

The First 100 Days

Name: _____

A. Presidential Perspectives. Presidents have approached their own First 100 Days in a variety of ways. Some do so with great confidence, others bristle against what they see as unfair judgement, while still others take it as just another part of the job. Read the quotes from Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and answer the questions that follow.

President John F. Kennedy (1961-1963)

"All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.

In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty "

- Excerpted from his foreign policy-focused Inaugural Address, 1961

President Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969)

"I was just elected president by 15 million votes. Just by the natural way people think and because Barry Goldwater scared the hell out of them, I have already lost about 2 of these 15 million and am probably getting down to 13. If I get in any fight with Congress, I will lose another couple of million, and if I have to send any more of our boys to Vietnam, I may be down to 8 million by the end of the summer."

- On the need to act quickly after his 1964 reelection victory

1. How did each president respond to the idea of the First 100 Days? Did they embrace it, reject it, or respond differently? Use evidence from the quotes to explain your answer.

2. Each president references the American public in a different way. Based on these quotes, who is responsible for achieving the agenda set forth by the president and what role does the public play?

3. Which attitude toward the First 100 Days would you be most likely to take if you were to become the President of the United States? Why?

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B. Influencing the First 100 Days. The President of the United States is a very powerful position, but the success of the first three months in office can be impacted by many different variables. First, read through the list of these variables and identify if they would help or hurt a presidential record. Then, circle the variables that are within the president's control.

_____ Oppositional Majority in Congress	_____ National crisis (like terrorist attack or natural disaster)	_____ Election resulted in a narrow, contested win
_____ Skill in working with Congress	_____ Actions of foreign nations against U.S.	_____ Supportive Majority in Congress
_____ Election resulted in a landslide win	_____ Strong economy at time of inauguration	_____ Skill in gathering public support for agenda

Based on the variables above and the degree to which presidents do or do not have control over them, do you think it's fair to evaluate presidents based on their First 100 Days in office? Explain your answer.

C. Mandates Matter Too? A presidential mandate is believed to occur when the results of an election are clear and direct, showing that the president has significant popular support for his or her agenda. The idea of a mandate is often used to persuade Congress to pass legislation that the president supports, since the American public voted so strongly in one direction. But is the idea of a mandate as straightforward as it sounds? Read each statement argument and select which is the strongest for each side, explaining your answer.

Mandates Make Sense	Mandates Are... Meh
A- The presidential election is the main opportunity for the American public to show support for the policies they think are best for the nation.	A- Low voter turnout means that a president may really have only received strong support from much less of the American public than it looks on the surface.
B- Winning by a landslide or a slim majority doesn't matter. If a candidate wins, their agenda should be what's put through Congress.	B- Presidents have claimed mandates after only winning 51% of the vote. The use of the term has lost it's meaning over time.
Which is the stronger argument? _____ Why?	Which is the stronger argument? _____ Why?

If you were in charge, how would you define a mandate? In the space below, determine the threshold for each element. If a newly elected president meet or exceeds your thresholds, they will have a mandate.

Voter Turnout:	Share of the Popular Vote:	Share of the Electoral College:
Higher than _____%	Higher than _____%	Higher than _____%