

**From Reinventing to Reform to Routine:
the Clinton Administration and the Bureaucracy**

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I will use interviews, published sources, and survey data to describe the Clinton-Gore efforts to Reinvent Government (Rego), as well as the general tone of relations between career bureaucrats and political appointees in the administration. I will start by outlining the causes and key principles of Rego, as exemplified by the Clinton-Gore National Performance Review (NPR) producing a government that “works better and costs less.” Rego is a broad social movement reflecting the confluence of several factors including the quality revolution in American business, ideological changes in Democratic party elites brought about by the end of the Cold War, and state and local level reinventing successes. Further, Democrats had lost five of six presidential elections prior to 1992, making administrative reform a politically attractive “third way.” The NPR fit President Clinton’s image and self-image as a “New Democrat.” Chiefly, Rego emphasizes increased use of measurement and competition in service delivery, reducing the number of regulations limiting administrative discretion, and a third area less often explored, cutting across traditional organizational boundaries to increase government capacity. I will also summarize and (mainly) refute common criticisms of Rego in general and the Clinton-Gore efforts in particular.

In the second part of the paper, I will argue that Clinton-Gore appointees were uniquely qualified to reinvent government. As the party of government, the Democrats enjoy more credibility than Republicans on administrative reform, both within the Washington community generally and in the bureaucracy in particular. Efforts which under President Reagan were viewed as “anti-government,” were deemed more acceptable when coming from President Clinton. In effect, administrative reform had a “Nixon going to China” quality. My surveys show that save in the Defense Department, most career executives voted for President Clinton and had fairly good relationships with their Clinton political appointees. Second, by the early 1990s administrative reform was a “ripe” policy owing to changing ideas, a poor economy stressing the need for cost savings, technological advancements, and previous efforts by the Carter and Reagan administrations.

I will conclude with a summary evaluation of the Clinton-Gore administrative reforms. The NPR achieved substantial success in such areas as procurement reform, better measurement of results, and customer service initiatives. Most importantly, the NPR reformed the culture of many government organizations, so that what was once revolutionary is now routine. Unfortunately, the NPR failed to reform government’s highly dysfunctional personnel systems.