

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

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 begin each class by discussing the presidency and how current events are related to class material. Finally, students must be respectful of others during classroom discussion.

Communication

The class will be run through 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 on the readings for one class that does the following:

1. Briefly summarizes the readings, synthesizing as much as possible;
2. Discusses applications and implications of the theories and research findings presented;
3. Raises questions, concerns, or criticisms about the limitations of the assigned readings.

You should also include 3–5 discussion or clarification questions based on your paper that will be shared with the class. You will be randomly assigned to one of the class sessions and will be expected to be a primary contributor to discussion during that session. These are due January 21 so that I can provide feedback to you on your writing as early in the course as possible. The rubric I will use to evaluate these papers is included at the end of the syllabus.

Extra credit: Briefly describe an active learning activity or exercise that would help students to understand apply the key theoretical claims in the assigned readings, to assess their strengths and weaknesses, and/or to otherwise engage with the key points or issues they raise. If I use your suggestion instead of the currently planned activity during your class, you will receive 1% extra credit toward your final grade.

Midterms – 40%

The class will include two closed-book in-class midterms (20% each) testing your knowledge and understanding of the readings from that portion of the course. These may include multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer questions and/or a brief essay.

Analytical paper – 40%

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.

In the course of making your argument, your paper should answer these key 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?

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.

A draft one-page proposal/outline for your paper topic (including outside references) is due February 7. After getting feedback from your classmates, you should then submit a revised version of that proposal to me by February 11. I will either approve your proposal or ask you to submit a revised version by February 18. A complete draft of your paper including references is due February 27 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 March 13. The rubric that I will use to evaluate your work is provided at the end of the syllabus.

Course materials

No books are required for this course—all readings are available on Blackboard 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 Blackboard for the most up-to-date information.

Introduction

The presidency and political change (1/7)

- Ryan Lizza (2012), "The Obama Memos," *The New Yorker*, January 30, 2012

- James Fallows (2012), “Obama, Explained,” *The Atlantic*, March 2012
- Ezra Klein (2012), “The Unpersuaded,” *The New Yorker*, March 19, 2012
- Syllabus review
- Assignment: Take class survey (<http://j.mp/Wvtkd4>)

The development and study of the presidency

The Constitution and the pre-modern presidency (1/9)

- 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
- In-class activity: Ask and answer questions about the structure of the presidency and American government

The modern presidency (1/11)

- 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
- In-class activity:
 - Introduction to Bloom’s taxonomy
 - Creates examples of each type of learning using either Healy or Tulis

The contemporary presidency/introduction to analytical writing (1/14)

- Special guest: Michael Cohen (Fellow, The Century Foundation, and former chief speechwriter for U.S. Representative to the United Nations Bill Richardson and Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat)
- Healy (2009), Chs. 4–5
- 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
- In-class activity:
 - Apply Bloom’s taxonomy to your writing and that of your partner—identify specific examples of summary, application, analysis, etc.

- What are the characteristics of good analytical writing? What are problems to be avoided?
- What *specific* improvements can you make in your writing based on these conclusions?

Different approaches to the study of the presidency (1/16)

- 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
- In-class activity: Choose a research topic concerning Obama’s second term and design a prospective study as a group using one or more of these approaches

Interbranch relations: Congress and the courts

Polarization and divided government (1/18)

- 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*
- In-class activity: Applications of readings to Bush and Obama, respectively (jigsaw)

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 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/UGPSpx>)
- In-class activity: Divided government versus pivotal politics as theories of how Congress works

Analytical paper session I (1/24–x-period)

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

Enacting a legislative agenda (1/25)

- 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
- In-class activity: Bullet point memo to President Obama with recommendations for his second-term legislative strategy based on readings

Unilateral actions: Vetoes and executive orders (1/28)

- Charles Cameron (2000), *Veto Bargaining*, 1–26
- John B. Gilmour (2011), “Political Theater or Bargaining Failure: Why Presidents Veto,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*
- William G. Howell (2005), “Unilateral Powers: A Brief Overview,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*
- In-class activity: Review for Midterm 1

Interactions with the courts (1/30)

- Lee Epstein, René Lindstädt, Jeffrey A. Segal, and Chad Westerland (2006), “The Changing Dynamics of Senate Voting on Supreme Court Nominees,” *Journal of Politics*
- Lee Epstein, Andrew D. Martin, Kevin M. Quinn, and Jeffrey A. Segal (2007), “Ideological Drift among Supreme Court Justices: Who, When, and How Important,” *Northwestern University Law Review*
- Ryan C. Black and Ryan J. Owens (2011), “Solicitor General Influence and Agenda Setting on the U.S. Supreme Court,” *Political Research Quarterly*
- In-class activity: Interactions with the judicial and legislative branches
 - In what ways/under what circumstances does the president have influence over the other branches of government and vice versa?
 - Is this a normatively desirable form of government? Why or why not?

Midterm 1 (2/1)

The executive branch

Governing the executive branch (or not) (2/4)

- B. Dan Wood and Richard W. Waterman (1991), “The Dynamics of Political Control of the Bureaucracy,” *American Political Science Review*
- B. Dan Wood and John Bohte (2004), “Political Transaction Costs and the Politics of Administrative Design,” *Journal of Politics*
- William G. Howell and David E. Lewis (2002), “Agencies by Presidential Design,” *Journal of Politics*
- In-class activity: Midterm 1 postmortem

Economic and foreign policy

Presidents and the economy (2/6)

- Edward R. Tufte (1978), *Political Control of the Economy*, Ch. 1
- Larry M. Bartels (2010), *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*, Ch. 2
- In-class activity: Preparation for peer review

Analytical paper session II (2/7–x-period)

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

Foreign policy and presidential power (2/11)

- Richard Fleisher, Jon R. Bond, Glen S. Krutz, and Stephen Hanna (2000), “The Demise of the Two Presidencies,” *American Politics Research*
- 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*
- Revised analytical paper proposal due (including references)
- In-class activity: Is President Obama’s experience consistent with the two presidencies thesis? Why or why not? (jigsaw)

The role of domestic politics in foreign policy (2/13)

- 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
- In-class activity: Review and discussion of sample analytical paper (technique and content)

Accountability: The public, the press, and scandal

Understanding presidential approval (2/15)

- 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
- USA Today’s presidential approval tracker (<http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/presidential-approval-tracker.htm>)
- HuffPost Pollster’s presidential approval chart (<http://elections.huffingtonpost.com/pollster/obama-job-approval>)
- In-class activity:
 - Identify a prediction about presidential approval in the public debate or scholarly literature
 - Evaluate that prediction using interactive approval plots
 - Annotate a graphic evaluating that prediction (example: <http://j.mp/UoghJL>) using simple graphics program like Skitch

Are presidents responsive to public opinion? (2/18)

- James A. Stimson, Michael B. Mackuen and Robert S. Erikson (1995), “Dynamic Representation,” *American Political Science Review*
- Brandice Canes-Wrone and Kenneth W. Shotts (2004), “The Conditional Nature of Presidential Responsiveness to Public Opinion,” *American Journal of Political Science*
- In-class activity: Assess President Obama’s first term. Which events or trends were consistent with the theories of the authors you read? Which were inconsistent? (sources: Huffpost Pollster / Pollingreport.com)

Going public—does it work? (2/20)

- George C. Edwards III (2003), *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*, Ch. 2
- Matthew A. Baum and Tim Groeling (2010), “Reality Asserts Itself: Public Opinion on Iraq and the Elasticity of Reality,” *International Organization*
- Jeffrey E. Cohen (1995), “Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda,” *American Journal of Political Science*
- In-class activity: Apply these theories to the debates over the fiscal cliff/debt ceiling debate and gun control—would the authors say that Obama should go public? Why or why not? (jigsaw)

The president and the press (2/22)

- 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*
- In-class activity: Collect the first question from a random sample of ten Obama press conferences from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu> and assess the extent to which the Bennett and Clayman et al. analyses are supported

Presidential scandal (2/25)

- Brendan Nyhan (2012), “Scandal Potential: How Political and Media Context Affect the President’s Vulnerability to Allegations of Misconduct”
- Robert Entman (2012), *Scandal and Silence: Media Responses to Presidential Misconduct*, Ch. 2
- In-class activity: Why no major Obama scandals?

Analytical paper session III (2/27)

- Due 36 hours before class: Paper draft
- Due before class: One-page peer review

1. Using cut and paste (only!), provide answers to the key 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 further
 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 (3/1)

- 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
- In-class activity: Applications to the 2012 GOP primary campaign

The general election (3/4)

- 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*, Chs. 3 and 5
- In-class activity: Applications to the 2012 general election campaign

Wrapping up

Concluding discussion: Obama reconsidered (3/6)

- Ryan Lizza, “The Obama Memos,” *The New Yorker*, January 30, 2012
- James Fallows, “Obama, Explained,” *The Atlantic*, March 2012
- Ezra Klein, “The Unpersuaded,” *The New Yorker*, March 19, 2012
- In-class activity: Midterm 2 review

Midterm 2 (3/8)

Analytical paper due (3/13)

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