

approaches to reform, but whether there are discernible patterns in reform over time and how these patterns explain the success or failure of improvement. Although there are many ways to track the history of reform—through administrative regulations, blue-ribbon commissions, executive orders, budget circulars, job descriptions, organizational charts, congressional committee hearings, articles in the *Public Administration Review*, and so forth—this article is based on a careful reading of major administrative reform statutes enacted between 1945 and 2002.¹

Not only are statutes easier to identify and track, they tend to be much more durable over time, in part because they spawn offspring through amendments

and expansions in future sessions of Congress. Without naively suggesting that they remain relevant or even enforceable in perpetuity, formal statutes do endure for a moment or two across the boundaries of administrations. While the Clinton administration's heavily promoted National Performance Review gathers dust in an aptly named "cybercemetery" at the University of North Texas,² its most significant reform statute, the Acquisition Streamlining Act of 1994, remains alive and mostly well in procurement offices across government (Kelman 2005).

In all, Congress enacted 177 major reform statutes in the 68 years covered by this study.³ Table 13.2 shows the number of major reform statutes enacted each year and the accumulation over time.

Table 13.2 Cumulative Frequency of Reform, 1945–2002

Year	Number of Statutes Enacted	Cumulative Percentage	Year	Number of Statutes Enacted	Cumulative Percentage
1945	3	1.7	1974	13	41.8
1946	3	3.4	1975	1	42.4
1947	2	4.5	1976	2	43.5
1948	0	4.5	1977	4	45.8
1949	5	7.3	1978	7	49.7
1950	3	9.0	1979	1	50.3
1951	1	9.6	1980	6	53.7
1952	1	10.2	1981	1	54.2
1953	4	12.4	1982	4	56.5
1954	0	12.4	1983	1	57.1
1955	0	12.4	1984	3	58.8
1956	1	13.0	1985	2	59.9
1957	1	13.6	1986	8	64.4
1958	4	15.8	1987	2	65.5
1959	0	15.8	1988	10	71.2
1960	0	15.8	1989	4	73.4
1961	5	18.6	1990	4	75.7
1962	3	20.3	1991	0	75.7
1963	0	20.3	1992	3	77.4
1964	3	22.0	1993	3	79.1
1965	1	22.6	1994	4	81.4
1966	4	24.6	1995	5	84.2
1967	2	26.0	1996	8	88.7
1968	0	26.0	1997	4	91.0
1969	1	26.6	1998	8	95.5
1970	7	30.5	2000	5	98.3
1971	1	31.1	2001	1	98.9
1972	2	32.2	2002	2	100
1973	4	34.5			

N = 177

The Pace of Reform

Table 13.2 clearly shows the quickening pace of reform over time. It took Congress 28 years to enact the first third of the 177 statutes but just 16 years to produce the second third and 14 years to produce the final third. Divided in political time by Watergate and President Richard Nixon's resignation, it took Congress 28 years to produce the first 61 reform statutes, averaging two a year, and another 30 years to produce the next 116, averaging almost four per year. By decade, the averages increased from 2.2 per year in 1945–54 and 1.7 in 1955–64 to 3.5 in 1974–85, 4.0 in 1985–94, and 4.1 in 1995–2002.

Even as the pace of reform has accelerated, so has the complexity of individual reform statutes, at least as measured by the number of separate provisions within each act that represent a different philosophy such as war on waste and scientific management. Between 1945 and 1994, for example, 68 percent of major reform statutes contained just one philosophy compared with just 46 percent from 1995 to 2002. War on waste is the most frequent companion of other reforms, while watchful eye the most likely to be enacted alone.

If the provisions representing each philosophy within a given law are counted as discrete reforms, the average number of reforms per year rose from 3.5 in 1945–54 to 5.6 in 1985–94 and 6.7 in 1995–2002, which suggests continued acceleration, not leveling off. Simply put, the time between today's reform and tomorrow's has closed to months, not years—there were 13 years before Watergate during which Congress enacted either one or zero reform statutes, and just six after.

It is not yet clear whether this recent increase in complexity is the product of Republican control of Congress because the only years of Republican control

happen to have occurred during the same decade as the increased complexity. What is clear is that the complexity is not the result of unified government led by Democrats, when the percentage of one-philosophy statutes rested at 68 percent, or divided government between Republican presidents and either Democratic or split-party control of Congress, when the percentage of one-philosophy statutes stood at 62 percent.

Table 13.2 also shows five major spikes in reform activity, the first associated with the implementation of the first Hoover Commission's agenda in 1949; the second in 1969, the first year of Nixon's presidency, during which there was a mix of reorganization and financial reforms; the third in 1974, with a range of watchful eye reforms prompted by Nixon's resignation; the fourth in 1986 and 1988, with a mix of Reagan administration war on waste statutes and streamlining reforms; and the fifth in 1996 and 1998, with a combination of Clinton administration reinventing government programs and a mix of regulatory reform and reorganizations. Together, these spikes covered less than a tenth of the time covered by the analysis but produced more than a third of the statutes. Even here, however, one sees the acceleration of reform—two of the spike years occurred before Watergate and four occurred after.

It is useful to note that the recent acceleration in reform activity has occurred during a period when overall congressional action has slowed considerably. At least measured by statutory output, Congress has produced less legislation over the past two decades than at any point since the end of World War II. Even though they are spending more time in session and taking more recorded votes, members are introducing fewer bills and passing fewer laws. As we shall see, the market for spending legislation and new programs may have collapsed somewhat in the wake of budget

Table 13.3 Patterns in Reform Philosophy by Decade, 1945–2002 (percentages)

	1945–54	1955–64	1965–74	1975–84	1985–94	1995–2002
Scientific management	82	82	43	30	18	39
War on waste	9	0	3	37	28	21
Watchful eye	9	12	29	27	33	21
Liberation management	0	6	26	7	23	18

N = 177

caps and tax cuts, but the market for administrative reform has grown stronger.

It is also useful to note that the federal government is not alone in its high rate of reform. The most recent survey by Bain & Company (Rigby 2005) shows that private firms used 13 different management reforms in 2004, and my own research on the nonprofit sector shows a similar level of change (Light 2004). All three sectors are plagued by a lack of evidence-based research on which reforms work under which circumstances.

The Mix of Reform

As the pace of reform has increased, so has the mix of potentially competing reform philosophies and the amount of process reform, including changes in rule-making systems, personnel management, financial controls, and administrative procedures. As I have already noted, major reform legislation has become more complex over time, perhaps suggesting that reform must carry more philosophies to assure enactment. Moreover, as noted earlier, adding a war on waste provision such as an employment ceiling or promised dollar savings may have become the price of passage for other reform.

Scientific management was the dominant philosophy of administrative reform from the 1930s to the 1960s, whereas the war on waste, watchful eye, and liberation management have been ascendant since then. Congress and presidents built the basic structure of the modern administrative state during the first period, creating one department and agency after another to administer the New Deal and the Great Society. Once created, the process reforms followed, whether in the form of new administrative systems, attacks on bureaucratic waste, or efforts to give managers and employees greater space to do their work through what Lois Recascino Wise (2002) calls the pursuit of social equity (e.g., pay comparability), democratization (e.g., labor-management partnerships), and humanization (e.g., job enrichment and employee empowerment). The pattern suggests a “field of dreams” effect—that is, if Congress and the president build it, process reforms will come. Table 13.3 shows the rise and fall and rise again of the four reform philosophies from 1945 to 2002.⁴

Scientific management did not disappear entirely from the reform agenda, of course. Indeed, it supplied 33 (28 percent) of the 116 major post-Watergate reform statutes. But it clearly had to share the reform agenda with process reforms, including a long list of war on waste statutes authored during the first and second terms of the Reagan administration, the watchful eye reforms boosted to the agenda after Watergate, and the liberation management reforms authored under the aegis of reinventing government. Although the proportion of reform statutes associated with scientific management decreased with time, its influence continued and came back forcefully with reorganizations at the Internal Revenue Service, Food and Drug Administration, and Amtrak and the creation of the Transportation Security Administration and the Department of Homeland Security. It also was the primary philosophy that underpinned new rules governing information management under the Information Technology Reform Act of 1996.

The changing mix of reform is expressed in other characteristics of the 177 reform statutes. The percentage of statutes that clearly focused on a specific process of government, such as personnel, financial management, information management, and so forth, increased from 41 percent in 1945–54 to 67 percent in 1975–84, 73 percent in 1985–94, and 88 percent in 1995–2002. Scientific management played a role in creating strict rules governing some of these processes, of course, but found dwindling outlets for the creation of new units of government until September 11 and the call for new agencies to wage the war on terrorism.

From 1945 to 2002, the nature of compliance changed dramatically, largely because scientific management tends to emphasize providing the basic structures and capacity for government to work, whereas the war on waste and watchful eye place their faith in compliance with strict rules of accountability. Despite the rise of liberation management and its focus on giving managers and employees greater freedom, compliance accountability rose from just 32 percent of statutes in 1945–54 to 57 percent in 1974–85, with statutes such as the Ethics in Government Act; to 53 percent in 1985–94, with the expansion of existing statutes such as the Freedom of Information Act; and to 64 percent in 1995–2002, with passage of a raft