

with him, included him in all White House advisory groups and all important meetings, and asked him to lobby Congress and read the paperwork that crossed Carter's desk. Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Bill Clinton added to this new tradition.

The relationship between Bill Clinton and Al Gore was surely one of the closest in the history of the presidency (see "You Are There" at the beginning of the chapter). Gore became so influential in the Clinton White House that he was referred to as a "shadow president" and his staff as a "shadow cabinet." There is no legal basis for institutionalizing such an expansion of the office because, beyond the few duties specified in the Constitution, whatever duties vice presidents assume, and whatever advising or policymaking authority they acquire, are at the president's discretion. Therefore, much depends on the personal relationship of the two people filling the positions and how needy the president is for assistance or how generous he is about sharing power.

The President and the People

Our earliest presidents had little contact with the general public and even communicated with Congress in writing. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson averaged only three speeches a year to the public, while John Adams averaged one. Adams in fact spent eight months of his presidency living in Quincy, Massachusetts, avoiding Congress and conflict over the War of 1812.³⁷

Abraham Lincoln thought it prudent to avoid giving speeches. He told people gathered at Gettysburg the night before his famous address, "I have no speech to make. In my position it is somewhat important that I should not say foolish things. It very often happens that the only way to help it is to say nothing at all."³⁸ It has been many years since we have had such a diffident public speaker in the White House.

Until the advent of radio and television, presidents had to speak to the nation indirectly through newspapers. The development of new transportation and communication technologies has given presidents more opportunities to utilize the presidency as a "bully pulpit," as Teddy Roosevelt called it.

Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats were the first presidential effort to use the media to speak directly and regularly to the nation. They helped make him, and his of-

fice, the most important link between people and government. In a personalized style he began, "My friends. . ." People felt Roosevelt was talking to each of them in their own homes, and they gathered around their radios whenever he was on. Whereas President Herbert Hoover had received an average of forty letters a day, Roosevelt received four thousand letters a day after beginning his chats.³⁹ He even received some addressed not to "The President" but simply to "My Friend, Washington, D.C."

The Personal Presidency

Political scientist Theodore Lowi believes that we have had a **personal presidency** since the New Deal era.⁴⁰ He argues that, consciously or unconsciously, the American people have had a "new social contract" with the president since the 1930s. In return for getting more power and support from us than we give to other government officials, the president is supposed to make sure we get what we want from government.

The personal presidency ties government directly to the people and gives us someone to rally around during times of crisis. To the extent that it serves as a focal point for national unity, the personal presidency also contributes to our ability to achieve national goals.

Polls have consistently shown that Americans consider "leadership" very important in evaluating presidents.⁴¹ Somewhat paradoxically in light of their fear of "big government," most people want a president who can get government to "do" things.

Franklin Roosevelt was the first president to use survey data to identify public needs and to use the media to tell people that he would give them what they wanted. Making himself the major link between public opinion and government often enabled him to overcome the inertia and divisions associated with a system of fragmented powers.

However, Roosevelt's actions also revealed a cost of the personal presidency: Presidents with great power often seek more. Roosevelt won reelection in 1936 by a landslide, confirming popular support for his New Deal. This led him to seek more power by trying to expand the size of an unfriendly Supreme Court so he could appoint judges who supported him. He also tried to get local and state parties to nominate congressional candidates he favored by using federal funds as a carrot. The defeat of pro-Roosevelt congressional candidates in 1938 ruined both his plans. People did not want to politicize the Court, and state and local parties wanted to pick their own nominees.

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt died, most Americans felt a personal loss. Here Chief Petty Officer Graham Jackson plays "Nearer My God to Thee" as the president's body is carried to the train that returned him to Washington.

Edward Clark/Life magazine © Time Inc.



Nixon and Reagan also tried to override constitutional limitations on their power after their landslide reelections in 1972 and 1984, as evidenced in the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals. The use of popular mandates to amass power in the Oval Office illustrates the relationship between the growth of the modern presidency and the rise of the personal presidency.

Practitioners of the personal presidency have sought more power because they promised more than they could deliver. To win approval for their programs, they needed more power to compete successfully with other parts of government and maintain their public support. Thus, they were caught in a cycle of making great promises, seeking more power to honor them, and making even greater promises to get more power. Inevitably, they promised more than they could deliver. Bush promised to send astronauts to Mars, protect the environment, be the "education president," and do many other things while cutting the budget deficit without raising taxes. Today promising *less* from government has become the tactic of the personal presidency. So while Clinton also began by making promises and saying he wanted "to do it all as quick as we can," he started his second term by announcing that "the day of big government is over."⁴²

Yet Clinton had his own angle on the personal presidency, an approach that is said to "have changed the very nature of what the public expects of its Presidents." While deemphasizing big government, Clinton dwelt on "little initiatives," such as his proposal to adopt uni-

forms in public schools. These are what one of his advisers called "kitchen table issues," problems that families deal with on a daily basis and may discuss around the kitchen table.⁴³ Not only was Clinton extremely adept at speaking directly to people in a conversational style, but he projected an intimate knowledge of domestic, school, and community problems that were of great concern in everyday life.

Lowi might have been right in calling the personal presidency the "victim" of democracy, but irresponsible leadership is not an inevitable consequence of the age of mass media. The separation of powers and the press should check the short-term excesses of presidential power. However, every president since the 1960s has needed and sought media exposure and in turn has had to submit to intense scrutiny by media that delve into every detail of his personal life, as well as his performance on official duties. Few people can withstand such prolonged exposure without losing public esteem. (For attitudes toward the presidency by its occupants, see the "Match the Quote to the President.")

Persuading the Public

The relationship of the president to the people started well before inauguration day. Changes in electoral politics have established a relationship with the public quite different from the one that the Founders saw for their heads of state. The president is no longer just an elder states-

man chosen by the Electoral College or a politician selected by party professionals to run for the presidency; he is a politician with a national constituency who convinced the rank-and-file voters in his party to choose him in the primaries and at least a plurality of the general population to vote for him in the general election. The modern president comes into office with extensive experience in persuading the public.

As presidential scholar Richard Neustadt pointed out long ago, presidents need more than their formal powers to achieve their goals. They need the **power to persuade**.⁴⁴ In addition to the public, presidents must be able to win over interest group leaders; newspaper and magazine publishers, reporters, and columnists; judges who hear challenges to their policies; and a majority in Congress. These policymakers and opinion elite, who Neustadt called Washingtonians, are, in short, the people the president needs to get his policies enacted. Because the Washingtonians also need him to get what they want, a president can bargain and persuade.

The effective president is “one who seizes the center of the Washington bazaar and actively barter . . . to build winning coalitions.”⁴⁵ Presidents “remember” their friends by putting their pet projects in the budget, by campaigning for them, and by naming the people they want to public office.

In pursuit of his policy agenda, a president can use his powers to persuade the public as a means to bring pressure on reluctant Washingtonians, or when the public is disinterested or slow to accept, he can try to persuade Washingtonians to shape public opinion. In doing so he has much more to rely on than his rhetorical skills. A president’s powers give him considerable favors and penalties to dispense. As the chief maker of foreign policy, he can seek support from Irish and Jewish Americans by supporting their objectives in Northern Ireland and the Middle East. As de facto leader of his party, he can use the symbolic resources of the presidency in campaigning for candidates he supports. And as chief budget maker, he has many favors to give and withhold, including support for hundreds of pork barrel projects.

Match the Quote to the President

1. Powers can be used more than once.

2. I don't even remember that I ever was president.

3. No man who ever held the office would congratulate another on attaining it.

4. Wars and politics are so different that I still think it is the greatest job in the world.

5. His law partners said of him, “If his ambition is still the right that knows no rest.”

6. He wanted to put a sign on the Oval Office that said, “Don't shoot, he's doing his damnedest.”

7. I called having both horns and horns in the White House an evil combination.

8. This country is not white men and by God, as long as I am President

9. I will be in government for only

10. I don't know how to describe the Presidency.

11. I can use it [the presidency] for any damned thing I want to.

12. Unpredictability is the greatest weapon a president can have.

13. You are only fit to be president when you are not obsessed with it.

14. Above all, . . . my something.

15. No man ever lived a really well life unless he possessed power.

16. The presidency is the greatest sacrifice ever made. I feel like I was facing my executioner.

17. I will be in government for only

18. We are so young.

19. William Adams.

20. John Adams.

21. Woodrow Wilson.

22. Abraham Lincoln.

23. George Washington.

24. Bill Clinton.

25. Andrew Jackson.

26. Franklin D. Roosevelt.

27. Andrew Wilson.

28. William Adams.

44. Interview with Bill Clinton, *Time*, June 19, 2000; Tom Achinger, *Modern View* (New York: Penguin, 2000).
45. Alliances from PBS “American Presidency” series (<http://www.pbs.org/>).

ANSWERS: 1. C, 2. B, 3. F, 4. E, 5. A, 6. D, 7. G, 8. I, 9. H, 10. J, 11. K, 12. L, 13. M, 14. N, 15. O, 16. P, 17. Q, 18. R, 19. S, 20. T, 21. U, 22. V, 23. W, 24. X, 25. Y, 26. Z, 27. AA, 28. AB.

The strategy of making a direct presidential appeal to the people to gain cooperation from Washingtonians is called *going public*.⁴⁶ The strategy includes giving prime-time television and radio addresses, holding press conferences, making speeches at events around the country, and using satellite technology to give interviews to local television stations, conventions, and other audiences.

Why have some presidents found going public attractive? One reason is that the weakness of party identification forces presidential candidates to appeal as widely as they can for support. They continue doing so after taking office because they have seen its value. In addition, national parties have been unable to represent the larger number of interests produced by government's larger role in society. This has helped disperse power



Although the public did not always agree with President Reagan's policies or views, he was popular in part because of his image as a rugged individualist.

Ronald Reagan Library

among alliances interest groups form with congressional committees, subcommittees, and executive agencies that write and administer the laws they lobby for and against. It is difficult for presidents to know, bargain with, and persuade all these Washingtonians. It is often easier to go public.

Finally, as outsiders, or presidential candidates without national political experience, Carter, Reagan, and Clinton have used the strategy of going public because they lacked ties with the Washingtonians they needed to govern.⁴⁷ In a 1981 television address to stimulate support for major tax cuts, Reagan asked viewers "to put aside any feelings of frustration . . . about our political institutions . . . [and] contact your senators and congressmen."⁴⁸ The public's reaction was swift and overwhelming. Many Democrats decided to support the president, and the cuts passed.

Going public has a number of important effects. It makes the workings of the presidency resemble an election campaign because presidents fly around the country to get their views in the media. Seeking coverage and support, they use the same simple, dramatic style to oversell their positions that they used as candidates. To identify public reactions, presidential staff regularly gather data just as they did on the campaign trail. A White House aide described the Reagan administration as "a P.R. outfit that became President and took over the country."⁴⁹

Going public leads presidents to use "sound bites" to simplify their positions to build public support while working behind the scenes to build congressional and interest group support. This approach worked for Reagan, who publicly described his 1982 budget package as "a line drawn in the dirt" to stress his resolve. He traveled around the country to generate public support, and his staff used focus groups to identify popular reactions to his proposals. These analyses told his advisers where he could hold firm and where he should compromise. And he made the necessary changes in his package to build congressional support for it.

Clinton used Reagan's sound-bite and compromise strategy to gain congressional passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement and a ban on assault weapons. But Clinton's health care reform plan was too complex and difficult to understand, making it an easy target for interest groups to oppose by playing on fears of an unknown plan. His effort to build support for his position failed, and Congress defeated his bill.

Going public may sometimes lead presidents to emphasize public relations over results and to blame the

media rather than themselves for low poll scores. For example, Nixon claimed the media had hounded him from office, Reagan said they exaggerated the importance of the Iran-Contra scandal, and Clinton complained they did not give him credit for his first-year accomplishments. "I have fought more damn battles than any president has in 20 years with the possible exception of Reagan's first budget and not gotten one damn bit of credit from the knee-jerk liberal press," Clinton said. "I am sick and tired of it, and you can put that in the damn article."⁵⁰

Bush's use of the going public strategy in garnering support for the Persian Gulf War was very skillful. He decided to use military force soon after Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Until January, when Congress approved this option, Bush made many speeches comparing Iraq's Saddam Hussein to Hitler, condemning his use of chemical and biological weapons on his own people, and warning that Iraq would soon have nuclear weapons. Bush's efforts won more public support for using force, which in turn made congressional support more likely.

Public Opinion and Effectiveness in Office

Americans pay more attention to the president than to other public officials, and we typically link government's success to the effectiveness of his leadership. Although many factors affect public opinion about presidential effectiveness, a positive image of a president's leadership skills helps protect his ratings after serious policy failures.

Many people are predisposed to support the president and to look at his overall record rather than his short-run successes.⁵¹ Failure on specific issues does not always produce low scores on general performance. For example, majorities of respondents simultaneously disapproved of Reagan's handling of environmental and foreign policy issues, which the public thinks are important, and registered approval of his overall performance.

Crises called *rally events* affect presidential popularity.⁵² President Clinton's approval ratings increased after the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. Public support rises significantly at such times because people do not want to hurt the president, the symbol of national unity. However, the higher levels of support produced by rally events are rarely sustained.⁵³ The rise in support among those who were critical of a president before the event tends to be short-lived.

Support for Bush's policies toward Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait also demonstrates public readiness to

rally around the president. In November 1990, the public was divided over Bush's decision to send more troops to the Persian Gulf, with 47 percent approving and 46 percent disapproving. By January 1991, after fighting began, almost 90 percent approved of the way he was handling the situation. As Figure 2 shows, this increasing support helped raise Bush's general approval ratings from 54 percent in October to 89 percent in February. The unexpectedly swift defeat of Iraq with surprisingly few American casualties kept Bush's poll scores high for some time.⁵⁴ However, the effect of the Gulf War faded as Americans began focusing on domestic concerns, especially economic problems. Bush's approval rating fell to 33 percent by mid-1992, leading to his defeat by Clinton in November.⁵⁵

Clinton's up and down scores during his first term reflected public anxiety about his leadership skills. In 1995 polls 56 percent of Americans described Clinton as a weak president, and 80 percent expected the Republican Congress would have more influence than Clinton on the nation's direction.⁵⁶ But Clinton was far more adept at going public than the Republican leadership, and by the end of his first term, his approval rating was at 53 percent and Congress was in legislative retreat.

Winning consistently good ratings when public anger and frustration with government are widespread is difficult. Although short-term crises or rally events can help a president's ratings, long-term conditions will continue to influence them. Clinton's 67 percent approval rating during the impeachment investigation may have been sparked by a public backlash against the salaciousness of congressional and media commentary, but it is more likely that he got a positive bounce from public confidence in the overall state of the economy.

The more important issue is whether a president with high approval ratings can translate them into policy successes. Reagan had only qualified success in using his popularity to get Congress to enact his legislative proposals. He relied heavily on his own appointment and budgetary powers and the issuing of executive orders to accomplish much of his agenda. The problem with this approach is that it is easily reversible by a successor. Bush showed little inclination to use his high ratings to pursue any legislative agenda on domestic policy. Clinton, with higher sustained approval ratings than either Reagan or Bush late in their terms and a substantial legislative agenda, was not able to translate his popular support into victories in Congress.