



# SIENA RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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**Siena College Poll:**

## **Siena College Research Institute Ranks Best Presidents in U.S. History**

**Loudonville, NY.** 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 College Research Institute.

Siena College professors Thomas O. Kelly II and Douglas A. Lonnstrom, who direct the SCRI, 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, survey 220 scholars about the nation's 40 Presidents. Each President was rated in 20 different categories that reflect both personal and political attributes.

The SCRI 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 ratings of Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford (both dropped), and Jimmy Carter and Richard Nixon (both improved). According to the SCRI, 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 33<sup>rd</sup> in the 1982 survey; his rating has since gone up to 24<sup>th</sup>.

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

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

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.

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 on 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 Peirce.

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