

## **Executive Power Through the Looking Glass**

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Models and evidence from political science suggest that left-wing presidents often supply right-wing policies, and vice-versa. The basic mechanism is that policies are a function not only of a president's preferences, but also of his political opportunities, and of what voters will accept. Voters who lack sufficient information to judge the merits of proposals will discount executive claims based on the known skew in executive preferences, but will take right (left) wing policies proposed by left (right) wing presidents as relatively credible. I will draw some implications for executive power and counterterrorism policy in the near term. If the next President is a Democrat, counterterrorism law and policy may well be more draconian on net than they were under President Bush. Although a President Obama (say) may engage in some symbolic civil-libertarian politics in areas where voters are well-informed, such as closing Guantanamo, he will have both the opportunity and the incentive to signal credibility by maintaining or expanding most of the Bush administration's counterterror policies, and by proposing new ones.