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# Obama Tops Public's List of Best President in Their Lifetime, Followed by Clinton, Reagan

*Reagan is top choice among Boomers, Silents*

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# Obama Tops Public's List of Best President in Their Lifetime, Followed by Clinton, Reagan

*Reagan is top choice among Boomers, Silents*

When asked which president has done the best job in their lifetimes, more Americans name Barack Obama than any other president. More than four-in-ten (44%) say Obama is the best or second best president of their lifetimes, compared with about a third who mention Bill Clinton (33%) or Ronald Reagan (32%).

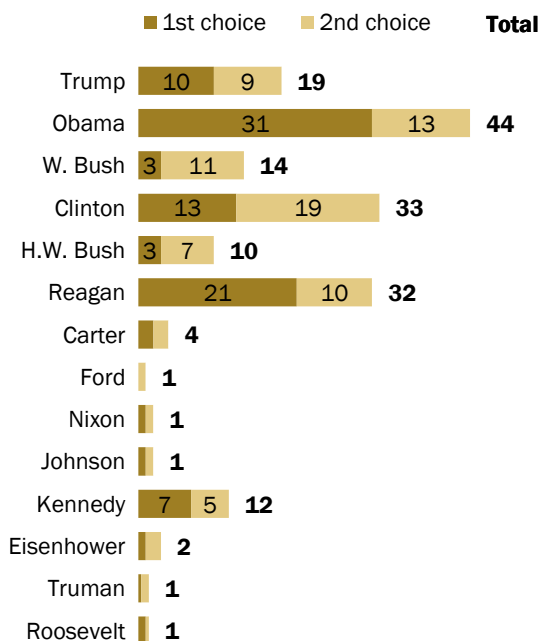
Not yet halfway through his term, 19% say Donald Trump has done the best or second best job of any president of their lifetimes. That is comparable with the share who viewed Obama as one of the best presidents in 2011 (20%).

The survey by Pew Research Center, conducted June 5-12 among 2,002 adults, asks people in an open-ended format which president has done the best job in their lifetimes. The analysis is based on their first and second choices.

About one-in-ten adults (12%) say John F. Kennedy did the best job in office during their lifetimes. But Kennedy is named as the best or second best president by about a quarter of those who were alive during his presidency: 24% of Baby Boomers and 25% of those in the Silent Generation.

## Which president has done the best job during your lifetime?

*% who say \_\_\_\_ has done the best job as U.S. president during their lifetime*



Notes: Don't know responses not shown. Numbers add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-12, 2018.

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## Generations' views of the best president

People's views of the best president of their lifetimes are partly tied to their ages. Millennials, who are currently ages 22 to 37, are far more likely than older generations to name Obama as one of the best presidents in their lifetimes: About six-in-ten Millennials (62%) view Obama as one of the top two, with nearly half, 46%, naming him the best president.

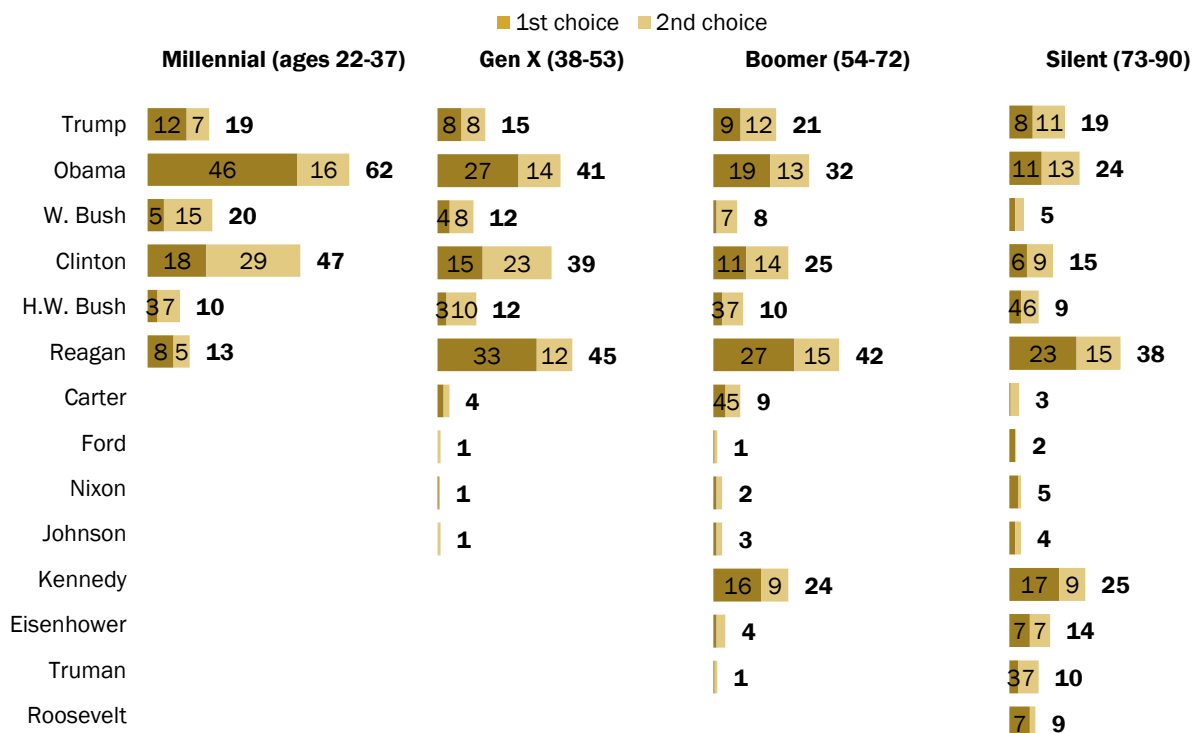
Older generations are much more likely than Millennials to name Reagan as one of the best presidents. Reagan was president before most Millennials were born.

Gen Xers (ages 38 to 53) are divided in their assessments: 45% of Gen Xers name Reagan, while nearly as many mention Obama (41%) or Clinton (39%).

Reagan is the top choice among Boomers (ages 54 to 72) and Silents (ages 73 to 90); about four-in-

### Millennials widely view Obama as one of the best presidents; more Boomers and Silents name Reagan more than other presidents

% who say \_\_\_ has done the best job as U.S. president during their lifetime



Notes: Don't know responses not shown. Numbers add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-12, 2018.

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ten in the two older generations name Reagan (42% of Boomers, 38% of Silents). But within both generations, there are a range of opinions, with Obama, Kennedy, Clinton and Trump all receiving mentions from 15% or more Boomers and Silents.

## Changing views of the best president

As was the case in 2011, many people, including many in the president's own party, do not name the current president as the best in their lifetimes.

Currently, 44% name Obama as their first or second choice for having done the best job of any president of their lifetimes, while 33% name Clinton, 32% Reagan and 19% Trump. In 2011, 49% said Clinton had been one of the top two presidents, compared with 34% who cited Reagan and 20% who mentioned Obama.

The share naming Obama has more than doubled since 2011 (from 20% to 44%), while the share mentioning Clinton has declined, from 49% to 33%.

The ratings for other presidents have not changed much since 2011: 32% cite Reagan (34% in 2011); 14% name George W. Bush (15% then); and 12% name Kennedy (15% then).

### More Americans name Obama as best president than did so in 2011; share citing Clinton has declined

*% who say \_\_\_\_ has done the best job as U.S. president during their lifetime*

	June 2018			Oct. 2011		
	1st choice	2nd choice	Total	1st choice	2nd choice	Total
Trump	10	9	19	N/A		
Obama	31	13	44	7	13	20
W. Bush	3	11	14	5	10	15
Clinton	13	19	33	34	15	49
H.W. Bush	3	7	10	3	9	12
Reagan	21	10	32	25	9	34
Carter	1	3	4	1	5	6
Ford	1	0	1	1	0	1
Nixon	1	0	1	3	0	3
Johnson	1	0	1	2	0	2
Kennedy	7	5	12	7	7	15
Eisenhower	1	1	2	1	3	4
Truman	1	0	1	1	1	2
Roosevelt	1	0	1	1	2	3

Notes: Don't know responses not shown. Numbers add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-12, 2018.

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## Partisan differences in views of best president

A sizable majority of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents say Barack Obama (71%) is the best (51%) or second best (20%) president in their lifetimes. About half of Democrats name Clinton (49%). Another 14% of Democrats name Kennedy as one of their top two, 12% name Reagan and 10% mention George W. Bush.

In 2011, Clinton was named most often as the best or second best president by 69% of Democrats, while 36% named Obama.

A majority of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents say Reagan (57%) ranks in the top two presidents in their lifetimes. Another 40% of Republicans name Trump, while 20% name George W. Bush, 16% name George H.W. Bush and 15% mention Clinton.

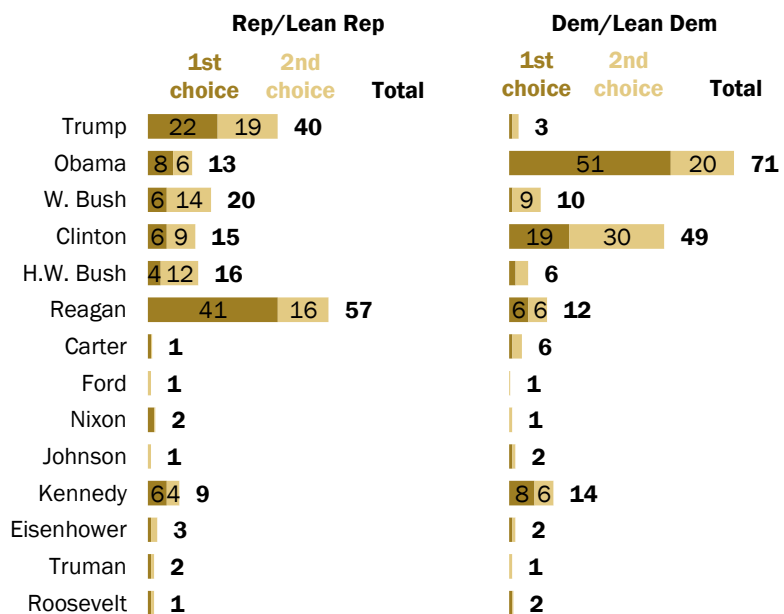
Republicans' choices for the best president also have changed since 2011, though the share pointing to Reagan has not changed since then (57%).

Republicans are less likely to name Clinton than in 2011 (28% then, 15% today), while somewhat more say Obama has done the best job of any president of their lifetimes (5% then, 13% today).

Republicans' evaluations of other presidents, Republican and Democratic, have changed little. One-in-five Republicans say George W. Bush is the best president of their lifetimes (27% said this in 2011); 16% say Bush's father, George H.W. Bush, is the best president (20% in 2011).

### Democrats overwhelmingly say Obama has done 'best job' as president; most Republicans name Reagan

*% who say \_\_\_\_ has done the best job as U.S. president during their lifetime*



Notes: Don't know responses not shown. Numbers add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-12, 2018.

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## Acknowledgements

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

### Research team

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## Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted June 5-12, 2018 among a national sample of 2,002 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (502 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 1,500 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 998 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers under the direction of Abt Associates. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample is weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2016 Census Bureau's American Community Survey one-year estimates and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cell phone only, or both landline and cell phone), based on extrapolations from the 2016 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

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*Survey conducted June 5-12, 2018*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	2,002	2.6 percentage points
Rep/Lean Rep	836	4.0 percentage points
Dem/Lean Dem	964	3.7 percentage points

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Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Pew Research Center undertakes all polling activity, including calls to mobile telephone numbers, in compliance with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and other applicable laws.

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JUNE 2018 POLITICAL SURVEY  
FINAL TOPLINE  
JUNE 5 – 12, 2018  
N=2,002**

**QUESTIONS 1-2, 6-7, 10 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****NO QUESTIONS 3-5, 8-9****ASK ALL:**

Q.11 Now thinking about all of the U.S. presidents during your lifetime, which ONE has done the best job as president? **[OPEN END DO NOT READ]** **[INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTIONS: ACCEPT LAST NAME BUT PROBE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN GEORGE W. BUSH AND GEORGE H.W. BUSH. IF RESPONDENT VOLUNTEERS A NAME NOT ON THIS LIST, CLARIFY "a president during your lifetime"]**

**ASK IF NAMED A PRESIDENT (Q.11=1-15):**

Q.12 And which president, if any, would you name second? **[OPEN END DO NOT READ]**  
**[PROGRAMMING NOTE: REMOVE PUNCH FOR RESPONSE IN Q11]** **[INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION: ACCEPT LAST NAME BUT PROBE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN GEORGE W. BUSH AND GEORGE H.W. BUSH IF RESPONDENT VOLUNTEERS A NAME NOT ON THIS LIST, CLARIFY "a president during your lifetime"]**

Jun 5-12, 2018

<u>First choice</u>	<u>Second choice</u>	<u>Total</u>	
31	13	44	Barack Obama
13	19	33	Bill Clinton
21	10	32	Ronald Reagan
10	9	19	Donald Trump
3	11	14	George W. Bush
7	5	12	John F. Kennedy
3	7	10	George H.W. Bush
2	2	4	Jimmy Carter
1	2	2	Dwight Eisenhower
1	1	1	Lyndon Johnson
1	1	1	Richard Nixon
1	*	1	Franklin Roosevelt
*	1	1	Harry Truman
*	*	1	Gerald Ford
*	0	*	Herbert Hoover
3	8	3	None
3	4	3	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>
--	<b>6</b>	--	<i>No first choice</i>

**Q.11/Q.12 TREND FOR COMPARISON...**

<u>October, 2011</u>			
<u>First choice</u>	<u>Second choice</u>	<u>Total</u>	
34	15	49	Bill Clinton
25	9	34	Ronald Reagan
7	7	15	John F. Kennedy
7	13	20	Barack Obama
5	10	15	George W. Bush
3	9	12	George H.W. Bush
2	4	6	Jimmy Carter

**Q.11/Q.12 TREND FOR COMPARISON CONTINUED...**

<u>October, 2011</u>			
<u>First</u>	<u>Second</u>		
<u>choice</u>	<u>choice</u>	<u>Total</u>	
2	1	3	Franklin Roosevelt
2	3	4	Dwight Eisenhower
2	1	2	Harry Truman
1	2	3	Richard Nixon
1	1	2	Lyndon Johnson
*	1	1	Gerald Ford
0	*	*	Herbert Hoover
3	8	3	None
7	7	7	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>
--	10	--	<i>No first choice</i>

**QUESTIONS 20-21, 25-32, 38-42, 60, 68-69, 82-83, 90-94, 100-105 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

**NO QUESTIONS 13-19, 22-24, 33-37, 43-59, 61-67, 70-81, 84-89, 95-99**

**ASK ALL:**

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

**ASK IF INDEP/NO PREF/OTHER/DK/REF (PARTY=3,4,5,9):**

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	<u>(VOL.)</u> No preference	<u>(VOL.)</u> Other party	<u>(VOL.)</u> DK/Ref	<u>Lean</u> Rep	<u>Lean</u> Dem
Jun 5-12, 2018	25	31	38	3	1	2	15	18
Apr 25-May 1, 2018	27	28	38	4	1	2	14	19
Mar 7-14, 2018	26	28	41	3	*	1	17	18
Jan 10-15, 2018	26	33	34	3	1	3	12	18
Nov 29-Dec 4, 2017	20	32	40	4	1	3	13	19
Oct 25-30, 2017	22	32	41	3	1	2	17	19
Jun 8-Jul 9, 2017	25	31	39	3	1	2	16	18
<b>Yearly Totals</b>								
2017	23.6	31.4	39.4	3.3	.6	1.7	15.8	18.7
2016	25.4	32.0	36.5	3.4	.5	2.2	14.6	17.0
2015	23.7	30.4	40.1	3.6	.4	1.8	16.4	17.3
2014	23.2	31.5	39.5	3.1	.7	2.0	16.2	16.5
2013	23.9	32.1	38.3	2.9	.5	2.2	16.0	16.0
2012	24.7	32.6	36.4	3.1	.5	2.7	14.4	16.1
2011	24.3	32.3	37.4	3.1	.4	2.5	15.7	15.6
2010	25.2	32.7	35.2	3.6	.4	2.8	14.5	14.1
2009	23.9	34.4	35.1	3.4	.4	2.8	13.1	15.7
2008	25.7	36.0	31.5	3.6	.3	3.0	10.6	15.2
2007	25.3	32.9	34.1	4.3	.4	2.9	10.9	17.0
2006	27.8	33.1	30.9	4.4	.3	3.4	10.5	15.1
2005	29.3	32.8	30.2	4.5	.3	2.8	10.3	14.9
2004	30.0	33.5	29.5	3.8	.4	3.0	11.7	13.4
2003	30.3	31.5	30.5	4.8	.5	2.5	12.0	12.6
2002	30.4	31.4	29.8	5.0	.7	2.7	12.4	11.6
2001	29.0	33.2	29.5	5.2	.6	2.6	11.9	11.6
2001 Post-Sept 11	30.9	31.8	27.9	5.2	.6	3.6	11.7	9.4
2001 Pre-Sept 11	27.3	34.4	30.9	5.1	.6	1.7	12.1	13.5
2000	28.0	33.4	29.1	5.5	.5	3.6	11.6	11.7
1999	26.6	33.5	33.7	3.9	.5	1.9	13.0	14.5
1998	27.9	33.7	31.1	4.6	.4	2.3	11.6	13.1
1997	28.0	33.4	32.0	4.0	.4	2.3	12.2	14.1

## PARTY/PARTYLN CONTINUED...

	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	(VOL.) No preference	(VOL.) Other party	(VOL.) DK/Ref	Lean <u>Rep</u>	Lean <u>Dem</u>
1996	28.9	33.9	31.8	3.0	.4	2.0	12.1	14.9
1995	31.6	30.0	33.7	2.4	.6	1.3	15.1	13.5
1994	30.1	31.5	33.5	1.3	--	3.6	13.7	12.2
1993	27.4	33.6	34.2	4.4	1.5	2.9	11.5	14.9
1992	27.6	33.7	34.7	1.5	0	2.5	12.6	16.5
1991	30.9	31.4	33.2	0	1.4	3.0	14.7	10.8
1990	30.9	33.2	29.3	1.2	1.9	3.4	12.4	11.3
1989	33	33	34	--	--	--	--	--
1987	26	35	39	--	--	--	--	--