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THE GEORGE W. BUSH PRESIDENCY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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George W. Bush's presidency has been contentious from the moment the Supreme Court confirmed his election as president in *Bush v. Gore*. The Court's decision meant that Bush joined John Quincy Adams, Rutherford B. Hayes, and Benjamin Harrison as one of four U.S. presidents who owed their elections to a victory in the Electoral College while finishing second in the national popular vote. The protracted and bitter postelection conflict over Florida's electoral votes and the various irregularities revealed in the Florida count also raised further initial questions about the "legitimacy" of the Bush presidency (Dionne and Kristol 2001).

Yet if Bush's political opponents believed that the circumstances of his election would temper his ambitions in terms of policy and conservative ideology, they were to be unpleasantly surprised by the course of his administration. Despite losing the popular vote, Bush from the outset has governed as if he had a clear mandate from the public for his strongly conservative economic, domestic, and foreign policy agenda (Frum 2003a,b). So integral to the presidency is the role of national agenda-setter and the notion of a policy "mandate" that these claims have been generally accepted by press and public, and several of the

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most significant items on the Bush agenda have actually been enacted (Cochran 2002).

The other distinguishing feature of the Bush presidency has, of course, been his reaction to the traumatic events of September 11, 2001. There is no question that the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington marked a significant turning point for Bush, not only in his popularity, which soared in the wake of the tragedy, but also in the focus and direction of his administration (Keller 2003a). The surprising Republican gains in the 2002 midterm elections seemed to indicate approval of Bush's conduct of the office after September 11 and provide the "mandate" lacking in the close election of 2000 (Nather and Cochran 2002)

So in the changed domestic and international political order subsequent to September 11 it fell to Bush, already a controversial president, to chart a course for America in a transformed international environment. The protracted domestic and international political debates surrounding Bush's decision to launch a "preemptive war" for the purpose of overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq in March 2003 were indicative of the potentially dangerous and uncharted territory this could be for any president. The United States won decisive victories on the battlefield in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the course of events in those countries as well as in the "war" against terrorism will play a large part in determining whether Bush secures a second term, an outcome denied to his father in 1992.

Problems of Presidential Legitimacy Since 1825

Bush's victory in 2000 was a reminder that American presidents are elected not by popular vote but by the 538-member Electoral College, composed of blocs of electors (roughly proportionate to the population of each state) awarded on a winner-take-all basis (except Maine and Nebraska) to the plurality vote winner in each state and the District of Columbia. The original intent of the aristocratically minded framers of the U.S. Constitution was that each state would select the "best and the brightest" among its political elite to elect the federal chief executive (Ceaser 1979, 41–87). With the advent of party competition, however, and the increasing democratic pressures within American society, states began to choose their electors at large by direct popular vote, leaving

South Carolina as the only holdout for legislative selection by 1832 (Wayne 2001, 14–15). The final passing of the founding generation's natural order of succession to the presidency in 1824 led to the Electoral College vote being splintered among four candidates. With no candidate achieving an electoral vote majority, according to the Constitution the House of Representatives then had to choose between the top three candidates, with each state delegation in the House casting one vote.

The House's choice of John Quincy Adams over the popular favorite General Andrew Jackson signaled the end of the Electoral College as an independent decision-making body. Four years later Jackson's supporters created a national electoral organization to corral voters behind slates of electors committed to voting for Jackson in the Electoral College. The Jackson slates prevailed and gave birth to the Democratic Party; the anti-Jacksonians similarly organized themselves into the Whig party by 1840 (McCormick 1975).

The post-1824 system made electing the president more of a popular contest but not completely, since states, rather than the national popular vote, remain the key unit of election. The system also left open the possibility that a candidate could prevail in the Electoral College with less than a majority of the popular vote and that in a very close election a candidate could be elected—through carrying enough states with significant numbers of electoral votes by narrow margins—who had finished second in the overall national popular vote. The final awarding of Florida's 25 electoral votes to Bush in 2000 (based on an official statewide popular plurality of 537 votes) enabled him to eke out a four-vote margin in the electoral college (271 votes, to Vice President Al Gore's 267) while losing the national popular vote by some 540,000 votes (0.5 percent) (see table 1.1).

In eighteen (40 percent) of the forty-five presidential elections from 1824 to 2000, the winner was elected despite his having won less than a majority of the national popular vote. (In ten of these cases, the presence of significant nonmajor party candidates effectively kept the winner of the electoral vote from winning a national popular vote majority.) The heavy or comfortable electoral vote margin of the winning candidate has probably helped to confer legitimacy on a plurality popular-vote winner, a function that has formed a major part of the defense of the Electoral College from political scientists and commentators (Wayne

Table 1.1
Presidents Since 1824 Who Failed to Win a Majority of the Popular Vote

Year	*President*	*Popular vote (%)*	*Margin (%)*	*Electoral vote (%)*
1824	**J. Q. Adams**	**30.5**	**–13.1**	**32.2**[a]
1844	Polk	49.6	1.5	61.8
1848	Taylor	47.4	4.9	56.2[a]
1852	Buchanan	45.3	12.2	58.8[a]
1860	Lincoln	39.9	10.5	59.4[a]
1876	**Hayes**	**47.9**	**–3.1**	**50.1**
1880	Garfield	48.3	0.1	58.0
1884	Cleveland	48.5	0.2	54.6
1888	**Harrison**	**47.8**	**–0.9**	**58.1**
1892	Cleveland	46.1	3.2	62.4[a]
1912	Wilson	41.9	14.5	81.9[a]
1916	Wilson	49.3	3.2	52.2
1948	Truman	49.5	4.4	57.1[a]
1960	Kennedy	49.7	0.1	56.4
1968	Nixon	43.4	0.7	56.0[a]
1992	Clinton	42.3	4.9	68.8[a]
1996	Clinton	49.2	8.5	70.4[a]
2000	**G. W. Bush**	**47.9**	**-0.5**	**50.4**

Source: Mieczkowski 2001.
Note: 1824 is the first election with accurate data on the national popular vote. Boldfaced entries are popular vote losers elected president.
[a]Minor party candidates with over 5 percent of the national popular vote.

2001, 13–21; Polsby and Wildavsky 1996, 291–99). Plurality popular vote victories have also not precluded presidents such as James K. Polk and Woodrow Wilson from successfully pursuing ambitious legislative agendas, indicating that presidential "mandates" are not made by election tallies but by astute politicking by presidents once in office.

In four of the eighteen elections won with less than a majority of the national popular vote (almost 10 percent of the total number of elections since 1824), presidents were elected despite their having *lost* the national popular vote: John Quincy Adams (1824), Rutherford B. Hayes (1876), Benjamin Harrison (1888), and George W. Bush (2000). In a nation that takes its democratic credentials extremely seriously, the legitimacy issue may be particularly troublesome for presidents who have lost the popular vote.

John Quincy Adams, 1825–1829

In addition to being losers of the popular vote, George W. Bush and John Quincy Adams share another distinction: they are the only presidential offspring to ascend to the office in their own right. While Bush's governmental experience was limited to two terms as Texas governor, Adams came to the office with an extremely distinguished resume. He had served as ambassador to the Netherlands, Prussia, Russia, and Great Britain; as a U.S. senator (1803–1808); and as secretary of state in the administration of his predecessor, James Monroe (1817–1825), in which he was primarily responsible for the famous "hands off America" doctrine that bears Monroe's name (Hecht 1972; Nagel 1997).

While Adams may have appeared to be the natural successor to Monroe, his candidacy for president in 1824 was swept up in the new democratic fervor and political controversy sweeping the nation as the so-called Era of Good Feelings came to a close (Wood 1992, 287–305). The Jeffersonian Democratic Republican Party had become meaningless in the absence of serious competition, and the nomination of its congressional caucus ("King Caucus") was no longer decisive, as the caucus nominee Treasury Secretary William Crawford of Georgia attracted opposition from Adams (Massachusetts), House Speaker Henry Clay of Kentucky, and General Andrew Jackson of Tennessee, hero of the 1815 battle of New Orleans and champion of the frontier and states rights against the federal government (Remini 1999, 99–117). Adams finished second behind Jackson in both the electoral vote (receiving eighty-four votes to Jackson's ninety-nine) and the popular vote (receiving 32 percent to Jackson's 43 percent), but since no candidate had gained a majority in the Electoral College, according to the Constitution the House of Representatives—with state delegations voting as units—had to choose the president from among the top three contenders: Jackson, Adams, and Crawford (who had forty-one electoral votes). Clay (with thirty-seven votes) had been eliminated, but in the House, the Speaker threw his decisive support to Adams, who won thirteen states to Jackson's seven and Crawford's four. Three days later it was announced that Adams would appoint Henry Clay to be his secretary of state (Milkis and Nelson 1999, 108–12).

Adam's move infuriated Jackson's supporters, who accused Clay and Adams of having made a "corrupt bargain" to deny the presidency to the popular favorite, Jackson (Remini 1999). Although Clay and Adams

both strenuously denied the accusation, Adams was never allowed to escape the controversy over his election, and the notion that a corrupt Washington political elite had robbed Jackson of the presidency only seemed to enhance popular enthusiasm for the general and his states' rights agenda.

The Jacksonians were further provoked when President Adams pursued an ambitious policy agenda utterly opposed to their objectives. The agenda was based on internal improvements by a vigorous federal government and was designed to promote economic growth and development of the West (Skowronek 1997, 110–27). Dogged by his election controversy and lacking political skills commensurate with his formidable intellect, Adams was unable to advance his legislative program. After the rampant Jacksonians took over Congress in 1826, his administration's agenda-setting capacity essentially ended (Milkis and Nelson 1999, 108–11; Hargreaves 1985), and he was easily defeated by Jackson in 1828. The circumstances of Adams's election undoubtedly undermined his authority as president from the start, and once in office Adams lacked the political ability or good fortune to ever escape the shadow of illegitimacy that hung over his presidency.

Rutherford B. Hayes, 1877–1881

In contrast to Adams, Hayes, while losing the popular vote to Democratic candidate Samuel J. Tilden, actually did win a majority in the Electoral College. He did so only after the House of Representatives intervened to resolve disputed electoral votes in his favor following another infamous political "deal" that had much more long-lasting ramifications for American politics than the so-called corrupt bargain of 1824.

Hayes was a typical Republican presidential nominee of the post–Civil War era. He had served as a major general during the war and as a congressman and three-term governor of his home state, Ohio, a decisive battleground in presidential elections during this period (Hoogenboom 1995; DeGregorio 1997, 279–91). Hayes also had a reputation as a reformer, endearing him to the Republican Party bosses who controlled party nominations at this time, because he was unassociated with the scandals that had marred the administration of incumbent Republican Ulysses S. Grant (Sproat 1968, 88–103). The Democrats selected another reformer, Governor Samuel J. Tilden of New York, conqueror of Tammany Hall and the notorious "Tweed Ring" in New York City, as their candidate. Tilden won the popular vote with a narrow but

decisive margin on election day (51 percent to Hayes's 48 percent), and he led Hayes in electoral votes (184 votes to Hayes's 165). But he remained one vote short of an Electoral College majority because of disputed election returns in four states: Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Oregon, the first three being former confederate states still occupied by federal forces. If Hayes could win all twenty electoral votes at stake in these disputed contests, he would win the Electoral College and the presidency by a vote of 185 to 184 (Mieckzkowski 2001, 63–64).

With the outcome in doubt, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives decided to create a committee of ten members of Congress and five Supreme Court justices to resolve the issue. Coincidentally, this commission had an 8–7 Republican majority, which just happened to resolve all the disputed states in favor of Hayes, thus giving Hayes the 185 electoral votes sufficient for victory. To overcome potential Democratic resistance and filibustering, the Republicans conceded that in exchange for allowing the election and inauguration of Hayes to proceed, federal troops would be withdrawn from the former confederate states and Reconstruction brought to an end, which duly came to pass after Hayes was inaugurated (Ayers 1992).

Having been elected in such circumstances, it is no surprise that Hayes' legitimacy as president was clouded—Democrats referred to him as "Rutherfraud B. Hayes" (Mieckzkowski 2001, 64). But no matter how cynical the deal making that led to his occupying the White House, he turned out to be serious in his commitment to civil service reform (Hoogenboom 1995). And this commitment set him on a collision course with the bosses in his party both in Congress (particularly the Senate) and back in the states and cities who relied on federal patronage and spoils to sustain their political machines. His first run-in with the Senate occurred when he refused to consult with Republican senators on cabinet nominations. He appointed a former confederate as postmaster general and Carl Schurz, the nation's leading civil-service reformer, as interior secretary—both key patronage positions (Sproat 1968, 100).

Hayes then proceeded to appoint an independent commission to investigate corruption in the New York federal customs house, where tariffs on imported goods (the main source of federal government revenue at the time) were collected. Hayes subsequently decided to remove the top three officials in the customs house, even though all three were important figures in New York Republican politics (including Chester A.

Arthur, who would himself be elected president in 1880 and succeeded the assassinated James A. Garfield as president the following year) (Milkis and Nelson, 1999, 173–76). The struggle over the New York customs house used up what little political capital Hayes possessed, and his administration achieved little else. Having alienated the party bosses, Hayes would not likely have been renominated in 1880 even had he wished to run for a second term.

For all the murkiness surrounding his election, Hayes did succeed in restoring some integrity to a federal government sullied by the scandals of the Grant administration and thereby dissipated some of the questions of legitimacy surrounding his election. In an era of limited federal government and a generally weak presidency, Hayes was not notably weaker than any of his contemporaries who occupied the office during this period and whose elections were uncontroversial.

Benjamin Harrison, 1889–1893

Like Hayes, Benjamin Harrison was a Republican president in an era of very limited presidential power. The so-called Gilded Age (1876–1896) was a period of intense party competition and extremely close presidential elections. In the five presidential elections from 1876 to 1892 presidential "winning" margins in the popular vote were: -3.1 percent, 0.1 percent, 0.2 percent, -0.9 percent, and 3.2 percent, respectively (see table 1.1). With the parties so closely matched and possessing an unprecedented capacity to mobilize the electorate, it is hardly surprising that half of the four instances in U.S. history of popular vote losers winning in the Electoral College took place during this period. It is also probably not entirely coincidental that both winners were Republicans. While the Democrats piled up popular votes in the South, more often than not Republican candidates eked out narrow margins in the key northern states heavy with electoral votes.

The Republican Congress elected in 1886 had blocked incumbent Democratic president Grover Cleveland's tariff proposals, rendering him highly vulnerable in his bid for reelection in 1888 (Milkis and Nelson 1999, 180–83). The Republican candidate—former Indiana senator Benjamin Harrison (1881–1887)—had not enjoyed a particularly distinguished political career up to that point, but he had a nearly ideal background and profile for a Republican presidential candidate of the period. He was the great grandson of Benjamin Harrison, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and the grandson of the ninth president,

William Henry Harrison. And he had served as a brigadier general under William Sherman during the Civil War. Harrison led a united Republican campaign against Cleveland on the tariff issue, which also stimulated a high level of support from the northeastern business community for the Republican ticket (Marcus 1971, 101–150). Although Cleveland secured a narrow popular vote plurality of 0.9 percent—ironically more than four times his winning margin in 1884—he lost the Electoral College vote 233–168 to Harrison primarily because he narrowly lost the thirty-six electoral votes of his home state of New York (Mieckzkowski 2001, 71–72).

Harrison was not as bedeviled by questions over his legitimacy as president as Adams and Hayes had been, perhaps because he held such a passive view of the presidential role and subordinated himself to Congress in terms of setting the national political agenda (Sievers 1968; Socolofsky and Spetter 1987). The archetypal Gilded Age president, Harrison was by and large content to sign the bills and dole out the federal patronage to party regulars. Indeed, the presidency appeared to be so ineffectual at this time that the issue of his legitimacy hardly seemed relevant, and real national political leadership lay in the hands of House Speaker Thomas B. Reed of Maine (Strahan 1998; Peters 1990, 52–91).

In the 1892 rematch between Harrison and Cleveland, again fought largely over the tariff issue, Cleveland won a comfortable Electoral College victory, 277–145–22 (the third candidate was Populist James Weaver) and a popular vote plurality over Harrison of over 3 percent, although Cleveland's winning percentage (46.1 percent) was lower than in 1888 (48.7 percent).

George W. Bush: A Minority President in the Modern Era

Perhaps the major difference between Bush's presidency and that of those who lost the popular vote during the nineteenth century is the vastly changed nature of the modern presidency in its scope and political power. A century of expanded federal government in the domestic sphere and the United States' rise to global superpower status have made a contemporary presidency along the lines of Hayes's or Harrison's not only impossible but inconceivable. The modern president is the lynchpin and dynamic element of the American system of government. The contemporary president is expected to claim an electoral mandate from the voters and use it to set the national policy agenda in

Washington (Ceaser 1979, 170–212). The president is the most visible symbol of the United States at home and abroad and is expected to display immediate and decisive leadership during national calamity or crisis. Of course, this power to deal with national emergencies—particularly in the foreign-policy sphere—was latent in the powers conceded to the president in the 1787 Constitution, but because the United States was a peripheral power for most of the nineteenth century, this potential went untapped. When the United States rose to global power and then superpower status in the twentieth century, the extent of the presidency's power became evident (McDonald 1994).

In the domestic sphere, presidential power remains more circumscribed, particularly by Congress's strong constitutional powers over the federal budget (Wildavsky 1975). The president is nevertheless expected to set the national agenda on the budget as with most other domestic political issues. Indeed, the president has almost come to resemble an institutionalized "charismatic leader" in Weberian terms, expected to render shots of democratic energy and adrenalin to a political system that is largely inert and incremental most of the time (Weber 1970, 245–52). The president roams the modern American political system like a "magnificent lion," to use Clinton Rossiter's colorful phrase (Rossiter 1957, 52). By contrast, Richard Neustadt's classic *Presidential Power* emphasizes the persisting constitutional constraints on presidential power in a separated system of government, even in the modern era (Neustadt 1990). Yet Neustadt's purpose is to demonstrate how presidents can effectively exercise their power, because he is convinced that the modern American political system absolutely requires strong and effective presidential leadership (Neustadt 1990, 152–63).

Following the failures of the Johnson, Nixon, and Carter presidencies, a recurring theme in presidential scholarship has been the growing gap between the actual powers of the presidency and public expectations—as well as the president's—about what the holder of the office can realistically achieve (Lowi 1985). At least since the time of Woodrow Wilson—who first thoroughly articulated the theory—presidents have claimed that their election constitutes a "mandate," that is, an expression of the will of the American public regarding the course of public policy. Moreover, according to this view, as the sole nationally elected officeholder, the president is best placed to interpret and shape that popular will once in office (Tulis 2003). This in turn has given rise to an increasingly "plebiscitary" presidency that constantly campaigns for public sup-

port or "mandates" against the other branches of the system: a tendency that, some scholars have argued, undermines the spirit and the authority of the Constitution and the American system of separated government (Lowi 1985; Dahl 1990; Kernell 1997).

One implication of enhanced presidential power contingent on popular support is that the authority of a contemporary president elected after losing the national popular vote might well be seriously undercut from the beginning of the president's administration, with potentially deleterious consequences for a governmental process that has become so dependent on presidential power and authority. In short, how can a president who fails to win the national popular vote claim any kind of mandate or authority to advocate policy change?

The Bush administration set out to deal with this problem by denying its existence. Not wishing to concede the legitimacy issue and be on the defensive from the start, his administration simply proceeded as if it had a mandate and began to advance a highly conservative Republican policy agenda (Frum 2003a,b). Doing so appears to have been an inspired political move, and the idea of presidential leadership is so endemic to the modern American political process that the circumstances of Bush's election appear to have had little long-term relevance to voters outside the ranks of hardcore Democrats.

In fact, Bush was able to implement a significant $1.3 trillion tax cut with the support of several Senate Democrats, although they were largely able to block the Bush policy agenda on other domestic issues in the spring and summer of 2001, particularly after the Democrats regained control of the Senate in May 2001 following the defection of Vermont Republican James Jeffords. While the conservative Bush strategy might have alienated moderates like Jeffords, it did give direction and energy to his presidency and enabled him to solidify his support among the conservative Republican base, which had become estranged from his father's administration prior to the 1992 election (Keller 2003a). Before September 11, then, it appeared that Bush would be a highly partisan Republican president and that his administration would be characterized by the legislative gridlock and ideological partisan warfare typical of American politics at the end of the twentieth century. But even with his legitimacy still questioned by Democrats, it was by no means obvious that Bush would lose this struggle if he chose his issues carefully and kept his base mobilized (Brownstein 2002).

September 11 tilted everything in favor of the president. The attacks

on New York and Washington demanded a firm presidential response, and Bush provided it with the successful American military operation against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Remaining doubts about Bush's legitimacy faded into the background, and, since a national security crisis is the primary raison d'etre for the presidency, the public rallied behind him (Cook 2001). America's vulnerability to national security crises since becoming a global superpower has given modern presidents (regardless of how they got to the White House) a potential political advantage denied to most of their nineteenth-century predecessors. There were no comparable crises on which Adams, Hayes, or Harrison, for example, might have capitalized politically.

Bush parlayed the effectiveness of his response to September 11 to a surprise victory for his party in the 2002 midterm elections, and the Republicans regained control of the Senate and strengthened their grip on the House. Following the election, Bush submitted another huge tax cut proposal ($726 billion) to the new Congress (Brownstein 2003). The president ended up getting only $326 billion in tax reductions from Congress in May 2003, but he could still claim a success in achieving another substantial federal tax reduction (Ota 2003a). In April 2003 Bush, in defiance of several of America's traditional allies and the United Nations Security Council, led the United States into a successful "preemptive war" against Saddam Hussein's Iraq (McManus 2003): a new foreign policy doctrine that surely implies another dramatic increase in presidential power and initiative.

In the modern era, where "democracy" has an even stronger place in American political culture than it did a century ago and the presidency has become the most powerful branch of the federal government, one might have assumed that one instance of a popular vote loser securing the presidency would bring about the fairly immediate demise of the Electoral College in favor of direct popular election of the president. In the aftermath of the 2000 election, however, there has been remarkably little popular momentum for this radical but obvious solution to the constitutional problem. Perhaps the concentration of the antagonists and the media on the electoral shenanigans in Florida in November 2000 distracted public attention from the broader constitutional issue. It is also apparent, however, that the presidency has become so integral to American government and society, and the demand for effective presidential action in response to crises at home and abroad is so ubiquitous, that contemporary America cannot afford to indulge in prolonged un-

certainty over the electoral legitimacy of the chief executive and commander-in-chief.

The extent of presidential power today has given Bush an advantage in the struggle to establish himself as a legitimate president that was denied to his three predecessors who came to office in similar political predicaments, and his administration appears to be fully aware of this fact. Even prior to the tragic events of September 11 Bush was using the power and authority of the office with some success to establish a governing "mandate." The ongoing crisis atmosphere at home and overseas since that date, has, of course, elevated his authority to an even higher plane and rendered moot any lingering doubts about his legitimacy. Like all modern presidents, however, Bush remains vulnerable to the "expectations gap" discussed earlier. Having raised public hopes concerning the effectiveness of pre-emptive war in neutralizing the dangers from international terrorism and rogue states, as well as large tax cuts as the remedy for the sluggish domestic economy, the administration needs to produce substantive results on both fronts or face the prospect of losing legitimacy from another and more electorally significant direction—policy failure.

Bush and "Political Time"

Dissatisfied with analyses that focus on individual presidential characteristics such as political skill, character, or emotional intelligence (Neustadt 1990; Barber 1992; Greenstein 2000) or that emphasize the gulf between the powers of the contemporary presidency and that of the nineteenth century, Stephen Skowronek has suggested that presidents should be viewed from the perspective of their place in the development of a specific political regime, or what he refers to as "political time" (Skowronek 1993; 2003). These regimes reflect the balance of power between political forces during a particular period, define the roles of political institutions, and set the national policy agenda. Skowronek classifies presidencies as those of "reconstruction" (founding a regime); "articulation" (maintaining the regime); or "disjunction" (signaling the end of a regime and beginning the transition to a new one). He also has a fourth category, "preemption," where peculiar short-term circumstances might lead to the election of a president from outside the regime, though one who is ultimately unable to change it substantially (Skowronek 1997, 3–58).

Are there any early indications where the presidency of George W. Bush might be placed according to this scheme? If we take Ronald Reagan as the founder of the conservative Republican regime beginning in 1980, then the most obvious way to classify Bush's presidency is "orthodox innovation" or "articulation" (Skowronek 2003, 153–54). Bush has made no secret of his admiration for Reagan and adherence to Reaganite values of a smaller federal government, major tax cuts to stimulate growth, social conservatism, and "standing tall" in defense of American interests abroad. Indeed, it appears that Reagan has been more of an ideological and political model for Bush than is his own father, whose electoral defeat in 1992 helped instigate the son's political career, and whose alleged mistakes in office he has striven to avoid (Keller 2003a; Nagourney 2003a). Of course, as the elder Bush demonstrated, a presidency of articulation—or what Skowronek refers to as the "faithful son" (Skowronek 1997, 430)—does not guarantee political or electoral success, particularly if the president is being forced by the exigencies of political time into a role contrary to his personal political inclinations, as was the case with the first President Bush (Parmet 1997). The upshot for the elder Bush was a presidency torn between moderate instincts harking back to the New Deal era and the need to conciliate the new conservative base of the Republican party created by Reagan. In the end George H. W. Bush lost the enthusiasm of the base with his support for tax increases to deal with the deficit and then overcompensated by sounding shrilly and inauthentically conservative in his failed 1992 reelection campaign against the agile Democratic preemptor Bill Clinton and populist outsider H. Ross Perot (Frum 1994).

If the younger Bush appears most apt for the role of articulator, however, his place in the political regime is not ultimately in his own hands. While preceding political regimes have been of at least thirty years duration, Skowronek has also spoken of the waning of political time, due to wider changes in the American political universe, such as the decline of traditional party loyalties and the rise of the mass communications media as the primary political intermediary institutions in the modern era. As a result, politics is more fluid, political regimes less durable, and under the greater power of short-term forces, preemptive politics—à la Clinton—becomes more prevalent (Skowronek 1997, 49–58). If the conservative Republican regime has exhausted itself intellectually and its nostrums seem irrelevant to the changed circumstances of the nation at

home or abroad, then Bush also might find himself as a president of "disjunction" with a failed presidency representing the last gasp of a dying political regime. The end of the Cold War that was so integral to the Reagan regime certainly appeared to have eroded the Republican grip on the presidency during the 1990s. And Bush's own slender and contentious election victory in 2000 by comparison with the Republican landslides of the 1980s might be adduced as additional evidence for regime decay. Finally, if the Bush administration tax cuts send the U.S. economy into long-term deficit and recession, and his post–September 11 foreign policy doctrine of "preemptive war" against rogue states leaves America isolated internationally, still vulnerable to international terrorism, and enmeshed in civil strife in Iraq, then defeat in 2004 would likely bring about the final demise of the post-1980 conservative Republican political regime.

But it is obviously too soon to pronounce the end of the "Reagan era," and there is compelling evidence for an alternative conclusion. The Republican majorities in Congress since 1995 after over half a century of largely minority party status hardly indicate the political demise of conservative Republicanism. Moreover, Bush's politics of orthodox innovation—Reagan-style tax cuts and social conservatism tempered by "compassionate conservativism" on issues like Medicare coverage of prescription drugs—are intended to bring new constituencies such as seniors and Hispanics into the Republican electoral coalition. Similarly, Bush's preemptive war doctrine may also provide an effective substitute for "standing tall" against the Soviets during the Cold War as a new conservative Republican national security policy. Thus Bush's articulation and innovation may actually succeed in reinvigorating the precarious regime (certainly the conservative Republican Party base is more energized behind him than it ever was behind his father), and the Republican successes in the 2002 midterm elections may indicate that these tactics are working, at least to some extent.

The Skowronek framework is useful in placing the Bush presidency in historical perspective, but as yet we cannot definitively answer whether he is a Theodore Roosevelt (an effective articulator and innovator) or a Herbert Hoover (a classic disjunctive leader). Skowronek's allusion to the "waning" of political time and rise of preemptive politics in recent times might also shed some light on the factors underlying the volatile and bitter partisan conflict of the past decade in American poli-

tics. The rise of George W. Bush and his conduct of the presidency also needs to be placed in the context of this changed American political environment.

A Partisan President in a Partisan Era

Bush's presidency is taking place during one of the most partisan periods in American history. In fact, contemporary American politics is regularly compared to the Gilded Age (1876–1896): the period between the Civil War and the Progressive Era when party loyalties were strongest, party machines mobilized unprecedented numbers of voters to go to the polls, and the major political parties were extremely evenly matched nationally, as evidenced by the exceedingly close presidential contests of the period (Silbey 1991). Most of the twentieth century has been characterized by party decline, and political scientists and historians have well documented the erosion of the party machines, the erosion of party loyalty in Congress, the rise of the primary system for choosing presidential candidates, and the loosening of party ties among voters (Burnham 1982; McGerr 1986; Wattenberg 1984).

The major parties were at their nadir from 1952 to 1980, when they appeared to be irrelevant to the dominant concerns of the country such as civil rights and the Vietnam War (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979). The civil rights revolution and the political turmoil of the 1960s, however, also generated a gradual realignment of electoral forces so that the two major parties gradually became ideologically homogeneous with particular reference to issues involving cultural cleavages, such as abortion, the relationship of church and state, affirmative action, gun control, the environment, and gay and lesbian rights. With the dramatic erosion in the numbers of "liberal northern Republicans" and "southern conservative Democrats," party loyalty rates in Congress have risen dramatically, and the two congressional parties have strengthened their leadership in an effort to implement a partisan policy agenda (Rohde 1991; Sinclair 1995). This process began under Democratic House Speakers Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill and Jim Wright and continued under the Republican House majority led by Speaker Newt Gingrich (Fenno 1997). While this development has been less evident in the Senate, the movement toward greater party loyalty and interparty acrimony has also characterized that chamber (Rae and Campbell 2001).

Much of the driving force for this new partisan politics in Congress

lies in the electoral process. Most congressional districts are drawn to favor one or other major party and thus the decisive contest becomes the primary election where ideologically oriented party activists have disproportionate influence due to low voter turnout (Burden 2001). Single-issue and ideological groups aligned with the major parties increasingly provide the funds, infrastructure, personnel, and electoral base for each of the major parties in most areas of the country (Schier 2000). In presidential primary elections the same rules apply although somewhat mitigated by the higher turnout of independents in early presidential primaries such as New Hampshire. It is still generally the case, however, that a presidential candidate who is seriously "out of sync" with the activist base of his or her party is highly unlikely to be nominated in today's political environment.

Party competition in the United States today has become not only increasingly shrill but also remarkably evenly balanced of late. The Republican dominance of the presidency and the Democratic control of Congress that prevailed for most of the 1952–1992 period have been replaced by competitiveness at all levels since the early 1990s. Margins of victory have been slight and tenuous, and elections have increasingly become a game of mobilization—getting one's own faithful troops to the polls—rather than a battle for the broad center ground of American politics (Schier 2000). And while the number of "ticket-splitting" voters have declined from the high rates of the 1970s, there were still enough of them to lead to situations of divided government with different parties controlling the presidency and at least one chamber of Congress, for all but a few months in the 1995–2002 period (Jacobson 2000). From the 1950s to the mid-1970s, the congressional parties were so amorphous and broad that divided government could be mitigated by cross-party coalitions—such as the one that passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act. By contrast, the congressional parties of today are so polarized and ideologically homogeneous, and the margin of control is so slight, that there is little incentive for cooperation on either side. Thus the last six years of the Clinton presidency were characterized by bitter partisan warfare, leading to a shutdown of the federal government in the winter of 1995–1996 and the impeachment of the president over the Lewinsky affair by the Republican House in December 1998 (Rae 1998; Rae and Campbell 2003).

As has already been noted, the 2000 presidential election was characteristic of the preceding decade: exceedingly close and exceedingly

partisan, with a highly controversial aftermath in Florida that left the parties more embittered and polarized than ever. George W. Bush's rise to the presidency took place within the context of this new polarized politics. Conservative activists who dominate the Republican Party needed a fresh face who was ideologically sound enough to enthuse the Republican base but would not frighten independent voters. Bush, who had pioneered a "compassionate conservatism" as governor of Texas, seemed to fit the bill perfectly, and he became the clear Republican frontrunner early in the 2000 nominating campaign by securing the necessary money, endorsements, and activists from the party base (Ceaser and Busch 2001, 49–76). The only serious challenge to Bush came from the maverick Arizona senator and Vietnam War hero John McCain. On most issues the Arizonan's policy positions were akin to Bush's, but McCain emphasized his differences on two issues—campaign finance reform and putting a balanced federal budget ahead of big tax cuts (2001, 77–107). McCain enjoyed some successes in early primaries largely due to the help of Independents and Democrats in states where they could vote in the Republican presidential primary, but the more he courted them by emphasizing his differences with Bush, the more he alienated the conservative Republican base that held the key to the nomination, and in the end Bush easily overwhelmed him in the primaries on Super Tuesday 2000 (Mayer 2001, 34–37).

For the remainder of the 2000 campaign season, Bush did nothing to distance himself from conservative Republicans. While electoral strategy might have dictated the choice of a northeastern moderate as his vice-presidential running mate, Bush instead chose a reliable Republican conservative, former Congressman and Defense Secretary Richard Cheney (Ceaser and Busch 2001, 137–41). The risk of estranging the Republican base by choosing a running mate with deviating positions on one or two major issues (such as abortion) was too great in an age when electoral success has become so contingent on ideological mobilization. Bush's gestures toward the center in the 2000 campaign were mainly cosmetic and rhetorical—such as the staging of the anodyne 2000 Republican convention—and at no point did he make a point of distancing himself publicly from a major conservative position. However, in an effort to reach out to Independents and Democrats, the Bush campaign did devote more attention to some traditionally Democratic issues such as education (Ceaser and Busch 2001, 116–17).

Governing as a partisan president in a partisan era when your party

has only a tenuous control over Congress—and even that was forfeited after the Jeffords defection and the Senate switch to Democratic control—is a skill that requires some degree of political dexterity. Clinton demonstrated how it might be done in the last six years of his presidency through the agile use of the "triangulation" strategy pioneered by his 1996 reelection strategist, Dick Morris. The trick here was to do enough to keep the devoted loyalty of your own party's core voters while making strategic departures on certain selected issues—such as the 1996 welfare reform and the Defense of Marriage Act—calculated to appeal to centrist and more moderate Republican voters (Rae 2000).

Even so deft a politician as Clinton was only able to make "triangulation" work intermittently, and, as the events of 1998 proved, it did nothing to reduce the intense Republican hostility toward him. Yet as Skowronek has also noted, this strategy of preemption might provide a more effective means of presidential governance in a political universe where the velocity of political information and the inability of parties to mobilize voters beyond the hard-core ideologues has eroded the natural "life cycle" of political regimes and the constraints of "political time" (Skowronek 1997, 442–46).

Since Bush is evidently not a "preemptive" president in the Clinton mould and his personal authority has clearly benefited from his response to September 11, he has not been required to demonstrate the same degree of political agility. Yet while Bush's main political strategist, Karl Rove, publicly eschewed the idea of a Republican version of "triangulation" (Crabtree 2003), the Bush White House has at least been pursuing a strategy that can be described as "base plus": seeking to reach out to key Democratic constituencies while fortifying the GOP's conservative base. As already mentioned, during most of the first six months of Bush's presidency, he adhered to a clear conservative line but strove to avoid a rhetorical tone that might disconcert more moderate voters, and he continued to emphasize his reform proposals on traditionally Democratic issues such as education and health care (Brownstein 2002). On the highly controversial issue of stem-cell research, for example, Bush found a position that simultaneously pleased most Republican conservatives and public opinion more generally. The dominance of national security issues after September 11 also enabled Bush to move the national political debate to new terrain where it was easier to accommodate both Republican conservatives and the political center (Frum 2003a,b). Democrats also found it extremely hard to oppose the presi-

dent vigorously in such an ongoing crisis atmosphere. This was demonstrated dramatically in the 2002 congressional elections when Democratic senators and Senate candidates suffered at the polls after the president and the Republicans had attacked them for failing to support legislation establishing the new Homeland Security Department (Nather and Cochran 2002).

Bush has not departed from a strict conservative Republican agenda in terms of budget policy, abortion, affirmative action, or in the highly vexed areas of court appointments, but his loyalty to the Republican base diminishes the probability of debilitating intraparty challenges in 2004 (Nagourney 2003a). At the same time he has made inroads into the political center by choosing his issues and his rhetoric carefully (as in his address in August 2001 on stem-cell research) and practicing his own version of "triangulation" on Democratic issues like education and prescription drugs. And while the word *triangulation* was singularly absent from the vocabulary of the Bush White House, the president earned plaudits for his political astuteness from the architect of the practice, Dick Morris (Morris 2003). September 11 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, however, have also made it easier for Bush to govern in a partisan era since that catastrophic event and its aftermath have focused political debate on an area—national security—where the president has all the advantages.

In a national crisis, American presidents almost inevitably rise to heroic status (at least temporarily) in the eyes of the American public because they are expected to take on the enemy, win, and "save the nation." George W. Bush has found that the mantle of defender of the nation has enabled him to transcend polarized ideological party politics without conceding any substantial ideological territory to his political opponents in a highly partisan era characterized by narrow and electorally vulnerable presidential and congressional majorities. The strategy is contingent, however, on his continued ability to "deliver the goods," in terms of economic recovery and the global war that Bush himself has declared against terrorism and rogue states. A major setback in these endeavors would surely leave his presidency vulnerable to Democratic preemption in 2004.