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BERT A. ROCKMAN, PURDUE UNIVERSITY

ANDREW RUDALEVIGE, DICKINSON COLLEGE

**1. Introduction: A Counterfactual Presidency**

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*Barack Obama's ascension to the president was historic and seemed to defy the "facts" of American politics. But the heady success of the 2008 election was mirrored by the 2010 midterm "shellacking" as the president had to argue that his consequential, but controversial, policy agenda had prevented disaster even if it had not restored economic boom times. A 50-50 nation is the result as 2012 approaches. Counterfactual will need to become factual for the Obama administration to live up to its transformative potential.*

JOEL D. ABERBACH, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

**2. "Change We Can Believe In" Meets Reality**

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*How have President Obama's actions matched up to candidate Obama's vision of large-scale change? The record is mixed, owing to a combination of historical circumstance, robust partisan opposition, and the president's own choices. Yet perhaps the most fascinating thing about the Obama administration after two-plus years in office is the utter confusion about what it is.*

GEORGE C. EDWARDS III, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

**3. Strategic Assessments: Evaluating Opportunities and Strategies in the Obama Presidency**

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*Presidential success rests not upon persuasion of legislators or the public, but upon the presidents' facilitation of policy change within the constraints of the political context they inherit: they cannot create new opportunities, but only take best advantage of those that exist. Obama (hardly alone among presidents) misread his electoral mandate and overestimated his own persuasive abilities, given a hugely divided country.*



JAMES E. CAMPBELL, UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO, SUNY

**4. Political Forces on the Obama Presidency: From Elections to Governing** 67

*In the polarized, partisan, and competitive world of American politics, presidents must decide how to pitch their policy appeals. Obama's early strategy was to appeal to his left-leaning base, not to the middle; but in a country that remains to the center-right of the ideological spectrum, this was not an approach likely to be entirely successful. Obama will need to move back to centrist ground – either by choice or by being forced there by the 2010 midterm results – in order to win back majority support for 2012.*

GARY C. JACOBSON, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

**5. Polarization, Public Opinion, and the Presidency: The Obama and Anti-Obama Coalitions** 94

*Obama's 2008 victory sparked a brief moment of euphoric post-election unity – but the extraordinarily wide partisan differences in presidential approval that typified George W. Bush's second term would shortly reappear. A close examination of public opinion and of the party coalitions that support and oppose the president, with special attention to the "Tea Party" movement, suggests that polarized division is not merely a consequence of national conditions and Obama's political agenda. It also arises from deeper and more fundamental divisions within the American polity.*

DIANE J. HEITH, ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

**6. Obama and the Public Presidency: What Got You Here Won't Get You There** 123

*The politician's holy grail is the ability to communicate directly with the mass public without mediation or commentary. The Obama administration, perhaps misreading its communications triumphs during the 2008 campaign, sought to evade the traditional media through various tools of social media and outreach. These were successful in reaching the White House's existing supporters, but less so in addressing or convincing the wider public reliant on a new media environment marked by "narrowcasting."*

LAWRENCE R. JACOBS, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

**7. The Privileges of Access: Interest Groups and the White House** 149

*The Obama administration made great show of its outreach efforts launched through the new Office of Public Engagement. But in many cases, those efforts were more for show than they were new channels of valued policy advice. Insider interest group connections remained the real locus of action, as exhibited in interactions on issues ranging from health care to financial reform.*



ANDREW RUDALEVIGE, DICKINSON COLLEGE**8. Rivals, or a Team? Staffing and Issue Management in the Obama Administration**

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*History suggests that styles of White House issue management can affect the way decisions are conceived and made. Obama's campaign endorsement of a stylized "team of rivals" advising structure suggested a competitive staff model that has real benefits in generating presidential options – but at real costs to his managerial resources.*

*Exploring the staff and advising patterns of the administration shows that those tradeoffs, and Obama's own stylistic preferences, prevented the model from being fully implemented.*

BARBARA SINCLAIR, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES**9. Doing Big Things: Obama and the 111th Congress**

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*President Obama and his Democratic allies in Congress had ambitious legislative goals and won correspondingly impressive victories on a series of issues, including health care reform. But they did so with nearly no cross-party support, in a body whose makeup and rules encouraged minority recalcitrance, constraining both the substance of legislation and the tactics used to pass it. After the 2010 midterms, divided government combined with polarized legislators makes near gridlock the most likely prognosis.*

DAVID A. YALOF, UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT**10. Obama and the Law: Judicial Restraint at the Crossroads**

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*Despite an occasionally contentious relationship with the Supreme Court, the Obama administration was marked by a relatively hands-off approach to this aspect of inter-branch relations. For reasons partly of pragmatism and partly of philosophy, Obama's efforts generally side-stepped the courts in his efforts to implement more sweeping policy reforms. At the same time, his war on terrorism – as waged through the courtroom – has been every bit as forceful as that of his predecessor.*

CHRISTOPHER H. FOREMAN, JR., UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**11. Ambition, Necessity, and Polarization in the Obama Domestic Agenda**

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*The ambitious Obama efforts to shape long-term change while dealing with short-term crisis inevitably walked a tightrope. He shaped a remarkable record of domestic policy change, but major challenges remained, not least to the nation's fiscal health – and these were unlikely to receive comprehensive attention in the lead-up to 2012. Still, with the 2009-10 changes now the new status quo, they will be difficult to dislodge even in the face of partisan rancor and public misgivings.*



ROBERT S. SINGH, BIRKBECK COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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*Despite the warm glow it sparked in many quarters abroad, the new Obama administration faced a difficult balancing act between acknowledging the constraints of a multilateral world and a commitment to continued American strength and leadership. Replacing "Wilsonian militarism" with "restrained pragmatic realism" had important consequences, but was not necessarily novel. Indeed, in some ways Obama's term was perhaps more like the second term of George W. Bush, than Bush's second term was like his first.*

M. STEPHEN WEATHERFORD, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

**13. Economic Crisis and Political Change: A New New Deal?** 295

*The Great Recession and the continuing impacts of the financial crisis crowded most other issues off the agenda during President Obama's first two years – and probably the next two as well. His plans to deal with the immediate emergencies of job loss and financial collapse while taking action on the longer-term crisis of income inequality won voter support in 2008 but Obama's election did not overthrow the dominant conservative ideology. Positive policy change did not lead to political reward.*

BERT A. ROCKMAN, PURDUE UNIVERSITY

ERIC N. WALTEBURG, PURDUE UNIVERSITY

COLIN CAMPBELL, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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*The "essential Obama" comes wrapped around a paradox: he is both goal-oriented as a politician, but consensus-oriented in his political style. He is a careful (even cautious) decision-maker who makes dramatic decisions. Thus the president faces a continuing tension between achieving his policy ends and sustaining his political viability. The result may be operational, if imperfect, outcomes—an inevitable part of politics in a system where elections are rarely conclusive even, as in 2008, when they seem to be.*

About the Contributors

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