

Is the era of presidential ‘honeymoons’ over?

Average approval rating, disapproval rating and net approval rating in FiveThirtyEight’s presidential approval tracker in the first six months of an elected president’s term, since World War II

ELECTED	PRESIDENT	AVERAGE OVER FIRST SIX MONTHS OF FIRST TERM		
		APPROVAL	DISAPPROVAL	NET
2016	Donald Trump	41 . 4	52 . 2	- 10 . 8
2008	Barack Obama	60 . 2	30 . 8	+29 . 4
2000	George W. Bush	53 . 9	28 . 1	+25 . 7
1992	Bill Clinton	50 . 5	36 . 4	+14 . 1
1988	George H.W. Bush	62 . 3	16 . 1	+46 . 2
1980	Ronald Reagan	60 . 7	21 . 5	+39 . 2
1976	Jimmy Carter	66 . 0	15 . 0	+50 . 9
1968	Richard Nixon	61 . 6	11 . 2	+50 . 5
1960	John Kennedy	74 . 5	8 . 6	+65 . 9
1952	Dwight Eisenhower	71 . 0	9 . 7	+61 . 3

Excludes Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson and Gerald Ford, who ascended to the White House from the vice presidency rather than by election.

SOURCE: POLLS

Critical Analysis

1. According to the chart above, during the first six months of Dwight Eisenhower’s presidency, what percent of Americans disapproved of his presidency?
2. According to the chart above, over the past 60+ years, what is one trend in the net approval ratings for presidents in the “[honeymoon period](#)” - the early period of their presidency?
3. What do you reckon (think) is the main reason for that trend?
4. How does that trend impact a president’s ability to govern?
5. Gallup [has also found](#) that presidential honeymoon periods are getting shorter and shorter. By the last few decades of the 20th century, the typical honeymoon period had shrunk to seven months, down from an average of 26 months earlier in American history. Explain whether this is good news.
6. According to FiveThirtyEight, Joe Biden currently has approximately a [+20 point net approval rating](#). How does that compare to historical averages in the chart above?

7. How do you think this net approval rating will impact Biden's ability to govern?
8. Why do you think [Trump's disapproval ratings were so high at both the beginning and the end of his presidency?](#)
9. Both President George W. Bush in 2000, and Donald Trump in 2016 lost the popular vote but won the presidency. Bill Clinton won the presidency in 1992, but with a plurality, not a majority of the popular vote. How did these narrow presidential victories impact their approval ratings during the first six months of their presidencies?
10. Whatever their initial approval ratings are, what generally happens to presidential approval ratings as their term progresses?
11. Based on this data in the chart, do you believe Biden will be reelected?
12. There once was a thing called a presidential [honeymoon](#) (it's one of our GoPo Pro [vocab terms](#)), where presidents were basically supported for their first 100 days-or so in office. What do you think the Biden honeymoon will be like?
13. Explain whether you think Biden's relatively high approval rating will help his administration fight the Coronavirus.
14. If President Biden were a Star Wars character, which character would he be and why?

Learning Extension

Read the FiveThirtyEight article: [Is the Presidential Honeymoon Over?](#)

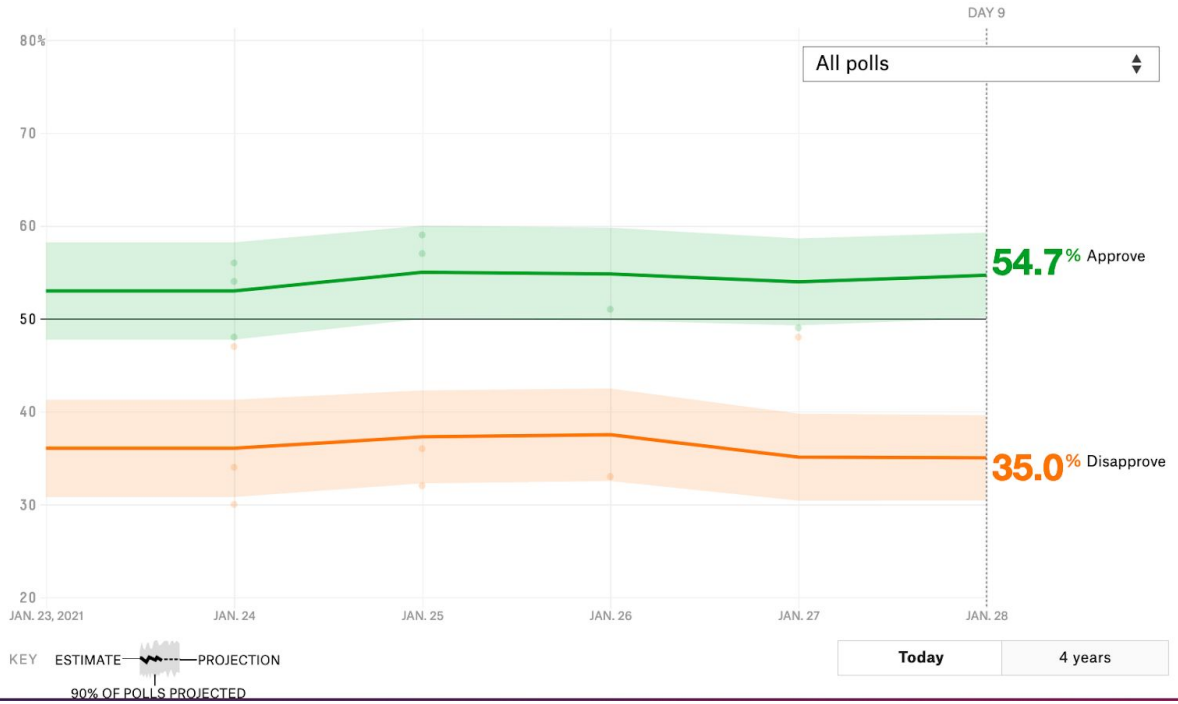
Action Extension

Take an unscientific sample of ten of your peers. Ask them if they have a favorable opinion of Joseph Biden. Compare your numbers to the FiveThirtyEight's numbers below* and share your findings online or in class!

Visual Extension

How popular is Joe Biden?

An updating calculation of the president's approval rating, accounting for each poll's quality, recency, sample size and partisan lean. [How this works »](#)

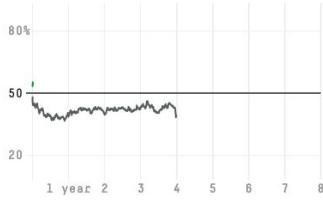


How Biden compares with past presidents

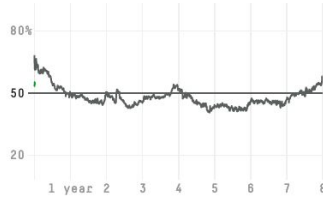
Approval rating Disapproval rating Net approval

9 days 4 years **8 years**

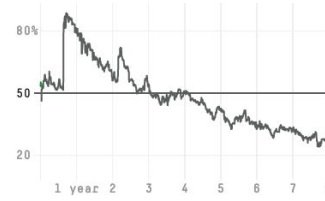
Donald Trump 2017-2021



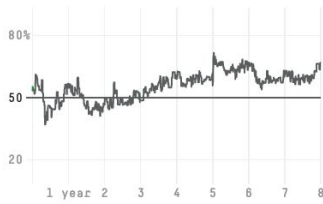
Barack Obama 2009-17



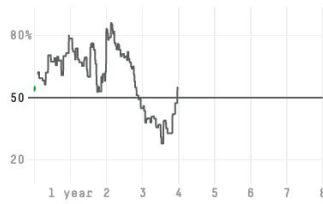
George W. Bush 2001-09



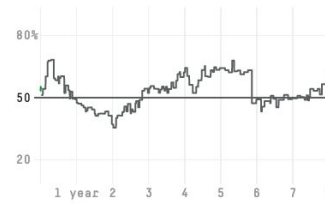
Bill Clinton 1993-2001



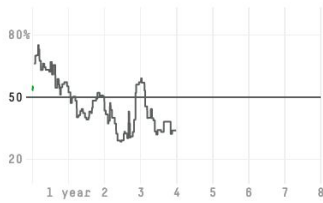
George H.W. Bush 1989-93



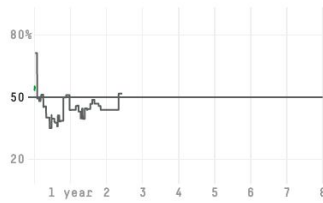
Ronald Reagan 1981-89



Jimmy Carter 1977-81



Gerald Ford 1974-77



Richard Nixon 1969-74

