have to be taken into account. The size of this list threatens to overwhelm us before we can, with confidence, either advise managers as to what they

should do to increase productivity or develop theories that have much explanatory power. (85–86)

The most important lesson that presidential scholars stand to gain from organizational theory, in my view, is not a lesson about the causal foundations of presidential style. Nor is it about the causal connection between presidential style and presidential performance. Organization theory has very little of positive value to tell us on these scores. The major lesson to be learned, rather, is about how the presidency ought to be studied. It is a methodological rather than a substantive lesson.

What decades of research on organizational leadership have demonstrated is that the conventional methodology will never lead to a clear, coherent theory that makes sense of the encyclopedic list of variables that are supposedly relevant. The lesson is that this line of research is on a path to nowhere. Presidential scholars can learn best and most productively from organization theory by paying close attention to it, recognizing its failures, refusing to repeat them, and insisting upon a new methodology that will take presidential theory and research down a very different path.

Proposal: A New Methodology for Presidential Studies

Like everyone else, I believe that style and other personal variables make a difference for presidential behavior. My considered opinion is that institutions probably have much more to do with it than individuals do. But I cannot be sure about this. As Joseph Pika (1981, 17) has observed, the question of relative explanatory power—of the “relationship between the president and the presidency, the individual and the institution”—has long been perhaps the central analytic problem of the field, and it remains unanswered. All we can say with confidence is that both aspects of the presidency, the personal and the institutional, are important.

By almost any account, however, scholars have been distinctly unsuccessful thus far in building theories anchored in the individuality of presidents. And while it is tempting to think that this is only a temporary problem, a problem that might be solved with a half century's

worth of new research, there is little basis for this kind of optimism. The problem is inherent in the enterprise itself, and it cannot be resolved through more study. The only way out is to change the enterprise, to move along a different path.

How can this be done and still allow us to learn as much as we can about the presidency? There are two basic parts to what I consider a reasonable answer. First, I think efforts to build institutional theories of the presidency are far more likely to prove successful over the long haul than are efforts to build personal theories. We need not pretend that institutions are simple or easy to understand. The crucial thing is that they are impersonal. They do not force us to open the Pandora's box of the individual's psyche, nor to engage in endlessly detailed personal comparisons across individuals. Institutions direct our attention instead to structures, roles, authority, control, hierarchy, incentives, and other general properties of organization—properties that shape presidential behavior in distinctive ways regardless of who is president.

Personality, style, and other aspects of the personal presidency are eminently worth studying, and they should continue to be the focus of intensive research. But our expectations should be different. We should expect research along these lines to provide essential facts about the presidency and its occupants over time and thus to build an empirical foundation that promotes sound judgments about what presidents have actually done and why. We should also expect it to be structured, as all good research is, by analytical rigor and theoretical notions of cause and effect. But we should not expect it to generate, somewhere down the road, coherent theories with the degree of generality and explanatory power we are looking for, and we should not design or undertake it with that purpose in mind. The theoretical resources of the field should be invested on the institutional side of the equation, not the personal side.

Second, I think scholars would do well to move away from the conventional methodology of the field, which encourages a fruitless search for relevant variables, and move instead toward the methodology that has worked so well for economics. This does not require a heavy reliance on mathematical models. What it requires is a different orientation to explanation: one that places positive value on *not* being comprehensive, on eliminating rather than proliferating

variables, on capturing just the essence of a problem rather than describing the whole thing.

In general, I think presidential scholars must take a more restrictive view of what they want to explain. They cannot explain everything about the presidency that they find interesting or important. They can explain institutional aspects better than they can explain personal aspects, and they can probably explain some properties of institutions—structure, in particular—more readily than others. In the long run, it seems to me that they will learn more about the presidency, produce better theories, and invest their scarce resources more wisely if they concentrate their scientific efforts more narrowly and strategically.

Rational Choice and the Presidency

The methodology I am suggesting here has been influential and productive in other areas of the discipline, especially in the study of legislatures and elections, but it has rarely been applied to the presidency. In part, of course, this has happened because presidential scholars have their own, very different ways of doing things. But another, equally important reason is that the most aggressive proponents of this methodology within the wider discipline, positive theorists, have themselves shown little interest in building a theory of the presidency.

Why did positive theorists invade, quite successfully, the study of legislatures and elections, yet choose to stay away from the study of presidents? The answer is that their analytic tradition is rooted in social choice theory, which centers on voting—and presidents don't vote. Legislators and members of the general electorate do, allowing for elaborately developed positive theories of legislative and electoral behavior. But the same technology cannot readily be applied to presidents. Much the same story, I should add, can be told for public bureaucracy.

This imbalance is slowly being corrected. Positive theorists moved into the era of the new institutionalism by exploring the various ways that institutions bring stability to the inherently unstable world of majority rule voting. Their focus was largely on the U.S. Congress, and their concerns centered on how its internal structures—committees, procedural rules, and the like—constrain the behavior of mem-

bers, allocate agenda powers, and produce stable outcomes. For these matters, social choice seemed to work fine. Over time, however, they began to ask how the legislature's internal structures might have emerged in the first place, and, more generally, how rational legislators approach and resolve issues of institutional choice. They also began to branch out, concerning themselves with aspects of legislative behavior—political control of the bureaucracy, for instance—that involve nonvoting institutions and nonelectoral types of relationships (Shepsle, 1986; McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast, 1987).

For these sorts of things, positive theorists had to look beyond social choice for other theories that could help them out. They found what they were looking for in the new economics of organization (Moe, 1984), a fast-growing body of work—consisting, roughly speaking, of transaction costs economics, agency theory, and the theory of repeated games—that is revolutionizing not only the way economists think about firms, but also how social scientists think about structure, control, and other issues at the heart of organization theory (Williamson, 1985; Milgrom and Roberts, 1992).

The new economics is not about voting or the instabilities of majority rule, although it can accommodate them. It is about voluntary exchange among actors in the marketplace, and it inquires into the conditions under which they will find it mutually beneficial to cooperate—that is, to organize their behavior. Some of this work focuses on how cooperation, in the form of regularized or tacitly coordinated behavior, can emerge from the “noncooperative” dynamics of strategic interaction. But the bulk of it is about how formal cooperative structures are explicitly arrived at through contractual agreement—and thus, as political scientists might put it, through bargains or deals the relevant players find mutually beneficial. Considered together, then, these strands of theory get at both the informal and formal aspects of cooperation, and they point the way toward a coherent perspective on the rational bases of organization.

In recent years, the trend has been toward a positive theory of political institutions that combines social choice and the new economics. Voting remains of key importance, as it should, but attention is increasingly paid to the conditions affecting the desirability of cooperative deals (conditions having to do, for instance, with transaction costs or asymmetric information), the commitment and enforcement problems that make durable deals so hard to arrange in politics, the

kinds of structures that help mitigate these problems, and the consequences that these deals and structures have for institutional behavior and outcomes.

Positive theorists are just beginning to sort all this out, and they have a long way to go. But it is clear even now that rational choice theory can be extended to a full range of important institutional topics—from congressional procedures to legislative oversight and bureaucratic design to presidential control and the institutional presidency. Given where the discipline stood just ten years ago, remarkable headway has been made in putting us on the threshold of a broadly based theory of institutions.

What does this mean for the study of the presidency? It means that, unlike at any time in the past, a powerful theoretical framework is now available to help us work our way toward an institutional theory of the presidency. This is an extraordinary opportunity for a field that has long found theory so elusive, an opportunity that presidential scholars should welcome and exploit.

It also means that an institutional theory of the presidency built along these lines will not simply be presidential in focus but an integral part of a larger theory of the institutional system. Presidential scholars who think in institutional terms, then, will really be thinking and studying about institutions more generally. The rational choice foundation ensures as much by linking everything together, providing the same explanation for the legislature, the presidency, the bureaucracy, and the judiciary, and understanding each in connection with the others.

And finally, it means that, even if presidential scholars are not keen to embrace this alien methodology, the positive theorists are coming anyway. They are going to invade presidential studies, just as they invaded legislative and electoral studies, and they will change the field. How productively it changes depends on the extent to which presidential scholars contribute to its development: to the theoretical ideas that get proposed, to debates about these ideas, and to research that puts them the test. This has been the key to progress in legislatures and elections, where positive theorists and scholars wedded to very different traditions have learned enormously from one another, and where, as a result, rational choice has both transformed and been transformed by the fields it has invaded. Much the same must happen in the study of the presidency.

Putting Rational Choice to Use

How, then, should we proceed in trying to put rational choice to good use in building an institutional theory of the presidency? It seems to me that there are two basic ways to go about it that, in the end, ought to be quite complementary. The first is to follow the trajectory already set by positive theory, which is expanding outward from its base in legislatures and voting to incorporate other institutions. The emphasis here, at least in the early stages, is on the legislative aspects of the presidency—veto and appointment power, for instance—and their implications for the strategies and outcomes of legislative voting. Theoretical anchoring is largely in the social choice tradition, with some attention to the new economics (Hammond and Miller, 1987; Calvert, McCubbins, and Weingast, 1989). Future developments along this path will presumably integrate presidents more fully into models of legislative choice and then, taking greater advantage of the new economics, begin to explore aspects of the presidency that are less directly related to Congress and voting.

This “normal science” approach has much to recommend it as a way of developing a coherent body of institutional theory. But those of us who are less content in the short term with a Congress-centered view of the world are likely to find a second approach much more attractive—and at least as productive. The theoretical orientation here comes more from the new economics (and political modifications of it) than from social choice, and its emphasis is on understanding the presidency—its basic properties, its development over time, its consequences for behavior—as an integral part of the larger institutional system.

This second approach lacks the well-defined trajectory of the first. But this is also what makes it so exciting. For it is not yet bogged down in technicalities, incremental modifications, and unavoidable baggage. It is just starting out: thrusting new issues to the fore, begging for new ideas, and opening up opportunities for dramatic progress. The tools are available, and, precisely because rational choice theory has so rarely been applied to the presidency, the field is especially fertile ground.

In the remainder of this paper, I want to illustrate what an analysis along this second path might look like. In an article I wrote several

years ago (Moe, 1985), I argued that the presidency has become more centralized and politicized during the modern era for reasons that have little to do with individual presidents and a lot to do with forces rooted in American institutions. In more recent work, I have put the new economics of organization to use (with modifications) in an effort to explain the broader structure of government, especially its public bureaucracy (Moe, 1989, 1990a, 1990b). Here I will bring these two strands of argument together.

A mature institutional literature, of course, would speak to a much wider range of topics than I can deal with here. My purpose is simply to raise some basic issues that are central to an institutional theory, address them in a clear, logical fashion, and combine them into a coherent perspective that sheds light on the presidency and its place in the larger system. Whether or not these specific ideas prove to have staying power over time, my hope is that they will help broaden the debate and get the ball rolling.

Institutions and the Politics of Structural Choice

One problem with the new institutionalism, at least within presidential studies, is that institutions tend to be so vaguely conceptualized that, in effect, they are just another way of talking about all the environmental or historical factors that somehow affect the presidency (Pike, 1981; Peterson, 1990). If we are to get a useful handle on how presidential behavior is shaped by its surrounding institutional system, and indeed on how presidents can actually change the system itself, then we need a simple, clear way of thinking about it. Let's try to do this by stepping back from the presidency for a moment and reflecting on the system as a whole.

A useful place to begin is with the most basic building block of any political system: public authority. In politics, people with very different interests engage in a struggle to control and exercise public authority. The struggle arises because public authority does not belong to anyone and because whoever wins hold of it has the right to make law for everyone. The winners can legitimately promote their own interests through policies and structures of their own design, and the losers can be forced by law to accept outcomes that make them absolutely worse off. The power of public authority, then, is essentially

coercive and redistributive. This is why political actors value it so much—and, at the same time, fear it.

Most political institutions are instances of the exercise of public authority. They arise out of a politics of structural choice in which the winners use public authority to design new structures and impose them on the polity as a whole. These structures are simply vehicles by which the winners pursue their own interests. Some may administer programs that supply the winners with benefits. Others may extract resources or behavioral adjustments from losers. Still others may impose new constraints on the way the political game will be played in the future, giving today's winners advantages over their opponents in tomorrow's jockeying to exercise public authority.

Consider American bureaucracy in particular. What can we say about the politics of structural choice and the kinds of bureaucratic institutions it is likely to yield? Several very basic forces are at work, all of them anchored in the American separation of powers system and its distinctive scheme of public authority (Moe, 1990a).

The first is what I call *political uncertainty*. A winning group or coalition that gains control of public authority today is in a position to impose whatever structures they like—say, an agency with a particular mandate, organization, and staff. But they do not own what they create. They have no property rights making the agency legally theirs—as, say, economic actors do when they create business organizations. Political structures belong to whoever happens to be in authority, and tomorrow some other group with opposing interests may gain control. They would then become the new “owners” and have the legal right to destroy or undermine what the first group had created (without paying any compensation whatever).

Because the dangers of political uncertainty can be anticipated from the outset, however, today's winners need not leave their creations unprotected. They can fashion structures to insulate their agencies and programs from the future exercise of public authority. In doing so, of course, they will not only be reducing their enemies' opportunities for future control; they will be reducing their own opportunities as well. But this is often a reasonable price to pay, given the alternative. And because they get to go first, they are really not giving up control. They are just choosing to exercise a greater measure of it *ex ante*, through insulated structures that, once locked in, predispose

the agency to do the right things. What they are moving away from—because it is dangerous—is the kind of ongoing democratic control that is exercised through the discretionary decisions of public authority over time.

There are various ways of doing this (Moe, 1990a). The most direct is for the winners to specify, in excruciating detail, precisely what the agency is to do and how it is to do it, leaving as little as possible to the discretionary judgment of bureaucrats—and thus as little as possible for future authorities to exercise control over, short of passing new legislation later on (which is usually not possible). Thus, agency goals, decision criteria, procedures, timetables, personnel rules, and virtually anything else affecting agency performance can be specified exhaustively in the original legislation, sinking a vast range of behaviors in formal concrete and shielding them from political influence.

Obviously, this is not a formula for effective organization. In the interests of political protection, agencies are knowingly burdened with cumbersome, technically inappropriate structures that undermine their capacity to do their jobs well. Nor, obviously, is this a formula for effective control by democratic superiors. Insulationist devices are called for precisely because those who create public bureaucracy do not want a truly effective structure of democratic control.

A second force driving the politics of structural choice is what I call, for lack of a better term, *political compromise*. The design of most structures, in or out of politics, involves lots of compromise. In business transactions, for instance, economic actors make compromises all the time as they engage in voluntary exchange, hammer out contracts, and create structures. The key thing about voluntary exchange, however, is that the structures so created should tend to be mutually beneficial. All participants expect to benefit—and if they don't, they are free to leave. In these contexts, organizations are designed by people who want them to succeed.

This is not so in politics. In the American separation of powers system, political victory is exceedingly difficult in the absence of compromise with the losing side. And because everyone knows that whatever structures are chosen will influence the content and effectiveness of public policy, virtually all aspects of structure and policy are up for grabs as separate items for political compromise. The re-

sult is that, if the winners want to shift the status quo, they will usually have to let the losers participate in the design of any organization being created—and the losers will often press for structures that undermine the organization's performance. Because American politics is unavoidably a process of compromise, then, public agencies will be designed in part by their enemies, who want them to fail.

A third basic force driving the politics of structural choice is what I call *fear of the state*. To see what it is and where it comes from, we need to distinguish two types of political participants: public officials (elected and administrative) and social actors (interest groups and constituents). Public officials occupy positions of public authority and have the legal right to exercise it. Social actors try to influence public officials through elections, lobbying, and other means.

When the relationship between the two is construed in principal-agent terms (Pratt and Zeckhauser, 1985), it is clear that social actors, as principals, cannot perfectly control the public officials who are presumably their agents. This is perhaps less a problem in the politics of structural choice than in other aspects of politics, because here the most relevant social actors by far are likely to be organized interest groups—who, compared to constituents in general, are well informed about structural issues and endowed with substantial resources for monitoring official behavior, assigning credit and blame, and bringing their influence to bear. Structural politics is clearly interest group politics. But even though public officials have strong incentives to respond to what the groups want, control will still be imperfect—and officials, therefore, will still have a measure of autonomy in their exercise of public authority.

This has a profound effect on the way interest groups approach the design of political structures. While they are afraid of one another, pressing for structures that protect their own interests from subversion by their group enemies, they are also afraid—quite separately afraid—of public officials, even those who are presumably their allies. For public officials have their own interests—in money, security, policy—at heart; and, because political control is imperfect, they can use the coercive power of public authority in ways that are unwanted and sometimes even devastating to the groups.

When a winning group creates a new public agency to serve its interests, then, it is creating a new structure of public authority—and agreeing to be a subordinate in a forbidding authority relationship

that will henceforth be involuntary. There is no exit, even if it has created a monster. Its design problem, therefore, is to protect itself from the dangers of public authority. While there are various ways to do this, one attractive approach is to limit the autonomous exercise of authority *ex ante* through detailed formal requirements—criteria, standards, rules, deadlines—that are written into the law. This maneuver simultaneously protects against political uncertainty: by locking in controls *ex ante*, not only are public officials highly constrained in how they can use their authority, but opposing groups are effectively shut out as well.

In any event, protection against the state will entail structures that make it more difficult for the agency to do its job well—just as protection against political uncertainty does. There is no getting around this. In politics, it is rational for social actors to fear one another, to fear the state, and to use structure to protect themselves—even though it may hobble the agencies that are supposed to be serving them.

Presidents, Legislators, and Structure

All this suggests that American public bureaucracy will tend to be highly “bureaucratic,” structured in complex, cumbersome ways that undermine effective performance and insulate against effective political control. To this point, however, we have focused our attention largely on the interest groups that make up the winning and losing coalitions. This is the kind of bureaucracy they would build.

But what about the public officials most directly involved in the politics of structural choice: legislators and the president? They are the ones who exercise public authority, and the groups must act through them. Do they go along with these political forces and thus help create a bureaucracy built more for protection than for performance and accountability? The short answer is that legislators do and presidents don’t—and this, I will argue later, is essential to what the institutional presidency is all about.

Legislators go along because of their almost paranoid concern for reelection (Mayhew, 1974). They are not in the business of creating effective organizations that can be held accountable. They are in the business of making themselves popular. And because broad constituency influences are largely absent on arcane issues of structure, their attentions center on the active interest groups.

This does not mean that legislators will simply operate as faithful agents of the groups. There is some basis for autonomous action. The incentive and monitoring mechanisms available to groups are imperfect. Moreover, the fact is that legislators value reelection as a means to more fundamental ends—income, power, policy—and these may give them incentives on occasion to “shirk.” But truly autonomous action is likely to be important for legislators only at the margin. The electoral connection ensures that they will be highly responsive to group pressures and, in particular, to the costs groups can impose on them for going their own way.

Congress, then, is receptive to the kind of bureaucracy groups want to create. Legislators are not bound by any overarching notion of what the bureaucracy as a whole ought to look like. They are not driven by efficiency, coordination, management, or any other design criteria that might limit the kind of bureaucracy they can accept. They do not even insist on retaining control for themselves. For the most part, they willingly build, piece by piece—however grotesque the pieces, however inconsistent with one another—whatever makes the groups happy. This “congressional bureaucracy” is not supposed to function as a coherent whole. Only the pieces are important.

Were it not for presidents, this would pretty much be the end of the story. But presidents do not want the kind of bureaucracy that the other players are busily trying to create—and they have the power to do something about it. Because of presidents, the game of structural politics is very different than it would otherwise be, and its outcomes are very different as well.

Presidents pursue interests that are often incompatible with, and indeed threatening to, the interests of most of the other major players. Their heterogeneous national constituency leads them to think in grander terms about social problems and the public interest and to resist specialized appeals. Reelection, moreover, does not loom so large in their calculations (and in the second term, of course, it is not a factor at all). They are more fundamentally concerned with governance.

Unlike legislators, presidents are held responsible by the public for virtually every aspect of national performance. When the economy declines, an agency falters, or a social problem goes unaddressed, it is the president who gets the blame and whose popularity and historical legacy are on the line. All presidents are aware of this, and they

respond by trying to build an institutional capacity for effective governance. As a result, they are the only players in the politics of structural choice who are motivated to seek a unified, coordinated, centrally directed bureaucratic system. They want a bureaucracy they can control from the top.

The presidential quest for control is especially troublesome, from the standpoint of the other players, because the president acts with a great deal of autonomy. This is true in two basic respects. The first is that his large, heterogeneous constituency, along with the lower priority he attaches to reelection, gives him freedom to fashion his own agenda and to pursue his own brand of control. In the language of social choice: his constituency constraints are weak, the set of feasible choices large, and he has great flexibility in deciding where in the "policy space" he wants to end up.

The second is more deeply rooted. If there is a single driving force that motivates all presidents, it is not popularity with the constituency, nor even governance per se. It is leadership. Above all else, the public wants presidents to be strong leaders, and presidents know that their success in office and place in history hinge on the extent to which citizens, political elites, academics, and journalists see them as fulfilling these lofty expectations.

What do presidents have to do in order to be regarded as strong leaders? Clearly, they often have to do what is popular, and they have to govern effectively; these aspects of presidential motivation are, in large measure, simply derivative components of strong leadership. But presidents also have to do something else: they have to show the way by charting new paths for American society—even when these paths happen to be *unpopular* at the time. Strong leaders have the capacity for rising above politics when necessary, for pursuing their own vision in the face of political odds, for doing what is right and best rather than what is politically safe and expedient. Strong leaders have to demonstrate their true metal by being selectively *unresponsive*—by being autonomous.

Here again, presidents are dramatically different from legislators. For legislators, autonomy is a form of shirking for which they expect to be electorally punished if caught. Their incentive structure strongly discourages whatever inclinations they may have to go their own way. But almost the opposite is true for presidents. They are expected to

take autonomous action—indeed, to be open and bold about it—and their leadership suffers when they fail to do so. Autonomy is an integral part of their institutional incentive structure, part of what it means to be a good president.

The great emphasis presidents place on autonomy is a major threat to most of the organized groups that animate the legislative politics of structural choice. As far as they are concerned, presidents are unresponsive and out of control. Worse, presidents not only want structures of a different kind, they want structures that *give them control* of public bureaucracy—when, of course, what the groups want is to control the various, uncoordinated pieces of the bureaucracy themselves.

Thus, while groups have rational grounds for fearing the state, they do not fear all state actors equally. They fear legislators a little. They fear presidents a lot. As they pursue their best interests in the politics of structural choice, then, they will favor protective structures that are disproportionately aimed at limiting presidential control. There are various ways of going about this. They may favor independent forms of organization, the insulation of personnel through civil service and professionalism, and reduced roles for political appointees, for example. And, of course, they can also seek protection from the president by pushing for all the usual formal restrictions (on procedures, criteria, timing, and the like) that, by reducing the scope for agency discretion, insulate "their" components of the bureaucracy from anyone's *ex post* control.

When the various pieces of the bureaucracy are being created, then, the legislative politics of structural choice tends to reflect an antipresidential bias. The U.S. Constitution may say that the president is the chief executive, but his domain is largely the creation of other powerful players—who incrementally build an executive branch that is both difficult for him to control and ill-suited to effective performance.

Structural Choice and Presidential Power

This is what presidents are up against. It is not just that the American separation of powers system is stacked against them, denying them the power they need for true leadership. It is that they are part

of a dynamic system that, by virtue of the politics of structural choice, is continually generating *new* institutional arrangements that are purposely designed to limit and obstruct the very leadership presidents are trying to exercise.

Presidents are driven to do something about this. There is not much they can do to change the basic features of separation of powers. But by weighing into the politics of structural choice, they can alter the dynamics of institutional change and fashion a system more to their liking. In some measure, they can create their own context—and either prevent others from doing so or counteract what others have done.

The simple fact that presidents are the nation's chief executives, endowed by Constitution and statute with certain formal powers, is of great consequence. For these powers enable them to make lots of important structural choices *on their own* without going through the legislative process. They have what economists would refer to as “residual decision rights” (Grossman and Hart, 1986) to take unilateral action at their own discretion: in many spheres of government organization, the absence of specific legal directives about how to proceed means that presidents are able to make authoritative decisions on these matters. They can organize and direct the presidency as they see fit, create public agencies, reorganize them, move them around, coordinate them, impose rules on their behavior, put their own people in top positions, and otherwise place their structural stamps on the executive branch.

Some of these actions, particularly those broadly authorized by statute, might be reversed by legislation later on. But because separation of powers makes legislative victories so difficult to achieve, this is unlikely. The result is that the president has a trump card of great consequence for the institutional system. He can act unilaterally in many matters of structure, while Congress must go through a difficult process of legislation—in which the president gets to participate and, if he disagrees, to veto. Moreover, when Congress does succeed in designing administrative arrangements much to its own liking, the president can subsequently add on new structures that, in qualifying the way these arrangements work, are more conducive to his own interests.

As presidents pursue strong leadership, then, their best strategy is not simply to take structure as given and plunge into the informal

politics of bargaining. Nor is it to concentrate their institution-building energies solely on the legislative politics of structural choice. In both, especially the first, presidents are playing on someone else's turf, are prisoners of the prevailing structure, and are acquiescing to an institutional system that is incompatible with their leadership. Their best strategy is to use their comparative advantage—their residual decision rights as chief executive—by taking aggressive action within their own sphere of authority to shift the structure of politics for themselves and everyone else. Doing so allows them to become, as much as they ever will, masters of their own destinies, shaping the institutional system along presidential lines.

This is the rational basis for the institutional presidency. Throughout this century, presidents have struggled to provide themselves with a structural capacity for leadership by building institutions of their own. For all kinds of reasons—political opposition, the pressure of events, the scarcity of resources, imperfect knowledge about what works—this has not been a simple, linear process of development. But the trajectory is clear, and the motive force behind it is the president's drive for leadership in a system largely beyond his control.

At a very general level, the internal organization of the presidency can be understood in much the same way as the internal organization of Congress. Both take forms that facilitate the realization of member interests. Congress, however, is made up of hundreds of coequal individuals, each concerned with bringing home the bacon to his own constituents; and, as a group, they face serious collective action problems in arriving at structures that are stable and mutually beneficial. In large measure, the committees, procedures, and party leadership that organize congressional behavior emerged over time as (imperfect) solutions to these collective action problems. They enable members to have disproportionate influence over issues of relevance to their own districts, to make credible commitments in legislative bargaining, to arrive at durable political deals, and thus to realize gains from trade with their colleagues. They minimize the transaction costs of political exchange (Weingast and Marshall, 1988; Cox and McCubbins, 1990).⁷

The internal organization of the presidency, likewise, reflects the interests of the president. The crucial difference is that the presidency is a unified institution, in the sense that it has one supreme authority: the president. In determining his own preferences and making his

own decisions, the president does not suffer from the severe collective action problems plaguing Congress, and he need not resort to complex structural arrangements for mitigating them.⁸ The task of institution building, then, even if politically difficult, is conceptually more straightforward here. Presidents create structures that provide them with a capacity for effective leadership.

All sorts of functions are essential to effective leadership in modern times, but most of these the president cannot possibly handle by himself. He cannot carry out his own lobbying with Congress. He cannot recruit, screen, and hire all his own personnel. He cannot maintain constant contact with relevant interest groups. He cannot provide the press with all the information they want (or he wants them to have). He cannot plan and schedule all the details of his day-to-day activities. He cannot know enough, technically or politically, to formulate coherent programs and make wise policy choices. He cannot personally control the bureaucracy.

He is infinitely better able to carry out these functions, and thus to be an effective leader, if he relies on other people to perform them for him—if he relies, that is, on agents. In rational choice terms, the president faces the classic “principal’s problem” in building his institution: how to choose agents, and how to structure his relationship to them—via rules, incentive schemes, monitoring and reporting requirements, and the like—in such a way that they are most likely to take actions that enhance his own capacity for leadership (Pratt and Zeckhauser, 1985).

Figuring out how to organize people productively is a complicated business. But the fact that presidents have unchallenged authority within their own realm gives them a great advantage in minimizing the “agency losses” that plague most control relationships in politics. They can choose people who not only have the right kind of training and skills to do their jobs well but who also—by virtue of ideology, partisanship, and loyalty—can be expected to keep the president’s own interests uppermost as they go about their tasks. The presidency is not just a hierarchy of employees: it is, more than perhaps any other political institution, a team.⁹

This simplifies the president’s job and his organization as well. In most agency relationships, structures proliferate in order to minimize the agency losses associated with opportunism, conflict of interest,

and asymmetric information. Rules, incentive schemes, monitoring, and all the rest are necessary to control agents who cannot be counted upon to do the right thing. But to the extent that personnel choices produce a genuine team, opportunism and conflict of interest are greatly reduced, and much of the bureaucratic apparatus designed to reduce agent shirking can be dispensed with. Still, the decisions these agents make are important to the president, they are often politically sensitive, and mistakes can be very costly. So some bureaucracy is still necessary. Its purpose is to mitigate the problems teams face by promoting coordination, information sharing, and suitable expertise among individuals who all want the same thing (what is best for the president) but may not know how to achieve it or how to function productively as a group.

All this applies with most force to what we might think of as the purely presidential part of the institutional presidency. This is the part that provides support services for the president—his closest advisers, the personnel office, the media office, the congressional liaison office, units for outreach to interest groups, and the like. These are clearly internal to the presidential hierarchy, subject to his complete authority. But the boundaries of the institutional presidency are unclear at the margins, more so than those of Congress, because the president as chief executive has rationally extended his own institution to try to control the far-flung federal bureaucracy—which is *not* solely under his authority. This extension of the presidency reaches beyond the president’s own special realm. And the problems he faces, as well as the structures needed to deal with them, are different.

Presidential control of the bureaucracy involves a two-step agency relationship. The first step is of the purely presidential sort: the president delegates the task to his own agents, whom he must try to control. Although he cannot do so perfectly, this is nonetheless the easy part. It is the second step, in which the president’s people try to control the bureaucracy, that produces real trouble. Opportunism, conflict of interest, and asymmetric information—the bases of willful noncompliance—are rampant at this lower level. The surface reason is that each agency has its own mission, expertise, clientele, linkages with congressional committees, and ways of operating. They do not want to be controlled by the president. The deeper reason is that much of this is built in: legislators and groups design it to be that way.

How can the president employ his residual decision rights as chief executive to mitigate these problems and gain more control for himself? Two institutional strategies stand out: he can politicize and he can centralize. Although dealing with agencies designed and overseen by Congress, he can implement these two strategies on his own authority to target the foundations of agency noncompliance.

The term *politicize*, I should point out, is something of a misnomer (although I sometimes use it myself). The agencies arise out of the politics of structural choice and are thoroughly political from the moment of their conception. Their insulation from presidential control—whether through rules, civil service, professionalism, or whatever—is itself a political act with widespread political consequences, and presidents do not make the agencies more political by trying to do something about it.

Semantics aside, presidents follow this strategy by using their appointment authority to place their own people—loyal, ideologically compatible people—in pivotal positions in the bureaus, the departments, and of course, the Office of Management and Budget and other presidential agencies whose job it is to exercise control. This is a strategy of imperialism: extending the turf of the presidential team by infiltrating alien territory. The idea is to ensure that important bureaucratic decisions are placed in the hands of presidential agents, or at least are directly overseen and monitored by them.

To the extent this can be done, the aggressive use of presidential appointment power goes a long way toward mitigating the most severe problems of opportunism and conflict of interest that prompt agencies willfully to resist presidential control. In addition, especially if appointees bring expertise or experience to their jobs, it also attacks the problem of asymmetric information by providing the presidential team with a pipeline into the private information that agencies might otherwise use to evade control. Thus, it mitigates not only the will to resist, but also the means—for expertise and other types of private information are perhaps the most crucial sources of agency power (Rourke, 1984; Niskanen, 1971).

This does part of the job, but serious problems remain. Political appointees can never know what career bureaucrats know; they will always be at a disadvantage. Moreover, precisely because they are “out there” and need the support of agency personnel to do their jobs well, they are under very real pressures to become advocates for the paro-

chial interests of their agencies. For these and other reasons, as long as effective decision authority rests with the agencies themselves, presidents will have a difficult time gaining control through an appointments strategy alone. And because the parceling out of authority in this manner means that decisions will be decentralized and fragmented, presidents cannot simply rely on appointments to create the kind of coherent, coordinated policy control they need.

This is where the centralization strategy comes in. Instead of infiltrating the agencies to ensure they make the right kinds of decisions “out there,” presidents can try to see that most of the important decisions are not made “out there” at all, but inside the presidency proper. They can use structure to shift the locus of effective decision authority to the center. One basic way they can do this, as chief executives, is by imposing managerial rules that constrain agency behavior, and thus by building presidential organizations—the OMB, notably—whose job it is to make and enforce these rules. The rules may vary from the most mundane procedures for budget submissions to the bold Reagan-era requirement that regulatory agencies send proposed regulations to the OMB for prior approval. But all such rules have the effect of limiting agency discretion and shifting decision-making power to the president.

More generally, presidents can move toward coherent central control by setting up their own policy-making structures inside the White House, incorporating people of their own choosing from the departments and agencies (and presidential units like the OMB), and pulling salient issues of public policy into the presidency for consideration, debate, and resolution. In foreign policy, of course, the major centralizing institution is the National Security Council. The president clearly has strong reasons for not wanting the State Department, the Defense Department, and other agencies to make their own foreign policy decisions. And by incorporating them into a central structure run by his own people, he can attempt to make foreign policy truly presidential: hearing their views, enlisting their expertise, coordinating their contributions, and directing policy toward presidential ends.

In domestic policy, much the same applies. Although there is no statutory agency like the NSC to put a formal stamp on their efforts, all modern presidents have rightly feared becoming captives of the bureaus and departments, and they have incrementally moved toward the development of White House structures—for example,

Nixon's Domestic Council, Reagan's cabinet councils—that presidentialize major policy issues. As structures of presidential control, these are the functional equivalents of the NSC.

Even in combination, of course, politicization and centralization cannot give the president the control he really needs for effective leadership. The bureaucracy does not want to be controlled, is structured to prevent it, and has resources to resist. Moreover, even if he could—and the system would stop him far short of it—the president would not want to push these strategies to an extreme. For his leadership obviously benefits from the expertise, experience, and continued operation of public agencies, and he cannot totally circumvent them or deny them discretion without undermining their essential role in governance—and his own capacity for leadership (Hecl, 1975; Aberbach and Rockman, 1988).

The continuing problem for presidents, though, is that they have far too little control, not too much, and they need to build an institution—however inadequate by absolute standards—that allows them to overcome the tremendous obstacles to leadership the system places in their way. This is what the presidential team, the various presidential organizations, and the strategies of politicization and centralization are all about, and it is what the institutional presidency as a whole is all about. This is how presidents fight back against a system that is stacked against them.

Presidents and the Dynamics of System Change

Now let's take another look at the system. Its basic framework is fixed by the Constitution, but within this framework institutions of various sorts are continually being created, modified, and destroyed. There is an ongoing process of institutional development, animated by the politics of structural choice. The system is being changed. What I want to argue here is that, while the basic structure of the system is stacked against the president, the dynamics of system *change* are stacked in his favor.

At the heart of system change is a basic political tension. Legislators and groups, motivated by parochial concerns, routinely go about the piecemeal construction of a bureaucracy buried in formalism, insulated from effective control, and ill-designed for its tasks. Presi-

dents, motivated to lead, find this unacceptable. They take aggressive action to presidentialize the system's institutional makeup by modifying "congressional bureaucracy," developing their own institutions, and putting them to use. The other players resist, the president counters, and so it goes. The central dynamic of the American institutional system comes from this tension between presidents who seek control and the legislative and group players who want to carve out their own small pieces of turf.

The American system has always been fragmented and decentralized. The kind of institutions favored by legislators and groups fit in nicely with the traditional character of the system. What is new and different in the modern period is the presidency and, in particular, the public expectations that drive all modern presidents to seek leadership and control. Presidents are the ones who are out of step, pushing for new institutional arrangements that fly in the face of traditional practice and parochialism. They are the ones, as a consequence, who represent the real driving force for change in the American institutional system. Legislators and groups are essentially protectors of the institutional status quo.

Inevitably, the protectors of the status quo are well equipped to block most attempts at change. But presidents hold pivotal advantages that, over the long haul, allow them to propel the system (however haltingly and intermittently) along a presidential trajectory. Two have already been discussed at some length. The first is a matter of authority: presidents can take unilateral action through their residual decision rights a chief executives to impose structures of their own design. In some measure, they can presidentialize the system on their own, without explicit congressional approval. The second is motivational: presidents are driven to gain coherent, centralized control over government, but legislators are not. Thus, presidents are constantly on the move in building institutions of control—they are imperialistic—while members of Congress are defensive and protective. When change comes, therefore, it is most often presidential.

A third key advantage, at least as important as the others, has only received brief mention so far and deserves greater emphasis. It is that Congress suffers from collective action problems that the president avoids—and can exploit. There is a tendency among scholars and journalists of reify the Congress, to treat it as though it is a unitary

decision maker like the president, and to analyze their institutional conflicts accordingly. The president and Congress are portrayed as fighting it out, head to head, over matters of institutional power and prerogative.

But this misconstrues things. Congress is a collection of hundreds of individuals who do their work in committees, who struggle among themselves, and who take action in their own best interests—which may conflict with the best interests of the institution as a whole. When decisions about policy or structure are beneficial to individual legislators (or their group allies) but have negative consequences for the institution—for example, by reducing Congress's power relative to the president—individual interests will often win out. As a collegial organization lacking strong, unifying authority, Congress is simply in a poor position to protect its institutional interests. As an "actor," it will often make choices that are to its own disadvantage. Shifting coalitions of legislators and groups are short-term winners. The institution is the long-term loser.¹⁰

Presidents are not hobbled by these collective action problems and can simply make authoritative decisions about what is best for the presidency. While their own interests as individuals may sometimes conflict with the interests of the presidency as an institution—their demand for short-term responsiveness, for instance, could undercut the presidency's long-term institutional capacity for expertise and competence—their overriding concern for leadership induces them to promote the power of their institution relative to that of others. Thus, not only is the presidency a unitary institution, but there is also substantial congruence between the president's individual interests and the interests of the institution, far more so than within Congress.

Moreover, because Congress is a collective institution and, specifically, a majority-rule institution, presidents can manipulate outcomes to their own advantage. As positive theorists have already shown, there are typically lots of outcomes that, given the right manipulation of the agenda, could win against the status quo (McKelvey, 1976). Thus, when presidents—whether through appointments, executive order, bureaucratic policy making, or simply the initiation of legislation—are able to exercise agenda control, they can take still greater advantage of Congress's collective action problems by engineering outcomes beneficial to the presidency as an insti-

tution and sometimes, for reasons noted above, disadvantageous to Congress as an institution (Hammond, Hill, and Miller, 1986).

To illustrate, let's consider one example. Throughout most of the modern period, Congress has willingly granted reorganization authority to presidents, thus giving them additional means of building their capacity for control. Why would Congress do this? The answer, at least in part, is that presidents have taken advantage of Congress's collective action problems.¹¹

If presidents were to propose specific reorganizations that had to be approved through legislation, the interested groups and legislators could use their leverage within the relevant committees to block them. But by asking for general authority without tying it to specific cases, presidents avoid activating the fierce opposition of special interests, and they avoid the decision arenas that those interests control. Instead, they make vague appeals to the broad, relatively indifferent majority, suggesting that they can do good things as chief executives that otherwise wouldn't get done at all by an unwieldy Congress—for example, coordinating services, raising the profile of deserving programs, saving money.

The majority does not simply trust presidents to do good things, of course, and has always insisted on protection through legislative veto (prior to the 1983 Chadha decision). But this is palatable to presidents. For, once they submit a specific proposal, an *affirmative* act by Congress is therefore necessary to *prevent* such proposals from going into effect. All the usual impediments to congressional action are thereby turned to presidential advantage—and special interests threatened by the proposal find themselves facing an uphill battle: they cannot simply block, but must mobilize a majority on their own behalf. Indeed, the latter's job is all the more difficult because, assuming the president's targets (in each instance) are narrowly drawn, most legislators and groups will often not be opposed on substance, and they will typically not see the larger institutional issue—further expansion of presidential control in only these particular respects—as a threat to their individual interests.

Now that Chadha has eliminated the legislative veto as a protection, it appears the whole arrangement surrounding reorganization authority is extinct. But while it operated, faced as they were with a system stacked against their leadership, presidents were only too happy to take what they could get—relatively small victories that,

with Congress's "support," shifted the institutional balance a little bit more toward the presidency over time.

This is just the tip of the iceberg, for there are many ways presidents might take advantage of Congress's collective action problems to enhance their own control at Congress's expense. And in each case, once they have done so a ratchet effect takes over: presidents will not give back what they have achieved. They want control, and every president will protect not only what he has won, but what all past presidents have won. Sometimes they cannot succeed in this. Congress may on rare occasions overcome its congenital incapacities and strike a blow for greater congressional control—as it did, for instance, in the War Powers Act (which presidents have largely ignored). But these are the exceptions. Congress will usually be incapable of winning back the ground it has lost.

When it comes to building structures of control, then, the battle between president and Congress is lopsided. The president is a unitary decision maker, he can take unilateral action in imposing his own structures, his individual interests are largely congruent with the institutional interests of the presidency, and he is dedicated to gaining control over government. Congress is hobbled by collective action problems, vulnerable to agenda manipulation by the president, and populated by individuals whose interests diverge substantially from those of the institution. The result is an asymmetry in the dynamic of institutional change, yielding an uneven but steady shift toward a more presidential system.

Once again, I am not saying that presidents are destined to take over. Separation of powers sets up legal impediments to such an extreme shift in the institutional balance. And, in the ongoing politics of structural choice, the growth of presidential control represents an increasing threat to parochial interests and gives them greater incentives to invest in political opposition. The most reasonable expectation is for some sort of equilibrium to be reached in future years, an equilibrium more presidential than what we have now, but still a far cry from what presidents might like.

Conclusion

Scholars often rail against presidents for being imperialistic about institution building and political control. Presidents should stop all

this, critics say, and do an about-face. They should rely more heavily on their cabinet. They should decentralize. They should respect the "neutral competence" of the bureaucracy. They should appoint professionals, not loyalists. They should resist creating their own bureaucracy (Hess, 1988; Hecl, 1975; Seidman and Gilmour, 1986; Aberbach and Rockman, 1988).

These sorts of criticisms arise from perspectives in which presidents are understood, in the final analysis, as just people like the rest of us. When they go astray, it is for reasons intrinsic to their own cases: their psyches, backgrounds, skills, relationships, political situations. Scholars do not think they can remake presidents into different individuals, of course. But they do tend to think that, through ideas, evidence, and argument, they might convince presidents to stop their mischief and do a better job of running the presidency.

Consider how strange this would seem if Congress were the target of reform. Viewing members of Congress as just people, we might urge them to stop being so concerned with pushing the parochial interests of their districts and instead to think in terms of the national interest. Or to vote their consciences. Or to stop being so responsive to interest groups. Or to centralize power in a strong congressional leadership. But this is obviously an empty exercise, and congressional scholars rarely waste their time making these sorts of recommendations. They know full well that members of Congress will not heed them.

The reason, of course, is that members of Congress are *not* just people. They are people who occupy distinctive formal roles embedded in an institutional context. Their incentives are strongly shaped by this context, and they behave in very predictable ways because of it. Virtually any individuals placed in the same roles can be expected to behave in the same basic ways, regardless of their personalities or styles or values. Members of Congress are institutional actors, and they conform to their roles.

This does not mean that members of Congress are not open to ideas about reform. They are. But only to ideas asking them to do things that are in their own best interests. Feasible reform proposals therefore require serious attention to what those interests are and how they are embedded in institutions. Congressional scholars are aware of this, and their work reflects it. They know that members of Congress are highly constrained by their roles, they know why, and

they do not (usually) prod them to behave otherwise. They have treated members of Congress as institutional actors.

But too often, presidential scholars have not done the same for presidents. Their tradition has been to treat presidents as personal actors. And while they surely recognize that institutions constrain presidential behavior, they have paid far less attention to institutions than congressional scholars have in building their explanations and fashioning their reform proposals. When presidents politicize, centralize, and otherwise offend scholarly sensibilities of what a good presidency ought to look like, scholars "take it personally"—rather than recognizing, as congressional scholars would, that this sort of behavior is likely to arise from institutionally rooted incentives that have nothing to do with presidents as people, are common to all presidents, and are fundamental to an understanding of the presidency. The result is that presidents are not fully appreciated as institutional actors, and they are presented, time and again, with reform proposals that they have absolutely no incentive to follow through on.

When presidents are regarded as institutional actors, our explanations of their behavior are dramatically different than a traditional methodology of personalism would suggest, and even the most basic issues are cast in a different light. To take an obvious example, consider presidential power, which has been central to the presidency literature for decades. Would we want to say with Neustadt—and conventional wisdom in the field—that presidential power is the power to persuade? I don't think so.

Persuasion and bargaining are essential to presidential leadership. But the activities surrounding them are reflections of their institutional setting. Institutions allocate authority, resources, and opportunities—they entail a structure of power. The way this power gets exercised is, to a significant degree, epiphenomenal. It *arises* from structure, and it can be fully appreciated only when its connection to structure is laid bare.

Much of the institutional context, moreover, is itself endogenous. It not only conditions the presidential behavior we observe, but it is also a dynamic product of that behavior. This means that presidents can alter their own power through the politics of structural choice, and that leadership is not simply about the exercise of power, *per se*, but about developing the structural capacity for its exercise. It is about institution building.

Like the pluralist theories of power that gained prominence during the 1960s (e.g., Dahl, 1961), Neustadt's "power to persuade" directs attention to the action of politics and away from its deeper structure, failing to recognize that the power wielding we observe is but a small part of a larger story. The job of presidential theory, it seems to me, is to tell this larger story—to understand the presidency as an integral part of the institutional system. The best way to do this is to stop thinking about presidents as people and to start thinking of them *generically*: as faceless, nameless, institutional actors whose behavior is an institutional product.

I am not claiming that personal variables are unimportant, nor that we can get away without studying them. The fact is, scholars must attend to many aspects of the presidency, and the balance between institutional and personal influences can vary considerably depending on what is being explained. If the topic is political control or power, for instance, institutional concerns are likely to play a more influential role than if the topic is crisis decision making or White House advisory processes, which often are heavily dependent on the president's personal characteristics. Across the field as a whole, then, there is no substitute for paying attention to the personal side of the equation. An argument can be made, in fact, that personal factors cannot be ignored even in areas that are strongly institutional—for, especially given the autonomy that presidents exercise, personal factors are everywhere relevant in helping us understand why presidents make one choice rather than another. Institutions may push them in a general direction—to politicize, to centralize, and so on—but the specific decisions they make along the way will often be a reflection of their individuality.

The problem is not the relevance of personal factors for presidential behavior. The problem is that the personal side of the presidency lends itself very poorly to theory. When the exercise is taken seriously, personal theories turn out to be extremely complex, difficult to construct, and quite limited in generality and scope. Given their scant progress over the last half century within both presidential studies and organization theory more generally, there is every reason to believe that the enormous scholarly investment in them has simply not been worth it and that further investment is unwarranted. Much the same must be said for the methodology underpinning all this: a methodology that sees everything as worth explaining, proliferates

relevant variables, and views progress in terms of endlessly increasing complexity and comprehensiveness.

This is why I have to depart so radically from the mainstream. The standard, widely accepted critique in recent years is that the field is not sufficiently scientific, that we have not paid enough attention to institutions, and that we should be striving to build theories that combine and sort out the personal and institutional influences on presidential behavior. While much of this is well founded, it ultimately keeps us on the same path—and, if we are to succeed, it seems to me that we cannot do this. We need to strike out in a very different and, for the field, unorthodox direction.

The new approach I'm suggesting has two components. First, while recognizing the genuine importance of personal variables, we should nonetheless invest our theoretical efforts far more heavily on the institutional side. Institutional theories, precisely because they are impersonal and deal with generic properties of actors and their contexts, hold out far greater prospects for success than personal theories do. Research on personal factors should continue to be an integral part of the field, but its role should be descriptive, informative, and suggestive.

Second, as this exclusion of personal concerns from theory indicates, we cannot dedicate ourselves to explaining everything. We need to move toward a methodology that, instead of reveling in complexity and universal relevance, places a premium on just the opposite: on simplicity, on parsimony, on stripping away the tangle of relevant variables and capturing just the essence of what is going on. We need to get simple and get basic or we will not get anywhere.

There are perhaps various ways of going about this. The most obvious is to rely on rational choice theory, which is already founded on such a methodology, and which, thanks largely to the new economics of organization, already provides a powerful body of institutional theory, one that political scientists are now exploiting to great advantage in the study of political institutions.

In the latter half of this essay, I have tried to show how rational choice, and the new economics in particular, might be put to use in fleshing out at least one small part of an institutional theory, the part dealing with the development of the institutional presidency and its anchoring in the politics of structural choice. Some readers may disagree with the arguments I make here. Others may claim that this

kind of theory can never be extended to much of what is truly important about the presidency. But such reactions are to be expected at this point, and they are healthy for a field in which theory has played too little a role for far too long. I invite these readers to counter with theories of their own. If what I say here stimulates a measure of debate and turmoil over basic issues of theory and method, not to mention substance, I will consider my efforts worthwhile.

Notes

1. For a brief overview, see Wayne, 1983.
2. The best known of these efforts is James David Barber's *Presidential Character* (1985), which, it happens, stands apart from most other work in this tradition by attempting to fashion a simple, potentially powerful theory. Partly for this reason, however, it has been extensively criticized on both theoretical and empirical grounds, especially by those who take a serious interest in psychological explanation (see George, 1974). For an overview of some of the broader, more mainstream literature on the psychological foundations of presidential behavior, see Erwin Hargrove's chapter in this volume.
3. Note that the Brownlow reforms of 1939, which Roosevelt initiated and which signaled the beginning of the modern institutional presidency, were founded on classical principles. Since then, formal structure has grown increasingly important (in fits and starts) in presidential style. See, e.g., Kernell and Popkin (1986).
4. Not all presidential scholars, of course, have ignored the organizational literature on leadership. Two who stand out as having put this work to serious use are James MacGregor Burns and Alexander George. See, e.g., Burns (1978) and George (1981).
5. For overviews of the literature on organizational leadership, see Bass (1981) and Perrow (1986).
6. I should point out here that many political scientists eventually arrived at this conclusion on their own, aided especially by Greenstein's (1982) revisionist analysis of Eisenhower. They would have seen the light much earlier had they looked beyond presidential studies and paid serious attention to organization theory.
7. The internal structure of the legislature has also been shaped by the power politics of winning and losing and not simply by considerations of mutual gains. Rational choice theory clearly has much to say about both, but for convenience I stress only the latter here (which happens to be the standard line these days among positive theorists). See Moe (1990b).
8. I should emphasize that I am making relative statements here. Within the presidency, various players with different interests, ideologies, information, etc. participate in decision making; and collective action problems can surely arise. This is true of any organization (Hammond and Miller, 1985). My point here is simply that the presidency and Congress are fundamentally different in terms of the way formal authority is allocated within them, and, for this reason, Congress is far more vulnerable to collective action problems than the presidency is.

9. Again, I use the team concept here to emphasize very basic differences between the presidency and Congress. It is not meant to be taken literally—e.g., that there are no conflicts of interest among presidential staffers.
10. Congress does, of course, have internal arrangements that help protect its institutional interests—party leadership, most notably—but these are highly imperfect and weak. They mitigate the problem somewhat but are far from solving it. For a sympathetic treatment, see Cox and McCubbins (1990).
11. For overviews of reorganization politics, see Arnold (1986); Fesler and Kettl (1991); Seidman and Gilmour (1986); and Wilson (1991).

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