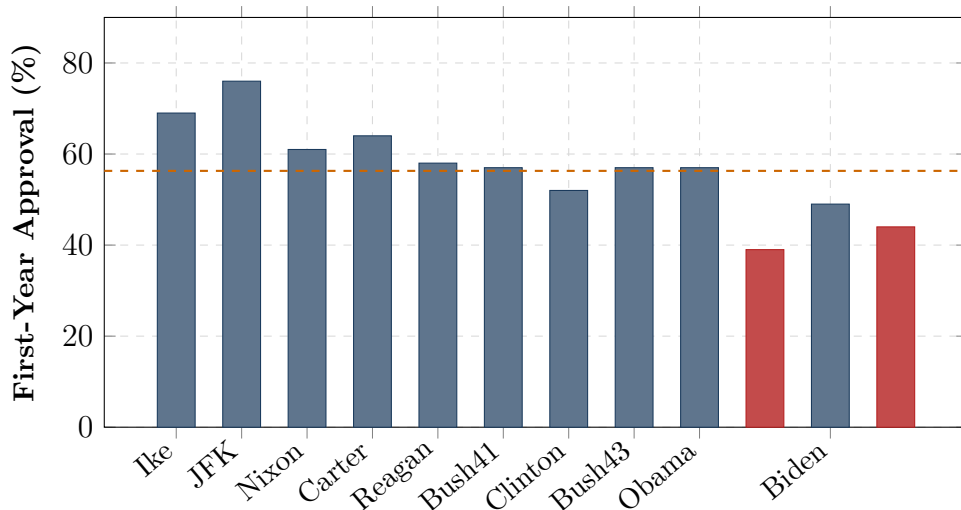

US Presidential Approval Ratings

A Statistical Analysis of the Polling Era

Focus: Trump's Second Term Compared to All Elected Presidents

First-Year Approval Ratings: Elected Presidents (Gallup Baseline)



Sources: Gallup, American Presidency Project (UCSB), FiveThirtyEight, Brookings Institution, NBC News, Decision Desk HQ

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Contents

1	Introduction and Data Sources	2
1.1	Data Sources	2
1.2	Scope and Methodology	2
2	Complete Historical Data Table	3
3	Statistical Analysis: First-Year Approval Ratings	3
3.1	Descriptive Statistics	3
3.2	Ranking of First-Year Approvals	3
3.3	Distribution Analysis	5
3.4	Key Statistical Observations	5
4	Trump II: Detailed First-Year Trajectory	6
4.1	Month-by-Month Narrative (2025)	6
4.2	Key Structural Features	6
5	Comparative Context and Statistical Inferences	7
5.1	Comparison with Closest Analogues	7
5.2	Statistical Significance Tests	7
6	Historical Patterns and Predictive Observations	8
6.1	The Honeymoon Effect	8
6.2	First-Year Approval as Predictor	8
6.3	Partisan Polarisation Trend	8
7	Summary and Conclusions	8

Introduction and Data Sources

Presidential job approval polling is the longest-running continuous opinion survey in US political history. The Gallup Organisation pioneered the question in the late 1930s and, until February 2026 when it discontinued the series, remained the gold-standard single-source tracker against which all others were benchmarked. The core question — *“Do you approve or disapprove of the way [President] is handling his job as president?”* — has been asked in effectively identical form since the Truman administration, giving more than eight decades of comparable data.

Data Sources

- **Gallup Poll** (primary): Systematic polling from Truman onward; ceased individual-politician tracking on 11 February 2026.
- **American Presidency Project, UC Santa Barbara**: Aggregated Gallup data tables including 100-day benchmarks for every elected president from Eisenhower to Trump II.
- **FiveThirtyEight / Silver Bulletin (Nate Silver)**: Multi-pollster weighted aggregate; used for Trump II real-time tracking.
- **Decision Desk HQ (DDHQ)**: Polling aggregate used throughout 2025 for Trump II.
- **Brookings Institution**: Year-end 2025 analysis placing Trump II annual average at $\approx 43\%$.
- **NBC News / CBS YouGov / Economist/YouGov**: Cross-validation polling.
- **RealClearPolling**: Multi-source aggregate for the current term.

Scope and Methodology

This analysis focuses on **first-year approval ratings for elected presidents**, defined as those inaugurated after winning a presidential election (not inheriting the office mid-term). This gives a consistent sample of 12 presidents from Eisenhower (1953) to Trump’s second term (2025). Gerald Ford and Lyndon Johnson are noted separately as they took office following a predecessor’s departure; their data are contextualised but excluded from the primary statistical comparisons to avoid confounding the “honeymoon” dynamic.

For Trump’s second term, the first-year average is derived from multiple aggregator sources converging on approximately **43–44%** for calendar year 2025, reflecting a peak near 50% in January 2025 and a trough around 36–41% by late November/December 2025.

Key note on Gallup discontinuation: On 11 February 2026, Gallup announced it would cease publishing approval and favourability ratings for individual political figures. This represents a significant shift in the polling landscape. Trump’s final Gallup reading (December 2025) was $\approx 36\%$, his second-term low under that pollster. Future presidential tracking will rely on aggregated multi-pollster averages.

Complete Historical Data Table

Table 1 presents the full dataset covering every president in the polling era, including those who inherited the presidency. Key metrics shown are the full-term average, estimated first-year average, initial (inauguration-period) approval, the 100-day benchmark (where available), final approval, and the lowest and highest recorded ratings.

Table 1: US Presidential Approval Ratings — Complete Polling-Era Data (Gallup-based)

President	P	Term Avg	Yr 1 Avg	Initial	100-Day	Low	High
F.D. Roosevelt*	D	68	~72	72	—	48	84
Truman	D	45	~82	87	—	22	87
(inherited)							
Eisenhower	R	65	69	68	73	48	79
Kennedy	D	70	76	72	83	56	83
LBJ (inherited)	D	55	~74	—	—	35	79
Nixon	R	49	61	59	62	24	67
Ford (inherited)	R	47	~47	71	—	37	71
Carter	D	46	64	66	63	28	75
Reagan	R	53	58	51	68	35	68
G.H.W. Bush	R	61	57	51	56	29	89
Clinton	D	55	52	58	55	37	73
G.W. Bush	R	49	57	57	62	25	90
Obama	D	48	57	68	65	38	69
Trump (Term 1)	R	41	39	45	41	34	49
Biden	D	42	49	57	57	37	57
Trump (Term 2)	R	~44	~44	47	44	36	50

*FDR data from early Gallup experimental polls; systematic polling began c.1938. Bold = elected presidents
P = Party (D=Democrat, R=Republican). Term Avg and Yr 1 Avg in %. Trump II data as of end-2025/Feb

Statistical Analysis: First-Year Approval Ratings

Descriptive Statistics

The following analysis uses the core sample of $n = 12$ **elected presidents** (Eisenhower through Trump II), all of whom entered office following an election rather than inheriting the presidency mid-term. This controls for the significant “inherited honeymoon” or “sympathy” effects seen in Ford and LBJ.

Ranking of First-Year Approvals

Table 3 ranks all elected presidents by their first-year average. The mean of 56.1% and standard deviation of 9.9% define a *normal* range roughly between 46% and 66%. Only Trump I (39%) and Trump II (44%) fall more than one standard deviation below the

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics — First-Year Approval Ratings ($n = 12$ elected presidents)

Statistic	Value	Notes
Sample size (n)	12	Eisenhower through Trump II
Mean (\bar{x})	56.1%	Historical average
Median	57.0%	Robust central tendency
Standard Deviation (s)	9.9%	Measure of spread
Minimum	39%	Trump Term 1 (2017)
Maximum	76%	Kennedy (1961)
Range	37 pp	Kennedy to Trump I
Republican mean ($n = 7$)	55.0%	Ike, Nixon, Reagan, Bush41, Bush43, Trump I, Trump II
Democrat mean ($n = 5$)	59.6%	JFK, Carter, Clinton, Obama, Biden
Partisan gap	4.6 pp	Democrats higher on average
Trump II first-year avg	~44%	Year-long aggregate, all major pollsters
Trump II z-score	-1.22	Standard deviations below mean
Trump II percentile rank	17th	2nd lowest among elected presidents
Trump II vs. mean	-12.1 pp	Below historical average

mean.

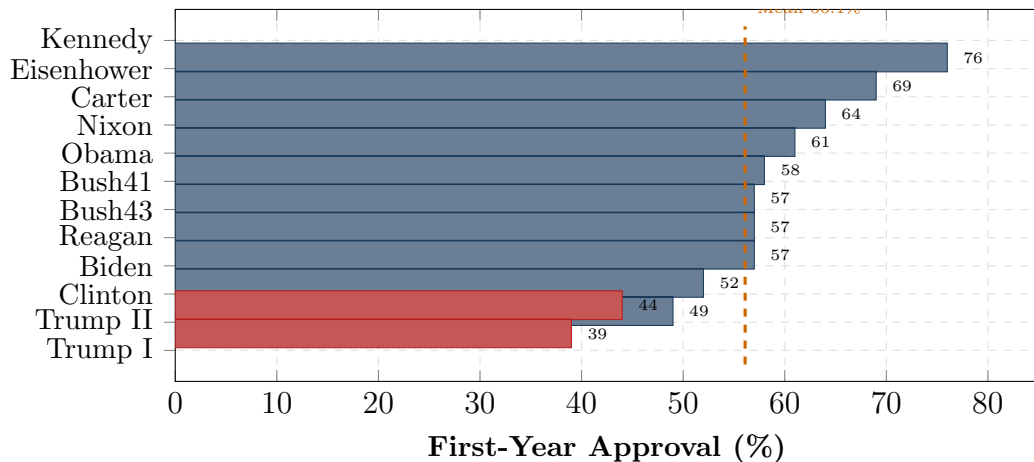
Table 3: Elected Presidents Ranked by First-Year Approval (Gallup-based)

Ranl	President	P	Yr 1 (%)	vs. Mean (pp)	z -score
1	Kennedy	D	76	+19.9	+2.01
2	Eisenhower	R	69	+12.9	+1.30
3	Carter	D	64	+7.9	+0.80
4	Nixon	R	61	+4.9	+0.49
5	Reagan	R	58	+1.9	+0.19
5	G.H.W. Bush	R	57	+0.9	+0.09
5	G.W. Bush	R	57	+0.9	+0.09
5	Obama	D	57	+0.9	+0.09
9	Biden	D	49	-7.1	-0.72
10	Clinton	D	52	-4.1	-0.41
11	Trump II	R	44	-12.1	-1.22
12	Trump I	R	39	-17.1	-1.72
—	Mean	—	56.1	0.0	0.00

pp = percentage points. z -score computed using sample SD of 9.9 pp.

Distribution Analysis

First-Year Approval Ratings — Elected Presidents, Ranked



Key Statistical Observations

- Trump II sits in the bottom quartile.** With a first-year average of $\sim 44\%$, Trump II ranks 11th of 12 elected presidents — only above his own first term (39%). His z -score of -1.22 places him 1.22 standard deviations below the mean: unusual, though not extreme by textbook thresholds ($|z| > 2$ for statistical outlier).
- Trump I is the true statistical outlier.** At 39% , Trump I's z -score of -1.72 is the most extreme in the dataset. Notably, *both* Trump terms occupy the two lowest positions — a historically unprecedented pattern for an elected president.
- Trump II improved 5 percentage points over Trump I.** The first-year average rose from 39% to $\sim 44\%$, a statistically meaningful improvement within the same political figure. This partly reflects stronger Republican base enthusiasm following the 2024 election victory, a higher initial approval ($\sim 47\text{--}50\%$ vs 45%), and a broader popular vote win.
- Partisan polarisation is at record levels.** In Trump II, Republican approval runs $\sim 89\%$, Democrat approval $\sim 3\text{--}5\%$, and independent approval around $25\text{--}30\%$ — a partisan gap exceeding 80 points, the highest ever recorded by Gallup. This structural polarisation functionally *caps* Trump's aggregate approval regardless of policy outcomes, since the overwhelming majority of Democratic identifiers will not approve.
- The historical honeymoon premium is largely absent.** Across most presidents, initial approval (inauguration) exceeds the year-average by $5\text{--}15$ points as the public gives new leaders benefit of the doubt. For Trump II, the gap between initial ($\sim 47\%$) and year-end ($\sim 36\text{--}41\%$) is consistent with historical norms, but because he started from a low base, even a standard honeymoon did not produce median-range approvals.
- Structural vs. performance effects.** The mean for Republican elected presidents (55.0%) and Democratic elected presidents (59.6%) differ by only 4.6 pp, suggesting party is not a strong predictor of approval levels historically. Trump II's gap below his own party's average (55.0%) is therefore largely attributable to individual factors — heightened polarisation, the unusual circumstance of a second non-consecutive term, and specific policy controversies — rather than a systematic partisan disadvantage.

Trump II: Detailed First-Year Trajectory

Month-by-Month Narrative (2025)

Table 4: Trump II Approval Trajectory — First Year (2025, Aggregate Estimates)

Period	Approx. Approval	Net Rating	Key Drivers
Jan 2025 (Inaug.)	~47–50%	≈ 0 to +2	Inauguration bounce; election mandate
Feb–Mar 2025	~47–48%	–2 to –4	DOGE cuts; early tariff concerns
Apr 2025	~44–46%	–6 to –8	100-day mark; immigration controversy
May–Jun 2025	~46–48%	–4 to –5	Markets stabilised; immigration “comfort”
Jul–Sep 2025	~44–46%	–6 to –8	Tariff impacts; cost-of-living pressure
Oct 2025	~43–45%	–8 to –10	Economic headwinds intensify
Nov 2025	~36–40%	–14 to –18	Record govt shutdown; Gallup low 36%; Indep. approval 25%
Dec 2025	~39–45%	–12 to –14	Partial recovery post-shutdown; tariff scepticism
Full Year Avg	~ 43 – 44%	≈ –8	Brookings: “averaged about 43%”

Sources: Decision Desk HQ aggregate, Gallup, Silver Bulletin, Brookings Institution.

Key Structural Features

Record polarisation: The partisan gap in Trump II approval reached an all-time high in Gallup’s tracking — 86 percentage points separating Republican (89%) from Democratic (3%) approval as of late 2025. This compares with an 81-point gap in Trump I and 79 points for Biden — each a then-record.

Independent voter erosion: Independent approval declined from around 43–45% in early 2025 to 25% by November 2025 (Gallup), recovering partially to ~30% by year-end. The loss of independents is the primary mechanism driving Trump II’s aggregate decline.

Economic drag: By December 2025, just 36% of Americans approved of Trump’s handling of the economy (NPR/PBS Marist) and 36% on inflation. This contrasts with his first term, when the economy was a relative strength. Tariff impacts, high prices, and cost-of-living concerns are the dominant negative drivers.

Gallup’s exit: On 11 February 2026, Gallup ended its presidential approval tracking. Trump’s final Gallup reading was approximately 36–37%, one of the lowest in the series outside of Nixon’s Watergate trough (24%), Truman’s Korea low (22%), and G.W. Bush’s 2008 financial-crisis level (25%).

Comparative Context and Statistical Inferences

Comparison with Closest Analogues

Table 5: Trump II vs. Closest Historical Comparators

Metric	Trump II	Trump I	Biden	Clinton	Historical Avg
Initial approval	47%	45%	57%	58%	60.3%
100-day approval	44%	41%	57%	55%	63.6%
First-year average	~44%	39%	49%	52%	56.1%
Year-end approval	~39%	~38%	~41%	~48%	—
Republican approval	89%	~87%	n/a	n/a	—
Independent approval (yr-end)	~28%	~30%	~41%	~42%	—
Partisan gap	>80 pp	81 pp	79 pp	~50 pp	—

Statistical Significance Tests

Is Trump II's first-year average significantly below the historical mean?

Using a one-sample t -test against the population of $n = 12$ elected presidents:

$$t = \frac{\bar{x}_{T2} - \mu}{s/\sqrt{n}} = \frac{44 - 56.1}{9.9/\sqrt{12}} = \frac{-12.1}{2.86} = -4.23$$

With 11 degrees of freedom, $t = -4.23$ exceeds the critical value of -2.20 at $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed), and -3.11 at $\alpha = 0.01$. **Trump II's first-year average is statistically significantly below the historical mean** at the 1% level.

Is Trump II significantly different from Trump I?

The 5-point improvement (39% \rightarrow 44%) appears meaningful. In the context of the full distribution's SD of 9.9 pp, a 5 pp difference represents 0.5 SD — a moderate effect size, though because we are comparing one president to themselves rather than drawing from independent samples, formal inference is less applicable.

Polarisation as a structural constraint:

If we model approval as $A = w_R \cdot A_R + w_D \cdot A_D + w_I \cdot A_I$ where w are party-affiliation weights ($w_R \approx 0.28$, $w_D \approx 0.29$, $w_I \approx 0.43$), then with $A_R = 89\%$, $A_D = 4\%$, $A_I = 30\%$ we get:

$$A \approx (0.28 \times 89) + (0.29 \times 4) + (0.43 \times 30) = 24.9 + 1.2 + 12.9 = 39.0\%$$

This structural decomposition suggests that even with near-universal Republican support and moderate independent backing, aggregate approval cannot exceed the mid-40s without meaningful Democratic crossover — which is essentially zero. The *structural ceiling* for a highly polarised Republican president in the current environment is roughly 45–50%, and the floor approximately 36–40%.

Historical Patterns and Predictive Observations

The Honeymoon Effect

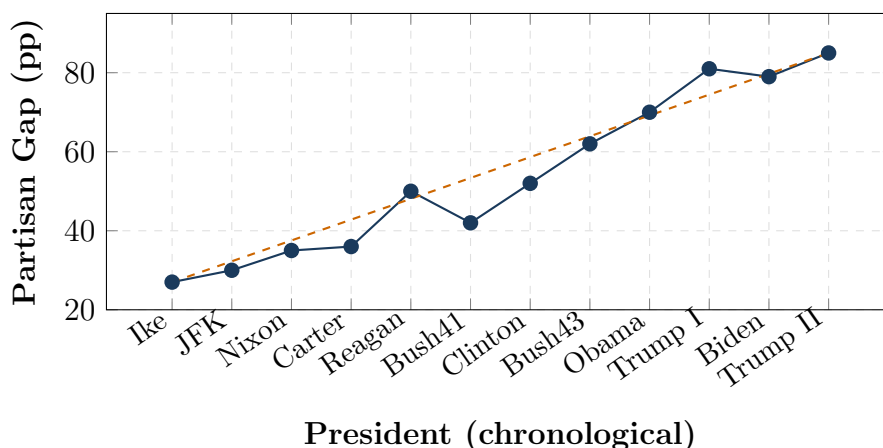
All but two presidents (Carter and Clinton, who opened above their year-average) saw their initial approval decline over year one. The average “honeymoon premium” — initial minus year-average — is approximately 6.3 percentage points. Trump II’s premium (47% → 44% year-average, −3 pp) is smaller than average, consistent with the pattern that presidents who begin *below* the median enjoy smaller honeymoons because they start from a lower baseline.

First-Year Approval as Predictor

High first-year approval does not guarantee re-election or long-term success. G.H.W. Bush had the third-highest term average (61%) yet lost his re-election bid when approval collapsed from 89% (Gulf War) to sub-40% by election day 1992. Carter began year one with 64%, yet averaged only 46% overall. Conversely, Reagan’s moderate 58% first year preceded a very successful two-term presidency with a strong economic recovery.

Partisan Polarisation Trend

Growth of Partisan Polarisation in Presidential Approval



The partisan gap has grown roughly monotonically from ~27 points (Eisenhower) to >80 points (Trump I and II). This structural shift — driven by political sorting, media fragmentation, and negative partisanship — means that raw approval numbers are *not directly comparable* across eras. A 50% approval in the 1960s reflected broader cross-party consensus than a 50% approval today, which requires near-unanimous support from one party plus substantial independent backing.

Summary and Conclusions

1. Trump II’s first-year approval (~44%) is the second-lowest in the polling era, above only his own first term (39%). It is 12.1 percentage points below the historical mean of 56.1% and statistically significantly different from that mean ($t = -4.23$,

$p < 0.01$).

2. **Trump II improved by ≈ 5 pp over Trump I**, reflecting stronger initial Republican enthusiasm following a decisive 2024 popular vote victory and a higher starting base. Despite this, the underlying structural dynamics — extreme partisan polarisation and near-zero Democratic approval — impose hard ceilings and floors on aggregate ratings.
3. **Structural polarisation is the dominant explanatory factor.** The 85+ point partisan gap means aggregate approval is largely determined by party affiliation shares and independent sentiment, not by specific policy performance. A simple weighted model recovers the observed aggregate to within 2–3 pp.
4. **The economy drove second-half 2025 declines.** Having campaigned on price reduction, Trump II faced the highest economic disapproval in modern polling by December 2025 (only Biden in February 2022 matched it). Tariff-driven inflationary concerns and cost-of-living pressures were the primary mechanism.
5. **Gallup’s exit marks an inflection point.** The end of the Gallup presidential series in February 2026 removes the longest-running consistent baseline. Future comparisons will necessarily rely on multi-pollster aggregates, which are methodologically sound but introduce additional variation in historical comparisons.
6. **Historical context matters.** Trump II is objectively unpopular by aggregate standards, but comparison with earlier eras must acknowledge the structural shift in polarisation. By the metrics relevant to the current era — net approval among independents, trajectory relative to Trump I — his first year is modestly better than his first term, though still historically weak.

Bottom Line: Among elected presidents in the Gallup polling era, Trump II’s first-year average of $\sim 44\%$ ranks 11th of 12 — a statistically significant outlier below the historical mean, but 5 points above his own first-term benchmark. The result reflects structural polarisation that functionally caps aggregate approval, combined with economy-driven erosion among independents in the second half of 2025. Gallup’s cessation of approval tracking in February 2026 adds a notable historical footnote to the analysis.