

TOPIC #6: Was Bill Clinton a good president?

While opponents of Bill Clinton point to his impeachment due to his personal scandals and inconsistent foreign policy, his supporters downplay his marital infidelities and praise his economic policies.

In your response, analyze the two articles taken from www.procon.org to determine which position is best supported. Use relevant and specific evidence to support your response.

Article 1

- (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. An affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky culminated in Clinton's impeachment by the House of Representatives on December 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. Some blame Clinton's moral shortcomings for disenfranchising Democratic Party members and Independents, and causing Al Gore to lose the 2000 presidential election.
- (2) Crime: The number of federal prisoners doubled under Clinton, and 58% of them were serving time for drug-related offenses. Resources were geared towards incarceration instead of rehabilitation or crime prevention. Clinton's 1994 Crime Bill was filled with "pork spending" that distributed \$10 billion to states and special interest groups.
- (3) 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. Clinton's failure to regulate the financial-services markets enabled the bad lending and Wall Street scams that led to the 2007 banking crisis.
- (4) 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.

Article 2

- (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." Clinton's private marital issues were unrelated to his ability to govern the United States. Even after the news of his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky broke in early 1998, his approval rating was 63%, according to a *Washington Post* survey.
- (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% decline in gun crime by 2001.
- (3) Economy: The United States 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. There were 22.5 million new jobs 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.
- (4) Foreign policy: Clinton played an instrumental role in the peace process in Northern Ireland, which culminated in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. He helped to get former Soviet nations to give up their nuclear arsenals and improve their control of nuclear materials. 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. He nearly orchestrated an historic Israeli-Palestinian agreement at Camp David in 2000.