

PLSC 235
The Chief and the Bureaucrats:
Power Dynamics in the U.S. Executive Branch

Fall 2024

Yale University

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Office: ISPS, 77 Prospect St., B-211

Mondays, 9:25 - 11:15am

Location: TBD

Course website: [canvas](#)

Office Hours: Monday 1:30-3pm or
by appointment.

Please sign up via [Calendly](#)

Course Description

This seminar provides an in-depth exploration of the U.S. President's role within the executive branch, focusing specifically on the interactions between the Chief Executive and the federal bureaucracy. Throughout the course, students will examine the constitutional foundations that establish and limit presidential power, the operational structure of the federal bureaucracy, and the complex dynamics that characterize the relationship between the President and bureaucratic agencies. We will examine the strategic tools and mechanisms at the President's disposal, such as executive orders, appointments, and regulatory reviews, to understand how these instruments are used to direct and control bureaucratic actions. The course will address both historical and contemporary examples, providing a comprehensive view of how different administrations have navigated the challenges of bureaucratic management.

Additionally, the seminar will investigate the common institutional constraints (statutory, procedural, judicial, and political) that shape and sometimes hinder a president's ability to exert influence over the bureaucracy. Through case studies, students will analyze significant instances where these constraints have impacted presidential decisions and policy implementations. This seminar is designed to foster critical thinking and analytical skills, enabling students to critically assess the effectiveness of presidential strategies in managing the U.S. executive branch. Importantly, this course is also designed to advance your understanding of the practice of political science. Throughout our discussions, we will consider how executive politics scholars study presidential power and control of the bureaucracy – highlighting their questions and the tools and approaches they employ to answer those questions. It offers a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical insights, making it an essential course for students interested in American politics, governance, and executive leadership.

Prerequisites

You should have taken an introductory Political Science course, American politics or Comparative politics being preferable, but not necessary. Since we will be reading published academic articles that make use of quantitative methods and formal theory (e.g. game theory) research methods and/or game theory courses are a plus, BUT definitely not necessary to take this course.

Required Course Materials

- Howell, William G. *The American Presidency: An Institutional Approach to Executive Politics*. Princeton University Press, 2023.
- Rudalevige, Andrew. 2021. *By Executive Order: Bureaucratic Management and the Limits of Presidential Power*. Princeton University Press.
- All additional reading material will be made available on **canvas**.

Course Requirements

Your grade will be determined by your performance on the following:

Seminar Participation (10%): Participation in seminar is key for your success in this class. There are many ways to maintain your participation grade – attendance is only one. You should be prepared to contribute meaningfully by asking questions and actively engaging in discussions. Attending class and being prepared by having read the assigned material will ensure that you are best able to fully participate in section.

Discussion Leader (10%): Students will be tasked with presenting the week's readings in conversation with each other to start off our class discussions, 2 times during the course.

Discussion Questions (15%): Each week, after you have done the corresponding seminar readings, students will submit 2 discussion questions. These questions are intended to be a space for students to reflect on the readings before seminar and offer insights, critical evaluations, or clarifications that demonstrate that you have done the reading. I will be randomly selecting submitted questions to consider during our seminar discussions. **The discussion questions are due by 5pm the day before each seminar (Sundays).**

Presidential Action Impact Report (30%): Students will select a significant presidential action, such as an executive order, a significant appointment, or a regulatory change, and analyze its impact on the federal bureaucracy and policy implementation. The assignment will encourage students to critically evaluate the effectiveness of presidential strategies in managing the bureaucracy and the broader implications for governance. Assignment details will be distributed on the first day of seminar. A 5 page outline will be due on October 8, 2024 at 5pm. The outline will be worth 30% of the total report grade. The final written 12-15 page report will be due **November 15, 2024 at 5pm.**

Final exam (35%): The final exam will be a take-home, open-book essay exam where you will write two essays from a set of prompts related to course material. Prompts will be distributed before our last seminar and essays are due by **December 18, 2024**.

General Expectations

Learning is most effective when the classroom is comfortable, challenging, and fun. A key part of the academic environment is participating in the frank and civil exchange of ideas in an environment where people disagree but nonetheless treat one another with respect. As such, we – as a group – must cultivate mutual respect for ideas, freedom/ability to speak in class, and a professional tone. I will, consequently, not tolerate any form of disrespect geared towards me or another in class, dishonesty or disruptive activity. Spirited engagement and exciting disagreement, however, are encouraged.

My office, office hours and email are at the top of the syllabus. The best way to contact me is to come to office hours where we can discuss questions about the material, assignments, or your experience in class. Please sign up for time slots during office hours (or for an appointment outside of office hours) via [Calendly](#). As for email, please include “PLSC X” in the subject line of the email. Generally, I will respond to e-mails within 48 hours. I cannot guarantee a response during the weekend; any e-mails received after 5pm on Friday will be answered the following Monday.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is unacceptable, corrupts your personal integrity, and ultimately stunts your intellectual growth. Academic integrity is a core university value and the University expects that students will conduct themselves in an honest and ethical manner and respect the intellectual work of others. Academic dishonesty is not tolerated at Yale (see the Yale College Undergraduate Regulations [here](#)) and there are resources to help you maintain your academic honesty, including the Yale Writing Center (find more details on their [website](#)). When in doubt, cite your sources and trust your own brain - don't cheat.

Students with Disabilities

Your experience in this class is important to me. I am happy to accommodate students with disabilities and requests go through the Yale University Resource Office on Disabilities. If you have already established accommodations with the ROD, please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you feel you need accommodation please contact the [Resource Office on Disabilities](#).

Course Schedule

Week 1. Introduction

Friday August 30 (special seminar date):

- Howell, Introduction (p. 1-14)
- Whittington, Keith E. and Daniel P. Carpenter. 2003. "Executive Power in American Institutional Development." *Perspectives on Politics*.

Week 2. Constitutional Foundations of Presidential Power

September 9:

- Howell Chapter 1 (p. 19-55)
- McConnell, Michael. 2020. *The President Who Would Not Be King: Executive Power under the Constitution*. Chapters 1 (p. 19-35), 7 (p. 95-99), 10 (p. 142-173)

Week 3. Building and Organizing the Bureaucracy

September 16:

- Howell Chapter 3 (p. 85-105)
- Rockman, Bert. 2000. "Staffing and Organizing the Presidency." *Presidential Power*. (p. 159-174)
- Selin, Jennifer L. and David E. Lewis. 2018. *Sourcebook of United States Executive Agencies*.

Week 4. Institutionalizing Presidential (Unilateral) Power

September 23:

- Howell Chapter 4 (p. 109-131) and Chapter 9 (p. 300-340)
- Howell, William G. and David E. Lewis. 2002. "Agencies by Presidential Design." *Journal of Politics*.

Week 5. Executive Orders I

September 30:

- Mayer, Kenneth R. 2001. *With The Stroke of a Pen: Executive Orders and Presidential Power*. Chapters 1 (p. 1-33) and Chapter 4 (p. 109-137)
- Thrower, Sharece. 2017. "To Revoke or Not Revoke? The Political Determinants of Executive Order Longevity" *American Journal of Political Science*
- Kaufman, Aaron R. and Jon C. Rogowski. 2023. "Divided Government, Strategic Substitution, and Presidential Unilateralism." *American Journal of Political Science*

Week 6. Executive Orders II

October 7:

- Rudalevige, Andrew. 2021. *By Executive Order*. Chapters 1-5.

October 8, 5pm Presidential Action Impact Report 5 page Outline Due

Week 7. Controlling the Bureaucracy

October 14:

- Howell Chapter 10 (p. 347-371)
- Kroll, Alexander and Donald P. Moynihan. 2020. "Tools of Control? Comparing Congressional and Presidential Performance Management Reforms." *Public Administration Review*.
- Moe, Terry. 2012. "Delegation, Control, and the Study of Public Bureaucracy." *The Forum*

October 15-21 - October Recess (no class)

Week 8. Appointing Bureaucrats

October 21:

- Pfiffner, James P. 2001. "Presidential Appointments: Recruiting Executive Branch Leaders." *Innocent until Nominated: The Breakdown of the Presidential Appointments Process*.
- Aberbach, Joel D. and Bert A. Rockman. 2009. "The Appointments Process and the Administrative Presidency." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*
- Kinane, Christina M. 2021. "Control without Confirmation: The Politics of Vacancies in Presidential Appointments." *American Political Science Review*
- Bednar, Nicholas and David E. Lewis. 2023. "Presidential Investment in the Administrative State." *American Political Science Review*.

Week 9. Challenges in Bureaucratic Management

October 28:

- Durant, Robert F. and William G. Resh. 2010. "'Presidentializing' the Bureaucracy."
- Krause, George A. and Daniel Carpenter. 2015. "Transactional Authority and Bureaucratic Politics." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*.
- Gailmard, Sean and John Patty. 2012. *Learning While Governing*. Chapter 1.

Week 10. Policy Implementation and Bureaucratic Performance

November 4:

- Howell Chapter 14 (p 483-503)
- Wagner, Wendy. 2015. "A Place for Agency Expertise: Reconciling Agency Expertise with Presidential Power" *Columbia Law Review*.
- Napolio, Nicholas G. 2021. "Implementing presidential particularism: bureaucracy and the distribution of federal grants." *Political Science Research and Methods*

Week 11. Congressional Oversight over the Executive Branch

November 11:

- Howell Chapter 8
- Shipan, Charles. 2004. "Regulatory Regimes, Agency Actions, and the Conditional Nature of Congressional Influence." *American Political Science Review*
- Lowande, Kenneth. 2018. "Who Polices the Administrative State?" *American Political Science Review*
- Kriner, Douglas and Eric Shickler. 2016. *Investigating the President: Congressional Checks on Presidential Power*. Chapter 1.

November 15, 5pm PRESIDENTIAL ACTION IMPACT REPORT DUE

Week 12. Judicial Constraints on Presidential Power

November 18:

- Howell Chapter 11
- Gardner, Paul J. and Sharece Thrower. 2023. "Presidential Constraints on Supreme Court Decision-Making" *Journal of Politics*
- Whittington, Keith E. 2007. *Political Foundations of Judicial Supremacy: The Presidency, the Supreme Court, and Constitutional Leadership in U.S. History* Chapter 1 and 4

November 22 - December 2 November Recess (no class)

Week 13. Power Dynamics in the Executive Branch

December 2:

- 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*.
- Reeves, Andrew and Jon C. Rogowski. 2022. *No blank check: The origins and consequences of public antipathy towards presidential power*. Chapter 1 and 2.

December 18, 5pm FINAL EXAM DUE