
How Democratic Was Andrew Jackson?

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A Document Based Question (DBQ)

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Andrew Jackson may have been the most popular president in the history of the United States. Although he had his enemies during his two terms (1829-1837), many Americans at the time thought he could do no wrong. He was so popular that he was still getting votes for the presidency fifteen years after he died!

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Historians connect Jackson to a new spirit of democracy that swept over the United States during the early 1800s. This era of the "common man" marked a new stage for American democracy where average people began to have a say in the workings of their government. There is no question Jackson saw himself as the President of the People. But just how democratic was he? Before examining this question, it is important to review the early life of this most remarkable American.

Boyhood

Born on the border between North and South Carolina in 1767, Jackson grew up poor. His father died a few days before his birth, and Andrew was not an easy child for his mother to raise. He enlisted in the Revolutionary War at age 13, was captured and seriously wounded by a British officer. Typical of Jackson throughout his life, he had refused to take a demeaning order and was slashed with a sword. Because of a prisoner exchange, Jackson managed to survive his wounds. Sadly, his mother died shortly after

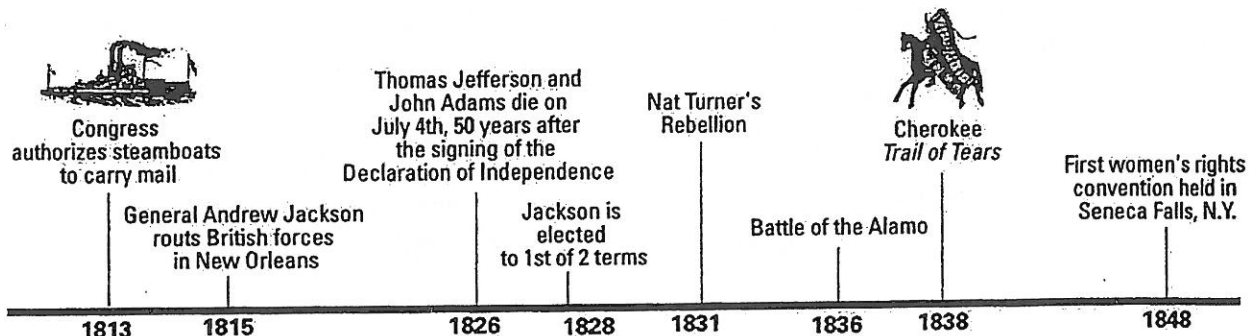
he returned home, and young Andrew was left to confront the world on his own.

Jackson was a tough kid with a wild streak that ran deep. He never backed away from a fight – not even as a 75-year-old man – and left a trail of card games, busted-up taverns, liquor bottles, and bloody noses in his wake. A favorite trick of Andrew and his buddies was to drag away family outhouses and hide them in remote places.

At age 17 Jackson's self-discipline improved, and he began his study of the law. At 21 he became a public prosecutor on the North Carolina frontier. Jackson soon moved west to Tennessee, married his wife for life, Rachel Donelson, and got involved in land speculation, farming, and slave ownership. At age 29 Jackson was elected Tennessee's first representative in the U.S. House of Representatives and a year later was elected to the U.S. Senate.

Military Career

It was not, however, Andrew Jackson's early political career that would make him an American hero; it was war. Andrew Jackson was born to be a soldier. His first successes came when he led a campaign of Tennessee volunteers against the Creek Indians in Alabama in 1813 and 1814. A year later he commanded American forces in the defense of New Orleans against the British. Jackson unknowingly took a huge step towards the presidency when he held off a



British attack on January 8, 1815. The results of the battle were staggering – 71 American casualties versus 2,037 British soldiers killed, wounded, or missing. It did not matter to the American people that a peace treaty had already been agreed upon in Europe (news traveled slowly in 1815). Jackson instantly became a national hero.

Jackson won American hearts not just because he won battles. Jackson never asked his men to endure more than he endured. During a bad patch of the Creek War, he ate acorns and cattle offal with his soldiers. He mailed home bone splinters to Rachel that occasionally

Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Seminoles. His treatment of the Indians is one subject of this DBQ.

Presidential Politics

In 1824, Jackson made his first run for President of the United States. The vote was split four ways – 158,000 popular votes for Jackson, 114,000 for John Quincy Adams, 47,217 for Henry Clay, and 46,979 for William Crawford. In presidential elections, however, the popular vote does not determine the winner. A winning candidate needs a majority of the electoral votes, and Jackson, while ahead in the popular vote, fell short. The electoral tally was

Jackson 99, Adams 84, Crawford 41, and Clay 37.

What happened next was to have a huge effect on Jackson and his thinking for the next 20 years. According to the 12th Amendment, when no candidate for the presidency receives a majority of the electoral votes, the House of Representatives elects the president from the top three vote-getters. This left Clay out of the running but not without great influence. In a deal that Jackson supporters



pushed up through the skin in his arm. He carried a bullet next to his heart from a nearly fatal duel over the honor of his wife. For the last 25 years of Jackson's life, including his eight years in the White House, he lived in nearly constant pain, but he never stopped. Known affectionately as Old Hickory, Andrew Jackson was tough and unbreakable.

Jackson spent much of the time between 1815 and 1820 removing the Spanish from Florida and negotiating treaties with the Five "Civilized" Indian Tribes – the Cherokees,

forever branded "the corrupt bargain," Clay traded his support and 37 electoral votes to Adams for Clay's appointment as the Secretary of State. Jackson raged that the People's voice had been silenced. He had been the choice of the largest number of voters, and he was being sent back home to Tennessee. Was this democracy?!

Andrew Jackson spent much of the next four years preparing for the election of 1828. His mantra was that the voice of the People must be heard. The electoral system and Henry Clay had cost him the presidency. He, Andrew Jackson, would create a new era of real democracy in

America. He would listen to the People and do their will.

Jackson was elected President in 1828 and again in 1832. How well he listened to the People and did their will is left for you to decide.

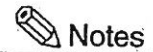
Ideas About Democracy

The focus question of this DBQ is "How democratic was Andrew Jackson?" A few words about Jackson's understanding of democracy are in order. Jackson and others of his time distinguished between something called **republicanism** and **democracy**. Republicanism might be thought of as cautious democracy. This idea placed an elite group of men – mostly lawyers, merchants, and wealthy farmers – between the common man and power. The **electoral system** is a good example of republicanism. The people vote for electors and electors vote for the president. The Founding Fathers created this system so that the electors could change an unwise choice by the common voter. Election to the US Senate before 1913 was another example of republicanism. The people in a given state voted for state legislators; then the state legislators

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elected the two members of that state to the US Senate. For Andrew Jackson, this was not democracy. To Jackson, democracy meant that all branches and agencies of the government – the President, the Congress, the National Bank, even the Supreme Court – must listen to and follow the wishes of the People. Of course, Jackson, like most men of his times, had certain ideas about who were included in the People, and enemies of Jackson claimed he behaved more like an autocrat, or a king, than a democratically elected president.

Following are 15 documents that touch on some of the key issues Jackson faced during his life and his presidency. This DBQ asks you to make a judgment about Jackson's commitment to democracy: *How democratic was Andrew Jackson?*



Document A

Source: Adapted from *Historical Statistics of the United States, Part 2, 1975*.

Methods of Electing Presidential Electors: 1816 to 1836

	P— by people		L— by legislature			
	1816	1820	1824	1828	1832	1836
Massachusetts	L	P	P	P	P	P
New York	L	L	L	P	P	P
Delaware	L	L	L	L	P	P
S. Carolina	L	L	L	L	L	L
Georgia	L	L	L	P	P	P
Vermont	L	L	L	P	P	P
Louisiana	L	L	L	P	P	P
Indiana	L	L	P	P	P	P
Illinois	*	P	P	P	P	P
Alabama	*	L	P	P	P	P
Maine	*	P	P	P	P	P
Missouri	*	L	P	P	P	P

Note: States not listed above chose Presidential Electors by the people as of 1816. States displaying the (*) were not yet admitted as states.

Document B

Source: Thomas Bailey and David Kennedy, *The American Pageant*, 1994.

...(T)he concept of a political revolution in 1828 is not completely farfetched. The increased turnout of voters proved that the common people, especially in the universal-white-manhood suffrage states, now had the vote and the will to use it for their ends....

So in a broader sense the election was a "revolution" comparable to that of 1800. It was a peaceful revolution, achieved by ballots instead of bullets.... "Shall the people rule?" cried the Jacksonians. The answering roar seemed to say, "The people shall rule!" In the struggle between the poorer masses and the entrenched classes, the homespun folk scored a resounding triumph, befuddling some members of the elite establishment. "I never saw anything like it," a puzzled Daniel Webster mused about Jackson's inaugural. "Persons have come five hundred miles to see General Jackson, and they really think that the country is rescued from some dreadful danger."

America hitherto had been ruled by an elite of brains and wealth, whether aristocratic Federalist shippers or aristocratic Jeffersonian planters. Jackson's victory accelerated the transfer of national power from the country house to the farmhouse, from the East to the West, from the snobs to the mobs. If Jefferson had been the hero of the gentleman farmer, Jackson was the hero of the dirt farmer. The plowholders were now ready to take over the government: their government.

Document C

Source: Reprinted by permission of P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida.

Hermitage, August 27th, 1822

Dr. Bronough,

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I had the pleasure on last evening to receive your letter of the 22nd. It affords me great pleasure to be informed of your flattering prospects of success on your election (as Florida Territory's first delegate to the House of Representatives)....

If the soldiers should be admitted to vote you are safe, the army will stick by you.... Under existing circumstances, it would be impolitic & unjust to make a property qualification. Residence alone, in justice to all, should be required. This is the only...rule that can be established until your land titles are adjudicated, and your vacant land...brought onto the market.... Then in your constitution you can adopt such qualifications as you may think proper for the happiness, security, & prosperity of the state. Until then all freemen of six months residence should be entitled to a vote....

Andrew Jackson

Document D

Source: Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and The Course of American Empire*, Vol III, Copyright (c) 1984.

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...(T)he General's views on office holding became even more democratic as he grew older. He proceeded from the (idea) that all offices – whether appointed or elected – must ultimately fall under the absolute control of the people. Appointed offices should be rotated, preferably every four years. Elected offices must be filled directly by the people. In keeping with this principle, Jackson tried to abolish the College of Electors in the selection of the chief executive by proposing a constitutional amendment. In addition, he said, the President should serve a single term of no more than four or six years.... Moreover, he believed that United States senators should be directly elected by the people. Also, their term should be limited to four years and they should be subject to removal.

Document E

Source: Reprinted by permission of Library of Congress, Lithograph, 1832, LC-USZ62-1562.

Note: Cartoon appeared in the presidential election of 1832.



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Document F

Source: James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902, 1905.*

Andrew Jackson's Bank Veto Message to Congress July 10, 1832

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I sincerely regret that in the act before me I can perceive none of those modifications of the bank charter which are necessary, in my opinion, to make it compatible with justice, with sound policy, or with the Constitution of our country.... The present Bank of the United States...enjoys an exclusive privilege of banking,... almost a monopoly of the foreign and domestic exchange.

It appears that more than a fourth part of the stock is held by foreigners and the (rest) is held by a few hundred of our own citizens, chiefly of the richest class.

Of the twenty-five directors of this bank five are chosen by the Government and twenty by the citizen stockholders.... It is easy to conceive that great evils to our country...might flow from such a concentration of power in the hands of a few men irresponsible to the people.

Is there no danger to our liberty and independence in a bank that in its nature has so little to bind it to our country?

It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes.

Document G

Source: Daniel Webster, July 11, 1832.

Daniel Webster's Reply to Jackson's Bank Veto Message July 11, 1832

(President Jackson's message) extends the grasp of (the chief executive) over every power of the government.... It sows...the seeds of jealousy and ill-will against the government of which its author is the official head. It raises a cry that liberty is in danger, at the very moment when it puts forth claims to powers heretofore unknown and unheard of.... It manifestly seeks to inflame the poor against the rich, it wantonly attacks whole classes of the people, for the purposes of turning against them the prejudices and resentments of the other classes.



Document H

Source: Senate Documents, 21st Congress, 1829-1830.

Andrew Jackson's Letter To Congress

December 8, 1829

The duties of all public officers are...so plain and simple that men of intelligence may readily qualify themselves for their performance; and I...believe that more is lost by the long continuance of men in office than is generally to be gained by their experience. I submit, therefore, to your consideration whether the efficiency of the government would not be promoted...and integrity better secured by a general extension of the law which limits appointments to four years. In a country where offices are created solely for the benefit of the people, no one man has any more...right to official station than another. Offices were not established to give support to particular men at the public expense. No individual wrong is, therefore, done by removal, since neither appointment to nor continuance in office is a matter of right.

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Document I

Source: Robert V. Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, 1988.

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One bit of advice (Secretary of State) Van Buren offered (Jackson) concerned the appointment of the collector of the Port of New York. This was a very sensitive and important position. Some \$15 million annually passed through the collector's hands. If any post needed a man of the highest integrity it was this one. And when Van Buren learned that Jackson intended to appoint Samuel Swartwout to the office he almost collapsed. Not only did Swartwout have criminal tendencies but the Regency detested him. Van Buren alerted the President immediately and warned him that Swartwout's appointment would "not be in accordance with public sentiment, the interest of the Country or the credit of the administration." Unfortunately, Jackson refused to listen. He liked Swartwout because he had been an early supporter – unlike Van Buren – and so he went ahead with the appointment. In time, of course, Swartwout absconded with \$1,222,705.09. It was a monumental theft.... Jackson was mortified.

When the scandal broke, Jackson's opponents doubled over with laughter. All the talk about rooting out corruption in government, they said, and here the greatest theft in the history of the Republic occurred in the General's own administration.... Here, then, was the bitter fruit of rotation, hooted the President's critics. Here the dreadful consequence of denying the government the service of an elite bureaucracy in order to serve some idealistic democratic principle.

Document J

Source: James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902*. 1905.

Andrew Jackson's Message to Congress
December 7, 1829

The condition and destiny of the Indian tribes within the limits of some of our states have become objects of much interest and importance.... By persuasion and force they have been made to retire from river to river and from mountain to mountain, until some of the tribes have become extinct and others have left but remnants.... Surrounded by the whites with their arts of civilization, which, by destroying the resources of the savage, doom him to weakness and decay, the fate of the Mohegan...is fast overcoming the Choctaw, the Cherokee, and the Creek.... Humanity and national honor demand that every effort should be made to avert so great a calamity.

...I suggest for your consideration...setting apart an ample district west of the Mississippi, and (outside) the limits of any state or territory now formed, to be guaranteed to the Indian tribes as long as they shall occupy it, each tribe having a distinct control over the portion designated for its use.... This emigration should be voluntary, for it would be as cruel as unjust to compel the aborigines to abandon the graves of their fathers and seek a home in a distant land. But they should be distinctly informed that if they remain within the limits of the states they must be subject to their laws.

Document K

Source: "Memorial of the Cherokee Nation," as reprinted in *Niles Weekly Register*, August 21, 1830.

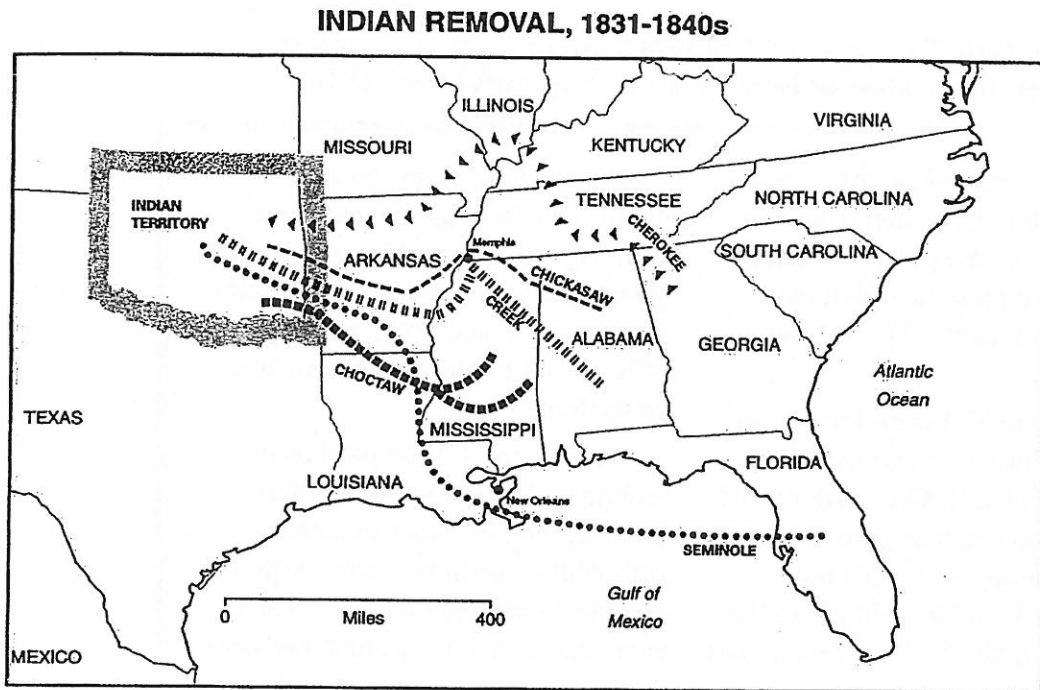
We wish to remain on the land of our fathers. We have a perfect and original right to remain without interruption or molestation....

But if we are compelled to leave our country, we see nothing but ruin before us. The country west of the Arkansas territory is unknown to us.... The far greater part of that region is, beyond all controversy, badly supplied with food and water; and no Indian tribe can live as agriculturalists without these articles. All our neighbors...would speak a language totally different from ours, and practice different customs.... It contains neither the scenes of our childhood, nor the graves of our fathers....

Shall we be compelled by a civilized and Christian people, with whom we have lived in perfect peace for the last forty years, and for whom we have willingly bled in war, to bid adieu to our homes, our farms, our streams and our beautiful forests? No. We are still firm.... Our consciences bear us witness that we are the invaders of no man's rights – we have robbed no man of his territory – we have usurped no man's authority, nor have we deprived any one of his unalienable privileges. How then shall we indirectly confess the right of another people to our land by leaving it forever? On the soil which contains the ashes of our beloved men we wish to live – on this soil we wish to die....

Document L

Source: Map created from various sources.



Document M

Source: John Spencer Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 1931.

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Excerpts of letters written by Andrew Jackson to his wife Rachel regarding their Creek Indian son, Lyncoya, adopted after the battle of Tallashatchie, November 13, 1813

December 19, 1813

He is the only branch of his family left, and the others when offered to them to take care of would have nothing to do with him but wanted him to be killed.... Charity and Christianity says he ought to be taken care of and I send him to my little Andrew and I hope he will adopt him as one of our family.

December 28, 1823

Tell Lyncoya to read his book and be a good boy and obey you in all things.

Note: Lyncoya died at age 14 of tuberculosis in 1827 and was buried in the family cemetery.

Document N

Source: H. Eaton, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States*, 1837.

Jackson's Call "To the Free Coloured Inhabitants of Louisiana" before the Battle of New Orleans, September 21, 1814

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Through a mistaken policy you have heretofore been deprived of a participation in the glorious struggle for national rights, in which our country is engaged. This shall no longer exist....

To every noblehearted free man of color, volunteering to serve to the present contest with Great Britain and no longer, there will be paid the same bounty in money and lands now received by the white soldiers of the United States, viz. \$124 in money, and 160 acres of land. The non-commissioned officers and privates will also be entitled to the same monthly pay and daily rations and clothes furnished to any American soldier.

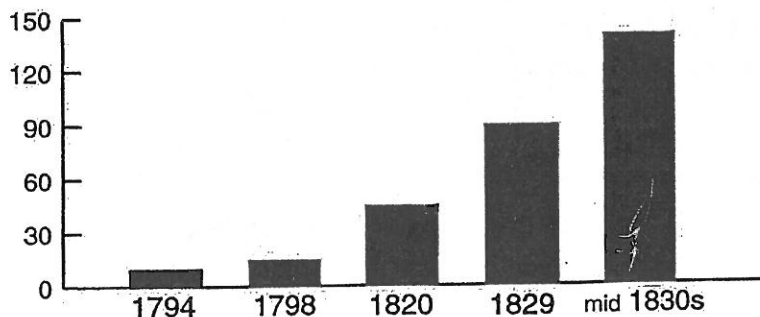
On enrolling yourselves in companies, the major general commanding will select officers for your government, from your fellow white citizens. Your non-commissioned officers will be appointed from among yourselves.

Due regard will be paid to the feelings of freemen and soldiers. You will not, by being associated with white men in the same corps, be exposed to improper comparisons or unjust sarcasm. As a distinct, independent battalion or regiment, pursuing the path of glory, you will, undivided, receive the applause and gratitude of your countrymen.

Document O

Source: Robert Remini, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 1988.

Slave Holdings of Andrew Jackson



Note: Andrew Jackson served as President from 1829-1837.