Topics

- A very different presidency
- The job?
- The office most defined by the incumbent’s personality
- Trump’s style
- Trump’s likelihood of success
- Policies
- The purpose of the tweeting and lying
- Could President Trump be removed?
A very different presidency

- And president – from what we are used to
  - No prior government experience
  - No prior military experience
  - He has retained ownership of his business empire
  - He is the oldest person to become president
  - He has begun with the lowest approval ratings of any postwar president
  - Family is part of government
  - Many appointees have no experience in their areas of responsibility or are opposed to the activity
A bigger contrast with previous presidents than any president we have seen in some time

- Adopted the tea party platform (not what he ran on)
A job largely defined by tradition

There isn’t much in the constitution that defines the president’s job – Article II:

- “The executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.”
- The oath – “faithfully execute the office”
- “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution…”
- Commander-in-chief
- “…he shall take care that the Laws be faithfully executed…”

Big contrast with Art. I, Sec. 8 - Congress
As a result

- The details aren’t there
  - Consequently, the presidency has evolved over time

- The P is the office in the US most dependent on the personality, style, and political character of the incumbent
  - And what a style this president has!
Style

- You can see a real estate person here – a big project real estate person
  - Where as a strategy, you tear down and demolish the existing structure – and then
  - If there is local resistance to your project,
    - You wait patiently until they give in
  - Trump is great at demolishing – or verbally demolishing – existing patterns, structures, institutions, trade deals:
    - Trans-Pacific Partnership, Paris accords, UNESCO, Iran nuclear deal, Obamacare, NAFTA
The Trump White House

- The open door presidency, led by a person who likes chaos:
  - Who undercuts his top officials in public – why?
  - Who refuses to coordinate policy within the administration
  - Who doesn’t like structure
    - “I prefer to work each day and see what develops”
  - Who allows shifting factions compete for his ear
    - The factions do not agree – does the last one win?
    - Until the next day, when the P contradicts himself
- Inability to ignore criticism – the thinnest skin
  - Tends to make bad situations worse (gold star families recently)

- No interest in the content of policy
  - And no commitment to any particular policy
    - Tends to agree with whatever is presented to him
      - And that is his style – open door policy, people come in with problems, he weighs in, and they leave
    - Does the presidency work that way?

- Means that building anything new
  - Is almost impossible for him
    - Many Rs in the Senate now think his presidency will fail
- All as a function of his personality
  - Which he seems unable to control
  - But that in fact is what his supporters love about him
- For a fellow who says that he is a “deal maker”
  - He seems unable to make deals politically
    - Because he is no longer working in an environment where he is a CEO
Compared with earlier presidents

Earlier ones largely conformed to the norms for presidential behavior:
- Try to bring the nation together in the wake of tragedies
- Try to be above the crowd
- Try to negotiate with Congress over legislation

But Pres. Trump:
- Largely abhors these norms
  - Clearly doesn’t adhere or believe in them
- Instead, much of what he does is directed only toward his strongest supporters
Is the Presidency powerful?

- We think of it as powerful, because of nuclear war
  - But in fact, the P was designed to be weak in an era when the founders profoundly distrusted kings and executive power
    - Articles of Confederation? No executive – post office only
  - Presidents can sign/veto laws, make appointments, etc. but – power is divided
    - Less power than 44 state governors – who have item vetoes
  - In short, you are not a king, or even a CEO
    - Much less power than someone who has commanded his own business and real estate empire
Trump’s presidency

- The presidency is powerful
  - Witness Obama’s executive orders/memos
    - Much was done administratively
    - Historically Congress might have objected
      - But recently Congress has been weak because of its divisions

- Pres. Trump’s likelihood of success
  - Think about what he brings to the presidency:
    - His professional reputation?
    - His relationship with his political party?
    - Friends on Capital Hill?
White House organization and functioning
- Fired aides? (Really? 3-6 months after hiring them?)

Control over the bureaucracy
- Policy: not to hire assistant secretaries, deputy assistant secretaries, etc.
- Preventing leaks in the WH and bureaucracy?

His own skill set from his CEO experience?
- Would you put a man like DT in a position where his accomplishments depend on persuading others?

In his role, he needs 100s of people to help
- And more are walking away – 6 months into the 4 year term

His own public approval?

Are these factors that lead you to believe he can be successful? The last 9 months?

By traditional political science standards, this is a recipe for disaster – but Trump is not being judged by these standards
Will Congress step in?

- Not so far
- Tradition since WWII:
  - “President proposes; Congress disposes”
- Congress weakened by years of staff cuts, feuding
  - Divisions in the Republican party
  - Rs weakened by their own rules, where the majority of the caucus decides
    - You fall in line (a conservative line) or face a primary challenge
      - Fueled by outside money (Club for Growth, Koch brothers organizations, many others)
    - And now it is starting on the left also
Policy wise

- Deconstructing the administrative state
  - Meaning - taxes, regulations, trade pacts
    - Trump and Bannon say these have held down economic growth and infringed upon US sovereignty
  - Many felt that DT would moderate once in office
- Actions
  - Trade: import restrictions on solar panels
    - Tariffs on Bombardier aircraft
    - Washing machines case brought by Whirlpool
  - Budget: defense/security/military – more $
    - But not much beyond basic services on the other side
- **Appointees**
  - Chosen to undo Obama/Bush/Clinton actions
  - Many positions left vacant on the grounds that they are unneeded
    - An effort to weaken the bureaucracy generally

- **Deregulation – pro-business actions**
  - Attempts to neutralize or eliminate numerous environmental regulations
    - And to eliminate the people who believe in such regulations
  - Internet privacy – gone – so that the providers can share and sell your personal information
  - Obamacare
Much of this is supported by the Freedom Caucus in the House and by the most conservative Republican Senators.

- Many of whom would like to have significant reductions in entitlement, regulatory, other programs
- Except defense and the police
What is the purpose?

- Of the President’s endless tweeting:
  - Shannon Wheeler’s “Sh*t My President Says: The Illustrated Tweets of Donald J. Trump”
  - The tweets are about his base
  - The goal is to “entertain” them
    - Message: you can indulge your prejudices, be racist, be sexist, hate and fear the world
    - Hate DC / federal government – encourages distrust
- What does that do?
  - It keeps them in the coalition and fires them up
  - Same as campaign rallies and social media – it’s **how** he won
What is the purpose

- Of repeating lies time after time after time?
- Examples:
  - Obama born in Kenya
  - Number at his inaugural
  - Phone calls from the president of Mexico and head of the Boy Scouts
  - Holds the record for being on the cover of Time Magazine
  - Millions of undocumented immigrants voted for HJC
Clear that the consequences of lying are diminished

Some politicians no longer have to apologize and ask for another chance to get that chance

Huge difference between Trump and past Ps:

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True/mostly true</th>
<th>False/mostly “Pants on fire”</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jeb Bush</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trump</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>52%</td>
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The audience? His supporters, not the rest of us

Media challenges are then met with charges of “fake media”
Threats to the administration

- The Mueller investigation
- Uncertainty over N. Korea, Iran
- Global warming – where will the P end up?
- DT’s relations with congressional Republicans
- His own inability to hear negative news
- His own physical and mental health
- DACA – another case raising the question
  - Thinking for the nation? Or for yourself?
Removal from office?

Based on history – over time:
- 1 resignation
- 2 impeachments & trials
- 8 deaths

To impeach = indictment
- 50% vote in the HR
- To convict, 2/3rds vote in the U.S. Senate
- A past lesson: “Presidential popularity is crucial to surviving an impeachment”
25th amendment

- VP and cabinet majority (or another body Congress specifies) – VP must agree to this
  - Tell Congress in writing the P “is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office”
    - VP becomes acting P

- But if thereafter the P tells Congress in writing that no inability exists, the P resumes the office unless
  - VP & cabinet majority tell Congress in writing in 4 days that the P is still unable to discharge the powers and duties….
    - Then Congress shall decide the issue, assembling in 48 hours
    - Congress has 21 days to sustain the VP/cabinet by 2/3rds vote
      - If not, the P resumes the office
But what IS “inability to discharge” the duties of the office?

- Like an impeachable offense, this is a political question
  - Not defined deliberately so that it will be a “political” Q
    - Not a medical question – not up to the MDs
  - Use considered in 1987 (Reagan 76 years old)

Use of the 25th amendment prematurely

- Trump would certainly fight it
- Will result in a huge political fight
- Many might find it a act of a political coup d'état