



American Government  
**OFFICE OF THE  
PRESIDENT**

John Perritano

A close-up, vertical view of the American flag, showing the blue field with white stars and the red and white stripes. The flag is draped and folded, creating deep shadows and bright highlights in the fabric.

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# Introduction

Article II of the United States Constitution. What is it? It spells out the executive branch. The executive branch runs the country. The president is the boss. Article II has four sections. Each describes the **roles** and rules.

A presidential hopeful must be at least 35 years old. A natural-born U.S. citizen. And a resident of the U.S. for 14 years. The framers wrote the Constitution. They wanted a strong leader. It's one of the hardest jobs in the world. To many, the rewards are few. People dislike you. Write mean things about you. Take you to court. They work hard to make sure you are not reelected.

So why do people run for president? There are many reasons. Some care about history. They want to be remembered. This is a big reason. People want to be known. Others think about one cause. Things like the environment. Or campaign **reform**. It may be important enough to run. Many want to have power. It may be the biggest job in the world.



Whatever the reason, the job is hard. There is a lot of worry. The responsibility is great. Every American soldier killed. Every citizen without a job. Every natural disaster. Every big oil spill. These all become the responsibility of the president of the United States.

President Barack Obama's first four-year term was busy. He signed 654 bills into law. And vetoed two. Three more bills were signed by autopen. Autopen is a mechanical signature. The president was on a trip. He allowed the autopen to be used. In the past a White House worker would travel with the bill. Bring it to the president to be signed.

The president held 19 cabinet meetings. He visited 35 countries and 44 states. Some more than once. He flew on Air Force One 836 times. And on Marine One 801 times. The president met with 131 foreign leaders. And he hosted state dinners at the White House. State dinners celebrate our foreign friendships. They are like fancy parties. Six countries

were honored. India. Mexico. China. Germany. South Korea. And Great Britain.

President Obama didn't pardon many people. It was the lowest number since President James Garfield. Mr. Obama "takes his Constitutional power to grant clemency very seriously." That's what the president's spokesman said. Only 22 people received presidential pardons. Of course that number doesn't include two pardons. Each year two Thanksgiving turkeys are saved.



*A good president does with executive power what Pablo Picasso did with paint. He takes bills into new and slightly discomfiting territory. He puts extra eyes on policies. He moves the mouth of the Supreme Court from where it should be to where it must be.*

**—Lyndon B. Johnson**



# Chapter 1


## **GOING TO WORK**

June 26, 2015. The Supreme Court made same-sex marriage legal. Same-sex couples could now marry. It was a big moment.

President Obama went outside the White House. He stepped up to a microphone. Mr. Obama is the country's chief executive. He praised the court's decision.

"All Americans are entitled to equal protection of the law," he said. "All people should be treated equally, regardless of who they are or who they love."





**Think About It:** *Does the Constitution limit a president's power?*

[ TIME TO INSPIRE ]

Later that day the president went to a funeral. It was in Charleston, South Carolina. A white gunman had killed nine people in a church. The dead were Black.

The president gave a speech. His chief-executive hat was off. The chief-of-state hat was now on. As chief of state, the president is a symbol of the nation. The chief of state inspires and comforts.

President Obama talked about **race relations**. He talked about faith. And the president talked about what it means to be an American. It was a moving speech. People cheered when he was done.

It was 1961, John F. Kennedy's **inauguration**. He spoke words of inspiration. "Ask not what your

country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country,” Kennedy said. These famous words still mean something today.

Up and away. Then 73 seconds later, the space shuttle *Challenger* was destroyed. It was 1986. Ronald Reagan was president. He said, “The future doesn’t belong to the faint-hearted; it belongs to the brave.”



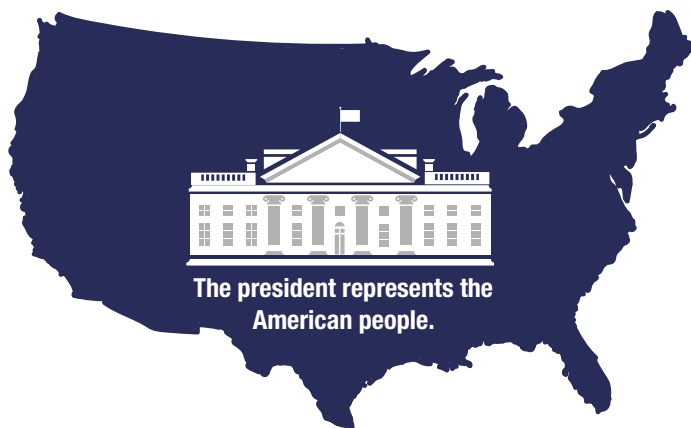
The chief of state expresses American values. Presents awards. Welcomes visitors to the White House. The chief of state holds us up.

## [ WORLD’S TOUGHEST JOB ]

Being president of the United States is a big job. There are many roles. Chief executive. Chief of state. Chief

administrator. Chief **diplomat**. Commander in chief. Chief legislator. Chief of party. Plus the chief citizen.

The president represents the people. As commander in chief, the president runs the world's greatest army. The president decides what problems need fixing. As chief executive, the president manages the government. The government is like a big company. There are many different departments.



It's the president's duty to help people and keep them safe. The president makes hard decisions each day. It's an around-the-clock job. The president's decisions can change the nation. "A president's

hardest task is not to do what is right, but to know what is right,” President Lyndon Johnson once said.

## [ SAY NO TO TYRANTS ]

It wasn't always this way. Early American presidents didn't have much power. The Constitution was written that way. That's what the framers wanted. They created three branches of government. Each had a special job. Congress would make laws. Judges would interpret them. The president would carry them out.

The framers didn't trust executive power. Who could blame them? The U.S. had just won a war with England. King George III had too much power. He forced Americans to do things they did not want to do. The war was over. The U.S. won. The old government was gone. A new one was made.



*King George III*



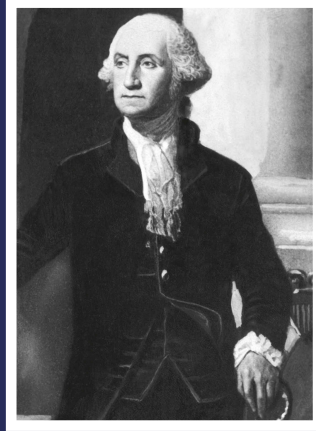
## HISTORY HAPPENED HERE

**Event:** Naming the First Chief Executive

**Where:** New York City

**When:** 1789

George Washington was the first U.S. president. What should people call him? That was what they asked. They thought long and hard. John Adams wanted to call Washington “Your Highness.” It sparked a big fight in Congress. Others had names of their own. “His Exalted Highness.” “His Elective Highness.” “His Majesty the President.”



“Why not call him George IV?” one senator asked. He was joking. Washington was not a king. Kings inherit their jobs. They rule for life. U.S. presidents are elected. They only serve for four years.

Washington was not an emperor. Emperors have absolute power. Just like kings. Presidents have limited power.

Senators fought. They finally came up with an answer. A simple name. “Mr. President.”

Americans did not want the president to become a tyrant. They didn’t want another king. So they gave the president only a few powers. Enforce laws. Veto them. Appoint judges and ambassadors. Run the military. Pardon criminals. Make treaties. But they

didn't know how a president would do these things. One of the president's jobs was to receive officials from other nations. The president also had to give Congress a yearly update on the state of the nation. Today the speech is called the State of the Union.

## [ OFFICE CLERKS ]

George Washington did it. So did some other early presidents. They stretched their power. Thomas Jefferson bought the Louisiana Territory. He didn't ask Congress for its okay. He just did it. America doubled in size overnight.

Abraham Lincoln was president during the Civil War. He took control of the government. He freed the enslaved. Many called him a tyrant. A **dictator**. They thought he abused his power.



A few presidents were more like office clerks. They signed papers. Those presidents gave people jobs. They did not try to solve problems. James Buchanan was president before Lincoln. He didn't do much to stop the coming Civil War. Most presidents didn't work a full day. They took summers off.



*James Buchanan*

Early presidents didn't even campaign to be elected. Others did that for them. Thomas Jefferson ran against John Adams. Insulting things were said. Bad names were used. One said Jefferson was "a mean-spirited, low-lived fellow." Jefferson's people said Adams was "one of the most **egregious** fools upon the continent."

## [ POWER PLAY ]

Things slowly changed. Presidents gained more power from Congress. It was the early 1900s. The president was now the most important person in the

government. Theodore Roosevelt. Woodrow Wilson. Both had great power. Especially when it came to dealing with other nations. They then left office. Three presidents followed them. They became clerks again.

Then came President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was during the Great Depression. The **economy** failed. It was a terrible time in the U.S. Millions lost their homes. Jobs. Shops.





Roosevelt changed the role of the president. He played an active part in people's lives. Roosevelt started work programs. Saved banks and farms. He helped homeowners. Factory workers. Writers. Artists.



World War II (1939–1945) came. Roosevelt became even more powerful. He was popular. The president led the nation to victory. He died in

office. The power of the president was great. Future presidents did not want to give that up.

There have been 44 administrations. But only 43 people have been president so far. Grover Cleveland served two **nonconsecutive** terms. He was president number 22 and 24. John Adams was number two. He knew how hard the job could be. “No man who ever held the office of president would congratulate a friend on obtaining it,” he said.

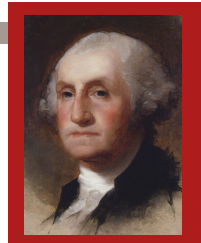
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## **FACES IN THE CROWD**

### **George Washington**

Born: February 22, 1732

Died: December 14, 1799



George Washington could have been president for a long time. There were no rules saying how long he could serve. Washington left after two terms. Each was four years. He set the example. Other presidents followed. Except Franklin D. Roosevelt. He was elected four times.

A law was written after Roosevelt died. Many Americans thought it was a bad idea for a president to serve more than eight years. They wanted to change the Constitution. In 1951, they did. The nation passed the 22nd Amendment. It stopped presidents from serving more than two terms.

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American Government

# OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

**Being an informed citizen is not a choice. It is a responsibility.**

*Office of the President* details the specific jobs of the president, including chief of state, chief executive, and commander in chief. Learn about the role of the president's cabinet and the limited powers of the office, with relevant facts and interesting sidebars. Open-ended "Think About It" questions frame each topic.

- Does the Constitution limit a president's power?
- Should the president be held to a higher standard than other elected officials?
- Are there too many departments for the chief executive to manage?
- Was Lincoln's move to hire his enemies a good one?
- Does Congress do a good job of limiting the president's power?
- Can the president change public opinion about a topic? How powerful is the art of persuasion?

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