

# 12

# The Presidency

## Politics in Action: Presidential Power



As Barack Obama waited to deliver his State of the Union address in January 2012, he could reflect on his three years as president. They had certainly been eventful. Winning an historic election in 2008, he had hoped to make rapid progress on his agenda for change. Once in office, however, he had to deal first with the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression. Only then could he turn his attention to health care reform, climate change and energy legislation, immigration, and other crucial matters. Each of these issues presented challenges in forming winning coalitions, especially since Republicans adamantly opposed his proposals.

He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet he also had to make critical and difficult decisions regarding the use of U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Stopping the development of nuclear weapons in Iran and North Korea posed intractable problems. In addition, he had to deal with regime changes in the Middle East.

The poor economy, the controversial nature of his proposals for reform, and the strident tone of the opposition all contributed to a decline in both his public approval and his party's chances in the 2010 midterm elections. He had campaigned as an agent of change, and he had proposed many reforms, but he faced the same challenges in accomplishing his goals as his predecessors. His frustrations only increased after the Republicans took control of the House in 2011.

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Being president is the most difficult job in government. Every president faces the challenge of living up to the expectations of the American people while having limited power to do so. Thus, being a successful chief executive requires much more than arriving at correct decisions.



**The Big Picture** Is the President of the United States really the most powerful person in the country? Author George C. Edwards III explains the limitations that are placed upon the president, and gives examples of challenges presidents have historically faced accomplishing their goals.



**The Basics** What do presidents do? The simple answer is “an awful lot.” In this video, you’ll hear what ordinary people think about what presidents should do. In the process, you’ll discover why there is often a gap between what we expect and what we get.



**In Context** Uncover the historical context that led the Framers to fear a strong executive. In this video University of Oklahoma political scientist Glen Krutz not only reveals the reason behind the Framers’ apprehension, but also explores how this fear still restricts presidents today as they struggle to create new policies.



**Thinking Like a Political Scientist** Why do presidents try to persuade you to support their policies? In this video, University of Oklahoma political scientist Glen Krutz discloses why persuasion is vital to a president’s success and how technology has created obstacles and opportunities for presidents.



**In the Real World** Should President Obama have used an executive order to change immigration policy? The president bypassed Congress to implement his own agenda. Find out why some people believe the president abused his powers and others think he was entirely justified.



**So What?** Feel like the President hasn’t fulfilled all his campaign promises? Find out why that may not be his fault. Author George C. Edwards III reveals what characteristics make a good president, and gives tips on what you should be evaluating candidates for when you prepare to vote.



Powerful, strong, leader of the free world, commander in chief—these are common images of the American president. The only place in the world where television networks assign permanent camera crews is the White House. The presidency is power, at least according to popular myth. Problems are brought to the president's desk, the president decides on the right courses of action and issues orders, and an army of aides and bureaucrats carries out these orders.

As Barack Obama 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."<sup>1</sup> Congress is beholden not to the president, but to the individual constituencies of its members. Cabinet members often push on behalf of their departmental interests and constituencies (farmers in the case of the Department of Agriculture, 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, especially about presidential power. World history is replete with examples of leaders who have exceeded the prescribed boundaries of their power. Is the Madisonian system strong enough to prevent the presidency from becoming too powerful and posing a threat to democracy? 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?

Another 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?

Because not everyone bends easily to even the most persuasive president, the president must be a *leader*. Richard Neustadt famously argued that presidents were generally in a weak position to command, so they had to rely on persuasion.<sup>2</sup> George Edwards found that presidents have a difficult time changing people's minds, however, so they have to recognize and exploit opportunities already in their environments.<sup>3</sup> To be effective, the president must have highly developed *political skills* to understand the political forces around him, 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 following sections explore who presidents are and how they try to lead those whose support they need to accomplish their goals.

## The Presidents

### 12.1

Characterize the expectations for and the backgrounds of presidents and identify paths to the White House and how presidents may be removed.

**T**

he 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.



have resided in the United States for at least 14 years. Before Barack Obama was inaugurated as the forty-fourth president in 2009, all American presidents had been white males and, except for John Kennedy, Protestant. This homogeneity conceals considerable variety. Over the years, all manner of men have occupied the Oval Office. Thomas Jefferson was a scientist and scholar who assembled dinosaur bones when presidential business was slack. Woodrow Wilson, the only political scientist ever to become president, combined a Presbyterian moral fervor and righteousness with a professor's intimidating style of leadership and speech making. His successor, Warren G. Harding, became president because Republican leaders thought he looked like one. Poker was his pastime. Out of his element in the job, Harding is almost everyone's choice as the worst American president. His speech making, said opponent William G. McAdoo, sounded "like an army of pompous phrases marching across the landscape in search of an idea." Harding's friends stole the government blind, prompting his brief assessment of the presidency: "God, what a job!"

Since 1953, the White House has been home to 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 almost his entire political career in the House of Representatives, a former governor who had been a Georgia peanut wholesaler, an actor who was also a former governor of California, a CIA chief and ambassador who was the son of a U.S. senator, an ambitious governor from a small state, a former managing director of a Major League Baseball team who had won his first election only six years before becoming president, and a young black man who had served in national office for only four years before assuming the role of commander in chief (see Table 12.1).

So far, no woman has served as president. As social prejudices diminish and more women are elected to positions that serve as stepping stones to the presidency, it is likely that this situation will change.

## □ How They Got There

Regardless of their ability, background, or character, all presidents must come to the job through one of two basic routes.

**ELECTIONS: THE TYPICAL ROAD TO THE WHITE HOUSE** Most presidents take a familiar journey to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue: they run for president through the electoral process. The Constitution guarantees a four-year term once in office (unless the president is convicted in an impeachment trial), but the **Twenty-second Amendment**, ratified in 1951, limits presidents to being elected to only two terms.

Only 13 presidents have actually served 2 or (in Franklin Roosevelt's case) more full terms in the White House: Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Jackson, Grant, Cleveland (whose terms were not consecutive), Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Reagan, Clinton, and George W. Bush. A few—Coolidge, Polk, Pierce, Buchanan, Hayes, and Lyndon Johnson—decided against a second term. Seven others—both the Adamses, Van Buren, Taft, Hoover, Carter, and George H. W. Bush—thought they had earned a second term but found that the voters did not concur.

**SUCCESSION** For more than 10 percent of American history, an individual who was not elected to the office has served as president. About one in five presidents succeeded to the job because they were vice president when the incumbent president either died or (in Nixon's case) resigned (see Table 12.2). In the twentieth century, almost one-third (5 of 18) of those who occupied the office were "accidental presidents."

The **Twenty-fifth Amendment**, ratified in 1967, created a means for selecting a new vice president when that office becomes vacant. The president nominates a new vice president, who assumes the office when both houses of Congress approve the nomination by majority vote. President Nixon chose Gerald Ford as vice president

### Twenty-second Amendment

Ratified in 1951, this amendment limits presidents to two terms of office.

### Twenty-fifth Amendment

Ratified in 1967, this amendment permits the vice president to become acting president if the vice president and the president's cabinet determine that the president is disabled, and it outlines how a recuperated president can reclaim the job.

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TABLE 12.1 RECENT PRESIDENTS

	President	Term	Party	Background	Presidency
12.2	Dwight D. Eisenhower	1953–1961	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commander of Allied forces in Europe in World War II</li> <li>• Never voted until he ran for president</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presided over relatively tranquil 1950s</li> <li>• Conservative domestic policies</li> <li>• Cool crisis management</li> <li>• Enjoyed strong public approval</li> </ul>
12.3	John F. Kennedy	1961–1963	Democrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. senator from Massachusetts</li> <li>• From very wealthy family</li> <li>• War hero</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Known for personal style</li> <li>• Presided over Cuban missile crisis</li> <li>• Ushered in era of liberal domestic policies</li> <li>• Assassinated in 1963</li> </ul>
12.4	Lyndon B. Johnson	1963–1969	Democrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senate majority leader</li> <li>• Chosen as Kennedy's running mate; succeeded him after the assassination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skilled legislative leader with a coarse public image</li> <li>• Launched the Great Society</li> <li>• Won passage of major civil rights laws</li> <li>• Escalated the Vietnam War</li> <li>• War policies proved unpopular; did not seek reelection</li> </ul>
12.5	Richard M. Nixon	1969–1974	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. senator from California</li> <li>• Served two terms as Eisenhower's vice president</li> <li>• Lost presidential election of 1960 to John F. Kennedy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presided over period of domestic policy innovation</li> <li>• Reopened relations with China</li> <li>• Ended Vietnam War</li> <li>• Resigned as a result of Watergate scandal</li> </ul>
12.6	Gerald R. Ford	1974–1977	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• House minority leader</li> <li>• First person ever nominated as vice president under Twenty-fifth Amendment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pardoned Richard Nixon</li> <li>• Helped heal the nation's wounds after Watergate</li> <li>• Lost election in 1976 to Jimmy Carter</li> </ul>
12.7	Jimmy Carter	1977–1981	Democrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governor of Georgia</li> <li>• Peanut farmer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viewed as honest but politically unskilled</li> <li>• Managed Iranian hostage crisis</li> <li>• Lost bid for reelection in 1980</li> <li>• Brokered peace between Egypt and Israel</li> </ul>
12.8	Ronald W. Reagan	1981–1989	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governor of California</li> <li>• Well-known actor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Won a substantial tax cut</li> <li>• Led fight for a large increase in defense spending</li> <li>• Hurt by Iran-Contra scandal</li> <li>• Known as the Great Communicator</li> </ul>
	George H. W. Bush	1989–1993	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. representative from Texas</li> <li>• Director of CIA</li> <li>• Ambassador to UN</li> <li>• Served two terms as Reagan's vice president</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led international coalition to victory in Gulf War</li> <li>• Presided over end of Cold War</li> <li>• Popular until economy stagnated</li> <li>• Lost reelection bid in 1992</li> </ul>
	William J. Clinton	1993–2001	Democrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governor of Arkansas</li> <li>• Rhodes Scholar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moved Democrats to center</li> <li>• Presided over balanced budget</li> <li>• Benefited from strong economy</li> <li>• Tenure marred by Monica Lewinsky scandal</li> <li>• Impeached but not convicted</li> </ul>
	George W. Bush	2001–2009	Republican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governor of Texas</li> <li>• Son of President George Bush</li> <li>• Elected without plurality of the vote</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched war on terrorism</li> <li>• Won large tax cut</li> <li>• Established Department of Homeland Security</li> <li>• Began war with Iraq</li> </ul>
	Barack Obama	2009–	Democrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senator from Illinois</li> <li>• First African American elected as president</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealt with financial crisis</li> <li>• Continued war on terrorism</li> <li>• Won health care reform</li> </ul>

when Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned, and Ford then assumed the presidency when Nixon himself resigned. Thus, Ford did not run for either the vice presidency or the presidency before taking office.

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 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. A law specifies 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.

**IMPEACHMENT** Removing a discredited president before the end of a term is not easy. The Constitution prescribes the process of **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.

### 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.

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## Why It Matters to You

### 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 legislature could change the chief executive at any time.

The House has impeached only two presidents. It impeached Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's successor, in 1868 on charges stemming from his disagreement with Radical Republicans over Civil War reconstruction policies. He narrowly escaped conviction. On July 31, 1974, the House Judiciary Committee voted to recommend that the full House impeach Richard Nixon as a result of the **Watergate** scandal. The three articles of impeachment charged that Nixon had (1) obstructed justice, (2) abused

**TABLE 12.2** INCOMPLETE PRESIDENTIAL TERMS

President	Term	Succeeded 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 <sup>a</sup>	Andrew Johnson
James A. Garfield	March 4, 1881–September 19, 1881	Chester A. Arthur
William McKinley	March 4, 1901–September 14, 1901 <sup>a</sup>	Theodore Roosevelt
Warren G. Harding	March 4, 1921–August 2, 1923	Calvin Coolidge
Franklin D. Roosevelt	January 20, 1945–April 12, 1945 <sup>b</sup>	Harry S. Truman
John F. Kennedy	January 20, 1961–November 22, 1963	Lyndon B. Johnson
Richard M. Nixon	January 20, 1973–August 9, 1974 <sup>a</sup>	Gerald R. Ford

<sup>a</sup>Second term.

<sup>b</sup>Fourth term.



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.

his power, and (3) failed to comply with congressional subpoenas. Soon thereafter, a tape recording of White House conversations provided evidence that even Nixon's defenders found convincing, and Nixon resigned from the presidency rather than face certain impeachment and a Senate trial. In 1998, the House voted two articles of impeachment against President Bill Clinton on party-line votes. The public clearly opposed the idea, however, and in 1999 the Senate voted to acquit the president on both counts.

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, for example, 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.* 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.* When Andrew Johnson was impeached in 1868 and survived conviction by only one vote, the real issue was his disagreement with Congress over the policy of Reconstruction following the Civil War. Johnson's impeachment is widely viewed as an abuse of impeachment power.
4. *Impeachment is an inherently political process.* 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. Thus, in Clinton's case, the question of what constituted an impeachable offense was hotly debated, as you can read in "You Are the Policymaker: What Should Be the Criteria for Impeaching the President?"

# You Are the Policymaker

## What Should Be the Criteria for Impeaching the President?

**W**hen the story of President Bill Clinton's sexual liaison with Monica Lewinsky first broke in January 1998, astute political observers immediately perceived that this was more than a lurid sex scandal involving the president. For although the sex angle attracted the most attention, there were also allegations of President Clinton committing perjury when questioned about the affair and obstructing justice by urging Lewinsky to lie under oath. These charges would clearly put any private citizen in danger of being indicted in a criminal court. For a president, who cannot be indicted while in office, it meant possible impeachment by the House of Representatives followed by a Senate trial.

After months of investigation into the allegations, 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.

The White House fought back. First, the president apologized to the nation and engaged in a round of expressions of remorse before a variety of audiences. At the same time, the White House accused Starr of 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.

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. In the Senate trial that followed, the standards for removing a president from office were hotly debated. Ultimately, neither article received support from even a bare majority of senators, much less the two-thirds threshold necessary to convict him of high crimes and misdemeanors.

**What do you think?** If you were a member of the House, would *you* have voted to impeach President Clinton?

## Presidential Powers

### 12.2 Evaluate the president's constitutional powers and the expansion of presidential power.

**T**he contemporary presidency hardly resembles the one the Constitution's 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 Framers 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 seen<sup>7</sup> (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 12.3). The Framers' invention fit nicely within the Madisonian system of shared power and checks and balances, forcing the president to obtain the support of officials in 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) but also the

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**Simulation:** You Are a  
First-Term President

## President or Prime Minister?

The Framers chose 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, known as the prime minister, is selected by the members of the legislature from among themselves, rather than by the voters. More specifically, 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 votes in the legislature. 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, he might have to call for an immediate election to try to obtain a working majority under unfavorable circumstances. 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 Framers were concerned about the concentration of power and 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.

### CRITICAL THINKING QUESTION

Would the United States be better off with a parliamentary system in which the majority party would have the power to govern and thus keep its electoral promises?

**TABLE 12.3** 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

excesses of state legislatures. 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.

## □ 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 an institution epitomizing democratic government.<sup>8</sup> By the 1970s, many felt differently. Lyndon Johnson and the unpopular Vietnam War made people reassess the role of presidential power, and Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal heightened public distrust. The Pentagon Papers, a secret history of the Vietnam War, revealed presidential duplicity. Nixon's “enemies list” and his avowed goal to “screw our enemies” by illegally auditing their taxes, tapping their phones, and using “surreptitious entry” (a euphemism for burglary) asserted that the president was above the law, possessing “inherent powers” that permitted presidents to order acts that otherwise would be illegal.

Early defenders of a strong presidency made sharp turnabouts in their position. In his book *The Imperial Presidency*, historian Arthur Schlesinger argued that the presidency had become too powerful for the nation's own good.<sup>9</sup> (Critics pointed out that Schlesinger did not seem to feel that way when he worked in the Kennedy 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.”<sup>10</sup>

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. Once again, the country sought a strong leader, and in the 1980s many thought it found one in Ronald Reagan. Although Reagan experienced short periods of great influence, more typically he was frustrated in achieving his goals as the American political system settled back into its characteristic mode of stalemate and incremental policymaking.

## executive orders

Regulations originating with the executive branch. Executive orders are one method presidents can use to control the bureaucracy.

The Iran–Contra affair, in which some White House aides engaged in illegal activities, kept concern about a tyrannical presidency alive, while Reagan’s inability, in most instances, to sway Congress evoked a desire on the part of some (mostly conservatives) for a stronger presidency. Reagan’s immediate successors, George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, often found it difficult to get things done.

The presidency of George W. Bush raised anew the issue of presidential power. He asserted an expansive view of the president’s constitutional powers, including withholding information from Congress under the doctrine of executive privilege to encourage candid advice from his aides, issuing statements when he signed new laws asserting the right to disregard certain provisions in them, ordering without warrants electronic surveillance of individuals, and holding prisoners without trial for an indefinite period. Once again, critics charged that presidential power threatened the constitutional balance of powers.

## Running the Government: The Chief Executive

**12.3** Describe the roles of the vice president, cabinet, Executive Office of the President, White House staff, and First Lady.



Although we often refer to the president as 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 receives less publicity than, for example, 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 nearly \$4 trillion a year and numbers more than 4 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 president’s resources for controlling this bureaucracy is the 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.

Presidents also use **executive orders** to run the government. These orders carry the force of law and are used to implement statutes, treaties, and provisions of the Constitution.<sup>11</sup> Harry Truman desegregated the military, John F. Kennedy created the Peace Corps, Lyndon Johnson began affirmative action, Richard Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency, Ronald Reagan centralized powers of regulatory review in the Office of Management and Budget, and George W. Bush established military tribunals for terrorists by executive order.

This section focuses 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; it has also often been an effort to placate some important symbolic constituency. Jimmy Carter, a moderate southerner, selected as his running mate Walter Mondale, a well-known liberal from Minnesota, and conservative Ronald Reagan chose his chief rival, George H. W. Bush, in part to please Republican moderates.<sup>12</sup>

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).

Before the mid-1970s, vice presidents usually found that their main job was waiting. The Constitution assigns them the minor tasks of presiding over the Senate and voting in case of a tie among the senators. As George H. W. Bush put it when he was vice president, “The buck doesn’t stop here.” Nonetheless, recent presidents have taken their vice presidents more seriously, involving them in policy discussions and important diplomacy.<sup>13</sup>

The relationship between Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale marked a watershed in the vice presidency, as Mondale, an experienced senator, became a close advisor to the president, a Washington outsider. In choosing George H. W. Bush, Ronald Reagan also chose a vice president with extensive Washington experience. To become intimates of the president, both vice presidents had to be completely loyal, losing their political independence in the process. Although Bush himself chose as vice president 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 advised the president on a wide range of issues and chaired task forces dealing with major policy issues. He also was the focus of criticism, especially from those opposed to his support for the aggressive use of military power and an expansive view of presidential power. Barack Obama chose Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware as his vice president. Biden had substantial experience in government and became a close adviser to the president, especially on foreign policy. He also represented the president abroad and served as an important liaison with members of Congress.

## □ 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 (heads of the executive departments) 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.”

### 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, the attorney general, and others designated by the president.

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**TABLE 12.4 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 War 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

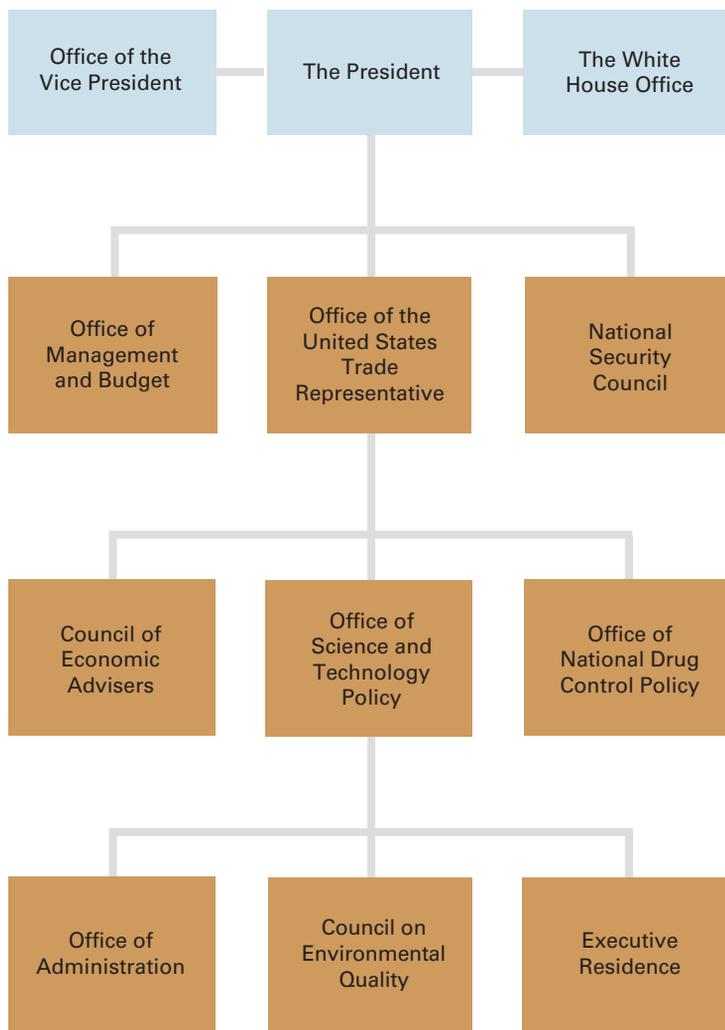
George Washington's cabinet was small, consisting of just three secretaries (state, treasury, and war) and the attorney general. Presidents since Washington have increased the size of the cabinet by requesting Congress to establish new executive departments. Today 14 secretaries and the attorney general head executive departments and constitute the cabinet (see Table 12.4). In addition, presidents may designate other officials (the ambassador to the United Nations is a common choice) as cabinet members.<sup>14</sup>

Even in making his highest-level appointments, the president is subject to the constitutional system of checks and balances. For example, President Barack Obama nominated Tom Daschle, a former senator, as secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. However, he had to withdraw the nomination after it became clear that Daschle's tax problems would create a barrier to his confirmation by the Senate.

## □ 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.<sup>15</sup> Congress has created some of these offices by legislation, and the president has simply organized the rest. The Executive Office started small in 1939, when President Roosevelt established it, but has grown with the rest of government. Three major policymaking bodies are housed in the Executive Office—the National Security Council, the Council of Economic Advisers, and the Office of Management and Budget—along with several other units that serve the president (see Figure 12.1).

**FIGURE 12.1** EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT



SOURCE: White House ([www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop](http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop))

The **National Security Council** (NSC) is the committee that links the president's key foreign and military policy advisers. 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, running a staff whose responsibilities include providing the president with information and policy recommendations on national security, aiding the president in national security crisis management, coordinating agency and departmental activities related to national security, and monitoring the implementation of national security policy.

The **Council of Economic Advisers** (CEA) has three members, each appointed by the president, who advise the president 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) originated as the Bureau of the Budget (BOB), which was 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. 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 has an agenda, presidents need a clearinghouse—the OMB. Presidents use the OMB to review legislative

### National Security Council

The committee that links the president's foreign and military policy advisers. 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 Advisers

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

### Office of Management and Budget

An office that prepares the president's budget and also advises presidents on proposals from departments and agencies and helps review their proposed regulations.

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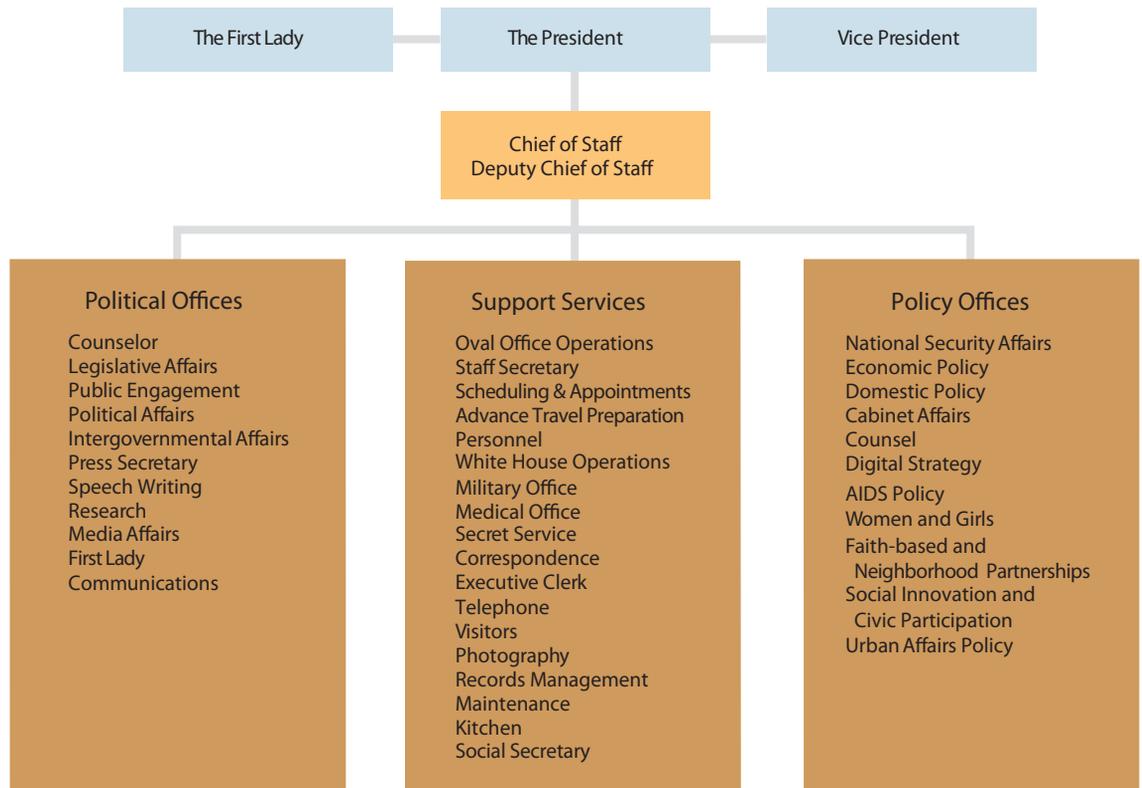
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**FIGURE 12.2** PRINCIPAL OFFICES IN THE WHITE HOUSE



SOURCE: White House ([www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop](http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop))

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.

Although presidents find that the Executive Office is smaller and more manageable than the cabinet departments, it is still filled with people who often are performing jobs required by law. 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. Woodrow Wilson was in the habit of typing his own letters. As recently as the 1920s, the entire budget for the White House staff was no more than \$80,000 per year.

Today, the White House staff includes about 600 people—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 12.2). At the top of the White House staff are the key aides the president sees daily: the chief of staff, congressional liaison aides, a press secretary, a national security assistant, and a few other administrative and political assistants.

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 mundane 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. Dwight Eisenhower’s Sherman Adams, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Harry Hopkins, and Richard Nixon’s Henry Kissinger, 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 styles. 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.

Recent presidents illustrate significant contrasts in decision-making styles. President Clinton 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 took pride in being decisive and was more likely to delegate responsibility than was Clinton. Bush, however, was less likely to persist in asking probing questions. Investigations into the Bush White House’s decision making regarding the war in Iraq have found that the president’s aides sometimes failed to properly vet information and follow other appropriate procedures. Barack Obama has a deliberative decision-making style that is more orderly than Clinton’s and more likely to challenge the premises of policy advocates than Bush’s.

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 advisers 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 some people may 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 drug abuse prevention, and Barbara Bush advocated literacy, as did Laura Bush, a former librarian.

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 responsible and visible leadership position ever held by a First Lady. She was an influential adviser to the president, playing an active role in the selection of



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. First Lady Michelle Obama gave high priority to supporting military families and veterans.

- *How would things change if a woman were elected president and her spouse was the First Man?*

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. Michelle Obama has focused on a range of issues, which have included fighting childhood obesity, supporting military families, helping working women balance career and family, and encouraging national service.

## Presidential Leadership of Congress: The Politics of Shared Powers

**12.4** Assess the impact of various sources of presidential influence on the president's ability to win congressional support.

**A** long with their responsibility for running the executive branch, presidents must also deal intensively with the legislative branch. 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, they must devote much of their time in office to leading the legislature in order to gain support for their initiatives. This effort requires wielding constitutional powers, building party coalitions, exploiting popular support, and exercising legislative skills.

## □ 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 simply requires that the president give a State of the Union report to Congress and instructs the president to bring other matters to Congress's attention "from time to time." But in actuality 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 votes to override the president. In cases where Congress adjourns within 10 days of submitting a bill, the president can use a **pocket veto**, that is, simply let it die by neither signing nor vetoing it. Table 12.5 shows how frequently recent presidents have used the veto.

The presidential veto is usually effective; Congress has overridden only about 4 percent of all vetoed bills 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 (in contrast, most governors have a *line-item veto*, allowing 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. In recent years, presidents have issued statements when they sign bills, saying they will not comply with certain provisions and, in effect, vetoing parts of bills.

### 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 type of veto occurring when Congress adjourns within 10 days of submitting a bill to the president and the president simply lets the bill die by neither signing nor vetoing it.

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## Why It Matters to You

### The President's Veto

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

TABLE 12.5 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. H. W. Bush	29	1	3	15	44
Clinton	37	2	5	1	38
G. W. Bush	12	4	33	0	12
Obama*	2	0	0	0	2

\*as of January 2013

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There are some bills, such as those appropriating funds for national defense, that *must* be passed. Knowing this, the president may veto a version containing provisions he opposes on the theory that Congress does not want to be held responsible for failing to defend the nation. Nevertheless, 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, every president must provide party leadership in Congress, countering the natural tendency toward conflict between the executive and legislative branches that is inherent in the government's system of checks and balances.<sup>17</sup>

**THE BONDS OF PARTY** For most senators and representatives of the president's party, 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. These members also feel they have a collective stake in the president's success. Of course, the opposition party has incentives to resist the president. Thus, presidential leadership demarcates and deepens cleavages in Congress. The parties tend to be more cohesive on issues on which the president has taken a stand.<sup>18</sup>

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.

**SLIPPAGE IN PARTY SUPPORT** Things are not so simple, however. Despite the pull of party ties, all presidents experience at least some slippage in the support of their party in Congress. Because presidents cannot always count on their own party members for support, even on key votes, they must be active party leaders and 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."<sup>19</sup> When George W. Bush proposed reforming Social Security and immigration policy, many congressional Republicans refused to support him. Likewise, when Barack Obama negotiated deals with Republicans on taxes in 2010 and spending in 2011, many congressional Democrats voted against him.

This diversity of views often reflects the diversity of constituencies represented by party members. The defections of conservative and moderate Democrats from Democratic presidents are a prominent feature 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. Moreover, if the president is not popular with their constituencies, congressional party members may avoid identifying too closely with the White House.



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Presidents depend heavily on their party's leaders in Congress to pass their initiatives. Here, President Obama thanks House Speaker Nancy Pelosi after signing the Affordable Care Act. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid are to her left.

**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.

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. Perhaps more important, districts represented by members of the president's party receive more federal outlays than those represented by opposition party members.<sup>20</sup> Although this largesse may earn the president the benefit of the doubt on some policy initiatives, party members consider it their right to receive such favors from the White House and as a result are unlikely to be especially responsive to the president's largesse. In addition to offering a carrot, the president can, of course, wield a stick in the form of withholding favors, but this is rarely done.

If party members wish to oppose the White House, the president can do little to stop them. The parties are highly decentralized. 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.

## 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.

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.<sup>21</sup> The change in party balance that usually emerges when the electoral dust has settled is strikingly small. In the 16 presidential elections between 1952 and 2012, the party of the winning presidential candidate averaged a net gain of 8 seats (out of 435) per election in the House and only 1 seat in the Senate, where the opposition party actually gained seats in 7 of the elections (see Table 12.6).

Recent presidents have campaigned actively for their party's candidates in midterm elections (those held between presidential elections), and there is evidence that they reap benefits from those members who win.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the president's party typically *loses* seats, as you can see in Table 12.7. For example, in 1986, the Republicans lost 8 seats in the Senate, depriving President Reagan of a majority, and in 1994, the Democrats lost 8 Senate seats and 52 House seats, in the process losing control of both houses.<sup>23</sup> The president's party is especially likely to lose seats in the House when the president's approval rating is low and when the party gained a lot of seats in the previous election. Thus, the Democrats suffered large losses in the 2010 midterm elections, including 6 seats in the Senate and 63 in the House.

As this discussion suggests, the president's party often lacks a majority in one or both houses. Since 1953 there have been 30 years in which Republican presidents faced a Democratic House of Representatives and 22 years in which they faced a Democratic Senate. Democrat Bill Clinton faced both a House and a Senate with Republican majorities from 1995 through 2000. Barack Obama had to deal with a Republican majority in the House in 2011–2014.

**TABLE 12.6** 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)	+3	+4
2008	Obama (D)	+21	+8
2012	Obama (D)	+8	+1
	Average	+7.9	+1.2

**TABLE 12.7 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
2006	G. W. Bush (R)	-30	-6
2010	Obama (D)	-63	-6
	Average	-24	-3

Lacking majorities and/or 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."<sup>24</sup> Presidents with low approval ratings in the polls find it difficult to influence Congress. As one of President Carter's aides put it when the president was low in the polls, "No president whose popularity is as low as this president's has much clout on the Hill."<sup>25</sup> 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 the president's 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.

Widespread public 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.

Conversely, lack of public support narrows the range in which presidential policies receive the benefit of the doubt and strengthens the resolve of the president's opponents. Low ratings in the polls may also create incentives to attack the president, further eroding a weakened position. For example, after the U.S. occupation of Iraq turned sour and the country rejected his proposal to reform Social Security, it became more acceptable in Congress and in the press to raise questions about George W. Bush'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. George W. Bush enjoyed very high public approval following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but Democrats did not support his domestic policy proposals. Public approval gives the president leverage, not command.<sup>26</sup>

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.

**ELECTORAL 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 and his 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.<sup>27</sup>

More importantly, 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, as in 1972 and 1984, or if the voters also elected majorities in Congress from the other party, as in 1972 (of course, the winner may *claim* a mandate anyway).<sup>28</sup>

## □ Legislative Skills

Presidential legislative skills include 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.



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.

**BARGAINING** 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.”<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, such bargaining—trading support on 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 policymakers.

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. To this group he may add those of the opposition party who provide support on ideological or policy grounds as well as those who provide support 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 avoiding veto overrides).

**MOVING FAST** 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. Lyndon Johnson, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush took advantage of this one-shot opportunity.

**SETTING PRIORITIES** An important aspect of presidential legislative strategy can be establishing priorities among legislative proposals. The goal of this effort is to set Congress’s 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.

The president is the nation's key agenda builder; what the administration wants strongly influences the parameters of Washington debate.<sup>30</sup> 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."<sup>31</sup> There are limits to what the president can do, however.

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).<sup>32</sup> 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.

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

### 12.5

Analyze the president's powers in making national security policy and the relationship between the president and Congress in this arena.

**C**onstitutionally, 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. 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 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.

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”). Bill Clinton was not so lucky when he sought ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. The Senate rejected it in 1999. At other times senators add “reservations” to the treaties they ratify, altering the treaty in the process.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to treaties, presidents also negotiate *executive agreements* with the heads of foreign governments. Executive agreements do not require Senate ratification (although the president is supposed to report them to Congress and they 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.<sup>34</sup>

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, as Barack Obama experienced in dealing with the world financial crisis and George W. Bush found in his attempts to obtain support for invading Iraq. Given the natural independence of sovereign nations, the increasing economic might of other countries, and the many competing influences on policymaking in other nations, the president will continue to find such leadership challenging.

## □ 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.

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

## 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. However, presidents have viewed the resolution as unconstitutional.

commander in chief of about 1.4 million uniformed men and women. In his farewell 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.

## War Powers

Perhaps no issue of executive–legislative relations generates more controversy than the continuing dispute over war powers. Although 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, aircraft, 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). 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 resolution that could not be vetoed, ending American participation in hostilities.



The president commands vast military resources, ranging from nuclear weapons and aircraft carriers to armies and special forces. Here, President Obama and his national security team watch the Navy Seals raid the compound of Osama bin Laden in 2011.

Congress cannot regard the War Powers Resolution as a success, however. All presidents serving since 1973 have deemed the law an unconstitutional infringement on their powers as commander in chief, 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 powers. Presidents have largely ignored the law and sent troops into hostilities, sometimes with heavy loss of life, without effectual consultation 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.<sup>35</sup>

For example, exercising his powers as commander in chief, George H. W. Bush on his own authority moved half a million troops to Saudi Arabia to liberate Kuwait after its invasion by Iraq in 1990. Congress averted a constitutional crisis when it passed (on a divided vote) a resolution authorizing the president to use force against Iraq. Bill Clinton in 1999 authorized the United States to take the leading role in a sustained air attack against Serbia to stop ethnic conflict there, but Congress could not agree on a resolution supporting the use of force. Barack Obama did not seek congressional authorization for U.S. support of NATO-led efforts to protect civilians in the civil war in Libya and support efforts to overthrow that country's dictator.

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. However, Congress was less deferential to presidential war powers when the press revealed U.S. mistreatment of prisoners of war and the president's authorization (without a judicial warrant) of the National Security Agency to spy on persons residing within the United States.

Analysts continue to raise questions 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.

### legislative veto

A vote in 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.

### crisis

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

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## Why It Matters to You

### War Powers

The United States has never fully resolved the question of the president's war powers. The ambiguity about presidents' powers frees them from what some see as excessive constraints on their ability to conduct an effective foreign policy. On the other hand, if the president could only send troops into combat after a congressional resolution authorizing the use of force, it is possible that we would be less likely to go to war.

### □ 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

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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 meets with firefighters and rescue workers at the World Trade Center site three days after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

of sketchy information. Be it American hostages held in Iran for Jimmy Carter or the discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba for John F. Kennedy, 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.

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 secrecy difficult), 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 on 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 intelligence operations; the treatment of prisoners of war; 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 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.<sup>36</sup> Congress frequently originates proposals for domestic policy, but it is less involved in national security policy.<sup>37</sup>

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.

Although Congress is typically reactive on national security policy, it can constrain the president, even on the initiation, scope, and duration of military actions. Members can introduce legislation to curtail the use of force, hold oversight hearings, and engage in debate over military policymaking in the public sphere. Such debate influences public opinion and thus raises the cost of military action for the president.<sup>38</sup>

Commentators on the presidency often refer to the "two presidencies"—one for domestic policy and the other for national security policy.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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; other support comes from the president's ability to act first, placing Congress in a reactive position and opening it to the charge that it is undermining U.S. foreign policy if it challenges the president's initiatives.

Presidents need resources to influence 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

**12.6** Identify the factors that affect the president's ability to obtain public support.

**“P**ublic 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 more difficult for other power holders in a democracy to deny the legitimate demands of a president with popular backing.

## □ Going Public

Presidents are not passive followers of public opinion; they actively try to shape it. The White House is a virtual whirlwind of public relations activity.<sup>41</sup> Beginning with John Kennedy, the first “television president,” presidents, with the notable exception of Richard Nixon, have been active in making public presentations. Indeed, they have averaged more than one appearance every weekday of the year in their attempts to obtain the public's support for themselves and their policies.

Often the White House stages the president's appearances purely to get the public's attention. George W. Bush chose to announce the end of major combat in Iraq on board the aircraft carrier the *Abraham Lincoln*. The White House's Office of Communications choreographed every aspect of the event, including positioning the aircraft carrier so the shoreline could not be seen by the camera when the president landed, arraying members of the crew in coordinated shirt colors over Bush's right shoulder, placing a banner reading “Mission Accomplished” to perfectly capture the president and the celebratory two words in a single camera shot, and timing the speech so the sun cast a golden glow on the president. In such a case, the president could have simply made an announcement, but the need for public support drives the



Presidents often use commercial public relations techniques to win support for their policy initiatives. President George W. Bush, for example, used the backdrop of an aircraft carrier to announce the end of the war in Iraq and obtain support for his stewardship.

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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 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.

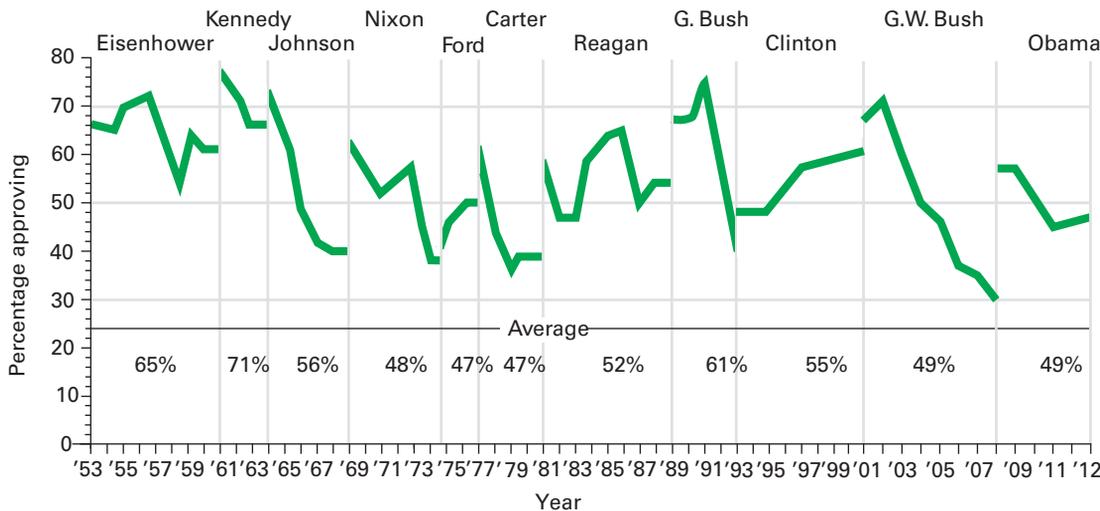
## □ Presidential Approval

The White House aims much of the energy it devotes to public relations at increasing the president's public approval. It 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 press, members of Congress, and others in the Washington political community closely monitor the president's standing in the polls. For years, the Gallup Poll has asked Americans, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way [name of president] is handling his job as president?" You can see the results for presidents beginning with Eisenhower in Figure 12.3.

Presidents frequently do not have widespread public support, often failing to win even majority approval, as Figure 12.3 shows. For Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, this average approval level was under 50 percent, and for Ronald Reagan it was only 52 percent. Although George H. W. Bush enjoyed much higher average approval levels for three years, in his fourth year his ratings dropped below 40 percent. Bill Clinton struggled to rise above the 50 percent mark in his first term.

**FIGURE 12.3** PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

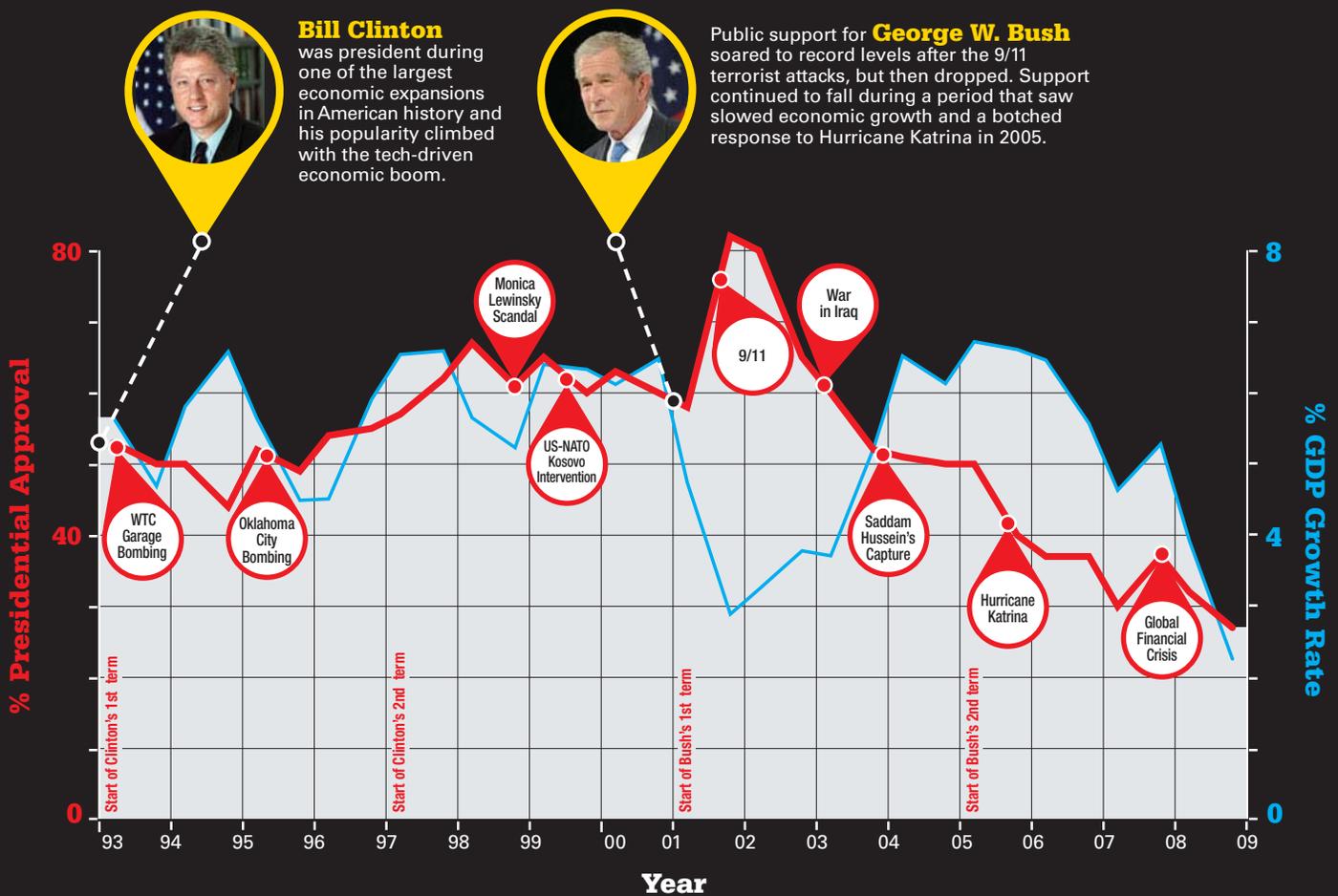
Most presidents seem to be most popular when they first enter office; later on, their popularity often erodes. Bill Clinton was an exception, enjoying higher approval in his second term than in his first. George W. Bush had high approval following 9/11, but public support diminished steadily after that.



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

# What Influences a President's Public Approval?

Political scientists watch a president's approval because it shows how much political capital is available to him, indicates the extent to which the public endorses his performance, and helps us look at the relationship between popular support and policy success, for example, in managing the economy or dealing with foreign crises. Gallup approval ratings of two recent presidents are shown below; they suggest that presidential approval might indeed be influenced by the economy and by events.



SOURCE: Data from the Gallup Presidential Job Approval Center.

## Investigate Further

**Concept** Do presidents gain or lose popularity over the course of their term? For Bill Clinton, an initial loss of popularity—during a period of economic recession—was followed by lasting gains in public support. George W. Bush's popularity peaked with the 9/11 attacks and then steadily dropped.

**Connection** Is popularity tied to the performance of the economy? Clearly, as the economy improved, so did Clinton's job approval. In Bush's case, a recession early in his first term does not appear to have affected popularity, perhaps because of the influence of war on public opinion.

**Cause** How might events have influenced the popularity of President Bush? The 9/11 terrorist attacks had a rally-round-the-flag effect, which played a substantial role in George W. Bush's presidency. For a brief period, success in the war in Iraq boosted Bush's popularity, until war fatigue and failure to manage other crises pulled his approval ratings to record low levels.

Presidential approval is the product of many factors.<sup>42</sup> Political party identification provides the basic underpinning of approval or disapproval and mediates the impact of other factors. Partisans are not inclined to approve presidents of the other party. Historically, those who identify with the president's party give the president approval more than 40 percentage points higher than do those who identify with the opposition party. In the more polarized times under George W. Bush and Barack Obama, this difference rose as high as 70 percentage points.

Presidents usually benefit from a “honeymoon” with the American people after taking office. Some observers believe that “honeymoons” are a fleeting phenomenon, with the public affording 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 12.3 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 shows that support can be revived; Bill Clinton enjoyed more approval in his second term 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 international acts of terrorism on American interests are increasing, 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.<sup>43</sup> A classic example is the 18-percentage-point rise in President George H. W. Bush's approval ratings immediately after the Gulf War began 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. George H. W. 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. Different people see things differently (see “Young People & Politics: The Generation Gap in Presidential Approval”). 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 in order 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.”<sup>44</sup>

## □ 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.

# Young People & Politics

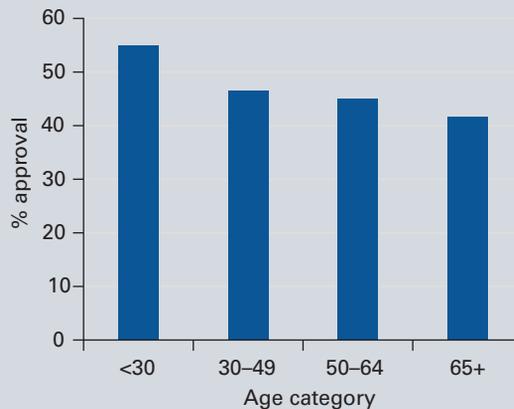
## The Generation Gap in Presidential Approval

Presidential approval is not uniform across different groups in society. Young people approve of President Obama at higher rates than do other age groups, and especially more than those 65 or older. The higher approval could be because the younger generation is more liberal than are their elders, because it includes a higher percentage of minorities, because the president has made a special effort to reach out to young people via the Internet, or because of some other reason.

**Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?**

### CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think young people are more supportive of President Obama than are their elders?
2. Do you think policymakers pay as much attention to the opinions of young people as to the opinions of those over 65?



SOURCE: Gallup Poll, for week of May 7-13, 2012.

Despite this aid and despite politicians' speaking experience, presidential speeches designed to lead public opinion have typically been rather unimpressive. In the modern era, experts consider only Franklin D. Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama to have been especially effective speakers. Partly because of his limitations as a public speaker, George H. W. Bush waited until he had been in office for over seven months before making his first nationally televised address.

Moreover, the public is not always receptive to the president's message. For the most part, Americans are not especially interested in politics and government; thus, it is not easy to get their attention. Citizens also have predispositions about public policy (however ill informed) that filter presidential messages. Evan Parker-Stephen suggests that when people encounter political information, they must balance two conflicting roles: as "updaters" who want to perceive the world objectively and as "biased reasoners" who distort information to make it consistent with their political preferences. The more salient people's partisan identities—which are especially heightened during the long presidential campaigns and in an era of extreme partisan polarization—the more difficult it is for the president to get his message through.<sup>46</sup>

The public may miss the point of even the most colorful rhetoric or get its basic facts wrong, and thus may have difficulty evaluating policies sensibly. In his 2010 State of the Union address, President Obama declared that as part of its economic recovery plan, his administration had passed 25 different tax cuts. At about the same time in a Super Bowl Sunday interview, he touted the tax cuts in the stimulus package.



Ronald Reagan actively sought public support for his policies. Despite his skills as a communicator, he typically failed to move the public in his direction.

Nevertheless, shortly afterward, 24 percent of the public responded that the administration had *increased* taxes, and 53 percent said it kept taxes the same.<sup>47</sup> By the end of October, 52 percent of likely voters thought taxes had gone up for the middle class.<sup>48</sup>

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, also an extraordinarily able communicator, 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.<sup>49</sup> More recently, George W. Bush made an extraordinary effort to obtain public backing for his stewardship of the war in Iraq and his proposal to reform Social Security. Like his predecessors, he was unsuccessful.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Barack Obama was not able to rally the public behind his efforts to reform health care or for most of the elements of his economic policy. In the absence of national crises, most people are unreceptive to political appeals.

## □ Mobilizing the Public

Sometimes merely changing public opinion is not sufficient—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.

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However, the president is rarely able to mobilize the public because doing so involves overcoming formidable barriers. It entails the double burden of obtaining both opinion support and political action from a generally inattentive and apathetic public. In addition, the effort to mobilize the public is a risky strategy. If the president tries to mobilize the public and fails, the lack of response speaks clearly to members of Congress.

## The President and the Press

**12.7** Characterize the president's relations with the press and news coverage of the presidency.

**D**espite 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.<sup>51</sup>

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 policy advocates and thus want to control the amount and timing of information about their administration. The press, in contrast, 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. The White House also goes to great lengths



Press coverage of the president is pervasive because of the importance of the presidency. At the same time, the press is the primary means by which the president communicates with the public. Here President Obama answers questions from the press in the White House briefing room.

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 H. W. Bush, however, prime-time televised press conferences have become relatively rare events. Presidents often travel around the country to gain television time to spread their messages. Barack Obama favors interviews with individual journalists as a means of reaching the public.

## □ Nature of News Coverage

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."<sup>52</sup> Because there are daily 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.<sup>53</sup> Cable news channels, especially Fox and MSNBC, are another story and have numerous commentators who approach the news from an ideological perspective.

To conclude that most news outlets contain 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 booed. 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.<sup>54</sup>

The news tends to be superficial, oversimplified, and often overblown, all of which means it provides the public with a distorted view of, among other things, presidential activities, statements, policies, and options. We also see 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 information, often determining what is covered and the context in which it is presented. For example, once a stereotype of President Ford as a "bumbler" was established, his 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.<sup>55</sup>

News coverage of the presidency often tends to emphasize the negative (even if the presentation is seemingly neutral).<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup> The trend of negative coverage continued in the George W. Bush<sup>59</sup> and Barack Obama presidencies.

In the past, most editors were reluctant to publish analyses sharply divergent from the president's position without direct confirmation from an authoritative source who would be willing to go on the record in opposition to the White House. This approach restrained media criticism of the president. During the famous investigation of the Watergate scandal, the *Washington Post* verified all information attributed to an unnamed source with at least one other independent source. It also did not print information from other media outlets unless its reporters could independently verify that information.<sup>60</sup> Things have changed, however.

The press relied on analysis, opinion, and speculation as much as on confirmed facts in its coverage of President Clinton's relations with Monica Lewinsky. Even the most prominent news outlets disseminated unsubstantiated reports of charges that those originally carrying the story had not independently verified. If one news outlet carried a charge, the rest, which did not wish to be scooped, soon picked it up. For example, the media widely reported unsubstantiated charges that members of the Secret Service had found the president and Ms. Lewinsky in a compromising position. Such reporting helped sensationalize the story, keeping it alive and undermining the president's efforts to focus the public's attention on matters of public policy.

Similarly, in 2004, the press gave immediate attention to a story on the CBS television program *60 Minutes* that revealed documents regarding President George W. Bush's service in the National Guard. The documents purported to show dissatisfaction with the president's performance—or nonperformance. On closer scrutiny, however, it turned out that the documents were forgeries.

On the other hand, the president has certain advantages in dealing with the press. The White House largely controls 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. The press typically portrays the president with an aura of dignity and treats him with deference.<sup>61</sup> 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.”<sup>62</sup>

Thus, when Larry Speakes left after serving as President Reagan's press secretary for six years, he told reporters they had given the Reagan administration “a fair shake.”<sup>63</sup> Scott McClellan, a George W. Bush press secretary, concluded that media bias was not a problem and that any bias had minimal impact on the way the public was informed. The “Bush administration had no difficulty in getting our messages across to the American people,” he declared.<sup>64</sup>

## Understanding the American Presidency

### 12.8

Assess the role of presidential power in the American democracy and the president's impact on the scope of government.



Because the presidency is the single most important office in American politics, there has always been concern about whether the president, with all of his power, is a threat to democracy. The importance of the president has raised similar concerns about 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 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. Over the past century and a half, 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 the possibility of a president's acting outside the law and the Constitution—as became a concern during the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama with regard to the holding of prisoners and the interception of communications—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. It is true that more potentially important legislation fails to pass under divided government than when one party controls both the presidency and Congress.<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup>

## □ 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) 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. The presidents following Lyndon Johnson for the most part 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. If so, for most of the past generation, it has been their will to choose presidents who reflected their ideology 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.

## Review the Chapter



### The Presidents

**12.1** Characterize the expectations for and the backgrounds of presidents and identify paths to the White House and how presidents may be removed, p. 399.

Americans have high expectations of their presidents, who have come from a relatively wide range of backgrounds. Most presidents are elected by the public, but about one in five succeeded to the presidency when the president died or resigned. No president has been removed for disability, as provided by the Twenty-fifth Amendment, which also provides the mechanism for filling vacancies in the office of vice president, or by conviction of impeachment, although two presidents were impeached.

### Presidential Powers

**12.2** Evaluate the president's constitutional powers and the expansion of presidential power, p. 405.

The Constitution gives the president a few national security, legislative, administrative, and judicial powers, some of which are quite general. Presidential power has increased over time, through the actions of presidents and because of factors including technology and the increased prominence of the United States, and the assertion of presidential power has at times created controversy regarding the constitutional balance of powers.

### Running the Government: The Chief Executive

**12.3** Describe the roles of the vice president, cabinet, Executive Office of the President, White House staff, and First Lady, p. 408.

One of the president's principal responsibilities is to manage the executive branch. The vice president has played a central role in recent administrations. Cabinet members focus on running executive departments but play only a modest role as a unit. The Executive Office includes the Council of Economic Advisers; the National Security Council, which helps organize the president's national security decision making process; and the Office of Management and Budget, which prepares the budget and evaluates regulations and legislative proposals. Presidents rely heavily on the White House staff for information, policy options, and analysis. The First Lady has no official position but may play an important role in advocating on particular issues.

### Presidential Leadership of Congress: The Politics of Shared Powers

**12.4** Assess the impact of various sources of presidential influence on the president's ability to win congressional support, p. 414.

The veto is a powerful tool for stopping legislation the president opposes. The president's role as party leader is at the core of presidents' efforts to assemble a winning legislative coalition behind their proposals, but party members sometimes oppose the president, and presidents cannot do much to increase the number of fellow party members in the legislature in presidential or midterm election years. Moreover, the president frequently faces an opposition majority in Congress. Presidents rarely enjoy electoral mandates for their policies, but they can benefit from high levels of public approval. A variety of presidential legislative skills, ranging from bargaining to setting priorities, contribute only marginally to the president's success with Congress.

### The President and National Security Policy

**12.5** Analyze the president's powers in making national security policy and the relationship between the president and Congress in this arena, p. 422.

The president is the chief diplomat, commander in chief, and crisis manager. Presidents have substantial formal and informal powers regarding going to war, and these powers remain a matter of controversy. Congress has a central constitutional role in making national security policy, but leadership in this area is centered in the White House, and presidents usually receive the support they seek from Congress.

### Power from the People: The Public Presidency

**12.6** Identify the factors that affect the president's ability to obtain public support, p. 428.

Presidents invest heavily in efforts to win the public's support, but they often have low approval levels. Approval levels are affected by party identification; by evaluations of the president's performance on the economy, foreign affairs, and other policy areas; and by evaluations of the president's character and job-related skills. Presidents typically fail to obtain the public's support for their policy initiatives and rarely are able to mobilize the public to act on behalf of these initiatives.

## The President and the Press

12.7

Characterize the president's relations with the press and news coverage of the presidency, p. 434.

The press is the principal intermediary between the president and the public. Presidents and the press are frequently in conflict over the amount, nature, and tone of the coverage of the presidency. Much of the coverage is superficial and without partisan or ideological bias, but there has been an increase in the negativity of coverage and there are an increasing number of ideologically biased sources of news.

## Understanding the American Presidency

12.8

Assess the role of presidential power in the American democracy and the president's impact on the scope of government, p. 436.

The fear of a presidential power harmful to democracy is always present, but there are many checks on presidential power. Support of increasing the scope of government is not inherent in the presidency, and presidents have frequently been advocates of limiting government growth.

## Learn the Terms



**Study** and **Review** the **Flashcards**

Twenty-second Amendment, p. 401  
Twenty-fifth Amendment, p. 401  
impeachment, p. 403  
Watergate, p. 403  
executive orders, p. 408  
cabinet, p. 409

National Security Council, p. 411  
Council of Economic Advisers,  
p. 411  
Office of Management and Budget,  
p. 411  
veto, p. 415

pocket veto, p. 415  
presidential coattails, p. 418  
War Powers Resolution, p. 424  
legislative veto, p. 425  
crisis, p. 425

## Test Yourself



**Study** and **Review** the **Practice Tests**

- Which of the following statements is true concerning presidential selection and tenure?
  - Approximately half of the presidents in U.S. history have served two or more terms.
  - Impeachment has led to the removal of two presidents.
  - Nearly all presidents have won the office through election.
  - Several vice presidents have assumed the office when the president became incapacitated.
  - None of the above is true.
- The American public tends to expect presidents to be powerful while disliking a concentration of power.  
True \_\_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_\_
- In your opinion, does presidential background matter to the office of the presidency? If so, which aspects are most important? If it does not matter, why doesn't it matter?
- The ability to nominate ambassadors, who are to be approved by a majority of the Senate, falls into what category of presidential powers?
  - administrative powers
  - legislative powers
  - national security powers
  - judicial powers
  - organizational powers

- Political scientists and historians have consistently supported a strong presidency model beginning with the latter half of the twentieth century.  
True \_\_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_\_
- What are at least three different factors that have contributed to the expansion of presidential power over time? In what ways have these factors enabled expansion of presidential powers beyond the Founding Fathers' intentions? Do you think that these developments are for the better or worse? Why?
- Which of the following statements best describes the role of the vice president today?
  - The vice president's main job is waiting.
  - The vice president's main job is casting tie-breaking votes in the Senate.
  - The vice president's main job is to balance the presidential ticket during the election.
  - The vice president's main job is to play a central role in administration policy and advising.
  - The vice president's main job is to negotiate treaties with other nations.
- The First Lady fulfills an official government position at the side of her husband.  
True \_\_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_\_

**9.** Briefly explain the make-up and functions of the National Security Council, the Council of Economic Advisers, and the Office of Management and Budget.

**10.** Does the president's cabinet serve as a "collective board of directors"? Explain your answer.

**11.** Which of the following statements about changes in Congress in presidential election years from 1952 through 2012 is NOT true?

- Over the period, the president's party averaged a very small net gain in the Senate.
- The president's party made significant gains when the president was reelected.
- In some elections the party that won the presidency lost seats in both houses.
- Over the period, the president's party averaged a small net gain in the House.
- In some elections, the party that won the presidency picked up seats in both houses.

**12.** Merely winning the election provides presidents with a governing mandate.

True \_\_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_\_

**13.** What are the primary constitutional tools available to presidents as chief legislators? Can you think of any changes that might be made to the Constitution to strengthen the president as chief legislator? How might this change help the president?

**14.** The president's ability to win congressional support is predicated on a handful of factors. Explain how three of these factors may help the president win congressional support. In what ways are these factors limited in assisting the president in the legislative arena? Which single factor do you think is most important for the president in Congress? Explain your answer.

**15.** Executive agreements require

- ratification by the House of Representatives.
- ratification by the Senate.
- ratification by both houses of Congress.
- support of the cabinet.
- none of the above.

**16.** The War Powers Resolution has succeeded in giving Congress a greater voice in the introduction of American troops into hostilities.

True \_\_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_\_

**17.** Checks and balances and the separation of powers were central elements in the framing of the U.S. Constitution. Based on your understanding of the Constitution and foreign affairs, do you think the president and Congress act to uphold the separation of powers and checks and balances concerning foreign policy? Do you think that the president has usurped Congress' constitutional influence over foreign affairs and issues of war? If so, is this justified and what are some pros and cons for the U.S. government?

**18.** Which of the following is true regarding presidents' mobilization of the public?

- Presidents are rarely successful mobilizing the public.
- Presidents rarely attempt to mobilize the public.
- Presidents have often lacked the communication skills to mobilize the public.
- Presidents need congressional support to be effective mobilizing the public.
- None of the above is true.

**19.** Presidential approval ratings mainly reflect the public's views of the president's personality.

True \_\_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_\_

**20.** What are at least three different factors that influence a president's public approval ratings?

**21.** Which of the following statements concerning presidential news coverage is true?

- The press has a liberal bias that tends to put Republican presidents at a disadvantage.
- The press devotes ample time to analysis and comprehensive coverage of the presidency.
- The press tends to emphasize the superficial in its coverage of the presidency.
- The press tends to emphasize the positive in its coverage of the presidency.
- None of the above is true.

**22.** The White House is effective in controlling the environment in which the president meets the press.

True \_\_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_\_

**23.** Based on your understanding of presidential–press relations, do you think that the Framers of the Constitution would be pleased with current news coverage of the presidency? Explain your answer.

**24.** Which statement is true?

- Concerns about an excessively strong presidency began during the early twentieth century.
- Most recent presidents have sought to expand the role of the federal government.
- Divided government is an important check on presidential power.
- A strong president can easily threaten American democracy.
- Concerns about presidential power are unrelated to concerns over the president's policies.

**25.** Which of the following two statements do you agree with more? Explain your answer.

- Excessive presidential power undermines American democracy.
- A powerful president promotes democratic values.

**26.** What role has the presidency played in the expansion of the scope of government? In your opinion has the president worked more to expand or limit the role of the federal government? Explain your answer.

# Explore Further

## WEB SITES

[www.whitehouse.gov/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/)

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

[www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop](http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop)

Information about the Executive Office of the President.

[www.ipl.org/div/potus](http://www.ipl.org/div/potus)

Background on presidents and their administrations.

[www.presidency.ucsb.edu/](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/)

Presidential papers, documents, and data.

[www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=CPD)

[action?collectionCode=CPD](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=CPD)

The Compilation of Presidential Documents, the official publication of presidential statements, messages, remarks, and other materials released by the White House Press Secretary.

[www.youtube.com/whitehouse?gl=GB&user=whitehouse](http://www.youtube.com/whitehouse?gl=GB&user=whitehouse)

White House YouTube channel.

[www.presidentialrhetoric.com/](http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/)

Presidential rhetoric, including videos of presidential speeches.

## FURTHER READING

**Burke, John P.** *The Institutional Presidency*, 2nd ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. Examines the organization of the White House and presidential advising.

**Cohen, Jeffrey E.** *The Presidency in the Era of 24-Hour News*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. Explores how changes in the news media have affected the relationship between the president and the press.

**Edwards, George C., III.** *At the Margins: Presidential Leadership of Congress*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989. Examines the presidents' efforts to lead Congress and explains their limitations.

**Edwards, George C., III.** *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003. The effect of presidents' efforts to change public opinion in the White House's pursuit of popular support.

**Edwards, George C., III.** *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009. Argues that presidential power is not the power to persuade.

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**Howell, William G.** *Power Without Persuasion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003. Focuses on the use of the president's discretionary power.

**Kumar, Martha.** *Managing the President's Message: The White House Communications Operation*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. Explains White House communications and media operations.

**Neustadt, Richard E.** *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*. New York: Free Press, 1990. The most influential book on the American presidency; argues that presidential power is the power to persuade.