Gov 1539: Section 2

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February 19th, 2021

The goals for today

- Clarify / review **utility functions** in models.
- Substantive discussions:
  1. **Veto**
     - 1.1 Hamilton's Federalist #73 argument in favor of them.
     - 1.2 Veto power vs. vetoes in practice
  2. (Preview of) **Unilateral action** (i.e. when president acts alone)
     - 2.1 What is it? When can we expect president to act alone?
     - 2.2 Strengths, limitations, and trade-offs.
     - 2.3 Relationship with other models of presidential power we've discussed.

Warm-up: Remember this?

(1) How might you improve this model (what would you add or remove)?
(2) How might that improvement change the model (at a high-level, don't worry about technical details)?

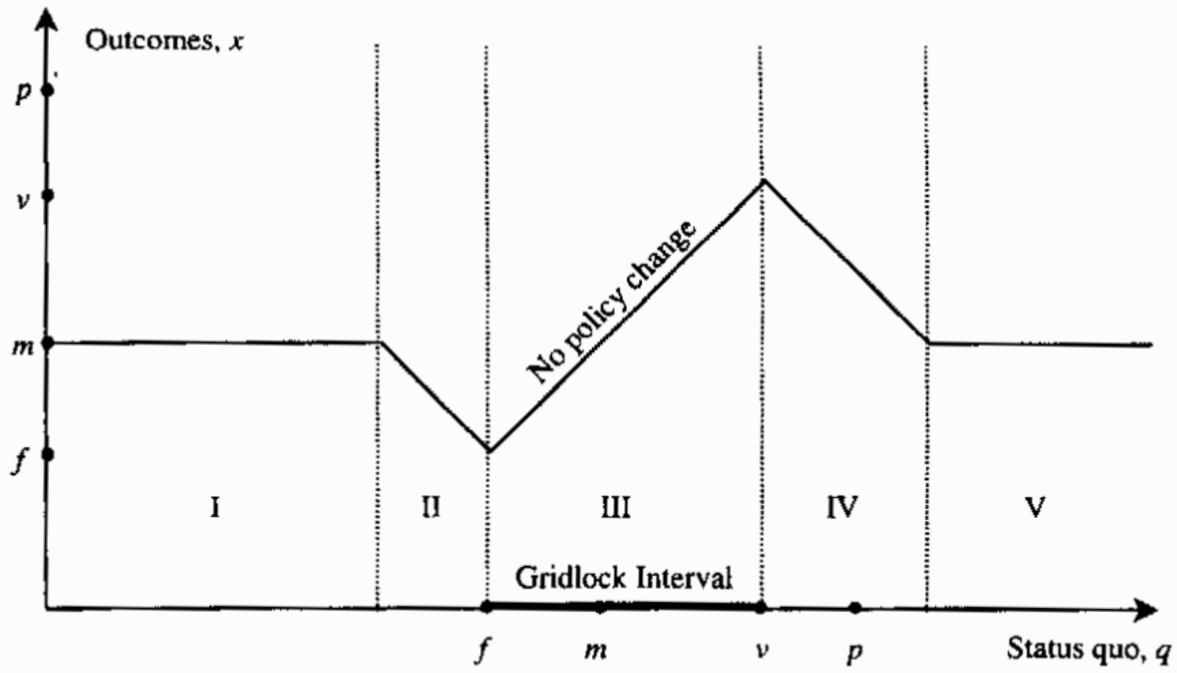

Figure 2.7
Equilibrium policies in the pivotal politics theory

Brief detour: utility functions

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  - For a particular walk, assume she gets utility w from being outside, but loses s if it is snow.
  - Her utility could be written as:
    1. $u = w$ if there is no snow.
    2. $u = w - s$ if there is snow.

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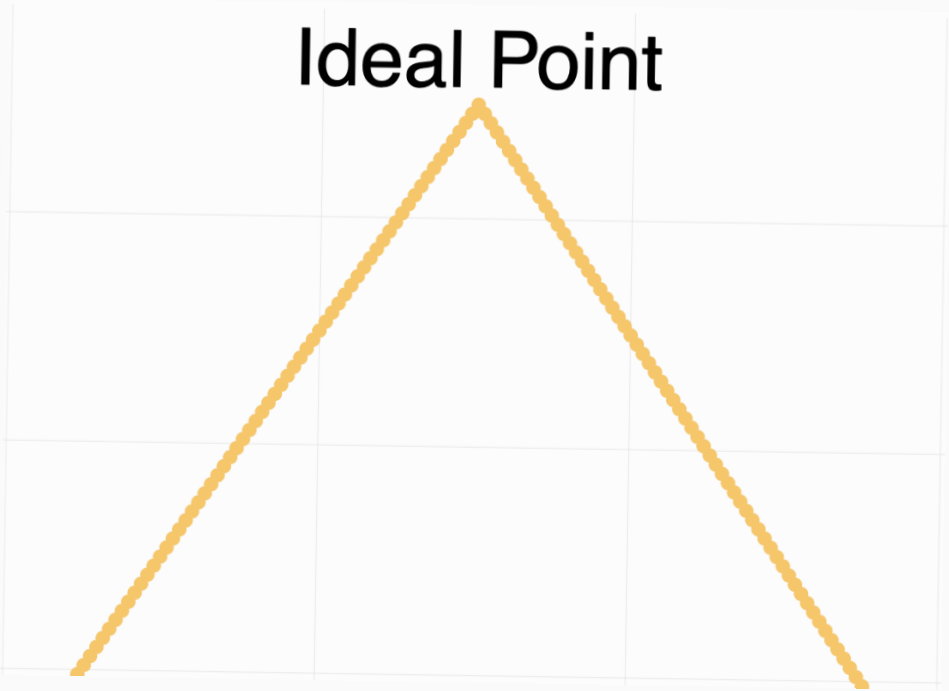
Remember this graph? It shows a utility function!
(in this case: higher = more utility, happier. Max at their ideal point.)



- For this graph: legislator L with ideal point x voting on a proposal b, we can find their utility (how much they like the outcome) with $u_L = -|x - b|$.

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- This could push some legislators on the margin to voting differently than what distance alone might suggest. **If distance isn't the only pressure facing players, they may behave in ways the model didn't anticipate**.

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  3. When analyzing a model, think about how the assumptions change the utility function. Is it realistic? What are they missing? What could incorporating these outside forces change?
- But at the same time, social science is about understanding general patterns in the world.
- So our answer can't always be to just make our models more complicated. We need to balance model complexity with usefulness.

Discussion: the veto

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  1. One of the few explicit presidential powers granted by Constitution.
  2. Not absolute! Can be overriden with 2/3 of both chambers.
  3. Highly visible and often dramatic.

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Do you think each benefit has proven true? What could go wrong?

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    - More common when: (1) high inter-party ideological polarization, and (2) divided party govt.
  - Presidents can **bluff** veto on a bill they would actually be willing to accept, in order to extract concessions in the successor bill. Why is this risky? (this is in Cameron model too)

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  1. When presidents think Congress will enact sweeping policy changes that President's oppose.
  2. When Congress is gridlocked on a policy area.

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- Neustadt (1960) is a natural point of comparison here. Why?
- Remember Neustadt frames presidential power as the power to **persuade**.
- When acting unilaterally, presidents don't need to bargain.
- Can be helpful to frame unilateral powers and bargaining as part of larger toolkit. When will presidents use each?

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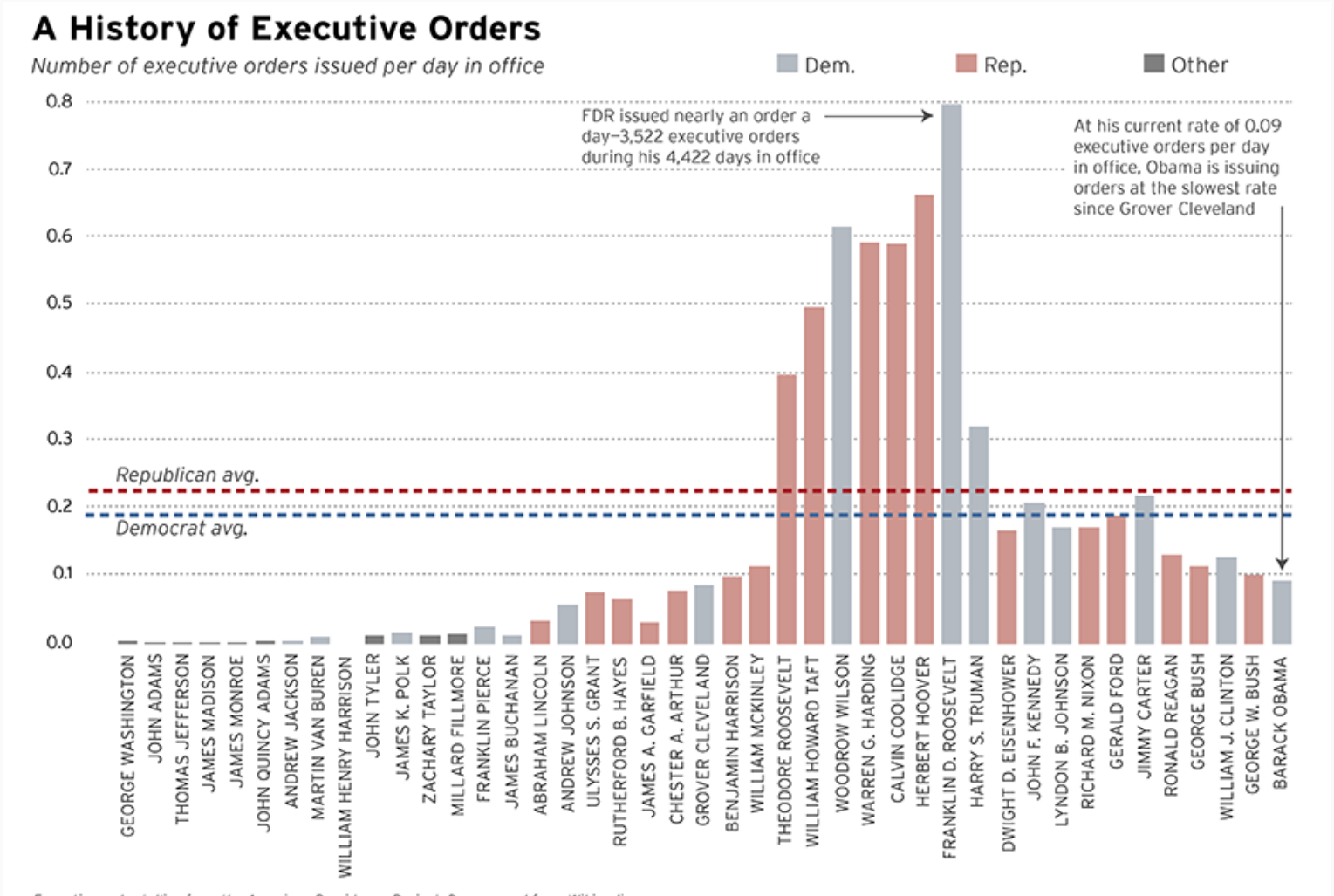
- What factors might make unilateral action more / less effective?

- More likely / effective when president has informational advantages (particularly in foreign policy).
- Powerful because president can set the **agenda** of the day by acting unilaterally - other actors (like Congress) are then forced to respond on president's terms.
- Less effective when needs $$$: Congress controls funding for created agencies and programs.

Executive Orders over time

Howell warns against using raw number of unilateral actions (like executive orders, even though unilateral action is increasing over time) taken for analyses. Why?



Executive Orders over time

Executive Order 12112
President Carter: January 1979

Establishes the Seal for the Executive Office of the President

"On a blue seal, the Arms of the United States proper above the inscription "OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATION," in gold raised letters, all within a white border edged gold ……..."

Executive Order 12127
President Carter: March 1979

Creates the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Methodological issues in the study of presidency

Cameron mentions a few methodological problems in studying the presidency that will return again and again this semester. What makes studying the presidency difficult?

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1. Measuring policy content / significance is difficult.
    - Common proxies: newspaper mentions, manual classification into "significance" categories.
2. Small-N problem: low sample size, have only been 46 presidents!
    - Common workarounds: change unit of analysis - maybe we study impact of presidential speeches rather than impact of individual's rhetorical power.
3. No institutional variation
    - Typical way to estimate effects (think medicine) is to compare people with treatment (i.e. took the medicine) to those who did not (i.e. control group). But all presidents have unilateral powers!