

The University of Texas at Austin  
Government 330K (38270):  
**The American President**

Fall, 2023

Christopher Wlezien

TTh 2:00-3:15

UTC 4.124

**Contact Information:**

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**Course Description**

This course examines the president of the United States -- the (many) demands on him/her and the (limited) ability to deliver on those demands. We begin with presidential elections, focusing especially on who wins and why. This is interesting and important unto itself but it also tells us a lot about what the public considers to be important when evaluating presidents. We then turn to the president's ability to deliver the things the public considers to be important, focusing on US policy outputs. Much policy is made by Congress, and so we start there, by considering whether and how the president can impact legislative action. While statutes are important, implementation is too, and we next turn to the president's influence within the executive branch. We then turn to presidential influence over the judiciary, which is an important policy actor as well. Finally, to tie things together, we assess presidential influence in different policy areas – domestic, fiscal, and foreign policy. By the end of the course, students should have a sense of and appreciation for the president's role in US politics and policymaking. Along the way, I expect students will sharpen their analytical abilities and develop their instincts for how the political world works.

**Course Format**

The course will consist of lectures and discussion. Thus, while the course is not a seminar—there are too many students for that—class participation is important. Students will need to keep up with the reading and then be prepared to participate, at least to some extent. To encourage

this, students will receive extra credit based on the quality—not just quantity—of their contributions to class discussion. (See the description of “Grades” for details.)

## **Grades**

The main graded components for this class are two midterm exams and a final examination. Performance in the class will be assessed as follows:

30%	First midterm examination
30%	Second midterm examination
40%	Final examination
+0-5 %	Participation

In allocating grades, the following scale will be used, though I do reserve the right to curve up (not down!):

A	93-100%
A-	90-93%
B+	87-90%
B	83-87%
B-	80-83%
C+	77-80%
C	73-77%
C-	70-73%
D+	67-70%
D	63-67%
D-	60-63%
F	< 60%

Examinations are based on readings, lectures, and discussion and may include multiple choice, short answer questions, and essays. The final examination is cumulative, meaning that you are required to remember and integrate information from the first half of the course in order to complete the course in good standing.

## **Readings**

The course readings include three books, which are available in the university bookstore:

Edwards, George C., Kenneth Mayer, and Stephen J. Wayne. 2022. *Presidential Leadership: Politics and Policy Making*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield.

Erikson, Robert S. and Christopher Wlezien. 2012. *The Timeline of Presidential Elections*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kernell, Samuel. 2007. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.

NOTE: Used versions of the books are available and e-book versions are too.

Various other readings are required and these—as well as additional reading pertaining to specific subject areas—are listed in the course outline that follows. The required readings are available via the internet, the UT Library’s electronic resources or will be made available on Canvas. Yet other reading may be distributed during the course, as appropriate.

## **Disabilities**

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

## **Academic Dishonesty**

UT prohibits academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism; see <https://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/student-services/discipline/>. Also see the UT codes of conduct: [http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/the-university/](https://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/the-university/).

## **Religious Holidays**

UT policy allows students to miss a class, examination or assignment to observe a religious holy day. Students are expected to notify professors of the pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day, and will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

## **Classroom Safety and COVID-19**

To help preserve an in-person learning environment, the University of Texas at Austin recommends the following:

- Get vaccinated, which is free and not billed to health insurance. The vaccine will help protect against the transmission of the virus to others and reduce serious symptoms in those who are vaccinated.
- Proactive Community Testing remains an important part of the university’s efforts to protect our community. Tests are fast and free.
- Visit [protect.utexas.edu](https://protect.utexas.edu) for more information

## **Confidentiality of Recordings**

Class recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form.

# **COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

August 22: Introductory class

Required reading:

NONE

August 24: The President in the Constitution (and beyond)

Required reading:

The Constitution of the USA (<http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html>)

*Skim* Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Preface and Chapter 1.

*Read* Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 2.

August 29: The Contenders for Office

Required reading:

*Review* Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 2.

Robert Lineberry. 1996. “Fatal, Failed and Fulfilled Presidencies.” Unpublished ms. (C)

August 31: Presidential Elections—A Two-Stage Process

Required reading:

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapters 3 and 4

Further reading on the Electoral College:

<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/about.html>

September 5: Who Votes?

Required reading:

*Historical:*

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/turnout.php>

In 2020:

<http://www.electproject.org/2020g>

*The Demographic Composition:*

<https://www.electproject.org/election-data/voter-turnout-demographics>

In 2012:

<http://www.people-press.org/2012/11/01/nonvoters-who-they-are-what-they-think/>

In 2016:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/>

In 2020:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/26/what-the-2020-electorate-looks-like-by-party-race-and-ethnicity-age-education-and-religion/>

September 7: How do People Vote? The Case of 2020

Required viewing:

*Data: The Results*

<https://www.cnn.com/election/2020/results/president>

*Data: The Exit Poll*

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-elections/exit-polls>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/interactive/2020/exit-polls/presidential-election-exit-polls/>

*Data: The Fox News Voter Analysis*

<https://www.foxnews.com/elections/2020/general-results/voter-analysis>

Required reading:

*Voting in 2012:*

<http://www.people-press.org/2012/11/07/changing-face-of-america-helps-assure-obama-victory/>

*Voting in 2016:*

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/>

*Voting in 2020:*

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/30/behind-bidens-2020-victory/>

Further reading on exit polling (from Edison Research in 2016):

<http://www.edisonresearch.com/behind-numbers-2016-national-election-exit-poll/>

September 12: No class

Required reading on election campaigns:

Erikson and Wlezien, Skim Chapters 1- 3 (and 4).

*The Polls in 2020:*

[https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2020/president/us/general\\_election\\_trump\\_vs\\_biden-6247.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2020/president/us/general_election_trump_vs_biden-6247.html) NOTE: You may have to copy and paste link into browser.

September 14: Who Wins and Why?

Required viewing:

*A history of presidential elections:*

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections>

*Party identification over time:*

<http://www.people-press.org/interactives/party-id-trend/>

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/328310/party-average-2020-winds-similar-prior-years.aspx>

*Patterns of party identification in 2020:*

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/06/02/in-changing-u-s-electorate-race-and-education-remain-stark-dividing-lines/>

Required reading:

*Skim:* Erikson, Robert S. 1989. "Economic Conditions and the Presidential Vote," *American Political Science Review* 83:567-573. (C)

*Skim:* Erikson, Robert S. and Darren Davis. 1992. "The President's Approval Rating," in Kent L. Tedin and Donald F. Lutz (eds.), *Perspectives on American and Texas Politics*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt. (C),

Read: Jacobson, Gary. 2021. "Driven to Extremes: Donald Trump's Extraordinary Impact on the 2020 Elections." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 51(3):492-521, especially the first 15 pages. (C).

## September 19: The Election Campaign, the Polls, and the Vote

Required reading:

Erikson and Wlezien, read Chapter 5, 6, and 8, skim Chapters 4 and 7.

Further reading:

For further reading on (problems with) the polls in 2020:

[https://aapor.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AAPOR-Task-Force-on-2020-Pre-Election-Polling\\_Report-FNL.pdf](https://aapor.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AAPOR-Task-Force-on-2020-Pre-Election-Polling_Report-FNL.pdf)

## September 21: The National Vote and the Electoral College

Required viewing:

*Election-to-Election Vote Swing, 2000-2016*

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/09/us/elections/states-shift.html>

*On the 2020 Election: Early Returns*

<https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2020-swing-states/>

Required reading on the 2016 election:

Sides, John, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck. 2017. “How Trump Lost and Won.” *Journal of Democracy* 28 (2): 34-44. (C)

## September 26: On Forecasting the Presidential Vote

Required reading:

*General:*

Erikson, Robert S. and Christopher Wlezien. 2021. “Forecasting the 2020 Presidential Election: Leading Economic Indicators, the Polls, and the Presidential Vote.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 54:55-58. (C)

*Post-mortems of Political Science Forecasts of the 2020 Election:*

<https://centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/how-did-the-political-science-forecasters-do/>

Further reading on the 2020 forecasts:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/2020-presidential-election-forecasting-symposium>

Also see:

<https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2020-election-forecast/>  
<https://projects.economist.com/us-2020-forecast/president>

On forecasting the 2024 election!

*A Prediction Market:*

<https://www.predictit.org/markets/detail/6867/Which-party-will-win-the-2024-US-presidential-election>

September 28: First MIDTERM EXAM (tentative date)

October 3: The President and Congress

→Graded exams returned

Required reading:

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 11.

Kernell, Chapter 1.

October 5: The Evolution of Washington and Presidents and Going Public

Required reading:

Kernell, Chapters 2-3.

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 7.

October 10: The President and the Media and the Growth of Going Public

Required reading:

Kernell, Chapter 4-5.

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 5.

October 12: The Conditions for Going Public

Required reading:

Kernell, Chapter 6-7.

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, begin Chapter 6.

October 17: The Costs of Going Public

Required reading:

Kernell, Chapter 8.

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, finish Chapter 6.

October 19: Second MIDTERM EXAM (tentative date)

October 24: On the Limits of Presidential Power

➔ Graded exams returned.

Required reading:

Neustadt, Richard. 1980. *Presidential Power*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, selected chapters. (C)

October 26: The President as CEO

Required reading:

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, begin Chapter 8.

October 31: The Executive Branch

Required reading:

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, finish Chapter 8, begin Chapter 9.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/1600/executive-branch>

<https://www.usa.gov/federal-agencies/a>

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/fedgov.html>

## November 2: Presidential Appointments

Required reading:

Lewis, David. 2011. "Presidential Appointments and Personnel." *Annual Review of Political Science* 14:47-66. (C)  
Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, finish Chapter 9.

## November 7: Presidential Management

Required reading:

*General:*

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, begin Chapter 10.

*On Czars:*

Vaughn, Justin. 2014. "Reconsidering Presidential Policy Czars." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 44: 522-536. (C)

*On the Number of Czars by President...*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_U.S.\\_executive\\_branch\\_czars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._executive_branch_czars)

## November 9: The Administrative President

Required reading:

*General:*

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, finish Chapter 10

*Presidential Actions:*

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions>

*The Number of Executive Orders by President:*

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/orders.php>

*On Trump's Executive Orders*

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/01/30/most-of-trumps-executive-orders-arent-actually-executive-orders-heres-why-that-matters/?utm\\_term=.252577e9c49c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/01/30/most-of-trumps-executive-orders-arent-actually-executive-orders-heres-why-that-matters/?utm_term=.252577e9c49c)

*On Biden's Executive Orders*

In 2023:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/presidential-documents/executive-orders/joe-biden/2023>

The term so far:

[https://ballotpedia.org/Joe\\_Biden%27s\\_executive\\_orders\\_and\\_actions](https://ballotpedia.org/Joe_Biden%27s_executive_orders_and_actions)

November 14: The President and the Judiciary

Required reading:

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 12

*On Trump and the Judiciary:*

<http://theweek.com/articles/741314/how-trump-wields-unprecedented-control-over-americas-judiciary>

*On Biden and the Judiciary:*

<https://news.ballotpedia.org/2022/01/04/biden-has-appointed-second-most-federal-judges-through-jan-1-of-a-presidents-second-year-in-office/>

November 16: The Two Presidencies?

Required reading:

Review Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 2.

Aaron Wildavsky, “The Two Presidencies.” (C)

November 21: No Class – Thanksgiving week

November 23: No Class – Thanksgiving week

November 28: Presidents and Fiscal Policy

Required reading:

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 13.

The US Budget: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/>

November 30: Final class: Presidents and Foreign Policy

Required reading:

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 14.

December 7: Final examination, 8:00-10:00 a.m.