

# TRANSITIONS AND DEMOCRACY

PERSONS become presidents. Presidents are variously prepared to do the job by reason of what they know, whom they know, and whether this knowledge is an asset or a liability in Washington, D.C. Persons as presidents differ from one another in most critical characteristics—experience, style, temperament, intelligence, and savvy. Yet they enter an office (literally and figuratively) that symbolizes stability and continuity. Our expectations of new presidents are often pure and hopeful, as with any new beginning. Accordingly, we tend to exaggerate presidential power at the start of a new administration, even as we support the conditions that limit its exercise (notably the constitutional separation of institutions, bolstered by a sharing of powers).<sup>1</sup> Discerning these inflated expectations is what is involved in a person becoming a president. Managing their effects is what is involved in successfully serving. These challenges distinguish the passages from campaigning to governing.

My purpose in this book is to explore the challenges faced by those elite persons who survive the arduous workings of presidential selection. I concentrate on the last four party shifts in the twentieth century: Lyndon B. Johnson to Richard M. Nixon (1968), Gerald R. Ford to Jimmy Carter (1976), Carter to Ronald Reagan (1980), and George Bush to Bill Clinton (1992). A candidate who wins is said to undergo a transition from the very special experience of campaigning to the very demanding service as president. I explore how that happens—from the decision to run until the inau-

guration. I identify the changes that affect this process of persons as candidates assuming the role of president. Throughout the book I draw heavily on formal interviews and informal discussions with those who experienced and observed the four most recent transitions involving party change. My goal is to consolidate and synthesize their analysis so as to provide lessons from the past and anticipations of the future. The principal focus is on the passages from declared candidate to nominee to president-elect to president.<sup>2</sup>

I confess to imagining in advance that contemporary campaigning deprives candidates of the experiences that prepared past presidents to govern. For example, candidates now surround themselves with merchandising specialists, not politicians upon whom they can depend later to bargain with other politicians. Consequently, today's presidents have a task for which their predecessors were better prepared—that is, connecting with other major decisionmakers. Further, they are likely to employ a coterie of advisers oriented more to the outside than the inside, more to the public and media than to legislators, governors, and bureaucrats. Samuel Kernell writes about the increasing tendency of presidents to “go public,” as though doing so was a choice rather than an inevitability in today's politics or, as he puts it, their “preferred course.”<sup>3</sup> Yet modern campaigning may leave them unprepared for classic bargaining and may require them to govern differently than in the past. On the other hand, after looking at recent cases I conclude that future transitions may feature a less sharp distinction between campaigning and governing, thus calling into question what it is we think we know about preparing for office.

Here then are some of my contentions:

—A president-elect's personal, political, policy, and organizational experience sends strong signals as to the type of transition to expect. Likewise, stature in the Washington community aids in identifying the advantages and disadvantages of assuming the presidency.

—Outsiders as presidents-elect face special problems in acquainting themselves with the politics of the inside. Often lacking stature, they need help from those in the know, and yet they may deny themselves this aid.

—The canons of an effective transition are based on a distinction between campaigning and governing, with election day as the marker: campaigning before, preparing to govern after.

—The press serves as the public's “window” for the transition, with reporters relying primarily on the conventional tests for judging effectiveness.

—Campaigning has lessons for governing for those prepared to learn them.

—Preelection planning is a vital, yet sensitive, enterprise best integrated into the campaign organization and leadership.

—The Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and Clinton transition teams all acknowledged the standard criteria; Nixon and Reagan had more success in meeting these criteria, Carter and Clinton had less.

—Campaigning and governing are undergoing important changes: campaigning is increasingly professionalized, requiring direction by skilled technicians more than experienced politicians; governing is more public, requiring skilled opinion specialists.

—These changes are blurring the distinction between campaigning and governing, suggesting an ancillary passage from campaigning for election to campaigning for policy.

—The conventional canons for an effective transition must now be supplemented by revised standards of governing that incorporate campaigning on issues.

—The Clinton transition is the watershed case. Dubbed the “worst” for having failed to meet many of the tests for a conventional transition, the Clinton White House developed a campaigning style of governing over the first term.

—The “biggest mistakes” for transitions—not establishing leadership, mismanaging time and opportunity, misjudging or mishandling appointments, failing to connect with Congress—are related to a failure to project competence and clear direction.

## Changing Transitions

Transitions are themselves in transition. The new is often tested by the familiar for the good reason that it is all we know and it is hard to prepare for that which is unrecognizable. In the case of transitions, judgments continue to be based on conventional standards, and yet a campaign-oriented style of governing has developed. The passage continues to be one from campaigning to governing, but within that generic transition is a shift from campaigning for election to campaigning for policy. Among other demands of this revised transition is the integration of political consultants and pollsters into White House staff operations without disrupting regular operations, a not inconsiderable challenge.

This alteration in transitions relates to a style or manner of governing, not

simply to a continuation of election campaigning. The shift is not only a result of electing a postwar-generation leader, though Clinton's arrival surely symbolized change. Quantum increases in access to information, as well as in the speed and sources of communication, have contributed to a substantially more public and participatory policy process. The very terms of governance are changing.

Current transition rules do not reflect these important developments, and yet new rules have not been formed and codified. Further, the changes, while acknowledged by sophisticated observers, are resisted as distortions to be refocused and clarified rather than realities to be confronted. I concede my own misgivings about a future for which I know we must prepare. Yet I acknowledge that it is quite possible that an effective transition in the standard mode may leave the new president unprepared in the next millennium to participate effectively in a more public governing process. Change must, and will, be absorbed in a democracy. This book, then, specifies a challenge for future presidents-elect: how best to achieve an ancillary passage following the election, while satisfying the standards of the conventional transition.

### Thinking about Transitions

Representative democracy is about transitions. Citizens are chosen in free elections to become agents. As such, they no longer speak just for themselves. Agents have the responsibility to speak and act for others. And so every election is a time of transition, with first-time winners experiencing the challenge of assuming another's stead and incumbents reading the results as a measure of their performance.

Democratic government is also about transitions. Most of the time the newcomers try to fit in. They accept current institutional practices in their effort to learn what is expected of them. Occasionally, however, institutional norms are themselves at issue in an election, and fresh representatives or new presidents seek change. For example, the elections in 1932, 1964, and 1980 for president and Congress, or 1974 and 1994 for Congress, produced transition-like impacts within institutions. The effect of the old on the new and the new on the old is at the heart of political or institutional transitions. A misreading of political conditions by newcomers, therefore, can lead either to loss of effectiveness if the support is not there for change or to a failure to capitalize on the opportunity if it is.

Attention here focuses on presidents as newcomers to government. They are currently among the least-tenured public servants. The Twenty-Second Amendment imposes a two-term limit. Between 1951, when it was ratified, and 1992, however, the average length of presidential service was five, not eight, years.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the Senate carries over two-thirds of its membership by constitutional design, and the House of Representatives has had impressively high incumbent return rates in the post–World War II period.<sup>5</sup> The bureaucracy is based on a merit system, not election, and service in the federal courts is for a life term.

Expectations of presidents are high since they have come to symbolize the national government for the public, the political parties, the media, and other nations. But when they take office, presidents are imagined to lead a government mostly already in place, a government selected *independently* of its newly elected chief. Followership must be earned by the person who will be designated by others as the most powerful leader in the western world. Meanwhile other transitions may be occurring in Congress and state governments—changes that are responsive to developments separate from those that brought the new president to Washington.

Here then is the task undertaken in this book: to explore why people run for president, how they campaign, who their friends are, what they believe the job is like, what they want to accomplish, whether and how they think organizationally, how they manage the transition from being a candidate to serving as president, and what the role of the press is in this vital function of creating a presidency. A basic premise of this study is that the transition begins when a person decides to seek the presidency.<sup>6</sup> Candidates vary in the extent to which they contemplate, at the start, what is involved in serving as president and why it is that they are willing to undertake the arduous task of seeking the office and then creating an administration. Those actively weighing these matters wonder how it is that a person-as-president can be fitted atop the executive and alongside the other branches. To delay such considerations until after the election is to be tempted to rely heavily on the recent campaign experience in creating a presidency (a dependency unlikely to prepare a president-elect to manage even a revised transition effectively—that is, to govern by campaigning).

Put otherwise, those candidates who decide early why they want to be president and whether they have the personal, political, and organizational resources to meet the demands of the job will likely have an advantage in the transition. A first requirement for realizing this edge is a working knowledge

of what is expected of presidents, then tested by the personal qualifications of any one chief executive. Nicholas Johnson, former member of the Federal Communications Commission, had exactly these issues in mind when he wrote about the “questions they [the candidates] never get asked”:

Have they read Richard Neustadt’s “Presidential Power” and comparable studies of process? What did they learn? How do they propose to build the coalitions and political support necessary to accomplish those things in “the public interest” that are of low priority for the mass media and public but of high priority to the special interests that oppose them? How will they break the grip of the sub-governments. . . ?

Is the candidate interested in the management of the federal government at all? What management experience, theories, preferences—or “style”—will he or she bring? How will the candidate collect, evaluate and select nominees for presidential appointments—or proposals for legislation? How will he or she apportion functions and staff between Cabinet departments and the White House?<sup>7</sup>

Johnson pointed out that “few if any such questions are ever put to the candidates,” and yet they should be since “the qualities it takes to govern are different from the qualities it takes to be elected.”

Granting that it is important to ask such questions, I believe it is also possible to extrapolate from a president’s previous political and administrative experience to predict how he or she might perform as president. Presidential candidates are not blank slates. The overwhelming majority have made appointments, created staffs, made political and policy decisions, and managed an organization. As Richard E. Neustadt advised, presidents arrive at the White House with their “own operating style.” “Harry Truman,” he said, “was instinctively a judge. . . . Franklin Roosevelt, by comparison, was an intelligence operative.”<sup>8</sup> Thus it is possible to answer certain of the questions raised by Johnson even if they are not asked directly of the candidates. An attempt is made here to relate presidents’ earlier experiences to the transition from candidate to president-elect to president. The crucial point for now simply is that inquiry regarding transitions should not be shelved until a candidate wins. Those interested in effective governance, presumably including the candidates themselves, are well advised to confront the issues

of leadership long in advance of the celebration of victory and the ceremony of inauguration.

### A Leisurely Pace

Most political systems install new leadership in a matter of days following an election. The rationale for a quick transition is persuasive. The people have made their decision; why not install a new government? Thus, for example, Jacques Chirac was elected president of France on May 7, 1995, and the sitting president, François Mitterrand, announced that he would step down even before the end of his term on May 20, 1995. On May 1, 1997, British voters chose a Labour party majority, and on May 2 the moving vans were removing the defeated prime minister's household goods from No. 10 Downing Street.

By comparison, the United States maintains a leisurely pace in changing the head of state, waiting two and one half months to install the new president, during which time the transition—that uniquely American political exercise—takes place. Yet however slow-paced the process is today, it was tortoise-like before the ratification of the Twentieth Amendment. An act of Congress in 1788 dictated that the president be inaugurated on March 4, about four months after the election. The previous Congress typically met in a lame-duck session between the election and the inauguration.<sup>9</sup> Here then was the spectacle of the president-elect watching from the sidelines as the old Congress, populated with many retired and defeated members, acted on the issues of the day. Another oddity, provided for in Article I, Section 4 of the Constitution, was that a new Congress would meet on the first Monday in December, some thirteen months after being elected.<sup>10</sup>

Led by George W. Norris, Republican of Nebraska, in the 1920s, the Progressives sought, to no avail, to change the dates for both the inauguration and the meeting of Congress. According to constitutional scholar Carl Brent Swisher, “it was lethargy which stood in the way of the amendment rather than overt opposition.”<sup>11</sup> Differing versions of the proposed amendment passed the House and Senate in 1929 and 1930 but died in conference for lack of agreement on a House provision that sessions should end on May 4 during even-numbered years. In 1932, with the Democrats a majority in the House, the Norris proposal received the requisite two-thirds vote in both chambers. It was quickly ratified by

**Table 1-1. Lame-Duck Presidents and Congresses, 1940–94<sup>a</sup>**

<i>President and party</i>	<i>Election year</i>	<i>Party change</i>	<i>Reason for leaving</i>
<i>Presidents</i>			
Truman (D)	1952	Yes	Retired
Eisenhower (R)	1960	Yes	Term limit
Johnson (D)	1968	Yes	Retired
Ford (R)	1976	Yes	Defeated
Carter (D)	1980	Yes	Defeated
Reagan (R)	1988	No	Term limit
Bush (R)	1992	Yes	Defeated
<i>Congress and majority party</i>	<i>Election year</i>	<i>Party change</i>	<i>Adjournment date</i>
<i>Congresses</i>			
76th (D)	1940	No	Jan. 3, 1941
77th (D)	1942	No	Dec. 16, 1942
78th (D)	1944	No	Dec. 19, 1944
81st (D)	1950	No	Jan. 2, 1951
83d (D)	1954	Yes	Dec. 2, 1954 <sup>b</sup>
91st (D)	1970	No	Jan. 2, 1971
93d (D)	1974	No	Dec. 20, 1974
96th (D)	1980	Senate	Dec. 16, 1980
97th (split)	1982	No	Dec. 23, 1982
103d (D)	1994	Yes	Dec. 1, 1994

SOURCE: Compiled by the author.

a. Following ratification of the Twentieth Amendment in 1933.

b. Senate only.

three-fourths of the states, to be in effect for the next session of Congress and the inauguration of the president in 1937.<sup>12</sup>

The ratification of the Twentieth Amendment, however, did not eliminate lame-duck or transitional government. Rather it shortened its life and reduced substantially the possibility of having the old Congress meet after the election. The amendment provides that “the terms of the President and Vice President shall end at noon on the 20th day of January, and the terms of Senators and Representatives at noon on the 3d day of January . . . and the terms of their successors shall then begin.” The date for the annual assembly of Congress was also changed from the first Monday in December to the “3d day of January.” So we were left with two lame-duck forms: a defeated or retiring president serving with the old Congress (until January 3) and this same president serving for over two weeks with the new Congress.<sup>13</sup>

As table 1-1 shows, presidents were lame ducks seven times after the rat-



ification of the Twentieth Amendment. Four of those had retired (two voluntarily, two having reached the two-term limit), and three were defeated. Six of the seven cases involved party changes and therefore represented instances where the losing party in the presidential race managed the two-and-one-half-month transitional government. After 1933, lame-duck Congresses—those in which the previous membership met after the election—occurred during the war years of 1942, 1944, and 1950 (Korea), and in seven other years. Just three of these sessions (1940, 1944, 1980) followed presidential elections.

To what extent did lame-duck sessions have political or policy significance? Five in particular are worthy of comment. In 1942 the Republicans rebounded from their nadir in the 1930s, realizing a net gain of forty-seven House seats and ten Senate seats. But the war effort reduced the probability of partisanship. In 1950 Republicans also had notable gains of twenty-eight House seats and five Senate seats. Once again the United States was engaged in a significant military engagement, this time in Korea. The lame-duck session was devoted to what President Truman dubbed his “must list”—“supplemental defense appropriations, an excess profits tax, aid to Yugoslavia, . . . extension of federal rent controls and statehood for Hawaii and Alaska.” All except the statehood proposals were acted on in this lengthy session.

In 1954 and again in 1980 party power shifted as a result of the elections: to Democratic majorities in both houses in 1954 and to a Republican president and Senate in 1980. The 1954 case was special in that the Senate met to act on a recommendation to censure Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, Republican of Wisconsin. The 1980 session was quite active, to include the final budget resolution, Alaska land preservation, the toxic waste “superfund,” and an extension of general revenue sharing to the states. The Republicans suffered significant net losses in the House and Senate in the post-Watergate election of 1974. As in 1950 and 1980, the 1974 session was active: a mass transit bill, appropriations measures, and a foreign aid package passed; several vetoes were overridden; and the nomination of Nelson A. Rockefeller as vice president was approved.<sup>14</sup>

A lame-duck congressional session along with a lame-duck president has occurred just once since the ratification of the Twentieth Amendment (Carter in 1980). Such a session is more common following the midterm elections. This record, however, is a reminder to presidents and presidents-elect that the period between the general election and the constitutional ending of a Congress has characteristics that require adaptive strategies.

## Budgeting for Transitional Government

In a letter of transmittal to Congress with the report of his bipartisan Commission on Campaign Costs, President John F. Kennedy stated: "There are important reasons, aside from costs, to institutionalize the change in party power from one administration to another."<sup>15</sup> Budgeting is surely the ultimate stage in the institutionalization of a practice. Presidents-elect and their appointees had previously arranged for their own financing during this period. The national party committees and private individuals had contributed funds for this purpose. In testimony before a House subcommittee, Elmer B. Staats, then deputy director for the Bureau of the Budget, stated: "It has been estimated that a special Republican committee expended in excess of \$200,000 in 1952–53 and that the Democratic National Committee spent over \$360,000 in 1960–61." Staats also observed that appointees to major positions had to endure "considerable personal sacrifice" in working "without pay for 2 to 3 months while incurring the increased personal expenditures caused by absence from the family residence."<sup>16</sup>

A bill providing for transition costs of up to \$1.3 million for the incoming and outgoing president and vice president passed the House on a voice vote on July 25, 1963. The bill permitted 20 percent of the expenditures to be certified as "confidential." The Senate did not act until October 17, providing just \$500,000 for expenditures, with no funds designated as confidential. The compromise in conference was \$900,000 for expenditures, with 10 percent allowable as confidential. No expenditures were permitted if an incumbent was reelected. The measure became law with the president's signature on March 7, 1964, and its first application followed the 1964 election for the new vice president only (Lyndon Johnson was an incumbent serving out Kennedy's term and therefore was not eligible for monies under the act).<sup>17</sup> The first full application of the 1963 act occurred in 1968 with the election of a new president and vice president. The \$900,000 was split evenly between the incoming and outgoing administrations. The Nixon administration reportedly also used an estimated \$1 million in private funds.<sup>18</sup>

With the passage of the Presidential Transition Act, the postelection, pre-inaugural period was officially sanctioned as a government- and taxpayer-sponsored event. It is therefore reasonable to expect accountability during this time. Judgments about effectiveness are justified, and presidents-elect

have a responsibility to perform competently. They should be answerable if their transition is not efficacious.

The 1963 act was amended in 1976 and again in 1988. The principal changes were to increase the amount available and to specify more clearly how the funds might be used. In 1976 the authorization for expenditures was increased to \$3 million: \$2 million for the incoming administration, \$1 million for the outgoing administration. It was also provided that any detailees from departments or agencies would be paid for from transition funds. In part the urgency of an increase was due to a Federal Election Commission ruling that prohibited the use of privately raised funds for transition purposes if the president- and vice president-elect accepted public financing for the campaign.<sup>19</sup>

In 1988 Congress reviewed a number of issues associated with the cost and management of the transition. First, the authorization of expenditures was again increased: to \$3.5 million for the incoming administration, \$1.5 million for the outgoing, with inflation-adjusted amounts in the future.<sup>20</sup> Second, the issue of using private funds was more fully engaged than in the past. The president- and vice president-elect were permitted to solicit and spend private funds but were required to make full disclosure of the contributions as well as the sources of funding for each transition team member. A limitation of \$5,000 was set for contributions. Additionally, the incoming administration was required to report an estimate of in-kind contributions to the administrator of General Service.<sup>21</sup>

Third, attention was devoted in the Senate to providing appropriations for preelection planning, with each of the national committees receiving reimbursements after the election (to prevent use of public funds for campaign-related purposes). This proposal was innovative in acknowledging that what happened the day after the election was related to what happened before. The Senate report noted:

In addressing the funding issue, the Committee [on Governmental Affairs] also recognized the near-unanimous agreement among past transition officials that a President-elect must undertake at least some advance planning during the general election campaign. A President-elect cannot wait until the morning after the election to start planning for the transition. In order for the President-elect to "hit-the-ground-running," the candidate must lay the administrative groundwork before the campaign is over.<sup>22</sup>

Both of the sitting national committee chairs favored the provision, which was subsequently passed by the Senate, with an allocation of \$200,000 for any political party receiving 25 percent of the popular vote or more.<sup>23</sup> This provision did not survive, in part because of a concern that reimbursements would be made for planning by losing candidates, in part because of the problem of judging legitimate preelection transition costs and the belief by some that preparations before election were the responsibility of the candidate.<sup>24</sup>

Several other relevant issues in the Senate report deserve attention since they will be visited throughout this book.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the most important of these concerned the preparation of the budget. There are few more awkward arrangements in government than the transition in budgeting, particularly given the long lead time required for a budget and the lack of experience common for a new White House team. Cooperation between the old and new administrations was recommended by the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, a goal more easily stated than realized given the partisan nature of most budget planning. Another large issue identified by the Senate report was the problem of recruiting the best talent at a time of increasing attention to ethical standards for government service. As Marshall Berger, chairman of the Administrative Conference, explained it: "What remains to be studied is the application of current conflict-of-interest restrictions to transition personnel. Obviously, we should seek requirements that are appropriate to such activities—not so harsh as to chill participation in these necessary efforts or so loose as to allow untoward conduct."<sup>26</sup> One proposal by the committee was that the White House Personnel Office forward a list of position descriptions for major appointments to the national party committees, in part to encourage preelection planning for the transition.

Just as important as people are the records and documents necessary for building a new presidency. The committee report addressed this issue, even to the point of undertaking a study. The problem itself was described in testimony by Stuart Eizenstat, former domestic policy adviser to President Carter:

One major disability during transitions is the absence of access by the incoming Administration to records, documents, and key papers in the Executive Branch bureaucracy. Even more troubling is the absence of documents at the White House from the outgoing Administration, to which reference could be made on important decisions. For example, it is nearly impossible to envision a new cor-

porate CEO confronting the same situation each new President faces—assuming the top position in his company with no available records of his predecessor's decisions and no background on those decisions; the offices he and his new team enter are empty of past memos and files on major events—records which had been there the day before. . . . A structure such as this makes it virtually impossible from the onset to instill institutional memory and to make transitions effective.<sup>27</sup>

Again, the committee did not deem it necessary to legislate in regard to this problem, but they did contact the National Archives and Records Administration, which agreed to provide briefings, training, and advice to current and incoming White House staff regarding records management and responsibilities.

Clearly, there has been a gradual recognition of the organizational and management issues associated with transferring power from an incumbent administration to an emergent one. This began with the 1963 act, when Congress recognized the period as officially associated with governing by providing funds to assist in managing the process. The expenditure of public funds is logically followed by an auditing of expenditures and that function leads to inquiry about effectiveness. Therefore by 1988 there was increased attention to the practical matters associated with moving a new president into the White House. As it happens, this quarter century of time was characterized by a significant increase in the reach and complexity of the federal government, further justifying the need to try to do it right.<sup>28</sup>

Another dimension of transition is not well accommodated by attention to the more strictly administrative issues. That is, not all presidents-elect have the experience or the aptitude to manage an effective transition. Furthermore, their most recent political exercise—the campaign—furnishes training of limited value for forming a presidency, yet it is extraordinarily demanding of time, energy, and resources. Presidents-elect enter the critical transition period in a physically and mentally exhausted state, typically dependent on an equally fatigued staff. These physical and psychological aspects require notice as well as the organizational matters that have been the subject of transition planning. In fact, how the new team manages the challenges during this stressful time may offer early signals as to the character and style of the presidency.

**Table 1-2. Characteristics of Originated Presidencies, 1896–1992**

<i>President and year</i>	<i>Party change</i>	<i>Incumbent defeated</i>	<i>President's party in control of Congress</i>	<i>Prior executive service</i>	<i>Prior Washington service</i>
McKinley (1896)	D to R	No	Yes	Governor	House
Taft (1908)	None	No	Yes	Secretary of War	Secretary of War
Wilson (1912)	R to D	Yes	Yes	Governor	None
Harding (1920)	D to R	No	Yes	Lieutenant Governor	Senate
Hoover (1928)	None	No	Yes	Secretary of Commerce	Secretary of Commerce
Roosevelt (1932)	R to D	Yes	Yes	Governor	Assistant Secretary of Navy
Eisenhower (1952)	D to R	No	Yes	Military commander	Army Chief of Staff
Kennedy (1960)	R to D	No	Yes	None	Senate
Nixon (1968)	D to R	No	No	Vice President	House and Senate
Carter (1976)	R to D	Yes	Yes	Governor	None
Reagan (1980)	D to R	Yes	Senate only	Governor	None
Bush (1988)	None	No	No	Vice President	House; CIA Director
Clinton (1992)	R to D	Yes	Yes	Governor	None

SOURCE: Compiled by the author.

### Variations in Transitions

The most commonly referenced transition is that of the first-term, elected president who must create a new administration in the period between the election and the inaugural. There are, however, other types. Tables 1-2 to 1-4 show the variation as associated with the manner in which the president takes office. I identify three forms of transitions: *originated*—those associated with presidents elected for the first time, *regenerated*—those of reelected presidents and of takeover presidents who win election on their own, and *received*—those of vice presidents assuming the office. Attention here concentrates on four cases of originated presidencies, notably the four most recent instances of a party shift: Johnson to Nixon (1968), Ford to Carter (1976), Carter to Reagan (1980), and Bush to Clinton (1992). A useful purpose is served, however, by observing how these cases differ from other forms.

Note in tables 1-2 to 1-4 that the originated presidencies for first-time winners in this century are outnumbered by the other two types of transi-

**Table 1-3. Characteristics of Regenerated Presidencies, 1896–1992**

<i>President and year</i>	<i>Change in margin or size of margin</i>	<i>President's party in control of Congress</i>	<i>Change in margin (Congress)</i>
<i>Reelected presidents</i>			
McKinley (1900)	Small increase	Yes	Small increase
Wilson (1916)	Large decrease	Yes	Small decrease
Roosevelt (1936)	Increase	Yes	Small increase, House Large increase, Senate
Roosevelt (1940)	Decrease	Yes	Small increase, House Small decrease, Senate
Roosevelt (1944)	Decrease	Yes	Small increase, House
Eisenhower (1956)	Increase	No	No change
Nixon (1972)	Huge increase	No	Small increase, House Small decrease, Senate
Reagan (1984)	Increase	Senate only	Small increase, House Small decrease, Senate
Clinton (1996)	Increase	No	Small increase, House Small decrease, Senate
<i>Elected takeover presidents</i>			
Roosevelt (1904)	Large	Yes	Large increase, House No change, Senate
Coolidge (1924)	Large	Yes	Small increase
Truman (1948)	Narrow	Yes	Huge increase
Johnson (1964)	Landslide	Yes	Large increase, House Small increase, Senate

SOURCE: Compiled by the author.

**Table 1-4. Characteristics of Received Presidencies, 1896–1992**

<i>President and year</i>	<i>Cause of takeover</i>	<i>Previous executive service</i>	<i>Previous Washington service</i>
Roosevelt (1901)	Death	Governor	Assistant Secretary of Navy, Civil Service Commission
Coolidge (1921)	Death	Governor	None
Truman (1948)	Death	None	Senate
Johnson (1963)	Death	None	House, Senate
Ford (1974)	Resignation	None	House

SOURCE: Compiled by the author.

tions: thirteen versus eighteen (thirteen regenerated presidencies and five received presidencies). Observe also in table 1-2 the small number of cases among originated presidencies in which a new president succeeds one of the same political party—just three of thirteen. The importance of this fact is

simply that a significant proportion of newly elected presidents enters office assuming strained or unfriendly relations with those they are replacing. Indeed, in half of the ten instances of party change (Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Carter, Reagan, and Clinton), the new team defeated the incumbent administration. Until 1968 it was common for the new president's party to have congressional majorities. Since then three of the five (Nixon, Reagan, and Bush) have had to manage with one or both houses of Congress in the hands of the opposition party. Transitions into split-party governments are bound to differ from those into single-party governments, given the need for Senate confirmation of major appointments and the requirement of cross-party coalitions to approve the president's program.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, most of these new presidents have had some executive service—six as governors. However, four, all governors, lacked any Washington experience. Only Kennedy completely lacked executive experience, though service as a lieutenant governor (Harding) barely qualifies and that as vice president (Nixon and Bush) depends greatly on how the president defines the position.

As shown in table 1-3, the regenerated presidencies are of two types: those reelected to a second term (or a third and fourth for Franklin D. Roosevelt) and those vice presidents serving out a term who were then elected on their own. Transitions for the first group should be relatively tranquil, requiring few adjustments in response to the election. There are exceptions, however. Woodrow Wilson won narrowly in 1916, and though the Democrats retained their majority in the Senate, they needed support from Progressives to organize the House. Democrats then lost their majorities in both chambers in 1918. After his narrow win in 1968, Richard Nixon won every state but Massachusetts (and the District of Columbia) in 1972, encouraging him to reform his government for the second term to suit his more imperial concept of the presidency. According to Stephen E. Ambrose, in the first meeting with the White House staff following his triumphal reelection, "Nixon gave perfunctory thanks . . . before announcing that the first order of business was to reorganize. 'There are no sacred cows,' he declared, then changed the metaphor: 'We will tear up the pea patch.'"<sup>30</sup> Other presidents in this group interpreted their reelections as public support for more of the same and thus made few changes.<sup>31</sup>

The second group of regenerated presidencies is better discussed following treatment of the received presidencies listed in table 1-4. These are the vice presidents who find themselves having to take over another person's government. Seldom have vice presidential candidates been selected as substitute



presidents. More often they are chosen to suit political imperatives. Three of the five takeover presidents in this century had no previous executive experience. Further, there is no "day certain" when they will become president. Illness of the president or serious ethical problems (in the case of Nixon) may encourage them to prepare for assuming office. But public preparations would be unseemly. Successfully managing these difficult transitions depends on the extent to which presidents equip their vice presidents to assume control by giving them important and relevant assignments and keeping them briefed on major issues.

Even when fully involved, however, the vice president inherits an administration organized to suit the operating style and policy preferences of another president. There is no emptying out of the White House and the appointive offices in the departments and agencies, as happens following an election. In fact, a takeover president may be under some pressure to retain many of his predecessor's appointments for continuity or because he is viewed as a custodian more than a president in his own right. An abrupt turnover in personnel would be interpreted as disloyalty.

Takeover presidents who then win election have an opportunity to regenerate an administration. They can make the case that election legitimizes their independence and therefore frees them to effect a transition not unlike those of first-time winners. What has been the experience with the four cases listed in table 1-3? Although Theodore Roosevelt made a number of cabinet changes in 1904 and 1905, mostly moving persons from one department to the next, his actions did not constitute a wholesale reorganization. Coolidge changed half of the cabinet following his election, but the changes were more a result of circumstances (scandal, death, resignation) than with the intent of establishing a new Coolidge administration.<sup>32</sup>

The Truman case is particularly interesting because he served nearly a full four-year term and succeeded a president with a contrasting style who had been in office more than twelve years. Many members of the cabinet were ready to leave; others were dismissed. As a result there was significant turnover in the first year. A second wave of changes came approximately two years later. There was no major reorganization following Truman's election in 1948 since by then he had already reshaped his government. Lyndon B. Johnson faced the highly sensitive political circumstances occasioned by the tragic death of his predecessor. However anxious he may have been to create his own presidency, Johnson had to protect the Kennedy legacy. He essentially managed for a time with two staffs and, according to Neustadt,

“another circle, private, occasional, informal, wholly unofficial, and linked to the officials largely through himself . . . [that] included old Washington and Democratic hands.”<sup>33</sup> He kept the cabinet in place. In fact, four of the Kennedy appointments stayed through Johnson’s elected term, while another resigned only in the last year.

This rich variety of transitions illustrates yet again the vibrant nature of American national politics. Change is ever incorporated into government, as befits a democracy. But the methods by which change is absorbed differ substantially, even within one branch. I concentrate on a set of party-switching, originated presidencies. They offer a comparative base, so analysis of their experience should be helpful in the creation of future presidencies.

### Transitions in a Separated System

The following chapters are organized to treat topics notably associated with the personal transition of a winning candidate to become president. I begin in chapter 2 by exploring the background of the candidate himself and its importance in determining how he is likely to fit into the job.<sup>34</sup> I pay particular attention to why the person wants to run for president and what is his concept of the office. What follows in chapter 3 is an analysis of the campaign experience for presidential candidates and the extent to which this experience enhances or modifies the candidate’s political and policy motivations and conceptions. In this chapter I attempt to identify the candidate’s campaign theme that provides an orientation for the subsequent presidency, showing that a theme may be more policy oriented (as with Reagan) or more stylistic (as with Clinton).

The transition itself is the subject of chapter 4. The analysis begins with those activities during the campaign that are designed to prepare for a takeover should the candidate win. It continues with the efforts between the election and inauguration to effect a transformation from campaigning to governing, with special emphasis on the president-elect. An important feature of this period is the extent to which an identifiable presidency is created, one that clearly moves the president-elect away from the campaign mode into a governing mode. Should this goal not be achieved, transition-type tasks then carry forward into the period of governing.

It is generally acknowledged that the press plays a potentially major role during the transition. Chapter 5 examines that role and its effect. The press

itself experiences a transition during this time. National political reporters tend to have expectations arising from the campaign and from their coverage of other presidencies. What happens during this time can affect how a White House is then portrayed in the future and, consequently, how its press office may spend its time and resources.

A concluding chapter explores the importance of the transition for governing later and whether there is a “biggest mistake” that can be made during this time. As a part of that analysis, I try to identify certain realities characterizing this important phase of American politics and governing—realities that shape transition behavior and foretell its importance. Special attention is directed to the Clinton case because it may represent a transition in transitions. A final exercise considers how it is that presidents-elect bring change to the transition and how changes otherwise affect what they can accomplish. Special emphasis is placed on the significance of a change in governing style for future transitions.

Each election presumably settles an important question: Who will serve in the White House? It is the responsibility, then, of the winner to send clear signals as to how he will do the job. The transition period is an early opportunity to accomplish that purpose. Failure to take advantage of that opportunity almost certainly will result in problems later for the president. Richard E. Neustadt said it so well:

Everywhere there is a sense of a page turning, a new chapter in the country's history, a new chance too. And with it, irresistibly, there comes the sense, “they” couldn't, wouldn't, didn't, but “we” will. We just have done the hardest thing there is to do in politics. Governing has got to be a pleasure by comparison: We won, so we can! The psychology is partly that of having climbed one mountain so the next looks easy, partly that of having had a run of luck that surely can't turn now!

The arrogance that goes with this is native to contemporary nominations and campaigns, and to the young who man them.<sup>35</sup>