

POLI 108: The American Presidency

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Class: WF 11:40-12:55, Perkins 307
Office hours: By appt., Old Chem 408A

“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 more than 200 years of presidential history. 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 debates about the merits of the Electoral College and the US presidential system.

Throughout this process, we will be talking about the 2008 presidential campaign and relating it to class material. This will include a dedicated fifteen minute segment each Friday in which we’ll discuss both the state of the current campaign and a set of assigned television commercials from past campaigns.

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;
- Compare and contrast the American presidential system with the parliamentary systems that predominate in other Western democracies.

Course requirements and expectations

Our classes will consist largely of discussion, so you are required to complete the assigned reading before each class. You are also expected to follow political news in the Washington Post or the New York Times every day and to read the polling blog Political Arithmetik (politicalarithmetik.blogspot.com) – we will frequently relate class readings 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 to provide links and PDFs of assigned reading. Please submit your work to me through its assignments page rather than by email. However, if you have questions about the reading or would like to set up a time to talk, feel free to email me – I'm always happy to meet with you in person. (In fact, I insist on it for sensitive subjects such as grading.)

iPod integration

This is an iPod class. As such, those students who do not have iPods should borrow one from the OIT Help Desk for the semester (tinyurl.com/2u957p). We will use iPods to help keep up to date on politics and to study how the 2008 presidential candidates are using podcasts to communicate directly with their supporters. Each student will be required to subscribe to the email list and podcast feed of at least one presidential candidate as well as the CNN Race to '08 podcast.

Assignments and grading

Participation – 10%

Each student is expected to attend class on time, to come to class with the readings completed, and to contribute thoughtfully to class discussion. A pattern of missing class or failing to complete the assigned readings will result in a lower participation grade. I also reserve the right to hold impromptu quizzes and to grade students down for using laptops for any purpose other than taking notes.

Discussion leadership – 5%

Each student will be required to write a critical analysis of the readings for one class of 300-500 words, including 3-5 discussion questions, and to lead off that class with discussion and questions. (If more than one student is assigned, we'll divide the readings between you.) Response papers must be submitted to me 72 hours before class; I will send your discussion questions to the class and post them on Blackboard.

Analytical paper I – 20%

Each student will write an analytical paper of 1500-2000 words on a pattern, phenomenon, or question raised in the Milkis and Nelson book concerning the pre-1960 presidency. You should discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to the study of the presidency for your question and propose a research strategy that a scholar could use to answer it. Be as specific as possible! Secondary sources may be consulted, but the paper should focus on analysis rather than historical summary. You should speak to me about topic ideas by September 26 and papers are due by 5 PM on October 5.

Analytical paper II – 20%

Each student will write an analytical paper of 1500-2000 words in which they use ideas discussed in the course to pose and answer an interesting question pertaining to the contemporary presidency (post-1960). The topic is intentionally open-ended to allow you to be creative. We'll talk about this assignment more as the semester goes on, but you should speak with me about topic ideas by October 22. Papers are due by 5 PM on November 16.

Debates – 10%

At the end of the semester, we will hold debates on two controversial topics in political science – the Electoral College and the merits of presidentialism (11/30 and 12/7, respectively). Each student will participate in one debate (I will assign you to teams during the semester). In each debate, both side will present three claims in support of their argument and attempt to rebut the claims made by the other team. You should draw upon the assigned reading for

that class as well as readings we've previously covered. One-sentence summaries of all claims must be submitted to me ten days in advance of the debate so that I can share them with the other team. Each team member will be responsible for writing up a claim or rebuttal in 500 words or fewer and for presenting it to the class (notes are allowed, but please do not read what you wrote verbatim). The writeups are due to me the morning of the debate. At the end of each debate, the audience will vote on who won; the winning teams will receive 1% extra credit in their final grades.

Final exam – 35%

The class will conclude with a three-hour essay-based final exam on December 16 from 2-5 PM at the location assigned by the university. The goal of the exam is to give you an opportunity to integrate the class material and show what you have learned.

Grading policies

I expect each student to be able to speak and write intelligently about each reading. However, you should aspire to not only master the material (which I will help you with) 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. This higher-level analysis will typically be the differentiating factor in assigning grades. The course is structured to provide you with a number of opportunities to do this in different formats. You are always welcome to discuss your grades with me if you would like to learn how you can do better in the future. Finally, late work will not be accepted without prior permission and all expectations of academic integrity apply.

Course materials

The following books are required and can be purchased at the bookstore:

- Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson. 2007. *The American Presidency: Origins and Development 1776-2007*. 5th edition. Washington: CQ Press.
- Michael Nelson, ed. 2005. *The Presidency and the Political System*. 8th edition. Washington: CQ Press.
- Brandice Canes-Wrone. 2005. *Who Leads Whom? Presidents, Policy, and the Public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- David W. Brady and Craig Volden. 2005. *Revolving Gridlock: Politics And Policy From Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush*. 2nd edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

As indicated below, all other readings are available via a link or a scanned PDF on the course's Blackboard website. You will need to be on the Duke network or logged into the Duke VPN to access them. Finally, the assigned presidential campaign commercials can be viewed at livingroomcandidate.movingimage.us.

Course schedule

Introduction

Why study the presidency? (8/29)

- No reading

No class (8/31)

- No reading

Analytical approaches

How should we study the presidency? (9/5)

- George C. Edwards III and Stephen J. Wayne (1983), eds., *Studying the Presidency*, Ch. 1 and 4 (pp. 99-107) (PDF)
- Nigel Bowles (1999), "Studying the Presidency," *Annual Review of Political Science* (link)

The personality/psychology approach (9/7)

- James David Barber (1992), *The Presidential Character*, Ch. 1-2 (PDF)
- Alexander L. George (1974), "Assessing Presidential Character," *World Politics*, 250-260 and 271-282 (link)
- Michael Nelson (2005), "The Psychological Presidency," in Nelson (req.)
- Presidential campaign commercials: 1952 & 1956

The qualitative/historical approach (9/12)

- Richard Neustadt (1990), *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, Ch. 1-4 (PDF)
- Stephen Skowronek (2005), "Presidential Leadership in Political Time," in Nelson (req.)

The quantitative/institutional approach (9/14)

- Gregory L. Hager and Terry Sullivan (1994), “President-Centered and Presidency-Centered Explanations of Presidential Public Activity,” *American Journal of Political Science* (link)
- Presidential campaign commercials: 1960 & 1964

Development of the presidency

Debating the form of the presidency (9/19)

- Letters of Cato 4, 5 in Michael Nelson (2004), ed., *The Evolving Presidency* (PDF)
- Federalist Papers 69, 70, 73 (link)
- U.S. Constitution, Article II (link)
- Milkis and Nelson (2007), Ch. 1-2 (req.)

The pre-modern presidency (9/21)

- Milkis and Nelson (2007), Ch. 3-7 (req.)
- Presidential campaign commercials: 1968 & 1972

The modern presidency (9/26)

- Jeffrey K. Tulis (2005), “The Two Constitutional Presidencies,” in Nelson (req.)
- Milkis and Nelson (2007), Ch. 8, 9, 11 (req.)

The contemporary presidency (9/28)

- Milkis and Nelson (2007), Ch. 12-15 (req.)
- Presidential campaign commercials: 1976

The president and Congress

Enacting a legislative agenda – or not (10/3)

- Matthew J. Dickinson (2005), “The President and Congress,” in Nelson (req.)
- 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* (PDF)

Divided vs. unified government (10/5)

- Morris P. Fiorina (1992), *Divided Government*, Ch. 6 (PDF)
- George C. Edwards III, Andrew Barrett, and Jeffrey Peake (1997), “The Legislative Impact of Divided Government,” *American Journal of Political Science* (link)
- Paul J. Quirk and Bruce Nesmith (2005), “Divided Government and Policymaking: Negotiating the Laws,” in Nelson (req.)
- Presidential campaign commercials: 1980

Pivotal politics (10/10)

- Brady and Volden (2005), Ch. 1-3 (req.)

Vetoes and executive orders (10/12)

- Charles Cameron (2000), *Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power*, Ch. 8 (PDF)
- William G. Howell (2003), *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action*, Ch. 1 and 4 (PDF)
- Presidential campaign commercials: 1984

Executive privilege (10/17)

- Mark J. Rozell (2002), *Executive Privilege: Presidential Power, Secrecy, and Accountability*, Ch. 1-2 (PDF)

The executive branch

Who governs the bureaucracy? Does anyone? (10/19)

- David E. Lewis (2005), “Presidents and the Bureaucracy: Management Imperatives in a Separation of Powers System,” in Nelson (req.)
- B. Dan Wood and Richard W. Waterman (1991), “The Dynamics of Political Control of the Bureaucracy,” *American Political Science Review* (link)
- Presidential campaign commercials: 1988

The president and the public

Understanding presidential approval (10/24)

- James A. Stimson (2004), *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*, Ch. 5 (PDF)
- Paul Gronke and Brian Newman (2003), “FDR to Clinton, Mueller to ? A Field Essay on Presidential Approval,” *Political Research Quarterly* (link)
- Charles Franklin’s presidential approval graph (link)

Going public – does it work? (10/26)

- George C. Edwards III (2003), *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*, Ch. 1-2 (PDF)
- Brandice Canes-Wrone and Scott de Marchi (2002), “Presidential Approval and Legislative Success,” *Journal of Politics* (link)
- Lawrence R. Jacobs (2005), “The Presidency and the Press: The Paradox of the White House Communications War,” in Nelson (req.)
- Presidential campaign commercials: 1992

When do presidents “pander”? (10/31)

- Canes-Wrone (2005), Ch. 1-2, 5-6 (req.)

The president and the courts

Interactions with the court (11/2)

- David A. Yalof (2005), “The Presidency and the Judiciary,” in Nelson (req.)
- 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* (PDF)
- Presidential campaign commercials: 1996

Economic and foreign policy

Presidents and the economy (11/7)

- Edward R. Tufte (1978), *Political Control of the Economy*, Ch. 1 and 4 (PDF)
- Larry M. Bartels (2004), “Partisan Politics and the U.S. Income Distribution” (link)

Foreign policy (11/9)

- Andrew J. Polsky (2005), “The Presidency at War,” in Nelson (req.)
- Richard M. Grimmett (2004), “The War Powers Resolution: After Thirty Years,” Congressional Research Service (link)
- Presidential campaign commercials: 2000

Presidential elections

The primaries (11/14)

- Richard M. Pious (2005), “The Presidency and the Nominating Process: Politics and Power,” in Nelson (req.)
- Larry M. Bartels (1988), ‘*Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Public Choice*, Ch. 6 (PDF)
- Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller (2003), “Polls or Pols? The real driving force behind presidential nominations,” *Brookings Review* (link)

The general election – what matters? Who wins? (11/16)

- Christopher Wlezien (2001), “On Forecasting the Presidential Vote,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* (link)
- James A. Stimson (2004), *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*, Ch. 4 (PDF)
- Larry M. Bartels (n.d.), *Unequal Democracy*, Ch. 4
- Presidential campaign commercials: 2004 (including web ads and shadow campaign)

The general election – voter priorities and issue ownership (11/28)

- John H. Aldrich, John D. Griffin, and Jill Rickershauser (2005), “The Presidency and the Election Campaign: Altering Voters’ Priorities in the 2004 Election,” in Nelson (req.)
- John R. Petrocik, William J. Benoit, and Glenn J. Hansen (2003), “Issue Ownership and Presidential Campaigning, 1952-2000,” *Political Research Quarterly* (link)

Debate: The Electoral College (11/30)

Proposition: “Be it resolved that the Electoral College is detrimental to American democracy.”

- George C. Edwards III (2004), *Why the Electoral College Is Bad for America*, Ch. 1-2 (PDF)
- Gary L. Gregg II (2001), ed., *Securing Democracy: Why We Have an Electoral College*, Ch. 1, 6-7 (PDF)

The presidency in comparative perspective

Debate: The pros and cons of presidentialism (12/5)

Proposition: “Be it resolved that the United States would be better served by a parliamentary form of government than the current system.”

- Arend Lijphart (1992), ed., *Parliamentary Versus Presidential Government*, Ch. 1, 14, 29-32 (PDF)
- John M. Carey (2005), “Presidential versus Parliamentary Government,” in Claude Menard and M. Mary Shirley, eds., *Handbook of New Institutional Economics* (link)
- Matthew Soberg Shugart and John M. Carey (1992), *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics*, Ch. 3 (PDF)

Wrapping up

Review session (12/7)

- Study!

Final exam (12/16)

- Study!