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## Bush and Kerry: Questions About Governing Styles

CHARLES O. JONES

Political campaigns are about governing. Candidates offer themselves to the public and endure a grueling process of nomination and election. Campaigns generate a lot of headlines, but it's what comes afterward that counts. Voters usually are left guessing about how each of the candidates would govern.

In 2000, the Brookings Institution, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Hoover Institution jointly conducted several forums with journalists and the presidential candidates' close associates that explored how each of the candidates would govern based on their backgrounds, experience, and leadership styles.



The questions raised in 2000 are relevant in 2004, but there are notable differences. In 2000, the race was between two candidates with executive experience at high levels: a sitting and active vice president, Al Gore, and Texas Governor George W. Bush. Bush is now an incumbent president, so most questions that were raised in 2000 have been answered. But new questions arise because second terms differ from first terms, and because his administration may change if he is re-elected. Bush's opponent, John F. Kerry, has nineteen years of experience in the Senate, but lacks noteworthy executive branch service.

After the elections, how will the next president govern? This policy brief outlines how best to ascertain that information before November.

### EXECUTIVES AND LEGISLATORS

John Kerry's executive experience is limited to brief service as lieutenant governor of Massachusetts and administrative responsibilities when he was first

assistant district attorney of Middlesex County. Legislative service differs substantially from that in the executive branch, possibly explaining why only two sitting senators—John F. Kennedy and Warren G. Harding—have ever been



elected president. If anything, it is even more important that Kerry's approach to governing as president be examined and clarified for the voting public and for those in the permanent government.

What are the relevant differences between legislative and executive service? They were illustrated in the Democratic Party's January 2004 debate in Greenville, South Carolina, when former Vermont Governor Howard Dean cited his record in getting results. With reference to health care, he contrasted his performance with that of Senator Kerry, who sponsored several bills and "not one of them passed." In response, Kerry instructed Dean: "You need to know as president how things work in Congress.... You can, in fact, write a bill, but if you're smart about it, you can get your bill passed on someone else's bill that doesn't carry your name."

The core legislative and executive branch processes vary in significant ways, the most important being a legislator's ability, as Kerry's example unintentionally points out, to elude accountability for their part in passing certain bills. Legislators represent their constituents' interests in lawmaking and select certain broader issues typically related to the jurisdictions of their committees. They do their best, understanding that others are doing the same, making compromise inevitable. Lawmakers offer amendments and multiple votes are taken in several venues as a bill works its way from subcommittee to committee to the House and Senate chambers, perhaps then to a conference. Seldom are individual legislators subsequently held responsible for the composite

result, which, in any event, will be implemented elsewhere, often in the states.

By contrast, chief executives are ordinarily held responsible for proposals submitted to legislatures, however or wherever they are developed. Likewise, they are accountable for implementing laws whether or not the final versions reflect their preferences. Accountability is a hallmark of executive life. Presidents are praised if things go well, criticized if they do not, and evaluated continuously. In Bush's first three years in office, his performance was tested in polls 630 times.

This is not a sinister comparison. Both legislators and executives perform needed functions in a democracy. But they are not interchangeable roles. Crossing over requires an understanding of what is expected on the other side. "Taking charge" and "accepting the buck" summarize what is demanded in a top executive position—certainly as president. One other difference: presidents are term-limited, senators are not. A re-elected president serves the equivalent of one and one-third Senate terms. Senator Kerry, on the other hand, is serving with his fourth consecutive president.

## THE CANDIDATES

So what do we want to know about the candidates and the campaign? In launching the 2000 Brookings-AEI-Hoover project, Thomas E. Mann of Brookings and Norman J. Ornstein of AEI wrote in the winter issue of the *Brookings Review* that they planned to ask "questions about governing that become absolutely central the day after the election."



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What follows are some of the more important concerns deserving media and public attention in 2004. These questions are directed to the candidates' backgrounds, styles, and preferences. They are personal and yet important because the White House is reconstituted around a person and then fitted into the continuing government:

**Why does he want to be president (or be reelected)?** There is, perhaps, no more important question and so a candidate's answer should be readily forthcoming. It should reveal the candidate's purpose and potentially, his vision.

**Does he have the right temperament?** A difficult question, yet campaigns typically provide answers that should be publicized. Journalists traveling with a candidate are in the best position to judge temperament as observed in staff relations, off-stage behavior, reactions to setbacks, and humor.

**What are his qualifications? What must he overcome?** The executive/legislative distinctions are relevant here. But an incumbent's record should be evaluated in this context, especially in regard to pending issues for which he is held accountable (e.g., Iraq and jobs).

**Who are his friends and associates? To whom does he turn for advice and counsel?** Public figures function as clusters of persons whose fate is aligned with their principal. The clusters grow in size in a campaign. Identifying these aides and associates helps in knowing what to expect in the substance and style of governing.

**To what and to whom is the candidate committed?** Public figures also function as a cluster of obligations associated with their record, experience, and connections. It is critically important for the public to know about these commitments because of their effects on decisions once the candidate is in office. Clinton's association with the Democratic Leadership Council is a case in point, as is Bush's business background.

**How has the candidate managed a crisis and its aftermath?** The September 11 case provides more than the usual amount of evidence for Bush, to be weighed along with the decision to go to war in Iraq. As a decorated veteran, Kerry has emphasized his military experience in Vietnam, where he regularly participated in dangerous missions.

Finally, one of the favorite tests of the late presidential adviser and scholar Richard E. Neustadt: Is there an issue so important to the candidate that he would sacrifice support, even election, rather than change his views?

## THE CAMPAIGN

The 2004 campaign will eclipse all others in length, primarily because of the "front-loading" of the delegate selection process, which made Kerry the presumptive nominee by March. The advantage is that the public will have ample time to acquaint themselves with the candidates before November. Maintaining the public's interest, however, will be a challenge for the campaigns.

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**What has been the effect of previous campaigns on the candidate?** Bush and Kerry have been elected several times, Bush to executive positions, Kerry primarily to legislative posts. So there is a record to examine in regard to their different jobs. But some attention should also be paid to the effect of Kerry’s campaign for the nomination, with a particular focus on evidence of his conception of the job and his thoughts on governance.

**Does the campaign’s organizational structure offer evidence of how the candidate would build and manage his presidency?** Mann and Ornstein advise that “campaigning is governing is campaigning.” Like it or not, the greater “publicness” of lawmaking has encouraged the selling of policy on a continuing basis. As a result, more attention should be paid to how candidates campaign for signs of how they will conduct the “selling” part of governing.

**Which campaign staffers are likely to get jobs in the White House?** This directs attention to the political consultants who are likely to influence, and even perhaps direct, the constant campaigning within the presidency. It is important to know the names and to understand their perspectives. The question is most relevant for Kerry.

**What does the campaign tell us about communication styles and press relations?** Hugh Hecl of George Mason University warns against the effects of “leading without educating.” The president is in a unique position to teach. Lacking a classroom, he has a pulpit and

a megaphone. The campaign is a time for taking the measure of candidates’ skills in communicating, which may or may not include oratory. The press performs a vital role in this campaigning and governing function. Therefore the campaign is a good time to judge candidate-media relations.

## THE AGENDA

Campaigns are issue searches. The hunt is facilitated somewhat when there is an incumbent. A sitting president and his record mostly determine the issues, but events may alter the salience of specific topics. And both candidates may want to change subjects. So questions arise:

**What issues are important to the candidate and why?** Measures of quality and quantity apply. Not everything can be done first and so priorities and sequences are important. A first hundred days plan should be evident even if not so designated by the candidate. The response to this question will likely comport with that of why a candidate wants to be president—or should.

**Do a candidate’s issues form a coherent program? Some might ask: Is he ideological?** No judgment need be made about whether it is good or bad to have a program. Rather it is useful for forecasting how he will govern once in office. Bush’s “compassionate conservatism” in 2000 is a case in point. But what about Bush in 2004? And will Kerry’s campaign themes for the nomination be reshaped for the general election?

**How do the candidates balance national security, foreign and economic policy, and domestic concerns?**

The unprecedented war on terrorism and global economic issues challenge the candidates as they prepare their agendas. How they define and rank these matters, and specify the linkages with domestic problems may well be among the most important indicators of governing capability and style.

**How do they respond to events during the campaign?** *Financial Times* columnist Philip Stephens quotes Harold Macmillan's dictum: "Politics is shaped by the unexpected, by what the former Conservative [British] prime minister aptly described as 'events.'"

We have had relatively placid election years in the past. After all, we hold elections by the calendar, not when crises occur. The 1988 campaign was nearly devoid of major issues or crises as turning points. It was difficult to know the day after the election what it was about. That will not be (and has not been) the case in 2004. Therefore, "events" during the campaign will serve as tests of the abilities of the candidates to manage under difficult circumstances. In responding to the unexpected, Bush must continue governing without seeming to gain a campaign advantage; Kerry must continue campaigning without seeming to interfere with governing. How these roles are played deserve to be reviewed by analysts and the voting public.

**Will "the economy, stupid" dominate the campaign?** If so, history suggests an advantage for Kerry. The uncertainty about which set of issues, economic or national security, will lead complicates campaign planning. How the candidates manage under these conditions may provide clues to their governing abilities.

## ORGANIZING TO GOVERN

Candidates are superstitious about revealing their plans for what is surely among the most important matters for the public: how they will organize their presidencies. Why? "Deweyitis" — counting their voters before they hatch. This reluctance on the part of the candidates cannot be a barrier to probes by media analysts and others. The task is too important to be ignored. However fanciful, speculation about what a presidency will look like is an essential part of pre-election analysis and commentary. And while much is known about the incumbent, history shows that presidencies are often remade in a second term.

### **What is the evidence that the candidate has thought ahead to the transition?**

Vice President Cheney managed the 2000 transition for Bush. He may be expected to perform that role again in 2004 and attention should be paid to his efforts. For Kerry, look to those he includes as personal aides during the campaign. Do they have experience in government organization and personnel selection? Gore had a transition team. Have they joined the campaign?

### **Do the candidates understand the unique organizational issues related to a presidency?**

Again, Bush has experience in taking over and recreating the linkages to government that get ripped loose with a change in administrations. The transition memos of Richard E. Neustadt, Stephen Hess's book, *Organizing the Presidency*, and *The White House World* (another Pew-supported project edited by Martha Joynt Kumar and Terry Sullivan), among other items, would aid the Kerry

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organizational effort, as would a review of the Clinton transition as an example of what not to do.

**Does the candidate have an organizational model in mind?** Hess offers three models in *Organizing the Presidency*. Most presidents develop a hybrid of some type. Probing each candidate’s preferences and experience in interacting with staff and other organizations would be a useful exercise, as well as exploring how they use advice.

**Who are the likely appointees to key White House staff, executive office, and cabinet positions?** This question is properly directed to both campaigns. The Dewey superstition and hesitancy to disappoint supporters will prevent clear answers. But informed speculation should be encouraged, based on a review of those with experience and either a close association with the candidate or obvious support for his views. Kerry is in a better position than was Bill Clinton in 1992 because just four years have elapsed since a Democratic presidency compared to twelve for Clinton. A number of former Clinton aides have signed on with Kerry. History tells us to expect substantial turnover in a second Bush term. Exactly how much turnover and replacement practices are the subject of an ongoing Brookings Institution study by political scientists Stephen Hess and Kathryn Dunn Tenpas. This is vital work for analysts, made so by the disinclination of candidates to inform the voting public how it is that each intends to transform himself into a presidency. Attention as well to likely Supreme Court appointments is especially relevant given the

probability of retirements in the next presidential term.

## THE CONGRESS

Split-party government and narrow-margin politics have featured prominently in contemporary American government. Both parties have won at least one of the three elected institutions (House, Senate, presidency) over three-fourths of the time since 1968. Margins have been narrow in recent Congresses, and the 2000 presidential election was among the closest in history. Prospects are that this trend will continue.

**What is the evidence that the candidates are skilled at split-party, narrow margin politics?** President Bush has been criticized for being too partisan at a time when cross-partisan coalitions are crucial to passing legislation. Critical attention should be directed to whether this is likely to change or to how Bush will govern should his party either increase or lose their House and Senate majorities. John Kerry’s Senate record should be probed for how he has worked with Republicans, particularly given that they may have majorities in one or both houses in a Kerry presidency. Attention also might be directed to the effects of a bitterly fought campaign on future congressional-presidential relations.

**Do the candidates have an appreciation for the contribution of Congress to governing?** Presumably candidates whose experience is mostly in the executive branch are less appreciative of congressional contributions than are lawmakers. Either way, the question is relevant because governance in a separated system demands involvement from both

branches. Beyond the constitutional requirement is its rationale: that Congress relies on its representative base to refine executive proposals.

**Do the candidates have a strategy for building the supermajorities that are now required for most major legislation and judicial appointments in the Senate?** There is no escaping the power of the Senate minority party to thwart presidential requests. Both Bush and Kerry are familiar with how it works. As president, Bush has had limited success in dealing with “holds” and filibusters. Kerry has participated in them but as president would require a strategy for circumventing them.

**How do candidates view the use of executive orders as a means of governing?** It has become commonplace for candidates to announce what they would do in the first days in office. Typically these actions can be taken only by issuing executive orders. It is worthwhile, therefore, to probe the candidate’s opinions on the effects on governing of executive orders in contrast to proposing legislation.

## FOREIGN POLICY

In the aftermath of World War II, foreign policy and national security were judged to be separate from domestic issues and as a result, often garnered bipartisan support. This is no longer the case except during the immediate period following a catastrophe like September 11. Even military actions are the subject of partisan differences. The war in Iraq promises to be a major issue in the campaign.

**How do the candidates frame the issues of foreign policy?** The world views of the candidates should be apparent as they discuss the issues. Bush has defined and acted on a war on terrorism. Kerry and other Democrats have heavily criticized his approach. Kerry has served on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. The voting public should be informed about how each candidate views the changing nature of issues, with threats and effects of terrorism at home and abroad.

**Who will serve the president?** There are no more important positions to be filled than those in the foreign policy and national security teams. The voting public should know something about who will fill these positions.

**What steps would the candidates take to build domestic support for foreign policy?** Mann and Ornstein asked this question in 2000. It is even more pertinent today given the preemptive action against Iraq in the war on terrorism. Again, Hecló’s emphasis on the teaching function of a president is apropos. Domestic support is always crucial but it is especially important when a new approach is undertaken.

**What should be done in Iraq?** A large part of the debate on Iraq has been about the wisdom of the war. The crucial issue for the 2004 election is what should be done now, including the effects of decisions on the war on terrorism and related matters.

## EVALUATING THE CANDIDATES AS PRESIDENT

Observers frequently say that the 2004 election is one of the most important in

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recent decades. Why? Because President Bush won a disputed election in 2000, Republican margins in Congress are narrow, partisanship is intense, the United States is at war, relations with traditional allies are strained, and security at home is threatened. Those developments make the inquiries cited here especially urgent. But building profiles of how a candidate would serve as president is an enduring task for the media. It is work that political reporters and columnists have taken more seriously with each election. Many outstanding articles have already appeared this year. It would be useful for major newspapers and other outlets to highlight on their websites articles that focus on how each candidate would govern—Kerry in his first term, Bush in his second. Not only would that serve an important public

purpose by enhancing public information about the candidates, but it would also urge candidates to think more carefully about the issues raised in these profiles.

Kerry will not want to repeat the missteps of Clinton’s transition in 1992 and the early months of his administration. Crucial time was lost in developing effective governance. Nor will Bush want to duplicate Richard Nixon’s second term transition in 1972, when he asked for the wholesale resignations of his Cabinet and top aides. The result was demoralizing and confounding.

It is vital that the candidates’ staffs pay the necessary attention to the day after the election. In the midst of a war on terrorism, a smooth transition will be critical. **B**

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