

CHAPTER 12

The Presidency

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter you should be able to

- Define the key terms at the end of the chapter.
- List the powers and duties of the president, as set forth in the Constitution.
- Describe other sources that presidents have used to expand the authority of the office.
- Explain why presidential popularity usually declines while a president is in office.
- Outline the process by which presidents are elected.
- Explain why modern presidents are more likely to rely on the White House staff than on the cabinet for advice on policymaking.
- Explain what is meant by referring to the president as “chief lobbyist.”
- Point out the assets and liabilities a president brings with him as he tries to translate his political vision into public policy.
- Describe the special skills presidents need for crisis management.
- Discuss the role of presidential character in evaluating presidential candidates.

THE PRESIDENCY AND THE CHALLENGE OF DEMOCRACY

The opening case illustrates the difficulty that presidents face in maintaining support for their initiatives. Presidents are expected to take on a number of different roles, yet they face limits to their formal powers and experience dramatic fluctuations in support from the public.

The president and vice president are the only nationally elected political officials in the United States. As a result, there is strong moral pressure on the president to be “the president of all the people.” The president is potentially the focal point of majoritarian politics in the American system. He is in a unique position to see that the national interest is not always the sum of all our single or special interests. Following opinion polls may make him aware of the need to appeal to the majority. Yet, the realities of American presidential politics are more pluralistic than majoritarian. Although classical majoritarian theory might put a premium on being responsible to “the people,” the reality of presidential politics is that people to whom presidents respond are organized in groups.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The task of designing the office of chief executive presented the founders with a dilemma. They had just rebelled against a king and were reluctant to concentrate too much power in the hands of one individual. However, their experience under the Articles of Confederation convinced them that they needed strong national leadership, so they established the office of president. The new president would be chosen independently of Congress by an election of the electoral college. To limit presidential

power, they relied on two things: the mechanism of checks and balances and their expectation that their first president, George Washington, would set good precedents.

The Constitutional Basis of Presidential Power

According to the Constitution, the president is the administrative head of the nation and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He has the power to convene Congress and to veto their legislation. In addition, he may grant pardons, appoint ambassadors, judges, cabinet members, and other key officials, and make treaties.

The Expansion of Presidential Power

The list of the president's constitutional powers does not tell the whole story, however. Presidential power has increased tremendously since the Constitution was adopted. Presidential power increased aggressively through the use of the formal powers and broad claims that the president has certain inherent powers implied by the Constitution. Executive orders are the embodiment of the president's inherent powers. In addition, Congress has also delegated power to the executive branch, allowing the president more freedom to implement policies.

The Executive Branch Establishment

The executive branch establishment gives a president substantial resources to translate an electoral mandate into public policy. He may call on the executive office of the president, the cabinet, the vice president, or he may rely on his own staff, including his national security adviser, the Council of Economic Advisers, and the Office of Management and Budget. The methods presidents use to organize their staffs differ from administration to administration and generally reflect the individual chief executive's own working style. Modern presidents usually rely much more heavily on the White House staff than on the cabinet (the heads of the executive departments and other officials) to make policy. President Carter and later Presidents Clinton and Bush are unusual in that each involved their respective vice president in substantive policy matters; in general, presidents have rarely looked to their vice presidents for assistance on such matters. In theory, the cabinet also acts as a presidential advisory group, but the importance of the cabinet has declined with the increase in the importance of the White House staff.

Presidential Leadership

In recent years, journalists have paid increasing attention to aspects of the "character issue." Scholars, too, have suggested that the electorate ought to pay more attention to a candidate's formative experiences and basic psychological makeup.

The president's ability to persuade is one of the most important factors determining how much power he has. His persuasiveness is often related to his personality but may also result from his reputation and prestige. These attributes, in turn, spring from such things as past successes (at the polls or with Congress) and presidential popularity. Presidential popularity may be affected by many factors, including economic conditions, wars, and unanticipated events. Presidents usually are at the peak of their popularity during the "honeymoon period" of their first year in office, and they monitor their popularity closely as a kind of "report card." Good communication can serve to rally the public to the president's side, but the ability to form congressional and interest group coalitions should not be overlooked either.

One reason why presidents have trouble sustaining popularity is found in the difference between what it takes to win the presidency and what it takes to do the president's job. Winning the election involves assembling a winning coalition of voters in enough states to provide a majority vote in the electoral college. Candidates are often tempted to be vague on issues, to avoid alienating voters on either side.

But a candidate who is too vague may appear wishy-washy. Once in office, a winning candidate may try to claim a mandate for his policies—claiming majoritarian backing from the voters. Divided government, with the presidency and Congress controlled by different parties, has made it more difficult in recent years for presidents to translate perceived mandates into policy, though polls suggest that the public prefers to have control of government divided between Democrats and Republicans, and scholars are divided in their assessment of the productivity of divided government.

The President as National Leader

Presidents have differed considerably in their views of what government should do. Some, like Lyndon Johnson, emphasized the value of equality, while others, including Ronald Reagan, stressed freedom. The agendas they set grow out of their general political ideologies, tempered by the realities of political life in Washington. Those who enter office after serious upheavals or political crises may have great opportunities to reshape the political agenda. In the modern era, presidents have assumed significant leadership in the legislative process. Departments and agencies clear their budgets and proposed legislation through the president. Presidents also act as “chief lobbyists,” trying to win support in Congress for their proposals. In this role, presidents may rely on their own personal contact with legislators, on contacts by their legislative liaison staffs, or on the aid of interest groups. Presidents may also use the threat of a veto as leverage to prevent Congress from passing measures of which they disapprove.

The President as World Leader

Presidents are concerned with four basic foreign policy objectives: national security, international stability and peace, protection of U.S. economic interests, and the promotion of democracy and freedom. The collapse of the Soviet Union has forced recent presidents to redefine foreign policy goals. One persistent question has been the extent to which we act in concert with international allies or “go it alone” to pursue our foreign policy objectives.

KEY TERMS

veto

inherent powers

executive orders

delegation of powers

executive office of the president

cabinet

divided government

gridlock

mandate

legislative liaison staff

RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

For up-to-date printed information on the president’s policies and actions, the best official source is the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), which is published every Monday by the Office of the Federal Register. For documents dating from 1993 on, you may wish to check online at <<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/wcomp/index.html>>.

In addition to this resource, the Federal Register also issues an annual bound volume entitled *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office). These volumes are useful for researching the presidency from Truman's administration to the present.

If you wish to study earlier occupants of the White House, you should turn to *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789–1927* (New York: Bureau of National Literature 1928). This is a twenty-volume set containing official utterances of presidents from Washington to Coolidge. These volumes include presidential proclamations, addresses, annual messages, veto messages, and other communications to Congress, as well as articles about the issues that faced each president.

For the interim period not covered by either of the two works above, you will find the following two privately published works useful:

- Hoover, Herbert C. *The State Papers and Other Public Writings of Herbert Hoover*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1934.
- Roosevelt, Franklin. *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*. New York: Random House, 1938–1950.

For researching topics related to the presidency, another valuable resource is a four-volume work edited by Leonard Levy and Louis Fisher, *Encyclopedia of the American Presidency* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1994).

For current information on-line, the White House maintains a Web site at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov>>. There you can read about the president and vice president, search presidential documents, check out current press releases, listen to speeches, and even tour the White House from your desktop. If you are interested in historical information on individual presidents, including sound and video clips, check out Grolier Online's "The American Presidency" at <<http://ap.grolier.com>>; also, see the Internet Public Library site at <<http://www.ipl.org/ref/POTUS>>.

USING YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Using the resources suggested above, try to learn the president's position on the bill you researched in chapter 10. Are there speeches or press conferences where he indicates his views on the bill? Is there a public ceremony where he delivered remarks as he signed the bill into law? Was there a veto message?
2. Use the Gallup Poll or other survey data to construct a graph showing the percent of respondents who approve of the way President Clinton handled his job from 1993 to the end of his term. Do you observe any trends in your graph? How do the trends in your graph compare with the usual trend in presidential popularity sketched out in the text? Try the same exercise for Presidents Reagan and Bush.
3. Have you ever wanted to tell the president what you think? Pick up your phone and dial 1-202-456-1414, the White House telephone number. The electronic superhighway also runs through the White House. To send electronic mail to the president, use the following email address: president@whitehouse.gov. Of course, you are extremely unlikely to find the occupant of the Oval Office answering his own phone or responding to his own e-mail, but you can register your opinion on issues that are of significance to you. The White House does use this as one method of keeping track of public opinion.

GETTING INVOLVED

Ironically, perhaps, one accomplishment of the Clinton administration was the addition of the now-famous White House internship program. The program gives some 600 interns a year the opportunity to work in one of twenty-two White House offices, handling a range of chores from advance planning to

staffing the visitors' office. Internships are available for twelve-week sessions in spring or fall or for six-week summer sessions. For further information, see the White House website, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/wh-intern.html>>.

SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which of the following is one of the president's checks on Congress?
 - a. commander-in-chief power
 - b. appointment power
 - c. ability to grant pardons
 - d. administrative head of the nation
 - e. veto power
2. Which of the following presidential powers would need approval by two-thirds of the Senate?
 - a. commander-in-chief power
 - b. appointment power
 - c. ability to grant pardons
 - d. administrative head of the nation
 - e. veto power
3. What term do we use to describe presidential directives that create or modify laws and public policies without the direct approval of Congress?
 - a. executive orders
 - b. executive mandates
 - c. delegation of powers
 - d. inherent powers
 - e. veto powers
4. The Constitution empowers the president in all of the following ways *except*
 - a. to act as administrative head of the nation.
 - b. to act as chief of his political party.
 - c. to act as commander-in-chief of the military.
 - d. to make treaties.
 - e. to appoint federal officers.
5. When President Lincoln blockaded Southern ports, what authority allowed him to do so?
 - a. the inherent powers of the presidency
 - b. a congressional delegation of power
 - c. executive privilege
 - d. the War Powers Resolution
 - e. the executive mandates
6. When government is unable to act on policy issues, how do we describe that situation?
 - a. a congressional quagmire
 - b. a presidential fault line
 - c. gridlock
 - d. congressional veto
 - e. congressional stalemate

7. Which of the following would not be considered a part of the Executive Office of the President?
 - a. White House Chief of Staff
 - b. Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
 - c. National Security Advisor
 - d. Secretary of State
 - e. All of the above
8. According to the Constitution, what entity has the power to act as commander-in-chief of the military?
 - a. the Congress
 - b. the president, with the advice and consent of the Senate
 - c. the Supreme Court of the United States
 - d. the president, on the advice of the National Security Council
 - e. the president
9. When a president contends that the voters have given him a special endorsement of his policies in an election, what is he claiming?
 - a. inherent powers
 - b. a mandate
 - c. a congressional delegation of power
 - d. pardon power
 - e. home rule advantage
10. Which of the following has not been a major factor in increasing presidential power?
 - a. constitutional amendments expanding presidential power
 - b. the theory of inherent presidential power
 - c. crises such as war or depression
 - d. congressional delegations of power
 - e. increasingly aggressive use of formal powers
11. When contemporary presidents face resistance from Congress, what do they typically do?
 - a. bargain with a small number of party and committee leaders
 - b. not rely on public appearances to promote their objectives
 - c. rally broad coalitions of public support to pressure Congress to act
 - d. rely exclusively on party loyalty to win key votes
 - e. rely on the power of the veto
12. In recent times, presidents have relied most heavily for advice on which of the following?
 - a. the cabinet
 - b. the House of Representatives
 - c. the Senate
 - d. the vice president
 - e. the White House staff
13. What is the War Powers Act an example of?
 - a. Congress restricting the power of the president
 - b. delegation of powers
 - c. executive order
 - d. inherent powers of the president
 - e. the Supreme Court limiting presidential power

14. President Bush suggested what major change in conducting our foreign policy?
 - a. building international coalitions
 - b. deployment of troops abroad without a declaration of war
 - c. preemptive military action
 - d. promoting democracy and freedom
 - e. reduction in the scope and use of military force
15. What did the Articles of Confederation provide for?
 - a. no head of state
 - b. a parliamentary government
 - c. a powerful head of state
 - d. a president similar to the one defined in the Constitution
 - e. a weak head of state
16. Who was the first president to have an M.B.A. degree?
 - a. Jimmy Carter
 - b. Bill Clinton
 - c. Gerald Ford
 - d. George W. Bush
 - e. Harry Truman
17. What term do we use to describe the first one hundred days in office during a president's first term?
 - a. gridlock
 - b. honeymoon effect
 - c. mandate model
 - d. Mondale model
 - e. constitutional mandate
18. What do we call the situation in which one party controls Congress while the other party controls the White House?
 - a. the separation of powers
 - b. checks and balances
 - c. pluralism
 - d. divided government
 - e. cabinet government
19. As originally ratified, the Constitution included which of the following among its requirements for presidential candidates?
 - a. a natural born citizen who has lived in the United States for at least 14 years
 - b. a male at least 35 years of age
 - c. a white male at least 35 years of age
 - d. a property owner
 - e. None of the above
20. Who is third in line to become U.S. president if the sitting president becomes incapacitated?
 - a. the secretary of state
 - b. the attorney general
 - c. the secretary of defense
 - d. the speaker of the House
 - e. the president pro tempore

21. How would we best describe the contemporary role of the president in the legislative process?
 - a. The president proposes and Congress disposes.
 - b. Under the separation of powers, the president distances himself from the process.
 - c. The president may serve as chief lobbyist and be active in all stages of legislation.
 - d. The president is active only if his party controls Congress.
 - e. The president can largely determine the content of legislation passed by Congress.
22. What is the major communications link between the president and Congress?
 - a. the legislative liaison staff
 - b. the vice president
 - c. the cabinet
 - d. the Office of Management and Budget
 - e. the Government Accountability Office
23. Which of the following is not one of the chief “roles” of the U.S. president?
 - a. commander-in-chief
 - b. chief diplomat
 - c. chief lobbyist
 - d. chief lawmaker
 - e. national leader
24. Which of the following is not one of the four fundamental objectives of our President in Foreign Relations?
 - a. fostering a peaceful international environment
 - b. mediates conflict and facilitates bargaining
 - c. assist with humanitarian aid around the globe, as needed
 - d. ensure stability and enforce negotiated peace plans
 - e. direct protection of the U.S. from external threats
25. Which of the following is true about executive orders?
 - a. They require the approval of Congress.
 - b. They carry the weight of law.
 - c. They require the approval of the Supreme Court.
 - d. They are explicitly described in the Constitution.
 - e. None of the above

Essay Questions

1. Does divided government mean we must suffer through “gridlock?” Draw on research discussed in the chapter in formulating your answer.
2. What are the major constitutional powers of the presidency and how have they changed through the years?
3. Explain the constitutional role of the vice president and how that position has changed according to the will of the president that they serve under.
4. What factors influence the level of presidential approval? Discuss both factors that tend to reduce approval ratings and factors that tend to drive up approval ratings.
5. How did the events of September 11 affect the power of President Bush? Are these changes a new direction, or do they continue trends that were observed prior to the attacks?

ANSWERS TO MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. e
2. b
3. a
4. b
5. a
6. c
7. d
8. e
9. b
10. a
11. c
12. e
13. a
14. c
15. a
16. d
17. b
18. d
19. b
20. e
21. a
22. a
23. d
24. c
25. b