Bush Defeats Truman

Tough But Familiar Numbers for Bush: High Disapproval on Job Performance, Iraq and Economy

ANALYSIS by GARY LANGER

April 14, 2008 —

At 39 months in the doghouse, George W. Bush has surpassed Harry Truman's record as the postwar president to linger longest without majority public approval.

Bush hasn't received majority approval for his work in office in ABC News/Washington Post polls since Jan. 16, 2005 three years and three months ago. The previous record was Truman's during his last 38 months in office.

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Truman's problems included both economic recession and the war in Korea, which, in October 1952, 56 percent of Americans said was not worth fighting. Bush's approval, likewise, has suffered overwhelmingly because of the unpopular war in Iraq; his job rating correlates almost perfectly with views of the war.

In the latest ABC/Post poll, just 33 percent of Americans approve of Bush's work, a point from his career-low 32 percent earlier this year. Sixty-four percent disapprove, with those who "strongly" disapprove outnumbering strong approvers by a 3-1 margin.

The president's rating has been remarkably stable 32 or 33 percent approval in the last nine national ABC/Post polls, comprising nearly 10,000 interviews since July. Indeed, Bush hasn't exceeded 36 percent approval since November 2006.

His rating specifically on handling the war in Iraq is equally poor 33 percent approve, 65 percent disapprove and on the economy it's even worse, with a record 70 percent disapproval.

GROUPS All of Bush's ratings are marked by sharp partisanship. Just 7 percent of Democrats approve of his work overall (a point from the low in this group) compared with 74 percent of Republicans. (Fewer Republicans, 59 percent, approve of his work on the economy, a career low.)

Indeed Bush's ratings have been more partisan on average than those of any president in ABC/Post polls dating to 1981 slightly more so than Bill Clinton's and Ronald Reagan's, and especially more so than Bush's father's. (Specifically, there's been an average 57-point gap between Democrats and Republicans in their ratings of Bush, compared with 54 points for Clinton, 50 points for Reagan and 34 points for Bush's father.)

Among Bush's lowest ratings in overall approval are 8 percent among strong opponents of the war, 9 percent of African-Americans and 17 percent of liberals; his highs, beyond Republicans, include 75 percent of war supporters and 77 percent among the few who say the economy's in good shape. In a larger group, conservatives, 56 percent approve.

The balance, as often is the case in U.S. politics, is tipped by the political center. Just 27 percent of independents and 23 percent of moderates approve of his job performance, the latter a career low for the president.

YEAR to YEAR Bush's year-to-year ratings help tell the tale. Bolstered by his response to 9/11, he averaged 72 percent approval in 2001, 74 percent in 2002 and 62 percent in 2003 66 in the first half of that year, but 56 percent in the second half as the war in Iraq continued.

As the war went on, Bush's ratings fell further to an average 50 percent in 2004 (remaining just high enough for him to win re-election), 46 percent in 2005, 39 percent in 2006 and 34 percent in 2007. He's averaged 33 percent so far this year.

Three other postwar presidents have gone lower than Bush's career-low 32 percent Truman at 22 percent; Richard Nixon, 24 percent; and Jimmy Carter, 28 percent. Similarly, just two presidents have seen lower full-year averages than Bush's in 2007 Nixon and Truman.

HIGHS and AVERAGES There's some irony in the fact that Bush, now record holder for the longest period below majority approval, also holds the highest approval rating 92 percent in an ABC/Post poll a month after the 9/11 attacks, unsurpassed in polling by ABC News since 1981 and by Gallup before it since December 1943.

The next highest rating was Bush's father's, at 90 percent during the 1991 Persian Gulf War; third was Truman irony again at 87 percent in June 1945, a month after VE Day.

Boosted by his pre-2004 ratings, Bush's average approval rating across his career is 51 percent. But he's still in the lower tier of postwar presidents. In the top rank are John Kennedy, Dwight Eisenhower and George H.W. Bush, with average ratings of 71, 65 and 63 percent, respectively. In the middle, Reagan, Clinton and Lyndon Johnson, at 57, 57 and 56 percent. And in the lower tier, Bush (so far), Nixon, Gerald Ford, Truman and Carter, with career averages ranging from 46 to 51 percent.

METHODOLOGY This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone April 10-13, 2008, among a random national sample of 1,197 adults, including an oversample of African-Americans for a total of 213 and an oversample of Catholics for a total of 292 (both weighted to their correct share of the national population). The results have a 3-point error margin for the full sample. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

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ABC NEWS/WASHINGTON POST POLL: BUSH/TRUMAN
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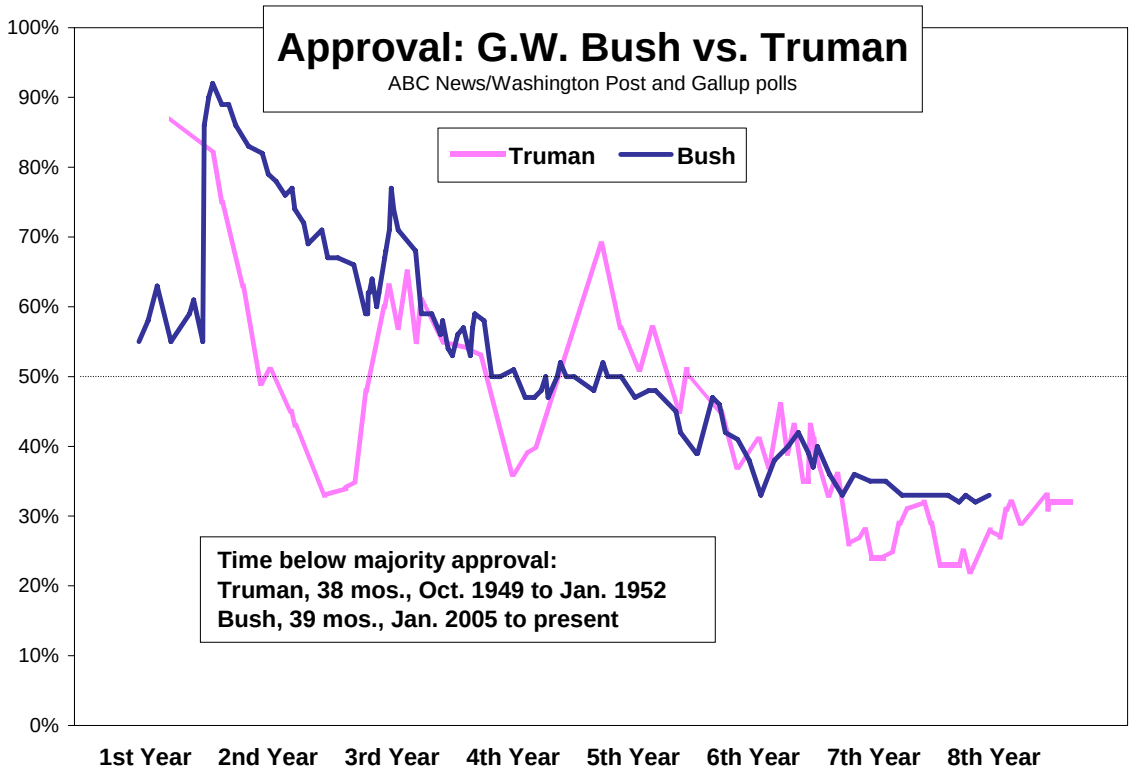

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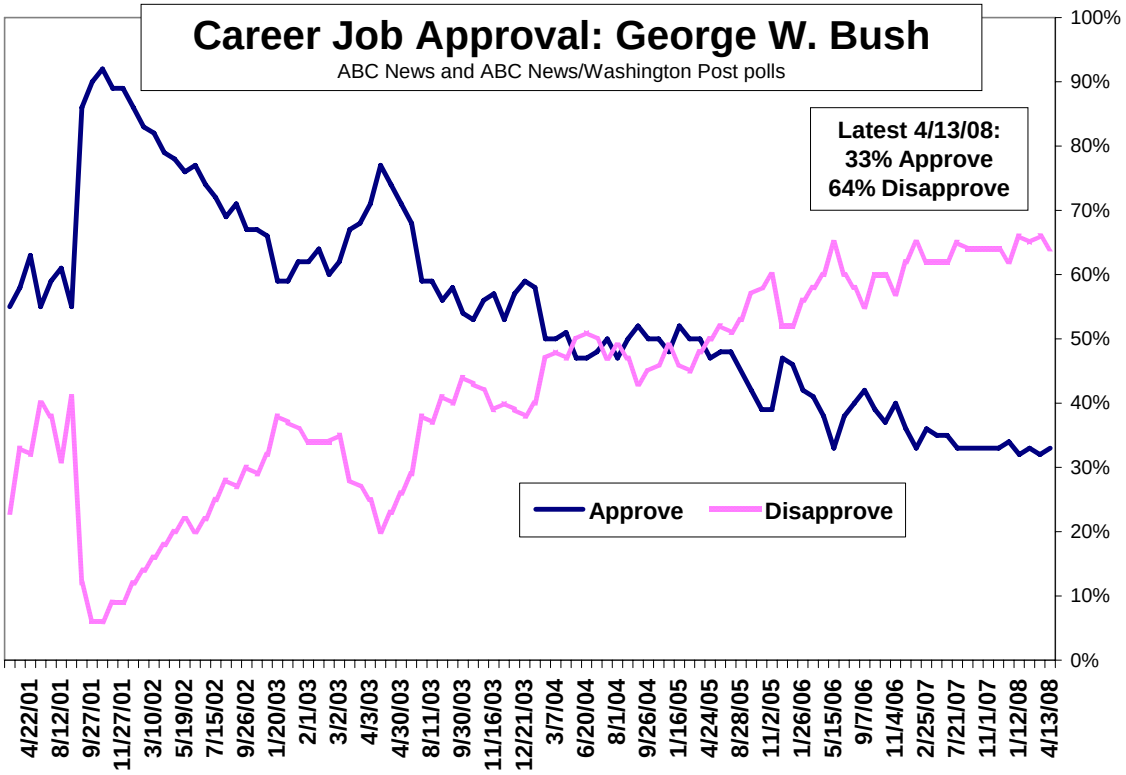

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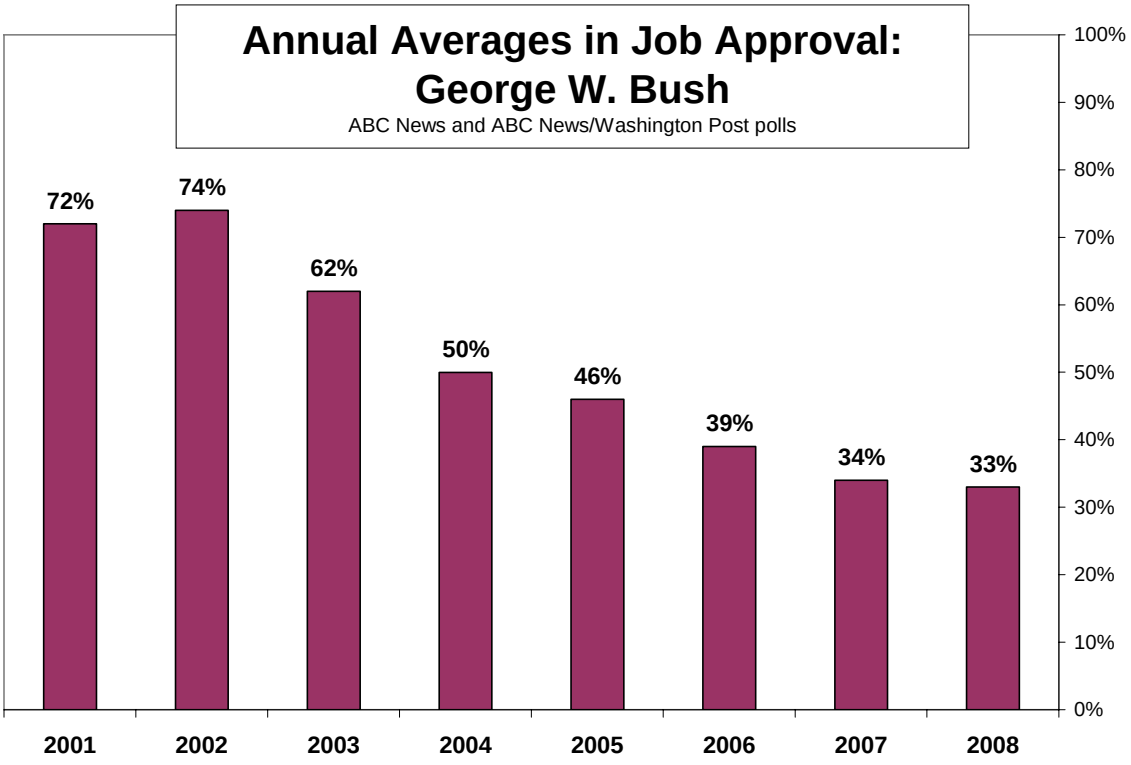

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Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at http://abcnews.com/pollingunit

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	-------- Approve --------			------- Disapprove ------			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
4/13/08	33	16	17	64	15	49	2
3/2/08	32	15	17	66	16	50	2
2/1/08	33	17	16	65	14	51	2
1/12/08	32	16	16	66	15	51	2
12/9/07	33	17	16	64	14	50	3
11/1/07	33	17	16	64	13	50	3
9/30/07	33	15	18	64	14	49	3
9/7/07	33	16	17	64	15	49	3
7/21/07	33	16	17	65	13	52	2
6/1/07	35	17	18	62	16	46	3
4/15/07	35	17	18	62	14	49	2
2/25/07	36	19	17	62	12	49	2
1/19/07	33	17	16	65	14	51	2
12/11/06	36	18	18	62	13	49	2
11/4/06	40	24	16	57	12	46	2
10/22/06	37	21	16	60	15	45	3
10/8/06	39	23	16	60	12	48	1
9/7/06	42	24	18	55	12	43	3
8/6/06	40	23	17	58	12	46	2
6/25/06	38	20	18	60	12	48	2
5/15/06	33	17	16	65	18	47	2
4/9/06	38	20	18	60	13	47	1
3/5/06	41	24	17	58	14	44	1
1/26/06	42	25	18	56	14	42	2

1/8/06		46	29	17	52	13	39	2
12/18/05		47	29	17	52	12	40	1
11/2/05		39	20	18	60	13	47	1
10/29/05		39	22	17	58	13	45	3
9/11/05		42	27	15	57	12	45	1
8/28/05		45	27	18	53	12	41	2
6/26/05		48	27	21	51	11	40	1
6/5/05		48	27	21	52	14	38	1
4/24/05		47	25	22	50	13	38	3
3/13/05		50	31	19	48	11	37	3
1/31/05		50	34	15	45	11	34	5
1/16/05		52	33	19	46	11	35	2
12/19/04		48	27	21	49	12	38	2
10/20/04		50	30	20	46	11	35	4
10/17/04	LV	54	35	19	45	9	36	2
10/16/04	LV	54	35	19	44	10	34	2
10/15/04	LV	54	35	19	44	10	34	2
10/3/04	LV	53	36	17	46	11	34	1
9/26/04		50	33	18	45	13	32	5
9/8/04		52	35	17	43	11	32	5
8/29/04		50	31	19	47	13	34	3
8/1/04		47	28	18	49	13	36	5
7/25/04		50	32	19	47	13	34	3
7/11/04		48	31	17	50	11	39	2
6/20/04		47	30	17	51	13	39	1
5/23/04		47	31	17	50	14	36	3
4/18/04		51	33	18	47	13	34	1
3/7/04		50	32	18	48	12	36	2
2/11/04		50	30	21	47	14	34	2
1/18/04		58	35	24	40	9	30	2
12/21/03		59	39	21	38	15	23	3
12/14/03		57	37	20	39	10	29	5
12/7/03		53	32	21	40	13	27	7
11/16/03		57	34	23	39	11	28	4
10/29/03		56	30	26	42	13	29	2
10/13/03		53	33	20	43	13	29	4
9/30/03		54	34	20	44	15	29	2
9/13/03		58	35	23	40	14	27	2
9/7/03		56	34	22	41	13	28	4
8/11/03		59	37	22	37	14	23	4
7/10/03		59	35	24	38	13	25	3
6/22/03		68	45	23	29	11	18	4
4/30/03		71	50	22	26	17	9	3
4/16/03		74	52	22	23	9	14	3
4/9/03		77	58	19	20	6	14	4
4/3/03		71	54	16	25	7	19	4
3/23/03		68	NA	NA	27	NA	NA	4
3/20/03		67	NA	NA	28	NA	NA	5
3/2/03		62	38	23	35	13	22	4
2/23/03		60	NA	NA	34	NA	NA	6
2/9/03		64	42	21	34	14	20	3
2/1/03		62	41	21	34	13	22	4
1/28/03		62	43	19	36	13	23	2
1/27/03		59	39	21	37	15	22	4
1/20/03		59	36	23	38	16	22	2
12/15/02		66	37	28	32	12	20	2
11/4/02	LV	67	45	23	31	12	20	1
11/3/02	LV	67	45	22	32	12	20	1
11/2/02	LV	67	47	20	32	9	23	1
10/27/02		67	39	28	29	13	16	4
9/26/02		67	42	25	30	12	18	3
9/8/02		71	42	28	27	12	15	3
7/28/02		69	39	31	28	14	14	3

7/15/02	72	42	31	25	12	13	2
6/17/02	74	42	32	22	9	13	4
6/9/02	77	41	36	20	9	11	3
5/19/02	76	48	28	22	8	13	3
4/21/02	78	47	31	20	9	10	2
3/28/02	79	49	30	18	8	10	3
3/10/02	82	52	30	16	9	7	2
1/27/02	83	56	27	14	7	7	3
12/19/01	86	64	22	12	6	6	2
11/27/01	89	69	21	9	4	5	1
11/6/01	89	65	24	9	5	4	2
10/9/01	92	76	16	6	3	3	1
9/27/01	90	70	20	6	3	3	4
9/13/01	86	63	23	12	5	6	2
9/9/01	55	26	29	41	20	22	3
8/12/01	61	28	33	31	14	17	8
7/30/01	59	28	30	38	17	22	3
6/3/01	55	27	28	40	18	22	6
4/22/01	63	33	30	32	16	16	5
3/25/01	58	NA	NA	33	NA	NA	8
2/25/01	55	NA	NA	23	NA	NA	22

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling (ITEM)?

4/13/08 - Summary Table

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
a. The situation in Iraq	33	65	2
b. The economy	28	70	3

Trend:

a. The situation in Iraq

	-------- Approve --------			------- Disapprove ------			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
4/13/08	33	NA	NA	65	NA	NA	2
2/1/08	33	21	12	65	10	56	2
1/12/08	30	17	13	69	14	54	1
12/9/07	33	19	14	65	13	52	2
9/30/07	30	17	14	68	12	57	1
9/7/07	34	16	18	65	12	53	1
7/21/07	31	17	14	68	11	58	1
6/1/07	31	17	14	67	11	56	1
4/15/07	29	17	13	70	11	59	*
2/25/07	31	17	14	67	13	55	1
1/19/07	29	16	13	70	13	57	1
1/10/07	34	21	13	64	14	50	2
12/11/06	28	12	16	70	13	57	2
10/8/06	35	21	14	64	10	54	1
9/7/06	41	25	16	57	10	47	2
8/6/06	36	21	15	62	10	52	2
6/25/06	37	21	17	62	11	52	*
5/15/06	32	19	13	66	13	53	1
4/9/06	37	21	16	62	11	51	1
3/5/06	40	23	17	59	12	47	*
1/26/06	39	24	15	60	10	50	1
12/18/05	46	31	15	53	10	43	1
11/2/05	36	20	15	64	13	51	1
9/11/05	38	NA	NA	62	NA	NA	1
8/28/05	42	28	14	57	11	46	1
6/26/05	43	25	18	56	12	44	1

6/5/05		41	NA	NA	58	NA	NA	1
4/24/05		42	"	"	56	"	"	2
3/13/05		39			57			4
1/16/05		40			58			2
12/19/04		42			57			1
9/26/04	RV	47			50			3
8/29/04	RV	47			51			2
7/25/04		45			53			2
6/20/04		44			55			2
5/23/04		40			58			2
4/18/04		45			54			1
3/7/04		46			53			1
2/11/04		47			52			1
1/18/04		55			42			2
12/21/03		60			39			2
12/14/03		58			38			4
11/16/03		48			48			4
10/29/03		47			51			2
10/13/03		51			47			2
9/29/03		50			47			3
9/13/03		52			46			2
9/7/03		49			47			4
8/24/03		56			37			7
8/11/03		56			41			3
7/10/03		58			41			2
6/22/03		67			30			2
4/30/03		75			22			2
3/27/03*		69			26			5
3/23/03		71			26			3
3/20/03		65			29			5
3/17/03		64			29			7
3/9/03		55			38			8
2/23/03		55			39			6
2/9/03		61			37			2
2/5/03		61			32			7
2/1/03		61			35			3
1/28/03		58			38			4
1/27/03		57			40			3
1/20/03		50			46			4
12/15/02		58			37			5
11/4/02	LV	56			40			4
11/3/02	LV	57			40			4
11/2/02	LV	56			41			3
10/27/02		57			38			5
9/26/02		58			39			3
9/14/02		65			31			4
8/29/02		52			36			12

*3/27/03 and previous: "The situation with Iraq and Saddam Hussein"

b. The economy

		-------- Approve --------		------- Disapprove ------			No
		NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
4/13/08		28	NA	NA	70	NA	NA	3
2/1/08		30	14	16	67	18	50	3
1/12/08		28	NA	NA	69	NA	NA	3
12/9/07		34	"	"	63	"	"	3
9/30/07		37			61			3
6/1/07		40			57			3
4/15/07		40			59			1
2/25/07		43			55			2
1/19/07		41			57			2
12/11/06		43			55			2

10/8/06		41			56			2
8/6/06		39			59			2
6/25/06		38			61			1
5/15/06		38			60			2
4/9/06		40	20	21	59	18	41	1
3/5/06		48	NA	NA	51	NA	NA	1
1/26/06		46	"	"	52	"	"	1
12/18/05		47			52			1
11/2/05		36			61			3
9/11/05		40			58			2
8/28/05		44			54			3
6/5/05		40			58			2
4/24/05		40			57			3
3/13/05		43			55			2
1/16/05		46			52			2
12/19/04		46			51			3
9/26/04	RV	47			50			4
8/29/04	RV	45			52			3
7/25/04		47			50			3
6/20/04		46			53			1
5/23/04		44			54			2
4/18/04		44			54			2
3/7/04		39			59			1
2/11/04		44			54			2
1/18/04		51			47			2
12/21/03		51			44			5
11/16/03		48			49			3
10/29/03		45			53			2
10/13/03		45			52			2
9/13/03		42			56			3
9/7/03		44			51			5
8/11/03		45			51			5
7/10/03		47			49			4
4/30/03		52			45			3
2/9/03		47			49			4
2/1/03		44			52			4
1/28/03		46			49			4
1/27/03		47			47			5
1/20/03		43			53			4
1/5/03		50			43			7
12/15/02		50			46			4
11/4/02	LV	53			45			2
11/3/02	LV	52			46			2
11/2/02	LV	55			43			2
10/27/02		51			43			6
9/26/02		51			47			3
9/8/02		57			40			4
7/28/02		57			39			4
7/15/02		58			38			3
4/21/02		64			33			3
1/27/02		62			34			4
12/19/01		67			27			6
11/6/01		72			23			5
9/9/01		48			48			4
7/30/01		52			45			3
6/3/01		53			41			6
4/22/01		55			38			7
3/25/01		50			42			8

3-35 Held for release.

36-42 Previously released.

END