President Clinton's Approval Ratings High Despite Lewinsky Scandal

In this NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll taken in the midst of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, 63% of Americans give President Bill Clinton a favorable rating, with only 30% unfavorable. The numbers are the highest for any second-term president in history, stronger even than Ronald Reagan. NBC's Tim Russert analyzes why Clinton's approval ratings are staying so high.

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Transcript

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MATT LAUER, co-host:
On CLOSE UP this morning, good news for President Clinton as he embarks on his trip to China. His approval rating remains high, while an overwhelming 83 percent say they are sick and tired of the Monica Lewinsky story. Tim Russert, NBC's Washington bureau chief and moderator of "Meet the Press," has all the results of today's NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll.
Good morning to you.
TIM RUSSERT, reporting:
Good morning, Matt.
LAUER: The President heads to China with a nice pat on the back from the American people. Any surprises in the approval rating?
RUSSERT: Just how strong they continue to be, Matt. Sixty-three percent give the President a favorable rating, only 30 percent unfavorable. That is stronger for any second-term President--stronger than Ronald Reagan, stronger than Richard Nixon before Watergate--very strong numbers for the President.
LAUER: Let's talk about this trip to China. There was talk that he should or should not go. Well, the majority of the people think the trip is a good idea, but at the same time while they say that, his approval ratings on foreign policy have dropped.
RUSSERT: This is quite striking. As you'll see, there's been about a 10-for--a 10-point drop in his foreign policy approval handling. What people at the White House I've spoken to believe that's because of India and Pakistan testing nuclear devices, and the criticism he's gotten in China. They believe if he's successful
over the next nine days, they can get those numbers back over 60 as well.
LAUER: Think also the Asian monetary crisis has something to do with that?
RUSSERT: No doubt about it. The--they're afraid that that may spill over into the US economy, and no strong signs of that yet.
LAUER: How about this question? When asked if Ken Starr comes up with evidence that President Clinton perjured himself in the case of Monica Lewinsky, should impeachment proceedings go forward? What do the American people have to say?
RUSSERT: Nearly six out of 10 said no, Matt. And we also added another question. We said what about obstruction of justice as well as perjury? The numbers did not change. People do not have any appetite to impeach President Clinton, even if he committed perjury and obstruction of justice.
LAUER: But, also, a connection to the economy there. Things are going well at home, so they really don’t care about those proceedings.
RUSSERT: That second addition is being added on and times are rolling and people still perceive this as very much an issue of sex and not criminality.
LAUER: Tell me about the question where you asked people what they felt about the Monica Lewinsky story. Were they tired of it? Did they want to hear more of it? And what's the message to the media based on their answer?
RUSSERT: This is quite striking. We asked people exactly that question. As you can see, 83 percent are tired of hearing about this story. Fourteen percent want a continued interest.
And it's very striking, Matt. We went on to ask people, well then, what about Ken Starr? Fifty percent said they have little confidence in any report he's going to put forward, and 55 percent said he's the reason why this investigation has been delayed so long, not the President, despite the President's claims over privileges and attempts to delay. Very striking. Very strong for the President.
LAUER: Let me ask you briefly to change subjects for a second, Tim, and let’s look forward to the election in the year 2000. We've an interested party about to sit down with Katie. What do the numbers show the results to be for Al Gore?
RUSSERT: This is quite striking. We ran Al Gore against George W. Bush, the Texas governor, son of the former President. And as you can see, compare that to what happened in 1996, George Bush is winning 46-40, Clinton/Gore won 49-to-41. And, Matt, two important warning signals for Al Gore in these numbers. The Clinton/Gore campaign carried Hispanics by more than 30 points in 1996. He is winning Hispanics by about 10. Clinton/Gore won women by 16 points, he is winning women by about three. Al Gore must improve dramatically his standing with women voters and Hispanic voters, or this is going to be a very difficult election in the year 2000.
LAUER: All right, Tim. Thanks very much. We appreciate it.
RUSSERT: OK, Matt.