

# Emerging From the Shadow: The Vice Presidency in the Modern Era

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Numerous studies exist in political science that attempt to fully understand the workings of the presidency. In many respects these seminal studies have contributed greatly to our understanding of the presidency and its evolution over time. They have critically assessed the president's formal and informal powers, examined the personality of particular presidents, written about the complex relations that exist between the president and Congress, and evaluated presidential performance in domestic and foreign affairs. As thorough and groundbreaking as these studies of the presidency have been, many have forgotten that the presidency consists of more than just one man; rather, it is an institution. Therefore, studies that attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the presidency must move beyond the president and his or her powers and analyze the varying entities that comprise the institution.

One aspect of presidential research that has received scant coverage and attention is the vice presidency. The vice presidency in recent years has become a critical component in the execution of presidential duties. Scholars such as Joel Goldstein, Paul Light and Jody

Baumgartner have advanced our understanding of the vice presidency beyond the insignificant office it once was. As many are aware, the vice presidency has often been derided as inconsequential. Our nation's first vice president, John Adams stated, "My country in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived." Similarly, John Nance Garner, vice president to Franklin D. Roosevelt, commented that the vice presidency was "not worth a bucket of warm piss". These descriptions fail to accurately depict the nature of it as a modern institution. Thanks to the precedents established by a host of vice presidents and presidents, the vice presidency has become an integral component of the presidency.

As a result of this newfound interest in the vice presidency and its unique position within the executive, my dissertation attempts to uncover the nature of the modern vice presidency in the post-Watergate era. My research begins with Nelson Rockefeller's vice presidency. While many attribute the modern vice presidency to Walter Mondale, Nelson Rockefeller was the first to take an active role in domestic politics. President Ford asked Rockefeller to head the Domestic Policy Council. In other words, the White House's complete domestic policy agenda was organized and run by the vice president. Rockefeller was well suited for the position. As one who was often quoted as saying that he "never wanted to be vice president of anything," Rockefeller undertook each task as vice president with the same vigor and intensity regardless of whether it was something as important as the Domestic Policy Council or attending a small Republican gathering in the Midwest. Therefore, with the agreement reached between President Ford and Vice President Rockefeller, the vice presidency was transformed from an office with little obligation to one that became an integral player in the day-to-day activities of the White House.

My research follows the vice presidencies from Nelson Rockefeller to Dick Cheney. The purpose is to illustrate how the office has changed, the unique characteristics of each presidential-vice presidential relationship, and the dynamic forces at play in molding the responsibilities and activity of the office. I was fortunate to receive a research grant from the Rockefeller Archive Center for the purposes of reviewing the Nelson Rockefeller vice presidential collection. Combined with the archival research conducted at the Ford Presidential Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and numerous in-depth interviews with several members of the Ford administration I was able to get a thorough and accurate depiction of Rockefeller's vice presidency and the precedent he established for future vice presidents.