
How Democratic Was Andrew Jackson?



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?

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 8 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 8 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?

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!

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 lawyer 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 US House and a year later was elected to the US Senate.

Military Career

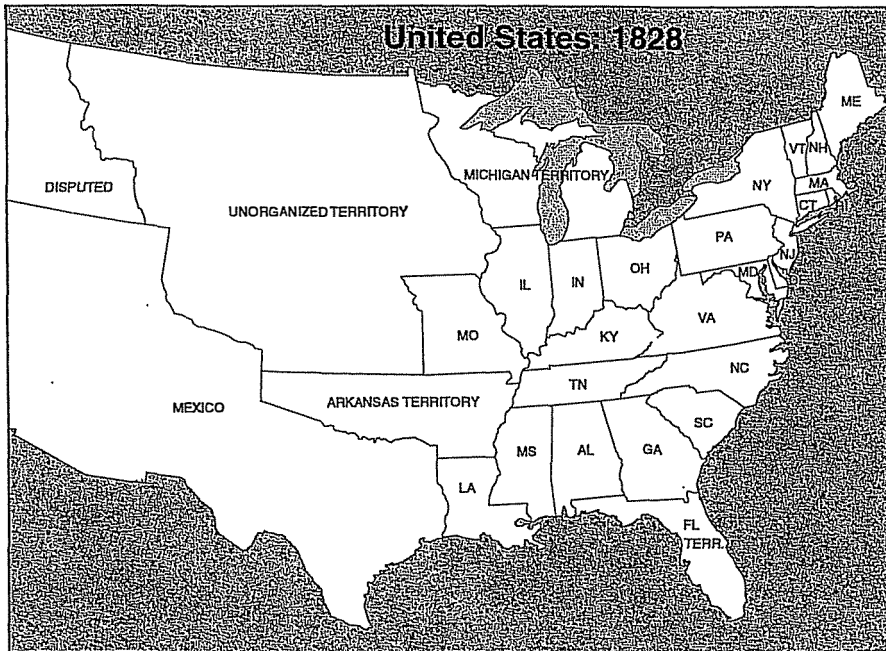
It was not, however, Andrew Jackson's early political career that would make him an American hero; it was war. Andrew Jackson was born to be a soldier. His first successes came when he led a campaign of Tennessee volunteers against the Creek Indians in Alabama in 1813 and 1814. A year later he commanded 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 waste with his soldiers. He mailed home bone splinters to Rachel that occasionally 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. Known affectionately as

Old Hickory, Andrew Jackson was tough and unbreakable, just like a hickory tree.

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. Because no candidate received a majority of the electoral votes, the election was decided in U.S. House of Representatives. In what Jackson called “the corrupt bargain,” Clay traded his electoral votes to Adams for an 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?!

Ideas About Democracy

Jackson became determined to create a new era of real democracy in America, where the people would be heard. From 1824-28 he campaigned by telling the People he would listen and do their will. Finally, in 1828, Jackson was elected President. He was reelected in 1832.

How well he listened to the People and did their will is left for you to decide.

The focus question of this DBQ is “How democratic was Andrew Jackson?” Remember, 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. He never considered Native Americans as potential citizens,

and he was one of the largest slave-owners in Tennessee at the time of his election. Enemies of Jackson claimed he behaved more like a dictator or king than a democratically elected president.

On the following pages are 11 documents that touch on several 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. Your task is to decide: *How democratic was Andrew Jackson?*

Document 1

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 2

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

So in a broader sense the election (of Andrew Jackson in 1828) 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!”...

“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.”

...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.

Document 3

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

...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.

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

Document 4

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 5

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.... I submit, therefore, to your consideration...(a) 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 (government jobs) than another.

Document 6

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

...By persuasion and force they (Native Americans) have been made to retire from river to river and from mountain to mountain, until some of the tribes have become extinct.... (T)he 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...to be guaranteed to the Indian tribes as long as they shall occupy it.... This emigration should be voluntary...(but) if they remain within the limits of the states they must be subject to their laws.

Document 7

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...badly supplied with food and water.... All our neighbors...would speak a language totally different from ours, and practice different customs....

...On the soil which contains the ashes of our beloved men we wish to live – on this soil we wish to die....

Document 8

Source: Map created from various sources.

INDIAN REMOVAL, 1831-1840s

