

**WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL PRESIDENT?**  
*Measuring Presidential Success Through Our Last Five Presidents*

By

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**ABSTRACT**

Scholarly evaluations of rankings of the presidents are abundant in political science, but rarely do the scholars offer any criteria or basis for judgment in their analyses of presidents. In evaluating success in the American presidency, this paper offers three systematic and rigorous dimensions we can use to measure success. First, we assess the external factors that a president faces when serving in office and how well he deals with those situations, events, and crises. Next, we examine his ratings in public opinion polls throughout his presidency. Finally, we can analyze his legislative success in implementing his campaign promises. A thorough study of the presidency should include all three of these measures, and we will attempt to do so as we qualitatively and quantitatively study the presidencies of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. Our model formulates a set of rankings that is dramatically different from the pre-established norms of presidential greatness, illustrating the profound effect of an objective and methodical formula in studying presidential success.

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Keywords: Presidency, Success, Evaluation, Performance, Rankings

## Introduction

In 1964, Curtis Arthur Amlund, discussing studies attempting to measure presidential greatness, wrote: “Unfortunately, there has not yet been developed a systematic, analytical-oriented treatise on the subject that has methodological merit (p. 309).” These words ring as true today as they did over 40 years ago. Scholars often formulate presidential ratings, numerically, and often arbitrarily ranking presidents. Very rarely do they offer any basis of comparison. On what are the presidents being ranked? What is the basis for being a “good” president? How does one measure success in the presidency? This paper will attempt to answer some of these questions and, in doing so, will analyze and critique those frequently cited rankings. To formulate a better alternative, I will develop several determinants of presidential success that can be used to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate success in the presidency. This work will also allow us to formulate our own presidential rankings that can be traced to clear justifications and rationale for use.

To measure the success of presidents, I must compare them and their presidencies, which is a lot like comparing apples and oranges. Presidents typically change every four or eight years, and each time this happens, contemporary issues in the country have changed as well—presidents are never dealt the same hands. Thomas Bailey (1966) writes that the president of today is not the president of yesterday. The Constitution of today, with its various amendments and current interpretations, is not the same as the one of yesterday. The economy and the powers and responsibilities of the presidency also change and evolve with each successive president. Bailey affirms that the “basic pitfall of attempting to measure presidential achievement is that we must compare unlikes (p. 37).” Although the task may be difficult, I will identify some basic

measures of presidential success. Comparing presidents who serve consecutively in a given time frame will allow me to draw valid conclusions about presidential success.

In evaluating the American presidency, this paper offers three major elements that I deem vital to measuring success. First, I assess the external events that a president faces when entering office and how well he deals with those constraints (major crises, wars, etc.). Next, I examine his ratings in public opinion polls in each year of his presidency. Finally, I analyze his legislative success in implementing his policy. These measures of success are partly intuitive and partly a function of literature that already exists. However, much of the literature to date in this field focuses either on presidential success in the abstract, a particular measure of success, or an analysis of each individual president. This paper aims to synthesize these approaches by offering a quantitative and qualitative perspective on measuring presidential success. This comprehensive study of the presidency will include analysis of all three of these measures, in their qualitative and quantitative form, which I will apply to the presidencies of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. Of course, this is my personal conception of presidential success. People may have different definitions of what success really is, but these three components form my model for presidential success.

I will begin by explaining the rationale for each of the three measures of success. Next, I will apply my criteria for presidential success to qualitatively and individually assess the presidencies of Carter, Reagan, H.W. Bush, Clinton, and W. Bush. Then, I will discuss the methodology being used to quantify the variables and illustrate them with data. My goal is to formulate a "Presidential Success score" for each of these five presidencies using the three measures of success. I will use these scores to objectively quantify and compare the relative successes of these presidents. This will ultimately allow us to construct a cogent and objective

ranking of the presidents, which I can subsequently compare to the scholarly rankings that have already been formulated.

### **Presidential Rankings**

In most of the major polls over the past half century, the top-ranked president has been Abraham Lincoln and the next two have been George Washington and Franklin Roosevelt, with Washington generally ranked second until the 1980s, after which he and Franklin Roosevelt switched places. There is also some general consensus on the other “great” presidents, with Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and sometimes Harry Truman sharing the “great” category. Warren Harding, Ulysses Grant, and Richard Nixon are consistently in the “failure” category (Pffifner 2003). While these rankings seem to be fairly uniform across various studies, the methodology used to formulate them is not. Moreover, the methodology is often not even explained or standardized. In addition, the studies often use a set of scholars to formulate the ratings—scholars that can be subject to various biases and who possess inherent characteristics that can determine how they rank presidential success.

One of the first researchers to conduct studies of presidential ratings was Harvard Professor Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. He attempted to establish a ranking of presidents in his 1948 and 1962 surveys, which he gave to 55 and 75 political scientists and historians, respectively. The results, however, showed a strong pro-Democratic bias: only two of the top 11 presidents were Republicans (Lincoln and T. Roosevelt). Both of the “true failures” that Schlesinger found were Republicans (Grant and Harding). This follows from the fact that most professors and scholars of American history are Democrats. The lower ratings that Republicans generally received may not be a reflection of the presidents themselves, but rather of their Republican ideology. In addition, there were disproportionate representations of Northeastern and Harvard

academics in the survey, with 32/75 Northeasterners and 20/75 Harvard professors in the 1975 survey; both groups tend to be more liberal than the average citizen (Bailey 1966).

Although they accounted for ideological differences, the 2000 *Wall Street Journal* presidential rankings are a prime example of a study in which criteria for evaluation are neither explained nor uncovered. In explaining the methodology of the study, James Lindgren (2001) writes, "Respondents used different criteria in ranking presidents. Many favored their own evaluations of the presidents' goals and accomplishments. Others...emphasized the presidents' own goals" (p. 252). How can there be any objectivity when everyone is using his or her own criteria for success? One major foundation of my study is formulating standardized criteria for presidential success.

The emphasis of many of these past studies is who is being surveyed instead of what they are actually being surveyed on. In comparing the WSJ study with the previous Schlesinger studies, Lindgren (2001) writes at great length about which scholars were actually being surveyed to rank the presidents:

Like Schlesinger, we surveyed 30 historians, but in place of his 2 politicians (Mario Cuomo and former senator Paul Simon), we surveyed 25 political scientists and 23 law professors. While Schlesinger surveyed 1 woman and no nonwhite minorities, about 15 percent of our respondents were women and minorities, a substantial proportion only by comparison. We believe that we also surveyed more young professors than did Schlesinger. (p. 251)

When there is so much importance being given to who is involved with the study, how can we actually use the results for any further purpose? What do those results say about the actual presidents as opposed to just the people ranking them? The WSJ study actually found some systematic differences in the way that different scholars rated the presidents. Historians seemed to favor Democrats while law professors slightly favored Republicans (Lindgren 2001). Another facet of my study will be impartiality and consistency in repeated trials. So it does not matter

who is doing the ranking, as long as they follow my criteria. My goal will be to provide an empirical foundation for measuring presidential success.

Notable is that in the four major polls to date, the top seven presidents remain the same: (in alphabetical order) Jefferson, Lincoln, F. Roosevelt, T. Roosevelt, Truman, Washington, and Wilson. Similarly, the bottom ranks show remarkable consistency. There seems to be some degree of professional coherence among the academics responding and some general agreement as to the positive and negative characteristics assigned to each president in regard to how well he performed in office. Yet, by relying on scholars and this type of elite opinion, we may be taking away some of the value that comes with ranking presidents. Pfiffner (2003) writes that in ranking presidents, we are “forced to make complex trade-offs in values and to compare individuals who are not directly comparable, just as during an election we are forced to choose among a small number of individuals rather than create the perfect candidate” (p. 24). But similar to voting, when ranking, it is constructive to communicate our measures for judgment.

In recent years, there have been some attempts to identify criteria for evaluating presidents in rankings. In a 1997 article about his survey, Schlesinger identifies a few qualities common to presidents who rank as “great”: ability to rise to the challenges of crises and build congressional and public support for their decisions; and the possession of vision, political skill, and communication abilities. James MacGregor Burns (2003) proposes five criteria for evaluation: character, competence, courage, conviction, and commitment, listed in increasing order of importance. Fred I. Greenstein (2004) presents the most systematic list of qualities for presidential leadership, based upon his book *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to George W. Bush*. Six qualities are especially important for modern presidents: public communication, organizational capacity, political skill, vision, cognitive style, and emotional

intelligence (Bose 2003). Cognitive style refers to a president's methods of processing advice and information, while emotional intelligence is "the president's ability to manage his emotions and turn them to constructive purposes, rather than being dominated by them and allowing them to diminish his leadership" (Greenstein 6). Yet these analyses seem to be much more applicable to the study of simply ranking presidents than measuring objective success, which is the focus of this paper. I have formulated three measures of presidential success that I believe can be measured objectively and without the need for a renowned scholar or historian. Below, I will explain in detail the three criteria of president's response to external events, public approval, and policy success.

Table 1 displays the results from recent analyses of presidential ranking that include at least one of our five presidents of study, with their averaged rank in parentheses (the lower the rank, the better).

### **Criteria for Measuring Presidential Success**

One of my major contributions to this field of study is devising a set of criteria that can be used to measure presidential success. Below, I will go through each of the measures, explaining my motivation for their inclusion in this analysis. I find that a president's response to events, public approval ratings, and policy success are vital to a comprehensive evaluation of his presidency.

#### ***President's Response to External Events***

A president's success, in large part, depends on the situations and events he faces while in office. George Washington happened to preside over a period of economic prosperity, while the bountiful Louisiana Purchase fell into Thomas Jefferson's lap. Thomas Bailey claims that

Herbert Hoover may have been remembered as a great president if he had served in the 1920s, rather than his current status as the infamous overseer of the Great Depression. During Hoover's WWI days as a food administrator, his last name became a verb ("to hooverize"). Through his presidency, however, he came to represent the state of shantytowns during the Great Depression ("Hooverilles") (Bailey 1966, p. 97). It is often said that a president is "lucky" to serve during a time of intense crisis. History has shown that the bigger the conflict, the bigger the President—the more he is remembered and revered. All of the "Big Five" presidents (Franklin Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Woodrow Wilson, and Thomas Jefferson) served during critical eras of conflict. While Lincoln, Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt got us into our three biggest wars, Washington and Jefferson kept the country out of war with England in 1794-95 and 1807, respectively. This brings up the possibility that Washington and Jefferson may have been able to add to their already-impressive reputations by going to war (Bailey 1966). This is related to Nelson Polsby's rally-around-the-flag theory: during a time of war, the country will unite and rally around its president, boosting his popularity. This was clearly illustrated after September 11, 2001, when President George W. Bush's approval rating soared from 51 to 90 percent (Hetherington 2003).

These examples force us to ask the question of how much timing and external events influence a president's success in the public's eyes. Bailey (1966) brings up the age-old chicken-or-the-egg dilemma by asking, "Do great men make great times or do great times make great men by shoving them forward on the stage of history? (p. 100)" Stephen Skowronek (1993) has a theory about presidential time, in which he claims that presidents inherit "regimes" that they are affiliated with, with given levels of strength, in given eras. These regimes display cyclical patterns over time, so that a president's timing of taking office determines his opportunities and

ability to use his power. This theory views the presidency more as a function of timing and circumstance than personal character or political acumen. In this case, I would measure presidential success externally to the president himself and, look at how he has handled the systems he has inherited and crises or domestic situations he has faced.

### ***President's Public Approval***

Polling is another way to measure presidential success. The president is the only public official in the United States to be elected by the entire country—he is the only politician to serve a national constituency. So one obvious measure of a president's success would be his interaction with the general public and their subsequent opinions of him. In many ways, public opinion polls may be the best contemporary way to judge presidents. Campaigns are becoming more TV-based, with massive amounts of money being spent on commercials. Rallies are also attracting large crowds, with greater celebrity involvement. In addition, debates are drawing large audiences and high ratings. To be elected, a president must have strong people skills. He must be able to articulate himself, smile often, and enjoy being the center of attention; the presidential candidate must exude confidence, while still respecting the dignity of the office (Bailey 1966). Presidents today come into office with the ability to communicate well with the electorate. This has translated into greater public involvement in policymaking. Thus, measuring public opinion is useful as a means to an end and an end in itself.

For most Americans, the president is the representative of government. He symbolizes national unity and stability and provides a sense of reassurance about the future. The president can use this standing to garner a high level of public support and prestige and ensure authority over members of Congress. He will have greater opportunities to enact his agenda, as his prestige will give him greater bargaining power with Congressmen (Neustadt 1990). The president can

also bypass Congress and “go public” by taking his message directly to the people (Kernell 1997). In the age of omnipresent media, with the president constantly in spotlight, he has a large audience readily available whenever he makes a public appearance. The president gets his message to the people through public speeches, public appearances, political travel, and outreach operations. He can make great use of this “bully pulpit” and transform public opinion into public policy (Kernell 1997).

Ideally, a public opinion poll would measure a president’s success in terms of how the public perceives him and how well his message is getting across. Unfortunately, there are numerous external and superficial factors that affect how people judge presidents in polls. Some include the height of president, performance of his predecessor, etc. In addition, people often fall into the trap of presentism when taking these polls—they rank presidents who are fresher in their minds higher on the scale. In addition, presidents’ standing is shaped by the performance of their predecessors. So Franklin Roosevelt had already won half the battle in the public’s eyes by serving after the unpopular Hoover. Some of the most reputed presidents have had the good fortune of having merely passable predecessors. They always came out on top in comparisons: Thomas Jefferson versus John Adams, Andrew Jackson versus John Quincy Adams, Abraham Lincoln versus James Buchanan, Woodrow Wilson versus William Taft, and William Clinton versus George H.W. Bush (Bailey 1966).

The chances of presidential success are also greater when a president succeeds a president from the opposing political party. When successive presidents come from the same party, they are prisoners of the party platform that is already in place and they cannot easily renounce existing policies. A number of other variables have been found to affect citizens’ views of their presidents. There are some superficial factors that affect the public’s perception, such as

a president's "rags to riches" story, his height, degree of "presidentialness," and/or the president's pre-office career (Bailey 1966). Gallup polls on this subject are abundant and the textbook-driven presidents are always among Americans' favorites. The public also prefers "men of deeds"—men who can win a battle; they are more impressed by "doers than dreamers" (Bailey 1966, p. 21). Thus, the results obtained from public opinion polls may not be as reflective of actual presidents as they are of other secondary factors. Many of the factors associated with presidential success are beyond the president's control. His personal characteristics and political expertise may be useful in getting himself elected, but once in office, those skills may not be of much assistance in determining his success.

### ***President's Policy Success***

Because public opinion polls are subject to so many external influences, the most objective measure of a president's success may be his alleged purpose as a public official—implementing policies. Throughout their campaigns, presidents make several policy proposals and promises to the American people. The question is how much policy is actually implemented.

One of the components of the president's role as chief executive is his prominent role in the legislative process. The president cannot do whatever he wants, but he can come close at times, with certain unilateral powers. In the domestic policy arena, he has the power to pass executive orders, which have the same effect as laws, but do not require congressional approval. In foreign policy, he has even more leeway. As the commander in chief, he can send troops to countries and essentially engage in war without congressional declaration. He can also pass executive agreements, equivalent to treaties, without Congress. If Congress disagrees with the president's orders, it can pass a conflicting law, but the president still needs to sign it. He can also exert his influence through the veto, or more practically, the threat of the veto. The president

can make his views on legislation known and Congress must pass bills that satisfy him, or face his veto. Their only other option is to attempt to override the veto with a two-thirds vote in both houses, but this has only happened about seven percent of the time (“Article One of the United States Constitution” 2006). So, the president has the power and means to influence policy decisions.

### **Qualitative Analysis of Presidential Success**

In assessing the American presidency, I have found three major approaches for measuring success. First, we can evaluate the external factors that a president faces when entering office and how well he deals with those choices or constraints. Next, we can examine his ratings in public opinion polls at various points throughout his presidency. Finally, we can analyze his legislative success in implementing policy. Now that we know what we are looking for, I will systematically apply the criteria for success to the presidencies of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. While other scholars have studied these characteristics in the abstract or in the case of a particular president, I will use them in tandem as I qualitatively evaluate the success of our last five presidents.

#### ***Jimmy Carter***

We have already discussed the various measures used to determine a president’s success. It is ironic that for President Jimmy Carter, the same factors that got him elected to the presidency actually contributed to his ineffectiveness as a president. These factors included being elected as a Washington “outsider,” Carter’s lack of foreign policy experience, the increased calls for accountability, intractability in Congress, and the public’s interest in “personal qualities” during the election. President Carter’s ineffectiveness is illustrated by his inability to

deal with the various events that were thrown his way, his low approval rating and popularity by the end of his presidency, his failure to get re-elected (in a landslide defeat), and his relative ineffectiveness in the legislative arena.

After the Vietnam War and Watergate scandals, the American public was ready for a break from Washington politics. They found their match in James Earl Carter, Jr., a peanut farmer, businessman, and governor from Plains, Georgia. He was a total unknown outside of Georgia, even within Democratic circles. He had no national political experience or name, nor could he be categorized ideologically (Haas 1992). “Jimmy who?” was a popular question at the time and the fact that it was even being asked worked to the advantage of the Carter team.

Carter’s campaign manager, Hamilton Jordan, noted that distrust of government was a national issue and one that Carter could capitalize on. As Carter traveled the country, delivered speeches, appeared on programs, and attempted to gain national recognition for the primary contests, he maintained the same simple message: he stressed trustworthiness in government and told the people that he would open up the government to the average citizen. Carter said that he hoped to do away with the kind of secrecy in government and diplomacy that had caused the Vietnam War and Watergate scandals. In one his most famous campaign quotes, Carter told his listeners that he would make his administration, “as good and honest and decent and compassionate and filled with love as are the American people” (Haas 1992, p. 9). His campaign strategy emphasized Carter as a Washington outsider. He identified himself with the general public, looking in on Washington with confusion: “A lot of us are outsiders. We don’t see why these strange things happen in Washington,” said Carter. While this strategy worked well in the aftermath of Watergate and ultimately led Carter to victory, it created problems for him once he began his term as president (Haas 1992, p. 42).

The issues, or lack thereof, that guided Carter's campaign, were also a factor in his later performance as president. The United States' defeat in the Vietnam War, in effect, helped get Jimmy Carter elected in 1976. In his campaign, Carter utilized his lack of experience in foreign policy. He promised change in the country, with more open leadership, and a commitment to human rights. There would no longer be an obsession with the Soviet Union (Smith 1986). Carter, as an outsider, was not responsible for the past and he had no old commitments to be burdened with. In 1976, surveys confirmed that the public was more in favor of reform, disappointed with recent leadership, and opposed to a military emphasis in foreign policy than at any time since the 1930s (Smith 1986). Unfortunately for Carter, the public's disengagement from foreign policy did not last long and his term was filled with foreign policy decisions to be made: Carter's lack of experience did him no favors down the road (McCrisken 2003). By 1977, memories of Vietnam and Watergate were fading and American opinion was shifting back in favor of higher military spending and more aggressive foreign policy. Carter's talk on moral values in international affairs seemed inconsistent with prevailing American attitudes (Smith 1986). When things went awry with hostages in Iran and Soviets in Afghanistan, the public's perceptions of Carter's ineffectiveness in foreign policy were reinforced. In addition, his "Rose Garden strategy" of isolating himself from the media and public backfired as he was seen as "out of touch with the nation and perhaps the world" (McCrisken 2003, p. 78). After running as a Washington outsider, Carter was truly becoming a stranger to the public.

Another factor aiding Carter's electoral victory, but working against him during his term, was the economy. While Carter succeeded in portraying himself as a non-ideologue during his campaign, the economy was one issue in which his party affiliation came in handy. Economic issues were the most important concern for 78 percent of voters in 1976. In addition, two-thirds

of voters believed Democrats were better at preserving economic prosperity than Republicans (Morris 1996). Unfortunately for Carter, the one issue that the country was counting on him for turned against him during his term. Here, Carter was a victim of bad timing and matters beyond his control. His term saw double-digit inflation brought on by Vietnam War deficit spending and increased oil prices. High interest rates led to increased unemployment and Carter was blamed. His administration took corrective actions, but their effects were not felt until Carter left office (Morris 1996). As we have seen, the state of the nation's economy often determines how a president's performance is viewed. In this case, Carter felt the consequences of the poor economy especially harshly because of the prominence of the issue in voters' minds when he was elected in 1976. What had been an asset during the campaign became a liability during his presidency.

Carter's election in 1976 was unique because of its relative relegation of specific issues on which he stood. Instead, Carter believed that he could hand-select the issues he wanted to run on and ignore the others. The issues he picked were character and competence. He wanted to instill faith in the American people and he kept emphasizing his moral character (Morris 1996). His campaign was based on his "personal touch"—Carter spent nearly every morning for two years shaking hands, giving talks, and sitting down for interviews. This was a personal campaign more than any other in American history. But by not campaigning on a specific set of issues, ideology, or vision, Carter was unable to revitalize Americans down the line when his faith and competence were not enough. He could not reinvigorate Americans by recalling any clear goals set during his campaign—another factor that contributed to his poor performance as president (Morris 1996).

The results of the election itself, while leaving Carter victorious, did not establish a clear mandate for his presidency. Carter lost a late spring 2-to-1 advantage over incumbent President Gerald Ford to beat him by a razor-thin 50.1 percent majority, the closest margin since 1916. This lack of mandate, in addition to Carter's campaign itself, gave him an uphill battle in his relationship with the Congress, even though he was welcomed by 291 Democrats in the House and 61 in the Senate. This two-thirds majority in Congress did not go as smoothly as the numbers might suggest. With post-Watergate and Vietnam calls for increased accountability, the batch of Congressmen that Carter had to work with were among the most independent in recent history—they had their own money and felt little allegiance to the President or Party. Two sets of groups emerged within the Democrats in Congress, so Carter had to deal with a divided party, as well. Many Congressmen were elected by bigger margins than Carter and felt less inclined to follow his lead (Haas 1992). In addition, Carter had been elected on the basis of his inexperience and lack of connections in Washington. Gaddis Smith (1996) writes that the use of Carter's outsider status implied that "anyone who had been in Washington before the arrival of Jimmy Carter was tainted"—including Washington veterans who felt they had more expertise than Carter (p. 246). This message made it difficult for Carter to win the trust and support of Congressional leaders and he was never able to acquire a personal following. Carter had very few people he could count on for favors and no leaders who would take on the task of getting a Carter proposal through Congress (Smith 1986). There was also evidence that Carter truly did not have enough experience to deal with Congress effectively: he and his staff often did not return members' phone calls, announced legislative packages without notice, failed to set clear priorities, and took trips without informing members (Haas 1992).

The result of all of these factors is best illustrated in Carter's failures to achieve his legislative priorities. His highest priority was solving the energy crisis. But it took nearly two years for Congress to pass a comprehensive energy plan and it was one that barely resembled Carter's original proposal. A lot of his energy legislation took until 1980 to be passed by Congress. This is especially problematic considering the huge Democratic majority in Congress. Human rights policy was another arena in which Carter had placed great emphasis. But here too, his administration's policies were inconsistent, as in their behavior toward PLO refugees, normalization in relations with China, and in Latin America. The policies were "problematic" at best, if not a "failure" (McCriskin 2003, p. 78).

We can also judge a president's performance by how well he responded to the events and circumstances surrounding his term in office. For President Carter, the answer would likely be "not very well." Carter served during an infamous American "Crisis of Confidence"—a lack of confidence in American values, progress, and hope for a better future. However, Carter's attempts at restoring American assurance failed, as his "national malaise speech" was believed to have made American apprehensions worse instead of restoring faith (McCriskin 2003). The Iran hostage crisis and Soviet occupation of Afghanistan were also two events during Carter's term for which Americans judged Carter negatively. Trevor McCriskin writes that Carter's inability to solve problems made him seem "inept," "crippled by doubt, and lacking the courage to break free from Vietnam and Watergate" (McCriskin 2003, p. 80-83). Ironically, by the end of his presidency, Carter had convinced people of his campaign conviction that "he was a man of high moral principles" (83 percent of Americans agreed), but less than a third of those thought that Carter could convert those principles into progressive policies (McCriskin 2003, p. 84). Carter's campaign promises could only get him so far.

Another judge of Carter's presidential success was the numerous public opinion polls measuring Americans' approval of Carter as a president. Carter's popularity hit record lows for Gallup. In August 1980, in the midst of the hostage crisis, only 21 percent of Americans approved of Carter's job as president—the lowest figure since 1936 (McCracken 2003). Of course, Carter's presidency was subject to many ups and downs, but nonetheless, the extent to which Americans lost faith in their president was reflective of Carter's ineffectiveness and failure to get through to the public. His successes in negotiating the Panama Canal treaties, brokering peace between Israel and Egypt, and normalizing relations with China were not enough to bring Americans to his side of the table, and in November 1980, President Carter was soundly defeated by Ronald Reagan.

Interestingly, Jimmy Carter has turned into what many call "America's greatest ex-president." Just eight years after his record-breaking defeat to Reagan, Americans approved of Carter 47 to 43 percent according to a 1988 Wall Street Journal/ NBC News survey. He has shown that the White House can be "a stepping-stone to greater and more important global role—that of a world-class humanitarian" (Haas 1992). In 2002, the former president received the Nobel Peace Prize for his "untiring effort to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development." While he could not find success during his presidency, Carter has managed to find it following his term.

### ***Ronald Reagan***

Ronald Reagan was one of the most popular presidents of modern times. Especially after his recent death, he has been widely admired and appreciated for his presidency by the American public. Reagan was elected with huge margins in 1980 and 1984. His vice-president and

successor, George Bush, was also elected with a comfortable margin. Scholars and academics, however, do not have quite so positive a view of the 40<sup>th</sup> president. Using our criteria of presidential success, we find that while Reagan had high approval ratings for most of his presidency and after it, his policies have not had the greatest success. He left behind a large deficit that affected his successor George H.W. Bush's presidency. Reagan's ways of dealing with events were also mixed in their results. While he was able to inspire optimism in the American people, the Iran-contra affair was certainly one of the low points in American history. Thus, Reagan's presidency is an example of one in which popularity did not necessarily translate to policy success.

Optimism pervaded the Reagan years in America. Reagan believed in "the magic of individual freedom," according to Lou Cannon (1991, p. 26). Reagan wanted to spread happiness throughout the country and world with promises of free markets and personal liberties. And after the Jimmy Carter presidency, the public embraced Reagan's outlook. Reagan enjoyed high approval ratings for much of his presidency, barring some low points in 1982-83 with economic problems and after the Iran-contra affair, and even then, he was able to do without the public's support. Optimism pervaded the country once again in the fall of 1983 as the economy started recovering and Reagan's approval rating soared into the 50s. In 1984, Reagan was responsible for "Morning Again in America"—America was "back." Feeding off American victories in Grenada and the Olympics, Americans were jubilant with patriotism. James W. Ceaser (1988) writes that, "After years of frustration and humiliation...It was Ronald Reagan, apple pie, and the American Dream" (p. 193-97). Reagan's approval rating hit 60 percent during his prime time. The administration's lowest point came in fall of 1986, when the Iran-contra scandal rocked the nation. It was revealed that the U.S., with Reagan's approval, had sold weapons to

Iran. Some of the funds from these sales had been diverted to aid the contras in Nicaragua, allegedly without the president's knowledge. But even these disclosures only brought Reagan's approval down to 50 percent, much higher than Carter's public rating during the Iran hostage crisis. Eventually, Reagan again found favor with the American public, aided by the signing of the INF Treaty (Ceaser 1988). On January 20, 1989, Reagan left office with the highest approval rating for any president since Franklin Roosevelt (63 percent). The president had succeeded in restoring national confidence at a time when America needed it (Cannon 1991).

Judging Reagan on the basis of these public opinion poll numbers, he was no doubt a successful president given that he was so popular; Reagan was able to lead and inspire the nation. Yet, this is an incomplete analysis of his presidency. As we found in our previous discussions, public approval ratings are subject to many factors external to the president's actual performance. For example, the public's dissatisfaction with Reagan's predecessor, Jimmy Carter, may have made Reagan's initial job a little easier. Carter spoke of the American crisis of confidence, while Reagan did not believe in any crisis. Reagan made the dichotomy between himself and Carter especially clear by outlining a clear, unequivocal political philosophy and agenda for the country that was missing the ambiguity of Carter's approach (Jones 1988). There was also the assassination attempt early in Reagan's presidency that helped portray him as a public official who almost had to sacrifice himself for his nation. Ceaser (1988) describes the assassination's effects on Reagan's presidency: "For many, Reagan went into the hospital a Republican and emerged a president" (p. 184). The event gave Reagan a lofty status and bond with the American people. But this does not paint a complete picture of Reagan; to effectively judge his actual performance as president, we must examine his policy accomplishments and his response to circumstances and events taking place in his presidency.

Reagan began his term with productivity in policy achievements. The composition of Congress helped tremendously—the Republicans controlled the Senate for the first time since 1954 with the Republican gain of twelve seats. There were also coattails at work, as Reagan ran ahead of 30 out of the 34 Senate Republican candidates. The Republicans actually gained 33 seats in the House, but left it in the control of a divided Democratic Party. Coupled with Reagan's 90-percent domination of Electoral College votes, he won a legitimate mandate from the people and used it to his advantage. Although Reagan only received 51 percent of the popular vote, the country definitely seemed ready for a change. Even Speaker of the House Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. recognized this and felt a public push to work with the Republicans in Congress. Reagan was also a master in the powers of persuasion and playing politics with Congress. The "great communicator" was constantly calling members and senators, and cajoling and selling his ideas (Jones 1988). Thus, Reagan was able to fundamentally alter U.S. economic policy with his Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981, a huge tax cut bill. He was also able to secure a reduction in domestic spending, approve higher defense spending, and reduce spending on entitlement programs like AFDC and food stamps and Medicare and Medicaid, all within his first year in office. Reagan succeeded in resisting welfare program restorations and cuts in military spending in successive years, as well (Greenstein 1983). In 1983, Reagan and the 98<sup>th</sup> Congress, with 26 additional Democratic seats in the House, passed Social Security reform legislation. In 1984, Reagan won in a huge landslide against Walter Mondale, beating the Democrat in every state except Minnesota (and the District of Columbia). The Republicans gained 14 seats in the House and lost two Senate seats. However, problems arose for Reagan in the last two years of his presidency when the Republicans lost control of the Senate and he was dealing with the aftermath of the Iran-Contra affair; Congress was able to override two of Reagan's vetoes on

water pollution and highway bills. Yet, publicly, as a lame duck president facing a Democratic House and Senate, Reagan was able to get by on the basis of low expectations.

Another component of Reagan's successes was his appointments to the judiciary. He left office appointing close to half of all lower court justices, a large portion of federal judges, and four Supreme Court Justices, including William H. Rehnquist as Chief Justice. Ninety-seven percent of Reagan's appointees shared his party affiliation. Although Reagan lost one well-publicized battle over Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork, he got a unanimous confirmation for Antonin Scalia, one of the Court's most conservative members. His appointments were also fairly young, so many of them are still serving their terms (O'Brien 1988).

One of Reagan's biggest success stories was his turnaround of the American economy and economic policies of the so-called "Reagan Revolution." Within Reagan's eight years in office, the interest rate was reduced from 15.26 to 9.32 percent, inflation fell from 12.5 to 4.4 percent, and unemployment dropped from 7.1 to 5.5 percent. Moreover, the gross national product doubled and per capita disposable income increased from \$9,722 to \$11,326. The Dow Jones index went up from 950.68 to 2235.36 (Cannon 1991). Reagan was fulfilling his promise of making people better off, confirmed by public opinion polls at the time. However, there are some things missing from these numbers and high approval ratings. The national deficit tripled under Reagan's tenure as president, from \$908.5 billion to \$2,684.4 trillion. The U.S. trade deficit quadrupled to \$137.3 billion. While Reagan blamed Congress for the record deficits, conservative writer George Will calculated that Reagan's budgets were responsible for 13/14<sup>ths</sup> of the national debt (Cannon 1991). Reaganomics, as Reagan's economic policies were known as, were also not as equitable as the numbers might suggest. In 1989, the richest two-fifths of the country had the highest share of national income in Census Bureau history—67.8 percent, while

the poorest two-fifths had the lowest share—15.5 percent. In addition, 20 percent of children were living in poverty—a 24 percent increase over 1979 (Cannon 1991). One of Reagan's most lasting legacies has been the huge budget deficit.

These statistics give rise to the question of how Reagan was able to remain such a popular figure, even though the economy, the number-one issue for most Americans, was amassing large deficits. Reagan even had to go back and raise taxes in 1982. Hugh Hecio and Rudolph Penner (1983) attribute Reagan's public success to his ability to deal with circumstances in a politically strategic manner, as opposed to an ideological response. Especially in an arena like economics, in which following ideology can lead to disagreement in itself, Reagan's ability and willingness to compromise while fighting for what his administration believed in helped "maintain an overall appearance of consistent commitment to its goals" (p. 36). Reagan's "strategic management" always gave government the backseat in trying to revitalize the economy. Charles O. Jones (1988) writes that Reagan "uses ideology, but does not lose because of it" (p. 38). Reagan shifted some of the responsibility and blame for the struggling economy to Congress and publicly framed the debate to his advantage. In addition, the problem of the deficit is one that is not reflected in polls because of its intangible nature (Ceaser 1988). People cannot observe it directly, yet its consequences are felt for years to come, as Reagan's successor George H.W. Bush found.

One of Reagan's goals that had little success was his attempt to decrease the size and cost of the federal government and its role in the nation's economic affairs, one of his campaign priorities (Benda & Levine 1988). Reagan tried to fundamentally redistribute certain federal responsibilities to state and local governments with his 1982 "Federalism Initiative." Under this proposal, the federal government would take over full responsibility for Medicaid while the

states would take over AFDC. In addition, the federal government would, over time, withdraw funding for federal programs in education, community development, transportation, and social services. The proposed legislation did not even make it to Congress. There was concern, especially during times of economic hardship, that the movement toward increased federalism was just another way to cut costs and programs. Reagan also tried to move the government agencies and programs increasingly toward privatization, which was, again, not widely embraced (Benda & Levine 1988).

Reagan's major objective in foreign policy was to put the United States on watch and ready to fight, including battles against communism. Reagan wanted to restore the United States' national pride and strength. Yet Reagan faced great criticism in his attempts to aid anticommunist forces in Central America- El Salvador and Nicaragua. The media, the American public, and much of the world opposed Reagan's nuclear arms build-up and Strategic Defense Initiative, termed "Star Wars." Eventually, the Soviet attack on Korean Air Line flight 007 helped bring some Americans on to Reagan's side, as did the successful American invasion of Grenada (Ceaser 1988). Yet, instead of defending the nation against a nuclear threat, many scholars believe that Reagan's policies were actually heightening the threat. The Soviet Union perceived U.S. actions to be disturbing to the strategic balance between the two forces—the U.S. was looking for an opportunity to strike the Soviets first, without being afraid of the repercussions (McCracken 2003).

Reagan's policy success as a president should be distinguished from his success with the American people. With the public, Reagan was unambiguously victorious. His greatest achievement was rebuilding Americans' respect for "themselves and their own government" after a tumultuous time with Vietnam and Watergate, "the frustration of the Iran hostage crisis,

and a succession of seemingly failed presidencies,” according to Cannon (1991, p. 830). Reagan was able to get through to the nation. His policies, on the other hand, were mixed in their effectiveness and success. While the Soviet Union ultimately collapsed, precluding the possibility of further confrontation with the U.S., Reagan’s economic policies had many unintended and undesirable consequences that reverberated for years after he left office and after Americans could attribute any responsibility for the economy. The U.S. went from being a creditor nation to a debtor nation for the first time since WWII. In addition, the Reagan administration neglected many prominent societal problems of the time such as AIDS, crime, homelessness, racial tension, health, education, the environment, and homelessness (McCracken 2003). Taken altogether, Reagan was successful in many areas, but just not as successful as his poll numbers and popularity might suggest.

### ***George H. W. Bush***

The presidency of George H. W. Bush is a unique one because of its inconsistency in measuring factors of success. This was a president who had a 90 percent approval rating one year before the election and yet lost to his opponent by a significant margin. George Bush was a man who had notable foreign policy successes, yet was never able to succeed in the domestic arena. David Halberstam (2002) writes that “Foreign policy, rather than domestic affairs, was the administration’s area of expertise, interest, and passion” (p. 57). However, Bush’s domestic performance went so awry, especially his handling of the economy, that it affected the public’s evaluation of his presidency as a whole, including his foreign accomplishments. Unfortunately for the president, on the basis of our criteria for judging presidential success, Bush ended his term as an unsuccessful president who had low approval ratings, unbalanced policy achievements, and was characterized by a “crisis of leadership”—lacking “the vision thing”—

when dealing with events during his tenure in office (Halberstam 2002).

George Bush came into office with a great deal of experience and reasonably high expectations. He had served as Ambassador to China and to the United Nations, Republican National Committee Chair, CIA Director, and Vice-President to Reagan for eight years. He secured 53.4 percent of the popular vote, won 40 states, and captured 426 out of 538 electoral votes. However, the Democrats were able to maintain control of the House and Senate, even gaining three seats in the House and one in the Senate (Hill & Williams 1994). In addition, Bush had received 5.4 million fewer votes than Ronald Reagan had four years earlier, lost 500 counties that Reagan had won, and received less support from Independents and Democrats (Greene 2000). So, while Bush's mandate was tenuous at best, he had fought a tough campaign, and Americans expected him to build on the Reagan legacy, solve the nation's economic problems, and continue America's dominance in the world.

Bush proclaimed himself to be a foreign policy president, and he lived up to his categorization. Bush presided over America during a period that marked the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union, the liberation of Eastern European states, the unification of Germany, a successful American invasion of Panama, and American victory in the Persian Gulf. He also presided over a new bipartisan policy to diplomatically aid the contras in Nicaragua. Yet these triumphs could not compensate for the disappointments in domestic policies. And Bush's foreign policy performance had its own set of critics. The president was "faulted for failing to articulate a memorable response" to the falling of the Berlin Wall, not fully convincing the public of the need for substantive military action in the Persian Gulf, and lacking a general foreign policy vision, as in domestic policy (Mervin 1996, p. 158). The bounces in popularity that Bush did receive from international accomplishments were always short-lived and unsustainable. As soon

as people started thinking about their own lives, they were unsatisfied by Bush's performance, as illustrated by his one-term fate.

In implementing legislative proposals, President Bush faced an uphill battle in Congress, a large deficit, an obstinate court, and a vacillating leadership style, which may account for his lack of success in domestic policy. In Congress, Democrats had a ten-vote majority in the Senate and an 89-vote majority in the House and they wanted to make Bush pay for the negative campaign he had run against Michael Dukakis. The Republicans in Congress also felt less loyalty to Bush than they had to Reagan. Any president would have had a hard time getting favorable legislation passed under these conditions, and Bush was no exception. Bush also never experienced any honeymoon period in Congress or with the public. One of his first nominations, that of John Tower as the Secretary of Defense, failed in Congress. Of course, the absence of a honeymoon did not matter as much because he did not have a legislative agenda (Rose 1991). The successful strategy that Bush did employ was the threat and use of his veto power. The Democratic majorities were not strong enough to override a veto, so Congress was forced to be receptive to the President's views, bringing a conservative slant to the legislation it proposed. Bush's veto threats were not empty; he used the veto 44 times during his presidency and it was overridden only once (Rose 1991).

The Bush administration also faced a surprisingly uncooperative Supreme Court. The Court disagreed with Bush on issues ranging from legislation outlawing flag burning to resisting the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, so the president was unable to turn his views into policies on these issues (Greene 2000). Another impediment to Bush's policymaking was the state of the U.S. budget, courtesy of Reagan's high defense spending and tax policies. Bush was operating under a large budget deficit that made any far-reaching social agenda too costly to execute. By

1989, the deficit was \$2.7 trillion and the annual interest on the debt was \$200 billion (Greene 2000). Balancing the budget was an arduous task that left Bush limited options for funding programs.

Whether it is because of tight budget constraints or obstinate players, Bush had little success fulfilling his campaign promises in the area of domestic policy. While he can be credited with two constructive pieces of legislation in the Americans with Disabilities Act (which he did not even initiate) and the Clean Air amendments of 1990, Bush had a harder time dealing with issues like education and the war on drugs. Though he tried to be the “education president,” he was hampered by the shortage of funding in attempting to institute broad-based education reform. The 1992 budget cut education spending in almost every area. Two of the president’s initiatives, rewarding the country’s best schools and the “America 2000” proposal, did not receive enough funding for successful implementation. The programs were forced to rely on states to voluntarily establish reforms for improving the education system (Greene 2000). The drug war was another domestic area in which Bush was unsuccessful. Despite passage of laws increasing drug control funding by 50 percent and passage of South American trade conditions, in April 1991, the administration announced that the war on drugs had failed in Washington (Greene 2000). In welfare policy, as well, Bush seemed to renege on his image of a “kinder, gentler America.” The White House Domestic Policy Council spent months evaluating alternatives and producing a 50-page options paper for the president, yet did not recommend a presidential initiative on welfare; none was attempted. And Bush vetoed the civil rights legislation that was passed by Congress in 1990 (Quirk 1991). After one year in office, a Gallup poll reported that 40 percent of Americans could not name anything when asked about Bush’s greatest achievement in office (Edwards 1991).

Economically, the Bush picture was equally grim. Bush did not even come close to fulfilling his promise of creating 30 million new jobs in eight years—less than one million were created during his four years, compared to the 18 million new jobs created under Reagan's two terms. America's GNP grew at a dismal average of 0.9 percent during his four years compared to 2.75 percent annually during Reagan's tenure. In addition, domestic spending grew 7.54 percent annually compared to 0.53 percent for Reagan, on average (Mervin 1996).

The policy failure for which Bush will most likely be remembered is breaking his promise to the American people not to raise taxes. Accepting his nomination at the Republican National Convention, Bush declared, "The Congress will push me to raise taxes, and I'll say no, and they'll push and I'll say no, and they'll push again. All I can say to them is: read my lips. No new taxes" (Greene 2000, p. 79-80). These lines got quite a reaction from the crowd and they were hard to forget. Unfortunately for Bush, their consequences may have marred his presidency in ways he could not have imagined. Bush could not bring himself to cut discretionary federal spending to make the deficit more manageable. Bush resisted raising taxes in his first two budget proposals, but this may have actually hurt him because later, there was less time before his reelection campaign to deal with the consequences of his the tax increases. Now the president was in "deep voodoo" (Rose 1991, p. 22). Bush was also induced to raise taxes because of the government's Savings and Loans bailout. This was another case of Reagan's policies revealing their consequences during Bush's tenure. Reagan had deregulated the S&Ls with the U.S. government responsible to the depositors. When the real estate market started to decline and S&Ls started to fold, it was federal funds that had to bail them out, to the cost of \$200 billion, increasing the deficit by \$50 billion over three years. The economy did not take this news well; the stock market plummeted in October 1989, with high unemployment, rising inflation, and a

recession in progress. Bush submitted his 1991 budget to Congress with the possibility of new tax revenue, which Democrats made Bush spell out in a White House press release. The budget was finally passed with support of Democrats and opposition from Republicans. Bush had taken full public blame for raising taxes two years before his re-election campaign and right before the 1990 mid-term elections. This was not good news. Even though the situation in the Persian Gulf looked good, the Republicans lost ten Senate seats, 25 House seats, and two governorships. Of the 62 close races that Bush had been campaigning for, 35 candidates lost (Greene 2000). Regardless of Bush's foreign policy successes, the American electorate made it clear how they felt about Bush and his domestic policy initiatives.

Paul Quirk (1991) attributes Bush's lack of domestic policy success to his inability to "take positions and adopt strategies well-suited to a cooperative approach [with the Democratic Congress]" (p. 75-76). Bush flip-flopped between being overly flexible and exceedingly unyielding. He often gave up too much to strike a quick deal. He did not have a consistent negotiating strategy. Bush also, self-admittedly, lacked a vision of legislative priorities. On the budget issue, he went back and forth several times on how he wanted to raise new revenue and whether his decision was the right one. Moreover, Congress was allowed to set the agenda on their own terms, so issues that gave the president negative publicity often took center stage (Quirk 1991).

The impact of the American success in the Gulf War can be seen from results of polling done by Fred Steeper. Despite the end of the Cold War and America's new lone superpower status, two out of three Americans believed that the nation was on the wrong track. Those numbers came right before the start of the Gulf War. But two days into the Gulf War fighting, those numbers were reversed: two-thirds of the country thought the U.S. was heading in the right

direction. Thus, the Gulf War had only momentarily covered up the deep dissatisfaction present in the country, specifically discontent with the economy. Unfortunately for Bush, the four-day Gulf War invasion and victory did not leave a lasting impression with Americans. It was a “virtual war” that did not affect the majority of the country in any personal way. The president’s approval ratings entered a period of steady decline from March to fall 1991 as the economy once again became the dominant issue for most of the electorate. The fact that the Cold War was over also meant that the public’s attention was fully focused on the economy. Perhaps most damaging to Bush was his perceived denial of the nation’s economic woes. While most Americans believed that the nation was going through a recession, Bush went public in the fall of 1991 and announced that the recession was over. This put Bush in conflict with the views of most Americans and made it seem as though the president did not care about their problems (Halberstam 2002).

The Gulf War showed that the American military had recovered from the dissatisfaction of the Vietnam debacle and was again a world exemplar. The nation was “strong, resilient, and optimistic” (Halberstam 2002, p. 12-13). Yet, in the eyes of Americans, this return to glory was eclipsed by Bush’s domestic policy failures and the poor economy. Americans did not have the faith to believe in Bush and his approval ratings showed much variation with each new day, depending on what was going on in the country. Bush’s average public opinion rating in his first two years was 66 percent, higher than that of any Republican predecessor during a complete term in office. After the swift, bloodless triumph in the Gulf, Bush soared to 91 percent approval, the highest ever recorded to that point in a half century of public opinion polling on presidency. Before the 1992 budget negotiations, the rating stabilized to 76 percent approval; after the proposed tax increases, approval fell to 56 percent (Rose 1991). Judging from these numbers, the

public was never really with Bush. They liked him if something particularly good happened, but he fell out of favor with them just as fast. He was probably also hurt by comparisons to his predecessor Ronald Reagan—the well-spoken Reagan, who had not only a vision, but also an ideology, and the charisma and charm to make Americans like it. The electorate ultimately replaced George Bush with Bill Clinton in November 1992. Bush lost 15 percent of his voters from 1988, losing to Clinton, 38 percent to 43 percent, with Perot winning 19 percent of the vote. Foreign policy was a deciding factor for only eight percent of voters. The public cared about the economy, and 80 percent of voters disapproved of Bush's performance in that sphere (Mervin 1996).

So whether we judge President George H.W. Bush in terms of his overall policy accomplishments, public approval ratings, or how he played the cards he was dealt, we find that he was an unsuccessful president. Had he been judged on foreign policy alone, Bush would have fared significantly better. Unfortunately, as Bush learned the hard way, "It's the economy, stupid."

### ***Bill Clinton***

When Bill Clinton began his presidency in 1992, expectations were remarkably high. His party controlled the House, Senate, and White House and had regained the presidency after a twelve-year break. Many new policy changes were expected, including the much-touted health care reform proposal. Yet, within two years, the Democrats lost control of both the House and Senate, with the House being lost forever and the Senate regained only sporadically since. One of our criteria for determining the success of a president is his policy accomplishments, made possible through an effective relationship with Congress. In the case of Clinton, he never had a fully functional and cooperative connection with Congress, Democratic or Republican. Yet, after

many initial setbacks, he learned to use his veto power and find a middle ground, resulting in policies that may not have accomplished his initial goals, but were nevertheless accomplishments, given the political context. Clinton finally acknowledged that, “We’re in an era when people don’t want promises to be high flown and unrealistic...I’ve learned that the system simply won’t accommodate big changes even when in theory you think they’re warranted” (Foley 1998, p. 137).

While Clinton welcomed the Democratic majorities in Congress, he actually entered office with less than a majority of votes. Clinton was elected with 43 percent of the popular vote—most Americans had voted against him, which was not a selling point to the Party leaders in Congress. There were no coattails to speak of. Clinton’s first test in Congress came with the economic stimulus package, which was a way for the president to fulfill some of his campaign promises of investments in human resources, education, and job training. Unfortunately, Clinton failed this early test when his proposal was defeated in the Senate with a Republican filibuster. Ironically, in trying to avoid the mistakes of George Bush and focus on domestic policy, Clinton had become too distracted in foreign issues concerning Bosnia, Boris Yeltsin’s reforms in Russia, and trade disagreements with Japan and the European Union. Clinton did not pay enough attention to moderate Democrats, and even less attention to the Republican moderates. Trivial issues like gays in the military were allowed to balloon into negative controversies. The Republicans took advantage of this by reconciling their ranks and uniting against the economic stimulus legislation. Martin Walker (1997) describes the setback as “a dreadful way to mark the first hundred days of the administration that had begun with such high hopes.” Republicans boasted that they had turned Clinton into the “Jimmy Carter of the 1990s” (p. 190-192).

The first Clinton budget ended up becoming a very partisan issue and was finally passed

in a highly diluted form. The House passed Clinton's budget bill with 218 votes to 216, without a single Republican vote and with several Democrats voting against it. The Senate removed Clinton's major revenue-enhancing measure, an energy tax, and replaced it with a gasoline tax. The reduced revenues generated forced a reduction in expenditures on programs like the Earned Income Tax Credit for working poor. Spending caps had made a mess of Clinton's investment strategy and jobs program. Even so, Vice-President Al Gore had to break a 50-50 tie in the Senate to get the bill passed (Berman 2001).

Clinton's relationship with Congress was most infamously demonstrated in his quest to reform health care. Providing health care to all Americans was one of Clinton's central campaign promises, and one in which he was unsuccessful. Clinton was unable to persuade key Republicans, like Newt Gingrich and Phil Gramm, that reform could be in their interests. The Clinton team also lost the battle for public opinion, as a \$100 million grassroots and media campaign was able to turn public opinion against the reform proposals. Democrats in Congress did not want to have to vote for an unpopular plan and the bill never made it out of committee (Sinclair 2000). Clinton later admitted, "I overestimated the extent to which a person elected with a minority of votes in an environment that was complex, to say the least, could achieve a sweeping overhaul of the health care system when no previous president had been able to do it for decades and decades" (Berman 2001, p. 33).

Charles O. Jones (1999) has a variety of explanations for Clinton's early failures with Congress. First, Clinton's initial policy proposals and speech focuses were more liberal than centrist, including legislation about abortions in military hospitals, allowing gays in the military, importation of the morning-after pill, and a family medical leave act. Clinton's pledge for a middle class tax cut was also abandoned when he chose to focus on deficit reduction instead.

Thus, Republicans in Congress had ideological incentive to unite in opposition to Clinton and his policies. In particular, Senate Republicans were able to filibuster Democratic legislation, like the economic stimulus bill. Clinton also arguably lacked the experience in the beginning of his term to effectively deal with Congress. Prior to his presidency, he had never worked in federal government. As a governor of Arkansas, he had only worked with a Democratic legislature, so he never needed to work with Republicans or take their views into account. Instead of beginning his term with more bipartisan foreign policy initiatives, Clinton went straight into contentious domestic policy bills. Clinton also confessed to being a “policy wonk” in that he had a hard time narrowing his policy priorities. His legislative agenda promised more than he could have possibly accomplished. When Clinton found Congress to be a tough sell, he went public to sell his agenda, more so than any other president. Clinton was the most traveled president in history, making use of his charisma and oratorical skills. Unfortunately for Clinton, going public did nothing to boost his popularity with the public or his standing with Congress. And the fact that he separated himself from Congress made him seem more accountable for policy failures when it came time for mid-term elections (Jones 1999). Clinton’s administration itself seemed incompetent and ill equipped to govern. Clinton got credit for things that were going well, like the improving economy, but the unified government meant that he was blamed for everything going wrong. Clinton also failed to build a cohesive and disciplined party. The Democrats did not follow their leader or their president, evident in the Zoe Baird nomination and fight for gays in the military, both of which were withdrawn. In the referendum against Clinton in the 1994 election, the party paid the price (Bruno 1995).

Clinton’s problems in Congress were not alleviated by his media coverage.

Communications director George Stephanopolous closed the press corps door and Clinton

appeared on several regional news shows and MTV before holding his first national press conference. Reporters did not feel like they were being treated with respect and felt disliked and distrusted. Nonpartisan *Washington Post* columnist David Broder reported after Clinton's first 100 days in office that his presidency was "a calamity that reached beyond our borders. That this is happening to a man who will remain president for the next 43 months is an international disaster" (Walker 1997, p. 196-202). Headlines around the country read "The Incredible Shrinking Presidency" and "What's Wrong?" The Center for Media and Public Affairs found that in the first three months of Bush's presidency, 74 percent of evaluative comments made by reporters had been positive, compared to just 21 percent during the first three months of Clinton's presidency. The press coverage was reflected in the public's (declining) opinion of the president. Clinton's 54 percent approval rating in January 1993 fell to 35 percent in June, while his 35 percent disapproval rating soared to 63 percent. His approval stood at 40 percent during the summer of 1994, before the mid-term elections (Walker 1997).

The 1994 mid-term election brought all of these pent-up frustrations and policy disappointments to light. The election was nothing short of historical, in several categories. For the first time in 40 years, the Republicans gained control of the House and Senate. Republicans took 52 Democratic seats, including those of 34 incumbents, with no Republican incumbents losing their seats, which had not occurred since 1948. House Speaker Tom Foley (D-WA) lost his seat—the first Speaker to lose his seat since 1862 (Owens 1998). In 1992, the public had preferred Democrats for economic stimulus and healthcare and welfare reform, but the Party had failed to deliver on both of these issues. While the Contract with America is often used as an explanation for the Republican landslide, it was actually more significant in the proceedings of the new Congress, as only a minority of Americans had even heard of the Contract when they

voted. But this Contract provided the Republicans in the House with a unified, national agenda for legislation to which they had committed themselves. These anti-Clinton proposals avoided divisive issues like school prayer and abortion, so they were able to unite both moderate and conservative Republicans. The shocked and demoralized Democrats and Clinton had no agenda to respond with (Berman 2001).

Clinton had a much tougher time in Congress dealing with the new Republican majority. The newly elected members came from the South and Southwest, and were far more conservative than their neighbors from the Northeast. These Republicans were committed to the views and ideals of the Christian Coalition, business interests, and National Rifle Association, who collectively formed their monetary and grassroots base. These Republicans were excited to do battle with the Clinton White House and their confidence made them more resistant to compromise. The Democrats in Congress were now more liberal than their predecessors and disagreed with Clinton on a number of issues (Berman 2001).

The 1995 session in Congress was the most partisan ever to be recorded by the Congressional Quarterly; Clinton's "presidential success" rate was only 36.2 percent, compared to 86.4 percent for the years before. It was also the least productive Congress in its first session. Even so, Clinton was able to make a presidential comeback in popularity and influence during this period. He was helped by the Republican Senate, which had signed no "Contract" and did not support the contract's more extreme measures. While 21 items on the contract sailed through the House, only five made it into law, with the help of Clinton's veto power (Sinclair 2000). Clinton was also able to find a successful strategy of "triangulation" from advisor Dick Morris, becoming a third, centrist force in debate. Clinton was able to take a middle ground on policies, which separated himself from the liberal Democrats while also depriving the GOP of their issue

ownership. The strategy was most successfully demonstrated in the budget fight between Congress and the president. The Republican proposal had many measures that would have fundamentally altered the role of government in American society. They also attached provisions to the budget bill that would cover government activities, calculating that Clinton would not have the political or personal determination to veto such a large budget bill. But Clinton did veto the bill and government activities were shut down for six days, with the Republicans taking the blame. Clinton said to the American people: "If America must close down access to quality education, a clean environment, and affordable health care for our seniors in order to keep the government open, that is a price too high" (Foley 1998, p. 126-29). The president was successful in taking his message public and appealing to the middle ground.

Clinton's popularity was also increasing at the expense of the Republican Congress, with Gingrich having turned into the most unpopular politician in American history. The Republicans had miscalculated how much Americans wanted to cut government services for the sake of ideology. Like Clinton in 1993-94, the Republicans under Gingrich in 1995 had overstepped their mandate (Berman 2001). Clinton had the upper hand in the ensuing budget negotiations and was able to restore or increase funding for education, job training, and environmental protection. The Democrats also succeeded in passing an increase in minimum wage. In January 1996, Clinton had a job approval rating of over 50 percent. As the 1996 election approached, the President and Republicans in Congress became more willing to compromise and work together. Clinton actually earned the ire of many Democrats when he finally accepted a welfare reform bill. He was viewed by many as sacrificing his Party's principles for the sake of reelection.

Regardless of Clinton's policy accomplishments, for many Americans, the first word that comes to mind when they think about President Clinton is "Lewinsky." Clinton's infamous affair

with the White House intern will be forever etched in the memory of Americans. Clinton became only the second president in U.S. history to be impeached by the House of Representatives. By the time the Clinton's 1996 re-election campaign rolled around, Kenneth Starr's team was three years deep in investigations about Whitewater, Travelgate, Filegate, and the suicide of Vincent Foster, Clinton's Deputy White House counsel, with no results to speak of and no end in sight. In addition, the *Jones v. Clinton* sexual harassment lawsuit had made its way to the Supreme Court and would not be heard until 1997 at the earliest. Clinton's path to re-election was secure, and he was able to capture the White House for a second term with 379 electoral votes to Dole's 159.

The relations between Monica Lewinsky and the president were the cause of most concern to Clinton. But it was not the relations themselves that necessarily warranted the scrutiny of Ken Starr and the later impeachment of the president; instead, Clinton and Lewinsky's efforts to cover up their affair were the most troubling for the president. Lewinsky's internship at the White House began in July 1995 and she became close to Clinton in late 1995 during the government shutdown and budget crisis. Their relationship continued until April 1996, when she was dismissed to the Pentagon for being a "nuisance" to the president. When the president was deposed on January 17 for the Paula Jones case, Clinton denied having any "sexual relations" with Lewinsky. It was after this testimony that Kenneth Starr went after Clinton for lying under oath, obstruction of justice, and subornation of perjury. The public learned of the investigation on January 21, and Clinton denied all of it. Lewinsky signed an immunity agreement in July and Starr's investigation went ahead at full speed. On August 17, the President finally made a four-and-a-half-minute speech to the nation admitting to having had an "inappropriate relationship" with Monica Lewinsky and misleading the nation (Posner 1999). These events set in motion the ultimate impeachment and acquittal of President Clinton.

Republicans in Congress succeeded in impeaching Clinton, but they were never able to win popular support for their actions. Three days after the 1998 election, in which Republicans actually lost some seats, Gingrich resigned as party leader (Berman 2001). The Republicans' onslaught united Democrats behind their president as they fought for control of the budget surplus. Clinton, with his veto power, once again got the upper hand in budget negotiations and the final budget had something for both sides. However, with an increasingly poisoned relationship with Congress, Clinton was never able to fulfill his promises of reforming Medicare and passing a patients' bill of rights (Berman 2001).

The question now asked is if and how the scandal affected Clinton's legacy and his success as a president. If we judge a legacy by his public opinion rating, Clinton's legacy as a president was left largely intact. After details of the alleged affair were made public, Clinton's approval rating stood at a high 57 percent. This figure soared to 73 percent after his State of the Union address on January 28. Americans believed that his relationship with Lewinsky was a "private and personal matter." Even if Clinton had behaved unethically, he could still be an effective president. And the electorate also had a hard time trusting Kenneth Starr—only 26 percent of people believed that he was "conducting a fair and impartial investigation" (Berman 2001, p. 81). Even after the President's admission of guilt to the nation in August, his approval rating declined only marginally, although his disapproval rating climbed from 33 to 40 percent. Ironically, Starr's ratings fell more than Clinton's, with only 19 percent of the public viewing him favorably and 43 percent not. A majority of Americans still believed that the Lewinsky affair was a private issue and that the investigation should be dropped. The public viewed the reports as partisan efforts to damage the president. They did not want Clinton to resign or be removed from office, even after watching his Grand Jury testimony (Berman 2001). There was a

clear distinction in people's minds between Clinton the person and Clinton the president. While women actually approved of Clinton as a president at a slightly higher rate than men, only 45 percent of women respected him as a person, compared to 52 percent of men (Sapiro & Canon 2000). Clinton ended his presidency with a 65 percent approval rating—the highest of any president (Langer 2001).

As we have seen in our past presidential appraisals, however, public approval ratings are often based on external factors, rather than the issue at hand. In this case, Clinton's buoyant popularity was certainly facilitated by the booming economy. Clinton's second term saw a \$70 billion budget surplus—the first surplus since 1969 and the largest in history. Clinton did not necessarily deserve credit for the surplus, yet he reaped the benefits of it. So, did Monica Lewinsky actually affect Clinton's success? I, along with many other scholars, would argue that she did. Lewinsky's name will forever be ingrained into Americans' memory of Clinton. Historian Joseph Ellis claims that Monica Lewinsky is “a tin can that's tied to Clinton's tail that will rattle through the ages and through the pages of history books” (Berman 2001, p. 94). The public forgave Clinton's personal weaknesses, but they will never forget them. Clinton's scandals came during a time when the media was fascinated and glued to the “personal presidency.” And Clinton gave them plenty to write about. In national surveys, the president is always picked as the man that Americans admire the most. Yet, Clinton is a president who most Americans probably did not admire. They thought he was a good president, but his personal failings and lack of self-control is what most of the public will remember. At the end of his presidency, 67 percent of Americans said he was not honest and trustworthy, while 77 percent said he lacked high moral and ethical standards. And just 44 percent viewed him encouragingly “as a person” (Langer 2001).

This also brings up the question of whether Clinton even deserves a favorable legacy. The Lewinsky scandal, with its countless probes, taxpayer dollars spent, and subsequent impeachment proceedings and trial, put Congress in a gridlock. There were few policy accomplishments during Clinton's final two years as president. And the public had little incentive to care about issues such as expansion of NATO, bombing of Iraq, and collapse of Russia. In addition, the complete lack of judgment that Clinton demonstrated in his personal affairs is a quality that should not be understated. In the eyes of many Americans, Clinton turned out to be "another politician who lacked credibility and...[had] a total absence of moral leadership" (Busby 2001, p. 7). If Clinton really believed there was a "right-wing conspiracy" out to get him, it was not wise to have sexual relations with a young intern he barely knew. This was a president who forgot about the long-term consequences of his actions—a quality that could doom most presidents to failure. He risked his marriage, daughter, presidency, and the nation's stability, all for the sexual gratification that came with Lewinsky and the many other accusers. He wanted "sex with deniability" that he would not have to deal with later. With Starr investigations and Jones proceedings already in place, Clinton might have saved himself a lot of trouble had he been a little more intelligent in assessing risk (Dershowitz 1998).

In any case, Clinton has ended up being a highly regarded president, which is the job he signed on to. His lack of judgment and concern with long-term consequences was fortunately limited to his personal affairs. The unprecedented economy was able to overshadow any misgivings that Americans had about their president as a person.

### ***George W. Bush***

George W. Bush was the first U.S. president since 1888 to be elected without winning the popular vote—in 2000, most Americans wanted Al Gore to be their leader. After the razor-thin

results of the election, the country faced an extremely contentious battle over its outcome, especially the vote count in Florida. With a 5-4 decision of the Supreme Court, which overturned a 5-4 decision by the Florida Supreme Court, the presidency was effectively handed to George W. Bush. With a 50-50 split in the Senate and a 221-212-2 Republican majority in the House of Representatives, the country was literally divided and Bush had no mandate to speak of. Comparing the first nine months of his presidency before September 11, 2001 to his performance after the terrorist attacks, we find that the historic event profoundly affected the Bush presidency. Bush went from being a president without a plan to a president with a central policy focus of ensuring national security. Bush was able to use this theme to demonstrate unwavering leadership in a time of crisis and used the effects of this performance to secure Republican congressional victories in 2002 and re-election in 2004. George W. Bush's presidency illustrates how one catastrophic event can affect the success of a president.

The Bush presidency prior to 9/11 focused on two major priorities: the \$1.6 trillion Bush tax cut proposal to stimulate the economy and an overhauling education reform package. These were both far-reaching initiatives and Bush was able to get them passed with relative speed. While the No Child Left Behind education reform bill was passed in a diluted form with bipartisan support, Bush relied on very few Democrats to get his tax cut bill passed. The bill's many conservative provisions included reducing taxes for the wealthy, eliminating the estate tax, and reducing the marriage penalty. Even though there were ongoing negotiations in the Senate as to the size of the tax cut, the final \$1.35 trillion figure was much closer to Bush's proposal (80 percent of his proposed size) than what the Democrats had wanted. Bush also secured passage of his package on May 26—much faster than Reagan's efforts after his 1980 landslide victory (Fortier & Ornstein 2003).

Two other Bush initiatives in the first part of his term were his executive action to create the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. This new office allowed the use of federal money for social purposes, dispensed by faith-based organizations. Bush also proposed establishing personal retirement accounts for Social Security, which was not achieved. However, Bush's legislative victories were eclipsed in 2001 by the defection of Vermont Senator James Jeffords from the Republican Party to an Independent affiliation and the Democratic caucus. As a moderate, he felt that the Republican Party had shifted too far to the right and his move was a political setback for Bush. Senate control and chairmanships switched to the Democrats, who were not as enthusiastic about Bush's policies. So Bush ended his first six months in office with a 57 percent approval rating, which was not bad, especially considering the contentious nature of the 2000 election, but still lower than the ratings of the other postwar presidents except for Clinton at 45 percent. In the summer of 2001, Bush was looking to reorganize his priorities to try to break through the Democratic Senate. Then came September 11, 2001, which would alter the course of the Bush presidency indefinitely (Pfiffner 2003).

On September 11, 2001, over 3,000 people, almost all Americans, were killed in a terrorist attack, which was the largest attack since the War of 1812 to take place on American soil. Several hundred citizens of another 50 nations also died in the attack (Pfiffner 2003). This historical event profoundly affected the Bush presidency in three major ways. First, the attacks affected the political environment in which Bush was leading by putting him at the forefront of a national crisis when a leader was needed, creating a "rally event." Second, the terrorist attacks changed Bush and his views about his presidency. He started to take his presidency more seriously and embraced his newfound role of commander in chief. Finally, Bush took advantage of the opportunity given to him to further legitimate his presidency and regain political control of

Congress (Kraus 2004).

After the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the fear of the ambiguous, unknown enemy and further attacks created a political atmosphere that was ripe for strong political leadership. Bush was the figure who was there to deal with the crisis and “provide hope and reassurance” (Kraus 2004, p. 1). The American public and institutions like the CIA, Congress, and Judiciary all responded to Bush with unity and strong support. Americans welcomed their president, as shown in public opinion surveys. In the Gallup poll from Sept. 7-10, Bush’s approval rating stood at 51 percent. In the next poll from Sept. 14-15, public approval of the president was 86 percent—a 35 percent jump virtually overnight. This was an unprecedented leap compared to the 12-point approval increases during the Vietnam War and Cuban Missile Crisis. Public approval of Congress and federal government in general soared as well. For the rest of 2001, Bush’s approval ratings averaged 87 percent, compared to the 56-percent figure before Sept. 11 (Pfiffner 2003).

This “rally” phenomenon is a testament to the powerful impact that an event can have on one’s presidency, first explained by Nelson Polsby. During an international crisis, the inherent threat the United States incites a patriotic response from the electorate that is illustrated in the public’s “reluctance to criticize and its predilection to praise the president.” Unity is demanded in the American people and they respond. People take cues from trusted political leaders during the confusion surrounding an international emergency. In this case, the political leaders from all sides came together to unite behind President Bush, inducing the universal “rally around the flag” effect. Surprise and uncertainty about what was going on also contributed to the rally by leaving the centralization and interpretation of information in the hands of the White House (Brody 2003).

The Bush administration could now use this new political environment to mobilize the American public, media, and the numerous government institutions to perform new national security and public safety goals. In demonstrating their support for the President, Congress went beyond simple rhetoric by promptly voting without dissent for bills that pumped money into rebuilding and security initiatives for New York City and the Pentagon and anti-terrorism bills. The Patriot Act expanded the definition of who might be a terrorist and gave the attorney general John Ashcroft increased powers to handle suspected terrorists. Bush's extraordinary level of support was sustained through December 2001 following news of the success of the American military campaign in Afghanistan and the defeat of al-Qaeda. In accordance with these changes in the White House agenda were changes in the importance of certain presidential advisors. Prior to Sept. 11, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had run into criticism using a top-down approach in trying to re-evaluate U.S. national security forces. He was widely suspected to leave the administration after a year in office. For Rumsfeld, the 9/11 terrorist attacks imbued new meaning and life into his career and he became the clear leader of and spokesman for the U.S. military forces fighting the war on terror. In addition, Secretary of State Colin Powell had been on the losing side of many foreign policy disagreements with the Bush team. But after 9/11, Powell became the chief architect of the coalition of allies that joined the war effort and served as Bush's primary spokesman for foreign policy concerns (Pfiffner 2003).

September 11 also affected the Bush presidency by transforming Bush himself and his priorities. He went from being a president who previously spent an estimated 42 percent of his presidency on vacation. After 9/11, Bush took his job much more seriously, especially in defending the country against future terrorist threats. He became more decisive and resolute, which was highlighted countless times during the 2004 election campaign. Bush has embraced

his role as the nation's commander in chief, making use of his tougher personal qualities (Kraus 2004).

Finally, the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 allowed a president who had been elected by a minority of Americans to establish himself as a legitimate and qualified leader of the country and the opportunity to bring Congress back under his control. The Bush team recognized the opportunity that lie in front of them if they could respond to the attacks effectively (Kraus 2004). Their efforts were deemed successful in light of the results of the 2002 mid-term elections. Traditionally, domestic policy issues dominated the mid-term elections and the party in power expected to lose seats. However, this time around, Bush campaigned actively for Republicans throughout the country and the party gained two seats in the Senate and six seats in the House, giving Republicans control of the White House and Congress. This was only the second time since 1934 that the president's party gained seats in the House in a mid-term election, and Bush was given credit, as he had traveled 10,000 miles in the last five days to make it happen. These strides were a direct result of Bush's post-9/11 popularity, the framing and salience of national security in voters' minds, and a looming Iraqi "threat." The Republican victories were even more impressive in that they took place during a time of economic downturns, with stock market losses, slow economic growth, and increasing unemployment. But the Republicans were successful in blaming these statistics on 9/11 (Beachler 2004). The prolonged rally effect and Republican victory in 2002 was also facilitated by the media's focus on national security and the war on terror. There was a noticeable and measured shift in the media's evaluation of Bush before and after Sept. 11. When evaluated in the foreign policy domain, the president receives more symbolic authority, greater perceived consensus, and less visible political opposition. When media attention started shifting back to the declining economy, Bush refocused public

debate back to terrorism and the threat from Saddam Hussein and Iraq, with its alleged weapons of mass destruction and ties to al-Qaeda. Again, there was positive media attention and portrayal of Bush's leadership, along with rising public opinion (Rankin 2004).

These same issues presented themselves in the 2004 election and, again, the Bush team was able to come out victorious. Bush's approval ratings did eventually drop back to their pre-9/11 levels, about two years after Sept. 11, 2001. There was a decline in Democrats' and Independents' support for the president, who had been the main component of his rally effect. The rally effect could only take Bush so far, until he had to face the perceived mishandlings for the war in Iraq and a stagnating economy. Yet, Bush learned from the mistakes of his father. The economy was not in the best shape, so he reframed the debate away from that. The focus of the entire election was national security and terrorism. By allowing Bush to set the terms of the debate, Democratic challenger John Kerry was put on the defensive and was forced to challenge Bush on an issue on which the Republicans have clear historical issue ownership. A sense of fear was instilled in the American people—terrorists wanted a Kerry victory, according to the Bush campaign. The American public trusted Bush and the Republicans more on foreign policy and the result was a significant victory for Bush in 2004. He was the first president since 1988 to be elected with a majority of the popular vote. The Republican Party also increased their majorities in both houses of Congress. The mandate Bush had been waiting for was finally his to use.

The presidency of George W. Bush is a great example of how an outside event can shape a presidency. The terrorist attacks gave Bush a central theme around which he could center his presidency. National crisis is the perfect time for a president to display his leadership and Bush succeeded in this task. He achieved electoral legitimacy, legislative success, high public approval, and secured re-election—all determinants of presidential success. The biggest factor in

Bush's second term is how long he can survive politically riding the coattails of 9/11 and the war on terror. Bush's legacy is already secured with his performance during the terrorist attacks, but for him to leave any long-term domestic policy success, as in reforming Social Security, is yet to be determined. We are also seeing the effects of the prolonged war in Iraq on Bush's popularity, in addition to perceived mishaps in his handling of events like Hurricane Katrina.

### **Quantitative Analysis of Presidential Success: Data and Methodology**

While the above qualitative analyses are valuable and often necessary to understanding a president's success in office, I must objectively compare the presidents with quantifiable criteria for their success, in order to devise an impartial set of presidential rankings to compare with established scholarly ratings. This preliminary analysis enables us to go one step further than previous scholars because we now have a basis for evaluation of all presidents.

#### ***Measurement of Variables***

I measure the president's success in handling events by examining Gallup polling questions and responses that ask about major events and situations occurring during the president's term in office. I am making an implicit assumption that Gallup would ask about the significant problems that a president has dealt with during his time in office. The question I looked for was worded in the following way: "*Do you approve or disapprove of the way [president] is dealing with [situation]?*" I recorded responses for events that the president in question did not necessarily expect to deal with, such as inflation, the Iran Contra affair, or 9/11. I separated responses into yearly blocks and then averaged approval rate for each event per year. For example, if respondents were asked about Carter's response to the energy situation multiple

times in a given year, those approval rates were averaged to find Carter's approval rate for dealing with the energy situation. Then that value was averaged with the values for how Carter responded to other events taking place that year.

Respondents may answer a question with either "Approval," "Disapproval," or "Don't know/ No Opinion." Tables 2-6 show two different approval rates. The first is the general approval rate—the percentage of people that approved of the president's handling of the given event. The last columns of the tables show a slightly modified approval rate, which is what I will be using in the analysis. This rate is the proportion of respondents who approved of the president's performance in dealing with the situation *of the people who had an opinion*. This is a more relevant measure because it better evaluates the president's handling of the event by discounting unawareness and lack of knowledge on the issue. I am essentially standardizing all of the event scores.

There are some shortcomings in this specific technique and with the method in general. First, I am treating all events as equal, regardless of their impact. So events like 9/11 are given the same weight as events like maintaining good relations with China. Some events with especially long-term impact, like the campaign against terrorism are asked yearly, so in that sense, there is more weight given to events that span multiple years because they are included in each year's score. There is also a second shortcoming, mentioned briefly above, about people's lack of awareness about certain issues and occurrences taking place. While respondents who have no idea what an event is or how the president performed will ideally skip the question or mark that they do not know, there will definitely be some people who lie. And there is also the question of whether events that do not garner as much approval or disapproval should be weighted the same as events for which more people have definitive opinions. One other possible

discrepancy is wording of questions. For each year, I averaged polling data for an issue if the question was worded the same way as when asked in previous months. However, for the sake of consistency and accounting for wording-of-question bias, I treated events as separate if questions were not framed the same way from month to month. For example, the “situation in Russia” is a little different from general “U.S. relations with Russia,” and thus, those events were treated separated, even though they are quite related. This may cause some over-weighting of certain episodes. Finally, one other shortcoming is the lack of consistent pattern in Gallup’s questioning. There are events that Gallup asks about in relatively random time intervals, which I just averaged together for each year. For example, even if polls were conducted in February, March, and November of a given year asking about a given incident, I weighed those intervals equally and averaged the results. The reasoning is that I assume that Gallup is asking about certain episodes at non-random times for a reason, i.e. news reports, politically relevant statements or updates, etc. So if an event is not being asked about for a number of months, public opinion is not changing much.

Tables 2-6 show the annual and total “Event Success scores” for each president. One data manipulation I tried was to only include foreign policy events in the score, since those dominated the Gallup polling questions. I found minor differences, with all the presidents’ scores increasing and George H. W. Bush going from the third-highest to the first-highest score because of the prevalence of foreign policy events during his term and the dichotomy between his approval on domestic versus foreign policy issues, as discussed in the qualitative analysis. Table 7 shows the difference in overall Event Success scores versus foreign policy Event Success scores.

Acknowledging the many shortcomings present in polling, I use Gallup polling data from 1977- 2005 for responses to the standard question of “*Do you approve or disapprove of the way*

*[the incumbent] is handling his job as president?"* to measure public approval of the president.

This same question has been asked for decades and several times throughout the year, and should provide a consistent indicator of public opinion. The president's approval score will be the average of the approval ratings of each one-year term of his presidency, to be termed the "Public Approval score." This measure is clearly subject to the many pitfalls of polling studied extensively and mentioned briefly earlier. Our particular method may be subject to additional weaknesses, including the equal weight given to each year of the presidency. Often times, public opinion of the president is colored by his performance leaving office as opposed to an equal evaluation of his entire presidency.

Table 8 shows the average Public Approval Scores for each president. In Table 9, I take the annual median Public Approval Scores for each president to preclude the effects of any extreme ratings, but our results are not significantly affected.

I evaluate policy success by analyzing the last five presidents' *Congressional Quarterly* (*CQ*) "Presidential Support Scores," which measure the level of support (based on percentage) that Congress votes with the president on certain bills. The president's position on the vote is based on his public statements and messages. These scores, in use since 1953, are based on congressional roll-call votes on "key issues" (determined by *CQ*) on which the president has taken a clear position. *CQ* only includes votes on legislation passed in a form similar to that which the president supported. It also uses the president's position at the time of the vote, as positions may change during the course of passage (Edwards 1976).

Of course, policy success is very much related to party representation in Congress. I can adjust the scores to account for president's party representation in Congress. This is done by multiplying the *CQ* score by the percentage of the opposition party in each Congress, treating the

House and Senate as equal entities and using two-year averages of CQ presidential support scores. This gives the president more credit for dealing with opposition, so I am measuring his skill in working with people and getting policy through Congress. The corresponding score, averaging each of the one-year periods of the president's term, is the "Policy Success score." The initial Policy Success scores in Table 10 (not adjusted for party representation in Congress) have been color-coded to represent the party leadership in Congress, with red representing a Republican Congress (both houses), blue representing a Democratic Congress, and black representing a divided Congress. Table 11 shows the party-adjusted Policy Success scores. This method of measuring policy success is subject to many shortfalls. First, the *CQ* score is based only on roll-call votes in Congress. However, many important decisions are made by party leaders or in committees, and are thus not included in this analysis. *CQ* also does not attempt to interpret absences by Congressmen, even though members may not vote because they are hampered in their ability to support or undermine a president publicly. Finally, *CQ* weighs each vote equally in their analysis. In reality, the president usually has a set of priorities that determine how important certain victories and defeats in Congress might be. There are certain votes that he puts more effort into than others, but there is no practical way to quantify these outcomes, so they will be left alone in the analysis (Edwards 1976).

I ultimately weigh these three scores (equally) to generate the overall Presidential Success score for each of the last five presidencies. I did not see any reason why one measure would be any more important than the other two, so an equal weighing makes sense. All three measures are essential to a complete view of presidential success, and policy, public opinion, and response to events are equally important to a president's ultimate performance in office. Table 12

shows the initial Presidential Success scores, while Table 13 shows the revised Presidential Success scores using the party-adjusted Policy Success score.

As a test, I also correlated all three of my measures with each other to make sure they did not have unreasonably high correlations with each other. For example, I know that public opinion is correlated with policy success, and success in dealing with external events certainly affects public opinion of the president. So I just needed to make sure these variables are not over-counting the same trends to a disproportionate degree. Figures 1-3 show the results of the correlations between the three success variables.

### **Analysis**

When the criteria for success are ultimately quantified and synthesized, we get significantly different rankings for presidential success than those of the renowned scholars—the current gold standard in this field. This confirms the necessity for clear guidelines for the measurement of success, so that final results can be traceable and rational, which this paper has aimed to establish.

The results for Event Success scores seem rather intuitive, with George W. Bush being ranked first, with his handling of 9/11 and terrorism being the primary explanatory factors. Clinton was ranked second, with notable approval in many foreign policy issues, which tend to bring higher approval ratings, including Clinton's ratings for the situations in Russia, North Korea, Iraq and the Middle East, Kosovo, and Yugoslavia. Although his biggest spike came from his response to the Oklahoma City bombing, which was relatively short-lived, Clinton also didn't suffer negatively for any particular events, including the Lewinsky scandal and Elian Gonzalez situation. George H. W. Bush, Carter, and Reagan round out the bottom three spots respectively.

George H. W. Bush's term was filled with many foreign policy issues, which raised his Event Success score significantly.

One source of measurement error in this category could be my selection of "events"—there were some difficult distinctions to make in terms of what was and was not counted as an event. For example, I did not count gays in the military as an "event" or situation" for President Clinton because I ruled it a policy issue. However, this issue had effects on Clinton's presidency and public opinion similar to other event because it became dominant national news. This is just one example of the tenuous distinctions that had to be made. Another source of measurement error could be my use of the proportion of approval scores instead of a simple approval rating. This measure reduces the effects of uninformed respondents or issues that don't make as big a "splash" in the news. However, perhaps those events *should be* weighted less in the score—maybe events on which the public is less informed are not as relevant events for determining presidential success.

If we were to transform this variable, we could consider creating a dichotomy between foreign and domestic events, which would allow us to distinguish between the more inflated foreign policy approval scores and the more personally relevant domestic event public opinion ratings. Aaron Wildavsky (1966) wrote a seminal article on the idea of "two presidencies"—one for domestic affairs and one for foreign and defense policy. He contended that presidents had much greater control over this area of policy and they use this control to their advantage. International problems can "drive out" domestic concerns (p. 14). This is related to the fact that "Salient international events and presidential actions in the foreign arena enhance the public standing of the president" (Marra, Ostrom, Jr., & Simon 1990, p. 592). Major presidential actions in the international arena are usually followed by a bump in his public approval, related to the

“rally around the flag” effect discussed earlier. Carter’s approval jumped by nine points after the Israeli-Egyptian agreement was formalized in 1979 (Marra, Ostrom, Jr., & Simon 1990).

One way to manipulate our Event Success score might be to include only foreign policy events, since they already dominate the poll questions and we can then eliminate the effects of other events on our annual scores. This will also allow us to compare apples with apples, so to speak, as we evaluate presidents based on their handling of more similar events. Table 7 shows the comparison between overall Event Success scores and foreign policy Event Success scores. While all of the presidents’ scores increase because of the reasons mentioned above, the only significant jump occurs in President George H. W. Bush’s score as he vaults from third to first place in the category. This is likely due to Bush’s noticeable dichotomy between his handling of foreign and domestic policy issues, mentioned in the qualitative section. Because of the uneven effects of this transformation, I will drop the foreign policy Event Success score in favor of the overall Event Success score.

Our initial results for Presidential Approval Ratings (Table 8) defy most conventional expectations, with President George H.W. Bush ranked first of the five presidents and President Reagan ranked fourth of five. Clinton was ranked last. President H.W. Bush’s polling success might be due to his relatively high standing for most of his presidency and the large spikes that came with the Gulf War. I sought to alleviate the effects of context-driven surges and dips in public opinion by taking the median scores of public approval (Table 9). While this transformation remedied some of the outlying scores, the rankings still stayed the same. I will keep the average Public Approval score as my measure of public opinion.

George H. W. Bush’s over-performance in the public approval category may come as a surprise to individuals who follow the established rankings and evaluations of the presidents. Yet

this analysis demonstrates a clear and unequivocal numerical superiority of the elder Bush in the public approval category among our last five presidents. This is further confirmation of the vague measures that scholars use in their studies of the presidents. A quick look at the numbers shows that Bush was far more popular throughout his presidency than we tend to give him credit for. We have no idea how the scholars arrived at their traditionally negative evaluation of Bush, but it certainly affects the way most people remember him, as unfair as that may be. My best guess is that Bush's last year in office seems to take precedence over three above-average years in the scholars' mind. Our analysis shows that a rigorous examination of public approval puts George H. W. Bush on top, regardless of how surprising that may seem.

My initial Policy Success scores (Table 10) showed President Carter rated very highly (ranked second), which may be counter-intuitive to some. This bump helped him significantly in his Presidential Success score—he was ranked as the second most successful president. But party representation seems to go a long way in explaining policy success, as both Carter and George W. Bush (ranked first) had significantly higher Policy Success scores than the rest of the presidents and they were also the only presidents to face both houses of Congress led by their own party for the entirety or majority of their terms. On the other hand, George H.W. Bush was rated the lowest in policy success, as he faced an uphill battle in Congress, a large deficit, an obstinate court, and had a vacillating leadership style. I found an  $R^2$  of 0.52 between policy success and representation of the president's party in Congress (treating the House and Senate as equal entities in Congress and using two-year averages of policy success).

One way to account for this party effect was to multiply the *CQ* Presidential Support score by the percentage of the president's opposition party in Congress (treating both houses as equal entities). This transformation gave more standing to presidents who had to pass their

policies through the opposing party's control. Taking political party into account changed the results dramatically (Table 11). While George W. Bush stayed on top, albeit by a reduced margin, and likely due to a remarkably unified Republican Congress, President Carter went from being ranked second to ranked fourth. Reagan and Clinton moved into the second and third positions, respectively, as they were given additional credit for dealing with opposition parties for much of their presidencies.

A final source of error that deserves mention is the system of weighting used in this model. Each event, approval, and policy was weighed equally when determining these scores—time, importance, relevance, and salience were not considered. But it is often true that a president is judged on the merits of his most significant moment, whether it is a positive or negative evaluation. This holds true on policy issues and event ratings. George H.W. Bush's decision to raise taxes probably defined him more than any other policy issue. And George W. Bush's handling of Sept. 11 is probably much more significant in the eyes of the nation than relations with China, which was weighed equally. In addition, I weigh all public approval scores equally even though a president's rating when he leaves office may be more indicative of the lingering evaluation that people hold of him than any other time in his presidency. Finally, I weigh each of my criteria for presidential success equally, which may not be the most accurate conception of success. Are policy issues really as important as events that arise and capture the nation's attention? And isn't the president ultimately responsible to the public, his constituency, suggesting a higher emphasis being placed on public opinion? I made the decision to weigh the variables equally, but our results might change dramatically if we adjusted the importance that each criterion holds in presidential success.

The three components being used to measure overall success seem to be acceptable distinctions, judging from the first correlation I ran on public approval and policy success. We used the one-year-mark data points for the Gallup poll numbers and *CQ* scores (29 total data points). There seemed to be *no* relationship between the two variables ( $R^2 = 0.016$ ), which seems slightly anomalous. But this actually resembles work that George Edwards (1976) has done on the subject. Edwards found approval ratings were correlated with *CQ* support scores in the Senate, but not in the House. He also found a slightly negative correlation between Republicans' public approval of the president and Republican presidents' support scores. Douglas Rivers and Nancy Rose (1985) found that party representation in Congress was twice as influential in congressional approval rate than public approval, although they still found a positive relationship between the president's congressional approval rate and his public opinion rating. But this study used *CQ* presidential boxscores to compute the president's congressional approval rate, which were discontinued in 1974. Boxscores measure *all* presidential requests for legislation and congressional action taken on them at the end of each session.

In any case, I am assured that the Policy Success and Public Approval scores are not highly correlated (if they are correlated at all), so I can use both of them independently to measure presidential success. I also found no correlation between my Event Success and Policy Success variables ( $R^2 = 0.002$ ), which makes logical sense given that the events I chose from the Gallup polling data were very distinct from most policy issues in Congress. There was a moderate correlation between the Public Approval and Event Success variables ( $R^2 = 0.267$ ), mainly because people are thinking of major events in the country when they rate a president generally and the polling was conducted at the same time. It is important to keep in mind that I treat the three criteria for measuring success as independent dimensions of presidential success,

*not* as three ways of measuring the same thing. The results of these correlations confirm that each variable is tapping a different and unique aspect of presidential success—each criterion is providing new information to the model, which computes success as a sum of all three unique measures.

Taken together in its original form, this model shows some interesting and counter-intuitive results, with George W. Bush being established as the most successful president of the five (counting only his first five years in office), followed by Carter, George H.W. Bush, Clinton, and Reagan, in order. These results are highly inconsistent with the established scholarly rankings, which have Reagan at the top, followed by Clinton, George W. Bush, George H. W. Bush, and Carter ranking last. When I adjust my rankings using party-adjusted policy scores, I get slightly more conventional rankings, with George W. Bush still ranked highest, followed in order by George H. W. Bush, Clinton, Reagan, and Carter.

These rankings may still seem suspect and surprising compared to our acknowledged evaluations of these presidents. That may be due to the above-mentioned possibilities of measurement error in my criteria and my model itself. *Or*, it could be due to our pre-established rankings, which offer very little objective rationale or foundation. We have no idea what scholars are basing their presidential success ratings on when they vote on their favorite presidents. Their justifications are ambiguous at best. And while my rankings might fly in the face of conventional wisdom, at least they offer rigorous and valid criteria for success, which hold true when these presidents are evaluated qualitatively and quantitatively. What are our grounds for accepting the customary scholarly ratings? This paper shows us that when we establish systematic standards for success and track them through presidencies, our findings may be dramatically different from those that we expect. These seemingly anomalous rankings are the result of a comprehensive and

objective evaluation with a clear basis, and that is more than any established scholar has been able to provide.

### **Conclusion**

These criteria for presidential success are unique in that they are being analyzed in tandem to formulate a comprehensive, systematic, and unbiased evaluation of how one can measure presidential success. However, this model comes with its own set of shortcomings. The most significant factor omitted in the model is the absence of historical perspective—how we evaluate a president's actions during his presidency may be different from how we evaluate them in the future. A president's decision that is criticized today might be celebrated in ten years. A choice thought to be brilliant now may be judged foolish with the passage of time (Nice 1984). Most Americans today regard Lincoln as the most successful president, but half the country hated him while he was in office. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (1957) notes that even Franklin Roosevelt was not universally considered a great president for the first decade after his death:

We are always in a zone of imperfect visibility so far as the history just over our shoulder is concerned. It is as if we were in the hollow of the historical wave; not until we reach the crest of the next one can we look back and estimate properly what went on before. (p. ix)

Another, more current example is that of President George W. Bush. His decision to go to war in Iraq may be judged as the best or worst decision he made depending on the historical consequences of his actions, which will not be determined for a number of years. The Iraq war may lead to a nuclear holocaust or democracy in the Middle East, and each of those paths would logically lead to very different evaluations of Bush's success as a president. Lonnstrom & Kelly (2003) have found that a president's ranking will change with the passage of time. Such a rating is likely to move, either up or down, for about 40 years and then stabilize. A president can affect

his rating by his own actions after leaving office. And new information about a president can affect his rating after he leaves office. One could argue that a president's success should be determined while he is actually president—during his term of office. The consequences of his decisions will be dealt with by his successors, and will likely play a role in the successors' evaluations of success, by my own model. While this argument may make logical sense, one cannot help but associate a president with the consequences of his decisions while in office and it would be unnatural to suggest otherwise.

Regardless of the views one holds on this matter, I contend that there is an undeniable value that comes from explicating one's criteria for determining presidential success. Whether we judge success in the present or in the future, we may find, as this model did, that our most basic assumptions could be challenged and even nullified. We cannot continue to blindly accept the evaluations that publications and scholars construct for us. Such analyses should be complemented by models such as the one proposed here, to objectively examine and determine our own criteria for presidential success.

## Tables and Figures

**Table 1: Established Presidential Rankings**

President (Rank)	Chicago Tribune 1982 poll rank	Siena 1982 poll rank	Siena 1990 poll rank	Siena 1994 poll rank	Ridings-McIver 1996 poll rank	CSPAN 1999 poll rank	Wall Street Journal 2000 poll rank	Siena 2002 poll rank	Wall Street Journal 2005 poll rank	Average
<b>Jimmy Carter (5)</b>	26	33	24	25	19	22	30	25	34	<b>26.44</b> (9 rankings)
<b>Ronald Reagan (1)</b>	—	16	22	20	26	11	8	16	6	<b>13.88</b> (8 rankings)
<b>George H.W. Bush (4)</b>	—	—	18	31	22	20	21	22	21	<b>22.14</b> (7 rankings)
<b>Bill Clinton (2)</b>	—	—	—	16	23	21	24	18	22	<b>20.67</b> (6 rankings)
<b>George W. Bush (3)</b>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	23	19	<b>21</b> (2 rankings)

Source: Wikipedia contributors, "Historical rankings of United States Presidents," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Historical\\_rankings\\_of\\_United\\_States\\_Presidents&oldid=51908284](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Historical_rankings_of_United_States_Presidents&oldid=51908284) (accessed May 9, 2006).

**Table 2: Event Assessment- Jimmy Carter**

Year	Event/ Situation	Average Annual Approval	Average Annual Proportion
1977	Energy Situation	50.97	62.65
<b>1977</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>50.97</b>	<b>62.65</b>
1978	Energy Situation	41.33	49.93
1978	Relations with Russia	34.20	44.13
1978	Middle East situation	37.02	60.12
1978	Inflation	22.39	25.46
1978	Unemployment	36.07	44.42
1978	Environmental Problems and Pollution	42.59	57.78
<b>1978</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>35.60</b>	<b>46.97</b>
1979	Iranian Hostage Crisis	75.51	82.09
1979	Cuban situation [presence of Russian troops in Cuba]	34.15	47.18
<b>1979</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>54.83</b>	<b>64.64</b>
1980	Iranian Hostage Crisis	50.18	55.09
<b>1980</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>50.18</b>	<b>55.09</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>CARTER PRESIDENCY AVERAGE</b>	<b>47.90</b>	<b>57.34</b>

Source: Gallup Polling Data 1977-1980; Accessed from <http://brain.gallup.com>

**Table 3: Event Assessment- Ronald Reagan**

Year	Event/Situation	Average Annual Approval	Average Annual Proportion
1981	Relations with Russia/Soviet Union	54.59	70.94
1981	Situation in El Salvador	39.04	56.20
1981	Inflation	42.58	50.95
1981	Unemployment	41.39	49.56
1981	Energy situation	41.58	55.16
1981	Air traffic controllers strike	58.96	66.36
1981	Situation in the Middle East	38.57	60.63
<b>1981</b>	<b>AVERAGE APPROVAL</b>	<b>45.24</b>	<b>58.54</b>
1982	Relations with Russia/Soviet Union	51.83	64.47
1982	Inflation	47.24	59.04
1982	Unemployment	20.16	21.94
1982	Energy situation	33.18	38.55
1982	Situation in Poland	52.06	67.74
1982	Situation in the Middle East	36.07	47.58
<b>1982</b>	<b>AVERAGE APPROVAL</b>	<b>40.09</b>	<b>49.89</b>
1983	Relations with Russia/Soviet Union	43.32	55.17
1983	Inflation	41.06	48.71
1983	Unemployment	22.40	24.72
1983	Energy situation	34.21	41.89
1983	Situation in the Middle East	37.66	45.51
1983	Situation in Central America	37.27	45.42
1983	Nuclear Arms Situation [disarmament negotiatons with Soviet Union]	40.50	48.99
1983	Korean Airline incident	45.29	50.86
1983	Situation in Lebanon	39.57	45.08
1983	Situation in Grenada	59.47	65.26
<b>1983</b>	<b>AVERAGE APPROVAL</b>	<b>40.07</b>	<b>47.16</b>
1984	Relations with Russia/Soviet Union	47.62	53.65
1984	Unemployment	49.93	55.68
1984	Situation in Central America	45.37	51.95
1984	Nuclear Arms Situation [disarmament negotiatons with Soviet Union]	47.25	55.74
1984	Situation in Lebanon	37.62	43.81
1984	Federal Budget Deficit	35.00	42.85
1984	Situation of Poor People in the U.S.	28.25	32.42
1984	Civil rights of minority groups	44.34	56.95
<b>1984</b>	<b>AVERAGE APPROVAL</b>	<b>41.92</b>	<b>49.13</b>
1985	Relations with Russia/Soviet Union	37.97	48.59
1985	Inflation	55.49	59.49
1985	Unemployment	49.94	54.91
1985	Situation in the Middle East	41.89	54.20

1985	Situation in Central America	28.61	36.21
1985	Nuclear Arms Situation [disarmament negotiatons with Soviet Union]	41.43	50.05
1985	Federal Budget Deficit	37.35	44.84
1985	Situation in Nicaragua	32.91	41.70
1985	Reducing U.S. Trade Deficit	38.13	48.93
1985	Situation in South Africa	33.33	46.30
<b>1985</b>	<b>AVERAGE APPROVAL</b>	<b>39.70</b>	<b>48.52</b>
1986	Relations with Russia/Soviet Union	38.07	46.64
1986	Unemployment	42.02	47.38
1986	Situation in the Middle East	36.13	41.19
1986	Nuclear Arms Situation [disarmament negotiatons with Soviet Union]	40.13	46.57
1986	Federal Budget Deficit	32.29	38.48
1986	Situation in Nicaragua	25.64	29.83
1986	Situation in South Africa	42.00	54.60
1986	Situation in the Phillipines	52.57	66.45
1986	Disarmament negotiations at the Iceland summit	53.61	66.91
1986	Iran-Contra Affair	13.46	14.50
<b>1986</b>	<b>AVERAGE APPROVAL</b>	<b>37.59</b>	<b>41.43</b>
1987	Relations with Russia/Soviet Union	74.09	83.38
1987	Nuclear Arms Situation [disarmament negotiatons with Soviet Union]	39.84	45.42
1987	Federal Budget Deficit	39.15	43.67
1987	Situation in Nicaragua	25.46	28.86
1987	Iran-Contra Affair	22.49	26.09
1987	Imposition of 100% import duties on some Japanese products in retaliation for Japan's "dumping" of microchips used in computer products	70.46	74.79
1987	Persian Gulf Situation	45.70	52.95
<b>1987</b>	<b>AVERAGE APPROVAL</b>	<b>45.31</b>	<b>50.74</b>
1988	Relations with Russia/Soviet Union	77.22	82.71
1988	Nuclear Arms Situation [disarmament negotiatons with Soviet Union]	60.73	68.36
1988	Federal Budget Deficit	25.28	28.08
1988	Situation in Nicaragua	26.59	32.77
1988	Situation in Panama	26.88	33.81
1988	Drug Epidemic	44.53	49.69
<b>1988</b>	<b>AVERAGE APPROVAL</b>	<b>43.54</b>	<b>56.23</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>REAGAN PRESIDENCY AVERAGE</b>	<b>41.68</b>	<b>50.21</b>

Source: Gallup Polling Data 1981-1988; Accessed from <http://brain.gallup.com>

**Table 4: Event Assessment- George H. W. Bush**

Year	Event/ Situation	Average Annual Approval	Average Annual Proportion
1989	Federal Budget Deficit	36.23	45.40
1989	Inflation	41.27	55.50
1989	Relations with the Soviet Union	50.45	67.60
1989	Situation in the Middle East	44.12	63.05
1989	Situation in Central America	51.27	68.86
1989	Eastern Airlines Situation	35.80	66.14
1989	Situation in Panama	56.92	74.55
1989	Recent Events in China	67.05	78.06
1989	Hostage Situation in the Middle East	56.58	62.79
1989	Situation in Eastern Europe	65.76	76.01
<b>1989</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>50.54</b>	<b>65.80</b>
1990	Federal Budget Deficit	33.22	40.03
1990	Relations with the Soviet Union	63.63	71.20
1990	Situation in Central America	69.29	80.16
1990	Situation in Eastern Europe	57.26	65.84
1990	Current Situation involving Iraq and Kuwait	59.88	67.25
1990	Savings and Loan crisis	21.71	26.72
1990	Sending of U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia after invasion of Kuwait by Iraq	65.11	72.76
<b>1990</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>52.87</b>	<b>60.57</b>
1991	Federal Budget Deficit	30.42	33.95
1991	Relations with the Soviet Union	72.70	82.43
1991	Situation in the Middle East	72.24	81.33
1991	Situation in Central America	52.40	71.57
1991	Situation in Eastern Europe	70.04	85.40
1991	Current Situation involving Iraq and Kuwait	62.08	67.74
1991	Savings and Loan crisis	28.44	33.90
1991	Sending of U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia after invasion of Kuwait by Iraq	59.75	63.88
1991	Energy Situation in this Country	53.72	60.02
1991	Recent Events in the Soviet Union	80.82	87.07
1991	Situation in Iraq	51.52	57.16
1991	Situation in the Persian Gulf Region	67.17	75.82
1991	Situation involving the Soviet Union's crackdown on the Baltic states of Latvia and Lithuania	60.18	75.57
1991	Relations with Israel	58.04	69.22
<b>1991</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>58.54</b>	<b>67.51</b>
1992	Federal Budget Deficit	24.57	26.40
1992	Unemployment	27.53	28.90
1992	Recent events following the King verdict and the outbreak of violence in Los Angeles	40.49	44.20
1992	Situation in Bosnia	37.84	50.06

1992	Plan to send American military forces to assure distribution of relief supplies in the African nation of Somalia	65.70	65.70
<b>1992</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>39.23</b>	<b>43.05</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>BUSH PRESIDENCY AVERAGE</b>	<b>50.29</b>	<b>59.23</b>

Source: Gallup Polling Data 1989-1992; Accessed from <http://brain.gallup.com>

**Table 5: Event Assessment- Bill Clinton**

Year	Event/ Situation	Average Annual Approval	Average Annual Proportion
1993	U.S. relations with Russia	64.16	78.59
1993	Federal Budget Deficit	37.30	40.53
1993	Situation in the former Yugoslavian republic of Bosnia	48.55	58.22
1993	Ordering several hundred more American troops and some armored vehicles into Somalia to deal with the military situation there	38.00	39.92
1993	Situation in Russia	54.11	68.02
1993	Situation in Somalia	32.18	35.21
<b>1993</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>45.72</b>	<b>53.41</b>
1994	Federal Budget Deficit	36.75	45.85
1994	Situation in the former Yugoslavian republic of Bosnia	33.47	42.29
1994	Situation in Russia	46.69	61.76
1994	Whitewater Investigation	32.19	39.89
1994	Situation in Haiti	41.16	47.96
1994	Situation in North Korea	40.85	52.32
1994	Situation in Cuba	33.00	37.18
1994	Situation in Iraq	62.74	69.01
1994	Increasing U.S. military forces in the Persian Gulf area, after Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, sent his military troops toward the Kuwait border	74.01	76.10
1994	Situation in the Middle East	56.09	61.78
<b>1994</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>45.70</b>	<b>53.41</b>
1995	Federal Budget Deficit	49.95	55.98
1995	Situation in the former Yugoslavian republic of Bosnia	60.43	67.99
1995	Events surrounding the bombing in Oklahoma City	83.68	91.62
1995	U.S. Relations with Japan	43.27	56.36
<b>1995</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>59.33</b>	<b>67.99</b>
1996	Federal Budget Deficit	34.20	36.93
1996	Whitewater Investigation	35.84	39.59
1996	Situation in Iraq	56.69	71.25
1996	Situation in the Middle East	50.73	59.02
1996	Problem of Terrorism	54.06	64.33
<b>1996</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>46.30</b>	<b>54.22</b>

1997	Federal Budget Deficit	50.97	57.59
1997	Situation in Iraq	58.77	66.43
<b>1997</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>54.87</b>	<b>62.01</b>
1998	Situation in Iraq	65.21	70.93
1998	Controversy over Clinton and Monica Lewinsky	45.59	50.90
1998	Relations with China	39.66	51.95
1998	Recent Middle East peace talks	77.76	86.66
<b>1998</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>57.05</b>	<b>65.11</b>
1999	Situation in Iraq	66.22	69.96
1999	Situation in Kosovo	56.47	61.00
<b>1999</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>61.35</b>	<b>65.48</b>
2000	Elian Gonzalez Situation	41.68	49.60
2000	Situation in Yugoslavia	51.86	73.66
<b>2000</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>46.77</b>	<b>61.63</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>CLINTON PRESIDENCY AVERAGE</b>	<b>52.14</b>	<b>60.41</b>

Source: Gallup Polling Data 1993-2000; Accessed from <http://brain.gallup.com>

**Table 6: Event Assessment- George W. Bush**

Year	Event/ Situation	Average Annual Approval	Average Annual Proportion
2001	Situation with U.S. Navy plan that was involved in a mid-air collision with a Chinese plane, and had to land in Chinese territory. The plan and its 24 crew members are currently being held by China.	65.69	70.08
2001	Relations with China	54.6	61.17
2001	Sept. 11 Terrorist Attacks	88.71	91.35
2001	Campaign Against Terrorism	84.63	88.64
2001	Recent incidents involving anthrax	75.14	81.70
<b>2001</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>73.75</b>	<b>78.59</b>
2002	Campaign Against Terrorism	78.90	82.06
2002	Unemployment	56.95	66.62
2002	Situation in the Middle East	61.26	63.49
2002	Situation With Iraq	58.31	60.04
<b>2002</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>63.86</b>	<b>68.05</b>
2003	Sept. 11 Terrorist Attacks	87.64	89.82
2003	Campaign Against Terrorism	63.69	67.13
2003	Situation in the Middle East	50.60	55.16
2003	Situation With Iraq	57.64	61.25
2003	Situation with North Korea	52.14	59.42

2003	Federal Budget Deficit	50.56	53.88
<b>2003</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>60.38</b>	<b>64.44</b>
2004	Campaign Against Terrorism	48.40	49.67
2004	Situation With Iraq	45.02	48.03
2004	Situation in Haiti	51.84	66.71
2004	Hurricanes that hit Florida	70.59	81.62
2004	Conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians	45.17	52.46
<b>2004</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>52.20</b>	<b>59.70</b>
2005	Campaign Against Terrorism	45.54	48.73
2005	Situation With Iraq	35.43	38.14
2005	Federal Budget Deficit	32.15	33.87
2005	Earthquake and tsunami in Asia	74.57	78.50
2005	Case involving Terri Schiavo	32.77	38.42
2005	Gas Prices	22.85	24.19
2005	Hurricane Katrina	42.44	43.82
<b>2005</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>40.82</b>	<b>43.67</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>BUSH PRESIDENCY AVERAGE</b>	<b>58.20</b>	<b>62.89</b>

Source: Gallup Polling Data 2001-2005; Accessed from <http://brain.gallup.com>

**Table 7: Event Success for Overall vs. Foreign Policy Events:**

President	Carter	Reagan	H.W. Bush	Clinton	W. Bush
<b>Overall Event Success Score</b>	57.3	50.2	59.2	60.4	62.9
<b>Foreign Policy Event Success</b>	57.3	52.4	68.4	62.8	64.5

Source: Data above

**Table 8: Average Presidential Approval Rating:**

Year of Term	Carter	Reagan	H.W. Bush	Clinton	W. Bush
<b>1</b>	61	57	65	52	66
<b>2</b>	46	44	67	47	72
<b>3</b>	39	45	73	48	60
<b>4</b>	36	56	49	55	51
<b>5</b>		60		58	46
<b>6</b>		60		64	
<b>7</b>		47		62	
<b>8</b>		52		60	
<b>Average</b>	<b>45.5</b>	<b>52.6</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>55.7</b>	<b>59.0</b>

Source: Gallup Polling data; Harold Stanley and Richard Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics*, 1997-1998 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1998), 198.

**Table 9: Median Presidential Approval Rating:**

Year of Term	Carter	Reagan	H.W. Bush	Clinton	W. Bush
1	63	57	67	48.5	58
2	46.8	43.5	69.3	45.4	73
3	35	43.7	72.4	47	60
4	34	54	40.5	55	51
5		61.5		57.5	46
6		62.8		64	
7		48.5		59	
8		51		59.7	
<b>Average</b>	<b>44.7</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>62.3</b>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>57.6</b>

Source: Gallup Polling data; Harold Stanley and Richard Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics*, 1997-1998 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1998), 198.

**Table 10: Original Presidential Support Scores:**

Year #	Carter	Reagan	H.W. Bush	Clinton	W. Bush
1	75.4	82.4	62.6	86.4	86.7
2	78.3	72.4	46.8	86.4	87.8
3	76.8	67.1	54.2	36.2	78.7
4	75.1	65.8	43	55.1	72.6
5		59.9		53.6	78.0
6		56.1		51	
7		43.5		37.8	
8		47.4		55	
<b>Average</b>	<b>76.4</b>	<b>61.8</b>	<b>51.7</b>	<b>57.6</b>	<b>81.5</b>

Source: *Congressional Roll Call 2004*. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2004)

**Table 11: Party-Adjusted Presidential Support Scores:**

Year #	Carter	Reagan	H.W. Bush	Clinton	W. Bush
1-2	27.2	39.3	26.2	36.5	43.1
3-4	29.4	29.9	23.4	24.4	35.9
5-6		24.7		28.0	35.3
7-8		22.0		24.7	
<b>Average</b>	<b>28.3</b>	<b>29.0</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>38.1</b>

Source: Data above, Office of the Clerk of U.S. Senate and House of Representatives

**Table 12: Initial Overall Presidential Success Scores:**

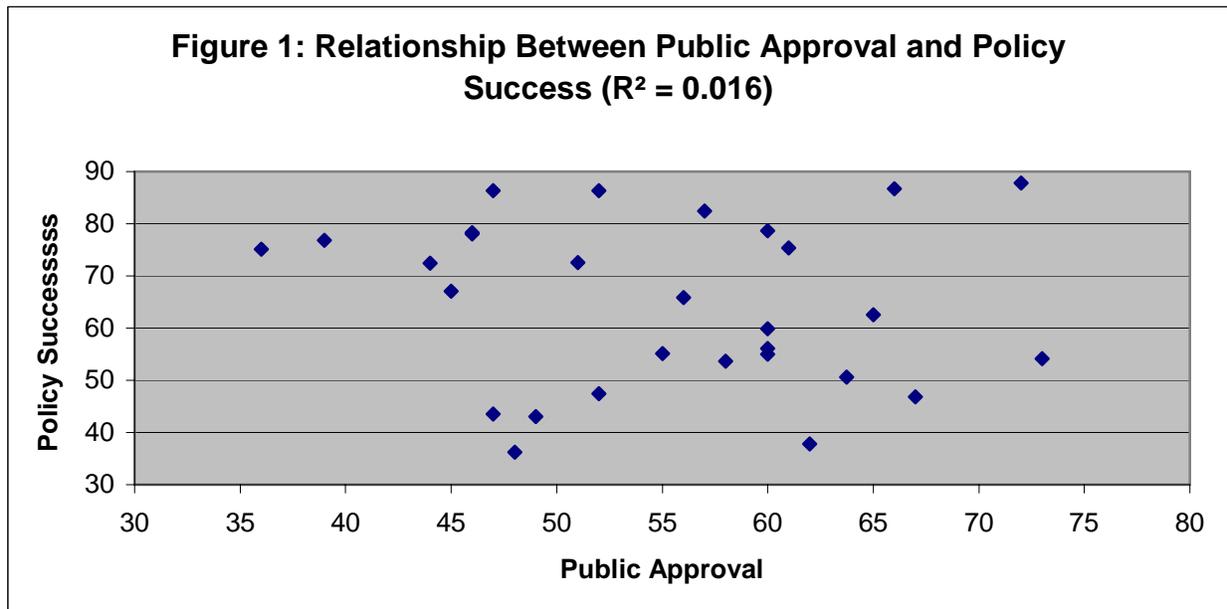
President	Carter	Reagan	H.W. Bush	Clinton	W. Bush
<b>Average Public Approval Score (Rank)</b>	45.5 (5)	52.6 (4)	63.5 (1)	55.7 (3)	59.0 (2)
<b>Original Policy Success Score (Rank)</b>	76.4 (2)	61.8 (3)	51.7 (5)	57.6 (4)	81.5 (1)
<b>Overall Event Success Score (Rank)</b>	57.3 (4)	50.2 (5)	59.2 (3)	60.4 (2)	62.9 (1)
<b>Presidential Success Score (Rank)</b>	<b>59.7 (2)</b>	<b>54.9 (5)</b>	<b>58.1 (3)</b>	<b>57.9 (4)</b>	<b>67.8 (1)</b>

Source: Data above

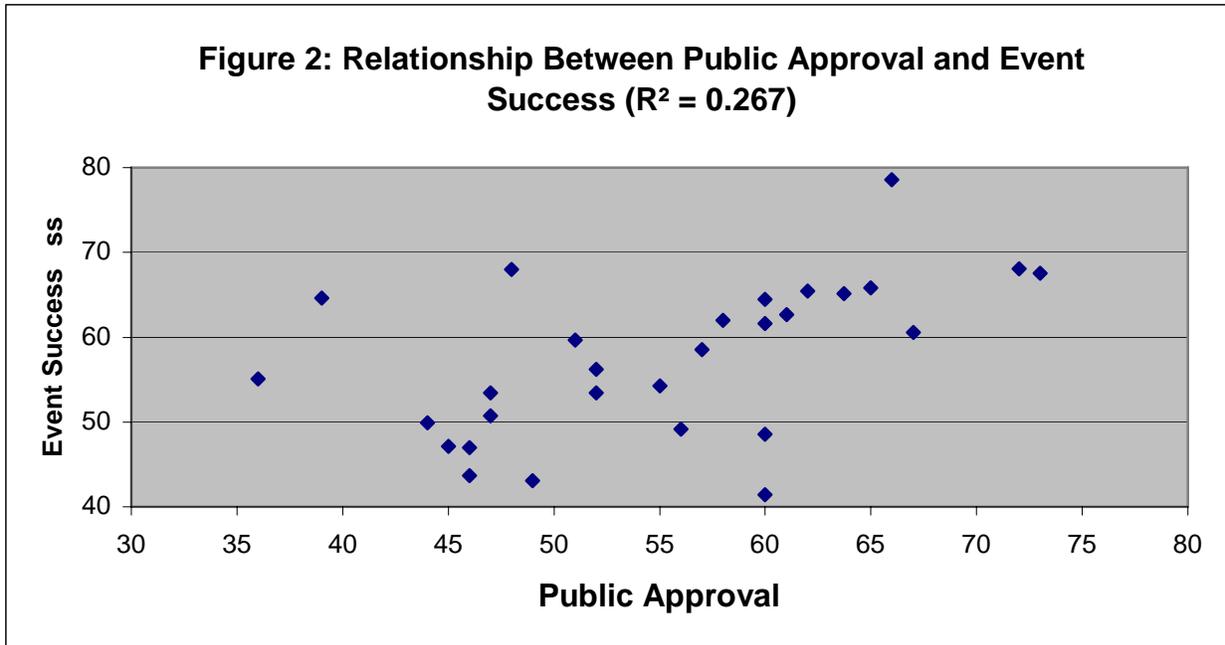
**Table 13: Adjusted Overall Presidential Success Scores:**

President	Carter	Reagan	H.W. Bush	Clinton	W. Bush
<b>Average Public Approval Score (Rank)</b>	45.5 (5)	52.6 (4)	63.5 (1)	55.7 (3)	59.0 (2)
<b>Party-Adjusted Policy Success Score (Rank)</b>	28.3 (4)	29.0 (2)	24.8 (5)	28.4 (3)	38.1 (1)
<b>Overall Event Success Score (Rank)</b>	57.3 (4)	50.2 (5)	59.2 (3)	60.4 (2)	62.9 (1)
<b>Presidential Success Score (Rank)</b>	<b>43.7 (5)</b>	<b>43.9 (4)</b>	<b>49.2 (2)</b>	<b>48.2 (3)</b>	<b>53.3 (1)</b>

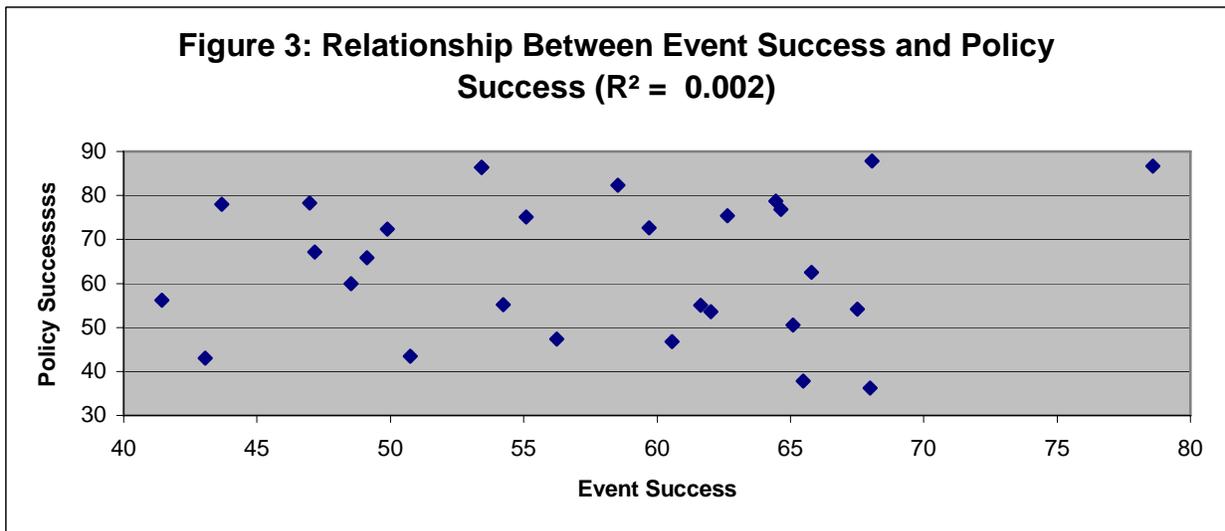
Source: Data above



Source: Data above



Source: Data above



Source: Data above

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