U.S. in the Modern World Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Did Obama really make government bigger?**

NEW YORK (CNNMoney)

President Obama = big government.

Or so say the Republican presidential candidates. Newt Gingrich has labeled him the "food stamp president" for expanding entitlements, while Mitt Romney has said the size of the federal government has "exploded" under Obama.

By many measures, the federal government has indeed grown during Obama's tenure. Spending as a share of the economy has gone up. The number of federal employees has risen. More Americans are relying on federal assistance.

But not all of those things were the president's doing.

CNNMoney takes a look at the facts.

**Spending:** Government spending as a share of the economy has hovered around 24% during the Obama administration, several percentage points higher than under President Bush, according to Congressional Budget Office data. It's also elevated from the historical average of 20.7% over the past 40 years.

Much of that increase has come from mandatory spending, including Medicare, Social Security and Medicaid. Those programs have expanded mostly because of the recession, which has prompted more people to apply for Medicaid and Social Security, as well as the growth in people hitting retirement age.

"How much do you lay at the recession's feet versus the president's policies?" said Josh Gordon, policy director at the Concord Coalition, a fiscal policy group. "The aging of the population can't be blamed on the president."

Many safety net programs, such as Medicaid and food stamps, automatically expand during economic downturns. And in the face of prolonged high jobless rates, Congress has authorized extending federal unemployment benefits to a record 99 weeks. The initial extension was passed under President Bush.

The conservative Heritage Foundation, which advocates for a reduced government role in society, acknowledges that much of the increase in federal spending originates in laws passed by this Congress and previous ones, but feels that Obama could do more to rein it in.

"He didn't do it alone," said Patrick Louis Knudsen, a senior fellow at Heritage. "But he tends to do little to reduce spending. He is taking the size of government to new levels and he's keeping it there."

Of course, Obama did press for a record $787 billion stimulus plan in 2009, as well as a bailout of the automakers in Detroit. But he also deserves credit for winding both of those down, said Stan Collender, partner in Qorvis Communications, a public affairs firm.

**Employees:** The number of federal employees grew by 123,000, or 6.2%, under President Obama, according to the White House's Office of Management and Budget.

Much of the hiring increases came in the departments of homeland security, justice, veterans and defense.

The federal payroll has been expanding since President Bush took office, after declining during the Clinton administration. But it's still a tad smaller than it was in 1992, said Craig Jennings, a federal budget expert at the progressive think tank OMB Watch.

The federal government has been one of the few areas that's grown during the economic downturn. The private sector remains down 1.1 million jobs from the start of 2009, while state and local governments have shed 635,000 positions.

**Regulation:** While regulations have been proliferating since the Reagan administration, the pace of large-scale regulation has picked up under Obama.

There were 75 major regulations adopted in Obama's first two years in office, compared to 120 during Bush's entire term, according to the Heritage Foundation, citing Government Accountability Office statistics. Fiscal 2010 saw a record 43 rules adopted.

Major regulations are those that have cost or saved more than $100 million. They range from new rules concerning pipeline safety to air cargo screening to investment fee and expense disclosures.

"These new burdens are being put on and someone has to pay for them," said James Gattuso, a senior fellow at Heritage.

Regulatory activity is likely to pick up in coming years as agencies start implementing two of Obama's major initiatives -- the Affordable Care Act and the Dodd-Frank financial reform law.

Overall, however, the Obama administration has adopted roughly the same amount of regulations as Bush did, according to the White House. The administration says the "net benefit" -- savings plus other factors such as the economic value of lives saved -- of the regulations adopted in Obama's first two years in office exceeded $35 billion.

What's important to look at, according to OMB Watch's regulatory expert Jessica Randall, is the impact the regulations have had. Many have helped Americans, such as the health care reform act allowing children to remain covered under their parents' health insurance until age 26.

"The regulations issued under Obama have benefited people's lives more than they've cost them," Randall said. [o top of page](http://money.cnn.com/2012/01/25/news/economy/obama_government/?iid=EL%23TOP)

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