



The Presidency

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Understanding the American Presidency

Summary

■ As George W. Bush stood before a joint session of Congress in early 2005, he could reflect on his first term in office. It had certainly been eventful. Elected without even a plurality of the vote and after a protracted battle in the courts, he had to create a new administration under the difficult circumstances of a substantially shortened transition period. Once in office, he had led the successful fight on his highest priority—a major tax cut. Soon, however, his approval ratings dropped and the Senate switched to control by the Democratic opposition. Shortly afterward, terrorists launched a devastating attack on the United States, and the focus of his administration abruptly changed to a war on terrorism. His approval ratings rocketed to the highest on record and his party won majorities in Congress in the midterm elections. Nevertheless, Congress was often resistant to his proposals and members of both Congress and the press raised disturbing questions about the bureaucracy's performance regarding homeland security. Even more frustrating were the difficulties he faced in pacifying and democratizing Iraq.

Powerful, strong, leader of the Free World, commander in chief—these are common images of the



American president. The president epitomizes American government. The only place in the world where television networks assign a permanent camera crew is the White House. The presidency is power—at least according to popular myth.

In this presidency-as-powerhouse myth, presidents are the government's command center. Problems are brought to their desk, they decide on the right courses of action, they issue orders, and an army of aides and bureaucrats carry out their commands.

As George W. Bush and all other presidents soon discover, nothing could be further from the truth. The main reason why presidents have trouble getting things done is that other policymakers with whom they deal have their own agendas, their own interests, and their own sources of power. Presidents operate in an environment filled with checks and balances and competing centers of power. As one presidential aide put it, "Every time you turn around people resist you."¹ Congress is beholden not to the president but to the individual constituencies of its members. Cabinet members often push their departmental interests and their constituencies (the Department of Agriculture has farmers as its constituency, for example). Rarely can presidents rely on unwavering support from their party, the public, or even their own appointees.

As the pivotal leader in American politics, the president is the subject of unending political analysis and speculation. A perennial question focuses on presidential power. World history is replete with examples of leaders who have exceeded the prescribed boundaries of their power. Can the presidency become too powerful and thus pose a threat to democracy? Or is the Madisonian system strong enough to check any such tendencies? On the other hand, is the president *strong enough* to stand up to the diverse interests in the United States? Does the president have enough power to govern on behalf of the majority?

A second fundamental question regarding democratic leaders is the nature of their relationship with the public and its consequences for public policy. The president and vice president are the only officials elected by the entire nation. In their efforts to obtain public support from the broad spectrum of interests in the public, are presidents natural advocates of an expansion of government? Do they promise more than they should in order to please the voters? As they face the frustrations of governing, do presidents seek to centralize authority in the federal government, where they have greater influence, while reducing that of the states? Does the chief executive seek more power through increasing the role of government?

Since not everyone bends easily to even the most persuasive president, the president must be a *leader*. As Richard Neustadt has argued, presidential power is the power to *persuade*, not to command.² To accomplish policy goals, the president must get other people—important people—to do things they otherwise would not do. To be effective, the president must have highly developed *political skills* to mobilize influence, manage conflict, negotiate, and fashion compromises. Presidential leadership has varied over the years, depending in large part on the individual who holds our nation's highest office.

The Presidents

The presidency is an institution composed of the roles presidents must play, the powers at their disposal, and the large bureaucracy at their command. It is also a highly personal office. The personality of the individual serving as president makes a difference.

Great Expectations

When a new president takes the oath of office, he faces many daunting tasks. Perhaps the most difficult is living up to the expectations of the American people. Americans expect the chief executive to ensure peace, prosperity, and security.³ As President Carter remarked, “The President is held to be responsible for the state of the economy and for the inconveniences, or disappointments, or the concerns of the American people.”⁴ Americans want a good life, and they look to the president to provide it.

Americans are of two minds about the presidency. On the one hand, they want to believe in a powerful president, one who can do good. They look back longingly on the great presidents of the first American century—Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln—and some in the second century as well, especially Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy.






On the other hand, Americans dislike a concentration of power. Although presidential responsibilities have increased substantially in the past few decades, there has been no corresponding increase in presidential authority or administrative resources to meet these new expectations. Americans are basically individualistic and skeptical of authority. According to Samuel Huntington, “The distinctive aspect of the American Creed is its antigovernment character. Opposition to power, and suspicion of government as the most dangerous embodiment of power, are the central themes of American political thought.”⁵ The American political culture's tenets of limited government, liberty, individualism, equality, and democracy generate a distrust of strong leadership, authority, and the public sector in general.

Because Americans' expectations of the presidency are so high, who serves as president is especially important. Just who are the people who have occupied the Oval Office?

Who They Are

When Warren G. Harding, one of the least illustrious American presidents, was in office, attorney Clarence Darrow remarked, “When I was a boy, I was told that anybody could become president. Now I'm beginning to believe it.” The Constitution simply states that the president must be a natural-born citizen at least 35 years old and must have resided in the United States for at least 14 years. In fact, all American presidents have been White, male, and (except for John Kennedy) Protestant. In other ways, however, the recent collection of presidents suggests considerable variety. Since World War II, the White House has been home to a Missouri haberdasher, a war hero, a Boston-Irish politician, a small-town Texas boy who grew up to become the biggest wheeler-dealer in the Senate, a California lawyer described by his enemies as “Tricky Dick” and by his friends as a misunderstood master of national leadership, a former Rose Bowl player who had spent his entire political career in the House of

Table 13.1 Recent Presidents

PRESIDENT	TERM	PARTY	BACKGROUND	SIGNIFICANT EVENTS
Harry S. Truman 	1945–1953	Democrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. senator from Missouri • chosen as FDR's running mate in 1944 • became president when FDR died 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • made decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan to end World War II • presided over postwar recovery • laid foundation for Cold War policy • relatively unpopular during term
Dwight D. Eisenhower 	1953–1961	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commander of Allied forces in Europe in World War II • never voted until he ran for president 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presided over relatively tranquil 1950s • conservative domestic policies • cool crisis management • enjoyed strong public approval
John F. Kennedy 	1961–1963	Democrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. senator from Massachusetts • from very wealthy family • war hero 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • known for personal style • presided over Cuban missile crisis • ushered in era of liberal domestic policies • assassinated in 1963
Lyndon B. Johnson 	1963–1969	Democrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senate majority leader • chosen as Kennedy's running mate; succeeded him after the assassination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skilled legislative leader with a coarse public image • launched the Great Society • won passage of major civil rights laws • escalated the Vietnam War • war policies proved unpopular; did not seek reelection
Richard M. Nixon 	1969–1974	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. senator from California • served two terms as Eisenhower's vice president • lost presidential election of 1960 to John F. Kennedy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presided over period of <i>domestic policy</i> innovation • <i>reopened</i> relations with China • ended Vietnam War • resigned as result of Watergate scandal

Jackson, Grant, Cleveland (whose terms were not consecutive), Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Reagan, and Clinton. A few decided against a second term ("Silent Cal" Coolidge said simply, "I do not choose to run"). Five other presidents (Polk, Pierce, Buchanan, Hayes, and Lyndon Johnson) also threw in the towel at the end of one full term. Seven others (both the Adamses, Van Buren, Taft, Hoover, Carter, and George Bush) thought they had earned a second term, but the voters disagreed.

Succession and Impeachment. For more than 10 percent of American history, the presidency has actually been occupied by an individual who was not elected to the office. About one in five presidents got the job because they were vice president when the incumbent president either died or (in Nixon's case) resigned (see Table 13.2). In the twentieth century, almost one-third (5 of 18) of those who occupied the office were "accidental presidents." The most accidental of all was Gerald Ford, who did not run for either the vice presidency or the presidency before taking office. Ford was nominated vice president by President Nixon when Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned; Ford then assumed the presidency when Nixon himself resigned.

Table 13.1 Recent Presidents (continued)







PRESIDENT	TERM	PARTY	BACKGROUND	SIGNIFICANT EVENTS
Gerald R. Ford 	1974–1977	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> House minority leader only person ever nominated as vice president under Twenty-fifth Amendment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pardoned Richard Nixon helped heal the nation's wounds lost election in 1976 to Jimmy Carter
Jimmy Carter 	1977–1981	Democrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> governor of Georgia peanut farmer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> viewed as honest, but politically unskilled managed Iranian hostage crisis lost bid for reelection 1980 brokered peace between Egypt and Israel
Ronald W. Reagan 	1981–1989	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> governor of California well-known actor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> won a substantial tax cut led fight for a large increase in defense spending hurt by Iran/Contra scandal known as the Great Communicator
George Bush 	1989–1993	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. representative from Texas director of CIA ambassador to UN served two terms as Reagan's vice president 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> led international coalition to victory in Gulf War presided over end of Cold War popular until economy stagnated lost reelection bid in 1992
William J. Clinton 	1993–2001	Democrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> governor of Arkansas Rhodes Scholar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> moved Democrats to center presided over balanced budget benefited from strong economy tenure marred by Monica Lewinsky scandal impeached but not convicted
George W. Bush 	2001–	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> governor of Texas son of President George Bush elected without plurality of the vote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> launched war on terrorism won large tax cut established Department of Homeland Security began war with Iraq

Table 13.2 Incomplete Presidential Terms

PRESIDENT	TERM	SUCCEDED BY
William Henry Harrison	March 4, 1841–April 4, 1841	John Tyler
Zachary Taylor	March 4, 1849–July 9, 1850	Millard Fillmore
Abraham Lincoln	March 4, 1865–April 15, 1865 ^a	Andrew Johnson
James A. Garfield	March 4, 1881–September 19, 1881	Chester A. Arthur
William McKinley	March 4, 1901–September 14, 1901 ^a	Theodore Roosevelt
Warren G. Harding	March 4, 1921–August 2, 1923	Calvin Coolidge
Franklin D. Roosevelt	January 20, 1945–April 12, 1945 ^b	Harry S. Truman
John F. Kennedy	January 20, 1961–November 22, 1963	Lyndon B. Johnson
Richard M. Nixon	January 20, 1973–August 9, 1974 ^a	Gerald R. Ford

^aSecond term.^bFourth term.

impeachment

The political equivalent of an indictment in criminal law, prescribed by the Constitution. The House of Representatives may impeach the president by a majority vote for “Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors.”

Watergate

The events and scandal surrounding a break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in 1972 and the subsequent cover-up of White House involvement, leading to the eventual resignation of President Nixon under the threat of impeachment.

Twenty-fifth Amendment

Passed in 1951, this amendment permits the vice president to become acting president if both the vice president and the president’s cabinet determine that the president is disabled. The amendment also outlines how a recuperated president can reclaim the job.

Richard Nixon was the only American president ever to resign his office. Nixon decided to resign rather than face impeachment for his role in the Watergate scandal, a series of illegal wiretaps, break-ins, and cover-ups.

Removing a discredited president before the end of a term is not easy. The Constitution prescribes the process through **impeachment**, which is roughly the political equivalent of an indictment in criminal law. The House of Representatives may, by majority vote, impeach the president for “Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors.” Once the House votes for impeachment, the case goes to the Senate, which tries the accused president, with the chief justice of the Supreme Court presiding. By a two-thirds vote, the Senate may convict and remove the president from office.

Only two presidents have been impeached. The House impeached Andrew Johnson, Lincoln’s successor, in 1868 on charges stemming from his disagreement with radical Republicans. He narrowly escaped conviction. Richard Nixon came as close to impeachment as anyone since. By July 31, 1974, the House Judiciary Committee voted to recommend his impeachment to the full House as a result of the **Watergate** scandal. Nixon escaped a certain vote for impeachment by resigning. In 1998, the House voted two articles of impeachment against President Clinton on party-line votes. The public clearly opposed the idea, however, and the Senate voted to acquit the president on both counts in 1999 (see “You Are the Policymaker: Should President Clinton Have Been Convicted?”).

Constitutional amendments cover one other important problem concerning the presidential term: presidential disability and succession. Several times a president has become disabled, incapable of carrying out the job for weeks or even months at a time. After Woodrow Wilson suffered a stroke, his wife, Edith Wilson, became virtual acting president. The **Twenty-fifth Amendment** (1967) clarifies some of the Constitution’s vagueness about disability. The amendment permits the vice president to become acting president if the vice president and the president’s cabinet determine that the president is disabled or if the president declares his own disability, and it outlines how a recuperated president can reclaim the Oval Office. Other laws specify the order of presidential succession—from the vice president, to the Speaker of the House, to the president *pro tempore* of the Senate and down through the cabinet members in the order their departments were created.

The Twenty-fifth Amendment also created a means for selecting a new vice president when the office becomes vacant (a more frequent occurrence). The president nominates a new vice president, who assumes the office when both houses of Congress approve the nomination.





You Are the Policymaker

Should President Clinton Have Been Convicted?

Monica Lewinsky became a household name in January 1998. By the end of the year, the most intimate details of her two-year affair with President Bill Clinton were known to almost everyone in the country. The nation had to do more than live through a new soap opera of sex and politics, however. The question became whether the president should be removed from office.

In September, Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr issued a report to Congress accusing President Clinton of 11 counts of possible impeachable offenses, including perjury, obstruction of justice, witness tampering, and abuse of power. The president's detractors used the report as a basis for charging that he had broken the law, failed in his primary constitutional duty to take care that the laws be faithfully executed, betrayed the public's trust, and dishonored the nation's highest office. As a result, they argued the president should be removed from office through the process of impeachment. They also argued that other public officials would be removed from office for having an affair with a young intern. Why, they asked, should the president be held to lower standards?

The White House fought back. First, the president apologized to the nation—sort of. Then he engaged in a round of expressions of remorse before a variety of audiences. At the same time, the White House accused Starr of engaging in an intrusive investigation motivated by a political vendetta against the president. The White House argued

that the president made a mistake in his private behavior, apologized for it, and should continue to do the job he was elected to do. Impeachment, the president's defenders said, was grossly disproportionate to the president's offense.

The Constitution provides only the most general guidelines as to the grounds for impeachment. Article II, Section 4, says "The President, Vice President and all civil Officers of the United States, shall be removed from Office on Impeachment for, and Conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors."

There is agreement on at least four points regarding impeachable offenses.

1. Impeachable behavior does not have to be a crime. If the president refused to work or chose to invade a country solely to increase his public support, his actions could be grounds for impeachment, even though they would not violate the law.
2. The offense should be grave for it to be impeachable. A poker game in the White House, even though it may violate the law, would not constitute an impeachable offense.
3. A matter of policy disagreement is not grounds for impeachment. The only president who had been impeached before Clinton was Andrew Johnson, who was tried in 1868. He survived by one vote. The real issue was disagreement between the president and Congress over the policy of Reconstruction following the Civil War. Johnson's impeachment and trial are widely viewed as an abuse of impeachment power.

4. Impeachment is an inherently political process and the grounds for impeachment are ultimately whatever Congress decides they are because the Constitution assigns these calibrations to members' political judgment.

Beyond these points of agreement, we enter speculative territory. In 1974, the House Judiciary Committee passed three articles of impeachment against President Richard Nixon, but the president resigned before the House took up the charges. The three articles charged that Nixon had (1) obstructed justice, (2) abused his power, and (3) failed to comply with congressional subpoenas. The Democrats overwhelmingly supported all three articles, and the Republicans generally opposed them.

In 1998 and 1999, the tables were turned, as the Republicans supported a lower threshold for an impeachable offense while the Democrats argued for a higher one. In December 1998, the House voted two articles of impeachment against President Clinton on nearly straight party-line votes. The articles charged him with lying to a grand jury and obstructing justice.

Most Americans felt that the president had behaved improperly, but they also felt he was doing a good job as president. Most opposed impeaching Clinton. Opinion among officeholders and journalists was more negative toward the president, however. After a Senate trial, senators voted to acquit the president. If you were a member of the Senate, would *you* have voted to convict the president?

Presidential Powers

The contemporary presidency hardly resembles the one the Constitution framers designed in 1787. The executive office they conceived had more limited authority, fewer responsibilities, and much less organizational structure than today's presidency. The



Comparing Chief Executives



America in Perspective

President or Prime Minister?

The Founders selected a presidential system of government for the United States. Most democracies in developed countries, however, have chosen a parliamentary system. In such a system the chief executive, the prime minister, is selected by the legislature, not the voters. The prime minister is a member of the legislature, elected from one district as a member of parliament. The majority party, or the largest bloc of votes in the legislature if there is no majority party, votes its party leader to be prime minister. The prime minister may remain in power for a long time—as long as his or her party or coalition has a majority of the seats and supports the leader.

Presidents and prime ministers govern quite differently. Prime ministers

never face divided government, for example. Since they represent the majority party or coalition, they can almost always depend on winning on votes. In addition, party discipline is better in parliamentary systems than in the United States. Parties know that if the prime minister should lose on an important vote, the government might have to call elections under circumstances unfavorable to the majority. As a result, members of parliament almost always support their leaders.

Prime ministers generally differ in background from presidents as well. They must be party leaders, as we have seen, and they are usually very effective communicators with skills honed in the rough and tumble of parliamentary

debate. In addition, they have had substantial experience dealing with national issues, unlike American governors who may move directly into the presidency. Cabinet members, who are usually senior members of parliament, have similar advantages.

So why does the United States maintain a presidential system? The Founders were concerned about the concentration of power, such as that found in the prime minister. Instead, they wanted to separate power so that the different branches could check each other. More concerned with the abuse of power than its effective use, they chose a presidential system—the first the world had ever known.



Why It Matters

Standards of Impeachment

It is not easy to impeach a president; the threshold for an impeachable offense is a high one. This standard makes it very difficult to remove a president Congress feels is performing poorly *between* elections. A lower threshold for impeachment would have the potential to turn the United States into a parliamentary system in which the chief executive could be changed at any time.

Founders feared both anarchy and monarchy. They wanted an independent executive but disagreed about both the form the office should take and the powers it should exercise. In the end, they created an executive unlike any the world had ever seen⁶ (see “America in Perspective: President or Prime Minister?”).

Constitutional Powers

The Constitution says remarkably little about presidential power. The discussion of the presidency begins with these general words: “The executive power shall be vested in a president of the United States of America.” It goes on to list just a few powers (see Table 13.3). The framers’ invention fit nicely within the Madisonian system of shared power and checks and balances. There is little that presidents can do on their own, and they share executive, legislative, and judicial power with the other branches of government.

Institutional balance was essential to the convention delegates, who had in mind the abuses of past executives (including both the king and colonial governors) combined with the excesses of state legislatures (discussed in Chapter 2). The problem was how to preserve the balance without jeopardizing the independence of the separate branches or impeding the lawful exercise of their authority. The framers resolved this problem by checking those powers they believed to be most dangerous, the ones that historically had been subject to the greatest abuse (for example, they gave Congress the power to declare war and the Senate the power to approve treaties and presidential appointments), while protecting the general spheres of authority from encroachment (the executive, for instance, was given a qualified veto).

Provisions for reelection and a short term of office also encouraged presidential responsibility. For those executives who flagrantly abused their authority, impeachment was the ultimate recourse.

Table 13.3 Constitutional Powers of the President

National Security Powers

Serve as commander in chief of the armed forces
 Make treaties with other nations, subject to the agreement of two-thirds of the Senate
 Nominate ambassadors, with the agreement of a majority of the Senate
 Receive ambassadors of other nations, thereby conferring diplomatic recognition on other governments

Legislative Powers

Present information on the state of the union to Congress
 Recommend legislation to Congress
 Convene both houses of Congress on extraordinary occasions
 Adjourn Congress if the House and Senate cannot agree on adjournment
 Veto legislation (Congress may overrule with two-thirds vote of each house)

Administrative Powers

“Take care that the laws be faithfully executed”
 Nominate officials as provided for by Congress and with the agreement of a majority of the Senate
 Request written opinions of administrative officials
 Fill administrative vacancies during congressional recesses

Judicial Powers

Grant reprieves and pardons for federal offenses (except impeachment)
 Nominate federal judges, who are confirmed by a majority of the Senate

The Expansion of Power

Today there is more to presidential power than the Constitution alone suggests, and that power is derived from many sources. The role of the president has changed as America has increased in prominence on the world stage; technology has also reshaped the presidency. George Washington’s ragtag militias (mostly disbanded by the time the first commander in chief took command) were much different from the mighty nuclear arsenal that today’s president commands.

Presidents themselves have taken the initiative to develop new roles for the office. In fact, many presidents have enlarged the power of the presidency by expanding the president’s responsibilities and political resources. Thomas Jefferson was the first leader of a mass political party. Andrew Jackson presented himself as the direct representative of the people. Abraham Lincoln mobilized the country for war. Theodore Roosevelt mobilized the public behind his policies. He and Woodrow Wilson set precedents for presidents to serve as world leaders; Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt developed the role of the president as manager of the economy.

Perspectives on Presidential Power

During the 1950s and 1960s it was fashionable for political scientists, historians, and commentators to favor a powerful presidency. Historians rated presidents from strong to weak—and there was no question that “strong” meant good and “weak” meant bad. Political scientists waxed eloquent about the presidency as the epitome of democratic governments.⁷

By the 1970s, many felt differently. The Vietnam War was unpopular. Lyndon Johnson and the war made people reassess the role of presidential power, and Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal heightened public distrust. Presidential duplicity was revealed in the *Pentagon Papers*, a series of secret documents slipped to the press by Daniel Ellsberg. Nixon’s “enemies list” and his avowed goal to “screw our enemies” by



Presidential Leadership:
Which Hat Do You Wear?

illegally auditing their taxes, tapping their phones, and using “surreptitious entry” (a euphemism for burglary) asserted that presidents considered themselves above the law. Nixon’s lawyers argued solemnly to the Supreme Court and Congress that the presidency has “inherent powers” permitting presidents to order acts that otherwise would be illegal. Nixon protected himself with an umbrella defense of executive privilege, claiming that he did not need to provide evidence to Congress or the courts.

Early defenders of a strong presidency made sharp turnabouts in their position. In his book *The Imperial Presidency*, historian Arthur Schlesinger, an aide of John Kennedy’s, argued that the presidency had become too powerful for the nation’s own good.⁸ (Critics pointed out that Schlesinger did not seem to feel that way when he worked in the White House.) Whereas an older generation of scholars had written glowing accounts of the presidency, a newer generation wrote about “The Swelling of the Presidency” and “Making the Presidency Safe for Democracy.”⁹

The Nixon era was followed by the presidencies of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, whom many critics saw as weak leaders and failures. Ford himself spoke out in 1980, claiming that Carter’s weakness had created an “imperiled” presidency. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan experienced short periods of great influence and longer periods of frustration as the American political system settled back into its characteristic mode of stalemate and incremental policymaking. The Iran-Contra affair kept concern about a tyrannical presidency alive, while, in most instances, Reagan’s inability to sway Congress evoked a desire on the part of some (mostly conservatives) for a stronger presidency. Reagan’s immediate successors, George Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, often found it difficult to get things done.

The following sections will explore the relationship between the president’s responsibilities and resources by examining how contemporary presidents try to lead the nation.

Running the Government: The Chief Executive

Although the president is often called the “chief executive,” it is easy to forget that one of the president’s most important roles is presiding over the administration of government. This role does not receive the same publicity as other functions do, such as appealing to the public for support of policy initiatives, dealing with Congress, or negotiating with foreign powers, but it is of great importance nevertheless.

The Constitution exhorts the president to “take care that the laws be faithfully executed.” In the early days of the republic, this clerical-sounding function was fairly easy. Today, the sprawling federal bureaucracy spends more than \$2 trillion a year and numbers about 4.2 million civilian and military employees. Running such a large organization would be a full-time job for even the most talented of executives, yet it is only one of the president’s many jobs.

One of the resources for controlling this bureaucracy is the presidential power to appoint top-level administrators. New presidents have about 500 high-level positions available for appointment—cabinet and subcabinet jobs, agency heads, and other non-civil service posts—plus 2,500 lesser jobs. Since passage of the Budgeting and Accounting Act of 1921, presidents have had one other important executive tool: the power to recommend agency budgets to Congress.

The vastness of the executive branch, the complexity of public policy, and the desire to accomplish their policy goals have led presidents in recent years to pay even closer attention to appointing officials who will be responsive to the president’s policies. Presidents have also taken more interest in the regulations issued by agencies. This trend toward centralizing decision-making in the White House pleases those who think the bureaucracy should be more responsive to elected officials. On the other hand, it dismays those who believe that increased presidential involvement in policymaking will undermine the “neutral competence” of professional bureaucrats by encouraging

them to follow the president's policy preferences rather than the intent of laws as passed by Congress.

Chapter 15 on the bureaucracy explores the president's role as chief executive further. This chapter will focus on how presidents go about organizing and using the parts of the executive branch most under their control—the vice president, the cabinet, the Executive Office of the President, and the White House staff.

The Vice President

Neither politicians nor political scientists have paid much attention to the vice presidency. Once the choice of a party's "second team" was an afterthought; now it is often an effort to placate some important symbolic constituency. Southerner Jimmy Carter selected a well-known liberal, Walter Mondale, as his running mate, and Ronald Reagan chose his chief rival, George Bush, in part to please Republican moderates.¹⁰

Vice presidents have rarely enjoyed the job. John Nance Garner of Texas, one of Franklin Roosevelt's vice presidents, declared that the job was "not worth a pitcher of warm spit." Some have performed so poorly that they were deemed an embarrassment to the president. After Woodrow Wilson's debilitating stroke, almost everyone agreed that Vice President Thomas Marshall—a man who shirked all responsibility, including cabinet meetings—would be a disaster as acting president. Spiro Agnew, Richard Nixon's first vice president, had to resign and was convicted of evading taxes (on bribes he had accepted).

Once in office, vice presidents find that their main job is waiting. Constitutionally, they are assigned the minor tasks of presiding over the Senate and voting in case of a tie among the senators. As George Bush put it when he was vice president, "the buck doesn't stop here." Recent presidents, though, have taken their vice presidents more seriously, involving them in policy discussions and important diplomacy.¹¹

Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, both Washington outsiders, chose vice presidents who had substantial Washington experience: Walter Mondale and George Bush. To become intimates of the president, both had to be completely loyal, losing their political independence in the process. Vice President Bush, for example, was accused of knowing more about the Iran-Contra affair than he admitted, but he steadfastly refused to reveal his discussions with President Reagan on the matter.

When his turn came to choose a vice president, Bush selected Senator Dan Quayle of Indiana, considered by many a political lightweight. Albert Gore, Bill Clinton's vice president, was a Washington insider and played a prominent role in the administration. He met regularly with the president, represented him in discussions with the leaders of numerous countries, and chaired a prominent effort to "reinvent" government. George W. Bush chose Richard Cheney, who had extensive experience in high-level positions in the national government, as his vice president and assigned him a central role in his administration. Cheney has advised the president on a wide range of issues and chaired task forces dealing with major policy issues.

The Cabinet

Although the Constitution does not mention the group of presidential advisers known as the **cabinet**, every president has had one. The cabinet is too large and too diverse, and its members are too concerned with representing the interests of their departments for it to serve as a collective board of directors, however. The major decisions remain in the president's hands. Legend has it that Abraham Lincoln asked his cabinet to vote on an issue, and the result was unanimity in opposition to his view. He announced the decision as "seven nays and one aye, the ayes have it."

George Washington's cabinet was small, consisting of just three secretaries (state, treasury, and war) and the attorney general. Presidents since Washington have

cabinet

A group of presidential advisers not mentioned in the Constitution, although every president has had one. Today the cabinet is composed of 14 secretaries and the attorney general.

Members of the president's cabinet are important for both the power they exercise and the status they symbolize. President George W. Bush formed a cabinet that was representative of America's demographic diversity. Pictured here is President Bush with Secretary of Education Rod Paige, an African American, who served in Bush's first term.



increased the size of the cabinet by requesting that new executive departments be established. These requests must be approved by Congress, which creates the departments. Today 14 secretaries and the attorney general head executive departments and constitute the cabinet (see Table 13.4). In addition, presidents may designate other officials (the ambassador to the United Nations is a common choice) as cabinet members.¹²

Even in making his highest level appointments, the president is subject to the constitutional system of checks and balances. President George Bush met resistance when he nominated John Tower, a former senator, to be secretary of defense. After a bitter

Table 13.4 The Cabinet Departments

DEPARTMENT	YEAR CREATED	FUNCTION
State	1789	Makes foreign policy, including treaty negotiations
Treasury	1789	Serves as the government's banker
Defense	1947	Formed by the consolidation of the former Departments of the Army and the Navy
Justice	1870	Serves as the government's attorney; headed by the attorney general
Interior	1849	Manages the nation's natural resources, including wildlife and public lands
Agriculture	1862	Administers farm and food stamp programs and aids farmers
Commerce	1903	Aids businesses and conducts the U.S. census
Labor	1913	Formed through separation from the Department of Commerce; runs programs and aids labor in various ways
Health and Human Services	1953	Originally created as the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, it lost its education function in 1979 and Social Security in 1995
Housing and Urban Development	1966	Responsible for housing and urban programs
Transportation	1966	Responsible for mass transportation and highway programs
Energy	1977	Responsible for energy policy and research, including atomic energy
Education	1979	Responsible for the federal government's education programs
Veterans Affairs	1988	Responsible for programs aiding veterans
Homeland Security	2002	Responsible for protecting against terrorism and responding to natural disasters



The president must sometimes fight for his nominees, even to his cabinet. President George W. Bush met resistance to his nomination of John Ashcroft, shown here being sworn in during his Senate confirmation hearing as attorney general. Ultimately, Ashcroft was confirmed and served during the president's first term.

debate (which focused on the nominee's use of alcohol and relations with women), the Senate handed the president a serious defeat by rejecting Tower. President Clinton's first nominee to serve as attorney general, Zoe Baird, withdrew from consideration after she came under fire from senators of both parties for hiring an illegal alien as her babysitter and for failing to pay Social Security taxes for her employee.

The Executive Office

Next to the White House sits an ornate building called the EEOB, or Eisenhower Executive Office Building. It houses a collection of offices and organizations loosely grouped into the Executive Office of the President.¹³ Some of these offices (such as the Council of Economic Advisors) are created by legislation, and some are organized essentially by the president. The Executive Office started small in 1939 when President Roosevelt established it, but has grown with the rest of government. In the Executive Office are housed three major policymaking bodies—the National Security Council, the Council of Economic Advisors, and Office of Management and Budget—along with several other units that serve the president (see Figure 13.1).

The **National Security Council (NSC)** is the committee that links the president's key foreign and military policy advisors. Its formal members include the president, vice president, and secretaries of state and defense, but its informal membership is broader. The president's special assistant for national security affairs plays a major role in the NSC. The occupant of this post has responsibility for running the council's staff; together they provide the president with information and policy recommendations on national security, aid the president in national security crisis management, coordinate agency and departmental activities bearing on national security, and monitor the implementation of national security policy.

The **Council of Economic Advisors (CEA)** has three members, each appointed by the president, who advise him on economic policy. They prepare the annual *Economic Report of the President*, which includes data and analysis on the current state and future trends of the economy, and help the president make policy on inflation, unemployment, and other economic matters.

The **Office of Management and Budget (OMB)** grew out of the Bureau of the Budget (BOB) created in 1921. The OMB is composed of a handful of political appointees and more than 600 career officials, many of whom are highly skilled professionals. Its major responsibility is to prepare the president's budget (discussed in Chapter 14). President Nixon revamped the BOB in 1970 in an attempt to make it a managerial as well as a budgetary agency, changing its name in the process to stress its managerial functions.

Because each presidential appointee and department have their own agenda, presidents need a clearinghouse—the OMB. Presidents use the OMB to review legislative

National Security Council (NSC)

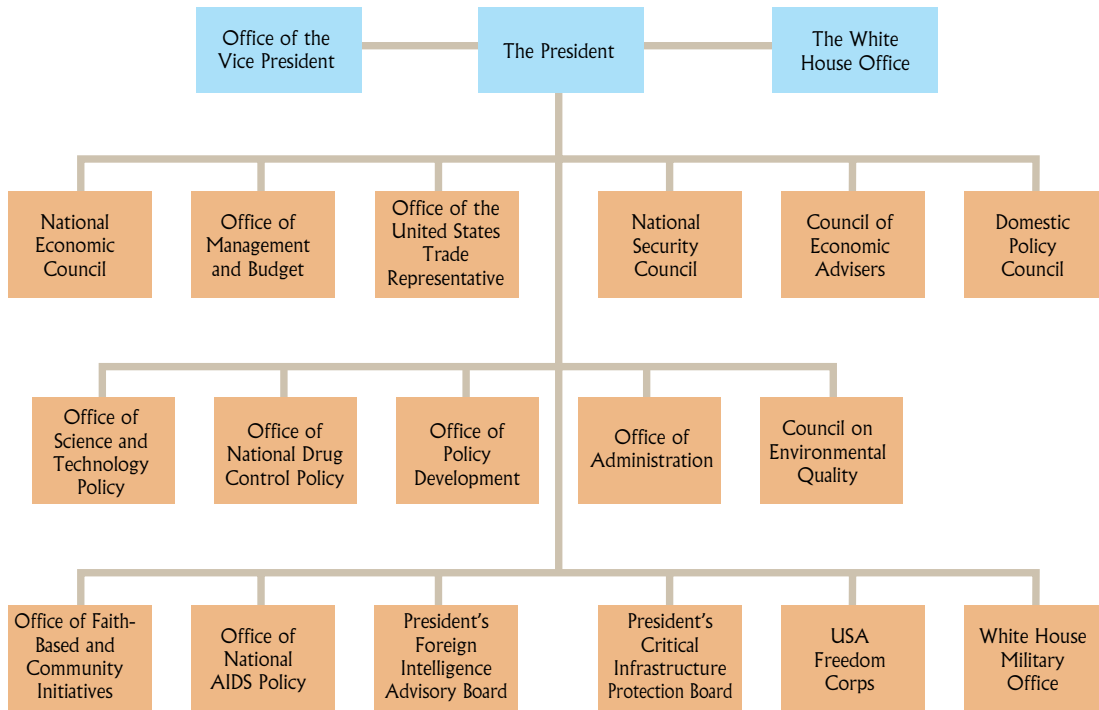
An office created in 1947 to coordinate the president's foreign and military policy advisors. Its formal members are the president, vice president, **secretary of state**, and **secretary of defense**, and it is managed by the president's national security assistant.

Council of Economic Advisors (CEA)

A three-member body appointed by the president to advise the president on economic policy.

Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

An office that grew out of the Bureau of the Budget, created in 1921, consisting of a handful of political appointees and hundreds of skilled professionals. The OMB performs both managerial and budgetary functions. See also **Congressional Budget Office**.

Figure 13.1 Executive Office of the President

Source: Office of the Federal Register, *The United States Government Manual, 2003/2004* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004), 87–102; <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/eop.html>.

proposals from the cabinet and other executive agencies so that they can determine whether they want an agency to propose these initiatives to Congress. The OMB assesses the proposals' budgetary implications and advises presidents on the proposals' consistency with their overall program. The OMB also plays an important role in reviewing regulations proposed by departments and agencies.

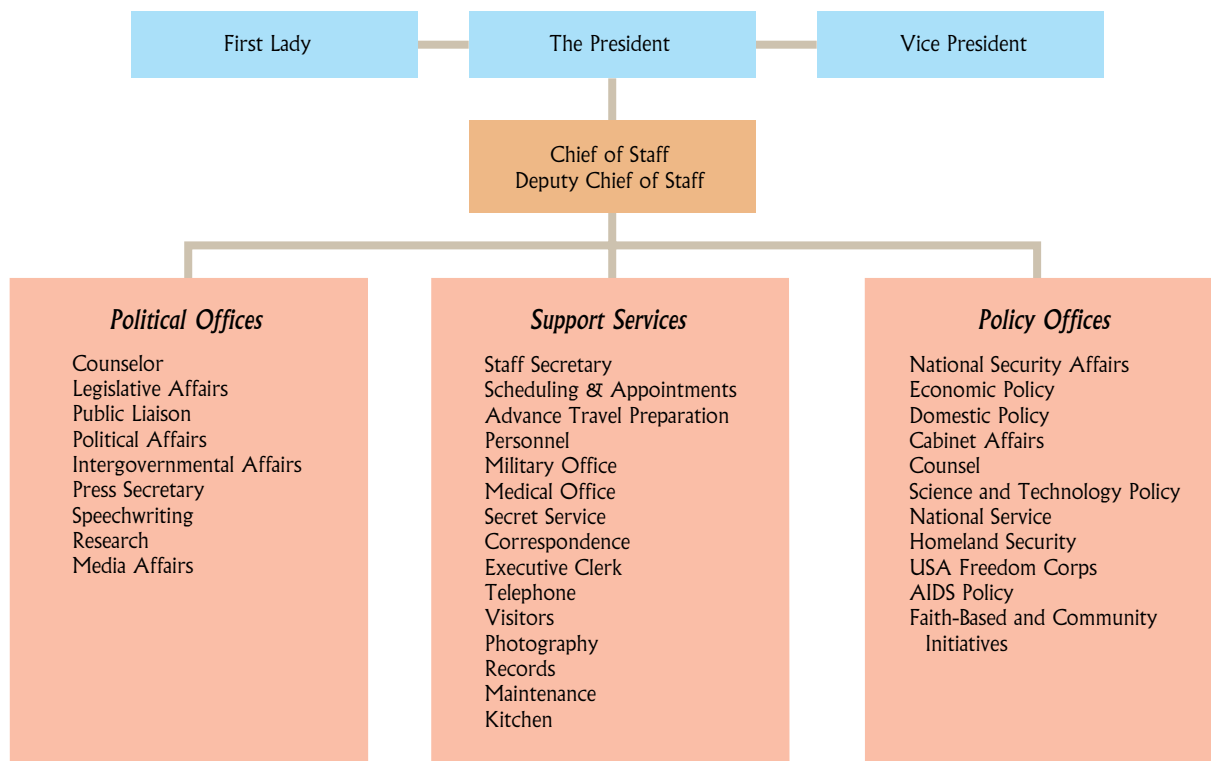
Though presidents find that the Executive Office is smaller and more manageable than the cabinet departments, it is still filled with people performing jobs required by law and whose primary allegiance is to their office, rather than to the president. There is, however, one part of the presidential system that presidents can truly call their own: the White House staff.

The White House Staff

Before Franklin D. Roosevelt, the president's personal staff resources were minimal. Only one messenger and one secretary served Thomas Jefferson. One hundred years later the president's staff had grown only to 13, including clerks and secretaries. Woodrow Wilson was in the habit of typing his own letters. As recently as the 1920s, the entire budget for the White House was no more than \$80,000 per year.

The White House staff consists of the key aides the president sees daily: the chief of staff, congressional liaison people, a press secretary, a national security assistant, and a few other administrative and political assistants. Today, there are about 600 people at work on the White House staff—many of whom the president rarely sees—who provide the chief executive with a wide variety of services ranging from making advance travel preparations to answering the avalanche of letters received each year (see Figure 13.2).

The top aides in the White House hierarchy are people who are completely loyal to the president, and the president turns to them for advice on the most serious or mun-

Figure 13.2 Principal Offices in the White House

Source: Adapted from George C. Edwards III and Stephen J. Wayne, *Presidential Leadership*, 6th ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), Figure 6-2.

dane matters of governance. Good staff people are self-effacing, working only for the boss and shunning the limelight. The 1939 report of the Brownlow Committee, which served as the basis for the development of the modern White House staff, argued that presidential assistants should have a “passion for anonymity.” So important are their roles, though, that the names of top White House aides quickly become well known. Woodrow Wilson’s Colonel Edward M. House, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Harry Hopkins, Richard Nixon’s Henry Kissinger, and George Bush’s John Sununu, for example, did much to shape domestic and global policy.

Presidents rely heavily on their staffs for information, policy options, and analysis. Different presidents have different relationships with their staffs. They all organize the White House to serve their own political and policy needs and their own decision-making style. Most presidents end up choosing some form of *hierarchical* organization with a chief of staff at the top, whose job it is to see that everyone else is doing his or her job and that the president’s time and interests are protected. A few presidents, such as John F. Kennedy, have employed a *wheel-and-spokes* system of White House management in which many aides have equal status and are balanced against one another in the process of decision-making.¹⁴ Whatever the system, White House aides are central in the policymaking process—fashioning options, negotiating agreements, writing presidential statements, controlling paperwork, molding legislative details, and generally giving the president their opinions on most matters.

No presidential management styles contrasted more sharply than those of Presidents Carter and Reagan. Carter was a detail man, pouring endlessly over memoranda and facts. President Reagan was the consummate delegator. George Bush’s operating style fell between the extremes of his two immediate predecessors. He consulted widely both within and outside of government, and he insisted on letting others’ views

reach him unfiltered by his staff. He was considerably more accessible than Reagan and devoted more energy to decision-making. At the same time, he liked to delegate responsibility to his subordinates and took little initiative in domestic policy.

President Clinton, like Carter, immersed himself in the details of policy. He ran an open White House, dealing directly with a large number of aides and reading countless policy memoranda. His emphasis on deliberation and his fluid staffing system generated criticism that his White House was “indecisive” and “chaotic.” George W. Bush is more likely to delegate and his White House has been a more orderly one.

Despite presidents’ reliance on their staffs, it is the president who sets the tone for the White House. Although it is common to blame presidential advisors for mistakes made in the White House, it is the president’s responsibility to demand that staff members analyze a full range of options and their probable consequences before they offer the president their advice. If the chief executive does not demand quality staff work, then the work is less likely to be done, and disaster or embarrassment may follow.

The First Lady

The First Lady has no official government position, yet she is often at the center of national attention. The media chronicles every word she speaks and every hairstyle she adopts. Although many people think of First Ladies as well-dressed homemakers presiding over White House dinners, there is much more to the job.

Abigail Adams (an early feminist) and Dolley Madison counseled and lobbied their husbands. Edith Galt Wilson was the most powerful First Lady, virtually running the government when her husband, Woodrow, suffered a paralyzing stroke in 1919. Eleanor Roosevelt wrote a nationally syndicated newspaper column and tirelessly traveled and advocated New Deal policies. She became her crippled husband’s eyes and ears around the country and urged him to adopt liberal social welfare policies. Lady Bird Johnson chose to focus on one issue, beautification, and most of her successors followed this single-issue pattern. Rosalyn Carter chose mental health, Nancy Reagan selected drugs, and Barbara Bush advocated literacy. Laura Bush, a former librarian, has also chosen to focus on increasing literacy.

In what was perhaps a natural evolution in a society where women have moved into positions formerly held only by males, Hillary Rodham Clinton attained the most

Although the First Lady has no official government position, she is often at the center of national attention. In recent years, First Ladies have taken active roles in promoting policies ranging from highway beautification and mental health to literacy and health care. Here First Lady Laura Bush reads to Washington-area students.



responsible and visible leadership position ever held by a First Lady. She was an influential advisor to the president, playing an active role in the selection of nominees for cabinet and judicial posts, for example. Most publicly, she headed the planning for the president's massive health care reform plan in 1993 and became, along with her husband, its primary advocate.

Although many have hailed her as a model for our times, successfully combining career and family, others have criticized her as a political liability. The health plan failed to pass Congress and was seen by many observers as a leading cause of the Democrats' crushing defeat in the 1994 congressional elections. As a result, she retreated to a more traditional role, focusing on representing the United States abroad and on advocating policies to help children and women in developing countries. In 2000, however, she was elected to the U.S. Senate.

Presidents not only have responsibility for running the executive branch, they must also deal intensively with the legislative branch. These dealings are the topic of the following section.

Presidential Leadership of Congress: The Politics of Shared Powers

Near the top of any presidential job description would be “working with Congress.” The American system of separation of powers is actually one of *shared* powers, so if presidents are to succeed in leaving their stamp on public policy, much of their time in office must be devoted to leading the legislature to support presidential initiatives.

Chief Legislator

Nowhere does the Constitution use the phrase *chief legislator*; it is strictly a phrase invented to emphasize the executive's importance in the legislative process. The Constitution does require that the president give a State of the Union address to Congress and instructs the president to bring other matters to Congress' attention “from time to time.” In fact, as noted in Chapter 12, the president plays a major role in shaping the congressional agenda.

The Constitution also gives the president power to **veto** congressional legislation. Once Congress passes a bill, the president may (1) sign it, making it law; (2) veto it, sending it back to Congress with the reasons for rejecting it; or (3) let it become law after 10 working days by not doing anything. Congress can pass a vetoed law, however, if two-thirds of each house vote to override the president. At one point in the lawmaking process the president has the last word, however: If Congress adjourns within 10 days after submitting a bill, the president can simply let it die by neither signing nor vetoing it. This process is called a **pocket veto**. Table 13.5 shows how frequently recent presidents have used the veto.

The presidential veto is usually effective; only about 4 percent of all vetoed bills have been overridden by Congress since the nation's founding. Thus, even the threat of a presidential veto can be an effective tool for persuading Congress to give more weight to the president's views. On the other hand, the veto is a blunt instrument. Presidents must accept or reject bills in their entirety; they cannot veto only the parts they do not like (most governors have a *line-item veto* that allows them to veto particular portions of a bill). As a result, the White House often must accept provisions of a bill it opposes in order to obtain provisions that it desires. For example, in 1987, Congress passed the entire discretionary budget of the federal government in one bill (called an “omnibus” bill). President Reagan had to accept the whole package or lose appropriations for the entire government.

veto

The constitutional power of the president to send a bill back to Congress with reasons for rejecting it. A two-thirds vote in each house can override a veto.

pocket veto

A veto taking place when Congress adjourns within 10 days of submitting a bill to the president, who simply lets it die by neither signing nor vetoing it.

Table 13.5 Presidential Vetoes

PRESIDENT	REGULAR VETOES	VETOES OVERRIDDEN	PERCENTAGE OF VETOES OVERRIDDEN	POCKET VETOES	TOTAL VETOES
Eisenhower	73	2	3	108	181
Kennedy	12	0	0	9	21
Johnson	16	0	0	14	30
Nixon	26	7	27	17	43
Ford	48	12	25	18	66
Carter	13	2	15	18	31
Reagan	39	9	23	39	78
G. Bush	29	1	3	15	44
Clinton	37	2	5	1	38
G. W. Bush*	0	0	0	0	0

*Through 2004.



Why It Matters

The President's Veto

Unlike most governors, the president does not have the power to veto parts of a bill. As a result, he cannot choose to delete what he views as wasteful items from the budget. At the same time, the lack of a line-item veto helps to maintain the delicate balance of separate institutions sharing powers.

In 1996, Congress passed a law granting the president authority to propose rescinding funds in appropriations bills and tax provisions that apply to only a few people. Once the president signed tax or spending bills, he had five days to propose rescissions; such provisions could become law only if Congress passed them as separate bills—which would then be subject to a presidential veto. The 1996 law was immediately challenged in the courts as being an unconstitutional grant of power to the president. In 1998 the Supreme Court agreed in *Clinton v. City of New York*, and voided the law.

The presidential veto is an inherently negative resource. It is most useful for preventing legislation. Much of the time, however, presidents are more interested in passing their own legislation. To do so, they must marshal their political resources to obtain positive support for their programs. Presidents' three most useful resources are their party leadership, public support, and their own legislative skills.

Party Leadership

No matter what other resources presidents may have at their disposal, they remain highly dependent on their party to move their legislative programs. Representatives and senators of the president's party usually form the nucleus of coalitions supporting presidential proposals and provide considerably more support than do members of the opposition party. Thus, party leadership in Congress is every president's principal task when countering the natural tendency toward conflict between the executive and legislative branches that is inherent in the government's system of checks and balances.¹⁵

The Bonds of Party. For most senators and representatives, being in the same political party as the president creates a psychological bond. Personal loyalties or emotional commitments to their party and their party leader, a desire to avoid embarrassing "their" administration and thus hurting their chances for reelection, and a basic distrust of the opposition party are inclinations that produce support for the White House. Members of the same party also agree on many matters of public policy, and they are often supported by similar electoral coalitions, reinforcing the pull of party ties.

If presidents could rely on their party members to vote for whatever the White House sent up to Capitol Hill, presidential leadership of Congress would be rather easy. All presidents would have to do is make sure members of their party showed up to vote. If their party had the majority, presidents would always win. If their party was in the minority, presidents would only have to concentrate on converting a few members of the other party.



Presidents depend heavily on their parties' leaders in Congress to pass their initiatives. They also must frequently seek support from the opposition party. Here President George W. Bush meets with (from left to right) House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, House Speaker Dennis Hastert, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, and former Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle.

Slippage in Party Support. Things are not so simple, however. Despite the pull of party ties, all presidents experience substantial slippage in the support of their party in Congress. Presidents can count on their own party members for support no more than two-thirds of the time, even on key votes. Presidents are thus forced to be active in party leadership and to devote their efforts to conversion as much as to mobilization of members of their party.

The primary obstacle to party unity is the lack of consensus on policies among party members, especially in the Democratic Party. Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, remarked, "I learned the hard way that there was no party loyalty or discipline when a complicated or controversial issue was at stake—none."¹⁶

This diversity of views often reflects the diversity of constituencies represented by party members. For many years the frequent defection of Southern Democrats from Democratic presidents (such defectors were called "boll weevils") was one of the most prominent features of American politics. When constituency opinion and the president's proposals conflict, members of Congress are more likely to vote with their constituents, whom they rely on for reelection. If the president is not popular with their constituencies, congressional party members may avoid identifying too closely with the White House.

Leading the Party. The president has some assets as party leader, including congressional party leaders, services and amenities for party members, and campaign aid. Each asset is of limited utility, however.

The president's relationship with party leaders in Congress is a delicate one. Although the leaders are predisposed to support presidential policies and typically work closely with the White House, they are free to oppose the president or lend only symbolic support; some party leaders may be ineffective themselves. Moreover, party leaders, especially in the Senate, are not in strong positions to reward or discipline members of Congress on the basis of presidential support.

To create goodwill with congressional party members, the White House provides them with many amenities, ranging from photographs with the president to rides on Air Force One. Although this arrangement is to the president's advantage and may earn the benefit of the doubt on some policy initiatives, party members consider it their right to receive benefits from the White House and as a result are unlikely to be especially responsive to the president.

Just as the president can offer a carrot, so too can the president wield a stick in the form of withholding favors, although this is rarely done. Despite the resources available to the president, if party members wish to oppose the White House, there is little the president can do to stop them. The parties are highly decentralized, as we saw in Chapter 8. National party leaders do not control those aspects of politics that are of vital concern to members of Congress—nominations and elections. Members of Congress are largely self-recruited, gain their party's nomination by their own efforts and not the party's, and provide most of the money and organizational support needed for their elections. Presidents can do little to influence the results of these activities.

One way for the president to improve the chances of obtaining support in Congress is to increase the number of fellow party members in the legislature. The phenomenon of **presidential coattails** occurs when voters cast their ballots for congressional candidates of the president's party because those candidates support the president. Most recent studies show a diminishing connection between presidential and congressional voting, however, and few races are determined by presidential coattails.¹⁷ The change in party balance that usually emerges when the electoral dust has settled is strikingly small. In the 14 presidential elections between 1952 and 2004, the party of the winning presidential candidate gained an average of 7 seats (out of 435) per election in the House. In the Senate the opposition party actually gained seats in seven of the elections (1956, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1988, 1996, and 2000), and there was no change in 1976 and 1992. The net gain for the president's party in the Senate averaged less than one seat per election (see Table 13.6).

What about midterm elections—those held between presidential elections? Can the president depend on increasing the number of fellow party members in Congress then? Actually, the picture is even bleaker than during presidential elections. As you can see in Table 13.7, the president's party typically *loses* seats in these elections. In 1986, the Republicans lost 8 seats in the Senate, depriving President Reagan of a majority. In 1994, the Democrats lost 8 Senate seats and 52 House seats, losing control of both houses in the process.¹⁸ Recently there have been exceptions, however. In 1998, the Democrats gained 5 seats in the House, and in 2002, Republicans made small gains in both houses.

presidential coattails

These occur when voters cast their ballots for congressional candidates of the president's party because they support the president. Recent studies show that few races are won this way.

Table 13.6 Congressional Gains or Losses for the President's Party in Presidential Election Years

Presidents cannot rely on their coattails to carry their party's legislators into office to help pass White House legislative programs. The president's party typically gains few, if any, seats when the president wins election. For instance, the Republicans lost seats in both houses when President George W. Bush was elected in 2000.

YEAR	PRESIDENT	HOUSE	SENATE
1952	Eisenhower (R)	+22	+1
1956	Eisenhower (R)	-2	-1
1960	Kennedy (D)	-22	-2
1964	Johnson (D)	+37	+1
1968	Nixon (R)	+5	+6
1972	Nixon (R)	+12	-2
1976	Carter (D)	+1	0
1980	Reagan (R)	+34	+12
1984	Reagan (R)	+14	-2
1988	G. Bush (R)	-3	-1
1992	Clinton (D)	-10	0
1996	Clinton (D)	+9	-2
2000	G. W. Bush (R)	-2	-4
2004	G. W. Bush (R)	+4	+4
	Average	+7	+7

Table 13.7 Congressional Gains or Losses for the President's Party in Midterm Election Years

For decades the president's party typically *lost* seats in midterm elections. Thus, presidents could not be certain of helping to elect members of their party once in office. The elections of 1998 and 2002 deviated from this pattern, and the president's party gained a few seats.

YEAR	PRESIDENT	HOUSE	SENATE
1954	Eisenhower (R)	-18	-1
1958	Eisenhower (R)	-47	-13
1962	Kennedy (D)	-4	+3
1966	Johnson (D)	-47	-4
1970	Nixon (R)	-12	+2
1974	Ford (R)	-47	-5
1978	Carter (D)	-15	-3
1982	Reagan (R)	-26	0
1986	Reagan (R)	-5	-8
1990	G. Bush (R)	-9	-1
1994	Clinton (D)	-52	-8
1998	Clinton (D)	+5	0
2002	G. W. Bush (R)	+6	+2
	Average	-21	-3

To add to these party leadership burdens, the president's party often lacks a majority in one or both houses of Congress. Since 1953 there have been 28 years in which Republican presidents faced a Democratic House of Representatives and 20 years in which they encountered a Democratic Senate. President Clinton faced both a House and a Senate with Republican majorities from 1995 through 2000. George W. Bush faced a Democratic Senate from May 2001 through December 2002.

As a result of election returns and the lack of dependable party support, the president usually has to solicit help from the opposition party. This is often a futile endeavor, however, since the opposition is generally not fertile ground for seeking support. Nevertheless, even a few votes may be enough to give the president the required majority.

Public Support

One of the president's most important resources for leading Congress is public support. Presidents who enjoy the backing of the public have an easier time influencing Congress. Said one top aide to Ronald Reagan, "Everything here is built on the idea that the president's success depends on grassroots support."¹⁹ Presidents with low approval ratings in the polls find it difficult to influence Congress. As one of President Carter's aides put it, "No president whose popularity is as low as this president's has much clout on the Hill."²⁰ Members of Congress and others in Washington closely watch two indicators of public support for the president: approval in the polls and mandates in presidential elections.

Public Approval. Members of Congress anticipate the public's reactions to their support for or opposition to presidents and their policies. They may choose to be close to or independent of the White House—depending on the president's standing with the public—to increase their chances for reelection. Representatives and senators may also use the president's standing in the polls as an indicator of presidential ability to mobilize public opinion against presidential opponents.

Public approval also makes other leadership resources more efficacious. If the president is high in the public's esteem, the president's party is more likely to be

responsive, the public is more easily moved, and legislative skills become more effective. Thus public approval is the political resource that has the most potential to turn a stalemate between the president and Congress into a situation supportive of the president's legislative proposals.

Public approval operates mostly in the background and sets the limits of what Congress will do for or to the president. Widespread support gives the president leeway and weakens resistance to presidential policies. It provides a cover for members of Congress to cast votes to which their constituents might otherwise object. They can defend their votes as support for the president rather than support for a certain policy alone.

Lack of public support strengthens the resolve of the president's opponents and narrows the range in which presidential policies receive the benefit of the doubt. In addition, low ratings in the polls may create incentives to attack the president, further eroding an already weakened position. For example, after the arms sales to Iran and the diversion of funds to the Contras made the headlines in late 1986, it became more acceptable in Congress and in the press to raise questions about Ronald Reagan's capacities as president. Disillusionment is a difficult force for the White House to combat.

The impact of public approval or disapproval on the support the president receives in Congress is important, but it occurs at the margins of the effort to build coalitions behind proposed policies. No matter how low presidential standing dips, the president still receives support from a substantial number of senators and representatives. Similarly, no matter how high approval levels climb, a significant portion of Congress will still oppose certain presidential policies. Members of Congress are unlikely to vote against the clear interests of their constituencies or the firm tenets of their ideology out of deference to a widely supported chief executive, as George W. Bush learned following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Public approval gives the president leverage, not command.²¹

In addition, presidents cannot depend on having the approval of the public, and it is not a resource over which they have much control, as we will see later. Once again, it is clear that presidents' leadership resources do not allow them to dominate Congress.

Mandates. The results of presidential elections are another indicator of public opinion regarding presidents. An electoral mandate—the perception that the voters strongly support the president's character and policies—can be a powerful symbol in American politics. It accords added legitimacy and credibility to the newly elected president's proposals. Moreover, concerns for both representation and political survival encourage members of Congress to support new presidents if they feel the people have spoken.

More important, mandates change the premises of decisions. Following Roosevelt's decisive win in the 1932 election, the essential question became *how* government should act to fight the Depression rather than *whether* it should act. Similarly, following Johnson's overwhelming win in the 1964 election, the dominant question in Congress was not whether to pass new social programs but how many social programs to pass and how much to increase spending. In 1981, the tables were turned; Ronald Reagan's victory placed a stigma on big government and exalted the unregulated marketplace and large defense efforts. Reagan had won a major victory even before the first congressional vote.

Although presidential elections can structure choices for Congress, merely winning an election does not provide presidents with a mandate. Every election produces a winner, but mandates are much less common. Even large electoral victories, such as Richard Nixon's in 1972 and Ronald Reagan's in 1984, carry no guarantee that Congress will interpret the results as mandates from the people to support the president's programs. Perceptions of a mandate are weak if the winning candidate did not stress his policy plans in the campaign or if the voters also elected majorities in Congress from the other party (of course, the winner may *claim* a mandate anyway).²²

Legislative Skills

Presidential legislative skills come in a variety of forms, including bargaining, making personal appeals, consulting with Congress, setting priorities, exploiting “honeymoon” periods, and structuring congressional votes. Of these skills, bargaining receives perhaps the most attention from commentators on the presidency, and by examining it, one can learn much about the role that a president’s legislative skills play in leading Congress.

Bargains occur in numerous forms. Reagan’s budget director David Stockman recalled that “the last 10 or 20 percent of the votes needed for a majority of both houses on the 1981 tax cut had to be bought, period.” The concessions for members of Congress included special breaks for oil-lease holders, real estate tax shelters, and generous loopholes that virtually eliminated the corporate income tax. “The hogs were really feeding,” declared Stockman. “The greed level, the level of opportunities, just got out of control.”²³

Nevertheless, bargaining, in the form of trading support on two or more policies or providing specific benefits for representatives and senators, occurs less often and plays a less critical role in the creation of presidential coalitions in Congress than one might think. For obvious reasons, the White House does not want to encourage the type of bargaining Stockman describes, and there is a scarcity of resources with which to bargain, especially in an era where balancing the budget is a prominent goal for policy-makers (discussed in Chapter 14).

Moreover, the president does not have to bargain with every member of Congress to receive support. On controversial issues on which bargaining may be useful, the president usually starts with a sizable core of party supporters and may add to this group those of the opposition party who provide support on ideological or policy grounds. Others may support the president because of relevant constituency interests or strong public approval. The president needs to bargain only if this coalition does not provide a majority (or two-thirds on treaties and one-third on veto overrides).

Presidents may improve their chances of success in Congress by making certain strategic moves. It is wise, for example, for a new president to be ready to send legislation to the Hill early during the first year in office in order to exploit the “honeymoon” atmosphere that typically characterizes this period. Obviously, this is a one-shot opportunity.

An important aspect of presidential legislative strategy can be establishing priorities among legislative proposals. The goal of this effort is to set Congress’ agenda. If presidents are unable to focus the attention of Congress on their priority programs, these programs may become lost in the complex and overloaded legislative process. Setting priorities is also important because presidents and their staffs can lobby effectively for only a few bills at a time. Moreover, each president’s political capital is inevitably limited, and it is sensible to focus on a limited range of personally important issues; otherwise, this precious resource might be wasted.

In 1981 Ronald Reagan followed both of these strategies, moving fast and setting priorities. He had great success—obtaining passage of a large tax cut, a substantial increase in defense expenditures, and sizable decreases in the rate of spending for domestic policies. George Bush, in contrast, did not enter the White House geared for legislative action and did little to articulate his priorities. With a large budget deficit, few legislative goals, and the opposition in the majority in both the House and Senate, he did not feel it necessary or useful to focus his energies on Congress. From the outset Bush seemed destined to make his mark on foreign policy, where the president has more latitude to maneuver.

Within a month after taking office, President Clinton presented Congress with an ambitious agenda, including tax increases and both spending cuts and increases. He proposed a major health care reform bill and the North American Free Trade Agreement later in the year. The president lacked the political capital to pass much of his agenda, however, and some of the most important proposals fell prey to Republican opposition. By failing to focus on his priorities, Clinton spent his political capital on



Presidential Success in
Polls and Congress

Presidents influence the legislative agenda more than any other political figure. One of Ronald Reagan's chief legislative skills was the ability to communicate his policy priorities effectively to Congress and the public. No matter what a president's skills are, however, the "chief legislator," as the president is often called, can rarely exercise complete control over the agenda.



matters of less importance. Although he engaged in an endless campaign of public appearances and congressional meetings to build support for his legislation, in the end he met with substantial disappointment and was rebuffed by the voters in the 1994 midterm elections as the Republicans captured both houses of Congress. In his early months in office, George W. Bush followed Reagan's example of moving rapidly and focusing on his priority legislation.

The president is the nation's key agenda builder; what the administration wants strongly influences the parameters of Washington debate.²⁴ John Kingdon's careful study of the Washington agenda found that "no other single actor in the political system has quite the capability of the president to set agendas."²⁵ There are limits to what the president can do, however.

By his second year in office, Ronald Reagan's honeymoon with Congress was over, and he had lost control of the legislative agenda. Although the White House can put off dealing with many national issues at the beginning of a new president's term in order to focus on its highest priority legislation, it cannot do so indefinitely. Eventually it must make decisions about a wide range of matters. Soon the legislative agenda is full and more policies are in the pipeline, as the administration attempts to satisfy its constituents and responds to unanticipated or simply overlooked problems. Moreover, Congress is quite capable of setting its own agenda, providing competition for the president's proposals.

In general, presidential legislative skills must compete—as presidential public support does—with other, more stable factors that affect voting in Congress: party, ideology, personal views and commitments on specific policies, constituency interests, and so on. By the time a president tries to exercise influence on a vote, most members of Congress have made up their minds on the basis of these other factors.

After accounting for the status of the president's party in Congress and standing with the public, systematic studies have found that presidents known for their legislative skills (such as Lyndon Johnson) are no more successful in winning votes, even close ones, or obtaining congressional support than those considered less adept at dealing with Congress (such as Jimmy Carter).²⁶ The president's legislative skills are not at the core of presidential leadership of Congress. Even skilled presidents cannot reshape the contours of the political landscape and *create* opportunities for change. They can, however, recognize favorable configurations of political forces—such as existed in 1933, 1965, and 1981—and effectively exploit them to embark on major shifts in public policy.



Presidents find the role of legislative leader a challenging one. Often they must compromise with opponents in Congress, as President Bill Clinton did in 1996 when he signed the welfare reform bill.

Perhaps the most important role of presidents—and their heaviest burden—is their responsibility for national security. Dealing with Congress is only one of the many challenges presidents face in the realm of defense and foreign policy.

The President and National Security Policy

Constitutionally, the president has the leading role in American defense and foreign policy (often termed *national security* policy). Such matters, ranging from foreign trade to war and peace, occupy much of the president's time. There are several dimensions to the president's national security responsibilities, including negotiating with other nations, commanding the armed forces, waging war, managing crises, and obtaining the necessary support in Congress.

Chief Diplomat

The Constitution allocates certain powers in the realm of national security exclusively to the executive. The president alone extends diplomatic recognition to foreign governments—as Jimmy Carter did on December 14, 1978, when he announced the exchange of ambassadors with the People's Republic of China and the downgrading of the U.S. Embassy in Taiwan. The president can also terminate relations with other nations, as Carter did with Iran after Americans were taken hostage in Tehran.

The president also has the sole power to negotiate treaties with other nations, although the Constitution requires the Senate to approve them by a two-thirds vote. Sometimes presidents win and sometimes they lose when presenting a treaty to the Senate. After extensive lobbying, Jimmy Carter persuaded the Senate to approve a treaty returning the Panama Canal to Panama (over objections such as those of one senator who declared, "We stole it fair and square"). Carter was not so lucky when he presented the SALT II treaty on arms control; it never even made it to a vote on the Senate floor. At other times senators add "reservations" to the treaties they ratify, altering the treaty in the process.²⁷

In addition to treaties, presidents also negotiate *executive agreements* with the heads of foreign governments. However, executive agreements do not require Senate ratification (although they are supposed to be reported to Congress and may require implementing legislation passed by majorities of each house). Most executive agreements are routine and deal with noncontroversial subjects such as food deliveries or customs enforcement, but some, such as the Vietnam peace agreement and the SALT I agreement limiting offensive nuclear weapons, implement important and controversial policies.

Occasionally presidential diplomacy involves more than negotiating on behalf of the United States. Theodore Roosevelt won the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in settling the war between Japan and Russia. One of Jimmy Carter's greatest achievements was forging a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. For 13 days he mediated negotiations between the leaders of both countries at his presidential retreat, Camp David.

As the leader of the Western world, the president must try to lead America's allies on matters of both economics and defense. This is not an easy task, given the natural independence of sovereign nations; the reduced status of the United States as an economic power relative to other countries, such as Japan and Germany; and the many competing influences on policymaking in other nations. As in domestic policymaking, the president must rely principally on persuasion to lead.

Commander in Chief

Because the Constitution's framers wanted civilian control of the military, they made the president the commander in chief of the armed forces. President George Washington actually led troops to crush the Whiskey Rebellion in 1794. Today, presidents do not take the task quite so literally, but their military decisions have changed the course of history. Bill Clinton joined the ranks of presidents exerting their prerogatives as commander in chief when he sent American troops to occupy Haiti, keep the peace in Bosnia, restore order in Somalia, prevent an invasion of Kuwait, and bomb Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Sudan. George W. Bush ordered an attack on the Taliban government in Afghanistan—and on terrorists everywhere.

When the Constitution was written, the United States did not have—nor did anyone expect it to have—a large standing or permanent army. Today the president is commander in chief of about 1.5 million uniformed men and women. In his farewell

Presidents usually conduct diplomatic relations through envoys, but occasionally they engage in personal diplomacy. Here, President Carter celebrates a peace agreement he brokered between Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.





In 1950, President Harry Truman fulfilled his role as commander in chief by pinning a distinguished service medal on the shirt of General Douglas MacArthur, who was commanding American troops in Korea. The following year, Truman exercised his powers by dismissing MacArthur for disobeying orders—an unpopular decision given MacArthur’s fame as a World War II hero.

address, George Washington warned against permanent alliances, but today America has commitments to defend nations across the globe. Even more important, the president commands a vast nuclear arsenal. Never more than a few steps from the president is “the football,” a briefcase with the codes needed to unleash nuclear war. The Constitution, of course, states that only Congress has the power to declare war, but it is unreasonable to believe that Congress can convene, debate, and vote on a declaration of war in the case of a nuclear attack. The House and Senate chambers would be gone—*literally* gone—before the conclusion of a debate.

War Powers

Perhaps no issue of executive-legislative relations generates more controversy than the continuing dispute over war powers. Though charged by the Constitution with declaring war and voting on the military budget, Congress long ago accepted that presidents make short-term military commitments of troops or naval vessels. In recent decades, however, presidents have paid even less attention to constitutional details; for example, Congress never declared war during the conflicts in either Korea or Vietnam.

In 1973 Congress passed the **War Powers Resolution** (over President Nixon’s veto). As a reaction to disillusionment about American fighting in Vietnam and Cambodia, the law was intended to give Congress a greater voice in the introduction of American troops into hostilities. It required presidents to consult with Congress, whenever possible, before using military force, and it mandated the withdrawal of forces after 60 days unless Congress declared war or granted an extension. Congress could at any time pass a concurrent resolution (which could not be vetoed) ending American participation in hostilities.

The War Powers Resolution cannot be regarded as a success for Congress, however. All presidents serving since 1973 have deemed the law an unconstitutional infringement on their powers, and there is reason to believe the Supreme Court would consider the law’s use of the **legislative veto** (the ability of Congress to pass a resolution to override a presidential decision) to be a violation of the doctrine of separation of

War Powers Resolution

A law passed in 1973 in reaction to American fighting in Vietnam and Cambodia that requires presidents to consult with Congress whenever possible prior to using military force and to withdraw forces after 60 days unless Congress declares war or grants an extension. Presidents view the resolution as unconstitutional.

legislative veto

The ability of Congress to override a presidential decision. Although the **War Powers Resolution** asserts this authority, there is reason to believe that, if challenged, the Supreme Court would find the legislative veto in violation of the doctrine of separation of powers.



Why It Matters

War Powers

The question as to the president's war powers has never been fully resolved. Some feel we would be less likely to go to war if the president could only send troops into combat after a congressional resolution authorizing the use of force. Others see such a requirement as unduly hampering the president's ability to conduct an effective foreign policy.

powers. Presidents have largely ignored the law and sent troops into hostilities, sometimes with heavy loss of life, without effectual consulting with Congress. The legislature has found it difficult to challenge the president, especially when American troops were endangered, and the courts have been reluctant to hear a congressional challenge on what would be construed as a political, rather than a legal, issue.²⁸

Following numerous precedents, George Bush took an expansive view of his powers as commander in chief. On his own authority, he ordered the invasion of Panama in 1989 and moved half a million troops to Saudi Arabia to liberate Kuwait after its invasion by Iraq in 1990. Matters came to a head in January 1991. President Bush had given President Saddam Hussein of Iraq until January 15 to pull out of Kuwait. At that point, President Bush threatened to move the Iraqis out by force. Debate raged over the president's power to act unilaterally to engage in war. A constitutional crisis was averted when Congress passed (on a divided vote) a resolution on January 12 authorizing the president to use force against Iraq.

In a sweeping assertion of presidential authority, Bill Clinton moved toward military intervention in Haiti in 1994 and essentially dared Congress to try to stop him. Congress did nothing but complain to block military action, even though a majority of members of both parties clearly opposed an invasion. In the end, an invasion (as opposed to a more peaceful "intervention") was avoided, but Congress was unlikely to have cut off funds for such an operation had it occurred. In 1999, the president authorized the United States to take the leading role in a sustained air attack against Serbia, but Congress could not agree on a resolution supporting the use of force.

George W. Bush faced little opposition to responding to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Congress immediately passed a resolution authorizing the use of force against the perpetrators of the attacks. The next year, Congress passed a resolution authorizing the president to use force against Iraq.

Questions continue to be raised about the relevance of America's 200-year-old constitutional mechanisms for engaging in war. Some observers worry that the rapid response capabilities afforded the president by modern technology allow him to bypass congressional opposition, thus undermining the separation of powers. Others stress the importance of the commander in chief having the flexibility to meet America's global responsibilities and combat international terrorism without the hindrance of congressional checks and balances. All agree that the change in the nature of warfare brought about by nuclear weapons inevitably delegates to the president the ultimate decision to use such weapons.

Crisis Manager

The president's roles as chief diplomat and commander in chief are related to another presidential responsibility: crisis management. A **crisis** is a sudden, unpredictable, and potentially dangerous event. Most crises occur in the realm of foreign policy. They often involve hot tempers and high risks; quick judgments must be made on the basis of sketchy information. Be it American hostages held in Iran or the discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba, a crisis challenges the president to make difficult decisions. Crises are rarely the president's doing, but handled incorrectly, they can be the president's undoing. On the other hand, handling a crisis well can remake a president's image, as George W. Bush found following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Early in American history there were fewer immediate crises. By the time officials were aware of a problem, it often had resolved itself. Communications could take weeks or even months to reach Washington. Similarly, officials' decisions often took weeks or months to reach those who were to implement them. The most famous land battle of the War of 1812, the Battle of New Orleans, was fought *after* the United States had signed a peace treaty with Great Britain. Word of the treaty did not reach the battlefield; thus, General Andrew Jackson won a victory for the United States that contributed nothing toward ending the war, although it did help put him in the White House as the seventh president.

crisis

A sudden, unpredictable, and potentially dangerous event requiring the president to play the role of crisis manager.



Crisis management may be the most difficult of the president's many roles. By definition, crises are sudden, unpredictable, and dangerous. Here President George W. Bush stands with firefighters and rescue workers at the World Trade Center site three days after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

With modern communications, the president can instantly monitor events almost anywhere. Moreover, because situations develop more rapidly today, there is a premium on rapid action, secrecy, constant management, consistent judgment, and expert advice. Congress usually moves slowly (one might say deliberately), and it is large (making it difficult to keep secrets), decentralized (requiring continual compromising), and composed of generalists. As a result, the president—who can come to quick and consistent decisions, confine information to a small group, carefully oversee developments, and call upon experts in the executive branch—has become more prominent in handling crises.

Working With Congress

As America moves through its third century under the Constitution, presidents might wish the framers had been less concerned with checks and balances in the area of national security. In recent years, Congress has challenged presidents on all fronts, including foreign aid; arms sales; the development, procurement, and deployment of weapons systems; the negotiation and interpretation of treaties; the selection of diplomats; and the continuation of nuclear testing.

Congress has a central constitutional role in making national security policy, although this role is often misunderstood. The allocation of responsibilities for such matters is based on the Founders' apprehensions about the concentration of power and the subsequent potential for its abuse. They divided the powers of supply and command, for example, in order to thwart adventurism in national security affairs. Congress can thus refuse to provide the necessary authorizations and appropriations for presidential actions, whereas the chief executive can refuse to act (for example, by not sending troops into battle at the behest of the legislature).

Despite the constitutional role of Congress, the president is the driving force behind national security policy, providing energy and direction. Congress is well organized to deliberate openly on the discrete components of policy, but it is not well designed to take the lead on national security matters. Its role has typically been overseeing the executive rather than initiating policy. Congress frequently originates proposals for domestic policy, but it is less involved in national security policy.²⁹

The president has a more prominent role in foreign affairs as the country's sole representative in dealing with other nations and as commander in chief of the armed forces (functions that effectively preclude a wide range of congressional diplomatic and military initiatives). In addition, the nature of national security issues may make the failure to integrate the elements of policy more costly than in domestic policy. Thus, members of Congress typically prefer to encourage, criticize, or support the president

rather than to initiate their own national security policy. If leadership occurs, it is usually centered in the White House.

Commentators on the presidency often refer to the “two presidencies”—one for domestic policy and the other for national security policy.³⁰ By this phrase they mean that the president has more success in leading Congress on matters of national security than on matters of domestic policy. The typical member of Congress, however, supports the president on roll-call votes about national security only slightly more than half the time. There is a significant gap between what the president requests and what members of Congress are willing to give. Certainly the legislature does not accord the president automatic support on national security policy.³¹

Nevertheless, presidents do end up obtaining much, often most, of what they request from Congress on national security issues. Some of the support they receive is the result of agreement on policy, but presidential leadership also plays an important role. That role is not one in which presidents simply bend the legislature to their will, however; rather, they lead by persuasion.

Presidents need resources to persuade others to support their policies. One important presidential asset can be the support of the American people. The following sections will take a closer look at how the White House tries to increase and use public support.

Power from the People: The Public Presidency

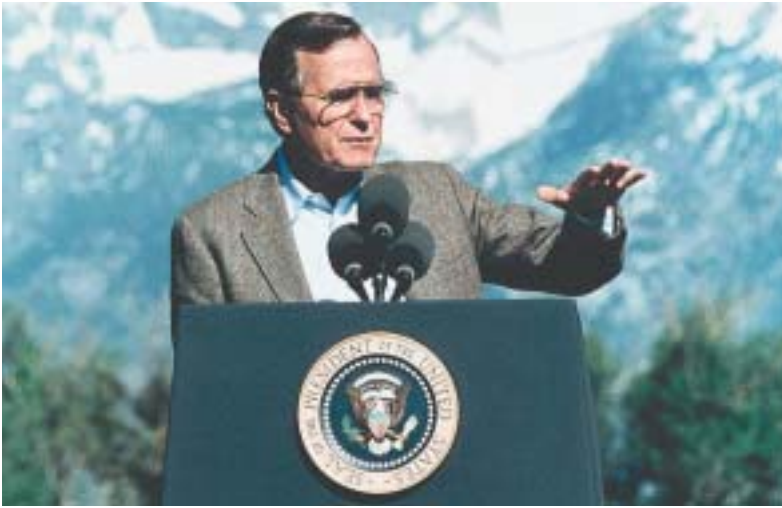
“Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.” These words, spoken by Abraham Lincoln, pose what is perhaps the greatest challenge to any president—to obtain and maintain the public’s support. Because presidents are rarely in a position to command others to comply with their wishes, they must rely on persuasion. Public support is perhaps the greatest source of influence a president has, for it is difficult for other power holders in a democracy to deny the legitimate demands of a president who has popular backing.

Going Public

Presidents are not passive followers of public opinion. The White House is a virtual whirlwind of public relations activity.³² John Kennedy, the first “television president,” held considerably more public appearances than did his predecessors. Kennedy’s successors, with the notable exception of Richard Nixon, have been even more active in making public appearances. Indeed, they have averaged more than one appearance every weekday of the year. Bill Clinton and George W. Bush invested enormous time and energy in attempting to sell their programs to the public.

Often the president’s appearances are staged purely to get the public’s attention. When George Bush introduced his clean-air bill in 1989, he traveled to Wyoming to use the eye-catching Grand Tetons as a backdrop. He announced his support for a constitutional amendment to prohibit flag burning in front of the Iwo Jima Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery. In cases such as these, the president could have simply made an announcement, but the need for public support drives the White House to employ public relations techniques similar to those used to publicize commercial products.

In many democracies, different people occupy the jobs of head of state and head of government. For example, the queen is head of state in England, but she holds little power in government and politics. In America, these roles are fused. As head of state, the president is America’s ceremonial leader and symbol of government. Trivial but time-consuming activities—tossing out the first baseball of the season, lighting the White House Christmas tree, meeting an extraordinary Boy or Girl Scout—are part of the ceremonial function of the presidency. Meeting foreign heads of state, receiving ambassadors’ credentials, and making global goodwill tours represent the international side of this role. Presidents rarely shirk these duties, even when they are not inherently



Presidents often use commercial public relations techniques to win support for their policy initiatives. President George Bush, for example, used the spectacular backdrop of the Grand Tetons to gain public approval for renewal and strengthening of the Clean Air Act.

important. Ceremonial activities give them an important symbolic aura and a great deal of favorable press coverage, contributing to their efforts to build public support.

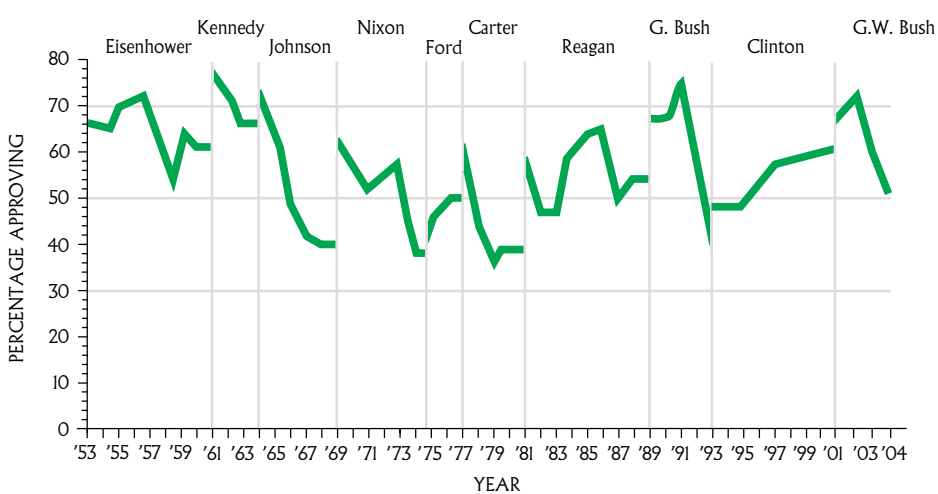
Presidential Approval

Much of the energy the White House devotes to public relations is aimed at increasing the president's public approval. The White House believes that the higher the president stands in the polls, the easier it is to persuade others to support presidential initiatives. Because of the connection between public support and presidential influence, the president's standing in the polls is monitored closely by the press, members of Congress, and others in the Washington political community. For years, the Gallup Poll has asked Americans: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way John Kennedy, George W. Bush, etc. is handling his job as president?" You can see the results in Figure 13.3.

Presidents frequently do not have widespread public support, often failing to win even majority approval. Figure 13.4 shows the average approval levels of recent presidents. Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter did not receive approval from 50 percent of the public on the average. Ronald Reagan had only a 52 percent approval level. For three years, George Bush enjoyed much higher levels of approval on the average than his



Figure 13.3 Average Yearly Presidential Approval



For years the Gallup Poll has asked Americans, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way ___ is handling his job as president?" Here you can track the percentage approving of presidential performance from Eisenhower to George W. Bush. Notice that most presidents seem to be most popular when they first enter office; later on, their popularity often erodes. Bill Clinton was an exception.

Source: George C. Edwards III, *Presidential Approval* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); updated by the authors.

predecessors did. In his fourth year, however, his ratings dropped below the 40 percent mark. President Clinton struggled to rise above the 50 percent mark in his first term, and George W. Bush was at 51 percent before the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Presidential approval is the product of many factors.³³ At the base of presidential evaluations is the predisposition of many people to support the president. Political party identification provides the basic underpinning of approval or disapproval and mediates the impact of other factors. On average, those who identify with the president's party give approval more than 40 percentage points higher than do those who identify with the opposition party. Moreover, partisans are not inclined to approve presidents of the other party. Predispositions provide the foundations of presidential approval and furnish it with a basic stability.

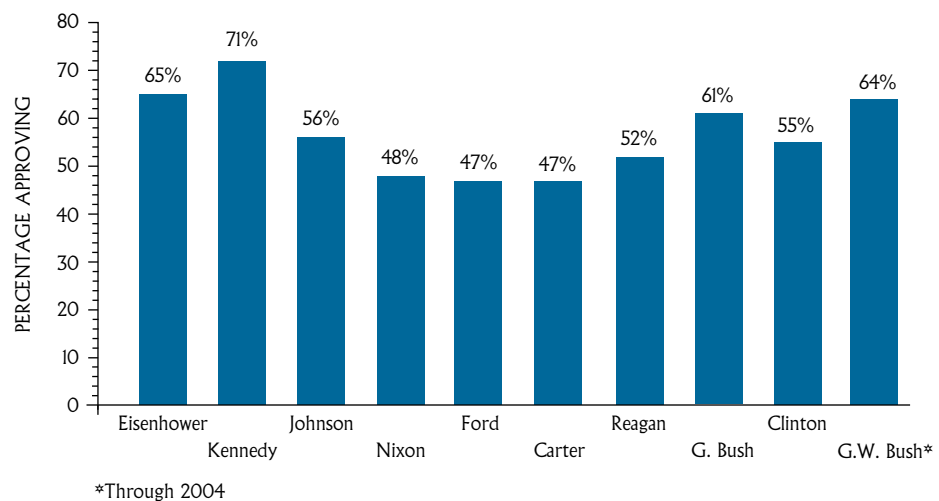
Presidents also usually benefit from a "honeymoon" with the American people after taking office. Some observers believe that "honeymoons" are fleeting phenomena in which the public affords new occupants of the White House only a short grace period before they begin their inevitable descent in the polls. You can see in Figure 13.3 that declines do take place, but they are neither inevitable nor swift. Throughout his two terms in office, Ronald Reagan experienced considerable volatility in his relations with the public, but his record certainly does not indicate that the loss of public support is inexorable or that support cannot be revived and maintained. George Bush obtained more public support in his third year in office than in his first two years, and Bill Clinton enjoyed more approval in his second term in office than in his first.

Changes in approval levels appear to reflect the public's evaluation of how the president is handling policy areas such as the economy, war, and foreign affairs. Different policies are salient to the public at different times. For example, if communism is collapsing, then foreign policy is likely to dominate the news and to be on the minds of Americans. If the economy turns sour, then people are going to be concerned about unemployment.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, citizens seem to focus on the president's efforts and stands on issues rather than on personality ("popularity") or simply how presidential policies affect them (the "pocketbook"). Job-related personal characteristics of the president, such as integrity and leadership skills, also play an important role in influencing presidential approval.

Sometimes public approval of the president takes sudden jumps. One popular explanation for these surges of support is "rally events," which John Mueller defined as events that are related to international relations, directly involve the United States and particularly the president, and are specific, dramatic, and sharply focused.³⁴ A classic

Figure 13.4 Average Presidential Approval for Entire Terms in Office



Source: George C. Edwards III, *Presidential Approval* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); updated by the authors.

example is the 18-percentage-point rise in President George Bush's approval ratings immediately after the fighting began in the Gulf War in 1991. George W. Bush's approval shot up 39 percentage points in September 2001. Such occurrences are unusual and isolated events, however; they usually have little enduring impact on a president's public approval. President Bush, for example, dropped precipitously in the polls and lost his bid for reelection in 1992.

The criteria on which the public evaluates presidents—such as the way they are handling the economy, where they stand on complex issues, and whether they are “strong” leaders—are open to many interpretations. The modern White House makes extraordinary efforts to control the context in which presidents appear in public and the way they are portrayed by the press, to try to influence how the public views them. The fact that presidents are frequently low in the polls anyway is persuasive testimony to the limits of presidential leadership of the public. As one student of the public presidency put it, “The supply of popular support rests on opinion dynamics over which the president may exert little direct control.”³⁵

Policy Support

Commentators on the presidency often refer to it as a “bully pulpit,” implying that presidents can persuade or even mobilize the public to support their policies if they are skilled communicators. Certainly presidents frequently do attempt to obtain public support for their policies with television or radio appearances and speeches to large groups.³⁶ All presidents since Truman have had media advice from experts on lighting, makeup, stage settings, camera angles, clothing, pacing of delivery, and other facets of making speeches.

Despite this aid and despite the experience that politicians have in speaking, presidential speeches designed to lead public opinion have typically been rather unimpressive. In the modern era only Franklin D. Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton could be considered especially effective speakers. The rest were not, and they appeared unimpressive under the glare of hot lights and the unflattering gaze of television cameras. Partly because of his limitations as a public speaker, President George Bush waited until he had been in office for over seven months before making his first nationally televised address in 1989.

Moreover, the public is not always receptive to the president's message. Chapter 6 showed that Americans are not especially interested in politics and government; thus, it is not easy to get their attention (see “Young People and Politics: The Generation Gap in Watching the President”). Citizens also have predispositions about public policy



John Kennedy was the first president to use public appearances regularly to seek popular backing for his policies. Despite his popularity and skills as a communicator, Kennedy was often frustrated in his attempts to win widespread support for his administration's “New Frontier” policies.



Young People and Politics

The Generation Gap in Watching the President

If the president is to persuade the public to support him and his policies, he must have the public's attention. He has been getting less of it, however. When President Nixon went on TV to give a speech or hold a press conference in the 1970s, many viewers had little other choice but to watch him if they had their TV on at that time. Today, when regular programming is preempted on the major networks for a presidential address, most people now can turn to either the many alternatives offered via cable TV or to a videotape or DVD if they are not interested in seeing what the president has to say. As a result, presidential speeches have been viewed by a smaller percentage of the American public in recent decades. The president cannot rely on a captive audience for a speech.

As described in Chapter 7, a whole generation has now grown up in the "narrowcasting" age, in which a number of cable stations that cater to particular audiences with a specific interest (such as ESPN, MTV, and C-SPAN) are available, as opposed to traditional "broadcasting." The Reagan years coincided with the rise of narrowcasting. Scholars have found that people over 65 years of age were about twice as likely to view the typical Reagan speech than those under 35. In addition, older people who tuned in were also much more attentive to President Reagan. When senior citizens said they watched a speech, two out of every three said they watched the whole thing. In contrast, less than one out of every three young viewers said they watched a typical speech in its entirety. Channel surfing, as facilitated by the widespread diffusion of TV and cable remote controls during the 1980s, apparently caught on much

faster with young adults—who used them to switch away from President Reagan's speeches.

The pattern of young people being less attentive to presidential messages has persisted, even for the high profile address President Bush delivered to Congress nine days after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Older citizens were about 20 percent more likely to tune in to hear from the president than were young adults. One might expect that young people would be especially attentive to speeches regarding the onset of a war that their cohort would be asked to fight. Yet, this was not the case. Young people were about 25 percent less likely to have tuned in to Bush's 2003 State of the Union speech, delivered shortly before the war with Iraq.

In sum, the audience for presidential speeches is now one that is unrepresentative of the general adult public in terms of age. When presidents address the nation in the narrowcasting age, they are actually likely to reach a much larger percentage of older than younger citizens. In some sense, then, presidents are in a less powerful position than in earlier decades. They have lost the ability to communicate directly with the American public anytime they see fit, making it more difficult to obtain the public's support.

Questions for Discussion

- Will the relative inattention to the president by today's young people persist as they age?
- Do you think presidents can govern effectively if they cannot connect to the people?

(however ill-informed) that act as screens for presidential messages. In the absence of national crises, most people are unreceptive to political appeals.³⁷

The public may misperceive or ignore even the most basic facts regarding presidential policy. For example, at the end of October 1994, 59 percent of the public thought the economy was still in recession (although it was growing so fast that the Federal Reserve Board was taking strong action to cool it off), only 34 percent knew the deficit had decreased since Clinton became president (it had decreased substantially), and 65 percent thought taxes on the middle class had increased during that period (income taxes had been raised for less than 2 percent of the public).³⁸ Partly as a consequence of these misconceptions, Clinton was frustrated repeatedly in his efforts to obtain public support for his policy initiatives.³⁹

Ronald Reagan, sometimes called the "Great Communicator," was certainly interested in policy change and went to unprecedented lengths to influence public opinion

on behalf of such policies as deregulation, decreases in spending on domestic policy, and increases in the defense budget. Bill Clinton was also an extraordinarily able communicator, and he traveled widely and spoke out constantly on behalf of his policies such as those dealing with the economy, health care reform, and free trade. Nevertheless, both presidents were typically unable to obtain the public's support for their initiatives and generally saw public opinion moving against them.⁴⁰

Mobilizing the Public

Sometimes merely changing public opinion is not sufficient, and the president wants the public to communicate its views directly to Congress. Mobilization of the public may be the ultimate weapon in the president's arsenal of resources with which to influence Congress. When the people speak, especially when they speak clearly, Congress listens.

Mobilizing the public involves overcoming formidable barriers and accepting substantial risks. It entails the double burden of obtaining both opinion support and political action from a generally inattentive and apathetic public. If the president tries to mobilize the public and fails, the lack of response speaks clearly to members of Congress.

Perhaps the most notable recent example of the president's mobilization of public opinion to pressure Congress is Ronald Reagan's effort to obtain passage of his tax-cut bill in 1981. Shortly before the crucial vote in the House, the president made a televised plea for support of his tax-cut proposals and asked the people to let their representatives in Congress know how they felt. Evidently Reagan's plea worked; thousands of phone calls, letters, and telegrams poured into congressional offices. On the morning of the vote, Speaker Tip O'Neill declared, "We are experiencing a telephone blitz like this nation has never seen. It's had a devastating effect."⁴¹ The president easily carried the day.

The Reagan administration's effort to mobilize the public on behalf of the 1981 tax cut is significant not only because of the success of presidential leadership but also because it appears to be an anomaly. In the remainder of Reagan's tenure, the president went repeatedly to the people regarding a wide range of policies, including the budget, aid to the Contras in Nicaragua, and defense expenditures. Despite high levels of approval for much of that time, Reagan was never again able to arouse many in his audience to communicate their support of his policies to Congress. Substantial tax cuts hold more appeal to the public than most other issues.

The President and the Press

Despite all their efforts to lead public opinion, presidents do not directly reach the American people on a day-to-day basis. The mass media provide people with most of what they know about chief executives and their policies. The media also interpret and analyze presidential activities, even the president's direct appeals to the public. The press is thus the principal intermediary between the president and the public, and relations with the press are an important aspect of the president's efforts to lead public opinion.

No matter who is in the White House or who reports on presidential activities, presidents and the press tend to be in conflict. George Washington complained that the "calumnies" against his administration were "outrages of common decency." Thomas Jefferson once declared that "nothing in a newspaper is to be believed." Presidents are inherently policy advocates. They want to control the amount and timing of information about their administration, whereas the press wants all the information that exists without delay. As long as their goals are different, presidents and the media are likely to be adversaries.

Because of the importance of the press to the president, the White House monitors the media closely. Some presidents have installed special televisions so they can watch the news on all the networks at once; Lyndon Johnson even had news tickers from AP, UPI, and Reuters in the Oval Office. The White House also goes to great

lengths to encourage the media to project a positive image of the president's activities and policies. About one-third of the high-level White House staff members are directly involved in media relations and policy of one type or another, and most staff members are involved at some time in trying to influence the media's portrayal of the president.

The person who most often deals directly with the press is the president's *press secretary*, who serves as a conduit of information from the White House to the press. Press secretaries conduct daily press briefings, giving prepared announcements and answering questions. They and their staff also arrange private interviews with White House officials (often done on a background basis, in which the reporter may not attribute remarks to the person being interviewed), photo opportunities, and travel arrangements for reporters when the president leaves Washington.

The best known direct interaction between the president and the press is the formal presidential press conference. Since the presidency of George Bush, however, prime time, televised press conferences have become rare events. Bill Clinton took office with an antagonistic attitude toward the national media and planned to bypass it rather than use it as part of his political strategy. After a rocky start in his press relations, the president made himself somewhat more accessible to the national press. Like Clinton, George W. Bush has relied more on travel around the country to gain television time to spread his message than on formal press conferences.

Despite their visibility, press conferences are not very useful means of eliciting information. Presidents and their staffs can anticipate most of the questions that will be asked and prepare answers to them ahead of time, reducing the spontaneity of the sessions. Moreover, the large size and public nature of press conferences reduce the candor with which the president responds to questions.

Most of the news coverage of the White House comes under the heading "body watch." In other words, reporters focus on the most visible layer of the president's personal and official activities and provide the public with step-by-step accounts. They are interested in what presidents are going to do, how their actions will affect others, how they view policies and individuals, and how they present themselves, rather than in the substance of policies or the fundamental processes operating in the executive branch. Former ABC White House correspondent Sam Donaldson tells of covering a meeting of Western leaders on the island of Guadeloupe. It was a slow news day, so Donaldson did a story on the roasting of the pig the leaders would be eating that night, including "an exclusive look at the oven in which the pig would be roasted."⁴² Because there are daily

The press secretary is the primary channel through which the White House communicates with the media. Here, President George W. Bush's press secretary, Scott McClellan, responds to reporters' questions.



deadlines to meet and television reporters must squeeze their stories into sound bites measured in seconds, not minutes, there is little time for reflection, analysis, or comprehensive coverage.

Bias is the most politically charged issue in relations between the president and the press. A large number of studies have concluded that the news media, including the television networks and major newspapers, are not biased *systematically* toward a particular person, party, or ideology, as measured in the amount or favorability of coverage.⁴³

To conclude that the news contains little explicitly partisan or ideological bias is not to argue that the news does not distort reality in its coverage of the president. As the following excerpt from Jimmy Carter's diary regarding a visit to a U.S. Army base in Panama in 1978 illustrates, "objective" reporting can be misleading.

*I told the Army troops that I was in the Navy for 11 years, and they boomed. I told them that we depended on the Army to keep the Canal open, and they cheered. Later, the news reports said that there were boos and cheers during my speech.*⁴⁴

We learned in Chapter 7 that the news is fundamentally superficial, oversimplified, and often overblown, all of which provides the public with a distorted view of, among other things, presidential activities, statements, policies, and options. We have also seen that the press prefers to frame the news in themes, which both simplifies complex issues and events and provides continuity of persons, institutions, and issues. Once these themes are established, the press tends to maintain them in subsequent stories. Of necessity, themes emphasize some information at the expense of other data, often determining what information is most relevant to news coverage and the context in which it is presented.

Once a stereotype of President Ford as a "bumbling" was established, every stumble was magnified as the press emphasized behavior that fit the mold. He was repeatedly forced to defend his intelligence, and many of his acts and statements were reported as efforts to "act" presidential. Once Ford was typecast, his image was repeatedly reinforced and was very difficult to overcome.⁴⁵

News coverage of the presidency often tends to emphasize the negative (even if the negative stories are presented in a seemingly neutral manner),⁴⁶ a trend that has increased over the past 20 years.⁴⁷ In the 1980 election campaign, the press portrayed President Carter as mean and Ronald Reagan as imprecise rather than Carter as precise and Reagan as pleasant. The emphasis, in other words, was on the candidates' negative qualities. George Bush received extraordinarily negative press coverage during the 1992 election campaign, and the television networks' portrayal of the economy, for which Bush was blamed, got worse as the economy actually improved to a robust rate of growth!⁴⁸

President Clinton received mostly negative coverage during his tenure in office, with a ratio of negative to positive comments on network television of about 2 to 1.⁴⁹ When the story broke regarding his affair with Monica Lewinsky, the press engaged in a feeding frenzy, providing an extraordinary amount of information on both the affair and the president's attempts to cover it up. Little of this coverage was favorable to the president.

White House reporters are always looking to expose conflicts of interest and other shady behavior of public officials. In addition, many of their inquiries revolve around the question "Is the president up to the job?" Reporters who are confined in the White House all day may attempt to make up for their lack of investigative reporting with sarcastic and accusatory questioning. Moreover, the desire to keep the public interested and the need for continuous coverage may create in the press a subconscious bias against the presidency that leads to negative stories.

Making a Difference

Helen Thomas

Journalist Helen Thomas is in her 80s and has been covering the White House since the Kennedy administration. She often arrives at 5:30 A.M., where her office is a tiny cubicle the size of a phone booth. The dean of the White House press, she, more than anyone else, sets the tone for White House coverage and ensures that Americans know as much as possible about the presidency. With a legendary nose for news that can anticipate a story days before it breaks, there is no more tenacious questioner in the press corps.



Issues of the Times

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The Issue: Who Controls White House News?

A vibrant democracy requires an informed public. The media provide people with most of what they know about chief executives and their policies. The media also interpret and analyze presidential activities. Dealing with the press is an important aspect of every presidency.

Despite their need for each other, the relationship between the White House and the press is often adversarial. The president wishes to control the amount and timing of information about his administration, whereas the press wants all the information that exists without delay. The president's press secretary, who conducts daily press briefings, must manage this difficult relationship. The following article discusses the efforts of George W. Bush's first press secretary, Ari Fleischer, to manage the White House press.



Read All About It

White House Keeps a Grip on Its News

BY JIM RUTENBERG

October 14, 2002

When he stands before the blue curtain of the White House press briefing area, Ari Fleischer, President Bush's press secretary, often seems downright chummy with reporters as they quiz him about the news of the day.

But in the privacy of his well-ordered office, he is not always so complimentary.

"There can be a tendency," he said in an interview, "of reporters kind of peacocking in front of each other to show each other and their editors, 'I'm the one, I can ask the same question a different way for the 18th time

to get the press secretary to say something different.'"

And the same goes for reporters, who often put on a cordial face during Mr. Fleischer's briefings but, privately, are often fuming.

"If the National Hurricane Center were as stingy with its information, there would be thousands dead," John Roberts, the senior CBS News White House correspondent, deadpanned in his West Wing broadcast booth the other day.

Mr. Roberts may have been joking, but the sentiment was real. "Ari has the uncanny ability to suck information out of a room," he added.

Tensions have escalated far beyond the inevitable grousing

between press secretaries and journalists, who said they could not remember a White House that was more grudging or less forthcoming in informing the press. Complaints from the White House press corps ranged from the paucity of presidential press conferences to fewer briefings from administration policy experts to instances where they believe they have been frozen out by White House officials when they ask questions considered out of bounds.

The White House in turn says these complaints are the result of its strict adherence to its own message,

Please see Grip

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Grip

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and a break from the tradition of gossip-mongering in the press.

Certainly, there have been strains between reporters and the press secretary in previous White Houses, and every administration has tried to prevent leaks and control spin.

But complaints about White House secrecy have reached new levels. White House reporters say they have been given very limited information about the cost, the length, and the risk of any military action in Iraq. They also contend that after Sept. 11, many more policy and governmental decisions are considered off limits for questions because of national security.

"We have a gap between information the public wants to know and information the White House has provided," said Bob Deans, the Cox Newspapers White House correspondent and the president of the White House Correspondents' Association.

"In this administration, the controls on information are tighter than in any other one I have covered," said Bill Plante, a CBS News White House correspondent, who has reported on the presidency since 1980.

Reporters also protest that they get little opportunity to directly quiz the president. Invitations to peek in on meetings between the president and foreign leaders, they say, do not come as often as they did in the past.

White House officials are proud of the discipline that reporters grouse about, and say they have such a relatively low leak factor because the president does not tolerate them, and officials have no interest in them. Still, Mr. Fleischer contends that reporters get as much information as needs to be available at the appropriate time, and have ample opportunity

to ask questions at various presidential photo opportunities, pool events and appearances with foreign leaders, which the White House puts at over 100.

"The press has plenty of access," Mr. Fleischer said. "I don't think it's a matter of withholding information—we withhold gossip."

With talk of war increasing, the White House press briefing room has become more confrontational. There, a fierce joust plays out day after day, as members of the White House press

Tensions have escalated far beyond the inevitable grousing between press secretaries and journalists, who said they could not remember a White House that was more grudging or less forthcoming in informing the press.

corps devise ways to draw Mr. Fleischer out in greater detail on the administration's case against Saddam Hussein—and Mr. Fleischer refuses to venture beyond his message of the day, often carried live on cable news.

For many reporters and producers, the briefings have become an exercise in frustration, a White House-produced television program in which they say they feel like unamused straight men, there to set up policy punchlines for Mr. Fleischer.

"I think Ari goes into the briefing with a message that he intends to deliver," said Campbell Brown, an NBC News White House correspon-

dent, "and what questions are asked is almost irrelevant."

Mr. Fleischer often does seem to stick to practiced catch phrases. Early this month, as the administration worked hard for stiffer United Nations weapons inspections terms, Mr. Fleischer warned six times that Mr. Hussein would play "cat-and-mouse games." During the same briefing, he repeated six times that the president would not accept a congressional war resolution that "ties his hands."

Mr. Fleischer said it was his policy to share new information only when the administration is ready to do so. "Why do they have to have everything spoon-fed ahead of time?" he asked.

Certain bits of information, he said, are withheld for good reason when the president is weighing action in Iraq on one front and considering homeland defense on the other. He said, for instance, that it was not in the administration's interests to divulge how far it was willing to compromise in negotiating over the congressional war resolution.

Mr. Fleischer expressed exasperation at what he considered to be a silly—and ultimately futile—exercise by reporters to prod him to say something controversial.

"Reporters who are polite, who gather their information with honey instead of vinegar, are going to get farther," he said. "I think the days of the shouting, the screaming, cynical approach have really ended."

As far as Mr. Fleischer is concerned, the press will never be satisfied. "I think there is a difference between the press's demand for information and the public's demand for information," he said. "Sometimes I think the press won't be satisfied until there's Oval Cam, and people can watch the president 24 hours a day in the Oval Office."

Think About It

- Do you think you are able to learn everything you need to know to evaluate the president and his policies?
- Should the relationship between the president and the press be adversarial, or should the press limit itself to transmitting what the White House wishes to say?
- Should the press be able to directly question the president more often?

On the other hand, the president has certain advantages in dealing with the press. He is typically portrayed with an aura of dignity and treated with deference.⁵⁰ According to Sam Donaldson, who was generally considered an aggressive White House reporter, “For every truly tough question I’ve put to officials, I’ve asked a dozen that were about as tough as Grandma’s apple dumplings.”⁵¹ Thus, when he left after serving as President Reagan’s press secretary for six years, Larry Speakes told reporters they had given the Reagan administration “a fair shake.”⁵²

Remember that the White House can largely control the environment in which the president meets the press—even going so far as to have the Marine helicopters revved as Ronald Reagan approached them so that he could not hear reporters’ questions and give unrehearsed responses. (See “Issues of the Times: Who Controls White House News?”)

Understanding the American Presidency

Because the presidency is the single most important office in American politics, there has always been concern about whether the president is a threat to democracy. The importance of the president has raised similar concerns for the scope of government in America.

The Presidency and Democracy

From the time the Constitution was written, there has been a fear that the presidency would degenerate into a monarchy or a dictatorship. Even America’s greatest presidents have heightened these fears at times. Despite George Washington’s well-deserved reputation for peacefully relinquishing power, he also had certain regal tendencies that fanned the suspicions of the Jeffersonians. Abraham Lincoln, for all his humility, exercised extraordinary powers at the outbreak of the Civil War. Since that time, political commentators have alternated between extolling and fearing a strong presidency.

Concerns over presidential power are generally closely related to policy views. Those who oppose the president’s policies are the most likely to be concerned about *too much* presidential power. As you have seen, however, aside from acting outside the law and the Constitution, there is little prospect that the presidency will be a threat to democracy. The Madisonian system of checks and balances remains intact.

This system is especially evident in an era characterized by divided government—government in which the president is of one party and a majority in each house of Congress is of the other party. Some observers are concerned that there is too much checking and balancing and too little capacity to act on pressing national challenges. More potentially important legislation fails to pass under divided government than when one party controls both the presidency and Congress.⁵³ However, major policy change *is* possible under a divided government. One author found that major change is just as likely to occur when the parties share control as when one party holds both the presidency and a majority in each house of Congress.⁵⁴

The Presidency and the Scope of Government

Some of the most noteworthy presidents in the twentieth century (including Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt) have successfully advocated substantial increases in the role of the national government. Supporting an increased role for government is not inherent in the presidency, however; leadership can move in many directions.

All seven presidents since Lyndon Johnson have championed constraints on government and limits on spending, especially in domestic policy. It is often said that the American people are ideologically conservative and operationally liberal. For most of the past generation, it has been their will to choose presidents who reflected their ide-



How You Can Make a Difference

The Fast Track to the White House

Since the scandal involving President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, presidential interns have become the butt of late night comedians' jokes. However, this bad publicity should not discourage you from investigating one of the best experiences available to college students who are eager to get a taste of politics at the top. This prestigious and highly competitive program allows you to actively participate in the federal government's policy decisions from inside the White House.

The White House Internship Program allows select college students to work within over 30 different offices under the control of the Executive Office of the President. Interns work in the more familiar offices of the chief of staff, communications, and press secretary's office as well as the lesser-known offices of the counsel of the president, executive clerk's office, and National Economic Council. Most of these internships are not located within the West Wing (where the president works) but at other buildings, especially the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, within the White House complex. In fact, fewer than a third of the over 500 interns at any one time ever secure

valid passes granting them access to the West Wing. Because the purpose of this program is primarily educational, interns learn skills and information that prove extremely valuable after graduation, whether one pursues a career in public office or the private sector. The work, though, is grinding and seldom glamorous. Long hours and hard work can gain an intern the reputation as a "trooper," a long sought-after title. Intense competition between interns for recognition is normal. Many interns hope to translate their internship into a paid position within the White House or another government agency after graduation.

How do you become a White House intern? There are two routes. First, according to Mike McCurry, former White House spokesman, it helps to have connections. "Many of [the interns] are sons and daughters of supporters," he said. Most college students, however, will compete purely on merit with the other applicants. To learn more, go to the White House homepage (www.whitehouse.gov/government/wh-intern.html) to download an application. Along with the application, you must submit a résumé, a personal statement, a writing sample, two letters of recom-

mendation, and a transcript. Although one is only required to be 18 years or older, most interns are either juniors or seniors in college. Among the criteria considered in the selection process are community service, academic achievement, extracurricular activity, and writing skills. Also, be aware that you must pass a background investigation to be admitted to the White House complex. Remember, in a few years, those late night comedy skits will be ancient history, but the opportunity to serve as a White House intern will remain with you (and your résumé) for a lifetime!

What you can do:

- Log onto www.whitehouse.gov/government/wh-intern.html for further information.
- Volunteer for a political campaign office in order to gain valuable experience.
- Ask your parents or friends if they know anybody in government. You never know!

Source: Duncan Moon, "Washington Interns: Lots of Gofer Work, Little Glamour," *Christian Science Monitor* 90 (January 29, 1998), 44:12.

ology and a Congress that represented their appetite for public service. It has been the president more often than Congress who has said "no" to government growth.

Summary

Americans expect a lot from presidents—perhaps too much. The myth of the president as a powerhouse clouds Americans' image of presidential reality. Presidents mainly have the power to persuade, not to impose their will.

Presidents do not work alone. Gone are the days when the presidency meant the president plus a few aides and advisors. The cabinet, the Executive Office of the President, and the White House staff all assist today's presidents. These services come at a price, however, and presidents must organize their subordinates effectively for decision-making and policy execution.

Although presidential leadership of Congress is central to all administrations, it often proves frustrating. Presidents rely on their party, the public, and their own

legislative skills to persuade Congress to support their policies, but most of the time their efforts are at the margins of coalition building. Rarely are presidents in a position to create—through their own leadership—opportunities for major changes in public policy. They may, however, use their skills to exploit favorable political conditions to bring about policy change.

Some of the president's most important responsibilities fall in the area of national security. As chief diplomat and commander in chief of the armed forces, the president is the country's crisis manager. Still, disputes with Congress over war powers and presidential discretion in foreign affairs demonstrate that even in regard to national security, the president operates within the Madisonian system of checks and balances.

Because presidents are dependent on others to accomplish their goals, their greatest challenge is to obtain support. Public opinion can be an important resource for presidential persuasion, and the White House works hard to influence the public. Public approval of presidents and their policies is often elusive, however; the public does not reliably respond to presidential leadership. The press is the principal intermediary between the president and the public, and relations with the press present yet another challenge to the White House's efforts to lead public opinion.

KEY TERMS

Twenty-second Amendment
impeachment
Watergate
Twenty-fifth Amendment
cabinet

National Security Council (NSC)
Council of Economic Advisors (CEA)
Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

veto
pocket veto
presidential coattails
War Powers Resolution
legislative veto
crisis

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.whitehouse.gov/

Links to presidential speeches, documents, schedules, radio addresses, federal statistics, and White House press releases and briefings.

www.whitehouse.gov/government/eop.html

Information about the Executive Office of the President.

www.ibiblio.org/lia/president/

Links to presidents and presidential libraries.

<http://www.ipl.org/div/potus>

Background on presidents and their administrations.

www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/fedprs.html

Wide range of documents regarding the president's activities.

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

Presidential papers, documents, and data.

www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/watergate_and_constitution/chronology.html

Contains background and details of the Watergate scandal.



GET CONNECTED

Approving of the President

The White House invests a great deal of time and energy in its public relations efforts designed to increase the president's public approval. A president who is popular with the people may find it easier to enact his initiatives. Throughout a president's term in office, approval ratings rise and fall in reaction to current events in the United States and abroad as well as in response to actions taken by the president. Different polling agencies use different questions to gauge presidential approval, but most follow the pattern set by the Gallup Poll: "Do you approve of the way [name of president] is handling his job as president?"

Search the Web

Go to the Polling Report's Politics & Policy page <http://www.pollingreport.com/POLPOL.htm> and click on "White House" to access the president's job approval ratings. Compare the ratings of the president to the historical information on presidential approval ratings presented in the textbook.

Questions To Ask

- When were the president's job approval ratings the highest? The lowest? Are the ratings trending up or down for the president?
- How similar are the ratings of different polling organizations?
- What were the major reasons for changes in the president's approval?

Why It Matters

Presidents believe that public approval is the political resource that has the most potential to turn a stalemate between the president and Congress into a supportive situation for the president's legislative proposals. The White House also believes that lack of public support strengthens the resolve of the president's opponents and narrows the range in which presidential policies receive the benefit of the doubt.

Get Involved

Keep track of how presidential approval is reported in your local newspaper and on the national television networks. Also watch to see whether Congress is more responsive and press coverage is more positive when the president ranks high in the polls.

To see more *Get Connected* exercises for Chapter 13, go to www.ablongman.com/edwards.

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