

THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY

Every president takes the same constitutionally prescribed oath of office. They all swear to faithfully execute the office of President of the United States and, to the best of their ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution. Yet every president brings wildly different abilities to the office and vastly different understandings of what counts as faithfully executing the office. Indeed, presidential history seems awash in differences: different experiences, different temperaments, different management styles, different rhetorical strategies, different goals, and different challenges. The immense importance for the nation and the world of what political scientist Fred Greenstein labels “the presidential difference” was never clearer than when Joe Biden took the presidential reins from Donald Trump.

Whereas Trump had never held elected office before taking the oath of office, Biden had held public office in the nation’s capital for 44 years, 36 as a United States Senator and 8 as the Vice President of the United States. Trump’s institution-bashing, norm-busting style could not have been further from Biden’s, which radiated respect for Washington’s institutions and mores and an appreciation for the messiness of the complexities of governance. Where Trump assailed the Deep State and promised to drain the Washington Swamp, Biden lauds the essential work of the nation’s public servants and experts. Trump seemed to view the projection of empathy as weakness, whereas Biden made “empathy and simple kindness” into his political brand. If Trump relished winding the nation up, Biden strove to “lower the temperature” of political dialogue.

So where does that leave the study of the presidency? Is it possible to generalize about an institution that seems to depend so much on individual traits of the incumbent? Can we discern patterns or trends in presidential history or identify rules that govern presidential behavior? How different is Trump from the presidents who came before him and how did we get a president like Trump? What does Trump’s presidency tell us about the political system? And what should we as citizens expect from a president? Do we expect too much of presidents? Is the problem particular presidents or the institution of the presidency? How, if at all, does Trump change the way we should think about the presidency created by the Constitution’s framers and the way we think about the benefits and dangers of presidential power? And what difference does the Biden presidency or the Obama presidency make in the way we think about the promise and peril of the presidency?

This course address these and other questions in three parts. The first third of the course focuses on the presidency’s place in the political system, with particular attention

to some of the systemic problems that the Trump presidency brought into sharp relief. The second third of the course focuses on explaining and even predicting presidential success and failure. The final third examines how we go about deciding on winners and losers in the presidency as well as how we distinguish between so-called “great” presidents and failed presidents. Do we need great presidents? Or are they part of the problem?

Participation in class discussions is a vital component of this class and will be worth 30% of your grade. Active participation entails doing *all* the reading, coming to class fully prepared to discuss the reading, and contributing constructively to class discussions. There will be three papers in this class; the first will be due Sept. 30 at 4pm (worth 20% of your grade), the second will be due Nov. 4 at 4pm (also worth 20% of your grade), and the third will be due on December 13 at 2pm (worth 30% of your grade).

More than one unexcused absence will result in a full letter grade deduction from your final course grade; more than two unexcused absences will result in two full letter grade deductions from your final grade; more than three unexcused absences will result in failing the class. Persistent lateness for class can also result in deductions from the final grade.

Required texts are available for purchase at the Willamette Bookstore. The texts to be purchased are William Howell and Terry Moe, *Presidents, Populism, and the Crisis of Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 2020) and Stephen Skowronek, John Dearborn, and Desmond King, *Phantoms of a Beleaguered Republic* (Oxford University Press, 2021). All other readings in the syllabus are available on the class WISE page (except where a URL is provided on the syllabus). Readings available on WISE must be printed out and brought to class. In class you should always have the reading for that day on the desk in front of you. I prefer that no laptops be used during class, except in extraordinary circumstances.

Please tell me about any disabilities that will affect your participation in this course and any accommodations authorized by the Office of Disabilities Services. I expect you to be familiar with Willamette’s Plagiarism and Cheating Policy.

My office is Smullin 324. My office hours are Tues 12:45-2:15 and by appointment (my email is rellis@willamette.edu). I am also happy to meet individually on Zoom.

Schedule of Class Topics and Readings

1.1 (Aug 31) Introduction: On Being Presidential

I. The Presidency and the Political System

1.2 (Sept 2) Populism and the Presidency

Howell and Moe, *Presidents, Populism, and the Crisis of Democracy*, 1-112

2.1 (Sept. 7) Presidents and the Crisis of Democracy

Howell and Moe, *Presidents, Populism, and the Crisis of Democracy*, 113-181, 194-219

2.2. (Sept. 9) The Deep State and the Unitary Executive

Skowronek, Dearborn, and King, *Phantoms of a Beleaguered Republic*, ix-x, 1-56

3.1 (Sept. 14) Depth in Staff, Norms, and Knowledge

Skowronek, Dearborn, and King, *Phantoms of a Beleaguered Republic*, 59-126

Howell and Moe, *Presidents, Populism, and the Crisis of Democracy*, 181-189

Charles Kesler, "Breaking Norms will Renew Democracy, Not Ruin It," *New York Times*, August 23, 2018

3.2 (Sept. 16) Depth in Appointment

Skowronek, Dearborn, and King, *Phantoms of a Beleaguered Republic*, 127-164

Howell and Moe, *Presidents, Populism, and the Crisis of Democracy*, 189-194

4.1 (Sept 21) The Check of Public Opinion

Dino P. Christenson and Douglas L. Kriner, *The Myth of the Imperial Presidency: How Public Opinion Checks the Unilateral Executive* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2020), 1-25, 148-170, 177-220

4.2 (Sept 23) Depth in Oversight

Skowronek, Dearborn, and King, *Phantoms of a Beleaguered Republic*, 165-204

5.1 (Sept 28) Work on Essay #1

5.2 (Sept 30) Essay #1 Due

II. Presidential Leadership

6.1 (Oct. 5) The Rhetorical Presidency

Jeffrey Tulis, "The Two Constitutional Presidencies," in Michael Nelson, *The Presidency and the Political System* (CQ Press, 2021; 12th edition), 3-39

Mary Stuckey, "The Rhetoric of the Trump Administration," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (March 2021), 125-150

Michael D. Shear, Maggie Haberman, Nicholas Confessore, Karen Yourish, Larry Buchanan and Keith Collins, "How Trump Reshaped the Presidency in 11,000 Tweets," *New York Times*, November 2, 2019,

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/02/us/politics/trump-twitter-presidency.html>

Alexandra Samuel, "How Trump's Twitter presidency hijacked hopes for e-democracy," *daily.jstor.org*, January 24, 2017

6.2 (Oct. 7) The Media and the Presidential Spectacle

Bruce Miroff, "The Presidential Spectacle," in Michael Nelson, *The Presidency and the Political System* (CQ Press, 2021; 12th edition), 279-306

Marjorie Randon Hershey, "The President and the Media: The Case of Donald Trump," in Michael Nelson, *The Presidency and the Political System* (CQ Press, 2021; 12th edition), 307-334

7.1 (Oct 12) Presidents in Political Time

Stephen Skowronek, "Notes on the Presidency in the Political Order," *Studies in American Political Development* 1(1986), 286-302

Stephen Skowronek, "Is Transformational Leadership Still Possible? Barack Obama in Historical Perspective," and "What's New in the Political Leadership of Donald Trump," in *Presidential Leadership in Political Time* (University Press of Kansas, 2020), 167-220

7.2 (Oct 14) Presidential Character

James David Barber, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House* (Prentice Hall, 1992; 4th ed.), 1-11, 81-84

Dan McAdams, "The Mind of Donald Trump," *The Atlantic* (June 2016)

Craig Malkin, "Pathological Narcissism and Politics," in Bandy X. Lee, ed., *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 25 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President* (St. Martin's, 2017), 51-68

Mary Trump, "Psychiatrists know what's wrong with my uncle. Let them tell voters," *Washington Post*, October 22, 2020

8.1 (Oct. 19) Leadership Style in Historical Perspective

Fred I. Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Barack Obama* (Princeton, 2009), 1-25, 43-57 (Eisenhower), 75-89, (LBJ), 91-109 (Nixon), 127-143 (Carter), 145-157 (Reagan), 173-188 (Clinton)

Fred I. Greenstein, "Barack Obama: The Man and His Presidency at the Midterm," *P.S.: Political Science and Politics* (January 2011), 7-11

8.2 (Oct 21) The Limits of Leadership

George C. Edwards, *Predicting the Presidency: The Potential of Persuasive Leadership* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 1-52

George Edwards, *Changing Their Minds: Donald Trump and Presidential Leadership* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), 64-112

9.1 (Oct 26) Race and the Obama Presidency

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (One World, 2018), 119-147 ("Fear of a Black President") and 291-339 ("My President Was Black")

Peniel E. Joseph, "Barack Obama and the Movement for Black Lives: Race, Democracy, and Criminal Justice in the Age of Ferguson," in Julian E. Zelizer, ed., *The Presidency of Barack Obama: A First Historical Assessment* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 127-143

Excerpts from Barack Obama interviews with *Vanity Fair*, December 1, 2020, and *New York Magazine*, December 9, 2020

9.2 (Oct. 28) Presidents and Social Movements

Sidney Milkis and Daniel Tichenor, *Rivalry and Reform: Presidents, Social Movements, and the Transformation of American Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), chap. 1 ("Presidents, Social Movements, and Contentious Change: Some Theoretical Foundations") & chapter 4 ("Joining the Revolution': Lyndon Johnson and the Civil Rights Movement")

10.1 (Nov 2) Work on essay #2

10.2 (Nov. 4) Essay #2 Due

III. Winners and Losers in the Presidency

11.1 (Nov. 9) Selecting for Winners

James Bryce, "Why Great Men are Not Chosen President" (from *The American Commonwealth* originally published 1888), in *The Evolving Presidency: Landmark Documents, 1787-2015*, ed. Michael Nelson (CQ Press, 2016; 5th ed), 113-116

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, "Gatekeeping in America," chapter 2 in *How Democracies Die* (Crown, 2018), 33-52

Nate Silver, "The Republican Party May Be Failing," *FiveThirtyEight*, January 25, 2016, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-republican-party-may-be-failing/>

Julia Azari, "Weak Parties and Strong Partisanship are a Bad Combination," *Vox*, November 3, 2016

William G. Mayer, "The Presidential Nominations," in Michael Nelson, ed., *The Elections of 2020* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2021), 33-67

11.2 (Nov 11) Sore Losers: The 2020 Election and Its Aftermath

Andrew Rudalevige, "The Meaning of the 2020 Election: Fundamentally Divided," in Michael Nelson, ed., *The Elections of 2020* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2021), 33-67

Michael C. Bender, "*Frankly We Did Win This Election*": *The Inside Story of How Trump Lost* (New York: Twelve, 2021), 335-379

Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker, *I Alone Can Fix It: Donald Trump's Catastrophic Final Year* (New York: Penguin Press, 2021), 506-519

12.1 (Nov 16) Losers Who Won

Jeffrey Tulis and Nicole Mellow, *Legacies of Losing in American Politics* (Chicago, 2018), chaps 1 and 4

12.2 (Nov 18) Hitting "The Glass Ceiling"

Jena McGregor, "How the 'glass ceiling' became such a powerful—and problematic—metaphor," *Washington Post*, June 9, 2016

Meena Bose, "Gender and Leadership Challenges in National Security," in Lori Cox Hahn and Caroline Heldman, eds., *Madam President? Gender and Politics on the Road to the White House* (Lynne Reiner, 2020), 167-191

Brian Schaffner, Matthew McWilliams, and Tatishe Nteta, "Understanding White Polarization in the 2016 Vote for President: The Sobering Role of Racism and Sexism," *Political Science Quarterly* (2018), 9-34

Matt Viser, "Trump, Biden, and Masculinity in the Age of Coronavirus," *Washington Post*, October 16, 2020

13.1 and 13.2 (Nov 23 and 25): No class

Happy Thanksgiving Break

14.1 (Nov 30): Was Lincoln the Greatest President?

Sidney Milkis and Daniel J. Tichenor, "The Crucible: Lincoln and the Abolitionist Movement," in *Rivalry and Reform: Presidents, Social Movements, and the Transformation of American Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 41-79

Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Who Freed the Slaves?" in *The Civil War: An Illustrated History*, ed. Geoffrey C. Ward (New York: Knopf, 1990), 178-181

James McPherson, "Who Freed the Slaves?" in *The Emancipation Proclamation: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Michael Vorenberg (Bedford, 2010), 128-138

Frederick Douglass, "Speech in Memory of Abraham Lincoln," April 14, 1876, in *The Emancipation Proclamation: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Michael Vorenberg (Bedford, 2010), 119-123

John Blake, "Did Black Lives Matter to Abraham Lincoln? It's Complicated," CNN.com, March 24, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/14/us/abraham-lincoln-racism-blake/index.html>

14.2 (Dec 2) The End of Greatness?

Aaron David Miller, *The End of Greatness* (St. Martin's Press, 2014), 1-15, 207-225, 241-254.

15. 1 (Dec. 7) An Impossible Job?

John Dickerson, "The Hardest Job in the World," *The Atlantic* (May 2018)

Final Paper Due: December 13, 2pm