

Introduction

John Nance Garner, one of Franklin D. Roosevelt's vice presidents, equated the vice presidency to being "not worth a pitcher of warm spit," or as others have quoted him as stating, "not worth a pitcher of warm piss."¹ Garner goes on to say, "Worst damn-fool mistake I ever made was letting myself be elected vice president of the United States. . . . Should have stuck with my old chores as Speaker of the House. I gave up the second most important job in the Government for one that didn't amount to a hill of beans."² Yet, much has changed since the 1930s when John Nance Garner made those derogatory statements. In the last several decades, the vice presidency has reformed partly through those who have followed in the office and partly through the efforts of the presidents themselves. Garner's comments fail to capture the reality of the vice presidency today. For instance, Dick Cheney's role in the first year of the Bush administration was consequential and created the blueprint for the biggest governmental reorganization since the creation of the Department of Defense and advocated for new executive powers needed to fight the war on terror. Now, in the twenty-first century, the Office of Vice President has transformed into a position of tremendous influence.

The Evolution of the Vice Presidency

Presidents, realizing the demands of the office were so great due to the increasing size of the bureaucracy and executive branch, sought relief by delegating some of their presidential functions.³ President Woodrow Wilson described the position of president prior to taking office as "the most heavily burdened officer in the world."⁴ Likewise, Truman, contemplating

his tenure of office as president stated, "I think no absolute monarch ever had such decisions to make or the responsibility that the President of the United States has. . . . No one man can really fill the Presidency. The Presidency has too many and too great responsibilities. All a man can do is try to meet them. He must be able to judge men, delegate responsibility and back up those he trusts."⁵ Because of such burdensome tasks, it is no wonder that the vice presidency can no longer be characterized as insignificant. Presidents have the authority to delegate powers in the exercise of their responsibilities, and the Supreme Court has ruled that the delegation of powers to others within the executive is implied "and acts performed by such officials, if pursuant to law, will be presumed to be the President's acts."⁶ Vice presidents, and willing presidents, stretched the boundaries of the office by instilling it with more authority and stature. For instance, Kennedy chose Vice President Johnson to chair the Space Council, which included an increase in staff.⁷

The changes in American politics during the twentieth century such as the New Deal, new domestic and foreign policy roles of the presidency, and increased power of the president created the ideal environment for changes to occur in the vice presidency.⁸ More specifically, the creation of numerous federal agencies under the auspices of the New Deal enlarged the executive branch and provided the president with greater authority in domestic policy. Recognizing the enormous growth in the executive branch, "Congress expressly gave the president broad authority to delegate to Department and Agency heads, and to certain lesser officials, functions vested in him by law if such law did not affirmatively prohibit delegation."⁹ This express authority by Congress enabled the president to delegate duties, not prohibited by law, to agents such as the vice president. Due to the responsibilities given to the presidency in domestic and foreign policy, the vice president began to play a more active role by chairing committees for specific programs, acting as a liaison between the White House and Congress, attending cabinet meetings, traveling to foreign countries as "surrogate head of state," serving as a spokesman for the administration, and being actively involved in party politics.¹⁰

In 1949, Congress authorized an increasing role for vice presidents by making them statutory members of the National Security Council.¹¹ This action further enhances the vice president's foreign policy credentials and makes him or her a critical member of the president's team. The increased responsibilities given to the vice president are quite evident in the following

quote from President Carter regarding Vice President Mondale. “I see Fritz [Walter Mondale] four to five hours a day. There is not a single aspect of my own responsibilities in which Fritz is not intimately associated. He is the only person that I have, with both the substantive knowledge and political stature to whom I can turn over a major assignment.”¹²

Perhaps one of the greatest roles of the modern vice presidency is that of adviser to the president. With ever increasing demands on the office, the president must surround him- or herself with capable advisers that have the necessary skills and experience to assist the president in executing his or her constitutional duties. As the presidency has grown over time, so too has the vice presidency. With the increase in staff, budget, and responsibilities as well as the proximity of the vice president to the president (whose office is now located within the West Wing), vice presidents in the modern era are important advisers to the president.¹³ Because influence depends on access, this role enables them to be influential and therefore, wield more influence than the vice presidents of yesteryear. In other words, proximity breeds influence, and the nature of the modern vice presidency is predicated on an assumption that the position carries influence, but the degree of that influence can vary. Both internally and externally, the vice president is perceived as being more influential because of this proximity and advisory role.

However, access does not guarantee that presidents will listen. Just because the vice president advises the president, and has weekly one-on-one meetings, does not mean that the president will take the vice president’s advice.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the greater access, visibility, location of the vice president’s office in the West Wing, and the willingness of recent presidents to cultivate a more hands-on role for the vice president provides ample opportunity for access to become influence. A relatively large staff and independent budget provides the vice president with the latitude to independently staff his or her offices in a similar fashion to the president, thus further enhancing the vice president’s capacity for influence.¹⁵

The Vice Presidency

Understanding the limitations that exist, presidents routinely turn to resources and tools that at times put them in direct conflict with the Constitution and open them up to criticism by the public and the media for

overstepping their boundaries. One aspect of the presidency that receives rather limited attention, yet can prove to be an important and strategic influence that can assist presidents in overcoming the restrictive nature of the office without giving rise to questions of constitutionality, is the vice presidency. As a constitutional officer, the vice president occupies a unique position as a nationally elected officeholder to assist the president with his or her duties. However, studies of the presidency inadequately address the nature of vice presidential influence. As argued by Neustadt, presidents must utilize informal powers to be effective. Presidents rely on their vice presidents in both formal and informal manners to transcend the obstacles they encounter. As a result, a greater opportunity for the exercise of vice presidential influence exists now more so than at any other time in history.

If we apply the fundamentals of Neustadt's argument to the vice presidency several things become clear. First, like the president, the vice president encounters a constrained office that is quite limited in terms of constitutional responsibilities. Second, some vice presidents are more effective than others, providing evidence that informal powers, informal institutional arrangements, and the politics in which they govern can offer vice presidents greater influence. Thus, good bargaining, negotiating, and persuasion skills are critical for a vice president to possess in order to play a significant role within a presidential administration. And once in office, employing these same skills to further the administration's policy objectives is crucial as well.

Finally, those vice presidents who make significant use of their existing skill sets to the benefit of the president become indispensable partners in the administration; further, in many cases, they take on greater responsibilities beyond the limited powers bestowed by the Constitution. While no specification exists in the Constitution for vice presidents to be given significant influence or responsibilities or that vice presidents should be men or women of influence, presidents in recent decades rely on their vice presidents to a greater degree, and with this comes greater influence and responsibility resulting in the vice presidency emerging from the shadows.

Although once derided as an insignificant office, the vice presidency in the last forty years has witnessed an increase in stature, prominence, and influence. It is difficult to argue against the fact that Vice Presidents Mondale, Gore, Cheney, and Biden have significantly altered the traditional views of the office and have assisted in advancing the president's objectives and their own influence and power with it.

Why Study the Vice Presidency?

At its most basic level, presidential scholars should consider the individual vice presidents and the institutional dynamics of the vice presidency for several reasons beyond just its constitutional position within the presidency. At least ten reasons exist for closely examining the vice presidency. First, the vice president is part of the Constitution and significant debate existed among the founding fathers as to the functions of his or her office. Second, the vice president maintains a crucial position within the executive branch as well as the presidential selection system (presidents and vice presidents appear together on the ballot). Third, the vice presidency is one of only two nationally elected offices created by the founding fathers. Fourth, as president of the Senate, the vice president is vested with the constitutional authority to issue a tie-breaking vote. Thus, he or she holds the ambiguous position of serving in the leadership hierarchy of two different branches of government. Fifth, in case of the president's death, resignation, and removal from office, or inability to execute the duties of the presidency, he or she is first in line of succession. In our nation's history, nine vice presidents have assumed the presidency due to assassinations (4), natural death (4), or resignation (1).¹⁶

Sixth, in our nation's history, fifteen vice presidents, mostly in the modern era, have become their party's frontrunner in the next presidential election. "Since 1953, four of the 11 VPs became presidents, and another four were their party's nominee for the presidency but lost the general election. In recent years, both George H. W. Bush and Al Gore spent eight years viewed by the public as essentially the president-in-waiting."¹⁷ Seventh, examples of vice presidential selection failures have been widely criticized and lamented, thus careful study of the office is necessary in order to attempt to avoid future mishaps.¹⁸ Eighth, a notable expansion of influence and importance has characterized the vice presidency in the post-World War II era. Ninth, the selection of a vice presidential candidate is considered by many to be the first major decision by a presidential nominee.¹⁹ Last, focused attention on the vice presidential nominee by the media and the public occurs at least twice during the presidential campaign season (nominating convention and the vice presidential debate).²⁰

Due to the nature of the office and the position it plays in American politics (elections and governing), attention should focus not only on the president, but also on the vice president. As a critical actor within the administration, and one who in recent years has displayed significantly

more influence and responsibility in the presidency, vice presidents warrant increasing attention. More importantly, they deserve consideration because of how they contribute to presidential administrations and how they have helped expand the authority of the presidency. Furthermore, the way their role has changed over several decades fosters questions about how their role will continue to change in the future.

Most studies of the vice presidency tend to evaluate the role of the vice president or vice presidential nominee in elections. However, the role of the vice president in governing is often overlooked and warrants scrutiny because it is crucial in fully understanding the presidency in action. In particular, vice presidents function as the president's cheerleader and attack dog and in many cases act as the president's surrogate during their term in office. Furthermore, vice presidents serve as a lightning rod to mitigate potential criticism of the president.

Purpose of Study

This study analyzes the vice presidency from a constitutional, behavioral, electoral, and institutional perspective. It focuses on explaining variation in vice presidential influence over time, between vice presidents and within individual vice presidencies. This study is particularly interested in what causes vice presidential influence to increase or, more importantly, diminish over the course of a term, with an assumption that all vice presidents in the modern era have the capacity to exercise influence. While attention has shifted in recent years to the importance of the vice presidency, the need to address the ambiguous nature of the vice presidency and the rather unique position it occupies in national politics still exists. Great strides have been made in assessing the different aspects of the presidency (e.g., individual presidents, Executive Office of the President, the cabinet, etc.), yet a clear deficiency exists in those studies because they fail to examine a vital component—the vice president or the Office of the Vice President. This book intends to fill a noticeable void in the literature on politics within the executive branch.

Despite critical moments in vice presidential influence, academics have largely ignored the topic. One explanation is the challenging nature of the topic. In order to tackle the topic, I conducted extensive archival research and in-depth interviews with senior officials from presidential administrations to understand the imprecise nature of vice presidential

influence. The research that follows distinguishes itself from the scholarship of others by conceptualizing how the informal roles of the vice president provide an outlet for exercising influence within an administration, the factors that affect the capacity for and exercise of vice presidential influence, and the fairly predictable phenomenon of diminishing influence over the course of an administration. To showcase vice presidential influence and fully understand its origins, the impact of vice presidential selection, electoral incentives, institutional arrangements, and the personal/professional relationship between the president and vice president on influence, and the political time in which these dynamics play out are analyzed.

Furthermore, a framework is developed for understanding vice presidential influence and the different ways it can impact the capacity of a vice president to exercise influence. This will assist the reader in understanding the unique nature of vice presidential influence and the ways in which it may be enhanced or marginalized from vice president to vice president or even within vice presidencies. Vice presidential influence seems to follow a certain trajectory with the same outcome for most vice presidents (diminishing influence). While no two vice presidents are the same, regardless of the level and capacity of their influence, one thing is certain—he or she will become marginalized and influence will diminish. This predicament can be attributed to personal, political, and professional decisions of the two principals (president and vice president), their surrogates, or circumstances in which they find themselves governing within.

Theory

The institutional development of the vice presidency in the modern era combined with precedent has provided all vice presidents with the capacity to exercise influence. As stated earlier, the developments that have occurred during the modern vice presidency justifies the assumption that the capacity for vice presidential influence exists and this is where the research will commence. What distinguishes one vice presidency from another is the interplay of four dynamics—interpersonal, situational, institutional, and electoral—(see figure 1) and its effect on vice presidential influence. This research will also demonstrate that within a vice presidency these four dynamics can shift, resulting in a change in the capacity for a vice president to exercise influence. The focus will not be on the direct consequences of vice presidential influence on decision making since influence,

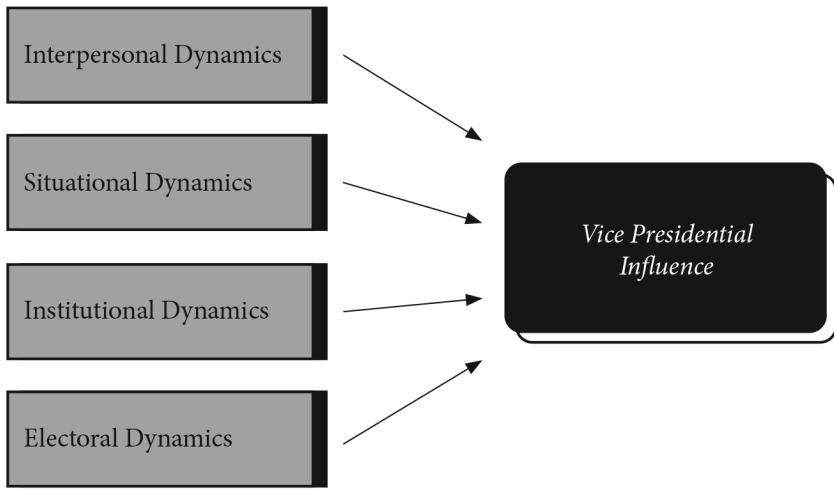


Figure 1. Vice presidential influence and the four dynamics. Author provided.

as some suggest, may not invoke change as a necessary component.²¹ Vice presidential influence is not dependent on converting the president's position. Influence may be subtler. Vice presidential influence might still be present despite no change occurring in the position of the president that can be attributed to the vice president. Instead, the vice president might be influencing the process or influencing the definition of alternatives.²² Furthermore, the direct consequences of a vice president's influence are less palpable since a lot of advice given to a president is done in private with only the two principals present. Above is a small diagram for the purposes of illustrating the focus of the research as it pertains to vice presidential influence.

Scope of Study

In an attempt to assess an understudied area of the presidency, this study will analyze the evolution of the vice presidency, the unique relationship of presidents and vice presidents in the modern era, vice presidential influence, and the role of vice presidents in governing. This research examines the modern vice presidency beginning with the vice presidency of Nelson Rockefeller. Nelson Rockefeller's vice presidency was selected as

the inception of what is termed the “modern vice presidency” due to the nature of his involvement in the Ford administration. Admittedly, Rockefeller’s vice presidency was short-lived; however, in that short period of time President Ford entrusted Rockefeller with responsibility over domestic policy. Ford named Rockefeller chair of the Domestic Council, to bring his vice president into the administration as a partner and provide him with definitive responsibilities. This was the first time a vice president took an active role in policy making.²³

In addition to Rockefeller, this study will analyze the vice presidencies of Walter Mondale, George H. W. Bush, Dan Quayle, Al Gore, Dick Cheney, and Joe Biden. These vice presidents were selected for the case study in order to assess vice presidents of different political parties, as well as to study those vice presidents who have seen their influence wax and wane over the course of their terms due to changing interpersonal, situational, institutional, and electoral dynamics. Particular emphasis will be placed on the vice presidencies of Rockefeller and Cheney, because Rockefeller’s vice presidency ushered in the possibility for an influential vice presidency to exist and is the start of the modern vice presidency as defined in this study, and Cheney epitomizes the apex of vice presidential influence at play. These two vice presidencies will allow for a greater understanding of vice presidential influence and its fleeting nature, because even though Rockefeller laid the foundation to exercise influence he still encountered obstacles to exercising that influence, and while Cheney is considered the most influential vice president in history, he too faced similar constraints. As a result, two very detailed chapters are dedicated to fleshing out the importance of their respective vice presidencies to our understanding of vice presidential influence.

The institutional structures, the situational dynamics, the electoral dynamics, the interpersonal dynamics, and precedent handed down by previous vice presidents will be studied in order to understand how the office transformed from an irrelevant and disdained office to one of considerable influence. To understand this phenomenon, specific attention will be paid to the president’s and vice president’s relationship and how the uniqueness of each relationship shapes the vice presidency. In addition to the unique relationship that exists between each president and vice president, the role of precedent in sustaining the influence and prominence experienced by vice presidents over the last forty years demands attention.

The object of this study is to analyze and understand the influence of the vice president in the modern era. Many mistakenly equate influ-

ence with power, but a clear difference exists. And in terms of the vice presidency, discussions tend to revolve around the ascendant power of the office. However, no two vice presidencies are created equal. Thus, it is important to distinguish between power and influence to accurately characterize the vice presidency. While power, in a social science context, is best defined as the ability of an individual to exert real control over his or her environment, influence is a trait that is much more indirect, and thus quite difficult to measure. Influence produces an effect without direct action and is intangible in nature. Influence is also more passive. Despite the differences, both power and influence require an individual to have the capacity for some type of an effect, whether direct or indirect.

To get at the heart of vice presidential influence archival research was conducted at the Ford, Carter, Reagan, and George H. W. Bush presidential libraries. In addition, the papers of Walter Mondale and Nelson Rockefeller were examined at the Minnesota State Historical Society and the Rockefeller Archive Center, respectively. The archival research provided insight into the day-to-day activities of the vice presidents under study and was useful in examining any institutional changes to the office across vice presidencies in terms of organization and responsibilities. As is expected from archival research, information can be quite hit or miss. While the research offered a picture of the contextual environment that each vice president governed within, not all information sought was available. To overcome this dearth of information, extensive in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals from each presidential administration from Presidents Gerald Ford through Barack Obama. The interviews helped clarify some of the information gathered from the archival research and assisted in framing the working relationship between each president and vice president and the changes in influence over time. Over seventy interviews have been conducted with vice presidents, cabinet secretaries, press secretaries, chiefs of staff, national security advisers, and other presidential/vice presidential advisors.²⁴ This study is one of the first major efforts utilizing both in-depth interviews with political practitioners and extensive archival research to examine changes in vice presidential influence and the evolution of the office in the modern era. Furthermore, it is the first of its kind to ascertain the true nature of vice presidential influence and how that influence diminishes over time because of changing dynamics.

Every vice president's influence faces challenges that either advance or marginalize influence. I contend that while the modern vice presidency can be characterized as influential, the degree of influence is highly dependent

on the relationship between the principals, the manner of selection, precedent, institutional arrangements, electoral incentives, and the political and social context in which the president and vice president find themselves governing. One conclusion that can be drawn from most if not all the vice presidencies under study is that influence, despite any disparities among vice presidents, declines over the course of an administration. Therefore, this study will examine the possible reasons for its decline over time.

Access to the president provides the opportunity and the capacity to exercise influence; thus, one would expect that if a president and vice president meet frequently there is a greater opportunity for a vice president to exercise influence. In the last several decades, many presidents have realized the importance of having regularly scheduled meetings with their vice presidents. For instance, President Gerald Ford and Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, as well as each of their successors, have had weekly scheduled lunch meetings. Although some of these meetings may not be considered substantive in terms of policy discussions, they have proven instrumental in keeping the vice presidents informed about activities within the administration while simultaneously allowing them the opportunity to share ideas about critical matters and policy decisions. This differs substantially from those vice presidents who barely met with their president. For instance, when Harry S. Truman became vice president at the start of Franklin D. Roosevelt's unprecedented fourth term, Roosevelt had met with him very infrequently. No substantial policy discussions occurred, and Truman was left in the dark about the conduct of World War II. Upon Roosevelt's untimely death in April 1945, Truman, only vice president for a short time, was sworn in as the nation's president with little to no idea of the current conditions of the war effort. Truman was unaware of the Manhattan Project, which was responsible for building the atomic bomb or critical negotiations that occurred between the US and its allies, specifically Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin.²⁵ As a result, Truman as vice president was considered weak and did not play a critical role within the presidency. The frequency of contact and the proximity of the vice president to the president is a testament to the degree to which the president feels it necessary to include the vice president in critical discussions for the purposes of providing the vice president with an opportunity to assist in managing the executive branch, thus providing him or her the chance to exert influence.

One would expect that the greater the size of the office of the vice president, in terms of staff and the size of the budget, the greater is the

capacity for exerting influence. The increasing demands levied on the president with the establishment of the modern presidency have caused the executive branch to significantly increase in size over the last sixty to seventy years. In recent decades, where the influence of the vice president is noticeable, the vice president's staff has increased as well and, in many ways, resembles the president's staff in terms of organization and resources.²⁶ The increase in staff attests to the number and types of varied responsibilities the vice president is now involved in. It makes sense that the more active the vice president, the larger the staff needed to fulfill his or her obligations, and the more opportunity arises to exert influence. The increase in staff also signifies the influence of the office and its occupants.

Last, vice presidential influence can be affected by a host of different factors, including changing interpersonal relationships (interpersonal dynamic—how a presidential/vice presidential relationship is affected by scandal, election, etc.), changing political context (situational dynamic—issues facing the country), changing institutional structures (institutional dynamic—staff changes, chief of staff), and the electoral cycle and pressures (electoral dynamic). A vice president's capacity to exercise influence may be positively or negatively affected by the departure and arrival of staff and chiefs of staff, issues that arise that the vice president has an expertise on or does not, the presence of a scandal (vice presidential or presidential), and the demands of an election. In most cases, the vice president is utilized as a political emissary during election contests. During a president's reelection, the vice president crisscrosses the country to champion the administration's successes and win a second term for the ticket. However, electioneering can diminish the vice president's capacity for influencing policy since the vice president is so removed from the day-to-day activities of the White House while on the stump. The same is true of a vice president who is seeking election to the presidency in his or her own right. Not only does the vice president suffer from the same issues found in a reelection campaign but this is further intensified because the vice president may distance him- or herself from the administration, which could result in changes to the president's and vice president's relationship, thus resulting in a further diminishment of influence.

Regarding vice presidential influence in the modern era, one thing is certain—influence will diminish over the course of an administration. Regardless of the vice president, all vice presidents face the same phenomenon—diminishing or marginalized influence. Even with vice presidents who are considered the most influential in history (i.e., Vice Presidents Al

Gore, Dick Cheney, and Joe Biden), influence is negatively affected by the changing interpersonal, situational, institutional, and electoral dynamics, which will be explored in this study.