

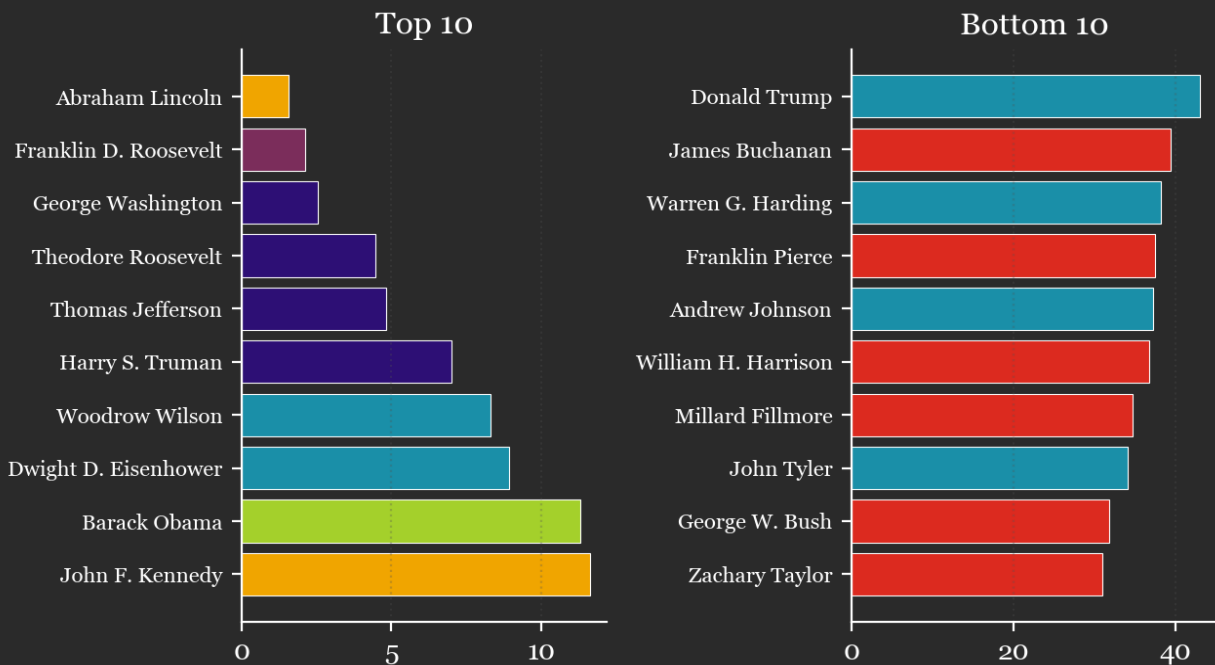
Aggregated Presidential Rankings

Context

Historians, political scientists, and journalists have ranked United States presidents in 25 published surveys spanning 1948 to 2024. Individually each survey reflects the moment it was taken, the ideology of its panel, and whatever crisis happened to dominate the news cycle. In aggregate the rankings deliver something sturdier: a consensus that shifts only slowly and tends to converge on the same hierarchy. I averaged the ranks of 45 presidents across every available survey to produce a single composite ranking.

The Consensus Top and Bottom

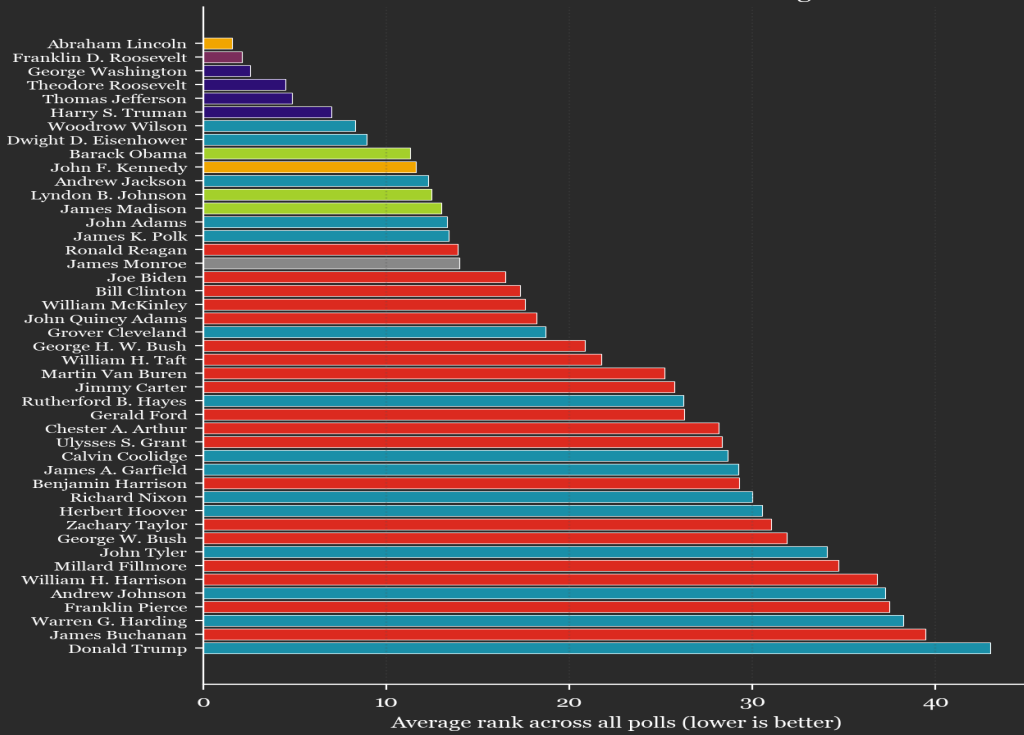
The top of the consensus is remarkably stable across decades. Lincoln, Washington, and Franklin Roosevelt occupy the top three slots in nearly every poll, regardless of which party commissioned it. Theodore Roosevelt and Jefferson round out the typical top five. The bottom of the list is similarly consistent. Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Pierce, and Harding cycle through the bottom five in poll after poll. The current bottom three by average are Donald Trump, James Buchanan, and Warren G. Harding.



All 45 by Consensus

Plotted left to right, the full list shows a remarkably even gradient. There are no large gaps in the middle of the distribution. Presidents ranked between 15 and 35 are within a few points of each other, which means small movements in any single poll can shuffle the middle considerably. Bars are colored by party, with red-orange for Republican, teal for Democratic, and other parties in unique hues.

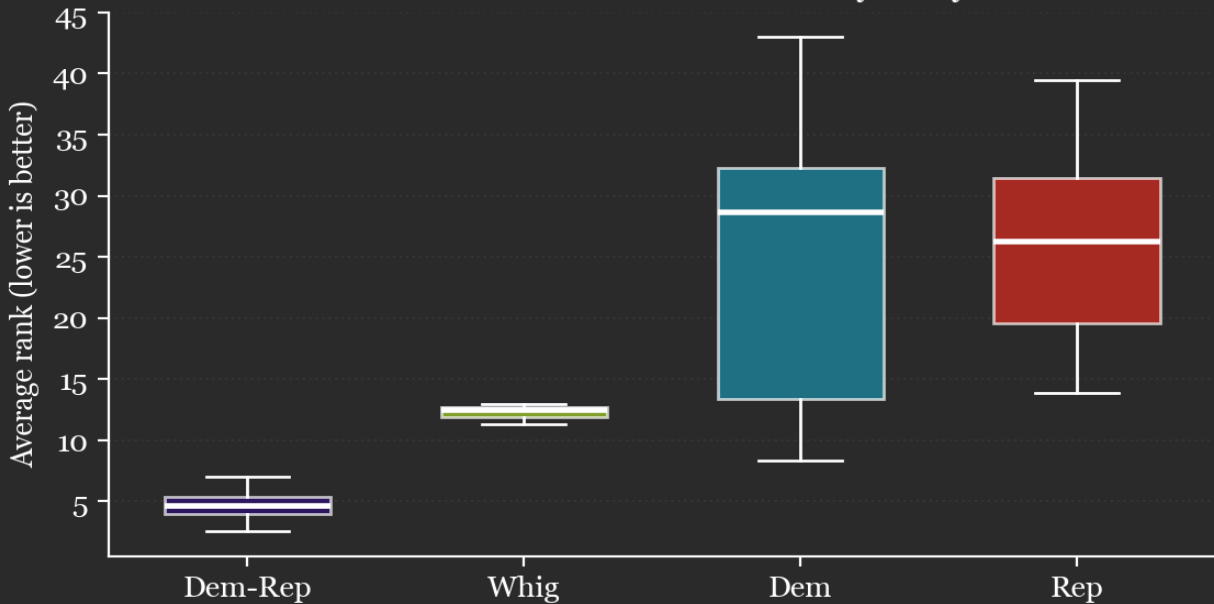
Consensus Presidential Ranking



Party Distribution

Distinguishing by party reveals two findings. First, Democratic presidents have a slightly better median consensus rank than Republicans, but the spread within each modern party is wider than the gap between them. Second, the small early parties (Federalist, Democratic-Republican, Whig) skew toward the middle. Their medians sit near twenty out of forty-five, neither distinguished nor disgraced.

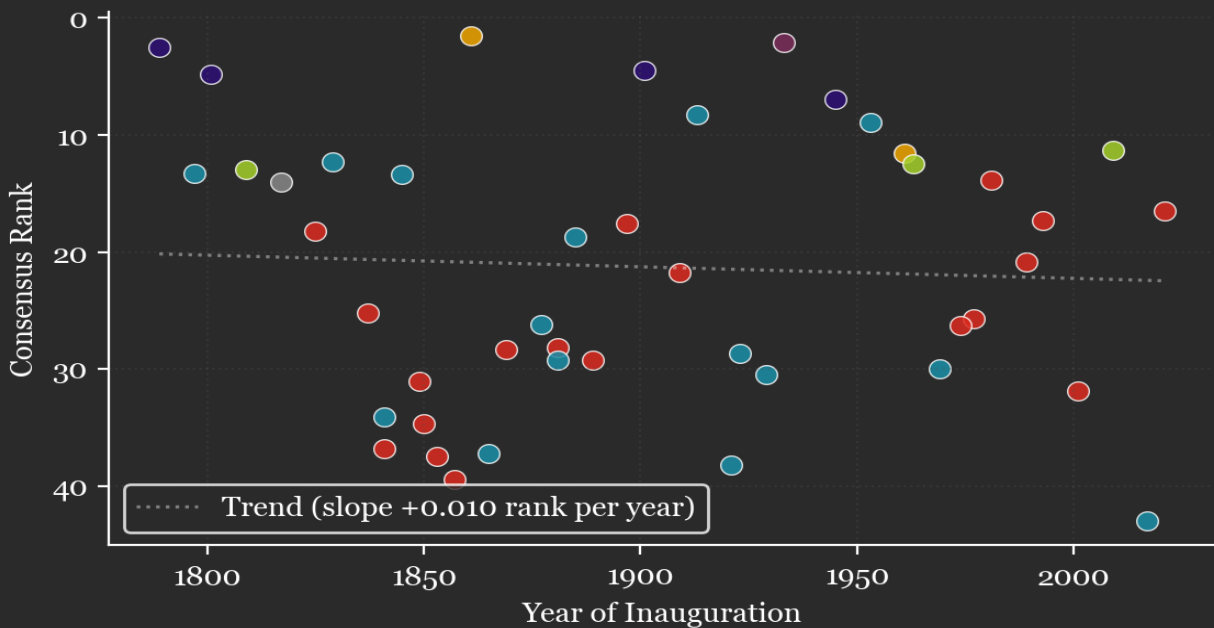
Consensus Rank Distribution by Party



Trend Over Time

Plotting consensus rank against year of inauguration shows a faint downward trend of 0.010 rank points per year, meaning more recent presidents tend to score slightly worse than older ones. The effect is small and noisy. Recency bias plausibly explains some of it. Modern presidents lack the historical distance that softens reputations, and active controversy still attaches to anyone within living memory. But the same pattern would also be consistent with the office becoming harder to do well in over time.

Presidential Rank Over Time



Takeaways

Three observations are worth noting. The consensus top five and bottom five are essentially settled. Lincoln, Washington, Franklin Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, and Jefferson have not relinquished the top, and Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Pierce, Harding, and Trump have not escaped the bottom. The middle is volatile. Adams, Madison, Monroe, Cleveland, and Carter all swing across single-digit ranges of average rank depending on the era of the poll. And the variance within parties exceeds the variance between them. Party affiliation predicts much less about how a president will be remembered than tenure, era, and what the presidency required of them.