HISTORY

All the Presidents' Regulations

John Graham's new book is a good starting place to understand recent federal regulatory policy and what may lie ahead.

BY CLIFFORD WINSTON

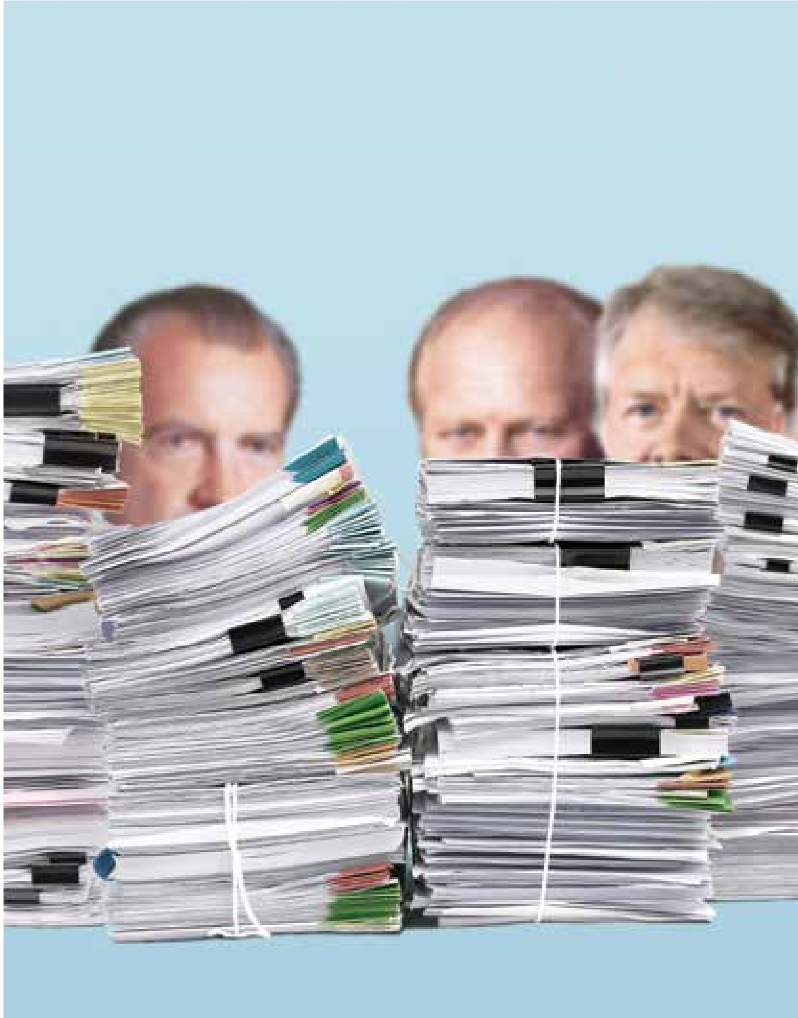
John D. Graham's *Regulatory Reform from Nixon to Biden* is a well-written, comprehensive, and stimulating book on regulatory reforms that US presidents initiated from 1968 to present. Although the book was published before Donald Trump's second term in office began, it is useful for thinking about the new administration's potential regulatory actions, especially advice it receives from the advisory group initially dubbed the "Department of Government Efficiency" and now known as the US DOGE Service, formerly the US Digital Service.

Graham is a longtime academic who also served as administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs under President George W. Bush from 2001 to 2006. Thus, the book's contents are not limited to economics; Graham provides blow-by-blow discussions of how politics and law shaped regulatory policy for each presidential administration.

Here is a quick summary of some of the major regulatory initiatives and reforms that occurred under these presidents:

- Richard Nixon created such regulatory agencies as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and he did not actively support transportation deregulation.
- Gerald Ford revitalized the Federal Trade Commission, but he also supported initiatives that led to transportation deregulation.
- Jimmy Carter greatly advanced deregulation of the airline, trucking, railroad, natural gas, and banking industries.
- Ronald Reagan signed legislation to deregulate interstate bus transportation, the savings and loan industry, and cable television, and supported the adoption of emissions trading by the EPA.

Clifford Winston is a Senior Fellow in the Economic Studies Program at the Brookings Institution.



- George H.W. Bush signed the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments and the Nutritional Labeling and Education Act of 1990.
- Bill Clinton persuaded Congress to pass the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and furthered deregulation of telecommunications, branch banking, and intrastate trucking.
- George W. Bush signed the Sarbanes–Oxley Act covering corporate accounting and governance, revived NHTSA's Corporate Average Fuel Economy Standards (CAFE), and signed the 2005 energy law that facilitated the expansion of hydraulic fracturing (fracking).
- Barack Obama signed the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the Dodd–Frank Act, insulated fracking from federal regulation, spearheaded the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) with Asian countries (excluding China) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the European Union.
- Donald Trump scaled back the ACA, pollution limits, and CAFE, abandoned the TPP, and replaced NAFTA with the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement. He also used the authority under the Congressional Review Act to repeal 17 regulations, but only two of them were "economically significant."
- Joe Biden reversed Trump's efforts to limit the ACA, revitalized NHTSA initiatives, instructed several federal agencies to launch rules to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and supported more aggressive antitrust enforcement.

After finishing the book, I was struck by the continuity of the presidents' regulatory policies presented and explained by Graham. However, I suspect most readers will not have that reaction. Why might our reactions differ?

I am an academic economist who has never worked in government, and while Graham seems to have some empathy for elected officials who contend with the politics of rulemaking, I do not. Accordingly, as I read the book, I performed a cold-blooded economic assessment of each president's regulatory policies, including actions they pursued and did not pursue. By the book's last chapter, where Graham encouraged readers to form their own list of beneficial regulatory reforms over the past 55 years, my list of beneficial reforms as well as my much longer list of harmful actions and inactions were complete. A familiar theme of vast governmental inefficiencies emerged, with each presidential administration contributing its share.

My take-away contrasts with the sympathetic and earnest tone of Graham, who concludes his book by characterizing presidentialism as the best of the imperfect paths forward. So, before talking about the economic effects of several of the presidential regulations discussed by Graham, I want to first

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explain the conceptual framework, based on market failure and government failure, that I used to evaluate those effects. I then discuss the scholarly evidence on the effects.

OVERVIEW OF MARKET FAILURE

Graham presents the presidents' regulations as policy interventions in the US economy, but he does not discuss the various economic motivations for those interventions. Generally, government policy interventions are motivated by the belief that the market has failed in some respect. It is, therefore, appropriate for views about whether a government policy was justified and was successful to be based on a comparison with a market outcome.

Economists have identified five market failures that lead to an inefficient allocation of resources: natural monopoly, abuse of monopoly power, imperfect information, externalities, and public goods. In theory, those market failures motivate a government policy intervention to address the inefficiencies and increase social welfare by improving resource allocation. In practice, a government policy intervention may not increase welfare.

In what follows, I explain each market failure, along with the economic goal that society wishes to accomplish by addressing it, the government policy that is intended to correct a market failure efficiently, the agency or department that implements the policy, and why a government policy may not be successful.

Natural monopoly / Natural monopoly is characterized by a technology where increasing returns to scale exist over the relevant range of an industry's output or by the unusual situation where cost is minimized when the industry's output is produced by only one producer. Natural monopoly results in a market failure because the unregulated outcome is either destructive competition that bankrupts an industry as each firm continues to reduce its price to take advantage of declining costs, or else a sole monopoly survivor that then sets prices above competitive levels. Society's economic goal is to protect consumers when technology appears to prevent workable price competition, as in the case of natural monopoly.

Government's efficient policy response is to institute price regulation so firms can earn roughly a normal rate of return on their investment, as well as entry regulation so that new entrants cannot prevent incumbent firms from earning a normal return by reducing their demand.

Policymakers eventually realized that the natural monopoly justification for regulating the US transportation, energy, communications, and financial industries was not justified; that is, those industries did not have natural monopoly characteristics. Workable competition was both possible and preferable to regulations precluding entry and price competition and slowing the industries' rate of innovation and technological advance. So, as Graham discusses, those industries were deregulated.

However, select agricultural products continue to be regulated by the Department of Agriculture, and international air and ocean transportation services are subject to various price and entry regulations. International trade is subject to export and import controls. Those economic regulations could fail like previous industry price and entry regulations because they are not justified.

Abuse of monopoly power / Monopoly power refers to the ability to raise price above marginal cost without attracting entry. Generally, price above marginal cost causes a welfare loss to consumers, which is interpreted as a market failure. However, society's economic goal is to protect consumers from anticompetitive behavior, meaning that consumers are *not* supposed to be "protected" from firms that are more efficient and more technologically advanced than other firms and are therefore able to set prices above marginal cost.

Antitrust policy and enforcement are used by the government to protect consumers against anticompetitive behavior by firms. The US Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission enforce the antitrust laws to prevent anticompetitive abuses of market power, mergers that harm consumer welfare by leading to higher prices, and collusion among competing firms that leads to higher prices. Antitrust enforcement could fail because a firm or firms have not engaged in an anticompetitive practice, no remedy exists that could address the anticompetitive behavior and enhance consumer welfare, or the market has addressed the anticompetitive behavior during the time that it takes to bring an antitrust case to trial, reach a verdict, and determine a remedy.

Imperfect or asymmetric information / Consumers, workers, and firms may not be aware of information that could help prevent harm to their and possibly others' welfare. Society's economic goal is to enable people to make more informed decisions about products and workplaces.

Several regulatory agencies—including but not limited to the CPSC, NHTSA, Food and Drug Administration, OSHA, Federal Communications Commission, and Securities and Exchange Commission—implement regulations that seek to ensure products and workplaces are safe and to enable people to make more informed decisions about products, companies, and workplaces. Information policies could fail because market competition and technological advance enable consumers and workers to be informed about any possible risks to their safety or improve the safety of products and workplaces.

Externalities in consumption and production / Externalities are positive or negative effects that consumers and producers have on the welfare of other members of society. Society's economic goal is to reduce negative externalities and promote positive externalities, especially from innovation.

The EPA, Federal Aviation Administration, US Department of Energy, and US Department of Transportation implement regulations to reduce consumption and production externalities caused by travelers and firms. To spur innovation, the Patent and Trademark Office awards patents and trademarks, various federal government departments provide subsidies for research and development, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Laboratories, and several departments conduct research on various topics of interest to the public.

Externality policies could fail because they do not use the appropriate policy instrument to address the source of the negative externality. For example, they might use an inefficient command-and-control policy instead of an efficient externality tax. Positive externality or technology policies could fail because the profit-maximization incentive for innovation provided in private markets is superior to any incentives for innovation or patent protections provided by government policy.

Government failure encompasses the vast array of economic, social, and even foreign policy interventions that adversely affect an economy.

Public goods / Public goods have the characteristics of being nonrivalrous, meaning they cannot be depleted, and nonexcludable, meaning they are available to everyone. Society's economic goal is to enable public production to provide public goods and services that are socially desirable and may not be provided by private firms because they are unprofitable.

Various federal and state government departments and agencies manage and provide public lands and the nation's transportation infrastructure and services, such as postal deliveries. Public production could fail if it is not socially desirable or if it could be provided profitably and more efficiently by the private sector through privatization.

Addressing market failure / In sum, the federal government has pursued multiple policies to address alleged instances of market failure. Graham's discussion of the presidents' regulatory reforms gives more attention to economic price and entry regulations, antitrust, information policies, and negative externality policies than to technology policies and public production. Accordingly, my discussion of the empirical evidence also will give more attention to those areas. To complete my conceptual framework, I now turn to government failure.

DEFINING AND MEASURING GOVERNMENT FAILURE

Government failure encompasses the vast array of economic, social, and even foreign policy interventions that adversely affect an economy. It is the leading cause of resource misallocation in the United States and in every other country in the world. Yet, to the extent that economists think about government failure, they tend to think about it narrowly as resulting primarily from various policies that limit the flexibility of prices while attempting to correct alleged market failures.

It is, therefore, not surprising that economists have not reached a consensus on defining government failure and on developing a unifying framework to categorize and distinguish between different types of government failures. A plausible definition of government failure in the context of regulation that lends itself to empirical measurement is a policy intervention that significantly wastes resources. Those resources include firms' compliance costs and the cost of taxpayers' funds to pay for government's implementation and enforcement of a regulatory policy. Social welfare could therefore be improved if the regulatory policy were reformed to improve its efficiency or were eliminated because its costs exceed social benefits.

Based on my definition, a government regulatory failure could be verified empirically by conducting a cost–benefit analysis that reveals government is significantly wasting resources because:

- the costs of the policy exceed the benefits (a government policy creates a net welfare loss),
- costs and benefits are roughly equal and small (a government policy has a negligible direct effect on welfare, but government's intervention creates a welfare loss by wasting taxpayers' dollars and by forcing firms to incur compliance costs), or
- benefits exceed costs, but the costs of achieving the benefits are excessive (that is, a government policy increases welfare but generates excessive costs to do so).

ASSESSING THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF THE PRESIDENTS' REGULATORY POLICIES

I use the preceding framework to assess some of the US presidents' major regulatory policies identified by Graham. I do so by drawing on scholarly empirical evidence on government successes and failures that I have synthesized in two books published by the Brookings Institution, *Government Failure Versus Market Failure* (2006) and *Gaining Ground: Markets Helping Gov-*

ernment (2021), and by drawing on the latest scholarly empirical evidence on market failures and market corrections that I have synthesized in a new book to be published this year by Palgrave–MacMillan, *Market Corrections Not Government Interventions: The Surest Path to Improving the US Economy.* Below, I examine those presidential regulatory policies discussed by Graham whose economic effects I have synthesized in my books.

Based on my framework, a government regulatory policy that improves social welfare must generate positive benefits, and those benefits must not be achieved at excessive costs that waste resources. Graham appears to characterize a government regulation as having positive effects if it simply generates benefits, so our interpretations of the overall effect of a government regulation may differ. My use of a more restrictive standard for interpreting the economic effects of a government regulation is justified because government's intervention is based on the belief that a regulatory policy can improve on market performance. However, if government regulation is wasting resources—even if it is generating benefits—then the day may come, or may already have come, when market forces could be an improvement over government regulation. Of course, market forces are likely to be an improvement over government regulation when regulation reduces or has no effect on welfare.

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I organize the evidence of the effects of the presidents' regulatory policies by their different effects on social welfare. Because those effects tend to be stable over time, I do not change the regulatory policies' welfare classifications. One could interpret the stability of regulatory policies' effects as implying that they do not get worse or they do not improve. Given the performance of regulatory policies, the latter is more concerning.

Reforms that increase social welfare / I have found very few new federal government regulations that have increased social welfare and have been assessed quantitatively. But like Graham, I can identify government regulations whose *elimination* significantly increased social welfare.

I noted that price and entry regulations of certain US industries were justified, in theory, to address alleged instances of market failure caused by natural monopoly. But by recognizing that the justification for regulation no longer applied, the federal government's deregulation of the transportation, telecommunication, energy, and financial industries has been a major policy success by facilitating large market corrections as firms shed their inefficiencies accumulated during regulation and became more productive and innovative.

Graham's Table 12.2 cites beneficial deregulatory actions and shows that deregulatory legislation has been a prominent feature of both parties' administrations. Graham points out that both Presidents George W. Bush and Obama encouraged fracking, which was facilitated and greatly expanded by energy deregulation. Deregulation has turned out to be the crown jewel of the federal government's regulatory reforms because, according to Litan 2014, the resulting annual social benefits from deregulation of US industries have been on the order of $1 trillion dollars!

The main implication from the deregulation experience is that government regulatory policy tends to benefit society when regulations are eliminated, not when they are expanded. Unfortunately, as I discuss below, government policy has continued to foreclose considerable benefits by not withdrawing more regulations.

Before turning to the various welfare costs of government regulations, I wish to stress that government policymakers have had other microeconomic policy successes besides deregulation. Virtually everyone would agree that the Federal Trade Commission's creation of a National Do Not Call Registry, giving people the choice of whether to receive calls from telemarketers, and the Federal Communications Commission's measures to block robocalls have been socially desirable policies.

Government policy that requires employees to make the conscious decision to opt out instead of opt into retirement plans has benefited employees by significantly increasing their 401(k) participation rates. Government's industrial research and development policy has complemented industry investments and boosted innovation with military expenditures that have supported research and development and led to useful civilian applications, and with expenditures on space exploration that have generated significant public returns. In addition, government support to universities in the late 1960s helped to develop the internet, investment in the Human Genome Project in the early 1990s increased our understanding of human disease, and funding in the mid-1990s helped to create Google.

Regulations that decrease social welfare / Government regulations decrease social welfare when they are no longer or were never justified because an unregulated market is workably competitive. In this case, regulations reduce competition, raise prices, and in some cases reduce service quality. Specific regulations include inefficient price regulations and subsidies that persist for agricultural products, tariffs that distort the international trade of products and increase the cost of imports, and regulations of international airline and ocean transportation prices and entry.

The annual costs of those regulations run in the tens of billions of dollars and their costs are compounded by adverse interaction effects. To take some examples, the more than $60 billion in subsidies expected to be provided to farmers from 2017 to 2027 have increased by more than $25 billion to offset the losses incurred from tariffs imposed by the first Trump administration. Tariffs harm US consumers by raising the price and limiting the availability of desirable products made by foreign firms. And by reducing competition provided by foreign firms, tariffs also may make it easier for US firms to engage in anticompetitive behavior, such as tacit collusion, which may not be prosecuted by the antitrust authorities.

For decades, presidents have used tariffs to protect the US automobile industry from competition by foreign automakers while reducing consumers' welfare. Beginning in 1964, the Johnson administration imposed a 25 percent tariff on light trucks that continues to protect US automakers from foreign competition in that large market segment; that is, for 60 years, no president has acted to eliminate the tariff. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration pressured Japan to impose voluntary export restraints (VERs), which limited the availability of fuel-efficient Japanese vehicles that US consumers preferred over less-fuel-efficient US vehicles. All US firms took advantage of the limited supply of Japanese vehicles to raise their prices significantly. A positive outcome of the VERs is that Japanese automobile transplants spurred competition by producing and selling their vehicles in the United States.

The long-term problem with trade protection is that although the US auto industry has steadily lost market share to foreign auto producers, US automakers have been sufficiently profitable to avoid the consequences of failing to close the gap between the quality and value of their vehicles and those of their foreign competitors. Thus, the US auto industry was not able to withstand the shocks of the Great Recession and Covid on its own, and the federal government had to provide the industry with considerable assistance to prevent a collapse, which policymakers claimed could have severely damaged the macroeconomy.

The US history of auto protection opened a new chapter when President Biden quadrupled tariffs on electric vehicles (EVs) from China from 25 percent to 100 percent. President Trump will undoubtedly keep that tariff. Importantly, the tariff prevents the global leader in EVs and hybrids, the Chinese company Build Your Dreams (BYD), from exporting its lower-priced but high-quality EVs to the United States. Unlike the Japanese automakers, Chinese automakers are wary of building plants in the United States.

Despite the benefits from domestic airline deregulation, policymakers continue to harm air travelers by maintaining regulations that restrict airline competition with foreign carriers. Some foreign carriers are prevented from serving US international airline routes that are not subject to Open Skies agreements and all foreign carriers are prohibited from serving US domestic airline routes; that is, they are not granted cabotage rights. Cabotage rights could enable new foreign entrants to increase price competition on US domestic routes, as well as enable all airlines to develop their networks to offer seamless domestic and international travel so that travelers would not have to endure long transfer wait times at foreign airports.

Regulations also increase the cost of ocean transportation service. The Jones Act requires ships carrying goods from one US port to another to be built in the United States, be owned by American companies, fly the American flag, and be operated by American crews. The Jones Act has significantly raised the cost of ocean transportation for US shippers because the cost of US-built ships is much higher than the cost of comparable ships built overseas. Ocean shipping companies also raise shippers' rates because they were given an antitrust exemption to fix rates in conferences.

When regulations limit competition and increase firms' profits, labor demands a share of those economic rents and will go on strike unless they are satisfied with their share. The International Longshoremen's Association struck in October 2024, demanding a 77 percent pay increase over the next six years. The dispute was subsequently resolved, with the two sides agreeing to a 62 percent increase. But a crippling future strike could bring the US supply chain to a halt. Policymakers could have eliminated the monetary source of the dispute between management and labor—namely, the existence of large rents created by regulations—by deregulating the ocean transportation industry and subjecting ocean carriers to much greater competition that would have dissipated their rents.

Regulations that have negligible effect / Government policies often have a negligible effect on social welfare when they effectively amount to solutions in search of a problem. This outcome can occur in the cases of antitrust and information policies because existing market forces or market corrections, in the form of new competition or technological advance, are often effective at addressing the alleged market failures attributable to anticompetitive behavior and imperfect information.

The benefits to consumers from vigorous antitrust policy, which has often but not always been supported by presidential administrations, have been found to be negligible for several reasons. First, the alleged anticompetitive behavior was, in fact, minimal. Second, the actual relief to consumers had a small effect. Third, the market environment became more competitive during the excessive time it took to litigate a monopolization case. Fourth, the criminal penalties for price fixing do not strongly discourage such behavior because they are levied against corporations instead of their officers. And fifth, the antitrust authorities have difficulty distinguishing anticompetitive mergers from procompetitive ones.

The benefits to consumers from information policies, which have often but not always been supported by presidential administrations, also have been found to be negligible for several reasons. First, regulatory agencies do not account for individuals' behavioral responses to their regulations, for example by taking fewer precautions in response to safety regulations. Second, regulatory agencies do not account for firms' market responses to risky workplaces, for example by offering compensating wage differentials for jobs that could pose risks to health. Third, improvements in information technologies in the past few decades have greatly informed consumers and workers about the risks to health and safety from harmful products and workplaces. And fourth, policymakers could encourage the provision of beneficial information by increasing competition, such as among the providers of credit ratings, but they have failed to do so.

Regulations that increase social welfare at excessive cost / Government policies may improve social welfare, but poor policy design and implementation may cause society to incur excessive costs to achieve the policies' benefits. In some cases, the costs can be so large that they result in a policy that provides large benefits but still reduces welfare.

The existence of negative externalities—such as air, water, and vehicle pollution, aircraft noise, and automobile accidents—indicates that government actions are justified to reduce the social cost of those externalities. The challenge for policymakers is to design externality policies that result in an efficient level of firms' performance without excessively increasing their costs, which reduces output and increases consumers' prices.

Graham's Table 12.1 includes clean air and water and automobile and traffic safety among the beneficial areas of federal rulemaking over time. The scholarly empirical evidence indicates that improvements in the environment and reductions in aircraft noise have occurred, while automobile safety has fluctuated with the economy. At the same time, policymakers have eschewed efficient environmental, noise, and vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT) taxes in favor of less efficient command-and-control policies. One exception is that Biden included a VMT tax in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, but the US Department of Transportation made little if any progress on a VMT pilot program as required by the legislation. The Trump administration is unlikely to resurrect testing and to eventually implement a VMT tax.

The upshot is that externality policies have amounted to:

- expensive successes in reducing air pollution, vehicle emissions, and water pollution, which could have been achieved at much lower cost;
- outright failures in the process of reducing aircraft noise and improving the quality of drinking water, because costs have exceeded benefits; and
- missed opportunities to provide social benefits by implementing efficient externality taxes to reduce congestion and global emissions.

Government's decisions to mandate certain automobile safety features have not been informed by a careful cost–benefit assessment. For example, automakers were steadily installing airbags on their vehicles when motorists were willing to pay the average cost of air bag installation. Nonetheless, federal law required that *all* cars and light trucks sold in the United States from 1998 onward be equipped with air bags on both sides of the front seat. Policymakers did not consider the welfare loss to motorists who valued air bags at less than the cost that was passed through in higher vehicle prices and the likelihood that some drivers would offset the safety benefits of airbags by driving more aggressively.

Beginning in the late 2000s, automakers began to steadily install Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), based on artificial intelligence, in vehicles whose owners were willing to pay the cost. The technology consists of a suite of automated safety features that assist in both the forward dimension (automatic emergency braking [AEB] and adaptive cruise control), and the lateral dimension (a lane departure warning and blind spot collision prevention). Recently, the federal government decided to require that all new passenger cars and light trucks be equipped with AEB systems by the fall of 2029, again without considering the costs to drivers who value AEB systems at less than the higher vehicle prices they will have to pay for vehicles equipped with them and how drivers' behavior may be affected by AEB systems.

FINAL COMMENTS

Graham's comprehensive and informative tour of regulatory policies from the Nixon to Biden administrations provides a less critical view than mine of their effects on the nation's welfare. He and I agree that the federal government's economic deregulation of the transportation, telecommunication, energy, and financial industries during the 1970s, 1980s, and even beyond, over the course of several presidential administrations, has generated enormous social benefits. However, I have argued in this essay that praise for the presidents' regulatory policies should stop there because, in general, they have imposed significant social costs through commission and omission. Graham acknowledges some but not all of those costs.

In my view, a fundamental problem is that, unless policymakers eliminate a regulatory policy, its failure persists because it is rarely reformed for the better. Graham discusses what he calls "presidential ping pong," where regulatory rules were changed from Bush 43 to Biden; undoubtedly, they will be changed again in Trump's second term. "Ping pong" suggests that regulatory reform may occur if one president substantially changes a regulation that was implemented by the previous president, but there is little evidence that any of the reforms from president to president have improved efficiency and social welfare overall.

Given the large cost of government policy inefficiencies, including but certainly not limited to economic regulations, there is substantial room for improved policymaking to greatly benefit the nation. Thus, in theory, Trump's proposals to restructure the federal government through the activities of entities like DOGE, to reduce government waste and inefficiencies, have merit.

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In practice, however, improving government performance amounts to improving specific spending and regulatory policies either by reforming or eliminating them. DOGE's leader, businessman Elon Musk, has not indicated he understands why extensive government policy inefficiencies exist and how he plans to use that understanding to craft recommendations for improving specific policies and overall government performance. Musk is not alone in his lack of understanding of these inefficiencies because little *causal* empirical evidence exists on why government policymakers pursue and maintain inefficient policies. Graham discusses policy processes at various places in the book, such as adopting regulatory budgeting and efforts to encourage the use of cost–benefit analysis to guide regulatory policy. However, he presents no evidence that improving those processes notably increased the benefits provided by specific regulatory policies and he offers no empirically supported guidance for improving other regulatory policies in practice.

Apparently, DOGE hopes to improve government performance by recommending the wholesale elimination of government departments and agencies, which also could eliminate certain policies. Those actions may be socially desirable, albeit overly broad, because they could eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse in government or because the government institutions that are eliminated do not perform any useful functions. (For example, eliminating the Federal Maritime Administration could, at long last, eliminate the Jones Act.)

But DOGE's recommendations also could impose large costs if they call for making arbitrary cuts to the federal workforce and government budget while maintaining governmental functions and understaffing them so they perform poorly. That approach could infuriate the public by, for example, delaying timely Social Security and Medicare enrollments and payments.

DOGE should take the time to develop both institutional knowledge and the capability to draw on empirical evidence to recommend eliminating those government departments and agencies whose spending or regulatory policies are reducing social welfare or whose useful functions could be performed more efficiently by the private sector. That is, they should use a precise and empirically targeted approach that draws on economic and institutional expertise instead of taking a shotgun approach.

Graham's book has turned out to be very timely because DOGE will intensify the debate on the overall welfare effects of government policies and how they should be reformed or eliminated to benefit society. Readers will appreciate that Graham has constructed the foundation for that debate by providing a comprehensive and clear discussion of the presidents' regulatory policies since Nixon's.

My thinking about regulatory reform has benefited from crafting a list of government failures and successes as I read Graham's comprehensive book. Other readers' thinking about regulatory reform also will benefit from crafting their lists of government failures and successes as they think about his discussion. If this exercise could serve as a template for voters in future presidential elections, presidentialism may not be such an imperfect path moving forward. R

READINGS

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