

Is the President of the United States the most powerful person in the world or a pitiful helpless giant? In this unit we will analyze this question by looking at the President's powers and contrast them to his/her limits.

The history of the presidency is a history of aggrandizement. We all imagine today a president with far reaching power. When looking at the constitution alone, however, we find a president with significant limits.

Here is a list of the president's formal powers as found in Article 2 of the US Constitution:

Commander-in-Chief (Congress declares war); **Make treaties** (w/ Senate approval); **Appoint ambassadors** (w/ Senate confirmation); State of the Union Address; **Convene special sessions of Congress** (Truman was the last to do this in 1948); Receive ambassadors; **“Take care that the laws be executed.”** [To this list many would add the veto once rarely used but now played out more frequently. Fewer than 4% of all presidential vetoes are overridden].

Not impressive by anyone's standards. Yet today many would argue that the U.S. president is the most powerful person in the world. Noted political scientist Richard Neustadt found the modern president's power in his ability to persuade. The unique position the president has to bargain and use his political resources has made any chief executive extraordinarily powerful.

Today the president is powerful due to his ability to politic. This involves applying his influence to important decisions. **Logrolling** involves trading votes. The prestige of the president applies tremendous pressure on policy decision makers. In addition the president can muster up public opinion to support his agenda. **Presidents can grab headlines to influence the national agenda.** This unique ability to persuade has made ALL presidents, not just the charismatic ones, truly powerful. No one has a **bully pulpit** like the president.

It should be added that certain powers exercised today by the president are also based upon tradition. These powers are NOT found in the constitution but are routinely practiced today without any reservations. They include:

Executive Orders – These domestic decrees carry the force of law but DO NOT require Congressional passage or approval. The president can change and affect policy details through directives like these. Obama for instance has changed details on various education and health care laws without any assistance from the other branches.

Executive Agreements – These foreign policy decrees carry the force of treaties but DO NOT require the Senate's approval. The president can change and affect foreign policy without having to bother with the Senate. Obama for instance has made numerous overtures in the Middle East without involving the other branches.

Executive Privilege – This privilege allows the president to seek candid and confidential advice without having to disclose details to the general public. Despite promises of transparency all presidents utilize executive privilege to keep many matters of importance outside the purview of the media.

Today we are learning about Presidential roles. The President of the United States has to wear many hats. The President of the United States has to fulfill many different roles. What role do you think is most important? How would you rank them?

Here is a list of the primary Presidential roles:

1. **Chief Executive** – the President oversees the vast powers of the United States government. Ultimately the President takes responsibility for governing. When times are good the President receives praise but when they are bad he is left with the blame. The President's closest political and policy advisors are to be found in the White House Office, sometimes called the Executive Office. Members of the White House Office are generally drawn from the President's campaign. As chief executive the President is called upon to make the final decisions in all public policy matters facing the nation.

2. **Commander-in-Chief** – The constitution created a military that would be lead by a civilian. The Framers hoped that such a set up might make war less common. The President of the United States, a civilian, is in charge of our entire military. Congress DECLARES WAR but the President mobilizes troops at his command. First strike capabilities are not checked or balanced by any other branch of government. The President of the United States can launch a nuclear strike at any time, for any reason. He is the commander-in-chief.

3. **Chief of Party** – Chief of Party is an informal power. There is no mention of this role in the United States Constitution. Though political parties are not mentioned in the Constitution, they undeniably play an important role in our government. As Chief of Party the President oversees electoral strategies, issues, agendas and public policy priorities. The President also plays a major role in raising campaign money for candidates from his party. When the majority of Congress shares the same party as the President it is called a UNIFIED GOVERNMENT. When the two are different it is called a DIVIDED GOVERNMENT.

4. **Chief of State** – This may be the President's most esoteric role. Yet some would call it the most important. This role is primarily ceremonial. As Chief of State the President serves as the embodiment of America. When there are important occasions around the world to attend our President goes. When important visitors come to America our President serves as host. When we honor our heroes the President awards them. If there is a solemn event our President speaks to the nation to console us. Throughout history the King played this role. We have no king. The stand in for Chief of State is our President. Our president is FIRST CITIZEN.

5. **Chief Legislator** – Though the Congress is given primary responsibility for writing laws our president serves as Chief Legislator. The power of veto, the power to reject laws, is given solely to the president. Fewer than 4% of presidential vetoes are overridden. In addition the constitution requires the president to give annually a State of the Union address. Often this is a legislative agenda for the year. Through his bully pulpit no single person in our government is situated better to influence the legislative process then the president of the United States.

6. **Chief Diplomat** – One of the clearest powers granted to the president is his authority in foreign policy. Appointing ambassadors, receiving foreign guests and designing treaties with other nations is a fundamental part of a president's term. The State Department along with the Secretary of State completes much of this work. However, the president conducts the highest levels of negotiations. The president makes agreements with foreign powers. Formal treaties require Senate approval but executive agreements do not. As globalization spreads more and more around the world the role of Chief Diplomat takes on greater and greater importance.