

The increased activity may have been driven partly by public disquiet, but there has always been a strong link between congressional involvement and a distrusting approach to administrative reform. In 1945–54, 56 percent of congressionally initiated reforms were coded as distrusting toward government compared with just 31 percent of presidentially initiated ideas during the decade.

Congressional preferences for compliance accountability show a much stronger imprint of public distrust. In 1945–54, just 33 percent of the 110 congressionally initiated reforms carried a compliance or rules-based approach to accountability. The percentages rose to 56 percent in 1965–74 and 72 percent in 1975–84, dropped back to 60 percent in 1985–94, then rose again to 69 percent in 1995–2002.

The Presidential Retreat

Public distrust also had an impact on the presidential reform agenda. In the three decades before Watergate, only 31 percent, 7 percent, and 24 percent of presidentially initiated statutes, respectively, were coded as distrusting; in the three decades after, the percentages rose to 58 percent in 1975–84, 57 percent in 1985–94, and 75 percent in 1995–2002. Just 20 percent of statutes that came before Watergate were coded as distrusting, whereas the percentage jumped to 58 percent in the decades after. As presidents became less active in generating reform ideas, they became more distrusting.

What did not change was the natural presidential aversion to compliance-based accountability. Altogether, just 20 percent of the 67 presidentially initiated statutes carried a compliance orientation, and the percentage never exceeded 33 percent in any decade.

Interesting though they may be, these trends in presidential preferences are far less important than the dramatic decline in presidential participation in statute-based administrative reform. It could be that presidents have simply given up on legislative solutions to administrative tasks, turning more to executive orders and memoranda, blue-ribbon commissions, task forces, management agendas, and even reinvention labs (Thompson and Ingraham 1996) to accomplish their ends. What such vehicles lack in durability, they may more than make up for in pliability.

Yet there is also ample evidence that presidents may be participating less because they no longer have the capacity or interest to develop the kinds of statutes that emerged in this study. None of the recent reorganizations in homeland security came from the White House, for example, nor did most of the major process reforms, such as the Chief Financial Officer Act, Government Performance and Results Act, or Information Technology Reform Act (better known as the Clinger-Cohen Act, in honor of its House and Senate cosponsors). Notwithstanding the handful of statutes associated with reinventing government, presidents have mostly relied on Congress and the Government Accountability Office to set the reform agenda.

Relying on Congress as the engine of reform may be the best that presidents can do to generate new ideas or to resist congressional involvement given the weakening of their own ability to set the reform agenda through the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). This decline has been well documented in *PAR*'s pages by scholars such as Ronald C. Moe (1990, 1994), who summarized the state of the "M" in OMB in 1999 before the House Government Reform Committee:

The contemporary presidency has been steadily losing its capacity to lead the executive branch on a day-to-day basis, in large measure because of the absence of a supportive institutional presence to project and protect the President's interests in government operations. . . . It is not enough for management purposes to rely on the budget process with its short-term deadlines and spending biases. Nor can ad-hoc groups tied to some unit without the Executive Office . . . substitute for permanent management leadership, properly defined and understood (1999, 9).

This is not to suggest that presidents are incapable of crafting a reform agenda or unable to participate in the reform process, as the Bush administration did in expanding the homeland security merger to include more agencies. However, it does suggest that presidents cannot go very deep in building such agendas, nor can they mount particularly effective counterarguments to the rising flow of reform from Congress.

Table 13.5 Predictors of Reform Philosophy, 1945–2002

Condition	Presence of Each Reform Philosophy under Each Condition (percentage and chi-square)			
	Scientific management	War on waste	Watchful eye	Liberation management
Watergate: Before, after	71%, 28% 28.8***	5%, 25% 10.9***	13%, 29% 5.8*	12%, 17% 1.0
Party control of Congress: Republican, Democratic	47%, 46% 0.03	18%, 10% 1.9	18%, 27% 1.0	16%, 18% 0.06
Party control of presidency: Republican, Democratic	37%, 48% 2.2	21%, 15% 0.9	28%, 20% 1.6	14%, 17% 0.2
Party control of government: Unified, divided	59%, 34% 10.1***	11%, 22% 3.7**	17%, 28% 2.6	14%, 16% 0.16
Origin of ideas: President, Congress	59%, 27% 29.1***	13%, 21% 1.6	2%, 27% 29.5***	16%, 15% 0.1
Blue-ribbon commission involvement: No, yes	37%, 83% 17.0***	4%, 20% 3.4*	2%, 27% 8.2***	13%, 16% 0.1

N = 177

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Explaining the Choice of Reform

These institutional preferences help to explain at least some of the variation in the tides of reform over the past 60 years. As the percentages in Table 13.5 show, Watergate, the source of ideas, and links to blue-ribbon commission are the strongest explanations for the rise or fall of a particular philosophy of reform.

The statistics confirm three points. First, presidents have been the source of most scientific management reform—they are the Kevin Costners of their fields of dreams—whereas Congress has been the source of most watchful eye statutes. Second, Watergate marked a critical dividing line in three of the four reform philosophies: It diminished scientific management and intensified both war on waste and watchful eye statutes. Third, divided government shows a strong relationship with watchful eye—separation of powers, not partisan politics, is the significant driver.

Table 13.5 also shows a strong relationship between blue-ribbon commission and both scientific management and war on waste. Under pressure to fix a problem, blue-ribbon commissions either recommend new structure, as the Hart-Rudman Commission on U.S. Security in the 21st Century and the 9/11 Commission did, or enunciate new rules to reduce

government waste, as the Grace Commission and the Packard Commission on Defense Procurement did. As the percentages suggest, commissions almost never suggest more sunshine and relaxation.

Finally, Table 13.5 offers little help in explaining the rise and fall of liberation management, largely because it peaked between the beginning of the Nixon administration and the end of Clinton's term. As a result, liberation management rose both before and after Watergate, when Congress was controlled by Democrats and Republicans, when the White House was occupied by Democrats and Republicans, and when the two branches were unified (1993–94) and divided (1969–74, 1995–2000).

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Assessing the Impact of Reform

The crucial measure missing from the tides of reform database is the extent to which a given statute worked. Has the Freedom of Information Act produced greater access or just more secrets? Has the Government Performance and Results Act generated greater performance or just more internal paperwork? Has the