



## AP<sup>®</sup> United States Government & Politics 2003 Sample Student Responses

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#1

Recently America has seen the consequences for a President who has character or personal problems during a Presidency. When a scandal is discovered typically a President's approval ratings will drop because the public feels cheated or upset with their mistakes. As seen in both Clinton's Presidency as well as Nixon the American public turned dramatically against the President once their scandal was unveiled. This is also related to the press, because they have so much power over public opinion, if they focus on a character flaw soon the general public will only associate that one aspect to the President.

Another factor that can lower approval ratings is a failed war effort. Because America likes to think of itself as a great superpower any blow to that image is seen as a great weakness for the President. This was demonstrated during Johnson's term when in the middle of Vietnam.

Because the war was looking like a failure with an enormous amount of American casualties the confidence in the President fell drastically. The American people had no one else to blame so they lashed out against the President.

In contrast public opinion is often highest during a successful wartime situation. More jobs are created and people feel as though they are supporting a heroic effort. The average American feels inclined

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to rally behind the troops and the view of "us vs. them" creates strong unity among the American people. When the people are satisfied they tend to be more in favor of their president.

Yet another time when there is typically higher approval ratings is when the economy is prosperous. If the president has worked to create jobs or boost the economy in a way that seems to be working the people will have more money and a general positive outlook on life. If a person feels as though they have strong job security they will feel grateful and be supportive of the president who worked to provide it for them.

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Presidential approval ratings fluctuate from month to month and year to year throughout a president's term and serve as a barometer for public opinion. Such things as scandal, failure/success in legislation or war, prosperity, and simply the looming end of a president's term can all affect approval ratings. ~~For example,~~ Scandal, for example, tends to not only affect the sitting president but sometimes his successor, such as Nixon's Watergate scandal and Ford's decision to pardon Nixon. Scandals can taint even presidents' revered as successful such as President Reagan (Iran-Contra) and President Clinton (Paula Jones, White Water, Monica Lewinsky). Defeats or failure abroad can also affect approval ratings. Vietnam ~~stifled~~ stifled many approval ratings. Sometimes approval ratings decline as a president prepares to leave office, such as Bush Sr's approval dropping from 90% ~~to 40%~~ after the Gulf War to 40% before he left office. President Clinton's approval also waned as he signed over 100 pardons in the last hours of his administration. Success abroad in war can boost a president's ratings as easily as it can deflate them, Presidents Woodrow Wilson and FDR basked in the glow of the U.S.'s victories overseas. Even

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Eisenhower enjoyed high ratings simply because of his involvement in WWII as a general. Prosperity ~~also~~ and unity also boosts presidential approval as exemplified by President Clinton also being remembered for his balanced budget and the eight years of prosperity that fell under his administration. Presidential ratings rise and fall through out each administration, but regardless of the direction in which the ratings move, it is usually events that receive large amounts of publicity that cause the movement.

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Presidential approval ratings are by no means constant. They fluctuate over the course of each presidential administration. There are several factors that cause this fluctuation, some good and some bad.

Decreases in presidential approval ratings is bad. This can have a negative effect on their effectiveness and severely hurt their chances for re-election. One cause for a decrease in approval ratings could be due to too much activity in a short period of time. Change is hard to deal with. If too much change occurs in a short period of time, people's negativity toward these changes can show in the president's approval ratings. On the opposite side of the coin, if a president is felt to not be doing enough, this can also hurt them.

No one likes taxes. What people like is when they have to pay less of them. It is almost guaranteed that if the president lowers taxes, his approval rating will go up. Another factor that could increase presidential approval ratings is war. The commander in chief gets respect and approval during war time.

Approval ratings depend on the actions of the president. They are bound to fluctuate over time, and all you can do is try to hope for the best.