

The successes and failures of the obama presidency politics essay



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President Obama is seen as a successful President according to the website Politifact. com, out of the 502 promises he made during the 2008 election campaign he has so far kept 134, compromised on 41, broken 40, stalled on 69 and still has 220 in the works. He may, therefore, be seen to be a successful President. However, this was not reflected in the mid-term elections where the Democrats lost a considerable number of seats within the Senate and lost their majority within the House. In this essay I will assess the successes and failures of the Obama presidency against what he promised during his election campaign of 2008 and during his subsequent State of the Union address. I will also judge some of his successes and failures by reference to opinion polls from various news outlets, particularly whether the public approved of his handling of certain situations such as unemployment and the BP oil disaster. I will first assess his domestic successes and failures then his foreign policy successes and failures, while assessing what it means to his presidency specifically and the American political system.

President Obama knew when he came into office that his first priority was to fix the economy after the recession of 2008-2009. He introduced the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 which provided a stimulus to the country; it was split into three parts at a cost of \$787 billion. One-third in tax cuts and tax credits to help overcome the hardships of the recession, such as an increase in food stamp benefits and unemployment benefits; one-third on the infrastructure of the country, which included projects on transport and highway and bridge construction and repair. Finally, one-third on state stabilization to stop the states cutting essential services that the

public need, such as teachers.[2]President Obama also bailed out the car industry, specifically Chrysler and GM, at a cost of \$17.4 billion.[3]The necessity to save the car industry was evident as it could have led to a double dip recession. GM alone employed 300,000 workers within the United States, and if it was to fall into insolvent administration it would have had a large impact on the economy. President Obama also initiated Cash for Clunkers scheme in which owners of cars could trade them in for more fuel efficient cars. This was very popular as the initial \$1 billion in subsidies for this program was supposed to last for 90 days but actually only lasted for 9. [4]He also brought in measures to help nine million homeowners facing foreclosure on their homes and who could not afford to repay their mortgages. The purpose was to offer mortgage companies subsidies and incentives to help troubled home owners.[5]

Obama also brought in regulation to control the banks after they started making profits again. He stated: " We are not going to let Wall Street take the money and run"[6]and imposed conditions before the banks could escape George W Bush's Troubled Asset Relief Programme (TARP) in which money was given to the banks in total costing \$700 billion.[7]Even though the stimulus was intended to create jobs, they were not planned to be created until 2010-2011. In 2009 unemployment was 10% of the workforce and as of March 2011 the unemployment rate still hovers around the 10% mark.[8]

Overall Obama has kept most of his promises regarding the economy, with very few promises broken.[9]However, in a poll of how he handled the economy his approval rating is only at 45% (January 2011) with 54%
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disapproving.[10]This shows that the public thinks he is handling the economy quite badly. Critics have pointed out that he has done well on the economy with Nouriel Roubini in an article in the Financial Times pointing out that he has ' inherited the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression' and that the stimulus ' did the right thing early and avoided another depression'[11]Without the stimulus Jonathan Alter makes the point that 8. 5 million workers would have lost their jobs. He has done well in regulating the banks and TARP with the loans with added interest that were made having now been paid back. The figures are seen as impressive as instead of \$700 billion being owed to the Government, the Government is owed just under \$100 billion. The Clash for Clunkers programme is estimated to have saved 120, 000 jobs.[12]The auto industry has also been greatly improved creating 55, 000 new jobs and GM paying back its bailout money five years ahead of schedule.[13]Obama recalls that " It wasn't an easy call...But we decided that while providing additional assistance was a risk, the far greater risk to families and communities across our country was to do nothing. ... I knew this wasn't a popular decision. But it was the right one."[14]

The way he dealt with the housing crisis was seen to go not quite so smoothly as of the 9 million homeowners the plan hoped to assist, only 3 million were actually helped. This was due to the fact that the legislation was directed at people who the Obama administration saw as having a good reason to stay in their homes; these people often worked full time and had received sub prime mortgages. The legislation helped stop house prices falling by the predicted 20% and instead increased them by 5% although house prices are still of considerable concern to the US economy.[15]

Where Obama has failed is in job creation. It is at its worst since 1982. Newt Gingrich of the Republican Party commented " If we're still at 9 or 10 percent unemployment in 2012, this is a one term president no matter how articulate he is." The unemployment rate is furthermore one of the factors why the Democrats failed in the mid-term elections losing control of the House.[16]As Alter states, for Obama even to be considered a success he must bring down unemployment.[17]Obama has been able to pass all of his economic legislation quite easily due to his previous super majorities within the House and the Senate after the election of 2008. However, as he has now reached the mid-terms and the Republican party have a majority hold within the House, he will have a much difficult time as the Republican party are likely to resist his legislative proposals. This is becoming apparent in the differences in Congress over this year's budget proposals and points to the difficulty when any president is faced with his party being in a minority within Congress.

One of Obama's major pledges was to reform the ailing healthcare system, as it would greatly increase the country's debt. Healthcare spending has grown to such an extent that it is predicted to rise from one-sixth of GDP in 2009 to one-third in 2035, and by 2080 nearly half of U. S. GDP would be spent on healthcare according to the Congressional Budget Office.

[18]Healthcare premiums had also doubled and the numbers of uninsured Americans would surpass 50 million. Families have told of being bankrupted by paying for the medical care, and of the bad treatment from insurance companies.[19]Obama and a Democrat Congress implemented a healthcare plan which contained new federal regulation of insurance, help for states on

Medicaid, an increase in the affordability of healthcare and higher fees on employers who do not provide insurance.[20] This was met with fierce opposition from some on the right of the political spectrum such that no Republican congressmen voted for it, mainly encouraged by those from the extreme right of the political spectrum, such as the Tea Party movement.

The healthcare plan was seen as a success as it was one of Obama's key campaign promises to ensure that some sort of healthcare plan became law, and he again mentioned in his 2010 State of the Union Address that he wanted to implement some healthcare reform.[21] He got his wish with the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010. Although seen as a success in that he got the Democratic Congress to pass the necessary legislation, it proved unpopular with the public with one poll giving 38% approving of the healthcare plan and 53% opposing it.[22] However, different news organisations reported different numbers at separate times. President Obama had to rely on his presidential powers of persuasion and bargaining to get this legislation through Congress, as he influenced Senators, House members and even tried unsuccessfully to get Republicans on his side. At various times he tried to influence public opinion that such legislation was necessary. The legislation is also subject to numerous court challenges with Judge Roger Vinson in the Federal District of Pensacola, Florida ruling that the whole legislation was void, not just the provisions for compulsory insurance.[23] It is likely that the Supreme Court will eventually be called upon to rule on the legislation. The importance of a president leading on controversial legislation and using all of his powers of persuasion to carry

Congress and the public with him is demonstrated by the healthcare legislation.

President Obama's other domestic policy initiatives include bringing in legislation on the repeal of ' don't ask don't tell', which stops the military from infringing on the rights of homosexual citizens if they choose to join the military; his education reforms which gave the power to close poor performing schools (which Bill Gates rated him a " A" for); and the equal pay legislation which promises equal pay for jobs that have equal standing.

Obama's biggest domestic disaster came with the BP oil spill. Obama could be said to have handled the BP oil spill poorly as he was slow to respond and criticised for not being more emotive on the issue, saying in an interview that " This is not a theatre".[24]Polls at the time showed a low approval rating of just 41%.[25]Nevertheless once the issue was resolved, it was quickly forgotten about by the media and the Government.

President Obama's foreign policy is one of both successes and failures. One of Obama's main campaign promises was to withdraw from Iraq which he successfully completed on the 31 August 2010 with only a handful of troops staying in Iraq to advise Iraqi forces.[26]Afghanistan was the most controversial foreign policy decision during his presidency with Dick Cheney accusing him of ' dithering'. Obama after much deliberation sent 30, 000 more troops into Afghanistan with the decision to withdraw some troops in summer 2011. The President of Afghanistan accepted cash bribes from Iran which caused embarrassment to the Obama administration and General McChrystal and his staff criticised the Commander in Chief in a magazine

article, calling him unimpressive and “ uncomfortable and intimidated”. He was dismissed and replaced by General David Petraeus. Obama has made positive steps to improve U. S.-Russia relations which saw a dispute with the Bush administration over the missile defence system in Eastern Europe which Russia strongly opposed. Obama scrapped this idea and began talks with the Russians and these resulted in good levels of cooperation with Russia over issues such as Iran and North Korea, and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) which was approved by the Senate and became effective on the 5 February 2011.[27]28He made the aid funding to Pakistan conditional on its controlling terrorist activities.

Obama has been successful in banning torture as an interrogation technique. He has been criticised from the right as being slow in supporting the Iranian uprisings in 2009. However, he was said to have exercised restraint on the issue as he did not want the Iranian government claiming that it was an American sponsored uprising.[29]Again he was criticised over his handling of the popular uprisings for democracy in 2011 in the Arab nations, such as Egypt and Tunisia, with Christopher Hitchens calling the slow response to these uprisings as a “ dithering response...[which has] been both cynical and naive”.[30]The same too could be said about Obama’s response to the Libyan rebellion. However, it is clear that Obama wanted a multilateral response, particularly from the Arab League, and UN approval before rushing into another war.[31]

Obama has tried to enhance relations with other countries, unsuccessfully in the case of Iran and North Korea, but successfully with Europe, China and more particularly with Russia. His meeting with the Russian President in June, <https://assignbuster.com/the-successes-and-failures-of-the-obama-presidency-politics-essay/>

2010 at the White House was said to mark the highest point of Russian-U. S. relations since Bill Clinton went to Moscow to mark Victory Day.[32]

Obama is said to be badly at odds with Israel with the Financial Times stating: “ Mr. Obama initially played tough with Mr. Netanyahu but then backed down.....Settlement expansion puts out of reach an agreement on borders..... The US veto at the UN badly damaged Mr. Obama’s credibility. The resolution, after all, reflected the White House’s own stated position..... Mr. Obama must choose between prevarication and the chance to sustain US influence in the world’s most troubled and strategically vital region.”[33]

His biggest failures to date are Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay. Obama acknowledges that progress in Afghanistan is limited and fragile although there has been success in resisting the Taliban and Al-Qaida.[34]It is still unpopular with the American public with just 31% of the American public thinking Afghanistan is worth fighting for.[35]Obama’s most problematic issue comes with Guantanamo Bay with the website Politifact. com listing it as a broken promise. Congress and the President remaining at odds over where to put the prisoners due to the refusal of Congress to allow detainees to be imprisoned within the United States . On the 7 March 2011 Obama signed an executive order making a number of changes to his policies, with a number of news outlets noting that it is an acknowledgement that he could not keep his campaign promise of closing Guantanamo Bay.[36]

President Obama has overall seen far more successes than failures during his Presidency although he has yet to convince the American people. Although this could all change with the losses during the mid-term elections

as he will find it a lot harder to pass his legislation. His recent reforms are under threat from the Republicans, such as Healthcare and environmental legislation which they want to scrap.[37]The President has been nicknamed 'no drama Obama' but as the Financial Times states this is often perceived as him having a sense of aloofness and on the national and international stage a sense of unwillingness to lead.[38]At the end of last week 64 senators, 32 Republican and 32 democrats, asked the President to lead on a comprehensive plan to deal with fiscal policy. As the Financial Times points out in a leader, " Mr Obama should be embarrassed that the Senate finds it necessary to ask him to do his job." [39]The importance of a president providing leadership is again emphasised. His priorities should be to deal with the issues facing Afghanistan, the US debt burden and the unemployment crisis, because as Newt Gingrich stated he will have a hard time becoming re-elected in 2012 if he does not solve these issues. These issues will no doubt have to be grappled with by any president elected in 2012.