

CHAPTER 12

The Presidency

PARALLEL LECTURE 12.1

- I. The constitutional basis of presidential power
 - A. The delegates to the Constitutional Convention were wary of unchecked power.
 - B. The Articles of Confederation had failed, however, in part because of the lack of a strong national executive.
 - C. Delegates had to balance the need to check the power of the presidency with the need to make it powerful enough to provide effective leadership.
 - D. In the end, they created an office that gave presidents the power to
 1. Act as administrative head of the nation.
 2. Serve as commander in chief of the military.
 3. Convene Congress.
 4. Veto legislation (but Congress can override a veto).
 5. Appoint top officials, though some are subject to the advice and consent of the Senate.
 6. Make treaties (again, subject to Senate approval).
 7. Grant pardons.
- II. The expansion of presidential power
 - A. The power of the modern presidency comes not only from the explicit powers listed in the Constitution, but also from the expansion of authority under claims of **inherent powers**.
 1. Presidents have claimed the authority to do certain things and have left it up to Congress or the courts to try to stop them. During the Civil War, President Lincoln issued orders increasing the size of the military and, therefore, military expenditures. This clearly usurped Congress's constitutional power to raise and support armies. Nevertheless, both Congress and the Supreme Court approved these actions.
 2. Today presidents issue executive orders, presidential directives that carry the force of law (the power to issue an executive order is not explicitly granted by the Constitution). Executive orders are issued for a wide variety of purposes, from administrative reorganization to civil rights (Fig 12.1)
 - B. Congress has also **delegated power** to the executive branch.
 1. During the Great Depression, for example, Congress delegated much authority to the Roosevelt administration to do what was necessary to solve the nation's ills.
 2. The delegation of authority is not necessarily permanent, however; Congress may attempt to regain its authority, as it did with the War Powers Resolution in 1973.
- III. The executive branch establishment
 - A. One of the most important of the president's resources in office is his White House staff.
 1. Each president has some key aides, including his chief of staff and his national security adviser.

2. The extended White House staff constitutes the **Executive Office of the President**. This includes the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Council of Economic Advisers, and other specialized staff.
 3. There is no “right way” for a president to organize his staff. Each president creates the structure that he thinks will work best for him, though sometimes finding the right balance takes a bit of trial and error. Scholars have so far singled out three major advisory styles: competitive management style (Franklin Roosevelt), a hierarchical staff model (Dwight Eisenhower), and collegial staffing arrangement (Bill Clinton).
- B. Vice presidents have traditionally been “standby equipment.” They are not usually used in a major advisory capacity. However, Al Gore was given a more public role than usual, and Dick Cheney has played an extraordinarily influential role in the George W. Bush administration.
- C. The cabinet is composed of the heads of the major departments in the executive branch and a small number of other key officials such as the director of the Office of Management and Budget and the ambassador to the United Nations
1. The cabinet is not used as a collective decision-making body. Cabinet meetings may not even be particularly important to the president, though he may value the advice of individual members of the cabinet.
 2. Presidents do not always know cabinet secretaries very well. Cabinet secretaries may also be too concerned with the wishes of their clientele groups.
 3. With the growth of the White House staff and the Executive Office of the President, there is little need to rely on the cabinet as an advisory body.

IV. Presidential Leadership

- A. Presidential Character
1. Presidential character matters. Scholars have identified personality traits such as strong self-esteem and emotional intelligence that are best suited to leadership positions like the American presidency. Voters repeatedly claim that they care about traits such as competence, integrity and empathy.
 2. A president’s actions in office reflect something more than his political views. They also reflect the inner forces that give rise to his basic character.
 - a) The study of the psychology of acting as president allows us to ask many interesting questions. For example: Did Lyndon Johnson’s insecurities about his masculinity make it harder for him to reduce America’s role in Vietnam? Did he see Vietnam as a personal test of his courage?
 - b) Many questions about character were raised during the Clinton presidency: how could a man who was so gifted in so many ways be so irresponsible in others?
 - (1) Some analysts argue that a review of Clinton’s childhood provide some helpful clues.
 - (2) The Lewinsky episode called into question Clinton’s fitness for the presidency, displaying his recklessness and impulsivity
 3. Personality characteristics clearly have an important effect on presidents’ success or failure in office. However, character is only one of a number of factors that go into making a successful president.
- B. The President’s Power to Persuade
1. Presidential power is determined in part by the political skills of the individual president.
 - a) In Richard Neustadt’s words, “Presidential power is the power to persuade.”

- b) Presidents must thus choose their issues carefully. They must calculate when they need to intervene and play their cards and when they need to hold back.
 - c) Though presidents must use their persuasive skills, they also have considerable power to simply order actions or policy changes in many areas.
- C. The President and The Public
 - 1. Presidents are in a better position to bargain when their public popularity is high. (See Figure 12.2.)
 - a) Over time, presidential popularity usually declines.
 - b) Presidential popularity can be strongly affected by economic conditions, unanticipated events or crises (such as the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks), or American involvement in a war.
 - c) Leading by public opinion polling reflects presidents' desire to be responsive, but high public opinion ratings do not guarantee bipartisan support in Congress or the support of broad interest group coalitions.
- D. The Political Context
 - 1. The president's popularity and legislative success depend on the wider political environment as well
 - 2. Presidential success largely depends on the number of fellow partisans in Congress, particularly whether the president's party has a majority in each chamber.
 - 3. As the president is elected independently of Congress, this may often lead to **divided government**.
 - a) Divided government is the situation that occurs when one party controls Congress and the other party controls the presidency.
 - b) Polls show that the public often finds divided government desirable .
 - 4. Favorable public opinion can help a president build consensus in the independent legislative branch.
 - 5. Despite the existing differences in the opinion among scholars regarding the impact of divided government, political scientists don't believe that it produces gridlock, a situation in which government is incapable of acting on important policy issues.
 - 6. Candidates may prefer to be vague on some controversial issues (as Nixon was about Vietnam in 1968) so as not to drive away any voters. Yet by the time candidates receive the nomination for president, they will have become closely associated with some important issues.
 - 7. Candidates who win the presidency claim they have been given a **mandate** by the voters, but such mandates tend to be more rhetoric than reality.
 - 8. A president's job is complicated when he is elected by less than a majority, such as George W. Bush's victory in the 2000 race.
- IV. The President as National Leader
 - A. Presidents carry into office a broad political vision that reflects their ideology and priorities.
 - 1. Lyndon Johnson, for example, saw government as a positive force for promoting justice and equality. Once in office, he tried to give life to that philosophy with the Great Society programs.
 - 2. Ronald Reagan came into office seeing government as part of the problem rather than as the solution. He tried to promote freedom by pursuing policies that would reduce the role of government in American life.

- B. Thus, the president is the “Chief Lobbyist” as well as an agenda setter. Presidents spend considerable time working to get legislation passed in the form they want it in.
 - 1. The president has a **legislative liaison staff** to help him.
 - 2. The White House will also work directly with interest groups to try to get them to activate members and to get their Washington, D.C., representative to lobby Congress directly.
- C. Part of the president’s job is to lead his party.
 - 1. Because parties are relatively weak in the U.S., this is an informal duty with no prescribed tasks.
 - 2. The president has become “fundraiser-in-chief” for his party, largely because it is in his best interest to have more members of his party in Congress.
- V. The President as World Leader
 - A. For nearly forty years, the president’s priority as world leader was to contain communism.
 - B. American presidents are now entering a new era in which there is more emphasis on managing security issues, like combating terrorism, fostering a peaceful international environment, protecting U.S. economic interests, and promoting democracy and humanitarian policies throughout the world.
 - C. Periodically, the president faces a grave situation in which conflict is imminent or a small conflict threatens to explode into a larger war.
 - 1. How a president handles such crises can be critical to the success of his presidency. He must exercise good judgment in situations where he may have limited time to make a decision.
 - 2. It is difficult to go beyond rather general advice in trying to design an ideal procedure for handling crises. Almost by definition, each crisis is a unique event.