



It's the President's Absolute Right to Pardon Whomever He Chooses

Robin Mizrahi

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About half the country is always outraged when a president pardons someone. For those in the opposing party, it's as if no previous Commander in Chief has ever been tyrannical enough to exercise this right.

President Donald Trump's **first pardon** was of Sheriff Joe Arpaio, convicted in Arizona of contempt of court. Predictably, half the country was outraged.

About half the country is always outraged when a president commutes a sentence or pardons someone. (A pardon reverses a conviction, and a commutation lessens a sentence.) For those in the opposing party, it's as if no previous Commander in Chief has ever been tyrannical enough to exercise this right.

In fact, the **right to pardon** or commute a criminal's sentence was written into the constitution by the Founding Fathers. George Washington issued pardons or commutations for 16 people, including two who had been convicted of treason for their roles in the Whiskey Rebellion.

In the past 100 years, **U.S. Presidents issued** about 20,000 pardons and commutations. Let's look at the most recent.

President **Bill Clinton pardoned** or issued commutations for 450 people. One contentious pardon was of Marc Rich, indicted for illegal trading with Iran, who became a fugitive after fleeing the U.S owing \$48 million in taxes. This was especially controversial because the pardon came after Rich's former wife made hefty donations to the Clinton Library and to Hillary's senate campaign.

President **George W. Bush pardoned** or commuted the sentences of 200 people, including Scooter Libby, his assistant and Dick Cheney's Chief of Staff, who was convicted of perjury in connection with CIA agent Valerie Plame's outing. When President Bush commuted Libby's two-and-a-half-year sentence, Congressional Democrats claimed the President had no accountability or respect for the law, and the commutation was "disgraceful".

President **Barack Obama pardoned** 212 people and commuted the sentences of 1,715 people. The most controversial of these was Lopez Rivera, a member of the FBI-labeled terrorist group FALN, (Armed Forces of National Liberation, which fought for Puerto Rican independence.) FALN set off about 130 bombs in the U.S., murdering six people. Rivera, sentenced to 65 years in prison, was instantly released from prison.

No matter how you feel about President Trump, and his decision to pardon Joe Arpaio, the President does have the **absolute right** to pardon or commute the sentence of anyone convicted of a federal crime. This power lies solely in the Executive Branch, protected from interference by the Judicial or Legislative Branches. That's the way it's always been, and probably always will be – whether it's your president or it's not-my president.



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