
How Democratic Was Andrew Jackson?

LV



A Document Based Question (DBQ)

STUDENT GUIDE SHEET

How Democratic Was Andrew Jackson?

Directions: Many great names in American history are closely connected with an idea or an event – George Washington and the Revolution, Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, Martin Luther King and Civil Rights. Andrew Jackson’s name is tied very closely to democracy, but is it historically fair and accurate to do so?

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Follow these steps as you grapple with this historical question:

1. Read the Background Essay. It provides an overview of Jackson’s life and the political climate of the day.
2. Quickly skim the 15 documents to get a sense of what they are about.
3. Make sure you have a clear definition of democracy written down before you analyze the documents.
4. Read the documents slowly. For each document use the margins or a Document Analysis Sheet to record:
 - a. What or who is the source?
 - b. What is the issue being discussed? (The Bank, Indian Removal, etc.)
 - c. Summarize in your own words the main argument or idea being presented in each document.
5. Clarify for yourself the different issues addressed by the 15 documents. Make a judgment as to how democratic Jackson was on each issue. Make sure to compare his actions to your original definition of democracy
6. Make a final summary judgment of Jackson. Overall, did he move the country towards democracy? Is it reasonable to argue that in some areas he did and in others he did not? Is it even possible that some of his actions may have been both democratic and undemocratic at the same time?

The Documents:

- Document A: Voting for Presidential Electors – A State-by-State View
- Document B: The Election of 1828: One Historian’s View
- Document C: Jackson’s Letter Regarding Voting Restrictions
- Document D: An Historian Discusses Jackson’s Attitudes about Voting
- Document E: “King Andrew the First” (a cartoon)
- Document F: Jackson’s Veto of the National Bank
- Document G: Daniel Webster’s Reply to Jackson’s Bank Veto Message
- Document H: Jackson Discusses Rotating Government Officials
- Document I: The Swartwout Case: A Study in Corruption
- Document J: Jackson on Native Americans and Indian Removal
- Document K: The Cherokee Plea
- Document L: Map – Indian Removal
- Document M: Jackson’s Letters about His Adopted Native American Son
- Document N: Jackson’s Call to Free Blacks During the War of 1812
- Document O: Jackson’s Slaveholdings

How Democratic Was Andrew Jackson?

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

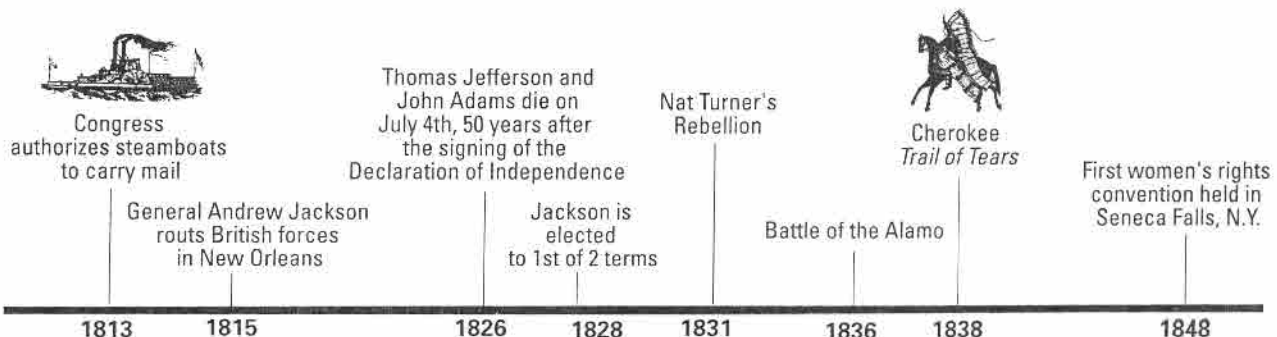
he returned home, and young Andrew was left to confront the world on his own.

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 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

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?*

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How democratic was Andrew Jackson?

Document A

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

	P— by people		L— by state 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,

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.

