



Worksheet 8 – Evaluating Statements and Discussion

Read the following statements and discuss which is the most effective in holding the President to account. Is it:

1. congress
2. the Supreme Court
3. public opinion and the media?

Congress: can use its constitutional powers to reject a President's legislative programme or override presidential vetoes on legislation it has passed. It can constrain the executive through its power of the purse. The President's actions as Commander-in-Chief are now accountable through the War Powers Act. The Senate has power to block presidential nominations and to reject treaties. Congress has broad investigative powers to hold the Executive to account and in extreme cases can impeach the president for 'high crimes and misdemeanours'.

Supreme Court: can declare presidential actions unconstitutional. The Court's judgment in the case of *United States v. Richard Nixon* (1974), forcing him to release the Watergate tapes, led directly to his resignation before he could be impeached. In the case of *Rasul v. Bush* (2004), the Court ruled that those detained at Guantanamo Bay could challenge their detention in the federal courts and in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* (2006) the military commissions set up to try Guantanamo detainees to be declared unconstitutional.

Public Opinion and the Media: Favourable public opinion is critical in maintaining presidential power and credibility. Evidence of this is seen when public opinion has turned against 'presidential wars': Presidents Truman, Johnson, Nixon and George W. Bush all left office with their political reputations damaged as a result of the Korean, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Conversely, Presidents Reagan and Clinton survived scandals while in office partly due to high public approval ratings. The media plays an important role in shaping public opinion: the proliferation of media sources and the 24 hour news cycle means that it is increasingly difficult for Presidents to control their image.