

Warren Harding
29th President




Terms: 1921-1923

Political Party: Republican

First Lady: Florence Kling Harding

Vice President: Calvin Coolidge

Overview

Born: November 2, 1865 in Corsica, Ohio... First United States senator to be elected president... An air of scandal and corruption infuses the legacy of the Harding administration. His election, predicated on a pledge to return the nation to "normalcy," ushered in a period of conservative Republicanism designed to slow the momentum of progressive legislation. Even the few noble accomplishments achieved by his administration were soon forgotten as tales of cronyism, greed, and influence-peddling came to light. Harding fell from favor with the American public soon after his untimely, and at the time, controversial death... Died: August 2, 1923.

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The Era

- First commercial [radio](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/rescue/sfeature/radio.html) broadcast (1920)
- [The League of Nations](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/portrait/wp_league.html) formed (1920)
- Italian-born anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti found guilty of murder and sentenced to death (1921)
- Japanese prime minister assassinated (1921)
- T. S. Eliot publishes *The Wasteland* (1922)
- *Reader's Digest* begins publication (1922)

Domestic Policy

Warren Harding took office promising to undo many of the progressive policies of [Woodrow Wilson's](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-wilson/) administration. Ushering in an era of conservative Republicanism, Harding wasted little time in cutting taxes on higher incomes and raising tariff rates. However, charges of patronage and wrongdoing sidetracked the president's agenda early in his administration. The accusations later proved to be true. In the wake of scandals and his untimely death while still in office, Harding's domestic achievements lost what little luster they had.

"The world needs to be reminded that all human ills are not curable by legislation, and that quantity of statutory enactment and excess of government offer no substitute for quality of citizenship."

— Warren G. Harding, 1920

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Foreign Affairs

Harding's short term as president prevented him from crafting a distinctive foreign policy and from making peace arrangements in the Pacific. His style was to defer to Congress as much as possible. The Washington Disarmament Conference of 1921 is a good example. The conference, which succeeded in reducing the navies of the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, and Italy, came at the insistence of the Senate, not the administration.

Presidential Politics

Warren Harding awarded cabinet and governmental positions to political supporters. The practice proved to have dire consequences. Long-time political cronies abused their offices for personal gain. Harding's passive style of leadership almost certainly contributed to their wrongdoing. The most infamous example involved Secretary of Interior Albert Fall's role in the Teapot Dome Scandal, in which oil-rich Wyoming public lands were exploited by private companies acting in collusion with Cabinet officials.

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