

How good a president was Bill Clinton?

William "Bill" Clinton was the 42nd President of the United States from 1993 to 2001. He ran for the Democrats against incumbent President George Bush, who had been deemed 'unbeatable' after the Persian Gulf conflict. However, his approval ratings fell from 80% to just over 40% by the time of the general election. Clinton's election campaign was dogged with allegations of affairs, drug-use and shady business deals, but Clinton stood firm by refusing to withdraw from the election. He unexpectedly won with 42.9% of the vote. There were three main factors that contributed to Clinton's election victory; first, the campaign came in the midst of the recession of 1992. The resulting job loss fuelled strong discontent with Bush. Clinton was perceived as sympathetic, concerned, and more in touch with ordinary families. Second was the decision by Bush to accept a tax increase. Not having been in Congress at the time, Clinton was able to effectively condemn the tax increase. Finally, Bush's support was in disarray as his conservative voters lacked confidence in him.

Clinton appealed to the electorates with his charismatic personality. His relaxed personality was popular with young people, whereas his high intelligence impressed those who expected more from him. Clinton was seen during his presidency and during his candidacy as a change from the presidents of the World War II Generation. Despite criticisms that his appeal to young voters lacked substance, Clinton won among younger voters in the 1992 election, with the highest Generation X turnout ever. Clinton clearly came across as popular to young people. Clinton was also very popular overall among African-Americans and made improving race relations a major theme of his presidency. However, America has the highest rate of inequality of any western country, and that increased further during Mr Clinton's years in office. Clinton's job approval rating varied over the course of his first term, ranging from a low of 36% in 1993, to a high of 64% in 1993. Bill Clinton was triumphantly re-elected president in 1996 and his job approval rating consistently ranged from the high 50s to the high 60s in his second term, with a high of 73% approval in 1998 and 1999. However, when he was leaving, a poll found only 45 percent said they would miss him, while 55 percent thought he "would have something worthwhile to contribute and should remain active in public life".

During his time as president, his domestic priorities included efforts to create a universal healthcare system, upgrade education, to restrict handgun sales, to improve race relations, and to protect the jobs of workers. His domestic agenda also included more conservative themes such as reforming welfare programs, expanding the "War on Drugs", and increasing law enforcement funding. Internationally, his priorities included reducing trade barriers, and mediating the Northern Ireland peace process. Clinton stumbled badly in his first term when his complex health care reform, mediated by his Wife Hillary, was rejected by Congress. By 1994, Republicans had launched an attack on Clinton that delivered Republican majorities in both houses of Congress for the first time since 1955. When Clinton refused to sign a highly controversial budget passed by the Republican-controlled Congress, he looked strong and resolute. Congress then tried to pressure Clinton to back down, but Clinton remained firm. Most Americans blamed Congress for the gridlock rather than the President, and Clinton was decisively re-elected in 1996.

Clinton believed that the key to fixing the economy was reducing government spending and the huge deficits that occurred in the federal budget each year because government spending exceeded its limits. During Clinton's time in office, the U.S. enjoyed continuous economic expansion, reductions in unemployment, and growing wealth through a massive rise in the stock market. The economic boom ended shortly before his term ended. Whilst the Democrats look upon this time with pride, the Republicans claim it had little to do with Clinton and more to do with the creativity and productivity of American companies. Clinton, however, did pass legislation and negotiate trade agreements that helped the American economy thrive.

In 1998, as a result of issues surrounding personal indiscretions with a young woman White House intern, Clinton was the second U.S. president to be impeached by the House of Representatives. He was tried in the Senate and found not guilty of the charges brought against him. He apologised to the nation for his actions and continued to have unprecedented popular approval ratings for his job as president. However Clinton was then impeached as President of the United by the House of Representatives on four counts. The charges were perjury, suborning perjury, and obstruction of justice arising from the Lewinsky testimony. The House passed two of the four counts.

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