

Introduction to American Politics

Week 13: The Presidency

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Attendance



Outline

- The Presidency (Kernell et al.)
- Neustadt, Kernell, Warshaw
- Addt'l articles

Section 1

Discussion

Overview: The Presidency

- Article II is “long on generalities and short on details”
 - Quite a bit to say about the election of and qualifications to be the president, but little about explicit *authority* (at least until §2)
 - Take Care Clause (Article II §3) → the president must “take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed”
- Since the founding, we’ve moved from a relatively weak executive to an extraordinarily powerful one
 - Historically, the presidency was little more than a glorified clerkship that (ultimately) served the party
 - Now (roughly since the New Deal), we have a president who serves as the “nation’s problem solver” → **why?**
- Presidential **unilateralism** is far more common in the modern era (see also **unitary executive theory**)

Presidential Power

- Commander in chief → war powers, congressional “ratification”
- Head of state → conducting foreign affairs, executive agreements (cf. treaties)
- Chief executive → Framers left the structure of the administration to Congress, nominally giving it the authority to define the president’s role as head of the executive branch
 - Delegation → the scale of oversight and obligations of governance are taxing on Congress, so they give the administration the “figure it out” power
 - Unilateral authority → executive orders, executive actions, proclamations, presidential memorandum
- Emergency powers → military action, land use, trade, criminal law, natural disasters, COVID
- Budgeting → president submits annual budgets to provide Congress with technical/political information

Working w/ Congress & Going Public

- Presidents are *partisans*, and rely on their party allies in Congress to move their agenda forward
 - Unified government “invites presidents to become legislative dynamos”
 - Divided government limits incentives to cooperate with opposition/minority legislators and encourages gridlock
- Presidents can use the threat of unilateral action to move Congress along (or extract concessions)
- Veto power/*threat* looms large (but so does a congressional override) → the **blame game**
- Presidents “go public” as a means of promoting policies directly to the public, largely in an effort to induce cooperation in Congress and rally public support
- Use of the State of the Union address and, more generally, the **bully pulpit**

The Institutional Presidency

- Since the New Deal era, the bureaucracy surrounding the president has expanded dramatically (esp. since Brownlow report)
- Executive Office of the President (EOP) and its derivatives → coordinates executive and legislative branches
 - Office of Management and Budget (OMB) → controls budget requests, monitors agency performance (and their relationships with legislators), and keeps track of important bills in Congress
 - National Security Council (NSC) → coordinates between the White House, State and Defense Departments, and Joint Chiefs of Staff on national security issues
 - White House Office → public/press relations, vetting appointees, chief of staff system
- To preview the bureaucracy material, the president also has important controls over the rules/policies created by federal agencies through unique entities like OIRA

Neustadt: From *Presidential Power* (1960)

- The authority of the president doesn't match the expectations put on them by the public
- Being successful in the presidency means being an expert in **persuasion** and **bargaining**
- The president has upsides (from the first-mover advantage and vast resources), *but it does not go unchecked by other actors* (e.g., Congress, governors, the parties)
- This is a pretty detailed qualitative account that demonstrates the persuasive power of the presidency → *but*, does this hold today? (i.e., is it generalizable?)

Kernell: From *Going Public* (1986)

- The presidency has evolved since Neustadt → rather than “quiet diplomacy,” the president now “**goes public**” in direct appeals to public support that attempt to persuade other politicians
- In essence, this is *pressure* above and beyond persuasion (and is incompatible with conventional wisdom about bargaining)
- Compares Reagan and Clinton administration strategies on budgets and tax policies
- Why has going public become more common?
 - Technology and communications improvements
 - Divided party government is more common
 - Increased polarization
- Presidential reputation/approval matters on both sides, so politicians and the president are conscious of public opinion when deciding whether to bargain or go public, as well as how to respond

Warshaw: “The Struggle to Govern...”

- The Trump White House faced 3 key challenges to effectiveness:
 - Enabling of multiple power centers → numerous “assistants” and senior staff, but many lower-level vacancies
 - Competing world views → nationalists vs. globalists
 - Loyalty “tests” → Trump constantly questioned the loyalty of his own staff until they “proved it” to him
- Overall, the White House resembled a cluster of ever-changing coalitions between staff over policies, with Trump serving as the wild card

Additional materials

- O'Brien → Trump veto of congressional resolution restricting presidential war powers
- Howell → unilateral presidential action (with 9/11 as a contextual backdrop)
- Barber → typology of different types of presidents
- Mazza → Trump blaming Democrats for forcing his hand to take unilateral action on COVID (via EOs)

Outro

- Group projects will be presented *next* week in section (4/25) → should be roughly 3-6 minutes at the most
- The TAs are working on grading your *Analyzing a Supreme Court Decision* papers → **if you haven't turned yours in, do so ASAP!**
- Note that we will *not* be able to cover the Week 14 (Bureaucracy) material in section next week, so let us know if you have questions

Attendance

