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Book Review

How Governors Shaped the Presidency and Intergovernmental Relations

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How Governors Built the Modern American Presidency

Saladin M. Ambar

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012

Governing the States and the Nation: The Intergovernmental Policy Influence of the National Governors Association

Mitchel N. Herian

Cambria Press, 2011

The relationship between governors and the presidency has long fascinated U.S. citizens and scholars as well as persons outside the United States, especially those unclear about American federalism. We know that governors campaign for the presidency and that state politics can affect the national agenda, but two books add much to our understanding of how governors created the modern presidency in the early twentieth century and how governors' collective work has built a powerful voice in Washington, D.C. and helped shape intergovernmental relations. Saladin M. Ambar's *How Governors Built the Modern American Presidency* and Mitchel N. Herian's *Governing the States and the Nation: The Intergovernmental Policy Influence of the National Governors Association* allow readers to better grasp why what happens in U.S. states' capitals and governors' mansions makes its way to Washington, D.C., and how this has occurred since 1876.

By putting these two books together, scholars can better understand how governors have affected executive leadership in American politics, how to think about informal powers of both governors and presidents, how institutions at the state and national level have grown and become professionalized, and how American federalism and intergovernmental relations have been shaped by governors, both individually and collectively. While Ambar's work focuses on political history from 1876-1932, Herian's book is a contemporary policy study of the lobbying work of the National Governors Association (NGA) from 1994 to 2006. The period between these two books, 1932 to 1994, means that a little better framing for both books would allow readers to see how American politics, intergovernmental relations, and the roles of governors were transformed during the twentieth century. But first, let us look at these books individually.

Ambar persuasively explains how late 19th and early 20th century governors especially the “Hudson progressives” – Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) of New York and Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey – created the presidency as we know it today. He showcases five elements of the modern presidency that come from governors between 1876 and 1932: (1) strong legislative leadership; (2) service as the “unqualified party leader” (3) skillful management of the press; (4) chief executive of an expanding administrative state; and (5) a belief in executive-centered governance (2012, 4). Ambar writes that even before scholars “identify these categories of authority with the modern presidency, they were first employed – experimentally and often peremptorily – by America’s governors” (5).

Although Ambar’s book concentrates on the Progressive Era and progressive governors, this is not merely a study of Progressivism or the administrative state. Rather, he writes in the broader subject of American political development and aims to re-shape scholars’ thinking about the modern institutional presidency. His book also connects his study with research within federalism and U.S. state politics. Presidency scholarship has shown the growth of the institutional presidency since the Brownlow Committee and the Bureau of the Budget moving into the Executive Office of the President during FDR’s tenure. But Ambar’s book does much to illustrate how this could happen because FDR built upon his experiences as Governor of New York to shape his time in the White House.

The book begins with the controversial 1876 presidential election. Rather than recount the details of comparing the Electoral College result to the popular vote, Ambar centers in on the fact that this was the first time that two sitting governors – Samuel J. Tilden of New York and Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio – ran for the White House. And he concludes that this was a watershed moment in American politics because this election began the first wave of electing governors to the White House that would shape the presidency as we know it today. There were, after all, seven “governor-presidents” (as Ambar calls them) between 1876 and 1932: Hayes, Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, Calvin Coolidge, and FDR.

In chapters 1-4, Ambar shows that when governors became presidents, they brought their views on executive power as well as their tactics on how to wield it (particularly informal powers) with them to Washington, D.C. But these governor-presidents also influenced other governors and created a

dynamic interplay in which the seeds of executive leadership were growing. Thus, Theodore Roosevelt's work in Albany and Wilson's work in Trenton (and his prior thinking at Princeton) are detailed, but the book also explains how these governorships influenced other states' chief executives of the time. Readers can learn much about future presidents of the period (minus McKinley and Coolidge), but also about influential governors such as Hiram Johnson of California, Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin, and Alfred E. Smith of New York.

As the nation's "most powerful executive state office," Ambar focuses on the New York governorship as one that would shape the modern presidency (29). This allows him to talk extensively about Grover Cleveland and both Roosevelts. Of course, New York also had a very large economy and an influential press, so coverage of the New York governorship received more attention and was more likely to influence American politics than most governorships of the time period. Connections between Albany, Trenton, and New York's media helped to underscore Ambar's point of how Hudson progressives shaped how a leader has to manage the press and use the media to increase gubernatorial power over the political agenda. Cleveland, for example, was the first to invoke "executive privilege" during his first term as president and used his veto more than anyone but FDR (32, 34).

Ambar explains how Wilson championed causes by appealing directly to New Jersey voters and FDR's "innovative use of radio for political purposes originated with his governorship" (111). In fact, Ambar could have shown how Wilson and FDR were "going public" (Kernell 1997) long before governor-presidents such as Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton; he does not make this connection to the literature. He also explains how Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, and FDR led their parties by challenging party bosses and entrenched interests. Thus, the president's role as "party leader" is shown to begin with governors.

Inheriting Woodrow Wilson's views on executive power – summed up as "a call for government of the people, for the people, but through the executive" (98) – and combining it with the legacies of the "La Follette School" from Wisconsin shapes FDR's views about what he can do in the Oval Office. In fact, FDR felt that he needed to "pay homage" to the transformational leadership of Robert M. La Follette when campaigning for the presidency in 1932 (100). FDR's governorship had been one built on furthering progressive causes, but, as presented by Ambar, his time in Albany was the prelude to using new levels of executive power during his

twelve years in the White House. Presidents after FDR—Democratic and Republican alike—continued to build presidential power as leaders of their party, shapers of public opinion through management of the press, and as the CEO of an expanding government. In his conclusion, Ambar appropriately notes that the second wave of governor-presidents, beginning with Jimmy Carter, may have begun in reaction to Watergate and the imperial presidency, but this clustering of governors in the White House “did very little to reject such imperial interpretations of the modern presidency” (128).

Ambar’s book is nicely written and includes new information and analysis drawn from the author’s research in many manuscript collections. Quotes from the official and personal papers of several governor-presidents are showcased, and Ambar’s new interpretation, analysis, and synthesis of scholarship within history and political science makes the book an exciting read.

Although governors’ influence over the agenda is treated on an individual basis in Ambar’s work, Herian’s book correctly points out that the literature has not adequately examined governors’ collective ability to shape national policy. In *Governing the States and the Nation*, he contends that this is a significant weakness given the way in which American politics, and intergovernmental relations in particular, have emerged. Drawing on research by Grady (1987) and others, Herian notes that governors are a key piece in the puzzle since they implement much national legislation and develop their own legislative initiatives that can serve as a model for the nation. His book is a study of the ways in which governors seek to have policy influence through the NGA, their primary conduit of collective influence in Washington, D.C., and accurately notes that scholarship looking at the NGA’s impact at the federal level “has only been conducted intermittently” (32). Although the book focuses on the NGA’s lobbying efforts, Herian also notes that the NGA has grown as a policy resource for governors.

To show the NGA’s policy influence, Herian presents several case studies of the tobacco settlement, taxation of the telecommunications industry, and the Real ID Act. These cases are informative and showcase episodes in which the NGA was both successful and unsuccessful in its lobbying efforts. These cases also illustrate how lobbying occurs throughout the entire legislative process as well as in the implementation of rules and laws. These qualitative studies are paired with presentation of quantitative

evidence on 73 lobbying efforts by the NGA between 2001 and 2006. Thus, one of the benefits of Herian's work is his use of qualitative and quantitative methods.

The NGA, Herian argues, should not be treated like any other interest group because of the shared constituency that governors have with members of Congress and its "insider" status since governors leave office and later serve as high-ranking federal officials, such as cabinet members. This comes into play in chapter 5 when he explains how the Real ID Act was not fully implemented because Janet Napolitano, a former Arizona governor and chair of the NGA, became U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security in 2009.

Through both his cases studies and quantitative analysis, Herian finds that the NGA is not more likely to achieve lobbying success within the U.S. Senate, a surprising finding given the shared consistency of senators and governors and the fact that the Senate's membership has more former governors than the U.S. House of Representatives. Even so, the case studies reveal how former NGA chairs, such as Ohio's George Voinovich, can be helpful allies to the NGA in the Senate. Not surprisingly, Herian finds that the NGA is most likely to achieve lobbying success when there is a broad consensus of its membership, that it is more likely to achieve success when it opposes rather than supports Congressional legislation, and that it is more likely to be successful when working with other public interest groups, such as the National Council of State Legislatures.

Herian's inclusion of a case study on the Real ID Act is beneficial because it allows readers to see the very complicated relationship between state and national officials on homeland security, an important piece of cooperative federalism in the 21st century. This chapter allows the book to showcase another situation in which governors are (1) frustrated about federal requirements to fund additional needs to protect or provide for citizens without added revenues (an unfunded mandate); (2) do not like having to choose between their own first responders and other needs, such as motor vehicle operations; and (3) remain concerned about the costs of implementation. This chapter also allows Herian to show how gubernatorial politics connect to presidential politics since the Real ID policy debate connected to the 2008 race in which former NGA chairs Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota and Mike Huckabee of Arkansas were running for president.

Yet the strengths of Herian's study – his mixed methods approach and systematic study of NGA lobbying efforts – are met with weaknesses in the

book's organization. After an overview of the project's relevance and the book's plan, it would have helped readers to understand how the NGA evolved after 1908 into a sophisticated lobbying organization by the 1970s. The NGA's history is covered too quickly and sporadically. This causes Brooks' (1961) seminal history and explanation of the NGA to be somewhat hidden in a few pages of chapter 2 rather than highlighted as a way to explain how the NGA transformed over time and can therefore be conceptualized as a significant public interest group today.

If Herian had explained that the NGA was slow to professionalize and become a leader among interest groups representing public officials, it could have shown why his study of twelve years of policy advocacy (1994-2006) is a substantial portion of the organization's history as a real player in Washington, D.C. Only a footnote (47, fn. 8) explains that the organization's name changed from the National Governors Conference to the NGA in 1977. This, of course, was meant to indicate the more regularized nature of the NGA's business and its formalized representation of states' leaders and interests. It is also in a footnote that Herian addresses how previous studies credit the NGA's committee system as a reason for its increased lobbying success (153, fn. 4). The year 1977 was, of course, the beginning of a second wave of governor-presidents to occupy the White House. Thus, more coverage of the NGA's history in early chapters would have helped Herian convey the relevancy of his research and his contribution to several areas of the literature.

Although Herian discusses the previous studies that examine the NGA's lobbying efforts and their shortcomings, he does not integrate as much scholarship from U.S. state politics and gubernatorial leadership in his literature review. Even as he demonstrates the significance of the NGA as a public interest group in chapter 2, Herian could have made more connections with the literature on intergovernmental relations and federalism instead of doing some of this in his conclusion chapter. Herian's links to a broader literature in chapter 7 help frame his study, but should have been provided earlier. Ambar, in contrast, uses his introduction and chapter 1 to paint an expansive picture of his research agenda.

Whereas Herian could have benefited from a "foreword" about the NGA and its history, Ambar's book could have benefited from an "epilogue." By not examining the governorship and presidency after 1932, Ambar misses opportunities to show readers that governors continued to shape the presidency. Ambar's book clarifies the origins of the modern presidency, but

it could have said more about its consequences in developing the institutional presidency after FDR. Again, this would have heightened the relevancy of his project and eliminated any criticism that his book is too historical. Ambar's book would have benefited from an epilogue that describes more about the second wave of governors that came to the White House between 1977 and 2009: Carter, Reagan, Clinton, and George W. Bush. This might have included a summary of another University of Pennsylvania Press book, *A Legacy of Innovation: Governors and Public Policy* edited by Ethan G. Sribnick. This 2008 study covers governors' innovative policy leadership in the 20th century and might have shown the continued connections between the governorship and the presidency. It would have also provided more evidence of how U.S. states continued to professionalize their bureaucracies and grow governors' executive powers. As written, Ambar's book begs for a second volume. Thus, Ambar could have used more of a policy approach in his book, while Herian could have used more of a historical approach in his book.

Both books would benefit by more readily examining governors' connections with international affairs. Herian twice mentions how the NGA sought to prevent the U.S. government from federalizing the National Guard in 2006, but briefly (47, fn. 9; 136). Since he leans on Brooks' (1961) study to define success and non-success in lobbying efforts, it is surprising that Herian does not showcase the connections of governors and the NGA to global issues since Brooks devotes an entire chapter to the "international dimension" of governors' work. Herian might have, for example, mentioned how the NGA formed a Committee on International Trade and Foreign Relations in 1978, a move advocated from the Oval Office by Jimmy Carter. President Carter also encouraged governors to travel overseas to promote trade and attract investment, as he had done in Georgia. Many governors followed this advice in the 1970s and 1980s (Kincaid 1984).

While some scholars miss the connections between governors and globalization, works by Conlan and Sager (2001), Fry (1998), Kincaid (1984), McMillan (2012), Sager (2002), and others explain U.S. states' and governors' links to international affairs and note that although governors do not make foreign policy, their foreign relations activities have risen as the globalized world has taken shape. Today governors' economic development roles are vital and necessary (Teaford 2002) and increasingly internationally-oriented (McMillan 2012). Teaford's (2008) essay in Sribnick's (2008) volume underscores this. He writes, "In 1908 voters did not expect their governors to provide jobs or generate business; regulation of corporate excesses took

higher priority" (Teaford 2008, 107). But although attracting jobs and creating an optimal business climate were not jobs for early 20th century governors, "economic development is decidedly a gubernatorial function" today (Teaford, 2008, 107).

As governors spent more time promoting economic growth and creating jobs after 1936 (Cobb 1993), the president's role as economic manager grew as well. Thus, if Ambar had provided coverage of the governorship and presidency after 1932, this commonality between governors and presidents might have been addressed. In fact, Ambar's emphasis on New York's governorship is a reminder that New York was the first state to form an office overseas in 1953. And the NGA coordinated some of the early overseas trade missions for governors in the 1960s. Although Herian notes that the NGA's Economic Development and Commerce Committee wrote more letters to members of Congress than other committees, he did not elaborate on how NGA committees serve as a policy resource for governors and promote best practices (see NGA 2002).

Both books have exciting avenues for future research. The literature would benefit from a systematic analysis, such as Herian's, that looks at how successful the NGA is in lobbying the White House. This would have more methodological difficulties than the ones encountered by Herian in studying Congress, but it is warranted. There are also research questions surrounding the work of regional governors' associations. Herian briefly notes contributions by the Western Governors Association and Southern Governors Association to policy debates, but does not explain how these organizations interact with the NGA. Scholars might examine those topics.

In his conclusion, Herian has useful ideas on better conceptualizing gubernatorial powers, particularly informal powers. To better understand governors' relationships with the NGA, he notes that a governor's participation in the NGA might relate to Beyle's (2008) category of political ambition within governors' personal powers and help to understand governors as policy entrepreneurs. Herian should explain more, however, about his theory of intergovernmental governance in chapter 7. His ideas about the NGA's place in modern intergovernmental relations and the work of entrepreneurial governors is worthy of future research, scholarship that would better clarify the modern governor and who runs for president.

Ambar's study also provides many questions about American political development such as the relationship between the governorship and the

presidency during the Cold War and in the 21st century, especially after a re-assertion of federal control in some areas. There is still more to understand about how governors after FDR shaped American federalism and intergovernmental relations. Although federalism experts have offered much analysis in the last 40 years, Ambar's innovative scholarship, both in terms of institutional analysis and historiography, means more questions about governors' roles and their influence on the presidency (as well as the presidency's influence on the governorship) should be investigated. Putting Ambar's work, with its use of manuscript collections, next to Herian's book, with both case studies and quantitative analysis, is a reminder of the methodological diversity than can be employed by scholars in the subfields of U.S. state politics and the presidency.

Together, these two books showcase how governors have shaped the modern presidency: (1) by changing the debates on executive-led governance; (2) by increasing bureaucratic professionalism through reforms and appointments; (3) by becoming dominant party leaders; (4) illustrating how leaders can use the media and speak directly to constituents to advance their interests (methods that grew governors' and presidents' informal powers); and (5) by shaping intergovernmental relations in building the National Governors Association as a strong public interest group that enables governors to learn from one another, become better educated on national policy debates, and become policy entrepreneurs, both individually and collectively. Taken together, several of these factors have produced more (and perhaps better prepared) governors who run for the White House. Thus, as the 2016 presidential election looms ahead, these two books add much to our understanding and generate more intriguing research questions.

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