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The Presidency

Chapter 8

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In this chapter we will learn about

- The double expectations gap between what Americans want the president to do and what he can deliver
- The evolution of the presidency from its constitutional origins to the modern presidency
- The president's struggle for power
- The organization and functioning of the executive office
- The role of presidential character
- The relationship of citizens to the president

The double expectations gap

- Gap between presidential promises and powers of the office
- Unlimited promises versus limited ability to deliver
 - We demand that candidates promise us everything during campaign
 - President's relatively limited formal powers prevent him from delivering on promises while in office

The double expectations gap, cont'd.

- Head of state vs. head of government
 - Head of state: the apolitical, unifying role of the president as symbolic representative of the whole country
 - Head of government: the political role of the president as leader of a political party and chief arbiter of who gets what resources
 - Must please party, broker deals, work to pass legislation
 - Most nations separate these roles so that symbolic duties won't be contaminated by politics

The evolution of the American presidency

- Framers' design for a limited executive
- Qualifications and conditions for the presidency
 - Chosen by electoral college
 - Limited to two four-year terms in office
 - Natural-born citizen; resident for 14 years
 - At least 35 years old
 - Vice president succeeds in event of death, disability, or resignation
 - Removal from office by House impeachment and Senate conviction for “high crimes and misdemeanors”

Constitutional powers of the presidency

- Executive powers
 - Chief administrator: head of federal agencies and responsible for the implementation of national policy; appoints cabinet members (heads of departments and agencies)
 - Commander in chief: top officer of the country's military establishment and civilian head of American military forces
 - Chief foreign policy maker: negotiates treaties, makes executive agreements with other countries

Constitutional powers of the presidency, cont'd.

- Legislative powers

- State of the Union address: speech given by the president to a joint session of Congress and to the nation announcing the president's agenda
- Presidential veto: president's authority to reject a bill passed by Congress; may only be overridden by two-thirds majority in each house; veto threat often brings congressional compromise

Constitutional powers of the presidency, cont'd.

- Legislative powers, cont'd.
 - Executive orders: clarification of congressional policy issued by the president and having the full force of law
 - Power to clarify how to execute law but may fundamentally change law
 - Historically responsible for major policy shifts

Constitutional powers of the presidency, cont'd.

- Judicial powers
 - Judicial appointments: nominate judges to the federal courts and justices to Supreme Court
 - Lifetime terms
 - Senatorial courtesy
 - Pardoning power: release or excuse person from legal penalties of a crime
 - Often controversial and done at end of term
 - Solicitor general: Justice Dept. officer who argues government's cases before Supreme Court
 - More cases heard and won than any other litigant

The traditional presidency

- Presidents mostly conformed to founders' limited, administrative vision of office until the 1930s
- Presidents expanded office somewhat through inherent powers
 - Inherent powers: implied but not explicitly stated in the Constitution

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The modern presidency (1933-1970s)

- Federal government assumed responsibility for economic well-being of citizens during the Depression and American role in world expanded
- Power and leadership responsibilities grew

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The modern presidency today (post-Watergate and Vietnam to present)

- Congress and media check presidents more aggressively
- Less power, but public expectations remain the same

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Presidential politics: the struggle for power

- Expectations gap: high public expectations but limited constitutional authority means presidents rely on informal powers
- Power to persuade: a president's ability to convince Congress, other political actors, and the public to cooperate with the administration's agenda

Presidential politics, cont'd.

- Use public presence to indirectly lobby other politicians
- Going public: president's strategy of appealing to the public on an issue, expecting that public pressure will be brought to bear on other political actors
- Use media, play ratings game: cycle effect, honeymoon, economy, newsworthy events

Working with Congress — directly

- Shared powers and conflicting policy goals
 - Different constituencies and politics
 - Use of legislative liaison
- Partisanship and divided government
 - Better success when party controls Congress

Managing the presidential establishment

- Cabinet
 - Members head the executive departments
 - Cabinet members have own views; may not be loyal
- Executive Office of the President (EOP)
 - Designed to serve president's interests and exert control over executive branch
 - OMB, NSC, Council of Economic Advisors

Managing the presidential establishment, cont'd.

- White House Office
 - Close relationship to president
 - Chief of staff: the person who oversees the operations of all White House staff and controls access to the president

Managing the presidential establishment, cont'd.

- Vice president
 - Used to be chosen to balance ticket; had little real power
 - Recent vice presidents have had significant roles
- First lady
 - Range of roles, from traditional to political

Presidential character

- Classifying presidential character
 - Expectation that knowing about presidential personalities will help explain or predict presidential behavior
 - Barber typology: based on energy level and orientation toward life; provides four types of presidents

Presidential character, cont'd.

- Presidential style: image projected by the president that represents how he would like to be perceived at home and abroad
 - Used by presidents to differentiate themselves from other presidents
 - Public perceives differences in these traits

Citizens check the president

- Public approval essential
 - Reelection
 - Influence of legislation (going public)
 - Combat media and legislative criticism
- Public evaluates each president differently
 - Clinton's personal approval lower than job approval
 - Bush's job approval closely matches (though lower than) personal approval

Outside conditions affect presidential approval

- Economy, cycle effects, political conflicts, and external events
- Public uses these conditions to check president