

Ch. 1 – US Politics

Learning Intentions

In this section, you should understand:

- The structure of the US government.
- The roles of the President.
- The domestic policies of the presidents and the growth of the imperial presidency.
- The role of Truman and Johnson.

Structure of the US GOVERNMENT

Introduction

The American political landscape underwent dramatic changes from the era of Franklin D. Roosevelt through to Ronald Reagan. From 1945 to 1989, these years witnessed seismic shifts in the U.S. political system, government policies, and global outreach. To comprehend this evolution, one must have a foundational understanding of the American Constitution and the principles of 'separation of powers' and 'checks and balances' that underpin the governance system in the United States. It is against this backdrop that the power dynamics of the Presidency itself have evolved, impacting domestic and foreign affairs profoundly.

Structures and Tensions

The United States of America won its independence from Britain in the late eighteenth century. The leaders of the new America drew up a constitution which laid out the basic laws of the country. The new government was:

- A **representative democracy** - the people elected leaders who acted on their behalf.
- A **republic** which had a President, rather than a King, at its head.
- A **federal system** or structure with a central (or national) government in the capital, Washington, sharing power with state governments.

US States and Natural Resources



Federal and State Powers

The Constitution gave some powers to the **federal** (or central) government and some to the **states**. In general, the **federal government** controls war and peace, taxation, interstate and foreign trade and foreign relations. The **states**, on the other hand, provide education, regulate trade within the state, maintain the police and levy local taxes. This **separation of power** between the federal and state governments creates **tension** between the two, but it was one way to avoid an abuse of power. The second way was to separate the powers within the federal government.

Separation of Powers

The eighteenth-century leaders did not want any branch of government to have too much power, so they devised a **separation of powers** between three separate branches - the **legislative** (which passed laws), the **executive** (which carried out the laws) and the **judicial** (which examined the laws). The separation of powers created a system of **checks and balances** which allowed each branch to have some control over the other two branches. This prevented any one branch becoming too powerful.

KEY CONCEPT: SEPARATION OF POWERS

In the US Constitution, each branch of government has different (separate) powers so that no one branch can have too much power. The power to make laws is divided between the President, Congress and the Supreme Court. Power is also divided between the federal (national) government and the state governments.

THE BRANCHES OF THE US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

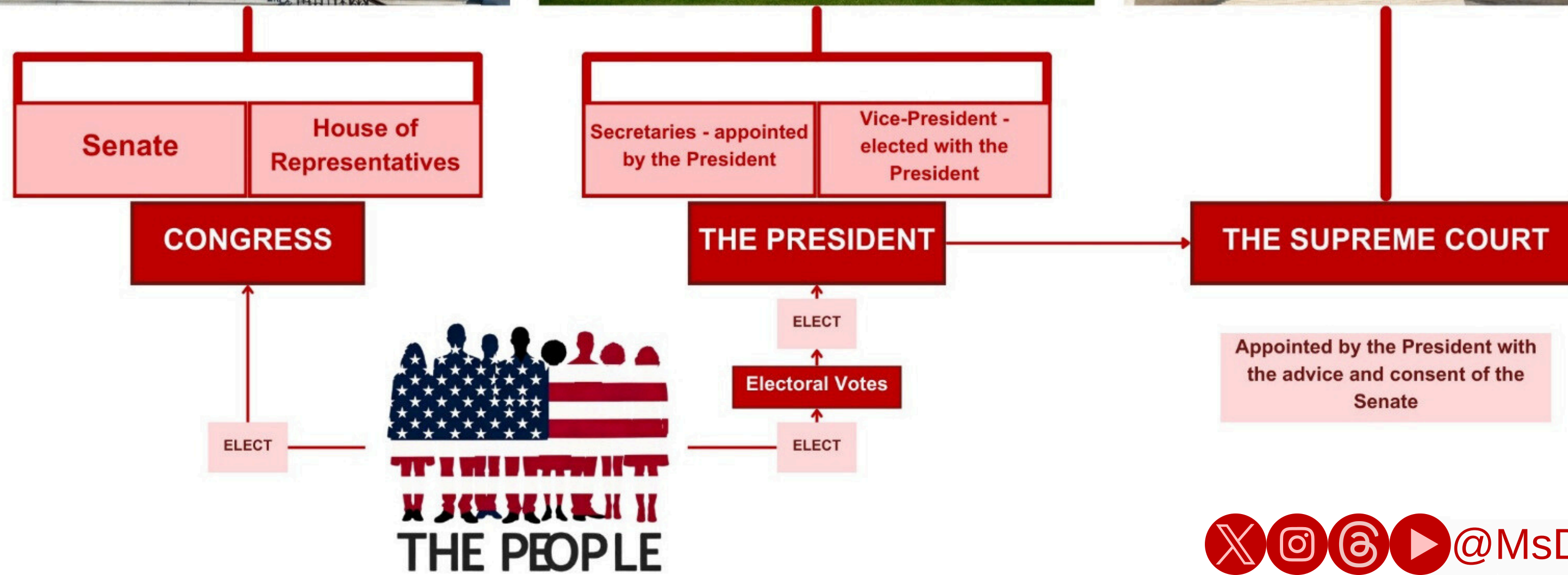
THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH
Makes the country's laws



THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH
Administers the country



THE JUDICIAL BRANCH
Explains and interprets the laws and the Constitution



The Legislative Branch

Congress is the **legislative** or **lawmaking** branch of government. The power of passing laws is shared by the two houses of Congress - the House of Representatives and the Senate - based on Capitol Hill in Washington. The two Houses have a system of checks and balances - each House must co-operate and compromise with the other to get laws passed. Congress has many important powers - to declare war, raise taxes and pay for the armed forces, and it can **impeach** (bring charges against) any member of the executive branch who may have committed a crime.

The **House of Representatives** has 435 members who serve for two years. They represent the people of a congressional district. The House of Representatives has a special role in taxation - all bills (proposed laws) for raising revenue (money) must begin in the House.

The **Senate** is much smaller, with 100 members - two from each state, regardless of the population size. Each senator is elected for a six-year term, with elections held for one-third of the senators every two years. The Senate has special responsibility for approving treaties with foreign countries; it is more influential than the House of Representatives in foreign affairs.

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POLITICAL PARTIES

There are two main political parties in the US - the **Democratic Party** and the **Republican Party**. They are organised at national and local level, where they are run by county and state committees. Every four years the parties hold national conventions to choose Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates and to decide a **platform**. This is a statement of the policies of the party which will guide elected representatives.

In general, the **Democrats** favoured federal government intervention in economic and social affairs. On the other hand, the **Republicans** were opposed to government intervention and preferred to give more power to the individual states. Third parties have developed in the US but they have never lasted very long. After the Second World War, the Southern Democrats formed the **States' Rights** or **Dixiecrat Party** to protest at giving **civil rights** to black Americans. At a later stage, in the late 1960s, the American **Independence Party**, led by George Wallace, opposed **racial integration** (the coming together of the races). Very often those parties drew attention to important social and political issues.

The Judicial Branch

The highest court in the US is the **Supreme Court**. Its principal function is to review laws passed by Congress or the state governments. It has the power to declare laws **unconstitutional** (or invalid). Judges are appointed by the President, and Presidents can therefore influence the general direction of the judgments of the Supreme Court.

The Executive Branch

The President of the US is elected every four years on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November. Presidents can only serve for two terms. The successful candidate takes office after inauguration (the ceremony for swearing in the President) on 20 January of the following year. On that day the incoming President takes an oath of office: *'I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.'*

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What type of government structure does the US have?
2. How and why is there a separation of powers?
3. What is the function of each branch of the US government?
4. What two main political parties rule the US?

ROLES OF THE PRESIDENT

Roles of the President

The President has **six main functions** or roles:

- Chief executive
- Commander-in-chief
- Foreign policy director
- Legislative leader
- Party leader
- Head of state

KEY CONCEPT: PRESIDENTIAL BUREAUCRACY

As the influence of the President and the federal government grew, so did the bureaucracy (civil service) which had to implement the policies. The President expanded the number of Cabinet posts and departments, also increasing the number of agencies to carry out presidential policy.

Chief Executive

As chief executive or chief administrator of the country, he or she has to enforce the laws of the country and prepare a national budget. The President is assisted by the **Cabinet**. These are the heads of the government departments who are appointed by the President with the approval of Congress. As the power of the President grew, more departments were formed to run the country. Since 1945, six new departments were added, including Defence, Education and Transportation.

Commander-in-Chief

The President is commander-in-chief of the US army, navy and air force. In this way, he or she is responsible for the **defence of the country**. He or she appoints the top military officers with the approval of Congress. Only the President can decide on the use of nuclear weapons.

Foreign Policy Director

The President can make treaties, appoint ambassadors and meet foreign diplomats. The **Secretary of State** is usually responsible for foreign policy, but some Presidents have been more active than others in this area.

Legislative Leader

The President can propose laws for Congress in his **State of the Union** address, given to the Houses of Congress in January each year. He or she has a large influence on laws passing through Congress. He or she has to work to ensure the support of Congress for his or her proposals. The President can also issue Executive Orders, which do not need Congressional approval.

Up to the present time, all US Presidents have been men. Hillary Clinton failed in her attempt to become the first female President in the 2016 election. However, she has opened up opportunities for potential female candidates in future elections.

Party Leader

The President is **leader** of his party. He works to form the party's policies on all major issues. The President is in a strong position if his party is in control (is in the majority) in the House of Representatives and in the Senate.

Head of State

This is mostly a ceremonial role where the President attends functions and meets the representatives of foreign countries.

The **PRESIDENCY** *from* **ROOSEVELT** *to* **REAGAN**

Introduction

The power of US Presidents has grown from being largely honorary at the end of the eighteenth century to being the most powerful person in the US (and the world) in the second half of the twentieth century:

- The rise of the power of US Presidents has depended very much on **individual** Presidents. Some have been stronger leaders than others.
- It also depended on the circumstances of the time. Very often in times of crisis such as the American Civil War, the First and Second World Wars, the Great Depression and the Cold War, the power of the President has been expanded to lead the country.
- Presidential power has also grown because **American society** has become more complicated, with greater problems. Presidents have been given more powers to solve these problems. Sometimes this has happened because Congress failed to take action itself.

Introduction

- It also depended on **political beliefs**. Some Presidents believed in active government, while others believed in less active government, often giving power back to the individual states. The President is listened to because of his position, so his policies are more likely to be acted upon. As one President called it, this was the '**bully pulpit**'. When a President raises issues, it will be more likely to become part of national debate.
- Some historians have argued that the power of the President is the '*power to persuade*'. In other words, the power of the President rests on **bargaining and persuading Congress** (House of Representatives and the Senate) to carry out presidential policies. Because of the separation of powers, the President has to negotiate and bargain with other groups.
- The President is the **only unifying** force in a political system where power is so scattered. He speaks for the US, more than any of the other branches of government.

Some historians have called this the growth of the **imperial presidency**, whereby more and more power was **centralised** in the hands of the President.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the six main functions of the US President?
2. What is the imperial presidency?

RECENT PRESIDENTS OF THE US

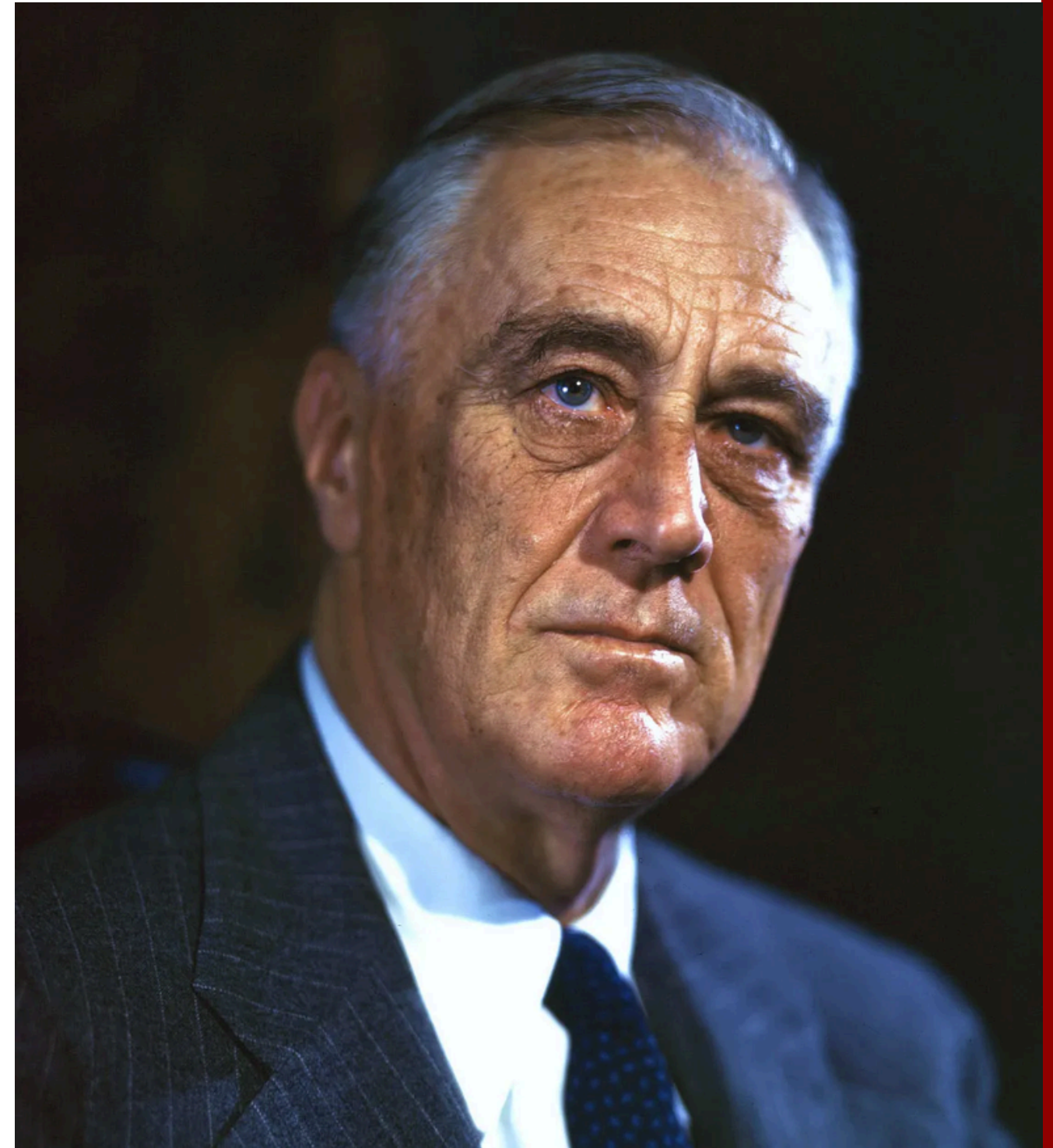
YEAR	PRESIDENT	FIRST LADY	VICE PRESIDENT	PARTY
1933-1941	Franklin D. Roosevelt	Eleanor Roosevelt	John N. Garner	Democrat
1941-1945	Franklin D. Roosevelt	Eleanor Roosevelt	Henry A. Wallace	Democrat
1945	Franklin D. Roosevelt	Eleanor Roosevelt	Harry S. Truman	Democrat
1945-1949	Harry S. Truman	Bess Wallace Truman	office vacant	Democrat
1949-1953	Harry S. Truman	Bess Wallace Truman	Barkley, Alben W.	Democrat
1953-1961	Dwight D. Eisenhower	Mamie Doud Eisenhower	Richard M. Nixon	Republican
1961-1963	John F. Kennedy	Jacqueline Kennedy	Lyndon B. Johnson	Democrat
1963-1965	Lyndon B. Johnson	Lady Bird Johnson	office vacant	Democrat
1965-1969	Lyndon B. Johnson	Lady Bird Johnson	Hubert H. Humphrey	Democrat
1969-1973	Richard M. Nixon	Pat Nixon	Spiro T. Agnew	Republican
1973-1974	Richard M. Nixon	Pat Nixon	Gerald R. Ford	Republican
1974-1977	Gerald R. Ford	Betty Ford	Nelson Rockefeller	Republican
1977-1981	Jimmy Carter	Rosalynn Carter	Walter F. Mondale	Democrat
1981-1989	Ronald Reagan	Nancy Reagan	George Bush	Republican
1989-1993	George Bush	Barbara Bush	Dan Quayle	Republican
1993-2001	Bill Clinton	Hillary Rodham Clinton	Albert Gore	Democrat
2001-2009	George W. Bush	Laura Bush	Richard Cheney	Republican
2009-2017	Barack Obama	Michelle Obama	Joseph R. Biden	Democrat
2017-2021	Donald J. Trump	Melania Trump	Mike Pence	Republican
2021-	Joseph R. Biden	Jill Biden	Kamala Harris	Democrat

The Roosevelt Presidency

By the time President Roosevelt (FDR) died in April 1945, he had expanded the power of the presidency considerably. He was the longest-serving President and he was faced with two major crises - the Great Depression and the Second World War.

In trying to solve these problems, he was able to extend presidential power. In Roosevelt's view, *'The presidency is pre-eminently a place of moral leadership.'* This was the rise of the **imperial presidency**, when more power was **centralised** in the hands of the President.

During the Great Depression, as part of Roosevelt's **New Deal** policies, the government took a more active interest in the economy. Roosevelt set up many emergency agencies 'to promote the general welfare' (US Constitution). This was the beginning of the American **welfare state**. Even though the Supreme Court limited the spread of the New Deal policies by declaring some of them unconstitutional, others expanded the power of the federal government.

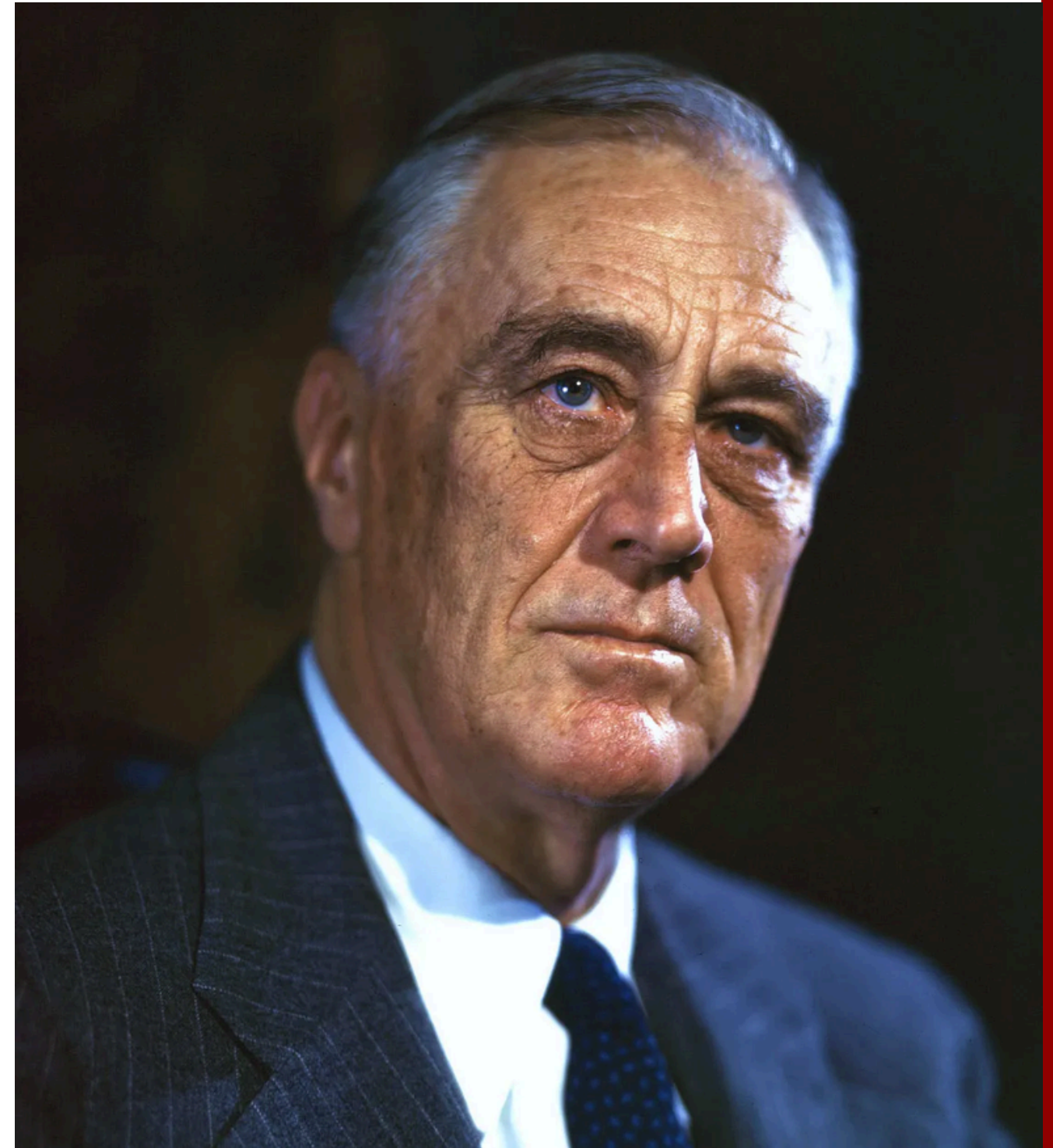


The Roosevelt Presidency

In 1939, Roosevelt created the **Executive Office** to control the work of the many agencies that operated directly for the White House.

During the Second World War, Roosevelt extended federal government control over manufacturing. In foreign policy, he took part in the wartime conferences with Churchill (Britain) and Stalin (Soviet Union). He gave general direction to US foreign policy.

Roosevelt provided a direct link with the public (people) by speaking over the radio in his 'fireside chats'. He was also the first President to speak on television. This increased his **popularity**.



The Truman Presidency

Truman was **Vice-President**, so he became President when Roosevelt died in office (April 1945). Truman was a strong and honourable leader, with sympathy for the less well-off in society. He was a straight-talking person who liked simple food and pleasures. Truman was prepared to take decisive action when it was necessary. *'The buck stops here'* was a sign he displayed on his desk to show how he viewed his responsibility as a President.



Truman's Domestic Policies

- Truman was more successful in his foreign than in his domestic policies. This was partly because he faced opposition to the latter in Congress.
- **Housing:** Truman was faced with a **serious housing shortage** as thousands of demobilised soldiers returned home. Working through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), Truman made loans from the banks more easily available. The construction industry responded by increasing house construction from 117,000 units in 1944 to 1.7 million units in 1950. In this way, house construction became a key component in boosting the post-war US economy.
- **Inflation and wages:** In spite of demands from industry and business to ease price controls, Truman continued the Office of Price Administration (OPA) which had been set up during World War II to control prices and wages. This **limited inflation** to 7 per cent over the first ten months after the war. In relation to **wages**, Truman had to resolve huge strikes in the electrical, car, and steel industries, and later in the mining and railway industries. He sought increased legal powers from Congress to control industries vital to the national interest. But Congress resisted and Truman was forced to use mediation to solve the strikes.
- **Congress:** Truman had difficulties with Congress. When he became President, Southern Democrats (Dixiecrats) disagreed with his **21-point programme** for social reform, so he failed to get it passed in Congress. Then the Republicans got control of Congress in the 1946 elections and they were opposed to greater government power.

Truman's Domestic Policies

- **The 1948 presidential election:** The Republican candidate, Thomas Dewey, was the favourite to win this election because the Democrats were divided between Truman, Strom Thurmond, a Dixiecrat candidate, and Huey Wallace, a Progressive candidate. But Truman won because he travelled 22,000 miles on his '**whistle stop**' tour to meet people all over the country. His style pleased ordinary people, who said, '*Give 'em hell, Harry!*' He won with the support of organised labour and working-class Americans, as well as the support of black Americans because of his views on civil rights, housing, health care and education.
- **Fair Deal:** After his re-election, Truman wanted to build on Roosevelt's New Deal. He proposed a **Fair Deal** - to increase the minimum wage, improve health care, set up public works schemes and expand social security. He had some success - there was better social security, more public housing and slum clearance. But other proposals were rejected by Congress. Even though Democrats won a majority in the 1948 elections, Southern Democrats (Dixiecrats) combined with Republicans to reject further government involvement in education and health care.
- **Economy:** The US economy was prosperous after the Second World War, so unemployment did not rise above 4 per cent. Truman set up the **Council of Economic Advisers** and passed **the Employment Act**, which showed that the US accepted more government involvement in the economy. Truman also passed **the GI Bill**, which gave loans for education, housing and business to veterans - 8 million veterans were helped by 1955. There was major economic growth in US by 1950 and this continued after Truman.

Truman's Domestic Policies

- **Civil rights:** Truman set up the **President's Committee on Civil Rights**. Their report outlined a widespread pattern of segregation and discrimination. In 1948, Truman called on Congress to pass laws on civil rights, including a call to outlaw lynching. Congress failed to act. So later in 1948, Truman issued Executive Orders that ended racial discrimination in federal employment and he desegregated (ended racial segregation) the US armed forces.
- **McCarthyism and the Red Scare:** There was a growth of Communist hysteria in the US after the Second World War due to the Cold War. The House Un-American Committee (HUAC) and the actions of Senator Joe McCarthy (McCarthyism) in looking for Communists in the US heightened tensions. Even though Truman disliked McCarthy, his own actions played on the fear of Communism, e.g. passing the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. He also set up **Federal Loyalty Boards** to remove people believed to be disloyal to the US government.

KEY PERSONALITY: HARRY S TRUMAN

Harry Truman, a Democrat, was the thirty-third President of the United States of America (1945-53). He was elected a Senator in 1934 and again in 1940. He became Vice-President to President Roosevelt in 1944. When Roosevelt died in April 1945, Truman became President while the Second World War was still in progress. He told reporters he thought that 'the moon, the stars and all the planets had fallen on me.'

However, he was inspired by the history and biographies which he had read. He believed in the role of **strong and honourable leadership**. On his desk he had a sign, 'The buck stops here', which reflected his view of his responsibility as President. Truman was also a straightforward person who liked simple food and pleasures.

Truman was faced with two immediate problems when he became President one was relations with Stalin and the Soviet Union and the second was how to defeat Japan. After Germany was defeated, he met Stalin at **Potsdam** (July 1945) along with the British Prime Ministers, Churchill and Attlee (who replaced Churchill).

KEY PERSONALITY: HARRY S TRUMAN

Very soon, relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated. Truman believed in a **policy of containment** - keeping Communism from expanding further. This remained **US foreign policy** for the rest of the Cold War. In 1948-9, Truman was faced with the **Berlin Crisis and Airlift**.

In domestic policy, Truman wanted to add to the New Deal of Roosevelt, but Congress (House of Representatives and Senate) blocked many of his ideas. However, he was re-elected in 1948 in a very close contest with Thomas Dewey. During his last few years in office, he also experienced the growth of **McCarthyism** - anti-Communist hysteria - which he disliked.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What did Truman mean by the phrase '*The buck stops here*'?
2. How successful was Truman in dealing with
 - a. Congress
 - b. The 1948 presidential election
 - c. The Fair Deal
 - d. The economy
 - e. McCarthyism and the Red Scare?

The Eisenhower Presidency

Eisenhower became President in 1953. He had been a very successful Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during the Second World War; in particular he was in overall charge of the D-Day landings in 1944. He was now leader of the Republican Party, which favoured cutting back taxes and cutting back **big government**.

Ike, as he was known, had a **limited view** of the presidency. He believed that the functions of the President were very different from those of the legislature and that Roosevelt and Truman had taken over some of the powers of Congress. But he still opposed efforts to pass a constitutional amendment which would reduce the power of the presidency to negotiate agreements and treaties with foreign powers.



Business-dominated Cabinet

In domestic affairs, Ike believed in what he called **dynamic conservatism** - less government intervention in the economy along with continued federal support for individual welfare. He appointed a very business-dominated cabinet - '*eight millionaires and a plumber [a union leader]*', it was said. He encouraged business by granting tax reductions. He also transferred the control of offshore oil deposits to the states, which opened the way to private development.

Ike and Congress

However, he did not attempt to repeal the social welfare laws implemented by Roosevelt and Truman; instead, he extended social security and unemployment benefits and raised the minimum wage. Ike worked equally well with **Republicans** and **Democrats** in Congress. He got much of his legislation through Congress. They were largely uncontroversial, so he got 73 out of 83 Bills passed. It was during Eisenhower's presidency that significant **civil rights events** occurred - Brown v. Board of Education, the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Little Rock, Arkansas. These led Eisenhower to pass the **1957 Civil Rights Act** which imposed fines and imprisonment for interfering with a citizen's right to vote. However, trial was by jury and there were all-white juries in the southern states so this limited the effect of the Act.

Ike and Congress

But Eisenhower's **prestige declined** in his second term from 1956-60 due to a number of factors:

- There was a short economic recession.
- The rise of the civil rights agitation.
- The success of the Sputnik.
- Corruption among some officials.
- The shooting down of the **U-2 spy plane** by the Soviets and the resulting collapse of the Paris Summit.

By 1960, some accused Eisenhower of not making full use of presidential power.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What were Eisenhower's views on big government and the power of the presidency?
2. What was dynamic conservatism?
3. Why did Eisenhower's prestige decline?

The Kennedy Presidency

John F Kennedy was elected America's youngest President after a hard-fought campaign against Richard Nixon. He appointed **Lyndon Johnson** as his Vice-President. He tried to imitate the New Deal by talking about a **New Frontier** which would 'get America moving again'. He wanted to take a strong stand against the Soviet Union, and at home tackle poverty, civil rights, health and education.

But Kennedy faced problems with the **conservative coalition** in Congress between Republicans and Southern Democrats. He was able to increase spending on defence and space because of competition with Soviet space successes and another Berlin crisis. By doubling **NASA's** budget, he laid the foundation for the **space project** which eventually fulfilled his promise to have a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s. He had little difficulty getting these passed because much of the spending benefited the southern states. Kennedy's extra spending on largely military purposes gave a boost to the economy which had gone into recession in the last few years of the Eisenhower presidency.



Kennedy and Congress

However, he postponed a cut in taxes which was eventually brought in by his successor, Lyndon Johnson, because he feared failure in Congress. Kennedy did not want to send proposals to Congress which he thought would not pass. This would make him look weak and ineffective and it would damage his chances of re-election. But he was partly to blame himself because he did not work very hard at improving relations with Congress.

Kennedy was able to use the power of the presidency to win a battle against one of America's largest corporations, **US Steel**. He wanted to control inflation (price rises) and he got companies to control wages and price rises. But US Steel raised their prices, which would affect car and defence industries and other areas of the economy. Kennedy threatened an FBI investigation of US Steel and he also threatened to withdraw government contracts. These actions forced US Steel to back down. This victory helped control inflation but it also showed the **power of the presidency** and federal government.

Congress Blocked Policies

Poverty was a serious problem in the US by the early 1960s and Kennedy wanted to tackle it. He got agreement with Congress for a school- and job-based training programme, but he failed to get Congress's support for a huge public works programme. He also failed to get a health care programme passed, as well as a proposal to set up a Department of Urban Affairs to tackle the problems of the cities. However, even though the conservative coalition did not like what they saw as federal interference in certain areas, they agreed to \$4.88 billion aid for slum clearance and public housing projects.

Kennedy was slow to act on **civil rights**. During his presidency, the Freedom Rides, James Meredith and the University of Mississippi, and King and Birmingham, Alabama highlighted serious civil rights issues. But Kennedy feared that the conservative coalition in Congress would block any proposal. Instead Kennedy was forced to act mainly through his brother Robert, as Attorney-General, to support desegregation. He introduced a **Civil Rights Bill** in 1963 but knew it would be difficult to get it passed. He was assassinated before it came to a vote in Congress. Kennedy's time in government was short and historians still debate what might have happened if he had been re-elected in 1964.

KEY CONCEPT: LIBERALISM

Liberalism was the political belief that was concerned with personal freedom and social progress. Liberals favoured gradual reform of political and economic matters. US liberals favoured government intervention in the economy.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the New Frontier?
2. How did Kennedy deal with Congress?
3. Why was he able to spend money on NASA?
4. How successful was Kennedy in tackling poverty and civil rights?

The Johnson Presidency

When President Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963, his Vice-President, Lyndon Johnson, succeeded him. Johnson was able to use the shock of the assassination to continue the work of JFK. He supported the ideas of the **New Frontier** in trying to tackle poverty, health care and civil rights.

FDR was Johnson's hero. Johnson believed that the **power of the federal government** should be used to improve the lives of the people. He wanted to create a **Great Society**. He believed that economic progress gave government the means to improve the lot of its people. He was helped by a huge presidential victory in 1964 and by Democratic control of Congress. The 1964 Congressional elections weakened the conservative coalition which had dominated since the 1930s.



Domestic Policies

Johnson won the 1964 presidential election because:

- He campaigned on peace in Vietnam - Barry Goldwater, the Republican candidate, was a 'hawk', with a more aggressive policy on Vietnam.
- He got the sympathy of the American people after Kennedy's assassination - he wanted to carry on Kennedy's work.
- He outlined his **Great Society programme** - it was a strong social policy, including civil rights for black Americans; Goldwater was seen as right wing and too conservative (Goldwater's slogan - *'In your heart you know he's right'* - was added to by the Democrats - *'In your guts you know he's nuts'*).

A SPEECH BY PRESIDENT JOHNSON ON THE GREAT SOCIETY, MAY 1964

'The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice, to which we are totally committed in our time. But that is just the beginning.

The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents. It is a place where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness. It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.

It is a place where man can renew contact with nature. It is a place which honours creation for its own sake and for what it adds to the understanding of the race. It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods.'

'What is your view of Johnson's idea of The Great Society?'

Johnson and Congress

Johnson **centralised control** in the White House. He showed his gifts as a negotiator in his dealings with **Congress**. In 1965, Congress felt it was the 'Three B Congress' - bullied, badgered and brainwashed. He got **60 bills** passed before and after his re-election.

Civil Rights

Johnson ensured the passage of two major laws which ended the legal basis for discrimination and increased the powers of the President and the executive. He felt he had to introduce an even stronger Civil Rights Act than that proposed by President Kennedy. He worked hard to ensure that a combination of liberal Democrats and moderate Republicans supported the Act.

- **Civil Rights Act 1964**, which banned discrimination on grounds of race, religion, sex or national origin. It gave powers to the federal government to investigate cases. It proposed to cut federal funding from programmes that discriminated.
- As a result of the **Selma to Montgomery March**, he introduced the **Voting Rights Act 1965** which gave powers to the federal government to supervise state elections, mainly in the southern states because of their history of discriminating against black people.
- He used **affirmative action** to ensure that the companies working on federal contracts reserved a certain quota of jobs for minority groups.

KEY PERSONALITY: LYNDON JOHNSON

Lyndon Johnson (LBJ as he was called) was a Democrat and thirty-sixth President of the US (1963-9). After a brief career as a teacher, he became an assistant to a US Congressman. He was later elected to the House of Representatives in 1937, and to the Senate in 1948. He soon became **Senate majority leader** and showed his ability to get laws passed. He was able to use his powers of persuasion, which were very important later.

He became Vice-President to President Kennedy in 1960 but he was not part of the Kennedy inner circle in the White House. Everything changed suddenly when President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas in November 1963, and Johnson became President. Johnson wanted to create a **better and fairer society**. He used the goodwill after the assassination of Kennedy to get a series of laws passed the **Civil Rights Act 1964** and the **Voting Rights Act 1965**. This outlawed racial discrimination in jobs, voting and education.

KEY PERSONALITY: LYNDON JOHNSON

He had an overwhelming victory over Barry Goldwater, a Republican, in the 1964 presidential election. He also saw more liberal Democrats elected to Congress. Johnson was able to bring in many laws as part of his Great Society programme. These included **Medicare** (for older people) and **Medicaid** (for poorer people). However, even though he had more interest in domestic affairs, his presidency from 1964 onwards was dominated by the Vietnam War.

Johnson expanded US involvement in Vietnam after the **Tonkin Bay** incident in August 1964.

Most Americans still supported the President in the war. But after the **Tet Offensive** in early 1968, more and more people said America should withdraw. He barely won the New Hampshire Democratic primary election in 1968 against the anti-war Democrat, **Eugene McCarthy**. This prompted Johnson to cut back the bombing of North Vietnam and organise peace talks with the North Vietnamese. He also declared he was not standing for re-election. But he had begun the process which reduced American involvement and eventually led to peace under the next President, Richard Nixon, in 1973.

War on Poverty

'(Johnson) was imbued with real concern for the poor and the deprived.' (Woods) He used presidential power to begin a **war on poverty**. He set up the **Office of Equal Opportunity** to coordinate the war on poverty.

- He set up schemes or programmes:
 - To improve employment prospects.
 - To give money to provide cheap housing and rent aid.
 - To provide grants for slum clearance.
 - To educate poor students in public schools.
- **Healthcare** - he set up the first federally funded healthcare system - **Medicare** and **Medicaid** a proposal which previous Presidents had failed to get passed.

Johnson showed the federal government could tackle poverty. He also involved the **federal government** in creating national parks and many other conservation measures, limiting car pollution and supporting arts and culture.

War on Poverty

The economy: Johnson continued Kennedy's boost of the economy. He ensured the passage of a tax bill proposed by Kennedy. The tax cuts, and also increased military spending, both helped the economy to grow - there was a huge increase in GNP (gross national product) in the following year (1964-65) and unemployment was reduced to 4.5 per cent. But during Johnson's presidency, the cost of the Vietnam War increased rapidly and this damaged the US economy – inflation rose and there was a budget deficit. There was less money available for the war on poverty and the Great Society. As Martin Luther King said, *'The promises of the Great Society have been shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam.'* However, in a period of 18 months, as a New York Times columnist wrote, Johnson had passed more reform legislation (laws) than most Presidents had put through in two full terms in office. In doing so, he extended the power of the presidency.

War on Poverty

'LBJ felt strongly about the American Promise, and he wanted to help create a country where opportunity was there for all Americans. At the time, there were 54 million Americans without a high school education, more than 25 percent of the population. More than 20 percent of the population was living in poverty. Johnson wanted to spend his time as President righting some of these wrongs and bringing opportunity to those who did not have it. By the end of his term as President, Johnson had help cut the number of Americans living in poverty from 20 percent to 12.'

Source: <http://www.lbjlibrary.org/exhibits/social-justice-gallery>)

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was Johnson's attitude to the role of government?
2. What was the Great Society?
3. How did Johnson deal with civil rights?
4. How successful was he in relation to poverty?
5. How well did he deal with the economy?

EXAM QUESTION

1. How does Johnson's domestic policy compare with Truman's?

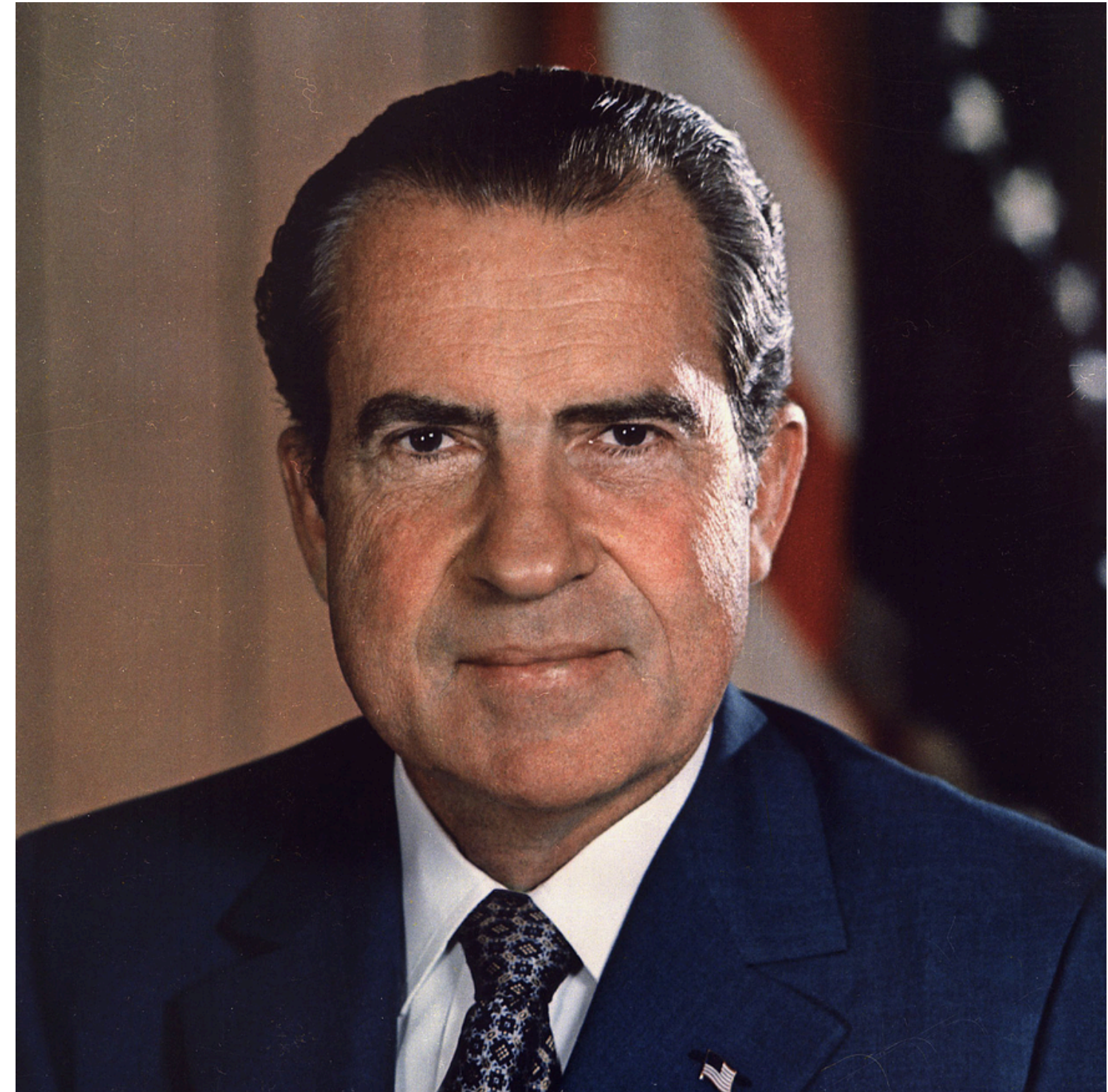
The Nixon Presidency

Richard Nixon became President in 1969 after he defeated his main opponent, the Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey (as well as George Wallace of the American Independent Party), in November 1968.

Nixon and Congress

But the **Democrats** still dominated Congress as they did under Johnson, so Nixon's plans to follow a conservative domestic policy were not always successful:

- In spite of Nixon's opposition, in 1970 **Congress** lowered the voting age from 21 to 18.
- Congress also passed many environmental laws to control pollution from industry, power companies and from cars.
- Nixon's plan to end direct payments to the poor was rejected by Congress.
- Congress also increased social security benefits.



Nixon and the Supreme Court

Nixon also had difficulty with the **Supreme Court**. He wanted to prevent further desegregation in schools in Mississippi. But the Supreme Court demanded more school integration and supported bussing children between black and white areas. However, Nixon was eventually able to appoint **more conservative judges** to the Court. He was also successful with his revenue-sharing plan to hand back power to the states for more control over the finances of social welfare matters.

But by the early 1970s, Congress was concerned at the growth in the power of the presidency. In spite of his difficulties with Congress and the Supreme Court, Nixon's term in office was the high point of the **imperial presidency** (centralising government powers). More than any other President, Nixon concentrated powers in the presidency:

- He refused to spend money that Congress had allocated for health and the environment.
- He increased US involvement in Cambodia and Laos without approval from Congress.
- Congress began proceedings to impeach Nixon. He refused to co-operate, claiming **executive privilege**.
- He also claimed **executive powers** when he refused to hand over tapes of White House conversations on the **Watergate affair** (a Republican organised break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters and subsequent cover-up).

However, the **Supreme Court** ruled against him and he had to hand over the tapes. Nixon then resigned rather than be impeached.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Nixon have trouble passing laws in Congress?
2. What changes did he make to the Supreme Court?
3. How was Nixon's term the high point of the imperial presidency?
4. How did Congress limit the power of the president?

Limiting the Powers of the President

Because of events in the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, Congress began to limit the power of the President. Congress passed a series of laws to control presidential powers and to make the federal government more accountable:

- They set limits to political contributions for elections.
- They gave power to individuals to see government files on themselves.
- They passed the **Ethics in Government Act** to require senior government officials to declare their wealth.
- They made the CIA report to Congress.

The **War Powers Act 1973** and the **Budget Reform Act 1974** restored the powers of Congress in declaring war and in budgeting.

The Ford Presidency

Nixon was succeeded by his Vice-President, Gerald Ford. He found himself in conflict with Congress. He wanted to increase military and space spending and reduce spending on social welfare programmes. He vetoed 18 Bills coming from Congress. Congress tried to overrule his veto on nine occasions but only succeeded in having the necessary two-thirds majority on three occasions.



The Carter Presidency

Jimmy Carter defeated Ford in the 1976 presidential election. He was a former governor of Georgia and an outsider to Washington politics. He promised a **new style** of presidency but, as an outsider, he failed to persuade Congress. He came across as being arrogant. However, he did have **some success** - he raised the minimum wage and provided money to clean up toxic waste sites. But he was not a decisive leader and his foreign policy was a failure. He cancelled the SALT II agreement after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and he failed to rescue American hostages in Iran.



The Reagan Presidency

Ronald Reagan defeated Carter in the 1980 presidential election. This election also gave control of the Senate to the Republicans. Reagan became a two-term President when he won re-election in 1984.

Reagan's term in office is sometimes called the **Reagan Revolution**. He wanted to restore the **prestige** of the presidency. Reagan was helped by being a good communicator, and was especially good at using **television**.



Reduce Big Government

Reagan wanted to reduce the role of **big government**. He believed that '*Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem.*' He wanted to dismantle the welfare state which had existed since Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s.

His economic policies were called **Reaganomics** - a promise to cut spending, reduce government regulation (control) of industry and lower taxes. In the economy he did this with major tax cuts and by reducing federal spending on 300 programmes. He persuaded the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives to pass these. However, Reagan also began a massive build-up of US armed forces, which only increased government spending.

In **social policy**, Reagan wanted to give the **states** more responsibility for welfare. He also wanted to reduce the federal government by giving money to the states to use as they saw fit. But Congress refused to pass these plans.

Reagan mainly targeted the **health programme** - Medicare and Medicaid - with cutbacks. Reagan also believed that people did not need federal government intervention in their lives and he put this into practice when getting the private sector to do some of the job training. He gave less money to libraries, public radio, museums, national parks and education.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the Reagan Revolution?
2. What was Reagan's attitude to big government?
3. What was Reaganomics?
4. How did Reagan deal with Medicare and Medicaid?