**Symbolic presidents as initiators of policy and agents of change: Strategies for the creation of policy change processes through soft power and informal authority**

**Introduction**

In countries with a democratic parliamentary regime, in which the president is not elected directly by the people but by the parliament, then the role of the president of the state is only symbolic, almost completely lacking formal authority. The law does not grant such presidents significant powers other than perhaps the power to pardon subjects, and most of their functions are official and stately: hospitality, officiation of military ceremonies and swearing-in ceremonies, art, diplomatic and state visits.

Nevertheless, it is possible to find cases in the literature of presidents and heads of state of this type who succeeded in achieving meaningful activity, acted as a symbol and example unto others, and received broad recognition for their work, despite such actions not being required by their powers, as defined by law.

A review of most studies shows that the ability of symbolic presidents to be a significant figure stems mainly from the individual president’s personality and nature. It stems from their entrepreneurial ability and from unmediated interpersonal skills with their fellow citizens, and the ability to understand their distress and offer proactive and strategic solutions.

**Soft Power**

What might give the president such powers and capabilities? Soft Power is a term in international relations that describes a situation in which a state affects another country in the international system in a non-forceful way, achieving different objectives in its foreign policy. Soft Power is based mainly on a state’s “attractiveness,” that is, the gravity that a state can project, which can derive from legitimacy (in the eyes of others), culture, morality, values, ethics, etc. Soft power differs from hard (or rigid) force, which refers to the use of military force. In this study, I suggest borrowing the concept from the realm of international relations and applying it to the study of domestic public policy. The concept first appeared in the writings of Joseph Nye, who argued that democracy (and especially its liberal values, such as human rights and individual liberties) can cause countries to admire states that are perceived as the embodiment of liberal values ​​and therefore try to appease them.

Nye (2002) defines soft authority thus: "The power to persuade and change a worldview through ideas, moral culture and values." Nye emphasizes the importance of using soft cultural and ideological authority, and argues that its use will increase because soft power relies on reliability and that the need for such power increases with the resources of existing forces. In another article, Nye (2009) defines soft power as a force that manages to make people act without coercion and constraint but rather out of desire.

Joe Merton (2007) describes how candidate Richard Nixon, managed to win the 1968 US presidential election by informal means. Nixon used soft power; with the help of travel videos, he raised the subject of ethnic minorities in the United States to the national agenda, and in so doing captured the imagination of the people ultimately winning elections. Likewise, in an article on Queen Elizabeth I, Heisch (1975) describes how she used soft, informal power (speeches in government chambers) to deliver messages. She was forced to continue to behave in an historical way in a manner that she did not find appealing. She nevertheless succeeded in wielding power by informal means, utilizing the soft power of parliamentary speeches to great effect. In an article on the president’s weekly speech to the nation, Miles (2014) writes that American presidents are able to make changes and even divert issues from the media agenda, even without the use of formal authority. Through their national addresses and soft power, presidents of the United States succeed in attaining substantial goals.

In another article on the American system, Beasel (2014) describes how U.S. First-Lady, Mrs. Roosevelt, used informal power (press conferences) and through her ability to speak to the people, regularly briefed the media in a press conference of sorts that she would organize. She thus demonstrated that the importance of an idea can be “broadcasted,” if it is presented in a special occasion. By using informal power and soft power (in the form of press conferences), Roosevelt succeeded in changing and motivating formal processes. Additionally, the literature records how the Spanish viceroys who served in Naples in the seventeenth century behaved similarly. One article describes the figure of the viceroy as one who has no great formal authority, but through its symbolic power managed to rule, change and instil values ​​within the people of Naples who were under his control (Guarino, 2010).

In a similar vein, an article by Samuel Kernel describes how modern presidents use social media and tools that influence public opinion in order to pass legislation. After swaying public opinion in favor of the process they are trying to lead, they pass the legislation via the formal route of voting in Congress, but since public opinion with them, members of Congress are actually "forced" to vote with them. That is, even here informal, soft power is used (through social networking and communications) to bring about formal and practical results.

Neustadt (1960) argues that modern presidents manage to amass much more power than what is granted to them formally and constitutionally. According to him, many presidents exploit the soft variant of power, thereby expanding their formal power, in order to deepen and assimilate their social agendas. Atalli, in his article on soft power in sport, defines soft authority as non-coercive control through culture, society, and ideology. He suggests that results achieved through such forms of control are at least as good as the results obtained by more aggressive methods, and are sometimes even better (Attali, 2016). In his article on the use of informal power, George Tsai (2016) argues that many scholars engage with the power of states to impose behavior on their citizens. Strength is typically measured in its scope, range, and variance of the areas it encompasses. According to him, much attention is paid to coercive force—the formal force, which includes the state's ability to punish, ban, collect, recruit and dissolve. On the other hand, he says, too little attention is paid to the abilities of the soft power of the informal authority of leaders, which may achieve even more important results than coercive force.

In his article on soft diplomacy, Kass (2015) describes the skills and soft power required of diplomats. He explains that diplomats must exercise their prestige, reputation and personal charm, even though these things are not taught in diplomacy courses. According to him, the use of informal power and soft power helps diplomats function better in diplomatic circles than the use of the formal and institutional power legally granted to them.

In his book, Joseph Nye (2005), quotes former United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as saying that “this country will no longer revolve around its military power but will strive to use soft power, through cultural attractiveness”. According to her, America will lead by the power of example, and not by the example of power. Nye goes on to quote the next secretary of state after Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, who said: “I use the term power at length, because even more important than military power or economic power is the power of the idea, the power of compassion and the power to hope. They have formal authority, and have the ability to exercise their military and economic power, prefer to use soft, sophisticated power, and informal means, to achieve goals of a certain kind.”

**Policy Initiators and Agents of Change**

Given that these presidents are individuals of a unique personal character, who have little to no available resources, and therefore are forced to use soft power and informal authority, one of the best ways to analyze this in terms of public policy is through the term policy entrepreneur. The literature defines policy entrepreneurs as individuals who initiate a policy, employing various means to make it an accepted and influential public policy to achieve the desired results.

These individual policy entrepreneurs take advantage of opportunities to influence public policy and expand their achievements. They do so using innovative ideas and non-traditional strategies to promote the results they wish to achieve from public policy. One of the most prominent characteristics of a policy entrepreneur is his willingness to invest private resources—time, energy, reputation, reputation, and sometimes even money—all in order to achieve a future result of policy change (Cohen, 2016). The term "entrepreneur" appeared for the first time in the literature of political science, in Robert Dahl's articles in 1961. There Dahl argued that policy entrepreneurs are the agents of decisive change. He suggests that policy entrepreneurs are not so much the agents of others as others are actually their agents (Cohen, 2016).

Public policy researchers often seek explanations for the dynamics of policy changes. Mintrom believes that individual policy makers (or even small groups) can draw close attention to policy problems and offer them innovative policy solutions (Mintrom & Norman, 2009). The definition of the problems and the placement of solutions offered to them on the institutional agenda are among the main challenges faced by policy makers, along with the translation of ideas into viable and applicable policies and action plans with a reasonable chance of realization and success (Cohen, 2016). Setting an agenda is a crucial component of political initiatives. The agenda is actually the list of issues and preferences that are at the top of the agenda of individual, group or governmental entrepreneurs. These issues will be seriously considered and will induce these decision-makers to act seriously (Cobb & Elder, 1983, p. 86).

Rabe characterizes the policy entrepreneur as someone who knows how to re-formulate problems well and can find a way to approach and resolve them. According to him, policy entrepreneurs bring about small changes in policy, step by step, so that at the end of the process, the policy ends with a significant incremental change. Rabe notes a number of cases in which changes in such a process, through the entrepreneur’s added knowledge and experience, have brought significant benefits. These entrepreneurs were able to grasp the 'window of opportunity' when it appeared and to achieve significant policy changes when the situation and time were ripe (Rabe, 2004). Caroli also sees the process of entrepreneurship as an incremental one. In her study, she describes entrepreneurial policy makers as achieving small successes that enable subsequent entrepreneurs to build more significant and dramatic successes, thereby helping to change the policy in their desired direction (Crowley, 2003). On the other hand, there are those who view policy change work by policy entrepreneurs through the lens of “punctuated equilibrium.” In other words, the entrepreneur’s work consists of periods of rapid, profound change, followed by long periods of quiet change (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993).

However, it is not enough to define problems and set preferences and agendas. The ambition of policy makers requires significant political skills to properly address problems and to mobilize the necessary support to solve problems and bring about policy change (Mintrom & Salisbury & Luetjens, 2014). It seems that although the term entrepreneur has been adapted to a variety of actors in the public policy arena, most researchers see the entrepreneur as a central figure in the political and decision-making game (Arieli & Cohen, 2012).

Kingdon explains that policy entrepreneur can be internal or extra-parliamentary, appointed or elected, as part of interest groups or research authorities. When a window of opportunity opens, the policy-maker will play a key role in finding solutions to problems and emphasizing the importance of new ideas (Kingdon, 1995). The window of opportunity can consist of demographic changes on the one hand, and a suitable government composition on the other. Therefore, presidents of this type can also be defined as agents of change. Based on Weber's thought, Abrutyn and Van Ness (2015) developed a theory to explain how a special agent of change creates a new social order. Eisenstadt (1964) called these agents institutional entrepreneurs, claiming that they were policy makers as far as socio-cultural changes were concerned (Eisenstadt, 1980). Mintrom and Norman (2009) add that such policy changes may be particularly influenced by entrepreneurs who exhibit high entrepreneurial enthusiasm. Such an opportunity for entrepreneur success arises from developments in the political system, such as socio-demographic development (Cohen, 2016), a success that can occur regardless of the central government and even when there is no dominant business sector. Even in such cases, initiating a policy can lead to a successful social change (Eun sun lee, 2015). This explains those symbolic presidents who succeed in changing policies through research on policy entrepreneurs and agents of change.

**Hypotheses**

Many countries face significant internal or external problems, and have no body formally authorized to deal with them. In the proposed study, I will argue that presidents who by law do not have formal authority, but who are protected by a unique character that enables them to come into direct contact with the people and to feel their distress, can serve as policy entrepreneurs and through soft power and informal strategic means, can resolve problems and bring about policy changes.

I will also argue that presidents of this type who try to change policies and solve problems also require an entrepreneurial character. They are required to be initiative and “project partners,” even if they are not required, and it is not their legal remit to do so.

Research shows that it is not enough to be entrepreneurial and attentive to people's feelings; it is also important that people should know and be familiar with the president's special power and characteristics. I will, therefore, make a further claim: the greater a president’s reputation, the more they are able to influence and effect change. His or her reputation and good name will affect the people and help him or her change policy.

**The Case Study**

I will test these hypotheses by examining a case study from Israel: the institution of the Israeli presidency. I will examine the presidents who have served in Israel since the 1990s until today. I will show that the more the president's personality was entrepreneurial, and the more he could feel the distress of his citizens, the better he succeeded in changing policies, domestic or foreign.

I will also show the impact of the president's reputation and good standing on his successes in making policy changes.

**Methodology**

The research will be carried out as a qualitative study, which will also include a quantitative element. I will conduct interviews (structured and unstructured) with heads of state, presidents, policy and strategic entrepreneurs.

I will also employ textual analysis to study presidential speeches and performances in the media, indexing key words (I have yet to decide which) which indicate the president’s entrepreneurship/reputation/ and ability to “feel” the people, showing that the more a president uses such words, the greater his success in changing policy.

**Contribution of the study**

The theoretical contribution of my research is the ability to identify which personality characteristics are required for presidents and heads of state in order to succeed in their position. This ability will provide a future opportunity to successfully train leaders on an individual scale.

Another contribution is the importing of the concept of soft power—currently used exclusively in the fields of international relations—into public policy, and into the field of politics and government.

In addition, the fact that the research combines qualitative research with quantitative research also contributes to the research.

**Examples of sources**

Barrett, Andrew W. 2004. "Gone public: the impact of going public on presidential legislative success." American Politics Research no. 3: 338.

Beasley, Maurine H. "Eleanor Roosevelt's Press Conferences: Case Study in Class, Gender, and Race." *Social Science Journal* 37, no. 4 (October 2000): 517

Beasley, Maurine H. 2000. "Eleanor Roosevelt's Press Conferences: Case Study in Class, Gender, and Race." Social Science Journal 37, no. 4: 517. Business Source Premier

Heisch, Allison. 1975. "Queen Elizabeth I: Parliamentary Rhetoric and the Exercise of Power." Signs, 1975. 31

Hloušek, Vít. 2013. Presidents above parties? : presidents in Central and Eastern Europe, their formal competencies and informal power. Brno: Masarykovauniverzita, 2013.

Merton J. The politics of symbolism: Richard Nixon's appeal to white ethnics and the frustration of realignment 196972. European Journal Of American Culture [serial online]. October 2007;26(3):181-198.

Miles, Matthew R. 2014. "The Bully Pulpit and Media Coverage: Power without Persuasion." International Journal Of Press/Politics 19, no. 1: 66-84. Political Science Complete

Neustadt, Richard E. 1960. Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership from FDR to Carter. New York: Wiley.

Nye Jr, Joseph S. 2002. "The Information Revolution and American Soft Power." Asia-Pacific Review 9, no. 1: 60-76. Political Science Complete

NYE, JS. On the Rise and Fall of American Soft Power. *New Perspectives Quarterly*. 3, 75, 2005

Tsai, George. 2016. "The Morality of State Symbolic Power." *Social Theory And Practice: An International And Interdisciplinary Journal Of Social Philosophy* 42, no. 2: 318-342.