

# The American Presidency Project



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## Executive Orders: Washington - Obama

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The form, substance and numbers of presidential orders has varied dramatically in the history of the US Presidency. Numbering of Executive Orders began in 1907 by the Department of State, which assigned numbers to all the orders then in their files dating from 1862 (Lord 1944, viii). Through those efforts, the frequency of unnumbered orders declined sharply. President Hoover attempted to bring further order and regularity to the processing and documenting of Executive orders (ibid).

But it was not until the Federal Register Act in 1936 that a more thorough contemporaneous documentation of Executive Orders began. Before then, and occasionally afterwards, a later discovery of another order has resulted in assigning a number already in use together with an associated letter (e.g., 7709, 7709-A). This practice explains why the total number of orders issued may be greater than the result that would be obtained by subtracting a president's first order number from his last (and adding 1).

Today virtually all numbered Executive Orders are published. However, the Federal Register Act specified that such orders need not be published if they had "no general applicability and legal effect." Thus, the text of some orders is not available.

In addition to the numbered executive orders, there are many unnumbered orders (see Lord 1943). The best known compilation includes "over 1500" unnumbered orders, but the editor notes that the true total is unknown. Estimates have reportedly ranged as high as 50,000. The editor, Lord, notes emphatically that "no distinction can be made between numbered and unnumbered Order on the basis of subject matter, general applicability, public interest, or legal effect."

There have always been many forms of Presidential orders in addition to the numbered Executive Orders and Executive Orders included in the published "unnumbered series". Currently, these commonly are called "Memorandums" but can have many titles. Decades ago, such documents were commonly titled "Letters."

In this table we present the total number of Executive Orders issued by presidential term (not calendar year). Thus, *this table does not include other forms of written presidential orders (such as memorandums), or discretionary executive actions not accompanied by a published presidential directive.*

The table below is modified and updated from time to time. This table includes our own original tallies for the first FDR term based on Lord (1943, 1944). Our numbers still differ slightly from the numbers posted in the NARA Executive Order Disposition Tables. But we are confident that we have correctly counted the Lord entries (and the NARA figures are very close to ours).

Our APP document collection of numbered Executive Orders is complete with respect to published Orders starting in 1945. We are adding earlier orders to the collection as possible, and welcome (and will gladly acknowledge) contributions to this effort. We will also be adding our independent tallies for unnumbered orders.

### Sources:

Lord, Clifford L., ed. 1944. *Presidential Executive Orders, Numbered 1-8030, 1862-1938. Prepared by the Historical Records Survey, New York City. New York: Books Inc.*

Lord, Clifford L., ed. 1943. *List and Index of Presidential Executive Orders (Unnumbered Series, 1789 - 1941). New Jersey Historical Records Survey, Works Progress Administration, Newark, NJ*

President	Term	Total Orders <sup>1</sup>	Average / Year	Years in Office	EO Number Range
George Washington	Total	8	1	7.85	unnumbered
John Adams	Total	1	0.25	4.00	unnumbered
Thomas Jefferson	Total	4	0.50	8.00	unnumbered
James Madison	Total	1	0.13	8.00	unnumbered
James Monroe	Total	1	0.13	8.00	unnumbered
John Quincy Adams	Total	3	0.75	4.00	unnumbered
Andrew Jackson	Total	12	1.5	8.00	unnumbered
Martin van Buren	Total	10	2.5	4.00	unnumbered
William Henry Harrison	Total	0	0	0.08	unnumbered
John Tyler	Total	17	4.3	3.92	unnumbered
James K. Polk	Total	18	4.5	4.00	unnumbered
Zachary Taylor	Total	5	3.7	1.35	unnumbered
Millard Fillmore	Total	12	4.5	2.65	unnumbered
Franklin Pierce	Total	35	9	4.00	unnumbered
James Buchanan	Total	16	4	4.00	unnumbered
Abraham Lincoln	Total	48	12	4.12	unnumbered
Andrew Johnson	Total	79	20	3.89	unnumbered
Ulysses S. Grant	Total	217	27	8.00	unnumbered
Rutherford B. Hayes	Total	92	23	4.00	unnumbered
James Garfield	Total	6	11	0.55	unnumbered
Chester Arthur	Total	96	28	3.46	unnumbered
Grover Cleveland - I	Total	113	28	4.00	unnumbered
Benjamin Harrison	Total	143	36	4.00	unnumbered
Grover Cleveland - II	Total	140	35	4.00	unnumbered

William McKinley	Total	185	41	4.53	unnumbered
Theodore Roosevelt	Total	1,081	145	7.47	
William Howard Taft	Total	724	181	4.00	
Woodrow Wilson	Total	1,803	225	8.00	
Warren G. Harding	Total	522	217	2.41	
Calvin Coolidge	Total	1,203	215	5.59	
Herbert Hoover	Total	968	242	4.00	5075 - 6070
Franklin D. Roosevelt	Total	3,721	307	12.12	6071 - 9537
Harry S. Truman	Total	907	117	7.78	9538 - 10431
	I	504	133	3.78	9538 - 10029
	II	403	101	4.00	10030 - 10431
Dwight D. Eisenhower	Total	484	61	8.00	10432 - 10913
	I	266	67	4.00	10432 - 10695-A
	II	218	55	4.00	10696 - 10913
John F. Kennedy	Total	214	75	2.84	10914 - 11127
Lyndon B. Johnson	Total	325	63	5.17	11128 - 11451
Richard Nixon	Total	346	62	5.55	11452 - 11797
	I	247	62	4.00	11452 - 11698
	II	99	64	1.55	11699 - 11797
Gerald R. Ford	Total	169	69	2.45	11798 - 11966
Jimmy Carter	Total	320	80	4.00	11967 - 12286
Ronald Reagan	Total	381	48	8.00	12287 - 12667
	I	213	53	4.00	12287 - 12499
	II	168	42	4.00	12500 - 12667
George Bush	Total	166	42	4.00	12668 - 12833
William J. Clinton	Total	364	46	8.00	12834 - 13197
	I	200	50	4.00	12834 - 13033
	II	164	41	4.00	13034 - 13197
George W. Bush	Total	291	36	8.00	13198 - 13488
	I	173	43	4.00	13198 - 13370
	II	118	30	4.00	13371 - 13488
Barack Obama	Total	276	35	8.00	13489 - 13764
	I	147	37	4.00	13489 - 13635
	II	129	32	4.00	13636 - 13764
Donald J. Trump	Total	12	150	0.08	13765 - 13776

**Note:** Trump EO counts are updated monthly following the 20th day of the month to recompute average per year. Orders issued between updates can be accessed here:  
[http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/executive\\_orders.php?year=2017](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/executive_orders.php?year=2017)

**Last Update:** Data through February 20, 2017.

**Citation:** Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, "Executive Orders." *The American Presidency Project*. Ed. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters. Santa Barbara, CA. 1999-2017. Available from the World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/orders.php>.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> 1789 to 1945 (Roosevelt) data includes "numbered" and "unnumbered" executive orders. 1945 (Truman) & 1967 (Johnson) data includes only numbered executive orders including those with letter designations (ex. Executive Order 9577-A).

**Data Sources:**

- 1789 - 1945 (Roosevelt) data from Lyn Ragsdale, "Vital Statistics on the Presidency: Washington to Clinton." rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1998); data compiled by John Woolley, The American Presidency Project; and figures from the National Archives and Records Administration.
- 1945 (Truman) - present data compiled by Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project, from documents contained in the *Federal Register*.

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