PUSHING THE AGENDA

Today’s presidents enter office having campaigned on an ambitious policy agenda, eager to see it enacted, and willing to push so that it is. The central question of presidents’ legislative leadership, therefore, is not a question of resolve but a question of strategy: By what means can presidents build winning coalitions for their agenda? Pushing the Agenda uncovers the answer. It reveals the systematic strategies presidents employ to influence Congress and the conditions that determine when those strategies work – or don’t. Drawing on an eclectic array of original evidence – spanning presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to George W. Bush – Matthew N. Beckmann finds that modern presidents’ influence in Congress is real, often substantial, and, to date, largely underestimated.

Matthew N. Beckmann is Assistant Professor of political science at the University of California, Irvine, where he studies Washington politics, particularly those involving the White House. His work has appeared in the Journal of Politics, the Journal of Theoretical Politics, Political Research Quarterly, and Political Communication. Professor Beckmann received his BA from the University of California, Los Angeles, and his PhD from the University of Michigan.
“A critical part of the new generation of presidency research, Matthew Beckmann’s *Pushing the Agenda* takes complex formal and informal theories seriously and then asks, ‘is this really how presidential influence works?’ His distinction between endgame, where votes matter most, and ‘earlygame,’ where cooperation over agendas matters most, constitutes an original theoretic as well as empirical contribution that academics in every setting will begin to take up in their own research. His analysis of presidential ‘influence’ within these two contexts breathes new life into a traditional concept rendered moribund by two decades of identification with measures of ‘voting success’ by demonstrating that when agendas matter and when votes matter, presidents matter and not at the margins either, but at the core. This book represents a foundation on which to construct a new generation of understanding and relevancy for presidency research.”

– Terry Sullivan, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

“Matthew Beckmann’s *Pushing the Agenda: Presidential Leadership in U.S. Lawmaking, 1953–2004*, is a major contribution to our knowledge about presidential legislative power. He uses rich and innovative quantitative and qualitative analysis of the last half-century’s presidential-congressional interactions to explain presidential power on the Hill. His well-written and unique analysis focuses on presidential strategies and successes and failures of presidential influence in Congress. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the presidency and Congress.”

– James A. Thurber, American University
Pushing the Agenda

*Presidential Leadership in U.S. Lawmaking, 1953–2004*

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As it turns out, writing the acknowledgments is the hardest part: too many debts, too few words, and probably not the right ones anyway. Even so, I hope the notes that follow convey, however imperfectly, just how grateful I am to the many people who have assisted me on this journey.

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