



Siena College

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Presidents 1990

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**SIENA RESEARCH INSTITUTE
RANKS BEST PRESIDENTS
IN U.S. HISTORY**

LOUDONVILLE, N.Y. -- The President who led the United States out of the Great Depression and through World War II-- not "The Father of Our Country" -- ranks as the nation's best chief executive, according to a national survey conducted by the Siena Research Institute.

Siena College professors Thomas O. Kelly II and Douglas A. Lonnstrom, who direct the SRI, report that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the best President in the view of history and political science scholars who rated this country's chief executives.

Kelly, a professor of history, and Lonnstrom, a professor of statistics, surveyed 220 scholars about the nation's 40 Presidents. Each President was rated in 20 different categories that reflect both personal and political attributes.

The SRI released a similar study in 1982, and plans to do a new survey each time there is a change in Presidents. This more extensive survey rates President Bush and shows changes in

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ratings of Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford (both dropped), and Jimmy Carter and Richard Nixon (both improved). According to the SRI, this is the only comparative survey of U.S. Presidents in which the same questions are asked of the same group each time there is a change in administration.

Kelly and Lonnstrom explained that one of the primary reasons for the second survey was to gauge how recent Presidents changed in their ratings.

"When a President leaves office, his rating is often low," said Kelly. "After time passes and people have a chance to review his accomplishments and mistakes more objectively, the rating usually changes accordingly."

Carter rated 33rd in the 1982 survey; his rating has since gone up to 24th.

Ford rated 23rd in the first survey, and has now dropped to 27th. Nixon previously rated 28th and has risen slightly to 25th.

Bush, who was rated for the first time to convey early perceptions of his administration, came in 18th. At a similar point in his administration, Reagan was rated 16th.

FDR (1933-1945) rated first overall, and also in the categories of party leadership, communication ability, relationship with Congress, court appointments, handling of the U.S. economy, ability to compromise, willingness to take risks and foreign policy accomplishments. FDR was President longer than anyone else.

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Coming in second was Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865), another wartime President. He rated first in overall ability, domestic accomplishments, executive ability and overall present view of those polled. Lincoln was commander-in-chief of the Union forces during the Civil War, and issued the Emancipation Proclamation that freed the slaves.

Rated third was Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809), who rated first in the categories of personal background, imagination and intelligence. Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence, was responsible for the Louisiana Purchase, which greatly increased the size of the United States.

George Washington came in fourth, and was rated first in executive appointments, integrity, leadership ability and avoiding crucial mistakes. Rounding out the top 10: Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Harry S. Truman, James Madison, Andrew Jackson and John F. Kennedy.

The only President who rated number one in any category but did not come out in the top 10 was Ronald Reagan, who rated first in luck.

The President with the worst overall rating was Warren G. Harding, who is chiefly remembered for a string of scandals that occurred during his administration. He is rated worst or next to worst in 12 of the 20 categories. Following Harding: Andrew Johnson, James Buchanan, Ulysses S. Grant and Franklin Pierce.

The Siena Research Institute investigates political, educational and historical issues on a statewide, regional and

national basis. In addition to the U.S. Presidents survey, it has been responsible for a number of other definitive surveys, including the effects of New York's 21 drinking age and rankings of U.S. senators, American films, U.S. first ladies and Soviet leaders.

The SRI has also presented scholarly conferences including an on-going series on World War II.

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THE SIENA RESEARCH INSTITUTE

1990 PRESIDENTS' SURVEY

Overall ranking

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 21. Martin Van Buren |
| 2. Abraham Lincoln | 22. Ronald Reagan |
| 3. Thomas Jefferson | 23. Rutherford B. Hayes |
| 4. George Washington | 24. Jimmy Carter |
| 5. Theodore Roosevelt | 25. Richard Nixon |
| 6. Woodrow Wilson | 26. Chester Arthur |
| 7. Harry S. Truman | 27. Gerald Ford |
| 8. James Madison | 28. Herbert Hoover |
| 9. Andrew Jackson | 29. Benjamin Harrison |
| 10. John F. Kennedy | 30. James Garfield |
| 11. James Monroe | 31. Calvin Coolidge |
| 12. Dwight D. Eisenhower | 32. Millard Fillmore |
| 13. James Polk | 33. John Tyler |
| 14. John Adams | 34. Zachary Taylor |
| 15. Lyndon B. Johnson | 35. William Henry Harrison |
| 16. John Quincy Adams | 36. Franklin Pierce |
| 17. Grover Cleveland | 37. Ulysses S. Grant |
| 18. George Bush | 38. James Buchanan |
| 19. William McKinley | 39. Andrew Johnson |
| 20. William Howard Taft | 40. Warren G. Harding |

THE TOP AND BOTTOM FIVE IN:

Personal background

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Thomas Jefferson | 36. Andrew Jackson |
| 2. John Quincy Adams | 37. Ronald Reagan |
| 3. John Adams | 38. Ulysses S. Grant |
| 4. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 39. Warren G. Harding |
| 5. James Madison | 40. Andrew Johnson |

Political party leadership

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 36. Warren G. Harding |
| 2. Andrew Jackson | 37. Jimmy Carter |
| 3. Thomas Jefferson | 38. Ulysses S. Grant |
| 4. Abraham Lincoln | 39. John Tyler |
| 5. Theodore Roosevelt | 40. Andrew Johnson |

Communication ability

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 36. William Henry Harrison |
| 2. Abraham Lincoln | 37. Calvin Coolidge |
| 3. Thomas Jefferson | 38. Zachary Taylor |
| 4. Theodore Roosevelt | 39. Warren G. Harding |
| 5. John F. Kennedy | 40. Andrew Johnson |

Relationship with Congress

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 36. William Henry Harrison |
| 2. Abraham Lincoln | 37. James Buchanan |
| 3. Thomas Jefferson | 38. Jimmy Carter |
| 4. George Washington | 39. John Tyler |
| 5. Theodore Roosevelt | 40. Andrew Johnson |

Court appointments

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 36. Jimmy Carter |
| 2. George Washington | 37. Franklin Pierce |
| 3. John Adams | 38. James Buchanan |
| 4. Theodore Roosevelt | 39. William Henry Harrison |
| 5. Dwight D. Eisenhower | 40. Andrew Johnson |

Handling of the U.S. economy

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 36. Jimmy Carter |
| 2. George Washington | 37. Calvin Coolidge |
| 3. Theodore Roosevelt | 38. Ulysses S. Grant |
| 4. Abraham Lincoln | 39. Warren G. Harding |
| 5. Woodrow Wilson | 40. Herbert Hoover |

Luck

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Ronald Reagan | 36. Jimmy Carter |
| 2. George Washington | 37. William Henry Harrison |
| 3. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 38. James Garfield |
| 4. Theodore Roosevelt | 39. Andrew Johnson |
| 5. Andrew Jackson | 40. Herbert Hoover |

Ability to compromise

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 36. Herbert Hoover |
| 2. Abraham Lincoln | 37. Zachary Taylor |
| 3. George Washington | 38. John Tyler |
| 4. Thomas Jefferson | 39. Woodrow Wilson |
| 5. Dwight D. Eisenhower | 40. Andrew Johnson |

Willingness to take risks

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 36. Herbert Hoover |
| 2. Abraham Lincoln | 37. Franklin Pierce |
| 3. Theodore Roosevelt | 38. Warren G. Harding |
| 4. Andrew Jackson | 39. Calvin Coolidge |
| 5. Thomas Jefferson | 40. James Buchanan |

Executive appointments

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. George Washington | 36. Franklin Pierce |
| 2. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 37. Ronald Reagan |
| 3. Thomas Jefferson | 38. James Buchanan |
| 4. Abraham Lincoln | 39. Warren G. Harding |
| 5. Theodore Roosevelt | 40. Ulysses S. Grant |

Overall ability

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Abraham Lincoln | 36. Andrew Johnson |
| 2. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 37. James Buchanan |
| 3. Thomas Jefferson | 38. Franklin Pierce |
| 4. George Washington | 39. Ulysses S. Grant |
| 5. Theodore Roosevelt | 40. Warren G. Harding |

Imagination

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Thomas Jefferson | 36. Franklin Pierce |
| 2. Abraham Lincoln | 37. Ulysses S. Grant |
| 3. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 38. James Buchanan |
| 4. Theodore Roosevelt | 39. Calvin Coolidge |
| 5. Woodrow Wilson | 40. Warren G. Harding |

Domestic accomplishments

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Abraham Lincoln | 36. Ulysses S. Grant |
| 2. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 37. Herbert Hoover |
| 3. George Washington | 38. James Buchanan |
| 4. Thomas Jefferson | 39. Andrew Johnson |
| 5. Lyndon B. Johnson | 40. Warren G. Harding |

Integrity

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. George Washington | 36. Ulysses S. Grant |
| 2. Abraham Lincoln | 37. Ronald Reagan |
| 3. Thomas Jefferson | 38. Lyndon B. Johnson |
| 4. John Adams | 39. Warren G. Harding |
| 5. John Quincy Adams | 40. Richard Nixon |

Executive ability

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Abraham Lincoln | 36. Franklin Pierce |
| 2. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 37. Andrew Johnson |
| 3. George Washington | 38. James Buchanan |
| 4. Theodore Roosevelt | 39. Ulysses S. Grant |
| 5. Thomas Jefferson | 40. Warren G. Harding |

Foreign policy accomplishments

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 36. Franklin Pierce |
| 2. George Washington | 37. Calvin Coolidge |
| 3. Abraham Lincoln | 38. James Buchanan |
| 4. Harry S. Truman | 39. William Henry Harrison |
| 5. Thomas Jefferson | 40. Lyndon B. Johnson |

Leadership ability

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. George Washington | 36. Calvin Coolidge |
| 2. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 37. Franklin Pierce |
| 3. Abraham Lincoln | 38. James Buchanan |
| 4. Theodore Roosevelt | 39. Andrew Johnson |
| 5. Thomas Jefferson | 40. Warren G. Harding |

Intelligence

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Thomas Jefferson | 36. Andrew Johnson |
| 2. Woodrow Wilson | 37. Calvin Coolidge |
| 3. Abraham Lincoln | 38. Franklin Pierce |
| 4. James Madison | 39. Ronald Reagan |
| 5. John Adams | 40. Warren G. Harding |

Avoiding crucial mistakes

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. George Washington | 36. James Buchanan |
| 2. Abraham Lincoln | 37. Herbert Hoover |
| 3. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 38. Warren G. Harding |
| 4. Thomas Jefferson | 39. Andrew Johnson |
| 5. Theodore Roosevelt | 40. Richard Nixon |

Overall present view (not a composite score of the categories above)

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|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Abraham Lincoln | 36. Andrew Johnson |
| 2. George Washington | 37. Franklin Pierce |
| 3. Franklin D. Roosevelt | 38. James Buchanan |
| 4. Thomas Jefferson | 39. Ulysses S. Grant |
| 5. Theodore Roosevelt | 40. Warren G. Harding |