

CHAPTER 1

Perspectives on the Presidency

The president is not the presidency. The presidency is not the government. Ours is not a presidential system.

I begin with these starkly negative themes as partial correctives to the more popular interpretations of the U.S. government as presidency-centered. Presidents learn these refrains on the job, if they do not know them before taking office. Consider what President George W. Bush knew of executive power prior to his taking the oath of office on January 20, 2001. He witnessed firsthand his father's problems in governing with a Democratic Congress, 1989–93, culminating in his father's defeat in 1992. He observed the struggles of President Bill Clinton throughout his eight years in the White House, battles that intensified with Republican majorities in Congress, 1995–2001. He learned about the limitations of executive power on the job as governor of Texas. And his own election was a bitterly fought contest that extended beyond election day. One of the closest races in history was finally ended on December 12, 2000, when the U.S. Supreme Court effectively stopped the recount in Florida, thus giving the state's electoral votes to Bush by fewer than 600 popular votes. A deeply disappointed Al Gore conceded the following day. Gore actually won the popular vote and lost the Electoral College by just four votes.

Joining Bush in Washington was a Republican House of Representatives, by the narrow margin of 221 to 212 (with two independents), and a Senate that was a dead-even split. The Democrats failed to win majorities in either chamber but had net gains in both.

George W. Bush proceeded to form his presidency with the least political standing of any president in the post–World War II era and with relatively weak legislative standing as well (see table 2-3 on page 52). The popular vote was a 50.3–49.7 percent split of the two-party vote in favor of Gore; the Electoral College vote, 50.4–49.6 percent in favor of Bush; the House of Representatives, 50.8 percent Republican to 49.2 percent Democrat and other; and the Senate, fifty Republicans (plus one vice president) to fifty Democrats. It was “the perfect tie,” as one book had it.¹ But Bush won the tie and therefore had the responsibility of governing. Lacking political stature, he capitalized on *position*, the status of being president.

In 1992, President-elect Bill Clinton’s circumstances contrasted sharply with those of Bush in 2000. He won handily in the Electoral College but received just 43 percent of the popular vote in a three-way race. Democrats maintained majorities in both houses of the 103rd Congress but had net losses of seats in each. As the leader of the first one-party government in twelve years, Clinton was under pressure to produce. Yet exercising influence required adjusting to its limitations. At a news conference shortly after his election, the president-elect acknowledged the challenge of converting campaign promises into legislative accomplishments.

It’s all very well to say you want an investment tax credit, and quite another thing to make the 15 decisions that have to be made to shape the exact bill you want.

It’s all very well to say . . . that the working poor in this country . . . should be lifted out of poverty by increasing the refundable income tax credit for the working poor, and another thing to answer the five or six questions that define how you get that done.²

These lessons are not exclusive to presidents who enter office with constrained political standing. President Lyndon B. Johnson during the early years of his administration had the most impressive political advantages of any chief executive in the post–World War II era. An outpouring of grief for John F. Kennedy, an anxiety on Capitol Hill to enact legislation as a legacy for the young, assassinated president, a landslide win for Johnson in 1964, and two-thirds majorities for Democrats in both the House and the Senate, combined to provide huge benefits. However, President Johnson, too, understood that the president is not the presidency and the presidency is not the government. In his “perspectives on the presidency,” Johnson reflected later on what is required to realize the potentialities of the office.

Every President has to establish with the various sectors of the country what I call “the right to govern.” Just being elected to the office does not guaran-

tee him that right. Every President has to inspire the confidence of the people. Every President has to become a leader, and to be a leader he must attract people who are willing to follow him. Every President has to develop a moral underpinning to his power, or he soon discovers that he has no power at all.³

For presidents, new or experienced, to recognize the limitations of office is commendable. Convincing others to do so is a challenge. The names of presidents become convenient labels for marking historical time: the Johnson years, the Nixon years, the Reagan years. Media coverage naturally focuses more on the president: there is just one at a time, executive organization is oriented in pyramidal fashion toward the Oval Office, Congress is too diffuse an institution to report on as such, and the Supreme Court leads primarily by indirection. Public interest, too, is directed toward the White House as a symbol of the government. As a result, expectations of a president often far exceed the individual's personal, political, institutional, or constitutional capacities. Performance seldom matches promise. Presidents who understand how it all works resist the inflated image of power born of high-stakes elections or short-term policy successes and seek to lower expectations. Politically savvy presidents know instinctively that it is precisely at the moment of great achievement that they must prepare themselves for the setback that will surely follow.

Focusing too much on the presidency can lead to a seriously distorted picture of how the national government does its work, the identification of weaknesses that are not there, and hence the proposal of inappropriate reforms. The plain fact is that the United States does not have a presidential system. It has a separated system. It is odd that it is so commonly thought of as otherwise, since schoolchildren learn about the separation of powers and checks and balances. As the author of *Federalist* 51 wrote, "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition." No one, least of all presidents, the Founders reasoned, can be entrusted with excessive authority. Human nature, being what it is, requires "auxiliary precautions" in the form of competing institutions, their legitimacy grounded in differing forms of public support and representational behavior.

The acceptance that the United States has a separated, not a presidential, system prepares one to appraise how politics works, rather than being simply reproachful and reformist. Thus, for example, for one political party to win the White House, while the other wins majority control of Congress (referred to here as split-party government) would be acknowledged as a potential or even likely outcome in a separated system, its legitimacy rooted in the separation of elections. Failure in recent decades to admit the authenticity of

the split-party condition has fostered criticism and reform, often to the exclusion of analyzing what actually gets done. The post–World War II record shows that bills are passed and signed into law, executive orders issued, revenues collected, standards promulgated, military actions taken, under both one- and split-party arrangements. And so-called gridlock has occurred either way.

Simply put, the role of the president in this separated system of governing varies substantially, depending on his resources, advantages, and strategic position. My strong interest is in how presidents place themselves in an ongoing government and are accommodated by other participants, notably those on Capitol Hill. The central purpose of this book is to explore these adaptations. In pursuing this interest, I have found little value in the presidency-centered, party government perspective, as I will explain below. As a substitute, I propose a separationist, diffused-responsibility perspective that I find more suited to the constitutional, institutional, personal, political, and policy conditions associated with the American system of governing. First, however, I offer dramatic cases of how a president’s role can change during his term in office, stories of the highs and lows of serving in the White House.

Landslides, No Slides, and Presidential Power

Surely if any president is to command the government, it will be one who wins so overwhelmingly that no one in Washington can deny his legitimacy for setting and moving the agenda. Two postwar presidents illustrate that a big win is no protection against changing conditions. Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 and Richard M. Nixon in 1972 triumphed at the polls. Both then suffered dramatic losses in their capacity to lead. Johnson decided not to seek reelection in 1968; Nixon resigned in disgrace in 1974.

Election does not guarantee power in the American political system. Rather it legitimizes the effort of a president to lead, “to establish . . . the right to govern,” in President Johnson’s words. Leadership itself depends on opportunity, capability, and resources. By intent, the U.S. government performs within a set of limits designed to prevent it from working efficiently. There is substantial evidence that Americans continue to support the principles of mixed representation, separation of institutions, and distribution of powers, with all the checks and balances associated with those structural features.

Johnson won by a landslide in 1964. His opponent, Senator Barry M. Goldwater (R-Ariz.), won the electoral votes of just five Deep South states (those won by Dixiecrat candidate Strom Thurmond of South Carolina in 1948) plus a narrow win in his home state. On the day following Johnson's triumph, a *New York Times* editorial expressed the prevailing optimism. The predominant interpretation was that voters had expressed trust in Johnson, disaster had been averted with the defeat of Goldwater, and a mandate had been sanctioned. It was a "good election" by the criteria of the model of party government preferred by many analysts.

The American people have given emphatic notice that they want to move forward constructively along the road of international understanding and domestic progress. . . .

Rejected is the thesis that the challenges of an era of dynamic, relentless change in domestic and foreign affairs can be met by dismantling the Federal Government or by shaking a nuclear fist at the rest of the world. No more decisive rebuke could have been administered to the right-wing extremists whose command of the Republican national machinery plunged that great party into its destructive course. . . .

The strong mandate for flexibility of approach now given to the man in the White House offers some hope, in contrast to the despair that would have been engendered throughout the world—especially among America's allies—by a Goldwater victory.⁴

Johnson's victory was amplified by the gains of congressional Democrats. Their already impressive margins in each house increased, producing better than two-to-one Democratic majorities. It was a victory akin to those of the Franklin D. Roosevelt era. No one doubted that President Johnson had the right and the responsibility to govern. Yet upon leaving office he pondered that such an election guaranteed only the responsibility; the right had to be established, then continually nurtured. In fact, Richard E. Neustadt recalls that Johnson himself was aware that he had two years of grace. Summarizing a meeting in December 1964, he wrote that Johnson understood the nature of his win, that it was "a sharp defeat for screwballism and an endorsement of sanity, but by no means an overwhelming mandate for a Hundred Days, à la 1933."⁵ At the same time, Johnson predicted that there would be pressure for a bold agenda, with the columnists "watching, counting days, and keeping score."

Conditions changed substantially as a result of the midterm elections of 1966. Republicans realized a net gain of forty-seven House seats (their greatest gain since 1946) and four Senate seats. They also won back several

state houses. This significant Republican showing brought rather different editorial comment in the *New York Times*: “There is a widespread dissatisfaction and uneasiness about the course and the prospects of the Vietnam War. . . . As a result of Tuesday’s victories, the Republican Presidential nomination in 1968 now seems very much worth having and the number of potential claimants was increased.”⁶

By the final year of the Johnson administration, the commentary could be described as “doleful.” David S. Broder of the *Washington Post*, in discussing the 1968 State of the Union message, compared the mood of 1964 with that of 1968: “Above all, the optimistic ‘can-do’ President of 1964 had been transformed into a sober, slow-talking man who puzzled aloud about the ‘restlessness’ and ‘questioning’ in the land.”⁷ The message from a spent president emphasized crime control legislation.

Johnson himself clearly felt every bit of the burden detected by Broder and others. Here is how he described that last year in his memoirs:

As I look back over the crowded diaries listing the telephone calls and meetings of 1968, as I reread the daily headlines that jumped so steadily and forebodingly from one trouble spot to another, as I review the memos and the intelligence reports, I recall vividly the frustration and genuine anguish I experienced so often during the final year of my administration. I sometimes felt that I was living in a continuous nightmare.⁸

There are few better illustrations of how changes in the political and policy configurations influence the confidence, capacity, dedication, and fever for governing. But there are other interesting cases.

Richard M. Nixon was reelected in 1972 by stunning popular and Electoral College margins. His percentage of the popular vote was nearly as great as Johnson’s in 1964; his Electoral College count was greater (520 compared to 486). His opponent, George McGovern, won the electoral votes of Massachusetts and the District of Columbia. Editorial comment, however, deemed this a less significant result than for Johnson in 1964. Why? Primarily because congressional Republicans did not do as well as had congressional Democrats in 1964. In 1972, the Republicans realized a net gain of twelve House seats and a net loss of two Senate seats, failing to produce majorities in either chamber. Some called it the “empty landslide.” “What the election appears to say through Congress is: All right, four more years—but only with the continued safeguard of checks and balances in liberal doses.”⁹ Arthur Krock of the *New York Times* concluded that “in the wide meaning of the term, he [Nixon] has no mandate at all.”¹⁰ Imagine, a forty-nine-state win and “no mandate at all.”

Less than nineteen months after his second inaugural, President Nixon resigned as a consequence of the Watergate scandal. The reactions were a mixture of pity and relief.

The resignation of Richard M. Nixon . . . comes as a tragic climax to the sordid history of misuse of the Presidential office that has been unfolding before the eyes of a shocked American public for the last two years. . . . What is important is that here was a man who failed his public trust. Never before in American history has there been such a failure at so high a level. This is the sorrow and the tragedy.¹¹

The disgraced president returned to California, where he suffered an attack of phlebitis. He had an operation and was in serious condition.

I was a physical wreck; I was emotionally drained; I was mentally burned out. This time, as compared with the other crises I had endured, I could see no reason to live, no cause to fight for. Unless a person has a reason to live for other than himself, he will die—first mentally, then emotionally, then physically.¹²

The Johnson and Nixon cases are particularly dramatic examples of how political, personal, and policy conditions can change during a presidency. But all presidents face ups and downs in their status and influence. There are no exceptions. More recently, George H. W. Bush had record job performance ratings at the height of the Gulf War, only to see these numbers plummet with the downturn in the economy. Bill Clinton's election in 1992 was greeted with enthusiasm after twelve years of Republican control of the White House. As one analyst put it, "the stars are really aligned right for the next four years."¹³ Yet in 1994 the Democrats lost their House and Senate majorities. And subsequently Clinton himself, reelected in 1996 by a comfortable margin, became the first elected president to be impeached. George W. Bush lacked a popular majority and faced serious doubts about his abilities to lead and to govern, especially in regard to foreign and national security issues. The terrorists' attacks on September 11, 2001, dramatically changed his status and his presidency: his approval ratings soared to record highs. Later, however, they declined dramatically with the prolonged insurrection in Iraq. In 2004 he narrowly won reelection.

Nowhere in the Constitution is there a guarantee that election by a wide margin ensures a president advantages through a term in office, nor that a president who barely ekes out a win can never gain an edge in the governing process. The election is but one in a series of events that variably affect presidential power. Likewise, high public approval ratings at one point are no guarantee either of political success at that time or of subsequent high

ratings. Breathtaking shifts can and do occur. Presidents must be ever attentive to the inconstant nature of their strategic position. Most presidents in the postwar period have hardly needed this advice. Truman, Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Bush 41, Clinton, and Bush 43 served with split-party control between the White House and Congress (one house or both); Truman, Kennedy, Nixon in 1968, Carter, Clinton, and Bush 43 won by narrow margins or less than 50 percent of the popular vote. That leaves just Lyndon Johnson. And he learned that political support can deteriorate: “A President must always reckon that his mandate will prove short-lived. . . . For me, as for most active Presidents, popularity proved elusive.”¹⁴

Pictures in Our Heads

If the presidency is to be a major source for understanding American politics, then it is convenient to have a set of expectations by which to test performance. Richard Rose points out that several “portraits” have been used in recent years—some more idealistic, some more iconoclastic. “The overall effect is confusion rather than understanding; balanced portraits are relatively rare.”¹⁵

Two types of expectations are frequently relied on by analysts, particularly those in the media, who necessarily produce short-term commentary and evaluations. Presidents are tested first by the broader criteria associated with judgments about the role of the presidency in the political system. The specifics may vary from one president to the next, but, in Walter Lippmann’s marvelous phrase, we carry “pictures in our heads” that serve as cues for evaluating behavior: “what each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by himself or given to him.”¹⁶ Often reactions based on these images are not fully or systematically articulated as models of behavior. Rather, they are formed by judgments made along the way. Sometimes these are traceable to positive evaluations of one president: Franklin D. Roosevelt is a frequent model, and surprisingly, given how he was judged at the time, so is his successor, Harry S Truman. Or judgments can be traced to comparisons with a predecessor of the same political party: Dwight Eisenhower for Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson for Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan for George H. W. Bush, or George Bush the father for George Bush the son.

The second type of evaluation measures a president against himself. This test is based on who the president is (or who the evaluator judges him to be), what his record has been to that point, and what he has said in gaining

office. Mark J. Rozell spotted this form of assessment in his study of President Carter's press relations.¹⁷ Journalists' conceptions of how Jimmy Carter ought to perform as president were based on what they thought they knew about him; in a sense, they were testing him by their understanding of his own performance criteria.

If integrated, these two sources provide the basis for a balanced judgment about presidential performance. Often, however, the two are drawn on separately and may conflict. For example, it might be argued that President Carter should compromise in order to get legislation enacted because that is what a president should do as political leader in a separated system; yet a compromising Jimmy Carter is out of character and thus he loses credibility. President Ford should restore the leadership of the White House; yet a vetoing Gerald Ford is out of character with his image of establishing harmony. Each President Bush (father and son) should offer an extensive legislative program; yet activism is out of character with the men and their limited or nonexistent mandates.

There also are contrary expectations associated with split-party government. Hopes are expressed for reduced partisanship even as conditions usually promote partisanship, such as when one party controls the White House and the other, Congress. Here, for example, is editorial analysis following the 1946 elections in which the Republicans recaptured both houses of Congress for the first time since 1930:

The greatest danger is that a purely partisan approach to the 1948 Presidential campaign, now hardly a year and a half off, will stultify the work of this Congress. The hope must be that the President and the majority and minority leaders will realize that a narrow partisanship will hurt, not help, them in 1948.¹⁸

As it happened, of course, the 80th Congress was intensely partisan. President Truman used that fact in the 1948 campaign. He won a surprising victory, the Democrats recaptured control of Congress, and the *New York Times* then expressed "gratification . . . in the emergence of a unified National Government."¹⁹ Ignored was the fact that the 80th Congress had enacted ten pieces of major legislation, including the Marshall Plan and the Taft-Hartley Act.²⁰

Likewise, when the Democrats won so overwhelmingly in 1974, increasing their margins substantially in both houses, President Ford was advised "to temper partisanship in favor of collaboration with the opposition party." "A similar spirit of constructive collaboration" was expected from the Democrats.²¹ In effect, it was recommended that separated system politics

be dismissed in favor of the politics of harmony as the preferred picture in our heads.

These various impressions or expectations are not models in the scientific sense. But they do serve a similar function by creating standards for testing presidential performance. Even when presidents exceed the expectations, there often is a return to the home base of prior judgments. In some cases, as with Carter, those evaluations may result in less credit than is actually due; in other cases, as with Reagan, they may result in more. That is, Carter's and Clinton's penchant for hyperbole led to tests that were unrealistic; Reagan's tendency to support the inevitable earned him praise for a positive record with Congress that was in fact quite limited beyond his first year in office.

Behavior or performance that exceeds expectations is treated as just that—exceptional. Thus it is difficult to get an adjusted reading. The case of George W. Bush is pertinent. While Bush has been frequently judged not to be legitimate as president (for failing to win the popular vote in 2000 and the controversy over the Florida recount) or competent (for questions about his experience and intelligence), evidence to the contrary, such as strong public support or able decisions, was treated as transitory and unusual. As subsequent challenges arose, expectations reverted to the lesser view of Bush's status and ability. Ironically, the rather consistent low expectations lowered the bar for him in making the next decision. The notion that a presidency is the composite of accommodations to changing people, politics, and policy issues is, perhaps, too demanding and best left more to historians than contemporary analysts or critics. It was decades before a more positive score was computed for Truman.

The Dominant Perspective: Unitarianism and Party Government

The pictures in our heads are impressions, not well-thought-out theories of governance. The images set forth above, however, are consistent with a dominant and well-developed perspective that has been highly influential in evaluations of the American political system. I refer to it as "unitarianism" and it varies in important ways from "separationism," which I discuss below. The unitarian perspective supports party government, typically led by a strong and aggressive president. Its advocates prefer a system in which political parties are stronger and more integrated than they normally can be in a system of separated elections. Accountability and responsibility are the

primary objectives. Accordingly, split-party outcomes are anathema because both parties win and are then encouraged to share credit and avoid blame. This lack of clear and direct accountability is viewed as a deficiency that naturally fosters a reformist mood among party government advocates. James L. Sundquist refers to it as “the constitutional dilemma.”²² Roadblocks built into the system often prevent ideological policy positions, conservative or liberal, from being enacted into law:

A president is expected to lead the Congress, but its two houses are independent institutions and, most of the time of late, one or both are controlled by his political opposition. And when a president fails as leader—whether because the Congress chooses not to follow or because of the many possible forms of personal inadequacy—the system has no safeguard.²³

Sundquist quotes Douglas Dillon, secretary of the Treasury in the Kennedy administration and cochair of the Committee on the Constitutional System (a group dedicated to reforming the Constitution), in identifying the insufficiencies of the U.S. system:

Our governmental problems do not lie with the quality or character of our elected representatives. Rather they lie with a system which promotes divisiveness and makes it difficult, if not impossible, to develop truly national policies. . . . No one can place the blame. The President blames the Congress, the Congress blames the President, and the public remains confused and disgusted with government in Washington.²⁴

The unitarian or party government perspective is best summarized in the recommendations made in 1950 by the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association.

The party system that is needed must be democratic, responsible and effective. . . .

An effective party system requires, first, that the parties are able to bring forth programs to which they commit themselves and, second, that the parties possess sufficient internal cohesion to carry out these programs. . . .

The fundamental requirement of such accountability is a two-party system in which the opposition party acts as the critic of the party in power, developing, defining, and presenting the policy alternatives which are necessary for a true choice in reaching public decisions.²⁵

Note the language: party in power, opposition party, policy alternatives for choice, accountability, internal cohesion, programs to which parties commit themselves. As a whole, it forms a test that a separated system is frequently bound to fail.

Oddly, the report did not envisage strong presidential leadership for the party. Rather, the emphasis was on creating a powerful party council with whom the presidential candidate and the president would be expected to cooperate.²⁶ This council would play a major role in determining the party platform and in interpreting the platform as applying to current problems. The ultimate goal was to create party structures that would overcome the divisions inherent in a separated system. Put otherwise, an effort was made to make party an independent rather than dependent variable.

I know of very few contemporary advocates of the two-party responsibility model. But I know many analysts who rely on its criteria when judging the political system, for example, in interpreting elections and evaluating presidents once in office. By the standards of unitarianism, the good campaign and the good election have the following characteristics:

- Publicly visible issues that are debated by the candidates during the campaign.

- Clear differences between the candidates on the issues, preferably deriving from a party ideology as expressed in the platform.

- A substantial victory for the winning candidate, thus demonstrating public support for one set of issue positions.

- A net increase in congressional seats and state houses, indicating a win for the party (not just the president) and its positions.

- A greater than expected win for the victorious party, preferably at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

- A postelection declaration of unity from the congressional leaders of the president's party.

A good president, from this perspective, is one who makes government work, one who has a program and uses his resources to get it enacted. A good president is an activist: he sets the agenda, is attentive to the progress being made, and willingly accepts responsibility for what happens. He can behave in this way because he has demonstrable and dependable support within his party. There is unity and therefore the likelihood of accountability—the very essence of unitarianism.

It is not in the least surprising that the real outcomes of separated elections frustrate those who prefer responsible party government. Ordinarily these demanding tests will be met only by coincidence. Even an election that gives the same party control of the White House and both houses of Congress in no way guarantees a unified or responsible party outcome. And even if a president and his congressional party leaders appear to agree on policy priorities, the situation may change dramatically following midterm

elections, which do not involve the president. Robert A. Dahl and Charles E. Lindblom described the effects of the constitutional electoral provisions this way:

The strategic consequence of this arrangement, as the Constitutional Convention evidently intended, has been that *no unified, cohesive, acknowledged, and legitimate representative-leaders of the "national majority"* exist in the United States. Often the President claims to represent one national majority, and Congress (or a majority of both houses) another. The convention did its work so well that even when a Congressional majority is nominally of the same party as the President, ordinarily they do not speak with the same voice.²⁷

Understandably, advocates of party government are led to propose constitutional reform. Coincidence is not a reliable basis for ensuring their preferred outcome. Still, recent developments on Capitol Hill may be encouraging. Party unity has strengthened, especially with the Republicans' success in the South and their majority status in the House of Representatives from 1995, after forty years in the minority.²⁸ President George W. Bush even found it advantageous to have the disciplined House Republicans act first on his proposals, as pressure on the Senate. As it happened, however, narrow margins there enabled the Senate Democrats to obstruct passage in many instances. In this case the president working with a strengthened party organization on Capitol Hill brought limited results—and, oddly, frequent media and Democratic criticism of House Republican leaders for failing to be more accommodating to the Democrats.

There is no standard formula under present constitutional arrangements for governing from the White House. Presidents identify their strengths and evaluate their weaknesses in negotiating with Congress or otherwise attempting to lead. They seldom have the advantages desired by advocates of party government, though party strength in Congresses waxes and wanes. Even in those cases where appearances would suggest "responsible party" leadership (for example, in 1932, 1936, and 1964), it is by no means certain either that the appearances are the reality or that the advantages can be long sustained. The tests of performance should account for the variations in party splits and in the political and policy advantages available to the president and Congress.

Variations in Party Splits

Split-party control between the White House and Congress has been characteristic of national politics since the founding of the present two-party

system and has been featured a majority of the time in the post–World War II period. It is, of course, a wholly constitutional result in a system of separated elections for three elected institutions (president, House of Representatives, and Senate). With the establishment of a well-fixed two-party system, there are eight potential combinations of governance: two with one party in command of the three institutions and six split-party arrangements. The voters have frequently exercised their option of producing split-party government. All six split-party combinations have been experienced since 1856. Table 1-1 lists the cases, the first of which was in 1858. Although split-party results were frequent in the nineteenth century, they tended to arise from midterm elections. That is, a president would first be elected with a Congress under the control of his party, which would then lose one or both houses at the midterm. In only three cases (Hayes, 1876; Garfield, 1880; and Cleveland, 1884) did a president begin his administration under split-party conditions, and in each instance the president's party only failed to achieve a majority in one house. These three instances did occur in sequence, however, producing the longest period of split-party government in history—fourteen years (see table 1-2). It was also rare in the nineteenth century for the president's party to be in the minority in both houses. The two cases (Hayes, 1878; Cleveland, 1894) occurred as a result of midterm elections (table 1-1).

There are but three instances of split-party control in the early twentieth century: Taft, 1910; Wilson, 1918; and Hoover, 1930. Only under Wilson did the president's party lose its majority in both houses. These three instances of midterm losses presaged substantial defeats for the president's party in the subsequent presidential election. Perhaps the contemporary presidency-centered, party government perspective derives from analysis of this period, particularly given the expansionist outlooks of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt (the quintessential strong president, by which others are typically measured). It may also be that analysis of this period encourages the view of divided or split-party government as a corruption—a condition associated with the failure of party and policy leadership by presidents and therefore to be prevented.

In the period from 1946 to 2004 there has been split-party government a majority of the time. In contrast to earlier eras, in this third period presidents have often entered office when their party was unable to command majorities in Congress: Eisenhower in his second term, Nixon and Reagan in both terms, Bush 41 in his single term, and Clinton in his second term. In 2000, Bush 43 had a Republican majority in the House, a tie in the Senate. During

Table 1-1. *Split-Party Control between the White House and Congress, 1858–2002*

<i>President and year</i>	<i>Type of split control</i>		<i>Election establishing split control</i>	
	<i>Both houses of opposite party</i>	<i>One house of opposite party</i>	<i>Presidential</i>	<i>Midterm</i>
Buchanan (D) 1858		House		x
Grant (R) 1874		House		x
Hayes (R) 1876		House	x	
Hayes (R) 1878	x			x
Garfield (R) 1880		Senate ^a	x	
Arthur (R) 1882		House		x
Cleveland (D) 1884		Senate	x	
Cleveland (D) 1886		Senate		x
Harrison (R) 1890		House		x
Cleveland (D) 1894	x			x
Taft (R) 1910		House		x
Wilson (D) 1918	x			x
Hoover (R) 1930		House ^b		x
Truman (D) 1946	x			x
Eisenhower (R) 1954	x			x
Eisenhower (R) 1956	x		x	
Eisenhower (R) 1958	x			x
Nixon (R) 1968	x		x	
Nixon (R) 1970	x			x
Nixon (R) 1972	x		x	
Ford (R) 1974	x			x
Reagan (R) 1980		House	x	
Reagan (R) 1982		House		x
Reagan (R) 1984		House	x	
Reagan (R) 1986	x			x
Bush 41 (R) 1988	x		x	
Bush 41 (R) 1990	x			x
Clinton (D) 1994	x			x
Clinton (D) 1996	x		x	
Clinton (D) 1998	x			x
Bush 43 (R) 2000 ^c		Senate	x	

Source: Calculated from data in Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics*, 3rd ed. (Washington: CQ Press, 1992), table 3–17; and various Internet sources for later presidencies.

a. The situation following the 1880 elections was extraordinary. The Senate was split evenly: thirty-seven Democrats, thirty-seven Republicans, two independents. After much maneuvering and two Republican resignations, the Democrats appointed the officers and the Republicans organized the committees.

b. The Republicans, in fact, won a majority of House seats (218–216), but by the time the Congress first met, a sufficient number had died to permit the Democrats to organize the House.

c. The Senate was split evenly. Vice President Cheney broke the tie to allow Republicans to organize. Five months later, a Republican senator switched to Independent, voting with the Democrats to organize.

Table 1-2. *Split-Party Control between the President and Congress, by Historical Period, 1856–2006*

Period	Number of splits		Total years		Consecutive years
	Both houses of opposite party	One house of opposite party	Number	Percent	
	1856–1900 (44 years)	2	8	20	
1900–1946 (46 years)	1	2	6	13	0 ^a
1946–2006 (60 years)	14	4	36	60	12 (1980–92) ^b
1856–2006 (150 years)	17	14	62	41	...

Source: Calculated from data in table 1-1.

a. There were three Congresses with split control (1911–13, 1919–21, and 1931–33), but no two were consecutive.

b. There were two other lengthy periods of split control: 1954–60 and 1968–76.

the postwar era, Republican presidents had seventeen opportunities to capture full control of the government; they did so three times (in 1952, 2002, and 2004). The longest sequence of split-party government in this period—twelve years—does not quite match the fourteen-year spell in the nineteenth century, but in combination with the eight-year span during the Nixon and Ford presidencies, it represents an extraordinarily high percentage for a twenty-four-year period (83 percent).

In summary, it is apparent that split-party control can hardly be labeled an aberration, at least as measured by frequency of occurrence. It has been the result in two out of five elections since 1856 (see table 1-2). The period that appears to serve for many analysts as a model for testing effective government (1900–46) had the fewest years of split control. Divided government occurred 54 percent of the time in the other two eras combined.

Also noteworthy are the differences between the first and third periods. Instead of serving as a corrective check at the midterm, as was so frequently the case in the nineteenth century, split-party government has been legitimized from the start of a presidency in the contemporary period. There must be a point at which an event that is repeated frequently is misdiagnosed as exceptional or even as a corruption. In the third period voters have had seven opportunities (1948, 1956, 1972, 1976, 1984, 1992, and 2002) to make adjustments from an incumbent split-party government to a single-party government. They did so four times, once providing congressional majorities to an incumbent Democratic president (Truman, 1948), once

switching the Senate from the opposition to the president's party (Bush, 2002), and twice giving an incumbent Democratic Congress its own president (Carter, 1976; Clinton, 1992). Interestingly, in each of these cases the president himself emerged from a narrow election win with, at best, an ambiguous charge. In 1980, the voters chose to go in the opposite direction—from an incumbent single-party government (that of the Carter presidency) to a split-party government (a Democratic House and Republican Senate for Reagan). The 2000 election was a special case in which the Republicans barely won the White House, kept their majority in the House, and had a tie in the Senate that was lost a few months later.

Variations in Presidential Advantages

The variation in political status and strategic positioning does not end with having identified presidents with single-party or split-party governments. Presidents in each situation differ substantially in the advantages they have beyond those associated with their party's being in the majority in the House and the Senate. These advantages may derive from the election itself and how it is interpreted, the actual number of House and Senate seats held by the president's party, public and media support (typically measured by job approval ratings), midterm results, and the nature of the issues. Thus, for example, there is a substantial difference between Jimmy Carter's single-party government in 1977 and that of Lyndon Johnson in 1965; and equally, between Richard Nixon's split-party government in 1969, that of Ronald Reagan in 1981, and that of Bill Clinton after the 1994 midterm election.

These advantages and their effects will be identified in subsequent chapters. Suffice it for now to state that sometimes when the president has few resources, the Congress has many (or members are led to believe so). The Republicans in the 80th (1947–49) and 104th (1995–97) Congresses, for example, believed that they were on their way to single-party government in the subsequent presidential election and acted aggressively in pursuing that goal, unsuccessfully in both cases. Similarly, congressional Democrats in the post-Watergate era (1975–77) acted confidently on policy issues and carried this behavior over into the Carter presidency, often challenging a president of their own party. The variations foster distinctions among governments: those that are *presidential* because of extraordinary White House advantages and the wit to use them; those that are *congressional* because of weakness in the White House and strong leadership capabilities on Capitol

Hill; and those that are *balanced*, with advantages more or less evenly distributed at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

Taken together, party splits and different institutional advantages prepare the analyst for the varied circumstances under which presidents seek to govern. Political parties simply lack the structural status to override these distinctions, to compensate for the limitations experienced by elected officials within the executive and the legislature. Nor should one expect political parties in a separated system to exercise power they do not or cannot possess.

The variations in conditions for governing are clearly consistent with a separation of powers anchored by distinct elections. The independent sources of power for each institution often lead to different interpretations of the agenda and what is required to cope with the problems it lists. As noted above, occasionally one or the other institution is dominant. More typically, however, the White House and Congress must “act in tandem,” as Mark A. Peterson correctly asserts. He views the two as a partnership and conjures up the image of a tandem bicycle. “On matters of domestic policy, the president may sit at the ‘front’ of the process, providing direction by influencing the policy agenda . . . but the choice of direction lacks significance without a synchronized response from the ‘rear’.”²⁹ This metaphor is appropriate enough under some conditions, but the variations noted above suggest that the president will not be riding up front at all times or on all issues. They also suggest that before tandem-ness there may be competition for who rides up front and, more than likely, for how credits are shared for a race well run.

It is difficult to maintain a distinction between partisan and institutional differences when seeking to understand how the government works. Is it a case of a Republican president versus a Democratic Congress? Or is it simply the president versus the Congress? The puzzlement is a consequence of the constitutional and political structure itself. Not all dilemmas were resolved in Philadelphia; in fact, several were generated there. To take the case of split-party government, the president obviously cannot appeal solely to his political party under most circumstances (sustaining a veto is an exception). Meanwhile, the majority party in Congress may well appeal to institutional identification in seeking support from members of the president’s party. I can promise no more than attentiveness throughout this book to the distinction between conflict that is more strictly partisan and that which is more strictly institutional.

What can be said about responsibility for policy and governing within this system? At least two interpretations are evident: that responsibility is either assignable or not, and correspondingly that it is focused or diffused. Neither interpretation presumes an empirically demonstrable responsibility, as would suit the criteria set forth by party government advocates. The first simply proposes that under certain conditions (typically single-party government) analysts will be inclined to assign responsibility to the president's party when it has majorities on Capitol Hill. And the second proposes that under other conditions (typically split-party government) analysts will find it difficult to assign responsibility, though they will often, nonetheless, hold the president accountable for whatever happens "on his watch." The consequence is more focused with the first, diffused with the second.

I make no judgment at this point about a preferred interpretation. The immediate purpose is to encourage the reader to accept both assignable and nonassignable responsibility as legitimate interpretations associated with electoral outcomes and institutional shares of powers. Acknowledging the legitimacy of both types is particularly important for the postwar period, since the preferred outcome of the party responsibility advocates—single-party control and superior White House advantages—is an uncommon occurrence. Analysts limited to presidencies under those conditions have an *N* of 1 to work with in the postwar period—the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, and then for just two years, 1965–67. Remaining to be explained are the fifty-eight years of that period when, by a wholly constitutional process, voters produced split-party government or single-party government with ambiguous electoral messages.

The intention then is to establish a framework that permits analysis of relative presidential and congressional political, institutional, and policy advantages, reserving judgments about the workability of the system for the time being. The party responsibility model provides little or no aid either for describing a significant portion of the politics since 1946 or for predicting policy developments in the period. An alternative perspective is needed: one more suited to the political, institutional, and policy conditions of the time.

An Alternative Perspective: Separationism and a Government of Parties

An alternative perspective for understanding American national politics is bound to be unsatisfactory to party responsibility advocates. By the rendition

promoted here, with separationism, responsibility is individualized, not collectivized. Accordingly, it is diffused, not focused. Representation is not pure and unidirectional; it is mixed, diluted, and multidirectional. Further, the tracking of policy from inception to implementation discourages the most devoted advocate of responsibility theories. This alternative perspective accepts the rationale and reality of separate institutions competing for shares of powers. It does not pursue means for overcoming these features. Party government is not considered likely; rather a *government of parties* is presumed commonly to exist. By this perspective, there is no overarching political party apparatus, nor can an effective one be fashioned by reforms. Multiple party units operate throughout the elected national government—in the House of Representatives, the Senate, the White House, the national party headquarters. Accordingly, a president finds that he must negotiate with leaders of his own party, as well as those from the other party.

Separationism advances a government of parties, which, in turn, tends to diffuse responsibility. The presidency and Congress and multiple party units and leaders share credit when things go well and make it difficult to pinpoint who was wrong when things go badly. For the mature government (one that has achieved substantial involvement in social and economic life), much of the agenda is self-generating, that is, it results from programs already on the books. Thus the desire to propose new programs is often frustrated by demands to sustain or expand existing programs, since resources are often limited because of growth in entitlements and defense. Much of the modern agenda then tends to be reformist in nature, altering what exists more than enacting what is new.

Additionally there is the matter of who should be held accountable for what and when. This is not a novel issue by any means. It is a part of the common rhetoric of split-party government. Are the Democrats responsible for how Medicare has worked because it was a part of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society? Or are the Republicans responsible because their presidents accepted, administered, and revised the program? Is President Carter responsible for creating a Department of Energy or President Reagan responsible for failing to abolish it, or both? At what point should a new president be held accountable for the decline of the economy when the downturn started in the previous administration? The partisan rhetoric on deficits continues to blame the Democrats for supporting spending programs and the Republicans for cutting taxes. It is noteworthy that this level of debate fails to treat more fundamental issues, such as the constitutional roadblocks to defining or

assigning responsibility. In preventing the tyranny of the majority, the Founders also made it difficult to specify accountability.

It is understandable that critics will conclude that the American political system lacks responsibility in the classic sense. Yet this view is typically based on a collective notion of responsibility, as identified with parliamentary systems. A separated system will fail this test for structural reasons. Having a president, representatives, and senators elected separately and for terms of different lengths tends to individualize responsibility. A composite or collective party accounting may be possible by examining the individual records and behaviors of those seeking reelection. But it takes a shrewd and calculating voter to stitch together an accounting of party performance through sequences of presidential and congressional elections.³⁰

Here are the reasons why. Presidents are electorally accountable after a first four-year term, if they choose to run again. The Twenty-Second Amendment precludes an electoral accounting after the second term except by assignment to the successor candidate of his party, for example, Bush 41 for Reagan or Gore for Clinton. Elected representatives are accountable every second year, and all along the way, according to David R. Mayhew in *Congress: The Electoral Connection*.³¹ Collective accountability for the party's record in the House is at least potentially possible because all districts have elections. In practice, however, members seeking reelection are normally held responsible for their record and behavior during the two-year span, not for the record of their party. No such potential exists for senators, given the constitutional provision that one-third of the body is up for reelection every two years. This feature complicates accountability in other ways too. With two senators and three elections in a six-year period, every state will have one of those biennial elections without a senatorial contest. Additionally, the classes of senators up for reelection vary substantially in two respects: regional representation and population. For example, the class standing in 2000 was weighted heavily toward the Northeast, representing states with about 70 percent of the national population; the Midwest and South dominated the 2002 class, representing states with just half of the population; and the 2004 class had more regional balance, again representing about 70 percent.³²

Diffusion of responsibility, then, is not only a likely result of a separated system but may also be a fair outcome. Accordingly, one has to doubt how reasonable it is to hold one institution or one political party accountable for a program that has grown incrementally through decades of varying single-

and split-party control and through disparate sequences of elections. Reforming a government program is bound to be an occasion for holding one or the other of the branches or parties accountable for wrongs being righted. If, however, politics allows crossing the partisan threshold so that both parties are on the same side, as may be possible in split-party government, then agreements may be reached that will avoid blame and permit credit taking and, potentially, significant policy change. This is not to say that both sides agree from the start about what to do. Rather it is to suggest that diffusion of responsibility may permit policy change that would have been much less likely if one party had to absorb all of the criticism for past performance or blame should the reforms fail when implemented. The forging of a major welfare reform package between President Clinton and congressional Republicans in 1996 is but one notable example (see chapter 7).

Institutional and partisan competition is an expected outcome of the constitutional arrangements that facilitate mixed representation and variable electoral horizons. For forty years (1954–94), this competition was reinforced by Republicans frequently winning the White House, Democrats comfortably maintaining majority status in the House of Representatives, and, in the 1980s, both parties hotly contending for majority status in the Senate. Bargains struck under these conditions may have the effect of perpetuating split control by denying opposition candidates the issues upon which to campaign and the means for defining accountability. To take an example from the 104th Congress: If a President Clinton reaches agreement with congressional Republicans on welfare or immigration reform, as he did, then split-party government may be perceived as working. Why not, then, return the Democrat to the White House and the Republicans to Congress? That was the outcome in 1996.

The participants in this system of mixed representation and diffused responsibility naturally accommodate their political surroundings. A government of parties is a working system, after all. Gridlock is possible, but it is by no means inevitable. Competition can facilitate resolution of issues if the participants are motivated to enact laws. It is useful to be reminded that the Founders were seeking to create a government. In *Federalist* 47, Madison cited a provision of New Hampshire's constitution that exquisitely reveals the governing purposes of separationism: "The legislative, executive, and judicial powers ought to be kept as separate from, and independent of, each other *as the nature of a free government will admit; or as is consistent with that chain of connection that binds the whole fabric of the constitution in one indissoluble bond of unity and amity.*"³³ Seemingly, the

Founders were sensitive to the possibility that separate institutions competing for and sharing powers could produce a stalemate.

Much of the above suggests that the political and policy strategies of presidents in their dealings with Congress will depend on their advantages at the time. One cannot employ a constant model of the activist president leading a party government. More often than not, presidents participate in a government of parties—one defined more by the principle of separation than by unity. Conditions may encourage the president to work at the margins of presidential-congressional interaction (for example, where he judges that he has an advantage, as with foreign and national security issues). He may allow members of Congress to take policy initiatives, hanging back to see how the issue develops. He may certify an issue as important, propose a program to satisfy certain group demands, but fail to expend the political capital necessary to get the program enacted. Or he may seek to escape the trying politics of split control and issue executive orders when feasible. My point is that having been relieved of testing the system for party responsibility, one can proceed to analyze how presidents perform under variable political and policy conditions.

In reprise, separationism was designed as a means of governing, one that promotes competition, multiple legitimacies, mixed representation, and institutional sharing of powers. In stark contrast to the preferences of the unitarian, for the separatist the good election is one that preserves the incentive to share powers and to compete in the lawmaking process. Party landslides are worrisome, leading as they do to declarations of mandates and unwarranted interpretations of advantages in the competition for powers. The period following World War II has been a separationist era that has both encouraged reform and frustrated its realization.

The Neustadt Formulation

In 1960 a book on the presidency was published that was destined to become one of the most influential works on a political institution. Richard E. Neustadt worked as a “political-level bureaucrat” in the Truman White House and was headed for a career in government and politics. But when the Republicans took charge of Washington in 1952, Neustadt left to begin professional life in academia. He found scholarly work on the presidency “to be very remote from what I had experienced.” And so he set about writing *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* “to fill the gap between the academic literature . . . and my experience.”³⁴

The separation of powers, or as Neustadt interpreted it “separated institutions *sharing* powers,” is bedrock to how the presidency is analyzed. Presidents seek influence in a government that mostly cannot be led by commandments. Presidential power, then, is the power to persuade and to bargain. Optimally, the president makes an effort to convince other power holders that what he wants is what they should want, as suited to their authority in the separated system. Sources of persuasion include the president’s “vantage points in government, together with his reputation in the Washington community and his prestige outside.”³⁵ It follows that these sources must be nurtured, protected, and, when possible, enhanced.

I have proposed modifications to Neustadt’s interpretation of the separation of powers and to “vantage points” as a source of power, alterations that in conversations and correspondence he agreed were consistent with his formulation. The first modification simply adds competition to the dynamics of the separated system: separated institutions sharing and competing for powers. That competition both complicates and helps to define the tasks of presidents exercising personal influence. The second modification enlarges Neustadt’s first and basic source of power, the vantage points in government, by adding the qualities or status of being president. The vantage points are more objective; the qualities more subjective but very real. I apply the label “position” to this combination of advantages. As noted below, I have found the concept of position to be particularly useful in analyzing the presidency of Bush 43, both in his first year, when he had few other advantages, and later, when the war in Iraq came to threaten his status as a leader.³⁶

Also basic to the Neustadt formulation is a distinction between *power* and *powers*. Power is personal influence, that is, what a president can do to get his way within a separated system populated by others equally anxious to exercise their own influence. Powers are those designations of authority to the president by the Constitution, Congress, or custom. Having powers is no guarantee of the effective wielding of personal influence. For that, a president depends on the sources noted above (vantage points, professional reputation, and public prestige) and his leadership skills in applying them.

Neustadt’s formulation was an effort to comprehend the nexus of the personal and the institutional, of what is transitory with what is constant. In personal correspondence, he explained it this way: “My fundamental question remains the same throughout, namely how best to think about the possible effects of one’s own choices on one’s own prospects for personal influ-

ence within the institutional setting of a given office. . . . This amounts to seeking the essence of thinking politically, an endless search since this is so much an instinctive, intuitive process.”

By this view, effective presidents continuously calculate the implications of their choices for their personal influence in making subsequent choices. They should think prospectively as they make their own history. And they also learn from their history: “The history you know, the experience you’ve had are critical. How useful it is if you’ve had it and how difficult it is to apply if it isn’t your history.”³⁷

Neustadt’s formulation has been enormously helpful in my thinking about the presidency in a separated system. We both begin with the reality of separationism. He focuses almost exclusively on the president and his exercise of power; I am more broadly attentive to relations with Congress. He is ever sensitive to the constraints on presidential power coming from Capitol Hill; I describe the sources of these constraints. I widen the lens and he narrows the focus within that broader field, mindful of motion threatening the president’s personal influence.³⁸

The Politics of Partisan Variations

A main contention so far is that constitutional arrangements for elections and the distribution of powers challenge presidents in their quest to serve effectively. Several combinations of party control of the elected branches of government are possible, thus adding the separation of politics to the separation of powers. Equally, these arrangements invite several patterns of partisan interaction and policy participation between the White House and Congress, as well as between the two houses of Congress and within committees. In fact, one-party government with powerful presidential advantages is an uncommon outcome in the post–World War II period. Therefore, one should not expect to witness straight, or noncompetitive, partisanship—winning with votes from only the president’s party—very often. Exercising power as personal influence demands reaching across the aisles as well as down Pennsylvania Avenue.

An alternative perspective to that of party government, as offered above, should encourage a search for other partisan patterns and the conditions shaping those patterns. This approach may even permit a better understanding of institutional reform by identifying the circumstances under which changes can be effective, given the patterns of partisan interaction that obtain.

I have identified five patterns that will be explored further in the chapters devoted to presidential-congressional interaction on legislation: non-competitive partisanship, competitive partisanship, competitive bipartisanship, bipartisanship, and cross-partisanship.³⁹ These categories identify the nature of the coalition building that takes place, directing attention to who participates in the lawmaking process, how they do so, and at what point. Most patterns can occur under either split- or single-party government. And there may be differences between how the president interacts with the House and the Senate. As will become evident, the patterns may vary within an administration—either during a particular period or in regard to specific bills. Much depends on the strategic situation: who initiates the legislation, the nature of the support, and what additional support is required.

Noncompetitive Partisanship

In this pattern, bargaining and coalition building occur primarily within the president's party, which has majorities in both houses of Congress. It is the pattern that best suits the conditions of the party government model. Responsibility is presumably focused within the dominant party. The purest example in the postwar period occurred during the first two years of the Johnson administration (1965–67). With two-thirds majorities for the Democrats in the House and Senate, the president had only to satisfy his own party in building majority support for his program. A significant number of major laws were enacted. No one doubted who was responsible.

A most interesting case of partisanship under split-party government developed in the final eighteen months of the Bush 41 administration (1991–93). Oddly, the partisanship was associated with the weakness of both the Republican president and the Democratic Congress. Both lost a basis for bargaining and compromise because their advantages were seriously reduced: public confidence in the president declined dramatically following the Persian Gulf War; Congress experienced a number of humiliating scandals. The stalemate that many predict for split-party government under any circumstances was characteristic of the 102nd Congress. In this case, the leaders of both parties viewed their opponents as vulnerable. Thus deadlock was associated not with strength, but rather weakness. Not surprisingly, little was accomplished.

The Clinton and Bush 43 presidencies also displayed cases of straight, noncompetitive, partisanship (see chapter 7). These instances were very

different from those of the Johnson presidency, however. The party margins were narrow but unity was sufficient to win the day. Especially notable was the passage of President Clinton's 1993 economic package by the narrowest possible margins in each house, with no Republicans voting in favor in either chamber. The House Republicans during the first term of the Bush 43 presidency also showed extraordinary party discipline to suit the president's strategy of putting pressure on the Senate, a strategy that had mixed success.

Competitive Partisanship

This pattern is associated with split-party control and is, therefore, commonly featured in the postwar period. Until 1994, the split typically was between a Republican president and a Democratic Congress (there was just one case of the opposite arrangement, 1947–49). In 1994, the Republicans won majority status in the House of Representatives for the first time in forty years and also won the Senate; for the next six years President Clinton faced a Republican Congress. There was an important difference between the two partisan splits. Under the Republican presidents, Congressional Democrats frequently had sizable margins; Congressional Republicans had very narrow margins in the Clinton years.

Under certain conditions, competitive partisanship may characterize single-party government. The Bush 43 presidency is a case in point. With the Senate split 50-50 in 2001, Republicans were able to organize only with the vote of the vice president. Even so, the parties worked under a historic agreement that gave the Democrats special status as a minority. And after Senator James Jeffords (Vermont) switched from Republican to Independent, the Democrats were able to organize the Senate. In 2002, Republicans had a net gain of Senate seats sufficient for a narrow majority (51 to 48, with one Independent). Given the small margins in both houses, it took very few defections for the Republicans to lose a vote. Accordingly, competitive partisanship characterized most major issues on the agenda of the 107th Congress (2003–05).

Competitive partisanship is typified by the parallel development of proposals at each end of Pennsylvania Avenue or by the two parties in each house of Congress. Often these proposals represent different approaches to the problem, with participants in both institutions having sufficient support and expertise to be credibly involved. The increase in analytical capability on Capitol Hill in recent decades has allowed the majority parties in the

House and the Senate to be more active players in all phases of the policy process, thus enhancing their competitive edge.

Bargaining and coalition building can and do occur in competitive partisanship. At some point, the two forces typically try to reach an agreement. Why not simply capitalize on the failure of the other side to compromise? Because both sides identify possible political gains in reaching an agreement, or losses due to stalemate. Acknowledging that the problem requires attention, the participants determine that they can claim credit for success while avoiding blame for failure (past, present, or future). The latter point requires more elaboration. The agenda of a government with mature programs often is dominated by reform proposals or adjunct proposals (that is, those extending particular benefits). As noted earlier, it is difficult to enact reform without partisan recrimination. If, however, the two parties, each in control of an institution, can reach agreement, they can neutralize the issue for subsequent electoral campaigns yet preserve their right to formulate an initial proposal that reflects partisan concerns and group pressures. Competitive partisanship may be expected to work best when there is acknowledged strength in both the White House and Congress, thus creating the bargaining condition. There is less basis for this pattern if one or the other is dominant or if both are weak (as in the Bush 41 case cited above).

Competitive Bipartisanship

Recent developments in narrow-margin politics suggest a variation of competitive partisanship. The classic case is the education legislation in the 106th Congress (2001–03). George W. Bush made education reform a priority issue in the 2000 campaign. Bush invited Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Representative George Miller (D-Calif.) to work with the White House in designing legislation for this traditionally Democratic Party issue. The effort was bipartisan in that key representatives of both parties were actively involved during the early stages of crafting a bill. However, Republicans and Democrats had real differences that needed to be reconciled, making the process competitive.

The principal difference between partisan and bipartisan competition is in the stage at which it occurs. In partisan competition, each party develops its own proposal, fights for that plan, and remains sensitive to a point at which compromise is possible. If a bargain can be struck, then a coalition is formed to pass the legislation; if not, stalemate may be the result, especially given that filibusters are frequently threatened in a Senate with nar-

row margins. In bipartisan competition, the contenders compete throughout in fashioning legislation that can be enacted with a cross-partisan coalition. Stalemate may also occur if the bipartisan working group fails to shape a broadly acceptable bill. In the case of education reform in 2001, a bill eventually passed with 89 percent support in the House and 92 percent support in the Senate (see chapter 7). Several of the bills relating to national security following 9/11 also evidenced competitive bipartisanship; others, straight bipartisan cooperation.

Bipartisanship

There is a tendency to associate bipartisanship with foreign policy and national security issues. The most frequently cited era of bipartisanship—that following the end of World War II—was characterized by certain congressional leaders, most notably Senator Arthur Vandenberg (R-Mich.), accepting the president's leadership and convincing other Republicans to do the same. As used here, bipartisanship refers to the active and cooperative involvement of Republicans and Democrats in several phases of the law-making process, from problem definition through program approval. Representatives from both parties work to formulate proposals, fashion compromises, reach agreements, and enact laws. Public interest typically overcomes competitive spirit.

Bipartisanship may occur between the president and Congress or within Congress. The first type is likely to be facilitated when the president and congressional leaders from both parties agree on the need for policy action and cooperate in producing legislation (the Marshall Plan is an example). In the second type, congressional leaders may work together, then convince the president to join them (as on some environmental issues and Social Security reform), or the issue may be substantially congressional in scope, not requiring presidential involvement (for example, budget reform). There may also be cases in which congressional bipartisanship is used as a strategy to counter the president (as with the passage of the War Powers Resolution during the Nixon administration, or resistance to the cuts in water control projects recommended by President Carter in the first year of his presidency). Such cases illustrate institutional conflict—between the legislative and executive branches—over partisan disagreements.

Finally, it is worth noting what bipartisanship is *not*, at least as used here. It is not simply cosponsorship of a bill by a few members from each party or one or more members from one party working with the other party; such

activity is classified here as cross-partisanship. Often the term “bipartisanship” will be used strategically to enhance the success of legislation, in the belief that it has a cachet among the public and the media.

Cross-Partisanship

In cross-partisanship an important segment of one party works with or can be counted on for support by the other party. Typically the initiative comes from one party, which then seeks to gain enough support from the other to form a winning coalition. Often it is the president who needs votes from the other party. The “conservative coalition” of Southern Democrats and Republicans illustrates that a cross-party coalition can develop at certain times on some issues. This alliance frequently voted together against legislation, but in 1981 it combined to produce important budget and tax laws. Republican gains in the South have eroded its base as a working coalition.

Cross-partisanship differs from competitive partisanship and bipartisanship in important ways. As noted above, the coalition often forms to stop action, not to initiate it. If there is a proposal, however, it typically comes from the president, who then tries to gain support from a sufficiently large segment of the other party to win. Often he knows in advance whom he can count on. Compromises may have to be accepted, but the process is different from competitive partisanship, where independent proposals are developed along the way, or bipartisanship, where both parties cooperate from the start (often through their leaders).

Two forms of cross-partisanship are pursued in lawmaking. The first, discussed above, arises from knowing in advance where support from the other party is likely. Examples would be the availability of southern Democrats to Republican presidents on certain economic and social issues, and that of northeastern Republicans to Democratic presidents on environmental and social issues (and a larger segment on trade). The process can sometimes look very much like bipartisanship, in that the supportive members of the other party may well be active in the early stages of lawmaking. The difference is in the scope of support.

The second type of cross-partisanship emerges from the playing out of competitive partisanship. As agreements are reached through the lawmaking process, leaders learn who on the other side is willing to support a final bill. Thus it is that competitive partisanship results in a cross-partisan coalition sufficient to pass legislation. As strategies, the two patterns may be interactive. What begins as one may develop into the other as agreements are either forged or fall apart.

Summary

It is apparent from this brief review that lawmaking in the separated system depends on the political conditions of the time. As I show in chapter 2, the political and legislative standing of presidents varies substantially, as do the issues faced by each. These variables have an effect on presidential power and, in turn, on which partisan strategies work best, or work at all.

Change within Presidencies

Research on the presidency is often criticized for being insufficiently comparative, too often focusing on one president and offering limited capacity for generalization. That criticism itself is revealing of a common practice in the study of American national politics, dividing political and policy time by presidential administrations. Yet people, politics, and issues change during a president's tenure. For example, the Eisenhower years were considered to be relatively calm, yet the last two years looked very different from the first two. Only three members of Eisenhower's original cabinet remained (and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles died early in 1959). The Democrats had nearly two-thirds majorities in both houses of Congress in 1959; the Republicans had slim majorities in both during Eisenhower's first Congress. The federal budget actually decreased during Eisenhower's first two budget years (1954, 1955), but then increased by a third in his last budget year (1961). The unemployment rate went from 2.9 percent in 1953 to 6.8 percent in 1958.

These changes pale in comparison with what happened under subsequent presidents. There were thirty-one changes in cabinet secretarial positions during the Nixon-Ford presidencies, whereas Eisenhower had ten changes during his eight years. And, of course, Nixon himself was gone, as was his original vice president, Spiro T. Agnew. Lyndon Johnson's Gallup poll rating went from 80 percent approval in January 1964 to 35 percent approval in August 1968. The Democrats' two-thirds majority in the House shrank to 57 percent, allowing the reemergence of the conservative coalition between Republicans and southern Democrats. George H. W. Bush achieved record public approval in 1991, only to see it soon dissipate. His effectiveness in the Persian Gulf War was quickly forgotten during the economic recession that persisted through the summer of 1992. And Bill Clinton began with Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress in 1993, but lost those majorities for good in 1994. In 1998, he was impeached in the

House of Representatives, although he survived his subsequent trial in the Senate.

Tracking these changes and their implications for presidential power is not a simple task. And it will not be accomplished here to full satisfaction, to be sure. But this study emphasizes the importance of accounting for change in any effort to locate a president politically, understand how much help he can count on, and estimate what problems he is trying to solve.

There are other, more conceptual reasons for emphasizing change within as well as between presidencies. Developments that carry through from one to another can be explored, and the contribution or function of any one presidency is set in the context of the broader national policy process. Thus, for example, analysis of developments in health care costs as a policy problem may elaborate or modify the notion that the president sets the agenda for Congress. It may show where the president fits within a larger agenda-setting process that precedes and succeeds his service. Finally, attention to changes within a president's term in office increases the number of presidencies to study. There have been eleven post-World War II presidents at this writing but, as will be discussed later, these eleven have had many more presidencies, as measured by their changes in status.

What Is to Follow

This book emphasizes the strategic positions of presidents and how they change. I will rely on the alternative "diffused responsibility" perspective, ever searching for how this nation is governed under the strikingly diverse constitutional arrangements of single- and split-party control. I am interested in the coping and the recouping, the initial efforts to organize and the subsequent adaptations as presidents explore what works best for them, and the variations in the president's role in lawmaking.

There are several expectations stemming from the alternative perspective that help shape the organization of the book from this point forward. Of central interest are those having to do with presidents themselves, White House and cabinet organization, public support, the nature of the agenda, lawmaking, and reform. In a separated system of diffused responsibility, these are the expectations:

—Presidents will enter the White House with variable personal, political, and policy advantages or resources. Presidents are not equally good at comprehending their advantages or identifying how these advantages may work best to influence the rest of the government.

—White House and cabinet organization will be quite personal in nature, reflecting the president's assessment of strengths and weaknesses, the challenges the president faces in fitting into the ongoing government, and the political and policy changes that occur during the term of office. There is no formula for organizing the presidency, though certain models can be identified.

—Public support will be an elusive variable in analyzing presidential power. At the very least, its importance for any one president must be considered alongside other advantages. "Going public" does not necessarily carry a special bonus, though presidents with limited advantages otherwise may be forced to rely on this tactic.

—The agenda will be continuous, with many issues deriving from existing programs. The president surely plays an important role in certifying issues and setting priorities, but Congress and the bureaucracy will also be natural participants. At the very least, therefore, the president will be required to persuade other policy actors that his choices are the right ones. They will do the same with him.

—Lawmaking will vary substantially in terms of initiative, sequence, partisan and institutional interaction, and productivity. The challenge is to comprehend the variable role of the president in a government that is designed for both continuity and change.

—Reform will be an especially intricate undertaking since, by constitutional design, the governmental structure is antithetical to efficient goal achievement. Yet many, if not most, reforms seek to achieve efficiency within the basic separated structure. There are not many reforms designed to facilitate the more effective working of split-party government.

I have chosen to organize this book by the set of topics identified in these expectations: who presidents are and how they differ (chapter 2); organization of the White House and the cabinet, and how both change during a president's time in office (chapter 3); how public support varies and what it means (chapter 4); the continuing agenda and how presidents manage it (chapter 5); how lawmaking works, where the president fits, and how it varies by issue (chapters 6 and 7); and reform in a separated system of diffused responsibility (chapter 8). I will make comparisons among the postwar presidents, constantly endeavoring to identify the variations in governing that this country has experienced. The chapters on lawmaking focus on specific pieces of legislation. I have, however, selected major bills from each administration and also show how patterns of presidential-congressional interaction vary within one administration.

My main mission is to provide a means for understanding how a separated system of government works under the varying circumstances allowable by the Constitution and a two-party structure. I focus on presidents, but my purpose is broader, as I attempt to place them in the continuing process of governing. I am not by nature a reformer. I am, however, eager to see the national government work effectively under all of the conditions sanctioned by the Constitution. Therefore one underlying purpose of this book is to promote a perspective that will encourage analysts to appreciate the unique nature of the American system and to think creatively about how to make it work better.