

# Yes, but can we? Obama's first year

by Pietro Manzella

More than a year has gone by since Barack Obama was sworn in as the 44th President of the United States. He was then regarded as the man leading the USA towards change, showing the qualities to bring America back where it deserves: at the top of the world. For this reason, he was welcomed by the people with enormous enthusiasm, as embodying the story of a dream coming true. The newly elected President, the first African-American to hold this office, stood in front of more than two million people gathering in Washington DC for his inaugural address. *Yes we can*, his catchy slogan, became very popular at the time, to the extent that a hit record with the same title was released, with lyrics including his concession speech on New Hampshire Primary Night. On that cold election day in November, Americans were putting their trust in the man who was claiming that it was time for a new era, who was asked, among others, to stop the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, to protect his people from terrorism, and to come up with solutions to the crisis.

Today, one year after Mr. Obama was sworn in as President, and with three though years ahead, let us try to provide a cool-headed assessment of his achievements so far.

Let us start by making clear that, with so many political agendas, it would be difficult for anyone in his position. The banking disaster, the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq, the terrorist threat and an unprecedented worldwide economic downturn are serious issues which are not easy to deal with separately, much less if they come all together. In the US, however, they do not think that way. If we consider the January statistics ([www.gallop.com](http://www.gallop.com)), we soon realize that most Americans are disappointed with his performance, with public support below 50%, rather far away from that 70% received when he came into office. In addition, Republicans are reorganizing themselves, and they already started to win back the trust of the community. Just a few days ago, Republican Josh Brown was elected Senator after Edward Kennedy's death in Massachusetts, a democratic stronghold. More generally, President Obama seems to be unable to solve problems he promised to overcome during his election campaign. He has been rounded on by his detractors, according to whom Obama is having difficulty taking the reins of a nation shattered by a number of events. For instance, there is widespread criticism of the government's handling of the terrorist threat. While running for the White House, he promised to fight Al-Queda, but the unsuccessful kamikaze attempt in Detroit last Christmas proved that US is still too vulnerable, and that there is a need to strengthen security. As for the extension of healthcare, the plan might prove effective, as providing many people with social protection, but it is reckoned to be a burden for the government treasury. Another big challenge concerns foreign policy, more specifically the Middle East issue. Obama's effort through speeches and talks to bring together Arabs and Palestinians does not seem to pay or, to be more precise, shows slow progress. On the other hand, we should also recall, however, that the American President allocated funding to tackle automotive crisis, and encouraged the agreement between Fiat and Chrysler in order to save the Detroit-based company from bankruptcy. As for young people, his plan to support education met with considerable success, and the government passed a law increasing federal aid for college students. Not to mention his commitment to promote international diplomacy, which led him being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2009.

Therefore, in an attempt to evaluate Mr. Obama's first year of presidency, we might say that "it has been good, but not great" as argued by *The Economist*. There are still many issues at the top his agenda, and people, especially Americans, need to be patient. On his website, the President asks them *to believe*. Will they be willing to do so?

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