

## Meredith McLain

---

CONTACT INFORMATION Commons 301  
Department of Political Science  
Vanderbilt University  
Nashville, TN 37203  
*Phone:* (704) 281-4883  
*Email:* meredith.e.mclain@vanderbilt.edu  
*Website:* meredith-mclain.com

EDUCATION **Vanderbilt University**, Nashville, TN

Ph.D. Candidate, Political Science (expected graduation date: May 2023)

*Fields:* American Politics & Political Methodology

*Dissertation:* “Strategic Presidential Unilateralism in the Face of Institutional and Public Sanctioning”

Amid incessant inter-branch stalemates and forceful assertions of executive authority, many fear presidents freely wield unilateral directives to create policy without legislative approval. Political scientists, however, largely find that presidents are constrained when issuing executive orders. But few studies investigate the reasons underlying this constraint or whether it manifests for other types of directives. Accordingly, this dissertation develops a theory of how presidents strategically select between distinct unilateral directives, based on differences in their transparency and the information Congress, the public, and agencies have to respond. Using data on all executive orders, published memoranda, and unpublished memoranda between 1981 and 2020, I test the theory’s predictions across three empirical chapters corresponding to the constraints imposed by each of these political actors. Further, I leverage variation across unilateral directives based on their publication in the Federal Register, media coverage, issue salience, and publicity from the White House. Overall, I find that presidents deploy less visible directives when facing political resistance, but engage in more public-facing unilateralism when such constraints are absent and their incentives to credit claim are high. Overall, this dissertation offers an explanation for when and why presidents are constrained, based on the trade-offs between their different unilateral strategies. Importantly, it demonstrates how exactly presidents can still powerfully impact policy, even in the face of fierce legislative, public, and bureaucratic opposition.

*Committee:* Sharece Thrower (Chair), David E. Lewis, Alan Wiseman, Douglas L. Kriner

**Vanderbilt University**, Nashville, TN

M.A., Political Science, December 2021

**University of North Carolina- Asheville**, Asheville, North Carolina

B.A., Political Science, May 2018

- *Summa Cum Laude*

RESEARCH INTERESTS Separation of Powers; Presidency; Unilateral Policymaking; Executive Politics; Congressional Oversight

EDITOR-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS **McLain, Meredith** and Sharece Thrower. 2021. “Executive Unilateralism and Individual Rights in a Federalist System.” *William and Mary Law Review Journal*. 29(3): 713-74.

WORKING PAPERS “Presidential Policymaking in the Face of Congressional Sanctioning” (Job Market Paper)  
“Public Preferences and Presidential Policymaking”

“Preaching to the Choir: Agency Composition and Unilateral Action Use” (with Christopher Piper)

WORKS IN  
PROGRESS

“Presidential Unilateralism and the Risk of Bureaucratic Non-Compliance”

CONFERENCE  
PARTICIPATION

“Public Preferences and Presidential Policymaking.” Paper presented at the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association.

“Congressional Sanctioning and Strategic Presidential Unilateralism.” Paper presented at the 2022 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.

“Presidential Policymaking in the Face of Congressional Sanctioning.” Paper presented at the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.

“Preaching to the Choir: Agency Composition and Unilateral Action Use” Paper presented at the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association. With Christopher Piper.

GRANTS, AWARDS,  
AND CERTIFICATES

Patrick J. Fett Award for “Presidential Policymaking in the Face of Congressional Sanctioning” from the Midwest Political Science Association for the best paper on the scientific study of Congress and the presidency. (2023)

Certificate in College Teaching, Center for Teaching, Vanderbilt University, 2022

J.Leiper Freeman Memorial Fund Award, 2022

American Political Science Association Presidents and Executive Politics Section Travel Grant, 2022

American Political Science Association Travel Grant, 2022

Vanderbilt University Graduate School Travel Grant, 2022 (2)

Southern Political Science Association Travel Grant, 2023

TEACHING  
EXPERIENCE

*Teaching Assistant*

- Introduction to American Politics, PSCI 1100, Spring 2023 (Instructor: David Lewis)
- Introduction to American Politics, PSCI 1100, Fall 2022 (Instructor: John Sides)
- The Politics of Public Policy, PSCI 2556, Spring 2021 (Instructor: Alan Wiseman)
- Introduction to American Politics, PSCI 1100, Fall 2020 (Instructor: David Lewis)
- The Politics of Public Policy, PSCI 2556, Spring 2020 (Instructor: Alan Wiseman)
- Introduction to American Politics, PSCI 1100, Fall 2019 (Instructor: John Sides)
- Legislative Process, PSCI 3244, Spring 2019 (Instructor: Bruce Oppenheimer)

MEMBERSHIP

Midwest Political Science Association 2019-present

American Political Science Association 2022-present

Southern Political Science Association 2022-present

PROFESSIONAL  
SERVICE

Affiliate, Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions (CSDI), 2018-present

Lab Chair, Vanderbilt Institute for Polling and Elections Research (VIPER)

Vanderbilt Political Science Graduate Student Council Secretary, 2022-present

Vanderbilt Political Science Graduate Student Mentorship Coordinator, 2021-22

Vanderbilt University Graduate Student Council Representative, 2020-21

Vanderbilt Political Science First-Year Graduate Student Mentor, 2020-21