

Executive Branch

When the delegates to the Constitutional Convention created the executive branch of government, they gave the president a limited term of office to lead the government. This was very different from any form of government in Europe and caused much debate. The delegates were afraid of what too much power in the hands of one person might lead to. In the end, with a system of [checks and balances](#) included in the Constitution, a single president to manage the executive branch of government was adopted.

The executive branch of the Government is responsible for enforcing the laws of the land. When George Washington was president, people recognized that one person could not carry out the duties of the President without advice and assistance. The Vice President, department heads (Cabinet members), and heads of independent agencies assist in this capacity. Unlike the powers of the President, their responsibilities are not defined in the Constitution but each has special powers and functions.

- **President:** Leader of the country and Commander in Chief of the military.
- **Vice President:** President of the Senate and becomes President if the President is unable to serve.
- **Departments:** Department heads advise the President on policy issues and help execute those policies.
- **Independent Agencies:** Help execute policy or provide special services.

The President of the United States

The President is the head of the Executive Branch. The President and the Vice-President are the only officials elected by the entire country. However, there are requirements for holding either of these positions. In order to be elected, one must be at least 35 years old. Also, each candidate must be a natural-born U.S. citizen and have lived in the U.S. for at least 14 years.



When elected, the President serves a term of four years. At most, a President may serve two terms.

NOTE: Before 1951, the President could serve as many terms as he wanted. However, every President had followed George Washington's example of stepping down after two terms. Franklin D. Roosevelt broke with tradition. Roosevelt successfully ran for office four times. Early in his fourth term, in 1945, he died. Six years later, Congress passed the 22nd Amendment, which limits Presidents to two terms.

The President can be removed from office through the process of [impeachment](#). If the House of Representatives feel that the President has committed acts of "Treason, Bribery, or other High Crimes and Misdemeanors" they can impeach him with a majority vote. An impeachment is very similar to a legal indictment. It is not a conviction, however, and not enough to remove the President from office alone.

The case then goes to the Senate. Overseen by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Senate reviews the case and votes whether or not to convict the President. If they vote in favor of conviction by a two-thirds margin, then the President is removed from office.

The powers of the President of the United States are set forth in Article II of the Constitution. Some of these powers the President can exercise in his own right, without formal legislative approval. Others require the consent of the Senate or Congress as a whole. The following is a list of duties of the President of the United States:

National Security Powers:

- Serves as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. He can authorize the use of troops overseas without declaring war. To declare war officially, though, he must get the approval of the Congress.
- Makes treaties with other nations; however, the Senate must approve any treaty before it becomes official.

- Nominates ambassadors, with the agreement of a majority of the Senate.
- Receives ambassadors of other nations, thereby recognizing those lands as official countries.

Legislative Powers:

- Presents information on the state of the union to Congress.
- Recommends legislation to Congress. Despite all of his power, the President cannot write bills. He can propose a bill, but a member of Congress must submit it for him.
- Convenes both houses of Congress in special sessions.
- Approves laws passed by Congress.

Administrative Powers:

- "Take care that the laws be faithfully executed" -- Article II, Section 3
- Appoints the heads of each Executive Branch department as Chief of the Government. He also appoints ambassadors, Supreme Court Justices, and other officials, with the agreement of the majority of the Senate.
- Requests written opinions of administrative officials.
- Fills administrative vacancies during congressional recesses.

Judicial Powers:

- Grants reprieves and pardons for Federal crimes (except impeachment).
- Appoints Federal judges, with the agreement of the majority of the Senate.

The President's Lawmaking Role

The President plays a large role in making America's laws. His job is to approve the [laws](#) that Congress creates. When both chambers have approved a [bill](#), they send it to the President. If he agrees with the law, he signs it and the law goes into effect.

If the President does not like a bill, he can [veto](#) it. There are two ways that he can veto a bill. First, the President can send the bill back to Congress unsigned. In most cases, he will also send a list of reasons he does not like the bill. Second, the President can "pocket" the bill. After ten days, one of two things happens: 1) if Congress is in session, the bill becomes a law anyway 2) if Congress has adjourned, the bill does not become law and the President has used a "[pocket veto](#)".

When the President vetoes a bill, it will most likely never become a law. Congress can override a veto, but to do so two-thirds of both the House of Representatives and the Senate must vote against the President.

Despite all of his power, the President cannot write bills. He can propose a bill, but a member of Congress must submit it for him.

Compromise, in general, is a crucial aspect to a President's success in working with Congress. The President's political party very rarely also controls Congress. Therefore, the President must work with Senators and Representatives who disagree with his agenda. However, if the President refused to pass any legislation that he disagreed with and Congress behaved similarly, the government would come to a halt. Thus, they must work together to keep the government moving.

In addition, the President relies on the support of the American people to accomplish his goals. The public elects the President and the members of Congress. When the public disapproves of the President, Senators and Representatives will distance themselves with the President and his agenda. If they side with an unpopular President, their constituents might not re-elect them. Thus, if the President loses popular support, he will lose support in Congress and will be unable to get any of his suggested legislation enacted.