

The University of Texas at Austin
Government 330K (38205):
The American President

Spring, 2021

Christopher Wlezien

TTh 2:00-3:20

WEL 2.224

Contact Information:

Office: 4.154 Batts

Zoom Office Hours: 3:20-4:50 T; 3:20-4:50 TH; and by appointment

E-mail: Wlezien@austin.utexas.edu

Homepage: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/government/faculty/cw26629>

Office phone: 512-232-7236

Teaching Assistant: Brooke Shannon; E-mail: bshannon@utexas.edu

Office Hours: 10:30-12:00 M; 9:30-11:00 W

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 consider the president and the judiciary, which is an important policy actor as well. Finally, to tie everything together, we consider how presidential influence looks in different policy areas – domestic, fiscal and foreign policy. By the end of the course, students should have a good 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 is a hybrid course, which means that it combines in-class and remote teaching. As I just learned on January 8, 2021, we will be entirely online through the end of January, and this may be extended; we will see. For now, here's the plan, keeping in mind that I reserve the right to adjust the format of the course as needed based partly on feedback from you. The first class

meeting on January 19 will be synchronous – live – on Zoom. This will allow us to go through the syllabus together and you to ask questions. Thereafter I will use a combination of recorded lectures and live discussion. On Thursday, January 21, I will post a short, say, 30-minute, lecture by 2:00 p.m. (Central) and then open a Zoom discussion at 2:45. For the rest of January, I will continue to post lecture by 2:00 p.m. each Tuesday and Thursday and hold discussions beginning at 2:45 on most class days. Thereafter, assuming in-person classes are allowed, I will post lectures on Tuesdays and we will meet in classroom on Thursdays for the full period of class, beginning with discussion relating to the previous class before turning to the new material and discussion of that. Those in-person sessions also will be recorded and posted later in the day for those of you who cannot be in attendance. (So you know, I do not control the recording and posting.) Thus, while the course is not a seminar—there are too many students for that—and we will not always be meeting in person, class participation is important. 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.) To be clear, participation includes what happens in class and also questions/comments you convey to me by e-mail and office hours.

Grades

The main graded components for this class are the midterm and final examinations and a paper that is due near the end of the semester. Performance in the class will be assessed as follows:

40%	Midterm examination
40%	Final examination
20%	Paper
+0-3 %	Participation

In allocating grades, the following scale will be used, though I do reserve the right to curve up grades (but 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 will need to remember and integrate information from the first half of the course in order to complete the course in good standing. These will be take-home open-book examinations, subject to the expectations of academic honesty outlined in the UT catalog and the Honor Code (see below).

A paper is due on Thursday, May 6. It must be turned in to me in class that day or else posted by 4:30 p.m. The paper will take the form of a policy brief for President Biden regarding any issue with which the administration is involved. The brief will (1) provide essential historical background of the issue, (2) recommend a position, and (3) lay out a course of action. You will need to justify your recommendation and also describe what the president must do to succeed, e.g., dealing with the public and Congress. To help make the exercise realistic, you will have only 4-5 typed (with 12-point font) double-spaced pages, or about 1,250 words. The assignment will be described more fully in class, especially as the semester progresses.

Readings

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

Edwards, George C., Kenneth Mayer, and Stephen J. Wayne. 2018. *Presidential Leadership: Politics and Policy Making*, 10th 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*, 4th edition. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.

NOTE: Used versions of the latter two books are available and both are available as even less expensive e-books; the Edwards, et al book also is available electronically.

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.

Academic Dishonesty

UT prohibits academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism; see

<http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/appendices/appendix-c/student-discipline-and-conduct/>. Also see the UT Honor Code <http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/the-university/>.

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/>.

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.

* Given COVID-19, a number of other disclosures also deserve your attention*

Safety and Class Participation/Masks

We all need to make some adjustments in order to benefit from in-person classroom interactions in a safe and healthy manner. Our best protections against spreading COVID-19 on campus are masks (defined as cloth face coverings) and staying home if you are showing symptoms. Therefore, for the benefit of everyone, and per University policy, this means that all students are required to follow these important rules:

- **Every student must wear a cloth face-covering properly in class and in all campus buildings at all times.**
- **Students are encouraged to participate in documented daily symptom screening.** This means that each class day in which on-campus activities occur, students can upload certification from the symptom tracking app and confirm that they completed their symptom screening for that day to Canvas. Students should not upload the results of that screening, just the certificate that they completed it. If the symptom tracking app recommends that the student isolate rather than coming to class, then students should not return to class until cleared by a medical professional.
 - Information regarding [safety protocols with and without symptoms](#) can be [found here](#).

According to the University of Texas, if a student is not wearing a cloth face-covering properly in the classroom (or any UT building), that student must leave the classroom (and building). And, if the student refuses to wear a cloth face covering, class will be dismissed for the remainder of the period, and the student will be subject to disciplinary action as set forth in the university's Institutional Rules/General Conduct 11-404(a)(3). Students who have a condition that precludes the wearing of a cloth face covering must follow the procedures for [obtaining an accommodation](#) working with [Services for Students with Disabilities](#).

Class Recordings

Classes are automatically recorded and the 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. Guidance on public access to class recordings can be found [here](#).

Sharing of Course Materials also is Prohibited

According to the University, no materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class explicit written permission.

COVID Guidance

To help keep everyone at UT and in our community safe, it is critical that students report COVID-19 symptoms and testing, regardless of test results, to [University Health Services](#), and

faculty and staff report to the [HealthPoint Occupational Health Program](#) (OHP) as soon as possible. Please see this [link](#) to understand what needs to be reported. In addition, to help understand what to do if a fellow student in the class (or the instructor or TA) tests positive for COVID, see this [University Health Services link](#).

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

January 19: Introductory class.

Required reading:

NONE.

January 20: INAUGURATION DAY!

January 21: 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.

+ Given current events:

Skim “Explainer: Impeachment of 14th Amendment ...” Reuters (January 14, 2021): <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-impeachment/explainer-impeachment-or-the-14th-amendment-can-trump-be-barred-from-future-office-idUSKBN29I356>

January 26: The Contenders for Office

Required reading:

Review Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 2.

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

January 28: 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>

February 2: Who Votes?

Required reading:

Historical:

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

In 2020:

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

The Demographic Composition:

<http://www.electproject.org/home/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: Early returns!

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

February 4: 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/>

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/>

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

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

February 9: Who Wins and Why?

Required viewing:

A history of presidential elections:

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/elections.php>

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>

Required reading:

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)

February 11: The Election Campaign and the Polls

Required reading:

Erikson and Wlezien, Chapters 1-3.

Further reading:

On the 2012 Election (free via Amazon):

https://www.amazon.com/Campaign-Timeline-Presidential-Elections-Chicago-ebook/dp/B00IPNNEF2/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1515451195&sr=8-4&keywords=wlezien

On the 2016 Election:

Wlezien, Christopher and Stuart Soroka. 2019. "Mass Media and Electoral Preferences During the 2016 Presidential Race." *Political Behavior* 41:945-970. (C)

February 16: The Polls and the Vote

Required reading:

Erikson and Wlezien, Chapter 5, 6 and 8. (Skim Chapters 4 and 7.)

The Polls in 2020:

https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2020/president/us/general_election_trump_vs_biden-6247.html

February 18: 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)

NOTE: Might be replaced by something on 2020, if appropriate!

February 23: 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>

February 25: The President and Congress

Required reading:

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 11.

Kernell, Chapter 1.

March 2: A Class on Paper Proposals

Required reading:

NONE

Assignment:

Consider the topic for your paper. The proposal will include a title and one short paragraph outlining the focus. Additional information will be provided in class.

March 4: The Evolution of Washington and Presidents and Going Public

➔ Initial paper proposals due.

Required reading:

Kernell, Chapters 2-3.

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 7.

March 9: The President and the Media and the Growth of Going Public

Required reading:

Kernell, Chapter 4-5.

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 5.

March 11: The Conditions for Going Public

Required reading:

Kernell, Chapter 6-7.

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, begin Chapter 6.

March 16: NO CLASS

SPRING BREAK

March 18: NO CLASS

SPRING BREAK

March 23: The Costs of Going Public

Required reading:

Kernell, Chapter 8.

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, finish Chapter 6.

March 25: MIDTERM EXAM (tentative date)

March 30: 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)

April 1: The President as CEO

➔ Final paper proposals due. (NOTE: Only if topic changes.)

Required reading:

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, begin Chapter 8.

April 6: 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>

April 8: 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.

April 13: 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

April 15: NO CLASS – Midwest Political Science Association Meeting

April 20: 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/2017/04/28/trump-may-have-the-most-executive-orders-since-truman-but-what-did-they-accomplish/?utm_term=.5f8cddca804a

April 22: 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>

April 27: The Two Presidencies?

Required reading:

Review Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 2.

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

April 29: Presidents and Fiscal Policy

Required reading:

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 13.

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

May 4: Presidents and Foreign Policy

Required reading:

Edwards, Mayer, and Wayne, Chapter 14.

May 6: Final class: On the Biden Presidency and the 2020 (and 2024) Elections

➔ Papers due.

Required reading:

NONE.

May 18: Final examination, 2:00-5:00