

**Main Idea**

The Constitution gives only a brief description of the president's qualifications and powers. Yet the job is vast and complex, as the president must fulfill many roles.

**Reading Focus**

1. What are the roles of the president?
2. What are the formal characteristics of the presidency?
3. What are the informal qualifications for the presidency?

**Key Terms**

chief executive  
 commander in chief  
 foreign policy  
 diplomacy  
 chief of state  
 succession

**Roles of the President** (pp. 163–164)

Some of the president's roles are stated in the Constitution. Others have developed over time.

**Official Roles** Article II of the Constitution assigns the president the following duties: chief executive, chief administrator, commander in chief, foreign policy leader, and chief agenda setter. “Executive power” means the power to execute, or carry out, the nation's laws. The president carries out this duty as **chief executive**.

The president is also the chief administrator, or manager, of the 15 executive departments and federal agencies that carry out government policy. Millions of people are employed in these organizations.

The Constitution names the president **commander in chief** of the nation's military. As commander in chief, the president has the authority to order troops into action and to call them back home. As **foreign policy** leader, the president has the

job of formulating, or making, the nation's plans and procedures for dealing with other countries. This includes the power to make treaties. The president also directs the activities of the country's ambassadors and its diplomatic efforts. **Diplomacy** is the art of negotiating with foreign governments.

The Constitution says that the president will set out the government's agenda, or outline of things to do, during an annual State of the Union address. This duty makes the president the nation's chief agenda setter. The president also helps Congress prepare the annual federal budget.

**Unofficial Roles** The president fulfills other key roles, including chief of state, party leader, and chief citizen. As **chief of state**, also known as the head of state, the president takes on the role of the symbolic figurehead of the United States.

The president is also recognized as the official leader of his or her political party. He or she shapes and promotes the party platform—the important issues for which the party stands—and helps raise money for the party.

The president and vice president are the only two nationwide elective positions in the government. As such, they are said to be chief citizens, or the main representatives of all the American people.

**Reading Check Identifying the Main Idea** What are the constitutional roles of the president?

### **Formal Characteristics of the Presidency** (pp. 164–167)

The Constitution lists the qualifications, terms of office, election, succession, and benefits of the presidency. These are covered in a few short paragraphs.

**Formal Qualifications** There are three formal qualifications for the presidency. Presidents must be 35 years old, have lived in the country for 14 years, and be a natural-born U.S. citizen (a person who has been born a citizen of this country).

**Term of Office** Today a president can serve two four-year terms. Originally, there was no restriction on the number of terms a president could serve. The first U.S. president, George Washington, served only two terms. Presidents after Washington followed Washington’s example. In the 1940s, however, Franklin Roosevelt ran for and won third and fourth terms. Roosevelt died during his fourth term. Two years after his death, Congress proposed a constitutional amendment to limit a president to two full terms and no more than 10 years in office. The states ratified the Twenty-second Amendment in 1951.

**Election to Office** The Constitution outlines the process for electing the president. Voters do not directly elect the president and vice president. Instead, voters choose electors, or people pledged to support the candidates that the voters choose. Taken together, these electors are

known as the electoral college. The electoral college was a compromise. Some Framers believed the people should choose the president, while others thought that Congress should choose the president.

Every state is granted a number of electors equal to the number of its members in the House and the Senate. Additionally, Washington, D.C., has three electors. Thus those states with the largest numbers of representatives, such as California, have more electoral votes. This fact makes a win there a big advantage for a candidate.

States have the power to decide how to pick their electors. Today all states use the popular vote. Electors can be nominated through a primary election or at the party’s convention. They can also be named by campaign committees for a presidential candidate.

In 48 states, all electors cast their votes for the candidate who wins the popular vote. This is called the “winner-take-all” rule. In Maine and Nebraska, electors are pledged to choose the candidate who wins in their district only, so the electoral vote could be split among different candidates.

**Succession** According to the Constitution, the vice president is the first in the line of succession to the presidency.

**Succession** is the process of succeeding, or coming after, someone. The Constitution was unclear as to whether the vice president would become president, or just act as president. The Twenty-fifth Amendment was added in 1967 to formally state that the vice president takes the title of president if he or she takes over the office. It also states that the vice president will take over if the president is unable to fulfill his or her duties due to illness.

Congress has the power to decide order of succession. In 1947 Congress passed the Presidential Succession Act. It establishes the Speaker of the House as the person next

in the line of succession after the vice president.

**Salary and Benefits** The president's salary is \$400,000 per year. The vice president's salary is \$208,100. These amounts cannot be changed during a president's time in office. Presidents have large staffs and live with their family in a mansion in Washington, D.C., called the White House. They also have health and retirement benefits and travel in special cars and *Air Force One*, the president's plane.

**Reading Check Summarizing** How did the current plan for presidential succession come to be?

### **Informal Qualifications for the Presidency** (pp. 167–168)

There are few constitutional requirements for the presidency. However, there are many informal qualifications.

**Presidential Backgrounds** Most presidents have been well-educated white men from middle- to upper-class families.

All have also been Christian. John F. Kennedy, elected in 1960, was the only Roman Catholic president thus far. In the 2000 election Joe Lieberman was the first Jewish person to run for vice president.

Three-fourths of the presidents have had some sort of military background. Many presidents were former governors.

**Personal Qualities** Successful presidents are likeable and possess leadership qualities. They are also good communicators. In today's electronic age, presidents must also appear dignified, confident, poised, and charismatic. They must work well with both friends and opponents and be effective managers. They must also demonstrate control during times of crisis. Finally, they must be able to maintain all of these traits under enormous pressure.

### **Reading Check Identifying**

**Supporting Details** What are some of the personal qualities presidents have possessed?

## **SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT**

1. **Define** What is **diplomacy**?
2. **Describe** What are some of the benefits the president receives?
3. **Describe** What are some informal job requirements of the presidency?