

## *Explaining Increasing Turnover Rates among Presidential Advisers, 1929–1997*

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The transformation of the presidential electoral process from a party-controlled to a media-driven candidate-centered system has made it increasingly difficult for presidents to meld governing and campaigning expertise within a single White House-centered advisory organization. This is because the skills needed to win office are increasingly divorced from those needed to govern effectively. As presidential priorities shift from campaigning to governing (or vice versa), then, presidents must reorganize their advisory system to maximize the usefulness of those aides possessing the requisite talents and experiences. The findings from a logistic regression analyzing the causes of staff turnover during the period 1929–1997 are consistent with the claim that higher rates of presidential staff turnover are linked to changes in the presidential selection process.

**T**he frequency with which presidential aides and cabinet members are replaced has generally increased during the last seven decades, particularly since 1970. Although journalists have documented this trend, they typically attribute these changes to idiosyncratic factors, such as a failed policy or a staff member's ethical lapse, or to a more general perception of staff inexperience or "burnout" (Barnes 1993; Solomon 1993). While plausible, these accounts overlook a more systemic cause for the increase in staff turnover: the changing nature of presidential campaigns. A series of electoral reforms has transformed the presidential selection process from a *party-based* to a *candidate-centered* system (Ceaser 1979; Davis 1997; Milkis 1992; Shafer 1983). The result is that presidents are largely responsible for constructing and managing their campaign organization. Once elected, however, presidents discover that staffs dominated by campaign specialists are not typically well suited for operating within a bargaining-based governmental system of separate institutions sharing powers. Conversely, advisers with governing skills often find it difficult to perform

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effectively on the campaign trail. In short, this paper argues that presidential staff turnover since 1929 reflects a more general difficulty modern presidents confront in trying to combine governing and campaign expertise within a single presidential advisory system.<sup>1</sup>

The argument unfolds in three parts. Section one presents a conceptual framework that links presidents' advisory needs to their bargaining goals. Part two then tests one of the observable implications of that framework by using the *U.S. Government Manual* and other sources to calculate presidential staff retention rates across a 69-year period.<sup>2</sup> Using variations in the percentage of party delegates selected through primaries—a key indicator of the candidate-centered campaign—as the explanatory variable, we estimate the probability that an individual staff member will hold his or her job from one year to next, while controlling for a variety of factors that previous research suggests influence staff retention rates. The findings support the contention that increasing rates of presidential staff turnover are, in large part, a function of the changing nature of presidential campaigns. In the concluding section, we discuss the implications of our findings and provide organizational advice for future presidents.

### Presidential Power, Presidential Staff, and the Provision of Bargaining Expertise

Richard Neustadt argues, in an oft-cited passage, that presidential power—a president's effective influence on governmental outcomes—is tantamount to bargaining effectiveness (Neustadt 1990, 30–32). Consider the presidential campaign to be a form of electoral bargaining between groups of political actors, including candidates, party delegates, interest groups, and the general public. To win the party's nomination and achieve victory in the general election, a presidential incumbent must have political *capital*—money, labor, delegates and, ultimately, votes, from these groups. To receive this capital, the candidate makes promises regarding policy and personnel issues, as reflected in party platforms, campaign pledges and political appointments such as the choice of a running mate and cabinet members. In short, “[a] campaign . . . implicitly offers the voters [and others, we add] a contract: ‘If elected I promise to . . .’” (Aldrich and Weko 1992, 379).

Campaign staffs also provide candidates with electoral resources, but of a different kind. Rather than tangible goods, they provide *expertise*. This is spe-

<sup>1</sup> Presidential “advisory organization” refers here to individuals working in the White House Office and the secretaries of the major executive branch departments that collectively constitute the presidential cabinet.

<sup>2</sup> A staff aide is considered retained if listed in two consecutive volumes of the *United States Government Manual*. Although the *Manual* typically includes only upper-level staff appointees, and criteria for inclusion can vary from year to year, it provides the most accessible and comprehensive source of long-term White House and cabinet listings *at the individual level*. To ensure consistency across years, care was taken to count only the same levels of staff aides each year.

cialized knowledge that helps the presidential candidate predict the likely impact of his (someday her) bargaining choices on their campaign objectives. Analytically, then, staff-derived expertise can be distinguished from bargaining capital: the former helps presidents absorb the informational costs involved with negotiating bargaining details; the latter is a measure of a president's political strength.

Prior to the campaign finance and delegate selection reforms of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the traditional party structure—the loose federation of party leaders at the national, state and local levels—provided most of a president's campaign expertise. The national party organization charted campaign strategy, solicited donations, and coordinated the overall reelection effort in response to presidential direction (Bone 1958, 116–123). Party officials at the state level who controlled blocs of delegates and helped mobilize voters in the general election provided personnel and organizational expertise (Bone 1958; Cotter and Hennessey 1964; Farley 1938; Sait 1927).

By the late 1960s, however, the parties' preeminence as purveyors of campaign expertise was greatly eroded. Changes in campaign finance regulation weakened the parties' financial ties to the candidate (Epstein 1986; Jacobson 1985; Magleby and Nelson 1990; Sabato 1981); the shift begun by the Progressives in delegate selection from closed caucuses controlled by the old-style political machine to primaries open to the party rank-and-file increased dramatically (Ceaser 1979; Herrnson 1988); the media, prompted in part by the telecommunications revolution and changing standards of coverage, largely supplanted the party as the mediator between candidates and the public (Patterson 1993; Sabato 1981); and a changing issue pool loosened traditional party allegiances among voters, in part by mobilizing heretofore dormant political groups (Peterson and Walker 1992). Collectively, these developments completed the transformation from an electoral process that was "party-centered" to one more aptly described as "candidate-centered" (Epstein 1986; Herrnson 1988; Sabato 1981, 263–284; Wattenberg 1991).

The cumulative impact on the parties' organized campaign role was, and continues to be, dramatic. Comparatively speaking, they are now more unified at the national level, with fundraising and spending control increasingly centralized within the national committees. But party influence over the presidential nominating process, particularly candidate selection and the running of presidential campaigns, has declined (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations 1986; Polsby 1983; Ranney 1978; Sabato 1981). In the parties' stead, the president's personal staff has assumed campaign dominance, its members taking major responsibility for providing expertise pertaining to voter mobilization, campaign strategy, spending, policy and media relations.

The growing prominence of presidential candidates' (including incumbent presidents') personal staffs as purveyors of campaign expertise has had a profound impact on the stability of presidential staffs. This is because governing and campaigning in the post-electoral reform era are, to a certain extent, rela-

tively distinct processes. To be sure, winning elections and governing effectively in the American political system both require presidents to construct *coalitions* of support. However, as Seligman and Covington (1989, 7–16) argue, since Nixon's administration there has been a notable divergence between the interests of the presidents' electoral and governing coalitions. Electoral coalitions are increasingly composed not by durable partisan blocs beholden to state and local leaders, but by more ephemeral and volatile issue-oriented groups, and by voters defined by socioeconomic characteristics rather than party ties. As a result, the processes by which presidents construct these respective coalitions have also grown more distinct. To build governing coalitions in a system of separate institutions competing for and sharing powers, presidents must bridge differences through negotiated compromises (Jones 1994, 295; Neustadt 1990, 8–9). The emphasis is on finding common ground with bargaining partners, typically in the ideological center. In contrast, campaigning in the post-reform electoral era places a relatively greater premium on *accentuating* differences among candidates and their issue stances. This is in part because electoral coalitions tend to be composed of more ideologically homogeneous and extremist groups that are less willing to compromise. The result, as James Ceaser writes, is that "the current [electoral] system creates more incentives to promote differences among factions and fewer incentives to weld these factions together into broad and relatively harmonious coalitions" (Ceaser 1982, 110).

As the composition of electoral and governing coalitions diverges, then, so too does a president's strategy for constructing them. And different strategies require different expertise and advice. To secure the party nomination and win the general election in the post-reform, primary-dominated electoral system, presidential candidates want advisors skilled at manipulating political symbols and at conversing in policy abstractions, and familiar with electoral procedures (e.g., rules governing delegate selection, campaign finance laws, and filing deadlines). Candidates try to tailor campaign messages to critical electoral blocs and portray rivals as unflatteringly as possible through high profile, frequently negative campaign tactics (Bartels 1988; Ceaser 1982, 110; Hart 1995, 129; Polsby 1983, 150–151).

Constructing governing coalitions, in contrast, requires a different set of advisory skills. Presidents want aides with substantive policy knowledge who are sensitive to the bargaining interests of other "Washingtonians," and whose temperaments are more suited to negotiated compromise than winner-take-all confrontation (Jones 1994, 294; *Dialogues on Presidential Leadership* 2000, 86). It is true, as Samuel Kernell (1997, 44–6) points out, that in the post-reform electoral era of "individualized pluralism" successful presidential candidates (and their aides) are initially inclined to govern by utilizing the same campaign-style tactics with which they won election. They soon discover, however, that "going public" has drawbacks as a dominant governing strategy, and that to build coalitions while in office requires traditional bargaining as well.

In sum, although not mutually exclusive tasks, campaigning and governing are distinct enough even during the post-reform era to make it difficult for one organization to carry out both tasks simultaneously and effectively (*Dialogues on Presidential Leadership* 2000, 86; Matalin and Carville 1994, 299; Pfiffner 1988, 21; Seligman and Covington 1989, 67–8; Thompson 1987, 260). Presidents may be inclined to rely, at least initially, on the same campaign aides and tactics that helped them gain the Oval Office, but the demands of governing soon force them to turn elsewhere for advice and expertise.

### The Electoral Connection: 1929–1997

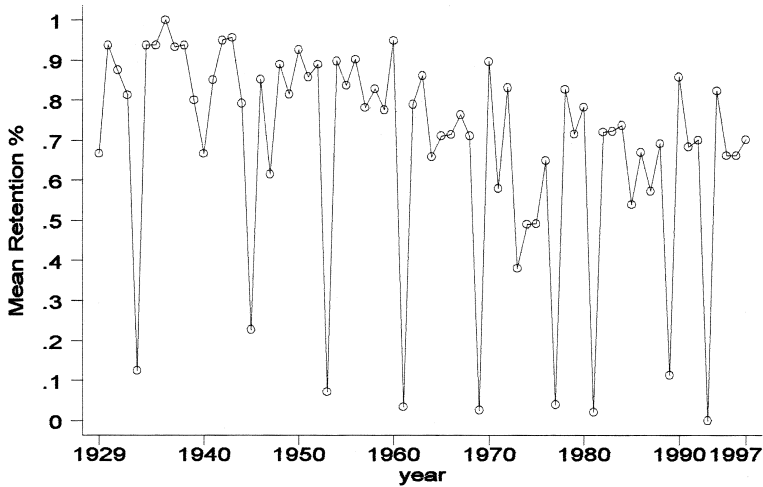
Previous scholarship has noted a potential mismatch between governing and campaigning dating at least as far back as the Carter presidency. Critics observed that Carter's senior aides, who performed so brilliantly on the campaign trail, did not appear to operate with equal effectiveness within the White House (Neustadt 1990, chap. 11). Similar charges were subsequently made against the Bush, Clinton and, to a lesser extent, the Reagan presidential staffs, each of which was accused of failing to replicate campaign success with governing effectiveness (Brauer 1986; Hart 1995, 128–129; Lowi 1985, 149–151; Pfiffner 1988; Pfiffner 1995; Polsby 1983, 105–114; Rose 1987, 53–74; Tenpas and Dickinson 1997).

To date, however, there has been almost no cumulative research on this matter; most claims along these lines are based primarily on case studies of particular presidential decisions (e.g., Neustadt 1990, chap. 11; Johnson and Broder 1996) or more general descriptions of administrative changeovers (e.g., Drew 1994; Woodward 1994). The emphasis has thus been on the idiosyncratic features of individual staffs and related issues, at the expense of more systematic generalization. Moreover, these analyses focus almost exclusively on the transition of newly elected presidents to office (Pfiffner 1988; Porter 1996). This “front-end” perspective, however, makes it difficult to assess the organizational and personnel impact of the transition to the presidency because scholars lack comprehensive baseline data regarding campaign organizations.

The biggest single obstacle to testing whether a tension between governing and campaign skills decreases staff retention rates, however, is the lack of systematic data on the backgrounds of White House staff members.<sup>3</sup> Without this data, it is impossible to tell with certainty whether those aides who are retained or released in any given year share a dominant type of expertise, as the theory presented here suggests they should.

<sup>3</sup>There are few studies of White House aides' backgrounds, and none analyze enough aides across a long enough time span to accurately test the hypothesis under consideration here. See Florestano (1977), Lacey (1969) and Riddlesperger and King (1986). In contrast, we know much more about cabinet secretaries; see Cohen (1988).

FIGURE 1  
Mean Staff Retention Rates, 1929–1997



However, it is possible to look at individual staff retention rates to see whether they are consistent with the argument outlined above. Is it the case that staff retention rates have declined as campaigns have become more president-centered? To test this premise, we calculated individual staff retention rates—the frequency with which a staff member or cabinet secretary working for the president one year is retained for the next year—beginning with Hoover’s presidency in 1929 through 1997, the first year of Clinton’s second presidential term.<sup>4</sup> We then estimated the relationship, if any, between retention rates and changes in the manner in which presidential campaigns are run. The fundamental premise is that, when controlling for other factors expected to influence staff retentions rates, the probability that a staff member will be retained from one year to the next will *decrease* as presidents are forced to assume responsibility for campaign tasks once entrusted to political parties.

Figure 1 lists staff retention figures. It shows a relatively steady decline in retention rates, punctuated by periods of near-total staff overhaul as a consequence of a new president taking office.

<sup>4</sup>In a previous version of this paper (Dickinson and Tenpas 1997) we used annual retention rates for the cabinet and White House staff as a group, rather than individual-level data, as the dependent variable. The substantive results did not differ, however; an increase in the percentage of delegates selected through campaigns was also linked with a decrease in group retention rates.

As a first test of the argument, we expect average annual staff retention rates to be lower in the post-1970 electoral reform era—the year that comes closest to demarcating the advent of a new, “candidate-centered” post-reform era—than during the pre-reform period.<sup>5</sup> And, indeed, this is the case; the mean retention rate for the electoral pre-reform, pre-1971, 41-year period is 78% ( $n = 1,201$ ), a statistically significant different average ( $\text{Pr} > |t| = 0.00$ ) than the post-reform mean of 68% ( $n = 2,088$ ). Note also that these aggregate changes reflect significant differences in retention rates for the first, third and fourth years of a president’s term during the pre- and post-reform periods as well.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, it may be the case that the decrease in retention rates reflects other factors, such as a more rapid staff “burn-out” due to greater job-related stress associated with the more intense media scrutiny in the post-reform period. To test whether the change in staff retention rates is in fact linked to changes in the electoral system, yearly staff retention rates are regressed against the percent of the president’s party delegates selected through primaries, while controlling for a variety of other factors (including the aide’s time served), that might be expected to influence staff turnover.

The party delegate selection variable measures the decline in party influence over the delegate selection process, and thus serves as an indicator of presidents’ tendency to develop their own campaign organization. As the president’s personal campaign organization grows, the theory predicts increased difficulty in melding campaign and governing expertise within a single White House staff (Dickinson 2000; Tenpas 1997, 66–76). This, in turn, should decrease staff retention rates as presidential bargaining priorities switch from campaigning to governing and vice versa.

Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, measuring whether an individual cabinet member or White House aide listed in the *U.S. Government Manual* in one year is retained in the following year, a logit model is estimated. In gauging the impact of the changing delegate selection process on staff reten-

<sup>5</sup>Most scholars argue that the changeover to the new, candidate-centered system crystallized in the period between the 1968 and 1972 presidential elections. As evidence, they note two relatively distinct periods of delegate selection, dating from 1929 through 1968, and from 1972 to the present. During 1929–1968, the percentage of the president’s party delegates selected through primaries averages 39%, with a low of 34% and a high of 46%. In contrast, in the period 1972–1996, the average percentage of party delegates selected through primaries jumps to 71%, with a low of 65% and a high of 84%.

<sup>6</sup>Based on t-tests of the difference of means of annual retention rates for each year of a four-year term during the pre-1971 and post-1970 eras. The respective means (and associated  $p$ -values), pre- and post-reform are: Term Year 1 .47 v. .35 ( $\text{Pr} > |t| = 0.00$ ); Term Year 2 .93 v. .90 ( $\text{Pr} > |t| = 0.15$ ); Term Year 3 .86 v. .73 ( $\text{Pr} > |t| = 0.00$ ); and Term Year 4 .87 v. .79 ( $\text{Pr} > |t| = 0.00$ ). The inability to reject the null hypothesis of no difference in means in pre- and post-reform retention rates during year two of the presidential term is consistent with our argument that the impact of electoral change begins to be felt in year three. Although first-year pre- and post-retention rates are significantly different, this finding is difficult to interpret due to the impact of newly elected presidents on staff changeovers.

tion rates, we assume that presidents begin revamping their advisory organization in anticipation of the coming presidential election at the start of the *third year* of the presidential term, just after the mid-term congressional elections, and continue the campaign-induced restructuring through the fourth year of the term. The logistics of running a national campaign, including fundraising and assembling a field organization, particularly in the post-reform period with its extensive primaries and front-loaded schedule, require presidents to begin organizing their campaign staff as soon as politically feasible. In the model estimated here, then, the percent-delegate-selected-through-primaries variable is assumed to impact staff retention in both the third and fourth year of a president's term. This modeling assumption is supported by Federal Election Commission data, presidential archival documents and secondary sources that indicate that reelection planning begins roughly two years before the next presidential election in the post-reform era (Hagen and Mayer 2000, 6–21; Tenpas 1997, 30–31). Presumably presidents also seek to jettison controversial aides and cabinet secretaries as early as possible, before the campaign and accompanying media scrutiny begins.

### Non-Electoral Controlling Variables

Obviously the most significant cause of staff turnover is likely to be a change in presidents. A newly elected president will be expected, regardless of the electoral system, to replace the existing White House staff and cabinet with his own handpicked political loyalists and policy experts. Similarly, vice presidents who assume office on the death or resignation of the president will likely bring in their own aides, although the extent to which they do so may be mitigated by their desire to show continuity with their predecessor. To control for these possibilities, the statistical model includes dummy variables for a newly-elected president, and for a vice president who assumes the presidency, that take the value 1 in the year they first take office and measures 0 otherwise.

It is also plausible that an impending election will influence presidential staff retention rates less if the incumbent president cannot run for reelection. The Twenty-second amendment has limited every president beginning with Eisenhower to two terms in office. Accordingly, the multivariate regression includes a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 in each year a president serves while ineligible for reelection and 0 otherwise.<sup>7</sup> To adjust for the impact of intra-term cycles on staff retention rates, such as opportunities for aides to parlay their Washington experience into high-paying jobs or other career opportunities, and other factors related to the length of time the president is in office, the model

<sup>7</sup> Presidents Truman and Johnson were eligible for reelection in 1952 and 1968, respectively, but decided early in the campaign season not to run. To address their potential candidacies, we estimated an alternative logistic regression that included a dummy control variable that took the value of 1 in the years 1951–52 and 1967–68, but it was not statistically significant and is not used here.



includes a variable that takes the value of the year (one through four) of the four-year presidential term.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, it is possible that whether an individual stays on or not depends in part on how long the person has already served the president. By failing to control for this type of temporal dependence, the model can underestimate the variability of the results, producing exaggerated *t*-values and thus suggesting a better fit with the data than actually exists (Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998). However, the theory presented here does not suggest any particular relationship between length of service and the probability of retention. On the one hand, a president might be more likely to retain an aide if she has proved her mettle in the post after a year or more of service. Alternatively, the longer an aide serves, the more likely he may succumb to “burnout” and be replaced, regardless of impending election, or the more willing the aide will be to parlay her political connections to a more lucrative job. Instead of assuming a specific fit between length of service and probability of retention, then, the model includes a series of dummy variables that measure the length of time each aide served the president prior to leaving their position.<sup>9</sup>

## Results

The full model, then, estimates the impact of a change in the percent of party convention delegates selected through primaries on the probability of retaining

<sup>8</sup>To test whether the variables used are stationary—that the probability of a change in the mean of the dependent variable as a result of the impact of the explanatory variable(s) is constant throughout the time period under consideration—we performed an Augmented Dickey-Fuller test by regressing staff retention against its lag value, the lagged annual difference in retention rates across the two previous years, and a yearly trend variable. The ADF test indicated one could reject the presence of a unit root indicating non-stationarity at the .01 probability level. To correct for possible serial correlation, in which the level of staff retention in any given year is largely a function of the prior year’s level, we also tested a lag of the dependent variable, but it proved insignificant and was dropped from the analysis.

<sup>9</sup>The temporal dummy variables were created using a program devised by Richard Tucker of Vanderbilt University, and implemented through STATA 6.0. Because the longest any aide served continuously was 26 years (William Hopkins served as Assistant and then Executive Clerk from 1945 to 1971), the program created 25 separate temporal dummies, one for each potential length of continuous service in the data set. As noted above, we did not simply use previous time served as a control variable because it assumes a monotonic relationship between time in office and the probability of retention, and there is no reason to think that the probability of retention increases (or decreases) continuously as a function of time served.

Following the suggestion of Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998), we also modeled the relationship using a cubic spline “smoothing” function, with temporal “knots” set at various years to allow for a more complex interaction between time served and the probability of staff retention. In separate statistical estimations, we varied the location of the knots connecting the spline segments to account for different possibilities regarding how long aides might be expected to serve before they are replaced. The use of the spline function does not, however, change the substantive results; an increase in the percentage of delegates selected through primaries is still associated with a decrease in staff retention rates.

TABLE 1

Logit Model of Staff Retention, 1929–1997  
Coefficients measure impact of one-unit change in independent variable on the probability of staff member being retained from one year to the next.

Independent Variable	Coef.	Std. Err.
Delegates selected through primaries	-2.00*	.31
New president	-4.54*	.35
Vice president	-1.76*	.26
Lame duck president	-.53*	.13
First year of White House service	4.67*	1.78
One year of White House service	7.53*	1.76

(Coefficients for 12 temporal dummies that are not statistically significant are not shown. In addition, 12 temporal dummies that perfectly predicted staff retention were dropped from the statistical analysis.)

Number of observations = 3,277

\* $p \leq .01$

Log Likelihood = -1142.90

$\chi^2(19) = 1608.76$

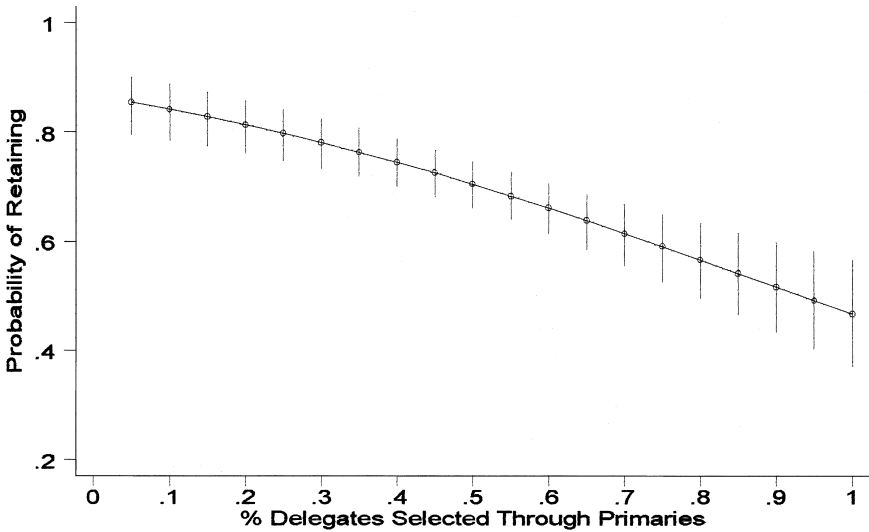
Prob >  $\chi^2 = 0.00$

an individual presidential advisor from one year to the next. Controlling variables adjust for the presidents' electoral eligibility, the temporal cycle of the presidential term, and the length of time the aide has previously served. The results as listed in Table 1 show strong support for the supposition that the development of the candidate-centered campaign, as defined here, has depressed staff retention rates.

Because the logistic function assumes a curvilinear relationship between the dependent and explanatory variables, however, the precise impact of delegate selection on staff retention depends in part on the values of the other variables in the model. To ease interpretation of the logit coefficients, and to make fuller use of the data in the statistical analysis, we employed a statistical simulation program, devised by King, Tomz and Wittenberg (1998) that approximates the model's estimated parameters within specified measures of uncertainty by repeatedly (1,000 times) taking random draws from the vector of variables in the data set. Using these simulated parameters, a baseline equation is established with all the variables set to 0, except for the variable for time served by an aide, which is set to two years, and the term year variable, which is set to three. The delegate selection rates were then varied to estimate the expected impact on staff retention rates, given these parameters.

Figure 2 shows the predicted changes in staff retention rates, with 95% confidence intervals, as the percent of party delegates selected through primaries

FIGURE 2  
Probability of Staff Retention



varies from zero to 100%. As delegate percentage rates increase from lowest to highest value, the probability of an aide with two years of service being retained in the third year of the presidential term drops 40%, from 86% to 46%.<sup>10</sup>

What do these findings say about the likely impact on staff retention rates caused by the transition from the party-based electoral system to the candidate-centered one? Using the baseline equation outlined above, an increase from 39%, the mean percent of delegates selected through primaries in the pre-1971 reform era, to 71%, the mean percent in the post-reform era, is estimated to cause a 14% drop in the probability of a presidential adviser being retained in the third year of the president's term. In the fourth year, an aide's probable retention rate drops by 9%, given a similar increase in percent delegates selected by primaries.

It appears, then, that staff turnover is, in part, systemic and electorally generated, and not just a function of idiosyncratic factors related to personal fail-

<sup>10</sup>For comparison purposes, note that the retention rate for an aide with four years service drops more than 43%, from 44% to less than 1%, when a new president is elected, and by 41% (67% to 26%) when a vice president takes office in the third year of the previous president's term. Serving under a lame duck president reduces the probability of staying on by 12% (44% to 32%). These numbers assume a delegate-selection-through-primaries percentage of 58%, the average for the period under study here.

ings, staff burnout, more lucrative job opportunities, or other individual-based causes. Moreover, these findings are consistent with previous research based on journalists' campaign coverage, related secondary readings, and interviews with former presidential advisers and campaign officials that collectively suggest staff turnover is at least, in part, electorally induced (Tenpas and Dickinson 1997).

### Concluding Thoughts

Beginning formally with the Brownlow Committee report in 1937, scholars have long argued that presidents would benefit from additional staff resources to help make their authority more commensurate with their growing responsibilities. But this argument presumed that those staff resources would evince some stability and continuity through time (Dickinson 1997, 86–113). In fact, as this analysis shows, White House staff and cabinet retention rates have steadily declined during the last half century, precipitously so since the 1970s. It is unlikely that such instability is compatible with the notion of “help” embraced by the Brownlow committee and subsequent commissions on presidential staffing. Rapid staff turnover leads to a loss of institutional memory within the presidential branch, and makes it more difficult for presidential aides to communicate with their senior counterparts in federal departments and agencies, and in other branches of government.

The findings here suggest a potential remedy, although it is one that will be difficult to implement. By accelerating the demise of the political party as purveyors of campaign expertise, the electoral reforms of the 1960s and 70s have expanded the advising burdens carried by the White House-centered advisory organization. Presidents thus find themselves struggling to juggle two critical advising tasks—campaigning and governing—within one advisory organization, often to the detriment of both. Any solution to the problem of decreasing staff retention rates must simultaneously address two issues: the incentives driving presidents to hire campaign staff to serve in governing positions for which they lack expertise, and the tendency for presidents to involve White House staff in reelection planning. Understandably, presidents are inclined to reward those individuals who stood with them throughout the long, arduous campaign. And for many campaign aides, proximity to the White House is the greatest payoff. Ultimately, overcoming these factors may require resurrecting political parties from their current marginal position as fundraisers to a more influential role as the central presidential campaign organization. By vesting the party with an influential role in campaign strategy and tactics, presidents could enhance the attractiveness of employment within the party organization and more easily channel campaign aides away from the White House. And by allowing the White House to divest major responsibility for running the reelection campaign, presidents could avoid the inevitable staff shuffling and related ethical improprieties associated with this task.

Political scientists, of course, have for many years sought to remedy the perceived weaknesses of the American constitutional system by strengthening political parties, albeit with little success to date (American Political Science Association 1950; Epstein 1986; Reichley 1992, 411–433). Nevertheless, by carefully considering the deleterious effects of White House staff turnover on presidential leadership, and by acknowledging that it is at least partly rooted in the campaign reforms of the 1960s and 70s, presidents may have a compelling self-interest to support efforts to strengthen political parties. In so doing, they may also encourage the creation of an advisory organization that actually “helps” the president govern.

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