

In his speeches as president, Obama did not make more overt references to race relations than his predecessors,<sup>[223][224]</sup> but according to one study, he implemented stronger policy action on behalf of African-Americans than any president since the Nixon era.<sup>[225]</sup> Following Obama's election, many pondered the existence of a "[postracial America](#)."<sup>[226][227]</sup> However, lingering racial tensions quickly became apparent,<sup>[226][228]</sup> and many African-Americans expressed outrage over what they saw as an intense racial animosity directed at Obama.<sup>[229]</sup> The [acquittal](#) of [George Zimmerman](#) following the [killing of Trayvon Martin](#) sparked national outrage, leading to Obama giving a speech in which he noted that "Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago."<sup>[230]</sup> The shooting of [Michael Brown](#) in [Ferguson, Missouri](#) [sparked a wave of protests](#).<sup>[231]</sup> These and other events led to the birth of the [Black Lives Matter](#) movement, which campaigns against violence and [systemic racism](#) toward [black people](#).<sup>[231]</sup> Though Obama entered office reluctant to talk about race, by 2014 he began openly discussing the disadvantages faced by many members of minority groups.<sup>[232]</sup> Several incidents during Obama's presidency generated disapproval from the African-American community and with law enforcement, and Obama sought to build trust between law enforcement officials and civil rights activists, with mixed results. Some in law enforcement criticized Obama's condemnation of racial bias after incidents in which police action led to the death of African-American men, while some racial justice activists criticized Obama's expressions of empathy for the police.<sup>[233]</sup> In a March 2016 Gallup poll, nearly one third of Americans said they worried "a great deal" about race relations, a higher figure than in any previous Gallup poll since 2001.<sup>[234]</sup>

## LGBT rights and same-sex marriage

On October 8, 2009, Obama signed the [Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act](#), a measure that expanded the [1969 United States federal hate-crime law](#) to include crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.<sup>[235]</sup> On October 30, 2009, Obama lifted the ban on travel to the United States by those infected with HIV. The lifting of the ban was celebrated by [Immigration Equality](#).<sup>[236]</sup> On December 22, 2010, Obama signed the [Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010](#), which fulfilled a promise made in the 2008 presidential campaign<sup>[237][238]</sup> to end the [don't ask, don't tell](#) policy of 1993 that had prevented gay and lesbian people from serving openly in the [United States Armed Forces](#). In 2016, the Pentagon ended the policy that barred [transgender people from serving openly in the military](#).<sup>[239]</sup>

As a candidate for the Illinois state senate in 1996, Obama stated he favored legalizing [same-sex marriage](#).<sup>[240]</sup> During his Senate run in 2004, he said he supported civil unions and domestic partnerships for same-sex partners but opposed same-sex marriages.<sup>[241]</sup> In 2008, he reaffirmed this position by stating "I believe marriage is between a man and a woman. I am not in favor of gay marriage."<sup>[242]</sup> On May 9, 2012, shortly after the official launch of his campaign for re-election as president, Obama said his views had evolved, and he publicly affirmed his personal support for the legalization of same-sex marriage, becoming the first sitting U.S. president to do so.<sup>[243][244]</sup> During his second [inaugural address](#) on January 21, 2013,<sup>[199]</sup> Obama became the first U.S. president in office to call for full equality for gay Americans, and the first to

mention [gay rights](#) or the word "gay" in an inaugural address.<sup>[245][246]</sup> In 2013, the Obama administration filed briefs that urged the [Supreme Court](#) to rule in favor of same-sex couples in the cases of [Hollingsworth v. Perry](#) (regarding [same-sex marriage](#))<sup>[247]</sup> and [United States v. Windsor](#) (regarding the [Defense of Marriage Act](#)).<sup>[248]</sup>

## Economic policy

Main article: [Economic policy of the Barack Obama administration](#)

On February 17, 2009, Obama signed the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009](#), a \$787 billion (equivalent to \$1074 billion in 2022) [economic stimulus](#) package aimed at helping the economy recover from the [deepening worldwide recession](#).<sup>[249]</sup> The act includes increased federal spending for health care, infrastructure, education, various tax breaks and [incentives](#), and direct assistance to individuals.<sup>[250]</sup> In March 2009, Obama's Treasury Secretary, [Timothy Geithner](#), took further steps to manage the [financial crisis](#), including introducing the [Public–Private Investment Program for Legacy Assets](#), which contains provisions for buying up to \$2 trillion in depreciated real estate assets.<sup>[251]</sup>

the [civil rights movement](#) in the United States. He said both movements seek to bring justice and equal rights to historically persecuted peoples, explaining: "To me, being pro-Israel and pro-Jewish is part and parcel with the values that I've been fighting for since I was politically conscious and started getting involved in politics."<sup>[372]</sup> Obama expressed support for Israel's right to defend itself during the [2014 Israel–Gaza conflict](#).<sup>[373]</sup> In 2015, Obama was harshly criticized by Israel for advocating and signing the [Iran Nuclear Deal](#); Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#), who had advocated the U.S. congress to oppose it, said the deal was "dangerous" and "bad."<sup>[374]</sup>

On December 23, 2016, under the Obama Administration, the United States abstained from [United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334](#), which condemned [Israeli settlement](#) building in the occupied [Palestinian territories](#) as a violation of international law, effectively allowing it to pass.<sup>[375]</sup> Netanyahu strongly criticized the Obama administration's actions,<sup>[376][377]</sup> and the Israeli government withdrew its annual dues from the organization, which totaled \$6 million, on January 6, 2017.<sup>[378]</sup> On January 5, 2017, the [United States House of Representatives](#) voted 342–80 to condemn the UN Resolution.<sup>[379][380]</sup>

## Libya

Main article: [2011 military intervention in Libya](#)

In February 2011, protests in Libya began against long-time dictator [Muammar Gaddafi](#) as part of the [Arab Spring](#). They soon turned violent. In March, as forces loyal to Gaddafi advanced on rebels across Libya, calls for a no-fly zone came from around the world, including Europe, the [Arab League](#), and a resolution<sup>[381]</sup> passed unanimously by the U.S. Senate.<sup>[382]</sup> In response to the unanimous passage of [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973](#) on March 17, Gaddafi—who had previously vowed to "show no mercy" to the rebels of Benghazi<sup>[383]</sup>—announced an immediate cessation of military activities.<sup>[384]</sup> The next day, on Obama's orders, the U.S. military took part in air strikes to destroy the Libyan government's air defense capabilities to protect civilians and enforce a no-fly-zone,<sup>[385]</sup> including the use of [Tomahawk missiles](#), [B-2 Spirits](#), and fighter jets.<sup>[386][387][388]</sup> Six days later, on March 25,

by unanimous vote of all its 28 members, [NATO](#) took over leadership of the effort, dubbed [Operation Unified Protector](#).<sup>[389]</sup> Some Representatives<sup>[390]</sup> questioned whether Obama had the constitutional authority to order military action in addition to questioning its cost, structure and aftermath.<sup>[391][392]</sup> Obama later expressed regret for playing a leading role in the destabilization of Libya, calling the current situation there "a mess."<sup>[393]</sup> He has stated that the lack of preparation surrounding the days following the government's overthrow was the "worst mistake" of his presidency.<sup>[394]</sup>

## Syrian civil war

See also: [Foreign involvement in the Syrian civil war § United States](#), and [American-led intervention in the Syrian civil war](#)

On August 18, 2011, several months after the start of the [Syrian civil war](#), Obama issued a written statement that said: "The time has come for [President Assad](#) to step aside."<sup>[395]</sup> This stance was reaffirmed in November 2015.<sup>[396]</sup> In 2012, Obama authorized multiple [programs run by the CIA](#) and the Pentagon to train anti-Assad rebels.<sup>[397]</sup> The Pentagon-run program was later found to have failed and was formally abandoned in October 2015.<sup>[398][399]</sup>

In the wake of a [chemical weapons attack](#) in Syria, [formally blamed](#) by the Obama administration on the Assad government, Obama chose not to enforce the "red line" he had pledged<sup>[400]</sup> and, rather than authorize the promised military action against Assad, went along with the Russia-brokered deal that led to Assad [giving up chemical weapons](#); however attacks with [chlorine gas](#) continued.<sup>[401][402]</sup> In 2014, Obama authorized an [air campaign aimed primarily at ISIL](#).<sup>[403]</sup>

Historian [Julian Zelizer](#) credits Obama with "a keen sense of how the institutions of government work and the ways that his team could design policy proposals." Zelizer notes Obama's policy successes included the [economic stimulus package](#) which ended the [Great Recession](#) and the [Dodd-Frank](#) financial and consumer protection reforms, as well as the [Affordable Care Act](#). Zelizer also notes the Democratic Party lost power and numbers of elected officials during Obama's term, saying that the consensus among historians is that Obama "turned out to be a very effective policymaker but not a tremendously successful party builder." Zelizer calls this the "defining paradox of Obama's presidency".<sup>[480]</sup>

The [Brookings Institution](#) noted that Obama passed "only one major legislative achievement (Obamacare)—and a fragile one at that—the legacy of Obama's presidency mainly rests on its tremendous symbolic importance and the fate of a patchwork of executive actions."<sup>[481]</sup> David W. Wise noted that Obama fell short "in areas many Progressives hold dear", including the continuation of drone strikes, not going after big banks during the Great Recession, and failing to strengthen his coalition before pushing for Obamacare. Wise called Obama's legacy that of "a disappointingly conventional president".<sup>[482]</sup>

Obama's most significant accomplishment is generally considered to be the [Affordable Care Act](#) (ACA), provisions of which went into effect from 2010 to 2020. Many attempts by Senate Republicans to repeal the ACA, including a "skinny repeal", have thus far failed.<sup>[483]</sup> However, in 2017, the penalty for violating the individual mandate was repealed effective 2019.<sup>[484]</sup> Together with the [Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act](#) amendment, it represents the [U.S. healthcare system](#)'s most significant regulatory overhaul and expansion of coverage since the passage of [Medicare](#) and [Medicaid](#) in 1965.<sup>[485][486][487][488]</sup>

Many commentators credit Obama with averting a threatened [depression](#) and pulling the economy back from the [Great Recession](#).<sup>[483]</sup> According to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), the [Obama administration](#) created 11.3 million jobs from the month after [his first inauguration](#) to the end of his second term.<sup>[489]</sup> In 2010, Obama signed into effect the [Dodd–Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act](#). Passed as a response to the [financial crisis of 2007–2008](#), it brought the most significant changes to [financial regulation](#) in the United States since the regulatory reform that followed the [Great Depression](#) under Democratic President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#).<sup>[490]</sup>

In 2009, Obama signed into law the [National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010](#), which contained in it the [Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act](#), the first addition to existing federal hate crime law in the United States since Democratic President [Bill Clinton](#) signed into law the Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996. The act expanded [existing federal hate crime laws in the United States](#), and made it a federal crime to assault people based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.<sup>[491]</sup>

As president, Obama advanced LGBT rights.<sup>[492]</sup> In 2010, he signed the [Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act](#), which brought an end to "[don't ask, don't tell](#)" policy in the U.S. armed forces that banned open service from [LGB](#) people; the law went into effect the following year.<sup>[493]</sup> In 2016, his administration brought an end to the ban on [transgender](#) people serving openly in the U.S. armed forces.<sup>[494][239]</sup> A [Gallup poll](#), taken in the final days of Obama's term, showed that 68 percent of Americans believed the U.S. had made progress on LGBT rights during Obama's eight years in office.<sup>[495]</sup>

Obama substantially escalated the use of [drone strikes](#) against suspected militants and terrorists associated with [al-Qaeda](#) and the [Taliban](#).<sup>[496]</sup> In 2016, the last year of his presidency, the U.S. dropped 26,171 bombs on seven different countries.<sup>[497][498]</sup> Obama left about 8,400 U.S. troops in [Afghanistan](#), 5,262 in Iraq, 503 in Syria, 133 in Pakistan, 106 in Somalia, seven in Yemen, and two in Libya at the end of his presidency.<sup>[499]</sup>

According to [Pew Research Center](#) and [United States Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), from December 31, 2009, to December 31, 2015, inmates sentenced in U.S. federal custody declined by five percent. This is the largest decline in sentenced inmates in U.S. federal custody since Democratic President [Jimmy Carter](#). By contrast, the federal prison population increased significantly under presidents [Ronald Reagan](#), [George H. W. Bush](#), [Bill Clinton](#), and [George W. Bush](#).<sup>[500]</sup>

[Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW) called Obama's human rights record "mixed", adding that "he has often treated human rights as a secondary interest — nice to support when the cost was not too high, but nothing like a top priority he championed."<sup>[222]</sup>

Obama left office in January 2017 with a 60 percent approval rating.<sup>[501][502]</sup> He gained 10 spots from the same survey in 2015 from the [Brookings Institution](#) that ranked him the 18th-greatest American president.<sup>[503]</sup> In Gallup's 2018 job approval poll for the past 10 U.S. presidents, he received a 63 percent approval rating.<sup>[504]</sup>

