Political Science 17.20
Introduction to American Politics

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The Presidency
Lecture 8 (March 5, 2013)
Outline

1 The Evolving Presidency

2 Strategies of Modern Presidents

3 Unilateral Action and Pivotal Politics
Outline

1. The Evolving Presidency

2. Strategies of Modern Presidents

3. Unilateral Action and Pivotal Politics
Enumerated Powers

- **Veto** → negative power to check Congress
- **Appointment** → friendly personnel, patronage
- **Commander-in-Chief** → act decisively in time of war
- **“Take Care” Clause** → execute laws (ambiguous)

→ Independent selection and powers (not Congress’s agent)
The 19th-Century Presidency

- Congressional government
- President as clerk of small bureaucracy
- Small peacetime military establishment
- President’s relationship with people mediated by party
- President as agent of his party (patronage)
The Rise of the Modern Presidency

The president as leader of the nation:
- Communicate directly with people (newspapers, radio, TV)
- Elected representative of the whole nation (mandate)
- Embodiment of whole government (held responsible)

Increasing presidential resources and responsibilities:
- Growth of national government and bureaucracy
- Congressional delegation to president
- Cold War → permanent military establishment
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Neustadt (1960):

- President has little power of direct command, even over the bureaucracy
- Demands exceed actual capacity
- Presidential power is the “power to persuade”
  - Get others to want what he wants through skillful deployment of resources in bargaining with power holders
Kernell (1986):

- Mass media allow the president to communicate directly with the people.
- Set agenda and put electoral pressure on Congress
- Public threats rather than private bargaining

Baum & Kernell (1999/2010):

- Rise of cable and end of network oligopoly lessened presidents of ability to command the public’s attention, esp. the least politically interested (most persuadable)
The Power of Command

Moe & Howell (1999):

- President’s power of command underrated
- Executive orders, international agreements, military deployments...
- President able to make law unilaterally, without the consent of Congress
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Framers’ Assumption: All politicians seek more power, so “ambition must be made to counter ambition.”

 Presidents seek power, but Congress seeks reelection

→ Why might reelection-focused MCs give up power?
Presidential Advantages

- Ambiguity of Constitution (incomplete contract)
- Congressional delegation, but little control over agent
- Informational asymmetry
- Congressional power is a collective good
- Presidential appointment of Supreme Court
- First-mover advantage (veto points, fait accomplis)
The legislative advantages of unilateral action.

(A) Legislative politics

(B) Unilateral politics

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