

## TOPIC #5: Was Ronald Reagan a good president?

People who believe Ronald Reagan was a good president point to his character and his role in defeating communism, while those who believe he was not a good president claim that his leadership style was too “hands off” and that he made several foreign policy mistakes.

In your response, analyze the two articles taken from [www.procon.org](http://www.procon.org) to determine which position is best supported. Use relevant and specific evidence from both articles to support your response.

### Article 1

- (1) Character: Reagan's charm, geniality, and ability to connect with average citizens as well as world leaders earned him the nickname “The Great Communicator.” Through his speeches and actions, Reagan restored the confidence of the American public in the office of the president. Decades after he left office, Reagan left a legacy that remained strong, with admirers wanting to add his portrait to Mount Rushmore and to US currency.
- (2) Crime: On October 2, 1982, Reagan launched a “War on Drugs” that helped reduce the high rate of casual drug use lingering from the 1970s. He increased funding for the drug war from \$1.5 billion in 1981 to \$2.75 billion in 1986. Reagan also signed eight major Executive Orders related to crime and justice as well as five major crime bills: Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984, Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, National Narcotics Leadership Act of 1984, Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, and Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988.
- (3) Economy: Reagan's economic policies, such as a reduction in government spending and regulation and cuts in taxes, resulted in an unprecedented 92-month long economic boom, from November 1982 to July 1990, with expansion and growth in the GDP (+36%), employment (+20 million jobs), and the Dow Jones Industrial Average (15%).
- (4) Foreign policy: Reagan helped bring an end to the 46-year-old Cold War, through a combination of hostile, anti-communist rhetoric and a massive arms buildup followed by skillful diplomacy and disarmament. On November 9, 1989, just over two years after his famous Brandenburg Gate speech, the Berlin Wall fell, marking the end of communism in Germany. On December 15, 1991, after four bilateral summits with Reagan, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev dissolved the Soviet Union.

## Article 2

- (1) Character: Reagan's hands-off leadership style manifested into an inability to control his administration from potentially illegal activities, e.g. the "Iran-Contra" scandal. His "troika," the nickname given to Chief of Staff James Baker, Deputy Chief of Staff Michael Deaver, and Counselor Edwin Meese, made many of Reagan's key administrative decisions for him.
- (2) Crime: In a September 28, 1981 speech to the International Chiefs of Police, Reagan claimed that people who commit violent crimes "are not desperate people seeking bread for their families; crime is the way they've chosen to live." This attitude failed to address the stark realities underlying crime, namely the national culture of poverty and discrimination. Violent crime nationwide increased 21% from 1981 to 1989. The "War on Drugs" wasted billions of dollars and escalated drug-related crime.
- (3) Economy: Reagan pledged during his 1980 campaign for president to balance the federal budget, but he never submitted a balanced budget in his eight years in office. In 1981, the deficit was \$79 billion and, in 1986, at the peak of his deficit spending, it stood at \$221 billion. The federal debt was \$994 billion when he took office in 1981 and grew to \$2.9 trillion when his second term ended in 1989. Reagan also added more trade barriers than any other President since Hoover in 1930. US imports that were subject to some form of trade restraint increased from 12% in 1980 to 23% in 1988.
- (4) Foreign policy: Reagan broke his own vows not to make deals with terrorists or states that aided them. In the "Iran-Contra" scandal, Reagan's administration bypassed congressional restrictions on aiding Nicaragua's Contra guerilla fighters, in part by diverting money to them from the sale of missiles to Iran. Reagan also initiated military involvement in Libya, Grenada, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Lebanon.