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American Presidents: Greatest and Worst
Siena's 5th Presidential Expert Poll 1982 - 2010

Rushmore Plus One; FDR joins Mountainside Figures Washington, Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt and Lincoln as Top Presidents

TR Leads with Right Stuff; Lincoln on Ability; FDR Accomplished Most
Obama Enters at 15th; High on Imagination, Communication and Intelligence;
Weak on Background; G.W. Bush falls from 23nd in 2002 to 39th Today
Worst Ever: A. Johnson, Buchanan, Harding, Pierce and G.W. Bush

Loudonville, NY – For the fifth time since its inception in 1982, the Siena College Research Institute’s (SRI) Survey of U.S. Presidents finds that experts rank Franklin D. Roosevelt as the top all time chief executive. The 238 participating presidential scholars round out the top five in order with Theodore Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Teddy Roosevelt had, more than any other president the “right stuff”, and tops the collective ranking of a cluster of personal qualities including imagination, integrity, intelligence, luck, background, and being willing to take risks. Lincoln, according to the experts, demonstrated the greatest presidential abilities while FDR ranks first in overall accomplishments.

Results of Siena College Research Institute Presidential Ranking Survey					
Top Ten Presidents by Survey Year					
Rank	1982	1990	1994	2002	2010
1	F. Roosevelt				
2	Jefferson	Lincoln	Lincoln	Lincoln	T. Roosevelt
3	Lincoln	Jefferson	T. Roosevelt	T. Roosevelt	Lincoln
4	Washington	Washington	Washington	Washington	Washington
5	T. Roosevelt	T. Roosevelt	Jefferson	Jefferson	Jefferson
6	Wilson	Wilson	Wilson	Wilson	Madison
7	Truman	Truman	Truman	Truman	Monroe
8	Kennedy	Madison	Eisenhower	Monroe	Wilson
9	Madison	Jackson	Madison	Madison	Truman
10	J. Adams	Kennedy	Kennedy	Eisenhower	Eisenhower

“In nearly thirty years, the same five presidents have occupied the first five places with only slight shuffling. Despite decades of new research on former presidents and the accomplishments or lack thereof of the current chief executives, scholars display amazingly consistent results,” according to Dr. Douglas Lonnstrom, Professor of statistics at Siena College and one of the study’s directors. “Only eight names have appeared in the second five over the years. Wilson and Truman hold onto membership in this club while Kennedy, John Adams and Jackson fell, Eisenhower holds on and Madison and Monroe have seen their stock rise.”

The current president, Barack Obama, while highly rated on imagination (6th), communication ability (7th) and intelligence (8th) scores poorly on background (family, education and experience) and enters the survey in the 15th position. George W. Bush, had entered the survey at 23rd when the study was last conducted one year into his first term. Today, just one year after leaving office, the former president has found himself in the bottom five at 39th rated especially poorly in handling the economy, communication, ability to compromise, foreign policy accomplishments and intelligence. Rounding out the bottom five are four presidents that have held that dubious distinction each time the survey has been conducted: Andrew Johnson, James Buchanan, Warren G. Harding, and Franklin Pierce. Andrew Johnson leads the ‘worst ever’ in both abilities and accomplishments finishing below both Buchanan and Harding, but Harding tops the worst in personal attributes including integrity where he finishes just slightly ahead of Richard M. Nixon.

Results of Siena College Research Institute Presidential Ranking Survey				
Bottom Five Presidents by Survey Year				
1982	1990	1994	2002	2010
Harding (39)	Harding (40)	Harding (41)	A. Johnson (42)	A. Johnson (43)
A. Johnson (38)	A. Johnson (39)	A. Johnson (40)	Buchanan (41)	Buchanan (42)
Buchanan (37)	Buchanan (38)	Buchanan (39)	Harding (40)	Harding (41)
Grant (36)	Grant (37)	Grant (38)	Pierce (39)	Pierce (40)
Pierce (35)	Pierce (36)	Pierce (37)	Fillmore (38)	GW Bush (39)

“Aside from the newest entry in the “Bottom Five”, George W. Bush, the others have a firm hold on this ignominious distinction. Three, Pierce, Buchanan and Andrew Johnson wrap around one of our finest presidents, Abe Lincoln and those three perennial poorly ranked are held responsible for a failure to avert the Civil War in the case of Pierce and Buchanan, and perhaps even more shamefully in Johnson,

prolonging the national disgrace with a prejudiced, Jim Crow, reconstruction,” according to Professor Tom Kelly, Professor of History and American Studies, emeritus Siena College and the study’s other director. “Harding, well, no one appreciates corruption nor accepts ineptitude as an excuse.”

Over two hundred presidential scholars ranked the 43 U.S. Presidents on six personal attributes (background, imagination, integrity, intelligence, luck and willingness to take risks), five forms of ability (compromising, executive, leadership, communication and overall) and eight areas of accomplishment including economic, other domestic affairs, working with Congress and their party, appointing supreme court justices and members of the executive branch, avoiding mistakes and foreign policy. T.R. led the attribute category and was tops in imagination and willing to take risks. Lincoln leads in ability with first places in ability to compromise, executive ability and overall ability. FDR not only is the overall top rated president but also leads in accomplishments topping the list in party leadership, handling the U.S. Economy, and foreign policy accomplishments.

Bill Clinton, now nearly ten years removed from the White House, moved upwards in the rankings from 18th overall in 2002 to 13th today. Clinton moved up the list based on improving ratings of his background and his executive appointments but continued to be haunted by his integrity and failure to avoid critical mistakes. G. H. Bush’s legacy held constant with the one term Bush fixed at 22nd.

Ronald Reagan dropped two places from 16th overall in 2002 to 18th today. Still, Reagan remains highly regarded for his luck, party leadership, communication ability, relationship with Congress and his leadership ability. Jimmy Carter, despite continuing visibility and philanthropic efforts, dropped from 25th in 2002 to 32nd in 2010. Carter’s high suit is his enviable integrity rating (7th) but he draws low marks for his handling of the economy, relationship with Congress, party leadership, luck, executive and leadership abilities and his failure to avoid crucial mistakes.

Among other historically recent presidents, Gerald Ford held steady at 28th, Richard Nixon dropped four spots from 26th to 30th, Lyndon Johnson, rated number one for his relationship with Congress, fell one place from 15th to 16th, and John Kennedy climbed three spots from 14th to 11th. Kennedy continues to be highly regarded for his communication (4th), ability to compromise (6th), executive appointments (6th), imagination (7th) and his handling of the U.S. economy (7th).

The Siena College Research Institute (SRI) Survey of U.S. Presidents is based on responses from 238 presidential scholars, historians and political scientists that responded via mail or web to an invitation to participate. Respondents ranked each of 43 presidents on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) on each of twenty presidential attributes, abilities and accomplishments. Overall rankings were computed by assigning equal weight to each of those twenty categories. For additional information about the survey visit www.siena.edu/sri/research or contact Professor Tom Kelly at 518-372-7890 or Dr. Douglas Lonnstrom at 518-783-2362.

20 Presidential Categories

Top and Bottom Two in Each

	Background	Imagination	Integrity	Intelligence	Luck
Top Rated	Jefferson	T. Roosevelt	Lincoln	Jefferson	Washington
Second Rated	J.Q. Adams	Lincoln	Washington	Madison	T. Roosevelt
Next to Last	A. Johnson	Buchanan	Harding	G.W. Bush	W. Harrison
Rated Last	Harding	Harding	Nixon	Harding	Hoover

	Willing to take risks	Avoid crucial mistakes	Court appointments	Domestic Accomplishments	Executive Appointments
Top Rated	T. Roosevelt	Washington	T. Roosevelt	Lincoln	Washington
Second Rated	Lincoln	Lincoln	F. Roosevelt	T. Roosevelt	Lincoln
Next to Last	Hoover	A. Johnson	Buchanan	A. Johnson	A. Johnson
Rated Last	Buchanan	Nixon	A. Johnson	Buchanan	Harding

	Foreign Policy Accomplishments	Handling of U.S. Economy	Party leadership	Relationship w/Congress	Ability to compromise
Top Rated	F. Roosevelt	F. Roosevelt	F. Roosevelt	L. Johnson	Lincoln
Second Rated	Monroe	T. Roosevelt	Jackson	F. Roosevelt	F. Roosevelt
Next to Last	G. W. Bush	G. W. Bush	Tyler	Tyler	G. W. Bush
Rated Last	L. Johnson	Hoover	A. Johnson	A. Johnson	A. Johnson

	Communication ability	Executive ability	Leadership ability	Overall ability	Present overall view
Top Rated	F. Roosevelt	Lincoln	Washington	Lincoln	Lincoln
Second Rated	Lincoln	Washington	Lincoln	F. Roosevelt	F. Roosevelt
Next to Last	G. W. Bush	Buchanan	A. Johnson	Buchanan	A. Johnson
Rated Last	A. Johnson	Harding	Buchanan	Harding	Buchanan