

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

“[A] man in his right mind would never want to be president if he knew what it entails. Aside from the impossible administrative burden, he has to take all sorts of abuse from liars and demagogues...and...incompetent Congressional committees... The people can never understand why the president does not use his supposedly great power to make ’em behave. Well, all the president is, is a glorified public relations man who spends his time flattering, kissing, and kicking people to get them to do what they are supposed to do anyway.”

–Harry Truman

“Obama Blanks On What He’s Ineffectually Urging Congress To Take Action On Now”

–The Onion

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 with a whirlwind tour of the historical development of the institution of the presidency. After reviewing different scholarly approaches to understanding the presidency, we’ll consider the president’s relationship with Congress, the courts, and the bureaucracy; his influence on economic and foreign policy; his relationship with the press and the public; and presidential elections.

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

Instructional approach

Each class period will begin with a brief lecture highlighting and expanding on key points from the readings and answering any questions about them. The remainder of the course period will consist of class discussion and active learning exercises in which we critically examine those ideas.

Learning objectives

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

- Describe the development of the modern presidency and evaluate the causes and consequences of major changes in the institution over time;
- 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 his 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;
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to the study of these topics.

I expect each student to complete and understand the assigned readings. However, we will aspire to not just learn this material but to take it in new directions, applying theories to new contexts such as current events, drawing connections between the readings, and critiquing authors' assumptions, theories, and findings. The course is structured to help you take these additional steps in your thinking 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 often begin class by discussing how current events relate to class material. Finally, students must be respectful of others during classroom discussion.

Background knowledge

I assume students have a basic conceptual understanding of the American political system and its history (GOVT 3 or equivalent). Please contact me immediately with any questions about your preparation. For those who would like to strengthen their background knowledge, a recommended text on the history of the presidency is Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development 1776-2011*, 6th edition, which you may borrow from me (the library has older editions as well).

Communication

The class will be run through Canvas (not Blackboard!). I will use it to email announcements to you and provide access to 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>. 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 because it often distracts other students. Finally, late work will be graded down 10% for each day it is submitted after a deadline.

Quizzes – 10%

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

Short paper – 10%

Each student will be required to write a short paper of 1500—2000 words that makes a *specific argument* related to the presidency drawing on at least two of the assigned readings for a specific class session. It is not necessary to summarize all of the readings or even aspects of the readings you draw on that are not relevant to your argument. Instead, you should present an argument that considers applications and implications of *two or more* of the theories and research findings presented and/or raises questions, concerns, or criticisms about the limitations of the assigned readings.

You should also include 3–5 discussion or clarification questions based on the readings that will be shared with the class. You will be randomly assigned to one of the class sessions after the first week of the course and will be expected to be a primary contributor to discussion during that session.

The short paper and discussion questions are due January 20 by 5 PM so that I can provide feedback on your writing as soon as possible. The rubric I will use to evaluate your papers is provided at the end of the syllabus.

Midterms – 50%

There will be two closed-book in-class midterms (25% each) testing your knowledge and understanding of the readings from that portion of the course. These may include multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer questions, and/or brief essays. An exam study guide is provided at the end of the syllabus.

Analytical paper – 30%

Each student will write an analytical paper of 3000—4000 words (excluding references) in which you apply one or more theories we've read to the Bush 43

or Obama presidency. You should identify a theoretically interesting argument that generates one or more predictions or expectations that you can evaluate using historical sources, journalistic accounts, or quantitative data. The theory or prediction can be yours or an author's, but ideally you will be adding new ideas or analysis beyond just testing a theory that we discuss in class. In general, you should be engaging with a larger scholarly literature outside of the assigned readings, which will help you go beyond the theories we've discussed and/or look at more detailed evidence. For instance, one author may state that $X \rightarrow Y$, but you might predict that X only affects Y under condition Z . Alternatively, you might test competing predictions — for example, author A argues that X increases Y and author B argues that X decreases Y . The citations in the works we read in class are excellent guides to the relevant literature as well as who is citing research of interest in Google Scholar (click on "Cited by ...").

In the course of making your argument, you should answer these questions:

1. What would the author's theory predict? Why?
2. Is what we observe consistent with their prediction(s)? Why or why not?
3. What implications does this evidence have for their theory (i.e., strengths and weaknesses)? How could it be improved?
4. What conclusions should we draw from your findings about the study of your topic more generally?

Other notes and suggestions:

- You don't need to do data collection as such, but you should think about how to reasonably evaluate a prediction or expectation. For instance, I wouldn't expect you to code all the legislation passed under Obama for importance, but you could identify some reasonable proxy of bill importance and evaluate a few key bills relative to the theory or prediction in question.
- Please make sure your theories are not about proper names. For example, you wouldn't want to study the effect of Sandy Hook on President Obama's approval rating. Instead, you would want to write a paper on the effects of mass shootings on presidential approval more generally even though the evidence you will consider will be from Obama's time in office.
- Make sure to keep the scope of your paper manageable both substantively and theoretically (i.e., don't try to explain everything!). You should also try to minimize the space you devote to summaries of other people's work—the goal is to extend and critique the arguments of the authors you have read, not to recapitulate them.

Paper timeline

A draft one-page proposal/outline for your paper topic (including outside references) is due before class on February 6. After getting feedback from your classmates, you should then submit a revised version of that proposal to me before class on February 10. I will either approve your proposal or ask you to submit a revised version by February 17. A complete draft of your paper including references is due February 24 before class for peer review. I recommend that you edit the paper after receiving feedback from your colleague and then take the revised version to RWIT for further assistance. The final version of your paper is due by 5 PM on March 12. The rubric that I will use to evaluate your work is provided at the end of the syllabus.

Ideas for sources

Possible academic sources:

- Google Scholar searches (regular or advanced search)
- Citations *in* a relevant article
- Citations *to* a relevant article (Google Scholar)
- *Annual Review of Politics* literature reviews

Historical, media, and polling data:

- The Policy Agendas Project
- The American Presidency Project
- Lexis Nexis Academic
 - Media coverage of the president/White House
 - Public Papers of the Presidents (use Advanced Search→Find source→Type in president→Select Public Papers of the Presidents)
- WhiteHouse.gov
- Huffington Post Pollster

Course materials

No books are required for this course—all readings are available on Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Course schedule

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

Introduction

The presidency and political change (1/6)

- Maureen Dowd (2013), “President Obama Is No Bully in the Pulpit,” *New York Times*, April 20, 2013
- Ezra Klein (2012), “The Unpersuaded,” *The New Yorker*, March 19, 2012
- Ezra Klein (2013), “Obama’s Three Fateful Leadership Tests,” *Bloomberg View*, April 17, 2013
- Ryan Lizza (2012), “The Obama Memos,” *The New Yorker*, January 30, 2012
- Syllabus review
- Assignment: Take class survey (http://tuck.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_71BDUZ3y3QpV749)

The development and study of the presidency

The Constitution and the pre-modern presidency (1/8)

- Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson (2012), *The American Presidency: Origins and Development 1776-2011*, 6th edition, Ch. 2.
- U.S. Constitution (1789), Article II
- Gene Healy (2009), *The Cult of the Presidency*, 32–46

The modern presidency (1/10)

- Jeffrey K. Tulis (2010), “The Two Constitutional Presidencies,” in Michael Nelson (ed.), *The Presidency and the Political System*, 9th ed.
- Healy (2009), Chs. 2–3
- Optional background reading: Milkis and Nelson (2012), pp. 218–264, 288–350

The contemporary presidency/introduction to analytical writing (1/13)

- Healy (2009), Chs. 4–5
- Optional background reading: Milkis and Nelson (2012), 351–485
- Bring one-page excerpts of two previous analytical writing assignments with you to class (any subject/topic but social science preferred)
 - One that you are proud of
 - One that you could improve on

Different approaches to the study of the presidency (1/15)

- James David Barber (1992), *The Presidential Character*, Ch. 1
- Michael Nelson (2010), “The Psychological Presidency,” in *The Presidency and the Political System*, 9th edition, Nelson, ed., 147–155
- Gary King (1993), “The Methodology of Presidential Research,” in *Re-searching the Presidency*, Edwards, Kessel, and Rockman, eds.
- Charles Cameron (2000), *Veto Bargaining*, Ch. 3

Reading quantitative social science (1/16–x-period)

- William D. Berry and Mitchell S. Sanders, *Understanding Multivariate Research*, pp. 1–39, 45–49
- Hints on how to read and interpret regression tables (handout on Canvas)

Interbranch relations: Congress and the courts

Polarization and divided government (1/17)

- George C. Edwards III, Andrew Barrett, and Jeffrey Peake (1997), “The Legislative Impact of Divided Government,” *American Journal of Political Science*
- David C.W. Parker and Matthew Dull (2009), “Divided We Quarrel: The Politics of Congressional Investigations, 1947–2004,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*

Pivotal politics (1/22)

- David W. Brady and Craig Volden (2005), *Revolving Gridlock: Politics And Policy From Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush*, 2nd edition, Chs. 1–2 and 80–90

- Jonathan Woon (2009), “Change We Can Believe In? Using Political Science to Predict Policy Change in the Obama Presidency,” *PS: Political Science & Politics*
- Jonathan Woon (2012), “Fundamentals of Lawmaking: Gridlock in the 113th Congress,” The Monkey Cage (<http://j.mp/VglFVu>)

Analytical paper session I (1/23–x-period)

- Before class: Submit brief description of at least three possible topics of interest
- Discussion of assignment
- Pairs: Paraphrase of assignment; plans for improvement from short paper; brainstorming on topics

Enacting a legislative agenda (1/24)

- George C. Edwards III (2009), *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership*, Ch. 4
- Matthew N. Beckmann (2010), *Pushing the Agenda: Presidential Leadership in US Lawmaking, 1953–2004*, Ch. 3

Unilateral actions: Vetoes and executive orders (1/27)

- John B. Gilmour (2011), “Political Theater or Bargaining Failure: Why Presidents Veto,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*
- Jeffrey A. Fine (2012), “Circumventing Adversity: Executive Orders and Divided Government,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*

Interactions with the courts (1/29)

- Lee Epstein and Jeffrey A. Segal (2005), *Advice and Consent: The Politics of Judicial Appointments*, Ch. 3
- Lee Epstein, René Lindstädt, Jeffrey A. Segal, and Chad Westerland (2006), “The Changing Dynamics of Senate Voting on Supreme Court Nominees,” *Journal of Politics*
- Michael A. Bailey, Brian Kamoie, and Forrest Maltzman (2005), “Signals from the Tenth Justice: The Political Role of the Solicitor General in Supreme Court Decision Making,” *American Journal of Political Science*

Midterm 1 (1/31)

- Midterm course survey (http://tuck.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_eX0Jj1ESciI9MBT) must be submitted to take exam

The executive branch

Governing (or exploiting!) the executive branch (2/3)

- B. Dan Wood and Richard W. Waterman (1991), “The Dynamics of Political Control of the Bureaucracy,” *American Political Science Review*
- Andrew Rudalevige (2009), “‘Therefore, Get Wisdom’: What Should the President Know, and How Can He Know It?”, *Governance*
- Douglas L. Kriner and Andrew Reeves (2013), “Presidential Particularism and Divide-the-Dollar Politics”

Economic and foreign policy

Presidents and the economy (2/5)

- Irwin L. Morris (2000), *Congress, the President, and the Federal Reserve*, Ch. 5
- Larry M. Bartels (2010), *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*, Ch. 2
- James E. Campbell (2012), “The President’s Economy: Parity in Presidential Party Performance,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*
- Revised analytical paper proposal due (including references)

Analytical paper session II (2/6–x-period)

- Due before class: One-page summary proposal (including references)
- Discussion of proposals
- Pairs: Peer review

Foreign policy and presidential power (2/10)

- William G. Howell and Jon C. Rogowski (2013), “War, the Presidency, and Legislative Voting Behavior,” *American Journal of Political Science*
- 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*

The role of domestic politics in foreign policy (2/12)

- William G. Howell and Jon C. Pevehouse (2005), “Presidents, Congress, and the Use of Force,” *International Organization*
- Matthew A. Baum and Tim Groeling (2010), “Reality Asserts Itself: Public Opinion on Iraq and the Elasticity of Reality,” *International Organization*

Accountability: The public, the press, and scandal

Understanding presidential approval (2/14)

- 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

Are presidents responsive to public opinion? (2/17)

- Robert S. Erikson, Michael B. MacKuen, and James A. Stimson (2002), *The Macro Polity*, Ch. 8
- Brandice Canes-Wrone and James P. Kelly (2013), “The Obama Presidency, Public Position-Taking, and Mass Opinion”

Going public—how does the president do it? Does it work? (2/19)

- Samuel Kernell (2006), *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership* (4th edition), Ch. 5
- George C. Edwards III (2003), *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*, Ch. 2
- Jeffrey E. Cohen (1995), “Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda,” *American Journal of Political Science*

The president and the press (2/21)

- Samuel Kernell (2006), *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership* (4th edition), Ch. 4
- W. Lance Bennett (1990), “Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States,” *Journal of Communication*
- Steven E. Clayman, John Heritage, Marc N. Elliott, and Laurie L. McDonald (2007), “When Does the Watchdog Bark? Conditions of Aggressive Questioning in Presidential News Conferences,” *American Sociological Review*

Presidential scandal (2/24)

- Brendan Nyhan (forthcoming), “Scandal Potential: How political context and news congestion affect the president’s vulnerability to media scandal,” *British Journal of Political Science*
- Robert Entman (2012), *Scandal and Silence: Media Responses to Presidential Misconduct*, Ch. 2

Analytical paper session III (2/26)

- Due 48 hours before class: Paper draft
- Due before class: One-page peer review (pairs)
 1. Using cut and paste (only!), provide answers to the questions for assignment
 2. Using the rubric criteria, identify at least two specific aspects of the paper that are especially strong and two that could be improved
 3. With the rubric criteria in mind, write at least three specific and constructive questions for the author that could help them think about how best to revise the paper
- Class discussion of paper progress
- Review and discussion of peer review responses

Presidential elections

The primaries (2/28)

- 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*, 187–234 and 288–303

The general election (3/3)

- Alan I. Abramowitz (2008), “Forecasting the 2008 Presidential Election with the Time-for-Change Model,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*
- James A. Stimson (2004), *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*, Ch. 4
- Lynn Vavreck (2009), *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns*, Ch. 3

Wrapping up

Midterm 2 (3/5)

Concluding discussion: The presidency reconsidered (3/7)

- Juan Linz (1990), “The Perils of Presidentialism,” *Journal of Democracy*
- Matthew Yglesias (2013), “Juan Linz’s Bad News for America,” *Slate*, October 2, 2013

- Dylan Matthews (2013), “The shutdown is the Constitution’s fault,” *Washington Post*, October 2, 2013

Analytical paper due (3/12)

Presidency midterm study guide

Syllabus description

There will be two closed-book in-class midterms (25% each) testing your knowledge and understanding of the readings from that portion of the course. These may include multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer questions, and/or brief essays.

Exam details

- Each covers approximately half the class
- Closed-book and held during class
- Test *conceptual* knowledge and understanding of readings and lectures, not tiny details of individual articles or examples

Questions to consider for readings

- What is the authors' *main hypothesis*?
- What is the *theoretical mechanism* that they believe would generate such an outcome?
- What is their *general approach to testing* their theory?
- What are their *key results*?
- How do their theories/results *relate to those of other authors* we read?

Sample questions from previous exams

1. (1 point) Compared to an agency created by Congress, which of these would Howell and Lewis expect for an agency created through executive action? (select all that apply)

- (A) A greater likelihood of reporting to the president
- (B) More stringent limits on personnel selection and replacement
- (C) A shorter life span
- (D) Larger budget

2. (2 points) Why do Black and Owens question the use of success rates to measure the influence of the Solicitor General on Supreme Court decisions? What implications does this argument have for the legislative success data cited by Edwards?

Short paper rubric

Criteria	A	B	C/D/F
Understanding	Demonstrates deep understanding of readings and relationships among them	Demonstrates acceptable understanding of readings, but some limits or errors	Demonstrates limited or no understanding of readings and relationships among them
Application	Applies several key concepts from readings to current events or historical cases	Successfully applies at least one concept from readings to current events or history	Implies one or more key concepts, but link to readings is missing or flawed
Discussion/critique	Significant insight and creative discussion	Interesting, engaged discussion and critique	Shallow, flawed, or incorrect
Quality of expression	Excellent grammar, vocabulary, and word choice	Some errors, imprecision, or room for improvement in writing	Awkward, imprecise, sloppy, or error-filled writing

Analytical paper rubric

Criteria	A	B	C/D/F
Thesis/argument	Clear, strong arguments that go beyond description, address important objections	Discernible arguments but not strong/clear enough or too much description	Unclear or weak arguments; mainly description or assertion; incomplete
Originality	Especially creative new arguments, juxtaposing previously unrelated theories, or relating of facts to theories in new ways	Demonstrates some analytical originality in arguments, themes, and evidence covered; opportunities for greater creativity	Demonstrates little analytical originality, relies mainly on arguments and evidence covered in class or suggested by sources
Evidence	Numerous, varied, and relevant details and facts provided in support of arguments	Details and facts support arguments, but more needed or some lacking relevance	Some details and facts to support arguments, but not enough and/or lack relevancy
Use of course concepts	Excellent understanding of course concepts and insightful application to research topic	Conveys familiarity with course concepts; applies concepts to topic appropriately	Basic course concepts not applied appropriately; incorrect or incomplete
Organization	Clear, logical organization that develops argument appropriately; does not stray off topic	Organization not totally clear; some digressions or lack of needed structure	Organization is unclear and/or paper strays substantially from agreed-upon topic
Quality of expression	Excellent grammar, vocabulary, and word choice	Some errors, imprecision, or room for improvement in writing	Awkward, imprecise, sloppy, or error-filled writing