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Few theories have captured the imagination of scholars of urban politics as completely as that of urban governing regimes in recent years. At much the same time, urban universities have become more aware of their special roles, purposes, and pursuits in the development and improvement of cities. This article summarizes regime theory, examines the implications for urban universities and their leaders, and offers an illustration from the experience of Georgia State University and its president, Carl Patton.

Urban Governing Regime Theory: Implications for Leaders of Urban Universities

In recent years, few theories have captured the imagination of scholars of urban politics as completely as the theory of urban governing regimes. Regime theory, including such variants as “growth coalition” theory, holds that cities are governed by ongoing coalitions of local economic and political actors who, in processes more complex than once thought, work to achieve particular ends, especially but not exclusively economic ends (e.g., Logan and Molotch, 1987; Elkin, 1987; Stone, 1989).

At much the same time, urban universities have become more self-conscious about their special purposes and pursuits, as illustrated by the emergence of this journal in the early 1990s. Having moved past both the initial glut of students and the many federal programs of the 1960s and 1970s, administrators and scholars in urban universities increasingly seek to define what the role of their universities should be in the changing cities of the 1990s and beyond.

Curiously, no one has linked these two lines of thinking. The purpose of this article is to attempt that linkage, first summarizing regime theory, and then considering its implications for urban universities, especially for their leaders—presidents, chancellors, provosts,

deans, and department heads. Lastly, the implications of the theory are explored through the experience of Georgia State University and the efforts of its president, Carl Patton, to work with the urban governing regime in Atlanta.

Urban Governing Regime Theory

Governing regime theory is concerned with how cities are run; that is, with how important decisions in cities are made and implemented. This concern dictates an interest in more than local governments because many major decisions are made either collaboratively between local government and the private sector, or independent of government entirely. The summary below relies principally on the work of Clarence Stone (1989), who provided arguably the best scholarship on regime theory.

Stone defined a regime as consisting of “the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together to make and carry out governing decisions.” As such, a regime has four core elements: “(1) a *capacity* to do something; (2) a *set of actors* who do it...; (3) a *relationship* among the actors that enables them to work together”; and (4) *durability* of the first three elements over some period of years. Each characteristic warrants elaboration.

Considering the “set of actors,” regime theory holds that most cities are run by alliances of political leaders, mostly the elected leaders of local governments, and land-based economic elites. Land-based elites are those economic actors who have substantial investments in the physical space of the city, including such commercial interests as banks, major department stores, and shopping areas, as well as developers and other real-estate interests. As a consequence of those investments, land-based elites are both interested in future economic decisions about the city and able to bring substantial economic resources to bear on those decisions. Those resources could be directed toward campaigning for particular decisions or toward funding projects the decisions would authorize (e.g., development projects).

As for the “capacity to do something,” a regime represents the successful bridging of two capacities common to all U.S. cities: the need for popular control; and the need for an acceptable level of economic activity. The need for popular control recognizes that, since a city’s political leaders must be elected, any alliance that would constitute a regime must be able to win elections. The need for an acceptable level of economic activity reflects how the health of any city ultimately depends in large part on the vitality of its economy. Achieving that economic activity requires economic resources that ordinarily require the support of at least some of the city’s principal economic actors.

Achieving both popular control and adequate economic activity often requires a compromise between popular preferences and the desires of economic elites. In the Atlanta case on which Stone principally based his theory, a decades-long, post-World War II regime was built on a grand compromise by which economic elites offered racial moderation to a growing black voting population in exchange for the freedom to redevelop the downtown as they liked.

The third necessary element of a regime is a strong relationship between the actors. To achieve that, regime leaders make “deliberate efforts to inculcate a *group* perspective and surmount the tendency to think parochially.” Regime members are

drawn into a “network of relationships” that will help to nurture a common outlook on local issues. Moreover, when differences of opinion do develop, the regime ethic holds that those differences should be resolved internally, not in the public eye.

Building a strong relationship and a capacity to get things done requires that regimes overcome the “free rider” problem, wherein whoever does the work on a group initiative may stand to gain no more than those who do not work but still enjoy the benefits of the resulting public goods. This potential to “free ride” can limit the willingness of anyone to pursue collective action. Regimes overcome this problem by distributing “selective incentives,” which are rewards that go only to those who do the work. Selective incentives can also be used to gain the support of important political actors. In the Atlanta case, “Particular benefits were...accorded to strategically-placed black interests—land for the Atlanta University complex, deposits in black financial institutions, donations to black nonprofit organizations, and profit opportunities for black real-estate brokers and builders” to gain the support of the black political leadership in the post-World War II years.

The logic of regime operations dictates, however, that members frequently go along with projects from which they or the institutions they represent stand to gain nothing. They “go along to get along,” believing that, by cooperating when not directly benefiting, they will eventually gain backing for projects from which they will benefit. Regime members also sometimes modify their goals in order to take advantage of the opportunities compatible with a particular regime.

The fourth and final element necessary to a regime is durability. The first three elements, the capacity, the set of actors, and the relationship between those actors, must endure in essentially the same composition for a period of years, typically a decade or longer, in order to constitute a regime.

Regime theory sounds similar to traditional “power elite” theory, the argument that powerful economic elites hold all important power in cities (Hunter, 1953), but the two differ in important respects. Most notably, far from predicting rule by the same economic elites in all cities, regime theory holds that regime composition varies between cities, with the variations leading to very different orientations and goals. The orientation of a particular regime will depend both on which actors become members and what group-wide view develops through their interaction. That view may also change across time as the composition of the regime changes and as new issues arise. Regime theory is thus both less economically deterministic and more dynamic than is elitist theory.

Different compositions appear to have produced a variety of orientations across the U.S., including at least the following:

- *The growth coalition.* The best known type of regime is the “growth coalition,” in which an alliance of political and economic actors has the economic growth of the city as its principal shared goal (Logan and Molotch, 1987). Economic and political actors can readily agree on that goal as likely to bring profits to private economic interests and tax revenues to municipal governments.

- *The entrepreneurial regime.* “New fast-growing cities, not confined to old boundaries, may provide less incentive to organize for collective action on a redevelopment agenda,” with power instead mostly in the hands of “individual, free-wheeling entrepreneurs” (Stone, 1989). With less power at the center, entrepreneurial regimes are weaker than growth coalition regimes.
- *The caretaker regime.* This type of regime is focused more on maintaining the city than on developing it, and so does not strongly push economic growth or any other agenda. As Stone (1989) explained, “Caretaker regimes solve the problem of civic cooperation—the coordination of efforts across institutional lines—by minimizing the need for it...Since little is being done, no complicated forms of coordination and no broad bases of resource mobilization are called for.”
- *Federalist regimes.* The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of what Elkin (1987) termed “federalist” regimes, those that emphasized neighborhood development over either commercial or downtown development. These formed because of a combination of forces unique to these years: (1) the mobilization of neighborhoods and neighborhood organizations; and (2) the dramatic expansion in federal urban funding to address the problems of low and middle-income neighborhoods and populations. Neighborhood mobilization complicated traditional arrangements for popular control by challenging the hegemony of traditional downtown business leaders, even as expanded federal funding, initially through the War on Poverty and later through Community Development Block Grants and other programs, provided the means and encouragement to pursue collective ends other than downtown development. Federalist regimes formed, sometimes without the participation of traditional downtown business interests, in cities affected by both phenomena. When federal urban funding began to decline in the late 1970s, these regimes also declined and may by now have disappeared. However, their brief prominence serves to underscore the primacy of financial support for shaping regimes and regime orientations.
- *Slow growth/quality of life regimes.* Economic growth can conflict with an area’s quality of life by producing traffic congestion, pollution, and developmental incursions in residential neighborhoods. Faced with such a tradeoff, some cities have produced regimes that attempt to limit growth in order to preserve a high quality of life. This orientation appears most likely in those cities that have both (1) an economy strong enough to flourish even if constrained by regulation; and (2) a substantial population of “white middle-class professionals who [are] politically motivated by quality-of-life concerns and neighborhood preservation goals,” as DeLeon (1991) has described San Francisco.

- *Human capital regimes.* Some cities have developed regimes that temper their pursuit of economic development with a concern for developing human capital. In Baltimore, for example, after the city's African-American churches formed a grass-roots organization, Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), with the goal of better using the human capital in the African-American community, the group's leaders were able to win over key business and political leaders to create a regime focused on improving local schools and enhancing the job prospects of their graduates. Business leaders were persuaded that "it was in the business community's best interest to have a quality public education system" to create a better-qualified work force, while political leaders were persuaded by both the political popularity and the economic potential of the BUILD agenda (Orr, 1992).

A census of cities would undoubtedly reveal other types of regimes, as well as variations on those described above. The composition and orientation of a regime in any particular city depend on (1) the nature of the local economy; (2) the nature of the local voting population; and (3) the success of entrepreneurial political, civic, and business leaders in forging alliances that combine those first two factors.

A census might also reveal that many central-city regimes have destabilized in recent decades. For one thing, the exodus of capital from central cities removed many traditional regime partners, thereby both changing regime composition and reducing the economic resources available to them. In addition, many of the economic interests that remain in cities have become branch offices of national or international companies that are run by transient executives, in contrast to the homegrown, locally-invested executives of an earlier era's locally-owned companies. At the same time, growing ethnic diversity in cities has challenged the ability of many traditional white male-dominated regimes to retain popular control (Savitch and Thomas, 1991). These several factors in combination may mean that many U.S. cities are now governed by regimes weaker or more fragile than a quarter century ago.

Implications for Urban Universities

Governing regime theory holds many implications for the leaders of urban universities, and for their presidents in particular, as they attempt to cope in the 1990s and beyond. These implications are explored below in the approximate sequence leaders might consider.

Understand the nature of the local governing regime. This is the first and minimal implication of regime theory. Although one might for any number of reasons choose not to work with the local regime, no urban university that hopes to flourish in its community can safely be oblivious to what is probably the most powerful force at work within it.

This understanding should include a sense of the regime's orientation and priorities, as well as of its power and stability. For example, to what extent is the regime focused on downtown development as opposed to, say, the development of

human capital? Those priorities have obvious relevance for how university priorities might be advanced by cooperating with the regime. Regime power and stability can also vary greatly between cities in ways that affect how well the regime can pursue its priorities and how much support, or opposition, the regime could mount for the university's priorities.

Recognize the economic clout of the university. Viewed from the perspective of regime theory, urban universities emerge as major economic actors in cities. By bringing people to the city for classes and other programs, the universities give a direct economic stimulus to the city. They provide further boosts to the area economy by enhancing the abilities students bring to their jobs. What universities build for their own purposes, from classroom buildings to sports facilities to performing arts centers, also contribute to the physical economic development of the city as a whole. All of these factors together make for a considerable economic impact.

The urban university as an economic force in the city is not a new phenomenon. As Logan and Molotch (1987) document, economic elites have long recognized "the use of universities and colleges as a stimulus to growth...." What may be new is recognition of this economic clout—and of the associated opportunities, responsibilities, and risks—by urban universities themselves.

Consider the possibility of regime membership. This economic clout of urban universities makes their leaders obvious candidates for regime inclusion, and could persuade regime leaders to welcome a university's president to their number. Recognizing these facts, a shrewd urban university leader should consider the possibility of seeking that membership.

Economic investment in the city gives urban universities reason to penetrate the regime's inner circle. Such universities may have even more economic stake in the fate of the city than do most private businesses, given the relative immobility of public universities as compared to private capital. If the economic health of the central city suffers, the urban university seldom has the option of moving.

The Calculus of Regime Membership

A decision on whether to pursue membership should be based on a careful assessment of the benefits and risks.

Benefit 1: Improvements in the university's physical base. On the benefit side, as a participant in regime discussions about economic development projects in the city, a university president may be able to persuade other regime partners to support projects that will improve the university's physical base. It also becomes more likely then that public facilities for which the university is *not* the primary beneficiary may be planned with an eye toward how the university might also use them.

Benefit 2: New or expanded educational programs. Regime membership can also bring new opportunities for educational programs in at least two ways. As a regime partner, a university president may be able to educate other regime members about the need for particular educational programs, thereby building either a student base or a funding base for those programs. Regime partners may also alert the university to community educational needs, prompting the university to undertake new programs that were not previously contemplated. University capabilities can

often be better adapted to meet community needs if universities listen carefully to what community leaders say.

Benefit 3: Research and public service. A president who hears community leaders raising questions about community problems can volunteer the university's capabilities, not necessarily on a pro bono basis, to assess them. The president can then bring research and public service projects back to the university as opportunities for faculty and students.

Although many of these benefits might flow to the university anyway, more benefits are likely with regime membership. As a member, a university president can advocate for the university's interests as decision-makers deliberate the city's future. Fewer opportunities are likely to come to the university that is not a regime partner because the president is not at the table to interject the university's needs during deliberations.

Risk #1: Distraction from what the university does best. On the other side of the equation, regime membership also carries risks. First and most generally, some critics worry that becoming intimately involved in the city "diverts [universities] from their true mission of teaching and thinking. Although the ivory tower is mocked for its isolation, this detachment is necessary for generating and nurturing new ideas, which are delicate and need tender cultivation" (Davis, 1995).

This potential risk seems exaggerated. For one thing, some of what universities do best is to work in their communities through applied research, service learning, and other programs that are integral, not peripheral, to university purposes. In fact, there may well be more benefit than cost to greater community involvement. Having some parts of the university working in the community need not preclude other parts operating in a more detached ivory-tower manner. The extreme departmentalization so often lamented in universities should actually help to protect more traditional academic pursuits.

Risk #2: The economic risk. As a second possibility, when regime membership leads to university involvement in economic development projects, there is an inevitable risk of a project failing and the university incurring a financial loss that could put the responsible president's job in jeopardy. But this is a risk that comes with project involvement, not with regime membership as such. In fact, the economic risk may actually be less with membership, because the risk is then likely to be shared with other regime members who will do what they can to ensure success; without regime membership, the risk may be the university's alone.

Risk #3: The risk of joining a dying regime. With the weakening of many urban regimes, presidents who would be regime partners face a risk that they may be joining dying entities. Membership in the old regime could then be a barrier to joining a new one, should one form, since the old could be perceived as the enemy of the new. This risk can be minimized, however, by following the initial advice offered earlier: to understand the nature of the local regime before joining.

Risk #4: The potential conflict between the university's mission and the regime's orientation. A greater risk is that the traditional urban university mission of "providing simple access to higher education to working class and inner city communities" (Bartelt, 1995) could conflict with the common regime focus on commer-

cial and downtown development. This is the very conflict that has often pitted liberal faculty, interested in the development of low-income inner-city communities, against economic elites for whom downtown development is the first priority. The university president who joins a regime could then become caught between the demands of faculty and the priorities of the regime.

The problem can become more acute should the president be captured by the regime, adopting its world view and losing touch with some university values. As others have observed, "it is easy to become so involved in the community that the president's relationships on campus are undermined" (Thompson, Burton, and Berrey, 1994). Although there are ways to mitigate these problems, the risks counsel caution about regime membership.

Risk #5: Substantial time costs. As a final risk, anyone who joins a regime must be prepared to spend a great deal of time, both for regime discussions and for the many civic involvements that membership can entail. A president may not wish to make that time commitment if, as an example, the regime itself is relatively ineffectual (e.g., a caretaker regime) or if the greater leadership challenges appear to be at other levels (e.g., the state legislature).

A Strategy of Regime Membership

The calculus of membership will also be affected by the strategy a university president pursues as a regime member. Here regime theory implies a number of possible stratagems.

Stratagem #1: Examine how the university agenda can be served by regime priorities. To begin with, the university should consider where its agenda and that of the regime overlap. If the regime has a principal concern for downtown development, the university should examine which of its priorities fit with such development and then attempt to put those priorities on the regime's agenda. The university should also be on the watch for ways in which its needs might be served by projects proposed by others. A president might, for example, be able to persuade regime leaders to add university uses to projects for which the primary users will be non-university (e.g., sports facilities that could be used by university teams as well as by professional sports franchises).

Regimes with different orientations offer different opportunities. Perhaps the best-case scenario for universities is the regime focused on human capital development, for which education is central. Human-capital regimes might facilitate new university partnerships with K-12 schools or with businesses, wherein the university would provide college educations at business expense to needy students from city schools.

Stratagem #2: Consider if and how to advocate for a different regime orientation. A university president need not feel bound by the prevailing regime orientation: the group view held by regime partners is dynamic, changing with events and persuasive arguments. University administrators may be most persuasive when they are able to articulate the value of the university to the city, and what the university needs in order to maximize that value. If, for example, the regime does not already favor human capital policies, university administrators might advocate those policies that would both meet community needs and advance university priorities.

To be sure, any effort to reshape a group view should proceed cautiously, given the supposed distaste of regime members for having their disagreements aired publicly. At a minimum, new ideas probably should be tested first within the regime's inner circle, and pursued more broadly only if support can be found there.

Stratagem #3: Understand the need to "go along to get along." Almost inevitably, regime membership will find a university president being asked to support projects that run counter either to the university's priorities or to the preferences of faculty and students. It could also happen that a project so conflicts with the president's or the university's values that regime membership then becomes untenable. Short of that, however, the president must be prepared to go along with at least some of these projects in order to survive as an effective regime member. To make this task easier, the president may have the option to support by not actively opposing.

"Going along" need not mean that the university speaks with one voice on the issue. To the contrary, faculty will sometimes offer the most articulate opposition to regime projects that the president feels obliged to support. The task for the president may then be to educate regime partners in the importance of academic freedom to avoid their alienation by the faculty opposition. The president may truthfully argue that the same freedom that nurtures creativity and innovation in universities also sparks frequent dissent.

Stratagem #4: Stay attuned to the university's priorities and capabilities. To be an effective advocate for the university, the president as regime member must work hard to remain knowledgeable about the university's interests and abilities. Otherwise, he or she could be tempted to try to provide anything and everything a regime asks, and is willing to pay for, which could distract from what the university does best and also potentially alienate faculty. The best way to avoid this may be for the president to talk regularly with faculty and other university administrators about the university's interests and, to the extent confidentiality permits, about opportunities arising through the regime.

Stratagem #5: Identify and involve others from within the university to work on regime-related projects. In addition to listening to others from within the university, the president needs to find the faculty and administrators likely to be interested in the opportunities—for applied research, community service, new educational programs, and the like, that the president may bring from regime discussions. Although many faculty resist community-initiated research that might have quick turnaround times and questionable scholarly potential, growing numbers welcome opportunities to serve the community and enjoy the challenge of having to respond quickly. An early task for a university president as a regime member may be to identify these allies on whom he may call when possible projects arise.

This job should not be the president's alone. Deans and department heads can encourage faculty responsiveness to regime-related opportunities for their value in providing research, classroom examples, internships, and even new departmental locations (e.g., abandoned office buildings). It can be especially important to nurture the responsiveness of tenured faculty, because they need not be as immediately concerned with whether community research translates to publications and are also more likely to have the experience necessary to make that translation.

The Case of President Carl Patton at Georgia State University

The experience of Georgia State University (GSU) President Carl Patton illustrates a number of the benefits, risks, and possible strategies associated with regime membership. Persuaded by arguments like those articulated above, He sought regime membership when he became president of GSU in 1992. Patton joined and eventually became a member of the board of directors of both Central Atlanta Progress (CAP) and the Chamber of Commerce, two organizations that historically have been the locus of regime activities, and he has also served as president of the Atlanta Downtown Partnership and as a member of the board of directors for the United Way and the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau.

As a regime member, Patton has pursued a number of the strategies described earlier. First, he has pushed university needs and projects that also fit regime priorities, in particular by asserting GSU's role in the redevelopment of the struggling Atlanta downtown area. Early on in his tenure, he led the effort to raise community funding for a \$14 million redevelopment of the city's historic Rialto theater, which has now become a fine-arts performing center, owned by the university but serving both the campus and the downtown. Patton was also instrumental in shaping a new Downtown Improvement District (DID), which provides additional security services for the downtown area, and benefits GSU in its urban setting. Supported by voluntary taxes from area businesses, the enhanced downtown security has the goal of attracting more visitors and new residents from outside the urban core.

Second, he has attempted to reshape the regime's group view through frequent speeches arguing that the downtown Atlanta economy should focus on "industries of the mind." In his view, Atlanta should build around its closely related information and education industries: information through CNN and BellSouth and education through GSU and the Atlanta University Complex. In so arguing, he has in effect sought to modify the regime's focus from economic development alone to a broader view that also favors GSU. Judging from how frequently the "industries of the mind" phrase now appears in discussions of Atlanta's development, he has had some success.

Third, Patton has been cautious about committing the university to any projects inconsistent with university interests. To assist in this regard, he relies on both conversations with faculty and administrators and on the university's strategic plan. He also regularly asks departments to provide "factoids"—brief facts about university accomplishments—for use in his speeches in the community and around the state. His resulting knowledge about institutional strengths increases the potential for finding connections between those strengths and community needs. The strategic plan is especially useful, he believes, when an opportunity arises about which he must decide within a matter of hours. He will then look to the plan and say "yes" only if the opportunity is consistent with university strategy.

Patton's efforts have brought a number of benefits to the university, the renovated Rialto Theatre being the most obvious. GSU was designated as an Olympics venue, which ensured that most of the housing for athletes in Olympic Village became GSU dormitory space once the Olympics were over. Less publicly, GSU

also receives frequent opportunities to purchase, at little or no cost, downtown office buildings that are being abandoned by businesses.

In one such case, regime membership brought unanticipated economic benefits to the urban university. A building owner was unable to strike a deal with GSU because the costs to renovate the building for university use would be too high. GSU remained involved, however, as the building was instead given to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in exchange for a line of newspaper advertising credit. The newspaper then gave the building to the university as a tax-deductible contribution, and GSU sold the building to a developer at market rates, with the proceeds going to create an endowment to support faculty development. Without question, GSU could not have been part of such a complicated deal but for Patton's regime membership. This membership has also brought many programmatic benefits to GSU, from new and expanded educational programs to a variety of research projects. The university's new School of Policy Studies, launched in July of 1996, probably owes its existence to Patton's connections in the external community.

His experience at GSU also provides examples of the risks of regime membership, the greatest of which may be the substantial time required by regime responsibilities. In Patton's case, which may not be atypical, time has been necessary both for regular regime discussions and for the many civic involvements that membership entails. That may be time well spent, but it is also time unavailable for other responsibilities and opportunities.

Another economic risk of regime membership might appear to be the Rialto renovation, since many observers doubt whether the crowds will return in numbers adequate to sustain the theater. If so, GSU could find itself owning a wonderfully renovated theater that is an economic drain on the university. Yet, as argued earlier, this risk is a consequence of the project, not of regime membership. In fact, membership may actually lower the risk by enlisting other regime members to join their energies in seeing the theatre succeed.

Patton could also face the risks associated with joining a dying regime. With the departure of many economic interests from downtown, Atlanta's governing regime is reputedly much less powerful today than a decade ago, when Central Atlanta Progress ruled the city. To date, though, there is no sign that the old regime is about to be replaced.

On the whole, Patton's choice to join the Atlanta governing regime appears to have brought more benefits than costs to GSU. The university has expanded its physical space in the Atlanta downtown, and Patton himself has won praise within Georgia as "a skilled coalition builder" who "has labored to help revitalize downtown and to make GSU an integral part of the city" ("75 Who Were Leaders in Their Fields," *Georgian Trend*, January 1997).

Conclusions

Urban governing regime theory has provided scholars with many valuable insights into who governs cities and what ends they pursue in governing. Urban universities, and their leaders in particular, can also profit from understanding this interesting theory. Such understanding raises the question of whether the university should

seek membership in the local regime. The typical urban university has the economic power that is the principal prerequisite to regime membership, and urban universities are better positioned to argue their cases from within regimes than from without.

Considering the various possible benefits, risks, and strategies of regime membership, the equation appears to tilt heavily in favor of membership. There will be times when an urban university should avoid membership, such as when the local regime is dying, when its orientation conflicts with the university's, or when the principal challenges for the university lie elsewhere. For the most part, however, the success of the university and the success of the city may be so intertwined that the best means for the university to promote its own success is to seek regime membership and then to work strategically for the university inside the regime.

Suggested Readings

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NOTE: This assessment is based on conversations with Patton, with a few other university and community leaders, and on readings of newspaper accounts of community issues. This is not offered as an evaluation of Patton's work, but only as a case illustration of regime-urban university interactions.