

Pro & Con Arguments: *"Was Bill Clinton a good president?"*

PRO Bill Clinton Was a Good President

- 1. Character:** Clinton was deeply religious from a young age and regularly attended a Baptist church as an adult. He once said, "Religious faith has permitted me to believe in the continuing possibility of becoming a better person every day, to believe in the search for complete integrity in life." [6] Clinton's private marital issues were unrelated to his ability to govern the US. Even after the news of his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky broke in early 1998, his approval rating was 63 percent according to a *Washington Post* poll. [7]
- 2. Crime:** The crime rate fell every year that Clinton was president and was at a 26-year low by the end of his two terms. He got funding for 100,000 new police officers nationwide. He signed the 1993 Brady Bill requiring a waiting period and background check to purchase handguns. Clinton's 1994 Crime Bill included a ban on assault weapons, and there was a 40 percent decline in gun crime by 2001. [8]
- 3. Defense:** Clinton presided over a modernization of the US military which led to increased readiness and efficiency. His administration focused on precision weapons and the use of GPS (Global Positioning System) technology. The result of his focus was lower collateral damage, lower casualty rates, and advanced communications. He also increased pay and benefits for military personnel. [9][10]
- 4. Economy:** The US went from having the largest budget deficit in American history (\$290 billion) in 1992 when Clinton was elected to having a budget surplus of \$127 billion when he left office in 2001. 22.5 million new jobs were created and unemployment dropped from 7.5% when Clinton took office to 4.0% by the end of his second term, the lowest in 30 years. The poverty rate dropped to 11.8% in 1999, which was the lowest it had been since 1979. [2] [11]
- 5. Education:** Clinton's Goals 2000 program distributed two billion dollars between 1994 and 1999 to set uniform standards in US schools. His 1994 Improving America's School Act (IASA) received support from Republicans and Democrats and from the education and business communities. IASA required that standards and accountability be the same for economically disadvantaged students as for other students. [12]
- 6. Environment:** Clinton's pro-environmental policies included preserving 4.6 million acres of land in national monuments, strengthening the Safe Drinking Water Act, and enacting tougher emissions and energy efficiency standards. The communities of more than 44 million Americans were brought up to clean air standards during his presidency. The Environmental Protection Agency and Justice Department prosecuted 241 environmental-related crimes in 1999, more than twice as many as in 1992, the year before Clinton took office. [13]
- 7. Foreign Policy:** Clinton played an instrumental role in the peace process in Northern Ireland, which culminated in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. [14] He helped to get former Soviet nations to give up their nuclear arsenals and improve their control of nuclear materials. [15] Clinton worked with NATO, a military alliance between Europe and North America, to bomb Serbia to end Slobodan Milosevic's ethnic cleansing campaign. Clinton then sent 20,000 American troops to enforce peace in the region, a mission with no American casualties. [16] He nearly orchestrated a historic Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement at Camp David in 2001.

8. **Health:** Clinton sought to bring attention and action to the fight against HIV/AIDS. Funding for AIDS-related programs increased 150 percent during his presidency, and he was a leader in developing international initiatives to search for a vaccine. [17] He signed the Newborns' and Mothers' Health Protection Act of 1996, allowing women to stay in the hospital for 48 to 96 hours after giving birth instead of being kicked out in less than 24 hours. [18]
9. **Science/Technology:** Clinton's instructions to NASA in 1993 led to productivity gains and reduced overhead for the International Space Station program, as well as a better research relationship with Russia. [19] Clinton fought to bridge the "digital divide," an inequality of access to technology that would make poor people even more disadvantaged in education and employment opportunities. His policies helped schools and libraries introduce computers and the internet to people who wouldn't otherwise have had access. [20]
10. **Social Policy:** In 1996, Clinton fulfilled his campaign promise to reform welfare by creating new rules that required recipients to work within two years of getting benefits and limited the time most people could spend on welfare to five years. [21] As proof that the reform was successful, 10 years after he signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, welfare rolls had dropped from 12.2 million to 4.5 million. [22]
11. **Taxes:** The \$290 billion national deficit of 1992 became a \$124 billion surplus by 1999 because Clinton's Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 raised taxes on the top income rate from 28 percent to 39.6 percent, thus increasing tax revenues. [23] [24] Just as the 1980s economic boom followed a tax increase by Reagan, the economy likewise improved after Clinton raised taxes in 1993. [25] He also limited the ability of corporations to claim deductions for entertainment expenses. [26]
12. **Other:** Clinton was aware of the threat of Al Qaeda and authorized the CIA to kill Osama bin Laden. He sought to hunt down bin Laden after the Oct. 12, 2000 attack on the USS Cole, but the CIA and FBI refused to certify bin Laden's involvement in the terrorist act. "I got closer to killing him than anybody's gotten since," Clinton said in a Sep. 24, 2006 interview with Chris Wallace. [27]



CON Bill Clinton Was a Bad President

- 1. Character:** Constant scandals took Clinton's focus off running the country. When Paula Jones sued Clinton for sexual harassment, he became the first sitting president to testify before a grand jury investigating his own conduct. [3] An affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky culminated in Clinton's impeachment by the House of Representatives on Dec. 19, 1998 on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice. The only other president in US history to be impeached was Andrew Johnson in 1868. [4] Some blame Clinton's moral shortcomings for disenfranchising Democratic Party members and Independents, and causing Al Gore to lose the 2000 presidential election. [28]
- 2. Crime:** The number of federal prisoners doubled under Clinton, and 58 percent of them were serving time for drug-related offenses. Resources were geared towards incarceration instead of rehabilitation or crime prevention. [29] Clinton's 1994 Crime Bill was filled with "pork spending" that distributed \$10 billion to states and special interest groups. [30]
- 3. Defense:** Clinton was unable to fulfill his campaign promise to repeal the ban on homosexuals serving in the military. Faced with strong opposition from conservatives early in his presidency, Clinton settled on a compromise policy referred to as "don't ask, don't tell," which allowed gays to serve in the military if they did not disclose their sexual orientation. Neither conservatives nor liberals were satisfied by the outcome. [24]
- 4. Economy:** Clinton gets too much credit for the good economy of the 1990s, which was already growing when he took office. The Republican-controlled Congress helped improve the economy by exercising fiscal restraint. [31] Clinton's failure to regulate the financial-services markets enabled the bad lending and Wall Street scams that led to the 2007 banking crisis. [32]
- 5. Education:** Clinton's Goals 2000 program did not ensure uniform quality of standards among all the states because he compromised on oversight to get the program passed. The impact therefore varied by state and Clinton never fulfilled his goal of equalizing education standards and improving results for all students. By 2000, six years after IASA was implemented, only 17 states were in full compliance with the standards. [12]
- 6. Environment:** Clinton passed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) despite the fact that it traded lower environmental standards for increased free trade. [33] NAFTA resulted in more air pollution on the US/Mexico border, which experts estimated would cost \$15 billion to clean up. [34] Clinton also signed a 1995 measure to allow logging in national forests which suspended environmental laws protecting those forests. [35]
- 7. Foreign Policy:** A year after 18 American troops were killed in a failed 1993 mission to capture a warlord in Somalia, Clinton was hesitant to take action to stop a genocide in Rwanda. While he failed to act, more than half a million Tutsis were murdered. Critics accused Clinton of appeasement when he gave China Most Favored Nation (MFN) status despite their terrible human rights record and when he granted North Korea concessions in exchange for a promise to discontinue their nuclear weapons program. [36]

8. **Health:** Health care reform was Clinton's major goal when he took office but his administration was ill-prepared for such a large task and made several missteps. Republican opposition was insurmountable and Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME) declared on Sep. 26, 1994 that Clinton's plan would never pass. The failure is considered the biggest of his administration in part because it led to the Republicans regaining control of Congress in the next election but also because he expended a lot of political capital without getting anything in return. [24] [37] [38]
9. **Science/Technology:** Clinton cut NASA's budget by \$715 million in 1995 (about 5%) and did not restore the bulk of the money until three months before he left office. The result was a space program struggling to operate with less money for most of Clinton's time in office. Some blame the 2003 Space Shuttle Columbia explosion on Clinton's decision to slash NASA's budget by an aggregate of \$56 million over his presidency. [39]
10. **Social Policy:** Clinton neglected to take to steps to restructure Social Security and Medicare. In anticipation of the upcoming Baby Boom generation retiring and drawing heavily on those social services, Clinton should have worked to secure those programs. In a June 20, 2004 interview with 60 Minutes, he admitted "I'm sorry on the home front that we didn't get healthcare and that we didn't reform Social Security." [40][41]
11. **Taxes:** The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 increased the gasoline tax by 4.3 cents per gallon, which directly impacted the middle class. [42] The 1993 tax hikes cannot be credited with the economic boom of the 1990s: it was after the Republican Congress passed tax cuts in 1997 that the economy really became stronger and the budget was balanced. [43] Clinton designed his tax plans to place an unfair burden on the wealthy, punishing the most productive members of the US economy while cutting taxes for the least productive. [44]
12. **Other:** Clinton failed to deal with the threat of Osama bin Laden, whose terrorist acts escalated and culminated in the Sep. 11, 2001 attacks that killed 2,973 people. Clinton was too distracted by scandals such as the threat of impeachment to take action against Al Qaeda. [45] A former CIA station chief in Pakistan said Clinton ordered the CIA to capture bin Laden alive, which resulted in a missed opportunity to kill him at an al-Qaida training camp in 2000. [46]

