

# US presidents

An analysis of how effective recent US presidents have been in achieving their aims

## Bill Clinton

Effective	Ineffective
<b>Economy (big success)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>oversaw a balanced budget, and the economy grew in every quarter of his presidency</li> <li>unemployment fell to a 20-year low</li> </ul>	<b>Affordable healthcare (biggest failure)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>inexperience working with Congress and overconfidence in his ability saw his proposal failing to be put to a vote</li> <li>healthcare reform was his biggest policy objective and it failed</li> </ul>
<b>Expansion of civil rights (moderate success)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>created what was then the most diverse cabinet in history</li> <li>championed LGBTQ+ rights by instructing the Defense Department to follow 'Don't Ask Don't Tell'</li> </ul>	
<b>Foreign policy (moderate success)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enjoyed moderate success in foreign policy in Russia, Yugoslavia and with the Northern Ireland peace process</li> </ul>	

## George W. Bush

Effective	Ineffective
<b>'War on terror' (some argue a success)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>created a Homeland Security Department in an attempt to prevent another attack like 9/11</li> </ul>	<b>'War on terror' (some argue a failure)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the war with Iraq was based on a false premise and US involvement arguably made the region less stable</li> <li>the Iraq War cost close to \$2 trillion</li> <li>was criticised over the legality of Guantanamo Bay</li> <li>was criticised by civil liberties groups over the Homeland Security Department's invasion of privacy</li> </ul>
<b>Education reform (successful in funding terms)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'No Child Left Behind' policy saw a 2% increase in spending for inner-city schools</li> </ul>	<b>Education reform (unsuccessful in policy terms)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'No Child Left Behind' did not significantly improve inner-city education</li> </ul>
<b>Major tax cuts (a key policy aim)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>made \$1.35 trillion worth of tax cuts</li> </ul>	<b>Major tax cuts (an ill-judged policy)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>it was fiscally irresponsible to make tax cuts at a time when government spending was growing because of the 'war on terror'</li> </ul>

## Barack Obama

Effective	Ineffective
<b>Healthcare reform (biggest success)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>passing healthcare reform was a significant achievement</li> <li>the number of uninsured adults dropped from 18% in 2013 to 11% by 2016</li> </ul>	<b>Healthcare reform (could have been more radical)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>had to compromise and sacrifice the more radical and expensive aim of achieving universal healthcare coverage, so as to secure support from more fiscally conservative Democrats</li> </ul>
<b>Stimulating the economy (major success)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>saw the USA through the 2008 economic crisis, with Congress passing two major pieces of legislation essential to his plans: the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009) and the Dodd-Frank Act (2010)</li> </ul>	<b>Immigration reform (a significant failure)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>failed to persuade Congress to pass the DREAM Act, underestimating opposition within his own party</li> <li>his attempt to bypass Congress and extend the rights of illegal immigrants via executive order was frustrated by the Supreme Court in the 2016 <i>United States v Texas</i> ruling</li> </ul>
<b>Ending the war in Iraq (moderate success)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>successful in engineering an exit strategy that ended the war in Iraq</li> </ul>	

## Donald Trump

Effective	Ineffective
<b>Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (2017) (a moderate success)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>biggest overhaul in the nation's tax codes for 30 years, slashing corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%</li> <li>the Act stimulated the economy and saw unemployment fall to its lowest level since 1969</li> </ul>	<b>Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (2017) (not as successful as Trump thought)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>argued that GDP would rise to 6% and that the tax cuts would pay for themselves, which did not happen</li> </ul>
<b>Immigration (some success)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>policy agreements with Central American countries successful in reducing the number of migrants illegally trying to enter the USA</li> </ul>	<b>Immigration (failure)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>failed to build a wall across the USA and Mexico border – only 24 km of new fencing was built</li> </ul>
<b>CARES Act (2020) (some success)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>during the Covid-19 crisis, Trump's administration persuaded a divided Congress to pass the CARES Act</li> <li>this prevented the US economy from entering a deep recession</li> </ul>	<b>Management of Covid-19 crisis (considerable failure)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>slow to recognise the danger of the virus</li> <li>failure to communicate a national response</li> <li>the USA was severely affected in terms of total fatalities</li> </ul>
	<b>Repealing Obamacare (considerable failure)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lacked a clear vision for replacing Obamacare</li> <li>was defeated by a Republican-majority Senate, who were unconvinced by his vision</li> </ul>

## Joe Biden

Effective	Ineffective
<b>Covid-19 vaccination programme (broadly successful)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when Biden entered office, less than 1% of the US population had been vaccinated</li> <li>six months later, 67% of the population were vaccinated</li> </ul>	<b>Covid-19 vaccination rate (comparatively disappointing)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>US vaccination rate lags behind global rivals</li> <li>struggled to combat misinformation on vaccines</li> </ul>
<b>Covid-19 relief aid (successful)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>in March 2021, signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act, which provided direct payments of \$1,400 to eligible Americans and helped fund the reopening of schools and universities</li> <li>in November 2021, signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act into law, which provided \$1 trillion of aid into ageing public works such as roads and bridges</li> </ul>	<b>Covid-19 relief aid (less successful)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relief aid contributed to inflation (an unintended policy failure)</li> <li>the huge amount of government spending has helped spur inflation</li> <li>frustration with inflation and economic pessimism were instrumental in the Democrat loss of control of the House in the 2022 midterms. However, retaining control of the Senate indicated that dissatisfaction with the president was not as widespread as predicted</li> </ul>
<b>High number of diverse federal judges confirmed (successful)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>confirmed more federal judges in his first year than any president since Reagan</li> <li>75% of nominees women</li> <li>65% of nominees people from minority ethnic backgrounds</li> </ul>	<b>The Build Back Better Act (failure of a key policy)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>signature legislation failed to pass the Senate, as Biden was unable to persuade moderate Democrat senators, such as Joe Manchin, to support the Act</li> <li>Manchin argued that the \$1.75 trillion climate and social-spending bill would be too expensive</li> <li>an embarrassing defeat for Biden's signature policy</li> </ul>
	<b>Afghanistan withdrawal (major failure)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>withdrawal was disastrous for Biden and an international embarrassment for the USA</li> <li>the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan for the first time since 2001</li> </ul>

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