

# The americans' loss of trust in presidency following the infamous watergate scandal...

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## **Watergate and the Nature of the Presidency**

Watergate Plus 30, a 2003 documentary looking back on the Watergate scandal during Richard Nixon's presidency, gives viewers direct insight into the boundaries that were breached by the Nixon administration back in the early 1970s. Although Watergate is arguably the most well-known and most serious presidential abuse of power to date, there are without a doubt several events that have occurred since that can also be analyzed to find out more about the limits of the presidency. The National Security Agency spying scandal and Edward Snowden, as well as Clinton impeachment in the 1990s, are all examples of events in which the nature of the presidency was under scrutiny.

When viewing Watergate Plus 30, one thing struck me in particular. It seemed to me that the main reason that the break-in occurred in the first place was because those working around Nixon (i. e. his administration, the CIA, etc.) all viewed him as the highest possible power, and he viewed himself that way as well. These so-called "loyalists" ended up doing things they otherwise may never have done, simply because they felt as though it was their duty to appease the president—one example being James McCord, a CIA officer and devout Nixon loyalist who played a significant role in precipitating the break-in. This raises the question: is the president treated as an equal entity to Congress and the other branches of government? I personally believe the answer is absolutely not, but it should be yes. Perhaps if the media and all the branches of government ceased placing so much emphasis on the executive branch, the nature of the presidency would begin

to transform back into what the founders intended and shy away from the hierarchical system it has begun to resemble. I truly believe the nature of the presidency has begun to gain too much power, and it is a direct result of the treatment of the executive branch as a higher power.

One fine example of the executive branch, and the president specifically, believing it is above the law can be seen in the 1998 impeachment of then-president Bill Clinton. No, it is not the issue of his misogynistic tendencies, or the inappropriateness of an inter-White-House affair, but the simple fact that he lied under oath, commonly known as perjury. For everyday citizens, this offense can result in up to five years of prison. Clinton, however, was not punished; similar to Nixon being pardoned despite the very real reasons to be locked up. How was this allowed? Well, the presidency has simply ballooned into a far larger entity than our founders intended. The checks and balances system is intended to balance the executive branch's decisions, but if the president believes he is above the law, will this system even function correctly? No. And this brings me to my next example.

Edward Snowden is a CIA employee (similar to McCord) who has become known as the NSA spying "whistleblower". Because of the "classified information" he supplied to journalists about the National Security Agency spying on American citizens, Snowden was forced to flee the United States and seek asylum in a foreign country. The irony of this situation is very clear: the government was secretly breaking the law and spying on innocent Americans, thus breaching the right to privacy, yet they attempted to prosecute Snowden for violating the Espionage act and stealing government

property. This seems to have a much larger scope than the Watergate scandal, yet the actions taken have been substantially less significant. This is because of the ever-shifting boundaries of the presidency and the unsettling new norm. The government by no means should be able to decide what is good for the people without the people's knowledge.

Overall, the statement at the end of Watergate Plus 30 that I agree with the most is that the Watergate scandal did not have a lasting effect. The presidency is still overstepping its boundaries and arguably is beginning to expand its sense of self-entitlement even more. As much as the president may believe he (or maybe someday she) is above the law, he isn't, and it is our duty as American citizens to make sure the executive branch knows this and abides by it.