

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**POSC 105
THE PRESIDENCY**

I. THIS MORNING:

- A. Wrap up interest group politics
- B. The presidency
 - 1. Explaining presidential success and failure
 - 2. Personality: “What Happened to Bill Clinton?”
 - 3. Structural factors

II. INTEREST GROUP POLITICS:

- A. Summary:
 - 1. Politics in America often involves conflict among organized groups.
 - a. Example from recent *Times*: patient rights bill and logging
 - 2. This system provides an alternative to representative democracy.
 - 3. Interest groups use a variety of “tools” to advance their causes:
 - a. Lobbying: efforts to influence legislation, policy making, or court decisions by appeals, favors, etc.
 - b. Public relations in the broad sense (e.g., advertising, protest marches, leaflets, etc.
 - c. Financial “assistance”: (i.e., campaign contributions)

III. INTEREST GROUP POLITICS-WHO WINS:

- A. Representation of the interest of their members.
 - 1. Americans rely heavily on groups to represent them in the political arena.
 - 2. These organizations are a second form of representation.
- B. They provide the political system with information and services.
 - 1. Lobbying is an information service.
- C. **Private government:** many government programs are administered by private groups. Examples: job training, loans, housing, schools, jails.
 - 1. A great deal of legislation is written by private groups.
- D. Pluralism: groups are part of society's system of checks and balances.

IV. INTEREST GROUP POLITICS-WHO LOSES:

- A. Notes from last time
- B. Interest groups by definition act on behalf of particular groups and interests.
 - 1. Frequently then there is a conflict between the general or public good and what's good for specific individuals.
 - a. See the article on the web site “Delaware and Banking Laws.”

- C. Certain segments of society are not well represented by groups
 - 1. Even those that are may not actually have their interest represented as well as the leadership thinks and claims.
 - a. The “iron law of oligarchy”: leaders become self-perpetuating
 - 2. Social and economic inequality disadvantage certain segments of society.
 - 3. Others are not represented, or are not represented effectively, by groups.
 - D. Privatization and conflicts of interest
 - 1. Examples: regulation and conflicts of interest
 - a. Atomic energy, Dow Chemical
 - E. Campaign spending, PACs, interest groups, and political influence.
 - 1. Narrow, “parochial” interests over the common good.
 - a. Example: sugar lobbying
 - * By the way, note that virtually all of the protagonists in the film on Florida representatives and the sugar lobby were Republicans.
- V. A FEW OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY:
- A. All things to all people. Americans have unrealistic expectations about presidential performance.
 - 1. And why not? Listen to campaign promises and public addresses.
 - a. Consider the State of the Union speech in which Clinton, among other things, claimed credit for our current economic growth, progress balancing the books, world peace, and on and on.
 - 2. Assumptions about presidential power and expectations are thus virtually limitless.
 - 3. And as we will note (see “E” below) presidents don’t have nearly the power to solve problems.
 - B. Presidential popularity frequently declines the longer a president is in office.
 - 1. See “Presidential Approval Ratings” on the web site.
 - a. The trend shown in the figure summarizes, I think, the American political experience.
 - C. Presidents themselves feel frustrated and disappointed.
 - 1. These feelings have led to enormous antagonisms and brought many presidents into bitter conflict with the media, the Congress, voters, and parties.
 - 2. Clinton’s first term was a perfect example; his second has been (so far) a major exception.
 - D. At the height of the cold war (about 1966 to 1974) many scholars and journalists fretted about the “imperial presidency.”
 - 1. Many journalists and congress people felt that the White House needed to be controlled.
 - E. But, ironically, given expectations and beliefs about presidential power, the office has surprisingly limited power.
 - 1. It is perhaps the weakest branch in constitutional terms.

2. The institutions, structures, practices, and traditions that seem to give presidents their influence and authority actually limit what they can do.
3. Note, for example, how commonly president “drift” into foreign affairs, an area in which they come to feel more comfortable.
 - a. Why? Because they may feel they have greater control over foreign policy than domestic politics.
 - b. In a way it is easy for President Clinton to deal with Saddam Hussein than with Congress or even members of his own party.

VI. DETERMINANTS OF PRESIDENTIAL PERFORMANCE:

- A. As noted in the last class many institutions and events determine how successful presidents can be.
- B. Moreover, they cannot control many of these factors.

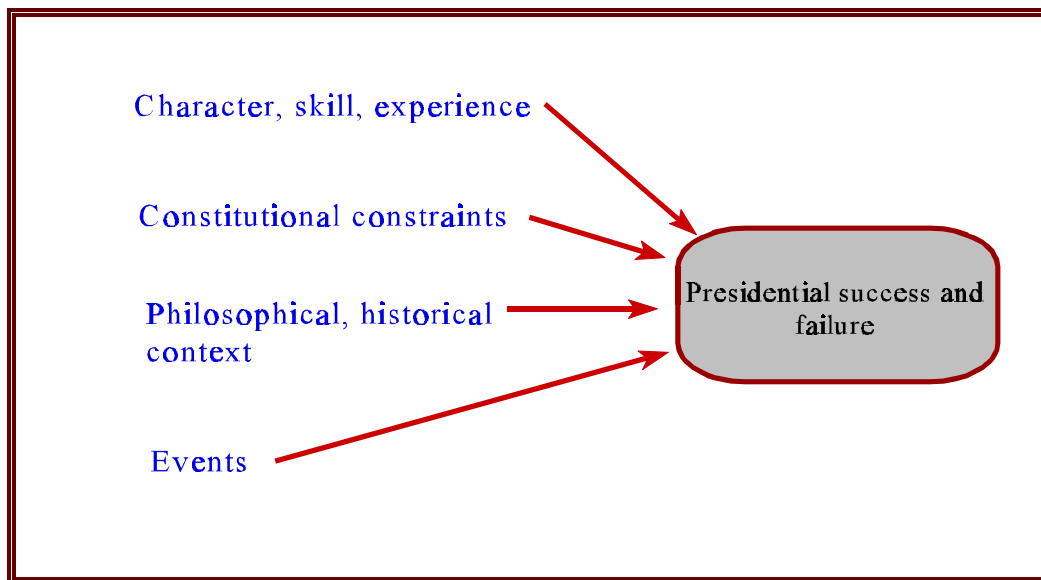


Figure 1: Determinants of Presidential Success

VII. CHARACTER AND SUCCESS:

- A. This film “What Happened to Bill Clinton” attempts to demonstrate that Clinton's problems in his first term stemmed largely from his own character weaknesses that began in childhood and have continued to plague him ever since.
 1. Hence, the reporters mentioned such factors as his political defeats, his susceptibility to persuasion, his refusal to confront powerful foes, his need for adulation, and the like.
 2. We would be justified in concluding then that a better person would, under the same circumstances, have greater success.

VIII. THE IMPORTANCE OF ALTERNATIVE FACTORS:

- A. But consider the graph mentioned above:

1. In the last 40 years not many presidents have a) served two full terms and/or b) left office more popular than when they entered.
 - B. True, contrary to the what the film suggests, Clinton handily won reelection. Yet does this result disprove the assertion? Perhaps but consider that his reelection probably resulted in mostly from 1) Dole's weakness as a candidate; 2) Clinton's skill as a **campaigner**; and 3) the nation's relative economic health.
 1. Moreover, much of his success can be attributed to his adjusting to political realities, rather than implementing his program.
 - a. Example: welfare reform.
 2. His achievements were, one can argue, relatively minor in view of his and the country's agenda.
 3. Gone and almost forgotten: "middle class bill of rights," health care reform; campaign finance legislation.
 - C. The lesson to be drawn is the presidential success is only partly determined by the person; much depends on structural factors and limitations on presidential power.
- IX. NEXT TIME:
- A. The limitations on presidential power
 - B. Reading:
 1. Patterson, *We the People*. Read the chapter on the presidency for general understanding.
 2. Print a copy of the figure pertaining to presidential popularity.

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