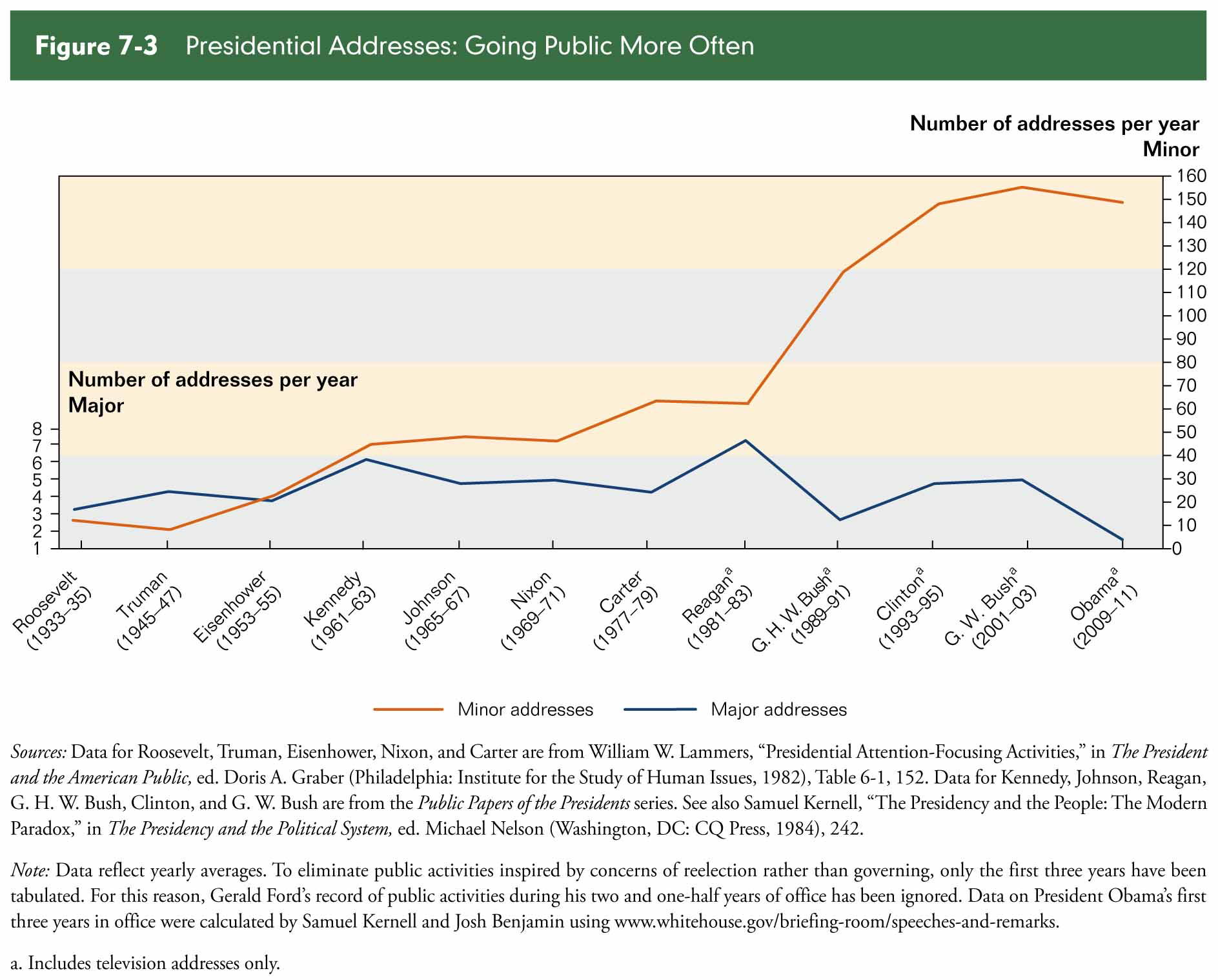
*The Logic of American Politics*, 7th Edition

Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck

Data Literacy Exercises: Chapter 7

Figure 7-3



**Learning objective:** 7.2 Discuss the modern presidency’s roles, powers, and challenges.

*Divided Government* occurs when the party that controls the presidency does not control at least one chamber of the Congress. Unified government was the norm during much of the 20th century, but, as the text mentions, divided government has been the norm during most of the post-war period. Many times, divided government occurs as a result of a midterm election when the president’s party is likely to lose seats while the incumbent president stays in place. Or it may, as it did in 1931-1932, be the prelude to a realignment and new party system (see Chapter 12) that will usher in new party majorities in all chambers once all office-holders can be displaced. Presidents, after all, serve four year terms, and only one-third of Senators are elected each cycle.

The overwhelming occurrence of divided government in recent decades, however, is not without historical precedent. For much of the 19th Century, divided government was also the norm after most midterms and/or as a result of realignments. The following figure depicts instances of unified and divided government in the 19th century after mass based elections became the norm (1828) and before the era of party regionalism ushered in by the election of 1896. With the exception of the Civil War-Reconstruction period (that still witnessed close party competition outside of the South), the two-parties were so competitive nationally and within most states and districts, that a minor change in the partisan vote balance or turnout could easily tip the White House or Congress from one party to the other.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Term | President | Party | Divided? |
|  |  |  |  |
| 1837–1839 | Van Buren | D | Unified |
| 1839–1841 |  | D | Unified |
| 1841–1843 | W. Harrison/Tyler | W | Unified |
| 1843–1845 | Tyler | W | Divided-House Only |
| 1845–1847 | Polk | D | Unified |
| 1847–1849 |  | D | Divided-House Only |
| 1849–1851 | Taylor/Fillmore | W | Divided |
| 1851–1853 | Fillmore | W | Divided |
| 1853–1855 | Pierce | D | Unified |
| 1855–1857 |  | D | Divided-House Only |
| 1857–1859 | Buchanan | D | Unified |
| 1859–1861 |  | D | Divided-House Only |
| 1861–1863 | Lincoln | R | Unified |
| 1863–1865 |  | R | Unified |
| 1865–1867 | A. Johnson | R | Unified |
| 1867–1869 |  | R | Unified |
| 1869–1871 | Grant | R | Unified |
| 1871–1873 |  | R | Unified |
| 1873–1875 |  | R | Unified |
| 1875–1877 |  | R | Divided-House Only |
| 1877–1879 | Hayes | R | Divided-House Only |
| 1879–1881 |  | R | Divided |
| 1881–1883 | Garfield/Arthur | R | Unified |
| 1883–1885 | Arthur | R | Divided-House Only |
| 1885–1887 | Cleveland | D | Divided-Senate Only |
| 1887–1889 |  | D | Divided-Senate Only |
| 1889–1891 | B. Harrison | R | Unified |
| 1891–1893 |  | R | Divided-House Only |
| 1893–1895 | Cleveland | D | Unified |
| 1895–1897 |  | D | Divided |

Source: Lyn Ragsdale, *Vital Statistics on the Presidency*, 4th ed., Table 9-1, CQ Press (2014)

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Since 1920, divided government has been most prevalent during which administrations?

a. Jimmy Carter

\*b. Dwight Eisenhower

c. Ronald Reagan

d. George W. Bush

@ Feedback: President Eisenhower faced an opposition majority throughout his eight years in office. Jimmy Carter in none. Ronald Reagan only faced the opposition in both houses once, as did George W. Bush.

2. Between 1920 and 1944, divided government occurred only during the administration of:

a. Warren Harding

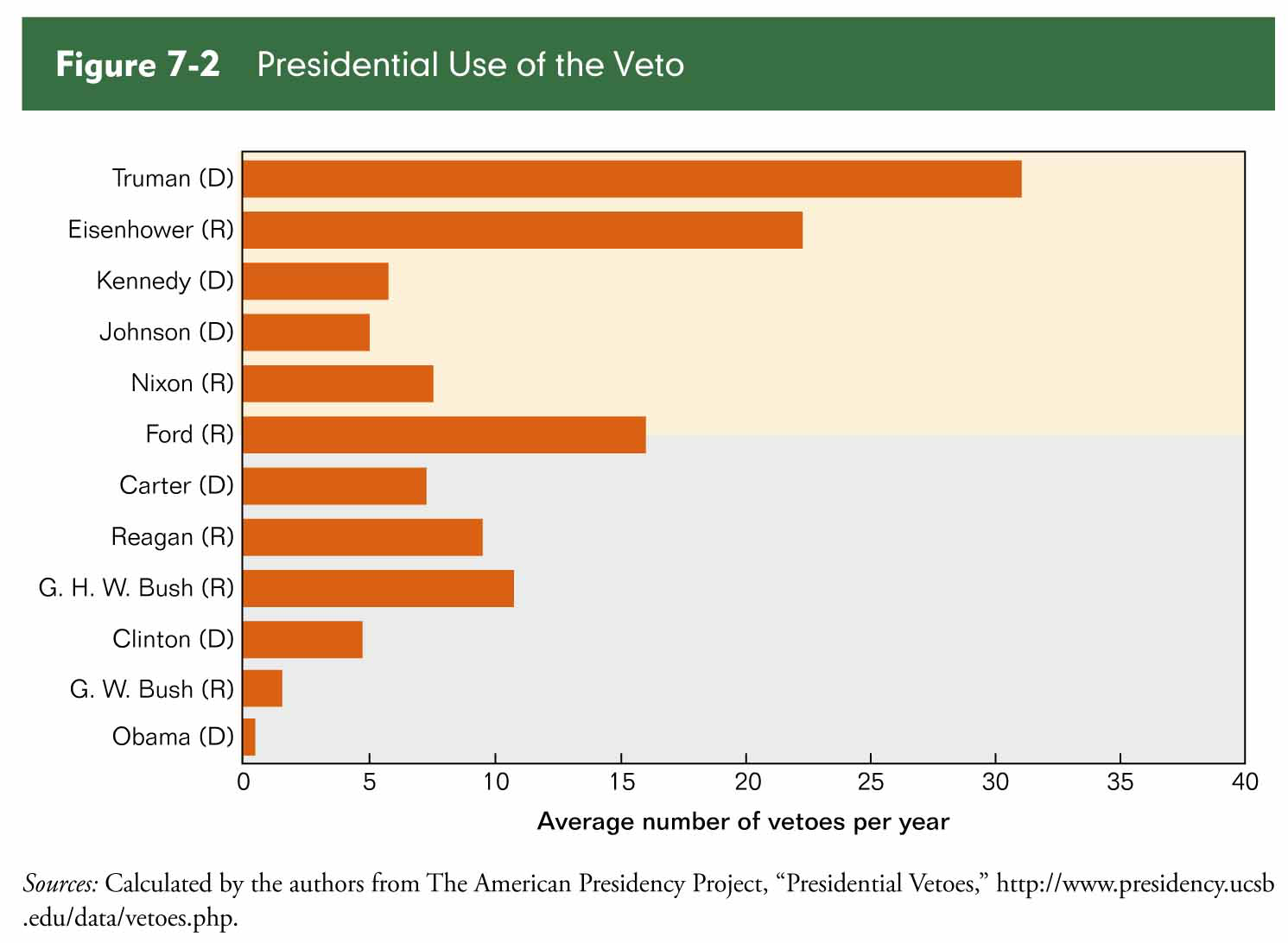
b. Calvin Coolidge

\*c. Herbert Hoover

d. Franklin Roosevelt

@ Feedback: This country transitioned, or realigned, from a republican to a Democratic nation after the Great Depression started in 1929. The movement to Democratic majorities started in the U.S. House in 1930 while Republican president Herbert Hoover was still in office. Even then, he faced opposition only in the House (remember, only one-third of Senators are elected each two-year cycle).

Figure 7-2

**Learning objective:** 7.3 Explain the dilemma of the president as a strategic actor.

The ability of the president to veto legislation is clearly specified in Article I, Section 7 of the U.S. Constitution (although the term “veto” is never used). Most Constitutional scholars would argue that the Framers assumed that power would be used sparingly, lest “checks and balances” supersede “separation of powers.” The veto, or its threat, however, has since become a common method of legislative power exercised by the president when congressional policy does not quite coincide with his own preferences.

One would assume, that as a point of policy negotiation, presidents would be most likely to use the veto during periods of divided government, when the opposition party controls one, more likely, both chambers of Congress. In his first term in office, Grover Cleveland (D) vetoed more legislation per year than any other president. He was opposed by an opposition Senate, but not House. Franklin D. Roosevelt (D-1933-1945) holds the record for total if not annual vetoes (635), but his party held both chambers by large majorities for most of his administration. Number of vetoes may, of course, be a factor of the total number of bills enacted by Congress. FDR’s record number was certainly an attempt to reign in the left-leaning policies of a newly and overwhelming Democratic Congress, but it also was a series of congresses that were passing record numbers of important legislation. President Barack Obama vetoed only 2 bills during his first six years in office (4 years with the opposition in control of the House), but congress passed fewer bills than in any time in modern history. The dramatically increased use of the filibuster also prevents congress from passing legislation before it can even be handed over to the president for his signature or veto. And, unlike, the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, legislation now gets pieced together in such a way as to make it difficult for presidents to veto legislation without losing most of what they wish to achieve. Unlike most governors, presidents do not have a “line-item” veto and, thus, must sign or reject whole, multi-faceted bills (a limitation affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Clinton v. City of New York*, 1998). One more change should be noted. Prior to the 1970s, a large proportion, sometimes a majority, of bills enacted would be ‘private’, i.e., geared to helping a single individual or entity. Since the 1970s, that practice has declined to virtual insignificance.\*

The following figure depicts the percentage of all legislation (private and public) passed by congress that the president vetoed, separating each administration by congressional term. Note that, even with President Obama’s hesitancy to use the veto, the veto percentage is generally higher during periods of divided government (blue), even with the same president in authority.

\*For an excellent overview of the complexities of measuring vetoes across time, see Charles M. Cameron, “the Presidential Veto,” <http://www.princeton.edu/~ccameron/The%20Presidential%20Veto%20v3.pdf>

Source: Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, Andrew Rugg, and Michael J. Malbin, Vital Statistics on Congress, <https://www.aei.org/publication/vital-statistics-on-congress/> and The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/vetoes.php>.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Which president vetoed the most legislation on average each year of his administration?

\*a. Truman

b. Ford

c. Reagan

d. Obama

@ Feedback: President Truman, at least for this period, holds the record for largest number per year, President Obama the least.

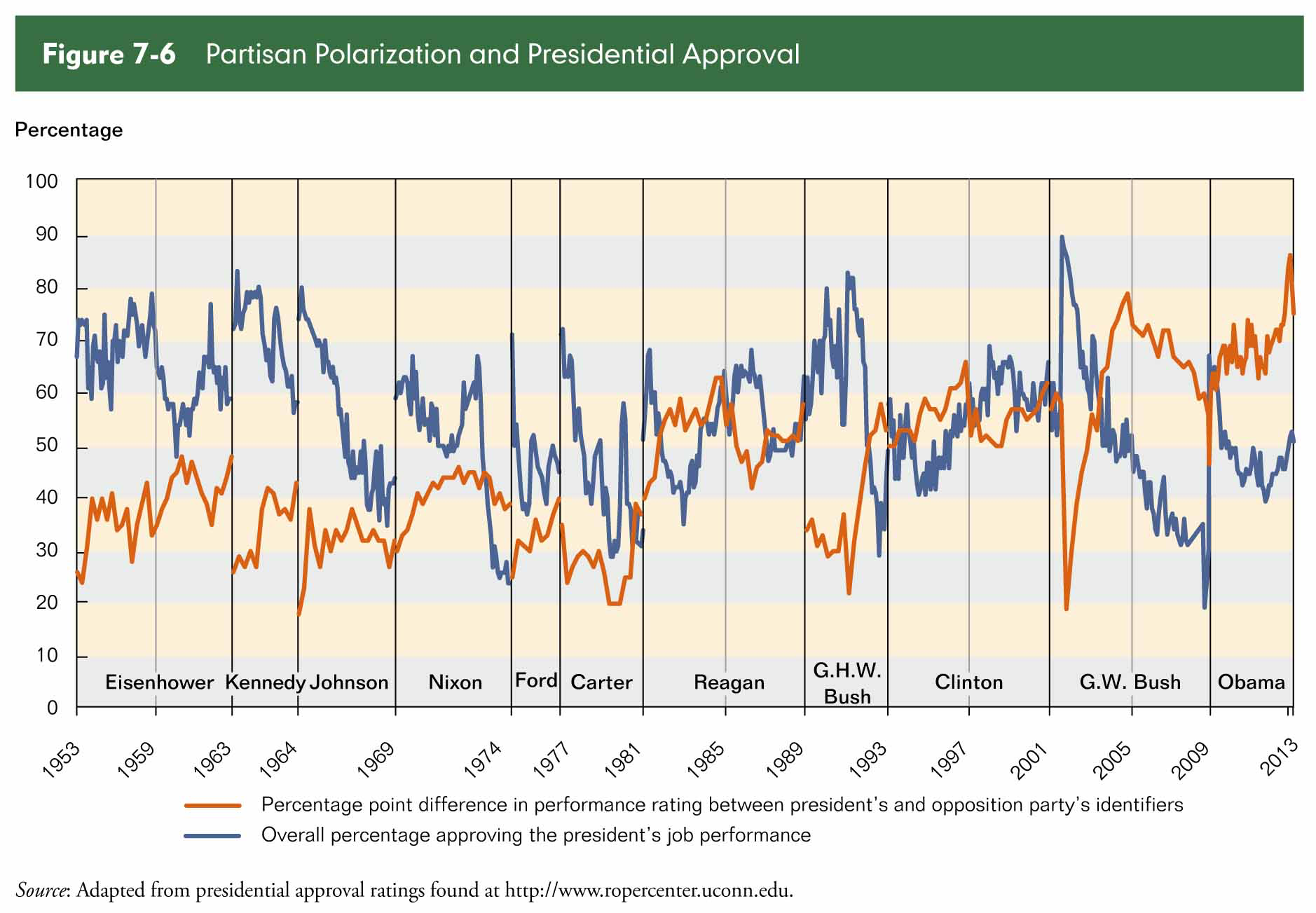
2. Compared to the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, the number of presidential vetoes in subsequent administrations is relatively low.

\*a. True

b. False

@ Feedback: Even with increases in the Ford administration, no subsequent administration has matched those numbers, although percentages were higher in several congressional terms in later years.

Figure 7-6:



**Learning objective:** 7.3 Explain the dilemma of the president as a strategic actor.

With rare exception, the public’s overall approval of the sitting president’s performance declines during his administration, especially during one’s second term if reelected. Certain critical episodes can reverse this trend temporarily. The public rallied behind Ronald Reagan after the 1981 assassination attempt on his life. George W. Bush’s ratings sky rocketed after the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York. Those spikes have, however, become rather short-lived, especially after the good-will and support provided by independents and, especially, affiliates of the opposition party dwindles. After the 9/11 attacks, for example, President Bush’s approval ratings dropped among all groups, including Republicans, but the decline was greatest among Democrats (see Figure 10-1).

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Presidential approval ratings generally decline throughout each president’s terms.

\*a. True

b. False

@ Feedback: Although the decline is generally not continuous, presidential popularity at the end of each term is generally lower than at the beginning. In the modern era, presidents Reagan and Clinton have been exceptions.

2. Since the 1950’s, the decline in presidential popularity in each administration has been matched by dramatic increases in polarization between the ratings of his party and the opposition.

a. True

\*b. False

@ Feedback: Although polarization generally increases, the inverse relationship between approval and polarization has been greatest during the Clinton, Obama, and both Bush administrations.

3. Which of the following is most true?

a. Since the 1950s, presidential approval has generally declined along with polarization.

b. Since the 1950s, presidential approval has generally been episodic but fairly stable overall along with polarization.

\*c. Since the 1950s, presidential approval ratings have been episodic but fairly stable overall but, overall, polarization has increased.

d. Since the 1950s, presidential approval ratings have been episodic but fairly stable overall but, overall, polarization has decreased.

@ Feedback: Each administration witnesses fairly dramatic fluctuations in approval, generally trending downwards for each term of a president’s administration. The general average rating across time has not, however, declined that much. Although polarization has generally moved in the opposite direction of approval, polarization has been at its highest during the past two administrations. Notice also that the decline in approval for President Nixon, reaching the lowest point in modern history with the exception of George W. Bush towards the end of his term, was not accompanied by the level of polarization of the last two administrations.