

## The Clinton Presidency



The **1992 election** was a three-way race between **the incumbent President George H.W. Bush**, the Independent candidate **Ross Perot**, and the former Democratic Governor of Arkansas **Bill Clinton**.

Clinton only received **43% of the Popular Vote** but won the Electoral College vote easily, receiving 370 votes to Bush's 168. However, the **Republicans narrowly controlled both the House of Representatives and the Senate** (the first time in 12 years that any party controlled both houses).

The economy remained sluggish with unemployment and welfare expenses rising. Congress was in favor of lowering federal spending and lessening the national debt. This led to Congress rejecting many of Clinton's programs, especially the issue of national health insurance.

One major bill that came into effect that brought both Republicans and Democrats together was the signing of **NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement)** that in 1994 created an economic alliance with Canada and Mexico that reduced tariffs and trade restrictions between the three countries.

### The "Contract with America"

This was a reform program for balanced budgets, tax cuts, and welfare reform that was led by the Speaker of the House **Newt Gingrich** (R, GA) and the Senate Majority Leader **Bob Dole** (R, KA). However, only some of these ideas became law, because the Republicans did not have the two-thirds majority to override Clinton's vetoes.

**Positive results** from the "Contract of America" were deficit reduction, gun control, childhood disease immunizations, family sick leave, and some tax reforms.

### Campaign Finance Reform

In the 1990's, **special interest groups (PACs) – Political Action Committees**, influenced the decisions made by government officials and donated large amounts of money to their parties. Individuals and businesses faced strict limits on their donations, but PACs had fewer restrictions. Another source was **"Soft Money"** which was given to the political parties instead of the candidates that were virtually unlimited amounts of money.

**Proposed legislation** that attempted to voluntarily impose spending limits on the amounts raised by both candidates and parties was **rejected** by Congress in 1999.

## Foreign Policy Issues

Clinton's foreign policy was uneven. He was slow to withdraw troops from **Somalia**, slow to take action in **Bosnia**, and delayed helping restore President Aristide's democratic regime in **Haiti**.

Clinton did persuade Congress to ratify the **GATT Treaty (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs)**. The GATT treaty created the 116-member **World Trade Organization (WTO)** whose role was to moderate trade disputes, environmental issues, labor standards, and questions arising from foreign investments.

Bill Clinton was successful in pressing **Israelis** and **Palestinians** to restart peace negotiations. In 1994, Israel and the **PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization)** agreed on Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and sections of the West Bank, including Jericho. Israel hoped the compromise would stop Palestinian violence. Palestinians wanted this to be the first step to an independent Palestinian State. In June 2000, Israeli troops pulled out of southern Lebanon and the slow process of negotiation continued.

### The Oslo Accords and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process



*President Clinton, Yitzhak Rabin, and Yasir Arafat at the signing ceremony for the Oslo Accord, September 13, 1993. (William J. Clinton Presidential Library)*

On September 13, 1993, Israeli Prime Minister **Yitzhak Rabin** and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Negotiator **Mahmoud Abbas** signed a Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, commonly referred to as the "Oslo Accord," at the White House. Israel accepted the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians, and the PLO renounced terrorism and recognized Israel's right to exist in peace. Both sides agreed that a Palestinian Authority (PA) would be established and assume governing responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over a five-year period. Then, permanent status talks on the issues of borders, refugees, and Jerusalem would be held. While President Bill Clinton's administration played a limited role in bringing the Oslo Accord into being, it would invest vast amounts of time and resources in order to help Israel and the Palestinians implement the agreement. By the time Clinton left office, however, the peace process had run aground, and a new round of Israeli-Palestinian violence had begun.

Source: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/oslo>

Two other positive foreign policy achievements during the Presidency of Bill Clinton were the efforts to convince **North Korea to halt nuclear weapon development** and in 1997 and 1998, Clinton called for firm action against **Iraq's blocking of the United Nations weapon inspection program**.

### **The 1996 Presidential Campaign**

Despite Clinton's inconsistent record of achievements, personal and party ethical problems, the strong economy helped Clinton received 49% of the Popular Vote. He easily defeated the Republican Candidate, **Bob Dole** in the Electoral College Vote (379 to 159) but the **Republicans held their majorities** in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

By the end of 1997, the nation's economy was the best it had been in decades. Unemployment and the rate of inflation was down, interest rates remained stable, and the stock market had reached record highs. Gasoline cost less than it had 20 years earlier! Because of the strong economy, federal, state, and local governments collected billions in added revenue. Budget surpluses were common. There was however, still a **large trade deficit** as American people bought more imported goods and the dollar amounts of these goods greatly exceeded the value of American exports.

### **The Asian Currency Crisis of 1997**

The "wonder-growth economies" of Asia (Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan) faltered in 1997 and 1998. In June 1998, President Clinton helped shore up the Asian economy by jumping into the currency market and buying \$2 billion in Japanese yen.

### **Clinton's Personal Problems**

The strong national economy led many Americans to ignore Clinton's personal problems and campaign finance investigations. However, events were to rapidly change.

Convictions were passed down on former Clinton associates in Arkansas for illegal banking and real estate deals in what was to be known as the **Whitewater Scandal**.

A sexual harassment suit against Clinton by **Paula Jones**, a former Arkansas state employee was dismissed but Clinton had to pay her a monetary settlement. Later, the same judge fined Clinton for **contempt of court** for giving "misleading" testimony.

The most serious situation arose from the President's perjury before Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr regarding an improper relationship with White House intern **Monica Lewinski**. In the summer of 1998, Clinton admitted he had lied about the affair. The House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee drew up **four articles of impeachment**.

In December 1998, the full House voted for two articles, accusing the President of lying under oath and obstructing justice. Clinton became the second President to be impeached [Andrew Johnson in 1868]. In January 1999, the Senate began the trial. **Chief Justice William Rehnquist** presided over the trial and several weeks of testimony ended with an unusual three-day closed-door session. The Senate failed to reach the necessary votes for a two-third majority, and **Clinton remained in office**.



## A reprieve from domestic scandals

In the spring of 1999, a new crisis in the Balkans gave Clinton a break from issues in America. In the former **Yugoslavia**, ethnic Albanians in the Kosovo Province intensified their resistance to the Serbian-led government's **ethnic cleansing** policies. The Albanians were met with brutal repression. Whole villages were evacuated and many inhabitants slaughtered. Kosovar refugees streamed into Albania and Macedonia.

President Clinton authorized U.S. participation in an intensive **NATO air campaign** to drive Serbian troops out of Kosovo. The air strikes pounded the regions for more than two months. Finally, in the summer of 1999, Serbian leaders agreed to withdraw.

Bill Clinton's turbulent second term put the Democrats on the defensive for the election of 2000. His **Vice-President, Al Gore** (TN) would run against former Texas Governor **George W. Bush**.

Clinton's presidency would end but the Election of 2000 will end with the Supreme Court Case **Bush v. Gore** and Al Gore finally conceding defeat.

