

The Nixon Model: The Enduring Legacy of the Imperial Presidency of the United States

By Connor Weathers

Spring 2026

BY THE WINNER OF TWO PULITZER PRIZES • WITH A NEW EPILOGUE



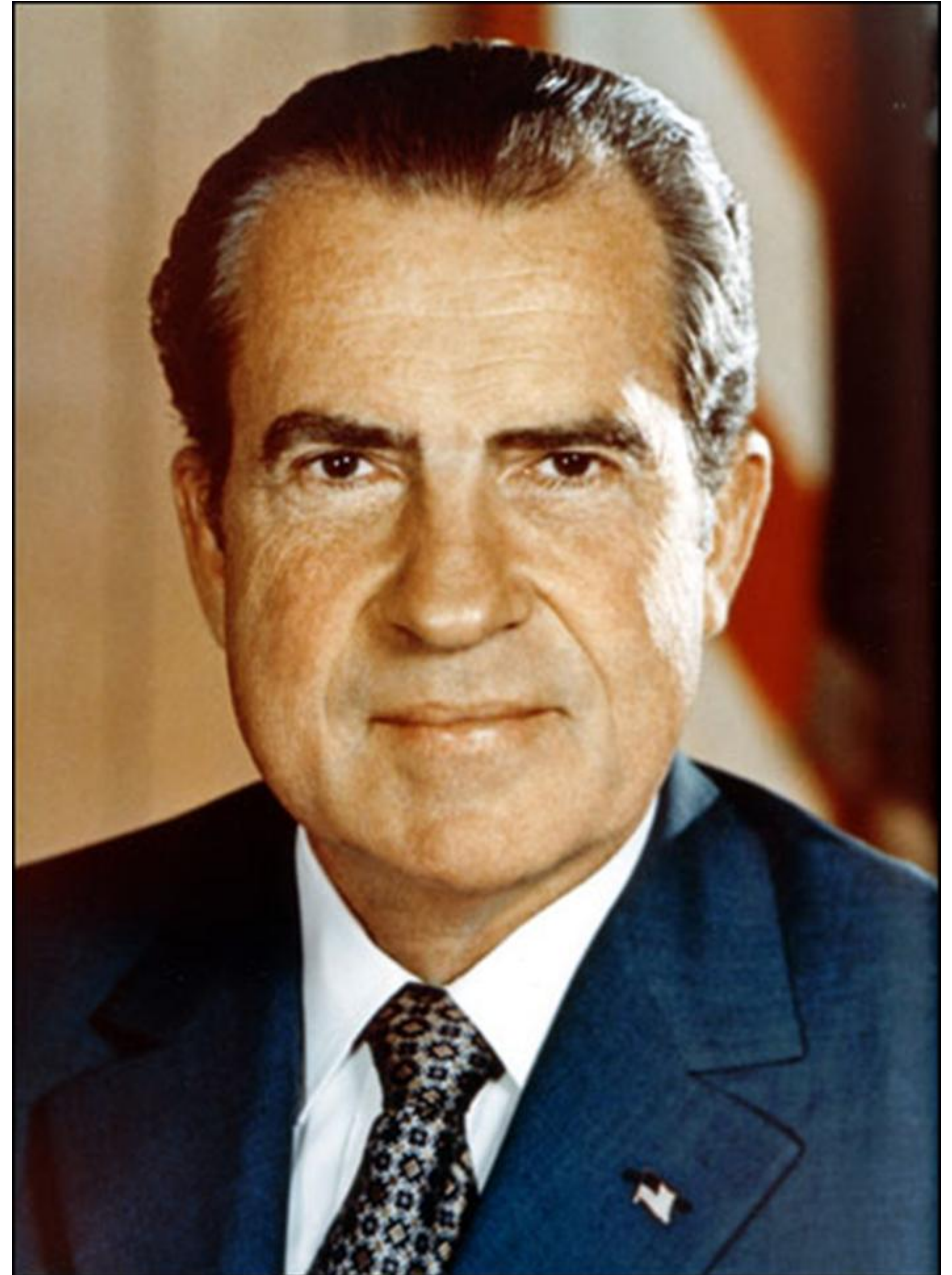
THE IMPERIAL PRESIDENCY

ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, JR.

"A brilliant, provocative book about the presidency in general and the manner in which the office has appropriated powers never intended for it."

— CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

MARINER BOOKS



Research Question

Did President Nixon's imperial presidency persist in subsequent presidential administrations?

Approach to Study

- Schlesinger's book *The Imperial Presidency* first popularized the concept, arguing that Nixon was an “Imperial President” (Schlesinger 1973)
 - It emerged as a popular concept post-Watergate, when presidential power reforms from *U.S. v. Nixon* and War Powers Resolution failed to meaningfully restrict presidential authority (Graff 2022, Mayer 2001, Schoen 2016)
- By utilizing this concept of an “Imperial President,” the study has identified key identifying traits of an “Imperial President”
- Using these Identifiers, this IS has utilized research methods from both Political Science and History to examine three presidential administrations for these identifiers
- Historically analyzing each presidential administration for these imperial identifiers, brought forth evidence that imperial traits from Nixon’s time have endured and evolved in our presidency

Method and Major Focuses of the Study

- This study had developed a method of historically pinpointing the presence of imperial presidential traits
- This approach was by developing Three Identifiers from existing scholarly work that showed these identifiers as being key features of an “Imperial President”
- **Three Identifiers:**
 - 1: Excessive use of unilateral action
 - 2: The excessive use of secrecy and expansive claims of national security authority while politically acting
 - 3: The overreach of wartime or emergency powers by the Executive
- **Reviewed Presidential Administrations:**
 - President Reagan and the Iran-Contra Affair
 - President Clinton and the intervention in Kosovo
 - President Obama’s intervention in Libya

Findings

- This study has found that a trend of an increasing growth of presidential power within the American government was visible beginning around the time of Nixon's administration
- This pattern of executive growth, which is that Schlesinger and other predominant scholars in the field relate to an "Imperial President" didn't end with Nixon
- By using this studies framework of using historical and political science approaches to track this trend, it was possible to find a continuing and evolving imperial legacy in our presidency
- The administrations picked were picked due to their chronological spacing from each other, yet each reviewed case shows at least some signs of the identifiers of an imperial president
- The "Imperial Presidency" is not just a concept from an author, but it is a visible trend of presidents acting more and more unilaterally in their political actions, while at the same time inevitably expanding their presidential power