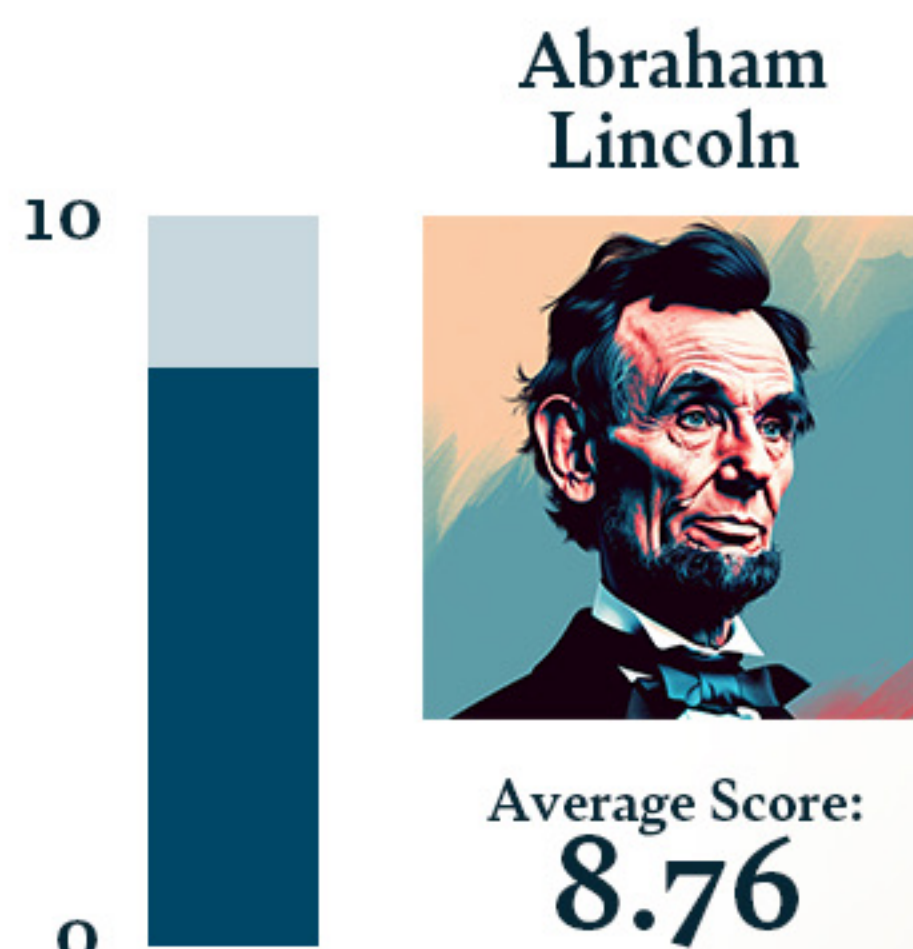
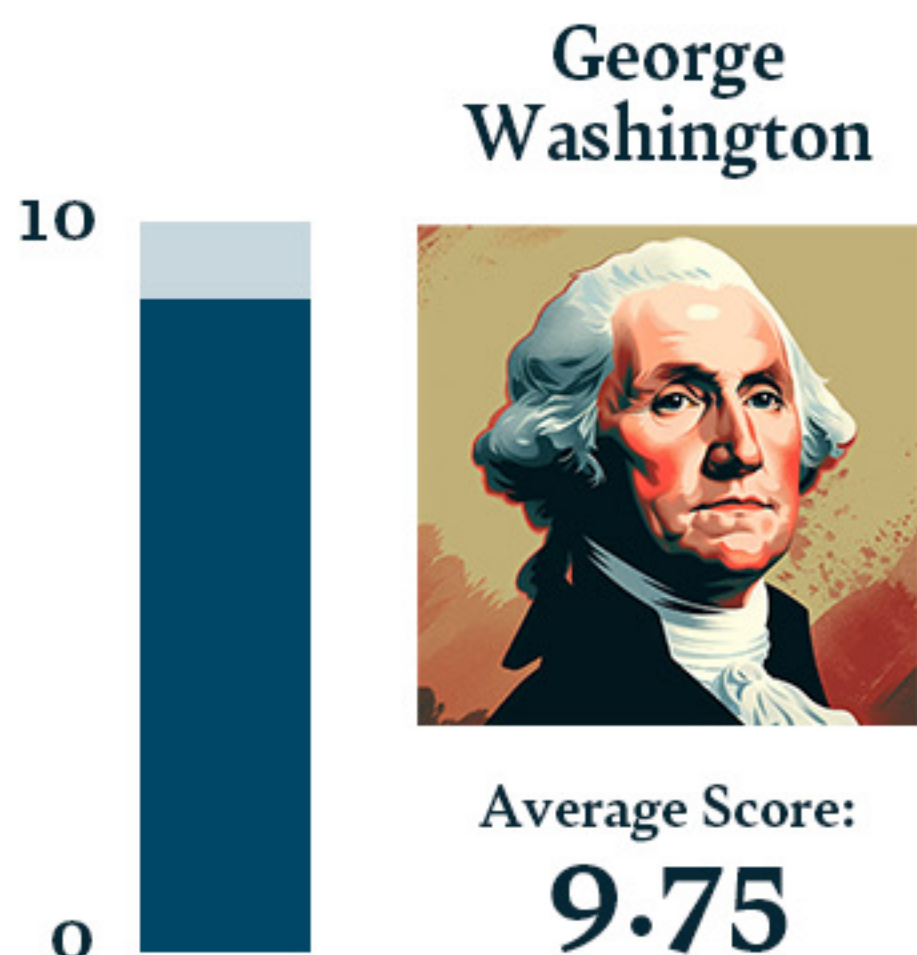


Presidential Ranking Survey

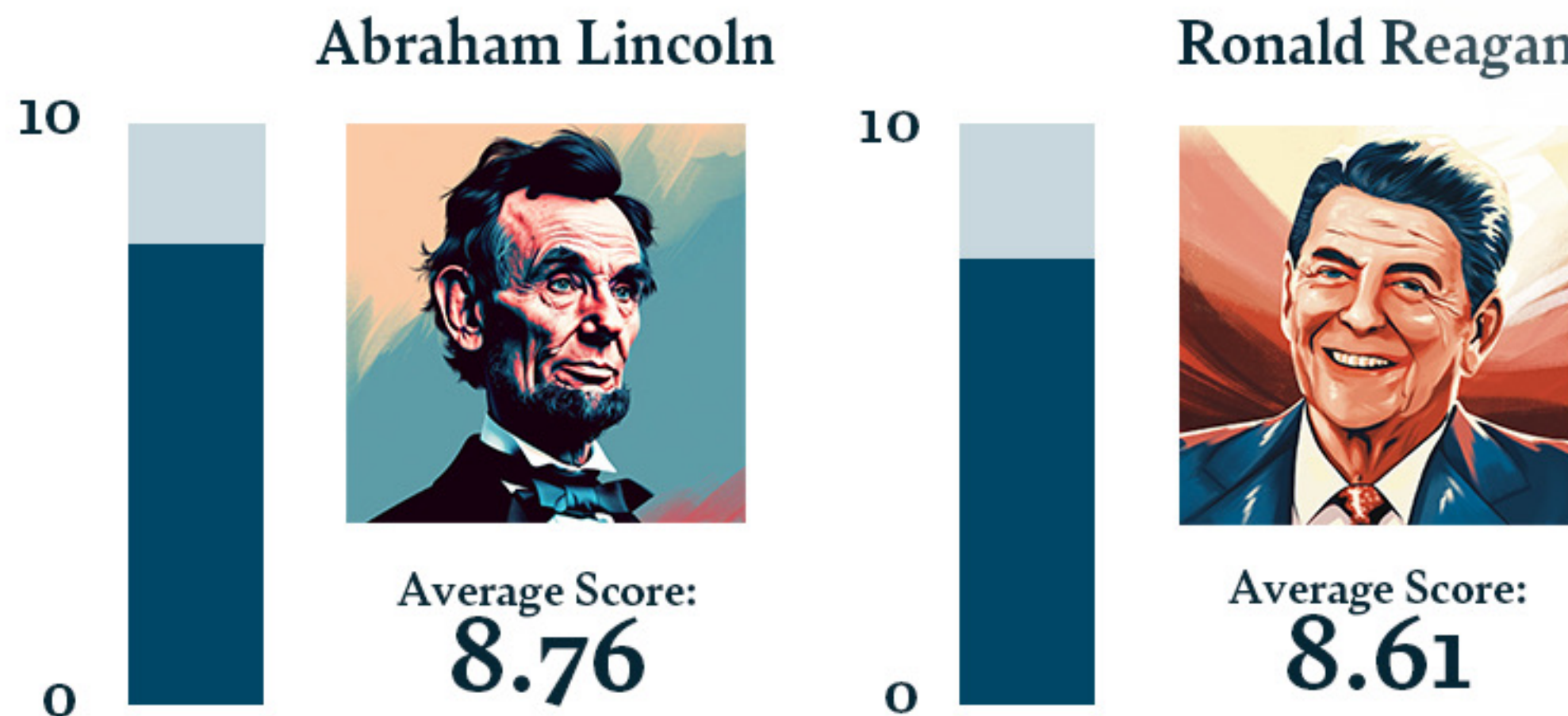
ANALYSIS

There is some agreement between conservatives and liberals on who were the greatest and/or very good presidents (Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Eisenhower, and T. Roosevelt) and who were the failed presidents (Pierce, Buchanan, and A. Johnson).

Conservatives agree with liberals, for example, that Washington and Lincoln are among the greatest presidents in American history. In the words of one respondent, “Washington and Lincoln [are] in a league of their own. Nobody else comes close.” However, while liberals have often ranked Lincoln and FDR above Washington, conservatives chose Washington as the greatest president by a significant margin. As one respondent said, “Without [Washington’s] example and steady hand, the nation may never have gotten off the ground.” In fact, Washington has the lowest standard deviation, at .629. By contrast, Lincoln has the third-highest standard deviation at 2.40.



Conservative esteem for Reagan is very high—his average is close to Lincoln’s ranking. According to one respondent, Reagan “was a visionary whose moral clarity helped usher in the end of the Cold War.” He also had the third-lowest standard deviation at 1.43.



The top ten presidents, according to our survey, include all of the first five (Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe), reflecting conservatives’ admiration for the Founding Fathers.

TOP 10

While conservatives agree with liberals that Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Eisenhower were great/very good presidents, they also esteem other lesser-known presidents. Coolidge cracked the top four, Monroe was seventh, and Cleveland was 11th.

Rank		Average Score
1.	Washington	9.75
2.	Lincoln	8.76
3.	Reagan	8.61
4.	Coolidge	7.68
5.	Jefferson	7.59
6.	Eisenhower	7.37
7.	Monroe	6.78
8.	Madison	6.62
9.	J. Adams	6.60
10.	T. Roosevelt	6.55

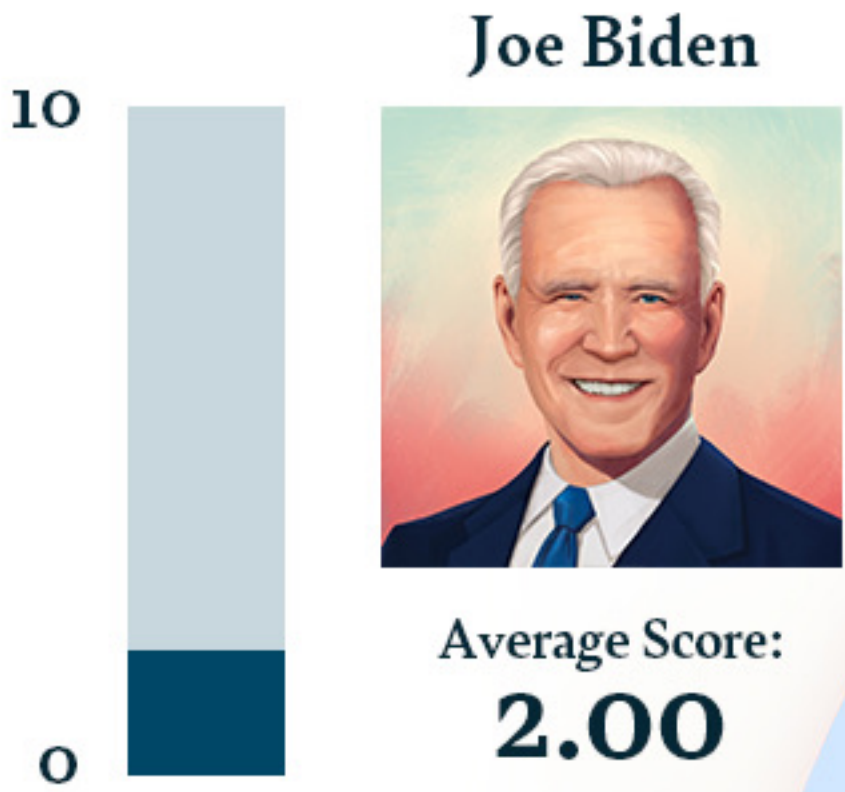
The bottom half of presidents in our ranking includes most of the recent chief executives (G.H.W. Bush, Clinton, G.W. Bush, Obama, and Biden). Popular Democratic presidents FDR and JFK landed near the middle, the result of polarized ratings. Conservatives have a bit of a love/hate relationship with them. FDR had the highest standard deviation at 2.99.

BOTTOM 10

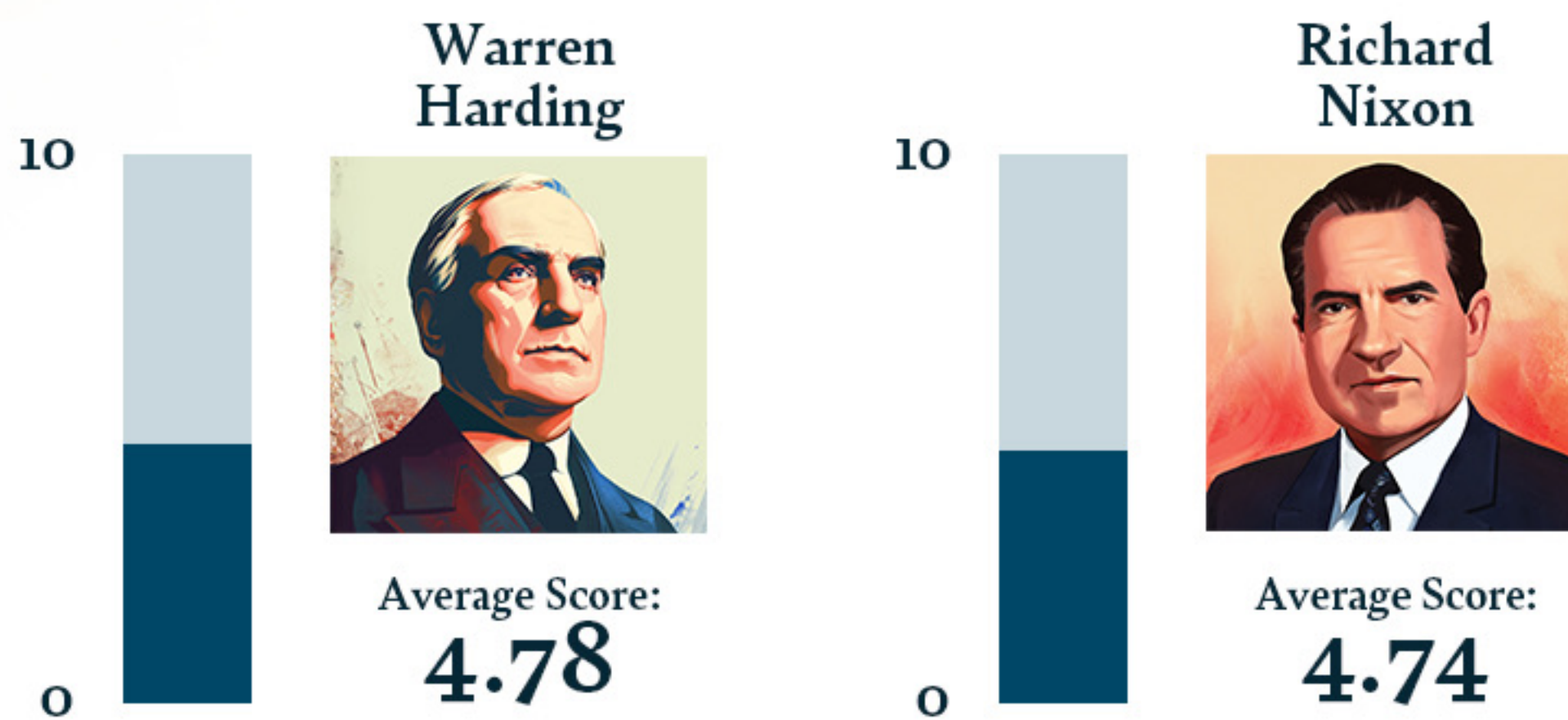
Rank	Average Score
33. Hoover	4.00
34. Filmore	3.90
35. L.B. Johnson	3.47
36. Pierce	3.21
37. Wilson	3.10
38. Obama	3.08
39. Carter	2.98
40. A. Johnson	2.52
41. Buchanan	2.10
42. Biden	2.00

Conservatives expressed a strong dislike for modern liberal presidents, especially Wilson, L. Johnson, Carter, Obama, and Biden. Although conservatives tended to rate “controversial” presidents, such as Jackson and Polk, more highly than liberals did, it wasn’t by much, suggesting that conservatives have embraced similar negative views that liberals hold on these presidents’ controversial decisions, such as initiating wars, fighting Indians, failing to stop scandals, etc.

Conservative regard for Biden is very low—he is ranked the worst president, even below Buchanan and A. Johnson. One respondent described Biden as “the most defective and most unfit chief executive in American history.”



Conservatives join liberals in giving Harding and Nixon below-average ratings, despite both being Republicans.



Respondents pointed out three dilemmas of surveys like this one.

First, it was difficult to rate presidents whom they felt performed well in one category, but poorly in another. The result was often an average of the two categories, but was considered fundamentally different from a president who was mediocre across multiple categories. As one respondent said, “If you rated FDR as ‘war president’ you’d give him a high mark; for the economy, a low mark. For me, that took him to an ‘average’ overall ranking...”

Second, some respondents felt uncertain about using the terms “success” or “failure” to evaluate the presidents. They expressed confusion as to whether a president could be considered a “failure” if he was highly effective in implementing his agenda, even if his agenda led to harmful policies. In the words of one respondent, “Woodrow Wilson was not a ‘failed’ president, he was tremendously efficacious in advancing many of his objectives; that said, I want to downrank him because I judge many of those objectives bad.”

Third, some respondents felt the need to rate a president based, at least in part, on their achievements beyond their tenure in the White House. One respondent noted several of the founders whose greatness came largely before becoming president and added, “This applies especially, for example, to [John] Adams.”



METHODOLOGY

Our methodology was simple: we asked our respondents to rate each president on a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being the lowest (or a “failure”) and 10 being the highest rating (or a “great” president). Other surveys often ask respondents to rate presidents in different categories, such as foreign policy, domestic policy, and public persuasion, and then employ a formula with each category assigned a certain weight. This rigid approach, however, assumes every president should have prioritized each category according to the weight assigned in the formula.

The reality is every president faces circumstances that force him to prioritize these categories differently. Circumstances led Abraham Lincoln and Herbert Hoover to focus primarily on domestic issues. Is it fair to evaluate them on foreign policy the same way we would Woodrow Wilson and Harry Truman, who had more opportunities to make an impact on the global stage? You could argue a president would be irresponsible to prioritize foreign affairs in the event of a civil war or a major depression at home.

Moreover, the expectations for certain categories have changed over time. For example, other surveys often evaluate presidents on “public persuasion”—their ability to communicate to the American people and rally them behind a cause. Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan usually score highly in this category. The expectation, however, that presidents be effective communicators, is largely a 20th-century phenomenon, with the rise of radio and television. Earlier presidents were not expected to be a constant presence in Americans’ lives. This survey attempts to overcome an inherent bias that would penalize a president like Grover Cleveland, for example, merely because he was a “less effective” communicator than Bill Clinton. Our survey emphasizes the importance of rating every president within the context of the challenges and expectations of their own time.





While we did not offer a strict formula, we did offer our respondents four guidelines to keep in mind—guidelines that reflect our own values as an organization, which we believe transcend time and circumstances:

- Their adherence to the Constitution and the rule of law
- Their success in promoting national prosperity
- Their success in developing a well-considered, responsible foreign policy given the context of their time
- The difficulty of the circumstances in which they served

Our methodology involved reaching out to 535 individuals, 155 of whom responded to the survey, a 29.0% response rate. These respondents (75 of whom have PhDs) are all authorities and leaders within their respective fields of expertise, including academia, government, history, law, media, and politics. We then calculated the total ranking using the average rating of each president.

Three final notes:

- Two presidents, William Henry Harrison and James A. Garfield, were not included in our rankings, given the brevity of their terms and the inability to judge their effectiveness in carrying out their agenda.
 - We did not include Donald Trump because his tenure as president is ongoing and, therefore, cannot yet be judged in its totality.
 - While we use the term “conservative” in our analysis, we do so in a broad sense. We acknowledge that while many of our respondents identify as conservative, not all do.
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