

# U.S. Presidency and Executive Politics

POLI 258

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## Course Description

The U.S. President is a key figure on the world stage whose words, actions, and influence are of interest to foreign leaders, domestic politicians, journalists, scholars, and the American mass public. But how do presidents wield this power? How do they influence legislators, bureaucrats, their parties, and the public? And who do presidents represent?

In this course, graduate students will begin to answer these questions as they examine the role of the institutional presidency, with special attention paid to the separation of powers. We will explore presidential power; presidents' interactions with Congress and the bureaucracy; presidential leadership of public opinion; and presidential representation. Students will see where the field has been and gain an understanding of gaps in the current literature in an effort to develop their own projects.

## Assignments

### Participation, Short Reviews, Seminar Leadership (40%)

You should be an active and engaged participant in this class. This means attending class, doing the readings, and contributing actively. Now, yes, it's a lot of reading! For some advice on why there's so much reading, why you should actually do it, and how to be a more efficient academic reader, see my post: "[Don't Take Shortcuts When It Comes to Course Readings.](#)" Also see Nate Meyvis on "[Actually Reading the Book.](#)" The presidency is a subfield that prizes books, and so, I've assigned a lot of them. But the cost can add up. My advice: don't buy them with your hard earned grad stipend! Many of these titles can be downloaded as PDFs *for free* through the library website or can be found there in their physical form. If you cannot find a book I've assigned through the library, please talk to me. I probably have the book, and I'm happy to let you borrow it.

Each week, one student will lead class discussion. To prepare, each discussion leader should write a 3ish page (double spaced) memo analyzing the week's reading (each leader is responsible for all of the readings, do not split them). The memo should not summarize the readings. It should be a critical, analytical piece. Questions you might answer include: what do we learn from these readings? What do the authors agree or disagree about? Where are there gaps in the literature? What kind of data and methods are used and why? How would someone interested in this topic build on what we've read? Please share your memo on Canvas by 12

noon on Tuesday (giving everyone time to review the memo before class on Wednesday). *I will assign discussion leaders on the first day of class.*

More than one absence (barring anything major or serious—please talk to me) will adversely affect your final grade. If you will not be able to attend class, please send an email to me beforehand.

## Minimum Viable Paper (30%)

Writing a good paper is hard. Writing an OK paper is also hard, but not as hard. So for our class, my encouragement is to write an OK paper, what I call the Minimum Viable Paper. In short, this paper should be approximately 7-10 pages and include (almost) all the major components of an academic paper: an introduction, theory, data, method, and results. Rather than write a conclusion, you'll write a few paragraphs about what you learned from this project and next steps (if any) or why you're not going to pursue the project further. If you don't find support for your hypothesis, that's perfectly fine. Just write up the paper as above with null results. Explain the findings and consider potential reasons why your hypothesis did not receive support.

My expectation is that this paper will be a professional product (e.g., full sentences, no typos, complete paragraphs, etc). It will still include the major components of a theory, such as a first go at appropriate literature citations and hypotheses. It will include a discussion of the data and results. I would encourage you to use easily accessible data (from the internet, from replication files, etc). The paper does not have to be "done" in the sense that you would still need to develop each section further before submitting it for publication. In fact, if this project is successful, I would expect you would need to go collect new data and continue revising the paper.

For more on this specific assignment, see my post: [Write Your First Draft Faster by Writing the "Minimum Viable Paper"](#).

Checkpoints:

- Before class on week 4: A one-page memo describing the motivation, research question, and your strategy for collecting the data and completing the paper.
- Before class on week 8: A 3-4 page summary of your question and hypotheses (no more!), a description of your data, and a first cut of empirical results.
- On Monday 03/17/2025: Paper due by 5pm.

## Class Presentation (30%)

An important part of professionalizing yourself into the discipline is presenting your work. On the last meeting of class, you'll present a conference-style presentation of your work. That means, you should present a 12-15 minute talk with about 8-12 slides introducing your project in an attention-catching way, a brief description of the theory, a discussion of the data and

results, and contributions and thoughts on future work. For further advice on preparing this presentation, see my post: [A Long Guide to Giving a Short Academic Talk](#).

I also expect those in attendance to ask questions after the presenter is finished and provide kind and thoughtful feedback on the work.

## Course Policies

### Academic Integrity

Students should uphold the [UCSD policy on academic integrity](#) and do their own independent work. Do not cheat, plagiarize or turn in someone else's work (including an AI's work) as your own.

Beyond this vague and general warning, you should feel free to discuss your work with others and/or use generative AI. In fact, I encourage you to do so. However, you should see these as complements to your own thinking, reading, and writing rather than substitutes. I would discourage you from uncritically copying and pasting AI output and putting your name at the top. You might fool me (LLMs are pretty good these days), but if you want to get a job as an academic political scientist, you need to show independence as a scholar---not just pass this class by doing the minimum.

If you're ever uncertain about something, ask me.

### Accommodations

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability should provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (<https://osd.ucsd.edu/>) and should speak with me at the beginning of the course.

## Course Schedule and Readings

All readings should be completed by class on the date listed.

Note:

\* Available online through Geisel Library.

† Available in physical form at Geisel Library.

### Week 1 (01/08/2025): The Presidency in American Politics and Political Science

- U.S. Constitution, Article II.

- Federalist Papers Nos. 68, 70, 72, 76.
- Clifford, Scott, D. J. Flynn, Brendan Nyhan, and Kasey Rhee. 2024. "Decider in Chief? Why and How the Public Exaggerates the Power of the Presidency." *Political Research Quarterly* 77(2): 469–84.

## Week 2 (01/15/2025): Presidential Power

- Richard E. Neustadt. 1990 [1960]. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. Free Press. [Prefaces, Chapters 1, 2 (Pt I only), 3, 5]<sup>†</sup>
- Terry M. Moe and William G. Howell. 1999. "The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 15(1):132–179.
- Edwards, George C. 2000. "Building Coalitions." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 30(1): 47–78.
- David E. Lewis. 2008. *The Politics of Presidential Appointments: Political Control and Bureaucratic Performance*. Princeton University Press. Princeton, NJ. Chapters 1, 2, and 5.
- Howell, William G., and Jon C. Rogowski. 2013. "War, the Presidency, and Legislative Voting Behavior." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(1): 150–66.

### Further Reading:

- Cameron, Charles M. 2002. "Studying the Polarized Presidency." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32(4): 647–63.
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, William G. Howell, and David E. Lewis. 2008. "Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential Power: A Reevaluation of the Two Presidencies Thesis." *The Journal of Politics* 70(1): 1–16.
- Dearborn, John A. 2021. *Power Shifts: Congress and Presidential Representation*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Howell, William G., Saul P. Jackman, and Jon C. Rogowski. 2013. *The Wartime President: Executive Influence and the Nationalizing Politics of Threat*. University of Chicago Press.
- Levinson, Daryl J., and Richard H. Pildes. 2006. "Separation of Parties, Not Powers." *Harvard Law Review* 119(8): 2311–86.
- Rogowski, Jon C. 2016. "Presidential Influence in an Era of Congressional Dominance." *American Political Science Review* 110(02): 325–41.
- Wildavsky, Aaron. 1969. "The Two Presidencies." *Trans-Action* 4: 230–43.

## Week 3 (01/22/2025): Partisan Presidents

- Daniel J. Galvin. 2009. *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush*. Princeton University Press. [\[Chapters 1, 2\]](#) \*
- Kriner, Douglas L., and Andrew Reeves. 2015. "Presidential Particularism and Divide-the-Dollar Politics." *American Political Science Review* 109(1): 155–71.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2019. *Presidents and Parties in the Public Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [\[Chapters 1, 3, 5\]](#) \*
- Miller, David Ryan. 2023. "The President Will See Whom Now? Presidential Engagement with Organized Interests." *American Political Science Review* 117(3): 1019–35.
- Wood, B. Dan. 2009. *The Myth of Presidential Representation*. Cambridge University Press. [\[Chapters 1-4\]](#) †

### Further Reading:

- Milkis, Sidney M. 1993. *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System Since the New Deal*. Oxford University Press.
- Milkis, Sidney M., and Daniel J. Tichenor. 2018. *Rivalry and Reform: Presidents, Social Movements, and the Transformation of American Politics*. University of Chicago Press. *Individual chapters to be assigned in class.*†

## Week 4 (01/29/2025): Presidents and Congress

*Checkpoint 1 for course projects due before class.*

- Lee, Frances E. 2016. *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [\[Chapters 1-3, 5\]](#) †
- Lee, Frances E. 2008. "Dividers, Not Uniters: Presidential Leadership and Senate Partisanship, 1981-2004." *The Journal of Politics* 70(4): 914–28.
- Noble, Benjamin S. 2024. "Presidential Cues and the Nationalization of Congressional Rhetoric, 1973–2016." *American Journal of Political Science* 68(4): 1386–1402.
- Kriner, Douglas L., and Eric Schickler. 2014. "Investigating the President: Committee Probes and Presidential Approval, 1953–2006." *The Journal of Politics* 76(2): 521–34.
- Ban, Pamela, Ju Yeon Park and Hye Young You. (Forthcoming). "Bureaucrats in Congress: The Politics of Interbranch Information Sharing." *The Journal of Politics*. [\[link\]](#)

Further Reading:

- Beckmann, Matthew N. 2010. *Pushing the Agenda: Presidential Leadership in US Lawmaking, 1953–2004*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bond, Jon R., and Richard Fleisher. 1990. *The President in the Legislative Arena*. University of Chicago Press.
- Groseclose, Tim, and Nolan McCarty. 2001. "The Politics of Blame: Bargaining before an Audience." *American Journal of Political Science* 45(1): 100–119.
- Kriner, Douglas L., and Eric Schickler. 2016. *Investigating the President: Congressional Checks on Presidential Power*. Princeton University Press.

## Week 5 (02/05/2025): Going Public

- Kernell, Samuel H. 1997. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*. Washington, D.C: CQ Press. [[Chapters 1-2](#)] <sup>†</sup>
- Cohen, Jeffrey E. 1995. "Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda." *American Journal of Political Science* 39(1): 87–107.
- Edwards, George C. III. 2003. *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*. New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press. [[Chapters 1, 2, 10](#)] <sup>\*</sup>
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice. 2006. *Who Leads Whom?: Presidents, Policy, and the Public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [[Chapter 1-3](#)] <sup>†</sup>
- Noble, Benjamin S. "Presidential Negative Partisanship." [[link](#)].
- Russell, Annelise, and Rebecca Eissler. 2022. "Conditional Presidential Priorities: Audience-Driven Agenda Setting." *American Politics Research* 50(4): 545–49.

Further Reading:

- Cohen, Jeffrey E. 2009. *Going Local: Presidential Leadership in the Post-Broadcast Age*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cavari, Amnon. 2017. *The Party Politics of Presidential Rhetoric*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Druckman, James N., and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2015. *Who Governs?: Presidents, Public Opinion, and Manipulation*. University of Chicago Press.
- Rottinghaus, Brandon. 2010. *The Provisional Pulpit: Modern Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion*. Texas A&M University Press.

## Week 6 (02/12/2025): Unilateral Power I, Presidential Practice

- Howell, William G. 2003. *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press. [Chapters 2 and 6] \*
- Rudalevige, Andrew. 2021. *By Executive Order: Bureaucratic Management and the Limits of Presidential Power*. Princeton University Press. [Chapters 1-2, 5] \*
- Kaufman, Aaron R., and Jon C. Rogowski. 2024. "Divided Government, Strategic Substitution, and Presidential Unilateralism." *American Journal of Political Science* 68(2): 816–31.
- Bolton, Alexander, and Sharece Thrower. 2016. "Legislative Capacity and Executive Unilateralism." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(3): 649–63.

### Further Reading:

- Bolton, Alexander, and Sharece Thrower. 2021. *Checks in the Balance: Legislative Capacity and the Dynamics of Executive Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [Chapters 1, 2, 5 and 6] \*
- Lowande, Kenneth. 2021. "Presidents and the Status Quo." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 16(2): 215–44.
- Martin, Lisa L. 2005. "The President and International Commitments: Treaties as Signaling Devices." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35(3): 440–65.
- Thrower, Sharece. 2017. "To Revoke or Not Revoke? The Political Determinants of Executive Order Longevity." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(3): 642–56.

## Week 7 (02/19/2025): Unilateral Power II, Public Opinion

- Reeves, Andrew, and Jon C. Rogowski. 2018. "The Public Cost of Unilateral Action." *American Journal of Political Science* 62(2): 424–40.
- Christenson, Dino P., and Douglas L. Kriner. 2017. "Mobilizing the Public Against the President: Congress and the Political Costs of Unilateral Action." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(4): 769–85.
- Lownade, Kenneth. 2024. *False Front: The Failed Promise of Presidential Power in a Polarized Age*. University of Chicago Press. [Chapters 1-5] \*

### Further Reading:

- Reeves, Andrew, and Jon C. Rogowski. 2022. *No Blank Check: The Origins and Consequences of Public Antipathy towards Presidential Power*. Cambridge University Press.
- Christenson, Dino P., and Douglas L. Kriner. 2020. *The Myth of the Imperial Presidency: How Public Opinion Checks the Unilateral Executive*. University of Chicago Press.

## Week 8 (02/26/2025): Elections

*Checkpoint 2 for course projects due before class.*

- Baccini, Leonardo, and Stephen Weymouth. 2021. "Gone For Good: Deindustrialization, White Voter Backlash, and US Presidential Voting." *American Political Science Review* 115(2): 550–67.
- Wattenberg, Martin P. 2016. "The Declining Relevance of Candidate Personal Attributes in Presidential Elections." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 46(1): 125–39.

### Further Reading

- Ghitza, Yair, Andrew Gelman, and Jonathan Auerbach. 2023. "The Great Society, Reagan's Revolution, and Generations of Presidential Voting." *American Journal of Political Science* 67(3): 520–37.
- Hetherington, Marc J., Meri T. Long, and Thomas J. Rudolph. 2016. "Revisiting the Myth: New Evidence of a Polarized Electorate." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80(S1): 321–50.
- Erikson, Robert S. 2016. "Congressional Elections in Presidential Years: Presidential Coattails and Strategic Voting." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41(3): 551–74.
- Petrocik, John R. 1996. "Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study." *American Journal of Political Science* 40(3): 825–50.
- Popkin, Samuel L. 1991. *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## Week 9 (03/05/2025): Bureaucracy and Politicization

- Bednar, Nicholas R., and David E. Lewis. 2024. "Presidential Investment in the Administrative State." *American Political Science Review* 118(1): 442–57.



- Ban, Pamela, Ju Yeon Park, and Hye Young You. 2023. "How Are Politicians Informed? Witnesses and Information Provision in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 117(1): 122–39.
- Napolio, Nicholas G. 2023. "Implementing Presidential Particularism: Bureaucracy and the Distribution of Federal Grants." *Political Science Research and Methods* 11(1): 180–90.
- Potter, Rachel Augustine. 2025. "Buying Evidence? Policy Research as a Presidential Commodity." *The Journal of Politics*.

Further Reading:

- Bellodi, Luca. 2022. "A Dynamic Measure of Bureaucratic Reputation: New Data for New Theory." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Kinane, Christina M. 2021. "Control without Confirmation: The Politics of Vacancies in Presidential Appointments." *American Political Science Review*: 1–16.
- Potter, Rachel Augustine. 2019. *Bending the Rules: Procedural Politicking in the Bureaucracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. *Individual chapters to be assigned in class.*

## Week 10 (03/12/2025): Class Presentations

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## Acknowledgements

I thank Jonthan Klingler, Andrew Reeves, Patrick Rickert, and Sharece Thrower for their inspiration.