

The Harris Survey

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CARTER'S FINAL RATINGS

By Louis Harris

As a result of the euphoria over the return of the former hostages, the American people's rating of President Carter's four-year term in the White House has risen to 42 percent positive. In early January, before the 52 hostages were released, only 31 percent gave Carter a positive rating, unchanged since the month before the November election.

These latest Harris Survey results, obtained from a cross section of 1,250 adults nationwide, suggest that if Carter had been successful in bringing the hostages home before Election Day, the outcome of the election might have been a lot closer. The groups that changed most in their assessment of Carter after the hostage release were those who live in the South and Midwest, big city and rural dwellers, women, blacks, lower-income groups, Democrats, and those with a middle of the road or liberal political philosophy. In the aggregate, these were the pivotal groups Carter needed to have a chance in the 1980 election.

However, when people were asked to rate Carter on some specifics of his stewardship in the White House, the improvement in the ratings are highly selective. The areas where Mr. Carter's ratings improved were:

--On his handling of the situation in Iran, the 74-24 percent negative rating accorded him in January improved to 54-45 percent negative after the hostages came home. This was a gain of a full 21 points for the former president.

--On his working for human rights, Carter's rating went to 70-29 percent positive, up sharply from the 55-42 percent positive rating he received just before the hostages came home.

--On his working for peace in the Middle East, Carter's late January rating of 71-27 percent positive was up sharply from the 57-40 percent positive score he received earlier that month.

--On his handling of foreign policy, Carter's rating went from 72-26 percent negative, just before the return of the hostages to 62-36 percent negative, a rise of 10 points in his positive standing.

--On his handling of the energy situation, Carter's rating went from 75-23 percent negative in early January to 69-29 percent negative several weeks later.

But on four other specifics, the Carter ratings remain low:

--On keeping inflation under control, an 89-10 percent majority still gives Carter negative marks, exactly the same as before the release of the hostages.

--On his handling of the economy, Carter is rated 83-16 percent negative, quite similar to his 84-15 percent negative assessment in early January.

--On his ability to get things done, his 81-18 percent negative rating, given to him before the hostage release, improved slightly to 76-23 percent negative in late January.

--On the important element of inspiring confidence in the White House, Carter's rating rose from 72-25 percent negative at the turn of the year to a final 64-34 percent negative, a rise of 9 points on the positive side.

(over)

Compared with other recent presidents, Carter's overall rating of 42 percent positive is well above the bare 26 percent given to Richard Nixon. But it is one point below the 43 percent mark achieved by Lyndon Johnson and seven points below the 49 percent positive rating given to Gerald Ford when he left the White House. Carter's improved rating means that, at least at the time he left office, he ranks in the same general range with Johnson and Ford, whereas at the 31 percent mark given to him in early January, he would have been more in the range with Nixon.

Of course, these ratings were taken between January 22nd and 25th, in the midst of a highly emotional outpouring by Americans over the return of the hostages. It is entirely possible that further reflection might find the public less favorable. And it is also true that historians, many years removed from this contemporary scene, might view the Carter record in a very different light from the American people who lived through his four years with him.

But the upward movement for Carter indicates once again the strong hold that the hostage situation has had on American public opinion for the past 15 months. Just as the former hostages must undergo a period of readjustment, it is a sound assumption that the American people also will need time to recover from the national trauma of the hostage episode.

T A B L E S

Between January 22nd and 25th, the Harris Survey asked a cross section of 1,250 adults nationwide by telephone:

"Now that his four years in office are over, how would you rate the job Jimmy Carter has done as president--excellent, pretty good, only fair or poor?"

CARTER JOB RATING

	<u>**Positive</u> %	<u>Negative</u> %	<u>Not sure</u> %
Late January 1981	42	58	*
Early January 1981	31	68	1
October 1980	31	68	1

"Now let me ask you about some things Carter did while in office. How would you rate him on (READ EACH ITEM)--excellent, pretty good, only fair or poor?"

CARTER SPECIFICS

	<u>**Positive</u> %	<u>Negative</u> %	<u>Not sure</u> %
Working for peace in the Middle East			
Late January	71	27	2
Early January	57	40	3
Working for human rights around the world			
Late January	70	29	1
Early January	55	42	3
Handling the situation in Iran			
Late January	45	54	1
Early January	24	74	2

TABLE CONTINUED

CARTER SPECIFICS CONT'D.

	<u>**Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Not sure</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Handling foreign policy matters			
Late January	36	62	2
Early January	26	72	2
Inspiring confidence in the White House			
Late January	34	64	2
Early January	25	72	3
Handling the energy situation			
Late January	29	69	2
Early January	23	75	2
Getting things done			
Late January	23	76	1
Early January	18	81	1
Handling the economy			
Late January	16	83	1
Early January	15	84	1
Keeping inflation under control			
Late January	10	89	1
Early January	10	89	1

* = less than 0.5 percent

** = Positive=excellent and pretty good
 Negative=only fair and poor

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All of this information is provided in this release.

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