

GOVT 35: The Presidency

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“The presidency has made every man who occupied it, no matter how small, bigger than he was; and no matter how big, not big enough for its demands.”

–Lyndon B. Johnson

“Someone said that being a president was a lot like running a cemetery: There are a lot of people under you, but nobody’s listening.”

–Bill Clinton

Overview of the course

This course provides a modern political science perspective on the presidency, focusing particular attention on the “leadership dilemma”—the gap between the expectations that are placed on presidents and their limited institutional powers. Our goal is to understand the conditions under which presidents are more (or less) likely to achieve their objectives. As we’ll see, the answers are more complex than most people think.

The course begins by considering different scholarly approaches to understanding the presidency. We will then embark on a whirlwind tour of the historical development of the institution of the presidency. After that, we’ll consider the president’s relationship with Congress, the bureaucracy, and the courts; his influence on economic and foreign policy; whether the famed “bully pulpit” is all it’s cracked up to be; and presidential elections. We will then conclude with a discussion of the merits of the Electoral College.

Throughout this process, we will be discussing the current administration and relating President Obama’s experience to ideas we have discussed in class.

Learning objectives

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to the study of the presidency;
- Describe the development of the modern presidency and evaluate both its causes and its consequences;

- Explain the formal and informal mechanisms that the president can use to achieve his objectives when interacting with other branches of government, the bureaucracy, and the public;
- Identify the institutional and political constraints that limit the president's ability to achieve those objectives;
- Assess the president's influence on economic and foreign policy;
- Analyze the major factors affecting the outcome of presidential primary and general election campaigns.

I expect each student to be able to speak and write intelligently about the readings we cover. However, you should aspire to not only master the material but to go beyond it—drawing connections between articles; putting them in tension with each other; critiquing authors' assumptions, theories, and empirical claims; and applying theories to new contexts such as current events. The course is structured to provide you with opportunities to do this in several different formats over the course of the quarter.

Course requirements and expectations

Students are expected to complete the assigned reading before each class. You are also expected to follow political news—we will begin each class by discussing the Obama presidency and relating class material to current events. Finally, students must be respectful of others during classroom discussion and should keep their comments focused on analysis rather than personal opinion.

Communication

The class will be run through Blackboard. I will use it to email announcements to you and provide access of assigned readings. Please submit your work to me through its assignments function rather than by email. However, if you have questions, feel free to come to my office hours or email me.

Academic integrity

Students are responsible for understanding the academic integrity rules at Dartmouth. Explanations of integrity rules and principles can be found at <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~uja/>. Ignorance of the Academic Honor Principle will not be considered an excuse if a violation occurs. Beyond any penalties imposed as a consequence of an Academic Honor Principle investigation, any student who is found to have cheated or plagiarized on any assignment will receive a failing grade in the class. Details on citing sources are available at

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/sources>. These academic integrity issues are especially important since we will be conducting original research in the class. Please see me immediately if you have any questions or concerns.

Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities enrolled in this course who may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me before the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although the Student Accessibility Services office may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

Religious observances

Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Assignments and grading

Grading in this class will be based on the components described below. In general, each student is expected to attend class on time with the readings completed and to contribute thoughtfully to class discussion when appropriate. Especially thoughtful contributions to class discussion will be taken into consideration when final grades are assigned. I also reserve the right to grade students down for using laptops for any purpose other than taking notes since this distracts others in the class. Finally, late work will be graded down 10% for each day it is submitted after a deadline.

Quizzes – 5%

During the quarter, approximately three classes will begin with a one-question quiz intended to determine if you completed the readings (one point will be awarded on each quiz simply for attending class). Your lowest score during the quarter will be dropped.

Discussion leadership – 15%

Each student will be required to write a critical analysis of the readings for one class of 1000–1500 words, including 3–5 discussion or clarification questions that will be shared with the class. Response papers must be submitted to me 72 hours in advance; I will send your questions to the class and use them to

help guide our discussion. (No discussion leaders will be assigned for March 2 or 5 since the analytical paper is due March 1.)

Analytical paper – 40%

Each student will write an analytical paper of 2500—3000 words (excluding references) in which they pose and answer an interesting question relating the experience of the Bush or Obama administrations to one or more readings from class. The topic is intentionally open-ended to allow you to be creative, but the paper should draw on two or more political science articles or books that were not assigned in class as well as news accounts and/or scholarly literature on the Bush or Obama presidencies (I can provide suggestions). Please keep your summaries of other people's arguments to an absolute minimum—the goal of the assignment is for you to use the experience of Bush or Obama to interrogate the claims made by authors you have read. What do they get right and wrong about your topic? What can we learn from the experience of Bush or Obama that could help us go beyond the authors' arguments and better understand your topic? We'll talk about this assignment more as the quarter goes on, but you should speak with me about topic ideas by February 9. Papers are due by 12:00 PM on March 1.

Final exam – 40%

The class will conclude with an open book essay-based final exam on March 11 at 11:30 AM. The goal of the exam is to give you an opportunity to integrate the class material and show what you have learned.

Course materials

The following books are required and can be purchased at Wheelock Books:

- CQ Press course reader with chapters from Michael Nelson (2010), ed., *The Presidency and the Political System*, 9th edition and Stephen C. Craig and David B. Hill, eds., *The Electoral Challenge: Theory Meets Practice*, 2nd edition
- George C. Edwards III and William Howell (2009), eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*. Oxford University Press. (Make sure to buy the paperback version!)
- Matthew N. Beckmann (2010), *Pushing the Agenda: Presidential Leadership in US Lawmaking, 1953–2004*. Cambridge University Press.
- George C. Edwards III (2009), *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership*. Princeton University Press.

All other readings are available on the course's Blackboard website unless otherwise noted. You will need to be on the campus network or logged into the VPN to access them.

Course schedule

The tentative schedule for the course is presented below. Please note that certain classes have been replaced with x-periods due to schedule conflicts. This course outline is subject to change; please consult the current version of the syllabus on Blackboard for the most up-to-date information.

Introduction

The presidency and political change (1/4)

- Ezra Klein, "Do we need a third-party presidential candidacy? A debate with Matt Miller," *Washington Post*, October 18, 2011
- Course syllabus

Analytical approaches

Qualitative/historical research on the presidency (1/6)

- Richard Neustadt (1990), *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, Chs. 1–4
- Stephen Skowronek (2005), "Presidential Leadership in Political Time," course reader

Psychological approaches to the presidency (1/9)

- James David Barber (1992), *The Presidential Character*, Chs. 1–2
- Alexander L. George (1974), "Assessing Presidential Character," *World Politics*, 250–260 and 271–282
- Michael Nelson (2010), "The Psychological Presidency," course reader

Quantitative/formal approaches to the presidency (1/11)

- Irwin L. Morris (2010), *The American Presidency: An Analytical Approach*, pp. 48–54
- Gary King (1993), "The Methodology of Presidential Research," in *Researching the Presidency*, Edwards, Kessel, and Rockman, eds., pp. 387–412
- Charles Cameron (2000), *Veto Bargaining*, Ch. 3

Development of the presidency

The Constitution and the pre-modern presidency (1/13)

- Letters of Cato 4, 5 in Michael Nelson (2004), ed., *The Evolving Presidency*
- Federalist Papers 69, 70, 73
- U.S. Constitution, Article II
- Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson. 2012. *The American Presidency: Origins and Development 1776-2011*, 6th edition, Ch. 1.
- Gene Healy (2009), *The Cult of the Presidency*, Ch. 1

The modern presidency (1/18)

- Jeffrey K. Tulis (2010), “The Two Constitutional Presidencies,” course reader
- Healy (2009), Chs. 2–3

The contemporary presidency (1/19–x-period)

- Scott C. James (2009), “Historical Institutionalism, Political Development, and the Presidency,” in Edwards and Howell (eds.)
- Healy (2009), Chs. 4–5

The president and Congress

Coping with division and polarization (1/20)

- Matthew J. Dickinson (2010), “The President and Congress,” course reader
- David Rohde and Meredith Barthelemy (2009), “The President and Congressional Parties in an Era of Polarization,” in Edwards and Howell (eds.)
- David Mayhew (2005), *Divided We Govern*, Ch. 4
- John J. Coleman and David C.W. Parker (2009), “The Consequences of Divided Government,” in Edwards and Howell (eds.)

Pivotal politics (1/23)

- David W. Brady and Craig Volden (2005) *Revolving Gridlock: Politics And Policy From Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush*, 2nd edition, Chs. 1–2
- Jonathan Woon (2009), “Change We Can Believe In? Using Political Science to Predict Policy Change in the Obama Presidency,” *PS: Political Science & Politics*

Enacting a legislative agenda I (1/25)

- Charles M. Cameron and Jee-Kwang Park (2007), “A Primer on the President’s Legislative Program,” in Bert Rockman and Richard Waterman, eds., *Presidential Leadership: The Vortex of Power*
- George C. Edwards III (2009), *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership*, Chs. 4–5

Enacting a legislative agenda II (1/30)

- Beckmann (2010), Chs. 1–3 (Ch. 4 optional)

Vetoes (2/1)

- Charles Cameron (2000), *Veto Bargaining*, Ch. 1
- Charles Cameron (2009), “The Presidential Veto,” in Edwards and Howell (eds.)
- John B. Gilmour (2011), “Political Theater or Bargaining Failure: Why Presidents Veto,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*

Executive orders (2/2–x-period)

- William G. Howell (2003), *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action*, Chs. 1, 4
- Kenneth Mayer (2009), “Going Alone: The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action,” in Edwards and Howell (eds.)

The executive branch

Governing the bureaucracy (or not) (2/3)

- David E. Lewis and Terry Moe (2010), “The Presidency and the Bureaucracy: The Levers of Presidential Control,” course reader
- Barry R. Weingast (2005), “Caught in the Middle: The President, Congress, and the Political-Bureaucratic System,” in Joel D. Aberbach and Mark A. Peterson (eds.), *The Executive Branch*
- Robert F. Durant and William G. Resh (2009), “Presidential Agendas, Administrative Strategies, and the Bureaucracy,” in Edwards and Howell (eds.)

Presidential appointees (2/6)

- B. Dan Wood and Richard W. Waterman (1991), “The Dynamics of Political Control of the Bureaucracy,” *American Political Science Review*
- David E. Lewis (2007), “Testing Pendleton’s Premise: Do Political Appointees Make Worse Bureaucrats?,” *Journal of Politics*
- David E. Lewis (2011), “Presidential Appointments and Personnel,” *Annual Review of Political Science*

The president and the public

Understanding presidential approval (2/8)

- James A. Stimson (2004), *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*, Ch. 5
- Robert S. Erikson, Michael B. MacKuen, and James A. Stimson (2002), *The Macro Polity*, Ch. 2
- Paul Gronke and Brian Newman (2009), “Public Evaluations of Presidents,” in Edwards and Howell (eds.)
- USA Today’s presidential approval tracker
- HuffPost Pollster’s interactive presidential approval chart

Do presidents represent “the people”? Should they? (2/9–x-period)

- B. Dan Wood (2009), “The Myth of Presidential Representation,” Chs. 2, 4
- Brandice Canes-Wrone (2005), *Who Leads Whom? Presidents, Policy, and the Public*, Chs. 5, 7
- James N. Druckman and Lawrence R. Jacobs (2009), “Presidential Responsiveness to Public Opinion,” in Edwards and Howell (eds.)
- Deadline for topic ideas on analytical paper

Going public—does it work? (2/13)

- George C. Edwards III (2003), *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*, Chs. 1–2
- George C. Edwards III (2009), *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership*, Chs. 2–3
- Lawrence R. Jacobs (2010), “The Presidency and the Press: The Paradox of the White House Communications War,” course reader

The president and the courts

Interactions with the court (2/15)

- David A. Yalof (2010), “The Presidency and the Judiciary,” course reader
- Forrest Maltzman (2007), “The Politicized Judiciary: A Threat to Executive Power,” in Richard W. Waterman and Bert Rockman, eds., *Presidential Leadership: The Vortex of Power*
- Keith E. Whittington (2009), “Judicial Checks on the President,” in Edwards and Howell (eds.)

Economic and foreign policy

Presidents and the economy (2/20)

- Edward R. Tufte (1978), *Political Control of the Economy*, Chs. 1, 4
- Larry M. Bartels (2010), *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*, Ch. 2
- Robert J. Franzese Jr. (2002), “Electoral and Partisan Cycles in Economic Policies and Outcomes,” *Annual Review of Political Science*

Foreign policy and the two presidencies thesis (2/22)

- Andrew J. Polsky (2010), “The Presidency at War,” course reader
- Brandice Canes-Wrone, William G. Howell, and David E. Lewis (2008), “Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential Power: A Reevaluation of the Two Presidencies Thesis,” *Journal of Politics*
- William G. Howell (2011), “Presidential Power in War,” *Annual Review of Political Science*

The role of domestic politics in foreign policy (2/23–x-period)

- B. Dan Wood and Clayton Webb (2011), “Explaining Presidential Saber Rattling,” unpublished manuscript
- William G. Howell and Jon C. Pevehouse (2005), “Presidents, Congress, and the Use of Force,” *International Organization*
- Douglas L. Kriner (2010), *After the Rubicon: Congress, Presidents, and the Politics of Waging War*, Ch. 3
- Douglas L. Kriner (2009), “Presidents, Domestic Politics, and the International Arena,” in Edwards and Howell (eds.)

Presidential elections

The primaries (2/24)

- Richard M. Pious (2010), “The Presidency and the Nominating Process: Politics and Power,” course reader
- Larry M. Bartels (1988), *Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Public Choice*, Ch. 6
- Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller (2008), *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*, Chs. 7, 9

Congress to Campus Program visit (2/27)

- Former Rep. Beverly Byron (D-MD)
- Former Rep. Sue Kelly (R-NY)

The general election—micro and macro perspectives (2/29)

- Christopher Wlezien (2001), “On Forecasting the Presidential Vote,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*
- Stephen C. Craig and Michael D. Martinez (2011), “Voter Competence,” course reader
- Larry M. Bartels (2010), *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*, Ch. 4

The general election—campaign dynamics (3/2)

- Thomas L. Holbrook (2011), “Do Campaigns Really Matter?,” course reader
- James A. Stimson (2004), *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*, Ch. 4
- Christopher Wlezien and Robert Erikson (2002), “The Timeline of Presidential Election Campaigns,” *Journal of Politics*

The general election—ads and media (3/5)

- Jeffrey Cohen (2009), “The Presidency and the Mass Media,” in Edwards and Howell (eds.)
- Thomas A. Hollihan (2011), “Campaigns and the News Media,” course reader
- Michael M. Franz (2011), “Political Advertising,” course reader

Wrapping up

Electoral College/review session (3/7)

- George C. Edwards III (2010), “The Faulty Premises of the Electoral College,” course reader
- Gary L. Gregg II (2001), ed., *Securing Democracy: Why We Have an Electoral College*, Ch. 1
- Final exam review

Final exam (3/11)

- Study!