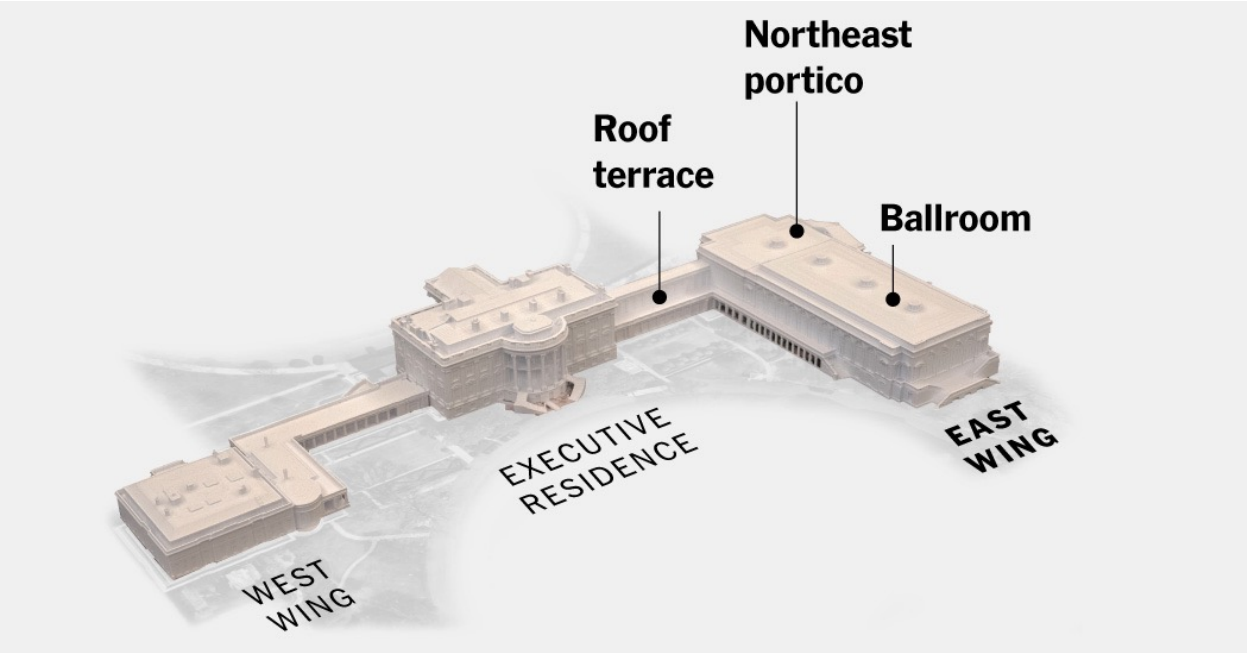
The Wrong Ballroom



A Question of Proportion, Not Politics

The question isn't whether the White House should have a ballroom.
It probably should. The question is how large it should be.

The White House was not designed for modern-scale events. Its largest interior space, the East Room, is approximately 3,000 square feet—sufficient for ceremonial functions, but limited for large state dinners, diplomatic gatherings, and major receptions.

As a result, administrations have repeatedly relied on temporary solutions. Large tents have been erected on the South Lawn to accommodate events that exceed the capacity of the residence itself. While effective, these structures introduce logistical challenges, security complications, and a level of impermanence that contrasts with the significance of the occasions they are meant to support.

A dedicated ballroom would address these constraints. It would provide a secure, controlled environment and a consistent capacity for large-scale events. In that sense, the case for a ballroom is straightforward.

Earlier additions, including the original East Wing, were modest in scale and clearly subordinate to the main residence—a pattern that has guided the evolution of the White House for over a century.

In a structure defined by proportion, scale is not incidental. It is decisive.

The White House's largest room is approximately 3,000 square feet. A ballroom of roughly 10,000 square feet would more than triple that capacity, providing ample space for modern state functions. Even accounting for the necessary support areas—kitchens, circulation, and security—a total footprint in the range of 13,000 to 15,000 square feet would be sufficient. That scale would remain well below the size of the West Wing and clearly subordinate to the main residence.

That is a fraction of the current proposal.

The planned expansion approaches 90,000 square feet—several times larger than what would be required to meet the functional need—far beyond what proportion would justify. At that scale, the issue is no longer accommodation. It is proportion.

Scale Matters More Than Purpose

There is a basic principle in architecture and historic preservation:
Additions must serve the original building—not compete with it.

This isn't a matter of taste. It's standard practice in preserving historic structures. Whether the project involves a courthouse, a university, or a national landmark, the rule is consistent:

The new must remain subordinate to the old.

That is how a building's character is preserved. That is how its identity endures. Break that rule, and the addition doesn't enhance the structure—it diminishes it.

This Isn't a Close Call

What's striking about the current ballroom proposal is how direct the criticism has been from architectural and preservation voices.

One architectural review described the design as:
"wrong in placement, wrong in size and proportion."

Preservation advocates have warned that a structure of this magnitude would:
"overwhelm" the White House and "permanently disrupt" its design.

Even outside professional circles, the conclusion has been blunt:
It's simply too large.

This is not a narrow disagreement. It's a shared concern about proportion.

The White House Is Defined by Restraint

The White House is one of the most recognizable buildings in the world, not because of its size, but because of its balance.

Its architecture reflects:

- proportion
- symmetry
- restraint

It does not dominate its surroundings. It does not rely on scale to project importance.
It doesn't need to.

A ballroom that rivals or exceeds it in size reverses that logic. It shifts the visual center away from the building itself and toward the addition.

At that point, the addition is no longer supporting the White House.
It is competing with it.

There Is a Better Way

None of this argues against building a ballroom.
It argues for building one properly.

That means:

- keeping the structure clearly secondary
- integrating it without disrupting the original design
- or placing it nearby, rather than attaching it in a way that alters the building's scale

These are not unusual constraints. They are standard practice in preservation architecture.

This Is a Question of Judgment

In the end, this is not a technical problem.
It is a judgment call.

Do we treat the White House as a structure to be expanded,
or as a landmark to be respected?

A ballroom may be justified.
But one that competes with the White House is not.