

Reagan Approval: Better in Retrospect

Two-thirds of Americans look back favorably on Ronald Reagan's presidency, a better rating than he received while serving.

Reagan's average approval rating during his two terms in office was 57 percent, in the midrange for a postwar president – tied with Bill Clinton. But looking back today, more Americans – 66 percent – say they approve of Reagan's work.

That's a familiar phenomenon: Presidents tend to be rated better as they recede from the fray. Reagan scored a similarly strong retrospective job approval rating in February 2000. And Jimmy Carter's was 66 percent in a poll a couple of years ago – a full 20 points higher than his career average while in office.

Reagan's approval rating while he served peaked at 73 percent in the spring of 1981, after he was shot and wounded in an assassination attempt; and 70 percent in 1986, after he ordered a bombing raid against Libya. It fell to a low of 42 percent in early 1983, following a surge in unemployment; and 44 percent in early 1987, during the Iran-Contra controversy.

	Reagan's Job Performance		
	Approve	Disapprove	
7/30/01	66%	27	(Retrospective)
2/27/00	64	26	(Retrospective)
'81-'88	57	39	(Career average)
2/26/87	44	51	Low - Iran-Contra
4/26/86	70	26	High - Libya bombing
1/22/83	42	54	Low - unemployment
4/22/81	73	19	High - shot by Hinckley

FAVORABILITY – Nearly seven in 10 Americans also report a favorable overall impression of Reagan, up 12 points since the last asking in 1994, and up from a low of 48 percent in August 1988. That may reflect public sympathy with the 90-year-old ex-president's struggle with Alzheimer's disease.

PARTISANS – Reagan still incites sharp partisan differences. A whopping 87 percent of Republicans approve of his work as president, but that dives to 48 percent of Democrats. Independents fall in between.

	Rating Reagan	
	Approve	Disapprove
Republicans	87%	8
Democrats	48	45
Independents	68	25

Reagan also gets a 79 percent positive rating from conservatives, compared to 69 percent from moderates and just 45 percent from liberals.

Call the Polling Unit for a more detailed assessment of public opinion during Reagan's presidency.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone July 26-30, 2001, among a random national sample of 1,352 adults. The results have a 2.5-point error margin. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Dalia Sussman.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Media contact: Todd Polkes, (212) 456-4586

Here are the full results (*=less than 0.5 percent):

25. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of Ronald Reagan?

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion
7/30/01	69	29	3
10/31/94	57	38	5
9/1/91	55	38	7
11/21/89	59	36	5
8/14/88	48	41	10
7/11/88	60	36	4
1/23/88	58	40	2
12/13/87	61	37	2
12/2/87	63	37	1
5/19/86	74	23	3
7/29/85	65	31	3
10/23/84 RV	62	35	3
10/16/84 RV	60	36	4
10/9/84 RV	60	36	4
10/2/84 RV	60	35	5
9/11/84 RV	60	38	2
1/17/84	54	38	8

26. Thinking back to when Ronald Reagan was in office, would you say you approve or disapprove of the way Reagan handled his job as president?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
7/30/01	66	27	7
2/27/00	64	26	10

Call for full trend, 1981-1989.

END