

AP US Government and Politics  
Executive Orders

*The Big Question*

I thought only congress could make laws, but President Biden has used executive authority to direct the federal government's policy in many different areas including immigration and regulations on the environment. And he's not the first president to use executive orders. President Obama, issued executive orders regarding stem cell research, immigration, accelerating investment in energy efficiency, restoring ecosystems in the gulf coast, and authorizing sanctions on Iran, just to name a few. And just about every recent president before him did the same thing! How can it be legal for the President to make rules and decisions using executive orders?

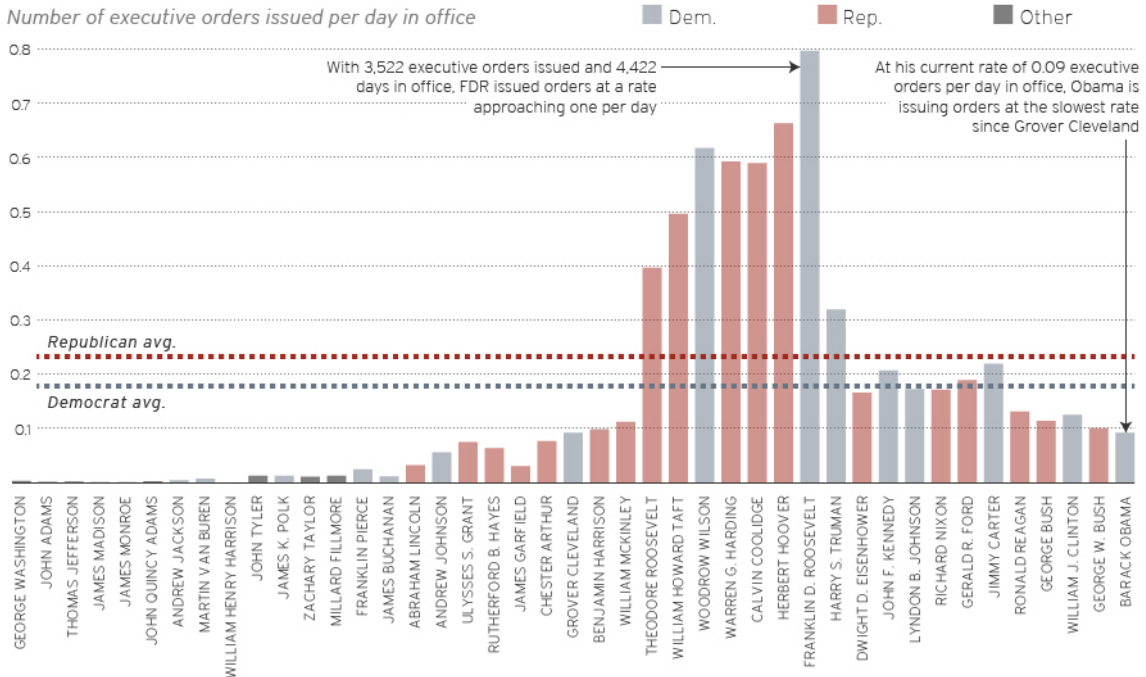
*Data & Sources*

Executive order-A rule or regulation issued by the president that has the effect of law.

- (1) Enforce legislative statutes
- (2) Enforce the Constitution or treaties with foreign nations
- (3) Establish or modify rules and practices of executive administrative agencies

Can be retracted by successor, nullified by Congress or ruled unconstitutional by a federal court. Presidents have issued over 13,698 of them.

**A history of executive orders**



Graphic by Christopher Ingraham. Executive order tallies from the American Presidency Project. Days served from Wikipedia.  
 Note: Grover Cleveland's two non-consecutive terms were merged together for the purposes of this chart.

Here's a photograph of our 45th president, Donald J. Trump, signing an executive order on his first day in office, January 20, 2017.



And here's a photograph of our 44th president on his second full day in office, January 22, 2009, signing [Executive Order 13492](#) to close Guantanamo Bay.



#### *Questions & Activities*

Now that you know so much about executive orders it's time you started answering some questions

1. What is an Executive Order?
2. What president has made the most Executive orders ever?
3. Does one party tend to make more executive orders than another?
4. What is the difference between a law and an executive order?
5. Are executive orders legal?
6. How are executive orders different from laws?
7. Why do presidents make executive orders, anyway?
8. Write your own question about executive orders:

*Informed Civic Action*

Congratulations! You are the president. Write an executive order in the official language of an executive order. Use your copy of Obama's Executive Order as an example of the official language of an Executive order.

Here is an example of an Executive Order from a former AP Government student.

President Carlie Herron

Executive Order 13547 of March 3, 2010

Reducing Carbon Emissions

By the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, in order to reduce carbon emissions, to set a positive, environmentally friendly example for the United States as a whole, to spread awareness of the need for action against climate change, to improve the state of our environment, and to ensure a cleaner and safer future for the United States, I hereby order as follows:

Section 1. All members of executive departments, independent agencies, and Government corporations, shall trade in any personal automobile which yields fewer than 40 miles per gallon. The vehicle must then be replaced with a fuel-efficient automobile which yields 40 or more miles per gallon.

Section 2. Government funds will be appropriated in order to pay for any discrepancy between the trade-in value of each individual's obsolete vehicle and the price of a new, fuel-efficient automobile. Government funds will also be provided for any individual to pay off the remainder of a leased vehicle, if necessary.

Section 3. Each member has six months (until September 3, 2010) to trade in their vehicle, if necessary.

Section 4. Any individual who fails to comply with the standards outlined in Sections 1-3 will be charged a fine of \$2,000 for each month which passes after September 3, 2010.

THE WHITE HOUSE,

March 3, 2010.