

Great Debates in American Democracy
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Leadership in the Presidency

Both Richard Neustadt and Samuel Kernell write about the different sources of presidential leadership and power which are both exemplified in Franklin Roosevelt's presidency.

In his essay "The Presidency," Richard Neustadt discusses presidential leadership through bargaining, known as pluralist theory. Neustadt argues that the Constitution "created a government of separated institutions sharing powers" (275). Because the power must be shared between the three branches of government, the president's power to bargain with others builds his leadership. As Neustadt points out, "when one man shares authority with another, but does not gain or lose his job upon the other's whim, his willingness to act upon the urging of the other turns on whether he conceives the actions right for him" (275). To increase his power and develop his leadership the president must convince those around him that what the White House wants them to do is beneficial for them as well; "persuasion is a two-way street" (276). According to Neustadt, another source of presidential leadership and power are the choices made by the President. For example during the creation of the Marshall plan, Truman's choices to lend "Marshall and the rest of the perquisites and status of his office" and appoint the heads of different groups on the Marshall plan, the legislation was passed and put into action (290).

In his article Samuel Kernell discusses the trend of modern presidents "going public" with their policies. Presidents use the "going public" strategy, to promote

themselves and their “policies in Washington by appealing to the American public for support” (296). This tactic forces compliance from Congressmen because it directly addresses their constituents. “Going public” works against bargaining by failing to “extend benefits for compliance, but freely [imposing] costs for noncompliance” as well as making the President publicly take a stand that can be altered very little.

President Franklin Roosevelt used both of Neustadt and Kernell’s ideas in his bargains with other people in power and his “fireside chats.” For example, in Richard Polenberg’s book about Roosevelt he mentions the late president’s bargaining with A. Philip Randolph. In exchange for Randolph calling off his planned march on Washington, President Roosevelt created the Committee on Fair Employment Practices “to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color or national origin” (32).

Roosevelt’s “fireside chats” on the radio were his form of “going public” to create support for his policies. For example in September 1934 President Roosevelt defended the NRA by pointing out that it had “chalked up major victories in eliminating child labor, shortening the workday, and establishing a minimum wage” (10). Another way that Roosevelt went public was by holding press conferences personally with reporters and abandoning the written-question format. Roosevelt felt that the press was a good for launching ideas and “shaping public opinion” (44).

According to Neustadt and Kernell, the source of presidential leadership and power is bargaining, choices and “going public,” all of which are shown in the Roosevelt presidency through his bargaining, “fireside chats” and press conferences.