Notes for Guest Lecture by Yamilesi Villavicencio

I. Why study the vice presidency?

1. First answer is simply that the vice presidency is important.

2. The vice president’s position as a potential leader of the nation makes the office one of great importance.

3. It has become a primary recruiting ground for political candidates. Like the Senate, the vice presidency is now an incubator of presidential nominees.

4. The modern vice presidency has also become an important and visible political institution. Each of the twentieth century’s five vice presidents turned successor presidents – Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Gerald R. Ford- subsequently was nominated by his party for a full term, and all but Ford were elected.

II. Historical Background

Constitutional origins

The founders originally provided that the person who coming in second would be the vice-president.

Presidential Responsibilities

1. The Constitution established the office of vice president primarily to provide a successor in the event of the president’s death, disability or resignation.

2. The document, however, was vague about the way the presidential succession would work. It also left unclear whether the succession was to last until the end of the departed president’s four-year term or until a special election could be held to choose a new president. In addition, the constitution does not provide a mechanism for the vice president to take power in the event that the president became disabled.

3. Would the vice president become acting president until another was chosen, or would he become president in his own right?

Senatorial responsibilities

1. The framers provide only that the vice president shall be the President of the Senate. The vice president enforces the rules established by the Senate for its own guidance. Senators can speak only after being recognized by the vice president or the president tempore.
2. As President of the Senate he can vote only in case of a tie vote.

Example: In practice, the number of times vice presidential have exercised this right has varied greatly. More than half the total number of 233 tie-breaking votes occurred before 1850, with John Adams holding the record at 29 votes. Since 1870s, no vice president has cast as many as 10 tie-breaking votes.

3. The vice president’s other constitutionally mandated duty was to receive from the state the count of electoral ballots cast for president and vice president and to open the certificates.

Example: John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Martin Van Buren and George Bush had the pleasure of announcing their own election as a president.

President Tempore

1. In the absence of the vice president, or when he shall exercise the Office of the president of USA the Senate would choose a president pro tempore.

Presidential Succession Act

1. If a president dies when there was no vice president, the Senate pro tempore or the Speaker House of Representatives, in that order, would succeed to the office.

Nineteen Century

1. The first two vice president, Adams and Jefferson, did much to shape the nature of the office, setting precedents that were followed by others. However, Adams and Jefferson developed two different views of the vice presidency.

2. The birth of the party system in Washington’s second term decreed that Adam’s relations with his vice president would be decidedly different from those he had enjoyed with Washington.

3. Unlike Adams, who shared the political beliefs of the presidents with whom he served, Jefferson and his president belonged to different political parties (the Federalist and the Democratic-Republicans). The rise of political parties caused the breakdown of the election system.

4. In the election of 1800 the Democratic-Republican Party, which advocated states’ rights, offered Thomas Jefferson as president and Aaron Burr as vice president. The Constitution specifies that the candidate who wins a majority of votes in the Electoral College wins the presidency, but
Jefferson and Burr each polled 73 electoral votes. The tie in the Electoral College sent the decision to the House of Representatives, which was controlled by the Federalist Party. The Federalists, who supported a strong central government, opposed both Burr and Jefferson, and voted 35 times over six days before Jefferson secured the necessary majority to win the presidency.

5. Unresolved issues of succession and disability vexed the vice presidency during the nineteenth century.

6. During the nineteenth century, the vice-presidency remained essentially a legislative position. Those who held it rarely attended cabinet meetings or otherwise involved themselves in executive branch business. Their usefulness to the president generally ended with the election. While those who had served in congress might offer helpful political information.


Twelve Amendment - 1804

1. Establish the present system wherein electors cast separate ballots for president and for vice president. The vice president was no longer elected as the second choice for the presidency.

2. This amendment also extended the Constitution’s original age, citizenship, and residency qualifications for president to vice president.

Twentieth century

1. The rise of national news media, a new style of active presidential campaigning, and some alterations in the vice presidential nominating process moderately enhanced the status of the vice presidency during the first half of the twenty century.

2. The role of the vice president has evolved into more of an executive branch position. Now, the vice president is usually seen as an integral part of a president’s administration and presides over the Senate only on ceremonial occasions or when a tie-breaking vote may be needed.

3. The principal twentieth – century growth in the vice president’s role occurred when the national government assumed a greater presence in America life, beginning with the New Deal era and extending through the cold war years. That era brought to the vice presidency such majors political leaders as Lyndon
Johnson, Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, Hubert Humphrey, Water Mondale and Al Gore. These men were selected not by party wheel horses but by the presidential candidates themselves.

Twenty-fifth Amendment

The assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 shocked the nation and raised questions about presidential succession that the Constitution left unanswered. With Vice President Johnson assuming the presidency, there was no mechanism to fill the vacant vice presidency. In addition, the shooting of Kennedy and his subsequent hospitalization raised the question of who leads the country if the president is unable to perform duties, and who has the power to declare that the president is in such a state.

1. Before President Kennedy’s death no one seemed to be concerned if the vice presidential office was vacant.
2. In 1967, the twenty-fifth amendment became part of our constitution.
3. The amendment states that the president may appoint a vice president to fill a vacancy in that office, subject to approval by both houses of Congress.
4. The amendment also sets forth very specifically the steps that would permit the vice president to serves as acting president.
5. Further, the 25th Amendment details procedures for replacing a president who is incapacitated.
6. This amendment created a mechanism to assure that the office would never remain vacant for long.

Example: This provision was used twice, first in 1973 when President Nixon appointed Gerald R. Ford to replace Spirow Agnew, who had resigned, and again in 1974, with Ford’s appointment of Nelson Rockefeller after Nixon himself resigned and Ford became president.

Example: In 1985, George Bush became the first vice president to serve as acting president. He held the office for about eight hour. President Ronald Reagan had designated Bush as acting president when Reagan had surgery.

III. Selection

Ticket-balancing

1. The vice- presidential candidate was usually chosen to balance the ticket, to compensate for presidential weakness in specific areas of the country. Ticket balancing is perhaps the major way presidential candidates try to expand their electoral base.
2. Attempts at ticket balancing generally involve four important factors: geography, ideology, religious background, and political experience.

Geography

1. Candidates choose running mates from different parts of the country. A presidential nominee from the east may be balanced with a vice presidential from the West.
2. Often the vice president comes from one of the states considered to be especially important in the election. This may be a state in which the election outcome is expected to be very close, or it may simply be a state with a large electoral vote.
3. Sometimes the vice presidential candidate is chosen because the person is thought to appeal to a large bloc voters.

Religion

Example: In 1960 Kennedy chose Protestant running mate in order to attract Protestant voters.

Political experience

1. A presidential nominee will sometimes choose a running mate with different type of political experience to demonstrate the wide competence of his ticket.
2. All recent vice presidents have extensive background in government before their inauguration and all recent vice presidents have shown at least some political ambition for the presidency.

Example: 1. Thirty-one of the forty-four served in Congress, and fifteen had been states or territorial governors. 2. Since 1948, about half the vice presidential candidates – for example, Henry Cabot Lodge, Lyndon Johnson, Walter F. Mondale, and George Bush- have had more years of experience in high government office than the presidential candidates with whom they were running.

Ideology

1. The modern era has been marked by an almost complete absence of ideologically opposed running mates.

Qualifications

To meet the new public expectations about vice- presidential quality, most modern presidential candidates have paid considerable attention to experience, ability, and political compatibility in selecting their running mates. Presidential nominees realize that
voters now care more competence and loyalty. The public’s increased concern with the competency of the vice president can be explained in large part by the visibility of the office in an age of pervasive national government and electronic communication.

1. The qualifications for the vice presidency are the same as those for the presidency. The vice president must be a native-born American of at least 35 years of age who has resided in the United States for at least 14 years.

2. Success in the White House depends on some shifting combination of talent, personality, popularity, experience, knowledge and luck.

3. Politicians and voters generally consider experience an important factor in appraising a candidate’s merit. Length and breadth of government service are two relevant criteria.

Example: 1. Johnson and Humprey had been elected by their colleagues to leadership positions in the Senate. 2. Miller, Dole and Bush had been party chairmen.

4. Competence and compatibility became the most sought –after qualities in a running mate. These characteristics were especially evident in the Truman-Barkley and Clinton-Gore tickets, both of which set aside the traditional selection considerations of geographical and ideological balance.

IV. Role

The vice president has almost no political power, unless the president asks for advice. But with the active support of the president, the ice president can exert a tremendous amount of influence.

1. Since 1933, vice presidents regularly attended cabinet meetings and received executive assignments.

2. Since World War II (1939-1945) the president and Congress have assigned more and more responsibilities to the vice president.

3. In the years after World War II the vice presidency became more prominent, gaining staff, office space, policy responsibility, and public visibility.

4. Vice presidents represented their president’s administration on Capitol Hill, served on the National Security Council (is the highest advisory body to the president on matters of foreign and defense policy), shared special commission, and acted as a high level representative of the government to foreign heads of state.

5. The vice president also is a member of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institutions. In these ways the vice president shares in the making of administrative policy.

6. The president may assign the vice president general counseling and liaison activities. Such duties may involve trips abroad to spread good will, exchange information, and learn about the attitudes of various nations towards the U.S.
7. The president also relies on the vice president to lead important presidential committees and panels, which study issues such as environmental protection, urban renewal, and reducing the size of the government bureaucracy.
8. The vice president may also act as an intermediary between the president and their political party.
9. The vice president also spends time managing the work of the special committees that the president assigns him or her to lead.

**Advisory Role**

1. Vice president has greater proximity to major policy decisions. However, the president conditions the vice president advice and influence.
2. Now, vice presidents are senior advisors to the presidents, sometimes with a policy portfolio of their own, always as an integral part of administration, and usually as an estimable political figure.

**Campaign role**

2. Ability as a campaigner also figures into the calculus of completing a ticket.
3. Campaigns have become national efforts in which both members of the ticket must travel widely and speak frequently to join support.
4. The vice-presidential candidate, like the campaign manager, press aided, speechwriter, or treasure is part of the campaign team.

**The press campaign**

1. The images voters develop of candidates depend on what they read, hear, and see through the media.

**The Fund-Raising Campaign**

1. The vice president also travels to campaign for congressional candidates and to raise money for his or her political party

**Social duties**

1. One of the oldest functions of the vice presidents is to serve as a ceremonial assistant to the president.
2. If the president is unavailable, the vice president may also attend luncheons and dinners for diplomats or other officials from abroad, and hold meetings with leaders from business groups, labor unions, and other important political constituencies.

Example: The vice president attends many receptions and other social events at which the president cannot be present. The vice president often plays host to dignitaries from other countries.