

Chapter 12

The Presidency: Leadership Branch

Key Chapter Questions

1. What factors constitute effective presidential leadership?
2. What are the roots of divided government in the United States?
3. What roles does the president have that are not clearly defined in the Constitution?
4. What are the roles of the vice president and what two constitutional amendments have significantly affected the vice presidency?
5. What constraints exist upon presidential power?
6. What does presidential leadership mean in a constitutional democracy?
7. How do we judge presidential greatness or failure?

Chapter Outline

- I. Introduction/The politics of shared powers (framers admired/feared centralized leadership)
 - A. Original intent
 1. The framers of the Constitution created a presidency of limited powers
 2. The framers combined the ceremonial head of government with the actual head of government
 3. Four year terms; no original limitation; would still share power with Congress
 4. Framers outlined the powers of the president broadly
 - B. Divided powers
 1. Framers wanted powers to be shared and divided; we have divided government today
 2. Clinton faced GOP in Congress; Bush faced a 50-50 Senate
 - C. The Evolution of Presidential Influence
 1. History of presidential power one of “steady, if uneven growth”
 2. Congress and the courts have been willing partners
 3. When crises occur, Congress holds debates and delegates authority to president
 4. War, television, growth of federal role, and public expectations have all been expansion factors
 5. Supreme Court has favored an expansive interpretation of presidential power
 6. Possible decline in president’s influence? Critics note impeachment, scandals, George W. Bush in 2000
- II. In search of the perfect president
 - A. Not clear today as how much authority/influence we want to vest in president
 1. Washington knew that people needed to have confidence in their government; also knew that Americans were antigovernment and even anti-authority
 2. Three qualifications: 35 years old, 14 years a resident, natural-born citizen
 3. Active presidents are accused of dictatorship; if not they are judged weak/passive
 - B. Character and Honesty --Grover Cleveland, Bill Clinton’s reckless character; Qualities:

1. Courage, experience, political savvy, sense of history and constitutionalism
 2. Vision, listening/teaching skills, communication and morale-building skills
- III. The challenging job of being president (See Table 12-1, “A Presidential Job Description”)
- A. Presidents as crisis managers
 1. The principle of civilian control over the military is a central element in our constitutional democracy
 2. Presidents are expected to provide stability and continuity
 3. Presidents are expected to be crisis managers in the domestic sphere as well
 - B. Presidents as morale builders
 1. Presidential head-of-state duties/extraordinary symbolism
 - C. Presidents as recruiters
 1. Presidents control more than 4,000 appointments
 2. Effective presidents use their appointment power to reward campaign supporters, enhance ties to Congress, and to communicate priorities and policy directions (possible lasting impact)
 3. Turnover problem is acute—people make more in private sector
 4. Presidents have lasting impact in nomination of judges (Eisenhower-Warren, Clinton, etc.)
 5. Ethics in Government Act of 1978—disclosure/conflict-of-interest requirements
 - D. Presidents as priority and agenda setters
 1. National security policy
 - a. Presidents have more leeway in foreign policy and military affairs than in domestic matters
 - b. The Constitution vests in a president command of the diplomatic corps and the armed services and gives the president responsibility for negotiating treaties and commitments with other nations
 - c. Congress has granted presidents discretion in initiating foreign policies and the Supreme Court has upheld strong presidential authority in this area (*Curtiss-Wright* case)
 2. Economic policy
 - a. Ever since the New Deal, presidents are expected to keep unemployment low, fight inflation, keep taxes down, and promote economic growth and prosperity
 3. Domestic policy
 - a. The president must know where his followers are
 - b. A president, with the cooperation of Congress, can set national goals and propose legislation; he cannot ignore what divides or inspires a nation
 - E. Presidents as legislative and political coalition builders
 1. Presidents use State of the Union addresses, written policy messages to members of Congress
 2. Presidents cannot escape coalition building—must work with diverse groups (can hurt approval)
 3. Presidents rarely command, they must persuade people through bargaining
 - F. Presidents as molders of public opinion
 1. Press conferences can be used to build legislative and political coalitions
 2. Presidents regularly commission polls
 3. Clinton gained popularity despite his personal troubles; Clinton had testy relations with press; (See “A Closer Look—Evaluating Bill Clinton’s Presidency”)
 - G. Presidents as party leaders; but no president has ever wholly dominated his party
 - H. Presidents as administrators
 1. The line and staff organization is typical of every large administrative entity
 2. The institutionalized executive office

- a. The Executive Office of the President consists of the Office of Management and Budget, the Council of Economic Advisers, and several other staff units
 - b. The staff of the White House office can be categorized by their primary functions
 - 3. The cabinet
 - a. The cabinet consists of the president, the vice-president, the officers who head the 14 executive departments, and a few others a president considers cabinet-level officials
 - b. George W. Bush recruited a notably diverse cabinet; also troubles with Chavez/Ashcroft
 - c. Most presidents do not use cabinet as an advisory body—many cabinet members adopt “narrow advocate” views
- IV. The vice president (formerly unimportant, now performs more important role—Gore, Cheney)
 - A. Functions
 - 1. Ceremonial function of acting as president of the Senate
 - 2. Casts the tie-breaking vote if the Senate has a tie vote
 - 3. A member of the National Security Council
 - 4. Back-up for the presidency
 - B. Two constitutional amendments that significantly affected the vice presidency
 - 1. Twenty-second Amendment, imposes a two-term limit on presidents; consequently vice presidents have a better chance of moving up to the Oval Office
 - 2. Twenty-fifth Amendment
 - a. Confirms the prior practice of making the vice president not an acting president, but president, in the event of the death of a president
 - b. Outlines a procedure to determine whether an incumbent president is unable to discharge the powers and duties of the office and establishes procedures to fill a vacancy in the vice presidency
 - C. Vice-presidents will be subject to the goodwill and mood of the president
- V. Keeping Presidents Accountable
 - A. Reelection and legacy
 - 1. Midterm congressional elections can check presidents (LBJ, Ford, Clinton)
 - 2. Every president wants to leave a positive legacy
 - B. Congress and the president—Congress can use impeachment, reject presidential nominees, etc.
 - C. The Supreme Court and the president—have clashed (see text examples)
 - D. A watchdog media and the president
 - 1. Recent presidents complain that media misrepresent them and report bad news
 - 2. Presidents want initiatives praised, but media journalists wish to explain context
 - 3. Presidents and their aides engage in extensive public relations
 - 4. Presidents/media will always be in conflict—inherent in a constitutional democracy
 - E. Public opinion and presidential accountability
 - 1. Polls/media demand from presidents demand “instant accountability”
 - 2. Public blames a president for whole range of problems, some of which are not subject to presidential control
 - 3. Most presidents lose public support over time—can’t live up to exaggerated honeymoon period
 - 4. Economic successes/major TV addresses/short, successful wars/diplomatic breakthroughs all can boost (temporarily) a president’s public approval rating; so do legislative victories
- VI. Presidential greatness? How we judge them
 - A. We use varying and sometimes unfair standards when we judge presidents

1. Historians/political scientists publish rankings—sometimes differ from public's views
 2. Paradox: we long for “common person” president yet want uncommon, heroic visionary
- B. Great presidents “stretched constitution” and strengthened the presidency (Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln)
1. Best presidents surround themselves with talented advisers and administrators
 2. Great leadership depends on situation, resources, opportunity, timing, teams of leaders
 3. Some presidents valued more after leaving office (Truman)
- C. Failures—lacked programs, vision, political skill, or integrity (Harding, Nixon, Clinton—a flawed character)