

Although I think you are correct that for most of our history VPs weren't administration heavyweights, that has changed, I think much more than you suggest. For most of our history, the VP was a legislative officer who spent their time presiding over the Senate and typically weren't chosen by (and often disagreed with) the presidential candidates. Those wonderful Adams and Garner quotes disparaging the office are about the old vice presidency, not the modern office.

When Nixon was VP, the office moved into the executive branch in response to larger changes related to the New Deal, World War II, and the atomic age and took on a standard set of executive duties, and his successors followed suit. But the office remained peripheral. The Mondale vice presidency, though, really did change things in a big way institutionally, as VPs moved into the White House, began to attend Oval Office meetings with POTUS regularly, had regular private access to POTUS through the weekly lunch and otherwise, received documents POTUS saw, their staffs were included, etc. Since Mondale, the VP has acted as a general across-the-board adviser and presidential trouble-shooter, and that's been true generally, including re Dan Quayle, who, though not as significant as some of the others, did work important to the Bush administration as a legislative and political adviser and operator, and chairing the Competitiveness Council and had a lot of access to POTUS. I think you're right that the Clinton-Gore and Bush-Cheney relationships became less close in the second term (for quite different reasons) and that Obama-Biden strengthened over time (and Biden was clearly a very consequential VP based on things he did, including being the closer for important legislative deals, even if they weren't really BFFs). Carter-Mondale and Reagan-Bush also had upward trajectories so Obama-Biden isn't the only such example. And Gore and Cheney mattered, even after their relations with POTUS slipped a bit.

Of the two roles, advising and trouble-shooting, the VP's advising role is always pretty invisible. Measuring that role in real time is difficult for a lot of reasons, including the fact that some of what is exchanged between the two is said when they're alone and necessarily must remain private.

In some respects, as you point out, an insider VP with an outsider POTUS has a natural role. But VP success doesn't depend on the outsider President-insider VP combination. Outsider presidents like Reagan, Clinton, GW Bush, Obama figure out DC and Congress and national security pretty soon yet their VPs remained consequential, as advisers and trouble-shooters. There's just a lot to do, presidents need help, and VPs can add value as an adviser and trouble-shooter even if they're not operating in an outsider-insider tandem.

In terms of VP Harris's operational role, she's been very active speaking on issues of importance to the Biden administration and to its supporters and potential supporters. Most prominently, she's done a lot of events especially dealing with reproductive rights and has also spoken on issues like climate change and inclusivity as well as legislative accomplishments. All of this is an important VP role, educating the public regarding the purposes and accomplishments of an administration. And it's a particularly important role in an administration which has had trouble communicating its successes. Her foreign travel compares pretty well

with her recent predecessors, too. Her missions appear substantive and consistent with important aspects of administration foreign policy.

She's faced some unusual challenges, many of which you mention. The pandemic and the evenly-divided Senate in such polarized times have, in different times and ways, affected her public schedule. We generally assume presidents will seek a second term which clarifies the first term role of a VP and then allows him or her to emerge as a presidential prospect during the second term after a full first term record. The speculation about President Biden's plans for 2024, notwithstanding his statements, has focused attention on her in a somewhat unique way, in addition to the different way some media often treat women and minority public figures.

One other point that I think has skewed discussion re VP Harris. We focus too much on what's the VP's portfolio. Presidents organize their administrations differently for a number of reasons. Some VPs, like Gore, Quayle, Biden, had specific, significant portfolios that occupied a fair amount of their time, especially Gore. Others, like Mondale, Bush, and Cheney did not have issues they were the principal in charge of. Mondale, in fact, told Carter he didn't want a portfolio because it would distract him from helping Carter on the most significant issues. VPs can be consequential without a portfolio and having a portfolio can complicate a VPs overall usefulness.

VPs should help POTUS, as an adviser and operator, on central issues. VP Harris's advising role, as I mentioned, like that of her predecessors, is largely invisible, but with respect to her public role, she's been focused on central issues, themes and accomplishments which is exactly what she should be doing. I expect she'll continue to do so in the coming months.

Being VP isn't easy and the job is challenging and complicated in a lot of ways, But it also provides someone a chance to make an impact in a way that few others have. I think that is and will be true of VP Harris as with her recent predecessors.

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