

Newt Gingrich: The Rise and Fall of a Party Entrepreneur.

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In the beginning of the 118th Congress, Representative Kevin McCarthy (R-California) failed 14 times to become Speaker of the US House of Representatives. Finally, on the fifteenth attempt, he secured a majority of the votes and, with them, the position that he had been seeking for most of his congressional career. The hands of Newt Gingrich were all over McCarthy's fight to sit in the chair that Gingrich had occupied from 1995 to 1998—even though the longest-serving Republicans (Hal Rogers and Chris Smith) in the 118th Congress were not elected until Gingrich was reelected for the first time in 1980; only one other Republican (Ken Calvert) had been elected prior to the 1994 election that made Gingrich the Speaker; not a single Republican elected in that transformative election remained in the House; and only three other Republicans (Frank Lucas, Robert Aderholt, and Kay Granger) remained in the House since Gingrich's days as Speaker.

Using words that might very well have appeared on his GOPAC recommendations for “contrast” words, Gingrich, in an appearance on Fox News (January 2, 2023), accused the Republicans opposing McCarthy of being “kamikazes” and argued that to undermine McCarthy “is to undermine conservatism, undermine the Republican Party and, frankly, undermine the country.” And yet those Republicans' antics were vintage Gingrich and could easily have been another anecdote that Matthew Green and Jeffrey Crouch share in their excellent recent book analyzing Gingrich's role in the House of Representatives from his election in 1978 until his resignation following the 1998 midterm elections.

If you replace the names of “Bob Michel” with “Kevin McCarthy,” “Newt Gingrich” with “Lauren Boebert,” and the “Conservative Opportunity Society” with the “House Freedom Caucus,” the tactics in early 2023 were reminiscent of those in Gingrich's era. The one key difference is that the modern-day equivalent could not have the modifier that Green and Crouch use to define Gingrich: “party entrepreneur.” As Gingrich complained on the Fox News segment, the McCarthy holdouts were trying to “sink the whole Republican Party.” Although Gingrich was willing to tear down the House to obtain victory, he was unwilling to hurt his party—a lesson that the McCarthy holdouts had not learned.

In reading Green and Crouch (henceforth, GC) with the memories of January 2023 still so fresh in my mind, I am reminded of the old Mark Twain line that “history doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes.” The names are different, the specific tactics have changed, and the

historical context has evolved, but the refrain sounds so familiar but is one that would have been unimaginable even as late as the 1970s.

This book is the first in a new series at the University of Kansas Press, which had Burdett Loomis as its founding editor. Although “Bird,” who worked with the authors in developing this book, did not see its publication, I am certain that he would have been happy with how it turned out. Just as did Bird's scholarship, this book uses data and stories to construct an argument that is accessible to people not only in the academy but also to all those who enjoy a good political book. With a preface, six substantive chapters, and a conclusion, it is the best of what journalists, historians, and political scientists do in mixing archival research, interviews, and data analysis. The interplay between these different approaches and methods makes for an enjoyable and compelling read; the writing is also very good.

In the first chapter, GC introduce the concept of “party entrepreneur,” which they define as those who “dedicate their scarce resources to strategically create or exploit opportunities that will assist their political party” (p. 2). They explain that “party entrepreneurs...recruit new candidates to challenge incumbents of the other party, raise sums for vulnerable same-party incumbents, or employ communication tactics to improve their party's brand and dent the image of the other party” (p. 6).

To help explain the rise and fall of Gingrich, they apply Arthur Lykke's “Three-Legged Stool Model of Military Strategy,” which encompasses objectives, concepts, and resources. They do not ascribe this model with predictive power, “but the presence of all three in equal amounts does increase a strategic plan's likelihood of success” (p. 166). Analyzing Gingrich's career through this lens—as well as via the tables at the beginning of each chapter that outline the major activity, type of tactic, and primary strategic objection—is what political scientists can add to what journalists, who write the first draft of history, and historians do. GC represent us well in this effort.

During the first six years of Gingrich's congressional career, GC argue in chapter 2 that he was an “entrepreneurial outsider.” They place emphasis on these early years by showing how instrumental the 1980 election was to Gingrich's rise within the Republican Party. As Reagan walloped Carter to win the White House and as Republicans became the majority in the Senate, House Republicans were a dominated minority party. GC show that the discontent that House Republicans felt helped pave the path for Gingrich's argument that a new, more confrontational strategy was needed to achieve majority-party status.

After Reagan's even better performance in 1984, the Gingrich strategy gained adherents with each passing election, as documented in chapter 3. Although the “moderates” were in control at the beginning of the period,

their days were numbered by the end of the decade. GC show that the moniker of “moderates” works better in terms of tactics than in terms of ideology because Gingrich was joined in his efforts by ideological moderates who also yearned to exercise the powers of the majority party. Gingrich’s two-step process of becoming the Speaker—which had to go through the intermediate stages of gaining a position in leadership (even if by only two votes), challenging Republican leader Michel enough but not too much (and eventually propelling his retirement), and developing a game plan for the 1994 elections—is documented in chapter 4. GC label Gingrich as an “entrepreneurial insider” during this phase of his career.

Chapters 5 and 6 document Gingrich’s two congresses as Speaker of the House. What GC make clear is that, through the force of his personality and diligence in knowing his members, Gingrich at first led a unified conference (GC label this congress, “Promise and Pitfalls”). However, Gingrich’s lack of organizational abilities and personal foibles caught up to him in the second congress (what GC call “a failing speakership”). Indeed, Gingrich failed so sufficiently that some on his leadership team even contemplated a coup. After the Democrats gained seats in the 1998 elections, he felt enough pressure that he resigned.

In the conclusion, GC try to put Gingrich into a broader perspective. They suggest that his party entrepreneurialism was better suited to obtaining majority-party status for the Republicans than for organizing the House of Representatives. They seem to imply that gaining this status was mostly due to the type of leader he was than to whom he was as a person: “Gingrich was never going to be able to run the *entire* federal government from the House of Representatives, let alone *all* of society in a conservative direction” (p. 166; emphasis added). Although I agree that he could not run the *entire* government from the House, the policies passed in the last six years of the Clinton presidency were more conservative than they would have been had Gingrich not led the Republicans into the majority. Let us not forget that after the 1994 elections, Clinton declared that “the era of big government is over,” a statement we could not imagine him making when he secured the White House in 1992.

Having spent way too much of my career thinking about Newt Gingrich, I am a big fan of this book. First, it is packed with stories that were new to me. GC’s digging through archival material and interviewing the major players (now with a bit more perspective) made for a thrilling read. Second, the authors make a claim for the ground that political scientists usually cede to historians in producing the second draft of history. Third, they use the tools of political science to offer perspective on a complex person operating in a time of change. If I have a quibble with the book, it is only that I wish GC had done more of that, especially in the conclusion. On the fourth page of the conclusion (p. 168), they ask, “Were these feats

accomplished because of Gingrich’s entrepreneurial deeds, or would those outcomes have come about without them?” In answering this question over the next 20 pages, they seem to settle on the idea that Gingrich is partially but not entirely the cause of those outcomes: they show that polarization was already occurring by the time Gingrich entered the scene, the House was already becoming a more contentious political institution, conservatism was ever so gradually becoming more popular before Gingrich and his presence did not disturb that trend, and the public’s perception of difference between the parties does not line up with Gingrich’s timeline. Although their answer is certainly fair and their assessment is true, I wish that they had used a bit more of social science to get us to a more precise understanding of how responsible Gingrich was for the transformation of American politics in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

In my own work (*The Gingrich Senators*, 2013), I argue that Gingrich transformed the Republican conference in not only the House but also the Senate. A former student had an occasion to ask Gingrich about my argument. He is said to have responded, “I think the author gave me too much credit.” I hope you will forgive me for pushing Green and Crouch to come up with a bit more evidence that Gingrich deserves a great deal of credit (or blame) for transforming American politics in ways that still resonate strongly today.

Demagogues in American Politics. By Charles U. Zug.
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In *Demagogues in American Politics*, Charles Zug makes an original and striking argument about a traditionally reviled form of political leadership and rhetoric. He contends that demagoguery, although subject to excess and abuse, is not inherently bad. In fact, it can be a legitimate mode of provocative communication, bringing attention and urgency to neglected causes, social interests, and a political community’s highest “substantive goals and aspirations” (p. 3).

The book’s nine chapters are arranged into two major parts. The first part develops Zug’s philosophical and historical account. After an introduction and overview (chapter 1), chapters 2–5 trace the evolving form and meaning of demagogues from “Greco-Roman antiquity” (p. 18) to modern political regimes, including the American republic. In the second major part, Zug applies and develops his theory alongside a series of absorbing case studies involving demagogues on the Supreme Court (chapter 6), in Congress (chapter 7), and in the presidency (chapter 8). The concluding chapter serves as a brief coda.