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Presidential Power Couples: Does a Strong First Lady Correlate with a Strong President?

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Date of Completion

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Abstract

This thesis explores the extent to which a strong first lady correlates with a strong president, and if she impacts public perceptions of his success. To do this, I have run a cross-tabulation through STATA with comprehensive rankings on presidents and first ladies from C-SPAN and Siena College respectively. Both consist of 10 categories that factor into the overall rankings. I have also compiled brief case studies on statistically significant first ladies in order to discover why some of these women are ranked as such. The correlations between rankings are most prominent at the bottom of the rankings - with low ranked presidents having low ranked first ladies - but less so at the top of the rankings. The most statistically significant category of the first lady rankings was "Background", with the least significant being "Accomplishments". I also found that more recent first ladies tend to be ranked higher, possibly due to their ability to be seen as political figures. My qualitative research concludes that despite there being low correlations between strong first ladies and strong presidents in the rankings, the first lady does have a strong behind-the-scenes impact on her husband.

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spheres of executive power every day. The former traditional role of presidential wives has made way for what is viewed by many as a real partnership function with the president.