

PO 300: Special Topics in American Politics
Executive Power and the Modern Presidency
Prof. Claire Leavitt
Midterm Exam (6 March 2015)

Instructions: You will have the entire class period, 50 minutes, to complete the exam. Please answer any **two** questions from the following three. You should allot approximately 25 minutes per question and structure your answer like a formal essay (i.e., state your argument, introduce the evidence to support it, and conclude). You will be graded based on how well you have digested the course material as well as on your ability to make a critical argument. (You are not required to cite specific authors and readings but should do so when you think this information enhances your point.) Each essay is worth 30 points, for a total of 60.

1. In the 2008 Republican primary, John McCain became the Republican party's presumptive nominee very early, after the Super Tuesday contests on 5 February 2008. The Democratic primary, by contrast, dragged on for a few more months, officially ending when Hillary Clinton conceded to Barack Obama on 7 June 2008. Why was McCain able to sew up the nomination so quickly while the Democratic process was prolonged? What were McCain's strengths and weaknesses as a candidate? If the primary process *had not* been reformed via the McGovern-Fraser Commission in 1968, would McCain have been able to win the Republican nomination? Why or why not?

2. Throughout the course, we have discussed five major sources of presidential power: the Constitution's enumerated powers; the power to persuade (bargaining); "going public"; executive orders; and the more ineffable "power of personality." From which source do you think the president obtains most of his power? In your argument, you should address why the other sources are (comparably) insufficient.

3. In the preface to the most recent (1991) edition to his seminal book, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (originally published in 1960), Richard Neustadt says the following: "Compared to all the oppositions, even a 'strong' president is weak. [When speaking about the presidency], *weak* remains the word with which to start." Why did the Framers design the executive as the weakest of the three branches of government? Conversely, what strengths/powers *did* the Framers give the president? Do you think the Framers, were they alive today, would think President Obama has too much power? Why or why not?

EXTRA CREDIT (5 points): In a few sentences—if you were Barack Obama in 2008, would you have chosen Joe Biden as your running mate, or would you have selected somebody else (e.g., Hillary Clinton)? Justify your answer in terms of the political considerations surrounding VP selection.