

**Reaction Paper to *Presidential Power and the Modern  
Presidents* (1968) by Richard Neustadt**

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In his book *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (1968), Richard Neustadt establishes that the presidency in America has amassed a set of “vantage points” that have become advantageous for the White House. According to Neustadt’s theory, the president’s prerogatives and available tools like veto, appointments, publicity, and budgeting create dependency, fear, and need in those he interacts with. Because they have a constant relationship with the president, they know they could use his influence as an advantage. Therefore, when the White House persuades individuals to act following its wishes, a president can leverage their dependence on the present and the future. These are dependent relationships, where the individuals also possess status or authority that can neutralize the president’s vantage points (Neustadt 1968, 31). Hence, the president resorts to persuasion. Neustadt posits that “the power to persuade is the power to bargain,” and status and authority provide bargaining advantage. However, in the American case, the bargaining advantage goes to both sides. Even when the president retains prerogatives and tools, do not guarantee his persuasiveness will produce any results because bargaining is a “give-and-take” process (Neustadt 1968, 32). For Neustadt, the president’s power lies in his persuasiveness and ability to bargain successfully.

In contrast, William G. Howell points out that the modern president’s power is not simply about persuasion but rather about independently shaping public policy and curbing the influence of Congress and the courts in hindering their initiatives (Howell 2003, 14). According to Howell, presidents can conduct policy change by acting independently from Congress and the courts. These actions involve executive orders, proclamations, executive agreements, general memoranda to agency head officials, and national

security directives. The modern era has witnessed increased presidential independent actions (Howell 2003, 13). Hence, Howell states that not all facets of presidential policymaking are characterized by bargaining (Howell 2003, 14).

Joshua B. Kennedy contradicts Howell by agreeing with Neustadt's theory. In *"Do This! Do That!" and Nothing Will Happen": Executive Orders and Bureaucratic Responsiveness* (2015), Kennedy questions Howell's views for assuming that bureaucrats do not monitor the president's power and they simply do what the president commands, which is not accurate. According to the author, there is no certainty that the agency will do what the president orders. Some agencies are politicized, making them less likely to implement an executive order. Kennedy accepts the power of executive orders. Yet, he emphasizes that they are powerful as long as they are executed by cooperative bureaucrats, who sometimes must be persuaded by the president. In Kennedy's words: "presidential power is still the power to persuade, in part, if not in whole" (Kennedy 2015, 76-77).

After reading the authors mentioned above, I can conclude that presidential power is a dynamic and versatile process that involves interpersonal skills, manifested in the capacity to persuade and bargain with the administrative and leadership of the government apparatus. However, at the same time, presidential power requires the willingness to make policy by acting independently from the other branches of the government, Congress, and the courts.

## References

Howell, W. G. (2003). *Power without persuasion: The politics of direct presidential action*.

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